

BOOK REVIEWS

Martin Tamcke, ed. *Orientalische Christen zwischen Repression und Migration. Beiträge zur jüngeren Geschichte und Gegenwartslage*. Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 13. Münster, Hamburg, and London: LIT-Verlag, 2001. Pp. 210. ISBN 3-8258-5472-8. Paperback. Euros 17.90.

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- [1] Upon the initiative of Dr. Helga Anschütz and since their sixth meeting held in Hamburg in 1999, the annual assembly of the German-speaking Working Group Middle East (*Deutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft Vorderer Orient* = DAVO) includes a panel on issues that are of relevance for the study of the Christian Orient in contemporary times. The volume under review presents a selection of papers delivered at the sixth annual meeting, as well as papers presented at the seventh annual meeting, held in Mainz in 2000.
- [2] One of the stated interests of the annual panel is to highlight the study of the modern-day situation of Oriental Christians in the “diaspora” in the West. This emphasis is pursued more or less explicitly in about half of the twelve papers printed in the book. Subsequent meetings of the same group have seen a continued interest in this initiative.
- [3] The spectrum of Eastern Christian cultures, countries, and languages represented in these articles ranges from examples taken from Georgia, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, to examples taken from Israel/Palestine and Egypt. Many of the papers included in the volume constitute reports on work in progress. In some instances the contributions summarize studies that have been presented in fuller form in other places. In general, the book is written to be accessible to a broader audience.
- [4] Two contributions to the volume focus on Christianity in the Caucasus. The first paper in the collection considers Protestant influences on Christianity in that area. In connection with work done for a dissertation on German-speaking, Protestant missionaries from Basel (Switzerland) and Hermannsburg (Germany) to colonies of German-speaking settlers in Georgia in the nineteenth century, Andreas Groß (“Mission und Endzeiterwartung in Katharinenfeld,” pp. 9-16) discusses

theological developments affecting life in the village of Katharinenfeld during that time period. His main interest focuses on the impact, that the expectation of an imminent beginning of the end-times had on baptismal practices among the colonists as well as on separatist initiatives, including a planned migration to Jerusalem led by Anna Barabara Spohn and reigned in by military control and lack of divine support. By far the longest article in the book is a contribution by Martin Tamcke (“Arnim T. Wegners ‘Die Austreibung des armenischen Volkes in die Wüste’—Einführung zum unveröffentlichten Vortragstyposkript vom 19. März 1919 in der Urania zu Berlin,” pp. 65-135). As an expert on Arnim Wegner’s role as eye-witness to the Armenian Genocide at the end of World War I, Tamcke provides the *editio princeps* of Wegner’s type-written manuscript for a lecture he delivered on March 19, 1919, at the Urania in Berlin, a lecture that turned its audience of Germans, Armenians, and Turks violent towards one another by way of a graphic depiction of atrocities committed against Armenians on their deportation from their homes in Armenia / Eastern Turkey. The edition, or rather the *de facto* exact reproduction of the manuscript, is intended to allow the reader some direct insight into Wegner’s way of working on a text (so Tamcke, p. 73, fn. 9). It seems that a photo reproduction of the manuscript could have served the same purpose. Comments in English added to the manuscript at a later point in time reveal Wegner’s intentions of eventually publishing an English translation of the text. Tamcke’s introduction to the material supplies helpful immediate historical context to the tensions Wegner experienced as well as created with his decision to speak up on the Armenians’ fate, for which Germans were partially responsible in Wegner’s view.

