

THE SYRIAC VERSIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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1. Introduction

Since the end of the second century, Syriac-speaking Christians have had their own translation of the Old Testament, made on the basis of the Hebrew original. This translation, called 'Peshitta', has been in use up to the present day and there are no plans to revise or replace it. Of course, members of the Syriac churches use versions in other languages and in neo-Aramaic as well, but this does not alter the fact that the Peshitta is accepted by all and is indeed 'widespread', as a possible rendering of the name Peshitta indicates. The Peshitta has even been used as the basis for new translations in other languages². However, the position of the Peshitta has not always been unchallenged. Syriac exegetes knew that there were other versions of the Scriptures, and some tried to replace the Peshitta as a whole, or certain of its readings, by these. This essay discusses the Peshitta itself, but also provides some information on the later Syriac versions of the Old Testament. Pride of place among these is taken by the Syro-Hexapla, the version made by Paul of Tella on the basis of the Septuagint column of Origen's *Hexapla*, a Bible containing

¹ The author's research is supported by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO).

² Cf. S.P. BROCK, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, (SEERI Correspondence Course on Christian Heritage 1; Kottayam, [1989]), p. 55, and P.B. DIRKSEN, *La Peshitta dell'Antico Testamento*, (Studi Biblici 103; Brescia, 1993), p. 19.

the Hebrew text as well as a number of Greek versions in six parallel columns.

2. The Name 'Peshitta'

It is only in the ninth century that we find the first attestation of the name 'Peshitta'. Moses bar Kepha (d. 903) uses the name in his *Hexaemeron*³ and his *Introduction to the Psalter*⁴. He explains that he knew of two translations in Syriac: the Peshitta, based on the Hebrew text, and Paul of Tella's translation from the Greek text of the Septuagint. Earlier references, in Syriac as well as in Greek sources, simply refer to 'the Syrian'.

The word *Peshitta* is the feminine passive participle of the verb ܦܫܬܐ, 'to stretch out, to extend'⁵. It presupposes the word *mappaqta*, 'translation'. The precise sense of this participle is no longer clear. In other contexts, it often means 'simple'. It is possible that this is also the sense when the word is applied to the Syriac Bible. Barhebraeus clearly assumed this, as he says: '...their translation, called Peshitta because it abstains from eloquent language in its translation, agrees with the text of

³ *Der Hexaemeronkommentar des Moses bar Kepha*, transl. L. Schlimme (Göttinger Orientforschungen [GOF] I. Syriaca 14.1; Wiesbaden, 1977), pp. 167-73. The Syriac text has not yet been edited.

⁴ *Eine jakobitische Einleitung in den Psalter in Verbindung mit zwei Homilien aus dem grossen Psalmenkommentar des Daniel von Salah zum ersten Male herausgegeben, übersetzt und bearbeitet*, ed. and transl. G. Dietrich, (BZAW 5; Giessen, 1901), pp. 106-16. For the attribution to Moses bar Kepha, see J.-M. VOSTÉ, 'L'introduction de Mose bar Kepha aux Psaumes de David', *Revue Biblique* 38 (1929), pp. 214-28.

⁵ For a survey of the different opinions on the translation of the name 'Peshitta', see P.B. DIRKSEN, 'The Old Testament Peshitta', in: M.J. Mulder (ed.), *Mikra. Text, Translation, Reading, and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum 2. The Literature of the Jewish People in the Period of the Second Temple and the Talmud 1 (Assen/Maastricht-Philadelphia, 1988), p. 256.

the Jews'⁶. Modern scholars, however, have suggested two other options. On the basis of the sense of the verb, L. Bertholdt and E. Nestle thought the participle should be interpreted as 'widespread', in the sense of 'in common use', just like the Latin word *vulgata*. The Syriac Bible based on the Hebrew was indeed in common use, in contrast to the versions made on the basis of the Greek Septuagint, which never became very popular. F. Field, on the other hand, accepted the usual sense of the participle, but interpreted it as 'single' rather than as 'abstaining from eloquent language'. This also assumes that the name was intended to contrast the version with the Syro-Hexapla, the word *Hexapla* meaning 'six-fold'.

3. Manuscripts and Other Sources

The present editions of the Peshitta are based on manuscripts: codices written on parchment or paper by hand. The oldest manuscripts date from the fifth century. One of these is the oldest dated biblical manuscript in any language: British Library Add 14512 (5ph1 according to the system of the Peshitta Institute, in which the first digit refers to the century) from the year 771 'according to the Greeks', that is, AD 459/60. This means that there is a gap of almost three hundred years between the years in which the Peshitta was translated and the oldest manuscript known to us. Several generations of copying separate the original translation and the copies we have. In the course of this period, the text may of course have been changed or corrupted. To make things worse, the oldest manuscripts do not contain the Peshitta as a whole. 5ph1 contains fragments of Isaiah and Ezekiel. 5b1, dated to 463/64, contains the Pentateuch, but the early date only applies to the first two books: Genesis and Exodus.

The oldest complete Syriac Old Testament known to us is the so-called Codex Ambrosianus, from the Ambrosian Library in Milan (MS B. 21 Inf.). As the name 7a1 in the Leiden edition indicates, this manuscript

⁶ This comes from Barhebraeus' *Compendious History of Dynasties*, written in Arabic. The text is quoted in N. WISEMAN, *Horae Syriacae, seu commentationes et anecdota res vel litteras Syriacas spectantia* (Rome, 1828), pp. 92-94.

may have been written in the seventh century. As it is not dated, this is just an educated guess; some have opted for the sixth century. There are only a few of such complete Bibles or *pandects*. We may assume that their text is of a composite nature: the copyist probably had to use biblical manuscripts containing smaller groups of books as his model. This is also reflected in the order and choice of books, which appears not to have been seen as being completely fixed. Some features are shared by several pandects, such as the fact that Job follows immediately after the Pentateuch (perhaps he was associated with the patriarchal era, as he was identified with Jobab of Gen. 10:29) and that all books on women were grouped together (Ruth, Susanna, Esther, and Judith). The first feature has been reproduced in Lee's edition. The pandects also contain a number of books that are considered apocryphal or deuterocanonical by western churches, and some works that are not even part of this category, such as IV Ezra and the Apocalypse of Baruch.

In light of the distance between the original translation and the oldest manuscripts, it is very important to use all additional sources we can find. The Peshitta is already quoted in the *Diatessaron*, it would seem⁷. This Gospel harmony from the second century, or at least the Syriac version of it, may have taken quotations from the Old Testament from the Peshitta rather than from the Greek text of the Gospels. Unfortunately, full copies of the Syriac text of the *Diatessaron* itself have not come down to us; it has to be reconstructed on the basis of quotations. A very important source of direct quotations from the Old Testament Peshitta is formed by the quotations of the fourth-century Syriac father Ephrem the Syrian⁸. His *Commentary on Genesis and Exodus* in particular contains many literal translations, which show that he had a copy of the biblical text at hand. Aphrahat's quotations, from the same century, are less reliable. He

⁷ Sebastian P. BROCK, 'Limitations of Syriac in Representing Greek', in Bruce M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations*, (Oxford, 1977), pp. 83-98, especially 97-98. This position is strongly advocated by Jan JOOSTEN, 'The Old Testament Quotations in the Old Syriac and Peshitta Gospels: A Contribution to the Study of the Diatessaron', *Textus* 15 (1990), pp. 55-76.

