Mathunny John Panicker. *The Person of Jesus Christ in the Writings of Juhanon Gregorius Abu'l Faraj Commonly Called Bar Ebraya*. Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 4. Münster, Hamburg, and London. LIT-Verlag, 2002. Distributed in the US by Transaction Publishers (New Brunswick and Piscataway, N.J.). Pp. 239. ISBN 3-8258-3390-9. Euros 30.90.

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[1] Responding to a perceived one-sided *rapprochement* between Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches at the expense of the Assyrian Church of the East, which took place at Chambésy, Switzerland, in 1990, Wolfgang Hage repeatedly has called attention to the timely relevance of Gregory Barhebraeus (A.D. 1226-1286).[1] One may agree with him that this universally respected and appreciated leader of the Syrian Orthodox church is to be considered as an early model of how one may respectfully engage in dialogue with representatives of other Christian denominations, in Barhebraeus's case both the "Chalcedonians" and the so-called "Nestorians," without condemning either of the two as heretics. Just prior to the publication of the book here under review, Karl Pinggéra explored in outline the historical development of Barhebraeus's Christology by focusing on three texts: a) Barhebraeus's treatise *On the Incarnation*, which constitutes the fourth treatise of his main speculative theological work, the *Candelabra of the Sanctuary*, as well as b) Barhebraeus's *Letter to the Catholicos of the Church of the East, Mar Denḥā I*, who held office from 1265 to 1281, and c) chapter four of the more spiritually and mystically oriented *Book of the Dove*.[2] It is to be warmly welcomed that with Dr. Mathunny John Panicker, a member of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church who now teaches at the seminary in

[1] See Wolfgang Hage, "Ecumenical Aspects of Barhebraeus' Christology," *The Harp* 4.1-3 (1991), 103-109; and *idem*, "Chambésy 1990 und zwei syrische Stimmen aus dem Mittelalter," in *Trinitäts- und Christusdogma. Ihre Bedeutung für Beten und Handeln der Kirche. FS für Jouko Martikainen*, eds. Jobst Reller and Martin Tamcke, Studien zur orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 12 (Münster, Hamburg, and London: LIT-Verlag, 2001), 9-20.

[2] See Karl Pinggéra, "Christologischer Konsens und kirchliche Identität. Beobachtungen zum Werk des Gregor Bar Hebraeus," *Ostkirchliche Studien* 49 (2000), 3-30, see also there p. 5, fn. 11.

Kottayam, one of Barhebraeus's own spiritual descendents engages this same line of ecumenically motivated inquiry into thirteenth-century Christology.

[2] Panicker's study, a dissertation accepted at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, situates Barhebraeus's life and work against the political and religious background of Muslim, Byzantine, Crusader, and Mongol conquests and interactions from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries on the one hand and ecclesiastical developments within the Syrian Orthodox church at the time on the other. In some places the reader may come to conclusions that differ from those Panicker reached regarding individual aspects of Barhebraeus's biography. A case for Barhebraeus's Jewish origins, for example, made on the basis of his father's name, Aaron, combined with the information provided in the Karshuni inscription over his gravesite in the monastery of Mar Mattai, where Gregory and his brother Barsauma are identified as "children of Hebrew? (Ebro ?)" (p. 29, fn. 55) may be judged as stronger than the case made for deriving Barhebraeus's name from the adjective *ʿebrāyā*, a word itself derived from the noun *ʿebrā* ("seashore," "crossing") (see p. 29). Likewise, Panicker's dismissal of Budge's suggestion that Barhebraeus's mother may have been of Arab extraction (pp. 29-30) appears to rest solely on a presumed equation of Arab with Muslim and neglects the equally likely alternative identification of Arab with Christian; that this is not Panicker's thought throughout his work becomes clear from p. 207. This reviewer nevertheless appreciates Panicker's generally ample documentation for and presentation of disagreeing positions, which allow one actively to engage the material and formulate one's own conclusions in the process. Panicker concludes his first chapter by providing a helpful and sufficiently detailed classification and brief description of Barhebraeus's written works. The categories of exegesis, liturgy, theology, philosophy, canon law, history, grammar, science (mathematics, astronomy, and medicine), and poetical and literary productions show Barhebraeus as a man of truly renaissance-style expertise.

