CONFERENCE REPORTS

Christian Art and Identity in Medieval Syria. Qara, Dair Mar Yakub-The "Museum Fragments," Damascus, May 20-22, 2004.

Andrea Schmidt, Université Catholique de Louvain

An international conference on Syriac wall paintings was held from 20 to 22 May 2004 in Damascus. It was organized by Mat Immerzeel (Paul van Moorsel Centre for Christian Art and Culture in the Middle East, University of Leiden), Andrea Schmidt (University of Louvain) and Stephan Westphalen (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin-Damascus). The participants convened in the German Goethe-Institut in the Sharia Malki which is located in the same building as the German Archaeological Institute. The conference was supported by donations of the Gerda Henkel Stiftung (Germany), the German Archaeological Institute (Berlin), the Oriental Institute of the University of Louvain and the pioneer project on Syriac Christianity of the Leiden University.

The main interest of the symposium was focused on the newly restored Syriac-Melkite monastery of Saint James (Dair Mar Yakub) near the village Qara in the Qalamun Mountains. Together with Saydnaya, Ma'lula and Yabrud, this village, situated of approx. 95 km to the northeast of Damascus, is among the most ancient Christian centres in the Qalamun. Since 1999 the German Archaeological Institute in Damascus under the directorship of St. Westphalen was engaged in the restoration of the wall paintings dating from the 11th and 13th century which had been discovered in the church of the monastery. Twenty-two fragments of the church were already removed from the walls in 1970 and had been kept in the museums of Damascus and Dair 'Atiye. Except for two fragments, which are part of the exhibition in the National Museum in Damascus, the fragments of Dair 'Atiye have been now returned to Dair Mar Yakub which is inhabited by a newly founded convent of eight nuns. A. Schmidt cooperated with the restorers investigating the history of Qara from the 5th to the 20th century. The results of these research studies carried out between 1999 and 2004 were discussed in a broader assessment of Christian wall paintings in Southern Syria (Dair Mar Musa, Ma'arrat Saydnaya), Lebanon (Qadisha Valley) and Egypt (Dair al-Surian). Another subject of the conference was the cultural identity of the Christian minorities in Syria and its cultural and sociological background. The conference thus brought together the practical skills of restorers with the distinguished analysis of art historians and experts in Byzantine, Syriac and Arabic studies.

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The conference was opened the evening before with a reception in the courtyard of the Netherlands Institute for Academic Studies in Damascus situated in the old town of the city near Bab Sharqi. Mat Immerzeel (Leiden) delivered a lecture about a very popular subject in medieval church decoration in Lebanon and Syria—that of the equestrian saint (Holy horsemen and templar's banners.) He specially focused on the role of the crusader's art in the contacts with indigenous christians. After him, Bas Snelders (Leiden) spoke about the origin and the unusual Asiatic style of a Syriac liturgical fan from the 13th century once belonging to the Syrian monastery in Wadi Natrun which is now preserved in the collection of the Musée Royal de Mariemont in Belgium (The flabellum from Dair al-Surian, a unique liturgical object from the 13th century). He discussed arguments in favour of Mongolian influence in the iconographic representation of the Mother of God with child.

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Next day the sessions were opened by the historical section of the symposium. Klaus-Peter Todt (Mainz) spoke about Greek Orthodox Christians in Southern Syriac in the period of the crusaders. He focused on the reestablishment of the authority of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch during the Byzantine reconquest of Southern Syria (969-1084) and the renewal of Melkite institutions during this period. The question of the use of liturgical languages in the patriarchate of Damascus—Greek or Syriac—was broached too. Dorothea Weltecke (Göttingen) explored the social conditions in medieval Syriac christianity (Living during the so-called Syrian Renaissance—observations and questions). She pointed out conflicts between rich and poor, church dignitaries and lay elite or aspects of cross confessional relations in a multi-religious society. On the other hand she stressed that the common perception of "Renaissance," as it was defined by A. Baumstark and P. Kawerau, must be redefined on the basis of a more comprehensive research. Baas ter Haar Romeny (Leiden) discussed the complex terminology which is generally used to define the identity of Syriac christians and its sometimes inconsistent religious and ethnic implications

