

CHRISTIAN LANGE (ed.), *Ephraem der Syrer: Kommentar zum Diatessaron I*. Fontes Christiani Bd. 54/1. Turnhout: Brepols, 2008, pp. 366, ISBN 9782503519746.

CHRISTIAN LANGE (ed.), *Ephraem der Syrer: Kommentar zum Diatessaron II*. Fontes Christiani Bd. 54/2. Turnhout: Brepols, 2008, pp. viii + 332, ISBN 9782503528694.

This is the first German translation of the Syriac commentary that Ephrem of Nisibis, the Patristic poet, theologian, and exegete, devoted to the most influential second-century Gospel harmony of Tatian the Syrian, a disciple of Justin Martyr, who in turn may have availed himself of a more primitive Gospel harmony<sup>1</sup>. This commentary is valuable both per se and as a source of fragments from Tatian's lost work, whose structure can be guessed from late translations and adaptations<sup>2</sup>. An English version was offered by McCarthy<sup>3</sup>, and Latin and French versions were made available by L  loir, the French editor<sup>4</sup>. Ephrem's commentary was known only through an Armenian version preserved in two manuscripts, and scanty fragments from later Syriac authors, until the relatively recent publication of a sixth-century Syriac codex (Chester Beatty 709, from the Syriac monastery in Wadi Natrun) by L  loir<sup>5</sup>. Now we possess about eighty percent of the original commentary in Syriac. The problem is rather to establish how much of this material is Ephrem's own, and how much is later.

The German translation, unfortunately without a facing Syriac text, is generally careful, although occasionally rather free, and the relevant notes, albeit short and strictly explicative, are useful. Lange translates the Syriac text of the Chester Beatty codex and in the notes indicates the most remarkable variants found in the Armenian translation. The sections that are not included in the

<sup>12</sup> See at least W.L. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship*, Leiden 1994; cf. R. Schedinger, *Tatian and the Jewish Scripture*, Louvain 2001.

<sup>3</sup> C. McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on the Diatessaron. An English Translation of the Chester Beatty Syriac MS 709 with Introduction and Notes*, Oxford 1993.

<sup>4</sup> The Latin in his edition (see next note), the French in L. L  loir, *Ephrem de Nisibe. Commentaire de l'  vangile concordant ou Diatessaron*, Sources Chr  tiennes 121, Paris, 1966.

<sup>5</sup> L. L  loir (ed.), *Saint Ephrem. Commentaire de l'  vangile concordant. Texte syriaque*, Dublin 1963, followed by the relevant *Folios additionnels*, Louvain 1990. See also Id., "Le commentaire d'Ephrem sur le *Diatessaron*, Quarante et un folios retrouv  s", *Revue Biblique* 94, 1987, 481-518; Id., "Le commentaire d'Ephrem sur le *Diatessaron*", in *The Four Gospels 1992. Festschrift F. Neyrinck*, III, Louvain 1992, 2359-67.

Syriac codex, and are also missing from another, secondary codex, are translated from the Armenian; the beginnings and endings of these different sections are marked, not in the body of the translation, but in the notes. Moreover, Lange chose to translate also four bits that the Armenian version includes, but were surely absent from the Syriac. An inevitably select bibliography and useful indices complete the book.

A substantial introduction precedes the translation, handling intricate questions such as that of the authorship and of the double redaction of the text. In Chapter 1 Ephrem's biography is taken into consideration. While Palladius and Sozomenus call Ephrem a monk, this assertion is corrected by Lange, on the basis of Beck's and Brock's studies, into Ephrem belonging to Syriac proto-monasticism. Lange also addresses the question of Ephrem's knowledge of Greek language and philosophy, which seems to have grown deeper in the late Edessan years, also thanks to the stimulating intellectual environment of Edessa. A careful picture of Edessa and Nisibis, and Syriac Christianity in the time of Ephrem, is offered. On p. 18, the authenticity of the *Chronicle of Arbela* is presented as debated and some scholarship is cited; however, no mention is made of arguments for authenticity recently adduced, for instance by Kawerau or myself<sup>6</sup>. The epitaph of Abercius, on the other hand, is rightly taken as valuable evidence of the presence of Christians in Nisibis at the end of the second century (19)<sup>7</sup>. Lange also mentions (23) Ephrem's polemic against Bardaisan and in particular his doctrine of preexisting beings or *ityē*. I find that Ephrem did so in that he misunderstood Bardaisan's *ityē* as deities simply because of their preexistence to the present world and because he wanted to keep only for God the characterization of "Being," grounded in *Ex* 3:14<sup>8</sup>. Lange also mentions Ephrem's polemic against Mani, and indeed I have argued that his polemic against Bardaisan was deeply influenced by his polemic against Mani, although historically Bardaisan cannot of course be ascribed Manichaean ideas.

