CHAPTER I

ON THE NAME "SON OF GOD" IN NORTHERN SYRIA

An inscription in Greek characters was recently sent me by my friend Professor Lootfy Levonian, of the American College at ‘Ain Ṭab, which ran as follows:

ΒΑΡΛΑΑΑ
[Figure of an eagle]
ΑΛΥΠΕ ΧΑΙ
ΡΕ
ΞΤΟΥΣΤΖΛΥ

i.e. Βαρλία, ἀλυπὲ χαίρε· ἔτους ξαυ.

This inscription may serve as the point of departure for the following investigation; it does not contain anything which cannot be paralleled from other quarters, but it contains within its own brief compass several important statements, from which equally important inferences can be drawn; so we will begin by considering it from the side of epigraphic lore.

In the first place, then, it is a funeral inscription. This appears from the conjunction of the name of the person (α) with the figure of an eagle, a common funerary symbol in northern Syria1, (b) with a common form of Greek farewell to the departed, (c) with a date which is presumably the date of death.

The next thing we notice is that although the inscription is in Greek, the name of the deceased is transliterated from the Syriac; he is called Bar ‘a’lāhā, or Son of God. It is, therefore, the grave of a Syrian. When we have recognised this indisputable fact, of which, strange as it may seem that a Syrian should have such a name, we shall find abundance of confirmation and parallel, we may perhaps be able to clear up an obscurity as to the date.

1 Cumont has written at length on the subject of the ‘Funerary Eagle among the Syrians” in Revue de l’Histoire des Religions for 1910.
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For if the deceased is of Syrian family (though the family were bilingual and had Greek for a second language), the stone-cutter of the inscription is probably a Syrian, and that would explain why he has written the figures of the date in reverse order, so as to give the year ζων’, where he should have written ναζ’, i.e. the year 437 of the Seleucid era, corresponding to the Christian date A.D. 125–6¹.

The inscription itself was found not very far from ‘Ain Tab, and we may, therefore, describe it as a funeral inscription from Commagene in the early part of the second century (the date depending upon the accuracy of the transcription and its interpretation, which I do not think admit of serious question). We shall see presently reasons for believing that it cannot be very far wrong, for we shall be able to refer other Bar-Alaha inscriptions to the same period, and to connect them, directly or indirectly, with the same locality. The Greek formula ἄναπτον ζαίρε need not detain us long; in this shape and in a somewhat more extended one διορε καὶ ἄναπτον ζαίρε we find it in use in the East: I quote an instance from a Palmyrene bust in the possession of a sheikh at Kuraytein, on the road to Palmyra, which appears in Lidzbarski² in the following form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>Palmyrene</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ΝΑΣΡΑΛΑΘ</td>
<td>נזרא בר</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΛΑΘΟΜΑΛΛ</td>
<td>מלו בכר</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΧΟΥΑΛΥΠΕ</td>
<td>נזרה בכר</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΖΑΙΡΕ</td>
<td>חאיר</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

where the Greek is deciphered by Lidzbarski as follows:

Nasrapalath Malchalon Anape Zaire:

the Palmyrene showing simply Nasra, son of Malku, son of Nasra,

¹ Such lapidary reversals are common on the Palmyrene monuments. Cf. Lidzbarski, Handbuch: “Palmyrene Inscriptions,” i. p. 458 et seq. where are the Greek dates:

ετος ν’ = A.D. 139.
ετος ζ’ = A.D. 179.
ετος δζ’ = A.D. 193.
ετος δηφ’ = A.D. 242–3, etc.,

and which dates are certified by the Palmyrene texts. The same thing occurs in the trilingual inscription from Zebed, whose date is given, in words, in the Syriac as 823 (i.e. of the Seleucid era), but in Greek in the form ετος γεω’ (328).

² Lidzbarski, ii. 450.
mourning. The two sides are independent, the Palmyrene giving only the names: but it is reasonable that the names on the two sides should agree. It is quite impossible that the person buried should be called Νασράλλαθως, but he may very well have borne the name Νασράλλα or Ακιλα Δει, in which case we have a suggestive parallel to our Barlaha inscription1. The Greek of this inscription, however, needs to be re-examined. We will only use it at present to show how the Greek funeral formulae assert themselves in a bilingual country.

