'ABBĀ ISN'T 'DADDY'[1]

THE great Jeremias has made very widespread the idea that the expression *'abbā*, used in addressing God, had a very familiar and intimate tone; moreover, being completely without parallel in contemporary Judaism, it was clearly something original with Jesus and historically genuine as his own. It was, above all, a term of a child addressing his father. It was 'a children's word, used in everyday talk'; and 'it would have seemed disrespectful, indeed unthinkable, to the sensibilities of Jesus' contemporaries to address God with this familiar word' (*New Testament Theology*, p. 67). The use of the Aramaic vernacular removed prayer from the formal liturgical sphere and placed it in the midst of daily life.

In other words, putting this into English, it was somewhat like saying 'Daddy', though Jeremias seems to have stopped short of saying this explicitly; and the idea that *'abbā* was like 'Daddy' is, the writer has been assured, a great favourite with students and with preachers. Enquiries made among listeners to sermons confirm this: almost all have been made familiar with this view of *'abbā*. Jeremias, indeed, is not solely responsible for this: many points made by him are already made in the TWNT articles of Kittel on ἀββᾶ and of Schrenk on πατήρ. But it was Jeremias who most insisted on the point, built it into a cornerstone of his theological position, and repeated the arguments again and again. Publications include: 'Vatername Gottes, III' in *RGG*[3] vi. 1234 f.; *The Central Message of the New Testament* (1965); *Abba. Studien zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitgeschichte* (1966), with English version *The Prayers of Jesus* (1967); *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, i (1971), ET *New Testament Theology* (1971). These will be cited below with abbreviated title as necessary. In view of this extensive and influential series of writings, few will question the assertion that Jeremias is the person behind the vogue of 'Daddy'. And the idea, clearly, has an appeal to many readers and hearers of today.

But is it right? Is this really the nuance of *'abbā*? Would such a meaning naturally occur to anyone who knows the relevant languages? To the present writer it would never have occurred as even remotely

[1] This paper had already been written before I discovered that my colleague Dr Geza Vermes had already made, in his *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (London, 1983), pp. 41 f., a serious criticism of Jeremias' use of the term *'abbā*. Though my conclusions are very much in agreement with those of Dr Vermes, this further discussion may perhaps be justified on the grounds that it goes much more deeply into the philological arguments and principles involved.

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likely. Yet in the face of Jeremias' strenuous arguments it is not easy to say just *why* it is wrong, where the fault in his reasoning lies, if there is indeed a fault. Perhaps the technicalities of the discussion of Aramaic grammatical forms and the like have made it too hard for the general reader to exercise upon this suggestion the critical attention that it ought to have. We shall look first of all at these philological technicalities and then turn to an alternative account of the nuance of our term.

1. *The 'origins' of the form 'abbā.* In the philological discussion, as it has been developed, there seem to be three ingredients:

(*a*) the 'emphatic state' explanation. Nouns in Aramaic do not have a definite article that precedes them, as we find in Hebrew, but have a form with ending *-ā*, characteristically spelt with aleph, which has a similar force: thus *yōm* 'day', *yōmā* 'the day'.[2] According to this line of thought, *'abbā* was 'father' in the emphatic state, and began by meaning more or less 'the father' but went on to take over the functions also of the form with first person singular suffix ('my father'). This view has had wide circulation; Jeremias, himself, however, says that it is wrong (*Prayers*, p. 58, etc.). Kittel had accepted it (TWNT i. 4) but later abandoned it, and Schrenk rejected it too (TWNT v. 984 and n. 248).

(*b*) the 'vocative' explanation. This goes back to ideas of comparative Semitists such as Nöldeke. The form has nothing to do with the Aramaic 'emphatic state'. In origin, Jeremias says, it is 'a pure exclamatory form, which is not inflected and which takes no possessive suffixes; the gemination is modelled on the way in which a child says *'immā* to its mother (the reason being that a small child says "Mama" more often than "Dada"). This form *'abbā*, deriving from children's speech, had made considerable headway in Palestinian Aramaic in the period before the New Testament' (*Prayers*, p. 58).

(*c*) the 'babbling sound' explanation (German *Lallwort*). In origin, Jeremias says, *'abbā* is a babbling sound, 'so it is not inflected and takes no suffix' (*NT Theology*, p. 66). This would seem to imply that its proper analogue in English would be something like 'Da-da' rather than 'Daddy', and 'Dada' has in fact been mentioned in the quotation above.

2. *Interaction of the three philological explanations.* These three

[2] It should not be thought, however, that the use of the emphatic state coincides very strictly with the function of precisely defining 'this particular' entity: in fact the use of the emphatic state is loose and irregular, it is often used with terms that in our sense are not defined and it tends to become the common and normal form of a noun and thus not particularly differentiated from the absolute. This is significant for some examples that will be cited later. See S. Segert, *Altaramäische Grammatik* (1975), p. 334, § 6. 3. 3. 1. 1; W. B. Stevenson, *Grammar of Palestine Jewish Aramaic* (1924), p. 23, § 8. 2.

philological accounts of the matter interact in a curious way. Moreover, Jeremias himself shows certain signs of inconsistency, and also admits certain changes of mind on his own part.

(*a*) Jeremias insists throughout that *'abbā* is Aramaic (and not Hebrew), and it is of course one of those Semitic words quoted in the New Testament that has often been taken as evidence that Jesus normally spoke Aramaic. But the idea that it *must* be Aramaic depends entirely on the 'emphatic state' explanation, which Jeremias rejects. If we do not depend on that explanation, then the form can just as well be Hebrew. For Jeremias himself makes clear, with plenty of examples, that *'abbā* was normal, not only in Aramaic, but also in the Hebrew of Jesus' time.

