

ST. MAXIMOS AND THE FORCED BAPTISM AT CARTHAGE IN 632

The recent publication of the hitherto unpublished conclusion of a letter written at Carthage by the important theologian Maximos of the Confessor has added some interesting information with regard to the drastic step taken by Heraclius toward the solution of the Jewish problem.¹ We know now that his decree ordaining the forcible conversion of the Jews was issued no later than May, 632 and that it included the Samaritans, as might well be expected. The discussion of this measure in the letter of Maximos, who viewed the affair with misgivings, is not as concrete or as vivid as the previously available account, which constitutes the opening section of that precious polemic entitled *Διακονία Ἰουδαίου Νεοβαρτάρου*,² but the two texts complement each other neatly. Unfortunately, the original Greek of the latter passage has not been discovered, and the account must be read in one of the versions: Slavonic, Arabic, or Ethiopic. Inasmuch as only the first of these is based directly on the Greek, I follow it in the translation here given.³

The Emperor Heraclius ordered the Jews to be baptized in all parts and everywhere. And when (Georgios, who was the Eparch, arrived in Africa, he ordered us, the leading Jews, to come together before him. When we had come together before him, he said to us: 'Are you the servants of the Emperor?' And we replied saying: 'Yes, sir, we are the servants of the Emperor.' Then he said: 'The gracious ruler has ordered you to be baptized. When we heard this, we were startled and stricken with great fear, none of us dared to speak his thoughts. And when he said: 'Do you make no answer?', one of us named Nonnos answered saying: 'We shall do no

such thing, for this is not the time for the holy baptism. Then the Eparch stood up enraged, and with his hands slapped his face saying: 'If you are servants, why do you not do as our Sire commands?' We were, however, petrified with fear. Then he ordered us baptized. And we were baptized willingly or not.⁴

Even before the publication of the new text, which we are to consider below, this event had been dated between 630 and 633,⁵ the period during which Maximos is known to have resided at Carthage, the scene of the forced conversion.⁶ That Maximos, reference to the event was extant first became known in an appendix to Y. A. Kulakovskii's history,⁷ while the text itself was published shortly thereafter in a work by S. L. Epitanovich.⁸ It has now become clear that this text is a variant copy of the original recently edited by Devreesse.⁹

The text in question is the conclusion of a letter defectively edited in Migne, *PG*, XCI, col. 440—45 as number 8. In that edition the addressee is John, which is to be corrected to Sophronios, probably at Alexandria,¹⁰ who was to become Patriarch of Jerusalem in 634. The text as published by Devreesse is given below and is followed by a translation.

Val gr. 905 ff. 142^v-143; 1502, f. 175.

¹ R. P. Blake, 'On the relations between the Jews and the state in the Eastern Roman Empire in the years 602-34', (Russian) *Византизмъ Востоку*, III, (1914), 192.

² See *PG* XCI, 137: *ἡμεῖς τὴν ἐμὴν γένοιτο οὐδένα* by Καρθαγέν. Cf. V. Grumel, 'Maxime de Chrysopolis ou Maxime le Confesseur (Saint)', *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, X, 449-51 (1928). The city is named in the title of the Slavonic version, and in the opening lines of the Arabic versions; for the Arabic see F. Nau in the introduction to his unfinished edition, *La Didache de Jacob, Patrologia orientalis*, VIII (1912), 717-18.

³ *Istoriya Vizanti* (Kiev, 1915), III, 432.

⁴ *Materialy k izucheniyu skriptov. Maksima prep. i ispytaniya* (Kiev, 1917), p. 84. Despite a prolonged search I have been unable to locate this book, the contents of which are analyzed by V. Beneshevich, *Br.-Ngr.*, 76. VII (1929-30), 376, and *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, XXIV (1928), 803 f. The contributions of Russian scholars to the study of Maximos seem to have remained unknown in the West. See the following: Epitanovich, *Prigodnoye Mestim Ispytaniya i vizantio bogoslovie* (Kiev, 1915); K. Ketelidze, 'Data in Georgian sources concerning the Confessor', *Khv. Var.*, VI (1917), 1-62.

⁵ Cf. the variant ms. cited by Devreesse, *l.c.*, 34, n. 3.

⁶ He appears there in May 633; Hefele-Leclercq, *Histoire des Conciles*, III / 1, 342.

