



Faculty of History, The Stephen A Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities

The Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, Oxford OX2 6AH

www.history.ox.ac.uk

Summary

Job title	Research Associate: Women in Syriac Christianity, 1500-1800
Division	Humanities
Department	Faculty of History
Location	The Stephen A Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities, Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, Oxford OX2 6AH
Grade and salary	Grade 7: 1-3: £39,424-£41,636 per annum with an Oxford University Weighting of £1,750 per annum
Hours	Full time (37.5 hours / 1FTE)
Start date	23/09/2026
Contract type	Fixed-term for 36 months
Reporting to	Dr Lucy Parker
Vacancy reference	186208

Research topic	“Women, Manuscripts and Identity Formation in Syriac Christianity, c.1500-1800”
Principal Investigator / supervisor	Dr Lucy Parker
Funding partner	The funds supporting this research project are provided by the Leverhulme Trust

The role

“Women, Manuscripts and Identity Formation in Syriac Christianity, c.1500-1800” is a three-year project funded by a Leverhulme Trust Research Project Grant, based at the University of Oxford. The project’s Principal Investigator is Dr Lucy Parker. Interdisciplinary and multilingual in scope, the project will produce an ambitious study of Syriac women, looking beyond male, clerical elites to write a broader social, economic and cultural history of early modern Syriac communities. Analysing unpublished Syriac and Arabic manuscripts, it will illuminate how women acted as key agents within manuscript culture, confessionalization and processes of identity formation, as well as exploring how far Syriac language use and Syriac identity were gendered phenomena.

The early modern period (c.1500-1800), during which most Syriac Christians lived in the eastern Ottoman empire, offers particularly exciting sources for studying Syriac women. Most surviving manuscripts from Syriac communities were copied



in this period, and their marginal notes and colophons are rich, but overlooked, sources for Syriac women's history. This manuscript material will lie at the heart of the project. Importantly, the project will be multilingual in scope, recognising that most users of Syriac were users of multiple languages. Arabic will play a key role, since women's lives were more likely to be recorded in Arabic than in Syriac, Arabic being the vernacular language in many communities which used Syriac as an ecclesiastical and literary language. The project will take a broad definition of 'Syriac Christianity', comparing evidence from different Syriac-using churches and interrogating the significance of confessional identities.

The project will employ a postdoctoral Researcher in Arabic for three years to work closely with the Principal Investigator (PI). The Arabic Researcher will have primary responsibility for working with relevant Arabic manuscript materials while the PI will take the lead on Syriac manuscripts.

For a more detailed description of the project, see Appendix 1 below.

Overview of the role

This is an exciting opportunity for an expert in Arabic to work as a postdoctoral researcher on the Leverhulme-Funded project "Women, Manuscripts and Identity Formation in Syriac Christianity, c.1500-1800", under the guidance of the Principal Investigator, Dr Lucy Parker. You should be passionate about using Arabic manuscript materials and about uncovering little-known eastern Christian histories. You will be responsible for conducting research into Christian Arabic manuscripts to uncover and interpret material relating to the lives of women from Syriac Christian communities in the early modern period. You will use manuscript catalogues, online manuscript repositories, and in-person visits to manuscript collections, to uncover this material about women. With advice and guidance from the PI, you will produce independent research publications (e.g. articles or a monograph) on topics relevant to the project's agenda, and will collaborate with the PI on at least one co-authored article. You will present project findings at local, national, and international seminars, workshops, and conferences. You may also be asked to contribute some entries to research databases, blogs, and other short-form publications.

Since many Arabic manuscripts and notes related to Syriac communities are written in Arabic Karshuni (Arabic language in Syriac script), you will be required to develop expertise in reading Karshuni if you do not already possess this. In addition, it will be important to learn basic Syriac in order to identify relevant manuscript notes and material. Training in Syriac will be provided.

