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THE BOOK OF THE LAWS OF COUNTRIES AND
THE PESHITTA TEXT OF GENESIS IX, 6

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The quotations from, or the allusions to Scriptures in *The Book of the Laws of Countries* are few in number. In fact, the idea that man is created in the image of God, the story of the intercourse of the sons of God with the daughters of men, and the parable of the tares seem to be the only Biblical passages which Philip, the author of the Dialogue, makes his master Bardaisan refer to. In this note we shall confine ourselves to those verses which contain the expression "the image and the likeness of God".

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The three texts under consideration read in the Peshitta as follows:

וַאֲמַר אֱלֹהִים . וְנַבְרָא אֲדָמָא כְּצִלְמֵנוּ אִמְגֵי דְמִצְלָמֵנוּ .
וְנַבְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאָדָם כְּצִלְמֵהּ . כְּצִלְמֵהּ אֱלֹהִים בְּרֵאשִׁיתוֹ .

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness",

"And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him" (*Gen. I, 26a and 27a*);

בְּיֶוֹם הַבְּרָאָה אֱלֹהִים לְאָדָם כְּצִלְמֵהּ אֱלֹהִים בְּרֵאשִׁיתוֹ .

"In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him"
(*Gen. V, 1b*);

וְכִי יִשְׁפֹךְ אֲדָמָה הַאֲדָמָה הַזֹּאת כִּי אֲדָמָה הִיא הִיא תִּשְׁפָּק .
כִּי הַאֲדָמָה הַזֹּאת הִיא תִּשְׁפָּק כִּי אֲדָמָה הִיא הִיא תִּשְׁפָּק .

"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God man was made" (*Gen. IX, 6*).

The Syriac text of these verses has been taken from the *Codex Ambrosianus* (1). A collation of all Mss available provides the following variants (2): I, 26 אלהא] add אלה , “come” Ms Syr. 267 of the Mingana Collection at Selly Oak, Birmingham; this addition is also attested by Narsai, the author of *The Cave of Treasures*, Pseudo-Dionysius of Tellmahre, Solomon of Basra and Barhebraeus (3).

IX, 6] pr א , “and” Ms Add. 14.426 of the British Museum at London.] om Ms Syr. 341 of the *Bibliothèque nationale* at Paris.] בנה , “he has made” Ms Syr. 234 of the Monastery of St. Catharine at Sinai and Ms Oo I.26 of the University Library at Cambridge; this reading, which is in accordance with the Hebrew text, is also attested by Ephraem in his *Commentary on Genesis* (4).

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The conception of man as the image or likeness of God is referred to twice in *The Book of the Laws of Countries* (5). In the first part of the Dialogue (543, 23 - 556, 27) the question is posed why God has not made us so that we could not sin. If man had been so made, Bardaisan replies, he would be an instrument. God in his kindness, however, has endowed man with freedom. The things needed for human use have been placed in his power “because he was made in the image of God”:

(547, 13 - 14)] הכהן אלהא בנה

In the second part of the Dialogue (559, 1-564, 14) one of those present, whose name is Awida, says that men do wrong from their nature. In order to refute this assertion Bardaisan endeavours to explain what is nature and

(1) A.M. CERIANI, *Translatio Syra Pescitto Veteris Testamenti ex codice Ambrosiano sec. fere VI photolithographice edita*, Milan 1876-1883.

(2) The variants have been taken from the apparatus which I have compiled for the *International Peshitta Project*.

(3) See A. VÖÖBUS, *Peshitta und Targumim des Pentateuchs*, Stockholm 1958, p. 33.

(4) R.-M. TONNEAU, *Sancti Ephraemi Syri in Genesim et in Exodum commentarii*, Louvain 1955 (*GSCO*, vol. 152), p. 63, 3.

(5) The Dialogue is quoted according to columns and lines of the edition by F. NAU, *Bardesanes Liber legum regionum*, Paris 1907 (*Patrologia Syriaca*, tomus II).

what is freedom. The laws of nature, so he argues, are uniformly observed by the animals. Men, however, behave differently. In the affairs of their bodies they keep the laws of their nature, but in the affairs of their minds they do what they will, acting as free beings who are masters of themselves “and as the likeness of God”:

(560, 15) ܐܢܘܢܐ ܕܥܠܡܢܐ ܥܘܠܡܐ

Let us consider first the expression last quoted. From the use of the words 'ak and *dmūtā* I am inclined to deduce that Bardaisan in describing man as the likeness of God had in mind the words: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” and that for the sake of his argument he changed the expression from the first person plural into the third person singular. So the second part of the Dialogue most probably contains an allusion to *Gen.* I, 26.

