Some Uncanonical Psalms (Mingana translation)

Syriac and Arabic apocrypha (anonymous) (medieval, from Syriac and Garshuni manuscripts)

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Prefatory Note and Translation

I give in the following pages the text and the translation of five uncanonical Psalms. Psalm 1 is found in many MSS. of the Syriac Psalter where it is known as Ps. cli. and where it is often introduced as follows: "This Psalm was said by David on himself, when he fought Goliath." It is a translation from Greek, but I have remarked in a footnote that its first verse seems, in thought but not in phraseology, to be reminiscent of the corresponding verse of the famous Gnostic "Hymn of the Soul." If this comparison were proved to be possible, we would be allowed to hold the contrary view, viz. that the "Hymn" itself was under the influence of the "Psalm"; this, however, is a question on which we cannot dwell at present as it is beyond the scope of our present studies.

The four other Psalms are only found in the interesting work entitled Durrāsha, "Discipline," or more generally ma'wātha, "Centuries," of the Nestorian writer Elijah of Anbar who died about 940. The work is represented by some other MSS. all of which are, however, much later than the one marked Mingana Syr. 31 in the custody of the Rendel Harris Library, Birmingham. The MS. has unfortunately lost a few of its final leaves and is consequently undated, but on palæographic grounds it may be assigned to about A.D. 1340. It formerly belonged to the Nestorian writer Isho'yahb bar Mukaddam who died about 1445, and who in an inscription on fol. 90b informs us that he collated a large part of it with an autograph of the author himself. There is reason to believe that at least six out of the eight other MSS. in existence are mere transcripts of this Mingana Syr. 31. A fascimile of the pages containing the Psalms accompanies the translation. I have also compared the translation with Syr. MS. Mingana 51 (ff. 100 b-105 a) of about A.D. 1550, in the custody of Rendel Harris Library, Birmingham.

The source of the author for some of these uncanonical Psalms is unknown to me, but there is no doubt that he was drawing upon excellent material at his disposal. There is in the matter of elevation of thought and diction considerable difference between all these uncanonical Psalms, and in reading those numbered 2 and 3 we almost feel that we are perusing the Bible itself. Their Hebrew parallelism is perfect and there are grounds for believing that they are a direct translation from Hebrew or Aramaic. Psalms 1, 4-5 refer more or less distinctly to the deliverance of David from the wild beasts of 1 Sam. xvii. 34-36.

Translation.

The Five Psalms of David, which are not written in the Series of the Psalms. I. Thanksgivings of David. I was the youngest of my brothers, and a child in the house of my father.1 I shepherded the sheep of my father, and met a lion and also a wolf,2 and I slew them and rent them. My hands made an organ, and my fingers fitted a harp. Who will show me to my Lord? —He, my Lord, became my God.3 He sent his angel and removed me from the sheep of my father, and anointed me with the oil of unction.4 The Lord was not pleased with my elder and handsome brothers, and I went to meet the Philistine, who cursed me by his idols; but I unsheathed his sword, cut off his head, and banished the insult from the children of Israel. 1 Compare this verse with the beginning of the Edessene Gnostic hymn of the Soul: "While I was a small child, and dwelling in my kingdom in the house of my father." Bedjan's Acta. iii. 110.

2 From 1 Sam. xvii. 34-36 we know that David was met by a lion and a bear and not a wolf. The variant may be explained by the graphic resemblance that exists in Syriac between the words bear and wolf. This verse is missing in Greek. 3 The Greek is: "Who will show it to my Lord? He is the Lord, He heareth me." 4 The Greek is: "Of His unction."

Prayer of Hezekiah when Surrounded by Enemies.

Praise God with a loud voice, and proclaim His glory in the congregation of many people. Praise His magnificence in the assembly of the just, and make known His majesty in the company of the pious. Extol His praise, and narrate His exalted dignity in unison with the righteous. Unite your souls with the good and with the meek in order to magnify the Most High. Gather together in order to proclaim His might, and be not tired in showing forth His salvation, His power, and His glory to all the children. It is in order that the majesty of the Lord may be made manifest that Wisdom has been given, and it is in order that it may proclaim His works that it has been made known to men; for the spreading of His might among the children, and instructing the weak-hearted in His glory: those who are remote from its good advices, and far from its doors. Because the Lord of Jacob is high, and His majesty is on all His servants. The Most High shall be as pleased with the one who magnifies Him as with the one who offers pure flour, and the one who offers he-goats and calves, and the one who makes the altar smell with the odour of many holocausts, and as with the incense from the hands of the righteous. His voice is heard from thy righteous doors, and there is admonition from the voice of the pious, and true satisfaction from their food and their drink, when taken in fellowship.

