17. THE NINEVEHITES

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

This short text is taken from among a group of similarly brief pieces in Erevan, Matenadaran manuscript no. M101, fol. 401v. It is followed on fol. 401v by an extract from the Physiologus, the section on the Phoenix,1 and a passage on the Dragon-serpent (vişap).2 This second short piece is followed by another text on the Ninevehites, attributed to St. Ephrem.3 We are not publishing the latter, attributed text, but only the anonymous one that precedes it.

Manuscript M101 is a Miscellany that was copied in Constantinople and T'oxat' in 1740.4 It is discussed above, see introductory remarks to text no. 13, Praise of the Prophets. In addition to the works mentioned above, it contains: Concerning the 72 Translators5 and Concerning Elijah.6

As is pointed out in the annotation, the text contains several unusual elements. These include the three-days' fast, Nineveh's location on a lake or perhaps an inlet, and the statements about the prior sin of the city and its corruption. It seems that the author thought that Nineveh had been worthy of destruction because of the Ninevehites' promiscuity. It has been saved by repentance and remained built for three hundred years after this event. This text does not mention Jonah and his preaching, but apparently the penitence that saved the city was that which followed on Jonah's teaching.

2. Gohar Muradyan informs me that the passages on the Phoenix and on the serpent are also found in the second recension of The Physiologus, which she has published in "Physiologus (Baroyakhos): Armenian Recensions," Banber Matenadarami 23 (2016), 312–13, 314–15.
3. For further Ephrem references in Armenian apocryphal texts, see text no. 12, King Solomon: Four Short Texts, above pp. 145 n. 12, 147 n. 29.
5. Published in Stone and Ervine, Armenian Texts of Epiphanius of Salamis, 73, but not from this particular manuscript.
Nineveh’s recidivation and its eventual submersion until only its walls and perhaps “its battlements” are visible are events that took place three hundred years after the repentance. In fact, Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BCE as we know from sources outside the Bible. However, the Book of Jonah does not give a date and so it was possible to date his story quite early. This idea of the sin, repentance, and the subsequent renewal of sinning and punishment has not been observed elsewhere, though there is tension between Nineveh’s repentance and its overall biblical image as a wicked city; see Nah 2:9 and 3:7.

There are other Jonah works extant among the Armenian parabiblical writings. We may note the following:

1. ղարդար Երիւսաղեց Ունիսկում Ունիսկում Ունիսկում (Sermon of Jonah the Prophet which (was) in the City of Nineveh) (Yovsep’ianc, Uncanonical Books, 345–47; Issaverdens, Uncanonical Writings, 185–91).

2. Ունիսաղեց Ունիսաղեց Ունիսաղեց (This is the Story of Nineveh and Jonah) (Stone, Angels and Biblical Heroes, 266–76).


4. My notes from over the years also include a brief notice of a Jonah work in manuscript M59, 9v–11r. Diligent work in manuscript catalogues would doubtless increase the number of works known from manuscripts.

**TEXT**

M101 Երիւսաղեց Ունիսաղեց
Concerning the Ninvehites

When the Ninevehites heard of the destruction of their city, they so repented that it was the cause of three days' penitence,11 on which they returned to the Lord with great repentance in sackcloth and ashes.12 For three hundred years the city remained built and firm, but after that they strayed and returned to their former promiscuity. And the lake that was close by flooded and concealed them, and the top of the wall and the battlements13 are visible in the midst of that water.14

10. Above line p.m.
11. The three days' penitence in not mentioned in the book of Jonah. In Jonah 3:4 forty days' penitence are mentioned. The figure of "three days" may derive from Jonah 3:3 which describes Nineveh as "three days' journey in breadth." The same is to be found in Angels and Biblical Heroes, 4.13 §1.
13. The meaning of qhûntawônu is more precisely "armament." However, that would be odd here, and perhaps it signifies something like "battlements."
14. This element is not mentioned in other sources we have seen. The word ãmûnti which we have translated "lake" could also mean a delimited part of the sea. In Angels and Biblical Heroes, 273, n. 1247 we discussed the geographical anomaly of Nineveh being on the sea, which could also be inferred from the biblical book, Jonah 3:1.