

Some Aspects of Gospel Introduction (Continued) [Part 3]

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III

ARAMAIC ORIGINS

The Semitic background to the Greek documents of our N.T. has received increasing attention of recent years. Much that is strange in N.T. Greek can best be explained on the hypothesis that some of these documents or their sources were originally composed in a Semitic language, and that what we have before us is a fairly literal rendering into Greek, so-called "translation-Greek".

When first the papyrus discoveries of Egypt threw a flood of light on the idiom of the N.T., and showed how close this "language of the Holy Ghost"¹ was to the Hellenistic vernacular of the Eastern Mediterranean, there was a natural tendency to suppose that the newer research had rendered quite obsolete the older theories which attributed the peculiarities of N.T. Greek to Semitic influence. But a more balanced judgment has resulted from the lapse of time and the further prosecution of research, and while the kinship of N.T. Greek with the Hellenistic vernacular, the "Koine" or "common" speech, is now universally recognised, considerable differences between the two have been pointed out.

The trend away from the absolute identification of N.T. Greek with the Koine may be observed if we compare Vol. ii of Moulton and Howard's *Grammar of New Testament Greek* with Vol. i (J. H. Moulton's *Prolegomena*). In the *Prolegomena* (1st ed., 1906), Moulton reduced to a minimum the influence of Semitic idiom on N.T. Greek. In Vol. ii (1929), Professor W. F. Howard adds an Appendix of 73 pages on "Semitisms in the New Testament" (pp. 413 ff.), at the beginning of which he reminds his readers that "in some respects Dr. Moulton's attitude to the subject of Semitisms in the New Testament was slightly modified after the first edition of the *Prolegomena* appeared".

Even so, it is a far cry from the recognition of Semitic influence in the language of the N.T., which one might have expected in

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any case, to the assumption of Aramaic documents underlying our Gospels. Yet this assumption, too, was made by J. H. Moulton in the earlier part of the Introduction to Vol. ii of Moulton and Howard's *Grammar*, written before his death in 1915. "Lost Aramaic originals", he wrote, "lie behind a fair proportion of these documents" (p. 3). That there is in some form or other an Aramaic substratum is generally admitted nowadays, whether that form be documentary or not. For there is nowadays general agreement that Aramaic was the

¹ This expression is quoted from Rothe (1863) by H. Cremer in the Preface to his *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of N.T. Greek*.

customary language of our Lord; and if this be so, then the Sayings of Jesus at least go back to an Aramaic original.

The recognition that Aramaic was most probably our Lord's mother-tongue has been growing since the eighteenth century.² In 1772 Giambernardo de Rossi published at Parma a work, *Della lingua propria di Cristo e degli Ebrei nazionali della Palestina da' tempi de' Maccabei*, in which he argued with insight that the mother-tongue of Jesus was what he called Syro-Chaldaic, i.e., Aramaic. Twenty years later Johann Adrian Bolten attempted to translate the First Gospel "back" into Aramaic, giving his work the title, *Der Bericht des Matthäus von Jesu dem Messias* (Altona, 1792). In the similarly named work, *Der Bericht des Joannes von Jesu dem Messias* (1797), he expressed the view that the Fourth Gospel, too, was originally written in Aramaic. But it was not until the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth that the claims of Aramaic were fairly definitely settled by Arnold Meyer in *Jesu Muttersprache* (Leipzig, 1896), and in particular by Gustaf Dalman, who in a series of works indispensable to the student of this subject,³ not only established pretty conclusively that Aramaic was the mother-tongue of Jesus, but also showed in many instances what must have been something very like the actual Aramaic words that proceeded out of His mouth.

It is generally conceded nowadays, even by those who argue that Hebrew persisted as a living language in Jerusalem and Judaea well into the Christian era, that Aramaic was the common language of Galilee. Thus, for example, Professor M. Segal, who considers that the evidence leaves no doubt that "Mishnaic" Hebrew was the vernacular of Judaea in N.T. times, concedes that "with regard to the language of Jesus, it is admitted that in the Roman period, and perhaps earlier, Aramaic was the vernacular of the native Galilean Jews".⁴

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We need not repeat here the convincing arguments for believing that Aramaic was our Lord's habitual tongue. They may best be studied in the writings of Dalman, especially in *The Words of Jesus*. But if He spoke habitually in Aramaic, the original source of His Sayings was naturally an Aramaic one, though it does not necessarily follow that they were written in Aramaic, or that our Gospels depend on Aramaic *documents*. Dalman was very cautious in this respect; while he tries to reproduce the original Aramaic of several Sayings of Jesus, he says: "For my own part I do not see more than a high probability for an Aramaic primary gospel, and dare not speak of a *certainty* resting on proofs" (*Words of Jesus*, p. 62). Again: "It is thus *possible* that the oldest Christian writing may have been composed in Greek; and its Semitisms, so far as they are not Biblicisms, are in that case due to the Aramaic oral archetype (*Urgestalt*) of the Christian tradition" (ib., p. 71).