(From religious association to ethnic community—Identity formation among the Syrian Orthodox). He illustrated his theoretical approach with examples from Syriac historiography (John of Ephesus, Jacob of Edessa, Michael the Syrian), Biblical exegesis (Jacob of Serug, collection of Simeon, Dionysius bar Salibi) and art. The afternoon session was focused on Syriac wall paintings. Mat Immerzeel read a paper on the Syrian wall paintings of Dair al-Surian. Erica Cruikshank Dodd (Victoria, BC) questioned in her paper the problem of what exactly the Syrian style is (The Syrian Style at Dair Mar Musa). She explained her concepts in analysing frescos from Dair Mar Musa near Nebek and from the Qadisha Valley in the hinterland of Byblos und Tripoli. Together with the Wadi Qadisha, the Qalamun area is among the territories in which a local style marked the paintings of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries at most. On this occasion Andrea Schmidt (Louvain-la-Neuve) presented to the audience Dodd's wonderful illustrated book which just came out from the printing press: Medieval Painting in the Lebanon (Sprachen und Kulturen des Christlichen Orients. 8), Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag 2004, X, 450 pp. Nada Hélou (Antelias) presented a sample of her collection of slides concerning the symbolic meaning of church decorations in Lebanon (Le décor des absides dans les églises du Liban). Then the third session of the day concentrated specifically on Qara. Aida Kaplan (Louvain-la-Neuve) who is working on a doctoral thesis about the nomenclature and development of Syriac writing systems, talked about the graphic character of a Syriac inscription which had been found on the southern wall of the church in Dair Mar Yakub; she placed it into the broader frame of palaeographic analysis (Le graffito syriaque de Oara: analyse paléographique). Stephan Westphalen and Andrea Schmidt (Göttingen-Louvain-la-Neuve) presented the results of their recent research in the monastery Mar Yakub (Historical evidences and wall paintings of Oara, Dair Mar Yakub). Originally known in antiquity as Goaria, Qara is mentioned as a Melkite Episcopal residence and Suffragan of the Metropolis of Damascus for the first time at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, where it is referred to as 'Chonochora.' Apart from that almost nothing is known about the bishopric in the first millennium. The most information—names of churches, bishops, scribes, and other persons in Qara—is furnished by colophons from the 12th century on in Melkite liturgical manuscripts from the Qalamun. We also know that Qara was

exclusively inhabited by Melkite Christians until the middle of the thirteenth century. St. Westphalen reconstructed the original location of the wall paintings preserved in the Syrian museums and the murals found in situ in the church. He discussed the question of a local 'Syrian Style' in Qalamun comparing the paintings of Mar Musa (Syriac-orthodox monastery) with that in Mar Yakub (Syriacmelkite monastery); he came to the conclusion that the 'Syrian Style' in the 12th-13th century was not related to any specific confession. The medium of wall painting was not used to express theological differences. A complete catalogue of the murals in Dair Mar Yakub and the discovered Syriac and Greek inscriptions, as well as the history of the monastery are published in the forthcoming book: A. Schmidt-St. Westpahlen, Christliche Wandmalereien in Syrien. Qara und das Kloster Mar Yakub. Mit Beiträgen von S. Brock, M. Immerzeel und Ch. Strube, (Sprachen und Kulturen des Christlichen Orients. 13), Wiesbaden 2004 (in print). The paper of Mat Immerzeel (Leiden) related to the fragmentary Wall paintings in the chapel of the Prophet Eliah at Ma arrat Saydnaya which have been recently discovered and restored by him. His investigations are included in the above mentioned book.

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The excursion next day brought all participants to Qara (the mosque of the village, formerly the St. Nicholas church; Mar Sarkis church; monastery Mar Yakub); to the monastery Mar Musa near Nebek and to the chapel of Eliah in Macarrat Saydnaya in order to get acquainted with the specific conservation problems of the murals. The restorers explained the different methods of their work and emphasized the problems that last. In the evening there was a reception in the old damascene house of the Cultural Attaché of the German embassy which has a splendid view of the illuminated Umayyad mosque. Representatives of the Austrian, Belgian, Danish, Dutch and Swiss institutions and embassies in Damascus had been also invited.

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The third day of the conference was wholly dedicated to the practice of mural conservation. There was an interesting exchange of techniques and methods by the experts. Ewa Parandowska (Cairo-Warsaw) explored which kind of techniques had been used for restorations in Sudan and elsewhere (Roman and Christian wall paintings from Syria, Egypt and Sudan Conservation solutions). Wolfgang Frey from the society of protections of monuments (Berlin) presented a paper on the possibilities and problems of relocating

removed frescos on the walls. He illustrated his speech by examples of removed and re-installed wall paintings of the 19th century in the "Neues Museum" in Berlin. The conference concluded with a round table discussion on further conservation work which has to be done in the church of Dair Mar Yakub. The participants engaged in a keen debate on the 22 fragments which had been removed in 1970 from the walls and which are now in a very crumbled state. How to restore them and where to preserve them? Does it make sense to relocate them in the church or should they be given to a museum? Present at the discussion were also the superior of Mar Musa, Father Paolo dall'Oglio, the abbess of Mar Yakub, Soeur Agnes de la Croix, and the doyen of the faculty of art of the university of Damascus, Elias Zayat.

In the afternoon all participants were honoured by a cheerful reception by the Syriac Orthodox patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka Iwas in his new residence in Macarrat Saydnaya. The director of the patriarchal library, Father Hazail Soumi (Paris-Damascus), gave us a vivid report about the history and composition of the Syriac manuscript collection in the patriarchate (Histoire du fond des manuscripts syriaques du patriarcat syriaque-orthodox à Damas). He is actually engaged in a systematic reorganisation of the manuscript collection and its cataloguing. Therefore the library with the manuscript collection was closed. But as a compensation he showed us digitized photos of some of the most interesting and beautiful manuscripts which attracted the attention of the scholars. At the end of the day H. Soumi gave the participants a tour of the new patriarchal library which has been well organised by him.