¹ R. Devreesse, 'La fin inédite d'une lettre de Saint Maxime: un baptême forcé de juifs et de Samaritains à Carthage en 632', *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, XVII (1937), 25-35.
² Edited by N. Bonwetsch, *Doctrina Iacobi imper baptizant* (Berlin, 1910).
[Abhandl. d. Kön. Ges. d. Wiss. zu Göttingen, phil.-hist. Kl., N. F. XII, 3].
³ *Palkhya Istorii Vizanti: Dskl.*, ed. Metropolitan Nakariie (Moscow 1907), col. 1438-39 (December 191 German tr. by Bonwetsch, *op. cit.*, 1 f.).

[... ἐν τῇ περὶ τῶν θεότων γενέσεως (PG, XCI, col. 445 B 8)]. Ἰνα
 δὲ καὶ τὸ γενόμενον νῦν ἐνταῦθα καινογραφῆς πρῶτον γινώτε, τίμοι πατέρες,
 ἐξῶ συννόμος διὰ βασιγέων. Ὁ εὐλογημένος δοῦλος τοῦ Θεοῦ τῶν ἐνταῦθα
 πανεύφημος ἔπαρχος, ἐπανεβλῶν ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλίδος τῶν πόλεων, πάππας τοῦς
 κατὰ πᾶσαν τὴν Ἀφρικὴν Ἰουδαίους καὶ Σαμαρείτας, αὐτοχόθους τε καὶ ἐπι-
 λυβας κατὰ μέλειαν τῶν εὐσεβεστάτων ἡμῶν βασιλέων πεποίηκε Χρυσιανοὺς
 οὐκ ὀνομαζομένους εἰς πολλὰς ψυχῶν μυριάδας συνειννοῦσας πρὸς α-
 ρχόντας τῶν παναγίων βασιλευμένων ἡμεῶς τῆς ἁγίας Πεντηκοστῆς, τῆς ἐνταύ-
 ρους πέμψης ἐπανεμνήσεως.

Ἀκούει δὲ τοῦτο γεννηθῆναι κατὰ πᾶσαν τὴν Ἰσραήλιν ἀρχὴν· περὶ οὗ
 δεινὴν κατεσχέθη γόβη καὶ τοῦτε φρίττω. Δέδοικα γὰρ πᾶσι μετ' ἐμοῦ καὶ
 καθύβρισθ' ἐν μέγα τοῦτο καὶ θέλω ὄντως μυστήριον δοῦν ὑμῖς, μὴ ποτε
 πιδεξέμενός τις πιστεύῃ γνώμην ἀμώδιον. Δεῦτερον δὲ καὶ αὐτὸν ἐκείνων
 ἔνωσ' ἐν εἰς ψυχῇ κινεῖται ἐν ἡμῖν πᾶσι—τὴν πικρὴν ὄψιν τῆς παρακινῆς αὐτῶν
 ἀνίσταται κατὰ τὸ βῆθος διέμεναν ἔχοντες, καὶ τὸ μέγ' τῆς χάριτος φῶς ἐν-
 τὸς ἐποταμίζονται—τὴν [βλ.] κατὰ κράτος πολλοπλοῦσιν καταστῆσαι ἐφ' ὅσον
 συναρξήθαι τῆς ἀπορίας. Καὶ τρίτον τὴν κατὰ τὸν δῖον ἀποστόλον πρὸς
 δοκιμαζέμεν ἀποστασίαν ἐφορᾶμεν, μὴ πᾶσι ἀρχὴν λάβῃ τὴν τοῦτον πρὸς
 τοὺς λαοὺς ἐκμελίζαν, δι' ἣς ἀνέπαυτον ἐν τοῖς ἀρετέτεροις ποιηθῇ
 δυνήσονται τὴν κατὰ τῆς δῖας ἡμῶν πίστεως ποταγὰν τὴν σκαυθίδαν στο-
 γάζαν, καὶ εὐρεθῇ τοῦτο σημείον φανερὸν καὶ ἀνεμφατίστον τῆς θρησκουμένης
 τοῦ παντός συντελέας, καθ' ἣν τοὺς ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀληθείας μετὰ δὲ πειρασμοῦς
 καὶ ἀνῶντος ποροδοκῶσι οἱ δι' εὐχὰν καὶ βεβαίαν καὶ διαρκῶν πολλῶν
 καὶ τῶν πρὸς δικαιοσύνην ἐξουρημένον ῥημάτων ἐκαστοὺς ἐτοιμάζοντες.