The words, "so far as they are not Biblicisms", are important. In so far as they *are* Biblicisms, they are due to the influence of the LXX, and are Hebraisms, not Aramaisms. The "translation Greek" of which the LXX is so full is a literal Greek rendering of Hebrew idiom, and has

² J. T. Hudson points out in *The Expository Times*, liii, p. 264, that as early as 1596 J. Almira thought that his Syriac Grammar treated of Jesus' mother-tongue.

³ *Grammatik des jüdisch palästinischen Aramäisch* (Leipzig, 1894); *Words of Jesus* (Eng. tr., 1902); *Sacred Sites and Ways* (Eng. tr., 1935); *Jesus-Jeshua* (Eng. tr., 1929).

⁴ *Mishnaic Hebrew Grammar* (1927), p. 17. T. W. Manson (*The Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 46ff.) suggests that in His more formal disputations with the Pharisees, our Lord may have used Mishnaic Hebrew, as they did.

affected to a greater or less degree all the N.T. writers. We have to distinguish this form of Semitic influence from that which reflects Aramaic originals. Many people who talk about Semitisms in N.T. Greek fail to distinguish between Hebraisms and Aramaisms. It is usually pretty easy for a reader familiar with Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, to say whether, a reasonably long piece of translation-Greek from a Semitic original is from Hebrew or Aramaic. For while Hebrew and Aramaic have naturally many features in common, being neighbouring Semitic tongues, there are also outstanding differences, especially in syntax. Of the most distinctive Aramaic constructions reflected in the Greek N.T., we may mention asyndeton, the use of *'edayin* ("then") to introduce sentences, the periphrastic use of the imperfect of the verb "to be" with the participle, the anticipation of the genitive of a substantive by a pronominal suffix attached to the governing noun,⁵ the anticipation of the direct object by a pronominal suffix attached to the verb,⁶ the introduction of the direct object by the preposition *le*,⁷ and especially the multifarious uses of the particle *de* or *di*, originally a demonstrative pronoun, and then used to precede a genitive, or as the indeclinable relative, or as a

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conjunction meaning "that"; "because", "when", "in order that". It must frequently give translators from Aramaic pause before they decide by what equivalent this overworked particle must be rendered, and not infrequently an awkward Greek construction becomes plain if we discern behind it a piece of Aramaic containing this particle.

Among scholars who have postulated Aramaic sources for part at least of our Gospels during the past, fifty years may be mentioned such outstanding names as F. Blass, E. Nestle, J. Wellhausen, Th. Zahn, W. C. Allen, A. Harnack, and C F. Burney. The last-named made two very important contributions to the subject in *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel* (1922), which, we shall notice later, and *The Poetry of our Lord* (1925). In the latter book he takes a large number of passages from our Lord's teaching as recorded in all four Gospels, and shows how they are not only characterised by the poetical parallelism which is the main feature of O.T. poetry, but also how, when turned into Aramaic, they reveal regular rhythm and even, at times, rhyme. A short example is the passage commencing "The foxes have holes" (Matt. viii. 20 = Luke ix. 58), which Burney turns thus (p. 169):

le-tha'layya 'ith lehon borin
le-'opha di-shemayya qinnin
u-le-bar 'enasha leth leh
han de yarken resheh.

Some of the passages which present these features markedly when retroverted into Aramaic are passages which have been suspected by many writers as not authentic words of Jesus. Such are, for example, Matt. xi. 25-27 = Luke x: 21f.; Matt. xvi. 17-19; xxv. 31 ff., as well as several passages from the Fourth Gospel. Their poetical character does not in itself, of course, afford a conclusive proof of their authenticity, but it must be taken into serious consideration,

⁵ Cf. τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτῆς τῆς Ἡρωδιάδος, Mark Vi. 22; τοὺς γονεῖς αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀναβλέψαντος, John ix. 18.

⁶ Cf. John ix. 13, ἄγουσιν αὐτὸν πρὸς Φαρισαίους τὸν ποτε τυφλόν.

⁷ Cf. Matt. xxi. 9, ὡσαννὰ τῷ υἱῷ Δαυεὶδ ("Save now the Son of David," i.e., practically, "God save the King"),

for there is much in what Professor Dodd says, that "since Jesus appeared to His contemporaries as a prophet, and prophets were accustomed to give oracles in verse, it is credible that we have here something approaching His *ipsissima verba*" (*History and the Gospel*, pp. 89f.).

But of all the writers who have examined the question of Aramaic origins, none has dealt with it more thoroughly than

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Professor C. C. Torrey of Yale. In a succession of works—*The Translations Made from the Original Aramaic Gospels* (1912), *The Composition and Date of Acts* (1916), *The Four Gospels* (1933), and *Our Translated Gospels* (1936)—he argues that practically the whole of our four Gospels and Acts i-xv are translations from Aramaic:

The material of our Four Gospels is all Palestinian, and the language in which it was originally written is Aramaic, then the principal language of the land; with the exception of the first two chapters of Lk., which were composed in Hebrew. Each of the first two Gospels, Mk. and Mt., was rendered into Greek very soon after it was put forth. The Gospel of Jn. was translated considerably later, probably at Ephesus. (The translator added, in Greek, chap. xxi.) Luke made in Palestine, very likely during the two years of Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea (Acts xxiv. 27), a collection of Semitic documents relating to the life and work of Jesus, arranged them very skilfully, and then rendered the whole into the Greek which is our Third Gospel" (*Our Translated Gospels*) p. ix).

