



CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

MORAN 'ETHO - 9

S. BROCK

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF SYRIAC LITERATURE

ST. EPHREM ECUMENICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE
BAKER HILL, KOTTAYAM - 686 001
INDIA

MARCH 1997



CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

MŌRĀN 'ETHŌ -9

S. BROCK

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF SYRIAC LITERATURE

ST.EPHREM ECUMENICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE
BAKER HILL, KOTTAYAM
INDIA
MARCH 1997



PREFACE

This outline of Syriac literature aims to provide no more than an initial orientation to the subject. The number of authors and writings covered has deliberately been limited to the more important (or, in some cases, the more accessible); furthermore, although it is emphasised that the history of Syriac literature is a continuous one up to the present day, the focus of this outline has been on the period up to the early 14th century. The reasons for these limitations are largely practical ones: Syriac literature of the period up to c. 1300 is often of particular significance and importance, and accordingly the editing of Syriac texts has largely been confined to authors of this period; but it should be noted that even here many important works remain unpublished, and reference has on occasion been made to these. On the whole, however, the writers selected and the works specifically mentioned in Section III are for the most part confined to those which are available in published form; within this section the most important authors are indicated with an asterisk(*). Indication is also given of the availability of an English translation (and/or, on occasion, to translations into other modern European languages); details of these can be found in Section VI. In Section IV preliminary guidance is given to certain specific topics. Some indication of the very large number of texts translated into Syriac is given in Section V. In order to give the reader a first impression of the variety to be found within Syriac literature, a small selection of short samples has been provided in Section VII. Finally, Some basic guidance for further reading will be found in Section VII.

In Section III the following abbreviations are used:

E= East Syriac (Church of the East)

ET, FT, GT, IT, LT = English, French, German, Italian, Latin translation available.

W= West syriac (predominantly Syrian Orthodox)



A brief outline of Syriac Literature

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

- I. A Bird's Eye View: the Main Periods
 - II. Secular and Ecclesiastical Background
 - (a) Periods A-C (2nd - 7th cent.)
 - (b) Periods D-F (7th - 20th cent.)
 - III. The Six Main Periods
 - A. 2nd - 3rd centuries
 - B. 4th century
 - C. 5th to mid 7th century
 - (a) 5th cent.
 - (b) 5th/6th cent.
 - (c) 6th cent.
 - (d) 6th/7th cent.
 - D. Mid 7th to end of 13th century
 - (a) second half 7th cent.
 - (b) 7th/8th cent.
 - (c) 8th cent.
 - (d) 8th/9th cent.
 - (e) 9th cent.
 - (f) 10th cent.
 - (g) 11th cent.
 - (h) 12th cent.
 - (i) 13th cent.
 - E. 14th to 19th century
 - F. 20th century
- Appendix: Chronological List (periods A-D)



CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

- IV. Particular Topics
 - (a) Bible
 - (b) Exegesis
 - (c) liturgy
 - (d) Canon Law

- V. Translations into Syriac

- VI. Summary Guide to English Translations

- VII. Short samples from selected authors

- VIII. Select Bibliography
Index of Names (to III)



I. A BIRD'S EYE VIEW: THE MAIN PERIODS

Syriac began as the local Aramaic dialect of Edessa (Urhay, modern Urfa in SE Turkey), with its own script, first attested in inscriptions of the first century AD. It must have been adopted as the literary language of the Aramaic-speaking Christianity at an early date, and as a result of this its use spread rapidly along with the spread of Christianity in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire and in the Persian Empire further east. Syriac is in fact one of the three Late Aramaic dialects which came to produce large surviving literatures, the other two being Jewish Aramaic and Mandaean; both in literary quality and in quantity Syriac easily surpasses these other two large Aramaic literatures.

Syriac literature covers from the second to the twentieth century AD. This long span of time can conveniently be broken up into six main periods:

- A. The earliest literature: 2nd- 3rd century AD.
- B. Aphrahat, Ephrem, and other fourth-century writings.
- C. Fifth to mid seventh century.
- D. Mid seventh to end of the thirteenth century.
- E. Fourteenth to nineteenth century.
- F. Twentieth century.

Of the six periods, B-D (4th-13th cent.) provide the most extensive and most important literature.

