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## **WORDS, ORACLES OR COMMANDMENTS – THE DECALOGUE IN THE ARMENIAN TRADITION<sup>1</sup>**

**Key word:** *Oracle, commandments, Syriac affiliation, Persian origin.*

It is a great honor to me to be able to contribute to a conference dedicated to Papazian, one of the outstanding scholars at the Matenadaran. He intended to preserve Armenian heritage that is so precious. In this my small contribution, I would like to show a glimpse of this treasure: in the Armenian Bible there are many features that show the value of the Armenian tradition, not only for itself, but all the more for the textual history of the other traditions of Scripture, too. They had even consequences for the liturgy, as we will show: for, before manuscripts were developed, liturgy was the first vehicle to transmit the living oral traditions of the Old and New Testament. As such it is often neglected, as being relatively late in the history of textual transmission.

The Decalogue as will of God has a central role in Scripture. Often the Psalms and Prophets refer to this legislation on Mount Sinai: to instruct the people of God to live according His will. It was revealed, when they were about to enter in the Promised land. Therefore it has a prominent place in Jewish traditions, exegetical and liturgical, but also in daily life: in amulets and in rabbinic literature, but they are not treated as a whole<sup>2</sup>. Surprisingly, however, it has no prominent role in the Church<sup>3</sup>. Only in the catechetical tradition it plays a more prominent one, but even in the oldest Catecheses of Gregory of Nyssa and those of Cyril of Jerusalem there is no explicit reference, even not during the instruction preparing baptism. Irenaeus is the first mentioning the word in the Latin translation “decalogo”<sup>4</sup>, only to show the utility of Gods law of retaliation.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. **F. Horst**, “Dekalog”, in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Tübingen 1960<sup>3</sup>, part II, s.v.; and **A.Q. Dihle**, “Orakel”, *Die Religion in Geschichte...*, part IV, s.v.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. **S. Safrai**, *Literature of the Sages* I, Assen/Maastricht, 1987, p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. **F.E. Brightman**, *Liturgies-Eastern and Western* I, Oxford, 1896: no mention of “Decalogue”, p. 574;

<sup>4</sup> **Irenaeus**, *Adversus Haereses*, 4.15.1, ed. **N. Brox**, FC 8, Freiburg, 1995.

The word itself is used in Exodus 34,28, Deuteronomy 4,13 and 10,4: עֲשֵׂת דְּבָרֵי הָעֵשֶׂת, τοὺς δέκα λόγους “the ten words”. In Hebrew the meaning shifts from “word” as original sense of the semitic root, to the more general sense of “thing”. This shift in meaning we shall see it also in Syriac and all other versions, including Armenian. In the Masoretic text the most affiliated word is דִּבְרֵי “saying”, having a more pronounced revelatory character. It occurs there 376 times, but is never used in the sense of oracle, even not in the Balaam-story (Numbers 24). It has here a positive connotation, only, while “oracle” in itself has an ambiguous meaning.

Ptolemy (2<sup>nd</sup>c.) is the first to use the specific word ἡ δεκάλογος, “the Decalogue” in his letter to Flora 5.3<sup>5</sup>. The ten commandments were given to Moses, who had to inscribe them on the tablets. Philo<sup>6</sup> treats extensively in his treatise *De Decalogo*, “On the ten Words”, without, however, employing the specific term. In his *Leg. All.* 3.142<sup>7</sup> he speaks of χρησμῶν θεοῦ “oracles of god”, that are heard by Moses; this mention we shall treat later in our research. The Sibylline Oracles<sup>8</sup>, in their Jewish part, 3.256 mention them as τὸν νόμον οὐρανόθι “the law from heaven”. As a whole they are cited in Ps.-Philo<sup>9</sup>, in *Ant.Jud.* XI “you shall not adulterate, you shall not kill!”, the Septuagint order, but omitting thus “do not rob!”; in book XLIV he mentions them in the order: steal-murder-adultery, as it is in Jeremiah 7,9: this could well be the oldest order of the commandments.

