
FROM THE EDITOR



JCSSS 16 contains four papers presented at the CSSS Symposium XV, held at the University of Toronto on the 14th of November 2015, and one paper on Armenian inscriptions from the oldest church of Baghdad.

Sidney Griffith's contribution, "Syriac into Arabic: A New Chapter in the History of Syriac Christianity," surveys strategies taken up by Syriac-speaking Christians to express themselves in Arabic in their own fields of theology and exegesis. While Coptic, Greek, and some Syriac speakers ended up adopting Arabic at the expense of their native languages, other Syriac communities used Arabic in different ways while in direct contact with Islam. Qur'anic diction and Islamic phraseology can be seen in some writing, Arabic is used despite its inadequacy to express Christian tenets, and, in the case of certain apologists, while the Qur'an is used as witness to the truthfulness of Christianity, Qur'anic vocabulary, overtones, and thought-patterns permeate their writings. Despite these and other manifestations of Arabic influence, Syriac continued to be the predominant language of literary production in every single field of study.

Alexander Treiger's article, "The Earliest Dated Christian Arabic Translation (772 AD): Ammonius' *Report on the Martyrdom of the Monks of Sinai and Raithu*," exploits this earliest Christian Arabic text to prove that translations of Christian material into Arabic began possibly as early as ca. 750 AD, at Mount

Sinai. While Greek was the language of prestige, Syriac was the language of choice. Moreover, the versions of Ammonius' *Report* highlight the multi-lingual nature of Palestinian and Sinaitic translation efforts: The *Report* was purportedly composed in Coptic, then translated into Greek, then into Syriac (767 AD), then from Syriac (and Greek) into Arabic (772 AD), and finally from Arabic into Georgian (between 772-864)!

Strangely, few, if any, of the hymns of the famous theologian-poet Jacob of Serugh were translated into Coptic, despite the heavy presence of Syriac monks at the monastery of the Syrians in Egypt as early as the 7th century! Nonetheless, Aaron Butts' article, "The Christian Arabic Transmission of Jacob of Serugh (d. 521): The *Sammlungen*," sheds light on the reception of Jacob among Copts in Arabic, beginning in the 13th century. The earliest manuscripts might derive from Dayr Anbā Bišāy in the Wādī Naṭrūn, which had a close relationship with Dayr al-Suryān. Eventually, Jacob's beautiful pastoral homilies were integrated into the Coptic liturgy.

Jeannie Miller's paper, "What it Means to be a Son: Adam, Language, and Theodicy in a Ninth Century Dispute," examines an early 9th century theological debate narrated in a Muslim source about what exactly it means to call the Messiah the "Son" of God. Here an unnamed Muslim Mu'tazili theologian argues in favour of calling the Messiah the Son of God "by adoption," thus appropriating some debatable Christian ideas. By contrast,

his opponents, who were leaders of Muslim theological disputation at the time, display a more realistic awareness of arguments that Christians actually made in their theological discourses about the “Son” of God.

The last paper, “The Armenian Inscriptions of the Old Armenian Church of Our Lady in Baghdad,” written by Vincent van Vossel of Baghdad and Gagik Sargsyan of Yerevan, aims at preserving Christian inscriptions in restive Iraq. The Armenian church of Our Lady was the first to be built in Baghdad after Tamerlane totally destroyed Christianity in southern and central Iraq, as well as in China and the whole of Central Asia, in the course of the 14th century. After the building of the

church, Christians returned to Baghdad little by little. In recent years, however, they have dispersed once again after the disastrous invasion of Iraq by the Americans and their allies.

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A.H.
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