CHAPTER THREE

THE SYRIAC SIRACH AS A TRANSLATION

3.1 GENERAL CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SYRIAC SIRACH

In the preceding chapter we have seen that any study of the character of Syr as a translation is hindered by our lack of knowledge about the translator’s Hebrew source. Nevertheless, on the basis of an internal analysis of Syr and an investigation of the patterns of correspondences to other versions, it seems justified to characterize Syr as a free translation. This may be related to the status of Sirach in the community in which the translation originated. Smend argued that the character of the translation—which in his view is not only free, but also imprecise and careless—indicates that the translator did not consider Sirach canonical. A similar argument has been put forward for Chronicles, which too has been translated very differently from the other books of the Hebrew Bible. According to some scholars the non-canonical status can also account for the poor state of the translator’s Hebrew source text both in the case of Sirach and in the case of Chronicles.

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1 Similarly Lévi, L’Ecclésiastique I, lii.
2 Smend, Jesus Sirach, cxxxvii: ‘Die Ubersetzung des Sirach ist wohl das schlechteste Uebersetzungswork der syrischen Bibel. Es bleibt freilich in vielen Fallen unsicher, was von ihren Mängeln auf Rechnung des Uebersetzers und was auf Rechnung seiner hebräischen Vorlage oder der syrischen Textüberlieferung zu setzen ist. Es steht trotzdem fest, dass der Uebersetzer vielfach nachlässigen und leichthartig gearbeitet hat. Man kann sein Verfahren nur daraus erklären, dass das Buch ihm wie später den Jakobiten nicht für kanonisch galt.’
3 Cf. Weitzman, Syriac Version, 208. Also one of the two versions of Pesh-1–2 Maccabees seems to be the product of free and sometimes inaccurate translation (Konrad Jenner, personal communication; cf. Schmidt, ‘Die beiden Syrischen Übersetzungen’, esp. 1, p. 5).
4 On Sirach see § 2.2.1; on Chronicles see Weitzman, Syriac Version, 111, 208; see, however, § 6.2.1 (A) on the validity of this argument.
3.2 EXPLANATORY AND EXPLICATIVE VARIANTS

Many free renderings are of an explanatory or explicative nature. This applies to a number of examples quoted in Chapter Two, to which we can add the following categories.

(a) Syr provides a free rendering of an idiomatic Hebrew expression.\(^5\)

5:11 יִשָּׂרָאֵל ‘I have much’; A יֵשׁ נָא לָדָד, א.\(^7\)  
5:14 בִּיוֹת שַׁדִּי ‘walking in two (ways)’; A יִבְנוּת שָׁדִּי Similarly 6:1.  
6:5 בְּלַע כְּפֵר ‘the lips of the upright’; A בָּלַע כְּפֶר.\(^8\)  
8:16 בָּלַע מַעָּל ‘an unrighteous man’; A בָּלַע מַעָּל.\(^9\)  
9:8 בָּלַע מַעָּל בִּרְשָׁת ‘your face should not look at a beautiful woman’; A בָּלַע מַעָּל בִּרְשָׁת ‘hide your eyes from a comely woman’.  
9:16 בָּלַע מַעָּל ‘those who eat from your table’; A בָּלַע מַעָּל.  
44:5 בָּלַע מַעָּל ‘and who say proverbs’; B מַעָּל, M מַעָּל.\(^{511}\)  
48:2 בָּלַע מַעָּל ‘and he brought upon them famine’; B מַעָּל, M מַעָּל.\(^{511}\)  
48:2 בָּלַע מַעָּל ‘and he broke their staff of bread’.

(b) Syr explains a difficult or uncommon expression in Heb.\(^{10}\)

7:12 בְּלַע מַעָּל ‘do not devise (evil against your brother)’; A בְּלַע מַעָּל.\(^{72}\)  
15:13 בְּלַע מַעָּל ‘He will not give them (to those who love Him)’;  
15:13 בְּלַע מַעָּל ‘He will not give them (to those who love Him)’;  
36:24 בְּלַע מַעָּל ‘the words of the unrighteous (or: unrighteousness)’;  
36:24 בְּלַע מַעָּל ‘the words of the unrighteous (or: unrighteousness)’;  
B מַעָּל ‘delicacies of deceit’.\(^{13}\)

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\(^{5}\) Also elsewhere in the Peshitta and the Targums; cf. Weitzman, *From Judaism to Christianity*, 190.


\(^{7}\) According to Smend, *Jesus Sirach*, 52, this Syriac expression is not attested elsewhere.

\(^{8}\) We consider this as a free rendering in Syr, rather than the result of a corruption of מַעָּל to מַעָּל in its Hebrew source text; pace Ginzberg, *Randglossen*, 615.

\(^{9}\) For the examples from 8:16 and 9:8 see also § 10.1.1.

\(^{10}\) Obviously, the distinction between ‘Syr gives a free rendering of an idiomatic expression’ (a) and ‘Syr explains a difficult expression’ (b) is vague, because we cannot always be sure whether a Hebrew expression is ‘idiomatic’ or ‘difficult’.

\(^{11}\) Cf. *HALOT 53* on מַעָּל ‘plough, devise’ in Biblical Hebrew.

\(^{12}\) For מַעָּל see BDB 58; *HALOT 70*; Daube, ‘Direct and Indirect Causation’, 265–266.

\(^{13}\) Cf. *HALOT 574*. 