Ἄλλ' εἰ τι ἐπιβάλλετε περὶ τούτου κατὰ τὴν ὑποῦσαν ὑμῶν θεοκίητον τῆς γνώσεως δύναμιν, ἀξιώσατε θηλάσαι μοι τῇ ὑμετέρῃ δοσῶν καὶ μαθητῇ ποτὴν ὅσον οὐδένα πρόμον ἔχοντι καὶ φόβον. Διὰ τοῦ γεγένητος ὡς παρὼν διατίθενται τοὺς ἀγνωστάτους ὑμᾶς καὶ πάντας τοὺς σὺν ὑμῖν...

«Letter from the monk Maximos to the Sophronios the monk, called Eukratas... In order that you should know of the recent event which has just occurred here, honored Fathers, I will relate it briefly. The blessed servant of God, the celebrated Eparch of this region¹, upon his arrival from the queen of cities, by order of our most pious emperors made Christians of all the Jews and Samaritans throughout Africa, both natives and immigrants, with their wives,

¹ Georgios as the name of the prefect of Africa appears in Maximos' correspondence: *PG*, XCI, 36f, 392, 584, 648. Cf. also the Slavonic passage cited above, which must be preferred to the other versions which name the prefect Sergios, Nau, I-C, 716-20.

children, and servants, numbering many myriads of souls, and compelled them to be led to the most sacred baptism, on holy Pentecost day, the fifth indiction¹.

« I hear that this has taken place throughout the Roman realm, wherefore I am terror-stricken and I tremble on account of it. I am concerned first lest this great divine sacrament be desecrated by being presented as an agreeable doctrine to persons unprepared for the faith. Secondly, I see them in spiritual peril,—for at bottom they retain the bitter root of their ancestral lack of faith and thus cut themselves off from the light of grace—lest having sunk more deeply into the darkness of unbelief they become subject to a condemnation many times more severe. Thirdly, I bear in mind the rebellion predicted by the Apostle² and I am fearful lest it begin through contact between these and the believing peoples, which will enable them to spread the evil seed of the stumbling-blocks among the most innocent folk, and there appear that manifest and undisputed sign of the end, discussed by all; according to this, they expect great temptations and struggles for the sake of the truth, for which they prepare themselves by prayers, by entrance into many tears, and by the changes necessary for righteousness.

“Now if you have anything to offer concerning this, through the divinely moved power of knowledge to which you are subject, be good enough to show me, your servant and disciple, why he should not be so stricken with trembling and fear. Through this letter I greet as one present you most holy ones and all who are with you...”

Although it is clear that Maximus disapproved of this baptism *per vim*, his opposition is rather mild when compared with the denunciations of such imperial measures on the part of certain church leaders of the eighth and ninth centuries, viz., the Council of 787, and the tract directed against Basil I by Gregorios Asbestas.⁴ With regard to the Samaritans, it is relevant to note that their presence in northern Africa is also attested in the early fifth century in nearly Tagaste, and in 589 in Alexandria.⁵ Together with the Jews, undoubtedly much more numerous, they may well have numbered «many myriads of souls». The ensuing decades did not, however, justify Maximos' fears.

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1 II Thess. 2:3.

¹ See my *Jews in the Byzantine Empire, 641-1204* (Athens, 1939), pp. 96-97, 136-38.

⁴ See the life of Melania, *Analeta Bollandiana*, XII (1903), 24. PG. CIII, 1084-85; cf. Devresse, *l.c.*, 27.

that these numerous insincere converts would damage the faith of the Christian population. In the light of the Moslem conquest his words read like a premonition of the approaching victory over Christian rule in northern Africa and western Asia¹.

The new text unfortunately throws no light on the motive underlying this forcible baptism². The fear of Heraclius lest the Jews and Samaritans make common cause with the threatening Arab hordes still seems to me the most plausible explanation, although there is no evidence that as early as 632 the danger confronting the remote provinces should have been sensed in Constantinople. A word, finally, with regard to the contemporary persecutions of the Jews in the Visigothic and Frankish kingdoms which medieval traditions attributed to Heraclius' inspiration³. Inasmuch as Heraclius is not known to have maintained relations with Sisebut and none of any consequence with Dagobert and had nothing to gain by advising these rulers to suppress Judaism in their realms, the traditions seem far-fetched⁴. Moreover, since the steps taken by the Visigothic king in 613 and the Frankish king in 629 are now known to have occurred earlier than Heraclius' decree, it seems advisable to absolve the Byzantine Emperor from the international anti-Jewish influence long attributed to him.

