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THE HEADINGS OF PSALMS 73-82 IN THE COMMENTARY OF DIONYSIUS BAR SALIBI

ABSTRACT

In 2004 Ryan published a critical edition of Psalms 73-82 in the commentary of Dionysius Bar Salibi. He indicates where Bar Salibi depended on other commentaries, such as the shorter and longer commentaries of Athanasius in Syriac and the commentaries of Daniel of Salah and Isho'dad of Merw. Ryan did not pay special attention to the headings in the factual commentary of Bar Salibi. A comparison of these headings with the East Syriac headings makes it clear that they reflect the East Syriac tradition as it appears in commentaries such as Denha-Gregory and Sachau 215. Bar Salibi's headings were not derived from East Syriac psalm manuscripts or the commentary of Isho'dad of Merw, on which his factual commentary frequently depends.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2004 Ryan published a study on Psalms 73-82 in the commentary of Dionysius Bar Salibi (Ryan 2004). This study includes a critical edition of these psalms, with an indication of where Bar Salibi depended on other commentaries on the psalms available to him. These commentaries are especially the shorter and longer commentaries of Athanasius in Syriac (Thomson 1977a and b), the commentary of Daniel of Salah (Taylor 1998) and the commentary of Isho'dad of Merw (Van der Eynde 1981a and b). Ryan did, however, not pay special attention to the headings in the commentary of Bar Salibi, especially those in the factual commentary. A comparison of these headings with the East Syriac headings published by Bloemendaal (1960) makes it abundantly clear that these headings reflect the East Syriac tradition, but not the tradition as it appears in East Syriac psalm manuscripts. The question to be answered in this paper is: what can the headings of the psalms in the factual commentary of Bar Salibi on Psalms 73-82 contribute to the question about the sources used by Dionysius?

2. THE SOURCES USED FOR PSALMS 73-82 IN THE COMMENTARY OF DIONYSIUS BAR SALIBI

Ryan discusses in some detail the distinction made by Bar Salibi between two kinds of commentaries in his work. Dionysius distinguished between a factual and a spiritual commentary. Ryan (2004:26) points out that Bar

Salibi's commentary on the individual psalms is preceded in most manuscripts by an introduction attributed to Moshe bar Kepha, who distinguished between the literal and spiritual meaning of each psalm. Bar Salibi used the terms factual and spiritual (or mixed) commentaries (Ryan 2004:27). In his factual commentary Bar Salibi offers one commentary on each psalm, while he frequently has multiple commentaries in his mixed commentary (Ryan 2004:30). It may be that the factual commentary was aimed at what Ryan calls beginners and the mixed commentary at the advanced readers (Ryan 2004:44).

Ryan (2004:53-87) discusses the statements made by Bar Salibi with regard to the sources he used. He states, however, that Bar Salibi never refers to the sources used for the factual commentary (Ryan 2004:54 note 295). The chief source for that commentary is the work of Isho'dad and Ryan thinks that his name was not mentioned because of Isho'dad's affiliation to the Church of the East. Ryan says that Bar Salibi used Isho'dad as a source for his factual commentary, some portions of the mixed commentary and for his commentary on the New Testament (Ryan 2004:64). Ryan (2004:65) establishes that Bar Salibi used Isho'dad for about 45-50% of the time in his factual commentary. As far as Theodore of Mopsuestia is concerned, Ryan (2004:68) is of the opinion that Bar Salibi did not use him independently of Isho'dad.

Ryan refers to the commentary attributed to Denḥa and Gregory as well. He says that this commentary is dependent on a commentary like the one contained in manuscript Sachau 215. Ryan states that he got a copy of that commentary too late to be included in his work, but that he did find some material on Psalm 82 in one of the manuscripts (Mingana 58) of that commentary common to a part of the same Psalm 82 in Bar Salibi's factual commentary. This indicates that Bar Salibi and Denḥa used a common source, or that Bar Salibi used Denḥa. Ryan (2004:70) was unable to explore this further. By looking at the material contained in the headings of the psalms in the factual commentary, this paper will explore this matter further.

