



CFP for an international research workshop on
Utopias among Jews in Islamic countries: Theory and practice
Ben Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the Middle East
November 2, 2025, Jerusalem

The vision of an ideal future society, in which all the injustices and pains of existence in our world will be corrected, is a human response that derives from the unwillingness to accept all the evils and shortcomings of the existing world. Descriptions and plans of the ultimate future world has found expression in many genres of utopian literature, that can be found in many different cultures.

Utopian literature, utopian thinking (including critiques of utopias), and utopian movements that attempted to make such visions a reality have been the subject of much research. The study of utopia is the study of the human imagination and its limitations, through which it is possible to reveal not only a society's hopes and desires, but also its fears, anxieties, and the evil spirits that haunt it. It is unclear whether utopian thinking and its literary and political expressions are universal phenomena that can be found in every culture and at every time, or whether they are characteristic only of certain cultures and specific periods.

This conference is a first attempt to uncover and discuss utopian phenomena in the literature, thought, and politics of Jews who lived and worked in Islamic countries. Since this topic has been studied very little,

the very discovery, identification, and characterization of utopian phenomena in these societies will also be important. At the same time, we will also try to address questions such as: What are the sources of utopian thinking among Jews in Islamic countries? Does it grow from and is nourished by the world of religion and tradition, or is it perhaps a reaction to Western secular thinking? Did the encounter between Judaism and Islam lead to the development of utopian thought? What is the place of utopia in the society of a landless religious minority, and what is its connection to communal identity and political imagination? What is the relationship between utopia, and eschatology and messianism? How did Jewish thinkers perceive political and social utopias that arose in the Islamic space and beyond? Were there attempts to realize these utopias, and if so, under what conditions were they born and how did they come to pass or fail?

We would be pleased to receive proposals for lectures on these and other relevant topics.

Proposals, along with a 300-word abstract and CV, should be sent by
15.6.2025 to mbz@ybz.org.il

Regards,

Steering Committee Members: David Guedj, Zvi Zohar, Menachem

Lorberbaum, Miriam Frenkel