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THE INFLUENCE OF THE TESTAMENTS OF THE
TWELVE PATRIARCHS IN THE EARLY CHURCH:
JOSEPH AS MODEL IN PROCHORUS' ACTS OF JOHN

It is remarkable that the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, a writing which in our opinion could have been used for several purposes by early Christian writers, in fact seems to have played a very small role. Of course, it is mentioned in some lists of writings such as the *Stichometry* of Nicephorus¹, but Origen and Jerome seem to have been the only early Christian authors who have really read and used the Testaments². For we read in Origen, *In Librum Iesu Nave Homilia XV* 6, "Sed et in aliquo quodam libello, qui appellatur testamentum duodecim patriarcharum, quamvis non habetur in canone, talem tantum quendam invenimus sensum, quod per singulos peccantes singuli satanae intelligi debeant"³—comp. T. Reub. 2f.—, and Jerome writes in his *Hom. in Pss.*, "In libro quoque Patriarcharum licet inter apocryphos computetur, ita inveni, ut quomodo fel ad iracundiam, sic renes ad calliditatem et ad astutiam sint creati"⁴—comp. T. Napht. 2, 8. But these two are the only texts known to us that make explicit reference to passages of the Testaments.

Because the oldest (Greek) manuscript dates from the Xth century (b), there is a big gap of time from Jerome until the Xth century, in which we do not find any trace of the Testaments at all⁵. The

¹ See R. H. CHARLES, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, London, 1908, p. LXXVIII; E. SCHÜRER, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*⁴, III, Hildesheim, 1964, p. 353. On the *Stichometry* of Nicephorus, see also H. J. DE JONGE, *The earliest traceable stage of the textual tradition of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, in *Studies on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. Text and Interpretation*, ed. by M. DE JONGE, Leiden, 1975, p. 66, n. 7.

² See R. H. CHARLES, *op. cit.*, p. LXXV-LXXVIII. The other instances that he gives here are not convincing.

³ Ed. BAEHRENS, *G.C.S.*, *Origenes*, VII, 2, p. 392. See also M. DE JONGE, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. A Study of their Text, Composition and Origin*, Assen, 1953, p. 121.

⁴ In 'Anecdota Maredsol.' III, 3 (ed. by G. MORIN, 1903), p. 22f. See R. H. CHARLES, *op. cit.*, p. LXXVII.

⁵ On the problem of the Armenian version and its date, see M. DE JONGE, *The Greek Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Armenian version*, in *Studies on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. Text and Interpretation*, ed. by M. DE JONGE, Leiden, 1975, p. 120-139, esp. p. 135-139.

problem, what happened to the Testaments from the beginning of the Vth century until the Xth seems to be a difficult one and almost unsolvable.

In this article, I shall investigate another passage in an early Christian writing, which seems to be influenced by the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, although it does not mention its source explicitly.

One of the stories about John the apostle that are found in Prochorus' Acts of John⁶ is that of Procliane and her son Sosipatros (p. 135-150). Here it is told that Procliane, a rich widow, falls in love with her own son, a handsome boy of twenty-four years old (p. 135f.). This young man meets John, who is preaching the gospel in his town (Karos) on the island of Patmos. After John has told him a parable which is in fact an illustration of Sosipatros' own situation, the young man invites John (and Prochorus) for dinner at home, against his mother's will (p. 136-140). Hereafter, they go out, notwithstanding Procliane, who wants her son to stay with her and to fulfil her desire (p. 140-142). A few days later, she goes out to look for her son, and finding him, she seizes him and, in front of the proconsul, accuses him of attempts to sleep with her. John tries to defend him, but in vain: Procliane brings charges against him as well, with the result that both John and Sosipatros are condemned to death (p. 142-144). Then John prays and asks for an earthquake, which indeed happens, accompanied with other miracles. On the proconsul's request, John prays again and asks for restoration, after which the proconsul believes in the God of John and is baptised (p. 144-147). Finally, it is told that Procliane is full of repentance, asks for remission of her sins, and is baptised together with her son (p. 148-150).

It is clear that this story gives a good example of the Phaedra-motif⁷, a motif that is found in many pieces of literature. M. Braun has convincingly proved that the so called first story of Joseph in

⁶ Ed. by Th. ZAHN, *Acta Joannis*, Erlangen, 1880. Reference will be made to the pages (and lines) of this edition. Prochorus' Acts of John is distinct from the Acts of John which rank among the five major Apocryphal Acts and which are in fact used by Prochorus. See HENNECKE-SCHNEEMELCHER, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, II, Tübingen, 1971⁴, p. 402f.

⁷ See also R. SÖDER, *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und die romanhafte Literatur der Antike*, Stuttgart, 1932, p. 141f.

