Dorushe Conference 2007, April 14–15, 2007

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[1] The success of Beth Mardutho's second annual *Dorushe* conference demonstrated the continued growth of Syriac studies in graduate programs both in North America and Europe. Princeton University hosted the conference this year. Support for the conference was provided by Princeton University's Department of Near Eastern Studies, the Group for the Study of Late Antiquity, the Center for the Study of Religion, the Program in Hellenic Studies, the History Department, the Program in the Ancient World, and the Dean of the Graduate School. With stimulating papers and responses, feedback from senior scholars, and enjoyable meals and even dancing, this year's conference provided an excellent opportunity for intellectual exchange and professional development for the next generation of Syriac scholars. David Michelson, Ph.D. candidate in Princeton's Department of History, organized the event with assistance from a Dorushe committee of students.

[2] Students from nine universities and three countries presented papers on a wide variety of stimulating topics ranging from historical and literary studies to theological and philological investigations.

[3] The conference began on Saturday, April 14, 2007. Dr. Emmanuel Papoutsakis of the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University and David Michelson welcomed the group. We heard excellent papers from students on Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning. Outside observers from several universities attended, and Gorgias Press set up an outstanding book display.

[4] Saturday evening, after a lovely reception, conference participants celebrated together at a dinner hosted by Princeton. Prof. David Taylor of Oxford delivered an outstanding after-dinner talk. He spoke about changes in the field of Syriac studies in the last twenty-five years. He discussed how graduate students from both sides of the Atlantic can benefit and learn from the methodologies and approaches of one another and offered suggestions of topics in the field needing further research. On Sunday morning, after students presented their last papers, both

Prof. Taylor and Dr. Papoutsakis offered closing remarks and conclusions for the group.

[5] Following is a brief summary of the papers presented. On behalf of the Dorushe conference committee, I express our thanks to Princeton University and to the students who contributed to the success of the weekend. Students who wish to join Dorushe are urged to contact dorushe@bethmardutho.org. Tentatively, next year's conference is planned for April 2008 at the University of Notre Dame.

[6] *Elitzur Avraham Bar-Asher* (Harvard University): "Syriac as an Eastern Aramaic Dialect: a Reassessment of the Evidence." Elitzur Bar-Asher's paper reviewed the main scholarly positions on the topic of Syriac as an Eastern Aramaic dialect. This paper brings these discussions up to date by contributing new information and evaluating previous scholarship using methodologies from historical linguistics. This study also raised methodological problems concerning the study of Syriac. On account of inner evidence and comparison with phenomena in other eastern dialects, Bar-Asher suggested that Syriac be seen as an "Eastern literary language."

[7] *Kevin Casey:* (University of Toronto): "The Use and Interpretation of Scripture Amongst Muslim and Christian Exegetes of the 7th through 10th Centuries." This paper discussed biblical interpretation in Syriac mystical literature: the recognition of levels of meaning in the scriptural text and the intersection of spiritual experience, religious practice and hermeneutics. This paper situated these principles of mystical hermeneutics within the larger debate concerning the interpretation and meaning of scripture which raged in the Late Antique Near East. The discussion pointed to some areas where, perhaps, these principles and this debate were absorbed and manifested in Islam. The Syriac author Dadišoʿ Qatraya, for example, expands upon Antiochene theories of exegesis that reigned in the East Syrian Church in his discussion of the several senses (*sūkālē*) of meaning in the word of Scripture: historical interpretation (*pūšāqā taśʿitānāyā*), homiletic interpretation (*mtargmānāyā*), and spiritual interpretation (*pūšāqā ruḥānāyā*). Spiritual interpretation, for him, is a practice appropriate only for the solitaries and holy men. Early mystical commentary on the Qur'an took the form of short utterances and glosses of inspired speech that resulted from listening to and reciting the text of the Qur'an.

Both Muslim and Christian mystics from the early Islamic period also single out the heart, not the mind, as the locus of the spiritual understanding of scripture. There are obvious similarities between the spiritual exegesis practiced by the monks of the Church of the East and the spiritual reading of the Qur'an found among the mystics of the first centuries of Islam.

