

These minor complaints, however, do not detract from the book's value. Kaplony's study is an excellent example of meticulous philological handling of texts that are difficult, not only to read but also to understand and interpret.

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Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World. By MICHAEL PHILIP PENN. Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion. Philadelphia: UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRESS, 2015. Pp. v + 294. \$59.95, £39.

Michael Penn's *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World* is a welcome contribution to the rapidly growing body of research on the Christian communities in the Muslim-ruled Middle East. It offers an insightful survey and analysis of the earliest (seventh- through ninth-century) Christian writings about Islam in Syriac, many of which are now conveniently available in Penn's own translations in the companion volume *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Oakland, CA: Univ. of California Press, 2015).

These sources, ranging from scribal colophons and marginalia to theological treatises, apocalypses, hagiographies, martyrologies, and historical works, allow Penn to challenge the widespread assumption—prevalent in modern popular discourse—of a perpetual and inevitable “clash of civilizations” between Christendom and Islam. Penn is careful to emphasize, however, that by denouncing the “clash of civilizations” model, he does not intend to endorse the opposite and equally flawed view that Islamic rule ushered in “a golden age of religious tolerance.” Rather, his aim is to offer “a more accurate depiction of how the first Christians experienced Islamic rule” (p. 13). Penn argues that “Christianity and Islam's relationship to each other” was “characterized by a multiplicity of complex, heavily negotiated interactions occurring in a rapidly changing and highly permeable environment” (p. 13); that “Christianity and Islam no longer seem to have been locked in an inevitable conflict”; and—most significantly—that they have “exhibited too much permeability, interdependence, and convergence to be defined as firmly bound, independent entities, to say nothing of clashing civilizations” (p. 186).

Penn's study includes an introduction, four chapters—dealing with “memories of the Islamic conquests,” “narratives of religious identity,” “narratives of Islamic rulers,” and “the continuum between early Christianity and early Islam” respectively—and a conclusion. Extensive endnotes (pp. 187–250), a comprehensive bibliography, and a helpful index add value to the volume.

Chapter one discusses how Syriac memories of the Islamic conquests changed over time, from the matter-of-fact eyewitness account of Byzantine losses and casualties, drafted as early as 637 (a fragmentarily preserved scribal note in the manuscript British Library Add. 14,461), to the *Chronicle* of Dionysius of Tel-Mahrē, written ca. 842. Of all the sources examined, Dionysius's account is the only positive assessment of the Islamic conquests: uniquely, this author presents the conquests as a liberation from oppressive Byzantine rule. Penn points out that, unfortunately, many modern writers have read Dionysius's account “uncritically as an objective description of the conquests and their reception” and, as a result, have maintained that “Syriac Christians conspired with Muslims against the Byzantines and welcomed the Arabs with open arms” (p. 49). As Penn shows, this view is groundless and misleading, because it overlooks the evidence of the Syriac sources earlier than Dionysius, all of which regarded the Byzantine defeat to the Muslims as a catastrophe, a divine chastisement that befell the Christians on account of their sins. Dionysius's idiosyncratic assessment of the Islamic conquests tells us more about his own worldview and circumstances of writing than about seventh-century realities.

Chapter two surveys how Syriac conceptualizations of Islam and the Syriac terms used to describe Muslims evolved over time. It offers a helpful account of the history of such designations of Muslims as *ṭayyāyē* (an ethnonym derived from the Arab tribe of Ṭayyi'; originally a generic term for “nomadic Arabs,” which gradually came to mean “Muslims”), *ḥanpē* (pagans), *bnay Ishmā'el* or *Ishmā'elāyē*

(sons of Ishmael or Ishmaelites), *mhaggrāyē* (Hagarenes), and, very rarely, *mashlmānē* (Muslims). He also describes how Syriac authors gradually came to categorize Islam as a “religion” (*dehltā*) and a “confession” (*tawdtā*), different, yet never completely separate, from Christianity.

