

THE PRAYER OF MANASSES

INTRODUCTION

§ 1. DESCRIPTION OF THE BOOK

‘The Prayer of Manasses, King of Judah, when he was holden captive in Babylon,’ is the title of a short penitential Psalm. It is written in Greek, and contains thirty-seven *στίχοι*. In Fritzsche’s *Libri Apocryphi Vet. Test. Graece* it is divided into fifteen verses; and this division has been very generally adopted.

The Psalm consists of (a) an invocation of the Deity (vv. 1-7), (b) a confession of sin (vv. 8-10), (c) an entreaty for forgiveness (vv. 11-15).

§ 2. ITS ORIGIN

Its literary origin is obscure. There seems, however, to be little reason to doubt that the author was a Jew, i.e. not a Christian. While, in the case of so short a fragment, it is difficult to decide with absolute certainty, it seems most probable that the Prayer was originally written in Greek; and that the existing Greek text is not, as has sometimes been maintained, a translation from the Hebrew or Aramaic.¹ If this view be correct, ‘The Prayer of Manasses’ should be classed with such writings as ‘The Song of the Three Children’, and be regarded as, in all probability, the composition of a Hellenistic Jew, who in the interests of his people’s faith wrote the penitential Prayer to suit the special circumstances under which the prayer, ascribed to Manasseh, King of Judah, in 2Chron. 33:18, 19, was supposed to have been uttered.

It will be convenient to quote the Whole passage in which this mention of the king’s prayer occurs, 2Chron. 33:11-13, 18, 19:

(11) ‘Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh in chains (Or, *with hooks*), and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.

(12) And when he was in distress, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. (13)

And he prayed unto him; and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God. ... (18)

Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and his prayer unto his God, and the words of the seers that spake to him in the name of the LORD, the God of Israel, behold, they are written among the acts of the kings of Israel. (19) His prayer also, and how *God* was intreated of him, and all his sin and his trespass, and the places wherein he built high places, and set up the Asherim and the graven images, before he humbled himself: behold, they are written in the history of Hozai (Or, *the seers*).’

According to this account, a Prayer of Manasseh² was reputed, in the Chronicler’s time, (a) to have been preserved among ‘the acts of the kings of Israel’, and (b) to be contained in the records

of Hozai (or, *the seers*). Whether the Chronicler himself was acquainted with any such Hebrew prayer, or whether he is simply repeating a popular tradition, we have no means of determining. No such writing was ever contained in the Hebrew Scriptures; nor, if it ever existed, has it survived in any Hebrew or Aramaic form.

It is easy to understand that the Chronicler's story of Manasseh's repentance and prayer and deliverance from captivity must have produced upon the minds of devout Jews a profound impression. The record of his idolatry and of his persecution of the servants of Jehovah had stamped his name with infamy in the annals of Judah. But side by side with his wickedness were commemorated the unusual length of the king's reign and the quiet peacefulness of his end. The Chronicler's story of the repentance and conversion of Manasseh provided the explanation of a seemingly unintelligible anomaly. Henceforth his name was associated by Jewish tradition not only with the grossest acts of idolatry ever perpetrated by a king of Judah, but also with the most famous instance of Divine forgiveness towards a repentant sinner. What more remarkable example could be found of the long-suffering compassion of the Almighty and of His readiness to hear and to answer the supplication of a contrite penitent?

Nothing would be more natural than for a devout Jew to endeavour to frame in fitting terms the kind of penitential prayer, which, according to the tradition, Manasseh had poured forth when he was in captivity in Babylon. The sentiments embodied in such a form of petition might conceivably be appropriate to those of his countrymen who had fallen into idolatry, and who might yet be reclaimed from the error of their way.

According to this hypothesis, the Psalm was composed for a practical devotional purpose.

§ 3. ITS LITERARY HISTORY

'The Prayer of Manasses' makes its first appearance in extant literature, so far as is known at present, in the so-called *Didascalia*. This was an early Christian writing, composed probably in the second or third century, and incorporated into the *Apostolical Constitutions*, a work of the fourth or fifth century, of which the first six books consist of the *Didascalia*.

The author of the *Didascalia* was probably a member of the Christian Church in Syria, and wrote in Greek. In a long extract, apparently derived from some other writing, he records at length the narrative of Manasseh's idolatry and punishment, of his repentance and prayer, of his miraculous deliverance from captivity and restoration to Jerusalem. The object which the author of the *Didascalia* has in view is to illustrate God's mercy towards a repentant sinner. After briefly mentioning the classical instances of David's repentance at the rebuke of Nathan, of Jonah's repentance and the answer to his prayer uttered in the whale's belly, of Hezekiah's supplication and the pardon of his sin of pride, he continues, 'But hearken, ye bishops, to an excellent and apposite example; for thus is it written in the Fourth Book of

the Kingdoms (i.e. 2Kings) and in the Second Book of Chronicles.’ Then follow extracts from the **LXX** of 2Kings 21:1-18 and 2Chron. 33:1 ff., which are welded together and expanded by four Additions, to which there is nothing corresponding in the Hebrew text. The order in which these extracts follow one another is as follows:

1. 2Kings 21:1-4.
2. 2Chron. 33:5-8.
3. 2Kings 21:9-16.
4. 2Chron. 33:11.
5. Addition A.
6. 2Chron. 33:12-13^a (προσηύξατο).
7. Addition B. λέγων, followed by ‘The Prayer of Manasses’.
8. Addition C.
9. 2Chron. 33:13b.
10. Addition D.
11. 2Chron. 33:15, 16.

