

## INTRODUCTION.

DURING the greater part of the first nine centuries of our Era the language commonly used in the Valley of the Euphrates and the neighbouring provinces was the dialect of Aramaic which we call Syriac. The literary headquarters of the Syriac-speaking Church was the city of Edessa (in Syriac *Urhāi*), which also had been the centre from which Christianity spread in all that region. The beginnings of Christianity at Edessa are lost in legend, but it is certain that the new religion was well established there before the city was absorbed into the Roman Empire during the reign of Caracalla (AD 216). The political independence of the little state accounts for the early translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular of the Euphrates Valley.

About the year 420 AD the Gospel was extant in Syriac in three forms, *viz* :—

1. The present Syriac Vulgate, now called the *Pēshittā*.
2. The *Diatessaron* of Tatian.
3. A translation of the Four Gospels, called by the Syrians *Evangelion da-Mēpharrēshē*.

The *Evangelion da-Mēpharrēshē* (ܐܘܢܘܢܐ ܕܡܘܫܐܘܪܐ, i.e. 'Evangel of the Separated ones') derives its name by contrast with the *Diatessaron*, which is a Harmony containing the substance of our Four Canonical Gospels arranged in one narrative. This Harmony, besides the naturalised Greek name *Diatessaron* (ܕܝܘܬܝܫܐܪܘܢ), was also called *Evangelion da-Mēhallētē* (ܐܘܢܘܢܐ ܕܡܘܫܐܘܪܐ ܕܡܫܠܠܐ, i.e. 'Evangel of the Mixed ones').

The main object of the following pages is to trace the history of the *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe*, and to determine as far as possible its relations to the *Diatessaron* and to the *Peshitta*.

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The *Pëshittá* (ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܫܐܢ, i.e. ‘The Simple Edition’) does not seem to have acquired this name earlier than the 9th century<sup>1</sup>. It is called *Simple* to distinguish it from the later versions of the Old and New Testaments made by Paul of Tella and Thomas of Harkel, both of which were provided with an apparatus of critical signs inserted in the text. The name *Peshitta* is never used by Syriac writers to distinguish the Syriac Vulgate either from the *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe* or from the *Diatessaron*, but the term is distinctive, and it is sometimes convenient to continue its use. In the same way we speak of the Latin *Vulgate* as opposed to pre-Hieronymian texts, although the term *Vulgata editio* was originally used by the Council of Trent to contrast S. Jerome’s work with the new translations of Erasmus, Beza, and others.

The Peshitta is the only version now used in the Church services. It is so used by all branches of Syriac-speaking Christendom, whether Nestorian, Monophysite, Maronite, or Malkite. This fact alone is enough to prove that its general acceptance is older than the great split between the Nestorians and Monophysites after the middle of the 5th century<sup>2</sup>. In this version mss of the Gospels are very numerous and a few are themselves as ancient as the 5th century, but they all represent the same type of text, the variations being considerably less important than those exhibited by the better mss of the Latin Vulgate. There are several editions of the Peshitta New Testament, none greatly differing from the *editio princeps* of Widmanstadius or Widmanstetter (Vienna, 1555): a useful small edition was published in 1880 at New York and subsequently reprinted. A critical edition is now being prepared at the Clarendon Press by the Rev. G. H. Gwilliam, B.D., who has collated for the purpose all the oldest codices: of this edition, the volume containing the Gospels (called *Tetra-evangelium Sanctum*) appeared in 1901.

The wide use of the *Diatessaron* in the early Syriac-speaking Church is undoubted. This work (to quote Dr Wright) “certainly gained

<sup>1</sup> *Pëshittá* is the pronunciation according to the ‘Nestorian’ System, which preserves the older sound of the vowels, as in *Talitha* and *Maranatha*. The Monophysites and Maronites say *Pëshittó*. The word is a fem. adj. in the ‘definite’ state, agreeing with *mappaktá*, i.e. ‘Edition’, but Bar Hebraeus sometimes uses it by itself in the ‘absolute’ fem., hence the spelling *Peshito*. The form *Peschito* is merely an adaptation to German orthography.

<sup>2</sup> The Nestorian School at Edessa was finally broken up in 489.

