

## Translation, Amplification, Paraphrase. Some Comments on the Syriac, Greek and Coptic Versions of the *Abgar Letter*.

[Traducción, amplificación, paráfrasis. Algunos comentarios sobre las versiones siríaca, griega y copta de las cartas de Abgar]

**Tomasz POLAŃSKI**

Jan Kochanowski University of Kielce, Poland  
tomaszpolanski@yahoo.com

*In memoriam Magistri mei*

*Andrae Zaborski*

**Resumen:** En este artículo se analizan algunas estructuras gramaticales de una selección de textos coptos, siríacos y griegos y se los evalúa como traducciones y versiones. Se centra principalmente en la correspondencia Abgar/Jesús de Eusebio de Cesárea en griego, un pasaje relevante de la *Doctrina Addai siríaca*, y un par de textos coptos con el *Papyrus Anastasy 9* de Leiden y el *Papyrus Régnier 3151* de Viena, y referencia a ellos de las inscripciones griegas de Éfeso, Pontos (Gurdju, Hadji Keui), Édesa, y Filipos (siglos IV-VI).

**Abstract:** The paper discusses certain grammatical structures of a number of the selected Coptic, Syriac and Greek texts and assesses them as translations and versions. It focuses mainly on Eusebius of Caesarea's Greek Abgar/Jesus correspondence, a relevant passage from the Syriac *Doctrina Addai*, and a couple of Coptic texts with the Leyden *Papyrus Anastasy 9* and *Papyrus Régnier 3151* from Vienna, and refer them to the Greek inscriptions from Ephesus, Pontus (Gurdju, Hadji Keui), Edessa, and Philippi (4-6<sup>th</sup> centuries).

**Palabras clave:** Carta de Abgar. Griego. Siríaco. Copto. Tradición literaria. Papiros. Inscripciones. Técnica de traducción.

**Keywords:** Abgar Letter. Greek. Syriac. Coptic. Literary tradition. Papyri. Inscriptions. Translation technique.



It is not easy to write about texts which have been so thoroughly studied, discussed and commented as the apocryphal correspondence of King Abgar Ukkomo and Jesus. An ephemeral original text, its mysterious origins and unknown chronology and authorship, and its later numerous linguistic versions make everything even more difficult.<sup>1</sup> In addition the apocryphon won a

---

<sup>1</sup> The reader can consult a concise and apt summary of the historical circumstances of the apocryph's origin with valuable bibliographic footnotes in W. Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum. Ein Versuch ihrer Deutung* (Munich: s.n., 1971), pp. 295-296; F. Haase, *Altchristliche Kirchengeschichte nach orientalischen Quellen* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1925), p. 70; W. Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*, Beiträge zur histor. Theologie 10 (1934), p. 40 (dated in Eusebius' period, 3/4<sup>th</sup> century); the origins related to Bishop Kune in Speyer (1971), p. 296; Haase (1925), pp. 70-90; G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* «Studi e Testi 118», (Città del Vaticano, 1944), vol. 1, 237f.; E. Kirsten, *Edessa*, RACH 4, cc.552-597, pp. 588-93. R. Duval, *Histoire politique, religieuse et littéraire d'Édesse jusqu'à la première croisade*, (Paris: Imprimerie International, 1892), old and good; E. von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder. Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende*, (Leipzig: JC Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1899), TU 18.1.2; R. Lipsius, "Zur edessenischen Abgarsage" *Jahrb. f. prot. Théologie* 7 (1881), pp. 189ff.; J. Segal, *Edessa. 'The Blessed City'*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur*, 1 (Freiburg: Herder & CO., 1913), pp. 590-596; Bardenhewer 4, (1924), pp. 326; I. Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia Syriaca*, (Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1958), pp.

great authority in ancient Syriac Christianity in its all branches, that is in the Nestorian, Jacobite, and Chalcedonian Churches. This air of the text's holiness was also gradually transferred to other cultural circles of early Christianity and in this way it also became holy for the Arab, Latin, Greek, Georgian, Armenian, Coptic, and later Slavic-speaking Christian communities.<sup>2</sup>

---

41f. (dated: medium saeculum tertium aut paulo prius); A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, (Bonn: A. Marcus und E. Webers Verlag, 1922, repr.1968), 27f.; L. J. Tixeront, *Les origines de l'église d'Édesse*, (Paris: Maisonneuve et CH. Leclerc éditeurs, 1888); I. Ortiz de Urbina, "Le origini del cristianesimo in Edessa", *Gregorianum* 15 (1934), pp. 82-99.

<sup>2</sup> Speyer (1971), p. 296; Haase (1925), pp. 70-80; Egeria c.17,1; 19,2. 8f.13.16.19; P. Devos, "Égérie à Édesse. S.Thomas l'apôtre, le roi Abgar", *Analecta Bollandiana* 85 (1967), pp. 392-400; C. Picard, "Un texte nouveau de la correspondance entre Abgar d'Osroène et Jésus-Christ gravé sur une porte de ville, à Philippes (Macédoine)", *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 44 (1920), pp. 41-69; H. Blok, "Die koptischen Abgarbriefe des Leidender Museums", *Acta Orientalia* 5 (1927), pp. 238-251; S. Giversen, "Ad Abgarum. The Sahidic Version of the Letter to Abgar on a Wooden Tablet", *Acta Orientalia* 24 (1959), pp. 71-82; Y. Abd al-Masih, "Bohairic Letter", *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'Archéologie Orientale* 45 (1947), pp. 65-80, BIFAO (1954), pp. 13-43; R. W. Thomson, *History of the Armenians*, (New York: s.n., 1981), p. 95f., 142-162; E. Mescherskaya, *Legenda ob Avgare*, (Moskva, s.n., 1984) (Slavic); J. P. Monferer-Sala, "Leyenda del rey Abgar", *Archivo Teológico Granadino* 62, (1999), pp. 107-140; E. Drioton, "Un apocryphe anti-arien: La version copte de la correspondance d'Abgar, roi d'Édesse, avec Notre-Seigneur", *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 20, 2 sér., (1915-1917), pp. 306-326, 337-373; L. Alishan, *Doctrina Addai*, (Venice: s.n., 1868); G. Haile, "The Legacy of Abgar in Ethiopic Tradition", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 55 (1989), pp. 375-410; A. Palmer, "The Logos of the Mandyllion: Folktale or Sacred Narrative? A New Edition of the Acts of Thaddaeus", in L. Greisiger, C. Rammelt and J. Tubach (eds), *Edessa in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit «Beiruter Texte und Studien»* 116 (Beirut: Ergon Verlag GmbH, 2009), pp. 117-207; M. von Oppenheim, F. Hiller von Gaertringen, Höhleninschrift, *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 23 Juli, (1914), pp.

The recent decades have brought a new wave of interest in Edessan studies, which have mainly focused on cultural environment, Christological doctrinal controversies, the impact of the political, military and ethnic history, and the earliest history of Christian art.<sup>3</sup> In those discussions the Manichean and Judeo-Christian aspects have come to the fore among those discussions.<sup>4</sup> King Abgar and Jesus' correspondence has also been more thoroughly studied in its broader Syriac literary context, as a component of the literary structure which also included the stories of Protonice's finding of the True Cross, the evangelical mission of Addai, the messenger of Christ, in Edessa, and the correspondence of Abgar and the Emperor Tiberius, and the *Historiae Mar Mari*. The

---

817-828; S. Grébault, "Les relations entre Abgar et Jésus", *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 3 ser. I (XXI), no 1, (1918-19), pp. 73-87 (Ethiopian); P. Bruns, "Abgarlegende", in S. Döpp, W. Greelings, et al. (eds), *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur*, (Freiburg: Herder, 2002), pp. 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> L. Greisiger, C. Rammelt, J. Tubach (eds), *Edessa in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit. Religion, Kultur und Politik zwischen Ost und West. Beiträge des internationalen Edessa-Symposiums in Halle an der Saale, 14.-17.Juli 2005*, «Beiruter Texte und Studien» 116, (Beirut: Ergon Verlag GmbH, 2009); T. Polański, "Religious Conflicts, Cultural Eclecticism and Parthian Art: Edessa in the Early Byzantine and Early Islamic Period", a review article in *Folia Orientalia* 51 (2014), pp. 438-449; S. Brock, "Transformation of the Edessa Portrait of Christ", *Journal of the Assyrian Academic Studies* 18 (2004), pp. 46-56; A. Cameron, "The Mandylion and Byzantine Iconoclasm" in H.L.Kessler, G.Wolf, *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, «Villa Spelman Colloquia» 6 (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998), pp. 33-54; T. Polański, *Christian Art in Oriental Literatures: Greek, Syriac and Coptic Sources from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> Century*, «Grazer Beiträge SB» 15 (Horn-Wien: Verlag F. Berger & Söhne, 2014); Polański (2013), pp. 139-143.

<sup>4</sup> H. J. W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980); H.J.W. Drijvers, "Addai and Mani", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 221 (1983), pp. 171-185; A. Desreumaux, "La figure du roi Abgar d'Édesse", in L. Greisiger, C. Rammelt, J. Tubach (2009), pp. 31-45, reviewed by T. Polański (2014), p. 443f.

recent research has refreshed our knowledge, and has brought new conclusions and new questions. The tool of interpolation, which has been extensively applied in the research, seems to have undermined some of our traditional opinions on the chronology of the highly venerated apocryph, and its origins and ideology, which we inherited from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century text editors and commentators. The professional quality of the texts editions, commentaries and papers of some German, French and English Orientalists of the *belle époque* like W. Cureton, G. Philips, K. Brockelmann, T. Nöldecke, still arouse the admiration of the contemporary philologist who works with early Christian Coptic, Syriac and Greek texts. I think that the interpolation theory applied to those early texts may lead to erroneous conclusions if used in isolation from the analysis of their original Syriac and Coptic versions, from their original grammatical structures: syntactic, phraseological and lexical. If we can find anomalies in those structures then we can guess that what we have is an interpolation. Otherwise, our conclusions may be only arbitrary and highly hypothetical.

I am not going to present any startling new facts which have not been already observed. I only want to compare and review certain grammatical structures of a number of the selected Coptic, Syriac and Greek texts and assess them as translations and versions. I will focus mainly on Eusebius of Caesarea's Greek Christ/Abgar correspondence, a relevant passage from the Syriac *Doctrina Addai* (=DA), and a couple of Coptic texts with the Leyden *Papyrus Anastasy* 9 and *Papyrus Régnier* 3151 from Vienna, and refer them to the Greek inscriptions from Ephesus, Pontus (Gurdju, Hadji Keui), Edessa, and

Philippi (5-6<sup>th</sup> centuries), which have preserved the Abgar and Jesus correspondence on stone monuments.<sup>5</sup>

Now I am going to review some grammatical, phraseological and lexical units in the *Letter's* Syriac version preserved in the *Doctrina Addai*, and Eusebius' Greek translation of the allegedly original *Letter of Abgar* drawn from the Edessan ecclesiastical archives.

In the heading of Eusebius' translation, in the *Letter's* *chairein* formula Abgar Ukkomo, Abgar the Black, is rendered as τοπάρχης Ἐδέσσης, the toparch (governor) of Edessa. The addressee is Jesus, who appears in the Syriac *Letter* as ܐܣܝܐ ܛܒܐ ܐܝܠܘܗܝܐ *āsyā tāḥā*, the Good Healer, and is addressed in Greek as σωτήρι ἀγαθῷ, the Good Saviour.<sup>6</sup> The addressee formula describes Jesus as ܕ-ܐܬܗܝܐ ܒ-ܐܬܪܐ ܕ-ܕܘܪܫܠܝܡ, *d-ethzi b-atrā d-Ōrêšlem*, who has appeared in the place of Jerusalem. The Greek translator imitates this salutation: ἀναφανέντι ἐν τόπῳ Ἱεροσολύμων. The passive participle ἀναφανέντι is applied for ܕ-ܐܬܗܝܐ *d-ethzi* relativum, Ethpe (passive, medial). ἐν τόπῳ Ἱεροσολύμων is a Syriac calque (τόπος for ܐܬܪܐ, which in this context should be interpreted as a city, country, or district).<sup>7</sup> The heading of the *Letter* is concluded by the idiomatic ܡܪܝܢܐ ܡܪܝܢܐ *mār(y)*

<sup>5</sup> G. Philipps Labubna bar Sennak, *Mallpānutā d-Addai Šliḥā. The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle*, (London: s.n., 1876); Drioton (1915-1917); Giversen (1959); *Eusebii Caesariensis Opera*, ed. by W.Dindorf, «Historiae Ecclesiasticae» 1-10 (vol. 4), (Lipsiae: Teubner, 1871); R. Lipsius, M. Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum I*, (Leipzig: s.n., 1891), pp. 273-283; T. Nöldeke, *Kurzgefasste syrische Grammatik*, (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1898); T. Nöldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*. Translated by J.Crichton (London: T.O. Weigel, 1904); Brockelmann (1968); Von Oppenheim, von Gaertringen (1914); Picard (1920); Von Dobschütz (1900).

