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## THE ODES OF SOLOMON: JEWISH OR CHRISTIAN?

IN the following pages some considerations are offered which have led me to think that the Odes of Solomon are an entirely Christian work, as against Dr Harnack's view that the main body of them is Jewish, and that the definitely Christian portions (about one-eighth of the whole) were added later. Study of the Syriac text has impressed me with the belief that the passages bracketed out by Harnack as Christian interpolations are in spirit, thought, and vocabulary so intimately related to the rest that nothing short of identity of authorship can satisfactorily account for them. Harnack himself is much impressed by the closeness of this relation, for he writes: 'Für "Johannes" hat also sowohl der ursprüngliche jüdische Verfasser als auch der christliche Interpolator die grösste Bedeutung'; and again: 'sind aber der ursprüngliche Dichter und der Interpolator dem Verfasser des vierten Evangeliums verwandt, so sind sie auch unter sich verwandt. . . . Die Interpolationen sind z. T. im Geiste des ursprünglichen Verfassers *mutatis mutandis* gedichtet.'

Dr Harnack's hypothesis then postulates a good deal. We have to think of a Jew and a Christian, separated by perhaps a century, both deeply imbued with 'Johannine' ideas, and having, in addition, a mutual affinity of such a kind as to make it probable that the *milieu* of the Christian interpolator was one not far removed from that of the original Jewish author: 'dies macht es aber wahrscheinlich, dass der Interpolator räumlich dem Kreise nicht ferngestanden hat, dem die ursprünglichen Oden angehören.' The following are the passages which Harnack regards as Christian interpolations: 3<sup>9</sup>, 7<sup>4b-8, 14, 15, 18, 8<sup>23-26</sup></sup>, 9<sup>3</sup>, 10<sup>4b-6, 8</sup>, 17<sup>10-14, 15</sup>, 19, 23<sup>16, 19</sup>, 24<sup>1</sup>, 27, 29<sup>6-7a, 8(?)</sup>, 31<sup>3-11</sup>, 36<sup>3</sup>, 39<sup>10</sup>, 41<sup>1-7 11-17</sup>, 42<sup>1-3, 17-26</sup>, and parts also of 42<sup>4-16</sup>.

If we suppose that the object of the interpolator was to Christianize the Odes, it must be admitted that he was a consummate artist. One who reads the Odes through with Harnack's supposition in mind can hardly fail to be struck by the extraordinary forbearance of this Christianizing interpolator. With the exception of Ode 19 and the last two verses of 22, the Christian colouring, though unmistakable, is as delicate as it well could be, being for the most part by way of allusion to, or implication of, Christian beliefs, rarely by explicit statement. Again, while it is not easy in many cases to assign a motive for either the place

or the content of the interpolations, it is also difficult to conceive why so many of the Odes should have been left wholly untouched.

These are some of the general impressions which the Odes have left upon others besides myself. But my present purpose is to shew by particular examples that the Christian element goes deeper than Dr Harnack seems to have observed; while, on the other hand, passages in which he has detected Christianity, are so interlaced in other ways with the rest as to make it impossible to detach them with any degree of verisimilitude. In quoting from the Odes I shall for the convenience of readers usually place in square brackets references to the suspected passages.

I. Ode [42<sup>17-25</sup>] is rejected by Harnack from the Jewish *Grundstock* because it obviously treats of the descent of Christ to Hades. Why he does not include verses 15 and 16 in the bracket is not obvious, since they are plainly an integral part of the *Descensus* passage. Perhaps it is because Death and Sheol (= Hades) are also mentioned together in another Ode, in which there is nothing overtly Christian, viz. 15<sup>9</sup>. Of Ode 42, verses 15 to the end have most of the features that are familiar to us from Tischendorf's so-called *Gospel of Nicodemus* part II: Hades is disturbed by the advent of Christ; and Death vomits Him up, and many along with Him, for He is as gall and bitterness to him: many run to meet Him, and hail Him as the Son of God, begging Him to release them from bonds and darkness. There is no mistaking this: here, in one of our Odes, is a veritable *Descensus* document; and we shall not be justified in relegating it to a later date than the rest until, at least, we are sure that the collection contains no other reference to the descent to Hades.