- [5] Four papers treat questions pertaining more immediately to Syriac-speaking Christians. Shabo Talay (“Die Christen in der syrischen Ġazīre [Nordostsyrien],” pp. 17-30) describes the development and settlement process of Syrian and Armenian Christians in the province of Ḥasake in north-eastern Syria with its center in Qamishly. Independent of the more recent military and political developments in the neighboring country of Iraq, which have made life more difficult for Christians in this region of the Middle East, Talay’s report, written prior to the American invasion of Iraq, highlights three points. The increasing agricultural and

economic difficulties caused by the lack of rain in the region, the decline in business relationships with Turkey and Iraq because of a deterioration of political stability, as well as the population growth among Kurds and Muslims in the region emerge as the three main factors that prompt those Christians from the region who can afford it to emigrate to the West. Addressing related issues in the same region, Wolfgang Schwaigert, a Protestant pastor from Württemberg, (*“Die Partnerschaft zwischen dem evangelischen Kirchenbezirk Blaubeuren und der syrisch-orthodoxen Metropole Djazira wa’l-Furat/Hassake in Nordostsyrien,”* pp. 31-37), shares news about an innovative and thus far unheard of ecumenical partnership established between the Protestant ecclesiastical district of Blaubeuren in southern Germany and the Syrian-Orthodox metropolitan district of Djazira wa’l Furat in Hassake, north-eastern Syria. The collaboration was initiated through personal encounters and initially focused on the establishment of an ecumenical, interreligious, and educational center in Tell Wardiat. The partnership continues on, furthering mutual contacts through visits, through studying the theological traditions and languages of the respective partners, through supporting financially those in the diaspora who wish to return to Syria, as well as through encouraging projects in the humanitarian realm. The explicit aim of this ecumenical partnership is to strengthen and enable Christians to remain settled in this region in Syria.

- [6] Helga Anschutz is the author of two further papers on aspects of the contemporary situation of Syriac-speaking Christians. The first shorter paper (*“Die Überlebenschancen der syrischen Christen im Tur Abdin/Südosttürkei und im Irak,”* pp. 39-42) addresses factors that evaluate the long-term prospects of a Christian presence in the regions of the Tur Abdin, south-eastern Turkey, as well as in Iraq. While Anschutz, also writing before the US invasion of Iraq, still had positive expectations for the Christian presence there, her analysis of the situation in the Tur Abdin is less promising. Restrictions regarding the exercise of Syriac language instruction for children, the discrimination of young men from the Syriac-speaking Christian community in military service, and repeated acts of forced expropriations of real estate property of Christians, as well as the gentrification of the Syrian-Christian population in the homeland and a desire on the part of Christians in the Tur Abdin to join family members who have reached a status

of financial security in the West are key reasons that continue to contribute to the depopulation of the Christian landscape in south-eastern Turkey and to draw people to move westward. This tendency only intensifies a behavior that already characterizes the life of those who have gone into the diaspora. They suffer from a sense of loss of their roots and identity and they compensate for this by placing all their hopes in the acquisition of material goods.

- [7] In her second contribution (“Die Auswirkungen von Aktivitäten westlicher Missionare, Wissenschaftler und Hilfsorganisationen auf die ostsyrischen Christen im Orient und in ihren neuen Heimatländern,” pp. 137-143), Anschütz reconsiders the impact of the work of Catholic and Protestant missionaries, western scholars, and Christian as well as humanitarian relief organizations on the fate of the East Syrian Christian community both in the Middle East and in the diaspora. The activities of none of the three types of groups is seen as a blessing for the community.

- [8] Werner Arnold (“Volksglaube bei den Aramäern in Maʿlūla,” pp. 145-165) reports on progress made in connection with research towards a collaborative, ethno-geographic monograph on the West Aramaic-speaking village of Maʿlūla. Based on interviews Arnold conducted with the villagers, he presents a summary of their beliefs in saints and demons and characterizes their convictions regarding vows, the evil eye, magic, and the protection against evil. Arnold’s decision to include numerous excerpts in German translation from responses he received in his interviews leaves the reader with the impression of a close, almost personal encounter with many of his interviewees. Michael Marten (“Representation and misrepresentation in 19th century Lebanon—Scottish and American Protestant missionaries in conflict,” pp. 167-183) contributes the only article not written in German. Based on archival research in Scotland and the US, his paper examines the founding of the Lebanese mission of the Presbyterian Free Church of Scotland (FCS) in the 1870s. The heart of his article is a presentation of differences of perception and self-representation that are found in the reports of British and American observers of the 1869/1870 visit of Alexander Duff (convener of the Foreign Missions Committee of the FCS) and John Lumsden (representative of the interdenominational Lebanon Schools Committee) to Protestant schools in Beirut and throughout Lebanon. Alexander Duff, for

