

MAREK STACHOWSKI
STUDIEN ZUM WORTSCHATZ
DER JAKUTISCHEN
ÜBERSETZUNG
DES NEUEN TESTAMENTS

Kraków 1995

big 8°, 63 pages, 2 facsimiles, ISBN 83-86110-21-X

The new book by M. Stachowski is based on D. A. Kukhnev's Yakut translation of the New Testament, which was first published in 1898 and surpassed in size any other early Yakut edition. The most thorough study of the entire text resulted in singling out ca. 450 Yakut words, which occur in this translation and are either missing in the monumental *Slovař jakutskogo jazyka* by Edward Piekarski and in later dictionaries of Yakut, or, from the viewpoint of their formal or semantic properties, add to our knowledge of the Yakut lexical stock and grammar. These words are listed in alphabetical order (pp. 17-43) with lexicological and etymological comments, being preceded by an exact and thought-provoquing introduction (with text specimens) and followed by a German index of meanings.

The choice of the criteria for selecting lexical items, as well as the implementation of these criteria, reflect the author's high qualification and his most intimate acquaintance with the material of Yakut. The new book reaffirms M. Stachowski's reputation of an outstanding contemporary representative of the Polish school of Turkological and especially Yakutological studies.

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GEZA VERMES

REFLECTIONS ON JESUS THE JEW,
HIS WORLD AND HIS RELIGION

After completing my trilogy on Jesus — *Jesus the Jew* (1973), *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (1983), *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (1993) — I have often been asked whether I have changed my mind in the course of those 20 years on any essential points? In all honesty the answer is that I am not aware of any such change, though a close friend, Anthony Harvey, half-seriously, half-jokingly remarked that in the *Religion of Jesus the Jew* I show signs of mellowing. This may be true though I think that book proves that the blood is still boiling in my veins when I am confronted with portraits of Jesus or interpretations of his teaching which are, for me sheer caricatures. To demonstrate that I am still satisfied with my stand taken up 22 years ago, I only need to stress that in 1994 a fifth impression of *Jesus the Jew* went ahead without any alteration other than a new preface dealing with a few recently revealed, or settled, Qumran issues which could not be foreseen, let alone solved, in 1973.

If I had to begin from scratch, would I present the Jesus problem differently? The answer to this hypothetical question is another no. Let me sketch how I started on my Jesus venture and what was the inspiration behind it. *Jesus the Jew* is the off-shoot of the Schürer project, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (I—III, 1973—1987), which I undertook as far back as 1965. Some five years of hard labour on updating Schürer vol. 1 demanded a bit of a change, and as an exercise of relaxation, I decided to apply the knowledge acquired in the Schürer work to the problem of Jesus. The result was *Jesus the Jew*. The fundamental inspiration behind it, and behind the whole trilogy, has been to put the historical record straight by attempting to portray Jesus without denominational bias, Jewish or Christian. Despite the complexities involved, I tried to make my case as simple and clear as I could. I know of course that in some quarters and in some cultures obscurity and grandiloquence are signs of depth and readability is taken as tantamount to superficiality. An American New Testament scholar, not exactly a friend of mine, recently called *Jesus the Jew* a "popular work" (Bruce Chilton, 'Jesus within Judaism', in *Judaism in Late Antiquity* II (ed. J. Neusner), 1995, p. 264). He meant to be disparaging, but I accept the phrase as a compliment. After all, the new Hungarian *A zsidó Jézus*, to be published a week from today [it

was sold out on the first day!], is the seventh translation of *Jesus the Jew*, preceeded by Spanish, French, Japanese, Italian, Portuguese and German versions without mentioning the various British and American hard and soft cover editions of it.

I fear that all this may sound rather conceited, and this is the last impression I want to give. So let me come to those features of the Jesus trilog which continue to provoke criticism.

