

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

STUDIES IN HONOR OF
WILLIAM FRANKLIN STINESPRING

Edited by
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DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Durham, N. C. 1972

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L.C.C. card no. 70-185463
I.S.B.N. 0-8223-0288-8

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Composition by Maurice Jacobs, Inc.

בְּעוֹתָא IN EARLIEST CHRISTIANITY

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Almost thirty years ago Professor W. F. Stinespring's mentor, C. C. Torrey, speculated on the meaning of בְּעוֹתָא among the earliest Aramaic-speaking Christians. His conjecture has been subsequently ignored both by Semitists and historians. Recent discoveries of Aramaic manuscripts and contemporary research on related subjects show that a reassessment of Torrey's speculation is opportune.

In the present essay we shall discuss the following: the definition of בְּעוֹתָא customarily held by Semitists today; Torrey's position; the meaning of this noun in an apocryphal Syriac psalm; the use of בְּעוֹתָא¹ in the Sinaitic Palimpsest; the derivation of the Arabic word *'lbā'ûth*; and finally the probable meaning of בְּעוֹתָא in the earliest Christian hymnbook, the so-called Odes of Solomon.

The denotation of בְּעוֹתָא that is usually given is "petition," and this meaning is said to derive etymologically from the familiar verb בָּעָא ("to ask," "to pray"). There is no question that this definition is supported by the expression in Dan. 6:14 [13]: בָּעָא בְּעוֹתָא "petitioning his petition." The meaning "petition" for בְּעוֹתָא, however, does not apply in some later texts, viz. the Sinaitic Palimpsest and the Odes of Solomon, as we shall see.

Professor Torrey's speculation regarding the meaning of this noun was that בְּעוֹתָא also meant "resurrection," but that this meaning was peculiar to the earliest Aramaic-speaking Christians.² He obtained this meaning from the use of בְּעוֹתָא in the Sinaitic Palimpsest, a variant reading found also in Aphraates, and from an etymological examination of the Arabic word *'lbā'ûth*. In the following pages we shall attempt to revive Torrey's inference. At the outset it is important to observe that he did not challenge the meaning of this noun in Jewish circles.

1. Printing costs demand that the Syriac script be put into square characters. It is hoped, however, that this practice will not give the impression that the writer believes the Sinaitic Palimpsest and the Odes of Solomon were originally composed in the square script.

2. *Documents of the Primitive Church* (New York, London: Harper and Brothers, 1941), pp. 257-62.

While **בעוּתָא** is not found in the Genesis Apocryphon, it is present in the five apocryphal Syriac psalms³ recently described by M. Delcor as "Cinq Psaumes Syriaques Esséniens."⁴ We are in agreement with Delcor's judgment "que ces cinq psaumes trouvent leur explication normale sinon dans le milieu essénien proprement dit, du moins dans un milieu essénisant. . . ."⁵

Our attention is drawn to the third psalm, the fifth line of which is as follows:

בעוּתִי לֹא תַכְלֵא מִנִּי.

My **בעוּתָא** do not withhold from me.

What is the denotation of **בעוּתָא** in this line? The answer is clarified by the corresponding word in the first line of the synonymous parallelism: **שְׂאֵלְתִי** ("my request").⁶ The meaning of this stich, therefore, is as follows:

And give me my request,

My petition withhold not from me.

Consequently, as in Dan. 6:14 [13] so in this Jewish, Syriac psalm **בעוּתָא** signifies "petition." The denotation is precisely the one Torrey would expect since the psalm is not Christian. For example, see line 11: **נְמוּסָךְ** and lines 37-38:

פְּרוּק לִיסְרִיִל גְּבִיךְ
וּלְדַבִּיתָ יַעֲקֹב בַּחִירְךָ

When we turn to the early Christian, Syriac literature, we discover that another meaning is given to this noun.

In the earliest Syriac recension of the gospels, the Sinaitic

3. These psalms have been known to western scholars since Assemani's publication in 1759 (*Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae Codicum manuscriptorum Catalogus* [1759], vol. 1, 3:385 f.). For a succinct bibliographical statement regarding the extant manuscripts of these psalms, see M. Delcor, *Les Hymnes de Qumran (Hodayot)* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1962), p. 299.