Responsibilities

- Conduct independent research (with guidance from the PI) into the history of Syriac Christian women, managing own academic research and administrative activities. This involves small scale project management, to co-ordinate multiple aspects of work to meet deadlines
- Identify, analyse, and interpret relevant material from Arabic and Karshuni manuscripts, reviewing and refining theories as appropriate
- Adapt existing and develop new research methodologies and materials to meet the project's ambitious agenda of opening new directions in Syriac Christian studies
- Produce single-authored publications (such as two articles or a monograph) on the history of Syriac women in this period
- Co-author at least one article with the PI on Syriac Christian women
- Present project findings at national and international seminars, conferences and workshops
- Act as the project's expert on Arabic and share linguistic expertise with other project members
- Develop language skills in Arabic Karshuni and Syriac

- Develop ideas for future research activities linked to the project, potentially including bids for conference funding; present detailed research proposals to senior researchers

Selection criteria

Applications will be judged only against the criteria which are set out below. You should make sure that your application shows very clearly how closely your skills and experience meet these criteria. We are committed to fairness, consistency and transparency in selection decisions. Chairs of selection committees will be aware of the principles of equality of opportunity and fair selection and there will be both female and male members of the selection committee. Selection committees will explicitly take into account any career breaks or other factors, such as part-time working or disability, which may have had an impact on the quantity of candidates' publications.

Essential selection criteria

- A relevant PhD/DPhil, or be close to completion (submitted with no corrections anticipated), (e.g. in Arabic/Syriac Christianity, Middle Eastern History)
- Excellent knowledge of Arabic and the ability to work with Christian Arabic manuscripts from the early modern period
- Ability and willingness to learn to read Arabic Karshuni and basic Syriac, if not already known (training will be provided)
- Interest in and understanding of relevant historical methodologies, concepts, and approaches
- Ability to manage own academic research and associated activities
- Ability and willingness to plan, research, and write single-authored and co-authored publications within the scope of the project's aims and methodologies
- Ability and willingness to work as part of a team, to share knowledge, and to collaborate in research
- Excellent communication skills, including the ability to write for publication, present research proposals and results, and represent the research project at meetings
- Excellent spoken and written English
- Awareness of the University's obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Desirable selection criteria

- Knowledge of Arabic Karshuni
- Knowledge of Syriac
- Knowledge of other relevant research languages, such as Italian, Latin, French, Turkish
- Knowledge of relevant fields (e.g. Syriac Christianity, Ottoman History, or Early Modern History)
- Interest/experience in women's history/gender studies
- Experience of working with Christian Arabic manuscript material

- Experience of independently managing a discrete area of a collaborative research project
- Experience of developing research articles for publication

Appendix 1: Detailed Project Description

“Women, Manuscripts and Identity Formation in Syriac Christianity, c.1500-1800” is a three-year project funded by the Leverhulme Research Project Grants Scheme under the direction of Dr Lucy Parker.

Background:

Syriac Christians of the Middle East have long left their mark on history and its records. Yet Syriac Christianity remains relatively isolated within broader historical scholarship, largely the preserve of philologists and experts in doctrine and theology. Historical studies tend to focus on the monks and clerics who wrote most surviving Syriac sources, thereby excluding large parts of Syriac communities. Notably, those left out include Syriac Christian women, who have been the subject of very few studies. An ambitious study of Syriac women is long overdue and offers a chance to reset the field, looking beyond male, clerical elites to write a broader social, economic and cultural history.

The early modern period (c.1500-1800), during which most Syriac Christians lived in the eastern Ottoman empire, offers particularly exciting sources for studying Syriac women. Most surviving Syriac manuscripts were copied in this period, and their marginal notes and colophons are rich sources for Syriac women’s history. The early modern period is also of great importance for understanding the position of Syriac Christians within the Ottoman empire, for exploring the emergence of new identities as some Syriac communities made unions with the Catholic church, and for understanding the formation of Syriac manuscript collections. Despite this, the early modern period has been less well studied within Syriac studies than the medieval period and the aftermath of the 1915 *Sayfo*. Early modern Syriac women are thus doubly marginalised, a neglected group within a neglected period of history. Our project focuses on these lost voices, offering new perspectives on key debates about manuscript culture, identity formation, and Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire.

Objectives:

The project has three key objectives:

- 1) To analyse women’s contribution to Syriac manuscript culture through the detailed study of manuscripts produced c.1500-1800. Women played an important role in Syriac manuscript culture, including as patrons and financiers, readers and owners of manuscripts, and occasionally as authors or scribes. The manuscript evidence will also offer a window onto broader questions about women’s economic and social activity and about cultural gender norms.
- 2) To explore gendered dimensions of Syriac language use and Syriac Christian identity (asking, for instance, whether men were more likely to use the classical Syriac language than were women, who might instead use Arabic)
- 3) To write a more inclusive history of Syriac Christianity, demonstrating the importance of studying Syriac women, and bringing Syriac Christianity into dialogue with wider historical scholarship, showing its potential to transform other scholarly debates.