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great popularity in the early Syrian Church, and almost superseded the Separate Gospels. Aphraates quoted it; Ephraim wrote a commentary on it; the *Doctrine of Addai* (in its present shape a work of the latter half of the 4th century) transfers it to the apostolic times; Rabbula, bishop of Edessa (411–435), promulgated an order that ‘the priests and deacons should take care that in every church there should be a copy of the Separate Gospels (*Evangelion da-Mépharrēshē*), and that it should be read’; and Theodoret, bishop of Cyrillus (423–457), swept up more than two hundred copies of it in the churches of his diocese, and introduced the four Gospels in their place: τὰ τῶν τεττάρων εὐαγγελιστῶν ἀντεισηγάγον εὐαγγέλια.”<sup>1</sup>

The policy of Rabbula and Theodoret was only too successful. Not a single copy of the *Diatessaron* has survived in anything approaching its original form—that form, I mean, in which it was known to and used by Aphraates and Ephraim. The discoveries of the last twenty years have enabled us to determine with considerable accuracy the order followed by Tatian, but it is only here and there (and generally by way of inference rather than direct testimony) that we can reconstruct the actual text of the *Diatessaron*.

The chief sources of information about the *Diatessaron* now available are :—

(i) *The Commentary of S. Ephraim.*

This work is preserved in an Armenian translation, which has been printed in vol. ii of S. Ephraim’s Works (Venice, 1836). A Latin translation of the Armenian was made by the Mechitarist Aucher and edited in 1876 by G. Mösinger, but the passages quoted by Ephraim from the *Diatessaron* are more accurately given in an English version revised by Dr Armitage Robinson in Dr Hamlyn Hill’s *Earliest Life of Christ*, pp. 333–377<sup>2</sup>.

Some fragments of the original Syriac of S. Ephraim’s book, which moreover include a few important readings from the *Diatessaron* itself, are imbedded in later Syriac writers, notably the commentators Îshô‘-dâd the Nestorian (*fl.* 852) and Dionysius Bar Şalibi the Monophysite

<sup>1</sup> Wright’s *Syriac Literature*, p. 9 : for further details, see Chapter 4 of this volume.

<sup>2</sup> Repeated in Dr Hill’s *Dissertation on the Gospel Commentary of S. Ephraem*, pp. 75–119. The pages of Mösinger’s edition, by which the Commentary is always quoted, are to be found in Dr Hill’s margin.

(† 1171). Neither of these somewhat voluminous compilations has as yet been published, but most of the quotations from S. Ephraim have been collected in Dr Rendel Harris's *Fragments of the Commentary of Ephrem Syrus on the Diatessaron* (Cambridge, 1895).

(ii) *The quotations from the Gospel in Aphraates.*

The Homilies of Aphraates were written between the years 337 and 345. In his numerous Evangelical references and allusions he never mentions either the Diatessaron or the evangelists by name, but it is universally recognised that some at least of his quotations are from the Diatessaron rather than from the Separated Gospels. This is notably the case with the rapid survey of our Lord's ministry at the end of Homily II (Wright's *Aphraates*, pp. 41–43).

(iii) *The Arabic Diatessaron.*

This is a careful translation of the Diatessaron from Syriac into Arabic made by the Nestorian monk Ibn at-Ṭayyib († 1043). It was edited from two MSS by A. Ciasca of the Vatican Library in 1888. A Latin translation was given by Ciasca, and an English one is to be found in Dr Hamlyn Hill's *Earliest Life of Christ*, published in 1894. Unfortunately the Syriac text of the Diatessaron from which the Arabic was translated had been subjected to a revision which very seriously lessens its worth for critical purposes.

In its original, or at any rate earlier, form the Syriac Diatessaron was very closely akin in its renderings to the *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe*. The causes which led to this textual resemblance are the subject of controversy, but the fact is undisputed. Moreover the Evangelists were not named in the text of the Harmony. But in Ciasca's Arabic the text is conformed to the Peshitta, and every clause is labelled 'Matthew,' 'Mark,' 'Luke,' or 'John.' In other words the Syriac Diatessaron from which the Arabic version was made had been prepared by identifying the Gospel passages out of which Tatian's Harmony had been constructed, and substituting clause by clause the corresponding passages as given in the Peshitta<sup>1</sup>.

The three documents above mentioned supply our main information about the text of the ancient Syriac *Diatessaron*. The *Peshitta*, as has

<sup>1</sup> The Latin Harmony prepared by Victor of Capua, preserved in the *Codex Fuldensis*, was constructed in the same way out of what seems to have been a Latin text of Tatian's *Diatessaron*.

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been already stated, is preserved in many ancient MSS, some as old as the 5th century. The third form of the Gospel in Syriac, the *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe*, is represented by the two ancient MSS called *C* and *S* in the following chapters.

Besides these primary authorities we have to reckon with the scattered quotations from the Gospel in the scanty remains of Syriac literature before the second quarter of the 5th century. It is an obviously delicate task to distinguish between quotations from the Gospels and quotations from the Diatessaron, when (as often happens) the wording of the Gospel and of the Diatessaron coincides, and it is only in the case of the *Acts of Thomas* that we can be sure that the writer is using the Separate Canonical Gospels. The quotations have been collected in the present work, and are discussed in Chapter 3.

