ARMENIAN APOCRYPHA RELATING TO BIBLICAL HEROES

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Early Judaism and Its Literature
3. The Construction of Noah's Ark

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Manuscript M4618 has been the source from which a number of the works edited in this volume were drawn. It is described in the Short Catalogue of Matenadaran manuscripts. The manuscript is a Miscellany composed of different parts, copied by different scribes, dated to 1569, 1693, 1695, and 1706. The text presented here is on fol. 53r in the section copied by Ignatius of Amida who wrote the greater part of the manuscript. The rest of the manuscript was copied by Grigor (fols. 79r–93r), Vardan vardapet (fols. 178r–200v), and an unknown scribe (fols. 162r–167v). The manuscript was copied in Van between 1675 and 1706.

This codex contains a number of apocryphal texts. Those texts listed in the Short Catalogue of the Matenadaran in Erevan include: History of Adam and Eve,² Flight of Christ to Egypt,³ Noah's Ark (apparently, the present text), The Oil That They Found in the Albanian⁴ Books, The Fall of Satanel and Adam,⁵ The Deception of Adam, Adam's Sons,⁶ King Hezekiah,⁷ Isaiah,⁸ Other works, listed in our own notes and in the detailed description, include Questions of St. Gregory (fols. 9r–10v) and Concerning the Tower,⁹ (fols.

1. My thanks are expressed to K'nar Harut'yunyan of the Matenadaran who kindly verified my long-hand copy of this text made some years ago against the manuscript. Dr. Géorg Tër Vardanyan graciously made a draft of the full description of this manuscript available to me and here I have extracted from it material relevant to the Armenian Apocryphal literature.

2. Folios 1r–6r.
3. Folios 45r–46v.
6. Folios 138r–140r; see Lipscomb, Apocryphal Adam Literature, 142–71.
7. Folios 142v–144r.
9. The Tower of Babel is intended.
43r–44r). Story concerning Abraham is found on fols. 53v–55 and is another copy of Abraham Text 2, edited some years ago. Text no. 12, King Solomon: Four Short Texts is published from this manuscript. In general, the texts of apocryphal interest are to be found in the first 160 folios of the manuscript. Some time ago I made public some details of and extracts from a work on Abraham, and a short composition on calendar titled Concerning the Millenium II has also been published, from this manuscript. In addition Concerning the Places of Hell was published from fols. 146r–146v of the same manuscript. Many of its riches, however, have not yet been mined.

In the present book I publish a number of texts from this interesting volume, including text no. 12 Concerning King Solomon (fols. 133v–135r); text no. 7, Brief History of Joshua Son of Nun (fols. 146v–148v); and text no. 15, Hezekiah and Manasseh (fols. 142r–143v).

Texts dealing with Noah are not uncommon, but I am familiar with no other apocryphal text than the one presented here that contains such details about the construction of the Ark. In addition, the tradition about the craftsman Nersès remains mysterious. Of previously published texts relating to Noah, note The Story of Noah, which forms part of a longer biblical retelling called Biblical Paraphrases and Sermon concerning the Flood.

The text I am presenting here overlaps with material found in the fourteenth-century work Քղբփ հուբգունաք (The Book of Questions), by Grigor Tat'ewac'i (1346–1409/10) in the chapter titled Հիշատ Հոբգունու աջաջային (Concerning Noah’s Ark). For its first three sections our text runs parallel to but is shorter than Grigor Tat'ewac'i’s Book of Questions. However, from the words եւ ավույսավունային “and the craftsman” in section 4 on, there ensues material that is not contained in Book of Questions. Its source is unknown, as are traditions about the existence of the craftsman and his name. Indeed, usually stress is laid up on Noah’s building the Ark himself. The text is formulated in the standard erotapokritic form of question and answer.

Following this text, for convenience's sake I have given an extract from The Story of Noah mentioned above, which also deals with the construction of the Ark and draws a rather different picture. In the section titled "Some Other Noah Traditions," I present next a further narrative of the same events, taken from the Armenian Adam apocryphon titled Concerning the Good Tidings of Seth. For this text I draw upon Lipscomb's text and translation.15

EXCURSUS: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS AND OTHER SCHOLASTIC TEXTS IN THE ARMENIAN APOCRYPHA

There exist in Armenian, as in many other Christian languages, documents composed of texts of questions and answers about the Bible, often elucidating details of the biblical narratives. This genre of texts is widespread.