The 'vocative' explanation is plausible only on the basis of considerations of comparative Semitic philology, which in the nature of things must carry us back to remote antiquity. The *only* ground for accepting the 'vocative' explanation lies in comparative evidence, especially from various forms in Arabic and in Arabic dialects, notably those which are classified as the use of the 'accusative' ending *-a* in vocative functions (Wright, *Arabic Grammar*, ii. §38, pp. 85 f., and dialect forms cited by Ch. Rabin, *Ancient West-Arabian* (1951), pp. 70 f., this latter relating expressly to forms for 'father'; cf. also Bauer and Leander, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache* (1922), §61h, p. 450). The 'vocative' explanation cannot easily or naturally be united with the idea that a form like *'abbā* is the product of a late development, specially in Aramaic and in Hellenistic times. If it is true at all, it is likely to mean that such forms had existed for millennia, even if they are not found in extant literature such as the Old Testament. If that is so, then *'abbā* could just as well be Hebrew, and a sentence in which it occurred could have been in Hebrew.

Indeed, precisely this argument was used by those, including the present writer (see his 'Which Language did Jesus speak?—Some remarks of a Semitist', *BJRL* liii (1970–1), 16 and notes), who perceived the repercussions of the 'vocative' explanation. Rabin was right in writing (ibid. 71): 'It is hard to believe that such a homely word should have been taken over from Aramaic [into Mishnaic Hebrew].' Birkeland in his *The Language of Jesus* (Oslo, 1954) took up this point and used it in his attempt to show that Jesus' language had been not Aramaic, but Hebrew.

Our purpose here, however, is not to argue that the language of Jesus was Hebrew. In fact the question as between Aramaic and Hebrew makes little difference to the meaning or nuance of *'abbā*. As Jeremias himself made clear, *'abbā*, even assuming its Aramaic origin, had already fully entered into later Hebrew: 'in the colloquial language of Palestine, *'ābī* had entirely given way to *'abbā*, both in

Aramaic and in Hebrew' (*Prayers*, p. 23). When he emphasizes the fact that the form was *Aramaic* (e.g. *Prayers*, p. 57), Jeremias seems to do this as part of the argument that, being Aramaic, the term came from the colloquial language of the time, as distinct from the higher style of liturgical Hebrew *'ābī*. But this argument is otiose, since, even if Aramaic was the 'popular' language, Mishnaic Hebrew, by modern opinion, was clearly popular language too, so that we have the same result either way. Acceptance of the 'vocative' explanation left the question between Aramaic and Hebrew open; it made no direct difference to the assessment of *meanings*, but it opened up difficulties and contradictions in Jeremias' argumentation.

If *'abbā* belonged to a group of phenomena that are in principle ancient, there would then be a question why it never appears in the Old Testament. But this can be answered on the same basis as a number of other problems in Mishnaic Hebrew. An obvious analogue is the relative particle, which in Mishnaic is more or less universally *še-*; this particle begins to appear also in late biblical sources. But it is easily relatable to comparative philological data in other Semitic languages, which suggests that it may go back to a high antiquity; and in fact the Bible has a few instances in early sources, especially in Judges (Judg. 5: 7, 6: 17, 7: 12 and 2 Kgs. 6: 11). A natural explanation is that *še-* existed in Hebrew at an early date and reappeared in late biblical and Mishnaic times, but that for some reason it was overlaid in the central biblical period by the common *'ᵃšer*. The same *type* of account of *'abbā* could be suggested, and is made natural by the appeal to comparative philology in the 'vocative' explanation of the form.

It may similarly be asked why *'abbā* is spelt with the ending aleph if it is not Aramaic. We do not know, however, that the spelling was necessarily with aleph: the New Testament form would be the same if the original had been spelt with he. In texts like Neofiti the spelling with he occurs sporadically along with that with aleph, for example, Gen. 20: 13, 28: 21. But I do not lay much weight upon this argument, for there is another that is much more important. It has long been recognized (Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen* (1928), p. 38) that 'hypocoristic' shortenings of biblical Hebrew personal names often end with the vowel *-ā*; this ending is regarded as 'vocative' and thus comes into exactly the same general category as *'abbā*, and 'hypocoristic' forms have the same affinity with family speech and children's speech that has been alleged for *'abbā*. Thus a name meaning 'servant of God' might be shortened to עַבְדָּא, one like Uzziah might be shortened to עֻזָּא, one like Azariah ('God helped') can be found as עֲזָרְיָא, and in such names we find the final *-ā* spelt either with aleph or with he. Thus the spelling with aleph does not

require us to have recourse to Aramaic, nor does it support a late date for the phenomenon.

These considerations do not exhaust the implications of the 'emphatic state' explanation of *'abbā*, and we shall return to it somewhat later, and ask whether it is really right to abandon that account of it. At this point, however, we have concentrated on the effects that follow if we adopt the 'vocative' explanation in preference.

To sum up, then, the rejection of the 'emphatic state' explanation, and the adoption of the 'vocative' explanation, make it less obvious that the form is necessarily Aramaic, and make it probable that it goes back to an early time.[3]

(*b*) More damaging for Jeremias is the contradiction between the *Lallwort* ('babbling sound') explanation and either of the other two. Talk of such 'babbling sounds', as the supposed origin of actual words, does occur sporadically in historical philology, mostly of a very old-fashioned kind, but it is obviously a very slippery and doubtful area. Generally speaking, a safe rule is to disbelieve any philological explanation that rests upon such babbling. The attraction of *Lallwort* explanations for the older biblical philology is well illustrated by Schrenk in TWNT, v. 948, who tells us that the Proto-Indo-European ancestors of πατήρ and μήτηρ contained, in addition to the formative element -τηρ, the 'natural sound', the *Lallwort* of the child, which was originally perceived as *pa* and *ma* and so interpreted by adults. If this is thought of as serious discussion, and somehow relevant even to the New Testament (!), it is no wonder if Jeremias went along the same path.

