This helpful book consists of an introduction (9–100), a series of Greek and Latin texts with facing German translation and essential footnotes plus some Syriac and Slavonic texts that are presented only in translation (102–330), as well as abbreviations (334–39), a select bibliography divided into sources and studies (340–58), and indexes (359–72).

The introduction is essentially a presentation of the sources of the legend of Christ’s portrait kept in Edessa until the ninth century, which are translated in the subsequent section of the work. It is very helpful to have all the documents related to this legend collected, although some important evidence is missing, as I shall show. But a great many sources are here, and with useful notes. They help the reader follow the development of the legend concerning the Mandylion of Edessa, the portrait of Jesus “not made by human hands” that might even be, in its unfolded version, the so-called Turin Shroud. For a critical assessment of the historical evidence, see my “Dal Mandylion di Edessa alla Sindone: Alcune note sulle testimonianze antiche,” ‘Ilu: Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones 4 (1999): 173–93.

One important version of the Abgar legend is missing from the texts and translations (although it is briefly mentioned in the introduction on 19, 41, and n. 153 in the discussion of previous scholarship): that of Moses of Chorene, the Armenian historian, whose narrative in P.H. 2 is parallel to the Doctrina Addai, seems to be based on it and on Eusebius (both were translated into Armenian), and includes the story of the image of Christ. I analyzed this source, together with the Doctrina and other historical and legendary sources on Abgar the Black, in “Edessa e i Romani tra Augusto e i Severi,” Aevum 73 (1999): 107–43, in “Abgar Ukkama e Abgar il Grande alla luce di recenti
apporti storiografici,” *Aevum* 78 (2004): 103–8, and in “Possible Historical Traces in the *Doctrina Addai*?” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 9.1 (2006): §§1–24. There I endeavored to show that, although Moses must always be treated very carefully as a historical source, he does transmit some interesting historical details concerning Abgar that are not to be found in other sources. Moses also declares in 2.66 that he used Bardaišan’s historical work, and Barhebraeus (*Chronicon ecclesiasticum* 1.47) states that Moses actually relied on Bardaišan, too, for his version of the Abgar legend. Barhebraeus’s information is not to be dismissed without reflection, since his data on Bardaišan are generally trustworthy and find confirmation in Ephraem and other sources (I show this in *Bardesanes Katà Εἱμαρμένης*, forthcoming in Ephraem and other sources (I show this in Bardesanes Katà Εἱμαρμένης, forthcoming in Bologna).

Eusebius’s account, which is translated with facing Greek text, is fundamental because it is the oldest preserved version of the Abgar-Addai legend, and it is presented right at the beginning. In the introduction, Illert rejects Grabe’s 1699 hypothesis that Eusebius drew his material from Sextus Julius Africanus, observing that Eusebius claims to have taken Abgar’s and Jesus’ letters and the following account from Syriac documents kept in the Edessan archives. This is correct; Eusebius himself says so in *Hist. eccl.* 1.13.5 and 11 (and I think that these documents constitute precisely the common source of both Eusebius and the *Doctrina Addai* that Illert, too, rightly postulates on 32). This, however, only applies to §§5–21, which are translated from the Syriac materials, whereas a different source can be detected behind §§1–4, thanks to many clues. For example, the presentation of Abgar in §§5ff., always and exclusively as a τοπάρχης, moreover of a “very small city” (μικρότατη), is completely different from his description in §2 as a king, indeed a dynast, who ruled over whole peoples beyond the Euphrates, moreover “in an extremely glorious way:” βασιλεὺς Ἄβγαρος, τῶν ὑπὲρ Εὐφράτην ἐθνῶν ἐπισημότατα δυναστεύων. These words, which in fact do not reflect the historical reality in the least, are not Eusebius’s own—for in his own summary in *Hist. eccl.* 2.1.6 he simply defines Abgar τὸν τῶν Ὑσσορομον βασιλέα—but rather betray a highly encomiastic source, probably local, and obviously anterior to Eusebius, which could even be Bardaišan’s historical work, also known to Moses of Chorene. By glorifying Abgar the Black (first century), Bardaišan could praise his successor Abgar the Great (second-third century), who at a certain point, according to the *Liber Legum Regionum* stemming from Bardaišan’s school and to other sources, converted to Christianity. For further elements pointing to different sources underlying *Hist. eccl.* 1.13.1–4 and 1.13.5–21, see my “Bardesane e la sua scuola, l’Apologia siriaca ‘di Melitone’ e la *Doctrina Addai*,” *Aevum* 82 (2009). Illert did very well to include in his collection also *Hist. eccl.* 7.18.1–4, which reveals Eusebius’s attitude toward portraits of Jesus and apostles: he somehow excuses them as due to pagans who were healed by them. At the same time, Eusebius claims that he himself saw the famous bronze statue of Jesus in Paneas (i.e. Caesarea Philippi). Eusebius’s position may explain
the absence of any reference to Jesus’ portrait in his Abgar account, although it is not to be ruled out that the original version of the legend, in his source, did not yet include any image of Jesus. For neither does Egeria mention this portrait some decades after Eusebius (although she does mention portraits of Abgar and his son Ma’nu), whereas the *Doctrina Addai* seems to be the first extant source to refer to Jesus’ portrait.

