

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### Christians and Jews in Ottoman Society: A Workshop in Oxford

**Organiser:**

John-Paul Ghobrial, University of Oxford ([john-paul.ghobrial@history.ox.ac.uk](mailto:john-paul.ghobrial@history.ox.ac.uk))

**Dates:**

3-5 July 2017 (two and a half days)

**Description:**

It has been over thirty years since the publication of Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis's seminal work, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society* (1982). The two-volume collection of essays quickly became a classic, and it continues today to be widely cited by specialists and non-specialists alike. This is not surprising given the ambition and breadth of the work. Ranging from early Islam to the nineteenth century, with essays covering a diverse assortment of Christian and Jewish communities across the empire, the collection offered a distinctly panoramic approach to the study of *dhimmis* in the Ottoman world. And it did so while engaging with wider questions about the structure and workings of Ottoman society: it taught us, for example, that the 'millet' was a figment of our imagination, at least before the nineteenth century. The work continues to have special resonance for scholars working on the contemporary politics and history of the Balkan and Middle Eastern societies that emerged from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, particularly since its republication in an abridged edition in 2014.

In recent years, however, there have been significant developments in Ottoman history, Islamic history, and Eastern Christian and Jewish Studies, all of which promise to radically transform our understanding of the place of *dhimmis* in Ottoman society. For example, we know enough now about religious identity in the Ottoman Empire to know that the 'plural society' depicted in *CJOE* does not fully capture the nuances and complexities of life for Christians and Jews in the Ottoman world. Where such communities were regarded as organic, bounded units in 1982—the veritable 'building blocks' of the Ottoman world—scholars now acknowledge the porousness of these boundaries owing to a wide range of phenomena such as intermarriage, conversion to Islam, and the incidence of migration. Moreover, access to a wider range of sources has revealed how these communities were riven by deep divisions between clergy and laity, men and women, young and old. Where Christians and Jews were once regarded as 'minorities' in an Islamic society, scholars now recognise how networks of patronage, sociability, and trade gave certain individuals status and power, even when they didn't constitute part of the 'ruling religion'. Where normative rules in early Islam formed the background to the study of Christians and Jews in *CJOE*, Ottoman historians today ask questions about how geography and locality influenced the everyday life of Ottoman subjects—Christian, Jewish, and Muslim alike. And although *CJOE* taught us to be skeptical about the existence of the millet system in the early modern period, we have yet to understand the mechanics of communal religious identity as it played out in Ottoman governance. Indeed, was there even a common approach to Christians and Jews across the wide geography and diverse contexts of 'Ottoman society'?

Put simply, the time is ripe for a new, three-dimensional study of Christians and Jews in Ottoman society, one that cuts across social, intellectual, economic, cultural, legal and religious history. Such an endeavour requires the collaboration of specialists working on different parts of the empire. As part of an ERC-funded project on Eastern Christianity in the Early Modern World, a workshop is being held in Oxford in July 2017 for the purpose of writing such a history. The workshop will bring together several junior and senior scholars in this field in order to produce a collection of essays that offers a comparative study of *dhimmis* in the Ottoman Empire. The outcome of the process will be a book aimed at a wide readership, intended at the very least to shape the research agenda for the future while also providing non-specialists with a vision of Ottoman society that better reflects the developments of the past thirty years.

**Call for Papers:**

This workshop has the explicit purpose of the publication of a volume of collected essays. As such, we invite submissions for papers from scholars who will be able to adhere to the provisional schedule detailed below. We are interested in papers that engage with the general subject in different ways. For example, some papers might consider aspects of everyday life among specific communities of *dhimmis*, while others might offer more, general accounts of the place of *dhimmis* in Ottoman society. The main criterion is that papers must engage with wider questions about the place of *dhimmis* within various contexts of Ottoman, Muslim, or imperial society. Given limits of space and time, it is unlikely that we will be able to select papers that focus only on practices *within* specific dhimmi communities, i.e., all papers must engage in a meaningful way with the status of these communities as Ottoman subjects.