II. THE SECULAR AND ECCLESIASTICAL BACKGROUND.

(a) Periods A-C (2nd-7th cent.) belong to the time when Syriac writers were living either under the Roman Empire or under the Persian Empire (Parthians up to AD 226; Sasanians from 226 - 640). Syriac writers living under the Roman Empire (Christian from the fourth century onwards) mostly came from



what is now SE Turkey and Syria; those living under the Zoroastrian Persian Empire were from modern Iraq, Iran and the Gulf States, Under the early Sasanians there were intermittent persecutions of Christians, mostly at times of war with the Roman Empire; the most serious of these were under Shapur II in the mid 4th century. By the 6th century Christianity had become a recognized minority religion, and martyrs from that period onwards were almost all Zoroastrian converts to Christianity from noble families.

Periods A-B (2nd-4th cent.) belong to the time of the undivided Church. Arianism was a serious threat in Ephrem's day. As a result of the christological controversies of the 5th century Syriac - speaking Christianity was divided into three ecclesiastical bodies: (1) the Church of the East (almost entirely in the Persian Empire, with a Catholicos Patriarch at Seleucia-Ctesiphon), which followed the strict Antiochene or dyophysite (two-nature) Christology advocated by Theodore of Mopsuestia; (2) those who (along with the Greek and all the Western Churches) accepted the Christological formula of the Council of Chalcedon (451); these in the course of the 7th century emerged as two separate bodies, each under a different Patriarch of Antioch, namely the Melkites and the Maronites; and (3) the Syrian Orthodox, who (along with the Armenian, Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox) rejected the Council of Chalcedon, and followed the Alexandrine or miaphysite (one-nature) Christology based on the teaching of Cyril of Alexandria. (The terms 'Nestorian' for the first group, and 'Monophysite' (or 'Jacobite') for the third group are seriously misleading, and should be avoided). It should be noted that the 'ecumenical' councils of this period were councils convened by the Roman emperor, and so applied only within the Roman Empire (though they might subsequently be received outside it, as happened with the Council of Nicaea (325) which was offi-

Besides Marcionism, Manichaeism, Buddhism & Jews.

Syria not Ec

becau

Th



- (1855) 3-34, and *H.J.Drijvers (1965).
- (5) ODES of SOLOMON: *J.H.Charlesworth (1973); a better translation, by J.A.Emerton, in H.F.D.Sparks (ed.) The Apocryphal Old Testament (Oxford, 1884), 683-731.
- (6) ACTS of THOMAS: *W.Wright (1871); A.F.J.Klijn (1962), with introduction.
- (7) MELITO, Apology: *W.Cureton, Spicilegium Syriacum (1855), 41-51
- (8) MENANDER, sayings: T.Baarda, in J.H Charlesworth (ed.) The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha II (1985), 591-606 (with good introduction)
- (9) MARA, Letter to Serpation: *W.Cureton, Spicilegium Syriacum (1855), 70-76. Cp K.McVey, in V Symposium Syriacum (1990), 257-72
- (10) AHIKAR: *J.R.Harris, F.C.Conybeare, A.S.Lewis, The Story of Ahikar (1913).
- (11) APHRAHAT, Demonstrations: 1,5,6,8,10,17,21,22 in J.Gwynn, in A Select Library of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers II. 13 (1898). 11-13, 15-19,21 part of 23 in J.Neusner, Aphrahat and Judaism (1971). 2 and 7 in Journal of the Society for Oriental Research 14 (1930) and 16(1932). 4 in S.P.Brock, The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life (1987), 5-25. Complete French translation by P.Bruns (1991-2).
- (12) EPHREM. The following are the main English translations available (in chronological order):
- J.B.Morris, Select Works of St Ephrem the Syrian (1847). Includes the only complete English translation of Hymns on Faith.
 - H.Burgess, Select Metrical Hymns and Homilies of Ephrem Syrus (1853); The Repentance of Nineveh (1953).
 - J.Gwynn (ed.), A Select Library of Nicene and Post



Nicene Fathers II.13 (1898). Includes Nisibene Hymns 1-21, 35-42, 62-68; Hymns on Epiphany

-*C.W.Mitchell, Prose Refutations I-II (1912, 1921).

-S.P.Brock, The Harp of the Spirit. Poems of St Ephrem (1975; selection of 12 poems; 2nd edn 1983; 18 poems).

-J.Lieu, in S.N.C.Lieu, The Emperor Julian (1986, 2nd edn 1989). Hymns on Julian.

-K.Mc Vey, Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns (1989). Includes Hymns on Nativity on Virginity, and on Julian.

-S.P.Borck, St Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns on Paradise (1990).

-C.Mc Carthy, St.Ephrem, Commentary on the Diatessron (1993).

