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Nikolai Seleznyov. (2014). *Pax Christiana and Pax Islamica: On the History of Interconfessional Relations in the Medieval Middle East. (Pax Christiana et Pax Islamica: Iz istorii mezhkonfessional'nykh sviazei na srednevekovom Blizhnem Vostoke)*. Moscow: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet (in Russian). — 268 pages.

The monograph under review synthesizes the research of N. N. Seleznyov in the field of the constructive social and intellectual interplay of religious communities. The author bases his work on the study of historical experience as conveyed by original (Arabic) theoretical texts. Seleznyov publishes and analyzes sources that allow him to achieve a theoretical reconstruction of a situation of fruitful coexistence of religious communities in the broad cultural space of the Islamic world. This material provides a foundation for tracing the historical logic behind the construction of interrelations between confessional groups that are oriented around the value of tradition. The data on the historical experience of such interrelations was not sufficiently taken into consideration by earlier researchers. Many earlier studies focused on

the polemical contents of written records of Arab culture from the period in question. There are few studies that address the creative interaction of distinct and historically competing Christian confessions in the context of the development of Arab culture, which led to the formation of an essentially ecumenical paradigm of mutual interaction, and for this reason the present volume is of particular interest.

The book's materials are arranged in a logical sequence in the spirit of a major work, *The Summa of the Fundamentals of Religion and the Basic Essentials of Authoritative Knowledge* (*Majmūʿ uṣūl al-dīn wamasmūʿ maḥṣūl al-yaqīn*), which was written by Muʾtaman Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm Ibn al-ʿAssāl, a thirteenth-century Coptic Arab encyclopedist who came from an influential intellectual family, the Awlād al-ʿAssāl. This philosophical-liturgical composition "is based on the heritage of Ibn al-ʿAssāl's ancestors, which is organized into a philosophical interpretation of Christian teachings. The author's overview includes those confessions that are known to him, and in all of them he attempts to see reasonable formations, note contradictory positions, and point to the possibility of their rational solution" (8). Among the abundant material included in Ibn al-ʿAssāl's

Summa, we find a narration of a series of texts by "the worthy Melkite priest Naẓīf ibn Yumn, a Baghdādī doctor; a summary of compositions by Elias, Metropolitan of Jerusalem, of the same topic, which he called *[the Book] of the Concordance of Faith and a Concise Exposition of Religion* (it was said that this was a work by ʿAlī ibn Dāwūd); a short version of the treatise "How to Comprehend the Truth of the Confession of Faith" by the "most-revered, the only one knowing worthy wise man, philosopher and doctor, Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq; and a reproduction of "The Eleventh Chapter of the Works of the Nestorian Ibn al-Ṭayyib, with a list of people's opinions on unity and their conclusions."

All of these are included in the volume under review. We should particularly note the chapter dedicated to the *[Book] of the Concordance of Faith and a Concise Exposition of Religion*. The book's author not only presents a translation and discussion of the sources of this work, but also gives us the original text itself based on a manuscript in Garshūnī (recording of Arabic text in Syriac script), Ms. Ar. 657 in the Vatican Library. As Seleznyov observes, "the fate of this work turned out to be no less ecumenical than its author's original idea. Created by a 'Jacobite' scribe, this treatise was distribut-

ed under the name of the 'Nesto-rian' Metropolitan that 'copied' it, was used by a Coptic theologian, described by a Maronite scholar, transcribed in 'Chaldean' letters... and finally was used as proof of the antiquity of the two-fingered sign of the cross by historians of Russian Old Belief" (43–44).

The research into Ibn al-'Assāl's sources in this volume is incorporated into a larger context. The volume opens with a chapter about the meeting of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius with Īshōʻyahb Catholicos of the East-Syriac Church (in the seventh century) and ends with a liturgical treatise by a Coptic-Arab author that is a review of the features of Christian communities in the East that characterizes them as traditionally Eastern Christian as well as including some representatives of the West, Franks who had come to the East. Thus, the volume under review can also be seen as a series of enticing excurses into various areas of intellectual creativity by representatives of the Christian segment of the medieval Muslim East. It reveals the intensive cultural contacts and notes unifying tendencies, which give the volume its name. The title *Pax Christiana et Pax Islamica* plays on the theme of the search for Christian unity in connection with the development of Arab-Muslim thought.

