

Ancient Evidence:
A Fourth Century Witness to the Antiquity and Originality of the Peshitta Text
(Supplemented with Additional Proofs from "Ruach Qadim")
By Andrew Gabriel Roth

Introduction

As we have seen previously in "Ruach Qadim" and "The Path to Life", the idea that the Peshitta was the work of Rabulla of Edessa has been thoroughly discredited by inscription evidence and modern scholarship. Furthermore, we have also seen that one of the Old Syriac manuscripts bears the unique name that Rabulla gave to his translation of the Gospels from Greek into Aramaic, *evangelion de mepharreshe* (separated Gospels) and that the other Old Syriac document appears to be a minor revision of the former.

However, as compelling as this evidence is, there is one other aspect that bears detailed exploration but that would nevertheless not have fit well in terms of flow with the previous treatment, and that is the quotations from the Peshitta by Early Syrian Fathers. This is key because many Old Syriac advocates such as James Trimm have made the allegation that saints like Mar Ephraim quote liberally from Old Syriac against the Peshitta. The reality of that situation though is quite different.

First of all, Mar Ephraim was known to employ a great deal of poetic license in the way he applies Scripture. Or, to put it another way, he likes to do a lot freestyle targumming. As a result, random chance demands that there will be times when a quote looks like the Peshitta or another like Old Syriac. What is lacking from those who would apply this into an Old Syriac Primacist model is the fact that just as often Mar Ephraim's targumming results in renditions that resemble neither Old Syriac nor Peshitta, simply because of his own writing style. Many other alleged quotations in favor of Old Syriac are simply not from the real Mar Ephraim at all, but are later students of his following along in his style and applying his name to their work, which was a common practice in the East.

Secondly, we should look at what Mar Ephraim does not say. There is not mention in any of his writings of the need to standardize, revise or otherwise co-opt Scripture into a form other than what was already circulating in his day. As I have mentioned before, there is a great tradition in the East of inaugurating feast days to celebrate the day that the Holy Writings arrive in the local vernacular of an assembly. Therefore, if a revision from Old Syriac was done, and that revision became the Peshitta text, we would surely have heard about it. Another key place where such a ruling, which could only come from a patriarch, would have had to have been set down, are the Eastern Councils. There were ten of these Councils held by various patriarchs in the Church of the East during the third and fourth centuries, the precise time when the change over to the Peshitta was alleged to happen. Unfortunately for the Old Syriac

crowd though, neither this issue nor the ecclesiastical ruling authorizing such a change is ever recorded, and this would have been required by Church by-laws if in fact it went on.

And so, with the witness of Mar Ephraim not really being probative due to his free-verse style of writing and other issues, we need to look for another ancient witness. Ideally, this witness should also be a well-respected leader of the Church of the East, whose writings are both ancient and not in dispute with respect to his genuine identity. Furthermore, the writing style of this saint should be one that tends to quote directly and in a verbatim manner from some Aramaic source, be it Peshitta, Old Syriac or whatever.¹

After much research then through ancient records of the Church of the East, many of which are largely unknown in the West, I am happy to report that just such an ancient witness has been found. His name is Mar Aphrahat, and his writings pre-date Mar Ephraim by several decades, and are rooted in the first quarter of the fourth century.² It is also significant that the many Peshitta-exclusive quotes against Old Syriac precede Rabulla's time by almost a century, and so since the Old Syriac has been shown to be Rabulla's work, the Peshitta as quoted by Mar Aphrahat is obviously much older.³

The final aspect to keep in mind is that there are times when Old Syriac and Peshitta share a quote. In those cases, the historical linkage just mentioned is the guiding principle in showing that it was not Old Syriac that first held that reading. In many other cases though, the readings that are in both Old Syriac manuscripts are clearly not reflected in Mar Aphrahat's writings, since they had not yet entered the written record. And so, where the Peshitta and Old Syriac agree with Mar Aphrahat, there is no need to show the Old Syriac reading. However, in places where we see a genuine preference of one source over the other with Mar Aphrahat, those examples will present the best evidence for my overall argument.⁴

With those thoughts in mind, let us go to the written record.

Lining Up the Witnesses

Red highlight = verbatim reading between Mar Aphrahat and the Peshitta in the entire passage, with special attention paid to where these readings will diverge in Old Syriac.

Blue highlight = divergent reading between Mar Aphrahat with either the Peshitta, Old Syriac (Siniaticus) or Old Syriac (Cureton).

Green highlight = minor paraphrase linking clearly to a verbatim Peshitta reading that was adopted for Mar Aphrahat's use.

Matthew 5:16

Mar Aphrahat

ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ
ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ
ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ

"And again he said to his Apostles:
"Let your light shine before **men**, that they may see your **good** works."

Peshitta

ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ
ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ

"Let your light shine before **men**, that they may see your **good** works."

Old Syriac-Siniaticus

ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ
ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ

"Let your light shine before (with Lamadh Proclitic) **men**, that they may see your **beautiful** works"

Old Syriac-Cureton

ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ
ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ ܘܥܢ

"Let your light shine before **men**, that they may see your **beautiful** works."

Comments from Paul Younan:

- 1) Sinaiticus has a Lamad Proclitic before "qdam" - and Mar Aphrahat does not.
- 2) Both Sinaiticus and Cureton have "Shapir" (beautiful) before "works", whereas Mar Aphrahat and the Peshitta agree against them with "Tawa" - "good".
- 3) Finally, both Old Syriac (s) and (c) have "Bnay Anasha" (men) as distinct words - whereas Mar Aphrahat and the Peshitta have them combined.

Luke 15:8

Mar Aphrahat

ܩܘܠܐ ܕܡܪܝܩܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ
ܘܥܘܣܐ ܕܡܪܝܩܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ
ܘܥܘܣܐ ܕܡܪܝܩܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ

"What woman, who has ten coins and loses one of them, and (Waw Proclitic) not does light a lamp and sweep (Khama) the house..."

Peshitta

ܩܘܠܐ ܕܡܪܝܩܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ
ܘܥܘܣܐ ܕܡܪܝܩܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ
ܘܥܘܣܐ ܕܡܪܝܩܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ

"What woman, who has ten coins and loses one of them, and (Waw Proclitic) not does light a lamp and sweep (Khama) the house..."

Old Syriac-Siniaticus

ܩܘܠܐ ܕܡܪܝܩܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ
ܘܥܘܣܐ ܕܡܪܝܩܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ
ܘܥܘܣܐ ܕܡܪܝܩܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ

"What woman, who has ten coins and loses one of them, not does light a lamp and (No Waw proclitic) sweep (Khama) the house..."

Old Syriac-Cureton

ܩܘܠܐ ܕܡܪܝܩܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ
ܘܥܘܣܐ ܕܡܪܝܩܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ
ܘܥܘܣܐ ܕܡܪܝܩܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ ܕܥܘܣܐ

"What woman, who has ten coins and loses one of them, (No Waw Proclitic) not does light a lamp and organizes (kansha) the house..."

Comments from Paul Younan:

- 1) Old Syriac (S) has the imperfect of the PEAL **ܥܘܣܐ**, whereas Mar Aphrahat uses **ܥܘܣܐ** just like the Peshitta.
- 2) Both Old Syriac (S) and (C) are missing the **Waw Proclitic**, included in Aphrahat and the Peshitta.
- 3) Old Syriac (C) uses a completely different word, **ܥܘܣܐ** for "sweep~organize", instead of the word employed by both the Peshitta and Mar Aphrahat - **ܥܘܣܐ**.

John 10:27

Mar Aphrahat

ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ
ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ

"For he said to his disciples: whatever I tell you in the darkness, proclaim in the **light (Nahira)**."

Peshitta

ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ
ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ

"Whatever I tell you in the darkness, proclaim in the **light (Nahira)**."

Old Syriac-Siniaticus & Cureton

ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ
ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ

"Whatever I **te**ll you in the darkness, proclaim in the **light (Nuhra)**."

Comments from Paul Younan:

The quote given by Mar Aphrahat not only matches the Peshitta 100% - but I've also demonstrated that there are two major differences between the quotation given by Mar Aphrahat and the Old Syriac:

- 1) The "Emar ena" (I said) are two distinct words in Aphrahat, but a combined word in Old Syriac.
- 2) Instead of "Nahira" for "light" as Aphrahat and the Peshitta have it, Old Syriac has "Nuhra".

John 10:30

Mar Aphrahat

ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ
ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܠܝܢܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ

"And in another place, he said:
I and my Father are **one (khnan)**"

d'amlekh mowtha men wAdam w'adma l'Moshe
w'ap al aylyn d'la khaTaw

Translation:

As the Apostle said, that "Death ruled from Adam unto Moses" and "even over those who sinned not."

