BAHÁ'Í STUDIES BULLETIN

VOLUME 1.
NO. 1
MARCH
1983

CONTENTS

Editorial................................................................. p.2.

Dr. Peter Smith, A Note on Babi and Bahá'í Numbers in Iran...... p.3f.

Dr. Moojan Momen (Ed.), Eagleton's Survey of the Bahá'í Community in 1919-20, Part III, America by Albert Vail...... p.8f.


Stephen Lambden, An Episode in the Childhood of Siyrid Ali Muhammad the Bab.......................................................... p.22f.

Dr. Kent Beveridge, Seven Manuscripts attributed to Baha'u'llah...... p.33f.

Dr. Denis MacEoin, Seven Manuscripts attributed to Baha'u'llah, Some Further comments............................................... p.52f.

Dr. Moojan Momen, A Response to MacEoin's 'Problems of Scholarship...'
................................................................. p.57f.

Dr. Denis MacEoin, A Critique of Moojan Momen's Response to my 'Problems of Scholarship in a Bahá'í Context'... p.66f.

Notes, Reviews and Communications................................... p.81f.
A few of which are mentioned above. The organisation was good and several persons expressed the desire for more such communication between those engaged in Baha'i studies and the Baha'i community at large.

Stephen Lambden

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FORTHCOMING BAHAI STUDIES SEMINAR

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

DEPT. OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES.

SAT. 17TH AND SUN. 18TH SEPT.
1981.

It is hoped that at this forthcoming Baha'i Studies Seminar papers will be read which fall into one of the following four (obviously loosely defined) categories:

1) The study of Babi-Baha'i texts;
2) The study of Babi-Baha'i history;
3) The study of Babi-Baha'i doctrine;
4) The study of the Babi-Baha'i movements.

Offers of papers and enquiries should be addressed to either Dr. Denis MacEoin, Dept. of Religious Studies, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU, England, U.K., or Stephen Lambden (same address).

* Venue and sponsorship subject to confirmation.

Letter to the Editor: A Note by Christopher Buck on Jesus' Cry From the Cross.

Exemplary for Baha'i scholarship is Lambden's treatment of Mark 15:34. In making full use of critical apparatus available to him, Lambden has been able to test a scriptural "emendation" such as Backwell (and possibly the Master) has hazarded. Though I do not have Lambden's linguistic command, perhaps I might try to evolve the methodology he has tried to introduce by introducing iconographical as well as a few further textual and extra-biblical considerations.

E.R. Goodenough has stated that "religious symbols remain as the greatest unexplored body of historical data." 1 The late Cardinal Danielou in his Primitive Christian Symbols reviews the important archaeological data surrounding the symbolism of the Cross, which I shall not reduplicate here. If trust may be placed in Danielou's digestion of the unearthed symbols, his conclusion could prove crucial to Lambden's discussion: "The conclusion reached by our inquiry is this: The sign of the cross is seen to have its origin, not in an allusion to Christ's passion, but as a signification of his divine glory." 2

I submit that one's Christological perspective in primitive times did, to a remarkable extent, condition tradition. Jesus says not only what venerated the air but also what oral and written tradition redactionally filtered, let us ponder the fact that the tradition of Mark 15:34 has only Matthew 27:46 as a parallel, which means that in the New Testament alone, these words were accepted by only 50% of the fourfold evangelists who transmitted traditions of Christ's life. The other Christian traditions, as evidenced by archaeological data, wished to convey the consciousness of the glory of martyrdom, how can we be so certain that Jesus was not audible during the final moments of his unthinkably painful exaltation, as were so many of our Baha'i martyrs, who afford us a "phenomenological" parallel?

John the Evangelist is a case in point: he presents no close parallel for Mark 15:34, yet obliquely (to hire Lambden's word) "reveres" the verse or at least its purpose, to accord to the idea that Jesus was conscious of the glory of martyrdom. Since the Johannine Jesus is so laconic upon the Cross, one might wonder if John has not in fact distorted the saying, transferred it to chapter 12 and consoled it with the Voice from heaven in verse 28! After all, patristic exegesis is not unanimous in ascribing the utterance of Mark 15:34 to Jesus' Own words; if not originally the first of Christian scholars, is anxious to avoid this idea of utter angst in loss of faith on Jesus' part, and insists that when Matthew and Mark report a "loud" or "great" voice, they are referring to the "divine voice" by which the cry was augmented. 3

But if the Cry of Divestiture was indeed evocative of Psalms 22, the cry need not have been one of abandonment at all, but rather a Cry of Victory. This is quite probably what was reflected in the Ebionite Christian tradition, for the Ebionite scholar Synaxarion entitles the Psalm, "A Song of Victory", while Theodotion (whom Jerome identically also as an Ebionite) offers the heading, "To the Victory," with Jerome closely following with "To the Victory". 4

Thus we can see indications that even if Backwells' 'Abdu'l-Baha's exegesis is without textual foundation, it is certainly not without ideographic or exegetically-textual foundation. Let us see if St. Peter in Acts 2:36 or John 12:17 during the crucifixion in terms of glorification. The two events of crucifixion and glorification may even be unified as simultaneous in an extra-biblical verb, Palestinian Aramaic 'isdi'aw, which could signify "to be glorified" as well as "to be crucified?"

