Christian Communities in the Contemporary Middle East: An Introduction

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Who are the Christians of the Middle East? How have churches and Christian organizations responded to violent conflicts, political unrest, refugee flows, and economic crises in the region? Does such socio-political turmoil define Middle Eastern Christians as a group? By what methods do scholars today study Christian communities in the Middle East? This special issue addresses such pertinent questions and contributes to a growing body of scholarship on the contemporary realities and recent histories of institutional churches and Christian communities in the Middle East. It does so with a specific focus on the Arabic speaking regions of North Africa and West Asia, while including studies on Christians in these regions who are not Arab and who use vernacular and liturgical languages other than Arabic. The diversity and rich heritage of Christianity in the Middle East is apparent in this issue's articles on Christianity in Egypt, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon, while these studies also highlight the ties Christians in these nations have to co-religionists in Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Armenia, and around the world.

To convey the particularities of contemporary churches in the Middle East and their place in religious and theological studies, in what follows, I first consider the demographics and denominational diversity within Middle Eastern Christianity and the ways scholars have studied these communities in recent years. Then I introduce the nine articles in this issue, noting the critical gaps this research fills in support of Middle Eastern Christian Studies.

1 Middle Eastern Churches

Scholars and Middle Eastern Christian leaders alike describe the distinct expressions of Christianity in the Middle East by dividing the region's churches

into five 'families.'¹ Although it is important to recognize each individual church within these broader traditions, the following five categories are useful in introducing the often unfamiliar ecclesial communities of the Middle East:

1. *The Church of the East* is sometimes termed Assyrian Orthodox, and its members today call themselves Assyrian. They formed two branches in the modern period: the Assyrian Church of the East and the Ancient Church of the East.²
2. The *Oriental Orthodox* family includes the Coptic Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, and Armenian Apostolic churches.³
3. The *Eastern Orthodox* are commonly called Greek Orthodox, but many members are Orthodox Arabs whose churches use Arabic liturgy. These

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- 1 Matthew Baker, "Christian Traditions in the Contemporary Middle East: A Bibliographic Essay," *Theological Librarianship* 4/1 (2011), 69; Anthony O'Mahony, ed., *The Christian Communities of Jerusalem and the Holy Land: Studies in History, Religion and Politics* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 8; Betty Jane Bailey and J. Martin Bailey, *Who Are The Christians in the Middle East?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 47. For a listing of the members of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) in English and Arabic, see: <https://www.mecc.org/churches> and <https://www.mecc.org/churchesar> (accessed 30 July 2020). The Orthodox Churches of Alexandria and all Africa, of Antioch and all the East, of Jerusalem, and of Cyprus are listed in Arabic as the *Rum Orthodox* (the Arabic term for Eastern Orthodox), along with the seven Catholic churches and thirteen of the region's Protestant churches (from Presbyterian, Lutheran, Anglican, and Methodist denominations) that are members of the MECC.
 - 2 The Ancient Holy Apostolic Church of the East was founded in 1968, with its patriarch in Baghdad, and has a smaller population than the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East. John Joseph, *The Modern Assyrians of the Middle East: A History of their Encounter with Western Christian Missions, Archaeologists, and Colonial Powers* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 247-250; David Gaunt, Naures Atto, and Soner O. Barthoma, "Introduction: Contextualizing the Sayfo in the First World War," in *Let Them Not Return: Sayfo—The Genocide of the Assyrian, Syriac, and Chaldean Christians in the Ottoman Empire*, (eds.). Gaunt, Atto, and Barthoma (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 28, note 16. The term Assyrian is sometimes applied broadly to indicate a common ethnic identity that extends beyond members of the Church of the East to the Chaldean Catholics and Syriac Orthodox. H.L. Murre-van den Berg, "The Church of the East in the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century: World Church or Ethnic Community?," in *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, (ed.). Jan J. Van Ginkel, Heleen Murre-van den Berg, and Theo M. van Lint (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 301.
 - 3 The Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church in India are part of the Oriental Orthodox family as well. The Armenian Apostolic Church is sometimes called Armenian Orthodox or Gregorian. The Syriac Orthodox are sometimes referred to as 'Jacobite' and also called Syrian Orthodox or Syrian Christians. Because these latter two terms can be used, however, to refer to Christian communities in the modern state of Syria, over the past few decades scholars and practitioners have begun to use the name Syriac Orthodox instead. Heleen Murre-van den Berg, "A Center of Transnational Syriac Orthodoxy: St. Mark's Convent in Jerusalem," *Journal of Levantine Studies* 3/1 (2013), 78, note 21.

churches include four autocephalous patriarchates (of Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria) and are in communion with other Eastern Orthodox churches worldwide.⁴

4. The *Catholic* churches of the region, most of which came into full communion with Rome in the modern period, bring significant diversity to global Catholicism with liturgies rooted in the region's ancient ecclesial traditions.
5. The *Protestant* (or *Evangelical*) churches of multiple denominations, with roots in modern western missionary movements, are a minority within Middle Eastern Christianity.⁵

Without representing contemporary Middle Eastern Christians solely according to ancient theological positions, it is necessary to acknowledge how the region's Christians divided into separate churches between the fifth and seventh centuries due to disagreements over Christology. The Christological stances of the first two families listed above (the Church of the East and the Oriental Orthodox) differ from the formulations of today's Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches. Those latter three traditions are known as Chalcedonian because of the Christological articulation they inherited from the early church council held in 451 at Chalcedon, an ancient town near present-day Istanbul, Turkey. This was the fourth in a series of councils that the early church bishops convened to define Christian orthodoxy and reject what they conceived of as heresy. The Council of Chalcedon emphasized the union of Christ's two natures in one person (or *hypostasis*).⁶

As Rima Nasrallah and Ronelle Sonnenberg explain later in this issue, Copts, Syriacs, and Armenians rejected this Chalcedonian formula. Instead, these Oriental Orthodox churches follow a miaphysite Christology (wrongly termed

4 A fifth Eastern Orthodox Patriarchate is located in Nicosia, Cyprus. This eastern Mediterranean island nation is often considered geographically to be a part of the Middle East, but with a majority Christian and majority ethnic Greek population, Cyprus is culturally closer to Europe. For all five of these autocephalous churches (whose patriarchs answer to no higher clerical authority), Greek is or was the ecclesial language. Outside of Cyprus, most members of these churches are Arab.

5 The Arabic term for Protestants is *injiliyyun*, meaning 'Evangelical'. On the particularities of the first four families, see Emma Loosley, "Peter, Paul and James of Jerusalem: The Doctrinal and Political Evolution of the Eastern and Oriental Churches," in *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East*, (eds.). Anthony O'Mahony and Emma Loosley (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010). For a helpful treatment of the diverse religious communities in the Ottoman Empire, see Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 41-67.

6 Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, vol. 1: Earliest Christianity to 1453 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 184-194.

