

Françoise Petit, Lucas Van Rompay and Jos J.S. Weitenberg, eds., *Eusèbe d'Émèse, Commentaire de la Genèse. Texte arménien de l'édition de Venise (1980), Fragments grecs et syriaques, avec traductions*. Traditio Exegetica Graeca 15. Louvain: Peeters, 2011. xl + 442 pp; €94.00.

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In his fifth-century catalogue of ecclesiastical authors, Jerome praises Eusebius, the fourth-century bishop of Emesa, for his “fine rhetorical talent” and claims that “he is most diligently read by those who practice public speaking” (*Lives of Illustrious Men*, 91). The same church father also maintains that a number of prominent Antiochian exegetes, including Diodore of Tarsus, the reputed “founder” of the school of Antioch, all based their own biblical interpretative methods on the work of Eusebius (*ibid.*, 119, 129). Nearly all of the early church historians also remembered him in glowing terms. Nonetheless, Eusebius of Emesa has been all but left out of standard modern church histories and histories of theology, and it is only relatively recently that he has received any significant attention at all.

But today it is no exaggeration to say that Eusebius is in the midst of a significant renaissance, despite the fact that the originals of his works, with the exception of a single homily, remain lost. In addition to numerous articles scattered in various journals, conference volumes and *Festschriften*, three significant monographs dedicated to Eusebius have appeared in just over a decade and a half. The first of these, by a student of two of the editors of the volume under review here and now a top-flight scholar in his own right, was a significant study of Eusebius’ *Commentary on Genesis*, his use of various biblical versions, and the place of the *Commentary* in the nascent Antiochian tradition (ter Haar Romeny, *A Syrian in Greek Dress*, 1997). The other two have just appeared in this calendar year and both constitute significant contributions: the volume under review here which comprises the first modern translation of one of Eusebius’ commentaries, and the other even more recent volume which studies the place and contribution of Eusebius’ homilies in the context of the developing theology of the fourth-century church (Winn, *Eusebius of Emesa*, 2011).

Until the middle of the twentieth century, scholars were essentially ignorant of the works of Eusebius of Emesa, the primary reason for his having been overlooked in the standard

reference works. While a few homilies, many spurious, had been published in the latter half of the seventeenth century, it was not until 1949 that É.M. Buytaert published a number of Eusebius' homilies in a Latin version that had been made in the fifth century. Very soon after this publication, Fr. Nersēs Akinian began publishing in a series of articles a collection of Eusebius' homilies that had survived in Armenian; many of them were known in their Latin versions while several were reassigned to Severian of Gabala. While its publication had been announced for some time, it was not until 1980 that a text of any of the biblical commentaries of Eusebius appeared. Although they were not actually published until several years after his death, Fr. Vahan Hovhannessian of the Mekhitarist Order of Armenian priests had prepared the text of an ancient Armenian *Commentary on the Octateuch* that was attributed to Cyril of Alexandria in the single manuscript in which the text was preserved. In his introduction to the volume, Fr. Hovhannessian rightly restored the authorship of these commentaries to Eusebius. The volume was published entirely in Armenian so the text still remained essentially inaccessible to all but the Armenian scholar. Now, with this publication, western scholars finally have access to one of the fundamental texts in the Antiochian tradition of biblical exegesis.

As useful as it is for western scholars finally to be able to have access to at least one—indeed, the longest by far—of Eusebius' commentaries, the volume under review here is of much more significance than just offering a modern translation for the non-Armenologist. More than half the volume offers to the reader substantial collections of supporting materials. As the title suggests, the primary focus of the volume is the *Commentary on Genesis* composed by Eusebius of Emesa (pp. 1-179, with introduction). The editors have chosen to include the Armenian text, which is essentially the *editio princeps* as printed in the 1980 edition of Hovhannessian; it represents the text as found in Venice 873, the only manuscript (besides a nineteenth-century copy of this manuscript) that has survived. The editors have nonetheless set it out in a much more reader-friendly format, separating out the various verses discussed into clearly distinct paragraphs, but also setting out in a bold font the biblical text being commented on. In addition, the editors were able to make certain corrections to the text of Hovhannessian, eight by their own count, and relegated to

the apparatus the reading of the 1980 edition. The accompanying French translation, on facing pages, is the first ever of this text into any modern language. It was first begun by Van Rompay and Weitenberg not too long after the appearance of Hovhannessian's edition when both were colleagues at the University of Leiden. It is a very carefully crafted translation with minimal though not insignificant annotation, and it shows the care and precision of their having "lived with" the text for so long. It flows nicely and where they have opted for a less literal option for the sake of clarity, they always provide the literal translation in a footnote.

