BOOK REVIEWS


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With respect to the advancement in manuscript editing and the development of efficient tools for researchers, the monograph under review is a masterful work. Its impressive apparatus is designed to meet the need of the established scholar as well as that of the advanced student. It should also be warmly welcomed as a direct continuation of the fundamental studies by H. Ewald, A. Merx, G. Diettrich, T. Weiss, and J. B. Segal on the ‘Masoretic’ accents. In this context, it is worth noting the author’s latest publication on the patristic selections included in the ‘Masoretic’ West Syriac manuscripts (see the reference below). In a sense, this work will complement the book under review: both open new perspectives in the study of the Syriac ‘Masora’.

The monograph consists of two volumes, of which the first presents a facsimile edition of manuscript BL Add. 12138. Volume 2 is an introduction to Volume 1. Dated to 899 CE and written in the city of Harrān, BL Add. 12138 is a manuscript that aims to support accuracy in the recitation and transmission of the Peshiṭṭa according to the tradition of the East Syriac schools. It consists of sample passages from the Peshiṭṭa which are vocalized, marked with diacritics, accentuated, and accompanied by marginal notes. Some discourses on the accents, grammar, various marks, and the East Syriac schools are included at the end. It is the only known East Syriac ‘Masoretic’
manuscript, and scholars such as P. Martin, A. Merx, and W. Wright have long recognized its significance for the study of how the Peshīṭṭā was read and interpreted in the ninth and tenth centuries.

Some parts of BL Add. 12138 were previously published by G. Diettrich and T. Weiss, among others. The contribution of Volume 1 is, first, to present for the first time the entire text of the manuscript. The copyist, Bābai, claims that he punctuated the text according to older books of reading teachers (maqryānē). Interestingly, he also incorporates, in red ink, the punctuation of another respected scribe, viz. Rāmīšo‘. Herein lies the second contribution of Volume 1. Previous publications of excerpts from the manuscript were for technical reasons printed only in black and white, but Loopstra’s colour reproduction allows the reader to distinguish precisely between the two systems of punctuation. In addition, the high resolution of the printed images (and even more so the PDF version which allows one to zoom in) allows an easier reading and a more secure identification of the other reading marks (vowels, diacritics, symbols indicating mistakes or revisions, etc.). The third contribution of the volume is the placement of folio numbers and the range of biblical passages above each image. These enable the reader easily to find any passage in the manuscript.

Loopstra begins the second volume by discussing principal issues pertaining to the manuscript (historical background, general overview, biographical elements of the copyist, relation with the West Syriac ‘Masoretic’ manuscripts, and publication history). In the following seven chapters, he dives into an exhaustive description of the different marks and notes of the text (the collections of šmāhe and qrāyātā, section dividers, reading marks, vowel marks, phonological marks, notes on schools, and exegetical glosses). This study is remarkably thorough in its treatment of the sources and the scholarship. It covers various fields of research such as history, palaeography, exegesis,
liturgy, grammar, and even music. The author should be commended for his handling of these different areas, which are so often intertwined. Worth mentioning is the description of the marks and reading system of Rāmīšoʿ (pp. XXXIV–XXXVI): these clarifications are essential for scholars who want to study the accentuation system. When needed, the sections are copiously illustrated with images extracted from the manuscript. It is regrettable that these extracts are in black and white, since in some cases colour would have been more suitable, as for example on pp. XXXIV–XXXVI where Rāmīšoʿ’s punctuation is explained. In addition, the author could have dealt in more depth with one sign, viz. the dash between two words. Loopstra discusses this sign when accompanied by the gloss ʾqpb in the margin where it has to be understood as a hyphen (see pp. XLII, 422). However, according to El-Attar (1982) (not cited in the bibliography), the dash appears in many more occurrences and corresponds to the sign meṭappeyānā whose functions seem more varied and complex than that of a mere hyphen. One must admit that the name meṭappeyānā occurs neither in the marginal notes nor in the Tract on the Accents (a text which appears at the end of the manuscript). It is thus a complicated issue which needs to be clarified.

The volume’s extensive bibliography covers almost all the relevant publications. On the Syriac accentuation, the author could have added Avenary (1963), who places it within the broader context of the Eastern biblical chant in the Early Middle Ages; Jourdan-Hemmerdinger (1979), who argues for its musical signification (on the basis of similar notation found in some Greek papyri); and Moberg (1906), who refutes Merx’s view on its origin and development. The lack of the aforementioned study of El-Attar (1982) is of more relevance since this work examines the use of two diacritical marks in BL Add 12138, viz. nāgōḏā and meṭappeyānā.
Volume 2 concludes with a list of the biblical passages, a list of the examples cited in the *Tract on Accents*, some grammatical notes, the translation of the material in the colophon, and the index of the marginal notes. Overall, Volume 2 is very well organized. The reader will appreciate the book’s apparatus and the tedious labour the author has accomplished in creating useful lists of verses, citations, glosses, section dividers, etc.

As well known, BL Add. 12138 is an outstanding source for the study of the Syriac ‘Masoretic’ accents. Not surprisingly, Loopstra dedicates the longest section of Volume 2 (33 pages) to this subject. Thus, this section deserves special attention. Loopstra offers an overview of the accents and the history of their study and does not enter unnecessarily into the details of the long-debated question of their origin (Greek or Syriac) and possible transmission to Hebrew. He is appropriately measured in his interpretation of the various possible values of the accents (pausal/grammatical, intonational, ekphonic/musical). Also, his thorough philological knowledge renders persuasive his effort to draw out common accentual patterns between BL Add. 12138 and other non-Masoretic East Syriac manuscripts. However, he could have addressed a few points better.

Firstly, he could have ranked the accents not alphabetically but according to a more significant principle such as 1) the linguistic function (e.g. pausal or conjunctive force, modality, expressiveness) as in the descriptions by Merx and Duval; or 2) the position of the accent mark related to the word (above, below, etc.) as in Segal’s study (see, however, the author’s explanation on p. LXII, note 224).

Secondly, the description of the use of the accents is sometimes vague, as shown by expressions such as “may indicate,” “can also occur,” “often used,” “sometimes used.” Notwithstanding the intricacies involved in the process of identifying the accent signs, in order to arrive at a more accurate description,
one will have to proceed to an exhaustive inventory, for each accent, of all its occurrences.

Thirdly, it is well known that the recitation according to the accents has been lost for a long time. However, the biblical texts are still recited today during offices. A few words on this subject would have been appreciated (e.g., the different regional traditions, the main musical features, the possible other contexts where the texts are cantillated, such private study), or at least some bibliographical references.

One cannot blame the author for these minor flaws since the chapter on the accents is meant as an overview. His more recent publications show that he continues to expand his research and that he is now the leading authority on these matters (see the references below). Thanks to him, other researchers have all the material necessary for further investigations.

It is already evident that the book under review marks an important step in the history of Syriac studies. Overall, it provides a wealth of phonologically and lexically reliable linguistic evidence ready for further reflection and analysis. Aramaists interested in Eastern Syriac pronunciation and lexicology will find it indispensable. In addition, it will allow in-depth study of the accents, not only among Syriac scholars but also among Hebraists and Byzantinists who will find valuable information on shared features and differences between the Hebrew and Greek ekphonic notations and that of BL Add. 12138. More broadly, it will also be of interest to biblical scholars concerned with Syriac exegesis and the textual and oral transmission of the Bible at the end of the first millennium.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Ishoʿdad of Merw's commentaries on the New Testament gospels were edited and translated into English by Margaret D. Gibson and published in three volumes in a generous format by Cambridge University Press in 1911. This work is well known and respected, and one's first question on seeing the present new edition of the commentary on John is why it should be needed. The editor Johan D. Hofstra explains this in his introduction (text vol., pp. xiii–xv) under three heads. First, new Syriac texts have been published since 1911, in particular some that are possible sources for Ishoʿdad's work. Secondly, the text of the commentaries is known from more manuscripts now than in 1911, while Mrs. Gibson (for all her “enormous achievement”) made mistakes in collating the manuscripts she did have. Thirdly, her translation is not always “accessible”; that is, it does not always make clear the meaning of the Syriac. We can consider these points in reverse order here.

Mrs. Gibson’s translation of Ishoʿdad is on the whole correct word by word, and Hofstra has done well to follow, as he most often does, her choice of English equivalents. Frequently enough, however, Ishoʿdad's meaning eluded her, and Hofstra has found it, or at least come closer to it. To take one example, on John 1.14, Ishoʿdad comments on the phrase “glory as of the Only-begotten”:

This addition and position of dolath (“of”) is suitable ... for from what he says on the one hand without addition; He has taught us one nature and person, of the Word and of His flesh... (Gibson).
And he (the evangelist) said it (very) well with the addition, that “dalat”... If now, instead of it, he had spoken without addition, he would be teaching us one nature and hypostasis of “the Word” and of his “flesh” (Hofstra).

Hofstra’s translation rightly captures the commentator’s christological aversion, typical of East Syrian authors, to “one nature” or “one hypostasis (qnoma)” in Christ.

Occasionally, the reader may wonder if Ishoʿdad’s compressed comments have still been elusive. On the enigmatic 153 fish in John 21.11, Hofstra translates:

Origen (says) it symbolizes the Holy Trinity. By the fifties and the three it symbolizes also the Psalms of David, a hundred and fifty in number; and by the three (it symbolizes) the three praises which they add to the Psalms from the Law and the Prophets.

This does not quite catch the Syriac. “By the fifties and the three” is part of Origen’s alleged Trinitarian explanation: 153 = 3 x 50 + 3. And the Psalms are 153 including the 3 odes (ܚܬܐ, not “praises”) that are added in the liturgical Psalter. (Ishoʿdad usually stays away from allegorizing details of the gospel story, although a similar comment to this one comes on John 19.23 where he quotes Ephrem on the treatment of Jesus’s garments by the soldiers.)

