



GSRL - UMR 8582
Groupe Sociétés Religions Laïcités



Call for papers:

International Workshop: CNRS-GSRL

Paris, May 26, 2016

Organizer: Saïd Chaaya, PhD

The Bible in Arabic in the nineteenth century:

What challenges for Christianity and Islam in the Middle East societies since 1865?

The publication in 1865 of the complete translation of the Bible into Arabic in Beirut, accompanied by its wide distribution, under the aegis of the American missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) with the participation of scholars from Lebanon, remains a turning point and a milestone of the religious and intellectual history of the Middle East. The consequences of this translation exceed furthermore, indeed, the religious and theological field to reach man and his role in society: politics at large. The translation was finalized and can be seen as a sign of a changing society; especially since Muslims scholars were called to collaborate side to side with Christians.

Beyond the challenge faced by this translation and the difficulties encountered by this work, we note that it is regarded as the manifesto of some desacralization of the Bible, that is now available in the hands of the people rather than preserved with clergy.

The American Protestant missionaries in Ottoman Syria in this way, imposed for the purposes of reading, catechesis, and even for the education in general, vehicular Arabic, as the *lingua franca* of the Middle East. This language once again overlooked in the religious field in the nineteenth century is now ready to be the center of debate of ideas and the social controversies.

The Arabic language, which is the common denominator, is seen as the new brand identity of populations that have combined their aspirations to modernity and progress in the advancement of the language. The *Nahda*, Arabic literary renaissance, would not have been possible without the use of the Arabic language advocated by learned societies created in the wake of the work of biblical scholars and freemasons. The editing and the translation of the great Arabic classics contributed at this period the Arabic language to evolve through the integration of modern scientific terminology compatible with Western technical knowledge.

Arabic, thus, becomes an assertive brand identity by Arab intellectuals facing a Middle Eastern Ottoman Empire unresponsive to their expectations.

What has been the real impact of this translation that changed the representations of the world? What were the direct implications that enabled advanced scientific and technical knowledge as well as the self-awareness through the Arab cultural heritage? How the Bible translation changed the relationship of people to their confessional society in Lebanon and Syria since the nineteenth century? How it was received by Muslim intellectuals?

The Workshop will focus on two themes in particular:

- The religious liberalism, known or feared, generated by mass distribution of these Bibles, made possible reading the Bible by everyone, this translation is the culmination of an era of liberation of consciences, a renewal of theological thought and religious practices, a modern era allowing each individual to become a master of its own spirituality. God once unattainable is now himself present by his word in every home and in a language which is understood by them, Arabic lingua.
- The inculturation and re-introduction of the Bible in an Arab sociocultural environment which is influenced by Islam. We must ask the question, from the point of view of the history of events and of social history, of how the Bible became part of the religious and intellectual history, but also of the politics of the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Province of Syria and especially in Lebanon, not to mention the repercussions to Egypt. It is also questionable how the various religious sects responded to the upheaval caused by the common availability of the scriptures and the relativity of the Catholic and Orthodox clerical discourse. Finally this complete translation of the Bible, (continuous text) allowed the Islamic thought to develop a better understanding of Christianity, now accessible in the language of the Koran.

This International Workshop primarily intended to bring together researchers from all disciplines, who worked on the Middle East in a perspective linking the history, sociology and anthropology to this translation of the Bible into Arabic. We strongly encourage junior researchers to apply too.

The conference languages are French, English, contributions can take the form of traditional lectures or of work-in-progress presentations.

The selected contributions will be published.

Calendar and submission guidelines:

Proposals for contributions (including a CV, a title and an abstract of 400 words maximum) should be sent no later than February 29, 2016.

For inquiries about the workshop and submissions please email: chaaya.gsrl@gmail.com .

Date of the workshop: May 26, 2016
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