

Xth SYMPOSIUM SYRIACUM

Identifying early Syriac gospel texts¹

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Abstract

This paper introduces and applies a methodical approach which can be used to reconstruct early Syriac gospel readings from allusions found scattered in Syriac literature. Using only a few examples, this method is used to recover readings from each stage in the early evolution of the gospel text in Syriac. The results indicate the existence, date and character of a hitherto unknown Primitive Syriac gospel text type and its evolution, up to and including the appearance of the Peshitta about A.D. 400.

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§1 The early Syrian patristic authors; Mar Ephrem of Nisibis, Aphrahat and Mar Narsai, drew wisdom and beauty from the Syriac gospel tradition: yet their writings still contain many gospel quotations and allusions which are difficult to explain, or to place in any kind of order. That this problem is worth some attention, almost goes without saying; For if progress could be made, it would shed light on the ethos of early Semitic Christianity – a Christianity which preceded and shaped every other kind, but of which we know comparatively little.

§2 From a historical point of view, only scanty evidence for Syriac Christianity exists before the 4th century A.D. However, reviewing the 4th century evidence, we find an already very diverse and mature Christian faith practised by thousands of people over a wide area in Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia. We also see the maturity of these communities expressed, not only in numerical terms, but also in social sophistication; For example, in the 4th century writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem and in the *LIBER GRADUUM*,² we encounter complex social structures, with interplay

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² Kmosko 1926.

between bishops, priests, lay people, cenobitic monks, ‘sons and daughters of the covenant’ and solitaries. Thus from the mature situation we find in the 4th century A.D., it is clear that the Syriac Christian community must have been developing for several centuries before that.

§3 Close study of the gospel quotations found in these same 4th century sources, reveals that multiple gospel texts were in simultaneous use. Even if we no longer possess them, we know quite a lot about *some* of these early Syriac gospel texts;

- Tatian’s Diatessaron gospel harmony of c. A.D. 170, known from the commentary on it, which is attributed to Mar Ephrem, (Leloir 1963, 1990).
- The Old Syriac separate gospels, known from the two codices found by William Cureton, (Cureton 1858) and Agnes Smith Lewis, (Lewis et al. 1894, Lewis 1910).
- The Peshitta gospels, of which there are many surviving codices and for which we have a critical edition, (Gwilliam & Pusey 1901).

§4 However, I will argue that a Syriac gospel text earlier than all these once existed. Its existence can be demonstrated, because the gospels we do know of listed above, cannot account for the gospel texts we encounter in the writings of the early Syrian fathers. The existence of this Primitive Syriac gospel text will be shown for the first time using some fairly standard text-critical methods and a few examples.

§5 Of course, the evolution of the Syriac gospel text did not stop in the 4th century. We have historical evidence of a textual evolution which continued long after that;

- The Philoxenian revision created in A.D. 508 under the authority of Philoxenus, Syrian Orthodox bishop of Mabbug, (Wright 1894, p. 13; Segal 1970, p. 95).
- The Church of the East revision created about A.D. 550 under the authority of Mar Abha I, Catholicos of the Church of the East, (Wright 1894, p. 19; Segal 1970, p. 165)³.
- The Harklean revision by the Syrian Orthodox church, created in A.D. 616 by Thomas of Harkel, (Wright 1894, p. 16; Mingana 1939, cols. 870, 871, 875).

I. Assumptions and methods

§I-1 Based upon ideas adapted from Greek textual criticism,⁴ we assume that there was one original Syriac gospel text, which to a greater or lesser degree influenced the later gospel texts familiar to every Syriac patristic author.

³ Wright’s tentative assertion about this revision is based solely upon the 12th century ‘*Kitāb al-Majdal*’ by Māri ibn Sulaimān, however, it could now be corroborated using the methods described here.

⁴ For example, the twelve basic rules for textual criticism by Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland in ‘The Text of the New Testament’

§I-2 The latest date of a variant we find, shall depend upon the date of an author who alludes to that variant, or the date of the manuscript in which it is found.

§I-3 Should a gospel variant be alluded to by authors belonging to more than one denomination within the Syriac tradition, it shall be deduced that that variant must be dated to a period before those denominations became distinct.

§I-4 Should a gospel variant be alluded to by Syriac speaking authors and by authors from other traditions, it shall be deduced that that variant must be dated to a period before those traditions became distinct.