Now in Ode 17, after an allusion in verse 4 to a release from 'choking bonds', and the statement in *vv.* 8, 9 that 'from thence He gave me the way of His goings (*or* steps), and I opened the doors that were closed, and brake in pieces the bars of iron', we read straight on in verse [10 foll.], 'nothing appeared closed to me: because I was the door of everything. And I went over all my prisoners to loose them; that I might not leave any bound or binding . . . and they received my blessing and lived; and they were gathered to me and were saved.'

With the last clause of this passage compare the following from the *Descensus* part of Ode 42 [verse 19]: 'and I made a congregation of the living among his dead.'<sup>1</sup> As regards verses 8 and 9—the opening of closed doors, and the breaking of iron bars,—and verses [10 foll.]—the loosing of prisoners—surely they are integral parts of one and the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Gosp. Nicod.* Latin A c. 8 (24): 'statim omnes sancti sub manu domini adunati sunt'; also Latin B c. 9 (25): 'et congaudentes concurrebant sub manibus domini.'

same Ode: cf. the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, Greek form c. 5 (21): 'And immediately with these words the brazen gates were shattered, and the iron bars broken, and all the dead who had been bound came out of the prisons.'

I now pass to Ode 22, in which Harnack finds no interpolations. It begins: 'He who brought me down from the height also brought me up from the lower (regions).' It goes on in verse 5 foll.: 'He that overthrew by my hands the dragon with seven heads: and Thou hast set me over his roots that I might destroy his seed. Thou wast there and didst help me . . . and Thy hand levelled a way for those who believe in Thee; and Thou didst choose them from the graves, and didst separate them from the dead. Thou didst take dead bones and didst cover them with bodies; they were motionless, and Thou didst give the energy of life.'

Here we have to ask, what connexion has the dragon with seven heads with the descent to Hades? In the first place it may be remarked that it is needless to trace this dragon further than Apoc. xiii 3, where he appears, as in the Ode, with seven heads; and on the authority of Apoc. xx 2 we may venture to identify him with 'the Devil and Satan'. Now in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, Greek form c. 7 (23), Hades addresses Satan thus: 'O arch-devil, beginning of death, root of sin, end of all evil.' If the dragon in our Ode then is Satan, we find him alluded to, together with his 'root' (= sin), in a formal account of the *Descensus*.

There are two other points in the passage quoted from Ode 22 which must now be considered, viz. *v.* 7, the levelling of a way before those who believe, and *vv.* 9, 10, the 'dead bones' (obviously an allusion to Ezekiel). The first of these features appears in a less definite form in Ode 17<sup>10</sup> (dealt with above): 'and from thence He gave me the way of His goings (or steps), and I opened the doors that were closed', &c. For further illustration we must go outside our present *Gospel of Nicodemus*. A moderate acquaintance with early Syriac literature is enough to reveal the fact that one of the most popular themes among Syriac writers of the fourth century was that of the *Descensus ad inferos*. Any one who will read through St Ephraim's Nisibene Hymns, nos. xxxv-lxviii, in the Latin version of Bickell or in the English one given in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* xiii pp. 193-219, will see at once that the author is using a document which presented practically all the features of our so-called *Gospel of Nicodemus*, though probably not identical with any of the three current recensions. The elaborate dialogues, in which Satan, Sheol (= Hades) and Death figure, are on exactly the same lines as in our documents, and they can only be explained by the use of a written source. The same is true of a long passage in Aphraates (written c. 335), *Hom.* xxii §§ 4-5. This evidence

of Ephraim and Aphraates for the existence in Syriac of a written account of the *Descensus* in the fourth century explains certain features, not found in our set documents, but shared by several Syriac writers. The most striking of these is the statement that when Christ departed from Sheol He trod a way for the dead to follow in. The following passages will illustrate the occurrence of this idea in Odes 17 and 22.