Hofstra lists and describes fifteen manuscripts, including the three which Mrs. Gibson had used. His detailed descriptions leave nothing to be desired, recording scribal characteristics, and counting and listing variant readings large and small. Most readers will probably take the details as read and skip to the stemma codicum (p. lxix) which, although not a strict stemma, organizes the manuscripts into families. Following this classification, the editor chooses five as his “base manuscripts” (p. lxxxv). The choice is not clearly explained, but seems to rest on the others, in particular those that derive from Alqosh,
reflecting a revised text. In any case, the base manuscripts include the two oldest codices, Berlin 81 (1490) and Saint Petersburg Syr. 33 (16th cent. in its older part), neither of which was accessible to Mrs. Gibson in 1911. But they also include ms. Harvard Syriac 131 (formerly Harris 130) on which she based her edition; and this means that Hofstra’s text is not very different from hers. All the same, among the tabulations in his introduction I wish there were one that pointed out the places, or at least the important ones, where his text does differ from Mrs. Gibson’s. (The long table of “errata in Gibson’s edition” on pp. lxx–lxxxiv does not do this, but only lists readings where she misread one or other of her manuscripts, something that hardly seems worth recording now.) Although the text may not be a major issue for the whole commentary, there are occasions where the translation can be significantly affected by variants in the principal manuscripts. When Caiaphas pronounces that it is better for one man to die for the people than that the whole nation should perish (John 11.50), was it Isho’dad’s view that he spoke by the gift of the Holy Spirit (Hofstra), or not (Gibson)? At the last supper (on John 13.18), does Jesus eat the passover with his disciples (Gibson) or does he only eat by himself after them (Hofstra)? In these two cases, it is a question whether to read \( \text{ܠܘ} \) “not” with some of the manuscripts. In the same passage (on v. 27), did Judas go out (ܐܙܝܠ, Hofstra) to bring in the Jews, or was he moved (ܐܙܝܥ, Gibson) to do so? Hofstra may be right, on the textual evidence and even on the sense of the passages, to correct Gibson; but these matters are arguable, and there ought to be footnotes in the translation to call attention to the alternative possibilities.

1 But she used them in her later volumes, on Acts and the catholic epistles (1913) and the Pauline epistles (1916). Photographs of the Petersburg ms. (borrowed and photographed in Cambridge!) is now Cambridge University Library ms. Or. 1750. Photographs of the Berlin ms. are likewise in the archives of Westminster College, Cambridge, WGL2/2.
It may be in place to comment here in passing on the sentence-punctuation and diacritical pointing of Hofstra’s Syriac text. He says (p. lxxxv), “The edition generally follows the punctuation of the base manuscripts.” But this rule, even if strictly applied, does not prescribe the punctuation where these six manuscripts differ. Editors are generally allowed some freedom here; but I found that Hofstra often chose punctuation that was unnecessarily against the grain of the translation. With diacritical marks, the text “retains the points meant to distinguish homographs and the points used to distinguish perfect tense verbs from participles.” It is no fault of Hofstra’s that there is no set of such points that is accepted by all editors, but there would be no harm in being more liberal with these, especially since vocalized East Syriac manuscripts make the choices clear. Such pairs as ܢܘܢ ̇ ܗ and ̣ ܢܘܢ ܗ should at any rate always be included.

It is in the investigation of the sources that Ishoʿdad used for his commentary on John that Hofstra makes his most valuable contribution. His discussion occupies most (pp. xx–lxxii) of his introduction to the translation volume. Mrs. Gibson’s translation had pointed out only occasional contacts with Ephrem on the Diatessaron. J. R. Harris in his introduction remarked on the much more important contribution of Theodore of Mopsuestia, whose commentary on John is available to us, as it was to Ishoʿdad, in Syriac; but it seems this came as an afterthought to her. This contribution is now thoroughly explored by Hofstra. It amounts by his reckoning to no less than 40% of the text of

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2 The received wisdom of R. Draguet is that for any text, even one edited from a single manuscript, the editor may impose “une ponctuation normalisée.” See his “Une méthode d’édition des textes syriaques” in *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus*, ed. R. H. Fischer (Chicago 1977), 13–18, specif. 15–16.
3 Reading is also not helped by the punctuation in Peeters’s Syriac font, which has become curiously tiny. The single and double points ought to be, as they were in past publications, of the same boldness as the letters.
4 She gives a table, without comment, on 221 “coincidences” between Ishoʿdad and Theodore.
Isho’dad. Each of 371 instances of dependence on Theodore is recorded in the footnotes to the translation. A similar treatment is given to John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzen, and Ephrem, Isho’dad’s other three considerable (although far less so than Theodore) patristic sources. This analysis facilitates the translation of many obscure passages in Isho’dad. An example is his elaborate discussion of John 5.19ff. (“the Son can do nothing ... but only what he sees the Father doing”) where he comments, “Are there four worlds then?” – that is, the two, present and future, that the Father creates, and two more that would be created by the Son if we supposed the Son did all that the Father did. The line of reasoning comes from Gregory of Nazianzen, and it is explained clearly by Hofstra’s footnote – only leaving one wondering how many readers of Isho’dad would ever have understood his comment without this context.

Hofstra also considers Isho’dad’s dependence on writers in his own East Syriac tradition. He joins a long-running discussion on this subject, and concludes, carefully, that Isho’dad used the works of both Isho’ bar Nun and Theodore bar Koni directly; and among other occasional sources, also the letters of Catholicos Timothy. Only notably missing in his list of sources is Henana, whose commentaries were certainly known to Isho’dad but who is not cited by him on John at all. It is possible that some comments by this ambiguous figure may be concealed under the name of the “Theophoroi” or the “Tradition of the School” of Nisibis; but since Henana is repeatedly cited by Isho’dad on Matthew, it may be either that his commentary on John was lost early on, or simply that his exegetical work never extended to this gospel.

Hofstra’s detailed and painstaking volumes will supersede Mrs. Gibson’s as the edition of choice for anyone using the work of Isho’dad on John. This is particularly so with respect to the text, although the reader may need to be alive to the apparatus for the sake of variant readings not signalled in the translation.
For the translation itself, it may still be helpful sometimes to compare Mrs. Gibson. But for the identification and analysis of Isho‘dad’s sources, readers have now been well served as never before.
This momentous monograph on Dionysius bar Šalibi (d. 1171), one of the main authorities of the Syriac Orthodox tradition, consists of three parts, each with its own distinctive content and qualities. The first part (pp. 5–75) offers a detailed biography and a survey of the works of Bar Šalibi. The second and central part (pp. 77–295) focuses on his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. The third part (pp. 297–470) presents itself as an appendix with five components: 1. a detailed catalogue of all the known manuscripts of Bar Šalibi’s works, published and unpublished, several of them previously unknown (pp. 299–448); 2. an edition and translation of an anonymous Syriac testimony on the life and works of Bar Šalibi, written a few years after his death (pp. 449–454); 3. an edition and translation of Bar Šalibi’s “Creed of the Suryoye” (pp. 455–460); 4. sample photographs of the five manuscripts underlying the edition of the Commentary on Romans (pp. 461–466); 5. photographs of the Mother of God cathedral in the city of Amid (Turkish: Diyarbakir) and of Bar Šalibi’s tomb therein (pp. 467–470). The book concludes with the list of the manuscripts referenced throughout the monograph (pp. 471–473), the bibliography (pp. 474–490), and an index of names and places (pp. 491–503).

The overview of Bar Šalibi’s life and works in the first part of the book is richer and more detailed than anything published so far. The author relies, among other things, on colophons and notes in manuscripts, many of which previous scholars have not
used. Several short pieces are edited here, in addition to the one longer text, written by a younger contemporary, that is edited in the Appendix (pp. 449–454). Basing himself on these new materials, the author is able, among other things, to confirm the year 1148 as the date of Bar Ṣalibi’s consecration as bishop of Marʿaš, or Germanicia (from which he later moved to Amid), and to adduce additional information on Bar Ṣalibi’s relationship to Michael Rabo (patriarch from 1166 to 1199), for whom he served as a mentor. Bar Ṣalibi’s edited works are listed, with full references to the manuscripts as well as to existing editions and translations in Arabic, Armenian, and European languages.

The main part of the book provides the first edition of Bar Ṣalibi’s *Commentary on Romans*. The edition is preceded by a description of the manuscripts used. Out of the 21 existing manuscripts, six were selected for the edition: A = Mosul, Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese, 6 (between 1222 and 1234); B = Mardin, 107 (13th cent.); C = London, British Library, Add. 7185 (around 1200?); D = Berlin, 181/Sachau 238 (14th cent.?); E = Oxford, Bodleian Library, Or. 560 (before 1524); F = Manchester, John Rylands Library, Syr. 35 (1904). The author describes each of these manuscripts at great length, including all available information on the scribe and the place and date of origin, and reflections on the *Vorlage*. He also provides editions of colophons and additional notes, along with translations. Here again the author shows his skills in Syriac codicology and paleography, his familiarity with manuscript collections in the Middle East and in the diaspora communities in Europe, his overall knowledge of Syriac literary culture, and his attention to detail. With regard to mss. A, B, and C, he speculates that they may have been copied from Bar Ṣalibi’s autograph, which is not preserved, but a sister manuscript of which (containing Bar Ṣalibi’s commentary on the four Gospels) may survive in ms. Damascus, Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, 2/7, in which Patriarch
Barsoum already recognized Bar Ṣalibi’s hand (see esp. pp. 95–96, 116, and 132).

Ms. A constitutes the base manuscript for the edition. The variants of all the other manuscripts are given in the apparatus, which is very exhaustive and also includes spelling variants, dots, corrections, etc. Occasionally it is not the A reading that is reproduced in the main text, but a variant taken from one or more other manuscripts. This is understandable in the case of an obvious scribal error. In other cases, however, the author’s rationale is less clear and remains unexplained. In the translation, one occasionally notices that a variant from the apparatus is prioritized over the A reading, without further explanation: e.g., Rom. 6:2, where the translation “er flüchtet” (p. 247) reflects the reading of B (ܡܪܒܘܐ) rather than the reading of A and the majority of the manuscripts (ܡܡܘܗ “he goes away”). Overall, the notes to the translation very rarely refer to variant readings. The different meaning of a variant is reported only rarely; when a variant has a longer text or includes an additional comment, these are ignored in the translation (e.g., Rom. 2:23, p. 163, note 32). Thanks to the author’s exceptional generosity in composing the Syriac apparatus, an attentive reader will be able to figure out an answer to the questions she or he may have, but a more transparent approach would have been welcome.

The author’s German translation is deliberately very close to the Syriac text. Throughout his commentary, Bar Ṣalibi quotes only the initial words of each biblical verse and proceeds with short sentences, which sometimes seem disconnected and may have been taken from different sources. One occasionally is tempted to connect the short pieces and construe larger sentences. The author mostly resists this temptation and respects Bar Ṣalibi’s style, which he characterizes as less enthusiastic and less accomplished than the style in his commentaries on the Gospels – perhaps due to the fact that Bar Ṣalibi had to write the Commentary on Romans under the weight of his office
("unter der Last seines Amtes," p. 295). The author's decision, therefore, to limit himself to minimal interventions (such as completing the biblical verses or parts thereof) seems justified. At the same time, the reader feels invited to participate in the interactive process of interpretation.

Bar Ṣalibi's Commentary on Romans is an outstanding piece of exegesis in the Syriac Orthodox tradition. Its inspiration comes largely from John Chrysostom and Mushe bar Kipho (d. 903). The author mentions both names on each page of his translation, referring to J. Jatsch's German translation (1923) of Chrysostom's Greek text, and to J. Reller's Syriac edition of Mushe's commentary (1994). It would be important to ascertain whether Bar Ṣalibi used the early Syriac translation of Chrysostom's commentary, the same version to which Mushe had access. This early translation is imperfectly known. To the witnesses mentioned on p. 145, note 294, one should add ms. Deir al-Surian 19, which is the second half of a once two-volume manuscript (6th or 7th cent.), containing homilies 15 to 32, which cover Romans 8 to 16; see S. P. Brock and L. Van Rompay, Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts and Fragments in the Library of Deir al-Surian (2014), pp. 95–100.