§I-5 Syriac gospel readings which include linguistic features or terminology in common with other datable materials, shall be dated or sequenced accordingly. This is the cross-dating method adapted from the science of geology.

§I-6 Other text-critical and source-critical methods may be adapted where possible. For example; A) The stemma of a variant should be derived based upon the principle of causality, i.e. a reading which explains other variants, must be earlier in the sequence. B) A reading agreeing with the context must be considered earlier than others which do not. Again, those readings which do not agree with the context may derive from an alternate source.

II. Example text – John 1.3

§II-1 My first two examples from John and Luke have been selected to introduce a primitive Syriac gospel text type which can be dated to the 1st century A.D. By tracing their evolution, I also argue how and why these texts may have become Hellenized.

§II-2 According to the apostle Paul, († c. A.D. 62) from his letters and Ephrem of Nisibis († A.D. 373) from his hymns, and again from his discourse on ‘in the beginning was the Word’ and the same quoted by Philoxenus of Mabbug († A.D. 523), and according to Theodore Abu Qurra, a monk who lived in the monastery of Saba who later became bishop of Harran († A.D. 820) who wrote in Arabic, this verse originally read: **ܠܗ ܘܥܠܡܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܝܐ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܝܐ** = ‘through him all things were created.’

< Ephrem, (Leloir 1958, number 615), Philoxenus quoting Ephrem, (Burkitt 1901, p. 48; Burkitt⁵ 1904 vol. 2, pp. 139, 187f.; Brière & Graffin 1982, Florilegium 13.2), Abu Qurra in Arabic, (Vööbus 1951, p. 158), **ܠܗ ܘܥܠܡܝܢ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܝܐ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܝܐ** = ‘through him all things were created.’

~ Ephrem, Hymns on the Faith, (Beck 1955, 1.11) **ܕܡܢ ܗܘܝܐ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܝܐ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܝܐ** = ‘To him through whom it was created.’ (Here, Ephrem is referring to **ܕܡܢ ܗܘܝܐ** = the soul.)

§II-3 The verb ‘to create’ is echoed by the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, **οτι εν αυτω εκτισθη τα παντα** = ‘because in him, all things were created,’⁶

⁵ Here Burkitt argues that Ephrem quoted John 1.3 from the separate gospels, not from the Diatessaron.

⁶ Colossians 1.16, The Nestle Greek text.

against the Greek text of our verse, *παντα δι αυτω εγενετο* = ‘all things through him *became*’.⁷ Hence, invoking a text-critical method⁸ we can tentatively date the origin of the Syriac reading no later than the mid 1st century AD.

§II-4 If this were the only time that Paul could corroborate a form of John’s gospel from the Syriac tradition, then perhaps we could explain it away, either as Syriac commentary upon Paul, or as a coincidence. However, there are at least two other points of contact between the Apostle Paul and the early Syriac text of John’s gospel which also cannot be explained from the Greek;

- In two of his epistles; 1 Corinthians 15.54 and 2 Corinthians 5.2-4, Paul used John’s terminology from the Syriac of John 1.14 ‘the Word *put on* a body’.⁹ This terminology cannot be explained from the Greek text. On the other hand, the early Syriac reading at John 1.14 is very widely represented in Syriac literature¹⁰ and in the liturgical traditions¹¹ of all Syriac denominations.
- In his letter to the Ephesians 1.4, Paul quoted and commented on an early Syriac reading of John 6.70 which is completely lost in the Greek; ‘You were chosen for me before the world’s foundations’. Again, many Syriac patristic authors knew this verse in the manner Paul comments upon, including Ephrem¹² and Philoxenus¹³.

A full treatment of these other examples will have to await another opportunity. However, these Pauline allusions are very important for the dating of John’s gospel. Taken together, these data lead us to a number of momentous conclusions, including:

- That Paul knew John’s gospel in a form preserved in the Syriac tradition.
- The Syriac tradition preserves the earliest reading of John 1.3
- A date for our Syriac reading in the middle of the 1st century A.D.
- A date for John’s gospel in the middle of the 1st century A.D.

§II-5 Developments of our Syriac reading from John 1.3 in the early centuries can be explained because they preserve traces of the primitive reading described above. Hence, invoking another text-critical method,¹⁴ these traces found in later sources further demonstrate the existence of the primitive reading:

> Philoxenus from his commentary upon John, (Vööbus 1951, pp. 158, 199):

,ܠܗܘܘܢ ܕܘܢܗܘܘܢ ܕܘܢܗܘܘܢ ܕܘܢܗܘܘܢ ܕܘܢܗܘܘܢ = ‘All things *through him* and in him *were created*.’

