CONFERENCE REPORTS

Recovering the Role of Christians in the History of the Middle East: A Workshop at Princeton University May 6-7, 2016

MICHAEL REYNOLDS, JACK TANNOUS, AND CHRISTIAN SAHNER
WORKSHOP ORGANIZERS

On May 6-7, 2016, the Near East and the World Seminar welcomed fourteen distinguished scholars to Princeton University to discuss the place of Christians in Middle Eastern history and historiography. At the outset, speakers were invited to reflect on how the field of Middle Eastern history generally and their work specifically changes when they consider perspectives provided by Christian sources, institutions, and individuals. A working premise of the conference was that although Christians have formed a significant portion of the population of the Middle East since the Arab conquests, the stubborn but understandable tendency of historians to conceive of the Middle East as a Muslim region has had the effect of marginalizing Christian experiences. The result has been to consign Middle Eastern Christianity to a niche specialty alongside larger fields, such as Islamic studies, Byzantine studies, church history, Jewish studies, and Ottoman history.

The workshop participants answered the question of how to integrate Christians into Middle Eastern history in different ways. Robert Hoyland and Bruce Masters stressed how scholars must be open to evidence produced by Muslims and non-Muslims when writing the social and political history of the region: a source is a source, no matter its confessional origins. John-Paul Ghobrial and Bernard Heyberger underlined the importance and payoff of integrating Christians into bigger narratives about early modernity, especially how Eastern Christians served as cultural brokers between the Middle East, Europe, and the New World. Scholars sometimes struggle to find Christians in historical sources written primarily by and for Muslims. But Petra Sijpesteijn and George Kiraz discussed two sets of overlooked archival evidence that can help provide a more balanced picture of Muslim-ruled societies,

including the papyri of early Islamic Egypt and the Syriac archives from late-Ottoman Tur Abdin. Thomas Carlson explored the theme of Islamization in medieval Middle Eastern history. Specifically, he questioned the need to identify tipping points and conversion curves, since Islamization can be measured in subtler, more meaningful ways than simply the number of Muslims who lived at a given time.

The religious diversity of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Middle East was a theme in the presentations of Febe Armanios, Bedross Der Matossian, and Tom Papademetriou, who discussed the experiences of Copts, Armenians, and Greeks, respectively. In their own way, each speaker challenged the idea of center and periphery in Ottoman Studies, specifically why the history of Muslims was often given precedence over that of non-Muslims, and the history of cosmopolitan elites over that of sub-elites in the provinces. Lev Weitz and Luke Yarbrough asked how distinctive Christians really were in medieval Islamic societies, especially when it came to issues such as marriage and state service. Along the way, they discussed the importance of seeing Christians as representative of their broader societies, while at the same time, acknowledging the traditions, practices, and mentalities that made them distinct. Finally, Stephen Davis and Samir Khalil Samir emphasized the significance of the Arabic Christian patrimony for the study of Middle Eastern History. Davis did so by discussing his work with the uncatalogued Copto-Arabic manuscripts of Dayr al-Suryan in Egypt, and Samir by discussing the urgency of updating and disseminating one of the major *instrumenta studiorum* of the field, Georg Graf's monumental *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (1944-53).

These presentations led to discussion and debate about a number of bigger historiographic issues. Much of the conversation revolved around how to make the research of specialists in Middle Eastern Christians accessible to scholars in adjacent fields. The general opinion was that historians of Middle Eastern Christianity must resist the impulse toward ghettoization and do a better job of inserting themselves in wider debates. This can be done by tackling themes that transcend the study of Christians in the region – including global history, microhistory, the history of the body, etc. It can also be done by inviting scholars from these fields to collaborate and comment on our work, even when they study very

different geographies and time periods. Another way of accomplishing this would be to promote an "integrated" or "connected" history of the Middle East, one that does not privilege any one ethnic or religious group over another, but studies them side by side. At the same time, as we should strive to collapse distinctions among the "Islamic," "Christian," and "Jewish" layers in the history of the region, we should also take stock of what makes each of these communities unique. Thus, there was discussion about how specialists of Middle Eastern Christians must create a shared scholarly agenda based on comparison of Christian practices, institutions, and ideas over time. These might include the study of distinctive Christian languages (Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, Greek, etc.), literary genres (theology, poetry, hagiography), and social phenomena (pilgrimage, monasticism, sectarianism).

Along with this, the workshop touched on practical matters related to the study and teaching of Middle Eastern Christians. Several participants noted the difficulty of gaining access to archival materials in the Middle East, especially from ecclesiastical institutions. Others noted the need to eliminate barriers for entry by making basic scholarly resources – such as manuscript catalogs, reference works, and dictionaries – freely accessible online. Still others bemoaned the fact that because the history of Middle Eastern Christians remains an academic niche, it can be difficult to find gainful academic employment, even if a candidate has the ability to teach and research across more "mainstream" fields, such as Islamic, Byzantine, Ottoman, or early modern studies.