As a likely third source, less significant than the other two, the author mentions Ishoʿdad of Merv (fl. 850), who wrote a complete commentary on the Bible. Several notes to the translation refer to interpretations or expressions that Bar Ṣalibi shares with Ishoʿdad, which is all the more interesting, since Ishoʿdad belongs to the East Syriac tradition, for which Theodore of Mopsuestia is the leading authority. In one passage, ad Rom. 6:5, the author points to Theodore as the ultimate source of an interpretation that Bar Ṣalibi and Ishoʿdad share (p. 248, note 184). He does not mention, however, that here Bar Ṣalibi follows Theodore much more closely than Ishoʿdad does, which rules out the possibility that Ishoʿdad was Bar Ṣalibi’s source. (Bar Ṣalibi: “For plants also die and are destroyed when they are
planted, and then they sprout and are changed to something better than the first (condition)” [p. 177,12–13] = Theodore: ἐπειδὴ καὶ τῶν φυτῶν ἢδον ἔστι τὸ νεκροῦσθαι μὲν ἐν τῇ φυτείᾳ, μεθίστασθαι δὲ ἐπὶ τὸ κρεῖττον ... πολλῷ [K. Staab, Pauluskommentare aus der griechischen Kirche, 2nd ed., 1984, p. 121: 25–27].

Evidence of Bar Ṣalibi’s access to (parts of) Theodore’s Commentary on Romans (which in Greek is known only in a number of isolated fragments), beyond what was available to him in Isho’dad, may be found in Bar Ṣalibi’s not infrequent use of the concept of ḫܒܝܬܐ ܕܠܘܬ ܕܡܨܛܠܝܢܘܬܐ “inclination (mostly toward sin).” This is commonly used in the Syriac Theodore tradition, rendering ῥοπὴ “propensity,” sometimes in combination with εὐκολία “ease, or facility (in doing evil).” For example in Rom. 6:13, Christians are encouraged “to offer the members of their bodies as instruments of righteousness to God,” which for both Bar Ṣalibi and Theodore implies neutralizing the evil influence of “the inclination toward sin and its movements” (Bar Ṣalibi: “the movement/stirring of the inclination toward sin” [p. 178:27; ἡ ἁμαρτήσεως μετάδοσις τῆς ῥοπῆς καὶ τὰς ἐντεῦθεν κινήσεις]; Theodore: τὴν περὶ τὸ ἁμαρτάνειν ῥοπὴν καὶ τὰς ἐντεῦθεν κινήσεις [Staab, p. 122:19–20]).

Bar Salibi’s likely familiarity with (isolated pieces of) Theodore’s exegesis has its precedents in the Syriac Orthodox tradition, in particular in Mushe bar Kipho and in Lazarus of Beth Qandasa (probably 9th cent.). The latter, whom the author briefly discusses on p. 142, note 283, had access to the Syriac translation of some of Theodore’s writings (see my article in Parole de l’Orient 45 [2019], pp. 363–392) and was the author of a Commentary on Romans, of which perhaps a tiny piece survives in a Deir al-Surian fragment, see Brock and Van Rompay, Catalogue, pp. 465–466 (Fragment 177).

With this impeccable text edition and annotated translation, accompanied by much-needed discussions of many aspects of Bar Salibi’s legacy, the author has laid a robust foundation for all future research on this important scholar and leader of the
Syriac Orthodox church. Particularly in his analysis of the manuscripts and in his many precious comments on textual details and historical content, the author brings together the worlds of Syriac Christian and Western scholarship, two worlds which in an impressive way converge and enrich each other in his work. He deserves the congratulations and profound thanks of all Syriac scholars.

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It is a rare thing for a book to accomplish exactly what it sets out to do, but Yifat Monnickendam has done precisely that, in her erudite study of marriage laws in the writings of Ephrem. *Jewish Law and Early Christian Identity: Betrothal, Marriage, and Infidelity in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian* is a remarkable accomplishment, and a groundbreaking contribution to a field that is constantly evaluating the evidence of contact between Aramaic-speaking Jewish and Christian communities in late antiquity. Monnickendam brings together a considerable command of many sources (Roman law, Rabbinic literature, Ephrem’s corpus) with a deep understanding of legal theory to examine a complex and often disparate body of evidence.

Monnickendam’s investigation is shaped by her analysis of four related concepts, with a chapter dedicated to each. These concepts are organized through their temporal relationship to marriage: the first chapter deals with the act of betrothal itself, the second with questions of cohabitation during betrothal, the third with marriage, and specifically, the question of whether or not rape requires marriage after the fact, and the fourth with questions of infidelity and fornication—the violation of a marriage. Each chapter moves fluidly through sources that range temporally from the Hebrew Bible to Ephrem’s writings, covering a millennium’s worth of evidence, and a dense web of interpretive possibilities that Monnickendam skillfully delineates and analyzes.

Two aspects of Monnickendam’s argument stand out as particularly important, and it is worth highlighting them here. I hasten to add, of course, that I am only able to present them in
the briefest of terms: Monnickendam’s book is worth reading in its entirety for its nuanced treatment of sources, and the keen critical eye with which they are compared. Her close readings are both lucid and convincing. Rabbinic literature especially can be difficult for the uninitiated, but Monnickendam’s careful attention to detail ensures that even the absolute beginner to rabbinic materials will gain something valuable from her writing. The two most important aspects of Monnickendam’s book, in my view, come from both the author’s background in legal studies and an extensive training in rabbinic sources: only the combination of these two would be able to produce such thought-provoking results. In that sense, this book is truly interdisciplinary.

First, following a growing trend in the study of rabbinic literature, Monnickendam places the halakhah of the rabbinic movement onto a spectrum of law that runs from “positive” to “naturalistic” and identifies Ephrem’s approach to sexual relations as distinctively naturalistic (pp. 3, 37–39). Monnickendam is not the first to think about rabbinic halakhah in the context of Roman law—indeed, this is a robust area of research.1 Using this type of broad heuristic as a framing device, however, is a particularly helpful and useful strategy on her part. “Law” and “halakhah” are neither of them immediately self-evident categories, but by placing them on a spectrum, and explaining how they relate to the communities she is discussing, Monnickendam creates a highly suggestive interpretive framework.

“Positive” law, according to Monnickendam, refers to legal writing and legislation that aims to describe the way people act and behave, and the way that larger structures—be they political or religious—attempt to govern that behavior. “Natural”

law, on the other hand, is normative, attempting to derive laws of behavior from principles that are either assumed or explicitly stated. Roman law falls on the “positive” side of the spectrum, while *halakhah* is “natural,” but Monnickendam is swift to note, in several instances, that neither of them is exclusively one or the other. It is this vision of a sliding scale, moreover, that is so helpful, providing a vocabulary for legal concepts and laws that mostly, if not entirely, fall on one side or the other.

Monnickendam’s most striking conclusion, however, and the second critical aspect of this book, is an element of her overall argument that Ephrem utilizes different legal traditions in different contexts while largely reproducing ideas found in Palestinian rabbinic sources. She points out that time and time again, when Ephrem’s legal terminology and thinking is in line with opinions expressed in Palestinian rabbinic sources, the opinions he follows, while expressed in the Palestinian literature, are ultimately rejected (p. 27). Palestinian rabbinic literature, for example, has notably less severe penalties for pre-marital cohabitation than Roman legal literature and Greek Christian literature. This is a line of thinking shared by Ephrem, and ultimately rejected in Babylonian rabbinic literature (and, indeed, discussed by those same rabbis as a uniquely Palestinian phenomenon, pp. 97–108).

This is a compelling observation, and if I have one criticism of Monnickendam’s book, it is that she presents us with this tantalizing analysis, but offers no concrete explanation for it. There is a general sense that it is reasonable for Ephrem, a Syriac-speaking writer in the general region of the Palestinian rabbis, to have access to this material, likely through oral transmission, but the conditions on the ground that might have enabled this are left undiscussed. Did Ephrem come across only these rejected traditions over the course of his life? Did he have access to a wide variety of them, from which he picked and chose selectively? If so, was that selection process a polemic against
the Jews in whose proximity he lived? Is this understanding of marriage and related concepts deeply personal and idiosyncratic, or is it part of a broader set of group understandings, and were these understandings consciously arranged in opposition to another set of ideas? These are possibilities without a way of being proven decisively, of course, but as reflections of possible lived conditions, articulating them would lend another angle to this fascinating book.

The absence of this type of reconstruction, it should be noted, seems to come from the author’s robust commitment to clear, analytic methodology, and an unwillingness to engage in speculation (pp. 22–27). However, it seems that evidence like this is what makes speculation possible, and a little bit less “speculative,” when we engage in it as readers and scholars. The general question of how Ephrem might have accessed rabbinic ideas is broad and nebulous, to be sure, but the presence of rejected rabbinic opinions points to a slightly more constrained arena of possibilities that would, in all likelihood, be fruitful to reflect upon.

In many ways, *Jewish Law and Early Christian Identity* is a model book. It delineates a clear project, which it accomplishes with precision and finesse. Complicated rabbinic texts, along with Ephrem’s own poetry and commentaries, are introduced clearly and accessibly: a sign that readers unfamiliar with either are still likely to gain much. Perhaps most valuable of all, though, Monnickendam presents her findings in a way that raises still more productive questions. These are not vague, mysterious questions whose answers forever elude the scholar, however—or at least, not entirely. These are questions that promise hours of research and stimulating, thoughtful answers; questions that, even if they don’t immediately shed light on the lives and inner thoughts of ancient figures like Ephrem, at least allow us to build lamps that might one day be lit for that purpose.

JEFF W. CHILDERS, ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

In this study of late antique eastern baptismal rites and mystagogy, Nathan Witkamp addresses the relationship between Narsai of Nisibis and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Specifically, Witkamp tests long-standing presumptions of Narsai’s heavy dependence on Theodore, showing that whereas Narsai relies on received traditions, he in fact draws on a broad Antiochene heritage, to which Theodore also belongs, synthesizing the inherited material into a creative treatment distinctive to him and reflective of his own East Syriac context.

Theodore’s influence on the East Syriac tradition is well known. However, influential studies have read Narsai as offering little more than a nearly wooden adaptation of Theodore’s baptismal rite—perhaps even to the point that Narsai obscured native aspects of the East Syriac baptismal rite for the sake of promulgating Theodore’s version. In this important contribution, Witkamp probes the connections between the two, attempting to clarify the true nature of Theodore’s influence on Narsai. The study identifies and explores the distinctive features of Narsai’s rite and mystagogy, thereby putting the study of Narsai’s presentation on a more secure footing in its own right and illuminating the practice and theology of baptism in the late antique East Syriac context.

