

Īšō‘dād’s Commentary on Psalm 141,2: A Quotation from Theodore of Mopsuestia’s Lost Commentary*

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In the following paper I intend to present one of the rare passages in Īšō‘dād’s commentary on the Psalms which probably preserved an otherwise not attested piece of the Syriac translation of Theodore of Mopsuestia’s († 428) commentary. This assumption is justified on the basis of observations on the stylistic features of both commentaries, Īšō‘dād’s citation technique, and parallel texts¹.

1 The Literary Background

1.1 Theodore’s Commentary on the Psalms

Early in his life Theodore of Mopsuestia wrote a commentary on the book of Psalms, which was soon translated into Syriac². His Commentary to the Psalms 119 and 139-148 is the longest of his exegetical texts extant in Syriac translation. The fragment was appended to an East-Syrian exegetical collection on the Psalms which was already in very bad shape when a scribe of the late nineteenth century copied this collection into the manuscript Cambridge Or. 1318 (edited by Van Rompay 1982) – the only extant witness for this text.

1.2 Diodore

Diodore of Tarsus († before 394), too, was highly venerated as a reliable foundation of the faith of the East Syrian church³. Nevertheless his works were

* I would like to acknowledge my most sincere gratitude to Prof. Dr. Lucas van Rompay, who provided me with a copy of Diodore’s commentary to Ps 141,2 and a microfiche of the manuscript Mingana 58. I am also indebted to Mag. Michael Margoni-Kögler and to Angela Y. Kim for their comments on a draft of this paper.

¹ The corpus of the extant text of the Syriac translation of Theodore’s commentary (Ps 119 and 139-148) has been studied with regard to its parallels in Īšō‘dād’s works in my dissertation: C. Leonhard, *Ishodad of Merv’s Exegesis of the Psalms 119 and 139-147. A Study of his Interpretation in the Light of the Syriac Translation of Theodore of Mopsuestia’s Commentary* (Wien, 1999).

² Only a few fragments of Theodore’s exegetical works are extant in Syriac translation (cf. CPG 3827, 3834). No Greek source of Theodore’s commentary to Ps 141,2 is known.

³ A. Scher, *Traité d’Išai le docteur et de Hnana d’Adiabène sur les martyrs, le vendredi d’or et les rogations suivis de la confession de foi à réciter par les évêques avant l’ordination* (PO 7, Turnhout, 1909), p. 84 line 8.

not handed down as carefully as Theodore of Mopsuestia's. No Syriac translation of Diodore's exegetical works is known⁴. However, as Theodore had studied his predecessor's opinions, it is helpful to refer to Diodore's commentary as a representative of the Antiochene style of interpretation in those cases where Theodore's text is not extant⁵.

1.3 *The Structure of an Exegetical Paragraph in Theodore's Commentary*

According to Antiochene stylistics the text was divided into smaller units such as verses or stichoi each of which was discussed in a short paragraph. Such a paragraph would begin with the quotation of the Biblical lemma. The exegete would then explain certain *realia* or difficult terms. The paragraphs lead to a comprehensive expression of their exegete's understanding – the paraphrase⁶.

Most paragraphs in the Syriac translation of Theodore's commentary to the Psalms are written in this form. Apart from philological and historical information an Antiochene exegete could also give an ethical interpretation as actualization of the Biblical text.

1.4 *The Transposition of Theodore's Commentary into a Syriac Environment*

Theodore's commentary was translated in the fifth century – an epoch where translators would render Greek texts freely and in good Syriac style⁷.

⁴ Cf. CPG 3818 and J.-M. Olivier, *Diodori Tarsensis Commentarii in Psalmos. I. Commentarii in Psalmos I-L* (CCG 6, Turnhout–Leuven, 1980).