<sup>6</sup> Inscr.Philippi: Ἀβγάρος Οὐχαμᾶ = Inscr.Euchaita/Gurdju; Inscr.Philippi is missing σωτήρι ἀγαθῷ.

<sup>7</sup> Inscr.Philippi: ἐν πόλει; Inscr.Ephes.: ἐν πόλι.

*šlām*, ‘greetings to you, my Lord’ which is also rendered by the idiomatic χαίρειν in Eusebius’ version.

ܕܠ ܡܫܠܡܐ ܠܥܝܢܝܗ ܠܥܝܢܝܗ ܠܥܝܢܝܗ ܕܠܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

*šem’et̄ ‘layk w-‘al āsyūtāk d-lā (h)wā b-sammānē wa b-‘eqqārē massē att*

“I have heard about you and your healings and that you have not healed with herbs and roots”

It is literally given as ἤκουσται μοι τὰ περὶ σοῦ καὶ τῶν σῶν ἰαμάτων, ὡς ἄνευ φαρμάκων καὶ βοτανῶν ὑπὸ σοῦ γινομένων.<sup>8</sup> I think ἤκουσται μοι is a Syriac calque, and so is τὰ περὶ σοῦ καὶ τῶν σῶν. The Syriac phraseological structures and word order is literally mirrored in Greek. It is interesting to observe that Syriac idiomatic ‘herbs and roots’ (=medicines) has been literally and skilfully rendered as φαρμάκων καὶ βοτανῶν, medicines and plants. The relative ܕܠ ܡܫܠܡܐ ... ܠܥܝܢܝܗ ܕ, *d-lā (h)wā ... massē att* (2 sing. Praesens, ܐܘܪܐ *assi Pa* has the *intensivum* meaning) has been translated with a participle phrase ὑπὸ σοῦ γινομένων, which is syntactically joined to the previous τῶν σῶν ἰαμάτων. In this way the translator has avoided a noun and verb which derive from the same root (ܥܡܪܐ *āsyūtāk* and ܕܠ ܡܫܠܡܐ *massē att*), which would sound cacophonous in Greek, although it does not in Syriac. This seems to speak good of the Greek interpreter.

<sup>8</sup> Inscr.Gurdju, ll.3-4 reflects Eusebius’ version almost exactly with a minor dialectical change ἤκουσθε for Eusebius’ ἤκουσται = Inscr.Philippi ll.4-5. Picard (1920) restoring illegible ἤκουσται on the basis of Eusebius’ text.







ܘܩܕܘܢܐ ܕܗܠܐܢ ܬܡܡܝܗܘܬܐ ܪܘܪܒܘܬܐ ܫܝܡܘܬܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܐܬܬܐ ܫܡܥܬ ܒܪܥܝܢܐ  
*w-ḳad hālēn tammihātā rawrbūtā šem‘et d-‘āḇed att, sāmeṭ b-re’yān(y)*

“when I heard of those great miracles that you have done, it occurred to me that ...”

καὶ ταῦτα πάντα ἀκούσας περὶ σοῦ κατὰ νοῦν ἐθέμην τὸ ἕτερον  
 τῶν δύο (= the Gurdju inscr. has the same wording, l.7).<sup>12</sup>

The relative clause *d-‘āḇed att* ܕܥܒܕܐ, has been rendered by *περὶ σοῦ*, which is tolerable. *κατὰ νοῦν ἐθέμην* offers another example of a Syriac calque ܫܡܥܬ ܒܪܥܝܢܐ *sāmeṭ b-re’yān(y)* (ܫܡܥܬ *sām* put, place, ܪܥܝܢܐ *re’yānā* mind; I put it in my mind, it occurred to me, I came to the conclusion). The Syriac temporal clause ܘܩܕܘܢܐ *w-ḳad šem‘et*, ‘when I heard’ has been rendered by a smooth Greek temporal *participium coniunctum* in compliance with the principles of Greek literary syntax (ἀκούσας).

ܕܘܠܐܗܐ ܕܐܘܪܫܠܝܡ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ  
 ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܥܒܕܐ

*d-aw allāhā att da-nḥett men šmayyā wa-‘ḇadṭ hālēn, aw breh att d-allāhā  
 d- hālēn kolhēn ‘āḇed att*

“(It occurred to me) that either you are God who came down from heaven and does all these things, or you are the son of God that you do all these things)”

<sup>12</sup> Picard reconstructed this part of the Philippi inscription from extant ] τα ἄκου [in ll. 8-9, which have been destroyed. His reconstruction is highly hypothetical.

The parallel Greek passage even preserves the Syriac word order. It is simple and clear. ἢ ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ θεὸς καὶ καταβὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ποιεῖς ταῦτα, ἢ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ ποιῶν ταῦτα.<sup>13</sup> The Greek imitation of the Syriac structures is also mirrored in the verb forms: ποιεῖς for ܠܒܕܬܘܿ *wa-‘bādt* 2 person present, and the participle ποιῶν for the Syriac active participle ܕܒܕܬܘܿ *‘ābed* (*‘ābed* is a component of the periphrastic present tense, *‘ābed att*). Probably only an insignificant πάντα for ܕܟܠܗܘܿ *kolhēn* is missing in the Greek translation.

We have a good opportunity to read the next passage phrase by phrase in order to see the interpreter’s translation technique: ܠܗܘܿ *meṭṭul hānā* (for this reason) διὰ τοῦτο τοίνυν / ܕܕܒܕܬܘܿ *ketbetē* (I have written) γράψας / ܕܒܕܬܘܿ *b’êt mennāk* (and asked you) ἐδεήθην σου / ܕܕܕܬܘܿ *d-tētē lwāt(y)* (that you come to me) σκυλῆναι πρὸς ἐμὲ / ܕܕܕܘܿ *kad sāged-nā lāk* (because I worship you) (the Greek version omits this clause) / ܕܕܕܘܿ *w-kebā meddem dit li tassē* (so that you may heal each of my illnesses) / καὶ τὸ πάθος, ὃ ἔχω, θεραπεῦσαι / ܕܕܕܘܿ *ak d-haymnetē bāk* (because I have believed in you) is also missing in Eusebius’ text. ܕܕܕܘܿ *ketbetē b’êt mennāk d-tētē lwāt(y)* is probably the most difficult stylistic figure in the Syriac *Letter* to be rendered in Greek. It may seem to the Syriac reader that the sentence is not entirely correct, because it opens with two verbs in the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular (ܕܕܕܘܿ *ketbetē* rendered as a participle in Greek) without the usual preposition *wa-* or *d-* etc. In addition ܕܕܕܘܿ *b’êt* (ܕܕܕܘܿ *b’ā*, *neb’ē* to seek, look for) can be confused with ܕܕܕܘܿ *b’aṭ* to urge on, spur, which would also make sense. The

<sup>13</sup> All we can read of the relevant part of the Philippi inscription: ἢ ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ θεὸς (l.10), and next only the concluding ταῦτα (l.10). The Gurdju inscription exactly reflects Eusebius’ version (ll.7-9).





“Although this city of mine is small, however it is beautiful and sufficient for two persons to live in peace”

The Greek translation has σεμνή (noble, venerable) for ܫܦܝܪܐ *šapirā* (beautiful). It also cut the concluding Syriac epistolographic formula ‘to live in peace’ (ܠܡܥܡܪ ܒܫܠܘܡ ܠܡܥܡܪ ܒܫܠܘܡ *lme‘mar bāh b-šelyā*). The Greek reader may actually have the feeling that the *Letter* in Eusebius’ version lost its original concluding formula, probably a simple *chaire* or *eirene* expression. This comment is also valid for the parallel passage of the Gurdju inscription.

What I have shown above in comparing the Syriac and Greek texts is enough to warrant the observation that Eusebius’ version of Abgar’s *Letter* is a translation from Syriac. We can even reconstruct the anonymous Greek scribe’s translation technique. The Syriac lexical, phraseological and syntactic substrate is only too clear for the Syriac-Greek reader. In my opinion the Greek translator’s Syriac competence was impeccable. He was inclined to shorten and simplify the prolific, ornate literary style of the Syriac source text. It was probably his task to make his Greek version as economical as possible, I presume. However, his departures from the original semantic meaning and reductions do not change the content of the *Letter*’s message. It is also interesting to observe that another Greek version of Abgar’s *Letter* which we know from the Gurdju inscription presents a somewhat longer rendering, which comes closer to the Syriac *DA* text in some points than Eusebius’ translation.

Eusebius emphasised the authenticity of Christ’s authorship. He did his best to convince us of his reliability. He wrote in his testimony that he himself visited the public archives of Edessa, where the ancient chronicles were kept (ἔχεις καὶ τούτων

ἀνάγραπτον τὴν μαρτυρίαν, ἐκ τῶν κατὰ Ἐδεσσαν τὸ τηρικανῦτα βεσιλευομένην πόλιν γραμματοφυλακείων ληφθεῖσαν). The chronicles, he continued, also contained the deeds of Abgar (ἐν τοῖς αὐτόθι δημοσίοις χάριταις, τοῖς τὰ παλαιὰ καὶ τὰ ἀμφὶ τὸν Ἄβγαρον πραχθέντα περιέχουσι). The Edessan archivists brought the Christ-Abgar correspondence to Eusebius and translated exactly it for him from Syriac (ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρχείων ἡμῖν ἀναλεφθεισῶν, καὶ τόνδε αὐτοῖς ῥήμασιν ἐκ τῆς Σύρων φωνῆς μεταβληθεισῶν) (Eus. *HE* 1,13,5).<sup>18</sup> Reference to the authority of ancient libraries was a frequently used means of persuasion applied by ancient writers, including their lesser kin, the forgers of document, no matter whether Pagan, Jewish and Christian. When in his *Kestoi* Julius Africanus was quoting a number of fake Homeric verses of magical meaning he resorted to the authority of libraries in Jerusalem and Nysa as proof of their authenticity.<sup>19</sup> Like Eusebius, the anonymous author of the *Acts of Sharbel* invoked the reputation of Edessa's archives as a source of the reliable, ancient Christian tradition similarly to Eusebius.<sup>20</sup> When the anonymous forger of the Coptic eulogy of John the Baptist pretending to be St. John Chrysostomos, cited a passage from the alleged *Gospel of Saint James*, the Brother of Christ, he authenticated it by pointing to a collection of ancient writings from the Apostolic times, which he had allegedly found in a church

<sup>18</sup> Segal (1970), p. 62, n. 3. His translation of the passage is ambiguous. I have translated it again to emphasise the passive forms: 'it was brought to me and it was translated to me.' B. Altaner, A. Stuiber, *Patrologia*. Translated by P. Pachciarek (Warsaw: Ed. Pax, 1990), p. 218, 'an alleged document form the Edessan archives.'

<sup>19</sup> Speyer (1971), p. 69, n. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Speyer (1971), p. 69, n. 6.

library in Jerusalem.<sup>21</sup> Another pious forger supplemented the Coptic *Life of Saint Joseph the Carpenter* with Christ's words which, according to the forger's testimony, had been written and preserved in a library in Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup> Incidentally the *Life of Saint Joseph the Carpenter* in Coptic is a great literary composition. W. Speyer collected a treasury of rhetorical means of persuasion exploited by Christian forgers which are valid for the early Christian and early Byzantine period: the ancient libraries of Edessa and Jerusalem as the sources of the most venerable and trustworthy tradition, the Apostolic date of the writings, the Brother of Christ as an author, the authority of a famous Church Father. It certainly worked. Let us conclude this chapter with two judicious comments by Speyer: ‚ein Eusebios nicht in der Lage war, den unechten Briefwechsel zwischen Abgar und Jesus als Fälschung zu durchschauen‘.<sup>23</sup> And he wisely concluded: ‚Die Geschichte der literarischen Leichtgläubigkeit ist noch nicht geschrieben.‘<sup>24</sup> It would be good to remember that since the early Christian times some critics, as for example St. Augustine, regarded the correspondence as inauthentic and apocryphal (*ep.*230; *c.Faust.*28,4; *cons.ev.* 1,7,11). This is what the author of the *Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis* (494), considered it to be, and therefore not admitted for use in the liturgy of the Great Church.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Speyer (1971), p. 69f., n. 1,70.

<sup>22</sup> Speyer (1971), p. 70, n. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Speyer (1971), p. 201.

<sup>24</sup> Speyer (1971), p. 85. Andreas of Crete used the Abgar correspondence as an argument in his anti-iconoclastic polemics in defence of icons, Speyer (1971), p. 285, n. 2.

