

## Salaf in the Classical Age

### Building an Authority Figure

The Islamic reformist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought the salaf, those first generations of Muslims, back to the forefront as a major reference of Islam, in doctrinal contents and as exemplary models of life, to the point that many of these movements, despite great differences between them, are generally grouped under the terms salafism or *salafiyya*. However, while they have promoted the generations of the *salaf* in a new way, they inherit about them an older tradition, which is based on a famous *ḥadīth*: "The best of my community are those of my time, then those who will follow them, then those who will follow the latter."<sup>1</sup>

For all that, the notion of the salaf is relatively problematic. Who exactly does it refer to? The first three generations of Muslims, as suggested by the *ḥadīth* (who will be called the Companions, the Followers and the Followers of the Followers), in a strict temporal approach, or should this approach be adapted to exclude those who are unworthy of it, because they have deviated from strict orthodoxy, or to include later but highly authoritative figures, such as the founders of schools? Can we really designate them as a homogeneous group, which would have shared the same theological or legal opinions? The question arises all the more because the *salaf* left little written material, and their thought is known only through the quotations we find of them in the oldest *tafāsīr*, the Qur'anic commentaries.

The seminar will intend to study the construction of the salaf as a reference group in medieval Islam. Through the study of different classical texts, it aims to understand how this authority figure was developed and what functions were assigned to it, depending on the disciplines and contexts.

The seminar will be held one Wednesday per month at the Dominican Institute of Oriental Studies, from November to May.

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<sup>1</sup> « *Ḥayr ummatī qarṇī, ṭumma allaḍīna yalūnahum, ṭumma allaḍīna yalūnahum* » (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī 3650, vol. 62, h. 2).

## Seminar schedule

*Wednesday 16 November at 5pm:*

General introduction to the seminar: the *Salaf* between history, memory and myth

Ancient and modern historians in search of the *salaf*

*Wednesday 14 December at 5pm:*

The *salaf* as a source of religious knowledge in the early *tafāsīr*

*Wednesday 18 January at 5pm:*

Early ḥanbalites, supporters of the *salaf*?

*Wednesday 15 February at 5pm:*

The *salaf* in the theology of al-Ašʿarī

*Wednesday 15 March at 5pm:*

The *salaf* in the doxographers (Al-Šahrastānī, Ibn Ḥazm)

*Wednesday 5 April at 5pm:*

Medieval Shi'ism facing the *salaf* — with Dr Mathieu Terrier

*Wednesday 17 May at 5pm:*

The *salaf* in the thought of Ibn Taymiyya — with Dr Jon Hoover