T. Joseph (3,1-10,4), though it is based on *Gen.* 39, is influenced by the same motif, showing many elements from the Phaedra-legend⁸.

From the following more detailed analysis of the story about Procliane and her son Sosipatros it will be demonstrated that this story and that about Joseph in the Testaments not only deal with the same motif, but that Prochorus obviously compared Sosipatros with Joseph, knew traditions about Joseph, and very probably used elements that can only be found in the Joseph-story as it is told in the Testaments⁹.

For we read in the beginning of Prochorus' story that Sosipatros ... τῆ ... ἔσω ἐσθήσει εἶχεν τὴν σωφοροσύνην τοῦ Ἰωσήφ (p. 136, 2f.). On p. 144, 8, he is called σώφρων another time. Joseph's σωφοροσύνη is, although it does not occur in the Genesis-story, a well-known motif, which we find, among others, in T. Joseph, Philo, Josephus and Joseph et Asenath¹⁰.

It seems, therefore, likely that Prochorus went beyond the Genesis-story and was familiar with later Jewish hellenistic traditions about Joseph¹¹:

a. The woman's action of accusing her son in front of the proconsul is expressed by the word διαβάλλειν (p. 138, 1). The same word

⁸ See M. BRAUN, *History and Romance in Graeco-Oriental Literature*, Oxford, 1938, p. 44-95. See further M. DE JONGE, *The Testaments ...*, p. 102ff.; J. BECKER, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Testamente der zwölf Patriarchen (AGJU, VIII)*, Leiden, 1970, p. 234ff.; R. I. PERVO, *The Testament of Joseph and Greek Romance*, in *Studies on the Testament of Joseph (Septuagint and Cognate Studies, 5)*, ed. by G. NICKELSBURG jr., Montana, 1975, p. 15-28; H. W. HOLLANDER, *The Ethical Character of the Patriarch Joseph, ibidem*, p. 47-104, esp. p. 47-68.

⁹ It is interesting that the theme of a young man who is loved by his mother, but remains pure and is finally accused by her, is also found in the Acts of Andrew (see J. A. FABRICIUS, *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti*, Hamburg, 1703, p. 461ff. = Abdias, *Hist. apost.* III 6). The story itself, however, is worded completely different from that in the Acts of John, and is, therefore, not important for our thesis. On the relation between these two stories, see R. A. LIPSIVS, *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und Apostellegenden (I; II 1, 2; Erg. Bd.)*, Braunschweig, 1883-1890, I, p. 401; 602; Erg. Bd. p. 97. In this connection it is worth mentioning that Prochorus knew and used the older Acts of John, but, "es scheint, dass sein bewusster Gegensatz gegen dieses heterodoxe Buch ihn veranlasst hat, sich möglichst fern von demselben und damit von der alten Tradition zu halten, und statt dessen lieber biblische und andere heilige Geschichten nachzubilden... Soviel scheint mir hierdurch bewiesen zu sein, dass Prochorus nicht beflissen war, die vorhandenen Traditionen über Johannes zu sammeln, sondern einen erbaulichen Roman zu schreiben" (ZAHN, *op. cit.*, p. LVf.).

¹⁰ See HOLLANDER, *op. cit.*, p. 64f.

¹¹ Although the expression κοιμήθητι μετ' ἐμοῦ (p. 143, 15) obviously reminds of *Gen.* 39, 14 (and 39, 7.12).

(διαβάλλειν or διαβολή) is used in connection with the Egyptian woman who brought charges against Joseph: see Philo, *De Josepho* 66; 80; Josephus, *Ant.* II 54; T. Joseph 1, 7. It is, however, not found in *Gen.* 39.

b. The trouble the woman gave to Sosipatros is expressed by the verb ἐνοχλεῖν (p. 137, 16) or ὀχλεῖν (p. 149, 1)¹². It is also found in the story about Joseph: see T. Joseph 3, 6; and Jos. et Asen. 7, 3, but here it describes not the attitude of the Egyptian woman to Joseph, but rather that of 'all the wives and daughters' of important Egyptians. Again, this term does not occur in the Genesis-story.

c. Before Procliane went to the proconsul, she caught her son by his clothes and did not let him go (p. 142f.). This action of catching Sosipatros by his clothes (ἐπέλαβετο τῶν ἱματίων αὐτοῦ, p. 142, 13), which has no real function in the story, finds its origin undoubtedly in the Joseph-story. In *Gen.* 39, 12, however, another verb is used: ἐπεσπάσατο αὐτὸν τῶν ἱματίων. But we do find the verb ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι in this connection in Philo, *De Josepho* 49¹³ and in T. Joseph 8, 2¹⁴.

d. Some other terms used by Prochorus are often found in this kind of stories, and are, therefore, too general to draw any conclusion, although they do occur in the Jewish hellenistic tradition about Joseph. I mean ἀκόλαστος (p. 146, 4)¹⁵, ἀναιδής (p. 144, 13)¹⁶, ἀπάτη/ἀπατῶν (p. 137, 11 ff.)¹⁷; further, the motif that the seducing woman herself is beautiful (εὐμορφος, p. 136, 10)¹⁸, and that she is driven by μανία (p. 143, 7; 149, 6)¹⁹.

