

# New Perspectives on the Early Transnational History of the *salafiyya*

## Responsable

**Rainer Brunner**  
(LEM, CNRS)

**Jeudi 13 juillet 2023**  
**11h-13h**  
**Salle Déméter 021**

## Intervenants

**Rainer Brunner**  
(LEM, CNRS)

**Pieter Coppens**  
(Vrije Universiteit)

**Umar Ryad**  
(University of Leuven)

**Mehdi Sajid**  
(Utrecht University)

## Résumé de l'atelier

One of the most striking developments in the research about Muslim intellectual history since the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the changing significance of the concept of *salafiyya* in recent decades. While it is largely absent from many classical studies (e.g. Albert Hourani's *Arabic Thought*, 1962, and Nikki Keddie's biography of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, 1972), *salafiyya* has become the most central concept for describing religiously motivated reformist currents. While it had been used uncritically over several decades, it has recently been questioned by Henri Lauzière (*The Making of Salafism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, 2016) who argued that the concept of *salafiyya* was not used by the reformers themselves, but was rather coined by Louis Massignon and Henri Laoust in the 1920s, whose use of the term only later spread among Muslim authors. It would thus seem that the term *salafiyya* makes sense only for later trends which evolved after the Second World War into what is today well-known as Salafism. On the other hand, however, the question may be asked why, of all notions, *salafiyya* so easily caught on for the description of developments since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. This panel therefore aims at investigating into the early uses of *salaf* and related concepts on a broad basis of sources and from a transnational angle in order not only to shed light on the early history of Islamic modernism, but also to overcome the previous focus on the Egyptian trinity of reform, al-Afghānī – ‘Abduh – Rashīd Riḍā.

## Programme

**Rainer Brunner**

*Between salaf and ahl al-bayt: Conceptual Approaches to Reform in Sunnite and Shi’ite Journals*

Religious, social and scientific journals were the main medium of Muslim reformist currents from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, both as far as Sunnite and Shi’ite reformers are concerned. They not only served the purpose of familiarizing their readers with new inventions, theories and developments of the colonial modernity, but also contributed to the evolution and dissemination of new concepts and a new terminology. The paper is based on a comparison of some wide-spread and influential journals: the Cairo-based Sunnite *al-Manār* (edited by the Sunnite religious reformer Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā) and *al-Hilāl* (edited by the Christian secularist Jurjī Zaydān), as well as the shi’ite *al-‘Irfān* (edited by Aḥmad ‘Ārif al-Zayn in Ṣaydā’, Southern Lebanon) and *al-‘Ilm* (edited by Hibat al-Dīn al-Shahrastānī in Iraqī Najaf, the most important centre of traditional Shi’ite learning). The main focus

is on articles that deal specifically with calls for social and religious reform, and the terminology that is used there to denote several key concepts, such as "reform", "renewal", "modern(ity)", etc., in order to investigate to what degree authors from such different backgrounds differed in their respective approaches to reform. This also helps us to gain a more sophisticated view of when and how earlier authorities (the notorious *salaf* on the Sunni side, the Prophet's family, or *ahl al-bayt*, on the Shi'ite side) were recruited as role models in order to justify the necessity of reform.

### **Pieter Coppens**

#### *Was the modern term Salafi a Damascene invention?*

A current theory is that the term *salafī* initially only figured in reform-oriented writings in the sense of "the doctrine of the forefathers" (*madhhab al-salaf*), signifying an approach to God's attributes, typical of (neo)Hanbalism. The term *salafī* or *salafiyya*, according to this interpretation of history, was not used for the propagation of *ijtihād* based on the Qur'an and the Sunna outside the boundaries of the four madhhabs, and was not used as an epithet for a coherent "modernist" movement before the 1920's. However, the term *salafī* as a denominator for an international network of reform-oriented interlocutors frequently occurs in the letter correspondence of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (1866-1914). This paper scrutinizes all usages of the term *salafī* in al-Qāsimī's letter correspondence, suggesting that Damascus was likely the place where reformers started using this epithet for a method that pertained to more than simply creed, but also included a specific approach to *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*, closely intertwined with the idea of *ijtihād*. The making of the concept should thus not be attributed to Ignaz Goldziher or Louis Massignon: it is more likely they picked it up as a genuine emic term through their intimate contacts with reformers from Damascus and Baghdad.

### **Umar Ryad**

#### *al-Manār's Salafi Circles in al-Ḥaramayn*

The well-known Muslim *salafī* reformist Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935) is one of the most influential religious scholars of his age. As global reformist, he gathered round his journal *al-Manār* (*The Lighthouse*, 1898-1935) a wide network of writers who shared with him similar ideas and actions. After the abolishment of the Caliphate, Riḍā turned his political gaze towards the Hijāz by supporting the founder of the new Saudi kingdom King 'Abd al-Azīz Āl Sa'ūd as a potential Arab caliph. In the paper, on the basis of his journal and remaining family archive, I will focus on his network of associates in the Hijāz, and which religious and political ideas and encounters he expanded among the Hijāzī elites and religious scholars around the Ḥaramayn of Mecca and Medina in particular.

### **Mehdi Sajid**

#### *Salafism and the Making of a Modern Moroccan Nation*

The paper will offer a case study of Salafism in 20<sup>th</sup> century Morocco. This research is part of a broader conceptual reflection on the meaning of the term "Islam" (Bauer, 2010; Ahmed, 2015; Reinhart, 2020) and how the latter was radically transformed in the modern period. The focus will be put on of the role played by Middle Eastern-inspired reformists and Salafis in forging a modern Moroccan nation. In fact, and since the nineteenth century, Moroccan Sultans showed a growing interest in Muslim reformists and Salafis who attacked Sufi charismatic leaders and challenged the autonomy of traditional '*ulamā*'. I argue, therefore, that Salafism was one of the main tools used by the Moroccan central government (the *makhzan*) to:

1. strengthen its grip over the religious field;
2. standardize Islamic education for the nascent Moroccan nation;
3. solidify its power claims in the face of rising religious and political contenders.