

MAGNIFICAT AND BENEDICTUS—MACCABAEAN PSALMS?

By PAUL WINTER

IN a forthcoming study on *The Origins and Composition of the Lucan Nativity and Infancy Narrative* I advance for consideration the view that Luke i. 46b-55 (Magnificat) and Luke i. 68-75 (first part of Benedictus) are Maccabaeen war songs which found their place in the Third Gospel by way of a Jewish-Christian (Nazarene) adaptation of the "Baptist Document", i.e. a first century literary record emanating from the circle of followers of John the Baptist and dealing with John's birth. The language of these writings was Hebrew.

The present paper will not deal with the complex problem of how the two songs were modified to the use to which they were put by successive writers, but will deal exclusively with the songs themselves and with their original character and function.

Our knowledge of post-canonical Hebrew poetry is incomplete. That being so we do not sufficiently appreciate the fact that the generation of Jews who were living in Palestine in New Testament times possessed a much fuller knowledge of the literature in question than we do. Post-canonical Hebrew poetry from the second century B.C. was known, and was still remembered by Jews in the first, and even in the second, century of our era. This fact may be illustrated by comparing fragments of Hebrew songs from 1 Maccabees with poems from 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch.

Amongst the lyrics that are interspersed in the narrative account of the First Book of Maccabees we read :

- 1 Macc. ii. 9 . . . her vessels of glory were carried away into captivity,
Her infants are slain in the streets,
Her young men by the enemy's sword.
10 What nation has not inherited her palaces
And gotten possession of her spoils?
11 Her adorning is all taken away :
Instead of a free woman she is become a slave.

1 Macc. ii. 12 Behold, our holy things and our beauty and our glory
are laid waste
And the Gentiles have profaned them.
13 Why should we live any longer ?

1 Macc. iii. 45 And Jerusalem was without inhabitant as a desert,
There was none of her sons that went in and went out,
And the sanctuary trodden down, and the sons of strangers
in the citadel—
The Gentiles lodged therein.
And joy was taken away from Jacob
And the pipe and the harp ceased.¹

We compare these poems from the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes with the dirges composed after the destruction of the Temple by Titus Flavius.

4 Ezra x. 21-3 . . . thou seest
Our sanctuary laid waste
Our altar trodden down
Our Temple destroyed,
Our harp is laid low
Our song is silenced
Our rejoicing has ceased,
The light of our lamp is extinguished
The Ark of our Covenant spoiled
Our holy things defiled,
The name that is called upon us is profaned.
Our nobles are dishonoured
Our priests burnt
Our levites gone into captivity,
Our virgins are defiled
Our wives ravished,
Our righteous are seized,
Our children are cast out
Our youths enslaved
Our heroes made powerless—
And what is more than all :
 Şion's seal is now sealed up dishonoured
 And given into the hands of them that hate us.

2 Bar. x. 6 Blessed is he who was not born,
Or he, who having been born, has died.
7 But for us who live—woe unto us
Because we have seen the affliction of Şion
And what has befallen Jerusalem.

¹ The translations of this and the following poems are, with negligible alterations, those of the Revised Version, of George Herbert Box and of Robert Henry Charles.

- 2 Bar. x. 8 I will call the Sirens from the sea,
 And ye, Lilin, come ye from the desert,
 And ye, Shedim and dragons from the forest :
 Awake, and gird up your loins unto mourning,
 And take up with me the dirges
 And make lamentation with me.
- 9 Ye husbandmen, sow not again !
 And, oh earth, why givest thou thy harvest fruits?
 Keep within thee the sweets of thy sustenance !
- 10 And thou, vine, why further dost thou give thy wine?—
 For no offering will again be made therefrom in Şion,
 Nor will first fruits again be offered.
- 11 And ye, oh heavens, withhold your dew
 And open not the treasuries of rain !
- 12 And do thou, oh sun, withhold the light of thy rays,
 And do thou, oh moon, extinguish the multitude of thy light !—
 For why should light rise again
 When the light of Şion is darkened?

Nothing perhaps shows the profound change in the attitude to life which the writers of these songs and those for whom the songs were written had undergone than the cry “ Why should we live any longer ? ” The belief that fecundity in women was a sign of God’s special grace is turned into its opposite. It is one of the rare moments in the history of Jewish thought when despair prevails over hope. The last barrier of defence of an immensely proud soul is broken ; for a moment it looks as if even the perennial optimism of the Judaic spirit that makes Jews so exceptionally unsuited for the tragic fate of their race could not stand up against such catastrophe.

- 2 Bar. x. 13 . . . ye bridegrooms, enter not in,
 And let not the brides adorn themselves with garlands,
 And, ye women, pray not that ye may bear !

For the barren shall above all rejoice
 And those who have no sons shall be glad ;
 Those who have sons shall have anguish.
 For why should they bear in pain
 Only to bury in grief?
 Or why, again, should mankind have sons? . . .
 From this time, speak no more of beauty
 And talk not of gracefulness.

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2 Bar. xi. 2 . . . the grief is infinite,
The lamentation measureless,

· · · · ·
Oh YHWH, how couldst thou have borne it !

