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978-1-107-49773-3- The Odes and Psalms of Solomon: Published from the Syriac Version: Second Edition: Revised and Enlarged with a Facsimile

J. Rendel Harris

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

The present volume contains an important addition to our knowledge of the literature which immediately anticipates or directly follows the time of Christ. It contains, on the one hand, a hitherto unknown version of the Psalms of Solomon, a collection which has often been studied, from the standpoints both of the higher and lower criticism, and which is, by common consent, referred to the middle of the first century B.C. ; and on the other hand it presents a new collection which I have called, for the sake of distinction, and in harmony with the references in ancient writers, by the name of the Odes of Solomon ; they are here edited and translated from a Syriac MS. in my own possession : and it will probably be no rash prediction to say that their value and antiquity will be at once recognized by students and critics, and that they will be assigned, either wholly or in part, to the first century of the Christian era. The reasons for this belief will appear presently, but, apart altogether from the question of a half-century more or less in the dating of a document, it lies outside controversy that the new Odes are marked by a vigour and exaltation of spiritual life, and a mystical insight, to which we can only find parallels in the most illuminated periods of the history of the Church. They differ, in this respect, by the whole breadth of the firmament, from the extant Psalms of Solomon, with which they are associated in our MS. In these there is little originality, and not much hope : the hard experiences through which Jerusalem passed at the hands of the Romans in the Invasion of Pompey have left a gloom over the sky even in the moments of temporary relief and in the time of exultation over the fall of the great oppressor : what life and light there is may be traced to the severe morality of the traditional Pharisees, and to the Messianic hopes for whose development their times of affliction were the appropriate and necessary nidus ; and so far are they from

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[More information](#)

religious originality in the expression of personal or national experience, that many of the Psalms in question are little more than centos and expansions from the canonical Hebrew Psalter. In the Odes, on the other hand, we have few quotations or adaptations from previous writings, whether Jewish or Christian; there is little that can be traced to the Old Testament, almost nothing that is to be credited to the Gospels or other branches of the Christian literature. Their radiance is no reflection from the illumination of other days: their inspiration is first-hand and immediate; it answers very well to the summary which Aristides made of the life of the early Christian Church when he described them as indeed 'a new people with whom something Divine is mingled.' They are thus altogether distinct from the extant Psalms of Solomon which are bound up with them in our MS. Whatever we may have to say of these latter is limited to the interest which arises in the discovery of an Eastern Version of a book whose Greek text is peculiarly difficult to edit, and whose original Hebrew text has altogether disappeared. We shall show that the new Syriac version is itself a translation of the Greek; we shall point out in what ways, if any, it serves to the betterment of the Greek text, and whether it gives any assistance to the detection of the lost Hebrew text.

Our chief interest, however, will be with the Odes. We shall discuss the quotations and fragments of these which are found in early Christian writers: we shall try to determine the limits of time within which the composition of the Odes must lie, as well as the locality or Church from which they emanate: we shall try to find out also how they became attached to the Psalms, and whether they were originally composed in Greek; and we shall add a brief commentary and notes to the Odes as translated. In this way we hope to clear up some perplexities in the historical tradition, while leaving, no doubt, a number of unsolved problems to those who shall follow after us.

The MS. from which our texts come is a paper one of quite a late period: its age may be between three and four hundred years: but as it is imperfect both at the beginning and ending, and so has lost both its preface and colophon, we cannot tell how it was described by the person who made the copy, nor can we say anything definite about the date. It has been lying on my shelves for some time, perhaps

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

DESCRIPTION OF MS.

3

for as long as two years, along with a heap of leaves from various Syriac MSS. written on paper, which came from the neighbourhood of the Tigris. In spite of its relatively late date, the text is a good one: it is carefully, if somewhat coarsely written, and is furnished with occasional vowels in the Nestorian manner, to which there have been added, probably by a later hand, sundry Greek vowels in the Jacobite manner. As we have said it is incomplete both at the beginning and the end: we can, however, make out pretty clearly what the original MS. was like.

