

# The Hebrew Bible

Volume 1C  
*Writings*

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# Contents of THB Volume 1

## VOLUME 1A

Preface

Introduction to the Textual History of the Bible

Introduction to Textual History of the Bible, Vol. 1: The Hebrew Bible

### 1 Overview Articles

## VOLUME 1B

### 2 Pentateuch

### 3–5 Former Prophets

3 Joshua

4 Judges

5 Samuel–Kings

### 6–9 Latter Prophets

6 Isaiah

7 Jeremiah

8 Ezekiel

9 Minor Prophets

## VOLUME 1C

### 10–20 Ketuvim (Writings)

10 Psalms

11 Job

12 Proverbs

13–17 Five Scrolls

13 Ruth

14 Canticles

15 Qohelet

16 Lamentations

17 Esther

18 Daniel

19 Ezra–Nehemiah

20 1–2 Chronicles

### 21 The Biblical Text as Attested in Ancient Literature

Addenda et corrigenda to volumes 1A and 1B

# Contents of THB Volume 1A

Preface (Armin Lange) .....	IX
Introduction to the Textual History of the Bible (Armin Lange) .....	XI
Introduction to Textual History of the Bible, Vol. 1: The Hebrew Bible (Armin Lange and Emanuel Tov) .....	XV
Area Editors .....	XXI
Authors .....	XXII
Notes to the Reader / Abbreviations .....	XXIII
Collective Bibliography .....	XXIX
<b>1 Overview Articles</b>	
<b>1.1 Introduction</b> .....	3
1.1.1 Textual History of the Hebrew Bible (Emanuel Tov and Eugene Ulrich) .....	3
1.1.2 Canonical History of the Hebrew Bible .....	35
1.1.2.1 The History of the Jewish Canon (Armin Lange) .....	36
1.1.2.2 The History of the Christian Old Testament Canon (Armin Lange) .....	48
<b>1.2 Ancient Hebrew-Aramaic Texts</b> .....	82
1.2.1 History of Research (Armin Lange) .....	82
1.2.2 Ancient and Late Ancient Hebrew and Aramaic Jewish Texts (Armin Lange) .....	112
1.2.3 Samaritan Pentateuch (Sidnie White Crawford) .....	166
<b>1.3 Primary Translations (Emanuel Tov)</b> .....	176
1.3.0 Introduction .....	177
1.3.1 Greek Translations .....	191
1.3.1.1 Septuagint (Emanuel Tov) .....	191
1.3.1.2 Pre-Hexaplaric Translations, Hexapla, post-Hexaplaric translations (Peter J. Gentry) .....	211
1.3.2 Samareitikon (Jan Joosten) .....	235
1.3.3 Targumim (Beate Ego) .....	239
1.3.4 Peshitta (Ignacio Carbajosa) .....	262
1.3.5 Vulgate (Michael Graves) .....	278
1.3.6 Arabic Translations (Jewish [Rabbanite and Karaite], Samaritan) .....	289
1.3.6.1 Jewish Arabic Translations (Meira Polliack) .....	289
1.3.6.2 Samaritan Arabic Translations (Tamar Zewi) .....	309
<b>1.4 Secondary Translations</b> .....	316
1.4.0 Introduction (Emanuel Tov) .....	316
1.4.1 Vetus Latina (Julio Treballe Barrera) .....	319
1.4.2 Coptic Translations (Frank Feder) .....	331
1.4.3 Ethiopic Translation(s) (Steve Delamarter, Ralph Lee, and Curt Niccum) .....	345
1.4.4 Syro-Lucianic Translation (Ignacio Carbajosa) .....	360
1.4.5 Syro-Hexapla (Ignacio Carbajosa) .....	362

1.4.6	Jacob of Edessa's Syriac Translation (Ignacio Carbajosa) .....	368
1.4.7	Armenian Translations (Claude Cox) .....	370
1.4.8	Georgian Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	375
1.4.9	Christian Palestinian Aramaic Translation (Christa Müller-Kessler) .....	385
1.4.10	Old Church Slavonic Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	393
1.4.11	Arabic (Christian) Translations (Ronny Vollandt) .....	408
1.4.12	Gothic Translations (Marcus Sigismund) .....	416
1.5	Medieval Masoretic Text (Elvira Martín-Contreras) .....	420
1.6	The Biblical Text as Attested in Ancient Literature (Michael Segal) .....	430
1.7	The Biblical Text in Light of Its Quotations and Allusions .....	440
1.7.1	Jewish Quotations and Allusions (Armin Lange) .....	440
1.7.2	Christian Quotations and Allusions (Martin Meiser) .....	445

# Contents of THB Volume 1B

Area Editors .....	XII
Authors .....	XIII
Notes to the Reader / Abbreviations .....	XIV
Collective Bibliography .....	XIX
 <b>2 Pentateuch</b>	
 <b>2.1 Textual History of the Pentateuch (Emanuel Tov) .....</b>	<b>3</b>
 <b>2.2 Ancient Hebrew Texts .....</b>	<b>22</b>
2.2.1 Ancient, Late Ancient, and Early Medieval Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange) ....	22
2.2.2 Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Ronald Hendel) .....	59
2.2.3 Other Texts (Ronald Hendel) .....	72
2.2.4 SP and Ancient Texts Close to SP .....	84
2.2.4.1 Genesis (Ronald Hendel) .....	84
2.2.4.2 Exodus (Magnar Kartveit) .....	86
2.2.4.3 Leviticus (Sarianna Metso) .....	93
2.2.4.4 Numbers (Nathan Jastram) .....	98
2.2.4.5 Deuteronomy (Sidnie White Crawford) .....	101
2.2.5 Other Sources (Nathan Jastram) .....	105
2.2.5.1 Tefillin and Mezuzot .....	105
2.2.5.2 Nash Papyrus .....	111
2.2.5.3 Silver Scrolls from Ketef Hinnom .....	115
2.2.5.4 Severus Scroll .....	119
 <b>2.3 Medieval Text of MT (Elvira Martín Contreras) .....</b>	<b>126</b>
 <b>2.4 Primary Translations .....</b>	<b>131</b>
2.4.1 Septuagint .....	131
2.4.1.1 Genesis (Martin Rösel) .....	131
2.4.1.2 Exodus (Larry Perkins) .....	135
2.4.1.3 Leviticus (Moshe A. Zipor) .....	142
2.4.1.4 Numbers (Martin Rösel) .....	145
2.4.1.5 Deuteronomy (Sidnie White Crawford) .....	148
2.4.2 Pre-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (Andrew McClurg) .....	152
2.4.3 Targumim (Avigdor Shinan) .....	152
2.4.3.1 4Q <sup>tg</sup> Lev .....	152
2.4.3.2 Targumim – General .....	153
2.4.3.3 Targum Onqelos .....	158
2.4.3.4 Palestinian Targumim .....	161
2.4.4 Samaritan Targum (Abraham Tal) .....	167
2.4.5 Peshitta (Jerome Lund) .....	173
2.4.6 Hexaplaric Greek Translations and Hexapla of the Octateuch (Andrew McClurg) ...	180