Torrey's views on the dates of the Gospels are as unusual as his views on their composition.

"The Gospels as completed and published, in their present extent and form, are all of considerably earlier date than has commonly been supposed. The latest of them can be only a little later than the middle of the century. At the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis in New York City, in December, 1934, I challenged my New Testament colleagues to designate even *one* passage, from any of the Four Gospels, giving clear evidence of a date later than 50 A.D., or of origin outside Palestine. The challenge was not met, nor will it be, for there is no such passage" (op. cit., p. x).

Needless to say, these opinions have not met with general approval, though their author's high scholarship and thorough command of his subject bespeak for them great respect and close study. One wonders at times whether the violence with which they have been attacked is not partly due to their challenge to

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"vested interests" in the methods and conclusions of the older school of Synoptic criticisms. For, to quote Professor W. F. Albright:

"It is difficult to imagine a more complete *volte-face* than would be necessary for New Testament criticism if Torrey's views were proved correct. He has consequently been attacked with the greatest vigour by many New Testament scholars, led by E. J. Goodspeed and D. W. Riddle. Other scholars, few of whom are specialists in the New

Testament, have rallied to his support, but the majority remains on the side-lines, equally awed by Torrey's learning and impressed by the authority of his antagonists."⁸

Much of the evidence adduced by Torrey, however, will be satisfied if we assume that it was the various sources, and not necessarily all the completed Gospels as literary units, that were originally composed in Aramaic. Take Mk. for example. In the first paper of this series we discussed the testimony of Papias,⁹ according to whom Mark was the interpreter of Peter. I said there that I saw no reason to doubt that the word ἐρμηνευτής is to be understood primarily in its literal sense, the meaning being that Mark turned Peter's Aramaic into Greek. Mark's was a pretty literal interpretation, too: we have Professor Howard's word for it that "Mark is the most Aramaic of the Gospels."¹⁰ Indeed, there is ground for believing that Mark first wrote down the Kerygma in Aramaic before, it was turned into Greek. "How a man of so good education", says J. H. Ropes, "who knew so much Greek, could have written out of his own head so barbarous a Greek style is to me puzzling. On the other hand a man who knew Greek well and was translating rather literally an Aramaic book would have been not unlikely to produce exactly the result which we find before us."¹¹

One test of whether the sources were oral or written is to look in our Greek Gospels for expressions which might be due to misreading of an Aramaic original. Aramaisms of syntax might be due to the influence of an oral tradition; the confusion of letters which looked alike in Aramaic writing, though their sounds were quite different, betokens a written source. There is, for example, a curious phrase in Mark vii. 3, ἐὰν μὴ πύγμῃ νύψωνται τὰς χεῖρας, οὐκ ἐσθίουσιν, which can only be rendered

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"Except they wash their hands with the fist, they do not eat." Here Torrey has a very attractive suggestion that an original *li-gmar* (לגמר) has been misread as *li-gmod* (לגמוד), the former meaning "at all," the latter "with the fist". The sense will then be: "Except they wash their hands, they do not eat at all."¹² The similarity of *d* (ד) and *r* (ר) in Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac is a notorious source of copyists' errors. And it might frequently happen that where there was no misreading of consonants, there was ambiguity because of two or more possible vocalisations. In oral communication this ambiguity would not arise, because the vowels were pronounced, but it would arise in reading a document, because they were not written. So, in Mark x. 12, Torrey sees behind καὶ ἐὰν αὐτὴ ἀπολύσασα τὸν ἄνδρα αὐτῆς ("and if she herself having put away her husband") the unpointed Aramaic פטרה לבצלה, vocalised as *patera le-ba'alah*; but he points out that a simple change of vocalisation to *petira le-ba'alah* gives the sense "if she herself shall be divorced by her husband", which is in agreement with Luke xvi. 18 (ἀπολελυμένην ἀπὸ ἀνδρός), and also with the law as recorded by Josephus in *Ant.* xv. 7, 10.¹³

⁸ *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (1940), pp. 294f.

⁹ *Apud Euseb., H.E.* iii. 39. Cf. Vol. xiv, pp. 180f.

¹⁰ Moulton-Howard, *Gr. of N.T.Gk.*; ii. p. 481.

¹¹ *The Synoptic Gospels* (1934), p. 98. The Aramaic origin of Mk: was maintained also by W. C. Allen: cf. *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, ed. Sanday (1911), p. 293.

¹² *The Four Gospels*, p. 300; *Our Translated Gospels*, pp. 92ff.

