MARK xii 42 AND ITS METROLOGICAL BACKGROUND
A study in ancient Syriac versions

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In Mark xii 41-4, it is related how Jesus sat by the treasury and watched the people casting money into it. Among them were many a rich person, who apparently made large donations. But then there came a poor widow, and she cast in "two mites which make a farthing", or in other words a trifling sum. Whereupon Jesus called to his disciples and explained to them that the gift of this poor widow was worth so much more than all the wealthy people's rich donations, etc. The same story is related with only very slight differences in Luke xxi 1-4. In the following study we would wish to examine the textual traditions concerning the poor widow's gift as presented in different versions and manuscripts, and relate these traditions to their various metrological backgrounds.

In table I we have set out the source material, numbering each version from 1 to 6 etc. Even on the most cursory glance at the above table certain points become evident:

(a) In both the Greek and the Latin 1a) versions (1 and 2) the smaller coins, two of which make up the larger coin (in column A), do not change their name (from columns A to B). Thus either "two lepta" or "two minuta". In the Peshitta version, on the other hand, first (3A) we read that "two mania make a shamuna"—meaning that the shamuna is the larger

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1a) For the Greek variants see, HERMAN Freiherr VON SODEN, Die Schriften des Neues Testaments, (Göttingen 1913), Teil 2, 1A p. 204, 1B p. 362, 1C p. 11, 1D p. 320, and TISCHENDORF'S Novum Testamentum Graece, vol. 1 (Leipzig 1869), 1A p. 386, 1B p. 675, 1C p. 19, 1D p. 593.

Az is the translation of λεπτα δύο of ΝΒΙΩΚ etc. (TISCHENDORF ibid.). The only other significant variant is in 1D to ἐσχ. χοδραντην (D = Cod. Bezae Cantab VI), cf. Latin quadrantem (b c e f ff2 etc.) TISCHENDORF ibid. These appear to be harmonistic readings.

coin—then (3B) we read "two shamunas", according to which it would appear that the shamuna is the smaller coin.

(b) Both 1A 2A and 6A mention the quadrans (or quadrantes) as being the larger coin, while in 3A, 4A and 5A such a coin does not figure.

(c) Both 4 and 5 have harmonized texts A and B (as had 1 and 2) in that in both of them the shamuna is the smaller half-denomination. In 4A the full denomination is called "tumna", in 5A "rub’a".

(d) 6A mentions the quadrantes as the full denomination (= 1A, 2A), but the half-denomination is here an assar (or issar). In 6B, on the other hand, the coin mentioned is a "zuz", which had not figured in 6A at all, neither as the half nor as the full denomination.

Having pointed out these differences, let us now examine the terms themselves. The lepta according to Lidell & Scott, is a very small coin (they refer to Photius, a 9th century. c.e. source, s.v. ὀξιλός) 1b); now according to St. John Chrysostom (on Luke xxi 2) 2 Δαυιδῆς καὶ φιλότιμος ἦ ἐκ τῶν δύο λεπτῶν ἠλειμονόν, τοῦτον ἐκ τῶν δύο ὀξιλόν from which we see that he thought that the lepton was the same as the obol; (obol = 1/6 denarius). As the Syriac maneh equals the lepton (3A = 1A), it follows that a maneh is one obol. This is indeed the opinion of Payne-Smith, in his Thesaurus Syriacus. 3)

SEGÈRE, 4) following up a statement by S. Lieberman 5) to the effect that the maneh in Rabbinic was sometimes a small coin, and not merely a large coin equalling 100 denarii 6), independently sought to establish this identification of the maneh and the ma’ah (= obol). He adduced as his proof the fact that Ps. Jonathan to

1b) Lidell & Scott (9th ed.) s.v. λεπτόν p. 1040A (Photius, Lex., s. λεπτόν).
2) Opp. 7. 29B. (cited in Payne-Smith, note 3, ibid., and Stephanus Thesaurus, s.v. λεπτόν).
3) Payne-Smith, Thesaurus Syriacus, s.v. λεπτόν p. 2164. See also ibid. s.v. λεπτόν p. 4212. B. Bahlul, and K. and see below.
6) Jastrow, Dictionary etc. p. 797.