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F. C. Conybeare, J. Rendel Harris, and Agnes Smith Lewis

Excerpt

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THE SLAVONIC VERSION

Translated from the German of Professor V. Jagić.

SINAGRIP was King of Assyria and of the land of Nineveh. At that time I, Akyrios, was his minister (a learned scribe). And it was revealed to me by God: "No child shall be born to thee." I owned more wealth than all men; and I had married a wife; my household was well-ordered, and I lived for sixty years without a child. Then I erected altars, and kindled fires and said: "O Lord my God! if I should die without an heir, what will men say? 'Akyrios was a just man, he served God truly. When he dies, there will be no male offspring to stand at his grave, and no female offspring to shed tears for him, and he will have no heir.' Therefore I beseech thee, O Lord my God! give me a male offspring, that he may strew dust on my eyes after my decease." And the Lord hearkened unto my voice. A sound came down from Heaven: "O Akyrios! I will fulfil all thy requests, but thou must not ask for a child. Behold, thou hast a nephew (a sister's son) Anadan, take him instead of a son." When I perceived the voice of the Lord, I said: "O Lord my God!"

I took my nephew Anadan instead of a son. He was still very young. I had him brought up at the breast, and fed him with honey and wine, and I clothed him in silk and purple. After he had grown up, I instructed him in every kind of wisdom and learning. Then the King said to me: "O Akyrios! my

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counsellor, when thou shalt die in a good old age, where shall I find another such counsellor?" And I replied: "I have a son, whom I have instructed in every kind of wisdom and learning." The King said: "Bring me thy son, that I may see if I like him: then I will dismiss thee, that thou mayest spend thine old age at home."

I took my son Anadan and brought him to the King. When the King perceived me, he said: "Blessed be this day, O Akyrios, which has brought thee to me in good health." I bowed before the King and said: "Thou thyself knowest how truly I have served thee. Be patient a little longer, till thy favour be shewn to my old age and to the youth of Anadan." When the King heard that, he said: "Because of thy former deserts none other (save Anadan) shall take thy place."

I, Akyrios, kept the son with me, and after I had fed him with good lessons, as with bread and water, I said to him:

1. My son, hearken to my words; receive all instruction with pleasure and be obedient all the days of thy life.

2. If thou hearest aught in the King's presence or if thou seest aught in his house, let it remain shut up (rot) in thy heart and share it with no one. But if thou share it, it may fall on thee as burning coals; thou wilt get blame to thyself and rue it afterwards.

3. My son, relate to no one what thou hearest, and reveal to no one what thou seest. Untie not a bound cord, and tie not a loosened one.

4. And let this be said to thee, my son: Look not on the beauty of a woman. Even if thou sacrifice all thy wealth to her, thou wilt at the last reap reproach and fall into sin.

5. My son, be not hard, like the bones of men, nor soft as a sponge.

6. My son, let thine eyes look on the ground and thy voice be soft. If it were a loud voice alone that decided the event, the ass could build two houses in a day with his braying.

7. My son, it is better to roll stones with a wise man, than

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to drink wine with a fool. Carry on no nonsense with a sensible man, and reveal not thy wit to a senseless one.

8. My son, be not over sweet, lest they eat thee up, nor over bitter, lest thy friends run away from thee.

9. My son, if thou hast a wound on thy foot, step not forth firmly.

10. My son, the rich man's son swallowed the serpent. Some said: "From hunger"; others said: "As medicine¹."

11. My son, when a man distinguishes himself, worry him not; if a mishap occur to him, rejoice not over it.

12. My son, keep what is thine own; seek not what belongs to others (or thus: give of what is thine own, but borrow not from others).

13. My son, venture not on the road with a man who will not accept advice, and sit not down at the same table with a deceiver.

14. My son, when a man more highly placed than thyself falls, exult not above measure; betray not thyself in thy speech before others who might communicate it to him, for he might rise higher again and be revenged on thee.