¹³ *F.G.*, p. 302; *O.T.G.*, pp. 93ff.

Or again, an ambiguity might arise without any confusion in either consonants or vowels. The difficult saying of Mark ix. 49, *πᾶς γὰρ πυρὶ ἀλισθήσεται* ("for everyone shall be salted with fire") is explained by Torrey as going back to Aram. *kol ba'esh yithmallach*, which means "everything spoiling is salted". But the previous verse, a quotation from Isa. lxvi. 24, appeared in the original document in its Hebrew form, in which the Hebrew word *'esh* ("fire") occurs. The translator, according to Torrey; thought that verse 49 was a continuation of the Hebrew of verse 48, and not unnaturally read *ba'esh* as the Hebrew for "with fire".¹⁴ Whether we agree with these emendations of Torrey or not, they are good examples of the kind of thing that would be apt to happen in translating from Aramaic.

The Parable of the Sower (Mark iv. 3ff.) is an interesting study if we try to get at the Aramaic underlying the Greek. In verse 4, *ἐν τῷ σπείρειν* is possible though unidiomatic Greek, but a regular Aramaic construction. *παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν* would represent *'al 'orcha*, which would more commonly mean "on the path" and seed falling on the beaten track would be most likely to be picked up by the birds. In verse 8 "gave

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fruit probably a Semitic rather than a Greek idiom; *ἀναβαίνοντα καὶ ἀυξανόμενα* quite plainly a Semitic idiom; it is the Aramaic *'azelin we-rabayin*, "increasing constantly." (cf. the corresponding Hebrew idiom with *halakh*). In the same verse the construction at the end is given differently by different MSS. and editors; Westcott and Hort read *εἰς τριάκοντα καὶ ἐν ἑξήκοντα καὶ ἐν ἑκατόν*, but allow in the margin either *εἰς* or *ἐν* instead of *ἐν* in both its occurrences. The fact is, that there is MS. authority for reading either *ΕΙΣ* or *ΕΝ* before each of the three numerals; the question is, whether we should take these to be the prepositions *εἰς* and *ἐν*, or the numerals *εἶς* and *ἐν*. The parallel passages in Matt. xiii; 8 and Luke viii. 8 do not help us, as the construction is there replaced by normal Greek idioms. But we do find help from the Vulgate, which has in Mark iv. 8: *et efferebat unum triginta, et unum sexaginta, et unum centum*. This suggests that whether we read *ΕΙΣ* or *ΕΝ* in the Greek, we should supply them with a rough breathing and regard them as the masculine or neuter of the numeral "one". This is no more a Greek idiom than it is a Latin one, but it is a good Aramaic idiom, occurring in the Aramaic of the O.T. at Dan. iii. 19, where *chad shib'ah* is literally rendered in our A.V., "one seven times".

Some points of interest also arise in the conversation which followed the Parable. "To you", He said, "it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God; but to them who are outside everything comes in parables" (ver. 11). This *ἐν παραβολαῖς* may seem strange, as we are accustomed to think of parables as intended to convey deep truths to common people in a simple manner; but the corresponding Aramaic *methal* (like the cognate Hebrew *mashal*) has a wide range of meanings, such as "maxim", "by-word", "proverb", and "riddle", the last of which is most appropriate in this particular verse.¹⁵ "To those who are outside all these things come as riddles." Then, stranger still to many readers, comes the construction with *ἴνα* in verse 12: "that they may see indeed, but not perceive", and so on (the Semitic idiom here, "that seeing they may see", reflects the Hebrew original of Isa. vi. 9). But *ἴνα* will reflect Aramaic *de*, which is also used as the relative, so that the original meaning of the passage may

¹⁴ *F.G.*, p. 302; *O.T.G.*, pp. 11, 13.

¹⁵ See O. A. Piper's remarks on this verse in Vol. xiv., p. 44.

be: "but all-these things come as riddles to those who are outside, who see indeed, but do not perceive; who hear indeed, but do not comprehend, lest they should turn

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and be forgiven." But are we justified in regarding this verse as a translation from Aramaic, and not rather from the original Hebrew of Isa. vi. 9f.? Yes, for the quotation is much closer to the Aramaic Targum than to the Hebrew. The Hebrew ends with *we-rapha lo*, "and one should heal it" (LXX, καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς, "and I should heal them"); whereas the Targum ends with *we-yishtebeq lehon*, the exact equivalent of καὶ ἀφεθῆ ἁὐτοῖς ("and it should be forgiven them"). And the passage in the Targum begins with the particle *de*, which we have postulated behind Mark's ἵνα.