The main conclusions to which I have been led may be summarised as follows :—

(1) The Peshitta is a revision of the *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe*, undertaken mainly with the object of conforming the translation more closely to the Greek text as read at Antioch early in the 5th century. It was prepared by Rabbula, bishop of Edessa from 411–435 AD, and published by his authority as a substitute for the Diatessaron.

(2) The Diatessaron is the earliest form of the Gospel in Syriac. It was made originally in Greek, probably at Rome, by Tatian the disciple of Justin Martyr, and translated into Syriac during Tatian's lifetime, about 170 AD. As might be expected from a document geographically Western in origin, the Gospel text of the Diatessaron is very nearly akin to that of Codex Bezae (D) and the various forms of the Old Latin version.

(3) The *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe* dates from about the year 200 AD. It was the earliest rendering of the Four separate Gospels into Syriac, but the translator was familiar with the Diatessaron and often adopted its phraseology. There is great probability that the *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe* was prepared under the auspices of Serapion, the bishop of Antioch who is mentioned in the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius as having suppressed the apocryphal Gospel of Peter, and there is some reason to identify the translator with Palut, the third bishop of Edessa.

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(4) In text, the *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe*, so far as it is a direct translation from the Greek, reproduces for us the Greek text current in Antioch at the end of the 2nd century, a text of great critical value which is often very slenderly represented in extant Greek mss. But the use of the Diatessaron by the translator has often introduced readings which really belong to the texts current in Western lands. Moreover both *S* and *C*, our two mss of the *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe*, contain readings which have been assimilated to the Diatessaron by transcribers; and further, *C* represents a text that has been partially revised by later Greek mss.

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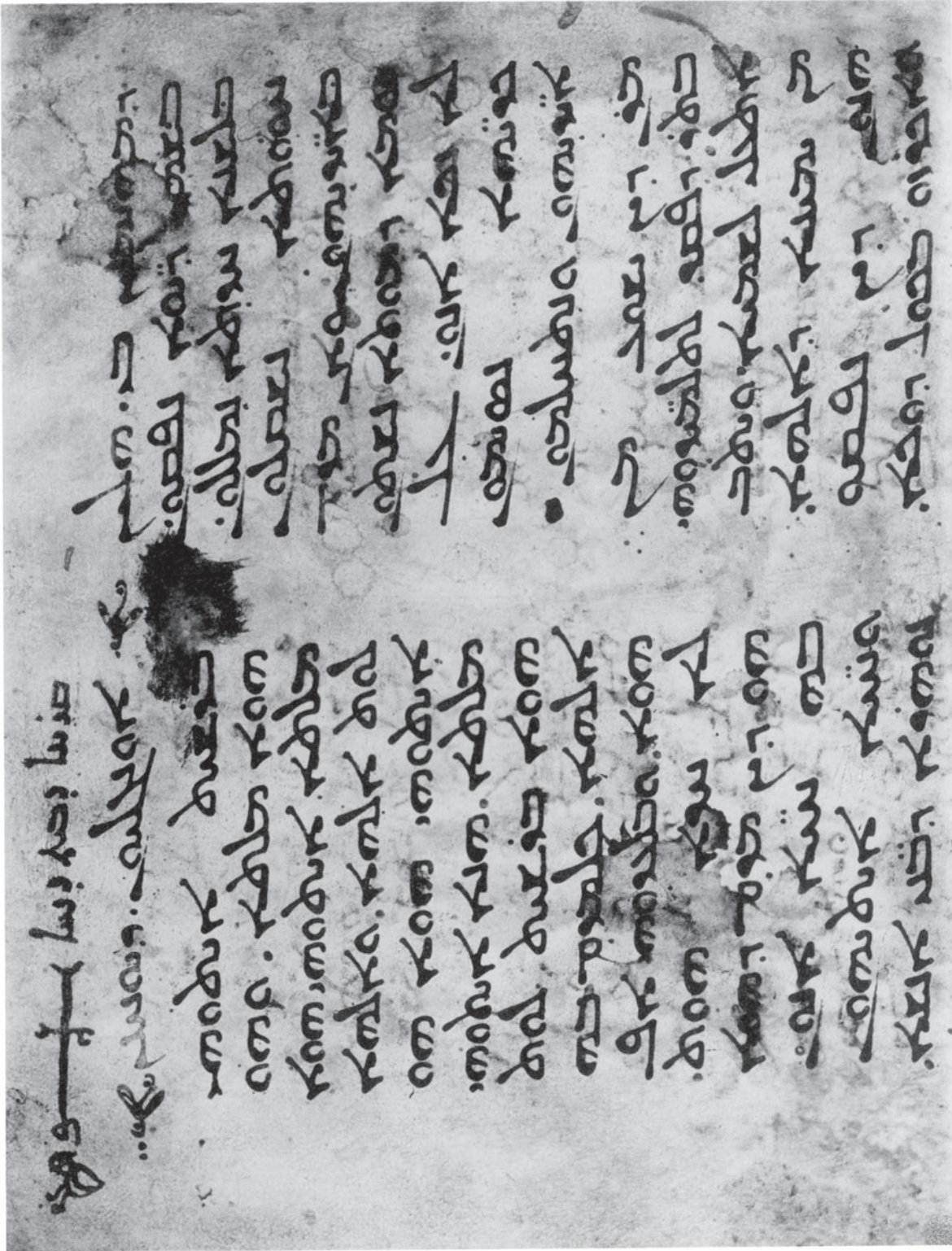
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CODEx C, upper part of fol. 39 r, natural size.  
This page contains Mk xvi 17–20 followed by Joh i 1–7.



