

BOOK REVIEWS

Sebastian P. Brock, Aaron M. Butts, George A. Kiraz and Lucas Van Rompay, eds., *The Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press & Beth Mardutho, The Syriac Institute, 2011). Pp. xl + 539 including 20 plates and 5 maps; \$160 for Institutions, \$98 for individuals.

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The Gorgias Encyclopedia of the Syriac Heritage (GEDSH) is a landmark in Syriac scholarship. It provides greater coverage of the Syriac heritage than any other modern reference work.¹ A copy should be within arm's reach of every scholar and student working in the field of Syriac studies, and it certainly belongs in the library of every person interested in the Syriac heritage.

So, what is in it? GEDSH offers 622 articles that fall into the following broad categories: Syriac authors and texts (271 articles, spanning the 2nd–20th centuries); modern Syriac scholars and scribes (103 articles); thematic and topical entries (99 articles); Syriac clerics (75 articles); and places (74 articles). The volume is further enriched by the inclusion of five especially prepared maps, patriarchal lists, and a general index. An introductory note by George Kiraz explains the evolution of the project and promises its continuation in both print and electronic forms.² The editors' preface is a model of modest and succinct clarity, and nicely anticipates many of the questions of potential readers (and reviewers).

Despite its abundance of articles GEDSH is not comprehensive, either in depth or coverage. Nor did it aspire to be. Instead, the editors made the pragmatic decision to produce a useful refer-

¹ This review should be read in conjunction with, Kristian S. Heal, "The GEDSH and Related Resources" (available at <http://byu.academia.edu/KristianHeal/Resources>). This spreadsheet provides a sortable list of authors and articles, together with cross references to related resources. Entries can also be sorted by category and date. A notes section includes additional bibliography and comments.

² The electronic version will be prepared in collaboration with the Syriac Reference Portal (www.syriaca.org). In that form GEDSH will become part of a growing number of linked ancient world resources, and be even more useful and useable.

ence work in a timely way, hoping that in doing so it would also “lay at least the ground work” for a comprehensive encyclopedia of the Syriac tradition (ix). For this all-important first step the editors decided to limit the focus of GEDSH to “the Classical Syriac expression of Syriac Christianity” (x). In other words, GEDSH is primarily about Syriac authors, the texts they wrote, the places they lived in and wrote about, and the scholars who have studied them.

With the outline and disclaimers out the way, the reader should now ask, how do I make the most of GEDSH? This may seem a silly question. Surely a newly purchased encyclopedia or dictionary should be put straight on the shelf, to wait patiently until needed. Well, yes and no. Certainly this reference work will be most frequently consulted in response to a particular query. However, one of the most valuable features of GEDSH is the proliferation of generous thematic articles that brilliantly orient the curious reader to broader issues and provide context for many individual entries. These serve as extremely useful entry points for anyone interested in exploring the richness of GEDSH and broadening their horizons in Syriac studies.

Where to start? There is unfortunately no general article on Syriac Literature.³ However, this lacuna is abundantly compensated for by the extended surveys of particular genres (Apocalypses; Arabic, Syriac Translations from; Bible; Chronicles; Exegesis (separate articles for Old and New Testament); Greek, Syriac Translation from; Hagiography; Historiography; Inscriptions; Juridical literature; Liturgy; Medicine; Melkite Literature; and Poetry).

Those interested in linguistic matters can turn to the articles on Syriac Language and Syriac Lexicography, with cross-references to both ancient and modern practitioners.

For those interested in cross-cultural contacts, there is an extremely interesting series of articles on Syriac contacts with Armenian Christianity, Coptic Christianity, Ethiopic Christianity, Georgian Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

Many scholars are turning to the manuscripts in their research. Those interested in doing so will be well rewarded by reviewing the

³ The most recent extended encyclopedia article on the topic in English is by Arthur Vööbus in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14th ed., published in 1968.

articles on Bible Manuscripts; Colophons; Manuscripts; Palimpsests; Papyri, Syriac; Scribes; and Script, Syriac.

Lastly, few Syriac scholars feel entirely comfortable explaining the origins of and relationships between the various Syriac churches. For the curious, and those who want to impress their guests at dinner parties, the series of articles on the Syriac Churches are the perfect primer (British Orthodox Church; Chaldean Catholic Church; Chaldean Syrian Church; Chaldeans; Church of the East; Malabar Catholic Church; Malabar Independent Syrian Church; Malankara Catholic Church; Malankara Syriac Orthodox Church; Mar Thoma Syrian Church (Malankara); Maronite Church; Syriac Catholic Church; Syriac Orthodox Church; Thomas Christians).

A striking feature of GEDSH, at least when looked at by the numbers, is the considerable attention given to modern scholars of the Syriac tradition. This is more than a vestige of the original plan of the Encyclopedia, with its biographical focus. Rather, it is a sign of the maturing of the field of Syriac studies. As the field has grown and developed, there has been a commensurate increase of interest in tracing the intellectual genealogy of its modern practitioners, which takes the form both of biographical research and history of scholarship.⁴ Of course, this observation may well apply to GEDSH as a whole. It takes a critical mass of scholars (in this case 76) to produce a dictionary of this magnitude and scope.⁵

Finally, one cannot spend time with GEDSH without wanting to give thanks to the editors and publisher of this volume. To bring consistency to and rid error from such a large and complex volume is a stakanovian feat. But that is not the limit of the editors' contribution. Between them, the four editors also authored or co-authored 363 of GEDSH's 622 articles. Certainly each of the 76 contributors deserves a portion of our thanks for their work, but the editors deserve a five-fold portion! Likewise, Gorgias Press is to be thanked for producing this beautifully typeset and richly illustrated volume, and for publishing it at such a reasonable price.

⁴ This latter area is less developed, with a few exceptions (e.g. William Peterson, *Tatian's Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance & History in Scholarship* [Leiden: Brill, 1994]).

⁵ And of course, it will take an even larger group to replicate for Syriac studies the exemplary *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, prepared under the editorship of Prof. Dr. Dr. Siegbert Uhlig.