So much, then, for Mark.¹⁶ On *a priori* grounds we should have still more reason to expect that our Lord's Sayings originally circulated in Aramaic, especially if there is any truth, as I believe there is, in the suggestions we have noticed earlier, that they were memorised and recorded in writing in His lifetime on earth. Here it is appropriate again to consider the fragment of Papias which we discussed in our first paper, that "Matthew compiled the Logia in the Hebrew (i.e., Aramaic) tongue, and everyone translated them as best he could". It is coming increasingly to be recognised that of all the strata in our Gospels, those which show most conclusive signs of an Aramaic original are and "M", which are the main components of the document which I have earlier ventured to call "Proto-Matthew" and to identify with the Matthaean Logia mentioned by Papias.¹⁷ Wellhausen, Nestle, and Harnack among others have stated their conviction that "Q" depends on an Aramaic original; among our own contemporaries Professor T. W. Manson, who is specially qualified to speak on this subject, declares that "the more one studies the data, the more one is confirmed in the belief that there is an Aramaic document behind the Greek Q", and adds: "It is also, I think, probable that much of the matter peculiar to Matthew is derived from an Aramaic document or documents" (*Expository Times*, Vol. xlvii, pp. 8, 10). In view of the treatment of several "M" passages by Burney in *The Poetry of our Lord*, I should say that their derivation from an Aramaic document is much more than "probable". In short, if there was such a document as "Proto-Matthew", the evidence is all in favour of its having; been originally written in Aramaic.

When we turn to the Third Gospel, we should expect to find Aramaic influence in the "Q" sections and in the Markan

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material. But there is also a surprising proportion of Aramaisms in the "L" material as well. It is not clear, however, that "L" ever had a separate existence in documentary form. The Aramaisms may well go back to oral transmission only. At any rate, Luke, for all his mastery of literary Greek style, reproduced faithfully the idiom of his sources, so that Ropes could say

¹⁶ See also J. T. Hudson's article, "The Aramaic Basis of St. Mark", in *The Expository Times*, liii, pp. 264ff.

¹⁷ *Apud Euseb.*, *H.E.* iii. 39. Cf. Vol. xiv, pp. 187 ff. This "Proto-Matthew" is very like W. C. Allen's reconstruction of the Matthaean Logia, including both "Q" and "M" material: see his Commentary on Mt. in the I.C.C. series (2nd ed., 1907), pp. lviff., and his chapter, "The Book of Sayings and the First Gospel", in *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, pp. 234ff. The main difference is that I have envisaged "Proto-Matthew" as containing a narrative framework.

that "even in Luke, in spite of the literary standard which the writer attains, not merely do the two infancy chapters show strong Hebraic character, but elsewhere in the Third Gospel, especially in the sayings of Jesus, specific Aramaisms abound".¹⁸

It is particularly striking to find a Semitism in Lk. where the parallel passages in the other Synoptists have a Greek idiom. In Luke xx. 11 we have καὶ προσέθετο ἕτερον πέμψαι δοῦλον, literally, "and he added to send another servant" (cf. Verse 12, καὶ προσέθετο τρίτον πέμψαι). This is a common idiom both in Hebrew and Aramaic. But Matt. xxi. 36 and Mark xii. 4. have the ordinary Greek expression πάλιν ἀπέστειλεν. It is more probable that Luke is here not following an Aramaic source, but employing a literary mannerism; he uses it again in Acts xii. 3 (προσέθετο συλλαβεῖν καὶ Πέτρον), and it is said to be the only Semitism to be found in the Greek of Josephus.

The material common to Mt. and Lk. is sometimes so verbally identical that we have no hesitation in assuming a single Greek source (i.e., one of the Greek versions of the Matthaean Logia); where there is some disparity we may assume that divergent Greek versions were being used, but where the difference is greater still, it is more satisfactory to suppose that Luke was not following the Matthaean Logia, but a parallel account to which he had independent access, so that such a passage in Lk. should be ascribed not to "Q" but to "L". Now, where two different Greek versions of the Logia were being used, and even sometimes when the parallel accounts in Mt. and Lk. come along different lines of transmission, we may expect to find "translation-variants"—divergent Greek words and phrases which may represent the same or nearly the same Aramaic original. Many of these possible "translation-variants" are noted by Professor Manson in *The Teaching of Jesus* (1931) and in the middle section of Major, Manson and Wright's *The Mission and Message of Jesus* (1937). Others have been pointed out earlier, by Arnold Meyer, Nestle, Wellhausen, Allen and others. The study of these translation-variants is

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one of the most important branches of the study of Aramaic origins in the Gospels, as frequently the very differences in the Greek versions of some Saying of our Lord, which might at one time have presented a problem to simple readers of the Bible, or an opportunity to others to, seize upon an imagined discrepancy, actually help us with a fair measure of confidence to discover the actual Aramaic words used by our Lord.

