Translator's introduction

Joshua the Stylite (fl. c. AD 507)

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THE CHRONICLE OF JOSHUA THE STYLITE. London: C. J. CLAY AND SON, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS WAREHOUSE, 17, PATERNOSTER ROW. Cambridge: DEIGHTON, BELL, AND CO. Leipzig: F. A. BROCKHAUS. THE CHRONICLE OF JOSHUA THE STYLITE, COMPOSED IN SYRIAC A.D. 507, WITH A TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH AND NOTES BY W. WRIGHT, LL.D., PROFESSOR OF ARABIC IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE. EDITED FOR THE SYNDICS OF THE UNIVERSITY PRESS. CAMBRIDGE: AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS. 1882 Cambridge: PRINTED BY C. J. CLAY, M.A. & SON, AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

PREFACE.

I. The Chronicle of Joshua (Yeshua or Jesus) the Stylite has been long known to historians in the abridged Latin translation of Joseph Simon Assemani, which occupies pp. 262-283 of the first volume of his Bibliotheca Orientalis; and it is generally acknowledged to be one of the most valuable authorities for the period with which it deals . The first complete edition of the Syriac text did not, however, appear till 1876, when it was edited for the German Oriental Society, with a French translation and many useful notes , by the well known orientalist the Abbe P. Martin, to whose industry scholars are indebted for various important Syriac publications.

That this editio princeps should be faulty in many respects was unavoidable, partly from the fact that the editor had only a single not very clearly written manuscript for the basis of his text, and partly because circumstances prevented him from re-collating his copy with the original before putting it to press. It was reviewed by Professor Noeldeke of Strassburg in the Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft, Bd xxx, pp. 351-8, where he proposed many excellent emendations. Having read the book through several times with pupils, I sent to Professor Noeldeke a further list of corrections, shortly before the publication of his Syriac Grammar in 1880, and we exchanged several letters on the subject. Since then another friend, Professor Ignazio Guidi of Rome, has most kindly supplied me with a fresh collation of the entire work; and I am thus enabled to lay a tolerably correct text before the reader, without having much recourse to conjectural emendation. If I have not described certain readings of my text as corrections made by this or that scholar, it is because I have ascertained, thanks to Guidi's unwearying kindness, that they are the actual readings of

the original manuscript. ... I have never altered the actual readings of the manuscript, so far as I am aware, without giving due warning thereof in the notes. I have, however, taken the liberty, with the view of facilitating the task of the reader, of adding a considerable number of diacritical points, especially in the verbal forms. From the interpunction of the manuscript, on the other hand, I have but rarely deviated, and then only when it seemed to me to be absolutely necessary.

In my translation I have striven to be as literal as the difference between the two idioms will allow. My method is first to translate as closely as I can, and then to try if I can improve the form of expression in any way without the sacrifice of truthfulness to the original. I also endeavour to preserve a somewhat antiquated and Biblical style, as being peculiarly adapted to the rendering into English of Oriental works, whether poetical or historical. The Old Testament and the Kor'an, which are, of course, in many ways strikingly similar in their diction, can both be easily made ridiculous by turning them into our modern vernacular, particularly if we vulgarize with malice prepense. In my version I have sometimes expressed the sense of a conjectural emendation rather than of the manuscript reading. The comparison of the Syriac text and the critical notes will readily show the attentive reader when this is the case. Words which I have found it necessary to add for the sake of the English form of expression, or of greater clearness, I have commonly put within parentheses ( ); but where an actual lacuna in the text is supplied by conjecture, I have employed brackets [ ].

Of the notes I think it necessary to say no more than that they are intended chiefly for non-orientalists and for those who are beginning their oriental studies. It seemed to me to be quite superfluous to repeat the historical information contained in the copious annotations of Assemani and of the Abbe Martin. In matters relating to the topography of Edessa and its district I have had recourse to my friend Professor G. Hoffmann of Kiel, who is probably the best acquainted of living orientalists with the geography of Mesopotamia and the adjacent countries. A comprehensive work on the subject from his hand would be a boon to all scholars. The plan of Edessa is taken from Carsten Niebuhr's Voyage en Arabie, et en d'autres Pays circonvoisins, traduit de l'Allemand, 1780, t. ii, p. 330, with additions and alterations suggested by Professor Hoffmann. As for the rough map of the seat of war, it is only reproduced from an ordinary atlas.

I have endeavoured, for the convenience of readers, to conform my edition in externals, as far as possible, to that of the Abbe Martin; and I would therefore have gladly adopted his numeration of the chapters, but found it to be impossible. In the first place, I had to strike out his seventh chapter, which is merely the final note of a scribe of much later date. This reduces the number of chapters by one from VIII (now VII) to XCI (now XC). But, in the second place, I had to unite his chapters XCI and XCII, the lacuna on p. 75 of his edition being imaginary. Consequently the number of chapters from here to the end is reduced by two, and Martin's ch. XCIII is in my edition XCI. II. We owe the preservation of the short Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite to the care of a later historian, Dionysius of Tell-Mahre , patriarch of the Jacobites (ob. A. Gr. 1156, A.D. 845) , who incorporated it with his own

larger work, which deserves to be made accessible to students of history without further delay . The solitary manuscript of this work which has come down to our times is preserved in the Vatican Library . It is in great part palimpsest, the underlying text being Coptic. According to Assemani, Bibl. Orient, t. ii, pp. 98, 99, it was written in the Nitrian desert when Moses of Nisibis was abbot of the convent of S. Mary Deipara, that is to say, between A.D. 907 and 944 (see my Catalogue of Syriac MSS. in the British Museum, General Index, p. 1310); but in his Catal. Codd. Manuscriptorum Biblioth. Apostol. Vaticanae, t. iii, p. 328, no. CLXII, he asserts that it was one of those volumes which Moses of Nisibis brought back with him to the Nitrian Convent in 932, after his visit to Baghdad and his journey through Mesopotamia .

Of Joshua we know little more than what he has himself thought fit to tell us. He wrote his Chronicle at the request of one Sergius, the abbot of a convent in the district of Edessa (ch. I), to whom he repeatedly addresses himself in the course of it. The last date which occurs in it is 28th November A.D. 506 (ch. C); and considering the tone of the final chapter, I have thought myself justified in assigning the composition of the work to that winter and the earlier part of the following year, which is also Noeldeke's opinion (Zeitschrift d. D. M. G., Bd xxx, p. 352) . A more recent copyist, who supplied a lacuna in the manuscript of Dionysius , adds some details regarding Joshua as follows (see Martin's edition, p. 8). "Pray for the wretched Elisha, from the convent of Zuknin (near Amid), who wrote this leaf, that he may find grace like the thief on the right hand. Amen and Amen. May the mercy of the great God and our Redeemer Jesus Christ be upon the priest Mar Yeshua (Joshua) the stylite, from the convent of Zuknin, who wrote this Chronicle of the evil times that are past, and of the calamities and troubles which the (Persian) tyrant wrought among men."

W. WRIGHT. Queens' College, Cambridge. 23 April, 1882. [These are the majority of the footnotes, minus any Arabic and Syriac]

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.