

THE LADDER OF JACOB

The Ladder of Jacob is extant only in Slavonic, in two distinct recensions, preserved in several MSS of the *Palaea interpretata*.¹

About its origin nothing whatever is known. According to Epiphanius² the Ebionites possessed an apocryphal work called *'Αναβαθμοὶ Ἰακώβου* ('Jacob's/ James's Steps'); but the contents of the work as described by Epiphanius in no way correspond with the contents of the Ladder. Moreover, both the literary context in which Epiphanius places it ('. . . other Acts of apostles'), and the fact that he uses the declinable form of the proper name (*Ἰάκωβος*) strongly suggest that it was a New Testament apocryphon to which he was referring and that it was concerned with James, the Lord's brother.³

The central feature of the Ladder is Jacob's dream at Bethel. It begins as an amplification of Gen. xxviii. 10–12 after the manner of Jewish *haggada*. Then an angel appears, in typical apocalyptic style, to interpret Jacob's dream and goes on to prophesy his descendants' future suffering and their ultimate vindication.

That a Greek text lies behind the Slavonic is not only probable in itself, but it is also rendered more probable by certain points of contact between chap. vii in the 'longer' recension and one of the sources of the *Narrative concerning things done in Persia*, a 5th (?) cent. Greek work, first published in full in a critical edition by Bratke in 1899. If there was a Greek text of the Ladder, it will doubtless have formed part of the Greek *Palaea*; and since the Greek *Palaea* is usually dated in the 8th or 9th cents., a Greek Ladder must be pushed back into the 7th or 8th cents. at the latest, and it may well be very much earlier. There are no sound arguments for suggesting a Semitic original, though obviously such a possibility cannot be altogether excluded.

Since the Ladder is relatively brief it has been thought worthwhile to print translations of both the available Slavonic recen-

¹ On the *Palaea* see above, p. 364, n. 5.

² Epiph. *Haer.* XXX. xvi. 7.

³ The normal Christian Greek for the patriarch Jacob is the indeclinable form, *Ἰακώβ*, following the Septagint (e.g. John iv. 5; *Ep. Barn.* viii. 4).

sions one after the other. First is printed the 'shorter' recension from the *Palaea* in the Rummyantsev collection (= Rum. 453: AD 1494), published by A. N. Pypin in 1862, and designated by the symbol 'R'. Then follows a translation of the 'longer' recension from the *Palaea* of the Solovetski Library (= Sol. 431) published by I. Ya. Porfir'ev in 1877: this last MS is designated by the symbol 'S'; and in the apparatus are added certain readings from the *Palaea* of the Troitse-Sergieva monastery (no. 38), written in Kolomna in AD 1406, published by N. S. Tikhonravov in 1863, and designated 'K'. The chapter and verse numerations are so far as possible the same in both recensions.

The reader can thus study the differences between the recensions for himself and appreciate the problems that their existence raises. The 'longer' recension not only offers a more satisfactory opening, but also in chaps. v–vii goes into far greater detail about Israel's vindication (in particular there is a full description of the accompaniments of the coming of the 'man from the Most High', much of it, if not all, manifestly Christian). On the other hand, the 'shorter' recension offers in chap. ii a longer version of Jacob's prayer. And both recensions have suffered from having interpretations of the *Palaea* incorporated into the text (see especially the addition in chap. i). In these circumstances it would be hazardous to affirm simply that one recension is to be preferred and that the other is either an 'expansion' or an 'abbreviation'. And it would be equally hazardous to pick out passages here and there and stigmatize them as 'later additions' or 'interpolations' – unless, of course, they are very evidently pieces of *Palaea* interpretation. In a situation like this such terms as 'original' and 'interpolation' tend to lose their meaning. In both recensions, it seems, we are dealing with a document in an almost permanent state of literary flux.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

EDITIONS

- A. N. PYPIN, *Lozhnye i otrechennye knigi russkoi stariny* (= ed. G. A. KUSHELEV-BEZBORODKO, *Pamyatniki starinnoi russkoi literatury*, iii (St. Petersburg, 1862), pp. 27–32). [= R]

- N. S. TIKHONRAVOV, *Pamyatniki otrachennoi russkoi literatury*, i (St. Petersburg, 1863), pp. 91–95. [= K]
- I. Ya. PORFIR'EV, *Apokrificheskie skazaniya o vetkhozavetnykh litsakh i sobyitiyakh po rukopisyam Solovetskoi biblioteki* (= *SORYaS* xvii. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1877), pp. 138–149). [= S]

TRANSLATIONS

English

- M. R. JAMES, *LAOT*, pp. 96–103. [A conflation of the two recensions based on Bonwetsch's German rendering.]

