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READING THE PSALMS HISTORICALLY. ANTIOCHENE EXEGESIS AND A HISTORICAL READING OF PSALM 46

ABSTRACT

The Antiochene exegetes, most notably Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia read the psalms against the historical background of Israelite history, reconstructing a historical setting for every psalm. This paper presents a brief survey of Antiochene exegesis of the psalms in general. The Antiochenes reacted against the allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament by the school of Alexandria. They were influenced in their approach by Aristotelian logic, by the Greek-Christian culture of their time and by the method propagated by Aristarch. This survey is followed by a discussion of the interpretation of Psalm 46 by Diodore, Theodore and Išō`dādh of Merv. Diodore laid the foundation on which Theodore built. Išō`dādh followed the interpretation of this Psalm by Theodore. They linked this psalm to the events of the Syro-Ephraimite war.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Antiochene exegesis, especially in the commentaries on the psalms by Diodore and Theodore of Mopsuestia, the psalms were read historically. The commentators reconstructed a historical context for each psalm and then interpreted the whole psalm against that historical context. This paper will present a brief discussion of Antiochene exegesis of the Psalter in general, highlighting some of the most important contributions in this regard. This will be followed by a discussion of the interpretation of Psalm 46 by Diodore and Theodore, as well as the later interpretation of that psalm in the commentary of Išō`dādh of Merv, who made use of the work of Theodore in the compilation of his commentary. These interpretations will then be evaluated against the background of the events in the books of Kings and Chronicles. It is often stated that the historical interpretation of the Antiochene school was a precursor of modern historical interpretation, as is done in the work of Zaharopoulos, discussed below. This viewpoint will be evaluated in the light of the interpretation of Psalm 46 by the three exegetes mentioned.

2. ANTIOCHENE EXEGESIS OF THE PSALMS

In 1880 an important volume was published by Kihn, dealing with the history of the Antiochene School, and in particular with Theodore of Mopsuestia and Junilius Africanus. The fame of the Alexandrian school goes back to the exegetical approach started by Lucian and Dorotheus, in their struggle against Gnosticism, Arianism and Appolinarianism (Kihn 1880:5). One must keep in mind that the Antiochene School reacted against the Alexandrian allegorical approach. The Alexandrians tried to solve the problem of the interpretation of the Old Testament by following a speculative philosophical route, while the Antiochenes built on Aristotelian logic (Kihn 1880:6). Kihn (1880:17-20) distinguishes three periods in the history of the Antiochene school, namely from Lucian to Diodore (290-370), from Diodore to Theodoret (370-450) and the decline of the school after 450, through the Nestorian dispute and the acts of the Monophysites.

Schäublin published a very important book on the method and origin of Antiochene exegesis. He states that the usual view is that the most common trait of the Antiochenes was their attempt at a historical and grammatical interpretation of the Bible. In this they reacted against the allegorical approach, typical of the Alexandrian school. The focus on difficult words and concise explanation was typical of the interpretation of the Antiochenes, not looking at application, but striving to make clear what is unclear. They wanted to understand the Bible in its simple sense (Schäublin 1974:26).

To understand the approach of the Antiochenes, Schäublin points to an important aspect of their background in the fourth and fifth centuries. They were not shaped by the Jewish-Christian culture, but rather by the Greek-Christian culture (Schäublin 1974:29). One important difference between the Alexandrians and the Antiochenes is the difference in their ideological tradition. The Antiochenes linked up with Aristotle, while the Alexandrians linked up, via Philo, with the Stoa and their interpretation of poetry. This link with Aristotle prompted the Antiochenes to build their historical interpretations on a grammatical base (Schäublin 1974:33-34). In this way they link up with the well-known remark of Aristarch, that one has to understand Homer from Homer (Schäublin 1974:172). In the end, the Antiochene exegetical approach was greatly influenced by the grammar of the pagans of that time (Schäublin 1974:173). Ter Haar Romeny (1997:141) refers to this background by stating that the roots of the Antiochene method must be seen in the educational system of the late Hellenistic and imperial era.

