



Titus of Bostra in Syriac Literature

Nils Arne Pedersen

Volume 62, numéro 2, juin 2006

Relire Platon

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/014286ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/014286ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Résumé de l'article

Le *Contra Manichaeos*, rédigé en 364 environ après Jésus-Christ par l'évêque chrétien Titus de Bostra, fut traduit en syriaque dès l'année 411. Cet article montre que, plus tard, l'oeuvre joua un certain rôle dans les Églises syriennes, ainsi qu'il s'ensuit de citations par des auteurs syriaques postérieurs.

Éditeur(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval

Faculté de théologie et de sciences religieuses, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Pedersen, N. A. (2006). Titus of Bostra in Syriac Literature. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 62(2), 359–367. <https://doi.org/10.7202/014286ar>

TITUS OF BOSTRA IN SYRIAC LITERATURE

Nils Arne Pedersen

Faculty of Theology
University of Aarhus

RÉSUMÉ : Le *Contra Manichaeos*, rédigé en 364 environ après Jésus-Christ par l'évêque chrétien Titus de Bostra, fut traduit en syriaque dès l'année 411. Cet article montre que, plus tard, l'œuvre joua un certain rôle dans les Églises syriennes, ainsi qu'il s'ensuit de citations par des auteurs syriaques postérieurs.

ABSTRACT : *Contra Manichaeos* was written in c. 364 C.E. by the Christian bishop, Titus of Bostra. Already by 411 it had been translated into Syriac. The article shows how the work came to play a role in the Syriac-speaking churches, as evidenced by quotations from later Syriac writers.

In continuation of my book of 2004 on the work *Contra Manichaeos*, written around 364 C.E. by Titus, Bishop of Bostra, in the Roman province of Arabia, I shall here seek to expand and develop one aspect of the book, namely the question of the use of Titus' works in the literature of the Syriac-speaking churches.¹

Titus himself wrote in Greek, but soon after the work was completed, it was translated into Syriac, and this translation proved to be of particular value, since only the first half of the Greek original has survived to this day. It comes as no surprise that Titus was soon translated into Syriac, for Manichaeism had arisen in the Aramaic-speaking countries with its origin in Mesopotamia, and with a single exception (namely the Persian *Šābuhragān*) Mani wrote his works in a form of Eastern Aramaic that is very close to classical Syriac²; the Syrian Church therefore needed to include

1. N.A. PEDERSEN, *Demonstrative Proof in Defence of God. A Study of Titus of Bostra's Contra Manichaeos. The Work's Sources, Aims and Relation to its Contemporary Theology*, Boston, Leiden, E.J. Brill (coll. "Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies," 56), 2004, p. 66, 68, 112-113, 116. — I take this opportunity to correct some of the errors in the book. The reference to the Arians and Pelagians as not being in communion with the "Catholic" Church on p. 13 is untenable, since such groups were rather an example of the Church's continuing plurality mentioned on p. 12. — The concluding *semkath* (ω) p. 112, l. 18, should be deleted. On p. 169, n. 26, l. 1, there should be a reference to p. 130-131. On p. 276, n. 59, l. 4, there should be a reference to p. 343, 349-350. On p. 294, l. 19-21 read: "Ostensibly Mani criticised that the oxen, which have a soul from the good, are slaving for the farmers." On p. 298, l. 18, the text should read: ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܢܝܢܐ (Sy 143.16-17). On p. 403, n. 118, l. 1, read "Theodore's view" for "Theodore." On p. 425, l. 39, read "ascribe" for "ascribes."

2. See further in N.A. PEDERSEN, *Studies in The Sermon on the Great War. Investigations of a Manichaean-Coptic Text from the Fourth Century*, Aarhus, Aarhus University Press, 1996, p. 39. In addition to fragments

Titus' refutations of Manichaeism in its polemical arsenal. However, as Bishop of Bostra³ and thereby also metropolitan of all the sees in the Roman province of Arabia, Titus' own church province was a largely Semitic-speaking area, and previous scholars such as F. Cumont and R. Reitzenstein have argued that by virtue of his geographical position Titus must have known Nabataean and probably also Syriac and must therefore have used Manichaean texts in Syriac for his work.⁴ This is far from certain, however; what is beyond dispute is Titus' Greek education and his use of Greek philosophy and the Greek Church fathers. As the wealth of Greek and Latin personal names found in inscriptions from the city prove, Bostra itself also contained a large Graeco-Roman population,⁵ and Titus' work must therefore be said to be a literary example of the same hellenization of Bostra to which the inscriptions bear witness.

