

INTRODUCTION.

Discovery and Transcription of the Gospel Text.

THE story of how I discovered the Syriac Palimpsest of the Four Gospels in the Convent of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai in February, 1892, how its text was recognized as being "the Curetonian" by the late Professor Bensly and Dr. Burkitt when I submitted more than a dozen of my 400 photographs of it to the latter on July 15th of the same year, and how four-fifths of it were transcribed by these two gentlemen and by Dr. Rendel Harris from the manuscript itself in 1893, has been already told in my Introduction to the *editio princeps* published by the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press in 1894. There is therefore no necessity for me to recapitulate it, especially as the said Introduction was submitted for approval to Mrs. Bensly, Dr. Harris, and Dr. Burkitt, and is consequently a reliable and final statement of the facts.

To the text, as copied from the MS., Dr. Burkitt added some gleanings from my photographs. But these were not sufficient to prevent the appearance of many gaps, varying in size from a whole or a half page to the space of a single word in passages which had baffled the sight or the ingenuity of the transcribers. In a subsequent visit to the Monastery in 1895, accompanied, as on the first occasion, by my twin sister, Mrs. Gibson, I was enabled, with the help of the same re-agent which had been used in 1893, to fill up most of these *lacunae*, and thus bind together large portions of the already deciphered text, discovering at the same time several of those peculiar readings which make the Sinai Palimpsest unique among Biblical MSS.

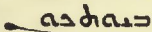
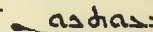

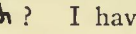
I published my transcription in a volume of 98 pages, entitled *Some Pages of the Four Gospels Retranscribed from the Sinaitic Palimpsest*. My own contribution to it was printed in blue ink, to distinguish it from the work of the original transcribers, which was in black.

I had my fourth opportunity of examining the manuscript in 1897, when my sister and I went to Sinai chiefly in the interests of the Palestinian Syriac Lectionaries and of the dated Arabic MSS. I then made a few emendations and additions to the text, which I published in the *Expositor* (Fifth Series), vol. vi., pp. 111-119. By turning my photographs into lantern-slides, I have verified many passages in them with the aid of the electric lamp.

The Evangelion da-Mepharreshe.

In 1904 the long-promised edition of the Curetonian Gospels, begun some 20 years previously by the late Professor Bensly but edited chiefly by Professor Burkitt, appeared in two volumes under the title of the *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe*. In it, variants from the Sinai text were added in the foot-notes, and the text of missing pages was supplied from the same source; giving thus a fairly accurate idea of the Version, which may reasonably be called syr. vet., or Old Syriac. Vol. ii. contains grammatical, linguistic, and textual notes, with quotations from the Syriac Fathers which have been collected with great diligence, and are illustrated with much learning and acuteness. As for Professor Robertson Smith's opinion that the Sinai text could not carry the variants of the Curetonian, it was formed two years before I filled up most of the gaps in the former. How far it now holds good, the present volume will give the student ample opportunity for observing.

The list of corrections to the text as previously published, both in the Syndic's edition and in my supplementary one, given by Dr. Burkitt in Appendix III., were derived from his close scrutiny of my photographs. I had already detected many of them in 1902, when I made a fresh study of the manuscript. I accept most of them, but not all. One or two of those to which I decidedly object have been examined, at my request, by one of the most expert of Greek palæographers, Dr. C. R. Gregory, whom my sister and I had the good fortune to meet during our sixth visit to Mount Sinai in 1906. I have had Dr. Gregory's tracings reproduced, and they now appear in my notes on the verses where these disputed words occur.

That mistakes may be made, and are made, in copying a palimpsest text is not wonderful. The merest tyro at the business may see this by a glance at the published facsimiles. Where blots, or heavy strokes of the upper writing lie on the top of a word, or when its tall letters are covered up, is it wonderful that in 1895 I should have copied  instead of  in Luke vi. 24, or that in Matt. xxiv. 2, both Drs. Bensly and Burkitt should have read  for ? I have consequently my own list of corrections to offer in Appendix I.

As I wrote the numbers of the pages on them in 1895, there can be no objection to my quoting them. Before that time I arranged my photographs by a list of the first lines on each page of the upper script, which I made at the time of its discovery in 1892. But that list has served its purpose, and the present numbering ought to take its place.

