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'Without Note or Comment': British Library Or. 11360 and the
Text of the Peshitta New Testament

For over seventy years, textual critics have displayed an intense curiosity about the manuscripts employed in the standard edition of the Peshitta New Testament.¹ Published by the British and Foreign Bible Society, this compendium took the Gospels from the *editio maior* issued by the Clarendon Press,² and the books outside the Peshitta canon from the editions prepared by John Gwynn of the minor Catholic Epistles³ and the Revelation.⁴ In the preface to the BFBS edition,⁵ the Editorial Superintendent Robert Kilgour explained that the remainder of the Peshitta canon – the Pauline Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles, and the major Catholic Epistles – had been the work of G.H. Gwilliam, assisted by John Pinkerton. However, in accordance with the Society's policy of presenting the Bible 'without note or comment',⁶ Kilgour mentions only 'the collation of manuscripts at the British Museum Library'.⁷ There is no indication of which manuscripts were collated, or of the variant readings they might have contained.

Most of the modern champions of the Traditional Text no longer seem to regard the Peshitta as crucial evidence for its primacy,⁸ a view taken not only by Burgon and Miller,⁹ but by at least one of the Bible Society editors as

1 *The New Testament in Syriac*, London, 1920.

2 P. E. Pusey and G.H. Gwilliam, *Tetraeuangelium Sanctum juxta simplicem Syrorum versionem...*, Oxford, 1901.

3 J. Gwynn, *Remnants of the Later Syriac Versions of the Bible; Part I: New Testament. The Four Minor Catholic Epistles in the Original Philoxenian Version of the Sixth Century, and the History of the Woman Taken in Adultery (St. John 7,53-8,12)*, London, 1909.

4 J. Gwynn, *The Apocalypse of St. John in a Syriac Version hitherto Unknown*, Dublin, 1897.

5 op. cit., iii-iv.

6 Laws and Regulations of the British and Foreign Bible Society, I, 1804.

7 op. cit., iii.

8 e.g. W. N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, Nashville, 1977; H. A. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-type and New Testament Textual Criticism*, Nashville, 1984. A useful survey and bibliography can be found in D. B. Wallace, 'The Majority Text Theory: History, Methods, and Critique', in B. D. Ehrman and M. W. Holmes, eds., *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, Grand Rapids, 1995, 297-320, but the author makes no reference to the importance once attached to the Peshitta.

9 e.g. J. W. Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, London, 1883; see also *The Oxford Debate on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, London, 1897 for an account of the debate organized by Miller, in which G.H. Gwilliam, A. Bonus and Miller himself adduced the Peshitta as evidence

well.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the absence of detailed and accurate information about the manuscript basis of the text printed for the Pauline Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Catholic Epistles has continued to frustrate recent scholarship, above all a more rigorous assessment of enthusiastic claims that lost Old Syriac versions of the Acts and the Epistles have been recovered.¹¹ The question is of considerable importance, since the Old Syriac Acts has been assumed to be one of the most important witnesses for the 'Western' text, primarily on the basis of two Armenian versions of the commentary of St. Ephrem.¹² However, without any knowledge of the manuscript tradition of the Peshitta, it is impossible to determine whether many of the patristic quotations actually do represent a type of text that should be considered as outside the Peshitta tradition, or whether Peshitta manuscripts of the Acts might contain evidence of a revision from the Old Syriac, as Arthur Allgeier claimed for Codex Phillipps 1388 of the Gospels.¹³ The mystery of the manuscript basis of the Bible Society edition is therefore central to the study of the text of the New Testament and to the origin of the Syriac literary tradition.

Shortly after the edition was published, both Kilgour¹⁴ and Alfred Guillaume¹⁵ issued brief accounts of the manuscripts employed, but since then, no new information has been available. In 1986, Barbara Aland was able only to re-

for a Syrian type of text in the second century. Their opponents, W. Sanday, A. C. Headlam, and W. C. Allen, were unable to refute the claim at the time.