1. *Acts of Judas Thomas* (Wright, p. 155): 'And Thou didst descend to Sheol, and go to its uttermost end [cp. Ode 42<sup>17</sup>]; and didst open its gates and bring forth its prisoners [cp. 17<sup>8, 11</sup>], and *didst tread for them a path* (leading) above.'

2. *Ibid.* p. 288: 'Thou didst descend into Sheol with mighty power, and the dead saw Thee and became alive, and the lord of death was not able to bear (it), and Thou *didst tread for them a path* (leading) on high; and in Thy footsteps all Thy redeemed followed.' On page 187 is a passage which gives us another idea already noticed in Odes 17<sup>14</sup> and 42<sup>19</sup>: 'Jesus, right hand of the Father, who hast hurled down the evil one to the lowest limit,<sup>1</sup> and collected his possessions *into one blessed place of meeting.*'

3. Aphraates *Hom.* xii § 8 (ed. Parisot, col. 524): 'Our Redeemer divided (*or* broke open) Sheol, and shattered her doors, and He went into her midst and opened them, *and trod a way before all those who believed in Him.*'

4. St. Ephraim *Homily on our Lord* (ed. Lamy, vol. i p. 145; English transl. in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* xiii p. 305): 'And He departed from Sheol, and took up His abode in the Kingdom, that He might *seek out a path from Sheol.*'

Here are four passages, from three different writers, all making in effect the same statement, that Christ trod a way for the dead out of Sheol. In the passage from Aphraates xii we have the idea in a form which is very close indeed to that found in Ode 22<sup>19</sup>, viz.: 'and (He) trod a way before all *those who believed in Him.*'

The second point for illustration in Ode 22 is the reference to the quickening of the dead bones. This is not found in the *Descensus* documents printed by Tischendorf; but it appears in the *Descensus* dialogues of St Ephraim's Nisibene Hymns (xxxvii): 'I saw in the valley Ezekiel, who quickened the dead when he was questioned; and I saw the bones move which were (mingled together) in confusion. There was a noise of the bones in Sheol, each bone searching for its fellow and each joint for its mate . . . unquestioned the voice of Jesus, the commander of (all) creatures, quickened them.' I think it will appear from some of the variants cited by Tischendorf *Evang. Nicod.*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ode 42<sup>17</sup>: 'I went down with him to the utmost of his depth'; and *Gosp. Nicod.* Latin A c. 7 (24): 'et firma ima carcerum confregit.'

Latin A c. 4 (20) no. 3 that Ephraim is here reproducing a written source: cp. his 'questioned . . . unquestioned' with the 'divinis precibus . . . sine precibus' of the Latin document. In these Hymns we also find Satan addressed by Death as 'Dragon' (Hymn lviii), the Syriac word *tannin* being the same that is used in Ode 22.

The evidence here brought together leaves no doubt in my mind that Odes 17 and 22, equally with 42, deal with the descent of Christ to Hades. But they do not, I think, exhaust the allusions to this subject in the Odes. The mention of Death and Sheol together in 15<sup>o</sup>, as in the *Descensus* portion of 42, has already been pointed out. Ode 31, I believe, also refers to this event: cp. v. 6 'come forth ye that have been afflicted, and receive joy, and possess your souls by His grace; and take to you immortal life'. The next verse (7) should, I think, be translated: 'and they made me a debtor to him (sc. Death) to whom I was not a debtor.' (For the omission of the usual 'referring' pronoun and preposition *leh*, see Nöldeke *Syr. Gram.* § 347.) Again, Ode 21 appears to me to be put into the mouth of the risen Christ, who is released from the bonds (of death?), clothed in light for darkness, and acquires 'members free from sorrow and affliction and pain'. With this compare [17<sup>14</sup>] 'because they were to me as my members, and I was their head'. Ode 33 also is intelligible as a message to the dead. The key to this interpretation lies in v. 2: 'and He destroyed perdition from before Him, and spoiled<sup>1</sup> all its belongings.' The spoiling of Death, or Hades, is a feature of the *Descensus* emphasized by Aphraates in his most elaborate passage on this subject, Hom. xxii § 4: 'and He went in to him (Death) and began to spoil his possessions'; and again: 'He oppressed Death by spoiling of his possessions.'