The introduction lays out the status quaestionis, surveying scholarship and introducing the two authors and their relevant works. Witkamp defines the aims of his research, characterizing his method as “a critical comparative approach,” and contrasting it with the typically “harmonizing” approach to be found in much of the existing scholarship. The value of his approach is
that it allows each source and its respective context to retain
greater integrity than harmonizing approaches do. The latter
tend to privilege either a specific author or a hypothetical, sup-
posedly original rite that tends actually to be a composite,
constructed partly from the sources and partly from a scholar’s
suppositions, shaped according to certain presumptions
regarding the development of early baptismal rites.

Witkamp also analyzes other eastern source material, partic-
ularly where instances of similarity between Narsai and
Theodore occur, seeking to determine whether the similarities
may be due to the influence of the common Antiochene tradi-
tion or other sources (e.g., Didascalia Apostolorum, Aphrahat)
rather than because of Narsai’s dependence on Theodore. Yet
Witkamp does not employ other sources reductively, in order
to propose a parallel source theory; instead, their use conveys
the complexities of the late antique contexts, reminding the
reader that we have only a very incomplete portrait of the his-
torical realities and that many of the influences on liturgy and
mystagogy were not literary at all, but oral and performative.
Treating each author independently, and comparing them criti-
cally rather than harmonistically within the larger context of
possible influences, gives Witkamp a more secure vantage point
from which to analyze their relationship.

The first main section of the book defines the late antique
authors’ terms and delineates the structures of their rites, while
sections two and three thoroughly explore the rituals before
and during baptism, respectively. Each part focuses on different
aspects of the subject, but the author constantly brings the
reader back to his principal concern: critically comparing and
contrast Narsai and Theodore in order to detect and charac-
terize their relationship.

The first main section focuses on terminology and structure.
A study of the sources’ baptismal vocabulary raises questions
about the view that the eastern baptismal rite consisted of three
functionally distinct parts: pre-baptismal rituals, baptism, and post-baptismal rituals. Instead, the rite basically falls into two major parts: “rituals preceding the mystery/ies” and “rituals of the mystery/ies.” For both Theodore and Narsai, the post-baptismal rituals are largely transitional and should not be distinguished functionally from the second part of the rite. Witkamp provides helpful charts laying out the structures of the rites, helping the reader visualize the results of his comparative analysis, namely: the rites of Theodore and Narsai have important similarities but are also notably different; furthermore, features of Narsai’s version (especially the absence of post-baptismal rituals) mark it as more conservative and less developed than Theodore’s. In other words, it is better to see Narsai’s rite as more primitive developmentally than Theodore’s, rather than derivative of it.

Having established some key differences between Theodore’s and Narsai’s rites and anchored the latter firmly in the early stages of the East Syriac tradition, the remaining two sections of the book work through the rituals according to their basic division: 1) rituals functionally prior to baptism and 2) rituals functionally accompanying baptism. Each chapter describes specific aspects of ritual in the two authors, discussing their functions and explaining their meanings for each. The author is attentive to minute details of ritual structure, roles, postures, gestures, and the like, insisting that these things together help constitute the meanings of the rituals. A study of the rituals in relation to other sources allows Witkamp to contextualize them before comparing Narsai to Theodore and proposing conclusions about the relationship between them in each case. Where there is insufficient data to draw clear conclusions, especially about influence, Witkamp is quick to point that out, exhibiting an intellectual modesty that invites the reader to become comfortable with uncertainty.
Overall, the analyses of sections two and three confirm the results of the preceding structural analyses: that both late antique authors participate in the same eastern tradition but that Narsai's rite is not dependent on Theodore's and is in fact often quite different, representing an earlier East Syriac tradition instead. Narsai essentially sticks to the rite he has inherited, which in turn distinguishes the theological meanings of the rituals from those of Theodore. For instance, the different positions and functions of the lawsuit or exorcism in each author construct the baptizand differently just prior to the mystery.

Even if Narsai does not depend on Theodore's rite, in his mystagogy Narsai borrows from Theodore's interpretations of the rite, sometimes in straightforward ways, but often more creatively and adaptively. Narsai's symbolism tends to be richer than Theodore's, as we might expect from Ephrem's heir, but also his theological emphases frequently strike their own tones. Narsai puts more emphasis on baptism as re-creation than Theodore; unlike Theodore, he depicts baptism as marriage and God as an artist painting a new portrait on the waters. For Narsai, the story of the prodigal son is a baptism narrative. At times, even where their language and imagery are similar, as when they both draw on the notion of the baptismal process as a fiery one heated by the Spirit, the meanings can diverge significantly—Theodore pictures the baptismal font as a fiery potter's kiln, whereas for Narsai it is a furnace in which metal is reforged.

The book accomplishes its task, effectively testing the connections between the two authors and showing that they both draw on a common tradition, but that each practices somewhat different rites, and that Narsai is no slavish imitator of the Bishop of Mopsuestia. There can be no doubt that Narsai knew and used Theodore's interpretations, but he did not do so systematically and he often shows himself to be an independent
and creative theologian, at times reflecting the East Syriac heritage that we find in other sources and at times seeming to convey his own ideas and emphases. Narsai’s own context and East Syriac heritage provide simpler and more convincing explanations of his treatment of baptism than do theories of heavy reliance on Theodore.

The book is based on the author’s doctoral dissertation and still bears the evidence of its origins as such. The reader will detect some redundancies, especially in the summary portions. Chapter structures and section titles can become repetitive, though they also attest to the careful method the author follows throughout. The author relies fairly heavily on translations and secondary sources. Some of the introductory discussions may be too basic for some readers; other readers, however, will appreciate the introductions to the persons of Narsai and Theodore and to unfamiliar Syriac sources, finding the discussions of liturgical scholarship helpfully orienting. In any case, the dissertation vestiges do not detract at all from the important contribution this book makes to the study of Theodore and especially of Narsai, and to our knowledge of late antique eastern baptismal practices and theology. No longer can scholars presume that Narsai merely relies on Theodore, nor that Narsai is not a worthy representative of his native East Syriac tradition. Not only must scholars reckon with Witkamp’s conclusions—the methods of his work should also inform future comparative liturgical scholarship. Students of liturgy, patristic scholars, church historians, and scholars of late antiquity will find the book instructive and helpful.

ANDREW PALMER, ZWIJNDRECHT, THE NETHERLANDS

Bishop Rabbula of Edessa († 435) can be compared with John Chrysostom († 407). Both men were born into the Greek-speaking élite of the most hellenized part of Roman Syria and educated accordingly, both made it their objective “to suppress abuses and reform society, so as to bring it into a more faithful observance of the precepts of the gospel” (A.-M. Malingrey on the latter). But whereas Chrysostom encountered powerful opposition at Constantinople and ended his life in exile, Rabbula dominated his city right up to his death. Few bishops have been such uncompromising advocates of a society in which poverty is honoured above riches. Rabbula claims the attention of all who suspect that Jesus aspired to radical social reform and actually said “Blessed are the poor,” which his more worldly followers later qualified as “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

Phenix and Horn set out to provide a more or less comprehensive source-book for the study of Rabbula. They have called it “The Rabbula Corpus,” which is perhaps a little misleading. There is indeed, preserved in a sixth-century manuscript, such a body of texts: “The Heroic Deeds of Bishop Rabbula of Edessa” with its three appendices: Rabbula’s rule for his clergy, his rule for the monks of his diocese and an anti-Nestorian homily (in Syriac), which he is alleged to have delivered in the presence of Nestorius himself at Constantinople. This fifth-century kernel has snowballed, since the nineteenth century, into the much fuller source-book under review. Phenix and Horn build on the corpora assembled by Overbeck and Bickell.
Overbeck expands the sixth-century corpus by the addition of further canons and correspondence before the “Homily” and, after it, of “supplications” (texts to be sung at prayer) attributed to Rabbula. He does not translate the Syriac texts. Bickell rolls the snowball further, picking up the passage on Rabbula’s conversion from the Life of Alexander Akoimetes; but his German translations are printed without the Syriac and Greek originals. The Rabbula Corpus represents a further accumulation. Phenix and Horn alter the order as follows:

1) “The Heroic Deeds of Bishop Rabbula” (in Syriac);
2) Rabbula’s alleged Constantinopolitan homily (in Syriac);
3) Rabbula’s rule for monks (in Syriac);
4) Rabbula’s rule for the clergy and the qyāmā (in Syriac);
5) Another rule for monks, falsely attributed to Rabbula (in Syriac).

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2 The author of “The Heroic Deeds of Bishop Rabbula” tells his reader, in §47, that he is already engaged in a project to translate from Greek into Syriac forty-six letters which Rabbula wrote “to ordained clergy, crowned heads, powerful men and monks.” This statement probably inspired Overbeck to include the Syriac texts of correspondence between Rabbula and three bishops (see No. 6).

3 Bickell’s translation deserves to be reprinted in Latin type, observing present-day orthographical and grammatical norms.

4 The Rabbula Corpus refers to “The Heroic Deeds of My Lord Rabbula, Bishop of Edessa, the Blessed City,” as “The Life of Rabbula” or “the encomium” (this specific term is even substituted for the general word “speech” ܐܡܪܐ ܡ in the translation) and to its author as “the encomiast.”

5 Texts II and III of A. Vööbus, Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism (Stockholm 1960) are the first two appendices of “The Heroic Deeds of Bishop Rabbula,” in reverse order, as in Overbeck’s edition; text IX contains more “Rules attributed to Rabbula,” the first six of which are thought to be genuine, though this should probably be seen as a later revision of his rule, incorporating some original material.
6) Rabbula’s correspondence with Cyril, Andrew and Gemellinus (in Syriac);  
7) John of Antioch’s letter to the bishops of Osrhoene and other letters (in Latin);  
8) The tract *De recta fide*, dubiously attributed to Cyril (in a Syriac translation);  
9) A larger number of hymns attributed to Rabbula (in Syriac).

The bibliography (primary sources and translations pp. 419–440; secondary literature pp. 440–474) and the comprehensive index (pp. 475–509) will make the book very useful to specialists, though the latter is marred by the occasional omission of spaces between the page-numbers.  