I remember reading an article somewhere in which the writer professed himself anxious to know whether Jesus said "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v. 3), or "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke vi. 20). Well, in the first place, "heaven" (*shemayya*) was regularly used in Aramaic as a substitute for "God" (*'Elaha*), so that the idiom used by our Lord is literally rendered in Mt., whereas it is replaced by a Greek idiom in Mk. and Lk. If then, behind "the kingdom of God" in Lk. we see the Aramaic *malkutha di-shemayya*, the whole Lukan beatitude will go back into Aramaic thus: *tubekhon miskenayya, de-dilekhon malkutha di-shemayya*. Now *miskenayya* is literally represented in Greek by οἱ πτωχοί. But "poor" in the religious language of Palestine at that time had not merely an economic connotation; it had derived a deeper spiritual significance

¹⁸ *The Synoptic Gospels*, p. 96. But Professor J. A. Findlay is surely exaggerating when in *The British Weekly* for Oct. 8, 1942, he says: "The evangelist who shows *most* signs of an Aramaic background is Luke" (italics mine).

from the descriptions of the "poor and needy" saint of so many of the Psalms. So *miskenayya* is rendered in Mt. by the less literal but more exact Greek, οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι. The only difference now remaining between the two versions is between the third person in Mt. and the second person in Lk., and this difference will not be felt to be very great when it is realised that it turns upon the difference between two guttural sounds in Aramaic. Where Lk. reflects *tubekhon* ("blessed are ye") and *dilekhon* ("yours"), Mt. reflects *tubehon* ("blessed are they") and *dilehon* ("theirs").¹⁹

Did John the Baptist say that he was unworthy to "bear" (βαστάσαι, Matt. iii. 11) or to "unloose" (λῦσαι, Mark i. 7 Luke iii. 16; John i. 27) the shoes of his successor? Probably the word he used was capable of both senses, for Aramaic *sheqal* means (1) to carry or take up, (2) to take off a garment.²⁰

When our Lord sent out the Twelve, did He forbid or allow them to take a staff? Matt. x. 10 (μηδὲ ῥάβδον) and* Luke ix: 3 (μήτε ῥάβδον) support the former; Mark vi. 8 (εἰ μὴ ῥάβδον μόνον) the latter. If we turn the Greek into Aramaic, the difference turns

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upon a single letter; μηδέ and μήτε of Mt. and Lk. represent ܡܠܐ (*we-la*); εἰ μὴ... μόνον of Mk. represents ܡܠܠܐ (*'ella*), which was the original is uncertain; Burney²¹ thought Mk. and Allen²² thought Mt. and Lk.; but the point is that what looks a real discrepancy in the Greek is shown by the Aramaic to be a simple copyist's error.

"Wisdom is justified by her works", says our Lord in Matt. xi, 19; the corresponding passage in Luke vii. 35 has "wisdom is justified of all her children" (the variant "children" in some texts in Matt. xi. 19 is harmonistic). Arnold Meyer²³ pointed out that the difference could be due to a very small change in Aramaic, the addition or omission of ܐ (*t*), "her works" being ܐܒܕܐܗܐ (*'abidathaha*) and "her children" ܐܒܕܐ (*'abdaha*), though the latter literally means "her servants".

For "many prophets and righteous men" in Matt. xiii. 17, the parallel passage in Luke x. 24 has "many prophets and kings". The difference may turn literally upon the presence or absence of a jot, the letter ܝ (*y*).²⁴ "Righteous men" would represent ܝܫܪܝܢ (*yashrin*), and "kings" would represent ܫܪܝܢ (*sarin*). Some help may be afforded in deciding which of the two is original by the juxtaposition of prophets and righteous men in Matt. x. 41.

In Matt. xxiii. 26 we read καθαρίσοι πρῶτον τὸ ἐντὸς, while the parallel passage in Luke xi. 41 has the difficult Greek τὰ ἐνόντα δότε ἐλεημοσύνην. Wellhausen suggested that

¹⁹ Cf. Burney, *The Poetry of our Lord*, p. 166.

²⁰ Torrey, *F.G.*, p. 290. Less happily, R. Eisler, in *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist* (1930, p. 261, thinks the text in Mt. due to a misreading of ܢܫܐ (*neshal*), "take off", as ܢܫܐ (*nesa*), "bear".

²¹ *The Poetry of our Lord*, p. 121.

²² *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problems*, p. 296. See his whole chapter in *O.S.S.P.* on "The Aramaic Background of the Gospels", pp. 288ff. Cf. Torrey *O.T.G.*, pp. 143ff.

²³ *Jesu Muttersprache*, p. 82.

²⁴ Cf. T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 32.

καθάρισον of Mt. Represents the imperative singular *dakki*, but that Luke, finding before him the imperative plural *dakkau* ("cleanse ye"), misread it as *zakkau* ("give alms").²⁵ Burney, however, has shown that in Aramaic and Mishnaic Hebrew *zakke* means not only "to give alms" but also "to cleanse", although the normal verb for the latter is *dakke*.²⁶ We have thus before us in these two passages simply two possible translations of the verb *zakke*, the one more appropriate to the context being that in Mt.

