

## The Peshitta of ISAIAH 53:9 and the Syrian Commentators

The Peshitta version of Isaiah 53:9 presented a peculiar problematic for those Syrian exegetes who sought to make the Old Testament a Christian book and to that end would use that rendition of the text as a basis for a christological interpretation. The Church Fathers had usually interpreted the entire "Servant Song" christologically<sup>1</sup>, to which the Syrian Fathers were no exception. The general theme of suffering and death in the larger unit, Isa. 52.13-53.12, made it quite natural for those reading the document in light of the Christ event to apply these phrases to the narrative of the Evangelists concerning the death and burial of Jesus. Following this norm was however rendered problematic by the distinctive rendition of Isa. 53:9 in the Syriac version. The translators of the Peshitta, whoever they may have been and wherever they may have worked, translated, "The wicked gave his grave and the rich (gave) in his death"<sup>2</sup>.

This reading of the Peshitta is far removed from that of the MT<sup>3</sup>, Dead Sea Scrolls<sup>4</sup>, the LXX<sup>5</sup> and its versions<sup>6</sup>, as well as from Targum Jonathan<sup>7</sup>

1 For the use of Isaiah 53 up to and including Justin Martyr, see Hans Walter Wolff, *Jesaja 53 im Urchristentum*, Berlin, 1952. This was the determinative period for the Christian interpretation of this passage. There are a number of Patristic commentaries on Isaiah but these have been little studied. Of the Greek commentaries, see especially that of *Theodoret von Kyros. Kommentar zu Jesaja*, hrsg. August Möhle, *Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens*, Bd. 5 (Berlin, 1932), which discusses Isaiah 52:13-53:12, pp. 210-213, and *Hesychii Hierosolymitani Interpretatio Isaiae Propheiae*, Freiburg i.B., 1900, pp. 165-168. Other commentaries on this passage are those of Procopius of Gaza PG 87 col. 2528, Cyril of Alexandria, PG 70, col. 1182, Theodorus Heracleensis, PG 18, col. 1357, and that of John Chrysostom preserved most completely in an Armenian version: *Eraneluoyñ Yovhannou Oskeberani Meknouthiun Esayeay Margarëi*, Venetik, 1880, pp. 402-403. The Syriac language commentaries will be mentioned below.

2 *Biblia Sacra juxta versionem simplicem quae dicitur Peshitta*, Vol. II. (Beryti, 1951).

3 *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, Liber Jesaiae* preparavit D. Winton Thomas, Stuttgart, 1968.

4 *The Dead Sea Scrolls of St. Mark's Monastery. I The Isaiah Manuscript and the Habakkuk Commentary* ed. M. Burrows et. al. (New Haven, 1950), Plate XLIV. See below, note, 12. Hereafter cited as I Q Is<sup>a</sup>.

5 *Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum*, Vol XIV, *Isaias* ed. Joseph Ziegler (Göttingen, 1939), 322. Hereafter cited as LXX Göttingen.

6 Fridericus Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt; sive Veterum Interpretum Graecorum*



and the Palestinian Syriac<sup>8</sup>. It is, however, found without significant variants in the manuscript tradition<sup>9</sup> as well as in the citations presented by the authors discussed below. It radically transforms the intent of the Isaianic statement. The wicked becomes the doner of his grave and the rich gives the motif of his death. Thus, instead of being either classified with the two groups in his death (MT), or of being their judges (LXX and versions, Targum Jonathan), the Servant of the Lord is the beneficiary of their largess.

The object of this essay is to delineate the ways in which the Syrian exegetes resolved the interpretative dilemmas presented by their version of the biblical text of Isa. 53:9. The writers are presented in chronological sequence.

### *The Ephremian Commentary*

The mysterious commentary attributed to St. Ephrem the Syrian (306?-373) is presented first, primarily for three reasons: (1) Its attribution to St. Ephrem, while improbable, remains possible; (2) The nature of the commentary on the Servant Song is rather different from the others now extant; (3) The commentary on this passage appears to have no filial relation with the other commentaries.

The Ephremian commentary of Isaiah 43-66 was published with a Latin translation by Th. J. Lamy<sup>10</sup> of Louvain from the Severian catena on the basis of B.M. add. 12,144 (1081 A.D.), a copy of Vat. Syr. 103 (IXth-Xth century), as a supplement to the text of the Roman edition.

Chapter 52.13-53.12 as presented by this commentator is a literary unit providing a matrix for summarizing and interpreting the Christ event. After observations about the extraordinary aspect of the Messiah's arrival, he

*in totum Vetus Testamentum Fragmenta* (Oxford, 1875), Vol. II, 535. Cf. H. Hegermann, *Jesaja 53 in Hexapla, Targum und Peschitta* (Gütersloh, 1954), 42, and LXX Göttingen.