Peshitta

ܕܐܡܠܝܚܡܘܬܗܢܝܢ ܡܢ ܘܥܕܡ ܘܥܕܡܗ ܠܡܘܫܗ
ܘܥܢ ܐܠ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܠܗܗ ܕܘܠܗܗ

Transliteration:

amlekh mowtha men wAdam w'adma l'Moshe
ap al aylyn d'la khaTaw

Translation:

"Death ruled from Adam unto Moses, even over those who sinned not."

1 Corinthians 2:9

Mar Aphrahat

ܕܥܝܢܐ ܘܥܢ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܘܠܗܗ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

"There is the thing...

Which eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard, and which hath not come up into the heart of man,
that which Elohim hath prepared for them that love Him."

Peshitta

ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ
ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

הנהגה הליבית אלהא
אזיליב היז טעמל ליה

"Which eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard, and which hath not come up into the heart of man, that which Elohim hath prepared for them that love Him."

Galatians 3:28

Mar Aphrahat

האליטא אהמני
הדמא הבריא תמא נטבא
הדמא לבריא תמא בנ טמא
אזמא חלמא נה אהמא נטבא

Transliteration:

w'emar Shlikha:
d'la **dakra w'la neqbata**
w'la ebada w'la bar-khere
ela kulkhon khad 'ton b'Yeshua Meshikha

Translation:

And the Apostle said
neither "**male nor female**"
and neither "**servant nor free**"
rather "you are all one in Yeshua Meshikha"

Peshitta

למא לבריא תמא בנ טמא
למא הבריא תמא נטבא
חלמא נה אהמא נטבא

Transliteration:

Lyt ebada w'la bar-khere
Lyt **dakra w'la neqbata**
kulkhon gyr khad 'ton b'Yeshua Meshikha

Translation:

There is no "servant nor free"
There is no "male nor female"
"you are all one, for, in Yeshua Meshikha"

Comments from Paul Younan:

With just a little rearranging of the clauses which is typical of the writing style, or paraphrasing, of Mar Aphrahat, the reading is 100% identical to the Peshitta

A Scholar Weighs in

The great Aramaic scholar John Gwynn, D.D., D.C.L. and Regius Professor of Divinity for the University of Dublin, who broke new ground in the 19th century with his translation and late dating of the Crawford Manuscript of Revelation, was also well-versed in the writings of Mar Aphrahat. What follows then is his analysis as written in his famous work "Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Series II, Volume XIII. Let's take the issues he raises one at a time. Once again, my thanks to Paul Younan for classifying and compiling these writings.

1) The dates of Mar Aphrahat's writings:

The Demonstrations are twenty-two in number, after the number of the letters of the Aramaic alphabet, each of them beginning with the letter to which it corresponds in order. The first ten form a group by themselves, and are somewhat earlier in date than those which follow: they deal with Christian graces, hopes, and duties, as appears from their titles:--"Concerning Faith, Charity, Fasting, Prayer, Wars, Monks, Penitents, the Resurrection, Humility, Pastors." Of those that compose the later group, three relate to the Jews ("Concerning Circumcision, the Passover, the Sabbath"); followed by one described as "Hortatory," which seems to be a letter of rebuke addressed by Aphrahat, on behalf of a Synod of Bishops, to the clergy and people of Seleucia and Ctesiphon (Babylon); after which the Jewish series is resumed in five discourses, "Concerning Divers Meals, The Call of the Gentiles, Jesus the Messiah, Virginity, the Dispersion of Israel."

The three last are of the same general character as the first ten,--"Concerning Almsgiving, Persecution, Death, and the Latter Times." To this collection is subjoined a twenty-third Demonstration, supplementary to the rest, "Concerning the Grape," under which title is signified the blessing transmitted from the beginning through Messiah, in allusion to the words of Isaiah, "As the grape is found in the cluster and one saith, Destroy it not" (lxxv. 8). This treatise embodies a chronological disquisition of some importance.

Of the dates at which they were written, these discourses supply conclusive evidence. **At the end of section 5 of Demonstr. V. (Concerning Wars), the author reckons the years from the era of Alexander (B.C. 311) to the time of his writing as 648. He wrote therefore in A.D. 337--the year of the death of Constantine the Great. Demonstr. XIV. is formally dated in its last section, "in the month Shebat. in the year 655 (that is, A. D. 344). More fully, in closing the alphabetic series (XXII. 25) he informs us that the above dates apply to the two groups--the first ten being written in 337; the twelve that follow, in 344. Finally, the supplementary discourse "Concerning the Grape" was written (as stated, XXIII. 69) in July, 345. Thus the entire work was completed within nine years,--five years before the middle of the fourth century,--before the composition of the earliest work of Ephraim of which the date can be determined with certainty.**

2) The manuscript evidence:

The oldest extant MS. of these discourses (Add. 17182 of the British Museum) contains the first ten, and is dated 474. With it is bound up (under the same number) a second, dated 512, containing the remaining thirteen. A third (Add. 14619) of the sixth century likewise, exhibits the whole series. A fourth (Orient, 1017), more recent by eight centuries, will be mentioned farther on. Of the three early MSS., the first designates the author as "the Persian Sage" merely, as does also the third: the second prefixes his name as "Mar Jacob the Persian Sage."

3) The witnesses:

It is not until some years after the mid-die of the tenth century, that the "Persian Sage" first appears under his proper name,--of which, though as it appears generally forgotten in the Syriac world of letters, a tradition had survived.--The Nestorian Bar-Bahlul (circ. 963) in his Syro-Arabic Lexicon, writes thus:--"Aphrahat [mentioned] in the Book of Paradise, is the Persian Sage, as they record."--So too, in the eleventh century, Elias of Nisibis (Barsinaeus, d. 1049), embodies in his Chronography, a table, compiled from Demonstr. XXIII., of the chronography from the Creation to the "Era of Alexander" (B. C. 311), which he describes as "The years of the House of Adam, according to the opinion of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage."

To the like effect, but with fuller information, the great light of the mediaeval Jacobite Church, Gregory Barhebraeus (d. 1286), in Part I. of his Ecclesiastical Chronicle, in enumerating the orthodox contemporaries of Athanasius, mentions, after Ephraim, "the Persian Sage who wrote the Book of Demonstrations;" and again in Part II., supplies his name under a slightly different form, as one who "was of note in the time of Papas the Catholicus," "the Persian Sage by name Pharhad, of whom there are extant a book of admonition [al., admonitions] in Syriac, and twenty-two Epistles according to the letters of the alphabet." Here we have not only the name and description of the personage in question, but a fairly accurate account of his works, under the titles by which the MSS. describe them, "Epistles and Demonstrations;--and moreover a sufficient indication of his date, in agreement with that which the Demonstrations claim: for one who began to write in 337 must have lived in the closing years of the life of Papas (who died in 334), and in the earlier years of the life of Ephraim.

So yet again, a generation later, the learned Nestorian prelate, Ebedjesu, in his Catalogue of Syrian ecclesiastical authors, writes, "Aphrahat, the Persian Sage, composed two volumes with Homilies that are according to the alphabet." Here once more the name and designation are given unhesitatingly, and the division of the discourses into two groups is correctly noted; but the concluding words appear to distinguish these groups from the alphabetic Homilies. Either, therefore, we must take the preposition rendered "with" to mean "containing,"--or we must conclude that Ebedjesu's knowledge of the work was at second-hand and incorrect. Finally, in a very late MS., dated 1364, is found the first or chronological part of Demonstration XXIII., headed as follows:--"The Demonstration concerning the Grape, of the Sage Aphrahat, who is Jacob, Bishop of Mar Mathai." Here (though the prefix "Persian" is absent) we have the author's title of "Sage"; and the identification of the "Aphrahat" of the later authorities with the "Jacob" of the earlier is not merely implied but expressly affirmed. Here, moreover, we have what seems to account for the twofold name. As author, he is Aphrahat; as Bishop, he is Jacob--the latter name having been no doubt assumed on his elevation to the Episcopate. Such changes of name, at consecration, which in later ages of the Syrian Church became customary, were no doubt exceptional in the earlier period of which we are treating.

But the fact that Aphrahat was a Persian name, bestowed on him no doubt in childhood--when he was still (as will be shown presently) outside the Christian fold--a name which is supposed to signify "Chief" or "Prefect," and which may have seemed unsuited to the humility of the sacred office--supplies a reason for the substitution in its stead of a name associated with sacred history, both of the Old and of the New Testament. Here finally we have the direct statement of what Georgius had justly inferred from the opening of Dem. XIV., that the writer was himself of the clergy, and in this Epistle writes as a cleric to clerics.