⁵ It was edited as far as Psalm 50; Olivier, *Commentarii*. The following references to Diodore are based on a copy by J. Lebreton and L. Maries of the later Psalms; cf. L. van Rompay, *Theodore de Mopsueste. Fragments syriaques du commentaire des Psaumes. Psaume 118 et Psaumes 138-148* (CSCO 435-436, Louvain, 1982), transl.: XX note 70. The paraphrase in Julian of Eclanum's Latin epitome does not correspond to the text preserved by ʾĪšō'dād; L. de Coninck, *Theodori Mopsuesteni expositionis in Psalmos Iuliano Aeclanensi interprete in Latinum versae quae supersunt* (CCL 88a, Turnhout, 1977), p. 385 lines 6-8. The Latin epitome does not correspond to the extant Syriac translation of Theodore's commentary in every detail. Theodoret interpreted the verse independently of Theodore of Mopsuestia: *He combined the practice of virtue with the prayer. For, the lifting of the hands signifies this: the hands are entrusted with the action. He asks that the prayer be offered up in the same way as the smoke of the incense, that the nice fragrance be imitated, and that the extension of the hands should likewise appear as similar to the vesperal sacrifice. He mentioned the vesperal and not the matutinal one, because he was in distress and troubles. And darkness and night resemble the distress*; J.L. Schulze, [*Theodoretus Episcopus Cyri.*] *Interpretatio in Psalmos* (PG 80, Paris, 1864), col. 1948 B-C.

⁶ For the stylistic features of an Antiochene commentary cf. Schäublin's magisterial study: C. Schäublin, *Untersuchungen zu Methode und Herkunft der Antiochenischen Exegese* (Theophaneia 23, Köln–Bonn, 1974).

⁷ Cf. e.g. S.P. Brock, 'Aspects of translation technique in antiquity', *GRBS* 20 (1979), pp. 75ff.; idem, 'From antagonism to assimilation: Syriac attitudes to Greek learning', in: N.G. Garsoian, T.F. Mathews, and R.W. Thomson, eds, *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period* (Washington DC, 1982), pp. 17-34; idem, 'Towards a history of Syriac translation technique', in: R. Lavenant, ed., *III^o Symposium Syriacum 1980. Les contacts*

However, for the Syrian translators of the epoch the Pšitta had become the standard Biblical text and Syriac scholars had to face the fact that Theodore of Mopsuestia expounded a given verse differently because of his different Biblical text.

The problem was solved by including a separate Syriac translation of Theodore's Biblical lemma after the quotation from the Pšitta, which was necessary in order to allow a scholar who knew the Pšitta by heart to identify the verse. The translation of Theodore's lemma was given after the designation ܠܘܟܘܠܐ, *the Greek <text>*.

1.5 Īšō'dād's Commentary on the Psalms

In the mid-ninth century, the Bishop of Ḥḏattā, Īšō'dād from Merv⁸, composed a commentary on the whole Bible. It was edited and studied by several scholars from the beginning of this century until Van den Eynde published the commentary on the Psalms in 1981⁹.

As a member of the Church of the East, Īšō'dād cherished Theodore of Mopsuestia's method and approach. However, the demands which had to be met by an exegete of Īšō'dād's time had changed substantially over the four centuries which had elapsed from the era of the Antiochene exegetes. Īšō'dād could not actually reuse very much of the material of Theodore's commentary on the Psalms.

Īšō'dād's way of interpretation can be sketched as follows. In the wake of the Antiochene tradition the East Syrian exegetes read the Psalms as pertaining to a certain period of Biblical history. Thus, Īšō'dād's commentary gives many short references to Biblical persons or places in order to identify the events and situations alluded to in the Psalms. Occasionally pieces of the Biblical text

du monde syriaque avec les autres cultures (OCA 221, Roma, 1983), pp. 4ff.; L. van Rompay, *Fragments*, transl.: XLVIIff.; idem, 'The Christian Syriac tradition of interpretation: Greek and Syriac', in: Magne Sæbø, ed., *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. The History of its Interpretation. From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300)*, Vol. I (Göttingen, 1996), pp. 612-641.