7 *The Bible in Aramaic based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts*, ed. Alexander Sperber. Vol. III, *The Latter Prophets according to Targum Jonathan* (Leiden, 1962) 108. Cf. P. Seidelin, "Der 'Ebed Jahwe' und die Messiasgestalt im Jesajatargum", *ZNW* 35 (1936) 194-231.

8 The Syro-Palestinian version reads *wy'tl byšy' hwlp qbwrwy wl'tyry' hwlp mwth*, which is a translation of a text similar to that of Theodotion and Symmachus having no affinity with the Peshitta version, as indicated by the text published in Agnes Smith Lewis, *A Palestinian Syriac Lectionary containing lessons from the Pentateuch, Job, Prophets, Acts and Epistles*, *Studia Sinaitica*, 6 (London, 1897) 117, line 17.

9 I wish to thank Prof. Sebastian Brock for providing this information. An older collation is found in G. Diettrich, *Ein Apparatus criticus zur Pešitto zum Propheten Jesaja*, *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, VIII (Giessen, 1905) 182. This portion of Isa. 53:9 has not been found elsewhere in the writings of the Syrian authors.

10 Thomas Joseph Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem Syri Hymni et Sermones*, II (Mechlin, 1886) col. 103-214.



discusses the nature of Christ both (1) as it was (vv. 1-2c), that is, revealed and revealer (of the Father), as a child before the Father, born of a virgin, and not as an angel or prophet, and, (2) as "we" perceived it (2d-3), that is, not splendid as God, to be taxed like everyone else, as one who suffered, and as an ordinary man. He makes a transition (4-5b) to the Passion (5c-9a) by two quick observations about the mission of the Messiah and the human reaction to that mission.

The narration of the Passion is a chronological summary of the Gospel narrative using the Isaiah text and concise, incisive interpretative comments. The results of his life (the church, the restoration of man's glory, and Christ's intercessory activity) are discussed on the basis of verses 9b-12.

This was facilitated by two transformations of the Peshitta text quite unique in the textual tradition of the Peshitta<sup>11</sup>. Firstly, the Ephremian text is plural (both nouns and verbs) in contradistinction to the other Syriac texts preserved by our commentators or those attested by the manuscripts of the Peshitta. It has the closest textual affinity with I Q Is<sup>a</sup> where the same phenomena may be observed<sup>12</sup>. Secondly, an independent and complete phrase is made of the second clause by adding the word, *'ezdadaqw* "they were justified". The textual significance of this addition is uncertain. It does not otherwise appear explicitly in the Peshitta tradition. But judging from the not dissimilar method of one of the sources of Išo' bar Nūn (see below) there may have been an oral tradition completing the phrase<sup>13</sup>. Its exegetical significance was to resolve the dilemma confronting the Syrian exegetes and to thus allow the verse, together with the remainder of the Servant Song to serve as a premonstration of the Messianic event. Thus the Ephremian commentary reads<sup>14</sup>:

*yahbw raši'e qabreh . h . mawteh  
dbazqipo . w'atire' bmawteh 'ezdadaqw  
. h . yawsep bolūto' wpilatōs wniqodimōs.*

The wicked (pl) gave his grave. That is, his death which (was) on the cross. And the rich (pl) by his death were justified. That is, Joseph the Counselor, and Pilate and Nicodemus.

#### *Theodore bar Koni (VIIIth century)*

Little is known of this Nestorian author to whom 'Abdisho' ascribed a "Book of Scholia", an ecclesiastical history, instructions in asceticism and

11 See above, Note 9.

12 Cited above, note 4. The transcription of Plate XLIV does not take into account the partially effaced letter(s) following ... 'šyr. The photograph of the ms. shows a space sufficient for two letters, one of which partially effaced, is exactly the shape of a min.

By analogy with *rš'ym*, it is evident that the other word should thus be read 'šrym.

13 See below, note 31.

14 Lamy, *Sancti Ephraem Syri*, col. 149.



some funeral orations<sup>15</sup>. He was apparently a monk from the vicinity of Kashkar<sup>16</sup>. Only one date, that of 791 A.D. is attested, and that as being the date of completion on the scholia on the New Testament<sup>17</sup>. Only the “Book of Scholia” has been preserved, and this work is published in the edition of Addai Scher<sup>18</sup>.

The last section of the Scholia concerning the Book of Isaiah is a collection of materials illuminative of “difficult words in the book of Isaiah”<sup>19</sup>. He cites Isaiah 53:9: *yahb raši'o' qabreh w'atiro'* and offers the laconic observation *petgomo' hū dahpik*, “a phrase which is inverted”, “in the same manner as”, Isaiah 64.5 and Job 24.19<sup>20</sup>.