4) That Mar Aphrahat was definitely from the Persian Assembly, otherwise known as the Church of the East:

That the author was of Persian nationality, is a point on which all the witnesses agree, except the fourteenth-century scribe of the MS. Orient. 1017, who however is merely silent about it. The name Aphrahat is, as has been already said, Persian--which fact at once confirms the tradition that he belonged to Persia, and helps to account for what seems to be the reluctance of early writers to call him by a name that was foreign, unfamiliar, unsuited to his subsequent station in the Church, and superseded by one that had sacred associations. As a Persian, he dates his writings by the years of the reign of the Persian King: the twenty-two were completed (he says) in the thirty-fifth, the twenty-third in the thirty-sixth of the reign of Sapor.

Again: as a Persian of the early fourth century, it is presumable that he was not originally a Christian. And this is apparently confirmed by the internal evidence of his own writings; for he speaks of himself as one of those "who have cast away idols, and call that a lie which our father bequeathed to us;" and again, "who ought to worship Y'shua, for that He has turned away our froward minds from all superstitions of vain error, and taught us to worship one Elohim our Father and Maker."--But it is clear that he must have lived in a frontier region where Syriac was spoken freely; or else must have removed into a Syriac-speaking country at an early age; for the language and style of his writings are completely pure, showing no trace of foreign idiom, or even of the want of ease that betrays a foreigner writing in what is not his mother-tongue. It is clear also that, at whatever age or under whatever circumstances he embraced Christianity, he must have taken the Christian Scriptures and Christian theology into his inmost heart and understanding as every page of his writings attests.

- 5) That he was Bishop of Nineveh, which is Church of the East territory:

If we accept the late, but internally probable, statement of the Scribe of MS. Orient. 1017 (above mentioned), that "the Persian Sage" was "Bishop of the monastery of Mar Mathai," we arrive at a complete explanation of the circumstances under which this Epistle was composed. **For the Bishop of Mar Mathai was Metropolitan of Nineveh, and ranked among the Bishops of "the East" only second to the Catholicus; and his province bordered on that which the Catholicus (as Metropolitan of Seleucia) held in his immediate jurisdiction.** The Bishop of Mar Mathai therefore would properly preside in a Synod of the Eastern Bishops, met to consider the disorders and discussions existing in Seleucia and its suffragan sees. It thus becomes intelligible how an Epistle of such official character has found a place in a series of discourses of which the rest are written as from man to man merely. The writer addresses the Bishops, Clergy, and people of Seleucia and Ctesiphon in the name of a Synod over which he was President, a Synod probably of Bishops suffragan to Nineveh, and perhaps of those of some adjacent sees.

- 6) That he is, as we have been saying throughout this essay, prior to Mar Ephraim:

In thus placing Aphrahat first as their projected series of Syriac Divines, the learned editors follow the opinion which, ever since Wright published his edition, has been adopted by Syriac scholars--that Aphrahat is prior in time to Ephraim. This is undoubtedly true (as pointed out above) in the only limited sense, that the Demonstrations are earlier by some years (the first ten by thirteen years, the remainder by five or six) than the earliest of Ephraim's writings which can be dated with certainty (namely, the first Nisibene Hymn, which belongs to 350).

It is then assumed that Ephraim was born in the reign of Constantine, therefore not earlier than 306, and that Aphrahat was a man of advanced age when he wrote (of which there is no proof whatever), and must therefore have been born before the end of the third century--perhaps as early as 280. It has been shown above (p. 145) that even if we admit the authority of the Syriac Life of Ephraim, we must regard the supposed statement of his birth in Constantine's time as a mistranslation or rather perversion of the text. Thus the argument for placing Ephraim's birth so late as 306 disappears, while for placing Aphrahat's birth no argument has been advanced, but merely conjecture; and the result is, that the two may, so far as evidence goes, be regarded as contemporary. It is true that Barhebraeus, in his Ecclesiastical History, reckons Aphrahat as belonging to the time of Papas, who died 335; built is to be

noted that in the very same context he mentions that letters were extant purporting to be addressed by Jacob of Nisibis and Ephraim to the same Papas,--and though he admits that some discredited the genuineness of these letters, he gives no hint that Ephraim was too young to have written them.

In fact he could not do so, for in the earlier part of this History he had already named Ephraim as present at the Nicene Council in 325, and had placed his name before that of Aphrahat in including both among the contemporaries of the Great Athanasius.

7) And finally, and most importantly, that Mar Aphrahat's canon was none other than the Peshitta text!

His New Testament Canon is apparently that of the Peshitta;--that is to say, he shows no signs of acquaintance with the four shorter Catholic Epistles, and in the one citation which seems to be from the Apocalypse, it has been shown to be probable that he is really referring to the Targum of Onkelos on Deut. xxxiii. 6.

Concluding Comments from Paul Younan:

"The Peshitta present in Nineveh during the 330s - remarkable, seeing that Rabbula's great-grandmother had not yet even been conceived...[How modern scholars who] claim that Rabbula of Edessa, the 5th-century archenemy of the Church of the East, produced the Peshitta. How the Church of the East, his hated enemies, came to adopt a version supposedly made from his hands - only these idiots know...If the Peshitta was around during the 330s and quoted by a high-ranking official of the Church of the East, how much farther back in time must it have originated? The late 200s....the early 200s....the late 100s....the early 100s.....the Apostles' hands?"

I could not have expressed that idea better myself, and will end on that excellent point. Thank you all for your kind attention to the truth!

the Peshitta Aramaic and Greek versions of the New Testament. As evidence mounted that showed extensive divergences which could not be accounted for in a Greek to Aramaic translation, eager western scholars seized on what for them was the next best thing. The Peshitta, they claimed, was not translated from the Greek, but revised from these other Aramaic versions instead. However, as we will see with both of these documents, they have deep problems of their own. Starting with the Cureton, it has a very unique rendering of set 2:

- 1) Solomon
- 2) Rehoboam
- 3) Abijah
- 4) Asa
- 5) Jeshosopha
- 6) **Ahaziah**
- 7) **Joash**
- 8) **Amaziah**
- 9) Jehoram
- 10) Uzziah
- 11) Jotham
- 12) Ahaz
- 13) Hezekiah
- 14) Manasseh
- 15) Amon
- 16) Josiah
- 17) Jeconiah

Now what in the world is going on here? First we lose generations and now we are practically tripping over some extra ones? Well, as it turns out, the scribe who did this had the best of intentions. As a matter of fact, 2 Kings 14-15 faithfully records these same three generations that the Peshitta version omits. So, on the surface, it appears that Cureton is Torah-accurate, whereas Peshitta dropped the three names on the floor somewhere and never picked them up.

However, before everyone goes down that *Peshitta revised from Old Syriac* road again, they would do well to ask this question: Why does every Greek New Testament manuscript, *regardless of family or text type and going as far back as the second century*, also miss these same three names? Is this one scrappy little Aramaic version right and standing as a lone witness against thousands of contrary textual witnesses? And, how can that be, when the oldest Greek versions predate Cureton by at least 200 years?

Well, as we are about to discover, appearances can be quite deceiving. One of these scribal traditions is clearly reflecting a deep understanding of Jewish culture and Scriptural interpretation, while the other only appears to do so. Which is the fraud and which the original?

In order to find out, let us first realize that Matthew is doing far more than giving a list of generations. Rather, he is showing Messiah to have a *royal lineage* as a direct descendant of David. However, David was not the first king of Israel. That honor was given to Saul, and it is his example that showcases the first of two rules in recording the progeny of kings:

"Samuel said, 'Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has turned away from you and become your enemy? The LORD has done what he predicted through me. The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors--to David. Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today.'"

1 Samuel 28:16-18

From this point on, no descendant of Saul can ever lay claim to the throne of Israel. This rule, I believe, is easily understood by most scholars and lay people.

However, there is a corollary to this rule that is less well known but equally binding. It states that within a lineage certain generations can be invalidated, but the inheritance can still stay within that group. Or, to put it another way, the house of Judah can keep ruling, but certain rulers of Judah are not counted as genuine kings. Now the question is though, just how did this contingency get triggered?

The answer, ironically, comes not from Judah, but from the house of Israel:

"Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him...He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke to LORD to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him."

