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## An Unnoticed Aramaism in St. Mark.

BY J. RENDEL HARRIS, M.A., LL.D., LITT.D.

As the question of the existence of Aramaic influence in the Greek of the New Testament, including the case of what is definitely 'translation Greek,' is still an open question, in the sense that there is room for further demonstration of the existence of New Testament Semitisms, it may be worth while to draw attention to a striking case of Aramaic usage in St. Mark's Gospel, which, as far as I know, has hitherto escaped the notice of the critic and the commentator.

In the fourth chapter of Mark we are introduced to our Lord's parabolic teaching in the following manner: 'And he began again to teach by the sea-side; and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea.' So the passage runs in the A.V. with sufficient accuracy for our purpose: the R.V., indeed, replaces 'ship' by 'boat,' a change which was probably rendered necessary by the fact that *ships* have become bigger since the time when the Authorized Version was made, and the equivalent *skiffs* have become smaller. Other trivial changes, like 'there is gathered unto him,' which is hardly English, do not concern us; what does concern us is that both translations, following the Greek literally, report that our Lord 'sat in the sea,' a proceeding which might be described in the style of Dean Burgon, as sufficiently uncomfortable. Dr. Moffatt, who is our latest and, in many respects, best interpreter of the sense of the N.T., evades the difficulty of position and simply says:

'He entered a boat on the sea and sat down'—*i.e.* it was the boat that was on the sea, and not Jesus that was in the sea.

It has, apparently, as I stated above, escaped notice that the expression *ἐμβάντα καθῆσθαι* is the exact equivalent for the Aramaic term which describes the process which we call 'going on board.' Let me give one or two instances, translating Aramaic expressions as they certainly should be rendered.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In Moulton's *Prolegomena*, p. 2412, the usage is already recognized as a possible case of translation Greek, as follows: 'Dr. Rendel Harris tells me that my example is a translation of a phrase meaning simply "he went on board." He observes "to go up and sit in a ship" is a pure Syriac expression.

The Apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* are certainly Syriac in origin: we need not spend time in repeating proofs which every Syriac scholar can make for himself. In these Acts we have the story of how our Lord sells Thomas, his twin-brother, (so always in these Acts) to a merchant named Ḥabban, who is to take him by sea to India, where he is to build a palace for King Gundaphar. The story relates that 'Judas (Thomas) found Ḥabban the merchant carrying his goods on board the ship, and he began to carry them on board with him. And when they had *gone on board and sat down*, Ḥabban the merchant saith to Judas, What is thy art which thou art skilled in practising?'<sup>2</sup> Here the translator has been carried away by his own fidelity. There was no need to add the words 'and sat down.' In Syriac to 'go up (and) sit down' simply means to 'go on board.' Ḥabban and Judas might just as well have stood and talked as sat down and talked, so far as the language is concerned. Now let us see how the Greek translator of the Syriac Acts will render the idiom. We have as follows:

*ἐμβάντων δὲ αὐτῶν εἰς τὸ πλοῖον καὶ καθεσθέντων ἐξήταζεν ὁ Ἀββάνης τὸν ἀπόστολον λέγων.*

Here we have the exact parallel to the Marcan *ἐμβάντα καθῆσθαι*.

Later on in the Acts when Judas (Thomas) is commending his converts to the Heavenly care, he says to them: 'He will not forsake you. And if it be that ye sleep that sleep, which when a man sleeps, he is not, He will not sleep, but be wakeful and preserve you. *And if ye sit in a ship and on the sea*, where no man of you is able to help his fellow, He will walk upon the waves of the sea and support your ship.'<sup>3</sup>

Here the Aramaism, as often occurs, is slightly abbreviated, but is peculiarly interesting, because the very same expression 'to sit on the sea' occurs, Sometimes you "sit in the sea" for "embark" (Mk iv. 1, the original here) . . . the recognition of this as translation Greek does not affect the grammatical category in which we place *ἐμβάντα*.'

