

Chapter 11

The Lexicon of the Tabernacle Accounts in the Syrohexapla Version of Exodus

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The Harklean New Testament and the Syrohexapla are “mirror” translations of Greek Scripture, both produced in the early seventh century CE. The translators of both these works relied on centuries of expertise in rendering Greek biblical and theological texts into Syriac, and yet they may not have previously encountered certain technical terms they were required to translate.

This paper examines the nature of the Syrohexapla’s renderings for items in the Tabernacle described in Exodus. It asks to what degree such terms already existed in Syriac, and how consistent the translators were in using them. It illustrates something of the working methods of the ancient translators and their lexicographical expertise.

1. Introduction

The Syrohexapla (Syh) is the Syriac rendering of Origen’s revised Greek Septuagint text, carried out in 616/7 CE near Alexandria (the Enaton). The figure associated with this major undertaking is that of Paul, bishop of Tella, but this does not exclude the possibility that other translators were involved.

Given that the textual basis of Syh derived from the Origenic recension of the LXX, as suggested in several colophons to Syh manuscripts and demonstrated by modern scholars,¹ the traditional role of the Syh in scholarship has been to shed light on the history of the LXX text.

¹ See Hiebert, “Syriac Biblical Textual history,” 182–83; and Law, *Origenes Orientalis*, 18–21.

Indeed it frequently offers the best witness to Origen's activities.² Less attention has been paid to the achievement of the Syh translator(s). Though the style of rendering can be seen as rather "unnatural" Syriac compared to that of the Peshitta and even more to that of Ephrem, by the early seventh century similar translation techniques that attempted to mirror the Greek *Vorlage* had become the norm for rendering commentaries and other works from Greek.³ No doubt this long history of rendering Greek works into Syriac was of considerable help to the Syh translator(s), but given the range of genres covered by the Old Testament books, the lexicographical angle of the work was probably fairly demanding.⁴

In Marketta Liljeström's chapter on the Syrohexapla translation of 1 Samuel,⁵ she discusses the consistency of translation correspondences. In one section she comments specifically on the renderings of the more mundane cultic utensils. This lexical area is of particular interest, since Greek to Syriac translation was traditionally motivated by theological concerns. No doubt Paul and his circle had plenty of training in rendering commonplace vocabulary in addition to theological, philosophical and abstract terms.⁶ However, one wonders how far their knowledge of both Greek and Syriac covered prosaic items such as different sorts of pots and pans, and also more specialized technical terms that were of no special interest theologically.

Thus, the two separate accounts of the building of the Tabernacle in Exodus, recounting the Lord's detailed commands (henceforth Tab A: chs. 25–31) and Moses' fulfilment of them (henceforth Tab B: chs. 35–40) respectively, may provide some insight into the translators' methodology and range. Both in Hebrew and Greek, these chapters contain many fairly obscure

² For instance, in 3 Kingdoms (1 Kings): Law, *Origenes Orientalis*, 362–70.

³ See Brock, "Towards a History of Syriac Translation Technique," 5, 7; and Van Rompay, "Some Preliminary Remarks," 85.

⁴ The work of T.S. Rordam is a very thorough study of many aspects of Syh's translation technique, but does not analyze the lexicographical aspect of the enterprise, and there are no examples from the Pentateuch. Rordam, *Libri Judicum et Ruth*, 3–59.

⁵ Liljeström, "Observations on the Mode of Translation."

