

Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies

An Introduction

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3.17. Past and present trends in the edition of Classical Syriac texts (AM)

CSCO, Scriptores Syri: A 'base manuscript', defects included

In a recent survey of electronic resources for Syriac studies, Kristian Heal (2012, 74, n. 17) tells of oral tradition concerning the scientific and emotional value of the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (CSCO) for eastern Christian scholars: 'Sebastian Brock once observed in casual conversation that, 'The corpus is our life', referring to the CSCO'. Together with the *Patrologia Orientalis*, the CSCO and a few other editorial projects do indeed represent the life of Syriac philology and the solid skeleton for its growth in the twentieth century. So it is perhaps appropriate to start the present survey of text-critical choices in the edition of Classical Syriac texts from the sub-series *Scriptores Syri* of the CSCO. We can distinguish three main periods in its history: The Latin Period, from 1906 to 1949; Draguet's CSCO, from 1950 to 1995; and what we could label as 'new direction(s)' from 1995 onwards.

In the first period, all introductions and translations are written in Latin, the classical language of philology—and Roman Catholic liturgy—which virtually disappeared from the CSCO after 1950, when it was replaced by European national languages. To this period usually belong historiographical texts edited between 1903 and 1949, under the direction of Chabot. Their stocks were lost in 1940, when, during the second German invasion of Leuven, the building of the University Library was largely burnt down. Draguet directed their reprint in the years 1952–1955.

The Latin period includes various kinds of editions: diplomatic editions by Guidi and Vaschalde, eclectic texts by Labourt and Connolly, emended texts by Chabot, who clearly expresses the goal and limits of his editorial pride in the introduction of *Scriptores Syri* 36 (Chabot 1920): 'Editoris autem munus non est novam recensionem, etiam meliorem, constituere'.

Most of the Syriac texts published in the CSCO are in fact diplomatic editions, thanks to or because of the method elaborated, used and recommended by René Draguet, (re-)founder and director of the series for many years (1948–1995). Former professor of theology, in 1948 he took over the direction of CSCO and devoted most of his life to a monumental enterprise that required his total commitment (Ponthot 1981). Draguet (1977) exposes and summarizes his method in an article published in a miscellaneous volume in honour of Arthur Vööbus. It is clear that he is not discussing theoretical and methodological questions, but proposing a method in the sense of practical instructions or even directions for editors of Syriac texts. Following classical philological standards, he makes a detailed *recensio* of the manuscript witnesses a first requirement. Their evaluation should be in terms of closeness to 'the original', but the rather unclear expression 'textual profile which seems best to approximate the original' might in fact be the equivalent of Lachmann's concept of the archetype.

As we will see, the first recommendation made by Draguet to choose one manuscript as a base text and reproduce it as it is, with all its faults, is taken very seriously by all editors of CSCO in Draguet's period, preferred to any form of hybrid text, arbitrary contamination or conjectural reconstruction. The idea of reproducing the manuscript as it is, is much more fictional than it sounds. Besides concessions to the tacit normalization of the punctuation system (second recommendation), the subdivision of sentences, paragraphs and sections—procedures that profoundly alter the *mise en page* of the manuscript and its value as a historical witness of the punctuation system and the history of the language in a given moment—Draguet fails to mention another major change introduced in the reproduction of the manuscript in printed form, that is the substitution of all kinds of Syriac script with the 'estrangēlā available to *la typographie orientaliste* and probably most appreciated by Syriac students the world over.

The adverb 'tacitly' in the description of editorial methods should rouse especial alarm. Draguet is certainly right when he stresses that the works of scribes and editors ('objective data and subjective editorial judgment') must remain clearly distinguishable throughout the edition. Throughout text, apparatus—and to a certain extent also in the translation—one should be able to recognize what manuscripts and other primary sources actually attest and what has been legitimately altered, changed or omitted by the editor. Editors, however, should be allowed to propose a readable corrected text, close to the archetype or even to the original—if they think such a thing exists and can be reconstructed—and must be visible even in their intervention in choice of characters, vocalization, punctuation and page layout.