Chapter three begins with an entertaining story about a “temporarily resurrected dog,” familiar from Penn’s earlier publication (“A Temporarily Resurrected Dog and Other Wonders: Thomas of Margā and Early Christian/Muslim Encounters,” *Medieval Encounters* 16.2 [2010]: 209–42). The chapter surveys Syriac authors’ descriptions of Muslim rulers, from Muḥammad to the caliphs and emirs of their own times. Penn points out that “Syriac discussions of Muḥammad were often more balanced, informed, and multifaceted than those found in most non-Syriac sources,” because—according to him—they “were written by and for . . . Christians who had frequent interactions with Muslims” (p. 114). He stresses, however, that these discussions were always literary constructions that were not meant to characterize Muḥammad or the Muslim rulers objectively, but served to promote their authors’ agenda.

Chapter four focuses on what might be called Christian-Muslim hybridity—the historically significant yet hitherto largely neglected phenomenon of “blurring boundaries” between the two communities, reflected in a wide variety of Syriac sources. Penn’s insightful discussion of shared sacred spaces, Muslims participating in Christian festivals, Christians appealing to Muslim courts, and intermarriages (with the ensuing questions of ritual purity, admissibility to the Eucharist, baptism of offspring, and inheritance law) showcases “an ongoing debate between those who wanted to shore up confessional distinctions and those less concerned with a clear divide between Christian church and Muslim *umma*” (p. 143). The sections on “Christian-like Muslims” and “Muslim-like Christians” (pp. 155–61 and 161–67 respectively) are particularly important. They discuss individuals’ and social groups’ ambiguous identities and behaviors that defied and blurred the boundaries between the two communities. We hear, for instance, of Muslims seeking healing from Christian holy men, attending Christian churches, donating money to Christian monasteries, and even proclaiming Christianity as the only true religion, while remaining nominally Muslim; and of Christians practicing circumcision like the *hanpē* (pagans, i.e., in this context, Muslims), attending Muslim festivals, referring to Muḥammad as God’s messenger, and confessing Christ to be a mere human being, “like one of the prophets,” while remaining nominally Christian. As Penn rightly stresses, “religious elites did not have a monopoly on defining one’s identity,” while “lived religious experience was often much messier than what surviving texts advocated” (p. 167).

Christian-Muslim hybridity—arguably, the most innovative and significant aspect of Penn’s research—deserves special attention. Because Penn focuses exclusively on Syriac sources, he does not consider Arabic (Christian and Muslim) documents that provide further evidence for it. It is therefore important to review briefly some of these. On the Christian side, mention should be made of the still unpublished text of great significance, *al-Jāmiʿ wujūh al-īmān* (Compilation of the Aspects of the Faith, conventionally called *Summa Theologiae Arabica* and datable—I would argue—to 833). This text reprimands renegade Christians caught between Christianity and Islam, calling them “hypocrites” (*munāfiqūn*) and “waverers” (*mudhabdhabūn*) (see S. H. Griffith, “The View of Islam from the Monasteries of Palestine in the Early ʿAbbāsīd Period: Theodore Abū Qurrah and the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7.1 [1996]: 9–28, at 18–19).

On the Muslim side, mention should be made of numerous anecdotes about Christian monks (*ruhbān*) that feature prominently in Islamic ascetic and Sufi literature; in many of them Christian monks impart wisdom and expertise to Muslim ascetics (see S. A. Mourad, “Christian Monks in Islamic Literature: A Preliminary Report on Some Arabic *Apophthegmata patrum*,” *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 6.2 [2004]: 81–98; Yūḥannā Šādir’s collection *Ruhbān ʿarab fī baʿd siyar al-mutaṣawwifīn al-muslimīn* [Beirut: Dār Šādir, 2005]). The story of, say, an Ibrāhīm ibn Adham (an eighth-century Muslim ascetic), who managed to sell the twenty chickpeas given him by the solitary monk Abā Simʿān to a nearby Christian monastery for twenty golden dinars and thus learned the true value of the monk’s divinely revealed knowledge (*maʿrifa*), clearly belongs to the same hybrid world discussed by Penn, a world in which one could find both Muslim-like Christians and Christian-like Muslims.

Returning to Syriac, one can now refer also to David Taylor’s important article “The Syriac Baptism of St John: A Christian Ritual of Protection for Muslim Children” (in *The Late Antique World of Early*

Islam: Muslims among Christians and Jews in the East Mediterranean, ed. R. G. Hoyland [Princeton: Darwin Press, 2015], 437–59), which provides evidence for Christian-Muslim hybridity in upper Mesopotamia in the twelfth century (thus beyond the chronological boundaries of Penn’s study), testifying to the phenomenon of Christian-Muslim hybridity not being limited to the early period of Muslim rule.