'monophysite') that emphasizes the unity of Jesus Christ's human and divine nature (the Greek *mia physis* meaning 'one nature').⁷ In contrast, the dyophysite formulation of the Church of the East (which historians persist in calling 'Nestorian'), places emphasis on the duality of Christ's human and divine natures.⁸ Beyond their theological stances, these churches are also distinct for their ancient liturgical languages: Coptic, Armenian, and Syriac. Both the Church of the East and the Syriac Orthodox Church use Syriac.⁹

In the eastern part of the Roman Empire, at the time of these Christological controversies, the Chalcedonians included Greek-speaking and Syriac-speaking Christians, who split in the seventh century over yet another Christological question about the unity or duality of Christ's will. The faction affirming that Christ had a single will eventually developed into the Maronite Church, although contemporary Maronites do not uphold this position. Eastern Orthodox churches in the region today trace their heritage to the other group.¹⁰ In the western Roman Empire, the Chalcedonians were Latin-speaking Christians, who began gradually to argue for the primacy of

- 7 See in this issue Rima Nasrallah and Ronelle Sonnenberg, "Oriental Orthodox Young Adults and Liturgical Participation: A Matter of Identity," *Exchange* 49/3,4 (2020). Although the Oriental Orthodox churches reject the Chalcedonian definition, as Aho Shemunkasho emphasizes, "they share the theological definition of the first three universal councils—Nicea in 325, Constantinople in 381 and Ephesus in 431." Aho Shemunkasho, "Oriental Orthodox," in *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, (eds.). Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros, and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 247.
- 8 The Church of the East affirmed that Christ has two natures, but it eventually rejected the Chalcedonian understanding of the hypostatic union (the union of two natures in one person), considering Christ as incarnate in two hypostases. Jack Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 13. 'Nestorian' was originally a pejorative term applied by the Church of the East's rivals, but Tannous points out that by the eighth century, the churches members had started calling themselves Nestorians. On this nomenclature and the term 'miaphysite,' see Sebastian P. Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78 (1996), 23-35; Sebastian P. Brock, "Miaphysite, Not Monophysite!," *Cristianesimo Nella Storia* 37 (2016), 45-54.
- 9 Scholars sometimes refer to members of the Church of the East and the Syriac Orthodox Church as East Syriacs and West Syriacs, respectively. See, for example, Mar Sawirus Ishak Saka, "The West Syriacs," in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, (eds.). Habib Badr, Suad Abou el Rouss Slim, and Joseph Abou Nohra (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), 235-253; Mar Bawai Soro, "The Assyrians (East Syriacs)," in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (eds.). Habib Badr, Suad Abou el Rouss Slim, and Joseph Abou Nohra (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), 255-270.
- 10 Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, 13. Those affirming that Christ had one will (and one energy) were called *monotheletes*.

the bishop of Rome above other patriarchs. The theological tensions and political conflicts that grew between the Latin west and the Greek east over the centuries resulted in the schism of 1054 that severed communion between the Chalcedonian Catholic and Orthodox traditions.¹¹ It was within the Roman Catholic Church of western Europe that the Protestant Reformation arose in the sixteenth century.

The astounding diversity of Middle Eastern Catholicism today reflects the liturgical richness of the region's ancient churches and the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church to bring Middle Eastern churches into the Catholic fold beginning in the sixteenth century as part of the Tridentine Counter-Reformation, and also for geopolitical reasons.¹² Besides the Roman Catholic Church (Latin rite), the Catholic communion in the Middle East includes six Eastern-rite Catholic churches, listed here along with their original ecclesial languages: Maronite (Syriac), Chaldean Catholic (Syriac), Syriac Catholic (Syriac), Armenian Catholic (Armenian), Coptic Catholic (Coptic), and Melkite (Greek).¹³ Each church operates with its own patriarch and synod of particular churches, under the authority of the Pope as the bishop of Rome. All but the Maronite Church, which claims continuous communion with Rome, united with the Catholic Church as a result of missionary efforts between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The latter five churches above have thus

11 Irvin and Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, 223, 390-393.

12 Fr. Salim Daccache, "Catholic Missions in the Middle East," in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (eds.). Habib Badr, Suad Abou el Rouss Slim, and Joseph Abou Nohra (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), 691. The Counter-Reformation (or Catholic Reformation) began with the Council of Trent in 1545. After the seventeenth century, France sought to expand its role as protector of the Catholic churches in the Ottoman Empire and viewed French Catholic missionaries as helpful for facilitating that goal. See Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 69-71, 151-152; Michel E. Andraos, "Christian Communities in the Middle East and Islam: A Shift in the Understanding of Mission among Eastern Catholic Churches," in *Mission for Diversity: Exploring Christian Mission in the Contemporary World*, (eds.). Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, vol. 8, Interreligious Studies (Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2015), 171-86.

13 On the term 'Melkite' as a designation applied originally to Greek Orthodox Arabs and later adopted by Greek Catholics, see Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 49-50; Sidney H. Griffith, "The Church of Jerusalem and the 'Melkites': The Making of an 'Arab Orthodox' Christian Identity in the World of Islam (750-1050 CE)," in *Christians and Christianity in the Holy Land: From the Origins to the Latin Kingdoms*, (eds.). Ora Limor and Guy G. Strousma (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 175-204. On the five rites of the Eastern Catholic church and their relation to the Syro-Malabar and Malankara Catholic churches in India, see Andrea Pacini, "The Rites of the Churches of the Middle East," in *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East: The Challenge of the Future*, (eds.). Andrea Pacini (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 305-307. The Maronite Church now uses Arabic liturgy, as do the majority of Eastern Orthodox churches in the region, outside of Cyprus.

been designated 'uniates,' having broken away from the Church of the East, Syriac Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Coptic Orthodox, or Greek Orthodox churches.¹⁴ Several articles in this issue reference the presence of these Catholic traditions throughout the Middle East.¹⁵

Although some communities, like the Copts in Egypt and the Maronites in Lebanon, are largely associated with one particular country, the ecclesial traditions of the Middle East stretch across the borders of contemporary nation states. Free-flowing movement of Christians throughout the region for centuries contributed to the geographical spread of these traditions long before today's refugee crises. Internal migration of Christians was particularly prominent toward the end of the Ottoman Empire, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious empire that at its height included North Africa, West Asia, and Southeastern Europe.¹⁶ The Ottoman Muslim dynasty made Constantinople (Istanbul) its capital after defeating the Eastern Orthodox Byzantine Empire in 1453, and as several articles in this issue explain, Ottoman era policies continued to shape the Middle East long after the empire ended in 1923. The communal autonomy that the Ottoman administration afforded to various religious sects allowed the empire's Christians to maintain their ancient traditions.¹⁷

While the Christians of the Levant were a largely rural population at the beginning of the Ottoman period, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, cities like Jerusalem, Aleppo, and Mosul experienced an influx of Christian

14 Lucette Valensi, "Inter-Communal Relations and Changes in Religious Affiliation in the Middle East (Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries)," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39/2 (1997), 251-269; Bernard Heyberger, "The Development of Catholicism in the Middle East (16th-19th Century)," in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (eds.). Habib Badr, Suad Abou el Rouss Slim, and Joseph Abou Nohra (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), 631-651; Daccache, "Catholic Missions in the Middle East," 687-710.

15 Although none of these articles focuses exclusively on one particular Catholic community in the region, the pieces by Aaron Eldridge and by Rima Nasrallah and Ronelle Sonnenberg mention the prominence of Maronite Catholicism in Lebanon. Lucy Schouten notes the occurrence of Chaldean refugees from Iraq attending Anglican churches in Jordan; the historical presence of Latin Catholics and Melkites is apparent in all three studies on Palestine; and Rachel Scott recognizes the shared heritage of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Copts.

16 As Reşat Kasaba's research demonstrates, Ottoman Christians and non-Christians alike were part of the widespread "long-term patterns of internal migration" within the Ottoman Empire. Reşat Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 124.

17 For a discussion on this communal autonomy and on the *millet* system as a "latecomer on the Ottoman political scene," see Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 61-65. Tannous also critiques the "historiographic millet tradition" that has skewed studies of pre-modern Middle Eastern Christianity. Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, 7.

migrants. By the nineteenth century the region's Christian population had become predominantly urban, with the exception of the Maronites in Mount Lebanon and the large Coptic population in rural Egypt.¹⁸ Then, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a new wave of migration commenced, with Christians leaving the empire, and doing so at a higher rate than their Muslim neighbors. Their contact with western Christians in the region and the English language fluency they gained at missionary schools facilitated their migration to the west.¹⁹ The end of the Ottoman period also brought drastic changes for Christian communities in Ottoman Europe and Anatolia, where Greek, Bulgarian, and Armenian Christians experienced forced migration, expulsions, and population exchanges during and after the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and the First World War.²⁰ Refugees of the Armenian Genocide and Assyrian Sayfo also fled to other parts of the Middle East during this period, settling in places like Lebanon, as Nasrallah and Sonnenberg's article recounts.²¹

The table below conveys the liturgical and theological traditions of the five 'families' of Middle Eastern Christianity. Based on the *World Christian Database* it also lists the population estimates for members of these traditions living in the Middle East as of 2020.²² The numbers below do not account for

18 Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 55-58, 60.