Obviously it would be out of place for us here to pursue the question of Indo-European origins of a word like πατήρ. But something should be said about it, because it has had great historical influence. Numerous older philologists occupied themselves with *Lallwort* theory: it goes back to the desire to find in language an element that is not arbitrary but derives perceptibly from nature. Numerous examples can be found in P. Kretschmer's *Einleitung in die Geschichte der griechischen Sprache* (1896), and for a more modern example see the section ' "Mamma" and "Papa" ' in O. Jespersen, *Language* (1922), pp. 154–60. The older dictionaries of Indo-European etymology, and especially the German ones, greatly favour the *Lallwort* account of words such as 'father' and 'mother'. Thus Jeremias in being influenced by *Lallwort* theory was very much a child of his time.

[3] Incidentally, it is remarkable that the imposing work of M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (3rd edn., 1967), appears to give no attention to any of these questions; its only reference to the matter of *'abbā* at all is in the Appendix on the Old Syriac Gospels, pp. 282 f.

But at least let it be registered that there is doubt about this kind of explanation, and much more modern work tends to go by a quite different path. Among authoritative works of reference, J. Pokorny in his *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (1959), p. 829, mentions the *Lallwort* account of the origin of 'father' but with a question mark, and sets alongside it on equal terms, also with a question mark, the idea that it is derived from a root *pō(i)* 'protect' (as in ποιμήν 'shepherd'). The *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine* of A. Ernout and A. Meillet (4th edn., 1979), pp. 487 f., says absolutely nothing about any babbling sound, and offers an explanation which must lead in another direction: what *pater* indicates is not physical paternity; it has a social value, and is connected with religion and mythology; the aspect of solemnity which attached to it had the result that people tended to use a more familiar word in its place. Similarly, the important study of E. Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society* (1973), in a chapter dedicated to 'The Importance of the Concept of Paternity' (pp. 169–74), makes no mention of infantile babbling at all and insists that the original of 'father' was a social classificatory term. And, after all, going back somewhat in time, the *Oxford English Dictionary* itself had eschewed all appeal to such babbling.

For are we really to believe that children of ancient Indo-European times babbled their *pa* and *ma*, and that their parents (who apparently, *ex hypothesi*, had up to that time had no word for 'father' or 'mother'), noted this babbling of their offspring, added to it the suffix *-tēr*, and adopted it as their own adult speech? To suppose so is to press rather far the principle of 'out of the mouth of babes and sucklings'. Let it be at least considered possible that things took the opposite course. Children's babbling 'runs through more or less the whole gamut of human speech-producing movements' (D. Abercrombie, *Elements of General Phonetics* (1967), p. 21) and does not in itself conform to the phonemic system of any one language. It is the adults who 'hear into' this complex of sounds the sounds and 'words' of baby-language that *they* consider it fitting that it should contain. It is the adult who creates the baby-language, who causes the child to say 'papa' or 'daddy' rather than some other sequence of sounds. The interaction that thus takes place is a form of training by which the child learns to select what will be linguistically relevant in his family's language.

These sounds, these embryo words, are caught up by the persons of its environment and endowed by them with the meaning which they suppose the baby has intended to convey. In this way the nurse or parents themselves create the baby language and in fact actually teach it to their child, thus

establishing early verbal communication. (L. R. Palmer, *Descriptive and Comparative Linguistics* (1972), p. 20.)

It is not necessary that readers should *accept* this alternative account of the matter, nor does that which follows depend on any one or other among the possible accounts of it. But at least it should be known that philological explanations that depend on *Lallwort* theories are subject to question.

But in any case the babbling sound' explanation, if taken seriously at all, would seem to carry us even further back into the mists of prehistory than the 'vocative' explanation has already done. For it is perhaps *conceivable* that the Semitic terms for 'mother' and 'father' (in that order, as Jeremias would have it) originated from the babbling sounds of infants, but if this were so it would have taken place some millennia before the time of Jesus. What is *not* conceivable is that the specific forms *'abbā* and *'immā* in late Hellenistic times originated from the babbling of infants. That infants of Aramaic-speaking families should have babbled in forms that have such close morphological analogies with the grammar of their parents' language is too much to believe. As an account of *'abbā* in New Testament times, infantile babbling is nonsensical.

This is important because the 'babbling sound' explanation seems to be the essential link in the connection Jeremias makes between the specific form *'abbā* and the speech of children specifically. He may, however, himself have felt some uneasiness about this connection, and records that he changed his mind about it:

> One often reads (and I myself believed it at one time) that when Jesus spoke to his heavenly Father he took up the chatter of a small child. To assume this would be a piece of inadmissible naïvety. We have seen that even grown-up sons addressed their father as *'abbā*. (*Prayers*, p. 62; cf. *NT Theology*, p. 67.)

This 'piece of inadmissible naïvety', however, is just what has remained very powerful in the minds of Jeremias' readers, and the reason can easily be seen: in spite of his change of mind, Jeremias continued to depend on the 'babbling sound' explanation. His whole explanation of the forms *'abbā* and *'immā* in *Prayers*, p. 58, depends upon it, and it is there that we find him using the telling terms 'Mama' and 'Dada'. The statement just cited seems to stand in contradiction with the insistence in the same pages that 'it was never forgotten that *'abbā* derived from the speech of children' (*Prayers*, p. 59), and, similarly, '*'abbā* was a children's word' (*NT Theology*, p. 67). If Jeremias had become aware of faults and limitations in the 'babbling sound' explanation, he nevertheless continued to write as if it could be counted upon for something. And the reason is evident: *any* word for 'father' would, by normal usage and the inherent nature of its meaning, have an obvious connection with children's use: only the 'babbling sound' explanation could concentrate the connection purely on the one form *'abbā*. If English readers of his works tell their congregations that Abba meant 'Daddy', this is why. In fact the 'babbling sound' explanation, though it might have some reality as a speculation about the remote origins of speech, tells us nothing useful about New Testament *'abbā*.

Jeremias here made a confusion that was common in the older biblical philology. He looked upon origins as if they could tell us about contemporary functions. Though based upon ideas of historical linguistics, his thoughts operated in an anti-historical fashion, for they confused processes that might possibly have happened in some remote past age with functions and meanings that were evidenced in New Testament times.