⁶ See Brock, "Greek into Syriac," 3–4.

items. Furthermore, there are some differences between the LXX Greek of the first and second accounts.⁷ Since the oldest witnesses to LXX Exodus have a shorter and different order of material in the second Tabernacle account, the Hebrew text of Exodus may have been still developing towards its present form when it was rendered into Greek around 250 BCE by the first LXX translators. From a certain lack of consistency between the Greek rendering of the two Tabernacle accounts it is also possible that a different Greek translator worked on the second account some years after the first account had been translated: in other words, terms found in Tab B do not necessarily match those established in Tab A.⁸ In the early third century, the Greek Christian scholar Origen was the first to comment on the lack of match between the Church's LXX manuscripts of Exodus and the texts found among Jews, in both Hebrew and the later Jewish Greek revisions of Theodotion, Aquila and Symmachus that reflected the rabbinic Hebrew text.⁹ In an attempt to sort out the textual chaos of Exodus for Christians, Origen matched up (or patched up) and re-organized a semi-revised LXX text by means of further additional material from Theodotion, Aquila and Symmachus, in order to close the gap between the Jewish and Christian forms of the text.¹⁰

Almost four centuries later, the translator of the Syrohexapla version of Exodus rendered the revised LXX text of Origen, replete with text-critical (Aristarchan) signs that marked adjustments to the form of Exodus found among Jews. (It should be noted that this Greek text was

⁷ The standard scholarly edition is that of John William Wevers—*Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, II.1: Exodus*. As with the other books of the Septuagint Pentateuch, its reconstruction of the earliest recoverable text of LXX Exodus (the “Old Greek”) relies heavily on the earliest complete text of the book, that of Codex Vaticanus (fourth century CE). However, the Syrohexapla was based on the Greek text extensively revised by Origen in line with the later Jewish Greek versions and the Rabbinic Hebrew text and therefore does not correspond to the main text of the Göttingen edition. See also Wevers, *Text History of the Greek Exodus*; idem, “The Building of the Tabernacle;” and Wade, *Consistency of Translation Techniques*.

⁸ Not all scholars agree with this analysis, and so offer alternative explanations. For a recent summary of the situation and the various positions, see Salvesen, “Textual Criticism.”

⁹ Origen, *Letter to Africanus*, §7.

¹⁰ Origen's motives were likely to have been both apologetic and text-critical: see Salvesen, “A Convergence of the Ways?” 240 and n. 23.

very different from the modern critical editions of Rahlfs and Wevers, which aim to recreate the *pre*-Origenic form of the LXX approximating that which the original Jewish translators produced.) We are fortunate in having a complete, legible and early manuscript of SyhExodus in the British Library manuscript BM Add. 12432, dated by its colophon to 697 CE. This is a mere eighty years after the creation of the Syrohexapla.¹¹ So we can be confident that it is a reasonably reliable witness to the original work of the Syh translator(s).

Many major items in the Tabernacle such as the lampstand, altar and ark, maintain their Peshitta rendering in Syh, probably because they were well-known and the Peshitta terms had been retained in other translations such as commentaries. Other less significant items such as hooks and fire-irons do not appear to have had a translation history behind them, and Paul of Tella may have been the first to try to render the Greek names into Syriac. In some cases, alternative Greek terms for the same items were known from the revisions of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion. Before these were placed in the margins of the Syh, they required Syriac renderings that would preferably distinguish them from both those of the Peshitta and those provided by the Syh rendering of the LXX.¹² Interestingly, the translator seldom falls back on the Peshitta rendering for this kind of term. When he does so, it may be because no other word was available to him, or perhaps because he considered the Peshitta term to be synonymous with the LXX word anyway.

Since we have more-or-less parallel lists of items in chapters 26–31 and 36–40, it is possible

¹¹ For this study, the edition by Lagarde was used: *Bibliothecae Syriacae a Paulo de Lagarde collectae quae ad philologiam sacram pertinent*. However, it was supplemented by consultation of a microfilm of BM Add. MS 12134 in order to clarify ambiguities in Lagarde's edition. Vööbus' photographic edition of the Midyat Syh Pentateuch manuscript was also of use: Vööbus, *The Pentateuch in the Version of the Syro-Hexapla*. This twelfth century manuscript includes fewer text-critical symbols (the "Aristarchan signs" of asterisk and obelus) and readings from the "Three" than the manuscript in the British Library. No doubt many of these signs and readings had fallen out in the course of transmission. The colophon records faithfully (if rather unclearly) its pedigree back through Greek exemplars taken from the Hexapla in the library of Caesarea and the collation work of Eusebius.

