

THE HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON IN THE SYRIAN CHURCH

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BY
JULIUS A. BEWER

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
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PREFACE.

The study of the relation of the various documents which form the material of the dissertation has something fascinating, when the religious impulses are seen at work. The Syrians were no great literary people, but they were aglow for Christ. The throbbing of their passionate love for the Savior, which distinguishes them later on, may be felt here already in the various attempts which they made to translate his gospel into their own language. This recompenses us in a certain sense for the scanty information which we have of the beginning of Christianity in Syria. Three translations of the gospels, made at pretty nearly the same time, evidence the strength of the Christian life at the very beginning. It is important that this religious element be not overlooked.

I count myself happy that my teacher, Professor Gottheil, has allowed me to take this subject for my dissertation, and that he has always directed my attention to matters of special interest for a theological student. It is due to this that I could combine my theological with my oriental studies. I want to thank him most heartily for his teaching and the kind interest he has always taken in my work.

I am impelled also to thank my teacher, Professor McGiffert. To him I owe my training in historical criticism; he suggested the theme to me, and in his seminar the thesis was first read. His kind interest has never been wanting.

This dissertation was finished in the spring of last year; therefore the newer publications could not be consulted. They would, however, have modified none of the results.

JULIUS A. BEWER.

BASLE, SWITZERLAND,
January, 1900.

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INTRODUCTORY.

SINCE the publication of Theodor Zahn's monumental work, *Die Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, a flood of light has been thrown on the history of the New Testament canon in the Syrian church by the discovery of the Codex Syrus Sinaiticus, which modifies the course of the history a good deal. But though this famous codex has been carefully studied and compared with the other documents, though its place in the genealogy of the text has been the subject of controversy, nobody has as yet undertaken a reconstruction of the history of the New Testament canon in the Syrian church. It is this that I should like to attempt in this study. But before we can reconstruct the history, many points have to be considered, for there is lack of unanimity among scholars in regard to almost all the questions at issue.

Right at the outset it is best to define clearly what belongs to the subject and what not. I give, therefore, here a *statement of the questions* which will be treated. The cardinal point is: *only that which bears directly on the history of the canon will be considered*. Everything else, however valuable in itself, will be omitted. Thus it is not necessary for our purpose, *e. g.*, to compare the Syrus Sinaiticus, the Curetonianus, and Peshitta with the Palestinian Syriac, nor to compare the later revision, the Philoxenian and the Heraclian, with the Peshitta. The history of the text as such is different from the history of the canon. The problems to be considered are:

i. As regards the gospels:

1. What is the relation of Syrus Sinaiticus (= Ss) to Syrus Curetonianus (= Sc)?
2. What is the relation of Ss and Sc to the Peshitta (= P)?
3. What is the relation of Ss, Sc, and P to the Greek?
4. What is the relation of Ss, Sc, and P to Tatian's Diatessaron (= T)?
5. Which gospel did Aphraates (= A) use, the gospel harmony or the separate gospels, or both?
6. Which did Ephraim (= E) use?

- ii. As regards the Acts and epistles :
1. What does the Doctrina Addai say about them ?
 2. Does Aphraates use all of them ?
 3. Are all the epistles in the Peshitta ?
 4. What is the relation of the text of the epistles in Aphraates to that of P ?
 5. What that of Ephraim ?
 6. Does Ephraim use all the books of the New Testament ?
- iii. As regards canonicity :
1. What light does the Doctrina Addai shed on this question ?
 2. Did Aphraates have a canon ?
 3. If so, on what principle was it based ?

When these questions are answered, we are ready to attempt the reconstruction of the entire history.

The sources are not many. The lack of historical references makes the history all the more complicated. The sources are: (1) the Codex Syrus Sinaiticus (= Ss);¹ (2) the Codex Syrus Curetonianus (= Sc);² (3) the Peshitta (= P);³ (4) the Diatessaron of Tatian (= T);⁴ (5) the homilies of Aphraates (= A);⁵ (6) the works of Ephraim (= E);⁶ (7) references to Tatian and the Diatessaron in the church fathers;⁷ (8) the Doctrina Addai.⁸

¹ Cf. E. NESTLE, "Die syrischen Bibelübersetzungen," in *Real-Encyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* (= RE), 3. Aufl., Vol. III, 1897.

