John C. Reeves, *Prolegomena to a History of Islamicate Manichaeism* (Comparative Islamic Studies). Sheffield: Equinox, 2011, 338 p, hardcover. £60.00/$99.95.

The availability and easy access to primary sources are two of the most crucial elements for stimulating scholarship in any given field. Reeves’s *Prolegomena to a History of Islamicate Manichaeism* fulfills this fundamental function for the study of Manichaeism after the rise and spread of Islam and within the Islamic polity. But it does much more than provide sources in translation.

The book presents a collection of relevant excerpts from texts written in a wide time-, geographical and linguistic range made available to scholars in an English translation, accompanied with commentaries. Whenever available, Reeves indicates any alternative translations not only to English but other Western European languages as well. Linguistically it covers sources originally composed in Syriac, Arabic, Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic and Middle Iranian by authors living throughout an impressive geographical extension that went from al-Andalus to the cities of Samarkand and Bakhk, and in a time-frame encompassing the seventh to seventeenth centuries. The material is organized thematically and within each theme or sub-theme authors are arranged chronologically: Biographical *testimonia* about Mani himself; fragments of or indications about the Manichaean Scriptures which are then subdivided according to the titles of what are believed to have been Manichaean sacred texts authored, it was claimed, by Mani himself; references to Manichaean teachings, including doctrines and rituals; and, finally notices about Manichaeans or alleged Manichaeans who lived in the Islamic-controlled territories.

The author starts with a valuable “Introduction” to Mani and Manichaeism which sets the stage for appreciating the significance of the book and positioning it within the recent and still flourishing scholarship of Manichaean studies. Then, each thematic chapter or a section within a chapter opens with a more relevant introduction to the specific topics of discussion at hand, while concluding remarks place the testimony of Islamicate sources in a wider relevant context. Reeves remarks both in the main “Introduction” and in the “Concluding Postscript” that despite a growing number of studies on Manichaeism in the last four decades or so, works dealing with the Islamic period are but a few (see especially pp. 18-9 and 280-1). Based on this premise, the publication of a collection of sources, some of which had previously appeared in editions that are difficult or next
to impossible to access, appears as an important step in filling this gap in Manichaean studies. But the comments to the translation, as well as the introductory and concluding remarks to each thematic chapter make the book valuable also as a scholarly endeavour which touches upon and will most likely stimulate a debate on a number of major issues for the study of religions, such as the transfer of ideas from one religious community to another, biases inherent in heresiological literature and the cross-religious significance of certain writing patterns, the transformation of hagiographical narrative units into polemical pieces akin to “counter-history” under the pen of writers from a competing or an antagonistic religious group; and a persistent layer of stereotypes that could be perpetuated from one source to another without adding any historical evidence of merit. On the other hand, the study underscores that a careful scrutiny of the available material can add to our knowledge of the vitality of Manichaeism after the spread of Islam, as well as its seemingly persistent appeal to individuals among the educated Islamic elite, of whom Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq was the most notorious.

Introducing the reader to what has been reconstructed about Mani and Manichaeism as historically accurate, the author indirectly helps her to critically evaluate the biographical and/or chronological notices about Mani, as well as descriptions and/or distortions of the Manichaean doctrine, rituals and behavior, of Islamicate authors. To make one example, it becomes evident that the Fihrist of Ibn al-Nadīm provides reliable biographical information on Mani implying, subsequently, that a tenth century author could still have access to some authentic or at least not necessarily only polemical sources of information on Mani and Manichaeism. Moreover, the choice to present texts from the “Islamicate” cultural realm has several advantages. It juxtaposes works that emerged in different religious and linguistic communities living under Islamic rule and highlights the transmission of some ideas, narrative units or simply stereotypes on Mani and Manichaeism from one religious community to the other(s). One can mention two examples of such pieces of information: first is the polemical reference to Mani as a renegade Christian priest and the second is the knowledge of his journey to India. The first notice appears in such Christian texts as the Chronicon Maroniticum, the Chronicon Seertensis, the Chronicle of Michael the Syrian and the Historia of Bar Hebraeus, but also in the Tathbit of ʿAbd al-Jabbār (pp. 39-40). Equally, the “passage to India” topos is found in both Christian and Muslim authors. On the other hand, interest in and transmission of different motifs within dis-