This same method of explanation is also found in Išo' bar Nūn, Išo'dad of Merv and Dionysius bar Šalībī. It is a technique applied to texts which are difficult to understand according to Christian canons of interpretation as is the case with Isa. 53.9, and to texts which present problems of logic in the received version as in Isaiah 64.5<sup>21</sup> and Job 24.19. There appears to have been a generally agreed upon collection of “énoncés à termes intervertis”<sup>22</sup>, which could be interpreted in a manner consonant with the Syrian Christian exegetical tradition using this technique, while thereby preserving the reading of the Peshitta text. The problematic phrases and/or words were merely transposed in the writer's mind for the purpose of the interpretative comments.

### *Išo' bar Nūn*

The next commentator on Isaiah from whose pen material relevant to Isaiah 53.9 has been preserved is the contentious churchman who succeeded

15 See J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, III/1, 198.

16 *ThC* XV<sup>1</sup>, 1946, col. 228. Cf. Martin Lewin, *Die Scholien des Theodor Bar Kōnī zur Patriarchengeschichte (Genesis XII-L)* (Berlin, 1905) xii-xviii.

17 This note is quoted in J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, III/1, 174.

18 This edition is based on two manuscripts (as well two other mss are collated in the notes) and was published without translation: *Theodorus Bar Koni. Liber Scholiorum*, I, *CSCO* 55 Syr. 19 (= Syr. II, 65, T), 1912, and II, *CSCO* 69 Syr 26 (= Syr II, 66, T), 1912. The method of this edition was criticized by A. Baumstark, *OrChr* N.S. Vol. 3 (1913) 149-151. His objections are restated by Ernest G. Clarke, *The Selected Questions of Isho bar Nun on the Pentateuch, edited and translated from Ms. Cambridge add. 2017, with a study of the relationships of Ishō' dād̄h of Merv, Theodore bar Kōnī and Ishō' bar Nūn on Genesis*, *Studia Postbiblica*, 5 (Leiden, 1962) 184-187. A new critical edition is in preparation by R. Hespel to be published in the *CSCO*.

19 *Ibid*, II, 272-275.

20 *Ibid*, II, p. 275, lines 9-10.

21 Išo'dad comments: “You are angry and we have sinned against them. (Isa. 64.5). This is a saying with the terms inverted. That is, because we have sinned, you have become angered and have caused us to be deported ...” cited from the edition of C. Van den Eynde, see below note 41, Text 60, Translation 76.

22 This term coined by Father Van den Eynde most accurately describes the phenomenon.



Timothy, whom he detested, as Catholicos of the Nestorian church primarily because of his influence at the court of the Calif Ma'mun. His life was chronicled by Mari ibn Sulaiman and Amr ibn Matta<sup>23</sup> as well as Gregory Abū-l-Faraġ (Barhebraeus)<sup>24</sup> and his bibliography was recorded for us by 'Abdīsho' in his Catalogue<sup>25</sup>. Among those writings is "Questions on the Entire Text of the Two Parts", that is, of the Scriptures. This work, extant only in Cambridge Add. 2017<sup>26</sup>, is part of a considerable but generally unexamined corpus of what has been described as "the literary genre of Questions and Answers" which provided interpretative solutions to problematic biblical texts<sup>27</sup>. The question-answer on Isaiah 53.9 is one of only four Isaiah texts deemed troubling enough to merit a response and even then the response is a compilation of three solutions from sources whom he does not identify. This is presented with minimal personal involvement. Let us examine the significance of these suggestions, all of which are christological in orientation.

He begins :

šū'olo' mono' hī hī dyahb rašī'o' qabreh  
w'atir bmawteh.

Question : What is it that the wicked gave his  
grave and the rich in his death?<sup>28</sup>

The reading agrees exactly with that of the received Peshitta text. Three answers are posited.

(I) šroyo'.

bhad men zno' 'iteyh . dyahbw rašī'e'  
yehūdoye' wadbeyt pilatōs qeṭleh : hodo' hī hī  
dqabreh . w'atiray bhaymonūto' mhaymne'  
bmawteh hyaw.

Answer :

Indeed, in one manner, it is that the wicked  
Jews gave and the house of Pilate his murder,  
that is to say, "his grave", and the rich ones  
by faith lived in his death<sup>29</sup>.

This first explanation is also quoted by Išo'dad of Merv<sup>30</sup>, and is reminiscent of the explanation contained in the Ephremian corpus (see

23 Maris, *Amri et Slibae de Patriarchis Nestorianorum commentaria edidit ac latine reddidit* H. Gismondi. I. *Maris versio latina* (Romae, 1899) 66-68; II *Amri et Slibae textus versio latina* (Romae, 1897) 38-40.

