

## A baptismal address attributed to Athanasius

by

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The work published below is attributed to "Athanasius the archbishop of Alexandria" in a thirteenth-century collection of homilies, by both Greek and Syriac writers, preserved in BM Add. 14727, ff. 55a-58b<sup>1</sup>. The only surviving testimonium to the document appears to be Dionysius bar Šalibi's (unpublished) *Commentary on the Baptismal Service*<sup>2</sup>, where § 2 is quoted, again specifically attributed to Athanasius. No such work of Athanasius is otherwise known, and the style of the piece makes it very unlikely that the attribution is correct. The homily is nonetheless by no means devoid of interest, and is definitely a translation from Greek (the style of translation technique perhaps points to its having been made in the late sixth or seventh century)<sup>3</sup>. The original, which (as we shall see) may indeed have derived from Egypt, can hardly belong to a date before the late fifth century at the earliest.

The work is addressed to one specific baptismal candidate<sup>4</sup>, who is urged not to look on the water and the myron as ordinary water and unguent, in the Jewish fashion, but to regard them as having a divine power conferred on them by Christ, whereby the old man is stripped off and 'the new and divine man of heavenly origin' is put on (§§ 1-2). Failure to look upon baptism with a right mind will mean that the angels 'will not receive you in their company' (§ 3). The contrast between Jewish and Christian purification leads to a paraenetic section on the rejection of the Jews as a result of their failure to recognize Christian baptism (based on Zech. 13:1 and Isaiah 11:10) (§§ 4-6). Becoming a 'sheep' of Christ involves obedience to Christ (§ 7), and offering up one's body as a sacrifice

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<sup>1</sup> From this manuscript M. Kmosko published Marutha's Homily on New Sunday, in OC 3 (1903), 382-415.

<sup>2</sup> § 4; I use Mingana syr. 215 (f. 17<sup>b</sup>). A virtually identical text for this passage is found in BM Or. 9377 and Harvard Syr. 47, which also contain the Commentary.

<sup>3</sup> Note especially the following features: the many adjectival forms (e.g. *nahraya*, § 1); *b-hay d-'ahma'it 'it l'hon* (end of § 11), representing  $\epsilon\chi\omega$  + adverb; *a(n)ton bhon* (end of § 13), representing  $\epsilon\nu\ \iota\mu\iota\nu\ \alpha\nu\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma$ . For all these features see my *The Syriac Version of the Pseudo-Nonnos Mythological Scholia*, Cambridge, 1971, 36-9.

<sup>4</sup> The singular is used throughout.



to God, in imitation of Christ's sacrifice (§ 8). The 'new spirit' conferred in baptism brings about life as at the beginning, in Paradise (§ 9). At this point the author turns to the myron (of the post-baptismal anointing), and contrasts it with both the Old Testament and secular unguents (§ 10); to illustrate its role, Ps 44 (45):7-8 (= Hebr. 1:8-9), Isaiah 61:1 and Acts 10:38 are quoted (§§ 11-12). The concluding paragraphs (12-15) dwell on the effect on the newly baptized of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ: being anointed like Christ, the 'anointed one', he now becomes a sharer in his body (σύσσωμος, Eph. 3:6) and a sharer in his blood (σύναιμος).

The themes covered are for the most part conventional ones in connection with baptism, and there is nothing specific to provide any obvious pointers to date or provenance. There are, however, one or two clues which may suggest that the document may well belong to Egypt.

