

Mario Kozah, Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn, Saif Shaheen Al-Murikhi, and Haya Al Thani, eds., *The Syriac Writers of Qatar in the Seventh Century*, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 38 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2014). Pp. ix + 288; \$25 (paperback).

Mario Kozah, Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn, Saif Shaheen Al-Murikhi, and Haya Al Thani, eds., *An Anthology of Syriac Writers from Qatar in the Seventh Century*, Gorgias Eastern Christians Studies 39 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2015). Pp. xvi + 718; \$25 (paperback).

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Within the field of Syriac studies, the literary and monastic communities from the region known in Syriac as Beth Qaṭraye have received little attention. Spanning present-day Qatar, Bahrain and the Eastern coast of Arabia, Beth Qaṭraye was home to Christians from approximately the mid-fourth to the ninth century. This was an area of linguistic diversity, and in addition to evidence for Christians speaking Arabic and Persian, literary witnesses attest to the existence of a “language of Beth Qaṭraye.” However, Syriac was the literary and liturgical language for the region’s Christian inhabitants. Attending to the literary and historical legacy of Syriac writers from Beth Qaṭraye, this two-volume collection of essays and textual editions is the fruit of an international conference, “The Syriac Writers of Qatar in the Seventh Century CE,” which was held at Qatar University in 2014.

Although the essays of the first volume cover a wide variety of topics, the editors have selected and organized these complementary works into a coherent and elegant collection. Mario Kozah’s “Introduction” orients the reader to the study of Beth Qaṭraye, providing brief overviews of seminal authors such as ʾIshōʾyahb III, Isaac of Nineveh (or Isaac Qaṭraya), Dadishoʾ Qaṭraya, Gabriel Qaṭraya bar Lipah the liturgical commentator, Abraham Qaṭraya bar Lipah, Aḥūb Qaṭraya as well as anonymous writers. Concentrated in the seventh century, these authors represent a formative moment in the exegetical, theological, and philosophical development of the Church of the East, and the remaining essays in the volume explore the flowering of this moment of intellectual vigor. Haya Al Thani’s survey of the archaeological evidence of Beth Qaṭraye chronicles the material evidence for the presence of

Christians within the area, paying special attention to the remains of monastic structures. Traces of churches and monasteries once occupied by adherents of the East-Syriac Church are found in United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. Evidence from places such as Qasr Al Malehat on the east coast of Qatar suggests the existence of complex trade networks linking the region to places far afield. Within the limited space of a single essay, Suleiman A. Mourad covers an impressive amount of material, chronicling the growth and development of Christianity in Arabia from the fourth to ninth century. Although he raises the thorny issues of historical accuracy in Christian as well as Islamic sources, Mourad provides the basic contours of how Christianity arrived and fared in the regions of the Hijaz, Najran, Eastern Arabia, and Beth Qatraye. Combining archaeological evidence with textual evidence, he demonstrates that the degree and texture of Christian presence varied throughout the region, and the interaction of Christians of varying Christological viewpoints is suggested as one possible avenue for future research.

After these introductory essays, the scope narrows to deeply philological and philosophical examinations. Abdul Rahman Chamseddine ruminates on the Arabic term *ḥanif* ("inclination"), a root that appears twelve times in the Qur'an, in light of Syriac antecedents such as *ḥanpa* ("pagan"). The theme of linguistic penetration and multilingualism is a thread that runs throughout several of the essays, and one that would bear further development.

Among the authors hailing from Beth Qatraye, Isaac of Nineveh receives significant attention. Grigory Kessel's "The Manuscript Heritage of Isaac of Nineveh: A Survey of Syriac Manuscripts" is a rich and elegant study of the manuscript witnesses, and Kessel limns the textual transmission of the multiple parts of Isaac's work. Illuminating the editorial decisions of Paul Bedjan, Kessel shows the complexity of reconstructing a manuscript history due to the subsequent loss of witnesses Bedjan used. Kessel highlights the potential for monastic miscellanies to shed light on the various parts of Isaac's corpus. His reconstruction takes into account the added complexity of the ecclesiastical affiliation of the manuscripts along with their origin, showing how East Syriac, Syriac Orthodox, and Melkite scribes variously preserved and framed the three parts of Isaac's oeuvre, linking manuscripts to specific monasteries whenever possible. Drawing our attention to

