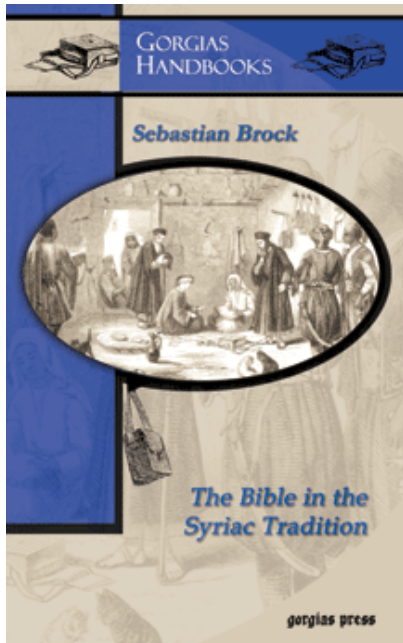


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**Brock, Sebastian**

***The Bible in the Syriac Tradition***

Gorgias Handbooks 7

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This book is published in the series Gorgias Handbooks by Gorgias Press, a publisher well-known for its contribution to the field of Syriac studies. The author is the retired Reader in Syriac Studies at the University of Oxford and one of the most important scholars in the field of Syriac studies. This book contains revised editions of two previously published introductions to the Bible in Syriac. Part 1 (“The Bible in the Syriac Tradition”) is a revised version of a correspondence course used by the St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute in Kottayam, India. Part 2 (“The Syriac Bible”) is a revised version of a contribution in the third volume of *The Hidden Pearl: The Syriac Orthodox Church and Its Ancient Aramaic Heritage*. Both the original works were introductions to the Bible in Syriac, although with different aims. Although both parts were revised and updated, they preserve their original structures, with the result that they contain a large measure of overlap.

The first part deals first of all with Bible translation in general (ch. 1). It discusses the transmission of the Bible in manuscript form and the transition to printed editions. Chapter 2 deals with the different translations of the Bible in Syriac. As far as the Old Testament is concerned, it discusses the Peshitta and the Syro-Hexapla. With regard to

the New Testament, it discusses the Diatessaron, the Old Syriac, Peshitta, Philoxenian, and Harclean. The Peshitta of the Old Testament was translated from a Hebrew text close to the Masoretic Text. The Syro-Hexapla is very important for research on Origen's Hexapla, as it translated the fifth column of that work. As far as the translations of the New Testament are concerned, Brock points to the difference between the text of the Peshitta and the Old Syriac. This can be attributed to the different base texts used, as well as a different translation technique. The Harclean is a very literal translation, giving much attention to philological detail.

Chapter 3 deals with the manuscripts of the different versions as well as the texts contained in lectionaries, printed editions, and translations of the Syriac versions. It discusses the four important complete Bibles: the Codex Ambrosianus and the complete Bibles in the National Library in Paris, the Laurentian Library in Florence, and the Cambridge University Library. These Bibles include a number of apocryphal books, such as Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon. There are not many variants in the different Syriac manuscripts, pointing to the faithful transmission of the text by Syrian scribes. The most important manuscript of the Syro-Hexapla is also in the Ambrosian Library and contains the second half of the Old Testament. Brock discusses the different printed editions of the Peshitta from 1555 up to the critical edition of the Old Testament Peshitta edited by the Peshitta Institute in Leiden. Unfortunately, the complete printed Bibles are mostly based on younger and inferior manuscripts and are not sufficient for scholarly work. The Leiden edition is to be used for the Old Testament, while a critical edition of the New Testament Peshitta is being prepared at the New Testament Text-Critical Institute in Münster.

Chapter 4 discusses Biblical interpretation in the Syriac traditions. In these traditions two modes of interpretations can be distinguished, factual and spiritual. This distinction goes back to Ephrem. This distinction is illustrated in this chapter with examples from Ephrem. Chapter 5 discusses the Syriac biblical commentaries. The oldest commentaries are from Ephrem, on Genesis and Exodus from the Old Testament, the Diatessaron, Acts, and the Pauline epistles. Greek commentaries from the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools were translated into Syriac in the late fourth and fifth centuries. Theodore of Mopsuestia is the most important example from the Antiochene school and Cyril of Jerusalem from the Alexandrian school.

The last three chapters in part 1 deal with the Syriac Bible in preaching, liturgy, and as a basis for Syriac Spirituality. Chapter 6 points to the important place of poetry in the Syriac tradition, especially the use of dialogue poetry and verse homilies. As far as liturgy is concerned (ch. 7), the way in which the Bible is used in prayers and hymns is very important. The Bible became the source of many terms used in Syriac spirituality (ch. 8).

The second part overlaps to a large extent with the first three chapters of part 1, although it contains some information not discussed in the first part, such as the issue of the apocryphal psalms and dated manuscripts. Brock discusses the place of Ps 151 in Syriac manuscripts as well as its removal from some of the editions of the Peshitta. He discusses the other four Syriac apocryphal psalms found in the Syriac manuscript 12t4, from the twelfth century. Versions of two of them appear in a manuscript from Qumran as well. The section on the translation of the Syriac Bible in other languages, such as Modern Syriac, English, and Malayalam is also new. This part of the book is written in a more popular style, making it very useful for people from a nonscholarly background.

What is very helpful at the end of this book is the extensive bibliography dealing with editions of the Bible in Syriac, tools, translations, studies, lectionaries, exegesis, and reception history.

This book is a valuable addition to works on the Bible in Syriac. It can serve as a very good introduction for students and people working in other fields who would like to know more about the Bible in Syriac. It contains very few errors (e.g., “and” for “an” on 59 and the “the” before “Andreas Masius” on 132). One may disagree with some of the statements in the book, such as on page 130, where the Urmi and Mosul editions are seen as largely derived from the edition of Lee. This is true of some of the biblical books, but the Psalms differ quite substantially from Lee, especially with regard to the headings, where these two editions have East Syrian headings.