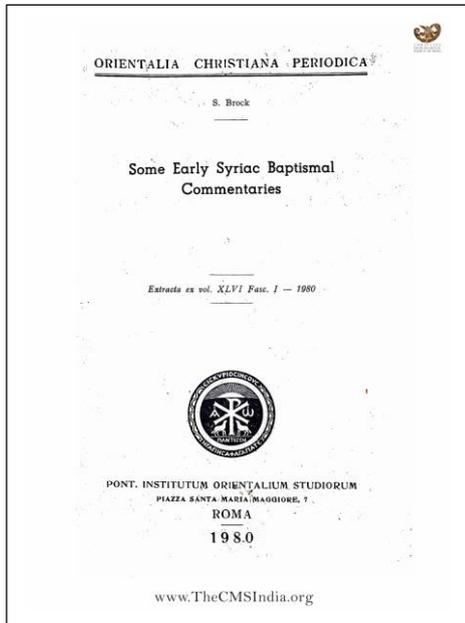


Some Early Syriac Baptismal Commentaries



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S. Brock

Some Early Syriac Baptismal
Commentaries

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Some Early Syriac Baptismal Commentaries

The three commentaries on the baptismal service which are published here all belong to the fifth-seventh century: not only are they closely related to one another, but they also constitute the main source for George, bishop of the Arabs (†724), in his commentary on the service⁽¹⁾. They were also known to the later commentators such as Moshe bar Kepha (†903) and Dionysius bar Šalibi (†1171)⁽²⁾, but, whereas George reproduces his sources fairly exactly, both Moshe and Dionysius handle this traditional material much more freely, and where they do make use of our three texts, they are apt to rephrase the matter that they take over, and sometimes they even transfer it to a different part of the service (notably in the case of the anointings). Of particular interest is the fact that the earliest of the commentaries (A and R below) was also known in East Syrian tradition: it seems very likely that Narsai used it, and at a subsequent date it was translated into Sogdian.

The three new texts are as follows:

(1) *British Library, Add. 14496*, f. 23 (= A). West Syrian, 10th century.

The title reads 'From the commentary of the holy fathers on these sacred mysteries'⁽³⁾. The excerpt covers only the baptismal liturgy. This commentary is almost identical to that published by I. E. Rahmani in *I Fasti della Chiesa Patriarcale Antio-*

⁽¹⁾ Ed. R. H. CONNOLLY and H. W. CODRINGTON, *Two Commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy* (London, 1913), pp. 3*-7* (text) = 11-15 (translation).

⁽²⁾ For references see p. 7.

⁽³⁾ W. WRIGHT, *Catalogue*, p. 224. It follows an acephalous discussion of the baptismal service, probably by Jacob of Edessa.

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chena (Rome, 1920), pp. x-xiii (= R). Rahmani's text consists of a commentary on the eucharistic liturgy as well (the text runs on without a break), and he took it from two manuscripts, one a Melkite manuscript dated 6 Adar (March) AG 1193 (= AD 882), belonging to Neuman (*sic*), the other a Syrian Orthodox manuscript at Charfet, dated AG 1535 (= AD 1223/4). The former of these can readily be identified as no 255b in Hiersemann's *Katalog* 487 (1921) = no 3 in *Katalog* 500 (1922), now in the library of the Cincinnati Historical Society (⁴). The Charfet manuscript contains only the very end of our text, §§ 19-20. It is evidently to be identified as the first half of Charfet 4/1 (⁵).

This oldest form of the commentary also survives, in fragmentary form, in Sogdian translation, being one of the collection of texts included in ms C2, originating from the East Syrian monastery at Bulayiq, near Turfan (⁶). Like R, the Sogdian is a combined commentary on the baptismal and eucharistic liturgies.

The Melkite manuscript attributes the commentary to John Chrysostom, and this attribution is also known to Moshe bar Kepha, who quotes § 1 as from John. The attribution is not likely to be correct: there are very few points of contact with John's catechetical homilies, whereas there exist some remarkable affinities with Theodore's (?). Since Theodore sometimes masquerades as John Chrysostom in the Greek translation of Isaac

(⁴) The Catalogue gives the folio numbers as 44^b-46^b; for the present location of the manuscript, see W. STROTHMANN, "Die orientalischen Handschriften der Sammlung Mettler (Katalog Hiersemann 500)", *ZDMG* Supplement III.i (1977), pp. 285-93, and A. DE HALLEUX, "Un chapitre retrouvé du 'Livre de Perfection' de Martyrius", *Le Muséon* 88 (1975), p. 254 note 9. See now the photographic reproduction in W. STROTHMANN, *Codex Syriacus Secundus* (GOF I.13; 1977), pp. 58-60.