the language of remembrance and mindfulness of God (*ʿubdānā d-alābhā*) as a means of spiritual transformation, Mary Hansbury's evocative essay places Isaac in conversation with other Christian writers such as Philoxenos and Evagrius and charts pathways of dialogue with Jewish and Islamic texts. Through the concatenation of passages from Isaac's *Third Part* (recently edited and published by Sabino Chialà and translated by Hansbury in the companion volume), she begins to draw out the inner logic of Isaac's use of this term while contextualizing his frequent usage within a larger conversation about *theosis* and spiritual ascent. The full extent of Isaac's literary production is the subject of Sabino Chialà's essay on the ongoing work to discern whether remnants of texts attributed to Isaac in Syriac and Arabic manuscripts (and heretofore omitted from his corpus) represent additional parts of his writings or are spurious attributions. Restricting his attention to two discourses whose critical editions he recently published, Chialà tests the probability of the manuscript ascription of these works to the "fifth part of Mar Isaac, bishop of Nineveh." After laying out attestations of a "fifth part" of Isaac's works, most importantly in the *Catalogue of Ecclesiastical Writers* by 'Abdisho' Bar Berika, Chialà argues that the theological contents of the text itself hold the key to untangling the mystery. The *Catalogue* further attests that the theological nature of the text roused opposition from Daniel Bar Tubanita. Citing the texts under question, Chialà argues that they do indeed belong to Isaac since they bear witness to the Syriac author's familiarity with the concept of *apokatastasis* that would have inspired the type of heated rebuttal attributed to Daniel. This case is strengthened by the claim of the Muslim author Shahrastani that Isaac held such a view.

Shifting to other East Syriac authors of the region, Bas ter Haar Romeny clarifies the identity of the biblical exegete Ahob of Qatar, as well as the knotty issues of the textual transmission of his works. Piecing together testimony from authors such as 'Abdisho' as well as references and quotations in commentaries by Isho'dad of Merv, an *Anonymous Commentary*, and the *Commentary* of ms. (olim) Diyarbakir 22. Building on Lucas Van Rompay's study of these last two commentaries, Romeny teases out from these textual fragments a profile of Ahob as a skilled and distinctive biblical interpreter. In Romeny's hands, Ahob emerges as a vital link in the East Syriac tradition of incorporating the work of Theodore of

Mopsuestia into the fabric of the Church's intellectual life. Sebastian Brock brings to the fore Gabriel Qaṭraya's commentary on the Liturgical Offices, a critical witness to East Syriac liturgy before the reforms of Catholicos Isho'yahb III (649–659). Remarkably aware of far-flung liturgical practices among the "Rhomaye" and in Antioch, Gabriel may have travelled widely. Building on his previous research, Brock demonstrates the breadth of literary sources within Gabriel's work, including Narsai, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Evagrius, as well as classical authors like Aristotle and Pythagoras.¹ Gabriel, fully conversant with these texts, provides a window into the intellectual world of the Church of the East including Beth Qaṭraye. This scholarly community, fully animated through translations also shared with the Syriac Orthodox communities in the Late Roman Empire, participated in sustained reflection and dialogue with these antecedent authors.

The question of how writers from Beth Qaṭraye were received in later periods is the subject of Thomas A. Carlson's essay "The Future of the Past: The Reception of Syriac Qaṭraye Authors in Late Medieval Iraq." The fifteenth-century poet Ishāq Shbadnaya, from northern Iraq, provides a valuable test case, given the abundance of quotations from earlier authors that appear in his poems. Carlson's reflections on his own methodology and the challenges of studying medieval transmission history frame his editions and translations of Shbadnaya's excerpts. His research demonstrates the enduring legacy these authors enjoyed within the East Syriac tradition.

In addition to his introduction, Mario Kozah persuasively argues that a Garshuni manuscript attributed to Philoxenos of Mabbug is actually a translation of Dadisho' Qaṭraya's Syriac commentary on 'Enanisho's *Paradise of the Fathers*. Like earlier essays in the volume, Kozah draws attention to the complexities of textual transmission. Through obscuring authorial identity, West Syriac scribes preserved East Syriac texts in both Syriac and later

¹ Sebastian Brock, "Patristic Quotations in Gabriel Qaṭraya's *Commentary on the Liturgical Offices*," in A. Binggeli, A. Boudhors, and M. Cassin, eds., *Manuscripta Graeca et Orientalia: Mélanges monastiques et patristiques en l'honneur de Paul Géhin*, OLA 243 (Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2016), 129–50.

Garshuni translations. Taking up the fragments of Dadisho' Qaṭraya's *Book of Perfection of Disciplines*, David Phillips finds a wealth of references to Theodore of Mopsuestia as well as to other authors like Evagrius, yielding a clearer picture of the author's intellectual climate. Mining these authors may ultimately result in the expansion of Theodore's extant corpus through their citation and preservation of the Interpreter.