Origen is the first to treat with them extensively in his eighth Homily on Exodus, but he does not treat this part of the verse. In *Hom. Ex* 4.6 he mentions: “decem mandatis quae in decalogo continentur” (“the ten commandments which are in the Decalogue”)<sup>10</sup>, thus implying to use a usual designation; in *Contra Celsum* II.74 he uses the word Decalogue in connection with the giving of the law on Sinai also<sup>11</sup>; in *Hom.Gen.* 16.6 he uses “decem verba” and “decalogo” to explain God’s gift to his people: the mysteries which the world did not know<sup>12</sup>. In a fragment of his commentary of Matthew 5:33 he

<sup>5</sup> In **Epiphanius**, *Panarion* 33.3; ed. **G. Quispel**, *Lettre à Flora*, SC 24bis, Paris, 1966, p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> Ed. **F.H. Colson**, Loeb VII, London, 1937.

<sup>7</sup> Ed. **Colson**, Loeb I, London, 1929, p. 396.

<sup>8</sup> Ed. **A. Kurfess**, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen*, Berlin, 1951, p. 82-84.

<sup>9</sup> Ed. **M.R. James**, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo*, London, 1917, tr. **D.J. Harrington**, in: **J. H. Charlesworth**, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* II, pp. 318-9, 358.

<sup>10</sup> Only in Latin translation, ed. **M. Borret**, *Homélies sur l’Exode*, Sources Chrétiennes (SC) 321, Paris, 1985, pp. 240-277, 130.

<sup>11</sup> Ed. **M. Borret**, *Origène-Contre Celse* I, SC 132, Paris, 1967, p. 460.

<sup>12</sup> Ed. **L. Doutreleau**, *Homélies sur la Genèse*, SC 7bis, Paris 1976, p. 390.

refers to τῆς δεκαλόγου τρίτη ἐντολή “the third commandment of the Decalogue”<sup>13</sup>.

The *Apostolic Constitutions* II.26.1 (3<sup>rd</sup>c. AD), however, mention that it is given to Moses as a Law, that is good, but then it says that God does not want sacrifices and thus minimizes its demanding character. In VI.20.1 and VII.36.4 it mentions the ἡ δεκάλογος “the Decalogue” to underline the liberty of mankind to follow God or not. Elsewhere, in book VI, it is called τὸ θεῖον λόγιον “the divine saying” before quoting the fifth commandment; never it is treated as a whole<sup>14</sup>.

As part of the liturgy the Decalogue never occurs in the tradition of the Church. Only after the Reformation, it got an important place in the Protestant liturgy: to reveal and remember the will of God, and so it became the continuation of the history of its tradition since Philo and Origen.

We know them the Ten Commandments in two forms: Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-20; in the Masoretic text they are almost identic: Deuteronomy has some additions and there is a more significant difference in the reason for the keeping of the Sabbath, the fourth commandment. But in LXX there is more variation, especially in the order of the sixth, seventh and eight commandments. The critical Armenian edition of Exodus has just here a confusing error<sup>15</sup>.

Just here the Armenian is unique in following the Masoretic text-order (kill-adulterate-steal) and not the usual LXX-text-order: adulterate-steal-kill. Ephrem<sup>arm</sup> follows the MT-order, but omits “do not adulterate!”, while Ephrem-Syriac follows the MT<sup>16</sup>. Philo follows the order of LXX-Deuteronomy, as does Jeremiah 7:9. Papyrus Nash has: adulterate-kill-steal (as does Ishodad of Merv<sup>17</sup>).

Other major differences of the Armenian with MT are:

20:3 ան աստուա]ճճ “other gods” (=LXX);

<sup>13</sup> Ed. *Klostermann/Benz, Fragmenta*, Griechische Christliche Schriftsteller 41,3, Leipzig, 1941, p.59.

<sup>14</sup> Ed. *M. Metzger, Les Constitutions Apostoliques* I - II, SC 320, 329, Paris, 1985-6, I, p. 236, II, p. 358, III, p. 84.