History of the Version.

The peculiarities of the text have been the subject of much discussion, both in Europe and in America. Two important publications have thrown much light

on them. *Die vier kanonischen Evangelien nach ihrem ältesten bekannten Texte*, by Dr. Adalbert Merx* of Heidelberg, and *Die Altsyrische Evangelien-übersetzung und Tatian's Diatessaron*, by Dr. Arthur Hjelt of Helsingfors. To these two works and to the smaller ones of the late Dr. Frederick Blass of Halle, and to instruction from Dr. Rendel Harris, I am indebted for most of my knowledge on the subject. These three first-mentioned scholars have studied it with the ardour born of a conviction that they were dealing with a text of the second century anterior to Tatian: in fact, with the earliest translation of the Four Gospels into any language. This position has been disputed by several other scholars, and latterly by Dr. Burkitt. On very insufficient grounds, he attributes its origin to the labours of a certain Bishop Palût, who flourished about A.D. 200, and was probably the first Bishop of Edessa. This would place it decidedly after Tatian's time. But Dr. Burkitt has not adduced a scrap of reliable evidence in support of his theory. As a writer in one of our literary periodicals observes, the fact, reported by Jacob of Serug from a lost passage in Ephrem's works, that the orthodox Christians of that period were called Palutians by the heretics, shows that the Bishop was much too powerful to have abstained from imposing on his followers his own translation of the Gospels, had such a translation existed. The Diatessaron seems to have been exclusively used in the Syriac-speaking church from the time of its publication, towards the close of the second century, till the time of Rabbula, at the beginning of the fifth century.

I can neither believe that all good work which dates from the early centuries of our era was done by well-known bishops, nor that the Syriac-speaking Christians of Palestine and in the country around Antioch, in the very first fervour of their faith, were content to wait till the year A.D. 160, that is, till at least three generations had passed away, for an authentic translation of the Gospels into their own vernacular.

Those who contend for the priority of Tatian's Diatessaron to the Sinai (or Syro-Antiochene version) will find some facts difficult to explain. The great amount of agreement between these two texts shows that one must certainly have influenced the other; though no one can suppose that the Sinai one was extracted out of Tatian's elaborate mosaic. If Tatian be the older, then:

I. Why is the angel of Bethesda presumably absent from the Sinai text, though present in the Diatessaron?

II. Why is the order of the story in John xviii. 12-25, as it stands in the Sinai text, so far superior from a literary point of view to that of the Greek MSS.? The translator cannot have got that from the Diatessaron.

* Dr. Merx died suddenly on August 4th, 1909, when the last volume of his valuable work was nearly ready for publication. It is satisfactory to know that I made him acquainted with my latest emendations to the Sinai text in 1907.

III. Why has the Sinai Palimpsest, with the Codex Bobiensis (k), according to Dr. Burkitt (vol. ii. p. 261), an earlier text than Tatian in Matt. i. 25?

The chief merit of the Sinai version, as of the Peshitta, is that it holds nearly the same relation to the Greek of the Gospels as the Septuagint does to the Hebrew of the Old Testament. It may not rival the authority of the oldest Greek codices, but in not a few instances, such as Matt. ii. 2, John xiv. 1, it may make their meaning clearer; and in others it may enshrine the record of an actual fact, preserved in the memory of some early disciple. Witness the "standing and speaking" of John iv. 27, which has come down to us also in the Armenian version of Ephraim's Commentary on the Diatessaron.

Peculiarities of the Text.

Dr. Rendel Harris, in his article in the *Contemporary Review* for November, 1894, called attention to the fact that the text of the Sinai Palimpsest is "rich in omissions." These include all passages which the textual critics of the nineteenth century have considered as doubtful, and all which the Revisers of the English New Testament have placed in brackets, or have omitted altogether.* It strengthens our reliance on the judgment of modern scholars when we find a translator of the second century in such close agreement with them. The last twelve verses of St. Mark's Gospel, which are certainly by a later hand, and the story of the woman taken in adultery (which, as the Ferrar group of Greek cursive MSS. has taught us, may possibly belong to the end of Luke xxi. instead of to John vii. 53-viii. 11), are, as might have been expected, absent. We find no mention of an angel at Gethsemane, nor of one at Bethesda; for though the leaf which might have contained the latter is among the seventeen missing ones, considerations of space make us judge that there never was room for him.

But this is not all. The number of short phrases which occur twice in other MSS. of the Gospels, but in the Sinai Palimpsest only once, led Dr. Frederick Blass to say that its text is almost a touchstone to determine what really belongs to each of the four Evangelists. Great as is the amount of matter common to the three Synoptists, scribes have, during their fourteen centuries of copying, done much to increase the mutual inter-dependence of these on each other.

When a man was employed by some church or by some family to provide a copy of one Gospel for them, say of the Gospel according to Mark, and he knew that the people who were employing him could afford to pay for one only of our Lord's biographies, he was greatly tempted to add to the narrative some picturesque detail from St. Matthew, from St. Luke, or from another page of St.

* The only exceptions to this which I have noticed are *εἰκὴ* in Matt. v. 22 and *ισχυρόν* in Matt. xiv. 30.

Mark himself. He was right from his point of view, for it was all Gospel, and all tended to edification ; but judged by our way of looking at things, he was quite wrong. We have an entirely different standard of literary taste ; we want to know exactly what each of the Evangelists wrote, preserved for us, so far as is possible, in his own words.

I have therefore compiled a list of the chief phrases omitted, showing also the other places in which the Sinai text has them ; and lastly, those other MSS. which agree with each particular omission.

The absence of one of our Lord's characteristic sayings, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," cannot be explained in the same manner. It is found in Tatian's Diatessaron ; and there is much cogency in Dr. Hjelt's contention that its non-existence in the Sinai text is a proof of the antiquity of that version ; because, he says, if it had been produced after the Diatessaron, the Syriac-speaking Church would never have submitted to the loss of so beautiful a passage, with which they were already familiar. We can account for its absence only on the supposition that it was quite unknown to the second-century Syrian translators.

I shall be disappointed if, after a careful study of my list of omitted phrases, some readers are not struck by the fact, that the literary style of the several Evangelists is really improved by their absence.

This, I submit, is also the case in those transpositions which occur in Mark xvi. 3, 4, Luke i. 63, 64 and John xviii. 12-25. I have drawn attention to these in my Notes. The cause of their occurrence is, to those who are accustomed to handle ancient MSS., extremely simple. It is only that a copyist, having overlooked a phrase, on perceiving his error, wrote it on the margin, with a small asterisk or other sign near it, and another small sign in the text, to show where it ought to be ; and that the next copyist of his works did not understand the asterisks, and so inserted the phrase in the text, but in the wrong place. In the case of ancient Greek MSS. of the Bible, which were written in three or four columns, like the Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus, the margin was simply the space between the columns. John xviii. 24, has thus been transferred from its true place after v. 13 or v. 14 to the right hand instead of to the left. We can hardly blame those scribes of the second and third centuries, when we remember the great disadvantages under which they sometimes worked, perhaps wandering about in sheepskins and goatskins, eluding all that the ingenuity of men and of devils could do to suppress them.

Of the Old Latin MSS. whose agreements with the Sinai text I have cited, under the title of "Similia," there are fortunately good and trustworthy editions, with the exceptions of the Codex Vindobensis (i) and the Codex Aureus (aur.). A collation of the former was made for me in Vienna on Belsheim's somewhat faulty edition by Dr. E. Kadlec, and the latter was thoroughly examined by my

sister, Mrs. Gibson, and myself during our visit to Stockholm in August 1908. I had already printed the text with its "Similia" down to Luke xi. 48, when I discovered to my consternation that Belsheim's editions of Old Latin texts are not reliable. I therefore revised my work with the texts of Tischendorf, Sabatier, Buchanan, and others; and to avoid the awkwardness of a long list of errata, I have printed at the foot of all pages before p. 160, these cases in which another editor has read something different from Belsheim.

In the Arabic Diatessaron I have often followed Ciasca's Arabic text, rather than his Latin translation: and have thus brought it into perfect agreement with the Peshitta.

I cannot pretend that I may not have made mistakes myself, or that I have not overlooked some variants for which a corroboration could have been found; but I trust that my faults may be chiefly those of omission, and that I have stated nothing without doing my best to be sure of its absolute truth.

Colophons of the Upper Script.

