Scott F. Johnson, ed., *Languages and Cultures of Eastern Christianity: Greek,* The Worlds of Eastern Christianity, 300–1500, vol. 6 (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2015). Pp. 600; $250.

YULIYA MINETS, CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

A few years ago Ashgate Variorum launched an ambitious new project, "The Worlds of Eastern Christianity, 300–1500," edited by Robert Hoyland and Arietta Papaconstantinou. Its subseries "Languages and Cultures of Eastern Christianity" has recently had a new addition, a volume devoted to Greek, edited by Scott F. Johnson. The volume contains an introduction and nineteen previously published articles that have been fundamental in shaping the scholarly understanding of the topic.

The articles reprinted in the volume are organized chronologically. The early period is covered by publications by William Adler, Fergus Millar, and David Taylor; the post-Chalcedonian situation is discussed in the works of Jean-Luc Fournet, Arietta Papaconstantinou, Bernard Flusin, Glanville Downey, and John Duffy. A lot of attention is paid to the centuries after the Arab conquest, with contributions by John Haldon, Robert Pierpont Blake, Cyril Mango, Guglielmo Cavallo, Marie-France Auzépy, Sidney Griffith, David Wasserstein, Bernard Flusin, Johannes Pahlitzsch, Joseph Nasrallah, and Averil Cameron.

In the following, I will focus on the extensive Introduction by Scott Johnson, entitled "The Social Presence of Greek in Eastern Christianity, 200–1200 CE" (pp. 1–122). It is a well-balanced analysis of the *status quaestionis* and the focal point of the publication that connects the diverse articles reprinted in the volume. Its purpose is to describe the dynamic role of the Greek language in "the cultures and institutions of 'eastern Christianity,' that is, groups of Christians whose primary language was not Greek, but who interacted with Greek to one degree or another" (p. 1). The intrinsically Greek-speaking areas such as Constantinople and Asia Minor are beyond the scope of the current work. The focus is instead on the Greek presence in the predominantly Coptic- and Syriac-speaking regions in the centuries before and after the Sasanian and Arab conquests. There is also ample discussion of Greek interaction with Georgian, Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Armenian, Arabic, and Latin.

The main conceptual difficulty lies in the fact that Greek was "more than simply one language among equals in the medieval Mediterranean." As Johnson demonstrates in the second section of the Introduction, the formula "Greek as a fundamental 'given' of eastern Christianity" (p. 7) is probably the best way to refer to the crucial role of Greek in "the history of Christianity *ab initio* and *in toto*" (p. 2) and to emphasize the great moments of Greco-Semitic cultural interference beginning with Alexander the Great, through the Septuagint translation up to the Middle Ages.

In section three, "Greek, Syriac, and the Language of Roman Power," Johnson reviews a series of Fergus Millar's publications.[1] Millar posits a lack of Syriac presence in the public and intellectual spheres and a dominant role of Greek in the regions West of the Euphrates from the early third century, when Edessa acquired the status of *colonia* in the Roman empire, up to the sixth century. Johnson demonstrates that these conclusions result from a sometimes tendentious use of the sources and an underestimation of the Syriac literary production in the Edessa region in the second and third centuries. On the more general level, Johnson questions Millar's explanatory framework of the linguistic processes in the late ancient Near East, within which Hellenization of the region is presented as the direct consequence of its Romanization. Instead, Johnson argues that "language was less a political necessity and more a functional tool for intellectual interaction and the self-definition of community" (p. 17) and suggests that the role of Greek in the eastern Roman empire would have been better articulated "if the Hellenism of Syriac (and other eastern Christian) literature is allowed to speak in its own cultural voice and context" (p. 13).

---

[1] Fergus Millar, *Religion, Language, and Community in the Roman Near East: Constantine to Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Fergus Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II, 408–450* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Fergus Millar, "Ethnic identity in the Roman Near East, AD 325–450: Language, Religion and Culture," in *Identities in the Eastern Mediterranean in Antiquity: Proceedings of a Conference Held at the Humanitites Research Centre in Canberra 10–12 November, 1997,* introd. G. W. Clarke (Sydney: Dept. of Archaeology, University of Sydney, 1998), 159–176; Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC – AD 337* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

In section four, "The Early Period: Edessa, Third to Fourth Centuries," Johnson discusses the Greek-Syriac interaction reflected in the intellectual movements, educational centers, and literary works of this early period. Johnson questions Brock's terminology of "antagonism" and "assimilation"[2] and proposes to treat the "idiomatic" position of Aphrahat, Ephrem, and Jacob of Serugh as a rather short aberration within the context of generally Hellenophile sentiments of Aramaic Christianity before 300 and after 500 CE.