⁸ Īšō'dād is mentioned once (ca. 852) in the short history of the East Syrian patriarchs and the dependent texts; H. Gismondi, *Maris Amri et Slibae De Patriarchis Nestorianorum Commentaria ... Pars Prior. Maris textus arabicus* (Rome, 1899), pp. 78f. He is referred to as the author of Biblical commentaries in 'Abd-Īšō's catalogue. There his attribution to Merv (*from the same place* as the preceding bishop listed in the catalogue) is an emendation by J.S. Assemanus, *De Scriptoribus Syris Nestorianis* (Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana 3,1, Rome, 1725), p. 211 note 3. For the location of the town cf. J.M. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne. Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire et de la géographie ecclésiastiques et monastiques du nord de l'Iraq*. Volume 1. (Recherches publiées sous la direction de l'Institut de lettres orientales de Beyrouth XXII, Beyrouth, 1965), pp. 103ff.

⁹ C. van den Eynde, *Commentaire d'Īšō'dād de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament*. VI. *Psaumes* (CSCO 433-434, Louvain, 1981). Hofstra began recently to reedit Īšō'dād's commentary on the Gospel of John; J.D. Hofstra, *Isho'dad van Merw. 'En het woord is vlees geworden'. De plaats van het commentaar van Isho'dad van Merw op Johannes 1,1-18 binnen de Syrische exegetische traditie* (Kampen, 1993).

are paraphrased. From a formal point of view *Īšō'dād* restricted his interpretations to a few remarks, giving a synonym, an explicative remark, or a single term of a Hexaplaric reading. Unlike Theodore he did not expound every verse. The addressees of his commentaries were advanced scholars of Biblical studies who were supposed to profit from concise bits of information¹⁰.

1.6 The Syrohexapla

Theodore of Mopsuestia and Eusebius of Emesa (* ca. 300) sometimes referred to the other Biblical translations of the Old Testament which were included in Origen's Hexapla¹¹. In the late eighth century the catholicos Timothy Ist introduced the Syrohexapla into the academies of the Church of the East¹². From this time on, East Syrian scholars were not only able to read a text which was very similar to Theodore of Mopsuestia's Bible but also had a tool at their disposal which allowed them to continue the great Antiochene scholars' method of quoting Hexaplaric readings in their commentaries.

In those pieces where Theodore's commentary in Syriac is extant, *Īšō'dād* could now either quote Theodore's so-called *Greek* text or that of the Syrohexapla and its marginal entries. *Īšō'dād* would refer to both as ܐܘܪܘܫܠܡܝܬܐ (*Greek*). However, he followed the sequence of the Antiochene standard paragraph as it was included in his source. Thus, he would quote Theodore's ܐܘܪܘܫܠܡܝܬܐ before a paragraph of interpretation, and he would cite the Syrohexapla only as an appendix to such a paragraph¹³. *Īšō'dād* rarely devoted a separate interpretation to quotations from other biblical versions within his commentary on Ps 119 and 139-148¹⁴. His exegetical paragraphs, based on a *Greek* citation followed by the interpretation, are therefore likely to be an echo of Theodore's commentary to that verse.

¹⁰ Apart from the assumption that *Īšō'dād* was writing for a very well-educated audience, for whom he could leave out many evident points of their common scholarly tradition, he also may have had less physical writing space at his disposal.

¹¹ Regarding the book of Genesis these questions have been discussed by Salvesen – selected passages also by ter Haar Romeny. A. Salvesen, 'Hexaplaric readings in *Īšō'dād* of Merv's commentary on Genesis', in: J. Frishman and L. van Rompay, eds, *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation. A Collection of Essays* (Traditio Exegetica Graeca 5, Louvain, 1997), pp. 230-252; R.B. ter Haar Romeny, *A Syrian in Greek Dress* (Traditio Exegetica Graeca 6, Louvain, 1997).

