

Isho‘dad of Merv: Commentary on Daniel. By T. C. Schmidt. Pp. 106. (Texts from Christian Late Antiquity, 62.) Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2022. ISBN 9781463242787. Paperback \$69.00.

Born in Merv (now Mary in Turkmenistan), the ninth century East Syriac commentator Isho‘dad bishop of Hadatha (near Mosul) is famed for his extensive commentaries on both the Old and New Testaments. Isho‘dad presents much material from earlier periods, and is especially indebted to the work of Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), the Greek theologian whose works circulated widely in the Syriac Church of the East where he was known as the Interpreter. The Syriac of Isho‘dad’s Old Testament commentaries was edited in separate volumes from 1950 onwards, mainly by Ceslas Van den Eynde who also provided a French translation, while Sebastian Euringer published the Syriac of Isho‘dad’s commentary on Song of Songs with a German translation. However, only the New Testament commentaries had previously been rendered into English, between 1911 and 1916 by Margaret Gibson and James Rendel Harris. For Isho‘dad’s Daniel commentary Schmidt provides the Syriac text, based on Van den Eynde’s edition but with additional consultation of other manuscripts, along with a facing-page English rendering and a full introduction.

Especially in the Church of the East, Syriac exegesis has much in common with Antiochene interpretations of the Old Testament in its preference for historical and philological matters and its avoidance of allegory and even christology. Like many of his predecessors Isho‘dad attempts to identify the Four Kingdoms of Daniel of chapters 2 and 7; and also like them, he had to comment on the ‘anointed one’ described as slain in the Syriac of Dan. 9:26. In general his treatment reflects the continuing influence of Porphyry’s rejection of Daniel’s authenticity as a composition of the sixth century BCE rather than a response to the policies of Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century. So although Isho‘dad regards the book as the work of the prophet Daniel in the Babylonian Exile, following the fourth century Syriac writer Aphrahat he identifies the ‘little horn’ with Antiochus; and while he sees the victory of the Maccabees in resisting the tyrant as predicted in the prophecy of the stone ‘hewn not by human hands’ (Dan. 2:34), he comments that the same prophecy reaches its truest fulfilment in the virgin birth of Christ.

In the Greek tradition there is much extra material attached to the book of Daniel. The Prayer of Azariah incorporated into Daniel chapter 3 is found in Peshitta manuscripts and thus is included in Isho‘dad’s commentary. Isho‘dad discusses the canonicity of the other additions to Daniel known as Bel and the Dragon, appealing to the authority of Gregory of Nazianzen and Theodoret for including them (somewhat misleadingly, since Theodoret only cites the very first verse of Bel in his own commentary), and identifying Bel with the golden statue of Dan 3:1. In the case of 1–2 Maccabees, Isho‘dad mines these books for information on the Maccabean resistance to Antiochus’ persecution. Susanna as the sister of Jeremiah is mentioned in the ‘family tree’ at the beginning of Isho‘dad’s commentary, but not the book named after her (though in Syriac tradition this work sometimes forms part of a separate corpus called the Book of the Women).

Isho‘dad cites a number of his sources, including Theodoret of Cyrus, whose Daniel Commentary survives in Greek, John Chrysostom (consisting of a lengthy citation from an unidentified homily), (Pseudo-) Ephrem, and a ‘Severus’: it would be a little surprising if this was either Severus of Antioch or Severus Sebokht who were both Miaphysite. In fact, though

Van den Eynde favoured the Antiochene Severus, he also suggested that ‘Severus’ could be a possible misreading of the name ‘Qiyore’, denoting the sixth century writer Cyrus of Edessa.

Some remarks in the *Commentary* may be unexpected for the modern reader. Isho‘dad provides a complicated explanation of why Daniel prays ‘only’ three times a day (Dan. 6:10), since Eastern Christians prayed seven times daily, a norm that Isho‘dad alleges ‘David’ had prescribed in Ps 119:164 for the Judean exiles in Babylon.

The translation is generally accurate, but sometimes more notation would be desirable. For instance, in a reference to Dan. 3:2 (105 line 21) Schmidt’s rendering mentions one of the assembled nations as the ‘Argadiens’. This spelling is taken directly from Van den Eynde’s French translation. Yet Isho‘dad’s Syriac clearly reads *’rgwn*, against both the Peshitta’s *’rgdy* (representing MT’s אֲרָגִיָּיִם, the Aramaic form of a Persian loanword) and the renderings of the Septuagint and Theodotion Daniel as a type of official. At 113 line 24, in an explanation of Dan. 7:13 (‘one like a human/a son of men’), Schmidt’s text has *mglh’yt* against Van den Eynde’s graphically similar *mglyy’yt*. Since there is no note it is difficult to know whether the former spelling is an error, or a correction of the latter. Both adverbs give a similar sense, ‘manifestly’, ‘openly’, ‘ostensibly’, and the contrast is made with the following adverb ‘truly’, describing the prophecy’s eventual complete fulfilment in Christ. On 135 line 19, a passage referring to the end of the rule of the twenty-two Jewish leaders after the return from Babylon, Schmidt renders *bwlblhwn* as ‘the catastrophe’, apparently following Van den Eynde. However, the word really means ‘(their) confounding’, and may imply a pun similar to that in Gen. 11:9.

This is a very useful contribution to Syriac studies in English, and it is to be hoped that further volumes of Isho‘dad’s OT commentaries will appear.

Alison G. Salvesen
University of Oxford, UK
alison.salvesen@ames.ox.ac.uk