

Joanna Weinberg, *Azariah de' Rossi's Observations on the Syriac New Testament: A Critique of the Vulgate by a Sixteenth-century Jew*, Warburg Institute and Nino Aragno Editore, London and Turin, 2005, vi + 109 pages (Warburg Institute Studies and Texts), ISBN 0-85481-133-8

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- [1] Azariah de' Rossi of Mantua (1511-1577) is best known for his work *Me'or Enayim* 'Light of the Eyes' (1573), which involved a treatment of the origin of the Septuagint. He also separately rendered the *Letter of Aristeas* into Hebrew. In this book, for the first time, are published his observations on the Syriac New Testament, written in Ferrara in 1577 shortly before the author's death. This work was unknown to modern scholarship until 1974, when an autograph was discovered. Since then another autograph, almost identical to the first, has come to light. Weinberg offers an introduction to the text (pp. 1-20) and thereafter the printed editio princeps giving the Italian text with an English translation on the facing page. The page with Italian has footnotes pertaining to the text of the work and variations between the two manuscripts, while the page with English has footnotes commenting on the content of the text.
- [2] This work is of interest from a number of points of view. Its period of composition, the sixteenth century, was of course one of considerable ecclesiastical debate about the most authoritative text of the Bible and about the nature of the Vulgate. This text shows a Jew engaging with this debate between Christians. That he was writing for a Christian audience also explains the choice of Italian rather than Hebrew as the language of composition.
- [3] The immediate context for the work was the publication of the first edition of the Syriac New Testament by J.A. Widmanstadt in 1555, of the second edition by I. Tremellius in 1569, and of the reprint of Widmanstadt's text with further manuscript evidence in the Antwerp Polyglot (1571). Thus the work was produced at a time when the nature of the Syriac New Testament text was an important question. De' Rossi offered the work to Giacomo Boncompagni (Governor General of the Church and son of future Pope Gregory XIII) and Cardinal Santa Severina (Giulio Antonio Santoro, 1532-1602).

- [4] The basic argument of the work was that ‘certain passages in the New Testament, particularly the Aramaic expressions, ought to be emended on the basis of the ancient Syriac rendering’ (p. 4). The work considers various texts, including Matthew 3:17; 5:22; 6:24; 16:17; 23:5; 27:6, 33, 46; Mark 3:17; 5:41; 7:11-12; 34-35; 15:34; John 1:42-43; 12:28; 19:13-14, 20-22; Acts 1:19; 7:14-16; 9:40; 13:17-22; 1 Cor. 16:22. Luke’s Gospel receives no special analysis.