⁸ A.G.P. JANSON, *De Abrahamcyclus in de Genesiscommentaar van Efreem de Syriër*, (doctoral dissertation Leiden; Zoetermeer, 1998).

appears to have cited from memory in a loose manner⁹. A special category of Peshitta quotations is formed by the readings of 'the Syrian' (Σύρος) in Greek exegetes. Eusebius of Emesa, a contemporary of Ephrem, born in Edessa and bilingual, wrote commentaries in Greek on the Septuagint. At some instances he translated the reading of the Peshitta for his Greek public, as an alternative to a difficult Septuagint reading. Most of the Greek Peshitta quotations in other authors derive from him; Theodoret of Cyrhus (d. c.458) seems to have been the only other Greek exegete who had independent access to a Syriac Bible¹⁰. Together with Ephrem and Aphrahat, Eusebius and Theodoret are the main witnesses to the Peshitta text before the earliest surviving biblical manuscript.

4. Text Editions

The first printed edition of part of the Syriac Bible was the edition of the Psalms that was published in Quzhaya, Lebanon, in 1610—in fact the first work printed in this country. It was followed in 1625 by two more editions of the Psalms: that of the Maronite Gabriel Sionita, published in Paris, and that of Thomas van Erpe (Erpenius), a famous professor of Arabic, printed in Leiden, the Netherlands. The latter edition is still important for some of its conjectures.

The first printed edition of the Peshitta as a whole is found in the Paris Polyglot. A Polyglot prints the biblical text in several languages for comparison. The Syriac text, edited by Gabriel Sionita, appeared in 1645. It was based, unfortunately, on a rather poor manuscript: 17a5 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Syr. 6). In its turn, the Paris Polyglot became the basis of the London Polyglot published by Brian Walton in 1657. This edition adds a number of variant readings from manuscripts present in

⁹ Robert J. OWENS, Jr., *The Genesis and Exodus Citations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage*, (MPIL 3; Leiden, 1983).

¹⁰ R.B. ter Haar ROMENY, *A Syrian in Greek Dress. The Use of Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac Biblical Texts in Eusebius of Emesa's Commentary on Genesis*, (*Traditio Exegetica Graeca* 6; Leuven, 1997), pp. 71-86.

English libraries, but otherwise just reproduces the Paris text. The text most widely available today goes back to that of Walton, and thus eventually to the Paris manuscript 17a5: in 1823 Samuel Lee published his edition of the Peshitta under the auspices of the British and Foreign Bible Society, adopting the text of the London Polyglot while making some use of the so-called Buchanan Bible (manuscript 12a1, brought from India to Cambridge by the missionary Claude Buchanan). This edition was intended originally for the Syriac churches on the Malabar coast in India, but it received a much wider circulation. The United Bible Societies have been publishing reprints of Lee's edition up to this day.

Whereas Lee's edition was printed in the West Syrian *serto* script, the same century also saw two editions in East Syrian type: the so-called Urmia and Mosul Bibles. In 1852 the former appeared. It had been prepared by Justin Perkins, a Methodist missionary sent to Urmia in Persia in 1834 by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions of Boston, Massachusetts. The purpose of this mission was, as they expressed it, to raise the spiritual and cultural level of the 'Nestorians'. In parallel columns, it gives the text of the Peshitta based on Lee's edition, corrected in some instances on the basis of a number of manuscripts that were available locally, and a new translation of the Hebrew text into neo-Aramaic¹¹. It is assumed that the text of the Mosul edition, in its turn, goes back to the Urmia edition¹². The Dominicans who published this edition in Mosul in 1887 for the Chaldeans probably also introduced changes on the basis of local manuscripts, and added the text of the apocryphal or deuterocanonical books. J.M. Vosté prepared a reprint of this edition with some corrections, which was published in 1952 in Beirut. Another version of the Urmia edition was printed in 1913 by the Trinitarian Bible Society in London.

A nineteenth-century edition of a completely different nature was A.M. Ceriani's facsimile publication of the manuscript 7a1, the oldest codex containing the complete text of the Peshitta, from the Ambrosian

¹¹ P.B. DIRKSEN, 'The Urmia Edition of the Peshitta: The Story behind the Text', *Textus* 18 (1995), pp. 157-67.

¹² DIRKSEN, 'The Old Testament Peshitta', p. 257.

Library in Milan. It was published in the years 1876-83, using the technique of photolithography, which had just become available. Although the huge and expensive volumes did not gather a wide circulation, this publication was a landmark in Peshitta studies. For the first time, a text became available to a scholarly public that differed markedly from that of the Paris Polyglot. The fact that 7a1 contained variants closer to the Hebrew sparked the discussion whether these readings reflected an original translation that was closer to the Hebrew, or were the result of a revision towards the Hebrew text (see § 7 below).

The first scientific edition, containing only the Psalms, was published by W.E. Barnes in 1904. He used 7a1 as his basic text, but corrected it on the basis of a number of other manuscripts. With the help of C.W. Mitchell and J. Pinkerton, the same author also published a new edition of the Pentateuch in 1914. This edition gives a corrected version of Lee's text. In order to gain a full picture of the text history of the Peshitta, it was necessary to collect all witnesses available in libraries in Europe and the United States as well as in the Middle East. It was not until 1959, however, that the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament decided to start the Peshitta project, which was entrusted to the Leiden Peshitta Institute. The first phase of this project entailed making a list of all Peshitta manuscripts and procuring microfilms of all of them. This work, which included expeditions to the Middle East, occupied the collaborators of the Institute for more than a decade. A preliminary *List of Old Testament Peshitta Manuscripts* appeared in 1961. It was in 1972 that the first volume of the new edition appeared, under the title *The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta Version*.

The original idea of the Leiden edition was to print the basic text, usually 7a1, without any changes, 'except for the correction of obvious clerical errors that do not make sense', as the 1972 General Preface states¹³. All other readings would be relegated to the *critical apparatus*, the list of variant readings. After publication of fascicles 3 and 6 of part

¹³ Peshitta Institute Leiden, *The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta Version: General Preface*, (Leiden, 1972), p. viii.

IV of the edition, containing the Apocalypse of Baruch, 4 Esdras, Canticles or Odes, Prayer of Manasseh, Apocryphal Psalms, Psalms of Solomon, Tobit, and 1 (3) Esdras, it appeared that the size of the apparatus would be too large, making the undertaking impossible for financial reasons. Piet de Boer and Wim Baars, then general editors, decided to omit all variant readings occurring only in manuscripts younger than the twelfth century, and to widen the scope for emendations in the basic text. The first decision can only be defended if it can be demonstrated that the later manuscripts all go back to existing earlier manuscripts. This would indeed seem to be the case, in the sense that there is a general impression, based on full or sample collations, that these manuscripts do not carry unknown variants that cannot be explained as inner-Syriac corruptions or changes. Still, it has been decided to publish the variants of manuscripts up to and including the fifteenth century in a separate volume.

The second decision, the introduction of a larger number of emendations, was also connected with the wish to make the apparatus leaner, 'thus facilitating the use of the edition and also its printing'¹⁴. The main rule for emendations should be seen in this light¹⁵:

Emendations were made also in those cases where the reading of the manuscripts chosen as the basic text of the edition is not supported by two or more manuscripts from the material used up to and including the tenth century. The printed text in these cases is chosen on the basis of a definite majority of the manuscripts dated to the tenth century or earlier.

Thus the choice was made for something between a diplomatic edition- an edition which renders one manuscript faithfully like a diplomat- and a majority text. It was not intended as a so-called critical

¹⁴ P.A.H. de BOER, 'Towards an Edition of the Syriac Version of the Old Testament' (PIC 16), *Vetus Testamentum* 31 (1981), pp. 346-57 (356); cf. also De Boer's Preface, in Peshitta Institute Leiden, *The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta Version*, I.1. Preface; *Genesis-Exodus* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), p. viii.

