

James Barker, *Tatian's Diatessaron: Composition, Redaction, Recension, and Reception*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. ISBN 978-0-1928-4458-3. Hardback, pp. viii + 157. £71.00.

- [1] James Barker's monograph on Tatian's Diatessaron is a surprisingly slender volume on a notoriously complex subject. The first half of the book introduces the reader to our main sources for Tatian's gospel (ch. 1), situates the work in the material realities of ancient book culture (ch. 2), and characterizes Tatian's creative interventions in the sequence of Jesus's life (ch. 3). The book's second half (chs. 4–7) is an extended argument about the relationship of certain versions of the Diatessaron.
- [2] In the book's first chapter, Barker "introduces the extant witnesses to Tatian's Diatessaron" (1). It is a surprise, then, to discover that Barker allocates no more than two pages to the entire Eastern tradition. First, the eleventh-century Arabic harmony is introduced as "the single most important Diatessaron witness in the east" (7). This reads like a contradiction of William Petersen's well-known judgement that Ephrem's fourth-century commentary on a Syriac text of Tatian's gospel is, in fact, "the premier witness to the text of the Diatessaron."¹ While Barker must be allowed his own judgments, the present work does not signal that this is a deviation from the practice of other Diatessaron scholars (including Petersen's ardent critics) nor defend his preference for a translation that stands a half-millennium further removed from Tatian's gospel. Rather, Barker's description minimizes the extant to which the Arabic harmony agrees with other Syriac gospel versions against Ephrem's *Commentary* and does not address any of the contradictions in sequence between Ephrem and the Arabic harmony.
- [3] Next, Ephrem's *Commentary* and Aphrahat's gospel citations are briefly introduced. The commentary "remains the strongest witness to Tatian's wording" and is "highly valuable for sequence [since] it independently corroborates the order of the Arabic harmony in numerous instances" (8). Barker then cautions against assuming that Ephrem's silence with respect to a verse or a story means that Tatian omitted it from his gospel (9). The basic point is true, of course, but Barker uses it to justify treating the sequence and content of the Arabic harmony as more or less equivalent to Tatian's Diatessaron. There are, in fact, good reasons to believe that Tatian did not include many of the redundancies found in the Peshittized Arabic harmony—including characterizations of the Diatessaron by several Syriac authors whom Barker never mentions (e.g., Theodore Bar Koni, *Liber Scholiorum*, Siirt Recension 8.39).
- [4] Barker acknowledges in a footnote that there are "additional eastern witnesses" but limits their value to "Tatian's wording" (7). In doing so, Barker omits any treatment of the *testimonia* to Tatian's Diatessaron from more than a dozen Syriac authors. These include descriptions of the harmony's overall character as well as its content and sequence. Some of this material would have supported Barker's subsequent arguments, while other *testimonia* might trouble his analysis. Likewise, Barker does not remark on the Old Syriac gospels or Ephrem's gospel citations outside the *Commentary*—both corpora with complicated but undeniable relationships with Tatian's gospel.
- [5] Barker's introduction of the Western witnesses is much more useful. This includes updated catalogs of the Latin harmonies descended from Codex Fuldensis and a family of Middle Dutch and Middle High German harmonies (i.e., the Stuttgart-Liège-Zurich har-

¹ William L. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship*, VCSup 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 116.