3. *The true import of the evidence.* It is not our purpose in this article to question the reality of the evidence that Jeremias carefully collected, or to add new evidence in any material degree. I shall argue rather that the same evidence upon which he relies points most naturally in a very different direction.

(*a*) The words for 'father' and 'mother' as used by children, as cited in evidence by Jeremias, have one completely obvious characteristic about them: *they are the same words as those used by adults*, completely identical. Even if *'abbā* 'originated' as a word of children, by Jesus' time it was a word of adults just as much: Jeremias himself makes this clear. But this immediately destroys the effect of some of his key examples. Take the often-cited case from the Talmud (e.g. B. Ber. 40a): 'When a child experiences the taste of wheat (i.e. when it is weaned), it learns to say *'abbā* and *'immā* (i.e. these are the first sounds it prattles)' (*Prayers*, pp. 59, 96, 111; *NT Theology*, p. 66; *Message*, p. 20). Even if we grant that the translation and interpretation offered is correct, the fact remains: the words that the child is to learn are the normal words of the language, correct and grammatical adult Aramaic. Similarly, the Targum of Isa. 8: 4 has 'before the child learns to call *'abbā* and *'immā*' (*Prayers*, p. 59): well, of course it has, for these were the normal adult words by that time, and Jeremias has already explained that they had taken over the functions of the older Hebrew *'ābī* and *'immī* 'my father' and 'my mother', which are the words of the Hebrew text of Isaiah. Thus the Targum translates the normal adult words of biblical Hebrew, to be learned by the growing child, into the corresponding normal adult words of contemporary Aramaic. Thus the example points in the opposite direction from that implied by the use that Jeremias makes of it.

The same is true of the school-children who were sent to Ḥanin ha-Neḥba at times when rain was needed: the Aramaic words of their refrain are quoted and translated as:

'abbā 'abbā hab lan miṭrā
Daddy, daddy, give us rain

—so *Prayers*, pp. 61, 111; *NT Theology*, p. 65, and surely this passage and its rendering have been a large factor in leading the general reader towards the nuance 'Daddy' for other cases of *'abbā*. But the translation 'Daddy' is tendentious, for once again the children are using exactly the same form which adults used. They *had* no word that was of a special nuance like our 'Daddy'. What the children said was: 'Father, father, give us rain.'

The same is true of the argument, frequently repeated, that Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret, 'born in Antioch of well-to-do parents and probably growing up under the supervision of Syrian nurses and nurserymaids', know from their own experience that small children call their fathers *'abbā* (*Prayers*, pp. 59 f., with texts helpfully cited on p. 60 n. 41; again, pp. 96, 111 n.; *Message*, p. 20). *Of course* they said *'abbā*, and for the reason that Jeremias himself suggests: the substrate language was Aramaic/Syriac and was used by nurses and among children; but *'abbā* in that language was the normal adult word (most of these children doubtless spoke Greek as they grew older).

Thus *'abbā* was the adult word, though used very heavily by children. Jeremias does indeed use another argument: 'it was never forgotten that *'abbā* derived from the language of small children.' But, as we have shown, it is not at all certain that it was *derived* from the speech of small children in this way; only if we accept, and emphasize, the *Lallwort* explanation, can that be true. And, even if it was so *derived*, that is a different mater from function. Moreover, even if it were so derived, that is a different matter from supposing that people were *conscious* of this derivation. To think so is a mistaken projection of our historical–philological interests into the minds of people who knew and cared nothing for such things.

In fact what existed was not an awareness of the derivation, but an awareness of the actual use. *Of course* *'abbā* had a noticeable connection with children; but this was not because of the derivation of the word, but because children are more dependent on parents and more likely to address them frequently. *'Abbā*, as Jeremias himself insists, is used by all sorts of people, all sorts of ages. But young children are likely to use it more frequently than adults, and more likely to use it in a vocative function, calling for the attention of a father, than any other group. Thus it may be quite right that *'abbā*

was specially associated with small children. But this is not because it is the specific form *'abbā*: on the contrary, the same would be true of any term with the meaning 'father', especially a term used in a vocative function, and still more if it also functioned, as *'abbā* did, for 'my father' and the like in statements. Jeremias thus mixes up what is true only of *'abbā* and what would be true, in principle, of any word that means 'father', in any language. Thus he may be quite right in saying that to address God as 'father' is very fitting for those who are also told, elsewhere, that they are to be 'like little children'; but this would be the same whatever the word for 'father', and thus has nothing to do with the specific form *'abbā*.

(*b*) To this we have to add *the evidence of the Targums*. Jeremias studied these intensively, and emphasizes their evidence a good deal. But his attention falls primarily on one question: whether *God is addressed* as *'abbā*, or indeed whether he is addressed with any term meaning 'father' (e.g. *Prayers*, pp. 60 f., 110 f.; *NT Theology*, p. 65). As he does not fail to show, examples using *'abbā* in addressing God are very few, and necessarily so, since there are few places in the Hebrew itself where God is *addressed* as 'father'. But we may study the Targum from another point of view, namely to consider whether, when it uses *'abbā* of a *human* father, it conveys a nuance that is childish and familiar or one that is adult and serious.

Now Aramaic *'abbā* is a fairly standard rendering for the Hebrew *'ābī* 'my father', and a glance at the many instances is enough to make it clear that they occur in a context that is adult, serious, and religiously solemn, that is, that 'Father' or 'my father' is a much more appropriate English gloss than 'Daddy'. One would be trivializing and vulgarizing the diction of the Targum if one were to render passages such as the following with 'Daddy' or 'Dad': just consider:

Gen. 20: 12 She is my sister, Dad's own daughter
22: 7 And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, Dad!
27: 31 And he [Esau] said to his father, Let Dad arise and eat from his son's food
31: 5 And the God of my Daddy has been my support
31: 42 The God of my Daddy, the God of Abraham . . .

