JACOB OF EDESSA’S VERSION OF 1–2 SAMUEL:
ITS METHOD AND TEXT-CRITICAL VALUE

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1. Introduction

Jacob of Edessa’s Syriac version of the Books of Samuel and the first part of 1 Kings is one of the textual witnesses used in the apparatus of Brooke–McLean’s edition of the Books of Kingdoms. In the introduction to their edition of 1–4 Kingdoms, Brooke and McLean write (p. viii):

The Syro-hexaplar Version (S) of 1, 2 Samuel is lost, except for the few extracts from it contained in the Auṣar Rāzē of Barhebraeus and quoted by us (S-ap-Barh) from the edition by P. E. Schlesinger (Berlin, 1897). A good many words and phrases belonging to this version are attested in the notes of Masius (Sm): see Lagarde, Bibliothecae Syriacae, pp. 21–32. But another Syriac version, that of Jacob of Edessa, comes into account in dealing with the LXX text of 1, 2 Samuel. According to Dr Wright (A Short History of Syriac Literature, p. 17) “Jacob, Bishop of Edessa, undertook, when living in retirement in the convent of Tell ‘Addā or Teleda in 704–705, to revise the text of the Pēshītī with the help of the Greek versions at his disposal, thus producing a curious eclectic or patchwork text.” His version of the books of Samuel and also of 1 K[ings] i. 1–49 is preserved to us in a British Museum MS. dated about A.D. 719 and numbered Add. 14,429 (see Wright’s Catalogue, vol. 1. pp. 37–39). From this version (Sj) we have quoted such readings as can reasonably be regarded as translations from a Greek Septuagint text [italics added].

The aim of the present essay is first to describe the nature of Jacob’s version of Samuel, which is not at all straightforward, before presenting an assessment of its usefulness as a textual witness to the Septuagint of Samuel.

2. The Nature of Jacob’s Version of 1–2 Samuel

According to the colophon at the end of 1 Samuel, Jacob composed his version of the first book of Kingdoms in 704/5 CE. Originally the whole work reflected the Lucianic division of books in that it covered 1 Samuel 1:1–1 Kings 2:11, but the end of the sole surviving manuscript is missing and terminates abruptly in the middle of 1 Kings 1:49. This slightly truncated copy is now kept in the British Library, and the

superscription on the first folio says that it was written in 719 CE, so although it is not the autograph, it must have been copied from it.

The shortest and best description of the nature of the Samuel version is that just cited, from the nineteenth-century Syriacist William Wright: ‘a curious eclectic or patchwork text’. This it certainly is. It is clearly a mixture of Syriac and Greek Bible versions (though the language is Syriac), but the precise make-up, as well as Jacob’s aims in producing it, is not readily evident.

Now the nature of the Septuagint in the books of Samuel is itself the subject of much debate. It is more or less accepted that there are three major textual families, i.e. the Egyptian, Hexaplaric, and Lucianic/Antiochene, plus a number of more ‘characterless’ manuscripts. The Egyptian group of manuscripts is represented by B (Vaticanus) ya2 and also the Ethiopic version (E); the text of Origen’s fifth column, the Hexaplaric recension, is found in A (Alexandrinus) cx and the Armenian version (A), along with the sub-Hexaplaric manuscripts dlpqtz and efmsw; and the Lucianic/Antiochene recension is represented by manuscripts boc2e2. The relationship of these groups to each other and to the Hebrew is still not wholly clear, but fortunately this is not of vital importance with regard to Jacob.

Jacob’s version of Samuel is of potential interest for two of the three recensions in particular. The Lucianic text type is named after the scholar and martyr Lucian of Antioch (250–312 CE) who is said by Jerome (De viris illustribus 77) to have worked on the biblical text. Certainly the citations of Christian writers from the Antiochene region (e.g. John Chrysostom and Theodoret of Cyrrhus) do exhibit characteristic readings found only in a small group of biblical manuscripts, but because pre- or proto-‘Lucianic’ readings are found in earlier sources such as Josephus, some scholars prefer the term ‘Antiochene’. Since Jacob spent most of his life in the region of Syria, it would not be surprising if his version reflected knowledge of the Antiochene Greek text. In theory too he had another tool at his disposal: the Syro-Hexapla, which was a literal Syriac rendering of the fifth column of Origen’s Hexapla carried out by Paul of Tella in 616/7. The question is, precisely what sort of Greek texts did Jacob use in his version of Samuel?