Here is another instance from Membidj (Hierapolis) which lies much nearer to ‘Αιν Ταβ2.

Βάκχιε χρηστε ἄλυτε χαίρε· Βε· Γόρτιαίον· β... In this inscription we have again the conjunction of the funerary eagle with the Greek formula; and whether we take βε to represent the Seleucid year or the day of the month (it is almost certainly the latter) the lapidary has again written his figures in the Semitic order, and is therefore probably a Syrian. If the day of the month be the 22nd, then the year which follows and begins with β has also its figures reversed.

Now for a word with regard to the bird whom Cumont calls the funerary eagle. It is commonly represented as holding a crown or garland in its beak, as a symbol of triumph and of the attainment of an immortal life among the blessed. In this form, for example, it is a constant motive upon the tombs at Membidj, the ancient Hierapolis of which Lucian writes. Similar things may be remarked at Balkis on the Euphrates, which Cumont holds to be the real Ζευγμα (commonly identified with Birejdjik), where the road from ‘Αιν Ταβ crossed the Euphrates: so that we may see that, in this part of Syria, the funerary eagle is conventional; Cumont maintains further that it was from the East that the Romans borrowed their idea of apotheosis of the Emperors, and the fiction that Romulus was carried up to heaven on the back of an eagle. It is probable that the problem of apotheosis by the help of eagles can be solved more simply: for if the eagle should turn out to be not a piece of Syrian ornithology, but the Thunder-bird itself, which turns up at the origin of all religions, he will not need to be imported into Rome from the East; he

1 Perhaps Νασράλλαθως means that the stone-cutter began to write θεοῖ after Νασράλλα.

2 It will be found in Cumont, loc. cit. p. 120, from Hogarth, Annual of the British School at Athens for 1907–8, pp. 186 sqq.
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will be at home there already, just as he is in any place where his royalty has displaced the minor claims of the Woodpecker to be the bird-form of the Thunder.

We shall point out presently that in the case of our Barlaha inscription, the eagle has a nexus with Barlaha, quite independently of the fact that Barlaha happens to have died: of this we have more to say at a later point. The inscription is non-Christian; we should suspect this from the occurrence of a pagan and hopeless formula, and from the presence of the eagle; but we are quite certain that no Christian in the year 125 would ever have been designated by the title of Son of God, nor is it likely that the term could have been employed by the Jews. The problem before us, then, is to determine the meaning of this pagan formula of nomenclature. Who is the god that is indicated, and how does anyone come to be his son? What honours attach to such sonship and what functions does the son discharge? And by what marks, if any, is he recognised? Is it royalty that is meant by the term, or is it priesthood? Or does the title depend upon physical and moral characteristics? These, and similar questions, are the points that require to be considered; and it will easily be seen that there are similar questions in most of the great religions, and in not a few of the small ones. The relation of kingship, for example, interpreted as sonship, is common in the earlier Judaism: the Psalms are full of it; “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee,” is an adoptionist formula in the older religion, which became an adoptionist formula in the Christian religion: and again, as the writer to the Hebrews would say, “I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son.” The same exact terms of adoptionism are found in Ps. lxxxix. 27, “I will make him my first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth.” In all these cases the king is regarded as, by adoption, the Son of God. What is true of Judaism is true of the Syrian Kingdom of Damascus, where we find a decided tendency to name their kings Bar-hadad, that is, to define them as the children of the Thunder-god; for Hadad (Adad) is the Amorite and Mesopotamian god of the Thunder: and in that sense, a Syrian king so named might be called in the terms of a later day, Son of God.

It is, however, useless to look in this direction for the meaning of Barlaha, for in the first place the country is under Roman rule,