24 J. B. Abbeloos and Th. J. Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, III (Louvain, 1872) col. 181-184; 187-188.

25 Cited in J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* III/I, 165-166.

26 A. Gr. 2017 = A.D. 1706. See, William Wright, *A Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge*, II (Cambridge: University Press, 1901) 555-559.

27 For a description of this genre in western literature, see G. Bardy, "La littérature patristique des 'Questiones et Responsiones' sur l'Écriture Sainte", *Revue Biblique* 41 (1932), 210-236, 341-369, 515-537; 42 (1933), 14-30, 211-229, 328-352. For a summary of the situation in Syriac literature, see Ernest G. Clarke, *The Selected Questions*, 8-13.

28 Cam. Add. 2017f. 36v, lines 11-12.

29 Ibid, f. 36v, line 12-f. 37r, line 1.

30 See below, p. 39.



above). It is impossible to be certain of a relationship between the sources of Išo' bar Nūn and the Ephrem material. However, both resolve the dilemma posed by the first phrase by equating "grave" and "death" although the note quoted by Išo' bar Nūn goes on to name the perpetrators of that death, this in a manner quite different from that of the earlier author. The dilemma of the second phrase is rectified by transforming it, much as did the Ephremian scholia, into a statement of personal salvation, quite distant in intent and significance from the context of Isaiah's Servant Song. It is most probable that these two authors reflect a popular Syrian usage, perhaps liturgical, which "completed" the phrase<sup>31</sup>.

(II) *bā'hrino' dīn zno' yahbw rašī'e' zqūpe' meštalmōnūteh dalqetlo' . w'atīro' yawsep būlewti' wniqodīmōsy . mawteh yqarw bhūnto' vbad šarko'.*

But in another manner: the wicked crucifiers gave delivery of him for murdering; the rich one, Joseph the Counselor and Nicodemus, honored his death with spices<sup>32</sup>, and with the rest<sup>33</sup>.

Here *qbrh* is tacitly assumed to mean "death" as in the first suggestion, which is also quoted by Išo'dad (see below) who ends the quotation: "with spices and linen (*ktn*)", indicating that Išo'dad was probably using a source other than Išo' bar Nūn.

(III) *wtūb bazno' 'hrino' yahb rašī'o' pilatōs mawteh bazqipo' w'atīro' būleoti' qabro' dabganto'.*

And again in another manner: the wicked Pilate gave his death on the cross and the rich counselor a tomb which is in the garden<sup>34</sup>.

This explanation is also cited by Išo'dad of Merv, who however attributed it material to the mysterious Daniel bar Toubanita<sup>35</sup>, once again indicating the probable use of a presently unknown independent source. Pilate is the culprit, here as in the first suggestion. It is worth noting that "death" and "grave" are inverted that the verse might correspond with the gospel narrative.

Išo' bar Nūn suggests that this inversion of terms was done in order to clarify the meaning of the verse:

*bazno' geyr hōno' . hpūkyo' dašmohe' hwo' 'ayk dalnūhro' yadi'o'.*

For in this manner. The inversion of terms was as to a distinctive light<sup>36</sup>.

31 This case may be similar to that cited by Gordon Fee, "The Text of John in the Jerusalem Bible: A Critique of the Use of Patristic Citations in N.T. Textual Criticism", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90 (1971) 163-173, or that noted by J. Duplacy and C. M. Martini, *Biblica* 58 (1977) 564 n. 74.

32 Cf. John 19.39-40.

33 Cam. Add. 2017f. 37r, lines 1-5.

34 Ibid, f. 37r, lines 5-7; Cf. John 19.41.

35 See below, note 46.

36 Cam. Add. 2017 f. 37r, lines 7-9.



The meaning of the verse, generally agreed upon in the Syrian exegetical tradition, was, for Išo' bar Nūn, clear in the reading received in the Peshitta text. "Inverting the terms" merely made it more explicit.

What do these three possible interpretations of Isaiah 53.9 have in common? The overwhelmingly important common denominator is the christological concern of each of the sources. Found as it is in the midst of the Song of the Suffering Servant, it appears to never have been considered feasible by Išo' bar Nūn or by his chosen sources to interpret this phrase in the historical context of the Book of Isaiah.

Secondly, the de facto rejection of the Peshitta text and the consequent rewriting to accord with the Johannine version was rendered necessary in each source by the christological exegesis. However, the mystique of the received text still retained the allegiance of the author/compiler who sought a rationale for this exegetically inspired transformation in the accepted "inversion" technique.