Hidal (1996) offers a recent discussion of the Antiochene School and its main proponents. In the study of the works of Homer in the Hellenistic period, two schools can be distinguished. The Alexandrian School was represented by Aristarch and the Pergamene School by Crates. The Alexandrian School had

a philological approach, while the Pergamene School used allegory. Aristotle can be regarded as the father of the Philology. In the allegorical approach the premise was that the text contains a deeper meaning and that deeper meaning was the real intention of the author. Against this approach, the philological approach looked at the original text and tried to restore and interpret that. This approach has a strong sense of history and of literary genre (cf Alexander 1998:138-139). It is evident that the difference between the allegorical and literal approaches of the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools in the early church was related to these different approaches used in the world of their time.

Van Rompay (1997:103) points to the fact that the contribution of the Antiochene School frequently does not get the credit it deserves, due to the controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries. Much work was done on the psalms, for example on the commentaries on the psalms by Theodore and Diodore of Tarsus. In addition to these two scholars, Van Rompay mentions the contribution of Theodoret of Cyrrhus as well (1997:105). He distinguishes three kinds of commentaries among the Antiochenes. In the full commentary the complete Old Testament text is quoted, with comments. In an introduction the broad lines are drawn, while the comments furnish a lot of detail. The commentaries of Theodore on the psalms and the Minor Prophets, as well as Diodore's commentary on the psalms are examples of this kind of commentary. In the selective commentary a limited number of passages are selected. In this regard the literary genre of problem and solution is frequently encountered. The third group consists of the typical questions and answers commentary, such as Theodoret's *Quaestiones* on the Octateuch. All three kinds of commentaries focussed on interpretation, whereas in homilies edification would be the aim. In this respect one can distinguish between pure and applied exegesis (cf. Van Rompay 1997:105-108). In their interpretation they recognised only one level of meaning, *viz.*, the one envisaged by the author himself, with no hidden messages or allegories. Because of this view, the message of the Old Testament is studied within the context of the Old Testament, independent of the New Testament. They adhered to the plain sense of the text and exercised much restraint in recognising New Testament references in the Old Testament (Van Rompay 1997:108-109). Within God's overall plan the Old Testament was one phase and it should be read within its limits (Van Rompay 1997:122). They focussed on the events that happened, within their context in narrative, as well as on their moral and dogmatic interpretations (Ter Haar Romeney 1997:128).

O'Keefe presents a negative evaluation of Theodore and the other Antiochenes such as Diodore and Theodoret. According to O'Keefe, the Antiochene exegesis "did a kind of violence to Christian reading" (2000:84). He rejects the present day attempt to present the Antiochenes as victims of misunderstanding, or to see in their approach some kind of a preview of the debate about the historical meaning of Scripture of the last two centuries (O'Keefe 2000:84-

85). By destroying the links between the psalms and the New Testament, as was done in the commentaries of Diodore, Theodore and Theodoret, they destroyed the coherence of the psalms as a Christian text. They restricted the meaning of the psalms to Old Testament times, with the result that in their interpretations the psalms did not bring a clear Christian message (O'Keefe 2000:84-88). He rejects the attempt to link the exegesis of the Antiochene School to the historical-critical approach of modern times (O'Keefe 2000:86). The Antiochenes still had a pre-modern view of history. While Theodore and Diodore tried to correct the errors of Origen, they went too far and in doing this, severed the link between the two testaments (O'Keefe 2000:86).

In the study of Antiochene exegesis of the psalms, the work of Theodore of Mopsuestia has received special attention. It started in 1836, when Fritzsche (1836:27-37) discussed the life and work of Theodore of Mopsuestia, and in his discussion Theodore's commentary on the psalms received a place of honour. Theodore regarded all the psalms as Davidic and he rejected the headings of the psalms in the Hebrew Bible (Fritzsche 1836:31-32). Theodore classified the psalms in four groups, namely historical, prophetic and ethical, as well as four Messianic psalms (Fritzsche 1836:32-35).