<sup>15</sup> Ed. *A. S. Zeytounian, Չիքը Ելից*, Erevan, 1992, pp. 123-124: it has a kind of doublet mentioning here: 13 մի՛ սպանաւ: 14 Մի՛ շնար: 15 Մի՛ գողանար: 16 Մի՛ շնար: 15 Մի՛ գողանար: 16 Մի՛ ստաւ.. “Do not kill! Do not adulterate! Do not steal! Do not adulterate! Do not steal! Do not (witness) false..!”.

<sup>16</sup> Ed. *R.-M. Tonneau, Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et Exodum Commentarii*, Louvain, 1955, p. 150-151.

<sup>17</sup> *C. van den Eynde, Commentaire d'Isodad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament*, Louvain, 1958, p. 51-52.

20:6 ի հազար ազգս “thousand generations”(=Tg sy<sup>p</sup> Eth bo);

20:12 և զմայր fn “and your mother”;

20:12b տէր Աստուած տալիք էիք “the lord God (om. your) will give to you”;

20:17 մի՛ ցանկանար տան ընկերի քոյ և մի՛ անդոյ նորա: մի՛ ցանկանար կնոջ ընկերի քոյ “do not desire the house of you fellow and not his field! do not desire the wife of your fellow.” (inversion of the phrase).

But in the introduction, there is a variant which could explain why the Church did not insert massively the Decalogue in its liturgy: in Ex. 20:1 the older form of the commandments, they are announced as: כֹּל דְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה “all these words” and in LXX as πάντας τοὺς λόγους τούτους “all these words”, but in Armenian there is: զամենայն զպատգամս “all oracles”, explaining thus the content.

“Oracles” do occur everywhere in the ancient world since that of Delphi. In beginning of Christianity the Sybilline Oracles were very popular, as also the Eclogue of Virgil; and it occurs also in many magic texts. The word “oracle” is therefore ambiguous in its use: it refers to old non-Christian practices and therefore had all kinds of connotations that were not accepted by the traditions of the Church<sup>18</sup>. In using this word here, the Armenian version of the Bible underlines the special character of this text, as we shall see.

In Deuteronomy 5:5 the same is used in the introduction to the Decalogue: պատմել ձեզ զպատգամսն Տեառն “to tell to you the oracles of the Lord” (mss. A8 H4 I1: պատգամս Աստուծոյ “.. of God”)<sup>19</sup>. In using the word “oracle” the Armenian version stresses the revelatory character of these sayings, as message from God. “Message” would be then also an appropriate rendering. In Deut. 1,1 the mention occurs as beginning of the whole Book: Այս են պատգամսք (“these are the words/oracles”), also in the Syriac Peshitta<sup>20</sup>: ܐܝܬܗ ܗܝܬ ܗܝܬ (“and these are the oracles”); and also Deut. 27:3 and 31:12 contain the mention զամենայն պատգամս արինացս այնոցիկ (“all these oracles/words of these laws”). Elsewhere in this book occurs as translation of ῥήματα “sayings” (excepting 9:10, 33:3, where it translates: “words”): in 4:12, 13, 36; 5:5; 10:2, 4; 18:18; 29:29; 30:1; 32:2. Most of them refer to the legislation given to Moses on Sinai. So the more general sense “word” became usual.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Բառարան Սուրբ Գրոց*, Constantinople, 1881, pp. 447-8, and: *Der Kleine Pauly* IV, ed. *Ziegler/Sontheimer*, München, 1979, p. 323-328.

<sup>19</sup> Ed. A.S. *Zeytounian*, *Գիրք Երկրորդումն Օրինաց*, Etchmiatsin, 2002, p. 82.

<sup>20</sup> Ed. *M.D. Koster*, *The Old Testament in Syriac* I,i, Leiden, 1977, p. 163.

