

Richard Payne

Richard Payne joined the Oriental Institute and the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations in July 2013 as the Neubauer Family Assistant Professor of Ancient Near Eastern History. Throughout the academic year, he prepared a book manuscript, *A State of Mixture: Christians and Zoroastrians in the Iranian Empire*, which is now under contract with the University of California Press. The book is a study of how the Zoroastrian elites of the Iranian empire in late antiquity, CE 226–636, integrated Christians into their political institutions, and how Christians positioned themselves in a political culture not of their own making. The research undertaken in the autumn quarter of 2013 focused on Middle Persian cosmological literature, which has often been undervalued as a source for social history. The scholar-priests who composed these works frequently discussed the practical problems that non-Zoroastrians, especially Christians and Jews, posed for a Zoroastrian empire. If historians traditionally considered Zoroastrian priests to have been consistently hostile toward Christians and Jews, Payne has documented a spectrum of views ranging from arguments that non-Zoroastrians could make positive contributions to the empire and even accrue spiritual merit to those who considered them capable only of malice. The Zoroastrian scholar-priests emerged from the study as much more sophisticated, nuanced observers of their religious landscape than previously realized.

In addition to completing the manuscript, he completed and submitted an article on the Iranian encounter with the Huns of Central Asia and began editing two volumes: one on Iranian archaeology, the other on cosmopolitan political cultures in ancient empires. An article on the role of Zoroastrian cosmological thought in the Iranian practice of war appeared in *Past & Present*, the leading journal in the discipline of social history. On topics related to his research on Iranian political culture, he gave lectures at the University of Basel in Switzerland, the Collège de France in Paris, Rice University, and the Austrian Academy of Sciences

in Vienna, as well as at a conference comparing the structures of ancient empires at home at the University of Chicago. He gave an Oriental Institute Members' Lecture, "The Rise of Christianity in Iran," and talks at the Persian circle and late antiquity workshop on campus.

In the winter quarter, Payne introduced a new seminar on the social history of Christian communities in the ancient Near East, *Saints and Sinners*, that considered the relationship between religion and social, political, and economic structures from the perspective of early Christian literatures in various Near Eastern languages, especially Syriac. The spring quarter took him to Istanbul, to teach in the NELC program for undergraduates on the Yıldız campus in Beşiktaş. He taught a course on late Roman political culture through the monuments of Constantinople, teaching where possible from the ruins, statues, and mosaics themselves. For the second course, a survey of Near Eastern history in late antiquity, he took the students on an archaeological tour of the Anatolian countryside, from the grand city of Ephesus to the humble fortress of Amorion, viewing the region as a nexus of the Roman, Iranian, and eventually early Islamic empires.