The book is arranged in quires of ten leaves: of the first quire three leaves are missing: these three leaves contained the first and second Odes and the beginning of the third Ode. The Odes then run continuously till the fourth quire, where they stop on the verso of the fourth leaf: thus the Odes occupy roughly thirty-four leaves. Then the extant Psalms begin: they occupy the remaining six leaves of the fourth quire (say six leaves *plus*), the fifth quire, and the sixth quire, of which the last leaf is gone, *plus* whatever was needed to complete the book from a seventh quire: and since the extant portion of the Psalms in our Syriac MS. takes us up to Ps. xvii. 38 there is not much to add from a seventh quire. Suppose we say that the Psalms occupied twenty-six leaves, and that three more leaves are required to complete the text, we have then approximately

Odes = 34 leaves

Psalms = 28 leaves

or Psalms and Odes = 62 leaves¹.

Now let us turn to the accounts given us by ancient writers of the extent of the books in question: first of all we know that the 18 Psalms of Solomon once stood in the great Codex Alexandrinus: for in the index to the MS. we find as follows:

Psalms
and Odes
compared.

Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰωάννου
Κλήμεντος ἐπιστολὴ α΄
Κλήμεντος ἐπιστολὴ β΄
ομοῦ βιβλία—
Ψαλμοὶ Σολομῶντος ιη΄.

¹ I have made a slight correction here, following Harnack's estimate of the missing matter.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

Here the eighteen Psalms stand just outside the accepted Christian books of the N.T., in the very penumbra of canonicity. Next turn to the *Synopsis Sanctae Scripturae* which passes under the name of Athanasius: here we find as follows, after the enumeration of the *Antilegomena* of the Old Testament:

σὺν ἐκείνοις δὲ καὶ ταῦτα ἠρίθμηνται·
 Μακκαβαϊκὰ βιβλία δ'
 Πτολεμαϊκὰ
 Ψαλμοὶ καὶ ᾠδὴ [1. ᾠδαί]¹ Σολομώντος
 Σώσαννα.

Here we find the Psalms in the company of the Odes, and forming a part of the disputed writings of the Old Testament: from the supplementary manner in which they are introduced, following an unknown book on Egyptian history, we may perhaps describe their position as the penumbra of uncanonicity, or, rather of deutero-canonicity. The Psalms and Odes are here (say in the sixth century) definitely grouped together.

Next take the Stichometry of Nicephorus, the Patriarch of Constantinople in the beginning of the ninth century: here we find as follows:

1. Three books of Maccabees.
2. The Wisdom of Solomon.
3. Ecclesiasticus.
4. The Psalms and Odes of Solomon, containing 2100 verses (στίχοι βρ').
5. Esther.
6. Judith.
7. Susanna.
8. Tobit.

Here we find our two books again grouped together, and very well placed amongst the Apocrypha of the Old Testament: they do not seem to have lost any dignity between the sixth and ninth centuries; and they have been carefully measured, after the manner of books which are likely to be transcribed and whose contents must therefore be estimated on some recognized scale.

¹ Zahn tries to justify the singular, by reference to the LXX. of 1 K. viii. 53 οὐκ ἰδοὺ αὐτὴ γέγραπται ἐν βιβλίῳ τῆς ᾠδῆς;

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

STICHOMETRY OF THE ODES

5

In the same connexion we have a list of books which is found attached to the *Quaestiones et Responsiones* of Anastasius the Sinaite, and is commonly known as the Catalogue of the Sixty Books. After the sixty canonical books, we have a list of nine deutero-canonical books, and then a list of twenty-five definitely apocryphal writings; amongst these last we find

8. Ἀνάληψις Μωϋσέως.
9. Ψαλμοὶ Σολομώντος.
10. Ἡλίου ἀποκάλυψις. etc.

Here we cannot be certain whether Psalms means Psalms and Odes, nor is any estimate made of the extent of the composition. The book is not in such good company as it is in the Catalogue of Nicephorus.

