

Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, *Creștinătatea arabă orientală*, translated by Anca-Irina Ionescu, Vremea Printing House, Bucharest, 2016, 80 p.

The author of the work, Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, was born in 1962 and attended Arab language and literature courses at the University of Granada, graduating in 1995, with a paper about 'Abd al-Malik b. Habib with the title *Kitab wasj of -firdaws* under the scientific leadership of Dr. Concepcion Castillo Castillo, the next year being granted the title of doctor of Semitic philology for his research on 'Abd al-Malik b. Habib and for the new edition, in two volumes of his famous writings. Specialized in Oriental studies, but also in a wider area, such as Arabic, Arabic literature of Islamic, Christian and Jewish origin, Semitic linguistics, text and literary criticism, Juan Pedro Monferrer Hall had a brilliant academic career as a humanistic teacher and researcher. He taught Arabic language and literature, following all the academic steps, currently occupying the post of head of the Department of Arabic and Islamic studies at the University of Cordoba. He was, in time, director of the Department of Arabic Studies UCO - Al-Babtay Foundation, Director of the PRESHCO Programme, secretary of the Department of Arabic and Islamic studies, or member of the evaluation committee of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Cordoba, etc. (p. 67). Speaker of no less than six languages, Professor Sala has published numerous studies in prestigious publishing houses in Spain and abroad, being also a member of several academic societies. The author was occupied mainly by the Middle Eastern world, covering different themes, such as: Eastern and Judaic Christian cosmology, the lives of Christian martyrs of Eastern origin, Christian Arabic apologetics, the sources of the monotheism of the Abrahamic religions. Together with other major experts in Arab and Islamic studies, Juan Pedro Monferrer Hall is one of the coordinator editors of the famous series of books published by EJ Brill, *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, vol. I (600-900), vol. II (900-1050) and vol. III (1050-1200) (p. 68). Through his work, Professor Sala Monferrer contributed to a better knowledge of

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the Arabic texts, of Christian or Islamic origin, of some religious writings proper to several cultures in the Middle East (p. 68).

In the present work, the author proposes an interesting introduction to the history of Arab Christian communities. In fact, the work represents the publication of some essays originally meant for a students' seminar at the University Complutense of Madrid. In Romanian, the work appeared due to conf. Dr. Ioana Fedorov, editor-coordinator and Mrs. Anca Irina Ionescu, who has translated it from Spanish. The Romanian edition is dedicated by the author to the „Christian Arabs, who, for various reasons, were forced to leave their homeland and home and start looking for an uncertain future for themselves and their children” (p. 6). In this book, the author has done a selection, with a strong critical and scientific character, focussed on historical, linguistic and literary issues of the strong Christian traditions of Arab origin in the East.

The first chapter entitled *Historical and geographical background* is a presentation of the concept of “Arabic Christianity” as part of the broader category of “Eastern Christianity”, especially after the spread and the establishment of the Islam as a dominant culture. Before the advent of Islam as a new politico-religious model, there was already an Arabic Christianity that, linguistically, took elements from other languages, especially from Greek, Aramaic and Coptic (pp. 9-10). Before the spread of Islam, the Arab population was in the border regions of northern Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Syria, West Persia. Linguistically speaking, the Arab population was not homogeneous, given the variety of numerous dialectal Arabian tribes, divided into sedentary and nomadic communities, some of them talking, in part, Aramaic. Gradually, this population begins to have a sense of “being Arabs” (p. 10).

The first references to the existence of a Christian Arabian populations was done by Eusebius of Cezareea. Arabia was part of the Eastern diocese, whose religious leader was residing at Bosra and depended on the seat of Antioch. The author presents the regional division of Christians in the Eastern part. (pp. 11-12).

In the second chapter entitled *Eastern Arabic Christianity*, the author shows the meaning of the term “Arab”, a group of nomads from the Syrian lands from the East of the Euphrates. The semi nomadic tribes of the Arabian peninsula, were constantly changing social realities, with a fundamental element, their permanent semi-nomadic character, but with the advent of Islam, everything has changed radically (p. 13). Due to their geographical positioning, the Arabian tribes have been in constant contact

