SYRIAC VARIANTS IN ISAIAH 26

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Introduction

In a three-part article concluded in the previous issue of this journal, a report was given concerning an investigation of the Syriac version of Isaiah. In the present article one chapter of Isaiah is selected for study in greater detail of a limited area.1 Ch. 26 has been chosen because, containing the Prayer of Isaiah in vss. 9-19, it involves 59 MSS, or 12 more than the 47 which are usually concerned in the rest of the study. Only the Song of Isaiah (a very small section, 42:10-13 plus 45:8, and hence not representative) involved more MSS—35 beyond the usual 47, out of the total of 94 Biblical MSS used in the investigation (six early, nine Massora, nine Lectionary, six fragmentary and rather old, 23 late, and 41 liturgical, containing the Psalter and Canticles or Biblical Odes). Ch. 26 is also exactly average in length among the chapters of the book, containing 21 verses.

From the original collection of variants in ch. 26, ten were discarded as obviously merely orthographic differences, and 12 as clearly scribal errors. This left 124 variant readings at 81 places in the text of the chapter, some being multiple. Whereas throughout the book the variants averaged two places to a verse, in ch. 26 they average four to a verse, though it must be conceded that some, which elsewhere would have been discarded for the above two reasons, were included.

1 For keys to abbreviations, symbols, sigla, and bibliographic references, see Part I in AUSS, III (1965), 138-157.
because of our special interest in this section that is found in the additional liturgical MSS.

All the variant readings of ch. 26 are exhibited below, each followed by a brief comment as to its type and sometimes an evaluation. The seven variants occurring only in patristic quotations are listed afterward, with brief comments. No variant from the Prayer of Isaiah is involved in NT quotations from this book. The concluding section draws some comparisons and expresses conclusions.

_The Variants in Is 26 in Biblical MSS_

vs. 1a  יִ֔רְשַׁ֖שׁ לָ֑יְךָ (change of verb from passive to active; scribal error?)

1b  יִ֔רְשַׁ֖שׁ L1 M1 P1/ (T G S) (omission of suffix; scribal error?)

2a  יִ֔רְשַׁ֖שׁ pr o O2 (completely non-significant addition of conjunction)

2b  יִ֔רְשַׁ֖שׁ RN (change to plural; omission of preposition)

3a  יִ֔רְשַׁ֖שׁ P3 R2, 3, 5/ (H T) G (S) (addition of conjunction; omission of preposition and object)

3b  יִ֔רְשַׁ֖שׁ P3 R2, 3, 5 (change of verb from first plural to third person singular)

3c  יִ֔רְשַׁ֖שׁ M3 (substitution of synonym)

5  יִ֔רְשַׁ֖שׁ L9-m R8-1 R7, 8, 9-m/ (2) R7, 8, 9-m (substitution; addition of a word)

8a  יִ֔רְשַׁ֖שׁ H T (G S) (completely non-significant omission of conjunction)

8b  יִ֔רְשַׁ֖שׁ P4/ (2) R5, 3, 5 (addition; substitution)

9a  יִ֔רְשַׁ֖שׁ L27-c P8-c R8-m R10, 11, 12, 13-c S6, 7, 8, 9, 10-c W2-c/ (3) pr יִ֔רְשַׁ֖שׁ
(omission; addition of word; addition of clause)

om R⁴ (omission of preposition and object)

om L²⁸-c P⁸-c R⁸-m R¹⁰, 11, 12, 13-c S⁶, 7, 8, 9, ⁴-c W²-c (omission of word)

pr a F¹ L⁴, 5 L¹³-¹ M¹ P³, 6 R⁵, 3, 5 R⁶-¹ S⁷, 9, ⁴-c/ Livre P II, 3B (addition of conjunction)

om R⁴ (omission of preposition and object)

om L²⁸-c P⁸-c R¹¹, ¹³-c W²-c (addition)

(omission of word)

om L²⁸-c P⁸-c R¹⁰-c S⁶, 8, ⁴-c (substitution)

(omission of preposition and object)

om L²⁸-c P⁸-c R¹¹, ¹³-c S⁶, ⁴-c/ (2) R⁸-m R¹⁰-c S⁸-c (om a Eph Op Om II, 62) (addition of conjunction; addition of suffix and conjunction; Ephraim adds suffix only)

verb changed to singular)

(2) pr a P⁸-c R¹¹, ¹³-c S⁶, ⁴-c/ (2) R⁸-m R¹⁰-c S⁸-c (om a Eph Op Om II, 62) (addition of conjunction; addition of suffix and conjunction; Ephraim adds suffix only)