Significance and Originality

The project will offer a new, interdisciplinary approach to Syriac history, drawing upon and targeting its findings at the fields of Syriac and Arabic studies, Early Modern and Ottoman History, and women's and feminist studies. It will begin to rectify the gender imbalance in Syriac studies, not only restoring women to the historical narrative but also demonstrating how attention to women can transform our understandings of fundamental aspects of Syriac Christianity.

To take one example, scholars of early modern Syriac Christianity have explored the role of bishops and priests in creating Syriac Christian identities (which often revolved around membership of particular churches) through literary projects and preaching. Yet this approach reveals little about how identities were experienced and expressed beyond a narrow priestly elite. To go further, we must consider phenomena in which women played a key role, such as: lay support and financing for clerical projects; marriage choices (did people marry within their own churches or more widely?); the education and upbringing of children; and choices about naming patterns and language use (did Syriac couples give their children distinctively Syriac names, or use Arabic or Ottoman names which would be more common within wider society?)

Methodology:

The primary body of source material will be unpublished Syriac and Arabic materials from collections across the Middle East, Europe, India, and the United States. The project will also draw upon archival materials from European archives such as the Vatican.

Three distinctive methodological approaches will ensure the originality of the project:

- 1) **The project will approach manuscripts as material culture.** If manuscripts are approached (only) as text, the figures in their histories are limited: the author of the text, and the manuscript's scribe. This approach typically excludes women, who rarely appear as authors and scribes. Approaching manuscripts as material culture instead uncovers a range of people involved in their production, including commissioners, owners, sellers, readers, binders, restorers and illustrators. This reveals the important role of women in manuscript culture, since women were more likely to act as commissioners, owners and sellers of manuscripts.
- 2) **The project will take a broad definition of 'Syriac Christianity'**, including a range of communities who used Syriac in some capacity as part of their religious or daily lives. It will not focus exclusively on one church/confession, instead comparing evidence from different Syriac-using churches. The project recognises that 'Syriac Christianity', although often treated as an unproblematic category, does not directly correlate to any particular church, ethnic or other identity group. We will not make straightforward assumptions about who should be considered within the Syriac Christian world; rather, we will explore the scope and scale of Syriac Christianity at different points in time, investigating how far Syriac and its cultural heritage played an important role in identities, culture and community formation. The significance of Syriac to identities will be interrogated, rather than assumed.
- 3) **The project will be multilingual**, recognising that most users of Syriac across the centuries were users of multiple languages. Women's lives may have been less likely to be recorded in Syriac than in Arabic, the vernacular language in many communities which used Syriac as an ecclesiastical and literary language. Texts in European languages including Latin, Italian and French were also produced by and about Syriac speakers.

The project will take a feminist approach, motivated by a desire to transcend the androcentric perspective of the field and to recognise the equal importance of women. Through an ambitious publication and dissemination strategy, we will demonstrate that studying Syriac women can transform the field of Syriac studies and serve as a way to integrate it fully into middle eastern, Eurasian and global history, contributing to some of the biggest debates in premodern history.

Pre-employment screening

Standard checks

If you are offered the post, the offer will be subject to standard pre-employment checks. You will be asked to provide: proof of your right-to-work in the UK; proof of your identity; and (if we haven't done so already) we will contact the referees you have nominated. If you have previously worked for the University we will also verify key information such as your dates of employment and reason for leaving your previous role with the department/unit where you worked. You will also be asked to complete a health declaration so that you can tell us about any health conditions or disabilities for which you may need us to make appropriate adjustments.

Please read the candidate notes on the University's pre-employment screening procedures at: <https://www.jobs.ox.ac.uk/pre-employment-checks>

About the University of Oxford

Welcome to the University of Oxford. We aim to lead the world in research and education for the benefit of society both in the UK and globally. Oxford's researchers engage with academic, commercial and cultural partners across the world to stimulate high-quality research and enable innovation through a broad range of social, policy and economic impacts.

