THE PESHITTA VERSION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT
TOWARDS A CRITICAL EDITION OF ST. PAUL’S LETTERS

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During the last decades editorial activity and research on the Peshitta version was dominated by the (now almost completed) project of editing the Old Testament Peshitta (directed by the Peshitta Institute at Leiden). This project created a co-operation of many renowned scholars and stimulated a large number of studies in the history of the text, in translation technique and in special textcritical problems. A considerable part of these studies is published in the ‘Monographs of the Peshitta Institute Leiden’.

Research on the New Testament Peshitta, however, was comparatively small: The editorial activity ended up with the Gospel volume Philipp Edward Pusey and George Henry Gwilliam published in 1901 and with the well-known handy volume issued by the British and Foreign Bible Society (B.F.B.S.) in 1920, which remained the standard text and was reprinted several times. The ‘Key to the Peshitta Gospels’ by Terry C. Falla (1991/2000)¹ is based on this text as well as the ‘Concordance to the Syriac New Testament’ and the ‘Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels’, both by George A. Kiraz (1993/1996).² Due to its conformity the text of the New Testament Peshitta by itself did not evoke textcritical research, but rather the questions of Rabbula’s authorship and of the survival of Old Syriac elements within the Peshitta were the key themes in the discussion between Matthew Black (1994) and Arthur Vööbus (1988), which mainly referred to the Gospels and did not arrive at a definite solution. Nevertheless, a small number of Dissertations was devoted to the Peshitta text of St. Paul’s Letters, but

mostly confined to single chapters.\textsuperscript{3} The most comprehensive ones were prepared by J.T. Clemons (1963) and M.E. Gudorf (1992).\textsuperscript{4}

1. \textsc{The B.F.B.S. Text}

The B.F.B.S. volume is not furnished with an \textit{apparatus criticus}. But the credit scholars pay to it is not only due to its clear Serto type and full vocalisation (including \textit{Qushshāyā} and \textit{Rukkākā}), but to its editorial policy. This policy derives from the Gospel volume Pusey and Gwilliam published in 1901. Their text is based on 42 manuscripts (some of them collated only in part), the reading of the majority of manuscripts is adopted for the text\textsuperscript{5}, the minority for the apparatus. Gwilliam writes: ‘The ultimate aim of our work is to exhibit the Peshitto Gospels as they were read, on the evidence of the MSS, in the ancient Syriac Church’... ‘For it is found that the ancient codices, and of both schools, [i.e., West Syrians and East Syrians] agree so remarkably, that seldom is the true reading left doubtful’ (p. vi). According to the preface, the B.F.B.S. Gospels are a reprint of the Pusey/Gwilliam text, Acts and the Letters are prepared by Gwilliam himself ‘on similar lines’ (i.e., as the Gospels) and completed by John Pinkerton after Gwilliam’s death in 1913.\textsuperscript{6} Consequently, Acts and the Letters again give a majority text based on a number of manuscripts. Unfortunately the collations were not published separately and did not return to the Bible Society after completion, but entered the British Library (where most of the collations were done) as an ‘Oriental Ms’ (No. 11,360). This remained unknown to the major part of scholars until the report of Roderick Grierson\textsuperscript{7} in 1998 who

\textsuperscript{6} ‘In the collation of manuscripts at the British Museum Library, and in the correction of the proofs, the editor received assistance from the Rev. J. Pinkerton, B. D., who carried on and completed this work after Mr. Gwilliam’s death in 1913’ (preface).
(working on an edition of Acts) ‘rediscovered’ the collations some years before. Thanks to his report we now know the fourteen manuscripts Gwilliam and Pinkerton used to draw the majority text of St. Paul’s Letters from, and the way would be open to prepare the text with these variant readings for publication.

2. ‘DAS NEUE TESTAMENT IN SYRISCHER ÜBERLIEFERUNG’

But meanwhile there was a project at Münster University (Germany) directed by Barbara Aland which provided scholars with a new Peshitta text of St. Paul’s Letters and a collation of 12 old manuscripts, 8 of them identical with those used by Gwilliam and Pinkerton. The project started in the eighties and produced three text volumes (1991/1995/2001). The purpose was not to edit the Letters of a special Syriac version but to compile a Comparative Edition of the whole Syriac tradition in a chronological order, versions and quotations, verse by verse. Because of this diachronic display the project was called ‘Das NT in syrischer Überlieferung’. The idea behind this project was that the display of the whole revisional development – from the Old Syriac (3rd/4th c.) to the Peshitta (ca. 400/450), to the Philoxenian (507/08), to the Harklean (615/16) and up to Barhebraeus – is the only solid ground for a sound judgement upon the single versions. Thus the mutual influence of the single versions can be traced as well as the intermediate position of the Philoxenian (which is extant in quotations only) between the Peshitta and the Harklean. The quotations (displayed with all their variant readings) offer evidence for the prehistory of the single versions, they give support to their variant readings and tell us about their late history, for they are usually ‘dated’ by the lifetime of the quoting authors.

