

An address of thanks / Christopher Lash. — Extrait de : Parole de l'Orient : revue semestrielle des études syriaques et arabes chrétiennes : recherches orientales : revue d'études et de recherches sur les églises de langue syriaque. — vol. 6-7 (1975-1976), pp. 229-235.

Titre de couverture : Mélanges offerts au R. P. François Graffin. — Notes au bas des pages.

Texts in english and in syriac.

I. Discours monastiques — Anglais.

PER L1183 / FT76495P

AN ADDRESS OF THANKS

BY

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The following short address is taken from a collection of similar addresses contained in a fine sixth century manuscript in the British Library, whose full contents are described by Wright in his catalogue (1). The first sixteen are addresses of thanks spoken by the head of a monastic community to those who have brought gifts to the monastery, while the next group of fifteen speeches is addressed to the monks themselves. One of these has already been published by Prof. Graffin (2). Among the pieces later in the collection is an address which is elsewhere attributed to Philoxenos of Mabboug, but the earlier ones are quite anonymous (3).

Most of the addresses are of a quite general nature and contain surprisingly little direct use of Scripture and even fewer references to Christ, though the one which immediately precedes the one presented here takes as its theme the story of Elisha and the Shulamitess. The thirteenth of the first series, which we present here for the first time, has been chosen because it contains one of the earlier Christian uses of the story of Elisha and the widow in which the dead husband is clearly identified with Obadiah, the steward of Ahab.

There is nothing in the text clearly to suggest what sort of offerer is envisaged, though other pieces in the collection are specifically addressed

(1) Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts, vol. II, pp. 661-668 (n° DCCXXXVIII). The British Library number is Add. 17, 181. It is written on vellum in "a fine Estrangela of the VIth century".

(2) In *Corona Gratiarum* for E. Dekkers OSB (Bruges 1975).

(3) See Wright, *ibid.*, n° 9. The same text is attributed to Philoxenos in Add. 17,173, n° 5.

to offerers of a particular type: rich, poor etc. However the use of the Obadiah story together with the reference to his busy life in the 'world' may mean that the offerer was a person of some social importance. The fact that the verbs are throughout in the second person plural is of no significance here: in the seventh address, which is specifically addressed to an individual, the verbs are likewise in the plural.

The fact that the speaker considers the prophets to be in some sense types of the monks is not without interest. He assumes that the Jewish prophets lived a sort of monastic life "outside the world" and this comparison between the prophetic communities and monks has been made by some modern scholars (4). Indeed one may perhaps ask whether there is not, in some sense, a real continuity between the "holy men" of the Northern Kingdom described in the Elijah and Elisha cycles of the books of Kings and the earlier Christian ascetics of Palestine and Syria. The survival of the "charismatic" holy man in later Judaism has been most suggestively discussed by Dr Geza Vermes in his articles on Hanina ben Dosa (5). One should perhaps add that the way of life "sons of the prophets" of Kings and the early Syrian ascetics was quite unlike the tidy and well-ordered monasticism of later Jewish and Christian tradition (6).

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If the writer of this moving little address is conscious both of his poverty and inadequacy, the same is even truer of his translator, who, in presenting this ancient monastic speech of thanks to his old teacher and friend Prof. François Graffin, from whom he has learnt more than he can succinctly express, wishes him "ad multos annos!" (7).

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(4) See for example J. PEDERSEN, *Israel*, vol. III (London 1940), pp. 109, 111 and 119.

(5) In *Journal of Jewish Studies* 23 (1972) and 24 (1973). See also the same writer's *Jesus the Jew*, London 1973.

(6) See A. VÖÖBUS, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* (CSCO 184, 197 — Subsid. 14, 17).

(7) I would like to thank Dr Sebastian Brock for a number of most helpful suggestions and criticisms.

TRANSLATION

Since God is a rich giver who sustains all, kind-hearted believers who fulfill God's command imitate (1) God, for God has also summoned them to the imitation of his kind-heartedness: "Be kind-hearted like your Father in heaven" (2).

But it is not only among the new elect of Christ that kind-heartedness towards the needy has become manifest: it was also met with among the former believers (3).

They, while dwelling in the world, taking their full part in its affairs and being assiduous in all human converse, discreetly honoured those who lived outside the world; as it is written of the faithful Obadiah, steward of the wicked Ahab, who took one hundred prophets and saved them from death by the sword and from destruction by starvation: "Obadiah led away one hundred men at the time when Jezabel was killing God's prophets and hid them by fifties in a cavern and supplied them with food and water" (4). For while the king had become a butcher who was slaying the prophets, his steward fitted out a hospice (5) in the mountain and prepared caves in the wilderness as a house of rest for the servants of God.

