

TACITUS AND THE *HODAYOT* IN THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Mr D. S. Barrett makes an interesting and valuable suggestion (this journal, 119, 1976, 366) when he cites the *Hodayot*, the *Hymns of Thanksgiving*, as the text in the Dead Sea Scrolls which may have been the source of the prophecy referred to by Tacitus in *Hist.* 5. 13. 2. In my discussion (this journal, 113, 1970, 363-8) I had cited Yadin's quotation from this text (my p. 366) of the phrase 'congregation of the sons of heaven' which Yadin saw as a parallel to the theme of *The Scroll of the War*.

One possible objection to the relevance of the *Hodayot* in the Tacitean context is that these hymns are not predominantly Messianic in theme. Mr Barrett quotes the translation of Menahem Mansoor, but in general this scholar is 'inclined toward a non-Messianic interpretation' of the hymns; he states that 'there are no clear references to the Messiah in these hymns'.¹⁾ According to Mansoor 'the battle of the mighty ones of heaven' refers to angels²⁾, and he also says (p. 121 n. 12) that 'the eternal destruction probably constitutes the goal of the global battle of the hosts of heaven, eschatologically speaking'. On the other hand, there is one highly probable allusion to a Messiah in the *Hodayot*. In 3. 3-18 we are told that a woman will give birth in anguish to a son who will prove to be a 'wonderful counsellor'. A. Dupont-Sommer³⁾ urged that the 'Teacher of Righteousness' of the scrolls is to be identified with the 'Messiah-Saviour'. Otto Betz⁴⁾ has made a good case for believing that the idea is probably collective, in the sense that the people of Israel are given the Messianic role. The passage quoted by Barrett (3. 35-6) occurs in a section not far removed from this prophecy.

It must be admitted that the non-Messianic character, for the most part, of these hymns is not a serious objection in view of the possibility that the intermediary exponent envisaged by Tacitus could easily have given a Messianic interpretation to a theme that was originally eschatological and collective. A military context, as Mr Barrett urges, could have been readily

1) M. Mansoor, *The Thanksgiving Hymns*. Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah, 3. Leiden, 1961, 90-91.

2) Cf. M. Delcour, *Les Hymnes de Qumran (Hodayot)*, Paris, 1962, 134.

3) Cf. S. Holm-Nielsen, *Hodayot. Psalms from Qumran*. Acta Theol. Danica, 2. Aarhus, 1960, 297: the community expects a victory by God in the end of the world. E. H. Merrill, *Qumran and Predestination*. Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah, 8. Leiden, 1975, 54, gives to the 'great eschatological triumph' a purely moral sense.

4) *Le Livre des Hymnes decouvert près de la mer Morte* (1QH), Paris, 1957, 18. That a personal Messiah is referred to is the view also of J. Licht, *Megillat haHodayot*, Jerusalem, 1957, 76, as reported by Otto Betz, *New Testament Studies* 5 (1959), 68.

5) *New Testament Studies* 5 (1959), 67-75; cf. Matthew Black, *The Scrolls and Christian Origins*, London, 1961, 150: 'the emergence through trial and suffering of the redeemed Israel'.

assigned to a conflict in heaven; and the reference of *visae per caelum concurrere acies* corresponds very well.

The objection that remains is that whereas such a theme is central to *The Scroll of the War*, it is marginal to the *Hodayot* and presented much more briefly. In *The Scroll of the War* is envisaged a holy crusade in which the world is conquered in the name of the God of Israel⁶). In my earlier discussion I had tended to favour the Book of Daniel as a more likely source, especially as it is not patently anti-Roman. I pointed out, at the same time, that *The Scroll of the War* is not explicitly anti-Roman either, in spite of the likely equation of the Kittîm and the Romans; clearly it could have been tactfully handled by a pro-Roman exponent. I now realize that the Book of Daniel does not suit the Tacitean description in one respect: it does not refer to a war in heaven. It is true that it describes God as wielding sovereign sway over the powers of heaven and earth (4. 35) and that it portrays the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven (7. 13). But a clash of forces in heaven is not presented. Such a clash is referred to in the *Hodayot*, but it is prominent in *The Scroll of the War* and in the picture conveyed by Tacitus. I now believe that *The Scroll of the War* is the most likely source.

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6) Cf. J. van der Ploeg, *Le rouleau de la guerre*. Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah, 2. Leiden, 1959, 26.