II. In Ode 11, in which again Harnack finds no interpolations, we have a description of Paradise, which presents practically all the features found in the *Apocalypse of Peter*. The following parallels will illustrate this statement (I quote from the edition of the *Apocalypse* by Robinson and James, p. 49).

*Peter.**Ode 11.*

'The Lord shewed me a very great space.'

v. 14: 'and He carried me to His Paradise.' v. 20: 'for there is abundant room in thy Paradise.'

'The air there was illuminated with the rays of the sun.'

v. 12: 'And the Lord was like sun shining on the face of the land.'

<sup>1</sup> This is the literal meaning of the word; while that rendered 'belongings' means 'preparation', or 'things prepared': it is sometimes used for 'a meal', but naturally applies to any kind of acquired property. The Greek may have been *σκεύη*: cf. Matt. xii 29 τὰ σκεύη αὐτοῦ ἀρπάσαι.

*Peter.*

'And the earth itself blossoming with unfading flowers . . . and . . . plants . . . bearing blessed fruit.'

'And so strong was the perfume that it was borne to us even from thence.'

'And the dwellers of that place were clad in the raiment of the angels of light.'

'And with one voice they praised the Lord God.'

*Ode II.*

*v.* 11: 'and I became like the land which blossoms and rejoices in its fruits.'

*v.* 13: 'and my breath enjoyed the pleasant odour of the Lord.'

*v.* 10: 'and the Lord renewed me in His raiment, and possessed me by His light.'

*v.* 15: 'and I worshipped the Lord on account of His glory.'

III. Ode 7<sup>16-17</sup> I translate thus: 'For knowledge He hath set as His way. He made it broad and He made it long, and He brought it to all perfection. And He set in it the footprints of His light; and I (*or* it: sc. 'knowledge') walked from the beginning to the end.'

With the thought and language of these verses is connected a whole series of passages in the Odes, from the 'interpolated' and 'uninterpolated' parts alike. First, it is to be noted that Dr. Harris's '*traces of light*' are literally '*footprints of light*'. The fact that the same striking metaphor is found in 10<sup>7</sup> also ('and footprints of light were set upon their heart, and they walked in my life and were redeemed'), is perhaps the reason why Dr Harnack has kept these two verses of Ode 7 as part of the original work, while he brackets out the two preceding verses and the one following. The thought in the two passages is clearly the same: '*footprints of light*' are left on the road, or in the hearts, of believers to guide them in the way in which they are to 'walk'. Compare again Ode 29<sup>6-7</sup> ['For I believed in the Lord's Messiah, and it (*or* He) appeared to me that He is the Lord; and He shewed me His *sign*], and *led me by His light*'. The words in brackets are regarded by Harnack as interpolations.

I now turn to Ode 39, which begins: 'Great rivers are the power of the Lord: and those who despise Him they carry headlong.' But, it is said (*vv.* 5, 6), 'those who walk on them without blemish shall not fear, for a *sign* on them is the Lord; and the *sign is a way* for those who cross in the name of the Lord.' Here again, as in [29<sup>7</sup>], we have the Lord's 'sign' as a guide in the way. What is this sign? The answer is found in *vv.* 8 ff, which I translate thus: 'The Lord bridged them by His word, and He walked and crossed them on foot. And His *footprints* remain on the waters; and they are not effaced, but they are