15. My son, approach not a shameless woman, and glance not at her beauty.

16. My son, if a friend should have a grudge at thee, or blame thee, make him welcome to thy bread and wine.

17. My son, the man who despises the law goes towards his fall, but the just man will rise higher.

18. My son, withdraw not thy son from chastisement: when a son is chastised, the water is being poured over the vineyard (the vine?).

19. My son, hold thy son with a bridle from his childhood; if thou hold him not tight, he will make thee old before thy time.

20. My son, keep not a chattering slave nor a pilfering one in the house, lest he eat up thy wealth.

¹ According to another version: The poor man's son swallowed the serpent, and people said: "From hunger." The rich man's son swallowed the serpent, and people said: "As medicine."

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21. My son, hearken not to him who censureth his friend; he will expose thy failings likewise to others.

22. My son, if some one meet thee and address thee, answer him with reserve; an inconsiderate word spoken in haste is repented of afterwards.

23. My son, a liar findeth sympathy at first, but at the last he is despised and abused. The speech of a liar resembles the twittering of birds, only the senseless hearken to it.

24. My son, honour thy father, for he bequeaths thee all his wealth.

25. My son, draw not on thyself the curse of thy father and thy mother, or thou wilt not live to have any joy in thine own children.

26. My son, if fierce anger seize thee, say not a word, lest thou be called senseless.

27. My son, go not unarmed by night, for thou knowest not whom thou shalt meet.

28. My son, he who is of low origin is despised by all.

29. My son, say not: "My master is stupid, I am sensible."

30. My son, take in good part the admonition of thy master, and thou wilt be in favour; trust not to thine own wisdom; however much thou mayest have to bear, bear it without uttering evil.

31. My son, be not talkative, or thou wilt be in fault before thy master.

32. My son, if thou art sent with a message, linger not, lest another be sent a little while after thee. Let not thy master say: "Get out of my way," and thou be sad, but: "Come hither to me," and be glad.

33. My son, neglect not to go to church on a holiday.

34. My son, seek out the houses of the deceased; visit them, and be mindful that thou too must die.

35. My son, if thou hast no horse of thine own, ride not on a strange one; if it becomes lame, thou wilt be laughed at.

36. My son, if thou hast no bodily hunger, eat not bread, lest thou appear greedy.

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37. My son, take up no quarrel with a man stronger than thyself; thou canst not know how he will pounce on thee.

38. My son, if thy house be too high, make the walls lower, and then walk in.

39. My son, if thou receive with good measure, sell not with scanty measure; say not: "Therein is the gain." That is bad. God, who knoweth and seeth all, will be angry with thee, and destroy thy house.

40. My son, swear not in God's name, lest the number of thy days be made fewer.

41. My son, go to the mourner and comfort him with (thy) words; it is worth more than gold and silver.

42. My son, keep thy tongue from evil report and thy hands from theft.

43. My son, flee from unchastity.

44. My son, if thou hearken unto a wise man, it is as if thou wert thirsty on a hot day, and didst refresh thyself with cold water.

45. My son, if temptations and afflictions from God befall thee, be not vexed. It leads to nothing, thou wilt not overcome thereby, but He will hear thy bad temper and respond to it in [deed and] truth.

46. My son, judge uprightly and thou wilt be honoured in thine old age.

47. My son, keep a sweet tongue and open thy mouth to speak what is good.

48. My son, be not fain to trample on thy neighbour, lest the like happen to thyself.

49. My son, say a word to the wise, and he will take it to heart; (but) though thou beat a fool with a staff, thou wilt not bring him to reason.

50. My son, thou mayest send a clever man without instructing him much: but if thou send a senseless man, thou must follow him thyself, lest he bring thee to shame.

51. My son, prove thy friend first with bread and wine, then may he be admitted to something better.

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52. My son, if one bid thee to a feast, appear not at the first summons; if he call thee the second time¹, thou wilt see that he esteems thee highly, and thou wilt enter his presence with honour.

53. My son, take no reward (for a right judgment), for a reward dazzles the eyes of the judge.

54. My son, I have tasted gall and bitterness, and it was not more bitter than poverty; salt and lead seem to be lighter.

