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**BIBLICAL TEXT AND ARMENIAN RETELLING**

The first time I published an Armenological article was in 1966. It was a translation of and notes on the Armenian apocryphal work, *The Death of Adam*.<sup>1</sup> This was the first, it turned out, of many articles<sup>2</sup> and of five books, – soon to be six – in which I published texts of what may be called “Armenian Apocryphal Literature of the Old Testament.” I use this category to characterize works that retell or supplement the stories of the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible).<sup>3</sup>

The Armenian tradition exhibited a sustained interest in the revelation of the Old Testament and numerous works exist connected with it. Not all such works are retellings of or supplements to the biblical narrative.<sup>4</sup> There are learned lists of various types, chronological, onomastic, genealogical and others.<sup>5</sup> There are geographical essays, metrological treatises, gemological catalogues, magical prayers and more. Indeed, the Armenian tradition produced and transmitted very many such “Bible-connected” works, rivaled within my own experience, in creative and scholarly intensity perhaps only by the Old Irish tradition.

It has been both a pleasure and a privilege of my scholarly life to make part of this wealth public, and now I have reached a point at which I feel impelled to start systematizing this material and exploring the strategies and literary techniques it employs for handling the biblical text. In the course of this endeavour I step back from the task of edition and translation and look in a more general way at this corpus of texts. I should preface these remarks, however, by stressing that the labour of edition and translation is far from over and a plethora of unpublished material still awaits attention. In the following experimental presentation I identify a number of different approaches to the biblical text, although constraints of space enable me to give only one or two examples of a limited selection of categories. Indeed, even enumerating and explaining all the categories would surpass the bounds time Theo has laid upon this lecture. Moreover, these categories are heuristic and obviously not determined by pre-existing conceptual structures or

<sup>1</sup> See M. E. Stone, “The Death of Adam: An Armenian Adam Book,” HTR 59 (1966): 283-91.

<sup>2</sup> Many texts published in scattered articles are drawn together in M.E. Stone, Պարականոն Բնագրեր և Աանդրոթիւններ *Uncanonical Texts and Traditions*] (Yerevan: Matenadaran, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> I use the term “Old Testament” here in discussing this Armenian material, for in the Armenian tradition it is just that. My own preference is for the term Hebrew Bible, or the like.

<sup>4</sup> M.E. Stone, “The Armenian Apocryphal Literature: Translation and Creation.” *Il Caucaso: cerniera fra culture dal Mediterraneo alla Persia (Secoli IV-XI)* (Spoleto: Presso la Sede del Centro, 1996), 611-46. Reprinted in M.E. Stone, ed., *Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha and Armenian Studies* (2 vols.; Leuven-Paris-Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2006), 1.105-37.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the lists published in M.E. Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha: Relating to Angels and Biblical Heroes* (SBLEJL 45; Atlanta: SBL, 2016).



of Genesis. He mentions but little about the death of Adam, that Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years (preface).<sup>11</sup> It goes on to add to Genesis's "little about the death of Adam" a quite detailed story about his death.

Another example is the text entitled *Hezekiah and Manasseh* (M4616) which has two narrative purposes.<sup>12</sup> The first is to provide further detail about the illness of Hezekiah and the reversal of the sun-dial. A second purpose is to clarify the story of King Manasseh. Manasseh worried the original biblical author in 2 Kings who had to account for his length of life – supposedly a correlative of righteousness -- and yet his wickedness and idolatry. This longevity also contrasted with the early death of his successor, King Josiah who was totally righteous in the sight of the author of 2 Kings. The biblical writer of 2 Kings resolved the consequent conundrum by blaming Josiah's death on Manasseh's wickedness (2 Ki 23). The author of Chronicles solves this problem quite differently, however, by saying that Manasseh was exiled, repented, prayed to God and returned to Jerusalem (2 Chron 33:12-13).

