

D. Kruisheer, 'Reconstructing Jacob of Edessa's Scholia', in J. Frishman and L. Van Rompay (eds.), *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation. A Collection of Essays* (Traditio Exegetica Graeca 5; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 187-196.

---

## RECONSTRUCTING JACOB OF EDESSA'S *SCHOLIA*\*

Dirk Kruisheer

If we were looking for something resembling a programme behind the exegetical work of Jacob of Edessa, we might turn to his letter to John the Stylite of Litarba<sup>1</sup>. John had put a number of questions to him concerning the Bible and related historical problems. In his reply, Jacob compares his questioner to a guest who, both greedy and wise, asks to be served many and varied dishes at a single meal. Jacob, like a wise and prudent servant, offers to put before him just a little of each dish, lest together they prove too abundant, so that 'our meal will become very contemptible and surpassingly despicable'. These and several personal remarks are followed by Jacob's answers, which take up no fewer than twenty-three pages in print. Jacob's letters tell us a great deal about his style, his efforts to edify his people, and his striving to be exhaustive. They are doubly important because all Jacob's other exegetical work which has thus far been published is thought to consist exclusively of abstracts or compilations. In these letters — which are apparently complete, or at least provide a number of extensive passages — we now have a basis for comparative research.

When we take as our starting point Joseph Assemanus's *Bibliotheca Orientalis* of 1719<sup>2</sup>, we see that some of Jacob's scholia have been available to Western scholarship for over two and a half centuries. In 1864 and 1867 these were joined by Phillips's edition of an additional twenty-four scholia<sup>3</sup>, and the two letters edited by Wright, one of which is quoted above. At present the goal is a complete edition and an accompanying study, which together will convey the contents and character of

\* I would like to thank the Board of the Reiman-de Bas Fonds (Prins Bernard Fonds, Amsterdam), for giving me the opportunity to work at the British Library for three months in the autumn of 1994, when the foundation was laid for the present research. My investigations are now supported by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO, The Hague).

<sup>1</sup> W. Wright (ed.), "Two Epistles of Mār Jacob, Bishop of Edessa", *Journal of Sacred Literature* NS 10 (1867) 430-461, this passage is found on the first two pages of a reprint consulted by the present author; F. Nau (transl.), "Traduction des lettres XII et XIII de Jacques d'Édèsse (exégèse biblique)", *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 10 (1905) 197-208; 258-282, this passage 198-199.

<sup>2</sup> J.S. Assemanus, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 1 (Rome 1719) 489-493.

<sup>3</sup> G. Phillips (ed. & transl.), *Scholia on Passages of the Old Testament by Mār Jacob, Bishop of Edessa* (London 1864).

Jacob's exegetical work, as well as a description of the intellectual milieu in which it was conceived, and a reconstruction of the biblical text as it was perceived and employed by Jacob.

The textual tradition that forms the basis of the edition can be divided into three branches: first, the Bible commentary in Vat. Syr. 103<sup>4</sup> and related manuscripts<sup>5</sup>; second, two manuscripts that together contain some thirty scholia by Jacob<sup>6</sup>, and third, the relevant passages in Jacob's letters<sup>7</sup>.

As noted above, the greater part of the published material is thought to have been compiled or reworked, and many texts indeed appear to have been designated as such in the manuscripts. Most of the scholia that are found outside the context of a running commentary either in Vat. Syr. 103 or in the scholia manuscripts, are introduced by means of such formulas as 'from the Sixth Scholion'. Moreover, in Vat. Syr. 103 we find a citation beginning with the words 'from a letter by Mar Jacob'<sup>8</sup>. It appears that the three branches of textual transmission that we have at our disposal, i.e., those found in Vat. Syr. 103, in the scholia manuscripts, and in Jacob's letters, are interrelated, not only with regard to their content, but also in that cross references are found.