#### *Išo'dad of Merv (9th century)*

Išo'dad, a Persian by birth from Mero (Merv) in northern Khorassan<sup>37</sup>, has given us one of the larger extant bodies of Syrian exegetical literature. Little is known of his life which more or less spanned the 9th century. His name appears in the Chronicles only in 852 A.D. when after the death of Mar Abraham, the name of Išo'dad, then Bishop of the village of Hadita was put forth as a candidate for the patriarchate. The nomination came to naught in the crossfire of imperial and ecclesiastical political intrigues<sup>38</sup>.

The authenticity of the commentaries is rather certain, this despite the error of 'Abdisho' who ascribed to him only commentaries on the New Testament and the *Mautbê*<sup>39</sup>. The material on the major and minor prophets as well as on the Psalms were "restored" to him by J. B. Chabot<sup>40</sup>. A critical edition accompanied by a French translation on the commentary on the prophets has been published by Father Van den Eynde of Louvain<sup>41</sup>.

37 Cf. William Wright, *A Short History of Syriac Literature* (Amsterdam, 1966), p. 220-221; Baumstark 234.

38 H. Gismondi, *Maris, Amri et Slibae* I, 69-70; II, 41-42.

39 Cited in J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, III/I, 210-212.

40 J. B. Chabot, *Littérature Syriacque*. Bibliothèque Cath. des Sciences religieuses (Paris, 1934) 111.

41 Ceslas Van den Eynde, *Commentaire d'Išo'dad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament*. IV *Isaïe et les Douze*. Text, CSCO 303 Syr. 128 (Louvain, 1969). Ibid, Trad., CSCO 304 Syr. 129 (Louvain, 1969). The New Testament Commentaries were published by M. D. Gibson, *The Commentaries of Išo'dad of Merv, Horae Semiticae* 5-7, 10 (Cambridge, 1911-1913).



A Nestorian, Išo'dad's exegesis reflects the traditions of that persuasion. The tendentious commentaries of Theodore of Mopsuestia are often cited verbatim in the other commentaries<sup>42</sup>. Unfortunately, Theodore's commentary on Isaiah is lost to us, but if the other commentaries of Išo'dad are any indication, that of Isaiah probably reflects the style and views of the ancient master. The style is sober and historically oriented; often more so than our modern critical commentaries. There is a minimum of reading the New Testament into the Old. Only six passages in Isaiah are considered exclusively messianic<sup>43</sup>, including the entire Servant Song of Isaiah 52.13-53.12. The Song is interpreted as a biographical-theological synopsis or premonstration of the messianic event. Verse 2, "he ascended as an infant", serves as a basis for renumerating reactions to the Christ child: God loved him, the disciples accepted him, Simon blessed him, and the Jews inquired (negative sense) about him, saw nothing distinctive about him and called him a liar, considering him disturbed. God willed his passion (verses 2, 5, 6) that there might be peace for Jew and Gentile (the people and the peoples) and "that we might have reconciliation before God". Verse 8 discusses the crucifixion; verse 9 the problematic of tomb and death. The remainder (10-12) presents a theological analysis of the entire Christ event.

Only verse 9 presented problems for the commentator in his analysis. The understanding brought to the passage as a whole required that a christological interpretation be adopted. As the text stood, "the wicked gave his grave", it did not match the gospel accounts. Therefore the scholarly Išo'dad was more tentative here than usual. He presented his preferred interpretation, and then listed a series of alternatives.

He accepted the "inverted sense" solution previously seen in the works of Theodore bar Koni and Išo' bar Nūn. Thus he wrote:

*The wicked gave his grave.* That is, the phrase is inverted, but the sense is that: the rich gave his tomb, that is, Joseph the Counselor. *And the wicked in his death,* that is Pilate who gave his body to Joseph that he might bury it<sup>44</sup>.

Note that the effort to conform to the gospel tradition led to the exchange of *rašī'o* for *'atīro* in the second clause of verse nine. This is probably integral to the text of the commentary and not a scribal error in light of the accord between the resultant reading and the interpretative schema.

There follows a series of interpretations gleaned from patristic sources. The first three are found nearly verbatim in Išo' bar Nūn (see above) but in a different order:

42 Ibid, CSCO 304, Syr. 129, ix-xxi.

43 Ibid, iii.

44 Ibid, Text, 53 lines 1-4; Trans., 67.



- (1) "The wicked Pilate gave his death on the cross ..." <sup>45</sup> which interpretation is attributed to Daniel bar Toubanita <sup>46</sup>.
- (2) "But correctly it is understood, the wicked Jews and those of the house of Pilate ... the rich live as faithful by his death" <sup>47</sup>.
- (3) "The wicked crucifiers gave his death. The rich ones, Joseph the Counselor and Nicodemus honored his death with spices and linens etc." <sup>48</sup>.