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1 Ps. ii. 7.  
2 2 Sam. vii. 14.  Heb. i. 5.
In Northern Syria

and there are no more kings to be affiliated to the gods, and in the next place, as we shall see, the name in question is borne by persons who are politically civilians. Our humble inscription is certainly not the tombstone of a king. Perhaps we shall reach a solution most easily by removing our attention for a while from the first syllable of the name, and fixing it on the remainder. Whatever sonship may mean, there is no question as to the meaning of the word Alaha. What god is meant by this title in Commagene in the year 125 A.D.? The answer to this enquiry is certain: if any god is especially indicated by the name Son of God, it should be the one whom archaeologists know as Jupiter Dolichenus, i.e. the Jupiter worshipped at Dolichē, a town a few hours to the north of ‘Ain Ṭab, represented to-day by a wretched Moslem village known as Tell Dūlūk, with many ruined walls and an occasional Syrian inscription, indicating obscurely the former greatness of the town. This town, whose ruins I have visited, though with no prospect of making excavations, has impressed itself on the whole western world, chiefly by means of its religion, which soldiers from Commagene carried as far as England, Scotland and Wales, Gaul, Germany, Pannonia, Dacia, and Numidia, to say nothing of countries lying nearer to the centre of civilisation. In fact, Commagene became a recruiting ground of the Antonine emperors, and the soldiers who were thus incorporated with the Roman army carried their religious symbols with them wherever they went, adapting themselves skilfully to the nomenclature of the Roman religion, so as to call their chief deity by the name of Jupiter, and establishing shrines and votive monuments wherever they travelled, much in the same way as did the worshippers of Mithras. The extent of the Dolichene influence can be judged by the number of inscriptions belonging to the cult. Hardly one has been found as yet in Commagene itself (though no doubt they will turn up when Tell Dūlūk is excavated), but apart from Commagene they are found all over the Roman Empire. Who then is Jupiter Dolichenus, for it is certain that in an ancient Eastern province, which has formed part of some of the greatest empires of the world, he was not called Jupiter, nor was he known by a place-name such as Dolichenus? The answer is that he is a survival from Hittite and Assyrian days. In some ways he resembles the Hittite storm-god Teshub; in others he is like the Amorite Adad, or Hadad, the thunder-god of Northern Mesopotamia, or the
Assyrian Ramman, the storm-god of the great empires on the two rivers. From the fact that he is always represented with the double-axe (thunder-axe), in his right hand, and with the bunch of split lightnings in his left, we might be disposed to say that he was simply the Thunder-god of the population of this region, slightly Romanised into a Jupiter Optimus Maximus, and accompanied by such religious symbols as we are accustomed to in the Thunder-cults of the East and West. Closer examination shows, however, that the matter is not so simple; for although the figure of Jupiter Dolichenus himself, in the monuments of the cult, is undoubtedly that of a thunder-god, there are features which suggest that he is Sky-god as well as Thunder-god, exactly as was the case with Zeus himself, who obtains his name from the bright sky, and discharges the functions of the darkened sky. In the Dolichene cult, we shall find the central figure accompanied by lesser figures of the Sun and Moon, sometimes associated with a pair of stars. Sometimes a feminine goddess is added, who passes for Juno, and may be the wife of the Solar deity. The denomination of the cult as that of a thunder-god is, therefore, not exhaustive. The main idea is certainly that of the Thunder. Jupiter Dolichenus stands on the back of a bull marching from left to right, the bull being his cult-symbol, as it is for Ramman in Assyria; he has the thunder-eagle with him, sometimes perched on the head of the bull, sometimes crouching beneath it, as if to support it, and sometimes flying with garlands symbolic of victory; and as we have said, he always carries the thunder-axe and the bunch of lightnings.

The god, therefore, who is involved in the name Barlaha must be sought for amongst the thunder-gods and sky-gods of the Oriental peoples. That being the case, the nearest equivalent that we can find in ancient history for the term Barlaha is the name Bar-Hadad (the Benhadad of the Hebrew Bible). Kingship being, however, excluded as an explanation, we must now try priesthood. It is well known that priests commonly acquire theophoric names, expressive of their relation to the God whom they serve; sometimes they actually pose under the name of the god himself. Let us, then, see whether we can make a priest of Barlaha.

In an inscription, preserved in the Museum at Salona in Dalmatia, we find the following:

1 C.I.L. iii. Suppl. ii. 8785.
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D(is) M(anibus) | Aurelius Ger|manus Barla|ha
Sacerdos | I(ovis) O(ptimi) M(aximi) Doli|cheni
vivus | sibi posuit et | Syre coniugit |

Figure of a double-axe.

