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Students of the Bible
in 4th and 5th Century Syria

Seats of Learning, Sidelights and Syriacisms

HENNING LEHMANN

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Contents

- 7 Introduction
- 13 Hosanna
A Philological Discussion in the Old Church
- 23 The Spirit of God upon the Face of The Waters
*The Sources of St. Basil's and St. Augustine's
Comments on Gen 1,2c*
- 37 Some Questions Concerning the Armenian
Version of the Epistle of James
- 67 Severian of Gabala
New Identifications of Texts in Armenian Translation
- 77 An Important Text Preserved in MS Ven.
Mekh. No. 873 Dated A.D. 1299
*(Eusebius of Emesa's Commentary on Historical
Writings of the Old Testament)*
- 95 Severian of Gabala
Fragments of the Aucher Collection in Galata MS 54
- 107 The Syriac Translation of the Old Testament
*– as Evidenced around the Middle of the Fourth
Century (in Eusebius of Emesa)*
- 125 Evidence of the Syriac Bible Translation in Greek
Fathers of the 4th and 5th Centuries
- 131 The Question of the Syrian Background of the
Early Armenian Church once again
Some Methodological Remarks
- 141 What Translators Veil and Reveal
Observations on two Armenian Translations of one Greek Homily

155	The Noble Art of Abbreviating <i>in the Light of some Texts attributed to Severian of Gabala</i>
171	The So-Called "Absurd" Punctuation in John 1,3-4 <i>Neglected Witnesses of the Old Church</i>
187	What was Theodoret's Mother Tongue? <i>– Is the Question Open or Closed?</i>
217	Severian Cento No. 2 in MS Galata 54
229	Greek and Syrian <i>under the Aspects of some Syrian Seats of Learning</i>
243	Indices <i>Biblical texts</i> <i>Patristic and medieval names and sources</i> <i>Modern writers</i> <i>Abbreviations</i>

Introduction

1. Subject, title, and context

This book is concerned with three bishops from Syria, viz. Eusebius of Emesa (ca. 300 – ca. 359), Severian of Gabala (? – after 408), and Theodoret of Cyrhus (ca. 393 – ca. 466). In their literary activity they altogether cover about 100 years – from the second quarter of the 4th century until the beginning of the second half of the 5th century. As bishops, of course, their main responsibilities were of an ecclesiastical nature. However, we shall be more concerned with their roles as representatives of seats of learning or school traditions, but it should be mentioned at the very outset that they hardly drew any sharp distinction between what belonged to School and what belonged to Church. It should also be emphasized that the state of research is characterized by a fairly great variation in the scholarly approach of each of the three authors.

Their “language of office” was no doubt Greek. Eusebius and Severian probably had Syriac as their mother tongue, whereas Theodoret’s vernacular, as will be argued below, was Greek. Generally speaking, they all have some connection with the School of Antioch; since, however, this “school”, as has been shown most convincingly, was not “monolithic”, and, as will be true of any “school”, was not “identical” in form throughout the years of 350, 400, and 450, respectively, this “identification” maybe contains far more open questions than definite answers. It is therefore a basic point that the three authors should each be considered on the background of their time and context in history, both theologically speaking as well as in terms of culture, language etc.

The reason that this collection of articles dating from 1969 to 2005 (2008) has been given the title “Students of the Bible”, is the fact that we shall mainly be concerned with the ways in which the three bishops approached the Bible. The state of research, however, compels us to include questions on the transmission

of their written texts, and other elements that might throw some light over their theology and exegesis – or on very elementary questions about defining and understanding their literary remains, all of which must be answered, before a full evaluation of their roles in the history of learning, religion and politics can be made.

