

Notes on the Assemani edition of Ephraem Graecus, “Sermo in adventum domini, et de consummatione saeculi, et in adventum antichristi” (TLG 4138.052, CPG 3946)¹

Extracted and translated from Wilhelm Bousset, *Der Antichrist in der Überlieferung des Judentums, des neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche*², Göttingen (1895), p. 21-25. The book traces the history of the figure of the Antichrist in Jewish and Christian literature.

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Introduction.

The present work was originally undertaken in the interest of illuminating and explaining some obscure passages in the Book of Revelation. The first observations that pointed me in the direction I have chosen for this work were the comparison of the Apocalypse [of John] with the late Syrian Apocalypse of Ezra undertaken by Iselin (theol., Z. a. d. Schweiz 1887). Bratke's work on the Arabic-Ethiopian Apocalypse of Peter (Z. W. Th. 1892) again drew my attention to the remarkable literary problems at hand. When I read a lecture on the Apocalypse two years ago, it had already become very likely to me that at least Chapter XI of our Apocalypse was rooted in an older tradition that was still accessible to us. Corrodi's history of Chiliasm first drew my attention to the writings of Ephraem that are relevant here. And then, over time, one link after another of the astonishingly extensive literature was added. I would, of course, still have overlooked important branches of the literature without the kind assistance repeatedly bestowed upon me by Professors Bonwetsch and W. Meyer. Even now, I do not yet dare to claim any completeness in my investigation; some writings that would be relevant are not yet accessible. But I believe, at least, that I have overlooked nothing essential concerning the transmission of the ancient Church's tradition of the Antichrist. ...

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Part I. The Sources.

[A Latin pseudo-Ephraemitic homily on the end of the world, the Greek homily of Ephraem on the Antichrist and other eschatological writings of the same, Pseudo-Hippolytus on the end of the world, the pseudo-Johannine Apocalypse, the fifteenth catechesis of Cyril of Jerusalem, the Dioptra of Philip Solitarius, Pseudo-Chrysostom]³

¹ Translated by Roger Pearse, mostly using Google Translate, 21 February 2026. The Ephraem Graecus material is what I am focused on – the rest is for context. I've added footnotes where Bossuet is unclear, translated the Greek, and located the Latin titles and CPG references for the works mentioned. I've made this for my own use while thinking about the Ephraem Graecus corpus, so I want it to be clear. You're very welcome to use it as you like, of course.

² = “The Antichrist in the tradition of Judaism, the New Testament and the early Church”

³ This extracted from the contents page which summarises each section. Bossuet is diffuse, so the reader needs all the markers he can get.

I. The first group of writings under consideration follows that highly interesting apocalypse which Caspari published in *Briefe, Abhandlungen etc.* 1890, pp. 208 ff. (text) and 429 ff. (study). The work is preserved in Codex Barberinus XIV 44, 8th century, under the title: *dicta sancti Effrem de fine mundi et consummatio saeculi et conturbatio gentium*, and in Codex Sangall 108, 4th century, 8th century, under the title: *incipit sermo sancti ysidori de fine mundi*.⁴

Chapters 1-4 of the text have more the character of a sermon; from chapter 5 onward, the narrative unfolds in the usual style of apocalyptic literature, with a simple, calm flow of speech. A clue to the time period is found in the very first chapter in the following sentences: "et in his Omnibus bella Persarum sunt. — in illis diebus veniunt (venient) ad regnum Romanum duo fratres et uno quidem animo praesunt (?), sed quoniam unus praecedit alium, fiet inter eos scidium." Caspari has demonstrated that these references point to the reigns of the Caesars Valentinian and Valens, the former of whom was elected Roman emperor in 364, and the latter of whom was appointed co-emperor by his brother soon afterward. Caspari's use of "fiet inter eos scidium" refers to the division of the empire that soon followed. The question could at least be raised whether the apocalyptic writer, in the fiet-scidium, is not prophesying a conflict between the Aveissa brothers that he expected—but which did not materialize (note the future tense). The phrase "quoniam (quia) unus praecedit alium" would then fit better with this. In any case, C. is correct in suggesting that the passage was written only at the end of Valentinian's reign, around 373, since it was then that the war with the Persians broke out again. — So, would the present text have originated around 373? C., however, raises objections to this conclusion. One would then have to assume that the author, in a Sibylline style, had prophesied his own time as future. Since this Sibylline style cannot be found elsewhere in the entire text, it is more likely that the author clumsily wove a piece of foreign (Sibylline) origin into his writing.