¹² Readings from the "Three" may have come to the Syh through marginal material in Eusebius' Greek text (as suggested by the colophon of Exodus in BM Add. 12134), and also via the medium of commentaries, homilies, catenae, and other biblical MSS (Law, *Origenes Orientalis*, 19).

to compare renderings in these parallel passages in order to check the translator's consistency. In a few places we find a LXX term translated once according to the Greek, and several chapters away the same term is rendered by the normal word used in the Peshitta.¹³

2. The Use of Greek Loanwords in the Syrohexapla of Exodus

In many cases, particularly for the basic items used in the construction of the Tabernacle, the Syh translator produces what are effectively transliterations of the Greek LXX terms. Some of these were well established as loanwords at an early stage of the Syriac language, being found in the Peshitta itself at times.¹⁴ Others may be forms created specially by the Syh translator, but as with apparent neologisms in the LXX, it is hard to prove that the occurrence in the Syh is also the word's first attestation in Syriac. Sometimes Jewish Aramaic or Christian Palestinian Aramaic have similar transliterations, which may suggest that a particular Greek word was used more widely by speakers across a range of Aramaic dialects. Thus we find Syh ܐܬܠܐ for LXX ἀγκύλαι “loops, hooks”¹⁵ (with the alternative transliteration ܐܬܠܐܐ at Exod 38:17; 39:6). Similar transliterations of ἀγκύλη are found in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic and Mishnaic Hebrew, though not in the Peshitta.¹⁶ Some must have been used in everyday life by native Syriac speakers in the seventh century: note the very early use of ܡܥܬܠܐ “bolts, bars” derived from Greek μοχλοί, which appears in the Peshitta Old Testament to render Hebrew בָּרִיחִים as well as in SyhExod for μοχλοί.¹⁷ At Exod 27:3 and 38:3

¹³ Because of the confusing lack of match between the chapter and verse numbering of the Hebrew Bible (MT) and that of the Old Greek, and since this study focuses on Syh as a rendering of the Origenic LXX, throughout this article the numbering used is that of the MT, which conveniently tallies with that of the Syh and Peshitta.

¹⁴ Schall, *Studien*, gives a useful survey of Greek loanwords in Syriac and the approximate date of their appearance. He mentions Syh on 136, 142–43. See also Brock, “Some Aspects of Greek Words,” 87, on the nature of early loanwords.

¹⁵ Exod 26:4, 5³, 10², 11; Exod 36:11, 12³, 17². Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text*, 615, observes that the Greek word refers to fabric loops in Tab A, but to metal hooks in Tab B.

¹⁶ See Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon (SL)*, 64b. The form ܐܬܠܐ is a corruption of ܐܬܠܐܐ, according to Sokoloff (38a).

¹⁷ E.g. Exod 26:26, 27. Theodore bar Koni gives an explanation of the word (Hespel, *Livre des Scolies*, 186, line 16). The difficulty, however, appears to arise not from the word itself but from the particular context where it is used, since

فتحما in Syh represents φιάλαι “shallow bowl, saucer.” The loanword فتحما occurs in the Peshitta Pentateuch in other places, so must be a fairly early loan.¹⁸ Similarly, Syh ܦܬܬܐ represents βάσεις “bases.”¹⁹ The Peshitta of Exodus uses the same word in another place (25:31). However, when Syh renders στύλος with ܣܬܠܐ (e.g. Exod 26 and 35–36 *passim*), according to Sokoloff (*SL*) and Schall, this is not in fact a loanword from Greek but from Middle Persian: yet the resemblance in sound and meaning to the Greek probably influenced its use to represent στύλος.²⁰ ܣܬܠܐ is a loanword from κρίκοι and occurs in the Peshitta of Exodus²¹ to represent the Hebrew term קְרָסִים “hooks” (no doubt a guess influenced by homoiophony). However, it was subsequently used in Syh to represent the very term κρίκοι from which it derived.²² Γωνίαι “corners” become ܓܘܢܝܐ in SyhExodus.²³ ܓܘܢܐ is attested in the Harklean version, contemporaneously with Syh, but it would not be surprising to find the word in technical works translated just before this period. Κεφαλίδες are rendered by either ܡܚܬܒܐ or ܡܚܬܒܐ, which do not appear to be early loans into Syriac, but a similar form apparently also appears in Christian Palestinian Aramaic.²⁴ ܬܢܐ renders θήκαι “cases”.²⁵ this loan is apparently not earlier than the sixth century, since it appears in the Syriac *Life of Severus* (though the date of the latter is uncertain).

