

**A short Version in Syriac and Arabic of the
Gloria in Excelsis Deo, with Additions by St.
Athanasius the Great***

[Una breve versión siriaca y árabe de *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*,
con adiciones de S. Atanasio el Grande]

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Abstract: The manuscripts preserved in the Mingana Collection –Mingana Syriac MS 83 and Syriac MS 155– contain, *inter alia*, an interesting short piece dealing with the text of the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* in Syriac and Arabic respectively with additions by Saint Athanasius the Great. The purpose of this paper is to draw the attention of scholars and colleagues to the existence of this hitherto unpublished work as well as to present its text and provide an analysis of its contents, linguistic features and likely authenticity.

Resumen: Los manuscritos conservados en la Colección de Mingana – Mingana Syriac MS 83 and Syriac MS 155– contienen, *inter alia*, una breve pero interesante parte del texto *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* en siriaco y árabe, respectivamente, con anotaciones de San Atanasio el Grande. El objetivo de este trabajo es mostrar a los investigadores y compañeros la existencia de estos manuscritos inéditos, así como presentar el texto y un análisis del contenido del mismo, sus rasgos lingüísticos y su autenticidad.

Keywords: Mingana Collection; Syriac MS 83; Syriac MS 155; *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*; Saint Athanasius the Great.

Palabras clave: Colección de Mingana; Syriac MS 83; Syriac MS 155; *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*; San Atanasio el Grande.

Collectanea Christiana Orientalia 14 (2017), pp. 65-71; ISSN-e2386-7442

Introduction

The rich collection of the Mingana Syriac, Arabic and Garshūni manuscripts, preserved in the University of Birmingham Library (England)¹ contains numerous valuable, and in some cases unique, works. Volume I of the *Catalogue* in particular contains a number of seminal works on a variety of Patristic and Christian subject matters in Syriac and Arabic (Garshūni). Two of these manuscripts, Mingana Syriac MS 83 and Syriac MS 155, contain a piece dealing with the text of the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* in Syriac and Arabic respectively with additions by St. Athanasius the Great.

History of the Hymn

Gloria in excelsis Deo is the title and beginning of a hymn known also as the *Greater Doxology* as distinguished from the “Minor Doxology” or *Gloria Patri* and the “Angelic Hymn”.² The title is often abbreviated to “**Gloria in Excelsis**” or simply “**Gloria**”. It is an example of the *psalmiidiotici* (‘private psalms’), i.e. compositions by individuals in imitation of the biblical Psalter that were popular in the 2nd and 3rd centuries.³ Another surviving example of this lyric poetry is the *Te Deum*. The hymn begins with the words that the angels sang when the birth of Christ was announced to shepherds in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2, verse 14. Other verses were added very early, forming a

* An updated version of a paper presented at the St. Andrew’s Patristic Symposium 2012 on St. Athanasius the Great [St. Andrew’s Greek Orthodox Theological College], Sydney, 28-29 September 2012.

¹ A. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts*, vol. I: *Syriac and Garshūni Manuscripts* (Cambridge, 1933); vol. II: *Christian Arabic Manuscripts and Additional Syriac* (Cambridge, 1936); vol. III: *Additional Christian Arabic and Syriac Manuscripts* (Cambridge, 1939).

² See F. L. Cross (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edition revised by E. A. Livingstone (Oxford, 2005), art. “Gloria in Excelsis”, p. 685.

³ See *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1909), vol. 6, p. 585.

doxology, which in the fourth century became part of morning prayers, and is still recited in the Byzantine Rite Orthros service.⁴

The Manuscripts

The text of the present piece has survived in the following Mingana manuscripts:

(i) MS Mingana Syriac 83, dated A.G. 2096 = A.D. 1785. The part of the manuscript which comprises our Syriac text consists of fols. 142a-143b. This manuscript contains a collection of prayers and tracts of a mystical character in Syriac, including the prayer of Philoxenus of Mabbug; the vision of Macarius of Egypt; the commandments of our Lord to his disciples and the Trisagion, the first part of which is said to have been recited by the angels near the tomb of our Lord, and the second part by Joseph and Nicodemus.⁵

(ii) MS Mingana Syriac 155, dated ca. 1830 A.D. The part of the manuscript which comprises our Arabic text consists of fols. 91b-92a. This manuscript contains a number of different works in Syriac and Arabic (Garshūni), including a miracle in Arabic of Saint George in the city of Baghdad; theological questions asked by Saint Basil and answered by Saint Gregory Nazianzen and various prayers in Arabic to be recited by the faithful.⁶

The Present Piece

The Syriac and Arabic superscription of this short piece in both manuscripts attribute the additions to the text of the hymn entitled "Praise of the Angels on the day of the carnal birth of our Lord" to

⁴ Cf. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 685.