55. My son, I have lifted iron and stone, and it seemed to me easier than when a man learned in the law carries on a suit against his nearest kin.

56. My son, love thy wife with all thy heart, for she is the mother of thy children.

57. My son, if there be no occasion for such a thing in thy house, set not up a commotion in it, lest thou be exposed in thy neighbours' eyes.

58. My son, it is better to listen to a wise man when he is drunk than to a noodle when he is sober.

59. My son, it is better to be blind of the eyes than in the heart; a man blind of the eyes grows apt at tapping about and finds his path at last; a man blind of heart will constantly decline from the right road and lose himself.

60. My son, it is better for a woman to lose her own son by death, than to nourish a strange one; for whatever good she does to him, he rewards her for it with evil.

61. My son, a loyal slave is better than a disloyal free man.

62. My son, a friend who dwells near thee is better than a brother far off.

63. My son, a good name is more honourable to men than personal beauty; fame lasts for ever; the beauty of the face fades at death.

64. My son, a good death is better for a man than a bad life.

65. My son, a sheep's foot in thine own hand is better than the whole shoulder in the hand of a stranger; better is a lambkin near thee than an ox far away; better is a sparrow held tight in

¹ Cf. Luke xiv. 17.

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the hand than a thousand birds flying about in the air; better is a hempen robe, that thou hast, than a robe of purple, that thou hast not.

66. My son, when thou hast bidden a friend to a feast, welcome him with a cheerful countenance, that he too may return to his home in a cheerful mood. When thou givest a dinner, appear not before thy friend with a gloomy face, lest thy banquet become a disgrace to thee, whilst thou art considered to be no good man.

67. My son, commend not the one man nor condemn the other, until thou hast proved the matter; let thy judgment be given only after ripe deliberation.

68. My son, it is better to lie in fever heat than to live with a wicked wife. Hold no consultations in thy house (i.e. in presence of the wicked wife) and share not with her the concerns of thy heart.

69. My son, if thou drink wine, speak little.

70. My son, mock neither at a stupid man nor at a deaf one, for they are both God's creatures.

71. My son, seek not to belittle a great saying of thy master, nor to magnify a trifling one.

72. My son, if thou desirest to say something to somebody, speak not immoderately, but weigh it well in thy heart and then say what is needful; for it is better to stumble with the foot than with the tongue.

73. My son, if thou chance to be amongst menials, smile not as thou approachest them; for a smile gives rise easily to a misunderstanding, and from a misunderstanding there springs a quarrel, and from a quarrel come mutual recriminations and scuffles, and scuffles may result in death, and death is the fulfilment of sin.

74. My son, a lying word is at first heavy as lead and at the last it floats on the water.

75. My son, if thou wouldest fain put thy friend to the test, share a secret with him; then in a few days pick a quarrel. If he betray not thy secret, love him with all thy heart, for he is a trustworthy friend; but if he prattle about thy secret, turn thy back on him.

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76. My son, it is better for thee to be robbed than to rob thyself.

77. My son, if thou say a good word for thy friend before the judge, thou hast snatched a lamb out of the jaws of the lion.

78. My son, if thou art going on a journey, count not on the bread of strangers; but carry thine own loaf with thee, for if thou hast it not, and art yet a wayfarer, thou wilt incur reproach.

79. My son, if a man who has hated thee die, rejoice not; it had been better for him to live, and for God to have humbled him, so that he might have come to thee with a prayer for forgiveness, and thou wouldst have granted it, and God would have shown thee favour for its sake.

80. My son, when thou seest an aged man, stand up in his presence; if he return not thy greeting, thou wilt receive thy thanks from God for it.

81. My son, if thou hast bidden any one to a feast, worry him not about other matters, lest thou be considered deceitful.

82. My son, when water runs up-hill, or a bird begins to fly backwards, when a Negro or a Saracen becomes white and gall is sweet as fresh honey, then will the stupid man learn sense.

