

## Doctoral dissertation draft

# **The Greek Vitae and Laudationes of St Ephraem Syrus: A Philological study**

Ephraem the Syrian, also known as Saint Ephraim and Ephraem Deacon of Edessa, is one of the best known ecclesiastical writers and at the same time the most important Syriac theologian. He is considered to be the most ideal representative of Syriac Christianity of the 4th century AD. He is also acknowledged to have introduced the rhymed ecclesiastical chant into Syria. He is honored as a saint by almost all Christian churches, among them the Eastern Orthodox, the Roman Catholic, various Protestant churches and the Assyrian Church of the East (Nestorian). In the Eastern Orthodox Church his memory is celebrated on January 28.

Modern scientific research has come to the conclusion that due to the fact of the Syriac origin of the Saint, he himself did not speak the Greek language. His works, however, were translated into several languages (Greek, Georgian, Old Church Slavonic, Ethiopian) and were widely used and disseminated, especially in monastic communities. The most complete critical edition of the Saint's work to-day is that of G. Assemani, made at Rome during the years 1732-1746.<sup>1</sup>

The proposed doctoral dissertation consists of two parts. In the first part there will be a recording of the existing material (Lives and Eulogies for the Saint). We will focus our attention on the Greek Lives and Eulogies that have been transmitted to us so far and will present in detail each work. We will also highlight the poetical works dedicated to Ephraem and similarly present their content. A comparison between the material will follow and the conclusions to be drawn will be presented.

In the second part we will proceed to a philological analysis of the material we have collected. We will attempt a rhetorical analysis of the Lives and Eulogies, based on the principles of Byzantine rhetoric. The Greek Lives that exist are claimed to date back to a Syriac one, which has already been studied and edited. Our intention is to exhaustively compare the Greek Lives with their Syriac counterparts and to draw a conclusion regarding their relationship. One of the main objectives of our research is the possible formation of a new scientifically correct Life, which will combine all the elements and information of the surviving Greek Lives and Eulogies. In shaping this new life will also play a role the Life written by Nicodemus the Hagiorite, as a representative sample of post-Byzantine effort. The views also, which have been expressed by Greek and foreign patrologists concerning Ephraem, will be reconsidered, as several new facts have come to light in recent years concerning the actions of the Saint. At the same time, we will attempt to answer a timeless question of science : did

---

<sup>1</sup> Assemani G., *Sancti patris nostri Ephraem Syri Opera omnia quae exstant Graece, Syriace, Latine*. Romae, 1732-1746

Ephraem's poetic production affect or not Romanus the Melodist and, if so, how much ? Also, various conflicting points of the Life will be discussed further.

Subsequently, we intend, as an appendix, to proceed to the edition of unedited Lives and Eulogies and possibly to a reissue of Lives already edited since the 18th century, for which new manuscripts have been discovered.

Among the unedited works is one by John Chrysostom, entitled "On prayer", and while for several years it was considered a eulogy dedicated to Ephraem, several scholars (eg. Fr. Halkin) argue that it concerns another saint. All opinions will be carefully examined, and after a study of the new manuscripts (eg. University of Michigan Library, MS 059, 14th century) we hope to arrive at a safe conclusion as to the person to whom the eulogy refers. Another unedited work is entitled "Precatio pro Edessa" and is found only in a Parisian Codex of the 15th century. (Paris. gr. 1372). Although brief, it highlights the Saint's special relationship with the city of Edessa, in which he was also a deacon.

To sum up, the research that we intend to carry out with this dissertation, we believe that it will help us to arrive at a "clean" model life of Saint Ephraem Syrus and through a fruitful scientific discussion to answer critical questions that concern the scientific community for many years. The planned parallel edition of the hitherto unedited hagiographical works concerning Ephraem will constitute an important contribution to science. Finally, the time that has elapsed since the most important and complete critical edition of Ephraem's works (which also includes hagiographical works about him), as well as the discovery of new manuscripts (sometimes older than those already used) make it necessary to reissue some Lives and Eulogies in order to form a complete picture of this great personality of Christianity.