from the time of Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria from 328 to 373, and the last quarter of the fourth century, just before the dramatic date of the text and the original composition of the text.

The first bishop of Philae, Macedonius, was a government official who, when assigned to the far south of Egypt, found other Christians on Philae but no bishop. On a visit to Alexandria, he asked Athanasius to provide one. Athanasius appoints Macedonius himself. Aaron had heard about this from Macedonius, which is chronologically possible (*pace* the editors, 178), and Isaac heard it from Aaron and here tells Paphnutius and Pseleusius about it. This chain could reach back from the early fifth century to the early years of Athanasius's episcopate. Macedonius attended the Council of Serdica in 343 (see 179) and was succeeded as bishop of Philae by Mark, who was exiled to the Siwa Oasis in 356 (198). Mark was himself succeeded by Isaiah in 368 (198). After Isaiah died, a monk, Psoulousia, became bishop of Philae. He paid a visit to Theophilus (shortly?) after he became bishop of Alexandria (r. 385–412). That gives us ca. 385 as the *floruit* of Psoulousia. If he died, say, toward the end of the fourth century, he was succeeded by another bishop, who is not named, presumably because he was still alive when the text was originally composed.

Bibliography and full indices follow the commentary. The index of biblical references and of other literary references occupies six and a half pages. Not all of these are explicit or even implicit references in the text; often, they are merely adduced by the editors in their commentary, who discuss the intertextuality of the text (46–56). It would have been more interesting if they had provided a second apparatus below their text separately listing the more obvious echoes. There is a two-page index of papyrological and epigraphical sources adduced by the editors in their commentary as well.

At the end of the volume there are two figures, one with a graphic representation of the various narrators and narrative levels in the text, which illustrates part of the introduction (37–41), and a map of the First Nile Cataract area. The editors deserve praise for their authoritative edition, their appreciation of the text as a serious work of literature, and especially for their detailed commentary. The last mentioned should challenge future editors of Coptic hagiographical texts to provide the same for their texts.

Peter van Minnen
University of Cincinnati
doi:10.1017/S000964072100158X

An Early Christian Reaction to Islam: Isu'yahb III and the Muslim Arabs. By **Iskandar Beheiry**. Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 57. Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2019. xiii + 191 pp. $80.67 cloth.

This stimulating book by Dr. Iskandar Beheiry focuses on a leader of the Church of the East who began his role as patriarch in the year 649, serving ten years until his death. He left a fascinating series of 106 letters that show his passions and concerns in a context of increasing ambiguity of relationship with Muslim Arabs. Through reading his letters, we gain important insights into a crucial period of religious change and the responses of this leader to it.

This man was Patriarch Isu-yahb III of the Church of the East. He was an important transitional figure in this period of change. He was formed in the monastic education and culture of his church and came to overall church leadership just seventeen years after the death of the Prophet Muhammed. In his letters, the sense of ambiguity and questions that many had about the nature of the new faith would also be apparent. He does not evidence in his letters a hatred of Islam or Arabs generally that had adopted it but rather a kind of bewilderment that was not unusual at the time.

Dr. Beheiry brings to this study not only the needed academic background but also pastoral experience in Chicago as a priest of the Syriac Orthodox Church. He particularly focuses on four key questions that needed more investigation in other prior research on Isu-yabh III and his letters. First is a greater explanation of his changing attitudes toward the Muslim Arabs. Second is a reexamination of the chronological development of those views. The third question relates to the dating of the letters, with a new proposal breaking ground from scholarship of the past. Fourth is the need for more clarity on identifying literary sources that the patriarch relied on in portraying Muslim Arabs.

These four questions are explored in the four chapters of Beheiry's book after a short introductory section and finishes with a short conclusion. His main argument is that certain important letters of Isu-yabh have been "disregarded" (8) and need further research, particularly in areas of dating, tone, and interpretation. The author is specifically responding to the challenge in an article by Victoria Erhart that a more detailed study of the letters is needed "to assess the seemingly contradictory statements about the Arabs and the providential reasons for their conquest" (9).

