

However, while the Western story is well known (in the West), most are unaware of the fact that *ten times* more people converted to the faith *east* of Jerusalem in the early decades after the resurrection. In Edessa, of what is now modern Turkey, an early “safe house” for the believers was established after one of their kings received a healing from *Shlichah* Thomas. In due time, the type of Aramaic script used in Edessa, what we now call Estrangela, would become the exact style preserved in the Peshitta, although it is also extremely likely that Hebrew-script styles of these same Aramaic NT books circulated in Israel decades earlier.

It is this early history that caused one of the Patriarchs of the Church of the East to comment in modern times:

“With reference to....the originality of the Peshitta text, as the Patriarch and Head of the Holy Apostolic 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 Master Y’shua Mashiyach 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.**” (Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun, April 5, 1957)

And so this is the core of the matter. These ancient traditions have come down from the First Century, lovingly maintained by this body of believers in an unbroken chain of authority that started with Keefa himself. The end result: 360 manuscripts from the Fourth to the Ninth Centuries that are, for all intents and purposes, virtually identical to one another.<sup>12</sup> They are far more consistent than the “families” which comprised the Greek New Testament.

On the Western side of the divide there is also plenty of early tradition regarding the Nazarenes and their Hebrew-script style Aramaic New Testament books:

Papias (ca. 130 CE):

“Matthew composed his work in the Hebrew dialect, and each translated as best they could.”<sup>13</sup>

Irenaeus (170 CE):

“Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect.”<sup>14</sup>

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.”<sup>15</sup>

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.”<sup>16</sup>

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.”<sup>17</sup>

Pantaneus...penetrated as far as India, where it is reported that he found the Gospel

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12 This is not to say that more ancient manuscripts do not exist. Many manuscripts were left behind in the Middle East when Muslim invaders banished Aramaic Christians from their own lands. In some cases manuscripts found their way into private hands, only to be made public when the circumstances of their owners changed.

13 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.

14 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.1

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

16 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25

17 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.24

according to Matthew, which had been delivered before his arrival by some who had the knowledge of Messiah, to whom Bartholomew [Nathaniel Bar Tulmay], one of the emissaries, as it is said, had proclaimed, and left them the writing of Matthew in Hebrew letters.<sup>18</sup> 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.”<sup>19</sup>

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.”<sup>20</sup>

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.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Modern Scholarship and New Resources**

Returning to the manuscript side of the equation, another interesting development occurred as the centuries passed. Stephen Silver explains:

“The transcribing of the Khabouris Codex began in September 2004, as a comparison with the 1905 Peshitta. In a careful reading of the entire manuscript during the time of transcription, I noted several grammatical differences, and some few synonyms, but there are only a handful of errors in the entire manuscript. All but one have been corrected by another, later scribal hand. I have pointed out one scribal error which the scribes didn't correct.... Parts of the manuscript have been rubbed off, smudged or otherwise illegible.” (quoted from Dukhrana.com)

So, over time, manuscripts were corrected by later scribes. Also, during this process, older pages became worn and had to be replaced, and when the manuscripts became aged, depending on whether they had dated the oldest pages or the youngest ones, it resulted in a dilemma which could easily have thrown off the original date by centuries!

While the age of the Khabouris Codex remains the subject of much debate, there can be no doubt that it ably represents a text group that has much older members. So, while some manuscripts may vary with minor spelling, synonym and syntax variants, this is inevitable over such a long span of time. However, the overall reliability of this text group is thoroughly amazing as it is superior to either the Hebrew Tanakh or the Greek New Testament.

The other collection is known as the “1905 Peshitta” or the Critical Edition that was completed in 1905 by the British and Foreign Bible Society, later merged into the United Bible Society. This text was carefully put together by examining a majority of the most important manuscripts in the Peshitta family and producing a unified text faithful to all of them. The 1905 is in fact so accurate, that it is even used liturgically by many Aramaic assemblies to represent their official manuscripts.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.10

<sup>19</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3:38.2-3

<sup>20</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 29.9.4

<sup>21</sup> Jerome, *On Famous Men*, 3; 5

<sup>22</sup> In fact, the United Bible Society edition of the Aramaic New Testament based on the 1905, has the seal of the Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church on it.

# כתבא קדישא

## ARAMAIC ENGLISH NEW TESTAMENT

### ברית חדשה

Fifth Edition

MARI

PESHITTA ENGLISH ARAMAIC CRITICAL EDITION  
A COMPILATION, ANNOTATION AND TRANSLATION OF THE  
EASTERN ORIGINAL ARAMAIC NEW TESTAMENT PESHITTA TEXT

Compiled, Edited & Translated with consultation to both  
Ancient and Modern Authorities including:  
The Khabouris Codex and the 1905 Critical Edition of the  
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*Andrew Gabriel-Yitzkhak bar Raphael*  
Andrew Gabriel Roth



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About the subtitle, **MARI** is the Aramaic word for “my master”, a title consistently given to Y’shua by his followers. When Thomas saw the risen Savior in John’s Gospel, for example, he dropped to his knees and declared “Mari w’Alahi”, or “My Master and my Elohim.”