

Nikolai N. Seleznyov (ed. and trans.), Книга собеседований Илии, митрополита Нисивина, с везиром Абӯ-л-Қāсимом ал-Ҳусайном ибн ‘Алӣ ал-Мағрибӣ и Послание митрополита Илии везиру Абӯ-л-Қāсиму / Kitāb al-Mağālis li-Mār Iliyyā muṭrān Nuṣaybīn wa-Risālatuhu ilā l-wazīr al-kāmil Abī l-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī al-Mağribī / Liber sessionum sive disputatio inter Eliam metropolitan Nisibenum et vezirum Abū ʿl-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī al-Mağribī et Epistola eiusdem Eliae Nisibeni ad vezirum Abū ʿl-Qāsim missa (Moscow: Grifon, 2017/8). Pp. 210 + ۲۶۸. ISBN 978-5-98862-366-3 + 978-5-98862-367-0 (two volumes); 978-5-98862-371-7 (one-volume edition).

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The East Syrian theologian Elias of Nisibis (975–1046) has been rightly acclaimed as one of the most influential Syriac and Christian Arabic writers. The book under review presents a first complete critical edition and Russian translation of two of Elias’ Arabic treatises: *Book of Sessions* (*Kitāb al-Mağālis*) and *Epistle to the Vizier Abū l-Qāsim al-Mağribī*.

Previous editions of the *Sessions* include Louis Cheikho’s uncritical and abridged edition,¹ Samir Khalil Samir’s editions of Elias’ Introduction and the First, Sixth, and (partially) Sev-

¹ Louis Cheikho, “*Mağālis* Īliyya muṭrān Nuṣaybīn,” *al-Mašriq* 20 (1922), 33–44, 112–122, 267–272, 366–377, 425–434 (reprint: Louis Cheikho, *Trois traités anciens de polémique et de théologie chrétiennes*, Beirut, 1923, pp. 26–73). Cheikho presents a collated text with no critical apparatus, based on four manuscripts: Beirut, Bibliothèque Orientale 564 (year 1826, a copy of a copy of Vat. ar. 645, written in 1234) – **B** in Seleznyov’s edition; Beirut, Bibliothèque Orientale 676 (year 1715) – **B** in Seleznyov’s edition; an unspecified Beirut manuscript, which Cheikho dated to the thirteenth century (cf. Louis Cheikho, “*al-Maḥṭūṭāt al-‘arabiyya fī ḥizānat kullīyyatinā al-šarqiyya*,” *al-Mašriq* 6 (1909), 374–378, at p. 376, No. 99); and Aleppo, Maronite Archdiocese 258 (year 1631).

enth Sessions,² and Martino Diez's recent edition of the Fifth Session.³ The Sixth Session, in particular, has a paramount importance for Syriac Studies in that there Elias offers a detailed comparison between Syriac and Arabic with reference to grammar, lexicography, and script and makes a case for the superiority of Syriac over Arabic.⁴ The *Epistle* was never published before.

² Introduction and First Session: Samir Khalil Samir, "Entretien d'Élie de Nisibe avec le vizir Ibn 'Alī al-Mağribī sur l'Unité et la Trinité," *Islamochristiana* 5 (1979), 31–117 (reprint: Samir Khalil Samir, *Foi et culture en Irak au XI^e siècle*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1996, Essay VII).

Sixth Session: Samir Khalil Samir, "Deux cultures qui s'affrontent: une controverse sur l'i'rāb au XI^e siècle entre Élie de Nisibe et le vizir Abū l-Qāsim," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 49 (1975–1976), 619–649 (reprint: Samir, *Foi et culture*, Essay XI); Samir Khalil Samir, "Langue arabe, logique et théologie chez Élie de Nisibe," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 52 (1991–1992), 229–367. I was unable to consult Samir Khalil Samir, *Ilīyā al-Naṣībī: Kitāb al-Mağālīs, al-Mağlīs al-sādis fī al-naḥw wa-l-luġa wa-l-ḥaṭṭ wa-l-kalām*, Cairo: n.p., 1975, 53 pages). Samir Khalil Samir, "Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien," *Islamochristiana* 3 (1977), 257–286 (reprint: Samir, *Foi et culture*, Essay I), p. [10]/264 describes it as an "édition polycopiée," i.e., a handwritten or typewritten text reproduced by a duplication machine; no copy of it seems available in major university libraries.

