ΤΟ ΑΙΜΑ ΜΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗΣ: The Evidence of the Syriac Versions

Until recently, Professor J. Jeremias maintained that the reference to the covenant is probably a later addition to the words spoken over the cup by Jesus at the Last Supper. He argued\(^1\) that ‘The words τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης cannot be retranslated into Aramaic, for in Aramaic a noun with a personal pronoun cannot be followed by a genitive’ (my italics). I ventured\(^2\) to challenge this assertion, on the ground that the construction to which Jeremias objects is found in Syriac, which is related to (though not, of course, identical with) the Aramaic spoken in Palestine in the time of Jesus.

In the latest edition\(^3\) of his book, Die Abendmahlsworte Jesu, Jeremias has modified his views. He no longer denies that the words can be translated back into Aramaic, but he thinks that the Greek may be an idiomatic\(^4\) rendering of 'adham qeyami. Although Jeremias does not now dispute the possibility that the reference to the covenant goes back to the ipsissima verba of Jesus, he still maintains that the Greek is unlikely\(^5\) to be a word-for-word translation from Aramaic, and he rejects my arguments in favour of its legitimacy. I hesitate to disagree with the considered opinion of so eminent a scholar as Jeremias; nevertheless, it still seems to me that he is mistaken in this matter, and that his new arguments do not establish the point which he seeks to prove.

Jeremias’s attempt to refute my argument is based on his interpretation of the ways in which the Syriac versions translate τὸ ὑπὸ ἐστι τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης in Mark xiv. 24, and the similar Greek in Matt. xxvi. 28. It is therefore convenient to begin this discussion by setting out the evidence; for convenience, the evidence for the adjective ‘new’, which is frequently attached to the word ‘covenant’, is ignored.

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4 Hans Gottlieb, however, argues that this is not natural Greek: Studia Theologica, xiv (1960), p. 115.
5 Now, however, he does not state his view with such confidence as in 1949. He says only that the expression is ‘sehr hart’.
1. Literal translation: ‘This is my blood of the covenant.’
   (a) The Peshitta\[^6\] in both Mark xiv. 24 and Matt. xxvi. 28:
   \[\text{ܗܢܘ ܕܡܝ ܕܕܝܬܩܐ}\]
   (b) The Sinaitic Syriac\[^7\] in Mark xiv. 24:
   \[\text{ܗܢܐ ܕܡܝ ܕܕܝܬܩܐ}\]
   (c) The Palestinian Syriac A\[^8\] in Matt. xxvi. 28:
   \[\text{ܗܕܢ ܓܝܪ ܐܝܬ ܗܘ ܐܕܡܝ ܕܕܝܬܝܩܐ}\]

2. ‘This is my blood, even the covenant.’
   (a) The Sinaitic Syriac in Matt. xxvi. 28 and Luke xxii. 17:
   \[\text{ܗܢܘ ܕܡܝ ܕܝܬܩܐ}\]
   This reading is also found in one of the manuscripts of the Peshitta
collated by Pusey and Gwilliam at Matt. xxvi. 28, and in two at Mark
xiv. 24.\[^9\] For this way of rendering the Greek into Syriac, Jeremias
also refers to Tatian and to the Anaphora of the Twelve Apostles.\[^10\]
   (b) The Palestinian Syriac B in Matt. xxvi. 28:
   \[\text{ܗܕܢ ܓܝܪ ܗܘ ܐܕܡܗ ܕܕܝܬܝܩܐ}\]

3. ‘This is the blood of the covenant.’
The Palestinian Syriac C in Matt. xxvi. 28:
   \[\text{ܗܕܢ ܓܝܪ ܐܝܬ ܗܘ ܐܕܡܗ ܕܕܝܬܝܩܐ}\]

Jeremias argues from this evidence that a word-for-word translation of the
Greek was not natural in Syriac. He points out that only two of the older Syriac
versions offer the first, the literal, translation. On the other hand, the second
type of rendering, which avoids the use of a genitive after a pronominal suf-
fix, is deeply embedded in the textual tradition. Moreover, there are variant
readings at this point in the Palestinian Syriac, as well as in the Eastern ver-
sions. Jeremias thinks, therefore, that the reading ‘my blood, even the cove-
nant’ cannot be explained as the result of haplography (as I had suggested); the
translators must, rather, have found it difficult to render the Greek literally into

\[^7\] F.C. Burkitt, *Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe*, i (Cambridge, 1904), p. 230. The other references
to the Sinaitic Syriac are taken from this edition. The Curetonian manuscript is not extant
in the relevant passages of Matthew and Mark.
\[^8\] A.S. Lewis and M.D. Gibson, *The Palestinian Syriac Lectionary of the Gospels* (London,
1899), p. 178. Other references to the Palestinian Syriac are taken from this edition.
\[^9\] Manuscripts 20 (6th or 7th cent.) for Matt., and 14 (5th or 6th cent.) and 15 (5th cent.) for
Mark.
\[^10\] He gives the references to various authorities for Tatian on pp. 135 f. For the Anaphora,
he refers to A. Merx, *Das Evangelium Matthaeus (Die vier kanonischen Evangelien, 11. i)*