W.Th. van Peursen, *Language and Interpretation in the Syriac Text of Ben Sira: A Comparative Linguistic and Literary Study*, Monographs of the Peshitta Institute, Leiden. Studies in the Syriac Versions of the Bible and their Cultural Contexts, volume 16 (Leiden: Brill, 2007) Pp. xvi + 473. Hardback.

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This volume continues the series of insightful books and articles that Wido van Peursen has written on the book of Ben Sira. It also continues the series of studies on biblical texts that is being carried out by the scholars associated with the "Computer-Assisted Linguistic Analysis of the Peshitta" (CALAP) project.[1]

This book is composed of 28 chapters grouped in six sections. Each chapter is tightly focused and most of them are short, which makes it easy for the reader to absorb the information.

Section One, "Sirach in Syriac," is a monograph in its own right which covers much of the ground typical of the studies of translation technique that have come out in recent decades such as those of Szpek,[2] Morrison,[3] Greenberg,[4] and Carbajosa.[5] Van Peursen discusses the manuscripts of the Syriac version, the portions of the Hebrew version that have been found, and the Greek and Latin versions; relationships among these texts and text types are quite complex. Van Peursen then examines specific characteristics and tendencies that distinguish the Syriac text and he looks for clues to the religious profile of the translator himself. It seems likely that the writer had a Jewish background and a

[1] The project is introduced and a sample of the research on 1 Kings is presented in *Corpus Linguistics and Textual History: A Computer-Assisted Interdisciplinary Approach to the Peshitta*, ed. P.S.F. Keulen and W.Th. van Peursen (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2006).

[2] Heidi M. Szpek, *Translation Technique in the Peshitta to Job: A Model for Evaluating a Text with Documentation from the Peshitta to Job* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

[3] Craig E. Morrison, *The Character of the Syriac Version of the First Book of Samuel* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

[4] Gillian Greenberg, *Translation Technique in the Peshitta to Jeremiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

[5] Ignacio Carbajosa, *The Character of the Syriac Version of Psalms: A Study of Psalms 90–150 in the Peshitta*, tr. Paul Stevenson (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

knowledge, though imperfect, of Hebrew. His attitudes toward the Law, sacrifices and other Jewish practices show that he was in all likelihood a convert to Christianity, but the available data are so scanty that it is impossible to say which variety (*pace* earlier scholars who have tried to pinpoint it).

Section Two, "Methodology of the Computer-Assisted Linguistic Analysis," has a careful, very readable explanation of the function of each the various programs used by CALAP. As a linguist with a decided preference for using the cerebellum rather than the computer as an analytical tool, I found this section blessedly light on computer jargon and thus quite easy to follow. Van Peursen' approach made it clear to me that the function of the CALAP programs is not to do analysis in lieu of a human linguist, but rather to add rigor to the human linguist's work by ensuring that he or she looks at every word, phrase and clause, and then determines its internal analysis as well as its relationship to other units at or above its level.

The CALAP model uses a strictly form-to-function approach to the data. This approach is well nigh indispensable in a computer-based model. It is also a sound model for non-computational approaches; just recall the great muddle linguists got themselves into in the 1960's and 1970's arguing about what the nature of "subjecthood" was. A lot of confusion resulted from the failure to maintain a clear distinction between the formal role (the argument that agreed with the verb) and the functional role (agent, experiencer, etc.).

The next three sections form a natural group that concentrates on the linguistic analysis of the text of Ben Sira. It is composed of Section Three, "Phrase Structure," Section Four, "Clause Structure," and Section Five, "Text Hierarchy." I will discuss highlights of these sections in more detail below.

Section Six, "Conclusions," summarizes the most important points of the preceding five sections. The book ends with an extensive bibliography, an index of passages, and an index of authors.