We would then only have the age of the manuscripts in which our text is preserved as a clue to its age. But these assumptions of C.'s are unfounded. It becomes quite clear even upon a simple reading of our text that the author has passed on an old, non-contemporary prophecy of the Antichrist, accompanied only by a brief historical and parenetic introduction. This assertion will be proven by the compilation of sources below. — The author himself speaks only in the first chapters, partly placing the following apocalypse in the context of his time, and partly prefacing it with general parentheses. Therefore, it is precisely the first chapter that should be used to determine the date. It is also quite inconceivable that an author living centuries later would have included such a specific, older prophecy if he had not witnessed its fulfillment in his own time. Thus, in the Apocalypse of the Antichrist, we have a text that originated around the year 373.

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[Two Sibyllinists of the Middle Ages (Sib.-Bede and -Usinger), Adso on the Antichrist, Pseudo-Methodius, **the Syriac homily of Ephraem on the Antichrist, overview of the Ephraemite writings**, the common source of Adso and Sib.-Bede, the apocalyptic material of Jerome.]⁵

⁴ This is the text known as the Latin Apocalypse of pseudo-Ephraim. There is also a different Syriac Apocalypse of pseudo-Ephraim.

⁵ Also from the contents page.

II. In a very insightful study, Caspari then discusses the relationship of this Apocalypse to Ephraem's works¹. Unfortunately, he neglected to familiarize himself with the transmission of the relevant writings of Ephraem. Assemani's edition of Ephraem is, in fact, incredibly sloppy. The available manuscript material was simply printed without any examination. Originally, a vast number of individual homilies circulated under the name of Ephraem. These—some of which probably originally belonged together—were then combined in the manuscripts into larger complexes in very different ways, so that we now find four independent pieces a, b, c, d in combinations such as: a + b; a + b; a + b + c; b + c + d; c + d, etc., etc. Thus, in Assemani's edition, the same pieces appear three, four, or five times. Only in the rarest of cases is this noted in the edition.

1) I provisionally assume that the relevant Greek homilies are by Ephraem. There seem to be no reasons to the contrary. In any case, all the relevant literature is closely connected with the name of Ephraem (cf. the Syriac homily *De Antichristo*, which will be discussed below and is also transmitted under Ephraem's name).

Thus, the work primarily relevant here, Λόγος εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου καὶ συντελείας τοῦ κόσμου καὶ εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου,⁶ is found in Vol. II, pp. 222–230, but also—only the opening section is missing, (i.e. II. 222–225 E) — in Vol. III, pp. 134–43,⁷ and indeed in a much better recension. Numerous smaller sections have disappeared entirely from the first recension, and the originality of the latter recension can be demonstrated by comparison with the Latin edition by Gerard Vossius of Antwerp, 1619, pp. 172ff., which, incidentally, is partly based on even more valuable manuscripts, and with the work by Pseudo-Hippolytus, which will be mentioned below. The specific evidence will be presented below.

Furthermore, the observation made by Professor W. Meyer that Ephrem's homilies are written and even translated in verse provides an excellent means of reconstructing the text. These are, admittedly, verses of a very peculiar kind; any measurement of quantities, stresses, and unstressed syllables must be completely disregarded here. Only the syllables are counted—verse, after all, originates from the Orient, and Ephrem is perhaps the first to have used it in Syriac.