whom “the key element in mission work was the school” (p. 174), did not perceive any reasons for possible conflict with already established missionary and educational activities of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in Syria. The Americans, however, represented in Marten’s discussion through the views of D. S. Dodge and H. H. Jessup, felt that the Scottish visit was an intrusion into territory that was already established both as an area of American missionary influence and as a region in which a reformed/Protestant Syrian church presence had taken root. Although Duff and Lumsden had misrepresented American views in their reports to their own constituencies, in the end, the American side agreed to and generously collaborated with the *de facto* establishment of the presence of the FCS in Lebanon. From the American perspective, the goal of attracting Muslims to the Christian faith was better served by Protestant Christians acting in unison with one another than by furthering an image of quarrelling and divisiveness among Christians, an impression too familiar to Muslims, who according to Marten’s assessment of American voices (p. 183) had witnessed for centuries the struggles, schisms, and splits of Latin and Greek Christians.

- [9] Two papers are dedicated to the study of Christians and the Christian church in Israel/Palestine. Drawing from his demonstrated expertise on the history of the Christian Church in the Holy Land, Friedrich Heyer (“Die Arabisierung der Kirchen im Heiligen Land,” pp. 43-52) presents a helpful overview of the process of acceptance of Arabic as the language used in liturgical celebrations as well as of communication in everyday affairs by Christians in the Holy Land. Building upon the work of Sidney H. Griffith for the early period of the process of Arabicization of the Christian communities starting in the 8th and 9th centuries, Heyer carries his discussion through to the end of the 20th century. It is of interest to note that while from the early 18th century the upper echelons of the ecclesiastical hierarchy actively promoted the use of Arabic in the liturgy by having printing-presses mass produce liturgical texts in Arabic, most parishes resisted that move, despised the Arabic texts, and preferred to copy by hand the liturgical texts in Syriac for use in their liturgical services (p. 45). This resistance to Arabic linguistic influence on the inner life of the church is in contrast to popular aspirations towards securing access for Arabic-speaking native Christians of the Holy Land to positions of

influence and power within the church hierarchy as well as within the economic and political sphere of public life in Palestinian society. For the modern period, Heyer helpfully highlights the initiatory role of the Maronite Butrus al-Bustani in the rise of Arab Nationalism, the ascendancy and role of the Latin patriarch Michel Sabbah, of the Orthodox publisher Hanna Siniora, the Orthodox professor and politician Hanan Ashrawi, as well as of the representatives of Protestant churches united in the Middle East Christian Council of Churches.

- [10] Paul Löffler (“Zur Lage palästinensischer Christen heute,” pp. 53-63) analyzes the modern-day situation of Palestinian Christians in their home country. To the factors more frequently recorded in the scholarly literature, Löffler adds what he calls the “factor of attraction,” which is noticeable in the aspirations of young Palestinian Christians. Having received a quality education at Christian schools, which emphasized Western values and perspectives on life, these young people are among the top group of potential and successful emigrants to the West. In a second section, Löffler highlights the relationship between Palestinian Christians and the problem of the Palestinian secular authorities: he sees as positive the relations of Palestinian Christians to them, and briefly emphasizes the influence of “Palestinian liberation theology” and “contextual theology” as instruments that move Christians in Palestine to reformulate their reservations towards Israel as well as their rejection of Israeli oppression against Palestinians. Löffler dedicates the final part of his presentation to a discussion of aspects of the inner structure of the Christian Palestinian community. While he notes that in more recent times the number of mixed marriages between Christians of different denominational backgrounds has increased, he also observes that the pressures of secularization manifest themselves in the hardening of denominational boundaries, a phenomenon that can be observed more widely in the Christian Orient in recent years. In the “Holy Land” of Palestine, however, this factor takes on a special character because of the proportionally larger presence of non-native, western Christian denominations, which heighten the fear of estrangement from their traditions among indigenous Christians. A fuller discussion of ecumenical efforts on the local level could have balanced the picture drawn in this article.

