

Nicholas Sims-Williams, *Biblical and Other Christian Sogdian Texts from the Turfan Collection*. Berliner Turfantexte 32 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014). Pp. 227 + 17 plates; €70.

MARK DICKENS, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

The Turfan Collection in Berlin contains fragments of texts in more than 20 languages and more than 20 scripts (with many languages written in two or more scripts and many scripts used to write two or more languages). The vast majority of texts are Buddhist or Manichaean, reflecting the two major religions practiced in the Uyghur Kingdom of Qocho (the capital of which was Turfan), but there are also about 1100 fragments from Christian texts, the majority in Syriac, Sogdian or Uyghur Turkic. This volume examines Christian Sogdian material, biblical and otherwise, in seven separate studies, providing transliterations, translations and commentaries on various fragmentary texts, followed by two helpful glossaries. The author, Nicholas Sims-Williams, is an internationally recognized scholar of Sogdian language and literature who has worked extensively with the Christian Sogdian material from Turfan. His catalogue *Iranian Manuscripts in Syriac Script in the Berlin Turfan Collection* (containing all the known Sogdian and Persian texts in Syriac script from Turfan) was published in 2012.

Although most of this volume addresses matters of Sogdian syntax, morphology, etymology, phonology and orthography, scholars of Syriac will find much of interest in the book. The author makes connections wherever possible (signalled in the commentary sections by ~) to Syriac equivalents of Sogdian words, phrases and longer chunks of discourse, highlighting similarities and differences between the two, whether the text was translated or adapted from a Syriac original or, in some cases, is of uncertain origin. As is the custom with all volumes in the *Berliner Turfantexte* series (which began in 1971), the texts themselves are all transliterated into Latin script. This may seem strange to those readers who are used to reading Syriac in Syriac script. However, it makes the volume more accessible to those who are not Syriac specialists and enables readers to decipher Sogdian words no matter what script they were originally written in.

The reader is advised to note the important footnote on p. 5 concerning the transliteration conventions employed. Sims-Williams has a very precise system for identifying missing, illegible or

reconstructed text which the fragmentary state of the texts necessitates. Readers will also find it handy to consult a copy of the aforementioned catalogue, since texts in this volume are referred to throughout by the numbering system employed in the catalogue. Finally, those unfamiliar with Sogdian orthography should be aware that the transliteration into Latin script reflects Sogdian pronunciation of Syriac ܐ and ܥ as *γ* and *ε* (= *ø*) respectively. Thus biblical names like ܢܒܫܬܢܪܝܐ and ܝܫܘܥ appear as *nbwkdnr* and *yswy*, reminding us that speakers of Iranian languages would pronounce these names differently from native Syriac speakers.

The first study in the present volume concerns a Sogdian Psalter written in Sogdian script, one of two such Psalters found at Turfan (Sogdian was written in the native Sogdian script, Manichaean script, Syriac script and Brahmi script). Although parts of this Sogdian Psalter were previously published by Martin Schwartz (1967), who was the first to recognize the text for what it was, the process of identifying the various fragments from the original manuscript has taken nearly 50 years. As with the texts addressed in the other chapters, the author clearly outlines the history of reconstructing the remains of the original manuscript, a reminder of the sleuth work required to work with this collection, so much of which consists of small pieces that must be matched to other fragments formerly joined together, but separated by deliberate vandalism at some point or the vicissitudes of time and weather. Indeed, the process of fragmentation continued during World War II and its aftermath; numerous references in this volume to lost originals and readings based on photographs remind us that the 20th century also wreaked havoc on these manuscripts.

Sims-Williams includes important information about the format of this Psalter, including Psalm numbers and titles, some of which are rendered in Syriac, as well as the relation of the translation to the Peshitta original and a complete list of variant readings in the Sogdian that agree with certain manuscripts of the Syriac text. As with all the studies in this volume, the Sogdian text in transliteration and the translation include an extensive and precise set of footnotes. Of particular interest to many readers will be the fact that the final extant folio of this manuscript contains translations of part of a hymn by Babai of Nisibis and the Nicene Creed, the latter differing only slightly from the East Syriac text. The creed in particular prompts a number of observations related to the

translation process (the following references are all from pp. 31 and 33).

In places the Sogdian reflects a literal translation rather than the figurative sense of the Syriac original (“God, the Father, the Keeper of all” to translate ܐܠ ܥܠܡ ܕܥܠܡ, instead of “God, the Father Almighty”; “by whose hands” to translate ܡܢ ܕܝܕܝܗ, instead of “by whom” – see the author’s comment on p. 70). Other variations do not reflect the Syriac text but are perhaps included to clarify a concept (“one Lord God, Jesus Christ” instead of “one Lord, Jesus Christ”) or to avoid using a word which would be meaningless in a Central Asian context (“one apostolic Christian church” instead of “one holy, apostolic, Catholic church”).