Perhaps the strongest piece of evidence lies in the form of one of the biblical quotations. All the quotations are manifestly taken from the Greek and not the Syriac bible, but one stands out as being of exceptional interest: Zech 13:1 is quoted in § 4 in the form: "A spring shall be opened up for the house of David, for a sprinkling". For the first phrase the LXX has something rather different: ἔσται πᾶς τόπος διανοιγόμενος τῷ οἴκῳ Δαυὶδ, but the Achmimic and Sahidic versions, alone of all LXX witnesses, have an approximation to the Hebrew text as a doublet, adding the words *et aperietur<sup>5</sup> fons domui david et habitantibus Ierusalem*. Among the church fathers, the reading πηγή is known to Theodoret<sup>6</sup> as that of Symmachus, but it is Cyril of Alexandria, in his commentary on Zechariah 13:1<sup>7</sup>, who comes closest to our text in his understanding of the passage, quoting it in similar form (attributed to ὁ ἑβραῖος), and specifically mentioning the Jews. Textually, then, the quotation in 4 is doubly tied to Egypt.

Another pointer to Egypt might be the absence of any mention of a pre-baptismal anointing, for in the Syrian area, even after the introduction of a post-baptismal anointing in the fifth century, the pre-baptismal one still retained an importance in the eyes of the commentators which it never appears to have had in Egypt. A difficulty here, however, is the paucity of evidence available on the subject of the early Egyptian rite<sup>8</sup>; in particular

<sup>5</sup> The Jewish Greek versions, α'σ'θ', and ὁ ἑβραῖος as quoted by Cyril of Alexandria, all have a participle; the future is found only in the Coptic versions and our quotation in § 4.

<sup>6</sup> PG LXXXI, 1948.

<sup>7</sup> Ed. P. E. Pusey, II, 498.

<sup>8</sup> See especially G. Kretschmar, "Beiträge zur Geschichte der Liturgie, insbesondere der Tauf liturgie, in Aegypten", Jahrb. f. Liturgik und Hymnologie 8 (1963), 1-54, esp. 43-50. Kretschmar indeed argues that originally Egypt, like Syria, had no post-baptismal anointing,



the use of the term *myron* raises certain problems. At first sight this may seem surprising, since in the later usage of the Coptic church *myron* is the term regularly used in connection with the post-baptismal anointing<sup>9</sup>, but for the pre-Islamic period the texts on the subject are both scanty and ambiguous. In any case it must be admitted that the term *myron* is very poorly attested in Greek writers of Egypt<sup>10</sup>. Thus the Euchologion of Serapion uses *ἄλειμμα* for the pre-baptismal, and *χρίσμα* for the post-baptismal anointing<sup>11</sup>, and it looks as if *χρίσμα* is the normal term for the post-baptismal<sup>12</sup> anointing in Athanasius<sup>13</sup>, Didymus and Cyril<sup>14</sup>; it probably underlies the Arabic *mashatun*, used in the sixth century baptismal *ordo* published by Baumstark<sup>15</sup>. Didymus and Cyril, however, do both on occasion use the term *μύρον* as well as *χρίσμα*, as can be seen from their comments on Isaiah 25:6 (LXX καὶ ποιήσει κύριος σαβαωθ πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσι ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος τοῦτο ... πίνονται οἶνον, χρίσονται μύρον). Didymus explains the *myron* as ὁ ἁγιασθέντες ἀλειφόμεθα ὑπὸ τοῦ ἱερέως, but from the rest of the passage it looks as if *χρίσμα* was the normal term for him<sup>16</sup>. The same emerges from Cyril's commentary on this verse<sup>17</sup>: τὸ δέ γε μύρον ἡμῖν κατασημῆνειεν εἰ μάλα τὴν τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος χρίσιν ... καταχρίόμεθα γὰρ μύρῳ κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν μάλιστα τοῦ ἁγίου βαπτίσματος, σύμβολον τοῦ μεταλαχεῖν ἁγίου πνεύματος τὸ χρίσμα ποιούμενοι.