All of these are *'abbā*, not only in Targum Onkelos, but also in Neofiti. The inconcinnity of the rendering 'Daddy' or 'Dad' is too obvious to need further remark. Note especially at Gen. 27: 31 the collocation of *'abbā* with the formal third-person style. In 20: 12 Abraham seems to be already nearly a hundred years old, while in chap. 31 Jacob, the speaker, has already been working for Laban for 20 years (Gen. 31; 41). The nuance is that of 'father', and not that of 'Daddy', throughout.

(*c*) *The Greek word used in the New Testament is always the normal adult word* πατήρ *and never a diminutive* or a word particularly belonging to the speech of children. Words somewhat similar in nuance and usage to our 'Daddy' did exist in Greek but there is not hint of any of them in the language of the Bible. One would scarcely expect to find the Homeric ἄττα (though it is more convincing as a *Lallwort* than most). The Revd J. L. Houlden kindly mentioned to me πατρίδιον, found in Aristophanes and later comic poets, but it is not easy to imagine it in the New Testament, having as it does the air of a 'wheedling diminutive' (words of D. M. MacDowell in his edition of Aristophanes' *Wasps* (1971), p. 259 on l. 986).

The word that would be most likely by far is πάπας or πάππας (παππίας and παππίδιον also exist). These words can hardly have been unknown to New Testament writers. The contemporary Stoic writer Cornutus uses πάπας. It too is much more like a real *Lallwort* than πατήρ could ever be. It was really used in speech with children. No less a person than Epicurus uses it in a letter to a small boy, writing:

εἰ συ ὑγιαίνεις καὶ ἡ μάμμη σου
καὶ πάπαι . . . πάντα πείθῃ
'. . . if you and your Mamma are well, and if you obey
your Dad in everything . . .'

(see *Epicuro*, ed. G. Arrighetti (Turin, 1960), 176. 5, p. 433; the Italian translation charmingly uses *Mamma* and *Babbo)*. Moreover πάπας, just as is said to be true of *'abbā*, seems at times to be on its way from being a children's word, 'Daddy', to becoming a familiar expression for 'father', as we see in P. Giessen 80.3 (second century AD):

ἀσπάζεταί σε . . . Τινουτις καὶ ὁ πάπας αὐτῆς
'Tinoutis and her father greet you.'

The mythological figure Attis is sometimes called Papas or Zeus Papas.

Thus words expressing the nuance 'Daddy' were available; but of course none of them are found in biblical Greek, and no wonder: they were quite unsuitable for biblical style. If the New Testament writers had been conscious of the nuance 'Daddy' they could easily have expressed themselves so; but in fact they were well aware that the nuance was not that of 'Daddy' but that of 'father'.

Thus, to sum up this section, the semantics of *'abbā* itself, the usage of the Targum, and the choice of vocabulary in the New Testament all agree in supporting the nuance 'father' rather than the nuance 'Daddy'. Though Jeremias did not expressly say that the

nuance was that of 'Daddy', he certainly used evidence and arguments in a way that naturally created that impression. Like many exegetes of his time, he allowed diachronic arguments about origins and developments to interfere with the assessment of the synchronic state of the language in the given period. On the central synchronic question, that of the nuance of *'abbā*, his opinion was the opposite of the reality: he allowed it to seem that Jesus was using a childish term, when the fact was that children, so far as we can tell from the literature, used the adult term.

These conclusions in themselves do not appear to upset Jeremias' wider argumentation. It may be fully probable that Jesus' addressing of God as 'father' is connected with his requirement that his followers should be 'like children', even if this not related to the specific term *'abbā* in the way that has been suggested. It may also be quite true that the use of *'abbā* was original with Jesus and historically genuine: I have no wish to dispute this, but the points that have been implied about meanings of words and about techniques of translation may affect our assurance about the degree to which this can be proved.

4. *Another semantic aspect.* Even if *'abbā* is not special through being a word of children, there may nevertheless be something about it which was significant in the meaning patterns of early Christianity and which caused the term to be remembered as it was, when so very few of the semitic-language terms of Jesus were remembered.

(*a*) *'abbā* in its common vocative function seems to have been closer to 'father!' than to the specific '*my* father!' The contrast with biblical Hebrew is marked. In Hebrew a son addressing a father would say *'ābī* 'my father' (e.g. Gen. 22: 7, Isaac to Abraham); he (it seems) could not say 'father!' without specifying '*my* father'. If one wanted to say something different, for example, '*our* father', then that would require a different form. There was, so far as we can learn from the biblical text, no way of saying 'father!' without such specification: unless, of course, *'abbā* already existed in that function, as discussed above. In later Hebrew and Aramaic the existence of *'abbā* made a difference to this. *'Abbā* said 'father!' but did not specify. Naturally among all cases a very large majority were in fact 'my father', but this was not expressly stated. The vocative expression named the relationship but did not name the other person involved in the relationship, even if that aspect was perfectly well known: compare the usage in *Come here, child!*, which leaves it open whether the child addressed is the child of the speaker or of someone else (example taken from J. Lyons, *Semantics* (1977), p. 217). Since for Jesus God was not only 'my father' (i.e. his own personal father) but also 'the Father' and 'your' or 'our' Father, this may well be significant. I do not necessarily suggest

that this was the reason why he used the expression *'abbā*; but, if that expression had not then existed and indeed been the most generally used, it might have been much more difficult to unite the range of meanings in the way that he did. Thus the use of *'abbā* may be highly significant for New Testament theology, but in a mode somewhat different from that which has been cited in the present discussion.

(*b*) This brings us back to one of the most striking facts in the whole matter: *in all three places where the New Testament has the full phrase ''Abba, Father', the Greek has the nominative with article*: ἀββᾶ ὁ πατήρ (Mark 14: 36; Rom. 8: 15; Gal. 4: 6). The unanimity of this Greek rendering suggests two things: (i) that it was a rather literal rendering which sought to represent the different elements within the Semitic form;[4] (ii) that, if so, it understood *'abbā* as in effect an emphatic state form and thus literally to be rendered '*the* father'. This does not mean that it was not recognized as a vocative function: surely it was, the context makes that plain. But it was, as they saw it, a vocative function of an emphatic state expression, which in itself meant 'the father', and which could thus be represented by nominative with article in Greek. That this could be done is confirmed by the fact that nouns in the nominative, with article, in vocative function are sporadically found in the New Testament, notably ὁ πατήρ at Matt. 11: 26, parallel Luke 10: 21, in both cases directly following the grammatical vocative πάτερ.