¹⁵ De BOER, 'Preface', p. viii.

text: one that tries to come as close to the original as possible. It was not even the intention to correct as many mistakes and changes in 7a1 as possible: only readings deemed impossible or readings not supported by two or more manuscripts were to be emended.

In hindsight, one must say that from the point of view of text-critical method, the introduction of the majority principle and the resulting mixed approach of the Leiden edition are not commendable. De Boer himself conceded that 'it is difficult to approve of the introduction of emendations in the basic text'¹⁶. One can only understand De Boer's decisions if one considers his aim. The text should be seen as a point of reference: it should be common enough to guarantee a concise apparatus. His goal was to publish a text that could be used in further research. The main text as such has no status; together with the apparatuses, it forms a do-it-yourself kit. As De Boer writes¹⁷:

The text printed in this edition - it must be stated *expressis verbis* - ought to be used in exegetical and textual study together with the apparatuses.

The reader cannot just quote the text, he should first go over the apparatus and do the work of the textual critic. De Boer himself was very unhappy with the way the main text of the edition came to be quoted as 'the Peshitta' without further ado. He admitted to have 'underestimated the force of the printed text even among scholars', and says not to blame his successors if they come up with 'a system that that gives less occasion to misunderstanding'¹⁸.

Nowadays we think that the textual critic cannot leave his job - the selection of the correct readings from all available variants - to the untrained reader just because he is uncertain whether his own choices will result in a reliable reconstruction of the original text. Moreover, the work on the present edition has greatly expanded our knowledge of the

¹⁶ DE BOER, 'Towards an Edition', p. 356.

¹⁷ DE BOER, 'Preface', p. viii.

¹⁸ DE BOER, 'Towards an Edition', pp. 356-57.

text history of the Peshitta, and recent editions and studies of some of the Syriac Fathers have made additional evidence available. For these reasons, the Peshitta Institute is making plans to publish a real critical text as well. However, this project will not be started before the present edition, which is already a giant leap ahead, and which should lay the foundation of this work, has been completed.

5. Tools

What I have just written indicates that the main tool for the study of the Peshitta of the Old Testament is the Leiden Peshitta edition with its apparatus of variant readings. Its main text, based on the Milan codex 7a1, is already much better than any of the nineteenth-century editions, and the apparatus offers all known variants from biblical manuscripts written before the year 1200. Together the main text and apparatus give a full picture of the tradition of the biblical manuscripts of the various Syriac traditions, enabling the reader to establish which text he deems closest to the original translation. Alternatively, the reader can choose the readings of the later standard text, which was established in the ninth century (see § 7 below). The edition will consist of 17 volumes, 13 of which have now appeared. The Peshitta Institute intends to publish additional volumes with the variants of biblical manuscripts up to and including the fifteenth century, as well as studies of the text of the Syrian fathers. The main text of the edition is also available in electronic format through the website of the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon (<http://call.cn.huc.edu/>).

Translation into English. The Peshitta has been translated into English by George M. Lamsa¹⁹. Unfortunately, this translation has been assimilated to the Hebrew text in quite a few places, and is not based on a reliable text of the Peshitta. The latter point also applies to Andrew

¹⁹ *The Holy Bible from Ancient Eastern Manuscripts Containing the Old and New Testament Translated from the Peshitta, the Authorized Bible of the Church of the East*, (Philadelphia, 15th edn., 1967).

Oliver's lesser known translation of the Peshitta Psalter²⁰. It would be best not to use Lamsa's version. A new English annotated translation is now being prepared by a group of scholars as one of the Leiden Peshitta Institute's projects. It will appear under the title *The Bible of Edessa*²¹.

Concordances. The first concordance of the Peshitta was published by the team of Werner Strothmann in Göttingen, Germany²². Unfortunately, the textual basis of this concordance is not very good. Strothmann assumed that he could use Walton's Polyglot as a witness to the West Syrian tradition, and the Urmia edition as a witness to that of the East Syrians. Even if the idea of a western and an eastern recension of the text had been correct, the choice of these two witnesses would have been a mistake: both editions eventually go back to the same Paris manuscript 17a5, which, to make things worse, is of poor quality. In this respect, Strothmann's concordance will be replaced by one based on the Leiden edition with variants. The first of the six volumes, containing the concordance of the Pentateuch, has already appeared²³. This new concordance also lists the variants in the main nineteenth-century editions. The words are arranged in alphabetical order as they appear in the text, as in J. Payne Smith's *Compendious Syriac Dictionary*. Strothmann's concordance lists the words according to their root, as in R.

²⁰ *A Translation of the Syriac Peshito Version of the Psalms of David*, (Boston, 1861; New York, 1867).

²¹ Cf. Konrad JENNER *et al.*, 'The New English Annotated Translation of the Syriac Bible (NEATSB): Retrospect and Prospect' (*PIC* 23), *Aramaic Studies* 2 (2004), pp. 85-106.

²² W. STROTHMANN, *Konkordanz des Syrischen Kohelethbuches nach der Peshitta und der Syrohexapla*, (GOF I.4; Wiesbaden, 1973); N. SPRENGER, *Konkordanz zum Syrischen Psalter*, (GOF I.10; Wiesbaden, 1976); W. STROTHMANN *et al.*, *Konkordanz zur Syrischen Bibel: Die Propheten*, (GOF I.25; Wiesbaden, 1984); W. STROTHMANN *et al.*, *Konkordanz zur Syrischen Bibel: Der Pentateuch*, (GOF I.26; Wiesbaden, 1986); W. STROTHMANN *et al.*, *Konkordanz zur Syrischen Bibel: Die Mautbē* (GOF I.33; Wiesbaden, 1995); W. STROTHMANN, *Wörterverzeichnis der apokryphen-deuterokanonischen Schriften des Alten Testaments in der Peshitta*, (GOF I.27; Wiesbaden, 1988). A list of names, not included in the above volumes, still has to be published.

²³ P.G. BORBONE *et al.*, *The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta Version V. Concordance 1. The Pentateuch*, (Leiden, 1997).

Payne Smith's *Thesaurus Syriacus* and in C. Brockelmann's *Lexicon Syriacum*. As it will be important to have concordances ordered according to both principles, Strothmann's work will remain useful to some extent.

Bibliography. The Peshitta Institute collects all scholarly literature on the Peshitta and other Syriac versions. A full bibliography of the Peshitta of the Old Testament was published in 1989²⁴. This collection was brought up to date (up to 1994) and corrected in a supplement²⁵. For literature on the Peshitta published between 1995 and 1997, there is no bibliography at the moment, but one may consult Sebastian Brock's general bibliographies on Syriac studies, which are also most helpful for literature on Syriac versions other than the Peshitta²⁶. The literature published since 1998, on all Syriac versions as well as the Targumim (Jewish Aramaic versions of the Old Testament), can be found in the 'Bibliography of the Aramaic Bible', published in the *Journal for the Aramaic Bible*, since 2003 continued under the title *Aramaic Studies*. A selection of this material will be published on the website of the Peshitta Institute, together with the data on 1995-1997. The Peshitta Institute also has its own monograph series with studies of the manuscript tradition, translation technique, and grammar of the Peshitta and other Syriac versions²⁷.

²⁴ P.B. DIRKSEN, *An Annotated Bibliography of the Peshitta of the Old Testament*, (MPIL 5; Leiden, 1989).

²⁵ P.B. DIRKSEN, 'Supplement to *An Annotated Bibliography*, 1989', in P.B. Dirksen and A. van der Kooij (eds.), *The Peshitta as a Translation: Papers Read at the II Peshitta Symposium Held at Leiden 19-21 August 1993*, (MPIL 8; Leiden, 1995), pp. 221-236.