19 Ibid., 55; Heather J. Sharkey, "Middle Eastern Christianity between the Local and the Global," *Ecumenical Trends* 48/6 (2019), 12.

20 Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire*, 123-133.

21 Ronald Grigor Suny, *"They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); David Gaunt, Naures Atto, and Soner O. Barthoma, eds., *Let Them Not Return: Sayfo—The Genocide of the Assyrian, Syriac, and Chaldean Christians in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017). The Sayfo during WWI, also known as the Aramean Genocide, targeted Assyrian, Syriac, and Chaldean Christians, or those of Aramean heritage. The Syriac term *sayfo* means 'sword.'

22 The table below is based on the chart Matthew Baker offered in his bibliographic essay on contemporary Middle Eastern Christian traditions in 2011. I expanded his chart to include the Roman Catholic and Protestant populations, and added the details about ecclesial languages and theological positions. See Baker, "Christian Traditions," 69. The information under the geographical distribution category is arranged in descending order and includes ecclesial communities of 2,000 or more people per country. The updated population estimates are from Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed 30 July 2020). Special thanks is due to Peter Crossing for assistance with the *World Christian Database* (WCD) statistics. The Protestant category includes 778,000 Christians that the WCD categorizes separately as "Independents." Of these Independents, 466,000 are considered "hidden Muslim believers in Christ." My table does not include the following WCD statistics for the Middle East: 52,000 Orthodox adherents of "multiple traditions," Ethiopian Orthodox (4,400 members); the Malayalam-speaking Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church of India (15,900 members); Reformed Orthodox

the significant presence of Middle Eastern Christians and their descendants now living outside their historic homelands due to long-standing and more recent migration trends. The total count of nearly 19 million Christians today in the Middle East does, however, include Christians in the majority Eastern Orthodox country of Cyprus and Christian migrant workers from outside the Middle East, who have multiplied the Christian presence in places where Christianity was never strong, like the Gulf States (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen). Their numbers are reflected especially in the Roman Catholic population. There are 4.39 million Christians in the Gulf today, and 3.82 million of those are Roman Catholic.²³

While demographic studies show that the Christian percentage of the Middle East's population declined from 6.1% in 1970 to 4.2% in 2020, over that same period Christianity grew from 2.8% to 11.5% of the population in Bahrain—to take just one example from the Gulf States.²⁴ The declining Christian percentage of the overall Middle Eastern population is due to emigration but also to lower Christian birth rates, as a consequence of Christians' comparatively high economic status in many Middle Eastern countries.²⁵ Even with significant ongoing emigration of Christian communities, however, it important to recognize that the region's Christians are not dwindling out of existence, as some may assume. Growing at a much slower rate than the Muslim majority, but growing nonetheless, the indigenous Christian population of the Middle East is, as Heather Sharkey put it, "persisting in the lands of Islam."²⁶ The rising scholarly interest in Middle Eastern Christian Studies reflects this reality.

(25,800 members); and members of five Eastern Orthodox churches from outside the region (Bulgarian, Georgian, Romanian, Russian, and Serbian) with a combined population of 21,200.

- 23 Johnson and Zurlo, *World Christian Database*. The WCD defines the Middle East as including seventeen countries, with a combined Christian population of 18,809,000. Of these, Cyprus is the only Christian majority nation, with Christians making up over 70% of the population. Among the other Middle Eastern nations, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Turkey are home to ancient Christian communities. The Christian presence in the Gulf States—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen—is mainly due to recent migration. For statistics on Cyprus and an overview of Christian demographics in the Middle East, see Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 240–241, 933. On the growth of migrant churches in Kuwait, see Stanley J. Valayil C. John, *Transnational Religious Organization and Practice: A Contextual Analysis of Kerala Pentecostal Churches in Kuwait* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

24 Ibid., 93, 993.

25 Ibid., 993.

26 Heather J. Sharkey, "Middle Eastern and North African Christianity: Persisting in the Lands of Islam," in *Introducing World Christianity*, (eds.). Charles E. Farhadian (Malden,

TABLE Christians in the Contemporary Middle East

Church		Estimated population	Geographical distribution	Ecclesial center(s)	Original Liturgy	Christology
Church of the East (Assyrian & Ancient branches combined)		172,000	Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey	Baghdad (Ancient); Irbil (Assyrian)	Syriac	dyophysite
Syriac Orthodox		117,000	Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey	Damascus	Syriac	miaphysite
Armenian Orthodox		416,000	Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Cyprus, Palestine	Etchmiadzin (Armenia), Cilicia/Antelias (Lebanon), Jerusalem	Armenian	miaphysite
Coptic Orthodox		8,960,000	Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon	Cairo	Coptic	miaphysite
Eastern Orthodox (Arabic and Greek rites combined)		1,350,000 (762,300 in Cyprus)	Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Turkey, Iran, Egypt	Alexandria, Damascus, Jerusalem, Istanbul, Nicosia (Cyprus)	Greek	Chalcedonian
Catholic 6,323,000 total population	Maronite	1,358,000	Lebanon, Syria, Cyprus, Israel, Egypt	Bkerke (Lebanon)	Syriac	Chalcedonian
	Catholic					
	Chaldean Catholic	119,000	Iraq, Syria, Lebanon	Baghdad	Syriac	Chalcedonian
	Syriac Catholic	75,400	Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Egypt	Beirut	Syriac	Chalcedonian
	Armenian Catholic	47,300	Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Turkey	Beirut	Armenian	Chalcedonian
	Coptic Catholic	182,000	Egypt	Cairo	Coptic	Chalcedonian
	Melkite (Greek Catholic)	553,000	Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq	Damascus	Greek	Chalcedonian
	Latin Catholic (Roman Catholic)	3,988,000 (3,820,000 in the Gulf)	widespread	Jerusalem	Latin	Chalcedonian
Protestant (Protestants and Independents combined)		1,570,000	widespread	—	—	Chalcedonian

2 Studying Christians in and from the Middle East

The study of Middle Eastern Christianity has advanced tremendously in English language scholarship since the 1990s, with nuanced research treating the Christians of the region not as passive victims of geopolitical events or as persecuted minorities, but as actors in their own right, with rich religious traditions worth studying.²⁷ Here I address the state of Middle Eastern Christian Studies in more detail in order to place the nine articles in the current volume within the larger context of this scholarship published in English.²⁸ A number of developments in the early 2000s paved the way for the contemporary studies presented in this issue, most of which come from scholars who have completed PhDs in the past decade or who are currently doctoral candidates.

In a 2010 roundtable published in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Fiona McCallum observed that within the field of Middle East Studies, Middle Eastern Christianity had finally become an independent area of research, a “new subfield” in fact.²⁹ In the same publication, Nelly van Doorn-Harder described Coptic Studies as having advanced from an initial focus on the early centuries of Christianity to include the medieval and modern periods. She noted the emerging multidisciplinary approaches to Coptic history and contemporary life, in addition to longer-standing church-oriented periodicals and internally-focused ecclesiastical histories.³⁰ This recognition of Coptic Studies as a significant branch for research on Middle Eastern Christianity was not incidental. A series of consultations on Coptic Christianity at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) conferences, under the leadership of Lois Farag,

MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 7–20. Whereas Christianity had 5.8 million adherents in the Middle East in 1900 and 8.4 million in 1970, there are 18,809,000 million Christians in the region today. See Johnson and Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 933.