Now this partly agrees with what Jeremias says. He accepts that the Greek rendering ὁ πατήρ in ἀββᾶ ὁ πατήρ takes it as emphatic state, and by implication this means that it is a literal rendering. It was, he rightly says, the same as *talīthā* rendered as τὸ κοράσιον, nominative with article, in vocative function, in Mark 5: 41 (*Prayers*, p. 56). But he goes on to say that the translation was *mistaken* in taking *'abbā* as an emphatic state form: *'abbā* was 'wrongly understood as a determinative form' (*Prayers*, p. 109 n. 3). But were they in fact wrong in this? We have seen that Jeremias, along with some noted Semitists, rejected the 'emphatic state' explanation in favour of the 'vocative' explanation. But here again we have to distinguish between what was the case in remote proto-Semitic times and what was understood in New Testament times. In whatever way things may have begun, by these later times *'abbā*, though very commonly used in vocative address, was also the common noun form meaning 'the father' and was also used in the first person possessive relation, 'my

[4] On the analysis of modes of literalism, see J. Barr, 'The Typology of Literalism in ancient biblical translations', *Nachrichten* (Göttingen Academy of Sciences, 1979). In this case the literalism depends essentially on segmentation of the Semitic form, that is, on analysing it into the two elements 'father' and 'the', each of which has to be represented in Greek.

father', and all of this is clearly stated by Jeremias himself. But in effect this set of facts is more naturally taken in the other way: for them, in New Testament times, *'abbā was* the emphatic state of the word for 'father'. It belonged to the same morphological type, and functioned in the same way.[5] To them it was thus a straightforward emphatic state form, 'the father', which also had the vocative function 'father!' (just as in biblical Hebrew vocative functions commonly had the article, so that one said 'the king', *ha-melek*, where we in English would say 'O king!' or the like (Gesenius–Kautzsch–Cowley, §126, p. 405)) and the possessive relation 'my [your, our] father'. Within their own terms, in the New Testament period, the writers were not at all mistaken, but were quite right, in treating the form as an emphatic state form used, as the Greek nominative could be, in a vocative function. And this is why the rendering of *'abbā* with ὁ πατήρ was so very stable, recurring as it does in every single instance that we possess.

Now this is important for another point in Jeremias' argumentation. 'Whereas there is not a single instance of God being addressed as Abba in the literature of Jewish prayer, Jesus *always* [my italics] addressed him in this way (with the exception of the cry from the cross, Mark. 15: 34 par.)'—so *Prayers*, p. 57, and see generally pp. 55–7, 111, and *NT Theology*, pp. 64 f. Whenever Jesus addressed God as Father, he used *'abbā*. But if this is so it produces two or three further problems.

First, as we have seen, all three cases where the Semitic *'abbā* is quoted have the Greek in the nominative with article, ὁ πατήρ; and we have seen reason to see this as a literal rendering which implies diagnosis of the form as emphatic state. If this understanding was both widespread and also more or less right in itself, then we might expect it to be widely represented in other places where Jesus addressed God as 'Father'. This, however, is not so: the *only* places where we have ὁ πατήρ in vocative function appear to be Matt. 11: 26, parallel Luke 10:21, and in both of these they are preceded by the grammatical vocative πάτερ. This must mean, if all places of this kind really came from an original *'abbā*, that the literal sort of rendering found in the three cases which have ἀββᾶ actually written, and the analysis of the Semitic form that that rendering implied, had been quickly forgotten, ignored, or considered incorrect or unsuitable. This is of course not impossible, but the fact in itself makes it less *absolutely* clear that all addresses to the Father derive from the one

[5] This may receive some confirmation from the fact that, of the few cases in the Hebrew Bible which have 'father' with definite article, *hā-'āb*, all three (Ezek. 18: 4, 19, 20) are rendered in Targum Jonathan with *'abbā*: 'as the soul of the father (*'abbā*), so the soul of the son (*bᵉrā*)'.

original *'abbā*. And this argument seems not to be considered by Jeremias.

Jeremias' own argument goes in the opposite direction. The Greek varies a great deal: commonly it has vocative πάτερ; twice it has vocative with genitive, πάτερ μου (Matt. 26: 39, 42); twice, as mentioned above, it has nominative with article, ὁ πατήρ (Matt. 11: 26; Luke 10: 21); in addition there are some cases of nominative πατήρ without article (several possible cases in John 17, depending on choice as between manuscript traditions; see *Prayers*, pp. 56 f. and n. 12). The existence of all this variation is taken by Jeremias as a positive proof that all cases derived from the one original, *'abbā*. One variation, indeed, namely the cases of nominative πατήρ without article, may perhaps be ignored as a variation purely within the Greek (*Prayers*, p. 56), but the difference between πάτερ, πάτερ μου, and ὁ πατήρ is a serious matter. The fact of this difference points to the one form, *'abbā*, that lies behind them all. This word could be a form of address, or it could be the emphatic state, or it could stand for the form with first person suffix (*Prayers*, p. 56). Therefore, we can be sure that the addressing of God as father goes back to *'abbā* not only at Mark 14: 36, where ἀββᾶ appears expressly in the Greek text, but in all the other passages as well.

If this is true, however, it must mean that a substantial change of translation technique had somewhere taken place. In *every* case where the Semitic *'abbā* is cited, the translation is the same, ὁ πατήρ, and an explanation of how this translation was arrived at can be offered; but, where the actual word *'abbā* is not quoted, the renderings differ considerably, only two cases agree with those that are found where *'abbā* is quoted, and we therefore have to assume that the process followed was one of a much freer sort of translation. As a hypothesis this is by no means impossible; but as a *proof* that *'abbā* was original in *all* cases where Jesus addressed God as Father it is by no means adequate.