- monies). His characterization of the latter group is somewhat colored by the conclusion of his argument in chapters 4–7, addressed below.
- [6] After disposing with a number of unrelated harmonies (18–21), Barker argues that a harmonized gospel fragment from Dura Europos is a Greek witness to Tatian’s Diatessaron (22–28). Barker is impressed by the fragment’s overall similarity to the Arabic harmony as well as its dissimilarity with harmonies not related to Tatian’s gospel. Barker’s appeal to intuition will elicit different responses from different readers. It is surprising, however, to discover that Barker’s only reference to Ephrem’s *Commentary* in this section is a footnote recording an observation by the author of this review that Ephrem and Fuldensis agree *against* the Arabic harmony and the Dura Europos fragment on the only detail of pericope-by-pericope sequence in the fragment (24 n. 96). In response to this evidence against the Diatessaronic character of the fragment, Barker casts doubt on our ability to derive any sequential information about Tatian’s Diatessaron from Ephrem’s *Commentary*. To make this argument, however, Barker claims (incorrectly) that the *Commentary* places Jesus’s saying “Father, forgive them” after the piercing of Jesus’s side—a narrative impossibility. Barker’s presentation of the evidence ignores the easily discernable difference between Ephrem’s lemmata (which Barker himself frequently cites in support of the Arabic sequence) and the many scriptural allusions that appear in the midst of Ephrem’s exegetical remarks. The sequence of Jesus’s distant spectators (*Comm.* 21.8), the piercing of Jesus’s side (21.10), and the actions of Joseph of Arimathea (21.20) can be reconstructed entirely from Ephrem’s lemmatic quotations. By way of contrast, Ephrem only alludes to Jesus’s words on the cross in 21.18 as part of a theological reflection on God’s justice and mercy. There is no reason to doubt that the sequence of Ephrem’s *Vorlage* agrees with Codex Fuldensis against the Arabic harmony, inconvenient though this is for Barker’s thesis.
- [7] In the book’s second chapter, Barker attempts to describe the mechanics of composing the Diatessaron with the technology and conventions of second-century Rome. For instance, Tatian might have worked with groups of readers (30), maintained direct visual contact with all four gospels (31), and/or harmonized his sources on wax tablets (32). Barker even suggests that Tatian literally cut and pasted sections of preexisting gospel scrolls into his Diatessaron (37–38). This final suggestion reflects Barker’s preoccupation with daughter versions that, having been corrected against a standard gospel text, frequently reproduce a single gospel at length. By way of contrast, Ephrem’s *Commentary* and other Syriac testimonia suggest a more thorough rewriting of Tatian’s sources, including but not limited to detailed harmonization.
- [8] The book’s third chapter is its most successful. Barker identifies six ways that Tatian creatively reworked the sequence of his gospel sources. Drawing on his own 2020 *New Testament Studies* article, Barker argues that Tatian restructured Jesus’s ministry around three Passovers, with the temple incident occurring at the second of the three (44–52).² Next, drawing on an article by Matthew Crawford, Barker argues that Tatian split up Jesus’s controversy in Nazareth into two distinct episodes (53–54).³ Curiously, Barker does not cite supporting evidence in Ephrem’s *Commentary* for the first episode (5.13–14). Instead, he records the varied sequences of numerous Latin and Western vernacular harmonies with no evidentiary value for reconstructing Tatian’s Diatessaron (53 n. 42). Barker may be the first to observe that Tatian brought together two separate episodes related to Jesus’s

² James Barker, “Narrative Chronology of Tatian’s Diatessaron,” *NTS* 66 (2020): 288–98.

³ Matthew R. Crawford, “Rejection at Nazareth in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke—and Tatian,” in *Connecting the Gospels: Beyond the Canonical/Non-canonical Divide*, ed. Francis Watson and Sarah Parkhouse (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 97–124.

family (Luke 11:27–28 and Luke 8:19–21 par.), relocated a Lukan prediction of his death (Luke 13:31–33) to an earlier point in Jesus’s ministry, brought together four separate stories about wealth at the Festival of Sukkoth, and collected three stories of conflicts from different gospels at Jesus’s final Passover in Jerusalem (54–57). Thus Barker identifies six case studies that reveal Tatian’s willingness to rework his gospel sources. According to Barker, however, the chapter’s “most important conclusion” is the superiority of the Arabic harmony as a witness to the Diatessaron’s sequence (57). It seems to me this was Barker’s working assumption, not the conclusion of any argumentation in chapter 3.