<sup>25</sup> The *Decretum Gelasianum* on the Abgar correspondence: Mansi 8, 152, 169f.=Thiel, *Epist.Rom.pont.*469=PL 59,164; *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et*



I think it is also important that the document which was used by the Greek translator was not merely Abgar's *Letter* but the *Doctrina Addai* in its early, probably original version. The texts of Abgar's *Letter* and Christ's answer in Eusebius' *Church History* are followed by an extensive passage which can be regarded as a translation from the *Doctrina Addai* as we know it today (Eus. *HE* 1, 13, 11- the beginning of 20). Certainly, there are some changes. The Greek version does not contain the story of Christ's portrait painted by Hannon (this is a short passage in the Syriac *DA*). The Greek translator omitted the name of the Roman Emperor Tiberius. Neither did he describe the place in Edessa where Thaddeus preached to the crowds summoned by King Abgarus (according to the *DA* it happened in Bēt Tḥārā, in the square of Bēt 'widā). In addition the Greek text gives the essence of Thaddeus' teaching, which is absent from the Syriac version: the coming of Christ, His miracles and teachings, his Crucifixion, Descent into the Abyss and Ascension (from the beginning of Euseb. *HE* 1,13,20 on). This latter relatively extensive passage has no equivalent in the Syriac *Doctrina Addai*. In the parallel section Addai speaks only of *melltā d-ḥayyē*, the word of life. These conclusions are important because the earliest Syriac manuscript cannot be dated before c. AD 400, that is roughly a hundred years after the Greek *Letter* copied by Eusebius of Caesarea (*HE* 1, 13, 6-8). N. Pigulevska was probably right when she dated the original Syriac *Letter* to the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>26</sup>

---

*de la liturgie* 1,97, Ed. F. Cabrol, H. Leclercq (Paris : Letouzey et Ané, 1924). The 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the decree is significantly later than the writings of St. Augustine (7<sup>th</sup> century), G. Rowekamp, "Decretum Gelasianum", LACL (1924), p. 188; Altaner, Stuiber (1990), p. 604.

<sup>26</sup> N. Pigulewska, *Kultura syryjska we wczesnym średniowieczu*, (Warszawa: PAX, 1989), p. 215.

We can guess that in all likelihood Abgar's apocryphon might have been even earlier (II/III century AD?).<sup>27</sup> However, so far we have not been able to prove it.

Eusebius also adduced Jesus' written answer to Abgar, which according to his testimony, was also preserved in Syriac in the archives of Urfa (Eus. *HE* 1,13,10-11). Our Syriac text, however, clearly speaks only of Christ's words directed to the king's messenger Hannon in the palace of the Jewish archpriests in Jerusalem ܘܠܗܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ *zel w-emar leh lmārāk d-šaddrāk šed(y)* (go and tell your lord who sent you to me). It is only in this point that the Greek letter begins. We are in a good situation, because we have at our disposal two well-preserved Greek inscriptions which contain both letters, Christ's and Abgar's (Gurdju/Euchaita and Ephesus) and another well-preserved inscription, which shows only the letter of Jesus (Edessa).<sup>28</sup> The inscription of Philippi once presented a complete correspondence. Now Jesus' letter of Philippi cannot be deciphered except for some characters. Consequently, in this paper it cannot be of assistance. The reader can consult Picard's tentative reconstruction in his brilliant paper (1920).<sup>29</sup> The inscription of Hadji Keui, which once contained only Christ's letter is unfortunately almost illegible.

Let us read both texts again to observe that the relevant Greek text is largely a mirror reflection of the Syriac source text:

<sup>27</sup> Ortiz de Urbina (1958), p. 41: medium saeculum tertium aut paulo prius.

<sup>28</sup> This is a big inscription, 1.5m/0.8m, discovered at the entrance to a rock tomb in Kyrk Maghara, Urfa by von Oppenheim. The reader can find a good and clear drawing by M. Lübke in von Oppenheim, von Gaertringen (1914), p. 824, and its transcription, p. 825.

<sup>29</sup> Picard (1920), pp. 47-48.

ܬܘܒܝܬܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܗܝܝܬܐ ܕܗܝܝܬܐ ܕܗܝܝܬܐ

*tubayk d-kaḏ lā ḥzaytan hayment bi*

“blessed are you because you have not seen me, yet you believed in me”

μακάριος εἶ πιστεύσας ἐν ἐμοὶ μὴ ἑωρακώς με.<sup>30</sup>

The Greek translator changed the *ordo verborum* from a-b to b-a, which is a stylistic, rhetorical device, and rendered the personal verb form ܗܝܝܬܐ *ḥzaytan(y)* 3<sup>rd</sup> person sing. by ἑωρακώς με, the perfect participle, which is one more proof of his good understanding of Syriac and his professional skills in idiomatic Greek translation. ܩܬܝܒܐ ܕܗܝܝܬܐ *ktīb gēr ‘lay* (then it is written about me), γέγραπται γὰρ περὶ ἐμοῦ. It is worthwhile focusing for a while on this phrase. This is an exact Syriac imitation, according to the principles followed by the *Septuagint* interpreters.

ܕܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܗܝܝܬܐ ܕܗܝܝܬܐ ܕܗܝܝܬܐ

*d-aylēn d-ḥāzeyn li lā nhaymnun bi*

<sup>30</sup> The Gurdju inscription reflects the same rendering with a number of minor changes, mostly dialectal in nature: ὅτι ἐπίστευσας (l.13); the Edessa inscr. develops Eusebius’ introductory blessing into an extensive passage, which has no parallel in the extant Greek texts. This probably came from a later development of the apocryphon (the inscription is dated to the 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century): μακάριος εἶ Ἄυγαρε καὶ ἡ πόλης σου ἣτις καλεῖται Ἐδεσσα μακάριος εἶ ὅτι ἐπίστευσας ἐν ἐμοὶ μὴ ἑωρακώς με, ὅτι ὕγεια ἐτοιμασθήσεται σοι διὰ παντός (ll.1-3).

“that those who have seen me they would not believe in me”<sup>31</sup>

τοὺς ἑωρακότας με μὴ πιστεύσειν μοι.<sup>32</sup>

It is interesting to notice that the Greek translator employed reported speech, which is usual in literary Greek. The following Greek ‘and that those who have not seen me will believe and live’ is absent from the Syriac text, but it appears in the Gurdju inscription (dated to the 5th century).

This phrase deserves special attention. It is an exact imitation of the difficult idiomatic Syriac usage, which apparently challenged his translation skills. Eusebius would have us believe that his aim was to effect a Greek translation as soon as possible, yet this passage (like several others) is indicative of smacks of painstaking labour, weighing up the pros and cons of all the potential solutions to the translation problems, and choosing the one he judged best.

ܘܕܐܟܬܒܬ ܠܝ ܕܥܬܐ ܠܡܘܬܐܝܟܝܢ

*w-da-ktabt li d-êtē lwātāḳ*

“because you read to me so that I may come to you”

περὶ δὲ οὗ ἔγραψάς μοι ἐλθεῖν πρὸς σέ.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Jn 20,29: Jesus’ words to Thomas: ‘happy are those who have not seen and yet believe’ (*The Jerusalem Bible*).

<sup>32</sup> Eusebius: γέγραπται γὰρ περὶ ἐμοῦ τοὺς ἑωρακότας με μὴ πιστεύσειν μοι, καὶ ἵνα οἱ μὴ ἑωρακότες αὐτοὶ πιστεύσωσι καὶ ζήσονται. This version is exactly preserved by the Gurdju inscription with minor, local variations ll.13-14 (γέγραπτε, ζήσωντε, ἑωρακόταις, πιστεύσωσιν; ὅτι in place of the reported speech in Eusebius’ translation). This passage is not in the Edessa inscription.

The translator's effort to adjust the Greek syntax to the Syriac structures is clearly visible. This is a sophisticated fist of linguistic gymnastics. Confused by the difficult Syriac meaning and compelled to imitate Jesus' words as exactly as possible including the verb order, the interpreter moved *haw meddem* (all those things, everything) to the beginning of the first dependent clause with the 2nd person sing. verb (ἔγραψας for ܕܟܬܒܬ, *da-kṭabt*) and made it into a relative clause (οὗ). Next he replaced the usual Syriac purpose clause by the aorist infinitive of purpose (ἐλθεῖν πρὸς σέ for ܕܠܐܕ ܠܠܐ, *d-êṭē lwātāk*).

ܘܗܘܐ ܕܠܐܕ ܠܠܐ ܕܠܐܕ ܠܠܐ ܕܠܐܕ ܠܠܐ ܕܠܐܕ ܠܠܐ ܕܠܐܕ ܠܠܐ

*haw meddem d-eštaddret 'law lhārkā mekkêl eṭṭallaq leh*

“Because you read to me asking me to come to you, (I would like to say, I must say, I want to say that), all those things for which I was sent here henceforth they have been completed”

δέον ἐστί πάντα, δι' ἃ ἀπεστάλην, ἐνταῦθα πληρῶσαί με.<sup>34</sup>

δι' ἃ ἀπεστάλην for ܕܠܐܕ ܠܠܐ, *d-eštaddret 'law* is a good solution. δέον ἐστί is the Greek translator's invention which documents his translation problems. They are not at all easy. The problems with δέον and ܕܠܐܕ ܠܠܐ, *mekkêl eṭṭallaq leh* are well-known to both ancient and modern translators. Let us try to understand the Greek interpretation: As regards my visit, of which you wrote to me, it is binding (needful, I have to) (δέον ἐστί) to accomplish everything

<sup>33</sup> The Gurdju inscription has the same clause with a local form ἐλθῖν for literary ἐλθεῖν (l.15); the same version is also preserved in the Edessan inscription (ll.3-4).

<sup>34</sup> The Gurdju and Edessan inscriptions have the same version.

(πάντα ... πληρῶσαί με) for which I was sent here (δι' ἃ ἀπεστάλην, ἐνταῦθα).<sup>35</sup> Segal followed this interpretation: I must first complete here all for which I was sent. The problem is, however, that the Syriac author wrote 'all those things for which I was sent here henceforth **they have been completed.**' *ettallaq* ethpaal (ܐܬܠܩ ܦܥܐܠ) is the perfect jussive, to be finished, vanished. In my view it has no future meaning. If so the Syrian writer would have used the imperfect (*nettallaq*). The Greek translator probably felt confused that Christ, who was still alive, said that his mission had already been fulfilled, when it had not. Presumably the Syriac author meant something else. The intention of the Syriac writer was probably different. Really he was a writer! 'When you bow before your lord, who sent you to me, I will have been crucified and will already be at the side of my Father in Heaven.' I mentioned a somewhat similar case at the beginning of Christ's *Letter*. The Greek writer supplemented the Syriac text with 'those who have not seen me will believe and live.' He apparently felt confused that the Syriac text emphasised 'those who have seen me yet they would not believe in me.' It is the theology which has influenced the translation. When did it happen? It is difficult to say. The reader can consult G. Ostrogorsky's excellent *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Bilderstreites* (1929), where the reader can find a lot of relevant material. The Iconoclastic controversies stained with human blood, torture, imprisonment, persecution and a massive wave of art destruction used, or rather abused the theological

---

<sup>35</sup> Note the erroneous dot in Dindorf's standard edition, before ἐνταῦθα. ἐνταῦθα is actually an adverb of place, but in the Syriac text it plays a different role. ܠܗܪܟܐ *lhārka* is an adverb of direction, to this place, to this world, here.

argumentation based on the Church Fathers. In fact most of these arguments were only apparently based on the early Christian Classics, which were invoked in theological controversies regardless of relevance or veracity. W. Speyer's two great books *Die literarische Fälschung im Altertum* (1971) and *Büchervernichtung und Zensur des Geistes bei Heiden, Juden und Christen* (1981) may be recommended as a competent introduction and guide to the problem of censorship, distortion and mutilation of the manuscript tradition. However, it is not the theology which really matters in our analysis, but the translation technique, the Syriac-Greek translator at work. We can now say: Habet! We have caught him red-handed. The developed syntactic and phraseological structures of Eusebius' version cannot be rendered the same by two or three different translators. Each of them would have rendered them in a different way, using different set of literary devices. Consequently we may conclude that the inscriptions of Gurdju and Edessa point to the same original Greek translation of the Syriac text, which is documented in Eusebius' copy. Next we can read:

ܘܫܐܠܩܢܐ ܠܝ ܠܘܐܬ ܐܒܝܝܢܝ ܕܫܐܕܪܢܝܢ

*w-sāleq-nā li lwāt āb(y) d-šaddran(y)*

“I will soon ascend to my Father who sent me”

καὶ μετὰ τὸ πληρῶσαι οὕτως ἀναληφθῆναι πρὸς τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με.