- 27 The ‘minority’ status of Christians within a Muslim majority context is often presupposed in research on the Middle East, but more recent studies challenge simplistic characterizations of Middle Eastern Christians as passive, victimized minorities. See Laura Robson, ed., *Minorities and the Modern Arab World: New Perspectives* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2016); S.R. Goldstein-Sabbah and H.L. Murre-van den Berg, *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).
- 28 For several important publications in other European languages, see footnotes 36, 44, and 50.
- 29 Fiona McCallum, “Christians in the Middle East: A New Subfield?,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2010), 486.
- 30 Of these church-oriented periodicals, she named *Proche Orient Chretien* and *Parole D'Orient*. Nelly van Doorn-Harder, “Finding a Platform: Studying the Copts in the 19th and 20th Centuries,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2010), 479. See also Febe Armanios, “Approaches to Coptic History after 641,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2010), 483–485.

led to the formation in 2009 of the AAR's Middle Eastern Christianity program unit.³¹ Growing interest in the field, spurred on by scholars in Britain, resulted that same year in the creation of the Christians in the Middle East research network, an international community of scholars that convened workshops at the University of Stirling and University of St. Andrews between 2009-2015 and supported conference sessions at scholarly societies in Europe and North America, including the World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies.³²

McCallum, Van Doorn-Harder, and others who surveyed the field at that time recognized ground-breaking books and PhD dissertations on Middle Eastern Christianity, as well as articles just beginning to appear with some frequency in mainstream disciplinary journals.³³ Ten years later, publications on Christians in and from the Middle East are now so numerous that it is impossible to list all of the monographs and edited volumes, let alone the myriad dissertations and the articles in journals across the humanities and social sciences. These works together constitute a now robust area of study that nevertheless remains divided into disconnected sub-areas within fields like Middle East Studies, Religious Studies, Church History, and World Christianity.³⁴ A number of academic press series that focus on Christianity in the Middle East indicate, however, a potential cohesion within Middle Eastern Christian Studies. Among the earliest of

31 Nelly Van Doorn-Harder and Mark Swanson headed the new unit at that time. I am grateful to Jason Zaborowski for providing this information on the Middle Eastern Christianity unit's history.

32 For the Christians in the Middle East research network website, see <https://www.cme.stir.ac.uk/>. This network was initiated by three scholars who were then based at universities in the UK: Michael Marten, Christine Lindner, and Fiona McCallum. The group sought to foster connections between scholars working on modern history and contemporary issues in Middle Eastern Christianity. In addition to organizing sessions at WOCMES 2010, 2014, and 2018, the network also co-organized conferences like one held in 2011 at the Catholic University Eischtätt-Ingolstadt, Germany, in collaboration with the Research Centre on the Christian Orient there. I am grateful to Marten and Lindner for information on the network's history. See also references to the network in McCallum, "Christians in the Middle East," 487.

33 McCallum, "Christians in the Middle East," 486-488; Van Doorn-Harder, "Finding a Platform," 479-482; Paul Rowe, "The Middle Eastern Christian as Agent," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2010), 473. Rowe noted that in 2010 most scholarship on Middle Eastern Christianity was taking place "outside of leading area studies journals." For another example, see the bibliographic essay Matthew Baker published in 2011: Baker, "Christian Traditions," 68-74.

34 Although books on World Christianity have consistently addressed Christianity in the Middle East, the region has not been a prominent area of specialization in the field of World Christianity. See Deanna Ferree Womack, "Middle Eastern Christianity in the Context of World Christianity," in *Handbook of Christianity in the Middle East*, (eds.). Mitri Raheb and Mark A. Lamport (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming 2020).

these, the Princeton University Press series on Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World (2000), places Middle Eastern Christians within the interreligious context of the region. Brill, likewise, takes an interreligious approach in its series on Christians and Jews in Muslim Societies (2012), while also publishing a series on Arabic Christianity (2019) and another on Eastern Christianity (2012). The latter category appears most frequently in academic publishing, with treatments of Middle Eastern Christianity in Eastern or Orthodox Christianity series from presses like Peeters, Gorgias Press, and Brigham Young University Press. Finally, as another sign of vitality in this area of scholarship, Edinburgh University Press announced in 2020 a new series focusing exclusively on Middle Eastern Christianity.

Notable books on Christians in the Middle East from these and other publishers fall into at least three substantive categories: 1) volumes covering Middle Eastern Christianity as a whole, 2) studies on western missions to the region, and 3) books specializing in particular ecclesial traditions, regions, or historical eras in the Middle East. The following survey of these three categories of publication updates the bibliographic surveys produced around 2010, when the study of Middle Eastern Christianity was picking up momentum.³⁵

The first category, of books introducing the breadth and nuances of Christian traditions in the region, is noticeably the smallest.³⁶ This reflects the disconnect between the various forums for research and publishing in Middle Eastern Christian Studies and the reality that few scholars have the expertise to represent the entire two-thousand-year history of Middle Eastern church traditions. For the latter reason, these publications have tended toward edited works, with seminal volumes including Andrea Pacini's *Christian Communities in the Arab*

35 In addition to the aforementioned articles by Baker, McCallum, and Van Doorn-Harder that reflected this growing momentum around the year 2010, see the following survey of scholarship on Middle Eastern missions: Heleen Murre-van den Berg, "The Study of Western Missions in the Middle East (1820-1920): An Annotated Bibliography," in *The Social Dimension of Christian Missions in the Middle East: Historical Studies of the 19th and 20th Centuries*, (eds.). Norbert Friedrich, Uwe Kaminsky, and Roland Löffler (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2010), 35-53.

36 Recent publications in this category in French, German, and Dutch include Bernard Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient: De la compassion à la compréhension* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2013); Bernard Heyberger, ed., *Chrétiens du Monde Arabe: Un Archipel en Terre d'Islam* (Paris: Autrement, 2003); Marie-Thérèse Urvoy, *Les Chrétiens d'Orient: Histoire et Identité* (Versailles: Éditions de Paris, 2014); Martin Tamcke, *Das Orthodoxe Christentum* (München: Beck, 2017); Martin Tamcke, *Christen in der Islamischen Welt: von Mohammed bis zur Gegenwart* (München: Beck, 2008); Herman G.B. Teule and Alfons Brüning, *Handboek Oosters Christendom* (Leuven: Peeters, 2018); Herman Teule and Antonie Wessels, eds., *Oosterse Christenen binnen de Wereld van de Islam* (Kampen: Kok, 1997).

Middle East (1998), the Middle East Council of Churches' *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* that featured contributions by many Middle Eastern authors (2005), and Anthony O'Mahony and Emma Loosley's *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East* (2010).³⁷ Rowman & Littlefield will also publish an edited 2-volume *Handbook of Christianity in the Middle East* in late 2020 that includes chapters from over fifty scholars in the field today.³⁸ Early scholarly monographs providing a wide overview of Christian history and practice in the region included Bruce Masters' *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World* (2001) and, likely better known by scholars of Christianity, Philip Jenkins' *The Lost History of Christianity* (2008).³⁹ Adding to these in recent years is Heather Sharkey's *A History of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East* (2017).⁴⁰ These comprehensive volumes tend to focus on the histories and distinctiveness of churches and Christian communities, giving less attention to contemporary realities.⁴¹ Yet new publications initiated by Arab Christian authors, like *Shifting Identities* (2016) edited by Mitri Raheb, have helped to fill in this gap.⁴²

37 Andrea Pacini, ed., *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East: The Challenge of the Future* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Habib Badr, Suad Abou el Rouss Slim, and Joseph Abou Nohra, eds., *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005); Anthony O'Mahony and Emma Loosley, eds., *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010). See also Anthony O'Mahony, ed., *Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in Modern History, Theology and Politics* (London: Melisende, 2008); Jan J. Van Ginkel, Heleen Murre-van den Berg, and Theo M. van Lint, eds., *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2005).