From all this it is obvious that the writer of the story about Procliane and her son Sosipatros was familiar with the Jewish hellenistic tradition about Joseph and used elements that belong originally to this tradition.

But did Prochorus know and use elements that are found only in the Testaments? In other words: is there a special link between

¹² Cf. the use of διενοχλεῖν in the woman's charges against her son (p. 143, 15).

¹³ ... ἀποδιδράσκει τὰ ἱμάτια καταλιπὼν ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῆς, ὃν ἐπέληπτο.

¹⁴ Τέλος οὖν ἐπιλαμβάνεται μου τῶν ἱματίων...

¹⁵ See Philo, *De Josepho* 40; 50; 64; cf. T. Joseph 7, 1 (cf. 9, 2). See HOLLANDER, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹⁶ See T. Joseph 2, 2. See HOLLANDER, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

¹⁷ See Philo, *De Josepho* 56; T. Joseph 9, 5 (ἀπάτησιν).

¹⁸ See T. Joseph 9, 5 (ὄραία).

¹⁹ See T. Joseph 8, 3 (μαιομένη).

the Joseph-story in the Testaments and Prochorus' story, so that we are allowed to suppose influence of the Testaments on Prochorus?

First, there are two arguments that are each in itself not very conclusive, but at least worth mentioning: *a.* we read that Sosipatros knew the bad intentions of his mother: ἤδει γὰρ τὴν δαιμονιώδη γνώμην τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ (p. 141, 12). We find something similar in T. Joseph 3, 9: after the Egyptian woman had tried to draw Joseph into fornication, he was no longer ignorant; 'and when I perceived (νοήσας) it I sorrowed unto death...'; cf. also 7, 4, 'And when I saw (νοήσας) that the spirit of Beliar was troubling her...'; *b.* on p. 140, it is told that when Sosipatros wanted to go out with John and Prochorus, his mother followed him in order to persuade him to come back soon and to fulfil her desire, ... ὅπως ... ἐπιτελέσῃ τὴν ἀκάθαρτον ἐπιθυμίαν αὐτῆς (14f.). This expression reminds us of T. Joseph 4, 7, where we read that the Egyptian woman held her peace, ποθοῦσα ἐκτελέσαι τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν αὐτῆς²⁰.

Next, I shall add three stronger arguments, which point to influence of the Testaments on Prochorus:

a. The desire of the Egyptian woman is usually expressed by the word ἐπιθυμία: see, e.g., Philo, *De Josepho* 41; 49; Josephus, *Ant.* II 42f.; 51; 55; T. Joseph 4, 7; 7, 6; 9, 1. We also find it in connection with Procliane: see p. 136, 5; 137, 17; 140, 15; but the formulation ἡ πονηρὰ ἐπιθυμία is also found here (p. 140, 5; 149, 3f.), an expression that occurs, in this context, only in the Testaments: it is used four times, always in connection with the Egyptian woman and Joseph: T. Reub. 4, 9; T. Joseph 3, 10; 7, 8 (twice)²¹.

b. The intensity of Procliane's attempts to seduce her son is expressed twice by the word πολλάκις: ... ὅτι πολλάκις ἐπελάβετο αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐσίανεν αὐτὸν οὐ μικρῶς (p. 141, 12f.), and ... καὶ πολλάκις ὀχλήσασα, αὐτὸς οὐ συγκατέθετό μοι συγκαθευδῆσαι (p. 149, 1f.). In spite of the many attempts of his mother, Sosipatros did not fulfil her desire. In T. Joseph, the same use of πολλάκις is found. The word itself occurs in 9, 1, 'often (πολλάκις) has she sent unto me saying: consent to fulfil my desire...' More often, the cognate word

²⁰ Cf. 9, 1.

²¹ For the expression ἡ πονηρὰ ἐπιθυμία, which does not occur in, e.g., LXX, NT or Philo at all, see HOLLANDER, *op. cit.*, p. 73 and n. 257 (on p. 98).

