

PART ONE

## CHAPTER I: THE SYRIAC APOCALYPSE OF PSEUDO-METHODIUS (PM)

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### Earlier Studies on the Syriac Pseudo-Methodius

The first scholar to draw attention to the existence of a Syriac text of the "Revelations of Methodius" was J.S. Assemanus in his edition of the Catalogue of Syriac Literature by 'Abdīso' bar Brīkā (fourteenth century). 'Abdīšō' attributed to "Methodius" a book "on the succession of generations" (d-yūbālā d-tawldâtā) and a great number of letters "on various subjects" (d-ʿal šarbīn šarbīn).<sup>1</sup> The Letters have never been found,<sup>2</sup> but the book On the Succession of the Generations was already identified by Assemanus with the Syriac text preserved in MS Vat. Syr. 58. He also realized that this text corresponded to the apocalypse attributed in the Greek and Latin traditions to the third century Christian bishop and martyr Methodius. In Assemanus' time, scholars had already expressed doubts concerning this attribution, and looked for other candidates for the authorship of the work. The two who seemed more likely were Methodius, Confessor and Patriarch of Constantinople, who died about 846 A.D., and another Methodius, also Patriarch of Constantinople, living in the middle of the thirteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Assemanus, who did not

question the Greek origin of the work, rejected the second candidate as a possible author of the Revelations, because 'Abdīšō' died in 1318 A.D., and the work would have required a certain amount of time to have been translated and to circulate in Syriac. According to Assemanus, the author was most likely Methodius of Constantinople in the early ninth century, and the text of MS Vat. Syr. 58 was a translation from Greek. Assemanus explained the differences between the Syriac, Greek and Latin texts as additions in the Western traditions, as the "very early Syriac version" showed.

The next notice concerning the Syriac text of PM is a short reference in Baumstark's Geschichte der syrischen Literatur.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, study in nineteenth century Germany on the sources of the German imperial legends had led more and more to the recognition of the Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius as the source for a number of motifs in the German sagas. The history of this discovery has already been told, and it is unnecessary to repeat it here.<sup>5</sup> By the end of the century, editions of the Greek and Old Russian texts of PM,<sup>6</sup> as well as of the Latin,<sup>7</sup> had appeared. The composition of the Greek text was moved back to the seventh century.<sup>8</sup> Sackur, the editor of the Latin texts, was able to conclude that the work had originated in Northern Syria.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, Sackur did not know of the existence of the Syriac text, and was forced to assume that

the original language was Greek.<sup>10</sup> In spite of this, his analysis of PM and the traditions behind it is a remarkable piece of scholarship.

Still before the publication of Baumstark's Geschichte in 1922, the French scholar F. Nau published a Syriac apocalyptic fragment, so close in conception to the textus receptus of PM, that Nau believed he had discovered the original text of it.<sup>11</sup> Nau's theories will be discussed at length below, but we can summarize here his vision of the origin of the work: PM had been composed in Syriac, most likely in Edessa, between 650 and 676 A.D., by a Monophysite writer. The work itself was based on earlier Syriac traditions, like those contained in the Cave of Treasures (hereafter, CT), the Romance of Julian the Apostate, and other Syriac texts concerning Alexander and the Huns (most of these traditions had already been noticed by Sackur). From this text, which was the one edited by Nau, the Greek version was made, and the Greek in turn was translated into Latin. From the Greek also, another Syriac version was made, the one used by later Syriac authors, like Solomon of Basra and Michael the Syrian.<sup>12</sup> Again, Nau failed to notice the existence of a complete Syriac text of PM in MS Vat. Syr. 58. Had he known that text, his reconstruction of the transmission of PM would have been substantially different.

Several studies at the beginning of the century continued to emphasize the relationship between PM and CT.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, research on the Alexander Legends had called attention also to other traditions related to PM.<sup>14</sup> But the first scholar to rediscover the Syriac text of MS Vat. Syr. 58 was M. Kmosko, a Hungarian interested in the Syriac traditions concerning the Caucasian peoples.<sup>15</sup> His analysis of the Vatican MS allowed Kmosko to state that the original language of the work was Syriac.<sup>16</sup> According to Kmosko, the author was an Eastern Syrian of North Mesopotamia, who had become a Melkite, and had travelled to Western Syria or to Palestine. Kmosko suggested that the author could have been a follower of the Nestorian reformer Ḥnânā of Adiabene, fleeing from persecution circa 628 A.D., that is, by the end of the Roman-Persian war; or, even better, in the years 635/636 A.D., at the time when Heraclius was gathering an army to fight the threatening Arabs.<sup>17</sup> The similarity of one passage in PM with another in the Adversus Judaeos attributed to Anastasius of Sinai<sup>18</sup> (who, according to Euthychios, was the same Māhān, -- in Greek, Baanes -- who lead the imperial troops and who, after the fall of Damascus, disappeared, fearing the wrath of the emperor),<sup>19</sup> suggested to Kmosko the idea that the author of PM may have ended his wandering in the Melkite monastery of St. Catherine, at Mount Sinai.<sup>20</sup> According to Kmosko, a number of Syriac works depend on PM: the Pseudo-Ephraemic

mimra De Christo et Antichristo,<sup>21</sup> the "Jacobite Edessene" fragments published by Nau,<sup>22</sup> the Apocalypse of John the Little attached to the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles,<sup>23</sup> and the Neṣḥânā d-'Aleksandrōs,<sup>24</sup> whose final composition Kmosko placed after the fall of Constantinople at the hands of the Turks.<sup>25</sup>

Kmosko's contributions to the study of PM are important. He called attention to the complete text in the Vatican MS; he showed the Eastern Syriac, even Persian origin of some of PM's ideas; he proved that Syriac had to be the original language of the work; and he proposed that the author of the apocalypse was a Melkite. The weakest points in his reconstruction are his brief description of PM's influence on other Syriac works, and his suggestion that the work may have been composed in the Sinai monastery. In fact, as will appear below, the fragments published by Nau are not at all Jacobite. It is rather doubtful that Pseudo-Ephraem depends on PM, and it is certain that the Neṣḥânā does not, but, on the contrary, was one of PM's sources. The earliest testimonies to the influence of the work come from Nestorian sources, and there is no hint that the work was ever known in the Sinai. The interest that PM shows in the Holy Land can easily be explained by the shock caused in the East by the loss of the holy places to the Arabs. The parallelism with Anastasius of Sinai only calls for an explanation in the Greek version of PM, and there it

does not create a problem to think of an addition by a scribe or a translator familiar with Anastasius' work.