German

- G. N. BONWETSCH, *Die apokryphe "Leiter Jakobs"* (= *Nachrichten von der Königl. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Philolog.-hist. Kl.*, 1900: Heft i; Göttingen, 1900, pp. 76–87.). [A translation of both recensions with a brief Introduction.]

GENERAL

- A. VASSILIEV, *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina*, i (Moscow, 1893), pp. xxx–xxxii.
- E. BRATKE, *Das sogenannte Religionsgespräch am Hof der Sasaniden* (= *TU N.F.* iv. 3; Leipzig, 1899), pp. 101–6.
- H. WEINEL in *EUX*, pp. 172–3.

I. And behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, whose top reached to heaven; and the top of the ladder was in form like a man, hewn out of fire. It had twelve steps to the top of the ladder, and on each step, up to the top, *were* two human forms, *one* on the right and *one* on the left: *there were twenty-four*¹ forms on the ladder, *visible* as far as their breasts. But the central form, which I saw, *was* of fire as far as the shoulders and arms *and* much more terrifying than those twenty-four forms. And while I was looking, behold, the angels of

¹ Emended in the light of verse 3 below: the MS reads 'four'. Cp. also the reading of K at i. 2 in the 'long recension' (p. 460 below).

God were ascending and descending on it; and the Lord had taken his stand upon it.

- 5 ²For so it is to be understood, as when a man leans on his staff. On
6 the angels we understand: those who were ascending are a figure of
this – when the tree of the Cross was fixed in the earth at the Lord's
passion, as the ladder was fixed in Jacob's sight, and the Lord
received the heathen who were baptized, and they ascended into
heaven; but those who were descending – *they are* the disobedient,
7 perverse ones. For Moses prefigured *this*, and said to them, Deceit-
ful and perverse generation! Is this your thanksgiving to the Lord?
8 In this, then, we see the heathen ascending, but the Jews descend-
ing . . . ²
9 . . . ³ on the highest form. And from there he called to me, saying
10,11 Jacob, Jacob. And I said, Here am I, Lord! And he said to me, The
land on which you are sleeping, to you will I give it, and to your
descendants after you; and I will multiply your race as the stars of
12 heaven and as the sand of the sea. Through your descendants will
the whole land be blessed, and those who live in it, until the last
times, *even* the years of the end: my blessing, with which I have
13 blessed you, shall go forth from you to the last generation. And the
East and West shall all be filled with your race.

- II. And as I heard *his voice* from the height, fear and trembling fell
2 on me. And I got up from my sleep; and while the voice was still
speaking, and the word of God *was* in my ears, I said, How awesome
is this place! this is none *other* but the house of God, and this is the
3 gate of heaven. And the stone, which had been my pillow, I set up
as a pillar, and I poured oil¹ on the top of it; and I called the name of
4 that place the house of God . . . ² O Lord God of Adam, thy . . . ,³ and
Lord God of Abraham and Isaac my fathers, *who* were righteous in
5 all their ways before thee, who sittest in might upon the cherubim

²⁻² Obviously an interpretative Christian gloss.

³ Lacuna in the MS.

¹ Oil from trees (not animal oil).

² Lacuna in the MS. We must supply at least 'And I prayed to God and spoke a
follows' (or something similar) as in SK: cp p. 460 below.

³ Lacuna in the MS: Pypin suggests 'creature'.

and on the fiery throne of glory and the many-eyed ones (as I saw
 6 in my dream), *thou who* sustainest the four-faced cherubim,
 who bearest also the many-eyed seraphim, who bearest the age of
 7 all beneath thine arm and art supported by nothing; thou hast
 established the heavens to the glory of thy name and stretched out
 8 on the clouds of heaven the shining heaven beneath thee, that thou
 mightest move the sun below it, and hide it in the night, that it
 9 should not be taken for God. Thou hast set on them a course for the
 moon and the stars: the former thou makest to wane and to wax;
 and the stars thou commandest to pass by, that they too should not
 10 be taken for gods. Of the face of thy glory the six-winged seraphim
 are afraid; and they hide their feet and their faces with their wings.
 11 And, as they fly with the others, they sing . . .⁴ High One, with
 twelve faces, many-named, Fiery One, in form like lightening,
 Holy One, holy, holy, holy, Jao, Jaova, Jaoil, Sabakdos, Chabod,
 12 Sabaoth, Omlelech, Ilabir, ⁵Amis'mi, Barech,⁵ Eternal King,
 Strong One, Mighty One, Most Great, longsuffering, blessed, who
 fillest the heavens and the earth and the sea and the abyss and all
 13 the ages with thy glory. Hear my song which I have sung to thee,
 and grant me my request which I shall ask of thee; and tell me the
 interpretation of my dream, as thou art God, mighty, powerful,
 and glorious, holy God, Lord of my fathers and my *God*.

