



**Prof. Paul Shore**

(University of Regina)

## **The Journeys of Father Nau: Polemic, Sex, and the Sacred**

**Friday, 26.02.2016, 18:00**

Zentrum für Alte Kulturen

Langer Weg 11, SR 5



The Jesuit Michel Nau (1633-1683) spent much of his career in the Levantine provinces of the Ottoman Empire, serving in the retinue of the Marquis of Nointel, the French ambassador to the Sublime Porte and establishing a mission to the Yezidi in Mardin. An aggressive promoter of Catholicism, Nau was briefly imprisoned by the pasha of Aleppo but was still able to compile a firsthand account of the Holy Land, *Voyage nouveau à la Terre sainte* (1679). Nau also engaged with the teachings of the Qur'an through a polemical document entitled *Religio Christiana contra Alcoranum* (1680) which dissects, *inter alia*, the sexual morality Nau perceived in the stories of the Prophet as preserved in

the Qur'an and the Hadiths. Some of these ideas were re-presented for a broader European audience in *État présent de la religion mahométane* (1685). This talk will explore Nau's understanding of Qur'anic ethical teachings and of the mores of Muslims (as he understood them), through an examination of his translations and discussions of key passages of the Qur'an. We shall also consider Nau as a representative of the "Golden Age" of Jesuit travel literature who furthered the goals of the Society of Jesus in its project of self representation. A careful observer of the practices of the peoples he met, Nau's renderings of the peoples, places and mores of the seventeenth century Eastern Mediterranean are nonetheless imbued with a baroque Catholic sensibility that sheds light not only on the lands he visited but also on his European audiences and on the institutional culture of the Counter-Reformation Society of Jesus.