



CHRISTIANS AND OTHERS IN THE Umayyad STATE, EDITED BY ANTOINE BORRUT AND FRED MCGRAW DONNER, *LATE ANTIQUE AND MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC NEAR EAST*. THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE: CHICAGO, 2016. PGS. 213.

THE SOAS JOURNAL OF POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH

- Author: J. Rudder Jenkins
- Department/Centre: Department of Religions and Philosophies
- Publication: The SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research,
Volume 10 (2016-17), Pages 116-120
Exploring fluid times: Knowledge, minds and bodies
- Stable URL: <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/24684/>
- Key words: Arab conquest - Umayyad state - late antique and medieval Islam - non-Muslim religious communities
- Licence: Published under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial (CC-BY-NC) 4.0 International Licence

CHRISTIANS AND OTHERS IN THE UMAYYAD STATE, EDITED
 BY ANTOINE BORRUT AND FRED MCGRAW DONNER,
*LATE ANTIQUE AND MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC NEAR EAST. THE
 ORIENTAL INSTITUTE: CHICAGO, 2016. PGS. 213.*

J. Rudder Jenkins
 602523@soas.ac.uk
 Department of Religions and Philosophies

The present edition consists of eight contributions originally presented in June 2011 at a workshop named "Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians in the Umayyad State". The edition represents the inaugural publication in the new book series entitled *Late Antique and Medieval Islamic Near East (LAMINE)*, which is published by the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. Borrut and McGraw open the volume with a concise introduction to the overall purpose of the edition and a general summary of each contribution, elucidating the history of the available scholarship on non-Muslims in the early Islamic world. They acknowledge that one of the main purposes of this edition is to further highlight the 'blurred' lines that existed between various 'religious communities' during the specified period, contrary to prevailing sentiment in past scholarship.

1. NOTES FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF MU`AWIYA: MATERIAL CULTURE IN THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD OF BELIEVERS, BY DONALD WHITCOMB, *THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE*. PGS. 11-27.

Whitcomb's contribution is unique; he extends the 'understanding of modern archaeology for the sake of developing an understanding of the early Islamic period' (p.12). He attempts to use archaeology to study a specific person (Mu`awiya), time, place, etc., against the usual focus of archaeology, which has conventionally been to draw broad and general de-personalised conclusions. Whitcomb begins by showing the architectural similarities between the praetorium and *dar al-imara*. He notes the intriguing similarity between a 'new architectural form of the *dar al-imara*, which may be traced back to Mu`awiya's rule' (p. 13) and that of a church. In doing so, Whitcomb attempts to argue for an era of cultural transformation during the rule of Mu`awiya by comparing three cities (Damascus, Caesarea and Jerusalem) that fell under his control. For Damascus, Whitcomb alludes to the practicality of the design to meet the needs of Christians and Muslims. The similarity of the Damascus complex to the 'Hagia Sophia and Augustaion/Chalke complex of Constantinople' is intriguing. Mu`awiya is identified by Whitcomb as 'more of a believer than a Muslim' (p.23), and from his 'archaeology of Mu`awiya' makes a convincing argument for a transitional phase during the rule of Mu`awiya in opposition to an 'explicitly Islamic state' under `Abd al-Malik. The larger question, which Whitcomb acknowledges, is whether this archaeological approach can answer matters of ideology or identity.

2. THE MANSUR FAMILY AND SAINT JOHN OF DAMASCUS: CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS IN Umayyad TIMES, BY SIDNEY H. GRIFFITH, THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA. PGS. 29-51.

Sidney Griffith sets out to clarify the oft confusing and perennially argued biography of the Mansur family and their most famous offspring, John of Damascus. Griffith solidifies the key involvement of the Mansur family in the governance of Umayyad rule, and the likelihood that they were either Aramaean or Arab not Roman/Byzantine or *al-Rum*; the author also assesses the difficulties of determining whether key references relate to John or his father, Sarjun ibn Mansur. It is exceedingly difficult to be sure what role John played in governance, at what date he left to be a monk at Mar Sabas, or when he died. This has been thoroughly detailed by Griffith and others, but what Griffith does elucidate is that John's:

Scholarly aim was to systematically present in summary fashion and defend the orthodoxy of the six councils...in the Umayyad milieu in which during his lifetime the crescendo of the twin processes of Islamicization and Arabicization were going forward under caliphal guidance (p. 36).

