

BOOK REVIEWS

Ignacio Carbajosa, *The Character of the Syriac Version of Psalms: A Study of Psalms 90–150 in the Peshitta*. Translated by Paul Stevenson. Leiden: Brill, 2008. xviii + 438 pp; hardcover. €148.00/\$203.00.

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It is not difficult to find in the secondary literature conflicting generalizations about the textual affinities of ancient versions of the Old Testament such as the Syriac Peshitta. According to some writers, the Syriac version shows significant influence from the Greek Septuagint; according to others, it derives from a Hebrew/Aramaic *Vorlage* with relatively little influence from the Septuagint. The only way such questions can be convincingly resolved is through systematic analysis of the Syriac text of the various Old Testament books. For some portions of the Old Testament this analysis has been done, but for other portions of the Old Testament it remains a *desideratum* for text-critical scholarship.

Ignacio Carbajosa has recently advanced this discussion with the publication of his analysis of the Syriac text of Psalms 90–150. This comprehensive treatment provides a detailed and perceptive analysis for this portion of the Syriac Psalter. This volume deserves to become a definitive treatment of the Syriac text of these psalms for quite some time to come.

C.'s work originated as a doctoral dissertation directed by Stephen Pisano at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. Other members of the examining committee were Craig Morrison and Sebastian Brock. The work was first published in Spanish under the title *Las características de la versión siríaca de los Salmos (Sal 90–150 de la Peshitta)* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006). It now appears in English as part of the prestigious series entitled Monographs of the Peshitta Institute Leiden. The English translation was undertaken by Paul Stevenson. If readability is an adequate measure, the translation is very well done. Only occasionally does the reader encounter syntax that seems a bit awkward from the standpoint of English style (e.g., pp. 27, l. 5;

123, l. 2; 130, ll. 14–15; 137, ll. 1–4). Repeated use of the term “systematicity” seems to be an odd choice of words (e.g., pp. 23, 55^{bis}, 57, 59^{bis}, 63, 70, 72). Typos in the book are few (e.g., p. xii l. 20). Occasionally the language is anachronistic, as when the Targum is said to be “following MT” (p. 288; cf. pp. 249, n. 162; 341). Sentence fragments appear in a couple of footnotes (e.g., pp. 320, n. 3; 326, n. 15), and occasionally Greek accents are incorrect (e.g., 223, l. 10; 249, n. 162) or absent altogether (e.g., p. 215, n. 79). A paragraph indent is missing on p. 213, l. 13. However, these are but minor blemishes in an otherwise well-written and well-translated book.

C.’s analysis of his selected portion of the Syriac Psalter (i.e., Psalms 90–150) consists of seven chapters, which will be briefly summarized in what follows. An introductory chapter situates C.’s own work against a backdrop of previous research on the Syriac Psalter, especially that of F. Baethgen, B. Oppenheim, J. F. Berg, E. R. Rowlands, A. Vogel, J. A. Lund, and J.-E. Eriksson. Most of these earlier researchers lacked the advantage of having available to them a critical edition of the Syriac text of the book of Psalms. C., on the other hand, is able to make use of the Leiden edition of the Peshitta Psalter, which was published in 1980. He is also able to take advantage of textual insights provided by the Dead Sea scrolls. Most of the previously mentioned scholars wrote prior to the discovery of the scrolls.

In chapter 2 C. takes up matters of translation technique, identifying a number of features found in the Syriac Psalter that are usually due to techniques adopted by the Syriac translator(s) as opposed to differences due to text-critical variation. This is an important distinction. As anyone who has worked extensively in this area will readily acknowledge, determining whether versional distinctives are due to textual differences in the translator’s *Vorlage* or whether they are due instead to translational strategies is often a difficult task. In this chapter C. decides to focus on variants that are in some way different from MT but do not align with the Septuagint and/or the Targums. He concludes that “The person responsible for P–Ps seeks to give a translation that is clear and that at the same time is faithful to the source text. This fidelity, though, aims more toward respecting the sense of the Hebrew text than toward reflecting each of its details” (p. 72). This conclusion is

consistent with what a number of scholars have found for other portions of the Peshitta Old Testament.

Chapter 3 considers particular interpretations found in the Syriac version of Psalms, such as renderings of unknown or difficult terms, contextual accommodation, harmonization, assimilation, and theological or exegetical distinctives. Also coming up for consideration in this chapter is the question of whether there is evidence sufficient to determine whether the Syriac translator was identified with either a Christian community or a Jewish community. C. finds that the use of certain Syriac terms points to a Christian connection, but he is unsure whether these terminological choices originated with the original translator or with a later reviser. The community origins of the translation itself remain uncertain. C.'s caution here is commendable. Other scholars have claimed to locate translational evidence for asserting a Christian or a Jewish origin for the Syriac version, but such claims almost always overreach the evidence produced in their support. It is wise not to tease too much from too little.

