

David BERTAINA, Sandra Toenies KEATING, Mark N. SWANSON, Alexander TREIGER (eds.), *Heirs of the Apostles. Studies on Arabic Christianity in Honor of Sidney H. Griffith*, Leiden / Boston, Brill, 2019 (Arabic Christianity: Texts and Studies, 1), XVII + 527 p.

There is perhaps no better way to honor the lifetime achievements of an accomplished scholar of Arabic and Syriac Christianity, such as Prof. Sidney H. Griffith, than by showing how much his research and teaching influenced both his own and the younger generations of scholars. The present book, *Heirs of the Apostles*, does just that: it is a captivating collection of studies offered with heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Griffith for his 80th birthday by his former students, colleagues, and friends. The twenty chapters of the volume are divided into four thematic clusters which coincide with some of the major research areas to which Griffith has made numerous significant contributions over the last decades.

Part I is entitled “Arabic Language, Bible, and Qur’ān” and is a tribute to Griffith’s seminal work on the Arabic Bible. The first and last chapters of Part I address the relationship between Arabic Christian literature and the Qur’ān. David Bertaina (Ch. 1, p. 3–21) analyses the inter-religious dialogues and debates about Christian and Qur’ānic monotheism between Elias of Nisibis (975–1046) and the Muslim vizier Abū al-Qāsim al-Maghribī (981–1027). These debates took place in the 1020’s and form the basis of Elias’ *Kitāb al-Majālis*. One important finding is that Elias’ successful defense of Christian monotheism is partially based on the Qur’ān and on al-Maghribī’s own commentary, suggesting that Christian intellectuals were well aware and could even engage with Qur’ānic exegesis. In a similar vein, Clare Wilde argues in Chapter 5 (p. 93–111) that Christian Arabic theological treatises can significantly enhance our understanding of the Qur’ān: whether the Christian use (through quotation, commentary, etc.) of the Muslim holy book aims at proving the validity of Christianity, or at polemicizing against Judaism and indeed Islam, it shows at any rate that Qur’ānic Studies can benefit from engaging with these early Christian Arabic texts.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 discuss various Arabic translations of the Bible: Elie Dannaoui (Ch. 2, p. 22–36) studies the role of Rūm Orthodox Christians in the printing of the New Testament during the Ottoman period. In particular, Dannaoui focuses on the translation projects of Meletius Karma (d. 1635), Athanasius Dabbās (1647–1724) and Ya‘qūb Šarrūf (1839–1912) with a two-fold aim: to establish the context and the methods used in each case, and to highlight the commonalities between these different projects. Among other things, Dannaoui rightly draws attention to the tensions between Protestant and Roman Catholic interests and the needs of the Arab Orthodox communities living in the Levant. In Chapter 3 (p. 37–55), Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala offers a close reading of the manuscript Vatican Arab. 13, one of the oldest preserved Arabic translations of the Gospels (ninth century). Using one pericope from the Gospel of Matthew (Matth 11:20–30, edited in the appendix, p. 52–54) as a case-study, Monferrer-Sala analyses the strategy of the Arabic translator under various aspects: literal/free translations, additions, omissions, lexical preferences, etc. The author’s conclusion is that the translator used a Greek *Vorlage* as his base text, but that he also used a Syriac version for comparison.

Ronny Vollandt’s chapter (Ch. 4, p. 56–92) discusses at length a remarkable scholarly project from Ayyūbid Egypt: the Christian Arabic revision of Saadiah Gaon’s Judeo-Arabic translation of the Pentateuch (the *Tafsīr*). This ‘revised edition’ took into account a wide array of other sources (e.g. Samaritan, Karaite, Melkite and East Syriac Bible translations and commentaries in Arabic) and was prepared in 1242 CE by a Copt, with the help of a Jewish scholar from Cairo. This edition of the *Pentateuch* contains a rather complex ‘critical apparatus’ and an important *Preface*. First, Vollandt sketches the intellectual context of Egypt in this period, which witnessed a flourishing of Jewish and Copto-Arabic letters and Biblical scholarship. Vollandt points to the role of the Maimonides and al-‘Assāl families, but also to that of individuals such as Ibn al-Rāhib and Ibn Kātib Qaysar. The main part of the chapter is the edition and English translation of the Arabic *Preface* mentioned above (p. 64–77), followed by a detailed commentary on selected aspects of the text. Notably, Vollandt makes a strong case for identifying the Coptic editor with al-As‘ad Abū al-Faraj Hibat Allāh ibn al-‘Assāl (d. ca. 1253/9), who is otherwise known as the author of an edition of the Arabic Gospels

which follows similar editorial principles as the Pentateuch. The name of al-As'ad's Jewish collaborator is Abū al-Majd al-Isrā'īlī, a member of the Babylonian congregation in Cairo, also known from documents in the Genizah (p. 79). The chapter thus throws light not only on the history of the Arabic Bible, but also on the hitherto neglected dimensions of Jewish-Christian intellectual collaboration under Muslim rule.