Assuming the correctness of the statement that the Odes and Psalms contain 2100 verses, let us now turn to the Greek texts of the eighteen Psalms, and see what the scribes say about their compass. The Vatican MS. (Cod. R of Gebhardt's edition of the Psalms) says that the book contains $\sigma\tau\iota\ \psi\nu'$: the Copenhagen MS. (Cod. H) says ἔπη α; and the Paris MS. (Cod. P) says ἔπη τριάκοντα. Here, as Gebhardt says, Cod. P has misread Δ as Λ'; so we have two statements as to the length of the book. One statement says *verses*, the other *verses of Homer*, but since that is what verses mean in a stichometric reckoning, there is no discrepancy here except in the numbers. If we imagine that the scribe of Cod. R has misread the sign for 900, Ϡ, as ψ, we have 950 verses for R, which agrees closely with the reckoning in Cod. H. Suppose we say then that the 18 Psalms equal 950 verses. But then we are told by Nicephorus that the Psalms and Odes together make 2100 verses: we have then the ratio of Odes to Psalms 1150 to 950 or 23 to 19. Our estimate of the relative lengths in the Syriac was 34 to 28 or 17 to 14. The former estimate is 1·21 to 1, the latter 1·21 to 1, which is so exact as to make the verification that our new Odes are those of which Nicephorus and the other Canonists speak, so far as statistics can make the demonstration.

It will be observed that Nicephorus has divided the Solomonic literature into two parts, the Canonical books, viz.: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Canticles, and the Antilegomena which include

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

the Wisdom of Solomon, perhaps Ecclesiasticus, and the Psalms and Odes of Solomon; that is, there are three canonical books of Solomon, and at least two sub-canonical books. We put it in that way, because there is evidence in some quarters that Ecclesiasticus was also reckoned amongst the books of Solomon. If, however, it is not so reckoned, we have five books of Solomon.

Now let us turn to the Cheltenham Stichometry as published by Mommsen¹.

Here we have the Solomonic writings introduced as follows:

Psalmi David CLI. $\overline{\text{ver. } \bar{\text{v}}}$.

Salomonis $\overline{\text{ver. } \bar{\text{v}}}$ D.

profetas maiores $\overline{\text{ver. } \bar{\text{xvi}}}$. CCCLXX. numero IIII.

This is a little perplexing; at first sight it seems as if the Cheltenham list had only one book of Solomon, or several books reckoned as one, and that the total extent of this book or books is 5500 verses.

But, as Preuschen² has suggested, the real reckoning for Solomon has got into the next line, and we should read

Salomonis lib. V. $\overline{\text{ver. } \bar{\text{vii}}}$. CCCXX.

profetas maiores numero IIII.

If this restoration be correct, we should have the Cheltenham list in evidence for five books of Solomon, but without any clue to the identification of the five books, or any means of comparison with the stichometry of the Psalms and Odes as given by Nicephorus.

Now, that Preuschen is correct as regards the numbers may be seen from the fact that the figure 7320 agrees with the count which we find in Vulgate MSS.³ For here we have

Proverbs	1740	verses
Ecclesiastes	800	„
Canticles	280	„
Wisdom	1700	„
Ecclesiasticus	2800	„
Total	$\overline{7320}$	„

¹ Mommsen, *Zur lateinischen Stichometrie* in *Hermes*, Bd xxi. pp. 142—156. Cf. Sanday in *Studia Biblica*, iii. pp. 217—303.

² Preuschen, *Analecta*, p. 138 ff.

³ Sanday, *l.c.* p. 266.

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[More information](#)

This justifies Preuschen's restoration, and shows that five books of Solomon were reckoned amongst the Canonical and deutero-canonical books, but the Psalms and Odes of Solomon are not amongst the five. For our purposes, therefore, we may dismiss the Cheltenham catalogue. The date of this catalogue is soon after A.D. 359, and it is North African in origin: we may say that at this date the Psalms of Solomon were not recognized in Carthage.

