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A table of contents for *Irish Biblical Studies* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ibs-01.php

D.R.G. Beattie

That the name Βοανηργες (Mark iii 17) represents a corrupt transliteration from Hebrew or Aramaic has long been acknowledged. That the first part reflects an original בנאי is readily acceptable,¹ but the second part "raises problems which have not yet been solved".² Dalman³ has suggested that the Semitic original of ρες could be the Aramaic רגז "anger", although he thinks רגז "noise, uproar" to be more likely.

The trouble with these suggestions is that neither of the words proposed means "thunder"⁴. Furthermore, it would appear that the men who translated the gospel into Syriac were unable to see any meaning in the strange form of the Greek, although in general they experienced no difficulty in re-transliterating Semitic words, even when these had suffered corruption in their Greek dress. Thus, for example, Εφφαθα (Mark vii 34) is "restored" in both the Peshitta and the Sinaitic text to ܦܩܠܐ, which is pure Syriac, but ܦܩܠܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ which appears in both the Old Syriac (Sinaitic) and Peshitta of Mark iii 17, is just a transliteration of the Greek text's Βοανηργες. "Sons of uproar" in Syriac would be ܦܩܠܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ. The expression in the gospel text may appear to be this with the suffix of the first person singular, but that is properly ܦܩܠܐ. What we have in ܦܩܠܐ is a transliteration of the Greek letters ρες, accommodated to Syriac writing conventions by the addition of a *yudh*, because, in view of the Syriac practice of using nouns habitually in the emphatic state, the only form of a noun which can end phonetically in a consonant is that with the (unvocalized and unpronounced) suffix of the first person singular.

If we stand back and look at the whole question from another point of view, the real problem may be seen to lie in the existence, in that verse, of the explanation of the word as meaning "sons of thunder". In so far as "thunder" may be used as a metaphor for noise, anger, violence, and so on, it is conceivable that such an

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epithet as "sons of thunder" might be applied to persons of unruly or volatile temperament, and it would be intelligible that such an epithet, once applied, should be explained in plain language. But the situation with the text of Mark iii 17 is just the reverse of this. Here we have what was once, if we accept Dalman's suggestion, a plain statement/⁵ explained by a figurative one. In short, the problem of Mark iii 17 is that, as matters stand in the search for the original word, it appears that a fairly clear statement has been "explained" by a metaphor.

Since the function of a gloss is to make plain what is otherwise obscure it must be presumed that the composer of the gloss "which means 'sons of thunder'" believed that the expression which he was explaining had this meaning. The question then, in the search for the original of "Boanerges" is, "Can we find a Semitic word meaning 'thunder' and capable of explicable corruption into ρυες?"

The obvious suggestion for a Semitic word for 'thunder' must be רעם (which is both Hebrew and Aramaic) or רעים (Aramaic)/⁶. Is there any way in which רעם (בני) could become (Boανη) ρυες in transliteration? I think there is. Taking רעם letter by letter we may say (a) that the Greek letter *rho* is an accurate transliteration for *resh*; (b) that the letter *'ayin* has two phonetic values and, as the Arabic cognate shows, it is the harder form (*ghain*) which occurs in רעם. *Gamma* is a legitimate representation of this phoneme, as is evidenced by LXX's Γαζα for עזה; (c) that the final form of *mem* (ם) may easily be confused with *samech* (ס). In short, we may say that ρυες is explicable as an error in transliteration by a scribe who misread רעם as רעס./⁷.

On this view the gloss "which means 'sons of thunder'" is not an attempt at translating the strange word/⁸ but the work of one who had a living tradition of the meaning of the original name. The implications of this suggestion for the history of the gospel text, I leave others to draw.

Notes

1. G. Dalman, *Grammatik des jüdisch-palästinischen Aramäisch*², Darmstadt 1960, p.144 n.2, suggests that the reading α has arisen through a conflation of two variant readings. D.W. Gooding has suggested to me privately that there may be, in the double vowel, a (misguided) interpretative element, inasmuch as " $\beta\alpha$ ", to a Greek-speaker, would suggest a shout or roar.
2. V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St Mark*, London 1963, p.232.
3. *loc. cit.*
4. Dalman himself observes (*loc. cit.*), " $\tau\omicron\tau\omicron\upsilon\sigma$ βρονης ist in keinem Fall genaue Übersetzung". Cf. Taylor, *loc. cit.*, "This view ... is weakened by the fact that the ordinary Hebrew word for thunder is רעם."
5. "Sons of uproar" or "sons of anger" would be a straightforward idiomatic expression for rowdy or irascible men, respectively.
6. We may note here Jerome's observation, in his commentary on Dan. i 7, "... filii Zebedaei appellati sunt filii 'tonitruī', quod non ut plerique putant 'boanerges' sed emendatius legitur 'banereem'.
7. The vocalization of רעם with "e" is attested in the comment of Jerome (see note 6).
8. Taylor, *loc. cit.*, "... it may well be that ... Βοανηργες is a corruption to which Mark has attempted to give what explanation he could".