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Introduction

Over the past decade, it has been my joy and privilege to study, learn, and lecture about the primacy and originality of the Peshitta text. Throughout most of that time though my emphasis has for the most part been on the linguistic side of the fence, i.e. comparing Aramaic version X with Greek version Y.

Now however, I want to shift gears a bit, for while such an approach remains the centerpiece of my scholarship, it is important also to step back from this paradigm, take stock, and see how the totality of my argument can be improved.

In particular, the development of my website in recent months has greatly encouraged me to put more and more of my teachings out for free public view and open discussion, and as I went through hundreds of pages of research, it dawned on me that something was lacking.

My first two books, *Signs of the Cross* and *Ruach Qadim* have almost 1,300 pages of research between them. However, in spite of this depth, after many friends and colleagues have read one or both of these, their questions back to me have more than suggested that some very basic parts of my theory have not come across well.

To be even more specific, the scope of my evidence has required me to inter-weave tons and tons of information in a very particular manner. As such, with one type of evidence acting as a counterpoint for another, it becomes difficult for the reader to see the full, systematic vision of my foundation, from which all the linguistic and other evidence flows. I had begun in *Signs*, for example, a section on answering the ten greatest questions of the Greek Primacist School, only to realize that I did not go far enough in answering other questions that I did not consider. Similarly, in *Ruach Qadim*, I found myself answering more of these questions in scattered places only to move on to linguistics at the next possible moment. The result of all of these efforts then was that there was no one section that, from beginning to end, only dealt with these "FAQs", if I am permitted to use internet-speak a little.

And so, that is why I decided to have this primer. Much of what you will see here is simply a re-editing of my larger works to fit this purpose, whereas other aspects are totally new writings that arose from a need to expand on a point only briefly made previously. Either way, I am happy to provide this work so that, should the reader then elect to move on to my larger writings, they too will have a good foundation to understand why I have made certain decisions that I vigorously defend every day of my life.

With those thoughts in mind, let us begin:

1) Why am I doing this?

Well, to open on a personal note, I think it only fair to inform the reader about certain aspects of my life so that they will have some idea where much of my emphases are coming from. Put simply, the greatest misconception I have encountered is when people confuse my criticism of the Greek New Testament as an attack on the New Testament as a whole. This erroneous idea has more to do with people who believe the terms "Greek New Testament" and "original New Testament" refer to the same thing rather than any of my beliefs, methodology or evidence.

But where did it all start? Well, first of all, it should take little effort for many to realize that I am a Jew who, since a very early age, developed a passion for both my heritage and its two sacred languages of Hebrew and Aramaic. From the age of four and onwards, I have always loved Jewish prayer and found my spirit extremely moved by the cantors, whose songs formed the soundtrack of my childhood.

By my freshman year in college, my Judaism took a bit of an activist turn, and I became the president of Hillel, the Jewish youth service group on campus. In that capacity, I began to network with various synagogues in the area, and soon found that certain rabbis liked my Torah views. It was at that point that I was introduced to the counter-missionary movement and was asked on a few occasions to "witness" to Jews by dissuading them from believing in Y'shua Ha Moshiakh.

I also frequently engaged in debates with Christians, venting my outrage that they would dare tell me what *my book* written by *my people* in *my language* was really supposed to say. Just who did these goyim think they were anyway? I can remember one of them inviting me to their religious group, and when I asked what it was called he said, "Campus Crusade for Christ", to which I replied, "Don't *ever* try to tell a Jew that a crusade is a good thing!"

Although, over a two-year period, I must admit that I began to make Christian friends almost in spite of myself, and they invited me to their meetings to "hear my perspective on the Hebrew".

On another occasion I was asked to go to hear a "Christian Rabbi" speak¹, and I remember answering, "Great, I have a square circle in my pocket." I also began musing about how clever these Christians were by not sharing verses from the Greek New Testament, which they knew I would tear apart as a pagan text. Furthermore, I sort of took a slight dark pleasure in pointing out things that my hosts clearly did not want to think about, like how Jeremiah 10:1-6 appeared to view Christmas trees, how "Sabbath" means Saturday and not Sunday, and so on. Through it all they were very patient and caring, and each time I met them I walked away with a greater admiration for their sincerity of faith, even if to me it appeared misguided.

However, a turning point came when one particular Christian by the name of Brian came up to me and said, "Andrew, I have an idea. We are going to do a Messianic Prophecy Seminar at the Campus Crus--uh--our group you know. At first I thought you should go, but then I worried that you might think everything would be coming from biased Christian translations, so how about this? I will go and take notes on all the verses they talk about, and then you can look them up in Hebrew to see what they say. Then, perhaps you might consider asking God to grant you true understanding to your mind and heart. After that, just tell me what happens, okay?"

I thought for a moment and said to myself, "Great, I can disprove this thing once and for all", and therefore agreed to the challenge. I got the list of verses a week later and began my study. Suffice to say that when I checked out their claims I was stunned, and my eyes were opened.

Clearly shaken, I returned to my friend Brian and told him, in no uncertain terms, that I was scared. They seemed to be right, but I felt that their rituals and certain ideas behind their beliefs in Y'shua as Messiah were wrong. Then, when I was shown a Greek New Testament, I immediately found a major problem. I had thought that the text, like some other documents I had seen, would simply transliterate the divine name of YHWH into Greek. However, to my shock, I found they used the word *kurios*--a title for Zeus--in its place! As a Jew, this was horrendous to me. I would not bend knee to a book that called on Zeus as the Almighty!² And yet, I was equally convinced that the Messiah, as he was portrayed in the Torah, had to be the same guy they believed in.

Seeing that I was upset, my friend Brian showed great wisdom in the way that he comforted me. He told me that if the only Messiah I could believe in was the one painted by more than 300 prophecies in the Old Testament, that I should reach out in faith to that extent and pray for guidance as my walk progressed. When I protested again the use of *kurios* in his part of the Bible he said, "Andrew, if anyone can possibly learn to resolve a contradiction like that and maybe show others how to also, it will be someone like you. But you must open yourself up to the Holy Spirit first. Believe in the best, and have faith in the rest." It was then that I accepted Y'shua as the Master of my life.

However, in the years that followed, my faith became severely tested. Somehow I came across the counter-missionaries again, and this time I was the target that they were trying to turn around. Not only did they point out the *kurios* problem to me again, they began also to show me dozens of errors in the Greek, including tons of places where the text got critical Torah details wrong. My head began to spin as my faith in Y'shua came into opposition with the text most believed to contain his original teachings and, after a decade of struggle, my faith began to wane. I despaired as my clear understanding of who the Messiah described in Torah was conflicted with a group of seemingly pagan writings about him. I also could not

understand how my Elohim could reveal half of His Word in the holy tongue of Hebrew and the other half in the language of Greek paganism and the "educated" Romans, who burned Jerusalem to the ground.

Nor was I the only new Messianic Jew to be beset with these kinds of issues. My good friend Dean Dana, who was raised Orthodox, wrote the following on www.peshitta.org:

What difference does the Aramaic New Testament make?

There is a rather important reason why the existence and survival of the Aramaic New Testament is crucial and foundational to the message of Christianity as a whole and the difference it makes. Now, this difference (as akhi Paul rightly stated³) is not so much an issue of salvation or even understanding the basic message of the bible. Rather it's about the credibility of the claims of Christianity and a much-needed correction in the understanding of the context and connection under which Christianity (or more correctly stated, "Messianity") was first proclaimed!

Firstly, lets remember some of the last words of the last OT prophet. Malakhi 4:4-5 "Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Khoreb for all Israel. "Behold, I am going to send you Eliyah the prophet before the coming of the great day of YHWH" .

There was virtual silence for about 400 years between the last prophet of the OT era and the words of Mattai 1:1 which begins to proclaim THE most important event in world history -the coming of Meshikha and the beginning of the fulfillment of all that GOD promised throughout Tanakh times. From Bereshit to Malakhi (or Bereshit to Chronicles-however you reckon it) GOD unfolded, among other things, specific information about WHO HE IS and WHO HE IS NOT. GOD used very specific names, titles and descriptive names about HIMSELF so as to not create confusion as it is written, "for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33) .

Now imagine this, the last voice from Tanakh times (Malakhi) encourages the readers to basically remember who GOD is (YHWH) and what He did (reveal himself through Moses). But according to Greek Primacists and the GREEK NEW TESTAMENT and the majority position of Christianity the world over, this same GOD in Malakhi enters the scene in the so-called original, divinely inspired Greek Gospels calling himself Theos, Kurios, Iezus Xristos, Pnuma Theon and Pnumotos Hagion.

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE !?!

Are these not well-documented pagan titles? What are these names doing in this book and why would the OT GOD (well now we must draw distinctions due the confusions introduced in the GREEK NEW

TESTAMENT) transgress His own commandment as it is written “Now concerning everything which I have said to you, be on your guard; and do not mention the name of other gods, nor let them be heard from your mouth” (Exodus 23:13). By doing so, GOD also forces every NT writer to transgress and every person reading, translating and studying the GREEK NEW TESTAMENT to transgress as well!

At least with the Septuagint we all know it's a translation, the translators knew it was a translation –no one tried to dupe the world into believing that it was divinely inspired, that would have been laughable. So these titles & names were included (for better or for worse) as a means to accurately TRANSLATE the text into a foreign tongue, so the inclusion of foreign deities was to be expected. Much like it is in English. No one claims that “LORD GOD” is what YHWH Elohim called himself.

SO WHY DO GREEK NEW TESTAMENT PRIMACISTS INSIST THAT GOD TOOK UPON HIMSELF THE NAMES OF PAGAN DEITIES?

I suppose it would have been possible, if the Greek NT was inspired, for the all names and titles of GOD to have been transliterated into Greek to have avoided this fundamental problem. THIS IS WHAT A DIVINELY-INSPIRED GREEK NEW TESTAMENT WOULD HAVE LOOKED LIKE.

I could flip through any book, chapter and verse of the Peshitta and NEVER have this problem –I know who Eloha is, I know who Y'shua is, I know who mar-YAH is, I know who Rukha d'Eloha is, I know who Meshikha is and I know who Rukha d'qudsha is.

Did theos speak the universe into existence?

Did kurios speak to Moses at the burning bush?

Did pnuma theon hover over the waters in Genesis 1:2?

I don't think so, and If GOD went by these names during all the years of Tanakh times, we would have known it. Remember, the NT covers a short time span, it is inconceivable that there would be such a sudden shift in Deity identity during the few years of NT times against the backdrop of thousands of years during Tanakh times.

So this is what I see as a huge and fundamental difference that the Peshitta NT brings to the table -credibility and connection to the same GOD, the Creator revealed in the Old to the same GOD, the Savior revealed in the New!

After all, only the Peshitta boldly declares, "for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is YHWH the Messiah" (Luqa 2:11). All other versions keep you guessing as to who the 'Lord' is.

*b'Meshikha,
Akhi Dean*

Therefore, were it not for my discovery of the Aramaic New Testament, I would not have retained my faith. I found, in beautiful and majestic detail, the authentic Jewish writings left by the apostles. As for myself, the Peshitta strengthens, rather than weakens, our understanding of the New Testament. In the end though, all I can do is methodically lay out as many relevant details as I can and let the reader make up their own mind. First however, the time has come to answer a very basic yet important question.

2) What is Aramaic?

Let not the Aramaic be lightly esteemed by you, seeing that the Holy One--blessed be He- - has given honor to it in the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings.

Palestinian Talmud, Sota 7:2

For this section on Aramaic History, I will defer to the thoughts of my colleague Paul Younan who, as a native Aramaic speaker, wrote:

Aramaic is the ancient language of the Semitic family group, which includes the Assyrians, Babylonians, Chaldeans, Arameans, Hebrews, and Arabs. In fact, a large part of the Hebrew and Arabic languages is borrowed from Aramaic, including the Alphabet. The modern Hebrew (square) script is called "Ashuri", "Ashuri" is the Hebrew name for Assyrian, the name being used to signify the ancestor of the Assyrians, Ashur the son of Shem, the son of Noah (Genesis 10:22). Aramaic is quoted in the very first book of the Bible, Berisheth (Genesis) in Chapter 31:47. In fact, many portions of the Old Testament are penned originally in Aramaic, including Daniel chapter 2:4 through chapter 7.⁴

The first known inscriptions of Aramaic date to the late tenth or early ninth century BCE. In a phenomenal wave of expansion, Aramaic spread over Palestine and Syria and large tracts of Asia and Egypt, replacing many languages, including Akkadian and Hebrew. For about one thousand years it served as the official and written language of the Near East, officially beginning with the conquests of the Assyrian Empire, which had adopted Aramaic as its official language, replacing Akkadian.

During the later Chaldean (Neo-Babylonian) and Persian conquests, Aramaic had become the international medium of exchange. Despite Hellenistic influences, especially in the cities, that followed the conquests of Alexander the Great of Macedonia, Aramaic remained the vernacular of the conquered peoples in the Holy Land, Syria, Mesopotamia, and the adjacent countries. It ceded only to Arabic in the ninth century CE, two full centuries after the Islamic conquests of Damascus in 633 and Jerusalem in 635. Aramaic has never been totally supplanted by Arabic. Aramaic had been adopted by the deported Israelites of Transjordan, exiled from Bashan and Gilead in 732 BCE by Tiglath-Pileser III, the tribes of the Northern Kingdom by Sargon II who took Samaria in 721, and the two tribes of the Southern Kingdom of Judah who were taken into captivity to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 587. Hence, the Jews who returned from the Babylonian Captivity brought Aramaic back with them to the Holy Land, and this continued to be their native tongue throughout the lifetime of Y'shua the Messiah.

During the Hellenistic period of the Seleucids, Aramaic ceased to be a uniform language, when various dialects began to form, due to regional influences of pronunciation and vocabulary. Some of these dialects became literary languages after the differences had increased. The language, henceforth, divided into an Eastern branch, with a number of dialects, and a Western branch with its dialects, but all of which retained a great similarity.

