

Preliminary Textual Work on Creation Themes

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Genesis 1.1

1:1 בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ

The Hebrew text can be rendered a number of different ways--all are literal translations:

- 1) When God started creating the heavens and the earth
- 2) In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth
- 3a) With *reshit* God created the heavens and the earth
See Proverbs 8.22: "The LORD created me *reshit*

יהוה קנני ראשית דרכו קדם מפעליו מאז

Who is created to be *reshit* ?

Wisdom. . . on the basis of Proverbs 8.1:

הלא־חכמה תקרא ותבונה תתן קולה

- 3b) With Wisdom God created the heavens and the earth
- 4) Bereshit created gods with the heavens and the earth
- 5) Bereshit created gods alongside Heavens and Earth

These kinds of readings surface in various traditions: Greek, Targum, Rabbinic literature, "gnosticism".

A project for study: Biblically-based gnosticism is rooted in bible; works just like classical midrash.

Syriac: כִּבְרֵת בְּרֵא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ Agrees with Hebrew exactly.

Alexandrinus, U₂ (PAmherst 003--contains Gen 1.1-5)

Old Greek: ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν In the beginning God made. . .

Aquila: ἐν κεφαλῶν ἐκτίσεν θεὸς οὐρανὸν καὶ τ[ῆ]ν γῆν In heading [playing on ראש ?] God created...
translates Hebrew אֶת reserving ποιεω
for עשה

Targums:

בְּקִדְמִין בְּרָא יְיָ יִתְשָׁמִיָּא וְיִתְאַרְעָא ONK 1:1

In ancient times the LORD created the heavens and the earth.

מִן אֲוֹלָא בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים יִתְשָׁמִיָּא וְיִתְאַרְעָא PSJ 1:1

From the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

מִלְקִדְמִין בְּחִכְמָה בְּרָא דֵיִי שְׁכֻלְל יִתְשָׁמִיָּא וְיִתְאַרְעָא NFT 1:1

From ancient times with wisdom the son of LORD perfected the heavens and the earth.

[** This is the result of a correction after erasure--*vav* before שְׁכֻלְל is still visible]

Perhaps:

בְּחִכְמָתָא בְּרָא יְיָ וְשְׁכֻלְל

With Wisdom the LORD created and perfected. . .

[P Nfmg and VN lack "and perfected"]

Hebrew *reshit* = Son

Jerome *Hebr quaest.* Gen 1.1

4 Ezra = 2 Esdras 6:38, 43: In the beginning of creation you spoke the word . . . and your word perfected the work.

Creation of the world in/by wisdom:

Proverbs 8.22:

יהוה קנני ראשית דרכו קדם מפעליו מאז

The LORD created me *reshit* of his ways, in front of his works of old.

Aramaic: יי בראני בריש בריותיה [בריתיה] ומן-קדם עובדוי מריש

The LORD created me at the head of his creation, and before his first works.

Syriac: ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ
Syriac and Aramaic agree in all but the last word.

Old Greek: κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχῆν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ
Agrees with more Hebrew than Syriac/Aramaic.

Proverbs 3.19:

יהוה בחכמה יסד־ארץ כונן שמים בתבונה

The LORD with Wisdom laid the foundations of the earth, established the heavens with understanding.

Aramaic: אלהא בחכמתא {פס} <סם> שיתאסיה דארעא ואתקין שמיא בביונא

God with Wisdom set the foundations of the earth, and fixed the heavens with understanding.

Note: Aramaic פס ?

Jastrow notes *p-s-final weak* : “to spread, extend”

A misreading of letters is also possible-- סם is the more common word.

Syriac: ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ

The Lord with Wisdom set the foundations of the earth, and fixed the heavens with insight.

Syriac has affinities to both Aramaic and Hebrew. Recall that in 8.22, Syriac and Aramaic mostly agree.

Old Greek: ὁ θεὸς τῇ σοφίᾳ ἐθεμελίωσεν τὴν γῆν ἠτοίμασεν δὲ οὐρανοὺς ἐν φρονήσει
God with Wisdom founded the earth, and prepared the heavens with insight.

Wisdom/Ben Sira 9.9:

[Hebrew from Genizah?]

Syriac: ܕܠܟܝܢ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ ܟܘܢܐ
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And with you was Wisdom, who knows your works and was with you when you made the worlds, and knows what is beautiful before your eyes, and what is right in your commandments.

Syriac here maps rather well to the Greek.

Old Greek: καὶ μετὰ σοῦ ἡ σοφία ἡ εἰδυῖα τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ παρούσα ὅτε ἐποίεις τὸν κόσμον καὶ ἐπισταμένη τί ἀρεστὸν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς σου καὶ τί εὐθές ἐν ἐντολαῖς σου
And with you was Wisdom; she is the one who knows your works and was present when you made the world, and she is the one who understands what is pleasing in your eyes and what is right in your commandments.