Two verse forms are particularly relevant here (cf. the Latin edition of Ephrem by Gerard Vossius, in which the transition from one meter to another is indicated by an *aliud metrum*).

First, the seven-line verse: the individual lines consist of fourteen syllables each, with a caesura almost always occurring in the middle; two lines belong together to form a stanza.

Second, the four-line verse: each line consists of sixteen syllables; after the eighth syllable, there is a caesura throughout, and whenever possible, every fourth syllable coincides with a word ending.

Where I quote Ephraem, I have reconstructed the verses as far as possible. In doing so, I was able to use several collations and copies of manuscripts²⁾ made available to me with great kindness by Professor Meyer for *De Antichristo*.

2) Vindob. theol. 165. Vatic. 1524. 1815. 2030. 2074.

⁶ = Sermo in adventum domini, et de consummatione saeculi, et in adventum antichristi, TLG: 4138.052, CPG:3946.

⁷ = In adventum domini sermones iii – TLG: 4138.055, 4138.056, 4138.057 – CPG:4012

Since the text can be reconstructed with almost absolute certainty according to the above principles, I have not included the manuscript variants. I quote the text according to the recension in Volume III, insofar as it exists. The first part is based on the copy and collations of W. Meyer.

The title of the work, according to the Latin edition and Pseudo-Hippolytus, was *περὶ τῆς συντελείας τοῦ κόσμου καὶ περὶ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου*,⁸ and according to the Greek manuscripts, *τοῦ ἁγίου Ἐφραίμ λόγος εἰς τὸν Ἀντίχριστον*.⁹

The following table may provide information about other writings of Ephraem that may be considered. There are four works, jumbled together differently in the various manuscripts:

- A concerning a *λόγος περὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ*,¹⁰
- B a *λόγος εἰς τὴν δευτέραν παρουσίαν τοῦ Χριστοῦ*,¹¹
- C and D *ἑρωτήσεις καὶ ἀποκρίσεις*¹² concerning the Last Judgment.

These are found in the following writings, listed as they appear in the edition of Assemani:

1. III 144–147 - *περὶ τοῦ σημείου τοῦ σταυροῦ*;¹³
2. II 247–258 - *λόγος εἰς τὸν τίμιον καὶ ζωοποιὸν σταυρὸν καὶ εἰς τὴν δευτέραν παρουσίαν καὶ περὶ ἀγάπης καὶ ἐλεημοσύνης*;¹⁴
3. II 192–208 - *εἰς τὴν δευτέραν παρουσίαν τοῦ κ. η. Ι. Χρ.*;¹⁵
4. II 377–393 - *ἑρωτήσεις καὶ ἀποκρίσεις*;¹⁶
5. II 209–220 - *περὶ τῆς κοινῆς ἀναστάσεως καὶ μετανοίας καὶ ἀγάπης*;¹⁷
6. III 215 ff. - *περὶ ἀποταγῆς ἑρωτήσεις*;¹⁸
7. III 371–375 - *περὶ μετανοίας καὶ χρίσεως καὶ εἰς τὴν δευτέραν παρουσίαν*.¹⁹

In the following table I place these seven writings side by side, showing where the pages of the respective pieces correspond – only approximately, of course. Where necessary, I have more precisely marked the beginnings of the corresponding sections (as well as the end of the four works A B C D) using the A-F subdivisions of the pages in Assemani. The four original pieces from which the seven homilies are composed are clearly and distinctly highlighted by the transverse lines [shading used here, heading line 1, 2, 3 etc added - RP].

⁸ “Concerning the consummation of the world and concerning the Antichrist”

⁹ “A discourse of the holy Ephraim on the Antichrist”

¹⁰ “A discourse concerning the cross”

¹¹ “A discourse on the second coming of Christ”

¹² “Questions and answers”

¹³ “Concerning the sign of the cross” = *De signo crucis, quod apparebit in caelo*, CPG 4013.

