George Kiraz and Andreas Juckel, eds. The Syriac Peshiṭta Bible with English Translation / ܟܬܒܐ ܩܕܫܐ ܦܫܝܛܬܐ ܥܡ ܬܪܓܡܐ ܠܐܢܓܠܝܐ / ܥܬܝܩ ܘܚܕܬ. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2012ff. Individual volumes at various prices.

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'The Antioch Bible' is the name of convenience for this series of volumes, the aim of which is, according to its editors, twofold: to give scholars a fully vocalized Syriac text, and to provide an English translation for use in churches of the Syriac tradition. It is a large project involving many scholars, and its progress can be followed on the website of the Gorgias Press: to date, twenty-two volumes have appeared out of a projected thirty-five. This reviewer has had two of the earlier volumes (2012) from each Testament (Isaiah, Twelve Prophets, Matthew, and Mark). The text of the two Old Testament volumes was prepared by George Kiraz and Joseph Bali and the translation by Gillian Greenberg and Donald M. Walter. The text of the two Gospel volumes was prepared by Kiraz and the translation by Jeff W. Childers.

To take the editors' two stated aims one at a time. The Syriac text is handsomely and comfortably presented. To be sure, some of the comforts seem intended not so much for scholars as for readers in the church community, and perhaps it leans a little far in this direction. Do readers, even beginners, really require the linea occultans on silent letters in such forms as ܡܠܟܐ? (And for consistency, we would expect (but fortunately do not get) ܐܝܟ, ܒܪܝܬܐ , and ܗܘ ܕܐܡܪ ܠܗ ܡܠܟܐ.) Some readers may also be annoyed by the form ܐ always used instead of ܐܢ and calligraphic affectations like ܨ (final lomad and initial olaph) and ܤ (semkath-ṭeth). Nor does the text claim to be a critical edition in the strict sense. There is no apparatus criticus at the foot of the page; there are no diacritical points as in old manuscripts; and sentence-punctuation is simply taken over from the printed editions that are the basis of the text.

These are its limitations; but on the other hand, great trouble and care have gone into the making of a correct and consistent West Syriac text in spelling, vocalization, and pointing with qushshaya and rukkaka (Q and R). In the New Testament, the establishment of the text was somewhat straightforward (if still demanding, for the sake of accuracy) since the text is taken from

the British and Foreign Bible Society edition of 1920, which is in West Syriac dress already. In the Old Testament, it was harder since the choice of base text was the vocalized East Syriac Mosul edition of 1887–8. Not that 'Western' readings had to be substituted for 'Eastern'—there hardly is a difference in the text between the two classes of manuscripts[1]—but spelling and vocalization rules in particular are different. The editor's prefaces to each volume explain the way the text was made to conform to West Syriac conventions. (These remarks, incidentally, make a useful introduction to the differences between Eastern and Western spelling.)

Western spellings and vowels, and Q and R, being the distinctive features of the edition, it may be excusable to stop over them here. Like all 'global' changes imposed on a text, spellings sometimes give trouble. One of the grammatical forms that required westernizing, even from the BFBS edition, is 3rd feminine plural perfect verbs, thus changing ܩܛܠ to ܩܛܠܢ ; and just occasionnally the form ܩܛܠ could be ambiguous. A possible example is Zechariah 9.2 where the form was left alone, ܘܨܝܕܘܢ ܘܬܝܪ ܟܝ ܚܟܡܬ ܠܗ: if the translation is indeed 'and Tyre and Sidon, which have become very wise' then I think the verb needs to be spelled ܚܟܡܬ. Another spelling rule followed was to supply yod in the syllable rish; so we get ܒܥܝܪܐ for the Eastern ܒܥܪܐ in Isa 3.17 etc.; but here something that has escaped is the name Jerusalem, which is ܐܘܪܫܠܡ (and I think by an oversight ܐܘܪܫܠܡ in the two Old Testament volumes). Finally, there is the curious pointing of 3rd feminine singular verbs with two points, above and below the final taw, e.g. ܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܒܪܬܗ Matt 9.22 and innumerable other places. The lower point might be rukkaka, but what is the upper one? In fact, the double point is one of a set of diacritics,[2] and there is no reason to have it in an edition which otherwise dispenses with such points.

No one will envy George Kiraz in his task of applying Q or R to every bgdkpt letter in the Bible. He explains that a computer program identified the letters not already provided with one or the other in the base text: these were again mostly in the Old Testament; but the decisions of the BFBS editors in the New Testament

[1] M. Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament* (Cambridge, 1999), 306–7.