The Greek translator added μετὰ τὸ πληρῶσαι οὕτως, ‘after thus completing it.’ This addition is not spurious or pleonastic. It can be explained as necessary to adjust to the demands of the complicated Greek syntactic pattern employed by the translator in the previous

clauses. It really does make sense with the concluding ‘and be taken up (inf. passive for the Syriac active participle, I will go up) to Him who sent me.’ It may be interesting to observe that both the Gurdju and Edessa inscriptions preserve exactly the same rhetorical literary style. The Syriac text emphasises the person. It says clearly and literally ‘to my Father’, while Eusebius’ version appears abstract. However, the Edessa inscription (dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> century by Segal) has the Greek equivalent for the Syriac ܐܠ ܐܒ(ܝ): π(ατέ)ρα (l.5). In this way the Edessan *Letter* cut in stone comes closer to the Syriac *DA* text than Eusebius’ translation.

ܘܡܐ ܕܫܠܩܬ ܠܡܳܬܳܗܳܘܳܬܳܐ ܘܡܳܫܳܕܳܕܳܐܳܪܳܢܳܐ ܠܳܐܳܟܳܠܳܗܳܕ ܡܳܢ ܳܬܳܠܳܡܳܝܳܕܳܝܳܐ ܕܳܩܳܠܳܒܳܐ ܡܳܕܳܡܳܘܳܬܳܐ  
ܕܳܝܳܬ ܳܠܳܐܳܟܳܠܳܗܳܕ ܳܢܳܫܳܐܳܘܳܬܳܐ

*w-mā d-selqet lwāteh, mšaddar-nā lāk lhad men talmiday d-kēbā meddem  
d-it lāk nassē w-naḥlem*

“when I ascend to Him, I shall send to you one of my disciples, so that he may completely cure you of every illness”

καὶ ἐπειδὴν ἀναληφθῶ, ἀποστελῶ σοὶ τινὰ τῶν μαθητῶν μου, ἵνα ἰάσῃται σου τὸ πάθος.<sup>36</sup>

There are again some small differences between the Syriac and Greek texts. The Greek interpreter prefers the passive ἀναληφθῶ ‘when I have been taken up’ in place of the Syriac active ‘when I ascend.’ Moreover, we find a clear, simple case of language

<sup>36</sup> The Gurdju inscription presents the same version (ll.16-17). The Edessa inscription misses the introductory temporal clause (καὶ ἐπειδὴν ἀναληφθῶ) to save room for the two disciples of Jesus named ὀνόματι Θεοδῶν τὸν καὶ Θεομᾶν (ll.6-7).





and peace to you and your people. These words can also be found in the Edessan inscription.<sup>37</sup>

καὶ τοῖς σὺν σοὶ offers one more instance of the Syriac linguistic interference: ܘܐܠ ܕܟܘܠܡܢ ܕܝܬ ܠܘܬܐܟܝܘܢ. *wa-l-koll man diṭ lwāṭāk*. We may legitimately conclude that Eusebius' text contains a number of clear instances of Semitisms, which are well known to every reader of the *New Testament* books as well as of the Alexandrian *Septuagint* translation.<sup>38</sup>

Eusebius' *Letter of Christ* ends abruptly without the usual *chairein* formula or a blessing from the author, which is intriguing. And the more so that the Syriac message has this:

ܘܟܪܟܐܟܐܢܝܗܘܐ ܒܪܝܟܐܘܬܘܪܐܝܢܐ ܘܠܐ ܝܘܠܘܕܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܠܝܢܐ ܕܘܠܡܝܢܐ ܕܘܠܥܝܠܝܢܐ ܕܘܠܥܝܠܝܢܐ ܕܘܠܥܝܠܝܢܐ

*wkarkāk nehwē brik, wab'eldbābā tub lā neštalleṭ beh lq-ālam*

“may your town be blessed and may no enemy ever gain control over it”

It is interesting to notice that all the other extant Greek inscriptional versions of the correspondence which reproduce Jesus' letter also contains Jesus' famous apocryphal blessing for the city of Urfa: καὶ τῇ πόλει σου πρὸς τῷ μηδένα τῶν ἐ<χ>θ[ρ]ῶν σου κατακυριεῦσαι αὐτῆς ἀμήν (Gurdju, ll. 18-19), ‘and may your city

<sup>37</sup> At this point the Edessan inscription follows the Syriac source message, however, at the same time it amplified it: καὶ ζωὴν αἰώνιον καὶ εἰρήνην σοὶ παράσχοι καὶ τοῖς σὺν σοὶ πᾶσι καὶ τῇ πόλει σου ποιήσει τὸ ἰκανόν (11.7-9), ‘to you, your people and your town’.

<sup>38</sup> M. Zerwick, *Graecitas biblica Novi Testamenti exemplis illustratur*, (Romae: E Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1966).

never be overpowered by any of your enemies.’<sup>39</sup> The *chairein* formula of Christ’s oral message brought to Abgar by Hannon has become the most popular and disputed point in the apocryphal correspondence between the Messiah and the King of Urfa. It is believed that this blessing was appended to the Syriac text later on, when Urfa became a border town during the wars with Persia in the 4th century. In those historical circumstances the blessing became a famous *phylakterion* used throughout Christendom.<sup>40</sup> It is also argued that Eusebius did not know this blessing (the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>41</sup> It seems that the blessing also remained unknown to Ephraim (in the *Testament* and one *Sugitho*, where the correspondence was alluded to, and Egeria (*Peregrinatio* 19)).<sup>42</sup> This mysterious Spanish nun, a society lady, visited Urfa in the mid-380s-mid-390s of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. ‘In the course of time it received various accretions. Probably the earliest was a sentence attached to the

<sup>39</sup> πρὸς τῷ μηδένα τῶν ἐχθρῶν κατισχυῖσαι αὐτὴν ἕως τις συντελείας τοῦ κόσμου ἀμήν, Jesus’ sphragis follows (Edessa); τῇ πόλι τῇ σῆ μηδένα τῶν ἐχθρῶν τῶν σῶν ἐξουσίαν ταύτης ἔχιν ἢ σχῖν ποτε, (Ephesus), Picard (1920), p. 48, n.9, (5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> century); κ<υρι>εὔσαι α<ύ>τ<ῆ>ς <εἰς τὸν> ἄ<πα>ντα [χρόνον ?] Ἡαδσι Κευί Αακηατ (Euchaita), c. 4<sup>th</sup> century; ]προς το[ ... τ]αύτης only legible in ll.13-14 of the Philippi inscription, where there is enough room to restore Jesus’ blessing for Edessa (5<sup>th</sup> century).

<sup>40</sup> A Greek formula of protection in the rock tomb in Kyrk Maghara, Urfa discovered by von Oppenheim in 1911; two inscriptions recovered in 1914 by M.G.Fougères in Philippi S-E of the theatre (5<sup>th</sup> century). They were originally located on one of the Eastern gates of the town (Via Egnatia); at the entrance to a house in Ephesus, and likewise in Euchaita (5<sup>th</sup> century); on the wall of a rock church in the region of Faras (Coptic), dated to 739, cf. Kirsten, Edessa, (1959), c. 590.

<sup>41</sup> Picard (1920), p. 53; Von Dobschütz (1899), p. 102f.

<sup>42</sup> Kirsten, Edessa, (1959), c. 589.

“letter of Jesus”,’ wrote Segal.<sup>43</sup> He quoted its English translation from the Syriac, which goes as follows: ‘And your city shall be blessed and no enemy shall ever be master of it again.’<sup>44</sup> This is an important point in the discussion. The Syriac letter has the customary concluding blessing formula: may your town be blessed and may no enemy ever gain control over it. ܠܘܫܢ *nehwē* and ܢܝܫܬܠܠܬ *neštallet* are imperfect forms and express a wish referring to the future. They are comparable to the Greek optative of wishing or the Latin conjunctive optative: may your town be blessed and may no enemy ever gain control over it (ܝܫܬܠܠܬ *šallet* Pa to put in authority, *eštallet b-* Ethpa, to gain dominion over).<sup>45</sup> If the Syriac version of Jesus’ blessing was read as a promise of security for the Christian community in Urfa, and Segal and probably many ancient Christians understood it as such, the confusion must have arisen after Edessa was seized by the Persians, which happened at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Jesus could not have been wrong. Consequently the passage might have been removed from the Greek text at some later stage.

Eusebius’ *Letter* has no necessary conclusion. It ends abruptly, although the writer says that it was a written letter. On the other hand its Syriac counterpart preserves the customary *chairein* formula, although the anonymous Syriac writer emphasised that it was an oral message for Abgar which Hannon was to repeat relate to the king in Edessa.

---

<sup>43</sup> Segal (1970), n. 73.

<sup>44</sup> Segal (1970), n. 21, p. 63; p. 73.

<sup>45</sup> Syriac ܬܘܒ *tub* does not necessarily mean ‘again’ as Segal interprets it (1970, n. 4, p.73). This is a frequently occurring emphatic particle with a wide range of highly idiomatic usages.

We have already mentioned the iconoclastic controversies. The writings of Eusebius of Caesarea, Epiphanius of Salamis and Nilus of Sinai had been in the vortex of vigorous doctrinal conflict for long. They were quoted time and again, mutilated if necessary or supplemented with new words or passages for the needs of those controversies. I would like to point again to Ostrogorsky's illuminating *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Bilderstreites* (1929), which discuss this difficult subject. Jesus' blessing might well have been understood by many ancient readers as referring to the devil, and to evil in general. The more so that the word ܒܠܕܒܒܐ *b'eldbābā* 'enemy' can be related to the similar sounding *b'el-zbob*, Beelzebul, Satan (cf. *b'eldbābā* in: Brockelmann, *Lexicon*, p. 81f., *calumniator, adversarius, hostis, inimicus*).

The Coptic collection which contain texts with the correspondence between Abgar and Jesus is very impressive and growing all the time since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with copies of the letters found in Egypt on papyri, parchments, ostraca and wood.<sup>46</sup> It

---

<sup>46</sup> *P. Anastasy 9* was found in a book of texts, W. Pleyte, P. Boeser, *Manuscripts coptes du Musée d'Antiquités des Pays-Bas à Leide*, (Leiden: Librairie et imprimerie ci-devant E.T. Brill, 1897), pp. 462ff; Drioton, *The Revillout Papyrus*, (1915-1917), p.308; *Régner 55*, parchment, Drioton (1915-1917), p. 308; *Régner 78*, parchment, Krall, *Mitteilungen aus der Sammlung der Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer*, t.V, (Wien: K.K. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, s.d.), pp. 115-117; *Régner 3151*, papyrus, Krall p. 118f., Drioton (1915-1917), p. 309; inscription on a rock in the desert of Faras, Drioton (1915-1917), p. 309; A. Sayce, *Gleanings from the land of Egypt*, XI, *Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie égyptienne* 13 (1892), pp. 62-67; The Golenishtschev ostraca, B. Touraiev, "Ostraca coptes de la collection Golénischeff", *Bulletin de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de Saint Pétersbourg*, V sér., vol. X, (1899), p. 436; *Cairo 8138*, ostraca; *British Museum Or.5439*, parchment; *BM no 19967*, ostraca, H. Hall, *Coptic and Greek Texts of the*

is easy to imagine how many of them must have been produced by their pious owners in early Coptic Christianity. In 1915/1917 E. Drioton published the extant part of Abgar's letter in Sahidic preserved on the *Papyrus Régnier 3151* (Vienna) together with the apocryphal exchange of letters preserved in a manuscript collection of magic texts also in Sahidic in the *Papyrus Anastasy 9* in Leiden (Cat. Leemans I, 385).<sup>47</sup> He associated the correspondence preserved in *P. Anastasy 9* with the Arian doctrinal controversy. In other words he dated it in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>48</sup> Drioton appended his edition of those texts with references to other Coptic versions which he knew. His critical edition of the Coptic correspondence has a high professional value and I am going to refer to it in this part of my paper. Since then new and new texts have been emerging.<sup>49</sup> The numerous Coptic versions extant make the original apocryphon even more ephemeral. Is it possible at all to retrieve the original apocryphon in its integral form? I believe the Syriac version which we know from the *Doctrina Addai* may reflect the

---

*Christian Period from Ostrka, Stelae etc. in the British Museum*, (London: British Museum, 1905), p. 43, pl.35.

<sup>47</sup> Drioton (1915-1917), *P. Anastasy 9* was originally published by Pleyte, Boeser (1897).

<sup>48</sup> Speyer (1971), p. 283, n. 1. The evidence for forgeries in the anti-Arian polemic on the part of the Nicean church is not convincing so far. Future research will probably adduce new evidence.

