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**SOME SYRIAC EXCERPTS FROM GREEK COLLECTIONS  
OF PAGAN PROPHECIES**

BY

SEBASTIAN BROCK

*For James Drescher, aet. LXXX*

Some time in the late fifth century, and perhaps in Alexandria, an anonymous author compiled a work entitled *Theosophia* in eleven books; the first seven books of this were devoted to an exposition of the orthodox faith, while the last four consisted of a collection of pagan oracles and sayings thought to predict or support certain Christian teachings. The original work is unfortunately lost, apart from a short fragment,<sup>1</sup> but an abstract, generally known as the Tübingen Theosophy,<sup>2</sup> survives, as well as a number of other later collections under such titles as *Symphonia*, *Chresmoi* or *Propheteiai*;<sup>3</sup> these latter texts, which mainly consist of sayings of Greek philosophers and poets, proved to be immensely popular, and use was made of them in popular sermons (in Coptic<sup>4</sup> as well as in Greek), and in art,<sup>5</sup> with provision even being made for the portrayal of these pagan prophets in the eighteenth-century manual of Greek ecclesiastical art by Dionysios of Fournà.

Drawing on this type of material a Syriac writer of c. 600 compiled a short work addressed to the pagans of Harran, inviting them to convert to Christianity, seeing that so many of the pagan writers they admired—as well as their own prophet, Baba—had foretold the coming of Christ and the main tenets of Christian doctrine. Three extracts from this particular collection (henceforth referred to as Syr-A)<sup>6</sup> are quoted in chapter 19 of Dionysios bar Šalibi's apologetic work against the Muslims,<sup>7</sup> where he triumphantly ends his quotations by asking his Muslim readers: "What have you got to say, children of Hagar, in answer to these manifest prophecies concerning Christ, his Incarnation and Passion, prophesied by pagans concerning him long before his coming? Which of them prophesied concerning your Muhammad?"

Dionysios in fact quotes six pagan prophecies, only the last three of which derive from Syr-A; evidently he had access to a second collection of prophecies which was circulating in Syriac. The new texts he quotes are:

- (1) a saying of Solon;
- (2) an oracle given at Cyzicus (although this text features in Syr-A §§ 7, 18, Dionysios quotes from a different translation which itself is based on a somewhat different Greek text);
- (3) an oracle given to Augustus.

All three texts reappear in Barhebraeus' compendium on theology, the *Candelabra of the Sanctuary*, base IV,<sup>8</sup> and this small collection will henceforth be referred to as Syr-B.

At first sight it might seem that Barhebraeus (died 1286) borrowed these prophecies from Dionysios (died 1171), but on closer inspection this proves impossible, seeing that Barhebraeus' text of the Cyzicus oracle contains material absent from Dionysios.<sup>9</sup>

In base III of his same work<sup>10</sup> Barhebraeus quotes eight further pagan prophecies from what (as we shall see) must have been yet another already existing Syriac collection, different from both Syr-A and Syr-B. These texts are attributed to:

- (1) Hermes Trismegistos;
- (2) Hules (a corruption of Thules);
- (3) Eunomios;
- (4) Plutarch;
- (5) Hermes;
- (6) Aristotle;
- (7) Sophocles;
- (8) Plato.

At the end Barhebraeus adds an intriguing note; "The person who translated these testimonies and oracles from Greek into Syriac says that 'the Greek is more extensive, for I found another testimony as well, but because it is in the language of Homer, I was unable to translate it' ".

This statement indicates that the particular Greek collection of prophecies which Barhebraeus is quoting in Base III contained only nine prophecies, and accordingly it must be distinct from the Greek behind Syr-B, quoted in Base IV. Furthermore, the fact that the untranslated text was 'in the language of Homer' at once suggests that it was an oracle.<sup>11</sup> This collection used by Barhebraeus in Base III will be referred to as Syr-C.