> LIBER GRADUUM (Kmosko 1926, 917.13): ,ܠܗܘܘܢ ܕܘܢܗܘܘܢ ܕܘܢܗܘܘܢ ܕܘܢܗܘܘܢ = ‘All things are in him and in him *were created*.’

⁷ John 1.3, The Nestle Greek text.

⁸ See method §I-2.

⁹ This argument uses the cross-dating method, see §I-5.

¹⁰ For example, Ephrem in Beck 1955, 4.2 amongst many others

¹¹ For example, the East Syrian Beth Gazza, Rome, Vatican Library, Borgia Syriac 60, (dated A.G. 1999 = A.D. 1687 or 1688), f. 92a.2.29 and the Syriac Catholic Fenqitho, (Mosul 1886-1896, vol. 2, p. ٤٦٩, or 2.469.1.3) amongst others.

¹² For example, Leloir 1958, number 925 amongst others.

¹³ For example, Brière & Graffin 1980, 82.8 and 82.9 amongst others.

¹⁴ See method §I-1.

The text of the Peshitta is of course quoted by the patristic fathers:

> Babai the Great, († A.D. 627 or 628) ‘LIBER DE UNIONE’ (Vaschalde 1915, p. 48.18), Peshitta ܐܘܪܘܫܝܡܐ ܕܥܘܢܝܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܢܝܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܢܝܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܢܝܘܢܐ = ‘All through him was and without him also nothing was the thing that it was.’

~ Isho`yabh Arzonaya, († A.D. 596), (Chabot 1902, p. 194.3):

ܐܘܪܘܫܝܡܐ ܕܥܘܢܝܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܢܝܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܢܝܘܢܐ = ‘without him also nothing was, the thing that it was.’

III. Example text – Luke 2.11

§III-1 According to the apostle Paul, († c. A.D. 62) and gospel allusions by Aitallaha bishop of Edessa, († A.D. 345 or 346), and Aphrahat, († c. A.D. 345) and a Syriac liturgical tradition, this verse originally read;

[ܐܘܪܘܫܝܡܐ ܕܥܘܢܝܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܢܝܘܢܐ] = ‘.. has been born for you, the Lifegiver, LORD Meshiḥa’

§III-2 Three points of contact between Paul’s writings and the gospel of John have been introduced above. Here again there is a fourth point of contact between another gospel text from the Syrian tradition and the apostle Paul. For, in one of his earliest letters he wrote, ‘Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; *the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.*’¹⁷ In this remarkable statement, Paul identifies Christ as ‘a life-giving spirit’. But where does his terminology come from? In the Peshitta, in the same place we read, ܐܘܪܘܫܝܡܐ ܕܥܘܢܝܘܢܐ = ‘life-giving spirit’. This is the same terminology as is used in our passage from Syriac Luke, only the gender of the adjective is feminine to reflect the grammatical gender of the word ‘spirit’ in Syriac. In contrast, the Greek text of Luke reads, ‘a Saviour who is Christ (the) Lord’. Again, Paul’s terminology in 1 Corinthians is missing from the Greek version of Luke and is not found anywhere else in the Greek New Testament, but his terminology can be explained from a Syriac text of Luke. Thus, using a text-critical argument,¹⁸ together with the other evidence showing contact between Paul and the Syriac gospel tradition, the Syriac also retains traces of Luke’s gospel which are datable to the middle of the 1st century A.D.

Accordingly, the early Syriac sources mentioned above, used the same terminology when they alluded to the gospels, for example:

~ Aitallaha, a Syriac letter in Armenian translation, (Vööbus 1951, p. 179), ‘is born to you, says, today the Life-giving Lord and the Messiah.’

~ Aphrahat, (Wright 1869, p. 13.9):

ܐܘܪܘܫܝܡܐ ܕܥܘܢܝܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܢܝܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܢܝܘܢܐ = ‘And also his Word, and his discourse, that the LORD is the Meshiḥa. As it was written in the beginning of our Lifegiver’s gospel.’

~ The Chaldean Hudhra, (Bedjan 1886, 1.332.11) ܐܘܪܘܫܝܡܐ ܕܥܘܢܝܘܢܐ = ‘You are the Meshiḥa our Lifegiver.’