With regard to the expression “the image of God” as it is presented in the first part of the Dialogue, I would not hesitate for a moment to assume that Bardaisan is quoting here *Gen.* IX, 6, if it were not that, instead of 'alāhā which is attested unanimously by the whole Mss tradition, he uses the word 'alōhīm. The three other words of the phrase, on the other hand, are exactly identical with the wording of the Peshitta. So one shrinks back from discarding too rashly the possibility that after all the phrase may be a quotation. It is, therefore, incumbent on us to explain the occurrence of the word 'alōhīm, which is a transliteration of the Hebrew, in what seems to be a quotation from the Syriac Bible.

* * *

The word 'alōhīm is rare in Syriac. As far as I know, it is to be found in the following works:

(1) In the Peshitta of the Old Testament, four times: *Gen.* VI, 2 and 4, *Job* I, 6 and II, 1: *bnai 'alōhīm*, “the sons of God”. With the exception of *Job* XXXVIII, 7 (where in vs. 7b the Peshitta reads *bnai malakē*, “the sons of the angels” in parallelism with vs. 7a *kaukбай šafrā*, “the morning stars”) the four texts just mentioned are in the Hebrew Bible the only occurrences of the expression *benē 'elōhīm*. In *Gen.* VI, 2 and 4 Ms Add. 14.425

of the British Museum (dated A.D. 463/4) on a folio which has been restored in the VIIIth century presents the variant *bnai dayyānē*, “the sons of the judges”, a reading which seems to betray the influence of Jewish exegesis. It is noticeable that Ephraem in his *Commentary* quotes *Gen.* VI, 4 in accordance with Codex Add. 14.425 of the British Museum (*meṭṭol d'al(w) dayyānē 'al bnāṭ ('a)nāšā*, “because the judges came in unto the daughters of men” (57, 3)), whereas a few pages before he had quoted *Gen.* VI, 2 in the following text form: *wahzau bnai 'alāhē labnāt ('a)nāšā dšappīrān*, “and the sons of the gods saw the daughters of men that they were fair” (55, 30). *Bnai 'alōhīm* is the text form of *Gen.* VI, 2 or 4 and *Job* II, 1 which is quoted by Ephraem in his Hymn *De nativitate Domini*, in his *Commentary on Job* and in the extracts from the *Commentary on Kings* which under his name have been inserted in the *Catena* of Severus (6). Ephraem, like other Syriac and Greek expositors (*The Cave of Treasures*, Theodore bar Koni, Ishodad of Merv, an anonymous elucidation of difficult words of the Old Testament which is called *Dirstarsinos*, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, Theodorete, Procope of Gaza (7)), identifies the *bnai 'alōhīm* with the sons of Seth (56: 1-3).

(2) In a work called *The Revelation of John* written by Udha. (As archdeacon of Edessa in the first half of the IVth century he, with some followers, seceded from the Church and founded a new sect.) In a passage from his book, which is quoted by Theodore bar Koni in the XIth *Memra* of his *Liber Scholiorum*, one of the seven Powers, by whom the different parts of the human body have been fashioned, is *'alōhīm* (II, 320, 6-12). If we may rely on Theodore bar Koni, Udha has derived this teaching from the Chaldaeans (II, 320, 12-13).

(6) P. BENEDICTUS, *Sancti Ephraemi Syri opera omnia*, tomus I, Roma 1737, p. 513 D and tomus II, Roma 1740, pp. 2 and 397 C.

(7) *Cave of Treasures*, ed. C. BEZOLD, Leipzig 1888, pp. 42, 3 - 15; Theodore bar Koni, ed. A. SCHER, tome I, Paris 1910 (*CSCO*, vol. 55), pp. 101, 18 - 102, 15; Ishodad of Merv, ed. J.-M. VOSTÉ - C. VAN DEN EYNDE, Louvain 1950 (*CSCO*, vol. 126), pp. 111, 1-112, 1; *Dirstarsinos*, ed. G. HOFFMANN, *Opuscula nestoriana*, Kiel 1880, p. 85, 9-11; Theodore of Mopsuestia according to Theodore bar Koni; John Chrysostom, *PG*, LIII, 187-189; Theodorete, *PG*, LXXX, 148 A - 152 A; Procope, *PG*, LXXXVII, 265 C - 268 A.