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The Bible of Edessa, Towards a New English Translation of the Syriac Bible, Leiden, 2 August 2004

WIDO VAN PEURSEN, LEIDEN UNIVERSITY

From 1 to 6 August 2004 the city of Leiden hosted the XVIIIth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT). Part of this congress was a seminar entitled 'The Bible of Edessa: Towards a New English Translation of the Syriac Bible.' The conveners of this seminar were Bas ter Haar Romeny and Wido van Peursen. The project to prepare a new English translation of the Peshitta was launched in the late nineties by the Peshitta Institute, Leiden. The first seminar devoted to theoretical, practical and editorial questions involved in this project was held in 1999 (see *Hugoye* 2/2 [1999].) The aim of the seminar at the IOSOT conference was to reconsider the editorial decisions that were the outcome of the first seminar and to reflect on the theoretical issues underlying the translation.

The programme of the seminar consisted of two parts. The first part contained three papers on the textual basis of the English translation, linguistic aspects of the translation, and the way in which the reception history should be accounted for in the annotations. The second part contained two papers by people who had already made much progress in their translation and could tell from experience what problems are encountered. This was followed by a general discussion, based on the article 'The New English Annotated Translation of the Syriac Bible (NEATSB): Retrospect and Prospect' by K.D. Jenner et al., which appeared in Aramaic Studies 2/1 (2004) 85-106.

Bas ter Haar Romeny presented the first lecture of the seminar. He discussed the textual basis of the English translation. In 1999 it had been decided that the BTR text of the Leiden Peshitta edition would be the basis of the translation, 'though only in the perspective of a well-founded text-critical and text-historical evaluation.' At first sight this decision was an unequivocal choice to take the main text of the edition as the source of the English translation, but the added remark about the text-critical evaluation left open the possibility that variants containing text-critically preferable readings could end up in the main text, with the BTR readings given in an apparatus. Ter Haar Romeny argued for the latter option. The most important reasons in his argument were the

fact that the Leiden edition is not a critical edition (its initiator P.A.H. de Boer emphasised over and again that the main text should only be consulted together with the critical apparatus) and the observation that the editors of the Peshitta volumes display different policies regarding variant readings to be included in the main text.

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The second lecture, by Wido van Peursen, dealt with the linguistic issues of NEATSB. From the very start of the NEATSB project, those involved in it believed that linguistics should play a prominent role in the project. The main reason was the peculiar situation that NEATSB is a translation-of-a-translation, in which Syriac is both target language (of the Peshitta) and source language (of the English translation). Van Peursen's paper illustrated how linguistic considerations can contribute to the preparation of the translation, taking as an example linguistic and text-critical issues in the field of clause combination.

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The third lecture, by David Taylor, focused on the commentary on the book of Psalms by Daniel of Ṣalaḥ. In the 1999 seminar it had been decided that 'significant information about the reception history' should be included in the annotations. Taylor discussed the information that the commentary by Daniel of Ṣalaḥ on the Psalms, the earliest Syriac commentary on this book (from 542 CE), can provide for establishing dated readings and developmental stages of the Peshitta text, and the information it gives about early Syriac interpretation.

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David Shepherd presented the first paper in the second part of the seminar. In his translation of the Peshitta of Job he found a clear tendency to diverge from the word order found in the Hebrew text. In Job 2:5, for example, the Hebrew 'bone and flesh' has been translated in the Peshitta with 'flesh and bone.' This reversal of the word order occurs in other places as well and may be due to the fact that the translators were familiar with the expression 'flesh and bone' in the New Testament (Luke 24:39).

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Gill Greenberg, the NEATSB translator of Jeremiah, gave the second paper in this part of the seminar. The Massoretic Text of Jeremiah uses a number of words related to 'evil' and 'wrongdoing.' The Peshitta employs another set of words for this semantic field. However, the correspondences between the Hebrew and the Syriac are very diverse and, it seems, inconsistent. This raises the question of what the English translator should do: should he or she feel free

to render them with those English words for 'wrongdoing' that are most appropriate to the context, or be more consistent in the translation of the Syriac words.

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Two other lectures during the IOSOT conference, although not scheduled in the NEATSB seminar, were devoted to the Peshitta as well. One was by Craig Morrison, who translates Samuel in the NEATSB project, and the other by Herry van Rooy, the NEATSB translator of Ezekiel. Morrison discussed the relationship of the Peshitta of 2 Samuel with 1 Chronicles. There are some indications that the translator or a later copyist of the Peshitta of 2 Samuel borrowed from either the Hebrew or Syriac text of 1 Chronicles. Because of the overall independent character of the Syriac translations of 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles, even in those cases where the Hebrew text is difficult, Morrison argued that the borrowing occurred not at the time of translation but during the transmission.

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Herry van Rooy discussed the Peshitta of Ezekiel 1. His paper addressed three issues: inner-Syriac variation, the relation between the Peshitta and the Massoretic Text, and the relation between the Peshitta and the Septuagint. The Peshitta follows the Hebrew text rather closely and can be characterised as a 'relatively verbatim translation,' even in those cases where the Septuagint shows divergent readings.