

PROJECTS AND CONFERENCE REPORTS

Short Report on the Symposium:

“Jacob of Edessa (c. 640–708) and the Syriac Culture of His Day”

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- [1] It was the aim of this Symposium to bring together students and scholars doing research on Jacob of Edessa. This learned monk and bishop belonged to the first generation of Syrian Christians who grew up under Islamic rule and as such he made a creative and personal contribution to many fields of Syriac tradition.
- [2] Various new research projects concerning Jacob have recently been started and the organizers (K.D. Jenner & L. Van Rompay), therefore, wanted to offer some scholars an opportunity to present their work, inviting others to make a more general contribution or to discuss the present state of the research on Jacob's works.
- [3] Not all scholars working in the field could be invited, nor could all fields of Jacob's activity be covered. Nevertheless, the Symposium gave a good idea of the author's versatile spirit as well as of present-day research.
- [4] Jacob's version of the Books of Samuel was discussed in two papers, which complemented each other: Richard J. Saley (Harvard University) studied the underlying textual traditions (Peshitta, Syro-Hexapla, Greek texts of predominantly Lucianic character, other), whereas Alison Salvesen (Oxford) focused on Jacob's purpose and methods, taking into account not only Jacob's biblical version, but also data taken from his exegetical work.
- [5] Jan J. van Ginkel (Groningen University) gave a survey of Jacob's existing Letters, of which he is preparing an edition (for a number of letters this will be the first edition to appear). He also read, as an example, one unpublished letter to John of Litharba. In his discussion of the themes and the literary genre of the letters, he more than once referred to the “network of scholars” (*Gelehrtenkreis*) to which, besides Jacob and John of Litharb, also George of the Arabs and Athanasius of Balad belonged.

[6] Some of the Letters were also discussed in two papers concerned with Jacob's juridical writings. Herman Teule (Catholic University of Nijmegen) first gave a general survey of Jacob's writings in this field, mainly his Canons (which quite often are known only in later, reworked versions) and some Letters (of which compilations already started being made in the eighth century). He then turned to the themes discussed in these writings and gave special attention to what Jacob had to say about Islam, which apparently in his day was not yet seen as a direct threat to Christianity. Konrad Jenner (Leiden University) made some suggestions for putting Jacob's juridical writings in their larger historical and cultural context and drew attention to the question to what extent the canons were related to the authority of the Bible.

[7] In the field of Jacob's grammatical work, R. Talmon (University of Haifa) made an attempt at a re-evaluation of Jacob's achievements as a grammarian. Although research is seriously hampered by our very imperfect knowledge of the *turrās mamllā nabrāyā*, some of Jacob's innovations in his description of the language could be singled out for discussion, especially in the sphere of phonetics and morphology. Moreover, some interesting suggestions were made concerning possible connections between Jacob—who was a master in the three Syrian sciences which left their traces in early Arabic grammar, namely grammar, logic and massora—and the Arab grammarians prior to Sībawayh (c. AD 800), among whom Sībawayh's teacher, Ḥalīl b. Aḥmad, would deserve special attention. In his turn, Michel Limpens (Catholic University of Nijmegen), discussing the vowels of Syriac and the vowels of Arabic, pushed forward the question of the connections between Jacob and early Arabic grammatical tradition.

[8] Dirk Kruisheer (Leiden University), who is studying Jacob's exegetical work, disentangled the various levels of exegesis and the related terminology in Jacob's work: typological, spiritual, and factual interpretation. He also ventured some ideas about the *Sitz im Leben* of Jacob's exegesis.

[9] Jacob's Chronicle was first discussed in a thorough paper by Witold Witakowski (University of Uppsala), with due attention paid to the problems of its transmission (and influence on later historiographers), the question of its sources, and its place in the Greek and Syriac historiographical tradition. One section of the Chronicle, dealing with the history of Edessa when it was an

independent kingdom, was the topic of L. Van Rompay's paper (Leiden University), which concluded the Symposium.

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- [10] The papers read at this Symposium (together with some additional papers on Jacob) will be published soon. As a tool for further research, Dirk Kruisheer and Lucas Van Rompay have compiled "A Bibliographical *Clavis* to the Works of Jacob of Edessa," which was submitted to the participants of the Symposium and which, in a slightly expanded version, is published in the present issue of *Hugoye*.
- [11] Richard J. Saley's research has now reached its final form and will be published, in the spring of 1998, as: *The Samuel Manuscript of Jacob of Edessa. A Study in Its Underlying Textual Traditions* (Monographs of the Peshitta Institute Leiden). In the same series, Alison Salvesen is soon due to publish the Syriac text, with an annotated English translation, of Jacob's Syriac text of 1 and 2 Samuel.
- [12] On Jacob's exegetical writings (both the *Scholia* and the *Commentaries*), work by Dirk Kruisheer and Edward G. Mathews, Jr. is well underway. See most recently: D. Kruisheer, "Reconstructing Jacob of Edessa's *Scholia*," in J. Frishman & L. Van Rompay (eds.), *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation. A Collection of Essays* (Traditio Exegetica Graeca 5; Louvain, 1997) 187–96; E.G. Mathews, Jr., "The Armenian Commentary on Genesis Attributed to Ephrem the Syrian," in the same volume, 143–61 (where sections of the Armenian Commentary are identified as stemming from Jacob's *Scholia*).