²⁶ From 1960 to 1990: S.P. BROCK, *Syriac Studies: A Classified Bibliography (1960-1990)*, (Kaslik, 1996). From 1991 to 1995: S.P. BROCK, 'Syriac Studies: A Classified Bibliography (1991-1995)', *Parole de l'Orient* 23 (1998), pp. 241-350. From 1996 to 2000: S.P. BROCK, 'Syriac Studies: A Classified Bibliography (1996-2000)', *Parole de l'Orient* 29 (2004), pp. 263-410. For earlier books on other versions, consult also C. MOSS, *Catalogue of Syriac Books and Related Literature in the British Museum* (London, 1962).

²⁷ Monographs of the Peshitta Institute Leiden (MPIL), published by Brill.

Commentaries. A very helpful source of information is formed by the biblical commentaries of the Syriac Fathers²⁸. They show how the Peshitta was interpreted in the course of the tradition. Authors like Ephrem the Syrian and Aphrahat, both from the fourth century, are now available in good editions. The same applies to some of the Fathers who were active after the split of the Syriac-speaking Church in the fifth century, though there is still much to be done. Thus the East Syrian commentary of Isho'dad of Merv has recently been edited, but the important West Syrian commentaries of Dionysius bar Salibi and parts of Barhebraeus *Treasure of Mysteries* are still waiting to be published in reliable editions. Most Fathers were interested both in factual and in spiritual interpretations. The former deal with the facts of history, and can still help us to see how they interpreted difficult passages. The latter form a timeless source of spirituality for all Christians.

6. The Origin of the Peshitta

6.1 Traditional Views

The earliest reference to the origins of the Peshitta is found in Theodore of Mopsuestia's commentary on the Twelve Prophets. This Greek-speaking exegete (d. 428) says that the Syriac Bible was composed by some unknown man who often made mistakes, and even made up stories. Therefore, he argues, this Syriac Bible could by no means compete with the Septuagint²⁹. Theodore was reacting against Eusebius of Emesa (see § 3 above), an earlier representative of the Antiochene

²⁸ A complete survey of Syriac biblical interpretation is found in two articles by Lucas VAN ROMPAY: 'The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation', in M. Sæbø, ed., *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. The History of Its Interpretation 1. From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300) 1. Antiquity* (Göttingen, 1996), pp. 612-41, and 'Development of Biblical Interpretation in the Syrian Churches of the Middle Ages', in M. Sæbø, ed., *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. The History of Its Interpretation 1. From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300) 2. The Middle Ages* (Göttingen, 2000), pp. 559-77.

²⁹ *Theodori Mopsuesteni Commentarius in XII prophetas*, ed. H.N. Sprenger (GOF V.1; Wiesbaden, 1977), pp. 283-84, ad Zeph. 1:4-6.

School of exegesis, to which Theodore also belonged. Eusebius had defended the importance of the Hebrew text as the original version of the Old Testament, and had used informants and the Peshitta to get access to it. Eusebius knew that Syriac (his mother tongue) and Hebrew were 'neighbours'. For this reason, he had accorded the Peshitta a special status. For Theodore, however, the most reliable way to access the Hebrew was via the Septuagint. He endorsed the view that the Septuagint was a translation made by seventy very learned persons who had independently come to the same renderings, and that it was, furthermore, adopted by the Apostles, who handed it down to the Gentiles. Theodore was anxious not to add anything to the biblical text. He was afraid of speculation³⁰. The fact that it was unknown to him who had translated the Peshitta, made him shun the latter version.

The next author who is known to have written about the origin of the Peshitta is the famous West Syrian polymath Jacob of Edessa (d. 708). The original text has not come down to us, but Moses bar Kepha (see § 2 above) quotes him as saying that the Peshitta was translated in the time of king Abgar. In the second half of the eighth century, the East Syrian author Theodore bar Koni shows that there are other theories with regard to the Syriac translation of the Old Testament³¹. Either it had been commissioned by Hiram, king of Tyre and an ally of David, who was still alive when the Jews returned from exile, and who wanted to have his own version for love of David; or it had been made by the Apostles themselves. The latter theory was especially interesting to Theodore bar Koni, as it could suggest that the Peshitta was even better than the

³⁰ Theodore's criticism of Jerome is the best illustration of this point. According to Theodore, it was foolhardy of Jerome to have made a new translation from the Hebrew, because he had only acquired his knowledge of Hebrew after his youth. Moreover, he had used informants whose knowledge was probably far from perfect: they were quite ordinary people. For Eusebius' and Theodore's positions, see also Bas ter Haar ROMENY, 'The Peshitta and its Rivals: On the Assessment of the Peshitta and Other Versions of the Old Testament in Syriac Exegetical Literature', *The Harp* 11–12 (1998–1999), pp. 21–31.

³¹ *Theodoros bar Koni. Liber Scholiorum*, ed. A. Scher, CSCO 55 / Syr. 19 (Paris, 1910) 279–82. *Théodore bar Koni, Livre des Scolies (recension de Séert)*, transl. R. Hespel and R. Draguet CSCO 431 / Syr. 187 (Leuven, 1981), pp. 242–44.

Septuagint: the Septuagint was accepted by the apostles, but the Peshitta was the version they made themselves. Within the East Syrian Church, Theodore of Mopsuestia was revered as *the* Interpreter, so it was important to deal with his criticism of the Peshitta.

Not much later, around 850, the East Syrian Isho'dad of Merv comes with a somewhat more sophisticated version³². According to him, the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Job had been translated in the days of Solomon, at the request of his ally Hiram, whereas the other books of the Old Testament, as well as those of the New, had been translated at the time of Abgar, when Addai and the other Apostles took care of this job. Isho'dad adds the opinion of others, who say that the Old Testament had been translated by a priest called Asya, who was sent to Samaria by the king of Assyria (cf. 2 Kings 17:27–28). Around the same time, a different tradition is found in 'Ali ibn Rabban al-Tabari's defence of Islam. He seems to suggest that Mark the Evangelist was the translator, as does the East Syrian exegetical work Gannat Bussame, probably to be dated to the tenth century³³. The West Syrian Barhebraeus (d. 1286) simply says there are three opinions: it had been translated at the time of Solomon and Hiram, or by Asa (a variant of Asya); or at the time of Addai and Abgar³⁴.

³² *Commentaire d'Išo'dad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament* 1. *Genèse* ed. I.M. Vosté and C. Van den Eynde (CSCO 126/Syr. 67; Leuven, 1950), p. 3; translation: C. Van den Eynde (CSCO 156/Syr. 75; Leuven, 1955), p. 3.

³³ For these two references, see Michael P. WEITZMAN, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction*, (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 56; Cambridge, 1999), pp. 248–49. The idea of Mark as a translator goes back to Papias, quoted in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Church History* 3.39.15. He would have been Peter's translator.

³⁴ *Barhebraeus' Scholia on the Old Testament* 1. *Genesis–II Samuel*, ed. and transl. M. Sprengling and W.C. Graham (The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications 13; Chicago, 1931), p. 4.

6.2 Modern Views

The distance between the original translation and the first authors who brought forward ideas on the origin of the Peshitta, their differences of opinion, as well as the obvious legendary nature of some of the accounts, have brought modern scholars to venture their own reconstructions. These are based on indications in the translation itself, as well as on our knowledge of the historical circumstances of the first Syriac-speaking Christians. Modern scholars would agree with Theodore of Mopsuestia that the name of the translator (or translators) is unknown. Still, one can try to find out where the Peshitta was translated, when, and in which community.