These are but a handful out of a long list of translation variants suggested by various scholars. Less important, but interesting none the less, are the evidences of word-play in the original which come to light after retroversion into Aramaic. Thus, in the words of John the Baptist, "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matt. iii. 9; Luke iii. 8), there may be a play on 'abnayya ("stones") and bnayya

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("children").²⁷ So our Lord's words about the lilies, "they toil not, neither do they spin" (Matt. vi. 28; Luke xii. 27), would be in Aramaic la 'amalu we-la 'azalu.²⁸ In Luke xiv. 35 ("neither for the land nor for the dunghill"), "land" might be *tebel*; but F. Perles would by a slight emendation change it to *tabbala* ("seasoning"), so that the words quoted appear in Aramaic as *la le-tabbala we-la le-zabbala* ("neither for seasoning nor for manure").²⁹ In these and other places the paronomasia or assonance, which does not appear in the Greek, becomes apparent at once in the Aramaic.

If time and space permitted, something might be added about some of the chief idiomatic Aramaistic expressions in the Gospels, and in particular about the two most important ones, "Kingdom of heaven" (*malkutha di-shemayya*) and "Son of man" (*bar 'enasha*), both of which, however, require a complete study by themselves, which may be forthcoming some day.

It remains for us to consider the question of Aramaic influence in the Fourth Gospel. Burney and Torrey have argued that this is a translation from Aramaic; a similar claim was made as far back as 1645, by C. Salmasius. Last century H. Ewald, while not holding that Jn. was actually written in Aramaic, wrote: "Under the Greek mantle that he at a late date learned to throw about himself, he still bears in himself the whole mind and spirit of his mother tongue, and does not hesitate to let himself be led by it" (*Die johanneischen Schriften*, 1861). In 1902 appeared A. Schlatter's *Die Sprache and Heimat des vierten Evangelisten*, in which, after an exhaustive collation of Rabbinic parallels, drawn especially from the Midrashim, he concluded that the Fourth Evangelist "was a Palestinian who thought and spoke in Aramaic, and only acquired his Greek in the course of his missionary work."

Twenty years later appeared Burney's exhaustive treatment in *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel*, supporting his thesis that the book as a whole was first composed in Aramaic and then turned into Greek. Then came Torrey's works in 1933 and 1936, reaching the same

²⁵ *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien* (Berlin, 1905), p. 36.

²⁶ *Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 9.

²⁷ Cf. *The Mission and Message of Jesus*, p. 332.

²⁸ Cf. *The Mission and Message of Jesus*, p. 404.

²⁹ Cf. *The Mission and Message of Jesus*, p. 424.

conclusion as a result of arguments independent of Burney's but not contradictory to them. Torrey's evidence is the more important, because when Burney's book appeared, Torrey thought its arguments inconclusive. "Burney's argument", he wrote, "for all its learning and acumen, weakens at the crucial point. Among those who are inclined to demand

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in John what Burney demands in Mark, I think the verdict is likely to be 'Not Proven'."³⁰ What Burney demanded in Mk. was "some cogent evidence of mistranslation" (*A.O.F.G.*, p. 19). Yet when Torrey came to examine the Fourth Gospel for himself, he not only came to the same general conclusion as Burney, but became convinced that in it "the proof of mistranslation is even more striking than in the other Gospels" (*O.T.G.*, p. xi).

If the general conclusion of Burney and Torrey could be substantiated, some interesting conclusions might follow, of great importance for the criticism of Jn. The puzzling connexion between John the Apostle and John the Presbyter might conceivably be explained if the former composed the Aramaic work, and the latter turned it into Greek.³¹ The argument that the diversity of style and language between the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse preclude a common authorship would lose most of its validity, especially if, with R. H. Charles, we see a Hebrew original for the latter.³² Referring to some of the linguistic characteristics of the Apocalypse enumerated by Charles, Burney says: "All these characteristics are precisely those which we should expect that the author of the Fourth Gospel would display if he turned himself to the composition of a book like the Apocalypse. Is this coincidence merely accidental?" Then, after giving "a rough list of Semitisms common to the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse", Burney concludes: "Thus it appears that the case against identity of authorship of the Gospel and Apocalypse can certainly not be maintained upon the ground of style. The evidence is all in the other direction" (*A.O.F.G.*, pp. 150, 152).

An Aramaic origin of Jn. renders less likely any dependence on Greek philosophy. We are less tempted to think of the *λόγος* of the Greek philosophers when behind the Johannine *λόγος* we see the Aramaic *memra*; we think rather of the characteristic part which the *Memra* of God plays in the Targums. Both Burney and Torrey, it is interesting to note, consider that in the Aramaic original, John i. 13 reads not "who were born" but "who was born" referring tacitly to the Virgin Birth. As is well known, this (*qui natus est*) is the reading of the Old Latin *Codex Veronensis*: the singular was regarded by Tertullian as the true text, and it is attested also by Justin, Irenaeus, Ambrose and Augustine, while in our own days Zahn, Resch, Blass, and

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Harnack have supported it as the true reading. In view, however, of the overwhelming evidence for the plural, we must be content to note with interest the attempt to find support for the singular in a postulated Aramaic original.

³⁰ *Harvard Theological Review*, xvi., p. 332.

³¹ Burney himself makes John the Presbyter the author.