The very same thing follows from the consideration of the list of Canonical Scriptures contained in the Acts of the Council of Carthage in 397, for the entry in the list of Canonical Books,

Salomonis libri quinque

can hardly be referred to any other grouping than that which we have already described. The tradition of the Church is steady that there are *five* books of Solomon. Thus we find in Innocentius, writing at the beginning of the fifth century,

‘prophetarum libri sexdecim, *Salomonis libri quinque*,
Psalterium’,

and in Cassiodorus, writing at the middle of the sixth century²,

‘Psalterium librum unum; Salomonis libros quinque
i.e. Proverbia, Sapientiam, Ecclesiasticum, Ecclesiasten,
Canticum Canticorum’;

and so in other places. Isidore of Seville, in the early part of the seventh century, divides the five Solomonic writings into groups of three and two respectively, and explains that the two which he detaches (Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus) were really the works of Jesus the son of Sirach, but have been credited to Solomon on the ground of style³:

‘Duo quoque illi egregii et sanctae institutionis libelli,
Sapientiam dico et alium qui vocatur Ecclesiasticus;
qui dum dicantur a Jesu filio Sirach editi, tamen propter
quandam eloquii similitudinem Salomonis titulo sunt
praenotati’⁴.

¹ *Ad Exsuperium* (Galland, *Bibl.* vol. viii. pp. 561 ff.).

² *De instit. div. litt.* c. xiv.

³ Isidore, *De ordine libb. S. Script.*, P.L. lxxxiii. 155 ff.

⁴ For the persistence of the tradition as to the five Solomonic books, see Nestle, *Zeitschrift f. altt. Wiss.* (1907), 27, 294 ff.

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[More information](#)

There are no further references that I know of to the Psalms or Odes of Solomon in the lists of canonical books which have come down to us, unless there should be a cryptic allusion to them in the new book of Psalms written for Marcion, which the Muratorian Canon condemns (Saec. ii.—iii.), or the ψαλμοὶ ἰδιωτικοί which the Council of Laodicea (c. 360 A.D.) prohibits from being used in the Church¹. In the latter case we have the opinion of John Zonaras in favour of the identification. But Zonaras in the twelfth century was probably, like ourselves, engaged in speculation. On the other hand, if we might describe ψαλμοὶ ἰδιωτικοί as meaning Psalms of personal experience, the term would exactly suit our collection of Odes.

Having now proved that we have the two books of Solomonic Psalms and Odes in substantially the same compass Lactantius and the Odes. that they were known to the ancient Stichometers, we now pass on to consider what light is thrown on the matter by actual quotations from the book of Odes which are extant. We begin with a passage from Lactantius, which was first noticed by the learned Whiston². In the *Divine Institutes* (Bk iv. c. 12) we have the following passage:

‘Salomon in ode undevicesima³ ita dicit: Infirmatus est uterus Virginis et accepit foetum et gravata est, et facta est in multa miseratione mater virgo.’

And in the *Epitome* of the *Divine Institutes* the passage is introduced by the words *Apud Salomonem ita scriptum est*. These references to a 19th Ode betray a knowledge of the book from which the quotation was taken: on turning to the 19th Ode in our collection we find the very words quoted by Lactantius, the actual Syriac text being as follows:

¹ Origen's Canon, as contained in Euseb. *H. E.* vi. 25, has an entry of three Solomonic books, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Canticles; with regard to this last he says ἄσμα ἁσμαίων, οὐ γὰρ ὡς παραλαμβάνουσι τινες, ἄσματα ἁσμαίων. But this is only an alternative title which Origen condemns; it has no suggestion in it of other Songs or Canticles. [In the Latin Vulgate of Sixtus V (1590) the title was first *Canticum* and is everywhere in the headings of the pages pasted over as *Cantica* (Nestle).] Origen is expressly enumerating the twenty-two books of the Hebrew Canon. The alternative title for Canticles is actually found in the *Synopsis* of Chrysostom, in John of Damascus (*De fide orthodoxa* iv. 17) and elsewhere.

² *Authentic Records*, i. 155.