The fact that already in the fifth century one had to guess where the Peshitta came from might betray that the real origin was not within the orthodox Syrian Christian community itself. Over the past two centuries, some scholars have defended Jewish authorship, others Christian, whereas the famous linguist Theodor Nöldeke came up with the compromise that Jewish Christians were behind the work³⁵. It is true that the Peshitta Old Testament contains some renderings that seem to introduce references to Christ, or sound like echos of the New Testament. However, it was a direct translation from a proto-Masoretic Hebrew original. It even betrays an excellent knowledge of the language. The Christian authors we are familiar with did not know Hebrew: Origen did not, and neither did Eusebius of Emesa, who did recognize the importance of the Hebrew original. Jerome was really an innovator and an exception in that he took up the latter idea and followed it through³⁶. He probably learned Hebrew in Chalcis in the Syrian desert. Among Jews in the Greek diaspora of Egypt and Italy, knowledge of Hebrew was

³⁵ A survey of the discussion with further references can be found in DIRKSEN, 'The Old Testament Peshitta', pp. 261-64. For the idea of a Jewish-Christian translation, see also Arie VAN DER KOOIJ, *Die alten Textzeugen des Jesajabuches: ein Beitrag zur Textgeschichte des Alten Testaments*, (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 35; Freiburg and Göttingen, 1981), pp. 273-77.

³⁶ Adam KAMESAR, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible: A Study of the Quaestiones hebraicae in Genesim*, (Oxford Classical Monographs; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

already very limited or even absent in the first century. Even the Bible commentaries of a learned man like Philo do not betray a knowledge of Hebrew. So how would Christians of the second or third century have been able to translate the Hebrew Bible in this way? And why did they not translate the Septuagint, as did all other non-Greek churches? On the other hand, if Jews made the translation, why do Jewish scholars not quote it until the end of the Middle Ages?

The most thorough and innovative discussion of the origin of the Peshitta is that of the late Michael Weitzman³⁷. In his *Introduction* to this Syriac version, he first explains that the categories of 'Judaism' and 'Christianity' as they were used in the debate do not take account of the diversity within both religions which research of the last decades has revealed. It would be better, he argues, first to establish the 'theological profile' of the translation. Only then can we compare the version with what we know of the Jewish and Christian communities of the time. Weitzman's own position is that the Peshitta was translated in Edessa from 150 onwards by a non-rabbinic Jewish group that clearly identified themselves with Judaism, but neglected some elements of ritual in favour of a more personal belief, in which prayer played an important role. They emphasized faith and hope rather than observance.

Weitzman's main arguments come from the translation of Chronicles. It happens that most of the Peshitta is a very literal translation that hardly betrays its origin. In Chronicles, however, we find some instances that are completely different from the Hebrew text as we know it. Weitzman suggests that the translator or translators had to deal with a damaged manuscript. Here and there, the model was simply unreadable, which forced them to fill the gaps themselves, thus bringing in their own ideas and concerns. As Chronicles was probably the last book to be translated, it seems reasonable to attribute the whole translation to this group, rather than the first parts to Christians and only the latter part to this Jewish group.

³⁷ WEITZMAN, *The Syriac Version*, pp. 206-62.

Weitzman reconstructs the history of the version as follows. Instead of assuming a Jewish group that lapsed from some pre-existing rabbinic standard, he thinks the origins of the translators' religion go back to biblical times. Sacrifice was prescribed twice daily in the Pentateuch, and prayer was not prescribed. It is possible, however, that Levites developed an independent prayer-cult 'evening and morning and noon-day', as Ps. 55:18 (17) has it. This original prayer-cult - three times a day at specified hours, without connection to sacrifice, as Weitzman claims - survived especially in the Diaspora. It appealed to God-fearers and full converts among the gentiles, and became the rule among Christians, for whom it is recorded as early as in the *Didache* (8.3). It is also this system that is central to the Peshitta. Weitzman holds the opinion that it tended to depreciate not only sacrifice, but also ritual in general. Instead, it emphasizes inward faith. Weitzman sees the beginnings of this movement in the book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible. Independently, the translators of the Peshitta introduced more passages reflecting the same attitude, especially in Chronicles. Weitzman goes on to suggest that a Jewish community that confined itself in its obedience to the law to the prayer-cult could have adopted Christianity. With many Christians they shared a high appreciation for prayer, charity, and faith. This would then explain how a Jewish translation came to be transmitted by the Eastern Churches, and why it was not received among rabbinic Jews.

Though I share Weitzman's view that non-rabbinic Jews must have been responsible for the translation, I think we should make at least one adjustment to his reconstruction³⁸. He suggests that these Jews belonged to a community of a certain non-rabbinic signature, 'estranged from the Jewish people as a whole'³⁹. The question is, however, whether it is at all possible to distinguish such a separate community. As Reif stresses with regard to the development of Jewish liturgy: we should think more in terms of dominant religious trends than of watertight, discrete groups

³⁸ For a fuller version of this discussion, see Bas ter Haar ROMENY, 'Hypotheses on the Development of Judaism and Christianity in Syria in the Period after 70 C.E.', in: H. van de Sandt (ed.), *Matthew and the Didache: Two Documents from the Same Jewish-Christian Milieu?*, (Assen & Minneapolis, 2005), pp. 13-33, especially pp. 28-32.

³⁹ WEITZMAN, *The Syriac Version*, p. 246.

occupying separate contexts. There was a variety of forms which were never mutually exclusive or beyond reciprocal influence⁴⁰. Outside Palestine it may not have been until the fourth century that the rabbinic Patriarch gained a certain degree of control over the Jewish communities, and even after that all sorts of non-rabbinic trends could remain active. Thus if one follows Weitzman's theory, it is not necessary to think in terms of a community that was clearly separated from other Jews of Edessa.

The evidence for the presence of Jews in Edessa may lead to a further modification of the picture. As far as we can tell on the basis of the funerary inscriptions found close to Edessa, it appears that Edessan Jews did use more or less the same dialect of Aramaic, but did not use the same script as the local pagans. They chose the square Jewish Aramaic script that was also used for Hebrew, while adding, in one case, a Greek inscription. This choice is significant. In contrast to other scripts, the Jewish script was not connected with a certain region or language, but with a religious group. Though it is theoretically possible that there were also Jews who adopted the Syriac script, we have clear evidence that there were at least some who chose to indicate their religious identity in this way in their funerary inscription, while one Jewish family simultaneously professed its allegiance to Greek culture by adding a Greek version of the text.

From the Classical Syriac as we know it from the earliest Christian sources, we may infer that Edessan Christians adopted the Old Syriac dialect and script that were used by the pagans, rather than the Jewish script. This confronts us with the paradox of a translation that supposes a knowledge of Hebrew found only among very learned Jews but was not written in the Jewish script. Was the Peshitta a gentile project, after all, or should we assume that, perhaps together with an update of the language, the translation was recast in Syriac script? I would suggest an

⁴⁰ Stefan C. REIF, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer: New Perspectives on Jewish Liturgical History*, (Cambridge, 1993), p. 61.

alternative: the translators may have been Jewish Christians from the start⁴¹.

We may conclude that either some of the Jews of Edessa or one of its Christian groups felt the need of a version in the dialect of the town. What Weitzman calls the 'theological profile' of the translators is compatible with either possibility, as long as we do not think in terms of the ideal types of rabbinic Judaism and later Christianity. Moreover, both those who defined themselves as Jews and those who called themselves Christians had a motive: for Jews it may simply have been a matter of dialect, for Christians the translation may also have played a role in their polemics with Marcionites, which made it necessary for them to have their own version of the Old Testament. The use of the Syriac script, however, points solely in the direction of Christians. Whatever the case may be, it should be granted that the actual translation work was done by Jews, be they converted to Christianity before (my position) or after (Weitzman) the production of the Peshitta.