1 Kings 16:30, 33

This idolatrous act, and many other grievous sins, led to the inevitable warning and rebuke of the prophets:

"Then the prophet quickly removed his headband from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. He said to the king, 'This is what the LORD says: You have set free a man I had determined should die. Therefore, it is your life for his life, your people for his people.'"⁶

1 Kings 20:41-42

"Then Micaiah answered, 'I saw all Israel scattered like sheep without a shepherd, and the LORD said these people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'"

1 Kings 22:17

Then when judgment does come, it is horrific:

"This what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anoint you king over the LORD's people Israel. You are to destroy the house of Ahab your master, and I will avenge the blood of my servants and the prophets and the blood of all the LORD's servants shed by Jezebel. The whole house of Ahab will perish. I will cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel, slave or free.'"

2 Kings 9:6-9

So Ahab's house is cut off, but what does that have to do with the house of Judah, which Messiah is descended from? The answer lies here:

"Now Jehosaphat had great wealth and honor, and he had allied himself with Ahab by marriage... Then Jehosaphat rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the City of David. And Jehoram his son succeeded him as king... He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel as the house of Ahab had done, for he had married a daughter of Ahab. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD. Nevertheless, because of the covenant the LORD had made with the house of David, the LORD was not willing to destroy the house of David. He had promised to maintain the lamp for him and his descendants forever."

2 Chronicles 18:1, 21:1, 4-7

Therefore, we have a bit of a contradiction here. On the one hand, Ahab's sin was so great that God had no problem permanently taking his house away. On the other, Judah, although perpetually blessed because of

David, also had Ahab's tainted blood flowing through its heirs! Since the Scripture cannot be broken, the only solution could come from the most sacred place of them all, the Ten Commandments:

"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them, **for I, the LORD God am a jealous God, punishing the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those that hate me.**"

Exodus 20:4-5

So that was the bottom line as far as Matthew was concerned. He knew that these generations were cursed and, even though they are counted physically, to refer to them as ancestors was tantamount to invalidating Y'shua's claim to be Messiah!

However, some critics will no doubt point to the fact that Manasseh, who is a direct ancestor of Y'shua, sinned far worse than Ahab did and for far longer, 55 versus Ahab's 22 years. Although this is clearly true, at least two factors spared this evil king from sharing Ahab's fate. First is the perpetual covenant with David's house just mentioned, which God clearly did not want to break. Second, Manasseh got lucky in a way Ahab did not. Reason being, Ahab was both preceded and followed by very evil men who sat on his throne. By contrast, Manasseh, evil as he was, had the good fortune of being sandwiched between Hezekiah and Josiah, two of the most righteous rulers Judah ever produced. As for Manasseh himself, there is even a record of this very epitome of evil actually repenting of his sins and making some restitution in the last years of his life (2 Chronicles 33:12-17)! Therefore, taken together, the punishment of Judah was less severe than that of Israel. Ahab's line was wiped out forever, whereas Judah was allowed eventually to return to the land and rule after only two generations of captivity in Babylon.

In the end then, only the Peshitta version shows the advanced understanding of Torah that would have been the hallmark of a first century pious Jew in Israel like Matthew. The Cureton, on the other hand, also shows the marks of its redactor: A Greek Orthodox monk writing more than 400 years after the fact.

Wisdom is Vindicated by Her What?

Let's look at the Greek texts first on this one:

kai; epikairwqh h; sofia apo; pantwn twh tekwnw auth;.

But wisdom is justified of all her **children.**

Luke 7:35

kai:ejlikaiwqh h sofia apo:tw h ergwn aut hβ.

But wisdom is justified by her **deeds**.

Matthew 11:19

Now for many centuries scholars simply assumed these were two variant traditions of what Y'shua said, in spite of the fact that both accounts appear to put near verbatim words and circumstances both prior to and after this utterance. The other more fundamental problem though is that of disconnection from the obvious. Given that almost all New Testament scholars agree that "Greek NT originals" nonetheless contain 75% of Y'shua's teachings that were originally delivered in Aramaic, it seems odd that such a variance would not also spark an inquiry into that linguistic direction. This is especially puzzling also given the fact that the two Greek words in question (ergon, teknon) could not look or sound more different.

Once again though, we come across the solution in the form of two similar looking Aramaic words:

ܒܢܗ (bineh) "deeds"

ܒܢܗ (beneh) "sons/children"

In this case, the mistake the Greek redactor makes is assuming that the ending in the letter *heh* (ܗ) indicates third person possession as in *her children*. As for the Aramaic version of Matthew, the apostle seems to have been aware of the possibility that these two words might get confused, and so he picked another word that clearly just meant "deeds", *abdeh* (ܐܒܕܗ).

The reader however should never be fooled into thinking that Luke himself made this mistake. Rather, the Aramaic origins of this verse are instead proven by the simple fact that the Greek manuscripts themselves disagree concerning this reading! It is a mark of translation.

The Greek versions **S, B, W and f13** contain the correct reading of "deeds".

By contrast, the erroneous reading of "children" is contained in **B2, C, D, K, L, X, Delta, Theta, Pi f1 28, 33, 565, 700, 892, 1010**⁷ and, not surprisingly, *both* of the so-called "Old-Syriac" manuscripts (Cureton and Siniaticus).

On the other hand, what we have between the Peshitta and the Hebrew Scriptures is an amazing word play:

"The so-called 'Old Syriac' manuscript of the four Gospels, known as the Siniatic Palimpsest, discovered by Mrs. Agnes Lewis in the Convent of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai in 1892, unfortunately was forged by the Monks, deliberately so, before it was sold to Mrs. Lewis and her companions. They made a hole in the date of the manuscript, thus apparently increasing its age by 900 years. The work was actually finished in the year 1599 CE. The English scholars who examined it first, placed its date as of 697 CE. Then, not being sure, they made a second inspection, and assigned to it a later date, at 778 CE. Dr. Burkitt (then young student), at the time of the discovery, thought that the hole in the date was natural, that is, in the skin when dated. He failed to realize that no responsible scribe would date a manuscript near a hole in such a way as to leave the reader in doubt as to the exact date.

"The above mentioned error in date recently was discovered by the writer, after examining several other Four-Gospel manuscripts which were brought to America from the Near East. All the owners of these manuscripts had used the same malpractice. They had made it appear from the mutilated dates that the manuscripts were one thousand years older than they actually were. One of these manuscripts is at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, another is at Harvard, and another is in Syria.

"Palimpsest' means double writing, or one writing over the other. The superwriting in Aramaic, on the vellum of the so-called Siniatic, was the story of martyrology. One of the stories is that of Saint of Augenia, believed to be a European Saint never heard of in the East. This book evidently was introduced by the Roman Catholic missionaries after the union of the Chaldeans with the Church of Rome in the sixteenth century. The work underlying the super-writing is that of a student who copied the Gospels for penmanship. No laymen or priest would destroy a sacred text of the Four Gospels just to write a history of the Saints. Such an act would be considered sacrilegious. Other Palimpsest texts of this nature, including the so-called Curetonian, are of late origin and are not authentic. They were never used by the Christians of the Church of the East.

"Many forged manuscripts, scrolls, and fake tablets have been brought to America and Europe. They generally are produced in Egypt and Iraq. Stone tablets and engraved and buried in the fields, and clay tablets are made similar to those made by the Assyrians. The work is so cleverly done that oftentimes even the experts are confused and deceived. Moreover, genuine tablets may be rejected because the archaeologists doubt their authenticity. Some years ago the writer received about two hundred tablets from a member of Turkish parliament who had purchased them in Constantinople. They were first regarded as a great discovery, but later were rejected as fakes. The writer reported this malpractice to Cambridge University, and received confirmation of such fraud. The writer also took the matter up with Dr. Hatch of the Episcopal Seminary in Cambridge,

Massachusetts. We made a study of the ink used in the manuscripts. After the writing ages for several weeks it cannot be washed off. However, it can be removed in a short time after it is written. Therefore, in the East, Palimpsest documents and revisions are rejected as sacred literature. They are never used in the churches.

"If this practice of forging manuscripts had been known earlier, there would not have been any confusion as to the origin of the Peshitta. Western scholars would have realized that neither the Siniatic Palimpsest nor the Curetonian are authentic manuscripts of the Scriptures. These were forged and used by heretical sects which tried to deny the divinity of Jesus. Some of them are works of the students who copied manuscripts for penmanship practice."

Dr. George M. Lamsa, "New Testament Origin", p. 89-91 (1947)

Now today, admittedly, Dr. Lamsa is a controversial figure. This is primarily due to his tendency to allow his liberal theological biases to infect his translation. Others directly question certain details of the role he ascribes to himself in this instance. Nevertheless, the main point Dr. Lamsa makes cannot be refuted: Middle Eastern scribes would never scratch off the original Word of God and substitute the biography of a saintly legend over top of it.

