

Muhanna states, drove a shift in approaches to knowledge from attention to the pedigree of the source to accuracy and contemporaneity of information (p. 90).

Chapter five treats al-Nuwayrī's work as a copyist, appropriately stressing that copying was conceived as different from mere replication. For example, editing and "mark-up," even if limited, were done in order to make manuscripts "more reader-friendly" (pp. 110, 112). In line with the recent trend of research into working methods of premodern scholars, this chapter addresses that of al-Nuwayrī, although—as Muhanna states—many important questions (e.g., the effect of archival practices on his working method, or the way he managed his papers and notes) remain open and are "left to other scholars to ponder" (p. 122).

Chapter six centers on the reception of *Nihāyat al-arab* in the Islamic world and Europe up to the modern period, with special attention given to the Dutch reception as a case study. This chapter underscores the variety of scholarly approaches, grounded in different motivations, to this gigantic work: philological, linguistic, historical, scientific, anthropological, and so forth. In the twentieth century, engagement with al-Nuwayrī's oeuvre culminated in the edition of *Nihāyat al-arab* (Cairo 1923–1997), which, followed by a second edition (Beirut 2004), has made this monumental work accessible to a larger audience.

The two appendices are a welcome addition. Appendix A, to be read in connection with chapter two, is a most useful list of contents of *Nihāyat al-arab*, instrumental for mapping its internal organization; appendix B offers a key to navigating *Nihāyat al-arab*'s contents in both of the printed editions.

The World in a Book is a timely contribution to the ongoing debate on Islamic encyclopedic works and, in general, on issues related to the organization of knowledge. It also offers a vivid picture of the cultural dynamics during the Mamluk period, including links between the scholarly and political life. Stressing the relevance of "imperial" bureaucracy, it emphasizes the "not accidental" connection between knowledge and statecraft so typical of that period, especially as it relates to "the importance attached to gathering data in the service of the state" (p. 104). It is instructive reading for Arabists, Mamlukists, and sociologists of culture in general, as well as a thought-provoking reflection on the meanings of the concept of encyclopedism in the Mamluk period (and beyond) and on the diverse factors driving it.

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Between Christ and Caliph: Law, Marriage, and Christian Community in Early Islam. By LEV E. WEITZ. *Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion.* Philadelphia: UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRESS, 2018. Pp. viii + 340. \$65.

Around 680, a West Syrian Miaphysite priest refused to give communion to a woman; since she had married a Muslim she was no longer fit to receive the Eucharist and to be considered part of the Church. The woman's Muslim husband came to see the priest and threatened to kill him if he did not give his wife communion. What to do? The question was put to monk and bishop Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) whose response was cautious. In theory, by marrying an infidel this woman had broken Church law and placed herself outside the community of the faithful; excommunication was the appropriate response, and hence the priest was right to refuse her communion. Yet, Jacob wrote, such harsh treatment would only push her to apostatize, to convert to Islam. Better to find an intermediate solution, to ask her to perform penance and to permit her to receive communion and to remain a member of the Church (see pp. 201–2). While the threat of murder made this incident unusual, it is otherwise a common example of the constantly porous and shifting nature of confessional boundaries in what the historiography tends to call the "Muslim" world.

Lev Weitz examines a rich mine of documentation, principally in Syriac and Arabic, concerning the Western Syrian Miaphysite Church (often known as "Jacobite") and the Eastern Syrian Church

(Nestorian) from late antiquity until the thirteenth century. He shows how authorities from these two churches navigate the shifting legal and confessional landscape of the region, delimiting their religious communities and affirming their jurisdiction over them. Other religious communities of the caliphate (Jews, Copts, Melkites) are more briefly evoked for useful comparisons. The Christian authors of the legal texts and letters Weitz analyzes were not the simple perpetuators of ecclesiastical tradition or the passive beneficiaries of a preconceived *dhimma* system. They were actors and builders of the system, a complex network of confessional communities and overlapping jurisdictions. Muslim law and theology did not spring like Athena fully grown, clothed and armed from the head of Zeus, as the last several decades of research have amply shown. What Weitz brings to this picture is detailed documentation of the constant interplay of pre-Christian legal traditions (Roman and Sasanid), canon law and Christian theology, and emerging Muslim law over this period.

Much of what Weitz finds defies our facile confessional and cultural categories. A vivid early example before the arrival of Islam is provided by the hundred or so Aramaic incantation bowls found in late antique southern Iraq (pp. 36–39). One Christian had a bowl inscribed with an incantation in Hebrew (presumably written by a Jew), meant to drive off a female demon haunting the Christian's house; it calls on the aid of an exorcist rabbi and invokes an Iranian ruler of demons. The borders between religious communities were porous indeed, despite efforts of some religious elites to enforce them. The arrival of Islam would complicate things further.

In Iraq the Muslim conquests brought an end to the Sasanid empire—and the collapse of its legal system. The Muslim legal apparatus would emerge gradually during the postconquest period. Some East Syrian bishops seized this opportunity to assert their authority to adjudicate disputes between Christians. They also tried to assert control over family law, in particular over marriage and inheritance. In 676, East Syrian Patriarch George I ruled that only Christian marriage blessed by a priest was henceforth valid. George asserted this novel sacramental conception of marriage in large part, no doubt, to affirm the unity of the Church and to address the problem of fraternization and marriage with non-Christians.