How are these three Syriac collections, Syr-A, Syr-B and Syr-C, related to extant Greek texts? With only a few exceptions (all in Syr-A),<sup>12</sup> the Syriac prophecies find parallels in one or other of the various Greek sources, although there is no exact correspondence with any single one: evidently all three Syriac collections are witnesses to lost Greek collections. The following tables indicate the main relationships with extant Greek texts (for these reference is made only to the closest parallel available);

## TABLES

<b>Syr-A</b> (section no.)	Erbse	Cyril of Alex. (PG 76)	Malalas (Dindorf)	Other
2 Thules (cp 16)	ω.16		25 <sup>6-8</sup>	
3 Orpheus			73 <sup>5-9</sup> , 74 <sup>6-10</sup> 74 <sup>12</sup> , 75 <sup>5</sup>	
4 Hermes (a)	ω.1		26 <sup>11-20</sup>	
(b) (cp 14)	ω.1	(556A)	27 <sup>5-6</sup>	
(c)	ω.1	(552C)	27 <sup>7-11</sup>	
5 Sophocles	ω.17	549D	40 <sup>17-18</sup>	
6 Petissonios			65 <sup>13</sup> , 66 <sup>1,3-7</sup>	
7 Oracle at Cyzicus (cp 18)	θ.53-4		77 <sup>14</sup> , 78 <sup>2</sup>	
8 Plato (cp 17)	(ω.3)		188 <sup>7-12</sup>	
9 Plato		548D		
10 Pythagoras		548D		
11 Orpheus		541B		= Kern 245 <sup>7-8</sup>
12 Apollo				Or. Sib. 1, 324-5
13 Porphyry				
14 Hermes (cp 4(b))	ω.1	552CD		
15 Amelios		936A		
16 Thules (cp 2)	ω.16			
17 Plato (cp 8)	ω.3	916B, 553B	188 <sup>7-12</sup>	
18 Apollo (cp 7)	θ.54			
19 Hermes				
20 Plotinos				
21 Poimandres				Corp. Herm. XIII, 1-2, 4 cp Baalbek Oracle
22 Sibyl (a)				Or. Sib. III, 785-8 cp Baalbeck Oracle
(b)				
(c)				

23 Sagae (a)	(p. 196)	Or. Sib. VI, 26; VIII, 312
(b)		
(c)	(p. 195)	Or. Sib. VIII, 287-90, 292-6

27-32, 34 Baba of Harran

### Syr-B (Dionysius, Barhebraeus *Candelabra* IV)

	Erbse	Malalas	parallel in Syr-A
1. Solon	ω.11 (p. 206)		
2. Oracle at Cyzicus		p. 77 <sup>17</sup> -18,19-78 <sup>2</sup>	§ 7
3. Oracle to Augustus		p. 231 <sup>12,15,20</sup> -232 <sup>1</sup>	

### Syr-C (Barhebraeus *Candelabra* III)

1. Hermes Trismegistos	ω.1 (p. 202-3)	p. 26 <sup>19</sup> -27 <sup>7</sup>	cp § 14
2. Thules	ω.16 (p. 207)	p. 25 <sup>2,4-9</sup>	cp §§ 2, 16
3. Eunomios <sup>14</sup>	ω.5 (p. 204)		
4. Plutarch	ω.6 (p. 204)		
5. Hermes	ω.2 (p. 203)		
6. Aristotle	ω.5 (p. 204)		
7. Sophocles <sup>15</sup>		p. 65 <sup>20</sup> -66 <sup>2</sup>	§ 6
8. Plato	ω.4 (p. 20)		

The links in Syr-B and Syr-C with the oracles quoted by John Malalas are intriguing, especially since similar links are also apparent in §§ 2-8 of Syr-A.

The more precise relationship of the Syriac sayings in Syr-B and Syr-C to the Greek can best be set out by juxtaposing the Greek texts alongside the English translations; these latter are deliberately literal, and their awkwardness simply reflects that of the Syriac translation itself, many of whose idiosyncracies are due to misunderstandings of the Greek.

The texts are presented in the order in which they appear in Barhebraeus' *Candelabra* IV and III. For Barhebraeus I have used, besides the editions in *Patrologia Orientalis* 31 and 27 (respectively), Mingana syr. 27 (of 1641/2),<sup>16</sup> and Cambridge Add. 2008 (of the fifteenth century);<sup>17</sup> while for Dionysios bar Šalibi's Treatise against the Muslims I have relied on Mingana syr. 89 (of the eighteenth century) and 215 (of the nineteenth century).<sup>18</sup>

For the Greek texts I quote from Dindorf's edition of John Malalas' *Chronicle* and from Erbse's edition of the Tübingen Theosophy and

related texts. The material for each excerpt in Syr-B and Syr-C is arranged as follows:

- (i) translation of text in Barhebraeus;
- (ii) variants in Dionysios bar Šalibi (only applicable for Syr-B) and in other Syriac manuscripts;
- (iii) nearest parallel Greek text;<sup>19</sup>
- (iv) Greek variants presupposed by the Syriac translation;<sup>20</sup>
- (v) further comments (where necessary).