Immediately after Eusebius, the *Itinerarium Egeriae* 17–19 is presented in Latin and in translation. It reflects a pilgrimage to Edessa that occurred in A.D. 384 and is the oldest source for our legend after Eusebius, although it might be roughly contemporary with the *Doctrina Addai*, which in fact comes next in the sources (and appears only in German translation). Illert embraces the very plausible hypothesis that the legend then expounded in the *Doctrina Addai* was used in a context of anti-Manichaean propaganda. It is not certain, however, that this was the original (ursprünglich, 35) intention of the Abgar legend, for its original nucleus is likely to be anterior to Manichaeism and may even stem from the Severan age. Also, doctrinal interests play a significant role only in the *Doctrina*, not in earlier phases of the Abgar legend, as attested by Eusebius (and Egeria). Illert correctly remarks that a Leitmotiv in the *Doctrina* is the insistence on human freewill (39); it is true that this was also a central issue in Ephraem. Still earlier, I wish to point out, it was crucial to the *Liber Legum Regionum* and to Bardaisan’s thought. Bardaisan wrote a Κατὰ Εἱμαρμένης whose relation to the *Liber* is discussed; scholars’ opinions range from a total identification of these works to a diametrical opposition. I incline to seeing a close relation between them, but in any case there can be no doubt that the question of free will was extremely important to him.

The remark is also interesting that the names of the converts who appear in the *Doctrina* were no longer used in the day of its final redaction (43). In this connection, I argued that Saints Abdon and Sennen’s legend was inspired by two historical figures found in Tacitus’s *Annals*: Abdu and Sennak, a powerful eunuch and a noble rich person both linked to the king of Edessa Abgar the Black, a contemporary of Jesus. They played a role in the complex political landscape of the time, and they appear again in the *Doctrina Addai* as converts to Christianity, thanks to Addai’s preaching. I demonstrated that the two saints derive from these historical characters in “Possible Historical Traces.”

Some Greek inscriptions stemming from the fourth century onward (from Alkat-Hadji-Kevi, Edessa, Gurdja, Philippi, Ephesus, and Ankara) are also presented, both in the original text and in translation, reporting the pretended letter of Jesus to Abgar; three of them also include Abgar’s letter to Jesus. The Syriac Testamentum ascribed to Ephraem is offered only in translation and constitutes a short blessing and praise of Edessa. The Greek Testamentum, which is presented in both the original text and translation, is somewhat longer and summarizes the main events of the Abgar legend. A brief summary
of these facts is also provided in Comes Darius’s letter to Augustine (A.D. 429–430), whose Latin text is here printed with facing translation.