Titus also mentions in passing that Mani wrote in Syriac. This is without doubt a negative reference, since Titus' entire concern at this point is to portray Mani as an irrational, mythologizing barbarian, devoid of rationality and Graeco-Roman culture:

Thus he [i.e. Mani] fabulates and writes many other things like an old hag, using the Syrians' language, both how the earth is being borne (by Atlas), since he does not shun the poetic myth, and how the showers are formed from the sweat of the archons of matter [...].⁶

of Syriac-Manichaean existing in the form of quotations by Syriac writers, further Syriac-Manichaean material is published in F.C. BURKITT, *The Religion of the Manichees. Donnellan Lectures for 1924*, Cambridge, The University Press, 1925, p. 111-119; as well as material from Ismant el-Kharab (Kellis in antiquity) in the Dakhleh oasis in Egypt, by M. Franzmann and I. Gardner, in *Kellis Literary Texts*, t. 1, edited by Iain GARDNER with contributions by S. CLACKSON, M. FRANZMANN and K.A. WORP, Oxford, Oxbow Books (coll. "Oxbow Monograph," 69, Dakhleh Oasis Project, Monograph 4), 1996, p. 101-131.

3. "Bostra" is the Graeco-Roman form for the city, in Syriac texts it is called "Busar" or "Busara" (see *The-saurus Syriacus*, collegerunt Stephanus M. QUATREMERIE, Georgius Henricus BERNSTEIN, auxit, digessit, exposuit, edidit R. Payne SMITH, t. 1, ܒܘܨܪܐ. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1879, 473a).
4. Franz CUMONT, Marc-Antoine KUGENER, *Recherches sur le Manichéisme*, II, *Extrait de la CXXIII^e Homélie de Sévère d'Antioche*, III, *L'Inscription de Salone*, Brussels, H. Lamertin, 1912, p. 159; R. REITZENSTEIN, "Eine wertlose und eine wertvolle Überlieferung über den Manichäismus," *Nachrichten von der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* (1931), philol.-hist. Klasse, p. 48-49. BAUMSTARK ("Der Text der Mani-Zitate in der syrischen Übersetzung des Titus von Bostra," *Oriens Christianus, Halbjahrshefte für die Kunde des christlichen Orients*, 28, Leipzig, 1931, p. 23-42) even sought to show that Titus' sources were Syriac-Manichaean texts that Titus' Syriac translator in turn had employed in the rendition of the Manichaean quotations, but his argumentation is unconvincing; cp. N.A. PEDERSEN, *Demonstrative Proof in Defence of God*, p. 82-83, 193-198. — As the discoveries from the Dakhleh oasis also show, the Manichaeans translated large quantities of their Syriac literature into other languages, including Coptic, Greek and Latin, but they also wrote new texts in these languages. Titus' Manichaean sources may thus have been in Greek.
5. Maurice SARTRE (*Bostra. Des origines à l'Islam*, Paris, Institut Français d'Archéologie du Proche-Orient, Beyrouth, Damas, Amman [coll. "Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique," CXVII], 1985, p. 141-152), who also mentions the Semitic personal names, which can be related to Nabataeans, Safaites and other groups.
6. I, 17, DE LAGARDE, 10, 12-16 (*Titus Bostreni quae ex opere contra Manichaeos edito in codice Hamburgensi servata sunt graece e recognitione Pauli Antonii de Lagarde. Accedunt Iulii Romani epistolae et Gregorii Thaumaturgi KATA ΜΕΡΟΣ ΠΙΣΤΙΣ*, Berlin, 1859); ὅσα μὲν οὖν ἕτερα γράσος δίκην μυθολογεί καὶ γράφει, τῇ Σύρων φωνῇ χρώμενος, ὅπως μὲν ἡ γῆ βαστάζεται, τὸν ποιητικὸν μὴ διαφυγῶν μῦθον, ὅπως δὲ συνίστανται οἱ ἄμβροτοι, ὡς ἰδρωτές εἰσι τῶν ἀρχόντων τῆς ὕλης, [...]. Cf. N.A. PEDERSEN, *Demonstrative Proof in Defence of God*, p. 168.

purely Syriac compilation, though if it is based on a Greek original we could also imagine that the translator has chosen to save time by employing the existing Titus translation instead of himself translating the entire text. At any rate the quotation is a sign that the “Monophysite” Church regarded Titus as one of the authorities of the past, a “father.”