Chapter 4 seeks to define the relationship of Peshitta-Psalms to the Septuagint and the Aramaic Targums. Here C. challenges the often-repeated thesis that the Greek version has significantly influenced the Syriac translation. Setting aside agreements between the Peshitta Psalter and the Septuagint that fairly easily can be attributed to Syriac translation techniques, C. isolates 116 agreements that merit special attention. He finds that all but seven of these agreements can be adequately explained without recourse to Septuagint influence. Five of the seven are attributable to developments in the process of textual transmission rather than the original Syriac translation. He therefore concludes that "the hypothesis of the influence of LXX on P-Ps should basically be restricted to a few localized cases during the process of textual transmission of the latter, something that should not be surprising, given the influence of Greek Christian literature on the Syriac Christian tradition from the beginning" (p. 272). So far as the Aramaic Targums are concerned, C. rejects the idea of influence from the Targums on the Peshitta of Psalms, since all of the agreements can be accounted for along other lines. His argument here is persuasive and, I think, correct.

Chapter 5 discusses matters related to the Hebrew *Vorlage* of Peshitta-Psalms, either with regard to vocalization or with regard to

the consonantal text. Although in a number of places the Syriac text clearly presupposes a vocalization different from that of MT, C. finds only one instance that clearly points to a unique Hebrew *Vorlage* for the Syriac version of these psalms. In his view, other possible instances are capable of explanation without resorting to the notion of a different *Vorlage*. In other words, the Hebrew *Vorlage* of Peshitta-Psalms was very close to the consonantal text of MT. This view is consistent with conclusions reached by scholars for other books of the Peshitta Old Testament and is no doubt correct.

Chapter 6 takes up certain changes that may be seen in the process of textual transmission. Here C. identifies eleven cases where a reading cited in the critical apparatus of the Leiden edition should be regarded as the original reading in preference to that found in the Leiden text. In a majority of these cases the preferred reading is the one attested by MS 9a1, and in seven instances the preferred reading is attested by MS 9a1 alone. This leads C. to conclude “that we should have an increased appreciation of MS 9a1, which seems to contain a good number of original readings that the rest of the manuscript tradition has lost” (p. 376). This is an important observation, one that has obvious text-critical application. One hopes that C.’s call for “a complete study of MS 9a1” (p. 388) will soon be answered.

A concluding chapter distills the general conclusions that the preceding evidence permits. Some of the more important of these conclusions are as follows. The Syriac translation of Psalms 90–150 was made from a Hebrew (not Greek) *Vorlage* sometime around the second century A.D. The translation is characterized by clarity of Syriac grammar and style, a feature that makes it both comprehensible and readable. However, the translator’s imperfect knowledge of Hebrew manifests itself from time to time, particularly with *hapax legomena* and difficult Hebrew words. A theological *Tendenç* may occasionally be seen, as when the Hebrew plural *gods* is sometimes rendered by the Syriac *angels*. Septuagint influence on the Syriac Psalter takes place primarily during the transmission process rather than with the original translation, according to C. The hypothesis of Targumic influence on the Syriac Psalter must be rejected for lack of evidence. Preferable readings will sometimes be found in the critical apparatus of the Leiden edition rather than in the text, and MS 9a1

should be afforded special attention in this regard. The Peshitta-Psalter witnesses to a pre-Masoretic Hebrew text of the second-century A.D. that was in the process of stabilization. The Syriac version therefore has an important role to play in the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible, although such use must be informed by an accurate understanding of translation techniques adopted by the translator. In an appendix C. lists seventeen deviations from MT encountered in his research for which he has no convincing explanation at present. He expresses the hope that future research may eventually shed light on these unresolved problems.

It is difficult to see how a more effective presentation of this material could have been devised. There is much to appreciate here and little with which to quibble. C.'s sound methods of textual analysis, his comprehensive research on the various ancient witnesses to the text of the Psalter, his detailed examination of the evidence of the Peshitta for Psalms 90–150 in particular, and his sober text-critical judgment provide a model of how similar analyses might be undertaken with great profit. It is a pleasure to commend this book with the hope that it will find a wide readership among Old Testament text-critics and students of the Syriac Bible.