Unfortunate mistakes in Penn’s book include typos and misspellings: “Cyril of Alexander” instead of “Cyril of Alexandria” (p. 6 and index, p. 282); “greater important” instead of “greater importance” (p. 18); “previous hidden” instead of “previously hidden” (p. 142); “Emessa” instead of “Emesa” (p. 19, though spelled correctly the second time); “Kashar” instead of “Kashkar” (pp. 83, 286); “Prophyrogenitus” instead of “Porphyrogenitus” or, better, “Porphyrogenetos” (p. 113); “Sydney Griffith” instead of “Sidney Griffith” (pp. 5, 284, and—attributable to the publisher—after Griffith’s blurb on the dust cover and on the Press’s webpage, advertising the book). The plural of the Syriac *dehlā*, translated by Penn as “religion,” should be *dehlātā*, not **dehlātē* (pp. 53–54). The late seventh-century East-Syriac catholicos’s name is Ḥnānīshōʿ, not *Ḥnanishā (pp. 69, 162, 213, 242, and 284). The Arabic term for “divine attributes” is *ṣifāt Allāh*, not **ṣifrat Allah* (pp. 82, 100, 217, and 290). The term “early Christianity” is rather confusingly used in the sense of “Middle Eastern Christianity of the early period of Muslim rule” (pp. 4, 9, 10, 54, 106, and throughout chap. four, including its title).

It is also problematic that while rightly stressing the crucial importance of Syriac for the study of Christian-Muslim relations, Penn occasionally implies that, unlike Syriac, Greek was extraneous to the Muslim-ruled Middle East. For example, on p. 2 he writes: “[W]hen Muslims first encountered Christians they did not meet Greek-speaking Christians from Constantinople, nor did they meet Latin-speaking Christians from the western Mediterranean. Rather, they first encountered Christians from northern Mesopotamia who spoke the Aramaic dialect of Syriac.” This tacit assumption that Greek-speakers hailed from Constantinople is, of course, misleading: at the time of the Islamic conquests, Greek was widely spoken in urban and monastic centers of Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, and even Egypt, and therefore Muslims encountered both Greek- and Syriac- (as well as Coptic-) speaking Christians simultaneously. (On Egypt, see, e.g., L. S. B. MacCoull, “The Paschal Letter of Alexander II, Patriarch of Alexandria: A Greek Defense of Coptic Theology under Arab Rule,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 [1990]: 27–40.) Indeed, as Cyril Mango has observed, “the most active centre of Greek culture in the 8th century lay in Palestine, notably in Jerusalem and the neighbouring monasteries,” rather than Byzantium (C. Mango, “Greek Culture in Palestine after the Arab Conquest,” in *Scrittura, libri e testi nelle aree provinciali di Bisanzio*, ed. G. Cavallo, G. de Gregorio, and M. Maniaci [Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo, 1991], 149–60, at 149–50); and elsewhere Penn himself duly acknowledges “Coptic, Greek, and Syriac” as “local languages” of the Middle East (p. 28).

Relatedly, from the fact that Syriac discussions of Islam differed substantially from those found in many Greek and Latin sources, Penn draws the conclusion that “[m]embers of the Syriac churches had a very different experience of Islam than did most Greek and Latin Christians” (p. 3). Are we to accept this line of reasoning? It could perhaps be accepted, provided we considered only Greek and Latin Christians living outside Muslim-controlled territory. But what about Greek-speaking authors and works written in the Muslim-ruled Middle East? It would seem rather odd for, say, the Syriac-writing theologian Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) to have had “a very different experience of Islam” than his Greek-writing younger contemporary John of Damascus (d. ca. 750, or perhaps later); nor is it obvious why Thomas of Margā, the author of the Syriac *Book of Governors* (ca. 850), would have lived in, and described, a completely different reality than Leontius of Damascus, the author of the Greek *Life of St. Stephen of Mār Sābā* (ca. 810).

