

THE ARABIC VERSION OF THE LIFE OF JOHN OF EDESSA

The Life of John of Edessa is an important, if little known, Christian apologetic text from the early Islamic period. Notwithstanding its title, this work does not recount the life of its hero, the archbishop of Edessa: his birth, miracles, and pious death. It offers, instead, an account of just one event in his life: his debate with Phineas the Jew in the presence of the Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786-809). This text is a double apology: ostensibly directed against the Jews, it is also if not more a defense of Christianity against Islam. Indeed, it explicitly presents the caliph as acquiescing to John's arguments in defense of Christianity, an acquiescence no doubt confirmed by John's subsequent raising of the caliph's daughter from the dead. It is a naively fictional account. For all that, it is an important example of how Christians living under Islam sought to defend their version of prophetic monotheism in the midst of what J. Wansbrough has termed the "sectarian milieu"¹ — a milieu in which Muslims, Christians, and Jews had at their disposal a common symbolic repertoire and endeavored to articulate their identities through the manipulation of that repertoire's symbols.

A Georgian version of the Life was published in 1914 by K. Kekelidze², and it has been through his edition and its accompanying Russian translation that scholars have thus far had access to the text. As a result of internal clues, it was long suspected that this Georgian version was a translation of a still earlier version of the Life. Kekelidze suspected that its exemplar had been in Syriac or Arabic³, while P. Peeters posited a version in Greek⁴. Notwithstanding Peeters' supposition of an earlier version of the text in Greek, it was he who in 1930⁵ announced the discovery of an Arabic version of the text. The ms. in which this Arabic version was preserved did not survive the Second World War,

¹ J. WANSBROUGH, *The Sectarian Milieu. Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (London Oriental Series, 34), Oxford, 1978.

² К. КЕКЕЛИДЗЕ, Житие и подвиги Иоанна, католикоса Урхайского (*The Life and Exploits of John the Catholicus of Edessa*), in Христианский Восток, 2 (1914), p. 301-48. The same was reprinted (with a number of additional footnotes) in his ეტიუდები ძველი ქართული ლიტერატურის ისტორიიდან, vol. 7, Tbilisi, 1961, p. 102-135. It is the latter that we have used here.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 109-110.

⁴ P. PEETERS, *La passion de S. Michel le Sabaitte*, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, 48 (1930), p. 86.

⁵ *Ibid.*

however. All that remains is a paragraph from the Life edited and published by Peeters⁶. In what follows, we offer a new, substantial fragment of the Arabic version of the Life, and seek to specify more fully this work's textual history.

The Structure and Content of the Life of John of Edessa

The Life of John of Edessa is, as it were, a drama in three acts⁷. The first sets the stage, introducing the main characters and bringing them together in a state of conflict. There is the wicked Jew Phineas and the defender of the faith, John, who both end up at the court of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. Act two has them engage in theological repartee: on the nature of God, that he is a trinity of persons, and that Christ is fully God. Act three is a thaumaturgic contest between John and Phineas, which ends with the raising of the caliph's daughter from the dead, the cessation of hostilities between the Muslims and the Byzantines, and the conversion of Phineas and his household to the Christian faith.

Act one begins with a description of Phineas (§1), and of the machination whereby he turns the caliph against the Christians. When news of this reaches John (§2), he prays for victory and vows not to leave the church of the Image of Christ until God grants his prayer. John then (§3) orders his disciples to enclose him in the church for eighty days. On the seventh day of his enclosure, he is visited by Gabriel, who assures him that God will give him victory over Phineas. After ascending his episcopal throne and proclaiming to the people that God has heard their prayers, John summons (§4) his bishops, who accompany him to the Commander of the Faithful, who is at this time in Raqqah⁸. As John draws near Raqqah, Hārūn al-Rashīd has a dream (§5). In this he is instructed to receive "the disciple of Christ" with honor. Hārūn wakes and rides forth with his troops to meet John (§6), and as he approaches sees a miraculous cloud and smells a marvelous perfume. John greets Hārūn, who orders that John and his bishops be led into the city with great honor. When Phineas hears of the honor bestowed on John, he grows angry (§7), and that night he too has a dream in which he is told that he will become a Christian. Unimpressed, Phineas vows never to abandon his allegiance to Judaism.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87-88.

⁷ The following is based on the Georgian version, the only complete copy of the text.

⁸ Hārūn was at Raqqah from 796-808. See M. MEINECKE, *al-Raqqah*, in *EP²*, VIII, 1995, p. 411.

Act two opens on the next day, with Hārūn summoning Phineas and John and ordering them to undertake a civil discussion on matters theological (§8). When Phineas says that he stands on Moses and the prophets, John asks why he does not then believe that the Christ is come and that he is God, even as the prophets believed. The discussion then (§9-11) focuses on the various scriptural proofs for the doctrine of the Trinity and on the various natural images that can be used to understand this doctrine: even as a person has mind, word, and breath, and cannot exist without all three, so also God (the *mind* or that which governs is the Father; the *word* or that which expresses the mind is the Son; and the *breath* or that which animates is the Holy Spirit); or the three are one in the same way that the sun, its light, and its heat are one. This portion of the text concludes (§12) when Hārūn declares the evidence on John's side: "As it seems to me, the prophets testify to the truth of what [the Christians] say, as does the Pentateuch; and the prophet David believed as they believe". Hārūn continues by expanding John's arguments, explaining that the tripartite human just mentioned suggests a single nature, as well as an inseparable will and counsel. Hārūn concludes by asking Phineas if he does not now see that God is triune.

Act three is a thaumaturgic contest, in which John heals a demoniac (§13) and threatens Phineas with demonic possession, drinks poison (§14), causes Phineas' hand to wither and then cures it (§15-16), and finally raises the caliph's daughter from the dead (§17), no small feat in that she had been in the grave for no less than forty-seven days. Not surprisingly impressed, the caliph orders (§18) that there be a cessation of hostility with the Byzantines, that Christian rites be practiced openly, that onerous taxes be lifted from the Christians, and that churches be built all over his realm. The text concludes (§19) with a description of the baptism of Phineas (accompanied by various marvels) and of the baptism of his household, an event said to have taken place on the 7th of April.

The Manuscript Witnesses

The Life of John of Edessa is preserved in two languages, Georgian and Arabic. As for the former, the first and only edition remains that of Kekelidze, published in 1914⁹. Kekelidze's edition was based on a single ms. And to the best of our knowledge, this is still the only copy of

⁹ KEKELIDZE, *art. cit.*, p. 114-29.

the Georgian version known to exist. It is a question here of *British Library add. 11281* (hereafter = G)¹⁰, a *paterikon* of (largely) Palestinian saints acquired in 1837 by the British Library from an Armenian priest in Alexandria. Among the texts found in this ms. are the lives of saints Antony, Sabas, Chariton, Euthymius, Theodosius, Ephrem, Cyriacus, Stephen and Nicon, John the Sabaite, and Simeon the Fool. At least one of these texts appears to have been translated into Georgian at the Monastery of Mar Sabas¹¹. As is clear from its marginalia and colophons, however, the ms. itself was copied at the Palestinian Monastery of the Holy Cross during the lifetime of its founder, Gregory Prokhori (1030-50)¹². Moreover, in that the emperor Michael is invoked in a colophon¹³, it is possible to specify the date of the ms. still further. Given Gregory's dates, it is a question here of either Michael IV (1034-41) or Michael V (1041-42). It can be inferred, thus, that the ms. was copied between 1034 and 1042.