The only materials we have for learning anything about the history of the manuscript are the colophons of the upper script, the Select Narratives of Holy Women, which were written above the Gospel text in the seventh or the eighth century. These are four in number.

- I. The first is on f. 2^b and is fairly legible, being written in red ink.

: ܡܝܫܝܢ : ܕܡܫܝܚܐ : ܕܥܝܫܐ : ܕܡܫܝܚܐ : ܕܡܫܝܚܐ : ܕܡܫܝܚܐ f. 2^b
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By the strength of our Lord Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God, I begin, I the sinner, John the Recluse of Beth-Mari ܩܕܕܝܫܐ, to write select narratives about the holy women; first, the book of the Blessed Lady Thecla, disciple of Paul, the Blessed Apostle. My brethren, pray for me.

- II. The second is on f. 165^b between the *Apology concerning the Faith*, and the *Book of Susan*. I have been familiar with it from my photographs ever since 1892, and I believe that Professor Bensly copied it in 1893. Yet strangely

the world that passeth not away ; with all the saints who do His good pleasure ; making them meet, God the Christ, for the sanctifying of faults, and the remission of sins, and the life everlasting, by the prayers of the prophets, and of the apostles, and of the martyrs, and the confessors, and the Lady Mary, the mother of God, yea, and Amen, and Amen."

III. The third is simply a list of the titles to the *Select Narratives*.

IV. The final colophon, which is the most important, as containing the date of the upper script. Nine of its lines are at the foot of f. 181a, and six at the top of f. 181b. The latter six were read by me in 1892, exactly as they are here printed ; except that at the end of the first line on f. 181b I copied ܘܨܕܝܢܝܢ = nine, and concluded that the upper script of the MS. must belong to the seventh century A.D. Dr. Rendel Harris, reading it in 1893, pointed out that a hole occurs after ܘܨܕܝܢܝܢ, and considered that the space thus left blank must have been occupied by the last syllable of ܘܨܘܨܝܢܝܢ = ninety ; and I, of course, bowed to his opinion. It has since occurred to me, however, that a flourish, such as frequently appears in the body of the MS., may have stood where that hole now is, and the Tales, supposed to have been written over the Gospels in the eighth century, may possibly belong to the end of the seventh.

As for the first nine lines of this colophon, the page on which they stand is so much rubbed and faded that their very existence was unsuspected till Good Friday 1900, when I, being about to publish the *Select Narratives*, as in duty bound, tried to pick what crumbs I could out of the photograph of that page. I was first struck by the word ܠܘܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ, and this gave me courage to attack the remainder. I could not try the re-agent on a photograph, so I failed to decipher ܠܘܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ and ܠܘܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ on line 2. As I gave a copy to Dr. Burkitt on the day before the publication of my book, he supplied Ma'arrath Meşrên from Colophon No. ii. and identified it with a village equidistant from Antioch and Aleppo. I made use of this information by adding Appendix viii. to my book.

The word : ܠܘܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ gave me more trouble. The horn of the ܠ, all but its tip, was washed or rubbed out of the MS., and this joined to a wrinkle in the vellum, and its own superfluous line at the foot, made me read the word : ܠܘܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ, the tip of the horn looking like an extra dot over the ܝ. Dr. Nestle suggested : ܠܘܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ, and Dr. Burkitt read it as : ܠܘܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ, maintaining in the *Expository Times* and in my Appendix, that the word had only three letters, with a blank space between the third and fourth. The matter was finally settled when I examined the manuscript itself, on my fifth visit to Sinai, in 1902. It will be seen from the accompanying tracings by Dr. Gregory that the Alafs in : ܠܘܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ; and in : ܠܘܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ; at the end of the fifth line in this colophon, are furnished with an extra stroke at the foot. This stroke was the chief cause of my reading a ܘܨ in my photograph of the page, the wrinkle having caused the Alaf, already shorn of its horn, to lie partly on its side. The whole colophon is in black ink.

f. 181a,
l. 4.

III. Here endeth this book of the Select Narratives : first, of the blessed Thecla ; second, of Eugenia ; third, of Pelagia ; fourth, of Marinus ; fifth, of Euphrosyne ; sixth, of Onesima ; seventh, of Drusis ; eighth, of Barbara ; ninth, of Mary ; tenth, of Irene ; eleventh, of Euphemia ; twelfth, of Sophia ; thirteenth, of Theodosia ; fourteenth, of Theodota ; concerning the Faith ; fifteenth, of Susan ; sixteenth, of Cyprian and Justa ; seventeenth, verses about Paradise.