And as there the prophets were honoured, so here God's disciples: for while we indeed are not prophets like them, your faith provides for us

(1) Cf. Eph. 5¹. It is not easy to decide whether this word should be pointed as Ethpe'el or Ethpa'al, probably the latter (See PAYNE-SMITH, *Thesaurus*, I, 912).

(2) Cf. Mt. 5⁴⁸ and Lk. 6³⁶.

(3) The use of the word "believers" for the Jews of the Old Testament seems comparatively rare in Syriac and Payne-Smith only gives references to Sir. 1¹⁴ and I Mace. 3¹³.

(4) I Kings 18⁴. This is a very free quotation of the Peshitsa, in particular the fact that our author says that Obadiah took one hundred *men*, where the biblical text has *prophets*.

(5) This word, as in Patristic Greek (see LAMPE, *Lexicon*, p. 932), is used in Syriac for religious, particularly monastic, hospices. Its spelling in Syriac varies a good deal: as Payne-Smith puts it (*Thesaurus* I, 184s.) "multa in scribendo incertitudo". The spelling found in our manuscript, without a penultimate *yudh*, is recorded neither by Payne-Smith nor by Brockelmann.

as if for them and you give heed to us as if to those saints. But even though we are unworthy, your faith does not lose the reward of its excellence: "He who honours a prophet in the name of a prophet, receives a prophet's reward; and he who honours a just man in the name of a just man, receives a just man's reward" (6).

And so the faithful steward received the recompense of his kindness after his death, and, as he had saved the prophets from death, so his sons too were freed from slavery and his wife from the exactions of her creditors, when Elisha became the one who repaid the kindness done to the prophets and the master paid the disciples' debt of honour (7).

But God, on behalf of them all, by his abundant bounties was honouring those who gave honour and giving a reward on behalf of the prophets who

(6) Mt. 10^{41s} and Mk. 9⁴¹.

(7) The idea that the widow was the widow of Obadiah is to be found in many sources, both Jewish and Christian, from Josephus onwards. I hope to deal with this question at length elsewhere and there is only space here for a brief resumé of the problem. There are four people involved:

1. the steward of Ahab, named Obadiah,
2. the prophet Obadiah,
3. the husband of the widow in II Kings 4 (unamed in the Bible),
4. the third Captain of Fifty in II Kings 1¹³ (also unamed).

1 and 3 are identified by Josephus (Ant. IX, 4.2), who gives it as a current opinion ("they say") and the Targum on II Kings 4. In the Midrash the creditor is identified with King Joram (Ex. R3¹⁴ and Midr. Teh. 1⁵⁶) and this tradition reappears in Ephrem, though here it is Ahab himself who is the creditor rather than Joram.

This idea is found both in the Hymns preserved in Armenian (P.O. 30/120-124) and in the prose Commentary, also in Armenian, on IV Kingdoms (see *Works of St Ephrem*, Venice 1836, vol. 1, p. 452). The latter does not appear to have yet been edited critically, but the numerous agreements in detail between the Hymn and the Commentary suggest that it may well repay further study. It is quite different from the Syriac commentary published in the Roman edition of St Ephrem. The fact that Ephrem makes Elisha turn water into oil in this story also enables us to see a reference to II Kings 4 in Afraat (P.S. 1,290 and 967). The identification of the steward with the dead husband is also to be found in Theodoret, Isho'dad of Merv and the Zohar.

1 is identified with 2 and with 4 in the *Vitae Prophetarum* edited by Th. SCHERMANN in *Propheten und Apostellegenden* (TU XXXI), p. 53s. and this identification thus occurs in the various Synaxaria; Greek, Armenian and Ethiopic (twice). Jerome reports it as the view of "Hebraei" (CCL 76/352).

There would thus seem to be two independent traditions, both going back ultimately to Jewish sources. Some of this material, together with further Rabbinic references, is to be found in GINZBERG's *Legends of the Jews* VI, 344-5.

had been received, to teach us and you that he is the one who repays here also.

A widow also fed Elijah and, while openly it appeared that she was giving nourishment, secretly it was the prophet who was feeding both her and her children (8). In the same way, here too, while the faithful are thought of as nourishing the saints, (in fact) the Lord of the saints rewards the favour (done) through them, and while the givers give openly, he who receives restores and repays in secret.

You then will be rewarded by the God of all (with) the good things which are here and those which are to come and through your present gifts you will become worthy of the good things which are promised, the true pleasures and the delights which do not pass, in the fellowship with all givers, past and present, in eternal life.

The end.

(8) Cf. I Kings 17¹⁵ (Pesh.). Our author here follows the Peshitta in writing, literally, "the sons of her house". With this we may compare the Greek "children" and the Hebrew "her house", though most editors propose reading "her son", since only one is mentioned in the rest of the story. The emendation seems unnecessary and the New English Bible retains the Massoretic text.