[2] Th. Nöldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar* (Eng. tr. 1904), §7.

were revisited too. Dictionaries, grammars, Masoretic manuscripts, and George Kiraz's own monograph on spirantization[3] were consulted. Reading the Antioch Bible text with Q and R in mind (something few readers will do!) can give an education in the subject. The present reviewer learned, for example, that the West Syriac rule about spirantizing initial consonants when the previous word ends in a vowel (e.g. ܒܝܘܡܐ ܕܢܩܛܠ ܒܪܟܝܐ Matt 23.35), does not apply when the last letter of the previous word is he even though there is no consonantal sound (thus ܒܝܘܡܐ ܗܘ ܕܢܩܛܘܠ in the same verse). Even so, some of the editor's choices must have been almost arbitrary, where for example Masoretic manuscripts differed or were silent, and it would be easy to make a long list of words on which the R and Q are at least discussable. For example, in Isa 40.29 ܠܚܫܝܫ̈ܐ ‘and to those who suffer pain’, is the Q on beth a mistake, or has some non-obvious rule been applied? And no doubt very rarely, the choice of R or Q can affect the translation. Isa 29.3 (where the Hebrew is obscure) reads ܘܐܦܩܝܦ ܥܠܝܟ ܐܝܟ ܚܝܠܐ and is translated ‘I will besiege you like a company of soldiers’. But ‘company of soldiers’ is ܐܟܬܐ with Q on the pe. With R, the word could derive instead from σφαῖρα and might mean here something like ‘I will encircle you’.[4]

The editors' second aim has been to provide an English translation to church readers. This readership is clearly in mind in Jeff Childers's Matthew and Mark volumes. An introductory section ‘Translating the Peshiṭta’ explains that his goal was a ‘fair idiomatic translation’ for ‘popular reading’ and ‘liturgy’. One feature of such a translation—now familiar in such versions as the NRSV, but perhaps new in the Syriac world—is the adoption of gender-neutral expressions such as ‘brothers and sisters’ for ܐܚܐ (likewise ‘he or she’ for the proselyte in Matt 23.15; but can a proselyte be female?). The quality of Childers's translation is high and I would point out only a couple of less happy decisions. One of these is to translate √ܩܛܠ (pe. and pa.) as ‘murder’ (as in Matt 23.31 ‘You are the children of those who murdered the prophets’). This must be deliberate, but surely the Syriac verb is no stronger than the Greek ἀποκτείνω underlying English ‘kill’. (And we do not

[3] G. Kiraz, *Introduction to Syriac Spirantization (Rukkōkhô and Quššōyô)* (Bar Hebraeus Verlag, 1995).

[4] Cf. R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, vol. 1, 314b.

need Matthew to be read as more anti-Jewish than he is!) Another one is to render ܡܫܝܚܐ always as 'Messiah'. Overwhelmingly in the Greek New Testament, Christos is a proper name; that is how the Peshiṭta translators met it; and any other English translation than 'Christ' needs to be justified. Perhaps 'the Messiah' can be defended some of the time in Matthew and Mark, but hardly in Mk 1.1 'the gospel of Jesus Christ' or 9.41 'your belonging to Christ'. At least there should be footnotes in these places.

For his lay audience too, Childers provides a polite but firm dismissal of the theory of 'Aramaic primacy' that lies behind the other English translation of the New Testament in popular use, by George M. Lamsa[5] (Mark, XVIII–XIX). There is also a section on 'noteworthy readings', which are miscellaneous, illustrating the 'varied interest attaching itself to the Syriac text' (Matthew, XXIII).

In the Old Testament volumes, a different state of affairs is addressed, and the church readership is not so much in view. Here, at least in the poetical books of Isaiah and the Twelve Prophets, the problem is often knowing how to understand the Peshiṭta text at all. Greenberg and Walter rightly emphasize the benefit of having a nearly word-for-word translation (Isaiah, XVI). This translation, which seems to me admirable and generally very accurate, shows what the Peshiṭta translators had to do in difficult passages. They aimed at a 'balance between fidelity and intelligibility',[6] most often having to sacrifice some of each. An example is Nahum 1.12: 'Concerning the sources of many waters, which ran and passed on: though I answered you, I will not answer you again.' This is just about meaningful, but to arrive at even this low level of intelligibility, the Peshiṭta translators departed from the Hebrew in two places. The issues in this verse and similar ones are well documented in the technical 'Addenda' to the Introduction, and these Addenda, analysing 'passages where the meaning of MT [the Hebrew] is not precisely rendered in P [the Peshiṭta]', running to 26 pages for the Twelve Prophets and 6 for Isaiah, will be among the most valuable features of the Old Testament volumes.

Perhaps the aims of the Antioch Bible should not be understood too narrowly after all. The text is not only for scholars; the translation is not only for Christian readers; and added value

[5] *The New Testament According to the Eastern Text* (1940).

[6] Weitzman, *Syriac Version*, 205.

can be found in the introductory matter that considers the place of the Peshiṭta text in relation to Greek, Hebrew, and even 'Aramaic'. The most various of readers can benefit from having a Syriac reference Bible of first recourse, and the Antioch Bible stands to meet this want.