

about the person, his rhetoric and his theology? Are we speaking about his audience, or the 'social history' to which his sermons witness? (These are very different objects of inquiry.) And which of his 800-plus sermons (not to mention letters and treatises) are we speaking of? While I did thus feel lost at times as I read through this volume, De Wet and Mayer have more often allowed us to see true scholarly conversation on John Chrysostom at its best, particularly in the several series of essays mentioned above.

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

ROBERT EDWARDS

Memory and identity in the Syriac Cave of treasures. Rewriting the Bible in Sasanian Iran.

By Sergey Minov. (Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture, 26.) Pp. xii + 411. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2021. €198. 978 90 04 44550 5; 1570 078X
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The *Cave of treasures* is a Syriac re-writing of the Bible narrative from Adam to the events of Pentecost. Like the *Histories* of Josephus or the Book of Jubilees (or parts of the Qu'ran) it is a blend of canonical and extra-canonical material that re-tells common stories with a specific apologetic agenda. This agenda is to emphasise the abolition of God's covenant with the Jews in favour of the new covenant with the Christians; to relate Christian narratives to the land and rulers of Sasanian Iran; and to proclaim the Suryaye as a Christian people *par excellence*, over and above the Greeks and Romans. The manuscript history of the *Cave of treasures* is very complex and the standard edition by Ri has a number of problems, but Minov guides the reader through this difficult terrain. Minov makes a convincing case for dating the text to the sixth century on the basis of the *Cave of treasures's* use of proper names and its Christology, and the absence of any allusions to Islam or the collapse of the Sasanian empire (pp. 38–9).

The *Cave of treasures's* anti-Jewish agenda is shown most clearly in what it omits from the biblical narrative. There is no exodus here, and no visit to Mount Sinai, nor is there a Second Temple or a Maccabean revolt. Instead, the *Cave of treasures* focuses on pre-Abrahamic material, especially on Adam and Noah, and on Adam's son Seth and his children, whom it sees as preserving the pure religion that was practised in Eden. As for Eusebius of Caesarea or Epiphanius of Salamis, Christianity is the restoration of a pure religion that was instituted at the beginning of time (pp. 121–7).

The *Cave of treasures* develops the presentation of the Jews as Jesus' enemies that is found in the Gospels. Thus the Jews are identified as the crucifiers of Jesus, and it is they who divide Christ's clothes and who weave the crown of thorns. And it is for this betrayal of Jesus that God's covenant with them is broken and the Holy Spirit abandons them. The supersessionist re-telling of Genesis in the *Cave of treasures* anticipates the breach of the covenant, and the establishment of the new covenant with the Christians, through such narratives as the cursing of the Canaanites (Genesis ix.20–7), who prefigure the scattering of the Jews, or Abraham's marriage to Leah and Rachel (Gen. xxix. 15–28), where Rachel, the second wife, prefigures the Church (pp. 105–10).

The *Cave of treasures* draws on anti-Jewish tropes in earlier Syriac writings such as Ephrem and Aphrahat, but its author was also highly creative, and responded to

local concerns. One idiosyncratic feature of the *Cave of treasures*'s anti-Jewish strategy is its elaboration of Mary's lineage, going back to David. Jesus' link to David *via* Joseph is, of course, given at length in Matthew i.2–16 and Luke iii.23–38, and this genealogy is associated with the claim that Jesus was the Messiah promised in Isaiah ix.6–7. But there seems to have been some criticism of this point by Jewish readers of the Gospels, who accused Mary of adultery. Such accusations were also repeated by Zoroastrian critics of Christianity. Fascinatingly, the *Cave of treasures*'s rebuttal was not simply to reassert Mary's virginity, but also to emphasise her Davidic lineage. In Sasanian Iran and Iraq, descent was a hugely important determinant of status: the Jewish diaspora in Babylonia was ruled by an exilarch who claimed Davidic lineage and defending Jesus' lineage seems to have been a key strategy for resisting Jewish criticism (pp. 60–70).

