



CALL FOR PAPERS

44th Annual Conference of the
North American Association of Islamic and
Muslim Studies (NAAIMS)

“Sectarianism in Islam and Muslim Communities”

Cosponsored By:

**Middle East Studies
Brown University, Providence, RI
Saturday, September 19, 2015**

Deadlines:

**Abstracts: May 8, 2015
Final Papers: August 31, 2015**

Sectarian difference and conflict has been part of Islamic history from early times, beginning in a tangible, if not fully established, way during the First Civil War in the mid-1st/7th century. By the late 3rd/9th century, Islamic heresiographers began to document a wide variety of real or reified sectarian identities within the Islamic community. This sectarian history has always been tempered, however, by a well-established Islamic principle that allowed for a certain degree of theological and legal pluralism within the Muslim community, and the fairly widespread acceptance of the idea that the unity of the Muslim *ummah* was best achieved through the tolerance of a certain degree of diversity. Indeed, some might argue that “sects” and “sectarianism,” as they are understood in a Christian context, do not actually exist in the Islamic world, given that the unifying fundamentals of Islam - its scripture, its central beliefs and practices - are essentially the same across all interpretations of Islam, and communal boundaries have historically been more porous and informal between, for example, *Sunnis* and *Shi`is* than between certain Christian sects and denominations.

Nonetheless, conflict has waxed and waned between *Sunnis* and *Shi`is*, and among *Shi`i* groups, and there have been varying degrees of intolerance for smaller sectarian groups in the Islamic world. Today, sectarian intolerance and violence, particularly between Sunnis and Twelver *Shi`is* seems to be growing increasingly acute, not only in the Middle East, but also in South and Southeast Asia as well. This conference aims to explore the conceptual and religious significance of such sectarian divisions in Islam, as well as the practical and material manifestations of those divisions in Muslim communities both historically and in the contemporary world. The conference aims to examine the issue both in the context of Muslim majority countries, and among minority Muslim communities in North American and Europe. It seeks to investigate not only the religious and historical origins and bases for sectarian differences in the Islamic world, but also the social, political, and economic conditions that generate, exacerbate, or ameliorate sectarian tensions.

We invite a diverse range of papers from professors and advanced Ph.D. candidates in the humanities and social sciences. Questions the papers might address include, but are not limited to the following:

- Are the terms “sect” and “sectarianism” accurate or useful in discussing diverse religious manifestations of Islam, past and present? Is it more accurate or useful to speak of groups, denominations, or perspectives?
- How do *Sunnis*, *Shi`is*, or other religious groups in the Islamic world conceptualize and religiously make sense of other groups or perspectives within Islam?
- What are some of the ways in which sectarian identities are materially, practically, or socially expressed? How do such expressions change over time, or in different geographical contexts?
- Deep differences between *Sunnis* and *Shi`is*, in particular, are generated by profound differences in their reading of Islamic history, particularly early Islamic history. Are there more inclusive and less divisive ways of reading this history?
- What factors contribute to situations of either conflict or peaceful coexistence between different sectarian groups, or between the dominant religious majority and minority communities? How do political, social, and economic issues create or amplify sectarian divisions and intolerance?
- How do sectarian differences affect social relations and marriage practices in different Muslim communities? How do substantial rates of intermarriage between *Sunnis* and *Shi`is* affect relations between the two communities in particular contexts?
- (Counterintuitively), in what ways might sectarian differences have been beneficial to the religious and intellectual development of the Islamic tradition as a whole? How have the intellectual traditions of different groups influenced and benefited from one another?

Abstracts (250 words) are due by May 8, 2015:

Abstracts ONLY from professors and advanced Ph.D. candidates will be considered. Abstracts will be evaluated according to the following categories: originality of theme, clear data and methodology, clarity and relevance of the proposal to the conference theme, and contribution to the conference theme. **Final papers must be submitted by August 31, 2015.**

Program panelists are required to preregister and pay non-refundable conference fees by June 29, 2015.

Program Chair:

Professor Beshara Doumani, Brown University, Providence, RI

Send abstracts and final papers to Layla Sein, Director of Academic Affairs, at conferences@naaims.org