***Do not even shake hands with them*. Purity as a demarcation tool in Egypt and West Asia in the 4th-8th c.**

Ghent, 20-21 September 2027

Purity offers an advantageous angle to reflect upon societal rules, the relationship between human and sacred, gender and power structures, moral behavior, and the influence of religious dogmas on everyday life. In the past century, research on purity has seen a multiplication of both intercultural theoretical reflections and culture-specific studies. In particular, new trends have challenged the theoretical framework delineated by Mary Douglas, especially in Purity and Danger (2004, first edition 1966). Whereas Douglas viewed purity norms as means to maintain social structures, more recent scholarship (e.g., Frevel-Nihan 2013: 6-10 and Blidstein 2017: 6-7) argues that purity norms are not stronger, as Douglas suggested, in societies with clear and rigid hierarchical structures, but in societies or religions whose boundaries are challenged or are being defined. If the "demarcational" function of purity has begun to be adopted to analyze the Ancient Mediterranean and Judaism, the Late Antique Egypt and West Asia – including Mesopotamia and Central Asia/Caucasus – remains largely unexplored. However, this domain can prove particularly fruitful, considering the extended contacts between Christian, Jewish, Manichaean, Zoroastrian, and Islamic communities of these centuries, which gave rise both to intercultural and interreligious influences and to processes of self-definition and separation.

This workshop wishes to bring new light to this theme. Rather than treating purity as an isolated religious category, we are interested in how it functioned within broader processes of boundary-making and identity construction. We invite **20-minute papers** investigating how Judaic, Christian (especially Greek and oriental Christianities), Islamic, Manichaean, and Zoroastrian sources used (im)purity discourses and ideas to demarcate and separate themselves from others – either other religions or other confessions. We particularly welcome papers exploring:

- the construction of alterity using (im)purity ideas
- the language of impurity, and especially whether it is possible to trace a specific language of "demarcational" impurity
- the construction of real and imagined spaces, especially in relation to the construction of boundaries with the heretics and the non-believers
- the differences between theological stances and social practices in relation to purity "demarcational" discourses
- everyday practices marking out the heretics or non-believers as impure
- interactions of different religions seen through the lens of impurity (including cryptoidentities and conversion processes)
- gender and impurity, and in particular how purity norms influenced the separation of a specific gender

We are especially interested in sources written in Greek, Syriac, Arabic, Coptic, Hebrew, Middle-Persian, and Armenian. The results of the workshop will be published in a collective volume.

The workshop will take place in **Ghent** on **20-21 September 2027**. Confirmed keynote speakers are Prof. Barbara Hjørdis Roggema and Prof. Albert de Jong.

Potential speakers are invited to send an abstract of 300 words, together with a 100-word professional biography, to giorgia.nicosia@ugent.be and Guillermo.MenendezSanchez@UGent.be by **15 December 2026**. The results of the selection process will be communicated by **15 January 2027**.

For any questions, please write to giorgia.nicosia@ugent.be and Guillermo.MenendezSanchez@UGent.be.