- 10 G. H. Gwilliam, 'A Syriac Biblical Manuscript of the Fifth Century with special reference to its bearing on the text of the Syriac version of the Gospels', *Studia Biblica*, 1885, 169-70; 'The Place of the Peshitto Version in the Apparatus Criticus of the Greek New Testament', *Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica* 5, 1903, 189-237.
- 11 The most energetic proponent of Old Syriac discoveries in general has been A. Vööbus, who has made a number of claims about the Old Syriac Acts in particular, e.g. 'Discovery of the New Exegetical Manuscript Sources Containing Commentaries of Dionysios bar Salibi on the Apostolos', *Abr Nahrain* 9, 1969, 39-42; *Discovery of the Exegetical Works of Mōšē bar Kepha*, Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile 25, 1973; 'Entdeckung der Überreste des von Mōšē bar Kepha verfaßten Kommentars zur Apostelgeschichte', *Oriens Christianus* 62, 1978, 18-23; 'Die Entdeckung von Überresten der altsyrischen Apostelgeschichte', *Oriens Christianus* 64, 1980, 32-5; *Studies in the History of the Gospel Text in Syriac: New Contributions to the Sources Elucidating the History of the Traditions, II, with an Appendix: The Discovery on New Sources for the Archaic Text of the Book of Acts*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 496, Subsidia 79, Louvain, 1987.
- 12 *Meknowtiwn Gorcoč Arak'eloč xmbagir arareal naxneac' yOskeberanē ew yEp'remē*, Matenagrowtiwnk' naxneac' 18, Venice, 1839; N. Akinean, *Sowrboyn Ep'remi Meknowtiwn Gorcoč Arak'eloč*, K'nnakan Hratarakowtiwn Matenagrowtiwn ew T'argmanowtiwn Naxneac' Hayoc', Hator B, Prak I, Vienna, 1921.
- 13 A. Allgeier, 'Cod. syr. Phillipps 1388 und seine ältesten Perikopenvermerke', *Oriens Christianus* Neue Serie 6, 1916, 147-52; 'Cod. syr. Phillipps 1388 in Berlin und seine Bedeutung für die Geschichte der Peshitta', *Oriens Christianus* 3 ser. 7, 1932, 1-15; see also M. Black, 'The Gospel Text of Jacob of Serug', *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 1, 1950, 57-63.
- 14 R. Kilgour, 'Peshitta Syriac N. T.', *Expository Times* 33, 1921-2, 332.
- 15 A. Guillaume, 'The Peshitta Syriac New Testament', *Expository Times* 33, 1921-2, 519-20.

peat the statements made sixty-five years earlier and lament that 'nothing more could be known'.¹⁶ The manuscripts cited by Kilgour and Guillaume represent a fraction of those known to have been used in the *editio maior* of the Gospels, and it has always been suspected that their list is not complete.

The mystery arose from the complex and tragic circumstances in which the Bible Society's edition was prepared, and the editorial minutes and letters preserved in the archives of the Society at the Cambridge University Library reveal the tension between the editorial policies of the Society and the interests of the Syriac specialists it employed.¹⁷

In the early years of the century, the Society was becoming aware of the demand for a Syriac bible, and specifically for an edition of the Peshitta, as they had been told that an edition of the modern Syriac produced by American Presbyterian missionaries was not a success due to 'strange idioms' and to doctrinal suspicions.¹⁸ The Oriental churches were anxious to have their own ancient version, and not something that had been altered by Protestants.

Having been assured that modern readers were still able to understand the ancient version,¹⁹ the Society approached W. Emery Barnes,²⁰ who had edited Peshitta versions of the Psalter²¹ and the Pentateuch,²² and asked him to oversee its production. However, Barnes was unwilling to undertake such a large project.²³ Even when the Bible Society proposed to concentrate on the Psalter and the New Testament, he replied that he was primarily an Old Testament specialist.²⁴ Instead, he suggested, the Society should invite G. H. Gwilliam, who had worked with P. E. Pusey to produce the critical edition of the Gospels published by the Clarendon Press in 1901,²⁵ and used as the basis for the text issued by the Society in 1905.²⁶ In the intervening years, Gwilliam had been much occupied with parish duties, and when a letter arrived from Kilgour, he saw it as 'a call' to return to his former studies.²⁷ He confirmed that he would contact the Claren-

16 B. Aland, *Das Neue Testament in syrischer Überlieferung. I. Die Grossen Katholischen Briefe*, Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung 7, Berlin and New York, 1986, 4 and 106, cf. J. Kerschensteiner, *Der altsyrische Paulustext*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 325, Subsidia 37, Louvain, 1970, 113-14.

