The Peshitta may be the subject of research for other reasons than that of textual criticism of the O.T. To mention two obvious ones: this version is of prime importance as a monument of the Syriac language, and it is an important witness for early exegesis. But the fact remains that for the O.T. scholar, and in particular the O.T. textual critic, the P is primarily an ancient witness to the text of the Bible, in importance second only to the LXX. The question that the O.T. scholar will usually ask, with respect to the P, is whether a deviation from the MT may reflect another and perhaps older and better text than the MT, or at least help him in tracing the early history of the biblical text. This text-critical interest in the P is a valid one, but it certainly is not easy to put it into practice.

For the O.T. scholar to use the P for textual purposes two needs must be met. The first need is to have the oldest possible text of the P available. This need is being fulfilled to a large extent by the Leiden Peshitta. It has become clear that in general the important variant readings occur in the ancient manuscripts, i.e. the manuscripts of up to and including the 9th century. With only a few exceptions of minor importance, the text and apparatus of the Leiden edition together allow us to reconstruct the text which underlies these ancient manuscripts, i.e. the text of the 6th, sometimes of the 5th century. Admittedly, this is still at least four centuries after the P came into being. What happened to the text in

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1 This article was read as a paper at the Joint Meeting of the British Society for Old Testament Study and the Dutch/Flemish Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap (OTW) at Durham, 16-19 July 1991. "P", "Trg" and "Sam" are used as abbreviations for "Peshitta", "Targum", and "Samaritan Pentateuch", respectively. The Peshitta text of Genesis in the Leiden Peshitta I, 1 (Leiden, 1977) has been prepared by M.D. Koster.

that period? We can do little more than guess. But this is as close as we can get.

The other need is guidance with respect to the question how to evaluate the P’s deviations from the Hebrew. It will be agreed that the mention of isolated readings of the P—and for that matter of the other ancient versions—in the critical apparatus of the Hebrew Bible is of little use, and may in some cases even be more misleading than helpful. We cannot bypass the question of the text-critical weight of a reading of the P which deviates from the Hebrew.

There will be cases when the P by itself may reflect a Hebrew variant, and indeed such cases have been suggested by various scholars. In general, however, we shall be hesitant to base text-critical conclusions on a deviation of the P alone. At any rate, no general rules can be drawn up for such cases. Each case has to be treated on its own merits, within the framework of all the textual data.

But what is to be done if the P agrees with the LXX, any or all of the targums, or with both? This has been a much debated question in scholarly literature. In this literature we find a large quantity of material consisting of extra-masoretic agreements between the P and any or all of the other ancient versions for various books of the O.T. And if we now disagree with some conclusions, we have certainly gained from this previous work a better insight into the issue and also into the pitfalls in dealing with it. We are now better aware of the variety of possible explanations of the agreements between the P and one or more of the other versions. I have counted the following eight possibilities, between which admittedly one cannot always draw a sharp line.

1. The same translation technique: two or more versions may follow the same method in going about the work of translation, which may result in agreements over against the MT. An example is the explanatory rendering of metaphors as “shield” and “rock” referring to God. In the LXX, the P, and the Trg we find translations as “Helper” and “the Strong One.”

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3 A recent notable example is the article by J. Joosten, “1 Samuel xvi 6, 7 in the Peshitta version”. VT 41 (1991), pp. 226-33, in which it is plausibly argued that the P reflects here a better text than that presented by the MT.

4 See e.g. J.A. Lund’s study, mentioned below, pp. 227-34.