The Additions are as follows:

(A) An insertion between 2Chron. 33:11 and 12: καὶ ἦν δεδεμένος καὶ κατασειδηρωμένος ὅλος ἐν οἴκῳ φυλακῆς, καὶ ἐδίδοτο αὐτῷ ἐκ πιτύρων ἄρτος ἐν σταθμῷ βραχύς, καὶ ὕδωρ σὺν ὄξει ὀλίγον ἐν μέτρῳ, ὥστε ζῆν αὐτόν, καὶ ἦν συνεχόμενος καὶ ὀδυνώμενος σφόδρα.¹

(B) After 2Chron. 33:13 καὶ προσηύξατο πρὸς κύριον (LXX αὐτόν) is added λέγων· κύριε παντοκράτωρ . . . εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. Ἀμήν.

(C) Instead of 2Chron. 33:13 καὶ ἐπήκουσεν αὐτοῦ· καὶ ἐπήκουσεν τῆς βοῆς αὐτοῦ, is substituted καὶ ἐπήκουσε τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ κύριος, καὶ ᾤκτειρεν αὐτόν· καὶ ἐγένετο περὶ αὐτόν φλόξ πυρός, καὶ ἐτάκησαν παντὰ τὰ περὶ αὐτόν σίδηρα· καὶ ἰάσατο κύριος Μανασσήν ἐκ τῆς ολίψεως αὐτοῦ.

(D) Instead of 2Chron. 33:14 is substituted καὶ ἐλάτρευσε μόνῳ κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ ἐν ὅλῃ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ αὐτοῦ πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς αὐτοῦ· καὶ ἐλογίσθη δίκαιος.

§ 4. ITS PRESERVATION

The preservation of this short disconnected Psalm may thus, with good reason, be ascribed to the accident of its occurrence in the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolical Constitutions*. There is no evidence to show that it was ever included in the Septuagint, the Judaeo-Greek Canon of Holy Scripture. But, very possibly, in consequence of the popularity of the *Apostolical Constitutions*, ‘The Prayer of Manasses’ became well known in the Eastern Church; and it was a natural step to take, to detach the Prayer from its context and to insert it among the Canticles (ὠδαί, *Cantica*) used and sung for liturgical purposes, and to be found appended to the Psalter ‘in certain uncial MSS. and a large proportion of the cursives’ (Swete, *Introd. to the O. T. in Greek*, p. 253).

In the Codex Alexandrinus (**A**) there are fourteen Canticles appended to the Psalter in the following order: (1) Exod. 15:1-19

(ὡδὴ Μωυσέως ἐν τῇ Ἐξόδῳ): (2) Deut. 32:1-43 (ὡδὴ Μωυσέως ἐν τῷ Δευτερονομίῳ): (3) 1Sam. 2:1-10 (προσευχὴ Ἄννας μητρὸς Σαμουήλ): (4) Isa. 26:9-20 (προσευχὴ Ἐζεκίου): (5) Jonah 2:3-10 (προσευχὴ Ἰωνᾶ): (6) Hab. 3:1-19 (προσευχὴ Ἀμβακούμ): (7) Isa. 38:10-23 (προσευχὴ Ἐζεκίου): (8) ‘The Prayer of Manasses’ (προσευχὴ Μανασσή): (9) Dan. 3:23 (προσευχὴ Ἀζαρίου): (10) ὕμνος τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν: (11) Magnificat (προσευχὴ Μαρίας τῆς θεοτόκου): (12) *Nunc Dimittis* (προσευχὴ Συμεῶν): (13) *Benedictus* (προσευχὴ Ζαχαρίου): (14) The Morning Hymn (ὕμνος ἑωθινός). Similarly, in the Codex Turicensis (T), the liturgical Canticles are appended to the Psalter; and ‘The Prayer of Manasses’ appears ninth in the list. But the evidence of Codex Alexandrinus would alone suffice to show that in the Eastern Church the Prayer was in use for liturgical psalms in the fifth century A.D.

§ 5. THE TITLE

To the Psalm is prefixed the title ‘The Prayer of Manasses’ (προσευχὴ Μανασσή) in Codex Alexandrinus (A); ‘The Prayer of Manasses the son of Hezekiah’ (προσευχὴ Μανασσή τοῦ υἱοῦ Ἐζεκίου) in Codex Turicensis (T); and in the editions of the Vulgate ‘The Prayer of Manasses, King of Judah, when he was holden captive in Babylon’ (*Oratio Manassae regis Iuda cure captus teneretur in Babylone*).

There is no sufficient reason to call in question the correctness of the title. (1) The title is derived from the narrative in the *Didascalia* in which the Prayer has been incorporated. (2) There is no evidence to show that the Prayer had existed before its inclusion in this Manasseh tradition. (3) Though it is noteworthy that the Prayer contains no mention of any proper name of personage or place, by which the legitimacy of the title might be confirmed, there are nevertheless to be found in it allusions which are most naturally interpreted on the assumption that the Prayer is put into the mouth of Manasseh, King of Judah. Thus, (a) the speaker describes himself as ‘weighed down with chains’, κατακαμπτόμενος πολλῷ σιδηρῷ (ver. 10): (b) he dwells with emphasis upon his many sins in past time, ἡμαρτον ὑπὲρ ἀριθμὸν ψάμμου θαλάσσης . . . ἀπὸ πλήθους τῶν ἀδικιῶν μου (ver. 9): (c) he makes particular mention of the forms of idolatrous sin whereby he had provoked the wrath of God, στήσας βδελύγματα καὶ πληθύνας προσοχθίσματα (ver. 10).

