Syriac fragments of Melito

Melito of Sardis (d. c. AD 180)

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BY MELITON, BISHOP OF SARDIS,

From the Discourse On the Soul and Body. FOR this reason the Father sent his Son from heaven incorporeal, that when He was become incarnate through the womb of the Virgin and was born man, He might save man, and collect those members of his which death had scattered when he divided man. And, further on. The earth quaked, and its foundations were shaken; the sun fled, and the elements turned back, and the day was changed; for they endured not that their Lord should hang upon a tree; and the whole creation was wonder-struck, marvelling, and saying, "What new mystery, then, is this? The judge is judged, and holds his peace; the invisible is seen, and is not ashamed; the incomprehensible is seized and is not indignant; the immeasurable is measured, and doth not resist; the impassible suffereth, and doth not avenge; the immortal dieth, and answereth not a word; the celestial is interred, and endureth! What new mystery is this?" The whole creation was astonished. But when our Lord arose from the dead, and trode death under foot, and bound the strong one, and loosed man,----then the whole creation perceived, that for man's sake the judge was condemned, and the invisible was seen, and the immeasurable was measured, and the impassible suffered, and the immortal died, and the celestial was interred: for our Lord, when he was born man, was condemned in order that He might shew mercy; was bound in order that He might loose; was seized upon in order that He might let go; suffered in order that He might have compassion; died that He might save; was buried that He might raise up.

By the same, from the Discourse On the Cross. For the sake of these things He came to us; for the sake of these things, while He was incorporeal, He formed for himself a body of our construction; while He appeared as a sheep, He still still remained the shepherd; while He was esteemed a servant, He denied not the souship; while He was borne of Mary, He |53 also was invested with his Father; while he trode upon the earth., He also filled the heaven; while He appeared as an infant, He belied not the eternity of his nature; while He was clad with a hody, He also hound not the singleness of his Godhead; while He was esteemed poor, He also was not divested of his riches; while, inasmuch as He was man, He needed food; still, inasmuch as He was God, He ceased not to feed the universe; while He was clad in the likeness of servant, He also changed not the likeness of the Father. He was every thing in

an immutable nature. He was standing before Pilate, and yet was sitting with the Father. He was nailed upon the tree, and yet was upholding every thing.

From Meliton the Bishop; On Faith.

We have made collections from the Law and the Prophets relative to those things which have been declared respecting our Lord Jesus Christ, that we may prove to your love, that He is perfect reason, the Word of God; who was begotten before the light; who was Creator together with the Father; who was the fashioner of man; who was all in all; who among the Patriarchs was Patriarch; who in the law was the Law; among the priests Chief priest; amongst kings Governor; among prophets the Prophet; among the angels Archangel; in the Voice the Word; among spirits Spirit; in the Father the Son; in God God----the king for ever and ever. For this was He who was pilot to Noah; who conducted Abraham;

who was bound with Isaac, who was in exile with Jacob, who was sold with Joseph, who was captain with Moses, who was the divider of the inheritance with Jesus the Son of Nun, who in David and the prophets foretold his own sufferings, who was incarnate in the Virgin, who was born at Bethlehem, who Avas wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger, who was seen of the shepherds, who was glorified of the angels, who was worshipped of the Magi, who was pointed out by John, who assembled the Apostles, who preached the kingdom, who healed the maimed, who gave light to the blind, who raised the dead, who appeared in the temple, who was not believed on by the people, who was betrayed by |54 Judas, who was laid hold on by the priests, who was condemned by Pilate, who was transfixed in the flesh, who was hanged upon the tree, who was buried in the earth, who rose from the dead, who appeared to the Apostles, who ascended to heaven, who sitteth on the right hand of the Father, who is the rest of those that are departed, the recoverer of those who were lost, the light of those who are in darkness, the deliverer of those who are captives, the guide of those who have gone astray, the refuge of the afflicted, the bridegroom of the Church, the charioteer of the Cherubim, the captain of the angels, God who is of God, the Son who is of the Father, Jesus Christ, the King for ever and ever.

