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Editor in chief Cristina D’Ancona (cristina.dancona@unipi.it)
Mailing address: Dipartimento di Civiltà e Forme del Sapere, via Pasquale Paoli 15, 56126 Pisa, Italia.

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Cover
Mathān, Kitābḫāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Radawī 300, f. 1v
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, gre 1853, f. 186v
Menander in Syriac: From Euthalian Apparatus to Scholia on Gregory of Nazianzus

Yury N. Arzhanov

Abstract
The collection of moral maxims known as the “Syriac Menander” has much in common with the new Christian educational models of the fourth-fifth centuries, which established the Bible, especially the books of Proverbs and Jesus Sirach, as alternatives to the gnomic collections attributed to Menander. The Syriac reception of the “Euthalian apparatus” adopted for the study of the orations of Gregory of Nazianzus gave birth to new collections of sentences, which were closely connected with the name of Menander. The evidence presented in the article helps us to better understanding the reception of the figure of Menander in Syriac literature.

1. Educational background of the “Syriac Menander”

“Syriac Menander” refers to three collections of moral sentences that differ in volume and in some minor details but in general contain the same version of the text:

(A) The florilegium in BL Add. 14658 (ff. 163vb-167vb) dated to the seventh century is the earliest and largest collection of sentences bearing the title “Menander the Sage said ...”.

(B) A selection from A is found on the fly-leaves of BL Add. 14598 (ff. 1v-3r) under the name “the Greek philosopher Homer”. The codex was copied in the seventh-ninth centuries, but the script of the flyleaves is later and may be dated to the tenth-thirteenth centuries.

1 This article was written as part of the research project “Syrische Gnomologien als Brücke zwischen griechischen und arabischen Spruchsammlungen”, sponsored by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, project No. AR 985/1-1). I’d like to thank Joshua Falconer for his valuable suggestions and for having corrected my English.


4 Published in: Arzhanov, “Amrus Philosphus Graecus” (above, n. 1).

(E) An epitome of A is found in BL Add. 14614 (ff. 116r-117r) dated to the eighth century. It was included in a composite anthology of excerpts that comprises ff. 114r-121v of the codex and bears the general title “Select Sayings of the Philosophers on Upright Conduct”. The full versions of the fragments inserted in the collection are to a large extent found in BL Add. 14658, i.e. in the codex containing A.

The collection of B ascribed to Homer is a remarkable witness to the combination of the two names in Syriac. Homer is the only figure besides Menander that appears in A in the chreia included in the florilegium, and that could have served as an impulse for the scribe of B to attribute the whole anthology to Homer instead of Menander. The association of both authors is characteristic of the Egyptian papyri that have preserved school exercises used in literary education. A visual expression of this association may be found in double herms from the Roman period.

The scholastic background becomes evident in the following passage of the Syriac florilegium ascribed to “Menander the Sage” (collection A):

If your son goes forth from his childhood humble and wise, teach him writing and wisdom. For writing is something that is good to learn. It means enlightened eyes and excellent tongue.

The motive to learn writing (τὰ γράμματα) is predominant in two Greek-Coptic collections of Menandrou gnomai, which probably derive from a Coptic monastery and include not only the monostichoi, but also quotations from the Book of Proverbs. The combination of these two sources is characteristic of the Syriac florilegium which bears the name of Menander. It reflects the educational program established by the writings of the Cappadocian Fathers in the late fourth-early fifth centuries and adopted in Syriac monasteries. The “Syriac Menander” as product of this cultural development may probably be dated to the fifth-sixth centuries, although this gnomic

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8 One of the double herms combining the heads of Homer and Menander may be seen in Rome in the Palazzo Massimo alle Terme that belongs to the Museo Nazionale Romano: cf. S. Nervegna, Menander in Antiquity: The Contexts of Reception, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2013, pp. 201-2.


10 Syriac text: BL Add. 14658, f. 164ra, lines 6-12 (Monaco, Sentences [above, n. 1], p. 60). The English translation is mine.


It expresses the idea of the “fear of God”, which became central for the educational program expressed in various monastic sources, including the collection of discourses (memre) of Philoxenos of Mabbug (d. 523). The B version of the Syriac Menander (ascribed to Homer) has come down to us on the flyleaves of the codex containing the discourses of Philoxenos. The bishop of Mabbug addressed his writings to the West Syriac monasteries suggesting a pedagogical system for gradual progress in spiritual life, which involved stages of faith, simplicity, and fear of God. The memre included a large number of biblical quotations, intended to serve as short exemplary texts and illustrations to the main ideas of the discourses.

The collection of sentences of the Syriac Menander on the flyleaves is not the only additional element to supplement the main text of the BL Add. 14598. Most of the biblical passages coming up in the discourses of Philoxenos are marked in the margins with special signs of angular brackets and dots ( • > ). Near some of these “quotation marks” we find short notes referring to the origins of the passages cited by Philoxenos.

The word ܐܘܢܓܠܝܘܢ points to one of the Gospels as the source of the quotation, the note ܠܝܕܐ to the Book of Acts, ܫܠܝܚܐ to the epistles of Paul, etc. We encounter the names of the biblical figures that also serve as references to the books associated with them: “David” serves as a synonym to the Psalms, “Jacob” and “Rebecca” remind us about the stories of the book of Genesis, and “Elia” and “Elisha” bring us to the stories of the two prophets in the historical books of the Old Testament. A number of didactic remarks (e.g., ܚܙܝ “look”, ܐܣܬܟܠ “pay attention”, ܫܡܥ “listen”, and ܟܬܘܒ “write”) bring the attention of the readers to particular topics, quotations, and short exemplary stories appearing in the memre of Philoxenos.

