15.3 Syriac

15.3.1 Introduction

S-Wis, like the Peshitta as a whole (→ 1.3.4), was likely completed before the early third century C.E. Other (non-Peshitta) Syriac translations surfaced as early as the seventh century C.E., and there are references to Aramaic/Syriac translations of the Wisdom of Solomon as late as the thirteenth century, as discussed below (→ 1.2.5.4).

15.3.2 Manuscript Evidence and Editions

Modern editions of Wisdom in Syriac include de Largarde’s edition from 1861,2 Emerton’s 1959 edition3 and the edition produced in 1979 by Emerton and Lane with Brill in Leiden.4 Older modern editions include the London Polyglot (1645)5 and the Mosul edition (1888). The texts of both the Emerton and Leiden editions are reproductions of the sixth- or seventh century C.E. manuscript Ambrosianus B. 21 Inferiore (S7a1 in the Leiden edition; manuscript a in Emerton’s edition), with corrections of typographical errors. Both editions group together the oldest three witnesses (Leiden edition, S7a1, S7g2, S8a1; Emerton, aAB) from the sixth to the eighth century C.E. because they share many common readings and the differences are often minor variants. The Leiden edition follows Emerton’s division of existing manuscript evidence into Eastern and Western families. Emerton distinguishes between two groups of Western manuscripts: (1) manuscripts S17a1–7. 17a1 as “Seventeenth Century Mss,” some of which share a Maronite origin, and (2) manuscripts S12a1. 16g6. 19g5. 19g7, with manuscripts S19g5 and S19g7 representing a slightly different textual tradition than the other Western witnesses. The Leiden edition, which is based on S7a1, combines these two groups. Leiden S12a1 (Emerton, manuscript C) is the best example of the Western text type. The Eastern family (Leiden, S1661 fam; Emerton, manuscripts EHQSTNm) share many common readings and resemble the old witness Leiden, S8a1 (Emerton B). They are all written in the East Syriac script (with the exception of S8a1), which seems to be the primary reason for grouping them together.

15.3.3 Other Syriac Witnesses: Syro-Hexapla, Nachmanides, and Jacob of Edessa

Rizzi argues that the Syro-Hexapla (→ 1.1.4.5) is a much better translation than the Peshitta.6 While it is “so literal as to be slavish,” the preserved diacritical marks and marginal notes provide explanations for the translator’s decisions.7 Thus, Rizzi argues, the Syro-Hexapla translator had a better general knowledge of Greek, although he admits that even this translator had difficulty rendering the sense of the last few chapters into Syriac.8

Another independent witness to the Syriac of the Wisdom of Solomon occurs in several quotations of the text from the medieval Hebrew commentator, Nachmanides (1194–1270). Nachmanides calls this text “The Great Wisdom of Solomon” (חכמה רבה של שלמה); the title in S-Wis is “Great Wisdom.” In his commentary on Deut 21:14, Nachmanides quotes Wis 7:5–8a and 7:17–21.10 He also cites the latter pericope in a lecture in the synagogue at Barcelona in 1265. He mentions the difficult character of the Aramaic of the Wisdom of

---


2 De Lagarde, *Libri Veteris Testamenti*, 51–73 (this edition is primarily based on S7a1).

3 Emerton, *The Peshitta of the Wisdom of Solomon*.

4 Emerton and Lane (eds.), *Wisdom of Solomon*.

5 Walton, *Polyglotta*.


Sagesse

161. and that the second translator picks up at chapter translator is apparent through the first ten chapters place at Wis 18:5. 16 with Holtzmann, Larcher argues that the shift takes exactly where the change of hand occurs. Agreeing the Wisdom of Solomon. The debate remains over translators involved in the production of the Peshitta of Most scholars agree that there were multiple trans-

15.3.4 Translation Characteristics

Wis 2:12–19. 15

The fragment covers Wis 2:12–19.

15.3.4 Translation Characteristics

Most scholars agree that there were multiple translators involved in the production of the Peshitta of the Wisdom of Solomon. The debate remains over exactly where the change of hand occurs. Agreeing with Holtzmann, Larcher argues that the shift takes place at Wis 18:3.16 Drijvers contends that the first translator is apparent through the first ten chapters and that the second translator picks up at chapter eleven to the end.17 Scholars generally agree that S- Wis is a “sense for sense” translation rather than a literal one.18

The translator of the first section of the book seems to have had a better sense of the Greek text (→ 15.2), although he translates Greek participles with finite verbs, changes tenses, changes plurals to singulars and vice versa, and even is inclined to make the text more explicit in places where there may be ambiguity (cf. Wis 10:1–3, where the translator adds the names of the famous men from Israel’s past). From chapter eleven on, the translation is plagued with misunderstandings of the Greek; the translator seems to be lost at certain points (e.g., Wis 11:13–15b; 13:12–13; 17:4c–16b).