In his *Geschichte* of 1922, A. Baumstark pointed out the similarity as regards genre between Jacob's letters on the one hand and his exegetical work on the other. According to Baumstark, the exegetical work appears to have existed in an independent form, but in two different editions: a *Book of Scholia* and a *Shorter Commentary*<sup>9</sup>. This is confirmed by the wording of the headings of the extracts from Jacob's work in Vat. Syr. 103. So far, we may expect to find material, transmitted in its entirety or in abstracts, from at least three different original writings by Jacob that are intimately connected: first, the *Book of Scholia*, second, the *Shorter*

<sup>4</sup> This is the so-called *Catena Severi*, preserved in a ms. dating from the 9th or 10th c.. To what extent this text reflects Severus's original composition of 861 A.D. is not clear at present; cf. C. Bravo, "Un Comentario de Jacobo de Edesa al Gen. 1, 1-7, atribuido a S. Efrén", *Biblica* 31 (1950) 390-401, and T. Jansma, "The Provenance of the Last Sections in the Roman Edition of Ephraem's Commentary on Exodus", *Le Muséon* 85 (1972) 155-169. The designation *Vat. Syr. 103* will, for the time being, be maintained for the contents of this and the related mss. (see the next note as well as note 38).

<sup>5</sup> Brit. Libr. Add. 12,144 (transcribed from Vat. Syr. 103 in 1081 A.D.); Birm. Ming. 147, Harv. Syr. 116 and Harv. Syr. 123 (all three around 1900).

<sup>6</sup> Brit. Libr. Add. 17,193 (9th c.) and Brit. Libr. Add. 14,483 (9th c.).

<sup>7</sup> Six mss. in the British Library (between the 9th and the 12th c.), the most important of which is Brit. Libr. Add. 12,172 (10th c.). An edition of Jacob of Edessa's letters is now being prepared by Dr. J. van Ginkel (Groningen).

<sup>8</sup> Vat. Syr. 103:39r; 110v.

<sup>9</sup> A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn 1922) 250-251.

*Commentary*, and third, his letters<sup>10</sup>. This means that, having found a piece of commentary in different versions, we will have to ask ourselves whether we are dealing with different abstracts from a single source or with single abstracts from different sources. As we conclude these remarks on the transmission of Jacob's exegetical work, it is worth noting that there are grounds, as we shall see, to suppose that redactional activities were carried out by Jacob himself as well, as a means of popularizing his work. Such an undertaking would appear to be in line with his obvious didactic ambitions.

Of course, the significance of the exegetical work of Jacob of Edessa also lies in the way it is situated historically<sup>11</sup>. In the West Syrian tradition of biblical exegesis we know of only one true predecessor, Daniel of Ṣalaḥ, whose *Commentary on Psalms* has yet to be published in its entirety<sup>12</sup>. Thus, since much of the burden of historical research will come to rest on the shoulders of Jacob of Edessa, we can consider ourselves fortunate with the breadth of his horizon and the rich variety of authorities he quotes. In particular the apocryphal books and stories cited, in some cases with reference to Jewish spokesmen, constitute a promising field, the exploration of which has already commenced<sup>13</sup>. Another circumstance of historical importance is the fact that Jacob, who lived during the first decades of Islamic rule, deliberately tried to protect Syriac heritage from decline and even disappearance. This intention may account for the zeal reflected in the quantity and the variety of Jacob's

<sup>10</sup> In addition, references to a *Commentary of Difficult Words* are found in Vat. Syr. 103:1v, 52r, 63r and 65r. This title was kindly brought to my attention by Dr. E.G. Matthews (New York).

<sup>11</sup> Baumstark, *Geschichte*, 248-249; H.J.W. Drijvers, "Jakob von Edessa", in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, 16 (Berlin 1987) 468-470; L. Van Rompay, "Development of Biblical Interpretation in the Syrian Churches of the Middle Ages", in M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament. The History of Its Interpretation*, 1/2 (Göttingen, forthcoming).