Draguet's opposition to any correction and reconstruction is surprising when we consider the rich and detailed introduction that he wrote for his own text editions within CSCO. They are impressive and regu-

larly contain an accurate codicological description of the witnesses, a discussion on their interrelationships and sub-grouping, and a *stemma codicum* (on Draguet's achievement as a Syriac scholar see Brock et al. 2011, 131–132). There are at least three explanatory hypotheses that do not necessarily exclude each other to understand Draguet's strenuous defence of mistakes and defects of the manuscript chosen as the base text. 1) A practical explanation is suggested by Draguet when he says that 'this method most conveniently allows for modifications when new textual evidence is found'. Although it is not clear why a reconstructed or emended text would exclude the recording of new evidence in the apparatus, Draguet may have come to this conclusion for practical typographical reasons—as Alessandro Bausi suggested to me informally: in the pre-digital world, reprinting the apparatus only, with minor up-dating, would be easier than the whole text. 2) A psychological explanation was envisaged by Bausi (2004a, 17, n 45; 2006a, 542; 2008b, 29), when he wittily pointed out that the base-manuscript method reflects the almost fetishistic attitude towards the manuscript, that Luciano Canfora observed among Hellenistic and Late Antique scholars. 3) From a historical point of view, Draguet's 'method' can be easily understood in the academic context in which he was trained and worked. It is clearly in line with Bédier's theory of the *bon manuscrit*. Draguet is even more radical than Bédier, who accepted correction at least of the most obvious mistakes of the base manuscript (Bausi 2004a, 16). On the other hand, Draguet—no doubt like most authors and readers of the CSCO—had a theological background and/or theological interests and was therefore familiar with the text history of the Hebrew Bible and Biblical philology. As is well known, what is generally intended as a critical edition of the Hebrew Old Testament is in fact the transcription of one manuscript, with all its mistakes and idiosyncrasies. Better readings or editorial corrections laid down in the apparatus as a *lege*—as required by Draguet—resemble very much the Masoretic practice of the *qere*. In this connexion, it is remarkable that the only 'bibliographical reference' given by Draguet (1977) is Origen's work on the pre-Masoretic Hebrew biblical text, as if no-one ever discussed textual criticism after Origen or there were no philology but ancient and mediaeval Bible philology.

In the CSCO and in general in Syriac philology, the editions are regularly and laudably accompanied by translations, which—especially in the case of diplomatic editions—represent the truly critical texts and are offered to a wider readership than Semitists and Syriac scholars only: students of the Bible, eastern Christianity, Late Antique and Byzantine history, Christian and pagan literatures written in Greek and Latin, Judaism, Islam, etc.

Faithfulness to the manuscript chosen as a base text is expressed in monumental sub-series of CSCO *Scriptores Syri* such as the editions of Ishodad of Merw, published between 1950 and 1981 by Ceslas Van den Eynde, OP, and Ephrem, published between 1955 and 1979 by Edmund Beck (see Brock and Van Rompay in Brock et al. 2011, 65 and 423). 'L'édition reproduit le texte de A tel qu'il est, fautes comprises' becomes a mantra-like refrain, declined in a variety of forms and translated in the various languages even after Draguet's departure from this earth in 1980. Indeed, Draguet managed to posthumously direct and influence the CSCO for 15 years at least after his death: from 1980 to 1995, the second page of the cover gives his name, followed by a crux, as the director of CSCO.

When the CSCO was Draguet's CSCO, there was at least one editor who opted for corrections in the critical text. Curiously he is the same Arthur Vööbus (see Buck in Brock et al. 2011, 433–435) to whom Draguet dedicated his notorious article of 1977.