Amen.

Of Meliton, Bishop of the city of Attica.

This is he that became incorporate in the Virgin, and was hanged upon a tree, and was buried in the midst of the earth, and did not undergo dissolution; he that rose from the dead, and raised up men from the earth, from the nether grave to the height of heaven. This is the lamb that was slain; this is the lamb that was dumb. This is He that was born of Mary a fair sheep. This is he that was taken from the flock, and was led to the slaughter, and was slain at eventide, and was buried at night; who had no bone in him broken upon the tree; who did not undergo dissolution in the midst of the earth; who rose from the dead, and raised up the race of Adam from the nether grave. This is he that was put to death. And where was he put to death? In the midst of Jerusalem. By whom? By Israel: because he healed their maimed, and cleansed their lepers, and gave light to their blind, and raised

their dead. For this cause he died. Thou gavest the command, and he was crucified; thou wast exulting, and he was buried; thou wast reclining upon a soft bed, and he was watching in the grave and in the coffin; Oh, Israel, transgressor of the law, why hast thou done this fresh wickedness, in casting the Lord into fresh sufferings; thine own Lord, who himself fashioned thee, who made thee, who honoured thee, who called thee Israel.

But thou hast not been found to be Israel; for thou hast not seen God, nor understood the Lord. For thou |55 knewest not, oh Israel, that this was the first-born of God, who was begotten before the sun, who made the light to rise, who lighted up the day, who separated the darkness, who fixed the first foundation, who suspended the earth, who collected the ocean, who extended the firmament, who adorned the world. Bitter were thy nails, and keen; bitter was thy tongue, which thou sharpenedst; bitter was that Judas, to whom thou gavest hire; bitter were thy false witnesses whom thou stirredst up; bitter was thy gall which thou preparedst; bitter was thy vinegar which thou madest; bitter were thy hands which were full of blood. Thou slewest thy Lord, and he was lifted upon the tree; and a tablet was fixed up to denote who he was that was put to death. And who was this?----what we would not speak harsh, and what we would speak very terrible, nevertheless still listen while ye tremble:----He, on whose account the earth quaked: he that suspended the earth, was hanged up; he that fixed the heavens was fixed with nails; he that supported the earth was supported upon a tree: the Lord was exposed to ignominy with a naked body; God put to death; the king of Israel slain by an Israelitish right hand. Ah! the fresh wickedness of the fresh murder! The Lord was exposed with a naked body: he was not deemed worthy even of covering;

but in order that lie may not be seen, the lights were turned away, and the day became dark, because they were slaying God, who was naked upon the tree. It was not the body of our Lord that the lights darkened when they fled, but men's eyes; for because the people quaked not, the earth quaked: because they feared not the creation feared. Thou smotest thy Lord, thou also has been smitten upon the earth; and thou indeed liest dead, but he is risen from the dead, and gone up to the heights of heaven, having suffered for the sake of those who were suffering, and having been bound for the sake of the race of Adam which was in bondage, having also been judged for the sake of him who was condemned, and been buried for the sake of him who was buried. And further on. This is he who made the heaven and the earth, and in the beginning together with the Father created man; who was preached by the law and the prophets; who |56 was incarnate in the Virgin; who was hanged upon the tree; who was buried in the earth; who rose from the dead, and ascended to the height of heaven, and sitteth upon the right-hand of the Father.

