

On an Obscure Quotation in the First Epistle of Clement

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READERS of the Epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians will remember a perplexing quotation at the end of the seventeenth chapter, in which Moses is made to say (it is the concluding proof of his lowliness of mind and personal humility),

ἐγὼ δὲ εἰμι ἀτμός ἀπὸ κύβρας,
But I am smoke from a pot.

The quotation is immediately connected with a previous one from Ex. 4 10, in which Moses refers to his lack of eloquence and hesitancy of speech, and with this quotation the former words are definitely connected by the sequence, 'And again he says,' so that we should naturally expect to verify the quotation somewhere in the Pentateuch; but no one, as far as I know, has ever succeeded in making an identification of the passage quoted.

If it is not to be found in the Pentateuch, it would seem natural to look for it in some other writing attributed to Moses; accordingly Hilgenfeld refers it, without any hesitation, to the *Assumption of Moses*: 'Verba Mosis, procul dubio e Mosis Assumptione desumpta.'¹ But in discussing the matter more at length in connection with the text of Clement, he speaks less confidently, and only says that it seems to be from the *Assumption of Moses*. For convenience I transcribe the part of the note that bears on the question:

¹ Hilgenfeld, *Nov. Test. extra can. rec.*, p. 93 (*Annot. ad Clem. Rom.*, ch. i.).

ἐγὼ δὲ εἰμι ἀτμῖς ἀπὸ κύθρας, haec Mosis verba a sacro codice frustra quaeruntur. quae enim Hos. 13 3 apud LXX. cod Al. et Theodotionem leguntur: ὡς ἀτμῖς καπνοδόχης (Vat. καπνοδόχης ὡς ἀτμῖς ἀπὸ δακρύων, var. lect. ἀκρίδων), neque Mosis sunt neque ea quae quaeruntur. etiam in libro Jubilaeorum, qui λεπτὴ γένεσις appellatur, neque aethiopico (vernacule edito a Dillmanno in Ewaldi Jahrb. d. bibl. Wiss. ii. 131 sq., iii. 1 sq.) neque latino (in Monumentis sacris et profanis ex codicibus praesertim bibliothecae Ambrosianae, tom. i, fasc. i, ed. Anton. Maria Ceriani, Mediolani, 1861, p. 8-54 et in Hermanni Roenschii libro: das Buch der Jubilaeen oder die kleine Genesis, Lips. 1874), neque in veterum scriptorum excerptis (cf. Fabricii cod. pseudepigr. V. T. i. 849 sq., ii. 120 sq.) illa reperiuntur itaque cum Cotelerio atque Hefelio et ipse (apost. Väter, p. 101) hic animadverti ῥητόν τι ὡς ἀπὸ τῆς θείας γραφῆς ξενίζον (Phot. Bibl. cod. 126). quum autem Mosis effatum laudetur, e Mosis Assumptione haustum esse videtur.

Hilgenfeld, then, affirms that the words we are in search of are not to be found in the Scriptures, nor in the *Book of Jubilees*; if, then, they are really Moses' words, we should expect to find them in the *Assumption of Moses*. But of this book only fragments are extant. So the conjecture remains unverified, and we are no further on than a marginal query. Next let us see what Lightfoot has to say upon the passage. For convenience I again transcribe the note:

ἐγὼ δὲ εἰμι ἀτμῖς, κτλ.] This quotation is not found in the Old Testament, or in any apocryphal book extant whole or in part. The nearest parallel is James 4 14, ποία γὰρ ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν; ἀτμῖς [γάρ] ἐστὶ ἢ πρὸς ὀλίγον φαινομένη, κτλ. Compare also Hosea 13 3, 'As smoke from the chimney' (or 'the window') where the LXX seems to have translated originally ἀτμῖς ἀπὸ ἀκρίδων (see Simson's *Hosea*, p. 44), corrupted into ἀπὸ δακρύων in B and corrected into ἀπὸ καπνοδόχης from Theodotion in A; and Ps. 119 83, 'I am become like a bottle in the smoke,' where again the LXX mistranslates ὡσεὶ ἀσκὸς ἐν πάχνῃ. In none of these passages, however, are the words very close, nor are they spoken by Moses. Perhaps, therefore, this should be reckoned amongst S. Clement's quotations from apocryphal books, on which Photius (*Bibl.* 126, ῥητά τινα ὡς ἀπὸ τῆς θείας γραφῆς ξενίζοντα παρεσάγει) remarks; see also §§ 8, 13, 23, 30, 46 (notes). Hilgenfeld supposes that the words were taken from the *Assumption of Moses*. This is not