38 Mitri Raheb and Mark A. Lamport, eds., *Handbook of Christianity in the Middle East* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming 2020). See also Stephan Stetter and Mitra Moussa Nabo, eds., *Middle Eastern Christianity: Local Practices, World Societal Entanglements* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

39 For an early edited volume see Anthony O'Mahoney, Gören Gunner, and Kevork Hintlian, eds., *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land* (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995). Baker provides succinct descriptions of pre-2010 texts, including Norman A. Horner, *A Guide to Christian Churches in the Middle East: Present-Day Christianity in the Middle East and North Africa* (Elkhart, IN: Mission Focus, 1989); Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991); Betty Jane Bailey and J. Martin Bailey, *Who Are The Christians in the Middle East?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003). For commentary on these publications, see Baker, "Christian Traditions," 70.

40 Heather Sharkey, *A History of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). For a recent study of the region's religious diversity, see Ussama Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

41 Pacini's book aimed to convey the contemporary realities and demographics of Middle Eastern Christianity in the late 1990s, but that information is now dated.

42 Mitri Raheb, ed., *Shifting Identities: Changes in the Social, Political, and Religious Structures in the Arab World* (Bethlehem: Diyar Publishing, 2016). Another recent volume reflects

In addition, a volume edited by Kenneth Ross, Mariz Tadros, and Todd Johnson, titled *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia* (2018), gives a demographic survey of the region with a number of essays by Middle Eastern scholars on contemporary contexts.⁴³

In the second category are books on western Christian, and especially British and American Protestant, missions in the modern Middle East.⁴⁴ Many of those published before 2012 can be found in the comprehensive bibliography in Eleanor Tejirian and Reeva Spector Simon's *Conflict, Conquest, and Conversion: Two Thousand Years of Christian Missions in the Middle East* (2012).⁴⁵ Among the notable texts of the early 2000s were *New Faiths in Ancient Lands* edited by Heleen Murre-van den Berg (2006), Sharkey's *American Evangelicals in Egypt* (2008), and Ussama Makdisi's study on Protestants in Ottoman Syria, *Artillery of Heaven* (2008).⁴⁶ More recent publications have covered missions

contemporary Arab Protestant theology: Andrea Zaki Stephanos, ed., *Arabic Christian Theology: A Contemporary Global Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019). For a similar publication in Arabic see Andrea Zaki Stephanos, ed., *Nahwa Lahut 'Arabi Mu'asir* (Beirut: Dar al-Thaqafa, 2008).

43 Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros, and Todd M. Johnson, eds., *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

44 For publications in this category in French and German, some of which focus broadly on European Christian interests in the Middle East, see: Chantal Verdeil, *La Mission Jésuite du Mont-Liban et de Syrie (1830-1864)* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2011); Chantal Verdeil, ed., *Missions Chrésiennes en Terre d'Islam, Moyen-Orient, Afrique du Nord (XVII^e-XX^e Siècles): Anthologie de Textes Missionnaires* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013); Esther Möller, *Orte der Zivilisierungsmission: Französische Schulen im Libanon 1909-1943* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013); Haim Goren, "Echt Katholisch und gut Deutsch": *Die Katholiken Deutschlands und Palästina 1838-1910*, trans. by Markus Lemke (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009); Dominique Trimbur, ed., *Europäer in der Levante: Zwischen Politik, Wissenschaft und Religion (19.-20. Jahrhundert)* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2004).

45 Eleanor H. Tejirian and Reeva Spector Simon, *Conflict, Conquest, and Conversion: Two Thousand Years of Christian Missions in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 245-269. Related to this category are studies on other western Christian encounters with the Middle East, such as Alistair Hamilton, *The Copts and the West, 1439-1822: The European Discovery of the Egyptian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Laura Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011); Aron Engberg, *Walking on the Pages of the Word of God: Self, Land, and Text among Evangelicals in Jerusalem* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

46 Heleen Murre-van den Berg, ed., *New Faith in Ancient Lands: Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2006); Heather J. Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008). See also the following edited volumes: Reeva S. Simon

in nearly every region of the Middle East and taken up overlooked subjects such as missions and gender.⁴⁷ In the latter category, Barbara Reeves-Ellington's 2013 book on Americans in the Near East and Balkans and Beth Baron's 2014 study of American missionaries and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, are noteworthy.⁴⁸ Even more than the first category of publications, however, these books focus almost exclusively on history up to the early twentieth century. Further work remains to be done, therefore, on contemporary and recent historical missions in the region.⁴⁹

and Eleanor Harvey Tejirian, eds., *Altruism and Imperialism: Western Cultural and Religious Missions in the Middle East* (New York: Middle East Institute of Columbia University, 2002); Martin Tamcke and Michael Marten, eds., *Christian Witness between Continuity and New Beginnings: Modern Historical Missions in the Middle East* (Berlin: Lit, 2006); Uwe Kaminsky and Roland Löffler, eds., *The Social Dimension of Christian Missions in the Middle East: Historical Studies of the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2010); Mehmet Ali Doğan and Heather J. Sharkey, eds., *American Missionaries and the Middle East: Foundational Encounters* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2011); Heather J. Sharkey, ed., *Cultural Conversions: Unexpected Consequences of Christian Missionary Encounters in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013).

- 47 For studies on missions and gender, see Inger Marie Okkenhaug, *The Quality of Heroic Living, of High Endeavour and Adventure: Anglican Mission, Women and Education in Palestine, 1998-1948* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Deanna Ferree Womack, *Protestants, Gender and the Arab Renaissance in Late Ottoman Syria* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019); Christine B. Lindner, "Negotiating the Field: American Protestant Missionaries in Ottoman Syria, 1823 to 1860" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2009). For other recent studies, see Paul Sedra, *From Mission to Modernity: Evangelicals, Reformers and Education in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Adam H. Becker, *Revival and Awakening: American Evangelical Missionaries in Iran and the Origins of Assyrian Nationalism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Melanie E. Trexler, *Evangelizing Lebanon: Baptists, Missions, and the Question of Cultures* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016); Samir Boulos, *European Evangelicals in Egypt (1900-1956)* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Uta Zeuge-Buberl, *The Mission of the American Board in Syria: Implications of a Transcultural Dialogue*, trans. by Elizabeth Janik (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2017); Emrah Şahin, *Faithful Encounters: Authorities and American Missionaries in the Ottoman Empire* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018).
- 48 Beth Baron, *The Orphan Scandal: Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014); Barbara Reeves-Ellington, *Domestic Frontiers: Gender, Reform, and American Interventions in the Ottoman Balkans and the Near East* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013).
- 49 One notable exception is Trexler, *Evangelizing Lebanon*, which includes the history of Baptist missions in Lebanon in the second half of the twentieth century. Brief attention is given to missionary movements of recent decades in Simon and Tejirian, *Conflict, Conquest, and Conversion*, 203-207.