<sup>49</sup> Drioton's list has been supplemented by new discoveries and their publication: Grébaut (1918-1919); H. Youtie, "A Gothenburg Papyrus and the Letter to Abgar", *Harvard Theological Review* 23 (1930), pp. 299-302. H. Youtie, 1931, "Gothenburg Papyrus 21 and the Coptic Version of the Letter to Abgar", *Harvard Theological Review* 24 (1931), pp. 61-65; A. Grohmann, *Veröff. Bad. Papyr.-Samml.* 5 (1934), pp. 250-295; Abd al-Masih (1947); cf. Graf (1947), 2, p. 448; Blok (1927); Giversen (1959).

original to the highest possible degree, if compared with other extant Greek and Coptic versions. The comparison of all those versions brings interesting conclusions. Blok (1927) juxtaposed the Coptic version in German translation with Eusebius's *Letter* in Greek, arranging them in two columns. In his commentary he focused on some of the theological issues and did not refer to linguistic and translation problems at all. If we are to discuss the latter we need the original Coptic versions. In his brilliant, comprehensive edition Drioton underlined instances of parallel Coptic-Greek wording in the footnotes of his French translation of the Coptic texts in the footnotes.<sup>50</sup> He focused on his editorial work and consequently his commentary is very limited. I think it might be interesting to compare some selected words, phrases and grammatical structures which appear in the Coptic texts with their Syriac and Greek equivalents.

*P. Régnier 3151* presents a concise, roughly parallel version if compared with Eusebius' and Syriac *DA* version. Unfortunately the first part of the document has been partly destroyed. The letter in its extant version opens with **ΚΙΟΥ ΕΖΕΑΖΝΕ ΔΥΩ ΝΕΤΜΟΟΥΤ ΚΤΟΥΝΟC ΜΜΟΥ** (you give order and raise the dead), which sound familiar to the Greek and Syriac readers of the *Letter* (καὶ νεκροὺς ἐγείρει, **ܐܢ ܡܝܬܐ ܡܩܝܡ ܐܬ** *āp mitē m̄qim att*). The words which immediately follow **ΖΝΤΟΟΜ ΝΤΕΚΕΞΟΥ[CΙΑ** (and you do this only by the power of your authority) are absent in Eusebius' text. However, this expression may be understood from a not directly but grammatically preceding Syriac phrase **ܐܠܠܐ ܒܡܠܬܐܟ** *ellā b-melltāk* and **ܒܐܗ ܒܡܠܬܐܟ** *bāh b-melltāk*, and (you do this) only

---

<sup>50</sup> Drioton (1915-1917) also quoted Eusebius' Greek version and appended it with his French translation, what enhanced the value of his publication.

with (your) one word. The next five lines contain Abgar's Creed in Coptic: 'I believed in you because you are the true God, the only-begotten (μονογενής) Son of God, etc.' This is clearly a post-Nicean wording, however it seems to be a Coptic equivalent of the original Syriac passage, which might not have pleased the ears of the Coptic author:

:ⲗⲁⲗⲏ, ⲃⲁⲓ ⲉⲃⲏ ⲁⲗ ⲉⲃⲏ ⲉⲃⲏ ⲉⲃⲏ ⲉⲃⲏ ⲉⲃⲏ,  
ⲃⲁⲓ ⲉⲃⲏ ⲉⲃⲏ ⲉⲃⲏ ⲉⲃⲏ ⲉⲃⲏ.

*d-aw allāhā att da-nḥett men šmayyā wa-ḥadt hālēn, aw breh att d-allāhā  
d- hālēn kolhēn ‘āḃed att*

“(It occurred to me) that either you are God who came down from heaven and does all these things or you are the son of God that you do all these things”

[Eusebius] ἢ ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ θεὸς καὶ καταβὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ποιεῖς ταῦτα, ἢ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ ποιῶν ταῦτα.

This simple early Christian, if not Pagan wording, must have sounded ill-chosen theologically to the Post-Nicean Coptic interpreter.

The Coptic Creed is followed by **ΕΤΒΕ ΠΑΙ †ΠΑΡΑΚΑΛΕΙ|**  
**Μ̄|ΜΟΚ ΖΙΤ̄Ν-ΠΑΒΑΪΩΙΝΕ ΕΤΡΕΚΚΑΤΑΞΙΟΥ Ν̄ΓΣΚΥΛΛΗ**  
**Μ̄|ΜΟΚ ΩΑΡΟΝ ΤΑΡΕΚΣΜΟΥ ΕΠΕΜΚΑΖ** (for this reason I summon you by my envoys, so that you may deem it worth coming (ΣΚΥΛΛΗ) to us and blessing our country). The Syriac and Greek substrate can be easily identified. Some points, however, are worth emphasising. The Coptic translator borrowed the Greek verb



σκυλῆναι, which seems to point to the source text.<sup>51</sup> The source message was evidently Greek (Euseb.: ἐδεήθην σου σκυλῆναι πρὸς ἐμέ). On the other hand, however, he apparently rendered the Syriac phrase ܟܕ ܠܝ ܕܥܒܕܐ ܕܢܐ ܠܐܟܝܢܐ *kaḏ sāged-nā lāk* (because I worship you), which was omitted by the Greek scribe of Eusebius' text. Although the Coptic author changed the person (2<sup>nd</sup> person singular – Christ for Abgar's 1<sup>st</sup> person) and the object (Abgar's country as the object of the blessing) the entire equivalent Syriac section seems to have been structurally paralleled in the Coptic document (Ⲛⲉⲥⲉⲗⲉⲛ *sged* worship, Brockelmann, *Lexicon* p.458, *procubuit, adoravit, veneratus est*, a cognate word to **CMOY** *segnen, preisen, loben*: Westendorf, *Handwörterbuch* p.185). Neither the Syriac nor the Greek parallel passage mentions Abgar's envoys. It looks as if the Coptic writer had a Greek version available, which seems to have been closer in some details to the Syriac *DA* than Eusebius' rendering as we know it today.

The Coptic scribe continues with 'to come to us...' and **ⲁⲮⲮⲟ ⲚⲒⲦⲧⲁⲗⲗⲟ ⲚⲒⲚⲈⲦ ⲮⲮⲟⲚⲈ ⲚⲒⲒⲘⲦⲚ** (and cure those of us who are sick). These words appear in both the Syriac and Greek texts with a symptomatic change from the first person singular (me, *li*, ὁ ἔχω), to the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural (us): ܠܝ ܕܠܝ ܕܝܚܝܢܐ ܕܝܚܝܢܐ *w-kebā meddem dit li tassē* (so that you may heal each of my diseases) / (Euseb.) καὶ τὸ πάθος, ὃ ἔχω, θεραπεῦσαι.<sup>52</sup>

The Coptic version of the passage which refers to the persecution of Jesus Christ by the Jews is strikingly reduced on the one hand, and amplified on the other hand: **ⲈⲦⲈⲒⲔⲘ ⲁⲮⲮⲁⲘⲒ ⲪⲈ ⲠⲈⲔⲒⲘⲚⲞⲤ ⲘⲞⲤⲦⲈ ⲚⲘⲞⲔ ⲚⲤⲈⲞⲮⲮⲟ ⲁⲚ ⲈⲦⲠⲔⲦⲠ̄ -**

<sup>51</sup> σκυλῆναι in the Gurdju inscription, l.9.

<sup>52</sup> Gurdju l.10; Philippi l.12.

**𐌱𐌹𐌺𐌴 𐌺𐌶𐌴𐌶𐌴 𐌲𐌲𐌶𐌴𐌳𐌴 𐌳𐌺 𐌴𐌹𐌴𐌴𐌴** ... (Because I have learnt that your nation hates you and does not want you to be its king I inform you that...). The Coptic scribe used one verb with an emphatic meaning **ΜΟΥΤΕ** as the equivalent of four Syriac verbs which dramatically described Jesus' persecution (*rāṭnin*, *rāḏpin*, *nezqpunāk*, *lmesraḥ*). They were also reduced in Eusebius' version (two Greek verbs to render Syriac *rāṭnin* and *lmesraḥ*). In this passage the Gurdju version with its three verbs stands closer to the Syriac *DA* text than Eusebius' translation, which we have already mentioned: Ἰουδαῖοι καταγογγύζουσεῖν σου κ[αὶ ...]κουσεῖν σε βουλόμενοι σε ἀποκτεῖναι (ll.10-11). The second component is hardly legible in the Gurdju inscription, however, the third component seems to render **𐌳𐌹𐌺𐌴 𐌲𐌹𐌶𐌴𐌳𐌴 𐌳𐌹𐌶𐌴𐌳𐌴** *w-āp d-nezqpunāk ba'eyn* (and they even want to crucify you) in the Syriac text. This component is absent in Eusebius' version.

At the end of Abgar's Coptic *Letter* we find a familiar and memorable concluding passage appended by a *chaire* formula: **𐌲𐌹𐌲𐌴 𐌴𐌹𐌴𐌴𐌴 𐌳𐌺 𐌲𐌲𐌶𐌴𐌳𐌴 𐌴𐌹𐌴𐌴𐌴 𐌲𐌹𐌶𐌴𐌳𐌴 𐌲𐌹𐌶𐌴𐌳𐌴** (I inform you through this letter that I have a small town where we can live together in peace). We have already observed that the Syriac version has the same concluding formula, 'live in peace' which is missing in Eusebius' text.

All in all we can label the Coptic version of Abgar's *Letter*, which was documented in the *P. Régner 3151*, fully legitimate as a translation, even if we keep some reservations. In all likelihood this version was based on a Greek source text. Its ephemeral Greek original seems to have been slightly different from Eusebius' copy and closer to Abgar's Syriac *Letter* preserved in the literary framework of the *Doctrina Addai*. The same can be said of the Gurdju Greek version, which stands closer to the Syriac *DA* version than to

Eusebius' translation. The Coptic scribe made palpable efforts to reduce the *Letter's* content to the basic meanings, and in this way to make the *Letter* as compact as possible. The impact of post-Nicean censorship can also be felt in the theologically correct ideas on the Son of God. This is by far not amazing. From the 4<sup>th</sup> century on we can frequently meet with the widespread practice of a newly arising Christian literary censorship employed on a daily basis by the Nicean Church and the Arians, and in a later period by the Chalcedonian, Jacobite, and Nestorian Churches divided by the Christological doctrinal controversies.<sup>53</sup>

*P. Anastasy 9* from Leiden contains an extensive version of Abgar's *Letter* which does not seem to be a translation at all. It is a literary creation in its own right. This text may perhaps be described as a pastiche, a literary fiction, a fantasy apocryphal letter, a hagiographic text, a brave and far reaching amplification of Eusebius' and of the Syriac *DA* version. The *P. Anastasy 9* letter is remarkable for its prolific, formal, ecclesiastical style. H. Blok compared Eusebius' *Letter* with the *Anastasy 9* Coptic version in the following words: 'Groß ist der Unterschied zwischen dem trockenen, etwas pedantisch-herablassenden Stile des griechischen Originals und der weitschweifigen, demütigen Wortwahl der koptischen Nachbildung.'<sup>54</sup>

The Coptic letter opens with a pretentious introduction conspicuous for its ecclesiastical style: **ΑΥΚΑΡΟΣ ΠΡΡΟ ΝΕΤΕΣΣΑ ΤΠΟΛΙΣ ΕΦΣΖΑΙ ΜΠΝΟΒ ΝΡΡΟ ΠΩΗΡΕ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΕΤΟΝΖ ΙΣ ΧΣ ΧΕΡΕ**, 'Avgar, the king of the city of Edessa is writing a letter to the powerful king, the Son of the Living

---

<sup>53</sup> Speyer (1981).

<sup>54</sup> Blok (1927), p. 242.

God Jesus Christ, *chaire!*' The Greek related opening formula, although stylised, still sounds modest in comparison with its Coptic structural equivalent: Ἄβγαρος τοπάρχης Ἐδέσσης Ἰησοῦ σωτήρι ἀγαθῷ ἀναφανέντι ἐν τόπῳ Ἱεροσολύμων χαίρειν.<sup>55</sup> However, it is the Syriac introduction which makes this text a showpiece of the formal epistolographic style: ܐܒܓܪܘܟܟܡܐ ܠܝܫܘܥ ܐܣܝܐ ܬܒܗܐ ܕܐܬܗܝܒܐ ܕܘܪܥܝܠܡܐܪܝܐ, *Abgar Ukkāmā l-Išo' āsyā tāḫā d-eṭhzi b-atrā d-Ōrêšlem mār(y) šlām* (Abgar Ukkomo to Jesus, the Good Healer, who has appeared in the city of Jerusalem). Syriac Οὐχαμᾶ appears in the Philippi inscription (l.1).

The next part of the *Letter* begins with a clause which has its equivalent in both the Greek and Syriac version: **ΑΥΑΝΑΝΑΓΕ ΝΑΙ ΕΤΒΗ-ΝΤΚ** (*šem'et 'layk*, Euseb.: ἤκουσται μοι τὰ περὶ σοῦ).<sup>56</sup> The passage which follows sounds like a quotation from a sermon for the Feast of Epiphany (p. 11 ver. ll.10-25). Let us read it in Drioton's elegant French translation: 'Des hommes honorables et dignes d'être crus (πιστεύειν) m'ont rapporté (ἀναγγέλλειν) à ton sujet que le monde (κόσμος) avait été enfin trouvé digne de notre temps de la visite bienfaisante que tu lui as faite par la manifestation dans laquelle tu nous as visité dans notre pauvre génération, à cause de ton amour des hommes existant de toute éternité pour le salut de l'univers. Lorsque j'ai entendu cela, j'ai cru (πιστεύειν) avec certitude, sans hésiter (διστάζειν)'. I must admit that the anonymous author who elaborated the original, simple and clear grammar and meaning of his Greek source into a sophisticated stylisation, was a good and skilful writer, even if

<sup>55</sup> The Gurdju and Edessa inscriptions imitate the same formal epistolographical style. In the Philippi inscription we find the Syriac Ἀβγάρος Οὐχαμᾶ.