### *Syr-B*

Barhebraeus, *Candelabra* IV

#### 1. *Oracle to Augustus*

(i) The oracle which was given to Augustus of the house of Octavianus<sup>a</sup> when he wanted to learn<sup>b</sup> who would reign after him: ‘A Hebrew child shall be (*or is*) called God, Christ<sup>c</sup>, who (will) reign over the blessed; being thus eternal he shall leave his dwelling place and come and return to<sup>d</sup> our dwelling place’.

- (ii) a. Dionysios: ‘the king’.
- b. Dionysios: ‘know’.
- c. Dionysios: ‘Christ God’.
- d. Dionysios: ‘from’ (= Greek).

(iii) This is an abbreviation of the form of the oracle to be found in Malalas (p. 231),<sup>21</sup> where the relevant parts read:

‘Ο δὲ Αὐγούστου Καῖσαρ Ὀκταβιανὸς.....Τίς μετ’ ἐμὲ βασιλεύσει τῆς Ῥωμαικῆς πολιτείας; .....

Παῖς Ἑβραῖος κέλεται<sup>a</sup> με θεὸς μακάρεσσιν ἀνάσσων  
τόνδε δόμον προλιπεῖν καὶ ἄιδος<sup>b</sup> αὐθις ἰκέσθαι.  
καὶ λοιπὸν ἄπιθι ἐκ πρόμων<sup>c</sup> ἡμετέρων.

- (iv) a. Misread as *καλεῖται*.
- b. Misread as *ἄιδιος*.
- c. Syr. = *δόμων* (so Kedrenos).

#### 2. *Solon the philosopher*<sup>a</sup>

(i) Finally, when he shall be seen upon earth in contemptible fashion, because<sup>b</sup> of wrongdoings he will be clothed in a body and by means of the irreproachable decisions of the divinity he will render ineffective the

corruption (produced by) the passions. From here envy shall seize an unbelieving people, and, as they hang him on high like a guilty person, he shall gently<sup>c</sup> gather everything to himself.

- (ii) a. Dionysios: 'for Solon said concerning Christ'.
- b. Dionysios (and some manuscripts of Barhebraeus): 'and because'.
- c. Dionysios: + 'and in lowly fashion'.

(iii) The following Greek text is Erbse's ω.11 (p. 206);<sup>22</sup> as it will be seen from (iv), some of the variants presupposed by the Syriac are to be found in Σ (Vat. gr. 2200 of 8/9th century). In some other collections the saying is attributed to Chilon.

ὄψέ ποτέ τις<sup>a</sup> ἐπὶ τὴν πολυσχιδῆ ταύτην<sup>b</sup> ἐλάσειεν <ἄν> γῆν καὶ δίχρα σφάλματος<sup>c</sup> σὰρξ γενήσεται ἄκαμάτοις δὲ θεότητος ὄροις ἀνιάτων παθῶν λύσει φθοράν. καὶ τούτῳ<sup>d</sup> φθόνος γενήσεται ἐξ ἀπίστου λαοῦ<sup>e</sup> καὶ πρὸς ὕψος κρεμασθήσεται<sup>f</sup> ὡς θανάτου καταδίκος καὶ πάνταπραεῶς πείσεται.

- (iv) a. *om* = Σ (cp Erbse p. 122).
- b. *om* = Σ.
- c. Syr = διὰ σφάλματα. Σ has διὰ πετάσματος. (for διὰ πταίσματος).
- d. Syr = κατὰ τούτου = Σ.
- e. Syr = ἀπίστῳ ἐγγενήσεται λαῶ = Σ.
- f. Syr = κρεμασθεὶς = Σ.

(v) The translation of σὰρξ γενήσεται by 'will be clothed in a body' (*pagra neth'aqtaph*) conforms with the predilection of Syriac Christianity for clothing metaphors in the context of the Incarnation.<sup>23</sup>

### 3. Oracle at Cyzicus

(i) The oracle which was given by Apollo in the temple of Cyzicus<sup>a</sup> when it was shaken so as to be destroyed<sup>b</sup>, 'when they said to him. 'Prophecy and tell us, o pure prophet, giver of oracles, valiant, almighty, king Apollo, what and whose shall this temple be?' And he said<sup>c</sup>, 'The things you are performing look to virtue and adornment. But I say, the trinity is a single God most high, alone, whose incorruptible word shall be conceived in a young girl, a child who has not experienced intercourse, and in the likeness of fire shall he run over the world; and he will catch everything and offer (it) as an offering to his father. Hers<sup>d</sup> shall be this house, and Maria is her name'. 'They say to him, 'Then we serve

you in vain, o pure one, giver of oracles, valiant, king of all, Apollo'. He says, 'Was it not he who sent me to make the truth clear (*lit.* polish)? I did not know what I said, but the cloud stretched above the heaven is his'<sup>e</sup>.