In fact, the *Life of St. Stephen of Mār Sābā* offers several examples of Christian-Muslim interactions not unlike those showcased by Penn. According to Leontius, one Muslim, though exceedingly zealous for Islam, did not consider it a problem to accompany a Christian fellow-traveler to the monastery of Mār Sābā; after witnessing a healing miracle, he converted to Christianity at the saint’s hands. Another story concerns a dying Christian woman who asked her nephew, a monk at Mār Sābā, to invite “distinguished and honest” Muslim witnesses, so that she could formally testify before them that she had no property in Jerusalem and that her former Christian slave girl had been legally manumitted. She wished to do this to prevent the Muslim authorities from seizing her Christian friends’ property or

selling the girl to slavery. As Leontius stresses, St. Stephen himself “showed mercy and compassion not only to Christians, but also to Muslims,” whom “he would feed with abundant foods of diverse kinds” (Leontius Damascenus, “De S. Stephano Sabaita thaumaturgo monacho,” in *Acta Sanctorum*, vol. VII/3 [Antwerp: Jacobus du Moulin, 1723], 572–73, 586–87, 613 [§§99–102, 133–34, 186]; J. C. Lamoreaux, *The Life of Stephen of Mar Sabas*, 2 vols. [Louvain: Peeters, 1999], 88–90, 110–11, 146 [Arabic]; 81–83, 100–101, 131 [English] [§§52.3–52.11, 64.1–64.4, 81.5]; I have cited Lamoreaux’s translations).

It would seem that the perceived difference between Syriac and Greek sources has to do not so much with Syriac-speakers’ and Greek-speakers’ “different experience of Islam” as with the relative paucity and vicissitudes of preservation of Greek texts written in the Muslim-ruled Middle East, particularly those that shed light on day-to-day life of ordinary Christians (and Muslims). If we had more Greek sources like the *Life of St. Stephen of Mār Sābā* (and if Greek, among Christians of the Middle East, had not been supplanted so relatively quickly by Arabic), the artificial dichotomy between Syriac and Greek would surely crumble.

Despite the minor shortcomings outlined above, Michael Penn deserves the highest praise for publishing an incisive and enlightening commentary on Syriac writings about Muslims and Islam in their historical development and for calling attention to such an important and virtually unstudied phenomenon as Christian-Muslim hybridity, which will surely preoccupy future researchers. The book is unquestionably a landmark contribution to the study of Syriac Christianity and Christian-Muslim relations, and a must-read for all those interested in the social history of the Middle East in this period, specialists and non-specialists alike.

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A Grammar of the Christian Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Diyana-Zariwaw. By LIDIA NAPIORKOWSKA. *Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics*, vol. 81. Leiden: BRILL, 2015. Pp. xiv + 600. \$234, €181.

This book demonstrates that Neo-Aramaic dialectology is a mature field of investigation, covering a wide range of dialectal variation, that is firmly rooted in and makes an original contribution to Semitic and general linguistics. It is part of the Brill series “Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics,” which hosts a number of important contributions to the field, such as the four-volume *The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of the Assyrian Christians of Urmi* by Geoffrey Khan (vol. 86, 2016), *Comparative Lexical Studies in Neo-Mandaic* by Hezy Mutzafi (vol. 73, 2014), *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Amədyā* by Jared Greenblatt (vol. 61, 2010), *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Challa* by Steven E. Fassberg (vol. 54, 2009), *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Sulemaniyya and Halabja* by Geoffrey Khan (vol. 44, 2004), and *The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Qaraqosh* by Geoffrey Khan (vol. 36, 2002).

The descriptive format is that of the Cambridge school of Neo-Aramaic studies led by Geoffrey Khan. In comparison with other works from the same research team, however, the language description is interspersed with much more precise and instructive references to classics of general and typological linguistics, especially of the 1970s to 1980s, such as Bybee, Comrie, Givón, Ladefoged, and Lyons. Based on the author’s Ph.D dissertation, the book under review contains a detailed description of the dialect on the three main levels of linguistic analysis (phonology, morphology, and syntax), a rich corpus in phonological transcription and English translation, and an Aramaic-English and English-Aramaic glossary, in which verbs are listed separately from other parts of speech. An impressive bibliography and two indexes complete the volume. A geographical map would have probably proved more useful to the reader than the index of geographical names.

The grammar describes the dialect(s) of Christian Assyrians of the town Diyana (or Diana), located to the north of the better-known Rawandiz and today belonging to the Erbil Governorate of Iraqi Kurdistan. Distinct dialectal features of speakers whose ancestors migrated to Diyana from the more