

THE COMPOSITION AND DATE OF ACTS

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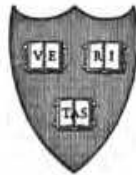
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THE COMPOSITION AND
DATE OF ACTS

BY

CHARLES CUTLER TORREY

PROFESSOR OF THE SEMITIC LANGUAGES
IN YALE UNIVERSITY



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CHAPTER I

THE ARAMAIC SOURCE IN ACTS 1-15

§ 1. INTRODUCTORY

THE hypothesis of a Semitic source (or sources) underlying more or less of the first half of Acts has commended itself to a few scholars. Thus Harnack, *Lukas der Arzt*, 1906, p. 84: "Es spricht Wichtiges dafür, dass Lukas in der ersten Hälfte der Acta eine aramäische Quelle übersetzt und benutzt hat, aber schlagend kann die Annahme nicht widerlegt werden, dass er lediglich auf mündlichen Mitteilungen fusst. Vollends unsicher ist es, welchen Umfang die Quelle gehabt hat und ob es überhaupt eine einzige Quelle gewesen ist." Similarly in his *Apostelgeschichte*, 1908, pp. 138, 186. Wendt, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 1913, p. 16, says: "Im Anschluss an Nestle *StKr* 1896 S. 102 ff. nimmt [Blass] die Bearbeitung einer aramäischen Quelle im ersten Teile der Apostelgeschichte an. Die in diesem ersten Teile häufiger als im zweiten vorliegenden Aramaismen werden von ihm als Beweis hierfür betrachtet (*Evang. sec. Luc.*, 1897, p. vi, xxi, ss.)." See also Blass' very meager statement in his *Philology of the Gospels* (1898), 141, 193 f., 201, of his somewhat hastily conceived theory according to which Luke followed an Aramaic source in the first *twelve* chapters of Acts.

But so far as I am aware, no one has ever attempted to point out specifically Aramaic locutions in Acts. Nor has the search for Semitisms, of whatever sort, hitherto resulted in any fruitful discovery. A few doubtful examples have been adduced in support of still more doubtful conclusions; there has been no effort to collect and examine the material of this nature. Nestle's observations,

referred to above,¹ were concerned only with two variant readings (2, 47 and 3, 14) in Codex Bezae, and have no bearing whatever on the question of the original language of this part of Acts, as I hope to have opportunity to show elsewhere.² Wellhausen in his "Noten zur Apostelgeschichte" (*Nachrichten von der K. Gesellsch. der Wiss. zu Göttingen*, 1907, 1-21) takes no notice of Semitisms or of possible Semitic sources; in his "Kritische Analyse der Apostelgeschichte" (*Abhandlungen der K. Gesellsch. der Wiss. zu Göttingen*, 1914, 1-56) he considers the possibility of translation in only one passage, namely 2, 23 f., and there in a wholly non-committal way. Among English and American scholars the question of Semitic sources in Acts seems to have aroused even less interest than among the Germans. Moffatt, *Introduction*, 1911, p. 290, says (citing Harnack): "There is fair ground for conjecturing that Luke used and translated an Aramaic source"; and Milligan, *The New Testament Documents*, 1913, p. 163, refers to the hypothesis as a possible one.

Now Aramaic is not an unknown language, and we have considerable familiarity with the principles and methods of those who rendered Semitic documents into Greek at the beginning of the present era. The question, too, is one of far-reaching importance. In a writing of the character and extent of the first half of Acts it would ordinarily be possible to determine whether the Greek is a translation, and if so, from what language the version was made. In the present case, by good fortune, the material at hand for the demonstration is more than usually satisfactory. I am confident that those who examine the evidence carefully will find it conclusive.

§ 2. THE LANGUAGE OF THE FIRST HALF OF ACTS

The first half of the Book of Acts is concerned primarily with the church in Jerusalem, viewed as the center from which great evangelizing forces went out into the world. The background of the narra-

¹ They were first published in English in *The Expositor*, 1895, pp. 235-239; then, with the title "Einige Beobachtungen zum Codex Bezae," in the *Theol. Studien u. Kritiken*, I. c.