like a (piece of) wood<sup>1</sup> which is established in truth (*or* with firmness). [And on this side and on that the waves were lifted up; but the *foot-prints* of our Lord the Messiah remain, and they are not obliterated neither are they effaced.] And a way was set for those who cross after Him.' The brackets again mark 'interpolations'. Here we have the 'sign' of Ode [29<sup>7</sup>] identified with the 'footprints' of Odes 7 and 10; and the thought connected with them is still the same—marks in the way for those who come after. But in 39 a further figure is introduced: these footprints are compared to a ξύλον firmly set up: by which is evidently meant some sort of road-post, either for direction, or simply to mark the boundary of the road. This figure may be illustrated from a Syriac writer. Philoxenus of Mabbōgh († c. 523) opens his seventh Discourse thus (I quote Dr Budge's translation<sup>2</sup>): 'The way of the rule and conduct of Christian life hath been trodden and made smooth by the example of the righteous men of old for whosoever wisheth to travel therein, and the marks of the footsteps of those who have before gone thereupon are before us, that we ourselves may go forward therein with ease. And like *sign-posts* and mile-stones which are set by the side of a natural road, that they may define [lit. 'shut in'] the place wherein the passers by are to travel, so are the examples and types of the men of old', &c. The word for 'sign-posts' is ܟܘܠܐ, from ܟܘܠܐ, 'to know', and it naturally denotes a notice of some sort. From its etymology, and the fact that it is coupled with 'mile-stones', it can hardly mean posts set at short intervals to keep vehicles on the road, though this is suggested by the context.

In Odes 7, 10, 29, and 39 we have now got the following equation: 'footprints of light' = 'footprints' = a 'sign' to mark the way = a wooden road-post. We may now turn to another passage, Ode 42<sup>1-2</sup> (also bracketed out by Harnack). I translate as literally as possible: 'I spread forth my hands and drew near to my Lord. For the extension of my hands is His *sign*: my spreading forth is the outspread *wood* which is hung over (*or* on) the way of the Upright (*or* straight) One.'<sup>3</sup> The three short verses of Ode 27 are nearly identical with this; and I suspect that Ode 27 is only the beginning of Ode 42, once copied out of place and afterwards regarded as a separate Ode. In the last clause of the passage just translated Zahn has suggested an alteration of the text which gives the sense, 'on which the Beloved was hanged'. This

<sup>1</sup> It is a mistake to translate ܟܘܠܐ 'tree': it means rather any piece of wood that is *not* growing in the ground, no doubt translating ξύλον.

<sup>2</sup> *Discourses of Philoxenus* vol. ii p. 184: the text is in vol. i p. 191.

<sup>3</sup> This is very awkward, and I suspect that the original reading was ܟܘܠܐ ܟܘܠܐ, not ܟܘܠܐ ܟܘܠܐ. This gives the natural sense 'over the *straight* way': see the expression 'straight way' in 38<sup>7</sup>, translated 'right path' by Dr Harris.



emendation is a violent one: but it well illustrates the difficulty there is in understanding the passage if we regard it (as it is usually regarded) as a direct allusion to the cross. A piece of wood hung up over a way involves the idea of some sort of roadside direction. And that this is really the meaning is, I venture to think, made practically certain by the foregoing passage from Ode 39, where the 'sign' of Christ's footprints on the water is compared to 'a ξύλον established in truth (*or* firmly fixed)'. The cross may very well have been in the writer's mind also; but it does not satisfy the language in which the figure is couched. I would paraphrase the passage thus: 'I, standing with my hands outstretched, am the Lord's sign,—like a piece of wood hung up over the way.' Taken thus *vv.* 1-3 explain *v.* 4 also: 'and I became of no use<sup>1</sup> to those who did not hold by<sup>2</sup> me.' The road-sign is useless to those who do not observe its directions: just as in 39<sup>2</sup> those who despise the Lord are carried headlong, but (*v.* 5) those who are blameless do not fear, 'for the sign in them (the rivers) is the Lord.' Note that the word for 'sign' in both these Odes is not in any way connected by Syriac usage with the cross or the sign of the cross.

I think it will appear from this investigation that Odes 7, 10, 27, 29, 39, and 42—in their 'interpolated' and 'uninterpolated' parts alike—are linked up by a chain of ideas and expressions which can only be explained satisfactorily by supposing them to have one and the same author. On the count of mere language we may connect two more Odes with the group, viz. 6 and 11; for while we read in 7<sup>17</sup>: 'And He set upon it the footprints of His light; and I walked therein (i.e. in the way of knowledge) *from the beginning to the end*'; we find in 6<sup>4</sup>: 'for thus it was *from the beginning, and will be to the end*'; and in 11<sup>3,4</sup>: 'I ran in His way in His peace, even in the way of truth: *from the beginning and even to the end* I acquired His knowledge.'