¹² O. Braun, 'Ein Brief des Katholikos Timotheos I.', *OrChr* 1 (1901), pp. 299-313. P. Petit-mengin and B. Flusin, 'Le livre antique et la dictée. Nouvelles recherches', in: E. Lucchesi and H.D. Saffrey, eds, *Mémorial André-Jean Festugière. Antiquité païenne et chrétienne* (Cahiers d'orientalisme X, Genève, 1984), pp. 247-262.

¹³ An example of this method is *Īšō'dād*'s commentary on Ps 119,19 (Van den Eynde, *Commentaire*, text: p. 168 lines 15-24), where both Theodore's *Greek* text and *Īšō'dād*'s Syrohexapla are quoted at their appropriate places within the paragraph of interpretation. The two versions differ from each other in this case; Leonhard, *Ishodad*, pp. 103-107.

¹⁴ An exception to this rule is *Īšō'dād*'s interpretation of Ps 119,83; Van den Eynde, *Comentaire*, text: p. 170 lines 12-18; Leonhard, *Ishodad*, pp. 113-115.

2 Īṣō'dād's Commentary on Psalm 141,2

2.1 The Biblical Text

Īṣō'dād's choice of verses to be interpreted from a given Biblical text was often determined by philological observations such as peculiar differences between the versions. Regarding Ps 141,2 the Pšitta differs in important details from the Septuagint.

MT	Pšitta ¹⁵	Septuagint	Syrohexpla ¹⁶	¹⁷ כא
תכך תפלת קשרת לפניך	סבב ¹⁸ סלח, קר קר סבב	κατευθυνθητω η προσευχη μου ως θυμιαμα ενωπιον σου	כחל סלח סלח קר קר קר סבב קר	—
משאת כפי מנחת ערב	סבב קר קר סבב סבב	επαρσις των χει- ρων μου θυσια εσπερινη	סבב סבב קר קר סבב	קר קר קר קר קר

Apart from the differences in the use of the particle *ως*, קר (*such as, like*) in the versions, the Pšitta rendered משאת as another term for offering (סבב) and not as the act of *lifting* one's hands. Thus the parallelism to the non-sacrificial prayer of the first stichos, which is there compared with *incense*, is destroyed in the Pšitta. The text of the Pšitta is simplified compared to the Hebrew, because it does not require an explanation of why the *extension* of the hands should be compared to the *vesperal sacrifice*.

It is likely that Theodore of Mopsuestia based his interpretation on a text similar to the Septuagint. Īṣō'dād was able to see the difference between the Pšitta and the Syrohexpla, which was very much like Theodore's Biblical text but not identical with it. The difference shows that Īṣō'dād did not copy his כא from the Syrohexpla here.

¹⁵ D.M. Walter, A. Vogel, and R.Y. Ebied, *Liber Psalmorum* (Vetus Testamentum Syriace iuxta simplicem Syrorum versionem 2,3, Leiden, 1980).

¹⁶ R.J.V. Hiebert, *The 'Syrohexplaric' Psalter* (Society of Biblical Literature. Septuagint and Cognate Studies 27, Atlanta, Georgia, 1989), p. 169.

¹⁷ Van den Eynde, *Commentaire*, text: p. 186 lines 20f.

¹⁸ סבב was understood by the editors of the Leiden Pšitta (and according to the punctuation of the Codex Ambrosianus, 7a1) as a translation of בקראי לך and as part of verse 1. תכך would then have been skipped in the Pšitta. However, the commentary of the manuscript Mingana 58 (fol. 163a line 26) shows that סבב was read as part of the following verse. For descriptions of this commentary cf. note 22 below.