2. State of research

The starting point of my studies into the three Syrian bishops was a collection of homilies transmitted in Armenian. I gave a provisional account of some of my findings in a communication at the Patristic Conference at Oxford in 1967 (published in 1970, not included here), and in my book *Per Piscatores* (1975) it was shown that eight of the homilies (I-VIII) belonged to Eusebius, the rest (IX-XIII) to Severian. I argued that it was possible in some cases to discern the text of Eusebius' Syriac Bible; this was an important argument for his author's right, but, obviously, it was not a criterion that lent itself easily to the investigator, as the texts were only transmitted in Latin and Armenian. In fact, the very intricate question of the transmission of Eusebian texts is one of the main reasons for using the word "sidelight" in the subtitle of this book.

The fact that Eusebius used the Syrian Bible as the basis for his exegesis and preaching was the reason for two further considerations, that of the evaluation of "syriacisms", not least in the Armenian version of the Bible. I discussed the principles of method in handling linguistic and text historical – and other – syriacisms in an article about the Epistle of James (*L 1982,1*, below pp. 37ff) and in a broader context in papers concerned with the discussion about the Syrian background of certain elements in the Armenian church (*L 1989 and 1990*, below pp. 125ff and 131ff). Particular examples of references to Eusebius as a "Christian Syrian" and of Syrian readings in both Eusebius and Severian were presented at conferences in 1979 and 1995 and in the jubilee volume of the Venice Mechitharists (*L 1981, 1996 and 1969*, below pp. 23ff, 171ff and 13ff).

More specifically, already in *Per Piscatores* I pointed to the Armenian translation of Eusebius' commentary on historical writings of the Old Testament as an important instrument in identifying Eusebian quotations in the Greek catenae, whereby considerable parts of Eusebius' Greek original could be retrieved. This was pursued in articles published in 1984 and 1987 (below pp. 77ff and 107ff).

A couple of initiatives to publish a *corpus Severianicum* in Greek (connected

with the names of C. Datema and K. H. Uthemann) determined to a great extent the principal concerns of research into Severian. I tried to contribute to the editorial preparations, mainly along two tracks: first the heuristic task of identifying further evidence to be gained from the transmission in Armenian. Here, especially, the exploiting of MS No. 54 of the Galata Collection was important, but also a couple of Jerusalem manuscripts (No. 1 and No. 154) could be helpful, not only because of the supplementary texts they contain, but also in identifying Greek originals in the vast field of Pseudo-Chrysostomica (*L1982,2; 1986 and 2005,1*, cf. below pp. 67ff, 95ff and 217ff). Second, I added some considerations of a methodical character about the particular case where two translations into Armenian of one homily are extant (*L 1993*, pp. 141ff). The Armenian transmission could also be helpful, I argued, in identifying the author, where we are concerned with abbreviated homilies – in Greek as in Armenian, but often differently (*L 1995*, pp. 155ff).

In the 1970s, and even in the 1980s, I had not thought of going very far into the study of Theodoret myself; and my questions concerning him were put in very open and provisional terms (as e.g. in *L 1987 and 1989*, pp. 107ff and 125ff). The reason for asking my questions was the demonstration that “the Syrian” as referred to by Eusebius was in Syriac; yet, it could not be neglected that the famous Old Testament scholar, A. Rahlfs (in 1915) had maintained to have found in Theodoret a “vollständig sicheren Beweis” that “the Syrian” was a Bible version in Greek (cf. e.g. below, p. 119).

As it seemed that very few patristic scholars contested the general assumption of Theodoret’s mother tongue being Syriac, and as his use of “the Syrian” was only approached in a rather superficial way with no definite or clear-cut answer to the question of the language of this version, I found it necessary to go a little deeper into Theodoret’s information about Syrian matters, his knowledge of Syriac, and his use of “the Syrian” (*L1999 and 2005,2*, below pp 187ff and 229ff).

3. Occasion, justification, and disposition of the book

It may perhaps be pretentious to publish a collection of one’s own contributions to a certain field of research, in particular when they cover as long a span of time as almost 40 years (1969-2005/08).