Aramaic can be dated to five periods, dating from inscriptions that go back to the first millennium BCE:

Old Aramaic, 925-700

Official or Imperial (Assyrian) Aramaic, 700-200 (when the language was still uniform)

Middle Aramaic, 200 BCE - 200 CE

Late Aramaic, 200-700

Modern Aramaic, 700 to our time

The Aramaic in which the Bible called "Assakhta Peshitta" is written, known as the Peshitta Text, is in the dialect of northwest Mesopotamia as it evolved and was highly perfected in Orhai, once a city-kingdom, later called Edessa by the Greeks, and now called Urfa in Turkey. Harran, the city of Abraham's brother Nahor, lies 38 kilometers southeast of Orhai. The large colony of Orhai Jews, and the Jewish colonies in Assyria in

the kingdom of Adiabene whose royal house had converted to Judaism, possessed most of the Bible in this dialect, the Peshitta Tanakh.

This Peshitta version of the Old Testament was taken over by all the Churches in the East, which used, and still use Aramaic, as far as India, and formerly in Turkestan and China. The Peshitta Tanakh was completed during Apostolic times⁵ with the writings of the New Testament. This literary form of Eastern Aramaic was pronounced differently in the Western countries under Roman rule and its Byzantine successor, and became the "Western" dialect, influenced by Greek grammar and style. In the Parthian (Persian) Empire, the language retained its archaic style, syntax and pronunciation.

Greeks had called Aramaic by a word they coined, 'Syriac', and this artificial term was used in the West, but not in the East, where it has always been known by its own name, 'Lishana Aramaya' (the Aramaic language). Modern Eastern Aramaic has sixteen dialects, spoken by Christians and Jews, and a widely spoken western dialect. Modern Western Aramaic is spoken in three small villages north of Damascus, but in a very mixed form with words borrowed from Arabic and Turkish.

Christian manuscripts in Eastern Aramaic are written in the ancient script called Estrangela (round, thick set) with no vowel markings. After the fifth century CE, two different scripts developed. In the West, a script (of which half the letters no longer resemble the Estrangela), called 'Serto' (strophe) is used, with five capital Greek letters for vowels, written on their side, above or below the letters. In the Eastern script, called 'Madinkhaya' (Eastern) or 'Swadaya' (Contemporary), only five of the twenty-two letters have been slightly modified. To indicate the seven vowels there are various accents, with two different strokes to indicate the semi-vowels, resembling the Jewish systems of Tiberias or of Babylon.

Modern Aramaic, in its various dialects, is spoken in modern-day Iraq, Iran, Syria, Israel, Lebanon, and the various Western countries to which the native speakers have emigrated, including Russia, Europe, Australia and the United States.

Churches which still use Aramaic as their liturgical language include the Church of the East, the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Syriac Catholic Church, and the Maronite Catholic Church.

With this background in mind, the central debate between Aramaic and Greek New Testament primacists needs to be briefly addressed. Basically both languages have been shown to have tremendous influence in the Middle East. Greek was the language of the Roman Empire which dominated the region, and anyone who wanted to do business with this great power had to have at least a working knowledge of that language, or perhaps even Latin as well.⁶

However, even allowing for a rather high level of Greek mastery by many Jews in first century Israel does not deal with the most critical line of evidence of them all. For myself, as well as many others in the Hebraic Roots Movement, the proper question to ask has nothing to do with Greek fluency among Jews. Instead, the better line of inquiry should focus on what language those same Jews used in a *sacred context*, which was always in Hebrew.

Now some will counter this idea, pointing to the strong Hellenistic Jewish communities scattered throughout the Mediterranean at this time in history. However, this line of evidence is irrelevant because both Y'shua and his disciples come from the Israeli tradition that hated the Greek translation of the Torah so much as to inaugurate a Fast for the day it was finished. That being said, most historians today freely acknowledge a clear enough bifurcation between Hellenistic and Israeli Jewish traditions as to invalidate any attempts of extrapolating one group's linguistic usage and applying it to the other.

Whichever side on this debate the reader may share in this issue, the important point to understand is that the best evidence for proving which language gave birth to New Testament lies within the texts themselves, and this is the area I plan to focus on for the duration. For now however, we need to turn to a different question, which is why the Roman Catholic Church venerates Greek NT texts as originals, while having copious traditional attestation to the contrary for at least two Gospels, Acts and one Pauline Epistle?⁷ Furthermore, is there anything in the historical record to account for an apparent discrepancy between some authorities who assert a Hebrew origin and others who believe they were done in Aramaic?

That answer, as it turns out, begins by consulting the sources themselves, and what they say about the origin of the Gospel of Matthew and the Epistle to the Hebrews:

Papias (ca. 130 CE):

"Matthew composed his work in the Hebrew dialect, and each translated as best they could."⁸

Irenaeus (170 CE):

"Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect."⁹

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 185 CE):

"In the work called *Hypotyposes*, to sum up the matter briefly, he [Clement of Alexandria] has given us abridged accounts of all the canonical Scriptures...The Epistle to the Hebrews he asserts was written by Paul, to the Hebrews, in the Hebrew tongue, but that it was carefully translated by Luke, and published among the Greeks."¹⁰

Origen (ca. 200 CE):

"The first [Gospel] is written according to Matthew, the same that was once a tax collector, but afterwards an emissary of Y'shua the Messiah, who having published it for his believers, wrote it in Hebrew."¹¹

Eusebius (ca. 315 CE):

"Matthew also, having first proclaimed the Gospel in Hebrew, when on the point of going also to the other nations, committed it to writing in his native tongue, and thus supplied the want of his presence to them by his writings."¹²

Pantaneus...penetrated as far as India, where it is reported that he found the Gospel according to Matthew, which had been delivered before his arrival by some who had the knowledge of Messiah, to whom Bartholomew, one of the emissaries, as it is said, had proclaimed, and left them the writing of Matthew in Hebrew letters."¹³

For as Paul had addressed the Hebrews in the language of his country; some say that the evangelist Luke, others that Clement, translated the Epistle."¹⁴

Epiphanius (370 CE):

They (the Nazarenes) have the Gospel according to Matthew quite complete in Hebrew, for this Gospel is certainly still preserved among them as it was first written, in Hebrew letters."¹⁵

Jerome (382 CE):

"Matthew, who is also Levi, and from a tax collector came to be an emissary first of all evangelists composed a Gospel of Messiah in Judea in the Hebrew language and letters, for the benefit of those of the circumcision who had believed, who translated it into Greek is not sufficiently ascertained. Furthermore, the Hebrew itself is preserved to this day in the library at Caesarea, which the martyr Pamphilus so diligently collected. I also was allowed by the Nazarenes who use this volume in the Syrian city of Borea to copy it. In which it is to be remarked that, wherever the evangelist...makes use of the testimonies of the Old Scripture, he does not follow the authority of the seventy translators [a.k.a. the Septuagint] but that of the Hebrew."¹⁶

He [Paul], being a Hebrew, wrote in Hebrew, that is, his own tongue and most fluently while things were eloquently turned into Greek."¹⁷

So there seems to be consensus here that at least the Gospel of Matthew and one of Paul's Epistles were written in a script usually thought of as Hebrew. However, it also appears that there is a fairly intense dispute as to the *language* beneath the letters, as this excerpt from the Catholic Encyclopedia shows:

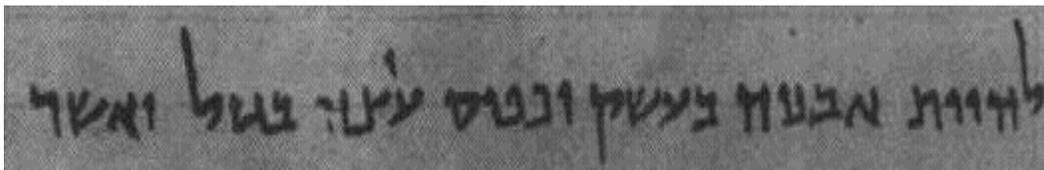
Moreover, Eusebius tells us that the Gospel of Matthew was a reproduction of his preaching, and this we know, was in Aramaic. An investigation of the Semitic idioms observed in the Gospel does not permit us to conclude as to whether the original was in Hebrew or Aramaic, as the two languages are so closely related. Besides, it must be home in mind that the greater part of these Semitisms simply reproduce colloquial Greek and are not of Hebrew or Aramaic origin. However, we believe the second hypothesis to be the more probable, viz., that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Aramaic.

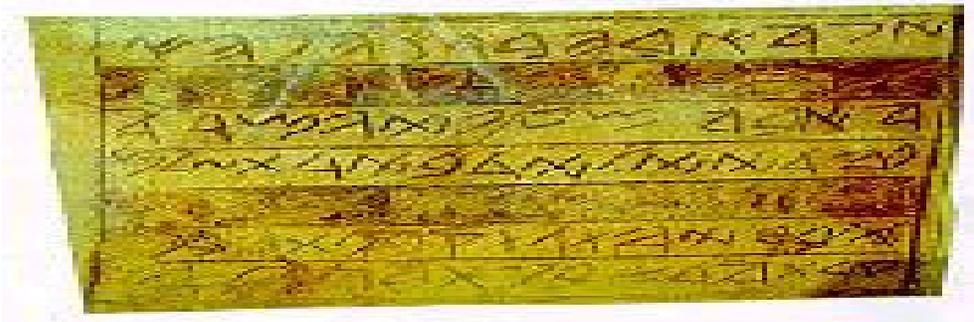
It should also be observed that while some Church Fathers stay quite general with phrases like "his own tongue" and "in their own dialect", others seem to go an additional step by simply saying "in Hebrew letters". The question then becomes, why the ambiguity? Aren't Hebrew and Aramaic clearly two different languages? The answer, as we will see, is not as simple as it appears.

Five millennia ago, the first Hebrew writing emerged as a minor variant from the predominant Canaanite script. Called *paleo-Hebrew*, its influence was so great that it has never completely fallen into disuse by Jews even now. Furthermore, up until the time the Jews returned from the Babylonian Captivity under Ezra in 515 BCE, *paleo-Hebrew* was the only truly genuine Hebrew script. However, after the Captivity another style of script, known as *asshuri*, came into use:

אבגדהזחטיכלמנסעפצקרשת

In other words, the proper name for what we think of as Hebrew script is in fact *asshuri*, and this is the same style that sacred Jewish books are written in today. However, what is not as well known is that there were quite a few scripts from first and second century Israel that greatly resembled this style but still contained only Aramaic words, such as these examples:





This gold inscription is from the Tomb of Abba, found in Northern Israel and dated to before 70 CE. Just six decades later the Bar Kochba rebels also used "Hebrew letters" in their Aramaic writings:



Similarly, in 1990 Israeli archaeologists unearthed the ossuary of the family of the High Priest Caiaphas:



The inscription reads "Yosef bar Caifa", and the fact that *bar* is used for "son" rather than *ben* makes this yet another Aramaic inscription using Hebrew style letters.

At this point though we need to keep in mind another key fact mentioned by these Early Church Fathers. Specifically, the "people of the circumcision who believed" were also known as Nazarenes.

Furthermore, since the Nazarenes were continuously active from the death of Messiah until the fourth century when these Church Fathers wrote about them, a strong reason emerges for these same authorities being confused about the actual language of the Nazarene books. Since the script looked like what they *thought* was Hebrew, some assumed that the script and the Hebrew language were one and the same.

Others however clearly did make the distinction between the script and "the Hebrew dialect", which we know as Aramaic today.

3) What is Estrangela?

However, as the Messianic movement spread outside of Israel and began to wind its way to countless populations that, while Semitic, were not of Hebrew extraction, it became necessary to transliterate the Hebrew-style of Aramaic into scripts these people could understand.

Eventually, by about 30 years after the crucifixion, the Edessan Aramaic script known as "estrangela" was chosen as the best vehicle to transmit the sacred writ across the Middle East. This was the script used by King Abgar, who ruled in what is now part of Turkey. The reason for this choice was simple: Edessa had become a kind of "safe zone" for Messianic believers outside of Israel. Then, while under the protection King Abgar, Edessa would become one of the first places where Aramaic New Testament documents were written, collected and distributed. As a result, the copies from these manuscripts that have come down to us today were also written in this same style of script.¹⁸ In terms of actual inscriptions, the earliest form of this script is dated to year 6 CE. However, given the circumstances of that inscription--namely a royal tomb--it is very likely that the origin of this script goes back considerably earlier.¹⁹ In any case, the script looked like this:

ܐܘܪܝܢ ܗܘܢ ܕܢܘܨܬܝܢ ܕܢܘܨܬܝܢ

Another key point is in determining the time frame when the transition from Hebrew to estrangela style script would have taken place. We know, for example, from historical records that the apostle Thomas visited Abgar in the year 36. It is also a matter of fact that Church of the East records, occasionally supplemented by Scripture like 1 Peter 5:12-13, that the apostle Peter founded many assemblies in that general area as well, including the one which would later become the Armenian Orthodox Church that was on Abgar's literal doorstep.

However, for myself, the most probative evidence comes from the textual arena, and this is simply one example of many others that I could use to this purpose:

Righteous versus Wicked: The Contradiction of Romans 5:7

This is such a key verse in so many ways, that we need to show both the English and the Greek texts to explain it properly:

For when we were still without strength, in due time Messiah died for the ungodly. **(1) For (2) scarcely (3) for a (4) righteous** man will one die; yet perhaps for a **(5) good** man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Messiah died for us.

Romans 5:6-8 (NKJV)

eti gar Xristoß ontwn hōwh aßqenwh eti kata;kairon uper aßebwh
apeqanēn. **molis** gar uper **dikaio** tiß apoqaneitai: uper gar tou' **agathou**
taw tiß kai;tol ma'apoqaneih: sunisthsin de; thn eautou' agaphn eiß hōwh
o;leob o;ti eti a;hartwl wh ontwn hōwh Xristoß uper hōwh apeqanēn.