The similarity, from a Jewish point of view, of the situations in the year 168-167 B.C. and the year A.D. 70-1 is great, and it is understandable that Jewish writers, writing of these events, would have found similar expressions to describe them. It is not contended here that the passages in 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch are merely a recast of the songs of which 1 Maccabees preserves fragments. The dirges in the works of the later writers are new, they are more highly elaborate, much less direct in their expression of grief—yet the pattern which they follow is that of the older poem. In the threnodies in 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch pervades an echo of a Hebrew song of Maccabaeian times and there is no mistaking it.

Philo describes in *De Vita Contemplativa* an assembly of the sect of Therapeutae and the proceedings which followed upon an exegetic discourse on Scripture passages. "When the president thinks he has discoursed enough . . . applause arises showing a general pleasure in the prospect of what is still to follow. Then the president rises and sings a hymn composed as an address to God, either a new one of his own composition or an old one by poets of an earlier day who have left behind them hymns in many measures and melodies, hexameters and iambics, lyrics suitable for processions or in libations and at the altars, or for the chorus whilst standing or dancing, with careful metrical arrangements to fit the various evolutions. After him all the others take their turn . . . in the proper order while all the rest listen in complete silence except when they have to chant the closing lines or refrains, for then they all lift up their voices, men and women alike."¹ When individual members of the congregation have finished their solo recitals, then "they rise up all together and . . . form themselves into two choirs, one of men and one of women, the leader and precentor chosen for each being the most honoured amongst them and also the

¹ *De Vita Contemplativa*, x (ll. 79, 80). I quote from Colson-Whitaker, vol. ix, pp. 160-3.

most musical. Then they sing hymns to God composed of many measures and set to many melodies. . . .”¹

We have here a description of social activities amongst Jews from the age of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. It is certainly not taking too great liberty with Philo’s record if we assume that the programme of a gathering as that described here was little different whether the persons who took part in it belonged to “orthodox” or sectarian groups.

In *De Agricultura* we have another instance where the use of a men’s choir and women’s choir, each with its respective precentor, is recorded. The leader of the men’s choir is symbolically called “Moses”, the leader of the women’s choir “Miryam”. The song which the two choirs alternately chant is here the psalm Exodus xv. 1b-18—indeed a very ancient example of Hebrew martial poetry. The congregation “sing to God, the giver of victory . . . with answering note they raise harmonious chant”.²

Assemblies of Palestinian Jews in the first decades of the first century had a variety of purposes and covered the whole normal range of the nation’s life. It would be unwarranted to assume that all such social gatherings had a principally religious character. It would be equally unwarranted to assume that the selection of hymns which were sung on such occasions was limited in choice to those that have been collected in canonical Psalms. Our knowledge of the subject has been greatly enriched by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The “Hymns of Praise (or Thanksgiving)” are examples of post-canonical Hebrew psalms that were in circulation amongst a Jewish public in Palestine. These hymns are not specifically battle songs, but information on such comes forward in the “Wars of the Children of Light against the Children of Darkness”³ where

¹ *De Vita Contemplativa*, xi (ll. 83, 84); Colson-Whitaker, vol. ix, pp. 164-5. The hymn sung by the whole company together was a martial lyric; the contrast *τοῖς μὲν σωτηρίας αἴτιον, τοῖς δὲ πανωλεθρίας* is beautifully exemplified by the lines Luke i. 51-3 in the Magnificat.

² *De Agricultura*, xvii (l. 79); Colson-Whitaker, vol. iii, pp. 146-9.

³ Eleazar Lipa Suqeniq, *Megillōth Genūzōth*, vol. i (Jerusalem, 1948), p. 19. An example of one such battle hymn is given in *Megillōth Genūzōth*, vol. ii (Jerusalem, 1950), Pl. XI.

we read that songs of praise were sung by Jewish warriors after their victorious return from battle. The information is not actually new; the custom is attested in 1 Maccabees iv. 24.¹ The point that is of specific interest to us in connection with our query is the form and the contents of the re-appeared Hymns of Praises: they are a mosaic of biblical phrases exactly in the same vein as the Magnificat and Benedictus.

In both songs from the first chapter of the Third Gospel, the Magnificat and the Benedictus, there is hardly a turn of speech and certainly not a single thought not to be found in older Hebrew poetry. Pleasing as the poems are, they are no more than centos of older literary production. When we compare the two hymns with the psalm in 1 Chronicles xvi. 8-36, we are able to recognize that the same principle has been at work in both places: they are pieced together from a variety of older poetic records. The comparison is worthwhile; not only is the working method of the author (or authors) of the hymns in Luke i. identical with the working method of the "author" of the psalm in 1 Chronicles xvi. 8-36, but we discover a marked predilection for the same range of ideas. The taste of the compilers is similar. Comparison will show this:

Luke i.	1 Chronicles xvi.
46b	23
47	10b, 35a
49a	9b, 12
49b	10a, 35
50	36b
51a	11, 24, 27, 28b
53	21b
52, 54	19-21a
68	36a
69b	13
72	34
73	15-17

etc.