As we have seen, Weitzman connects the Peshitta with the city of Edessa. Though the evidence is not altogether conclusive, I would agree that this is the best guess. Tradition considers this town the centre of Syriac Christianity since the conversion of Abgar. There is also a theory that connects the beginnings of Syriac Christianity with the Jewish Kingdom of Adiabene, further to the East, which seemed to find confirmation in the so-called *Chronicle of Arbela*. Nowadays, however, this chronicle is considered problematic, if not simply the product of a falsification. One of Weitzman's strongest points is that the Peshitta introduces references to Mabbog, Harran, and Nisibis as additions to the text or substitutions for other names. These names suggest an origin in Osrhoene, the province around Edessa. The Peshitta does not introduce comparable references to Adiabene. The dialect (and script) of the Peshitta, which accords well with that of the inscriptions found in

⁴¹ Defining Jewish Christianity is a very problematic issue; see James Carleton PAGET, 'Jewish Christianity', in W. Horbury, W.D. Davies, et al. (eds.), *Cambridge History of Judaism*, 3 (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 731-75, especially 733-42. Here, I do not want to indicate more than 'Jews who came to believe that Christ brought salvation'.

Osrhoene, is a further argument, though it is possible that this dialect was current in a wider area.

Weitzman's main argument for dating the Old Testament Peshitta is formed by quotations of the Peshitta in other texts⁴². On the basis of such quotations, a latest possible date can be established. If the Peshitta was indeed the basis for the Old Testament quotations in the *Diatessaron* (see § 3 above), at least the books actually cited, that is, the Pentateuch, the Latter Prophets, and the Psalms, already existed and had attained some status by around AD 170. On the other hand, the fact that Bardaisan, born in 154, quotes Gen. 9:6 in a form that stands closer to the Jewish Targum Onqelos could still indicate some reserve towards the Peshitta. This is a warning against adopting a much earlier date, and makes Weitzman propose the date of c. 150 mentioned above. Chronicles, and perhaps also Ezra and Nehemiah, may have been translated about fifty years later, as is suggested by a quotation of the Jewish Aramaic *Qaddish* prayer in 1 Chr. 29:19.

7. Nature of the Translation

There has been an extensive debate among specialists of the Peshitta on the question of whether those text forms that are closer to the Hebrew text are representatives of an older stage of the Peshitta tradition or products of a revision. As for the book of Genesis, it is the fifth century manuscript 5b1 - one of the oldest Peshitta manuscripts - that shows a large number of unique readings, many of which are closer to the Hebrew text. Marinus Koster in his extensive 1977 dissertation had already defended the original character of this kind of variants for the Exodus part of the manuscript⁴³. He thus corroborated the position taken by

⁴² WEITZMAN, *The Syriac Version*, pp. 248-58.

⁴³ M.D. KOSTER, *The Peshitta of Exodus: The Development of Its Text in the Course of Fifteen Centuries*, (Assen, 1977). See also his 'Peshitta Revisited: A Reassessment of its Value as a Version', *JSS* 38 (1993), pp. 235-68, and 'Translation or Transmission? That is the Question: The Use of the Leiden Old Testament Peshitta Edition', in M. Augustin and H.M. Niemann (eds.), *Basel und Bibel: Collected Communications to the XVIIIth*

Pinkerton in 1914⁴⁴. In my own study of the variants of 5b1 in the first half of Genesis I took into account the considerations with regard to translation technique brought forward in 1988 by Van der Kooij⁴⁵. It emerged that, for Genesis too, a translation very close to the Hebrew model had developed into one that was easier to read and less ambiguous⁴⁶. I observed the following conscious adaptations of the original text. Some phrases were replaced by more idiomatic Syriac ones or by expressions which better met the prevailing standards of literary Syriac. What is implicit in the Hebrew text and in the original translation was made explicit, for example, by adding the subject. Complicated sentences were clarified by slight additions or omissions, or by changes in word order. Finally, certain passages were harmonized.

In some places, the translator of Genesis may already have used these techniques of elucidation. However, the special position of 5b1 imposed the conclusion that they were also - and perhaps even chiefly - applied in the process of transmission during the first stages of the history of the Peshitta: although 5b1 is closer in many instances to the original translation than any other Peshitta manuscript, it also displays a few elucidating changes where 7a1 preserved the original reading. Thus in all extant branches of the tradition the text was clarified. This was done not so much systematically as haphazardly. Users appear to have added their alterations wherever they thought fit, either when making a new copy, or when reading an existing manuscript. Corrections by later hands in the

Congress of the IOSOT, Basel 2001 (Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums 51; Frankfurt am Main, 2004), pp. 297-312.

⁴⁴ PINKERTON, 'The Origin and Early History of the Syriac Pentateuch', *JThS* 15 (1914), pp. 14-41. The opposite position was defended by BARNES, 'A New Edition of the Pentateuch in Syriac', *JThS* 15 (1914), pp. 41-44.

⁴⁵ A. VAN DER KOOIJ, 'On the Significance of MS 5b1', in P.B. Dirksen and M.J. Mulder (eds.), *The Peshitta: Its Early Text and History. Papers Read at the Peshitta Symposium Held at Leiden, 30-31 August 1985*, (MPIL 4; Leiden, 1988), pp. 183-199. This article also gives a survey of the debate on 5b1.

⁴⁶ R.B. ter Haar ROMENY, 'Techniques of Translation and Transmission', in P.B. Dirksen and A. van der Kooij (eds.), *The Peshitta as a Translation: Papers Read at the II Peshitta Symposium Held at Leiden, 19-21 August 1993*, (MPIL 8; Leiden, 1995), pp. 177-85.

margins and in the text itself attest to this fact, even in a manuscript such as 5b1. We may conclude that if during the first attainable stage of the tradition copyist and readers felt free to introduce changes, some of them changed more than others. The result is that some manuscripts of this period stand closer to the original translation and thus the Hebrew text, whereas others must have exhibited more changes. This picture is confirmed by the results of the study of the Genesis quotations of the fourth-century exegetes Ephrem, Aphrahat, and Eusebius of Emesa (see § 3 above). For other books, it appears that we can discern a comparable first stage. Michael Weitzman, in particular, has pointed out the importance of the manuscript 9a1 in this respect. Even though this is a much later manuscript, for some books it still preserves a text comparable to the Genesis and Exodus text of 5b1⁴⁷.

The relative uniformity of manuscripts in later stages of the textual history, that is, after the sixth century, suggests some kind of standardization: one text was chosen from a broader spectrum of texts which must have existed in the first stage. Koster's research made it clear that after this second phase, represented by most manuscripts from the sixth until the eighth century, further textual convergence can be observed. We can speak of a third phase, which he termed that of the *Textus Receptus*. It is well known that Timothy I, who was Catholicos-Patriarch of the Church of the East from 780 until 823, took a vivid interest into the biblical text. He introduced the Syro-Hexapla, made by the West Syrian bishop Paul of Tella, to the East Syrian Church (see § 10 below). It is very well possible that he actively supported the spread of a Standard Text of the Peshitta as well⁴⁸. On the basis of Theodore bar Koni's biblical quotations, we can say that the later Standard Text or *Textus Receptus* was already available in the East at the end of the eighth century, possibly before the Catholicos Timothy I had had a chance to sponsor a certain standard text. On the other hand, the biblical text of the commentary of the monk Severus shows us that in the West, variation was still possible up to the end of the ninth century, and that the western

⁴⁷ WEITZMAN, *The Syriac Version*, 263-308.

⁴⁸ See K.D. JENNER, 'Some Introductory Remarks concerning the Study of 8a1', in Dirksen and Mulder (eds.), *The Peshitta: Its Early Text and History*, pp. 200-224.

biblical manuscript 9a1, which still represents the first stage of the development of the text, was not an isolated case.