However, the second translator is occasionally consistent with Greek nuances where the first translator is not. For example, variations on the terms φυλάσσω “to keep watch” and διαφυλάσσω “to watch closely” are consistently translated with when used in a positive sense (“to guard/keep”) in the second half of the text (cf. Wis 10:3, 5; 14:16, 24). The first nine chapters are inconsistent, translating τὸν (“to safeguard/to watch over” in Ethpa.; Wis 131), φυλάσσω (“to love/delight in”; Wis 6:30), φυλάξαντες (“to guard/keep” in Wis 18:4, 9:11). In Wis 18:4, the second translator distinguishes between positive and negative nuances of φυλάσσω “to keep watch” and διαφυλάσσω “to watch closely” (cf. Wis 17:4).

The Greek of Wis 18:4 contains both φυλάσσω “to be imprisoned/confined,” and φυλάξαντες “guarding/keeping.” The former form is rendered by the Hebrew נַעֲשָׁה in a positive sense (“to guard/keep,” the latter by נַעֲשָׁה “to keep/guard.” The translator seems to use נַעֲשָׁה “to keep/guard” when a variant of φυλάσσω is used in a positive sense, and נַעֲשָׁה “to be imprisoned/confined” when in a negative sense. Furthermore, Drijvers points out that the second translator transliterates certain Greek philosophical terms (עַלָּה “matter” in Wis 11:17; תָּוָרְשָׁא “the notes” in Wis 19:48) in order to maintain their nuances.19 Thus, despite


the manifold blunders, the second translator occasionally demonstrates facility in Greek.²⁰

15.3.5 Greek Vorlage

Although some scholars have tried to argue for a Hebrew or Aramaic original behind S-Wis, most scholars now agree that its Vorlage must be Greek (→ 15.2) since many errors and misunderstandings in the text only make sense if the Peshitta is translating a Greek original.²¹ Nevertheless, the Vorlage of the Peshitta does not match any known Greek manuscripts, and the Syro-Hexapla does not appear to have much influence on its composition.²² Furthermore, in some cases, the Peshitta has a stronger affinity with the Old Latin (→ 15.4) than with the LXX, and the Vetus Latina may have drawn upon the Syriac in several instances.²³ Overall, the identification of the Greek Vorlage is difficult to identify due to its translation techniques. After an exhaustive study Holtzmann concluded that the Peshitta is not an exemplary translation. Instead, it has several misunderstandings, failed etymological derivations, incorrect connections of single words and phrases, and false interpretation of the ideas in some particularly difficult verses, such as Wis 14:3; 16:3; and 18:1–3.²⁴

15.3.6 Text-Critical Value

The affinities the Peshitta has with the Old Latin (→ 15.4), particularly when a variant agrees with a Greek minuscule (→ 15.2) against the uncials, makes the Peshitta particularly fascinating. The variant “A son of God am I” (ܢܐܗܠܐ ܕܐܵܠܵܗܵܐ) in Wis 2:13 also occurs in the Vetus Latina (see also below), and the word reverentia in Wis 2:19 agrees with “humbility” (ܪܒܚܐ) in Syriac against the Greek text. Likewise, in Wis 6:9 the Old Latin’s incorruptio “incorruptible” agrees with the Syriac’s “deeds that are incorruptible” (ܐܬܘܵܢܵܐ). Furthermore, in Wis 3:20 the Syriac has “dishonor” (ܡܵܒܥ) in place of the LXX’s “punishment,” and this variant also occurs in several minuscules. These examples suggest that rather than being a product of loose translation techniques, some variants may also be evidence of a different text type. These examples, however, are not extensive enough to argue for this possibility definitively.