The bolded and numbered words indicate ones that we need to see in the Greek to understand fully, but before doing that even the English showcases this point to a degree. Almost no one will die for a righteous man, but if he is a good man they will? What does the “good” man have that the “righteous” one does not? Perhaps the following from *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* might shed a little light on the matter:

- (1) #1063- “gar”(gar); a primary particle, conjunction. Definition: 1) “for”.
- (2) #3433- “molis” (molis); adverb. Definitions: 1) With difficulty, hardly. 2) Not easily, scarcely, very rarely.
- (3) #5228- “huper”(uper); primary preposition. Definitions: 1) In behalf of, for the sake of. 2) Over, beyond, more than. 3) More, beyond, over.
- (4) #1342- “dikahyos”(dikaiou); adjective. Definitions: 1) Righteous, observing divine laws.
 - a. In a wide sense, upright, righteous, virtuous, keeping the commands of God.
 1. Of those who seem to themselves to be righteous, who pride themselves in their virtues, whether real or imagined.
 2. Innocent, faultless, guiltless.

“For hardly anyone would die in behalf of wicked man, but for a good man, some might die.”

Romans 5:7 (my translation)

Surely it makes much more sense to say that the average person--which is what this verse is referencing--is less likely to die for a wicked man than a righteous one. If this were not the case, why even go to the lengths of contrasting what is "normal" with extraordinary grace of God?

Not only that, but the Peshitta text gives a very quick, yet effective, explanation for the Greek error. In Aramaic, this is the word for "wicked" as it appears in Romans 5:7:

ܠܘܝܝ

And, this is the word for "blameless/righteous":

ܠܘܝܝ

They look the same, don't they? However, they are not. The difference is between two letters that look almost identical, namely the *aih/ayin* (ܐ) and the *noon* (ܢ), each of which takes the second to last position in their respective words. Therefore, if a scribe or translator is not very careful, he can make a wrong choice, which this one obviously did. If such a situation is the case with the precision of modern computer-generated fonts, how much more would this be the case with individual pieces of ancient handwriting? The alternative, which is even worse, is to suppose that Paul did not know the difference between “good” and “wicked”, and I doubt if anyone is going to that extreme.

Finally, while the spelling of these words is similar, their pronunciation is not, and as a result it is impossible that this verse was derived from oral Aramaic sources. Rather, this mistake could only come from a physical document sent by Paul but translated by a synagogue official into the local vernacular. If such is the case with Romans, it must also be indicative of a larger process that allowed Peter to reasonably suspect that, wherever he went, a given

congregation would be familiar not just with the local epistle but with "all of Paul's letters", (2 Peter 3:15-16).

My point in using this example then is a simple one. In *ktav asshuri* Hebrew script, the letters in question don't look anything alike (כ ך), making such a confusion impossible if Romans circulated in that script! And so, if we accept that the book of Romans was in fact authored by Rav Shaul, then we must also accept the fact that this proof shows the transliteration into estrangela had to happen prior to his death in the year 67. This general time frame also fits well with eastern traditions regarding when the apostolic writings were being collected.

"With reference to...the originality of the Peshitta text, as the Patriarch and Head of the Holy Apostolic and Catholic Church of the East, we wish to state, that the Church of the East received the scriptures from the hands of the blessed Apostles themselves in the Aramaic original, the language spoken by our Lord Eshoa Meshikha Himself, and that the Peshitta is the text of the Church of the East which has come down from the Biblical times **without any change or revision.**"

Mar Eshai Shimun, by Grace, Catholicos Patriarch of the East

4) What is the Peshitta New Testament Tradition?

The term "Peshitta", which was referenced previously by Paul Younan, is applied to the Aramaic versions of both the Old and the New Testaments. Derived from the Aramaic word *pshat* (פּשְׁטָה) meaning "simple" or "straight", the Peshitta is therefore said to also be the "true" version from which all other New Testament textual witnesses derive from. While the Aramaic Old Testament is also called by this name, no Aramaic assembly makes any claims to its originality since their traditions detail how it was translated from Hebrew sources into their local Aramaic vernacular sometime around the first century of the common era. The work was the result of a number of pious Jews who, after deciding to remain in Babylon and not return to Israel in about 515 BCE, eventually saw the need for a translation of their sacred texts into the dialect they were most familiar with.

In the case of the New Testament though we have a completely different set of circumstances. Currently there are sixteen dialects of Eastern Aramaic. Of these, the dialect preserved in the Peshitta is, without a doubt, the closest to the dialect of Aramaic that would have been spoken by the Messiah in first century Galilee.²¹ As a result, the Peshitta cannot be a translation from any other Hebrew or Greek source, or a revision from other Aramaic sources, as is often alleged. Instead, and as I hope to demonstrate throughout this book, the Peshitta is the original New Testament as it would have been set down by the apostles themselves or, at a minimum, the closest to those original sources that has survived into modern times.

5) What are the "Assembly of the Nazarenes" and the "Church of the East"?

In 1 Peter 5:12, the apostle writes²², "She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, as does my son Mark." However, and contrary to Roman Catholic tradition, this statement by Peter is not some coded allusion to Rome, the city where he would later be murdered. Rather, this is a literal reference to an assembly in Babylon that Peter helped to establish, and yet its story is almost completely unknown in the West. Before we can understand that aspect however, we need to look at two other key quotations:

"We have found this man (Paul) to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect."

Acts 24:5

"...The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."

Acts 11:28

What we see here are the beginnings of the original assemblies of messianic believers, both Jewish and Gentile alike. Tradition calls these key foundational assemblies "Sees", and they sprang up in large cities throughout both the Roman and Persian empires beginning in the opening decades after the death of the Messiah. Of these, the most powerful one was the See of Jerusalem, and it held sway in legal rulings that affected all the other assemblies of the time, such as with the circumcision controversy covered in Acts 15. These were the Nazarenes, also known as "the Way" (Acts 24:12-14), and even though the apostle Paul here is mentioned as being a "ringleader" by his accusers, the fact was that Paul was subservient to both Peter and to the Messiah's brother James the Just, who actually headed that contingent.²³ As we will also see later on, all of the original disciples and the other Jewish believers that were native to Israel who followed them, were given the title of "Nazarenes".

By contrast, the quote from Acts 11:28 clearly tells us that these same disciples were called "Christians" in Antioch. While this usage was somewhat of a misnomer given the fact that the people being addressed were again Jews, the term eventually stuck to the Gentiles in that city who later came to the faith, and this definition was later extended to all Gentile assemblies everywhere.²⁴ In any case, the "See of Antioch" would later become known as the Syrian Orthodox Church, and they are still with us today.

However, as 1 Peter 5:13 clearly states, a third ancient body had been established in Babylon by the apostle himself, for just as Paul went west and made converts throughout the Roman Empire, so did Peter do the

same thing east of Jerusalem. Babylon was also a logical choice for Peter to go since, after Israel, it boasted the largest Jewish population in the world.

The most amazing facet to this history though is not so much that Peter founded an assembly other than Rome that is almost unknown in the West, but more an issue of when this happened. For while Roman Catholics call Peter their first pope, the fact remains that Rome is the city where Peter was murdered. By contrast the various Babylonian groups that were known collectively as *khugy* (huts), were established by Peter at least twenty years earlier than any Roman assembly would have been. As a result, the first Epistle that Peter wrote would have been one of the earliest Aramaic New Testament documents to be sent to this group, that would soon also be known as *knooshta d'netzarim*, or the Assembly of the Nazarenes.

Other Aramaic New Testament documents followed suit, and when the See of Jerusalem eventually fell, the task of preserving these precious manuscripts fell to this same group in Babylon, who has carried on the responsibility down all the long centuries and into our present time. It is this body therefore, also known as "the Church of the East", which endures as the true legacy of the original *talmidim* (disciples)²⁵, and we will be looking at their relationship to the See of Jerusalem in much greater detail later on.

6) How old are the Peshitta manuscripts and what do they entail in their collections?

The oldest complete Peshitta mss is the Codex Khaborris. While some pages of it have been carbon dated to the tenth century and later, the oldest parts of Khaborris are fourth century, as it was common practice to replace worn pages with new ones. The key to understanding Khaborris' age is that the colophon is what gives us the true original date. In the Middle East, most sacred manuscripts have this *colophon*, or bookmark, that tells us which scribe wrote the document, where he did it, and when. When the Khaborris was smuggled out of Iraq, the patriarch for the Church of the East examined the colophon and verified that it read, "dated to the time of the Great Persecution", which refers to a singular historical disaster dated to the year 341, much in the same way a Jewish person talking about "The Holocaust" can only be referring to the Nazi era.

The next oldest manuscript from Khaborris is Syriac Siniaticus II, which comes from about 50 years later. From that point on, what we have is a continuous record of 360 manuscripts dated from the fourth to the ninth centuries. Furthermore, except for minor variations in spelling, these manuscripts are identical, a claim that no two Greek New Testament manuscripts can ever make.

In terms of their content, all 360 Peshitta manuscripts contain the full 22 book eastern canon, which includes all of the western books except for 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. The relationship between eastern and western canons though is exceedingly complex and cannot be entered into at this time.

However, a full explanation of all these issues can also be found at this website in my "New Testament Transmission Trends" article and, more specifically, in the section entitled, "The Ichabod Scenario".

7) Doesn't then the fact that the Greek manuscripts are both older and more numerous than the Peshitta prove that the Greek came first?

No, not at all actually. If all things were equal and we were in a kind of historical vacuum, then yes, such arguments for older and more numerous extant copies would carry a lot of weight here. In fact, it is certainly true that in many cases, these same tests are very helpful in defining what is and is not an original, such as when we compare the Peshitta to the two Old Syriac and three Hebrew versions of the Gospel of Matthew.

However, we are not in a historical vacuum and all things are not equal with respect to the Peshitta and her Greek counterparts and here is why:

Reason #1: Aramaic documents in Hebrew script, as well as those purely in Hebrew were suppressed, and Greek was not.

We have to start with the obvious calamity of the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70. Here are some excerpts from Josephus as to the totality of the destruction:

And here I cannot but speak my mind, and what the concern I am under dictates to me, and it is this: I suppose, **that had the Romans made any longer delay in coming against these villains, that the city would either have been swallowed up by the ground opening upon them, or been overflowed by water, or else been destroyed by such thunder as the country of Sodom (20) perished by, for it had brought forth a generation of men much more atheistical than were those that suffered such punishments;** for by their madness it was that all the people came to be destroyed. And, indeed, why do I relate these particular calamities . . . **no fewer than a hundred and fifteen thousand eight hundred and eighty dead bodies, in the interval between the fourteenth day of the month Xanthieus, [Nisan,] when the Romans pitched their camp by the city, and the first day of the month Panemus [Tamuz] . . . After this man there ran away to Titus many of the eminent citizens, and told him the entire number of the poor that were dead, and that no fewer than six hundred thousand were thrown out at the gates,** though still the number of the rest could not be discovered; and they told him further, that when they were no longer able to carry out the dead bodies of the poor, they laid their corpses on heaps in very large

houses, and shut them up there . . . And now the Romans, although they were greatly distressed in getting together their materials, raised their banks in one and twenty days, **after they had cut down all the trees that were in the country that adjoined to the city, and that for ninety furlongs round about, as I have already related. And truly the very view itself of the country was a melancholy thing; for those places which were before adorned with trees and pleasant gardens were now become a desolate country every way, and its trees were all cut down: nor could any foreigner that had formerly seen Judea and the most beautiful suburbs of the city, and now saw it as a desert, but lament and mourn sadly at so great a change: for the war had laid all the signs of beauty quite waste:** nor if any one that had known the place before, had come on a sudden to it now, would he have known it again; but though he were at the city itself, yet would he have inquired for it notwithstanding.

Excerpts from: War, 5.13.6-7; 6.1.1.

We can easily see how this relates to precious manuscripts. The Temple is completely gone, and with it, its archive. People at Qumran, either as Judeans fleeing a wrathful Roman army of near-apocalyptic proportions or concerned Essenes who were probably wiped out two years earlier and took precautions at the beginning of the conflict, had good reasons to fear for themselves and their holy books. Furthermore, if Dead Sea Scroll translator and author Norman Golb is correct²⁶, the calamity was so great that normal sectarian divisions broke down as the Jewish nation gasped for survival and deposited a wide variety of their traditions in the general area. But at least the Hebrew OT manuscripts had an advantage. They had been circulating for so many centuries and in such great numbers that even this type of catastrophe would not have destroyed them entirely. The Romans, in fact, actually had a copy of the Torah put in one of their own temples, (War 7.5.7)! Also in two cases the Romans allowed prominent Jews to take Hebrew documents out of the city. One, obviously, was Josephus, who tells us in Antiquities several times that he is translating directly from Hebrew sources, and the other is the famous Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, who was allowed to build one Torah academy at Yavneh by the emperor Titus.

However, it is also worth noting that the destruction of Jerusalem was still great enough as to cause the Sanhedrin and all Jewish learning to stop there and relocate to Yavneh. But, of course neither Josephus nor Rabbi Yochanan would have made any efforts to save the Hebrew documents written by that *other group* now called “Christians”.

Furthermore, the Hebrew and Aramaic NT documents would have almost all been confined to Jerusalem, ground zero of this entire conflagration. Nor could the apostles flee northward to what was, for many of them, their home region. Galilee also suffered horrendous losses during this same time, with estimates of the dead approaching 100,000—and of course the southern end of the Dead Sea, and its calamities at

Masada, need hardly be mentioned. Therefore, from one end of the nation to the other, death and destruction were clearly the order of the day and such were the reasons for reducing vast numbers of those early Hebrew and Aramaic witnesses.

Now take that greatly reduced number of remaining manuscripts and add the following disaster to the equation. That next crisis, known as the Bar Kochba Revolt, would have reduced their number even more. Emerging from the disastrous ashes of defeat six decades before, the second Jewish War proved to be a disaster on a magnitude that easily dwarfed its predecessor—with far greater incentives given to the Romans to “finish the job”.