Another issue that has been debated widely is the influence of other versions on the Peshitta. Some scholars even suggested that the Peshitta was not a direct translation of the Hebrew, but based on an earlier Targum. Arthur Vööbus posited the existence of a *Vetus Syra* of the Old Testament: an older, 'wild' Syriac version, closer to the supposed Targumic origins of the Syriac Bible⁴⁹. Patristic citations played a very important role in his argument. However, he selected only those quotations that supported his ideas, without paying attention to the manuscript tradition, the context of the commentary, the way an author quotes his Bible, and without obtaining a more complete picture of the biblical text used. More recent studies into the biblical manuscripts and into the quotations of the Fathers have not corroborated his ideas at all.

Parallels between translations over against the Hebrew original can be accounted for in several ways. First, they can be due to dependence of one version on the other, either at the translation stage, or in the course of the tradition. Second, they can be due to the use of a common source, be it a different Hebrew source text or an oral or written lexical or exegetical tradition. Third, they can be the result of polygenesis: two translators may have made the same choice, for example, because they used the same translation technique. Fourth, they can be accidental. Now if there is nothing else to suggest direct dependence of one version on the other, it is safer first to try the other explanations. After all, it is natural that two translations of the same text have something in common and could combine together against the source text because of the demands of the language or a similarity in interpretation - all the more so if the two translations are written in dialects of the same language. As there are no external data that prove a contact between the Peshitta and the existing Targumim, the burden of proof is on the side of those who say that there is more than such similarity, that there are parallels that cannot be

⁴⁹ Arthur VÖÖBUS, *Peshitta und Targumim des Pentateuchs: neues Licht zur Frage der Herkunft der Peshitta aus dem altpalästinischen Targum*, (Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile 9; Stockholm, 1958).

explained except by assuming a common source or even a dependence. Now it appears that all parallels between the Targumim and the Peshitta can be explained as being the result of polygenesis or dependence on a common exegetical tradition. However, for the Septuagint, which is a translation into a completely different language, these explanations do not always suffice. In some books, notably Ezekiel and the Twelve Prophets, we have to assume some literary dependence of the Peshitta on the Septuagint. However, this dependence is not of a systematical nature⁵⁰.

8. The Importance of the Peshitta

The reason why the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament took the initiative to produce a new edition of the Peshitta is its relevance for the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible. The edition and the studies based on it have made it clear that the Hebrew model of the Peshitta must have been nearly identical with the so-called Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible, the standard form of the text handed down to us by a tradition of Jewish scholars, the Masoretes. The Peshitta even reflects a vocalization of the Hebrew text that stands very close to the vocalization recorded many centuries later by the Masoretes. Though the Peshitta is a prime witness to the strength and quality of the Jewish tradition since the second century, this means that it usually does not help us to get closer to different forms of the text which must have circulated before the (proto-)Masoretic Text had been established. Such different texts are reflected in some of the scrolls found at Qumran and in some books of the Septuagint. Still, there are a number of instances where the Peshitta differs from the Masoretic Text, sometimes with the support of other versions. Some readings of this kind can be useful to correct errors in the Masoretic Text.

⁵⁰ A full discussion with many examples is found in WEITZMAN, *The Syriac Version*, pp. 68-129.

Another issue of scholarly interest is the language of the Peshitta.⁵¹ It is one of the largest and oldest texts written in Syriac. A number of studies into the syntax of the Peshitta have already appeared, and the Leiden Peshitta Institute is conducting major research projects in this field. Its new TURGAMA project concerns a computer-assisted linguistic analysis of the Peshitta. It uses a model of textual analysis that has been developed in the pilot-project CALAP (Computer-Assisted Linguistic Analysis of the Peshitta; with the Free University, Amsterdam). In CALAP the model was applied to Kings and Sirach. In TURGAMA this model and the computer programs required for are further developed, applied to another part of the Peshitta (Judges), and extended towards the Targum (Judges) and a corpus of original (non-translated) Syriac, namely Bardaisan's *Book of the Laws of Countries* or *Dialogue on Fate*.

The Peshitta is not only of interest to scholars, however. In the first place, it is the Bible of the Syriac Churches, and it has been a source of spirituality to them for ages. It is used in sermons, commentaries, poetry, and other genres of literature. Its interpretations and exegetical traditions have coloured the liturgy, and the prayers and hymns of the Syriac Churches follow the choice of words of the Peshitta. Many terms specific to the spirituality Syriac Churches have their origins in this ancient and reliable version of the Old Testament⁵².

Peshitta scholars have actually come to appreciate the importance of providing a context for the textual history of the Peshitta. On the one hand, this is the context of Church History. Peshitta manuscripts should be linked, if possible, to their place of origin or use. The development of the text is an event within the history of the Syriac Churches. The witness of the Syrian Fathers can also be of great importance in this respect. On the other hand, we should think of the history of exegesis and liturgy. It is not only the text of the readings that is of interest to scholars; they

⁵¹ Cf. Jan JOOSTEN, 'Materials for a Linguistic Approach to the Old Testament Peshitta', *Journal for the Aramaic Bible* 1 (1999), pp. 203-18.

⁵² On these matters, see Sebastian P. BROCK, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, (see note 2 above), pp. 70-88.

should also investigate the way the Peshitta was received and assessed by its users, whether in exegetical or historical literature or in liturgy.

9. The Syro-Lucianic or Philoxenian Version

The use of Syriac renderings of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, as an alternative to the Peshitta seems to have been an early development, born out of necessity. When translations of Greek commentaries were made, the translators found out that their own Syriac Bible was not exactly the same as the Bible the Greek exegetes were writing about. Thus the fifth-century translators of Theodore of Mopsuestia normally used the Peshitta reading when they had to render the Greek biblical text which formed the subject of his comments. In some cases, however, they kept to Theodore's Greek reading, especially when they found a difference in the choice of words, or in the construction or extent of a phrase. Often they did so tacitly, adapting all or only part of the Peshitta reading to the Greek. Sometimes, however, they must have thought that this procedure would cause insurmountable difficulties to the Syriac reader who was used to the Peshitta. In such cases, the translators gave the quotation first in the form of the Peshitta and then in the form of the Septuagint, which they explicitly introduced as *Yawnāyā*, 'the Greek'⁵³. At the beginning of the sixth century, Moses of Inghilene describes a new method: in an introductory letter to his translation of Cyril of Alexandria's *Glaphyra*, he explains that he and his assistants always render the biblical text 'as it is in the Greek'.

In the same text, Moses of Inghilene tells his readers about the new Syriac version on the basis of the Greek text made by the chorepiscopus Polycarp for Philoxenus, bishop of Mabbug (d. 523). This version would comprise the New Testament and the Psalter. On the basis of a marginal

⁵³ This procedure was first described by T. JANSMA, 'Théodore de Mopsueste, Interprétation du Livre de la Genèse. Fragments de la version syriaque (B.M. Add. 17,189, fol. 17-21)', *Le Muséon* 75 (1962), pp. 63-92 (82-83). All references and a nuanced discussion of the practice can be found in *Le commentaire sur Genèse-Exode 9,32 du manuscrit (olim) Diyarbakir 22*, transl. L. Van Rompay (CSCO 483/Syr 205; Leuven, 1986), p. xxxviii.

note on Isa. 9:6-7 in the Milan manuscript of the Syro-Hexapla, one could argue that this Philoxenian version also extended to other parts of the Old Testament.⁵⁴ If the reference to the Psalter in Moses of Inghilene is not a corruption or interpolation, and if the marginal note is correct, this version must have been the first full Syriac translation of (parts of) the Greek Old Testament. A.M. Ceriani edited fragments of a version of Isaiah which has often been called the Syro-Lucianic version, as it accommodates the Peshitta to the Greek text according to the so-called Lucianic text⁵⁵. As this is the version quoted by Philoxenus himself in his *Commentary on the Prologue to John*, it could well be that these Syro-Lucianic fragments belong to the Philoxenian version⁵⁶.

