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

BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS

IS ACTS I–XV. 35 A LITERAL TRANSLATION FROM AN ARAMAIC ORIGINAL?

Dr. Torrey's masterly exposition in the *Harvard Theological Studies*, No. I, of his theory of the Aramaic origin of Acts 1-15:35 is extremely suggestive, but before it is accepted it is desirable that his arguments shall be tested by an appeal to the literary and spoken Greek of the present day.

I propose to take some of those passages in which Dr. Torrey sees an unmistakably Aramaic original and shall endeavor to show that they are explicable on the hypothesis that they represent the colloquial Greek of the first century and present no difficulties to one whose native language is that of Greece today.

It is of course comparatively easy to one who has such a grasp of Palestinian Aramaic as Dr. Torrey and so keen an eye to detect divergencies from the Greek to which he is accustomed, to render a passage into Aramaic so skilfully as to persuade Semitic scholars that his version may be the original of the Greek of the Acts. But if it can be proved that there is really no difficulty in the Greek which he finds questionable to one accustomed to use the language in ordinary life, it may at least cause him to pause before he finally decides that his theory that Acts is translation Greek is the only possible one.

I am quite prepared to admit that the writer of the opening chapters of Acts employs a style saturated with Semitic vocabulary and methods of expression, and I see several instances of this which Dr. Torrey has not mentioned, though doubtless he has observed them. Taking, however, into account that the writer was thoroughly familiar with the Greek of the Septuagint, which betrays its translation character throughout, and may also have used Aramaic sources, I fail to see that Dr. Torrey has proved his case by the passages he has adduced as these are equally explicable by the method which I propose to adopt.

Let us take Acts 2:47 and Dr. Torrey's ingenious explanation of the difficulty he sees in the words ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό. He solves it by translating it into Palestinian Aramaic, using the word לחדא which he explains as meaning 'greatly'.

But before accepting his view that the presence of the Greek words in this position betray translation Greek, it is necessary to see whether it cannot be shown that the author of Acts employed language perfectly compatible with ordinary Greek usage.

(1)   The following examples are taken from classical authors. The most significant are two from Thucydides.

Thucydides bk. 1. 79.   Καὶ τῶν μὲν πλειόνων ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ αἱ γνῶμαι ἔφερον, ἀδικεῖν τε τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἤδη καὶ πολεμητέα εἶναι ἐν τάχει.

"Whereupon the opinion of the majority bore *upon the same point* that the Athenians had already been guilty of injustice and that they should go to war without delay."

Thucydides bk. 3. 59.   Καὶ δίκαιον, εἰ μὴ πείθομεν, εἰς τὰ αὐτά καταστήσαντες, τὸν ξυντυχόντα κίνδυνον ἐᾶσαι ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς ἐλέσθαι.

"And if we cannot convince you, it is only fair that you should put us in *the same position* as we were, and to leave us to choose how to meet the danger to which we should be exposed."

(2)   The words ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό are naturally very common in the LXX and it seems superfluous to multiply examples. It is, however, necessary to give those where a transitive verb is used, like προσετίθει in Acts.

Exodus 26:9 (συνάψεις . . . . ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό); Ps. 33:4, at end of sentence (ὑψώσωμεν . . . . ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό); 54:14; 73:6; 2 Esdr. 4:3 (οἰκοδομήσομεν . . . . ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτο); Jer. 3:18; 26:12; Mal. 2:3; 3:1 (συναγαγεῖν . . . . ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό); 3 Macc. 3:1.

In Ps. 33:4 we have a remarkable example of ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ concluding a sentence as in Acts 2:47.

We may, however, add a few uses of this phrase with the middle and passive form of the verb: Ps. 2:2; Neh. 4:8; Ps. 100:22; Hosea 2:2, as they bear on their use in connection with προστίθημι.

(3)   In the Apostolic Fathers stress is laid on the unity of the church emphasized in Acts. In Barnabas 4:10, like the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (10:25), the writer is aware of the danger of particularism; Christians are not to

live alone (μονάζετε ὡς ἤδη δεδικαιωμένοι), but to assemble ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό and consult for the common (κοινῇ) benefit (cf. Acts 2:42 the stress laid on κοινωνία.)

Ignatius attaches great importance to unity, and twice uses the words ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό. Frequent meetings of the church are urged in Eph. 13:1 as the power of the Christians when united ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ is more effectual in their warfare with Satan (cf. our Lord's words on the efficacy of unity συμφωνεῖν in prayer, Matt. 18:19).

In Magnesians 7:1 the same warning against exclusively private devotion is heard as in Barnabas. "Together ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ let there be one prayer, one supplication, one mind, one hope in love."

The Philadelphians (6:2) are warned to flee from Satan's ambuscades and to betake themselves to the common assembly (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό) in oneness of heart (ἐν ἀμερίστῳ καρδίᾳ). Επὶ τὸ αὐτὸ occurs in the same sense in 10:1.

In I Clement 34:7 we have ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ in a passage extremely liturgical in tone, comparing the Christian service of worship to that of the angels who stand before God and say the Trisagion. "Yea, and let ourselves then, being gathered together in concord (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ συναχθέντες ἐν ὁμονοίᾳ) with intentness of heart cry unto him as from one mouth earnestly. . ."

The above citations go to prove what everyone is prepared to admit: namely that ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ is an ordinary Greek expression especially common in the LXX. When, however, we turn to the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers, it is evident that it has a technical meaning. It signifies the union of the Christian body. An essential part of the Gospel is realized to be its unifying power in bringing men into one society, a thought on which Acts lays strong emphasis.