The third category includes a diverse variety of contextualized studies covering all eras of Middle Eastern history.⁵⁰ The most prominent area of research has been Coptic Studies, as the vast majority of Middle Eastern Christians today are Coptic. Building on groundbreaking work on early and modern Coptic history—such as Rebecca Krawiec's *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery* (2002) and Nelly Van Doorn-Harder's *Contemporary Coptic Nuns* (1995)⁵¹—a number of newer books reflect an ongoing interest in Coptic

50 Recent books in this category in languages other than English include: Theresia Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam: Verbreitung und Konfessionelle Zugehörigkeit: Eine Einführung*, Eastern Christian Studies 7 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007); Wassilios Klein, ed., *Syrische Kirchenväter* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004); Wolfram Reiss, *Erneuerung in der Koptisch-Orthodoxen Kirche: Die Geschichte der Koptisch-Orthodoxen Sonntagschulbewegung und die Aufnahme ihre Reformsätze in den Erneuerungsbewegungen der Koptisch-Orthodoxen Kirche der Gegenwart* (Hamburg, Germany: Lit Verlag, 1998); Martin Tamcke, *Die Christen vom Tur Abdin: Einführung zur Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2009); Georg G. Blum, *Geschichte der Begegnung Christlich-Orientalischer Mystik mit der Mystik des Islams* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009); Heike Behlmer, ed., *Christen in Ägypten* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015); Françoise Briquel Chatonnet and Muriel Debié, *Le Monde Syriaque: Sur les Routes d'un Christianisme Ignoré* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2017); Françoise Briquel Chatonnet and Muriel Debié, eds., *Sur les Pas des Araméens Crétiens: Mélanges offerts à Alain Desreumaux* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 2010); Bernard Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient au Temps de la Réforme Catholique: Syrie, Liban, Palestine, XVII^e-XVIII^e siècles* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1994); Guido Bellatti Ceccoli, *Tra Toscana e Medioriente: La Storia degli Arabi Cattolici a Livorno (sec. XVII-XX)* (Livorno: Editasca, 2008); Marta Woźniak-Bobińska, *Współczesna diaspora asyryjsko-aramijska w Szwecji* (Modern Assyrian-Aramean Diaspora in Sweden) (Łódź, Poland: University of Łódź Press, 2018); Valérie Assan, Bernard Heyberger, and Jakob Vogel, eds., *Minorités en Méditerranée au XIX^e Siècle: Identités, Identifications, Circulations* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2019).

51 Pietermella van Doorn-Harder, *Contemporary Coptic Nuns* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Rebecca Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery: Egyptian Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). By the 1990s, a strong movement in Coptic Studies was already well under way, stretching the sub-field beyond narrow ecclesiastical histories. See, for example, Van Doorn-Harder and Kari Vogt, eds., *Between Desert and City: The Coptic Orthodox Church Today* (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 1997); David Frankfurter, ed., *Pilgrimage & Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1998). Newer publications include Mark Swanson, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt (641-1517)* (Cairo: American University Press, 2010); Febe Armanios, *Coptic Christianity in Ottoman Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Mariz Tadros, *Copts at the Crossroads: The Challenges of Building Inclusive Democracy in Egypt* (Cairo: American University Press, 2013); Louis M. Farag, ed., *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith and Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); Sebastian Elsässer, *The Coptic Question in the Mubarak Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Gawdat Gabra, ed., *Coptic Civilization: Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Egypt* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press,

Studies and its intersection with other fields. McCallum expanded this discussion into the broader area of Middle Eastern Christian Studies, for example, in her comparative study on the Coptic and Maronite patriarchs (2010).⁵² The pioneering work of Saba Mahmood (2016) and Angie Heo (2018) has made Coptic Christianity a focus within the anthropology of religion as well.⁵³ Like Heo's book, several treatments of recent Middle Eastern Christian relations with Muslims also center on the Egyptian context, including the work of S.S. Hasan (2003), Peter Makari (2007), and Rachel Scott (2010).⁵⁴

Among the studies of pre-modern Middle Eastern Christianity outside of Egypt, Sidney Griffith's research on early Arab Christianity and Sebastian Brock's work on Syriac Christianity stand out.⁵⁵ More recent contributions on

2014); Nelly van Doorn-Harder, ed., *Copts in Context: Negotiating Identity, Tradition, and Modernity* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2017).

52 Fiona McCallum, *Christian Religious Leadership in the Middle East: The Political Role of the Patriarch* (Lampeter, UK: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010).

53 Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Angie Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints: Christian-Muslim Mediation in Egypt* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018). For other anthropological studies on Copts, see Anthony George Shenoda, "Cultivating Mystery: Miracles and A Coptic Moral Imaginary" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2010); Joseph Youssef, "From the Blood of St. Mina to the Martyrs of Maspero: Commemoration, Identity, and Social Memory in the Coptic Orthodox Church," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies* 5 (2013), 61-73; Carolyn M. Ramzy, "To Die is Gain: Singing a Heavenly Citizenship among Egypt's Coptic Christians," *Ethnos* 8/5 (2015), 649-670; Candace Lukasik, "Conquest of Paradise: Secular Binds and Coptic Political Mobilization," *Middle East Critique* 25/2 (2016), 107-125. For ethnographic work on Middle Eastern Christians outside of Coptic Studies, see Andreas Bandak, "Of Refrains and Rhythms in Contemporary Damascus: Urban Space and Christian-Muslim Coexistence," *Current Anthropology* 55/S10 (2014), S248-S261; Andreas Bandak, "Repeated Prayers: Saying the Rosary in Contemporary Syria," *Religion* 47/1 (2017), 92-110.

54 S.S. Hasan, *Christian versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Peter Makari, *Conflict and Cooperation: Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Egypt* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007); Rachel Scott, *The Challenge of Political Islam: Non-Muslims and the Egyptian State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). Others in this genre include Elizabeth Iskander, *Sectarian Conflict in Egypt: Coptic Media, Identity, and Representation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); Laure Guirguis, *Copts and the Security State: Violence, Coercion, and Sectarianism in Contemporary Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016). For a study on recent Christian-Muslim relations in Lebanon, see Heidi Hirvonen, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Perspectives of Four Lebanese Thinkers* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

55 Sidney H. Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002); Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Sebastian Brock, *Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006); Sebastian

this early period include Philip Forness's *Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East* on the Syriac theologian Jacob of Serugh (2018), and Jack Tannous' *The Making of the Medieval Middle East* (2018), which places the Christian Middle East broadly in its medieval context.⁵⁶ Several newer monographs on the modern period have addressed Christians in Palestine or in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, an area of interest among modern historians and ethnographers second only to Christianity in Egypt.⁵⁷ Other publications consider Christian communities in the context of conflicts elsewhere in the region, with a number focusing on the Armenian and Assyrian genocides.⁵⁸ Still other studies highlight overlooked Christian communities and movements in particular regions, like Heleen Murre-van den Berg's *Scribes and Scriptures* (2015) on the Church

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- Brock, *An Introduction to Syriac Studies*, 3rd edition (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006); Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World of Saint Ephrem*, revised edition (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992). See also: Martin Tamcke, ed., *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages/Christlich-muslimische Gespräche im Mittelalter* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag/Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2007); David Thomas, ed., *Syrian Christians Under Islam: The First Thousand years* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).
- 56 Philip M. Forness, *Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East: A Study of Jacob of Serugh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Jack Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018). See also: Antoine Borrut and Fred M. Donner, *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2016); Asa A. Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier: Interaction and Exchange among Muslim and Christian Communities* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).
- 57 Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Noah Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine: Communalism and Nationalism, 1917-1948* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Erik Freas, *Muslim-Christian Relations in Late-Ottoman Palestine: Where Nationalism and Religion Intersect* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Laura Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011); Aron Engberg, *Walking on the Pages of the Word of God: Self, Land, and Text among Evangelicals in Jerusalem* (Leiden: Brill, 2019). For prominent texts of Palestinian theology, see in this issue Elizabeth Marteiijn, "The Revival of Palestinian Christianity: The Development of Palestinian Theology," *Exchange* 49/3,4 (2020).
- 58 Paul S. Rowe, John H.A. Dyck, and Jens Zimmerman, *Christians and the Middle East Conflict* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Ronald Grigor Suny, *"They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Fatma Müge Göçek, *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and Collective Violence against the Armenians, 1789-2009* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); David Gaunt, Naures Atto, and Soner O. Barthoma, eds., *Let Them Not Return: Sayfo—The Genocide of the Assyrian, Syriac, and Chaldean Christians in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017).

of the East, two different studies on the Maronite mystic Hindiyya 'Ujaymi in Lebanon by Bernard Heyberger (2013) and Akram Khater (2011), and Deanna Womack's *Protestants, Gender and the Arab Renaissance* on the first historical Arab Protestant community (2019).⁵⁹ This significant body of scholarship does not focus much beyond the mid-twentieth century—with the exception of Coptic Studies research and some publications on Middle Eastern Christian diasporas⁶⁰ or Christian migrants in the Gulf States and Israel.⁶¹ However, ini-