[3] In chapter two, Panicker discusses Barhebraeus's general methodology which he uses throughout his work and thus also when presenting his Christological thought. The spectrum of Barhebraeus's sources is remarkable, ranging from Scripture, the Church Fathers, and synodal acts and canons, to historical works,

texts by pagan philosophers, and works of Islamic authors, primarily the eleventh-century al-Ghazali, to whom Barhebraeus is indebted in his later, more mystical works, and the twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Fakhr ad-Din ar-Razi, to whom Barhebraeus refers in his treatise *On the Incarnation*. Key to Barhebraeus's methodological approach to Christology, as Panicker highlights, is that although the author is "convinced that his own christological formula is the orthodox one" (p. 49), in his list of the thirty "very dangerous heresies" at the end of the treatise *On the Incarnation*, he does not include the "Chalcedonians and Nestorians." Rather, these two groups belong for Barhebraeus to those who "only dispute over the definition of the union (in Christ), because all of them agree in the doctrines of [the] Trinity and of the preservation of the natures out of which Christ was made, without change and mixture" (pp. 49-50; modified; see also p. 206). In his discussion of Barhebraeus's methodology, Panicker, moreover, emphasizes that Barhebraeus submitted himself to a principle of selection of prooftexts from patristic authors that was in accord with this conciliatory spirit. Thus, Barhebraeus did not "cite a Father as an authority to confirm his position against those who do not accept him as their Church Father" (p. 55). Cyril of Alexandria, for example, is only cited against Chalcedonians, but not against members of the Church of the East, as Panicker points out. Likewise, Barhebraeus also applied that same principle in situations of interreligious relevance. Views of Jews or Muslims that challenged the possibility of the incarnation are not countered by citations from church fathers, given that these authorities are not accepted by the respective dialogue partners. Panicker argues for Barhebraeus's originality on the basis of the thirteenth-century author's conscientious and astute handling of the patristic evidence. The ecumenical and interreligious dimensions of Barhebraeus's approach seem equally illustrative of his religious and political sensitivity and invite further investigation.

[4] In chapters three and four (pp. 65-170) Panicker paraphrases and summarizes the argument of the treatise *On the Incarnation*. The main concern of chapter three of Panicker's study is the question of the possibility of the incarnation. Presenting in its first half the positions of ancient christological heretics, including the lesser known Nepos the Egyptian (p. 75) and "Oudi of Edessa" (p. 78), the second half of chapter three rephrases Barhebraeus's response

to objections raised against the incarnation on the basis of rational arguments (pp. 85-95), as well as those raised by Jews (pp. 95-101) and by Muslims (pp. 101-120).

[5] Chapter four focuses on the question of the mode of unity of the natures in Christ. Its first part consists of an exposition of the range of terms (*ousia, ithutho, iyo, kyono, qnumo, parsupho, yuqne, tuphso, methbarnshonutho, methbasronutho, iḥidoyutho,* and *naqiphutho*) and their definitions that are crucial to how Barhebraeus formulated his Christology (pp. 121-131). This discussion as such is helpful and to be welcomed. Yet unfortunate misspellings (missing "t" in "sought" [p. 121]; "word" instead of "world" [p. 125, fn. 430]; "Shemeon" instead of "Senoun" [p. 129]) as well as imprecise or awkward expressions ("Ousia is a Greek word, which is used in Syriac either *ousia* or *ithutho* to correspond to it." [p. 122]), that were not removed from the study or corrected before publication, have the effect of distracting the reader's attention through a displayed lack of precision and attention to details, so necessary in foundational sections like this one.

[6] The second, main part of chapter four is divided into three sections in which Panicker lays out how Barhebraeus responded to objections raised by Dyophysites (not "Duophysites" [p. 131]) (pp. 131-153), Eutychians (pp. 153-158), and the followers of Julian of Halicarnassus (pp. 158-169). The length of the discussion devoted to those two last parties over and against which "Chalcedonians and Nestorians" can agree with Barhebraeus reveals that the author of the treatise *On the Incarnation* had an interest in finding and defining common ground between himself and those whom he did not identify as heretics, the "Chalcedonians and Nestorians," by characterising their shared opponents. This reviewer also notes especially the continued relevance and broad scope of the question of Theopaschism discussed between Chalcedonians and Syrian Orthodox Christians in the thirteenth century (pp. 149-152), given that already during the time of the immediate aftermath of Chalcedon in the context of Syria-Palestine this question appears to have played not the only but a decisively contributing role in the self-definition of anti-Chalcedonian identity.

[7] Both in chapter three and in chapter four Panicker helpfully embeds quotations of key passages in his discussion. While the range of church fathers, whom Panicker references in explanations in his footnotes, includes the classical Greek patristic authorities

like Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory Nazianzen, and others, not surprisingly the two most audible voices are those of Severus of Antioch and Philoxenus of Mabbugh, the first only slightly outweighing the latter. A short discussion of this selectivity could helpfully have been included in the study.