2.2 *Īšō'dād* and Diodore on Psalm 141,2

Theodore's interpretation of Ps 141,2 was not preserved in the manuscript Cambridge Or. 1318¹⁹. However, Diodore's interpretation is extant and can be compared with *Īšō'dād*'s (Biblical text in Italics)²⁰:

<i>Īšō'dād</i>	Diodore
1 The Greek <text says> instead of <i>the offering of my hands</i>	
2 <i>the extension of my hands</i> <is> like <i>the vesperal sacrifice</i> .	<i>May the prayer be directed</i> <or: <i>may it be made straight</i> > <i>like incense in front of you. May a lifting of my hands be a vesperal sacrifice!</i>
3 Two lambs were being offered to God. One in the evening on account of the fact that they were being protected from the daily harm; and another one in the morning because of the night. And that vesperal one was more precious, in the same way as the day <was held in> higher <esteem> than the night.	Again he says the same <such as in v. 1>; for, <i>a lifting of the hands</i> and a <i>requesting voice</i> <cf. verse 1> have the same effect. He speaks <about> a <i>vesperal sacrifice</i> and not <about> a matutinal one, because the evening is the beginning of the day. For the night comes first and the day follows. The beginning of the night is the evening. Thus, the vesperal sacrifice is more awe-inspiring than that of the early <morning>.
4 <This means> that he says: <i>May the extension of my hands</i> be accepted before you at the time of prayer, like that lamb, which is being offered to you in the evening time,	Thus he says: <i>May my</i> <cf. the Septuagint> <i>prayer</i> become a sweet and pleasant one for you and the <i>lifting of my hands</i> like <i>the vesperal sacrifice</i> .
5 that it is not so that it be offered on account of the sins of men, because it can often be refused because of the wickedness of those who offer it,	He speaks <about> <i>incense</i> , but not because the <i>incense</i> should carry some nice fragrance to God. For <i.e. on the contrary>, in the recognition of the one who is offering the incense God even turns towards the incense. And if he loathes the recognition — and even if the incense should be one of the finest — he does not accept it. And if he accepts the <offering person's> attitude — and even if the incense should be very cheap — he accepts this one.
6 but it is being slaughtered in accordance with the regulation of your commandment on account of the praise that the whole people owes you.	Indeed, he says it from them <i.e. the Israelites in Babylon ²¹ > about us. For, <he says> because the <i>incense</i> is sweet for us, may it also become as such for you, o Lord; <i.e.> may our prayer <become> sweet and precious!

¹⁹ Van Rompay, *Fragments*, text: p. 58.

²⁰ *Īšō'dād*: Van den Eynde, *Commentaire*, text: p. 186 line 20 – p. 187 line 3. For Diodore cf. note 5.

²¹ The reference to *the whole people* in *Īšō'dād*'s text suggests that *Īšō'dād*'s *Vorlage* (Theodore) read Diodore's expression *he says it from them* as pertaining to the people of Israel.

2.3 Observations on Īšō'dād's Text

The following observations on this paragraph support the hypothesis that Īšō'dād quoted the lost Syriac translation of Theodore's commentary here.

The Quantity of Meta-Language Used

In the context of Īšō'dād's commentary on the Psalms, this paragraph is strikingly long. In addition, this can be demonstrated by a comparison of Īšō'dād's interpretation and that of the East Syrian commentary of the manuscript Mingana 58²², which gives precisely what would have been expected in the context of Īšō'dād's commentary, namely some quotations from the Pšitta interspersed with remarks on certain words or phrases (Biblical text in Italics)²³:

O Lord, I was calling you to my help from Babylon while I was in distress. You! Answer me! And grant me the return from it <i.e. Babylon>! Listen to my words, which are said in a straightforward way of thinking. And I am knocking at your door. And accept <v.2> my prayer, which is extended towards you! And I did not abolish it because of some fear from mighty ones. May my prayer be like incense which was pleasant for the respiration. May it be counted in front of you <as> <fol. 163b> an offering <ܐܘܪܝܢܐ> of my hands, which are extended towards you, instead of a sacrifice <ܘܩܪܒܐܢܐ>. It will be like the offering of the evening and the morning – that one which is sacrificed for you in Jerusalem as <or: instead of, ܥܘܠܐ> the thanksgiving, which the whole people owes you, because of your sustaining them.