We believe our strengths lie both in empowering individuals and teams to address fundamental questions of global significance, while providing all our staff with a welcoming and inclusive workplace that enables everyone to develop and do their best work. Recognising that diversity is our strength, vital for innovation and creativity, we aspire to build a truly diverse community which values and respects every individual's unique contribution.

While we have long traditions of scholarship, we are also forward-looking, creative and cutting-edge. Oxford is one of Europe's most entrepreneurial universities and we rank first in the UK for university spin-outs, and in recent years we have spun out 15-20 new companies every year. We are also recognised as leaders in support for social enterprise.

Join us and you will find a unique, democratic and international community, a great range of staff benefits and access to a vibrant array of cultural activities in the beautiful city of Oxford.

For more information, please visit www.ox.ac.uk/about/organisation.

The Faculty of History

The Faculty of History in Oxford is the largest in the United Kingdom and one of the largest in the world. It has a very strong international reputation for its scholarship and its teaching of undergraduate and graduate students, with particular strengths in the history of the British Isles, continental Europe, imperial and global history, the United States, economic and social history, intellectual history and the history of science, medicine and technology. Within the Faculty there is also a Department of History of Art and a number of dedicated research centres. The Faculty holds a bronze Athena Swan award to recognise advancement of gender equality: representation, progression and success for all.

The Faculty, including the Department of History of Art, is located at the new, purpose-built Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities: <https://schwarzmancentre.humanities.ox.ac.uk/>. The Schwarzman Centre has been designed to be a dynamic hub dedicated to the humanities. For the first time in the University's history, humanities faculties are housed together with a new humanities library in a space designed to encourage learning and experimentation. The Schwarzman Centre is located with the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter (RAQ), a central and accessible part of Oxford.

More information about the Faculty can be found at: www.history.ox.ac.uk.

The Humanities Division

The Humanities Division is one of four academic divisions in the University of Oxford, bringing together the faculties of Classics; English; History; Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics; Medieval and Modern Languages; Music; Asian and Middle Eastern Studies; Philosophy; and Theology and Religion, as well as the Ruskin School of Art. The Division has more than 500 members of academic staff, approximately 4,100 undergraduates (more than a third of the total undergraduate population of the University), 1,000 postgraduate research students and 720 students on postgraduate taught courses.

The Division offers world-class teaching and research, backed by the superb resources of the University's libraries and museums, including the famous Bodleian Libraries, with their 11 million volumes and priceless early book and manuscript collections, and the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology. Such historic resources are linked to innovative agendas in research and teaching, with an increasing emphasis on interdisciplinary study. Our faculties are among the largest in the world, enabling Oxford to offer an education in Arts and Humanities unparalleled in its range of subjects, from music and fine art to ancient and modern languages.

For more information please visit: www.humanities.ox.ac.uk.

How to apply

Applications are made through our online recruitment portal. Information about how to apply is available on our Jobs website <https://www.jobs.ox.ac.uk/how-to-apply>.

Your application will be judged solely on the basis of how you demonstrate that you meet the selection criteria stated in the job description.

As part of your application you will be asked to provide details of two referees and indicate whether we can contact them now.

You will be asked to upload a CV and a supporting statement. The supporting statement must explain how you meet each of the selection criteria for the post using examples of your skills and experience. This may include experience gained in employment, education, or during career breaks (such as time out to care for dependants)

Please upload all documents as **PDF files** with your name and the document type in the filename.

All applications must be received by **midday** UK time on the closing date stated in the online advertisement.

Information for priority candidates

A priority candidate is a University employee who is seeking redeployment because they have been advised that they are at risk of redundancy, or on grounds of ill-health/disability. Priority candidates are issued with a redeployment letter by their employing department(s).

If you are a priority candidate, please ensure that you attach your redeployment letter to your application (or email it to the contact address on the advert if the application form used for the vacancy does not allow attachments).

If you need help

Application FAQs, including technical troubleshooting advice is available at: <https://staff.web.ox.ac.uk/recruitment-support-faqs>

Non-technical questions about this job should be addressed to the recruiting department directly recruitment.support@admin.ox.ac.uk.

To return to the online application at any stage, please go to: www.recruit.ox.ac.uk.

Please note that you will receive an automated email from our online recruitment portal to confirm receipt of your application. **Please check your spam/junk mail** if you do not receive this email.

