

THE MSS OF 'NARSAI ON THE MYSTERIES'

IN the year 1909 Dom R. H. Connolly published, in the well-known series called 'Texts and Studies', English translations of the Liturgical Homilies of Narsai, the Nestorian Doctor who died soon after A. D. 500. The book, with its careful Notes and the Additional Notes contributed by the late Mr Edmund Bishop, at once took rank as a primary document for the study of Christian Worship in the East.¹ But there was one point that was unsatisfactory. Of the four Homilies translated by Dom Connolly from the Syriac text of the 47 Homilies which had been published by A. Mingana at Mosul in 1905, the most important (Mingana's no. xvii, Connolly's A) is not apparently found in any ancient collection of works by Narsai. All Dom Connolly could do was to repeat Dr Mingana's rather vague account of his manuscript authorities. Homily xvii (the 'Exposition of the Mysteries') was not in the MSS from which Mingana had derived most of his text: he owed it 'benevolentiae D. Chikouana sacerdotis Alkoch'. Further, Dr Mingana had removed two passages from his text, giving them separately in his Introduction (Connolly, pp. 14 and 20), as the plan of his work had been to put *nil acatholicum* in the text itself.

This was bad enough, but what made it worse was that some 'Chaldean' authorities seemed to know of the elusive Homily xvii and to ascribe it to 'the pious Mar 'Abdisho', Metropolitan of Elam', a worthy of the 13th century. This personage is mentioned by Assemani (B. O. ii 453) under the year A. D. 1222.² Thus there has hung over the Homily, which is a liturgical document of the first importance, the taint of alleged illegitimacy. Dom Connolly did a great deal to remove the stain by his admirable arguments from style and the absence of rhyme (pp. xv-xxxviii). These arguments make it very difficult to believe that the Homily, as published by Mingana and translated by Connolly, can be by any one but Narsai or one of his immediate followers and imitators, and they make it clear that it is very ancient. But all the same its genealogy was not so satisfactory as might have been wished.

The immediate cause of this present paper was the chance discovery that the University Library at Cambridge possesses two MSS of Homily xvii. They have indeed been there ever since 1888, and duly appear in Wright's *Catalogue* (published in 1901) as Additional MSS 1977 and 2818. My belated discovery led me to look further, and I found (as might be expected) that Professor Baumstark knew all, or nearly all,

¹ See *J. T. S.* xi 315 and xii 319 for appreciations of its importance.

² Elam (𐭪𐭥𐭩) is the ecclesiastical name for Gondeshapur.

about it. Speaking of the works of Narsai he says¹: 'A comprehensive Exposition of the Syriac Liturgy in poetical form . . . is preserved under Narsai's name, and also both under the name of an 'Abdisho' of Elam and as anonymous', adding in a footnote:

¹⁰ Hss unter dem Namen des 'A.: Séert 76 (13. Jh); Diarb 67 (16. Jh) 2°. Urm 21 (17/18. Jh). VtB 90 (J 1867) 1°. BrlOrqu 967, mit anonymer Überlieferung: CmbrAdd 1977 (J 1728) IV°. 2818 (18. Jh) II°. Séert 44 (beigebunden). 122. 2°. N-Dsém 80. 1°. 82 (J 1894) 1°.

A translation of this may perhaps not be out of place! It tells us that Prof. Baumstark knows of five MSS of our Homily which assign it to 'Abdisho', and six in which it is anonymous. The 'Abdisho' MSS are according to Baumstark:

1. Séert 76, of the 13th cent. (see below).
2. Diarbekr 67, of the 16th cent.
3. Urmi 21, of the 17th or 18th cent.
4. Vatican, Borgia 90, dated A.D. 1867.
5. Berlin, Oriental-quarto 967.