Where does this explaining variant in Exodus 20:1 come from and why the usual designation for “word”, *puḥ*, was not used, as it is even in John 1:1 and 1:14, texts which played a so prominent role in early Christological discussions?

The word *uḥuḥuḥ* occurs in NT only in Lk 3,4 to translate “the words of Isaiah”, but is in frequent use in the whole Armenian O.T., as we saw for Deuteronomy. Later on it occurs in Eghishē (*Vardan* 38,23), in P'awstos (*History* 245) and Sebēos (*History* 29,67). Also derivations occur: *uḥuḥuḥuḥ* “the envoys” in Lk 7:10 and *uḥuḥuḥuḥ* “to envoy” in Ephesians 6:20 and 2Corinthians 5:20 (in these two cases Peshitta uses *ܐܢܝܢ* “to be hold in”). The key for understanding the shift in meaning in the Armenian translation is likely to be found in Syriac, underlining thus the Syriac connection to the Armenian Bible. In the Peshitta<sup>21</sup>, the heading above the chapter is: *ܐܘܪܥܐ ܕܥܕܪܐ ܕܥܕܪܐ* “the ten oracles”; and in Exodus 20:1: *ܐܘܪܥܐ ܕܥܕܪܐ ܕܥܕܪܐ* “all these oracles”. This Syriac and Armenian word is a loanword also, borrowed from Persian, as we shall see in the Persian Diatessaron<sup>22</sup>. It occurs very frequently in Syriac Bible, mostly translating “word” in the OT (150x in the Pentateuch only); in Gen 15:1 (2x), 4 in a revelatory sense: “God’s word” (Armenian has *puḥ* in v.1 (Ephr<sup>arm</sup> has “oracles” in the second case here) and *ḏuḥ* “voice” in v.4), but elsewhere mostly referring to “a message”; in the NT it is mostly a translation of “answer” (26x), and so it is used in a more general sense. But in origin it had a specific revelatory character, as we met already in Philo’s use of it in *Legum Allegoriae*. Elsewhere he concludes by saying that God does not punish, but leaves this to his subalterns, like in war-time the king leaves it to his generals to punish deserters (*De Decalogo* 178). As Stoic-influenced philosopher he wrote even a whole treatise *On Rewards and Punishments* to show how much he owed to it in explaining the Scripture in this way.

In Syriac Deut 5:22-23<sup>23</sup> it occurs also, where MT and LXX have “these words” as conclusion of the decalogue, while Armenian uses “oracles”, as in Ex 20, while the Syrohexaplar<sup>24</sup> follows exactly the MT. In the Peshitta the

<sup>21</sup> Cf. preceding note.

<sup>22</sup> Ed. **G. Messina**, *Diatessaron Persano*, Roma 1951; **J. Payne-Smith**, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, Oxford, 1988, p. 469; **H. Hübschmann**, *Armenische Grammatik* I, Leipzig 1897, p. 222.

<sup>23</sup> Ed. **v. Vliet/Hospers/Drijvers**, *The Old Testament in Syriac* I,2, *Deuteronomy*, Leiden, 1991, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> Ed. **A. Vööbus**, *The Pentateuch in the Version of the Syro-Hexapla*, Louvain 1975, fol.38v-39r.

word occurs very frequently (150x in the Pentateuch<sup>25</sup>), but only in 4:30 and 31:1 as translating “all these words”). So the Armenian tradition has thus preserved the Persian meaning here. This is very important for the understanding of the Decalogue as revelation from God’s promises and not as a program for ethics. This is in line with the Hebrew text having  $\text{אל}$  “do not!” as an apodictic commandment for a good life in the promised land, and not  $\text{אל}$  “you shall not!”, as a jussive form implying an adhortative, that had to be fulfilled<sup>26</sup>; we prefer to translate as a negative future tense: “you shall not”, implying thus a promise given by God, that man should receive by doing according.