I. I shall touch only briefly on the question of method; Philip Alexander has dealt with this as well as, if not better than, I can. I believe the problem regarding the use of Mishnah, Midrash and Talmud in interpreting the Gospels, is created by the formal and rigid approach of New Testament scholars. The basic issue is this: if a later rabbinic passage provides a useful parallel to the New Testament, this may be due (a) to coincidence; (b) to rabbinic dependence on the New Testament; or (c) to joint dependence on a pre-existent Jewish tradition current in the first century CE. We can exclude (a): there are too many correspondences to be explicable by coincidence. We can also exclude (b) because apart from possible late negative reactions to Christianity, there is no indication whatever that the rabbis of the first three centuries would have been prepared to learn from the Gospel, or if exceptionally an individual did, it is unlikely that he would have managed to ensure acceptance of such borrowings by his less impressionable colleagues. Hence (c) or the joint dependence hypothesis on a pre-existent Jewish tradition appears to be the most likely working hypothesis. It is the absence of a widely applicable control mechanism that is the cause of the methodological ills. For example, a rabbinic saying may validly be used in Gospel exegesis if its content is echoed, however rudimentarily, by, say, Josephus, but not if there is no first century attestation of any kind. But the confirmation of antiquity by Josephus is a merely external feature; it adds nothing to or detracts from the force of the rabbinic text itself. In other words, it increases an inherent probability which is already there as long as the rabbinic evidence is judiciously handled and due attention is paid to the chronological layers of tradition (cf. *Jesus and the World of Judaism*, pp. 74-88).

II. My characterization of Jesus as a "charismatic hasid", or a "charismatic healer-teacher-prophet", has been queried by some. Quite clearly, this theory is debatable. I find comfort, however, that some influential experts, among them Martin Hengel, E.P. Sanders, Paula Fredriksen and Marcus Borg, have reached identical or very similar conclusions. Shmuel Safrai, a recognized connoisseur of rabbinic sources, is also on the record as one placing Jesus among the ancient Hasidim from Galilee [cf. most recently 'Jesus and the Hasidim', *Jerusalem Perspective* 42-44 (1994), pp. 3-22]. Facile objections

have been raised by some writers against a self-contained concept of charismatic hasid on the grounds that the prototypal figures, Honi and Hanina ben Dosa, are depicted as rabbis in the rabbinic texts. But the objectors seem to overlook that this phenomenon was observed, analyzed and explained by me in my 1973 essay on "Hanina ben Dosa" in the *Journal of Jewish Studies*, reprinted in 1975 in *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies*, and the original independence of the non-rabbinic charismatic argued.

III. Again my interpretation of the phrase "son of man" continues to be resisted by some (e.g. J. A. Fitzmyer) and bypassed in silence by others (e.g. E. P. Sanders). The curious thing is that few seem to have truly grasped what I was getting at or what was meant by a "circumlocution". In the original study, delivered as a lecture in Oxford in 1965 and published in 1967 ('The Use of *bar nash/bar nasha* in Jewish Aramaic' in M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 1967, pp. 310-328; cf. further 'The Present State of the "son of man" Debate', *Jesus and the World of Judaism*, pp. 89-99, 175-180), my aim was to investigate the different meanings in which the expression *bar nash/bar nasha* is attested in Jewish Aramaic with a view to determining in what sense it may have appeared on the lips of the Aramaic-speaking Jesus. And, with apologies for stating the obvious, a circumlocution is a roundabout speech employed by someone who for some reason does not want to call a spade a spade.

According to some of my critics, I claim that the Aramaic "son of man" is simply identical with "I". Not true. Anyone who has actually read my essay knows that I distinguish in it several uses of the idiom. Others find fault with the thesis elsewhere, fault which an American professor declares fatal. According to her, all the Aramaic examples listed by me imply that the person referring to himself as "son of man" does so because he is "a member of humankind" and not as having a special role or authority (Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Daniel 7 and the Historical Jesus', in *Of Scribes and Scrolls* (H. W. Attridge & al. eds.), 1990, p. 188. But should the purpose of the phrase "son of man" be to express something applicable to all and sundry, it could only be used with regard to the generic and the banal. This is surely not the case in the Aramaic saying marshalled by me. Also, if a speaker wishes to state something with clarity and precision, he does not need a circumlocution; he would say "I", and not "the son of man". The aim of a circumlocution is equivocation. You speak of something on which you don't wish to be pinned down, so you leave a loophole so as to slip out if necessary. The century-old "Son of Man theology" is obfuscating the issue: I suggest that if one wishes to understand this mystery, one should approach it from a philological rather than a theological point of view. By the way, I have never suggested that the Greek *ho huios tou anthropou* has no built-in theological (or midrashic) content; the task

I set to myself was to discover the sense in which Jesus might have used the idiom in Aramaic, if and when he actually used it.