<sup>2</sup> *Acta Thomae*, ed. Wright, p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> *Acts of Thomas*, ii. 204; the passage is important for its Dioscuric colouring.

which we noticed in Mark. And it is worthy of remark that the Greek translator has here evaded the awkwardness of a literal rendering by saying,

καὶ ἐν θαλάσῃ πλεόντων ὑμῶν καὶ ἐν κινδύνῳ ὄντων,

so that he seems to have understood that to 'go up and sit in a ship' means to 'go on board and set sail.'

Instances might be multiplied to show that when a person 'sits in a ship' or 'goes up (and) sits in a ship,' the action of sitting is not involved, but only that of boarding a ship or embarking. The Edessan Syriac of the *Acts of Thomas* can be paralleled by the dialect which we call Palestinian Syriac; for instance, in the Palestinian *Life of Eulogius* the saint reports that

'Once upon a time I went to Thebais with one of my disciples and we sat in a ship,'

where he only means to say that 'once upon a time I sailed for Thebais in a ship with one of my disciples.'

Perhaps this will suffice to show what is the Aramaic way of describing an embarkation or a sea voyage. Note in passing that the Hebrew usage is altogether different: in Hebrew one 'descends' into a ship when one goes on board; but we need not spend time on this point: there is very little Hebrew in the N.T., though there are cases of Hebraized Aramaism.

Another instance may be taken from the Apocryphal *Acts of Philip*, which are also in the form edited by Wright, probably of Syriac origin. Philip goes to Cesarea, to find a ship that will take him to Carthage, where our Lord sends him to preach. He finds a ship that has been waiting twenty days for a wind. He addresses the captain who is fuming over the delay, but, struck with the appearance of Philip, he invites him to bring his baggage on board, and to pray for a favourable wind. Philip says:

'Thou seest me and my baggage: I have nothing else in the world, save Jesus the Messiah, and him crucified. But because I see that there are in thee the fruits of faith, order the people that are going with us to *come on board* (and) *sit down*<sup>1</sup> in the ship. And the captain ordered them and they all *came on board and sat down in it*.'<sup>2</sup>

Here even an English reader can see that we are

<sup>1</sup> Lit. 'go up, sit.'

<sup>2</sup> *Apocryphal Acts*, ed. Wright, ii. 71.

dealing with an Aramaic idiom, and that it would have been quite a sufficient translation to say 'come on board,' or 'come on board the ship,' and that the longer periphrastic rendering ought to have been abbreviated. It is precisely this long circumlocution that underlies the passage that we are discussing in the Gospel of Mark.<sup>3</sup>

Now let us return to the Evangelists, and see how the other Synoptic writers will deal with the Marcan passage and its awkward Greek. Luke is especially interesting: he could not leave our Lord sitting in the sea, but being loyal to his text he did not want to get rid of καθῆσθαι or of ἐμβάντα. So he rewrote the passage as follows:

ἐμβὰς δὲ εἰς ἓν τῶν πλοίων . . .  
καθίσας δὲ ἐκ τοῦ πλοίου ἐδίδασκεν τοὺς ὄχλους  
(Lk 5<sup>3</sup>).

The superfluous and not to be translated καθῆσθαι has now been explained to mean that Jesus sat in the boat when teaching. The original of Mark did not decide whether Jesus sat or stood.

Matthew takes a different line: he preserves carefully the ἐμβάντα καθῆσθαι of Mark, but drops the confusing ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ, so that no further misunderstanding can arise:

ὥστε αὐτὸν εἰς πλοῖον ἐμβάντα καθῆσθαι  
καὶ πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος ἐπὶ τὸν αἰγιαλὸν ἰστήκει  
(Mt 13<sup>2</sup>).

which really seems to be the best way of telling the story, if one has not the wit or the courage to neglect καθῆσθαι altogether. Matthew is, however, so far from neglecting the word that he makes a further introductory statement that Jesus sat by the sea! This is an alternative rendering.