(⁵) On the basis of the date (more exactly, Kanun I, thus 1223 not 1224). Rahmani gives no indication of the folio numbers, and it is unclear to which item in Armalet's catalogue it corresponds (*al-ṭarfah fī makḥūṭāt dair al-sharfah* (Charfet, 1937), pp. 70-5); only items 1-9 belong to the manuscript of 1223, the remainder being earlier (11th century). It is from the earlier part of this manuscript that our C derives.

(⁶) Recently restudied (using the Syriac texts) by N. SIMS-WILLIAMS in his *The Christian Sogdian manuscript C 2: edition, translation and commentary* (Diss. Cambridge, 1978), pp. 157-76. I am most grateful to Dr Sims-Williams for allowing me to make use of his work.

(⁷) See below, pp. 34-38.

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V The confession of Christ				
(a)	3			
(b)		7	8	*
VI The exorcism	4	5	6	*
VII The sponsor				
(a)	5			
(b)		9	12	*
VIII The inscription				
(a)		10	13	*
(b)			14	*
IX The first anointing				
(a)	6	(11)	(15)	(*)
(b)	7		11	
(c)	8	(8)	(10)	(*)
(d)			9	*
(e)	(8)	8	10	*
X The kneeling	9			(*)
XI The second anointing		11	15	*
XII The font	10	12	16	*
XIII The baptism				
(a)	11	13	17	*
(b)		14	18	*
XIV The baptismal formula	12	15	19	*
XV The ascent from the font	13	16	20	*
XVI The post-baptismal anointing		17	21	*
XVII The orarium/crowns	14	18	22	*
XVIII The white garments				
(a)	15		23a	
(b)		19	23b	*
XIX The softness of the garments				
(a)	16			
(b)		20		*
XX The incense				
(a)	17	(22)	(25)	(*)
(b)		21	24	*
XXI The lights		22	25	*
XXII The entry into the church				
(a)	18			
(b)		23	26	*
XXIII The entry into the sanctuary		24	27	*
XXIV Hearing of the scriptures	19		()	(*)
XXV The washing of hands of the priests	20		()	*
XXVI Communion			28	
XXVII The covering/no washing of hands				
(a)	21		22b	
(b)			29	*

*Abbreviations and symbols*

- A = British Library, Add. 14496.
 R = ed. Rahmani
 R^A = Cincinnati Historical Society (Hiersemann, *Kat.* 500, no. 3),
 R^B = Charfet ms of 1223/4 (Charfet 4/1, pp. ?).
 C = Charfet 4/1, pp. 678-9.
 D = British Library, Add. 14538.

* * *

- DS = Dionysius bar Šalibi, *Commentary on the baptismal service* (quoted by section, from Mingana syr. 214, ff. 15^b-24^b).
 GA = George, bishop of the Arabs, *Commentary on the baptismal service*, ed. Connolly-Codrington (quoted by page and line).
 GA^{ed} = ed. Connolly-Codrington (from British Library, Add. 12154)
 GA^H = Harvard syr. 47.
 MK = Moshe bar Kepha, *Commentary on the baptismal service* (quoted by section, from British Library, Add. 21210, ff. 134^b-140^b).

- [] : illegible or damaged (in A; supplied from R)
 < > : lacuna (in A; supplied from R)
 * : see 'Parallels', below, pp. 34-7.

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TITLES

A

אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

R^a

אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

C

אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

D (f. 67a)

אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

(f. 67b)

אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

I.

(a) AR 1:

אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

I(a): 1-1 quoted by MK 1. 2-2 quoted in D 2. 3 D אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ.
4 R D אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ. 5 R אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ; D אֲנִי מְבַרְכֵךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

- XXI. *C 22, D 25*: Compare John the Solitary (ed. RIGNELL, *Drei Traktate*, p. 23*), 'they reveal the light of knowledge that has been given to them by means of the light of the torches'. The lights, while not mentioned by John Chrysostom or Theodore, are referred to by Proclus (FINN, p. 189).
- XXII. *AR 18*: Baptism as a betrothal is prominent in John Chrysostom (cp FINN, pp. 165-6).
- XXVI. *D 28*: In general compare PsD, *EH III.iii.13-14*.
- XXVII. *AR 21*: D thus preserves the original form (*D 22b = AR 21*) and the corruption (*D 29*) which has led to a re-interpretation; since the corruption is also in the Sogdian it must be early. PsD *EH II.iii.5* speaks of the 'unchangeableness of the godlike habit', but in a different context. For ἀναλλοίωτος in a baptismal context, compare also Gregory of Nyssa, *Orat. Catech.* (*PG 45*, col. 100B).