There also exists a secondary witness to the Georgian version of the Life. It is found in *Tbilisi Institute of Manuscripts S-425*. This ms. was copied between 978 and 988 at Oški and Šatberd by the Georgian hymnographer Michael Modrekili¹⁴. Among the works found in it is a service in honor of John of Edessa¹⁵. As demonstrated by Kekelidze, while this service was an original composition in Georgian, it was not Modrekili who composed it¹⁶. Whoever its original author may have been, Kekelidze has shown that he must have made use of the Georgian version of John's Life.

¹⁰ For this ms., see the detailed description in J.O. WARDROP's appendix on the Georgian manuscripts of the British Library in F.C. CONYBEARE, *A Catalogue of the Armenian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London, 1913, p. 397-405. A further discussion of this ms.'s marginalia can be found in Kekelidze's introduction (*art. cit.*, p. 108-9) to his edition of the Life.

¹¹ As is clear from a marginal comment at f. 305r: "This life of the holy fathers [Stephen and Nicon] was translated at the lavra of our holy father Sabas". For the text of this marginal comment, see WARDROP, *op. cit.*, p. 404, and KEKELIDZE, *art. cit.*, p. 109.

¹² For a more detailed discussion, see KEKELIDZE, *art. cit.*, p. 108-9. On the monastery and its founding, see R. JANIN, *Les Géorgiens à Jérusalem*, in *Échos d'Orient*, 16 (1913), p. 32-38, 211-19, as well as G. PERADZE, *An Account of the Georgian Monks and Monasteries in Palestine*, in *Georgica*, 4/5 (1937), p. 220-22.

¹³ For the text of this colophon, see WARDROP, *op. cit.*, p. 401, and KEKELIDZE, *art. cit.*, p. 108.

¹⁴ For Michael and his hymnographic labors, see M. VAN ESBROECK, *L'hymnaire de Michel Modrekili et son sanctoral (X^e siècle)*, in *Bedi Kartlisa*, 38 (1980), p. 113-30, with the extensive bibliography there cited.

¹⁵ An edition and Russian translation can be found in KEKELIDZE, *art. cit.*, p. 129-35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

The Life exists not only in Georgian, but also in Arabic. Four copies of the Arabic version are known to have been extant at one time. Of these four, three seem now to be lost. First, the University of Louvain once possessed a ms. containing a copy of the Life in Arabic. This ms. was of Melkite provenance and must have been rather ancient. A. Baumstark, in particular, assigned it to the tenth century¹⁷. The ms. did not survive the Second World War. As noted above, however, a small portion of its version of the Life of John (hereafter = L) was published by Peeters in 1930¹⁸.

A second copy of the Arabic version of the Life must once have been present at Mt. Sinai. *Mingana Chr. Arab. add. 172*¹⁹ consists of two leaves in which are preserved the table of contents for a ms. that to the best of our knowledge no longer exists, either at Sinai or elsewhere. Dated to ca. 1400 on paleographic grounds, this ms. was copied at Mt. Sinai and once contained twenty-four short discourses and hagiographic texts. Among these: "The Story of the bishop of Edessa with a Jew and the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd".

A third copy of the Arabic version of the Life is said to be preserved in *Dayr al-Mukhalliṣ 2252*. Its existence was first noted by R. Haddad²⁰, who says that it is found on ff. 13v-21r of the ms. in question, a codex copied in the nineteenth century. From Haddad's short description, it would seem that the ms. contains a complete copy of the text. Despite repeated efforts and the generous help of the monastery's superior, we have been unable to locate the text to which Haddad made reference. The ms. in question, we are assured, contains not the Life of John, but a series of homilies attributed to John Chrysostom.

The fourth and final copy of the Arabic version of the Life is *Sinai ar. 411* (hereafter = S), a miscellany containing hagiographic texts, apophthegmata, and a variety of other works. This ms. was copied in the year 1287²¹. As for the Life, it is found on folios 191r-198r. Unfortunately, this copy of the Life is lacunous. Of the 19 sections into which

¹⁷ The ms. was described by A. BAUMSTARK in *Karl W. Hiersemann, Katalog 500. Orientalische Manuskripte. Arabische, syrische, griechische, armenische, persische Handschriften des 7.-18. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig, 1922, p. 10-12. The Life occupied ff. 116r-122r of this ms.

¹⁸ Corresponding to §14 of the present edition.

¹⁹ A. MINGANA, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts, III. Additional Christian Arabic and Syriac Manuscripts*, Cambridge, 1939, p. 52.

²⁰ R. HADDAD, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes (750-1050)*, (*Beauchesne Religions*, 15), Paris, 1985, p. 29-30.

²¹ M. KAMIL, *Catalogue of All Manuscripts in the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai*, Wiesbaden, 1970, p. 43.

Kekelidze divided the Georgian version of the Life, it contains: all of section 1, the beginning of section 2, the end of section 12, and sections 13-19 *in toto*. In other words, roughly 40% of the text is lacking. As the lacuna occurs in the midst of a folio, we can surmise that it reflects the state of the scribe's exemplar²², a supposition confirmed by the rather rough state of the text's opening, a matter discussed in greater detail below.

The Provenance of the Text

From the information presented above, it is possible to infer a few points as to the provenance of the Life, both when it was written and where. Because the text mentions Hārūn al-Rashīd, it must have appeared during or after the years of his reign (786-809): let us say, sometime after ca. 800, and perhaps significantly after, given the text's naively fictional character. At the same time, it must have been written before 978-988, the *floruit* of Modrekili: let us say, sometime before ca. 975. It should further be noted that this proposed *terminus* is also supported by Baumstark's dating of L to the tenth century²³. It is difficult to know how much earlier than 975 the text may have been written. It may have been significantly earlier, however. As noted above, Modrekili's service was not an autograph, but a copy of an earlier exemplar, and that earlier exemplar had itself made use of the Georgian version of the Life. Moreover, this Georgian version of the Life was itself derived from a still earlier Arabic version, as shall be argued shortly. The text must therefore have appeared after ca. 800, and perhaps significantly after this date, but before ca. 975, and perhaps significantly before. A date of composition ca. 900 seems not at all unlikely.

