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A table of contents for *Journal of Biblical Literature* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jbl-01.php



Gergesa — a Reply

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THERE is one point in Mr. Clapp's interesting and instructive article on Gergesa and Bethabara (*Journal of Biblical Literature*, xxvi. pp. 62-83) where I venture to think he has misinterpreted the Syriac evidence. I fear I may myself have helped to mislead him, as I did not fully understand the matter when I was editing S^a and S^o in *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe*. In fact, I only recognized the importance of perfectly clear ideas about the 'Gergesenes' after reading his article.

The cure of the demoniac took place according to the best text of Matt. 8 28 in the country of the *Gadarenes*, but according to the best text of Mk. 5 1 and Lk. 8 28, 37 in the country of the *Gerasenes*. There is, however, a various reading, whereby *Gergesenes* (τῶν Γεργεσηνῶν) are substituted for Gadarenes or Gerasenes. Mr. Clapp seeks to show that the name Gergesenes is wholly due to a conjecture made by Origen, and therefore that all Mss. and Versions which attest Gergesenes are later than Origen (A.D. 230) and influenced by his speculations.

Among these textual authorities is S^a, the Sinai Palimpsest of the Old Syriac Version, which has 'Gergesenes' in Mk. 5 1, while reading Gadarenes in Matthew and Luke. On the reading of S^a in Mk. 5 1, Mr. Clapp remarks (p. 69): "It cannot be directly derived from Palestinian tradition, and probably also not directly from Origen, since it reads , not , as S^{1st} stands, and Origen must have read to make the connection with Gen. 15 21." S^{1st} is the Palestinian Syriac Lectionary, which reads 'Girgashites' in Matthew and

Luke,¹ thus identifying the Gadarenes or Gerasenes with the Old Testament Girgashites, as also Origen did. Mr. Clapp thinks that S^a here gives simply a transcription from a Greek Ms. that had adopted the Origenian correction in Mark, because it spells the name with 's' and not with 'sh,' thereby agreeing with the Greek *γεργασηνοί* or *γεργασαίοι*, instead of the Hebrew גֵּרְגָשִׁי.


But a little further investigation will show that the facts really point the other way. I was wrong to translate  in Mk. 5 1 by 'Gergesenes'; I ought to have translated it 'Girgashites,' because it reproduces the Syriac Old Testament spelling of this ethnic name. Whenever the Girgashites (גֵּרְגָשִׁי) are mentioned, *e.g.* in Gen. 15 21, the Peshitta has . This is also the form in the margin of the Harclean Syriac at Matt. 8 28, and it is correctly rendered there into Greek by *γεργασίων*, *i.e.* 'Girgashites,' not 'Gergesenes.'²

Thus, S^a in Mk. 5 1 represents an exegetical theory which regards the people mentioned in the verse as 'Girgashites,' not necessarily the Greek variant *γεργασηνών* for *γερσσηνών*. This also was Origen's view. I venture to think that Origen was not the first to suggest it.

Of course the question of Gergesa does not stand alone, as Mr. Clapp has seen. It is part of the question of the origin of the *Onomastica* and the earliest study of the Holy Places. It is true that most of this literature and tradition, as we have it, has passed through the hands of Origen or his disciples Eusebius and Jerome, but I do not think that Origen began it. It seems to me more likely that it took its rise in the local patriotism of Palestinian Christianity.

The cult of the Holy Places succeeded to the indifference of the second century. "It would seem that soon after A.D. 200 'the Places' was already a technical term in the

¹ S^a is not extant for Mk. 5 1 (*pace* Clapp, p. 68, note). In Lk. 8 28 the Vatican Lectionary has the geographical gloss, "... land of Girgashites, which is opposite, on the other side to Galilee."

² That S^a should drop the *a* in  is quite characteristic; see *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe*, II, 40. The Targum of Onkelos calls the Girgashites גֵּרְגָשִׁי.

language of pilgrimage, though it is clear that it applied to the Holy Land at large, and not to the Holy City only.”³ This is the judgment of Mr. C. H. Turner, who quotes the examples of Melito, Alexander, and Firmilian, as well as Origen. It hardly fell within Mr. Turner’s immediate purpose to point out that Origen’s interest in the Holy Places seems to begin only after his arrival in the Holy Land. We find it in the Commentary on S. John from Book VI onwards, written in Cæsarea, not in the earlier books written in Alexandria. Origen goes on pilgrimage to the Places, and finds some of the local identifications so plausible that he accepts them, and regards the current readings in Gospel Mss. as corrupt.⁴ He does not claim to have discovered ‘Bethabara’ or ‘Gergesa.’ At Bethabara in the gorge of the Jordan ‘they say’ that John baptized; at Gergesa, an ancient city by the Lake of Tiberias, there is a cliff from which ‘it is pointed out’ that the swine had been driven down by the devils;⁵ that is, in other words, Origen accepts the claim of places which have already claimed to be the sites mentioned in the Gospel.

