THE USE OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT
IN THE NEW AND
OTHER ESSAYS

STUDIES IN HONOR OF

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Edited by

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DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Durham, N. C. 1972

NOTE ON MARK 5:43

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In an article in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*[1] Dr. W. F. Stine-spring demonstrated that the active infinitive can be and is used with passive meaning in biblical Aramaic. This usage he called the "hidden third-person plural indefinite."[2] The construction, found most frequently in Daniel, is used in places where someone *commands* that something be done, but the *active* infinitive is used.

It has long been noted though not accepted by all textual scholars that the so-called Western text, especially represented by Codex D (Bezae), is characterized by Semitisms.[3] The late A. J. Wensinck, some of whose work in this area has not yet been published, has demonstrated that there are many Semitisms in Codex Bezae. Matthew Black cites a conclusion of Wensinck's which is quite apropos to our discussion:

> In view of the attestation in Classical and later Greek of λέγειν in the meaning 'to enjoin', 'to command', it might seem a work of supererogation on Wensinck's part to trace this usage in the New Testament to Semitic influence. The broad distinction, however, between the two languages appears to be that, whereas in Greek the meaning is (comparatively) rare, in the Semitic group (so in Arabic) it is regular.[4]

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1. "The Active Infinitive With Passive Meaning in Biblical Aramaic," *JBL*, 81, pt. 4 (Dec., 1962), 391–94.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 393.

3. Cf. discussions in Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); E. J. Epp, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts*, Society for New Testament Studies: Monograph Series, no. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966). B. M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). The reader is referred to t' e arguments and bibliographies found in these three works for fuller explication of the problem. For a discussion of the whole question of "Semitism" the reader is referred to E. P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition*, Society for New Testament Studies: Monograph Series, no. 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). See especially pp. 190 ff.

4. P. 301. Subsequent references to Black are in the text.

The conclusion at which Wensinck arrived from his study of the Semitisms in Bezan Luke holds good for all the synoptics: D represents the Aramaic background of the synoptic tradition more faithfully than do non-Western manuscripts. [p. 277]

In what may be termed the "Bezan redaction" more of the primitive "Aramaized" Greek text has been left unrevised than in the redaction . . . represented by the Vatican and Sinaitic Uncials. [p. 279]

It has been further noted by many commentators of the Gospel of Mark that 5:43 has Semitic characteristics. Vincent Taylor comments:

In καὶ εἶπεν δοθῆναι αὐτῇ φαγεῖν the verb εἶπεν is used in the sense of 'told' or 'command'. Allen, . . . sees a Semitism here, corresponding to the late use of אֲמַר, 'to command' followed by לְ c. infin. . . . The same usage is found in the papyri . . . and in Cl. Gk. the simple infin. is used in a jussive sense after λέγω and εἶπον. . . . These considerations do not exclude the possibility that Semitic idiom is reflected, especially when several elements in the narrative point in this direction.[5]

The problem seems to be that there appears to be Semitic idiom here but the exact nature of it is not apparent! Giving added difficulty is the variant reading in Codex D, i. e., δοῦναι (the active infinitive) for δοθῆναι (passive). In commenting on this phenomenon Blass, Debrunner, and Funk state that Bultmann "*rightly* rejects the v. 1. δοῦναι (D) instead of δοθῆναι Mk 5:43."[6] Taylor says, "The passive infinitive δοθῆναι is used because the one who is to execute the order is not named. . . ."[7] It may be, however, that the curious variant in D, the active infinitive, is the clue to the Semitism here. For this passage as read in D is an exact copy of the pattern found in Daniel. A figure in authority speaks (εἶπεν), ordering that something *be* done (active infinitive).

5. *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), p. 298.

6. Friedrich Wilhelm Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. R. W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 201, para. 392, #4. Italics mine.

7. Taylor, p. 298.

It is the contention of this short note that the reading δοῦναι, the active infinitive, is illustrative of the linguistic phenomenon pointed out by Professor Stinespring as the "hidden third-person plural indefinite." If this is true, the active infinitive is, of course, explained as a Semitism illustrated in biblical Aramaic. Further the exact nature of the Semitism is made plain for the commentators who find "Semitic influence" but are not exactly certain what it is. Finally this is simply one more illustration to suggest that Codex D may reflect the Aramaic background of the Gospel tradition to a much greater degree than do the other recensions (as Black and Wensinck have argued) and therefore deserves much more careful consideration than it has been afforded in the past.