The Peshitta within this alignment is not the B.F.B.S. text but taken from a 5th-century manuscript of the British Library (Add. 14,470). This policy was due to the limited purpose of the Peshitta line within the chronological display to represent the early Peshitta of the 5th/6th century. For this purpose the text of one real early manuscript (copied during the lifetime of Philoxenus, controlled by manuscripts copied not later than the 7th cen-

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tury\textsuperscript{9}) was regarded more authentic than a majority (B.F.B.S.) text of unknown provenance. For convenience the differences between this Peshitta line and the B.F.B.S. text (and four more editions\textsuperscript{10}) are given in an appendix.

3. The New Project

The Peshitta block of this *Comparative Edition* is a convenient starting point for a comprehensive critical edition of St. Paul’s Letters. The development of this Peshitta block by additional manuscripts at Münster University will result in a separate Peshitta edition of the Letters, Acts and the Catholic Epistles may follow after a successful completion. I would like to offer you some reflections on the policy and guidelines of this edition(s). They are drawn from the *Comparative Edition* and supplemented by the knowledge available from the additional collations of *Romans*.

a. The Conformity of the Text

The project started this year with the Letter to the Romans. Until now it is based on 30 manuscripts, about ten more will be added (all of the first millennium or not later than Dionysius bar Šalib, d. 1171). The dominating feature is the well-known conformity of the text. There are no traces of different texttypes, it is one fully established version from its beginning. If we agree with Joseph Kerschensteiner\textsuperscript{11} that there was a pre-Peshitta of Old Syriac texttype, this type did not affect the manuscripts of the Peshitta. The quotations of Aphrahat, Ephrem and the Liber Graduum (collected by Kerschensteiner) were included in the *Comparative Edition*. The identity between them and the Peshitta is striking, but the latter is eliminating paraphrastic and idiomatic elements by a better adaptation to the Greek. With regard to the conformity of the Peshitta, these quotations prove it to be an original feature (not the result of a standardization), and the non-paraphrastic style of the Peshitta makes it to be a new decisively revising translation of its own.

\textsuperscript{9} In fact two of the manuscripts are later than the 7th century: Ms BL Add. 7157 (AD 767/68 and Ms Vat. syr. 16 (ca. 13th cent). The variants of the latter play an important role in the history of the printed editions of the Syriac New Testament.

\textsuperscript{10} The Polyglott of B. Walton (vol. V, 1657), the editions of J. Leusden/C. Schaaf (1709), S. Lee (1816), and of the Dominicans of Mosul (1900/Beirut, 1951).

\textsuperscript{11} J. Kerschensteiner, *Der Altsyrische Paulustext*, CSCO, 315 (Louvain, 1970).
b. *The Variants*

What about the variants? Their number is surprisingly high: ca. 1150 are quoted in the *Comparative Edition* (without any orthographical variants or different spellings of names and Greek loanwords). Expressed in terms of the B.F.B.S. volume you have 11 variant readings per page. The view that all these variants are secondary modifications of the (original) conformity is too simplistic, because the variants cannot be classified to be mere corruptions. Here the *Comparative Edition* proves to be a useful tool to evaluate the variants of the Peshitta. What seems to be a corruption or a scribal error of a single manuscript very often is supported by quotations and turns out to be a true variant. And we should not forget that the term ‘variant’ by no means implies a non-original reading, even if we accept the conformity of the Peshitta to be original in most of the cases. In principle the variants of the Peshitta advise us to be open for two trends within the transmission of the Peshitta: For secondary *modification* of the original conformity, and for secondary *removal* of archaic and possibly original readings (effected by a development towards a uniform standard text).

The Peshitta is a *translation* and several variants are the result of (stylistic) improvement and correction according to the Greek. Variants are certainly due to Greek influence, they correspond with Greek variants or reduce the idiomatic colour of the Syriac in favour of the imitation of the Greek. The influence of the Harklean (or Philoxenian) is attested in several variants of 6th/7th-century manuscripts. But already in pre-Harklean manuscripts we can find anticipations of Harklean readings, either due to Philoxenian influence or to an independent adaptation to the Greek. In some cases it is very probable that variants are more original than the majority reading – especially if the variant is archaic, clumsy or even incorrect (compared with the Greek) and supported by quotations (e. g., from the early writings of Philoxenus), while the majority text is a better and more elegant rendering of the Greek. These variants might have escaped elimination by the development towards a uniform standard text.