2.4.7	Post-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (Matthew M. Dickie) . . . . .	188
2.4.8	Vulgate (Matthew Kraus) . . . . .	189
2.4.9	Arabic Translations (Ronny Vollandt) . . . . .	195
2.5	<b>Secondary Translations</b> . . . . .	207
2.5.1	Vetus Latina (Julio Treballe Barrera) . . . . .	207
2.5.2	Coptic Translations (P. Nagel) . . . . .	211
2.5.3	Ethiopic Translation(s) of Octateuch (Steve Delamarter and Curt Niccum) . . . . .	215
2.5.4	Late Syriac Translations (Alison Salvesen) . . . . .	219
2.5.5	Armenian Translations (Claude Cox) . . . . .	225
2.5.6	Georgian Translations (Bernard Outtier) . . . . .	227
2.5.7	Old Church Slavonic Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) . . . . .	230
2.5.8	Arabic Translations (Ronny Vollandt) . . . . .	239
3–5	<b>Former Prophets</b>	
3	<b>Joshua</b>	
3.1	Textual History of Joshua (Michaël van der Meer) . . . . .	251
3.2	<b>Ancient Hebrew Texts</b> . . . . .	257
3.2.1	Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange) . . . . .	257
3.2.2	Masoretic Text and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Karin Finsterbusch) . . . . .	259
3.2.3	Other Texts (Karin Finsterbusch) . . . . .	265
3.3	Septuagint (Michaël van der Meer) . . . . .	269
4	<b>Judges</b>	
4.1	Textual History of Judges (H. Ausloos) . . . . .	277
4.2	<b>Ancient Hebrew Texts</b> . . . . .	281
4.2.1	Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange) . . . . .	281
4.2.2	Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Julio Treballe Barrera) . . . . .	284
4.2.3	Other Texts (Julio Treballe Barrera) . . . . .	289
4.3	Septuagint (Cécile Dogniez) . . . . .	294
5	<b>Samuel–Kings</b>	
5.1	Textual History of Samuel (Eugene Ulrich) . . . . .	301
5.2	Textual History of Kings (Philippe Hugo and Adrian Schenker) . . . . .	310

<b>5.3 Ancient Hebrew Texts</b> .....	319
5.3.1 Ancient and Late Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange) .....	319
5.3.2 Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Philippe Hugo & Adrian Schenker) .	332
5.3.3 Other Texts (Philippe Hugo & Adrian Schenker) .....	339
<b>5.4 Septuagint (Samuel) (Siegfried Kreuzer)</b> .....	349
<b>5.5 Septuagint (Kings) (Siegfried Kreuzer)</b> .....	362
<b>3-5.1 Primary Translations</b> .....	367
3-5.1.1 Septuagint (Emanuel Tov) .....	367
3-5.1.2 Pre-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (Andrew McClurg) .....	367
3-5.1.2.1 Joshua-Judges .....	367
3-5.1.2.2 Samuel-Kings .....	367
3-5.1.3 Targum (Willem Smelik) .....	367
3-5.1.4 Peshitta (Craig E. Morrison) .....	375
3-5.1.5 Hexapla (Andrew McClurg) .....	383
3-5.1.5.1 Joshua-Judges .....	383
3-5.1.5.2 Hexaplaric Greek Translations and the Hexapla: Samuel-Kings .....	383
3-5.1.6 Post-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (Matthew M. Dickie) .....	387
3-5.1.6.1 Joshua-Judges .....	387
3-5.1.6.2 Samuel-Kings .....	389
3-5.1.7 Vulgate (David Everson) .....	391
3-5.1.8 Arabic Translations (Meira Polliack & Meirav Nadler-Akirav) .....	396
<b>3-5.2 Secondary Translations</b> .....	397
3-5.2.1 Vetus Latina .....	397
3-5.2.1.1 Joshua-Judges (Andrés Piquer Otero) .....	397
3-5.2.1.2 Samuel-Kings (Pablo Torijano Morales) .....	400
3-5.2.2 Coptic Translations (Alin Suciu) .....	403
3-5.2.3 Ethiopic Translations .....	409
3-5.2.3.1 Joshua (Steve Delamarter) .....	409
3-5.2.3.2 Judges (Michael G. Wechsler) .....	410
3-5.2.3.3 1-4 Kingdoms (Curt Niccum & James Prather) .....	412
3-5.2.3.4 1-2 Kings (Curt Niccum) .....	415
3-5.2.4 Late Syriac Translations (Ignacio Carbajosa) .....	415
3-5.2.5 Armenian Translations .....	420
3-5.2.5.1 Joshua (Peter Cowe) .....	420
3-5.2.5.2 Judges (Peter Cowe) .....	422
3-5.2.5.3 1-2 Samuel (1-2 Reigns) (Peter Cowe) .....	424
3-5.2.5.4 1-2 Kings (3-4 Kgdms) (Peter Cowe) .....	427
3-5.2.6 Georgian Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	429
3-5.2.7 Old Church Slavonic Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	436
3-5.2.8 Arabic Translations (Ronny Vollandt) .....	445
<b>3-5.3 Medieval text of MT (Elvira Martín Contreras)</b> .....	447



**6–9 *Latter Prophets*****6 *Isaiah***

<b>6.1</b>	<b>Textual History of Isaiah (Arie van der Kooij)</b>	459
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Ancient Hebrew Texts</b>	470
6.2.1	Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Russell Fuller)	470
6.2.2	Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Russell Fuller & Peter Flint)	476
6.2.3	Other Texts (Russell Fuller & Peter Flint)	482
<b>6.3</b>	<b>Septuagint (Arie van der Kooij)</b>	489

**7 *Jeremiah***

<b>7.1</b>	<b>Textual History of Jeremiah (Richard D. Weis)</b>	495
<b>7.2</b>	<b>Ancient Hebrew-Aramaic Texts</b>	514
7.2.1	Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange)	514
7.2.2	Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Armin Lange)	518
7.2.3	Other Texts (Armin Lange)	536
<b>7.3</b>	<b>Septuagint (Georg Fischer)</b>	543

**8 *Ezekiel***

<b>8.1</b>	<b>Textual History of Ezekiel (William A. Tooman)</b>	559
<b>8.2</b>	<b>Ancient Hebrew Texts</b>	570
8.2.1	Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange)	570
8.2.2	Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (William A. Tooman)	572
8.2.3	Other Texts (Armin Lange)	579
<b>8.3</b>	<b>Septuagint (Johan Lust)</b>	581

**9 *Minor Prophets***

<b>9.1</b>	<b>Textual History of the Minor Prophets (Christopher J. Fresch)</b>	589
<b>9.2</b>	<b>Ancient Hebrew Texts</b>	601
9.2.1	Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Russell Fuller)	601
9.2.2	Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Russell Fuller)	606
9.2.3	Other Texts (Russell Fuller)	611
<b>9.3</b>	<b>Septuagint (W. Edward Glenny)</b>	614