Bar Salibi also made use of the work of Athanasius. Ryan (2004:71-75) found parallels between the work of Bar Salibi and Athanasius, with comparative material from the Greek as well as the longer and shorter Syriac versions of the commentary of Athanasius. This material is restricted to the mixed commentary. As far as Daniel of Salah and Daniel of Tella are concerned, Ryan (2004:81) thinks that Bar Salibi used Daniel

of Salah, but that Daniel of Tella probably used Bar Salibi. Daniel of Salah was mainly used in the mixed commentary.

3. *THE EAST SYRIAC HEADINGS AND COMMENTARIES ON THE PSALMS*

It is well-known that the East Syriac headings of the psalms go back to the commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia. Theodore rejected the headings of the Hebrew (and Greek) psalms. He gave an introduction to each psalm, stating the occasion of the psalm and giving a summary of the contents. The East Syriac headings can be regarded as a summary of these introductions. I have recently discussed these headings in some detail (Van Rooy 2008). In his publication of the East Syriac headings Bloemendaal also included the headings as they appear in three Syriac commentaries on the Psalms, namely the commentary ascribed to Denḥa, the commentary of the manuscript Sachau 215 and the commentary of Bar Hebraeus. The first two come from the eastern tradition, like Isho'dad, while Bar Hebraeus is from the western tradition (Bloemendaal 1960:16-17).

Dionysius bar Salibi died in 1171 (Ryan 2004:xvi). Bar Hebraeus lived from 1226 until 1286 and made use of the commentary of Bar Salibi for his work (Ryan 2004:xvi). As far as the commentary of Denḥa is concerned, Bloemendaal (1960:16) says that it must have been written in the ninth century.

As far as the commentary of the manuscript Sachau 215 is concerned, Bloemendaal (1960:16) says that the author must have lived before 1286. This is because this work was probably used by Bar Hebraeus and 1286 is the year of his death. This date of Bloemendaal is not very helpful, as it does not give an indication of the earliest possible date for this commentary.

Van der Eynde (1981b:xxxii-xli) has an extensive discussion of the East Syriac works on the Psalms. He (1981b:xxx) says that the commentary of the manuscript Sachau 215 was, according to the title, attributed to Theodore of Mopsuestia, but it uses the Peshitta as the basic text for the commentary. A part of the commentary deals with the text of the Peshitta, while the other part follows Theodore. The headings represent the Eastern tradition as well. The text is a commentary on the Peshitta, but with the spirit of Theodore in the comments and using many data from Theodore. It agrees to a large extent with the commentary of Denḥa-Gregory (Van der Eynde 1981b:xxxiv). Van der Eynde (1981b:

xxxv) also regards the commentary described by Vanderhoff (1899) as the same as Denḥa-Gregory. Van der Eynde (1981b:xxxiv) refers to the view of Devreesse (1939:xxix) that this commentary is a second, revised and enlarged edition of the commentary of the manuscript Sachau 215.¹ The largest part of this commentary agrees with the one in manuscript Sachau 215 (Van der Eynde 1981b:xxxvi). Many of the Psalms in this commentary have a second heading, not related to the introduction of Theodore. Agreeing with Bloemendaal, he regards the author of this commentary as a follower of Henana. This was already stated by Vandenhoff (1899:13). Van der Eynde (1981b:xxxvi) thinks that Denḥa may have been a disciple of Isho bar Nun, a contemporary of Isho'dad.

Leonhard (2001:14) also dates Denḥa-Gregory in the ninth century and also accepts that this commentary build on a commentary such as the one contained in manuscript Sachau 215, with expansions from a similar work of Ahob of Qatar. He (2001:15) also regards Denḥa and Isho'dad as contemporaries. He points to the existence of a number of manuscripts of this commentary, with some differences among them.

