

THE ODES OF SOLOMON: THE NUHRA VERSION (2020)

by Samuel Zinner and Mark M. Mattison



The Sabbath Queen by Ephraim Moses Lilien (1874 – 1925)

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ENDORSEMENTS

For scholars of the sacred literature of the early centuries of the Common Era, the various versions of the *Odes of Solomon* – in Coptic, Syriac, and Greek – are critical witnesses to the intellectual and spiritual ferment of those times. These versions reflect the circulation and popularity of the *Odes* in their time, but their incomplete and divergent nature, combined with the relative scarcity of scholars who blend proficiency in the three languages of their transmission with text critical competency, have hindered scholarly and general publics from engaging with them more fully. Now for the first time Zinner and Mattison have produced a lucid English translation of the *Odes* in their entirety, incorporating Zinner's plausible and convincing reconstruction of *Ode 2*. The Nuhra edition represents a fresh new take on an important subject of scholarship, and I am certain that it will provide a stimulus and departure point for any future discussion of this subject.

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Author of (with James McGrath) *The Mandaean Book of John: Critical Edition, Translation, and Commentary* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020)

<https://www.amesall.rutgers.edu/faculty-140/core-faculty/99-dr-charles-haberl>

The *Odes of Solomon* often echo traditional Jewish language and belong to the most beautiful early-Christian texts. The Nuhra translation is a very fine piece of scholarly work, and entirely remarkable. The annotations contain numerous philological advances, and Zinner's convincing reconstruction of the text of the long-lost *Ode 2* marks a significant breakthrough.

Bernhard Lang
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Author of *Hebrew Life and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2016)
Sprüche der Väter: Das Weisheitsbuch im Talmud [Pirkei Avot].
Reclams Universal-Bibliothek (Ditzingen: Reclam, 2020)

<https://kw.uni-paderborn.de/en/institut-fuer-katholische-theologie/biblische-theologie/team/ehemalige-professoren/prof-dr-h-c-bernhard-lang/>

DEDICATION

With his kind approval, the authors are privileged and pleased to dedicate *The Odes of Solomon: The Nuhra Version (2020)* to Elliot R. Wolfson (Marsha and Jay Glazer Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies Professor, University of California Santa Barbara).

THE ODES OF SOLOMON: THE NUHRA VERSION (2020)

PREFACE

I first read the *Odes of Solomon* in my youth while on my back looking up at the slowly shifting clouds of the California Mojave Desert. The soft spirit of the wind surrounded me and the warm sand supported me while Joshua trees and primeval creosote bushes flanked me, bushes already long ancient when the anonymous Solomonian odist walked the earth. My first impression, which has since only been strengthened, was that the odist's personal spiritual identity was shaped above all by a profound love for the Jewish Torah, to which he constantly alludes by deploying a rich variety of its standard (but often startlingly applied) poetic synonyms from literature of the Second Temple era. It is this aspect of the *Odes of Solomon* that has held my interest over the decades since that day in the Mojave Desert. My youth is now gone, and the world that existed then is gone, but it all lives on in my heart. Translating the *Odes of Solomon* was a welcome act of nostalgia, and it would not have been possible without Mark Mattison's encouragement and helpful feedback on my translation's various drafts, for which I am grateful. I also thank Charles Häberl and Bernhard Lang for their helpful comments on the manuscript and for their kind endorsements.

I was song, and God the rhyme . . .
Rainer Maria Rilke, *Book of Hours* I:50

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26 October 2020

I first encountered the *Odes of Solomon* as a young man in Bible college, but it wasn't until a passion for mystical Christianity was enkindled in me decades later that this text took on a whole new meaning. I was captivated by this rare glimpse into the spiritual ferment of Jesus' followers before Christianity became a distinct world religion – a liminal faithfulness that can be expressed only in the language of poetry, not dogma. The idea of translating the *Odes* appealed to me, but I quickly dismissed the thought since I could only work with the Coptic and Greek texts. Years later, when Samuel Zinner proposed to translate the Syriac *Odes* if I would translate the Coptic and Greek, I couldn't refuse. It's both a pleasure and an honor to work with someone of such vast knowledge and exceptional philological skills. I've enjoyed our many hours of poring over the digital photographs of the Greek manuscript and puzzling over its unique features. I'm also grateful to Lance Jenott, who graciously gave of his time in reviewing my work on the Coptic. Of course, I remain solely responsible for any errors in my work.

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