(verb changed to plural)

(2) pr a P⁸-c R¹¹, ¹³-c S⁶, ⁴-c/ (2) R⁸-m R¹⁰-c S⁸-c (om a Eph Op Om II, 62) (addition of conjunction; two additions)

(1) om a W²-c/ (2) L²⁷-c R¹⁰, 11, ¹³-c S⁶, 7, 8, ⁴-c/ G S/ (3) pr L²⁷-c R¹⁰-c/ G S (conjunction omitted or substituted by preposition; addition)

(verb changed to singular)

L²⁷-c R¹⁰-c S⁸, ⁴-c/ (T G) S (substitution)
IIa  Ṣ∀σσον] tr after Ṣ∀σσον P8-e (transposition, scribal)

IIb  Ṣ∀σσον] (1) Ṣ∀σσοŋ R10-c S7, 9-c/ (2) Ṣ∀σσοŋ S8-c/ S (verb changed to plural; suffix omitted)

IIc  Ṣ∀σσον] (1) Ṣ∀σσοŋ S8-c W2-c/ (2) + Ṣ∀σσον P8-e (addition of suffix; addition)

IId  Ṣ∀σσοŋ + Ṣ∀σσοŋ O2 P8-c R11, 13-c S6, 7, 9-c W2-c (addition)

Ila  Ṣ∀σσοŋ] (1) pr Ṣ∀σσοŋ/ S6-c/ (S) / (2) + Ṣ∀σσοŋ R11, 13-c W2-c (additions)

IIb  Ṣ∀σσοŋ] Ṣ∀σσοŋ R11, 13-c W2-c (change of verb to imperative; scribal error?)

Ilc  Ṣ∀σσοŋ] Ṣ∀σσοŋ R2 (mg) (different suffix pronoun; scribal error?)

Ild  Ṣ∀σσοŋ] Ṣ∀σσοŋ S6, 8, 10-c (addition of negative)

IIe  Ṣ∀σσοŋ] Ṣ∀σσοŋ R10-c S10-c (different suffix; scribal error?)

IIIa  Ṣ∀σσοŋ] (1) Ṣ∀σσοŋ R10-c S7, 9-c/ (2) Ṣ∀σσοŋ S6, 8, 10-c (omission of suffix pronoun; addition)

IIIb  Ṣ∀σσοŋ] (1) pr Ṣ∀σσοŋ P8-c/ (2) Ṣ∀σσοŋ S10-c/ (3) Ṣ∀σσοŋ R10-c/ (4) pr Ṣ∀σσοŋ L27-c P8-c W2-c/ (5) Ṣ∀σσοŋ R11, 13-c (addition of a preposition; change to singular verb; sg. plus negative; additions)

IIIc  Ṣ∀σσοŋ] Ṣ∀σσοŋ C1, 2, 3, 4, 5 F1 J1 L3, 4, 5, 6 L12-1 L27-c M1, 2 O1 P1, 2, 3, 5, 6 R1, 2, 3, 4, 5 R8-1 R10, 12-c S6, 7, 8, 9-c W2-c/ (T) / Eph Of Om II, 63 (substitution)

IIId  Ṣ∀σσοŋ] Ṣ∀σσοŋ W2-c (substitution)