The pilgrimage that Origen took must have been undertaken by the translator of the Old Syriac Version of the Gospel, or by some most intelligent Christian traveller on whose knowledge the translator relied. This unknown scholar—I should still like to call him Palut, but I fear Mr. Clapp would demur—had one advantage which Origen lacked. He was thoroughly skilled in Aramaic, his native language, and his ear discriminated between Semitic sounds which Origen confused. It is not, I think, sufficiently recognized, though I tried to lay stress upon it in *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe* (see especially my note on ‘Bethabara,’ vol. ii., p. 309), that the Old Syriac Version of the Gospels is a very considerable achievement of what may be called Sacred Geography and Nomenclature. The translator has deliberately aimed at giving the proper Aramaic equivalents

³ C. H. Turner, in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, i., p. 551.

⁴ *Comm. on John*, 6 ω, γερύμαροι ἐν τοῖς τόποις ἐπὶ ἱεροπόλιν τῶν ἰχθυῶν Ἰησοῦ.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6 ω.

of the Greek names, and it is no easy matter in many cases to recognize Semitic words in a Greek transliteration. The Syriac Old Testament, itself almost certainly the work of Jews, no doubt helped him greatly. By its aid he was able to turn *Ναχώρ* into *Nâhor*, *Σαρούχ* into *Sârog*, *Λάμεχ* into *Lamk*. He was not afraid of making considerable changes on Old Testament authority, and so *Σαλμών* (Matt. 14. 5) becomes *Shalâ* (שלם) on the authority of the Peshitta text of Ruth 4 20. 21, just as *Ἡλείας* becomes *Elijah* in the English Revised Version. But for most of the geographical names the Old Testament failed him, and here he seems to me to have deliberately trusted to local identification rather than to mere transliteration of the Greek. Thus of the comparatively obscure names we get *Beth 'Ania* for *Βηθανία* (near Jerusalem), *Beth Phagê* for *Βηθφαγή*,⁶ *Beth Hesdâ* for *Βηζαθά* (or however the name in Joh. 5 2 may have been spelt), *Beth Saïdâ* for *Βηθσαιδά* or *Βηθσαιδάν*. *Kurzîn* for *Χοραζεύ*, and *Nâsrath* for *Ναζαρέθ* or *Ναζαρά*, have, according to the Peshitta tradition, here given, a rather peculiar vocalization. But the consonants, which alone are directly attested by S^o and S^c, agree with the totally independent witness of purely Jewish writings. Not all these Semitic reconstructions commend themselves to modern scholars, in particular some which were accepted by later Greek ecclesiastical tradition. But their generally scholarly character, their frequent agreement with Talmudic data, coupled with their wide divergence from the Greek forms of the words, do seem to indicate that the translator of the Syriac Gospels was more anxious to give the right geographical names than to reproduce the peculiarities of the Greek Ms. of the Gospels from which he was translating.

The main point is that in Mk. 5 1 it is not quite correct to say that S^v supports the reading *Γεργεσηνῶν*; the accurate

⁶ *Beth Phag(g)ê* means 'Place of Wild-Figs,' a much more likely name for a village than 'Place of Jaws' (*οἶκος σιαγόνων*), which is what Origen thought it was (*Comm. on John*, 10 20. 122). Apparently he, or his source, thought of *פֶּה לֶעָל*. Does this indicate a specifically Syriac element in the *Onomastica*? The Talmud has *בֵּית פֶּה לֶעָל* (e.g. Tal. b. *Sota*, 45 a).

statement is that S^v agrees with Origen in recognizing the *χώρα τῶν Γερασσηῶν* as the 'land of the Girgashites.'⁷ Similarly in Joh. 1 28 S^v agrees with Origen in identifying *Βηθανία* beyond Jordan with that Bethabara which had already acquired a local fame as the place of John's baptism. Such agreement as this cannot of course be wholly independent, but as Origen speaks in each case of local claims (*δείκνυσθαι λέγουσι, δείκνυται*) the common source may very well be a knowledge of current Palestinian tradition, a tradition which may possibly have already begun to embody itself in early forms of the *Onomastica Sacra*. In these circumstances I still venture to date the Old Syriac Version of the Gospels about 200 A.D., and to regard that version as 'the earliest evidence we possess for the beginnings of the cult of the Holy Places' (*Ev. da-Mepharreshe*, ii., p. 309).

One conjecture at the end may be permitted, dealing not with the origin of the Syriac Version, but with the transmission of the story as a whole. On general grounds of Synoptic criticism, we may regard Mk. 5 1-20 as the original from which the parallel narratives in Matthew and Luke were derived, or at least as a fairly accurate representative of that original. Historical criticism of the tale must therefore start from the narrative in Mark. It seems to me not altogether hypercritical to see in Mk. 5 20 a clew as to the source from which this story came into Christian tradition. How did S. Mark know that the cured demoniac went home and told in the Decapolis the story of his wonderful healing? The answer obviously is that some one from the Decapolis, perhaps from Gerasa itself, told the story to S. Mark. In other words, the ultimate source of the narrative is the man who was healed: he tells the story as it appeared to him. Of course it has passed through other hands; we have to allow for the Evangelist himself and the man from whom the Evangelist heard the tale. But some of the more extravagant features of the story of the frenzied swine may very well

⁷ Note that *χώρα* is rendered 'Land' (ܠܢܗ) in Mk. 5 1 by S^v, not 'country' (ܚܘܪܐ). Does not this almost suggest that we are dealing with a conscious geographical paraphrase?

have taken concrete form in the diseased megalomania of 'him that had the Legion.' And if the tale came from Gerasa, we have an explanation why the action is supposed to occur in the 'country of the Gerasenes.'