

Christian Africa/Medieval Africa, 300-1600 CE

2-3 November 2017

Harvard University

From its earliest days, Christianity was woven deeply into the fabric of Roman Africa. Cities like Alexandria and Carthage quickly emerged as institutional, intellectual, and cultic centers of the newly ascendant church in the fourth century, while thinkers like Cyprian, Cyril, and Augustine confirmed Africa's critical role within the development of Christian theology and practice. Within three hundred years, however, "African Christianity" would take on a new and much broader significance, as Ethiopian and Nubian rulers to the south and east adopted and elaborated upon the Christian beliefs and institutions of the Romano-Byzantine world. The kingdoms and Christian communities that resulted would endure centuries after their northern neighbors were conquered by the armies of Islam, maintaining or re-establishing relationships with medieval and early modern Mediterranean Christendom. In West and Central Africa, too, Christianity made its mark through the transmission and influence both of material culture from the Christian east and of ideas and beliefs from the Christian west, epitomized by the adoption of Christianity by Kongo's rulers in the fifteenth century and the creation of a Central African Christian empire in the decades that followed.

The two-day symposium *Christian Africa/Medieval Africa* will explore this long, rich, and complex history of Christian beliefs, institutions, and communities in Africa between Late Antiquity and the seventeenth century CE. Bringing together an international group of researchers in a variety of disciplines, our aim is to encourage and advance the study of a crucial but lesser-known aspect of Africa's history, a goal best accomplished through collaboration and conversation between scholars of medieval studies, African studies, Byzantine studies, archeology, book history, and the history of religion. Continuing work begun with the 2015 Harvard conference *Medieval/Africa: The Trans-Saharan World 500-1700*, this symposium also represents an ongoing effort by Harvard's African Studies and Medieval Studies communities to explore the myriad of ways in which a globally-understood "medieval world" engaged with and encompassed Africa's diverse peoples, polities, and cultures.

Thursday, 2 November
CGIS So20, 1730 Cambridge Street

Welcoming remarks (5:00 pm)

Henry Louis Gates Jr., Alphonse Fletcher University and Director of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research

Keynote address (5:15 pm)

Stephen Davis (Professor of Religious Studies, Yale University): *From Moses the Black to Red-Haired Ethiopians: Monastic Multiculturalism and Discourses of Ethnicity in Medieval Egypt.*

Reception to follow

Friday, 3 November
Barker Center 110, 12 Quincy Street

Coffee and pastries (8:30-9:00 am)

Welcoming remarks (9:00 am)

Daniel Donoghue, John P. Marquand Professor of English and Chair of the Standing Committee on Medieval Studies

I. *The Church of Matthew: Christian Ethiopia* (9:00-10:50 am)

Chair: Michael Gervers (Professor of History, University of Toronto Scarborough)

1. Judith McKenzie (Professor of Classics and Archeology, Oxford University) and Mai Musié (Pembroke College, Oxford): *Engaging with the Garima Gospels: The Earliest Illuminated Gospel Books from Ethiopia.*

2. Marie-Laure Derat (Directrice de recherche, Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique (Orient et Méditerranée), Paris): *Christian Ethiopia and the Patriarchate of Alexandria from the Eleventh to Thirteenth Century: Regional Ambitions, Political Affirmation and Religious Identities.*

3. Samantha Kelly (Professor of History, Rutgers University): *Ethiopians Abroad: Pilgrimage and Religious Exchange in the Christian Ecumene.*

Break (10:50-11:00 am)

II. *The Churches of Philip and Mark: The Christian Nile* (11:00 am-1:00 pm)

Chair: Charles Stang (Professor of Early Christianity and Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University)

1. Elizabeth Bolman (Elsie B. Smith Professor in the Humanities and Chair of the Department of Art History, Art and Art Education, Case Western Reserve University): *Egyptian Christian Visual Culture: Fifth-Fourteenth Centuries*.

2. Alexandros Tsakos (Postdoctoral Fellow in the Study of Religion, University of Bergen): *Christian Nubia: The Literacy and Beliefs of an Afrobyzantine Theocracy*.

3. Giovanni Ruffini (Professor of Classical Studies, Fairfield University): *Nubia: Christianity Without Church or Theology*.