IIJe  Ṣ∀σσοŋ] Ṣ∀σσοŋ R10, 11, 13-c S6, 7, 8, 9-c (omission of suffix)
13f  הַזָּכָה  לְהַזָּכָה R12-c (change of verb to first person or to perfect; scribal error?)
14a  סְיָמַשׁ] (1) om א R10-c/ (H T G S) / (2) om sey. R11-c (omission of conjunction; change to singular)
14b  סְיָמַשׁ] (1) om ר L4/ (2) סְיָמַשׁ W2-c (omission of negative; change of participle from Pa’el to Pe’al; scribal error?)
14c  סְיָמַשׁ] (1) סְיָמַשׁ F1 P3 R5 S8, 7, 8, 9, 10-c/ (H T G S)/ Eph Op Om II, 63 / (2) סְיָמַשׁ W2-c (scribal errors, probably; the first is probably correct, an error being in the Urmia text)
14d  סְיָמַשׁ] סְיָמַשׁ P8-c R10, 11, 13-c S8, 8, 10-c W2-c (substitution)
15a  vs om R11, 13-c W2-c (scribal error, but not homoioteleuton)
15b  סְיָמַשׁ] סְיָמַשׁ P8-c S9-c/ (2) סְיָמַשׁ L27-c S8, 10-c/ (3) סְיָמַשׁ S8-c (suffix added; suffix added, and transposition; conflation)
15c  סְיָמַשׁ] סְיָמַשׁ P8-c/ (2) om ל R8-1; (3) סְיָמַשׁ R10-c S8, 8, 9-c (addition of conjunction; omission of preposition; addition of suffix pronoun)
15d  סְיָמַשׁ... סְיָמַשׁ] om P8-c (omission by homoioteleuton)
15e  סְיָמַשׁ] + סְיָמַשׁ O2 (addition in a MS full of scribal errors)
15f  סְיָמַשׁ] סְיָמַשׁ P1 (scribal error, r instead of d)
15g  סְיָמַשׁ] pr ל L27-c M1 P6 S6, 7, 8, 9, 10-c (preposition added)
15h  סְיָמַשׁ] (1) סְיָמַשׁ C5/ H / (2) סְיָמַשׁ L27-c S6, 9, 10-c/ (T) (omission of suffix; substitution, similar to the Targum)
16a [change of preposition] R⁸⁻m (change of preposition)
16b [om a P⁴/ (H T G S) (omission of conjunction, agreeing with all four texts, but non-significant)
16c R¹⁰⁻c/ H (T) (change of verb to singular)
16d [scribal misspelling; omission of suffix pronoun)
17a [om a R¹¹, ¹³⁻c/ G S (non-significant addition of conjunction, agreeing with Greek and Syrohexapla)
17b L²⁷⁻c (scribal error)
17c P⁸⁻c (addition of silent letter, a misspelling)
17d L²⁷⁻c P⁷⁻m R⁹⁻m (scribal error)
17e C⁵/ G (S) / (2) R¹⁰⁻c S⁷, ⁹⁻c change to singular; omission of suffix)
17f S⁶, ⁷, ⁸, ⁹, ¹⁰⁻c (common variant spelling)
17g L³(2) L¹¹⁻m/ (2) C⁵ P⁸⁻c R¹⁰⁻c S⁶, ⁷, ⁸, ⁹, ¹⁰⁻c W²⁻c H T G S / (3) om R¹³⁻c (addition of suffix pronoun; addition of suffix and transposition of letters, making the first person plural verb form, which is doubtless the correct and original form, the first variant actually being a transposition from this; omission)
17h om P⁸⁻c/ (G S) (omission)
18a om L²⁷⁻c (omission of probably one line, doubtless a homoioteleuton)
18b P³ R², ³, ⁵/ (2) L⁶(2) L⁹(mg)-m P⁷⁻m R⁷, ⁹⁻m R¹⁰, ¹¹, ¹³⁻c S⁶, ⁷, ⁸, ⁹, ¹⁰⁻c/ (3) pr S⁸⁻c/ (G S) (scribal spelling variations; addition)
18c L⁵ R⁹⁻m R¹⁰⁻c S⁶, ⁷, ⁹, ¹⁰⁻c W²⁻c/ (2) S⁸⁻c/ (3) P⁸⁻c (three substitutions)
The Variants in Is 26 in Patristic Quotations

vs. 8 Eph Op Om II, 62 (change of first person suffix from plural to singular)
9\( (g) \) ἔρημος Ἔφ Οφ ὸμ II, 62 (addition of suffix)

11\( (d) \) ἔρημος Ἔφ Οφ ὸμ II, 62 / H T G S (change from “furnace” to “fire,” with the four texts—probably a scribal error in the Urmia text)

13\( (l) \) ἔρημος Ἔφ Οφ ὸμ II, 63 (change from imperfect to perfect verb, reflexive, first person plural)

18 ἐσεῖς Ἐφ Οφ ὸμ II, 64 / G S (substitution of a synonym)

19\( (a) \) ἔρημος Ἔφ Οφ ὸμ II, 64 (omission by homoioteleuton)

21 ἐσεῖς Ἐφ Οφ ὸμ II, 64 / G S (omission)

Conclusion

It is interesting to note that while the 124 variants (+ five, because five pertained to two categories at the same time, making 129) of the MSS fell into 23 of the 35 categories of kinds of variation found in our study, the seven variants of the patristic quotations fell into five of the categories. While Ephraim, of the fourth century, alone is the source for the seven variants found only in patristic quotations, both he (five times) and Aphrahat, earlier in the fourth century (once) as well as the seventh-century Livre de la Perfection (once) give support to MS variants, but no other patristic sources do this in ch. 26.