<sup>56</sup> =Gurdju l.3; these words can also be restored in the Philippi inscription l.3.

somewhat pretentious. His highly literary language looks impressive: **Ⲭⲉ-ⲁⲓⲕⲟⲥⲙⲟⲥ Ⲉⲙⲓⲱⲁ ⲒⲙⲔⲎⲞⲨⲞⲨⲈⲚⲞⲨ  
ⲙⲙⲁⲧⲈ ⲙⲓⲔⲈⲔⲙⲓⲱⲓⲛⲈ ⲈⲧⲛⲁⲛⲟⲨⲨⲚ ⲒⲒⲧⲙ-ⲔⲈⲔⲞⲨⲞⲨⲛⲒ  
ⲈⲐⲞⲘ Ⲕⲁⲓ ⲛⲧⲁⲕⲔⲙ-ⲔⲈⲛⲱⲓⲛⲈ ⲛⲒⲕⲏⲧⲚ Ⲓⲛ ⲧⲈⲛⲒⲒⲛⲈⲚⲁ  
(γένος) ⲈⲧⲔⲞⲨⲚ ⲒⲒⲧⲛ-ⲧⲈⲔⲔⲛⲧⲙⲁⲓⲣⲱⲙⲈ ⲈⲧⲱⲟⲟⲔ ⲬⲒⲛ-  
ⲈⲛⲈⲒ ⲈⲨⲞⲨⲬⲁⲓ ⲙⲓⲔⲏⲣⲚ**. If he did not simply copy this passage from one of the model sermons by Pachomius, Saint Anthony or Theophilus of Alexandria, he was a master of the Coptic elevated style.

Next we find a passage on Jesus' miracles which can be labelled an exact translation: **Ⲓⲁⲙⲁ ⲁⲈ ⲁⲨⲬⲞⲥⲈ ⲬⲈ-ⲔⲈⲓⲣⲈ ⲛ̄ Ⲓⲛ  
ⲛⲞⲔ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲕⲧⲟ Ⲭⲱⲣⲓⲥ ⲛⲁⲒⲣⲈ ⲒⲓⲐⲏⲧⲁⲛⲓⲁ ⲁⲨⲱ  
ⲛⲈⲛⲧⲁⲨⲱⲥⲕ ⲒⲙⲔⲈⲔⲞⲨⲞⲥ ⲛ̄ⲐⲈⲘⲈⲈⲨⲈ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲛⲈⲔⲁⲘⲈⲈⲨⲈ  
ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲛⲈⲙⲧⲓⲔⲞ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲘ ⲁⲨⲱ ⲛⲈⲧⲥⲞⲐⲈⲒ ⲕⲧⲐⲐⲞ ⲙ̄ⲙⲞⲨⲨ  
Ⲓⲙ̄ ⲔⲱⲁⲬⲈ ⲛ̄ⲣⲱⲕ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲧⲈ ⲁⲨⲱ ⲛⲈⲁⲓⲙⲞⲛⲓⲞⲓⲞⲓⲞⲓ ⲥⲈⲛⲏⲨ  
ⲈⲐⲞⲘ ⲒⲛⲞⲨⲒⲟⲧⲈ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ ⲟⲨⲥⲧⲱⲥ {ⲈⲨⲈⲒⲞⲙⲞⲘⲞⲘⲒ  
ⲙⲓⲔⲈⲔⲞⲨⲁⲛ ⲈⲧⲒⲁⲈⲞⲨⲨ ⲁⲏⲙⲞⲥⲓⲁ} ⲁⲨⲱ ⲕⲞⲨⲈⲒ-ⲥⲁⲒⲛⲈ  
ⲛ̄ⲛⲈⲧⲙⲞⲨⲨⲧ Ⲓⲛ̄ ⲟⲨⲁⲨⲞⲈⲛⲧⲓⲁ ⲥⲈⲛⲏⲨ ⲈⲐⲞⲘ {Ⲓⲛ̄  
ⲛⲈⲙⲒⲁⲁⲨ ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲛⲥⲁ-ⲧⲣⲈⲨⲧⲞⲙⲥⲞⲨ} 'I was also (ἄμα δέ) told  
that you have the power to heal without (χωρίς) using diverse  
medicinal herbs (βωτάνη): those who suffer from chronic diseases  
(ἐν χρόνῳ), and the blind, and the lame, and the deaf and the dumb,  
and you also purify the leprous only with one word from your  
mouth, and the evil spirits (δαίμόνιον) depart, shuddering with fear  
{and they openly (δημοσίᾳ) confess (ἐξομολογεῖν) your holy name}  
and {through your supreme power (αὐθεντία)} you order the dead  
{and they leave the graves where they were buried}.' When we  
remove the clause and phrase in brackets and disregard a couple of  
Greek borrowings, apparently drawn from the Greek source text  
(documented in Eusebius' version: βοτανῶν, δαίμονας), we can**

legitimately say we have an exact Coptic translation of the Syriac DA letter. The order of the miracles has been slightly changed: **ΝΕΝΤΑΥΩΚ̄ Ζ̄ΜΠΕΧΡΟΝΟC**, *mšannqē*, τοὺς ἐν μακρονοσίᾳ βασανιζομένους occurs at the beginning of the Coptic ‘Cycle of Miracles.’ It actually appears in the penultimate position in the Syriac DA letter. This change of position is unimportant. It is only a matter of emphasis. However, it is interesting to observe that the Coptic translator preserves the Syriac *haršē* and renders its double meaning ‘the deaf and the dumb’ **ΝΕΜΠΤΟ ΜΝΝΑΛ**,<sup>57</sup> which is missing in Eusebius’ version. The Coptic monk also renders the emphatic evangelical expression *ellā b-melltāk* and *bāh b-melltāk* (with your only word) with an exact phrase: **Ζ̄Μ ΠΩΔΧΕ ΝΡΩΚ ΜΜΑΤΕ**. Strictly speaking the location of these phrases is strictly speaking different in both texts (Eusebius’ Greek and Coptic), but this is of no importance, because in both texts they refer to all the miracles.<sup>58</sup> The phrase ‘with just one word of you’ which is symptomatic for the language of the Gospels is also missing in Eusebius’ version.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, we can interpret one of the Syriac phrases **ܘܠܘܢܠܘܟܘܠܗܘܢ ܕܘܫܘܝܘܬܗܘܢ ܕܘܫܘܝܘܬܗܘܢ ܕܘܫܘܝܘܬܗܘܢ** *ellā b-melltāk* and **ܘܠܘܢܠܘܟܘܠܗܘܢ ܕܘܫܘܝܘܬܗܘܢ ܕܘܫܘܝܘܬܗܘܢ ܕܘܫܘܝܘܬܗܘܢ** *bāh b-melltāk* as the equivalent of **Ζ̄Ν ΟΥΔΑΥΘΕΝΤΙΑ**, which is certainly tolerable.

**ΑΥΩ ΝΕΔΔΑΙΜΟΝΙΟΝ CΕΝΗΥ ΕΒΟΛ Ζ̄ΝΟΥΖΟΤΕ ΜΝ ΟΥCΤΩC** (*Tb*13,6; *Ep* 6,5; *2 Co* 7, 15; *Ph* 2,12)<sup>60</sup> (and the evil spirits

<sup>57</sup> I do not think Blok (1927) was right in his argument that ‘Die „Stummen“ im Anfange heißen mit zwei Wörtern **ΝΕΜΠΤΟ ΜΝΝΑΛ**, was **ΝΕΜΠΤΟ** (Boh. **NEBO**) geschrieben werden soll, Blok (1927), p. 245.

<sup>58</sup> The Gurdju inscription preserves Eusebius’ order of Jesus’ miracles (ll.4-6), as well as of the Philippi inscription (ll.5-8).

<sup>59</sup> However, it is expressed in *λόγω* in the Gurdju inscription (l.5).

<sup>60</sup> Drioton (1915-1917), n. 2, p. 313.

(δαίμονιον) depart shuddering with fear) offers a good rendering of the Syriac expression ܠܐ ܘܥܘܕ ܠܥܘܕܐ ܠܥܘܕܐ ܠܥܘܕܐ *wa l-ruḥē wa l-bareggārē mappeq att* (and you cast out evil spirits and demons, Eusebius' καὶ ἀκάθαρτα πνεύματα καὶ δαίμονας ἐκβάλλεις).<sup>61</sup> The meaning of *ruḥē wa bareggārē* is not easy to render; *ruḥā*, pl. *ruḥē*, as 'demon' has an old scriptural tradition (Ac 19,16; *Acta martyrum* 4 532,2, Brockelmann p.718). However, 'Demon' is also the standard translation for ܠܥܘܕܐ *bareggārā*, pl. *bareggārē* (cf. Brun, *Dictionarium* p. 4: ܠܥܘܕܐ *bareggārā* filius tecti: daemon epilepticum vexans, that is a sleepwalker, somnambulist). Should we perhaps understand this apparently idiomatic Syriac expression as 'evil spirits of every sort'? The African author rendered this Syriac idiomatic phrase in compliance with with his innately Hamitic African penchant for description: 'and the evil spirits (δαίμονιον) depart shuddering with fear.' By analogy I have already suggested **ΧΩΡΙΣ ΝΑΖΡΕ ΖΙΒΗΤΑΝΙΑ** should be understood as 'without (χωρίς) diverse medicinal herbs (βοτάνη).' Superficially the meaning of these two words looks simple (Eusebius' ἄνευ φαρμάκων καὶ βοτανῶν;<sup>62</sup> Drioton: sans (χωρίς) médicaments ni plantes (βοτάνη)). Syriac ܠܥܘܕܐ ܠܥܘܕܐ *b-sammānē wa b-'eqqārē*: ܥܘܕܐ *sammā*, pl. *sammānē* means 'medicine, drug' (Brockelmann, *Lexicon* p. 479 *planta medicinalis, medicamentum, pharmacum*; ܥܘܕܐ *'eqqār* and *'eqqārā*, pl. -e, root, medicinal herb, Brun, *Dictionarium* p. 459: a component of different species of herbs, flowers and trees, many of them of medical use: *radix mali granati, planta androsaces, radix aurea (rubia tinctorum), radix columbarum (species vervenae), planta paeonia, pyrethrum, planta chelidonium, radix croci*). The Greek translator of

---

<sup>61</sup> =Gurdju l.5.

<sup>62</sup> = Gurdju l.3; Philippi l.4.

Eusebius' version correctly interpreted Syriac *sammānē* as 'medicines,' and rendered it with the equally general φαρμάκων. However, the Greek rendering might have been abstruse to the Coptic author, who seems to have looked for something local and familiar. He found **ⲗⲗⲣⲉ** which has a narrower and more specific usage: reeds, herbs which grow in marshland (Westendorf, *Handwörterbuch* p. 17). **ⲃⲏⲦⲁⲛⲓⲁ** is a calque from Greek βουάνη herb, which had a general and decidedly medical connotation in Greek (Thphr. *HP* 4.4.13; Diosc. *Medic. Praef.* 1, *LSJ* p. 323). In the same way Syriac **ⲗⲙⲩⲁ** 'eqqārē radices were used for different medical plants.

All in all we can sum up by saying that perhaps here as nowhere else we have come closer to an ephemeral Greek source text which made a fairly exact Greek translation from Syriac than the extant copy of Eusebius. Such a Greek translation must have existed and it was a document which the Coptic author of *P. Anastasy 9* had before his eyes when he was compiling his prolific composition testifying to his ardent devotion.<sup>63</sup>

Instead of Abgar's expected question, which sounds strikingly authentic and pre-Nicean: καὶ ταῦτα πάντα ἀκούσας περὶ σοῦ κατὰ νοῦν ἐθέμην ἢ ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ θεὸς καὶ καταβάς ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ποιεῖς ταῦτα, ἢ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ ποιῶν ταῦτα, we find an extended pious elaboration (p. 12 rec., l.17 - p. 12 ver., l.4) on the central theological concept of the Only-Begotten Son of God (**ⲚⲦⲐⲐⲐⲐⲕⲉⲭⲁⲛⲟⲩⲥ** **ⲠⲮⲈⲢⲈ** **ⲚⲦⲈⲠⲚⲐⲮⲦⲦⲈ** **ⲘⲚⲔⲈⲠⲮⲁⲘⲔ** **Ⲛⲃⲗⲗⲁⲕ**) (*Jn* 3,18), and the concept of Christ's Incarnation and the

---

<sup>63</sup> Blok (1927), p. 245 appears to point in the same direction writing: 'Der koptische Schreiber hat den griechischen Text des Eusebius oder dessen Vorlage benutzt.'



economy of Salvation. The extensive passage re-echoes the words of the Nicean Creed, which can be expressed in Latin as ‘unus Dominus Iesus Christus, Filius Dei Unigenitus’. It was compiled to a large extent out of a collection of biblical references and quotations drawn from the Gospel of St. John, Ps. 135, Isaiah, Deuteronomy, 1 Samuel, and the Book of Wisdom.<sup>64</sup> Blok was probably right when he argued that ‘die Worte Abgars kamen ihm warscheinlich etwas verdächtig vor; er ersetzte sie durch den flachen Ausdruck: (ϺΙΤΝ) ΠΡΟΟΥΨ ΝΤΕΚΜΝΤΝΟΥΤΕ ΜΝ ΤΕΚΜΝΤΡΩΜΕ’<sup>65</sup> (through the agency of Your Divinity and Your Humanity).