In response to this obvious truth, Siniaticus proponents have tried to suggest that perhaps the original manuscript was defective and, since vellum was kind of scarce, they simply re-used it. However, even this scenario is fraught with problems. In the Middle East, and especially in Israel, sacred manuscripts would never be "recycled" in such a horrific manner. If the texts of something, like say a Torah scroll, were defective, they would be destroyed. If the text or manuscript materials degraded, then a new copy would be made and the old one would again be destroyed. There are even records of rabbis "burying the Torah" or giving the old manuscript a kind of funeral, because its degradation has rendered it imperfect for daily use.

Now as for the Peshitta, it was preserved by the Assyrian people who, in addition to having close ethnic ties with the Jews, had adopted Judaism at some point in their long history and still retain much of those sensibilities even to this day. Therefore, if the manuscript of the "original Siniaticus" were defective, it would never have been scratched off and written over¹¹. It was an either-or, black and white deal instead. Either it can be used every day, or it must be discarded. There was never, and is not now, any middle ground on this point.

Finding the Hand of Revision

However, the biggest proofs against the Siniaticus are in fact textual in nature. For example, remembering a major proof at the beginning of this book speaks volumes on the question of who comes first. The Siniaticus version of Matthew 1:16 reads "her betrothed" instead of *gowra* in Matthew 1:16, which is clearly an effort to bring itself more in line with the majority Greek rendering of "her husband".

Now let us look at some other examples from these two traditions and see who was really revised from whom. Since the alleged revision is supposed to have been done to make the Peshitta more in line with the Imperial Byzantine Greek text, I will be contrasting both Peshitta and Siniaticus with that Greek family of manuscripts.¹²

"These things happened in **Beth-Abara**¹³ on the other side of the Jordan."

John 1:28 (Byzantine Text and Siniaticus readings)

"These things happened in **Beth-Anya** on the other side of the Jordan."

John 1:28 (Eastern Peshitta reading)

Beth-Anya is better known as *Bethany*, a city two miles outside of Jerusalem, and also known as the hometown of Y'shua's friend Lazarus (John 11:1). By contrast no city named *Beth-Abara* (place of the other side) has ever been found. Why is it then that the Peshitta preserves the name of a real city and the Siniaticus and Byzantine texts do not?

Simple, both of them misread the original!

Specifically, there were two stages to the confusion. First, on the Greek side, the redactor of the Byzantine text probably skipped over a couple of Aramaic words thusly:

"**These things happened in Beth Anya on the Abara (other side) of the Jordan.**"

Then, with his work now completed, the Greek redactor would have simply put the Aramaic text aside and never gave the reading a second thought. Next, when his text passes to the Old Syriac Aramaic scribe, he simply transliterates into his language the phrase preserved in the Greek. Granted though, it is possible to suggest that the Aramaic scribe could have also skipped over "Anya on the" as well, but this idea is less

likely, since an Aramaic speaker is less prone to error in his native language. Instead, the error the Old Syriac scribe makes is far subtler:

"These things happened in **Beth-Abara** (בֵּית עַבְרָה)."

John 1:28

"Go down ahead of the Midianites...down to **Beth-Bara** (בֵּית בְּרָה)."

Judges 7:24

Not only are the two names almost identical but for the use of a **ע**, notice they are both placed in almost the exact location as well. Therefore with the Greek reflecting an only minor transliteration variant and given the fact the geography also seemed accurate, there would have been no reason for the Old Syriac scribe to question the Byzantine reading. Even if he did though, the scribe still could have attributed the variant spelling to either that of a different Aramaic dialect or else a transliteration scheme in Greek of taking on an "a" at the beginning, which was also commonplace.

Here's another pair from Luke:

Y'shua himself stood among them and said, "Peace be to you."

Luke 24:36b (Byzantine Text and Siniaticus readings)

Y'shua himself stood among them and said, "Peace be to you. **It is I, don't be afraid.**"

Luke 24:36b (Eastern Peshitta reading)

And that repentance **and** remission of sins should be preached.

Luke 24:47 (Byzantine Text and Siniaticus readings)

And that repentance **for** remission of sins should be preached.

Luke 24:47 (Eastern Peshitta reading)

The other point of the post was, the Peshitta could **not** be a revision of the "Old-Syriac" in favor of the Greek reading of Mark 5:26. I cannot even fathom a direct relationship between the Peshitta and OS, unless the translators of the "Old-Syriac" had referenced the Peshitta. That's about the only relationship I can even imagine. The supposed revisers of the Peshitta had no reason to include ܐܘܪܘܫܝܡ and change the Proclitic ܐ to a Proclitic ܐ.

Therefore, if the Peshitta is supposed to be designed to agree with the Greek, it seems a very selective agreement indeed. In other places, agreement between the Peshitta and the most ancient Greek readings go *against* the Old Syriac manuscripts, since the latter obviously came on to the scene rather late, after the most reliable readings had been established.

The reader may then well ask how such a situation can be possible, whereby both agreement and disagreement with the Greek texts are taken as evidence of Peshitta Primacy. The answer is, quite honestly, that it depends on the case you are looking at. If we are, for example, studying Matthew 1:16-19¹⁵, that is a situation where an obvious mistranslation of the entire Greek record, Old Syriac, and the Hebrew versions of Matthew, arose from the only possible place for a correct and original reading, mainly the Peshitta text. Therefore, the consistent and early misreading in the Greek record serves as powerful proof that the only source it could have mistranslated from must be older than the earliest Greek documents, meaning prior to the second century.

On the other hand, if we have a very odd reading in either Old Syriac or the late medieval Hebrew Matthew manuscripts, and that odd variant cannot be explained by a mistranslation, picking the wrong reading from a multiple meaning Aramaic word, or confusing two Aramaic words that are spelled the same but have different meanings, then we need to shift gears. It is at that point that issues such as antiquity, multiple attestation of a reading and numbers of extant manuscripts must come into play. What is, after all, a grand total of five manuscripts with no concordance against 360 Peshitta manuscripts, complete codices from the fourth to ninth centuries, that are virtually identical?¹⁶ Furthermore, the variances between Peshitta and the Greek are easily explainable within the framework suggested above, as opposed to a totally bizarre reading from Old Syriac coming out of left field.

It is because of complexities like these that I am determined to offer as many comparative examples as possible, so that the reader may make up his or her mind based on the collectivity of the evidence.

So much then for the basic lesson in comparing these traditions so far. Now let's move on to the advanced class.

True Origins of Old Syriac Revealed

Another aspect though to this analysis has to do with the majority scholarly opinion that the Old Syriac itself was translated from a Greek source known as Codex Bezae, which would have been used as a base text by Rabulla, a fifth century bishop in the Syrian Orthodox Church.¹⁷ Here is just one example of many that could be offered to explain the rightful prevalence of this viewpoint:

In Matthew 9:34, 12:24 and Luke 11:15, the Peshitta contains this phrase:

ܩܝܢܬܐܢ ܗܘܢ ܗܘܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐܝܢ ܗܘܢ ܗܘܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐܝܢ ܗܘܢ ܗܘܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐܝܢ

The Pharisees were saying, "By the head of the demons, he casts out demons.

In so doing, the Peshitta not only agrees with the Byzantine Greek, but also the earlier Western text-type, and even ancient Latin versions.

However, the "original" OS manuscripts omit this phrase in all three places for a very simple reason: Their original source, the Greek Codex Bezae, is also the only text to not have it either!

Not only that, but the Old Syriac manuscripts also only contain the exact same completed books that Codex Bezae does, namely the four Gospels, and it follows this Greek version almost exactly, word for word. Finally, even the later medieval Hebrew manuscripts like Dutillet and Shem Tob, which are frequently reconstructed with the OS Group to recover the "original" contain the exact reading that the Peshitta does *against* the Old Syriac.

Furthermore, in the Greek New Testament tradition, many different kinds of mistakes happened because the Greek redactor did not have the careful textual tradition that his brethren the Semites did. One of these types of mistakes is technically called by the (appropriately) Greek name *homioteleution* ("like-ending"). It means that there is a phrase in between two words that is left out inadvertently when a copyist's eye jumped from the first "like word" to the next "like word." It is actually a very common error in Greek manuscripts. Now, study carefully the Byzantine Greek reading of Mark 6:33 shown below:

kai:eiδon autouβ upagontaβ kai:epewnsan pol l oiγkai:pezh'apo:paswh twh polwewn sunedramon ekei' kai:prohl qon autouβ. kai

There are two textual traditions here which differ in the Greek ("Byzantine" vs. "Western"). The Byzantine reading is shown above. The "Western" reading omits the phrase that is highlighted in blue.