Here as there we are dealing with a collection and agglutination of remembered passages from older Hebrew poetry. The literary taste of the writers in selecting their material and connecting it into consecutive clauses is remarkably similar. The

¹ Compare 2 Maccabees xv. 28-9.

fact that in comparison to "the composer" of the ill-assorted scrap in 1 Chronicles xvi. 8-36 the writer of the lines that are incorporated in Luke i. was a poet *Dei gratia* does not diminish the importance of the other fact that his work also is no more than a recapitulation of often repeated ideas and a rehearsal of well known poetic expressions. The assumption that the Magnificat and the first part of the Benedictus belong to the same period of history as the compilation of 1 Chronicles xvi. 8-36 is therefore permissible.

The appearance in the New Testament of poems which might have belonged to the repertoire of songs that were sung by the company of Mattathياهو, the rod of YHWH, or—as is more probable—by the subsequent generation of Maccabaeen warriors, should not cause surprise. It is not an isolated case.

Great and marvellous are thy works,	YHWH God Almighty,
Righteous and true are thy ways,	King of the ages,
Who shall not fear and glorify,	YHWH, thy name?
For thou art holy, and all the nations shall come	
	And worship before thee,

For thy righteous acts have openly been declared . . .

The superscription given to this fragment from a Hebrew hymn, "The Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb", must not deceive us; such superscriptions have about the same historical value as the superscriptions of canonical psalms. Yet it is probably the bizarre title that has so far prevented recognition of the origin of the fragment in Revelation xv. 3b, 4 as a Maccabaeen hymn which might have been sung on their way to death by the martyrs of YHWH when they refused to bow in worship to Zeus Uranios.¹

From verse 76 to verse 79 the Benedictus speaks of events that lie in the future; verses 68-75 use the past tense. The only logical conclusion it is possible to draw from this difference is that these parts of the Benedictus represent two different strata and are not the work of one author. This suspicion is confirmed when the contents of the two parts are examined and set against each other: only verses 76-9 deal with the future of the child John and are specifically called for by the occasion; they

¹ Remnants of Hebrew liturgical poetry can be found in Revelation iv. 11, xi. 17-8, xii. 12a, xix. 1, 2, 5b, 6b, 7a.

express a father's elated anticipation of the achievements of his son. Verses 68-75 are made up of generalities that have no connection with John's birth. They do not specifically fit the present situation and were written on a completely different occasion which had originally nothing to do with the birth of Zacharias' son.

The Magnificat is a similar case. It has been pointed out that the contents of the Magnificat are inappropriate in the mouth of Mary and could have been spoken more suitably by Elisabeth.¹ Yet even in the mouth of Elisheba the Magnificat

¹ It is only possible to give here a cross-section of scholarly opinions on the problem of textual criticism as to whom the Magnificat should be assigned as speaker. The question aroused considerable controversy two generations ago.

François Jacobé "L'origine du Magnificat" (*Revue d'histoire et de littérature religieuses*, vol. ii (Paris, 1897), pp. 424-32) raised the issue and brought forward reasons of critical interpretation of the contents of the story in support of the external evidence for the reading "Elisabet" (codices Vercellensis, Veronensis, Rhedigeranus-Vratislavenensis; Irenaeus, Origenes, Niceta of Remesiana, Paulinus of Nola, Cyril of Jerusalem): "Le contenu . . . du cantique n'a rien qui soit personnel à Marie", ". . . le Magnificat n'est qu'un décalque du cantique d'Anne, mère de Samuel. La situation d'Elisabeth n'a-t-elle pas plus d'analogie avec celle d'Anne que celle de Marie?" (p. 431). («François Jacobé» appears to be an early *nom-de-plume* of Loisy.)

The Jesuit father A. Durand (*Revue biblique internationale*, vol. vii (Paris, 1898), pp. 74-7) reviewed and rejected Jacobé's statement of the case, though he well understood that the error in the traditional text of Luke i. 46a could have crept in quite inadvertently from a desire for greater precision. "Le texte original devait porter simplement *ἐἶπεν*. Le désir de préciser aura fait ajouter par les uns *μαριάμ*, tandis que d'autres écrivirent *ἐλιζάβητ*" (p. 76).

Heinrich Weinel, "Ein Vorschlag" (*Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, vol. i (Giessen, 1900), pp. 347-51): ". . . so ist auch an unserer Stelle (Lc. 1, 46) das » *Ἐλισάβητ* « sachlich richtig; aber » *Μαριάμ* « ist sachlich falsch . . ." (p. 350). Not long before he wrote the article, Weinel had spoken of "die drei Psalmen der Maria, des Zacharias und des Symeon in Lc, welche deutlich ein semitisches Original verraten und vielleicht auf jüdische Vorbilder zurückgehen", *Die Wirkungen des Geistes und der Geister im nachapostolischen Zeitalter bis auf Irenäus* (Freiburg, 1899), p. 80.

Carl Gustav Adolf Harnack, in "Das Magnificat der Elisabet (Luc 1, 46-55) nebst einigen Bemerkungen zu Luc 1 und 2" (*Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, vol. xxvii (Berlin, 1900), pp. 538-56) collected and surveyed additional reasons of the internal evidence for his preference of the reading "Elisabet" in the O.L. His arguments have to be read.

