

Day; and to the author's text of the Gospels, which, although he does not work by explicit quotation, is clearly the Old Syriac and Diatessaron. Most of the discussion, however, which is abundantly – sometimes, in the manner of PhD theses, wearisomely – documented, analyses the author's imagery, its biblical background, its parallels in other sources and the manner of its assimilation into the poetry. It is as well to have the edition by one's side when reading this, lest the impression is given that the text is heavy and complex. The poems themselves, although they certainly share the intricate thought-world of Ephrem, are, compared to his often difficult *madrashé*, simpler in style and they make for easier reading. This reading is anyhow facilitated by Griffin's work, which is confident and authoritative, and serves this Syriac author well.

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*The Ethiopian Orthodox Church's tradition on the Holy Cross.* By Getatchew Haile. (Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity, 10.) Pp. x + 285 incl. frontispiece. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2018. €162. 978 90 04 34868 4; 2213 0039  
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The Holy Cross, the author states at start of this collection, is one of the two highly revered sacred objects in the Ethiopian Church, the other being the tabot which represents the Ark of the Covenant and on which the eucharist is celebrated. The cross signifies not only the wood on which Christ overcame evil on Calvary but it is also all forms of the cross that makes this power present to the believer. The place of the cross in the Church and nation of Ethiopia can be vividly experienced by the visitor who attends the large popular celebrations of the finding of the cross which take place around the country at the feast of Mäsqäl or Holy Cross Day in September, which are exceeded in scale only by the festival of timqät or Epiphany; and also in the use of the hand cross held by the priest and used in blessing those whom he meets. It is common for people to wear a neck-cross and these are made in many designs and patterns, all showing the central place of the cross in the life of the Church.

The place of the cross in the theology and the life of the Church is the subject of this book. Getatchew Haile has collected and translated sermons, commentaries and hymns from Ge'ez and Amharic manuscripts, dating from the early Axumite period through to the sixteenth century. These are taken mostly from collections on microfilm held in libraries in the USA and in Europe. So the texts in this book make available a selection of varied and important material previously unavailable in printed form. It introduces theological and literary themes from the Ethiopian tradition and is a valuable contribution to this series of texts from the eastern Christian tradition.

The passages collected in the book show the place of the cross by tracing the ways in which it has shown God's power through history. There is a commentary on the Gospel account of the crucifixion and also a typological series of references to the cross found in the Old Testament. There are two alternative accounts of how the Empress Helena found the wood of the cross in Jerusalem with the help of

Kyriakos the brother of Stephen the first martyr and there is also material about Helena's earlier life as the wife of a merchant, falsely accused of adultery, thrown into the sea in a casket before coming back to land to become the wife of the emperor. In addition there are hymns and poems showing the wonder and power of the cross for believers. This range of subject matter shows the richness and variety of the tradition of how the cross gives power to the Church, with stories and images not encountered in other parts of the Christian history. The themes contribute new areas of reflection on the meaning of the cross.

The tradition is presented through a collection of texts of various kinds, and the variety of the material collected shows aspects of theological method in Ethiopia. The crucifixion narrative is taken from an *andämta* text in which the Gospel verses are translated and also interpreted by the addition of commentary from the Fathers, in this case mostly from Athanasius of Alexandria. This is more than a translation or commentary, it is a way of reading Scripture within the Church and entering into a tradition of understanding. Then there are two *mälkä'* poems, a style of poem often encountered in saints' *Lives* with verses praising the various parts of the body of the saint which have helped the believer to achieve holiness in a set verse form with each stanza describing the bringing of peace, or *sälam*. Then there are homilies of the Fathers which have been preserved in the tradition describing the finding of the cross and also praising its wonder. The collection finishes with several liturgical hymns. Ethiopian theology is a predominantly oral tradition handed down by scholars within the Church with both the text of Scripture and the commentary passed down through generations. There is also a tradition of poems and hymns which are often improvised as well as being written and sung in church worship. As well as introducing the reader to the rich cross tradition, the mixture of texts chosen demonstrates these various methods and styles of Ethiopian theology.

The Ge'ez and Amharic texts are accompanied by translations into English. The translator has chosen to follow the structure and language of the Ethiopic originals faithfully and accurately. The result is that fluency and poetic quality is sacrificed to the aim of ensuring a literal and precise rendering. There is therefore a certain awkwardness in the translations. This is not helped by the unnecessarily large number of typos and misprints. For example we read on p. 73, 'Peace to you crucifixion, O awe-inspiring desert lion' which should, I presume, read 'your crucifixion' and 'awe-inspiring'. This is a shame because this carelessness detracts from the enjoyment of a wonderful collection of material.

The collection of texts come from a wide range of backgrounds and periods. They show different ways of doing theology and they explore the theme of the cross in a broad and thought-provoking way. The theological tradition of the Ethiopian Church was formed from several sources, including Greek and Syriac material, developed in a Christian kingdom in an African cultural environment. This has resulted in a distinctive theology, very different from other parts of the Church. The volume adds to our knowledge and understanding of these ideas. It will be welcomed and valued not only by students of Ethiopic but as a contribution more generally to our understanding of the life of the wider Church.

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