III. And while I was still making my prayer, a voice spoke¹ before
 my face, saying, Sarekl, elder of the joyful ones, *you* who are over
 dreams, go and explain to Jacob the dream that he has seen, and
 tell *him* everything that he has seen; but first give him a blessing.

2 And the archangel Sarekl came to me, and I looked *upon him*: there
 3 was a face. . . .² But I was not afraid of his glance, for the face I had
 seen in my dream³ was more terrifying than this; and I was not
 4 afraid of the angel's face. And the angel said to me, What is your
 5,6 name? And I said, Jacob. *And he said*, Your name shall be called

⁴ Lacuna in the MS.

⁵⁻⁵ Bonwetsch 'Ame (?), S'me Barech'.

¹ Lit. 'saw': Bonwetsch translates 'appeared'.

² Lacuna in the MS.

³ The MS adds *privanie* which appears to be both superfluous and corrupt.

- 7 Jacob no longer, but your name shall be like my name – Israel. And when I was coming from Fandana⁴ in Syria to meet Esau my brother, he⁵ came to me and blessed me and called my name Israel.
8 And he did not tell me his name until I adjured him; and then he told me, As you have prevailed.⁶

IV. *Then* he said to me, The ladder which you have seen, having twelve steps, *and* each step having two human forms *on it*, changing
2 their shape – the ladder is this age, and the twelve steps *are* the
3 times of this age; but the twenty-four forms are the kings of the
4 heathen tribes of this age. Under those kings . . .¹ of your *sons*. They will rise against the heatheness of your children's children; and he will lay waste this place through four generations² of the sins of
5 your children's children. And from the wealth of *their* forefathers will be built a sacristy in the temple to the name of your God and *the*
6 *God* of your fathers. And because of the provocation of your children it will lie waste until the fourth generation³ of this age, for
7 you have seen four forms. The first – him *whom you saw* stumbling upon the step (the angels ascending and descending, and the forms
8 in the midst of the steps) – *that is*, the Most High will raise up a king from the descendants⁴ of your brother Esau, and they will receive
9 all the rulers of the races of the earth, who have done evil to your descendants⁵. And they will be given into his hand; and *they* will
10 suffer *him* unwillingly. He will hold them by force and rule them; and they will not be able to resist him until the day he decides⁶ *that*
11 *they should serve idols . . .*⁷ *and sacrifice to dead things. And he will command*
12 *that all the people in his kingdom be forced to do this. And of those who will*

⁴ i.e. Paddan-aram (Gen. xxxv. 9).

⁵ i.e. the angel.

⁶ The MS reads *kop-zul*, which is unclear: the translation 'prevailed' is derived from Gen. xxxii. 28. The remainder of the sentence has presumably been lost.

¹ Lacuna in the MS: cp. the text of K in the 'long recension' at iv. 3.

² Lit. 'ends', 'descents'.

³ Lit. 'end', 'descent'.

⁴ Lit. 'children's children'.

⁵ Lit. 'seed'.

⁶ Lit. 'until the day when his intention goes out over them'.

⁷ Lacuna in the MS. The words in italics are taken from the *Palaea* interpretation, where they are quoted as coming from the text.

be guilty of such an offence, some *will serve the greatest*⁸ of your race, and some Falkonagargail.⁹

V. And your descendants, Jacob, will be like strangers in a foreign land; and they will be ill-treated, and made slaves of, and flogged
 2 daily. But the heathen, to whom they will be subject, God will judge. When a king shall rise up and execute judgement, then will there be a place for him: then will your descendants, Israel, be delivered from the oppression of the heathen, who have held them by force, and they will be free from every reproach of **their**¹ enemies; for the king will be *the source*² of all **vengeance**³ and retribution upon those who have afflicted you, O Israel. And at the end of the age, those who have suffered bitterly⁴ will rise up and cry out, and the Lord will hear them, and be moved,⁵ and the Mighty One will feel
 3 compassion for their suffering. For the angels and archangels pour
 4 out their **prayers**⁶ before him *for the sparing*⁷ of your tribe.⁷ Then will their women be fruitful; and then will the Lord protect your race.⁸

JACOB'S VISION OF A LADDER

I. Now Jacob was going to Laban his uncle; and he found a place and fell asleep there, having laid his head on a stone. Now the sun had gone down, and he saw there a dream; and behold, a ladder was fixed on the earth, and it reached to the heavens. And at its top
 2 there was a form, like a man, hewn out of fire. Now it had twelve steps; and on every step there were two human forms, *one* on the

¹ R is here corrupt: the restoration is from S and K.