Finally, in 1995, Bernard Coulie and Andrea Schmidt were chosen as members of the scientific board of the CSCO instead of Draguet, fifteen years after the latter's death. New methodological choices were made. It may be a coincidence, but the first text published under their direction 'is not a diplomatic edition'. The same Robert W. Thomson, who thirty years before had faithfully reproduced the manuscripts chosen as bases for the various texts, with all of their errors and accepting inconsistencies in the vocalization from item to item (CSCO *Scriptores Syri* 114, Thomson [R.] 1965), is now proud to announce that he has 'corrected the Syriac where it is clearly wrong' (CSCO *Scriptores Syri* 222, Thomson [R.] 1995). Other editors preferred to continue the tradition of diplomatic editions or to present eclectic texts.

Brock's work on dialogue poems: 'A readable text'

CSCO volumes usually represent points of arrival of many years of research on the same author or textual tradition—sometimes published in several volumes over years and decennia—and thus presuppose middle- or long-term projects compatible with the 4–5 years of a doctoral fellowship or rhythm of life and teaching tasks in a Benedictine school or a Dominican seminary

Sebastian Brock, lecturer at Oxford University and universally recognized as the leading scholar of Syriac Studies today, opted for other strategies for the publication of Syriac dialogue poems. Text editions, with translation and ample philological, literary and theological commentaries, are disseminated in more than twenty different periodicals and miscellaneous volumes, published in various countries, from India to Canada, from Lebanon to the United States. A coherent and ambitious project is clearly there and it becomes evident when reading Brock's programmatic survey (1983, 1984, 1987b) or lists such as Brock (1991b, up-dated in 2010b), where the researcher takes stock of progress and announces further publications as forthcoming.

From the literary point of view, dispute and dialogue poems are treated as a more or less unitary corpus, as the Christian continuation of a very old Mesopotamian tradition (Brock 1983, 1989, 2001), and representative of a characteristically Syriac genre, fascinating for its exegetical and theological content and influential in the emergence and development of Greek hymnography (Brock 1985a, 1987b, 2008) and, indirectly, in the diffusion of the dispute—and perhaps the religious drama, too—as popular poetic genres in the Arab and Persian East and in mediaeval Europe. As a matter of fact, the rather homogeneous literary corpus does not exist in the manuscript tradition and has been created by the editor. Brock compiled a list or inventory of dispute and dialogue poems, selecting them from liturgical manuscripts of various ages and origins and printed books, on the basis of the genre to which they belong or the textual structure (dialogue or dispute) they present.

Brock published the critical editions of texts in single papers and contributions, a choice which fits the 'publish or perish' policy of contemporary universities better and allows the scholar to make progress in his knowledge of the genre as a whole and to deal in depth with the literary richness of a single text, the often long and complicated history of its transmission, its fortune and web of intertextual references. One cannot find texts and translations of the dialogue poems by picking a couple of volumes from the same library shelf, as Draguet's grandiose project has made possible for various Syriac authors and corpora, but in doing so Brock certainly succeeded in reaching a wide and varied readership. In this connexion, he clearly intends not only to serve the needs of qualified readers of universities and specialized libraries—the target market of a publishing house like Peeters, which prints and distributes the CSCO—but he also makes this Syriac genre more widely known to scholars who do not read the language, and easily accessible to non professional readers—probably many Syrians among them—whose interests range from the search of inspiring devotional readings to the enhancement of a cultural and national heritage. This purpose is evident in the texts published exclusively in English translation (for example Brock 1987a; 1992, 2010b) and in the most complete collection of Syriac dialogue poems available in the original language, that Brock (1982) published in cooperation with first-class scribe, scholar and publisher: twenty-six poems—some in more than one version—were prepared for publication by Brock and copied by the elegant West Syriac hand of the late Mor Julios Yesu Çiçek, Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Central Europe and founder of the publishing house hosted in the St Ephrem Monastery of Glane (the Netherlands). It is one of those publications in which print and manuscript cultures seem to fade into each other.