Chapter 2 is devoted to a survey of Ephrem's literary works, in a broadly chronological order, which largely depends on the grouping of his hymns; the main problem with this approach is that we cannot be sure that this grouping is due to Ephrem himself. On the other hand, the positive side of the chronological approach is that it allows scholars to trace possible developments in Ephrem's

<sup>6</sup> See documentation in my *Il Chronicon di Arbela*, critical essay, translation from the Syriac, notes and bibliography, Madrid 2003, *Anejos de 'Ilu*, *Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones*, 8, with reviews by G. Firpo, *Aevum* 79, 2005, 195-7; E.G. Mathews, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* November 2003, and my "Il Chronicon di Arbela: una messa a punto storiografica", *Aevum* 80, 2006, 145-64.

<sup>7</sup> See also my "L'epitafio di 'Abercio', uno *status quaestionis* e alcune osservazioni", *Aevum* 74, 2000, 191-206. Margherita Guarducci, "Abercio", in *NDPAC*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, I, Genoa 2007, cites and accepts my interpretation.

<sup>8</sup> See my *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment of the Evidence and a New Interpretation*. Also in *the Light of Origen and the Original Fragments from De India*, Piscataway 2009, *Eastern Christian Studies* 22, 156-238.

thought. This, of course, presupposes that the chronological sequence reconstructed is correct, which is no easy task to determine. Chapter 3 finally reaches the Commentary on the *Diatessaron* itself, which, according to Lange, belongs to the late works of Ephrem's, given the doctrinal debates that it reflects. After a general presentation of the *Diatessaron*, Lange, following Aland and Vööbus, observes that Ephrem used it as the standard Bible of his church in Edessa, but he must have known also a form of the *Vetus Syra*. Lange is also right to highlight the use of the *Diatessaron* in Edessa as reflected by the *Doctrina Addai*, which in its final redaction stems from the beginning of the fifth century, but whose nucleus probably goes back to the Severan age<sup>9</sup>. The problem of the authenticity of the commentary first surfaced in the history of modern research, which followed the publication of the Syriac text (53-5). It is generally admitted that the text we have has been reworked and cannot be considered entirely a work by Ephrem himself<sup>10</sup>. Hogan, however, tends to see in it an authentic piece of Ephrem, and McCarthy finds that the name of Ephrem ought not to be completely detached from this commentary<sup>11</sup>.

Chapter 4 entirely focuses on this thorny problem and offers a synopsis of those sections of the commentary that are present in both recensions, Syriac and Armenian (these constitute the *Urtext*), those which are only extant in the Syriac, those which are only in the Armenian, and those which are preserved only in the Armenian but because the Syriac is there lacking. A more detailed discussion of the implications of this comparison is found in a previous book by Lange himself<sup>12</sup>. Lange observes that passages that are only extant in Syriac

<sup>9</sup> See my "Edessa e i Romani tra Augusto e i Severi: aspetti del regno di Abgar V e di Abgar IX", *Aevum* 73, 1999, 107-43; "La *Doctrina Addai* e gli *Acta Maris*: Note storico-letterarie sui loro rapporti intertestuali", *AION* 65, 2005, 75-102; "The Narrative Continuity between the *Teaching of Addai* and the *Acts of Mari*: Two Historical Novels?", in *Framing Plots*, Proceedings of the London 2006 Conference, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 189, 2009, 411-50; "Bardesane e la sua scuola, l'Apologia siriana 'di Melitone' e la *Doctrina Addai*", *Aevum* 83, 2009, 141-68.