Here there is a votive inscription for the tomb of a priest of Jupiter Dolichenus named Barlaha, with his wife, whose name is simply Syra or Syre, the Syrian lady; and the inscription is accompanied by the symbol of the thunder. It is clear, then, that a priest of Jupiter Dolichenus might be named Barlaha; it does not follow that every one named Barlaha is necessarily a priest of Dolichenus; and it seems to be made out that the Alaha of the Commagene Barlaha really does mean someone attached to Jupiter Dolichenus, or the thunder-god (sky-god) who lies behind him.

Let us now try to find out some more about this Dolichene priesthood; for if the priests are in the habit of wearing theophoric names, as in the instance before us, we may find from the inscriptions some more information about the cult than is betrayed by a scrutiny and study of the surviving Dolichene sculptures. The simplest way to determine what were the favourite names of Dolichene priests is to work through the collection of the inscriptions of the cult in Kan, De Jouis Dolicheni cultu. We shall easily detect five varieties of appellation (omitting names which are clearly Roman, and generally imperial, like Flavius or Antoninus and the like). These five varieties are as follows:

1. Those priests who bear the name Marinus or Marianus:
2. those who bear the names Castor and Polydeuces:
3. the priestly name of Barlaha:
4. the name Barsamya:
5. the name Aquila.

All of these names are those of priests attached to the service of the god, and they have, to say the least, a theophoric flavour. The evidence is as follows, the numbers of the inscriptions being as in Kan.

No. 3. Polydeuces Theophili along with Lucius Capito and Flavius Reginus.
No. 4. Castor and Aquila with Castor and Polydeuces.
No. 11. Aelius Valentinus veteranus sacerdos.
No. 15. Aurelius Marinus with Adde bar Samei and Oceanus Socratis.
No. 17. Bassus Aquila and Gai Gaiani.
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No. 22. Aurelius Germanus Barlaia ut supra.
No. 33. Aurelius Domitius with the brethren
          Flavius Castor and
          Aurelius Maximus brothers, not said positively to be priests.
No. 44. Antonius.
No. 48. Antiochus and Marinus.
No. 53. Bellicius Marini filius sacerdos.
No. 59. Demittius sacerdos.
No. 64. Sacerdotibus. Sopatrus et Marinus et Calus (sic).
No. 67. C. Julius Marinus miles, not said to be a priest.
No. 70. Flavius Marinus and Chrysas Thyrsus.
No. 72. C. Fabius Germanus.
No. 75. Aurelius Severus veteranus curator tempuli (in Aventino) et
          Aurelius Antiochus sacerdos, etc.
No. 83. M. Ulpius Chresimus.
No. 84. Aurelius Teatecus filius Hela.
No. 86. Aurelius Julianus eques Romanus sacerdos.
No. 99. Antipatrus sacerdos.
No. 100. Marcus Barsemon.
Nos. 104 and 105. C. Julius Flaccus.
No. 106. L. Aurelius Valerius.
No. 130. Arcias Marinus.
No. 141. G. Julius Marinus (not said to be a priest).
No. 152. Lucinus (?) Donatii, Aquila Barsemon and Flavius Damas.

It will be seen at a glance that these lists of priestly names are
significant. Setting aside a number of imperatorial names of the
time, we have, for the most part, a series of theophoric names,
which belong to the Dolicheine religion, and will help us to under-
stand the nature of the cult. Of these the first is Marinus and its
associated Marianus. The name stands for an old Syriac form
Marin, and its companion Maryan: each formed from the word
Mari, which becomes Mar in later Syriac (with silent yud), by
the addition of a suffix in the first person plural. The meaning
is then "our Lord," and it is an archaic title of honour, probably
used both for priests and kings. It becomes the appellation of
saints in the Eastern Church. It does not appear from our list
of cases that it is exclusively a priestly title, nor that it must be
necessarily read in a theophoric sense, though one remembers how
common is the doctrine that the honour of the priest is as the
honour of God. As it happens, in one case Marinus is described
as a soldier, and therefore presumably not a priest.¹ Other

¹ This statement may require qualification; we do not know whether Doli-
chene priests accompanied the Syrian legions into foreign countries. Some
instances of similar character can be brought forward. Students of Philo will remember the way in which the mob in Alexandria made a mock king of the poor idiot Carabas and saluted him with cries of Marin. Here the name has its loftiest connotation. We can, however, find a number of persons of humble origin, who bear the name without any sense of elevation or dignity. It appears to have become conventional.1

