

## GREEK μέν IN EARLY SYRIAC

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## ABSTRACT

The analysis of ܡܢ in the following colon from the Odes of Solomon (2<sup>nd</sup> cent.) remains a crux interpretum: ܡܢ ܕܠܗ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܥܠ ܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܟܠ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ‘may it (= Your right hand) guard everyone who is held in evil things’ (18.7). This study proposes that ܡܢ in this colon is best analyzed as ܡܢ man ‘indeed’, which is a loanword from Greek μέν. This is, thus, the earliest known attestation of Greek μέν in Syriac, and it shows that the particle is attested already in the earliest layer of Syriac literature (pre-4<sup>th</sup> cent.), even though it does not become common until the height of Syriac-Greek contact in the sixth and seventh centuries.

Throughout its history, Syriac has acquired more than a dozen particles from Greek.<sup>1</sup> Among these is the particle μέν (Liddell and Scott 1996: 1101-1102), which came into Syriac as ܡܢ *man*

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<sup>1</sup> For a general overview of the Syriac-Greek contact situation, see Taylor 2002. A bibliography of Greek loanwords in Syriac is available in Voigt 1999-2000. The present author is currently completing a monographic study of contact-induced changes in Syriac due to Greek that is tentatively entitled *Language Change in the Wake of Empire: Syriac in its Greco-Roman Context*.

(1) *Life of Yuhanon of Tella* by Eliya (mid-6<sup>th</sup> cent.) (ed. Brooks 1907: 29-95)

כאן נח אבא חתה, אבא ואלו חתה שם מחברות

In addition, **𐤌** *man* (< Greek μέν) can be used in conjunction with the particle **𐤌** *den* (< \*<sup>1</sup>*ḏayn*)<sup>2</sup> with the meaning ‘on the one hand ... on the other hand ...’:

לפניו כח נזירי עמל ונאכחם. לכחם ונא נאכחם  
נאכחם נאכחם נאכחם

While ܡܢ *man* (< Greek μέν) is well attested at the height of Syriac-Greek contact in the sixth and seventh centuries,<sup>3</sup> it remains unclear when this particle first entered Syriac.

On several occasions, Brock (1975: 89 with n. 55a; 1996: 259) has pointed to the Syriac translation of Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* (ed. Wright and McLean 1898), which must have been translated by at least the first decades of the fifth century,<sup>4</sup> as one

<sup>2</sup> For the development of Syriac ܕܢ *den* from earlier Aramaic \**iḏayn* under the influence of Greek δέ, see Butts Forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup> It is, for instance, found in Eliya's *Life of Yuhanon of Tella*, 68.7; 73.6; 82.20, 21 (ed. Brooks 1907), Yuhanon of Ephesus's *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 139.6 (ed. Brooks 1923-1925), the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, 13.11; 36.13 (ed. Reinink 1993), Ishaq of Nineveh's *Part 2*, 10.35; 17.1; *passim* (ed. Brock 1995), Denha's *Life of Marutha*, 69.12; 81.2 (ed. Nau 1905: 52-96), and throughout the works of Ya'qub of Edessa.

<sup>4</sup> The translation is preserved in one of the earliest dated Syriac manuscripts, St. Petersburg, Public Library, Cod. Syr. 1 (461/462). The translation must, however, predate this manuscript by at least half a

(3) Syriac Translation of Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* (ed. Wright and McLean 1898)

(333.9-10)

(4) Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*

‘On the one hand, this one, whoever he was, was thus. On the other hand, you may have seen others ...’ (8.7.5)

The demonstrative pronoun οὗτος in this sentence refers to a previously mentioned young man, while τις serves as an indefinite pronoun to avoid naming this definite referent: his identity is not important to Eusebius's narrative; only his heroic deeds in the face of persecution are.<sup>5</sup> Even though the Greek text clearly has the μέν - δέ construction, the ܐܢܝܢ in the Syriac translation is probably not to be analyzed as ܐܢܝܢ *man* (< μέν), but rather as ܐܢܝܢ ܐܢܝܢ *man d-bu* 'whoever he is', which is translating Greek τις.<sup>6</sup> According to this

century since the Syriac version was the basis of an Armenian translation from the first decades of the fifth century (Van Rompay 1994: 73 n. 15; cf. Merx, *apud* Wright and McLean 1898: xiii-xvii).

<sup>5</sup> For this use of  $\pi\iota\varsigma$  in Greek, see Liddell and Scott 1996: 1796 and especially Humbert 1972: §29.