Next we again come across a fairly well translated passage of Abgar’s *Letter*: ΤΝ̄СОП̄С-ЬЕ М̄МОК ΔΝΟΚ ΜΝ̄ ΠΛΑΟС ΕΝΠΡΟСКΥΝΕΙ ΝΑΚ ΕΤРЕКСКΥΛΛΙ Μ̄МОК ΝΓΕΪ ΨΑΡΟΝ ΕΤΒЕ ΠЕΝΟΥΧΑΪ ΜΝ̄ ΠΤΑΛΒΟ ΝΕΝΨΩΝΕ ΕΤΟΥΨ ΑΨΩ ΧΕΚΑС ΕΥΕΤΑΥЕ-ΠЕКΡΑΝ ΕΖΡΑΙ ΕΧΩΝ ΠΧΟΕΙС (we beg you, I and my people (λαός), and entreat you (προσκυνεῖν) to trouble yourself (σκόλλειν) and come to us and save us and heal our numerous illnesses, and that your name may be proclaimed to us, my Lord). The Coptic translator changed the subject from the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular to the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural. This is a successful translation of both the Greek and Syriac version. ΕΤΡΕΚСКΥΛΛΙ is a direct, literal transfer from Eusebius’ σκυλῆναι.<sup>66</sup> There is also an infinitive of purpose in both Eusebius’ Greek and Coptic texts. προσκυνέω is a popular verb, which had been widely used in the

<sup>64</sup> Drioton (1915-1917), nn. 1-7, p. 314.

<sup>65</sup> Blok (1927), p. 245. The Coptic expression is not shallow and superficial flach. It is simply different. Instead of a Pagan king’s amazement at Jesus’ miracles we find words of wise, and learned Fathers of the First and Second Council.

<sup>66</sup> =Gurdju l.9.

Classical Pagan as well as the Christian *belles lettres*. Consequently it cannot help us in this analysis. However, σκυλῆναι is a rare word. Its usage is not regular, but specific. Drioton emphasised that the word's meaning documented in the Coptic text is late and post-Classical. The word lost its etymological meaning (tear, dishevel, maltreat) and developed into an expression of politeness: μὴ σκύλλου trouble not thyself (Lk 7,6; the same example in Drioton 1915-1917, p. 315, n.1); σκυλῆναι πρὸς Τιμόθεον take the trouble to go to T., POxy 123.10 (III/IV AD).<sup>67</sup> This Greek borrowing in Coptic points to Greek as the source language. We have already mentioned that the dependent clause (that you come to me) 𐩧𐩬𐩏𐩣 𐩬𐩏𐩥𐩏 *kaḏ sāged-nā lāk* (because I worship you) is missing in Eusebius' version. It is, however, rendered in the Coptic version: **ΕΤΡΕΚΣΚΥΛΛΙ ΜΜΟΚ ... ΧΕΚΑC ΕΥΕΤΑΥΕ-ΠΕΚΡΑΝ ΕΖΡΑΙ ΕΧΩΝ.** (so that your name may be proclaimed to us). The equivalence (𐩧𐩬𐩏𐩣 𐩬𐩏𐩥𐩏 *kaḏ sāged-nā lāk* / **ΧΕΚΑC ΕΥΕΤΑΥΕ-ΠΕΚΡΑΝ**) is not complete. With some reservations, however, it can be labelled a paraphrastic rendering. In addition, the Coptic translator changed the causative clause (*kaḏ*: Abgar's confession of the faith) into a purpose clause (**ΧΕΚΑC ΕΥΕ**:- his expectation of Jesus' visit).<sup>68</sup> The Syriac syntactic clause structure of ܡܢ ܕܠܠܗ ܕܡܢܢܐܐ *b'ēt mennāk d-tētē lwāt(y)* (purpose clause) is mirrored by the same purpose dependent relation in Coptic: **ṬṆCOPṬ... NṬEṬ ṠAṠARON** (Syriac *d* + impf. = Coptic conj. **NṬ**). Let us also notice that **ΝΕΝΩΩΝΕ ΕΤΩΩ** (our numerous illnesses) can be regarded as a

<sup>67</sup> LSJ s.1617.

<sup>68</sup> Probably **ΕΝΠΡΟΚΥΝΕΙ ΝΑΚ** should be read as the equivalent of 𐩧𐩬𐩏𐩣 𐩬𐩏𐩥𐩏 *kaḏ sāged-nā lāk*. The Coptic circumstantial for the Syriac *causativum* is a good choice. *sāged* worship=προσκυνέω.

fitting rendering for the Syriac clause ܕܠܝ ܕܝܚܝܘܬܝܘܢ ܕܠܝܘܢܝܘܢܝܘܢ ܕܝܠܝܘܢܝܘܢܝܘܢ *w-kebā meddem diṭ li* (each of my illnesses, all that I suffer from). Eusebius spoke only of Abgar's specific illness τὸ πάθος, ὃ ἔχω, whatever it was.<sup>69</sup>

The next section (ll.13-16, p. 12 ver.) offers yet another invention on the part of the anonymous Coptic writer. This time it speaks of the king's promise of Edessa's service to God. It was also constructed as a sort of a biblical *cento*, like other similar passages in the Coptic *Letter P. Anastasy* 9.<sup>70</sup>

Most of the narrative of the following section in *P. Anastasy* 9 is a prolonged anti-Jewish pamphlet (p. 12 ver. l.16-p. 13rect. l.7), in which lines 16-21 can be regarded as a translation: **ΑΙCΩΤΜ ΧΕ-Α-ΠΕΚΖΕΘΝΟC ΑΘΕΤΙ ΝΤΕΚΜΝΤΧΟΕΙC ΕΥΩΟΠΙ ΖΝ ΟΥΚΑΚΙΑ ΜΠΟΥΦΘΟΝΟC ΑΥΩ CΕΤΩΚΕ ΜΜΟΚ** (I heard that your people (ἔθνος) has rejected (ἄθετεῖν) your kingship and is wicked (κακία) and envious (φθόνος) and persecutes (διώκειν) you). It should be remembered that Eusebius' version has only two verbs against the Syriac four, which describe the persecutions of Jesus: καταγογγύζουσι for *rāṭnin* (they murmur, conspire against you) and βούλονται κακῶσαι σε for *wa lmesrah bāk hāyrin* (and they are looking to hurt you). *rāḍpin* (they persecute you) is missing in Eusebius' text, as well as *nezqpunāk ba'eyn* (they want to crucify you). We have already seen that the Gurdju inscription seems to reflect the Syriac *nezqpunāk ba'eyn* in βουλόμενοί σε ἀποκτῖναι (l.11). This is a symptomatic passage, where we are again close to an integral Greek translation of the Syriac original: four Coptic verbs for four Syriac verbs: **ΕΥΩΟΠΙ**

<sup>69</sup> =Gurdju l.10; Philippi l.12 (?).

<sup>70</sup> *Rev* 7,15; *Gn* 3,14; 1 *K* 1,11, Drioton (1915-1917), p. 315, nn. 3,4.

**ΖΝ ΟΥΚΑΚΙΑ** for Greek βούλονται κακῶσαί σε; رادپن, *rāḏḥin* (persecute) has been satisfactorily rendered as **CE†ΩΚΕ ΜΜΟΚ. ΕΥΨΟΟΠ ΜΝΟΥΦΘΟΝΟC** may be regarded as roughly related in meaning to καταγογγύζουσι / *rātḥin*.

nezqrūnāḳ ba‘eyn (they want to crucify you) differs in meaning from **ΑΘΕΤΙ** (they reject). The intriguing question is why was it that neither the Greek nor the Coptic translations literally refer to the plans to crucify Christ on the part of His Jewish enemies, which is certainly a reference to the Gospels. The Gurdju inscription is so far unique in its strong and meaningful βουλόμενοί σε ἀποκτῖναι, which refers to the plans to kill Jesus (l.11).

The next passage is an independent literary composition which consists of a verse or two quoted from a hymn in praise of Christ, and an anti-Jewish pamphlet. It is also a collection of biblical quotations and references smoothly gathered together by a learned monastic scribe, who drew on both New and Old Testament literary lore.<sup>71</sup> Even words which sound like an invective are actually a quotation from 1 Samuel 24,15 and 2 Samuel 9,18 (p. 13 rect. l.3).<sup>72</sup>

After some more or less repeated words of invitation, which we already know from the earlier part of the *Letter* (p. 12 ver. ll.4-8),<sup>73</sup> with a meaningful change from the first person plural to the singular, we encounter the translation of the concluding words of

<sup>71</sup> *Lk* 19,14,27; *Ac* 17,24; *1 Tm* 6,13; *Ps* 117,22; *Mt* 21,42; *Ps* 83,3; *Mt* 26,63; *1 Tm* 4,10; *Jn* 4,10; *Ac* 8,10; *2 Co* 9,15; *Rm* 5,15; *Heb* 6,4, Drioton (1915-1917), p. 316, nn. 1-8.

<sup>72</sup> Drioton (1915-1917), p. 316.

<sup>73</sup> **ΤΝCΟΠC-ΘΕ ΜΜΟΚ ΔΝΟΚ ΜΝ ΠΛΑΟC ΕΝΠΡΟCΚΥΝΕΙ ΝΑΚ ΕΤΡΕΚCΚΥΛΛΙ ΜΜΟΚ ΝΓΕΪ ΨΑΡΟΝ;** p. 13 rec. ll.7-11: **†ΤΑΜΟ ΔΕ ΜΜΟΚ ΠΑΧΟΕΙC ΧΕ-ΕΝΨΑΝΚΑΤΑΞΙΟΥ ΡΩ ΕΝΕΖ ΕΤΡΕΚCΚΥΛΛΙ ΝΓΕΪ ΨΑΡΟΙ.**

both the Syriac and Greek version: **ΕΤΚΟΥΪ ΜΠΟΛΙΣ ΕΤΑΡΧΙ ΕΡΟΣ. ΤΡΩΥΕ ΕΡΟΝ ΖΙΟΥΣΟΠ ΖΝΟΥΑΓΑΠΗ** ((and come) to a small town where I rule, which is sufficient for us to live together with love). **ΖΝΟΥΑΓΑΠΗ** (lovingly), a structural equivalent of **ܒܫܠܘܐ** *b-šelyā* (in peace) concludes the Syriac and Coptic text. It is missing in Eusebius' version and the Gurdju inscription, which also ends abruptly.

In the concluding part of Abgar's Coptic *Letter P. Anastasy 9* the king promises his own and his people's loyal service and worship. The reader again has the opportunity to admire the Coptic author's art of constructing his text with a chain of quotations from different biblical books.<sup>74</sup> The last words are drawn from the Coptic liturgy. They are a sacred blessing, an ecclesiastical or monastic blessing: 'Glory to you, glory to your Invisible Father, who sent you to us, and glory to the powerful Holy Spirit, for ever and ever, Amen!' (p. 13 rec., ll.21-26). This is clearly not a translation, and not a literary text. It is a well-known Christian liturgical formula.