Of these the Séert MS is much the most important, from its age. 'Séert' means the Library of the Chaldean Archbishop of Séert (ܫܝܪܬ), a place in Kurdistan about half-way between Diarbekr and Mosul. Mgr A. Scher's *Catalogue* (Mosul, 1905) tells us that the MS contains some works of Isaac of Nineveh, followed by an account of 'Sainte Anasime',² some work of Abraham of Nethpar, and finally 'un Poème d'Ébedjésus, métropolitain de Ilam, sur la grandeur du St Sacrifice de la Messe. Il y manque un ou plusieurs cahiers; car ce même poème se trouve plus au long dans d'autres manuscrits, où il figure sans nom d'auteur (Voir Cod. 122. 2°). Quelques-uns l'attribuent plus vraisemblablement à Narsai. Le poème commence par ces mots:

ܟܝܘܢ ܒܘܕܝܢܐ ܡܘܠܐ ܫܝܪܬܐ ܫܝܪܬܐ

All this makes it quite clear that Séert 76 really does contain our Homily, that it ascribes it to 'Abdisho' of Elam, and that it is the same 'liber Isaac Catarensis' which Mingana (quoted by Connolly, p. xii) mentions in his Preface.³ What is not quite clear from Mgr Scher's method of describing the MSS is whether there is any prefatory matter in the MS before the Homily proper begins.

Of the other Homilies I have not been able to find out anything about nos. 3 and 5. I gather from Mgr Scher's description that Borgia 90 is really anonymous, and I am doubtful about Diarbekr 67.⁴

¹ A. Baumstark *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn, 1922) p. 112.

² Usually called in English 'Onesima'.

³ Isaac of Nineveh came from Beth Ƙaṭrāyā.

⁴ i. e. it is not quite clear from Scher's description whether the ascription to 'Abdisho' is in the MS itself.

Except for the three stanzas of verse in 6 the three MSS agree word for word. In mentioning Theodore 6 and 7 call him 'Bishop of Mopsuestia', 12 omits 'of Mopsuestia'. Narsai is called 'Blessed' in 6 and 12, 'Doctor' in 7. Otherwise there is complete agreement. The '2nd Metre' is a known Nestorian term for the 12-syllable metre, associated by Jacobites with the name of Jacob of Serug, in which our Homily is written.¹

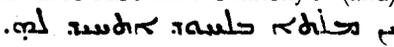
Before going any further I should like to point out that all this is a very familiar form of literature. It is an Editor's Introduction to a 'classic'. Unless the whole thing be an elaborate mystification the treatise or homily 'On the Mysteries' is an ancient and valued work, which the Editor can praise freely while proclaiming his own feebleness and unworthiness.

This conclusion is fully borne out by the rest of the text as it stands in these MSS. I have not noted the variants of no. 12 in full, but in all essentials, even as to the placing of rubrics and insertions, it agrees with the Cambridge MSS. I have not fully collated either codex, but am fairly sure that no point of major interest is omitted.

P. 3 of Connolly's ed., line 6 from end, where Dom Connolly remarks in a note 'The context would seem to require "deacons"', 6 has the sing., 7 the plural.

P. 5, ll. 14 ff., all three MSS have the passage given between † . . . †.

P. 11, l. 17 f. 'before the mystery thereof', 6 has  as in Connolly's text, 7 reads  i.e. omits 'thereof'.

P. 14, l. 4, all three MSS omit Connolly's '(and)', and at the end of the line add , followed of course by the passage between † . . . †. In other words Dr Mingana in removing the † . . . † passage from the text to a footnote dropped out one line. Translate, for line 4:

Through (God's) good pleasure the whole Trinity concurred, but in person the Word only was united with it (the body).

In the next line 7 drops two half-lines, making nonsense.

P. 14, l. 12, is omitted by both Cambridge MSS, probably rightly.

P. 14, l. 7 from end. Here the MSS insert a long rubric.

P. 20, l. 9. Nestorius, not Barsamya, is in 6 and 7.

P. 20, ll. 19 ff. (The long passage between † . . . †.) Here again Dr Mingana has omitted a line, and he did not indicate the right place

¹ The term occurs further down in our MSS, after one of the Editor's insertions (Connolly, p. 31, line 17); also B. M. Add. 25876 (Wright *CBM* 1178, l. 4). The 7-syllable line is called the 4th metre in this notation. In B. N. syr. 283 (fol. 158 v, *Zotenberg*, p. 216) the 12-syllable metre seems to be called the metre of Narsai.