What is significant in the marginal notes of this codex is the fact that they are written in the same negligent cursive script as the sentences of the Syriac Menander on the flyleaves and obviously belong to the same hand. Apparently, the scribe was interested in those elements of the discourses of Philoxenos that derived from other sources and could be identified and treated separately from the main text. In several cases the marginal notes in the codex have the form of short sentences which could easily be remembered.

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14 The dating of the “Syriac Menander” remains a debated issue; cf. the useful summary in Baarda, “Syriac Menander” (above, n. 3), pp. 584-5.
17 According to Aristonicus Alexandrinus’ De Signis Iliadis, critical signs have been used in the mss. with the text of the Iliad, cf. Aristonicus Περὶ σημείων Ἰλίαδος reliquiae emendationes, edidit L. Friedlaender, Dieterich, Göttingen 1853. The signs included the διπλῆ probably looking like >, i.e. similarly to the “quotation marks” in Syriac manuscripts. The practice of marking particular passages in the works of Plato is described by Diogenes Laertius in the Lives of Eminent Philosophers III.65-66 (cf. Diogenes Laertius, Lives of eminent philosophers; ed. T. Dorandi, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2013, pp. 276-7). He writes about using the διπλῆ for marking τὰ δόγματα καὶ τὰ ἀρέσκοντα Πλάτωνι, “doctrines and opinions characteristic of Plato”.
18 The references to the folios of the manuscript, where these marginal notes are found, are given in: Arzhanov, “Amrus Philosophus Graecus” (above, n. 1), pp. 78-80.
The scribe’s interest in the gnomic material resulted in adding a collection of moral sentences on the flyleaves, probably intended to serve for pedagogical purpose. Toward that end, the sentences of the Syriac Menander focus on the idea of the fear of God. The concept of the fear of God played a central role in the pedagogical system of Philoxenos, and the sentences of the Syriac Menander must have served as a useful supplement to the discourses.

The codex containing the B version provides us with an insight into the function of the gnomic sayings in the educational context. Several strategies may be identified based on the examples listed above:

1) Marking of “exemplary texts” (from the Bible) with signs of quotations inside the treatises used for educational purposes;
2) identifying of the sources of the “exemplary texts” cited anonymously;
3) writing down short sentences in the margins of the authoritative texts, deriving either from the texts directly or from other sources;
4) adding collections of gnomic sayings attributed to non-Christian authors (Homer/Menander) on the flyleaves.

This practice of transmission of moral maxims in the context of study of the authoritative texts goes back to the tradition that is associated with the name of Philoxenos whose treatises became the object of the scholarly interest in the codex containing selections from the Syriac Menander.

2. Gnomic Sayings in the Euthalian Apparatus

In 508/509 Philoxenos commissioned a new translation of the New Testament which was prepared by Chorepiscopus Polycarp but became associated with the name of the commissioner and is known now as the “Philoxenian” version. The Greek manuscripts that were used for that purpose included the so-called Euthalian material, a scholarly apparatus attached to the Acts of the Apostles, the Pauline Epistles, and the Catholic Epistles.20 Nothing is known for certain about the supposed author of the work or his life. Since he made use of the texts of Eusebius of Caesarea, he probably lived in the fourth century and was familiar with the rhetorical tradition of dividing books into fragments for the sake of reading and scholarly work.21 Euthalius himself referred explicitly to an earlier tradition on which his work was based, and his own material was probably also an object of transformation.

The Euthalian apparatus was usually transmitted as an addition to the biblical text. It enjoyed a huge popularity in the Middle Ages and has been preserved in hundreds of Greek mss.22 Translations

22 The “Euthalian material” was published on the basis of nine Vatican mss. by L.A. Zacagni, Collectanea monumentorum veterem Ecclesiae graecae et latinæ quæ hactenus in Vaticana bibliotheca deliquerunt..., vol. 1, Typis Sacrae congreg. de propag. fide, Romae 1698, pp. 401-708. The text of Zacagni was reprinted in PG 85, pp. 627-790. Ernst von Dobschütz used nine additional mss. in his most valuable study: “Euthaliusstudien”, Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte 19 (1898), pp. 107-54. Louis Willard (cf. n. 20) reportedly based his study on ca. 400 mss. that were available to him in the microfilm collection at Münster. For an English translation of some sections of the Euthalian apparatus see V. Blomkvist, Euthalian Traditions: Text, Translation and Commentary, W. De Gruyter, Berlin-New York 2012 (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur), p. 170.
have been made into Armenian, Syriac, Gothic, and Church Slavonic. The Euthalian apparatus included three prologues (to Pauline Epistles, Acts, and Catholic Epistles), lists of chapters (κεφάλαια), and summaries (ὑποθέσεις) of individual books. Additionally, the apparatus included six collections of testimonies (μαρτυρίαι), referring primarily to Old Testament quotations used in the Acts and the Apostolic Epistles with references to their origin in the biblical text. In five cases these lists were preceded by short summaries explaining the system of references in the longer sections.23

The six collections of testimonies by Euthalius provide us with an early example of transmission of sentences of Greek philosophers in context of the study of Christian authoritative texts. Besides the OT quotations, which clearly dominated in the lists of μαρτυρίαι, these lists included some references to the “non-canonical” writings, including the "Apocrypha" of Elia, Moses and Jeremiah, and several classical Greek authors, who are well-known to us from gnomic anthologies: Menander, Homer, and Demades.