And in fact at this point Jeremias mixes in the quite different argument that the original must have been *'abbā* because there was no other word that could have been used: 'there was no other equivalent of the address "my father" available either in Aramaic or in Hebrew, as spoken in Palestine in the time of Jesus' (*Prayers*, p. 56). Well, maybe; but these negative arguments are not very strong demonstration.

Obviously, it is difficult to prove *exactly* what was current usage in the time of Jesus, but anything in the Dead Sea Scrolls must come close enough to count as evidence, even if it may come from a century earlier or later. The Aramaic of Qumran, according to Fitzmyer, 'substantially increases our knowledge of the type of Aramaic used in

Palestine in the first century BC and AD' (J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave I* (1966), p. 18). Perhaps we might most safely count it earlier rather than later, but in any case relevant for the time of Jesus.[6] Now in the Genesis Apocryphon we have 'my father' three times (2: 19, 24; 3: 3), as in 'I, Lamech, ran to Methuselah my father' (2: 19), and every one of these is *'by*, that is, the traditional Aramaic form with possessive suffix, to be read *'ᵃbī*. In another fragment of the same sort (*DJD*, iii. 117, text 6Q8 1 4, photograph easily readable on Plate 24, no. 1) we have

brq'l 'by 'my hwh
'Barakiel my father was with me'

—again the same Aramaic form. There is no sign of *'abbā* anywhere in any of the documents thus far published, so far as I can see at present.

Again, the Job Targum (Col. 31: 5=Job 38: 28; pp. 72 f. of the edition) has:

h'yty lmṭr' 'b
'does the rain have a father?'

—that is, *'ab* and not *'abbā*. It is not certain, of course, that *'abbā* would have been used here, the noun being indefinite, but it might well have been, if it had spread as widely as is postulated by the arguments of Jeremias. Cf. *miṭrā* 'rain', above, p. 36, which is just as indefinite but is in the emphatic state.

It is clear that, even if Jeremias was right in his positive insistence on the wide extension of *'abbā* and its taking over of functions that had belonged to other forms, he was wrong in going beyond this and coming to the negative conclusion that it had *completely* displaced these other forms. Clearly it was, in the time of Jesus, so far as our present knowledge goes, perfectly possible that suffixed forms such as *'ᵃbī*, which specify 'my' father, would be used and readily understood.

One interesting case consists in the Synoptic parallels to Mark 14: 36, the words in Gethsemane. Mark has ἀββᾶ ὁ πατήρ; Matt. 26: 39

[6] Jeremias is, indeed, not unaware of the Genesis Apocryphon material, and cites it in *Prayers*, p. 58 n. But his reference on that same page, when he writes that *'abbā* 'suppressed the "Imperial Aramaic" and biblical–Hebraic form of address . . . all along the line', must imply that he classified the language of the Genesis Apocryphon with 'Imperial Aramaic' and, therefore, as too early to be relevant for Jesus' own speech. But such finely drawn limits are surely very precarious. Scholarly opinion will generally set the Genesis Apocryphon later than Daniel, and therefore most probably within the first century BC (see Fitzmyer, op. cit., pp. 14–25, and J. Barr in the *Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 2 (forthcoming), pp. 88–96). If it is even possible to set this work within the first century BC, it is impossible to say that its linguistic forms could not have been used by Jesus.

has πάτερ μου, and Luke 22: 42 has πάτερ alone. (Matthew repeats his πάτερ μου at 26: 42, in a saying not found in the other two Gospels.) Jeremias treats these as three different renderings of the one original *'abbā* (*Prayers*, p. 56). But it would also be possible to explain the differences as adjustments within the Greek tradition. If so understood, Matthew and Luke both altered the diction away from Mark's, dropping the Aramaic word and rewriting his rather unusual Greek as a vocative (even though Matthew did have ὁ πατήρ in vocative function at Matt. 11: 26, this would still be possible: it would only mean that Matthew was not consistent in doing this). The different Greek expressions for God as father would not be different 'translations' of the one word *'abbā* but different expressions of the generally received tradition that Jesus addressed God as Father. Again we repeat: if the variation of expressions means different translations of the one term *'abbā*, then this means a serious change of translation technique as against those few cases where *'abbā* is actually present in the Greek text; if, on the other hand, the same sort of translation technique which produced ἀββᾶ ὁ πατήρ uniformly in three very different places also existed in the rest of the Gospel material, then it would suggest that variations such as ὁ πατήρ, πάτερ, and πάτερ μου go back, in spite of everything, to forms that were different in Semitic.

These questions are important when we move from the cases of Jesus' own direct address to God in prayer to other cases, for example to the many places where Jesus refers to God as 'the father', 'your father', or 'our father'. A particularly striking case is the beginning of the Lord's Prayer. Luke 11: 2 begins with the one word πάτερ; Matt. 6: 9 has the much fuller exordium πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. According to Jeremias, the Lucan form is the original and goes back also to *'abbā*. Matthew, by constrast, 'has a sonorous address . . . such as corresponded to pious Jewish–Palestinian custom' (*Prayers*, p. 91). The Matthean version then resulted from an expansion, not made by the evangelist himself, who would never have dared to do such a thing, but by Jewish–Palestinian liturgical style. The expansion must then have been very early. But, on the other hand, the expansion produces something very like the Hebrew prayer exordium *'ābīnū-še-ba-šāmayim*, precisely 'our Father, which art in Heaven', and Jeremias writes, correctly, that the appearance of this form in the Lord's Prayer demonstrates that it must have existed as early as the first century AD (*Prayers*, p. 26). But if this is so, and it seems right, then it suggests: (*a*) the probability of a form that specifies '*our* father' rather than the indeterminate *'abbā*, and (*b*) the likelihood that Jesus himself might have used exactly this form too, either in Hebrew or in Aramaic. Not that I question the originality of the Lucan form; I

simply do not see that the linguistic evidence excludes an equal 'originality' for the Matthean form. Moreover, if this form of prayer exordium already existed in the first century, this fact seems somewhat to make vain all the strenuous effort deployed in order to show that it was extremely rare to address God as Father before Jesus himself did so.