² Cf. A. CIASCA, *Tatiani Evangeliorum harmoniae arabice . . .* edidit, Roma, 1888.—G. MOESINGER, *Evangelii concordantis expositio facta a sancto Ephraemo, Venezia, 1896.*—THEO. ZAHN, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons und der altkirchlichen Literatur*. I. Theil: *Tatian's Diatessaron*, Erlangen, 1881—a famous reconstruction of the lost gospel harmony. See also ZAHN's article, "Zur Geschichte von Tatian's Diatessaron im Abendland," *Neue kirchl. Zeitschr.*, 1894, No. 2.—J. HAMLIN HILL, *The Earliest Life of Christ ever Compiled from the Four Gospels, being the Diatessaron of Tatian*, Edinburgh, 1894.—J. RENDEL HARRIS, *The Diatessaron of Tatian. A Preliminary Study*, London, 1890, and "The Diatessaron," *Contemporary Review*, August, 1895, in answer to R. W. CASSELL, "The Diatessaron of Tatian," *Nineteenth Century*, April, 1895.—S. HEMPHILL, *The Diatessaron of Tatian*, London and Dublin, 1888.—Also the articles of J. M. FULLER in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography* and of ADOLF HARNACK in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

³ Cf. NESTLE in RE, s. v.

⁴ See J. RENDEL HARRIS and HILL as quoted in footnote 2.

⁵ See CURETON, *Ancient Syriac Documents*, 1864.—GEO. PHILLIPS in his standard edition, 1876.—LIPSIUS, "Zur edessenischen Abgar-Sage," *Jahrb. f. protest. Theologie*, 1880, pp. 187 f., and on "Thaddeus," in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography*.

PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATIONS.

I. THE GOSPELS.

As we should expect in any newly founded Christian church, the gospels were the first to be translated into Syriac. Having heard of Jesus Christ in the sermons preached by the missionaries, the Syrian Christians had surrendered themselves to him. An ardent longing to learn more of him than the sermons of these evangelists could give them must soon have taken hold of them. A translation of his works and words, as they had already been written down, must soon have been made. Whether Tatian was one of the early missionaries, or even the founder of Christianity, in Syria, we do not know. It is extremely doubtful. If he had been, it would be very strange that not even the slightest tradition concerning it has come down to us. We know that he has combined and interwoven the gospels in Syriac in his Diatessaron; we know that this gospel harmony was widely used in Syria; but we do not know that he was the first to give the Syrians Christianity and the translation of the Christian documents. Granted that a translation of the gospels was made early after the establishment of Christianity, we are at once confronted by the question: Which was the earlier work, the translation of the four separate gospels or the Diatessaron? We have, namely, on the one hand, a gospel harmony, and, on the other, the four gospels given us in the Syrus Sinaiticus, Curetonianus, and the Peshitta. That the contrast between the two was felt in Syria is seen from the title of the separate gospels, *ܩܘܪܘܢܐܢܐ*, *i. e.*, "the gospel of the separated." But this title cannot be used as an argument for the later origin of Ss and Sc than T, because we do not know whether the original translator has used it, or whether it was not added by the later scribe who wrote when the distinction between the separate gospels and the Diatessaron was marked, *viz.*, in the fourth century. There is no external evidence which can be brought to bear on this question of priority. It is true, we know from the *Doctrina Addai*, *Aphraates*, and *Ephraim* that the Diatessaron was widely used, but that does not mean that it was on that account the earliest text. The decision rests then, unfortunately enough, exclusively on internal evidence. We must examine the texts themselves, and there it is necessary to see the relation (1) of Ss to Sc, (2) of Ss and Sc to P, (3) of all three to the Greek, and (4) to T.

1. *The Relation of Ss to Sc.*

The order of the gospels is different in the two codices. Ss has the order (= P): Matt., Mark, Luke, John; Sc has: Matt., Mark, John,

Luke. I cannot help feeling that Sc's order seems to be older than that of Ss. The order varied in the Syrian church at first, which is seen also from D (Codex Bezae), which is so closely related to the Syriac New Testament. D has: Matt., John, Luke, Mark.⁶ The Old Syriac may, therefore, have had the order of Sc. But, on the whole, the order has very little voice in the decision. It will be seen in the course of this investigation that Ss has a different Greek original from Sc. It is unreasonable to suppose that the translators changed the order of the gospels. They translated in the order which they found in the Greek MS. used by them. All that can be inferred is that the Greek original of Ss had the order: Matt., Mark, Luke, John, while the Greek original of Sc had: Matt., Mark, John, Luke. It would be hazardous to affirm that a Greek MS. with the order Matt., Mark, John, Luke is older than one with the order Matt., Mark, Luke, John, if no other evidence were forthcoming.