4. Delcor, p. 299.

5. Delcor, pp. 299-300. The most important parallel with Qumran ideology is the emphasis that praise is more important than cultic sacrifices (Psalm 2, lines 17-21). Also of importance is the meaning of the communal meal (Psalm 2, lines 24-25) and the intermittent use of words that have an Essene connotation (see Delcor, p. 303).

6. Martin Noth brings out this meaning through his translation of the line into Hebrew: **שְׂאֵלְתִי** ("my supplication for favor"). See Noth's important study, "Die fünf-syrisch überlieferten apocryphen Psalmen," *ZAW*, 47 (1930), 1-23.

Palimpsest, we find the following unusual uses of **בעוּתָא** (juxtaposed with the parallel passages in the Greek and the Peshitta):

Luke 2:25		
προσδεχόμενος παράκλησιν τοῦ Ἰσραήλ,	ומקבל הוא בעוּתָא דַּאיִסְרִיִל	GK
	ומסכָּא הוא לְבוּיָא דַּאיִסְרִיִל	Sy ^a
	ומסכָּא הוא לְבוּיָא דַּאיִסְרִיִל	Peshitta
	looking for the consolation of Israel	RSV
Luke 6:24		
Πλὴν οὐαὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς πλουσίοις,	בְּרָם וַי לְכוּן עַתִּירָא דְקַבְלָתוּן בְּעוּתָכוּן	GK
ὅτι ἀπέχετε τὴν παράκλησιν ὑμῶν.	בְּרָם וַי לְכוּן עַתִּירָא דְקַבְלָתוּן בּוּיָאֲכוּן	Sy ^a
	But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation.	Peshitta
	your consolation.	RSV

It is important to note that the Peshitta follows the Greek and that the Sinaitic Palimpsest alone attests to this use of **בעוּתָא** (the Curetonian version has neither passage).

In attempting to understand the meaning of this noun, it is first necessary to note that in the Sinaitic Palimpsest it translates (or corresponds to) *παράκλησις*, which means "summons, imploring, invocation, request, exhortation, consolation." (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie). In the New Testament it is conceptually linked with *παράκλητος*, "the helper, intercessor." The latter Greek noun is used only by John (four times); the former is peculiar to Luke (two times in the Gospel, four times in Acts) and Paul (twenty).⁷ The two passages cited above, consequently, are the only ones in the Gospels in which we find the noun *παράκλησις*. In both passages it means "consolation." The translator of the Sinaitic Palimpsest would have rendered *παράκλησις*, if this noun was in his *Vorlage* and all the evidence leads to that presupposition, with a Syriac noun of similar meaning. Hence **בעוּתָא** in early western, Christian Aramaic⁸ probably obtained the meaning "consolation."

7. R. Morgenthaler, *Statistik des neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes* (Zürich: Gotthelf-Verlag, 1958).

8. No evidence has been found nor reason given to weaken or disprove C. C. Torrey's contention that the Sinaitic Palimpsest was written "at or near Antioch, early in the second century." *Documents* p. 275. Also see A. S. Lewis's comments in *The Old*

It should be observed that the Greek noun means both "petition" and "consolation." In Jewish Aramaic and Edessene Syriac **בעוּתָא** means only "petition." Of the numerous Aramaic and Syriac lexicons only those by R. Köbert, S.J., and C. Brockelmann record the meaning *solatium* for **בעוּתָא**. Brockelmann alone cites textual evidence; he lists the two passages in the Sinaitic Palimpsest given above.

What is the relationship between *παράκλησις* in the Greek New Testament and **בעוּתָא** in the Sinaitic Palimpsest? There are three reasonable possibilities. The first is that the Syriac translator chose **בעוּתָא** because it corresponded to one meaning of the Greek word, viz. "petition." This possibility is highly unlikely. It would demand the unfounded presupposition that the translator of the Sinaitic Palimpsest was unskillful. The second possibility is that **בעוּתָא** obtained a new meaning from *παράκλησις*, viz. "consolation." This possibility seems unlikely because there were Aramaic and Syriac words that meant "consolation," for example, **נְחֵמָה** (a Hebrew loanword, it is frequently used as a verb in the Hodayoth, e. g. 5:3, 6:7, 9:13 [bis], 11:32, 16:17) and **בִּימָא** (not found in the Gen.Ap. but used in the Peshitta at Luke 2:25 and 6:24).⁹ The third possibility is that **בעוּתָא** in the Sinaitic Palimpsest goes behind the Greek to the selfsame word in Palestinian Aramaic.