IV. In Ode 38<sup>8-9</sup> is an obscure passage which I translate thus: 'it (truth) shewed me all the poisons of error and the plagues of death<sup>3</sup>—which (men) suppose to be sweetness—and the corrupter of corruption. I saw while the bride that is corrupted was adorned, and the bridegroom who corrupts was corrupted.'<sup>4</sup> Then in *vv.* 10, 11 we have in the true apocalyptic style: 'And I asked the Truth, Who are these? and it answered me: This is the Deceiver and the Error; and they *imitate* the Beloved and his bride.' Dr Harris renders 'and they *are alike* in the Beloved

<sup>1</sup> Not 'of no account' (Harris): ܘܠܘܟܘܢܘܢ means 'useless'.

<sup>2</sup> The participial form ܘܟܘܢܘܢܘܢ expresses the continued action of holding on to; and the verb admits of the sense 'keep', 'observe'.

<sup>3</sup> In the Syriac text there is an obvious displacement, 'of death' coming after 'sweetness'.

<sup>4</sup> I can only translate by reading ܘܟܘܢܘܢܘܢ for ܘܟܘܢܘܢܘܢ.

and his bride'. But this is a mistranslation which obscures the whole sense of the passage: the Syriac verb ܘܫܘܠܐ followed by the preposition ܘ regularly means 'to imitate', as may be seen from most of the N.T. passages in which the Peshitta translates μιμνῆσθαι or μιμητής. The Greek word was without doubt μιμνῆσθαι. Thus the whole complexion of the Ode is altered; and we have an idea which can scarcely be anything but Christian: that of a male and female Antichrist who pass themselves off as the Beloved and His bride—Christ and His Church (?), or, in the language of the Apocalypse, the Lamb and the bride of the Lamb.

V. Ode 28 contains two very suspicious coincidences with St Luke's Gospel. The first is in the opening figure: 'As the wings of doves over their nestlings' looks like an adaptation of Luke xiii 34. The Syriac word for 'nestlings' is that which translates νοσοιδῶν in the Gospel, and it means 'chicks'. The second coincidence is in v. 3: 'and my heart is delighted and exults, as a babe that exults in the womb of his mother.' The Syriac words for 'babe', 'exults', and 'womb' are those used in the Syriac versions at Luke i 41 to translate ἐσκήρτησεν τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ. Again Ode 22<sup>12</sup>: 'and that the foundation for everything might be Thy rock: and on it Thou didst build Thy kingdom', will probably strike most readers as an allusion to Matt. xvi 18: even if we adopt the reading 'light' for 'rock' from *Pistis Sophia*,—which, however, looks like a Gnostic substitution.

VI. All the words which lend the characteristic 'Johannine' colouring to the Odes in general are found in the 'interpolations': such are *grace, light, life, love, Word*. Moreover, other highly distinctive expressions are found in them. Such are: *beloved, kindness* (= χρηστότης, as we learn from the Coptic of Ode 25<sup>11</sup>), *Most High, members, perfection, immortal life, without corruption* (ἄφθαρτος, ἀφθάρτως), *without grudging* (ἀφθονος, ἀφθόνως), *footprints*.

Further, a characteristic word or expression sometimes assumes further significance, as a mark of style, from its context: thus [17<sup>12</sup>] 'and I have given my *knowledge without grudging*'; 23<sup>4</sup> 'walk in the *knowledge of the Most High without grudging*'. [10<sup>8</sup>] 'and it became to me for *praise of the Most High*'; 29<sup>11</sup> 'and I gave *praise to the Most High*'. [41<sup>6</sup>] 'and let our *faces shine* in His light'; 15<sup>2</sup> 'and His *light* hath dispelled all darkness from my *face*'; 40<sup>6</sup> 'and my soul *shines* in Him'. Again Odes [27, 42] and 37 begin with the same Syriac words: 'I stretched out my hands.' In 23<sup>14</sup> and [42<sup>18</sup>] there is the same curious allusion to the *head* and *feet*. Again, five of the Odes end with simple forms of doxology, viz. 11, 16, [17<sup>16</sup>], 18, 20.