⁵ For a detailed description of the contents of this manuscript, see A. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts*, vol. I: *Syriac and Garshūni Manuscripts*, pp. 206-208.

⁶ For a detailed description of the contents of this manuscript, see A. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts*, vol. I: *Syriac and Garshūni Manuscripts*, pp. 356-358.

Saint Athanasius “Patriarch of Alexandria”.⁷ For the sake of comparison I reproduce below the text of the Syriac and Arabic versions of the original hymn, i.e. without any additions, together with present-day Greek text of the same and its translation. This is followed by the Syriac and Arabic text and translation of the additions attributed to Saint Athanasius of Alexandria. A comparison of the Syriac text of the piece with that of the Arabic shows that, with the exception of a few insignificant variations such as orthographic readings and the omission, addition or abbreviation of a word, they are substantially the same. Some features of the Arabic text indicate that it may have been translated from Syriac.

Text

Present-day Greek Text

Δόξα σοι τῷ δείξαντι τὸ φῶς. Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις Θεῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη,
ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκία.

Ἦμνοῦμέν σε, εὐλογοῦμέν σε, προσκυνοῦμέν σε, δοξολογοῦμέν σε,
εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι, διὰ τὴν μεγάλην σου δόξαν. Κύριε Βασιλεῦ,
ἐπουράνιε Θεέ, Πάτερ παντοκράτορ, Κύριε Υἱὲ μονογενές, Ἰησοῦ
Χριστέ, καὶ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα. Κύριε ὁ Θεός, ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ
Πατρός, ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἀμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου, ἔλεησον ἡμᾶς, ὁ αἴρων τὰς
ἀμαρτίας τοῦ κόσμου. Πρόσδεξαι τὴν δέησιν ἡμῶν, ὁ καθήμενος ἐν
δεξιᾷ τοῦ Πατρός, καὶ ἔλεησον ἡμᾶς. Ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ μόνος Ἅγιος, σὺ εἶ
ὁ μόνος Κύριος, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, εἰς δόξαν Θεοῦ Πατρός. Ἀμήν. Καθ’
ἐκάστην ἡμέραν εὐλόγησόν σε, καὶ αἰνέσω τὸ ὄνομά σου εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα
καὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος.

⁷ Syriac: “ ܕܘܟܠܗܘܩܕܝܫܐ ܘܕܘܟܠܗܘܩܕܝܫܐ ܘܕܘܟܠܗܘܩܕܝܫܐ ܘܕܘܟܠܗܘܩܕܝܫܐ ܘܕܘܟܠܗܘܩܕܝܫܐ ܘܕܘܟܠܗܘܩܕܝܫܐ ”; Arabic: “ وكتلها القدّيس ”
“athanasios بطرك اسكندرية” (= “and it was completed by St. Athanasius, Patriarch of
Alexandria”).

يا رب نحن الخاطئين: عبيدك نحن نعتزف اترحم
 علينا: محبتك أنزلتكم من موضعك إلينا يا رب:
 وبواسطة موتك تبطل موتنا¹⁰ اترحم علينا.

ܕܘܕܝܘܨܬܝܢ: ܨܘܒܝܢ ܕܘܕܝܘܨܬܝܢ
 ܕܘܕܝܘܨܬܝܢ ܕܘܕܝܘܨܬܝܢ: ܘܨܘܒܝܢ ܕܘܕܝܘܨܬܝܢ
 ܕܘܕܝܘܨܬܝܢ ܕܘܕܝܘܨܬܝܢ.

Translation of the Additions

Blessed are you, Lord Almighty, the God of our fathers. Your name is glorified and magnified by praises for ever and ever. You are worthy of glory; you are worthy of praise. Acclaim befits you, the God and Father of all, the Father of Truth with your Only- Begotten Son and your All Holy and Life-giving Spirit. Now and for ever and ever, Amen. Our Lord Jesus Christ, do not shut the gate of your mercy in our face. We the sinners, your servants, confess; have mercy on us. O Lord, your love caused you to come down to us from your position (place) so that through your death our mortality has become null and void: have mercy on us.

Conclusion

The Authenticity of the Piece with its additions must be questioned. Based on the language and the contents of both manuscripts, this piece probably belongs to the Pseudo-Athanasius works attributed to St. Athanasius which are of uncertain authenticity and are unlikely to be genuine Athanasius. To the best of my knowledge it does not rank amongst the surviving genuine authentic works of Saint Athanasius. It most likely falls into the category of valued works ascribed to Saint Athanasius the Great and sheltered under his authority. It is to be ranked with the *spuria* rather than with the merely *dubia*. None the less it is not without interest to Patristic scholars who are concerned with the out put of the great Theologian and Church Father of Alexandria.

¹⁰ Ms: مينو تننا, clearly following the Syriac: ܕܘܕܝܘܨܬܝܢ