³ So in the Cambridge MS. Gg. 4. 24 and in all MSS. in the apparatus of Brandt's edition; but in the MS. Kk. 4. 17 of the same University the reference is wanting.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

LACTANTIUS AND THE ODES

9

ܠܠܘܠܘܬܐ ܡܝܘܢܐ ܕܘܠ
 .ܕܝܠܘܢܐ ܠܘܦ ܕܘܠܘܢܐ
 .ܠܠܘܠܘܬܐ ܠܘܦ ܕܘܠܘܢܐ

The only discordance is in the first word of the passage, which is certainly wrong in the Latin¹, and very difficult to interpret in the Syriac. It is clear, however, that Lactantius is working from a book of Odes arranged in the same order as ours: if he had both Psalms and Odes in his collection, then the Odes preceded the Psalms. And further, since Lactantius quotes in Latin, the book was extant in a Latin translation in his time; for when Lactantius quotes Greek books, as in the case of the Sibylline verses, he quotes in Greek and does not offer a translation. From which it appears that by the beginning of the fourth century the Odes of Solomon must have been translated into Latin².

Ryle and James in their edition of the eighteen Psalms of Solomon drew attention, following Whiston, to this passage of Lactantius, and made the correct inference from it that there must have been more Solomonian matter at one time accessible to Christian scholars than the eighteen Psalms. And since the Ode quoted by Lactantius is undoubtedly Christian, they suggest that the original collection of Psalms of Solomon was fitted with an Appendix of Odes of Solomon, the added matter being approximately equal in length to the original collection, and either Christian or marked by distinctly Christian interpolations. So far they were undoubtedly right, as our MS. incontestably shows. Only our book presents the matter of the Appendix in a different light: here it is the Odes that have the first place and the Psalms that are appended; and possibly this was also the case with Lactantius' book of Solomon. We shall show, presently, that there is reason to believe that the two books came together in both orders, in different lines of tradition,

¹ I am inclined to believe it is simply a mistake for 'insinuatus.' Just above Lactantius says, 'Descendens itaque de caelo sanctus ille spiritus dei sanctam virginem cujus utero se *insinuaret* elegit.' Harnack points out, by reference to Rönsch, *Itala u. Vulgata* p. 371 that the word *infirmatus* is only used of sick people in the time of Lactantius. The Ode expressly denies sickness to the Virgin. For further suggestions see notes to text and translation.

² We shall show later that there is some probability that Lactantius has been influenced by our fourth Ode in a passage of *Div. Inst.* iv. 27.

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[More information](#)

and that there was current not only a book of Odes and Psalms but also a book of Psalms and Odes¹.

And now let us pass on to a more interesting question, the existence of extracts from the Odes of Solomon in that curious Gnostic book, preserved in the Coptic (or more exactly, Thebaic) language, and known as the *Pistis Sophia*. These extracts will be important, not only because they give us, in the form of a version, a good deal of matter that coincides with what we have recovered from the Syriac, but because they present this matter at an earlier time than that of Lactantius, from whom our first quotation was made, and the writer who made these quotations in the latter part of the third century was not only quoting from the Odes of Solomon, but from those Odes as forming a part of his accepted Biblical text. We shall endeavour to make these points clear, and also to show that in the Biblical text from which the writer quoted the Odes of Solomon were preceded by the Psalms of Solomon. If we can establish these points, the antiquity of the Odes will be made out, for it is on the one hand clear that they are traditional companions of the Psalms of Solomon for a considerable length of time and on the other hand it is quite improbable that a book written, say, as late as the end of the second century, should be a part of the accepted Egyptian canon in the latter part of the third century². To get into the canon at all, in any of the great centres of Christian life, a book must have a measure of antiquity on its side: those books which secured such canonicity, Clement's *Epistle*, or Barnabas' *Epistle* or the *Shepherd* of Hermas, obtained their position by the presumption of antiquity, and even then were not easily rooted in the positions that they acquired, as the history of the Canon will show. Let us, then, try to establish the points to which we have referred above: and first with regard to the date of the *Pistis Sophia* from which the extracts have been made.

The best investigation into the *Pistis Sophia* is the one

¹ Note that the five apocryphal Psalms published by Wright from the Syriac in *Proc. S. Bibl. Arch.* for 1887 have nothing to do with our collection.

² [Harnack puts the point equally strongly: *Die Oden Salomos* p. 9: 'dass irgend eine Provinzialkirche ein nach der Mitte des 2. Jahrhunderts entstandenes Schriftstück in das A.T. aufgenommen hat, ist ganz unwahrscheinlich.']