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 15.45, Revised Standard Version

¹⁸ See method §I-5.

§III-3 The following reading from Luke 2.11 is attested by multiple Syriac denominations, so it must long pre-date the schisms of the 5th century.¹⁹ It may perhaps have been the reading of the Diatessaron:

> Philoxenus (Brière & Graffin 1977, 3.27.11), Moshe Bar Kepha, († A.D. 903),²⁰ East Syrian Beth Gazza,²¹ ܠܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܗܐ = ‘Saviour LORD Meshiḥa’²²

§III-4 The early translation of the separate gospels from the Greek apparently altered the primitive reading very little. This similarity considerably strengthens the evidence supporting the prior existence of our Primitive Syriac reading:²³

> Ephrem,²⁴ Sin [Cur] ܠܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܗܐ = ‘The Lifegiver who is the LORD Meshiḥa’

~ Syrian Orthodox Qinotho, (Çiçak 2004, p. 209.9): ܕܡܫܝܗܐ ܕܡܫܝܗܐ ܕܡܫܝܗܐ ܕܡܫܝܗܐ = ‘By your cross, Lifegiver Meshiḥa our God,’

~ Syrian Orthodox service book,²⁵ ܡܫܝܗܐ ܕܡܫܝܗܐ = ‘Our God and our Lifegiver, Yeshe` Meshiḥa.’

§III-5 Then again, the Peshitta is often quoted, or alluded to by the fathers:

> Theodore of Mopsuestia, († A.D. 428), (Sachau 1869, p. 51.7), Jacob of Serug, (Olinder 1937, 13.1.14), Philoxenus (Brière & Graffin 1977, 4.66.3), Babai the Great, ‘LIBER DE UNIONE’ (Vaschalde 1915, pp. 46.24, 70.16, 133.23, 209.15, 218.14), Synodicon Orientale (Chabot 1902, p. 571.16), Moshe Bar Kepha,²⁶ Peshitta:

ܠܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܗܐ = ‘The Saviour who is the LORD Meshiḥa’

~ Rabbula (Vööbus 1951, p. 179), Cyril of Alexandria, (Urbina 1967, p. 14.149), ܠܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܗܐ ܕܡܫܝܗܐ = ‘Saviour and Meshiḥa, he who is the LORD Meshiḥa’

~ Philoxenus (Brière & Graffin 1980, 9.117.6) ܠܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܗܐ = ‘Saviour and LORD’

~ Philoxenus (Brière & Graffin 1977, 4.65.14) ܠܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܗܐ = ‘He is the LORD Meshiḥa’. Omitting ‘Saviour’

~ Moshe Bar Kepha²⁷ ܠܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܫܝܗܐ = ‘The Saviour who is the Meshiḥa’ Omitting ‘LORD’

§III-6 In the primitive Syriac text, the angels introduce Isho` as the Lifegiver from Genesis 2.7 who breathed life into Adam's nostrils, as the LORD of the Syriac Old Testament who spoke with Moshe, and as the Jewish Messiah. In announcing him so, the angels echoed Isaiah who proclaimed him much earlier, ‘*For to us a child is born,*

¹⁹ This argument uses method §I-3.

²⁰ Moshe Bar Kepha, ‘The commentary on Luke’s gospel,’ Mardin Ms 102

²¹ East Syrian Beth Gazza, Rome, Vatican Library, Ms Borgia Syriac 60, (dated A.G. 1999 = A.D. 1687 or 1688), f. 28a.1.9

²² This reading with Aithallaha’s quotation, reveals the original compact structure of this epithet.

²³ This argument uses method §I-6.

²⁴ ‘The commentary upon the Diatessaron’ Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, Ms Syriac 709, (5th century), f. 67b.2.6

²⁵ Kerala, Fr. Sleeba Library, Ms. 01, f. 131b.18 for which a catalogue is in preparation.

²⁶ Moshe Bar Kepha, ‘The commentary on Luke’s gospel,’ Mardin Ms 102.

²⁷ Moshe Bar Kepha, ‘The commentary on Luke’s gospel,’ Mardin Ms 102

*to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called, “Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*²⁸ Thus, in the primitive reading of Luke 2.11, we also have an expression of the earliest Christology of the Syrian Church. The Syrians believed that Isho` is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit who came to dwell with us for a while. In the west, typified by the creeds, we tend to distinguish the persons of the Godhead and understand Isho` as a part of the Divinity, not as *all* of the Divinity. But the ancient Syrians may have understood Isho` as all of the Divinity.