In 1885 Baethgen published an important study on a Syriac version of the commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the psalms. The importance of this study is that it was the first major study pointing to the important influence the major commentary of Theodore had on the subsequent interpretation of the psalms in the Syriac churches, and especially in the Eastern tradition. Baethgen points out that the original Greek commentary of Theodore was translated into Syriac by Ibas of Edessa, in the fifth Century (Baethgen 1885:55). In his commentary, Theodore had long introductions to each of the psalms, giving a summary of his exegesis. The headings of the individual psalms in the commentary in the manuscript Sachau 215 are summaries of these introductions of Theodore. Baethgen (1885:67-76) refers to the remark of Leontius of Byzantium that Theodore interpreted all the psalms in a Jewish manner, linking them to Zerubbabel and Hezekiah, with only three psalms being regarded as messianic.

Two scholars, Vosté and Devreese, dominated the research on Theodore of Mopsuestia, his commentary on the psalms and the headings of the psalms in the Syriac traditions during the second quarter of the twentieth century. Devreese published a number of preliminary studies (1928, 1929, 1930), but his research culminated in two large publications (1939, 1948), namely an edition of the commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Psalms and an extensive essay on Theodore. Vosté discusses the exegetical approach of Theodore, in opposition to the allegorical interpretation of people like Origen. Theodore did indeed reject the allegorical approach, but he did, however, use typology to make a link between the Old and New Testament (Vosté 1929:543-548).

In his extensive work on the works and approach of Theodore, Devreesse (1948) discusses the commentary on the psalms in detail. Theodore used the Septuagint as his base text for the exegesis, but did make references to the Hebrew as well (cf. Devreesse 1948:55-60). His interpretation was directed at the literal sense of the psalms, with the psalms being at the same time human, historical and religious (Devreesse 1948:69).

Vosté's publications on Theodore started already in 1925, with an article on the chronology of the work of Theodore. One of the accusations against Theodore was that he sacrificed the messianic prophecies and psalms in his quest for a historical understanding. This was a result of the rationalistic approach of the Antiochene School, especially exemplified by Diodore, Theodore and Nestorius (Vosté 1925:56).

Related to the study on Antiochene exegesis and the work of Theodore discussed above, is the renewed interest in the influence Theodore had on the interpretation of the Bible in the Syriac churches. Already in 1974, Van Rompay pointed to the advances made with regard to Nestorian exegesis, e.g. related to the work of Išō`dādh of Merv, the anonymous commentary on Genesis and Išō` bar Nun's questions and answers on the Holy Scripture (Van Rompay 1974:53; cf. Van Rompay 1977 for further remarks in this regard). Brade (1975) wrote about the influence of Theodore on Theodore bar Konai, with regard to the New Testament. The publication by Van der Eynde (1981a and b) of the Commentary of Išō`dādh of Merv on the psalms was an important step to show the influence of Theodore.

Van Rompay (1982a and b) published the remaining fragments of the Syriac version of the Commentary of Theodore on the psalms. This was a very important development in the study of Theodore, his interpretation of the psalms and his influence on the interpretation of the psalms in the Syriac tradition. Van Rompay (1982b:XVII) regards this commentary as a faithful translation of the Greek.

A very positive appraisal of the exegetical method of Theodore is given by Zaharopoulos. He (1989:6) equates Theodore's exegetical approach, his historical-grammatical approach, with the method used today. As far as the exegetical principles of Theodore (and Išō`dādh) are concerned, Zaharopoulos (1989:115-116) highlights three matters, *viz.*, that the meaning of a text is related to the historical context of the text, without recourse to allegory, that the Old Testament must be explained in the light of its historical environment and that typology was acceptable, but it must rest on the historical and grammatical interpretation of the text.

The contribution of Diodore to the interpretation of the psalms in the Antiochene School has not received as much attention as it should have. In his study on Diodore's commentary, Mariès (1933) has dealt extensively with

Diodore's treatment of the headings and the historical placement of the different psalms. In two studies Rondeau (1982, 1985) dealt with the patristic commentaries on the psalms in Greek and Latin, from the third to the fifth centuries. He (1982:105) points out that Theodore depended on Diodore with regard to the basic principles of his exegesis, as well as with regard to his methodology and some of the details of his interpretation.