In contrast to Egypt, the term *myron* is common in the Antiochene area: in John Chrysostom's catechetical homilies it is even used of the pre-baptismal anointing<sup>18</sup> (the only one he knew), but later the term was normally confined to the post-baptismal one, as can be seen from the surviving West Syrian *ordines*<sup>19</sup>; this usage goes back to the *Apostolic*

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and that it was only introduced at a comparatively late date (5th or 6th century). The evidence can hardly be said to be conclusive on this matter.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. *mīrūn* in the Book of the Chrism, cf. Le Muséon 45 (1932), 194 ("chrême" in the French translation, p. 219); J. A. Assemani, *Codex Liturgicus*, Rome, 1750, III, 82.

<sup>10</sup> The Valentinian Marcosians used *myron* for a post-baptismal anointing according to Irenaeus (ed. W. W. Harvey, I, 185), but their connections with Egypt are doubtful.

<sup>11</sup> Ed. P. E. Brightman, JTS 1 (1901), 264-5.

<sup>12</sup> Kretschmar (see note 5) of course takes the following passages as referring to a pre-baptismal anointing.

<sup>13</sup> See G. Müller, *Lexicon Athanasianum*, Berlin, 1952, s.v.

<sup>14</sup> For references see below.

<sup>15</sup> OC 1 (1901), 34-5.

<sup>16</sup> PG XXXIX, 557 = ed. I. Seiler, II. 184. The authenticity of this work is uncertain.

<sup>17</sup> *Comm. John* (ed. P. E. Pusey, II.276). Both Eusebius (PG 22.89-90) and Cyril of Jerusalem (*Cat. Myst.* III.7) make use of this verse in a baptismal context.

<sup>18</sup> *Huit Catéchèses baptismales* (ed. A. Wenger; SC 50, 1957), II.22 (see also Wenger's note 1 on p. 146). Compare also Proclus, *Hom.* 27.viii.50 (ed. F. J. Leroy, SeT 247; 1967).

<sup>19</sup> See my "Studies in the early history of the Syrian Orthodox baptismal liturgy", JTS, ns 23 (1972), 33.



















[illegible]

*Of the holy Athanasius, archbishop of Alexandria.  
Discourse on baptism, and (addressed) to those being baptized.*

1. The Jewish Law knows of washing and purifications that temporarily purified bodily impurity, and that were carried out ritually by means of spring or river water<sup>36</sup>; but Christ, in that he is the completion of the Law, brings to the soul the salvation of eternal purification that purifies men through the ritual of consecrated water. For the grace of Christ has crossed over the bounds of human measure to the realms that are eternal, for the benefit of the body; because of this it bestows a benefit that is spiritual, and not just applicable to the body; because of this it provides divine water, and not ordinary, for purification.

2.<sup>37</sup> You therefore, who draw near to the divine water of Christ, should not direct your gaze towards the visible water<sup>38</sup> or imagine something in the Jewish fashion, but turn your mind to the might (behind it) and think of the power added to the water through the agency of created things. Consider<sup>39</sup> the Lord who suffered for you, giving you purificatory water through his suffering. Thus draw near, in the belief that you are stripping

<sup>36</sup> Cp. *Apost. Const.* VII.44.3.

<sup>37</sup> § 2 and the first sentence of § 3 are quoted by Dionysius bar Šalibi in § 4 of his Commentary on the Baptismal Service (see note 2).

<sup>38</sup> 'what is visible' DbS.

39 'remember' DbS.



off the entire old and earthly man<sup>40</sup>, and that you are putting on the entire new and divine man who is of heavenly origin, in that you are changing from an earthly and temporal way of life to one that is heavenly and eternal<sup>41</sup>.

3. Do not allow any worldly desire (to remain) with you as you come to the baptism of Christ<sup>42</sup>; rather, you are changing over to Christ, following the words 'the whole of you with Christ'<sup>43</sup>, as one who is leaving earth far behind and is spending the rest of your life with the angels. Thus, if you do not draw near with this in mind, Christ will not recognize you, nor will grace rest (upon you), nor will the angels receive you in their company<sup>44</sup>; rather, they will disown the person who approaches a spiritual matter with (his) mind on bodily things, the person who approaches as if it was an ordinary washing, that (only) cleanses off dirt from the body; as the apostolic scripture says<sup>45</sup>: 'baptism is not for the removal of dirt of the flesh, but the beginning<sup>46</sup> of a good conscience in God'.