impossible; but the independent reason which he gives for the belief that Clement was acquainted with that apocryphal work is unsatisfactory; see the note on the phoenix below, § 25. I have pointed out elsewhere (§ 23) another apocryphal work, from which they might well have been taken. The metaphor is common with the Stoics; see Seneca, *Troad.* 392 sq.: 'Ut calidis fumus ab ignibus Vanescit . . . sic hic quo regimur spiritus effluit'; M. Anton. x. 31, καπνὸν καὶ τὸ μηδέν; xii. 33, νεκρὰ καὶ καπνός; so also Empedocles (in Plut. *Op. Mor.* p. 360, c, quoted by Gataker on x. 31) had said, ἀκύμοροι καπνοῦ δίκην ἀρθότες ἀπέπταν.

From the foregoing it appears that Lightfoot agrees with Hilgenfeld in looking for the origin of the passage in some apocryphal work; but, while admitting the *Assumption of Moses* as a possible origin, was rather disposed to think that the lost book of *Eldat and Modat* would be a better suggestion. And in this uncertainty the matter seemed likely to rest. Let us see, however, whether there may not be an easier solution.

My first thoughts were that the reference to Moses might lead us to the Prayer of Moses the man of God in the 90th Psalm, for here we have a reference to the brevity of human life under the terms of 'a tale that is told,' against which the Targum suggests the equivalent, 'like the breath of the mouth in winter'; and the idea naturally arose to one's mind that perhaps the 'smoke from a pot' might be a similar targumistic elucidation of the passage. But there was nothing to confirm the suggestion. The LXX interpreters render the Hebrew by the words 'like a spider,' so that they also were in perplexity over the meaning of the Hebrew.

If, however, the explanation does not lie in this direction, however attractive the reference to Moses in the headline of the Psalm may be, let us set Moses altogether on one side and go a little further afield.

In the first book of Chronicles, ch. 29, we have a famous prayer of David, in connection with the presentation of gifts for the Temple, in which the same theme of human inutability and the brevity of human life is introduced; "We are strangers before thee and sojourners, as all our fathers

icles, but he suggests that the Syriac Clement has done so in making the translation. The difficulty, however, remains as to how the Syriac version of 1 Chron. can be made to contribute a Greek text for Clement of Rome to quote. Is it possible to claim a Greek origin for the midrashic elements in the Syriac version of Chronicles? The first step towards lightening the difficulty has been taken for us by Dr. Barnes' study of the Syriac text, in which it is shown, by collation of the oldest Syriac Mss., that the peculiarities of the version go back to the origin of the version, and are not to be credited to later editorial hands; so we are carried back at least as far as the time when the Syriac version was made. There remains the question of the sources from which the version was made, and the possibility that Greek as well as Hebrew elements are present in it. It would be very interesting if we could prove that a targumized Greek version of Chronicles existed in the early times, but at this point we are without further light or leading.

Returning to Clement's text, we are met with a further difficulty, as to how Clement, supposing he quoted David's Prayer in Chronicles, could have referred it to Moses.

When we examine Clement's text, we see that after giving the passages which prove Moses' lowliness of mind, ending with the 'smoke from the pot' passage, he takes as his next example of humility, amongst those to whom testimony has been borne, King David. "And now what are we to say of the well-reported David, to whom God said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, etc., and David also himself says to God, Have mercy upon me, etc.," whereupon Clement quotes the whole of the 51st Psalm.

Here, then, we have David following Moses, and the suggestion is an obvious one that the passage about the 'smoke from the pot' has been misplaced, and that it really belongs lower down, at the end of the next chapter. How the displacement took place we have no means of determining; but it seems clear that a displacement has occurred, either in Clement's materials or in the transcription of his book. Perhaps the former is the easier supposition, since the dis-

placement already existed in the copy from which Clement of Alexandria makes extracts. The coincidence between the suggested authorship of David through the text of Chronicles, with the fact that David's name and speeches follow in the Clementine Epistle is one that can hardly be ignored. It is almost a verification of the correctness of the solution.

What remains to be settled is (i) how a Greek ancestry can be found, at least in part, for the peculiar Syriac version of Chronicles, (ii) how Clement, quoting the supposed Greek Chronicles, can have made the misplacement in question; the latter difficulty is much slighter than the former.