The connection between "son of man" and "one like a son of man" in Dan. 7:13 is secondary and midrashic. Incidentally, the so-called "Son of God" text in 4Q246 in which the figure fulfilling the role of a saviour is "the people of God" provides the earliest non-biblical confirmation of the collective understanding of "one like a son of man", an understanding first attested in the Book of Daniel itself (7:27 and 7:18).

IV. It should be noted that the *Religion of Jesus the Jew* has added an essential fresh element to the figure and ideology of a charismatic hasid, that of a thorough-going eschatological outlook, an eschatological enthusiasm, which so fixates the gaze of Jesus on the demands of the present, on the imminent arrival of God's Kingdom, that no room is left for futile speculation about, and provision for, tomorrow. Tomorrow's matters, church, bishops, sacraments, rules and regulations in an increasingly de-eschatologized future were taken care of by Peter, Paul, James and their colleagues and successors over the centuries. I know that this goes counter a strong trend in contemporary American NT scholarship, but here and on a number of other fundamental matters I am prepared to look old-fashioned. If it were true that the original teaching of Jesus was not eschatological, I cannot imagine in whose interest it would have been to introduce into it at a later stage, contrary to the tendency observable in post-70 Judaism, a powerful eschatological trend, less and less credible and more and more counterproductive as the years went by.

V. Finally, long experience as a lecturer has taught me that my line of argument on *Jesus the Jew* leaves Christian audiences with one special worry. This is so common that occasionally I teasingly foretold the first questioner, before he or she had the chance of formulating the query, what I thought was in their mind! And again and again I was right. This ultimate question *cum* objection is the following: If Jesus was so deeply steeped in Jewish piety and so little concerned with secular politics as you assert, why was he crucified? My first, negative, answer is that Jesus' downfall was not due to some theologically motivated opposition to the Temple. Having analyzed of the Synoptics, I have failed to discover real traces of the Temple playing a significant part in the religious thought and teaching of Jesus. Some may be surprised, but I find this quite normal in the case of any provincial Jew, let alone a charismatic hasid, during the era of the Second Temple. The religious life of Jews who lived outside Jerusalem was not, could not be, Temple-centred. They visited Jerusalem, if they were strictly law-abiding and in good health, for the three week-long pilgrim festivals. For the rest of the year they prayed, listened to Bible

reading and interpretation, etc. at home or in their synagogues. The over-all importance of Temple and sacrifice was part of the priestly theology and propaganda — after all their livelihood was at stake — but not one close to the heart of the large majority of Palestinian and diaspora Jewry. If the Temple had been so central and essential to Jewish religion, its destruction in 70 CE would have shaken the foundations of Judaism. It did not — so, in my view, the Temple was not so central and fundamental.

If Jesus' threat to, or attack on, the Temple *qua* religious institution cannot be substantiated, and thus account for his trial and execution, what does? Here my proposed solution is very simple. Many resist it, suggest, precisely because of its simplicity. I shall not repeat my full argument, which is set out in the Preface of *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (pp. viii-ix), and quotes Josephus on the reason of the execution of John the Baptist and the trial of Jesus son of Ananias in 62 CE, curiously similar to that of our Jesus, but will summarize that argument as presented in the Preface of *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (pp. IX—X):

"The arrest and execution of Jesus were due, not directly to his words or deeds, but to their possible insurrectionary consequences feared by the nervous authorities in charge of law and order, in that powder-keg of first century Jerusalem, overcrowded with pilgrims. Had Jesus not caused an affray in the Temple by overturning the tables of the merchants and money-changers, or had even done so at a time other than Passover — the moment when the hoped-for Messiah... was expected to reveal himself-he would have most probably escaped with his life. He died on the cross for having done *the wrong thing* (caused a commotion), *in the wrong place* (the Temple), *at the wrong time* (just before Passover)."

Maybe in the concatenation of these three *realities* lies the *real* tragedy of Jesus the Jew.

The last word in these Reflections must be the expression of deep gratitude to the four colleagues and friends who, in paying this magnificent tribute, have raised a good number of fresh questions to keep me busy in my so-called retirement.