For one thing, the Bar Kochba Revolt was not just a civil uprising. It was a religious one backed up by the Jewish hierarchy, including the great Rabbi Akiba. Bar Kochba (whose name means “son of the star”), was proclaimed the Jewish Messiah and fought the Roman war machine to a standstill for more than three years. His influence was in fact so strong that he was even able to mint coins saying, “year one of the New Israel”. So, when he was finally killed, one can imagine how the Roman wrath would turn not just on the infrastructure of the nation, but its faith as well. Here is what the rabbinic record has to say about that issue:

R. Yochanan said: Rabbi used to expound, “There shall step forth a star (kochav) out of Jacob” (Num. XXIV, 17), thus: read not ‘kochav but kozav (lie). When R. Akiva beheld Bar Koziva he exclaimed, ‘This is the king Messiah!’ R. Yochanan b. Torta retorted: ‘Akiva, grass will grow in your cheeks and he will still not have come!’ R. Yochanan said: The voice is the voice of Jacob (Gen. XXVII, 22)—the voice [of distress caused by] the Emperor Hadrian, who slew eighty thousand myriads of human beings at Beitar (the final battle site of Bar Kochba and his troops). Eighty thousand vanguard troops besieged Beitar where Bar Koziva was located who had with him two hundred thousand men with an amputated finger... They slew the inhabitants until the horses waded in blood up to their nostrils, and the blood rolled along stones of the size of forty se’ah (71 gallons, the same amount as is needed to make a mikvah kosher. . . .) and flowed into the sea [staining it for] a distance of four miles. Should you say .that [Beitar] is close to the sea; was it not in fact four miles distant from it?... R. Huna said: On the day when the slain of Beitar were allowed burial, the benediction ‘Who are kind and deals kindly’ was instituted ‘ Who are kind ‘ because the bodies did not putrefy, ‘and deals kindly’ because they were allowed burial. R. Yochanan said: The brains of three hundred children [were dashed] upon one stone, and three hundred baskets of capsules of tefillin were found in Beitar, each basket being of the capacity of three se’ah, so that there was a total of three hundred se’ah. **R. Gamliel said: There were five hundred schools in Beitar, and the smallest of them had not less than three hundred children.** They used to say, ‘If the enemy comes against us, with these styluses we will go out and

stab them!’ **When, however, [the people’s] sins did cause the enemy to come, they enwrapped each pupil in his book and burned him, so that I alone was left.** He applied to himself the verse, My eye affected my soul, because of all the daughters [i.e. inhabitants] of my city.”

Lamentations Rabba 2:4

The reader should not make any mistake. Those five hundred “schools” were synagogues with their students being burned alive in Torah scrolls—and this is what was done in *one city*—let alone the nationwide destruction that came later. Therefore, if this is the fate of the venerable Torah, what would happen if Aramaic NT documents in Hebrew script were found by the Romans as well, since the Nazarenes were also in that general vicinity?

What history also tells us is that the Nazarenes fled Israel after this, and many of them found their way to the Church of the East in places like Babylon, including members of Y'shua's own family. Again though, the details of this migration are in "The Ichabod Scenario", which also shows that by the end of the second century the Nazarene canon had circulated to Rome.

Reason #2: Jewish Traditions Regarding Sacred Texts

Ever since King Josiah of Judah found a copy of the Torah buried on Temple grounds (2 Kings 22:1-20), or perhaps even longer, there has been an extremely strong Jewish tradition to give old and worn out copies of the Torah a burial, rather than allow them for liturgical use. As terrible then as that may sound to western scholars who are always looking for the most ancient biblical manuscripts, it nevertheless does have a kind of sacred logic to it, and we certainly know such practices were continued into Y'shua's time by the Essenes at Qumran.

Put simply then, the reasoning behind this odd practice is that YHWH is eternal and therefore, His words must also, as Isaiah says, endure forever. A worn out Torah scroll then introduces corruption into what is supposed to be, literally, a text that is forever new for each generation. In addition, it is also well known that when a text was translated into another language, the original manuscript is typically discarded. Now let us look at this:

For you have been born again, not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, **through the living and abiding word of Elohim.** For all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flowers of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, **but the word of YHWH endures forever.**

And so, the next step in this story is that one of the assemblies that Peter founded, namely the Church of the East that preserved the Peshitta text, carried on this Jewish practice in the first few centuries of the common era. Since they were safe in the Persian Empire, there was no need for them to worry about losing their sacred traditions. We also know that this practice of sacred text burials continued on the Jewish side as well, as references to it in the Talmud also attest to.²⁷

However, once Aramaic Messianics began to get fiercely persecuted, it was only natural for them to want to preserve the heritage and keep it from going up in flames. As a result, it is no coincidence that the oldest known Peshitta manuscript is from "the time of the Great Persecution"! In fact, given the regular attempts by both Western Christians and Muslims to wipe these people off the face of the earth, the preservation of their text, blessedly free from the hand of Byzantine revision, is one of the greatest miracles in all of human history.

Reason #3: Internal Textual Evidence

Simply stated, what we have are two ancient traditions, one in Greek and the other in Aramaic, competing for the claim as the original New Testament language. However, this third piece of evidence quite honestly goes to the heart of my studies. Reason being, I have culled over the years hundreds of examples that show how a Greek reading has been badly translated, and how the source of that translation problem could only come from misreading the Peshitta. Once that fact is established then, it should take little effort to realize that the text with the original reading must be older than the one mistranslated from it.

Although, owing to the fact that these hundreds of examples are made available for careful review on this website by anyone who may be interested, there seems little need to relate the totality of that work here at the present moment. Rather, I would simply encourage sincere seekers of the truth to delve into one of these "master proofs" like the Gowra Scenario and see where their journey takes them. If they come to the same conclusion I have, then the earliest Greek readings from the second century have an ancestor from the Aramaic that goes straight back to the apostolic age.

8) Don't scribal glosses, phrases like "which is interpreted", prove Greek New Testament primacy?

First let us define this term. A *scribal gloss* is when there is a break in the narrative that the writer uses to say, "this foreign term *really* means X". Here is a classic example:

“After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him and went where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, ‘Talitha qumi!’ (which means, ‘Little girl, I say to you, get up!’)

Mark 5:40-41

Again, this is an assumption that presupposes the conclusion in its beginning hypothesis. If, as I said before, it is a given that the Greek manuscripts were first, then suggesting that the writer is transliterating Aramaic words into Greek letters, and then attaching a note to the reader as to the meaning of that word, makes perfect sense.

The question is, do the Aramaic manuscripts reflect such a scenario?

In a word: no. These same scribal glosses are completely missing from the Peshitta.

Now for the Greek school, this too can be explained to their advantage. The Aramaic readers knew what those phrases meant, so the translators dropped the explanatory notes going into that language, since they were not necessary. So we have oral Aramaic words of Y’shua being compositionally put into Greek for the first time, only to come *translationally back into Aramaic centuries later!*

As odd as that sounds, this is the majority view right now, and what I hope to be able to demonstrate is that there is more than one valid way to look at this evidence for glosses of this type. I say “of this type” because other kinds of glosses do not lend themselves at all to such flexible interpretations. But for now, let us list the other Aramaic words that Mark uses in the Greek texts. They are:

Qorban- ܩܘܪܒܢ (7:11)

Ephatha- ܐܦܬܬܐ (7:34)

Bar Timi- ܒܪ ܬܝܡܝ (10:46)²⁸

Abba- ܐܒܐ (14:36)

Golgotha- ܩܘܠܓܘܬܐ (15:22)²⁹

The reality with all of these is, of course, that they are just as likely to be transliterated from Aramaic written sources as they are from oral ones. But, as I also said, there is more than one kind of gloss.

For example there is the explosive example of Mark 3:17, where two disciples are given the title “sons of thunder”. In the Greek, this is rendered “boanerges”, but almost all scholars recognize this as a corruption of an Aramaic phrase.

Now here is where it gets interesting. In the Aramaic, that phrase is recorded as *bnai ragshee* (ܒܢܝ ܪܘܫܝܐ).

However, *ragshee* has multiple meanings, such as:

- 1) Enraged, to be in an uproar (used as a metaphor with storms).
- 2) To feel.
- 3) To perceive or be conscious of.
- 4) To rub down.
- 5) To be acquainted.

So what does it mean to be sons of *ragshee*? Are they “sons of feeling”? How about “sons of perception” or “sons of acquaintances”? It is even possible to speculate that they just gave great massages! However, in Aramaic *there is a phrase that only means “thunder”!* What happens here then is something very unusual: the Aramaic clarifies itself!

Mark actually puts:

ܒܢܝ ܪܘܫܝܐ ܕܝܬܘܝܗܝ ܒܢܝ ܪܘܫܝܐ

bnai ragshee, d'aytohi (that is) bnai reama.

The only time that *reama* has a similar meaning to *ragshee* is in the first definition. Therefore, to go from a Greek original into *ragshee* and then say, “Well, I really meant to use this second word so forget the first one”, is simply preposterous, not to mention awkward in the extreme. Why not simply translate *boanerges* directly into *bnai reama*?

The answer is then one of the most powerful reasons for supposing previous oral and written Aramaic sources in advance of the Greek versions, because only a written source in the same language as its oral predecessor would make such a modification. A translation *into that language*, by contrast, would simply pick the most precise term to use there.

9) Doesn't the fact that New Testament writers quote from the Septuagint prove Greek New Testament primacy?

Also some detailed treatment should be extended regarding the kind of Scripture used, whether at this early stage or throughout the rest of the process. Much has been made of the fact that Matthew as we now have it quotes from the Septuagint, a Greek translation, and not the original Hebrew Bible. Greek primacists have in fact used this observation to completely divorce the West from the Aramaic phrases and special meanings that form the core evidence of my argument.

My response to this theory is in three parts, and the first point is rather simple: Far from disproving a Semitic origin, if Septuagint quotes were actually used in the Greek NT— the opposite conclusion is true! Also, as we will see, the conclusion of LXX usage in the NT is far from proven. For the moment, however, let us say for the sake of argument that they were. We then should consider the situation this way: If a translator was going through his original Aramaic sources and trying laboriously to find some bare equivalent in the Greek, translating the Hebrew Old Testament quotes used on his own would most certainly discredit his efforts with his intended audience.

The question then arises, would such Hellenistic Jews, raised their entire lives on the Septuagint, accept anything in Greek other than quotes from that same source? Furthermore, could they possibly believe that any one person, however strong their Greek learning, was able to deliver a superior individual translation from Aramaic into Greek, when an authoritative version had been done and accepted for centuries?

The answer to both questions, as history shows, must be a categorical no, and this is reinforced when we consider that by the time these Gospels reached their final form Jerusalem had been destroyed, and the majority of Palestinian Jews, except for disciples and Nazarenes, had rejected the message. Therefore, the only logical place the apostles could go would be to either Hellenistic Jews or Greek speaking Gentiles, and in both cases the Septuagint was the logical Scripture of choice. Jerome may in fact refer to this very possibility.³⁰

The second part of my rebuttal then is largely a repetition of the points in the Greek general influence argument, with those two critical citations in Luke (11:50-51, 24:44). This use of Hebrew book order however is even more significant when we realize that the revised order in the Greek version had been circulating since 150 BCE . . . at the latest! So, even after nearly 200 years, Y'shua and everyone associated with his movement still used the order of the Hebrew Bible during the time of his ministry. If they did,

it is an equally safe bet that Paul was in the same situation. The apostle almost always went to synagogues in every major city he preached in and, even when his main focus was Gentile audiences, used the same Hebrew Bible.

Furthermore, a supporting statement regarding the " Law and Prophets" order is given by the apostle Paul and can be positively dated to the year 54 at the earliest.³¹ Therefore, we have clear proof that the use of the Hebrew Scriptures continued well past the point when the Gentile ministry was in full swing. The likelihood is also great that this usage continued at least until the year of Paul's death, 67 CE.

Then, just three years later, Jerusalem and her Temple were destroyed and both Jews and Christians faced heavy persecution by Rome. It was only then, with Jewish culture on the verge of extinction and a Gentile Christian movement eager to separate itself from Judaism so they could also survive, that the use of Greek Gospels— and Greek Old Testament quotes in them— became truly necessary. By contrast, right up until this time, the New Testament records in several places Greek proselytes (" God-fearers") going to the synagogue to hear prayers in Hebrew but also getting them translated into their native tongue. With the Jewish learning structure now destroyed, this was no longer possible, and so Gentile believers needed a Gospel they could understand directly, (Matthew 23:15, Acts 2:10, 14:1, 17:17, 18:4).¹³¹

Finally, a very interesting possible line of evidence is found in the entire Epistle of James the Just. The apostle, otherwise known by his Hebrew brethren as Ya'akov Ha Tzadik, was the brother of Y'shua and an early leader in the Jerusalem assembly. He also headed a Jewish Messianic congregation for more than thirty years after the Crucifixion. In his extensive discourse, James very likely has left a historical record of how these early congregations divided up their liturgy. The epistle begins by drawing from a wide variety of biblical themes in a kind of free form style that can only come from a life long study of the Scriptures. However, once James decides to directly quote from a book, a remarkable structure is revealed.

The direct quoting begins in earnest in 2:8 (comp. to Leviticus 19:18, 2:11 comp to Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18, and 2:23 comp. to Genesis 15:6). Then James changes abruptly by using an example from the second chapter of Joshua to round out the thought, (2:25). Two lines later, starting in the third chapter, another quick shift with a discourse on an evil tongue. While the apostle's individual

style is very much apparent here, the common imagery between 3:1-12 and Jeremiah 9:1-16 are quite striking. Both talk about springs of water made bitter by slander, (James 3:10-12, Jeremiah 9:1,16). Both refer to common images of desolation, probably by fire, (James 3:5, Jeremiah 9:10-11). Furthermore both compare slander to a deadly weapon, (James 3:7, Jeremiah 9:3) and, finally, both make mention of animals outliving man because he has an evil tongue and they do not, (James 3:7, Jeremiah 9:10-11).