Of course, in certain cases more recent research has taken the arguments further than I could do. This is especially true of the identification of the Greek of Eusebius’ Commentary on Genesis, as accomplished by R. ter Haar Romeny

in his brilliant book *A Syrian in Greek Dress* (1997). Also Ch. Burchard's treatment of the Armenian Epistle of James deserves to be mentioned.¹

However, even in my articles concerned with these questions there are still some observations not covered by the writers just mentioned, among other things on Eusebius' text outside the Commentary on Genesis; and, also the discussion of method in handling syriacisms given in my article on the Armenian Epistle of James might still be relevant, wherefore I have chosen to include these papers here. (For details, on which e.g. Romeny has rightly corrected some of my observations, I refer to his book and articles.)

To this, it should be added that a secondary justification for publishing the present collection of articles in the year 2008 is that quite a few of them have appeared in periodicals, annuals, *Festschriften* etc., which might not be easily available to the patristic scholar, generally speaking. Furthermore, one article has so far only been published in Spanish (*L 1981*), two only in Danish (*L 1999* and *2005,2*), and one only provisionally advertized as a contribution to the Weitenberg Festschrift (in press) (*L 2005,1*).

To such "technical" considerations is added, in my own evaluation, the idea that it might be worthwhile to assemble the studies under one aspect, viz. that of the approaches and methods applied by students of the Bible in 4th and 5th century Syria.

This does not, of course, change their character of being modest and singular studies, the illumination of which on the main subject might often be described as "sideways" and indirect.

I have chosen not to include any further discussion of recent research, other than what has been mentioned above and, in particular, what is included in the latest of the articles (*L 2005,2*). I have only – in connection with the process of translating my Danish articles of 1999 and 2005 made the following additions: material about Theodoret's *Commentary on Jeremiah* (pp. 206ff); and an extension of the concluding remarks about "Greek and Syrian" in later centuries (pp. 239f).

The studies are presented in the chronological order of their appearance in the hope that this will furnish the reader with a first hand impression of how the work was done. It might be appropriate however to add the hope

1 Christoph Burchard, "Zur altarmenischen Übersetzung des Jakobusbriefes", *Horizonte der Christenheit. Festschrift für Friedrich Heyer zu seinem 85. Geburtstag*, hrsg. v. M. Kohlbacher und M. Lesinski (*Oikonomia* 34), Erlangen 1994, 195-217.

that this will not be too inconvenient to any reader who, for example, might be primarily interested in just one of the figures treated of.

Finally, in this sequence of “expressions of hope” I also cherish another hope, i.e. that I shall not be the only person to find this collection of chapters – in direct reprint or translation – worthwhile, presented here, as it were, in “new clothing”.

Nourishing such a hope I offer this collection of studies about “Students of the Bible in 4th and 5th century Syria” to students of patristic, biblical and armenological matters – with cordial thanks to the Carlsberg Foundation, which has – in financial terms – made it possible to publish the book.

REFERENCES

Below, references to the original time and place of publishing of the studies are given. Supplementary information is added, where this is considered necessary.