The volume demonstrates the broad erudition of Seleznyov, who orients himself easily in this enor-

mous corpus of historical sources. Among the book's obvious achievements, let us also note the author's mastery of classical (Greek, Latin) and Eastern (Syriac, Arabic) languages. Texts in those languages are presented in the original and in the author's translations, which significantly increases the scholarly value of his study. Perhaps, the only criticism related to translation that can be made would be to address the author's repeated use of a particular type of Arabicism, namely his attempt to use the conjunction "and" when it comes at the beginning of a sentence for the Arabic "wa," as well as his scrupulous adherence to the Arabic original in translating other conjunctions or parts of speech, which in the original play a role in connecting sentences ("then," "it follows," etc.). Such scrupulousness would be justified if Arabic syntax were more similar to Russian syntax. However, the reality is just the opposite, and in this case, conveying a letter in the text can turn out to be a deviation from the text, since in fact it distorts the text, conveying to the Russian reader a feeling of artificiality and intentionality, whereas in the Arabic original it is merely adhering to a linguistic norm.

In what scholarly field should we place Seleznyov's book? While this may seem like a simple question, its answer is not. On the one hand, the subtitle, which includes the word "history," would seem to

put it in the historical discipline. It is difficult to object to this, but such a characterization does not exhaust the volume's contents. The author acts not only a historian but also as a philologist, and this philological orientation is apparent both in the attention that he pays to the texts, and in the careful and loving treatment of primary sources, and even in the amount of textual space devoted to reproducing the originals and their translations. The text does not hide "behind a screen," nor does it remain somewhere "in the author's research lab." Rather, it is persistently and visibly present on the pages of the volume. There is no division between these two hypostases (I hope the author will forgive me the allegorical use of this word, which is one of the key terms in his book). Rather, they organically intertwine and justify each other: history is studied through the primary sources, and a detailed philological study of these texts turns out to be essential for the historical research. Such a means of narrating history or showing the life and contents of a text is especially noteworthy and, in my opinion, is an essential virtue of the author's style.

However, it is not just a question of style. A combination such as this — history through text and text interlaced with history — is augmented by one more, no less substantive feature. Seleznyov is interested not just in the words in the text but also in the thought behind it, which may not be directly expressed; he is interested in history not only as a chain of events, but also in the causes that created and molded it. In my opinion, Seleznyov's research gravitates toward philosophizing, toward looking behind what is obviously presented to us, and thereby to understanding what explains it and how it became possible. It is for this reason that the individual essays in the book are unified not only externally via historical events, but also at the level of the internal idea, the theoretical. As we move from one part of the book to the next, we gradually begin to *understand* how this fruitful coexistence of Pax Christiana and Pax Islamica came to be not destroyed by, but, on the contrary, nourished by the dogmatic disagreements between the faiths, not to mention the internal differences of the various branches within each. It is most likely that this ultimately became possible thanks to a unified thought space, set and molded by common thought models.

I will name two of these that are clearly examined in the text and that are among the most frequently used and important in theoretical discussions of Arab-Muslim culture: these are the *aṣl-farʿ* (root-branch) and the *lafẓ-maʿnan* (word-meaning) concepts. As far as we can tell, these models are also used

by Christian authors when evaluating the question of the unity and heterogeneity of faiths (39, 88, etc.). Thought models have a formal character that is therefore one that is independent of its concrete contents; we can say that they stand above dogmatic (content) differences. It is not impossible that at the foundation of mutual understanding — not destroyed by dogmatic differences and supporting the coexistence and cultural exchange between the two worlds — not of the least importance was precisely the use of the same methods of thinking, formalized as these named models, terminologically marked, and therefore easily recognized and reproduced in their logical fullness by the listener.

I am sure that readers will receive not only benefit but also great intellectual satisfaction from Seleznyov's work. Though replete with scholarly apparatus and all sorts of quotes, the book nonetheless maintains a fresh, lively style and is not covered with the boring dust of the academic study. It is as if the author is bringing us into his circle of close friends, who are inviting us into their conversation, desiring to share their efforts with us and to enrich us with the results of their deliberations. We wish readers the joy of familiarizing themselves with this volume, and its author the joy of continuing down his chosen path, not falling off of the track.

Andrey V. Smirnov (Translation by Natasha Kolchevska)