

BOOK DESCRIPTION:

THE BIBLE IN THE SYRO-PALESTINIAN VERSION\*

PART I: PENTATEUCH AND PROPHETS

*Edited by Prof. M. H. Goshen-Gottstein*

It is sometimes amazing to notice how some field or other of contemporary biblical research has been neglected over decades, although its importance has long been recognised. The Syriac literature containing versions and exegesis of the Bible is one of the areas which still awaits extensive activity by semitic philologists and biblical scholars,

This is particularly amazing in the light of the fact that only individual books of the Bible have so far seen the light in the critical edition of the *Peshitta* published by the Peshitta Institute at Leyden. If this is the case with the *Peshitta*, which is the most important Syriac text and undoubtedly of great value for textual research of the Bible, even more conspicuous is the small interest in research of the ancient Christian exegesis that arose in the wake of the *Peshitta* from the fourth century onward. With the spread of Christianity in the first centuries and its division into separate communities and sects arose also a highly interesting activity in the field of translation and exegesis of the Bible. One of its expressions is the Aramaic version which was composed among Palestinian Christians, the existence of which has been known for about a century. Except for the book of Jonah, no single biblical book has been preserved in its entirety in this version, and in fact only a small part of the Bible is known at present. Many fragments have been discovered in the last century, and also nowadays scholars succeed in unearthing additional fragments in libraries all over the world, which are published in various scholarly organs.

Until now, anyone who wanted to know this Version was obliged to turn to various quarterlies and rare books in different languages published from 1875 on. In the volume brought out by Professor M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, "The Bible in the Syro-Palestinian Version – Part I, Pentateuch and Prophets", all of this material is collected and presented in a scientific edition according to photographs of most of the fragments scattered in libraries all over the world. In reading the texts he was assisted by his senior assistant, Mr. Hanan Shirun. This work has provided the scholarly world with a reliable text which surpasses in its precision the earlier publications.

\* The Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1973 (Part IV of the monograph series of the Hebrew University Bible Project). Hebrew title: המקרא בתרגום הסורי-ארץ-ישראלי

Many supposed difficulties have disappeared, to the relief of all those who have enough to do with the real difficulties. Moreover, in this edition, new fragments have been added which were discovered by the editor and some of his students and friends.

There are two apparatuses to the text:

- a. The bibliographical notes concerning the fragments;
- b. Notes concerning the state of the text and its reading by the first editors, indicating: lacuna, omission, scribal error, conjectures concerning completion, correction etc. of the text, and dozens of addenda which were discussed by each editor.

In order to reduce difficulties for scholars who are not well versed in modern Hebrew, the critical signs are indicated by abbreviations of Latin origin or by commonly agreed non-letter symbols, Longer remarks are written in English.

At the beginning of this first volume, which appeared in the summer of 1973, there is an introduction briefly describing the principles which guided this edition. Various results of years-long research by the editor do not here come to expression, but the reader is promised that these will be found in the second volume which will include the material of the Hagio-grapha and Apocrypha. In that volume the reader will also look forward to the correction of a regrettable shortcoming occurring in the first volume, relating to difficulties in the language of the text for anyone who is not acquainted with linguistic usages of the Syro-Palestinian Version (further referred to as *Syp*). The editor points to two such difficulties and anomalies, and indicates them in the notes with the sign § . . . but as his research is still continuing he was unable to indicate in the space provided the number of paragraph in which this phenomenon is to be explained in the comprehensive introduction which will appear in the second volume. Several times he makes corrections to certain applications and conclusions in the scholarly literature which are based upon a mistaken reading by the first editor.

The fragments which have been published are of two different types of manuscripts:

- a. Palimpsests which are at least partly remnants of a continuous text of complete books. These are the ancient witnesses of the Version and date from the sixth century and a little later. Partly they are in a state of bad preservation. Even if their state of repair was better they would require a painstaking work of deciphering in order to recover the text that was deliberately erased for the purpose of re-using the sheet.

- b. Biblical fragments which are pericopes designed for reading in church, which are found in liturgical manuscripts. Most of these manuscripts belong to the eleventh century and later. Here the scholar has to wrestle with the problem of whether these biblical fragments were copied from an integral *Syp* Version or whether these are perhaps translations which were

directly made from the Greek lectionary. In a separate place on the page are quotations of Old Testament verses taken from the New Testament, sermons, etc. It is possible that some of them were written up according to the memory of the writer or that he quoted what he heard from the mouth of the preacher, and thus an alteration or a corruption of the ancient *Syp* Version could have occurred if indeed they originated from this Version.

The scholar has now to note down all the additions, omissions and alterations which mark off the text which he has before him from the Septuagint, and to keep in mind the possibility that they originated from various sources, such as Lucian's revision of the LXX or Origen's additions in the Hexapla, or from non-Greek sources: the Peshitta, the Jewish Aramaic Targums, as well as Jewish exegetical traditions which come to the surface in the Rabbinical literature. Such work has only partly been carried out, but has not yet come to full crystallisation in a monograph. And a researcher of the Bible text will not fail to compare the *Syp* Version with biblical fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls, for also there occur versions of an exegetical character. Professor Goshen-Gottstein has possibly collected some of such instances and will publish them in the larger introduction which has been deferred to the second volume.

In conclusion, this edition excels in punctiliousness and precision with regard to the details of what has been discovered from the *Syp* Version. The reader who knows the editor's other works in the field of Versions and ancient biblical manuscripts will avidly look forward to the appearance of the second volume, which will include the introduction and the fragments of the Hagiographa and the Apocrypha.

Described by Jonathan Shunari