

Notes on the *Palaea Historica*

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The Byzantine biblical chronicle, the *Palaea Historica*, reports that, as a child, the prophet Samuel had a wet nurse by the name of Ἀρμαθεμ.¹ Neither the biblical account of Samuel's childhood (1 Sam. 1. 20–24) nor post-biblical expansions mention any wet nurse. Indeed, the Bible says explicitly that Samuel was nursed by his mother (1 Sam. 1. 23). The *Palaea's* version comes from a misreading of a Greek source that reported that the infant Samuel was raised in Rama or Ramathaim (as is stated in the Bible: 1 Sam. 1. 1, 19, 2. 11). The wording will have been something like Ἀρμαθεμ² (ἀν)έθρεψε³ αὐτόν. Our author will have understood Ἀρμαθεμ to be a person and so concluded that Samuel had a wet nurse.

Some twenty years ago David Flusser pointed out that much Jewish legendary material was preserved in the *Palaea*.⁴ I remark here several such passages that have gone unnoticed.

In the biblical narrative Moses descends from Mount Sinai with the tablets of the Law only to witness the Jews worshipping the golden calf. He smashes the tablets. Later he ascends again, receives a second set of tablets, and when he descends his face is shining (Exod. 31. 18–34. 35). The *Palaea* reports these two ascents and descents, but represents the shining of Moses' face as already taking place after his first descent (p. 242). This is a rabbinic change (see, e.g. Deut. Rab. 3. 12). Furthermore, the Bible says no more than that "the skin of Moses' face shone" (Exod. 34. 30; cf. 34. 35). The *Palaea* writes ἐλαμπρύνθη τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ Μωυσεως ὑπὲρ τὸν ἥλιον. The comparison of Moses' radiance to that of the sun is rabbinic, e.g. "Moses' face was like the face of the sun" (*Sifre* Nu. 140 ad Nu. 27. 20).

In the biblical story the Canaanite general Sisera flees to the tent of Jael. He requests water; she gives him milk (Ju. 4. 19). The *Palaea*

¹ See A. Vassiliev (ed.), *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina* (Moscow 1893) 270.

² For this spelling of the name of Samuel's native city, see the manuscripts at LXX 1 Sam. 1. 1, 19, 7. 17.

³ For τρέφω used of a person's native land or city, see e.g. Xen. *Lac.* 13. 1, Lycurg. 47, Polyb. 11. 28. 6.

⁴ *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 (1971) 48–79.

elaborates (p. 272): Jael offers and gives him also food (βούτυρον: cheese? butter?) and wine as well. The pseudo-Philonian Jewish work, *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (= *LAB*), while not specifying, also introduces food and wine into this episode (31. 3, 6). The *Palaea* further observes that Sisera was suffering from the great heat of the day. Although the Bible has nothing of this sort, *LAB* also makes explicit mention of Sisera's suffering from the heat (31. 4).

In the Bible's account of Samson and Delilah, there is never any mention of marriage between them (Ju. 16. 4–21). But due to the manner in which the *Palaea* conflates biblical episodes, they become husband and wife in its version of the story (p. 268). The same is true of *LAB* (43. 5).

In the famous episode of "the concubine at Gibeah" the gentlemanly host argues with the attacking mob, "Please, my brothers, do not do evil" (Ju. 19. 23). The *Palaea* (pp. 273–74) has him say something utterly different, ἡμέτερος γάρ ἐστι, which presumably means, "he is our kin," "he is one of us," *vel sim*. This appears to go back to a simple misreading or reinterpretation of the words, "my brothers, do not," as "these are my brothers," i.e. יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ / יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ. The same reinterpretation appears to be present in *LAB* 45. 3 (*nonne hi fratres nostri sunt*), as well as in Josephus (*AJ* 5. 144).

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