Some loanwords for technical terms in Syh probably were restricted to texts translated from

“bars,” normally associated with imprisonment, are used to carry the ark. On the early history of the word, see also Brock, “Some Aspects of Greek Words,” 95–98.

¹⁸ E.g. PNum 7:13, and in PExod 25:29.

¹⁹ At Exod 26:19³, 21³; 36:24³, 26³, 30⁴, 38.

²⁰ Schall, *Studien*, 35; *SL* 68, cf. Targum Aramaic.

²¹ Theodore bar Koni tries to explain the word (Hespel, *Livre des Scolies*, 186, line 21): though the text of the *Scholion* is corrupt, it indicates that he thought they were rings of some kind.

²² Exod 26:6², 11; 27:10, 11; 36:13, 18. See *SL*, 1415b.

²³ E.g. Exod 26:23, 24; 27:2; Exod 36:28, 29.

²⁴ E.g. Exod 26:24, 32, 37; 27:17; Exod 36:36; ch. 38 *passim*, and Aquila and Symmachus 38:38.

²⁵ E.g. Exod 25:27; Exod 37:14, 27. *SL* 1642a also cites references in the Harklean version of John, as well as the Syriac Apology of Aristides, whose date of translation seems to be unknown.

Greek.²⁶ For example, SyhExodus has ܦܩܕܝܬܐ (variously spelt ܦܩܕܝܬܐ or ܦܩܕܝܬܐ in both manuscripts) for ψαλίδες “rings; rounded mouldings.”²⁷ A scholion in the margin of Syh at Exod 27:10 explains ܦܩܕܝܬܐ as meaning tongs (ܡܚܬܐ) of various metals used to grasp things. The fact that such an explanation was deemed necessary suggests that the term ܦܩܕܝܬܐ would not have been familiar to the reader. Regarding ܐܡܬܐ for ἀγκωνίσκοι “joints,”²⁸ the Syriac equivalent is based on the non-diminutive Greek form of the word, ἀγκών “bend, angle,” and it occurs elsewhere in Syh for this latter term, but does not appear to be an early loanword.

In SyhExodus 28 and 39, the twelve stones in the high priest’s breastplate are all rendered by transliterations of the Greek forms in LXX, whereas the Peshitta uses only two Greek loans for its own, rather differently ordered list of stones, ܡܥܒܐ (καρχηδόνιος) and ܒܗܪܝܠܐ (βήρυλλος), the latter being the only shared term.²⁹

In other places the Syh translator took over terms from the Peshitta, either for general items of clothing, or as mentioned above, for well-known items such as the lampstand (Exod 25:32 etc., ܡܥܕܢܐ) and the altar (ܡܥܒܐ Exod 20:26 etc.). The Syh term ܦܢܐ referring to the veils in the Tabernacle, and translated by καταπέτασμα in LXX, is carried over from the Peshitta.³⁰ This could be either because there was no other appropriate term available to the translator, or it was due to

²⁶ Schall, *Studien*, 45, 50. He also refers to an inscription edited by Pognon and to the *Chronicle of Edessa*, on the Flood of 201.

