Eastern Christianity. A reader. Edited by J. Edward Walters. Pp. xvi + 423 incl. 4 ills. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2021. £44.99. 978 0 8028 7686 7

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Diarmaid MacCulloch began his acclaimed television series on the history of Christianity (that is, if my memory serves me aright), not with Christ himself, but with some of the Eastern Churches geographically close to where Jesus preached and healed, who use in their liturgy a language close to the language he spoke. This was done, I take it, to remind his viewers that Christianity is, in origin, a religion of the East, however much we may, over the centuries, have Europeanised, or even Anglicised it. Christianity should seem, in some respects at least, strange to us. The strangeness of this religion from the East has become more familiar in the West (that is, Western Europe, including Britain and North America), owing to (mostly forced) migration from the East (that is, the 'Near East' and further East, as well as lands long settled by the Greeks). MacCulloch's emphasis on the Eastern origins of Christianity was unusual, and when the TV series was broadcast (in 2009), it would indeed have been difficult to find out very much about Eastern Christianity. *Eastern Christianity*, edited by J. Edward Walters, now makes easily available a good account of Eastern Christianities (note the plural). These forms of Eastern Christianity are distinguished by language. There are other ways in which forms of Eastern Christianity differ from the West, notably the fact that most of them disown the Council of Chalcedon and its solution to the problem of Christology, but these doctrinal divisions are present in the variety of Eastern Christianity, too; by making distinctions in terms of language, we are directed to the differences in the ways they expressed their faith. The languages are Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Arabic, Coptic and Ethiopian (or to be more precise, Gəʿəz), presented in that order, each section introducing the Christians who used that language and enough history to place them in some kind of context.

To begin with Syriac makes good sense, as Syriac is close to the language that Jesus and his disciples likely spoke. It is not surprising that evidence for Syriac Christainity is early: one of the earliest works in Syriac, the *Odes of Solomon*, belongs to the second century AD. The selection of texts in Syriac here begins with a rather later text, the *Doctrina Addai*, the foundation document relating how Christianity arrived in Edessa – a popular account, found in Greek as early as Eusebius' *Church history*. That is followed by two hymns by Ephrem the Syrian, the greatest Syriac poet, influential both among Syriac speakers themselves and among the Greeks (though the Greek 'Ephrem' consists of imitations of authentic Ephrem, with hardly any extant translation). Other Syriac writers included are Jacob of Serugh, the most prolific of Syriac writers, whose *corpus* of sermons (many of them in verse) rivals in extent the sermons of John Chrysostom or Augustine, and Narsai. There are also two accounts of martyrdom, the Syriac version of the immensely popular *vita* of St Mary of Egypt, and a couple of shorter pieces.

Armenian follows, the language spoken in a country the boundaries of which have varied greatly over the centuries, the heart of which is Etchmiadzin, the patriarchal see, near Mount Ararat. The texts begin with an extract from Koriwn's *Life of Mashtots'*, or Mesrop, who devised the Armenian alphabet, followed by a passage from Eznik of Koghb's treatise *On God* – both fifth century. Then a brief account of the life of Jesus from the *Teaching of Saint Grigor*, the Evangeliser of Armenia

at the beginning of the fourth century; the account of Jesus is notable for the way in which it evokes the Genesis creation narrative. The texts then jump to the tenth century with Anania of Narek and his younger relative Grigor. Grigor of Narek was a poet and theologian, whose works are immensely popular among Armenians and show a great learning in Greek theology (Dionysios the Areopagite being a favourite). His writings are becoming available in translation owing to the labours of J.-P. Mahé and Abraham Terian. Also included are two prayers by Nersēs Shnorhali, a twelfth-century Catholicos.

We then move north to Georgia, a country that had a conflicted relationship with Armenia; closer to the Byzantine Empire (and serving as a Byzantine equivalent for Siberia; both John Chrysostom and Maximos the Confessor died there in exile); unlike Armenia, Georgia embraced Chalcedonian Orthodoxy. It is represented by two accounts of martyrdom – of St Shushanik and Habo, the Perfumer from Baghdad – and two *vitae* of monks from the beginnings of monasticism on Mount Athos – John the Iberian (that is, Georgian), Euthymios and George, both dubbed 'the Athonite' – who were important mediators (in both directions) between Greek and Georgian monastic (and especially hagiographic) literature. There is also an extract from Mark the Deacon's *Life of St Porphyrios of Gaza*, translated from Greek. It is a pity there is nothing from the twelfth-century Ioane Petritsi, a disciple of Michael Psellos, whose translation and commentary on Proclus' *Elements of theology* demonstrate his close acquaintance with philosophical and theological circles in Constantinople.

