CHAPTER 27

Seeing the End: The Vocabulary of the End Time in Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel 13

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The Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel is a little known Syriac Christian apocryphon. It tells the story of Daniel, who recounts his adventures at the courts of Kings Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, and Darius. The main part of the work is taken up by a long vision of Daniel about the end of time that begins with the revolt of the Peoples of the North and culminates in the Advent of the Messiah on Mount Zion and an eschatological banquet in the New Jerusalem.

The biblical book of Daniel has had a colorful afterlife. Our Syriac Apocalypse joins the ranks of the post-biblical texts of diverse literary genres and various languages that are attributed to the biblical seer. Since its publication almost two decades ago, the Syriac Apocalypse has received only sparse attention. And yet, it is an intriguing composition, not only for what it tells us about apocalyptic thought in early Syriac Christianity and for its many interpretive vignettes, but also because of its conceptions of the End.

1 Manuscripts, Editions, and Translations

The Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel was first published in 2000 by Miron Slabczyk. Slabczyk’s edition begins with a brief introduction to the text in Esperanto. He then reproduces the Syriac text and provides his own translation, again in Esperanto, on facing pages. The book concludes with an index of personal names. Another edition, which appeared only a year later in 2001, is by Matthias

3 M. Slabczyk, Apocalipso de Daniele profeto en lando Persio kaj Elamo (Wien: Arcado eldonejo, 2000).
Henze. In his introduction, Henze discusses the date of composition and possible authorship and offers a brief literary analysis of the text. This is followed by the Syriac text, an annotated English translation, and a photographic reproduction of the manuscript. In addition to these two editions, the Syriac Apocalypse has also been translated into German and Portuguese.

Both text editions are based on the same manuscript, the only manuscript that was known to include the Syriac Apocalypse at the time, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Library, Syr 42. The manuscript is mostly a collection of ascetical writings. Almost two thirds of the 125 folia are devoted to the works of John of Dalyatha (eighth century CE). It begins with fifty-one epistles by John (33r); discourses on knowledge by John bar Penkaye (67r), various epistles and hymns (93v), more texts by Penkaye (101v), and homilies by Evagrius Penticus (102v), Gregory the Monk (109v), and others. The Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel is found toward the end of the manuscript, on fols. 117r–122v. Various dates have been suggested for the manuscript, ranging from the twelfth to the seventeenth century. In his edition of the letters of John of Dalyatha, Robert Beulay observed that one of the copyists of Harvard MS Syr 42 is named in the margin of the manuscript, a certain Rabban Malke Saqo of Beth Sbirino, who died in 1490. This would imply that the manuscript dates from the fifteenth century.

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6 M.H. Goshen-Gottstein, *Syriac Manuscripts in the Harvard College Library: A Catalogue* (HSS 23; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 54. For a description of the manuscript, see A. Golitzin, “A Monastic Setting for the *Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel*,” in R. Darling Young and M.J. Blanchard, eds., *To Train His Soul in Books: Syriac Asceticism in Early Christianity* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 66–98, esp. 66. Golitzin argues that the *Syriac Apocalypse* stems from a monastic setting and that it was written by a monk “to remind his fellow monks of the meaning of their vows” (68). A. Salvesen, “Review of *To Train His Soul In Books*,” *Church History* 82 (2013): 420–422, however, is probably correct in her response to Golitzin when she points out that a monastic connection with our apocalypse, if it existed at all, was most likely established “in the final stages of its redaction or in its reception” (421). In other words, the nature of the other texts in the manuscript may not be a good guide to determine the origin and meaning of the Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel.
7 R. Beulay, ed., *La collection des lettres de Jean de Dalyatha: édition critique du texte syriaque*