Section Three comprises chapters 9–15. In Chapter 9, "Preliminary Remarks on Phrase Structure," van Peursen introduces the concept of "phrase atoms," that is, an irreducible core of the phrase. It seems this idea was formalized in the course of the development of CALAP. A phrase atom may consist of a

single noun but also of a sequence consisting of [construct noun + noun] or [preposition + noun]. These phrase atoms may be extended into more elaborate phrases by the addition of adjectives, *d*-phrases, or other elements. The distinction between a phrase atom and a phrase with extensions is seen, among other ways, in the kinds of differences found in inner-Syriac manuscript variation. Extensions may be added or dropped, but phrase atoms are not broken.

A significant observation about translation technique emerges from the comparison of phrase atoms and full phrases in the Syriac and Hebrew versions of Ben Sira. Often phrase atoms correspond in the two versions, but not infrequently one version has a single noun where the other has a phrase atom and *vice versa*. Sometimes a single noun in one language corresponds to a noun phrase in the other. The frequency with which such correspondences occur strongly suggests, not that the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Syriac translator was greatly different from that in the manuscripts that have been recovered, but that the Syriac version was translated phrase by phrase rather than word by word.

Chapters 10–12 discuss phrase atoms with one or more extensions added. In Chapter 13 van Peursen presents another important feature that demonstrates the inviolability of phrase atoms with complex internal structure. It is that a phrase may be broken up by an enclitic pronoun (such as ܗܘ) or a connective particle (ܓܝܪ, ܕܝܢ), but such a particle comes after the *first phrase atom*, not simply the first word. This simplifies traditional descriptions which have to posit various exceptions to a basic "first word" rule.

Section Four comprises chapters 16–24. In Chapter 16, which introduces the discussion of clauses, van Peursen agrees with A. Hoftijzer's proposal to consider the person-marking affixes of a finite verb the subject of the predication, while any nominal constituent that agrees with the affix is considered an extraposed element (p. 280). This analysis has interesting implications for the issue of topic and comment further on.

In verbless clauses, van Peursen borrows a hierarchy of definiteness proposed by J. Dyk and E. Talstra for Hebrew (pp. 281–282). The entity with the higher level of definiteness is taken to be the subject of the nominal clause (NC). This is a useful means of resolving some cases which might otherwise be ambiguous.

Chapters 17, 18, and 19 deal with bipartite, tripartite and quadripartite nominal clauses, respectively. In these chapters van Peursen contrasts the analyses of T. Muraoka and G. Goldenberg. Muraoka classifies NCs in a way that corresponds fairly closely to the surface patterns observed. Goldenberg only recognizes one basic pattern: [predicate + pronominal subject]. He regards full noun phrases that refer to the subject as extraposed elements. In the case of bipartite nominal clauses that have only a noun phrase as subject and no pronominal subject, he considers the clauses elliptical, lacking an enclitic pronominal subject (p. 289). Similarly, he considers the enclitic personal pronoun the true subject in other NCs. Van Peursen is careful to point out that while it is harder to reconcile the data of the Syriac Ben Sira with this analysis, Ben Sira is not written in the Classical Syriac of later centuries, but in a very early variety of it. Goldenberg's analysis may fit the later Classical Syriac more completely. In addition, Goldenberg's analysis of NCs ultimately fits very nicely with van Peursen's analysis of fronted elements in verbal clauses, as becomes clear in chapter 21.

Chapter 21 uses insights from G. Khan as the basis for a discussion of the matter of extraposition. This construction, traditionally called "casus pendens" or "nominative absolute," consists of placing a nominal element before a clause to which it has no direct grammatical connection. Its function is shown by a coreferential personal pronoun inside the clause proper. The main function of extraposition in the Syriac of Ben Sira, van Peursen tells us, is topicalization or thematization (p. 321). This phenomenon is more common in the Syriac than in the extant corresponding passages of the Hebrew of Ben Sira.

