Catalin-Stefan Popa, *Gīwargīs I. (660–680). Ostsyrische Christologie in frühislamischer Zeit*, Göttinger Orientforschungen, Syriaca 50 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2016). Pp. viii + 166; € 48.

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As the fourth catholicos of the Church of the East since the rise of Islam (following Ishoʿyahb II [628–645], Maremeh [646–649], and Ishoʿyahb III [649–659]), Gewargis I played an important role in giving his church a new voice under Islam. Submitted as a doctoral dissertation at the Theological Faculty of the University of Göttingen, Catalin-Stefan Popa's study of this pivotal but often overlooked historical figure makes a significant contribution to the field. It critically presents and contextualizes the available information on Gewargis' life and elucidates his position as a theologian of the Church of the East. The book is well documented, well presented, and well written. It consists of two parts. The first part deals with Gewargis' biography and recounts the synod that was held under his leadership on the island of Dirin (nowadays part of Bahrain) (pp. 15–56); the second part offers a detailed analysis of Gewargis' *Letter to Mina* (pp. 59–141), a significant theological exposition in which we encounter Gewargis as an individual author, preacher, and pastor.

Thomas of Marga's *Book of Governors* is our main source for Gewargis' biography. Hailing from Kafra, in Beth Garmai, Gewargis entered the famous monastery of Beth ʿAbe at a young age, perhaps shortly before 630, where he met and befriended, in a master-disciple relationship, (the later catholicos) Ishoʿyahb III. Gewargis became Ishoʿyahb's successor, first as metropolitan bishop of Adiabene (in 649) and, following Ishoʿyahb's death in 659, as catholicos. Gewargis faced two rivals for the patriarchal see. The way in which he was able to silence their claims and maintain power as the sole legitimate catholicos attests, according to the author, to his sense for reconciliation and compromise (p. 29).

The Synod of Dirin held in 676 – undoubtedly a highlight in Gewargis' twenty-year long tenure as catholicos – was the concluding part of a visitation that he undertook to the region of Beth Qaṭraye, on the Persian Gulf. As recounted in several letters of Isho'yahb III, a revolt had erupted in the middle of the century among the bishops of this region, setting the backdrop for this visitation. Even though the details remain unknown, the synod seems to have succeeded in mitigating the simmering conflict. The elevation of Beth Qaṭraye to the status of a metropolitan bishopric, as attested in the synodal acts, may have been part of the solution (pp. 43–44). It is probable that the synod had a local scope, limited to Beth Qaṭraye (p. 45).

The short report of the synod, followed by a list of nineteen canons, is preserved in the *Synodicon Orientale* of the Church of the East (ed. J.-B. Chabot, 1902, 215–226). The first canon urges the bishops and teachers to instruct the faithful in the "healthy faith," particularly on Sundays and holidays, so that they may stand firm in confronting heretics (*heresiyoṭe*). The following canons are principally concerned with organizational matters and aim at raising the disciplinary and moral standards of lay people and clergy. Warnings are issued against Christian women who consider marriage with pagans (*ḥanpe* – a term which includes Muslims, pp. 48–52) as well as against men hastening to drink wine in Jewish taverns after the liturgy.

Gewargis' *Letter to Mina*, "priest and chorbishop in the land of the Persians," written a few years after the synod, in 678/9, follows the report and the canons in the *Synodicon* (ed. Chabot, 227–245) and thus must have obtained an authoritative status. While Gewargis offers his reader a very broad outline of the theological positions of his Church, the focus is on the Incarnation and its Christological implications. Gewargis hints at heretical views which might have planted some doubt in Mina's mind. Interestingly, the letter as it was sent to Mina was written "in the Persian language, which is easy (*ṗshiq*) for you," and Mina was encouraged to have it read before him "many times" (ed. Chabot, 244–245). Regardless

of whether in the *Synodicon* we are dealing with the Syriac translation of a text originally written in Persian, or with the Syriac draft from which the Persian translation was made, the *Letter* – with its theological concepts and specific terminology – is fully embedded in the East Syriac tradition, which to a large extent was based on the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia and was shaped and transmitted in the East Syriac schools.