The most common variant consisted of the addition of one or more words (27 of the 129; see above); next came substitutions (16), scribal errors such as those of spelling (12), and omission of one or more words (11). Such scribal errors as omission by homoioteleuton or transposition were classified under omissions and transpositions rather than as scribal errors; otherwise the majority of variants could be classified as scribal errors, and distinctions would be blurred.
The chapter gives a fair sampling of the variants found in our whole study. Only five of those in ch. 26 were included in those considered worth evaluating as possible traces of Old Syriac, since those to be evaluated were limited to substitutions, scribal errors, omissions, additions, instances of a different form of the same word, transpositions, and clauses worded entirely differently. The last-named did not occur in ch. 26; the others provided 75, or 58 per cent, of the variants of ch. 26, yet their number was further reduced before the evaluation by their lack of support from the Aramaic Targum and/or a patristic quotation. We consider it extremely hazardous to say that a variant represents the oldest text type unless it does have the support of the Targum and/or one of the most ancient patristic sources, and even then it may be a coincidence of scribal errors. Only 47 of the screened

* The addition or dropping of the conjunction, which is involved in 15 of the 129 variants of this chapter, or 12 per cent, once with support of the *Livre de la Perfection*, is completely non-significant; a scribe somewhere will be found to have added or dropped it in the Syriac, and the same scribal tendency was at work in the four basic texts, the Hebrew, Targum, Greek, and Syrohexapla. M. H. Goshen-Gottstein correctly pointed this out in “Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the Peshitta,” in *Text and Language in Bible and Qumran* (Jerusalem, 1960), p. 174: “Especially vexing is the problem of the *Waw* copulative. One feels tempted to state that, provided a sufficiently large number of manuscripts is compared, there is hardly any case in which the addition (or omission) of a *Waw* would be syntactically or exegetically possible without at least one manuscript exhibiting such a deviation.” In the note on that page he adds: “... by now I feel convinced more than ever that the systematic noting of *waws* in the apparatuses to MT would lead us nowhere. No foreseeable result would justify the amount of work and the trebling (at least) of the size of the apparatus, which would be flooded by *waw*-readings.”

Yet an analysis of the variants that Arthur Vööbus exhibits as genuine traces of Old Syriac in *Peschitta und Targumim des Pentateuchs* (Stockholm, 1958) shows that 12 per cent of them consist of just this—addition or omission of the *waw* conjunction, with support of one or more Targum MSS.

Bruce M. Metzger discusses the problem of methodology in evaluating variants in connection with the “Caesarean text” of the Greek New Testament, coming to the same conclusion—that some variants are worthless: “... is it really legitimate to utilize all variants, large
IOI variants evaluated were judged to be probably genuine traces of Old Syriac, 24 of these being Targum traces, as shown in the preceding three-part article.

Glancing through the variants that have been presented here, one receives an overwhelming impression of scribal fallibility at work. Some examples are $3^b$; $9^h$; $10^a$ and $10^b$, which should go together, but the MSS for each are not the same ones except for two liturgical MSS from Sinai. In $10^c$ and $10^d$, the fact that the same added words appear in two locations in the text adds further suspicion to them. $11^d$ is a patent dittography, made still easier by the good sense it made, "furnace of fire." The same long addition appears in $12^a$ and $9^a$, widely separated, each time found in one (not the same) liturgical MS. The second occurrence shows its source—the Syrohexapla, for the first half of the addition minus pronominal suffix.

$12^b$ is dropping of a letter; the change of pronominal suffix in $12^c$ is especially easily made if a scribe is writing a different script than his Vorlage contains, or if the MS has a break or and small, to determine the relation between manuscripts? Manifestly a spectacular variant, such as the presence of the pericope de adultera after Luke 21.38 in the manuscripts of family $13$, has real significance in disclosing the textual affinities of a given manuscript. But it seems to the present writer that the possibility of mere chance coincidence among manuscripts in agreeing in small variations (involving inter alia, word order, common synonyms, the presence or absence of the article, the aorist for the imperfect or historical present) has not been sufficiently taken into account. . . . If one hundred people today were to transcribe independently from a common text, how often would they agree fortuitously in their errors? The point is that in many instances it is exceedingly difficult to decide with finality whether a given variant present in four or five manuscripts is significant or insignificant in determining genealogy. The conclusion which one must draw is that some of the variants which are commonly utilized . . . are not really capable of turning the scales in either direction." Chapters in the History of New Testament Criticism (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1963), p. 72.