Manuscript Sachau 215 was already discussed in some detail by Baethgen in 1885. He (1885:53) points to the introduction that states that this commentary was compiled by Theodore. However, this manuscript could not be a translation of Theodore's commentary, as this commentary is based on the Peshitta (Baethgen 1885:56). Some of the remarks made in the commentary deal with the Syriac text and must be regarded as original Syriac remarks (Baethgen 1885:57). Baethgen (1885:66-99) discusses the headings in this manuscript as well, with special attention to the four Psalms regarded as messianic by Theodore. It is quite clear that the headings reflect the interpretation of Theodore. As far as the date of this commentary is concerned, Baethgen discusses the relationship between this commentary and the work of Bar Hebraeus. He (1885:99-100) gives special attention to the headings again. He (Baethgen 1885:100) states that Bar Hebraeus took over the headings of this commentary, but also followed much of the commentary proper. Baethgen (1885:101) states the *terminus ante quem* as 1286 and in this he is followed by Bloemendaal, but he does not go any further than this.

If one accepts the date for the Denḥa-Gregory commentary as the ninth century and accepts as well that Denḥa used a source similar to Sachau 215, both these commentaries could have been used by Bar Salibi. They

1 Van der Eynde (1981b:xxxv) refers in his footnote 19 to page xix of Devreesse (1939), but it should be page xxix.

could have been used by Bar Hebraeus as well, but he also used Bar Salibi.

As far as Isho'dad is concerned, Bloemendaal (1960:24) discusses his use of the headings. As a rule, Isho'dad does not give the East Syriac heading. In some instances he has an introduction that is dependent on the work of Theodore. Bloemendaal (1960:24-30) then gives the introductions that do appear in the commentary of Isho'dad, albeit frequently not the whole introduction. In his introduction to the commentary, Isho'dad rejects the titles of the Hebrew text and regards the titles of Theodore as more reliable to use (Van der Eynde 1981a:10; 1981b:12). Even if Isho'dad did not give the East Syriac headings, his exegesis is clearly guided by the tradition going back to Theodore.

4. *THE HEADINGS IN THE COMMENTARY OF DIONYSIUS*

The factual commentary of Bar Salibi on Psalms 73-82 follows a set pattern. It starts with the number of the psalm, followed by an introduction. He then quotes from the Psalm and follows the quotation with his commentary. He does not give a commentary on every verse, neither on every part of the verses that he comments on. The same pattern is used for the mixed commentary. In the mixed commentary, however, he frequently does not give an introduction. Introductions occur only for Psalm 73 (mainly from the longer Syriac commentary of Athanasius; Ryan 2004:145) and Psalm 75 (using material from the shorter Syriac commentary of Athanasius and Daniel of Salah; Ryan 2004:165). He also often gives more than one commentary on every verse, giving the second and further commentary after the first one.

In the discussion of the headings below, the ten headings will be discussed in a number of groups, representing the different relationships between the heading in the commentary of Bar Salibi, the East Syriac heading and the headings in the three other commentaries under discussion. In the case of the first example in every group, the East Syriac heading of the Psalm will be given first, followed by the headings of Bar Salibi, manuscript Sachau 215, Denha and Bar Hebraeus. Where headings are identical, they will not be repeated. Translations will be provided for all the headings. The headings of the three commentaries are according to the edition of Bloemendaal (1960).

It is evident that the heading in Bar Salibi is closer to the headings in the commentaries. It agrees to a large extent with Sachau 215 and Denha. He does not use the verb “to prophecy”. Bar Salibi is especially close to Denha, only omitting the phrase ܕܠܘܘܢܐ ܕܡܘܨܝܐ. Bar Hebraeus agrees to a large extent with Bar Salibi, with just the reference to the time of the exile not in Bar Salibi. This reference is, however, part of the East Syriac heading.

What must be noted is the difference between the East Syriac heading and the headings in the four commentaries. In his commentary on this Psalm Theodore links the Psalm to the people of the exile, but says specifically that they repented after their return from the captivity (cf. Hill 2006:955, 957; Devreesse 1939:477-478). In the commentary on verse 1, Theodore mentions the return again (Hill 2006:957; Devreesse 1939:478). The return and the penitence of the people are mentioned in the East Syriac heading, but not in the headings of the commentaries.