James then wraps up his teaching with a quote lifted directly out of Proverbs 3:34 (4:6) and a final injunction to his congregation to "sing Psalms" , (5:13), and thus retains the Torah-Nebi'im-Ketuvim model.

Such is the case for demonstrating how history proves the Assyrian Church of the East correct.³² They have claimed that their Aramaic tradition is completely intact from the apostolic age, and that the Scriptures they use are direct descendants of Aramaic originals that were used to help the early assemblies grow during the first 40 years of its history. The rest, as they say, are just translations. The third and final part of this analysis then attacks the prejudice inherent at the core of the Greek assumption. Since the Greek texts are assumed by them to be originals, the fact that they use scriptural quotes in that same language is supposed to be powerful evidence.

However, I would submit respectfully that their conclusion is already taken as proven simply in the way the question is asked. Or, to put it another way, if the Aramaic documents were instead the ones shown to have circulated first, whatever quotes the translated Greek mss had would be considered irrelevant. Of course Greek audiences reading Greek translations would want authentic Greek Tanakh quotes! So, in my view, this whole issue is a bit of a smoke screen.

Now let us look at another possibility, namely that the Septuagint was **not** used in the Greek NT. The fact is, if the writers of the Greek NT thought the Septuagint was the sacred writ over the Hebrew, we should expect them to slavishly quote it word for word. The reality however is quite different, because a bit of a free form style seems to prevail in these quotations that may either represent Septuagintal influence (at best), or may just be the way the writer decided to set it down in Greek himself (at worst). Here is what I mean.

ISAIAH 7:14

Masoretic Text:

" Therefore the LORD himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

Septuagint:

" Therefore the LORD himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

As Quoted by Matthew 1:23:

" Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."

Comments:

One important difference: the LXX uses the word "lepsetai" (shall be) while Matthew uses the Greek word "ekzie" (shall be).

ISAIAH 42:1-4

Masoretic Text:

" Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law."

Septuagint:

" Jacob is my servant, I will help him: Israel is my chosen, my soul has accepted him; I have put my Spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up (his voice), nor shall his voice be heard without. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench; but he shall bring forth judgment to truth. He shall shine out, and shall not be discouraged, until he have set judgment on the earth: and in his name shall the Gentiles trust."

As Quoted by Matthew 12:18-21:

" Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and

smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust."

Comments:

With the exception of a word here or there, the only part which matches is the last phrase " And in his name shall the Gentiles trust." One must conclude that Matthew is either taking liberties with the LXX, or taking liberties with his translation of the Hebrew into Greek. Matthew is himself " targuming" .

ISAIAH 6:10

Masoretic Text:

" And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."

Septuagint:

" Ye shall hear indeed, but ye shall not understand; and ye shall see indeed, but ye shall not perceive. For the heart of this people has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them."

As Quoted by Matthew 13:14-15:

" And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

Comments:

There is a difference in the Matthew quote between the Greek NT and the Greek OT, and that is that the LXX has the word " auton" (their) after " ears" while the NT has it after " eyes." However, the same passage cited by Mark is quite different: ." That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and

hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them." (Mark 4:12) The citation is very free (a "Targum" or "Paraphrase"). Once we interject the usage of freely citing OT passages (as we find many times in the NT), we can no longer be dogmatic that the translation which was used as the base translation was in fact the LXX. It becomes an assumption only.

ISAIAH 29:13

Masoretic Text:

The LORD said: Because these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote.

Septuagint:

"Wherefore the LORD said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:"

As Quoted By Matthew 15:9:

"Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Comments:

There are here likewise some differences between the LXX and the Greek NT. The LXX adds "en" (in) before "with their mouth." The NT uses the phrase "me tima" (honors me). The LXX reads, "auton timosi me" (they honor me). The NT has "didaskalias" (doctrines) after "didaskontes" (teaching). The LXX reads "kai didaskalias" (and doctrines) and places it after "anthrpon" (of men). Mark 7:6-7 "He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." The literal translation of the LXX reads, "And the LORD has said, This people draw nigh to me with their mouth, and they honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me: but in vain do they worship me, teaching the

commandments and doctrines of men" (Isa. 29:13 LXX). The citation is rather loose if coming from the LXX as we have it.

DEUTERONOMY 18:15,19

Masoretic Text:

The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; . . .
19: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him."

Septuagint:

The LORD thy God shall raise up to thee a prophet of thy brethren, like me; him shall ye hear: . . . 19: And whatever man shall not hearken to whatsoever words that prophet shall speak in my name, I will take vengeance on him."

As Quoted by Acts 3:23-25:³³

" For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the LORD your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people."

Comments:

Acts 3:22-23 quotes Deuteronomy 18:15 and 19. This is a lengthy portion of Scripture, but demonstrates that Luke was not citing the LXX word for word in Acts chapter 3. While the literal translations may be close, we are here examining the usage of the LXX in the Greek NT. The Greek of both is given below. If Luke were using the LXX we would expect the passage in Acts 3:22-23 to match the passage in Deuteronomy 18:15,19. One does not have to read Greek to see that the two passages are not a perfect match.

EXODUS 9:16

Masoretic Text:

" And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth."

Septuagint:

" And for this purpose hast thou been preserved, that I might display in thee my strength, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth."

As Quoted by Romans 9:17:

" For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth."

Comments:

The Greek NT begins with " Oti eis auto touto exegeipa se opos" (For this purpose have I raised out thee, so that). The LXX begins with " Kai eneken toutou dietepethes, ina" (And for this purpose hast thou been preserved, that). These are two differing readings in both Greek and English. Moreover, the NT uses the Greek word " dunamin" (power), while the LXX uses the Greek word " isxun" (strength).

PSALM 69:22-23:

Masoretic Text:

" Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake"

Septuagint:

" Let their table before them be for a snare, and for a recompense, and for a stumbling-block. Let their eyes be darkened that they should not see; and bow down their back continually."

As Quoted by Romans 11:10:

" And David says, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block, and a recompense unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always."

Comments:

The NT passage is close to the reading found in the LXX. Yet there are differences. The LXX adds the Greek phrase " enopion auton" (before them) in the first part of the phrase. Also, at the end of verse nine, the NT has the phrase " kai eis antapodoma autois" (and a recompense unto them). However, the LXX places the same phrase in the middle of the verse and not at the end.

PSALM 68:18

Masoretic Text:

You ascended the high mount, leading captives in your train and receiving gifts from people, even from those who rebel against the LORD God's abiding there.

Septuagint:

Thou art gone up high, thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for man, yea, for they were rebellious, that they might dwell among them.

As Quoted by Ephesians 4:8:

Therefore it is said, " When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people."

Comments:

In this verse Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 to support his statement on the grace of Messiah. The quoted words from the Psalms, however, Paul's version of Psalm 68:18 does not come from the Hebrew text, nor from the Septuagint, but from the Aramaic Targums, and this fact even Western Scholars admit (c.f.—Furnish 1971b: 841; Mays 1217; Archer 404)!

Whatever the source, these Greek readings of the OT exist **nowhere else**. Now, to be fair, some Septuagint scholars suggest that there may have been several versions of this work that circulated before the earliest completed mss— which are 600 years after the time of the original. However, if that is the case, it becomes extremely tenuous to show how *any* influence from this collection prevailed upon the Gospel writers. After all, the whole idea is that the Greek Scriptures had such a profound effect on first century Palestinian Jews as to make them want to switch to them for the benefit of their audience in the first place! That having been said then, it seems odd that not a single scrap or fragment of any of these variants has ever been found in the archaeological record, and this even includes versions found at Qumran.

In that case, we now have to postulate as to where these quotes might have come from. Some have suggested that the Gospel writers themselves may have paraphrased them directly, or, when shown that writers like Matthew and Luke sometimes share the same rendering, some kind of validation process of these paraphrases must have ensued during the compilation process.

Fair enough, but it still does not deal with the issue directly, because it is still important to ask: Where did these Jewish writers learn to do this paraphrasing in the first place, and is there a context from Jewish tradition that can shed light on this process?

The answer to both questions, is yes:

" The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So, you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach."
Matthew 23:2-3

Now what does, " sitting in Moses' seat" mean? The answer is in the first part of the verse and the phrase, " teachers of the law" . As it turns out, the Pharisees are the ones who tell the public what the Scriptures actually mean, and they do so out of oral tradition, as we see here:

" When Y'shua had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law."

Matthew 7:28-29

This fact is easily shown throughout the entire Sermon. Matthew actually records no fewer than six times where the phrase " You have heard that it was **said** (i.e. spoken by the teachers of the law)" is contrasted with his own interpretation of " . . . but **I say** to you . . ." (5:21-26, 5:27-30, 5:31-32, 5:33-37, 5:38-42, 5:43-48).

Now let us hear what the great Greek Bible scholar Charles Ryrie had to say about this issue:

The scribes had to rely on tradition for authority; Messiah's authority was His own. It disturbed the Pharisees that he had no 'credentials' as an official teacher in their system.
Ryrie Study Bible (NASV), p. 18

In this context, several curious statements in the Gospels now make a lot more sense:

" Y'shua left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. 'Where did this man get these things?' they asked. 'What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother James, Joseph, Judas and

Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?' And they took offense at him."

Mark 6:1-3

" 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked."

John 1:46

" Not until halfway through the Feast did Y'shua go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews were amazed and said, 'How did this man get such learning without having studied?'"

John 7:14-15

Now let us look at how such a studying regimen is known to have happened. During this same time period on the Aramaic side, a body of literature had sprung up all over Israel to address a common problem. Deriving their name from the Aramaic phrase " to interpret" , the *targumim*— or simply *targums*— were very popular with the common people, and contained a combination of direct translation, local colloquialisms, and some limited free verse.

All these features were of course designed to make it easy for a primarily Aramaic speaker to understand the Hebrew scriptures that were read in the synagogue, but not discussed much outside of it. Additionally their original oral pedigree, like the Talmud itself claiming to be the Oral Law given at Sinai, went back many centuries before their official compilation. Fragmentary targums of both Job and Leviticus have been found at Qumran³⁴, and it is certain that other targums— admittedly now lost— must have existed for other books of the Bible as well.

The need for targums arose also out of a situation where differences in local dialect made straight interpretation from Hebrew very difficult, and we see evidences of this throughout the New Testament. In the third chapter of the Gospel of John, for example, Y'shua uses a Galilean idiom, " born again" , which his companion Nicodemus does not recognize. This of course necessitates a lengthy reply so he can " get it right" . Another instance is actually on the cross in Matthew 27, where Y'shua's cry to God is mistaken for that of " Elijah" by the Hebrew speakers present. However, from the early centuries of the common era and going forward, only a handful of targums have survived either in early written

form or as a later interpolation of oral readings put down into writing during the era of rabbinic Judaism.

Furthermore, it seems that most of these surviving interpretations came from the area of Judea. Their northern Galilean counterparts, which are well known as having once existed during the time of Messiah, are completely gone today. Therefore, that is why both Paul Younan and myself postulate that the best candidates for these missing OT quotes are in fact the lost targums of Galilee.

As for the Aramaic NT, their OT quotes do not match any other known collection either. Specifically, not a single one can be shown to have come from Hebrew (Masoretic Text), Aramaic (Peshitta OT- a.k.a. " Peshitta Tanakh") or Greek (Septuagint) sources. And, since we have seen that the Greek NT fares no better, we must look for a reason for that phenomenon also, and here it is:

At Caesarea there was man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly."

Acts 10:1-2 (NIV)

Now from the further context of the verse, we know that Cornelius is not a Christian because he gets converted later (Acts 10:44-48), and his ethnicity precludes him from being a Jew by birth, so how is it he " fears God" ? The answer, is that he is a proselyte, as Charles Ryrie again explains:

" Cornelius was a semi-proselyte to Judaism, accepting Jewish beliefs and practices but stopping short of circumcision."
Ryrie Study Bible (NASV), p. 225

For more information on the ramifications of that, let us look elsewhere, emphases mine:

Proselyte is used in the LXX. for " stranger" , i.e., a comer to Palestine; a sojourner in the land, and in the New Testament for a convert to Judaism. There were such converts from early times, (Isa 56:3, Neh. 10:28). The law of Moses made specific regulations regarding the admission into the Jewish church of such as were not born Israelites, (Ex 20:10, 23:12, De 5:14). The Kenites, the

Gibeonites, the Cherethites, and the Pelethites were thus admitted to the privileges of Israelites. Thus also we hear of individual proselytes who rose to positions of prominence in Israel, as of Doeg the Edomite, Uriah the Hittite, Araunah the Jebusite, Zelek the Ammonite, Ithmah and Ebedmelech the Ethiopians. In the time of Solomon there were one hundred and fifty-three thousand six hundred strangers in the land of Israel (1 Chr. 22:2). accordingly, in New Testament times, we read of proselytes in the synagogues, (Ac 10:27).. The "religious proselytes" here spoken of were proselytes of righteousness, as distinguished from proselytes of the gate. The distinction between "proselytes of the gate" (Ex 20:10) and "proselytes of righteousness" originated only with the rabbis. According to them, the "proselytes of the gate" (half proselytes) were not required to be circumcised nor to comply with the Mosaic ceremonial law. They were bound only to conform to the so-called seven precepts of Noah, viz., to abstain from idolatry, blasphemy, bloodshed, uncleanness, the eating of blood, theft, and to yield obedience to the authorities. Besides these laws, however, they were required to abstain from work on the Sabbath, and to refrain from the use of leavened bread during the time of the Passover. The "proselytes of righteousness", religious or devout proselytes (Ac 13:43), were bound to all the doctrines and precepts of the Jewish economy, and were members of the synagogue in full communion. The name "proselyte" occurs in the New Testament only in Matthew 23:15, Acts 2:10, 6:5 and 13:43. The name by which they are commonly designated is that of "devout men," or men "fearing God" or "worshipping God."