However, this anti-Chalcedonian “Monophysite” Christianity was marked by a tendency to fragment into still further factions. Among the new sects that arose within Monophysiticism and lasted for a time was the so-called “Tritheism,” gathered around the remarkable John Philoponus (pre-510-c. 565). Tritheism involved the Aristotelian concepts being applied to the doctrine of the Trinity, with the result that the three persons or hypostases of the godhead become individual natures and the godhead becomes their joint nature. Among their most active supporters was Conon, Bishop of Tarsus in Cilicia, who for this reason was exiled to Palestine. But when Philoponus in a new work denied that the resurrected body is identical with man’s earthly body, the Tritheists themselves were divided, with the “Cononites” around Conon condemning this teaching.¹⁴

As mentioned, by this time Titus of Bostra was a recognised authority, a “father,” whose texts were searched for significant quotations. And indeed from the Tritheists we actually have two testimonies to this: firstly in the fragments from Stephanus Gobarus’ florilegium preserved in Photius’ *Bibliotheca*, which contains references to Titus of Bostra and also a quotation from *Contra Manichaeos* I,15,¹⁵ and secondly another Titus quotation in a Cononite florilegium preserved in Syriac translation in two manuscripts. Van Roey has published this florilegium and argues persuasively that it is an extract from a larger work against Philoponus written by Conon, Eugenius and Themistius which is also mentioned by Photius in his *Bibliotheca*.¹⁶ The two Syriac manuscripts are designated Add. 14,532 (with the florilegium on f. 213vb-217vb), here designated “A”, and Add. 14,538 (with the florilegium on f. 147r-148v), here designated “B”; they are described in Wright’s catalogue and appear to derive from the 8th and the 10th century respectively.¹⁷

-
14. See A. VAN ROEY, “Un traité cononite contre la doctrine de Jean Philopon sur la résurrection,” in *ΑΝΤΙΔΩΡΩΝ, Hulde aan Maurits Geerard bij de voltooiing van de Clavis Patrum Graecorum. Hommage à Maurits Geerard pour célébrer l’achèvement de la Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, I, Cultura, Wetteren, 1984, p. 123-139, with further references to these controverses.
 15. PHOTIUS, *Bibl.*, cod. 232 (PHOTIUS, *Bibliothèque*, t. V, *Codices 230-241*, texte établi et traduit par René Henry, Paris, Les Belles Lettres [“Collection byzantine”], 1967, p. 70-71). See further in N.A. PEDERSEN, *Demonstrative Proof in Defence of God*, p. 67, 114-115, 153, 430-431. Moreover, Stephanus may himself have been a Cononite, and the epithet “Gobarus” can be Syriac; see further in Adolf VON HARNACK, “The ‘sic et non’ of Stephanus Gobarus,” *Harvard Theological Review*, XVI (1923), p. 205-234, esp. p. 213; Gustave BARDY, “Le florilège d’Étienne Gobar,” *Revue des études byzantines*, V (1947), p. 5-30; ID., “II. Sur Étienne Gobar: Compléments et corrections,” *Revue des études byzantines*, VII (1949), p. 15-52; A. VAN ROEY, “Un traité cononite contre la doctrine de Jean Philopon sur la résurrection,” p. 124.
 16. A. VAN ROEY, “Un traité cononite contre la doctrine de Jean Philopon sur la résurrection.” PHOTIUS, *Bibl.* cod. 23 (PHOTIUS, *Bibliothèque*, t. I, *Codices 1-84*, texte établi et traduit par René Henry, Paris, Les Belles Lettres [“Collection byzantine”], 1959, p. 14).
 17. Add 14,532 is described in W. WRIGHT, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts...*, 955b-967a, including the Cononite florilegium 966a-967b. Add 14,538 is described in *ibid.*, 1003b-1008b, with the florilegium in

follows in black ink in lines 12-16 cannot be found in *Contra Manichaeos*, so it remains something of mystery how this error by Moše bar Kepha could have come about.