Apart from Matthew 28:19, no other evangelical saying of Jesus may be so capable of variation. Not statistically in terms of manuscript witnesses necessarily, but in terms of the entire tradition itself. For variants to Mark 15:34 were first introduced by the very eyewitnesses of the Crucifixion, who could not all agree on just what Jesus has said!

In addition to the textual variants which Lambden lists, several more come to the fore:

- k (Codex Robinson) = maledicitia ("taunted")
- c (Codex Colbertinus) = malédicitia ("taunted")
- i (Codex Vindobonensis) = malédicitia ("taunted")
- Porphyry (Macarius Magnus, Apocrypha) = "reproached"
- Peshitta New Testament = ("taunted")
- Other witnesses (not specified by NRS) = ("shamed")

These variants are significant to the discussion only in that, though they do not confirm "glorified" as a reading, neither do they confirm "forsaken". Thus the whole thing is still a relatively open question.

Among the theological debates I have curiously followed, Schreiber stands out as the foremost exponent of the view that the so-called Cry of Dereliction was in fact a cry of triumph. Schreiber argues that the cry was one of exaltation or glorification and that this is demonstrated by the response in verse 39 of the centurion, who ironically is the symbol of earthly might and power. That the centurion interprets the cry in terms of glorification is more intriguing since the Kuran text states that the centurion saw the cry of Jesus. Some manuscripts of Mark omit heard his cry, and I wonder if Schreiber's arguments should be seen and heard by Mr. Lambden.

I have so far offered no textual ground for arguing the possibility that Jesus might have uttered something other than what the majority of the Greek manuscript text in this has been a weakness in my argument, just as the lack of any real redaction criticism has posed its own "Christological difficulty" in Mr. Lambden's argument. But recently with perfect timeliness, I have come across a textual argument for the reading of 'Robbattāni' ("praised") in the Qur'an: "And the Master's Cry on the Cross: An Alternative View," in Expository Times 93/7 (1982), pp. 215-217.

The Rabbi at University of Kent at Canterbury states that, assuming Jesus spoke Aramaic, it is possible to construe the words of Jesus, not as an Aramaic translation of Ps 22:1 ("Sealati"), but rather as the rhetorical question, "My God, My God why have you praised me?" ("Robbattāni") which is transliterated into Greek in exactly the identical way as the rendering of Ps 22:1. This linguistic possibility has sparked in me a further memory of 'Abdu'l-Baha's reported textual exegesis which I myself had read several years ago, but at the time I could only write that the text was reported to have said that through the change of one single letter, the text was altered to read "forsaken" instead of "glorified". I distinctly remember this sequence of textual basis for the Master's reported exegesis, which Mr. Lambden does not transmit in his paper.

Cohn-Sherbok concludes: "Given this interpretation, Jesus' words should not be understood as a cry of... desolation...but rather as a prayer for the dawning of the reign of God. Hanging on the cross, Jesus would have seen his life as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isa 52:5-12)...Thus in the cry "My God, My God why have you praised me?" we see the fullness of God's spirit, honoured in the eyes of God, 'exalted', and lifted up high (Isa 42:1, 15)."

Naturally the manuscripts to which Mr. Lambden refers cannot be summoned as essential witnesses against the reading of "praised" or "glorified", since the manuscripts themselves come into existence and attest to a primarily canonical tradition. The destruction of rival gospel traditions in the face of Christian history, so the text variants are simply not extant. And how can appeal to patronizing writings which Mr. Lambden makes, hope to give any independent textual witness?

I wish to state that, has 'Abdu'l-Baha actually proposed such an exegesis of Mark 15:34, I would hope that Baha'i scholars would seriously entertain the idea that he may well have been right, as a working hypothesis to test out, rather than the opposite, no matter how many manuscripts may at first be invoked as cards stacked against him. Although the evidence presented here is slender and tentative, theology, if not the text, is not lacking in order to support the conjecture that Mark 15:34 may indeed have yielded a sense of glorification alongside a very real Messianic passion.

Christopher Buck
Bellermine, Washington
20th March 1983

Notes

A Brief Response to Christopher Buck's Note

I am grateful to Chris Buck for taking the trouble to respond to my article on Jesus' cry from the cross and for drawing my attention to further interesting articles on this theme. When I wrote my original article I was fully aware of this post-Roman understanding of crucifixion as exaltation and glorification which tradition it was not my intention to minimize or deny. It is debatable however, whether this understanding of Jesus' crucifixion or the proposed reading 'Robbattāni' can be made to override the Marcan note of forsakeness. Though Buck seems to think that the Baha'i theological position must deny Jesus' uttering a cry of dereliction which is difficult to understand, I maintain that passages within the Baha'i writings by no means demand this. He inaccurately attributes my position as the opposite to that of 'Abdu'l-Baha's supposed interpretation (his last paragraph above) which is not intended at all. In my original article I quote 'Abdu'l-Baha as a pilgrim note recording Shoghi Effendi's words, the effect that Jesus did utter a cry of forsakeness during his last moments on the cross.

S. Lambden