Not very much later than 2 Chronicles, the apocryphal *Prayer of Manasseh*, which very possibly existed originally as a Jewish-Greek prayer of repentance, was taken over and attributed to Manasseh, presumably in line with Chronicles' narrative. Against this background, the Armenian document titled *Hezekiah and Manasseh* tells a detailed and almost completely apocryphal story of how Manasseh was exiled, taken to Babylon, and repented. It is, of course, dependent on 2 Chronicles and *PrMan* and it adds circumstantial details and fills in material so that forms an extension of biblical text. In his repentance as related at some length in *Hezekiah and Manasseh*, Manasseh was taken bound to Babylon in fetters (a detail from *Pr Man* 10 "I am weighted down by many an iron fetter") and there he pronounced the apocryphal *Prayer of Manasseh*. By divine intervention he was saved from the pit into which he had been cast and returned to Jerusalem. Hung on the hook of 2 Chron 33:12-13 and *PrMan*, the narrative utilizes a number of standard topoi to tell this detailed story – Manasseh was deceived by beautiful pagan wives (compare King Solomon), the king Nebuchadnezzar held a feast at which blasphemy was uttered and Manasseh's survival against all odds is demonstrated (compare Daniel), Manasseh was thrown in a pit and was miraculously delivered (Joseph, Jeremiah, Daniel's lion's den, etc.).<sup>13</sup>

A different type of text, biographical sketches of biblical prophets and other ancient worthies, giving details of their births, deaths and sometimes certain of their doings and sayings, already existed in the *Vitae Prophetarum* in Greek.<sup>14</sup> Its Armenian version was probably quite early and it served as a pattern followed in other Armenian works: three *Vitae* which were composed in Armenian (M1500), and a brief work called the *Praises of the Prophets* (M5531) among

<sup>11</sup> M.E. Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Patriarchs and Prophets* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982), 18-31.

<sup>12</sup> This appears to be the case in the texts themselves, even though the section divisions I have introduced highlight it.

<sup>13</sup> This tale is included in my forthcoming book, *Armenian Apocrypha : Parabiblical Narratives*.

<sup>14</sup> This work was extant in many languages. In general, see David Satran, *Biblical Prophets in Byzantine Palestine. Reassessing the Lives of the Prophets* (SVTP, 11; Leiden: Brill, 1995); Anna Maria Schwemer, *Studien zu den frühjüdischen Prophetenlegenden Vitae Prophetarum: Einleitung, Übersetzung und Kommentar*. (TUAJ, 49, 50; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (P. Siebeck), 1995). The Armenian form is called Մահի մարգարէից "Deaths of the Prophets" and is found associated with the books of the Prophets in many Bible manuscripts. It is also found in the Հաղորմաիր or *Collection of Homilies* and is connected with the feasts of the heroes. The *Praises of the Prophets* is to be published in Stone, *Parabiblical Narratives. The Lives, Works and Deaths of the Holy Prophets* (Stone, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 158-173) is most likely a translation from Latin and perhaps the *Praises of the Prophets* is also from Latin.

others.<sup>15</sup> Basically, it seems to me, the organized pattern of such works indicates a learned context which sought to fill in the biographical and geographical blanks in the Bible's information about the prophets. A hagiographical motivation of some of these writings might also be at play. Other works were also written on this pattern.<sup>16</sup>

*d. The fourth type of use of the biblical text is to be observed in: Narrative passages that view themselves predominantly as highlighting “New Testament in the Old” by means of small or larger insertions into the biblical narrative, to heighten the symbolic function of the biblical text.*

This approach is often combined with a clear narrative line drawn from the Bible. Texts in this category, and indeed many of the types of material discussed here, are based on the idea of a unitary divine revelation in Scripture, with the Old Testament presaging the New.<sup>17</sup> One such work is *The Brief Story of Joshua, son of Nun* (M461818 and M2168). There are a number of Armenian Joshua works, often combined with stories of the Ark of the Covenant.<sup>19</sup> This signal concentration seems to have been stimulated not only by the occurrence of striking material in the biblical books of Joshua and 1 Samuel (I Kingdoms). In addition, the very *point d'appui* is without doubt the name Joshua = Jesus. Thus we read in the *Brief History of Joshua*:

5/ His former name was Hosea, and Moses changed (it) and called him Joshua for Joshua is translated “saviour.”<sup>20</sup> And he was to be the saviour of the people from bodily enemies, in the pattern of Christ. And that one letter of his name is missing<sup>21</sup> is because he was human and the saviour Jesus was incarnated God; and for this reason his (that is, Joshua's) salvation was bodily and imperfect, and Christ's (was) a perfect and an eternal spiritual salvation.

This and similar passages throughout this work highlight the symbolism of the New Testament in the Old. So, in §§21-22 *Brief History* says of Rahab of Jericho:

21/ And Rahab is a type<sup>22</sup> of the Church and just as she for reason of the two spies distanced herself from idolatry and from all sin, thus the Church, by means of the twelve Apostles' preaching, distances itself from idolatry and all sin.

<sup>15</sup> On the Armenian *Vitae Prophetarum* see Sargis Yovsēp'ianc', Անկանոն Գիրք Հին Կառկարանաց *Uncanonical Books of the Old Testament* (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1896), 207-227; Stone, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 129-157, M.E. Stone, “Three Armenian Accounts of the Death of Moses,” in G.W.E. Nickelsburg, ed., *Studies on the Testament of Moses: Seminar Papers* (SBLSCS 4; Cambridge MA: SBL, 1974), 118-21.

<sup>16</sup> An example of a longer prophetic life is the *Short History of Elijah*, published by Yovsēp'eanc', *Uncanonical Books*, 333-342.

<sup>17</sup> See M.E. Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Abraham* (SBLEJL 37; Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Details of manuscript M4618 are given in “Introductory Remarks” to Text 3 *Construction* above.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, the two texts published in M.E. Stone, “Two Stories about the Ark of the Covenant,” in M.D. Findikyan et al., eds., *Sion, mère des églises: mélanges liturgiques offerts au Père Charles Athanase Renoux* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2016), 253-266.

<sup>20</sup> The change of name is recorded in Num 13:16. Note the use of onomastic explanations as a exegetical technique in the Armenian apocryphal stories. This is quite frequent and will be discussed elsewhere: see Stone, *Parabiblical Narratives* (under preparation). The meaning proffered here is known in Armenian onomastic lists: see F.X. Wutz, *Onomastica Sacra: Untersuchungen zum Liber Interpretationis Nominum Hebraeorum des Hl. Hieronymus* (Texte und Untersuchungen 41, Part 2; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1915), 921, 983; M.E. Stone, *Signs of the Judgment, Onomastica Sacra and the Generations From Adam* (UPATS 3; Chico: Scholars Press, 1981), 144.

<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the final “s” of “Jesus.” Alternatively, the name Joshua adds a single letter at the beginning of Hosea in the Hebrew forms of these names.

<sup>22</sup> Or: symbol. A homiletic section starts with this phrase and continues until §29. There the narrative resumes.



22/ And then that, that she lowered him<sup>23</sup> from the wall in a basket symbolized the mystery of the Church, that they lowered the apostle Paul <from> the wall of Damascus in a basket<sup>24</sup> and freed him from execution. And that the sign (was) red and not another colour announces the mystery of the cross; and just as Rahab's house was saved by the colour red, thus the house of Adam was saved from Satan's hands by the blood of Christ. And that that she believed in the red sign (and) at the time of the destruction of the wall she was not afraid, thus he who believes in the cross, which was painted red with the blood of Christ, at a time when creations are dissolved and undone is not afraid and does not shiver in that time; and that she bound the sign to wood, Oh! symbol of the people who were to hang the Son of God from the wood, that (is what) it describes.

e. *A fifth type of composition is: Questions and answers on the biblical text* — a genre going back to Alexandrian question-answer exegesis of Homer, and which served many purposes. This ancient exegetical technique is found in early Rabbinic literature as well. In Late Antiquity it was also a polemical as well as an exegetical instrument and was turned, for example, by Marcion and Tatian against Christianity.<sup>25</sup> The genre was firmly established in Patristic tradition and well-known to the Armenians from the translations of Philo on. Time does not permit me to give full details, but the text called *Questions and Answers from the Holy Books*<sup>26</sup> (M1654A) is a good example, posing a series of questions about things related in the Bible, from Creation to the Parousia. In its answers it preserves significant traditions, such as that of the Cainite Enoch killing Cain.