17 I should like to thank A. F. Jesson, The Bible Society's Librarian, for his generous assistance.

18 ESC Minutes, 7 August 1906, BFBS Archives.

19 Ibid.

20 Kilgour, letter to Barnes, 20 April 1910, BFBS Archives.

21 W. E. Barnes, *The Peshitta Psalter according to the West Syrian Text*, Cambridge, 1904.

22 W. E. Barnes, *Pentateuchus Syriace*, London, 1914.

23 Barnes, letter to Kilgour, 21 April 1910, BFBS Archives.

24 ESC Minutes, 9 November 1910, BFBS Archives.

25 See above, n. 2.

26 *The Fourfold Holy Gospel ... Tetraeuangelium Sanctum in the Peshitta Syriac Version* London, 1905.

27 Gwilliam, letter to Kilgour, 14 November 1910, BFBS Archives.

don Press to see if collaboration were possible on a second volume.²⁸ After some time, the Delegates of the Press agreed and proposed the terms of the collaboration: 'the Oxford Press attending to and paying for the collations, and the BFBS paying the printer's bill for the text composition, and letting the Press use either the type or the plates to produce the few copies they will want of the text accompanied by the critical matter (which they would add, of course, at their own expense).'²⁹

Given the amount of work required for the new edition, Gwilliam asked Kilgour to suggest a younger scholar who might help him with collations.³⁰ Kilgour proposed John Pinkerton,³¹ a young Church of Scotland minister who had been a prizewinner in Semitic languages at Edinburgh and Cambridge, and had already assisted Barnes in his edition of the Pentateuch.³²

It was unfortunate that Gwilliam and Pinkerton were to work together for little more than a year. Gwilliam died on 17 November 1913. When he received the news, Kilgour offered Pinkerton the task of completing the collations and seeing the text through the press,³³ and while Pinkerton was enthusiastic, he wondered whether the Clarendon Press would have him, since they might prefer 'an Oxford don'.³⁴ In fact, the Press chose to abandon the project entirely, Humphrey Milford writing to Kilgour that the Delegates did not believe that anyone besides Gwilliam possessed the necessary qualifications: 'his authority was unique'.³⁵

As unfortunate as the decision was to be for future generations of Syriac scholars, it could perhaps be defended on grounds of publishing expediency. The *editio maior* of the Gospels had after all been a very expensive undertaking.³⁶ However, the reason advanced by Milford seems decidedly peculiar, since many of the most prominent names in the history of British Syriac studies were alive at the time. Furthermore, the comments made by Pinkerton about Gwilliam's practice of inserting vocalization and punctuation without manuscript authority suggest that his own approach to editorial decisions was more sophisticated, at least by the standards of later decades.³⁷

When the BFBS decided to carry on by itself and produce an edition without

28 ESC Minutes, 9 November 1910, BFBS Archives.

29 ESC Minutes, 3 June 1912, BFBS Archives.

30 Gwilliam, letter to Kilgour, 21 June 1912, BFBS Archives.

31 Kilgour, letter to Gwilliam, 2 July 1912, BFBS Archives.

32 See above, n. 23.

33 Kilgour, letter to Pinkerton, 3 December 1913, BFBS Archives.

34 Pinkerton, letter to Kilgour, 4 December 1913, BFBS Archives.

35 Milford, letter to Kilgour, 1 January 1914, BFBS Archives.

36 Cannan, letter to Kilgour, 31 January 1911, BFBS Archives.

37 Pinkerton, letter to Kilgour, 19 February 1914, BFBS Archives.

apparatus,³⁸ Pinkerton agreed to see it through the press.³⁹ Although he believed that he had found all the material assembled by Gwilliam, and that this would be sufficient for the Catholic and Pauline Epistles, he maintained that Acts would require more work. He therefore planned to collate the British Museum manuscripts Add. 17120 and Add. 17121 from photographs, and then come to London twice during the summer of 1915.⁴⁰

On 20 May 1915, Pinkerton suggested that proofreading be undertaken by A. S. Tritton, later Professor of Arabic at the School of Oriental and African Studies.⁴¹ Tritton was to play an increasing role in the project. Although clergy were exempt from the general military call-up, and Pinkerton's eyesight was defective in any case, he enlisted in the 1st Royal Scots and requested active service. Training greatly reduced the time he could spend on the edition, and he was soon posted to Salonika to see action in the Balkan theatre. He entrusted the project to Tritton, and offered his earlier services as a gift if he were not to return.⁴² On October 1916, he was killed in action, and the aged Prof. Gwynn wrote to Kilgour: 'I feel it strange that out of the small number of persons engaged in producing the volume now in hand, this youngest should be taken away – after Gwilliam, who was some 20 years my junior, and that I in my 90th year should still be left to continue it, in correspondence with Mr. Tritton.'⁴³

While Pinkerton had been working on the project, he had been very anxious that the edition include an apparatus, believing it 'a pity if the collations of the Acts and Epistles which have been made, and will be made, could not be made public in some way or another'.⁴⁴ Tritton displayed a similar enthusiasm: 'I should like, if possible, to publish the M. S. evidence for the text of this part of the New Testament. It would be a pity for the collations to be in manuscript and not be utilized.'⁴⁵

When A. R. S. Kennedy, Professor of Hebrew and Semitic Languages at Edinburgh, was asked to provide advice on various points connected with the Syriac proofs, he wrote in even stronger terms: 'I wish it had been possible to give, in the preface, a summary of the critical principles on which the text is constructed, with reference to the MSS & editions on which it is based. This ought, most certainly, *to be given somewhere*. If not appropriate to your preface, such a state-

38 ESC Minutes, 4 February 1914, BFBS Archives.

39 Pinkerton, letter to Kilgour, 19 February 1914, BFBS Archives.

40 ESC Minutes, 13 May 1914, BFBS Archives.

41 Pinkerton, letter to Kilgour, 20 May 1915, BFBS Archives.

42 Pinkerton, letter to Kilgour, 13 August 1916, BFBS Archives.

43 Gwynn, letter to Kilgour, 27 October 1916, BFBS Archives.

44 Pinkerton, letter to Kilgour, 19 February 1914, BFBS Archives.

45 Tritton, letter to Kilgour, 15 July 1917, BFBS Archives.

ment is *morally due to New Testament scholars*, & might appear in a separate pamphlet or leaflet.⁴⁶

But although he was not opposed to an apparatus appearing elsewhere, the policy of the Society was clear, and in any case, Kilgour was obviously anxious to see the project finally completed. The war was causing considerable disruption to printing, and by the time Kilgour wrote to Kennedy in 1917, Prof. Gwynn had died as well. Kilgour was certain that 'after all the many difficulties and deaths in connexion with the preparation of this Syriac New Testament, you will share my relief that all of it is now in type.'⁴⁷

After the work was completed, Tritton retained many of the notes and collations made by Gwilliam and Pinkerton, and instead of returning them to the Bible Society he 'presented' them to the British Museum on 12 November 1932.⁴⁸ While the inscription on the papers suggests that they were donated, the seal of the Museum has been affixed in red ink rather than in black or green, and this choice would normally indicate that the papers had been acquired through purchase. At any rate, the Bible Society was not aware of their existence when W.D. McHardy, later Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford, wrote to them in 1941 asking where the collations might be,⁴⁹ or when he discussed the matter with them during a meeting in 1950.⁵⁰ Despite his enthusiasm, McHardy was to make 'little headway' in his enquiries,⁵¹ and no one else seems to have pursued the question. Even though Matthew Black stated in 1972 that he believed important 'materials' had survived at the Bible Society and the British Museum, he never actually attempted to locate or consult them.⁵²

However, to anyone familiar with the Syriac collection at the British Museum, the collations should not have been difficult to locate. They had been entered as Or. 11360 in the Classed Inventory, which records manuscripts as they are acquired, and is used any time readers need to identify manuscripts not yet included in the printed catalogues.

The papers 'presented' by Tritton are a random collection of 237 manuscripts sheets including lists of book, chapter, and *ṣḥaḥe* beginnings, tables of proper names and Old Testament quotations, and notes on orthography, punctuation, and other editorial decisions, along with the actual collations of the Pauline

46 Kennedy, letter to Kilgour, 14 September 1919, BFBS Archives. The emphasis is original.

47 Kilgour, letter to Kennedy, 12 October 1917, BFBS Archives.

48 I should like to thank V. N. Nersessian, curator responsible for the Oriental Christian collections of the British Library, for his generous assistance.

49 McHardy, letter to BFBS, 2 July 1941, BFBS Archives.

50 Minutes of interview with Prof. McHardy [*sic*], 13 May 1950, BFBS Archives.

51 McHardy, letter to author, 11 February 1991.

52 M. Black, 'The Syriac Versional Tradition', in K. Aland, ed., *Die alten Übersetzungen des Neuen Testaments, die Kirchenväterzitate und Lektionare*, Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung 5, Berlin and New York, 1972, 139.

Epistles, the Acts, and the Catholic Epistles, and three lists of manuscripts employed. The lists occur on f. 8v, ff. 186r-v, and f. 187r. Despite the title 'Collations by J. Pinkerton', the hands of both Gwilliam and Pinkerton can be identified throughout the papers, although the most important of the lists of manuscripts, f. 8v, was indeed written by Pinkerton. Along with the collations themselves and the documents in the BFBS Archives at Cambridge, his list allows us to augment the accounts published by Kilgour and Guillaume over seventy years ago.

a) Manuscripts in the British Library

i) Pauline Epistles

In his note in the *Expository Times*,⁵³ Kilgour seems to have been drawing primarily on a memo from Pinkerton, which is preserved among the BFBS papers and stamped with the date 7 May 1914. On the basis of this memo, he reports that Pinkerton informed him 'that for the Pauline Epistles he had himself fully collated three of the B. M. MSS. and constantly consulted two others on all important variants. Unfortunately he did not specify these MSS.'

On f. 8v, however, Pinkerton provides the following list: Add. 14470 ('collated in part by J.P.'), Add. 14448 ('collated in part by J.P.'), Add. 14476 ('collated by J.P.'), Add. 14480 ('collated by J.P.'), Add. 14479 ('collated by J.P.'), Add. 14475 ('collated in part by J.P.'), and the massoretic manuscript Add. 12138 ('collated by J.P.'). He also mentions Add. 17122, Add. 14477, Add. 14481, and Add. 14478 without indicating by whom they were collated, as well as Add. 14474, even though he drew a line through it. The collations themselves, however, indicate that readings from all these manuscripts are included in Pinkerton's own collations.

ii) Acts

Kilgour states that Gwilliam collated Add. 14473 (fully), as well as Add. 14472 and Add. 14470 (partially), and that Pinkerton had made a specially full collation of Add. 17120 and Add. 17121.

In addition to these manuscripts, Pinkerton informs us on f. 8v. that he employed Add. 14448, Add. 18812 ('collated by G.H.G.'), and Add. 14473 ('collated by G.H.G.'), along with Add. 14474 and the massoretic manuscript Add. 12138.

53 See above, n. 14.

iii) Catholic Epistles

Kilgour mentions only Add. 14473.

On f. 8v Pinkerton cites Add. 14470 ('collated by J.P.'), Add. 14448 ('collated in part by J.P.'), Add. 17121 ('collated by J.P.'), Add. 14472 ('collated by J.P.'), Add. 18812 ('collated in part by J.P.'), Add. 17120 ('collated by J.P.'), and Add. 12138 ('collated in part by J.P.').

b) Manuscripts in other libraries

In addition to the British Museum collection, Kilgour mentions four other manuscripts:

i) 'the collation of the Bodleian MS. by A. Guillaume for the Pauline Epistles and Acts and Catholic Epistles': This was identified by Guillaume in his own note to the *Expository Times* as Bod. Syr. d. 7, and it is also cited by Pinkerton on f. 8v.

ii) 'an important MS. of the Peshitta N. T. in the John Rylands Library, Manchester (Rylands Cod. Syr. 2, c. A.D. 900)': The manuscript is not mentioned explicitly in any of the lists provided by Gwilliam or Pinkerton in Or. 11360 or in the BFBS Archives, but it is mentioned in the actual collations of Acts, indicated by the siglum 12. Gwilliam noted on f. 187r that the sigla 1-42 in the collations should be 'as quoted in Tetraeuangelium Sanctum p. ix', and a year before the appearance of his article in the *Expository Times*, Kilgour made the same point in response to an enquiry by A. R. S. Kennedy.⁵⁴

iii) 'another important MS. of the Peshitta N. T. now in the Bible House Library (c. cent X. or XI.)': Kilgour later described this in more detail in *Four Ancient Manuscripts in the Bible House Library*, by which time it was catalogued as B. H. Syr. 1.⁵⁵ It is now preserved in the Bible Society's Collections at the Cambridge University Library as BFBS MSS 445.

iv) 'a partial collection by P. E. Pusey of "a MS. not yet identified," for the Acts and the Catholic Epistles': Pinkerton's notes on f. 8v allow us to identify this as MS 334 of New College, Oxford.

As we can see in the case of Rylands Cod. Syr. 2, the lists provided by Gwilliam and Pinkerton are not infallible, and indeed a detailed comparison of the ma-

⁵⁴ Kilgour, letter to Kennedy, 20 September 1920, BFBS Archives.

⁵⁵ R. Kilgour, *Four Ancient Manuscripts in the Bible House*, London, 1928, 57-71.

terial will reveal further inconsistencies. The siglum 58, for example, is used to refer to the New College, Oxford MS 334 as well as to the BFBS manuscript. The papers were never intended to be more than working notes, after all. They do, however, offer a valuable account of the manuscript base of the standard edition, and provide us with details not available before.

This information is significant in itself, since it provides the most complete answer to the question that has tantalized scholars from Kennedy to Barbara Aland. However, it is also important to consider whether it enables use to make any judgements about the type of text printed in the edition, especially in light of the criticisms made about the date and the provenance of the text that the editorial team produced for the Gospels:

a) In an article published over forty years ago,⁵⁶ Matthew Black criticized Pusey and Gwilliam for following the majority reading in the *Tetraeuangelium Sanctum*, and thereby producing a late rather than an early form of text. This is a criticism that has been repeated with increasing confidence in general introductions to New Testament textual criticism. Kurt and Barbara Aland, for example, state that the text printed in the BFBS edition is 'obviously a late form of text'.⁵⁷ However, the lists and collations now at our disposal indicate that unless one regarded manuscripts from the sixth or seventh century as 'late', the criticism should not be applied to the remainder of the Peshitta canon. If the editors did follow a policy of adopting majority readings, they simply did not collate a large enough number of 'late' manuscripts to produce a 'late' form of the Peshitta text.

Even if they had done so, however, it is perhaps debatable whether such a policy would render them liable to criticism. If one agreed with Black that Codex Phillippis or other manuscripts did provide evidence that the Peshitta arose in a process of revision from the Old Syriac, any text that could be called 'Peshitta' would be by definition 'late'. Indeed, the least confusing policy for an editor in such circumstances would be to print the latest and most fixed version of the text, and then use the apparatus to indicate how it arose, rather than print an uneasy mixture of revisions. Nevertheless, we do not yet have evidence of such a process of revision for the remainder of the Peshitta canon, despite the repeated announcements of Arthur Vööbus that he had succeeded in discovering it.⁵⁸

b) Vööbus himself criticized the policies of Pusey and Gwilliam by claiming that their reliance on the collection of manuscripts in the British Library, most of which were brought to London from a single convent in the Wadi Natrun, led

56 M. Black, 'The Text of the Peshitta Tetraeuangelium', in J. N. Sevenster and W. C. van Unnik, eds., *Studia Paulina in honorem Johannes de Zwaan*, Haarlem, 1953, 20-7.

