TO THE ROOTS OF THE SYRIAC DIATESSARON TRADITION
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Sacred to the Memory of the famous Dutch scholar in Diatessaron Studies Prof. Dr. D. Plooij (†5th of July, 1935)

1. Introduction

1. Almost a century ago—in 1888—A. Ciasca presented the textual experts working in the field of Diatessaron research with the Arabic translation of the Syriac harmony1. Its author, ʿAbūʿl Faraq ʿAbdūllāḥ ibn ʿat-Tayyib (†1043)2, is said, according to the preambule of his work, to have been translating from a Syriac exemplar3. It was, therefore, a publication from which scholars expected an essential contribution to their knowledge of the early Syriac harmony. However, as so often happens in the case of new discoveries, there was from the very beginning a large disagreement as to its real value in Diatessaron research.

2. There were, of course, several experts who held the view that the new document could bring us nearer to the roots of Syriac Diatessaron tradition. The editor himself, as a matter of fact, had a high esteem of both its text and its order, which in many instances could reveal the contents of the original Diatessaron4; throughout the Arabic work there was a strong Syriac flavour and there were no

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1 A. Ciasca, Tatiani Evangeliorum Harmoniae Arabice, Rome 1888.
3 Ibid, 62 (208).
indications of a later corruption through Arabic glossators. In his view, it certainly presents us the harmony such as it circulated in the tenth century, and there was nothing that prevents us saying that this tenth century work was to a large extent the same harmony as Mar Ephraem had before his eyes, when he wrote his famous commentary on the Diatessaron. This so positive evaluation reached its climax in the use and abuse of its text as found in the large critical edition of the Greek New Testament published by H. von Soden in 1913.

3. However, there were other experts in the field of textual criticism who struck a more pessimistic note. They condemned the Arabic text as a secondary witness whose testimony could hardly be taken seriously, ‘Für den Text des Diatessarons ist (...) der Araber bis auf weiteres gar nicht zu benutzen’, was the verdict of A. von Harnack as early as 1889, and a similar judgement was expressed in 1941 by K. Lake, who stated that its text was ‘so corrupt that it has very little value for reconstructing the original text of the Diatessaron’. Of course, we meet here with extreme positions and not with the average opinion about the Arabic text. Still, it is an undeniable fact that the attempts of the experts at reconstructing the original Diatessaron—after Th. Zahn (1881): J. H. Hill (1896), L. Leloir (1962), I. Ortiz de Urbina (1967) and J.

5 Ciasca, Harmoniae, xiii.
6 Ibid.
8 A. Harnack, Das Neue Testament um das Jahr 200, Freiburg 1889, 103.
10 Th. Zahn, Tatians Diatessaron, Erlangen 1881 (before 1888!).
12 L. Leloir, Le témoignage d’Éphrem sur le Diatessaron, Louvain 1962 (reconstruction on the basis of both the Syriac and Armenian texts of Ephraem’s commentary).