

MARK IX. 49

The well-known salt-saying, Mark ix. 49, has always caused much trouble to the interpreter. Criticism of the text in this very passage was difficult because of the many textual variants in the manuscripts: but diligent investigations of many scholars at this point made it probable that the Egyptian recension has preserved the oldest reading.¹ Exegesis, therefore, finds its starting-point in the somewhat enigmatic words πᾶς γὰρ πυρὶ ἀλισθήσεται. There is a tendency to detach this logion from its context, and to deal with it as an isolated aphorism, which has been introduced here by the compiler to make easy the transition from fire to salt.² And so the saying became a clear example of word-stitching, the key-words being πῦρ and ἅλς.³ The meaning of the words, however, remained difficult to explain. More than once the logion has been connected with such sayings as Matt. iii. 11 par., Mark x. 38, 39 par., Luke xii. 49, 50 and with the agraphon ὁ ἐγγύς μου ἐγγύς τοῦ πυρός.⁴ Such connections—suggested by the word πυρὶ—may be right; but it seems to me that, in spite of much ingeniousness, interpreters have not been able to explain how ‘everyone must be salted with fire’. Torrey described this difficult expression as ‘pure nonsense’.⁵ ‘The truth is that the text is corrupt’, Pallis thought, and he sought the corruption in ἀλισθήσεται, which word was to be emended into ἀγνισθήσεται.⁶ But there seemed to be good reasons why this attractive conjecture was not accepted in the commentaries.

It is not surprising that some scholars tried to find a solution of the difficulty in assuming a mistranslation from a Semitic original. So far as I see, Chajes was the first one who looked in this direction. He postulated the Hebrew words: . . . ‘כִּי כָל אִשׁ בְּאֵשׁ יִמְלַח’; denn jedes Feuer wird mit Feuer gesalzen. . . , a text still more obscure than the Greek, in spite of Chajes’s exegesis of the new phrase.⁷ Bergmann, following a suggestion of Halévy, assumed the Hebrew phrase: כִּי כָל אִשׁ יִבְאֵשׁ יִמְלַח, ‘denn alles was verfault wird gesalzen’.⁸ Halévy thought this reconstruction had to be seriously examined, but at the same time he maintained his own assumption of an *Aramaic* original of the

¹ Cf. O. Cullmann, ‘Que signifie le sel dans la parabole de Jésus’, *R.H.P.R.* xxxvii (1957), 36–43; 39.

² V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (London, 1953), pp. 413–14; L. Vaganay, ‘Le Schématisation du Discours Communautaire à la lumière de la Critique des Sources’, *R.B.* lx (1953), 203–44; 237.

³ D. R. Griffiths, ‘The Salt-Sections in the Gospels’, *E.T.* lxx (1947–8), 81–2; G. Delling, ‘ΒΑΠΤΙΣΜΑ ΒΑΠΤΙΣΘΗΝΑΙ’, *N.T.* ii (1957), 92–115; 113.

⁴ G. Delling, *loc. cit.*; cf. J. Jeremias, *Unbekannte Jesusworte* (Gütersloh, 1951), pp. 53–5.

⁵ Ch. C. Torrey, *The Four Gospels* (New York–London, 1947^a), p. 302.

⁶ A. Pallis, *Notes on St Mark and St Matthew*, new edition (Oxford–London, 1932), p. 34.

⁷ H. P. Chajes, *Markusstudien* (Berlin, 1899), p. 53.

⁸ J. Bergmann in a review in *O.L.Z.* vii (1904), coll. 21–2 of J. Halévy’s *Études Évangéliques*, i (1903).

Gospel according to Mark.¹ Torrey then, in the lines of Bergmann's reconstruction, supposed an Aramaic: *kōl bā'ēsh yithmallach*, 'whatever would spoil is salted' as original text, which the Greek translator thought to be the continuation of the Hebrew quotation in verse 48, so that he confused Aramaic ܡܠܚ 'spoiling' with Hebrew ܡܠܚ 'with fire'.² The conjecture is ingenious and solves a difficulty; it may be the right solution, says G. A. Barton in his review.³ Another still older suggestion had been advanced by Perles, who claimed an Aramaic: ܟܠ ܠܝܫܐ ܝܬܡܠܚ 'chaque pâte est salé', of which the ܠܝܫܐ was misread as ܠܝܫܐ.⁴ But all these suggestions, even Torrey's, do not simplify very much the task of the exegetical workers.

