CHAPTER FIVE

INTERTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

5.1 INFLUENCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Syr did not originate in a vacuum. In Jewish and Christian movements oral traditions and written documents were cultivated, cherished and transmitted. But can we establish the sources with which the translator was in touch? Was he acquainted with the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament or rabbinic literature? Parallels with these corpora may assist us in establishing the translator’s religious background, but before we can use the parallels for this purpose, our first task is a formal registration of them. This means that we have to investigate whether it is possible to identify phrases or idioms in Syr that seem to be due to the influence of passages in one of these corpora. The original Sirach already contained biblical references, but since our concern is the translator’s work, we will restrict ourselves to parallels that are secondary, as far as a comparison with the other textual witnesses can tell us. And even the secondary parallels are not necessarily due to the translator. We will take into account the possibility that some parallels were already present in the translator’s source text and that others have entered the text during the textual transmission of Syr.

The present paragraph will be concerned with parallels with the Old Testament in general. One of the questions that will concern us is the question of whether Winter’s claim that the translator avoided references to the Prophets (cf. § 4.3.2) is correct. § 5.2 will deal with the more specific question of whether these parallels reveal any influence of the Peshitta version of the Old Testament. This question is relevant for gaining insight into the milieu in which the Peshitta originated and the character of the sources that the translator had at his disposal.¹ In § 5.3 the parallels with rabbinic sources and other affinities with rab-

¹ H.P. Rüger’s unlikely hypothesis that the translator of Syr was dependent on the Targums has been discussed in § 3.8.
binic literature will be investigated and § 5.4 will be concerned with parallels with the New Testament.

In the present paragraph we will distinguish between the following categories: (A) Syr gives a free rendering containing words or phrases that occur also in other parts of the Old Testament and seem to have been borrowed from them; (B) Syr adds phrases or even whole verses taken from the Old Testament; (C) Heb or Gr contains a reference to a biblical passage which has been strengthened in Syr; (D) Syr introduces allusions to biblical stories. Finally we will have a look at (E) the tendency to make references to biblical stories in the Praise of the Fathers more explicit by introducing biblical phraseology.

The establishment of parallels is based on the observation of formal similarities, but it is sometimes difficult to determine what degree of similarity is significant enough to speak of parallels. Moreover, if parallels can be established, their background often remains obscure. Did the translator possess manuscripts with the Hebrew or Syriac text of the Old Testament? Or did he know parts of them by heart? Or did he have a general acquaintance with biblical phraseology and ideas? His use of ‘in the expanse of heaven’ in 26:16 (see below), for example, suggests that he was acquainted with this expression, but does not show that he wished to refer to the creation story, and the combination of ‘enmity’, ‘the head of the serpent’ and ‘the wife’ in Sir 25:15 (see below) does not necessarily show dependence on the text of Genesis 3.

A. In the following cases Syr gives a free rendering containing words or phrases that occur also in other parts of the Old Testament and seem to have been borrowed from them.²

(1) From the Pentateuch

26:16 ἐν τοῖς ουρανοῖς 'in the expanse of heaven'; Gr ἐν ὑψίστοις τοίου 'in the Lord’s highest'. Cf. Gen 1:15 MT יientes; Pesh

30:8 ἀκούεις ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολουθεῖς ἀκολο

Thus is a rebellious son who does not listen to his father'; Gr καὶ οὐδόσ ἀνεμένος ἐκβαίνει προσώπων 'And a son who is left to himself turns out precipitous'. Cf. Deut 21:18 MT ימ 'a stubborn and rebellious son who does not listen to the voice of his father

² Cf. Weitzman, Syriac Version, 43.