- (ii) a. Dionysios: 'the town Cyzicus'.
- b. Dionysios: 'so as to fall'.
- c. Dionysios omits.
- d. The manuscripts of both Dionysios and Barhebraeus have *dileh* 'his', but this is an easy corruption of *dilah* 'hers' (especially as the Syriac transcription of 'Maria' is very naturally misread as *marya* 'Lord').
- e. Dionysios omits this final section.

(iii) The Cyzicus oracle is also to be found in Syr-A, no 7 (and a brief extract in 18), which is closely related to the text in Malalas, pp. 77-78.<sup>24</sup> The present piece in Syr-B not only represents a quite independent Syriac translation, but it is also evident that it must have been made from a Greek version of the oracle which differed in several respects from the account in Malalas: thus both the reference to an earthquake and the final question and answer are without any parallel. For the central part of the text, however, the Greek underlying Syr-B will have been reasonably similar to Malalas' accounts where the relevant sections read (pp. 77-78):

...ἐπρωτήσαν λέγοντες ταῦτα· Προφήτευσον ἡμῖν, προφήτα, Τιτάν, Φοῖβε Ἄπολλον, τίνος ἔσται δόμος οὗτος, εἴ τι δὲ ἔσται; καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς χρησμὸς παρὰ τῆς Πυθίας οὗτος· Ὅσα μὲν πρὸς ἀρετὴν καὶ κόσμον ὄρωρε ποιεῖτε. ἐγὼ δὲ ἐφευμέω τρεῖν ἓνα μοῦνον ὑψιμέδοντα θεόν, οὗ λόγος ἀφθιτος ἐν ἀδαεῖ κόρη ἔγκυος ἔσται. οὗτος ὥσπερ τόξον πυριφόρον μέσον διαδραμῶν ἅπαντα κόσμον, ζωγρεύσας πατρὶ προσάξει δῶρον. αὐτῆς ἔσται δόμος, Μαρία δὲ τοῦνομα αὐτῆς.

### Syr-C

Barhebraeus, *Candelabra* III

#### 1. *Hermes Trismegistos*

(i) One alone is the intellectual light, (consisting) of intelligible fire: and the intellect which is at all times illumined in an illumined mind. And there is nothing else in its mixture, and in spirit it encircles<sup>a</sup> everything. And outside this one there is no god, no angel, no demon, no essence (οὐσία) whatsoever; but he is lord of all and god and father,

and everything is in him and under his authority; whose word, having in perfect fashion proceeded from him and been born, is maker of all; and having at his generation overshadowed the nature of the waters, he caused the water to bring forth.

- (ii) a. Graffin's text in *Patrologia Orientalis* reads *bryk* 'is blessed' (so too his translation), and no variant is recorded in his apparatus. The Greek *περιέχει*, however, makes it clear that this is a corruption of *kryk* 'encircles', which is in fact the reading of Mingana syr. 27, f.35a and Cambridge Add. 2008, f.67b.

(iii) Another excerpt from Hermes occurs in no 5, below, while partly parallel material, in a different translation, is to be found in Syr-A, 4 and 14; Syr-A. 4 is closely related to the text in Malalas, while the (short) extract in 14 seems to be nearer to the form of the quotation in Cyril of Alexandria, *C. Julianum* I (PG 76, col. 552D). The two excerpts in Syr-C, on the other hand, would appear to be associated rather with Erbse's  $\omega$ .1<sup>25</sup> (for Syr-C, 1) and  $\omega$ .2 (for Syr-C, 5);<sup>26</sup> the relevant part of  $\omega$ .1 reads (Erbse, pp. 202-3):

..ἐν μόνον ἦν φῶς νοερόν πρὸ φωτὸς<sup>a</sup> νοεροῦ καὶ ἔστιν αἰὶ νοῦς νοὸς φωτεινὸς καὶ οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἦν ἢ ἡ τοῦτου ἐνότη<sup>b</sup>.... καὶ πνεύματι πάντα περιέχει· ἐκτὸς τοῦτου οὐ θεός, οὐκ ἄγγελος, οὐ δαίμων, οὐκ οὐσία τις ἄλλη· πάντων γὰρ ἐστὶ κύριος καὶ πατὴρ καὶ θεός....καὶ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ὑπ' αὐτόν<sup>c</sup> ἐστὶν.