The objection must be admitted for what it is worth that there is no reference to the Temple of Jerusalem or to the religious worship of Israel. But this omission is intelligible, if we are correct in assuming that the composer is concerned with the tradition of Manasseh’s repentance in its religious rather than in its historical bearings.

§ 6. DATE OF COMPOSITION

It seems probable that the *Didascalia* (lib. 2:21), in which the Prayer was preserved, was composed in the first half of the third century A.D. (F. X. Funk, *Die Apostol. Konstitutionen*, 1891, p. 50),

and in Syria (*ibid.*, p. 54). If we may assume that the author of the *Didascalia* borrowed from some Jewish, or Hellenistic, source the whole passage relating to Manasseh, then the Prayer, and the writing in which it stood, must have been well known in the beginning of the third century A.D. Its composition must be assigned to an earlier date than this.

The inclusion of the Prayer among the liturgical Canticles in the Codex Alexandrinus implies a high degree of estimation; and if those Canticles were copied from a yet earlier *MS.*, we might be justified in inferring that its adoption for liturgical use had its origin not later than in the fourth century, and that a considerable interval of time must have elapsed between its becoming known in the Eastern Church and its being transcribed for liturgical use in MSS. of Scripture. Perhaps, however, we cannot say more than that (1) 'The Prayer of Manasses' probably found its way into liturgical use after becoming known to the Church through the *Didascalia*: (2) that the citation, in the *Didascalia*, of the long extract in which the Prayer occurs, points to an earlier date for the period of its composition: (3) that the position of the Prayer, in a setting of passages cited from the Greek versions of Kings and Chronicles, suggests that the Prayer itself is of considerably later date than the translations which were used as a framework into which the penitential Psalm was inserted.

§ 7. ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

'The Prayer of Manasses' is too brief to admit of any degree of certainty in the reply to the question whether we have to do with a Greek original, or with a Greek translation from a Hebrew or Aramaic original.¹ If it be a translation, it deserves to rank high. But the general impression produced by the flexible style and ample vocabulary favours the view that Greek is the language in which it was composed: and it receives further support from the consideration that the manner in which it is inserted in the *Didascalia* extract among quotations from the Greek renderings of Kings and Chronicles, combined with Greek 'Haggadic' Additions, would suggest an originally Greek compilation.

The language may be described as a good specimen of the κοινή διάλεκτος, and contains phrases which show the usual Semitic colouring, e.g. ἀπὸ προσώπου (ver. 3), ἐνώπιόν σου (ver. 10), εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (ver. 13). The occurrence of such adjectives as ἀμέτροτος, ἀνεξιχνίαστος, ἀνυπόστατος, ἄστεκτος (vv. 6, 7), of such substantives as ἀγαθωσύνη (ver. 14), ἐπαγγελία (ver. 6), ψάμμος (ver. 8), and of such verbs as ἀνανεύειν (ver. 10), ἀτενίζειν (ver. 9), κατακάμπτειν (ver. 9), would suggest a freedom from the usual restrictions of translation.

The employment of phrases based on, or derived from, the LXX seems to indicate an acquaintance with the Greek version rather than the work of an independent translator; e.g. ὁ ποιήσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν σὺν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ αὐτῶν (ver. 1), cf. Gen. 1:1, 2:1: μετανοῶν ἐπὶ κακίαις ἀνθρώπων (ver. 7), cf. Joel 2:13: μὴ συναπολέσης με ταῖς ἀνομίαις μου (ver. 13), cf. Gen. 19:15: εἰς τὸν

αἰῶνα μνήσας (ver. 13), cf. Ps. 102:(103:)9: ἐν τοῖς κατωτάτοις τῆς γῆς (ver. 13), cf. Ps. 138:(139:)15: πᾶσα ἡ δύναμις τῶν οὐρανῶν (ver. 15), cf. Ps. 32:(33:)6.

Strange constructions such as ὠρίσας μετάνοιαν . . . εἰς σωτηρίαν (ver. 7); ἡμαρτον ὑπὲρ ἀριθμὸν ψάμμου θαλάσσης (ver. 9); εἰς τὸ ἀνανεῦσαί με ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτιῶν (ver. 10), κλίνω γόνυ καρδίας μου (ver. 11); διὰ παντὸς ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς ζωῆς μου (ver. 15) seem to indicate the freedom of one who wrote in Greek.

It has been strongly urged by Sir Henry Howorth that the current LXX version of 2Chronicles should be identified with the work of Theodotion; and that as we have ‘a free rendering of parts of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah grouped round a fable (1Esdras), and by the same hand a paraphrase of parts of Daniel, also with legendary additions’ (Thackeray, *Grammar of O.T. in Greek*, p. 15), so we should be prepared to recognize in the Manasseh narrative, Prayer, and Additions, preserved in the *Didascalia* a reproduction of the original LXX version, for which the more literal version of Theodotion was afterwards substituted.

This view has been supported in *Old Test. and Semitic Studies in Memory of W. R. Harper: Apparatus for the Textual Criticism of Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah*, by C. C. Torrey (Chicago, 1908).