If this much can be known of when the text was written, what can be concluded as to where it was written? Any conclusions in this regard can only be tentative. The earliest evidence, however, would associate the text with the Orthodox, in particular those of Palestine. The lost Louvain ms., it will be recalled, was of Melkite provenance. Furthermore, it will be remembered that *British Library add. 11281* was a

²² Further, in that the transition to and from the lacuna is so rough, it seems unlikely that the scribe deliberately abridged his exemplar, leaving out the theological discussion and preserving its description of John's miracles.

²³ Note, however, Peeters' conclusion (*art. cit.*, p. 86 at note 4): "Il paraît bien difficile d'admettre que ce volume remonte au X^e siècle". In an earlier study, however, he seemed somewhat more inclined to accept Baumstark's proposed date: *La passion de S. Julien d'Émèse*, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, 47 (1929), p. 63 at note 1.

paterikon of (largely) Palestinian saints copied at the Orthodox Monastery of the Cross near Jerusalem.

The early association of John's Life with the Orthodox is further suggested by the little that can be discovered about the history of his cult, which seems to have been unknown except to the Orthodox of Syria and Georgia. Among the Georgians, Modrekili celebrated his memory on 13 November²⁴. As for the Orthodox of Syria, although John is otherwise absent from their synaxaria, Macarius III did dedicate to a certain John of Edessa a notice in his calendar²⁵, listing him among those saints who have not specific commemorations, but whose memories are celebrated on All Saints day. The text of Macarius' notice is as follows:

والبار يوحنا الرهاوي الفاضل. المشهور فضله عند العلماء. الذي الف اقوالاً كثيرة في ايضاح الامانة المستقيمة وتوطيدها. وله تواريخاً كثيرة لطيفة جداً. الذي اخبر عن سابق المسيح الدجال وظهوره وظلالته (= ضلالته) وغير ذلك. وخلف للكنيسة مصنفات كثيرة وانصرف الى الرب.

The righteous John of Edessa who was virtuous and famed for his virtue among the learned. He wrote many discourses in exposition of the Orthodox faith and its defense. He also had many historical books that are extremely pleasant. He reported about the Antichrist (i.e., the Dajjāl), his appearance, and his efforts to lead astray, and so on. He left behind many writings for the Church and then departed to the Lord.

It should be noted that none of these various treatises appears to have survived, if indeed they ever existed. Whatever the case, for lack of better options, it does seem that Macarius is here referring to our John.

One final point may also allow us to associate John with Orthodox circles. Writing while yet the bishop of Ḥarrān, the Melkite theologian Theodore Abū Qurrah composed his tract in defense of the veneration of images around 800. This work he wrote for a certain Edessene named Abba Yannah (John), who had requested it as an answer to those who criticized the veneration of the Image of Christ in Edessa, and of the saints in general. The language that Theodore used to address this John has suggested to I. Dick that it is a question here of the Melkite bishop of Edessa²⁶. If Dick is correct, it is very tempting to identify this John,

²⁴ See KEKELIDZE, *art. cit.*, p. 129.

²⁵ *British Library add. 9965*, f. 54v.

²⁶ I. DICK, ed., *Théodore Abuqurra. Traité du culte des icônes (Patrimoine arabe chrétien, 10)*, Jounieh/Rome, 1986, p. 39-40. But cfr S.H. GRIFFITH, *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons Written in Arabic by Theodore Abū Qurrah, Bishop of Ḥarrān (c. 755–c. 830 A.D.)*, (*Eastern Christian Texts in Translation, 1*), Louvain, 1997, p. 22.

the Melkite bishop of Edessa, with the John of the present text, both being bishops of Edessa who flourished under Hārūn al-Rashīd.

The Arabic and Georgian versions of the Life

As for the Georgian version of the Life, it was not an original composition in Georgian, but a translation. As noted above, there has been some debate as to the language of its exemplar. Kekelidze suggested a Semitic original, either Syriac or Arabic, but probably Syriac. He based his conclusions largely on the forms of the names²⁷ and on the one clear Semitic loan word in the text²⁸. Peeters, to the contrary, suggested a Greek original, but deferred discussing his reasoning in detail, noting that he would treat the subject at greater length elsewhere — something that he did not apparently do before his death²⁹. We cannot think what evidence could be mustered to support a Greek original, especially given the relation between the Georgian and Arabic versions, a point to which we now turn.

S and L do not offer the same recension of the Life. As noted above, only a small portion of L has survived, corresponding to §14 of the present edition. A collation of the parallel passage of S and L shows clearly that it is a question here of two different recensions of the text. (For our collation, see below.) In 56 instances words or phrases differ between the two Arabic versions. On the other hand, there is also significant overlap between the two versions. Both offer an identical narrative. And both also *often* agree in wording. There is, in fact, more than enough agreement between S and L to support strongly the positing of a genetic relation between the two recensions. In other words, it is quite impossible that S and L were independent compositions. And it also seems quite unlikely that S and L were independent translations of an earlier version of the text. The similarities and overlap between S and L are simply too great to support either conclusion.

How then are these two Arabic versions related to one another? The length of the surviving fragment of L makes a definitive answer elusive. One obvious possibility, however, is that both S and L are bowdlerized versions or paraphrases of a still earlier version of the text in Arabic.

²⁷ KEKELIDZE, *art. cit.*, p. 109-110.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110: at §12, ვადლაჟ or *waylak*, which is to say, “woe unto you”, an expression that is unfortunately both good Syriac and good Arabic. One could point to other evidence as well. In particular, the syntax of the Georgian is often quite irregular, and not infrequently suggestive of a Semitic exemplar: most dramatically, in the occasional use of resumptive pronouns after relatives. For example, at §11 we find the expression რომელ მის მიერ, literally “who from him”, but meaning “from whom”.

²⁹ PEETERS, *art. cit.*, p. 86.

And this possibility is strongly supported by the evidence that emerges from a comparison of S/L with G. The differences between S and L are often such that we can expect them to be recognizable also in Georgian translation. And in fact, in about 37 of the 56 differences between the two recensions it is possible to determine with reasonable certainty whether G aligns itself with S or L. The most important conclusion that can be inferred from a collation of S/L and G, is that G cannot be a lineal descendant of either S or L in their present forms. In 20 instances G agrees with S over against L. In another 17 instances, however, G agrees with L over against S. The collation presented below shows in what cases such a determination can be made.

If G was translated neither from the recension witnessed by L nor from that witnessed by S, what relation does it bear to the two Arabic recensions? Given the similarities and differences between S and L and the agreement of G sometimes with L and sometimes with S, one obvious possibility is that G is a translation of the exemplar common to both S and L. This earlier version of the text in Arabic, in turn, was reworked twice, giving rise to the variant recensions witnessed by S and L. Such a hypothesis goes a good deal of the way toward explaining the textual history of the Life such as it can be discerned today. Certainty is at present lacking, however.