[8] *Miriam Goldstein:* (Hebrew University): "Tafsīr al Tawrāt: Jewish and Christian Exegetes in the Muslim Empire." Following the initial Muslim conquest of the Mediterranean and the Near East, a second, linguistic, conquest proved to be the most crucial transformation of the region. This was the conquest in which the Arabic language, which had taken root among the populations of the region even prior to the spread of Islam, replaced Aramaic. This provided a medium of discourse that encouraged the flow of ideas between groups that had formerly held one another at a distrustful distance. Most studies of interconfessional scholarly ties in the Muslim Empire till now have focused on Jewish–Muslim interaction, including the areas of law, theology, philosophy and literature. Jewish-Christian ties have been a striking omission. The study of biblical interpretation provides a natural point of entry to such research, for Jews and Christians held a common text, the Hebrew Bible, to be sacred. It is clear from numerous sources that scholars of the two groups were not only aware of each others' interpretations; at times they actively sought the aid of each other in solving difficult exegetical problems. This paper sketched possible ties among exegetes of both religious traditions writing in Syriac/Aramaic and Arabic/Judeo-Arabic, both regarding interpretations of particular Scriptural verses as well as methodology.

[9] *Henryk Jaronowski:* (Leopold-Wenger-Institut für Rechtsgeschichte: University of Munich) "The Place of the Syro-Roman Law Book in Syrian legal Traditions." The Syro-Roman Law Book (SRLB) presents scholars with a set of tantalizing and difficult questions. This paper addressed the question of the SRLB's place in the Syrian legal traditions. Although the SRLB was continuously available and even translated into Arabic, Coptic, Armenian, and Georgian, citations of it are scarce. In the West Syrian tradition, only Bar Hebraeus (†1286) cites the SRLB. Although five East Syrian works cite it between the 8th and 13th centuries, the SRLB does not seem to be an essential part of

the East Syrian legal consciousness. There are certain passages of the SRLB, specifically on inheritance law, family law, the *arrha*, and measurements, which are cited by multiple authors. This paper connected the citations to their source manuscripts and discussed how the repeated citations differ between authors, showing how the contents of the SRLB were used and adapted over time. The SRLB also appears in divergent West and East Syrian manuscript families, with different numbering and variations in text and content. Although Kaufhold and Selb's 2002 critical edition of the SRLB edits, translates, and proposes a stemma for these various manuscripts, it does not treat the textual differences among them in detail. This paper characterized the differences in content between the two manuscript families and between the manuscripts in each family, evaluating how much and to what end the text was reworked.

[10] *Vitalijs Permjakovs:* (University of Notre Dame) "Two Spring Festivals in the Syriac Liturgical Calendar–Traces of an Archaic Calendar System?" This paper discussed two liturgical celebrations in the calendar used by the Syriac churches, both of West and East Syriac traditions. The first usually appears in the calendar under the title *dominica nova* (*ḥad bšabâ ḥadṯâ*): the first Sunday after Easter. The second feast comes in the middle of May. Often this is designated with the title "the Feast of the Theotokos over the ears of corn/grain." They appear to be parts of two different calendrical cycles – one, the Easter-Pentecost cycle, another – the cycle of fixed Dominical/Marian feasts. However, these two liturgio-calendrical units represent elements of one, more archaic calendrical system that may be linked to Jewish calendars of the Temple period (Jubilees, Dead Sea Scrolls) and possibly to early Judeo-Christian communities. Across Christian traditions, including Syriac, the celebration of the first Sunday after Easter (*dominica*, *dominica in albis*, *kainê kyriakê*, *antipascha*) is marked as a solemn and festive occasion. The significance of this day may derive from its connection to particular calendrical traditions that can be traced to the ancient 364-day calendars. This paper examined whether liturgical data from the Syriac tradition gives any evidence for the *dominica nova* being a part of this proposed ancient "calendar system:" the 'beginning' of the archaic Pentecost season.

[11] *Robert Riggs*: (University of Pennsylvania): "Ibn Qutayba's Usage of Arabic Biblical Referents: A Place for Syriac Informants?"

Even a cursory examination of the works of the famed Arabic litterateur Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) reveals a plethora of Biblical or pseudo-Biblical references in a variety of his writings. While it is not unusual to find early Muslim authors referring to the Tawra (Torah), Injil (Gospel), and Zabur (Psalms) in their Qur'anic context, the lucidity and accuracy with which Ibn Qutayba uses references to the earlier revealed literature leads the reader to question his oral and textual informants. Unlike many of his Muslim contemporaries, who seemed to attribute authoritative status to a wide variety of apocryphal stories taken in part from the growing corpus of folk tales and myths, the *qiṣṣaṣ al-ʾanbiyāʾ*, orally circulating during the milieu of the seventh to ninth centuries, Ibn Qutayba seems to draw from early textual sources which reflect a striking similarity to early Syriac and Hebrew manuscripts. This paper contrasted the use of Biblical references by early Muslim historians ʻAli Rabban al-Ṭabari, Abu Jaʿfar al-Ṭabari, and al-Yaʿqubi with the works of Ibn Qutayba to present a clearer view of the parallel usages and availability of Biblical texts in the ninth century.