4. The earthly-minded Israel did not recognize this spring of water, even though it had been opened up for them from the beginning, as indeed it is said in Zechariah the prophet: 'a spring shall be opened up for the house of David, for a sprinkling<sup>47</sup>' and the removal of sins.

5. It was necessary, then, for the house of Jacob to be purified in order to receive the true kingdom, concerning which Isaiah the prophet exclaims, calling 'a child' him who was born for the salvation of the world, — the almighty God, 'the angel of great counsel', who sits on 'the throne of David', and (resides) over 'his kingdom in order to direct it'<sup>48</sup>.

6. Therefore when (the Jews) did not accept the purification by which they were to receive the kingdom, the kingdom was removed from them, in accordance with the words foretold by the Lord, and it passed to the Gentiles, as Isaiah the prophet also proclaims, when he says: 'there shall be the stem of Jesse, and he who rises up shall have dominion over the gentiles; on him shall the gentiles hope, and his repose shall be honour'<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9, etc.

<sup>41</sup> 'supernal' DbS.

<sup>42</sup> *om* 'of Christ' DbS.

<sup>43</sup> Cp I Cor. 15:22.

<sup>44</sup> Cp Origen, *Hom I.7 in Ezek.* (GCS 8,331-2) *veni, angele, suscipe senem conversum ab errore pristino...*; also C. D. G. Müller, *Die Engellehre der koptischen Kirche*, Wiesbaden, 1959, 136.

<sup>45</sup> I Pet. 3:21.

<sup>46</sup> Greek *ἐπερώτημα*.

<sup>47</sup> Zech. 13:1 (see above, p. 92); cp also Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary ad loc.* (ed. Pusey, II.498).

<sup>48</sup> Isaiah 9:6-7.

<sup>49</sup> Isaiah 11:10. Neither this passage, nor Zech. 13:1, seems to feature in the standard Christian polemics against Judaism.



Why then are the Israelites unable to hear the words of our Saviour? Learn and take warning so that you do not suffer something similar, in order that you may be found (to be) a sheep of Christ. Do not think the same thoughts as 'the strangers'<sup>50</sup>, for to such it was said that they were unable to hear the words of the Lord, because they were not of the sheep of Christ.

7. But if you are a sheep of Christ, then the Lord's word applies to you, the one that says 'my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they cleave to me; and I give them eternal life'<sup>51</sup>. Look out that you do not think thoughts that resemble those of the people 'who think of earthly things', 'whose god is their belly', 'whose glory is a (source of) shame', as the apostle Paul said<sup>52</sup>— people who have preferred praise from men, and who have not sought after the praise that comes from the Only-begotten.

8. Lift up your desire on high, pass from this world, as you listen to Paul who says: 'do not take on the likeness of this world, but be changed with the renovation of your minds'<sup>53</sup>, offering up your 'body as a living and holy sacrifice, pleasing to God'<sup>54</sup>, after the likeness of the sacrifice of the Lord who was sacrificed for your sake in order to prepare for you an acceptable sacrifice to God. That new life that has been prepared does not accept the 'old man'.

9. The 'new spirit' does not rest on a man who is 'old' as far as his will is concerned. (This) 'new spirit' God promises through the prophet Ezekiel, and Paul states that we are saved by renewal<sup>55</sup>. The Spirit desires to renew you, to prepare you in such a way, just as you were created new in the beginning by God, in order to make<sup>56</sup> you an imitator of life in paradise.

10. Do you, therefore, receive the sweet scent of the myron, leaving nothing that smells foul in yourself. It is not physical (*lit.* bodily) myron that (the minister) is anointing you with<sup>57</sup>, made with costly preparation like the (myron) that anointed Aaron<sup>58</sup>; nor is it with myrrh, cinnamon, iris and sweet scented cane, compounded by cosmetic skill, that they are going to anoint you for 'a sweet scent' as is fitting.