<b>6–9.1</b>	<b>Primary Translations</b> .....	623
6–9.1.1	Septuagint (Emanuel Tov) .....	623
6–9.1.2	Pre-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (John D. Meade) .....	623
6–9.1.3	Targum (Gudrun Elisabeth Lier) .....	623
6–9.1.4	Peshitta (Arie van der Kooij) .....	630
6–9.1.5	Hexaplaric Greek Translations (John D. Meade) .....	637
6–9.1.6	Post-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (Matthew M. Dickie) .....	643
6–9.1.7	Vulgate (Michael Graves) .....	645
6–9.1.8	Arabic Translations (Meira Polliack and Meirav Nadler-Akirav) .....	652
<b>6–9.2</b>	<b>Secondary Translations</b> .....	660
6–9.2.1	Vetus Latina (Julio Treballe Barrera) .....	660
6–9.2.2	Coptic Translations .....	665
6–9.2.2.1	Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel (Frank Feder) .....	665
6–9.2.2.2	Minor Prophets (Nathalie Bosson) .....	671
6–9.2.3	Ethiopic Translation(s) .....	677
6–9.2.3.1	Isaiah (Curt Niccum) .....	677
6–9.2.3.2	Jeremiah (Martin Heide) .....	679
6–9.2.3.3	Ezekiel (Michael Knibb) .....	681
6–9.2.3.4	Minor Prophets (Jeremy Brown, Steve Delamarter, Anke Dorman, Curt Niccum, and Kipp Swinney) .....	684
6–9.2.4	Late Syriac Translations (Stephen Ryan) .....	689
6–9.2.5	Armenian Translations .....	695
6–9.2.5.1	Isaiah (Peter Cowe) .....	695
6–9.2.5.2	Jeremiah (Peter Cowe) .....	699
6–9.2.5.3	Ezekiel (Peter Cowe) .....	702
6–9.2.5.4	Minor Prophets (Peter Cowe) .....	703
6–9.2.6	Georgian Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	707
6–9.2.7	Old Church Slavonic Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	714
6–9.2.8	Arabic Translations (Miriam Lindgren Hjälms) .....	723
<b>6–9.3</b>	<b>Medieval text of MT (Elvira Martín Contreras)</b> .....	731

# Contents of THB Volume 1C

Area Editors.....	XIV
Authors.....	XV
Notes to the Reader / Abbreviations.....	XVI
Collective Bibliography.....	XXI
<b>10–20 Ketuvim (Writings)</b>	
<b>10 Psalms</b>	
<b>10.1 Textual History of Psalms (Brent A. Strawn) .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>10.2 Ancient Hebrew Texts .....</b>	<b>24</b>
10.2.1 Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange) .....	24
10.2.2 (Proto-)Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Brent A. Strawn) .....	42
10.2.3 Other Texts (Brent A. Strawn) .....	61
<b>10.3 Primary Translations .....</b>	<b>82</b>
10.3.1 Septuagint (Jannes Smith) .....	82
10.3.2 Pre-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (John D. Meade) .....	88
10.3.3 Targum (David Stec).....	88
10.3.4 Peshitta (Ignacio Carbajosa) .....	93
10.3.5 Hexaplaric Greek Translations (John D. Meade) .....	98
10.3.6 Post-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (Matthew M. Dickie) .....	103
10.3.7 Vulgate (Justin Rogers) .....	104
10.3.8 Arabic Translations (Ilana Sasson).....	110
<b>10.4 Secondary Translations .....</b>	<b>115</b>
10.4.1 Vetus Latina (José Manuel Cañas Reillo) .....	115
10.4.2 Coptic Translations (P. Nagel) .....	119
10.4.3 Ethiopic Translation(s) (Steve Delamarter) .....	122
10.4.4 Late Syriac Translations (Robert Hiebert) .....	125
10.4.5 Armenian Translations (Claude Cox) .....	130
10.4.6 Georgian Translations (Bernard Outtier) .....	132
10.4.7 Old Church Slavonic Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	135
10.4.8 Arabic Translations (Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala) .....	143
<b>11 Job</b>	
<b>11.1 Textual History of Job (R. Althann).....</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>11.2 Ancient and Late Ancient Hebrew Texts .....</b>	<b>156</b>
11.2.1 Ancient and Late Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange) .....	156
11.2.2 Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Brent A. Strawn) .....	158

11.2.3	Other Texts (Brent A. Strawn) .....	169
<b>11.3</b>	<b>Primary Translations .....</b>	<b>175</b>
11.3.1	Septuagint (Claude Cox) .....	175
11.3.2	Pre-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (John D. Meade) .....	181
11.3.3	Targum and Qumran Aramaic Versions (David Shepherd) .....	181
11.3.4	Peshitta (Ignacio Carbajosa) .....	187
11.3.5	Hexaplaric Greek Translations (John D. Meade) .....	190
11.3.6	Post-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (Matthew M. Dickie) .....	196
11.3.7	Vulgate (Soenksen, Jason) .....	198
11.3.8	Arabic Translations (Ilana Sasson) .....	202
<b>11.4</b>	<b>Secondary Translations .....</b>	<b>207</b>
11.4.1	Vetus Latina (Jean-Claude Haelewyck) .....	207
11.4.2	Coptic Translations (Frank Feder) .....	209
11.4.3	Ethiopic Translation(s) (Curt Niccum) .....	211
11.4.4	Job, Proverbs, Canticles, and Qohelet in Late Syriac Translations (Peter J. Gentry) ..	213
11.4.5	Armenian Translations (Claude Cox) .....	224
11.4.6	Georgian Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	227
11.4.7	Old Church Slavonic Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	228
11.4.8	Arabic Translations (Miriam Lindgren Hjälms) .....	236
<b>12</b>	<b><i>Proverbs</i></b>	
<b>12.1</b>	<b>Textual History of Proverbs (Johann Cook) .....</b>	<b>243</b>
<b>12.2</b>	<b>Ancient Hebrew Texts .....</b>	<b>248</b>
12.2.1	Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange) .....	248
12.2.2	Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Johann Cook) .....	250
<b>12.3</b>	<b>Primary Translations .....</b>	<b>253</b>
12.3.1	Septuagint (Forti, Tova) .....	253
12.3.2	Pre-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (John D. Meade) .....	259
12.3.3	Targum (Díez Merino, Luis) .....	259
12.3.4	Peshitta (Ignacio Carbajosa) .....	263
12.3.5	Hexaplaric Greek Translations (John D. Meade) .....	267
12.3.6	Post-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (Matthew M. Dickie) .....	270
12.3.7	Vulgate (Justin Rogers) .....	271
12.3.8	Arabic Translations (Ilana Sasson) .....	275
<b>12.4</b>	<b>Secondary Translations .....</b>	<b>280</b>
12.4.1	Vetus Latina (José Manuel Cañas Reillo) .....	280
12.4.2	Coptic Translations (Frank Feder) .....	283
12.4.3	Ethiopic Translation(s) (Curt Niccum) .....	285
12.4.4	Late Syriac Translations (Peter J. Gentry) .....	287
12.4.5	Armenian Translations (Claude Cox) .....	287