- 59 Heleen Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and Scriptures: The Church of the East in the Eastern Ottoman Provinces (1500-1850)* (Louvain: Peeters, 2015); Bernard Heyberger, *Hindiyya, Mystic and Criminal, 1720-1798: A Political and Religious Crisis in Lebanon*, trans. by Renée Champion (Cambridge, UK: James Clark, 2013); Akram Fouad Khater, *Embracing the Divine: Passion and Politics in the Christian Middle East* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011); Deanna Ferree Womack, *Protestants, Gender and the Arab Renaissance in Late Ottoman Syria* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019). Heyberger's book was originally published in French as *Hindiyya (1720-1798), Mystique et Criminelle* (Paris: Aubier, 2001). For other studies focused on one particular Christian community or historical period, see Matti Moosa, *The Maronites in History* (New York: Syracuse University press, 1986); Sargon George Donabed, *Reforging a Forgotten History: Iraq and the Assyrians in the 20th Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015); Tsolin Nabantian, *Armenians Beyond Diaspora: Making Lebanon Their Own* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019); Fiona McCallum, *Christian Communities in the Middle East: Faith, Identity and Integration* (Abingdon: Routledge, forthcoming 2021).
- 60 Andreas Schmoller, ed., *Middle Eastern Christians and Europe: Historical Legacies and Present Challenges* (Vienna: Lit, 2018); Naures Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland, Orphans in the Diaspora: Identity Discourses among the Assyrians/Syriac Elites in the European Diaspora* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011); Lise Paulsen Galal, Alistair Hunter, Fiona McCallum, Sara Lei Sparre, and Marta Woźniak-Bobińska, "Middle Eastern Christian Spaces in Europe: Multi-sited and Super-diverse," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 9 (2016), 1-25; Fiona McCallum, "Shared Religion but Still Marginalized Other: Middle Eastern Christians' Encounters with Political Secularism in the United Kingdom," *Journal of Church and State* 61/2 (2019), 242-261; Alistair Hunter, "Staking a Claim to Land, Faith and Family: Burial Location Preferences of Middle Eastern Christian Migrants," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 37/2 (2016), 179-194; Yvonne Haddad and Joshua Donovan, "Good Copt, Bad Copt: Competing Narratives on Coptic Identity in Egypt and the United States," *Studies in World Christianity* 19/3 (2013), 208-232; Sargon Donabed, "Neither 'Syriac-speaking' nor 'Syrian Orthodox Christians': Harput Assyrians in the United States as a Model for Ethnic Self-Categorization and Expression," in *Syriac in its Multi-Cultural Context*, (eds.) Herman Teule, et al. (Louvain: Peeters, 2017), 361-371. For historical studies on Middle Eastern migration to the Americas, see Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico: Middle Eastern Immigrants in Modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); Linda K. Jacobs, *Strangers No More: Syrians in the United States, 1880-1900* (New York: Kalima Press, 2019).
- 61 Stanley J. Valayil C. John, *Transnational Religious Organization and Practice: A Contextual Analysis of Kerala Pentecostal Churches in Kuwait* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Jose Francisco, "Migration and New Cosmopolitanism in Asian Christianity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, (eds.) Felix Wilfred (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 576-92;

tatives like the Coptic Canadian History Project and two new research projects on Middle Eastern Christians in Europe indicate that further studies of contemporary Christianity in the Middle East are forthcoming.⁶² Such work is needed to document the survival, the vitality, and the challenges for existing churches in the region and to better explain the place of the Middle East in global Christianity today. The nine articles in this special issue do just that.⁶³

3 Contemporary Middle Eastern Christianity in Context

Geopolitical events—including the Arab Spring that began in December 2010, the Syrian civil war since 2011, and the emergence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria thereafter—have brought scholarly and public attention in the west to the plight of contemporary Middle Eastern Christians. Some of this attention has

Naomi Hosoda, "Kababayan Solidarity? Filipino Communities and Class Relations in United Arab Emirates Cities," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 3/1 (2013), 18-35; Watanabe Akiko, "Does Religious Conversion Transcend the Boundaries of Multiple Hierarchies? Filipino Migrant Workers Embracing Islam in the UAE and Qatar," in *Asian Migrant Workers in the Arab Gulf States: The Growing Foreign Population and Their Lives*, (eds.). Masako Ishii, Naomi Hosoda, Masaki Matsuo, and Koji Horinuki (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 194-217; Shlomit Kanari, "Music, Musicians and Migration in African Migrant Churches in Israel," in *Religion in the Context of African Migration*, (eds.). Afe Adogame and Cordula Weissköppel (Beirut: Eckhardt Breiting, 2005), 267-84; Galia Sabar and Shlomit Kanari, "I'm Singing My Way Up': The Significance of Music Amongst African Christian Migrants in Israel," *Studies in World Christianity* 12/2 (2006), 101-25.

62 For the Coptic Canadian History Project, founded by Michael Akladios, see <https://thecchp.com> (accessed 30 July 2020). The "Rewriting Global Orthodoxy" project at Radboud University is led by Heleen Murre-van den Berg and focuses on Oriental Orthodox communities that have settled in Europe. See: <https://www.ru.nl/ptrs/research/research-projects/rewriting-global-orthodoxy> (accessed 30 July 2020). Fiona McCallum Guiney, at the University of St. Andrews, is Project Leader and Principal Investigator in the UK for "Defining and Identifying Middle Eastern Christian Communities in Europe." Lise Paulsen Galal, at Roskilde University, and Marta Wozniak, at the University of Łódź, are Principal Investigators for the Danish and Swedish components of the project, respectively. For more on this project and its 2015 study, "Middle Eastern Christians in Europe: Histories, Cultures and Communities," see: <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/dimecce> (accessed 30 July 2020). Another encouraging development is the National Endowment for the Humanities-funded summer institute titled "Middle Eastern Christianity: A Historic and Living Tradition," to be held at Bradley University in 2021.

63 Few other journals in theology and religion have published full issues on Middle Eastern Christianity in recent years. A forthcoming issue of *Religion, State and Society*, edited by George Soroka and Christopher Rhodes, however, will address Christianity and politics in the Middle East and North Africa. Also noteworthy, the *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* published a historically-focused issue in 2019 on Egyptian Christianity.

tended to reinforce simplistic tropes, representing Middle Eastern Christians collectively as victims of Islamic extremism. As Candace Lukasik has reported, political alliances between some Christian immigrants from the region and conservative political leaders in the US have bolstered Islamophobic sentiments.⁶⁴ It is all the more important, therefore, to seek out nuanced scholarly studies that employ religion as a category for analysis of Christianity in the Middle East today. Such research on the contemporary period and on modern history is indeed occurring now, especially among a younger generation of scholars, as this special issue highlights.

The nine articles presented here approach Middle Eastern Christian communities in their present-day contexts, while also attending to recent history. Together the authors convey the diversity of the Middle East's Christian traditions, each one focusing on an ecclesial community, on a Christian organization, or on Christians from multiple denominations in a single country. This new research follows the trends in other studies on Middle Eastern Christianity that focus primarily on the Arab world. Yet these articles also show that not all Christians in the Middle East are Arabs and that the region's multi-ethnic, multi-denominational Christians have formed ecumenical bonds with one another, have navigated intra-Christian conflicts, and have cultivated relationships with their co-religionists across the region and around the globe.

Reflecting the strong publication record in Coptic Studies, the first two articles center on Christians in Egypt. Rachel Scott's study of personal status laws on divorce and marriage in Egypt's Coptic community situates the Christians of Egypt within the state's larger Islamic legal framework. Yet she shows that recent controversies over the right to divorce and remarriage did not pit Copts against the precepts of Islamic law (*sharia*) or against the Egyptian state itself. Rather, Copts have negotiated with and even protested against each other's interpretations of Christian communal laws. This research demonstrates the cleavages within the Coptic community itself, as well as the ways that Coptic legal battles involve Egypt's Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox communities.