Psalm 73 is one of the Psalms where Isho'dad has an introduction. In his introduction he refers to the penitence of the people after their return (Van der Eynde 1981b:123). In this instance the situation of the Psalm in Isho'dad agrees with Theodore and the East Syriac heading, while the other commentaries place the Psalm in Babylon, not after the return. In his commentary on v. 10 Bar Salibi sees the return as still in the future (Ryan 2004:111). This part of the commentary was taken from Isho'dad. In the commentary on v. 24 Isho'dad does, however, refer to the return from the captivity as something in the past. In this example the setting of the heading in the commentaries differ from the East Syriac heading, but only with regard to the placement of the events referred to before or after the return from exile. In this instance the East Syriac heading agrees with the exegesis of Theodore.

Psalm 75 also belongs to this group. The East Syriac heading refers to the thanksgiving of the people for their victory against the Assyrians in the days of Hezekiah, while Bar Salibi and the other commentaries ascribe the victory to Hezekiah. The heading of the commentaries can be regarded as an abridged version of the East Syriac heading, but still there is the difference referred to above. Bar Salibi omits the reference to the Assyrians as well. Theodore also refers to the victory of Hezekiah, followed in this by the commentaries.

Psalm 77 also belongs to this group. It is such an interesting example that all the relevant headings will be given.

headings (6t1) does not refer to the oppressors, but to the calamities or oppressions suffered by the people (ܩܘܪܒܘܢܐ). This word occurs in the Peshitta of Ps 77:2 as well, and is also quoted by Isho'dad (Van der Eynde 1981a:17). This fits better with Theodore's introduction and the reading of 6t1 must probably be regarded as the original reading of the East Syriac heading, with the reading of the other witnesses to that heading the result of metathesis.

Ps 79 also belongs to this group. The East Syriac heading contains detail about the time of the Maccabees ("Spoken in the person of the Maccabees when they announced and narrated to God those evil things that Antiochus and Demeter had done to them, to the children of their people, asking for help") omitted by Bar Salibi and the other commentaries. Bar Salibi summarises the heading briefly ("About the Maccabees when they were suffering from the calamities that came upon them and they asked help from God") and the other commentaries have a similar heading, just adding that the Maccabees gave thanks to God.

The East Syriac heading of Ps 80 links the psalm to the Maccabees ("He prophesies about the Maccabees when they entreated God and asked for mercy"). Bar Salibi, Sachau 215 and Denha has this link as well, but give different information about the setting. Bar Salibi has the following: "About the Maccabees when they related their calamities and recall the goodness of God towards their fathers and requested that it would be on them as well". There are only minor differences between the headings of Bar Salibi, Sachau 215 and Denha, while the heading of Bar Hebraeus is close to the East Syriac heading, with only the verb at the beginning omitted. The East Syriac heading and Bar Hebraeus do not have the reference to God's kindness towards the forefathers. This reference is, however, part of the introduction of Theodore to this Psalm (Hill 2006:1096-1097; Devreesse 1939:548).

In Ps 82 the East Syriac heading refers to the rulers of the people ("He condemns the rulers of the people for their partiality in acquitting those who did wrong"). Bar Salibi, Sachau 215 and Bar Hebraeus have a slightly different referent. Bar Salibi has: "He admonishes the priests and the judges not to pervert the justice of the poor". The introduction of Theodore is not available for this psalm, making it difficult to judge which of the headings are closer to Theodore. The heading is about the partiality of the people, while the commentaries all refer to the priest and the judges. Isho'dad refers to the priests, judges and leaders in the commentary on v. 1 (Van der Eynde 1981a:127; 1981b:139). Bar Salibi

Salibi (“Thanksgiving for the return of the people”) and the other commentaries summarise the heading.

4.3 *The heading of Bar Salibi is very brief, following the introduction of Theodore*

Ps 76 is a very interesting example.

East Syriac heading

ܘܢܒܝܐ ܥܢ ܘܨܘܠܬܐ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܙܪܝܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ.

He prophesies about the victory of the people over the Assyrians in the days of Hezekiah.

Bar Salibi

ܥܢ ܘܨܘܠܬܐ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܙܪܝܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ.

About Hezekiah and the same occasion.

Sachau 215

ܥܢ ܘܨܘܠܬܐ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܙܪܝܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ.

About Hezekiah. About the thanksgiving on account of the victory of Hezekiah over the Assyrians.

