**OBITUARY: URI RUBIN (1944-2021)**

Uri Rubin, one of the most significant and pioneering researchers of Islam in our day, passed away on October 26 in his Tel Aviv home at the age of 77.

Rubin became interested in the Arabic language and the world of Islam as a high school student. He continued to deepen this interest during his studies at Tel Aviv University, where he went on to complete all of his academic studies and research activities. Initially, Rubin studied toward a B.A. in Middle East Studies and Biblical Studies. When he completed his undergraduate degree, the Department of Arabic Studies was founded at Tel Aviv University. Rubin then completed a second B.A. in this department and stayed on in the department through his doctorate. His doctoral work, which he completed magna cum laude under the supervision of Prof. M. J. Kister, addressed aspects of the figure of Muhammad in early Islamic tradition. Rubin’s first paper, which concerned the symbols of light in the figure of the prophet Muhammad, was based on a chapter of his doctorate. [[1]](#footnote-1)

Near the end of his doctorate, Rubin began to teach in the Arabic Studies department at Tel Aviv University. He later served as the department chair for three terms, during which he played a critical role in the department’s formation and development. In 2012, Rubin retired from his position as a full professor; however, after his retirement, he continued his research activities, and taught in the Arabic and Islamic Studies departments of Tel Aviv University until his passing.

Throughout his research career, Rubin published numerous books and articles in academic platforms worldwide. He was a member of the advisory committee of The Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān (*EQ*), and wrote dozens of entries for the encyclopedia, as well as for the second (*EI2)* and third (*EI3*) editions of the [Encyclopedia of Islam](https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%94%D7%90%D7%A0%D7%A6%D7%99%D7%A7%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%A4%D7%93%D7%99%D7%94_%D7%A9%D7%9C_%D7%94%D7%90%D7%A1%D7%9C%D7%90%D7%9D), the third supplement volume of Encyclopaedia Hebraica (Encyclopaedia Hebraica, 3rd supplement volume (1995) [Hebrew]), and additional encyclopedias. He also published book reviews and edited anthologies.

Rubin also published a new Hebrew translation of the Quran that was released in first and second editions.

Uri Rubin’s work dealt with research of the Quran and its interpretations, as well as the early Islamic tradition in general. Over the years, he told his close students that his studies in the Department of Biblical Studies had contributed significantly to his study of the Quran.

Rubin’s research goals, as he represented them in his articles and books, were to reveal Muslims’ views on the early Islamic past, and on their religion and culture, as reflected in early Islamic sources such as the Quran and the Islamic tradition. Rubin did not aim to distinguish between “history” and “folklore,” but rather between various forms of tradition, and between the various perspectives and beliefs that generated the texts we have today. He sought to illuminate the ways in which those who compiled and disseminated the Islamic tradition had molded the historical memory of Islamic antiquity.

Rubin’s first book focused on the life of Muhammad.[[2]](#footnote-2) In it, he examined the literary composition of traditions concerning the prophet Muhammad, and the underlying views that they reflected. Rubin demonstrates that Muhammad’s biography was largely constructed from the following two sources: a) a concrete extra-Quranic element (names of figures, places, battles), which provides a structured framework of events for the story of Muhammad’s life; b) a Quranic element – verses from the Quran incorporated by the compilers of Muhammad’s biography into the extra-Quranic groundwork of the story in order to anchor the obscure Quranic verses in a concrete series of events.

Rubin’s second book examined the portrayal of the children of Israel and the Islamic self-image.[[3]](#footnote-3) In this book, Rubin compares depictions of the children of Israel in biblical elements and in Quranic elements in various traditions, discussing the ambivalent attitude of these early traditions toward the children of Israel. On the one hand, it is possible to discern the positive image of the children of Israel as a messianic model suited to the Islamic nation; on the other hand, the factionalist character of the children of Israel is highlighted as a negative model from which the Islamic nation must take care to preserve itself. Rubin notes that these traditions make greater use of Quranic models to replace the biblical models.

