

REVIEWS

THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

EMMANOUELA GRYPEOU, MARK N. SWANSON and DAVID THOMAS (eds):
The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam.
(The History of Christian–Muslim Relations.) vi, 338 pp. Leiden and
Boston: Brill, 2006. €118. ISBN 90 04 14938 4.

This worthwhile volume has its origins in an international workshop organized in Erfurt in 2003; it contains much of interest for scholars working in a variety of different fields concerned with the world of Late Antiquity and Early Islam. Of the fourteen contributions, six deal primarily with a historical perspective: thus Irfan Shahid's "Islam and *Oriens Christianus*: Makka 610–622 AD" draws attention to the importance of the Ethiopian presence there, and suggests that the Prophet himself may well have known at least some Ethiopic. Daniel Sahas takes another look at the encounter between Sophronius, patriarch of Jerusalem, and 'Umar. A thought-provoking contribution by David Olster, "Ideological transformation and the evolution of imperial presentation in the wake of Islam's victory", seeks to bring out an important shift in imperial discourse as a result of the Byzantine defeat, with the "sacerdotalization" of the imperial office. Walter Kaegi looks at the reign of Constans II with specific reference to his campaigns in Anatolia. In his "Copts and the Islam of the seventh century" Harald Suermann discusses the evidence for the Coptic Orthodox reaction to the Arab invasions, and concludes that "the idea that the Copts received the Muslims as liberators is no longer tenable". Jan van Ginkel traces the development of a self-identity of the Syrian Orthodox community under early Arab rule, as witnessed by the changing emphases over time in the accounts given by the different Syriac chronicles of the Arab conquests.

Several contributors discuss texts that have not yet been published. Thus Andrew Palmer indicates the light that can be shed on Amid/Diyarbakir in the Syriac "Life of Theodote, bishop of Amid" (who died in 698). Gerrit Reinink looks at the question of the relationship between political power and right religion, which is a central topic in the East Syriac apologetic work entitled "The dispute between a monk of Bēt Ḥālē and a Muslim nobleman" (the latter is probably to be identified as Maslama). A hitherto unknown Syriac text, entitled "Revelations and testimonies about our Lord's dispensation", is introduced by Muriel Debié; although based in part on the Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius (which dates from c. 692), the account stresses the spiritual, rather than political, primacy of the Roman Empire, indicating that this work must belong to a time when Syriac Christians had realized that Arab rule was there to stay. Accordingly it is suggested that early decades of the eighth century would fit well for the work. An unpublished Christian Arabic treatise, "Answers for the Sheikh", is lucidly presented by Sidney Griffith. The work sets out to provide answers to three questions posed by the unnamed Sheikh. Since the questions are said to derive from a *Kitāb al-radd 'alā al-naṣāra*, this suggests that the work dates from at least the ninth century (the manuscript itself is dated AH 533 (AD 1138/9)). Latest in date is the discussion by Martin Tamcke of an unpublished poem by Giwargis Warda (probably thirteenth

century) on the Catholicoses of the Church of the East where he concentrates on the way the poem presents the seventh-century Catholicoses.

The remaining three contributions concern Christian–Muslim relations. David Cook looks at the New Testament citations in the *Hadīth* literature, and suggests that there may once have been a Muslim translation of the Gospel of Matthew into Arabic. In two appendices he gives a translation of 59 short quotations with some similarities to New Testament texts, and a document said to have derived from a Christian convert to Islam, preserved by Ibn ‘Asākir. An obvious point of dispute between Muslims and Christians concerns the crucifixion. Mark Swanson outlines the way certain early Christian Arabic writers confront the issue, concentrating on three different texts, *The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, the anonymous eighth-century *Treatise on the Triune Nature of God* (edited long ago by M. D. Gibson), and the famous *Discourse between the Caliph al-Mahdī and the Catholicos Timothy*. The new questions and issues raised for Christian theologians by early Muslim treatises against Christian doctrines are explored by David Thomas, focusing on works, probably both of the ninth century, by al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm and Abū ‘Isā al-Warraq (an author to whom he has already devoted two monographs).

The collection is prefaced by a helpful overview of the contents by Emmanouela Grypeou. A cumulative bibliography and an index are provided.

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JOHN C. LAMOREAUX:

Theodore Abū Qurrah.

(Library of the Christian East.) xxxvii, 278 pp. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005. \$29.95. ISBN 0 934893 00 4.

The life of the churches in the East after the Arab-Muslim invasion of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires is one of the less pursued areas of study. Few who are not conversant with the languages know much about the Syriac- and later Arabic-speaking Christian communities that continued to live, worship and debate under new imperial rule. The result is only a handful of specialists are aware of the Christian theologies that were developed against the background of new modes of religious reflection, as Christian theologians were compelled by their Muslim counterparts to explain and defend their beliefs in fresh terms. This book takes a major step in releasing this notable Christian history and its learning to a wider readership.

Its subject, the Chalcedonian theologian Theodore Abū Qurrah, was active in the latter years of the eighth and early ninth centuries. Together with two Christian contemporaries, the Diophysite ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, and the Monophysite Ḥabīb Ibn Khidmah Abū Rā’iṭah (some of whose apologies have themselves just appeared in English translation for the first time: Sandra T. Keating, *Defending the “People of Truth” in the Early Islamic Period, The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā’iṭah*, Leiden, 2006), he is acknowledged as one of the first known Christian theologians who wrote works in Arabic that both defined his particular form of Christian faith with respect to other denominations, and also defended and explained his beliefs to inquiring Muslim minds. He made a strong and lasting impression on the latter, seen in his own lifetime by the probable reaction of the Imām al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm to his influence, within a few decades of his death in about 830 by allusions to his