ποσάκις is used: see 3, 1; 4, 1; 9, 4²². These words, which play such an important role in the story of Joseph in the Testaments, may very probably have influenced Prochorus when he wrote his story about Procliane and Sosipatros, the more so, as Prochorus only used the word πολλάκις, but did not specify it in such a way as it is done in the Testaments.

c. On p. 141, we read, after it is told that Procliane did so much to seduce her son, ... ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς ἐρρῶσατο αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἰοῦ τοῦ θανατηφόρου (13f.). Comp. p. 142, 2f. ... Σωσίπατρος ἐρρῶσθη ἀπὸ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῆς. This motif of being saved by God in such a situation, which—again—is not specified in this story and does not play any role at all, but is only mentioned incidentally, is a very important theme in the story about Joseph as it is found in the Testaments: see T. Reub. 4, 10, διὰ τοῦτο ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων μου ἐρρῶσατο αὐτὸν (= Joseph) ἀπὸ παντὸς ὄρατοῦ καὶ κεκρυμμένου θανάτου²³; T. Joseph 4, 3.8, ... ἐδεόμην τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅπως ῥύσεται με ὁ κύριος ἐκ τῆς Αἰγυπτίας ... ὅπως ῥύσεται με κύριος ἀπ' αὐτῆς²⁴. Whereas this theme has a specific meaning in the Testaments²⁵, it occurs in Prochorus' story only incidentally²⁶.

²² On the use of ποσάκις, see HOLLANDER, *op. cit.*, p. 62 and notes 140-142 (on p. 92).

²³ On this verse, see HOLLANDER, *op. cit.*, p. 73. The 'hidden death' probably refers to the special food prepared for Joseph by the Egyptian woman (see T. Joseph 6). Whether this food contained a magic love-philtre or a deadly poison is not clear (see M. DE JONGE, *The Testaments* ..., p. 105; PERVO, *op. cit.*, p. 19f. and n. 28 (on p. 26f.)). This motif may have influenced the expression (ὁ θεὸς ἐρρῶσατο αὐτὸν) ἀπὸ τοῦ ἰοῦ τοῦ θανατηφόρου in Prochorus' Acts of John (p. 141, 14). More likely, however, the 'deadly venom' refers to the cunning talks through which the woman tried to seduce her son. For man's lips and tongue are traditionally connected with ἰός: see, e.g., Ps. 13, 3 LXX; 140, 3 (139, 4); James 3, 8 (ἰοῦ θανατηφόρου). In any case, reference to the death (by bites of snakes and other animals) to which Sosipatros was condemned by the proconsul later on in the story is especially in view of the direct context in which this expression is found, not very probable.

²⁴ Other instances, in which God's saving activity (expressed by the verb ῥύσθαι) is mentioned in connection with Joseph, are T. Joseph 1, 7; T. Sim. 2, 8; T. Gad 2, 5; see also T. Joseph 10, 3. In T. Sim. 2, 8; T. Gad 2, 5, we read that God ... ἐρρῶσατο αὐτὸν (= Joseph) ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν μου (= Simeon's or Gad's), a formulation that reminds of Prochorus' Acts of John, p. 142, 2f. ... ἐρρῶσθη ἀπὸ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῆς.

²⁵ It is connected with the genre of the individual thanksgiving; see HOLLANDER, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

²⁶ Yet another argument may be mentioned. At the end of Prochorus' story, it is told that Procliane repented, and that she ... διὰ γὰρ νηστείας καὶ προσευχῆς ἐταπεινώσεν ἑαυτήν, δεομένη τοῦ θεοῦ... (p. 150, 9f.). The theme of praying, fasting and humiliation plays a very important part in the Testaments and in T. Joseph in

In the introduction to his edition, Zahn informs us about the origin of Prochorus' Acts of John. Although he cannot say with any certainty when exactly Prochorus wrote his Acts, he is of the opinion that the date of its origin must be somewhere between 400 and 600 (p. LIX). Finally, he sums up his investigations as follows: "Ich denke mir daher Prochorus als einen beweibten Presbyter der westsyrischen Kirche um 500, ohne viel dogmatische oder asketische Interessen und ohne viel historische und geographische Kenntnisse" (p. LX). If this is true, it is—after what has been said about the influence of the Testaments on Prochorus—perhaps possible to conclude that the Christian community in West-Syria of about 500 shows familiarity with the writing of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.

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particular, and, although it is, of course, not confined to the Testaments and its function in T. Joseph is different from that in Prochorus' Acts of John, influence of the Testaments on Prochorus is possible, the more so, as this motif does not occur elsewhere in his Acts of John. On this theme in T. Joseph, see HOLLANDER, *op. cit.*, p. 60ff., 65.