Whatever the case, it should be noted that when G agrees with S it does so almost always in a literal fashion, so also, when G agrees with L. This can be seen in nearly every phrase and line of G. Indeed, it is often that case that G even preserves the word order of S and L. Because Kekelidze did not have access to the Arabic versions of the Life, he was unable to determine with certainty the language of G's exemplar. Similarly, it may well be that because Peeters knew only L and L was often at variance with G, it was thus that he was disinclined to posit G's exemplar as Arabic. The new evidence presented here, however, leaves little room for doubt that G was translated directly from a now *lost* Arabic version, one to which witness is borne by *both S and L*.

The Principles of Edition

In what follows we present an edition and translation of S's version of the Life. We have sought to preserve the distinctive character of the language of the text as it now stands. Corrections and emendations have thus been kept to a minimum, apart from the exceptions noted below. If non-standard spellings or constructions were found in the text and such non-standard usages are attested in other forms of Middle Arabic, no attempt was made to correct them. While this editorial technique may

make for a text that is slightly more difficult to read, it does at least preserve the distinctive language of what is for all practical purposes a unicum.

In the interests of readability, however, a few modifications were introduced into the text. Only on rare occasions does S distinguish *alif maqṣūrah* from final *yā'*. To facilitate reading, we have distinguished the two in accordance with standard Arabic convention. Similarly, B does not consistently distinguish *tā' marbūṭah* from final *hā'*. To facilitate reading, again we have distinguished them in accordance with standard Arabic practice. Furthermore, the scribe of S often marks *tanwīn alif*, but not always. In those few instances where he writes the required *alif* but does not add *tanwīn*, we have tacitly supplied the latter. And finally, for ease of reference we have divided the text into numbered paragraphs, which are identical to those used by Kekelidze in his edition of G, and have supplied a modern system of punctuation. These departures from the base ms. make for a more readable text, without, we think, denaturing to too great a degree the linguistic character of the text as a whole.

Finally, let us note that there are problems with the text's opening paragraph. There are expressions that we find difficult to construe; there are places where we are tempted to posit lacunae; there are passages that strike us as corrupt. Even so, we have done our best to make sense of the text as it *now* stands. In short, we have emended the text of this paragraph as little as possible, noting in our annotations where we think potential problems lurk. And yet, we continue to harbor suspicions, and wonder whether the scribe of S might not have been working from an exemplar whose opening portion was damaged or for some other reason only partially legible. There seem to have been words that the scribe was unable to read. Some of these were simply dropped; others were reproduced to the best of his abilities. The resulting text strikes us as at best artificial, and at worst manifestly corrupt. Notwithstanding the fluidity of our translation of this paragraph, such as it is, the English should not be taken to represent the haggard state of the Arabic.

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*A Collation of S and L, with a comparison
of their respective readings with G.*

L {G=S}. — المسيح قال في الانجيل [تقول في انجيلك] — L ايها [يا ايه
ان تشربون السم على اسمي فلا يضركم شيا] وان انتم شربتم السم لا يضركم
وقوله add. الله post. — L كذا [هكذا] — L فقال له [قال] — L {G=S}.
add. فيجب ante. — L فقال [قال] — L {G=L}. — L الصادق في انجيله المقدس
L فهوذا قد عملت في خزانة امير المؤمنين سم نصف ساعة واقل من ذلك
فتحب ان نجيب لك منه شي تشربه [فيجب ان يوتا بسم لتشرب منه] — L {G=L}.
حقا اني [نعم انا اشرب منه بغير خوف ولا فزع] — L فقال [قال] — L {G=L}.
ليجرب om. — L اليهودي [امير المسلمين] — L {G=L}. — L اشربه بلا خوف
يحمل [تحمل في كاليب] — L فاقبلوا بقوارير om. — L {G=S}. — L به انبا يحنا
فوضع قدام امير [فوضعت بين يدي الامير] — L {G=L}. — L بكاليب من حديد
وان اليهودي ادعا [ثم ان اليهودي امر ان يوتا بكلب] — L {G=L}. — L المؤمن
واخذ من ذلك [فاخذ من سم نصف ساعة] — L واوتى به om. — L بكلب
om. — L فوضعه في شدة [فوضع في فم] — L {G=S}. — L السم شي يسير
فلما راوا اهل المجلس ذلك فرحوا فرحاً عظيماً شديداً — L {G=L}. — L الا قليلاً
L ان يريح الله [من الله ان يريح] — L {G=S}. — L وقالوا اجماعة الجلوس [وقالوا
— L وان اليهودي ادعا [فدعا اليهودي] — L قد add. الذي post. — L {G=S}.
اشرب هذا الذي [تشرب الان ما في هذا] — L {G=L}. — L كلب add. لخمسين post.
— L {G=L}. — L و ante الضو. — L {G=L}. — L يتبين [نتبين] — L {G=S}.
L وان انبا يحنا اخذ [عند ذلك مد القديس انبا يوحنا يده بغير خوف واخذ
اساقفة يقوموا يصلوا معه ليعلم جميع من حضر انه يدعوا السيد] — L {G=S}.
وتوجه الى الشرق] — L {G=S}. — L الاساقفة ان يقومون يصلون معه فقاموا [المسيح
L هو الله [الله الالهنا] — L {G=S}. — L وصلا انبا يحنا وقال [ورفع صوته قايلأ
ان شربتم] — L {G=L}. — L المقدس [الطاهر] — L اوعدتنا [وعدتنا] — L {G=S}.
— L {G=S}. — L ان تشربون السم على اسمي فلا يضركم شيا [السم لا يضركم
مع ابوك om. — L {G=S}. — L وامانتي بك om. — L {G=L}. — L لنا add. لميعادك post.

L حينئذ شربه [ووضعه من ساعته على فمه وشربه — {G=S} L وروح قدسك في om. — L مثل ضو [كضو — {G=S} L وبقي [عند ذلك بدا — {G=S} L وامر الاساقفة ان يجلسوا [وجلسوا الاساقفة — {G=S} L موضعه غير مكترث — {G=S} L فتحير جميع من حضر في المجلس om. — L {G=L} فجلسوا معه — L {G=L} منه om. — L {G=S} فقال له امير المومنين [فلما راه الامير قال له [فلما — L كنت اجد على قلبي حرارة وعطش [كان بي حرارة العطش — L {G=L} امير المومنين [له الامير — L الم [حرارة — L فعندما يريد [وانما اراد يعرف ان كان السم عمل فيه شي — L {G=L} لحيتك [ولحيتك — L يسقط [يقع — L القديس om. — L امير المومنين ان يتبين له ما اصابه — L {G=L} فتحير الامير من ذلك [فعجبوا جماعة من حضر وبهت الامير

Arabic text

[1] اعلمكم، يا احباي، انه كان في زمان هارون الرشيد امير المسلمين¹ رجل يهودي يقال له فنحاس. وكان عالماً، ماهر بالتوراة والانبيا الاربعة وعشرين. وكان طبيباً ماهراً نافراً، تقياً من اهل دينه، حافظاً وصايا التوراة والناموس. وكان من شدة غيرته وامساكه لدينه وكان شديد البغض للنصارى. كان كثير² الوقعة فيهم، لا يرى على دينه ديناً. وكان بصيراً بالنجوم، لبقاً، حسن الخلق. قد استمال عقل امير المومنين بكثرة حكمته. وكان، اذا طلب منه شيئاً مما يحتاجون الملوك اليه، وجده عنده. فمن كثرة ما كان يقع في النصارا، بغضهم الى امير المومنين. وان امير المومنين نحا النصارا من كتبه وفرشه وخدمته، الى ان انتهى ذلك الى جميع مملكته في الاسلام. وبغضهم للنصارا الى امير المومنين من كثرة وقيعته فيهم.