-E.G.Mathews and J.P.Amar, St.Ephrem the Syrian. Selected Prose Works.

Includes Commentaries on Genesis and on Exodus, Homily on our Lord, and Letter to Publius.

-A.G.Salvesen, Ephrem, Commentary on Exodus (1995).

For further details, consult S.P.Brock, 'A brief guide to the main editions and translations of the works of Saint Ephrem', The Harp 3 (1990) 1-29

(13) BOOK of STEPS: Complete translation by R.Kitchen in preparation (Cistercian Studies, Kalamazoo). ch.12: in R.Murray, Symbols of Church and Kingdom (1975), 264-8; ch.12 and 18: in S.Brock, The Syriac Fathers on Prayer (1987), 45-59.

(14) CYRILLONA: FT by D.Cerbelaud, Cyrrillonas, L'Agneau veritable (1984).

(15) BALAI: On dedication of church in Qenneshrin, K.Mc Vey, in Aram 5 (1993), 359-67.

(16) JOHN the SOLITARY: - Dialogue on Soul, FT by



I. Hausherr (OCA 120, 1939); ET by Mary Hansbury
in preparation.

- Three Letters, GT by *L.G. Rignell (1941).

- Six Dialogues etc., G.T by *W. Strothmann (1972);
FT by R. Lavenant (Sources chretiennes 311, 1984).

- Three Discourses, GT (or summary) by *L.G. Rignell
(1960); ET of no. 1 by (D. Millet), Ascetic Homilies of
St Isaac the Syrian (1984) 461-6

- Letter to Hesychius, S.P. Brock, The Syriac Fathers
on Prayer (1987) 81-98

- On Prayer, *S.P. Brock in Journal of Theological Stud-
ies 30 (1979), 84-101; ET repr. in Ascetic Homilies of
St Isaac the Syrian (1984) 466-8.

(17) ANONYMOUS POETRY:- On Abraham and Sarh in
Egypt, *S.P. Brock, Le Museon 105 (1992), 104-32

- On Sacrifice of Isaac, *S.P. Brock, Le Museon 99
(1986), 108-12, 122-5.

- On Joseph, nos 3-4, A.S. Roderigues Pereira,
Jaarbericht Ex Oriente Lux 31 (1989/90), 95-120.

On Elijah, *S.P. Brock, Le Museon 89 (102) 106-10

Memra on Mary and Joseph, S.P. Brock, Bride of Light
(1994), 146-60

- Soghitho on Abel and Cain, *F. Feldmann, Syriache
Wechsellieder (1896); on Mary and Angel, Mary and
Magi, S.P. Brock, Bride of Light (1994), 111-32; John
the Baptist and Christ, Cherub and Thief, S.P. Brock,
Syriac Dialogue Hymns (1987);

Dispute of Months, *S.P. Brock, Journal of Semitic
Studies 30 (1985), 193-6.

(18) ANONYMOUS PROSE:- (Abraham of Qidun and) Mary,
S.P. Brock and S.A. Harvey, Holy Women of the Syrian
Orient (1987), 29-36.

- Man of God, FT by A. Amiaud (1889); ET (of FT) by



C.J.Odenkirchen (1978).

-Shmona, Gurya and Habbib, *F.C.Burkitt, Euphemia and the Goth (1913)

_Teaching of Addai, *G.Phillips (1876) and *W.Howard (1981); Martyrodms of Sharbel and Barsamya, *W.Cureton, Ancient Syriac Documents (1864), 41-72.

-Euphemia and the Goth, *F.C.Burkitt, Euphemia and the Goth(1913).

-Martyrdom of Martha etc., Brock and Harvey, Holy Women 67-81

-Martydom of Anahid, Brock and Harvey Holy Women, 82-99.

-Symeon the Stylite, R.Doran (1992).

-Julian Romance, H.Gollancz, Julian the Apostate (1928).

-Life of Rabbula (in preparation by R.Doran).

-On Abraham and Isaac, *S.P.Brock, Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica 12 (1981), 225-60



C H R I S T I A N
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

For further information
regarding this text

Please contact

library@thecmsindia.org

Please join the
'CMSI Benefactors Club'
and support the ongoing projects of
Christian Musicological Society Of India

-
- DIGITAL LIBRARY • ARAMAIC PROJECT
 - ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SYRIAC CHANTS
 - MUSIC ICONOGRAPHY • CHRISTIAN ART
 - RESOURCE FOR RESEARCHERS