Lunch (1:00-2:00 pm)

III. *The Church of James: Christian Central Africa* (2:00-3:50 pm)

Chair: Emmanuel Akyeampong (Ellen Gurney Professor of History and African and African American Studies, Harvard University)

1. Suzanne Preston Blier (Allen Whitehead Clowes Professor of Fine Arts and African and African American Studies, Harvard University): *A Christian Center in the Niger-Benue Confluence Area (Nigeria c. 1100-1600 CE)? Evidence and Further Questions*.

2. John Thornton (Professor of History and African American Studies, Boston University): *St. James and the Conversion of Kongo*.

3. Cécile Fromont (Associate Professor of Art History, University of Chicago): *Eyes, Minds, and Souls: The Visual and the Spiritual in Kongo's Early Christianity*.

Break (3:50-4:00 pm)

IV. *Christian Africa/Medieval Africa: New Perspectives* (4:00-6:00 pm)

Chair: Jacob Olupona (Professor of African Religious Traditions, Harvard Divinity School)

Reflections by Christopher Ehret (Distinguished Research Professor of History, UCLA) and Helen C. Evans (Mary and Michael Jaharis Curator for Byzantine Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art), followed by open discussion.

Contributors

Suzanne Preston Blier is Allen Whitehill Clowes Professor of Fine Arts and of African and African American Studies at Harvard University. She is the author of the forthcoming *Picasso's Demoiselles: Africa, Sex, Origins, and Creativity*, as well as many other works including *The Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form* (1998); *Butabu: Adobe Architecture in West Africa* (2004); and *Art and Risk in Ancient Yoruba: Ife History, Power, and Identity c. 1300* (2014), winner of the 2016 Prose Prize in Art History and Criticism and the Choice Book Award. Two of her articles appeared in *Art Bulletin's* Centennial Anthology of the top 33 art history articles from the last century. Professor Blier currently is President of the College Art Association, the professional association of art historians and artists.

Elizabeth Bolman is the Elsie B. Smith Professor in the Humanities, and Chair of the Department of Art History, Art and Art Education at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. Her research and writing engage with late antique and Byzantine visual culture of the eastern Mediterranean. She is best known for her work on Egypt, in which she has demonstrated the vitality of Christian Egyptian art from the early Byzantine to the medieval period. She edited and was the principal contributor to the award-winning *Monastic Visions: Wall Paintings in the Monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea* (2002) and to *The Red Monastery Church: Beauty and Asceticism in Upper Egypt* (2016).

Stephen Davis is Professor of Religious Studies at Yale University, and Head of Yale's Pierson College. He is an historian of ancient and medieval Christianity, with a focus on the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East. His areas of teaching and research include the study of women and gender, discourses of ethnicity, pilgrimage and the cult of the saints, the history of biblical interpretation, Egyptian Christianity, Arabic Christianity and its relation to Islam, early Christian art and material culture, and the application of archaeological, anthropological, sociological, and literary methods in the study of historical texts. His publications include *Coptic Christology in Practice* (2008) and *Christ Child: Cultural Memories of a Young Jesus* (2014). Professor Davis is executive director of the Yale Monastic Archaeology Project (YMAP) and editor-in-chief of the Christian Arabic Texts in Translation (CATT) book series at Fordham University Press.

Marie-Laure Derat is a medievalist whose research focuses on the history of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. She is particularly interested in the processes of Christianization of the region after its first conversion, the relations between the Ethiopian Church and Ethiopian royalty from the seventh to the fifteenth century CE, and the writing of history. Together with the art historian Claire Bosc-Tiessé, she is leading a program of historical and archaeological research on the site of Lalibela in northern Ethiopia. Her most recent monograph (forthcoming from Brepols) explores the dynasty of the Zagwé saint-kings from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries CE.

Christopher Ehret is Distinguished Research Professor in the Department of History at the University of California at Los Angeles. His research over the past four decades has dealt with a wide variety of African historical and cultural topics, and a wide range of time periods. A long-running focus in his research has been on understanding the ways cross-cultural interactions have shaped the courses of long-term social, cultural, and economic change across the continent. He has worked especially on developing the tools and techniques for reconstructing

history—especially early history—from the evidence of language, and for correlating the linguistic record with other types of historical evidence.