The next wave of studies on the Syriac PM comes in the late sixties from the American Byzantinist P.J. Alexander, who devoted a series of articles to the study of the work.<sup>26</sup> For Alexander, the author of PM was a Monophysite, living again in Northern Mesopotamia.<sup>27</sup> He thought the work was written between 644 and 678 A.D., i.e., between the creation of an Arab navy and the first attacks on Constantinople, which the Syriac text does not mention but which the Greek does.<sup>28</sup> Although Alexander knew MS Vat. Syr. 58, his attempts to interpret the work from the point of view of the Byzantine Reichseschatologie,<sup>29</sup> or as derived from Jewish Messianic ideas,<sup>30</sup> obscure the dependence of PM on Syriac traditions and ideas, and in this respect his work represents a step backwards from what Sackur and Kmosko had achieved.

In 1976, S. Brock included a reference to PM in a study of Syriac sources for the history of the seventh century,<sup>31</sup> and proposed a new date for the composition of the work, according to which it would have originated shortly before 692 A.D. Meanwhile, A. Vööbus announced the discovery of three new Syriac MSS which he thought represented the work of a previously unknown Syriac writer, "Methodius of Peṭrā," but which are in fact of PM.<sup>32</sup> Most recently, J.G. Reinink, of the University of Gröningen, has

devoted his attention to PM, publishing a number of studies which, in a sense, are the first attempts after Kmosko to understand the apocalypse from the point of view of the Syriac tradition, and which repair the damage caused by Alexander's interpretation of the work.<sup>33</sup> Reinink has emphasized anew the dependence of PM on Syriac ideas and sources, has restored its author to the Eastern part of the Syriac-speaking Church, has shown his exegesis and his use of typology to be specifically Syriac. The Universities of Gröningen and Louvain are now preparing a synoptic edition of all the early textual witnesses of PM, which will allow for a solution of the many textual and historical problems the work poses.<sup>33a</sup>

#### The Syriac Manuscripts

From the four Syriac MSS known today to contain the text of PM, the only one easily available in the West, and the one which will be used for this edition, is MS Vat. Syr. 58, the text of which will be cited as S.<sup>34</sup> The MS is a paper codex in 8°, with 203 folios. Part of it was written in A.Gr. 1895 (1584 A.D.) and the rest in A.Gr. 1897 (1586 A.D.). The scribe was a certain John of Gargar, who copied it in the region of Ma'dan, in upper Mesopotamia, first "in the blessed village of Sermed, near the city of Hīzān"(f. 107v.), and then "in the village of Şāq"(f.



151r.).<sup>35</sup> The MS is anything but homogeneous: it has works both in Kāršūnī and in Syriac, and they are as different from one another as the Testament of Adam, the Syrian Orthodox Ritual of the Lamps and the Penitential Canons. Within the MS, PM is found as no. 12 in the Assemani's Catalogue (ff. 118v.-136v.).<sup>36</sup> Each page has 17 lines in one single column. The hand is clear but careless, in serṭā characters. Whenever the vowels are indicated, the dots of the Eastern Syrian system are used, perhaps an indication that the MS' Vorlage was an Eastern Syriac text, but at times, some West Syrian vowels occur. Only the Nestorian vowels have been used in the present edition. Except in cases of obvious error, such as the omission or misplacement of the syâmē, or the substitution of the third feminine singular suffix for the third masculine, the pointing system of the MS has been retained. However, since the MS is unnecessarily generous in its use of punctuation, this has been reduced to more sober proportions.

S is full of misspellings, grammatical and scribal errors of all kinds. This is especially true in the first part of PM, which is a summary of "the succession of the kingdoms" up to the Muslim invasion (chaps. I-X). In order to improve the text, recourse was had to whatever supplementary sources were readily available: quotations from PM in other Syriac works, later reworkings of the material in

PM, some of its sources, parallel Syriac traditions and early versions. The result of this gleaning (which is not exhaustive) is twofold: first, it is clear that PM was better known in the Christian East and more deeply rooted in Syriac tradition than is generally assumed; second, the part of PM which aroused most interest in the East was, as might be expected, the apocalyptic section, especially the episode of Alexander at the Caspian gates, and the promise that the kingdom of the Romans would last until the end of time.

We have mentioned already that A. Vööbus had copies of three other MSS of PM: they all come from Mardin (in today's Turkey), and Vööbus gives them the notation Mardin Orth. 368 (written in 1365), Mardin Orth. A (written in 1956), and Mardin Orth. 891. In the first two MSS, PM appears together with works by Mōšē Bar Kēphā, and therefore, they are of Western Syrian origin.<sup>37</sup> In spite of repeated efforts to obtain access to these MSS, they were not available, and consequently, could not be used for this edition.

For the format of the critical apparatus, the edition follows the rules established for the CSCO series. The division into chapters, which is not in S, has been adopted for practical reasons, and is the same as that used by the editors of the Greek and Latin versions. The division of paragraphs within the chapters has been made by this editor.