Proposals should take the form of an *Abstract* (no more than 250 words, including title) and a short *Cover Letter* introducing yourself and including details of your current institutional affiliation and any previous publications (no more than 1 page). When preparing your proposal, we strongly encourage you to consider the section below ('Some Propositions').

Proposals should be sent to [john-paul.ghobrial@history.ox.ac.uk](mailto:john-paul.ghobrial@history.ox.ac.uk) no later than **20 February 2017**.

### Some Propositions:

1. The book will adopt a comparative approach to Christians and Jews *within* the Ottoman Empire: we encourage proposals from scholars working across the wide stretch of Ottoman geography including Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, the Balkans and the Mediterranean world. In the final publication, some attention may also be given to comparisons with the position of *dhimmi*s in other contemporary Muslim empires, most notably the Safavids and the Mughals.
2. In its focus on ‘Ottoman society’, the book will engage with wider questions about the place of religious identity—both individual and communal—in the Ottoman world. In doing so, we invite proposals that seek to problematize some of the traditional terminology of this field—for example, ‘millets’, ‘minorities’, ‘dhimmis’ (as a category applying in the same way to Christians and Jews) and so on—while also encouraging submissions from scholars with interests in the study of religious diversity (e.g., ‘ruled’ versus ‘ruling’ religions, ‘communitarian cosmopolitanism’, ‘toleration’, ‘pluralism’, etc.). The book will explore the meaning of religious identity in both a local and imperial context.
3. In place of *CJOE*’s focus on ‘early Islam’, we will consider Mamluk and Byzantine legacies as they informed Ottoman approaches to Christians and Jews. Moreover, we will seek to problematize the religious categories themselves, replacing simple notions of ‘Christians’ and ‘Jews’ as organic units with more considered reflections on how boundaries were formed between and within these communities. We encourage proposals, therefore, that pay special attention to everyday experience, identity formation (individual and communal), and the role played by particular practices (e.g., food, festivals, martyrologies, religious devotion, taxation, the *jizya*, clothing, migration, settlement, etc.).
4. Although we will adopt a wide chronology, the centre of gravity of the final publication will lie in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We will also pay attention to the nineteenth century. However, participants working on the nineteenth century are encouraged to consider what the changes of the nineteenth century revealed about earlier periods, that is, what can we learn from how individuals and institutions reacted to the changes of the nineteenth century about what was ordinary, commonplace and ‘status quo’ in earlier centuries.
5. The book recognises that a productive approach to this subject involves the consideration of Ottoman sources (archival, literary, legal and financial) alongside sources produced within particular communal traditions (Arabic, Syriac, Greek, Coptic, Hebrew, Ladino, Armenian, etc.), and the range of participants involved in this endeavour seeks to reflect this diversity of sources.

### Provisional Schedule and Deadlines:

The purpose of the workshop is to write a new history of Christians and Jews in Ottoman society, and to do so in a comparative, purposeful, and timely manner. Anyone who agrees to participate is asked to do so only if they think they will be able keep to the provisional schedule below.

20 February 2017	CFP deadline
(by) 1 April 2017	Participants notified and asked to commit to attendance
31 May 2017	All participants to submit final titles, extended abstracts, and short bios
3-5 July 2017	Workshop in Oxford (arrival on 2 July, departure on 5 July)
31 August 2017	All participants to submit initial drafts of papers to organiser for first review
1 October 2017	Organiser returns comments and suggestions to all participants
January 2018	Final versions of all papers due to organiser

*Potential publication in late 2018 / early 2019*

### Travel and accommodation:

We will provide accommodation for all participants for three nights in Oxford, checking in on 2 July 2017. Depending on funding, we also hope to be able to cover the travel expenses of Early Career Researchers. In all other cases, travel expenses will be reimbursed as far as possible given budget constraints although we will ask participants to apply if possible for reimbursement from their home institutions. All participants will be informed of how much we can reimburse before they make a final commitment to attend.

### Please direct any questions to:

John-Paul Ghobrial  
Associate Professor and Tutorial Fellow in Early Modern History  
Balliol College, University of Oxford  
[john-paul.ghobrial@history.ox.ac.uk](mailto:john-paul.ghobrial@history.ox.ac.uk)