A scholion to Acts 17:28 in the apparatus was based on the two proverbs introduced by the Apostle Paul with the words: “As some of your own poets have said ...” The Greek scholiast (known as Euthalius) found it necessary to identify the sources of these quotations and stated that their possible authors were “Aratus the Astronomer and Homer the Poet”.24

A sentence attributed to Menander appears in the part dealing with the Pauline Epistles. The admonition of the Apostle in 1 Cor. 15:33 implemented a hidden quotation from the gnomai monostichoi of Menander:

μὴ πλανᾶσθε· φθείρουσιν ἤθη χρηστὰ ὁμιλίαι κακαί

Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals”.25

It was probably the rhetorical education of the scholiast that helped him to correctly identify the source of the words of the Apostle, which is combined with another identification connected with the preceding verse of 1 Cor. and presented as a “Laconian proverb”:26

ΔΙΙΙ. ξβ’. Λακωνικὴ παροιμία α’, Φάγωμεν, καὶ πίωμεν, αὔριον γὰρ ἀποθνήσκομεν.
ΔΠ. ξγ’. Μενάνδρου κωμῳδιογράφου γνώμη α’, Φθείρουσιν ήθη χρηστά ὁμιλίαι κακαί.

XIV (62) First Laconian proverb: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”.

XV (63) First maxim of the comic writer Menander: “Bad company ruins good morals”.


The Euthalian apparatus has come down to us in several Syriac mss. containing the biblical text and in diverse anthologies. The Bible-mss. are BL Add. 7157 (eighth century, East Syriac) and Oxford New College 333 (dated to the eleventh century). The Euthalian materials included in them differ from one another, and the analyses of Dobschütz and Brock have demonstrated that the BL codex contains a revised version (which appeared during its transmission in the sixth century) of the “Philoxenian” translation of the NT. The version of the Euthalian scholia in the Oxford codex reflects the later Bible translation, which was made in 615/616 by Thomas of Harkel. There, in the margin near 1 Cor. 15:33, we find the short note:

(This is) a proverb of the comic writer Menander (found in) Thais.

The “pagan testimonies” included in the Euthalian apparatus are transmitted separately in two ninth century Syriac mss.: BL Add. 17193 (ff. 3v-4r) and Saint Mark’s Monastery of Jerusalem (SMMJ) 124 (ff. 5v-6r). The BL codex represents the earlier version of the materials going back to the translation arranged by Philoxenos of Mabbug and later associated with his name. The title of the collection makes apparent that it is extracted from the “Philoxenian” NT and contains a selection of μαρτυρίαι taken “from pagan sages and apocryphal books”.

The Jerusalem codex includes the same selection of “testimonies” based on the Euthalian apparatus. This selection is not separated from other materials but forms part of the larger section containing “sayings of the pagans that were included by the teachers in their works”. This ms. contains another version of the Euthalian apparatus which is very close to the one preserved in Oxford 333, going back to the Harklean version of the NT.

Transmission of a similar collection in both mss. demonstrates a constant interest of the Syriac scholars (starting with the Philoxenian work at the beginning of the sixth century) in the quotations from “pagan authors” as transmitted by those texts that were sanctioned by the Church and thus legitimized for use.


30 Dobschütz, Euthaliussudien (above, n. 27), p. 136; Brock, “Syriac Euthalian Material” (above, n. 27).

31 Ms. Oxford, New College 333, f. 228v, between the columns.

32 Cf. Wright, Catalogue (above, n. 2), vol. 2, pp. 989-1002.

33 Cf. the description in the database of vHMML (https://www.vhmml.org/) where this ms. has the number SMMJ_00124.

34 Cf. Brock, “Syriac Euthalian Material” (above, n. 27).

35 The BL version of [1] beginning with אִם is not supported by the quotations of this verse by Philoxenos, who has either שֲם (as in SMMJ) or מַעְשֶׂה. Cf. Aland-Juckel, Das Neue Testament, vol. II/1 (above, n. 25), p. 298.

36 Published as “E2H” in: Brock, “The Syriac Euthalian Material” (above, n. 27).
Synoptic edition of the two versions:

BL Add. 17193 (E¹)  SMMJ 124 (E²)  Euth. App. (Zacagni)

'Ἡλία ἀποκρύφου α'. Ἀ ὅρθολοκος οὖν Ἰδεν, καὶ οὖς οὖς ἤκουσε, καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἀνέβη, ἐς ἡτοίμασεν ὁ θεὸς τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτὸν. [556 b 16-20]

Λακωνικὴ παροιμία α'. Φαγώμεν, καὶ πίωμεν, αὔριον γὰρ ἀποθνήσκομεν. [558 b 6-8]

(Λακωνική, καὶ ἄρχια παροιμία α'. [546 b 14-15])

Μενάνδρου κωμῳδιογράφου γνώμη α', Φθείρουσιν ήθη χρηστὰ ὁμιλίαι κακαί. [558 b 9-11]

Μωϋσέως ἀποκρύφου α'. Οὔτε γὰρ περιτομὴ τί ἐστιν, οὔτε ἀκροβυστία, ἀλλὰ καινὴ κτίσις. [561 a 22-25]

Ἐν ἀποκρύφῳ Ἰερεμίου τοῦ προφήτου α'. Ἔγειρε, ὁ καθεύδων, καὶ ἀνάστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ ἐπιφαύσει σοι ὁ Χριστός. [561 a 22-25]

Ἐπιμενίδου Κρητὸς μάντεως χρησμὸς α'. Κρῆτες ἀεὶ ψεῦσται, κακὰ θηρία, γαστέρες ἀργαί. [567 a 23-25]

Cf. the edition of BL Add. 17193 (E¹) in Brock, "Syriac Euthalian Material" (above, n. 27).
Translation of the two Syriac collections:

Of the holy Philoxenos: The sayings that Paul quoted from pagan sages and apocryphal books.

