

The Publications of the St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI). Baker Hill, Kottayam—686 001, Kerala, India.

DAVID G.K. TAYLOR, UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

- [1] Although the name of SEERI [<http://www.keralaonline.com/seeri/>] has become familiar to Syriac scholars internationally because of the successful series of Syriac Conferences that it organises and hosts [see the report in *Hugoye* Vol. 2, No. 1 (January 1999)], its numerous publications are less well known. This is indeed a pity, because they include some important Syriac materials and resources that are not available elsewhere.

SECTION I

- [2] The first publication to be mentioned is the Institute's own journal, *The Harp: A Review of Syriac and Oriental Studies*. The first volume, I.1, is dated September 1987, and volumes have been steadily appearing ever since, although there is occasionally a time-lag (as with so many journals) between the published date and the time of appearance (the most recent copy in my possession is vol. X.2, dated July 1997). I think that it is fair to say that the early issues of the journal were not very impressive, and I can imagine that many readers (and libraries) would have been put off by what they saw. There are some important academic papers in these early issues, but there are also many transcripts of congratulatory speeches made by senior clergy and politicians wishing SEERI well.

- [3] After this initial hiccup, however, the quality of the articles has steadily improved. Not only have the papers delivered at the various World Syriac Conferences been published in the journal, and the quality of these is in general equal to that of conference proceedings published anywhere else, but increasing numbers of articles by Syriac scholars of international repute, both from overseas and from India, have been published in the non-conference issues. Most of the articles address issues of Syriac theology, literature, history, and liturgy, although there are also papers on ecumenical matters and on the churches in India. Papers on linguistics are printed, but these are much rarer. It is perhaps some indicator of the quality of these articles that references to them are to be found more and more frequently in the footnotes and bibliographies of other academic publications. There is also a

book review section in each volume. (The great majority of the articles are written in English, but several have also been successfully published in German, French, and Italian. Syriac, Greek, Hebrew and the various Indian languages are normally transcribed in Roman script, but Syriac type is occasionally used.)

- [4] *The Harp*, like many Indian publications, is published on slightly cheaper paper than would be normal in Europe or North America and has glossy paper covers, but my copies have shown no signs of deterioration, despite heavy usage. The cheap paper also translates into low purchase costs—indeed the whole series could be bought from SEERI for a very modest sum. This is a journal of genuine academic importance, and will be particularly valued by universities and colleges teaching programs in Syriac theology or church history where knowledge of Syriac is not a requirement.

SECTION II

- [5] The second set of publications to be mentioned is the *Moran 'Etb'o* series. This is SEERI's main collection of monographs (published in a format similar to that of *The Harp*), in which ten volumes have so far appeared. As will be seen from the descriptions which follow these are all serious contributions to Syriac scholarship.

1. Wolfgang Hage, *Syriac Christianity in the East* (1988; viii + 93 pp.). The seven papers in this volume were given as lectures by this renowned church historian at SEERI in March 1986. They are all English translations of slightly modified versions of papers published elsewhere in German. One of the papers deals with the relations between Christianity in the Roman and Persian empires, and one is a biographical essay on Gregory Bar Ebraya, but the remaining five focus on Hage's specialisation, Christianity in Central Asia. Few volumes in English deal seriously with Christianity in this region, and so this volume is a definite asset for a college library.
2. Sebastian P. Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition* (1989; viii + 120 pp.). This volume was originally produced as a correspondence course for SEERI (see Section III below), and I believe its publication as a monograph came as something of a surprise to its author! Despite the fact that

the author was thus not able to check the proofs or make any changes to the book's structure, the text is a valuable introduction to the subject. Brock provides an overview of Syriac spirituality, an introduction to the main texts and writers (mostly focusing on those prior to the ninth century), discusses the proto-monastic tradition, as well as baptism and eucharist, before identifying a number of the most prominent themes in the different periods. The volume ends with a small selection of passages from key writers in English translation.

3. J.P.M. van der Ploeg, O.P., *The Book of Judith (Daughter of Merari)*, (1991; 56 + 38 pp.). This volume contains the facsimile reproduction, and English translation, of the text of the book of Judith preserved in Syriac ms. 278 (dated AD 1734) of the Syro-Malankara Archbishopric of Trivandrum. This text is rather unusual in that it is partly identical with known Syriac texts of the book, but also frequently deviates from them and more closely follows the Greek text. There are few notes and the editor refuses to make any pronouncements on the character of the text until the Leiden Peshitta edition of Judith appears. Intriguing!
4. Sebastian P. Brock, *Burial Service for Nuns* (1992; viii + 67 pp.). This is an edition of the Syriac text of a West Syrian burial service for nuns with a facing page English translation. The text is taken from the only known manuscript to contain this text, which was written in Tur 'Abdin. The service is not only of interest to liturgists, for the elaborate prayers, poems, and hymns provide a rare insight into the monastic spirituality of Syrian Orthodox women.
5. Paul S. Russell, *St. Ephraem the Syrian and St. Gregory the Theologian Confront the Arians* (1994; viii + 192 pp.). This significant study examines the *Theological Orations* of Gregory of Nazianzus and Ephraem's hymns *On Faith* and compares the different concerns and reactions of their authors to the threat posed by Arianism. It focuses on their choice and use of scripture, their technical vocabulary, theological methodology, and christological

teaching, and draws out a number of interesting differences in emphasis and approach.