The engagement with Zoroastrian religion is complex, and, in parts, positive. The *Cave of treasures*'s treatment of Nimrod (Gen. x.10) is particularly fascinating in this regard. Though much of the Christian and Jewish traditions had a negative view of Nimrod as a tyrant who built the tower of Babel, the view in the *Cave of treasures* is more positive and he is celebrated as the founder of the first cities, including Edessa, Nisibis, Arbela, Ctesiphon and (unusually for the Syriac tradition) Azerbaijan (pp. 191–4, 198–201). Nimrod is also equated with the prophet Zoroaster, and credited with the origins of fire worship (pp. 145–52), the veneration of horses (pp. 152–62) and astronomy (pp. 189–90). The *Cave of treasures*'s description of both of these practices may be grounded in real knowledge of Zoroastrian practice, but is also strikingly neutral, given that such customs could easily be labelled idolatry. Nimrod is also credited with prophesying the coming of Christ, and the visit of the Magi of Matt. ii.1–12 is a response to this prophecy. Minov notes that the *Cave of treasures* heavily emphasises the status of the Magi as kings rather than Zoroastrian priests: the *Cave of treasures* names them after Sasanian shahs (Yazdedard, Hormizd and Peroz) who reigned in the late fifth century (pp. 228–33).

Minov situates the *Cave of treasures*'s treatment of Nimrod and the Magi against two contexts. Firstly, it is an indication that God was already active in granting revelation to the Gentile nations even before the coming of Christ (p. 241). Secondly, while Christians in Iran had been subject to persecution, sixth-century authors were keen to exonerate contemporary shahs from accusations of persecution, and focused these instead on their priestly advisors (pp. 243–4). The *Cave of treasures*'s praise for Nimrod as a king, and its depiction of the Magi as kings, may fit into this discourse of Christian loyalty to the shah.

On the other hand, the *Cave of treasures* offers marked criticism of other Zoroastrian practices such as close-kin marriage (*xwedodah*) and astrology (pp. 163–90). Nimrod himself is distanced from these customs: instead they are ascribed to one Ardashir. Here we should stress that many Christians continued to engage in practices that their clergy would condemn as Zoroastrian. Compared to most Christian authors, the *Cave of treasures* takes a relatively inclusive attitude by identifying Zoroaster in the Bible and ascribing a true revelation to him. This recognition might have partially allayed Zoroastrian accusations that Christian converts had abandoned the customs of their ancestors. Nevertheless, the *Cave of treasures* does draw a distinction between acceptable Zoroastrian

customs (which are ascribed to Nimrod-Zoroaster himself) and unacceptable innovations.

The identification of 'Ardashir' as the innovator of *xwedodah* is interesting. Minov notes that Ardashir was the name of two sixth-century high priests (p. 171), but it was most famously the name of the founder of the Sasanian dynasty. Ardashir's family had been associated with the fire shrine at Istakhr (near to ancient Persepolis) and he appealed to a religious mandate in overthrowing the Parthian dynasty and their fire shrines. I wonder whether the depiction of Ardashir in the *Cave of treasures* might rest on an anti-Sasanian memory of these third-century events, in which Ardashir was associated with false innovation in religion.

In the final part of the book, Minov turns to the treatment of 'Syriac' ethnic identity in the *Cave of treasures*. The *Cave of treasures's* claims here are highly original. Syriac, not Hebrew, is the primeval language spoken by Adam in Eden. The *Cave of treasures* observes that Syriac was not one of the languages of Jesus' persecutors (Greek, Latin and Hebrew) that Pilate inscribed on the cross. It celebrates the role of Abgar the Black, king of Edessa, who (according to Syriac tradition) had acknowledged Christ and offered to protect him from the Jews. The *Cave of treasures* also presented itself as the work of Ephrem, the only Syriac author to win fame across the Greek-speaking world and across confessional boundaries (pp. 273–98).