There is a distinctive group of manuscripts which can be classified as ‘East-Syriac’ by script, provenance and variants. One of the oldest out of this group is Ms syr. 8 of the National Library in Munich, which is of the ca. 6th century and written in a beautiful Estrangela. Its East-Syriac prov-

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12 Variants are discussed in the introductions of *Das Neue Testament in Syrischer Überlieferung* (see footnote 8).
enance is shown by the variants it has in common with manuscripts of evident East-Syriac origin. Support for the distinctiveness of this group comes from the quotations of East-Syriac authors, esp. of Babai (died 628). Of course not all variants can be evaluated conclusively by the help of the *Comparative Edition*, but to a larger extent than before variants can be textcritically controlled and be proved to have grown out of the tradition itself rather than simply out of the scribe’s pen.

But these two trends mentioned before (modification of the conformity and removal of variants) do not constitute a guideline for a ‘history’ of the Peshitta, because they are synchronic, not diachronic trends; we meet them both in one and the same manuscript. It would be even difficult to speak of a ‘revisional development’ – if this means systematic changings according to a major principle. To proclaim the Greek influence to be this major principle is not possible, because the Greek influence does not effect systematic changings, it is compromised by non-greacizing variants and disputed in many cases to be in fact Philoxenian or Harklean influence. Greek influence (in the proper sense) might rather be due to local trends, perhaps of ‘schools’ or ‘centers’ of Greek learning like Edessa and Qenneshrin. This suggestion of local Greek influence would correspond well with the fact that 760 variants out of these 1150 mentioned before (more than half!) are singular readings within our choice of 12 manuscripts. By the additional manuscripts used for Romans (most of them between the 7th and the 12th century) the numbers for singular and non-singular readings are (of course) better balanced.

c. The Editorial Policy

What does all this mean for editorial policy? Editorial policy should derive from a good knowledge of the history of the Peshitta. But no history nor revisional development can sufficiently be traced by the variants, and a development towards a uniform standard text certainly has contributed to the reduction of remaining vestiges of any revision. Should we accept the policy of the Pusey/Gwilliam (and B.F.B.S.) volume of editing the Peshitta to be the only suitable one? Their policy should be accepted in principle, but modified in a basic point. Conformity is an original feature of the Peshitta, editorial policy in fact should favour what most of the manuscripts read. But without any historical element the majority text is an artificial construc-
tion, a mere mechanical rule to establish the text and to produce the appara-
tus. What I suggest is: The majority text of the Peshitta should be drawn
from a qualified minority of manuscripts. What does this mean?

The text of the Peshitta to be printed should be drawn from a limited
number of manuscripts superior to the rest by age and quality. There is a
nucleus of about 10 to 15 manuscripts\textsuperscript{13} which tell us about age and quality
by their archaic orthographical features, by their firm text (compared with
later manuscripts) and by the textcritical transparency of their variants. It is
a group connected by identical features rather than by identical variants.
The oldest manuscripts of this nucleus are from the 5th/6th century, the lat-
est from the 8th. The superiority of these manuscripts can be drawn from
the following facts: 1. Most of their variants reflect very old readings of the
Greek NT (represented by the well-known majuscules of the 3rd/4th cen-
tury); 2. these manuscripts exhibit many corrections by later hands which
change the text according to readings we find in later manuscripts, thus up-
dating the old manuscripts according to the contemporary text; 3. inner-
versional corruptions of the text are almost totally absent.

One manuscript of this minority group will be the basic one, for practical
reasons the one which covers most of St. Paul’s Letters (i. e., Ms BL Add.
14,470). If there are gaps or late supplements in it, we have to change the
manuscript. This policy does not favour a special single manuscript to repre-
sent the most original Peshitta text, but prefers a minority of (at least 10)
manuscripts to represent the Peshitta of the 5th/6th century. And the mi-
nority reading of the basic manuscript will be moved to the apparatus in any
case. The advantage of a policy like this is threefold:

(i) The first advantage is that a historical element will be introduced to
the Peshitta text by preferring this outstanding minority of manuscripts.
The text and the variants of this minority will undoubtly date from the 5th/
6th century. Thus the printed text will stop to be a ‘timeless’ mix-up of early
and late manuscripts which are usually considered to read all the same.