[2] فلما اتصل ذلك بانبا يوحنا الراعي الصالح المختار من المسيح على رعيته بمدينة الرها الذي اعطاه ايها المسيح بيده، حزن حزناً شديداً وقال في نفسه: «ان كنا بكثرة خطايانا استهلنا هذا التويخ من هذا الرجل¹ اليهودي القاتل السافك الدماء، دماء الانبيا، الذي هو مولود من اللعنات، يبغض لامتك، بني تسبحتك، المولودين من معموديتك، الساجدين لروح قدسك، المقدسين بنعمتك، المومنين بقيامتك، الخاضعين الصديقين لانجيلك المقدس، في² السماوات

1 S. — 2 om. S.

2 S. — 1 corr. ex من S.

والارض يسبحون لاسمك، فالان، يا ربنا والاهنا، يسوع المسيح، لا بخطايانا تفضحنا وتشتت بنا الامم الباغضين لنا من اجل اسمك، يا ربنا، لا تبلغك العقول. وان كان هذا المسلط علينا بالخطية والمعصية اخطينا اليك وعصيناك، فلا من اجل ذلك تشتت بنا الامم الخارجين عن ناموس انجيلك المقدس. ولكن انا عبدك الواقف بين يديك باسمك المهوب العظيم احلف اني ادخل هيكلك المقدس ولا ابرح؛ او اموت او تقنعني بانك تعطيني سلطاناً اغلب اليهودي وافضح؛ ولا اكل شي من الطعام، الا قائماً وساجداً بين يديك في موضع قدسك الذي فيه نعاينك ...

[12] ... شبهنا ومثالنا. افلا ترى ان يشبه الانسان به بهذه الثلاثة التي في الانسان من العقل الخفي والكلمة المولودة من العقل والروح الذي بها يتنفس الانسان ويعيش؟

[13] قال اليهودي: «قد اظهر وبين وجا ببراهينه. فالان دع يحقق كتابه مثل امانته». قال له انبا يحنا: «قد ظهر الحق وبطل الباطل وعلمنا ان كتاب الله، الانجيل، حق ولا يبطل منه حرف واحد». قال اليهودي: «اليس قال في الانجيل: باسمي يخرجون الشياطين؟» قال انبا يحنا¹: «قد صدقت. هكذا قال الله وقوله الحق في انجيله الطاهر». قال اليهودي: «ان عندنا رجل وهو من بني هاشم وهو ياكل لحمه. فان انت ابريته، اتخذت بذلك يد عظيمة». قال انبا يحنا: «يوتا به الساعة». عند ذلك امر امير المسلمين فاحضر، وذلك انه كان في بيت مغلق² وكان مكبل بالحديد. فلما دخل المجنون الى المجلس، بدا يصيح ويقول: «ما لنا ولك، يا تلميذ المسيح؟ نحن جماعة في هذا الرجل. الى اين تطردنا وتخرجنا منه؟» قال له انبا يحنا، تلميذ المسيح، بالكلمة الذي اخرج المسيح ربنا لاجاون الجماعة الكثيرة الذي كانوا في ذلك الانسان عند مدينة جادر وسلطهم على الخنازير: «فباسم المسيح، اخرجوا انتم الساعة من هذا الانسان». ومن ساعتهم خرجوا تلك الشياطين من ذلك الانسان وهم يصيحون ويكون عند خروجهم من مسكنهم؛ وبري ذلك الانسان من ساعته. فعجب الجماعة عجباً عظيماً، لما راوا³ الشياطين قد اطاعوا وخرجوا، لما سمعوا «باسم المسيح» مع ابوه وروحه المقدس وهم واحد. قال اليهودي وهو غير مكترث: «المعاينين يفعلوا

13 ¹ om. S. — ² corr. ex مظلم S. — ³ راو S.

هذا». فغضب انبا يوحنا غضب شديد وقال: «يا فنحاس، تشبه روح الله الى المعانين؟ لولا اعلم انك سا ترجع، لامرت هولاً الشياطين ان يسكنوا فيك، فتهلك من ساعتك الى اخر الدهر». ومن ساعته احدقت به الشياطين مثل شرار النار. ففزع فنحاس ومد يده واخذ قرطاس فكتب: «يا انبا يوحنا، لماذا غضبت حين اردت ان استقصي على دينك؟ هل يمكن ان اتنقل عن ديني الذي انا لست اشك فيه الا ببرهان اكون احتج به على الناس؟» وان جماعة من كان في المجلس فزعوا فزعاً شديداً، لانهم سمعوا اصوات الشياطين. حينئذ رسم انبا يوحنا رسم الصليب على اليهودي فرجع اليه كلامه وتكلم. فعجب الناس وعجب امير المومنين عجباً عظيماً.

[14] فقال اليهودي: «يا ايه الانسان المبارك، اليس تقول في انجيلك: وان انتم شريتم السم، لا يضركم؟» قال انبا يوحنا: «صدقت. هكذا قال الله». قال اليهودي: «فيجب ان يوتا بسم لتشرب منه». قال انبا يوحنا: «نعم، انا اشرب منه بغير خوف ولا فزع». فامر امير المسلمين ان يوتا بالسم ليحرب به انبا يوحنا. فاقبلوا بقوارير تحمل في كلاليب فوضعت بين يدي الامير. ثم ان اليهودي امر ان يوتا بكلب. واوتي به. فاخذ من سم نصف ساعة فوضع في فم الكلب. فلم يلبث الا قليلاً حتى تساقط لحمه عن عظمه. فلما راوا¹ اهل المجلس ذلك، فرحوا فرحاً عظيماً شديداً وقالوا: «نرجوا من الله ان يريح من هذا الذي غلب اليهودي». فدعا اليهودي بقدح وصب فيه ما يكفي لخمسين وقال لانبا يوحنا: «تشرب الان ما في هذا القدح حتى نتبين الحق من الباطل، الضو من الظلمة». عند ذلك مد القديس انبا يوحنا يده بغير خوف واخذ القدح وامر اساقفة يقوموا يصلوا معه ليعلم جميع من حضر انه يدعوا السيد المسيح. وتوجه الى الشرق ورفع صوته قايلاً: «انت، الله، الالهنا، الاب والابن وروح القدس، انت الذي وعدتنا وقلت في انجيلك الطاهر: ان شريتم السم، لا يضركم، وهوذا انا لميعادك وثقتي بقولك وامانتني بك، يا ربي والاهي، يسوع المسيح، مع ابوك وروح قدسك، اشرب هذا السم». ووضعه من ساعته على فمه وشربه. عند ذلك بدا وجهه يضي كضو الشمس. وجلس في موضعه غير مكترث وجلسوا الاساقفة. فتحير جميع من حضر في المجلس. فلما راه الامير، قال له: «يا انبا يوحنا، ما

تجد على قلبك منه حرارة؟» قال له انبا يحنا: «قد كان بي حرارة العطش. فلما شربت هذا، بطل عني حرارة جسدي». فقال له الامير: «خذ هذا المشط وامشط به راسك ولحيتك». وانما اراد يعرف ان كان السم عمل فيه شي. ففعل القديس ذلك فلم يقع من لحيته شعرة واحدة. فعجبوا جماعة من حضر وبهت الامير.

