

ÉRIC CHAUMONT (1960-2021)

Éric Chaumont, a valued member of the International Society for Islamic Legal Studies, the *chef de file* of the Francophone study of Islamic legal theory, and a dear friend to many of us, died in September 2021. Éric, a member of the CNRS and based at IREMAM in Aix-en-Provence, presented at and attended ISILS conferences from the 1990s onwards. His love for the Shāfiʿī tradition and his deep engagement with *uṣūl al-fiqh* went hand in hand with an even greater obsession: the person and music of David Bowie. Every day with Éric was an adventure – you honestly did not know what was going to happen. He could be simultaneously charming, erudite, chaotic and infuriating. His contribution to the history of Islamic legal theory is immense, and his loss will be keenly felt for all of us who study *uṣūl*. Below is a translation of the French obituary for Éric, found on the IREMAM website (https://iremam.cnrs.fr/fr/memoriam-eric-chaumont?fbclid=IwAR1sNAmFWHrsH6hX0iyW1JoVMsUK00Qg92SXhtwyVFC_qHi08uphyfa9cw)

IN MEMORIAM ÉRIC CHAUMONT

Éric Chaumont died, unexpectedly, on 6th September 2021. His colleagues and friends pay tribute to him by outlining his career with these words:

Born April 26, 1960 in Wilrijk (Antwerp), Éric Chaumont came from one of Antwerp's bourgeois French-speaking families. He grew up in a rich intellectual environment, in part because his father, Maurice Chaumont, was professor of sociology at the Facultés Saint-Louis and at the Université catholique de Louvain. In the 1960s and 1970s, he attended conferences in the developing world, including the Arab world, and on occasions took Éric with him. Éric would come back enthused with a Third-Worldism which he shared with many young people of his generation, but also with the beginnings of an academic interest in these countries. In 1978, after a school baccalaureate, he started a double degree at the Université catholique de Louvain in Arabic and a licence (BA) in philosophy.

From 1980 to 1982, he broke with his university studies to perform his two-year national service – but as a conscientious objector, he went to the Collège des Frères d'Héliopolis in Cairo, where he obtained a post as a French teacher. Éric liked to say that this was his real education – the one that taught him “lived” Islam and from which he trained his ear in spoken Arabic – later in life, he mastered the Egyptian dialect. It was after this first long stay in Cairo that he decided to deepen his training in Arabic at the Pontifical Institute for Arab Studies in Rome. He stayed there for two years, before returning to Louvain to resume his university education in philosophy in 1984. As for Cairo and Egypt, they would remain his home in the Arab world for the years to come.

During these years of study, he was particularly inspired by figures with challenging approaches: Kant, Mill, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Otto, Weber, Derrida, Foucault, Gauchet and Levi Strauss. He obtained his license in philosophy in 1986 when he submitted a dissertation titled *La guérison du chercheur d'Ibn Khaldûn. Traduction partielle in princeps, annoté et commentée du Shifâ' al-sâ'il li-tahdhîb al masâ'il suivie d'un essai sur la critique d'Ibn Khaldûn de la philosophie dans la Muqaddima en relation avec sa pensée religieuse*. The same year he returned to Cairo as a teaching volunteer, during which time he returned to his duties as the “Professor French” at the Patriarchal College of Heliopolis. His teaching timetable allowed him to continue his research, and in 1989, he presented a new thesis to the Catholic University of Louvain to obtain his license in Arabic language and Islamic Studies

("Diplôme de licencié en langue arabe et islamologie") from the Oriental Institute. It was titled *La question de l'ijtihād selon Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī. Introduction, traduction partielle des Luma' fī usūl al-fiqh d'al-Shīrāzī*, notes et index.

A few months later, he began, under the supervision of under Daniel Gimaret, to prepare a doctoral thesis - the main objective was to complete a French translation of the *Kitāb al-Luma'*. The aim was also to propose a broad vision of the discipline of Islamic legal theory (*usūl al-fiqh*) when no treatise had been translated into any Western language. That translation remains (along with that of al-Shāfi'i's *Risāla*) one of the few that exist. His thesis was presented in May 1993, at the École Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris. It comprised four volumes: *I. Introduction à la lecture des Luma' fī usūl al-fiqh*, *II. Edition critique des Luma'*, *III. Traduction annotée et indexée des Luma'* et *V. Essai sur le lexique des Luma'*.

The same year, Éric joined the CNRS as a researcher of the assistant class, and entered the Institut de recherche et d'étude sur les mondes arabes et musulmans (IREMAM) in Aix-en-Provence. Alongside his masterly works in legal theory (from which he gained an international reputation), Éric broadened his field of research whilst at IREMAM - he began to examine, within the wider institution programme, "religious normativity". He was also in regular demand for works aimed at the general public. As his publications demonstrate, Eric had become increasingly interested in the link between ethics, politics and religion and was one of the first Francophone researchers to tackle the question of gender in Islam. In the 2000s, he participated in research programmes on the comparative study of the three monotheistic faiths resulting in some admirable publications. Finally, he received his *habilitation à diriger des recherches* (HDR) in June 2015, presenting, in addition to a portfolio of his previous works, an unpublished, partial edition of the treatise on legal theory by Abu Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *al-Taqrīb wa-l-irshād*.

In recent years, Éric became passionate about a return to his initial research interests: "anti-philosophism" in Islam - a theme he had begun to rework by renaming it "anti-intellectualism". He had planned to carry out large-scale research on this theme and about which he had become particularly excited.

Éric had a powerful critical mind – he was sharp and often provocative. Discussions with him could last very late into the night, around a good meal and good wine. He was food lover - and an excellent cook. Rabelais declared "The juice of the vine makes clear one's mind and understanding, calms one's anger, drives away one's sadness and gives one joy and jubilation". Eric was, in this sense, devilishly Rabelaisian. He loved literature, poetry, photography and music as much as philosophy and Islamic studies. It was his view that the researcher must draw upon all these sources of the human mind and sensitivity when reflecting and deciphering the world around us. The researcher should never be locked into an erudition which stifles creativity. He remains for us the perfect example of a free spirit.

[A bibliography of Éric's works can be found at: https://iremam.cnrs.fr/fr/memoriame-eric-chaumont?fbclid=IwAR1sNAmFWHrsH6hX0iyW1JoVMsUK00Qg92SXhtwyVFC_qHi08uphyfa9cw]