ὁ γὰρ λόγος αὐτοῦ προελθὼν, παντέλειος ὢν καὶ γόνιμος καὶ δημιουργός, ἐν γονίμῳ φύσει πεσὼν ἐπὶ γονίμῳ ὕδατι ἔγκυον τὸ ὕδωρ ἐποίησεν.

- (iv) a. Syr 'fire', but perhaps due to inner Syriac corruption: i.e. for *nura methyadd'anitha* read *nuhra methyadd'ana*.  
 b. How the Syriac translator reached 'in its mixture' is unclear.  
 c. Note that in Malalas both *πατὴρ* and *καὶ ὑπ' αὐτόν* are absent.

(v) The use of 'overshadow' (*aggen*) in the mistranslated final sentence is of interest, since this verb is a technical term in Syriac for the activity of the Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup>

## 2. *Thules*

(i) The oracle which was given to Thules<sup>a</sup> in the region of Africa when he enquired who before him and who after him was able to subdue the entire earth. And he was told, 'Before you, god; and after you, the word and the spirit which sprout up<sup>b</sup> with each other, and all things are coming to the one, whose dominion is for ever. Now you shall die speedily because you have not reflected on your path'.

- (ii) a. All manuscripts of Barhebraeus have *hl̄ys*, an easy corruption of *tl̄ys* (Thules).  
 b. Syr *šwh̄yn*, for which Graffin suggests (p. 583, n. 9) the emendation *šwygn* ‘equal’, but this is unnecessary since the Syriac represents a calque on σύμφυτα.

(iii) The oracle to Thules also occurs twice in Syr-A: first in § 2, with just the oracle’s reply, and then again in § 16, prefaced by a historical introduction similar to that in Malalas. Syr-C once again represents an independent translation, and its final sentence is absent from both quotations in Syr-A. Although the mention of Africa would seem to associate Syr-C with Malalas, the phraseology is somewhat closer to that of Erbse’s ω.16 (p. 207),<sup>28</sup> which reads:

Φράσον μοι, πυρισθενές, ἀφευδές, μάκαρ, ὁ τὸν αἰθέριον μετεγκλίτων δρόμον τίς πρὸ τῆς ἐμῆς βασιλείας ἠδυνήθη ὑποτάξαι τὰ πάντα ἢ τίς μετ’ ἐμέ; καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῶ χρησμὸς οὗτος· Πρῶτα θεός, μετέπειτα λόγος καὶ πνεῦμα σὺν αὐτοῖς· ταῦτα δὲ σύμφυτα πάντα καὶ ἔν τε καὶ εἰς ἓν ἰόντα, οὐ κράτος αἰώνιον. ὠκέσι ποσὶ βάδιζε, θνητέ, ἄδηλον διανύων<sup>a</sup> βίον<sup>b</sup>.

- (iv) a. Syr = διανοίωv, for which see Erbse, p. 212 (apparatus).  
 b. Syr = δρόμον = χ (Erbse, pp. 112, 212).

### 3. *Eunomios*

(i) Eunomios the philosopher said ‘The incorruptible eye of the father, whose flow is continual, having a power equal in course with his will,<sup>a</sup> receiving its nature from him, namely the all powerful, the word, who is by his nature almighty’.

- (ii) a. Reading *dabšebyaneh* for *dabšebyanah* (‘with its will’, i.e. the eye’s).

(iii) This is a particularly interesting piece as far as the manuscript transmission is concerned. The text represents a variant form of the Greek saying attributed to Aristotle (Erbse’s ω.5), to be found only in Erbse’s manuscript V<sup>1</sup>; it thus in fact represents a doublet to Syr-C. 6 below (which, however, translates the standard Greek text form of the saying attributed to Aristotle). Now V<sup>1</sup> in fact is the only manuscript to have a saying attributed to Eunomios (unknown; possibly the fourth-century Arian bishop of Cyzicus), but this is the saying attributed in the other Greek manuscripts to Plutarch (ω.6 = Syr-C, 4 below), and not ω.5. Erbse’s ω.5, attributed to Aristotle,<sup>29</sup> reads (p. 204; cp pp. 123-4):

ἀκάματος φύσις θεοῦ γενέσεως οὐκ ἔχουσα ἀρχήν<sup>a</sup> ἐξ αὐτῆς δὲ ὁ πανσθενῆς οὐσίωται<sup>b</sup> λόγος.