In addition to this material it must be mentioned that Wright's catalogue mentions two further manuscripts which suggest that other works by Titus were translated into Syriac. We know that Titus was the author of a series of *Homiliae in Lucam*, which are only partially preserved in the form of catena fragments; these were collected and edited by J. Sickenberger in 1901.²⁴ The Syriac excerpts from Titus' *Homiliae in Lucam*, which are found in the manuscript Add. 17,191, imply that this work was also translated into Syriac.²⁵ A further manuscript exists, Add. 12,156, containing fragments of a sermon at the Feast of Epiphany attributed to Titus, which may very well be genuine.²⁶

Since the London collection originates for the most part from the Jacobite Church, the Titus-quotations in question cannot tell us whether the translation preserved in Add. 12,150 was also in use in the Nestorian Church. This is most probably the case, however, for since the translation dates from before the confessional split, it was doubtless used by both churches, and this assumption is more or less confirmed by the listing of *Contra Manichaeos* in the Nestorian writer Abdišo's *Catalogus librorum omnium ecclesiasticorum*. This catalogue of authors is in verse and written after 1315/16; Abdišo was himself the author of other works as well as being Metropolitan of Nisibis; he died in 1318.²⁷ Here we read: "Titus wrote a controversial treatise against Mani, the madman" (ܐܘܡܢܐ ܡܢ ܡܢܝܐ ܡܪܝܢܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ).²⁸ We note that Abdišo quite rightly characterises Titus' work as a "controversial treatise," whereas the translation in Add. 12,150 merely calls Titus' work a ܡܠܟܐ, a "treatise" or "discourse" (the correct translation of the Greek λόγος). Like Moše bar Kepha, Abdišo also states that the work was directed against Mani, not the

24. Joseph SICKENBERGER, *Titus von Bostra, Studien zu dessen Lukashomilien*, Leipzig (coll. "Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur," 21, 1 [NF VI, 1]), 1901; references to later literature in N.A. PEDERSEN, *Demonstrative Proof in Defence of God*, p. 128 n. 31.

25. See W. WRIGHT, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts...*, 1010b, n. 23 (*ibid.*, 1008b-1015b [DCCCLXIV]); cf. Anton BAUMSTARK, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur...*, p. 60.

26. W. WRIGHT, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts...*, 646b; they are published in Paul A. DE LAGARDE, *Anmerkungen zur griechischen Übersetzung der Proverbien*, Leipzig, 1863, p. 94-95; and (with Greek retro-translation) in Ignaz RUCKER, *Florilegium Edessenium anonymum (syriace ante 562)*, Munich, Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (coll. "Philosophisch-historische Abteilung"), Jahrgang 1933, Heft 5, p. 82-87. See Joseph SICKENBERGER, *Titus von Bostra*, p. 138-139 as to whether Titus really is the author of this sermon.

27. See further in Anton BAUMSTARK, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur...*, p. 5, 323-325.

28. Abdišo's *Catalogus* XXIX (J.S. ASSEMANI, *Bibliotheca orientalis clementino-vaticana, in qua Manuscriptos Codices Syriacos, Arabicos, Persicos, Turcicos, Hebraicos, Samaritanos, Armenicos, Aethiopicos, Graecos, Aegyptiacos, Ibericos, & Malabaricos, jussu et munificentia Clementis XI, pontificis maximi, Ex Oriente conquisitos, comparatos, auctos, & Bibliothecae Vaticanae addictos, una cum iis, quos Sacra Congregatio de Fide Propaganda, In eandem Bibliothecam inferri jussit: Recensuit, digessit, excerptis, & genuina scripta a spuris secrevit, praemissa singulorum auctorum vita, Joseph Simonius Assemanus, Tomi tertii, Pars prima de scriptoribus syris nestorianis*, Rome, 1725, 41.2; a not quite exact English translation of the whole catalogue is to be found in George Percy BADGER, *The Nestorians and their Rituals: With the narrative of a mission to Mesopotamia and Coordistan in 1842-1844, and of a late visit to those countries in 1850; also, researches into the present condition of the Syrian Jacobites, Papal Syrians, and Chaldeans, and an inquiry into the religious tenets of the Yezedees*, Vol. II, London, 1852, p. 361-375).

Manichaeans. But these minor differences in relation to Add. 12,150 must be laid at Abdišo's door. The portrayal of Mani as mad or deluded contains a Greek pun based on the similarity between the Greek form of the name Mani, Μάνης, and μανείς, 2. aorist participle of μανίνομαι, "be mad" (because of the iotacisms they were pronounced identically, apart from the stressed accents). Normally Syriac literature, including Add. 12,150, otherwise uses the expression ܡܢܝܘܢ ܡܢܝܘܢ ("the mad Mani") to reproduce this pun.

The limited material presented here thus shows that Titus of Bostra was used both in the Jacobite and the Nestorian Church, and we must assume that this usage could be considerably expanded if other manuscript collections were examined. These brief observations may perhaps be included in a larger picture of the reception of the Greek Church fathers in Syrian Christianity.