§ 8. THE THEOLOGY OF ‘THE PRAYER OF MANASSES’.

The two main religious ideas which pervade the Prayer are (1) the infinite compassion of the Almighty, and (2) the efficacy of true repentance.

The opening Invocation portrays in striking terms the Omnipotence of the Deity, and this leads up to the consideration of the yet nobler attributes of His mercy and goodness (vv. 6-7). An effective prelude is thus furnished to the sinner’s confession of his iniquities, the climax of which had been reached by his having set up idolatrous abominations. The glory of God and the abasement of the sinner having thus been set over against one another in sharpest contrast, the way is prepared for the ardent supplication for forgiveness which occupies the remainder of the Prayer.

The reader should take notice of the emphasis laid upon the Israelite patriarchs and their true spiritual lineage. The God of ‘our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’ (ver. 1) is ‘the God of the righteous seed’ (ver. 1) and ‘of the righteous’ (ver. 8). The Patriarchs had not sinned against God (ver. 8). Those only were the righteous seed who had not yielded to idolatry. The range of view of the Psalmist is limited: it has regard to the sin of idolatry and to the pardon of the repentant idolater. But a warning seems to be conveyed against the notion that Divine acceptance was ensured by Jewish lineage. The same note is struck, though it may not ring so clear, as in Luke 3:8: ‘Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father.’ Cf. John 8:39; Rom. 9:6, 7.

Other points, characteristic of Jewish religious thought and deserving of attention, are the following:

(a) supernatural efficacy ascribed to the sacred Name (ver. 3);

(b) the statement that ‘repentance’ is appointed by God for certain persons, and not for others (ver. 8);

(c) the representation of the under-world (*Sheol*, or Hades) as a region containing various grades of remoteness from the light of heaven (ver. 11);

(d) the description of the angels as the ‘host of heaven’ (ἡ δύναμις τῶν οὐρανῶν, ver. 15).

§ 9. VERSIONS

(a) ‘The Prayer of Manasses’ was never included in the LXX version of the Old Testament Scriptures. Its position among ‘the Canticles’ appended to the Psalter, in certain MSS., is due to liturgical reasons.

The Greek text was first printed by R. Stephanus in his edition of the Vulgate. ‘The Prayer’ follows 2Chron.; and a short Preface contains this sentence: ‘Graecam hanc Manassae regis Iuda orationem, nunquam antehac excusam, peperit tibi, candide lector, bibliotheca Victoriana.’

It does not appear in the majority of the printed editions of the LXX. In the Complutensian Polyglott (1514-17) it is printed in small type, in Latin, at the end of 2Chron. It was not contained in the Sixtine edition (1586-7) of the LXX; nor does it appear in the editions of Holmes and Parsons, or of Tischendorf.

In Walton’s Polyglott (although not mentioned in the index of contents) it is found in vol. 4 (the Apocrypha) placed before 3Esdras, and is printed both in Greek and in Latin. The note is prefixed: ‘Orationem Manassae regis Iudae Graece non extare affirmatur in praefatione Bibl. *Vulg.* Lat. Edit. Antwerp. 1645. Quam tamen Graece iuxta exemplar Bibliothecae Victorianae in Bibliis latinis Roberti Stephani, Edit. 1540, fol. 159 excusam atque insuper in MS. A post Psalmos inter Cantica exarata invenimus: ipsamque hic subiunximus.’ The variants of *Cod.* A are recorded.

On the other hand, it is found in three reprints of the Sixtine edition, that of Frick (1697), that of Reineccius (1730), and that of Kirchner (1750). It was also included in Grabe’s edition of the LXX, following Codex Alexandrinus. But there was no foundation for the note: ‘Προσευχή Μανασσή, 2Paral. cap. 33 iuxta quaedam exemplaria’ (1817, 4:165). This statement has led to a very general misapprehension. No ancient Greek MSS. of 2Chron. 33 exist containing ‘Oratio Manassis’.¹

(b) *The Latin.* As it was not extant in the Hebrew or the Greek Bible, it was not included in the work of Jerome. In all probability he was not aware of its existence. Otherwise, he would scarcely have failed to make some allusion to it in the passage referring to the repentance of Manasseh: ‘Legimus Manassem post multa scelera et post captivitatem id Babylone egisse poenitentiam et ad meliora conversum Domini misericordiam consecutum. Unde et fidei suae, per quam crediderat Deo, filium vocavit ἐπώνυμον, id est Ammon’ (*In Saphoniam Liber I*, ed. Migne, P. L., 6, § 675, p. 1340).

At what date the Latin version, which is a good specimen of translation, was made is not known. It is probably much later than Jerome's version. The Prayer, however, is very commonly found in mediaeval MSS. of the Vulgate, immediately after 2Chronicles, and often with the title 'Oratio Manassae'.

In his *Septuagintastudien*, 3, p. 20, Nestle states that he had been assured both by Ph. Thielmann in Landau and by S. Berger in Paris that, so far as they knew, there was no MS. of the Vulgate containing 'The Prayer of Manasses' of an earlier date than the middle or first third of the thirteenth century. A list of fifteen Latin MSS. in the British Museum containing 'The Prayer of Manasses' at the end of Chron. has been most kindly furnished me by Mr. J. P. Gilson of the MS. Department; all belong to the thirteenth century. It would be extremely interesting to know whether there exists any copy of the Vulgate containing 2Chron. followed by 'The Prayer of Manasses' which is of an earlier date. It is also an at present unsolved problem to determine the influence which from the beginning of the thirteenth century led to the common inclusion of the Prayer in the Latin Scriptures.