The next case is more striking: we have Castor and Pollux in conjunction, and Castor several times separately. There can be no mistake about the meaning of this; the Heavenly Twins are a part of the Dolichene priesthood: and we must conclude that the cult involved not merely the Sky or the Thunder, but the Children of the Sky and the Children of the Thunder. Such priests are in all probability twins, or are acting representatively in a line of priests who have the care of a twin-cult. (A good instance is the priest Amphion at Antioch, for whom Tiberius set up the monument of Zethus and Amphion.) Now this might have been divined: for in Commagene we are in the Hittite country; and it is known from the inscriptions found at Boghaz köi, that the Hittites had not only a thunder-god (Teshub) but that there was also in the vicinity of the Hittite empire, and perhaps within the empire itself, a pair of twin deities who are called by their Aryan name Nasatiyau in the treaties between the Hittites, the Mitanni, etc. Thus every reason for regarding the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus as a survival, is a reason for expecting the survival of the cult of the Twins.

In the light of this important discovery of the existence of a twin element in the Dolichene priesthood, we may ask whether this fact can be used to illustrate the monuments. The answer priestly functions may have been discharged by soldiers; e.g. in the inscription from the Aventine (No. 75 in Kan) the curator of the temple is expressly said to be a veteranus. So in the inscription No. 11 of Kan, Aelius Valentinus is expressly said to be both veteranus and accedens. In No. 53 Bellicus the priest is almost certainly a soldier; from the description of him as Filius Marini it is possible that his father may have been a priest also. In No. 67 we have another soldier named Marinus, who may suggest a similar explanation.

Hettnner, De Jove Dolicheno, p. 9, says that the cognomen Marinus is found much more often in Dolichene inscriptions than can be explained by chance; as in not less than seven instances the name is that of a priest, he concludes that the Dolichene Marini are connected with the cult.

1 E.g. at the end of the Edessan Acts of Sharbil, we are told that Marinus was one of the notaries who composed the document. But perhaps this is consistent with dignity.
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10 is that the pair of stars in the Dolichene monuments must be held to be symbols of the Twins. Are the Twins themselves represented? Not in the Roman or Greek form; it is possible that the sun or the moon may have come in to represent the Twins as they do in some Assyrian inscriptions. What seems to confirm the supposed Assyrian influence at this point is the fact that the Dolichene monuments sometimes represent the Sun and Moon as carrying whips. Now the whip is from India westward a well-known Dioecetic symbol. The following sentence from Mr A. B. Cook’s recently published Zeus will illustrate the point. He is describing one of the Dolichene plates found at Heddernheim:

The upper division contains a bust of Sarapis; the lower, busts of the Sun and Moon. The Sun has the horns of a bull; the Moon, a rayed nimbus: both bear whips. Over their heads are two stars.

Without laying too much stress on this point, we can see that the reference to Castor and Polydeuces amongst the Dolichene priesthood requires us to admit that the Twins are a fundamental part of the cult, and that their presence on the monument is not due to syncretism.

But what were their names in Syriac, for after all, Castor and Pollux can only be a translation? It is possible that they may have had names which have come down to us as Cosmas and Damian, the ecclesiastical substitute for the Twins in this region, but we have not the means of determining this at present. The names Cosmas (Cosmus) and Damas are both found on the Dolichene monuments, and Damas appears to be a priest. That is as far as we can go with what, for the present, is little more than a suggestion.

There is, however, remarkable evidence in our list of the currency of the word Twin as a name. Twin, in Syriac, as is well known, is Tauma, and the similarity of this to the word for Abyss or Ocean (Tehoma), led earlier compilers of Onomastica to derive the name Thomas (or twin) from Abyssus. In the same way when pious persons attempted to get rid of the statement in the

1 Loc. cit. r p. 620.
2 Thus, when we find upon a Roman inscription (No. 71, Kan) that it is dedicated to J(ovi) O(ptimo) s(ancto) p(raestantissimo) D(olicheno) et Junoni Sanctae Herae Castoribus et Apollini, we are to regard all these as Roman equivalents for figures in the Dolichene cult. Juno as Hera is a double substitution; Apollo is the Sun-god of the east, and the Castors are the Twins.

On the inscription No. 91 of Kan, Juno is expressly called Juno Assyria regina Dolichena.