1. “Hosanna – A Philological Discussion in the Old Church”, *Armeniaca – Mélanges d'études arméniennes*, Venice 1969, 165-174. (L1969)
2. “The Spirit of God upon the Face of the Waters. The Sources of St. Basil’s and St. Augustine’s Comments on Gen 1,2c” (orig. “El Espíritu de Dios sobre las aguas. Fuentes de los comentarios de Basilio y Agustín sobre el Génesis 1,2”, *Augustinus XXVI*, Madrid 1981, 127*-139*). (L1981)
3. “Some Questions Concerning the Armenian Version of the Epistle of James”, *Aarhus Armeniaca*, eds. Lise Bek, Henning Lehmann, and Lars Kærulf Møller (*Acta Jutlandica LVII, Humanities Series 56*), Århus 1982, 57-82. (L1982,1)
4. “Severian of Gabala: New Identifications of Texts in Armenian Translation”, *Classical Armenian Culture*, ed. Th. J. Samuelian (*University of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies 4*), University of Pennsylvania 1982, 113-124. (L1982,2)
5. “An Important Text Preserved in MS Ven. Mekh. No. 873, dated A.D. 1299 (Eusebius of Emesa’s Commentary on Historical Writings of the Old Testament)”, *Medieval Armenian Culture*, eds. T. Samuelian & M. Stone (*University of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies 6*), Chico, CA 1984, 142-160. (L1984)
6. “Severian of Gabala: Fragments of the Aucher Collection in Galata MS 54”, *Armenian Studies / Études Arméniennes in Memoriam Haïg Berbérian*, ed. Dickran Kouymjian, Lisbon 1986, 477-487. (L1986)
7. “The Syriac Translation of the Old Testament – as Evidenced around the Middle of the Fourth Century (in Eusebius of Emesa)”, *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament 1*, Århus 1987, 66-86. (L1987)
8. “Evidence of the Syriac Bible Translation in Greek Fathers of the 4th and 5th Centuries”, *Studia Patristica XIX*, ed. E. A. Livingstone, Leuven 1989, 366-371. (L1989)
9. “The Question of the Syrian Background of the Early Armenian Church once again. Some Methodological Remarks”, *Studia Patristica XVIII, 4*, ed. E. A. Livingstone, Kalamazoo-Leuven 1990, 255-262. (L1990)

10. "What Translators Veil and Reveal. Observations on two Armenian Translations of one Greek Homily", *Armenian Texts – Tasks and Tools*, eds. Henning Lehmann and J. J. S. Weitenberg (*Acta Jutlandica* LXIX:1, *Humanities Series* 68), Århus 1993, 75-84. (L1993)
11. "The Noble Art of Abbreviating – in the Light of Some Texts Attributed to Severian of Gabala", *Proceedings of the Danish Institute at Athens I*, ed. Søren Dietz, Athens 1995, 221-227. (L1995)
12. "The So-called "Absurd" Punctuation in John 1,3-4. Neglected Witnesses of the Old Church", *Proceedings of the Vth International Congress on Armenian Linguistics*, ed. D. Zakayan, Montreal 1996, 45-62. (L1996)
13. "What was Theodoret's Mother Tongue? – Is the Question Open or Closed?" (orig. "Theodoret's modersmål – et åbent eller lukket spørgsmål?", *Ordet og livet. Festskrift til Christian Thodberg*, red. Carsten Bach-Nielsen, Troels Nørager & Peter Thyssen, Århus 1999, 43-65). (L1999)
14. "Severian *Cento* No. 2 in MS Galata 54", *Festschrift J. J. S. Weitenberg*, ed. Theo van Lint (2005/in print). (L2005,1)
15. "Greek and Syrian – under the Aspects of some Syrian Seats of Learning" (orig. "Det græske og det syriske – især set fra nogle af de antiokenske skolers katedre", *Et blandet bæger. Studier tilegnet Finn O. Hvidberg-Hansen*, red. Pernille Carstens, John Møller Larsen, Dorthe Maria Kodal & Dan Enok Sørensen, København 2005, 146-160). (L2005,2)

Studies Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12 are contributions to various conferences and workshops. In most cases, therefore, they have been written a couple of years before the date of publication. No. 9, though, was given as a "short communication" at the Patristic Conference at Oxford in 1983 – 7 years before the year of publication. (It is thus "earlier" than No. 8).

For study No. 2 the text given below is the original English version as prepared for the Patristic Conference at Oxford in 1979.

Study No. 14 is quoted as belonging to the year 2005, because that was the year it was delivered as a contribution to a *Festschrift* (for J. J. S. Weitenberg), which has not yet appeared in printed form.

Studies Nos. 13 and 15 have been translated from Danish in 2008. In the case of No. 13, I have added a paragraph on Theodoret's *Commentary on Jeremiah* (below, pp. 206ff).

Apart from minor corrections (and the additions mentioned above), the studies are otherwise presented in their original shape. References to my own studies republished in this book are given in the short form: *L + year*.