12.4.6	Georgian Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	289
12.4.7	Old Church Slavonic Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	291
12.4.8	Arabic Translations (Miriam Lindgren Hjälms) .....	295
 <b>13–17 Five Scrolls</b>		
 <b>13 Ruth</b>		
13.1	Textual History of Ruth (Melanie Köhlmoos) .....	303
13.2	Ancient Hebrew Texts .....	306
13.2.1	Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange) .....	306
13.2.2	Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Veronika Bachmann) .....	307
13.2.3	Other Texts (Armin Lange) .....	315
 <b>14 Canticles</b>		
14.1	Textual History of Canticles (Bénédicte Lemmelijn) .....	321
14.2	Ancient Hebrew Texts .....	327
14.2.1	Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange) .....	327
14.2.2	Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Armin Lange) .....	329
14.2.3	Other Texts (Armin Lange) .....	332
 <b>15 Qohelet</b>		
15.1	Textual History of Qohelet (Michael V. Fox) .....	339
15.2	Ancient Hebrew Texts (Armin Lange) .....	345
15.2.1	Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange) .....	345
15.2.2	Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Armin Lange) .....	346
15.2.3	Other Texts (Armin Lange) .....	350
 <b>16 Lamentations</b>		
16.1	Textual History of Lamentations (Gideon Kotzé) .....	357
16.2	Ancient Hebrew Texts .....	361
16.2.1	Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange) .....	361
16.2.2	Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Rolf Schäfer) .....	362
16.2.3	Other Texts (Rolf Schäfer) .....	367
 <b>17 Esther</b>		
17.1	Textual History of Esther (Kristin De Troyer) .....	377

<b>17.2</b>	<b>Ancient Hebrew Texts</b> .....	385
17.2.1	Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange) .....	385
17.2.2	Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Veronika Bachmann) .....	385
<b>13–17.1</b>	<b>Primary Translations</b> .....	389
13–17.1.1	Septuagint .....	389
13–17.1.1.1	Ruth (Cécile Dogniez) .....	389
13–17.1.1.2	Canticles (Cécile Dogniez) .....	391
13–17.1.1.3	Qohelet (Cécile Dogniez) .....	392
13–17.1.1.4	Lamentations (Cécile Dogniez) .....	394
13–17.1.1.5	Esther (Kristin De Troyer) .....	396
13–17.1.2	Pre-Hexaplaric Greek Translations .....	402
13–17.1.2.1	Lamentations (John D. Meade) .....	402
13–17.1.2.2	Ruth (John D. Meade) .....	402
13–17.1.2.3	Qoheleth (Peter J. Gentry) .....	402
13–17.1.2.4	Canticles (John D. Meade) .....	402
13–17.1.2.5	Esther (Peter J. Gentry) .....	402
13–17.1.3	Targumim (Christian Brady) .....	402
13–17.1.4	Peshitta .....	409
13–17.1.4.1	Ruth (Michael G. Wechsler) .....	409
13–17.1.4.2	Canticles (Ignacio Carbajosa) .....	413
13–17.1.4.3	Qoheleth (Maya Goldberg) .....	415
13–17.1.4.4	Lamentations (Claudio Balzaretto) .....	418
13–17.1.4.5	Esther (Michael G. Wechsler) .....	419
13–17.1.5	Hexapla .....	424
13–17.1.5.1	Lamentations (John D. Meade) .....	424
13–17.1.5.2	Ruth (McClurg, Andrew) .....	425
13–17.1.5.3	Qoheleth (Peter J. Gentry) .....	425
13–17.1.5.4	Canticles (John D. Meade) .....	433
13–17.1.5.5	Esther (McClurg, Andrew) .....	437
13–17.1.6	Post-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (Matthew M. Dickie) .....	439
13–17.1.7	Vulgate (Vincent Skemp) .....	441
13–17.1.8	Arabic Translations (Ilana Sasson) .....	446
<b>13–17.2</b>	<b>Secondary Translations</b> .....	452
13–17.2.1	Vetus Latina .....	452
13–17.2.1.1	Ruth (Bonifatia Gesche) .....	452
13–17.2.1.2	Canticles (José Manuel Cañas Reillo) .....	454
13–17.2.1.3	Ecclesiastes (José Manuel Cañas Reillo) .....	456
13–17.2.1.4	Lamentations (José Manuel Cañas Reillo) .....	457
13–17.2.1.5	Esther (Jean-Claude Haelewyck) .....	459
13–17.2.2	Coptic Translations (Alin Suciu) .....	461
13–17.2.3	Ethiopic Translation(s) .....	466
13–17.2.3.1	Ruth (Meley Mulugetta) .....	466
13–17.2.3.2	Canticles (Steve Delamarter, Ralph Lee, Curt Niccum & Melaku Terefe) .....	467

13-17.2.3.3	Qoheleth (Curt Niccum) .....	470
13-17.2.3.4	Lamentations (Curt Niccum) .....	472
13-17.2.3.5	Esther (Veronika Bachmann) .....	474
13-17.2.4	Late Syriac Translations .....	475
13-17.2.4.1	Ruth (Michael G. Wechsler) .....	475
13-17.2.4.2	Canticles (Peter J. Gentry) .....	477
13-17.2.4.3	Qoheleth (Peter J. Gentry) .....	477
13-17.2.4.4	Lamentations (Claudio Balzaretto) .....	477
13-17.2.4.5	Esther (Michael G. Wechsler) .....	478
13-17.2.5	Armenian Translations .....	478
13-17.2.5.1	Ruth (Peter Cowe) .....	478
13-17.2.5.2	Canticles (Peter Cowe) .....	480
13-17.2.5.3	Qoheleth (Peter Cowe) .....	484
13-17.2.5.4	Lamentations (Peter Cowe) .....	486
13-17.2.5.5	Esther (Peter Cowe) .....	489
13-17.2.6	Georgian Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	490
13-17.2.7	Old Church Slavonic Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	497
13-17.2.8	Arabic Translations (Ronny Vollandt & Miriam Lindgren Hjälms) .....	506
13-17.3	Medieval Text of MT (Elvira Martín-Contreras) .....	512
18	<i>Daniel</i>	
18.1	Textual History of Daniel (Daniel Olariu) .....	517
18.2	Ancient Hebrew-Aramaic Texts .....	528
18.2.1	Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange) .....	528
18.2.2	Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Michael Segal) .....	532
18.2.3	Other Texts (Michael Segal) .....	537
18.3	Primary Translations .....	542
18.3.1	Septuagint (D. Amara) .....	542
18.3.2	Other Greek Versions Prior to the Hexapla (Jason T. Parry) .....	554
18.3.3	Peshitta (Richard A. Taylor) .....	558
18.3.4	Hexapla (Jason T. Parry) .....	561
18.3.5	Post-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (Jason T. Parry) .....	565
18.3.6	Vulgate (Michael Graves) .....	568
18.3.7	Arabic Translations (Miriam Lindgren Hjälms) .....	571
18.4	Secondary Translations .....	575
18.4.1	Vetus Latina (José Manuel Cañas Reillo) .....	575
18.4.2	Coptic Translations (Sofia Torallas Tovar) .....	579
18.4.3	Ethiopic Translation(s) (Curt Niccum) .....	582
18.4.4	Late Syriac Translations (Richard A. Taylor) .....	584
18.4.5	Armenian Translations (Peter Cowe) .....	586
18.4.6	Georgian Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	589