It was πυρί, and not ἀλίσθησεται, that was supposed to be the product of mistranslation. And so in all the reconstructions mentioned above, the constant factor remained the verb מלח. This verb seemed to be required on account of the assumed word-stitching.⁵ However it may be questioned if indeed this מלח was the only possible equivalent of our Greek ἀλίζειν. In the Christian Palestinian Aramaic of the Malkite Lectionary of the Gospels we read Matt. v. 13 thus: ܡܬܬܒܠ ܡܠܚ ܒܡܐ ܬܒܒ ܠܘܢܗ;⁶ here the word *m'tabbēlā* is the passive participle of the pa'el *tabbēl*; apparently, the Malkite translator thought this a fit rendering of the Greek ἀλίζειν. That this was a good equivalent indeed, may also be taken from the word-play which most probably lies behind the Greek wording of the proverbial salt-saying Matt. v. 13 parr.: 'in taphel m'lah b'ma' tabb'lunneh.'⁷ And now, bearing in our mind this possible equivalency of Greek ἀλίζειν and Aramaic *tabbēl*, we may ask if a curious mishearing was not the origin of the perplexing logion Mark ix. 49. I think of a confusion of derivative forms of the root *tbl* and of the root *ṭbl*. Might not an original *miṭṭēbel* 'baptized'⁸ have been misheard as *mittabbal* or *m'tabbal* 'seasoned, salted'⁹—or perhaps *yittēbel* as *yittabbal*¹⁰—so that the translator targumized the Aramaic word with ἀλίσθησεται, where he had to translate βαπτισθήσεται? The wording πᾶς γὰρ πυρί βαπτισθήσεται is far from senseless. We find parallels in Matt. iii. 11 and Luke iii. 16;¹¹ and we know the answer of R. Abbahu given to a sectarian who had asked: 'When [God] buried Moses, wherein did He purify Himself?', viz.,

¹ J. Halévy, 'Un peu de Lumière', *O.L.Z.* vii (1904), 148-9.

² Ch. C. Torrey, *loc. cit.* cf. p. 90.

³ G. A. Barton, 'Prof. Torrey's Theory of the Aramaic Origin of the Gospels and the first Half of the Acts of the Apostles', *J.T.S.* xxxvi (1935), 357-73; 363.

⁴ F. Perles, 'La Parole du Sel Sourd', *R.E.J.* lxxxii (1926), 122-3.

⁵ This is the verb assumed also by L. Vaganay, *loc. cit.*

⁶ A. S. Lewis-M. D. Gibson, *The Palestinian Syriac Lectionary* (London, 1899), p. 62.

⁷ M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford, 1954²), pp. 123-5; cf. J. Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu* (Göttingen, 1956²), p. 147: 'in taphel milha b'ma j'tabb'lun.

⁸ *Iṭpe'el*, partic. pass. masc. of ܬܒܠ: ܡܬܬܒܠ, ܡܝܬܬܒܠ, ܡܬܬܒܠ or ܡܬܬܒܠ.

⁹ *Iṭpa'al*, partic. pass. masc. of ܬܒܠ: ܡܬܬܒܠ, ܡܝܬܬܒܠ; or pa'el, partic. pass. masc. of the same verb: ܡܬܬܒܠ.

¹⁰ *Iṭpe'el*, impf. 3. m. of ܬܒܠ: ܝܬܬܒܠ or ܝܬܒܠ, misheard as ܝܬܬܒܠ or ܝܬܒܠ, *Iṭpa'al*, impf. 3. m.

¹¹ αὐτὸς ὁμοῦς βαπτισθεὶς ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί.

'In fire did He purify Himself.'¹ Perhaps it may not be very conclusive, but I wish to point to a curious coincidence: Matt. iii. 11 and Luke iii. 16 are the only N.T. passages, wherein baptism by fire is spoken of; in the same passages there is also mention of πῦρ ἀβέστων, Matt. iii. 12 and Luke iii. 17, which expression is not frequent in N.T. literature; the only other instance is Mark ix. 43, cf. verse 48.² It would indeed be remarkable, if in this last case the original Aramaic text spoke of a baptism by fire also.

The solution given above dealt only with the possibility of a mishearing in the case of Mark ix. 49. This explanation seems to fail, when we have to assume a written source-text—and not an oral tradition—used by the translator in his composition of our Greek Mark. But now I wish to point to the fact that *tbl* sometimes also had the meaning 'to spice, to season'. So we find in the Jerusalem Talmud, in Sheḳalim III, 47^c the Hebrew phrase מבושל כמטובל, which Jastrow paraphrased 'boiled wine is in ritual law like spiced wine'.³ In Pesahim x, 37^c we read this with a slight variation as מבושל כמחובל. Levy thought the מטובל of Sheḳalim to be a corruption of מחובל,⁴ but this is not necessary. In the Babylonian Talmud, Erubin 28^b, we find in the phrase מטבילין בו את הצלי another proof of a verb *tbl* with the meaning 'to season'.⁵ It is true, these examples—a pi'el and a hif'il—are taken from post-Biblical Hebrew, and not from Aramaic; but they seem to be of Palestinian origin. We do not know very much about the vocabulary of Palestinian Aramaic of the first century,⁶ and we also know very little about Hebrew influences on the Aramaic language of that time. But I think, we are not allowed to exclude any exchange of words between the learned Hebrew language and the popular Aramaic speech.⁷ So I venture to suppose an Aramaic *tbl*, which in pa'el and perhaps in 'af'el had the meaning 'to season'. If this is right, then we may put forward this solution: in his source-text the translator found יטבל בנורא טבל,⁸ which words he vocalized: *dī kōl 'naš b'nūrā' yiṭṭabbal*, and therefore translated πᾶς γὰρ πύρι ἀλίσθησεται, perhaps because he was partly influenced by the following salt-logion. But his text ought to be read as: *dī kōl 'naš b'nūrā' yiṭṭōl* (or *yiṭṭ'bel*),⁹ and consequently translated thus: πᾶς γὰρ πύρι βαπτισθήσεται.