Or, to put it another way, the Old Syriac reads the exact same way as the Greek version from which it's translated. Surely this is yet another example then proving that the idea of Peshitta being a revision of the Old Syriac to bring it in line with the Byzantine Greek text is preposterous.

Luke 23:48

Sometimes however, when the Peshitta does have the same reading as the Byzantine Text, it is because that reading is almost universally attested to in all the Greek textual families, with the Peshitta lending its voice in agreement. The Old Syriac then, is literally left virtually alone with a spurious reading.

Consider the example then of Luke 23:48. In that passage, the Old Syriac curiously includes this interpolation after *beating upon their breasts*: "*and saying: 'Woe to us! What has befallen us? Woe to us from our sins!'*"

This reading, absent in Peshitta, the Greek traditions, and Dutillet and Shem Tob Hebrew versions, can only be found in 2 other manuscripts:

- Codex Sangermanensis - a 9th century Latin Vulgate manuscript
- The Apocryphal Greek Gospel of Peter

Acts 1:4

Sometimes though a mistranslation can produce results that are both ridiculous and laughable. For example, in some early Greek manuscripts as well as the Old Syriac Acts 1:4 reads "and he ate salt". The Peshitta however has "and he ate bread".

Does that mean that the earliest Greek manuscripts may be reflecting a more original Old Syriac reading? Hardly!

The Greek phrase in the Alexandrian text reads *kai sunalizomenus* (kai;sunal izo). Now, with a long "a" *sunalizomenu* was used in Classical and Hellenistic Greek to mean "collect or assemble". With a short "a" *sunalizomenu* means literally "to eat salt together". Leaving aside momentarily the issues that a clearer reading is possible even within the Greek, and the fact that the Peshitta also has a better reading, let's digress to show the error of some scholars when they throw out the obvious to embrace the extremely unlikely.

For example, according to Bruce Metzger the meaning “to eat salt together” is a rare and late meaning of the Greek word, which did not appear until the end of the Second century CE. Most of the early versions do take the word to refer to eating (The Old Latin, the Latin Vulgate; the Coptic, the Armenian, the Ethiopic and the Armenian for example). About thirty-five late Greek manuscripts read alternately *sunaulizomenos* “to spend the night with”.

On the Aramaic side, Dr. Daniel L. McConaughy has noted that the Ancient Aramaic “Church Father” Ephraim, early 4th century, quotes the passage in Aramaic in his Hymns on Virginité hymn 36. This is supposedly very important to the OS-Primacist camp because they believe, erroneously, that Ephraim’s quotations from the Gospels often agree with the Old Syriac against the Peshitta text, and because Ephraim uses the word **ܠܡܠܚ**, which they render “salted” or “ate salt”.

As a result, McConaughy suggests that this is the lost Old Syriac reading which would refer to an ancient Semitic custom of eating salt together in ritual meals (Numbers 18:19; 2 Chronicles 13:5).¹⁸ The confusion was also understandable, proponents of this theory point out, due to the similarity between the words for "salt" (*melkh*--**ܡܠܚ**) and "bread" (*lechem*--**ܠܚܡ**).

However, the most effective way to expose this falsehood, at least as a first step, is also the easiest. Since the linchpin of Dr. McConaughy's is that eating salt is an "ancient Semitic custom", it seems right to check the references he gives to see if this is in fact the case:

All these sacred gifts that the Israelites set aside for the LORD I give to you, to your sons, and to the daughters that are with you, as a due for all time. It shall be an **everlasting covenant of salt** before the LORD for you and your offspring as well.

Numbers 18:19

Surely you know that the LORD God of Israel gave David kingship over Israel **forever**--to him and his sons--by a **covenant of salt**.

2 Chronicles 13:5

Now, honestly, where in either of these passages does it say Jews ate salt together? Rather, the true meaning of "salt covenant" is the concept that appears in both quotes, a Hebrew metaphor for "everlasting". However, to be fair, it may be that the good doctor had another verse in mind. So, since "salt" only appears

a total of 29 times in the entire Tanakh, we can explore the full sample with little difficulty. To begin with, the only other time "salt covenant" appears is here:

You shall season your every meal offering with salt; you shall not omit from your meal offering the **salt of your covenant with God**; with all offerings you must offer salt.

Leviticus 2:13

Notice here that the Jews are not eating the salt either, but using it for the offering that goes to YHWH? It is true though that an argument can be made that some offerings are left over, either for the priests or for the petitioner to consume. However, in no case are groups of people sitting down just to eat the salt!

The remaining references then are all generic and the word "covenant" does not appear. They are:

- The "salt sea", (Genesis 14:3, Numbers 34:3,12; Deuteronomy 3:17, Joshua 3:16,12:3,15:2,5,18:19).
- Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt, (Genesis 19:26)
- "salt and brimstone" and Sodom and Gomorrah, (Deuteronomy 29:23).
- The "City of Salt" (Joshua 15:62).
- Abimelech sows an enemy city with salt so crops will not grow, (Judges 9:45).
- "The Valley of Salt", (2 Samuel 8:13, 2 Kings 14:4, 1 Chronicles 18:12,25:11,Psalm 60:1).
- Salt used to bless the waters and heal the land, (2 Kings 2:20-21).
- Salt again used to season sacrifices, (Ezra 6:9, 7:22, Ezekiel 43:24).
- A general reference to salt being used to season other foods, (Job 6:6).
- "salt land" as wilderness, (Jeremiah 17:6, Ezekiel 47:11).

Again, nowhere do we find the "Semitic custom" of Jews gathering to eat salt. By contrast, the ritual of all Semites getting together to "break bread" need hardly be mentioned!

However, as bad as the Tanakh is twisted in this pro Old-Syriac theory, the grammar errors are much worse. The fact is, *atemelkh* (**ܐܬܡܠܚ**) does **not** mean "salted" or "ate salt", both of which are ridiculous readings. The *melkh* (**ܡܠܚ**) root, a verb, cannot mean "salted"--an adjective! The same is true of "ate salt", which is an impossible reading grammatically, since to say "he ate salt" in Aramaic would be *akhel melkha* (**ܐܚܠ ܡܠܚܐ**).

So instead of a plausible explanation for this theory residing in the similarity between the words for salt and bread, it turns out Aramaic grammar is the greatest weapon for exposing the idea as a fraud! Reason being,  is a verb that is conjugated in a form known as *ethpeel*, and in that form it clearly means, "it was salted". That reading, in turn leads us to the "smoking gun", a scribal error between:

 (they ate salt)

 (they assembled, they deliberated, they took counsel)

In other words, the Old Syriac scribe mistook a *khet* () for a *kaph* () and this is what we are supposed to believe original God-breathed text? I don't think so, since it is a central hope of the faith that the Holy Spirit would not do such a poor job at inspiring such a composition! Although, what this little exercise does is present further proof that the Old-Syriac is translated from the Greek, which has "and they assembled". By contrast, the Peshitta has "he ate bread", which unlike both the Old Syriac and the Greek, the Peshitta makes more sense, since they always ate **bread** together.

Finally, not all of what is today known as St. Ephraim's writings are really from his pen. Most survive only in the Armenian and other non-Aramaic languages, and many of these reek from a distinctly Western-Byzantine flavor. However, even if the citation in question is genuine, one other fact still stands in the way of this theory being credible. First, Mar Ephraim was known to paraphrase Scripture either to make a poetic or spiritual point. Therefore, while some instances may sound somewhat like one version or another, the totality of this evidence had absolutely no bearing on proving which textual tradition preceded the other.

The Return of Zorba

For the last three years or so, I have been dealing with the happy ramifications of using the name "Zorba" in an internet post to describe the Greek redactors of the New Testament. In my mind, the image was most appropriate because, like the Anthony Quinn character in the 1964 film, Zorba seems to have done his work with a lot of joy but very little attention to detail. Still, and even though I have spent hundreds of pages showing problems with his work, the reader should not be left with the impression that Zorba was always wrong. In fact, compared his counterpart on the Old Syriac side, Zorba actually looks like he did a much better job.

You see, Zorba did his work from the Peshitta, and as we have seen he sometimes got various words confused, selected the wrong meaning from a word, and so on. However, in doing so, Zorba also provided

us today with the ability to both clarify the Greek and explain problematic readings in it that end up strengthening the claims of the New Testament as a whole. In that sense, Zorba deserves our praise and appreciation for making a noble attempt to bring a very challenged Galilean Aramaic dialect to the Greek speaking world--the results of which are nothing short of spectacular in terms of influence and staying power.