[1] From an apocryphal book: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” [1 Cor. 2:9].

[2] An old Laconian proverb: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” [1 Cor. 15:32]. It is also used by Isaiah [cf. Is. 22:13].

[3] Proverb of Menander the diviner in Thais: “Bad company ruins good morals” [1 Cor. 15:33].

These are in the Epistle to Corinthians. And a little further:
In the Epistle to Galatians.


In the Epistles to Philippians and Colossians, and in the First and Second Epistle to Thessalonians, Paul did not mention any saying from another source.

A quotation from the Epistle to Titus:

[6] Oracle of Epimenides, a diviner from Crete: “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons” [Tit. 1:12].

The Syriac translation of the Euthalian apparatus transmitted to the Syriac readers the only sentence of the “comic writer Menander” (who in the BL codex is called surprisingly a “diviner”) that we may directly associate with the Greek corpus of his sentences. The version of the BL codex (first column; cf. the note in Ms. Oxford 331) even gives the title of the comedy (Thais) where it could be found.

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38 The form ܬܐܝܣ is most likely a corruption of ܬܐܢܣ.
Elements in the BL codex attest to their provenance from the Euthalian apparatus. This version includes accurate references to the NT books, increasing the likelihood that the collection of the BL ms. derives from a larger corpus of Euthalian material.

The Jerusalem codex version stands closer in many respects to the Euthalian text known to us from the edition of Zacagni, although it lacks those elements which clearly associate it with the Euthalian tradition. The Jerusalem codex integrated the “pagan witnesses” taken from the Euthalian apparatus in the larger collection of “pagan witnesses” found by the Christian authors. The anthology includes the “Prophecies of Greek Philosophers about Christ”, mythological scholia on the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus, and selected sayings of Greek authors found in the orations of Gregory (cf. below). The Jerusalem anthology points thus at the afterlife of the Euthalian method that was applied by the Syriac scholars to the writings of the Church authorities, first of all to those of Gregory of Nazianzus.

3. Gnomic sentences among scholia on the orations of Gregory of Nazianzus

Gregory of Nazianzus (330-390) played a decisive role not only in the development of the Christian theology of the fourth century (the role which brought him the epithet “Theologian”) but also in the Christian reception of the Late Antique system of education. Having received the full scope of the enkyklios paideia, Gregory provided the Church with the Christian works shaped after classical rhetorical models and including plenty of explicit quotations from and anonymous references to the ancient authors.\(^{39}\) The works of Gregory, especially his poems and orations, became for Christian readers vehicles of transmission of the Late Antique gnomic materials.\(^{40}\)

The monostichs of Menander turned out to be an important source of quotations for Gregory.\(^{41}\) One of the Menandrean sentences is found in Carmen I.2.39, and the poem “On virtue” (I.2.10) contains large blocks of quotations taken from gnomai monostichoi and other gnomic anthologies, known to Gregory through his rhetorical education.\(^{42}\) The short Carmen morale 30 was composed as a stylization of the gnomai monostichoi and in the Arabic tradition was transmitted as an anthology of sentences of Menander.\(^{43}\)

A large corpus of writings of Gregory of Nazianzus was translated into Syriac, some of them several times.\(^{44}\) His orations were translated twice,\(^{45}\) and the Syriac mss. containing them\(^{46}\) reveal a close interest of Syriac scholars in the quotations from “pagan” authors included in the works of “the


\(^{40}\) Cf. H.L. Davids, *De gnomologieën van sint Gregorius van Nazianze*, Dekker en Van de Vegt, Nijmegen-Utrecht 1940.


\(^{42}\) Azzarà, “Fonti e rielaborazione poetica” (above, n. 41), pp. 56-9.


Theologian”. A Greek series of scholia on Gregory’s references to Greek mythology in Orations 4, 5, 39, and 43 ascribed to a certain Nonnus were translated into Syriac twice and usually attached to the orations. The early versions of both orations and scholia have been preserved only in fragmentary form; the second translation was made in 623/624 by the prolific scholar Paul of Edessa.

The gnomic elements found in the writings of Gregory became objects of special attention of Syriac readers, resulting in marginal notes referring to the origins of the quotations, in scholarly notes, and finally in excerpting them with the purpose of building new gnomic collections. Commentaries and scholia on the orations of Gregory turn out to have much in common with the method of treatment of the “pagan testimones” in the Euthalian apparatus and they were probably based on the same scholarly tradition.

Ms. BL Add. 14549 dated to the eighth/ninth centuries contains a collection of the discourses of Gregory of Nazianzus in a translation by Paul of Edessa. In the margins of this codex we find notes referring to the Greek mythological figures, philosophers, and scholars (which appear also in the scholia of Ps.-Nonnus): Euclid, Palamedes, Daedalus, etc. These figures are found in Oration 28, where the “Theologian” attacks with harsh words the Greek non-Christian philosophy. The series of critical remarks is interrupted several times by few positive examples of Greek philosophers who remained anonymous in the oration. Similar to the “pagan exempla” in the Euthalian apparatus, these anonymous references were identified in the marginal notes attached to the text of the oration in BL Add. 14549:

In the opening section Gregory refers to “one of the theologians of the Greeks” (τις τῶν παρ’ Ἕλλησι θεολόγων) who stated the impossibility of defining God in words. The same passage quoted anonymously in Oration 28, is ascribed to Hermes Trismegistos by Cyril of Alexandria and Stobaeus.

