Book Reviews

Charles Burnett and Pedro Mantas-España, eds.

Mapping Knowledge: Cross-Pollination in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages
(Series Arabica Veritas; vol. 1; Córdoba: Córdoba Near Eastern Research Unit).

This magisterial work produced by a team of distinguished scholars coordinated by Charles Burnett (Centre for the History of Arabic Studies in Europe-CHASE, Warburg Institute) and Pedro Mantas-España (Córdoba Near Eastern Unit—CNRU) is an ambitious and successful attempt to provide a history of cross-fertilization of knowledge and ideas in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. It is the product of a conference held at the University of Córdoba on November 29–30, 2012, entitled “Cultural Transfer in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.” In addition to the initial contributors’ thirteen papers, four more—those of Rifaat Ebied, Carlos Martínez Carrasco, José Soto Chica, and Maila García Amorós, and Maurizio Massaiu—were added. As might be expected from a collection of this nature, the seventeen contributions are varied in subject and scope, but most do address the permeable boundaries for multi-cultural and multi-faith encounters.

Charles Burnett and Pedro Mantas’ learned introduction offers a valuable overview, but there is a singular attraction in the diversity of the subjects and the richness of the details. Two major parts, Before the New World Order in the Near East and The Creation of a New World are provided in Mapping Knowledge. Charles Burnett and Pedro Mantas bring the two together in this volume through a series of studies that range from a much broader perspective.

The book is ecumenical throughout in that sense: it is all-embracing, all-inclusive. The subjects range from the great (Moses, Joseph, John the Evangelist, Paul the Apostle, Proclus, Origen, Athanasius the Great, Makarius the Great, Peter of Callinicus, Zenobia, Māwiya, al-Harith, al-Mundhir, Pisentius, al-Mas‘ūdi, Abū Qurra, Ibn ‘Adi, Thomas Aquinas, al-Ghazālī, Averroes, Masalama, al-Mu’tamid ibn ‘Abbād, Abū Ma‘shar, Ibn Shuhayd, Isidore of Sevilla, Adelard of Bath and
Alfonso X) to the less famous. The use of extensive quotation and exegesis of primary texts from various traditions serves as a distinctive hallmark.

Part one explores cultural diversity and interaction in the Near East before the rise of Islam. R. Ebied, “Quotations from the Works of St. Athanasius the Great in Peter of Callinicus Magnum Opus Contra Damianum,” reveals several works of Athanasius the Great in the Syriac translation of Peter of Callinicus (578–605). Jesús De Garay Suárez-Llanos, “The Work of Proclus and Its Reception in Byzantium,” identifies the survival of Proclus in Byzantine texts from the mid-ninth century until the fifteenth century. Jesús makes a clear distinction between the reception of Proclus and Neo-Platonism. While in periphery of Byzantium, Proclus was received by Georgians, such as Ioane Petritsi, in the core his ideas were refuted by the bishop Nicholas of Methone. However, Byzantine thinkers, namely Michael Psellos have urged to reconcile patristic tradition and Greek philosophy. On p. 26, Jesús writes: “[. . .] whilst Neo-Platonism adopted by the ‘Greek’ and Cappadocian Fathers [. . .] was accepted [. . .]” In using this Greek designation for Origen, a child of Horus (from Ὑρός, “Horus,” and γένος,”born”), the author fails to reflect Origen’s theophoric, truly ancient Egyptian name and identity and, more significantly, to cast light on the cultural diversity of the Greek speaking world. A more appropriate description would be Alexandrian-Egyptian.

This oversight is also evident elsewhere in the volume, in the qualification of Athanasius as a Greek Father when in fact he was the twentieth Coptic Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria. This is analogous to Philo, who should be recognized as an Alexandrian-Jew. In the same vein Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, “New Skin for Old Stories. Queens Zenobia and Māwiya, and Christian Arab Groups on the Eastern Frontier during the 3rd–4th Centuries CE,” emphasizes the significance of assimilation of Roman culture among the Semites of Palmyra through onomastics, cultural and linguistic factors that contributed to a multi-cultural society. His excellent philological analysis of the fourth century Namāra Arabic inscription written in Nabatean, the use of Michael the Syrian’s Chronicle to highlight Zenobia of Palmyra’s sympathy for Judaism, and the study of the particular Christian tradition adopted by Māwiya, Queen of the Arabs, are scholarly and serious-minded.

Using the criticisms of the fourth century Gregory of Nazianus and the fifth century Socrates Scholasticus, Alberto Quiroga Puertas, “‘Philostratean Bishops’ and the Rhetoric of the Empire,” shows the original diversity, rather than uniformity, of the rhetorical practice of the Christian bishops at the outset of the third century. Carlos Martínez Carrasco, “Arabs in the Face of Christianity: Creating an Identity before the Emergence of Islam,” utilizes both