Offering another example of the internal diversity within the Christian communities of Egypt, Rebecca Skreslet Hernandez examines the involvement of Egyptian Protestants (known as Coptic Evangelicals) in public theology in the

64 Candace Lukasik, "Middle Eastern Christians and the US Immigration Debate," *Anthropology News* (March 5, 2020). <https://www.anthropology-news.org/index.php/2020/03/05/middle-eastern-christians-and-the-us-immigration-debate/?fbclid=IwAR2BS4xx5e26J9o84cm3PD0QuAJmZv4SlwH2OaoNhDERdou8mrCdhNOFJtc> (accessed 30 July 2020).

wake of the Arab Spring. Her article argues that the Egyptian revolution of 2011 and the uprisings of 2013 prompted Egyptian Christians to examine their existing narratives of identity and to claim “political subjectivity” while actively participating in public debates. Hernandez shows through a close examination of the work of two public theologians that this shift has been prompted, at least in part, by leaders of the largest Protestant denomination in Egypt.

Scholars of Christianity are perhaps more familiar with the movement of Palestinian liberation theology than with these recent developments in Egyptian public theology, or indeed, with Palestinian theology more broadly. Elizabeth Martejn’s piece on the development of different forms of Palestinian Christian theology from the late twentieth century to present is the first of four articles on Christianity in Palestine and Israel that indicate the solid scholarly attention being given today to Christianity in the Holy Land. Martejn frames these developments as part of the recent “revival of Palestinian Christianity” and maps how new constructive theologies have arisen from within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to inform the lives of Palestinian Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christians. Through scholarly networks and European language publishing, Palestinian theologians have also enlisted support from Christians outside the region. Like Scott and Hernandez, then, Martejn demonstrates that the nuances of each particular context shape the contemporary realities for Middle Eastern Christians. In their theological responses, Christians throughout the region confront geopolitical circumstances that are unique to their local contexts.

Tala Raheb also demonstrates the particularities of Christian life in Palestine through a case study on the work of the Lutheran Church to change its personal status laws in pursuit of gender justice. Complementing Scott’s research on communal law in Egypt, Raheb traces the development of church laws and ecclesial courts in Palestine and similarly finds that Palestinian Lutherans do not understand themselves as victims of oppressive Islamic legal structures. The article explains, instead, that Palestinian Christian legal decisions have historically come about through dialogue with *sharia*. This included churches choosing to adopt Islamic interpretations on issues such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance when no biblical precedent could be found. Informed by the commitments of the World Lutheran Federation to gender equality, however, Palestinian Lutherans broke with traditional ecclesial laws in Palestine and, as Raheb contends, used their autonomy within the existing legal system to benefit Lutheran women and the church as a whole.

The ties of Christians in the region to Christians from around the globe can be seen, in a different way, in Aron Engberg’s study of Evangelical Christians in Jerusalem. His article centers around the city’s long-standing Christian Zionist

expatriate community that established the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ) in 1980. As he traces the history of this organization—made up largely of Evangelical Christians from Europe and South Africa—and as he uses field research to examine ICEJ's contemporary work, Engberg notes a subtle yet significant reorientation in the organization's theology. While still maintaining its core political commitment to support Jerusalem as Israel's capital, ICEJ's shift toward "eschatological moderation" made its presence in Jerusalem more palatable to mainstream Israeli society. This prompts Engberg to caution scholars not to represent all Evangelical Zionists as holding the same monolithic theological motivations.

The remaining four articles in this issue utilize extensive ethnographic field research to convey the everyday realities of contemporary life for Christians of diverse traditions in Palestine and Jordan, and for Christians from Syriac, Armenian, and Greek Orthodox churches in Lebanon. Whereas most studies on Palestinian Christianity focus on the West Bank, Kenny Schmitt's article attends to the troubling circumstances of the small Christian population in Gaza. He describes the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza since the Israeli-Egyptian blockade of 2007, explaining that as a result Gazan Christians from the largely Greek Orthodox and Catholic community have utilized the Israeli pilgrimage permit system to escape to the West Bank on temporary visas. Those who elect to overstay their pilgrimage visas experience a new situation of precarity, however, while residing in the West Bank illegally.

Although the situation for the migrants in Schmitt's study is considerably different than for migrants and refugees in other parts of the Middle East, Gazan Christians are among the many Christians emigrating from their homelands to seek better economic opportunities or to flee violence and humanitarian disaster. According to Lucy Schouten's study of Jordanian churches serving Christian refugees from other parts of the Middle East, a key goal for Anglican clergy and other Christian leaders in Jordan is to slow such emigration to Europe, North America, and Australia. Schouten's article highlights the understudied phenomenon of Middle Eastern Christian migration within the region and the recent flows of refugees from Syria and Iraq to Jordan. Noting her interviewees' emphasis on Christian "unity within diversity," she finds that in the context of ministering to Chaldean Catholics from Iraq and Syriac Orthodox refugees from Syria, Anglican clergy in Jordan emphasize a common Middle Eastern identity. They counsel refugees and their Jordanian congregants alike to stay rooted in Middle Eastern soil for the sake of their faith.

In nearby Lebanon, known for its strong Maronite Catholic community and its sectarian politics, Syriac and Armenian migrants and their descendants have found a new home where, as ethnic and religious minorities, they

nevertheless remain rooted in a Middle Eastern setting with a relatively large Christian population. In their article, Rima Nasrallah and Ronelle Sonnenberg elucidate the ties that bind youth from the Syriac Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic churches in Lebanon to their own ancient traditions. While representing two of the three miaphysite churches of the region, this study also breaks new ground with its attention to youth and young adults in the Middle East, stretching the boundaries of practical theology beyond the usual studies of Christian youth in the west. Sonnenberg and Nasrallah ultimately find that strong connections to the church community—its heritage, people, and ritual practices—provide a sense of identity and grounding for Syriac and Armenian youth as they develop into adulthood.

Lebanon is also, as Aaron Eldridge's article demonstrates, home to ancient monastic communities. Some monasteries have been inhabited for centuries, while others dispersed during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). As the concluding article of this issue, Eldridge's study signals the potential of an anthropology of Christianity focused on the Middle East. He recounts the re-inhabitation of the Eastern Orthodox monastery of Hamatoura that was abandoned during the war and then destroyed by fire. The return of the ascetic community, with its ties to Greece and other parts of the Eastern Orthodox world, runs parallel to another return: the discovery of the ancient monastery's martyred saints. According to an Orthodox ascetic conception of time, Eldridge challenges typical historiographical treatments of ruin, return, and recovery in post-war Lebanon. His study indicates that the reconstituted monastery, as a site of refuge for many fleeing the war in Syria, is not insulated from ongoing destruction in the region. Rather, both the article and the tradition of monastic renunciation itself point to cycles of ruin and return, in which destruction may yield a restorative revelation.

This final study of a monastery rebuilt after one civil war now sheltering refugees from another conflict could be taken as a definitive picture of contemporary Christianity in the Middle East. Precarious contexts emerge in most of these nine studies: civil war, economic despair, political upheaval, displacement, humanitarian injustices. Yet for the authors of this special issue and the Middle Eastern voices they endeavor to represent, violence and persecution do not define Christian identity in the region. Depictions of the Christian traditions of the Middle East collectively as struggling, even dying, in the land of Christianity's birth indicate that little else is left to be known about the lives of nearly 19 million people in the region. The articles in this issue take a different approach. They attend to the complexities of lived traditions and focus on the agency of Christians within these contexts. By seeking to understand the contemporary circumstances on local, indigenous terms, these articles expand

Middle Eastern Christian Studies with nuanced accounts of Middle Eastern Christians and challenge future scholarship to do the same.

About the Author

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