Among the oldest such texts in Armenian are the two surviving "Question and Answer" treatises of Philo's that are preserved in Armenian, his Questions on Genesis and Questions on Exodus. His Questions on Genesis is preserved fully, but only segments of Questions on Exodus survive. This genre's origins lie in the Hellenistic exegetical tradition and it was adopted in late antiquity as an exegetical and polemical tool.

Before the emergence of patristic and the polemical Question and Answer treatises, there were literary forms of Second Temple Jewish literature that cultivated series of questions set in the mouth of a biblical hero, or of a saint or other significant figure and answers given by angels or God. Thus, as well as texts in which the questions are posed by an anonymous interlocutor, there are dialogic compositions in which the questions are asked by a named hero. Such elenchic dialogues are to be found in many apocalyptic revelatory texts, an early example being the Book of the Watchers. Not dissimilar series of questions occur in heavenly ascent visions such as 3 Baruch; and in the Dialogic Dispute form, so beloved particularly of 4 Ezra.

For examples of such texts in published Armenian, see Questions of Ezra16 and Questions of St. Gregory.17 Apocrypha in this genre include the questions apocalyptic seers ask of angels in the course of heavenly journeys

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15. Lipscomb, Armenian Apocryphal Adam Literature, 196–200. This is cited by permission. Another form of this text is to be found in the other recension of Concerning the Good Tidings of Seth in Lipscomb, Armenian Apocryphal Adam Literature, 279–80.


17. Stone, "Questions of St. Gregory."
and the angelic responses. There are also texts that seem to be answers to questions like those posted by elenchic texts, but in which the questions themselves are not recorded.

There are medieval Armenian assemblies of questions and answers on narratives from the Hebrew Bible. The most famous are, perhaps, the Book of Questions of Vanakan vardapet Tausėc'i (1181–1251) and the Book of Questions of Grigor Tat'ewac'i (1346–1409), but a number of other texts exist, some attributed and some anonymous.

In the present collection of parabiblical texts, we find both "Question and Answer" texts, and also documents presenting lists of statements that appear to be answers to questions that are either not preserved or else deliberately omitted. Such texts in the medieval period seem to have emerged from the University Monasteries and other similar learned contexts.

Moreover, in addition to the Question and Answer genre, in medieval Armenian apocryphal texts we find further hints of a learned, scholarly origin of various features. These include citations of multiple authorities' views on a certain issue, consultation of multiple manuscripts in the attempt to clarify a textual difficulty, and application of material from a very specific genre as a rhetorical tool.  

Some instances in this book are the following:

(1) Instances of resolving exegetical difficulties in the biblical story.

No. 4, Concerning Abraham. This document is a single segment of Abraham 5 Genealogy of Abraham. That document is a series of units of information, each a self-sufficient paragraph, that could readily have been answers to questions.

(2) Instances in which the author draws on learned and scholastic traditions.

No. 3, The Construction of Noah's Ark. This text draws from Book of Questions of Grigor Tat'ewac'i and supplements that with other, elsewhere unknown traditions.

No. 7, Brief History of Joshua. Interest in natural science is exhibited in §43, which includes a passage either from a metallurgic work, or

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18. It is my hope to conduct a further study of such features of these Bible-related texts with the aim of gaining insight into at least one nexus of the genesis of the Armenian parabiblical texts, that is, the scholastic tradition. Other features relevant to such an enquiry are the calendary, astronomical, and astrological knowledge exhibited by some documents.
3. THE CONSTRUCTION OF NOAH'S ARK

from some Physiologus-like catalogue of wondrous beasts and natural phenomena.

No. 1, *The Number and the Twelve Classes of Angels* starts with 1/Μη δε μη ζητεθησην πως η θανατηθη η θανατηθη, η θανατηθη, η θανατηθη. “/But we having come to an end of their classes and elevation and brightness.” This phrasing in the opening of the indicates its scholastic origins, though not necessarily branding it as erotapokritic.