Dr. Beheiry then proceeds succinctly throughout the book to approach these areas of concern. One is left at times wanting more expansion on each point, but clearly there is more light shed on the letters, including a major focus on Letter 39b. On page 65, the author's hypothesis, challenging such eminent scholars of the Church of the East as Dr. Jean Fiey, is that this is the first time then Bishop Isu-yabh mentions Muslim Arabs as "secular rulers." The importance of this is that, as of 637 CE, it is among the "earliest mentions of all historical sources of the Muslim Arabs."

Letter 39b is also the earliest letter in which Isu-yabh presents specific information about the faith and beliefs of Muslim Arabs. Again, in this valuable section on this fascinating primary source, I found myself longing for more elucidation. Dr. Beheiry has done important work on these letters, and hopefully more research will be forthcoming.

Another area the author examines is the patriarch's largely positive attitude towards Muslim Arabs as evidenced in his letters. A key sentence on page 105 relates a strategy of Isu-yabh III as "he tried to build a platform of collaboration with the state by promoting the theological judgement that the new political era was part of God's plan to bring down the Persians and raise up the Arabs." Indeed, the patriarch is happy the Persian Empire has fallen, and he sees Muslims as "liberators and supporters who through political rule established a period of prosperity and religious freedom for Christianity" (113).

In an important thought on page 116, the author believes that the patriarch saw Muslim Arab rule as an "opportunity through which Christians might take control after the fall of the Persians." Did this Christian leader see the Muslims as similar to the pre-Islamic Arabs of Hira, who gave some freedom to the church? This may be going too far, but there was certainly much ambiguity in how Isu-yabh saw the new rulers. As Dr. Beheiry brings out in the final chapter, the patriarch had a strongly

developed trust in the resources of the charismatic gifts of his church functioning as "part of [a] purposely-constituted hierarchy in accordance with the norms of the church" (119).

In the conclusion, Dr. Beheiry includes references to a little-known text that can be an "important inter text" for understanding how Isu-yabh III saw Muslim Arabs. This was the *Life of Sabrisu*, a document that could be a "possible mirror from the days of Hira" when the king of the Arabs converts with all his household to Christianity. Beheiry postulates that this could have given the patriarch "hope that the Arabs of his day could follow their example" (170).

This book is an excellent resource for the continued study of these important letters. After reading, one is left wondering if it could have been considerably longer than its present length of 191 pages for the valuable analysis and content within. Certainly, another book by this author is to be expected and anticipated.

Steve Cochrane
University of the Nations
doi:10.1017/S0009640721001591

Poetry, Bible and Theology from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Edited by **Michele Cutino**. Millennium-Studien / Millennium Studies 86. Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020. xii + 568 pp. $149.99 hardcover.

In 1975, when Reinhart Herzog's pioneering study *Die Bibelepik der lateinischen Spätantike* was published, the subject of biblical poetry written in classical meters in late antiquity and the Middle Ages was not exactly a popular area of study. It would have been hard to imagine then that some four decades later the University of Strasbourg would sponsor a major international symposium devoted to the topic with the support of such prestigious institutions as the Institute d'Études Augustiniennes, the École Nationale des Chartes, and the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. In 2018, over thirty scholars from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States converged on Strasbourg to consider the significance of Juvencus, Sedulius, Arator, and other poets whose names have become far less obscure now than they were in the 1970s. The unifying purpose of the symposium was to show "how poetic form and exegetical-theological content support each other" (vi) in a wide variety of such texts written across the centuries, not only in late antiquity but well into the later Middle Ages. In the past, patrologists traditionally focused on prose (doctrinal treatises, sermons, creeds, and so forth), while classicists tended to ignore the large body of Christian verse written in Greek and Latin. This volume represents a significant attempt to fill the lacuna. While the proceedings of this symposium may not provide a systematic treatment of such a complex phenomenon, they do testify clearly to the vitality of a scholarly movement that shows no signs of losing momentum.

Carl Springer
University of Tennessee—Chattanooga
doi:10.1017/S0009640721001608