

Shem Tov's Hebrew Matthew

"Matthew collected the oracles (ta logia) in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best he could." - Papias (Eusebius, H.E. 3.39.16)

"Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome and laying the foundations of the church." - Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 3.1.1

"As having learnt by tradition concerning the four Gospels, which alone are unquestionable in the Church of God under heaven, that first was written according to Matthew, who was once a tax collector but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, who published it for those who from Judaism came to believe, composed as it was in the Hebrew language." - Origen (Eusebius, H.E. 6.25.4)

Shem-Tob ben-Isaac ben-Shaprut Ibn Shaprut, a Castilian Jewish physician, living later in Aragon. 12th/ 13th book of Even Bochan contains a Hebrew version of the complete text of Matthew. Even Bochan was completed in 1380 CE, revised in 1385 & 1400. Various quotations of a "Hebrew or Ebionite Gospel" from Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, Origen, Didymus, Clement of Alexandria seem not to have much of a relationship to this current version of Shem Tov's Hebrew Matthew.

An edition based on nine manuscripts of ST dating from 15th to 17th centuries; namely British Library Add no. 26964 for chapters 1:1-23:22; and JTS Ms. 2426 for 23:23-end. is available, called: The Gospel of Matthew according to a Primitive Hebrew Text by Howard, George. James D. Tabor writes:

Shem-Tov's text is basically BH (Vav Consecutive predominates) with a mixture of MH and later rabbinic vocabulary and idiom. In addition the text reflects considerable revision to make it conform more closely to the standard Greek and Latin Gospel texts. The underlying text, however, reflects its original Hebrew composition, and it is the most unusual text of Matthew extant in that it contains a plethora of readings not found in any other codices of Matthew. It appears to have been preserved by the Jews, independent from the Christian community.

It sometimes agrees in odd ways with Codex Sinaiticus. It contains some striking readings in common with the Gospel of John, but in disagreement with the other Gospels. It is very likely that the author of John polemized against the portrait of John the Baptizer that he found in a text such as ST' Hebrew Matthew. He might well have then known a Shem-Tov type Matthean text. ST also often agrees with the Lukan version of Q. ST also contains 22 agreements with the Gospel of Thomas. N.B. Sinaiticus, Q, and Thomas were all lost in antiquity but found in modern times-making the parallels with ST all the more remarkable.

The Pseudo-Clementine writings (Recognitions and Homilies) when quoting or referring to Matthew occasionally agree with ST Hebrew Matthew against the canonical Greek versions; e.g., puns that make sense in Hebrew: Matt 7:6: "Do not throw your pearls before swine [chazir], lest they trample them under foot and turn [yichazru] to attack you."

Lack of Trinitarian formula for baptism in Matt 28:19-20 is unique but seems to be in codices that Eusebius found in Caesarea: he quotes (H.E. 3.5.2): "They went on their way to all the nations teaching their message in the power of Christ for he had said to them, 'Go make disciples of all the nations in my name.'" ST reads: "*You go and teach them to carry out all the things that I have commanded you forever.*" Howard argues that Shem Tov did not create the Hebrew Matthew himself (e.g., translating from the Latin) but had an existing Hebrew text to work with-as he sometimes comments on its scribal errors and strange readings. Matt 11:11 is a good case in point, as the Greek, Latin, and all other Matthean witnesses contain the qualifying phrase: "*nonetheless, the least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*" Shem Tov comments on the unique Hebrew version he is following, and how its lack of such a phrase implies that John is greater than Jesus. If he were translating from the Latin, Greek, or any other version such a comment would be meaningless.

Shem Tov's Hebrew Matthew

Preaching to the Gentiles is not mentioned in Shem Tov's Hebrew Matthew, and is even called the work of the "anti-Christ" in Matt 24:14-15: "*And this gospel will be preached in all the earth for a witness concerning me to all the nations and then the end will come. This is the Anti-Christ and this is the abomination which desolates which was spoken of by Daniel as standing in the holy place. Let the one who reads understand.*"

Shem Tov's Hebrew Matthew never identifies Yeshua (Jesus) as the Christ: 1:1 "these are the generations of Jesus..."; 1:18 "The birth of Jesus was in this way . . ." etc. John the Baptizer plays an exalted role: Matt 11:11 "*Truly, I say to you, among all those born of women men has risen greater than John the Baptizer.*"

James D. Tabor writes: The phrase "*yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*" is missing. In the Luke parallel (7:28), MSS. 5, 475* and 1080* also omit the qualification. The same reading is inferred in the Pseudo-Clementine Writings, Rec 1.60.1-3, where one of the disciples of John argues that his teacher is greater than Jesus, Moses, and all men and thus the Christ. Also, in Rec 1.63.1 Peter taught the disciples of John not to allow John to be a stumbling-block to them. Matt 11:13 "For all the prophets and the law spoke concerning [a] John" in contrast to the Greek: "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John." Matt 17:11 "Indeed Elijah will come and will save all the world" in contrast to the Greek: "Elijah does come, and he is to restore all things." Matt 21:32 "Because John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him. But violent men and harlots believed him and you saw it and did not turn in repentance. Also afterward you did not repent to believe him. To the one who has ears to hear let him hear in disgrace." These words are directed to his disciples (v. 28), not to the chief priests and elders as in the Synoptic Greek tradition. The kind of polemic found in the Gospel of John appears to be directed toward an evaluation of John the Baptizer such as that found in ST Matthew. Similar reflective evidence is found in Luke-Acts and the Pseudo-Clementines (noted above).

John 1:7-8-He is a witness to the light, but is not the light 1:15, 30-He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me 1:20-I am not the Christ; nor Elijah 1:26-27-Not worthy to untie his sandals 3:30-He must increase but I must decrease 10:41-John did not sign; Jesus did many (20:30) Indeed Bultman argued that the Prologue was a hymn of the Baptist community, now recast to refer to Jesus (Gospel of John: A Commentary, 17-18). Luke-Acts 3:20-22 John is in prison-then only is baptism of Jesus mentioned! Drops Marks moving account of the death of John (Mark 6/Luke 9) Acts 18:25-Apollos knows only baptism of John Acts 19:1-7-Twelve from Ephesus that only know of John's baptism.

The Nazarenes of Mount Carmel · <http://www.essene.com>