An eleventh-century MS. of the Mozarabic Psalter gives a text which differs considerably from that in the thirteenth-century Latin Bibles, and with the title 'Oratio Manasse Regis De Libro Paralipomenon'. See below, Note B.

The three Latin MSS. (Colbert 273, Colbert 933, Remig. 4) which Sabatier collated with the Clementine Vulgate for his *Bibl. Sacr. Lat. Vers. Ant.* (3. 1038 sq.) belong to the same period, and have no special claim to distinction (see Fritzsche, *Libri Apoc. Vet. Test. Praefat.*, p. 15).

It was printed in, the Latin Bible of Stephanus (1540) together with the Greek text, and it appeared also in Joh. Brentius' edition of the Vulgate (Leipzig, 1544), in two columns, one in Greek, the other in Latin, side by side.

The edition of the Vulgate issued by Sixtus V (1590) did not contain the Prayer.¹ But in the revised edition of Clement VIII (1592) it was inserted, together with 3 and 4Esdras, as an appendix after the New Testament. The *Praefatio ad Lectorem* written by Cardinal Bellarmine contains the following statement: 'Porro in hac editione nihil non canonicum, nihil adscitium, nihil extraneum, apponere visum est; atque ea causa fuit, cur libri iii et iv Esdrae inscripti, quos inter canonicos libros sacra Tridentina Synodus non annumeravit, ipsa etiam Manassae regis Oratio, quae neque hebraice neque graece quidem exstat, neque in manuscriptis antiquioribus invenitur, neque pars est ullius canonici libri, extra canonicae Scripturae seriem posita sint.' This statement, as Sir Henry Howorth has pointed out (*Soc. Bibl. Arch.*, vol. 31, pt. 3, p. 90), 'was probably unwittingly taken over from the Dominican Pagnini's revised version of the Vulgate which was published in 1527, before Stephen had published his Bible. In Pagnini's edition the Prayer is put at the end of 2Chronicles, and is headed: "Oratio Manasse regis Iuda quae neque in Hebraeo neq. in Graeco habetur."'

In modern Greek Bibles 'The Prayer of Manasseh' has a place immediately after the Books of Chronicles (e.g. St. Petersburg, 1876).

§ 10. SYRIAC VERSION

An account of the Syriac Version of the Prayer appeared in *Hermathena* 36, 1910, from the competent pen of Professor George Wilkins, of Trinity College, Dublin. In his article he published a collation of a Paris MS. (*Anc. fonds 2, Biblioth, Nat., Syr. 7*) which is probably a transcript of the Syriac MS. (*Vat. 8*) written by Sergius Risius, Maronite Archbp. of Damascus, circ. 1610.

The Syriac Version of the *Didascalia* is preserved, according to Professor Wilkins, in the following four MSS.:

- (1) Cod. Syr. 62 (= Saint Germain 38), Paris, ninth century, = P.
- (2) Harris Codex (Mrs. Gibson's *Horae Semiticae*), eleventh century, = H.
- (3) University Library, Cambridge, thirteenth century, = C.
- (4) Cod. Borgia, Museo Borgia, Rome.

§ 11. OTHER VERSIONS

Armenian MSS. of the O.T. Scriptures contain the Prayer among the Canticles appended to the Psalter.

It is also stated to occur in the old Slavonic Version (cf. article by Sir Henry Howorth, *Soc. Bibl. Arch.*, March, 1909, p. 90).

It is found appended to the Psalter in the Ethiopic Version of the Psalms (ed. Ludolf, Frankfurt, 1701).

And the Ethiopic Version of the *Apostolical Constitutions* (ed. Thomas Pell Platt, London, 1834) contains the Prayer.

§ 12. TEXT

The principal authorities for the text are (a) the two Greek uncial MSS. Alexandrinus and Turicensis; (b) the Latin and Syriac Versions; (c) the *Apostolical Constitutions* and *Didascalia*.

The text of cursive MSS., containing the Canticles appended to the Psalter, has yet to be critically investigated.

The MSS. of the *Apostolical Constitutions* are given by Pitra in his *Iuris Ecclesiastici Historia et Monumenta*, tom. 1, p. 163 (Romae, 1864). Pitra himself seems to have relied especially upon 'Vatic. 1' (= Vatic. 839, f. 1-175, saec. 10, membr.), and 'Vatic. 2' (= Vatic. 1506, f. 1 ad. 77, a. 1024 membr.).

The important edition by P. de Lagarde, Lipsiae, 1862, contains an apparatus criticus.

The old edition of Cotelerius (1672) is well worth consulting.

The principal problems presented by the text of 'The Prayer of Manasses' are to be found in:

- (1) ver. 7; the additional clauses found in the Latin and in the *Apostol. Const.* at the close of the verse;
- (2) ver. 9; additional clause in the Syriac Version and in the Mozarabic Psalter;

(3) ver. 10; various readings arising from the obscurity of the verb ἀνανεῦσαι;

(4) ver. 10; the gloss added in Cod. T (μὴ ποιήσας τὸ θέλημά σου καὶ φυλάξας τὰ προστάγματα σου) and the Latin.