The fifth section of the Introduction, "The First Golden Age: Syria and Palestine, Fifth to Sixth Centuries," focuses on the time of the theological controversies when the language choice got closer to being the marker of confessional identity than ever before. Still, as Johnson warns, theological allegiances across languages should not be underestimated. While Eusebius of Emesa, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Nestorius, authors who played a formative role in the Christological controversies, chose to write in Greek, from the 470s onwards dyophysite authors like Narsai wrote exclusively in Syriac. Over the same fifth and sixth century, miaphysite authors wrote in both Greek and Syriac, and Greek compositions were often translated into Syriac soon after they were written.

Section six, "Greek, Syriac, and Coptic: The Case of Egypt, Fourth to Tenth Centuries," covers issues related to translation activities and intellectual connections between Manicheans and various kinds of Christians—the speakers of Greek, Coptic, Syriac, and Latin—who interacted in the monastic centers and settlements in Egypt. Johnson untangles the complicated linguistic evidence focusing on the papyri sources, the manuscript history, and colophons. He concludes that, far from being a dominant language, "Greek was a language of cultural currency which could be invoked when a translation from Syriac to Coptic was somewhat tenuous or needed further specification" (p. 40). By the late seventh century, Greek almost disappeared from the Coptic world.

[2] Sebastian P. Brock, "From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning," in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, edited by Nina Garsoïan, Thomas Mathews, and Robert Thompson (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 17–34 .

Section seven, "The Second Golden Age: Palestine, Sinai, and Syria, Seventh to Twelfth Centuries," explores the social value and functionality of Greek in the region under the increasing Arabicization, and traces the migration of texts through languages and locations. The separation along linguistic and theological lines between Chalcedonians (Greek) and non-Chalcedonians (other languages) went further, but Greek played a unifying role among different Christian communities in the East well into the ninth century and beyond. It was also the language that connected Eastern Greek intellectuals with Constantinople and the West. The last part of this section is devoted to Greek influence on Georgian literature.

In the conclusion Johnson once more turns to the debate with Fergus Millar on the relation between language and identity. He agrees with Millar's thesis that in the earlier period (the second to the fourth century) languages such as Greek, Syriac, or Coptic did not play the role of a primary marker of ethnic or religious identity among the Christian communities in the Near East. Yet he argues that the later use and functions of the Greek language in the region do not confirm Millar's assertion concerning an abrupt shift in the sixth century toward sectarian language use and identity formation. Johnson refers to the continuing appreciation of Greek among East Syriac Christians and the use of Syriac by the Melkites. He insists that the literary history of the sixth century demonstrates "that new, hybrid combinations of languages and authorial careers were producing innovations in literature well beyond anything easily captured under the term 'identity'" (p. 91). Cross-pollination between Greek and other languages of the East was crucial to the formation of the literary histories in all these languages, including Greek.

There are a couple of minor criticisms. First, it would perhaps be worth highlighting that in contrast to the Jewish and Islamic traditions, Christianity did not insist on the importance of the original language of the divine message, be it Aramaic, Greek, or Hebrew. This point would help to contextualize the case of Christianity within the history and sociology of the other religions of the Near East. Second, the difference between popular and elite use of Greek in a particular time is not always clearly articulated. Johnson refers to the evidence of low-register bilingualism, such as papyri and epigraphy for the earlier period, but at some point (post-seventh century) the focus is rather on the elitist culture. Cer-

tainly, the literary productivity of bilingual authors writing in Greek under Arab rule and ongoing translations to and from Greek in the monastic centers witness to the continuous use of Greek by the educated elite in the Near East, but the extent to which these activities affected the majority of the population remains unspecified. It may, however, well be that it is impossible to reconstruct the picture on the ground based on the available sources.

Johnson successfully summarizes the previous scholarship and carefully presents his own argument. One could specially mention his attention to manuscripts and literary histories, to intellectual and monastic centers and schools, and to the history of literary genres. So far, English scholarship has been lacking such a publication that combines a large-scale chronological perspective, a systematic approach to the primary sources, and a well-balanced conceptual framework. This book is an important contribution that demonstrates the diversity of the Christianities of the Near East and their interconnectedness.