⁹ Porfir'ev suggests this is a corruption of Greek *χαλκός* (a bronze statue) and Hebrew *Nergal* (the Mesopotamian idol mentioned at 2 Kings xvii. 30).

¹ So S and K in vi. 1 of the 'long recension' (below), where much of the material in this chapter is found in a different order: R reads 'your'.

² Lit. 'head'.

³ Reading *m'štenie* for the *kreštenie* ('baptism') of the text as in S and K.

⁴ Lit. '... the age, the bitter ones'.

⁵ Lit. 'be entreated'.

⁶ So S and K: R 'lightnings'.

⁷⁻⁷ Lacuna in the MS: the words in italics are from the *Palaea* interpretation.

⁸ Here follows the *Palaea* interpretation.

right and *one* on the left: *there were* twenty-four¹ forms on the ladder.

3 And the central form, which I saw, *was* of fire as far as the shoulders and the arms, *and* much taller than all *the others*: he was very terrifying, much more *terrifying* than the other twenty-four forms.

4-7 And while I was looking, behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it; *and* the Lord had taken his stand upon it.²

8,9 God stood, as it were, above the highest form. And from there he called to me, saying, Jacob, Jacob, And I said, Here am I. And he said to me, The land on which you are sleeping, to you will I give it,

12 that it may be filled with your descendants. My blessing, with which I have blessed you, shall go from you to the last generation.

13 And the East and the West shall all be filled with your race.

II. And as I heard *his voice* from the height, trembling and terror

2 fell on me. 'After getting up, *I*, Jacob, from my sleep, *I* said (the

3 voice was still in my ears) – after getting up, *I* said, to my feet, I prayed to God¹ and spoke thus, Lord, the Creator, Lord of all

4 Creation. And again I said, God of Abraham and of Isaac my father, and God of all who have walked before thee in righteousness: behold, I saw a terrifying vision, and trembling fell on me.

5 But remember, O Lord, Abraham my forefather, how he walked before thee in innocence and was perfect in all the ways of thy

6 commandments. So also my father, thy servant Isaac, did not disobey thy commandments. Therefore, O Lord, look mercifully

7 upon me also, on thy servant, and tell me *what is the interpretation of* this terrifying vision I have seen.

III. And while the voice and prayer were still on Jacob's lips, behold, an angel of God stood before him, saying, Jacob, I am sent

2 by the Creator of all to you to explain your dream to you. So pay attention to the explanation of your dream.

¹ So K: S 'two *and* four'.

² Here follows an interpretative gloss similar to that in R: see above (p. 456).

¹⁻¹ There is obviously some confusion here about whether the narrative should be in the first person or the third, and presumably also some dittography or dislocation of the text.

IV. The ladder which you have seen, having twelve steps, and
 2 each step having two human forms *on it*, changing their shape – the
 ladder is this age, and the twelve steps are the times of this age, and
 the twenty-four¹ forms are the rulers of the tribes of the heathen
 3,4 age. By those tribes will your children's children² be tried. And
 they will rise against the heatheness of your children's children,
 and they will make this place desolate for four generations³ of your
 5 children's children. And in the name of *their* forefathers a temple
 6 will be built in your name *and* that of your fathers. And the
 provocation of your children will cause *it* to lie waste for four
 7 generations⁴ of this age, for you have seen four forms. The first,
 8 who stumbled on the step – *that is*, there will be a ruler from your
 9 kin, and he will do evil to your descendants; and he will be suffered
 10 unwillingly by them. And he will hold them by force to rule them;
 and they will not be able to resist⁵ him; and he will decide⁶ that
 11 they should serve idols and sacrifice to dead things. And he will
 command that all the people in his kingdom be forced to do *this*.
 12 *And of those* who will be guilty of such an offence, some will serve the
 greatest of your race, and some Falkonagargail.⁷

V. Know, Jacob, that your descendants will be strangers in a
 foreign land; and they will be ill-treated, and made slaves of, and
 2 flogged daily. But that people, whose slaves they are, the Lord will
 judge; for the Mighty One will feel compassion for their suffering.
 3 For the angels and archangels pour out their prayers before him for
 the deliverance of your race, and that the Most High should have
 4 mercy. Then will their women be fruitful; and after that the Lord
 will defend your race with terrifying and mighty signs against
 5 those who enslaved them. Their storehouses, which were full, will
 be found empty of wine and of every kind of corn: their land will
 seethe with reptiles and all kinds of deadly things; and there will be
 many earthquakes and catastrophes.