² It should be added that Nestle's own conclusion as to the original language indicated was that it was more likely Hebrew than Aramaic (*Expositor*, I. c., p. 238); see however his *Philologica Sacra*, 1896, p. 55, where he refuses to express an opinion.

tive is obviously Judean. It is antecedently probable that the earliest documents of this Jewish-Christian community would have been written in Aramaic, the vernacular. We also have excellent reason for believing that Luke,¹ the compiler of the two histories, was one who made special search for Semitic documents, as the primitive and authentic sources, in order to render them into Greek. I think I may claim, without undue presumption, that the whole question of Semitic sources in Acts has entered a new phase since my argument, in the article "The Translations made from the Original Aramaic Gospels," contributed to *Studies in the History of Religions Presented to Crawford Howell Toy* (New York, Macmillan Co., 1912, pp. 269-317), that the compiler of the Third Gospel was an accomplished translator of both Hebrew and Aramaic.² We should therefore surmise, at the outset, that the very noticeable Semitic coloring of the first part of the book, remarked by all commentators, is simply due to translation.

It is not necessary to argue that the Greek of Acts is not homogeneous; it may be well, however, to review here the main facts touching the question of translation. For the first fifteen chapters, the language is distinctly translation-Greek; in the remaining chapters, on the contrary, the idiom is not Semitic, and there is no evidence that we are dealing with a version. The whole book, however, shows unmistakable uniformity of vocabulary and phraseology, so that it is obvious (to him who recognizes the Semitic source) that the author of 16-28 was the translator of 1-15. Many have remarked that the most strongly "Hebraizing" chapters are those at the beginning of the book. The reason for this appearance is the fact that the opening chapters are so largely made up of speeches composed in high style, along with quotations from the Old Testa-

¹ The identification of the author of the Third Gospel and Acts with Luke, the companion of Paul, is not essential to the present argument. I will, however, record here my opinion that the church tradition is right, and that Luke the compiler was also the author of the "We-document."

² The article was not reviewed or noticed in print, so far as I am aware, but the many letters which I received lead me to think that the demonstration was generally accepted by those who read it. Most of the letters expressly approved the argument derived from Luke 1, 39, in particular, and no one of my correspondents raised objection to it.

ment. The case is exactly parallel to that of the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel. On the other hand, in such chapters as Acts 13-15, where the events narrated are comparatively recent and widely familiar, and the language therefore is that of every-day life, the rendering sounds somewhat more free. But even in the chapters of this latter class the translation is found on examination to be truly close; the Greek idiom never strays far from the Aramaic, while occasional telltale phrases point to the underlying language. These indications of a translated Semitic source, it may be added, are present in every part of the first half of the book. There are no passages in which the *language* can be said to make it probable that Luke is composing his own Greek. It is a striking fact (which will be considered more fully below) that in the very beginning of the first chapter the evidence from the material content combines with that afforded by the language in such a way as to make it plain that Luke is following a written source so closely, and with such self-restraint, that he does not even allow himself space for an introductory sentence of his own. This, again, is altogether characteristic of the author of the Third Gospel.

Throughout chapters 1-15 we are constantly meeting such Semitisms as the following:¹ 1, 1 ἤρξατο ποιεῖν (Aram.); 1, 5 μετὰ πολλὰς ταύτας ἡμέρας (Jewish Aram.); 1, 10 καὶ ὡς (ἡ) ἀτενίζοντες ἦσαν . . . καὶ ἰδοὺ (ἡ) κ.τ.λ.; 1, 15 ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό (also 2, 1, 44, 47); 2, 7 οὐχὶ ἰδοὺ (Aram.); 2, 23 ἐκδοτὸν διὰ χειρὸς (ἡ) ἀνόμων;² 3, 20 καιροὶ ἀναψίξεως ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου; 4, 12 τὸ δεδομένον ἐν ἀνθρώποις; 4, 16 γνωστὸν σημεῖον (Aram.); 4, 30 ἐν τῷ τὴν χεῖρα ἐκτείνειν σε; 5, 4 τί ὅτι ἔθου ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου; 5, 28 παραγγεῖλια παραγγεῖλαμεν; 5, 41 ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ συνέδριου; 6, 5 καὶ ἤρεσεν ὁ λόγος ἐνώπιον πάντων τοῦ πλήθους; 7, 13 ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ

¹ I give here only a selection; it would be easy to make the list much longer. I have designated those idioms which are specifically Aramaic; those which are not thus designated might be either Aramaic or Hebrew. The Aramaic equivalents not given here will be found in the sequel. Some of these idioms are to be found occasionally in the Koiné, but no specimen of the Koiné ever showed such an array as this!