*P. Anastasy 9* also contains Jesus' written answer to Abgar. The Syriac *DA* text, as we know, clearly states that Jesus' reply was a spoken message passed on to Hannon, and not a written document. Drioton edited Jesus' Coptic *Letter* and pointed to all the differences between the numerous copies which he knew. The differences are of minor importance and mostly orthographic, dialectical and local in character. The Golenishtschev ostrakon, the Cairo ostrakon 8138, the inscription from a rock tomb in the region of Faras, *Papyrus Régnier 3151*, and an amulet on the *Régnier 78* parchment are Drioton's most important comparative materials, and also

---

<sup>74</sup> *Tt* 3,3; *Lk* 19,14,27; *Ps* 98,5; *Rev* 7,15; *Col* 1,15; *1 Tm* 1,17; *Mt* 10.40; *Jn* 11,42; 17,3.

represent a variety of media.<sup>75</sup> In 1959 S. Giversen published a new Coptic copy of Jesus' *Letter*. This time the *Letter* was written on a wooden tablet, which was purchased in Egypt in 1917 for the John Rylands Library in Manchester.<sup>76</sup> The differences between the text of this document and Drioton's papyrus are also of secondary importance. They are restricted to the concluding part of the document: **ΝΕΝΕΡΓΙΑ** omitted in Leid., **ΧΟΝΓΕ** (Rylands) for **ΧΩΖ** (Leid.), **ΠΜΑ** (Rylands) for its Greek equivalent **ΤΟΠΟΣ** (Leid.).<sup>77</sup>

The colophon with the sender and addressee (ll.1-7) is followed by the salutation which can also be found in Eusebius' and other Greek<sup>78</sup> and Syriac versions: **ΧΑΙΡΕΤΕ ΝΑΙΑΤΚ** (Greetings! Blessed are you!). Jesus' blessing at the beginning of the *Letter* is more developed in the Coptic version, which also comprises the blessing for the city of Edessa. It is interesting to observe that the Coptic *Letter* is reflected at the beginning of the Edessan inscription: μακάριος εἶ Ἄνγαρε καὶ ἡ πόλις σου ἣτις καλεῖται Ἔδεσσα. The second concluding Jesus' blessing appears at the very end of the Syriac *DA* text: ܩܪܩܩܐ ܢܗܘܘܐ ܒܪܝܩܐ ܘܒܥܠܕܒܐܒܐ ܬܘܒ ܠܐ ܢܝܫܬܠܠܐܬ ܒܗ ܠܐܠܡܐܘܢܐ ܘܩܪܩܩܐ ܢܗܘܘܐ ܒܪܝܩܐ ܘܒܥܠܕܒܐܒܐ ܬܘܒ ܠܐ ܢܝܫܬܠܠܐܬ ܒܗ ܠܐܠܡܐܘܢܐ (may your town be blessed and may no enemy ever gain control over it). The words of Jesus' blessing at the beginning of the Coptic text in *P. Anastasy 9* are as follows: **ΑΥΩ ΝΑΙΑΤΣ ΝΤΕΚΠΟΛΙΣ ΤΑΙ ΕΠΕΣΡΑΝ-ΠΕ ΕΤΕΣΣΑ** (p. 13ver, ll.10-12). The blessing is

<sup>75</sup> Drioton (1915-1917), pp. 307-309.

<sup>76</sup> Giversen (1959).

<sup>77</sup> Giversen (1959), other secondary differences in the footnotes on p. 72 and p. 74.

<sup>78</sup> Gurdju l.13.

reiterated once again shortly afterwards: **ΑΥΩ ΕΤΕCΣΑ  
ΝΑΨΩΠΕ ΕCΣΜΑΜΑΥ ΨΑΕΝΕΞ** (p. 13ver, ll.20-22) (and Edessa will be blessed for ever).<sup>79</sup> Jesus' blessing is not attested by Eusebius' version, but it is documented in all the available Greek inscriptions (Gurdju, Edessa, Philippi, Ephesus, Hadji Keui). Jesus' words at the beginning of the Syriac and Greek *Letter* appear in the Coptic only after His extended blessing: **ΕΠΙΔΗ ΜΠΕΚΝΑΥ  
ΑΚΤΙCΤΕΥΕ** (although you have not seen, you have believed).<sup>80</sup> After a hidden quotation from *Mt* 9,29 we can read **ΝΕΚΨΩΝΕ  
CΕΝΑΤΑΛΒΟΟΥ** (your diseases will be cured) (p. 13ver, ll.16-17). These words are also attested by the Greek and Syriac versions.<sup>81</sup> However, in the Coptic text they are, however, followed by the absolution of sins (p. 13ver, ll.18-20). In the lines 27-28 (p. 13ver) we discover Jesus' *sphragis* of the *Letter's* authenticity: 'I am Jesus, who commands and who teaches.' Christ's *sphragis* appears once again and this time it directly refers to the *Letter's* textual authenticity: 'I Jesus have written this letter with my own hand' (p. 14rec. ll.8-10). A similar *sphragis* can be found at the conclusion of the Edessan text (ll.10-11). This is a popular device used by many ancient writers of apocryphs to persuade their readers of their authenticity.<sup>82</sup> 'A.

<sup>79</sup> The Coptic blessing is more developed than its Syriac counterpart: the glory of God shall grow in her people, and the faith and the love shall grow in her streets (cf. *Ps* 143,11), English translation in S. Giversen (1959).

<sup>80</sup> *Mt* 21,22; *Jn* 16,21.

<sup>81</sup> Gurdju l.17; Edessa ll.7-8.

<sup>82</sup> Speyer (1971), pp. 45-61; In the 12th-century Greek manuscript of Christ's *Letter* to Abgar Jesus said: 'Daher ist die geschriebene Rede geschrieben mit meiner eigenen Hand, mit meinem Siegel, mit sieben Siegeln diesem Briefe eingedruckt.' Seven magic characters follow; Lipsius, Bonnet (1891), 1, 280f.

Harnack hat treffend bemerkt, daß in keinem der vier kanonischen Evangelien ein Ich oder Wir als Bezeichnung der Verfasser vorkommt. Die außerkanonischen Evangelien zeigen dagegen ein ganz anderes Bild. Bei ihnen ist die Ich- und Wir-Rede angeblicher Verfasser sehr häufig,' as W. Speyer aptly observed.<sup>83</sup>

The immediate and practical purpose of the Egyptian document becomes clear when we read concluding lines: ΠΜΑ ΕΤΟΥΝΑΤΩΧΕ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΖΗΤῆ ΝΤΙΘΙΧ ΝCΖΑΪ ΝΝΕ-ΛΑΑΥ ΜΑΝΝΑΜΙC ΝΤΕ-ΠΑΝΤΙΚΙΜΕΝΟC ΟΥΔΕ ΛΑΑΥ ΜΠΝΑ ΝΑΚΑΘΑΡΤΟΝ ΕΩ-ΘΜ-ΘΟΜ ΕΖΩΝΕ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΟΥΔΕ ΕΧΩΖ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΠΤΟΠΟC ΕΤΜΜΑΥ (there is no evil power and no impure spirit which will be able to come near or touch the place where you fix this writing).<sup>84</sup> The Rylands tablet has two small holes to fix it above the doors of a house or a monastery.<sup>85</sup> It is a fine example of the ancient Christian idea of a *phylakterion*, or amulet.

Like many other Coptic versions the Leiden and Rylands *Letters of Jesus* are eclectic compositions which consist of selected translated sentences, supposedly from an original Greek version, which must have been longer than Eusebius' copy (e.g. the blessing for Edessa). They also entail a liturgic formula for the absolution of sins, and the apocryphal *sphragis* of Jesus' authorship, and an elaborated

---

On the meaning of the signs: K. Thraede, "Exorzismus", *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 7 (1969), 104; Speyer (1971), p. 58, n. 4.

<sup>83</sup> Speyer (1971), p. 51.

<sup>84</sup> Some parts of the formula of the Leiden and Rylands *phylakteria* also make up a fine composition of hidden quotations from the New Testament, *Lk* 10,19; *2 Th* 2,1; *1 Tm* 5,4; *Mt* 10,1; 12,43, *Mk* 1,23; 4,36 etc., Drioton (1915-1917), p. 324, nn. 1,2; p. 325, n. 1.

<sup>85</sup> Giversen (1959), p. 78.



*phylakterion* formula. The Coptic versions conclude with the liturgic blessing formula ‘in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.’ In other words, the Coptic texts of Jesus’ *Letter* are a bizarre mixture of translations from a foreign language, biblical citations, and liturgical texts and magical incantations.

*P. Régnier 78* supposedly presents an economical, shortened version of Abgar’s *Letter*, which, however, preserves the substance of the original apocryphal text. Drioton observes that the shorter Coptic *Letter* is closer to Eusebius’ Greek text, because it shows more equivalent expressions than the longer one.<sup>86</sup> Eusebius’ *Letter* was either a translation of a shortened version of Abgar’s original Greek *Letter* or, and more likely so, an abridged translation of an integral, original Syriac text. *P. Anastasy 9* is an eclectic, literary composition, which also gives a translation of most of Abgar’s Greek text. This version also shows occasional interventions of ecclesiastical censorship either by an external agent, or perhaps of self-censorship. The translated passages are interwoven with citations from the Old and the New Testaments,<sup>87</sup> from sermons, liturgical prayers, and an invective. Selected sections of the parts translated into Coptic point to a Greek *Letter* which in turn represented an integral translation of a complete text of the oldest original Syriac apocryphon.

I am one of the group of scholars who have always argued for a Syriac original which became the source text for Greek the translations. The reader will find this opinion in A. Baumstark’s old Classic *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (1922): ‘Daß in der Tat ein

---

<sup>86</sup> Drioton (1915-1917), p. 326.

<sup>87</sup> The reader will find all the biblical references and hidden quotations in the footnotes of Drioton’s paper.

solcher (scil. edessenischer und syrischer), nicht ein griechischer die literarische Urgestalt der Legende war, darf mit Bestimmtheit angenommen werden'.<sup>88</sup>

The comparison of the earliest Greek and Syriac versions gives an insight into the details of the translation technique, and leaves no doubt that Syriac was the source language, and that Greek was the language of translation, and in all likelihood the source language for the Coptic versions. From the onset this opinion has been shared by other Syrologists.<sup>89</sup>

However, there have been always the others who argued for a Greek original for the Abgar apocryphal literary tradition.<sup>90</sup> A long time ago E. von Dobschütz drew attention to a distinct impact of the Syriac text which can be felt in other Greek texts besides Eusebius' version. It can be felt in such phrases: πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, ζῶην αἰώνιον, καὶ εἰρήνην τῇ πόλει σου.<sup>91</sup> Von Dobschütz dated the Ephesus inscription not earlier than the close of the 4<sup>th</sup>, and not later than the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Picard followed his arguments and was also inclined to date the Philippi inscription in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Von Dobschütz also argued that Jesus' final blessing was introduced to the Syriac text only as late as the Persian wars in the 360s, when Urfa was under a serious threat of destruction by the Persian

---

<sup>88</sup> Baumstark (1922), p. 28; Blok (1927), p. 241. The Armenian version is believed to have been derived from the Syriac original, cf. Baumstark (1922), p. 28.

<sup>89</sup> A. Stülcken, Abgarsage in E. Hennecke, *Handbuch zu den Neutestamentlichen Apokryphen*, (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1904), p. 153-165; Giversen (1959), p. 77; Ortiz de Urbina (1958), p. 42.

<sup>90</sup> Schwartz, "Zu Eusebius Kirchengeschichte", *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 4 (1903), p. 155; Giversen (1959), p. 77.

<sup>91</sup> Von Dobschütz (1900), p. 454 f.; Picard (1920), p. 52, n. 1.

invaders.<sup>92</sup> Von Dobschütz observed that the Syriac translation of Eusebius' *Church History* was carried out not very much later, c. AD 400. At roughly the same time Rufinus of Aquileia turned Eusebius' *History* into Latin. In his view this exchange of translations was responsible for the influence exerted by the Syriac Abgar story which had already contained Christ's blessing appended to the earlier Syriac original in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Von Dobschütz explained the Syriac influences which we find in other Greek texts like the Gurdju, Ephesus, Hadji Keui and Edessa inscriptions (c.550) through new Greek and Latin translations of the famous Syriac apocryphon in its newly amplified versions.<sup>93</sup> This is the standard view. However, if we take into account the fact that the chronology of the Greek inscriptions from Ephesus, Gurdju, Hadji Keui (the latter dated in the 4<sup>th</sup> century) and Philippi is not absolutely certain, and that they can also be dated in the 4<sup>th</sup> century; if we add evidence that the date of our main Coptic document *P. Anastasy 9*, which Drioton associated with the Arian controversy, that is with the 4<sup>th</sup> century, then we can also legitimately suspect that there was an earlier and complete Greek translation of an original Syriac text which contained Jesus' final blessing already when it was composed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. In this way we can also interpret the striking fact that the Gurdju inscription stands closer to the Syriac Abgar story from the *Doctrina Addai*. Eusebius' translation might have been only an economical, synthetic and somewhat abridged version of another complete Greek translation. It seems that there might have been more than one current and popular Greek translation attested by the extant

---

<sup>92</sup> Von Dobschütz (1899), p. 102f.; Picard (1920), p. 53.

<sup>93</sup> Picard (1920), p. 54.

Greek inscriptions and Coptic texts. Neither can we rule out that the Coptic Rylands and *Anastasy 9* versions were directly translated from Syriac into Coptic in monasteries of Egypt. We know that the cultural exchange between the Syriac and Coptic Christians had been always vivid and taken different forms.