No. 6, *Supplication about the Sodomites and Gomorrheans*, §§24–25 takes care to avoid contradictions in the biblical text by stressing details that are not treated in the biblical story, responding to an apparent contradiction.

The passage §§28–29 seems to draw on an erotapokritic source in its discussion of the Dead Sea and the divine destruction of Sodom. This source included questions about notable natural phenomena as well as exegetical difficulties in the biblical text. This source was in Question and Answer form, as is betrayed by the words, “If someone were to say that God judged mercilessly and did not give a sign first …” (§29). The answer forestalled the question.

No. 7, *Brief History of Joshua*, §63 discusses the astronomical ramifications of Joshua’s halting of the sun and moon. Here there is astronomical theory, including the ideas of the constellations and the decans, brought to bear on the standing still of the sun and moon. This appears to be a response to a question and adduces current astronomical and astrological ideas to make its point.

**Text**

Title/ Καθαργησεις ηλικιας ανθρωπων:

1/ // fol. 53r // Οδοιπορικη Νησια επισημαναι άκινητ η Αχαρνης:

2/ Τις αοιδας, ρε ξημερωσημιφης. ινυρη η απαινηρη ηαμηρη διαφεν, ρη ινυρη, ρη ινυρη μαχαμη:

3/ Πυρων Λ. (300) εκατοντα. η ιονιου Ω. (50) ετη και ερημ L Λ. (30):

4/ Ει γεννησει ομοιαν ζητησεις, κα ομοιαν ζητησεις ινπεριμαθη: ην παραλαμβανομενα πατησει εντητει τκ: Ι ιπωσει ημερημενη η οη, η ι Λ. (30) απο ωτοι αναλαμβαναν ι θρης:

5/ Ει η Ω. (100) απο Ω. (3) ηηνορ δανδα Μανι, Μανι, Μανι, Μανι, ετη παραλαμβανομενα και Ω. (100) απο ινπεριμαθης. εν θελη και ετη παραλαμβανομενα εν ωτοι αναλαμβαναν ι θρης:
Title/ Question Concerning Noah’s Ark:
1/ Of what form and construction is Noah’s Ark?
2/ Scripture says that it was four-cornered. It was plastered inside and outside with tar, which is bitumen, so that it would not be damaged.
3/ Its length was three hundred cubits and its width was fifty cubits and its height was thirty (that is: cubits). He raised it to a level of fifteen cubits, and at fifteen cubits he narrowed (it), so that the water would fall. It is like a gable of a church.
4/ And the door was from the stern, so that the animals might enter easily. And the craftsman’s name is Nersès. Noah was so chaste that he approached his wife only once during thirty years.
5/ And in the one hundredth year he begot three sons, Shem, Ham, Japheth. And then he began to build the Ark and in the one hundredth year it

19. The text opens with քե, which is far from usual and indicated that this is an extract from a text or a crystallized oral retelling.
20. That is, square or rectangular.
22. These are the measurements given in Gen 6:15.
23. Exactly what is intended in Gen 6:16 by “finish it to a cubit above” is unclear, but regardless, it does not mention a change of dimensions at the height of fifteen cubits.
24. The implications of this phrase are unclear. Is Nersès the same person as Noah, or is he a workman employed by Noah? This is unique.
25. The Armenian tradition makes much of Noah’s chastity. This is how the phrase “walked with God” (Gen 6:9) is understood. See in Sodomites published here, §30 and the extract from Concerning the Good Tidings of Seth given at the end of the present section. This is a standard Armenian Christian approach to the text.
26. The period of thirty years between births is to be found in many apocryphal stories. Some striking instances occur, such as History of Adam and His Grandsons §§1–12, which sets at a space of thirty years between each of the following events: Adam’s first intercourse with Eve and the birth of Cain, the begetting of Abel, and the killing of Abel. In Stone, Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Adam and Eve, 92 there is an extensive note on this topic.
was completed. They asked him, “What are you doing?” and he said, “God is wrath at your sins; He will bring a Flood.” They were sad and doubted, but their habitue won out. They joked and smiled; they were eating and drinking and taking women.