[15] قال اليهودي: «اليس مكتوب في الانجيل: انه لا يسقط شعرة من شعري روسكم ولا تهلك؟» قال له انبا يحنا: «صدقت. وهكذا قال الله وقوله الحق». قال اليهودي: «اذن لي حتى اقطع من لحيتك خصلة واطرحها في النار، وننظر هل تعمل فيها النار ام لا». قال له انبا يحنا: «وتحب ذلك، يا فحاس؟» قال اليهودي: «نعم». فقال: «افعل». فامر اليهودي فاوتي بمقراض. وقام ودنا من لحية تلميذ المسيح يريد يقطع منها. فيستا يداه كلتاها على المقراض ولم يقدر احد ينزع المقراض من يده. فقال انبا يحنا: «صدق الله في وعده وقد بين لك ذلك».

[16] قال اليهودي: «اليس في الانجيل مكتوب: ان تضعوا يديكم على المرضى فيبرون؟» قال انبا يحنا: «صدقت. كذلك هو في الانجيل الطاهر وهو الحق». قال فحاس: «فهذه يدي قد يستا. فان شيت ان تبريني، فافعل، لكي اتبين صحة القول وكمال الفعال». قال له انبا يحنا: «ينبغي ان تبقى كما انت ثلاثة ايام، لكيما تعرف ما تصنع وتتكلم به». قال اليهودي: «يا سيدي، تتركني اهلك؟ انا اليوم نصراني، مومن بالمسيح، وهو ربي والاهي؛ ولكني انما اردت اعرف الحق حتى لا يبقا في فكري شي». فقال الامير: «ابريه، يا انبا يحنا، لئلا يهلك ويقال ما استطاع بروه». حينئذ مد انبا يحنا¹ يده وقال: «كما قال المسيح الاهي² لذلك اليايس اليد، كذلك انا اقول لك: يا ايه العصب واللحم والدم، ارجع كما كنت قديماً صحيحاً». ومن ساعته سقط المقراض من يده ورجعن يداه صحيحتان.

[17] وكان للامير ابنة قد ماتت من سبعة واربعين يوماً وقد دفنت. فقال الامير لجلسايه: «ما أكثر حزني على ابنتي التي ماتت، لاني ما رايت كان احسن منها وجهاً. ترا كان انبا يحنا يقدر ان يبريها وقيمتها من القبر». قالوا¹ له: «ما اغناك عن ذلك». فسكت واخر الامر حتى قاموا جلساه وانصرفوا. وانه اخذ بيد انبا

16 ¹ om. S. — ² add. S. كما قلت.

17 ¹ قالوا S.

يحننا وفتحنا اليهودي ودخل بهما البستان التي كانت فيه الجارية مدفونة وقال: «يا انبا يحننا، هذا قبر ابنتي. ترى كان ربك قادر ان يقيمها لنا». قال له انبا يحننا: «كما قدر يخلقها هو قادر ان يقيمها». وامر انبا يحننا ان يفتح القبر ويرفع التراب. ثم انه رفع عينيه الى السما وقال: «يا ربي والاهي، انت، الله، الاب والابن وروح القدس، انت الذي صحت بلعازر بعد اربعة ايام من بعد دفنه، ومن ساعته قام ملفوف بالاكفان مربوط بالقمط²، كذلك، يا رب، انا اسلك واطلب اليك حتى يعلم هولاء انك انت الازلي الذي لم تنزل قادر ان تحيي من شيت». ثم قال: «باسم المسيح، ربي والاهي، تقوم هذه الجارية». ومن ساعتها قامت الجارية وهي تسبح اسم المسيح وبدت تخبر كيف اخرجت نفسها من جسدها وكيف جاتها الملائكة واخرجتها من الجحيم وكيف رات انبا يحننا القديس يطلب بسببها. ففرح عند ذلك الامير فرح شديد.

[18] وامر فبطل الغزو الى بلد الروم. وامر باظهار شرايع النصرانية وتظهر اعيادها. ورفع الجور عن الناس كافة. ولولا انه كره ان يسمع بذلك اهل ملته، كان قد دخل في الامانة. وامر فبنيت الكنائس في ساير مملكته. وامر لانبا يحننا في جميع ما اراده.

[19] واخذ انبا يحننا بيد فنحاس ومضى به الى مدينة بخت¹ ناصر وهي الرقة وتسمها راهط فاعمده بسم الاب والابن وروح القدس واعطاه سر المسيح. وراى جميع من حضر فنحاس وهو في الما والموج قد اقبل حتى رسم على راس فنحاس صليب ورجع الما الى وراه ووقف الفرات مثل الدفوف. وكان لباس فنحاس المعمودية في سبعة ايام من نيسان. وكتبت نصرانيته وما عمل انبا يحننا، تلميذ المسيح وخليفته على رعيته. واعتمد اهل بيت فنحاس كلهم، وكان عددهم رجال ونسا وصبيان اثنين وثمانين نفساً، مع قوم كثير اعتمدوا في ذلك اليوم على يدي انبا يحننا لم يحصون وامنوا بالثالوث المقدس، الاب والابن وروح القدس، الاله واحد، الذي له يجب السبح والمجد والوقار والاكرام من الان وفي كل اوان والى دهر الدهرين. امين.

² S. بالمقط

S. بحت¹ 19

Translation

1. My beloved, I want you to know that in the time of Hārūn al-Rashīd, the Commander of the Muslims, there was a Jew named Phineas. He was learned, versed in the Torah and the twenty-four¹ prophets. He was a skillful and adept physician, [the most] pious of the people of his religion², observant of the commandments of the Torah and the Law. On account of his great zeal and his devotion to his religion, he hated the Christians greatly³. Much did he slander them⁴, not considering that there was a religion other than his own. He was acquainted with the stars⁵, adroit, handsome. Because of his great wisdom, he was able to gain sway over the mind of the Commander of the Faithful. Whenever he asked him for anything of which kings have need, he found it with him⁶. Because he frequently slandered the Christians, he caused the Commander of the Faithful to hate them. The Commander of the Faithful dismissed the Christians from his service as scribes and chamberlains⁷ and servants — and eventually this command took effect throughout the whole of his dominion, in the realm of Islam. He made the Commander of the Faithful hate the Christians⁸ by his frequently slandering them.