Georgian is followed by Arabic. Although it is highly likely there were Arabic Christians before the Islamic conquests of the seventh century, it was in the lands conquered by the Muslims that Christian Arabic theology established itself. It became the language of commerce, everyday life, culture, including philosophy and theology, but never completely became the language of Christians, who remained attached to their linguistic roots, especially in worship, whether Greek, Syriac, Coptic or, in Cilicia, Armenian. Christian Arabic theology engaged with Islamic theology, adopting some its theological genres, especially in Syria. Contrary to what is often asserted, Arabic Christians remained broadly faithful under Islam, until the ravages of the Crusades drove many of them to take refuge in Islam. There is an extract from the first, and maybe the greatest, Christian Arabic theologian, Theodore Abū Qurrah, fluent in both Greek and Arabic and deeply indebted to John Damascene (without actually knowing him). There are examples of biblical interpretation, controversy with Islam and the miracles of a certain St George.

There follows a lively presentation of Coptic literature, which is held to have reached a high degree of literary skill, never to be repeated, in Shenoute of Atripe, the abbot of a group of monasteries in southern Egypt. He was inspired by the founder of coenobitic monasticism in Egypt, St Pachomios, an extract from whose *vita* is included. Among other texts, the Anaphora, or Eucharistic Prayer, of St Thomas the Apostle (that is ascribed to him) is included. One feature of the Eastern Churches is the richness of their liturgical traditions, never subject to the centralising tendencies of Greek or Latin Christianity.

The literature of Ethiopian Christianity comes over as in many ways rather different from the literature of the other Eastern Churches. Ethiopia owed its conversion to St Frumentios, sent to the Aksumite king, 'Ezana, by Athanasios of

Alexandria in the fourth century. Later accounts trace Ethiopian traditions back to the eunuch converted by the deacon Philip (Acts viii.26–40), and even to King Solomon and the queen of Sheba, as recounted in the *Kəbrä Nägäśt* (*Glory of kings*). The section ends with a passage from Zär'a Ya'əqob's *Book of the Trinity*, written in a prose highly evocative of the liturgy, and a prayer amulet, composed in much the same style.

This is a hugely fascinating book that deserves to be warmly welcomed. The texts open doors on to very different ways of envisaging Christianity (different both from familiar Greek East/Latin West modes, and among themselves), understanding of which is greatly enhanced by the introductions to each section and their suggested further reading.

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Papal jurisprudence, 385–1234. Social origins and medieval reception of canon law. By D. L. d'Avray. Pp. xii + 320. New York–Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. £75. 978 1 108 47300 2

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In this companion to *Papal jurisprudence c. 400*, David d'Avray addresses four questions among many: Why did bishops write to Rome? To what extent did letters of 'the first decretal age' (*c.* 400–600) already function as law, not theology? How did these shape canon law after 1050? How was canon law post-1200 ('the second decretal age') similar to the 'first age' as it responded to changing 'social systems' (chapter i and p. 240)?

Chapter i considers 'uncertainties' prompting bishops' letters to Rome. These came from 'Christian mobility' and 'variety of religious practice' (p. 31). Bishops were unsure about theology, notably Pelagius on grace (chs iv, ix), and 'practical issues' like varying rituals (ch. v), the status of clerics and monks (ch. vii) and heretical ordinations (ch. viii).

Were letters, 'decretals' after 400, counsel or positive law? The latter may well have been the case, as illustrated by Innocent I's decretal on communion for the lapsed at the point of death (p. 94). While some early canonical collections did include theology, material 'not simply legal' but 'true-false', the *Dionysiana*, the dominate model for later compilations, transmitted decretals as legal rulings, 'lawful-unlawful' (chapter xi).

Early decretals became 'more symbolic as the gap between them and the social practices widened' (p. 16). The author also categorises their reception by later canonical collections, for example the *Hispana*, *Hibernesis* and *Vetus Gallica* (chs xii–xiv). Some compilations were 'legal', derived from the *Dionysiana*; others a 'hybrid of law and theology'; a few contained 'much material that is neither obviously papal nor legal' (pp. 148–9).

The collections of Pseudo-Isidore provided the 'medium for the large-scale diffusion' of 'first age' jurisprudence. With their decretals, spurious and genuine, also came theological speculation which diminished the 'expectation of canon law as a system distinct from other forms of religious writing' (pp. 164–5).

Canon law in the tenth and eleventh centuries, prior to the 'papal turn' after 1050, receives far less attention (chapter xiv). A short entry on Burchard of