18.4.7	Old Church Slavonic Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	591
18.4.8	Arabic Translations (Miriam Lindgren Hjälms) .....	595
<b>19</b>	<b><i>Ezra–Nehemiah</i></b>	
<b>19.1</b>	<b>Textual History of Ezra–Nehemiah (Lisbeth Fried) .....</b>	<b>603</b>
<b>19.2</b>	<b>Ancient Hebrew-Aramaic Texts .....</b>	<b>610</b>
19.2.1	Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange) .....	610
19.2.2	Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (David Marcus) .....	611
<b>19.3</b>	<b>Primary Translations .....</b>	<b>615</b>
19.3.1	Septuagint (Zipora Talshir) .....	615
19.3.2	Other Greek Versions Prior to the Hexapla (Jason T. Parry) .....	620
19.3.3	Peshitta (Claudio Balzaretto) .....	623
19.3.4	Hexapla (Jason T. Parry) .....	626
19.3.5	Post-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (Matthew M. Dickie) .....	629
19.3.6	Vulgate (Edmon L. Gallagher) .....	630
19.3.7	Arabic Translations (Meira Polliack, Meirav Nadler-Akirav & Yair Zoran) .....	634
<b>19.4</b>	<b>Secondary Translations .....</b>	<b>638</b>
19.4.1	Vetus Latina (Bonifatia Gesche) .....	638
19.4.2	Coptic Translations (Frank Feder) .....	639
19.4.3	Ethiopic Translation(s) (Curt Niccum) .....	640
19.4.4	Late Syriac Translations (Claudio Balzaretto) .....	643
19.4.5	Armenian Translations (Peter Cowe) .....	645
19.4.6	Georgian Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	648
19.4.7	Old Church Slavonic Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	651
19.4.8	Arabic Translations (Ronny Vollandt) .....	653
<b>20</b>	<b><i>1–2 Chronicles</i></b>	
<b>20.1</b>	<b>Textual History of Chronicles (Andrés Piquer Otero) .....</b>	<b>659</b>
<b>20.2</b>	<b>Ancient Hebrew Texts .....</b>	<b>665</b>
20.2.1	Ancient Manuscript Evidence (Armin Lange) .....	665
20.2.2	(Proto-)Masoretic Texts and Ancient Texts Close to MT (Mika Pajunen) .....	665
<b>20.3</b>	<b>Primary Translations .....</b>	<b>670</b>
20.3.1	Septuagint (Gary N. Knoppers) .....	670
20.3.2	Pre-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (John D. Meade) .....	676
20.3.3	Targum (Leeor Gottlieb) .....	676
20.3.4	Peshitta (David Phillips) .....	681
20.3.5	Hexaplaric Greek Translations (John D. Meade) .....	684
20.3.6	Post-Hexaplaric Greek Translations (Matthew M. Dickie) .....	687
20.3.7	Vulgate (Edmon L. Gallagher) .....	688
20.3.8	Arabic Translations (Polliack, Meira) .....	692



<b>20.4</b>	<b>Secondary Translations</b> .....	693
20.4.1	Vetus Latina (José Manuel Cañas Reillo) .....	693
20.4.2	Coptic Translations (Frank Feder) .....	695
20.4.3	Ethiopic Translation(s) (Steve Delamarter) .....	696
20.4.4	Late Syriac Translations (David Phillips) .....	699
20.4.5	Armenian Translations (Peter Cowe) .....	701
20.4.6	Georgian Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	704
20.4.7	Old Church Slavonic Translations (Alessandro Maria Bruni) .....	708
20.4.8	Arabic Translations (Miriam Lindgren Hjälms) .....	710
<b>10–20.1</b>	<b>Ketuvim: The Medieval text of MT (Elvira Martín-Contreras)</b> .....	714
<b>21</b>	<b><i>The Biblical Text as Attested in Ancient Literature</i></b>	
<b>21.1</b>	<b>Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (Michael Segal)</b> .....	721
21.1.1	Jubilees (Michael Segal) .....	721
21.1.2	Pseudo-Philo (Howard Jacobson) .....	724
<b>21.2</b>	<b>Qumran Literature</b> .....	726
21.2.1	Exegetical Compositions (Alex P. Jassen) .....	726
21.2.2	Rewritten Bible/Parabiblical texts (Molly Zahn) .....	731
<b>21.3</b>	<b>Josephus (Paul Spilsbury)</b> .....	737
<b>21.4</b>	<b>Philo (James R. Royse)</b> .....	741
<b>21.5</b>	<b>New Testament (Peter Rodgers)</b> .....	747
<b>21.6</b>	<b>Rabbinic Literature (Assaf Rosen-Zvi)</b> .....	751
<b>21.7</b>	<b>Greek Church Fathers (Reinhart Ceulemans)</b> .....	755
<b>21.8</b>	<b>Latin Church Fathers (Michael Graves)</b> .....	759
<b>21.9</b>	<b>Syriac Church Fathers (Yifat Monnickendam)</b> .....	764
<b>21.10</b>	<b>Coptic Church Fathers (Anne Boud'hors)</b> .....	768
	<b>Addenda &amp; Corrigenda to Volumes 1A and 1B</b> .....	771

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Christian Brady

### 13–17.1.4 Peshitta

#### 13–17.1.4.1 Ruth

##### 13–17.1.4.1.1 Background

Translated by the end of the second century C.E., the original text of the Peshitta version of Ruth (S-Ruth) – as far as such can be retrieved – represents a generally faithful rendering of the Hebrew text as represented by MT (→ 13.2.2); relatively minor adjustments away from a strictly “literal” rendering are evident throughout, attesting a consistent overarching desire to produce a version of the book that is both conceptually and idiomatically comprehensible to the Syriac reader as well as in which any semantic difficulties in the Hebrew *Vorlage* are resolved. At several points, the translator(s) appear to have taken recourse to LXX (→ 13–17.1.1.1), and in at least two instances (*ad* Ruth 1:21 and 2:4; see below) their word choice may suggest Jewish exegetical influence.