Our hapless Old Syriac, Greek-Orthodox redactor however, whom we have sometimes called "Spyros" at www.peshitta.org, was far less successful in his endeavor. His Aramaic is terrible, the grammar atrocious and the spelling errors are copious indeed. In fact, it is these very errors that Spyros wrote while translating from the Greek that cause confusion all this time later with people who believe his work to be original! The reality is, they are simply cases of bad penmanship, with the correct reading being shared by both the Peshitta and the Greek. Also, in none of these cases can even a hint be shown that either the Greek or the Peshitta has an untenable or implausible reading. Here is just a sampling of what I am talking about:

Matthew 5:29

OLD SYRIAC: ܐܘܪܝܢܐ "should go"

PESHITTA AND GREEK: ܐܘܪܝܢܐ "should fall"

While the reading "go into hell" and "fall into hell" both seem reasonable, surely "falling" into an abyss or pit makes a lot more sense given the overall context of the passage. The word for "fall" also appears just a few lines later in the exact same form.

Matthew 23:16

OLD SYRIAC: ܕܥܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܪܝܢܐ "hurts not" and ܥܘܪܝܢܐ "sins"

PESHITTA AND GREEK: ܕܥܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܪܝܢܐ "nothing" and ܥܘܪܝܢܐ "is guilty"

Here we really have to see the full readings side by side to appreciate the error:

"Woe to you blind guides, for you say that whoever swears by the Temple **is not anything**, but he who swears by the gold by which is in the Temple is **guilty**." (Peshitta)

"Woe to you blind guides, for you say that whoever swears by the Temple **does not hurt**, but he who swears by the gold by which is in the Temple **sins**." (Old Syriac)

David went to the **priest** Ahimelech at Nob. Ahimelech came out in alarm to meet David and he said to him, "Why are you alone and no one with you?" David answered the **priest** Ahimelech, "The king had ordered me on a mission, and he said to me, 'No one must know anything on this mission on which I am sending you and for which I have given you orders'. So I have directed my young men to such and such a place. Now then, what have you got on hand? Any loaves of bread? Let me have them, or whatever is available." The **priest** answered David, "I have only consecrated bread, provided the young men have kept away from women." In reply to the priest David said, "I assure you that women have been kept from us, as always. Whenever I went on a mission, even if the journey was a common one, the vessels of the young men were consecrated; all the more then may consecrated food be put into their vessels today." So the **priest** gave him the consecrated bread, which had been removed from the presence of the LORD, to be replaced by warm bread as soon as it was taken away.

1 Samuel 21:1-7

So it seems that Tanakh is in disagreement with the Peshitta, but is it really? The fact is, the Peshitta opponents only *assume Ahimelech is the high priest, but this title is never given in the actual text*, where he is called "a priest" only! Now it is true that Ahimelech did have a son named Abiathar, and that it is very unlikely that the son would hold a high priesthood over and above his father who was a regular cleric. However, the fact is that Abiathar was also a very common name, and we are simply not told who the high priest of the tabernacle was. Furthermore, one did not have to be a high priest to have access to the consecrated bread, as even a regular Levite had this right as well:

Some of the priests blended to compound of spices. Mathithiah, one of the Levites, the first born of Shallum the Korahite, was entrusted with making the flat cakes. Also some of the Kohahite kinsmen had charge of the rows of bread, to prepare them for each Sabbath.

1 Chronicles 9:30-32

Another factor mitigating against the idea that Ahimelech was high priest is that Tanakh never mentions the same person as both priest and high priest during the same time frame, although it is likely that Aaron functioned as "high priest" before that title became official in David's day. Nevertheless, for our purposes here, there is no doubt that high priest's office was wholly separate from those of the lower priests, with rights and privileges exclusive to that position.¹⁹

Matthew 1:21 (Yunan Peshitta Interlinear Version)

By contrast, here is the parallel that Trimm drew on www.peshitta.org between the two textual traditions:

Matthew 1:21

OLD SYRIAC: ܠܠܝܟܝܢ “to the world”

PESHITTA AND GREEK: ܠܠܝܟܝܢ “to the people”

This is however not what the Peshitta says! The word is actually *l'aimmeh* (ܠܝܡܡܗ) *not* *l'aimmah* (ܠܝܡܡܗ). Trimm has therefore misspelled it so it would look more alike the Old Syriac as ܠܠܝܟܝܢ. The difference though is that the proper spelling with a heh (ܗ), rather than an *alap* (ܐ), renders the word in the Peshitta into a third person possessive (his). There can be no disputation on the subject then, because this is as basic an Aramaic grammatical structure as one will ever find in the New Testament. That being said, there is no way the Peshitta redactor could have done what Trimm suggested and wrote down ܠܠܝܟܝܢ as an error when revising from the Old Syriac reading of ܠܠܝܟܝܢ. Such a scenario might be a little more plausible if, as Trimm erroneously presents, the Peshitta used ܠܠܝܟܝܢ. To then further assert that the same error was repeated more than 360 additional times in the Peshitta text family without anyone suspecting a problem is clearly absurd, and then we will compound that madness further by saying the Greek is also wrong by saying "people"!

I offer then a far more sensible theory to explain the variant. The Greek redactor in this case read the Peshitta properly and simply turned "his people" into the neutered equivalent of "the people". Since the "the people"--the Jews--are the same as "his people", this is a perfectly fine reading.

Some time later then, the Old Syriac redactor again is looking through his Greek manuscripts and *intended to write "people" but instead accidentally added a lamed to the word, making it "world"*. By contrast, we know the Old Syriac redactor could not have had a copy of the Peshitta text in front of him. If he had, then he would have seen the ܗ at the end, sticking out like a sore thumb, and guiding him easily to the correct reading that everyone else had to begin with!

It's all in the "khads"

Sometimes claims about the originality of the Old Syriac Group border on the bizarre, if not ridiculous. For example James Trimm has claimed that the Old Syriac is more authentically Jewish than the Peshitta text, because of "an amazing Semitic idiom". That idiom, strangely enough, is the word for "one"-- *khad* (ܚܕ)--which when combined with another noun like "man" is better rendered as "a certain man". Trimm's claim on this matter is that "a certain man", which is how the Old Syriac often reads, is superior over the Peshitta's reading of "a man". Well, not only is this "idiom" not apparent to anyone who is a native Aramaic speaker, but even the linchpin on which it rests, that the substitution of "certain" for "a" is universal, is deeply flawed. To prove this, let's take a look at some texts, side by side:

Matthew 8:2

Peshitta: ܚܕ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ (a **certain/one** leper)

Old Syriac (Cureton): ܥܘܠܡܐ (a leper)²⁰

Matthew 8:5

Peshitta and Old Syriac (Cureton): ܚܕ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ (a **certain/one** centurion)

Old Syriac (Siniaticus): ܥܘܠܡܐ (a centurion)

Matthew 12:11

Peshitta: ܚܕ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ (a **certain/one** sheep)

Old Syriac (Cureton and Siniaticus): ܥܘܠܡܐ (a sheep)

Mark 3:1

Peshitta: ܚܕ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ (a **certain/one** man)

Old Syriac (Siniaticus): ܥܘܠܡܐ (a man)

Mark 7:24

Peshitta: ܚܕ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ (a **certain/one** house)

Old Syriac (Siniaticus): ܠܒܝܬܐ (a house)

Mark 12:1

Peshitta: ܠܒܝܬܐ (a certain/one man)

Old Syriac (Siniaticus): ܠܒܝܬܐ (a man)

John 3:1

Peshitta: ܠܒܝܬܐ (a certain/one man)

Old Syriac (Cureton): ܠܒܝܬܐ (a man)

John 3:25

Peshitta: ܠܒܝܬܐ (a certain/one Jew)

Old Syriac (Cureton): ܠܒܝܬܐ (a Jew)

These are just a sampling of the dozens of places in the Peshitta that disprove Trimm's theory. The fact is, *khad* is not a Semitic idiom at all. Instead, just like English, these variants simply represent two acceptable ways to say the same thing, and it has no bearing on the originality argument whatsoever. I also concur with my colleague Steve Caruso's analysis of this matter when he wrote on peshitta.org the following:

Posted on Heb-Aram-NT, AramaicNT, and b-aramaic lists:

Akhi [my brother--AGR] James and all involved with the khad/chad study,

There is something I noticed, going over the numbers concerning the preservation of the "Khad idiom." Going over the verses Akhi James provided I found out how the Old Syriac looks against itself along with the Peshitta:

Sinaiticus Unique (~4): 2:23; 15:22; 18:2; 21:2;

Cureton Unique (~3): 9:9; (26:7)? (27:57)?