The fourth possibility is introduced as "Greek", *yawnoyo'* :

*'etel rašī'o' ḥlap mawteh w'atire' ḥlap* I shall give the wicked in exchange for his  
*qbūrteh.* death and the rich (pl.) in exchange for his  
 burial <sup>49</sup>.

To this is added the interpretative comment :

*honaw 'etba' dino' men 'ayleyn das'arw lōteh* That is, I shall wreak vengeful judgement  
*holeyn bišto' wadšarko'.* from those who did to him these evil things,  
 etc. <sup>50</sup>.

The text cited as "Greek" appears to be an effort at correction aimed at once to bring the basic elements of the phrase, the verb tense, the object and the coordinating preposition (*ḥlap* for ἀντί) into line with the LXX text, and at the same time to resolve the christological problem of the text by inverting the troublesome terms, "grave" and "death".

An ingenious solution, the christological application was ignored by Išo'dad (or by his source?). Instead an application much more consistent with the views of the LXX (see above) than with those of the Christian exegetes of Syria is adopted, so that the verse is interpreted in the context of the document itself.

The exact significance of this reading is difficult to access. It is very different from the text usually cited by the Syrians as "Greek", that is the Syro-Hexaplar. The Syro-Hexaplaric text published by Ceriani translated the passage :

*w'etel biše' ḥlap qbūrto' dileh w'atire' ḥlap* I shall give the wicked ones in exchange for  
*mawteh.* the burial which is his, and the rich (pl.) in  
 exchange for his death <sup>51</sup>.

45 Ibid, Text, 53 lines 4-5; Trans., 67. On the relationship of the works of these two authors, see L. Van Rompay, "Išo' bar Nun and Išo'dad of Merv: New Data for the Study of the Interdependance of their Exegetical Works", *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 8 (1977) 229-249.

46 The identity of this author is uncertain. Baumstark 207 suggests he be identified with Daniel bar Maryam (VIIIth century) whose works have been preserved. Cf. Van den Eynde, *CSCO* 304 Syr. 129, x.

47 *CSCO* 303 Syr. 128, 53 lines 4-10. See above, note 31 where similar completions of the text are mentioned.

48 The text of Išo'dad adds *ketono'* to the text cited by Išo' bar Nūn, see above.

49 *CSCO* 303 Syr. 128, Text, 53, lines 10-12; V. 304, Syr. 129, Trans., 67.

50 Ibid, 53 line 11.



The tantalizing possibility of Jewish scholia collections or of a Syriac Translation of the LXX for Isaiah in addition to the above text, or of lists of "corrections" of difficult passages remain but tantalizing possibilities.

*Dionysius bar Ṣalībī († 1171)*

Most of what we know of this Jacobite bishop and scholar is dependant upon chronicle of his friend Michael the Syrian<sup>52</sup>. He was appointed Bishop, after 1166, of Amid (Diarbékir) where he founded a school. A prolific author, Dionysius wrote in various areas of theological science. His commentaries on the Old Testament, as yet unedited<sup>53</sup>, are among the most extensive which have been preserved through the vicissitudes of Syrian ecclesiastical history.

The commentary on Isaiah, like those on most other books of the Old Testament is divided into two distinct sections. The first section is entitled *pūšoqo' sū'ronoyo'* (literal explanation) and is based on the text of the Peshitta. The second section is designated *pūšoqo' datreyn rūhonoyo'* (A second, a spiritual interpretation). The biblical text cited in this section is generally that of the Syro-Hexaplar<sup>54</sup>. This section is apparently but an abstract of a more extensive commentary which apparently has not been preserved<sup>55</sup>.

Accordingly, portions of Isaiah 53 (not every verse) are commented upon in each of the two sections. Each time the author reflects upon key or

51 *Codex Syro-Hexaplaris Ambrosianus Photolithographice Editus curante et adnotante Antonio Maria Ceriani*, Monumenta Sacra et Profana, VII (Mediolani, 1874), fol. 189v.

52 J. B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, IV, Paris 1910; III, Paris, 1901, passim. For resums of this material and excellent bibliography, see A. Van Roey, "6. Denys bar Salibi", *DHGE* XIV, 1960, cols. 253-256; François Graffin, "4. Jacques (Denys) bar Salibi", *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* VIII, 1972, cols 29-30.

