1 SAMUEL XVI 6, 7 IN THE PESHİTTA VERSION

0. Introduction

The books of Samuel have enjoyed intensive and unremitting interest from the side of textual critics. Apart from the standard critical editions, the text of the books of Samuel has been made the subject of several monographs and numerous articles. Yet it seems that not all the textual treasures hidden in the various witnesses to this text have been uncovered. The present note deals with a set of two variants in the Peshîtta version (P) which have not been given the necessary attention in earlier research.

It has not been observed with sufficient accuracy that the P account of the anointing of David contains a different version of the
dialogue between Samuel and YHWH at the appearance of Eliab (1 Sam. xvi 6-7). P offers two variant readings: in v. 6 ḫwāṭēh dmnry ṭ is not quite equivalent to ḫ neqd ywh of the Massoretic Text (MT); in v. 7 ḫ hwit ḫ dlḥ ṭ lns diverges markedly from ḫ ḫ ṭ ylr hddm. Furthermore, as will be discussed below, these two variants lead to a coherent understanding of the passage different from the MT. The main part of this note is devoted to the analysis of the two variants. It will be argued that they are genuine variant readings and not instances of exegesis, translation technique or inner-Peshitta corruptions or alterations. On the basis of the analysis, the Hebrew text which they presuppose will be reconstructed.

In the last section the textual history of 1 Sam. xvi 6-7 will be discussed. Though this point remains hypothetical, it will be argued that the text preserved in P is the original text of 1 Sam. xvi 6-7 to which the MT is secondary.

1. 1 Sam. xvi 6 ḫwāṭēh dmnry ṭ mṣḥēh

Samuel’s reaction to the appearance of Eliab is according to the MT ḫ neqd ywh ṭ mṣḥō, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is before him” (Revised Standard Version). In P the words of Samuel are ḫwāṭēh dmnry ṭ mṣḥēh. The analysis of these words requires an exact knowledge of the Syriac idiom of P, but it is not problematic:
— ḫwāṭēh is the regular form with suffix pronouns of the preposition ḫ(y)k “as, like”, ḫwāṭēh means “like him”.
— The syntagm preposition-suffix + ḫ-noun is normal, with longer prepositions, when the noun is definite and has an important status in the context; ḫwāṭēh dmnry ṭ means “like the Lord, similar to the Lord”. The whole clause must be rendered: “similar to the Lord is his Messiah”, “The Lord’s Messiah is like him himself”.

In the light of this it is clear that the meaning of the Syriac diverges from that of the MT. But how shall we account for P’s text? First, it is unlikely that P is an interpretation of the MT. The difference in meaning between “he stands before him” (MT) and “he is like him” (P) is simply too great. Also, we would expect an interpretation to be more transparent than the text it purports to interpret, whereas in this verse P’s text stands more in need of commentary than the MT. Secondly, it is problematic to view P’s text as a mistaken translation of the MT. Both ḫ and neqd are else-