Griffith's salient point resonates with the fact that John was concerned with theological matters that were acutely specific to his current context. John was inherently linked to the Mansur family, which carried with it negative connotations and effected John's reception during his lifetime. Griffith convincingly points to this combination of facts in explaining the lack of contemporary evidence for John's life and the confusing way in which it took several centuries for his work to be properly received.

3. CHRISTIANS IN THE SERVICE OF THE CALIPH: THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS OF COMMUNAL IDENTITIES, BY MURIEL DEBIE, ECOLE PRATIQUE DES HAUTES ETUDES. PGS. 53-71.

Muriel Debie sets out to show that intra-Christian relationships existing before and during Umayyad rule were more all-encompassing (not simply ecclesiastical) than what many modern scholars have described. Specifically, Debie focuses on the Syriac Orthodox and Chalcedonian Christians in Edessa (Gumoye' and Mansur families, and Theophilus of Edessa). This contrasts with many studies that focus on the late Greek writers in the Arab milieu (Anastasios of Sinai and John of Damascus), as well as the Melkite expression of Christianity in Arabic (Theodore Abu Qurrah). Debie positions the Gumoye family contra the Mansur family of Damascus in setting up her argument that interrelations of different Christian groups greatly affected the way contemporary historians wrote and how modern historians now view these figures. Debie's concluding discussion on how the assumption that Theophilus of Edessa is the 'common source used by both Theophanes in his Greek chronicle and also by a number of Syriac chronicles' (pgs. 65-66) is an illumination of this issue.

Debie's argument underscores the need for modern scholars to be more attentive to the complex situations that might be influencing the content and transmission of source material.

4. PERSIAN LORDS AND UMAYYADS: COOPERATION AND COEXISTENCE IN A TURBULENT TIME, BY TOURAJ DARYAEE, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA-IRVINE. PGS. 73-81

In his brief contribution, Daryaee seeks to add insight into the complicated and misunderstood relationship between the Umayyads and Persian elite. He proposes that a mutually beneficial relationship existed and that the Umayyads may have treated the Persian elite differently than others under their control. This thesis is supported by numismatic evidence, and specifically, two separate examples of coinage. First, Daryaee argues that copper coins of *Fars* were represented with the name of one local Iranian elite and argues that this shows that the Umayyads tolerated co-regency with some level of local autonomy. Secondly, Daryaee provides examples of coins made for the Governor of Sistan that are representative of Islam and Islamic tradition, but use Zoroastrian terminology to express these ideas, which may have been more palatable to the users. By means of these examples Daryaee makes an interesting case for the Umayyads being more congenial with their Persian subjects than has been thought conventionally.

5. NON-MUSLIMS IN THE MUSLIM CONQUEST ARMY IN EARLY ISLAM, BY WADAD AL-QADI, THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE. PGS. 83-127.

Wadad al-Qadi provides a thoroughly sourced contribution that aims to explore if and in what capacity non-Muslims served in the Muslim Conquest Army. His proof texts convincingly confirm the fact that non-Muslims served in the Muslim army and provide detailed evidence that non-Muslims from a plethora of ethnic and religious backgrounds served in a multitude of ways in aid of the Muslim conquest. Especially interesting is the comparison al-Qadi makes in regards to the practical questions of how, when, and in what capacity non-Muslims served, especially in the early years of the Arab Conquest.

6. AL-AKTHAL AT THE COURT OF 'ABD AL-MALIK: THE QASIDA AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF UMAYYAD AUTHORITY, BY SUZANNE PINCKNEY STETKEYVICH, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY. PGS. 129-155.