The speakers proposed a number of concrete steps to help open the field and make it more attractive for prospective students. One would be to organize a second conference as a follow-up to the Princeton meeting, which might lead to the publication of an edited volume. Another would be to organize intensive workshops for graduate students aimed at introducing them to the history of Christians in the Middle East. This would also serve to promote an "integrated" approach to the history of the region more generally and create connections and collaborations among early-career scholars. Finally, the participants agreed that the present tumult in the Middle East provides a unique opportunity – indeed, an obligation – to disseminate our research about Christians to the broader public. This might take the form of books aimed at undergraduates and lay readers, including a new textbook on

Middle Eastern history that deals extensively with underrepresented ethnic and religious groups; lectures for the general public; podcasts, etc.

Allographic Traditions among the Arabic-speaking Christians, Jews and Samaritans. Workshop on the Writing Systems of Garshuni, Judeo-Arabic and Samaritan-Arabic.

EKATERINA PUKHOVAIA, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

On June 9-10 a unique workshop took place at the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton). It was convened to allow scholars from various fields of expertise to discuss allographic traditions among the Arabic-speaking Christians, Jews and Samaritans, circumstances under which such traditions developed and ways in which the use of particular scripts, writing systems and languages reflects communal and religious identity. The workshop was the first of a series of Patricia Crone Memorial Workshops, sponsored by the Director's Excellence Fund, established by the Hendricks Charitable Foundation.

The workshop was organized by Sabine Schmidtke (IAS) and George Kiraz (Princeton University). A total of 16 speakers from the USA, Europe, Israel, and Japan participated in the workshop. Their papers covered a variety of topics, all related to "allographic traditions" and illustrated the variations of these traditions among communities in the Middle East. The workshop was a unique meeting of experts on Judeo-Arabic, Garshuni, *aljamiado*, Ottoman, and Coptic, who study the Jewish, Samaritan, Christian and Morisco communities of the Middle East and Spain. This allowed the participants to discuss similarities and differences in which these communities used different scripts and languages in a broad variety of texts – from poetry to legal documents, private letters and religious polemical literature.

The workshop was accompanied by an exhibition of some examples of texts in Garshuni and Judeo-Arabic, materials for which were provided by the Princeton Geniza Lab and Beth Mardutho Research Library. The exhibits included some of the earliest printed books in Arabic Garshuni, notably, a grammar of Syriac written in Syro-Arabic Garshuni, as well as Syro-Ottoman and Syro-Arabic newspapers. Several liturgical manuscripts written in several languages (Syriac, Arabic, Ottoman, English) and scripts were also exhibited. The Princeton Geniza Lab exhibited reproductions of a ketubba (marriage contract), and a palimpsest, which is arguably one of the oldest manuscripts in the Geniza and

includes a unique example of Hebrew transliterated in Greek characters, both courtesy of Cambridge University Library.

The workshop was divided into 8 sessions dedicated to Ottoman and Judeo-Arabic, Samaritan, Syro-Turkic Garshuni, Judeo-Arabic, Syriac Garshuni, Syro-Arabic Garshuni, writing systems originating from Islamic Spain, particularly *aljamiado* and Arabic in Latin script. The last session was dedicated to a case of Arabic in Greek letters and Coptic allographic traditions.

The first session, chaired by Sabine Schmidtke (IAS), was dedicated to "code-switching" in Judeo-Arabic and Ottoman. Meira Polliack (Tel Aviv University) gave a paper on "The Phenomenon of 'code switching' in the Written Discourse of Judeo-Arabic Texts", where she discussed how sociolinguistic approaches to Judeo-Arabic, particularly, to cases when languages and scripts are being switched between in one text, can allow researchers to understand the social background of the text production. Her talk was followed by E. Efe (Khayyat) (Rutgers University), who in his paper "Turks with a 'wāw'" outlined the variety of allographic traditions in the Ottoman period and discusses the search for a new script for the Turkish language to replace the Ottoman-Turkish script.

In the second session, chaired by Eve Krakowski (Princeton University), two papers on Samaritan allography were presented. Stefan Scorch (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg) in his paper on "Allographic writing in the Samaritan manuscript culture between Arabic and Hebrew" paid special attention to multilingual manuscripts of the Samaritan Pentateuch as examples of simultaneous existence of three scripts (Arabic, Samaritan Hebrew cursive and formal Samaritan Hebrew) and two languages (Hebrew and Arabic). This presentation was followed by Tamar Zewi (University of Haifa). Her paper on "Arabic and Syriac in the Samaritan Version of Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Pentateuch" concerned the characteristics of a manuscript of Saadya Gaon's translation and ways in which it influenced the transmission of the text of the Pentateuch in the Samaritan and, possibly, Arab Christian communities.