[8] Chapter five consists of a systematic presentation of Barhebraeus's Christology. This section also includes the presentation of Christological statements from Barhebraeus's biblical commentaries (pp. 113, and 185-191). In his conclusions, Panicker accepts, though with some hesitance, the designation "diplophysitism" (not "diplophysetism;" p. 203) as the appropriate description of the characteristic feature of Barhebraeus's Christology. This term, as Panicker acknowledges, was introduced into the discussion by Hage in 1991 (see Hage, "Ecumenical Aspects," 106). Panicker sees that for Barhebraeus "Jesus Christ is one double nature." That Barhebraeus's expression here differs from Severus of Antioch's ὑπόστασις σύνθετος,[3] is a point which Panicker does not develop. In his conclusions, Panicker also accepts "miaphysite" as a fitting term to characterize Barhebraeus's position (p. 207, fn. 739).

[9] In his general conclusions following chapter five (pp. 205-212), Panicker highlights especially the harmonious relations between Barhebraeus and the respective incumbents of the office of Catholicos of the Church of the East, as well as the respect in which Barhebraeus was held by Muslims. For Panicker, Barhebraeus lived out the ideal of ecumenism by holding on to the right belief of his own church and at the same time reaching out and communicating across the boundaries of denominations. Using the formula of the "one incarnate nature of God the Word," Barhebraeus admitted, as Panicker sees it, that this "formula was not enough to conserve the faith in its fulness" (p. 208). He held on to it, since he thought it was better than what others had to

[3] On this term, see Joseph Lebon, *Le monophysisme sévérien. Étude historique, littéraire et théologique sur la résistance monophysite au concile de Chalcédoine jusqu'à la constitution de l'Église jacobite* (Louvain: Excudebat Josephus van Linthout Universitatis Catholicae Typographus, 1909), 319-322; and Joseph Lebon, "La christologie du monophysisme syrien," in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart, vol. 1: Der Glaube von Chalkedon*, ed. by Aloys Grillmeier and Heinrich Bacht (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1951), 425-580, here 272-277.

offer. Nevertheless, he worked on the assumption that all three groups, Chalcedonians, Oriental Orthodox, and the Church of the East, professed the same truth of the faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, according to Panicker, Barhebraeus's example forcefully mandates to establish "an immediate dialogue in Christian charity, patience, and openmindedness" (p. 211; modified) also with the Church of the East on the basis of the shared common faith in Christ.

[10] It is praiseworthy that Panicker's work provides the English-speaking scholarly audience with convenient access to Barhebraeus's Christological thinking, at least in its earlier phase, before the thirteenth-century theologian became Maphrian of the East,[4] or at most during his first year in office (Panicker, *The Person of Jesus Christ*, 37). Yet one has to bemoan problems of accuracy in the use of language, even problems with basic grammar (e.g., subject-verb agreement [numerous times, e.g., p. 22]; hypercoristic grammatical forms ["slained" instead of "slain;" p. 37]; confusing punctuation; tenses; misuse of or omission of necessary prepositions; etc.) and expression (see example cited above, to which others, e.g., on p. 207, could be added), which are almost to be expected in a work composed in English by a non-native speaker of English, under the direction of non-native speakers of English in Italy, and published under the direction of non-native speakers of English in a publishing house in Germany. Unless copy-editing of such works is entrusted to the hands of language professionals or native speakers, improvement of the linguistic quality of such works, which immediately influences their effectiveness of communication among an English-speaking audience, is not achievable. While being aware of the increasing costs of producing books in the field of Christian Oriental studies, this reviewer suggests a) that this question should be taken seriously in order to improve the quality and presentation of research results in the field of Christian Oriental studies, and b) to foster closer international collaborations between native and non-native English-speaking scholars in the field, whatever their level of documented achievement may be, who may be willing and open to proofread a work before it goes to print. These comments are not

[4] On the dating of Barhebraeus's *On the Incarnation*, see H. Koffler, *Die Lehre des Barhebräus von der Auferstehung der Leiber*, OCA 81 (Rome, 1932), 33-40; and Pinggéra, "Christologischer Konsens," 6.

meant to suggest that the author of a given work does not also share the burden of responsibility for accuracy of his own work. In the present case, simple typographical errors (e.g., "Angles" instead of "Angels" [p. 36], or the homophonic confusion exemplified by "inhabitance" instead of "inhabitants" [p. 23, fn. 10]), can be caught by the eye of the attentive reader, native or non-native speaker. Also note that the abbreviation "CHABOT, 'Deux textes"' (e.g., pp. 110, 111, 117-119 and in the bibliography) is misleading and should read "NAU, 'Deux textes."'