Stetkevych's sets out to show the importance assumed by poetry, and specifically Al-Akthal's poetry, in the solidification of Umayyad authority. By examining three of Al-Akthal's *qasidas*, Stetkevych brings to life the game that was played in the court of Abd al-Malik. She convincingly demonstrates that al-Akthal's poetry was 'conferring and confirming—but also, when necessary, challenging—Islamic, and particularly Marwanid/Umayyad, legitimacy and thereby articulating an ideology of legitimacy specific to Islamic caliphal rule' (p. 153). Stetkevych shows the uniqueness of the situation considering al-Akthal is a Christian, but also points out the inherent necessity of the subject in this context to not be a Muslim. For non-specialists in this field, Stetkevych's contribution provides intriguing insight into something that may be challenging for the Western mind to comprehend.

7. 'UMAR II'S GHIYAR EDICT: BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE, BY MILKA LEVY-RUBIN, THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF ISRAEL. PGS. 157-172.

Levy-Rubin seeks to introduce the question of whether 'Umar II's Edict was proscribed by him or added by later generations. She begins with the assumption that it is genuine and aims to determine what his *ghiyar* said about his ideology. In effect, Levy-Rubin does not

provide much evidence for her position that 'Umar II's Edict is genuine (she cites Ch. 3 of her book on the subject), but only offers a rebuttal of Yarbrough's position (see below). Her arguments are interesting and plausible (as Yarbrough admits), but the evidence is far from conclusive. Specifically, much of the strongest evidence comes from sources several centuries after 'Umar II and, as Levy-Rubin admits, is viewed as reconstructionist by some. Her argument hinges on the idea that 'Umar II's ideology aimed to separate non-Muslims from Muslims (different from Arab Conqueror and conquered) by imposing humiliating regulations on non-Muslims. According to Levy-Rubin, 'Umar II's *ghiyar* policy would have only effected a relatively small number of non-Muslims and mostly in *amsar al-muslimin*.

8. DID 'UMAR B. 'ABD AL-'AZIZ ISSUE AN EDICT CONCERNING NON-MUSLIM OFFICIALS? BY LUKE YARBROUGH, SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY. PGS. 173-206.

Yarbrough's contribution stands in direct contrast with the aforementioned argument of Levy-Rubin. He has offered a very concise and analytically creative survey of the relevant information available as to whether 'Umar II issued an edict barring non-Muslim officials. Yarbrough's paper is intellectually honest and stimulating; it attests that the current evidence allows for a variety of different readings in contradiction to each other and sometimes within the same readings. He sets up his argument by providing the minimalist (skeptical) and maximalist (accepting) viewpoints on the sources for 'Umar II's supposed edict. It is fitting that Yarbrough concludes that the 'evidence is intractable' (p. 198), and illuminates the inherent risk within scholarship of having to choose one source as more reliable against another.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This volume contributes to the ever-bourgeoning interest in the Arab Conquest, rise of Islam and the plurality of religious contexts that described some of the most important eras of human history. The level of scholarship and range of contributions make this volume relevant to scholars of broader Islamic, Christian, Art Historical, Archaeological, Historical studies and a variety of other disciplines. Most importantly, the volume's broad scope highlights the continuous lacunae within this scholarship, many of the presuppositions still being debated, and the inherent connectedness of subject matter related to the Umayyad State.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J. Rudder Jenkins (B.S. Liberty, M.A. Gordon Conwell, M.A. Gordon Conwell) is a 3rd year PhD Candidate in the Department of Religions and Philosophies at SOAS, University of London. Rudder was able to take advantage of the Boston Theological Institute during his master's program (additional studies at Harvard Divinity, Boston College School of Theology, and Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology) allowing for a multi-faceted look at Patristic studies. His current dissertation research focuses on the effects of the Arab Conquest and Rise of Islam on intra-Christian dialogue in the Middle East from 650-900AD. Rudder has presented at multiple conferences on issues relating to the Christological

Controversies of the Early Church and is particularly interested in the non-Chalcedonian traditions. He lives in London with his wife Jennifer.