A marginal note suggests the same authorship in the Syriac codex: ܗܪܡܝܣܛܪܝܣܡܝܓܝܣܛܝܣ (sic).


51 BL Add. 14549, f. 24r-v.


55 BL Add. 14549, f. 17r.
An unnamed Greek author is praised twice in the oration as a “foreign” (ἀλλότριος) philosopher who expressed ideas which are closest to Christian teachings on God as Creator of the universe. In both cases Gregory must have been thinking of Plato, and these references were made explicit by a Syriac commentator, who wrote Plato’s name in the margins.57

The marginal notes in the Syriac codex attached to Oration 28 were probably based either on some oral tradition or on commentaries to the writings of “the Theologian”. In the same ms., the provenance of the attribution in the marginal note to Oration 26 is not quite clear:

At the beginning of the oration, the author quotes an anonymous aphorism: “Thus we are slow to desire what is within easy reach, as one of the ancients has said”.59 A commentator added in the margin near this passage: “This (saying) belongs to Socrates”.60 No other instances of this attribution are known.

The quoted commentaries in the margins of BL Add. 14549 focus on those quotations by “the Theologian” that remained anonymous and transmitted sayings and ideas of non-Christian authors whose works were absent from the Christian schools. The method of selection and identification of the quotations remind us of the few non-Christian testimonies (μαρτυρίαι) included in the Euthalian apparatus.

The similarity to the Euthalian method becomes even stronger in those mss. that transmit scholia on the orations of Gregory. One of these collections is found in BL Add. 17147 dated to the eighth/ninth centuries.62 The scholia include fragments of the orations, commentaries on difficult terms, and lists of biblical quotations, which bear the title <šurūtem, a Syriac equivalent to the Greek μαρτυρίαι. With few exceptions, the “testimonies” in these sections derive from the Bible, as is the case in the Euthalian apparatus. In the list of “testimonies” extracted from Oration 26, the first one is the sentence quoted above, which in this case is directly attributed to Socrates.63 This example demonstrates how a gnomic saying found and identified in the writing of Gregory begins to take a life of its own.

Another collection of scholia to the writings of Gregory produced in the school of Rabban Benjamin (whose activity is dated to the ninth century)64 is found in the BL Add. 14725 (ff. 100-215, dated to the tenth/eleventh centuries).65 Among the scholia to Oration 2 we find the first Hippocratic Aphorism.

56 Thus the modern commentaries to the oration, cf. Gallay, Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 27-31 (above, n. 52), p. 134, n. 1; Barbel, Gregor von Nazianz (above, n. 52), p. 96, n. 44.
57 BL Add. 14549, f. 21v (ܚܠ܂ܐ) and f. 26v (ܚܠ܂ܐ).
60 BL Add. 14549, f. 32v, right margin: ܚܕܐ ܕܣܘܩܪܐܛܝܣ ܐܝܬܝܗ.
61 In later Byzantine florilegia this sentence is ascribed to Aesop, cf. B.E. Perry, Aesopica, vol. 1, University of Illinois Press, Urbana 1952, p. 280 (No. 103).
63 BL Add. 17147, f. 116r, line 15.
65 Wright, Catalogue (above, n. 2), vol. 2, pp. 441-3.
On one occasion, Gregory speaks of the brevity of human life, and this note brought one Syriac scholar (Rabban Benjamin?) to recall the famous maxim, “Life is short, the art is long”, serving as some sort of illustration of the main line of thought in the oration, which is full of medical images.

On the other folio of the same codex, we find another famous aphorism containing medical imagery: “Physician, heal thyself!” Similar to the sentences of the Syriac Menander attached to the discourses of Philoxenos, the two maxims serve as short gnomic supplements to the text of Gregory, expressing in aphoristic form the ideas of the Church Father.

In BL Add. 14549 mentioned above, on f. 198r, we find a Syriac version of the famous sayings of the Seven Sages of Greece immediately following the Ps.-Nonnus mythological scholia attached to Oration 5.

The examples listed above testify to the fact that the works of Gregory of Nazianzus in Syriac turned out to be an important channel of transmission for the gnomic materials that were seen as “pagan testimonies” used by the Church Father and legitimized by his authority. The anonymous passages were ascribed to famous Greek authors and transmitted among the “testimonies” extracted from the writings of Gregory.

4. Menander in the Gnomic Anthology of SMMJ 124

As in case of the “pagan testimonies” in the Euthalian apparatus, the maxims of the non-Christian authors found in the text of Gregory were also transmitted separately, forming new gnomic collections. An example of such a collection is found in SMMJ 124, which also includes the selection from the Euthalian apparatus.

The anthology of “pagan testimonies” in SMMJ 124 includes the following parts:

- ff. 2r - 4r: “Prophecies of pagan philosophers about Christ”, nearly identical to the collection preserved in Dayr al-Suryan
- f. 4v: “Sayings of philosophers” taken from the orations of Gregory of Nazianzus (cf. below)
- ff. 4v - 5r: Mythological scholia on the orations of Gregory
- ff. 5r - 6r: “Sayings of the pagans that were included by the teachers in their works:” the anthology includes a number of stories about the fall of Troy and non-Christian testimonies taken from the Euthalian apparatus (cf. above)

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66 Or. 2, § 39: “A suitable and worthy comprehension and exposition of this subject demands a discussion of greater length than the present occasion, or even our life, as I suppose, allows ...” (Ταῦτ’ οὖν μακροτέρου μὲν ἢ κατὰ τὸν παρόντα καιρὸν, οἶμαι δὲ καὶ βίον, τὸ λόγον καὶ νοῆσαι καὶ παραστῆσαι ἱκανῶς τε καὶ ὅσον ἄξιον – PG 35, 448A = 83 Bernardi).