Phenix and Horn do not intend their introduction to replace G. G. Blum’s *Rabbula von Edessa: Der Christ, der Bischof, der Theologe* (1969), “the only monograph on Rabbula”; but they do claim to bring that book up to date (p. xxiv). They do so, perhaps, where monasticism and the *qyámā* are concerned. But on the problem of Rabbula’s famous U-turn, when he switched his allegiance from Antioch to Alexandria, Phenix and Horn disappoint. They simply subscribe to Blum’s opinion, ignoring H. J. W. Drijvers, who argues that Rabbula’s formation as a

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6 Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor gives a longer version of this letter. It is this which is included in *The Rabbula Corpus*.  
7 In the correspondence of Rabbula are included several letters preserved from the Latin *Collectio Casinensis*, as edited by Eduard Schwartz in the *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*.  
8 The index would have been even more useful if an entry such as “church,” referring to 171 of the 757 pages, had been subdivided, separating references to the church as an institution from those to the church-building and breaking these up further, in order to save the reader time.  
theologian must have been Antiochene, because his masters were Eusebius of Chalcis and Acacius of Aleppo, the latter a close associate of Theodoret. Ibas' claim that Rabbula was once an avid reader of Theodore of Mopsuestia is therefore plausible. It does not occur to either Blum or Phenix and Horn that the Syriac “translation” of the homily (not extant in Greek) allegedly delivered at Constantinople, which takes a bold anti-Nestorian stance, is an answer to the charge that Rabbula must once have been a supporter of Nestorius. Indeed, who else but Nestorius can have invited him to preach in Hagia Sophia during that patriarch’s reign? At Ephesus in 431, Rabbula set his signature to the deposition of Cyril; only afterwards, when the emperor’s support for Cyril became known, did Rabbula “distance (separavit) himself from the Oriental synod” and become, overnight, an ardent supporter of Cyril and a slanderer of the great exegete Theodore and his disciple, Nestorius, thereby avoiding the fate of Chrysostom. Drijvers does justice to all the sources; yet his arguments are passed over in silence. Blum argues that Rabbula’s signatures at Ephesus were forged and that he must have stayed at home. This unlikely theory, supported by no good evidence, becomes, for Phenix and Horn, “the fact that Rabbula was not present at the Council of Ephesus” (p. clxxi, reviewer's emphasis).

The authors speak of “the stunning silences in the Life of Rabbula” (p. xviii). They do not appreciate the full significance of the encomiast’s silence about Rabbula’s role at Ephesus in 431. If he never put his name to the deposition of Cyril, the record ought to have been set straight by his apologist. Instead, the ecumenical council, like other awkward subjects, is avoided altogether. Much of his praise for Rabbula can be read as indirect criticism of his successor, Ibas, under whom the encomiast probably wrote. The famous schools of the city, including that

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graphy of The Rabbula Corpus, but it is referred to only once, in a general way, on p. xxiii.
of the Christians from Persia, of which Ibas was the head, are only mentioned in passing; indeed, Phenix and Horn mistake the word šēkiš (Overbeck, p. 190, line 7), which is probably to be translated as “schools” (though Doran, p. 89, penult, has “those inscribed on the welfare rolls”), for šēkiš “scribes,” so even this passing reference is missed.

The encomiast denies (§38) that Rabbula “built anything in the earth,” apart from his hospital for women  and minimal repairs to the nave-wall of the cathedral church, which had suffered nāsa “damage.” The devious wording of this denial conceals the fact, reported in the Chronicle of Edessa, that, already before the flood of 413, Rabbula had converted the synagogue of the Jews into the church of St Stephen. (He did not need to replace the foundations, so built nothing “in the earth”!

Far from acknowledging this, the encomiast is at pains to say how well Rabbula got on with the Jews of his city and how bitterly these outsiders – more honestly characterized in §42 as “the obstinate Israelite people” – mourned the dead bishop. Phenix and Horn (following Hallier, Blum and Doran) take this at face value. But the church-leaders of Syria are not to be trusted when they claim to have the best interests of the Jews at heart. One only has to remember Rabbula’s fourth-century models: the bishop who orchestrated (with impunity) the destruction of the synagogue of Callinicus, Chrysostom and

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10 The stone for this was obtained by the demolition of four temples of idols, so how can Phenix and Horn maintain (pp. cxlvii–cxlviii) that “no specific action that Rabbula took against [the pagans]” is recorded?

11 If he does not mention the probable cause of this damage, a flood which brought down the city-wall on Tuesday, 18th March, 413, that is probably because the fact of this flood had been used against Rabbula by opponents, who would have claimed it as proof of God’s dissatisfaction with the new bishop of the “Blessed City.” The flood of 525 was certainly cited as evidence that God disapproved of the actions of the then bishop of Edessa.

12 The Chronicle of Edessa is also the source for two reports of the flood of 413, one in its proper place and one in the conclusion.
(not least) Ephrem. Rabbula’s contemporary, Barṣauma of Samosata, was not the only one to intimidate judges and even royalty when they dared defend the downtrodden Jews. The reign of Theodosius II saw a rise in legislative discrimination against the Jewish community. There is no good reason, then, to doubt the report that Rabbula, in confiscating a synagogue, was acting in accordance with an imperial edict. Yet Blum accepts Ludwig Hallier’s far-fetched emendation of “Jews” to “Audians”; and Phenix and Horn join this chorus of denial that injustice was ever done to the Jews of Edessa!

It might have been better to leave the sixth-century corpus in its original sequence, not to re-order its parts. But the idea of making a source-book containing all the relevant texts in the original and in English translation was a very good one; and if this comprehensive “historical source-book for the study of Rabbula” can be revised, corrected and reissued with a shorter introduction, it will be an extremely valuable resource. The criticisms in this review should therefore be seen by the authors as constructive, intended to help them improve on their work in a second edition which will combine the best of Overbeck’s, Bickell’s, Vööbus’s and Doran’s work.

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14 The tract De recta fide would not really be missed, if it were omitted, whereas the Letter to Mari by Ibas of Edessa is a candidate for admission, since it contains controversial statements about Rabbula. As for the hymns, historians will gain little from reading them and lovers of florid liturgical poetry may not be interested in history, so why not put the hymns in a separate book?

15 The present introduction is 241 pages long; as if this were not intimidating enough, these pages are numbered, in Roman numerals, xvii–cclvii.

16 R. Doran, Stewards of the Poor: The Man of God, Rabbula, and Hiba in Fifth-century Edessa (Kalamazoo 2006).
Phenix and Horn disclaim the ambition to replace Blum’s study of Rabbula.\(^7\) Perhaps, then, they should issue an updated translation of Blum, incorporating much of the material which overburdens the present introduction, of which pp. xvii–xlvi seem the most necessary. This last applies particularly to the section on “Persuasion, encomium and biography in the *Life of Rabbula* (= The Heroic Deeds of Bishop Rabbula),” which shows an admirable command of scholarship concerning the various biographical genres. As Phenix and Horn write on p. xlv:

> The author’s fealty to classical literary convention may be far greater than previously imagined, and if so, this will impact the use of the *Life of Rabbula* for the reconstruction of history in Edessa.

Once the section on the *Sitz im Leben* of the *Life* (pp. lxx–cxiii) has been abridged and corrected (p. lxxii, on Rabbula’s dates, is misleading),\(^8\) it will be truly useful. The other texts included in the source-book should, in the reviewer’s opinion, be introduced at the appropriate points in the book. Here, too, brevity is needed – and greater accuracy, too.\(^9\)


\(^8\) “In the year 746 Rabbula, the bishop of Edessa, departed from this world on 8th August” (Chronicle of Edessa, A.D. 540, confirmed by Jacob of Edessa apud Elijah of Nisibis), that is 435, pace Phenix and Horn, *RC*, pp. xviii and lxxiii, n. 193, where Rabbula’s death is dated to the year 436). The obituary (§53) tells us Rabbula fell ill 24 years and 3 months after becoming bishop and died the following month, so his reign started on 1st April 411. The official date, however, was 1st October of the same year: “In the year 723 Rabbula became bishop in Edessa” (*Chronicle of Edessa*). As with the regnal dates of kings, the first full calendar year of each bishop is counted as his first year.

\(^9\) BL Add. 14,526 is a witness to the shorter of the two recensions of Rabbula’s monastic rule, and Overbeck identified only two MSS of the longer (not three, as stated on p. ccxii); the second sentence on the “Commandments and Admonitions for the Priests and the Children of the Covenant” seems to contradict the first (p. ccxiv); the Syriac on pp. ccxlvi and ccxlvii
The Syriac texts need to be corrected from the manuscripts. In an appendix to this review, a step is already taken in this direction by listing corrigenda to the fifth-century corpus from MS BL Add. 14,652 (Wright, Catalogue, p. 651f., no. 732).

As for the English translations, these would benefit from a comparison with Bickell’s German translations, which are generally better, as the following passage from the hymns on p. 290f. of The Rabbula Corpus shows:

Gustav Bickell, Ausgewählte Schriften aus syrischen Kirchenvätern, BKV (Kempten 1874), p. 262: Als die Heiligen kamen und sich niederlegten zum Gastmahl des Leidens, da tranken sie alle von jenem Most, welchen das Judenvolk auf Golgotha gekeltert hatte, und erlernten die verborgenen Geheimnisse des Hauses Gottes. Deshalb sagen wir lobsingend: Gelobt sei Christus, welcher die heiligen Märttyrer durch das Blut aus seiner Seite trunken gemacht hat!

Phenix and Horn: When the saints went up and rested (Syr. ܥܠܼܘ ܘܓܢܼܘ “came in and reclined”) on the couch of their sufferings (Syr. ܐ̂ ܟܐ ܕܚܫ ܒܣܡ “at the feast of sufferings” = “zum Gastmahl des Leidens” – the possessive pronoun is not in the Syr.), from that juice that the people trampled out (this ought to be: “that must which the [Jewish] people trod”) on Golgotha all of them drank and learned the secret mysteries (correct ܝܐ ̈ ܙܐ ܟܗ ܐܖ to ܝܐ ̈ ܟܣ ܙܐ ̈ ܐܖ = Overbeck) of the house of God. Wherefore (“and for that reason” – the archaic “wherefore” seems out of place) we sing with praises (“we sing praises” is better English) and say, blessed is the Messiah (this should be “Blessed is Christ”) who intoxicated the holy martyrs with the blood (“made the holy martyrs drunk on the blood” – the word “intoxicated” is taken from the wrong register) from his side.

is riddled with errors; and the Seleucid year 737 is A. D. 425/6 (not 424/5, as stated on p. ccl).

20 Vat. Borg. cod. syr. 10 is online and from it I have made many corrections to the “Canons for the Monks,” attributed to Rabbula, the translation of which by Phenix and Horn is particularly unreliable.

21 The reviewer thanks the British Library for allowing him to photograph this codex in its entirety, free of charge.
The English translations by Phenix and Horn, as published, are neither felicitous, nor accurate. For a revised edition they need to be thoroughly overhauled. An example will be given here from the most important source, “The Heroic Deeds of Bishop Rabbula.” In §46 the anonymous encomiast refers his reader to the Syriac translation of the homily delivered in Constantinople. This reference will be quoted here, first in Syriac (fol. 115v, Overbeck, p. 198f., Phenix and Horn, p. 68), then in Bickell’s German translation, then in Robert Doran’s English translation, and finally in the translation given in *The Rabbula Corpus*, so as to allow readers of this review to judge for themselves which is the best of the English translations.


