

### Conference Report

International Conference: The Syriac Writers of Qatar in the Seventh Century

The American University of Beirut (AUB) collaborated with Qatar University in an international conference entitled “The Syriac Writers of Qatar in the Seventh Century.” The conference took place on 26 - 27 February, 2014. It was the first of its kind in the Gulf Region, and it brought together some of the most prominent scholars in Syriac Studies from the Catholic University of Louvain, Marburg, Princeton, Smith, Rutgers, Georgetown, and Oxford.

The conference included papers on a number of Syriac monastic and ascetical writers from the seventh century who were born and educated in Beth Qatrāye (Syriac for Qatar or Region of the Qataris) of which Isaac of Nineveh of Qatar is considered to be the most influential of all Syriac monastic writers and who continues to exert a strong influence in monastic circles today. Many of the others like Dadishoʿ of Qatar, Gabriel bar Līpēh of Qatar, Abraham bar Līpēh of Qatar, Gabriel Arya of Qatar, and Ahob of Qatar were important Syriac writers on spirituality and commentators or exegetes within the Church of the East tradition. These writers, who all originated from the Qatar region and were educated there, reveal the presence of an important school of education that rivaled in its sophistication the other more well-known schools such as the School of Nisibis or the School of Edessa. The Syriac writers of Qatar themselves produced some of the best and most sophisticated writing to be found in all Syriac literature of the seventh century.

The demonym “Qatrāya” (Syriac for Qatari/of Qatar) is found added to the names of all of the writers above in the ancient Syriac manuscripts now to be found in the British Library, Paris Bibliothèque Nationale, Vatican Library, St Mark’s Monastery in Jerusalem, and Selly Oak Birmingham. In addition, the term Beth Qatrāye (Syriac for region of the Qataris) was used by the Syriac speaking communities who lived there to refer to the whole region of what is now Qatar and Bahrain and the adjacent coast of Arabia. The term Beth Qatrāye along with the place names of specific locations within this region are to be found, for example, in five letters written by Ishoyahb III, the Patriarch of the Church of the East

from 650-658 AD, to the church authorities, priests, monks, and lay people of Beth Qatraye.

Unfortunately the Syriac writers of Qatar have not received the scholarly attention that they deserve in the last half century. To this day many of their works remain scattered in manuscripts that are unedited and very rarely fully translated in libraries throughout Europe. Those translations that have been undertaken in English are mostly incomplete and fragmentary often as part of articles and without the accompanying Syriac editions. Furthermore, the translations that were completed in the 19th century in the Latin language are now inaccessible to the majority of modern readers and, similarly, those few translations to be found in German, Italian, and French are less accessible to the general Gulf Arab reader.

The conference "The Syriac Writers of Qatar in the Seventh Century" comes as part of a three year research project funded by the Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF) under its National Priorities Research Program (NPRP). The submitting institution is Qatar University while the collaborating institution is AUB. The team members are Professor Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn and Professor Mario Kozah from AUB, Professor Saif Al-Murikhi from Qatar University, and Dr Haya Al Thani from the Qatar Museums Authority.

The project plans to publish two books with Gorgias Press: the first an edited volume of this conference's proceedings entitled *The Syriac Writers of Qatar in the Seventh Century*; the second book entitled *The Syriac Writers of Qatar: an Anthology* will consist of English translations (many accompanied by the edited Syriac texts) of select texts from all the above listed Syriac writers along with introductions.

Below is a list of the papers that were presented at the conference:

1. "An Archaeological Survey of Beth Qatraye"  
Dr. Haya Al Thani (Qatar Museums Authority)
2. "Christianity in Arabia: An Overview (4th–9th Centuries)"  
Professor Suleiman A. Mourad (Smith College, USA)
3. "The Quranic Word ḥanīf and its Explanation in the Light of the Syriac Root."

Mr. Abdul Rahman Chamseddine (Georgetown University  
SFS, Qatar)

4. "Manuscript Transmission of the Works of Isaac of Nineveh in the Syriac Tradition"

Dr. Grigory Kessel (Marburg University, Germany)

5. "Remembrance of God and its Relation to Scripture"

Dr. Mary Hansbury (USA)

6. "Two Discourses of the "Fifth Part" of Isaac the Syrian's Writings: Prolegomena for Apokatastasis?"

Dr. Sabino Chiala (Italy)

7. "Syriac Biblical Interpretation from Qatar: Ahob of Qatar and Rabban Gabriel"

Prof. Bas ter Haar Romeny (Leiden University, Netherlands)

8. "Gabriel of Beth Qatrake as a witness to Syriac intellectual life c.600 CE."

Dr. Sebastian Brock (University of Oxford)

9. "The Future of the Past: The Reception of Syriac Qatrake Authors in Late Medieval Iraq"

Dr. Thomas Carlson (Princeton University, USA)

10. "Dadisho Qatrake's Compendious Commentary on the Paradise of the Egyptian Fathers in Garshūni - A Case of Manuscript Mistaken Identity"

Dr. Mario Kozah (American University of Beirut)

11. "Lost and found: Dadisho' Qatrake's Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers as a witness to the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia"

Mr. David Phillips (Catholic University of Louvain)

12. "The Book of Monks: Ethiopian Monasticism via Beth Qatrake"

Dr. Robert Kitchen (Knox-Metropolitan United Church, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada)

13. “The Influence of Christianity Among the Arab Tribes in the Gulf Area During the 6th and 7th Centuries A.D.”

Prof Saif Al-Murikhi (Qatar University)

Photo of conference participants:

