

The Peshitta of Ezekiel and the Septuagint: A study of the two traditions in Ezekiel 1

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Abstract

The version of the book of Ezekiel in the Septuagint has received a lot of attention in recent years, especially due to the importance of papyrus 967. The same is not true of the text of Ezekiel in the Peshitta. It is difficult to divide the manuscripts of the Peshitta into families, except for the family of 9a1. There are, however, groups of manuscripts with textual agreement. Their actual relationship is difficult to determine. This paper will discuss the version of Ezekiel 1 in the Peshitta, in comparison with the Septuagint and Masoretic Text, looking especially at instances where the Peshitta agrees with (such as in verses 1, 12 and 21) and differs from the original Greek (such as in verses 9, 24 and 26). That the Septuagint represents an own tradition can be taken as given. Although the Peshitta stands close to the Masoretic tradition, some influence from the side of the Septuagint may be indicated. The importance of the variants in the manuscripts of the Peshitta will be indicated. The first section will deal with the variants in the manuscripts of the Peshitta, the second with the Peshitta and the Masoretic Text and the third with the Peshitta and the Septuagint. The Peshitta is a representative of the same tradition as the Masoretic Text. Instances where the Peshitta and the Septuagint agree, may be an indication of the original Hebrew behind the Masoretic Text, especially in instances where the Masoretic Text is corrupt.

A INTRODUCTION

The version of the book of Ezekiel in the Septuagint has received a lot of attention in recent years, especially due to the importance of papyrus 967 (cf. Lust, 1986). It can be regarded as a consensus that the version of Ezekiel in the Septuagint reflects a different *Vorlage* than that of the Masoretic text (cf. Tov, 1992:333-334). The same attention has not been given to the text of Ezekiel in the Peshitta. The edition of M.J. Mulder is an invaluable tool for the text-critical use of that version (Mulder, 1985). He states that it is difficult to divide the

manuscripts of the Peshitta into families, except for the family of 9a1¹ (1985:VIII). There are, however, groups of manuscripts with textual agreement. Their actual relationship is difficult to determine. Although the manuscript 7a1 was used as the basic text for the edition, Mulder is of the opinion that 8a1 contains the preferred text of Ezekiel, on account of its fewer mistakes and unique readings (1985:IX). The importance of this manuscript is also demonstrated by Jenner (1988:215-216; cf. also Jenner, 1993:5), who regards it as an authoritative text serving as norm for official manuscripts. In the study of the text of Ezekiel in the Peshitta, more research is necessary to determine possible textual traditions.

The publication of the critical text of the Peshitta of Ezekiel by Mulder (1985) marked a new evaluation of the text-critical value of the Peshitta of Ezekiel in its relationship with the Masoretic text and the Septuagint. Up to that stage, the view of Cornill dominated the scholarly field. He regarded the Peshitta of Ezekiel as a very free rendering, taking many liberties with the Hebrew original (Cornill, 1886:151-153; for a discussion and evaluation of the views of Cornill, cf. Lund, 2001). This view was followed in many of the older commentaries, such as Zimmerli (1979:77) and Cooke (1936:xl-xli). After the publication of the critical text of Ezekiel, the editor summarised his views on the character of the Peshitta of Ezekiel in four points (Mulder, 1988:180; cf. also Mulder, 1986, especially p. 110):

1. P of the Book of Ezekiel is a literal translation of MT. It has used MT independently.
2. Also in those cases where P did not translate literally or verbatim, the Hebrew *Vorlage* is often clearly evident.
3. The value of P for the text-critical and exegetical study of the Book of Ezekiel exceeds that of the other ancient translations except for LXX.
4. The value of the oldest MSS of P far exceeds that of the editions printed before that time as well as that of the younger MSS. In this respect the 'Leiden Peshitta' provides a better basis for scholarly studies.

¹ The notation 9a1 is according to the system used for the edition of the Peshitta of the Old Testament from Leiden. The number at the beginning refers to the century of origin of the manuscript, the letter in the middle to the kind of manuscript and the final number to different manuscripts of the same kind from the same century. 9a1 refers to the first complete Bible manuscript from the ninth century on the list of manuscripts kept at the Peshitta Institute in Leiden.

Lund (2001:25) makes it quite clear that Cornill, and scholars following him, like Cooke, Zimmerli and Elliger, the editor of Ezekiel in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, erred in accepting the text as printed in previous editions. He points out that all printed editions prior to 1985 had as base mainly one manuscript of poor quality from the seventeenth century (Lund, 2001:26). He pleads for the use of the new edition made by Mulder (Lund, 2001:29), agreeing with Mulder's views on the value of that edition for the critical study of the Peshitta of Ezekiel.

In the literature not many remarks are found on the character of the text of Ezekiel in the Peshitta, and these remarks may indeed be in need of modification on account of the readings of the best manuscripts. One can, for example, look at the remarks of Weitzman, spread through his introduction to the Syriac version of the Old Testament (Weitzman, 1999). He quotes the view of Perles from the 19th Century that Ezekiel has a tendency to abbreviate, especially towards the end (Weitzman, 1999:164-165). It has a modernising tendency in its rendering of the word for 'city' and some other words as well (Weitzman, 1999:169-171, 172-173, 178-181). He quotes the view going back to Cornill that the Peshitta Ezekiel was frequently influenced by the Septuagint (1999:68), a view that should probably be reconsidered in the light of the edition of the text of Ezekiel by Mulder (1985).

This paper will discuss the version of Ezekiel 1 in the Peshitta, in comparison with the Septuagint and Masoretic Text, looking especially at instances where the Peshitta agrees with (such as in verses 1, 12 and 21) and differs from the original Greek (such as in verses 9, 24 and 26). That the Septuagint represents an own tradition can be taken as given. Although the Peshitta stands close to the Masoretic tradition, some influence from the side of the Septuagint may be indicated. The importance of the variants in the manuscripts of the Peshitta will be indicated. The first section will deal with the variants in the manuscripts of the Peshitta, the second with the Peshitta and the Masoretic Text and the third with the Peshitta and the Septuagint. The work done for this paper is part of the ongoing research on Ezekiel as part of the preparation of preparing the edition of Ezekiel for the Oxford Hebrew Bible project (cf. Van Rooy, 2004). It will be necessary to make two columns for the text of Ezekiel, one based on the Masoretic Text and the other on the Septuagint. In this process it is important to determine the exact place of the Peshitta of Ezekiel. For the comparison of the different versions with the Masoretic texts, the editions of Elliger and Rudolph (1984), Mulder (1985) and Ziegler (1977) were used.

B THE VARIANTS IN THE MANUSCRIPTS OF THE PESHITTA

There are relatively few variants in the manuscripts of the Peshitta. Mulder gives only fifteen instances of variants in the whole chapter. The following table gives

a survey of the spread of variants over the manuscripts used by Mulder:²

	1	5	11	13.1	13.2	15	16	18.1	18.2	20	21	22.1	22.2	24	27
6h15					x		x			x					
7h2		x							x				x		
8a1				x					x						
9a1	x							x			x	x			
9d1						x			x						
9d2									x						
10d1									x						
11d1									x						
11d2															
12a1				x					x						
12d1															
12d2			x											x	x
12d3															

There are only two variants occurring in more than one manuscript. The first variant in verse 13 occurs in 8a1 and 2a1 and the second variant in verse 18 occurs in 7h2, 8a1, 9d1, 9d2, 10d1, 11d1 and 12a1. There are no variants in 11d1, 12d1 and 12d3. Four variants occur in 9a1, three variants in 6h15, 7h2 and 12d2, two variants in 8a1 and 12a1, and only the second variant in verse 18 in 10d1 and 11d1. This spread of variants affirms the view of Mulder that clear groupings of manuscripts cannot readily be identified, except for 9a1 fam.

The majority of the variants can be regarded as inner Syriac variants, not due to possible influence from the side of the Hebrew or Greek versions, but appearing in the course of the transmission of the text in Syriac. The following variants can be classified as inner Syriac variants:

² For the purpose of this discussion, the two lectionaries used by Mulder, 1985 (9l2 and 10l2) are ignored. They contain only a part of the chapter, with no variants to the text of 7a1.

- Verse 1: 9a1fam omits the ן before רר. This omission does not occur in the Masoretic Text or the Septuagint. The same occurs with the first variant in verse 22.
- Verse 13.2: 6h15 adds *seyame* to רז. The other manuscripts follow the Hebrew and the Septuagint in retaining the singular.
- Verse 16: 6h15 adds *seyame* to the first ר. The other manuscripts of the Peshitta agrees with the singular of the Masoretic Text and Septuagint
- Verse 18.1: 9a1fam has the noun ר in the singular, against the plural of the other manuscripts, agreeing with the plural in the Masoretic Text and Septuagint.
- Verse 18.2: The second variant in verse 18 is very interesting, namely the addition of ר after ר. This occurs in 7h2, 8a1^c, 9d1 and 2, 10d1, 11d1 and 12a1. This addition of the verb ‘to be’ could reflect the translation technique of the translator. This example could be one of those where 7a1 does not have the original reading of the Peshitta. One will, however, have to look at more examples from the book as a whole before coming to a final conclusion.
- Verse 20: 6h15 has the noun ר in the emphatic state, against the absolute of the other manuscripts. The Masoretic Text and the Septuagint do not have an antecedent for the relative, the noun thus reflecting the technique of the translator.
- Verse 22.2: 7h2 reads ר for ר. This verse is not a literal rendering of the Hebrew and the reading of 7h2 is probably an attempt to simplify the sentence.
- Verse 24: 12d2 omits the third ,ר. This variant is related to the Syriac style of the translator, with the use of the compound tense with participle and copula.
- Verse 27: 12d2 adds ר to ר.

There are four examples where the variant agrees with the Masoretic Text and Septuagint against the other manuscripts:

- Verse 5: The Peshitta reads the plural **ܐܘܢܝܢ** for the Hebrew **אָנָּן**. The Septuagint has the singular as well, as does 7h2. It may be possible that 7h2 preserves the original reading of the Syriac.
- Verse 13:1: The Hebrew reads **הַלְפָּרִים**. The Septuagint has the plural as well. The majority of the manuscripts of the Peshitta has the singular (**ܠܚܦܐ**), but 8a1 and 12a1 add *seyame* to read the plural as well. This may be one of the instances mentioned where 8a1 rather than 7a1 has the reading of the original translation.
- Verse 15: The Hebrew reads **אֶחָד** (one wheel), and is followed by the Septuagint. The Peshitta has the plural (**ܠܬܠܐ**). 9d1 omits the *seyame*, reading the singular like the Masoretic Text and Septuagint.
- Verse 21: This verse starts without ‘and’ in the Masoretic Text and Septuagint. The ‘and’ of the Peshitta is omitted by 9a1 fam.

There is only one instance where the variant agrees with the Masoretic Text against the Septuagint:

- Verse 11: The Masoretic Text reads a noun in the plural (**גְּוִיֹּתֵיהֶנָּה**). The Septuagint has a singular noun, as has the Peshitta. 12d2, however, reads the noun in the plural.

One must be careful to make more conclusions than the evidence permits. A study of the whole book of Ezekiel will give firmer ground for conclusions. As far as Ezekiel 1 is concerned, the Peshitta does not have many variants in the different manuscripts. In some instances the variants agree with the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint. The majority of the variants are clearly of an inner Syriac variety. Further study is necessary to determine whether influence from the side of the Masoretic Text or Septuagint can be demonstrated.

C THE PESHITTA AND THE MASORETIC TEXT

With regard to the relationship between the Peshitta and the Masoretic Text of Ezekiel, Mulder states what has become more or less a consensus, namely that only few really essential variants are found in the Peshitta (Mulder, 1988:171) and that it is a relatively verbatim translation (Mulder, 1988:174). He qualifies the last part with the word ‘relatively’, and one has to look at the whole book before trying to question this consensus. Ezekiel 1 is, however, a very complicated text and a comparison between the Masoretic Text and Peshitta

demonstrates quite a few instances that do not agree with the consensus. A large part of the chapter can indeed be regarded as a ‘relatively verbatim translation’. One of the best examples of this is verse 16:

מִרְאֵה הָאוֹפָנִים וּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כְּעֵין תְּרִשִׁישׁ וּדְמוּת אֶחָד לְאַרְבַּעָתָן
 וּמִרְאֵיהֶם וּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר יְהִיֶה הָאוֹפֵן בְּתוֹךְ הָאוֹפֵן:

NIV: This was the appearance and structure of the wheels. They sparkled like chrysolite and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel.

הַמָּהֵל הַיְתָלָה הַבְּנִמָּה
 אֵת הַמָּהֵל וְזָרָז הַבְּנִמָּה לַמָּהֵל אֵת הַמָּהֵל
 הַבְּנִמָּה אֵת הַמָּהֵל כְּבֵן הַמָּהֵל

The only real difference is the ‘and’ at the beginning of the verse. For the rest the translation is almost verbatim. This kind of translation is evident even in instances where the Hebrew is very difficult to understand and where the Septuagint has quite a different reading, as for example in verse 23.

There are some instances where the Peshitta contains important textual variants, not all of them included in the apparatus of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. The following table gives a survey of the variants included in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*:

Reference	Variant	Other witnesses	Remarks
1 ^a	adds ‘and’	LXX	
1 ^b	noun in singular	LXX ^{L C} οὐ λ'	
3 ^a	Copula once	Versions	Probably original reading
3 ^b	suff 1 sing	nonn Mss LXX	Probably original reading
12 ^a	adds ‘and’	pc Mss LXX V	
12 ^b	omit prepositional phrase	LXX	
16 ^a	adds ‘and’	mlt Mss LXX V T ^{ms}	Probably original reading
20 ^{d-d}	deletes phrase	-	Probably original reading

וְכַף־אֶחָדָם לָגַעַת בְּכַף־אֶחָדָם׃ וְכָל־אֶחָדָם
 הָלַךְ יָשָׁרָה׃ וְכַף־אֶחָדָם לֹא־סָבָה׃ וְכַף־אֶחָדָם
 הָלַךְ יָשָׁרָה׃

NIV: And their wings touched one another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved.

The NIV connects this verse to the previous one, by adding an ‘and’ that does not appear in the Hebrew and moving the subject of the first clause to the beginning. In the second part of the verse the NIV switches the two clauses. It is interesting to note that the Peshitta does more or less the same: ‘And their wings touched one another. And when they went, they went straight ahead and they did not turn.’ The word order is changed and the parts of the sentence moved around to get a more intelligible sentence.

Example 2: verse 12

וְאִישׁ אֶל־עֵבֶר פָּנָיו יֵלְכוּ אֶל־אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה־שָׁמָּה הַרוּחַ
 לָלֶכֶת יֵלְכוּ לֹא־יִסְבּוּ בְּלִכְתָּן׃
 וְכָל־אֶחָדָם הָלַךְ יָשָׁרָה׃
 וְכַף־אֶחָדָם לֹא־סָבָה׃

NIV: Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went.

The Peshitta omits the reflexive at the beginning of the verse in the Hebrew, the repetition of יֵלְכוּ, and the prepositional phrase at the end, collapsing the verse into one, simpler, sentence: ‘They went straight ahead to the place where the spirit went, and they did not turn.’

The Peshitta deviates more from the Masoretic Text than one is led to believe from Mulder’s statement, at least as far as some of the more difficult sections of Ezekiel 1 is concerned. One will have to follow this line of research for the whole of the book, before drawing any final conclusions in this regard.