Doran, p. 97: Now, after we have written his life, we will set down – for the persuasion of many and for the benefit of everyone – that discourse which the blessed one spoke in the tyrant’s ears in the great church in Constantinople so that it may be seen openly by everyone and how his discourse, spoken from the robust witness of his pure conscience, gave great confidence.

Phenix and Horn, p. 69: We shall, for the sake of persuading many and for the sake of helping everyone, write down following our encomium about him that discourse that the blessed one spoke into the ears of the [imperial] throne in the great church of Constantinople, so that it appear openly to all people and be believed that his word possessed
authoritatively this great boldness of speech. On account of the great witness of his pure conscience …

In this last, the Greek loan-word τύραννος is translated as if it were βρόνος and the sentence ends too soon. The German translation is certainly the best of the three.

The list of corrigenda which follows this review makes Phenix and Horn’s text of the sixth-century corpus preferable to Overbeck’s, partly because it includes corrigenda to this earlier edition and partly because Phenix and Horn annotate the text copiously and divide it into numbered sections for ease of reference.22

APPENDIX: CORRIGENDA TO THE SYRIAC TEXT OF THE SIXTH-CENTURY “RABBULA CORPUS”

N. B. Bold type is used to highlight the differences between the printed text and the manuscript, where a longer passage is quoted.

Apart from an unnecessary “emendation” on p. 4 and the fact that “[85v]” is placed after, not before, the word with which that folio begins on p. 8, the only differences between the manuscript and the text printed on pp. 2–10 are points omitted and punctuation-marks altered. Such minor infidelities will be passed over here. On pages 12–20, 24–44 and 52–82, however, more serious errors have been introduced, sometimes (as on p. 4) through an attempt to emend the text.

22 Slight adjustments are needed, however: The last nine words of sect. 17 belong to sect. 18, the first six words of sect. 22 belong to sect. 21 and the first six words of sect. 37 belong to sect. 36.
The Heroic Deeds of Mar Rabbula, Bishop of the Blessed City of Edessa

(BL Add. 14,652, fols. 83r–125r; Overbeck, pp. 159–209; Phenix and Horn, pp. 2–83)

12' ܡܚܝܐ ܕܪܒܘܠ ܘܓܠܘ (MS, ܡܠܡܐ, ܡܠܡܐ ܪܒܘܠܐ).

12' ܐܟܐ ܕܡܠܡܐ ܒܠܒܠܐ ܣܠ ܠܒܠ ܡܠܡܐ ܘܓܠܘ (MS ܓܠܘ ܒܠܒܠܐ ܫܠ ܠܒܠ ܡܠܡܐ ܘܓܠܘ ܡܠܡܐ).

12' ܡܠܡܐ ܒܠܒܠܐ ܠܒܠ ܒܝܢ ܠܒܠ (MS, ܡܠܡܐ ܒܠܒܠܐ ܠܒ Liberties – the object is Jesus).

14' ܒܡܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ (MS ܒܗܝܡܢܘܬܗ – meaning Rabbula's faith).

14' ܒܡܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ (MS ܒܗܝܡܢܘܬܗ – meaning Rabbula's faith).

16' ܠܡܕܝܢܬܐ (MS ܠܡܕܝܢܬܗ).

16' ܕܥܡܪ (MS ܕܥܡܪܐ).

18' ܠܡܟܢܢܢ (MS ܠܡܟܢܢܢ).

20' ܢܩܐ (MS ܢܩܢܐ).

24' Fol. 92r begins after the second ܠܒܠ ܐܡܝܬܘ, not after the first.

26' ܠܒܠ ܡܘܠܟܢܢ ܠܚܙܝܝܢ ܕܣܪܝܪ ܕܐ ܣܗ (MS ܕܐ ܣܗ ܙܝܝܢ ܕܫܪܝܪ ܠܡܘܠܟܢܢ).

32' ܐܡܗ ܘܚܬܗ. ܕܦܐܐ ܠܢܩܕܘܬܐ ܐܠܦܐ (MS ܐܠܦܐ ܐܡܗ ܘܚܬܗ.

32' ܠܦܫܗ (MS ܢܦܫܗܼ).

32' ܕܥܕܬܐ (MS ܕܥܕܬܗ).

34' ܐ... ܘܠܥܝܢ ܥܠܡ ܠܟܠܗܘܢ ܐܢ ܕܝܢ (MS ܐܢ ܕܝܢ ܐ... ܘܠܥܝܢ ܥܠܡ ܠܟܠܗܘܢ).

35' (two errors) ܠܚܙܝܝܢ ܕܡܘܠܟܢܢ ܠܫܪܝܪ (MS ܕܫܪܝܪ ܠܚܙܝܝܢ ܕܡܘܠܟܢܢ).

36' ܠܚܙܝܝܢ ܕܡܘܠܟܢܢ (MS ܠܚܙܝܝܢ ܕܡܘܠܟܢܢ).

38' ܠܚܙܝܝܢ ܕܡܘܠܟܢܢ (MS ܐ... ܡܘܠܟܢܢ ܠܚܙܝܝܢ ܕܡܘܠܟܢܢ).

39' ܠܚܝܪ (MS ܠܚܝܪܐ).

40' ܠܚܙܝܝܢ ܕܡܘܠܟܢܢ (MS ܠܚܙܝܝܢ ܕܡܘܠܟܢܢ ܠܫܪܝܪ).

42' ܠܡܒܪܐ (MS ܐ... ܠܡܒܪܐ ܠܚܙܝܝܢ ܕܡܘܠܟܢܢ).
52f. Overbeck uses asterisks to fill the place of illegible letters, which is better than using the Syriac punctuation-mark ܀, as the editors of RC do here.
60^4 מִיַּזְּ(MS רֶבֶן מִיַּזְּ).
60^9 Fol. 111v begins after יַז and before יְהוֹנָן.
60^7 רְאוֹלָה (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
60^2 רְאוֹ (MS יַלְעֹ).
62^3 רְבִּים (MS רְבָּים).
62^5 אָמָה (MS אַמָּה).
64^2 מַלָּל (MS מַלָּל).
64^4 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
66^7 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
66^2 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
68^2 רְאוֹ (MS יַלְעֹ).
68^6 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה) plural (MS יִלְעֹלָה singular).
69^6 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
70^6 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
70^7 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
70^14 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
70^7 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
70^8 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
71^2 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
72^2 (three errors) מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה מַלָּל מַלָּל).
72^3 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה מַלָּל מַלָּל).
72^6 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה מַלָּל).
72^2 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
72^5 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
74^1 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
74^6 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
74^2 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
74^4 מַלָּל (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
76^2 מַלָּל = Overbeck (MS יַלְעֹלָה).
76<sup>2nd</sup> (two errors) ܟܕܲܒܩ ... ܕܒܩܥܕܬܐ (MS ܕܒܩܥܕܬܐ ... ܕܒܩܥܕܬܐ). 76, n. 1 The MS has ܟܕܣܘܐ, as correctly printed in the text, not ܟܕܣܘܐ, as in Overbeck's edition.

78<sup>3</sup>, ܡܘܡܚܕܬܐ (MS ܡܘܡܚܕܬܐ). 78<sup>9</sup> ܡܘܡܚܕܬܐ (MS ܡܘܡܚܕܬܐ).

80<sup>5</sup>, unnecessary “emendation” (MS ܚܝܬܐ). 80<sup>14</sup>, ܡܘܡܚܕܬܐ (MS ܡܘܡܚܕܬܐ).

82<sup>7</sup> ܡܠ (MS ܡܠ). 82<sup>8</sup> ܡܠ (MS ܡܠ).

Commands and Cautions Addressed to the Ordained Clergy and to the Bnay Qyāmā in the Villages<sup>23</sup>

(Add. 14,652 = MS, foll. 125r–131r; Overbeck, pp. 215–221; Vööbus 1960, pp. 36–50; Phenix and Horn, pp. 102–117)<sup>24</sup>

102, n. 2 ܒܥܕܬܐ (MS ܒܥܕܬܐ).

102, n. 8 is oddly phrased: Overbeck prints the text of BL Add. 14,652, the oldest and the best MS.


104<sup>3</sup> ܒܥܕܬܐ (MS ܒܥܕܬܐ), which Vööbus rightly allows to stand. the supplement, which should end with ܚܝܬܐ, printed in n. 3 as ܚܝܬܐ, comes from a C9 MS, supported only by very late apographa)


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<sup>23</sup> The Rabbula Corpus: “The Commandments and Admonitions for the Priests and for the Children of the Covenant of My Lord Rabbula, Bishop of Edessa.” Note 9 tells the reader that “One manuscript” adds dabqūryāʾ, “who are in the villages.” The correct vocalisation is da-b-qūryāʾ and the MS in question is Add. 14,652. Wright (Catalogue, p. 651b) translates “in the country.”

<sup>24</sup> These corrigenda disregard the later MSS collated by Vööbus, whose edition is not superseded by The Rabbula Corpus.
104° קְרִימַת דִּבְרֵי תַּנּוּךְ הָעֲשָׁר (MS יָסָמֵכָה חַלָּשִׁית וּכְלָשָׁהוּ).
106° קְרִים (MS יָסָמֵכָה).
106° קְרִים (MS יָסָמֵכָה).
106° קְרִים (MS יָסָמֵכָה).
108, n. 1 omits to say that Add. 14,652 is one of the MSS which has the reading יָשָׁמֵכָה, which ought to have been retained in the text.
110° יָשָׁמֵכָה (MS יָשָׁמֵכָה; but this should be printed as יָשָׁמֵכָה and the reader needs to know this reading comes from Add. 14,652).
112° None of the three supplements is necessary, indeed, the last is a diplography.
112° [.] יָשָׁמֵכָה יָשָׁמֵכָה יָשָׁמֵכָה (MS יָשָׁמֵכָה יָשָׁמֵכָה יָשָׁמֵכָה).
114° Delete brackets.
114, n. 1 For יָשָׁמֵכָה, read יָשָׁמֵכָה.
114° יָשָׁמֵכָה (MS יָשָׁמֵכָה).
114° יָשָׁמֵכָה (MS יָשָׁמֵכָה).
114° יָשָׁמֵכָה (MS יָשָׁמֵכָה).
114° יָשָׁמֵכָה (MS יָשָׁמֵכָה).

25 The editors use square brackets to group a number of words under one note. This should be done with a single upper half-bracket. The convention is that square brackets are placed around illegible text, which the editor has attempted to restore.
Item, “Cautions for Monks,” by the Same, Mar Rabbula, Bishop of Edessa

(Add. 14,652 = MS, foll. 131r–133v; Overbeck, pp. 212–214; Vööbus 1960, pp. 27–33; Phenix and Horn, pp. 94–101)

94, n. 1 seems to say there are only three MSS, whereas Vööbus uses nine.