##### 13–17.1.4.1.2 Text and Editions

As of 2016, the book of Ruth has not yet appeared in the Peshitta Institute’s *Vetus Testamentum Syriace* (Leiden: Brill, 1977–); it is expected to be published before too long, thus fulfilling the urgent *desideratum* for a critical edition of this first in the series of four books otherwise comprising the Syriac canonical subdivision known as “The Book of

Women.”<sup>1</sup> The *editio princeps* of s-Ruth was published in Le Jay’s “Paris Polyglot” of 1645,<sup>2</sup> based primarily on manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale syr. 6 (Ancien fonds 1 = s<sup>17a5</sup>), a relatively late (seventeenth century) and textually unreliable West Syriac witness.<sup>3</sup> This initial edition of Ruth was subsequently reproduced without any significant improvement by Walton (1655),<sup>4</sup> Lee (1823),<sup>5</sup> and Hübsch (1866; in vocalized Hebrew transcription),<sup>6</sup> though Walton did take the significant, albeit small, first step towards a critical presentation of s-Ruth by including Herbert Thorndike’s scanty collation of variant readings (accompanied by a few brief text-critical comments) drawn from two manuscripts furnished respectively by James Ussher and Edward Pococke.<sup>7</sup> The text of s-Ruth appeared again in the editions of Urmia (1852)<sup>8</sup> and

Mosul (1887),<sup>9</sup> which were based generally (i.e., for the Bible overall) on more reliable East Syriac witnesses; yet because these manuscripts are unspecified, and the method of their editing clearly uncritical, the text-critical value of these editions is insignificant.<sup>10</sup> The two giant steps that have been taken so far towards the presentation of a critical edition of s-Ruth (aside from the preparatory work currently being undertaken by the Peshitta Institute) are: 1) Ceriani’s publication in 1883 of the second volume of his photolithographic reproduction of ms B. 21 Inferiore of the Ambrosian Library (Milan),<sup>11</sup> containing the oldest complete witness to s-Ruth (on folios 213<sup>r</sup>–214<sup>r</sup>),<sup>12</sup> and 2) Diettrich’s publication in 1902 of a collation of all the variant readings in Ruth attested in five manuscripts dating from the ninth to the twelfth centuries.<sup>13</sup> Additional, potentially significant testimony to the text of s-Ruth are the quotations in pre-modern Syriac literature (→ 21.9), first and foremost in exegetical works containing specific treatments of the book, such as the commentary of Isho’dad of Merv,<sup>14</sup> the *scholia* of Gregory (Abu ’l-Faraj) Barhe-

<sup>1</sup> I.e., Ruth, Susanna (→ 11.3.3), Esther (→ 13–17.1.4.5), and Judith (→ 11.9.4), the order generally attested in those manuscripts (originally) containing the complete Peshitta Old Testament as well as in the separate Book of Women represented by the important early manuscript London, British Library Add. 14,652 (Peshitta Institute no. 6fi; the other separate Book of Women represented by manuscript Add. 14,447 [s<sup>10n</sup>] of the same library lacks Ruth, strangely); see the Peshitta Institute’s *List of Old Testament Peshitta Manuscripts* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), *passim*, and the supplement in VT 18 (1968): 130–32; and Haelewyck, “Le canon de l’Ancien Testament,” 147.

<sup>2</sup> Le Jay, *\*Biblia*. While almost all the books of the Peshitta included therein were prepared by the Maronite Gabriel Sionita, s-Ruth was prepared by the Maronite Abraham Ecchelenensis (see Bloch, “The Printed Texts,” 136, n. 4).

<sup>3</sup> See Bloch, “The Printed Texts,” 137–38.

<sup>4</sup> This is the date given in the colophon of vol. 2 of Walton, *\*Polyglotta*, in which s-Ruth appeared, pp. 181–93.

<sup>5</sup> S. Lee (ed.), *Vetus Testamentum Syriace: Eos tantum libros sistens qui in canone hebraico habentur, ordine vero, quoad fieri potuit, apud Syros usitato dispositos* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1823), 477–80.

<sup>6</sup> A. Hübsch, *Die fünf Megilloth nebst dem syrischen Thargum genannt “Peschito”: Zum ersten Male in hebräischer Quadratschrift mit Interpunktation edirt, ferner mit einem ... Commentare zum Thargum, mit sprachlichen Erläuterungen, Nachweisungen der verschiedenen Lesarten, Vergleichung mit andern alten Versionen, Erklärungen vieler thalmudischer und midraschischer Wörter und Sätze u. s. w.* (Prague: Druck von Senders und Brandeis, 1866), 1a–9a [Hebr.].

<sup>7</sup> In Walton, *\*Polyglotta*, vol. 6 (dated 1657), 21–22. For a critique of this collation, however, see Bloch, “The Printed Texts,” 138 and the additional literature there cited.

<sup>8</sup> ܡܪܝܢܐ :ܚܡܝܬܐ ܠܡܪܝܢܐ ܡܢ ܠܝܘܢ ܠܡܝܬܐ

ܡܪܝܢܐ ܡܢ ܠܝܘܢ ܠܡܝܬܐ [Vetus Testamentum Syriace et Neosyriace], 325–30.

<sup>9</sup> *Biblia sacra juxta versionem simplicem quae dicitur Pschitta*, vol. 1, 358–63.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., the assessments of Bloch, “The Printed Texts,” 140–42, and Haefeli, *Die Peschitta des Alten Testamentes*, 66–70.

<sup>11</sup> A.M. Ceriani, *Translatio Syra Pescitto Veteris Testamenti ex codice Ambrosiano sec. fere vi, photolithographice edita*, vol. 2, *Epistola Jeremiae–ad finem* (Monumenta sacra et profana 6; Milan: Impensis Bibliothecae Ambrosianae, 1883).

<sup>12</sup> One possibly earlier witness to the text of s-Ruth is contained in manuscript London, British Library Add. 14,652 (= s<sup>6n</sup>), folios 8<sup>r</sup>–24<sup>v</sup>, though the text of Ruth 4:11–22 is missing. Aside from these two, forty-seven additional manuscript witnesses to s-Ruth are enumerated in the Peshitta Institute’s *List of Old Testament Peshitta Manuscripts*, 104–5, with eleven more manuscript witnesses being identified in subsequent “Communications of the Peshitta Institute” published in *Vetus Testamentum* (i.e., manuscripts s<sup>8g1</sup>, 10c4, 14c2, 14h1, 15a3, 16a1, 17m1, 19a1–4; see VT 18 [1968]: 142; 27 [1977]: 509; 31 [1981]: 358).

<sup>13</sup> Diettrich, “Die Massora der östlichen und westlichen Syrer.” The five manuscripts are s<sup>9m1</sup>, 10m3, 11m2, 11m5, 12m2.

<sup>14</sup> In van den Eynde (ed.), *Commentaire d’Išo’dad de Merv sur l’Ancien Testament*, 224–33; C. van den Eynde (trans.), *Commentaire d’Išo’dad de Merv sur l’Ancien Testament*, Vol. 3.2:

braeus,<sup>15</sup> the anonymous East Syrian commentary in manuscript Diyarb.-Mos. 13 of the Chaldean Patriarchate of Mosul,<sup>16</sup> and the anonymous East Syrian *scholia* (viz., glossary of difficult words) edited by Hoffmann.<sup>17</sup>

### 13–17.1.4.1.3 Translation Character<sup>18</sup>

s-Ruth has been considered paraphrastic by previous scholars,<sup>19</sup> yet this assessment, in our view, is not quite fair. Generally speaking, the Syriac text – as represented by manuscript s<sup>7a1</sup> and the collation of Diettrich – represents a close and faithful rendering of the Hebrew text as attested by MT (→ 13.2.2). Any deviations from a strictly “literal” rendering do not, for the most part, introduce absolutely “extraneous” information, but rather reflect the consistently applied strictures of good Syriac idiom and style, as well as the desire to present the

*Livres des sessions* (CSCO 230/Syr. 97; Louvain: Peeters, 1963), 267–76.