Another text written in the genre is called *This is the history of the word* (M682). I published extracts from this document dealing with two questions: §1 Why was Satanayel's rank of angels cast out of heaven? The answer is that his pride led him to disobedience. This text does not give details of his disobedience, which was hybriatic according to apocryphal Adam sources.<sup>27</sup> The next subject starts, in §6 “Again a commentary on Adam's fruit” — a response to an unwritten question. The third question is posed in §9, “why did he ask ‘Adam where are you?’” — an apparent contradiction to the idea of Divine omniscience which was of considerable interest to the Armenians.<sup>28</sup> Finally, thus extract from a larger documents ends: “And why did He say to Eve, ‘Why did you, woman, do that?’ ” This raises the same sort of difficulty as the preceding.

Moreover, there are other texts which seem to be answers to questions, without the questions being preserved.<sup>29</sup> I cannot discuss them here, but only mention their existence.

f. Finally, I note without any discussion that texts existed that were *designed to harmonize biblical texts that are understood to be contradictory*, i.e., such texts reflects a scholastic utilization of apocryphal stories to solve exegetical problems. Still, further modes of utilization of the Bible by Armenian apocryphal texts also exist and these await future clarification and more

<sup>23</sup> Presumably this should be plural, perhaps due to a corruption reading զնս for զնս (= զնսս). On similar variation of number, see note 71 above.

<sup>24</sup> 2 Cor 11:32.

<sup>25</sup> Yakir Paz, *From Scribes to Scholars: Rabbinic Biblical Exegesis in Light of the Homeric Commentaries*, PhD Dissertation (Jerusalem: 2015) discusses this form at length.

<sup>26</sup> See Stone, *Angels and Biblical Heroes*, 92-101

<sup>27</sup> Latin, Armenian, Georgian *LAÉ* chaps. 13-14; M.E. Stone, “Enoch and the Fall of the Angels: Teaching and Status,” *DSD* 22.3 (2015): 342-57, and numerous other bibliographical entries.

<sup>28</sup> M.E. Stone, *Adam and Eve in the Armenian Tradition: Fifth Through Seventeenth Centuries* (SBLEJL 38; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2013), 74, 121-122, 152, 171-172.

<sup>29</sup> Examples are to be found in Supplication about the Sodomites and Gomorreans (M5571, M2242).

extensive treatment.

Some final remarks in conclusion. These texts are important for understanding ancient and mediaeval Armenian literary and artistic creation, as well as exhibiting great significance for the theological and spiritual tradition cultivated by the Armenian Church. All these documents function in one or another way within the broad category of “ornamented Bible.” By this name I denote the overall Bible retelling that served the Armenians to rehearse and teach the story of scripture and its teaching. This ornamented Bible was composed of narrative mixtures of the canonical and the apocryphal, of quotation and paraphrase, of homiletics and typology, drawing out and highlighting the theological, ethical and spiritual teachings of the biblical text. It exists in a variety of works and no single written document of the ornamented Bible exists, or could exist. Indeed its very nature implies a fluidity and variety of readings of the scriptural text. Many such texts exist and I have had the privilege of publishing quite a number. As I have said, the role of such apocryphal works in Armenian culture is enormous and touches on many realms of literature and art, of poetry and miniature painting among others. For the authors of these products of the Armenian spirit, Scripture was familiar through the text-reading to be found in this corpus of ornamented Bible tales that often became the norm for recitation of the given story.