<sup>12</sup> G. Diettrich, *Eine jakobitische Einleitung in den Psalter in Verbindung mit zwei Homilien aus dem grossen Psalmenkommentar des Daniel von Ṣalaḥ* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 5; Giessen 1901) 129-167. Cf. S.P. Cowe, "Daniel of Ṣalaḥ as Commentator on the Psalter", in E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *Papers presented to the Tenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1987. Critica, Classica, Orientalia, Ascetica, Liturgica* (Studia Patristica 20; Louvain 1989) 152-159. An edition of Daniel of Ṣalaḥ's psalm commentary is now being prepared by Dr. D.G.K. Taylor (Birmingham).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. S.P. Brock, "Abraham and the Ravens: A Syriac Counterpart to Jubilees 11-12 and its Implications", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 9, 2 (1978) 135-152; W. Adler, "Jacob of Edessa and the Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Syriac Chronography", in J.C. Reeves (ed.), *Tracing the Threads. Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha* (Society of Biblical Literature, Early Judaism and its Literature 6; Atlanta 1994) 143-171. See also the last scholion presented in this paper.

writings. But it is of equal significance that the study of his work is capable of making an important contribution to the history of ideas in the era of early Islam<sup>14</sup>.

Before turning to a number of samples of the scholia, one more characteristic of Jacob of Edessa should be pointed out. Throughout his work, Jacob displays a great interest in, and talent for, matters of philology, as can be inferred from his numerous translations from the Greek, and the fact that he composed a Syriac grammar. This expertise is decisive for Jacob's understanding of the Bible. Towards the end of his life, Jacob produced his own Bible revision, using the Peshitta, the Syro-Hexapla, and probably a Greek manuscript as well<sup>15</sup>. The transition between the starting point of the Peshitta and the version at which he arrives is documented in the quotations contained in the scholia<sup>16</sup>. Quite a number of instances cannot be ascribed to any of the known versions, including Jacob's. A difficulty that presents itself here is whether it would be better to describe a certain verse as taken from Jacob's own work in progress, or as a paraphrase — if putting the question that way is expedient at all. Fortunately, we can look forward to the publication of important contributions in this field by A. Salvesen and R.J. Saley<sup>17</sup>.

Three scholia by Jacob of Edessa are presented below in an English translation. In discussing these texts, we will return to a number of the problems mentioned above, to the extent that they are concerned with redaction and transmission, Jacob's use of apocryphal works, and his understanding of the biblical text.

### 1. On Gen. 4:7

This scholion was previously published by Phillips<sup>18</sup>. It is included here because it illustrates Jacob's conception, and thus his styling, of the

<sup>14</sup> See, for an attempt to integrate Jacob's work in this field, M. Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma* (Cambridge 1981) 145-152.

<sup>15</sup> A. Salvesen, "Spirits in Jacob of Edessa's Revision of Samuel", *ARAM* 5 (1993) (Festschrift S.P. Brock) 481-490, esp. 481-482, with reference to the now forthcoming study by R.J. Saley (see note 17).

<sup>16</sup> M.H. Gottstein, "Neue Syrohexaplafragmente", *Biblica* 37 (1956) 162-183, esp. 164 n. 3; Salvesen, "Spirits", 489.

<sup>17</sup> An edition of Jacob of Edessa's version of the book of Samuel by A. Salvesen and a study of the same text by R.J. Saley are forthcoming as *Monographs of the Peshitta Institute Leiden*. See also A. Salvesen, "The Purpose of Jacob of Edessa's Version of Samuel", *The Harp* 8-9 (1995-1996) 117-126.

<sup>18</sup> Brit. Libr. Add. 17,193:61r; ed. Phillips, *Scholia*, ⚡; transl. *ibid.*, 1-3.

scholion as a genre, as will be demonstrated below. The translation presented here is mine.

