

**Brock, Sebastian, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*. Second Revised Edition. Gorgias Handbooks, no. 7. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2006. Pp. x + 178. ISBN: 1-59333-300-5. \$29.00 USD.**

1. Written by the world's leading Syriac scholar, this unique resource is a comprehensive survey of matters pertaining to the Bible in Syriac. Dealing with both testaments equally, with all translations, with manuscripts, with the history of interpretation, and with general topics relating to the Bible, it has something that will be of interest to a wide variety of readers. Its non-technical style makes it ideal as an introductory textbook, but it also has enough detail to be of interest to every specialist. This is a fairly fast read, made quicker still by the fact that just over a sixth of the 178-page body of the work is taken up with blank pages or title pages of chapters.
2. The book is divided into two parts and is concluded by an extensive bibliography (pp. 155–78) categorizing publications under seven heads: editions, tools, translations, studies, lectionaries, exegesis, and aspects of reception history. The first part, which is free of footnotes, is a thorough expansion of the 1988 booklet with the same title as the current work. The second part is based on material from the third volume of *The Hidden Pearl: The Syrian Orthodox Church and its Ancient Aramaic Heritage* (Rome, 2001) and uses footnotes sparingly. Because of their origin there is some overlap between the two parts, though the reviewer did not find this to be problematic.
3. Brock begins with a general account of the transmission of the Bible, noting that a 'manuscript Bible was rarely a complete Bible' (p. 7). He then introduces Bible translations as a general phenomenon, maintaining that there are two basic types of translation—'text-oriented' and 'reader-oriented'—virtually all ancient translations being of the former type, and translations produced after the invention of printing tending to be of the latter type.

At the Reformation the role of translator came to be joined, to some extent, to that of the preacher or expositor, and so the entire aim of the biblical translation changed: no longer did the biblical translator defer to the original text, rendering it word for word, instead, he saw his task as conveying to the reader his own understanding of what the biblical text meant. (p. 12)

4. There then follows an overview of the Syriac Bible. For the Old Testament we have the Peshitta (including Apocrypha), the Syrohexapla, the version of Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), and the few remains of the sixth century translation by Philoxenus (esp. Isaiah). For the New Testament, or parts thereof, we have the Diatessaron, the Old Syriac, the Peshitta, the Philoxenian, and the Harclean. The history of these translations is then investigated in further detail. Thereafter we come to a treatment of the manuscripts of the versions, to details of their date and distribution, and to discussion of some individual manuscripts. Points noted include the gap of less than a century between the Syro-hexapla and the Harclean and their earliest manuscripts; that Syriac boasts the earliest dated biblical manuscript—a palimpsest of Isaiah from AD 459/60; the existence of a fourteenth-century quintilingual Ethiopic-Syriac-Coptic-Arabic-Armenian manuscript of the Psalms (readers may be frustrated here by the lack of mention of the manuscript's siglum or location).
5. Other matters discussed include editions of the various Bible versions and the question of canon. Brock helpfully tabulates the varying contents and orders of books in different Old Testament manuscripts.

6. There is little to disagree with in this book, though in his discussion of Genesis 4:8 Brock states that where other versions supply the words 'let us go out into the field', the translator of the Peshitta 'instead of translating the Hebrew word "field" literally ... renders it by "valley" (*pqa'ta*)' (p. 24). He suggests that this is an exegetical alteration based on the concept that Paradise is seen as a mountain. However, the Peshitta's rendering might more plausibly be explained by positing that the translator did not have access to Cain's words in Hebrew but only in Greek. Since the LXX's πεδῖον, like the Syriac word, could mean 'plain', the Peshitta would then be a witness to the absence of Cain's words in its Hebrew *Vorlage* though it clearly had access to his words in the LXX. But such minor cavils aside, the book is judicious throughout and should be widely read.

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