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¹ For the local struggle in 697-98 see R. Bassett, 'Hassān b. al-Nu'mān al-Ghassānī', *Encyclopedia of Islam*, II, 288-89. The province is said to have bought off 'Abdallāh b. Sa'd about half a century earlier; Ibn 'Abd-al-Hakam, *The History of the Conquest of Egypt, Northern Africa, and Spain Known as Futuh Misr*, ed. C. C. Torrey (New Haven, 1922), p. 183.

² For the background of Heraclius' policy with regard to the Jews, see my 'Byzantine Jewry on the eve of the Arab conquest (565-638)', *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*, XV (1935), 280-93. See also the article in Hebrew by K. Hilkowitz, 'The Participation of the Jews in the Conquest of Jerusalem by Persians in 614 A. D.', *Zion* IV (1939), 307-16.

³ See now S. Katz, *The Jews in the Visigothic and Frankish Kingdoms of Spain and Gaul* (Cambridge, Mass., 1937), pp. 11-12, 25-26.

⁴ By a striking coincidence the year 629 saw both the suppression of Judaism in the Frankish kingdom and the conclusion of a treaty between Dagobert and Heraclius. Without considering the chronological factor or the difference between Frankish envoys appearing in Constantinople to negotiate a treaty and the emperor dispatching his men to Dagobert's court (as described in the legend), a historian has recently asserted: 'en 629 l'inutile persécution des juifs fut la seule conséquence du traité'; R. Barroux, *Dagobert Roi des Francs* (Paris, 1938), p. 158.

ZU ANTIKEN LAPIDARIEN*

Der Aberglaube, der den verschiedenen Arten edler und unedler Steine heilkräftige und magische Wirkungen zuschrieb, taucht in hellenistischer Zeit in der griechischen Welt auf und gewinnt rasch an Boden. In der frühen Kaiserzeit hat er sich bereits in der ernsthaften Heilkunde seinen festen Platz erobert. Er verbindet sich mit der Astrologie; die eingeschnittenen Figuren erhöhen die Zauberkraft. Das Mittelalter hat diese wenig erfreuliche Erbschaft der Antike sowohl im lateinischen Westen wie im griechisch redenden Osten übernommen und sich zudem neuen Einflüssen des Orients geöffnet, die ihm im «Steinbuch des Aristoteles» das antike Gut noch einmal, aber in starker Umgestaltung und Erweiterung, zuführten. Selbst in der Gegenwart ist der Glaube an zauberkräftige Steine nicht ausgestorben; noch heute kann man in den Strassen der Grossstädte stützende «Monatssteine» kaufen.

Die wissenschaftliche Erforschung der antiken Stein-Literatur hat Val. Rose mit einem Aufsatz «Dauuigeron de lapidibus» (Hermes 9,471 ff.) im Jahre 1875 begonnen, aber lange keine Nachfolge gefunden. Eine ausgezeichnete Übersicht über die Schriftsteller der hellenistischen Zeit gab Bug. Oder in Susenhi's Gesch. der griech. Lit. in der Alexandrinerzeit I 836 ff., eine solche über die verschiedenen Formen der Stein-Magie Hopfner in der Real-Enzyklopädie unter dem Stichwort Lithika. Aber erst Welmann hat versucht, die Fäden aufzudecken, die die Vertreter der antiken Steinkunde mit einander verbinden, und die Aufgabe einer Geschichte der Quellen dieser Disziplin in Angriff genommen. Es ist ihm nicht vergönnt gewesen, diese Arbeit zu Ende zu führen; seine Abhandlung über die Stein- und Gemmenbücher der Antike, aus seinem Nachlass in den Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften und Medizin Bd 4 (1935) herausgegeben, trägt die deutlichen Spuren der

* Anlässlich der Berliner Dissertation von Karl-Willy Wyckhuysen, Berlin 1937, 48 S. 80. — Der Artikel ist im Jahre 1937 geschrieben, also vor dem Erscheinen des Werkes von Joseph Bidez und Franz Cumont, *Les magies helléniques*, Paris 1938, in welchem Bd. 19, 128 ff. und 191 ff. über die Steinbücher gehandelt wird.