²⁷ E.g. Exod 26:10, 11; 27:10, 11; 30:4; 36:38; 38:4, 9, 10, 17. There is a typographical error in this entry in *SL* 1210b: the penultimate *heb* should be *yudh*.

²⁸ E.g. Exod 26:17; 36:22.

²⁹ Exod 28:19, 20; 39:10–13. Both ܡܥܒܐ and ܒܗܪܝܠܐ are also mentioned in the Hymn of the Pearl: see Schall, *Studien*, 121–22 on loanwords from Greek for gems in the Hymn, though he notes that some may have come into Syriac through other oriental languages such as Sanskrit, rather than Greek.

³⁰ E.g. Exod 26:31, 33; 27:21 (Tab A); Exod 35:12; 39:34 (Theodotion) (Tab B) for Heb. פָּרָךְ, and Exod 26:36, 37 for פָּרָךְ. Note that τὸ κατακάλυμμα τοῦ καταπετάσματος is rendered by ܦܢܐ, ܦܢܐ at Exod 40:21.

the fact that the term can refer to the cloth covering the Eucharistic bread.³¹ However, where LXX has κάλυμμα (for ܩܬܡܐ) Syh registers the different Greek word by using ܬܥܬܐ (Exod 27:16) while the Peshitta continues to use ܩܬܡܐ. The native Syriac names for certain items of clothing such as ܬܥܬܐ,³² ܬܥܬܐ,³³ ܬܥܬܐ,³⁴ in the Tabernacle accounts are found in both Peshitta and Syh. Yet στολαί is transliterated as ܬܥܬܐ (cf. P ܬܥܬܐ)³⁵ and ποδήρης as ܬܥܬܐ (cf. P ܬܥܬܐ),³⁶ and there is the near-calque of ܬܥܬܐ for περιστήθιον (cf. P ܬܥܬܐ, probably a loanword from περίζωμα).³⁷

Ref. (MT and Syh)	MT	LXX	Syrohexapla	Peshitta
Exod 27:4	ܩܬܡܐ	ἐσχάρα	ܬܥܬܐ	ܬܥܬܐ
Exod 27:5	ܩܬܡܐ	ἐσχάρα	ܬܥܬܐ	ܬܥܬܐ
Exod 35:16	ܩܬܡܐ	✠κοσκίνωμα	ܬܥܬܐ	ܬܥܬܐ
Exod 38:4	ܩܬܡܐ	πυρεῖον	ܬܥܬܐ	ܬܥܬܐ

³¹ See RPS, 3278a–3279a.

³² E.g. Exod 28:4; 40 (for ܩܬܡܐ, which renders ܩܬܡܐ).

³³ E.g. Exod 28:4; 40; 29:9 (for ܩܬܡܐ, which renders ܩܬܡܐ).

³⁴ E.g. Exod 28:4; 40; 29:9 (for ܩܬܡܐ, rendering ܩܬܡܐ). However, see below for the different rendering at 39:29.

³⁵ E.g. Exod 28:2 (Tab A); Exod 39:41³ (Tab B).

³⁶ E.g. Exod 28:4.

³⁷ E.g. Exod 28:4. A marginal reading at 25:7 in both MSS of SyhExodus gives the word in Greek letters, and then an explanation: “a garment of the priests, reaching down to the feet.”

Compare the Syriac renderings by Jacob of Edessa for Severus of Antioch’s *Homily* 116 given by Lucas Van Rompay in the Greek-Syriac glossary to *La chaîne sur l’Exode*, (ed. Petit) §838 (Jacob glosses ποδήρης as ܬܥܬܐ, “a robe reaching to the feet”), §843, 78–81: the significance of a number of different items of high priestly apparel is drawn out by Severus. See also Brière, *Les Homélies Cathedrales*, 328–32, in which Jacob routinely gives both a transliteration in Syriac and the normal Peshitta term together. Salvesen, “Jacob of Edessa’s Version,” 50n21 comments on Jacob’s use of terms for priestly garments.