Before closing these notes I should like to make some remarks on Ode 19, which Dr Harris places, together with the *Descensus* portion

of Ode 42, at a later date than the rest. Whether he is justified in doing so will perhaps depend on the date we assign to the whole collection. If I am right in finding three Odes which shew dependence on a *Descensus* document, instead of only one, there will appear good grounds for dating the whole collection not earlier than the middle of the second century. But in any case Ode 19 is a most interesting Christian document, from an age considerably earlier than the end of the third century, where it is quoted and assigned to its present position in the collection by Lactantius: or, as Harnack puts it, 'eine kostbare Reliquie aus einer Zeit, in der man solche Bilder noch wagen durfte und in der Christen (Landleute?) solche Bilder erbaulich fanden.' Its meaning then deserves careful study; and I must confess that I do not find Dr Harris's translation of it satisfactory. His first error is the substitution in *v.* 3 of ܘܕܘܢ for the MS reading ܘܘܢ. The phrase ܘܘܢ ܘܘܢ ܘܘܢ is simply *καὶ οὐκ ἔδει*; and the following half verse means 'and it was not proper that His milk should be cast away empty (*or* to no purpose)'. Dr Harris renders 'and it was necessary for Him that His milk should be sufficiently released'. But 'sufficiently' would naturally be ܘܘܢܘܢܘܢ, while the verb ܘܘܢܘܢ means 'to cast down', or 'away', and cannot be so weakened as to mean 'release'. In *v.* 4 the Holy Spirit opens Her<sup>1</sup> own, not the Father's, bosom (ܘܘܢܘܢ must have been the Greek word), in order to catch the milk, that it may not be spilt. In *v.* 5 Dr Harris's translation ('and those who receive in its fullness are the ones on the right hand') is quite ungrammatical: the meaning is 'and those who receive (it) are in the perfection of the right hand', i. e. are in the perfect state of God's elect, who are set on His right hand. Compare Ode 8<sup>21</sup>, 'and by my right hand I set my elect ones.' In *v.* 6 Dr Harris has apparently not adverted to the fact that ܘܘܢܘܢ, 'womb', is feminine, and obviously the subject of the fem. verb ܘܘܢܘܢ. Hence he supplies a subject: '[The Spirit] opened the womb of the Virgin': thus cutting the Ode in two, and giving colour to the view that the second half, relating to the Virgin Birth, 'can almost be detached as a separate composition' (second ed, p. 117). But the subject of ܘܘܢܘܢ (whatever this verb may mean) is certainly 'womb': so Lactantius, 'infirmatus est uterus virginis.' When this is recognized it simplifies the interpretation of the verb ܘܘܢܘܢ itself, which has proved such a *crux* to translators. There is now no need to go outside the Syriac lexicons for a suitable meaning. In the first place the context leads us to expect an active verb, having the same object as the preceding 'and they who receive', i. e. 'it' ('the mixture'), understood in both cases. Such omission of a pronominal object, where it

<sup>1</sup> The Syriac word for 'spirit' is fem.

may easily be understood, is common in Syriac. In the present Ode this is carried to an unusual extent, since in the last two verses 'Him' has to be supplied five times in translating. I have little doubt that the verb is ܠܕܥ, from the root ܕܥܥ. Though well attested, this word is not common, and it probably indicates that there was something slightly peculiar in the use here of the original Greek verb also. Brockelmann's Lexicon gives the following meanings: (1) *attraxit, cepit*, (2) *spiritu duxit, hausit*, (3) *prorupit*; and Brun gives *allexit, rete venatus est, hausit, prorupit*. It is most commonly used as a hunting term, 'to catch in a net'; and there is a corresponding noun meaning 'a net'. The central idea appears to be that of drawing something into, or enclosing it in, a receptacle. In Neh. vii 3 the corresponding verb is found in Hebrew in the sense of shutting doors, and the Peshitta translates by the *ethpa'al* of ܥܦܐ. If we might suppose that the Greek word was *ἐκράτησεν*, of which ܠܕܥ would be a very good rendering in the present context, it would mean 'caught (it)' or 'took possession of (it)'; and ܠܕܥ would be a slightly more graphic equivalent. Lactantius's 'infirmatus est' is meaningless in the context, and appears to be based on a corruption in the Greek. Frankenberg (*Das Verständnis der Oden Salomos*) renders into Greek by *ἐξελίθη*, which he says 'ist der gebräuchliche Ausdruck für Umkommen vor Hunger'. This is based on Lactantius, and is hardly more intelligible. If I am right in supposing that the Greek word was *ἐκράτησεν*, we can account for Lactantius's 'infirmatus est' by a very simple corruption, viz. *ἡκράτησεν*. But whether this conjecture is right or not, the Syriac verb as it stands gives a sense perfectly in harmony with the context: in fact the meaning which we are almost led to expect. I now translate verses 3-6 as follows:—

