

**BOOK REVIEW AND NOTE**

***The Heirs of Theodore. Aḥob of Qatar and the Development of the East Syriac Exegetical Tradition.* By Seth M. Stadel. Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity 28. Leiden: Brill, 2023. xv + 472 pp. \$198.00.**

*The Heirs of Theodore* is a systematic attempt to fill in gaps in our knowledge of the relatively early East Syriac exegete Aḥob of Qatar and to provide an account of how later exegetes appropriated his work for their own ends. In Seth Stadel's view the need for such a comprehensive overview is pressing, as "Aḥob of Qatar's surviving biographical data have not been thoroughly examined by previous scholarship" (16). Stadel adds substantially to our knowledge of Aḥob in two ways: (1) he offers an overview of the works of Aḥob and his influence, and (2) he provides annotated editions and translations of the extant works, including an appendix containing an edition of part of the *Denḥa-Grigor Commentary*.

Stadel's research is a testament to his meticulousness, evident in his work, that collects the numerous excerpts from Aḥob's writing into this single volume. This task is not without its challenges, as Aḥob's original scholia are preserved mainly in fragmentary citations either in later commentaries or in the margins of Syriac manuscripts. Stadel's detailed annotated editions of "Aḥobian" writings should make this volume a trusted guide to the writings of this elusive East Syriac exegete. Random checks of folio numeration and page numbers in published editions by this reviewer can vouch for the overall accuracy of Stadel's work in bringing together so many citations from a wide variety of different sources.

This volume is prefaced by a short introduction that orients the reader to the East Syriac tradition of biblical interpretation, including background information about the Syriac system of schools and more specific details regarding Christianity in the region of Beth Qaṭraye. Chapter 1 briefly introduces the figure of Aḥob and what we know about him from various Syriac and Arabic sources. While recognizing that "modern scholarship remains divided over a date for Aḥob," Stadel settles for a late sixth-century date (31). Chapter 2 is longer and mainly consists of lists of works ascribed to Aḥob, alongside an edition of these writings. Having presented these Aḥobian writings, both chapters 3 and 4 show how these works were "used and preserved by eight writers and manuscript traditions within the East Syriac exegetical tradition" (wording that is identical at the beginning of both chapters, pp. 105 and 201). Chapter 5 may be the most helpful part of the volume for clarifying the "distinctiveness" of Aḥob's Old Testament exegesis. Here, Stadel lays out several conclusions regarding this figure and the impact of his work. Chief among these hypotheses, Stadel suggests that Aḥob wrote his Old Testament works in the form of scholia (314), not a full commentary as has been suggested earlier by Clemens Leonhard and Bas ter Haar Romeny. He also suggests that these scholia were collected and rearranged after Aḥob's death, eventually being passed down in two general collections after 850 CE. Another innovative

hypothesis Stadel proposes is that Aḥob's scholia originally functioned as "lecture notes" written down during his tenure as exegete of the School of Seleucia (323–326).

A general weakness of the volume is that this extensive material is not necessarily organized intuitively, making it difficult for a general reader to access. This would be true, though to a lesser degree, for readers more knowledgeable in Syriac studies. In other words, the volume appears to be a rather peripheral revision of the author's Oxford doctoral dissertation, completed only a year before.

There is much repetition throughout the volume, including the duplication of both content and wording (as in the identical phrasing quoted above from pp. 105 and 201). In particular, it takes considerable effort to understand how the five chapters are organized and, in Stadel's words, how each is "divided into a varying number of sections and subsections – and an Appendix" (16). For example, in chapter 2, the author includes annotated editions and English translations of Aḥob's *Cause of the Psalms* and thirty-five scholia with short studies interspersed between these editions. Such a system may work once the reader is familiar with Aḥob's works. However, the current arrangement is hardly intuitive for those initially approaching Aḥob or for knowledgeable researchers looking for a more succinct study. One wonders if there could have been a way to consign these annotated editions to an appendix instead, thus allowing for more concise studies in chapters 2 through 4. This way of organizing the material might have also reduced unnecessary repetition in these chapters.

In his conclusions, Stadel's thesis that Aḥob initially wrote his scholia as school notes and "clearly wanted his students to understand how to interpret various difficult Peshitta words and phrases" (410) is a valuable contribution to scholarship. Nevertheless, as elsewhere, Stadel could have explored these insights at more length or proposed additional ways forward. For instance, could it be the case that Aḥob and other East Syriac exegetes were more-or-less drawing upon exegetical difficulties that were commonly discussed in the schools, especially for shared interpretive issues such as "hinds" ('*aylātā*)/"trees" ('*iyātā*) in Psalm 29:9 and "mummy case" (*dufnā*) in Genesis 50:26 (151, 129)? Moreover, could possible sources for these interpretive problems – shared between Aḥob and other exegetes – include explanations present in oral traditions (*mashlmānūtā*) or in school handbooks, such as lists of "difficult words" (*shmāhē*)? In other words, Stadel's comprehensive work in mining "Aḥobian writings" from the quarry of East Syriac exegetical writings offers approaches worth pursuing in more depth.

Overall, *The Heirs of Theodore* is a treasure trove of information about the somewhat enigmatic East Syriac exegete Aḥob of Qatar. These annotated Syriac editions of Aḥob's writings with accompanying translations will be a particularly valuable resource for researchers. The side-by-side comparisons between excerpts attributed to Aḥob and the Aḥobian citations in other East Syriac writers, such as Isho'dad and Bar Bahlul, not only enrich our understanding of Aḥob's work but also offer exciting potential avenues for further research, sparking the curiosity of scholars in the field.

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doi:10.1017/S0009640724001227