Of the Holy Meliton, Bishop of Ittica. He that supported the earth was supported upon a tree. The Lord was exposed to ignominy with a naked body; God put to death: the King of Israel slain. [Selected endnotes moved here and numbered] 1. The four following extracts are taken from one of the Syriac manuscripts brought from Nitria, now in the British Museum, No. 12,150, f. 70.70, 77, written A.D.562. As I have already given a description of

this manuscript in my Corpus Ignatianum, p. 352, it is needless for me to repeat it here. 2. P. 52. Of Sardis. The Syriac has of Sardeon, which is the genitive of the Greek retained in the translation. 3. On the Soul and Body. This treatise is named by Eusebius, see below, p. 98; and by Jerome, "De Anima et Corpore:" and by Ruffinus, " De Anima et Corpore et Mente." 4. On the Cross. B.H.C. has translated incorrectly "on the crucifixion." This is not one of those works of Meliton mentioned by Eusebius, who, however, speaks as if he had not seen all his writings.

5. P.53, L. 21. In the Voice the Word. This confirms the reading of the Syriac in the Epistle of Ignatius to the Romans, c. ii. ..., and of the old Latin, "rursus factus sum vox," against the Greek .... see my note on this passage, Corpus Ignatianum, p. 291.

6. P. 54. L. 12. Of Meliton, Bishop of the city of Attica. This and the following extract were not printed at the same time as the others, because I did not believe them to be by the Bishop of Sardis, which inscription the two first bore. It is plain, however, that this is from the same work as that cited by Anastasius from the tract called ..., because it contains the passage quoted:...: see Routh, Reliq. Sacr. vol. i. p. 122. I have therefore printed it subsequently at p. 49. No one who compares this with the preceding can fail, I think, to draw the conclusion that they are by the same hand, although perhaps by a different one from that of the Apologies. Neither is there any work attributed by Eusebius to Meliton which has the title Eis to pathos------. It seems probable that there has arisen some confusion in the transcribers between the names Meliton and Meletius. B.H.C. assumes at once that this is the case. That Meletius of Sebaste in Armenia, and afterwards of Antioch, is the person meant, and consequently he has not hesitated to declare that the name of the city is mis-spelt, and Antioch clearly intended; and therefore has made no difficulty in giving Antioch instead of Attica. That a Syrian writer should have made any blunder in spelling the name of their great city Antioch is as improbable as that an educated Englishman should mis-spell London. There is a considerable difference between the words ... and ....

Besides this Meletius was translated to Antioch contrary to the canons of the Church, and was therefore soon expelled, and driven into exile. He would therefore hardly have been generally styled Bishop of Antioch, although indeed he afterwards returned, and was again expelled, and again returned. ... see Ruffinus, Hist. Ecc. b. x. c. 24. The word Attica is unquestionably right, and the error must have arisen from some copyist adding the word city to .... There was a Meletius, Bishop of Sebastopolis, in Pontus, who was present at the Council of Nice, and well known to Athanasius, and to Eusebitis, who, on account of his great learning and powers of oratory, was called The honey of Attica, ...: see Eusebius, b. vii. c. 32; and Valesius' notes. He could hardly be the same as Meletius, who was made Bishop of Antioch in the year 360, thirty-five years after the Council, although the similarity of their own names and that of their sees, the one being Bishop of Sebastopolis in Pontus, and the other of Sebaste in Armenia, might cause some confusion. The latter, according to Socrates, was translated from Sebaste, first to Beroca, and then to Antioch: see Hist. Eccl.

b. ii. c. 44; and Sozomen, Hist. Eccl. b. iv. c. xxviii. Both Meliton and Meletius were celebrated for their eloquence.

7. P. 56, L. 5. Meliton, Bishop of Ittica. This is the same as the preceding, although written .... This last extract is taken from a volume procured in Egypt in 1843 by Dr. Tattam, with several leaves added in 1847 from the fragments obtained by M. Pacho. It appears to have been written about the seventh or eighth century, is imperfect both at the beginning and the end, and in its present state consists of 186 leaves written in two columns. It contains numerous extracts from the Fathers of the Church, cited in opposition to various heresies. What the title of the work is, or who is its author, does not appear. Cod. Add. 14,533 (not 14,532 as B.H.C. states).

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