Functionally related to extraposition is anticipatory pronominal agreement. The latter takes place when an enclitic personal pronoun is used proleptically, that is, to refer to an entity that is later specified by a noun. One of the most common occurrences of this phenomenon is found in genitive constructions such as ܕܕܚܠܐ ܕܡܪܝܐ 'the fear of the Lord'. At the phrase level, it is also common after ܟܠ. At the clause level it is less common, but it occurs marking direct objects in constructions such as ܗܘ ܫܒܚܘܗܝ 'Praise him'.

While extraposition and anticipatory pronominal agreement are functionally similar, they differ in that "the element in extraposition is always topicalized, whereas the fronted element in a pronominal

agreement construction sometimes receives focus" (p. 330). The main formal difference is that the anticipatory pronoun, unlike an extraposed noun phrase, is part of the predication structure of the clause.

One of the most interesting parts of van Peursen's discussion is how he relates extraposition and anticipatory pronominal agreement with some of the NC patterns discussed earlier. It is in this discussion that the value of Goldenberg's analysis of NCs becomes apparent. Goldenberg analyzes noun phrase "subjects" of NCs as extraposed elements, whether they precede or follow the nuclear clause (predicate + enclitic personal pronoun serving as true subject). "Even if one disagrees with Goldenberg's analysis, one has to agree that in both the tripartite NCs and the extraposition structures the topic is placed in the first position" (p. 332).

Chapter 24 offers an excellent analysis of the structure commonly called the cleft sentence. The basic structure is [non-verbal clause element + ܐܡ + ordinary clause]. This construction serves to rhematize some part of the clause. The verb is the usual source of new information in a verbal clause; when another element of the clause is the new information, it is rhematized by means of clefting. Cleft sentences show similarities to tripartite NCs of the pattern [subject + enclitic pronoun + predicate]. In both cases the element before the enclitic pronoun is rhematized.

Chapter 26 offers a discussion of interclausal relations that is key for understanding the construction of discourses in Syriac. Generally speaking, a clause constitutes a "discourse segment." However, van Peursen points out that traditionally grammars of Semitic languages have recognized only two types of interclausal relations: parataxis and hypotaxis. The crucial category of embedded clauses (subject clauses, complement clauses and restrictive relative clauses) has been subsumed under hypotaxis.[6]

[6] The concept of embedded clauses as distinct from hypotactically subordinated clause was developed long ago in the literature of general linguistics. See, for example, chapter 11 "Clause as Term" (pp. 304–17) in *Grammatical Analysis* by Kenneth L. Pike and Evelyn G. Pike (Arlington, Texas: Summer Institute of Linguistics and University of Texas at Arlington, 1982). The theory behind phenomena such as embedded and merged clauses is dealt with by Robert E. Longacre in his book *The*

Van Peursen cites J. Schilperoord and A. Verhagen for an explanation of the role of embedding in determining discourse structure: " 'If a constituent of a matrix-clause A is conceptually dependent on the contents of a subordinate clause B, then B is not a separate discourse segment.' In other words: the exceptional status of embedded clauses is not due to their dependency on the matrix clause, but rather to the dependency of the matrix clause on the embedded clause for its conceptual realization" (p. 387). Consequently, a matrix clause and its embedded clause constitute a single discourse unit. An example of this is found in Sir 3:21 (p. 389):

ܕܩܫ̈ܢ ܡܢܟ ܠܐ ܬܒܥܐ

'Do not seek [what is too difficult for you].'

The translation is van Peursen's, but I have enclosed the embedded clause in brackets for ease of identification.

After defining the discourse segment, van Peursen moves on to a discussion of how these units are joined in coherent discourses. He makes use of the seminal work of Halliday and Hasan in his discussion of coherence (notional connections) and cohesion (surface markers of coherence). He makes the important point that the CALAP programs are limited in their ability to deal with coherence, since they can only take into account the surface signals of cohesion. The human analyst must consider six factors (clause opening type; grammatical clause type; grammatical and lexical correspondences; distance; set of participants; syntactic marking of paragraphs) as he or she determines to which preceding clause the current one is connected and what the nature of the connection is.