6. Sebastian Brock, *Bride of Light: Hymns on Mary from the Syriac Churches* (1994; viii + 171 pp.). This volume contains a short introduction followed by the English translation of 47 hymns (40 *madrāsbe*, 4 *soghyatha* or dialogue poems, and 3 *memre*) on Mary. Most are anonymous texts from the fifth or sixth centuries, but 5 are attributed to St. Ephrem and 9 to Simeon the Potter. All of the fine translations are by Brock, and few of these have appeared in English elsewhere. There is a very useful set of indexes. All in all, a very impressive volume.
7. Sidney H. Griffith, *Syriac Writers on Muslims and the Religious Challenge of Islam* (1995; vi + 52 pp.). Although only slender, this volume provides a useful introduction to the early Syriac literature on Islam. It begins with a survey of the available material, and then focuses on two texts, the “Disputation against the Arabs by a monk of Bet Hale,” and the Syriac Bahira legend. In all of this Sidney Griffith brings his unsurpassed knowledge to bear, and he concludes by suggesting ways in which this literature might provide insights and pointers for modern Christian theological engagement with Islam.
8. Alison Salvesen, *The Exodus Commentary of St. Ephrem* (1995; vi + 67 pp.). This volume contains the first annotated English translation of Ephrem’s Commentary on the book of Exodus. The translation is both elegant and accurate, and the notes draw attention to textual cruxes and to exegetical parallels in Rabbinic and other Jewish literature. An important volume for any library.
9. Sebastian Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* (1997; 312 pp.). Although written as an introductory outline for students and scholars, this is a work that specialists will also find useful. Brock begins by providing an overview of Syriac literature from the first to the twentieth century, although the focus is clearly on the first fourteen centuries. Each major writer is provided with brief biographical details, followed by a list of the author’s most significant writings (the existence of translations into European languages is also indicated). Certain particular topics in

Syriac literature are given separate sections (Bible, exegesis, liturgy, canon law, monastic literature, chronicles, secular literature, and translations into Syriac). The desire to avoid footnotes means that brief bibliographical notes—and they are brief—are provided in an appendix at the end of the section. This outline is no replacement for Baumstark or for Brock's own Syriac bibliographies, nor does it intend to be, but it does reflect Brock's own extraordinarily wide learning and reading and so provides much up-to-date information that is not so easily found elsewhere. Perhaps the volume's most unusual and valuable feature, however, is that the second half of the work (pp. 144–291) consists of English translations of sample passages taken by Brock from all the key writers mentioned. This alone makes the volume a useful addition to any library.

10. Baby Varghese, *Dionysius Bar Salibi: Commentary on the Eucharist* (1998; xxiv + 103 pp.). This excellent volume, produced whilst the author was on an Alexander von Humboldt Research Fellowship in Berlin, contains the first translation into a modern European language of the twelfth-century Commentary on the Eucharist by Bar Salibi. The detailed footnotes indicate the sources used by Bar Salibi, and provide further elucidatory comments and bibliographical references. A very scholarly work.

The series *Moran 'Eth'o*, then, has produced volumes of a consistently high academic quality and at an affordable price. Don't judge, or allow librarians to judge, these books by their covers—their contents make fascinating reading!

SECTION III

- [6] The following series, the *SEERI Correspondence Course on the Syrian Christian Heritage* (SCC), is mentioned only in brief. It is intended for students studying through SEERI (and so there are essay questions at the end of each volume), and is produced on even cheaper paper than before (without glossy covers!). The quality varies from volume to volume, and is not intended for an academic audience, but I at least have learnt much of interest from this series.

1. Sebastian P. Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition* (1988; vi + 102 pp.).
2. Sebastian P. Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition* (1989; iv + 120 pp.). (Identical contents to Moran 'Eth'o, vol. 2).
3. Geevarghese Panicker, *An Historical Introduction to the Syriac Liturgy* (1989; 60 pp.).
4. (Supplement). Jacob Vellian, *An Historical Introduction to the Syriac Liturgy: Syro-Malabar Liturgy—Encounter of the West with the East in Malabar* (1990; 47 pp.).
5. Samuel Thykootam, *The Mother of God in the Syriac Tradition* (1990; 44 pp.).
6. Dr. Mar Aprem, *Mar Aprem Theologian and Poet* (1990; 136 pp.).
7. Geevarghese Panicker, *The Church in the Syriac Tradition* (1990; 70 pp.).
8. Georg Günter Blum, *Mysticism in the Syriac Tradition* (1990; 44 pp.).
9. Baby Varghese, *Baptism and Chrismation in the Syriac Tradition* (1990; iv + 76 pp.).
10. Sebastian Brock, M.A. Mathai Remban, et alii, *Philoxenus of Mabbug* (1990/91?; 70 pp.).

SECTION IV

[7] In collaboration with Johannes Madey and the Ostkirchendienst in Paderborn, Germany, SEERI also publishes a series of German-language liturgical studies, focusing on the Syro-Antiochian rite. I am ashamed to say that I have not got access to any of the published volumes in this series, but perhaps someone who has would like to volunteer a short review for Hugoye?

[8] With this impressive collection of publications SEERI has made an impressive contribution to the study of Syriac literature and theology, both in India and abroad. With the advent of computer software facilitating desktop publishing in Syriac and Greek (and Malayalam!) as well as in Roman script it is to be hoped that the range and number of their publications will continue to expand whilst building upon their present high standards. Indeed, academics and research students in Europe and North America should also be encouraged to submit manuscripts of their work to SEERI so that they may be considered for publication there. They are not yet one of the world's great publishing houses, and neither

do they produce the world's prettiest books, but at least they can guarantee their authors that their books will be affordable, so that other scholars and students will actually be able to buy and read them! Other publishing houses should take note.