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## CHAPTER I.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE MSS.

CODEX *C*.

CODEX NITRIENSIS CURETONIANUS, called in this book *C*, consists in its present state of 82½ leaves in the British Museum, numbered Add. 14451, and of three leaves at Berlin, forming the fly-leaves of *Orient. Quart.* 528. The British Museum leaves are described in Wright's *Catalogue*, p. 73, No. CXIX. The MS came from the great Library of the Convent of S. Mary Deipara in the Natron Valley, west of Cairo.

*Later history of C.*

The preservation of *C* appears to be the result rather of a happy accident than of reverence for antiquity. Eighty of the surviving leaves reached England in 1842 as part of a volume of the Gospels made up in the year 1222 AD from various MSS of the same size; the other leaves of the volume were taken from copies of the Peshitta, and the binder hardly seems to have been aware that the text of *C* was different from the rest. The remaining leaves came to Europe as fly-leaves to strengthen the bindings of other books. The leaves thus used are *fol.* 53, containing Lk ii 48—iii 16; and the Berlin leaves, containing Joh vii 37—viii 19, Lk xv 22—xvi 12, xvii 1—23. Two more detached leaves reached the British Museum in 1847: *fol.* 52, the half-leaf containing fragments of Joh xiv; and *fol.* 72, containing Lk xiv 35—xv 21.

Of the earlier history of *C* we know very little. On the blank *recto* of the first leaf is written in a hand of about the 10th century the following note of its presentation to the Library of S. Mary Deipara:—

אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם | אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם ::  
 הַלְלוּ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ | הַלְלוּ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ ::  
 אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם | אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם ::  
 אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם | אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם ::  
 אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם | אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם ::  
 אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם | אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם ::  
 אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם | אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם ::  
 אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם | אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם ::  
 אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם | אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם ::  
 אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם | אֲנִי הָיִיתִי מִן הַמְּנַחֵם ::

"This book belonged to the monk Habibai, who presented it to the holy monastery of the Church of the Deipara belonging to the Syrians in the desert of Scete, that God, abounding in mercy and compassion, for the sake of whose glorious Name he separated and gave this spiritual treasure, might pardon his faults and forgive his shortcomings and number him among His own elect in the day that His mercy cometh to life, by the prayers of all the circle of the Saints. Amen, amen !

"Son of the Living God, have pity in the hour of Thy judgement on the sinner that wrote this. Amen !"

Whether *C* was perfect when it was presented to the Nitrian Library by the monk Habibai we do not know, but there are some indications that it was in a tattered condition before the rebinding in 1222 AD. The table of the quires given below shews a large proportion of loose leaves, and some marks on *fol.* 75 v, 76 v, 77 r, shew that *fol.* 72 was once lying loose between 76 and 77, while at the same time *fol.* 79 was facing 75. The conjugates of *fol.* 77 and 79 are now at Berlin : no doubt they were loose detached leaves when they were used to strengthen the binding of the book in which they now rest.

After the rebinding in AD 1222 a few Church-lessons were marked in the margin, and a misguided person corrected some of the pages containing the Sermon on the Mount to the Peshitta text. But the original reading can in all cases be made out<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The only word which presents any difficulty is **מִן** in Matt v 39, where Cureton failed to decipher the original reading and edited **כִּי** (the Peshitta reading) between square brackets. In Matt v 41 the word **בְּחַ** has been entirely retraced by this late corrector.