- [9] The final half of Barker’s monograph is a challenge to the reigning paradigm in Diatessaronic studies with respect to the Western daughter versions. In his 2005 monograph *Unum ex Quattuor*, Ulrich Schmid demonstrated that all known Latin gospel harmonies are descendants of the sixth-century Codex Fuldensis.⁴ A variety of studies before and after Schmid’s monograph concluded that the Western vernacular harmonies derived from this Latin tradition with Fuldensis at its head. Where these harmonies differ from Fuldensis, variant readings were explicable as artifacts of translation, mechanical errors, the influence of local texts, and, most importantly, correction toward marginal glosses found in many Latin and vernacular harmonies. Although this evidence eventually persuaded most scholars, this new paradigm was a disappointment to Diatessaronic studies, since it left the Fuldensis harmony as the sole independent witness to Tatian’s gospel in the West.
- [10] In a challenge to this model, Barker argues that a family of Middle Dutch and Middle High German harmonies are not descendants of Fuldensis but rather share with it a common ancestor, namely, a lost Old Latin Diatessaron. This family is the Stuttgart-Liège-Zurich harmonies (henceforth SLZ harmonies) singled out for special attention in Barker’s first chapter. According to Barker, these SLZ harmonies are independently derived from Fuldensis’s Old Latin archetype.
- [11] The argument begins in Barker’s fourth chapter with a survey of the many distinctive features shared by Fuldensis and the SLZ harmonies. Although Barker provides a helpful catalog of shared sequential features, the insertion of Jesus’s genealogy and the *pericope adulterae* (both absent from Tatian’s gospel) in the exact same location might have sufficed to demonstrate the close relationship of these Western harmonies. These shared features motivate Barker to posit a common ancestor for Fuldensis and the SLZ harmonies more proximate than Tatian’s Diatessaron. While Barker’s reasoning is sound, the evidence so far is equally compatible with the reigning paradigm. That is, Fuldensis might have introduced these changes, while the late medieval SLZ harmonies copied it from one of Fuldensis’s many descendants.
- [12] Next, in chapter 5, Barker demonstrates that many of the differences between Fuldensis and the SLZ harmonies can be explained in terms of redactional tendencies in the latter group. Many distinctive features of the SLZ sequence are revisions of the Fuldensis sequence toward a standard gospel text or glosses found in other Western harmonies. Still, Barker and advocates of the reigning paradigm have not parted company. This pattern of evidence is exactly what we would expect if the SLZ harmonies are derived from Fuldensis.
- [13] Finally, Barker sets off alone in his sixth and seventh chapters. Here Barker makes an argument from “alternating primitivity,” purporting to identify four passages where the SLZ harmonies preserve features of the hypothesized Old Latin Diatessaron *against*

⁴ Ulrich Schmid, *Unum ex Quattuor: Eine Geschichte der lateinischen Tatianüberlieferung* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005).

Fuldensis. For instance, the SLZ harmonies begin with the Johannine prologue in agreement with Ephrem, the Arabic harmonies, and several (unmentioned) Syriac *testimonia*, while Fuldensis begins with the Lukan preface (88–90). This is clearly an instance where the SLZ harmonies agree with Tatian's Diatessaron against Codex Fuldensis. But is this, indeed, evidence that a lost Old Latin Diatessaron furnished high medieval harmonies with Tatianic readings? Or is it, rather, another agreement by chance? Schmid, in his review of Barker's monograph published in the *Review of Biblical Literature*, provides alternate explanations for all four of Barker's examples. For instance, Schmid cites Elisabeth Meyer's study of the Middle Dutch/Middle High German harmonies to argue that the preface added to the SLZ harmonies rendered the Lukan preface redundant. I would add only that, in a different context, Barker criticizes Petersen for treating the presence or absence of the Lukan preface as genetically significant, since it is "highly unpredictable" even within families of related harmonies (116).

