

Gospel called 'according to the Hebrews', and found 'maar', with the sense 'crastinum', 'to-morrow's', and hence a future reference.¹ This is very likely to be right, a preservation of the Lord's prayer from the Aramaic-speaking church.² מחר really does mean 'tomorrow's', and the reference is likely to have been eschatological. Those Gospels which survive, however, all of them in the dialects of Aramaic generally known as Syriac, are translations from our present Greek Gospels into Aramaic. The process of translating the Greek Gospels into Aramaic is significantly different from trying to reconstruct original sources. Nowhere is this better illustrated than with the term 'son of man'. This was originally the Aramaic בר (א)נשא, a normal term for 'man'. By the processes of translation and Christological development, this became a Christological title in Greek, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.³ Since it had become a Christological title, it could not be translated into Syriac with בר (א)נשא. Hence Tatian produced the expression ברה ראנשא, and later translators produced also ברה דגברא and ברה דברנשא. These expressions naturally lent themselves to interpretation remote from the original בר (א)נשא. Philoxenus of Mabbug commented:

עלהדא לם אתקרי ברה דאנשא, מטל דהוא ברה דאנשא
חדתא דקמם עבר פוקדנא.

'For this reason, then, he was called "the (lit. his) son of (the) man"', because he became the (lit. "his") son of the new man who preceded the transgression of the commandment.⁴ Here the term has been interpreted as 'the son of *the* man', and the man in question has been identified as Adam, so that in effect the term is held to mean 'son of Adam'. This is quite remote from the meaning of the original בר (א)נשא. Once ברה דאנשא was established as the term which Jesus used to refer to himself, Syriac fathers could use בר (א)נשא of him in its original sense, apparently unaware that he had done so, and in ways remote from his view of himself. An anonymous poem on faith has this:

¹ D. Hurst and M. Adriaen (eds.), *S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Opera*. Pars I, 7. *Commentariorum in Matheum Libri IV* (CCSL LXXXVII. Turnholt, 1969), ad loc.

² J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, vol. I (London, 1971), pp. 196, 199–201; see p. 51 below.

³ See pp. 111–21, 130–2 below.

⁴ J. W. Watt (ed.), *Philoxenus of Mabbug: Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* (CSCO 392, SS 171. Leuven, 1978), frag. 23.

לא הוא לבר אנשא בתולתא טעינא הות

It was not (a/the) son of man that the virgin was carrying.⁵

What this means is that Mary gave birth to Jesus as both God and man, not only to a man as a normal human mother does. Thus the Syriac versions and fathers alike, though helpful in some matters if used carefully, are no simple guide to what was said and meant by Aramaic sources of the Gospels.

The next significant development took place as independent scholarship emerged slowly from the Reformation and the Enlightenment. A few learned men noticed Semitic features in the Greek of the Gospels, and sought to explain them with reference to the actual Semitic terms which lay behind them. As scripturally orientated scholars, however, they tended to resort to Hebrew rather than Aramaic, because their primary resource was the Old Testament. Sometimes, this did not matter in itself. For example, in 1557 Theodore Beza commented on the idiomatic use of *πρόσωπον* at Matt. 16.3, 'Hebraicè פנים'.⁶ This points to a correct understanding of this idiomatic usage.

Such an approach, however, will inevitably come to grief when Aramaic and Hebrew are seriously different. The term 'son of man' is again the best example of this. Commenting on Matt. 12.8 in 1641, Grotius gave several reasons why *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* could not be a simple reference to Christ, including that 'בן אדם' [*filium hominis*] meant 'hominem quemvis', 'any man'.⁷ This comes close to a reason why *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* could not be a Christological title on the lips of Jesus, but it leaves insoluble problems behind it. If we know only this, we cannot explain why Jesus used the Aramaic term בר (א)נשא, or how it came to be transmuted into a Christological title. The Bible-centred nature of this limitation is especially obvious in Grotius, for he could read Aramaic and Syriac.

During this period, scholars also edited texts and wrote works of reference. The first edition of the Syriac New Testament caused a great stir in 1555, on account of its claim to be written in the

⁵ S. P. Brock, 'An Anonymous Madrasa on Faith', *OrChr* 64, 1980, 48–64, p. 50, stanza 4, line 1.

⁶ T. Beza, *Novum d n Jesu Christi testamentum* (Geneva, 1557), ad loc. I had access to *JESU CHRISTI D. N. Novum Testamentum* (Geneva, 1565).

⁷ H. Grotius, *Annotationes in libros evangeliorum* (Amsterdam/Paris, 1641), ad loc. I had access to this as *Annotationes in quatuor Evangelia & Acta Apostolorum* in *H. Grotii Opera Omnia Theologica* (Amsterdam, 1679), book II, vol. I.