15.3.7 Exegetical Value

Besides summary statements and additional comments for clarification, several variants in the Peshitta are particularly important because they shed light on the translation’s milieu and various theological motifs that are important in the Syriac community. Drijvers helpfully delineated these historical and theological variants.²⁵ For example, in Wis 2:12, the Peshitta changes “reproaches us for sins against the law” (ܐܬܘܵܵܐ ܗܡܢܕܝܗܘ ܐܬܘܵܵܐ) to “reproaches us with his works of the of the law” (ܐܬܘܵܵܐ ܚܘܵܡ ܒܥܒ ܐܬܘܵܵܐ). The Syriac in Wis 3:8 changes “they shall judge the nations and rule over peoples” (ܟܝܟܡܐ ܡܢܕܝܗܘ ܡܵܡܥܢܘܙܘ) to “people will exult and the nations will rejoice” (ܟܝܟܡܐ ܡܢܕܝܗܘ ܡܵܡܥܢܘܙܘ). Drijvers suggested that these changes reveal an anti-nomian tendency in S-Wis that is similar to S-Sir (→ 4.4), which analogously identifies the righteous as pagans instead of Jews. Furthermore, there are several places in S-Wis that seem to make the ideal righteous person in the Greek text (→ 15.2) into Jesus. For example, Wis 2:13 changes the Greek’s “servant/child of the Lord” (παῖδα κυρίου) to “and he says himself: ‘I am the son of God’” (ܢܐܗܠܐ ܕܐܵܠܵܗܵܐ), a statement similar to the Peshitta of Matt 27:43 and John 10:36. Similarly, S-Wis 14:7 transforms “For blessed is the wood through which

²¹ Holtzmann, Die Peschitta, 34–47.
²² Larcher, Livre de la Sagesse, 1.69, however, suggests that the Vorlage of the Wisdom of Solomon has some affinities with two Lucianic manuscripts (→ 11.3.1.2.7), the Hexaplaric recension (→ 11.3.1.2), and minuscules LXX²⁶, ²⁸. Holtzmann, Die Peschitta, 113, agrees with these affinities, while he avoids associating S-Wis with a specific Greek manuscript.
²³ Holtzmann, Die Peschitta, 99–120.
²⁴ Holtzmann, Die Peschitta, 143.
righteousness comes” (εὐλογεῖται γὰρ ἡ ζῷα, δι’ αὐτῆς γίνεται δυσκοιλιόν) to “For blessed is the wood from which the righteous man appears” (אַל אִישׁ חַי מֵאָדָם, אֲשֶׁר מֲשָׁמֶה עַל יְאָשָׁר הָאָדָם). S-Wis 8:3 and 8:6 emphasizes personified Wisdom’s “marriage with God” (ܓܘܓܡܐ ܕܓܘܓܡܐ, a key religious symbol of Syriac spirituality that is similar to the “Spirit Christology” present in the apocryphal Acts of Thomas and the Odes of Solomon.

Drijvers argued that S-Wis is an important witness for “third-century Syriac-speaking Christianity” and that it “should be added to the still small number of sources we possess for the knowledge of Early Syriac Christianity.” This assessment warrants some caution. Unlike S-Sir, S-Wis is not systematic in its “anti-Jewish” tendencies. For example, S-Wis 6:4 agrees with the Greek in condemning those who do not keep the law. Also, one can read Wis 2:12–13 not as antinomian but rather as stating that God uses the works of the laws to condemn the unjust, not the law itself. The addition of the word “orphans” (ܒܢܝܐ) after “widow” (ܕܝܐ) in Wis 2:10 does not necessarily mean that the translator is Christian or values asceticism. This pairing is typical in the Hebrew Bible. Emphasis on poverty occurs in both Jewish and Christian texts (e.g., 1QH X:22–30; 1 En 94:8; Luke 6:20–24). This interpolation may also be an example of the tendency throughout the Peshitta to accentuate poverty. The addition in Wis 2:10 does not necessarily give evidence of a translator’s theological agenda, and as Weitzmann has demonstrated in regard to S-Wis 16:7, many apparent Christological formulations could simply be the result of translation techniques. The variants collected by Drijvers provide an impression of how an early Syriac community with a monastic orientation could have read Wisdom of Solomon, rather than, as he suggested, the motives of the translator himself.


Larcher, C., *Le Livre de la sagesse; ou, la sagesse de Salomon* (Études bibliques, nouv. sér. 1.3.5; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1983).


Weitzman, *Syriac Version.*


David Skelton

Jacob Lollar

---

30 Rizzi, *Hermeneutic Phenomena,* 244.
33 Weitzmann, *Syriac Version,* 245.