57 K. Aland and B. Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, Leiden and Grand Rapids, 1987, 190.

58 See above, n. 11.

them to give a false impression of a homogeneous Peshitta text.⁵⁹ Complaints of this sort have been made for many years, and about other editions as well. In the appendices included with Murdock's English translation of the Peshitta in 1851,⁶⁰ for example, the editors of the previous three centuries were all criticized for what was said to be a slavish devotion to the narrow manuscript base of the *editio princeps* of Widmanstadt.⁶¹ Murdock believed that Widmanstadt had produced a Nestorian form of text, and that by failing to collate manuscripts for themselves, the editors who followed him had remained blind to the significance of the Jacobite tradition. The problem with Murdock's complaint, however, is that when the editors of the BFBS text did consult manuscripts of both Eastern and Western traditions, and did rely on their own collations rather than the *editio princeps*, their text was still not significantly different from that produced by Widmanstadt and Moses of Mardin three hundred and sixty-five years before.

In regard to the specific assertion made by Vööbus, one should also point out that even if the manuscripts in the British Library were all preserved in a single location, they or their archetypes were by no means all written in a single location, not even Takrit, with which the Convent of St. Mary Deipara is known to have had close connections.⁶² Furthermore, almost any statement made by Vööbus is compromised not only by his attitude to what constituted Old Syriac evidence, whether for the Gospels or for the other books of the canon, but also by his frequent tendency to cite long lists of manuscripts without any indication of the readings they were meant to contain. His enthusiasm led him to claim that virtually any manuscript or patristic quotation which he believed to deviate in any way from the BFBS text should be seen as a precious relic of an otherwise unknown Old Syriac. His assumption, for example, that Paris Cod. Syr. 30 constituted an important witness for an Old Syriac text of Acts because he believed that its text of the Gospels greatly surpassed the value of Codex Phillipps is revealed to be quite unjustified if one actually collated the manuscript.⁶³ There is no evidence so far that manuscripts preserved outside the British Library, or editions based on such manuscripts, provide a text whose character is markedly different from the BFBS edition, especially one which reflects an earlier stratum of

59 A. Vööbus, *Studies in the History of the Gospel Text in Syriac: New Contributions to the Sources Elucidating the History of the Tradition II*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 496, Subsidia 79, Louvain, 1987, 20-4.

60 J. Murdock, *The New Testament or the Book of the Holy Gospel of our Lord and our God, Jesus the Messiah*, New York, 1851, 506.

61 J. A. Widmanstadt and Moses Mardinensis, *Liber sacrosancti euangelii de Iesu Christo domino et deo nostro*, Vienna, 1555.

62 W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired Since the Year 1838*, vol. 3, London, 1872, Preface, iv.

63 Op. cit., 190; see also 42-54.

textual history simply because it was never stored in the Convent of St. Mary Deipara.

The relative homogeneity of the manuscript tradition of Acts or of the other portions of the Peshitta canon for which we as yet have no adequate critical editions, can only be demonstrated when such editions are finally published.⁶⁴ Even then, however, the fact that the BFBS edition was chosen as the basis for a long awaited concordance⁶⁵ ensures that its manuscript base will continue to be a matter of concern for New Testament textual critics, and will not be consigned to a forgotten chapter in the history of British Syriac scholarship.

64 An edition of the Peshitta Acts is now in preparation by the author, with an apparatus indicating variants attested by over sixty manuscripts preserved in London, Paris, Berlin, and other libraries.

65 G. A. Kiraz, *A Computer-Generated Concordance to the Syriac New Testament: According to the British and Foreign Bible Society's Edition, Based on the SEDRA Database*, 6 vols, Leiden, 1992.