53 The commentary is preserved in libraries from Boston to India of which the most ancient is Dayr az-Za'farān 66 (A.D. 1189). For lists of these manuscripts see, Mar Ignatius Afram I, "Tafsīr nubuwwat Aṣā'ya an-Nabī li-l-'allāmah al-ḥaṭīr wa-l-mufasssīr al-kabīr Mar Diyūnūsiyūs Ya'qūb muṭrān Āmid (Diyārbakr) al-maṣhūr b-Ibn aṣ-Ṣalībī alladī nabāḡa fī l-mi'ah at-tāniyah 'aṣarah li-l-milād (sanat 1171 M.), "Al-Maḡallah al-Baḡriyariyyah as-Suryāniyyah 3 (Jerusalem 1935), 34; Arthur Vööbus, "Neue Funde für die handschriftliche Überlieferung der alttestamentlichen Kommentare des Dionysios bar Ṣalībī", *ZAW* 84 (1972) 246-249; Samir Khalil, "Le Commentaire d'Isaie de Denys bar Ṣalībī. Notes bibliographiques", *OrChr* 62 (1978) 158-165. E. R. Hambye, "Some Syriac Libraries of Kerala (Malabar), India", *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus* (Chicago, 1977) 38.

54 This is not the case with Isa. 53.9 according to the Ceriani text. See above p. 40.

55 The title of the second portion, B.N. Syr 66, fol. 364v reads:

tūb pūšoqo datreyn rūhonoyo'  
bkaryoto' men pūšoqo' sagiyo'noyo'  
d'ēša'yo' nbiyo' dīleh dmory  
diyūnnōsyōs.



problematic terms and phrases. The comments on passages are generally presented as isolated entities devoid of any internal continuity.

The "literal" explanation of Isaiah 53,9 presents an analysis strikingly similar to that of Išo'dad of Merv (see above). Dionysius reiterates the "inversion of terms" articulated by the Nestorian exegetes who preceded him indicating that, as the verse stands, it is incorrect. He then rewrites the second phrase of the verse in accordance with the gospel narratives. The text is found in B.N. Syr. 66, fol. 360<sup>r</sup>;

<p><i>wyahb raši'o' . h. petgomo' hū hpiko' .</i>  <i>d'itawhy hokan bsemolo' yahb 'atiro' qabreh .</i>  <i>h . yawsep būlewī . wraši'o' bmawteh . h.</i>  <i>pilo'tōs dyahb pagreh lyawsep dnetqbar.</i></p>	<p><i>And the wicked gave.</i> That is, the phrase is inverted for it is in this way incorrect. The rich gave his grave, that is, Joseph the Counselor. And the wicked in his death, that is Pilate who gave his body to Joseph that it might be buried.</p>
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The "spiritual" interpretation is surprising in that it ignores the problem entirely. It gives one version of the traditional explanation but with the problematic Peshitta text and without rectification of the misstatement. B.N. 66 Fol. 390<sup>v</sup> reads :

<p><i>yahb raši'o' qabreh . h . yawsep.</i>  <i>w'atiro' bmawteh . h . niqūdimōs d'ayti</i>  <i>hūnto' wketone'</i></p>	<p>The wicked gave his grave, that is Joseph; and the rich in his death, that is, Nicodemus who brought spice and linens.</p>
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#### *Gregory Abū-l-Farağ (Barhebraeus) (1226-1286)*

Among the extraordinary literary production of this Jacobite scholar-churchman<sup>56</sup> is a set of scholia on the Book of Isaiah, an edition of which was published on the basis of unspecified British Museum and Bodleian Library (Oxford) manuscripts<sup>57</sup>.

Barhebraeus reflects an orientation quite different from that of Išo'dad with regard to the passage as a whole. For instead of drawing heavily from the Gospel narratives to build on the outline of the Servant Song a biographical-theological resumé, the theological development follows more the Pauline model. The conception is still Christological but more cosmic in its understanding than evangelic. The structure of his comments is suggested here<sup>58</sup> :

56 For biographical and bibliographical information, see "Barhebraeus", *DHGE* VI, 1932, cols. 792-794, E. Herman; "Barhebraeus", *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1957, 131; Johann Göttberger, *Barhebraeus und seine Scholien zur Heiligen Schrift, Biblische Studien*, Bd. 5 Heft 4, 5 (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1900).

57 Otto Fridericus Tullberg, *Gregorii bar Hebraei in Jesaiam Scholia* (Uppsala, 1842).

58 Ibid, 29-31.



I. His identity and the response to Him. He argues that his coming was foretold but not heard (verse 1) since his divinity was concealed in his humanity (verse 2), observing that therefore “we considered him disturbed” because he broke the law, and we called him Ba'alzebub.

II. The Purpose of His coming: to instruct and to reconcile the people (verse 5).

III. The result of his coming (verses 8-12). His eternity was incomprehensible because he proceeded from the bosom of the Father and came to men (verse 8). Once here Pilate ordered his death and Joseph the Counselor gave his grave (verse 9).

The concluding series of oppositions have, perhaps, some relation to the Ephremian commentary (compare above):

Condemned as a sinner, the seed of his doctrine will bear fruit forever; He was tempted in all things, that the Gospel might be preached and cosmic wrong righted; Considered impious, he intercedes for the impious (verses 10-12).