A Syriac Transitus Mariae is also felicitously included in this collection, albeit only in German version. This document is very interesting because, like the Doctrina and Moses, it includes the Abgar-Tiberius correspondence, which must be kept separate from the pretended letters exchanged between Abgar and Jesus, and may contain historical traces, as I have argued in “Possible Historical Traces.” Also the poet and theologian Jacob of Sarug’s Syriac Letter to the People of Edessa is presented only in translation, just like other two Syriac works of his dating to the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century, one of which is a hymn on Edessa, which is exalted in that it was blessed by Jesus. In Jacob’s view, Abgar’s blackness is a symbol of the sins of paganism that are washed away by Jesus. Likewise, only the German translation is offered for a section of Joshua the Stylite’s Chronicle, from the beginning of the sixth century, which, however, does not include the image of Christ in his account, where, just as in Egeria’s narrative, the protection of Edessa is ascribed to Jesus’ supposed letter to Abgar. Procopius’s De Bello Persico 2.12.6–34, instead, is presented in both Greek and German. Procopius narrates the Abgar story, but without any reference to Jesus’ portrait, as in Eusebius, and likewise attributes the protection of Edessa during the unsuccessful Persian siege in A.D. 540 to his letter. I have demonstrated elsewhere (in “Edessa e i Romani”) that Procopius in fact conflated two historical kings of Osrhoene: Abgar the Black and a predecessor, a contemporary of Augustus. Procopius presents them as one and the same person, young under Augustus, even though already married and with several children, and older in the days of Jesus and Addai. Illert does not seem to distinguish these two kings either in the introduction or in the notes to the translation, but on page 56 he follows Ross’s suggestion that the account of Abgar’s stay in Rome under Augustus was modeled on Abgar the Great’s stay in Rome once century later. Indeed, on page 18 note 24 he accepts the traditional dating of Abgar Ukkama’s reign, 4 B.C.–A.D. 7 and again A.D. 13–50, which was recently called into question (see my “Abgar Ukkama” for documentation).

Some Greek papyri of the sixth-seventh century (from Cairo-Oxford, Göteborg, and Nessana) are set forth next in text and translation. In line with Peppermüller’s suggestion, Illert hypothesizes that the first might preserve a form of the Abgar legend anterior to that attested in the Doctrina Addai and even a pre-Eusebian version of it (59). Then comes, only in translation, a Syriac hymn on the cathedral of Edessa (sixth century), where an image “not made by human hands” is mentioned, but it is not clear whether it is Christ’s portrait, since it is also said to be carved in marble. Evagrius’s History of the Church 4.27 (end of the sixth century), based on Procopius and Eusebius and narrating a miracle worked by Christ’s image in Edessa during the Persian siege in A.D. 544, and the Acta Thaddaei are presented in both Greek and German. In the Acts, stemming from the
seventh century, the Addai story is applied to Thaddeus, and it is worth pointing out that, differently from what happens in Eusebius, the *Doctrina*, and Moses of Chorene, the healing of Abgar is due to the very portrait of Christ on a σινδών that is described as a τετράδιπλον, which was brought to Abgar by Ananias before Thaddeus’s arrival. Thus, by the time of the redaction of these *Acts* it was known that the image of Christ preserved in Edessa was on a fabric “folded four times” (this is, in my opinion, the better translation of the two proposed on 68 n. 286). This fits very well with the hypothesis that the Edessa picture was a whole sheet folded up four times, so that only the face of the person portrayed thereon was visible.