Since the markers of cohesion are optional, it is not surprising that they show considerable variability between the Syriac and Hebrew texts of Ben Sira, as well as in inner-Syriac and inner-Hebrew variation. Consequently, such differences are of little use for textual critics in their efforts to determine the Hebrew *Vorlage* of this book.

Just as Chapter 26 contributes to our knowledge of the discourse structure of Ben Sira, so Chapter 27 shows how the

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Grammar of Discourse (New York: Plenum Press, 1983). See the discussion of secondary exponence and recursion, pp. 279–89.

detailed examination of syntactic structure required by CALAP gives us insight into the genre of a section of this book. Specifically, van Peursen considers the claim that the "Praise of the Fathers" section (chapters 44–49) is an example of the *Beispielreihe* genre. Upon minutely examining the paragraph structure in Sir 44:17–23 (Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and comparing it to that of clear examples of *Beispielreihe* (Hebrews 11; 1 Macc 2:52–60), van Peursen finds appreciable differences. He continues his examination with Sir 47:23–48:15 (Elijah and Elisha) and finds similar results. These lead him to conclude that the "Praise of the Fathers" does not in fact conform to the canons of the *Beispielreihe* genre, as he once thought. Rather, "Ben Sira is deeply concerned with the flow of history as an ongoing chain of interrelated events rather than with the individual heroes who played a role in it" (p. 413).

This brief survey of the highlights of this book shows just how wide-ranging its contents are and in how many ways the computer-assisted study of language can yield insights into ancient texts. The editorial problems in this book (see Addendum) are few and its contributions to Syriac studies are great. The author is to be commended for bringing together such a wide variety of material in a well-organized fashion inside the covers of a single volume.

ADDENDUM: TYPOGRAPHICAL ERRORS

Although the number of typographical errors is not large, there are some. Problems in English include:

p. 163: "disambiguing" should be "disambiguating"

p. 187: "these two lexemes became to be treated," where "became" should be "came."

p. 251: "Now the sons of Bilha and the sons of Leah, the maidservants of Leah and Rachel," where the first "Leah" should be "Zilpa."

p. 355: "take ... council" for "take ... counsel" (translation of 9:14; the author has presumably taken this archaic spelling from Payne Smith's *Compendious Syriac Dictionary*)

p. 357: A period appears in the middle of a sentence: "...the internal temporal constituency of an event. that has not taken place."

p. 395: "a syntactical devices" should be "a syntactical device."

The plural of "hero" is spelled "hero's" (p. 405) and "heros" (p. 409) as well as the correct "heroes" (most of the time).

In Syriac the errors include:

p. 157 (about three-quarters of the way down the page): ܐܝܗܠ ܓܓܟ for ܐܝܗܠ ܟܓܓ

p. 269: ,ܡܗܒܓ for ,ܡܗܒܐ (3:11)

p. 309: ܐܝܣܟ for ܐܝܝܣܟ (1 Cor 7:22)

p. 332: ܓܟܐ for ܐܝܟ ̈ܓ and also ܐܝܒܗܐ for ܐܝܒ̈ܐ (3:11)

p. 355: ܠܟܒܟܒ for ܠܟܒܟܒ (5:11a)

p. 389: ܐܝ̈ܠ for ܐܝ̈ܟܠ (14:20–26).

There is also at least one problem of the type that plague those who write right-to-left languages in a work primarily written in a left-to-write language. The problem appears about the middle of p. 157:

ܓ ܟܓܟ corresponds to ܡܢ, עד אשר to ܩܡ, and ܢܒܝܐ to נביא.

Clearly, ܡܢ and עד אשר have been reversed from their correct order. While I myself have sometimes had considerable difficulty working around problems like this, it does not seem unreasonable to expect a prestigious publisher such as Brill to find a means of catching and fixing such problems before printing them in books that require considerable sacrifices for most scholars to afford.