**From the Fifth Scholion, of the story in which he gives an exposition about Cain: because he was found guilty of seven sins, he also deserved seven punishments.**

*Behold, if you do well, I accept (you)*<sup>19</sup>: 'and I accept you again if you do well'. These (words) are a manifest indication that God has delight in the repentance of man; he also expects him to repent, and patiently waits for him and gives him occasions that invite him to this (repentance), while wishing his redemption.

But, *If you do not well, sin lies at the door. You will turn to it and it will take possession of you*<sup>20</sup>. These (words) are arguments that dominion over himself and freedom of will belong to man. For if it is so that he by his (own) will wishes it (so), he invites sin to come to him and to take possession of his soul; and if he does not wish it (so), sin is not able to come near him:

*'Behold, he says, it lies at the door of your mind, like a rapacious animal outside the door of a house. If you turn to it by your (own) will and open to it, it will enter and take possession of you. And if you do not wish it (so), it will not be able to enter into you'. By these (words) it has become clearly known that Satan, the sower of sin, is not able to oppress and to force the self-dominion of the human mind. Nor is sin the seed of evil.*

For this reason Cain was found guilty, because he did not repent at all upon (hearing) these words, but actually opened the door to sin by his (own) will. It entered and took possession of him, as God had foretold him. And he killed his innocent brother, out of envy only.

As Phillips notes<sup>21</sup>, on a superficial level we are struck by the discrepancy between the synopsis in the heading and the scholion which follows. The heading would seem more appropriate to the next scholion, the sixth, in which we find an elaboration of the idea that Cain must have committed seven transgressions in order to be liable to seven punishments. Here, in the fifth scholion, Jacob dwells upon the fact that Cain was explicitly warned in advance that he would be responsible for his own deeds. As the two scholia reflect the same line of thought, we can disregard the introduction to the present one as an error on the part of some redactor. Such a conclusion is not too radical, and solves the problem. Although one may assume that not only the introduction, but the continuation of the text as well may be regarded as a redactional piece, that would, to my mind, be far from peremptory. My reason for including this scholion here is precisely my impression that it is *not* an

<sup>19</sup> Gen. 4:7, Peshitta.

<sup>20</sup> Gen. 4:7, Peshitta.

<sup>21</sup> Phillips, *Scholia*, 1, note 1.

abstract by just anyone, but rather a complete and original piece, even allowing for the polishing effect of the translation. Moreover, we are struck by the edifying or didactic effect produced by its concentrated and economic style. Such points as these support the supposition that the editorial work, the results of which are found in Vat. Syr. 103 and the scholia manuscripts, may be attributed in part to Jacob himself, who wrote not only for a scholarly audience, but also strove to instruct his readers on a more popular level. Here two of Jacob's books spring to mind, the *Book of Scholia* and the *Shorter Commentary*.

## 2. *On Gen. 4:15*

The second specimen is as yet unpublished. It follows the one discussed above in ms. Brit. Libr. Add. 17,193, but is also found in the section on Genesis which in Vat. Syr. 103 is attributed to Ephrem<sup>22</sup>. Apart from some minor variants, the two versions can easily be combined. As this text suggests, the Vatican manuscript may prove more useful as a basis for the edition. Additions and variants taken from it appear in square brackets.

### **From the Sixth Scholion. After the words of Scripture that (were said) by God in a personified way to Cain after he had killed his brother.**

This story about Cain is (fashioned as) wholly corporeal. And it is said according to the usual application of our (human) speech and in a personified way. For God did not speak to Cain one of these words, nor did Cain answer one of these (words) that are written, but it is the aim of these words to make manifest the evil mind of Cain and the verdict of the sentence that was issued to him by God because of the multitude of his sins. [Vat. adds: For what Cain had in his mind and absolutely wanted to accomplish Scripture has put forward and made known. It rendered the (sins) in a personified conversation with God.] For he perpetrated not only one (sin) in what he did, but many.