§ 13. ENGLISH VERSIONS

‘The Prayer of Manasses’ was not included in Coverdale’s Bible, 1535. But it appears in Cranmer’s Bible (Grafton), 1539 (being given a place in the Apocrypha after ‘Bel and the Dragon’ and before 1Maccabees), and in the subsequent editions (1541, 1549, 1562, 1566).

It receives the same position in the Bishops’ Bible, 1st ed., 1568. It does not appear in the Genevan version. In the ‘Authorized’ (1611) and ‘Revised’ versions it stands between ‘Bel and the Dragon’ and 1Maccabees.

In the Douai Bible of 1609 the Prayer precedes 2Esdras and follows 2Maccabees. It is headed by the note: ‘The Prayer of Manasses, with the second and third Bookes of Esdras, extant in most Latin and Vulgare Bibles, are here placed after al the Canonical Bookes of the Old Testament, because they are not received into the Canon of Divine Scriptures by the Catholique Church.’

In Luther’s Bible it stands at the end of the Apocrypha, after the Additions to Daniel.

Summary of the Prayer

(1) *The Invocation*: (a) O God of Israel (ver. 1), Lord and Creator of the Universe (vv. 2, 3), infinite in power (ver. 4) and in anger against the sinner (ver. 5); (b) infinite also in mercy (ver. 6), Thou hast proclaimed forgiveness for repentance, and appointed me the sinner unto repentance (vv. 7, 8).

(2) *The Confession*: my sins are innumerable; I am unworthy to look upwards: I am justly punished, loaded with chains, in misery (vv. 9-11).

(3) *The Entreaty*: I beseech Thee (ver. 11); I acknowledge all (ver. 12); grant pardon; consume me not; nor let Thine anger burn for ever (ver. 13).

(4) *The Ascription*: Thou, the God of them that repent, wilt graciously save me (ver. 14); and I will praise Thee for ever.

(5) *Doxology*: Angels hymn Thy praises; Thine is the glory for ever (ver. 15).

A¹. Note on the Latin MSS. containing the Prayer of Manasses

In the British Museum, the following MSS., all of the thirteenth century, contain the Prayer of Manasses at the end of 2Chron.:

(1) Add. 31,831 (f. 271 B): early thirteenth century.

(2) Eg. 2867.

[3] Lansd. 453: first half of thirteenth century. Does not contain Prayer, but has marginal note on f. 127 B: ‘M[in]us Oracio Manassé

regis qué sic incipit “Domine deus ...”]

- (4) Stowe 1.
- (5) Harl. 1748 (f. 130).
- (6) Royal 1 A. 8 (f. 155).
- (7) Royal 1 A. 17.
- (8) Royal 1 A. 19. (f. 106 B, insertion by a different hand).
- (9) Royal 1 C. 1. (f. 106 B).
- (10) Burn 3 (f. 390 B).
- (11) Burn 10 (f. 232 B).
- (12) *Ar.* 303 (f. 166).
- (13) Add. 28,626 (f. 210).
- (14) Add. 35,085 (f. 228 B): A.D. 1233-53.
- (15) Add. 37,487.

B. Mozarabic Psalter: Eleventh (?) -Century MS. of Prayer of Manasses

In the ‘Mozarabic Psalter (MS. British Museum, Add. 30, 851) edited by J. P. Gilson, M.A., of the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum’, vol. 30 of the Henry Bradshaw Society (London, 1906), Canticum 22 contains *Oratio Manasse Regis De Libro Paralipomenon* 7-15; and the text differs sufficiently widely from that which is found in the Latin Bibles to justify its transcription here (‘the character of the handwriting’, says Mr. Gilson in the Prefatory Note (p. 8), ‘points to the eleventh century as the date at which the MS. was written’).

XXII [Canticum] Oratio Manasse Regis De Libro Paralipomenon.

Antiphona. *Peccabi domine peccavi et iniquitatem meam ego agnosco.*

Deus altissimus magnanimis . miserator et multe misericordie .
patiens super mala hominum.

Tu ergo domine secundum multitudinem bonitatis tue promisisti
indulgentiam et remissionem delinquentibus tibi . et habundantia
misericordie tue statuisti penitentiam peccatoribus ad salutem.

Tu ergo domine deus iustorum . non posuisti penitentiam iustis
tuis Abraham Ysaac et Iacob . qui non peccaverunt tibi . sed
posuisti penitentiam mihi peccatori.

Quoniam super numerum arene maris habundaverunt
iniquitates mee . et non est declinatio delictorum meorum.

Et nunc iuste contineor . (et)¹ digne comprimor percurbat(u)s
(in)² multis vinculis ferreis. ad non erigendum caput.

Quoniam non sum dignus aspicere et videre altitudinem celi .
pre iniustitiis meis.

Quoniam irritabi furorem tuum . et feci malum coram te.

Statuens abominationes . et multiplicans odiositates.

Et nunc flecto genua cordis mei . precans a te bonitatem.

Peccavi domine peccavi . et iniquitatem meam ego agnosco.

Ne perdas me cure iniquitatibus meis . neque in finem iratus
contineas mala mea neque condemnaueris me cum (h)is³ qui sunt
in inferiora terre.

Tu es enim deus penitentium . ut in me hostendas bonitatem tuam.

Indignum me saluabis secundum multitudinem misericordie tue . et glorificabo nomen tuum in omni uita mea.

Quoniam te laudat omnis uirtus celorum . et tibi est gloria in secula seculorum.