Another source of the image legend is the *Acts of Mar Mari* 1–5, of which the author provides a German translation without the original text. On these *Acts* see at least (oddly not indicated by Illert, who cites Abbeloos’s 1885 edition, Bedjan’s 1890 edition, and Raabe’s 1893 translation) Christelle et Florence Jullien’s edition and French translation, *Les Actes de Mar Mari* (CSCO 602, Syri 234–235; Leuven : Peeters, 2003), and Amir Harrak’s English translation, *The Acts of Mar Mari the Apostle* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005). I have analyzed the relation of these *Acts* to the *Doctrina Addai* in the introductory essay to my *Atti di Mar Mari* (Brescia: Paideia, 2008). Indeed, the first sections of these Syriac *Acts* offer a short version of the story that is narrated in the *Doctrina*, concerning Jesus, Abgar the Black, and Addai. In section 3, the detail of the image is prominent: Abgar, after receiving Jesus’ letter, sent painters to Jerusalem to make a portrait of Jesus, but they were unable to reproduce his features. Jesus then pressed a cloth on his face and gave them his portrait, thus created, to bring to their king. It was put in the church (sic) of Edessa and remained there “until today.” The latter is the same assertion that is found in Moses of Chorene’s account (2.32).

One of the longest sources is the Byzantine narration ascribed to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, where the translation of the image of Christ from Edessa to Constantinople in A.D. 944 is told. In “Edessa e i Romani” I demonstrated that the Abgar account in this source includes some interesting details, such as the friendship between Abgar and the governor (prefect) of Egypt, that are unknown from other sources and are likely to be historical. It is also important to remark, as Illert does (77), that here appears for the first time an alternative explanation of the origin of the *Mandylion*: the image of Christ was impressed on a cloth through his blood in the Gethsemane. This explanation gets closer to the funeral nature of this portrait. The image “not made by human hands” is also mentioned in the Greek *Epistula Abgari* (probably of the eleventh century, presented here in both text and translation) along with the pretended letters of Abgar and Jesus. Its removal to Constantinople appears again in an old Russian legend, of which only the German translation is provided. The same is the case with another Slavonic text, Philip Stanislavov’s *Abagar*, from the seventeenth century.
Among a few small flaws in the translations and notes, which are generally accurate, I cite an omission of the translation of the Doctrina Addai in “Was wir ihn tun und lehren sahen” (140 §15) the translation of the Syriac verb for “we heard” is missing. The complete sentence would run: “What we saw and heard him do and teach,” meaning, of course, “What we saw him do and what we heard him teach.” In §13 (139), after Addai’s words, “Wie es uns von unserem Herrn geboten wurde: Wir sollen keine Tasche und keinen Geldbeutel besitzen,” some Gospel references are offered (Matt 10:9–10; Mark 6:8; and Luke 9:3), whereas, instead of the last, a reference to Luke 10:4 would have been more relevant.

A conjunction must have dropped out in the following sentence: “In der späteren Überlieferung finden sich verschiedene Varianten des Namens Abgar, der griechischen Umschrift des syrischen Ukkâmâ” (18 n. 25; examples follow: Ἄβγαρος, Ἄγβαρος, Αὔγαρος, Aggarus, Avgar, Abagar). As it is, this sentence seems to mean that “Abgar” is the Greek transcription of the Syriac “Ukkama,” which of course is not the case. I imagine that an “und” slipped: “…finden sich verschiedene Varianten des Namens Abgar und der griechischen Umschrift des syrischen Ukkâmâ.” In fact, Ukkama, too, is rendered Οὔχαμα in Eusebius, Οὐκάμα in the Ephesus inscription, and so on. There are some tiny inaccuracies in the bibliography, such as the attribution of the articles “The Protonike Legend, the Doctrina Addai, and Bishop Rabbula of Edessa” and “The Protonike Legend and the Doctrina Addai” to Han J. W. Drijvers (353-354) instead of Jan W. Drijvers.

But these are quibbles, φορ, in spite of minor lacunae and some imprecision, this is a very useful work, collecting a rich documentation on the legend of the image of Jesus kept in Edessa, for which we should be deeply grateful.