

P.V.M. Flesher (ed.), *Targum and Peshitta. South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism*, Number 165, Targum Studies, Volume Two, ISBN 07885044479, xx + 252 pages, Atlanta (Georgia), Scholars Press, 1998.

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[1] This volume was dedicated to Dr. M. Weitzman after his untimely death, in commemoration of his scholarship and friendship.

[2] In addition to the introduction, a select bibliography, and the indices, this book contains nine contributions by specialists in the field of Peshitta or Targum research. All contributions to this volume seek to investigate some kind of relationship between Peshitta and Targum, viz. how the Targum may or may not have influenced the Peshitta. The subjects are arranged in three major sections: "Explaining the Issues," "The Pentateuch," and "The Prophets and the Writings." In each section the question of influence is studied from a specific viewpoint. In my opinion, the overall conclusion of the contributors is that the Peshitta is not directly dependent on the Targum, i.e. the Peshitta is not translated from a Targum. Both traditions seem to reflect the reception of the Old Testament in two different, but closely related, religious and cultural environments. As may appear from some critical remarks below, however, this might be only one side of the picture. The contributors failed to prove that, from the viewpoint of the historian, a direct relationship between the Targum and the Peshitta could never have existed. Therefore, the resulting picture is little else than a hypothesis, though an important and intriguing one.

[3] In the introduction ("Looking for Links in all the Wrong Places: Targum and Peshitta Relationships"), the editor of the volume, Paul Flesher, highlights clearly the major issues he found in each contribution.

[4] The first major section, "Explaining the Issues," may be considered the basis of the whole book, since it presents a broad and thorough discussion of the state of affairs regarding the Peshitta from the viewpoint of textual history and criticism, as well as methodology. It would have increased the importance of this book, however, if a similar state of affairs with regard to the Targum could have been presented. The two contributions in this

section are mutually related; though, in fact, Dirksen's contribution presupposes that of Koster.

- [5] In his search for some relationship between Peshitta and Targum, P.B. Dirksen takes as his starting point the "...comparison between the text of the Peshitta and that of the targums" (p. 4). In the same paragraph, Dirksen also refers to the "...actual Peshitta text..." Though he does not explain what he means by the terms, "Peshitta text" and "actual Peshitta text," one might assume from his examples that he is referring to the text as given in the Leiden text edition, viz. "The Old Testament in Syriac."

- [6] Methodologically, Dirksen's terminology gives the impression that he does not consider some aspects of the textual history and criticism, nor the reception of the Old Testament in the Syrian church, as relevant as I would prefer.

- [7] The first problem is that the text of the Leiden edition is not an actual Peshitta text, let alone "the" Peshitta text. In 1974, for good reasons, the late P.A.H. de Boer, M.W. van Vliet, and this reviewer changed the editorial policy. The result of this change is that, with the exception of the first two fascicles, the text of the Leiden edition stands midway between a diplomatic and an eclectic text. The resulting text is equivalent to, but not identical with, M.D. Koster's BTR (accepted in 1977 and in subsequent studies). Thus, due to the change in editorial policy, the running text of the Leiden edition is a reconstruction. Though mainly based on the evidence of the ancient biblical manuscripts up to and including the tenth century, this text cannot be found in any single biblical manuscript. The rules of the edition, however, enable scholars with an interest in textual criticism and textual history to reconstruct the text of the individual biblical manuscripts including those of the eleventh and twelfth century.

- [8] The second problem is that the actual evidence of the running text and the BTR is usually based on no more than five complete ancient copies of the Old Testament in Syriac. Three of them are pandects, while the copies of the individual biblical books, drawn together, also result in two complete copies of the Old Testament Peshitta. For a very small number of biblical books one may add a few other individual manuscripts. This is the meagre and coincidental harvest of textual evidence as far as biblical manuscripts are concerned; it is hard to imagine that in such a vast

area such a small number of copies would have been in use at the time in question.

[9] The third problem is that the scant textual evidence does not provide us with a uniform type of text. If Koster's model of the development of the Peshitta text were historically indisputable, the BTR would still be only the "common denominator" of some four centuries.

[10] The fourth problem is whether or not the biblical manuscripts reflect a process of adaptation to the standards of the Syriac language (pace Koster). Indeed, all ancient Peshitta manuscripts, the fifth century ones included, give the strong impression that they are a studied reproduction of an older exemplar. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that the diversity in the BTR is to be explained as a state of affairs in the period previous to that covered by the biblical manuscripts which survived only coincidentally. In the light of this observation one may question whether the BTR should be related to a historical-linguistic development of the Syriac language in a post-fifth-century period. Would it be beyond any discussion to explain this diversity as the result of the flexibility of the Peshitta text and its regional differentiation in the period before the sixth century? This would at least explain why sometimes a BTR variant already occurs in a pre-fifth-century Syriac Bible commentary.

[11] The fifth problem is that interpretation and translation techniques are a part of the broader phenomenon of the reception of the Old Testament in the Syrian church. Dirksen seems to pay too little attention to this aspect (p. 5). A good understanding of the process of reception requires a careful and extensive study of the early Syriac commentaries, as well as other theological and liturgical sources. This study might provide us with additional data and perhaps nuance the current opinions regarding the origin and status of the Peshitta. In other words, one should also focus the study of the interpretation and translation techniques on genuine Syriac sources. One may even argue that these sources may provide us with much deeper insight into the techniques of interpretation and translation as used by the Syrians than into any comparison of Targum and Peshitta. Anyhow, this comparison should be done from the broader perspective of the reception of the Old Testament. From this perspective, a study of the influence of, or interaction with, the Greek commentaries might not be lacking.

- [12] In short, on the basis of the above reflections one may wonder whether it is still justifiable to speak of “the (actual) Peshitta” without any further specification.
- [13] The reflections above do not imply any unappreciation of the present book, they only point to the risk of ambiguity when using terminology such as, “the Peshitta,” or “the actual Peshitta;” and in this respect, they invite caution and further precision. They also emphasize that the Leiden edition is not the final step, but only the first inevitable, and perhaps most decisive, step in the search for the origin and early establishment of the Old Testament Peshitta.
- [14] The result of the present book is more or less a balanced picture of the relationship between “the Peshitta” and the Targums. This picture implies a refutation of the Old Testament Peshitta as a translated Targum. Yet, although the arguments for this refutation seem strong, they do not provide a proper explanation for the large number of terminological and exegetical similarities between the two textual traditions. The seven case studies in this book make it plausible, however, that “Peshitta” and Targums are two diverging, but nevertheless closely related Aramaic versions of an original Hebrew text. The divergences between the two, and the idiosyncrasies of each of them, are due to different editorial policies regarding exegesis, and the different religious interests of the intended audience.