Thus in I Cor. 11:20 Paul, in speaking of the disorders attendant upon the Eucharist at Corinth, introduces the subject thus: "When ye come together" ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ. He uses the word συνέρχεσθαι no less than three times in four verses (17-20); and the leading thought is that the ideal of a Christian meeting is unity, whereas that of the Corinthians does not attain its object. They came together, not as Christians should, for better, but for worse. The Eucharist has become, not a bond of union,

but a cause of division (συνερχομένων ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀκούω σχίσματα ἐν ὑμῖν). They came together (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό) in appearance, but not in reality. In other words, they fell short of the true Christian ideal of unity.

It is the same in I Cor. 14: 23: the spiritual gifts, especially that of glossolalia, improperly exercised tend to disturb the unity of the Christian meeting (ἐὰν οὖν συνελθῇ ἡ ἐκκλησία ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό). In Justin Martyr's well-known description of Christian worship I Apology 41: 11 the assembly of the faithful is a meeting ''together'' (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ συνέλευσις).

In Acts itself, however, we have the strongest argument against ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ in 2: 47 being so difficult as to be only explicable by 'being translation Greek.' The ecclesiastical bias of the author is manifest throughout. His object is to show the essential oneness of the Church and that the believers all entered into one body. Twice in the first section of the book does he use ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ, emphatically in this sense (1: 15 ἦν δὲ ὄχλος ὀνομάτων ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ), the unity of the little company after the Ascension, and again on the day of Pentecost, the meeting of the believers is said to have been ὁμοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ (2: 1). A third introduction of the words in 2: 47 need cause no trouble. The new brethren whom the Lord added to the Church were joined together in the community ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό. Obviously here the author is expressing his own central idea in his own words which may be a reminiscence of Septuagintal language, but is assuredly not borrowed from some one else who wrote in Aramaic.

Acts 13 : 25 is a passage in which Dr. Torrey sees no less than three distinct traces of an Aramaic original (p. 37).

(1) 'As John was fulfilling his course'. Ἐπλήρου is the translation of the Aramaic ישׁלם .

Πληροῦν is used 90 times in the NT. in 18 different books by 7 authors, counting the Johannine Gospel and three Epistles as by one, and the Apocalypse as by another hand. In 43 cases it means fulfillment of Scripture, and in 47 it is employed in another sense. How, therefore, can it be said that here it can be used as an evidence for an Aramaic original?

(2) Who do you suppose that I am? Τί ἐμὲ ὑπονοεῖτε εἶναι; accepting the reading τί rather than τίνα, Dr. Torrey remarks 'This is a regular Aramaic idiom'. So it is; but it is also an

English one. The Baptist asked the people 'What do you think I am?' They presumably knew *who* he was; but they did not know *what* he was—a prophet or the Messiah. It is true that in the Lord's question Matt. 6:13; Mk. 8:27; Lk. 9:18 we have τίνα, but we might have expected τί. A modern Greek would certainly use the *neuter* if he enquired in what capacity a man was acting, or what office he held.

(3) Οὐ εἰμὶ ἐγώ 'I am not he'. Here Dr. Torrey notes an Aramaism (not a Hebraism) in the repetition of the first person. But the passage can be easily rendered ''I am not, what you think I am.''

Acts. 14:17 ἐμπιμπλῶν τροφῆς καὶ εὐφροσύνης τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν, Dr. Torrey feels that it is absurd to say that our hearts can be 'filled with food'; so he retranslates the passage into Aramaic, then emends the text and gives as the true rendering ''Filling our hearts with all gladness.'' But a modern Greek would translate the verse thus: ''giving rain from heaven and fruitful seasons filling you to the full with food, and with gladness your hearts.'' The ἐμπιμπλῶν τροφῆς is a strong expression separate and complete in itself.

Acts 13:1 the phrase κατὰ τὴν οὖσαν ἐκκλησίαν in the Church which is (or was) there. This is another example of the translation of the Aramaic word אֲרִית, see also note on 5:17. But it appears to me that Dr. Torrey's rendering of the Greek is questionable. Κατὰ τὴν οὖσαν seems to distinguish the community of prophets and teachers in Antioch from those in Jerusalem. The verse would then mean ''The Church of Antioch as distinct from that of Jerusalem (this would be what is implied by κατὰ) had its prophets and teachers.''

This is at best a clumsy paraphrase of what a Greek could express in the few words employed by Luke. This rendering would help to indicate that the author had entered upon a new stage in his history. Hitherto the spiritual movement had emanated from Jerusalem, now a new centre had been found in Antioch.

Our conclusion is that though the writer of Acts may have and probably did use an Aramaic source or sources and betray by his language that he was translating instead of composing, it is scarcely conceivable that, as Dr. Torrey maintains. he used a

single source and translated it with slavish accuracy. Even though the internal evidence were far stronger than it actually is, our knowledge of Luke's treatment of other sources such as Mark and Q would make us hesitate to adopt the theory. But it has been sufficiently shown that in some places where Dr. Torrey sees clearest proof of translation Greek the author of Acts is not even thinking in Aramaic, but using the common language of his age.

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I have read Mr. Vazakas' article with interest, and hope that other scholars also will be moved to contribute to the discussion from their various points of view. I am sorry that Mr. Vazakas does not give us his rendering of Acts 2:47. It is precisely the difficulty of rendering ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό *in this verse* (not in all the other contexts, where its connection and meaning are matters of course) that has perplexed the best Greek scholars ever since the second century.

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