¹⁴ “A discourse on the precious and life-giving cross, and on the second coming, and concerning love and almsgiving” = *Sermo in pretiosam et vivificam crucem, et in secundum adventum, et de caritate et elemosyna* – TLG 4138.053 – CPG 3948

¹⁵ “On the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” = *Sermo in secundum adventum domini nostri Iesu Christi* – TLG 4138.049 – CPG3944

¹⁶ “Questions and answers” = *Interrogationes et responsiones* – TLG 4138.129 – CPG 3969

¹⁷ “Concerning the general resurrection, and repentance, and love” = *Sermo de communi resurrectione, de paenitentia et de caritate, et in secundum adventum d.n.I.C.* – TLG 4138.050 – CPG 3945

¹⁸ “Questions concerning renunciation” = *De abrenuntiatione*, CPG 4019.

¹⁹ “Concerning repentance and anointing, and on the second coming” = *De Poenitentia et iudicio et in secundum adventum domini nostri Iesu Christi*, CPG 4043.

	Homily: 1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Vol.: III	II	II	III	II	III	III
A		247					
		248 B				371 F	
		249				372	
B	144	250 B	192		212 F	373A	
	145	251	193		213	374	
	146	252	194		214	375	
	147	253 F	195 (A,B)		215		
C		254	166	377	215 F		215
		255 B	197 B	380 E	217 C		217 B
		256 BC	198 DE	382 C	218 D		218
		257 B	200 B	384 A	219 D		219 A
		258 A	201 E	385 E	220 F		
D			202 A	385 F			
			203	386			
			204	387			
			205 DE	388			
			206	389 E			
			207	390			
			208	391			
				392 (393)			

Table 1: Assemani volume number and column number and letter.²⁰

Parallels with the Apocalypse of the Antichrist are primarily found in our text B, which is printed no fewer than five times in this edition. The result of a more detailed examination of the texts – which I cannot reproduce in full for lack of space – is that two considerably differing revisions of this text exist, neither of which is entirely preferable to the other. One revision (I) is found in III 144ff and II 192ff, the other (II) in II 250ff, 212ff, III 373ff (so that again the last two witnesses are most closely related). I will cite with reference to the revision number.

Furthermore, there are direct connections between Chapter 2 of the Apocalypse (i.e., in the parenetic part) and Ephraem's λόγος περὶ μετανοίας²¹ III 376–80, and with the twentieth part of μακαρισμοὶ ἕτεροι²² I 294–99, and even closer connections with the Latin translation of this part (on *De beatitudine animae*) (Caspari 447, 456). The connections with the other writings cited by Caspari are insignificant.

Overall, Caspari has correctly presented the relationship between *De Antichristo* and Ephraem's writings. The notion that *De Antichristo* should be by Ephraem himself is an unfounded conjecture by one scribe. But Caspari was right: neither Ephraem's statements can be derived from the Apocalypse, nor the latter from the former (cf. p. 454).

However, this judgment requires further clarification. Ephraem cannot be assumed to be the source for all the passages in which Caspari demonstrates parallels. Only for the parenetic part of Chapter II does a dependence on Ephraem seem certain to me. — Here again, one must ask the question: where did Ephraem get the extensive eschatological material he uses in his homilies? The answer

²⁰ I've altered this table a bit, moving the A-D to the left, using shading to highlight the four works, and adding an extra 1-7 header.

²¹ "A discourse concerning repentance"

²² "Other beatitudes"

can only be that he certainly did not invent it himself, but rather borrowed it from one or more Apocalypses existing in his time. But then the further judgment is also very obvious: in *de antichristo* we have the same apocalyptic material still in a relatively original — albeit already revised — form, on which the author of those homilies relied — more original, insofar as we have before us the actual form of the Apocalypse and not of the homily.