- (iv) a. Syr = ἄφθιτον ἀένναον ὄμμα πατρός, σύνδρομον ἔχον τῆ θελήσει τὴν δύναμιν = V<sup>1</sup> (Erbse, p. 124).  
 b. Both here and in no 6 the Syriac represents φυσίωται.

#### 4. *Plutarch*

(i) Before that cause which is exalted more than all, nothing is understood;<sup>a</sup> its entirety (derives) from its entirety, and there is another (originating) from it, and resembling it; it is other, but does not (exist) in another fashion.

- (ii) a. Graffin's Syriac text has 'I do not understand anything', but the ʾnʾ 'I' is absent from Mingana syr. 27 and Cambridge Add. 2008, and represents an inner Syriac corruption.

(iii) This corresponds to Erbse's ω.6 (attributed to Eunomios in V<sup>1</sup>); this reads (Erbse, p. 204, cp pp. 138-9):<sup>30</sup>

τοῦ ὑπερτάτου τῶν ὄλων αἰτίου, προεπινοεῖται οὐδέν· ὄλος δὲ ἐξ ὄλου, ἄλλος δὲ ἐξ αὐτοῦ ὡς αὐτός, ἄλλ' οὐκ ἄλλοῖος καὶ μέσον οὐδέν<sup>a</sup>

- (iv) a. Syr would seem to represent ἄλλος ἄλλ' οὐκ ἄλλοίως, for which compare Erbse's V<sup>1</sup>.

#### 5. *Hermes*

(i) You, being god and father of all, do not have from any other this (ability) to exist at every moment. After you I acknowledge one like you, to whom, in a way that you know, you gave birth; and he is the son, and god from god, essence from your essence, who brings to you an incorruptible image and likeness in all things to you, o god and father, so that he may be in you, and you in him, the mirror of beauties and persons united to each other.

(iii) This is based on a text resembling Erbe's ω.2, which reads (p. 203):

..πατέρα τῶν ὄλων, θεὸν ὄντα μόνον, ἀπ' οὐδενὸς ἔχοντα ἀρχήν, ἔγνωκα. ἓνα μετὰ σε ὄντα μόνον ἐκ σοῦ γεραίρω υἱόν, ὃν ῥώμη ἀπορρήτω καὶ ὄξυτέρα φωνῆ ἴδιον εὐθύς ἀφθόνως καὶ ἀπαθῶς ἀγέννητον λόγον ἐγέννησας, θεὸν ὄντα τὴν οὐσίαν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας, ὃς σοῦ τοῦ πατρός τὴν εἰκόνα τὴν ἄφθαρτον καὶ πᾶν ὁμοίαν φέρει, ὥστε εἶναι ἐκεῖνον ἐν σοι, σὲ δὲ ἐν ἐκείνῳ, κάλλους ἔσποτρον, ἀλληλεύφραντον πρόσωπον.

## 6. Aristotle

(i) To the nature which has no labour of the child (*or* birth) of god<sup>a</sup> there is nothing prior, because from him he receives his nature - the almighty, the word.

(ii) a. The Syriac could also be translated 'To the nature of god which is without the toil of birth'.

(iii) This corresponds to Erbse's ω.5, to which Syr-C's 3 (attributed to Eunomios) is a doublet; the Greek text will be found under 3, above.

## 7. Sophocles

(i) There is one god, the father, self-originate, without father. His son who is from him has enriched himself threefold<sup>a</sup>. We belong to the minor portion of the angels. Now that you have learnt, go and be in silence.

(ii) a. Some manuscripts of Barhebraeus read 'him whom god has enriched'.

(iii) The text attributed to Sophocles in ω.17 (and quoted in Syr-A.5) is very different. In fact we have here another misattribution, for the quotation derives from an oracle given to king Petissonios at Memphis, recorded in Malalas (and later writers).<sup>31</sup> A rather longer excerpt, with the correct attribution, but without the oracle's last two lines,<sup>32</sup> is to be found in Syr-A.6. Once again Syr-C represents an independent translation from the Greek. The corresponding text in Malalas reads (pp. 65-6):  
 ..οὗτος ὁ θεὸς αὐτοπάτωρ, ἀπάτωρ, πατήρ υἱὸς αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ τρισόλβιος· εἰς μικρὸν δὲ μέρος ἀγγέλων ἡμεῖς. μαθὼν ἄπιθι σιγῶν.

