

The Canadian Society for Syriac Studies

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- Aaron Butts - Catholic University of America
- István Perczel - Central European University
- Emanuela Braidà - University of Toronto
- Hikmat Bashir al-Aswad - Mosul Cultural Museum
- Nasir al-Ka'bi - University of Toronto & University of Kufa

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The *JCSSS* is a refereed journal published annually, and it contains the transcripts of public lectures presented at the Society and possibly other articles and book reviews

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The aim of the CSSS is to promote the study of the Syriac culture which is rooted in the same soil from which the ancient Mesopotamian and biblical literatures sprung. The CSSS is purely academic, and its activities include a series of public lectures, one yearly symposium, and the publication of its Journal. The Journal is distributed free of charge to the members of the CSSS who have paid their dues, but it can be ordered by other individuals and institutions through Gorgias Press (www.gorgiaspress.com).

Cover

Cross in gypsum from al-Hira, Iraq (Photo Nasir al-Ka'bi)

JCSSS is a refereed journal published annually by the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies Inc. (CSSS), located at the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. JCSSS contains the transcripts of public lectures presented at the CSSS and possibly other articles and book reviews. JCSSS focuses on the vast Syriac literature, which is rooted in the same soil from which the ancient Mesopotamian and biblical literatures sprung; on Syriac art that bears Near Eastern characteristics as well as Byzantine and Islamic influences; and on archaeology, unearthing in the Middle East and the rest of Asia and China the history of the Syriac-speaking people: Assyrians, Chaldeans, Maronites and Catholic and Orthodox Syriacs. Modern Syriac Christianity and contemporary vernacular Aramaic dialects are also the focus of JCSSS. The languages of the Journal are English, French and German, and quotations from ancient sources are given in the original languages and in translation. The articles are interdisciplinary and scholarly; the Editorial Committee brings together scholars from four American, Canadian, and European universities. The CSSS that publishes JCSSS was founded in 1999 at the University of Toronto, Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, as part of the latter's academic programme in Aramaic and Syriac languages and literatures. It was incorporated under the Canada Corporations Act in January 23, 1999.

Volume 14 includes articles by Aaron M. Butts, István Perczel, Emanuela Braidà, Hikmat Bashir al-Aswad, and Nasir al-Ka'bi.

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FROM THE EDITOR



JCSSS 14 (2014) contains articles originally delivered at the CSSS symposia or as lectures given at the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto. Two of the articles on epigraphy and art are especially welcome since they offer previously unpublished archaeological material.

Dr. Aaron Butts, Catholic University of America, sheds new light on a Christian-Arabic biblical commentary as written by the 11th century Ibn al-Ṭayyib. Ancient writers rarely mention the sources they consult or quote, and Ibn al-Ṭayyib is not an exception in his work *The Paradise of Christianity*. Through a careful literary analysis, Butts identifies two of Ibn al-Ṭayyib's sources: Theodore bar Koni's *Scholion* and Isho'dad of Merv's *Commentary*. Butts also reveals Ibn al-Ṭayyib's method of using sources: he translates word-for-word while at times overlooking key elements; he also abridges and condenses, practices often witnessed in ancient and medieval writings.

Dr. István Perczel, Central European University, probes the mind of a 17th century Indian writer named Alexander of the Port, who was immersed in his cultural heritage. He was familiar with the Syriac culture, being a hymn composer in Syriac, and influenced by European humanist learning acquired not in Europe, but through Jesuit missionaries in India. His writings reflect a curious fusion of three different cultural traditions: his Syriac abounds in Latinisms; he expresses Roman Catholic Christology in East Syriac poetical pattern; while his poetry may have been influenced by Indian poetic trends.

Dr. Emanuela Braidà, Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Toronto, edits and translates the Neo-Aramaic "Romance of Aḥīqār the Wise"

while comparatively analyzing this version and the Syriac and the Imperial Aramaic versions. The present *JCSSS* contains the edition and translation of the Romance, written in the Neo-Aramaic dialect of Alqosh, a town in the Plain of Nineveh in Iraq, and preserved in the manuscript London Sachau 9321. This is the latest version of the Romance of Aḥīqār, a literary work known as early as the late 5th century BC. The earliest version was written in the Imperial Aramaic dialect and uncovered in Elephantine, in Upper Egypt. A commentary of the Romance by the same author will be published in a forthcoming *JCSSS*.

The former Director of the Mosul Cultural Museum, Mr. Hikmat Bashir al-Aswad, published the only Syriac Christian inscription found at the impressive site of Hatra in northern Iraq, giving epigraphic evidence that Hatra did indeed know Christianity as claimed by Bardaisan of Edessa. The inscription, with its incised cross, is rudimentary suggesting its old age. The inscription and script are in Syriac and not in Hatran Aramaic and script. Could this indicate that Syriac became the language of Christianity even in regions that spoke different dialects? There are also crosses and other non-Christian symbols incised by stonecutters or architects on stones of monumental buildings in Hatra, and some crosses appear to be clearly Christian.

Dr. Nasir al-Ka'bi, professor of history at the Kufa University in Iraq and Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Toronto, discusses a collection of plaque-type crosses uncovered by Iraqi archaeologists during the past few years at Ḥira, near al-Najaf, in southern Iraq. The collection is unique in terms of the number of plaques coming from one site, their excellent physical condition, and the variety of stylized crosses which they depict. The many features found in these plaques reflect the

environment of Hira and its artistic tradition. Talbot Rice, who excavated the site in the early 1930s, held that these stylized crosses originated in Hira, spreading to Armenia, Byzantium, and beyond.

I would like to thank the writers for coming to Toronto, sometimes from far away, to give their papers and discuss their latest researches and

archaeological discoveries. The publication of their papers in this issue of *JCSSS* is much appreciated. My thanks are also due to the members of the Editorial Committee who made the publication of this valuable issue of *JCSSS* possible. For many years now Gorgias Press is our publisher and we are very grateful to its President and officers for producing a very elegant *JCSSS*!

A.H.
15 October 2014