IV. ⲕⲓ I, the mean one, and the sinner, John the Stylite, of Beth-Mari Qanûn, the monastery of Ma'arrath Meşrên, the city, (in) the district of Antioch,* by the mercy of God, I have written this book for the profit of myself, of my brethren, and of those who are neighbours to it ; but because of (the love) of the Christ, I would persuade all those who (read) in it to pray for me the more (earnestly) But whenever thou meetest with this book . . . concerning the sinner thy prayer.

f. 181b.

This book was finished in the year a thousand and nine[ty] of Alexander of Macedon, the son of Philip, in the month of Tammuz : on the third day of the week, at the . . . hour of the day of the Baptism of our Lord Jesus the Christ. May . . . for the sinner who wrote this book . . . the multitude on the Right Hand. Amen, and Amen, and Amen.

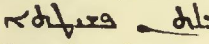
This is the Book of the Select Narratives about the Holy Women.

With the decipherment of the fourth colophon, every probability that the ancient Gospel text was produced at Mount Sinai has for ever vanished. True, it may have been brought to an Antiochene monastery, from Egypt, from Mesopotamia, or from elsewhere, but old vellum was not likely to be a profitable export from the Arabian desert ; and it would be passing strange if the finished palimpsest was really returned to the very monastery whence its first-written pages had been carried at some period before the eighth century. The earliest of Syriac versions was likely to be copied only where there was a native Syrian Church, and a seat of Syriac learning, such as was found at Antioch on the Orontes, or at Edessa. Rabbula, Bishop of Edessa, in the fifth century, issued a decree that a copy of the *Separatè Gospels* should be read in every church instead of *Tatian's Diatessaron*. This copy was probably the *Peshiṭta*, perhaps as revised by himself.† for had it been the Old Syriac surely more than two specimens of the latter would have come down to the present day. The multiplication of copies of the *Peshiṭta* probably caused those of the Old Syriac to become obsolete, and fit only for the use of men like John the Stylite. The *Diatessaron* was perhaps written at Edessa, and there the *Peshiṭta* was revised. Now the *Tales of Holy Women*, which overlie the Gospels of our palimpsest, were certainly written near

* I am sorry that Dr. C. R. Gregory has repeated my mistake in vol. iii. of his *Textkritik*. I corrected it first by requesting Dr. Burkitt to write part of Appendix viii. to *Studia Sinaitica*, no. ix., and afterwards by explaining it in the *Expository Times*. I repeat that the word "Kaukab" was never read, even from the photograph ; and it is curious that Dr. Gregory himself traced "Kura" for me, instead of it, from the MS. So hard is it for a mistake to die.

† See Dr. William Wright on 'Syriac Literature,' in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, p. 325.

Antioch, and the last of them, Cyprian and Justa, has a distinctly Antiochene flavour, for there (as a reviewer in the *Scotsman* lately observed) its demon boasts of having 'shaken the whole city, and overturned walls,' alluding, doubtless, to the terrible earthquakes with which Antioch was visited in the first two centuries of our era. I may perhaps be mistaken, but I do not find it difficult to imagine that as the Peshiṭta was highly appreciated in Edessa, so the Old Syriac version may have been cherished in the older seat of Aramaic learning, in the town where the disciples were first called Christians.

To those who believe, with Baethgen, Nestle, and Burkitt, that the Peshiṭta is the revision of the Old Syriac version made by Bishop Rabbula of Edessa in the early part of the fifth century, it will be interesting to observe, that Rabbula speaks of his own teaching as "our simple word,"  (ed. Overbeck, p. 243). The question as to why God has allowed variants to creep into the early texts and versions of these sacred books must be a puzzling one to many minds. The answer may be that His work is not mechanical, like ours. Is it not possible that we have ourselves confounded the idea of inspiration with that of dictation? The latter would have meant the production of a text whose every letter might have been worshipped; the former means that God put into the hearts of chosen men the desire to write what they knew for a certainty about His dealings with them, but that He left them at perfect liberty both to express and to transmit His meaning in their own way.