<sup>10</sup> A. de Halleux, for instance, calls the form we possess now "the Syriac commentary on the *Diatessaron*": A. De Halleux, "L'adoration des mages dans le commentaire syriaque du *Diatessaron*", in *Le Muséon* 104, 1991, 251-64; 399-412; Id., "L'annonce à Zacharie dans le commentaire syriaque du *Diatessaron*", in *Le Muséon* 106, 1993, 255-65; Id., "L'annonciation à Marie dans le commentaire syriaque du *Diatessaron*", in *Aram* 5, 1993, 131-45. See also E. Beck, "Ephräm und der Diatessaronkommentar im Abschnitt über die Wunder beim Tode Jesu am Kreuz", *OrChr* 77, 1993, 104-19.

<sup>11</sup> M. Hogan, *The Sermon of the Mount in St Ephrem's Commentary on the Diatessaron*, Bern 1999; McCarthy, *Ephrem, Commentary*, 34. See also C. McCarthy, "Allusions and Illusions: St. Ephrem Verbal Magic in the Diatessaron Commentary", in *Scriptural Interpretation in the Fathers*, ed. T. Finan - V. Twomey, Dublin 1995, 143-62; M. Hogan, *The Sermon of the Mount in St. Ephrem's Commentary on the Diatessaron*, Bern 1999.

<sup>12</sup> C. Lange, *The Portrayal of Christ in the Syriac Commentary on the Diatessaron*, Leuven 2005, 36-52.

include exegeses that differ from those parallel passages belonging to the *Urtext*; Lange rightly considers these passages to be interpolations, just as most of the sections only extant in Armenian.

The result of this discussion is a *stemma*, not *codicum*, but *recensionum*, on p. 65, from which it is clear that both the Syriac and the Armenian recensions include additions to the *Urtext*. This *Urtext*, in turn, does not seem to be unitary; three kinds of commentaries were distinguished therein by Yousif, and Lange tends to see these three kinds as evidence of different authors rather than simply different literary styles from one and the same author. The latter seems to be the position embraced by McCarthy and Petersen. According to Lange, therefore, not even the *Urtext* belongs entirely to Ephrem, and indeed there are grounds to support this supposition, even though he does not determine which sections therein go back to Ephrem himself and which to others, probably disciples of his, or at least one disciple.

In Chapter 5 Lang endeavours to establish the date and place of composition of the *Urtext*: it was probably composed in Edessa by a disciple of Ephrem in the years 361–400. This hypothesis is based on references in the *Urtext* to precise doctrinal details, especially on Trinitarian matters. For instance, Lange does not think that the Nicene–Constantinopolitan formula, which is echoed in the *Urtext*, that God is one nature (*kyānā*) in three Persons (*qnomē*), goes back to Ephrem himself, especially in that it is attested in Syriac only from the beginning of the fifth century. Indeed, I observe that the Cappadocian formula, that God is one οὐσία in three ὑποστάσεις, was already present in Origen<sup>13</sup>, but the replacement of ὑποστάσεις with πρόσωπα is later. The very brief Chapter 6 (half a page) is a recapitulation concerning the probability that a disciple of Ephrem is the compiler of the *Urtext*.

Chapter 7 plunges again into the theological features of the *Urtext*, for an engaging investigation in both the Christology and the Trinitarian doctrine it displays. The anti-Arian aspects of the *Urtext* find a parallel more in Ephrem's early works than in his later works, in which he directed his attacks more against Bardaisanites and Marcionites. Lange's conjecture is that the compiler of the *Urtext* was writing during the renaissance of Arianism with the so-called "Neo-Arianism", in the late fourth century, after Ephrem's death. The compiler too, however, like the late Ephrem, was engaged in fighting both Bardaisanism and Marcionism<sup>14</sup>. His polemic against the Pneumatomachians, on the other side, was absent from Ephrem's own writings, since that problem emerged after his death. History of salvation and the characterizations of Christ in respect to the economy in the *Urtext* are finally addressed. That of Christ as Physician and Healer is, I think, particularly important in respect to Ephrem's own thought, in

<sup>13</sup> As I have argued in "Origen's Anti-Subordinationism and Its Heritage in the Nicene and Cappadocian Line," forthcoming in *VigChr*.