Psalm 104.24

מה־רבו מעשיך יהוה כלם בחכמה עשית מלאה הארץ קניינך

How many are your works, O LORD! With wisdom you made all of them; the earth is full of your creatures.

Aramaic: מה סגיעין הינון עובדך יהוה כולהון בחכמתא עבדתא מליא ארעא קניינך

Aramaic = Hebrew

Syriac: ܡܗ ܫܘܓܝܝܢ ܗܝܢܘܢ ܥܘܒܕܟܝܢ ܝܗܘܗ ܟܘܠܗܘܢ ܒܚܚܡܬܐ ܥܒܕܬܐ ܡܠܝܐ ܐܪܥܐ ܩܢܝܝܢܟܝܢ
ܐܪܥܐ ܩܢܝܢܝܢܟܝܢ

Syriac= Aramaic = Hebrew

Greek: ὡς ἐμεγαλύνθη τὰ ἔργα σου κύριε πάντα ἐν σοφίᾳ ἐποίησας ἐπληρώθη ἡ γῆ τῆς κτήσεώς σου

Greek=Syriac=Aramaic=Hebrew

Another Trajectory: An Issue in Amos: Amos 4.13

כי הנה יוצר הרים וברא רוח ומגיד לאדם מה-שחור עשה שחר עיפה ודרך על-במתי ארץ
יהיה אלהי-צבאות שמו:

For look! The one who forms the mountains and creates wind and declares to *adam* what is his thought--he is the one who makes dawn of the darkness and treads on the heights of the earth--the LORD God of Hosts is his name!

Greek:

διότι ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ στερεῶν βροντῆν καὶ κτίζων πνεῦμα καὶ ἀπαγγέλλων εἰς ἀνθρώπους τὸν χριστὸν αὐτοῦ ποιῶν ὄρθρον καὶ ὀμίχλην καὶ ἐπιβαίνων ἐπὶ τὰ ὕψη τῆς γῆς κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ ὄνομα αὐτῷ

For look! I am the one who strengthens the thunder and creates wind and declares to humans his Christ--[I am the one] who makes dawn and darkness and treads on the heights of the earth--Lord God Ruler of All is his name.

1) Notice Greek “thunder” for Hebrew “mountains”: Hebrew רעם = “thunder.”

2) Notice different speaker.

3) Greek translation is perhaps reading a Hebrew manuscript which has משחור instead of מה-שחור .

Aramaic:

ארי הא מתגלי דצר טוריא וברא רוחא לחואה לאנשא מא עובדוהי לאתקנא ניהור זיהור לצדיקיא
כניהור צפרא דאזיל ותקין ולאיתאה חשוך לרשיעיא למתבר רשיעי ארעא יוי אלהי

For look! It is revealed that the one who formed the mountains and created the wind [perhaps “Spirit” here] to reveal to humanity what are his works, to establish the light splendor for the righteous ones just like the light of the morning that goes, and establishes, along with the darkness that comes for the wicked ones, for breaking the wicked of the earth--the LORD God of | Hosts | | is his name |

Syriac: ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܘܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܡܝܢ

For the one who created the winds and created the mountains and reveals to the sons of man what she/that praise/glory; he makes dawn darkness and treads on the height of the earth--the Lord God of Power is his name.

* In addition to the interesting textual issue surrounding “his thoughts” and “his Messiah,” the Amos passage is of interest in that the Hebrew can be read to suggest the first human’s presence at the time of creation. The passage may hint at an ancient idea wherein the creation of the first man occurred prior to the time of the creation of the physical world.

1) The notion is not that far removed from what one finds in the Genesis 2-3 creation account; there, the creation of man occurs at the beginning of God’s creative activity.

2) The idea would seem to have been more popular than the ‘biblical record’ would have us think, as early rabbinic reports and even medieval midrashic compositions seem to actively polemicize against the notion. For example, see Tosefta Sanhedrin 8:7 and Jerusalem Talmud Berakhot 12d.

Tosefta Sanhedrin 8:7: “Our rabbis taught: Adam was created on the eve of the Sabbath. Why? So that the sectarians could not say, ‘The Hold One, blessed be He, had a partner in His work of creation.’”

Jerusalem Talmud Berakhot 12d: “The sectarians asked Rabbi Simlai, “How may gods created the world?” He said to them, “Are you asking me? Go and ask the first man, as it is written (Deuteronomy 4:32): ‘Ask now of the first days which were before you, since God created man upon the earth.’ It is not written here ‘they created’ but ‘he created.’” They said to him, “It is written, ‘In the beginning God created (Genesis 1:1).’ “Is it written, ‘(they) created?’ It is only written, ‘(he) created.’” Rabbi Simlai said, “In every passage where the sectarians go wrong, they have an answer close by.”

In different ways, both texts seem to testify to the popularity of traditions which claimed exalted status for Adam.

For more, see Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), especially 109–14, 124–27, 151.