¹ b. Sanh. 39^a: ... בנורא טביל... קבריה למשה במאי טביל... a full translation of the passage in H. L. Strack-P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, II (München, 1924), 21.

² Verse 43: τὸ πῦρ τὸ ἀβέστων, cf. verse 48: τὸ πῦρ οὗ σβέννυται (= Isa. lxvi. 24).

³ M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, vol. I (New York, 1903, repr. 1950), 517; cf. B. Krupnik-A. M. Silbermann, מלח שמושי לתלמוד למדור לתרגום, vol. I (London, 1927), 329.

⁴ J. Levy, *Neuhebräisches und Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim*, Tl. II (Leipzig, 1879), 135.

⁵ M. Jastrow, *loc. cit.*; B. Krupnik, *loc. cit.*

⁶ Cf. Ch. C. Torrey, 'Studies in the Aramaic of the First Century A.D.', *J.A.W.* LXV (1953), 228-47; Torrey gives as 'a first attempt' an alphabetical list of twenty-four words.

⁷ See the additional note on טבל.

⁸ Or with the participle מטביל *miṭṭ'bel* 'baptized', wrongly vocalized as *miṭṭabbal* 'seasoned'.

⁹ The active יטבל seems to be the more probable form, since there was a tendency in Aramaic to avoid passive constructions—cf. the form used in the passage of Sanhedrin mentioned—but the

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON *tbl*

An example of Hebrew influence on Aramaic seems to me the verb *tbl* 'to bathe'. As far as I know, this verb does not occur in any Semitic language except in Biblical and post-Biblical Hebrew and also in Jewish Aramaic. The Arabic طَبَّل must be ruled out as witness for a common Semitic root-word *tbl*. We know the dependence of Jewish Aramaic on Biblical and post-Biblical Hebrew in so many religious terms and ideas; and, as we have the oldest occurrence of the word in Biblical Hebrew, so it seems likely that this word found its way from Hebrew to Aramaic at some time. If our solution of the difficulty in Mark ix. 49 is right, this will be an indication that the passing of the Hebrew word into Aramaic had already been accomplished before or in the first quarter of the first century A.D. Perhaps I may be allowed to propose here an etymology of the word *tbl*: the verb *tābāl* 'to bathe' gives the impression of being an original, popular (or learned?) contraction in Hebrew of two common Semitic verbs, viz. *tb*' and *'lh*: *tābā'ā-ā'ālāhā*, contracted to *tābala*, which was shortened in later Hebrew into *tābāl*, the meaning of the verb being 'to immerse and rise'.

T. J. BAARDA

New Test. Stud. 5, pp. 321-7.

LAZARUS

Amongst the unsolved puzzles of New Testament study one of the most teasing is the question of the connexion between the Johannine miracle story of the raising of Lazarus (John xi) and the Lucan parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke xvi. 19-31).

Westcott said, 'All attempts to identify Lazarus (of the raising) with the person in the parable are quite baseless.' If this means that the points of similarity in the two stories are mere coincidences, then it seems to me far

passive form is not impossible, as can be seen from the Gospels where the passive constructions seem to have an equivalent in the kerygma of the Primitive Church; we may refer to Matt. iii. 6, 13, 14; Mark i. 5, 9; Ebion. Ev. fragm. 3 with their explicit ὑπό (which was perhaps the rendering of Aramaic ܬܒܠ: (1) ܬܒܠ, cf. I Cor. x. 2; (2) ὑπό). In this connexion it seems important to pay attention to the: ... baptizemur ab eo...; ... baptizer ab eo..., which Jerome found 'in evangelio iuxta Hebraeos quod Chaldaico quidem Syroque sermone sed Hebraicis litteris scriptum est' (c. Pelag. iii, 2). In Jewish Aramaic, however, the passive construction has not been found; but we have in this Aramaic a causative 'af'el, e.g. אַסְבִּילֶיךָ לָהּ 'we make her bathe' in b. Nidda 30^a; cf. the corresponding hif'il in Gerim i. 8: הָאִישׁ מְטַבֵּיל אֶת הָאִשָּׁה וְהָאִשָּׁה מְטַבֵּלת אֶת הָאִישׁ. The sources of Gerim are from the first and second century; the early use of the causative stems in connexion with baptism may be another indication of the possibility of the passive of טבַּל in the Aramaic of Jesus and his early church.