Easton's Bible Dictionary, p. 563-564

Now, as it relates to this specific topic, these *proselytes of the gate* were not required to learn Hebrew until they went to the next level, the *proselytes of righteousness*. However, they still had to attend synagogue on the Sabbath and not do any work. So, for these people, *the Pharisees made a provision that they could get the services translated into Greek*. And, as we have seen, another word for interpretation is *targum*.

So, while we may never know for sure, it is very clear that "targumming" in the loose sense of the word, was happening in both Aramaic and Greek. Therefore, whether dealing with the Peshitta or Greek NT versions where these quotes exist, some form of targums must have

formed the basis, if not as direct sources, then as a methodology handed down from them, for the earliest believers to record their scriptural paraphrases.

Finally, as Paul Younan also explains, sometimes appearances can be deceiving as to what constitutes an OT quote in the first place:

It should be realized by now, although Western scholars are stubborn, that not every passage cited as an Old Testament quotation is in fact a quotation. Many times they are allusions or simply a general reference, but not an excerpt from an OT passage. For example, your Acts 7:14 example, in which Stephen says, "Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls." The number which Stephen gives is 75. However, the passage in Genesis 46:27 totals 70. There we read, "And the sons of Joseph, which were born him in Egypt, were two souls: all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten." The Greek LXX agrees with Stephen in Genesis 46:27 and lists the number as 75 souls. This passage is often used as an example of a NT saint citing the LXX. The truth is that Stephen is not quoting anything, he is *referring to something.* These two texts reflect two ways of numbering Jacob's family. Jacob's children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren amounted to sixty-six (Gen. 46:8-26). Adding Jacob himself, and Joseph with his two sons, we have seventy. If to the sixty-six we add the nine wives of Jacob's sons (Judah's and Simeon's wives were dead; Joseph could not be said to call himself, his own wife, or his two sons into Egypt; and Jacob is specified separately by Stephen), we have seventy-five persons, as in Acts. Therefore the difference in number can be clarified by an examination of the Biblical texts and not referencing the citation to that of the LXX. Further, scrutiny of the passage in Acts clearly shows that Stephen was referring to events in Genesis 46 and not quoting the passage.

And so, in the end, we are back to where we started that neither the use nor disuse of Septuagint quotes impacts on the linguistic primacy issues in any way. If it was used, it was only for the Greek audience of those manuscripts, and if it was not used, it emerged from a cultural milieu of interpreting scripture with some degree of poetic license.

10) What is the true historical relationship between the Peshitta, Old Syriac manuscripts and the Diatessaron?

Moving on, one of the most egregious falsehoods about the Peshitta text was that it was the product of an Edessan Bishop named Rabulla, in the early part of the fifth century. Basically the lie is outlined in this manner:

- In the middle of the second century, a man named Tatian combined the four Gospels into one work, the original of which was probably in Aramaic. He called it "the Diatessaron".
- Over the next 250 years, this combined work gained great popularity. Paper was scarce and a Lectionary of one unified account was a great boon to poor and struggling assemblies in the Middle East.
- Then, a Bishop named Rabulla came along and suppressed what he thought was the work of a heretic. Determined to have a more acceptable version of the New Testament to take its place, Rabulla is said to have crafted the Peshitta, as we know it today.

The scholar who came up with this idea, Dr. F. Crawford Burkitt, admitted that it was only a guess. However, many uniformed people have passed down Burkitt's guess as a kind of sacred cow of western scholarship. The fact is, it is not, and the history of the matter will certainly bear Burkitt's speculation out to be a horrible lie.

These are the facts:

- The Edessan group was separated from the Church of the East, and in fact was part of a rival assembly known as the Syrian Orthodox Church.
- Rabulla, as a Bishop in the Syrian Orthodox Church, was called "the heretic of Edessa" and "the devil" by the Church of the East because he was a Monophysite, which meant he only saw divine aspects to Messiah.

Therefore, there is **no way** that the Church of the East would accept any writing from Rabulla and call it original Scripture! The history in fact shows the opposite to be the case. The Church of the East resisted all efforts by the West to change their text, even to the point of death, and was ostracized by the Byzantines for their stubborn refusal to give up their ancient Semitic traditions and textual readings.

So, when the Syrian Orthodox Church made their first revision to the Peshitta, the Church of the East rejected it. Then a second revision was done, and the same thing happened. So now, we are supposed to believe they just decided to accept the work of a hated enemy and call it straight from the pens of the apostles?

As a result, these two groups actually made sure that they spoke with a different accent, and even manufactured different Aramaic scripts, so no one would confuse which text came from where. The scholars, who then came in the 19th century to places like Urmia, could not tell the difference between eastern originals and western revisions because they only saw the latter and adopted its structure in their scholarship! They then began spinning wild stories in total ignorance of the history of the matter, and this is one of them.

Let me say this clearly. There is about as much chance of the Church of the East accepting a Peshitta from Rabulla as there is the Orthodox Beit Din in Jerusalem embracing a Tanakh authored by Adolph Hitler. That is exactly how preposterous the idea is.

However, Rabulla was very much involved in the production of another Aramaic work, and this "contribution" has created confusion in the West ever since. A colleague of Rabulla, who authored an extensive biography of him shortly after his death, wrote:

By the wisdom of God that was in him he translated the New Testament from Greek into Syriac because of its variations, exactly as it was.' (Rabul episcopi Edesseni, Baleei, aliorumque opera selecta, Oxford 1865, ed. J. J. Overbeck)

At this point then, history takes over. Having made what he viewed as a definitive translation, Rabulla's next step was to purge all other variants from his domain, as he relates himself here:

'The presbyters and deacons shall see to it that in all the churches a copy of the **Evangelion de Mepharreshe** shall be available and read'. (Th. Zahn, Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons, i. (1881), p. 105.)

And so, what Rabulla really did was suppress the work of Tatian, which is why no complete copy of the Damkhalty (Aramaic for Diatessaron) survives. Rabulla gathered up the copies that had been in widespread use for about 250 years, made a huge bonfire, and burned them.³⁵

But let us now shift our focus from history and into linguistics for just a moment. This term, *evangelion de mepharreshe*, combines both Aramaic and Greek words into a single phrase meaning "separated Gospels".

As such, Rabulla is clearly trying to contrast his translation work of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John with that of the Diatessaron, which has combined the four into one literary work. So, he eliminated as many copies of the Diatessaron as he could get his hands on, and substituted his own translation instead. Then, all these centuries later, western scholars enter the equation and claim, without any evidence, that the *evangelion de mepharreshe* must be the Peshitta text.

The fact is though that western scholarship has completely rejected the Burkitt Hypothesis in spite of the fact that sources like the Encyclopedia Britannica continue to spout this theory as if it were genuine history. For example, with respect to Burkitt, Arthur Voobus wrote:

"This kind of reconstruction of textual history is pure fiction without a shred of evidence to support it" (Early Versions of the New Testament, Estonian Theological Society, 1954, see pp. 90-97)

Voobus in fact goes on to argue that Rabulla never even used the Peshitta at all!³⁶ Furthermore, even Dr. Bruce Metzger, who may be the world's foremost Greek New Testament Primacist, agrees with Voobus and rejects Burkitt:

The question who it was that produced the Peshitta version of the New Testament will perhaps never be answered. That it was not Rabbula has been proved by Voobus' researches...In any case, however, in view of the adoption of the same version of the Scriptures by both the Eastern (Nestorian) and Western (Jacobite) branches of Syrian Christendom, we must conclude that it had attained a considerable degree of status before the division of the Syrian Church in AD 431. (Bruce M. Metzger, The Early Versions of the New Testament (New York: Clarendon, 1977), p. 36).

I could not have said this better myself. Since the Eastern and Western Aramaic groups hated each other with a passion, once again we see that one faction would never accept the Scripture of the other. On the other hand, we have the writings of Mar Aphrahat, a fourth century Syrian saint, who quotes exclusively from the Peshitta against both Old Syriac manuscripts.³⁷ But perhaps the most damning piece of evidence as to what Rabulla really did is contained in a place that nobody in western scholarship seems to have expected:

ܩܠܡ ܘܥܘܢܐ ܕܡܦܗܪܪܫܐ

"Shlam Evangelion de Mepharreshe"

"Here ends the Evangelion de Mepharreshe"

So here, finally, we find an ancient inscription on a document that actually claims to be Rabulla's *evangelion de mepharreshe*. Guess what though? ***This is not the Peshitta text at all, but a line written by none other than the Old Syriac scribe at the end of that manuscripts' version of John's Gospel!*** What's more, the exact same title of *evangelion de mepharreshe* also appears at the very beginning of the Gospel of Matthew as well! That's two references to the unique title that Rabulla himself coined, ***whereas all other manuscripts have this term exactly zero times***. Surely then if the Old Syriac proponents could find even one reference to this work of Rabulla's on any Peshitta document, they would hail it as a smoking gun that Peshitta was revised. How inconvenient then that reverse has been found!

Therefore, Old Syriac must be Rabulla's *evangelion de mepharreshe* and, as Paul Younan points out, that piece of evidence makes a number of other obscure factors finally make sense:

This is the reason why the Old Syriac³⁸ was not used by the Church of the East, and why it eventually fell out of use in every other Church of the Middle East (including Rabbula's own Syriac Orthodox Church, which eventually reverted back to the Peshitta) - only [for Old Syriac] to find it's way to a dusty shelf in a Greek Orthodox monastery of Egypt.

And so, once we see the truth of the matter, it becomes clear the Peshitta could not have been a revision from the Old Syriac manuscripts. In fact, if anything, the Old Syriac manuscripts were an attempt to replace liturgically both the Peshitta and the work of Tatian. Furthermore, the dates of both manuscripts fit the time in which we know Rabulla did his dirty work very well.³⁹

To conclude then, let's just call a spade a spade here. This is just "white man's burden" junk all over again. It's the same kind of logic that made archaeologists in the 19th century assume that everyone *except* the natives of Zimbabwe built a huge wall in their land. No, better it be Phoenicians, Egyptians, Mayans or even Atlanteans, rather than a race they deemed inferior to themselves. And if Burkitt and those who continue to spout his theories uncritically ruffle a few Semites feathers by spreading lies and ignoring traditions and history, it certainly is not a problem that affects them in the comfort of sitting rooms in New York and London.

NOTE: To find out more information on the inferiority of the Old Syriac mss to the Peshitta in terms of linguistics, please consult "Ancient Evidence" and "New Testament Transmission Trends" also available at this website. Dutillet, Shem Tob and Munster Matthew are also addressed in these

sources as well as in "Proofs of Peshitta Originality in the Gospel According to Matthew & the GOWRA Scenario: Exploding the Myth of a Flawed Genealogy".

11) Apart from the inscriptions of Aramaic in Hebrew script that you showed at the beginning of this essay, is there any evidence from the texts themselves that the New Testament was written in Aramaic and not Hebrew?

Absolutely, and the evidence takes several forms:

1) *Scholarly consensus on the native language of Y'shua and his followers:*

It is currently the majority position in biblical scholarship that Y'shua spoke Aramaic as his native language and Hebrew as his liturgical language. Much of this evidence, again, was offered at the beginning of this essay. To add to that corpus however, let us look at some actual quotes that represent this view:

When he (Y'shua) was very young, he must have begun to work alongside his father, as is the custom throughout the Mediterranean world. Like many Jewish boys of his time, he was probably taught to read and write. He learned the ritual requirements of the Jewish Law and memorized verses of the Bible in Hebrew, a language that differed only slightly from the Aramaic vernacular that he and his countrymen spoke.

The Horizon Book of Christianity, p. 31

Joachim Jeremias has made numerous studies of all the occurrences of Aramaic in the sayings of Jesus. Apart from proper nouns and adjectives, he counts 26 Aramaic words attributed to Jesus by the [Greek] Gospels or rabbinic sources. Not all of the example he appeals to are probative, but some are especially useful for establishing that Jesus instructed his disciples in Aramaic. For example, if Jesus regularly spoke Greek, one is hard-pressed to explain the tenacious survival of the Aramaic address to God, *abba*, even among Paul's Greek speaking Gentile converts in Asia Minor (Gal. 4:6)--to say nothing of the Gentile Christians in Rome who had never met Paul (Rom. 8:15). The most reasonable explanation is that *abba* represents a striking usage by the Aramaic-speaking Jesus, a usage that so impressed itself on and embedded itself in the minds of his first century disciples that it was handed on a fixed prayer formula even to the first century Gentile believers. Interestingly, this clear presence of an Aramaic sub-stratum in many of Jesus' sayings stands in stark contrast to the relative absence of Hebrew words and constructions (Hebraisms).

John Maier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Volume One: The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, p. 266

The initial stage of Christianity might be called Palestinian, Aramaic-speaking Christianity. It was centered on Jerusalem and the Christian community which had formed there. Those belonging to the church were Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah sent by God. The disciples who had been associated with Jesus during his life formed the core of the fellowship. Through their preaching and teaching other Jews were persuaded to accept the same belief and join their community...

Most of the first Christians spoke Aramaic...The people to whom they preached were mostly Aramaic-speaking Jews. They could therefore assume acquaintance with Jewish religious traditions and acceptance of Jewish beliefs. Since they preached and taught in Aramaic, the stories about Jesus which they told were told in Aramaic.

Keith F. Nickle, The Synoptic Gospels, p. 19-20

Now stop for a moment and consider this. All these scholars have come to this conclusion by looking just at the Greek texts alone! And so, should any of these men have cared to examine the Aramaic New Testament itself, one can only imagine what they might have come up with, for surely Aramaic evidence would be even stronger there.