3. Կենցառի, յո՞ր Կժուրիչն յն Կտնոյն
 .Կժուր Կտնոյն յն յն ժաշտածի
 .Կժուր յն յն յն յն յն յն յն յն յն
 * Կտնոյն * Կտնոյն * Կտնոյն * Կտնոյն *

1. Now in reliance on the perfect power Divine
 'ABDA the weak and foul and worthless dares incline
 His feeble pen to write and transcribe line by line
 A treatise—rather say, a precious treasure-mine.
2. A treatise dealing with the Mysteries glorious,
 Holy and pure, life-giving and victorious,
 Done in the Orthodox Church of Mar NESTORIUS,
 True to its faith and loving and laborious.
3. Undauntedly it holds the truth, for it is stayed
 On that Confession which the holy Fathers made,
 Saints and just men, whose memory can never fade.
 Lord, to the end this sinful wretch in mercy aid! Amen.

I give this doggerel in full, partly in order that the English reader may appreciate better the difference between the writer of it and the author of the Homily itself, which has been so well translated by Dom Connolly. These stanzas are rhymed and the lines have been filled out for the sake of the metre in quite a different style from the characteristic rhetorical repetitions of the Homily. But I venture to suggest that it is the original from which the few prose lines at the beginning of 7 and 12 have been compiled, not *vice versa*. The rhymester was evidently called 'Abd-something, and I venture to suggest that he was really 'Abdisho' of Elam, the *editor* (not the *author*) of the ancient 'marvellous treatise'.

What we seem to have, then, in the MS tradition is an edition of the ancient Homily on the Greatness of the Mysteries, prepared by 'Abdisho', Metropolitan of Elam about A. D. 1222. The edition consisted in a set of prefaces, the insertion of rubrics in the text, and also some additions which were almost entirely in prose. One of these is concerned with the necessity of some form of testifying penitence before attending the Eucharist, a topic which formed no part of the original Homily.

In the Edition Narsai's name was mentioned just before the beginning of the Homily, but only by way of naming the metre. The authorship therefore, unless there be some note extant in the MS at Séert (no. 76), must be inferred from internal evidence, and Dom Connolly has shewn how strongly this internal evidence points to Narsai.

I conclude by an extract from a letter Dom Connolly wrote to me while this paper was being prepared. He says:

'As to the antiquity of the Homily there is a point worth noting, which I have just indicated at the end of my Introduction (p. xli. note 4): "The mere fact that A [Homily xvii, discussed in this paper] treats only of the *missa fidelium* strikes me as a note of antiquity". What I meant was (though this only occurred to me at the last moment) that the Homilies A, B, C, are really *catechetical instructions* like those of Cyril of Jerusalem—and indeed all three of them seem to shew acquaintance with Cyril's Catecheses (see p. 28, note 4; p. 38, note 1; p. 51, note 2).

'In A (Hom. xvii) the author is, I believe, addressing those who have just witnessed the Mysteries for the first time. They had seen all the earlier part as catechumens often before, and so he has nothing to say about it, but begins with the dismissal of the unbaptized and non-communicants. Later people, like "George of Arbel" (cf. also George of the Arab Tribes, and Bar Kepha), go through the whole from beginning to end, but the Catechists don't. They only deal first with baptism and then with the "Mysteries" or central part of the Mass. Such instructions were absolutely necessary, as nothing could be said about the "Mysteries" during the time of catechumenate. Hence all such—Cyril's, Ambrose's, the *De Sacramentis*—have this limitation of scope.'

The conclusion is, that our Homily was composed while the Catechumenate was still a living institution.

F. C. BURKITT.

MARCAN USAGE: NOTES, CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL, ON THE SECOND GOSPEL

(continued).

IX. *Lexical notes on (1) some ἀπαξ λεγόμενα: words used once in Mark, and nowhere else in the Gospels: (2) some words or phrases of common occurrence in Mark but rare in Matthew or Luke.*¹

(1)

ἀποστερεῖν.

MARK x 19 μὴ ἀποστερήσης. The word occurs among the list of the Commandments, and is clearly intended to be one of them: but because it does not in terms correspond to the Old Testament lists, it is dropped by both Matthew and Luke. It is quite certainly genuine,

¹ The notes that follow are rather miscellaneous in character, but I hope that they may be found to present not a few points of interest.