

## A RYLANDS REMINISCENCE

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The scholar has his own sort of joy, that of reminiscence. At a higher level than scholarship this anamnesis is seen in the poetry of a Dante or T.S. Eliot or David Jones, poets who undertake to relive traditional myth and symbol, who do not espouse the positivist doctrine of 'no ideas but in things'. For them the myth is the thing, the 'things' but shadows. At the humbler level this joy enriches the life of the scholar perusing his texts. Someone has said that the special joy of history is to enrich experience of place: one looks with different eyes at landscape or ruin. The scholar finds in common expression ancestry and history, and what at first seems to be an affair of today may for him reveal roots deep in time. With the recent disappearance of Latin from the daily liturgy of the Western Church reminiscences like the one described below will inevitably become rare if not extinct species. Perhaps it is wise to record this one while there is still time, and the Rylands Library can play the rôle of monastic preserver for a future dark age!

There used to be in popular Catholic prayer an invocation of the Virgin Mary known from its incipit as the *Memorare* and familiar in a variety of vernacular versions throughout Europe. Its original Latin form was commonly attributed to Saint Bernard, although its written forms are no earlier than the fifteenth century. At any rate nothing could sound more medieval and Western: it belongs to the wandering pilgrims and the cathedral niches with their lights and votive anathemata. Some of it coincided with a Latin anthem sung in monastic choirs to a plain-chant tune, the *Sub tuum praesidium*. But even here there may be reminiscent surprise. One phrase of the prayer came to my mind as I was leafing through the splendid third volume of the *John Rylands Greek papyri*, edited by Colin Roberts in 1938.<sup>1</sup> There, with Papyrus 470 and Plate I, 'Christian Prayer', I came upon something far from medieval, not in Latin but in Greek of the fourth century, the age of Constantine. A similarity in phrase to the medieval prayer was at once unmistakable: 'despise not our petitions in our necessity'.

<sup>1</sup> *Catalogue of the Greek and Latin papyri in the John Rylands Library at Manchester*, vol. iii (Manchester, 1938), ed. C.H. Roberts, 46 (no. 470).



Rylands Greek Papyrus no. 470 (s. iii-iv)

SUB TUUM  
 PRAESIDIUM  
 CONFUGIMUS  
 DEI GENITRIX: NOSTRAS  
 DEPRECATIONES NE DE-  
 SPICIAS IN NECESSITATE  
 SED A PERICULIS  
 LIBERA NOS:  
 SOLA CASTA ET  
 BENEDICTA

[\*Υ]ΠΟ [ΤΗΝ ΣΗΝ]  
 ΕΥΣΠΛΑ[ΓΧΝΙΑΝ]  
 ΚΑ[Τ]ΑΦΕ[ΥΓΟΜΕΝ]  
 ΘΕΟΤΟΚΕ ΤΑ[Σ \*ΗΜΩΝ]  
 \*ΙΚΗΣΙΑΣ ΜΗ ΠΑΡ-  
 ΙΔΗΙΣ ΕΝ ΠΕΡΙΣΤΑΣΕΙ  
 ΑΛΛ ΕΚ ΚΙΝΔΥΝΟΥ  
 \*ΡΥΣΑΙ \*ΗΜΑΣ ''  
 ΜΟΝΗ [\*ΑΓΝΗ ΜΟΝ-]  
 Η ΕΥΛΟΓ[ΗΜΕΝΗ]

- 1 \*ΥΠΟ [ΤΗΝ ΣΚΕΠΗΝ ΤΗΣ ] Mercenier  
 2 ΕΥΣΠΛ[ΑΓΧΝΙΑΣ] Mercenier : ΕΥΣΠΛΑ[ΓΧΝΕ ΠΑΡΘΕΝΕ ?] Roberts :  
 PRAESIDIUM (cf. ΣΚΕΠΗΝ) Lodi bcd  
 3 ΚΑΤΑΦΕ[ΥΓΟΜΕΝ Ω] Mercenier : ΚΑΤ ΑΦΕ[ΣΙΝ \*ΑΜΑΡΤΙΩΝ ?] Roberts  
 4 Τ[ΑΣ] Mercenier ΤΑ[Σ ΕΜΑΣ ?] Roberts 4-6 cf. Memorare  
 5 \*ΙΚΗΣΙΑΣ sic Lodi a ΠΑ[Ρ- Mercenier  
 6 -ΙΔΗΙΣ] ΕΙΔΗΣ papyrus: corr. Roberts : ΕΙΔΗΣ sic Mercenier  
 ΕΜ papyrus: corr. Roberts ΠΕΡΙΣΤΑΣ[ΕΙ ve] ΠΕΡΙΣΤΑΣ[ΕΣΙ Mercenier :  
 NECESSITATE Lodi d  
 7 ΚΙΝΔΥΝΩΝ Horologion : PERICULIS Lodi bcd  
 8 \*ΡΥΣΑΙ (cf. Matt.6,15)] ΛΥΤΡΩΣΑΙ Horologion \*ΗΜΑΣ [ ' ΣΥ \*Η Mercenier  
 9 ΜΟΝΗ ΔΕ [ Roberts : ΜΟΝΗ [\*ΑΓΝΗ ΚΑΙ ve] ΜΟΝΗ [ΣΕΜΝΗ ΚΑΙ Mercenier  
 10 \*Η Mercenier ΗΡΥΛΟΝ[ Roberts