THE PRAYER OF MANASSES

¹ O Lord Almighty,
*which art in
heaven*,
Thou God of our
fathers,
Of Abraham and
Isaac and
Jacob,
And of their
righteous
seed;

² Thou who hast
made the
heaven and the
earth,
With all the
array
thereof:

³ Who hast bound
the sea by the
word of thy
command;

⁴ Who hast shut
up the Deep,
and sealed it
With thy
terrible
and
glorious
Name;

⁵ Whom all things
do dread; yea,
they tremble
before thy
power:
For the majesty
of thy glory

cannot be
borne,
And the anger
of thy
threatening
against
sinners is
unendurable:

⁶ Infinite and
unsearchable is
thy merciful
promise;

⁷ For thou art the
Lord Most High,
of great
compassion,
long-
suffering
and
abundant
in mercy,
and
repentest
thee for
the evils
of men.

*Thou, O Lord,
according to
thy great
goodness
hast
promised
repentance
and
forgiveness
to them that
have sinned
against
thee; and in
the
multitude of
thy mercies
hast
appointed
repentance
unto sinners,
that they
may be
saved.*

⁸ Thou, therefore,
O Lord, that art
the God of the
righteous, hast
not appointed
repentance
unto the
righteous, unto
Abraham, and
Isaac and
Jacob, which
have not sinned
against thee:
But thou hast
appointed
repentance
unto me that
am a sinner;

For *the sins* I have
sinned *are* more
in number than
the sands of the
sea.

⁹ For my
transgressions
were
multiplied, O
Lord:
My
transgressions
were
multiplied,

And I am not
worthy to
behold and see
the height of
heaven by
reason of the
multitude of
mine iniquities.

*And now, O Lord, I
am justly
punished and
deservedly
afflicted;
For lo! I am in
captivity,*

¹⁰ Bowed down
with many an
iron chain,

So that I
cannot
lift up
mine
head by
reason of
my sins,
Neither have I
any respite:
Because I
provoked thy
wrath, and
did that
which was
evil in thy
sight.
*I did not do thy
will, neither
kept I thy
commandments:*

I set up
abominations,
and
multiplied
detestable
things.

¹¹ And now I bow
the knee of
mine heart,
beseeching thee
of thy gracious
goodness.

¹² I have sinned, O
Lord, I have
sinned,
And I
acknowledge
mine
iniquities.

¹³ But, I humbly
beseech thee,
Forgive me, O
Lord, forgive
me,
And destroy me not
with mine
iniquities.
Neither, in thy
continual anger
against me,

Lay up evil in
store for
me:

Nor pass thou
sentence
against me,
When I am in
the lowest
parts of the
earth.

For thou, O Lord,
art the God of
them that
repent;

¹⁴ And in me thou
wilt show forth
all thy
goodness:

For thou wilt save
me, unworthy
that I am,
According to thy
great mercy.

¹⁵ And I will praise
thee for ever all
the days of my
life:

For all the host
of heaven
doth sing thy
praise,
And thine is
the glory
for ever
and ever.
Amen.

¹ See note on § 7.—GEN. ED.

² The oldest non-canonical reference to this prayer is to be found in 2Baruch 64:8.

LXX Septuagint Version

¹ On the Jewish Midrashic legend respecting Manasseh's deliverance see Bali's 'Introduction to the Prayer of Manasseh' in Speaker's Comm. on Apoc. 2:360 ff. Compare 2Baruch 64:8, part of the section (53-74) assigned by Dr. Charles to 50-70 A.D. Cf. Anastas. *in Ps. 6 Canis. thes. Manum.* 3, p. 112 φασὶν οἱ ἀρχαῖοι τῶν ιστοριογράφων, ὅτι ἀπενεχθεὶς Μ. κατεκλείσθη εἰς ζῶδιον χαλκοῦν ἀπὸ βασιλέως Περσῶν καὶ ἔσω ὦν ἐν τοιοῦτῳ ζῶδίῳ προσηύξατο μετὰ δακρύων. Ioh. Damasc. *Parall.* 2. 15, Opp. 2, p. 463 ἱστορεῖται παρὰ Ἀφρικάνῳ, ὅτι ἐν τῷ λέγειν ᾠδὴν τὸν Μ. τὰ

δεσμὰ διερράγη σιδηρὰ ὄντα καὶ ἔφυγεν. Suidas s. v. Μανασσῆς: ὑπὸ Μερδοάχ βασιλέως Ἀσσυρίων δέσμιος εἰς Νινευὴ τὴν πόλιν αἰχμάλωτος ἀπήχθη καὶ εἰς τὸ χαλκοῦν ἄγαλμα καθείρχθη . . . ἐδεήθη τοῦ κυρίου . . . καὶ τὸ μὲν ἄγαλμα θείᾳ δυνάμει διερράγη . . . δεδεμένῳ δὲ ὄντι ἐν φυλακῇ, ἐν πέδαις χαλκαῖς ἐν Βαβυλῶνι ἐδίδοσαν αὐτῷ ἐκ πιτύρων ἄρτον βραχὺν καὶ ὕδωρ ὀλίγον σὺν ὄξει μετρητῷ πρὸς τὸ ζῆν αὐτὸν καὶ μόνον, καὶ τότε προσηύξατο· πρὸς κύριον· κύριε παντόκρατορ.

