

ALFORUM 2025: PARALLEL SESSION

# Dialogue Across Borders with ALF

## Memory and Universities

# AGENDA

- Paradigms of Mediterranean Culture
- Universities for the Future



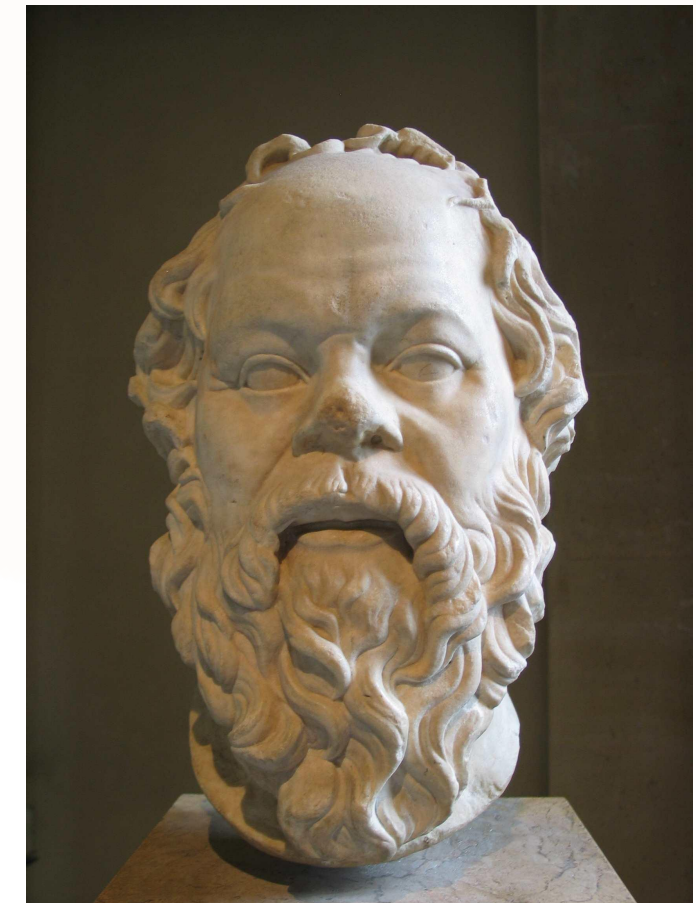
*Cultivation of the soul (lat. cultura animi)*

Marcus Tullius Cicero

# Paradigm of Greek thought

The Greek word for truth is Aletheia (α-λήθεια), and it means “what was discovered” or “what was uncovered”

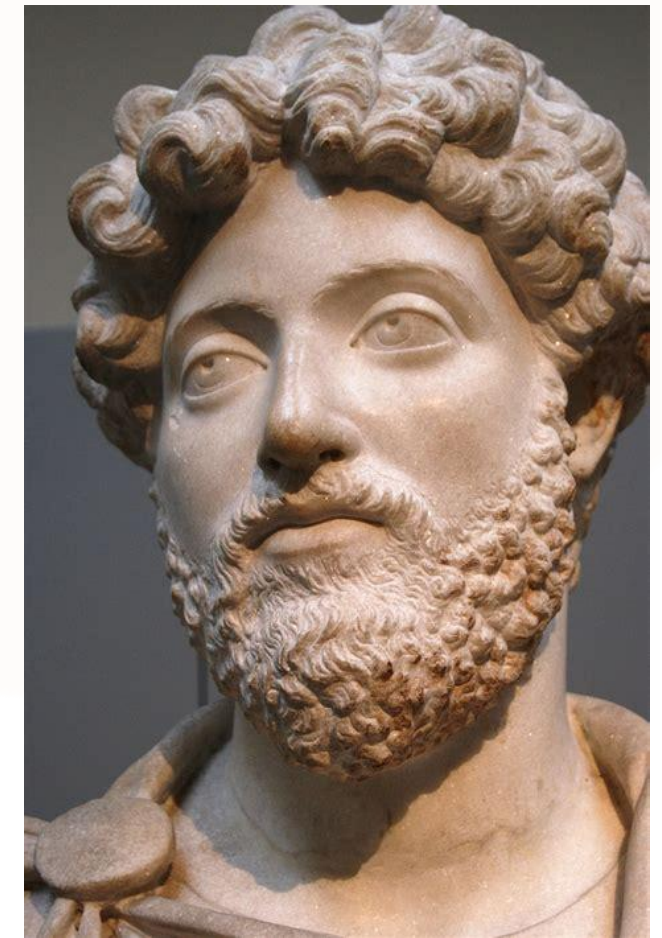
Certainty: The primacy of the „inner sight“ above our eyes



# Paradigm of Roman law

A certain idea can create law, and law can be applied to the whole world: *Pax Romanum*

Order: Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE) declared the common religion in the empire as the highest idea and the highest common law for everyone.





# Paradigm of Bible

The Hebrew word for truth is Emeth (אמת), which means “the word I heard”. I heard it, so it is true: trust.

Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE–50 CE) “argumentum ad humanum”  
(argument on behalf of a man)

„In the system of a strict law, the man became only the wheel in the machine with no free will and even no dignity.“



# Paradigm of Islamic culture

“The most historically impactful and intellectually and hermeneutically sophisticated articulations of Islam have not been of Islam as law, but of Islam as theology, philosophy, Sufism, poetry, painting, architecture, ethics, and belles-lettres. (...) Muslims have lived, thought, and acted in terms of a conceptual contradiction: of two—or more—apparently contradictory sets of values, ideas, and practices being simultaneously true and real.”

## Books & the Arts.



### Contradiction and Diversity

by ELIAS MUHANNA

**T**he medieval English allegorical poem *Piers Plowman* described the birth of Islam as the result of a clever hoax. Muhammad, it asserted, was a former Christian who had made a failed attempt to become pope and then set off for Syria to mislead the innocents. He tamed a turtle dove and taught it to eat grains of wheat placed in his ear. In a scene reminiscent of the enchantment of Melampus, the Greek oracle who was granted the ability to understand animal speech when his ears were licked by snakes, *Piers* Muhammad mesmerized audiences by having the bird fly down during the course of his preaching and appear to whisper

in his ear. Staging a moment of revelation from God, the false prophet led men to misbelief by “wiles of his wit and a whit dowe.” In the centuries following Muhammad’s death in 632, many Christians like William Langland, the author of *Piers Plowman*, sought to make sense of Islam in the terms and symbols of their own faith. Was it just another schismatic sect led by a great heresiarch, as Dante portrayed it in his *Divine Comedy*? Or was it an ancient form of chivalry, a Saracen code of ethics? Did Muhammad’s followers think him a god? The figure of the prophet-as-trickster found in *Piers Plowman* was not the most outlandish attempt to explain the origins of Islam. Medieval

**What Is Islam?**  
*The Importance of Being Islamic.*  
By Shahab Ahmed.  
Princeton, 609 pp. \$39.50.

French *chansons de geste* attributed a wicker of fantastical qualities to the cult of “Mahom,” including a pantheon of minor deities superimposed from Roman mythology. University chairs in Oriental studies began proliferating in Europe in the 17th century and were soon followed by the establishment of scholarly associations and academic journals. By the late 19th century, European knowledge of the languages, histories, and customs of Muslim societies had advanced significantly beyond the scope of medieval apologetics, but the interpretation of Islam through the lens of Christianity remained a central current of Orientalist scholarship. As Shahab Ahmed writes in a major new study, the consequences of this approach and its

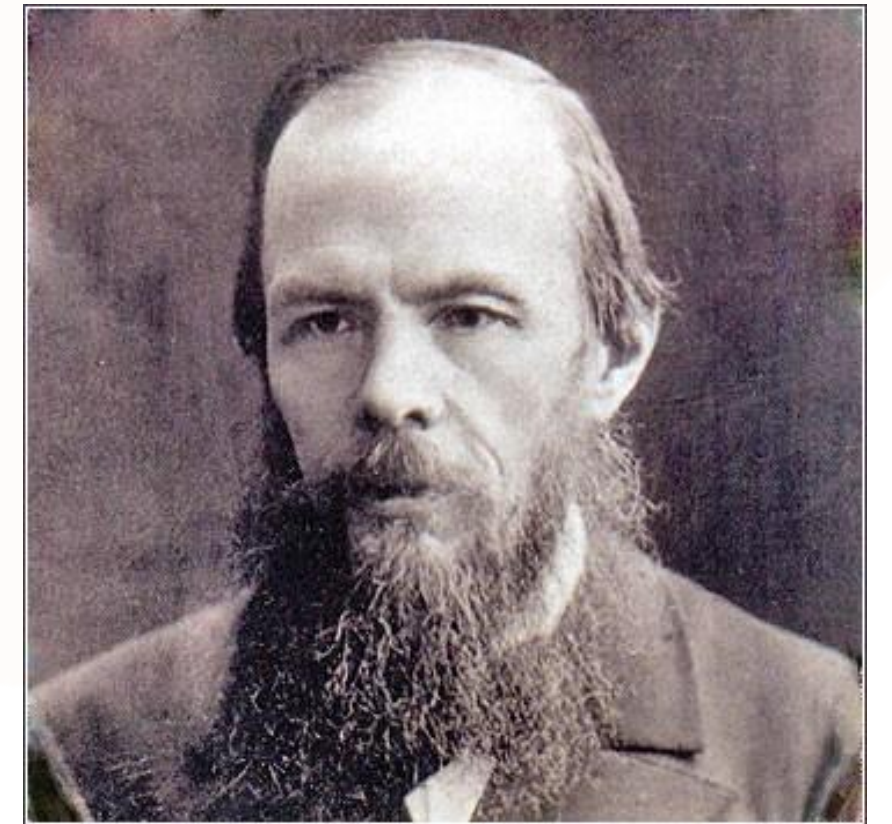
Elias Muhanna is the Manning Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at Brown University and director of the Digital Islamic Humanities Project.