Peshitta Unique (~1): 12:11

Peshitta & Sinaiticus Agreement (~4): 8:2; 8:5; 18:24; 21:19;
Peshitta & Cureton Agreement (~4): 9:18; 13:46; 21:24; (26:69)?
Sinaiticus & Cureton Agreement (~1): 17:14;
Complete Agreement (~6): 8:19; 12:10; 12:22; 19:16; 21:28; 21:33
Total Instances: ~23
Peshitta & Sinaiticus Agreement: ~43%
Peshitta & Cureton Agreement: ~43%
Sinaiticus & Cureton Agreement: ~30%
Peshitta, Sinaiticus, & Cureton Agreement: ~26%

Taking a close look at the evidence, there are many places where syr(s) and syr(c) disagree with each other. With this in mind, we find one place where the Peshitta disagrees with both Old Syriac manuscripts (Mt. 12:11), and one place that we can verify that both Old Syriac manuscripts disagree with the Peshitta (17:14). Even Steven We also see that the Peshitta Agrees more closely to each individual Old Syriac Manuscript than the Old Syriac Manuscripts do to each other (43% vs 30%).

With this in mind, I believe that this is ample evidence to conclude that the inclusion or exclusion of khad/chad as "certain" is arbitrary & not a valid means of determining which biblical text is "more authentic" than another; the statistics simply do not warrant it. Additionally, I wholeheartedly reject the further study of its frequency in this context as any form of evidence for the Gospel of Matthew.

The bottom line with all of these examples however is that even if it could be shown that the Old Syriac Group (Cureton and Siniaticus) was the original, their fragmentary condition is such that not even both of them put together form the complete Gospel record. Of course, in that scenario, we now have just these scraps of the Gospel texts against the *full Peshitta version* that is rendered *identically* in 360 other complete manuscripts! We also have the force of ancient eastern traditions unanimously proclaiming Peshitta as original, even as these same groups denounced, hated and almost destroyed one another. And yet, as volatile and dangerous as the relationship between the Church of the East and its rival Aramaic group the Syrian Orthodox Church has been, both would defend the antiquity and originality of the Peshitta ²¹and agree that the Siniaticus is nothing short of a pious fraud.

Peace and blessings to you all,

Andrew Gabriel Roth

March 21, 2004

ENDNOTES

¹ This is not to say that Mar Aphrahat never engaged in indirect scriptural allusion, as Matthew 1:23 is a good example of the saint quoting from no known source. Rather, my point is that in terms of overall style, Mar Aphrahat, when he does directly quote, clearly favors the Peshitta text over the Old Syriac.

² Mar Aphrahat lived from 280-367 CE; Mar Ephraim from 306-373 CE. Therefore, while there are some writings from both men that coincide in the middle of the fourth century, the earliest and greater portions of Mar Aphrahat's writings precede Mar Ephraim's by about 30 years.

³ The primary source material for these quotations in Mar Aphrahat's masterpiece, "Demonstrations of Faith", which is a detailed New Testament analysis in 22 parts, one for each letter of the Aramaic alphabet.

⁴ My sincere thanks to Paul Younan who compiled these examples from his extensive Church of the East library.

⁵ Obviously the Old Syriac versions of books other than the Gospels is not extant. In these cases, my intent is to demonstrate that the full breadth of the Peshitta canon is rooted to these ancient times.

⁶ Notice also that this particular sin of Ahab, letting a man live that God consigned to destruction, is also nearly identical to the sin that also got Saul's line permanently disqualified in 1 Samuel 28:16-18.

⁷ See the Appendix for the full list of Greek manuscripts.

⁸ It should also be fairly pointed out that this is pure Semitic speech. Aramaic and Hebrew are notoriously redundant in their phraseology and filled with statements like "and he opened his mouth, spoke and said to them", which is exactly what this line from John reflects.

⁹ The story of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11) is not in the Peshitta nor the 4 more most ancient Greek manuscripts. Therefore, the numbering order in the eastern Peshitta will vary from that of the west, and this omission will cause this scripture to appear 11 lines earlier, in John 8:28-30.

¹⁰ The following quote from George Lamsa is quite instructive on the issues surrounding the authenticity of both Cureton and Siniaticus manuscripts. As a native Aramaic speaker reared in the Middle East and steeped in the tradition of the ancient Church of the East that preserved the Peshitta collection, Lamsa is well qualified both liturgically and scholarly to comment on the practices he knew so very well. However, as a theologian, Lamsa leaves much to be desired, having let liberal theological notions such as an unbelief in demons affect many areas of his own translation. Therefore, the inclusion of this quote should only be an acknowledgment of his ability as a commentary, and not an endorsement of his actual religious views.

¹¹ While the Monks of Saint Catherine's were most certainly not Assyrians, but of Greek ethnicity, the theory that Siniaticus-primacists hold to is that the Peshitta was revised from it. Therefore, somehow the Siniaticus, or perhaps another copy of it, would have made its way into the hands of the Church of the East. Once there, the "original" Word of God would have been altered and the vessel it came in either defaced or destroyed. For that reason, the habits of the Middle Eastern scribes that would have done this deed are still very much on point. It is also the case that if another had scratched the text off before the Church of the

East officials looked at it, they would have immediately laughed heartily and dismissed the document as an obvious fraud without a second thought on the matter.

¹² The source for the Aramaic texts of the Siniaticus, Harkalean (western Aramaic revision of 616) and Peshitta readings is from George Kiraz's monumental work A Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels, whereas the translation of those texts was done by Paul Younan. I also cross-checked the readings and translations used in this section of the book.

¹³ This is also the root from which we get the word "Hebrew". Jews and Arameans had settled on opposite sides of the Jordan, and so the Arameans called their Semitic brethren "those from across" (Hebrews).

¹⁴ My source for all the comparisons between the Old Syriac manuscripts and the Peshitta is the monumental work of Dr. George A. Kiraz, Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels. Dr. Kiraz has made sure that there are three readings for any part of the Gospels. Since Cureton and Siniaticus are each missing large parts of the Gospels, Dr. Kiraz will augment the Peshitta and the Old Syriac existing reading with the Harkalean revision of the Peshitta done in 616. By contrast, in places where the both the Cureton and Siniaticus share a reading, only the Peshitta is added.

¹⁵ Please consult the section "The Gowra Scenario", from the chapter on Matthew's Gospel in Ruach Qadim, by Andrew Gabriel Roth.

¹⁶ By these I am referring to the Eastern Peshitta manuscripts, which are the same but for minor spelling variants. The Western Peshitto-Harkalean tradition, which includes adulterated readings such as Acts 20:28 and Hebrews 2:9, is not included in this group.

¹⁷ This evidence is documented extensively in my essay The Path to Life, p. 20-24, which is available on my website, www.aramaicnttruth.org.

¹⁸ See An Old Syriac Reading of Acts 1:4 and More Light on Jesus' Last Meal before His Ascension; Daniel L. McConaughy; Oriens Christianus; Band 72; 1988; pp. 63-67.

¹⁹ It is also fair to point out that the term "high priest" is not even applied to the first Levitical priest, Aaron. Rather, the specific office of high priest seems to have been a distinction made about four centuries later. However, even if technically speaking Aaron did act as a high priest, which I believe he did, that fact still does not invalidate the proposition that by David's time the bifurcation of titles had been in place for some time. Furthermore, Aaron also has no bearing on the central point of my argument, which is that the high priest in this instance is not named and that such an omission is hardly uncommon.

²⁰ These examples are again taken from Dr. George Kiraz's work. Since the Cureton and Siniaticus documents are quite fragmentary, what Dr. Kiraz is done is as follows: Where a reading is preserved in both C and S he simply adds the Peshitta as the third witness. However, in places where either C or S is wanting, Dr. Kiraz simply puts the remaining Old Syriac reading with the Peshitta, and contrasts it with the Harkalean Revision of the Peshitta done in 616. As a result, there are always three readings shown for each line of the Gospels.

²¹ This is not to say that the COE and SOC do not have other disagreements about the text. The SOC revised at least two readings (Acts 20:28, Hebrews 2:9) to fit more in line with their different beliefs and also accepted 5 books that the COE did not. The point however is that the SOC and COE accept the Gospel of Matthew, which is our focus, as being IDENTICAL AND ORIGINAL IN BOTH THEIR TRADITIONS. Therefore, if the COE decided to use the Siniaticus to do a revised work later called "Peshitta", then there would be no way their enemies at the SOC would have ever accepted it, and vice versa!