Part 2 ("Arabic Christian Responses to Islam and Muslim Interpretations of Christianity") treats some of the central points of debate between Christianity and Islam: the doctrine of the Trinity, Incarnation, the Cross, the Church, and the rationality of the Christian faith as such. Here again, Griffith's studies on Theodore Abū Qurrah and other early Christian Arabic theologians have proved to be fundamental. In a substantial chapter (Ch. 6, p. 115–156), Cornelia Horn investigates the *Arabic Apocryphal Gospel of John* (= AAGJ) and its apocalyptic section as an important source for Christian ecclesiology under Islam. According to Horn's reading of AAGJ, the author of the apocalyptic sections is concerned with the preservation and cohesion of the Christian community as it faced inner and outer threats after the advent of Islam. These concerns play out not only in the realm of theology (Christ, the cross, the Church), but also on a very concrete level: the value of martyrdom, the correct conduct among clergy and laity, Christian family life. Horn's detailed discussion of this understudied apocryphal text opens up new perspectives for the field of East Christian apocalypticism, which is still very much dominated by research on Pseudo-Methodius.¹

Sandra Toenies Keating (Ch. 7, p. 157–178) shows how one of the earliest Christian Arabic theologians and apologists, the Syro-Orthodox Abū Rā'īṭa al-Takrītī (d. 830), turned to Greek philosophy in order to demonstrate the rationality of the Christian doctrine of God. Keating's in-depth analysis of Abū Rā'īṭa's *Risāla* proves that – in the context of the dawning Graeco-Arabic 'translation movement' – Abū Rā'īṭa introduced important Aristotelian concepts in the debate on God's unity (*tawḥīd*). However, Keating's claim that some works of Plato, Aristotle, Porphyry, Plotinus and Proclus had already been translated into Arabic in the mid-eighth century (p. 159) is certainly an overstatement.² In an insightful contribution, Thomas Ricks (Ch. 8, p. 179–193) compares the arguments for Christ's Incarnation put forward by the most important Christian theologians of the Early Islamic period, the Chalcedonian (Melkite) Theodore Abū Qurrah, the East Syriac ('Nestorian') 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, and, again, Abū Rā'īṭa. Shawqī Talia (Ch. 9, p. 194–213) reviews the Islamic views of the cross as a symbol of Christianity. As one would expect, the overwhelming majority of sources take a negative stance, beginning with Q 4:157 and ending with a series of *aḥādīth* which view the cross as an 'idol' (*wathan*). On the other hand, Talia also lists some Arabic poems, e.g. of Abū Nuwās, which display a certain fascination with the symbol of the cross (p. 206–208). In the last chapter of this section (Ch. 10, p. 214–227) David Thomas paints a sobering picture of early Muslim and Christian attempts at interreligious dialogue on the subject of the Trinity. Reviewing some of the milestones of polemical literature from 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī and Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq (early ninth century) to Elias of Nisibis and al-Maghribī (eleventh century, see above), Thomas concludes that, for various reasons, the two sides never managed to overcome some embedded misconceptions about the opponent's position, or were not really interested in doing so.

Part 3 ("Arabic Christianity in the Medieval Islamic World") begins with Johannes Pahlitzsch's chapter on the role of the Holy Land in Byzantine hagiography of the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Ch. 11, p. 231–255). The interest of Byzantine monks to travel to Palestine was driven not only by the wish to visit the holy places, but also by the desire to 'live in the wilderness' as the founders of Palestinian monasticism had done. Moreover, the ascetic experience was a catalyst to develop similar ascetic models in the Byzantine Empire. In this sense, Pahlitzsch brings the examples of the Byzantine saints Lazar of

¹ In her brief review of Syriac and Arabic apocalyptic texts, Horn also mentions an *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Matthew* (p. 118), but this seems to be a lapse, as *Pseudo-Methodius* is apparently meant.