Dietrich discusses Iṣḏ`dâdh's place in the history of the interpretation of the Old Testament. The importance of Iṣḏ`dâdh is related to the fact that he made extensive use of the work of Theodore. He did use other sources in addition to Theodore, and his other sources included other Nestorian fathers as well (Dietrich 1902:VII). It is interesting that in most instances Iṣḏ`dâdh did not give the heading as known from the East Syrian tradition, but his interpretation is often informed by the heading.

In 2001 Leonhard published a very important study on the relationship between the commentaries on the psalms of Theodore and Iṣḏ`dâdh of Merv. Iṣḏ`dâdh's commentary is of the greatest importance for understanding East Syriac exegesis in the ninth century (Leonhard 2001:1). In comparison to Iṣḏ`dâdh's practice, Theodore used his introductions to each psalm to give the setting of that psalm. He had to do this as the Septuagint that he used, contained the headings which he rejected. Iṣḏ`dâdh, however, used a text of the Peshitta with the East Syrian headings, giving that setting (Leonhard 2001:235-236). Leonhard's study makes it clear that Iṣḏ`dâdh did indeed use Theodore's work, but in diverse ways. In some instances he copied portions from Theodore, in other instances he abbreviated it or expanded on it. According to Leonhard (2001:243-244), in the texts studied the dependence of Iṣḏ`dâdh on Theodore amounts to about 30% of the total, whereas 38% of Iṣḏ`dâdh's comments are based on features of the Syriac, and thus contains contributions from the side of Syriac exegesis.

3. THE INTERPRETATION OF PSALM 46 BY DIODORE

Diodore was an important figure in the rise of the Antiochene school. He died in about 393 A.D and was the teacher of John Chrysostom and Theodore (Hill, 2005:xi). He was born in Antioch and died in Tarsus, where he was bishop for the last fifteen years of his life. Diodore's commentary on the first fifty psalms was published by Olivier (1980). Diodore used, as one would expect, the Lucianic text of the Septuagint for his commentary (Hill 2005:xv). In this he was followed by his pupil, Theodore (Hill 2006:xx). A translation of this commentary from the original Greek was published by Hill (2005). This translation has an introduction by Hill, followed by his translation of Diodore's introduction before the commentary on the psalms. For the purpose of this study Diodore's

introductory remarks are very enlightening (Hill 2005:1-5). He had a very high regard for the psalms, as they instruct people in righteousness, reproves them and correct failings. He accepted that David was the author of all the psalms and that he looked prophetically into the future. Diodore distinguishes two major themes in the psalms, the moral and the doctrinal. The moral part can be directed at an individual, at the Jews or at people in general. The doctrinal psalms address those who believe that things came into being on their own accord and those who do not believe that these things fall under providence. As far as the historical background of the psalms is concerned, he links some psalms to the Babylonian captivity and others to the time of the Maccabees, or to Jeremiah and Hezekiah. Some psalms look back to historical events, such as the events in Egypt.

With regard to the order of the psalms, he says that the books were lost in the time of the exile and found again in the time of Ezra, but then scattered in small groups. They were not put back in the correct order and the compilers guessed at their order and content. The headings are wrong. In his commentary he does refer to the headings, as in the Septuagint, but then only to reject them.

He treats the psalms historically and literally, rejecting allegory. He restricts the historical interpretation to the history of Israel, up to the time of the Maccabees. In the first 51 psalms, he regards as messianic only Psalm 2, 8 and 45, just like Theodore did. He linked Psalm 8 to the incarnation, as did Theodore.