Important information for candidates

Data Privacy

Please note that any personal data submitted to the University as part of the job application process will be processed in accordance with the GDPR and related UK data protection legislation. For further information, please see the University's Privacy Notice for Job Applicants at: <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/job-applicant-privacy-policy>. The University's Policy on Data Protection is available at: <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/data-protection-policy>.

The University's policy on retirement

The University operates an Employer Justified Retirement Age (EJRA) for very senior research posts at **grade RSIV/D35 and clinical equivalents E62 and E82** of 30 September before the 70th birthday. The justification for this is explained at: <https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/the-ejra>.

For **existing** employees on these grades, any employment beyond the retirement age is subject to approval through the procedures: <https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/the-ejra>.

There is no normal or fixed age at which staff in posts at other grades have to retire. Staff at these grades may elect to retire in accordance with the rules of the applicable pension scheme, as may be amended from time to time.

Equality of opportunity

The University of Oxford is committed to equal opportunity, and to being a place where everyone belongs and is supported to succeed. We recognise how the diversity of our community enriches our ability to deliver on our academic mission.

We welcome applications from individuals from all backgrounds, including those under-represented within higher education. No applicant or members of staff shall be unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

Employment with the University and progression within employment will be determined according to personal merit and the application of criteria related to the duties and conditions of the post. In all cases, the primary consideration will be the ability to perform the job.

As stated in the University's Equality Policy and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan, our commitment to equality and diversity goes hand in hand with our commitment to academic freedom and free speech.

Benefits of working at the University

Employee benefits

University employees enjoy 38 days' paid holiday, generous pension schemes, travel discounts, and a variety of professional development opportunities. Our range of other employee benefits and discounts also includes free entry to the Botanic Gardens and University colleges, and discounts at University museums. See <https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/staff-benefits>

University Club and sports facilities

Membership of the University Club is free for all University staff. The University Club offers social, sporting, and hospitality facilities. Staff can also use the University Sports Centre on Iffley Road at discounted rates, including a fitness centre, powerlifting room, and swimming pool. See www.club.ox.ac.uk and <https://www.sport.ox.ac.uk/>.

Information for staff new to Oxford

If you are relocating to Oxfordshire from overseas or elsewhere in the UK, the University's Welcome Service website includes practical information about settling in the area, including advice on relocation, accommodation, and local schools. See <https://welcome.ox.ac.uk/>

There is also a visa loan scheme to cover the costs of UK visa applications for staff and their dependants. See <https://staffimmigration.admin.ox.ac.uk/visa-loan-scheme>

Family-friendly benefits

With one of the most generous family leave schemes in the Higher Education sector, and a range of flexible working options, Oxford aims to be a family-friendly employer. We also subscribe to the Work+Family Space, a service that provides practical advice and support for employees who have caring responsibilities. The service offers a free telephone advice line, and the ability to book emergency back-up care for children, adult dependents and elderly relatives. See <https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/my-family-care>

The University has excellent childcare services, including five University nurseries as well as University-supported places at many other private nurseries.

For full details, including how to apply and the costs, see <https://childcare.admin.ox.ac.uk/>

Disabled staff

We are committed to supporting members of staff with disabilities or long-term health conditions. For further details, including information about how to make contact, in confidence, with the University's Staff Disability Advisor, see <https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/disability-support>

Staff networks

The University has a number of staff networks including the Oxford Research Staff Society, BME staff network, LGBT+ staff network and a disabled staff network. You can find more information at <https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/networks>

The University of Oxford Newcomers' Club

The University of Oxford Newcomers' Club is an organisation run by volunteers that aims to assist the partners of new staff settle into Oxford, and provides them with an opportunity to meet people and make connections in the local area. See www.newcomers.ox.ac.uk.

Oxford Research Staff Society (OxRSS)

A society run by and for Oxford University research staff. It offers researchers a range of social and professional networking opportunities. Membership is free, and all researchers employed by Oxford University are welcome to join. Subscribe at researchstaff-subscribe@maillist.ox.ac.uk to join the mailing list to find out about upcoming events and other information for researchers, or contact the committee on committee@oxrss.ox.ac.uk. For more information, see www.ox.ac.uk/oxrss, Twitter @ResStaffOxford, and Facebook www.facebook.com/oxrss.