Over the last few years, the rather curious phenomenon of pair reversal in the Old Testament Peshitta has been noted with respect to various books by A. Gelston, R.A. Taylor, M.D. Koster, G. Greenberg and P.J. Williams. In returning to the topic in his recent monograph on the Syriac versions of the Gospels, the latter finds the translators’ reversal of source text pairs to be widespread in these texts as well. Indeed, Williams’ approach suggests the possibility that the phenomenon of pair reversal in the Old Testament Peshitta may best be explained by a combination of factors including the translator’s idiom, differing perceptions of logical and chronological sequence and the desire to

*While any shortcomings in what follows remain the responsibility of the author, the present study has benefited from the questions, comments and collected wisdom of P.J. Williams and those attending The Bible of Edessa, a symposium convened by the Peshitta Institute under the auspices of the meeting of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament in Leiden, 2004.

2R.A. Taylor, The Peshitta of Daniel (MPIL, 7; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), pp. 320-21. Similarly, p. 77: ‘... it should be noted that there is in Syr of Daniel a tendency to reverse the order of matched pairs.’

harmonize the word order of particular pairs. While Williams’ work represents a significant step forward, his study does not afford him the luxury of grappling with the question of how one might know whether a particular pair reversal actually reflects, in his words, a ‘natural’ or ‘preferred’ word order in Syriac. What, we might wonder, are the textual, historical and linguistic factors which conspire in any given case to produce one word order rather than another? The present study takes up a particular instance of pair reversal in the Peshitta of Job with a view to addressing these questions.

The beginning of the second chapter of Job finds Satan keen to pick up the gauntlet thrown down yet again by the LORD, as we can see from verse 4 and following:

4 And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. 5 But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh (אֲבִא יְבִי לָבָן), and he will curse thee to thy face. 6 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. 7 So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.

While the Satan’s invocation ‘Skin for skin’ remains an obscure rhetorical flourish, the explicit physical affliction of Job we find narrated in verses 6 and 7 makes it clear that the LORD acquiesces to the Satan’s demand to ‘touch his bone and his flesh’. When we turn to the Peshitta of Job, we see that the translation diverges from the Hebrew by rendering לְטַנְמוּר וּלְרַבַּב בָּרָק ‘touch his flesh or his bone’. While the provision of לְטַנְמוּר ‘or’ in place of לְטַנְמוּר ‘and’ is patient of various explanations, our primary interest in the

6While P.J. Williams, Early Syriac Translation Technique and the Textual Criticism of the Greek Gospels (Texts and Studies 3.2; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2004), pp. 210-13, offers six possible explanations for the reversal of paired items in the Syriac Versions of the Gospels (Error, Relative clause in Second Position, Influence of Tatian’s Diatessaron, Preferred Order, Assimilation, Ad hoc Explanations) only the latter three seem germane to the present discussion. While this study offers an explanation of the pair reversal in Job 2.5, instances of pair reversal such as those found in 1 Kings 8 (see n. 5 above) make it unlikely that this explanation will be able to account for all instances of pair reversal in the Peshitta.

7Williams, Early Syriac Translation Technique, p. 211.