Therefore the word of Scripture said: '*He* [Vat. adds: *who kills him*] *will repay seven transgressions* [Vat.: *requitals*]<sup>23</sup>. First, what he did wrong was that he did offer (his) offering to God not with concern, but with contempt. Second, that he became angry and indignant towards God, because his offering was not accepted. Third, that he envied his brother. Fourth, that he acted deceitfully. Fifth, that he murdered. Sixth, that he lied when he was asked by God '*Where is your brother?*', and said '*I do not know*'<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Brit. Libr. Add. 17,193:61r-61v; Vat. Syr. 103:13v.

<sup>23</sup> Gen. 4:15. The Peshitta has *Every murderer of Cain will be repaid sevenfold*. Speaking of seven sins, the wording here is close to that of the Septuagint and Jacob's own version. The additional *he who kills him* in Vat. Syr. 103 has a parallel in Jacob's own version.

<sup>24</sup> Gen 4:9, common to all versions.

Seventh, that he yielded himself to despair and said that his *sin was too great for forgiveness*<sup>25</sup> and did not want to repent and seek forgiveness.

Because of these seven (transgressions) he was cursed and found guilty with the sentence to suffer seven hundred years *shaking and trembling*<sup>26</sup> and not simply to be murdered immediately the way he had murdered. For every (other) murderer, he says, this will be (so) that he will be murdered the way he murdered, for Cain, however, *it will not be so, but he will be repaid sevenfold*<sup>27</sup> on the account that he first began with murder on earth.

Essentially, this scholion consists of three parts, all quite different. The first paragraph introduces the problem of how we should see the meeting and the conversation between God and Cain. Jacob's solution is that of *ἑβιδυτ παρσῶπᾶ*, or *προσωποποιῖα*, reminiscent of procedures found in earlier Greek exegesis<sup>28</sup>. Here, the term is translated as 'a personified way/conversation'. In the same paragraph we find *guṣmānāyā*, 'bodily' or 'corporeal'. These technical terms are points of departure for comparative research.

In the second paragraph Cain's seven transgressions are enumerated. We know of such inventories from Cyril of Alexandria<sup>29</sup>, Basil of Caesarea<sup>30</sup> and, later, Išo'dad of Merv<sup>31</sup>.

The concluding paragraph is more original. Readers may contrast its argument with the implied Peshitta reading of Gen. 4:15: the verse 'Not so! Every murderer of Cain will be repaid sevenfold' is alluded to by Jacob, who employs its elements 'every (other) murderer', 'it will not be so', and 'he will be repaid sevenfold'. These are God's words in

<sup>25</sup> Gen 4:13. The use of the noun *forgiveness* sets the wording apart from that of the Peshitta and Jacob's own version, both of which use verbal forms.

<sup>26</sup> Gen 4:12, 14, Peshitta.

<sup>27</sup> Gen. 4:15, Peshitta.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Didymus of Alexandria, see K. Staab (ed.), *Pauluskommentare aus der Griechischen Kirche* (Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen 15; Münster 1933) 1, 24 and 2, 20 (on Rom. 7); Theodoret of Cyrhus, see J.-N. Guinot (ed.), *Théodoret de Cyr. Commentaire sur Isaïe*, 1-3 (Sources chrétiennes 276, 295 & 315; Paris 1980-1984) 2, 584; 5, 251; 7, 696; 9, 140; 14, 6; 15, 445; 16, 7. See also B. Neuschäfer, *Origenes als Philologe* (Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft 18/1-2; Basel 1987) 268-276.

<sup>29</sup> *Glaphyra in Genesim*, I, (3), 2, in J.P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus ... Series Graeca* 69 (Paris 1864) 37AB, and in F. Petit (ed.), *La Chaîne sur la Genèse*, 2 (Traditio Exegetica Graeca 2; Louvain 1993) No 538 and No 546.

<sup>30</sup> *Epistulae*, 260, 3, in J.P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus ... Series Graeca* 32 (Paris 1886) 957 BC, in Y. Courtonne (ed.), *Saint Basile. Lettres*, 3 (Paris 1966) 107-108, and in Petit (ed.), *op. cit.*, No 543.