'And the Holy Spirit milked Him. Because His breasts were filled, and it was not fitting that His milk should be cast away empty (or to no purpose), the Holy Spirit opened Her bosom, and mingled the milk of the two breasts of the Father, and gave the mixture to the world, while they knew (it) not: and those who receive (it) are in the perfection of the right hand (cf. Joh. i 10-12). The womb of the Virgin caught (it), and received conception and brought forth.'

I have already referred to Ode 8<sup>21</sup> for a parallel to the expression 'in the perfection of the right hand'. The same Ode has also (v. 17) an allusion to the breasts and milk of God: 'I fashioned their members: my own breasts I prepared for them, that they might drink my holy milk and live thereby.' Dr Harris (second ed. pp. 50-51) compares also for the same idea Odes 4, 14, 35. Ode 19 further contains two expressions which are so distinctive of the style of the Odist as to call for special remark. These are 'perfection' (ܠܕܥܥܥܥ) and 'kindness'

(دهصصلا). The former occurs in *v.* 5, and ten times in other Odes, viz. 7<sup>13, 16</sup>, 9<sup>3</sup>, 17<sup>7</sup>, 18<sup>8, 10</sup>, 26<sup>7</sup>, 35<sup>7</sup>, 36<sup>2</sup>, 41<sup>14</sup>. The latter occurs twice in Ode 19, *vs.* 1 and 10, and seven times elsewhere, viz. 7<sup>4</sup>, 11<sup>17</sup>, 14<sup>3</sup>, 17<sup>7</sup>, 20<sup>0</sup>, 25<sup>11</sup>, 42<sup>21</sup> (in 25<sup>11</sup> the Coptic gives us the Greek word, *χρηστέτης*).

There are two more points on which I am obliged to dissent from Dr Harris. The one is his insertion in the text of دهصصلا (Brockelmann and Brun give only the form دهصصلا) 'in swaddling clothes' for the MS reading دهصصلا 'in redemption'. Such a graphic touch is quite out of place among the vague expressions which precede and follow. The second point is his interpretation of verse 8: 'and because she was not sufficiently prepared, and she had not sought a midwife.' There is nothing to suggest 'prepared'; and the word for 'sufficiently' is the same that in *v.* 3 was found to mean 'emptily'. The phrase لوه دهصصلا لوه لوه لا can only be translated 'and it (the thing) happened not emptily'. But I am inclined to suspect a corruption here in the Greek, viz. *κενῶς* for *κοινῶς*. The verse will now run: 'and because it happened not emptily (*query*, in the common way?), and she had not sought (*possibly* did not require) a midwife . . . she brought forth . . . of her own will.' But it would be better still to omit the first 'and' (the letter *waw*), and begin a new sentence with 'Because', thus: 'Because it happened not in the common way (?), and (for this reason) she had not sought (*or* did not require) a midwife, . . . she brought forth . . . of her own will.' The sentence will now be of the same form as that in verse 3 *b*: 'Because His breasts were filled', &c.

My last remark is that the active part assigned to the Holy Spirit, who mixes the milk of the Father in her (?) bosom or lap, suggests Gnostic influence; and I am not sure that Harnack is right when he says that in the original the Spirit 'männlich gedacht ist'.

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