Friedrich Spitta, "Das Magnifikat, ein Psalm der Maria und nicht der Elisabeth" (*Theologische Abhandlungen. Eine Festgabe zum 17 Mai 1902 für*

is not entirely convincing. Why does she, in her joy that her shameful barrenness is ended and that she will be rewarded with a child, have to exclaim that YHWH has thrown princes from their thrones and has set up the needy in their stead? These words bear no relation to the situation in which an expectant mother finds herself, and they sound unnatural in Elisheba's, and even more so in Maryam's, mouth.

These considerations lead to the supposition that the Magnificat and the first part of the Benedictus—those passages in which the use of the aorist prevails—were not first written

Heinrich Julius Holtzmann (Tübingen und Leipzig, 1902), pp. 61-94) disagreed with Harnack's analysis and brought forward a number of reasons why the Magnificat should be thought of as spoken by Mary, although—according to Spitta—it was not an original part of the narrative but had been added by the evangelist.

Francis Crawford Burkitt, "Who Spoke the Magnificat?" (*Journal of Theological Studies*, O.S. vii (Oxford, 1906), pp. 220-7): "St. Luke intended us to understand that the Magnificat was spoken by Elisabeth and not by Mary" (p. 222).

Alfred Firmin Loisy, *L'évangile selon Luc* (Paris, 1924): "Dans l'ensemble, le Magnificat, n'est qu'un décalque du cantique d'Anne, et c'est la situation d'Elisabeth, non celle de Marie, qui est analogue à celle de la mère de Samuel" (pp. 100-1). Compare the same author's *Les Évangiles synoptiques* (Paris, 1907), vol. i, p. 303.

Burton Scott Easton, *The Gospel According to St. Luke. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York, 1926): "Superficially . . . 'Elizabeth' seems the more natural reading. . . . The parallelism with Zacharias' song . . . would suggest that the . . . hymn was uttered by Elizabeth" (p. 14).

Maurice Goguel, *Au seuil de l'évangile Jean-Baptiste* (Paris, 1928): ". . . l'hymne connu sous le nom de Magnificat que le texte courant de Luc et la tradition attribuent à Marie mais qui paraît bien avoir originairement appartenu à Elisabeth" (p. 72). "La substitution d'Elisabeth à Marie étant très peu vraisemblable, la leçon » Elisabeth « doit être ancienne" (p. 72, n. 1).

John Martin Creed, *The Gospel according to St. Luke* (London, 1930): "In spite of the support of all Greek manuscripts and almost all versions, the conclusion should probably be drawn that *μαριάμ* [viz. in verse 46a] is not original" (p. 22).

I adhere to the opinion that the Third Evangelist intended his readers to understand that the Magnificat was spoken by the mother of John. Reasons for this opinion are submitted in a chapter treating of the relation between the "Baptist Source" and the "Nazarene adaptation" thereof among the literary records that preceded the evangelist's own presentation of the theme. With regard to the wider problem as to the authorship of Luke i. ii. in general, and of the Magnificat in particular, I do not subscribe to Harnack's and Burkitt's propositions.

when the birth of John the Baptist was celebrated in literature, but existed in independent form before then.

Harnack thought that the original language of the Lucan Nativity and Infancy Narrative was Greek; Torrey thought it was Hebrew—but both scholars believed that the lyrics were composed by the same person who wrote the narrative setting in which the lyrics are embedded. Loisy remained undecided as to the questions of author and original language of the poems; while leaving open the possibility that these songs might have been composed in Hebrew and, after translation into Greek, inserted with some retouches and stylistic alterations into the Lucan Birth Narrative by the evangelist, he admits the possibility that they might have been composed in Greek in imitation of the style of the Greek Old Testament.¹ Spitta expressed the view that the authors of the Magnificat and the Benedictus and of the story of John's birth were different persons; he believed the story to have been completed without the songs in verses 46b-55 and 68-79 and to have been amplified by a later hand which inserted the poems. "Das Magnifikat ist erst später (nachträglich) in den Geschichtszusammenhang eingefügt worden. Tatsächlich schliesst sich V. 56 tadellos an V. 45 an."² "Viel leichter wird sich alles erklären, wenn man annimmt, dass das Magnifikat . . . vom Evangelisten der von ihm benutzten Geschichte eingefügt worden ist."³ "Das Magnifikat hat ursprünglich der Geschichte in Luk 1 nicht angehört."⁴ "Das Benediktus kann der Erzählung ursprünglich nicht angehört haben, sondern ist ihr aus einem anderen Zusammenhang erst später eingefügt worden."⁵

Spitta's explanation, preferable though it is to Harnack's or Torrey's assumptions, does not entirely meet the case. It was not the evangelist who inserted the songs into their present setting. The editor of the Third Gospel did not insert anything

¹ "Il est permis de se demander si l'on est en présence d'un cantique hébreu plus ou moins librement traduit et glosé, ou bien d'une composition grecque où l'on aurait imité le style des Septante. La seconde hypothèse se pourrait n'être pas la moins vraisemblable; mais il est certain que le rédacteur évangélique s'il n'a pas composé les cantiques les a retouchés et appropriés à son style", L.c., p. 104-5.

² L.c., p. 85.

³ L.c., p. 89.