Also of interest are the two names written in the margin of the creed folio which demonstrate the onomastic interactions of Syriac, Sogdian and Turkic in the Turfan Christian community. Six of the nine folios from this text are included in the plates at the back of the volume; it would perhaps have been nice to have images of all folios (including the final one containing the creed), but presumably publishing costs dictated the use of only a representative set of plates. One other minor point that might seem strange to some readers is the use of *Thou*, *Thee* and *Thy* for the divine pronouns in the translation of this text, in contrast to the modern pronouns that are used in other translations in this volume.

The second study deals with select fragments of two separate gospel lectionaries, one Syriac-Sogdian and another exclusively Sogdian. As Sims-Williams notes, this essay was published previously, but with misprints that necessitated its republication in the present volume; it features fragments identified by a former student of the author. References to “a tiny scrap of paper... [containing] part of a final -/” (p. 58) that proved crucial in identifying where the scrap in question belonged and the conclusion that a fragment consisted of “two layers of paper from consecutive folios which are stuck together” (p. 60) remind the reader of the painstaking work needed to decipher and reconstruct the original texts from the extant remains of this corpus. More sobering are the phrases “a folio which is now lost” and “this fragment cannot now be located” (pp. 58, 62), underscoring the fact that even manuscript collections removed from their original context are not impervious to irretrievable loss.

The third study addresses another lectionary, this one containing only the Pauline epistles and written only in Sogdian (in contrast to a Syriac-Sogdian epistle lectionary in the collection), raising the question of why some Sogdian biblical texts were bilingual, while others did not include the parallel Syriac text. The presence of one Syriac word (ܐܡܝ, *God forbid!*) and certain “highly unusual linguistic and orthographical features” in the Sogdian translation highlight the multilingual nature of the Christian community that created and used these texts (pp. 64, 70). An extensive commentary on the text provides important insights into the process of translating the Syriac original into a Central Asian linguistic and cultural context, including the use of a Zoroastrian term for “Light Paradise” (p. 72). As Sims-Williams notes, this lectionary was not identified until after the aforementioned catalogue was published, highlighting the challenge of verifying the contents of some of these texts, even after they have been worked on by experts over many decades. Unlike elsewhere in the volume, the author has omitted the distinctive *n* signature numbers (assigned to nearly every Sogdian fragment in Syriac script) for the two partial folios extant from this lectionary (E32/1 = n377–n381; E32/2 = n376, n379).

The fourth study examines several folios from the same original manuscript, some of which deal with the story of Daniel from the Bible and all of which seem to share a common theme of fasting. Unlike the majority of texts presented in this book, the Syriac original of this text (if such existed) has not been identified. Of interest in this text are 1) an alternate version of the 10 commandments; 2) the use of both Syriac ܐܠܗܝܬܐ and Sogdian *byy* for the Judeo-Christian God; 3) the use of a Syriac term for bishops (ܩܪܝܬܐܝܢ – see the note on pp. 96–97 on the use of *seyāmē* in Christian Sogdian to indicate pronunciation as well as plurality) but a Sogdian term for priests (*dynd’rty*); 4) a specific reference to ܐܫܝ, “koumiss” (fermented mare’s milk, a favorite drink in Central Asia, especially amongst Turkic peoples) as one of the forbidden substances when undertaking a fast; 5) the use of Sogdian *sng*, “stone” instead of ܦܬܪܐ for “Peter” and 6) the upside-down writing of ܫܡܝܢ, “Satan” (discussed on p. 104). The author speculates that missing text in folio E29/2 may have “gone on to draw a parallel between Moses’ fast and the practice of fasting in the Christian

church” (p. 75), but the plain sense of the text seems to be more concerned with a parallel between Moses shepherding the people of Israel with his staff and bishops and priests shepherding the church with the (processional?) cross.

The fifth study discusses a Sogdian version of the *Wisdom of Ahiqar*, the famous Aesop-like collection of aphorisms extant in numerous versions. As Sims-Williams notes, the Sogdian version, which was “surely translated from Syriac... differs in many details from the extant Syriac versions” (p. 108), suggesting that the Sogdian translator had access to an earlier version in Syriac that contained material omitted in later versions. The commentary on this text contains copious notes, not only on philological points, but also on the presence or absence of individual maxims in other versions of Ahiqar (e.g., Aramaic, Armenian, Slavonic, Syriac, Turkish), thus providing invaluable material for those who wish to reconstruct the various textual layers of this ancient literary source.