<sup>31</sup> J.-M. Vosté & C. Van den Eynde (ed. & transl.), *Commentaire d'Išo'dad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament*, I, *Genèse* (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 126 & 156 / Scriptorum Syri 67 & 75; Louvain 1950 & 1955) 103 & 110.

response to Cain's uneasy observation that whoever finds him will kill him, in effect a warning to the would-be murderer of Cain that he will have to pay for his deed sevenfold. This warning is made more explicit in the version which Jacob quotes as scriptural: 'He [who kills him] will repay seven transgressions [requitals]'. Referring to seven transgressions instead of 'sevenfold', Jacob sees an opportunity to enumerate the transgressions in detail. In addition, the wording here is in the active voice (as it is in the Septuagint), whereas that of the Peshitta and the closing lines of this scholion is in the passive<sup>32</sup>. This passive can be interpreted in two ways: either revenge will be exacted on that person on account of Cain or Cain himself will be punished. The latter interpretation is chosen to form the climax of this scholion. In other words, by making its ambiguity explicit, Jacob distinguishes in Gen. 4:15 two layers of meaning: first, the verse is interpreted as a warning to the murderer of Cain, and second — as a consequence of this — it is taken to mean that Cain must suffer for his deed sevenfold and therefore must go on living<sup>33</sup>.

### 3. On Gen. 6:1-4

And finally, there is a piece, taken from the same manuscript<sup>34</sup>, which will serve as an example of the apocryphal material that is found in Jacob's work<sup>35</sup>. To date, one version of this unpublished scholion has been identified. The words in square brackets are conjectural emendations.

**From the Tenth Scholion, when he speaks about the giants of whom it is written that they were born out of the daughters of Cain before the Flood.**

Concerning these, there is written and mention is made in stories (which are) old and (are) additional to those which are (found) among the He-

<sup>32</sup> *nepro* / παραλύσει vs *netp<sup>e</sup>ra*.

<sup>33</sup> Ephrem's exegesis evolves around the second interpretation. See R.M. Tonneau (ed.), *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et Exodum Commentarii* (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 152 / Scriptorum Syri 71; Louvain 1965) 50-51; E.G. Mathews & J.P. Amar (transl.), *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works* (The Fathers of the Church 91; Washington, D.C. 1994) 128-129, cf. R.J. Owens, *The Genesis and Exodus Citations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage* (Leiden 1983) 72-73, and É. Levine, "The Syriac Version of Genesis IV 1-16", *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (1976) 70-78, esp. 75. Eusebius of Emesa ascribes this interpretation to 'the Hebrew' and 'the Syrian', see V. Hovhannessian (ed.), *Eusèbe d'Émèse*, 1, *Commentaire de l'Octateuque* (Venice 1980) 41, 771-42, 790 (Armenian), and Petit, *La Chaîne*, 2, No 536 and No 537 for Greek fragments, presumably going back to Eusebius's commentary (with thanks to my colleague Bas ter Haar Romeny (Leiden) for the references to Eusebius of Emesa).

<sup>34</sup> Brit. Libr. Add. 17,193:61v-62r.

<sup>35</sup> See also note 13.

brews, as follows. When God wanted to destroy them and their evil, still before that total wrath (exercised) by means of the Flood, while letting them perish through the evil things of their (own) minds, they fell upon each other in warlike manner, thoughtlessly as much as heartlessly. (This also occurred) in order that — still according to the wording of the story — in all ages of the world thereafter there would not be such inordinate war and desolation and destruction of men like this.

The destruction of those obstinate and rebellious giants — the evil offspring of those who transgressed their covenant, those who were unlawfully born out of the daughters of Cain — took place in such a way that (a distance of) many stadia of the earth was putrefied by their blood and by the festering (coming out) of their corpses and [that] enormous and mighty [worms] gathered out of the skeletons of their bones. As the story said, until the Flood the visible sign of their destruction clearly continued to exist.