⁴ L.c., p. 90.

⁵ L.c., p. 72.

anywhere without the guidance of a tradition which he considered trustworthy and which indicated to him that the inserted matter was causally connected with the subject with which he was dealing. The editor of Luke is the most conscientious, most scrupulous, and most historically-minded of compilers. He might have changed turns of speech and amplified details in the light of his own understanding of the tradition or of facts as had been "delivered" to him, but he definitely refrained from adding to his text anything on which he possessed no tradition. There are explanatory glosses in the Third Gospel, there are notes by which the evangelist attempted to correlate the gospel story with the political events of the world, but there is not one single item substantial to the gospel that had not been transmitted to the editor. He was a poet, but he invented nothing. The Songs were in the Third Evangelist's edition of Luke, and it was not the evangelist who had added them to his source. The songs were in the "Nazarene" *Vorlage* which the evangelist had at his disposal. The point at which the songs were added to the narrative was earlier: they were inserted by the author of the Baptist Document (Story of John's Birth) into his own narrative; he knew the lyrics and incorporated them into his own composition of the story of John's signal birth. Magnificat and first part of the Benedictus are Maccabaeian Hebrew psalms which the composer of the Baptist Document knew and which he found suitable for incorporation into his own work. The author of the Baptist Document is also the author of verses 76-9. Spitta is correct in saying that the psalms were written by another person than the author of the prose narrative—but his explanation that they were later joined to that narrative by someone other than the composer of the story of John's birth seems unwarranted.

Jacobé, who treated of the subject before the controversy between Harnack and Spitta had arisen, correctly remarked of the loose dovetailing of the lyrics into the narrative: ". . . les cantiques, le Magnificat et le Benedictus, ont un peu l'air des pièces rapportées dans le recit, où ils ne sont qu' à moitié encadrés",¹ ". . . le Magnificat est un vrai psaume, inspiré

¹L.c., p. 429.

comme le Benedictus, comme le cantique d'Anne, mère de Samuel, comme les psaumes davidiques".¹ On reading the first chapter in Luke with an open mind, it is impossible to disagree with Jacobé on this point; verses 46b-55 and verses 68-75 are not organically one with the surrounding setting, but are "des pièces rapportées".²

The relation of the poems Luke i. 46b-55 and Luke i. 68-75 to the narrative of the birth of John the Baptist is the same as that of the hymn 1 Samuel ii. 1-10 or other lyrical sets in the narrative books of the Old Testament to their present background. They are psalms, and like other Hebrew psalms they were written by anonymous authors; they were sung and recited until both their authors and the occasions on which they had been written sank into oblivion. The songs remained and

¹ L.c., p. 431.

² A careful conservative summary of earlier presented views on the subject is to be found in Erich Klostermann, *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament*, vol. ii, *Die Evangelien* (Göttingen, 1919), "Ein Problem für sich bildet das Magnificat . . . Abgesehen von den auch nur sehr allgemein auf Maria und ebensogut auf Elisabeth wie schliesslich überhaupt auf jede Mutter eines glorreichen Sohnes passenden Versen 48 f. (hat) der Hymnus keine . . . Beziehung auf das Erlebnis der Maria und die Ankunft des Messias . . . (Man will) in dem Magnificat einen älteren Dankpsalm erblicken, der vielleicht gerade wegen 48 f. nachträglich diesem Zusammenhang einverleibt (H. Holtzmann), oder umgekehrt durch späteren Einschub von V. 48 f. erst für den Augenblick passend gemacht und dann hier eingelegt wurde (J. Weiss). Umstritten bleibt dabei, ob der Psalm ein Produkt der judenchristlichen Gemeinde darstellt . . . (so z.B. J. Weiss) oder ob er vorchristlichen, d.h. rein jüdischen Ursprungs ist (Hillmann, Merx, Spitta . . .) und entweder auf Erweisungen Gottes in der Vergangenheit Bezug nimmt oder besser in Aoristen, die zeitlosen hebräischen Perfekten entsprechen, ausmalt, was Gott zu jeder Zeit tut" (pp. 374-5).

We may add to this survey of relevant opinions on the relation of the Songs in Luke i. to the narrative setting of the story the view expressed by Martin Dibelius in *Die urchristliche Überlieferung von Johannes dem Täufer* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments O.S. xv, Göttingen 1911): ". . . dann hätte der Psalm (i.e. Magnificat) ursprünglich gesondert existiert" (p. 74); the Benedictus is characterized by Dibelius as "kein notwendiges Glied der ganzen Erzählung", but "lose eingefügt" (p. 74). Goguel expressed the same opinion in *Au seuil de l'évangile Jean-Baptiste*: "Ce psaume (i.e. le Magnificat) . . . pourrait avoir eu originairement une existence indépendante" (p. 73) and "Quant au psaume de Zacharie qui, à cause de la manière dont il est inséré, paraît avoir eu originairement comme le Magnificat une existence indépendante et n'avoir été introduit qu'après coup . . ." (p. 74).