This curious compendium combines elements of several collections that must have served as reference works for Syriac readers about classical Greek literature. The aphorisms from the orations of Gregory fulfill the role of gnomic sentences ascribed to famous poets, orators, and philosophers. The ascriptions in this collection are rather unique and seem not to be based on any known tradition:

An explanation about the sayings of the philosophers: Whence did the holy Theologian and the other teachers take each one of them.

[1] First (saying): "Reap a harvest of the individual sorrows". This is (a sentence) of Archigenes.

[2] Second: “Let us learn the potter’s art through a wine-jar,’ as it is said”. This is (a sentence) of Menander.

[3] Third: "Dreams are utter drivel". This (sentence) is of the same author.

[4] Fourth: "Silence indicates assent". This (sentence) is of the same author.

[5] Fifth: "Nothing a man acquires is more precious than a good wife". This is (a sentence) of Demosthenes.

[6] Sixth: "A good thing is not good until it happens in a good way". This is (a sentence) of Menander.

[7] Seventh: “How can I hide something that is overflowed”. This is (a sentence) of Plutarch.

[8] Eighth: “This is wisdom: Know yourself, but do not exalt yourself". This is (a sentence) of Solon.

[9] Ninth: “Ah work! Stronger than any word we speak". This is (a sentence) of Menander.

[10] Tenth: “Ah, the masses take me for a fool,’ as someone said”. This is (a sentence) of Democritus.

[11] Eleventh: "We are capable of healing work". This is (a sentence) of Menander.

[12] Twelfth: "In the presence of the virtues, the vices are fastened". This is (a sentence) of Demosthenes.
The sayings derive from the orations of Gregory in the translation of Paul of Edessa.\footnote{Or. 2, §27: καὶ τὸ ἐπ’ ἀλλοτρίαις συμφοραῖς ἰδίας καρποῦσθαι λύπας, ὡς ἔφη τις τῶν παρ’ ἐκείνος σοφῶν — “they will reap a harvest of pain for themselves from the distresses of others, as one of their wise men said”.\footnote{Or. 2, §47: ἐν πίθῳ τὴν κεραμείαν μανθάνειν, τὸ δὲ λεγόμενον — “to learn, as men say, the potter’s art on a wine-jar”.}

\footnote{I am most grateful to Bastien Kindt (Université Catholique de Louvain, Institut Orientaliste), who provided me with the access to the database of the Syriac versions of Gregory of Nazianzus, prepared in the project “GREgORI”. It was due to the database GREgORI that I was able to check my identifications and find parallels to sentences [6], [7], and [12], which until then had remained a mystery for me.}


The maxim goes back to the beginning of the Hippocrates’ tract \textit{De Flatibus},\footnote{Ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἰητρὸς ὁρῇ τε δεινὰ, θιγγάνει τε ἀηδέων, ἐπ’ ἀλλοτρὶσί τε ξυμφορῇσιν ἰδίας καρποῦσθαι λύπας (ed. É. Littré, \textit{Œuvres complètes d’Hippocrate}, vol. 6, Baillière, Paris 1849 (repr. Hakkert, Amsterdam 1962), pp. 90-114, see 90.5-6). It is quoted as a maxim of Hippocrates in the commentary to Homer’s \textit{Iliad} of the twelfth century Byzantine scholar Eustathius, archbishop of Thessalonica, who probably drew this knowledge on the earlier Homeric commentaries. See M. van der Valk (ed.), \textit{Eustathii archiepiscopi Thessalonicensi commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes}, vol. 4, Brill, Leiden 1987, p. 410.16-18.}

which physicians are described as persons who bear the sufferings of their patients. It is probably the motive of suffering for the sake of the others that led some Christian authors to apply it to Jesus,\footnote{Eusebius of Caesarea (fourth century) quotes this passage in \textit{Historia Ecclesiastica} X.4.11 referring to Jesus who is presented as a doctor who takes upon himself the sufferings of people, “handles their foul sores, and reaps pain for himself from the miseries of another (θιγγάνει δ’ ἀηδέων ἐπ’ ἀλλοτρὶσί τε ξυμφορῇσιν ἰδίας καρποῦσθαι λύπας)” (Eusebius, \textit{Werke}, ed. E. Schwartz, vol. 2.2, Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, Leipzig 1908, p. 866.8-9).}

though Gregory’s use of it does not imply this meaning. No association of it with Archigenes of Apamea may be traced.\footnote{Galen often refers to Archigenes (Ἀρχιγένης) of Apamea as an authority, especially in issues of the pulse. This may explain the attribution as association with a medical issue.}


and this is probably how Gregory learned it as an anonymous maxim. No reason of attributing it to Menander may be established except the association of the latter’s name with the gnomic genre.
[3] Or. 2, §49: λῆρος πλατὺς τὰ ὀνείρατα — "Dreams are utter drivel".81

The sentence is not explicitly characterized as a proverb by Gregory. It is not found in this function by other Christian or non-Christian authors, and its attribution to "the same author", i.e. Menander, seems to be unfounded.