Syriac Gospels or Evangelion da-Mepharreshê (London: Williams and Norgate, 1910), pp. v, xiii. P. E. Kahle "fully" agreed with Torrey's conclusions regarding the date of the Old Syriac Gospels (OSG) but changed "in the region of Antioch" to "in Adiabene." *The Cairo Geniza*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1959), pp. 287 f. Cf. Arthur Vööbus, *Studies in the History of the Gospel Text in Syriac* (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1951), pp. 26 ff. Kahle rightly sees the weaknesses in Torrey's comment about Antioch but his own conjecture about Adiabene is burdened with more difficulties. That a palimpsest, whose upper script was written near Antioch and contains numerous Western features itself, was composed east of Edessa is a possibility which appears extremely improbable to the present writer. Matthew Black's discussion of the sources and antiquity of the OSG raises the possibility that a Palestinian Aramaic Gospel or Gospel tradition influenced the OSG; for example, the Sinaitic Syriac alone retains in John 10:12 a paronomasia characteristic of Jesus (*sakhr shaggar*). While Principal Black states that Torrey's conclusion goes beyond the evidence, he nonetheless amasses data to support the suggestion that the OSG were directly influenced by Palestinian Aramaic. We are in total agreement with his comment that "it is certainly difficult to believe . . . that in bilingual Antioch the Gospels were not translated in Syriac early in the second century." *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 262-70.

9. It is highly unlikely that **בעוּתָא** is a corruption of **בִּימָא**. The second and fourth consonants in each word are too dissimilar. Likewise, it is improbable that the supposed error would be repeated precisely the same way four chapters later.

This suggestion would demand that **בעוּתָא** in Palestinian Aramaic during the first Christian century meant both "petition" and "consolation." The possibility seems conjectural, but the following discussion tends to confirm it. For the moment, suffice it to state that new ideologies usually coin new words and infuse old words with new meanings. Certainly the earliest Christians used old words in new ways. Unfortunately, we cannot presently prove the third possibility since the earliest Christian Aramaic documents have not been preserved. However, the meaning of the noun **בעוּתָא** in the extant manuscripts from earliest Aramaic-(Syriac-)speaking Christianity, the Sinaitic Palimpsest and the Odes of Solomon, does reinforce the third possibility, as we shall soon see.

Professor Torrey argued that among the earliest Aramaic-speaking Christians **בעוּתָא** acquired the meaning "resurrection." The distance from "petition" to "resurrection" is extreme; the separation from "consolation" to "resurrection" is much less, but the two nouns are not exactly synonymous. They are not far from being synonyms, however, when one realizes that the "consolation" Simeon was looking for was certainly the "salvation" of Israel. "Salvation" and "resurrection" were metonyms for the early Christians, as Professor Torrey clearly demonstrated (p. 259; see also John 11:25 in the Sinaitic Palimpsest). Likewise, if one could push aside the veil of history, *et hoc genus omne*, that separates us from the earliest Palestinian Christians, and ask them what was their consolation, or what was their salvation, the answer would probably be the same, viz. the resurrection of the Messiah. The deduction is that for them **בעוּתָא** denoted "consolation" and connoted "resurrection." The following two observations, one concerning an Arabic word and the other about the use of **בעוּתָא** in the Odes of Solomon, certainly go a long way to substantiate this inference.

As we turn to Arabic for possible elucidation on this point, we note that two scholars besides Professor Torrey have argued that *ʿlbaʿūth* is a Syriac loanword. Both scholars note that the meaning of the Arabic word is connected with Easter. The first, S. Fraenkel, could not etymologically diagnose the origin of this meaning in Arabic, "Wieso aber grade das Osterfest speciell das 'Gebet' genannt wurde, weiss ich nicht zu sagen."¹⁰ The second, Adrien

10. *Die Aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1886), p. 277.