were saved from sharing the fate of the authors by some later collector or writer who preserved them by ascribing them to some royal or other important personage and who either included them in a book of lyrics such as canonical Psalms or inserted them in some narrative, such as the Hexateuch, Judges, Samuel or Kings. In any case, the new context of the songs had little to do with the circumstances in which they originated.¹ Such may also be the history of the Magnificat and of the longer part of the Benedictus: they may have been written and sung in Maccabaeian times by a poet who was one of a band of Jewish warriors and wished to commemorate the fact that princes had been put down and the poor exalted. These songs circulated amongst the people for a period of several generations. They may have been changed in the process of oral tradition, restyled, enlarged, adapted, set to tune for various occasions, as folk-songs are handed on and are constantly being reshaped by the people who use and who preserve them. If that happened to the hymns that are known to us from Luke, the process of changing which the hymns might have undergone was still not advanced enough to obliterate the original character of these poems. It is most likely that both the Magnificat and the first part of the Benedictus which speak of past manifestations of God's power and God's mercy toward Israel, which speak of salvation as an event known to have happened in the past—like the ויהי-לי לישועה in Exodus xv. 2—not as one awaiting the speaker in future, were written by some Jewish poet who wished to express gratitude for the help God had given in the struggle against the Syro-Macedonian armies. The author of the narrative of John the Baptist's birth knew these songs; he found them to his

¹ The fact that ancient poems which are now included in prose narratives of the Old Testament were drawn from older anthologies is explicitly stated in Josua x. 13 and 2 Samuel i. 18. These references must be supplemented by the LXX reading of 1 Kings viii. 53. We read there instead of the *sefer hayashar* (book of Yashar) of a *biblos tēs ödēs* (hymn book). This obviously is the same formula. In the M.T. the letters *y* and *s* are transposed. By restoring these two letters to their original order we obtain instead of a mythical "Yashar" a concrete reference to an existing song-book, *sefer hash-shir*. It is possible that even this transposition is not required. The title of the book may have been *yashir* = "they sang", to which some later scribe added the article.

liking and thought it fitting to put them into the mouth of the mother and father of John, in the belief that they would be appropriate in their new setting.¹

Let us see whether the contents of the poems fit the assumption that they were composed as war songs in Maccabaeian times. There is nothing in the contents of the two hymns that would rule out the idea of their having been composed as Psalms of Praises incanted by a militant crowd before joining battle or as triumphal odes after victory had been achieved on the battlefield. The *δούλη* in verse 48a need not necessarily be a designation of an actual person of the female sex. It might be Israel, "the virgin daughter of Sion", who was meant by this expression. In 1 Maccabees ii. 11, Israel is called a "free woman who is become a slave" (*ἐλευθέρα ἐγενήθη εἰς δούλην*). The humiliation of the slave-woman is avenged by YHWH's showing strength with his arm in scattering the proud and putting down the foreign princes from their thrones. "He has holpen Israel his servant in remembering mercy" as he had sworn in days of old. *Ἡ δούλη τοῦ κυρίου*, the people of the servants of YHWH, after suffering the humiliation of Seleucid rule had now "been filled with good things"—they had spoiled the camps of Nicanor and Lysias and captured rich booty. It is Israel also who will have to be identified with the *ταπεινοί* and *πεινῶντες* of verses 52, 53 (Syr sin has "poor" for "hungry" in the latter verse). Innumerable passages in the Old Testament justify this identification.²

¹ The freedom taken by the author of the narrative of John's birth in interpreting the old psalms in his own manner keeps within modest bounds. The views on the Magnificat expressed by more recent writers display a much more felicitous variety. To illustrate this I am quoting Ernest William Barnes' *The Rise of Christianity* (London, 1947). His Grace holds the following opinion of the Magnificat: ". . . the most triumphant welcome in religious literature to the uprising of the common man. No other . . . document shows so plainly that Christianity made headway as a movement among the proletariat" (p. 71).

² To Israel refer the designations: *עָנִי*, *ταπεινός* in Isa. xlix. 13; liv. 11; lxvi. 2; *עָנִי (עָנִי) πτωχός* in Isa. xxix. 19; lxi. 1; Ps. x. 2, 9; cxl. 13; Ps. Sol. xv. 2 (possibly also Ps. lxxii. 2, 13; cix. 22); *עָנִי (עָנִי), πραῦς* in Zeph. iii. 12; Ps. cxlix. 4; *לַד, ταπεινός* in Zeph. iii. 12 (possibly also *לַד, πένης* in Ps. cix. 22 and *לַד, πτωχός* in Ps. cxiii. 7, 8), probably *עָנִי* in *עֲנִי הַצֵּאן הַשְּׂמֵרִים*

It is possible to go further than merely saying that Magnificat (Luke i. 46a-55) and Benedictus (Luke i. 68-75) are Maccabaeen psalms composed as war songs in Hebrew. One may venture further and specify as closely as possible the function of these songs. It appears that Luke i. 68-75 is a paean that was sung *before battle*, and Luke i. 46b-55 a psalm of thanksgiving sung *after battle*. To determine the original character of the Benedictus as a Maccabaeen paean one has to compare it with 1 Maccabees iv. 28-34. Here we have a prose account of the respective strengths of Lysias' and Judas Maccabaeus' armies encamped before Beth Sur. The prose account is interrupted by insertion of the prayer of Judas Maccabaeus before his troops joined battle with the Syrians.

