

CHAPTER V.

A FEW FURTHER REMARKS ON NILUS DOXAPATRIUS.

WE have now said all that is necessary with regard to Nilus Doxapatrius from the point of view of the New Testament ; and having found out by his means the kind of influence which has been at work upon the text of a certain group of New Testament MSS., we might very well leave him, and go on with the main problem of the Ferrar-group and its meaning.

But as there are still some interesting points in the explanation of the tract on the Patriarchates which require to be cleared up, we give a little further space to the tract in question.

We have already pointed out the impossibility of ascribing the tract to Leo the Philosopher ; and we are, therefore, thrown back on Nilus and upon his own statements with regard to his work, and upon the MSS. in which that work has come down to us.

According to Nilus' own statement, then, he wrote the tract twice, first when he was at Palermo and then a second time, at greater length, when he was not at Palermo ; and on either occasion, at the request of King Roger.

The proof of this lies in his own words :

Πανευγενίστατε Αὐθέντα μου περὶ ἧς μοι ἔγραψας ὑποθέσεως, μέμνημαι, ὅτι ἐν τῷ καστελλίῳ Πανόρμῳ ὦν, ἔγραψα πρὸς τὴν σὴν ἀντίληψιν πλὴν οὐχ οὕτω πλατύτερον, ὡς νῦν ἠρώτησας. νῦν δὲ πολλά εἰσι τὰ ἐρωτηθέντα καὶ χρεῖα λεπτοτέρας γραφῆς καὶ διηγήσεως. διὰ τοῦτο καὶ παντὸς πόνου καταφρονήσας, τοῦτο γὰρ ἐκ χρείου ἐστὶν ἀπαραιτήτου ὀφειλόμενον, τὸ ὀλοψυχῶς ἐκπληροῦν τὸ παρὰ τῆς σῆς μεγαλυπερόχου ὑπεροχῆς ἐπιταττόμενόν μοι, μετὰ καὶ προτροπῆς τοῦ ἁγίου μου πατρός, πειράσομαι διὰ βραχείων ὅσον τὸ κατὰ δύναμιν, διὰ γραφῆς σαφοῦς παραστήσαι πάντα τὰ ἐπιτεταγμένα μοι. ἀρκτέον δὲ οὕτω.

We should naturally conclude from this that Nilus had written
(i) a short tract on the Patriarchates and ecclesiastical boundaries,

Or, to take another instance, the writings of a certain Arabic geographer named Esseriph Essachali¹ are thus summed up by John Leo Afer in his work *De Medicis et Philosophis Arabibus*².

"Esseriph Essachali, e progenie Maumedis, natus est civitate Messara in Sicilia...; fecit quendam librum cujus titulus erat *Nushat alabsar*, hoc est *spatiatorium* (si dici potest) *locorum*³, quem divisit in septem partes, secundum mundi climata; et recensere incepit de civitatibus existentibus in eo climate, tum antiquis, tum etiam modernis, et de earum aedificatoribus, et de dirutis earumque causis recensuit; sic etiam meminit de viis inter unam civitatem et aliam, et de mirabilibus earundem, et de natura et moribus et de animalibus uniuscunquae climatis. Postquam narravit de omnibus insulis ab Occidente usque Orientem existentibus. deinde de montibus excelsis, et de fluminibus memorandis, de lacubus, et de origine et ortu eorum, de metallorum numeris, et de omnibus, de quibus natura exornatur."

When we get our ideas cleared as to what Nilus was likely to find in ancient geographies, we begin to see the origin of certain obscure sentences in his book.

For instance why does he bring in a list of winds that blow in the several patriarchates⁴? does the East wind always blow on the Patriarch of Antioch and the South on the Patriarch of Alexandria? The supposition is evidently absurd. It only means that Antioch lies East and Alexandria South. The Abbé Martin, finding the description of Calabria and Sicily followed by a description of the winds that blow there, expressed himself in the following witty manner:

"Nous voilà bien renseignés sur les vents qui soufflent en Calabre et en Sicile! Nous en connaissons au moins les noms. Quant à dire ce que sont ces vents, c'est un problème que nous ne nous chargeons pas de résoudre.