The original texts have been scanned by Narayana Press. As it turned out to be difficult to scan elements in Armenian, Greek, Hebrew and Syriac, and as, originally, in some cases varying transcriptions of the alphabets of these languages had been used, it was decided to standardize these elements, which meant that they had to be "rewritten". This work was done by my wife, Else Lehmann, who thus had the great – or questionable (?) – pleasure of working on the manuscripts once again, as she had done 20 or 40 years ago. On technical questions good advice and assistance was given by colleagues such as Jørgen Ledet Christiansen and Aage Pilgaard, and not least by Jørgen Friis Bak of the Data Office of the University of Aarhus. The newly translated chapters were checked by Mary Waters Lund, and the bulk of work in planning, printing and editing the volume was carried out by Henriette Møller and Elsebeth Morville of Narayana Press and Katja Teilmann of the Aarhus University Press – supervised by Claes Hvidbak and Jørgen Sparre. I owe all of them cordial thanks.

Hosanna

A Philological Discussion in the Old Church

No. 11 of the 15 Armenian homilies, edited in 1827 by J. B. Aucher under the name of Severian of Gabala¹, ends as follows: “and him, whom angels glorify with awe in heaven, the children also praised with great joy on earth, saying ‘osanna’; in the language of the Hebrews this really means: glorification and great praise”². This homily, edited by Aucher from a manuscript in the monastery of S. Lazzaro³, is also found in a Parisian manuscript⁴ with quite insignificant variants⁵ as far as the section treated of here is concerned (as, indeed, on the whole). What is more interesting, is that the same homily was edited a few years ago in a considerably longer version and now under the name of Eusebius of Emesa⁶. I do not intend here to expatiate upon the problem of

1 *Severiani sive Seberiani Gabalorum episcopi Emesensis homiliae nunc primum editae ex antiqua versione armena in latinum sermonem translatae per P. Jo. Baptistam Aucher, Venice 1827.*

2 Ed. Aucher, p. 408: Եւ գոր հրեշտակք փառաւորեն յերկինս ահիւ, արհնէին եւ մանկտին՝ ցնծալով յերկրի, ասելով ովասննա, այս է ըստ եբրայեցոց բարբառոյն՝ փառաբանութիւն իսկ նշանակեալ, եւ մեծ զովութիւն, in Aucher’s Latin translation (*op. cit.*, p. 409): *et quem Angeli glorificant in caelo cum timore, benedicebant et pueri exultantes in terra, dicentes Hosanna, quod secundum Hebraicam linguam verae glorificationis est significatio, magnaue laudis.*

3 Referred to by Aucher (*op. cit.*, p. 402 f) as ճաղընտիր no. 13, p. 287. Unfortunately, Sargisean’s catalogue of the manuscripts in the monastery of St. Lazzaro has not been accessible to me during the preparation of the present study, but it seems to appear from Akinian’s note (*Handes Amsorya*, 73, 1959, col. 321f) that Aucher’s manuscript is identical with MS Ven. Mech. 212 (p. 356ff) in Sargisean’s numbering (cf. according to Akinian: Sargisean, *Catalogue*, vol. II, p. 226).

4 MS Par. Arm. 110, fol. 314 r, col. 1 – fol. 315 r, col. 2.

5 As compared with Aucher’s text (see above, note 2), the variants are the following: յերկինս: ի բարձունս, – ասելով: եւ ասէին, – փառաբանութիւն: փառաւորութիւն, – իսկ: om., – post զովութիւն: add. այնմիկ որ միշտ արհնեալն է յարիտեան: ասէն: (to him who is the eternally praised for ever and ever. Amen).

6 Եւսեբեայ Եպիսկոպոսի Եմեսացոյ ճառք – *Die Reden des Bischofs Eusebius von Emesa*, ed. by N. Akinian in the *Handes Amsorya*, 1956-1959, on the basis of the Armenian manuscript no. 110 from New Julfa. The homily treated of here is the last of the 13 numbers of the series (*HA* 73, 1959, col. 319-360).