(3) In the work entitled *The Book of the Knowledge of Truth or Causarum* (8). This anonymous treatise, which in all probability has been composed in the Xth century, "gives an account of God, the worlds material and spiritual, and man in a spirit of conciliation towards Jews and Muslims, as well as towards all fellow-Christians" (9). In a passage enumerating the names and epithets of God, besides *šebā'ōt*, *'adōnai* and *'elšaddai*, *'alōhīm* is also mentioned (55, 17).

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From this rapid survey of the occurrences of the word *'alōhīm* which are known to me, it appears that in the three works referred to the transliteration of the Hebrew word is part of different systems of thought. It is also obvious that none of them offers a satisfactory explanation of the use of *'alōhīm* in the Peshitta of *Gen. IX, 6*. If, therefore, a solution to the problem of why the transliteration was chosen by the Syriac translator is to be found, it is to be sought for outside of the field of Syriac literature.

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The works which in this connection first of all are to be taken into consideration, are the Aramaic versions of the Pentateuch. Now we find that one of them, like *The Book of the Laws of Countries*, presents in the expression "the image" or "the likeness of God" the transliteration *'alōhīm*, *viz.* the Targum of Onkelos. The rendering of *Gen. IX, 6b* reads in this Targum as follows:

'ry bšlm 'lhym 'bd yt 'nš'

This reading is attested by all Mss and Printed Editions with the exception of Ms Solger 2 of the *Stadtbibliothek* at Nuremberg, the *First Biblia Rabbinica*, Bomberg, Venice 1515/17, the *Biblia Sacra Complutensis*, 1516/17

(8) C. KAYSER, *Das Buch der Erkenntniss der Wahrheit oder der Ursache der Ursachen*, Leipzig 1889.

(9) W. WRIGHT, *A Short History of Syriac Literature*, London 1894, p. 243; cf. also A. BAUMSTARK, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, Bonn 1922, SS. 280-281.

and the Second *Biblia Rabbinica*, Bomberg, Venice 1524/25 which read *bšlm' dyyy* (10).

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In summary, then, the phrase in the Dialogue "because he was made in the image of God" may be an allusion to *Gen. IX, 6* rather than a quotation. Nevertheless the fact remains that the form '*bīd*' is in agreement with the Peshitta against the reading '*baḏ*' which agrees with the Hebrew and is also attested by Ephraem. The form '*alōhīm*', against the reading '*alāhā*' of all Peshitta Mss, may be explained on the assumption that in this verse the Syriac translator was dependent upon the Targum of Onkelos. It seems that this Targum, though most of its material ultimately derives from Palestinian exegetical traditions, was current in Babylonia from the end of the second century, in various forms slightly differing one from another. It has been proved beyond doubt that the Targum of Onkelos has exerted a considerable influence on the Peshitta (11). I venture, therefore, to think that the phrase in *The Book of the Laws of Countries* is an example of a Syriac quotation which in one respect is related to the Targum of Onkelos rather than to the Peshitta known to us.

Since Mss of the Peshitta older than the Vth century are lacking, it is, of course, impossible to say whether the quotation in the Dialogue was part of a manuscript or recension differing from the Peshitta and characterized by a greater nearness to the Targum of Onkelos or is to be explained on the hypothesis "that we have to reckon with *extra-Peshitta traditions* which were possibly connected with individual passages" (12). Whichever of the alternatives may actually be the case, it is perhaps worthwhile to have drawn attention to a Biblical quotation in an ancient Edessenian document which has been composed at some time or other in the IIIrd century.

(10) A. SPERBER, *The Bible in Aramaic*, I, Leiden 1959, p. 13.

(11) Cf. e.g. P. WERNBERG-MÖLLER, "Some Observations on the Relationship of the Peshitta Version of the Book of Genesis to the Palestinian Targum Fragments", *Studia Theologica*, XV, 1962, pp. 128-180, esp. pp. 165-177, and 179-180.

(12) Cf. the review of A. VÖÖBUS, *Peshitta und Targumim* [see note 3] by M.H. GOSHEN-GOTTSTEIN in the *Journal of Semitic Studies*, VI, 1961, p. 269; cf. also his "Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the Peshitta", *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, VIII, Jerusalem 1961, pp. 26-27, esp. pp. 38-40 and 59-63.