

Book of Esdras have some extravagant stories about Esdras reconstructing the sacred books of the Law which had been lost in the Exile. The essence of this tradition is maintained, with more sobriety indeed, by a number of the fathers, namely Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Basil the Great, Jerome and Isidore of Seville. The latter said quite simply of Esdras, 'This man wrote the sacred history and after Moses he is the second author of the Law, for after the captivity of Babylon he rewrote the Law which had been destroyed by the gentiles.'¹ At the back of these rather extravagant statements it is not difficult to see the survival of a tradition that Esdras had some very important role in the composition of the Law. The most satisfactory account of it is to admit that whereas Moses was the progenitor of the Pentateuch, Esdras put it into the written form which it has today.

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QUESTION AND ANSWER

SIMON BARJONA

On one occasion St Peter is addressed as Simon Barjona (Mt. 16:17). Is Barjona simply a patronymic or is it a symbolical name, meaning 'son of the dove'?

UNDER Hellenistic influence it became customary for the Jews, especially those of the Diaspora, to adopt a Greek name, and during the Roman occupation of Palestine Latin names were occasionally used. There was a variety of names from which to choose, but preference was usually given to transliterations of their original names, or to names which were similar in sound to the Hebrew or Aramaic. Thus for instance there were high priests who changed their names from Josue to Jason and from Menelas to Onias. The Latin name Justus is found together with a Hebrew name on two occasions in the New Testament (Ac. 1:23; 18:7) and once alongside the Greek form Jesus (Col. 4:11).²

In the Gospels Greek names are rare, but we do find Nicodemus, Andrew and Philip, whilst Thomas has also the Greek name Didymus with the same meaning of 'twin' (Jn. 11:16; 20:24; 21:2).

The original name of St Peter was the Hebrew Simeon. In the

¹ Isidore of Seville, *De Ortu et Obitu Patrum*, PL LXXXIII, 146

² Deissmann, *Bible Studies*, p. 315; *Dictionnaire de la Bible* IV, 1675

New Testament this is on two occasions simply transliterated into Greek (*Sumeōn* : Ac. 15:14 ; 2 Pet. 1:1), but in the gospels we always find the closely similar Simon (*Simōn*), which was a common Greek name. O. Cullmann considers that as St Peter came from the region of Bethsaida where Hellenistic influence is attested he received at circumcision the two names of Simeon and Simon.¹

In St John's gospel Our Lord refers on two separate occasions to the father of St Peter. In the account of the call of the disciples we read that Andrew 'brought him to Jesus. Looking at him Jesus said : You are Simon the son of John. You will be called Cephas, which means Peter.' (Jn. 1:42) Again we read that after the Resurrection 'Jesus said to Simon Peter : Simon son of John do you love me more than these ?' (Jn. 21:15). A fragment of the uncanonical *Gospel according to the Hebrews* also refers to him as the son of John.² On this evidence therefore the name of Peter's father was John (*yôḥanan*), a name which was very common amongst the Jews, and which was regularly represented in Greek as *Iōannēs*.

This would seem to exclude the possibility of Barjona being a patronymic. As is well known, the Aramaic *bar* means 'the son of,' but to understand Barjona as meaning the son of Jonas reopens the question of the name of Peter's father. That his father's name was Jonas is in itself improbable, since apart from its use as the name of the prophet (2 Kg. 14:25 ; Jon. *passim*), the name is not found as a masculine proper name before the fourth century A.D., though it is used as a woman's name in *Jubilees* 34:20, as a term of endearment similar to its use in the Canticle (2:14 ; 5:2 ; 6:9).

Iōna(s) is found, however, in some manuscripts of the Septuagint where the Hebrew reads *yôḥanan* (2 Kg. 25:23 ; 1 Chron. 26:3 ; Esd. 10:6), represented in others by *Iōannēs*. This evidence suggests that Jonas was used as an abbreviation or variant for John, and provides the basis for the commonly accepted solution to the difficulty. In this view Simon was the son of John, and when he is said to be Barjona, Son of Jona, in Mt. 16:17, it is nothing more than a variant or abbreviation. J. Jeremias favours this solution³, but he feels compelled to point out that the argument is not absolutely conclusive. No example of Jonas as a proper name is to be found in Rabbinic literature of the Tannaitic period (70–200 A.D.), but this is a negative argument of limited value. In literature belonging to the Amoraic period (200–500 A.D.) there are three examples, two Palestinian and one Babylonian. It must also be admitted that the usual abbreviation of *yôḥanan* was

¹ O. Cullmann, *Peter : Disciple—Apostle—Martyr*, 1953, pp. 17–18

² Lagrange, 'L'Évangile selon les Hébreux,' *Revue biblique* 1922, p. 339 ; James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 7

³ cf. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum neuen Testament*, III, 410

yôhay. Consequently he suggests an alternative solution. The name of Peter's father was Jona, but since it was a name which was little known, the much more common name of John has been substituted for it, in the fourth gospel and the uncanonical *Gospel according to the Hebrews*.

