

Pauline Allen and C. T. R. Hayward, *Severus of Antioch*. The Early Church Fathers. London and New York. Routledge, 2004. Pp. vii + 200. ISBN 0-415-23402-6 (paperback). \$29.95.

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[1] Severus of Antioch is one of the most important authors of the Syrian-Orthodox and Coptic-Orthodox Churches. According to historians of the imperial church he held the patriarchate of Antioch from 512 to 518, the year in which he was deposed, at the beginning of the reign of the Chalcedonian emperor Justin. His followers, however, continued to consider him their patriarch until his death in 538. Severus's leadership, which lasted 26 years, was of crucial importance for the formation and consolidation of the anti-Chalcedonian, Miaphysite movement.

[2] While Severus wrote his numerous works in Greek, very little has been preserved in that language. It is only in recent years that Greek fragments, which are preserved in exegetical Catena manuscripts, are being systematically published and studied. See particularly F. Petit, *La chaîne sur l'Exode*, I. *Fragments de Sévère d'Antioche* (Louvain, 1999), with a second volume, covering the remaining books of the Octateuch and the books of Kings, forthcoming (2006). The gradual loss of interest in Severus's Greek works marks the shift of the anti-Chalcedonian movement from the Greek to the Syriac and Coptic cultural areas, a shift which took place in the sixth and seventh centuries and reached its completion in the early Islamic period.

[3] In view of the loss of the original Greek Severus, the existence of an extensive corpus of Syriac translations is all the more important. Many of these translations were produced during Severus's lifetime and are preserved in sixth-century manuscripts. Even if they do not represent the actual wording of Severus's original writings, they give us access to the milieu of the mid-sixth-century anti-Chalcedonians in Syria and Egypt, many of whom were bilingual (Greek and Syriac or Coptic), and many of whom were instrumental in shaping what would later become the Syrian-Orthodox and the Coptic-Orthodox Churches. Compared to the importance of the Syriac transmission of Severus's works, the Coptic evidence is much more modest, although it once may have been significant. From Coptic and Syriac, Severus's name and fame became part of Christian-Arabic literature, from which his legacy

later reached Ethiopia. The Arabic and Ethiopic fields have not yet been fully explored, even though remarkable progress has been made in recent years. Youhanna Nessim Youssef's 2004 edition and translation of an Arabic Life of Severus, corresponding to the Ge'ez version published by E. J. Goodspeed in 1909, may be singled out: *The Arabic Life of Severus of Antioch Attributed to Athanasius of Antioch* (Patrologia Orientalis, 49,4; Turnhout, 2004).

- [4] The present volume, which is edited by Pauline Allen and C. T. R. Hayward, is a most welcome one, as several of Severus's works have remained relatively little-known in the English speaking world. One finds here long excerpts from various works, most of them newly translated. The translations are by: Robert Hayward (Texts 1-15: extracts from various theological works and Cathedral Homilies, nos. 13 and 14; Text 17: Homily no. 72; and Texts 18-25 and 27-28: extracts from various letters), Iain Torrance (Text 16: Homily no. 18), Witold Witakowski (Texts 29-34: Hymns), and Pauline Allen (Text 26: fragment from a letter). The omission of the translators' names from the respective chapters and from the Table of contents is misleading and unfortunate.

- [5] Except for text no. 26 (ten lines from Greek), all other translations are from Syriac. The English translations are particularly welcome for Severus's theological works, which have been published mostly with Latin translations, and for his homilies, the editions of which are accompanied by French translations. To my knowledge, one more homily has been translated into English, namely no. 52 (On the Maccabees), in R. L. Bensly, *The Fourth Book of Maccabees and Kindred Documents in Syriac* (Cambridge, 1895), p. xxvii-xxxiv. As for Severus's letters, most of these have been published by E. W. Brooks (in 1902-1904 and in 1916-1920, respectively) with excellent English translations, which these new translations do not substantially improve. The dossier of letters exchanged between Severus and a certain Sergius (after 518), published and translated into Latin by J. Lebon in 1949 (CSCO 119-120 / Syr. 64-65), was made available in English by Iain R. Torrance in his *Christology after Chalcedon. Severus of Antioch and Sergius the Monophysite* (Norwich, 1988), 143-236, an important complement to the theological texts translated in the present volume.

- [6] The first three chapters of the book provide well-written introductions to (1) Severus's life, (2) Severus's thought, and (3) Severus's works. In the broader historical sketch of the Miaphysite

resistance to the Council of Chalcedon one might have preferred to see a bit more nuance in the description of Justinian and Theodora in their alleged roles of opponent and supporter of the anti-Chalcedonians, respectively. It is also incorrect, I think, to see in John of Tella's ordinations of priests in the late 520s the birth of "a separatist and independent church" (p. 28). The Miaphysites' alienation and separation from the imperial church should rather be seen as a gradual process, spanning the entire sixth and even part of the seventh centuries.

- [7] Building upon earlier studies by J. Lebon (1951), R. Chesnut (1976), A. Grillmeier (1995), and I. Torrance (1988), a laudable effort is made here to analyze, understand, and contextualize some basic ideas of Severus's theology, which is profoundly Cyrillian (p. 34-38). In view of this, the following statement, which serves as a conclusion, is unsatisfactory (p. 37-38): "Despite the orthodox language in which such soteriological principles are enunciated by Severus and other monophysites, it is difficult to escape the impression that it was not only Julian of Halicarnassus who believed that, while Christ was a true human being, he was not an ordinary one. The interpenetration of the two natures results in a dominance of the divine nature in the union, and the exchange of properties (*communicatio idiomatum*) seems one-sided." Not only is the use of the term "orthodox" problematic in this context, but the application of a non-Miaphysite "orthodox" meta-discourse introduces a theological prejudice that hampers historical understanding.

- [8] "The Early Church Fathers" series has so far produced a number of important volumes. Severus of Antioch, who was one of the protagonists in a period of intense theological discussion and stood at the intersection of the Greek and Syriac worlds, has a well-deserved place in it. The highly readable translations provided in this volume will further increase awareness and understanding of this important tradition within early Christianity.