Barthélemy, reported that the Arabic word meant "prières du lundi de Pâques," and that it derives etymologically from the Syriac **בְּעוּתָא**, which comes from the root **בָּעָא**, "to demand, to pray."¹¹ The problem with Barthélemy's explanation, however, is that *ʿlbāʿūth* does have the meaning he suggests, but primarily means "Easter," and it is difficult to see how that meaning came from the verb "to demand."

The attempt to explain the Arabic noun on the basis of the Arabic verb *baʿatha* ("to revive"—a dead person) has been suggested,¹² but to represent the noun *Easter* requires the additional word *yōm*, which means in Arabic "the day of resurrection." There is no need to show that this latter derivation is different from the Syriac loan word which by itself means "Easter." Suffice it to say that *BʿTh* in Arabic means "to revive" but the selfsame root in Syriac means "to be formidable."

Perhaps some light will be shed upon a solution if we follow Torrey's lead and turn to a previously unmentioned Aramaic root, namely **בּוּע**, which means "to swell, burst forth, rejoice." The derivative **בּוּעָתָא** means "rejoicing." It is easy to see how *Easter* could have derived from *rejoicing*, but the waw is in the wrong place. The Targum to Psalm 43:4, however, has the waw after the *ʿayin*: **בְּעוּתִי**, as does the Targum to Psalm 42:5: **בְּעוּתָא**. It is possible that the first Aramaic-speaking Palestinian Jewish-Christian circles used this noun to signify their Easter, the time of rejoicing, because of the resurrection of their Lord. It is clear why **בְּעוּתָא** did not have this meaning for later Syriac-speaking Christians: **בּוּע** as a verb with this meaning is found neither in biblical Aramaic nor Edessene Syriac.¹³ Moreover, it seems relatively certain that the peculiarly western portions of the Old Syriac Gospels were edited out by Edessene Christians. The evidence, therefore, clearly points in one direction. The Arabic word *ʿlbāʿūth*, which means Easter, is a Syriac loanword that goes back to the

11. *Dictionnaire Arabe-Français* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1935), p. 51.

12. Régis Blachère, Mustafa Chouémi, and Claud Denizeau (eds.), *Dictionnaire Arabe-Français-Anglais*. Vols. in process (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1967-), 1: 697-99.

13. In Syriac another verb has the same radicals (**בּוּע**), but is found only in participial forms: **בּוּעִי**. R. Payne Smith reports that the verb signifies *cessavit, tempus trivium* (*Thesaurus Syriacus*, Oxonii: E. Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1879, vol. 1, *ad loc.*)

Syriac noun **בְּעוּתָא**, that comes from the root **בּוּע**, means "rejoicing," and was probably associated with the Resurrection.

In the preceding pages we have intermittently suggested that the meanings "consolation" and "resurrection" were obtained by **בְּעוּתָא** only in earliest Christian Aramaic. We now turn to the Odes of Solomon, which was probably composed in an early form of Syriac (Aramaic) around A.D. 100 in or near Antioch,¹⁴ in order to discover if either of these meanings is supported by it.

In Ode 17:13b we find the following difficult line:

ובְּעוּתִי בְּחֻבָּא דִּילִי

The translations of this line are equivocal and ambiguous. In his final edition of the Odes, J. R. Harris was forced to append the following note: "The sense is very doubtful."¹⁵ The confusion is caused by **בְּעוּתָא**. Applying the meaning found in most lexicons, we obtain the following translation of verse 13:

And I offered my knowledge generously,
And my petition through my love.

Obviously something is wrong. Harris's final attempt at solution was to amend the text to read, "And their request to me with my love." This conjecture is unacceptable for three reasons: The manuscripts agree at this point so that an emendation is purely subjective. The conjecture destroys the synonymous parallelism since "my knowledge" is not parallel with "their request." It is not easy to understand the meaning of "I offered . . . their request. . . ."

While the meaning "petition" does not fit into the context of this verse, the meaning "consolation" fulfills the requirements. It restores the parallelistic construction, and makes the verse coherent and lucid. The verse so translated would read as follows:

14. See the author's *The Odes of Solomon* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, in preparation). The provenance of the Odes will be discussed in a future publication.