<sup>14</sup> As for polemics against Manichaeism in relation to the *Diatessaron* see D.D. Bundy, "Revising the *Diatessaron* against the Manichaeans: Ephrem of Syria on John 1:4", *Aram* 5, 1993, 65–74.

which this aspect is especially emphasised<sup>15</sup>. The general conclusion of this chapter is remarkable: “die Christologie des Kommentars auf den Lehren Ephraems, wie sie uns in den Schriften des Syrers begegnen, beruht” (104).

In Chapter 8 Lange examines the text of the New Testament that is used in the *Urtext*: besides the *Diatessaron*, it is also a text that is close to that of the *Vetus Syra*. Indeed, in the fourth century both the *Diatessaron* and the *Vetus Syra* (in which the four Gospels were separated) were circulating. On their interrelationships I personally would refer readers to a recent study by Giovanni Lenzi<sup>16</sup>, who shows how from the *Vetus Syra* and the *Diatessaron*, originally different works, several intermediate recensions arose; few decades after the composition of the *Diatessaron* – which Lenzi too, as most scholars, assumes to have been originally written in Syriac – there existed Greek vulgarized versions of it. Moreover, Lenzi argues that there is a direct link between the Syriac church and the first Christian Aramaic communities (for the *Vetus Syra* this is confirmed by Brock).

Chapter 9 analyzes the different styles in the commentary; an interesting detail that is pointed out is that Mary, the Virgin, and Mary Magdalene are mixed up therein; the same confusion is found in Ephrem, but also in some other early Syriac authors. In Chapter 10 Lange examines the exegetical method in the *Urtext* and shows that it follows that of Ephrem in the use of typology and symbolism. Chapter 11 summarises what has already been said about the adversaries of the compiler of the *Urtext*.

All in all, this is a helpful and valuable contribution to the study both of the *Diatessaron* and of Ephrem and his immediate followers. For the first time it makes an important text available to German readers. It is to be hoped that the respected and useful *Fontes Christiani* series will consider including the original texts of Syriac works as well, just as it does with Greek and Latin works. This would be a service to all Syriacists and scholars in Syriac literature and culture, and would much enhance the value of the series books containing translations and studies of Syriac works, which are certainly a most welcome and enriching addition to the Greek and Latin volumes.

ILARIA RAMELLI

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore  
ilaria.ramelli@unicatt.it

<sup>15</sup> See A. Shemunkasho, *Healing in the Theology of St Ephrem*, Piscataway 2004, esp. 381–419, and my “La centralità del Mistero di Cristo nell’escatologia di s. Efreem”, *Augustinianum* 49,2, 2009, 371–406.

<sup>16</sup> “Note sul lessico della *Vetus Syra*,” *AION* 65, 2005 [2010], 51–74. See also T. Baarda, “John I : 5 in the Oration and *Diatessaron* of Tatian”, *VigChr* 47, 1993, 209–25; Id., *Essays on the Diatessaron*, Kampen 1994; Id., “The Syriac Versions of the New Testament”, in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research*, edd. B.D. Ehrman – M.V. Holmes, Grand Rapids 1995, 97–112. J. Joosten, “La tradition syriaque des Évangiles”, *RHPPhR* 77, 1997, 257–72; Id., *Jésus et l’aveugle-né dans l’évangile de Barnabas et le Diatessaron*, *RHPPhR* 80, 2000, 359–69, but A. den Hollander – U. Schmid, “The Gospel of Barnabas, the *Diatessaron*, and Method”, in *Vigiliae Christianae* 61, 2007, 1–20.