When we turn to the Syriac Gospels, to see how they retranslate the language of Mark, we find that the Peshitto reproduces the Syriac idiom almost exactly:

'He went up (and) sat him in a ship on the sea';

but the Lewis Syriac, which is the earlier type, and which was made, as far as we can judge, under Hebrew or Hebraizing influence, says that 'he

<sup>3</sup> The linguistic usage is precisely similar to that for riding a horse: in Syriac, *to go up, ride* means simply *to mount*. Thus in the *Acts of Thomas*, the tamed wild ass says to the Apostle, *mount upon me* (lit. *go up, ride upon me*). And the apostle *mounted upon it* (lit. *went up, rode upon it*). Cf. Wright ii. 180, 182.

went down (and) sat him in the ship on the sea': this is idiomatic and Aramaic in the junction of the two related verbs and in the omission of the connexion link between the verbs, but it is Hebraistic in saying 'went down' instead of 'went up.' Cf. Jon 1<sup>3</sup>, 'He went down into the ship to go with them,' where the LXX very naturally correct the expression to ἐνέβη εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦ πλεῦσαι κτῆ, which may be compared with the Marcan text.<sup>1</sup>

In conclusion, it may not be amiss to point out

<sup>1</sup> The reading of the Lewis text is that given by Mrs. Lewis, and subsequently confirmed by Professor Hjelt. Professor Burkitt had wrongly altered it to agree with the Peshitto, thus obscuring an important point in the genesis of the Syriac Gospels.

that the investigation into these idiomatic nautical expressions is important in the interpretation of the opening verses of the 39th Ode of Solomon. I have elsewhere pointed out that the literal expression

'I went up into the light of truth as into a ship (or chariot)'

required modification, on the very ground which we have been examining: the language is certainly nautical and we must translate

'I went on board the Light of Truth as a ship.'

The '*Light of Truth*' is the name of the ship in which the Odist sails.

## The Heart of Jesus.

### A COMMUNION MEDITATION.

BY THE REV. FREDERICK J. RAE, M.A., ABERDEEN.

ONE day as I was going round one of the military hospitals, I saw something that awakened my curiosity. Lying on the table beside a soldier's bed was a small square of white flannel, about the size of a child's palm. At the centre was a little heart of red flannel. Sewn on to the square above this was a tiny cross of the same red material. At the top, stuck in on a pin, was a very small Union Jack. And then below all these was sewed on the white flannel the words: 'Arrête! Le cœur de Jésus est avec moi' ('Stop! The heart of Jesus is with me'). This object had been handed to the soldier by a little Belgian child on the street of a village as he and his comrades had marched through. He did not know the meaning of the words on his souvenir. But when I translated them to him he was much affected, as well he might be. The incident struck me as very beautiful and touching. The stalwart soldiers swinging through the village, come there to help the weak and oppressed at the call of duty; and the little child stretching out a hand with this message from the unseen, a message surely of surpassing loveliness and power.

I am going to use this child's gift to-day to expound these words<sup>1</sup> about the Saviour. 'The

<sup>1</sup> 'For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been

heart of Jesus is with me'—that is simply a brief and telling summary of them. And the symbols above this sentence tell us what it means. Under this suggestive light the text has in it these four things about the sympathy of the Saviour: (1) The sympathy of Jesus is with the faithful; (2) the sympathy of Jesus is with the sufferer; (3) the sympathy of Jesus was purchased by the Cross; and (4) the sympathy of Jesus is our great incentive to prayer.

#### I.

#### *The Sympathy of Jesus with the Faithful.*

First, the sympathy of Jesus is with the faithful. That is what the Union Jack meant. The message of the little child to the soldier was something like this: 'You come to help us because we are weak. You come in the way of duty. And therefore you have the right to say, "The heart of Jesus is with me."'

Could anything be more encouraging for a soldier lad going into the fight than that! He had gone at his country's call. He had gone at the summons of helplessness and need. Who had a better right

in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need' (He 4<sup>15, 16</sup>).