2. When news of this reached Abba John, the good shepherd selected by Christ to be in charge of his flock in the city of al-Ruhā⁹, which

¹ Seemingly a reference to the twenty-four traditional divisions of the Jewish Scriptures (a number that includes the five books of the Torah, however).

² The expression *taqīyan min* is difficult to construe. We have supposed the phrase to be a Syriacism: an implied comparative or superlative, with the object of comparison governed by the preposition *min*. This supposition is partially supported by the Georgian, which reads: “And he was a skillful physician and *among his kinfolk there was none like him* and he observed the commandments. ...” Alternatively, it may well be that the text is corrupt.

³ Assuming that the text is not corrupt, which is not at all improbable, it would seem that there is here an unusual and rather clumsy repetition of the verb *kāna*, perhaps because of the length of the intervening prepositional phrases. In any case, the Georgian reads: “And with great zeal he steadfastly kept his law and he had great hate and enmity against the Christians”.

⁴ The reading of the ms. (*kāna al-waqī'ah fīhim*) is clearly corrupt. It seems likely that there is a lacuna before *al-waqī'ah*, probably *kathīr* or some similar word, perhaps even *shadīd*. Our addition of *kathīr* should thus be considered provisional. The Georgian offers no parallel for the phrase in question.

⁵ That is, he was an astrologer.

⁶ The meaning here is not entirely clear. Perhaps we should understand something like the following: “Whenever he asked him for anything (even if it were kingly in status), he found it *chez lui*”.

⁷ We take it that *farsh* refers to the office of *farrāsh* (lit. “one who spreads the carpets”, and by extension “a chamberlain, butler, or footman”).

⁸ The construction is weak Arabic, but good Syriac — an anticipatory pronoun and an object marked with *l-*.

⁹ That is, Edessa.

Christ gave him with his own hand, he became very sad and said to himself: “If by our many sins we have merited this rebuke at the hands of this Jew, this killer, this shedder of blood, the blood of the prophets, who was begotten of the curses, who hates your community, the sons of your praise, who are begotten of your baptism, who worship your Holy Spirit, who are sanctified by your grace, who believe in your resurrection, who are obedient and faithful to your holy Gospel, who praise your name in the heavens and on earth — because of our sins, our Lord and our God, Jesus Christ, do not now put us to shame because of our sins and do not let the nations rejoice at our misfortunes, the nations who hate us for the sake of your name, our Lord, you whom minds cannot comprehend. Even if this man is to be given power over us because of the sin and the disobedience with which we have sinned against you and disobeyed you, do not for that reason let the nations rejoice at our misfortunes, the nations who are outside the law of your holy Gospel. Rather, I who am your slave, I who am standing here in your presence — by your frightful and great name, I swear that I shall enter your holy temple¹⁰ and shall not leave it; either I shall die or you will convince me that you will give me power to overcome this Jew and put him to shame; I shall not eat any food, but shall stand here and worship in your presence in the place of your holiness, in which we see you¹¹ ...

12. ... our image and our likeness¹². Do you not see that a person resembles him [i.e., God] in these three things that are in a person: the mind that is hidden, the word that is begotten of the mind, and the spirit through which a person is animated and lives”?

13. The Jew said: “He has manifested and made clear [the truth] and has brought forward its proofs. And now, let him confirm his Scripture like his faith”. Abba John said to him: “Truth has become manifest and falsehood has ceased, and we know that the Scripture of God, the Gospel, is truth and that not one letter of it is false”. The Jew said: “Did he not say in the Gospel¹³: In my name they will cast out demons”? Abba John said: “You have spoken the truth. This is what God said, and his words in the pure Gospel are the truth”. The Jew said: “With us is a man, one of the Banū Hāshim¹⁴, and he eats his own flesh. If you cure

¹⁰ As is clear from the full narrative preserved in Georgian, this is the church in which the Image of Christ was preserved.

¹¹ The Georgian reads: “ ... in which is your image, our Lord God, Jesus Christ, which was given by your hand to Abgar the king to fortify his belief and on account of his upright mind”.

¹² Hārūn al-Rashīd is here speaking.

¹³ Mark 16.17.

¹⁴ The Banū Hāshim included in their number not just Muḥammad but the Abbasids as well.

him, you will receive thereby a mighty reputation”¹⁵. Abba John said: “Bring him now”. At this the Commander of the Muslims gave the order to have him brought in, for he was in a locked house and bound in irons. After the madman entered the court, he began to shout, saying: “What have we to do with you¹⁶, disciple of Christ? There is a multitude of us in this man. Whither shall you banish and cast us from him”? To him Abba John, the disciple of Christ, said — using the words that Christ our Lord used to cast out Legion, the great multitude who were in that man in the city of Jādar¹⁷, and to give them power over the pigs: “In the name of Christ, depart from this man now”. Immediately, those demons left that man, shouting and weeping at their departure from their dwelling; and that man was cured immediately. The crowd marveled greatly when they saw that the demons had obeyed and departed when they heard “in the name of Christ” — along with his Father and his Holy Spirit, and they are one. Not greatly impressed, the Jew said: “The magicians¹⁸ also do this”. Abba John grew very angry and said: “Phineas, are you likening the Spirit of God to the magicians? If I did not know that you will convert, I would have ordered these demons to take up residence in you, so that you would perish from now until the end of the age”. And immediately the demons surrounded him, like sparks of fire. Phineas grew afraid. He stretched out his hand and took paper, and he wrote: “Abba John, why are you angry, when all I wanted to do was examine your religion thoroughly? Is it possible that I transfer from my religion (in which I have no doubts), except with a proof which I might advance for other people”? Everyone at court grew greatly afraid, for they heard the voices of the demons. Abba John then made the sign of the cross over the Jew, with the result that his voice returned to him and he spoke. Everyone marveled at this, and especially the Commander of the Faithful.

14. The Jew said: “Blessed man, do you not say in your Gospel¹⁹: And if you drink poison, it will not harm you”? Abba John said: “You have spoken the truth. This is what God said”. The Jew said: “Then it is necessary that poison be brought so that you might drink some”. Abba

¹⁵ Lit. “a mighty hand”.

¹⁶ Cfr Mark 5.7 (and parallels).

¹⁷ That is, according to Mark 5.1, the country of the Gerasenes or (as a variant) Gadarenes.

¹⁸ It is thus that we have translated *al-mu'āyinīn*, here and in what follows. Notwithstanding, this usage is not attested in the standard lexica. Perhaps it is a question of magicians specially endowed with the ability to work the evil-eye. We infer its meaning from the context and from a parallel usage (the *maṣḍar* of *'āyana*) in 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-masā'il wa-l-ajwibah*: see M. HAYEK (ed.), *'Ammār al-Baṣrī. Apologie et controverses*, Beirut, 1977, p. 137 at line 8.