. . . and he prayed and said :

Blessed art thou, saviour of Israel,
 Who didst quell the onset of the mighty man
 By the hand of thy servant David,
 And didst deliver the army of the strangers
 Into the hand of Jonathan the son of Saul
 And of his armbearer. . . .

This is obviously a translation from Hebrew. It is regrettable that only five verses of one Maccabaeen prayer of dedication before battle have been preserved.¹ Yet is it really the only prayer of this sort we know? If the five metric lines in 1 Maccabees iv. 30b-33 are compared, as to their style and contents, with Luke i. 68, 69, 71-4, the original character of the

(τὰ πρόβατα τὰ φυλασσόμενά μοι), Zech. xi. 7, 11. For other instances see : Brown-Driver-Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1906) under עָנִי, n. 3, and עָנִי, n. 3 (p. 776). Humility befits the people who are called by God's name : . . . וְיִכְנָעוּ עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר נִקְרָא שְׁמִי עַל יְהוָה, 2 Chron. vii. 14. Poverty and wisdom are the marks of goodness : טוֹב יָלֵד מִסִּבְּנֵי הַחֲזָקִים, ἀγαθὸς παῖς πένης καὶ σοφός, Qoh. ix. 13.

Compare Alfred Rahlfs, *Anaw und Anawim in den Psalmen* (Göttingen, 1892) and see Midrash Naso Rabbah xi. 1 : "Anawim applies to Israel who are poor (עָנִיִּים) among the nations and go about in humility (עֲנָוָה) in their midst and suffer the burden imposed upon them, in order to sanctify the Name of the Holy One . . . , and to whom the Holy One . . . will in the future show grace", *Midrash Rabbah Numbers*, vol. i, translated by Judah J. Slotki (London, 1939), pp. 408-9.

¹ See also 2 Maccabees xv. 22b-24a.

Benedictus can no longer be doubtful.¹ The psalm in Luke fits exactly the same situation and breathes exactly the same spirit as the prayer of Judas Maccabaeus. The conclusion is inevitable that the Benedictus proper is a Maccabaeian paean, invoking the assistance of God before battle and avowing that if God will grant his assistance and will deliver his people from the enemy, the nation will then be able to serve God wholeheartedly without fear of interference from the oppressor.

If the Benedictus was a prayer incanted before battle was joined, the general character of the Magnificat indicates that it is a song of thanksgiving after victorious battle. Such songs are mentioned in the scroll of "The Wars of the Children of Light against the Children of Darkness" and in 1 Maccabees iv. 24. The words "deliverance" and "mercy" which occur in the passage last mentioned are key-words; the Magnificat would fit the situation described in 1 Maccabees.

It has to be noted that the spirit which pervades both lyrics is the spirit of an hopeful, vigorous, young generation, proud of its achievements and its valour. It is the spirit of a people whose favourite self-designation, "the humble ones", refers to their relation to God, but no man. (It would be difficult to find in the history of any nation a period of 300 years with a succession of men of such self-consuming, self-destroying pride as that of the Palestinian hillbillies—to Antioch and Rome, they were no more—from Mattathias, the son of John, to Simon who is called Bar Kokhba.) When reading the Magnificat and the first eight verses of the Benedictus we must beware of reading into them any sentiment or thought that is not borne out by the contents of these poems themselves but that might be suggested by the general tenor of the story with which, in their present setting, the two psalms are loosely linked together. We must not allow ourselves to be influenced by other passages of quoted speech from that story if we wish to recognize the Magnificat and the Benedictus as what they are. The predominant note in the first two chapters of Luke is the note which the "Nazarene

¹ Compare 2 Maccabees viii. 15 with Luke i. 49b and 72b, further 1 Maccabees iv. 10 and 2 Maccabees viii. 19-21 with Luke i. 72.

adaptor " of the story of John's birth impressed upon the narrative—a messianist character. Yet nowhere in verses 46b-55, 68-75 is a messiah mentioned or even a messianic situation alluded to. These songs of votive avowal and of thanksgiving look back upon past events of deliverance; there is in them no tension nor direction toward the unknowable future, but only elation over the great mercies that God has already shown. If it were not for the setting of these two psalms and for the messianic spirit that strongly pervades the setting, nobody would chance to think of these psalms as being messianic. No disillusion with " this world " has cast a gloom over the minds of the writers of these songs.

The pastoral idyll of Luke i. 5 - ii. 21, in the penultimate mould of the story which the evangelist took over with only the slightest of changes, was fashioned at a time of relative peace in Israel. The troubles which the armed conflict with Rome brought upon the country and its inhabitants had not yet arisen. Even so, the first century with its sense of imminent friction and constant tension (of which verses Luke i. 32, 33; ii. 25, 26; ii. 34-8, give eloquent testimony) was not the age in which the psalms Luke i. 46b-55 and Luke i. 68-75 came to be written. There occurs in verse 54 and verse 72 the word " remember "; in the first case the poet uses the verb in giving thanks that *God has remembered*, in the second he expresses his firm confidence that *he will remember*. The tone and connection in which the verb זָכַר turns up in works of Hebrew poetry may serve as a safe test in determining whether the subject poetical piece originated in a period of relative well-being or in a period of disaster. The tone in which the word is used in both psalms in Luke i. clearly shows that they were written in an age of success for the Jewish nation. When things become worse, the note changes and there is an impatient, urgent, throbbing demand in Jewish prayers that God *may remember*. We know this note from the Psalms of Solomon and from some of the benedictions in the Shmoneh Esreh. When things are at their worst and the poet is filled with dark despair, he says, " God no longer remembers the earth " (2 Baruch xxv. 4). The lyrics in Luke i are older than the Psalms of Solomon.