Literary remarks on the poems and philological notes on the manuscripts used for these printed handwritten texts are discussed in an article of *marginalia* published in English in *Le Muséon*. Although Brock declares there (1984, 39–40) that his aim was 'to select those dialogue *soghyatha* that might be of interest to a modern Syrian Orthodox readership (hence the absence of any pieces known only from East Syrian tradition)', he nevertheless included the exclusively eastern *Dispute of Gold and Wheat*. He then presents the collection as 'no more than an *editio minor*' and hopes 'one day to provide fuller editions, with critical apparatus, translations and commentaries of these intriguing and often delightful poems'. However, philologists should always keep in mind commented translations, minor editions and any form of popularization as complementary objectives of their editorial work, especially in times when philology—traditionally perceived as a discipline ancillary to literary, linguistic, historical or religious studies—is more and more marginalized in the university study programs and desperately needs to gain appeal among students and across disciplines.

Most dialogue and dispute poems are anonymous compositions, as is typical of liturgical poetry, and not authorial works like the vast majority of the CSCO texts. Being liturgical texts, they are intended for vocal performance—probably most often by choirs in the case of the stanzaic *sugītā* meter—and their use in the liturgy left marks in the history of their transmission in a number of ways. Some poems, evidently intended for alternating choirs, have been preserved only partially or fragmentarily due to the—eleventh

century and later—habit of separating the alternate verses in two manuscripts, each to be used by one choir. We are thus left with the verses and the arguments of only one of the two characters engaged in the dialogue or in the dispute. The half, apocopated text of some dialogue poems have been reproduced even in the printed editions of the West Syriac collection called *fanqīto* (Mosul 1886–1896 and Pampakuda 1962–1963; see Brock 1984, 38–39).

It is difficult to date anonymous texts and Syriac dialogue poems are no exception. Brock suggests that the texts preserved in both the West and East Syriac traditions may antedate or be contemporary with the Christological disputes of the fifth century that eventually led to the formation of two separate Churches and liturgies. In certain cases, a relative antiquity of the texts (fifth and sixth centuries) is suggested by the way they handle themes derived from early authors such as Ephrem (d.373; Brock et al. 2011, 145–147) or echoed by later ones such as Jacob of Serugh (c.451–521; Brock et al. 2011, 433–435). Dating texts on the basis of the content is however rather risky and it seems unwise to exclude contacts and reciprocal influences between the two churches, especially in a field like hymnography with its obvious links with sacred music. The two Syriac traditions do differ in the transmission of dialogue poems in that we have western manuscript witnesses from the ninth century onwards, whereas eastern collections are—sometimes considerably—later than the thirteenth century. Moreover some poems have been preserved in two distinct versions, the Eastern one being generally shorter and adapted to late literary forms and taste: end rhyme is introduced on the model of Arabo-Persian poetry and style and formalism reflect the poetic production of the so-called Syriac Renaissance (tenth to thirteenth centuries, but especially thirteenth century as far as East Syriac poetry is concerned).

Rather than following a hypothetical chronological order or arranging the texts according to the position they occupy in the liturgical calendar, Brock groups the poems according to the characters involved and orders them according to the biblical narrative: Old Testament, New Testament and others (personifications, saints and martyrs). Whenever possible, he publishes the two versions of a dialogue together, and in these cases the focus of the thematic and intertextual analysis is generally on the oldest—which usually means the West Syriac—version. Thus we get a comparative glance at two different texts, often separated by a considerable lapse of time and reflecting distant contexts of use and transmission, rather than a whole picture of the dialogue poems as preserved and used in a given period and within a certain—western or eastern—liturgical tradition. Interest in the contents would seem to prevail on philological concerns, but the history of tradition—in Pasquali's terms—of each text could have not be emphasized more efficaciously.

