

Syriac encounters. Papers from the Sixth North American Syriac symposium, Duke University, 26–29 June 2011. Edited by Maria Doerfler, Emmanuel Fiano and Kyle Smith. (Eastern Christian Studies, 20.) Pp. xix + 498 incl. 20 figs, 13 plates and 2 tables. Leuven–Bristol, Ct: Peeters, 2015. €85. 97 90 429 3046 9 JEH (69) 2018; doi:10.1017/S002204691700104X

Ever since 1991 there have been conferences on Syriac studies held once every four years in different locations in North America. That of 2011, held at Duke University, was the largest so far, thus offering testimony to the flourishing state of Syriac studies on the North American continent, despite a paucity of academic posts which have some specific connection with Syriac. The conference at Duke is the first of these conferences to have its main papers published together in a collective volume. Six of the twenty-four papers published here originated as plenary lectures, while the remainder started out as shorter presentations; nine of the authors had come over from Europe. The editors have arranged the papers, whose topics range in date from the third to the twentieth century, into eight sections: I, ‘Poetics and Representation’, with S. A. Harvey on Eve in the liturgy, J. Wickes on Ephrem, *Hymni.de Fide* 10, and R. A. Kitchen on a late verse *Life* of Jacob of Serugh; II, ‘Language and Identity’, with C. Shepardson on constructing linguistic difference in late antique Antioch, R. Contini on linguistic thought in the exegetical tradition, and H. Murre-van den Berg on Classical Syriac and the Syriac Churches in the twentieth century; III, ‘Resurrection and Apokatastasis’, with C. M. Stang on Evagrius’ reference to the ‘Great gift of letters’, and N. Kavvadas on an apologetic passage in Joseph Hazzaya; IV, ‘Nile and Tigris’, with M. E. Doerfler on Philoxenus’ Letter to Patricius, K. Innemée on the inlaid doors in the church of Deir al-Surian, and A. Harrak on Patriarch Dionysius of Tell-Mahre; V, ‘East and West’, with N. Andrade on the legal document of AD 343, A. Camplani on Bardaisan’s psychology, and C. E. Morrison on intercessory prayer in early texts; VI, ‘Greek and Syriac’, with A. Rigolio on some Greek literary texts taken over in Syriac monastic manuscripts, K. McVey on the Letter of Mara bar Serapion, A. Salvesen on biblical and secular learning in Jacob of Edessa, and U. Possekkel on the correspondence between Eliya and Leo of Harran on Christology; VII, ‘History and Influence’, with S. H. Griffith on Syriac Christianity, Islamic origins and the Qur’an, A. Hilkens on the Turks in the Chronicle of Patriarch Michael and in its Armenian adaptations, and A. Mengozzi on the poems of Khamis bar Qardahe; and, finally, VIII, ‘Text and Object’, with J.-N. Mellon Saint-Laurent on relics in hagiography, S. Bolz on a Jewish adjuration formula in three Syriac magic bowls, and L. van Rompay with detailed descriptions of two Syriac manuscripts in the library of Duke University. Each article is provided with its own specific bibliography. This is an impressive and rich volume: those with a specialist interest in Syriac matters will naturally benefit most, but anyone with even just a marginal interest in the Syriac world is likely to find here something that will be of interest. Since it is on a topic that is currently under much discussion, Sidney Griffith’s judicious contribution on the Syriac background to the Qur’an might be singled out as something that non-Syriacists might well be glad to read. The standard of the contributions is consistently high, and the editors are to be much commended for providing, not only a general index, but also an index of manuscripts to which reference has been made: this is something that all too few

editors of conference volumes think of providing, but their presence here will greatly enhance the usefulness of the volume.

WOLFSON COLLEGE,
OXFORD

SEBASTIAN P. BROCK

A companion to medieval Christian humanism. Essays on principal thinkers. Edited by John P. Bequette. (Companions to the Christian Tradition, 69.) Pp. viii + 354 incl. 1 ill. and 1 table. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2016. €199. 978 90 04 24845 8; 1871 6377 *JEH* (69) 2018; doi:10.1017/S0022046917000896

Christian humanism is a slippery term that functions as an ideal (often in contrast with what is labelled as secular humanism), but has been interpreted in many different ways over the centuries. This volume, edited by John P. Bequette, offers a series of fifteen essays on a range of thinkers, from Augustine to Julian of Norwich, to whom the label can be applied. Each chapter defends in one way or another how their subject contributes to humanist tradition, although not many of them tackle the broader question of what this post-medieval category might mean. There are no contributions on the Greek Christian tradition, reinforcing an impression that ‘Christian humanism’ is a uniquely Latin perspective. The challenge with this kind of volume is to avoid an uncritical Christian triumphalism that implies that humanism is an uncontested category, owned by the Latin theological tradition. The interest of this volume lies in the diversity of approaches to human dignity taken by thinkers in the Latin Christian tradition.

The opening chapter by David P. Fleischacker claims that Augustine offers ‘profound and lasting formulations’ of the human person, and indeed ‘the very mode’ by which subsequent analysis could be made. He argues that Augustine relies on four key heuristic canons or assumptions: the incorporeal reality of being and truth, the incorporeal elements of human nature, the habits of human nature, and the dialectical development of these habits. Fleischacker’s exploration of interiority as a key element in Augustine’s thought is helpful, but it does not explain the more pessimistic attitude to unaided human capacity taken by Augustine in his interpretation of St Paul’s teaching about natural human capacity to understand the divine. In many ways, the contributions to this volume deal with a range of attempts to respond to that critique offered by Augustine.

Bequette’s own contribution explores the particular way in which Bede develops Augustine’s understanding of six ages of history as a metaphor for understanding human development as itself a humanist perspective. Whether Augustine really did have a theory of man as a microcosm is debatable. His understanding of the soul as the image of God moves away from any sense that God could be grasped through nature. More perhaps could be made of the way Bede merged Augustine’s interiority with a greater interest in the natural world, mediated for example by Basil on the Hexameron. Benjamin Brown astutely picks up on a competing humanist perspective offered by Anselm of Canterbury with his focus not on sin, but on the capacity of the soul to pursue God through reason, free choice and love. Aage Rydstrøm-Poulsen argues that William of Saint-Thierry, known as a stern critic of Abelard, was himself fascinated by exploring the capacity of human