² Cf. Wellhausen, *Kritische Analyse*, 5 (this is the passage in which he touches the question of a Semitic source). In the original Aramaic the words were the same as those in Mark 14, 41, and the rendering should have been *de χεῖρας*.

ἐγνωρίσθη τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ; 7, 23 ἀνέβη ἐπὶ τὴν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ (Aram.); 7, 53 εἰς διαταγὰς ἀγγέλων; 8, 6 ἐν τῷ ἀκοῦεν αὐτοῖς; 9, 3 ἐν δὲ τῷ πορεύεσθαι ἐγένετο αὐτὸν ἐγγίξειν; 9, 22 ἐνεδυναμοῦτο (Aram., ܝܢܗܩ); 9, 32 διὰ πάντων; 10, 14 οὐδέποτε (κῆ ܘܢܦ) ἔφαγον πᾶν (ܘܨ) κοινόν; 10, 15 πάλιν ἐκ δευτέρου (probably ܦܢܢܢܢܢ; so also Matt. 26, 42); 10, 25 ἐγένετο τοῦ εἰσελθεῖν; 11, 4 ἀρξάμενος (Aram.); 11, 22 ἠκούσθη εἰς τὰ ὦτα; 12, 3 προσέβητο συλλαβεῖν; 12, 10 προήλθον ῥύμην μίαν (ἦ for indefinite article; even more common in Aramaic than in Hebrew); 13, 11 καὶ νῦν ἰδοὺ χεῖρ Κυρίου ἐπὶ σέ; and also ܕܟܝܪܝ ܕܟܝܪܝ (ܦܢܢ ܦܢܢ, Dan. 7, 12 etc.); 13, 12 ἐκκληττόμενος ἐπὶ (ܘܢ) τῇ διδαχῇ; 13, 24 πρὸ προσώπου τῆς εἰσόδου αὐτοῦ; 13, 25 οὐκ εἰμι ἐγώ (Aram.); 14, 2 ἐκάκωσαν τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἔθνῶν; 14, 8 χωλὸς ἐκ κυρίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ (also 3, 2); 14, 15 εὐαγγελιζόμενοι ὑμᾶς ἐπιστρέφειν ἐπὶ θεὸν ζῶντα; 15, 4 παρεδέχθησαν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας (ܘ ܝܗܪܗܩ, the invariable idiom in Aramaic. Correction to ὑπό, as in most MSS., was inevitable); 15, 7 ἐν ὑμῖν ἐξελέξατο (see below); 15, 3 ἀπεκρίθη Ἰάκωβος (the very common Aramaic ܦܢܢ "take up the word," sometimes hardly more than "speak"; cf. Dan. 4, 27¹. So also 3, 12 and 5, 8);¹ 15, 23 οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἀδελφοί.

The fact that so many of these idioms are obviously Aramaic, while no specifically (or even prevaillingly) Hebrew idiom is to be found, is certainly not accidental. Moreover, it is not enough to speak of frequent Semitisms; the truth is that the language of all these fifteen chapters is translation-Greek through and through, generally preserving even the order of words.

In the remainder of the book, chapters 16–28, the case is altogether different. Here, there is no evidence of an underlying Semitic language. The few apparent Semitisms (καὶ ἰδοὺ; ἐγένετο with infin.; τότε used in continuing a narrative; ἐνώπιον with gen.; ἔθετο ἐν τῷ πνεύματι πορεύεσθαι; ἐκ μέσου (ἐν μέσῳ) αὐτῶν) are chargeable to the Koiné; though their presence may be due in part to the influence of the translation-Greek which Luke had so exten-

¹ The idiom is also Hebrew. As for 2 Macc. 15, 14, it was written by a man who, as we have good reason to believe, was as familiar with Aramaic as with Greek (see my *Aramaic Gospels*, 295).