In fact elsewhere Jeremias, handling the Matthean form, takes a different course: the address πάτερ, as in Luke, goes back to an Aramaic *'abbā*, 'which is here to be translated "our Father" (thus rightly Matt. 6: 9)' (*NT Theology*, p. 197). So the '*our* father' of Matthew is also the product of (correct) translation from *'abbā*. But this becomes almost too much to believe. So much is made to depend on the idea that *'abbā* can mean so many different things, so that so many different 'translations' of it are all correct. In view of the many places where we have expressions such as '*our* father', '*your* father' and so on, one really finds it easier to believe that these go back to a Semitic original that specified 'our', 'your', etc.—or else, of course, that these differences originated in a Greek tradition anyway and therefore are not translated from a Semitic original at all. But if either of these things is right, then it reflects upon the central cases like πάτερ μου in direct address to God, which have been discussed above. How can we be sure that all these derive from *'abbā* and not from a form, Hebrew or Aramaic, that specifies *of whom*, at this point, God is the father?

In saying that *'abbā* at Matt. 6:9 is 'rightly translated' with 'our Father', Jeremias in his *NT Theology* adds in a footnote (p. 197 n. 1) a reference to some Rabbinic passages which he takes to validate this view. He does not explain how this is so, but, one must suppose, it is because they are passages where several persons speak of a father as *'abbā* and thus as 'our father'. But any thought about these passages quickly makes it clear that they do not have this implication for the words as used by Jesus. Take a typical case like B. Bathra 9: 3, one of those cited. Sons are discussing what their father left to them. They say (in Danby's translation, *The Mishnah*, p. 378), 'See, what our father [*'abbā*] has left us . . .' The word is *'abbā* and of course one can rightly translate it as 'our father'. But they did not actually *say* 'our father', they did not specify 'our': what they said, more accurately, was 'See what Father left us'. In other words, these are cases of a *natural family*, in which, when they say *'abbā*, it can only mean the father that they have in common. They did not *specify* that it was 'our' father and they could not have done so by using *'abbā*. They would have had to use *'ābīnū* in Hebrew, or a corresponding form in Aramaic. I doubt if there can be any case of *'abbā* that actually specifies 'our'. Jesus as portrayed in Matt. 6: 9 is talking in a quite different situation: he is teaching a prayer for his disciples to use. It

can be significant, for such a heterogeneous group (including all Christians of ages to come), that 'our' is specified, even if it is also possible (as in Luke) to have the same prayer in substance without such specification. The πάτερ ἡμῶν of Matt. 6: 9 is probably intended to specify 'our'. If so, it did not come from *'abbā*.

5. *Conclusions*. This article has not attempted to go into all the questions that are relevant or to survey every aspect of the evidence. We leave aside, for example, the discussion of Sir. 23: 1, 4, where the Greek κύριε πάτερ *might* be evidence of an address to God as Father, in Hebrew and two centuries before Jesus (cf. *Prayers*, pp. 28 f.; *NT Theology*, pp. 63 f.). We also leave aside the alleged lack of *'abbā* in address to God in the Targum (see *Prayers*, pp. 60 f.; *NT Theology*, p. 65), remarking only (*a*) that, since there are so few places in the Hebrew text where God is addressed as 'my father', it is not surprising if there are only very few cases with corresponding *'abbā* in the Targum, so that even the two cases recognized by Jeremias (Mal. 2: 10; Ps. 89: 27) do not seem to be a poor representation; (*b*) that, even where the Targum renders with *ribbōnī* for Hebrew *'ābī* (Jer. 3: 4, 19), this in itself hardly proves the drastic conclusion that the Targum was 'deliberately' avoiding *'abbā*. In matters of this kind one cannot help feeling that Jeremias has made the non-use of *'abbā* before Jesus into an apologetic matter, which status then forces him to press such arguments harder than they ought to be pressed. But we will say no more about these other aspects of the subject, and within the limits of the discussion in this article we can speak of one or two certainties and some probabilities.

(*a*) It is fair to say that *'abbā* in Jesus' time belonged to a familiar or colloquial register of language, as distinct from more formal and ceremonious usage, though it would be unwise, in view of the usage of the Targum, to press this too far. But in any case it was not a childish expression comparable with 'Daddy': it was more a solemn, responsible, adult address to a Father.

(*b*) While it is *possible* that all cases in which Jesus addresses God as 'father' derive from an original *'abbā*, it is impossible to *prove* that this is so, for there are alternative hypotheses which seem to fit the evidence equally well. The fact that *'abbā* is cited only once in all the Gospels, while it could mean that it was a typical expression used many times, could also mean that it was a less usual expression, specially quoted because of its use at a critical moment in the Garden of Gethsemane. In particular, in so far as Greek expressions can be said to derive from precise Semitic originals, it is likely that these originals included expressions that specified 'my' or 'our' or 'your' father and in this respect differed from *'abbā*. It is also possible that

many cases of address to God as Father have arisen in their present form within the Greek tradition and thus cannot be directly tied to any one precise Semitic original.

(*c*) The use of *'abbā* could in principle be within either Hebrew or Aramaic speech. In either case *'abbā*, though commonly used in address to one's own father, did not specify 'my' father expressly. Within both languages it was probably possible to use a form that specified 'my' father as distinct from 'father'; and on our present knowledge the existence and use of such a form is actually better evidenced in Aramaic.

(*d*) Although the use of *'abbā* in address to God *may* have been first originated by Jesus, it remains difficult to prove how constant and pervasive this element was in his expression of himself; and it is therefore difficult to prove that it is a quite central keystone in our total understanding of him.

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JAMES BARR