- [11] The volume concludes with two papers that treat Coptic Christianity in Egypt and abroad. Michaela Köger (“Die Mittwochabendveranstaltungen von Papst Shenouda III in Kairo,” pp. 185-199) analyzes the role of Pope Shenouda III as chief pastor and theologian in a global church. In particular, Köger focuses here investigation on aspects of Shenouda’s pastoral-theological concern and strategy displayed and pursued in his weekly, two-part meetings with Coptic laypeople in Cairo. In the first half of these meetings the Pope answers questions raised by the audience on biblical and theological issues as well as on issues pertaining to the practical aspects of the life of the Christian in the modern world. The second half is dedicated to a 45-minute-long sermon on theological issues, spirituality, or on the aspects of the practical side of the religious life. The systematic use of the internet as well as of electronic data recording to spread collections of the “questions and answers” have helped Pope Shenouda develop and maintain a personal and direct rapport in his role as key pastor of the Coptic Church. In the year 2000 and under the editorial leadership of Archbishop Mar Gregorius Johanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, the Syrian-Orthodox Church published a two-volume reedition of a ten-volume collection of Shenouda’s answers to questions posed to him throughout the years. Wolfram Reiss (“Die Koptisch-Orthodoxe Kirche an der Wende zum 21. Jahrhundert: Von einer Nationalkirche zu einer internationalen christlichen Konfession,” pp. 201-210), whose dissertation studied the Sunday-School movement in the Coptic Church, presents data that updates Otto Meinardus’s discussion (“The Coptic Church towards the End of the 20th Century: From a National to an International Christian Community,” *EkTh* 12 [1993], 431-472) of the impact of the emigration of Copts into the Western diaspora on the structures of the Coptic church. Reiss’s scant narrative frames tabular listings of data on the global spread of the Coptic Church and lists ways in which contacts are being established and strengthened between the mother Church in Egypt and the parishes and dioceses in the diaspora. Reiss clearly sees emigration as a factor that positively contributed to the strengthening of the Coptic Church worldwide. In his conclusion, he remarks, “the Coptic-Orthodox Church has not yet faced the questions posed by the scientific criticism of religion, by the Enlightenment, and by modern, scientific theology,” but instead still displays “a rather fundamentalist

approach to the Bible, and adamantly adheres to a belief in Marian apparitions even in modern times, to an excessive cult of [venerating] relics, to patriarchal and hierarchical structures, as well as to a firm fixation of [traditionally defined] gender roles” (p. 210). This conclusion appears not only to describe the author’s perception of the church, but also seems to reflect a Eurocentric and uncontextualized perspective.

- [12] Given that several of the contributions are working-papers, some of the results and conclusions can only be preliminary. That preliminary quality is also reflected in occasional typos in the book (e.g., p. 67, l. 18: drop the second “aus”), inconsistencies in translating Arabic book titles into German in otherwise well-structured bibliographies (p. 198), or inconsistencies in the transliteration of foreign names within a single article (e.g., “Schenute” vs. “Shenoude,” pp. 204 and 210). The level of bibliographical documentation likewise varies from article to article. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to see that interest in contemporary aspects of research pertaining to the Christian Orient is being cultivated among both senior and junior scholars in Europe, here primarily from among Protestant traditions. Also it is worth replicating an approach that attempts to integrate more fully and more prominently studies of the Christian Orient into the wider context of Middle and Near Eastern Studies. Establishing and promoting regular panels for the study of contemporary issues affecting Syrian Christians in the Americas within the framework of the North American Syriac Symposium and for the study of the Christian Orient at the annual meetings of the Middle East Studies Association of North America may very well be worthwhile initiatives.