Mellon Foundation Sawyer Seminar
Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam, and Beyond
Session on 'Converting States'
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"Conversion, Apostasy, and Penance: the shifting identities of the first generations of Muslim Converts"

Abstract
An eighth-century East-Syrian priest renouncing his Savior and embraces Islam, but later regrets and returns to Christianity; a Jew of priestly lineage (*kohen*) converts to Islam, but then seeks to return to his old religion; a former Zoroastrian who performs a virtuous deed as a means of returning to his old religion; and a Muslim who wishes to know what is to become of his Jewish and Christian neighbors who had converted to Islam, but some time afterwards apostatized. Concerns of such nature comprise only a small portion of a rather rich corpus of legal regulations issued by Muslim, East-Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian jurists who appear to have been highly preoccupied with the question of conversion to Islam, or from it, in the first centuries after the Muslim conquest. Within this very broad phenomenon, an intriguing trend of indecisive behavior on the part of new Muslim converts, perhaps manipulative in some instances, seems remarkable.
In my talk I plan to delineate some of the features of this trend by discussing a selection of îanbalī, Geonic, East-Syrian, West-Syrian, and Zoroastrian legal regulations and opinions, issued in Mesopotamia from the eighth to the tenth centuries.