As far as Psalm 46¹ is concerned, he links it to the time of Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimite war. He said that David recited this psalm “from the viewpoint of Ahaz and of the two tribes”. This theme is also found in the books of Kings and Isaiah. After the introduction to the psalm, he makes comments on every verse, linking it frequently to the historical background of the introduction. Verse 1 (2 in MT) says that God is our refuge and power. This is the case, he says, even if the ten tribes and the Syrians have conspired, God’s help is more powerful. In verse 3 (4) he says that the waters refer the “vast number of the ten tribes and the Syrians”. The city of God is Jerusalem. The shaking of the mountains refers to God toppling the warriors of the enemy, with the mountains being the leaders and rulers of the enemy. When the enemies are destroyed, the believers will know what kind of God their God is.

At the end of the commentary he refers to the heading of the psalm, as in the Septuagint. The persons responsible for the heading did not grasp the theme of the psalm. The heading links the psalm to the Korahites, stating

1 The translation of the commentary on Psalm 46 can be found in Hill (2005:148-150). Translations quoted here are from Hill’s translation.

that it was given to them for meditation and performance. As Hill says, the translators of the Septuagint did not know the Hebrew word for maidens in the heading (מַיִם לְעַיִן) and Diodore follows the Septuagint with the phrase ὑπὲρ τῶν κρυθίων (on the secrets; Hill 2005:150 note 1). It is clear from the commentary that the historical background created by Diodore was taken as the key to understanding the psalm as a whole, as well as the detail of the psalm.

Although he regarded the psalm as prophetic, with David predicting what is going to happen in the future, the contents of the psalm are clearly linked to specific historical data from the later history of the people, and interpreted against the background of those historical circumstances. It will be clear that the same is true of the interpretation of Theodore and Išô dâdh.

4. THE INTERPRETATION OF PSALM 46 BY THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA

Theodore was born in about 350 A.D. and was trained in Antioch, by, amongst others, Diodore. He died in about 428, while he was bishop of Mopsuestia (Hill 2006:xv). As mentioned previously, Theodore's commentary on Psalms 1-80 was published by Devreesse in 1939. This text was published again, with an introduction and translation by Hill (2006). The commentary does not have an introduction. Theodore's approach to the psalms as well as his relation to Diodore has already been discussed in the first part of this paper. Theodore wrote his commentary in Greek. It was later translated in Syriac (as can be seen from the fragments published by Van Rompay (1982a)) and the Syriac version of this commentary, as well as his other works, had a huge influence on East Syriac exegesis.

Theodore's commentary on Psalm 46 presents the same historical setting as that of Diodore, but it is more detailed (Hill 2006:600-613). The historical introduction to the psalm starts with the division of the kingdom of Israel after the death of Solomon. Theodore describes important events from the history of the people up to the time of Ahaz, such as Judah and Benjamin being part of the Southern Kingdom, with kings from the house of David. The Northern Kingdom had kings from different dynasties. Samaria was the capital and Ephraim the principal tribe. He refers to the agreement between Pekah and Rezin, as well as the actions of the prophet Isaiah, through which God promised help, even though Ahaz was not a good king. God saved the people on account of the temple. The allied forces were then defeated by the Assyrians, whom God sent against them. David saw these events well in advance and gives thanks while speaking on the part of the two tribes.

After this introduction, comments are made on the detail of the psalm, with frequent reference to historical events. The psalm starts with a reference

to “our God”. For Theodore this is very important. The people of the Northern Kingdom were related to the Southern Kingdom, but they plotted against them. By starting with “our God” David emphasises that God is on their side, not on the side of the enemies. The ten tribes and the Syrians were numerous, and the Judeans were few, but God’s help would overcome all. The shaking of the earth and the moving of the earth refer to the great warriors of the combined forces of the Syrians and the ten tribes. The mountains refer to the kings of Israel and Syria. The plural “seas” is used because the Syrians and Israel are numerous. The roaring of the waters refers to the attacking enemies. The river that gladdens the heart of the city refers to the Assyrians and the currents of the river are the advance of the Assyrians against the allies. The unexpected attack of the Assyrians brought the nations in uproar. The smashing of the weapons, the breaking of the bows and the smashing of the shield are all linked to the Assyrians.

In this way it is clear that the historical background is used to explain the theme of the psalm, as well as the detail. Theodore does not refer to the heading of the Septuagint at all.

