

## **Samuel N.C. Lieu and Glen L. Thompson (eds): *The Church of the East in Central Asia and China***

**(China and the Mediterranean World.) i, 260 pp. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2020. €75. ISBN 978 2 503 58664 9.**

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This edited volume contains 11 studies on the Church of the East in Central Asia and China. The papers were first presented at the International Conference on *Jingjiao* held in Hong Kong, 10–12 June, 2015. To accompany the conference, the University of Hong Kong Museum and Art Gallery launched an exhibition titled “Nestorian crosses of the Yuan Dynasty”. Hence, the volume includes a foreword by Florian Knothe, director of the museum, introducing the “Nestorian” crosses in its collection.

The Church of the East, with its unique tradition in the East Syriac language and liturgy, became officially established in Sasanian Persia during the fifth century, and its mission expanded to Central Asia and China from the sixth to fourteenth centuries. However, despite its being the largest church on earth in geographical extent by the fourteenth century, its glorious history had not been widely known or studied until the recent past. Just a few decades ago, renewed studies in the history of this church in Central Asia and China began, mostly based on the manuscripts in Syriac, Sogdian, Turkic, Chinese, and Iranian languages discovered in Dunhuang and Turfan as well as Christian epitaphs unearthed in Central Asia and China. The current volume is one of the publications which presents the outcome of some of this recent research.

The volume is divided into three parts: (1) The Church of the East in Central Asia; (2) The Church of the East in China; and (3) Art and iconography. The first part begins with Erica Hunter’s study of the manuscript MIK III 45 discovered in Bulayïg near Turfan, China. Based on her previous investigations of this liturgical manuscript, Hunter elaborates further in her article on the offices of the Saints, Mart Shir, Mar Bar Shabba, and Zarvandukht and Mar Sargis (pp. 4–7) with an English translation of the relevant Syriac texts. Nicholas Sims-Williams, in his article, introduces the entire corpus of Sogdian fragments discovered at Bulayïg by a German expedition in 1905, which contains the Book of Psalm and other biblical passages, translated from the Syriac original and used as liturgical texts. Sims-Williams focusses particularly on the Sogdian gospel lectionary E5 and its relationship to the Peshitta (pp. 17–19), discussing the relationship between the Syriac and the Sogdian syntaxes as well as other features in the Sogdian translation of the Syriac texts. Hidemi Takahashi in his contribution provides a thorough study on the Syriac language used in texts from China during the Tang and Yuan periods. This includes Chinese transcription of Syriac personal and place names, book titles, plant names, and names for God and Jesus the Messiah (pp. 24–39). It also deals with Syriac loanwords in Turkic epitaphs and other manuscripts from the Mongol–Yuan period (pp. 40–63). Takahashi concludes that the use of Syriac in Chinese texts was limited and a good knowledge of Syriac was only acquired by the clergy from the Church of the East (p. 63).

In the second part, Huaiyu Chen’s paper discusses some common features displayed in Buddhist, Christian, and Daoist texts, especially their common principles and practice in protecting the Chinese rulers and their state, the use of the “light” metaphor to describe God or the Lord of the Way, and other shared terminology. Similarly, contributions by

Max Deeg and Samuel Lieu both render their philological and historical studies of certain terms in Chinese documents and inscriptions, e.g. Lieu's discussion on the names of *Da Qin*, *Tarsāg*, *Jingjiao*, *Zhongguo* (the Middle Kingdom), etc. Particularly disputed is the title of Chorepiscopus and its Chinese equivalents in the Xi'an inscription, *p'pš* and *šingtsw'*. The former could be the Greek title *Papas* for "father" or a bishop in this context, but interpreted to be the Buddhist title *fashi* 法師 ("Lord of the law") by Lieu. *šingtsw'* is the parallel title of Mar Sargis, Chorepiscopus in the Xi'an inscription. Previous studies suggested this to be the phonetic translation of the Chinese title *Shangzuo* (上座) corresponding to the Buddhist term *Sthavira* (head monk, abbot, etc.), the view also held by Lieu (p. 134). However, few are aware of the work "Das Nestorianische Denkmal von Singan Fu" (Budapest, 1897) by J.E. Heller, who subtly but rightly pointed out that the term was the Chinese word for Chorepiscopus 鄉主(教), exactly corresponding to Mar Sargis' title in Syriac.

Articles by Glen Thompson and David Wilmshurst deal with the teaching of the Church of the East in China and the interfaith conflicts encountered by Christians in the Tang and Yuan periods. Thompson wrestles with the question of Christianity being regarded as "foreign" by contemporary Chinese, but also points out that modern scholars try to prove the *Sitz im Leben* of Syriac Christianity using newly discovered artefacts.

The final part begins with a brief study of an unearthed bronze mirror with a Syriac inscription by Niu Ruji, which does not provide a clear provenance of the object. Ken Parry's article traces the history of icon usage in the Church of the East, with evidence suggesting that this church in general felt comfortable with images (pp. 197–8). The final paper, by Patrick Taveirne, explains the provenance of the bronze crosses in the collection of the University of Hong Kong Museum and the related scepticism about their possible relationship to Christian crosses. The volume ends with a general index of all subjects and names with indiscriminate choices of entries; it would be more helpful if historical names and names of current authors or contributors had been put in different categories.

This volume is a very welcome, informative and useful addition to the corpus of scholarship on Syriac Christianity in Central Asia and China.

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## 時建 **Shi Jian**: 隴川阿昌語參考語法 **A Reference Grammar of Longchuan Achang**

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In this recent reference grammar of Achang, Shi Jian investigates the phonology, word classes, morphosyntax, and discourse structure of the Husa dialect of Achang spoken in