Denḥa

ܥܢ ܘܨܘܠܬܐ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܙܪܝܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ. ܘܥܢ ܘܨܘܠܬܐ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܙܪܝܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ.

About Hezekiah and the same thanksgiving of the people on account of the victory of Hezekiah over the Assyrians. About Satan and evil passions.

Bar Hebraeus

ܥܢ ܘܨܘܠܬܐ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܙܪܝܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ.

About Hezekiah with the same subject.

The heading of this Psalm in the different commentaries and the East Syriac tradition is very interesting. In the commentary of Theodore it is briefly stated that this Psalm is recited on the same theme, meaning the same theme as Ps 75 (Hill 2006:1010-1011; Devreesse 1939:505). Theodore does not have a discussion of this theme in any detail, but immediately proceeds to the exegesis of the Psalm. The East Syriac heading follows Theodore in connecting the Psalm to the same historical background, but does so in more detail. Sachau 215 and Denḥa both have a bit more detail about the occasion, while Bar Salibi and Bar Hebraeus

Bar Hebraeus

ܘܢܘܨܚܘܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ
ܘܢܘܨܚܘܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ

Admonition to the people while he teaches them to observe the law and he reminds them of the favours that were done by God for their nation.

In this instance there are only minor differences between the East Syriac heading and the headings of Sachau 215, Denḥa and Bar Hebraeus. Bar Salibi goes his own way in a number of instances. He mentions the Jews (as does Theodore; Hill 2006:1034-1035; Devreesse 1939:517), talks about the fathers and not the nation (again in agreement with Theodore) and adds a section about the foolishness of not keeping the law. In this instance Bar Hebraeus follows the other two commentaries and the East Syriac heading, and not Bar Salibi.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The headings of the psalms in the factual commentary of Bar Salibi stand in the East Syriac tradition. They reflect the interpretation of the psalms by Theodore. Although Bar Salibi made extensive use of the work of Isho'dad of Merw, he did not get his headings from that source. Isho'dad did not have headings or introductions for the majority of the psalms under discussion, although his exegesis reflects the tradition going back to Theodore as well. Bar Salibi's headings were also not taken from a Peshitta manuscript (or Psalter) from the Eastern tradition. The comparison shows dependence on the headings or introductions in the Eastern commentary tradition, such as those in the commentary of manuscript Sachau 215 or the commentary of Denḥa-Gregory.

In many instances the heading of Bar Salibi is very close to the heading in the commentary of Denḥa-Gregory, like in Pss 73 and 75, for example. However, the other three commentaries never have the additional part of the headings that appears from time to time in the commentary of Denḥa-Gregory. The headings of the commentaries agree against the East Syriac headings with regard to some detail in some instances, such as the reference to penitence in the East Syriac heading of Ps 73 and the linking of victories to Ezekiel in the commentaries on Ps 75. This is characteristic of the headings in the first group distinguished above, where Bar Salibi and the other commentaries differ from the East Syriac headings as far as the finer details of the setting is concerned. In other instances, in the second group, Bar Salibi agrees with the setting of the East Syriac

headings, but has shorter headings. In some instances, such as in Pss 76 and 78, Bar Salibi goes his own way.

As far as the headings of Bar Hebraeus are concerned, they are frequently identical or close to the headings of Bar Salibi, as one would expect. In Ps 81 he has exactly the same heading as Bar Salibi. In Ps 73 Bar Hebraeus only omits the reference to the time of the exile. In Pss 74, 75, 79 and 82 it has a small plus agreeing with Denḥa-Gregory and Sachau 215. In Ps 76 it has a brief heading close to Bar Salibi. In Pss 77 and 78 he is closer to the other two commentaries. In Ps 80 Bar Hebraeus is closer to the East Syriac heading than to any of the commentaries. The instances where Bar Hebraeus differs from Bar Salibi makes it quite possible that he used a commentary like the Denḥa-Gregory commentary as one of his sources for the heading, and not only Bar Salibi. Bar Salibi used a commentary or commentaries in the East Syriac tradition, close to but not identical to the commentaries of Sachau 215 and Denḥa.

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