Now, an examination of the two codices shows at once that they are related to each other. They are not altogether independent of each other, as was at once seen by Professor Bensly and F. C. Burkitt, when Mrs. Lewis showed them some photographed specimens of the Sinaitic codex.⁷ This has not been questioned since. Nestle, Wellhausen, Holzhey, etc., all agree in saying that the two codices stand in a certain relation to each other. What that relation is we shall see later on. It is usually thought, *e. g.*, by Wellhausen and Holzhey, that Sc is simply a recension of Ss; the revisor adding those parts which were omitted by Ss and correcting translations which did not correspond exactly to the Greek, his purpose being to bring this translation into a more intimate harmony with the Greek. Whether this position is tenable or not will appear as we go on. At all events, so much is certain, that the two codices stand in a close relation to each other.

Again, it is generally accepted that both Ss and Sc are translations from the Greek. Cureton showed this long ago for the gospels which are named after him, in the preface to his edition (1858). If there could have been any doubt whether this was so, it was removed by the reconstruction of the Greek text which underlay the Syriac translation by J. R. Crowfoot, 1871, and Friedrich Baethgen, 1885.

For the Sinaiticus no such reconstruction of the original Greek has been made as yet, though Adalbert Merx tells us that he began to

⁶ Cf. CARL HOLZHEY, *Der neuentdeckte Codex Syrus Sinaiticus untersucht* (München, 1896), p. 45.

⁷ *The Four Gospels in Syriac*, p. v.

translate Matthew into Greek, abandoning, however, this plan to bring out his German translation. The question whether Ss is a translation from the Greek is more important than might appear at first glance. If it can be proved that it is from a Greek original, then its relation to the Western Text is clearer; it cannot be that it is a translation from the old Latin, as I inclined to think for a time,⁸ nor can any other theory hold good.

Fortunately there are some indications which place it beyond doubt that the underlying text of Ss is Greek:

1. The version retains Greek words and writes them simply in Syriac form: John 11:18, *στάδιον*; 11:44, etc., *σουδάριον*; 11:54, *παρηρησά*; 12:3, *λίτρα*, *πάρδος*, *πιστικός*; 6:13, *κόφινος*; 12:6, etc., *γλωσσόκομον*; 14:16, etc., *παράκλητος*; 18:3, etc., *σπέιρα*, *λαμπάς*; 18:28, etc., *ἄγγελόν*. Matt. 8:5, etc., *χελίαρχος*; 8:9, *στρατιώτης*; 12:41, *κῆρυγμα*. Mark 15:44, etc., *κεκτυρίων*. Luke 13:34, etc., *πραιτώριον*; 23:53, *ἔρωμα*.⁹

2. There are incorrect translations in Ss which can be explained only on the assumption that a Greek MS. was used¹⁰: Matt. 10:40, *ἄλλως* instead of the correct *ἄλλ' οἰς*; 13:48, *εἰς ἀγαθή* for *εἰς ἀγγη* (or *ἀγγελία*). Luke 4:30, *κρεμάσαι* for *κρημνίσαι*; 19:4, *σῦκος μαρίας* for *σικαμορέα*; 21:46, *ἐν στοαῖς* for *ἐν στοαῖς*. John 7:35, *σπέρμα* (*σπορά*) for *διασπορά*.

3. There is at least one interpretatory phrase which shows as clearly as possible that Ss used a Greek original: John 1:42, "Cephas, which is being interpreted *into Greek*, Peter."

These arguments are conclusive. It would not be difficult, however, to point out Greek constructions in the Syriac, if it were necessary. It is already plain that both codices are based on a Greek original.

But now, though Ss and Sc are closely related to each other, and though they are translations from the Greek, yet Sc is not merely a recension of Ss, or *vice versa*, nor is the Greek text underlying Ss the same as that which Sc used.

To keep the two points distinct, we will prove each one separately.

⁸ Cf. the interesting colophon in the MS. of the fifth century described by Gwilliam in *Studia Biblica*, I: "Finished is the holy gospel, the preaching of Mark the evangelist, which he spoke in Roman, in the city of Rome."

⁹ For other examples see HOLZHEY, pp. 10, 11.

¹⁰ Cf. WELLHAUSEN, "Der syrische Evangelienpalimpsest vom Sinai," *Nachr. v. d. Kgl. Ges. d. Wiss. u. Gea.*, Phil.-hist. Cl., 1895, Heft 1; and especially C. HOLZHEY, pp. 10, 11.