PAUL OF TAMMA AND THE MONASTIC PRIESTHOOD

BY

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Thanks to an in extenso publication of his Coptic writings, the fourth-century ascetic Paul of Tamma is becoming known as one of the important authorities in the founding epoch of Egyptian monasticism. As well as treatises on the monastic cell, on poverty, and on humility, he also produced a lost work on the Last Judgement and others. A recently edited papyrus fragment listing his works includes “On the Place of Retirement”, “On Staying in the Desert”, “On Faithlessness”, and “On Accidie” (Coptic lastp). Clearly this range of concerns spoke to the condition of religious persons both cenobitic and eremitical, as well as to lay people feeling the call to the monastic state.

Logion 14 of Paul’s On the Cell (Eibe tri) reads: πέρε καθε εὐθύμβους σεανμυνε ἐρεφράν ἦν ἡμπρήθεσι, “The poor (man) who is humble will be called by name [lit. ‘they will call his name’] Josedek among the prophets.” The editor terms this reference “inexplicable”. Perhaps it is not quite so inexplicable as it may look at first.

To begin with, the second part of this logion is a direct scriptural quotation, of Jeremiah 23:6b LXX: καὶ τοῦτο τὸ ὅνομα, ὃ καλέσει οὗτον [κύριος] Ἰοσέδεκ ἐν τοῖς προφήταις. Both the Sahidic and the Fayumic Coptic dialect

1 See T. Orlandi, ed./trans., Paolo di Tamma: Opere (Rome 1988).
4 Orlandi, Paolo, 90-91.
6 2nd ed. J. Ziegler (Gottingen 1976), 263.
versions of this half-verse are unfortunately not preserved: they end with
the equivalent of πετοιθάς. The complete Bohairic, for its part, reads ouoh
phai pe pefran eta pch(oei)s natēs erof Iosedek hen mpropheis, "and this is his
name that the Lord will give him, Iosedek among the prophets." Note that
the Bohairic text (1) presumes a Greek Vorlage that contained the κύριος
as subject of the verb, unlike Paul’s quotation that uses a passive; and (2)
employs not moute/mouti "to call", translating καλέσει, but rather tī, "to
give". From the Greek and Coptic texts of this Jeremiah verse we also see
that (1) the verses 7 and 8, obelized in Origen’s Hexapla, were not in
the Greek or Coptic version being quoted by Paul, and (2) the phrase ἐν
toīς προφήταις was construed as belonging on the end of verse 6, not at
the beginning of verse 9. Paul’s use of this scriptural tag has recently
been termed an example of his “elliptical” mode of citation that presup-
posed a knowledge of the spiritual interpretation of biblical texts on the
part of his readers (or hearers).

Close to Paul’s time and place, the fourth century in Egypt, who was
using this Jeremiah verse in his exegesis? The answer is Didymus the Blind
(A.D. 313-398), in his commentary on Zachariah, dated to ca. A.D. 387
and preserved in one of the Tura papyri. In commenting on Zachariah
6:12, “Behold a man, ἀνασταλὴ is his name”, Didymus immediately quotes
Jeremiah 23:5-6: “... I shall raise up for David a righteous ἀνασταλὴ ... and this is his [Didymus’ text adds ὁτάκτω after ὅνομα, like the MT] name, that the Lord will call him, Iosedek among the prophets.” What, asks

Kent Riggsby for the text.
9 Interestingly, the Latin (ed. Rome 1972) has et hic est nomen quod vocabunt eum Dominus
iustus noster: vocabunt, “they will call”, is literally close to the way a Coptic passive is done.
10 Present in MT, not in LXX.
11 This verse identification and textual feature were also independently noticed by
M. Sheridan, “Il mondo spirituale e intellettuale del primo monachesimo egiziano,” in
Camplani, ed., L’Egitto cristiano (above n. 5), § 2.2.2, “Paolo di Tamma: Interpretazioni
delle scritture,” pp. 201-207, here 204.
12 Sheridan, “Primo monachesimo egiziano,” 204.
For the dating see vol. 1 (SC 83), 23. Didymus is presumed to have been, like Paul, a
monastic ascetic.
14 Doutreleau, vol. 2 (SC 84), 444-445. Didymus is following right after Zach 6:11
that mentions Joshua son of Josedek the high priest (cf. more below). His Greek text
too includes the κύριος. Sheridan, “Primo monachesimo egiziano,” 204-205 n. 121