Two years ago, in 2019, Rubin published two books in Hebrew through the Hebrew University of Jerusalem’s Magnes Press. The first book is a brief introduction to the Quran.[[4]](#footnote-4) The second book addresses the holy status of Mecca and Jerusalem in the Quran and in the Islamic tradition, shedding new light on the history of Jerusalem’s status in early Islam.[[5]](#footnote-5) It presents central aspects of the components of Jerusalem’s sanctity, as well as of the fluctuation between the sanctity of Jerusalem and the sanctity of Mecca and the Ka’ba. According to Rubin, the axis of sanctity between Mecca and Jerusalem had been an accepted fact in that part of the world well before the appearance of Islam on the historical stage. An English translation of the book is forthcoming; in the final year of his life, Rubin invested considerable efforts in translating the book into English and preparing it for print.

The articles that Rubin wrote over the course of his rich and diverse research career cover a broad range of topics, including: the image and life of the prophet Muhammad,[[6]](#footnote-6) the history of Islamic prayer, pilgrimage rites to Mecca, Abrahamic religion in the pre-Islamic Arabian region and its connection to the Ka’ba rituals in Mecca, the Ka’ba as a direction of prayer, the sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam, relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, biblical models in the Islamic tradition, prophets and prophecy, governmental authority in Islam, the meanings of numerous Quranic verses (**Q** 2:198; 7:166; 9:1; 9:29; 15:87; 44:10-11; 54:1-2; 73:1; 74:1; 96:1;  106:1-2; 111:1; 112:2), and so forth.[[7]](#footnote-7) Rubin even edited an anthology of articles examining various aspects of the life of Muhammad, [[8]](#footnote-8)and coedited an anthology on the status of the *dhimmi* in Islam. [[9]](#footnote-9)

Rubin’s translation of the Quran was well received by researchers, students, and readers in Israel and in the Arab world. In 2002, the head of the publishing house turned to Rubin with a request to translate the Quran for the Hebrew-speaking reader. The first edition of the translation was published in 2005. A decade later, in 2016, a new, updated and expanded edition was published.[[10]](#footnote-10) The translation was praised for its meticulousness, thoroughness, and extensive, valuable annotation. Rubin sought to reflect the accepted traditional interpretations; in footnotes, he described various additional meanings that were not reflected in the body of the translation, as well as parallels from Jewish and Christian sources. The translation also contains appendices and a detailed index.

Rubin provided a foundation for generations of students and researchers, making an important contribution to the research of Islam through his books and articles. His students – past, present, and future – are lucky to have learned from the work of this remarkable and generous researcher, lecturer, and expert.

* **עד כאן**

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למאמר על הטקסט הקוראני

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1. “Pre-Existence and Light—Aspects of the Concept of Nur Muhammad,” Israel Oriental Studies 5 (1975), 62–119. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
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3. [Between Bible and Qur'an: the Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image, Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1999](http://www.urirubin.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/BETWEEN_BIBLE_AND_QURAN_-_SEARCHABLE.32644357.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Quran: The Divine Voice Speaks to Muhammad the Messenger, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2019 (Hebrew).  [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Between Jerusalem and Mecca: Sanctity and Salvation in the Quran and the Islamic Tradition, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2019 (Hebrew﻿). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A selection of Rubin’s articles on Muhammad from the years 1975–2009 has been published by Variorum. The collection includes studies of the prophetic figure of Muhammad, his prophetic experiences, and the Arabia of his day. See [*Muhammad the Prophet and Arabia*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, Farnham: Ashgate, 2011](http://www.urirubin.com/publications/admin?t=1391009855&k=i1&v=q.qYc2GqCis0OyukWRzJcVOINu_gOehRHPhdizo1IX.IlKEJTMri0MNMKUtm3TLFnT_TTG3mDQ--~A&y=lRNof47VvZyFDlxhqKTqjq4_EIU-~A#mce_temp_url#). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Rubin wrote multiple articles on each of the topics listed above. For a complete list of Prof. Uri Rubin’s research publications and links to the articles, see his official website: **http://www.urirubin.com/publications.** [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Uri Rubin (ed. and Introduction), The Life of Muhammad *(The Formation of the Classical Islamic World: Vol. 4),* Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Uri Rubin and David J. Wasserstein (eds.), Dhimmis and Others: Jews and Christians and the World of Classical Islam, Israel Oriental Studies 17 (1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Qur’an: Hebrew Translation from the Arabic, Annotations, Appendices and Index﻿, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2005; [*The Qur’an: Hebrew Translation from the Arabic (New Edition*](http://www.urirubin.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/%D7%94%D7%A7%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9F_%D7%9E%D7%AA%D7%95%D7%A7%D7%9F_%D7%A9%D7%9C%D7%9D.9814712.pdf)), Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)