2) *Aramaic singular/plural patterns:*

Another piece of evidence comes from here:

Our first kind of Aramaic primacy proof in Matthew has to do with the problem of determining if a word is singular or plural. In most cases, Aramaic words have clear singular and plural endings. However, as with any language, a significant amount of irregular words also exist, and when these happen there is no way to distinguish between the two. The problem in fact became so pronounced that even various Aramaic scribes adopted a convention of marking the plural versions of these words with two dots above the middle letter. Called a *syame*, these markings solved a lot of problems, but not before the Greek redactors would have already done their work. In other words, for the time frame that we are discussing, which would be the first four centuries of the Common Era, no such markings existed on the Aramaic manuscripts. As a result, anyone who tried to translate these Aramaic terms into Greek might have

to guess in cases where the context did not definitively convey singularity or plurality of the noun in question.

For example the Greek reads:

"And he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the **prophets**: He will be called a Nazarene."

Matthew 2:23

This of course presents a major problem. First of all, Nazareth the city did not exist during the time of any of the Old Testament prophets. While there is some debate among archaeologists as to when it was built, no one thinks it could have been done any earlier than about 100 BCE. So, from a historical perspective, that is at least 300 years from when the last prophet Malachi would have died.

Therefore, the answer to this problem comes from both Torah and Aramaic understanding. Several times in the Hebrew text, the Messiah is prophetically referred to as a "righteous branch". In almost all cases, such as with Jeremiah 23:5-6, the word for "branch" used in these prophecies is *tzemach* (xmu). However, in Isaiah 11:1-2, a very rare alternate word is used, *netzer* (run). This word only appears three other times in the entire Hebrew Bible, twice more in Isaiah (14:19, 60:21) and once in Daniel 11:7. Although, in Daniel's case *netzer* is not pointing to a righteous Messiah, but to an evil idolater known as the "king of the south". Therefore, as this term relates to Messianic prophecy, Matthew would surely have known that only the *prophet* Isaiah used the word in that manner. Then, about five centuries after Isaiah's time, a small village would take the name NETZER-ET(Nazareth), or "City of the Branch." It is this usage, which only appears in Isaiah 11:1, that Matthew is clearly referencing.

Finally then, since the rendering of *prophets* in the Greek versions of Matthew 2:23 is clearly in error, it cannot be the original reading, but could only result in seeing an early Aramaic written document devoid of plural markings.

Now, in addition to how this evidence relates to the Greek, one should consider that in Hebrew, unlike Aramaic, the singular/plural form for "prophet" is easily defined as *nevi'im*. In other words, if Matthew was written originally in Hebrew, this error would never have happened on the Greek side. The Greek

redactor would have simply seen that the plural ending (𐤌) was lacking and never rendered the phrase as they did.

3) *Lack of the definite article and tense flexibility (in Aramaic) leads to confusion on the Greek side:*

It's the Definite Article

As we will see in great detail later on, Aramaic has one attribute that is so unique that not even Hebrew shares it. Hebrew, as well as Greek and almost every other language, has a definite article (the). Aramaic however can only have the definite or indefinite states implied in its text, and thus context and experience determine the way that is best for translation purposes.

Now let us look at a very interesting verse in Greek:

Kai;elegen autoi;ß, Mh;ti ercetai oJ luvno;ß i;ba upo;ton mo;tion teqh/h'upo;thn kl i;nhn;ouj; i;ba epi;thn l ucnian teqh/

He said to them, "Do you bring a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand?"

Mark 4:21

Now this reading, from the NIV, is well attested to in other popular translations such as KJV and NASB. However, when we come to the most prestigious and definitive work on the subject, an interesting textual variance emerges.

In the Greek-English Interlinear New Testament (UBS 4th Edition, Nestle-Aland 26th Edition), the side portion, which is intended to show better syntactical flow, translates oJ luvno;ß as "a lamp". However, in the interlinear portion it reads "**the** lamp" because those who can read Greek realize that such a rendering is unavoidable with the word oJ. Therefore, considering the level of precision in the Greek language, this bad reading can only make sense if the Greek redactor got confused by looking at the one language that lacks a definite article--Aramaic! For more information though, and a terrific instance on how this disparity can make a huge difference in proper understanding, please see the section in John entitled "Rising Prophets and Losses".

Rising Prophets and Losses

As we saw with Matthew 26:6-7, sometimes a Greek translation error is so egregious that it goes against known Torah practices in first century Israel. Such is the case also with this passage:

They (the Pharisees) answered and said to him (Nicodemus), "You are not also from Galilee are you? Search, and see, that no prophet arises out of Galilee."

John 7:52

No prophet has ever come out of Galilee? Then how do Greek advocates explain these passages?

The LORD said to him (Elijah)"...anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah to succeed you as prophet."

1 Kings 20:15,16

It was He who restored the territory of Israel from Lebo-hamath to the sea of Arabah, in accordance with the promise that the LORD, the God of Israel, had made through his servant, the prophet Jonah, son of Amittai from Gath-Hepher.

2 Kings 14:25

According to the Illustrated Dictionary and Concordance of the Bible, Abel-Meholah is near Beth-Shean and Gath-Hepher is in the region of Zebulun. Therefore, both of these prophets are from Galilee! In addition, Hosea and Elijah are also widely believed by most scholars to be from this same area. Surely the Pharisees also would have known that some prophets do in fact come out of this region!

Now let us look at what the Aramaic says:

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet from among your own people, like myself; him you shall heed.

Deuteronomy 18:15

This proclamation of Moses is as clear as can be, and it is no coincidence that the next prophet that came after the Lawgiver had the same name as Messiah as well: Joshua (YAH is salvation)!

As the centuries passed however, this prophet took on a formal title as "The Prophet" in Jewish thought, and as the Gospels open it is clear that there is a wide diversity of opinion on the subject. Y'shua himself of course believes that he is both "the Prophet" and the Messiah, but not Elijah. However, the Pharisees have a different view:

Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Israel sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah."

They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"⁴¹

He answered, "No."

"Are you the Prophet?"

He answered, "No."...

"Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

John 1:19-21,25

From this questioning, it is clear that the Pharisees expect three separate prophetic figures to come, because when John denies being one they still feel compelled to ask him about the other two! The debate on this issue continues here:

...(Y'shua) was asking his disciples and said⁴², "Who do men say that I am concerning me? That I am merely a son of man?"⁴³ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

Matthew 16:13-14 (Younan Peshitta Interlinear Version)

As a result, there were also a wide variety of opinions among Jewish authorities as to what passages applied to the Messiah and what to the Prophet. In this case, the one "Messianic/the Prophet" prophecy that relates to where this great man will be born is here:

And you, O Bethlehem of Ephrath, least among the clans of Judah, from out of you shall come forth, to rule Israel for me, one whose origin is from old, from ancient times.

Micah 5:1

And this fact of course manifests as follows:

And when Herod the king heard (it), he was troubled, and all of Jerusalem with him. And he gathered all of them, the chief priests and scribes of the people. And he was asking them, "Where (is it) that Messiah would be born?", and they answered, "In Bethlehem of Judah..."

Matthew 2:3 (Younan Peshitta Interlinear Version)

So, as far as these Torah experts were concerned, Micah was talking about the Messiah. However, the context of what we see here in John 7:40 and 52 is that, both the crowds and the Pharisees who heard Y'shua speak, were talking about his possible connection to "The Prophet". Ironically however, the Pharisees use Y'shua's residence in Galilee against him because they wrongly assumed that he had been born there as well! They had no clue he was in fact born in the right place, Bethlehem!

- 4) *Dialectical evidence shows that Y'shua's Aramaic is very close to, if not identical, to the Aramaic in the Peshitta text:*

Is the Peshitta Dialect the Same as Messiah's?

Let's start with the conventional view. The following was posted on the peshitta.org website by an Aramaic professor at Cambridge:

Dear Sir,

The view that the Peshitta is the purest form of the NT is rightly regarded as a 'rumour'. The Peshitta is in Eastern Aramaic, whereas Jesus certainly spoke Western Aramaic. His dialect will be more closely represented by Qumran Aramaic, Christian Palestinian Aramaic, the Aramaic of the Jerusalem Talmud, and to some extent Samaritan Aramaic (although none of these exactly corresponds to the dialect he is likely to have used). For an introduction to these matters one could consult Matthew Black, *_An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts_* (Oxford: 1967), though no one would agree with all of what he says.

With warmest regards,

Pete Williams

Dr P. J. Williams, Tyndale House, Cambridge, CB3 9BA, U.K.

Christos egertheis ek nekron ouketi apothneskei. Rom. 6:9.

The first observation that various members on the forum had regarding this statement was what was *not said*, or rather, proof or examples of Messiah speaking Western Aramaic. No linguistic evidence is proffered, not even in passing or by secondary reference. Instead, it seems that this gentleman expects his position at Cambridge entitled him to a kind of scholarly *carte blanche*, whereby all the proof on our side cannot be weighed against his mere pronouncement to the contrary.

It is also quite odd that someone in such a capacity decides to use such dismissive, and in fact, vague and lazy, language. Rather than give a direct answer that someone can respond to we are instead pelted with evasive phrases like, "certainly", "likely" and "although none of these exactly corresponds to the dialect he is likely to have used". Then there is my personal favorite "though no one would agree with all

of what he says"---as if every *other* scholar in the world would agree with everything *he says!*

To counter this "contention" then, I will offer concrete examples that prove the exact opposite of what this professor is saying. What is more shocking though to myself is how little Aramaic knowledge, at least as it is shown in the Peshitta text, this gentleman chooses to relate to us. It may be that he feels such an exchange is not needed, since we are only amateurs and he has a degree. However, my answer to that has always been that my *heritage is my credential*. Are hallowed halls of secular academia always vastly superior to the fervor of sacred education honed over decades of discipline and reverence? In asking this question, I surely am not referring exclusively to myself, but to every Aramaic Christian who has spent at least as many endless childhood hours learning his sacred language as I have learning mine.

This is not to say however that academia does not have a great deal to contribute to this discussion, but that would involve them actually having the discussion in the first place, with evidence instead of opinion. Until that time however, the following will have to suffice from our end. After all, is not assertion without fact the very definition of the word "rumour"?

Let's take this verse from Mark as an example:

"But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, "Whatever support you might have had from me is **Corban (that is, an offering to God)"**

Mark 7:11 (Greek New Testament)

In the Aramaic of the Peshitta, however, we read:

"But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, "Whatever support you might have had from me is **ܩܘܪܒܢܐ (Qurbanee)"**

Mark 7:11 (Peshitta reading)

Now here is what a respected source on Aramaic grammar has to say (emphases mine):

The "I" ("ee"ending) of the first person singular enclitic is pronounced **only when there is no other vowel in the word**, as in *bi* and *li*; otherwise the yodh is silent, as in *menn* "from me" and *lwat* "unto me".

Mark 11:17 (Younan Peshitta Interlinear Version)

Is this the "Syriac", or western Aramaic, the Peshitta is supposed to have been written in or that Messiah is speaking? Not according to Thackston's!

Here's another example, and this time we will go from the Greek traditions:

"And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, *Talitha qumi*; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise."

Mark 5:41

Luke also records this event in 8:54 of his gospel, but the Greek doesn't preserve this saying in the original Aramaic. Instead, the Greek text translates it this way:

"And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, *Maid, arise*."

Anyway, the point is that even most Greek scholars admit that Messiah said these words in *his Aramaic dialect* as recorded in this independent Greek witness!

Furthermore, we can assume that the Aramaic of the Apostle Paul would have been the same Aramaic of Y'shua since he too was raised in Israel (Acts 22:1-2). Unfortunately, there are only three instances where the Greek New Testament preserves an original Aramaic reading from Paul, and these are in 1 Corinthians 16:22 (Maran Atha) and two places where Paul says "Abba" (Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6). The noteworthy aspect of these examples is the huge fact that *all three readings are exactly the same dialect and vocalization as that of the Aramaic Peshitta*.

So while it is true that critics will no doubt scoff at such a small sampling from what they believe to be the original New Testament, the fact is no proof of their assertion is found in any one of them! If it were, then there is no doubt this fact would also be trumpeted against the cause of Peshitta originality.

Examples will beat hollow proclamations any day of the week.

12) Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

This essay, as the title implies, was intended only to give a basic overview of the evidence behind my overall position on Peshitta originality. And so, to put the matter simply, we have a long way to go in terms of the details behind the foundation I have laid here.

Therefore, should any questions remain in the mind of the reader, the odds are well above average that the answers will be found in this essay's sequel: *The Advanced Class: Exposing the Lies of Textual Primacy with Old Syriac, The Three Hebrew Versions of Matthew, and Alternate Versions of Hebrews and Revelation*.

I look forward to talking with you again on these absolutely critical sacred issues. Until then, my wish is that your walk with YHWH and quest for His truth be a fruitful one.

Peace and blessings to you all,

Andrew Gabriel Roth

April 28, 2004

ENDNOTES

¹ This was John Fischer, who at the time was promoting his book "The Olive Tree Connection". One of the members of the Campus Crusade insisted that I have a copy, and when I said I had no money, he paid for one on the spot. The author gladly handed it to me and the person who bought it for me said, "Don't even think of paying me back Andrew. My compensation is that the book is on your shelf and that hopefully you will read it." Well, it is, and I have, and Fischer did a lot to allay some of my misgivings of the Greek NT, but not all. When I spoke to him that day also, neither of us had any knowledge of the Peshitta, or if he did it did not come up. Still, I am grateful to him for helping me with some of the early problems and setting a foundation for viewing Jewish roots in the NT that has stayed with me ever since.

² There were sound scriptural reasons for this concern. I knew that the Hebrew for the first commandment in Exodus 20:3 literally read, "You shall not put another (face) upon **My face**" (לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים אֱלֹהֵי-פָנַי). Therefore, you could not take any name used for another god and put it on the "face" of YHWH. The very fact that *kurios* was used as Zeus for so many centuries in effect defiled the name for sacred usage for the Almighty. Incidentally a similar concept is enshrined in the third commandment of not to take the Name of the LORD in vain. In that verse, the Hebrew word usually translated as "vain" into English is *shav* (שָׁוָא). However, the literal meaning of the word is closer to the idea of "to make desolate", and this is done by taking the original name for Elohim and substituting it for the name of a false deity that has no power at all.