The expression πάντας τοὺς λόγους τούτους “all these words” occurs also in Greek New Testament<sup>27</sup>: in Matt. 26:1, as conclusion of Jesus’ message during his teaching; in Matthew 7:28: τοὺς λόγους τούτους “these words” (gr M: “all these words”), 19:1: “these words” and 26:1: “all these words” (gr E 124\* 157 565: “these words”), three concluding turning points in this Gospel, where Armenian follows Greek-majority, 7:28: զամենայն զբանս զայսուհիկ (“all these words”); 19:1: զբանս ալսուհիկ (“these words”); 26:1: զամենայն զբանս զայսուհիկ (“all these words”).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> **Borbone/Jenner**, *The Old Testament in Syriac* V,1, *Concordance Pentateuch*, Leiden, 1997, p. 704-706.

<sup>26</sup> **P. Joüon**, *Grammaire de l’hébreu biblique*, Rome, 1923, ch. 113<sup>m</sup>, 114<sup>i</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> **Nestle-Aland**, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. 28, Stuttgart, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Chrysostom<sup>arm</sup> omits “all” in 7:28 (**L. Leloir**, *Citations du Nouveau Testament dans l’ancienne tradition arménienne*, Louvain, 1967 ad loc); geo (ed. **R.P. Blake**, P.O. 24,1, Paris, 1933): in 7:28, 19:1; sy: “these words” (sy<sup>c</sup>: “these words of him”)/“these words”/ “all these words”(sy<sup>c</sup>: “all these words of him”); eth<sup>A</sup> (ed. **R. Zuurmond**, *Novum Testamentum Aethiopice* III, Wiesbaden, 2001): “this talk/his talk/all this talk”; eth<sup>B</sup>: “the words/this talk/all this talk”; it vg (ed. **A. Jülicher-Itala** I, Berlin, 1972; **R. Weber**, *Vulgata* II, Stuttgart, 1975): “these words/that speeches”(it<sup>c</sup>: “that words”; it<sup>d</sup>: “these words”)/“all these speeches” (it<sup>h</sup>: “all these words”; it<sup>q</sup>: “these words”); arab (ed. **B. Levin**, *Die Griechisch-Arabische Evangelien-Übersetzung*, Uppsala, 1938): “this talk/this talk/all this talk”(arab<sup>B</sup>: “this talk”); mae2(ed. H.-M. Schenke, *Codex Schoeyen*, Oslo 2001): “... /all these words/ these words”; mae1 (ed. **H.-M. Schenke**, *Codex Scheide*, Berlin 1981): “all these words/just these words/all these words”; sa (ed. **G.W. Horner**, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament, Sahidic* I, Osnabrück, 1969): “these words” (sa<sup>116</sup>: “all these words)/these words/all these words”; Bodm (ed. **R. Kasser**, *Papyrus Bodmer* XIX, Cologny, 1962): “these words/all these words”; bo (ed. **G.W. Horner**, *Northern Dialect* I, Osnabrück, 1969): “these words” (bo<sup>min</sup>: “all these words”)/ “these words” (bo<sup>D E F</sup>: “all these words”) / “all these words”; Diat<sup>A</sup> (ed. **A.S. Marmardji**, *Le Diatessaron arabe*, Beirouth, 1935): “all these words/--/all these words”; **Diat<sup>P</sup>: “these oracles/--/this oracle”**; du<sup>a</sup> (ed. **C.C. de Bruin**, *De Zuidnederlandse Vertaling van het Nieuwe Testament*, Leiden, 1971): “these words/this teaching/all this teaching”; du<sup>b</sup>: “these words/this speech/all these speeches”; L<sup>Gr</sup> Am: --/--/x; Diat<sup>V</sup> (ed. **Todesco/Vaccari/Vattasso**, *Il Diatessaron in Volgare Italiano*, Vaticano, 1938): --/“these words”/--; Diat<sup>T</sup> (ed. cf. Diat<sup>V</sup>): “these words/these words/words said above”;



