

Roberto Tottoli

IAS and Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale

"Editing the Qur'an in the 16th- and 17th-century Europe: Inter-religious polemics, print culture, and Arabic philology".

February 22, 4:00 to 6:00 pm
West Seminar Room at IAS.

The Qur'an had been translated in Latin since the 12th century and knowledge of the Arabic text was widespread in polemical and missionary literature in late Middle Ages. The humanistic interest to go back to the original sources prompted the first interest, along with translating it anew, to offer the original Arabic to the community of scholars, notwithstanding religious fears and oppositions. With the invention of printing, in the 16th and 17th century a few printed editions of the Qur'an have appeared, from the Paganinis' Venice edition (1537 ca.), probably realized for commercial reasons, to the editions of A. Hinckelmann (1694) and L. Marracci (1698). A few other scholars produced partial editions of the Arabic text and some others attempted to do it but had no possibility for many reasons to see their manuscripts become printed books. The recent discovery of new materials related to the activity and work in this regard of L. Marracci (d. 1700) and J. Zechendorff (d. 1662) has further contribute new information on the modern European interest in the Arabic Qur'an.

The presentation will discuss three of the many aspects of interest in this historical chapter of the knowledge and diffusion of Islam and the Qur'an in Europe. The polemical setting of this activity will be discussed, also focusing on how, from the 16th century onwards, the Qur'an was also used in the inter-religious polemics between Catholic and Reformed Christians. The relevance of this activity for print culture of the time and the influence of the problems connected to the Arabic types will also be discussed showing how they influenced the attempts to produce a printed Arabic Qur'an. And, finally, the problems of comprehension of the Arabic text through the access to manuscripts, and the origin of some lapses and mistakes in the existing editions and in the new materials discovered will show how these scholars worked and how they contributed to the first steps of history of the printed Qur'an.