[4] Or. 23, §6: καὶ γὰρ τὴν σιωπὴν συγκατάθεσιν εἴναι, διδάσκει καὶ ἡ παροιμία. — "As the saying goes, ‘Silence is assent’".83

As in [2], Gregory quotes these words as an anonymous proverb, and its popularity both in antiquity and in the modern time found expression in numerous references to it by different authors. Its attribution to Menander found in the margin of one of the mss. containing the oration and in the collection of SMMJ 124 remains quite unique.

[5] Or. 18, §7: τὸ δὲ αὐτὸ δοκεῖ καὶ τοῖς ἐξωθεν· εἴπερ ἐκείνων τὸ, Γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ χρῆμ' οὐδὲν ληίζεται καλλίον ἐσθλῆς, οὐδὲ χεῖρον τῆς ἐναντίας — "Even those outside are of the same mind, if they say that a man can win no fairer prize than a good wife, nor a worse one than her opposite".86

The saying goes back to Hesiod88 and it was included in both Christian and non-Christian gnomic anthologies.89 Its attribution to Demosthenes is found in the margins of the Syriac mss. containing this oration89 and it appears also in the collection of SMMJ.

[6] Or. 27, §5: ὡς Σολομῶτι κἀμοὶ δοκεῖ, καὶ τὸ καλὸν οὖ καλόν, ὅταν μὴ καλῶς γίνηται — “As it seems to Solomon, and also to me: Something good is not good unless it happens at the right time”.91

The allusion to Salomon by Gregory evidently implies the passage about the proper time for every activity in Eccl. 3:1. The specific expression used by Gregory is identified as a maxim by the Syriac

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82 Or. 2, § 49.22, versio nova (105 Haelewyck).
84 BL Add. 14548, f. 58v-9 = BL Add. 12153, f. 49v-12-14.
85 BL Add. 14548, f. 58v, right margin: ΣΟΛΟΜΟΝ ΣΟΛΟΜΟΝ ΣΟΛΟΜΟΝ ΣΟΛΟΜΟΝ.
86 PG 35, 993A. The English translation (with small modifications) from: Browne-Swallow, Orations (above, n. 52), p. 256b. The Syriac version of the oration remains unpublished.
87 BL Add. 14548, f. 90v-21-23 = BL Add. 12153, f. 83va26-30.
88 Hesiod, Opera et Dies 701-702: οὐ μὲν γὰρ τι γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ ληίζετ’ ἄμεινον τῆς ἀγαθῆς — "For a man wins nothing better than a good wife" (Hesiodi Opera, ed. F. Solmsen, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1970, p. 79).
90 It is found both in BL Add. 14548 and BL Add. 12153 near the corresponding passages.
92 Or. 27, §4.20-21 versio nova (15 Haelewyck).
scholar, and it is found in the same form by Origenes, though also in this case no connection to the monostichs of Menander may be traced.

[7] Or. 29, §2: οὐ γὰρ δὴ ὑπέρχυσιν ἄγαθότητος εἰπεῖν θαρρήσομεν, ἄ τῶν παρ’ Ἐλλησι φιλοσοφησάντων εἰπεῖν τις ἐπίλυσαν — “For we shall not venture to speak of an overflow of goodness, as one of the Greek philosophers dared to say.”

The Syriac version of Paul:

The Greek philosopher criticized by Gregory must have been Plotinus who spoke about God as “the Good” which is self-overflowing (cf. Enn. V 2[11], 1.8). The attribution of these words to Plutarch finds no parallel among the works of the latter.

Five other sentences may be associated with the orations of Gregory only with some degree of assurance:

[8] Cf. Or. 32, §27: γνῶθι σαυτὸν πρῶτον — “Know thyself first of all”.

The Syriac version:

This sentence was a paradigmatic moral maxim and was ascribed to different authors, probably also to Solon. The addition “and do not elevate yourself” is not found in Gregory, but it seems to sum up the argument which Gregory elaborates in the whole paragraph where this maxim is found. A similar slight modification of the wording of Gregory is characteristic of the next maxim which is found in the same discourse.


The Syriac translation which has a rather different wording:

The passage containing the extracted words focuses on the limits of rhetoric and includes a number of proverbs.


Let Solomon’s advice be your guide: ‘Better is a little with security than much with uncertainty’ (Prov. 5:16) and, ‘Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity’ (Prov. 19:1, 28:6 LXX), another of his wise sayings; that is, the man poor in words and understanding, who uses simple expressions and clings to them as to a flimsy raft in his effort to survive, is better than the unctuous fool who in his ignorance takes pride in feats of logic and by his facility with words empties the cross of Christ of its power (1 Cor. 1:17), a marvel beyond word, and thereby through logic and its inadequacy degrades the truth” [Vinson, Select Orations (above, n. 58), p. 210, emphasis mine].


94 180.6-8 Gallay, cf. PG 36, 76C. English translation: Browne-Swallow, Orations (above, n. 52), p. 301b.

95 Or. 29, §2.28-30 versio nova (141 Haelewyck).


97 BL Add. 14549, f. 11rb, lines 17-18.


99 BL Add. 14549, f. 11rb, line 4.

100 “Let Solomon’s advice be your guide: ‘Better is a little with security than much with uncertainty’ (Prov. 5:16) and, ‘Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity’ (Prov. 19:1, 28:6 LXX), another of his wise sayings; that is, the man poor in words and understanding, who uses simple expressions and clings to them as to a flimsy raft in his effort to survive, is better than the unctuous fool who in his ignorance takes pride in feats of logic and by his facility with words empties the cross of Christ of its power (1 Cor. 1:17), a marvel beyond word, and thereby through logic and its inadequacy degrades the truth” [Vinson, Select Orations (above, n. 58), p. 210, emphasis mine].

