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A Pair of Citations from the Diatessaron

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A PAIR OF CITATIONS FROM THE
DIATESSARON.

BY ISAAC H. HALL.

IN the catalogue of Christian books and writers composed by 'Ebed-yeshu' (or 'Odisho', as the Nestorians pronounce it), written about A.D. 1300, occurs the passage :

"Yeshu'dad (or Îsho'dad) of the same place [i.e. Ḥadath or Ḥadith, the place of Solomon, the writer just previously mentioned by 'Ebed-yeshu'] composed an exposition of the New [Testament], and also the book of the Beit^h Maut^hhê [i.e. part of the burial service] in a concise manner [*lit.* in a word of brevity]."

Yeshu'dad flourished about A.D. 852; his Commentary on the New Testament is still extant, though not yet printed. There is at least one manuscript of it in this country, and I think part of a second. I myself lately came into possession of a third, but it contains only his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. My manuscript is written in fine Nestorian script, dated the 21 Adar in the year 2041 of the Greeks, or 21 March, 1730 A.D. The testimony of this writer to a reading or to a passage in Tatian's Diatessaron is at least of as high a grade as the Arabic version published by Ciasca, and I therefore give one testimony therefrom, which differs entirely from the Arabic version. I give the text and context, as the matter is quite an important one in several aspects. The comment has to do with Matthew iii. 5, last clause. The text is as follows, omitting most of the needless Nestorian pointing, except in important words.

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أُسْتَلَا وَمَا فِيهَا مِنْ شَهَابٍ وَمَا فِيهَا مِنْ أُسْتَلَا . وَيَحْتَفَا
 أَلَا وَمَا مِنْهُ قَدِيمًا . وَيَا هَيْهَاتَا فَكَمْ خَفِيضًا . صَالِحًا
 وَمَا مِنْهُ أَمْرٌ وَمَا أُسْتَلَا . وَيَبْرَأُ أَلَا كَلًا وَيَرْصَا .
 وَأَفْ كَيْسًا تَلَا : كَمَا سَلَا سَلَا أَلَا . أَلَا تَلَا تَلَا
 تَلَا . بِحَقِّهِ . وَصَدَمًا وَمَا أَمْرٌ مَلَمَلًا . بِفَيْضًا تَلَا
 تَلَا . وَمَا وَمَلَا : وَمَا جَسْبَلًا أَلَا وَمَلَمَلًا أَلَا
 صَالِحًا جَسْبَلًا تَلَا .

Or, translated :

"And his food was locusts and wild honey. — But the Diatessaron says, His food indeed was honey and milk of the mountains. Others, The locusts indeed are tender roots that resemble parsnep, that is, *gezar* [i.e. *جزر*], and not very pleasant to the taste; which some call *qamsîs*, but others *qamsîn*, but in Persian *mang*. Others that they are roots which are called *gauche*, which in form indeed is like locusts, but in taste sweet, like honey. Others, that they are shoots of plants; and also that this [is meant] by the honey. This is not sweet, they say; but that is bitter and loathsome which wild bees make. According to the Expositor [i.e. Theodore of Mopsuestia], locusts are winged creatures, and the honey is [that] of nature; that is from the warmth of place [i.e. its *habitat* is warm], and its constitution air since it is continually found there [*lii.* they continually find it there].”

Yeshu'dad proceeds to remark upon these “theories of John,” and to draw allegorical and edifying conclusions, into which we need not enter. The noteworthy fact is that the Diatessaron, if it is here quoted correctly — and we can conceive no reason why it should not be so, but rather see every reason to the contrary — actually altered the reading of the Gospel to fit Tatian’s Encratite tenets. Here I leave the matter; but the restorers and students of Tatian cannot so leave it.

I will, however, give another citation which confirms this. It is from the Storehouse of Mysteries of Gregory Bar Hebraeus, in the Commentary on Matthew. I quote from Spanuth’s edition (Göttingen, 1879), p. 8.

ܘܡܢܐܘܟܠܘܗܘܢ ܩܘܨܘܬܐ ܘܚܘܒܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ . ܘܡܢܐܘܟܠܘܗܘܢ
 ܘܡܢܐܘܟܠܘܗܘܢ ܩܘܨܘܬܐ ܘܚܘܒܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ . ܘܡܢܐܘܟܠܘܗܘܢ
 ܘܡܢܐܘܟܠܘܗܘܢ ܩܘܨܘܬܐ ܘܚܘܒܐ ܕܥܘܠܘܬܐ .

Or, translated :

“*And his food was locusts and wild honey—with pethacha beth*
 [i.e. in the word ܩܘܨܘܬܐ]; the Greek ܩܘܨܘܬܐ with vowelless *beth*. With
 regard to this, some say that ‘locusts’ means roots and sweet plants
 (*gauche*); but in the Diatessaron ‘milk and honey’ is written.”

It can scarcely be doubted that Bar Hebraeus had good evidence
 for his statement. He *may* have had Yeshu'dad for his authority, but
 the form and matter of his writing look as if he knew something
 more of the Diatessaron than that paragraph of Yeshu'dad could give
 him. Is it not possible that the Diatessaron was known to him, and
 thus was actually extant down to the latter half of the thirteenth
 century?