Should the explanation of ἡ ταπείνωσις τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ *the abasement of his bondmaid*, as referring to the subjection of Israel under the Seleucids appear far-fetched to some reader (to me it does not so appear), let us say that there is nothing against the supposition that the actual author of the hymn Luke i. 46b-55 might have been a woman, a mother of warriors who gave in these lines expression to her personal feeling of gratitude to God for the safe return of her warrior sons from the battle field. The song might have been composed by one of the nameless mothers of nameless fighters, perhaps a Miryam or perhaps an Elishebha, or a Rachel, or Deborah, or Shulamith, or whatever the name may have been by which she was known to those who knew her—a name that is not even a memory today. All that remained of her may have been a few lines of a song which she sang in thanksgiving to her God for the return of her loved ones from war. The hearts of millions of nameless mothers and sons all over the world have been stirred by these lines, and it is perhaps an act of higher justice that her hymn has been ascribed by Christian tradition, though not by the writer of the Third Gospel, to the symbol of motherhood, to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

APPENDIX¹

Dedication Prayer Before Battle
(Luke i. 68-75)

בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
כִּי־פָקַד וְנָאֵל אֶת־עַמּוֹ
וַיְרָם לָנוּ קֶרֶן יְשׁוּעָה
בְּבֵית דָּוִד עֶבְדּוֹ
כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּפִי־נְבִיאָיו
הַקְּדוֹשִׁים אֲשֶׁר מְעוֹלָם

¹ The following is *not* a translation of the Benedictus and the Magnificat, but a rendering of what might have been the wording of the primary source of these hymns. I am fully aware of the fallacies that beset attempts at reconstructions of this sort, fallacies of which the present experiment is hardly free. The translation itself is not my work. I consulted and used—besides Hatch's

לְהוֹשִׁיעֵנו מֵאֲבִינּוּ
 וּמִדְּכָל-שְׁנֵאֵינוּ
 לַעֲשׂוֹת חֶסֶד עִם-אַבוֹתֵינוּ
 וְלִזְכֹּר אֶת-בְּרִית קִדְשׁוֹ
 אֶת-הַשְּׁבוּעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע
 לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ
 לְהַצִּילֵנוּ מִיַּד אֲבִינּוּ
 וּלְתַתְּנוּ לְעַבְדּוֹ בְּלֹא-פָחַד
 בְּחֶסֶד וּבְצַדִּיקָה לְפָנָיו
 כָּל-יְמֵי חַיֵּינוּ

Hymn of Thanksgiving After Battle
 (Luke i. 46b-55)

רוֹמְמָה נִפְשֵׁי בִיהוּה
 וַתִּשְׂמַח רוּחֵי בְּאֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 כִּי רָאָה רָאָה בְּעֵינֵי אִמָּתוֹ
 וַהֲנִיחָה מֵעַתָּה כָּל-דּוֹרוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל
 הַגִּבּוֹר הוּא גְדוּלוֹת עָשָׂה-לִּי
 נוֹרָא וְקָדוֹשׁ שְׁמוֹ
 וַחֲסִדּוֹ עַל-יִרְאָיו לְדוֹר וָדוֹר
 עָשָׂה חַיִּל בְּזִרְעוֹ
 הַפִּיץ וַדִּים בְּמַחְשְׁבוֹת לִבָּם
 הוֹרִיד שְׁלִיטִים מִכְּסְּאוֹתָם
 וְרוֹמֵם שְׁפָלִים

and Redpath's Concordance to the Septuagint—the translations by Elias Hutter (Nürnberg, 1599), by Richard Caddick (London, 1798), by Franz Delitzsch (Berlin, 1885) and by Isaac Eliezer Salkinson (London, 1886). In doing so I found that the Hebrew of successive translators tends to become worse from generation unto generation. My attempt, being the latest in this series, will, I presume, not be exempted from this apparent law of nature.

רַעֲבִים מְלֵא טוֹב
 וְעֲשִׂירִים שְׁלַח רִיקָם
 תִּמְדָּ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדוֹ
 לְזִכֹּר חֻסְדֹּ
 כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לְאַבְוֹתֵינוּ
 לְאַבְרָהָם וְלְיִצְחָק וְלְעִידֹלָם¹

¹ The Magnificat is clearly composed as a chant for alternate voices. A new tone sets in with verse 51. If we remember what Philo recorded in *De Agricultura* 79 and *De Vita Contemplativa* 83, 84 of male and female choirs complementing each other in their recitals, we may think that lines 46b-50 were incanted by the female choir to which the men answered with lines 51-55. I would, however, not unduly stress this point.

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