Helen C. Evans is the Mary and Michael Jaharis Curator for Byzantine Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. In addition to her groundbreaking work on the art and material culture of the Byzantine world—exemplified in the volumes *The Glory of Byzantium* (1997), *Byzantium: Faith and Power* (2004), and *Byzantium and Islam* (2012)—she has played a critical role in developing the Met's collection of early Christian and early Jewish art, and demonstrating the central place of Byzantine art and culture within the Mediterranean world and beyond. Dr. Evans is President of the International Center for Medieval Art, Chair of the Board of Directors for the Mary Jaharis Center for Byzantine Art and Culture at Hellenic College Holy Cross, and Past President of the Association of Art Museum Curators.

Cécile Fromont is Associate Professor in Art History and the College at the University of Chicago. Her writing and teaching focus on the visual, material, and religious culture of Africa and Latin America, with a special emphasis on the early modern period (ca 1500-1800) and on the Portuguese-speaking Atlantic World. She is the author of *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo* (2014), and currently is pursuing comparative research on the intersection between visual and material culture, religion, and knowledge creation in early modern Africa and Latin America, including a study of Franciscan Capuchin images of Kongo and Angola composed between 1650 and 1750 and an investigation of the circulation of African visual, material, and religious culture in the early modern Atlantic world.

Samantha Kelly is Professor of History at Rutgers University. Trained as a historian of medieval Europe, she wrote two books on medieval southern Italy before undertaking training in Ge'ez language to study European-Ethiopian relations in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Her current projects include an edited collection, *Companion to Medieval Ethiopia*, and a monograph, supported by a 2018 ACLS fellowship, on the collaborations between Ethiopian Orthodox and Catholic scholars in sixteenth-century Rome.

Judith McKenzie is University Research Lecturer in the Faculties of Classics and Oriental Studies at the University of Oxford. She lived in a cave while working on *The Architecture of Petra* (1990), the rock-cut capital of the Nabataeans in Jordan. Her other books include *The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt, 300 BC–AD 700* (2007) and, most recently, *The Garima Gospels: Early Illuminated Gospel Books from Ethiopia* (2016). She is the director of the open-access photo-archive www.manar-al-athar.ox.ac.uk and Principal Investigator of the European Research Council Advanced Project "Monumental Art of the Christian and Early Islamic East: Cultural Identities and Classical Heritage".

Mai Musié is a co-founder of the *Classics in Communities* project, based at the Faculty of Classics, University of Oxford (<https://classicsincommunities.org/>), and Alumni Relations Manager at Pembroke College, Oxford. Her forthcoming book *Forward with Classics* (with Arlene Holmes-Henderson and Steve Hunt) explores how knowledge of classical languages is considered valuable for diverse learners in the twenty-first century. She currently is pursuing her Ph.D. part-time, exploring ethnic identities and cultural representations in the ancient Greek novel.

Giovanni Ruffini is Professor of Classical Studies in the Department of History at Fairfield University, Connecticut, Director of Fairfield's Classical Studies Program, and Co-Director of

its Honors Program. His 2005 Ph.D. dissertation was published as *Social Networks in Byzantine Egypt* (2008); he also is the author of *Medieval Nubia: A Social and Economic History* (2012) and *The Bishop, the Eparch and the King: Old Nubian Texts from Qasr Ibrim IV* (2014). Professor Ruffini is the co-founder and co-editor of *Dotawo: A Journal of Nubian Studies*.

John Thornton is Professor of History and African American Studies at Boston University, where he currently directs the African American Studies Program. He is a scholar of Central West African and Atlantic history, but he has written about a wide range of areas, including the African Diaspora, the history of religion, demography, warfare, and cultural history. Among his many publications are *Africa and Africans in the Formation of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (1992), *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684-1706* (1998), and *A Cultural History of the Atlantic World, 1350-1820*, winner of the 2012 World History Association New Book Award.

Alexandros Tsakos earned his Ph.D. from the Humboldt University in Berlin. He has worked as an archaeologist in Greece, Syria, and Sudan, and currently is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Bergen working on the research project "Religious Literacy in Christian Nubia". In addition to publishing several articles on inscriptions, manuscripts, and graffiti from Christian Nubia, he has co-edited three collections of articles on Nubian and Sudan Studies. Dr. Tsakos currently serves on the editorial board of *Dotawo: A Journal of Nubian Studies*, and is a member of the International Association of Papyrologists and a co-founder of the Union for Nubian Studies.

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