

comptes rendus

MARK THE DEACON, *Life of Porphyry of Gaza*. Translated with introduction and notes by Jeff Childres, Claudia Rapp, and Michael Whitby.

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The *Life of Porphyry of Gaza* is a popular and often cited story, even though it must be approached carefully, due to some controversies regarding its reliability. The book in question includes both the scholarly discussion of the text and the parallel translation of both preserved versions, the Greek and the Georgian. The translations of the *Life* are a result of the joint work of several scholars; as explained in the Preface (p. xiv–xv), the idea of publishing the Georgian version came from J. Neville Birdsall who proposed it in 1991 and started working on it, while the idea of a parallel translation emerged in 1997. That year, Birdsall's work passed to Jeff Childers while the Greek translation was prepared by Claudia Rapp who, in 2023, decided to relinquish the project. Subsequently, Michael Whitby took over the task. This joint effort resulted in the present comparative study of both versions of the *Life of Porphyry of Gaza*.

Apart from the Preface, the book contains List of Abbreviations (p. ix–x), three Maps (p. xi–xiii), an Introduction (p. 1–50), followed by the comparative translation titled *Parallel Lives* (p. 53–227). The book closes with the Index of Biblical References (p. 229–232), the Glossary (p. 233–234), Selected Bibliography (p. 235–252) and Indices (p. 253–259).

The Introduction offers a detailed overview of the origins, the content and the research of both versions of the *Life* and an introduction of both the alleged author Mark the Deacon and the saint, Porphyry of Gaza.

Little is known about Bishop Porphyry of Gaza who was ignored by the 5th century church historians (p. 40). His personality is only known from an account by the above-mentioned Mark the Deacon, whose credibility nevertheless remains doubtful (see below). According to Mark, Porphyry (born ca. 347),¹ who was of aristocratic or-

igin, was born in Thessaloniki where he received an excellent education. After becoming a monk in Egypt and Palestine, he was ordained priest in 392 and elected bishop of Gaza three years later. The Life describes his struggle against pagans in Palestine as well as the relations between him and the imperial power in Constantinople, where he gained (financial) support of Empress Eudoxia.

Mark the Deacon has been considered a disciple and/or companion of Porphyry and the alleged author of his Life. When Porphyry was appointed bishop, Mark reportedly accompanied him and possibly witnessed Porphyry's fight against the pagans described in the Life.² While evaluating the relevant sources and opinions, the subchapter *Who was Mark? A hypothesis* (p. 43–48) brings an in-depth view on Mark's personality, his relation to Porphyry and his knowledge of Gaza. The author comes to the conclusion that it was unlikely that they knew each other, and it is similarly unlikely that Mark had visited Gaza (p. 43). The authors also inquire into the style of his writing, the language level of the work, Mark's narrative skills and, most importantly, the intentions and motives for writing the Life listing the opinions of various scholars.

The authors also thoroughly describe the discussion on the origins of both versions of the Life as well as the possible Syriac influences in the story. It was argued earlier that the Georgian version of the Life was translated from a Syriac work (p. 4), however, no trace

of such a text has been preserved and this hypothesis therefore seems to be improbable to the authors, who believe that the Georgian text originated from a Greek version, perhaps through a Syriac intermediary (p. 5 and 49). The Georgian Life was preserved in a 16th century manuscript and there are several significant differences between the Greek and the Georgian versions, e.g. the Georgian version lacks a Prologue (p. 48) but contains a deathbed speech (p. 49).

The Greek Life was preserved in six manuscripts, either in whole or in parts. The most important are three menologia for the month of February from the 10th and 11th centuries; preserved in manuscripts kept in Jerusalem, Oxford and Vienna. Although the Jerusalem manuscript comes from Palestine and the other two originated in Constantinople, all three share the same source (p. 51).

The main body of the book is created by the comparative translation of both versions of the Life: the translation of the Greek version appears on the even-numbered pages, while the corresponding part of the translation of the Georgian version follows on the odd-numbered pages (p. 53–227) allowing the reader to compare the differences between the two.

The authors tried to maintain the style of each version to show not only factual divergences but also stylistic differences. This approach, which fully corresponds with the purpose of the Translated Texts for Historians Series, allows the reader to compare and enjoy the vivid story of Bishop

Porphyry without the necessity to know Georgian or Greek. To a reader interested in the world of Late Antiquity, it reveals, among others, aspects of the Christian – pagan relationship in Palestine in the early 5th century.

The good impression of the book is not spoiled by a minor mistake, the switched map captions of maps 1 and 3, which can at first confuse a reader

unfamiliar with the geography of the region. In general, however, the translation of the Life of Porphyry of Gaza, together with the comprehensive Introduction, represent a useful and respectable contribution not only to the TTH Series but also to our knowledge of Late Antiquity in general.

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