In the present article and the preceding three-part report of the investigation of the Syriac text of Isaiah we have laid bare our methodology at every step, and will welcome scholarly discussion of the problems involved.
a smudge at the spot. The variety of changes at $13^b$ evidences scribal corruption; $13^f$ and $14^b$, $1, 2$ are doubtless scribal errors. In $14^c$, the first variant, with agreement of all four basic texts and Ephraim, is probably the original, from which the Urmia text form occurred by a misreading, and the other variant by a different misreading. $15^a$, a verse omission in three liturgical texts, is not due to similar forms but just to carelessness; $15^d$ is a homoioteleuton. $15^b$'s transpositions and conflation are obviously to be credited to the scribes.

The singular reading at $15^e$ in the wretchedly copied $O^2$ cannot command respect. $15^f$ is an example of one of the most common scribal errors in MSS involving Semitic languages. $16^d$, $17^b$, $c, d, e$, and $18^a$ are all obviously scribal errors. $17^g$ is interesting; the correct form is the second variant, with agreement of all four basic texts, and probably the first variant and the Urmia form developed from it. $18^b$ shows misspellings in both directions and Greek influence through the Syrohexapla; the variety of pronouns in $18^e$ is interesting.

It is difficult to characterize $18^d$; writing one dot over the $r$ instead of two is the only change, yet the result is to make the word singular, agreeing with the four texts. One is tempted to say that the plural form was the Old Syriac, and the two Sinai MSS deviated from it by scribal error, rather than being influenced by one or more of the texts. $18^e$ is scribal; also the variety at $19^d$.

To mention several that may be genuine Old Syriac, $13^c$, $15^{h_2}$, $19^{e_1}$, $19^{e_2}$, and $19^{g_1}$ were the 5 included in the evaluations of 101 out of 3339 readings in our investigation. $13^c$'s variant reading is found in 34 MSS, in the Targum, and in Ephraim's quotation; it was probably the original, and the Urmia form together with 3 MSS, $L^1$, $L^2$ and $P_8^c$, show a scribal error for it. The Hebrew, Greek, and Syrohexapla furnish no help here, reading differently.

$15^{h_2}$'s substitution of "wicked ones of the earth" for "ends of the earth" agrees with the word "wicked ones" in the
Targum; it occurs only in the liturgical MSS and may well be a genuine trace of the older text type.

19el, e2 agree with the Targum in adding the word "all," which may be the original text form, but on the other hand it would be easy for a scribe to bring this in from many parallel passages, such as 18: 3. One dare not be dogmatic on these matters. The other variations here are obviously scribal.

19gl is another instance of substitution of "wicked ones," this time with the agreement of the Greek and the Syrohexapla as well as the Targum. The second variant doubtless resulted from it; it may be the ancient form of the text.

Another, not included in the evaluations, is 19a. The addition is supported by the two oldest Syrian authors, Aphrahat and Ephraim; it may be genuine. Also 19b, where the passive verb form is supported by the Greek and the Syrohexapla as well as found in Ephraim's quotation, may be genuine—or it may be one of the instances of influence upon Ephraim from the Greek text. Dogmatic assertions are not in order.

Concerning the seven variants in the patristic quotations of ch. 26, all of which are found only in Ephraim's writings, 18 and 21 have the agreement of the Greek text and the Syrohexapla, with which Ephraim shows agreement as often as he does with Hebrew and the Targum. In 18, either word would, of course, translate the Greek word, but the Syrohexapla has the variant word, along with Ephraim—the Syrohexapla following Ephraim by about two and a half centuries, of course. All four basic texts support Ephraim's variant in 11(d); thus it seems all the clearer that the Old Syriac text-type had "furnace," to which the scribes of eight MSS (see above) added "of fire," the reading of the four texts and of Ephraim being just "fire." (The four references followed by a letter in parentheses also occur, with slight differences, among the variants from Biblical MSS.) 8 and 13f may be adaptations Ephraim made in fitting the quotations into his own sentences or in quoting from memory; 19(d) is a
scribal error made by Ephraim, or by the scribe of his Vorlage, or by a later scribe copying Ephraim’s MS.

It is apparent that the great mass of variant readings is worth very little for the recovery of the archaic text (as is true in all text-critical work, of course); it is equally apparent that great caution must be used in pronouncing certain readings Old Syriac. So little evidence is coercive; so many times one can only conclude, “It could be a genuine trace—or, a scribal error!”