Even though the *Letter to Mina* has received some attention from modern scholars (most recently D. W. Winkler, in *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 60 [2008], 293–311), the author provides here the most extensive study to date (pp. 69–141). He successively discusses: (1) the doctrine of God; (2) the Trinity; (3) creation, including the important aspect of divine pedagogy; (4) the righteous and prophets of the Old Testament as signposts, or "Hinweisfiguren" (p. 98), on the path to Christ (Abel, Enoch, and Elijah; Noah; Abraham and Jacob; David; Isaiah, Micah, and Malachi); (5) Christology: Christ's two natures; the concept of "indwelling," exemplified in John 2:19–22; the union of the two natures; refutation of heretical views, wherein Gewargis insists that the two natures remain separated, that Christ as Savior must be fully human and fully divine, and that, given human hopelessness and bondage to sin, no other way of renewal and salvation would have been possible. Throughout the exposition, Gewargis cites biblical verses from both the Old and New Testament as prooftexts, and he concludes the *Letter* with a short florilegium demonstrating that the orthodox faith, as preserved in its purity exclusively in the Church of the East, originally belonged to the universal church.

In the *Letter*, as the author observes, Gewargis intended to summarize the faith accessibly and concisely (as Mina had requested), avoiding technical details and not wanting to make an original contribution to the theological tradition of his Church. It is interesting to see, e.g., that in spite of the letter's Christological focus, Gewargis does not discuss the "two *qnome*" in Christ (which led to so much controversy in the time of Babai and Isho'yahb II). He simply takes the two

qnome for granted in his use of the expression "two hypostatic natures," or "zwei qnōmische Naturen" (p. 120: *kyane qnomaye*). In addition to the *Letter*'s reader-friendliness, Gewargis also frequently uses the pronouns of the first and second person ("I" and "you"), thus intimating that he and his (possibly wavering) correspondent both stand, and should stand, firm in the same community of faith. This faith needs to be defended against different enemies: the Jews, who have an incomplete understanding of God, the *ḥanpe* (a moniker here for the Muslims), who are "without God," and those Christians who have such blasphemous ideas about Christ and the Incarnation that they may be said to be "without God" as well (pp. 127–128). The Miaphysites are doubtless included within this last group. Gewargis' letter thus stands in the long tradition of rivalry between the Syriac Orthodox and the Church of the East, which started in the early sixth century under the Sasanians and continued into the early Islamic period.

The author brings many valuable insights to this important text. With an abundance of references he situates the text within the East Syriac tradition. With regard to Gewargis' sources, it is worth noticing that T. Jansma, in his study of Narsai's homily no. 34 ("On the creation," ed. Mingana, II, pp. 168–180), was so impressed with the similarity between this homily and a long section in Gewargis' *Letter*, that he regarded the latter as a prose rendering of Narsai's verse homily, "basé … sur les mêmes idées, et rédigé dans presque les mêmes termes" ("Études sur la pensée de Narsaï," *L'Orient Syrien* 11 [1966], 425–429). One wonders whether among the many parallel texts adduced by the author (in which Narsai features prominently), some special connection between Narsai and Gewargis could be detected.

Biblical commentaries appear to be an underrepresented genre among the sources listed by the author, particularly in the discussion of Gewargis' treatment of the Old Testament. The only reason why Jansma refrained from assuming a direct relationship between Narsai and Gewargis was the quotation of Job 38:7 (in the context of the creation of the light),

which is found in Gewargis' *Letter* and, in a similar context, among the Syriac fragments of Theodore's *Commentary on Genesis* edited by E. Sachau (1869), but is absent from Narsai. The same quotation, however, is found in the Diyarbakır *Commentary on Genesis* (CSCO 483 / Syr. 205, 1986, p. 4). Consultation of this commentary – which may have been composed only a few decades after the *Letter to Mina* – might have helped the author in his somewhat convoluted discussion of Job 38:7 in Gewargis' *Letter* (pp. 84–87). The same commentary could have shed light on the discussion of the primordial creatures. Gewargis and the Diyarbakır commentator (ed., p. 7) agree that "in the beginning" seven creatures were created in silence: heaven, earth, fire, water, air, darkness, and the angels (for Narsai, see Jansma, 416–417). I believe that the author's analysis of this question – suggesting a possible discrepancy between Gewargis and the rest of the East Syriac tradition (p. 80) – needs correction.

These minor issues do not affect the overall very fine quality of the book. The author's deep and well-informed reading and study of the original sources should be welcomed as a major contribution to our knowledge of an important period in the history of the Church of the East.