11. No, it is with myron that he is going to anoint you, that heavenly and divine myron, whose anointing the Lord himself received on his body<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> Cp John 10:5.

<sup>51</sup> John 10:27.

<sup>52</sup> Phil. 3:19.

<sup>53</sup> Rom. 12:2.

<sup>54</sup> Rom. 12:1.

<sup>55</sup> Ezek. 11:19; Rom. 12:2.

<sup>56</sup> The Greek word will have been ἀναδείκνυμι.

<sup>57</sup> Cp ?Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat. Myst.* III (PG XXXIII.1089-92).

<sup>58</sup> Ps. 132 (133):2.

<sup>59</sup> John 12:3, etc.



It is to make you a sharer with him, to show you to be anointed<sup>60</sup> in the same way; therefore it is an anointing that is in truth most scented of all. David spoke (of it), Isaiah proclaimed and Peter testified. David addressed the Lord saying, 'your throne, o God, is for ever and ever, a sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of your kingship; you have loved righteousness and hated iniquity; for this reason God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of rejoicing more than your companions'<sup>61</sup>.

12. Isaiah cries out, speaking in the person of the Lord: 'the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for this reason has he anointed me'<sup>62</sup>; while Peter (says): 'Jesus of Nazareth, whom (God) anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power'<sup>63</sup>. In this sweet scent does God rejoice, and the person who preserves it uncontaminated and pure<sup>64</sup> does he accept when (that man) stands before the throne of Christ and is mingled with the bands of angels, having been shown to be of the same name as Christ (*sc.* anointed)<sup>65</sup>, and as someone worthy of cleaving to him, being a companion of Christ, 'sharing in his body' and sharing in his blood<sup>66</sup>.

13. For you will receive the divine power that (comes) with the Body of Christ, and the mystical sanctification that (comes) with the Blood, that mingles you with the Body of the Lord and his Blood. And 'the Bread of Life' 'that came down from heaven'<sup>67</sup> will nourish you, concerning which Christ spoke, urging men to the divine banquet: 'unless you eat the body of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within yourselves'<sup>68</sup>.

14. It was the transgression (of Adam) that deprived mortal flesh of eternal life; after that the words 'earth are you, and to earth shall you go'<sup>69</sup> were spoken, and all of us became mortal. But when we participate of that living flesh and are filled with that truly living blood, we arrive at incorruption of life, so that we may remain with Christ, who himself remains for ever; along with whom and through whom be praise to his Father, together with the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever, Amen.

<sup>60</sup> I.e. *χριστός*, cp Cyr. Jer., *Cat. Myst.* III.1 (PG XXXIII.1088).

<sup>61</sup> Ps. 44 (45):7-8 = Heb. 1:8-9.

<sup>62</sup> Isaiah 61:1.

<sup>63</sup> Acts 10:38. These three passages are quoted together by ?Cyril of Jerusalem in *Cat. Myst.* III.1-2 (PG XXXIII.1089).

<sup>64</sup> Cp ?Cyr. Jer., *Cat. Myst.* III.7 (PG XXXIII.1093).

<sup>65</sup> For the idea cp ?Cyr. Jer., *Cat. Myst.* III.1 (PG XXXIII.1088).

<sup>66</sup> Eph. 3:6; cp ?Cyr. Jer., *Cat. Myst.* IV.1 (PG XXXIII.1100). (See also above, p. 94).

<sup>67</sup> John 6:35,33 and 6:48,50.

<sup>68</sup> John 6:53 (also quoted by ?Cyr. Jer., *Cat. Myst.* IV.4 (PG XXXIII.1100). For 'body' the Greek has *σάρκα*: the quotation has been subconsciously adapted to the Peshitta rendering.

<sup>69</sup> Gen. 3:19.