with the extra-Arabian area, these contacts being a channel of penetration of several influences, such as linguists, economic, cultural, and religious, a channel of the propagation of Christianity. In this respect, one of the areas most favourable for the penetration of Christianity in the Arab space was represented by the southwest area known as Arabia Felix, today's Yemen. The author refers to some moments of the phenomenon of penetration of Christianity in Arabia, namely, the preaching of Jesus Christ and His followers in Damascus and Hawrān in Nabat, the refuge of St. Paul in the same region, the spreading of the Gospel in the Nabataean region, Christian monasticism in 4th century in the steppe areas in Palestine, Mesopotamia and Arabia (pp. 15-16). Starting with the 3rd century, we have documents related to the presence of Christian communities in the Arabian speaking territories, in the next century, the Sinai Peninsula, the coastal area of south-Arabia and the Eastern tribal regions from the Syrian-Libyan region up to Mesopotamia, sheltered a large number of Christians, most of them concentrated in the Arabian Peninsula (p. 16). As a proof of this spread, there were over twenty bishopric sees. Arabia was the area where various Christian heresies appeared, starting from the earliest centuries, in the early third century, Origen combated Berilus, the heretical bishop, or the heresy of the Qasay sect. The 4th century is the century of the martyrs in these territories, the *Eastern synaxarion* mentioning numerous Arabian martyrs, among which we mention officer Zenon, his servant Zena or Theodore, Julian, Elian etc. (p. 18). In the years before the emergence of the Islam, there were numerous Arab Christians, but surprisingly, few Arab sources record their presence, which makes us believe that they have retained their cultural heritage in other languages (Greek, Syrian, Aramaic), Arabian becoming ecclesiastical language only after the Islamic occupation (p. 19). Since the eighth century there was manifested a strong Arabization policy in the occupied territories where there were many Christians .

Chapter III entitled *The Arabian alphabet and the writing styles of the Christian Arabian texts* refers to the specific of the Arabian language, to the Arab tribes who spoke at length Arabian, to the old age of the Arabian alphabet, somewhere documented since 500 BC. (p. 23). The author also exposes the various theories concerning the Nabataean origin or the Syrian origin of the Arabian language and the main features of the calligraphic system used by Muslim copyists (p. 25). As regards the Christian copyists, they did not use Arabic as a language of worship, even when they had to use it, they used Syrian characters in writing. Thus, the *karšūnī* manuscripts appeared (p. 26).

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In the fourth chapter, the author deals with the issue of Arabian used by Christians in the more general context of the Arabian language. Arabian has two areas clearly distinct from the linguistic contact: the Northern sector, which is in contact with the Amorite, the Acadian and the Aramaic dialects and southern sector, where it is in contact with South Arabic and Ethiopian (p. 29). On the other hand, there is no uniformity of language in Arabian, the fundamental characteristic being the wide range of dialects circumscribed in three main geographical areas: the eastern, represented by the semi-nomadic tribes in Nagda, the Western, which includes the land of Higaz and the southern area, which includes all Yemen languages, from the border of Higazul to Himayār (p. 32). The corpus of texts in pre-Qur'anic Arabian is the so-called pre-Islamic poetry dated between the 5th-7th centuries. In terms of linguistics, the Arabization started during the Omeiad dynasty begun was continued by the Abasid one, with two objectives: the developing of a standard Arabic language and the strengthening of the two pillars of the Arabian culture: the pre-Islamic poetry and the Qur'an (p. 33). In the case of the latter, the Qur'an is the perfection of linguistic and literary Arabic, being a writing model impossible to imitate. The language of the Qur'an is characterized by a sententious style, direct, concise, alternating with passages of narrative type, specific for the Semites (p. 35). In what concerns the Christians, we can say that there was not an Arabian owned by the Christians, but they used common Arabian of the ninth and tenth centuries, the same Arabian as the one used by the Muslim copyists (p. 41).

In the last chapter, the author makes a brief summary of the Christian Arabian literature, which can be divided into three periods: the pre-Islamic (4th century up to 622 AD), the pre-Ottoman period (622-1516 AD) and the Ottoman period (1516-1923 AD). The first period covers Christian Arabian texts from the 4th century until the advent of the Islam, in the second period, the fundamental one, are included texts that can be classified into three types: translations of religious texts, theological writings and profane works and the third period reflects the decline of Arabian culture since the fall of Baghdad in the hands of the Mongols (1258 AD) and certifies the interest in perpetuating the Christian Arabian literary inheritance (p. 43).

Although small, the work of the Professor Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala is a very useful tool for understanding the specifics of the Arabian Christianity, both before the advent of Islam, and after this time. The author, expert in Arabic, provides valuable information about the specifics of that language and its use by the Arabian Christians.

Archid. Ph.D. Caius Cuțaru