Two possible ways of reconciling Matthew's Barjona with the fourth gospel's 'Son of John' are thus suggested. But in both cases it is taken for granted that Barjona is a patronymic. It has however been recently suggested that Barjona is a symbolical name. *Yônah* in Hebrew means dove. When St Peter at Caesarea Philippi declared that Our Lord is 'The Christ, the son of the living God,' he was addressed in reply as 'Somin, son of the dove.' It is further supposed that the symbolism of such an epithet is explained by the words which follow: 'Flesh and blood have not revealed it to you, but my Father who is in heaven.' St Peter has received a Divine revelation. But the work of teaching divine truths is appropriated to the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26), Who came down at Our Lord's Baptism as a dove (Mt. 3:16). By giving Peter the symbolical name of Barjona, Our Lord is proclaiming that he enjoys, in a special manner, the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This interpretation of Barjona was very popular with the Fathers who were always alert to the possibilities of symbolical meanings. Jerome writes: 'The Lord said to him: Blessed art thou Simon Barjonas. Why? Because flesh and blood have not revealed this to thee but my Father. That which flesh and blood could not reveal was revealed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. By his confession then, he obtains a title which should signify that he has received a revelation from the Holy Spirit, whose son he shall also be called, for Barjonas in our tongue signifies the son of a dove. Others take it in the simple sense that Peter is the son of John, affirming that it was an error of the copyists in writing *Barjonas* for *Barjoannas*, dropping one syllable. But *Joanna* is interpreted: the grace of God. So either name has its mythical significance: the dove signifies the Holy Spirit; and the grace of God signifies the spiritual gift.'¹ This mystical interpretation of Barjona is continually repeated, in words almost identical with those of Jerome and obviously in dependence on him, by later writers such as Bede, Druthmar, Alcuin, Rabanus Maurus Haymo, Paschasius Radbertus, Bruno Signiensis, Godfridus Admon-tensis and Innocent III.² John Chrysostom however will have

¹ *Commentarium in Evang. Mat.*, Migne PL xxxvi, 117

² Bede: PL xcii, 78; Druthmar: PL cvi, 1396; Alcuin: *Catena Aurea* at Jn. 1:42; Rabanus Maurus: PL cvii, 990; Haymo: cxviii, 761; Paschasius: PL cxx, 559; Bruno: PL clxv, 212-213; Godfridus: PL clxxiv, 735; Innocent III: PL ccxvii, 550

nothing to do with the symbolical interpretation, for he writes : ' It would be without meaning to say : Thou art the son of Jonas, unless he intended to show that Christ is as naturally the Son of God as Peter is the son of Jonas, that is of the same substance as him that begot him.'¹

The symbolical interpretation is an attractive example of patristic exegesis. The Fathers have on the whole only one purpose in view when they comment upon the Scriptures : they wish to reiterate in every possible manner the great truths of the faith. One of these truths is that St Peter, chosen by our Lord to be the rock on which the Church is built, was divinely endowed for this great task with the wisdom which comes from the Holy Spirit. Of this truth the word Barjona may serve as an opportune reminder, once we remember that it can be translated as son of the dove. The Fathers were not particularly concerned with deciding what was in reality the name of Peter's father ; nor were they preoccupied with what Our Lord intended to convey by addressing Peter as Simon Barjona on that particular historical occasion ; nor were they concerned with what such a form of address meant to Peter.

Such questions however are our concern, since we undertake to expound the literal sense, and it seems certain that Our Lord did not use Barjona as a symbolical name. It is first of all unlikely that on the occasion when the symbolical name of Cephas plays so important a part, a second symbolical name would be included without any emphasis. The first is formally introduced : ' Thou art Peter,' but Our Lord does not say ' Thou, Simon, art Barjona,' nor does he give prominence to it in any other way. More important, there is no solid proof that Barjona could have borne any recognisable symbolism at the time Our Lord spoke to Peter. It is true that the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove at Our Lord's baptism ; but here it is the Holy Spirit in His role as the power of God, rather than as the divine revelation of supernatural knowledge. Nothing in Rabbinic literature suggests the latter symbolism of the dove, with the possible exception that the *Bath Qol* is said to sound like the cooing of the dove.² In any case, the divine revelation given to Peter is explicitly attributed not to the Holy Spirit but to the Father. In other words too much supposition is required, in order to maintain that Barjona was used as a symbolical name. It was therefore simply a patronymic, similar to such names as Bartholomew (son of Tolmai, Mk. 3:18), Bartimaeus (son of Timaeus, Mk. 10:46) and Barjesus (son of Jesus, Ac. 13:6).

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¹ *Catena Aurea* at Mt. 16:17

² *TWNT*, vi, 66, 4