The only scholium which is not integral to this theological discussion is that concerning verse 9. Here Barhebraeus was forced to come to terms with the problematic Peshitta rendition, which he without the reservations of his predecessors dismisses as incorrect. Thus he observes about Isaiah 53.9:

*yahb raši' o' qabreh w'atiro' bmawteh . h . hono' petgomo' bahpoko' zodek lmestaklūteh wdomyo' dmen kotūbe' 'etdawadt ke'mat raši' o' dhū pilatōs bmawteh pqad . w'atiro' dhū yawsep būlewī qabreh yahb.*

The wicked gave his grave and the rich in his death. That is this expression should be understood inversely and it seems to have been confused by scribes so that the wicked, that is Pilate, he ordered his death; the rich, that is Joseph the Counselor, gave his tomb<sup>59</sup>.

The technique of the “inversion of terms” to produce a startling result which would then force the reader to carefully consider the “true” solution was lost on Barhebraeus. For him it was a simple error to be tacitly corrected in light of the evangelist's narrative.

### Conclusions

The Syrian commentators whose observations and analyses of Isaiah 53.9 are available to us present three different solutions to the dilemma posed them by the Peshitta version of the text which forced them to choose between accepting a reading which did not correspond either with their

59 Ibid, 30, lines 10-13.



exegetical traditions or with the other versions, or rejecting the text as they had received it.

The first solution was to emend the text. Thus the Ephremian commentary chose to reject the reading of the version itself in an effort to allow the verse to function in the Christological analysis of the larger context. The author completed the phrase left incomplete by the Peshitta in order to remove the impediment to the "correct" interpretation.

The second and most popular method of removing the contradiction between the Isaiah passage and the Gospel narratives was by the technique of recognizing the "inversion of terms". These terms, admittedly difficult for the exegete, were considered to have been written cryptically by the ancient prophet. The discord between the inner meaning intended by the prophet and the external meaning (or lack thereof) was to draw the attention of the interpreter to the verse and to emphasize its significance for the passage to whose who would understand God's premonstration of the central event of history as they perceived it. It was the duty of the one who would actualize that premonstration in the Christian community to decipher the cryptic, to detect (in this case) the Christological reference, and to clarify the prediction.

The advantage of this exercise of reversing the difficulties was that it resolved the problem of the correspondance between the two standards of the received biblical text and the evangelic tradition while allowing both to retain their integrity.

This was the method adopted, explicitly or implicitly by Theodore bar Koni, Išo' bar Nūn and Iso'dad of Merv, Dionysius bar Šalībī, and by their sources. Even Išo'dad who had another option open to him in the text which he presumed to be Greek, an option which resolved the tension without resort to any interpretative device, seems to have no special inclination to accept that alternative. He merely listed it in scholarly fashion for the consideration of the reader. Any thought of a hierarchy of translations with an attendant construct of the correctness of the earlier versions was foreign to them.

The third resolution of the problem was offered by Barhebraeus. This exegete observed the disparity between the Isaiah narrative and the Gospel writer's account, assumed the New Testament narration to be the canon of exactness, and reasoned that therefore the particulars of the Isaiah description, as he had received it, must be in error. He dismissed the Peshitta of Isa. 53.9 as a scribe's mistake.

The resultant interpretations provided by these three alternatives reflect different assumptions about the nature of the Scriptures and of the received texts of the Scriptures. However the interpreters, by disparate paths arrived



at the same conclusion. That is, the verse without exception is seen as a prophecy of the death and burial of Christ. Only in the Ephremian commentary is there a divergence from the norm and then only in detail. This divergence is caused by the textual emendation.

The determinative factor in any specific exegesis of Isaiah 53.9 was not then the approach used to resolve the exegetical problem. It was the homogeneous exegetical tradition into which the interpretations were presented. There were two aspects to this tradition. The first was theological-exegetical. The Servant Song of Isaiah 52.13-53.12 was interpreted Christologically in the Syrian as well as the Greek Church and, as we have seen, was used as a framework for theological reflection about the Christ event.

Therefore by whatever method these scholars sought to remove the stumbling block of the terms "death" and "grave", the method was only a tool to buttress the author's perspective relative to the interpretative focus. No conception divergent from the tradition could be derived. It was the matrix of religio-exegetical traditions which set the limits of interpretative possibility.

The other aspect of this homogeneous tradition was textual. Until the time of Barhebraeus, this text was an accepted standard. In spite of the interpretative problem posed by the text, there appears to have been no effort by these commentators to bring the text into closer correspondance with either the Hebrew or the Greek versions.

Thus the Syrian authors whose work on Isaiah 53.9 has been examined were first of all scholars who aligned themselves with the exegetical traditions of their churches.