The Missing Interpretation of the first Stichos

Like the paragraph on Ps 141,2 in Īšō'dād's commentary, Diodore did not interpret the first stichos but read it as a parallel statement to the second one, which he expounded. Thus Īšō'dād's paragraph probably preserves the whole of Theodore's opinion on the verse. In other words, Theodore too did not compose a separate explanation for the first stichos.

The Motif of Thanksgiving

Section 3 in the table gives a summary of Diodore's argument on the higher value of the vesperal sacrifice²⁴. His text supposes that the lambs were offered to God for the purpose of thanksgiving. This idea was not part of Diodore's interpretation. It may be Theodore of Mopsuestia's addition to the interpretation.

²² For a description of the tradition of this commentary and other witnesses for the text cf. Van den Eynde, *Commentaire*, transl.: pp. XXXII-XXXVII, and Van Rompay, *Fragments*, transl.: pp. IX-XVII.

²³ Ms. Mingana 58 fol. 163a line 23-163b line 4.

²⁴ The author of the commentary in the manuscript Mingana 58 was not aware of this interpretation, because he added *and the morning*. He did not explain why the Biblical text mentioned the *vesperal sacrifice* alone by eliminating the problem.

A Summary of Diodore's Text

Īšō'dād's commentary in section 5 can hardly be understood without the assumption that this text is a summarizing reaction to Diodore's commentary. Diodore had given two symmetrical examples to prove his point. Īšō'dād's text is more concise, less easily accessible, and apparently dependent upon Diodore's commentary.

The Biblical Background

Both commentaries quote no other Biblical texts. Both of them presuppose the knowledge of the Biblical background. Nevertheless, they prefer to explain the text from common sense, only implying Biblical institutions such as offerings, commandments, and prayer. This stylistic element fits with the extant part of Theodore's Syriac commentary on the Psalms.

Īšō'dād's *Greek* Text is not Syrohexaplaric

Īšō'dād's (i.e. Theodore's) paragraph interprets the quoted ܟܘܠ (*Greek*) text. Moreover, the position of the quotation of the Biblical text – at the beginning of the interpretation and not at its end – suggests that he reworked a translation of Theodore's commentary. His *Greek* text also differs from the version of the Syrohexapla. This would be astonishing had Īšō'dād quoted the ܟܘܠ at the end of the paragraph. At its beginning the *Greek* text has to be understood as a copy of the Syriac translation of the Biblical lemma in Theodore's commentary. The catch-word of the Pšitta precedes it, as usual, in the translation.

Antiochene Style

Īšō'dād's paragraph unfolds according to Antiochene standards by giving information of *realia* before paraphrasing the text. It skips Diodore's ethical actualization and refrains from any anti-sacrificial or mystical exploitation of the text. It fits with Theodore's aim of the promotion of an intra-Biblical interpretation that takes Biblical institutions for granted.

3 Conclusion

To sum up, Īšō'dād's commentary to Psalm 141,2 is likely to be a faithful copy of the Syriac translation of Theodore's commentary on this verse, which is not extant elsewhere. With due caution, the text may now be included in a corpus of Theodore's exegetical works. The arguments based on stylistic affinities to the Syriac translation of Theodore's extant commentary and stylistic differences from Īšō'dād's commentaries have been further supported by three observations. Firstly, Īšō'dād's paragraph has been shown to be closely related to Diodore's interpretation of the verse. Secondly, it is completely different

from the East Syrian commentary of the manuscript Mingana 58. The latter is a typical specimen of the East Syrian style of exegesis. Finally, Īšō'dād's paragraph quotes a Biblical text which is similar to the Septuagint but different from both Syrohexapla and Pšīṭta. The interpretation is based on that text. Īšō'dād's paragraph is a typically Antiochene piece of interpretation.

Careful observations on the style, the Biblical texts used, the literary parallels, and the topics treated will allow us to look for additional traces of Theodore's exegesis in East Syrian commentaries. In addition, it may be inferred that Īšō'dād was still in a position to use Theodore's commentary independently of his own scholarly tradition in the ninth century.