The *Cave of treasures* offers a highly original indigenist challenge to the claims of other prestigious languages of Scripture in a period when Syriac literature was being rapidly Hellenised (p. 288). It draws on stories of local patriotism that were linked to Edessa and other cities (pp. 302–3), yet it transcends these by providing a broader Suryaya identity that is not limited to a specific territory but links language and peoplehood. The *Cave of treasures's* ability to do this is perhaps explained by its author's unusual confessional background: though he was based in the Sasanian world (perhaps in Azerbaijan), he was an apothartist Miaphysite (i.e. a 'Julianist', rather than a 'Severan'). This confession had ties to both sides of the Roman-Sasanian frontier and the *Cave of treasures* blends the perspectives of Syriac-speaking Christians on both sides of the border. For instance, in a Roman environment where most Christians were not Suryaye, ethnic and linguistic differences may have been much more salient. On the other hand, writers in the Dyophysite Church of the East tended to use Suryaya as an ethno-religious term to mean 'Miaphysite' or to distinguish between two ethnicities on either side of the border, Suryaye and Aramaye (p. 270). As Sebastian Brock has stressed, the normal group identification of Christians in the Sasanian world was religious. But an unusual feature of the *Cave of treasures* was to stress an ethno-linguistic group identity and to identify the Aramaye and the Suryaye. Thus it tends to downplay confessional differences in favour of celebrating a common prestigious history of a single ethno-linguistic group. The success of the author's strategy is shown in how widely the text was disseminated across confessional boundaries in the following centuries.

Minov's analysis here is highly persuasive. I would only add that the *Cave of treasures's* identitarian intervention was also made possible by the spread of Syriac, that is Edessene Aramaic, as a high dialect for speakers of other forms of Aramaic. This process has been carefully traced for Roman Syria west of the Euphrates in the fifth

century, but something similar may have occurred for the speakers of Aramaic dialects in the Sasanian world.

Minov should be commended for this highly erudite book. He marshals a vast range of evidence in many languages and a clear argument runs through his work. My only corrections are minor (for example, the synod of Acacius in 486 cannot really be characterised as ‘Nestorian’, or even strongly Dyophysite, and is better called anti-Theopaschite [p. 307]). Minov’s work demonstrates an important strength in the study of late antiquity in recent times, in which Syriac studies has been especially important, namely tracing common discourses that cross boundaries between religious traditions and political frontiers. This work should also be consulted by Islamicists. For, though Minov does not deal with the Islamic period in detail, the *Cave of treasures*’s elevation of the Syriac language and its positive characterisation of aspects of Zoroastrianism both anticipate discussions in the Islamic period. For instance, Islamic-era debates over whether or not Zoroastrians could be considered a people of the book had a substantive effect on the rights they could claim from their Muslim rulers. But the representation of Zoroaster or Sasanian shahs as monotheists, or attempts to differentiate between pure Zoroastrianism and later corruptions, do not have to be understood only as products of the Islamic period and may also reflect the inheritance of earlier constructions, such as the *Cave of treasures*’s, where Christians had already engaged with Zoroastrianism and Iranian culture.

AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

PHILIP JOHN WOOD

Sacred architecture and art of four Byzantine capitals. Constantinople, Thessaloniki, Mystras, Mount Athos. By Nicholas N. Patricios. Pp. xv + 409 incl. 476 colour and black-and-white ills. Columbia, NY: Kindle Direct Publishing, 2020. £38.57 (paper). 979 8580092782

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This book opens with a rather bald summary of the history of the Byzantine empire from 330 to 1453, concentrating on the problems of periodisation and repeating the misleading term ‘Dark Ages’ for the seventh and eighth centuries. It continues with a clearer explanation of the different areas of churches, their furniture and decoration and the symbolism of the liturgy. The substantive core of the book highlights the major churches of the capital, Constantinople, New Rome, founded by Constantine the Great, and of three cities that can claim the same epithet. Here Nicholas Patricios catalogues and illustrates sixty-nine monuments which represent the dominant styles of religious architecture and art from the fourth to the fifteenth century throughout the Orthodox world. The basic church forms, from the basilican to the cruciform plan, are outlined, as well as their development that spread Constantinopolitan designs to most other Byzantine centres. Since members of the ruling dynasty and wealthier patrons of monasteries concentrated on building in the capital, their highly creative activities dominated the earlier periods. The intense destruction of the crusader and Venetian capture of Constantinople in 1204 prompted increased construction in alternative centres of power that included Thessaloniki, Mystras and Mount Athos. After the Palaiologan dynasty had restored Byzantine control at the centre, during the late