The volume ends with two essays that look outward towards linkages between Beth Qaṭraye and the larger late antique and early medieval world. From the vantage point of translation, Robert A. Kitchen approaches the authors Dadisho' Qaṭraya, Isaac of Nineveh, and John Saba or John of Dalyatha through the *Book of Monks*, a translation and amalgamation of their writings into Ge'ez for Ethiopian Orthodox novices. Of particular interest for Kitchen is Dadisho' Qaṭraya's *Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers*, which became a part of the *Book of the Three Monks* after the Ethiopian renaissance of the late 13th century. However, the translator ameliorated the issue of Dadisho's confessional adherence through attributing the texts to "Filekseyus" or Philoxenos, bolstering textual authority through association with solid orthodox miaphysite and anti-Chalcedonian thought. Traveling to the new region as Christian Arabic translations of Syriac, these texts do not obscure the identity of other authors from Beth Qaṭraye such as Isaac of Nineveh or John of Dalyatha. Kitchen also shows how the presence of material from Evagrius and Theodore of Mopsuestia frustrates attempts of modern scholars to impose confessional clarity onto the textual production and transmission of the period. In addition to offering an astute assessment of the text's context and suggesting resonances with Philoxenos' genuine corpus as well as the *Book of Steps*, Kitchen notes the distinctive form of the text is the widely recognized question-and-answer genre, *erotapokriseis*. The final essay from Saif Shaheen Al-Murikhi provides a historical overview of the regional shift from Persian control to the emergent Islamic rule, paying particular attention to the institutional and social factors that allowed Christianity to weather these developments. First making inroads into the Gulf region in the fourth century, Christianity in the region existed in a religiously pluralistic atmosphere, and Arab tribes in the area used Syriac, especially in religious settings. Unfortunately, as Al-Murikhi notes, historians face a paucity of resources and there are no Arabic

Christian writings that speak specifically to the region's religious environment.

In conjunction with the volume of essays, the second volume features translations and editions of texts from the authors of Beth Qaṭraye. Prepared by the scholars whose essays appear in the first volume, these pieces range from translated parts of larger texts to critical editions. Short introductions to each text reveal the rationale for their inclusion and significance within the tradition. This volume grants access to previously obscure texts such as the introductory piece of Ahob of Qatar (Aḥūb Qaṭraya)'s *Book of the Aims of the Psalms*. Mario Kozah, Suleiman Mourad, and Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn edit and make accessible for readers the *Fourth Part* of Isaac Qaṭraya's *Ascetic Homilies* in Garshuni as well as Dadisho' Qaṭraya's *Commentary on the Paradise of the Fathers*.

One of the most important features of the second volume is the variety of genres represented. The *History* of Mar Yawnan, translated by Sebastian Brock, contains the eponymous hagiography of the founder of a monastery within the area of Piroz-Shabur/Anbar along the Euphrates. As Brock notes, the text provides a valuable lens on East Syriac monasticism in the region when placed in conversation with recent archaeological research. Those interested in legal traditions will value Mario Kozah's translation of an anonymously authored preface to a Syriac translation of Mar Shem'on (of Rew-Ardashir)'s *Law Book*. The *Law Book*, originally written in Persian, deals with family and hereditary law, and the Syriac translation served as an important precedent for later canonical traditions within the Church of the East. This piece, along with Kozah's introduction, underscores the potential of this material for scholars of multilingualism and translation technique. This capacious collection of texts will hopefully serve as a catalyst for further translations and manuscript editing.

These volumes serve as essential introductory material about this vibrant and under-studied region within the realm of Syriac Christianity. In addition to providing ample bibliography and explanatory footnotes, all the contributors offer insights into future paths of research and point out lacunae in our present knowledge. One desideratum would be a deeper engagement with the theological views of the various authors presented. Such work may also avoid consequential terms such as "Nestorian," a label that too often glosses nuanced theological debate. While several essays

point to resonances across religious traditions, more research must be done to fully substantiate such connections. The reader is also left with lingering questions about the coexistence of multiple spoken languages with Syriac as a literary and liturgical language, and the linguistic profile of the “language of Beth Qaṭraye” deserves more attention. The anthology of texts and translations will be instrumental in achieving these research goals.

Several themes arise organically among the essays, such as the Evagrian influence, the enigmatic multilingualism of the region, and the webs of textual exchange and translation between Christians of different Christological commitments. In his introduction, Mario Kozah argues that Beth Qaṭraye offers scholars the opportunity to nuance previous perceptions of “center and periphery” of learning within the region, drawing greater attention to the role of the Arabian peninsula in the production of knowledge. The efforts of the authors and editors of these volumes have made a major step forward in accomplishing that goal.