The Syriac version of Paul:102

The words of Gregory contain an allusion to 2 Cor. 11:23.

\[11\] Cf. Or. 2, §13: ἢ τῆς παροιμίας μὴ πόῤῥω θέωμεν, ἄλλους ἰατρεύειν ἐπιχειροῦντες κύτῳ βρύουσε θέλει. — "... barely escaping the proverb that we undertake to heal others while ourselves are full of sores".103

The Syriac version:104

The sentence which Gregory uses appears by a number of ancient authors in the form ἄλλων ἰατρὸς αὐτὸς ἕλκεσιν βρύων (Suda [No. 3691] ascribes it to Euripides).

\[12\] Cf. Or. 31, §§15-16: Οὐχ οὐδα δε, εἰ μὴ καὶ ἄγγελοι καὶ πᾶσα φύσις ή ὄνω μετα τὴν Τριάδα, κάν ἄπλοι τυνές ὡς, καὶ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν παγιώτεροι τῇ πρὸς τὸ ἄχρον καλὸν ἐγχύτητι. Οἱ τε γὰρ παρ᾽ Ἐυλήμνου σεβόμενοι θεοὶ τε καὶ διήμονες, ὡς κύτῳ λέγουσιν, ὡς ἄναμ θυμοὺν, ἀλλὰ τοῖς σφῶν κύτους ἄλησι κακοὺς, θεολόγους, ὡς μὲν ἐμπαθεῖς, ὡς δὲ στασιώδεις, ὡς ὡν ὡν κακῶν γέμοντες καὶ μεταβολῶν (…). And perhaps the same may be said of the angels and the whole of that superior nature which is second to the Trinity alone; although they are simple in some measure and more fixed in good, owing to their nearness to the highest Good. Nor do those whom the Greeks worship as gods, and (to use their own expression) demons, need us in any respect for their accusers, but are convicted upon the testimony of their own theologians, some as subject to passion, some as given to faction, and full of innumerable evils and changes ...".105

The Syriac translation of this passage106 stresses the state of “being fixed in good” (ܠܘܬ ܛܒܬܐ ܝܬܝܪ) and of “nearness to the highest Good” (ܒܩܪܝܒܘܬܐ ܕܠܘܬ ܛܒܬܐ ܪܝܫܝܬܐ) of the angels as opposed to the “evils” (ܝܫܬܐ) of the false sages among the Greeks. This opposition could have given an impulse for an aphoristic commentary in form of the maxim which closes the collection.

Most of the gnomic sayings included in the collection derive from those passages where Gregory refers to Greek non-Christian authors without making concrete attributions. Many such cases were marked in the margins of the Syriac mss. containing the orations proposing authorship for the maxims. In some cases, the attributions turned out to be very accurate and they could have been based on reliable sources. In other cases, the names of the alleged authors seem to be accidental.

The attributions in the anthology of SMMJ are not based on any known tradition and probably include the names which had played a purely symbolic function of representatives of the classical Greek tradition. Their association with the maxims and proverbs found in the orations of Gregory, however, point to the fact that the names of Menander, Demosthenes and Democritus still stood for the short moral maxims in Syriac schools as late as in the ninth century when the ms. was copied.

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102 Or. 2, §77.19-21 versio nova (151 Haelewyck).
104 Or. 2, §13.4-5 versio nova (45 Haelewyck).
106 Or. 31, §§15-16 versio nova (349 Haelewyck).
4. Conclusion

The evidence listed above adds new details to the image of Menander in Syriac literature. It closely associates the name of the Greek poet with the scholastic environment. The Syriac reception of Menander and the gnomic materials associated with his name reflect the change of educational models that took place in Syria and Palestine in the Late Antique and early medieval periods.

This development may be roughly summarized as follows:

1) The comedies of Menander were known in the Syriac urban centers that were influenced by the Greek education and culture, e.g. in the Antioch on Orontes, before the fourth century and could have been present even in Syriac monastic libraries.

2) The collection of moral maxims which became known as the “Syriac Menander” was the product of the introduction of educational models in the late fourth-early fifth centuries expressed in the monastic rules of Basil of Caesarea, which established the Bible, especially the books of Proverbs and Sirach, as alternatives to the gnomic collections attributed to Menander.

3) The Syriac translation of the Euthalian apparatus in the early sixth century gave Syriac scholars examples of non-Christian gnomic sayings (including a sentence of Menander) in the context of the Bible. The separate transmission of the few “pagan exempla” from the Euthalian apparatus in Syriac mss. bears witness to the importance of this channel.

4) The Euthalian method of identification of non-Christian “testimonies” inside the New Testament books was applied to other authoritative texts, e.g., to the biblical quotations in the treatises of Philoxenos, which in BL Add. 14598 were supplemented by the sentences of the Syriac Menander.

5) The application of the Euthalian method to the orations of Gregory of Nazianzus in the context of the Syriac schools in the seventh-ninth centuries produced a corpus of gnomic materials identified in the writings of Gregory and transmitted in the form of gnomic collections. The collection of sentences in SMMJ 124 taken from the orations of Gregory included five sayings attributed to Menander. In one of these sayings, the name of the Greek playwright is associated with the biblical wisdom literature, revealing the channels of transmission of Menander’s image in Syriac literature.

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