94, n. 3 ḫāṣelah is the reading of Add. 14,652 and is preferable to the reading adopted in the text.

94, n. 4 “Reading [搋חך] with many manuscripts. MS A and other manuscripts: [חחס].” Add. 14,652 (Vööbus’ “MS A”) has the reading [חחס], which therefore ought not to be changed.

96, n. 3 ḫēmārē balḥād should be ḥēmārē balḥūd (h’mārē balḥūd).

98, Add. 14,652 has ḫ̄, one of the few errors left uncorrected by this scribe.

98, ̈, (MS ḫ̄).  

100, delete brackets.

100, these doublets should be excised from the text – they are not in Add. 14,652.

100, nn. 8, 20 ḫ̄, mapānūtā, i.e., “with the permission,” is a copying error, compounded by a faithful transcription of the same and a wrong translation, for ̇."
belc ād men mapsānōtā “without the permission.”

The Homily Which My Lord Rabbula, Bishop of Edessa,
Pronounced in the Church of Constantinople
in Front of the Whole People

(Add. 14,652 = MS, foll. 133v–138v; Overbeck, pp. 239–244; Phenix and Horn, pp. 84–93)

84, n. 2 ܡܪ ܘܡܙ (w-mazmar) the reading of the MS is to be preferred: “For the grace by which our Lord (Jesus) used to teach his Church and move it to song is the source of all learning.” The editors’ emendation ܡܪ ܘܡܥܡܕ (w-macmed) does not make sense in the past tense (the auxiliary in the phrase ܡܪ ܠܦ ܗܘܐ ܘܡܙ belongs to both verbs), so they translate it in the present: “For grace is the fountain of all teaching, by which our Lord instructed his church and baptizes.”

86 Fol. 135v begins after ܠܢ, not before it, and the information given in n. 1 is usually conveyed by printing ܦܝܫܡܢܐ ܒܦܫܡܢܐ in the text, not “Reading for ܬܐ ***ܒ” in a note.

88 After ܗܘܬ and before ܒܫܡܝܐ belong the words: ܐܠܗܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܒܨܒܝܢܗ. ܠܗ ܐܠ ܓܝܪ ܒܐܪܥܐ ܐܡ, correctly transcribed by the editors, but unintentionally transported to line 1f.

90 After ܕܟܝܢܐܝܬ and before ܡܘܕܐ belong the words: ܝܠܕܬ ܐܠ ܪ. ܐܠ ܐܠܗܐ ܡܠܬܐ. ܠܘ ܒܠܚܘܕ ܕܫܦܝܪ ܠ ܠܕܐܦ ܒܝܫܐܝܬ, correctly transcribed by the editors, except for the omission of the diacritical point under ܝܠܕܬ and the mark of emphasis under the last letter of ܐܠ, but unintentionally transported to line 3f. of the same page.

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28 The Rabbula Corpus: “The Homily that My Lord, Bishop Rabbula, Spoke in the Church of Constantinople before All the People.” The editors place this directly after the Life and before the “Cautions for monks.”
90 The first letter of and the last of are illegible in Add. 14,652 and so should be placed between square brackets.

92 Fol. 138v begins before , not after this phrase.

92 The editors print , but the MS has .

92 The editors print and fail to note that this has been corrected, perhaps by a later hand, to in the MS.

92 The last word in this line with the punctuation-mark which follows it ( ) must be deleted.

92 The first letter of should be placed between square brackets. Instead of printing thirteen times at the end of this line to indicate letters missing, asterisks ought to have been used.

Phenix and Horn do not mention that a later reader interpreted the now illegible traces in the last line of fol. 138v as .

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In humanity’s search for an encounter with the divine, prayer holds a very important place. The present monograph zooms in on the praying individual, using as its sources descriptions, often self-descriptions, of a group of ascetic authors between the fifth and the eighth century, most of whom belong to the East Syriac tradition. With the exception of John of Apamea, they all represent the specific branch of East Syriac ascetic Christianity that took its main inspiration from the Syriac tradition of the writings of Evagrius Ponticus. The book, however, offers much more than a study of the Syriac reception of Evagrius, as it highlights the agency and the creative responses of Syriac authors, who shaped their own ideas and reflected on their own multifaceted experiences during prayer, experiences they were eager to share with their disciples and readers. Contextualizing prayer within the wider discourse of asceticism, the author engages with scholarship on East Syriac ascetic literature as it developed over the last one hundred years—if we take Paul Bedjan’s 1908 edition of (the first part of) Isaac of Nineveh’s *Mystic Treatises* and A. J. Wensinck’s 1923 English translation of the same texts as the starting point. Among the large body of scholarship, special mention should be made of Sebastian Brock’s 1987 richly annotated anthology, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, which to some extent sets the parameters for the present book. This new publication, extremely well documented and eloquently written, marks an important step forward in disclosing the richness of Syriac ascetic literature.
Chapter 1 (pp. 21–51) introduces the topic of prayer in its Late Antique context. It briefly surveys the philosophical tradition, starting with the second-century sophist Maximus of Tyre, and its reception by Clement of Alexandria and Origen, up to Evagrius, who understands prayer as “a conversation of the *nous* with God” and whose theory “reveals its radical originality in terms of its religious anthropology and technologies of the self” (pp. 46–47). Chapter 2 (pp. 53–78) discusses “John of Apamea on Silent Prayer.” While the tripartite model of John’s anthropology (body, soul, and spirit) was widely accepted by later ascetic authors, his exposure to Greek learning and his possible acquaintance with some of Evagrius’ writings remain debated in present-day scholarship. For the author, “John is representative of a unique moment in Syriac indigenous spirituality—just before it was affected by the *Evagriana Syriaca*” (p. 78).

In chapter 3 (pp. 79–103), Isaac of Nineveh (late 7th cent.) enters the scene, heir to John of Apamaea and an avid reader of Evagrius. Exploring the boundaries of Evagrius’ notion of “pure prayer,” Isaac proposes instead the experience of “non-prayer,” a condition in which prayer is replaced by “wonder”: ܬܡܗܐ (translated as “stupor” on p. 181) or ܬܗܪܐ. Chapter 4 (pp. 105–135) deals with Dadishoʿ Qaṭraya, Isaac’s contemporary, who draws his inspiration from a larger number of sources (including Mark the Monk and Abba Isaiah) and aims at a wider audience, including simple brothers who may have less interest in Theodore of Mopsuestia’s biblical exegesis as practiced in the schools. Chapter 5 (pp. 137–158) has Shemʿon d-Ṭaybutheh as its subject, who flourished roughly in the same period and whose literary corpus remains ill defined. (That he was a physician and the author of medical writings quoted in Bar Bahlul and in a number of Arabic sources may be incorrect, as recently argued by Grigory Kessel.) Shemʿon’s interest in the bodily aspects of asceticism leads him to a holistic approach to ascetic practice, understood “as a performance of introspection” (p. 157). Among
his sources of inspiration—in addition to those known to his predecessors—is the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus, available in Syriac since the early sixth century and briefly mentioned already by Isaac, but more prominent in Shemʿon.

With the last two chapters, we move into the eighth century. Chapter 6 (pp. 159–188) discusses John of Dalyatha whose mystical discourse “is marked by a density of ecstatic and emotional expression [and] radical theological claims regarding encounter and union with the divine” (p. 160). Even more than Shemʿon’s, John’s work is indebted to Pseudo-Dionysius. Chapter 7 (pp. 189–213) deals with Joseph Ḥazzaya, who in his description of prayer draws a clear distinction between prayer “in the sphere of limpidity (ܫܦܝܘܬܐ),” which belongs to the stage of the soul (ܢܦܫܢܘܬܐ), and prayer in the spiritual stage (ܪܘܚܢܘܬܐ), where the intellect’s vision has no image or form, “but is invested with a single vision of the light, to which nothing can be likened” (p. 197). The book ends with an “Afterword” (pp. 215–226), a most welcome recapitulation of some major points at the end of this fascinating and high-energy ascetic journey.

Carefully selecting the topics of discussion for each of the chapters, the author fully succeeds in “listen[ing] to the unique voices of the various texts” (p. ix). In this process, she is able to bring a good measure of convergence and cohesion to the multiplicity of texts, with many cross-references and echoes back and forth. What holds the book together, however, also raises some questions. The author’s specific interest in deliberate reflections on prayer and in the discourse on the praying self brings her almost by definition to the body of literature impacted by the introduction of Evagrius’ writings to the Syriac-speaking world. Texts that do not fit this paradigm are left out of consideration, and we run the risk of losing sight of the broader picture of Syriac literature on prayer. It is worth noting that Sebastian Brock’s anthology, The Syriac Fathers on Prayer,
has a different scope and includes Aphrahat, Ephrem, the *Book of Steps*, Philoxenus, and others. Even within the Church of the East, Evagrius’ influence was not felt equally by all ascetic writers, as is shown, for example, by the *Book of Gifts* of Shubḥalmaran of Karka d-Beth Slokh, a contemporary of Babai (ed. David J. Lane, CSCO 612–613/Syr. 236–237, 2004). These non-Evagrian texts stand in the same linguistic, literary, and cultural tradition and must have been read by the same monastic communities. Interestingly, the author occasionally points to expressions or specific ideas that the texts she discusses share with other Syriac compositions (the concept of “self-emptying,” ܡܣܪܩܘܬܐ  may serve as an example, see p. 154), thus warning the reader not to regard the selected texts as disconnected from the rest of Syriac literature.

Partly related is the larger issue of Greek vs. Syriac. Several of the foundational ascetic texts discussed in this book are of Greek origin and were subsequently translated into Syriac. Our Syriac ascetic authors, who may have known some Greek and may have been aware that the texts had a Greek provenance, only used the Syriac translations. Given our awareness of historical developments, it is difficult in our descriptions to avoid terminology that implies some binary, as the following phrases indicate: “this inter-cultural process of hybridization, incorporating Greek patristic learning while maintaining many indigenous features” (p. 8); “the melding of [Evagrius’] insights with Syriac ascetic transcendent thought ... in addition to other indigenous concepts” (p. 50); “Dadishoʿ’s process of adoption and selection from the Greek and Syriac literary ascetic legacy” (p. 106); “[Dadishoʿ’s] efforts to harmonize the amalgam of the Greek and Syriac ascetic traditions” (p. 115); “[the merging of] Greek ascetic theories with indigenous Syrian spirituality” (p. 222). While such language is historically justified, and the author shows much subtlety and insight in navigating the complex linguistic and cultural processes, I find her book also to be
a stimulus to rethink the ways in which we talk about the divide between what is Greek and what is “indigenous” in Syriac literature, even centuries after the indigenization of much Greek thought.