83. My son, if thou art bidden to (the house of) a neighbour, spy not out the nooks in his chamber, it is not becoming.

84. My son, if God has made a man rich, envy him not, but shew him respect.

85. My son, if thou enter a house of mourning, talk not of meats and drinks; and if thou enter a house of gladness, make no mention of grief.

86. My son, the eyes of a man, like a gushing fountain, are insatiable and would devour oxen; but when the man dies, they are filled up with dust.

87. My son, if thou array thyself in a new garment, behave thyself decently, and envy not another who owns something else; he whose clothing is gaudy, his speech should be worthy of respect.

88. My son, whether thou be wealthy or not, persist not in sorrow; what profit can sorrow bring thee?

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89. My son, if thou hast wealth, do not allow thyself to be tormented by hunger or thirst. If thou diest, another will enjoy thy wealth, and thou shalt have toiled in vain.

90. My son, if a poor man should steal something, make allowance for him.

91. My son, if thou go to a wedding, tarry not too long, lest they shew thee to the door before it be over.

92. My son, if a dog leave its master in the lurch, and follow another, the latter will look round, take up a stone, and fling it at him; and just the same (will happen to him) who leaves thee to run after another.

93. My son, if thy neighbour shew himself hostile to thee, cease not to meet him in a loving way, lest he carry out a design against thee when thou art not aware of it.

94. My son, when a man who hath a grudge at thee is fain to do thee a good turn, trust him not too readily, lest he outwit thee and vent his wrath on thee.

95. My son, if any one is punished for a fault, say not that he is punished without reason, lest thou incur the same penalty.

96. My son, it were better to be thrashed by a wise man, than to be anointed by a foolish one; for even if a wise man cudgel thee, he will meditate as to how he may comfort thee, while the fool will demand gold from thee for one anointing.

97. ¹[Let thy first axiom be the fear of God. Then be quick to obey and circumspect in answering. Be patient in anger.

98. My son Anadan, if thy master say to thee: "Come near," rejoice not thereat; and also if he say: "Get away from me," be not dejected with grief because of it.

99. My son Anadan, be not a drunkard; better is a lunatic than a man who is a slave to drink; for the one raves only when it is the new moon, but the other rages continually.

100. My son Anadan, if thou sittest as a guest at a friend's

¹ The sayings which are enclosed in square brackets appear only in two MSS. of South Slavonic derivation, and of the fifteenth century.

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THE WISE AKYRIOS

table, brood not over something evil about him, lest the bread in thy mouth taste bitter.

101. My son Anadan, when people are seating themselves at the table, press not forward, lest thou be pushed out; and stay not behind, lest thou be forgotten.

102. My son Anadan, if a sorrow befall thee, call in a wise man to comfort thee: a confused mind cannot utter a single clear word.

103. My son Anadan, it is easier to ride over a broad field on a horse without a saddle, than to ask advice from a senseless man.

104. My son Anadan, if thou seek to cherish thy perishing body and neglect thy soul, thou wilt be like the man who leaves a noble wife in the lurch to cherish a slave girl.

105. My son Anadan, if thou strive after earthly things, and neglect heavenly things, thou wilt be like the man who has painted a husbandman on the wall, instead of getting him to till the land and sow the corn.

106. My son Anadan, if we were to live a hundred years and more, it would just be like one day.

107. My son Anadan, however much it may grieve us to see a good man hanging dead from his horse, it vexes us quite as much to see a bad spirit in a fine body.

108. My son Anadan, a just judge may be likened to a good sieve; as a good sieve separates the chaff from the grain, so a just judge separates the wrong from the right.

109. My son Anadan, if thou wouldst have a large retinue, keep a sweet tongue and liberal hands.

110. My son Anadan, it is better to dwell in a hut as a just man, than in a palace as a guilty one.

111. My son Anadan, neglect not to nourish thy mind with books, for it is said: "As a fence cannot stand against the wind without support, so a man cannot cultivate wisdom in his old age without books."

112. My son Anadan, this is the way of the world: if a poor man speak prudently, he is not listened to; he is called a fool