- [14] I do not intend to relitigate Barker and Schmid's competing explanations for a few differences between far-flung vernacular harmonies. Instead, I want to conclude this review by arguing that Barker's treatment of these daughter versions misses the proverbial forest for a few curious shrubs. What Barker calls his "sharpest intervention" into the field is an argument that the SLZ harmonies are an independent witness to an Old Latin Diatessaron (116). This hypothetical source is called "Old Latin" because it predates Victor's revision of the harmony to conform with the Latin Vulgate (10, 109, 119). The larger problem for Barker's thesis is that—as generations of past scholars have recognized—the SLZ harmonies depend on Fuldensis's Vulgate Latin throughout.
- [15] The dependence of the Stuttgart harmony (chosen because Barker identifies it as the most important of the SLZ harmonies [117]) on Jerome's Vulgate via Codex Fuldensis was well-known to scholars such as Petersen. Indeed, Petersen characterizes the Stuttgart harmony as "heavily vulgatized."⁵ But we need not rely on the observations of our oft-mistaken forebears. The Vulgate character of the Stuttgart harmony is apparent from even a superficial review of the text.
- [16] For the first two chapters of John, the relatively unmixed witnesses to the Old Latin gospels are sufficiently distinct from Jerome's Vulgate to be identified in Middle Dutch translation in at least six locations. In five of these six locations, Fuldensis agrees with the Vulgate text against the Old Latin version. And in all five instances, the Stuttgart harmony (Bergsma 1854) agrees with Fuldensis (Ranke 1868). So at John 1:34, the Stuttgart harmony reads *die Gods sone* in agreement with *filius dei* in Fuldensis and the Vulgate but against the Old Latin *electus dei* (e a b ff²).⁶ At 1:38, Stuttgart reads *woenstu* with *habitas* in Fuldensis and the Vulgate but against the Old Latin *manes* (e a b ff²). At 2:3, Stuttgart reads *ende dar gebrac wijns* translating *et deficiente vino* in Fuldensis and the Vulgate in contrast to the longer explanatory phrases found in both the African and European Old Latin versions. The European witnesses, for example, read *et vinum non habebant, quoniam finitum est vinum nuptiarum* (a b ff²). In the same verse, the Old Latin concludes with the noun *fili* after *habent*, omitted by Stuttgart harmony in agreement with Fuldensis

⁵ Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron*, 434.

⁶ For the sake of presentation, I list only these four manuscripts as the best witnesses to the Old Latin version(s), comparatively unmixed with the Vulgate. As we should expect, many mixed manuscripts agree with the Vulgate for these test passages. Likewise, some mixed manuscripts and a few Vulgate manuscripts occasionally agree with the Old Latin reading. In my judgment, none of these predictable complications of working with mixed text traditions prevents us from confidently identifying distinct Old Latin and Vulgate readings in these six passages.

- and the Vulgate. Finally, the Stuttgart gives *clenen zelen* at 2:15 as a literal translation of *funiculis* in Fuldensis and the Vulgate, instead of the Old Latin *restibus* (a b [ff²]).
- [17] No witness to the Latin Vulgate is 100 percent pure, including the exemplar(s) presumably used to produce the Fuldensis harmony. In the sixth location where the Old Latin and the Vulgate are easily distinguishable, at John 1:36, Fuldensis unexpectedly agrees with the Old Latin version against the Vulgate. Here Fuldensis and many Old Latin witnesses add the phrase *ecce qui tollit peccatum mundi*, which is not found in Jerome's Vulgate. It is powerful confirmation of Stuttgart's dependence on a descendant of Fuldensis, therefore, that the Middle Dutch harmony diverges from the Vulgate at the very same point as Fuldensis to include the same Old Latin reading, *die de sonden der werelt afdoet*.
- [18] If the SLZ harmonies are translating a lost Old Latin Diatessaron instead of a descendant of Codex Fuldensis, these high medieval harmonies should not so clearly mirror Fuldensis's imperfectly Vulgate text. Barker's argument concentrates on a few unremarkable differences between Fuldensis and the SLZ harmonies while ignoring the fact that the SLZ harmonies overwhelmingly agree with the Vulgate Fuldensis.
- [19] In conclusion, Barker's model cannot be sustained. A few differences in sequence between Fuldensis and the SLZ harmonies, susceptible to multiple explanations, do not trouble the reigning paradigm. There is, rather, overwhelming evidence that the SLZ harmonies depend on a Latin text descended from the Fuldensis harmony. And so, yet again, Fuldensis stands alone in the West. In light of this, Barker's allocation of only a few pages to treat the many, expansive, and complicated Eastern witnesses is disappointing.

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