SOURCES AND INFLUENCE

(a) *AR*

The parallels adduced in the previous section indicate that the affinities of *AR* are far closer to Theodore than to John Chrysostom, and indeed in a few places it even looks as if *AR* could be quoting Theodore (see in particular on *AR 4,7* and *8*). Structurally, however, *AR* is more primitive⁽¹³⁾ than Theodore, since it knows neither a second pre-baptismal anointing nor a post-baptismal one (the description of the latter in Theodore may not, however, be genuine)⁽¹⁴⁾. It would seem more satisfactory, then, to suppose that *AR* belongs to a catechetical tradition very close to Theodore, but perhaps slightly earlier.

It is very likely that Narsai, in his two homilies on the bap-

⁽¹³⁾ This need not, of course, necessarily be a criterion of date (cp. Narsai).

⁽¹⁴⁾ For the view that it is a later addition, see C. J. A. LASH, "L'onction post-baptismale de la 14^e homélie de Théodore de Mopsueste: une interpolation syriaque?", in *XXIX Congrès International des Orientalistes: Resumés* (Paris, 1973), pp. 43-4.

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with the main baptismal rite (fifth century?), the exorcism was at first placed in a variety of different positions in relationship to the apotaxis and syntaxis: that in AR and the *ordo* attributed to Timothy is obviously illogical, and this alone will explain its abandonment for either the pattern of C D GA, or that of the extant manuscripts of the *ordines* and the later commentators ⁽²¹⁾. The latter is of course historically correct, but probably it represents only the final stage in the adjustments rendered necessary by the inclusion of the exorcism into the main rites.

(b) *The final sections*

Here the basic difference concerns the order of the two items, orarium ⁽²²⁾ and white garments:

(1) Orarium-white garments: this sequence is that of AR C and D; in the later commentators, however, it is found only in the Harvard manuscript of George, although it is evidently known to Dionysius bar Šalibi.

(2) white garments-orarium: this is the order of GA^a MK DS and Barhebraeus.

It is also to be noted that the Lights (XXI), absent from AR but not from the Sogdian, come after the Incense (XX) in C D GA, but before it in MK DS and Barhebraeus. Since C D GA Sogdian use AR's entry on Incense for the Lights, it is easy to see how confusion could have arisen.

Summary

The three commentaries published here, A C and D, represent three successive stages in the growth of the West Syrian commentary tradition, designed to cover both baptism and the eucharist (the latter is not discussed in this article). These commentaries form the basis of the subsequent commentary by George bishop of the Arabs.

baptism (Aphrahat, Ephrem, *Acts of Thomas* and *Acts of John*); Aphrahat, Ephrem and the *Acts of John* do, however, know an apotaxis.

⁽²¹⁾ Likewise the Byzantine rite.

⁽²²⁾ In ThM, *Cat. Hom.* XIII.19 (p. 398) the orarium is laid by the priest over the head of the candidate after the first pre-baptismal anointing.

The oldest text form, that of AR Sogdian, must date from the early fifth century, seeing that it preserves an archaic structure of service, without a post-baptismal anointing, and was early enough to be known to East, as well as West, Syrian tradition. The very close affinities of several sections with Theodore's *Catechetical Homilies* suggests that in its oldest form (probably in Greek) the commentary belonged to the same catechetical tradition (and one somewhat different from the one in which John Chrysostom worked). One might conjecture that the commentary reached the Church of the East by way of the Persian School at Edessa and its successor at Nisibis; this would readily account for Narsai's evident acquaintance with it.

This oldest recension was later expanded to meet changes in the structure of the baptismal rite, in particular the introduction of a second pre-baptismal, and a post-baptismal, anointing. In the course of this expansion of the commentary tradition Pseudo-Dionysius was certainly one of the authors on whom the later editors drew; Severus may have been another, but for the most part the additional sources of C and, later, D still await identification.

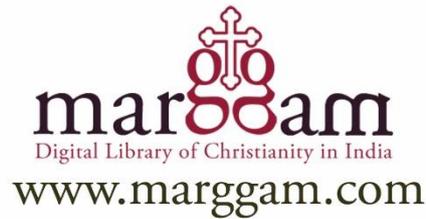
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