³ "akhi" = Aramaic for "my brother", and a common designation on www.peshitta.org. The form also sometimes appears as "akhan", "our brother".

⁴ In addition to these biblical sections that Paul Younan mentions, many ancient prayers (Amidah, Kaddish), as well as important literary works (Talmud, Zohar), are also in Aramaic but written in Hebrew letters.

⁵ The generally accepted range for the completion of the Peshitta Tanakh is between 200 BCE and 200 CE. Paul Younan here is being conservative then in his estimation of the Peshitta Tanakh not being done until the time that Peter (or Keefa) came to Babylon. I, on the other hand, find it hard to believe that an Aramaic Tanakh would not have long been in place by the time of that apostle's arrival there. While the legends surrounding the Peshitta Tanakh as going back almost to the time of Solomon are clearly without historical merit, the strength of that legend in my mind would attest to a date earlier in the range of dates proffered by the majority of scholars. Others though clearly (and correctly) point out that there would not have been a need for such a translation until after the time of Ezra (ca. 515 BCE), when the majority of Jews elected to not return to Israel to rebuild the Second Temple. At that point, with their residency in Babylon officially permanent, the clock would start ticking slowly to a period when a translation into their local vernacular became essential. Furthermore, the Peshitta Tanakh had to arise in an age not so far removed from Ezra and other legends but not so close to the apostolic age, since the text is clearly free from the torrential influences of Messianic debate that tore apart the Middle East during that period. For example, there is no rabbinic redaction of Isaiah 7:14 from "virgin" (*beytolata*) into something more like the rabbinical apologetic use of a generic term like "almah", indicating the redaction had to be before Y'shua's advent.

⁶ Although there are primary sources from the period that tend to discount Jewish mastery of Greek, such as these quotes from the first century Jewish historian Josephus:

"And I am so bold as to say, now I have so completely perfected the work I proposed to myself to do, that no other person, whether he were a Jew or foreigner, had he ever so great an inclination to it, could so accurately deliver these accounts to the Greeks as is done in these books. For those of my own nation freely acknowledge that I far exceed them in the learning belonging to Jews; I have also taken a great deal of pains to obtain the learning of the Greeks, and understand the elements of the Greek language, although I have so long accustomed myself to speak our own tongue, that I cannot pronounce Greek with sufficient exactness; for our nation does not encourage those that learn the languages of many nations, and so adorn their discourses with the smoothness of their periods."

Antiquities, 20.11.2

"I have proposed to myself, for the sake of such as live under the government of the Romans, to translate those books into the Greek tongue, which I formerly composed in the language of our country, and sent to the Upper Barbarians; Joseph, the son of Matthias, by birth a Hebrew, a priest also, and one who at first fought against the Romans myself, and was forced to be present at what was done afterwards, [am the author of this work]."

Preface to Wars Against the Jews, 1.1-2

⁷ In addition to the quotes listed in the main text, Epiphanius mentions a belief by Jewish followers that Hebrew copies of the Gospel of John and Acts were kept in a treasury in Tiberias, Israel (Panarion 30.3.6). While it is clear that Epiphanius disagrees with the Jewish testimony in this regard, the fact that he records the Jewish belief at all is highly significant.

⁸ Quoted by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39

⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.1

¹⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Hypotyposes*; referred to by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.14.2

¹¹ Quoted by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25

¹² Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.24

¹³ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.10

¹⁴ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3:38.2-3

¹⁵ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 29.9.4

¹⁶ Jerome, *On Famous Men*, 3

¹⁷ Jerome, *On Famous Men*, 5

¹⁸ Eventually though the leadership of Edessa and Antioch would set itself up against the Abdiabne-Babylon group, known as the Church of the East. So while it is clear that the Peshitta has a shared history with all these groups, the Syrian Orthodox Church that grew out of the Edessan and Antiochian bodies of believers would later try to change the Peshitta to align it better with their new-found Byzantine masters.

¹⁹ For further information, consult Drijvers, Han, J.W. and Healey, John F.: The Old Syriac Inscriptions of Edessa and Osrhoene, Brill Press, 1999.

²⁰ This is according to Strong's and other leading authorities. However, occasionally someone will point to the Greek of Matthew 19:17 (There is no one good, except God alone) and make the argument that *agathos* is being used to describe the righteous perfection of Deity. The reality is this is not true for two reasons. First, because the Greek text here is showing signs of an idiomatic Semitism that deals with what I call "the humble voice". This poetic pattern can be found all over Tanakh, such as in Isaiah 64:6 that declares our righteous deeds are like dirty (menstrual) rags. Therefore it is not so much that God is being described with a lackluster word for "good" as it is a rebuke for all mankind when they think they are even remotely good. Secondly, *agathos* is simply the Greek rendering of the Aramaic *taba* (ܐܘܒܐ), which encompasses the meanings of both Greek words.

²¹ A notable exception to this rule is with the Gospel of Matthew, which while accurately recording Y'shua's discourses in their proper form, nevertheless uses a narrative style much more closely associated with Judean-Southern Aramaic. This would have been a dialect much like the one Nicodemus would have addressed the Messiah in John's third chapter. Matthew, for example, is the only New Testament writer to make a distinction between two Aramaic words for Torah. Those words are *aurayta* (אוריתא), which is the direct cognate of Torah and shares the same root "to shoot straight", and *namusa* (נמוסא) which can mean either Torah or the pharisaic regulations and traditions surrounding Torah depending on context. The former term is found only in Matthew 11:3, 12:5, and 22:40. The very fact that Matthew is the only writer in the entire NT to be this precise by taking advantage of the subtleties between them is highly significant in terms of the dialect issues being discussed.

²² Greek New Testament quotes are taken from the New International Version, unless otherwise stated or cross-referenced. In this case however the Greek and the Aramaic read exactly the same way.

²³ Many critics look at Paul as some kind of independent rebel, noting the strong language in Galatians 1:11 of "I opposed Peter to his face". However, and as Dr. Allen Callahan of Harvard University pointed out on the PBS documentary "From Y'shua to Christ" (aired April 7, 1998), Paul apparently lost that argument because Peter's response and/or apology is never recorded. Nor is a rebuke from James to Peter mentioned, as it certainly would have been by Paul, had it come down in that manner. Therefore Dr. Callahan believes, and I concur with him, that Paul was using the occasion of his letter to merely "vent" his frustrations but his

views did not carry the weight of finality. Such a scenario is also supported by the statement in Galatians 1:18 that he received 15 days of training and eventual permission to preach from Peter in Jerusalem.

²⁴ The situation of titles was a somewhat dynamic one. While the term "Nazarene" was clearly fixed to those Jewish assemblies in Israel that sprang up the earliest, "Christian" is a more nebulous appellation. Certainly purely Gentile assemblies were called by this title. However, when the apostle Peter uses the term in 1 Peter 4:16 it is very likely he is referring also to some Semites and Diaspora Jews. Reason being, non-Hebrew Semites such as those from Syria would have been called *miskhannee* or "messianics" in Aramaic, and this of course would have been rendered as *christos*/Christian in Greek. As such, even the Church of the East would fall under the general classification of *miskhannee* although they would have also been more properly called "nazarenes" due to their linkage with the actual apostles themselves.

²⁵ The word *talmidim* is derived from the Aramaic phrase *talmid*, or "to learn". The word is not only used in Israel to describe a student to this day, it is also the basis for the term *Talmud*, or the body of rabbinical commentary on the Torah that many Orthodox Jews consider authoritative and just below Scripture itself in terms of its spiritual value. By contrast, the Aramaic word for "apostle" is *shlikha* which, just like its Greek equivalent means "to send out". The difference in the Aramaic term however is that it is linked directly to a High Holy Day. On the Jewish New Year, or Rosh Hashanah, Jews throughout the world seek out a body of water like a lake or a river. Once there, they pick up stones and "send them out" into the water as a way of symbolically sending their sins away. The Aramaic term for the ritual is *tashlikh*, and it shares the same root as *shlikha*.

²⁶ See *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls? The Search for the Secret of Qumran*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995.

²⁷ Schottenstein Edition, Talmud Bavli, Shabbos 115a-b.

²⁸ Better known by the Greek version of the name "Bar-Timaeus". It is very common for the Greek New Testament manuscripts to retain a portion of a Semitic name and give it a Greek style ending. Such is the case with the name of the apostle John's father, which in the Galilean dialect of Aramaic at the time would have been pronounced as *Zawdee*. However, when the Greek redactor looked at the Aramaic text, he noticed the word was spelled with a BEYT (בַּיַת), which normally had a "B" sound but in this case shifted to a "W" pronunciation. Nevertheless the Greek translator stuck to the "B" and then simply added a masculine ending, resulting in the form *Zebadaios*, or as we know it in English, Zebedee. The same thing is happening with "Bar Timi" being transformed into "Bar Timaeus".

²⁹ The actual pronunciation in Aramaic is G'aGuOLT'aA, so the spelling will vary from the more familiar English transliteration of the term.

³⁰ Jerome, *On Famous Men* 3.

³¹ When Paul is confused with an Egyptian terrorist in Acts 21:38, the event he is accused of causing is also recorded by Josephus, who dates it to the year 54. Also keep in mind that the Roman questioning Paul uses the phrase "some time ago" to describe the event in question, meaning it could easily be a few years later.

³² Acts 18:4 is particularly interesting with its references to "Jews and Greeks" – indicating clearly that the Jews there were not Hellenistic. As we will also see later, the Epistle of James also lends critical evidence to at least some rough draft of Matthew circulating more than 30 years before most liberal scholars believe the Greek version was written.

³³ LXX (Deut. 18:)" 15: Propheten ek ton adelphon sou, os eme, anastnsei soi Kupios o Theos sou: autou akousesthe: . . .19:Kai o anthropos os ean me akouse osa an lalase o prophetes ekeivos epi to onomati mon, ego ekdiknso ek autou." Greek NT (Acts 3:)" 22: Oti propheten umin anastesei kupios o

Theos umon ek ton adelphon umon, os eme: autou akousesthe kata panta osa an lalese pros umas. 23: estai de pasa psuxe etes an me akouse tou prophetou ekeinou exolothpeuthesetai ek toulaou." For those who wish a literal translation of each Greek word, the following is provided: LXX (Deut. 18:)" 15: Propheten(Prophet) ek(out) ton adelphon sou(the brethren of you), os eme(like me), anastnsei soi(shall raise up) Kupios o Theos(the LORD God) sou(of you):
autou(him) akousesthe(shall ye hear): . . .19:Kai(And) o anthropos(the man) os ean me akouse(if he shall not hear) osa an(whatsoever) lalese(he may say) o prophetes(the prophet) ekeivos(that person) epi to onomati mon(in the name of me), ego(I) ekdiknso(vengeance) ek autou(out of him)." Greek NT (Acts 3:)" 22: Oti propheten(A prophet) umin(to you) anastesei(will raise up) kupios o Theos(the LORD God) umon(your) ek(out of) ton adelphon(the brethren) umon(of you), os eme(like me): autou(him) akousesthe(shall ye hear) kata(in) panta(all things) osa an(whatsoever) lalese(he may say) pros(to) umas(you). 23: estai de(and it shall be) pasa(every) psuxe(soul) etes(which) an me akouse(may not hear) tou prophetou ekeinou (of that prophet) exolothpeuthesetai (shall be destroyed) ek(out) tou laou(of the people)."

³⁴ The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p.431-439.

³⁵ See Han J. W. Drijvers, Journal of Early Christian Studies 4.2 (1996) pp. 235-248, Johns Hopkins University Press.

³⁶ See Investigations into the Text of the New Testament used by Rabbula of Edessa, Pinneberg, 1947; Researches on the Circulation of the Peshitto in the Middle of the Fifth Century, Pinneberg, 1948; Neue Angaben Ueber, die Textgeschichte-Zustände in Edessa in den Jahren ca. 326-340, Stockholm, 1951; and Early Versions of the New Testament. Stockholm, 1954.

³⁷ An extensive study was done by Paul Younan on this topic, using as a primary source Mar Aphrahat's Demonstrations of Faith. Bottom line though is that the exclusive use of the Peshitta by this saint predates Rabulla's time by more than half a century.

³⁸ One of the colloquialisms that we use on www.peshitta.org is calling "Old Syriac" by another name, "Old Scratch", referencing the fact that part of its text had been removed to make way for the story of a western saint. Paul Younan originally then called "Old Syriac" by this term, which I have substituted with the more familiar "Old Syriac" for the sake of clarity.

³⁹ The vast majority of scholarship has dated Old Syriac Siniaticus from the middle to late fourth century and the revised Curetonian to the early part of the fifth century. Rabulla would have done his work around the year 400. This is about as close to hitting the target perfectly as we can get, since projections of mss age are largely based on trends in writing style and not through processes like carbon dating.

⁴⁰ "Syriac" is merely the western scholarly name for Aramaic, and what Thackston's says here is intended to apply directly to the dialect that is in the Peshitta New Testament.

⁴¹ Now in this case it seems odd that the Baptist would deny being Elijah and yet Y'shua appears to imply that he is (Matthew 11:11-14). However, the truth is that John is not a reincarnated Elijah but the inheritor of that prophet's "spirit and power" even as Elisha also inherited it, and this is also because Elijah never physically died, (comp. 2 Kings 2:9-19 and Luke 1:17). In that sense, John is saying he is not Elijah physically back from the dead, which means he understood these spiritual realities better than the Pharisees who were questioning him!

⁴² This line is pure compositional Aramaic. Reason being, all Semitic languages have an innate repetition that is completely lacking in Greek and English. For example, we would say simply "he spoke", whereas here we are given the repeating action of "he was asking his disciples and said".

⁴³ This is not a Messianic statement "THE Son of Man" but rather "that I am merely a son OF A MAN". As such, this is another example of the topic we are discussing, the lack of definite articles.