## 8. Plato

(i) One is the cause of all, and from him is the single son; and this one is not in time, for he is everlasting; and the other is everlasting and not in second place. And there is nothing equal to them in everlastingness.

(iii) This represents the end of Erbse's ω.4, and once again there are some evident links between the Greek text underlying Syr-C and that preserved in Erbse's manuscript V<sup>1</sup>. The relevant part of ω.4 reads (Erbse, p. 204; cp cp. 136-8):

..εἰς γὰρ αἴτιος τοῦ παντός, ἑὶς καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ, ἄλλος ὁ εἰς<sup>a</sup> καὶ ποτε οὗτος ὁ εἰς οὐκ ἐν χρόνῳ, αἰδῖος γὰρ ὁ εἰς καὶ συναίδιος<sup>b</sup>.

(iv) a. Syr = καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ εἰς υἱός = V<sup>1</sup>M<sup>1</sup>.

- b. Syr appears to represent a rather different text (none of the variants given by Erbse pp. 136-7 are suitable).

### *Conclusion*

The various pagan prophecies quoted by Dionysios bar Šalibi and Barhebraeus derive from three different Syriac collections:

(1) Dionysios' quotations from the Sibyl, the Sagai, and the Harranian prophet Baba, all derive from the Syriac collection of pagan prophecies probably made c.600 with the aim of encouraging the Harranians to convert to Christianity. This collection, referred to here as Syr-A, was published in *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 14 (1983) and so does not receive direct discussion in the present article.

(2) Three sayings, of Solon, an oracle at Cyzicus and an oracle to Augustus, which are found in both Dionysios and (independently) in Barhebraeus (*Candelabra* IV), derive from a second Syriac collection, here referred to as Syr-B, which may well once have contained further sayings and oracles as well. There is an overlap between the contents of Syr-A and Syr-B since both include the Cyzicus oracle; the two Syriac texts, however, represent independent translations from two differing recensions of the Greek, both of which are related in some way to the recension in Malalas. The oracle to Augustus also points to indirect links with Malalas.

(3) Eight sayings, preserved in Barhebraeus, *Candelabra* III, derive from a Greek collection of nine texts (the untranslated one probably being an oracle). These eight sayings here called Syr-C, once again exhibit a certain overlap with Syr-A (see Table, p. 80), and it is probably significant that this is in material which is also to be found in Malalas; Syr-C, however, represents an independent Syriac translation of a Greek text which was somewhat different from that underlying Syr-A. This Greek text behind Syr-C already contained one duplication (Syr-C.3 and 6 = Erbse  $\omega$ .5), and two misattributions (Syr-C.3 and 7); it evidently also had some striking similarities with Erbse's manuscript V<sup>1</sup> (Vind.ph.gr.110,I of the sixteenth century, copied by a monk of Sinai), whose markedly variant text is thus accorded a long ancestry.