IV. Example text – Matthew 3.14b

§IV-1 I have included here two related verses from the text of the Epiphany in Matthew’s gospel; Matthew 3.14b & 3.16a. I have selected these two verses as examples for the following reasons;

- They allow us to distinguish two lost Syriac text types; a primitive Syriac text type dating from the 1st century A.D., and the Diatessaron of Tatian which appeared later, around A.D. 170.
- They indicate how and when the Syriac gospel tradition may have been infiltrated by the Latin gospel tradition.
- They illustrate the historical significance of the Syriac liturgical manuscripts as treasuries, packed with these early Syriac gospel texts.

§IV-2 In the Old Latin versions of Matthew and in the Diatessaron, the light on the Jordan appears in chapter 3.16a²⁹ after the baptism has occurred, but in the earlier Syriac texts set out here, the fire appears on the Jordan as soon as Isho` enters the water, in 3.14b, before he was baptized by John. In fact, the early Syriac text follows the order of an apostolic narrative reported by Justin Martyr, († A.D. 165)³⁰ in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew;

*“And then, when Jesus had gone to the river Jordan, where John was baptizing, and when He had stepped into the water, a fire was kindled in the Jordan; and when He came out of the water, the Holy Ghost lighted on Him like a dove, [as] the apostles of this very Christ of ours wrote.”*³¹

§IV-3 Therefore, according to Justin Martyr, Ephrem, the East Syrian Beth Gazza, the East Syrian Gazza Madbarnutha, the Syrian Orthodox Fenqitho and allusions in many other sources, the primitive form of this verse read,

ܘܢܘܪܐ ܕܘܫܘܥܐ ܕܘܫܘܥܐ ܕܘܫܘܥܐ = ‘And his light shone brilliantly upon the Yordanan.’

²⁸ Isaiah 9.6, Revised Standard Version

²⁹ For the Diatessaron text type, see the next example.

³⁰ Roberts & Donaldson 1913, p. 160. Thus, using method §I-2, our reading is older than the mid 2nd century A.D.

³¹ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, LXXXVIII, see Roberts & Donaldson 1913, p. 243.

< Syrian Orthodox sughitha in a Fenqitho,³² East Syrian Beth Gazza³³ §83, §F1, East Syrian Gazza Madbarnutha,³⁴ ✧ ܦܘܠܫ ܠܝ ܡܝܬܘܠܝ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ = ‘And his light shone brilliantly upon the Yordanan.’

~ Ephrem, Hymns of the faith (Assemani & Benedicti 1743, p. 15.20; Beck 1955, 7.3),

ܦܘܠܫ ܡܠܟܐ ܝܘܡܐ ܡܝܬܘܠܝܗ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ ܕܢܘܪܐ = ‘From the twilight, that his light illuminated all of the Yordanan’

~ Ephrem, (Burkitt 1901, p. 67) .ܦܘܠܫ ܠܝ ܡܝܬܘܠܝ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ = ‘And his light dazzled the world.’

~ East Syrian sughitha number 5, (Mingana 1905, 2.385.22):

✧ ܦܘܠܫ ܠܝ ܡܝܬܘܠܝ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ = ‘and his light shone brilliantly upon the Epiphany.’ (or ‘..upon the rising’)

~ East Syrian sughitha number 3, (Mingana 1905, 2.372.6) ܦܘܠܫ ܠܝ ܡܝܬܘܠܝ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ = ‘his light shone brilliantly upon the Epiphany’ (or ‘..upon the rising’)

~ Syrian Orthodox sughitha, (Brock 1982, p. 43.12), Syrian Orthodox Fenqitho,³⁵

✧ ܦܘܠܫ ܠܝ ܡܝܬܘܠܝ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ = ‘and his light shone brilliantly upon the worlds.’

~ Syrian Orthodox Fenqitho,³⁶ Syrian Catholic Fenqitho, (Mosul 1886-1896, 3.259.1.19) ܦܘܠܫ ܠܝ ܡܝܬܘܠܝ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ = ‘that his light shone brilliantly upon the inhabited world.’

~ Melkite Menaion for Kanun II,³⁷ ܦܘܠܫ ܠܝ ܡܝܬܘܠܝ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ = ‘and his light shone brilliantly upon the desert places.’