¹ So K: S 'two *and* four'.

² K adds 'and the family of your sons'.

³ Lit. 'ends', 'descents'.

⁴ Lit. 'ends', 'descents'. Bonwetsch translates the whole phrase 'at the fourth end
 of this age'. ⁵ So K: S is corrupt.

⁶ Lit. 'and his intention will go out upon them'.

⁷ K 'Kalkonagargail'. See note 9 to chap. iv on p. 459 (above).

VI. Then will the Most High execute judgement on that place and deliver your descendants from *their* servitude to those peoples who rule over them by force; and they will be saved from the reproach of
 2 their enemies. For the king will be the source of vengeance, and will
 3 rise up in bitterness against them. And they will cry out, and the Lord will hear them; and he will pour out his anger on Leviathan the sea-monster and kill the heathen Falkon¹ with the sword, for
 4 against the God of gods he will exalt his pride. Then, Jacob, will come your vindication,² and *that* of your forefathers; and others,
 5 too, will come after you and share also in your prosperity.³ And then will your descendants blow the trumpet, and the whole kingdom of Edom will perish together with all the rulers and the tribes of the Moabites.

VII. And as you saw angels¹ ascending on the ladder— *that is* in the last years there shall be a man from the Most High, and he will join
 2 the higher things with the lower. Of him before² his coming shall
 3 your sons and daughters prophesy and³ see visions about him. And there shall be these signs at the time of his coming – a tree felled with the axe will drip blood: three-month old babies⁴ will speak rationally: a child in his mother's womb will proclaim his way; *and*
 4 a young man will be like an old man. And then will come the
 5 Awaited One, whose path will be found by none.⁵ Then will the earth rejoice, having received the glory of heaven; and what was
 6 above will be below also. And from your descendants will sprout a kingly shoot;⁶ and he will rise up and overthrow the power of evil.
 7 He will be the saviour of *all* lands, peace to those who labour, and a
 8 cloud protecting the whole world from the heat. Otherwise what was in disorder could not be *put into order*,⁷ if he did not come:

¹ Or 'idol'. See iv. 12 and the note in the 'short recension' (p. 459 above).

² Lit. 'Then, Jacob, will your righteousness appear'.

³ Lit. 'and after you there will be those who will go out in your righteousness'.

¹ K adds 'descending and'.

² So K: S om.

³ K adds 'your young men'.

⁴ So S: K 'a three-month old baby'.

⁵ So S: K 'whose precursor you are'.

⁶ Lit. 'root'.

⁷ So S: K 'Otherwise the ordered will not be put in order'. Cp. the *Palaea* interpretation in R ('otherwise what was spoken would not be fulfilled').

9 otherwise the lower things could not be joined to the higher. When
he comes the bulls of brass and stone and all the carved images will
give tongue for three days and they will tell the news to certain wise
men, *that they may* know what is to be on earth, and they will find
their way to him by a star. On earth will they see him whom the
10 angels do not see. Then will the Almighty be found with a body on
earth, and be embraced by mortal arms; and he will renew
humankind and give life to Adam and Eve – dead through the fruit
11 of the tree. Then will the deceit of the impious be uncovered, and
all idols will fall down and be put to shame before his face, clothed,
as he will be, in splendour; for they thought only how they might
deceive,⁸ but they will be able to rule no longer, nor *will they be able*
12 *to give prophecies. Their splendour will be taken from them, and*
they will be left without their glory; for he who is to come will take
their power and their might from them, and he will give the truth to
13 Abraham, which he promised to him before. Then will he make all
sharp things blunt and the rough smooth, and he will cast all
unrighteousness into the depths of the sea and perform miracles in
14 heaven and on earth. And he will be wounded inside the house of
the Beloved;⁹ and when he is wounded, then comes salvation and
15 the end of all corruption. And those who have wounded him will
receive a wound themselves, from which they will never be healed.
16 And all creation will bow down to the Wounded One, and many
will put their trust in him; and everywhere, and in all lands, he will
17 be known. Those who have known his name will not be ashamed;
and his power and years will never fail.

⁸ Lit. S 'for they imagined in deceit': K 'for they are lying of imaginations'.

⁹ Cp. Zech. xiii. 6.