Revising a Bible translation is an arduous task, but having one’s modernized version accepted by a religious community is perhaps even more difficult. The revision made in the first decade of the eighth century by the West Syrian polymath Jacob of Edessa has never been able to fully replace the Peshitta. The latter version, translated directly from the Hebrew in the second century, is still the standard Bible of the Syriac-speaking churches; Jacob’s work only survives in part in a small number of manuscripts.¹ For us, these manuscripts are a precious treasure, not so much because of their value for the constitution of the biblical text, but as a witness to the way one of the finest scholars of the Syrian Orthodox Church, comparable only with Jerome according to some, dealt with the text of the Bible and its different versions. In the 1990s, an edition and a study of Jacob’s revision of Samuel were published.² These discuss questions such as: what exactly was the base text of his revision, which choices did Jacob make, and what was his purpose?

I think that additional material for answering such questions can be gathered if we broaden our view and include the book of Genesis in our study.³ The advantage of Genesis over Samuel is that on this text more exegetical material by Jacob is available to us. Jacob’s works on Genesis differ in genre, but also in the way they use the biblical text


and in the actual form of the text which they quote. In this paper, I shall try to sketch Jacob’s development on these points. An additional advantage of the choice of Genesis is that large parts of the Syro-Hexapla survive. This translation of Origen’s text of the Septuagint was made some ninety years before Jacob made his revision. In the scholarship of the last century, the most debated issue was the question of whether Jacob used this version while making his text.

1. Sources

First, let me briefly introduce the sources. Jacob’s *On the Hexaemeron*, the Six Days of Creation, is his last work to deal with Genesis. This book, which was left unfinished at his death in 708, strives to incorporate large parts of the scientific and philosophical knowledge of his time. The term ‘commentary’ would therefore not be very apt, but the work does of course contain a number of Genesis quotations. Jacob finished his revision of Samuel in 705 and that of Genesis in 704. Three years earlier he had completed his revision of the Greek translation of Severus of Antioch’s *Homiliae Cathedrales*, with numerous biblical quotations. Then there are two works which are difficult to date, but were presumably written in an earlier period: the *Book of Scholia* and the *Commentary on the Octateuch* or *Commentary in Short*. The *Book of Scholia* has been known since the publications of the Assemani brothers; it seems to have been an important source for the monk Severus,