Their resting place is in the law of the Most High, and their speech is for the proclamation of His might. How remote is His word from the wicked, and how difficult it is for all evildoers to understand it! Behold the eye of the Lord looks upon the righteous, and He will increase His mercy on those who praise Him, and from the time of evil He will deliver their soul. Blessed be the Lord who delivered the needy from the hand of the strangers, and saved the meek from the hand of the evildoers, who raises power from Jacob, and the judge of the

Gentiles from Israel, in order that He may lengthen His sojourn in Zion and adorn all our people of Jerusalem.

When the People Received Permission from Cyrus to Return to their Country. O Lord, I have cried to Thee: listen to me; I have lifted my hands to the habitations of Thy holiness: incline Thy ear to me, and grant me my request, and do not refuse my prayer. Build my soul, and do not destroy it, and do not expose it before the unrighteous. Remove from me those who would requite me with evil, O Lord, just judge. Do not judge me according to my sins, because all flesh does not triumph before Thee. Make me, O Lord, understand Thy law and teach me Thy judgments, and many will hear Thy works and the Gentiles will bear witness to Thy majesty. Remember me, and do not forget me, and do not inflict on me calamities more than I can bear. Cast away from me the sins of my youth, and let them not remember my chastisement. Purify me, O Lord, from the evil leper, and let him not keep walking to me. Dry up his roots from me, and let not his leaves stretch over me. O Lord, Thou art great, and that is why my prayer is answered. Whom should I implore to give me anything, and what is the power of the sons of men before Thee, O Lord, my trust? I cried to the Lord, and He answered me and made whole the wound of my heart. I lay down and slept, I dreamed and was helped, and Thou, O Lord, hast sustained me. They have wounded my heart, but I shall receive (joy) because the Lord has delivered me: let me rejoice now in their confusion! I trusted in Thee and I shall not be confounded: grant honour for ever, and for ever and ever save Israel, Thy elect, and the children of Jacob, Thy chosen.

4.

Said by David when Fighting the Lion and the Wolf which took a Sheep from his Flock. O my God, O my God, come to my help. Help me and save me. Deliver my soul from the murderer. Let me not go down to Sheol in the mouth of the lion, and let the wolf devour me not. Is it not sufficient for them that they lay in wait for the flock of my father, and took out a lamb from the flock of my father, that they wish now to destroy my soul? Have pity, O Lord, and deliver Thy elect from destruction, in order that he may repeat Thy praises in all his moments, and glorify the name of Thy Majesty. When Thou hast delivered him from the hands of the lion which destroys and the wolf which devours, and Thou hast returned the booty from the hands of the beasts. O my Lord, send speedily a deliverer from before Thee, and pull me out of the open abyss that wishes to secure me in its depths.

5. Said by David when Thanking God who saved him from the Lion and the Wolf both of which he Killed. Praise the Lord, O ye all the peoples; magnify Him and bless His name, because He has delivered the soul of His elect from the hands of death, and saved His chosen from destruction. And He delivered me from the snare of Sheol, and my soul also from the unfathomable pit. Because if my salvation had not come from Him but a very short time before it did come, I would have been cut into two pieces for two beasts. He sent, however, His angel who closed the open jaws which were about to devour me, and saved my life from destruction. Let my soul magnify Him and exalt Him for all His favours that He did and is doing for me.

Source. English translation by Alphonse Mingana, from ***Woodbrooke Studies: Christian documents in Syriac, Arabic and Garshūni***, edited and translated by A. Mingana, with introductions by Rendel Harris, volume 1 (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1927); public domain. The text was read by machine (Mistral OCR) from a scan of the 1927 volume at the Internet Archive and has not been proofread against the printed book. SermonIndex has removed running heads and page numbers, joined words split across lines, and divided the text into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Footnotes and the editor's introduction are left out. Rendel Harris's introduction and the Syriac text in facsimile are also left out. No original-language text is shown beside it, and no modern English version has been made.

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