³² A Hebrew. original, that is, in the writer's mind: "while he writes in Greek, he thinks in Hebrew" (I.C.C. Commentary on Rev. [1920], p. cxlii).

On the words of John i. 29, Burney argues that the whole "presentation of the Baptist's witness, including these words, is fully in accord with the Synoptic narrative" (pp. 104ff.). Since John spoke of himself in terms of Isa. xl, we need not be surprised if he spoke of Jesus in terms of Isa. liii, especially as we know how our Lord Himself interpreted His mission in terms of the latter prophecy. Burney, following C. J. Ball, finds a word-play in the phrase "Lamb of God", as the Aramaic *talya*, cognate with Hebrew *tale* ("lamb"), had come to mean also "child", "servant", in the sense of Greek *παῖς*. This, suggests a double reference in the one word to the Servant of the Lord who was led as a lamb to the slaughter.

The argument as presented by Burney and Torrey is cumulative, depending for its strength on the remarkable number of passages where difficult Greek can be turned into natural Aramaic. As in the Synoptic Gospels, the majority of these passages occur in reports of the words of Jesus, thus providing an important piece of evidence for the genuineness of the Sayings attributed to Him in Jn. For example, Burney's argument that the indeclinable Aramaic particle *de* lies behind some difficult constructions with the relative in Jn. (x. 29; xvii. 11f.; cf. vi. 37, 39; xvii. 2, 24), is noticed by Howard in his Appendix on "Semitisms in the New Testament" (p. 437) with the remark: "Mr. G. R. Driver³³ does not dispute the Aramaic origin of the idiom, but observes that in every case the passage is attributed to Jesus, and is not evidence of an Aramaic Gospel translated into Greek, but of the Aramaic of the *ipsisissima verba* of our Lord."

One more example of retroversion into Aramaic from Jn. must suffice; it is interesting as showing both the strength and the limitation of this approach. In John vii. 37f., it is probable that we should divide the clauses after the example of *Codex Bezae* and some other Old Latin and Western texts, thus "He that is athirst, let him come to Me: and let him drink who believes in Me." Even in English we can trace the parallelism, rhythm, and rhyme when the clauses are so arranged. They are equally obvious in Burney's Aramaic: *man de çache yethe lewathi*;

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we yishte man di-mehemin bi. This strongly suggests that the arrangement in *Codex Bezae* is right.

What then of the remaining words: "As the Scripture has said, Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water"? What Scripture says this? Rendel Harris, in *The Expositor* viii, xx, p. 196, on the basis of the similarity between *כרסא* (*karsa*), "belly", and *כרסיה* (*kurseyā*), "throne", would emend to "Out of the throne shall flow rivers of living water." This reminds us of the living waters flowing from the Temple in Ezek. xlvii. 1ff. (cf. Joel iii. 18; Zech. xiv. 8), and still more forcibly of the "river of water of life, clear as crystal", which John saw "proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. xxii. 1). But Burney has another suggestion; he supposes (*A.O.F.G.*, pp. 109ff.) that *מַעַיַן* (*ma'yan*), "fountain"; has been vocalised as if it were *me'in*, another Aramaic word for "belly", so that his reconstruction runs "Rivers shall flow forth from the fountain of living waters," reminding us of the beautiful title of God in Jer. ii: 13. Torrey again, by a simpler emendation, the change of one vowel, would

³³ In *The Original Language of the Fourth Gospel*, reprinted from *The Jewish Guardian*, where it first appeared as a review of Burney's book.

read *min gawwah* ("from the midst of her") instead of *min gawweh* ("from the midst of him"), and thinks primarily of Ps. xlvi. 5, where "the midst of her" appears in the Aramaic Targum as *gawwah* (*F.G.*, p. 323; *O.T.G.*, pp. 108ff.).

Here, then, we have three very attractive emendations, by three very competent scholars. Each by itself would be almost convincing; but at most only one of them can be the true solution. Which is it? This will serve to illustrate the limitations of any argument which depends on the reconstruction of a document no longer extant.

There is, however, good ground for believing that "Proto-Matthew" and the first draft of Mk. were written in Aramaic. As regards Jn., the position is more complicated. The discourses certainly reflect an Aramaic original, and so do some of the narrative and meditative passages.

So, like Source and Form Criticism, but along a different route, the study of Aramaic origins takes us back behind our existing Greek Gospels to a period still nearer the events narrated, and helps to, confirm our confidence in the trustworthiness of the Gospels as they have come down to us. We should welcome all the light which critical scholarship and research can throw upon our Gospels, from every angle of approach. If our Gospels are

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untrustworthy, then the sooner we know it the better; but we who by grace of the Inward Testimony of the Holy Spirit know that He in whom we have believed is this same Jesus whom the Evangelists portray, are assured that we have not followed cunningly devised fables, and conclude therefore that as Truth can never contradict Truth, the truth about the origin of the Gospels can only serve to teach us more accurately, like Theophilus, the secure ground of those things wherein we have been instructed.

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