

**Fifth Woodbrooke-Mingana Symposium
on Arab Christianity and Islam
(14-17 September 2005)
'The Bible in Arab Christianity'**

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The Fifth Woodbrooke-Mingana Symposium on Arab Christianity and Islam was held in Selly Oak, UK (just outside of Birmingham) from 14-17 September 2005. The bucolic setting and warm hospitality of the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre provided a perfect background for the discussions on "The Bible in Arab Christianity". The patience of the staff in putting up with the comings and goings of the various participants, their ever-ready assistance with anything that might be needed, and their willingness to divulge the history of the Centre and the surrounding area made the participants – many of whom had come from outside the UK – feel immediately that they had found a home away from home. From breakfast to the evening prayer service, the conference participants were embraced by the Friends – but in such a way as to allow complete freedom to go off on one's own, if one so chose. Carol Bebawi deserves a special mention: her tireless tracking of the comings and goings of all the participants – down to the bus from Birmingham to Selly Oak – assured us that we would arrive safely – and that, if submitted, the papers would be well-tended. And, finally, a particular word of thanks is due to the organizer, Dr. David Thomas. His clear and gentle guidance made for an unusually cohesive and well-prepared set of papers. The participants were well-pleased with the high level of scholarship evidenced in the papers. The articles from the Mingana collection on display at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery nicely complemented the conference.

Twenty-two papers were presented by the participants (among whom were three Muslim scholars), coming from Europe, the Middle East, Africa (Sudan) and North America. Attendance was not limited to the presenters; other auditors included scholars who came from as far as Australia (like Prof. Rifaat Ebied, Univ. Of Sydney) and the United

States. Papers touched upon themes ranging from Arabic apocalyptic literature to discussions of scriptural corruption, from apologetic and polemical works to liturgical and artistic themes, as well as Arabic translations of the Bible and its diffusion in the Islamic world. Discussion was not limited to the Christian communities, however: a number of presentations made use of Islamic sources, shedding light on the larger milieu in which Arab Christianity developed. As each participant was encouraged to present his research in a condensed form (of about 20 minutes), there were 40 minutes of rich discussion on each paper.

Some topics that were touched upon in the general discussions following each presentation include the slow spread of Christianity among the non-urban Arabs, the development of Arabic writing and script, the Syriac Christian missionaries among the Arab tribes, the transformation of meanings and wording that occur between the Hebrew Bible and the Arabic Qur'ān (e.g. the loss of the resonance of “laughter” [קֶחֶץ < קֶחֶץ] of the Hebrew “Isaac” [יִצְחָק] in the Arabic form of the name), the degree to which Muslims used Christian understandings of the Bible in their works, and the freedom of translation found in Arab renditions of the Bible – in part due to the variety of languages from which the Arabic translations are derived (Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, etc.).

The following is a comprehensive listing of the topics – in the order of their presentation – discussed in the 22 sessions. The papers of those participants who so desired shall be edited and published by David Thomas through Brill.

Barbara ROGGEMA (John Cabot University): «‘Christ’s refutation of Islam’: The Arabic Apocalypse of Peter».

Emmanouela GRYPEOU (University of Cambridge): «The rewritten Bible in Arabic: The paradise story and its exegesis in the Arabic Apocalypse of Peter».

David BERTAINA (Catholic University of America): «Developing scriptural collections in early Christian apologetics with Islam».

Harald SUERMANN (University of Bonn): «Historical interpretation in early Islamic Christian Apocalyptic»

Clare WILDE (Georgetown University, Washington): «Is there room for corruption in the *kutub Allāh*?».

Mark BEAUMONT (Birmingham Christian College): «‘Ammār al-Baṣrī on the alleged corruption of the Gospels».

- Samir ARBACHE (Catholic University of Lille): «Bible et liturgie chez les arabes chrétiens (VII^e-IX^e siècles)».
- Mark SWANSON (Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota): «Beyond prooftexting (2): Observations on the use of the Bible in some early Arabic Christian Apologies».
- Gordon NICKEL (ACTS Seminaries, Canada): «Early Muslim accusations of *taḥrīf*: Muqātil Ibn Sulymān's commentary on key Qur'ānic verses».
- Samir Khalil SAMIR (CEDRAC, USJ, Beirut): «L'apologie de l'Évangile d'al-Ṣafī Ibn al-'Assāl, en réponse à l'accusation de *taḥrīf*».
- Shaun O'SULLIVAN (University of Balamand, Lebanon): «The development of seventh-century anti-Jewish polemic».
- Sandra KEATING (Providence College, USA): «The translations of biblical texts into Arabic in the writings of Abū Rā'īṭa al-Takrītī».
- Gabriel Said REYNOLDS (University of Notre Dame, Indianapolis): «The laughter of Sarah in Christian tradition and Qur'ān 11:71».
- Lejla DEMIRI (University of Cambridge): «Ḥanbalite commentary on the Bible: analysis of Najm al-Dīn al-Tūfī's *al-Ta'īq*».
- Hikmat KACHOUH (University of Birmingham): «Arabic translations of the Bible».
- Lucy Anne HUNT (Manchester Metropolitan University): «Art historical aspects of Bible texts in Arabic».
- Mahmoud EL-KASTAWY (University of Exeter): «Deciphering the Bible: Al-Bīrūnī and universal sacred history».
- David THOMAS (University of Birmingham): «The Bible and the *Kalām*».
- Maha EL-KAISY-FRIEMUTH (University of Dublin): «*Al-Radd al-Jamīl*, Ghazālī or pseudo-Ghazālī?».
- Philippe ROISSE (CEDRAC, USJ, Beirut): «Les citations des évangiles en arabe chez trois auteurs musulmans occidentaux».
- Juan Pedro MONFERRER-SALA (University of Córdoba): «A Nestorian Arabic Pentateuch used in western Islamic lands: Cod. Ar. Mon. 234».

The Sixth Symposium will be in 2009, but the exact theme is yet to be fixed upon.