# Paradigm of Christian culture

The centuries-long struggle to find the harmony between the dignity of human beings and the law.

„If we accept supremacy of the (dignity and freedom of the) person above the law, then we can ask the obedience to the law.“

(F. M. Dostojevsky, 1821-1881)





# European Union

The database aligns closely with the EU strategic priorities in higher education, intercultural dialogue, and peacebuilding (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, and the European Education Area).



The project is a milestone on the way towards a better understanding of the Mediterranean cultural paradox.

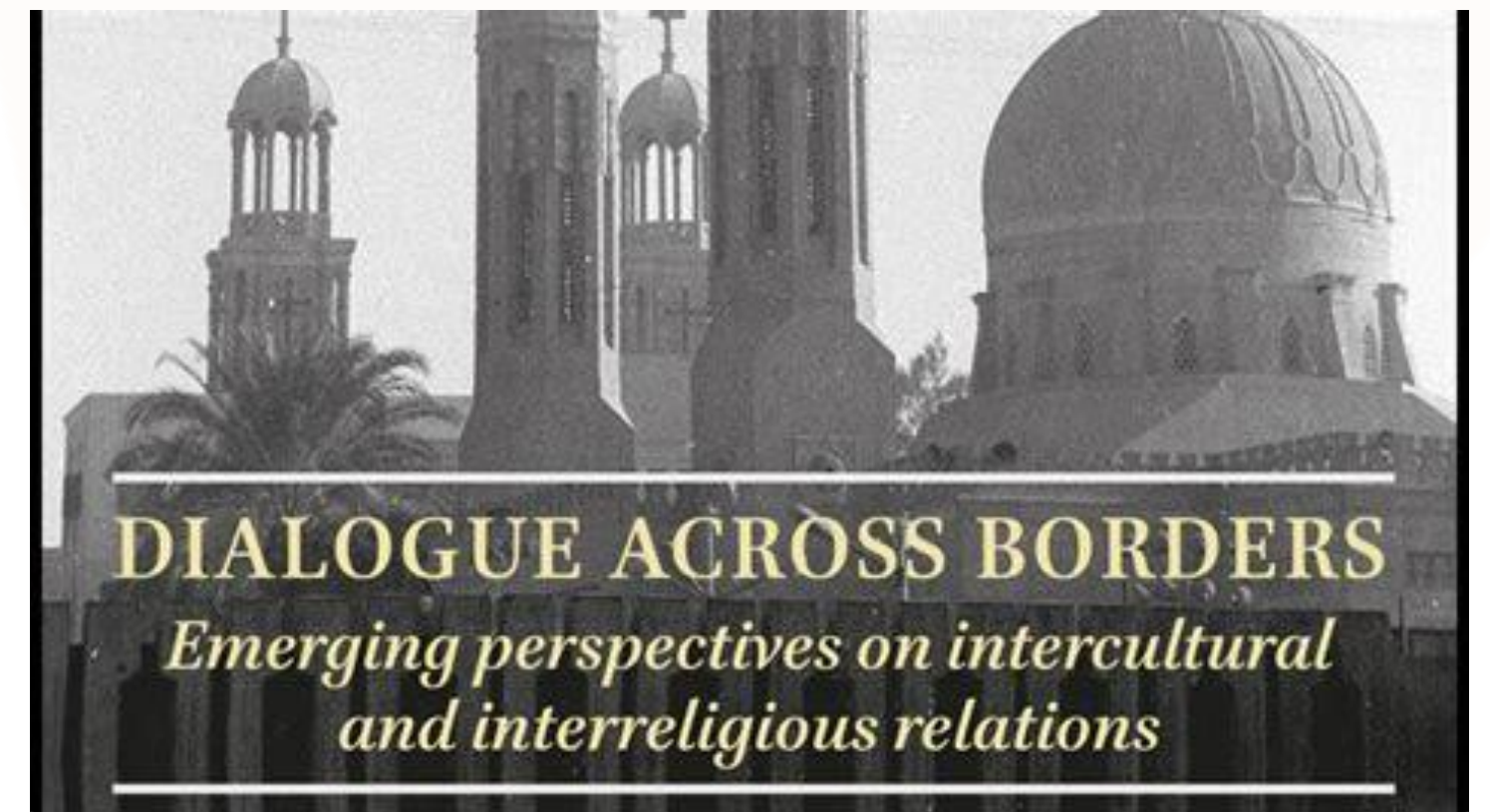
Technological shifts of the AI age need trustworthy sources of information.





# Conclusion

The database is more than just a repository of documents — it is a living memory, it is a vital and trustworthy resource for fostering understanding and reducing conflict.



Jaroslav Franc

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