An unpublished Christian Jewish disputation attributed to Sergius the stylite edited from a syriac manuscript in the British museum (BM. add. 17,199) with translation and commentary


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Abstract

The 'Disputation of Sergius the Stylite' is a Christian anti-Jewish work, written sometime between 730-770 A. D., and ascribed to Sergius the Stylite, an otherwise unknown Syrian ascetic, who lived in Gousit, a town not far from Antioch in Syria. The work purports to report a dialogue between Sergius and an anonymous Jew. This dialogue has been incorporated into the framework of an anti-Jewish treatise possibly by Sergius himself. The work begins with a long series of biblical texts quoted in order to show that all the events of Jesus Christ's life were prophesied or prefigured in the Old Testament. The two participants in the dialogue then discuss such subjects as the Crucifixion and the Cross, the Incarnation, the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Dispersion of the Jews, Christian worship of the Cross and saints' relics. Christian consumption of swine's flesh, and finally, the problem of Christians who were attracted by Jewish forms of worship. In the Introduction to this edition of the 'Disputation' a description of the manuscript is given. The date and authorship of the work are then considered, and its literary sources discussed. Some interesting biblical agrapha which are found in the 'Disputation' suggest that it stands in a stream of tradition going back to what is thought to be the earliest Christian literary activity, the composition of 'testimonies'. The work also contains some valuable quotations from an otherwise lost Syriac version of Flavius Josephus's 'War of the Jews'. The final chapter of the Introduction discusses the contents of the 'Disputation', the nature of the dialogue contained in it, the portrait which it gives of the Jewish participant, and the purpose for which the work was written.

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