Seventh Session: Samir Khalil Samir, "La réfutation de l'astrologie par Élie de Nisibe," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 43 (1977), 408–441 (reprint: Samir, *Foi et culture*, Essay X); revised edition: Samir Khalil Samir, "Īlīyā al-Nuṣaybīnī (975–1046 m) wa-l-wazīr Abū l-Qāsim al-Mağribī. II. I'tiqād al-naṣārā fī aḥkām al-nuġūm," *al-Maṣriq* 77 (2003), 83–105.

³ Martino Diez, "The Profession of Monotheism by Elias of Nisibis: An Edition and Translation of the Fifth Session of the *Kitāb al-majālīs*," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 28.4 (2017), 493–514.

⁴ David Bertaina, "Science, Syntax, and Superiority in Eleventh-Century Christian-Muslim Discussion: Elias of Nisibis on the Arabic and Syriac Languages," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22.2 (2011), 197–207. On Elias of Nisibis' contribution to Syriac lexicography, see Adam McCollum, "Prolegomena to a New Edition of Eliya of Nisibis's *Kitāb al-turjūmān fī ta'lim luġat al-suryān*," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 58.2 (2013), 297–322.

For his edition of the *Sessions*, Seleznyov consulted thirteen manuscripts, five of which were collated systematically (**V** = Vat. ar. 143, adopted as the *manuscript de base*;⁵ **Ũ** = Vat. ar. 155; **Ÿ** = Vat. ar. 180; **P** = Paris, BnF ar. 206; **K** = Berlin, Staatsbibliothek syr. 115 [Sachau 67] in Garšūnī), and three others partially (**H** = Oxford, Bodleian, Huntington 240 [Uri 38]; **A** = Aleppo, Salem ar. 274 [Sbath 1080]; **S** = Berlin, Staatsbibliothek syr. 114 [Sachau 205]).⁶ Five additional manuscripts of the *Sessions*—including two of the Beirut manuscripts employed by Cheikho—were judged to be unreliable and disregarded. The *Epistle* is edited on the basis of the only accessible manuscript: Aleppo, Salem ar. 318 [Sbath 1131].⁷

Seleznyov's publication breaks new ground in two respects. First, it offers, for the first time, a reliable integral text of the *Sessions*. This is particularly significant for those parts of the *Sessions* that had been hitherto available only in Cheikho's edition: i.e., the Second, Third, and Fourth Sessions. Crucially, Seleznyov's edition (pp. ٥٢:9–٦٣:7) includes an important passage from the Second Session in which Elias discusses the notion of *ḥulūl*, "inhabitation," of the Divine Word in Jesus. (The Christology of the Church of the East, espoused by Elias of Nisibis, is peculiar in that it construes the Divine Word and Jesus as two distinct subjects—divine / uncreated and human / created, respectively—and hence is predisposed to speaking about the Incarnation in terms of "inhabitation" of the former in the latter.) This passage had

⁵ Online: https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.ar.143.

⁶ The critical apparatus includes only the most significant variant readings (minor variants, e.g., *wa-* vs. *fa-*, are disregarded).

⁷ As Seleznyov indicates (p. 29, n. 3), the only other manuscript of the *Epistle*—Sbath 1130 (year 1231)—is now kept in a private collection in London. See Peter J. Starr, "The *Epistle to Bišr b. Finḥās* (*Maqālah ʿamilahā ilā Bišr b. Finḥās*) of Ibn Zurʿah (m. A.H. 398 / A.D. 1008): Edition, Translation, and Commentary," PhD diss., University of Cambridge, Emmanuel College, 2000, p. 74.

been omitted in Cheikho's edition for doctrinal reasons,⁸ and had therefore remained unpublished.⁹

Second, Seleznyov's publication presents an *editio princeps* of the *Epistle*. This allows him to reconstruct the relationship between the two works. Seleznyov argues (pp. 12–13) that the *Epistle* was written first, in response to Abū l-Qāsim's letter.¹⁰ After Abū l-Qāsim's death in 1027, Elias compiled the *Sessions*, which is a reworking of the *Epistle* with several omissions and additions. The division into seven "sessions" is, according to Seleznyov, a literary ploy. Though it loosely reflects the chronology of Elias' meetings with Abū l-Qāsim, it is doubtful that all the subjects treated in the *Sessions* were discussed in these meetings. It is more likely that Elias used this occasion to engage more deeply in various subjects of Christian-Muslim polemic.