(This destruction) was so enormous and surpassed (all) astonishment that also some heretic and erring people impiously composed poetical myths concerning them, (myths) full of nonsense and error, and said that out of their excrement the earth had been made firm and out of their skin the heaven had been stretched out.

In both the heading and the second paragraph of this scholion, the daughters of men in Gen. 6:2 are identified as the daughters of Cain. A Syriac tradition from Ephrem onward has it that from the intermingling of the Sethites and Cainites the giants of Gen. 6:4 were born<sup>36</sup>. Here, however, Jacob is referring to one of the stories additional (*yattirātā*) to those of the texts preserved among the Hebrews, which clearly points to an apocryphal tradition. Then again, in the last paragraph, Jacob criticizes 'some heretic and erring people' for impiously composing poetical myths. Here attention is directed to a second body of literature, and one gets the feeling that the whole of this scholion is meant to be a corrective on certain specific cosmological ideas, current in Jacob's time, for the refutation of which the authority of Jewish legends is invoked.

In the work of Alexander of Lycopolis, an Egyptian Neoplatonist from the late third or early fourth century, we find a passage that parallels our text in both structure and contents:

On the other hand, what is told in poetry about the giants is mythological. Those who discourse about these in allegorical form put forth such things hiding the solemnity of their tale behind the form of myth. For example, when the history of the Jews speaks of the angels who consorted with the

<sup>36</sup> Cf. S.D. Fraade, *Enosh and his Generation: Pre-Israelite Hero and History in Postbiblical Interpretation* (Society of Biblical Literature, Monograph Series 30; Chico CA 1984) 91-104. For Ephrem's description see Tonneau (ed.), *Sancti Ephraem Syri, 57*; Mathews & Amar (transl.), *St. Ephrem the Syrian*, 136.

daughters of men in order to have sexual intercourse, this way of telling the story hints at the nurturing faculties of the soul which comes down hither from above. The poets speaking of the giants that came out of the earth in full armour and then, having rebelled against the gods, perished immediately, demonstrating in this allusive way the quickly perishing constitution of the body, adorn their poetry in this way in order to persuade by the marvellousness of their tale. The Manichaeans, however, understand nothing of all this; whenever they are able to come to false conclusions, they appropriate these as a god-send, whatever their origin, making every effort, as it were, to vanquish truth by all possible means<sup>37</sup>.

Here, too, apocryphal stories are contrasted with other — untrue — versions. In the case of Alexander, however, the latter are ascribed to the Manichaeans. Further research will be needed to establish whether Alexander's work did influence Jacob's and whether Jacob was in fact combating Manichaean thought.

Jacob of Edessa was one of the last to make an original contribution to West Syrian exegesis. Exegetical works written after his time must in general be characterized as compilations or reworkings of earlier material. Jacob also belonged to the first generation to live and work under Islamic rule, and he was conscious of this fact. This makes him an exceptionally important figure in West Syrian history. But Jacob's work is also worthwhile in itself. The scholia presented here in short are to my mind evidence of craftsmanship and learning, as well as an ability to empathize with both the protagonists he is describing and his intended readers. Jacob's personages are real and alive to our world, so much so that his Bible presents itself as a dynamic narrative that can be rephrased within the boundaries of the received versions. Thus the reader is treated to many and varied dishes of dramatic narratives, tall tales, polemics, history, and tradition, whereby only a little of each is put before him<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> P.W. van der Horst & J. Mansfeld (transl.), *An Alexandrian Platonist Against Dualism* (Leiden 1974) 95, cited in J.C. Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony: Studies in the Book of Giants Traditions* (Monographs of the Hebrew Union College 14; Cincinnati 1992) 21, 41 n. 81.

<sup>38</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the composition of the *Catena Severi*, see my "Ephrem, Jacob of Edessa, and the Monk Severus. An Analysis of Ms. Vat. Syr. 103, ff. 1-72", in R. Lavenant (ed.), *VII Symposium Syriacum* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta; Rome, forthcoming).