<sup>6</sup> This meaning of ܐܡܢ ܕܒܗ *man d-bu* ‘whoever he is’ can be compared with ܐܡܢ ܕܒܗ *mon d-bu* / ܐܡܢ ܕܒܗ *mon d-bu* ‘whatever it is’ in the following Syriac translations of Gregory of Nazianzus’s *Homily 38* (ed. Haelewyck 2005: 70-71): ܐܡܢ ܕܒܗ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ (versio antiqua) and ܐܡܢ ܕܒܗ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ (versio nova). The Greek *Vorlage* reads τοῦτοῦ ἔθετο μὲν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ, ὅστις ποτὲ ἦν ὁ



(6) *Odes of Solomon*

'May your right hand set our salvation to victory / may it receive from every place / and may it guard everyone who is held in evil things' (18.7)

Charlesworth argues that ܐܢܝܢ is to be analyzed as the preposition *men* “used idiomatically as ‘on the side’” (1973: 80). This leads to his translation: ‘Let it preserve (it) on the side of everyone who is besieged by misfortunes’. This interpretation is problematic for at least two reasons. First, the diacritic point(s) in both manuscripts are decidedly against analyzing ܐܢܝܢ as the preposition *men*. Second, Charlesworth’s analysis is not in accordance with Syriac grammar. J. Payne Smith (1903: 280) does indeed give a meaning ‘on the side’ in her translation of her father’s *Thesaurus*, but this is in the sense of ‘on the side, of the party, in the name’ (‘a parte’ in the Latin original [Payne Smith 1879-1901: 2156]), as in the following example:

ආර්ථිකයේ ස්ථාවරත්වය සහතික කළේය.

<sup>9</sup> A facsimile edition of the two Syriac witnesses, as well as the Greek version of Ode 11 and the five Coptic quotations (Odes 1.1-5; 5.1-11; 6.8-18; 22.1-12; 25.1-12), is available in Charlesworth 1981. An additional facsimile edition of the other Syriac witness, ms. Birmingham, John Rylands Syr. 9, is available in Harris and Mingana 1916.

‘Who is **on the side** of the Lord? Let him come to me’ (Ex. 32:26)<sup>10</sup>

More importantly, however, Charlesworth’s analysis is ungrammatical since the combination of the preposition *men* and a second prepositional phrase introduced by *l-* is restricted to a handful of phrases in Syriac (cf. Nöldeke 1904: §156):

(8)

|          |                  |                |
|----------|------------------|----------------|
| ܡܢ ܠܚܐ   | <i>men lḥar</i>  | ‘from outside’ |
| ܡܢ ܠܓܐܝܐ | <i>men lḡaw</i>  | ‘from inside’  |
| ܡܢ ܠܬܬܬ  | <i>men ltaṭt</i> | ‘below’        |
| ܡܢ ܠܐܠ   | <i>men lʿel</i>  | ‘above’        |

In each of these cases, the element following *men* is to be analyzed synchronically as an adverb (so also Coakley 2002: 52), as is shown by the fact that a following complement must be introduced by an additional preposition.<sup>11</sup> Diachronically, of course, each of these has its origin in the preposition *l-* plus a substantive or preposition. It is, however, only after they were grammaticalized as adverbs that they could fill the syntactic slot after *men*, just as other adverbs, e.g., *men ḥorke* ‘from here’. Outside of the limited phrases in (8), *men* is never followed in Syriac by a prepositional phrase headed by *l-*. Thus, Charlesworth’s interpretation can be ruled out based on the diacritic point(s) of ܡܢ and on the lack of grammaticality of the phrase *\*men lkol* < *men* ‘from’ + *l-* ‘to’ + *kol* ‘all, every’.<sup>12</sup>

In the *editio princeps* of the *Odes of Solomon*, Harris and Mingana (1920: 297) take a different approach to this problem and propose to emend ܡܢ ܠܠܐ to ܡܢ ܠܠܐ producing the common idiom ܡܢ ܠܠܐ ܐ ‘whoever’.<sup>13</sup> This emendation, however, runs counter to the text-critical principle of *lectio difficilior potior*, as Charlesworth (1973: 80)

<sup>10</sup> Translating Hebrew *mi la-YHWY ʿeby* ‘Who is on the LORD’s side? Come to me!’ (NRSV).

<sup>11</sup> In other contexts, ܠܒܝܬ and (rarely) ܠܬܬܬ, e.g., ܠܒܝܬ ܡܢ ܠܬܬܬ ‘below ground’ (cited in Sokoloff 2009: 1639), are compound prepositions that can govern a complement of their own.

<sup>12</sup> Franzmann (1991: 139-143) also analyzes ܡܢ as the preposition *men*, and so her analysis can be ruled out for the same reasons.

<sup>13</sup> This suggestion has subsequently been adopted by, *inter alii*, Azar 1996: 124, 207 and Lattke 1999-2005: 2.68 (“vielleicht”), 2.78 with n. 3; 2009: 252, 259-260 with n. 107.

has pointed out. In addition, it must be stressed that it is an emendation, which goes against the only two Syriac witnesses.<sup>14</sup>

If the text of both manuscripts is to be taken seriously, another option is to analyze ܡܢ in ܡܢ ܠܠܗ ܕܡܢܗ ܕܡܢܗ as the particle ܡܢ *man* (< Greek μέν). This analysis would fit with the diacritic point(s) in both manuscripts (in contrast to Charlesworth). Syntactically, it would not be a problem since ܡܢ occurs in second position in Syriac, as it does in Greek. Semantically, it would simply mean ‘indeed’ as in the example from the *Life of Yuhanon of Tella* cited in (1). Finally, it would make sense of the text as it stands without resorting to emendation (in contrast to Harris and Mingana).