5. THE INTERPRETATION OF PSALM 46 BY IŠÔ`DÂDH OF MERV

The exact dates of the birth and death of Išô`dâdh are unknown. It is known, however, that he became bishop of Hedatta in about 850 A.D. He was one of the most important East Syrian commentators of the Bible from the Ninth Century (Leonhard 2001:5). The Syriac commentary of Išô`dâdh was published in 1981, with a translation, by Van der Eynde (1981a and b). The commentary uses the text of the Peshitta (Van der Eynde 1988a:XXXI). As indicated above, it is not a commentary on the whole of the psalm, but rather on a number of selected passages. It is evident that Išô`dâdh made use of the Syriac translation of the commentary of Theodore. The way in which he made use of this commentary is described by Leonhard (2001:25), who compared Išô`dâdh’s commentary with the Syriac fragments of the translation of Theodore’s commentary, looking at Psalm 119 and 139-147, the psalms available in those fragments. His use of the work of Theodore can be ascribed to the high regard the East Syrian Church had for the work of Theodore and Diodore. Išô`dâdh used the Peshitta in the East Syriac version, with the East Syriac headings related to the exegesis of Theodore. For the translation of Theodore’s commentary in Syriac the Peshitta was used for the biblical text as well, and not an translation of the original Greek biblical text.

Išô` dâdh does not refer to the heading of the psalm as in the East Syriac tradition, and neither to the heading of the Septuagint. The heading of Psalm 46 in the Peshitta is:

ܘܕ ܠܡܝ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܘܡܝܢ ܕܠܝܘܕܝܡ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܥܝܪܐܢܝܢ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܥܝܪܐܢܝܢ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܥܝܪܐܢܝܢ

About Ahaz and those of the house of Hezekiah that were delivered from the Damascenes and from the house of Ephraim.

The vast majority of manuscripts link this psalm to Ahaz. The only exception is the manuscript 6t1, the oldest manuscript with the East Syriac headings. It only contains a reference to Hezekiah and the house of Judah. This must probably be an intentional change in the manuscript, to link up with the headings referring to the “good” king Hezekiah, and removing the evil Ahaz from the heading.

The heading in the majority of witnesses is related to the exegesis of Theodore (and Diodore), which is the exegesis that Išô` dâdh takes as his starting point. The trembling of the earth in verse 3 (MT) is linked to the size of the advancing army. The trembling mountains are explained as the two kings of the allied forces, Pekah and Rezin. The heart of the sea is the multitude of their army. The overthrowing of the mountains (verse 4) is caused by their defeat. The rivers that are coming are the Assyrians, whose advance will cause joy to the city of God, to Jerusalem. The advance of the Assyrians will cause the countries of the Israelites and Aramaeans to tremble. In practically all of the detail the commentary of Išô` dâdh is dependent on Theodore.

6. ANTIOCHENE EXEGESIS OF PSALM 46 AND THE BOOKS OF KINGS AND CHRONICLES

The background for the historical interpretation is the Syro-Ephraimite war. This war is mentioned in different books of the Old Testament. The question to be answered in this section is which of the different passages in the Old Testament were taken in consideration in this interpretation.

The Syro-Ephraimite war is mentioned in 2 Kings 16, Isaiah 7 and 2 Chronicles 28. In 2 Kings mention is made of the kings, Rezin and Pekah, marching up to Jerusalem, laying siege to the city. Ahaz sent a message to Tiglat-Pileser of Assyria to come to his aid. Tiglat-Pileser complied by attacking Damascus and killing Rezin (2 Kings 16:5, 7 and 9). Verse 6 mentions the retaking of Elath by Rezin and verse 8 Ahaz sending silver and gold from the royal treasury to Tiglat-Pileser. Isaiah 7 mentions the campaign of the two kings as well, saying in verse 1 that it came to nothing. Verse 2 states that Ahaz and the people became afraid when they heard of the approach of the

allies, trembling like trees being shaken by the wind. In the prophecy (3-9) the prophet told the king that he should not be afraid. The prophecy mentions detail not in 2 Kings, such as the plan of the two kings to divide the land and to make the son of Tabeel king over Judah. The king is encouraged and told that their plans will fail and that their countries will be devastated (verse 16). In 2 Chronicles 28 the attack is described in two parts, with the two allied kings working on their own.