This Armenian text with its first ever modern translation is then accompanied, here under the direction of Françoise Petit, by two significant sets of supporting materials: the texts and translations of all the fragments of Eusebius' *Commentary on Genesis* found in the Greek *Catena* traditions; and the relevant fragments culled from the *Commentary*, or *Epitome*, of Procopius of Gaza (pp. 194-259 and 260-363, prefaced by a general introduction, pp. 183-192). Petit, the leading expert on the Greek *Catena* tradition and previous editor of several collections of them (Coisliniana and Sinaitica) has taken the Eusebian texts of the *Catena* materials from her recent *édition intégrale* of the *Catena on Genesis* (4 vols., Louvain, 1992-1996), which she here translates for the first time. Although Procopius made use of the very same materials, he reworked them—often reviewing the original texts in the process—in order to realize his own integral and continuous commentary. Thus, Petit adds the witnesses culled from his *Epitome*. In lieu of her forthcoming critical edition of all the witnesses, she has eschewed the incomplete text of A. Mai as found in the old edition of Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, and has compiled an interim edition based on the two oldest complete manuscripts, again accompanied here by the very first modern translation.

Finally, now primarily by the hand of Lucas Van Rompay, are appended the fragments culled from the ninth-century Syriac *Commentary on Genesis* of Išo'dad of Merv (pp. 365-415), the great eastern Syrian exegete whose commentaries on nearly the entire Bible have survived and been edited in modern versions and translations. Thus, this is the only section of the volume that is essentially "old news," in the sense that both the text and translation of the *Commentary on Genesis* of Išo'dad of Merv had long ago been published by Jean-Marie Vosté and Ceslaus Van den

Eynde in the series *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (1950). Here, however, Van Rompay has “touched up” in a number of places the old translation of Van den Eynde, now that he has the support of the Armenian text of the entire *Commentary* of Eusebius, unknown to Van den Eynde, as well as of the witness of the extensive Greek *Catena* materials. The volume is completed by a synoptic chart of all the various witnesses included in the volume, an index of biblical citations and another index of proper names.

Thus, one has collected here in a single volume all the fundamental texts necessary for an assessment of Eusebius of Emesa’s *Commentary on Genesis*, an analysis of which one hopes is forthcoming. And one could hardly have dreamed of a better team of scholars to prepare the various materials found in this volume. Each of the three editors is an established first-rate scholar in his or her field. Lucas Van Rompay has edited a number of Syriac biblical texts, written extensively on the Antiochian exegetical tradition, and is unarguably the world’s leading expert on the history of Syriac biblical exegesis. Françoise Petit, as already hinted at above, is right now unquestionably the *doyenne* of the Greek *Catena* traditions, having single-handedly provided for us the critical editions of nearly all of them. Jos Weitenberg is one of the world’s leading scholars on the history of the Armenian language and linguistics, with a special interest in literature translated into Armenian, particularly the so-called Hellenophile School. All the texts gathered in this volume have been meticulously prepared and just as meticulously translated; it is truly an astounding accomplishment. In this day and age of expensive, but less than satisfactorily edited, books, it is to the credit of the editors and the Peeters publishing team that this volume is of the highest quality. I did not find even a single typographical error—not even an insignificant one! An astonishing feat for a monolingual book these days, but truly exceptional for one composed in four primary languages, each with its own font, not to mention other languages and scripts found in the notes. But, for all the exemplary quality of its editing, it is still the scholarly quality and accuracy of this volume that will assure that this volume will be the fundamental starting point for the study of the commentaries of Eusebius of Emesa for a long time to come. There was no indication in this volume, but it is hoped that these same editors will soon address the rest of this collection of Eusebius’ *Commentaries*.