Department of Middle Eastern Studies Seminar Series

Michaelmas Term, 2022

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Georgia State University

"Men Loving Men in Nasrid Granada: Male Bonding in the Writings of Ibn al-Khatib (d. 1374 CE) and his Contemporaries"

This lecture highlights the overlooked importance of love between men in the Medieval Muslim West. Bonds of friendship, love and obligation between unrelated, highly educated men in the Muslim Western Mediterranean world of the Maghreb and of Nasrid Granada created a community. To make this argument, it uses the correspondence and writings of the great "Tongue of Religion" and Wazir of Granada, Ibn al Khatib (d. 1374 CE). Ibn al-Khatib was the pillar of an emotional tribe of unrelated intellectuals, power brokers, poets and religious leaders, almost all of them men, who wrote to each other in surprisingly loving ways. While acknowledging the important literary nature of the *nasib*, or erotic prelude, as an expected form in correspondence, the *nasib* should not be dismissed in the letters exchanged within this community of scholars. While most studies of literature and poetry in Arabic focus on intellectually empty desires between older and much younger men, desires that expired with the first blush of age, love between men of the same bearded age but of different families, created a parallel network of well-educated elites, one that broke through what Ibn Khaldun (himself a beloved mentee of Ibn al-Khatib) called the typical bonds of *'asabiyya* (blood based family blood ties). This was a community of mutual obligation, creating roles not based on nepotism but on poetic or literary skill and often attached to deeper, if not risk-free, Sufi ideals of the unity of existence (*wahdat al-wujud*). Ibn al-Khatib envisioned a tree of love in one of his writings, a type of intellectual genealogy of minds.

Thursday, 3 November 2022, 17.15
Room 10 (the old common room) at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies.
Refreshments will be served from 17.00.