In all these cases it is clear that there is no use of the usual later designations “Ten Commandments” or “Law”. Matthew uses the designation “all these words”; not only as summarizing Jesus’ teaching, but refers in using this expression to the Decalogue, also. Jesus fulfilled the revealed, oracular, promises God gave to Moses by living them to death. What the people were not able to fulfill, He did, and so we have the opportunity to accept its benefit in thankfulness. For this reason, the function of the Decalogue changed from “ethical program” into a revelation of God’s promise. Therefore, in the tradition of the Reformation the Decalogue got also the appellation: “rule of thankfulness” (e.g. for what God gave in Jesus). The special Armenian designation for the Decalogue as “oracle” in the Old Testament, reminds us this gradual change from orality to Scripture, where grace became more and more fixed as “word”. This original Armenian translation as “oracle”, being inspired by Syriac and Persian, and then being used later on in a more general sense, refers to this process of change from revelation to ethical program. The same change happens in liturgy too: originating in orality it became more and more fixed, but it still reminds us God’s goodness, that appeared also in the richness of the Bible-traditions and the liturgies preserved in the Armenia. The Matenadaran plays a prominent role in their conservation, as does the Armenian Apostolic Church.

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Diat<sup>Th</sup> (ed. **C. Gerhardt**, *Das Leben Jesu*, Leiden, 1970): “this word/this speech/all these speeches”; Diat<sup>H</sup> (ed. **C.C. de Bruin**, *Het Haarensse Diatessaron*, Leiden, 1970): “these words/all these words/all these words”; Diat<sup>C</sup> (ed. **C.C. de Bruin**, *Het Diatessaron van Cambridge*, Leiden, 1970): “these words/--/all these words”; Diat<sup>L</sup> (ed. **C.C. de Bruin**, *Het Luiks Diatessaron*, Leiden, 1970): “these words/these words/all these words”. The Persian Diatessaron seems to use the word “sayings” and does thus miss the point. The less specific sense has been introduced everywhere.

ԱԼԲԵՐՏ ՏԵՆ ԿԱՏԵ

## ԲԱՌԵՐ, ԳՈՒԾԱԿՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐ ԿԱՄ ՊԱՏԳԱՄՆԵՐ՝ ՏԱՍԸ ՊԱՏՎԻՐԱՆՆԵՐԸ ՀԱՅԿԱԿԱՆ ԱՎԱՆԴՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՄԵՋ

*Բանալի բառեր՝ Գուշակություն, պատգամ, առնչություն ասորերենի հետ, իրանական ծագում:*

Հին հայերեն Աստվածաշնչում տասը պատվիրանների համար կիրառված «պատգամ» բառը (Ելք Ի 1) վկայում է Պեշիտտայի հետ սերտ առնչության մասին: Այս իրանական փոխառյալ բառը շեշտում է Աստծո շնորհը: Որպես այդպիսին այն հիշեցնում է մեզ իր ժողովրդին փրկելու՝ Աստծո նախաձեռնությունը, որին անդրադարձ կա նաև Եկեղեցու պատարագի մեջ: Տասը պատվիրանները կատարում է Հիսուս Քրիստոսը, ինչը մեզ հնարավորություն է տալիս գոհություն արժանանալ հետևելու դրանց:

АЛЬБЕРТ ТЕН КАТЕ

## СЛОВА, ПРОРОЧЕСТВА ИЛИ ЗАПОВЕДИ – ДЕКАЛОГ В АРМЯНСКОЙ ТРАДИЦИИ

**Ключевые слова:** Пророчество, заповеди, сирийские связи, иранское происхождение.

В древнеармянской Библии слово *patgam* (պատգամ) для обозначения десяти заповедей (Исход 20:1) свидетельствует о тесной близости с Пешиттой. Это иранское заимствование подчеркивает подразумеваемую им милость Божию. Как таковое оно напоминает о решении Бога спасти свой народ, о котором говорится также в церковном богослужении. Десять заповедей исполняются Иисусом Христом, и поэтому мы получаем возможность с благодарностью следовать им.