⁸ Cheikho explains this omission in the introduction to his edition: "We shall print these *Sessions* in our journal with the exception of the Second Session, of which we shall publish only a short fragment, because [this Session] contains Nestorian heresy [*al-bid'a al-nastūriyya*] concerning the Incarnation of the Lord Christ, and [if we were to publish it in full], it [would] necessitate a long rebuttal" (Cheikho, "*Maḡālīs*," p. 34; cf. p. 117, n. 1).

⁹ Nikolai N. Seleznyov, "«И вселисѧ въ ныѧ»: Боговселение (*al-ḥulūl*) в мусульманско-христианском диалоге—Илия Нисивинский и Абū-л-Қāсим ал-Мағрибī" ["And Dwelled in Us': Divine Inhabitation (*al-ḥulūl*) in Muslim-Christian Disputation—Elias of Nisibis and Abū l-Qāsim al-Maḡribī"], *Христiанскiй Востокъ / Christian Orient* 8 (14) (2017), 297–312. On the peculiarities of the Christology of the Church of the East in an Arab Christian milieu, see also Alexander Treiger, "The Christology of the *Letter from the People of Cyprus*," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 65.1–2 (2013), 21–48.

¹⁰ This letter as well as Abū l-Qāsim's response to Elias' *Epistle* are also included in Seleznyov's publication (pp. ۱۶۰–۱۶۳ and ۲۰۹–۲۰۰ respectively).

Minor shortcomings of the publication include occasional misprints,¹¹ an overly literal translation,¹² and omission of folio numbers of the *manuscrit de base* (though the beginning of every manuscript page is helpfully indicated). While it is commendable that the Arabic text is reproduced the way it appears in the manuscripts, some punctuation would have been useful for most readers. Occasionally, it is noticeable that the text diverges slightly from the *manuscrit de base* with no explanation.¹³

Despite these minor deficiencies, Seleznyov's edition of the *Book of Sessions* and the *Epistle to the Vizier Abū l-Qāsim al-Mağribī*—the first to provide a complete and reliable access to these two works—is certainly a landmark contribution to Syriac and Christian Arabic Studies. It is to be hoped that it will stimulate further research into the thought of Elias of Nisibis, one of the most influential medieval Syriac and Christian Arabic theologians and a central figure in the history of Christian-Muslim polemic.

¹¹ For example, *wa-ḏālika* on p. ٧٤:4 should be corrected to *wa-li-ḏālika* (the reading of Vat. ar. 143, fol. 19r); *aw laysa* on p. ٣١:10 should be corrected to *a-wa-laysa* (spelled as one word); *kāna l-amr ḥadā* on p. ٥٧:5 should be corrected to *kāna l-amr 'alā ḥadā* (the reading of Vat. ar. 143, fol. 42r).

¹² For example, the term *qawl*, literally “statement” but frequently employed in the sense of “teaching” or “doctrine” (cf. the title of al-Aṣ'arī's heresiographical work *Maqālāt al-islāmīyyin*, *Doctrines of the Muslims*), is translated throughout as “statement” [высказывание] or “affirmation” [утверждение], though “doctrine” [учение] would have been more idiomatic and, arguably, more precise.

¹³ For example, Vat. ar. 143, fol. 19r:4 reads: *wa-li-ḏālika ḥaṣāla l-ḏāt ḡayr 'araḏ wa-ḡayr qābil li-l-a'rāḏ*; Seleznyov's edition, p. ٧٤:4–5 has: *wa-ḏālika ḥaṣalat l-ḏāt {bi-muḡarradiḥa—supplied from manuscripts PṾṾ} ḡayr 'araḏ ḡayr qābila li-l-a'rāḏ*.