

Sebastian Brock, *Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy* [Variorum Collected Studies Series 863; Ashgate Variorum; Aldershot, 2006; ISBN 0-7546-5908-9] xiv + 352 pp.; hardcover.

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'Fire from Heaven' is the fourth volume of Sebastian Brock's collected articles in the Variorum Collected Studies Series¹ (the titles of all the papers are listed in full at the end of this review), and as the title of the volume suggests, a majority of the papers (10 out of 17) are related to the invocation and descent of the Holy Spirit in Syriac sources. Four of these (X–XIII) explore the history and development of the technical vocabulary used in Syriac to describe this descent (primarily *aggen*, but also *šbrā*, *nhet*, *rahbeḥ*) in biblical, liturgical, and homiletic texts. Other papers (V–VI) address the visualisation of this descent in the form of fire, and the Syriac development of the concept that the Holy Spirit is essentially female, leading certain writers and texts to describe her as 'Mother'. Three papers (VII–IX) focus on the eucharistic anaphoras and epicleses, and it is worth noting that VIII includes a very useful table listing all 71 of the known West Syrian anaphoras, together with references to available editions or, if unpublished, inclusion in key manuscripts. A final paper (XIV) in this section examines the debate among Syriac writers about how best to translate *ruah elohim* in Genesis 1.2.

The volume begins with three important articles on the christology of the Church of the East which will be of great assistance to anyone who has to grapple with the theological complexities involved. All three include variant versions of a table which graphically demonstrates the extraordinary range of christological opinions that were being expounded in the fifth to seventh centuries, and seeks to undermine the arguments of reductionists who wish to focus on just two or three rival schools of thought. This table will be well-known to Sebastian's colleagues and former students, nearly all of whom have copied it and made

¹ The previous volumes were: *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (VCSS 199, 1984); *Studies in Syriac Christianity* (VCSS 357, 1992); *From Ephrem to Romanos: Interactions between Syriac and Greek in Late Antiquity* (VCSS 664, 1999).

use of it shamelessly in their own teaching! (The version of the table in paper II is the most complete, but cross-reference to the others will add clarification.) The fourth paper is a stimulating discussion of the theme of Christ as hostage, *ḥmayrā*, in East Syriac thought.

The volume ends with three articles on early Syriac liturgical commentaries. Papers XV and XVI provide an edition, translation, and analysis of a single short, but highly influential, commentary on the baptismal and eucharistic liturgies which predates the fifth-century church divisions and is preserved in Syriac in Melkite and Syrian Orthodox manuscripts, as well as in a fragmentary Soghdian translation produced by the Church of the East. Article XVII is a translation and study of the early seventh-century commentary on the liturgy by Gabriel of Qatar. (Unfortunately the lengthy Syriac edition of the text, included in the original article, is not reprinted here, but can be consulted online in *Hugoye* Vol. 6.2 [July 2003]).

Sebastian Brock's scholarship is, as always, ground-breaking and of outstanding quality, and given that his work is frequently published in a diverse range of journals and Festschriften, some more easily found in libraries than others, the convenience of having these articles collected together in a single volume will clearly recommend it to Syriac scholars and to libraries with an interest in Syriac Christianity, Patristic theology, or liturgical studies.

Contents of *Fire from Heaven:* *Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy*

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF THE CHURCH OF THE EAST

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- II. The Church of the East in the Sasanian Empire up to the sixth century and its absence from the Councils in the Roman Empire (1994)
- III. The Christology of the Church of the East (1996)
- IV. Christ 'The Hostage': a theme in the East Syriac liturgical tradition and its origins (1993)

INVOCATIONS TO THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THEIR BACKGROUND

- V. Fire from heaven: from Abel's sacrifice to the Eucharist. A theme in Syriac Christianity (1993)

- VI. 'Come, compassionate Mother ..., come Holy Spirit': a forgotten aspect of early Eastern Christian imagery (1991)
- VII. The epiklesis in the Antiochene baptismal *ordines* (1974)
- VIII. Towards a typology of the epicleses in the West Syrian anaphoras (2000)
- IX. Invocations to/for the Holy Spirit in Syriac liturgical texts: some comparative approaches (2001)
- X. The lost Old Syriac at Luke 1:35 and the earliest Syriac terms for the Incarnation (1989)
- XI. An early interpretation of *pāsah*:*'aggēn* in the Palestinian Targum (1982)
- XII. Passover, Annunciation and Epiclesis. Some remarks on the term *aggen* in the Syriac versions of Lk. 1:35 (1982)
- XIII. From Annunciation to Pentecost: the travels of a technical term (1993)
- XIV. The *ruah elohim* of Gen. 1,2 and its reception history in the Syriac tradition (1999)

EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

- XV. Some early Syriac baptismal commentaries (1980)
- XVI. An early Syriac commentary on the liturgy (1986)
- XVII. Gabriel of Qatar's commentary on the liturgy (2003)

Readers of this online review may perhaps find it useful to have a listing of the articles found in Sebastian Brock's earlier volumes, and so these are provided below.

***Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (VCSS 199, 1984)**

GENERAL THEMES

- I. Early Syrian Asceticism (1973)
- II. Greek into Syriac and Syriac into Greek (1977)
- III. Aspects of Translation Technique in Antiquity (1979)
- IV. Some Aspects of Greek Words in Syriac (1975)
- V. From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning (1982)
- VI. Christians in the Sasanid Empire: A Case of Divided Loyalties (1982)
- VII. Syriac Sources for Seventh-Century History (1976)
- VIII. Syriac Views of Emergent Islam (1982)

NEW TEXTS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

- IX. A Martyr at the Sasanid Court under Vahran II: Candida (1978)
- X. A Letter attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem on the Rebuilding of the Temple under Julian (1977)
- XI. The Orthodox-Oriental Orthodox Conversations of 532 (1980)
- XII. An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor (1973)
- XIII. A Syriac Fragment on the Sixth Council (1973)
- XIV. John of Nhel: An Episode in Early Seventh-Century Monastic History (1978)
- XV. Notes on Some Monasteries on Mount Izla (1980/1)

Studies in Syriac Christianity:***History, Literature and Theology (VCSS 357, 1992)***

- I. Syriac Historical Writing: A Survey of the Main Sources (1979/80)
- II. North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century: Book XV of John bar Penkāyē's *Riṣ Melle* (1987)
- III. Syriac Inscriptions: A Preliminary Check List of European Publications (1978)
- IV. Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources (1979)
- V. A Piece of Wisdom Literature in Syriac (1968)
- VI. Syriac and Greek Hymnography: Problems of Origins (1985)
- VII. A Syriac Collection of Prophecies of the Pagan Philosophers (1983)
- VIII. The Laments of the Philosophers over Alexander in Syriac (1970)
- IX. Secundus the Silent Philosopher: Some Notes on the Syriac Tradition (1978)
- X. Towards a History of Syriac Translation Technique (1983)
- XI. Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition (1982)
- XII. The Christology of the Church of the East in the Synods of the Fifth to Early Seventh Centuries: Preliminary Considerations and Materials (1985)
- XIII. The Conversations with the Syrian Orthodox under Justinian (532) (1981)

- XIV. A Monothelete Florilegium in Syriac (1985)
- XV. Two Sets of Monothelete Questions to the Maximianists (1986)

From Ephrem to Romanos: Interactions between Syriac and Greek in Late Antiquity (VCSS 664, 1999)

- I. Greek and Syriac in Late Antique Syria (1994)
- II. Eusebius and Syriac Christianity (1992)
- III. The Syriac Background to the World of Theodore of Tarsus (1995)
- IV. From Ephrem to Romanos (1989)
- V. Ephrem's Verse Homily on Jonah and the Repentance of Nineveh: Notes on the Textual Tradition (1994)
- VI. Two Syriac Verse Homilies on the Binding of Isaac (1986)
- VII. Syriac Dispute Poems: The Various Types (1987)
- VIII. A Dispute of the Months and Some Related Syriac Texts (1985)
- IX. Tales of Two Beloved Brothers: Syriac Dialogues between Body and Soul (1995)
- X. The Baptist's Diet in Syriac Sources (1970)
- XI. Two Syriac Poems on the Invention of the Cross (1992)
- XII. Some Uses of the Term Theoria in the Writings of Isaac of Nineveh (1995)
- XIII. The Syriac Commentary Tradition [on Aristotle] (1993)
- XIV. The Syriac Background to Hunayn's Translation Techniques (1991)
- XV. Greek Words in Syriac: Some General Features (1996)
- XVI. 'The Scribe reaches Harbour' (1995)