² Cf. Cristina D'Ancona, "Greek Sources in Arabic and Islamic Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2019 Edition), ed. E. N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/arabic-islamic-greek/> (last visited 5/6/2020). Especially for Plotinus and Proclus, there is no evidence of any Arabic translations before the period of al-Kindī (9th century).

Galesion, Christodoulos, and Meletius the Younger, who all founded important monasteries after returning from the Holy Land. There are however also negative examples, such as the case of Neophytus the Recluse, whose failure to find living examples of ascetic piety in Palestine led him to return to Cyprus where he founded his own community. For Pahlitzsch, this and other sources are an indication that despite the increased interest in the Holy Land, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries it had become clear that “the future of Orthodox monasticism lay in Byzantium” (p. 250).

The comparative study of Andrew Platt and Nathan Gibson (Ch. 12, p. 256–283) highlights the difficulties of having overlapping Muslim and non-Muslim legal systems in the early ‘Abbāsīd period. Platt and Gibson show how two ninth-century authors, the East Syriac patriarch Timothy I (d. 823) and the Muslim author al-Jāhīz (d. 868/9), responded to the delicate juridical problems their communities were facing. Mark Swanson (Ch. 13, p. 284–309) discusses an anecdote from the collection of philosophical sayings *Ādāb al-falāsifa*, attributed to Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq, which presents the meeting of Alexander the Great with a “hermit prince”. Swanson focuses on the Copto-Arabic reception and elaboration of this story, briefly in Mubaššir ibn Fātik’s eleventh-century *Mukhtār al-ḥikam* (p. 289), and in more detail in a late-medieval Arabic sermon attributed to Shenoute (p. 290–302).³ The ambiguous religious affiliation of one of the most famous Arabic poets of all times, Abū Tammām Ḥabīb ibn Aws al-Ṭā’ī (d. 845) is the subject of Jennifer Tobkin’s contribution (Ch. 14, p. 310–332). Tobkin engages with Louis Cheikho’s (1859–1927) claim that Abū Tammām was a Christian who (superficially) converted to Islam, and she dismantles some of Cheikho’s arguments, e.g. the assumption that the name Ḥabīb is distinctly Christian (see Appendix, p. 328–331). In Ch. 15 (p. 333–346) Alexander Treiger draws attention to a hitherto neglected polemical work of Paul of Antioch (twelfth-thirteenth centuries) against a Muslim sheikh, whom Treiger plausibly identifies with a certain Abū Surūr al-Tinnīsī, a known correspondent of Paul. This *Response to a Muslim Sheikh* treats three theological questions which, as Treiger correctly observes, reflect standard Islamic theology only partially, and rather represent Abū Surūr’s personal standpoint: the inseparability of good and evil, the figurative nature of Christ’s miracles, and predestination. For each of these views, Treiger discusses their possible Islamic sources and Paul’s refutation of them.

The last section of the volume, Part 4, presents a series of new findings in the field of Christian Arabic manuscript studies. Stephen J. Davis (Ch. 16, p. 349–394) offers a fascinating insight into the on-going work of cataloguing the Coptic and Arabic manuscripts at the monastery of the Syrians (Deir al-Suryān) in Wādī al-Natrūn. Davis describes in detail seven Arabic manuscripts containing works by Evagrius Ponticus. One particularly exciting find is the rediscovery of the lost Arabic translation of Evagrius’ most important work, the *Kephalaia Gnostica* (= *KG*). This work is only partially preserved in Greek and is extant in two different Syriac translations (S1 and S2) and an Armenian version. While Georg Graf had already noted the existence of an Arabic translation, the whereabouts of the only Arabic codex mentioned by Graf remain unknown.⁴ Fortunately, among the ascetic manuscripts of Deir al-Suryān, Davis has now identified two other codices (mss. 177 and 184) which contain Evagrius’ *KG* in Arabic. Although according to Davis this translation apparently follows the ‘expurgated’ Syriac translation S1, a critical edition of this newly discovered version remains an urgent desideratum.

Barbara Roggema’s chapter (Ch. 17, p. 395–414) focuses on what was arguably the most popular Christian Arabic collection of “Questions and Answers”, the *Erotapokriseis* attributed to Basil and Gregory, preserved in over 60 manuscripts (listed in a useful appendix, p. 408–412). As Roggema points out, this collection has remained unstudied by modern scholars, even though many

³ On Mubaššir ibn Fātik’s *Mukhtār* and its relationship to the Alexander traditions, see also Emily Cottrell, “Al-Mubaššir ibn Fātik and the α Version of the *Alexander Romance*”, in *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, eds. Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erickson, Ian Netton, Groningen, 2012, p. 233–253 (not mentioned by Swanson).