The third session, chaired by Hassan Ansari (IAS), concentrated on Syro-Turkic Garshuni. Anton Pritula (Hermitage Museum) presented the first paper in the session, entitled "Poems in Turkic and Persian Garshuni from the Mongol time", which

examined two poems, that used the switch between Syriac and a Turkic language in one case, and between Syriac and Persian in the other case and different intention for language switching in each case. The second speaker in the panel, Jonas Karlsson (Uppsala Universitet), presented the paper "Remarks on some Turkic Garshuni Texts Preserved in an 18th Century Chaldean Prayer Book", concerning four previously unidentified Syriac poems that employ different systems of transcribing Turkic.

The fourth session, chaired by Tamar Zewi (University of Haifa), was confined to Judeo-Arabic. Esther-Miriam Wagner (University of Cambridge) presented the paper "Jewish identity and Hebrew script: the case of Judeo-Arabic", which studies the ways in which various social groups in the Medieval Cairo Jewish community employed Judeo-Arabic and various scripts, depending on circumstance; it also touched upon changes in vocalization practices. The second speaker, Eve Krakowski (Princeton University) presented the paper "Judeo-Arabic as a legal language: the view from the Cairo Geniza", in which she outlined a shift in the legal clauses – a switch between languages (Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic) and a change in formulations, aimed to make a document acceptable both in a Jewish and Islamic court.

The second day of the workshop opened with two sessions on Garshuni. The first session of the day, chaired by Andrea Piras (IAS) was devoted to Syriac Garshuni. Grigory Kessel (Phillips Universität Marburg) presented a paper on "Syriac Garshuni: Patterns of distribution in different branches of Syriac Christianity". In his paper he demonstrated the spread of Garshuni in manuscripts of various Christian Syriac communities across the Middle East and pointed out that while some of these communities often resorted to the use of Garshuni, others chose not to; in most cases the use of Garshuni was determined by external factors. The topic of Garshuni was continued by the second speaker, George A. Kiraz (Princeton University), who presented a paper entitled "From Garshuni to 'garshunography': Garshuni Systems in the Early Modern and Modern World". In his paper he conceptualized Garshuni as a living tradition and a term used by members of the Syriac community to describe an array of usages both of the Syriac script to transcribe other languages (including Arabic, Ottoman, Armenian etc.) and other scripts to transcribe Syriac. He demonstrated that the semantic connotations of the lexeme

expanded to include any case of writing a language in the script of another.

The second session on Syro-Arabic Garshuni was chaired by Grigory Kessel. The first speaker, Johannes Pahlitzsch (Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz) presented the paper "The use of Garshuni by the Melkites from a cultural-historical perspective", in which he argued for a coexistence of languages and scripts within the Melkite community and questioned to what extent this coexistence was informed by identity preservation and expression needs. The second speaker, Hidemi Takashi (University of Tokyo), furthered this discussion in his paper "Why and when to write in Garshuni: observations based on some manuscripts and peripheral cases", in which he covered non-Arabic Garshuni instances in manuscripts and texts from a broad geographical and historical background, starting from the earliest known Syro-Sogdian texts found in Central Asia and ending with Syro-Armenian texts of the eighteenth century.

The third session of the day, chaired by George Kiraz, introduced the various allographic traditions that were spread in Spain before and after the Reconquista. Nuria Martínez de Castilla Muñoz (Universidad Complutense Madrid) presented a paper on "Linguistic and cultural uses behind Aljamiado texts". The paper concerned the use of Arabic script for transcribing Spanish texts in the morisco community and how the old Arabic-language tradition was preserved, translated and transmitted in it. The second speaker, Mònica Colominas Aparicio (Universiteit van Amsterdam) advanced the discussion with her talk "Spanish Islam in Arabic Script: Language, Identity, and Community Boundaries in the Literature of Religious Polemics of the Muslims of Late Medieval Christian Iberia". Her paper covered religious polemics with Christians and Jews in the mudejar community and how the Arabic script and the language of these polemical writings stand witness to cultural assimilation, adaptation, and gradual agency and identity change.

The last session of the day and the workshop was chaired by Johannes Pahlitzsch and included two papers. Firstly, Ronny Vollandt (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München) presented a paper on "The 'Violet Fragment': revisiting a strange case of Arabic in Greek letters", which discussed the provenance of this bilingual Septuagint fragment, its long travels between countries and libraries

and the theories surrounding the motivation of the copyist to use Greek letters for transcribing Arabic. The second speaker of the session, Sebastian Richter (Freie Universität Berlin) spoke on "Allographic Experiments at the Cradle and at the Grave of Coptic Written Culture". His paper concerned Coptic allography in Arabic script as present in a few manuscripts, which only underlines the fact that "Copto-Arabic" allography never became a major cultural trend within the Coptic community.

The workshop turned out to be successful. Every session closed with fruitful discussions between the participants, that allowed them to elaborate on their ideas and advance their inquiry. The papers presented at the workshop are expected to be published as a separate volume in the journal *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* (Brill).