¹⁹ Mark 16.18.

John said: “Yes, I shall drink some without fear or terror”. The Commander of the Muslims then ordered that poison be brought, that Abba John might be tested by it. They brought bottles carried by tongs. These were placed in front of the Commander. The Jew then ordered that a dog be brought. It was brought. He then took some of that instantaneous poison and placed [it] in the dog’s mouth. It took just a few moments until its flesh fell from its bones. When the people of the court saw this, they rejoiced greatly and vigorously, saying: “We hope from God that he will deliver [us] from this man who has overcome the Jew”. The Jew called for a glass and poured into it what is sufficient for [killing] fifty [dogs]. He said to Abba John: “Drink now what is in this glass, that we might distinguish truth from falsity, light from darkness”. At this the holy Abba John stretched out his hand without fear and took the glass, and ordered the bishops to stand and pray with him, that everyone present might know that they were calling on the Lord Christ. He turned toward the east and lifted his voice, saying: “You, O God, our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you who promised us and said in your pure Gospel: If you drink poison, it will not harm you — behold, because of your promise and my trust in your words and my faith in you, my Lord and my God, Jesus Christ, along with your Father and your Holy Spirit, I shall drink this poison”. And immediately he placed it to his mouth and drank it. At this his face began to shine with light like that of the sun. And he sat down in his place without concern, as did the bishops. Everyone present in the court marveled. When the Commander saw him, he said to him: “Abba John, in your heart do you not feel a burning”? Abba John replied: “In me there was a burning as a result of thirst; but when I drank this [poison], the burning of my body left me”. The Commander said to him: “Take this comb and with it comb your head and your beard”. He only wanted to discern whether the poison had had an effect on him²⁰. The saint did this, but not one hair fell from his beard. Everyone present marveled, and the Commander was amazed.

15. The Jew said: “Is it not written in the Gospel²¹: Not one hair will fall from your heads and perish”? Abba John said to him: “You have spoken the truth. This is what God said, and his words are the truth”. The Jew said: “Let me cut from your beard a tuft of hair and throw it into the fire, and we shall see whether or not the fire can have an effect on it”. Abba John said to him: “Do you really want to do it, Phineas”? The Jew said: “Yes”. He said: “Go ahead”. The Jew then ordered that

²⁰ Such as making his hair fall out?

²¹ Cfr Luke 21.18.

scissors be brought. He stood up and approached the disciple of Christ's beard, intending to cut off some of it. Both of his hands then dried up around the scissors, such that no one was able to take the scissors from his hand. Abba John then said: "God spoke true in his promise, and he has made this clear to you".

16. The Jew said: "Is it not written in the Gospel²²: You shall place your hands on the ill and they will be healed"? Abba John said: "You have spoken the truth. This also is in the pure Gospel, and it is the truth". Phineas said: "These hands of mine have dried up. If you wish to heal me, do so, that I might ascertain the validity of these words and the perfection of the one who causes [this healing]". Abba John said to him: "You must stay as you are for three days, that you might understand what you are doing and saying". The Jew said: "My lord, will you allow me to perish? I, this day, am a Christian, a believer in Christ, my Lord and my God. I only wanted to discern the truth, that no [doubt] might remain in my thought". The Commander said: "Heal him, Abba John, lest he perish and it be said: He was not able to cure him". At this Abba John stretched out his hand and said: "Even as Christ, my God, said²³ to that man with the dry hand²⁴, so I say to you: O sinew and flesh and blood, become healthy again as you were earlier". Immediately, the scissors fell from his hand and his hands became healthy again.

17. The Commander had a daughter who had died forty-seven days earlier and had already been buried. The Commander said to his courtiers: "How great is my grief for my deceased daughter, for I have not seen one with a more beautiful face than she. Perhaps Abba John can heal her and raise her from the grave". They said to him: "He can be of no use to you". He grew silent and put off the matter until his courtiers arose and departed. He then took Abba John and Phineas the Jew by the hand and brought them into the garden in which his daughter was buried. He said: "Abba John, this is the grave of my daughter. Perhaps your Lord can raise her up for us". Abba John said to him: "Even as he could create her, he can raise her up". Abba John commanded that the grave be opened and the dirt raised up. He then lifted his eyes to heaven, saying: "My lord and my God, you, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you who called to Lazarus four days after he was buried (and immediately he arose wrapped in a shroud, bound with winding cloths), so also,

²² Mark 16.18.

²³ We have emended the text by omitting *kamā qultā*. The words are difficult to construe and are not supported by the Georgian, which reads: "Even as Christ, my Lord and my God, said to the man with the withered hand, so also I say to you. ..."

²⁴ Cfr Mk 3.1-5 (and parallels).

my Lord, I ask you and beg of you that these might know that you who are eternal and without change can enliven whom you wish". Then he said: "In the name of Christ, my Lord and my God, let this girl arise". Immediately, the girl arose, giving praise to the name of Christ. She began to explain how her soul had been brought forth from her body and how the angels got it and brought it from hell and how she had seen the holy Abba John beseeching [God] for her sake. At this the Commander grew greatly afraid.

18. And he commanded that excursions into the land of the Romans cease and that the customs and festivals of Christianity be practiced openly. He also lifted oppression from the people in general. Indeed, if it had not been that his co-religionists would have hated to hear it, he would have entered the Christian faith. He also ordered that churches be built throughout his dominion and that Abba John be given everything he wanted.

19. Abba John took Phineas by the hand and led him to the city of Nebuchadnezzar, that is, al-Raqqah, which is also called Rāhiṭ²⁵. There he baptized him in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and gave him the sacrament of Christ. Everyone present saw Phineas in the water — the waves came forward until they made the sign of the cross over the head of Phineas, only then to return, and the Euphrates came to a standstill, [having risen up] like the sides [of a valley]. Phineas was clothed in baptism on the seventh day of Nīsān²⁶. His conversion to Christianity was written down, as were the deeds of Abba John, the disciple of Christ and his vicar over his flock. The whole house of Phineas was also baptized (counting men, women, and youths, their number was eighty-two souls) along with many other people, who were baptized on that day at the hands of Abba John (their number is beyond counting) and came to believe in the holy Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, to whom is due praise and glory and respect and honor from now and at all times and for ever and ever. Amen.

²⁵ *Rāhiṭ* should probably be emended to read *Wāsiṭ*. *Wāsiṭ* al-Raqqah, founded by Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 724-43), was an agricultural estate opposite Raqqah, near the south bank of the Euphrates. See M. MEINECKE, *al-Raḡḡa*, in *EP*, VIII, 1995, p. 410-411. The proposed emendation is supported by the Georgian, which reads not *Rāhiṭ* but *ᲕᲗᲗᲗ* (*Vast'i*).

²⁶ That is, 7 April.