Exod 38:4,5,30; 39:39 ³⁸	מִכְבֵּר	παράθεμα	ܡܢܚܠܐ	ܡܢܚܠܐ
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The table above shows the variety of LXX and Peshitta terms for the grating (מִכְבֵּר) and the border of the altar (פֶּרֶכֶב), and the way in which Syh uses ܡܢܚܠܐ as a blanket term for three different Greek words and three different Peshitta terms.

The Syh translator does not use the PExodus term ܡܢܚܠܐ, considered by *SL* to derive from Latin *cracili*, a form of *clathri* < κλειθρον (Exod 27:4: *CSD* glosses as “grating”³⁹). He employs only ܡܢܚܠܐ, “gridiron,” but a marginal note ܡܢܚܠܐ, “sieve,” at 38:4 indicates that this may have been an unfamiliar word.⁴⁰ *CSD* associates ܡܢܚܠܐ with Latin *craticulum*, but *SL* derives it from the dissimilation of ܡܢܚܠܐ.⁴¹ Had the Peshitta form ܡܢܚܠܐ fallen out of normal usage by the early seventh century? Certainly, by the end of the eighth century, Theodore bar Koni lists ܡܢܚܠܐ among the obscure words of the Peshitta Pentateuch and explains it as something resembling a net (ܡܢܚܠܐ).⁴² It may be pertinent that PLeviticus and PProverbs, both regarded by Michael Weitzman as two of the later books to be translated on the basis of other quirks of lexical usage,⁴³ use ܡܢܚܠܐ for מרחשת at Lev 2:7 and for פחם at Prov 26:21. A marginal note in the Midyat manuscript of

³⁸ Not represented in the Old Greek. Rendered by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion as ܡܢܚܠܐ, according to the margin of the Syh.

³⁹ *CSD*, 521.

⁴⁰ Cf. also the marginal reading of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion at Exod 27:4, ܡܢܚܠܐ.

⁴¹ *CSD*, 182. The margin of the Syh records that the “Three” also have ܡܢܚܠܐ: Theodotion and Symmachus in Exod 35:15 (LXX 17), and all three revisers in Exod 38:4. Jacob of Edessa also uses this word consistently in his version of Exodus.

⁴² Hespel, *Livre des Scolies*, 187, line 1.

⁴³ Weitzman, *The Syriac Version*, 179.

SyhExodus at Exod 27:4 gives ܠܬܪܝܥܐ in Greek letters (TPATEKAA): this would suggest that by the medieval period, a scribe considered the word to be Greek in origin.

The Syh translator avoids replicating the Peshitta term ܡܫܬܪܥܐ “square,”⁴⁴ preferring a transliteration of LXX τετράγωνον instead (ܬܬܪܝܥܐܢܐ). Nearly a century later, for his own version of Exodus, Jacob of Edessa sometimes uses ܐܘܪܬܐܢܐ “four cornered,” and at others ܡܫܬܪܥܐ—the Peshitta’s term in the emphatic state. Jacob’s version is a useful comparison to Syh. Even though he himself rendered Greek texts quite literally, his own late seventh century revision of Old Testament books that interweaves Peshitta and LXX material is less rigid than Syh, yet sometimes he appears to avoid certain expressions in the Peshitta that in his day may have been archaic.⁴⁵

3. Inconsistencies

Items for the bronze altar in SyhExod 38:23 (Tab B: MT and P 38:3) have three Greek-based renderings, ܡܬܠܐ, ܡܬܠܐ and ܡܬܠܐ, for φιάλαι, γείσιον, and βάσις, followed by two that follow the Peshitta, ܡܬܠܐ and ܡܬܠܐ for κρεάγραι and πυρεῖον. But in the earlier parallel list in Exod 27:3 (Tab A), the translator had used ܡܬܠܐ and ܡܬܠܐ for πυρεῖον instead of Peshitta ܡܬܠܐ. Jacob of Edessa follows the Peshitta’s terms in both accounts.

