

PREFACE

THIS BOOK HAS BEEN in the making for many years. It all began when more than twenty-five years ago I was a fellow at Dumbarton Oaks and in regular conversations with the Byzantinists who were my constant conversation partners there, and with Professor Irfan Shahid in particular, the master of Byzantine/Arab studies, who has continued to give me constant encouragement and help. In those days, Professor Giles Constable was the benevolent and broadminded director of Dumbarton Oaks, to whom I herewith acknowledge my gratitude for his unstinting advocacy and support. At that time I had proposed to write an account of the responses of the Christians in the so-called Oriental Patriarchates, as the Greeks called the Episcopal sees of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, to the challenges posed for them by the Muslims under whose hegemony most of the Coptic, Syriac, and Arabic-speaking Christians lived. Little did I know how long it would take me to accomplish the project; at that time there were few scholarly studies of the relevant materials in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic to which I could turn for help. I spent many years writing articles about individual Christian Arabic and Syriac writers and their compositions, translating and commenting on some texts and editing others. In the fall semester of the academic year 1991–92, I profited immensely from a semester's stay in the Institute for Advanced Study at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, at the invitation of Professor R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and the late Professor Hava Lazarus-Yafeh; the community of scholars in Jerusalem in my fields of interest is unequalled anywhere. Finally, in the fall of 2004 I was appointed to John Carroll University's Walter and Mary Tuohy Chair of interreligious studies, a situation that allowed me the opportunity to write as public lectures the general essays that, after much revision, would become the chapters of this book. I am most grateful to Professor David Mason, the director of the chair, and to all my erstwhile colleagues in the university's department of religious studies, particularly Dr. Zeki Saritoprak, for their warm welcome and unstinting hospitality during my time in Cleveland.

For more than thirty years I have been a member of the faculty in the Department of Semitic and Egyptian Languages and Literatures at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, where I took my own graduate degree under the guidance of the late Msgr. Patrick W. Skehan and now retired Professor Richard M. Frank. Needless to say, my debt to them is beyond calculation and well beyond what a simple acknowledgment here can adequately repay. For all of these years I have had the privilege to work in the incomparable library of the university's Semitics De-

partment and its Institute of Christian Oriental Research; again I am much indebted to the library's curator, Dr. Monica J. Blanchard, who for many years has gone well beyond the call of either duty or friendship to provide me with the often hard to find resources I have needed for my researches. Over these same years I have received much support from my colleagues and students, too numerous to list individually here; they, and our current chairman, Professor Michael Patrick O'Connor, have offered me their friendship and scholarly companionship, without which I surely would not have been able to work so happily for so long.

A number of people have read some or all of this book's chapters and have offered many helpful comments, not to mention their very welcome corrections of my unwitting errors of fact or interpretation. Among them I wish particularly to thank Professor Christopher Blum of Christendom College in Front Royal, Virginia; Professor Robert L. Wilken of the University of Virginia; Dr. Norbert Hintersteiner of the Catholic University of America; Fred Appel and Meera Vaidyanathan of the Princeton University Press; Dawn Hall, my copyeditor; and the two anonymous readers whom the press appointed to evaluate my work; their remarks and suggestions have very much improved the final product. I am particularly grateful to the Institute of Christian Oriental Research at the Catholic University of America; Professor Joseph Patrich of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem; and the British Library for permission to reproduce here the illustrations that belong to them.

Finally I wish to express here my gratitude for the support of my family, friends, and confreres, all of whom, again too numerous to mention here, have patiently, willingly, and supportively endured the vagaries of one absorbed for so long in the preoccupations of research and writing. I owe special thanks to Marlene Debole for her support and her skillful help in the assembly of the text, and to Professor Christine M. Bochen of Nazareth College of Rochester, New York, for long years of personal solicitude and inspiration.

This book is not a comprehensive presentation of its subject. Rather, I conceive it to be a general introduction to the study of Christian cultural and intellectual life in the world of Islam, from the time of the prophet Muḥammad to the time of the Crusades and the Mongol conquest of the Middle East in the middle of the thirteenth century. For this reason, and to lead the reader to further sources of study, I have included copious bibliographical annotations in the text. It is my hope that the book may thus become something of a reference source for the study of the Christian Middle East among English speakers, who are not yet well served with an abundant literature in this field. I, and all who work in Christian Arabic studies, owe much to the pioneering work in our time of Fr. Samir Khalil

Samir, S.J., whose many editions of texts and numerous scholarly studies, mostly in Arabic and French, have brought new life to the study of an often-overlooked portion of the Christian heritage; to him I offer the homage of a grateful colleague.

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**THE CHURCH IN THE
SHADOW OF THE MOSQUE**



Frontispiece. St. Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai

While the monastery at Sinai was dedicated to the martyr St. Catherine of Alexandria (fourth century) after the ninth century, it was founded in 527 CE and dedicated originally to the Mother of God. The monastery's library now houses one of the largest collections of Christian Arabic manuscripts, a number of them written in the monasteries of Palestine, the earliest of them dating from the second half of the eighth century CE. (Courtesy of Professor Joseph Patrich, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.)