⁴ Georg Graf, followed by Davis (p. 361), also mention a fragment of the Arabic *KG* in the loose folios of ms. Mingana, ar. chr. 212. However, these folios actually contain the *Chapters on Love* of Maximus Confessor (CPG 7693) and not the work of Evagrius.

questions and answers shed light on the social history of Christians and their interaction with Jews and Muslims (called *ḥunafāʾ*, p. 402) in the Middle East. In a short contribution, Harald Suermann (Ch. 18, p. 415–425) presents the contents of the Arabic ms. Gotha 2882 and proposes a reassessment regarding an anonymous polemical treatise (fol. 16–24v), hastily characterized by Georg Graf as being “in the style of Abū Rāʾiṭa and Ibn Zurʿa” (p. 417). A palimpsest manuscript containing a unique Greek-Arabic bilingual version of the Pauline epistles is studied by Jack Tannous in Ch. 19 (p. 426–445). On the basis of several key passages, Tannous shows that the Arabic part generally does not follow the Greek text, but that of the Syriac Peshitta (but cf. p. 432–433). This finding has important ramifications for the history of the Arabic Bible and of the multilingual communities which produced such manuscripts. The last chapter (Ch. 20, p. 446–494) contains Jason Zaborowski’s diplomatic edition and translation of the *Visions of Anba Shenouda*, based on a manuscript from Los Angeles (St Shenouda the Archimandrite Society, ms. 116). The text in this manuscript is longer than the one published by Adolf Grohmann in 1914;⁵ thus Zaborowski’s edition makes available for the first time the hitherto unknown ending of the *Visions* in Arabic.

The volume closes with a complete and up-to-date bibliography of Sidney Griffith’s publications, which amount to an impressive (but not surprising) total of 196 titles. In light of Fr. Sidney Griffith’s extraordinary contributions to the field of Christian Arabic Studies, it is very fitting that the *Festschrift* in his honor also inaugurates a new academic series edited by Alexander Treiger, *Arabic Christianity: Texts and Studies* (2019-), one of the very few that are dedicated exclusively to Arabic Christianity.

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Paul MAGDALINO, Andrei TIMOTIN (eds.), *Savoirs prédictifs et techniques divinatoires de l’Antiquité tardive à Byzance*, Seyssel, La Pomme d’or, 2018, 510 p.

Knowledge about the future has captivated human imagination throughout the ages. People have translated this fascination into a variety of means and techniques employed for predictive purposes. Perhaps the first to come to mind and surely the one garnering most of the academic interest is astrology. However, much is still to be explored regarding the ways in which the desire for predictive knowledge was manifested and fulfilled in Late Antiquity and was later transmitted in Byzantium. The volume edited by Paul Magdalino and Andrei Timotin significantly advances the knowledge on this subject by lifting the veil on an impressive number of such techniques of divination and on their interpretation. Both editors have an extensive expertise in this field of research.¹

The volume springs from the international conference *Theories of Divination in Late Antiquity and Byzantium*, which was held on November 17–18, 2017 at the University of Bucharest, organized in the framework of the eponymous research project funded by the Romanian National Council for Scientific Research.² It gathers 16 contributions, 10 in French and 6 in English, organized in five thematic sections. As introduced in the book description, these are: divination as an object of philosophical reflection in Late Antiquity; the appropriation and reinterpretation of oracles by both pagans and Christians at the end of Antiquity; the Byzantine attitude to divination; the place of astrology

⁵ A. Grohmann, “Die im Äthiopischen, Arabischen und Koptischen erhaltenen Visionen Apa Schenute’s von Atripe”, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 68, 1914, p. 1–46.

¹ P. Magdalino, *L’orthodoxie des astrologues. La science entre le dogme et la divination à Byzance (VII^e–XIV^e siècle)*, Paris, Lethielleux, 2006 (Réalités byzantines, 12); A. Timotin, *Visions, prophéties et pouvoir à Byzance. Étude sur l’hagiographie méso-byzantine (IX–XI siècles)*, Paris, Centre d’études byzantines, néo-helléniques et sud-est européennes, 2010 (Dossiers byzantins, 10).

² CNCS-UEFISCDI, PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2016-0712, *Theories of divination in Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium (2nd–7th centuries)*; project director A. Timotin (2017–2019).