None of the extant Greek collections provides us with the precise source for any of the three Syriac collections, and so these latter take on a certain importance as witnesses to collections no longer surviving (or at least not yet published), all the more so since it would seem likely that these underlying Greek collections all drew directly or indirectly upon the lost source(s) of Erbse's  $\omega$  and Malalas.<sup>33</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Reprinted in H. Erbse, *Fragmente griechischer Theosophien* (Hamburg 1941) 185-200 (these derive ultimately from the Sibylline Oracles; most of the pagan oracles in the Theosophia will have been drawn from Porphyry's *De philosophia ex oraculis haurienda*).
- <sup>2</sup> Erbse, 167-201.
- <sup>3</sup> Several are given in Erbse, 202-22.
- <sup>4</sup> See R. van den Broek, Four Coptic fragments of a Greek Theosophy, *VC* 32 (1978) 118-42; further bibliography on the Theosophy can be found here, 118 note 1.
- <sup>5</sup> See, for example, I. Dujčev, *Heidnische Philosophen und Schriftsteller in der alten bulgarischen Wandmalerei* (Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vorträge G 214, 1976).
- <sup>6</sup> Edition, translation and commentary are to appear in *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 14 (1983). The section containing the prophecies of Baba was earlier published by I. E. Rahmani, in his *Studia Syriaca* I (Charfet 1904), and of this there is an English translation by F. Rosenthal, The prophecies of Baba the Harranian, in *A Locust's Leg. Studies in honour of S.H. Taqizadeh* (London 1962) 220-32.
- <sup>7</sup> Unpublished; for manuscripts, see p. 80 above.
- <sup>8</sup> Edited by J. Khoury in *PO* 31, 18-20.
- <sup>9</sup> Note that Barhebraeus also quotes them in a different order.
- <sup>10</sup> Edited by F. Graffin in *PO* 27, 582-4.
- <sup>11</sup> These caused great difficulties to Syriac translators, who often resorted to guesswork.
- <sup>12</sup> For these, see my edition (n.6 above).
- <sup>13</sup> Barhebraeus has the order Augustus, Solon, Cyzicus.
- <sup>14</sup> Erbse's  $\omega.5$  is attributed to Aristotle, and 'Eunomios' here is in fact a doublet to Syr-C.6; see further below.
- <sup>15</sup> This is totally different from the Sophocles saying in Syr-A 5 (= Erbse,  $\omega.17$ ), and it corresponds to the oracle given to Petissonios (= Syr-A.6).
- <sup>16</sup> Ff.35a-36a (Base III), 45b (Base IV).
- <sup>17</sup> Ff.67b-68a (Base III).
- <sup>18</sup> Mingana syr. 89, ff.67a-b, and syr.215, ff.83a-84a; for other manuscripts, see A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn 1922) 297. J. Khoury (*PO* 31, 19 n.8) mentions the existence of an unpublished thesis on this work by Muḥammad Ḥamdi al Bakri.
- <sup>19</sup> For other Greek witnesses, reference should be made to Erbse and to Dindorf's edition of Malalas.
- <sup>20</sup> I pass over the many mistranslations. For Greek manuscripts and collections I employ Erbse's symbols.
- <sup>21</sup> The oracle in Erbse, 179, is only distantly related. The form in Malalas is subsequently to be found in some later Byzantine chronicles.
- <sup>22</sup> Part of the text accompanies the figure of Solon in the medieval wallpaintings of the Monē Bellas (in Epiros): cp K. Spetsieris, *Eikones hellēnōn philosophōn eis ekklēsiās, Epistēmonikē Epetēris tēs philosophikēs scholēs tou panepistēmiou Athēnōn* II.14 (1963-4) 413 and plate 32. For quite a different text attributed to Solon, see note 31.
- <sup>23</sup> See my Clothing metaphors as a means of theological expression in Syriac tradition, in ed. M. Schmidt, *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihre Parallelen im Mittelalter* (Eichstätter Beiträge 4: 1982), 11-40. The same phenomenon can be observed in Syr-A.24.

- <sup>24</sup> The setting and text in the Tübingen Theosophy (θ. 53-4) are very different. An extract from this text is regularly attributed to Plutarch in the portrayals of pagan prophets in Greek monasteries: Spetsieris, 413, 415, 419.
- <sup>25</sup> His paragraphs b, c and e.
- <sup>26</sup> Compare also Erbse's χ.2-3 for the same grouping of sentences. The complicated Greek textual tradition is discussed by Erbse, 104-11.
- <sup>27</sup> See my *Passover, Annunciation and Epiclesis*, *NT 24* (1982), 222-33.
- <sup>28</sup> Cp χ.15 (Erbse, 212); for the textual tradition see Erbse, 111-3.
- <sup>29</sup> Aristotle, with most of this text, features in the seventeenth-century wallpaintings in the Parekklesia of the Monē Ibērōn on Athos (Spetsieris, 401 with plate 16; cp also 413, 415, 419).
- <sup>30</sup> Plutarch, together with an extract from this saying, features on the wall of the Trapeza of the Lavra monastery on Athos (Spetsieris, 401 with plate 12). For quite a different text attributed to Plutarch, see note 24.
- <sup>31</sup> A shortened form of this saying (with a different ending) is attributed to Solon in the Parekklesia of the Monē Ibērōn (Spetsieris, 401 with plate 13; cp 415 with plate 33).
- <sup>32</sup> The penultimate sentence is of the greatest interest since it corresponds to a line in an oracle of Apollo to Theophilus in the Tübingen Theosophy (θ 13; Erbse, 169 line 31 τοῦτο θεός' μικρὰ δὲ θεοῦ μερίς ἄγγελοι ἡμεῖς) which, as L. Robert has recently pointed out (Un oracle gravé à Oinoanda, *CRAIBL* 1971, 597-619, esp. 605), is also to be found in a second-century inscribed oracle at Oinoanda (on the borders between Lycia and Phrygia).
- <sup>33</sup> According to Erbse, 145, ω was a source for Malalas, belonging to the early sixth century. That any of the Syriac collections could have derived their sayings direct from Malalas (or one of the later Byzantine chroniclers) is extremely unlikely.

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