Finally, I would like to comment on one of the author’s conclusions, namely “the relative paucity of biblical exegesis in the formation of the East Syrian mystical discourse” (p. 222) and her suggestion that “[t]hose authors made a deliberate choice to scrutinize the self rather than the Scriptures” (p. 224). I would like to offer one counter-argument. On pp. 90–93, the author discusses the state of “wonder and stillness,” in which the corporeal consciousness is eclipsed and which, according to Isaac of Nineveh, is achieved by prayer at the spiritual stage. The author sees this sensation of “wonder” as Isaac’s own contribution and refers to it as “the peculiar Syriac notion of wonder” (p. 174). While the term indeed has a Syriac pedigree and may be traced back to Ephrem (see Brock, The Syriac Fathers on Prayer, p. xxxi), Isaac may (also) have thought about biblical precedents, following Theodore of Mopsuestia. In his treatise “On the revelations and powers that happen to the saints in images” (ed. Bedjan, pp. 154–161; tr. Wensinck, pp. 105–109), Isaac explicitly mentions as his source “the writings of ... Theodore, ... especially the three volumes on Genesis ... and on Acts.” As is clear from his examples, Isaac has in mind the state of ἔκστασις which according to the Greek Bible fell upon Adam (Gen. 2:21, during the creation of Eve), upon Abraham (Gen. 15:12, following his sacrifice), and upon Peter (Acts 10:10, during his vision). Theodore’s definition of the term ἔκστασις is preserved in the Greek biblical Catena (ad Gen. 15:12): “the condition of being outside the awareness of the surrounding things (ἐξω τῆς τῶν παρόντων αἰσθήσεως), (which) prepares the thought (ἡν διάνοιαν) for the reception of the theory (θεωρίαν) of the hidden things” (ed. F. Petit, La chaîne sur la Genèse, III, 1995, p. 58 (no. 964)); a nearly identical definition is found ad
Gen. 2:21 (ed. Petit, *La chaîne*, I, 1991, p. 205 (no. 299)). Even while the Peshitta reads šəlāy “stillness” in the two passages in Genesis and tḥmāy “wonder” in Acts, East Syriac biblical commentators apply Theodore’s explanation invariably and almost literally to the three passages, as for example the *Diyarbakur Commentary* (ed. Van Rompay, CSCO 483–484/Syr.205–206, 1986, pp. 32:13–16 and 74:24–27 [text]; pp. 42 and 96 [transl.]), and Isho’dad of Merv (ed. M. D. Gibson and J. R. Harris, *Commentaries on the New Testament*, IV, 1903, pp. ܟܚ and 20). It seems very likely that Isaac, in analyzing the ascetic’s advanced stage of prayer, took his cues from biblical examples as understood by Theodore. Additional evidence of the prominent role that biblical exegesis had for the East Syriac ascetical authors may be seen in Joseph Hazzaya’s *On Providence* (ed. N. Kavadas, 2016), which for the most part is a narration of biblical history, often following in Theodore’s footsteps.

That this new monograph, in addition to offering such an engaged and well-informed reading of key passages in East Syriac ascetic literature, also raises interesting questions is the best guarantee for its usefulness in future research. By covering five of the most prominent writers over a period of two centuries, the author provides a broader framework and a number of signposts, which lead us to a fuller appreciation of an important subfield of Syriac literature and, more generally, of the intellectual history of Syriac Christianity. This is a most welcome contribution for which we should be very thankful!

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Most modern scholarship on the medieval Middle East bases itself on the writings of elite scholars in the region’s major religious traditions, authors who were generally focused on elaborating complex systems of theology and ideology. In this book, Tannous argues that the implicit world created by centering such sources neglects the overwhelming demographic reality of the period: that Middle Easterners were largely illiterate, largely agrarian “simple believers” (Syr. ḫedwēṭē; Ar. ʿawāmm). Remembering this population—and accounting for its halting, incomplete transformation from the sixth to the eleventh centuries¹—requires a historiographic turn towards a bottom-up history of the “lived religious experience of all the region’s inhabitants” (p. 8).

The book consists of four parts. The first, “Simple Belief,” asks a pointed question: “Did the society of the late antique Middle East resemble something like an advanced seminar in patristic theology” (p. 15)? The obvious (negative) answer reminds us that the interconfessional rivalry often foregrounded in the historiography of Christian late antiquity would not have been legible to many of the inhabitants of that world. Accounting for this “layering of knowledge” (p. 57), theological elites competed for the allegiance of simple Christians through an anxious mix of doctrinal compromise and pragmatism.

¹ The titular and *passim* division of this period into ‘medieval’ and ‘late antique’ feels somewhat in tension with the book’s attention to the continuities of these two eras. See now Thomas Bauer, *Warum es kein islamisches Mittelalter gab: Das Erbe der Antike und der Orient* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2018), who prefers the phrase “die islamische Spätantike.”
The second part, “Consequences of Chalcedon,” considers some of the ramifications of the haziness of late antique confessional identity. The discussion of the Canons of Jacob of Edessa in Ch. 3 is a particularly vivid example of a learned churchman’s difficulties policing confessional boundaries, inchoate boundaries that he himself was engaged in drawing. Church leaders used a broad arsenal of tools in the campaign to sway simple believers to their version of orthodoxy, including debate and “theological streetfighters” (Ch. 4); the sacraments, especially the Eucharist (Ch. 5); and education, particularly secondary schooling in scholastic centers (Chs. 6 & 7). All of this was an attempt by the various confessions to create “marginal differentiation” (p. 197), an advertising concept that Tannous adopts to denote the strategies used by similar groups to stand out in a crowded landscape of competitors.

Building on this approach, Part III (“Christians and Muslims”) applies a similar analysis to the rise of the early Islamic community. A religiously heterodox, under-catechized society was the *Sitz im Leben* for the Qurʾān, which is “a reflection of and reaction to Christianity as it existed on the ground in the seventh-century Ḥijāz” (p. 252). This account is not entirely convincing. For all the merits of reframing the Qurʾān as a document in conversation with simple believers, I wish more attention were paid to the text’s own complex and confrontational theology, its nuanced intertextuality with Syriac homiletic and liturgical works, and the importance of Jews in Muḥammad’s community—in Tannous’ terms, to the layering of knowledge within the seventh-century Ḥijāzī population. Indeed, the Qurʾān is perhaps our best document for the theological sophistication possible on the peripheries of the late antique oecumene.

Whatever its roots, Tannous argues that the ideology of earliest Islam, less developed than contemporaneous forms of
Christianity,² was not the reason for the political success of the nascent Muslim community. Most people in the lands of the early Islamic empire(s) would have been ignorant as to the specific propositional contents of Muḥammad’s message (Ch. 10), and conversion was driven more often by temporal concerns than by matters of religious conviction (Ch. 11). Moreover, the process of conversion was slow: Tannous asserts that Muslims were a numerical minority in the Middle East “at least until the Mamluk period” (p. 340).

The consequences of this religious inertia were profound. Lived Christianity was a fact of daily life for almost all medieval Middle Easterners, particularly in more rural areas. And much like the Christian elite, Muslim scholars’ anxiety over the reality of nebulous communal boundaries resulted in a raft of measures to try to create in practice the separation that the theologians articulated in theory. Such efforts, taken together with innumerable continuities between pre-Islamic and Islamic practices (Ch. 8 & pp. 419–428), indicate the ways in which the Middle East changed Islam, rather than the more frequently interrogated effects of Islam on the Middle East. Such a viewpoint historicizes Islam as a process, one linked intimately to the large groups of simple Christian believers who peopled much of region.

In the final part (“The Making of the Medieval Middle East”), Tannous examines some of the most important loci for Muslim-Christian connections: religiously heterogeneous families, daily interactions, monasteries, festivals, converts (and the traditions

² This is put rather starkly: “If Christian orthodoxy in the seventh century can be compared to a perfectly executed performance of a piece by Chopin (or Beethoven or Mozart, depending on the Christian group), then we can hardly say that Islamic orthodoxy even had a score in the same period” (p. 261). More useful is J. E. Brockopp’s notion of Muslim “proto-scholars”: see his Muhammad’s Heirs: The Rise of Muslim Scholarly Communities, 622–950 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
they brought with them), and prisoners of war (Ch. 14). He concludes (Ch. 15) with a challenge to modern scholarship: can we let go of the idea that the rise of Islam represented a “mass ideological change,” abandoning the “sectarian” conception of medieval Middle Eastern history as Arab Muslim history? And in so doing, could we do greater justice to what life, particularly ordinary life, was like? Lastly, there is a very useful appendix on Tannous’ approach to the sources and the problem of authenticity.

Despite, and perhaps because of, the scope of the book, there are topics the reader wishes received more attention. I will limit myself to two points. First, Egypt. Albeit Tannous states that he will focus mostly on “Syria, Palestine, and Iraq,” (p. 7), given the book’s ambitious title a more thorough account of Egypt would have been welcome. Egyptian evidence, though contradictory, complicates the book’s argument for a slow Islamization lasting until the rise of the Mamluks in the 13th century. It also provides vivid examples of the Islamic administration’s fine-grained attention to matters of religious affiliation (to the point of maintaining a registry of converts and branding the hands of monks to control their movement). Finally, although it appears at points, one wishes more use were made of the documentary wealth of Egyptian papyri as an unequalled window into the daily lives of Christians and Muslims alike.

Second, Tannous’ meticulous analysis of the textual sources of both the Syriac and Arabic traditions is unfortunately not

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³ Shaun O’Sullivan, “Coptic Conversion and the Islamization of Egypt,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 10:2 (2006), 65–79; but see the 10th-century geographer al-Muqaddasi: “there are not many towns in Egypt, because most of the people of the countryside [sawād] are Copts, and according to the rule of this discipline of ours, there can be no town [madīnah] without a pulpit,” i.e., a mosque (Descriptio Imperii Moslemici [Kitāb aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī maʿrifat al-āqālīm], ed. de Goeje [Leiden: Brill, 1906], 193).

turned to the panoply of relevant material evidence from the period. Apart from passing references, the physical record receives short shrift. Given the inevitable difficulties of recovering ordinary voices from elite sources, this is a significant oversight. Tombstones, graffiti, textiles, ceramics, images, coins, and the like all offer a unique perspective on discourses of religious identification. The inclusion of such objects within Tannous' analysis would have brought it closer to the communities it seeks to describe.

These suggestions aside, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East* offers an eloquent and provocative corrective for traditional histories wherein “the experience of a great deal of the region’s population is relegated to a bit part and minor role in the telling of the region’s story, or simply falls through the cracks” (p. 499). This is a tour de force of scholarship, meticulously researched but also approachably lively. Our understanding of the complex lives of the late antique and early medieval worlds is much richer for its having been written.

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5 E.g., Leor Halevi’s *Muhammad’s Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) is a relevant and classic study missing from Tannous’ extensive bibliography. David Frankfurter’s *Christianizing Egypt: Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018) is a useful companion read demonstrating the value of such sources.