<sup>15</sup> Assuming that his *scholia* on Ruth – which, being so far unedited, we have not personally examined – are introduced by biblical citations, in keeping with his practice when introducing *scholia* on other books. The one brief *scholium* on Ruth offered by Theodore bar Koni contains no biblical citation; see A. Scher (ed.), *Theodorus bar Kōnī: Liber scholiorum, pars prior* (CSCO 55/Syr. 2.65; Paris: E Typographeo Reipublicae, 1910), 359.

<sup>16</sup> See the description of van den Eynde (trans.), *Commentaire d’Išo’dad de Merv*, xxxv–xxxvi.

<sup>17</sup> In G. Hoffmann, *Opuscula nestoriana* (Paris: Maisonneuve et soc., 1880), 85–122. The *scholia* on Ruth are on 99 (l. 22)–100 (l. 2), the citations being: ܒܚܝܬܐ “your sister-in-law” (Ruth 1:15 [bis]), ܡܢ ܕܢܝܢ “(who) has (not) removed his kindness” (Ruth 2:20), ܐܡܝܢ “he is our kinsman” (Ruth 3:2), and ܡܢ ܕܢܝܢ “your kindness” (Ruth 3:10). The published editions agree with all of these (though we have been unable to check the Paris Polyglot), with the exception of manuscript s<sup>7a1</sup> *ad* Ruth 3:2, which has the clearly erroneous form ܒܚܝܬܐ. The anonymous Syriac chronicle edited by J.-B. Chabot (*Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234* pertinent [CSCO 81/Syr. 36; Paris: Gabalda, 1920]) also contains the complete text of Ruth (on which see M.D. Koster, “Peshitta Institute Communications 11: Second Supplement of the List of the Old Testament Peshitta Manuscripts,” *VT* 12 [1962]: 237–40 [237–38]).

<sup>18</sup> All citations from the text of s-Ruth are from Ceriani’s photolithographic edition of manuscript s<sup>7a1</sup>, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>19</sup> See Haefeli, *Die Peschitta des Alten Testaments*, 28, and the sources cited there.

reader with a semantically precise and logical text in which any ambiguities or difficulties in the Hebrew *Vorlage* have been resolved.<sup>20</sup> Hence, in addition to more intuitive – and, indeed, grammatically requisite – adjustments, such as in the gender of verbs (e.g., *ad* Ruth 1:8: ܒܚܝܬܐ “you have dealt,” fem. pl., over against MT ܒܚܝܬܐ, masc. pl.) and pronominal suffixes (e.g., *ad* Ruth 1:8: ܒܚܝܬܐ “with you,” fem. pl., over against MT ܒܚܝܬܐ, masc. pl.; Ruth 1:13: ܠܗܘܢ “for them,” masc. pl., over against MT ܠܗܘܢ, fem. pl.), the Syriac text also exhibits one-to-one *specification* (i.e., adopting a more specific lexeme where such may be reasonably inferred from the semantic range of a more general Hebrew lexeme, as *ad* Ruth 3:3:<sup>21</sup> ܐܕܝܢܝܢ “and adorn yourself” over against MT ܐܕܝܢܝܢ “and put on”), minimal *expansion* (likewise for the sake of specification or explanation, as *ad* Ruth 1:8: ܒܚܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܝܢ “with my two sons who died” over against MT ܒܚܝܬܐ “with the dead” [masc. pl.]), and *condensation* or *reductive substitution* (as *ad* Ruth 1:7: ܐܕܝܢܝܢ ܕܝܬܝܢ “the land of their sojourning” over against MT ܐܕܝܢܝܢ “the place where she was,” in the rendering of which s-Ruth also attests *specification* [i.e., “land” for “place”] and contextual one-to-one *substitution* [i.e., fem. pl. for fem. sg.]).

More substantive adjustments than the aforementioned are relatively few, and in almost every instance they reflect a desire to avoid ambiguity and/or maintain logical consistency with the perceived context, as in the *omission* in Ruth 2:13 of the negative particle (s-Ruth: “I shall be as one of your servants,” over against the contextually inconsistent reading of ܐܕܝܢܝܢ ܕܝܬܝܢ as “and I

<sup>20</sup> On this perspective of the translation technique in the Peshitta generally and the text of Ruth in particular, see Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament*, 15–62, and in particular the examples from Ruth on pp. 23, 28, 34, and 121 (from which several of our own following examples are derived).

<sup>21</sup> So, as in all the printed editions, whereas in manuscript s<sup>7a1</sup>: ܐܕܝܢܝܢ “and adorn yourself” from which the omission of the silent *yod* (ܝ) is not necessarily an error (see T. Noldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar* [trans. J.A. Chrichton; London: Williams & Norgate, 1904], § 50B).

shall not be,”<sup>22</sup> etc.), the *addition* in Ruth 3:15, 17 of “measures” (מִסֻּבִּים) and in Ruth 2:8 of the phrase “in a proverb” (בְּחִכְלָל),<sup>23</sup> and the *expansion-substitution* in Ruth 1:22 of the seemingly redundant phrase הַשֹּׁבֵה מִשְׂדֵּי מוֹאָב (“who returned from the countryside of Moab”; s-Ruth: “who consented wholeheartedly to return [לְחַמְחֵם] with her, and they came [בָּרָחָם] from the land of Moab”). Theological sensitivity also seems to have had some influence on the Syriac translator(s), as in the *substitution* at Ruth 1:15 of “the house of her people” (בֵּית אֱלֹהֵיהֶּם) for “her gods” (מֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶּם) – apparently to avoid the notion that Orpah was still a pagan – and at Ruth 2:4 of “Peace be with you” (שָׁלוֹם עִמָּכֶם) for “The LORD be with you” (מֵי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם), in all likelihood reflecting both contemporary aversion to the use of the divine name in casual greeting as well as the early rabbinic tradition identifying “Peace” as a valid substitute.<sup>24</sup> In at least two instances, moreover, the extant text of s-Ruth attests a *doublet*, i.e., *ad* Ruth 1:13 (“for it is very embittering to me on your account *and* it is more bitter for me than for you”) and *ad* Ruth 4:4 (“I said, ‘I will open your ears and say to you: “Make the purchase in the presence of these who are seated!”’ *and* I have presented myself to speak and to make the purchase in the presence of these

elders of my people who are seated”). Rather than representing *double renderings* by the translator(s), however, these doublets may well reflect scribal interpolation of alternative renderings either drawn from the margins of their Syriac exemplar(s) or as known to them from other sources.<sup>25</sup>

The translator(s) also appear to have taken sporadic recourse to LXX (→ 13–17.1.1.1), as, e.g., in the rendering of שַׁעַר “gate” by כְּסִיבָה “tribe” (corresponding to φυλή in LXX) in Ruth 3:11 and 4:10<sup>26</sup> but not in Ruth 4:1 and 11 (rendered literally by סְכִיבִים and LXX πύλη), and, *ad* Ruth 4:15, in the rendering מְגִלְתָּא “your city,” where MT has שִׁיבְתָּךְ “your old age,” reasonably suggesting the misreading of LXX πολιάν as πόλιν.<sup>27</sup> A thorough assessment of LXX influence on s-Ruth must, nonetheless, await the publication of a proper critical edition of the latter (→ 1.3.4.9).