A potential weakness with this analysis is that this would be the earliest attestation of ܡܢ *man* (< Greek μέν) in Syriac, predating Ephrem by around two centuries.<sup>15</sup> It should be noted, however, that Greek particles are attested in the earliest layer of Syriac literature (pre-4<sup>th</sup> cent.). The particle ܡܠܝܬܐ ‘yq’ ‘in vain’ (< εἰς ἄν[θρωπον] [Liddell and Scott 1996: 484]), for instance, is attested already in the *Acts of Thomas* (220.10; ed. Wright 1871a), which probably dates to the first half of the third century.<sup>16</sup> Or, to take an even earlier

<sup>14</sup> In the first volume of the *editio princeps*, Harris and Mingana (1916: 40 [Syr.]) erroneously read H as ܡܢ ܠܠܗ and gave the variant reading of N as ܡܢ ܠܠܗ. In the accompanying volume (1920: 297), they corrected this error and read both manuscripts as ܡܢ ܠܠܗ. Though the earlier, erroneous reading was corrected in the second volume, one wonders if it unduly influenced their decision to emend the text.

<sup>15</sup> Most scholars date the *Odes of Solomon* to the second century, though slightly later dates are occasionally suggested (see Lattke 1993b [= 1979-1998: 4.113-131]; 1995: 20-35; 2009: 6-10 with additional references). It should also be noted that it continues to be disputed whether the original language of the *Odes of Solomon* is Greek or Syriac (see Charlesworth 1998: 78-136; Lattke 1995: 16-18; 2009: 10-11 with additional references).

<sup>16</sup> For the date, see Bremmer 2001: 73-77. The word is also found in both manuscripts of the Old Syriac gospels at Mt. 5:22 (ed. Kiraz 1996; cf. Brock 1967: 398) as well as throughout fourth-century Syriac literature: Aphrahat’s *Demonstrations*, 1.568.8, 9 (ed. Parisot 1894-1907); *Book of Steps*, 288.20; 508.8 (ed. Kmosko 1926); Ephrem’s *Prose Refutations*, 44.4; 53.24 (ed. Overbeck 1865), *Madraše against Julian the Apostate*, 87.28 (ed. Beck 1957b), *Madraše on Nisibis*, 53.1; 122.7; 124.10 (ed. Beck 1963).





ܠܗܡܠܚܐ *pnqyt* ‘collection, volume’ (23.21) < *πινακίδιον* (Liddell and Scott 1996: 1405)

ܠܗܡܠܚܐ *pršwḥ* ‘face, person’ (8.13; 11.14; 15.9; 17.4; 22.11; 25.4; 31.5; 42.13) < *πρόσωπον* (Liddell and Scott 1996: 1533)

ܠܗܡܠܚܐ *qwbryt* ‘helmsman’ (16.1) < *κυβερνήτης* (Liddell and Scott 1996: 1004)

ܠܗܡܠܚܐ *qyndwnws* ‘danger’ (38.5; 39.8) < *κίνδυνος* (Liddell and Scott 1996: 952)

ܠܗܡܠܚܐ *qytr* ‘cithern’ (6.1; 7.17; 14.8; 26.3) < *κιθάρα, κίθαρις* (Liddell and Scott 1996: 950)

ܠܗܡܠܚܐ *tgm* ‘legion, troop; order, command’ (35.4) < *τάγμα* (Liddell and Scott 1996: 1752)

In the *Odes of Solomon*, there is also one verbal root that is ultimately of Greek origin, and it occurs two times:

(10) ܠܗܡܠܚܐ *√pys* Ct ‘to obey’ (8.17; 39.8) < *πείσαι* (Liddell and Scott 1996: 1353-1354)

Given that there are a number of Greek loanwords in the *Odes of Solomon* and that there are Greek particles in the earliest layer of Syriac literature (pre-4th cent.), the early date of the *Odes of Solomon* would not seem to be a sufficient reason for rejecting the analysis of ܠܗܡܠܚܐ ܠܗܡܠܚܐ ܠܗܡܠܚܐ as the particle ܠܗܡܠܚܐ (< Greek μέν). Rather, this proposal allows for an acceptable grammatical analysis of the word in question without resorting to emendation. Thus, it is proposed that ܠܗܡܠܚܐ ܠܗܡܠܚܐ ܠܗܡܠܚܐ (Ode 18.8) is the earliest known attestation of ܠܗܡܠܚܐ (< Greek μέν) in Syriac.

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