We have a similar situation with the sixth study in this book, which deals with a version of the *Dormition of the Virgin Mary*, written on two folios which probably come from the same original manuscript as the *Wisdom of Ahiqar*. In this case, as the author observes, although Syriac preserves one version of this story, “none of the [extant] Syriac texts provides a close parallel to the Sogdian version of this episode, which seems to be much more concise” (p. 125). Of special interest is the quotation in the Sogdian text of two Syriac phrases uttered just prior to Mary’s upward transfer to heaven (pp. 128, 132–133). A note written on the bottom of the first folio beginning “I, the faulty, the sinful” (p. 132) reminds us of the monastic milieu in which these texts were used and probably originally written—similar marginal notes in Syriac, Sogdian and Uyghur script can be found on Syriac manuscript fragments from Turfan.¹

The seventh and final study concerns a bilingual list of numerals which may well be part of the same original manuscript as the Sogdian Psalter discussed in the first study. Although the exact purpose of the list is unclear, it was presumably made to help Sogdian

¹ Erica C. D. Hunter and Mark Dickens, *Syrische Handschriften*, Teil 2: *Texte der Berliner Turfansammlung = Syriac texts from the Berlin Turfan collection*, *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland* 5/2 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2014), SyrHT 48 & 49, SyrHT 287, U 5545, pp. 63, 271–272, 491–492.

speakers who needed to use Syriac texts to learn the numbers, whether to find biblical references, pages or passages in liturgical and other texts. The omission and seemingly later addition of certain numbers to the list (p. 137, n. 3–4) may provide insight into the thought processes of the scribe who prepared this list. An apparently unrelated Syriac sentence contained in the central column is perhaps a mnemonic whose original meaning has been lost. Certainly all the texts in this volume provide plenty of fodder for those who want to understand scribal practices in the Syriac world.

These seven studies are followed by two glossaries, one concerned with Christian Sogdian texts in Sogdian script and the other addressing those in Syriac script. These glossaries are invaluable additions to the tools available to scholars of Sogdian and Syriac who wish to see how the latter tradition was interpreted in the world of the former. The volume concludes with a list of Abbreviations, an extensive Bibliography, an Index of all words cited from Sogdian and 24 other languages (highlighting Sims-Williams' broad knowledge of Indo-European languages), a list of Plates and 17 black and white plates at the back.

The two glossaries will undoubtedly be of interest to many Syriac scholars, particularly the way in which they show how sometimes Sogdian was used and sometimes Syriac when translating important religious terms. Thus, the following words are invariably Sogdian:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| • Church (p. 141) | • Heaven (p. 159, 192, 196) |
| • Holy (p. 144) | |
| • Angel (p. 146, 178) | • Christian & Christianity (p. 162, 194) |
| • Peace (p. 149, 177) | |
| • Priest (p. 149, 177) | • Spirit (p. 163, 196) |
| • Sin (p. 150) | • Salvation (p. 163, 172) |
| • Worship (p. 153, 184) | |
| • Soul (p. 158, 191) | • Lord (p. 165, 200) |

- Paradise (p. 171)
- Religion (p. 177)
- Demon (p. 177)
- Presbyter (p. 183)
- Fasting (p. 186, 202)
- Censer (p. 190)
- Baptism (p. 192)
- Monk (p. 192)
- Faith (p. 196)

By contrast, Syriac terms are employed for the following words or phrases:

- Amen (p. 140, 171)
- Messiah (p. 153, 183)
- Bishop (p. 171)
- Canon (p. 180)
- Catholicos (p. 180)
- Psalm (p. 184)
- Martyrs' (anthems) (p. 192)
- Vigil (p. 193)
- Deacon (p. 193)
- Blessed are they (p. 195)
- Altar (p. 195)

And a few words have both Sogdian and Syriac manifestations:

- God (p. 145, 171, 174)
- Cross (p. 154, 175, 189)
- Gospel (p. 172, 183)
- Resurrection (p. 173, 181)
- Prayer (p. 175, 184)
- Ascension (p. 192, 193)

There is little to critique in this volume. The following are minor points that do not in any way mar the overall value of the book. One minor oversight seems to be the lack of an explanation of the Aramaic heterograms that are rendered in capitals (as is common when dealing with Iranian languages that used alphabets

derived from Aramaic), e.g., pp. 142 ('PZY, ZY), 144 ('M), 146 (MN), 152 (L', MN), 167 (ZKn), 168 (ZY). Some readers will also wish that the second glossary (Sogdian words in Syriac script) included Syriac equivalents, as the first glossary (words in Sogdian script) does. There were several references in the texts to a source abbreviated merely as P (e.g., P9 on p. 97, P5.116 on p. 99) which is not included in the otherwise helpful list of Abbreviations located after the Glossary of Sogdian texts in Syriac script.

These trivial observations aside, readers will be struck throughout by the depth and breadth of the author's knowledge of not only the Sogdian language, but also many other languages, especially Syriac, as well as the broader scope of Central Asian culture and the beliefs and practices of Christianity in general and the Church of the East in particular. The extensive bibliography and frequent references to others who have written on a plethora of related texts or topics are a testimony to how well-read the author is and how quick he is to acknowledge the contributions of others, as well as to correct past scholarly errors, including those by himself. All in all, this volume not only introduces a significant corpus of texts for future scholars to work on, but also sheds considerable light on how Syriac Christianity adapted to the cultural intertidal zones in which it so frequently found itself.