At least in one case—the *Dispute of the Months* in Brock (1985b)—the comparison is extended to 'related texts', such as a Jewish *Dispute of the Months* added as an interpolation to Exodus 12:2 in the so-called *Fragment Targum* and the *Dispute of Gold and Wheat*, preserved only in the East Syriac milieu, in the classical language and in Modern Aramaic. The earliest and longest West Syriac version of the *Dispute of the Months* turns out not to be as reliable as one might expect. A fragment included as a quotation in the *Book of Rhetoric* by Antony of Tagrit (probably ninth century; see Watt in Brock et al. 2011, 23) shares a number of good readings with the East Syriac shorter version of the *Dispute*, attested in manuscripts of the nineteenth century. *Recentiores, non deteriores*.

The anthology of dialogue poems explicitly planned for Syrian Orthodox readers (Brock 1982) is in fully vocalized West Syriac script (*serṭā*), even for texts preserved in old 'eṣṭrangēlā or late East Syriac manuscripts. Elsewhere, Brock usually transliterates the Syriac text of both West and East Syriac versions in 'eṣṭrangēlā script, as in the CSCO, but he excludes vowel signs. This produces a neat readable text for western scholars primarily interested in the content of the poems and significantly reduces the number of spelling forms and readings to be recorded in apparatus—however, a brief discussion of the spelling is generally to be found in the introductions—as well as the number of corrections and interventions the editor needs to make. Nevertheless, the choice of suppressing the vocalization is questionable from at least two points of view: dialogue poems are liturgical texts and are preserved in liturgical manuscripts that often have vowels, being conceived and copied as supports for public performances; the vocalization may therefore be contemporary with the copy, it reproduces the pronunciation of a given time and is a potentially precious source of information about metric and the history of the Syriac language.

As far as philological methods are concerned, Brock is much more open to emendation and reconstruction than most CSCO editors. It is perhaps not a coincidence that he published his edition of Isaac of

Nineveh (*Scriptores Syri* 224 and 225; Brock 1995b) in the third period of the history of the *Corpus* as we have outlined it above. In a passage that is worth quoting in extenso, he would seem to distance himself from Draguet's method as applied by 'many' Syriac scholars:

Since no manuscript ever presents a text free from corruption (often obvious), the modern editor is compelled to produce an eclectic text, if his edition is to appear in a readable form (something many editors of Syriac texts choose to overlook).

The factual premises of classical philology—ubiquitous and explainable corruption of the copies—and the necessary conscious intervention of the editor, especially in cases of omissions and fragmentarily or partially transmitted texts, are clearly recognized. However, he stresses that the aim of the philological work is not so much the approximation to an archetype—as all (post-)Lachmannian theories and approaches in textual criticism entails—but the publication of a readable text.

In the metrical form of the *sugīṭā*, in which most dialogue poems are written, verses or pairs of verses are very often connected by means of an alphabetic acrostic—each verse or pair beginning with one of the letters of the Syriac alphabet—which clearly has a mnemotechnic function in oral performances. The mnemonic device is also integrated in the scribal technique, since the first letters are normally rubricated in the manuscripts. This has prevented omissions in the copying process, showed them up when they did occur and leads the editor in the reconstruction process, which is moreover enhanced by the relatively stable textual transmission and uniformity of Classical Syriac through the centuries. To exemplify the necessity of an eclectic text, Brock mentions the West Syriac version of *The Sinful Woman and Satan*, that he reconstructs using no less than five manuscripts (Brock 1988).

References

Bausi 2004a, 2006a, 2008b; Beck 1955, 1957, 1960, 1979; Brock 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985a, 1985b, 1987a, 1987b, 1988, 1989, 1991b, 1992, 1995b, 2001, 2008, 2010b; Brock et al. 2011; Canfora 1974; Chabot 1920; Draguet 1977; Heal 2012; Pasquali 1934; Ponthot 1981; Thomson [R.] 1965, 1995; Van den Eynde 1955, 1958, 1963, 1969, 1972, 1981; Van den Eynde – Vosté 1950.