

Richard A. Taylor, trans., *The Syriac Peshiṭta Bible with English Translation: Psalms*, text prepared by George A. Kiraz and Joseph Bali, *The Antioch Bible/Şurath Kthobh*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2020. ISBN 978-1-4632-0639-0. Hardcover, pp. lix + 635. \$90.00.

- [1] The relevance of the Syriac Bible, especially of the Peshiṭta version, for the textual criticism of the Old Testament needs no justification whatsoever, since both its age and its presentation of a certain form of the Hebrew-Aramaic text are reasons enough to deal with it in depth. Furthermore, it is needless to point at the significance the Syriac textual tradition has for investigations into the textual history of the New Testament, since Old Testament texts are frequently cited therein. Despite such generally acknowledged truisms, the study of the Syriac versions is of twofold relevance: first, scholars and students should be familiar with the textual tradition of the Bible, and the Syriac versions constitute a crucial element. Second, the Syriac versions have a salient and elementary significance for the churches of Syriac tradition; any ecumenical communication depends on mutual understanding and a profound knowledge about each other.
- [2] Against this background it is all the more welcome and of eminent importance that a scientifically responsible and reliable critical edition of the Syriac Peshiṭta accompanied by a translation in modern idiomatic English becomes available that “can be used in various religious and cultural settings” (vii). The book under review is the current output of a publication initiative titled *The Antioch Bible (Şurath Kthobh)* edited by George A. Kiraz and Andreas Juckel. The whole set will consist of thirty-six scheduled volumes of which twenty-eight have been published up to now (see “The Schedule for Releasing New Volumes” of Gorgias Press at <https://www.gorgiaspress.com/schedule>).
- [3] All in all, the present book mainly comprises the Syriac texts of the Psalms (on the right-hand pages) face-to-face with an English translation accompanied with philological notes (on the left-hand pages). As the individual compositions of the 155 Syriac Psalms and their English equivalents are presented verse by verse, it is rather easy to find one’s way in this synopsis-like arrangement and to bring the fully vocalized Syriac lines swiftly together with their English correspondences. The Syriac is the “West Syriac version of the 1887–91 Peshitta Mosul text” of Clemis Joseph David’s edition *The Syriac Bible according to the Mosul Edition* (repr. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010, with an introduction by Sebastian P. Brock). That does not mean the Mosul edition was a modern text, because it is primarily backed by “manuscripts belonging to the first millennium” (vii). Both Syriac and English are set in a readable font size with ample margin left on the pages. The numbering of verses is given in Arabic numerals and Syriac letters. The notes on the left, the pages of the English translation, provide (1) alternative or literal translations of words or phrases, (2) comparisons with Hebrew and Greek readings, and (3) brief discussions of differences the Syriac holds and their potential origin.
- [4] Although this is not the place to check every single verse and how it is dealt with in detail, a closer look at least at one psalm should be sufficient to illustrate the quality of how the Peshiṭta Psalms are represented. The Syriac text, its English translation, and accompanying notes of Ps 91 (LXX Ps 90) is printed on pages 378–83. The Syriac is well in accordance with other editions and notes provided in translations (see the titles referred to in section [7]). Of course, the focus of this edition is put on the presentation of the Syriac text and the English translation, so it is reasonable to restrict notes and annotations to the bare necessities. Be that as it may, the apparatus offers interesting and enlightening insights into alternative translations; relations between the Syriac, the Hebrew (MT), and

the Greek (LXX); and occasionally even the origin of a certain form or reading. However, interested and attentive readers of this edition might be rewarded by additional notes and observations such as the following:

- (1) the Peshiṭta is not in accordance with MT “[he] said to the Lord” but with LXX “I said to the Lord” (v. 2a).
- (2) It shares the same sequence of animals that the LXX has (v. 13) in contrast to MT.
- (3) The reference in v. 7c seems to be different in the Syriac text (“they will not draw near to you”) in comparison with MT and LXX (“it will not come near you”).
- (4) The Peshiṭta has “like armor his truth will surround you” in v. 4c, while MT reads “shield and sheltering wall are his faithfulness” and LXX has “his truth will surround you with a weapon.” Here the reader gets to know the origin of “like” in the English translation of the Syriac text in a necessary note (379: “The word *like* is not in the Syriac text. It has been supplied in the English translation for clarity.”)

There are even more significant differences between the Syriac, Hebrew, and Greek texts of this single Psalm alone (e.g., the Peshiṭta sticks with MT and has “trust,” while LXX repeatedly reads “hope” [vv. 2b, 4b, 9a and 14a]). Even if some of those distinctions may be seen as minor or as being the result of the translation process between different languages, they are of importance and at least some more should have been mentioned. Only then are readers enabled to observe the interrelations between the three texts (Peshiṭta, MT, and LXX) that are addressed in the notes of this edition. For the present psalm and those following after it in the Psalter, Ignacio Carbajosa provides further insights in his *The Character of the Syriac Version of Psalms: A Study of Psalms 90–150 in the Peshitta* (Monographs of the Peshitta Institute 17 [Leiden: Brill, 2008]).

- [5] Attentive readers may also want to more information about the headings at the places they appear in the edition, though Richard A. Taylor discusses them in his informative and thoughtfully arranged “Introduction to the Translation” (xiii–xxviii, esp. xxi–xxiii). The headings known from MT and LXX are absent in the East- and West-Syriac manuscripts, but those manuscripts do have superscriptions that represent theological, even a kind of exegetical, tendencies (also see the bibliographical references, lviii–lix).
- [6] The edition contains several tools to assist its users in utilizing this fine product of meticulous work. George A. Kiraz provides a general introduction and supplies an overview of “orthographic diversions from Mosul” (“Foreword to the Edition,” vii–x). The volume also includes a plain and short list of abbreviations (xi–xii), three appendices (that show differences in versification between the Leiden and Mosul editions, variant readings, and names; xxix–l), and a lucid bibliography with the most necessary titles (li–lix). The “Introduction to the Translation” by Richard A. Taylor offers salient pieces of information on the nature and background of the Peshiṭta, the guiding principles of translating it, and “issues of text and canon” in order to prepare readers for the fluently written translation to follow.
- [7] Personally, I am really satisfied with the present edition. Due to its trustworthy presentation of the Syriac and its critical and helpful notes, it represents both a convenient and reliable tool that facilitates access to the Peshiṭta version of the Bible and a text that is still in practical use in a considerable number of churches and communities. For further notes I can still refer to other editions and translations but make my own observations too. Consequently, with this edition in my hands, I can control and crosscheck the volumes with the Syriac text that I have previously used, which are Andrew Oliver’s *A Translation*

of the Syriac Peshito Version of the Psalms of David, with Notes Critical and Explanatory (Boston: Dutton; London: Trübner, 1861), the Syriac New Testament and Psalms, Bible Society in Turkey (Istanbul: Baskı Tarihi, 1982), and the nonvocalized Syriac text in William Emery Barnes's *The Peshitta Psalter According to the West-Syriac Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904). Moreover, the present edition is a welcome update of and companion to the Syriac Psalms published by the Leiden Peshitta Institute (*The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta Version. Part 2.3: The Book of Psalms*, Leiden: Brill, 1980; see the *Brill Peshitta Online* at <https://dh.brill.com/scholarlyeditions/library/urn:cts:syrLit:SyrBible>) and will certainly have its place as a, if not *the*, standard edition of the Syriac Peshitta in the future.

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