The textual tradition of Melito’s Περί Πασχά is, generally speaking, quite satisfactory.* The editio princeps, of 1940, was mainly the publication of one papyrus codex (A), of the fourth century A.D., accompanied by a very full and valuable commentary. This Chester Beatty-Michigan manuscript has since been reproduced in facsimile. Twenty years later, another early full-scale witness was published: papyrus Bodmer XIII (B), of the early fourth or perhaps the late third century A.D. As they came down to us, both these manuscripts have incurred some damage, notably B at the beginning of the Homily and A at the end. But fortunately they supplement each other in these and other passages. So Perler’s recent edition, the first to be based upon the two major codices, provides a well-nigh complete Greek text which may well approximate the original fairly closely.¹ Only for parts of one passage, extending over some 10 lines, § 4, l. 21–32, we still have no other source than the Latin Epitome, identified by Chadwick in 1960.² At this point the editions provide a retranslation into Greek – apparently a fairly certain one.

Further, the text seems to be rather badly corrupted in one or two passages.³ But these are minor blemishes. It seems to me that future editors of this second century text are, on the whole, in a fortunate position.

After Perler’s edition appeared, the Melito papyri have been reconsidered by S. G. Hall.⁴ It appears that careful comparison eliminates

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* I am grateful to the Revd Stuart G. Hall of Nottingham University, who checked the English of this article.


³ § 36, l. 244 ff.; § 99, l. 754–761.

most of the disagreements between A and B mentioned in Perler’s critical apparatus. Where A’s text is illegible or lost, one can and should reconstruct its readings in accordance with B. To my mind, the versions, especially the Syriac texts, should also be seriously studied again. For the present study, however, and perhaps even for the recension of the text in a new edition, the versions are of comparatively small importance.

Hall’s general conclusion tends towards a “rehabilitation” of A. And it is likely that future study of Melito in general will point the same way. Perler’s edition favours B: “B mérite généralement plus de confiance”, he says. In an article of 1963 he compared Melito’s Περὶ Πασχα with the homily “On the Soul and the Body” which in its various forms is attributed to different authors such as Athanasius and Alexander of Alexandria. In five out of six cases, it is the text of B which shows the closest similarity with the later treatise. And for this reason B deserves more confidence as a witness to Melito’s original text than A – Perler’s principle in his *emendatio* of the Homily. To me, Perler’s findings only suggest that (Pseudo-)Alexander’s model was more like B than like A; and not, that B is closer to the text of Περὶ Πασχα as Melito wrote it. There are other possibilities: Melito’s own work “On the Soul and the Body”, which is lost, must have dealt partly with the same matter as Περὶ Πασχα. Therefore it may have influenced the early textual tradition of Περὶ Πασχα as well as the doctrinal tradition on the subject. In principle one should state: any such secondary influence on the text of Περὶ Πασχα could account for the similarities between B and the later treatise just as well as the hypothesis that B’s readings are what Melito originally wrote.

So in principle Perler’s case for B is, in my opinion, a weak one. In practice, preference for one witness may as often lead to wrong as to right results. I mention one instance. In § 47, l. 337–339 there is a quotation from Genesis 2:16–17, which is transmitted with some degree of variation. Table I shows: (a) the LXX (according to Rahlfs); (b) Perler’s text; (c) the reading of B; (d) the reading of A; (e) my reconstruction of Melito’s quotation.

As for the variants indicated as (5) and (7), intentional omissions, there is no problem; nor is there for variant (1), an accidental omission by the

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6 Perler, p. 49. He continues: “Mais A n’est pourtant pas à négliger.”
8 See Perler, p. 236–238 for a fragment.