There are other intriguing inconsistencies between the two different Tabernacle accounts. In the descriptions of priestly clothing in the parallel accounts (Tab A in Exod 27 and Tab B in Exod 38), the Syh translator does not always use the same term for the Greek equivalent. In the case of the full-length robe, ὑποδύτης ποδήρη (ܡܥܝܠ ܕܬܝܠܐܢܐ), in Tab A he uses ܡܬܠܐ ܡܬܠܐ (LXX 28:27: MT/P 28:31), but in Tab B we find ܡܬܠܐ ܡܬܠܐ (LXX 36:30; MT/ P 39:22). In the case of the belts, ζώναι (ܐܡܝܬܐܢܐ), he uses the Peshitta term ܡܬܠܐ in Exod LXX 28:36 (MT/P 28:40),

⁴⁴ E.g. Exod 28:16; 37:25; 38:1.

⁴⁵ Salvesen, *I-II Samuel*, xi–xii.

but a transliteration of the Greek, **ἡμῶν**, in LXX 36:37 (MT/P 39:29). The same happens in Exod LXX 28:29 (MT/P 28:33), where Syh has the Peshitta term **ܠܗܡܐ** for **ἡμῶν**, “hem,” but in LXX 36:32–34 (MT/P 39:24–26) it is rendered as **ܠܗܡܐ** or **ܠܗܡܐ**.⁴⁶

In this respect of lexical consistency, we should compare the Harklean version of the New Testament, which emerged from the same milieu and period to the Syh (616 CE at the Enaton near Alexandria). Like Syh it aspired to be a very close rendering of the Greek biblical text. Yet as Andreas Juckel remarks, its lexical consistency is not perfect: “whether due to semantics or rather to the defective concordance of the translator cannot be determined with certainty.”⁴⁷

4. Signs of Flair?

The translator’s expertise was tested in places where he had to come up with a range of Syriac terms to represent recurring alternatives in different versions. One example would be the varying interpretations of the wood called **יָסָד** in Hebrew. Here the LXX term **ἄσηπτα** “(wood) that does not rot” (> Syh **ܠܐ ܡܚܬܝܠܐ**) was used theologically in patristic exegesis, for instance by Severus of Antioch, of the human body of Christ as a parallel to the Ark of the Covenant.⁴⁸ Symmachus understood the term to mean “thornwood,” **ἀκάνθινα**, rendered in Syh as **ܡܚܬܝܠܐ**. In contrast, Aquila merely transliterated as **σετείμ**, rendered in Syh as another transliteration of course (**ܣܬܝܡ**).⁴⁹

A frequently used Hebrew term in the Tabernacle accounts refers to fabric dyed scarlet,

⁴⁶ Jacob of Edessa uses the Peshitta terms for hems and belts in his own version of Exodus here.

⁴⁷ Juckel, “Should the Harklean Version be Included?” Brock, “Aspects of Translation Technique,” 85–86, notes that Syriac translators in general do not aim at total consistency but that, “each has his own area of special concern.” Cf. the earlier comments of Field (*Origenis Hexaplorum*, I:lxix) on variable lexical consistency between different books of the Syrohexapla.

⁴⁸ See Petit, *La Chaîne sur l'Exode*, 64–66.

⁴⁹ E.g. Exod 25:23.

תולעת השני “scarlet” (literally “worm of scarlet”). This had been rendered in different ways by the various Greek versions. LXX and Origen’s revised text usually interpret the element שני as διπλοῦν “double” (as if associated with the word שנים “two”) or κεκλωσμένον “woven.” Aquila has the phrase σκώληκα διάφορον “different worm,” based on an etymology of the Hebrew (שנה as “to change”) that was inaccessible to the Syrohexapla translator but that he rendered nonetheless as ܡܫܬܚܬܐ ܡܫܬܚܬܐ. Symmachus understands שני to mean δίβαφος “twice dyed,” hence the rendering in Syh ܡܫܬܚܬܐ ܡܫܬܚܬܐ.⁵⁰