¹ The noble Sicilian (?), as being sprung, like Edrisi, from the loins of the prophet.

² In Fabricius, *Bibl. Gr.* XIII. 278.

³ *Lege oculorum* (بصر).

⁴ The winds that blow in the Roman Patriarchate are, according to Nilus,

"Αρκτος, Παραίας, Χάβρωσ, Ζέφυρος, Δυτικός, και Λιβόντος.

For this Cod. 346 has

Θρισκίας, Παραίας, Χάβρωσ, και ό Ζέφυρος
Δυτικός, Αψ και Λιβόντος,
and Ps. Leo has

Θρασκίας, 'Αρκτός, και 'Απαρκτίας, και
Χόρεος ό έν ταίς πράξεσι τών αποστόλων κεί-
μενος, ό μέσος ό Ζέφυρος, ό 'Εσπίριος, ό Δυτι-
κός, ό Αψ, ό Λιβόντος.

The writer is clearly 'boxing the compass' from the North to the South-West points. It would be absurd to suppose that in Calabria or anywhere the wind always blew from one half of the sky and never from the other.

Note that there appear to be two zephyrs, ό μέσος and ό δυτικός.

Nous laissons cette question aux directeurs des bureaux météorologiques.—Que ceux qui veulent en savoir davantage sur cette rose des vents aillent prendre des informations en Calabre ou en Sicile. Nos vœux les accompagnent, qu'ils fassent bon voyage et soient préservés du choléra!"

The humour of this passage is delightful and it is quite a pity to spoil it: but what are we to do, if it should turn out that what Nilus has quoted is really only a bit out of a wind-rose, that is to say, an enumeration of a certain number of points of the compass? We can hardly catch the cholera from the mariner's compass, or from the weather-cock! Nor does it seem necessary to go to Sicily in order to learn the cardinal points, nor to invoke the meteorological service to decide such questions as to whether the Roman patriarchate contains regions lying to the west or to the south-west, nor to put ourselves under the Abbé's prayers before reading Aristotle's Meteorology!

What does come out of the observation on the winds is the anacoluthic character of Nilus' work; he has picked up a number of sentences out of one or two books on geography, and strung them loosely together, without any literary skill.

This helps us to understand what he means when after alluding to the fact that the western ocean has its waters dead and frozen, he goes on to describe a certain island in the western sea, which according to his description is very populous, contains an innumerable host of Christians, the men [? of which island] are big and hardy, as far as Ravenna and the country of the Lombards, &c.:

ἐν ᾧ [ὠκεανῷ] εἰσι νεκρὰ ὕδατα καὶ ὑαλώδη, ἐν ᾧ καὶ νήσος τις εἰς τὰ ἀκρὰ τῶν ὠκεανείων πελαγῶν πολὺάνδρος, χριστιανῶν ἄπειρον πλῆθος ἔχουσα, ἄνδρες εὐμηκεῖς καὶ ῥωμαλῆοι καὶ παναλκίστατοι, ἄχρι Ῥαβέννης κτέ.

Commentators have rushed to the conclusion that he was describing Ireland with its lavish allowance of pristine sanctity. It is much more likely that he was alluding to S. Brandan's Isle, which occupied such a prominent place in the Geographies of the Middle Ages, and of which traces may be found in Edrisi. The populousness, as regards Christians, to which he refers is, however, not that of the island, but of the patriarchate; in the same way the description of the men is only an imitation of the way in which ancient geographers describe the kind of humanity that inhabits the separate

climates. It relates, again, to the patriarchate, and not to the island. The men in this patriarchate, says Nilus, are strong and hardy, and the patriarchate itself extends as far as Ravenna and Lombardy. It will be seen that the whole composition is loosely strung together, and cannot be grammatically interpreted: and it is no wonder if it should turn out that King Roger sent it back, and asked to have it done more in detail.

We have said enough, perhaps, on this point and do not need to burden ourselves with the re-editing of the tract in question. It was certainly written by a Sicilian Christian who had access to books on geography in Arabic and perhaps in Greek. He has done his best to answer King Roger's geographical questions, though it must be owned that the best was not very good.

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