**Current Trends and Future Challenges in Syriac Studies**
Professor Amir Harrak, University of Toronto

During the past fifty years, Syriac Studies has been at the forefront of Middle Eastern Studies. Novel research by scholars such as Robert Murray and Sebastian Brock, highlighting the Semitic expression of Syriac Christianity in contrast to the Greek and Latin expressions, added new facets to the study of Eastern Christianity. Moreover, the writings of early Syriac Fathers such as Aphrahat and Ephrem, were shown to be of direct interest to Jewish Studies and Islamic Studies, while Syriac chorography sheds light, often unique, on Middle Eastern long history and cultures. Nonetheless, despite the strides in scholarship, there are various realms that are still understudied and many lines of inquiry yet to be probed. This paper will present a survey of the scholarly accomplishments of the last decades, while highlighting the areas and the themes that still warrant significant research.

**The Syriac Community in the Middle East: Challenges and Aspirations**
Dr. Khalid Dinno, University of Toronto

Various Christian communities in the Middle East have been under severe oppression. However, the Christian Syriac communities have been facing the worst of these oppressions that has almost reached the level of annihilation in Syria and Iraq in the last decade, and which reached its peak with the surrender of Mosul to the terrorists of ISIS. This paper will discuss the contemporary condition of the Syrian Christians and their attempts at preserving their community and culture.

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**Hidden Treasures of the Eastern Church: Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity and Early Islam**

8:15  CSSS Annual Meeting (for members only)
Themes from Late Antique Syriac Literature, 2nd - 6th Centuries
Chair: Professor Geoffrey Greatrex, University of Ottawa

8:45  Introduction

9:00  “Syriac Sources for the Study of Christian Apocrypha”
Professor Tony Burke, York University

9:30  “Early Syriac Encounters with Greek Philosophy”
Professor Adam Lehto, University of Toronto

10:00  “The Christian Captives of Roman Mesopotamia”
Professor Kyle Smith, University of Toronto

10:30  — Refreshment Break —

11:00  “Ecclesiastical Politics and the Syriac Acts of the Second Council of Ephesus”
Professor George Bevan, Queen’s University

11:30  Encounter between Syriac and Early Muslim Communities, 7th-9th Centuries
Chair: Professor Lucas Van Rompay, Duke University

12:00  “Complicated Connections: Early Islamic History through Syriac Eyes”
Professor Marica Cassis, Memorial University of Newfoundland

12:30  — Lunch Break —

13:00  “The Reinterpretation of the Identities of Jesus and Muhammad: Christian-Muslim Polemics in the Early Abbasid Era”
Ashoor Yousif, University of Toronto

14:00  “Current Trends and Future Challenges in Syriac Studies”
Professor Amir Harrak, University of Toronto

14:30  Syriac Studies and the Syriac Community in the 21st Century
Chair: Dr. Khalid Dinno, University of Toronto

15:00  “The Syriac Community in the Middle East: Challenges and Aspirations”
Dr. Khalid Dinno, University of Toronto

**The Department for the Study of Religion & The Canadian Society for Syriac Studies**
**Symposium — CSSS Symposium XIV**
Saturday 15 November 2014
Jackman Humanities Building: University of Toronto
170 St. George Street Room 100 Toronto ON M5R 2MB
**Syriac Sources for the Study of Christian Apocrypha**
Professor Tony Burke, York University

Though collections of Syriac apocryphal texts were published already in the second half of the 19th century, Syriac sources are somehow still neglected in contemporary scholarship of Christian Apocrypha. This paper will note the major publications of Christian Apocrypha in Syriac, survey the apocryphal texts extant in Syriac, including those that remain unpublished and those to be published, and also present the resources available to anyone who would like to study the material further.

**Early Syriac Encounters with Greek Philosophy**
Professor Adam Lehto, University of Toronto

The influence of Greek philosophy on early Syriac literature has received very little attention in modern scholarship. This presentation will reflect on the ways in which early Syriac Christian culture might, or might not, be considered ‘philosophical.’ In doing so the presentation will pay particular attention to the early 5th century monastic author John of Apamea, whose writings had a significant influence on the development of Syriac monasticism.

**The Christian Captives of Roman Mesopotamia**
Professor Kyle Smith, University of Toronto

As a result of the war that took place between Rome and Persia between 337 and 363, many inhabitants of Roman Mesopotamia, some of whom were Christians, were forcibly resettled within Persia. This paper will discuss two of the sources that provide evidence for those “Christian captives” of Sasanian Persia: the Res gestae of the Latin military historian Ammianus Marcellinus and the Syriac Martyrdom of the Captives of Beth Zabdai.

**Ecclesiastical Politics and the Syriac Acts of the Second Council of Ephesus**
Professor George Bevan, Queen’s University

The Syriac Acts of the Second Council of Ephesus supply crucial information about ecclesiastical politics in the East in the 440s. In particular they shed light on the death of Flavian of Constantinople, the aims of Dioscorus of Alexandria, as well as the activities of Theodoret of Cyrhus in consolidating his power-base in Syria. Overall they give the picture of a council that, had emperor Theodosius II not died accidentally in the following year, would have had an abiding impact on the development of the Eastern church, perhaps as much as the Council of Chalcedon did in 451.

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**The Virgin Mary’s Encounter with the Angel in Sūrat Maryam: Reading the Scene in Light of Late Antique Christian Traditions**
Rami Tanous, University of Toronto

Numerous Sources recast the Lukan encounter between the Virgin Mary and the angel Gabriel with the aim of reconceptualizing and reinterpretating it. In this vein, although the Qur’ān emphasizes the virginal conception of Jesus in various statements, Sūrat Maryam introduces a surprising sexual tone in this encounter, a view that is affirmed in the later works of prominent mufassirūn. This paper will demonstrate that, in reflecting this tone, Sūrat Maryam necessarily draws upon late antique Christian sources that present variant accounts of the encounter in an attempt to vindicate Mary.

**Complicated Connections: Early Islamic History through Syriac Eyes**
Professor Marica Cassis, Memorial University of Newfoundland

Far too often, the history of the early Islamic Near East is divided along religious lines, with little consideration given to the rich history of cultural interaction between the newly arrived Muslims and the older Christian communities in areas like Iraq, Syria, and Anatolia. Nevertheless, there are a number of references to Islam in early Syriac texts that provide important insights into the early years of Islam in these areas. Through a series of case studies, this paper will illustrate the significance of these references for creating a more nuanced view of the interaction between the Syriac and Islamic communities in the early Islamic Near East.

**The Reinterpretation of the Identities of Jesus and Muhammad: Christian-Muslim Polemics in the Early Abbasid Era**
Ashoor Yousif, University of Toronto

The identities of Jesus and Muhammad are the most discussed themes in the theological dialogues between Christians and Muslims and the polemical treatises written by each group during the early ‘Abbasid period (8th-10th centuries CE). This is not surprising since the identities of these figures are paramount in determining the legitimacy of each of the two faiths. This paper will demonstrate that the reinterpretation of the identities of Jesus and Muhammad in these polemics was not merely crucial for the construction of the religious identities of both communities within ‘Abbasid society, but that it also served the political goals of each community.