D THE PESHITTA AND THE SEPTUAGINT

That the Septuagint differs substantially from the Masoretic Text of Ezekiel can

be taken as a given (cf. Van Rooy, 2004, and Lust, 1986). To determine to what extent it influenced the text of Ezekiel 1, a few examples will be discussed, looking at minuses and plusses in the Septuagint.

There are a number of instances where the Peshitta and the Septuagint (sometimes with other witnesses as well) agree against the Masoretic Text. The examples are listed in the table in the previous section. Some of them may be instances where the Septuagint and the Peshitta reflect the original reading and where the Masoretic Text may be erroneous, such as the instances reflected in the following footnotes in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*: 1a, 3a and b, 16a and 20d.

In quite a number of instances the Septuagint differs substantially from the Masoretic Text, with important plusses or minuses, such as in verses 4, 9, 11, 20, 23, 24, 25-26 and 27. In these instances the Peshitta does not agree with the Septuagint.

As far as plusses are concerned, the instances in verses 4, 11, 20 and 26 can serve as examples.

The addition of ἐν αὐτῷ to καὶ νεφέλη μεγάλη in the Septuagint in verse 4, together with the ‘and’ before the phrase gives a much easier flow of thought than the Hebrew. The Peshitta is a faithful rendering of the Masoretic Text, as it is in the case of most of the examples following, unless stated otherwise. The following additions in the Septuagint are not followed by the Peshitta:

- καὶ φέγγος ἐν αὐτῷ at the end of verse 4
- τοῖς τέσσαρσιν in verse 11
- ἡ νεφέλη in verse 20
- ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ in verse 26.

At the beginning of verse 9 the Septuagint does not have a translation of the Hebrew אֵל־אֲחֻזָּהּ כְּנִפְיָהֶם אִשָּׁה . The translation of the Peshitta has been discussed previously as one of the instances where the Peshitta has a simplified text. Some witnesses of the Septuagint do have a rendering of the Hebrew, such as quite a number of Lucianic manuscripts, but it was not in the original Greek.

In verse 23 the Septuagint does not have a section that must indeed be regarded as dittography in the Masoretic Text:

לְאִישׁ שְׁתֵּים מִכִּסּוֹת לְהִנָּה וּלְאִישׁ שְׁתֵּים מִכִּסּוֹת לְהִנָּה
אֵת גּוֹיֹתֵיהֶם:

ἐκάστῳ δύο συνεζευγμένοι ἐπικαλύπτουσαι τὰ σώματα αὐτῶν

אִתְּךָ מִלִּמְנוּחַיִךְ מִלִּמְנוּחַיִךְ מִלִּמְנוּחַיִךְ

What is quite interesting is that, before this reading, the Peshitta has an addition to the Masoretic Text, trying to make sense of the Hebrew:

לְאֵלֶיךָ לְאֵלֶיךָ לְאֵלֶיךָ. This addition is not mentioned in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

The Septuagint omits the reference to the ‘like the sound of the Almighty’ in verse 24. The Peshitta translates it as

כְּשִׁמְעֵי מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹהִים, rendering שְׁמֵי with כְּשִׁמְעֵי.

In verse 25 and 26 the Septuagint has a number of substantial minuses and the Peshitta is again quite close to the Masoretic Text. The same is true of verse 27.

E CONCLUSIONS

It is quite clear that the *Vorlage* used by the translator of the Peshitta is fairly close to the Masoretic Text. There are, however, a number of instances where the Peshitta agrees with the Septuagint and some other witnesses and where the reading of these witnesses can be regarded as the more original reading. In these instances the Masoretic Text may be corrupt.

For the largest part, the Peshitta can be regarded as a relatively verbatim translation of its *Vorlage*, but there are a number of examples where the Peshitta gives a free rendering, especially in instances where the Masoretic Text is difficult to understand, or cluttered by repetition.

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