[11] Moreover, it is necessary to comment on the scope of discussion of the subject matter presented in the book. The title of Panicker's study leads one to expect a comprehensive and exhaustive treatment of Barhebraeus's Christology. Yet although the author collects and summarily evaluates Christological statements also from Barhebraeus's biblical commentaries, the clear focus and perspective of the analysis of Barhebraeus's Christology is determined by material gathered from the thirteen-century theologian's early work, the *Candelabra of the Sanctuary*. This, moreover, entails that Barhebraeus's explicit conviction of the superiority of his doctrinal position, which shaped his thinking during those early years more so than later on, constitutes the basis for Panicker's presentation, despite all references to ecumenical efforts. These two structural and systematic limitations of Panicker's study prevent the book under review from being comprehensive and exhaustive in its treatment of the subject matter.

[12] Panicker refers merely in passing to the *Letter to Catholicos Denḥā* (pp. 45 and 206). He notes that this letter is "[a] christological and historical treatise" (p. 45). Yet his study never explores the Christological content of this work any further, thus lacking in comprehensiveness at least in this instance. Pinggéra's discussion of the *Letter to Catholicos Denḥā*, on the other hand, has suggested and convincingly demonstrated that there is a connection between a group's theological, even Christological, identity, and that same group's view of church history. While Barhebraeus's main Christological statements in the *Letter to Catholicos Denḥā* do not differ from those in the *Candelabra of the Sanctuary*, in its second half, the *Letter* consists of a presentation of the early history of the Christian church in Persia, from its beginnings into the sixth century. Very great emphasis is laid on Barsauma of Nisibis's

efforts, beginning with the Synod of 486, to introduce and sustain a dyophysite Christology of Antiochene flavor among the faithful in Persia. In this process, Barsauma's support of "Nestorianism," according to Barhebraeus's presentation in the *Letter*, went hand in hand with furthering the moral decline of the bishops by allowing them to marry. Barhebraeus emphasizes that before Barsauma entered the Persian realm, no one there had ever heard of the two-nature teachings. Situating his opponent's Christology in a concrete, and therefore also historically and geographically limited context, Barhebraeus manages to present his own theological positition not only as the earlier, and therefore as the orthodox one, but also as that of the *oikoumenē*. To what extent such a claim to global presence can still be open to "ecumenical" tolerance would have to be questioned. Moreover, Panicker clearly knows of and cites a passage from Barhebraeus's later work, which demonstrates the significant, even radical shift in the maphrian's attitude to Christological disputes and controversies. In his concluding pages, Panicker quotes a passage from the *Book of the Dove*, likely written after 1279, that has Barhebraeus confess that he had become

> "convinced that these quarrels of Christians among themselves are not a matter of facts but of words and denominations. For all of them confess our Lord to be wholly God and wholly man without mixture, without confusion or mutation of natures. This bilateral likeness is called by some nature, by others person, and by others hypostasis. So I saw all Christian people, notwithstanding these differences, possessing one unvarying equality. And I wholly eradicated the root of hatred from the depth of my heart and I absolutely forsook disputation with anyone concerning confession" (p. 208; modified).

[13] Yet in his subsequent comments, Panicker draws no consequences from such a dismissal of the relevance of "disputation with anyone concerning confession." Instead, he reverts to a characterization of Barhebraeus as confessing Cyrillian dogma (p. 208), in line with Severus of Antioch, representative of "the faith of the early undivided Church" (p. 209), for whom "[t]he Nestorian interpretation of union by will and love alone is not acceptable" (p. 209), and who "rejects the Duophysetic [*sic*] formulas" (p. 209). When Panicker explains that Barhebraeus knew

that "Chalcedonians and Nestorians" did not "intend to affirm" what their formulas express and therefore saw no need to "call them heretics" (p. 209), he limits Barhebraeus's overall position to that held in his *On the Incarnation*. Panicker fails to see here Barhebraeus's change of mind prompted by a deepening of mystical insights into his religion through contacts with both Syrian mystical writers and Muslim philosophers like al-Ghazali and expressed in the *Book of the Dove*, a position, which indeed makes him a model of ecumenical dialogue "not yet fulfilled" (p. 210). The deeper reason for this oversight or neglect, which in the end affects Panicker's ability to see true ecumenical potential and power in the theologian he is studying, is the limitation of not giving sufficient space and consideration to the intrinsic connectedness between theological formulations and their conditioning by historical developments, including developments and radical changes in an individual's perception of his faith over time. Future studies of Barhebraeus's Christology will benefit from being able to expand further on the handy building-blocks which Panicker's systematic theological study of Barhebraeus's earlier Christology contributes to the foundation.