\textsuperscript{13} Manuscripts of the 5th/6th century are the most important: Ms \textit{Sin. syr. 5} (6th c.), BL
Add. 14,470 (5th/6th c.), Add. 14,476 (5th/6th c.), Add. 14,480 (5th/6th c.), Add.
14,479 (AD 533/34), Add. 14,475 (6th c.), Add. 17,122 (6th c.), and Ms \textit{syr. 8} of the
National Library, Munich (6th c.). But also manuscripts of the 7th/8th c. will belong to
the minority, if they present the (almost) same state of variants as the earlier ones, e. g.,
BL Add. 14,477 (6th/7th c.), Add. 14,481 (6th/7th c.), Add. 7157 (AD 767/68).
Surely there is no early or late texttype, but there is an early and late profile of the text, there are early and late variants, which do not constitute a ‘history’ but a ‘diversity’ of text. The manuscripts up to the 7th/8th century must be preferred for the presentation of the text because their text derives from the period of local diversity which was still open to Greek influence. After the rise of Islam, when the Syriac speaking christianity lost its formerly intensive contact with the Greek world, the partial ‘improvements’ and ‘corrections’ of the Peshitta were reduced to pure inner-versional changings, development of the text was replaced by philological conservation. This conservative period probably started in the time of the Philoxenian (507/508) and was definitely confirmed by the Harklean (615/616), when greacising types of ‘editions’ were available and the Peshitta was excluded from any revisional development towards the Greek text(s).

(ii) The second advantage: The orthographical features of this limited number of manuscripts can be given in full (e. g., kinuthā without Alaph etc.), while all orthographical variants of later manuscripts will be excluded. The full display of orthographical variants will be welcome, because it will stimulate studies in Syriac orthography (and we do not know where the orthographical features of the B.F.B.S. volume derive from).

(iii) The third advantage: The text based on this qualified minority of manuscripts will not be very different from the rest of the manuscripts and from the B.F.B.S. text. The ‘Concordance’ of George Kiraz and Terry C. Falla’s ‘Key’ will remain compatible with this text.

d. The Lay-out of the Edition

What about the lay-out of the edition? Only some general remarks can be given here since not all details are definitely settled yet. The text will be printed in Estrangela, diacritical points will distinguish homographs and verb stems. This application of diacritical points is based on the (slightly varying) system we find in the ‘qualified minority’ of manuscripts, but simplified and regularized according to the scholarly purpose.

A principal feature is the application of a first and a second apparatus: The first for the variants of the manuscripts, the second for the readings of the quotations. To separate both types of texts is essential and reflects the general well-known problems connected with quotations, viz. the quoting authors may have modified the text, scribes may have ‘corrected’ the text.
they copied, editions occasionally are unreliable (based on one single manuscript). To reduce the danger of introducing non-Peshitta text, only those authors who demonstrably quote the Peshitta will be included\textsuperscript{14} (no translations, no ‘Old Syriac’ authors), and only variants which are attested by the Peshitta manuscripts will be quoted. The *Comparative Edition* mentioned above is a helpful tool to evaluate the single authors and their quotations. It will remain a permanent point of reference for the Peshitta edition, though all quotations will be quoted according to the edition they are taken from.

Some of the quotations give the text of the 5th century (e.g., the early Philoxenus), by age they belong to the ‘qualified minority’ of witnesses. Not only their variants are important to quote, but also their support for the Peshitta line printed in the edition. The practical problem how to quote the identity will be solved by quoting the first and the last word of the quotation (this is necessary in any case to indicate the length of the quotation). If no variant reading is given after this ‘lemma’, the quotation is in agreement with the Peshitta text of the edition, occasionally there may be minor deviations not attested by Peshitta manuscripts.

Finally, the organisation of this Peshitta edition in principle will adopt the model of the OT Peshitta produced at Leiden. An annotated inventory of all manuscripts used for the edition, including the sources of the quotations, will be drawn up, supplemented by those manuscripts not used for the edition (i.e., manuscripts later than Dionysius bar Šalibi, d. 1171). This inventory specifies the manuscripts of the ‘qualified minority’ and gives not only a description but also an evaluation of the single manuscripts (and quoted sources) as far as possible. It will be in correspondence with the introductions of the single text volumes and will be published after the completion of the whole *Corpus Paulinum*. If the general method and the final presentation of the first volume (Romans) will be accepted, the Institute at Münster will not hesitate to invite scholars for co-operation.

\textsuperscript{14} In part VI.2 of *Das Neue Testament in Syrischer Überlieferung* (see footnote 8) there is a chronological list of the Syriac writings from which the quotations of this *Comparative Edition* are drawn. Almost all authors of section V, VII, IX, X and XI are those who quote the Peshitta.