[12] *Jeanne-Nicole Saint-Laurent:* (Brown University): "The Acts of Marī and the Rhetoric of Syriac Missionary Narratives." Recent scholarship by F. and C. Jullien and A. Harrak have brought greater attention to the importance of the late sixth-, early seventh-century text, the *Acts of Mari.* This foundation myth narrates the missionary tour of Mar Mari, the apostle of Babylonia, linked in East Syriac religious traditions with the Edessan apostle Addai. The text's rhetoric distinguished Mari and his foundations from other apostolic missionaries, like Thomas and Addai. While the apocryphal text established continuity between Addai and Mari, it also constructed difference to set Mari apart and make his story the exclusive treasure of the East Syrian Dyophysite Church. The text created and reconfigured a hierarchy for the cities of Persia and Babylonia. The rhetoric and vocabulary of this text reveal a distinct thought world and network of East Syriac monasteries in which this story circulated. As Jullien and Jullien have argued, the *Acts of Mari* must be interpreted in light of narratives of Manichean and Baptizing movements. As in the *Acts of Thomas*, women serve to advance the mission of the patron-apostle. The authors of the *Acts of Mari* used literary strategies of distinction to legitimize their

origins as they stitched Mari's itinerary into the literary framework of the apocryphal Acts narratives.

[13] *Edward Schoolman:* (UCLA): "From Antaura to the Evil Eye: Early Modern Syriac Magical Charms and their Pre-Christian Origin." In 1912, Hermann Gollancz published a volume entitled *The Book of Protection*, in which he edited and translated four collections of Syriac magical amulets and charms. These collections, compiled in the 17th and 18th century in book form, do not follow the templates of ancient magical handbooks, but nevertheless preserve Christian charms and magical elements that have their antecedents in ancient Greek and Coptic traditions. This paper discussed a formula found numerous times in these texts and common to both this early modern Syriac collection and to ancient phylacteries and magical handbooks. The main feature of this spell type is an invocation of a helpful divine figure, which arrives to challenge a demonic one, with the interaction recorded in dialog, and the divine figure either turning away or binding the demonic one. A detailed comparison of this charm formula through pagan, early-Christian, and late Syriac contexts brings to light the adaptation of magical traditions across cultural, linguistic, and social lines.

[14] *Michal Bar-Asher Siegal:* (Yale University): "The Problem of Evil in the Syriac Translation of the Book of Ben-Sira." This paper suggests that the treatment of evil in the book of Ben Sira caused the Syriac translator to change the content of the original text in several places. The translator found the treatment of the creation of evil in Ben Sira text problematic, particularly its suggestion of the possibility of predestined wicked men. In these cases, the Syriac translation tends to stress human choice and dims the sections of the text in which Ben Sira suggested divine determination and God's creation of Evil. Outlining this motivation in the Syriac version brings new insights concerning previous scholarship on this translation, (such as Winter [1977]) and a rejection of their conclusions.

[15] *Jeff Wickes:* (University of Notre Dame): "The Literary Structure and Historical World Vision of Pseudo-Ephrem's Sermon on the End of the World." During the course of the later seventh and early eighth centuries, a number of works were composed in Syriac that depicted the initial Islamic conquests as harbingers of the world's end. These works enlisted a cast of

characters to act out this apocalyptic drama: the "Sons of Hagar," or "Sons of Ishmael," Romans, Persians, and Alexander's Eschatological People of the North. All the characters that took part in these later seventh- and early eighth-century Syriac Christian representations of the end could be mapped onto actual historical figures, and thus the dramas functioned as commentaries on the world in which the authors and audiences lived. Moreover, the placement of these historical characters within a certain temporal framework—the brink of the end of time—aimed to alter audiences' perception of the time in which they lived. One of the relevant themes within this emergent literature was the concept of time in Pseudo-Ephrem's "Homily on the End of the World." Just as Ps. Ephrem's presentation of the Islamic invaders sought to foster a certain perspective towards this, so, too, his presentation of time sought to alter their perception of the temporal space and the characters in these events.