**SOME OTHER NOAH TRADITIONS**

*The Story of Noah*

2. ֶּהָּמְשַׁלְתַּהְתָּ בְּמָזְגַּלְתָּהּ. ֶלּוֹחַ הָּמְשַׁלְתַּהְתָּ בְּמָזְגַּלְתָּהּ, ֶלּוֹחַ נְתַּנְתַּהְתָּ בְּמָזְגַּלְתָּהּ, ֶלּוֹחַ נְתַּנְתַּהְתָּ בְּמָזְגַּלְתָּהּ, ֶלּוֹחַ נְתַּנְתַּהְתָּ בְּמָזְגַּלְתָּהּ:

2. And a hundred years then were completed. And the sound of axes, and of adzes, of chisels and of saws, said that the flood was coming. And they did not believe.

*Concerning the Good Tidings of Seth*

24. Now God became angry at them because of their many sins, and he wished to drown them. 25. God commanded Noah to build an ark and to marry. 26. When an angel came and told Noah to marry, he did not want to marry, for he was five hundred years old. 31

27. And the angel said, “You must fulfill God’s commands, for he is about to destroy this world with water; he will drown everything, and you will become a new Adam, for this world will be filled with your seed.” 28. Noah said, “How long shall I live in this world?”

29. The angel said, “You are five hundred years old; you must live another four hundred years.” 30. Noah said, “Four hundred years pass like a dream

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27. According to Gen 5:31, Noah begat his three sons at the age of five hundred, and the flood came when he was six hundred years old (Gen 7:6). This is the chronology of §5 in our text here.

28. The idea of his contemporaries mocking Noah is in part derived from Gen 6:9, which says that Noah “was blameless in his generation.”

29. His contemporaries were, in the retelling of this story, the sons of Cain and the wayward sons of Seth. In the apocryphal Armenian Adam books these themes of their promiscuity and gluttony occur repeatedly. See Lipscomb, *Armenian Adam Literature*.


31. Observe the stress on his chastity in §34 of 3 Construction above.

32. The idea of Noah as founder of humanity after the Flood, resembling Adam, is to be found in 4 Ezra 3:9–11, a work also extant in Armenian.
in the night. 33 Why should I corrupt my virginity on account of one transitory dream? 31. The angel said, "They are the Lord's commands; you cannot hinder them."

32. Noah said, "I do not know if there remains a chaste woman whom I might marry." 33. The angel said, "There is one pure virgin <from the line of Seth who has kept her virginity unstained>, whose name is Noemzara; 34 marry her."

34. And he began to build an ark. Its length was one hundred and fifty cubits and its width fifty, and its height was thirty cubits. 35. And the angel went away from him. 36. And Noah married.

37 Text of Y: And while he was building the ark, the axe cried out, the hatchet cried out, the saw cried out, <and> the wood cried out. "Behold a flood is coming and it will destroy this world!"

38. Text of B: 38a. Then Noah heard the cry of the axe, he went <and> related to everyone that a flood was coming. Everyone scorned him. But Noah was determined about the Ark. 38b. Everyone would go and see the design of the ark; they would hear the cry of the axe and the hatchet, the saw and the hand-saw which said, "A flood is coming!" 38c. They would scorn and say, "Look at the ignorance of Noah, who says a flood is coming!" 38d. Noah went forth, <and> upon a high hill he was building the ark, <and> he said, "The water will come up to here and will rise higher." He built the ark for eighty years.

38e. The angel came to Noah and said, "Take three women from Seth's line for your sons, and these are their names: Zanazan, Zarmanazan, <and> Yereknazan. 38f. And these three women are still young virgins, and of Seth's seed. But your sons may not marry <them> until you go out of the Ark. But you, enter that ark, because a flood is coming!" For when Noah married and began building the Ark he had three sons. And these were their names: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.


34. This is the name of Noah's wife in many sources, already starting with 1Q20 (Genesis Apocryphon) 6:7, Jub. 4:33, Stone, Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Adam and Eve, 97.