The Balzan Seminar on the formation, maintenance, and failure of states in the Muslim world before 1800

To advanced graduate students, postdocs, and holders of tenure-track positions working on relevant topics:

We are seeking to bring together an internationally recruited group of eight to ten early-career scholars working on topics related to the formation, maintenance, and failure of states in the various regions of the Muslim world prior to 1800. We would also like to include in the group two early-career scholars working on similar topics in the non-Muslim world. The project will last for five years, and is funded by the generosity of the Balzan Foundation. In the first two years the group will meet twice on its own, and in the last three it will convene up to five conferences to which other scholars, including more senior ones, will also be invited. The first meeting will be in late June or early July of 2020 at a location yet to be determined. The project will issue in the publication of a volume the core of which will be studies written by members of the group. The regular language of the group will be English, and basic expenses of the participants (including travel and accommodation) will be funded. More details are available below, and preliminary inquiries can be addressed to Antoine Borrut (aborrut@umd.edu) or Michael Cook (mcook@princeton.edu).

Applications to join the group should be submitted by January 31, 2020. Your application should consist of a CV, a cover letter setting out your interests and fields of expertise, two writing samples (papers or chapters, published or unpublished), and contact information for two referees. In the cover letter you should also indicate your availability in late June or early July of 2020. These materials should be assembled in the form of a single PDF, and sent to: nessemi@princeton.edu. Please name the file “lastname firstname Balzan application.pdf”.

Antoine Borrut (University of Maryland)
Michael Cook (Princeton University)

FURTHER DETAILS

The Balzan seminar seeks to shed fresh light on the formation, maintenance, and failure of states in the various regions of the Muslim world prior to 1800 in a comparative perspective. The basic idea of the project is to examine the roles not just of material resources and obstacles, but also of traditions and values, both Islamic and non-Islamic, over time and space, and the interactions between all these elements. We may decide to delimit the themes of the project in some respects after the group has taken shape.

As stated above, we would like to recruit eight to ten scholars working on the Muslim world together with a couple of scholars working on comparable topics in non-Muslim contexts. These contexts could be ancient, medieval, or early modern. We would particularly like to secure the presence of a scholar familiar with the well-developed literature on such issues in the
European context, but are also interested in recruiting a scholar working on East Asia, Hindu South Asia, or another part of the non-Muslim world.

The venue for the meetings and conferences remains to be determined; one consideration in making the decision will be visa requirements, particularly as they may affect scholars from the Muslim world.

The purpose of the first meeting (summer 2020) is for the members of the group to get to know each other and begin to establish a framework for the discussion of the issues. What matters is not that all members of the group should agree, but that they should be in widely-based conversation with each other. To expedite this process, we ask each member of the group to submit a month in advance a chapter or paper representative of their work for group discussion. Another significant part of the agenda of this first meeting will be to decide the basic parameters of the position paper that each member of the group will submit a month in advance of the second meeting.

The first task of second meeting (summer 2021) will be to discuss the position papers. These papers will not be presentations of detailed research but rather analytical and synthesizing discussions of agreed-upon issues within the region and period of the member’s broader field of expertise. When this is concluded, we expect to have a well-knit group with shared interests (not necessarily shared views) that reach across space and time, and include comparison with the non-Muslim world. The second task of the meeting will be to plan a series of up to five conferences.

These conferences will take place over the following three years. They could be on particular regions or periods, or particular themes across regions and periods. The group will identify other scholars, including more senior ones, to invite to these conferences; these would be scholars it was particularly interested in engaging with. The group will nevertheless constitute the backbone of each conference, and several of the papers submitted will be by its members.

Within six months of the final conference, each member of the group will be responsible for submitting a final version of the paper discussed at the second meeting, taking account of the work of the conferences. These papers, together with a few contributions from the senior scholars, will be peer-reviewed and published with a leading university press. We plan to seek a contract for the volume after the second meeting. We attach great importance to the coherence of the volume.

Members of the group in good standing will receive an annual research fund of $2,000 for the five years of the project. This can be used for relevant expenses including books and travel (other than travel to the meetings and conferences, which is already covered).

The project will also be able to support a few manuscript review workshops outside the framework of the meetings and conferences.