When the information about the Syro-Ephraimite war in Kings, Chronicles and Isaiah is compared to the interpretation of Psalm 46 by the three commentators, it is quite evident that they followed the story as in Kings and Isaiah, ignoring the detail of Chronicles. In relating the psalm to the Syro-Ephraimite war, the imagination of the commentators is used to expand on the detail. The accounts of Kings and Isaiah do not make a remark on the size of the allied forces and the commentators are reading between the lines.

Diodore ascribes the victory to God and does not make reference to the Assyrians. For him the river currents refer to the good things flowing from God, bringing joy to the city. Theodore goes further and tries to link more detail of the psalm to the historical situation. The currents of the river refer to the Assyrians, the river to the Assyrians themselves and the currents to their advance and assault on the Syrians. For Diodore the nations that were in uproar and the kingdoms that tottered refer to the attacking nations that were shaken and became subject to Judah. For Theodore this refers to the consequence of the attacks of the Assyrians. While Diodore and Theodore accepted the same historical situation, Diodore did not mention the Assyrians by name, giving more emphasis to the power and glory of God, while Theodore made more of all the detail of the descriptions in Kings and Isaiah. Both of them do not mention the fear of the Ahaz and his people as described by Isaiah, but emphasise that they did not have to fear. For Diodore the historical becomes subservient to a different view, emphasising the power and glory of God, while Theodore gives more attention to the historical. The conclusion is that Theodore accepted the historical identification of Diodore, but expanded on Diodore's interpretation by filling in more detail from the historical context. Išô`dâdh used Theodore's commentary as his source, probably his only source for this psalm, and summarises the most important parts of Theodore's interpretation. What is common to all three of them, is the linking of all the psalms to David, who acted as a prophet in describing events long after his death.

This kind of historical interpretation, constructing a historical context for a psalm and interpreting in the light of that reconstruction, may seem a bit strange to modern scholars, especially those inclined to read the psalms as texts in a synchronic way, without asking historical questions, or those looking for a liturgical context. However, in the history of the interpretation of this psalm, historical interpretations occurred frequently. The psalm was

frequently linked to the Syro-Ephraimite War or to the time of Sennacherib and the events of 2 Kings 19. A discussion of various possibilities is given by Ridderbos (1958:45-46) and Craigie (1983:344).

The interpretation of Psalm 46 differs from the interpretation of the Alexandrian exegetes, who used an allegorical approach. This can be seen from the interpretation of this psalm by Origen and Athanasius.² Both of them identify the city of God referred to in verse 5 with the church. They both link verse 7 to Christ. The lifting of the voice in verse 7 is linked to Christ, and explicitly to Christ on the cross by Athanasius. Athanasius equates the voice of the Lord with the gospel. In their commentaries no reference is made to the original context of the psalm in the time of the Old Testament.

7. CONCLUSION

The discussion of the interpretation of Psalm 46 by the two Antiochene exegetes, Diodore and Theodore, as well as the interpretation of this psalm by the East Syriac commentator Išô`dâdh of Merv, demonstrates the historical approach followed by Antiochenes and their East Syriac followers. They linked this psalm to the Syro-Ephraimite war and tried to explain the detail of the psalm against this setting. This was done in the most detail by Theodore, who accepted the historical setting of Diodore, but expanded on his interpretation in the detail of his exegesis. Their interpretation of this psalm is a good example of this approach. However, in linking all the psalms to David, as a prophetic figure, their approach can not be regarded as a precursor of modern historical interpretations of the psalms, or the Old Testament as a whole for that matter.

2 For the interpretation of Origen and Athanasius, their commentaries can be consulted in Migné, P.G. XII:1431-1436 for Origen and P.G. XXVII:213-218 for Athanasius.

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