#### 13–17.1.4.1.4 Text-Critical Value

The text of s-Ruth as represented by manuscript s<sup>7a1</sup> and the collation of Diettrich offer no clear evidence of a consonantal Hebrew *Vorlage* that – notwithstanding non-semantic orthographic differences – was any different from that represented by MT (→ 13.2.2). Of the twelve *Ketiv-Qere* distinctions in MT-Ruth, s-Ruth supports seven (i.e., *ad* Ruth 3:3 [*bis*], 4, 5, 12,<sup>28</sup> 17; 4:5) and offers no evidence either way for the remaining five (i.e., *ad* Ruth 1:8; 2:1; 3:14; 4:4, 6). In no instance, however, can one infer *consonantal* sup-

<sup>22</sup> Such appears to be the illogical alternative as perceived by the translator(s) of s-Ruth; the Hebrew text can also be understood in the contextually consistent sense: “*though I am not as one of your maidservants.*”

<sup>23</sup> Weitzman (*The Syriac Version*, 34–35) considers this an example of “faulty translation,” yet it seems to us just as reasonable – if not more so – to view this as an instance wherein the translator(s) sought to resolve a Biblical Hebrew idiom that, if translated literally, would have made little or no sense to the Syriac reader.

<sup>24</sup> See *b. t. Šabb. 10b* and Maimonides’ comment on *m. Ber. 9:5*. In this instance we take a decidedly contrary view to that of Weitzman (“From Judaism to Christianity,” 159; *The Syriac Version*, 238), who cites *m. Ber. 9:5* as proof that the Syriac translator(s) here adopted a rendering that was clearly “sectarian” and forbidden by the rabbis. Yet this is a far too narrow reading of the mishnaic passage, for at no point therein do the rabbis actually *forbid* the substitution of “Peace” for the divine name; the validity of this substitution is in fact borne out by, *inter alia*, the aforementioned talmudic tradition and Maimonides’ comment *ad loc.*

<sup>25</sup> See J. Perles, *Meletemata peschitthoniana* (Breslau: W. Friedrich, 1859), 10–11.

<sup>26</sup> In this instance כְּסִיבָה “tribe” also appears to encompass the following *nomen rectum* מְקוֹם “place”; this broader substitution is also attested in several minor LXX witnesses (*contra* the majority rendering of מְקוֹם “place” by either λαοὺ “people” or τόπου “place”; see Brooke–McLean, \**The Old Testament in Greek*, Part 4: *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* [1917], *ad loc.*).

<sup>27</sup> See Abramowski, “Eine spätsyrische Überlieferung des Buches Ruth,” 14–17; Weitzman, “From Judaism to Christianity,” 159; Weitzman, *The Syriac Version*, 71–72.

<sup>28</sup> With respect to this instance we are somewhat tentative; we have included it insofar as the text of v. 12a in s-Ruth reads affirmatively, which *may* correspond to the omission of כִּי, yet s-Ruth offers no clear equivalent of the preceding כִּי, and it may be that the translator(s) simply ignored the troublesome collocation כִּי אֲבָם “(but) rather” entirely.

port for the *Qere* in the Hebrew *Vorlage* of s-Ruth, since all of those readings that support the *Qere* are reasonably implied by either context (Ruth 3:3 [bis], 4, 12; 4:5) or normative idiom (Ruth 3:5, 17). At least one possible vocalization variant, on the other hand, is suggested by the rendering of שׁוּד in Ruth 1:21 as ܫܘܕܐ “The One who is Sufficient” (= שׁוּד over against MT שׁוּד “The Almighty”), which may well have been influenced by the LXX rendering ὁ ἰκανός “the Sufficient One,” if not also by the early rabbinic tradition regarding this divine title as attested in (*inter alia*) *Gen. Rab.* 46.3.<sup>29</sup>

Abramowski, R., “Eine spätsyrische Überlieferung des Buches Ruth,” in *In piam memoriam Alexander von Bulmerincq: Gedenkschrift zum 5. Juni 1938, dem siebenzigsten Geburtstage des am 29. März 1938 Entschlafenen, dargebracht von einem Kreise von Freunden und Kollegen* (Abhandlungen der Herder-Gesellschaft und des Herder-Instituts zu Riga 6.3; Riga: Ernst Plates, 1938), 7–19.

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### 13–17.1.4.2 Canticles

#### 13–17.1.4.2.1 Manuscripts of s-Cant

The oldest manuscript of s-Cant is manuscript s<sup>6h17</sup> (sixth century C.E.). This manuscript, together with the complete Bibles, s<sup>7a1</sup> and s<sup>8a1</sup>, probably preserves the oldest stage of the text to which we can gain access. The majority text or *textus receptus*, which is later, is attested by a large number of manuscripts of the Nestorian tradition, the best representatives of which are manuscripts s<sup>9cl</sup>, 9h1, 10cl, 11cl (ninth through eleventh centuries C.E.). Many of these manuscripts bring together the collection of books known as *Beth Mawtebbe* “Book of Sessions” (c in the nomenclature of the *Peshitta Institute*): Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings (→ 3–5.1.4), Proverbs (→ 12.3.4), Qohelet (→ 13–17.1.4.3), Ruth (→ 13–17.1.4.1), Canticles, Sirach (→ 11.4.4), and Job (→ 11.3.4). s-Cant is not preserved in s<sup>9a1</sup>, which is important for other books due to the uniqueness of its variants.

#### 13–17.1.4.2.2 Critical Edition

The critical edition of s-Cant is found in Vol. 2.5 of the collection *The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta*,<sup>1</sup> published by the *Peshitta Institute*. Its editors are J.A. Emerton and D.J. Lane. It is a diplomatic edition of manuscript s<sup>7a1</sup>, accompanied by a critical apparatus that takes into account the manuscripts prior to the twelfth century.

Dirksen has offered a series of *corrigenda et addenda* to the critical edition of s-Cant on the basis of a study of the Syriac manuscripts.<sup>2</sup> In addition, he presents seven variants that are found in the critical apparatus and which should be preferred to the main text of the edition: Cant 1:7 (ܐܝܬܐ “and where”); Cant 2:5 (ܐܝܬܐ “sustain me”); Cant 2:8 (ܐܝܬܐ “he comes”); Cant 2:15 (ܐܝܬܐ “catch”); Cant 5:4 (ܐܝܬܐ “are moved”); Cant

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Weitzman, *The Syriac Version*, 51, 70, 121.

<sup>1</sup> Emerton and Lane, *Canticles*.

<sup>2</sup> Dirksen, “The Peshitta Text of Song of Songs,” 171–83.