*Unto thy mercy we flee, Mother of God. Despise not our petitions  
 in our necessity, but deliver us from danger, thou only chaste and only  
 blessed one.*

The text of the papyrus, torn away almost in half, was emended and translated conjecturally by Roberts. But not recognizing the medieval motif he found it puzzling, and some of his emendations can now be seen to be off the mark. In 1939 his publication was studied by a Benedictine scholar from Chevetogne, F. Mercenier, who was able to produce a Greek parallel for the prayer as a whole from the Orthodox *Book of hours* (*Horologion to mega*), and was able to obtain a Coptic version as well, making completion of the Greek fragment unusually viable.<sup>2</sup> He was also able to compare two Latin versions found in the Catholic liturgy, in quite close translation, not to mention the vernacular versions known to the common people. The papyrus prayer was thus identified without doubt as a Greek ancestor of the Latin anthem *Sub tuum praesidium*.

Other Greek and Latin parallels can now be found in Enzo Lodi's collection of prayer texts (numbers 1889 abcd).<sup>3</sup> The closest Latin parallel is found in a processional anthem of the fourteenth century (Lodi d). In making a copy of the Greek text to enshrine my reminiscence I have accordingly decided to depart in several respects from Mercenier. I think he was unduly eager to make his resultant Greek support in close detail the liturgical Latin versions. My preference is to regard the *Horologion* text as ancient and basic and to depart from it as little as possible. The Latin texts are plainly derivative.

In line 1 Mercenier introduces ΚΚΕΠΗΝ, because found in Coptic and closer to Latin PRAESIDIUM. In line 2, alpha, which he excludes, is clearly present. In line 4 too alpha is clear, and in line 5 there are traces of rho both excluded by Mercenier. In lines 5–6 he keeps the itacistic misspelling ΠΑΡΕΙΔΗC of the papyrus which Roberts had corrected (the augment Ε is redundant). In line 6 Mercenier suggests as possible alternative reading the plural ΠΕΡΙΤΑΚΕCΙ, which would be closer to the common Latin NECESSITATIBUS: but the singular ending -ΕΙ is clear on the papyrus and is supported by Lodi d. In line 8 he supplies [CY 'H]: but there is no trace of this, just a double punctuation mark and a clear empty space. He also prints [ΑΓΝΗ ΚΑΙ] to complete line 9, which would represent CASTA ET, dispensing with the repetition: but ΜΟΝΗ repeated in the Greek is the most natural explanation of the eta at the beginning of line 10, which Mercenier has to read as 'H. The eta, rather confused in the Plate, is clearly there on the papyrus, even though its crossbar is extended into that of the unusually elongated epsilon following (which was mistaken for rho by Roberts). Mercenier also makes an alternative suggestion for line 9, [CEMNH ΚΑΙ], which would fit the common Latin version VIRGO GLORIOSA ET:

<sup>2</sup> F. Mercenier, 'L'antienne mariale grecque la plus ancienne', *Le Muséon*, 52 (Louvain, 1939), 229–33.

<sup>3</sup> E. Lodi, *Enchiridion euchologicum* (Rome, 1979), 856 (nos. 1889 abcd).

but the visible trace is clearly of alpha, not of sigma: so here I insert the Horologion text, which fits the space well, and has the repetition of MONH.

EΥΧΗΛΑΓΧΝΙΑΝ, ‘tenderheartedness’ (in non-biblical Greek, ‘stout-heartedness’), is supported by MISERICORDIAM in the Ambrosian Missal version; the usual Latin here is PRAESIDIUM (‘protection’), which seems to translate Greek ΚΡΕΠΗ, reproduced in the Coptic version. EN is Robert’s correction for EM, a common error from pronunciation. ‘PYCAI (‘deliver’) instead of ΑΥΤΡΩCAI (‘redeem’) is probably a ‘reminiscence’ of the Lord’s Prayer.

A.G. Martimort in his comprehensive historical work on liturgy remarks that the papyrus mentions ‘sainte Marie, Mère de Dieu’;<sup>4</sup> but actually only the second phrase is represented in the Greek.

The Latin versions are interesting as showing how the habit of literal translation, most noticeable in the pious translations of the Bible done under the Roman Empire, but also detectible in the Aristotelian translations of Boethius, extended also to more popular cultural forms such as prayer formulae. This habit had a crucial influence on the later history of the Latin language, literature and thought.

The papyrologist E. Lobel was eager, on the basis of the handwriting style, to date this papyrus to the third century. Roberts however found it difficult to agree that a prayer of this kind addressed directly to the Virgin could be earlier than the fourth century. But folk prayers, like folk tunes, can have long lives, and the earlier date may well be possible. This is so much the better for literary reminiscence. Such things were part of an oral tradition. If they ever got written down it was rather by some act of individual devotion. Roberts notes that this seems to be a single-sheet private copy, not part of a public prayer book. At any rate it can be described as the earliest written prayer to the Theotokos (‘Mother of God’).

To print out my copy of the papyrus text, along with the Latin processional anthem, I have the pleasure of using uncial alphabets drawn by Timothy Holloway. I have put restored letters in square brackets. I have also inserted rough-breathing marks and spaces between the words. And finally I append an English translation to replace that proposed in the Rylands edition (a translation of the Coptic version had already been made by the Marquis of Bute in 1882).

<sup>4</sup> A.G. Martimort, *L'église en prière*, iv (Paris, 1983), 146.