In the eighth century, East Syrian bishops such as Ishoʿbokt (who composed in the 770s an encyclopedic *Jurisprudential Corpus*) or Patriarch Timothy I (780–823, author of a law book compiling his judicial decisions and legal responsa) established the legal bases of their wide-reaching jurisdiction over members of their churches. Ishoʿbokt fused the legal traditions of the now-defunct Sasanian empire with rulings of earlier bishops and Church councils. Bishops like him were now called upon to judge in affairs that had formerly been the domain of the Sasanian state justice system. By the early ninth century, then, the East Syrian Church had a new Christian law created by eighth-century bishops. Weitz shows in particular how Timothy I used law as a means of defining and solidifying the boundaries of the Church, by, for example, insisting that East Syrian Christians should only receive the Eucharist in their own churches (and not in those of rival confessions). Timothy forged a vision of religious community based on household, through regulation of marriage and inheritance. As Weitz shows, this contrasts with other religious communities in the caliphate. West Syrians, who benefited from the tradition of Roman law, did not forge new legal syntheses such as those of Ishoʿbokt and Timothy. Zoroastrians sought above all to fashion themselves as *ahl al-kitāb*, people of the book, in order to benefit from the emerging status of *dhimmi*. Melkites insisted more on hagiography and particularly martyrology—a number of texts dedicated to Melkite Christians put to death by Muslim authorities sought to accentuate the religious difference between Christians and Muslims at a time of cultural and linguistic convergence and increasing conversions. The important differences in each of these instances gives the lie to facile generalizations about the *dhimma* system or about how Muslim authorities treated religious “minorities.” Yet in all these cases, the *dhimma* system is a “coproduction,” created by the interaction of these diverse communities between one another and with Muslims, not a preconceived system imposed on them by their Muslim rulers.

In the final chapters of the book Weitz shows how Islam affected the social and religious practice of Christians, in areas such as kin marriage (particularly marriage between first cousins) and polygamy. Indeed, marriage posed a constant problem for Church authorities. Some defended strict rules that distinguished Christian marriage from that of the “infidels”: prohibition of cousin marriage, polygamy,

marriage with those outside of the church, divorce. Respect for this vision of Christian family was, they hoped, the best way of preserving their Christian community. Yet the same authorities were painfully aware that overly rigid enforcement of these rules could push some of their flock to apostatize. Hence, Christian women who married Muslims were, more often than not, still accepted as members of the Church. While divorce was in theory not permitted, the threat of apostasy was at times effective in convincing Church authorities to allow annulment of marriage and remarriage.

Throughout the book, and particularly in the final chapter (entitled “Christian Shari‘a”), Weitz shows the profound influence of Muslim *fiqh* on Christian law. A West Syrian law on marriage of orphan women, for example, takes inspiration from Muslim legal traditions. East Syrian bishops in the Abbasid caliphate saw law as a learned tradition cultivated by specialists more than as a compilation of ad hoc legislation; the development of East Syrian law was contemporaneous with the development of Muslim *fiqh*, and can only be understood as the product of a complex relationship of emulation and rivalry. A striking example of “Christian Shari‘a” is seen in the legal work of the thirteenth-century West Syrian polymath Bar ‘Ebroyo (or Bar Hebraeus, d. 1286), in particular his legal code, the *Nomocanon*, which was closely modeled on the legal writings of Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111).

This meticulously researched, well-argued, and thoughtful book contributes in important and interesting ways to current historiographical debate about the history of early Islam and the “Muslim” world. In the rich and confusing religious and cultural mix that was the Abbasid caliphate, Christians (and Jews and Zoroastrians) were neither simply anachronistic survivals of a bygone age nor merely isolated communities, to be either persecuted or tolerated by Muslim rulers. They were active agents of societal change, cocreators of what historians would call classical “Muslim” civilization.

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The Ethical Thesis: Practical Reason in Islamic Legal Hermeneutics. By ABDESSAMAD BELHAJ. Documenta et Monographiae, vol. 8. Piliscsaba, Hungary: AVICENNA INSTITUTE OF MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES, 2015. Pp. 199. €38.80.

The Ethical Thesis is a series of essays, or as the author calls them, case studies, on *uṣūl al-fiqh*. The general argument is hard to follow, in part because the work is presented entirely deductively, that is, rather than survey the material and come to a conclusion, Abdessamad Belhaj presents a thesis and then offers citations to support his argument. The driver of the argument, however, is one general insight: that *fiqh* ought to be flexible and responsive to particular concerns rather than having *fiqh* decisions read as general principles imposed universally upon all situations. In short, universals ought to be subordinated to particulars, the *qawā‘id* must yield to *takhṣīs*.

After an introduction that presents the argument, chapter one argues for the relevance of Aristotle’s concept of practical reason (φρόνησις) and of Gadamer’s understanding that hermeneutical work is always creative and therefore provisional rather than indisputable and certain. Belhaj’s second chapter asserts that al-Shāfi‘ī’s *Risāla* was an attempt to thwart legal/linguistic “vagueness” in legal-scriptural passages. “Vagueness” is the term used to translate *mujmal* (although it is not just the uncertainty of a term that makes it *mujmal*; rather it is that there is a plurality of meanings legitimately included in a term. “Ambiguity” might be a better translation, while “vagueness” seems a better rendering of *shubha*). Al-Shāfi‘ī is understood to have argued that a focus on the linguistic norms of the “Arabs” served to constrain the numerous possible meanings of an utterance and select definitively among them to provide a single, determinate, textual meaning of a given utterance. Chapter three asserts that Islamic law was shaped by ethical concerns, but that a sort of division of labor was effected in which Sufism came to be the locus of ethics while *fiqh* became a formalist regime in which rules and language were presented as unambiguous and uninflected by the contingencies of a given situation. (This was not the case, Belhaj recognizes, with actual legal practice and fatwa production.) Chapter four evaluates