~ Syrian Catholic Fenqitho (Mosul 1886-1896, 3.285.2.16):

ܦܘܠܫ ܠܝ ܡܝܬܘܠܝ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ ܕܢܘܪܐ ܕܢܘܪܐ = ‘that his light shone brilliantly amongst the crowds when he was baptized.’

~ Syrian Orthodox Fenqitho,³⁸ ܦܘܠܫ ܠܝ ܡܝܬܘܠܝ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ = ‘And his rising shone brilliantly upon the river.’

~ Syrian Orthodox Fenqitho,³⁹ ܦܘܠܫ ܠܝ ܡܝܬܘܠܝ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ = ‘His rising shone brilliantly upon the river.’

~ Syrian Orthodox Fenqitho,⁴⁰ ܦܘܠܫ ܠܝ ܡܝܬܘܠܝ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ = ‘His soul shone brilliantly upon the river.’

~ Syrian Orthodox Qinotho (Çiçak 2004, p. 93.3) ܦܘܠܫ ܠܝ ܡܝܬܘܠܝ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ = ‘The heavens lit up’

~ Syrian Orthodox Fenqitho,⁴¹ ܦܘܠܫ ܠܝ ܡܝܬܘܠܝ ܕܠܝܘܪܝܢ ܕܢܘܪܐ ܕܢܘܪܐ = ‘And the river was burning with fire which had begun in it.’

³² Harvard, Houghton Library Ms Syriac 31, datable c. A.D. 1000, f. 21a.1.9.

³³ Forthcoming in an edition of the Epiphany from the East Syrian Beth Gazza.

³⁴ Harvard, Houghton Library Ms Syriac 142, (dated A.G. 1978 = A.D. 1666 or 1667), f. 127b.9

³⁵ Harvard, Houghton Library Ms Syriac 103, (datable c. A.D. 720), f. 62b.2.22

³⁶ London, British Library, Add. Ms. 14515, (dated A.D. 893), f. 57b.2.25 & 14516, (9th century), f. 37a.1.23

³⁷ Oxford, Bodleian Library Ms Dawkins 11, (15th or 16th century), f. 104b.7

³⁸ Harvard, Houghton Library Ms Syriac 31, (datable c. A.D. 1000), f. 9a.1.31

³⁹ Harvard, Houghton Library Ms Syriac 103, (datable c. A.D. 720), f. 59b.1

⁴⁰ Harvard, Houghton Library Ms Syriac 30, (datable 8th century), f. 35a.2 and London, British Library, Add. Ms. 14515, (dated A.D. 893), f. 57a.2.24

⁴¹ Harvard, Houghton Library Ms Syriac 103, (datable c. A.D. 720), f. 60a.1.27

VI. Preliminary conclusions

§VI-1 Only a few example verses could be presented in the space afforded here, however our brief survey bears out a sequence of early Syriac gospel text types;

- The Syriac separate gospels of Primitive text-type⁵²
- The Syriac gospel harmony, Tatian's Diatessaron text-type⁵³
- The Syriac separate gospels first translated from Greek, (Sin & Cur)⁵⁴
- The Syriac separate gospels of the Peshitta text type

§VI-2 The Primitive Syriac gospel text type is a newly identified set of distinct gospels originating from the apostolic era and dated before the mid 1st century A.D.

§VI-3 Three examples⁵⁵ have shown how in the second century A.D., the Primitive text of the separate Syriac gospels was slightly vulgarized by Tatian from an Old Latin text as he mingled its readings to create his Diatessaron gospel harmony.⁵⁶

§VI-4 The examples also show how the initial translation of the Greek separate gospels into Syriac during the 4th century A.D. erased too much of the native Syriac tradition to be acceptable,⁵⁷ and how the Peshitta may have offered a compromise Hellenized text, which restored just enough of the ancient Syriac tradition to secure its adoption by the Syriac-speaking Christian community.

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⁵² Three examples in §§ II, III and IV contain readings identified from this text type.

⁵³ Two examples in §§ III and V contain readings identified from this text type.

⁵⁴ Two examples in §§ II, III contain readings identified from this text type.

⁵⁵ The three examples in §§ III, IV and V.

⁵⁶ We wonder therefore, whether Tatian was the one who gave the Syriac tradition its Latin colouring.

⁵⁷ Evidenced by the survival of only two fragmentary codices as found by Cureton and Lewis.

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