A Codex Alexandrinus

T Codex Turicensis

MS. Manuscript

1

[There is, I think, one real piece of evidence on behalf of a Semitic original. This is to be found in ver. 7:

σύ, κύριε, κατὰ τὸ πλήθος τῆς χρηστότητός σου ἐπηγγείλω
μετανοίας ἄφεσιν τοῖς ἡμαρτηκόσιν σοι
καὶ τῷ πλήθει τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν σου ὤρισας μετάνοιαν
ἀμαρτωλοῖς εἰς σωτηρίαν.

Here μετανοίας ἄφεσιν is clearly anomalous and unintelligible. Furthermore, if we compare the two στίχοι, we discover that it is just this phrase that destroys the otherwise exact parallelism of the στίχοι. Originally the first line contained five elements parallel to the five elements still preserved in the second. Three of these still exist: κατὰ τ. πλήθος τ. χρηστότητός σου || τ. πλήθει τ. οἰκτιρμῶν σου, ἐπηγγείλω || ὤρισας, τ. ἡμαρτηκόσιν σοι || ἀμαρτωλοῖς. Over against μετάνοιαν . . . εἰς σωτηρίαν in the second line we have the corrupt phrase μετανοίας ἄφεσιν in the first, which on the analogy of the former phrase should obviously be ἄφεσιν . . . εἰς μετάνοιαν. If we ask how this corruption arose I reply that it is possible to explain it as due to a transposition of **לְתִשׁוּבָה** (= εἰς μετάνοιαν) from the end of the line to the place immediately after **סְלִיחָה** (= ἄφεσιν). In this new position the translation rendered **לְתִשׁוּבָה סְלִיחָה** by μετανοίας ἄφεσιν—a rendering that is quite possible though wrong in this context. On the order of the Greek cf. ver. 11 τῆς παρὰ σου χρηστότητος. Thus we should read:

‘Thou, O Lord, according to thy great goodness hast
promised forgiveness to them that have sinned against
thee that they may repent;

And in the multitude of thy mercies hast appointed
repentance unto sinners that they may be saved.’

If the above evidence is valid, then we can also recover the right rendering of ver. 4 ὃν πάντα φρίσσει καὶ τρέμει ἀπὸ προσώπου δυνάμεώς σου. Here the two verbs should be taken together. Then ὃν . . . ἀπὸ προσώπου δυνάμεώς σου is a pure Hebraism = **מִלִּפְנֵי חֵיל** ... **אֲשֶׁר**. Hence render—

‘Before whose power all things shudder and tremble.’—GEN. ED.]

Vulg. Vulgate

Cod. Codex

1 See the valuable discussion in Nestle’s *Septuagintastudien*, 3, pp. 6-22. Stuttgart, 1899.

¹The Bull of Sixtus V (*Aeternus ille*), by which it was prefaced, had simply this allusion: 'Orationem Manassae, quae neque in Hebraeo, neque in Graeco textu est, neque in antiquioribus manuscriptis Latinis exemplaribus reperitur; sed in impressis tantum post librum secundum Paralipomenon affixa est, tanquam insutam, adiectam et in textu sacrorum librorum locum non habentem repudiavimus.'

Syr. Syriac Version

O.T. Old Testament

¹For this list I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. Gilson.

[indicate an intrusion into the original text.

Ar. Arabic

¹et] interlined.

²percurbatus] *u* on erasure; *in* interlined.

³his] *h* interlined.

Apocrypha of the Old Testament. 2004 (R. H. Charles, Ed.) (1:612-624). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Prayer of Manasseh

"And now I bend the knee of my heart"

1. O Lord Almighty, God of our fathers, of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and of their righteous seed,
2. You Who have made heaven and earth with all their adornment,
3. You Who have bound the sea by the word of your command, You Who have shut the deep, and sealed it with your fearsome and glorious Name,
4. You at whom all things shudder, and tremble before Your power,
5. for unbearable is the magnificence of Your glory, and not to be withstood is the anger of Your threat toward sinners,
6. and immeasurable and inscrutable is the mercy of Your promise,
7. for You are the Lord Most High, compassionate, patient, and merciful, repenting from the evil deeds of people.

You, O Lord, according to the fullness of Your clemency, promised repentance and forgiveness to those who have sinned against You, and in the fullness of Your mercies, You have appointed repentance for sinners toward salvation.

8. Therefore, You, O Lord, God of the righteous, have not given repentance for the righteous, for Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, who had not sinned against You, but you have given repentance for me, the sinner.

9. For I have sinned more than the number of sand of the sea; my lawless deeds are multiplied, O Lord, multiplied, and I am not worthy to look and see the heights of heaven because of the multitude of my unrighteous deeds.

10. I am bent down by too many a bond of iron for the lifting of my head because of my sins, and there is no relief for me, for I have provoked Your wrath and done evil before You. I have set up abominations and multiplied provocations (idols).

11. And now I bend the knee of my heart, begging for Your clemency.

12. I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned, and I know my lawless deeds.

13. I am asking, begging You: forgive me, O Lord, forgive me! Do not destroy me with my lawless deeds, nor for all ages keep angry with me, nor condemn me to the depths of the earth, for You, O Lord, are the God of those who repent.

14. And in me You will display Your goodness, for, my being unworthy, You will save me according to Your great mercy.

15. And I will praise You throughout all the days of my life, for all the power of the heavens sing Your praise. For Yours is the glory, to the ages.

Amen.

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