15. J. R. Harris and Alphonse Mingana, *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, 2 vols. (London, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1919-20), 2: 291. In 1911 Harris had translated the verse as follows: "and I imparted my knowledge without grudging; and my prayer was in my love. . . ." *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), p. 114. In 1912 J. H. Bernard presented the same translation. *The Odes of Solomon*, Texts and Studies, vol. 8, no. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), p. 82. Both of these early translations were relegated by the later recognition that the Odes are composed in verse. Verse 12 is constructed according to *parallelismus membrorum*.

And I offered my knowledge generously,
And my consolation through my love.

What is the precise meaning of *consolation* in this passage? Let us now turn to the Ode with this question in mind.

The evidence points toward the assumption that *consolation* in this verse means "resurrection." First, we should note that the particular context favors it. Since the Odist frequently emphasizes that eternal life is the result or reward of belief in Christ, it is only natural that he would have written that Christ offered his knowledge and his resurrection (the passage is written *ex ore Christi*). Note that the first person, singular suffix shows that the "consolation" is not some abstract idea but a personal offering. No emendation is needed, and the synonymous parallelism is palpable.

Second, it is important to observe that the general context adds great weight to the deduction that **בְּעוֹתָא** in Ode 17:13 means "resurrection." Prior to verse 13 the Odist is probably developing the subtle meanings of the Resurrection of Christ. In verse 11 he claims that Christ is "the opening of everything" and in verse 12 he states the result of his Resurrection. These verses are as follows:

And nothing appeared closed to me,
Because I was the opening of everything.

And I went towards all my bondsmen in order to loose them;
That I might not leave anyone bound or binding.

The two verses that follow verse 13 speak of "my fruits" and "my blessing," both of which are parallel to **וּבְעוֹתָי**. Since the former two gifts by Christ result in the "bondsmen" being "transformed" and "saved," it is highly likely that **וּבְעוֹתָי** meant "and my resurrection." Moreover, if this passage concerns the *descensus ad inferos* (cf. Ode 42:10 ff.), then the only consolation which would be effective is the resurrection from the dead.

In conclusion, **בְּעוֹתָא** probably denoted "consolation" and sometimes connoted "resurrection" among the earliest Aramaic-speaking Christians in Palestine. These meanings alone explain the passages in the Sinaitic Palimpsest, clarify the etymology of the Arabic word *al-bā'ūth*, and remove the difficulty in Ode 17.

To sum up, we have found that **בְּעוֹתָא** in the Odes of Solomon has precisely the meaning that Torrey speculated it would have in

an early Christian, Aramaic (Syriac) manuscript. Incidentally, we may have found supportive evidence that the provenance of the Odes is not in eastern Syria, as most scholars have argued,¹⁶ but somewhere in western Syria or Palestine.¹⁷

16. The scholars who have defended this thesis, accompanied with the date of their publication, are the following: Johannes de Zwaan (1937), R. M. Grant (1944), Jean Daniélou (1957), Arthur Vööbus (1958), and Gilles Quispel (1965). Also included in this list are the scholars who contended that Bardaisan may be the author of the Odes: W. R. Newbold (1911), Martin Sprengling (1911), and F. M. Braun (1957). Full bibliography for their publications is given in the author's *The Odes of Solomon*.

17. Numerous scholars have told the writer that the word *Syriac* must be used solely for documents written in Edessa. *Aramaic*, on the other hand, should be used to signify western writings. This distinction between early Syriac and Aramaic is no longer tenable. For example, one of the heretofore cherished distinctions between Aramaic and Syriac is that the former uses the preformative *Yōdh* in the imperfect but the latter uses the preformative *Nūn*. This distinction no longer holds. Early Syriac inscriptions have been found containing the preformative *Yōdh*. The two most important publications on this point are the following: Klaus Beyer, "Der reichs-aramäische Einschlag in der ältesten syrischen Literatur," *ZDMG*, 116 (1966), 242-43; Ernst Jenni, "Die altsyrischen Inschriften," *TZ*, 21 (1965), 381.