10. Paul of Tella's Syro-Hexapla

Between 613 and 617 Paul, the Syrian Orthodox Bishop of Tella, made a new and very literal Syriac translation of the Septuagint. It is known among western scholars as the Syro-Hexapla; in Syriac sources it is often referred to as 'the Greek' or 'the translation according to the Seventy' (Septuaginta means 'seventy' and refers to the seventy or seventy-two translators who would be responsible for this translation). One should note, however, that the latter two names can also be used to refer to other Syriac renderings of the Greek biblical text.

Paul worked on his version in a monastery near Alexandria, as he had to flee the Persian invasion of Syria. He did not use the Lucianic text of the Septuagint, as the chorepiscopus Polycarp may have done for the Philoxenian version, but he based his translation on the Septuagint column of Origen's *Hexapla*, a Bible containing the Hebrew text as well as a number of Greek versions in six parallel columns. In this column, which may also have circulated on its own, Origen indicated when the

⁵⁴ See A. BAUMSTARK, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur mit Ausschluß der christlich-palästinensischen Texte*, (Bonn, 1922), p. 144.

⁵⁵ *Monumenta sacra et profana*, 5 (Milan, 1868-71).

⁵⁶ Cf. R.G. JENKINS, *The Old Testament Quotations of Philoxenus of Mabbug*, (CSCO 514/Subsidia 84; Leuven, 1989).

Hebrew and the other Greek versions had a longer or a shorter text, using a system of text-critical symbols, the Aristarchian signs. In the Syro-Hexaplaric manuscripts known to us, these signs are reproduced, but not always in a consistent manner. We also find varying quantities of marginal notes, quoting the other Greek translations in Syriac and sometimes the original Greek text. Unfortunately, we do not have the full text of Paul's version. The largest manuscript contains the Wisdom Books and the Prophets. It is kept in the Ambrosian Library in Milan (MS C. 313 Inf.; eighth or ninth century), and has been published in a photolithographic edition, just like the Peshitta manuscript 7a1, by Ceriani⁵⁷. Of some of the remaining books, we have full manuscripts, but in other cases there are no more than fragments⁵⁸.

The Syro-Hexapla enjoyed some popularity among the Syrian Orthodox. In some cases, its text was even adopted in lectionaries (manuscripts with selections of the biblical text to be read during services). It was never really able to replace the Peshitta, however. In the Church of the East, it was the Catholicos-Patriarch Timothy I who must have introduced this version. It is often adduced by Isho'dad of Merv in his commentary on the Old Testament, but not by earlier East Syrian exegetes⁵⁹. Because of its literalness, the Syro-Hexapla is one of our prime witnesses to the Hexaplaric text of the Septuagint. Moreover, the marginal notes are a prime source of information on the readings of the three Jewish revisions of the Septuagint: Theodotion, Aquila, and Symmachus.

⁵⁷ *Monumenta sacra et profana* 7. *Codex syro-hexaplaris Ambrosianus*, ed. A.M. Ceriani (Milan, 1874).

⁵⁸ A collection of this material is found in *Bibliothecae Syriacae quae ad philologiam sacram pertinent*, ed. P. de Lagarde (Göttingen, 1892). Additional material is listed, and published in part, in *New Syro-Hexaplaric Texts*, ed. Willem Baars (Leiden, 1968). Important is also Athur Vööbus's facsimile edition of a manuscript containing the Pentateuch: *The Pentateuch in the Version of the Syro-Hexapla: A Fac-simile Edition of a Midyat MS. Discovered 1964*, (CSCO 369/Subsidia 45; Leuven, 1975).

⁵⁹ R.B. ter Haar ROMENY, 'Biblical Studies in the Church of the East: The Case of Catholicos Timothy I', in M.F. Wiles and E.J. Yarnold (eds.), *Studia Patristica* 34. *Papers Presented at the Thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1999*, (Leuven, 2001), pp. 503-510.

11. Jacob of Edessa's Version

In 704-05, the famous Syrian Orthodox polymath Jacob of Edessa produced a revision of the Peshitta accommodating its text to some extent to that of the Greek Bible. Parts of this revision have come down to us in five manuscripts from the eighth century. They contain the Pentateuch, 1 and 2 Samuel, the beginning of Kings, Isaiah, as well as Daniel and Susanna. The Samuel text has recently been edited by Alison Salvesen⁶⁰. For us, these manuscripts are a precious treasure, not so much because of their value for the constitution of the biblical text, but as a witness to the way one of the finest scholars of the Syrian Orthodox Church, comparable only with Jerome according to some, dealt with the text of the Bible and its different versions.

Jacob's base text was the Peshitta, but which source or sources he used for the Greek text of the Septuagint has been a matter of debate. On the one hand, Alfred Rahlfs established for 1 Kings 1 that Jacob combined the Peshitta with the Lucianic recension of the Septuagint, without recourse to the Syro-Hexapla; on the other hand, Moshe Goshen-Gottstein defended the idea that Jacob's version was an interrelated revision of the Peshitta and the Syro-Hexapla, with only minor traces of Lucianic influence. On the basis of a study of the Genesis and Samuel text, I would concur with the former scholar. Many readings agree with Greek manuscripts against the Peshitta and the Syro-Hexapla. As Jacob knew Greek very well, direct access to Greek texts was no problem to him. For Genesis, we may assume the use of a vulgar, non-Hexaplaric text form of the Septuagint, often supported by Antiochene exegetes such as John Chrysostom. For Samuel, we can speak of a Lucianic text. None of the non-Peshitta readings for these books necessitate the assumption that Jacob also used the Syro-Hexapla. One should also note that there are quite a number of readings that do not agree with the Peshitta, the Syro-Hexapla, or the main Greek witnesses. These do not go back to a different Syriac or Greek manuscript tradition, but to Jacob's own

⁶⁰ *The Books of Samuel in the Syriac Version of Jacob of Edessa*, ed. and transl. Alison Salvesen (MPIL 10; Leiden, 1999). The Leiden Peshitta Institute is planning editions of the other books.

editorial activity. He felt free to rephrase the base text in order to make it consistent and understandable.

This brings us to Jacob's aims. Jacob made his revision during the last years of his life. The only major work he wrote after this, the commentary on the *Hexaemeron*, quotes the revision literally. This would seem to indicate that he had intended the revision as a new standard text, replacing the Peshitta, which he had still used in earlier exegetical works such as his *Scholia* and the *Commentary in Short*. Jacob aimed at a clear, consistent, and well-readable text, which at the same time stood closer to the Greek Septuagint. In many ways, he preferred the Greek Bible over the Peshitta. He understood, however, that a full and very literal version of the Septuagint like the Syro-Hexapla would never be fully accepted by his community. During the second half of the seventh century, an anti-Greek sentiment had come up among the Syrian Orthodox. The monks in the monastery of Eusebona even argued with Jacob about the content of his teaching 'for hate of the Greeks'. The Greek language had become associated with Chalcedon and the Byzantine empire. Jacob was aware of this, and tried to save at least some the Septuagint by coming half way in the direction of the Peshitta. In hindsight, we can say that this was too little, too late. The tradition of the Peshitta had already become strong enough to withstand competition⁶¹.

⁶¹ For a full discussion of the issues raised in this paragraph, see my article 'Jacob of Edessa on Genesis: His Quotations of the Peshitta and his Revision of the Text', in: Bas ter Haar Romeny and K.D. Jenner (eds.), *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day* (MPIL 14; Leiden, 2005, forthcoming).