Finally, the description of the cups on the lampstand as being “shaped like almond blossoms” ἐκτετυπωμένοι καρυίσκους, is expressed by the Syh as ܡܫܬܚܬܐ ܡܫܬܚܬܐ, “figured with nuts” (ܡܫܬܚܬܐ “nuts” is probably a graphic corruption of ܡܫܬܚܬܐ “almonds” in Estrangelo script). Aquila and Theodotion tried to express the single word of the Hebrew expression into a single Greek word also, using the neologism ἐξημυγδαλισμένοι, literally “almondized.” In this case, the Syh translator did not attempt to emulate this, but instead he “unpacked” the sense of the Greek with an entire phrase, ܡܫܬܚܬܐ ܡܫܬܚܬܐ ܡܫܬܚܬܐ, “on which (are) the forms of almonds.”⁵¹

As one would expect, all these show both a very good understanding of the Greek lexicon on the part of the Syh translator, and also reflect a long tradition of Greek-Syriac translation within the Syrian Orthodox Church.

5. Conclusion

The intense translational activity from the early fifth century into the seventh, principally of Greek

⁵⁰ E.g. Exod 28:6.

⁵¹ Exod 25:33, etc. For the Syh translator’s use of two words to represent one Greek word, see Weitzman, “The Reliability of Retroversions,” 323.

texts and commentaries into Syriac, indicates the existence of circles of scholarly translation in monasteries and the training of each subsequent generation of translators. The Syrohexapla did not emerge out of a vacuum. Yet how far did the Syh translators depend on personal study and oral training in techniques of rendering Greek into Syriac? Did extensive word-lists exist, and how far would the translators have depended on them? And did they exist for the whole Syrohexaplaric corpus or for individual books? These sorts of questions have often been raised concerning the Jewish Greek translators of the Pentateuch in the third century BCE and their successors in the next generations who rendered the other books of Scripture into Greek. In the case of the Syh, which was accomplished in just a year rather than over nearly three centuries, it seems more likely that the translator(s) had some kind of basic lexicon. However, this is not incontrovertible. A thorough acquaintance and training in existing translations may have been regarded as sufficient for the purpose. And yet the challenge of unusual technical vocabulary may have tested the translator's knowledge to the limits: some of the Greek loanwords discussed above may have been the result of transliteration out of desperation. If they are not merely to indicate the correct pronunciation of the corresponding Syriac term⁵² the many marginal notes in Greek preserved in both manuscripts of SyhExodus may have been intended to serve as justification to readers for the presence of unfamiliar Syriac words.⁵³

A classic article by Sebastian Brock speaks of the three possibilities for translating technical terms in antiquity: a transcription, an etymological translation ("usually a neologism"), or a cultural equivalent.⁵⁴ Although he notes that etymological translation of technical terms was "very much a feature of the seventh century Syriac translators," in the case of the Tabernacle items surveyed

⁵² The twelfth century Midyat MS has several Greek personal names in the margin at Exod 31:1–6, perhaps as pronunciation aids, but none of these appears in the seventh century London MS.

⁵³ E.g. Exod 24:10 ΣΑΦΦΕΙΡΟΣ for ܣܦܦܝܐ; Exod 39:3 ΠΕΤΑΛΑ for ܥܬܝܠܐ.

⁵⁴ Brock, "Aspects of Translation Technique," 84.

above that lack any wider theological significance, transcription or neologism seems to be the most common resort of the Syh translator. This was perhaps less out of laziness than a desire to point to the Greek original.

This study has also uncovered a few examples where the text has Peshitta renderings in one place and Greek-based ones in the parallel passage. Such lapses may indicate a lack of a word list, or merely a failure to consult it, since it would be easy to lapse into using the familiar Peshitta term. However, we should be impressed by the translator's achievements and virtuosity rather than criticize him for occasional lapses.

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