THE USE OF SOME PARTICLES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT PESHITTA

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In an article dealing with the text of the Old Testament Peshitta M.H. Goshen has summed up some main traits of the Syriac Old Testament:

There is no other Syriac text which can compare in importance with the Old Testament Peshitta. Not only is this the one direct non-midrashic translation of the Hebrew Bible into a language closely related to Hebrew and therefore invaluable to the study of the Bible text; it is also practically the oldest and best-attested text in Syriac, with an influence second to none on the development of that language.¹

Such a judgment warrants intensive study, not only of the text, but also of the language and translation technique of the Old Testament Peshitta. However, very little work has been done on the language of the Old Testament Peshitta. There are no specialized studies of its vocabulary², and research on its syntax is still in an embryonic stage.³ This lack of research confronts textual critics who

¹I wish to thank G. Marquis who has helped me improve the English of the present article, and S. Asif who has made helpful remarks concerning the OT Peshitta.

²The only studies of aspects of OT Peshitta vocabulary are those which try to trace non-Syriac vocabulary in the OT Peshitta; K. Beyer, "Der reichsaramäische Einschlag in der ältesten syrischen Literatur", ZDMG 116 (1966) 242-254, gives examples of influence of Official Aramaic; Y. Maori, "Midrashic Influence on the Peshitta's Choice of Words", Tarbiz 46 (1976) 212-230, brings some interesting instances of Jewish-Aramaic influence. The question of non-Syriac influences in the OT Peshitta is important but should not obscure the fact that, generally spoken, the Peshitta is written in idiomatic Syriac.

³The only work I know of is the doctoral thesis of I. Avinery, Syntaxe de la Peshitta sur le Pentateoque (Jerusalem 1973) [Hebrew], and the articles based on it, in: Leshonenu 38 (1973-74) 220-4 [Hebrew]; JNES 34 (1975) 123-7; Israel Oriental Studies 5 (1975) 45-6;
want to utilise this version with two sets of problems. Firstly, because we have no exact knowledge of the language of the Peshitta version, we may encounter a word, expression or syntagm whose meaning is unclear. Secondly, because the Syriac of the OT has not yet been studied thoroughly enough to categorize the language (classical Syriac, Old Syriac, Jewish Syriac, or 'Hebraized' Syriac) we do not always know how to approach linguistic problems of the OT Peshitta. The present article makes a modest contribution to a better knowledge and a more exact characterization of the language of the OT Peshitta.

Four particles will be studied with respect to their use and function in the OT Peshitta, in relation to matters of language and translation technique. The syntactic function of these particles will be defined, and it will be demonstrated that the use of each of these particles is stylistic, not related to the Hebrew Vorlage or Syriac syntax. Thus the use of these particles exemplifies the general translation technique of the OT Peshitta, which, though adhering closely to its Hebrew Vorlage, is not exaggeratedly literal. The authors of the OT Peshitta knew how to make use of nuances in their target language beyond the implications of the source language.

At the same time, the syntax of these particles assists us in categorizing the language of the OT Peshitta. It will be shown that the idiomatic use of these particles is not limited to the OT Peshitta, but is also found in other early Syriac works. Thus, in the use of these particles, the OT Peshitta reflects the Syriac style of the oldest period known to us.

1. "Why"

Already the native Syriac grammarians noted that while ḫ̣m ḫ̣m always means 'where', ḫ̣m may mean either 'where' or 'why'. This statement was taken over by the modern dictionaries. But nowhere do we find noted that aykaw meaning 'why' is quite rare and almost entirely limited to the OT Peshitta. Also, upon examining the evidence, the particle turns out to have a very specific, idiomatic function. The occurrences from the OT Peshitta are the following:

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4See Thesaurus syriacus, ed. R. Payne Smith (Oxford 1879), s.v.
These examples clearly show that *aykaw* means 'why' (translating Hebrew נָא and in Ezek. 18:19 וַיִּשָּׁא). Moreover, it is always followed by a negative clause.\(^5\) It was not, however, necessary to use *aykaw* in this syntactic situation, as is shown by the places where we find *lemana la* + a negative clause (Gen. 12:18, Num. 11:11, 2 Sam. 16:17, 19:25, Job 3:10). Apparently the use of *aykaw* as opposed to *lemana* depended on the choice of the translator.

This use of *aykaw* occurs sporadically outside the OT Peshitta, apparently only in the oldest writings. We find the particle a few times in the Old Syriac version of the Gospels:\(^6\)

Mat. 16:11 CS נָא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִשָּׁא יִш...
This probably indicates that at a later stage of Syriac aykaw was no longer understood in the sense 'why?'

We find the particle also in the very old texts contained in the Spicilegium Syriacum:\(^9\)

Spic., p.3, l.4 ܐܘܢܚܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܫܠܝܚܐ ܣܘܼܪܵܪ̣ ܐܠܗܐ.

"Why did God not make us so that we wouldn't sin and be found guilty?"

Spic., p.27, l.3 ܐܘܢܚܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܫܠܝܚܐ ܣܘܼܪܵܪ̣ ܐܠܗܐ.

"Why did God not make me so that I would serve him and not the effigies?"

Finally, the particle is also used by Ephraem:\(^10\)

Prose Refutations\(^11\) vol. 1, 79:36 ܐܘܢܚܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܫܠܝܚܐ ܣܘܼܵܪ̣ ܐܠܗܐ ܢܼܟܬ̣ ܐܢܫ̣צ̣ ܠܡ̣ ܓ̣ܝ̣ܪ̣ ܐܠܗ̣ܐ ܕܝ̣ܫ̣ ܐܠܗ̣ܐ.

"For he was afraid of the truth of Nature lest it should refute him. But if not, how (?) was the perverse tale not disgraced in their ears?"

Contra Haereses\(^12\), p.115 ܐܘܢܚܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܫܠܝܚܐ ܣܘܼܵܪ̣ ܐܠܗ̣ܐ ܢܼܟܬ̣ ܐܢܫ̣צ̣ ܠܡ̣ ܓ̣ܝ̣ܪ̣ ܐܠܗ̣ܐ ܕܝ̣ܫ̣ ܐܠܗ̣ܐ.

"Or maybe someone else has possessed you and why did you not feel it?"

I have not found the particle aykaw, 'why?' in later Syriac literature. The fact that the correctors of the NT Peshitta felt obliged to correct it is at least an indication that it belongs to the oldest stratum of Syriac only.

2. \(\text{why}\) in rhetorical questions

The student of Syriac is familiar with the particle ger which like γάρ means 'for, because' and usually takes the second position in the clause. This particle occurs in the OT Peshitta, albeit rarely (e.g. Exod. 23:9, Deut. 10:9, 18:2, Neh. 8:10). Equally rare are the cases where ger does not mean 'for, because', but has a different function:

Gen. 4:9 ܝܠרכז ܐܠܗܐ ܠܐ ܫܠܝܚܐ.

\(^9\)Spicilegium syriacum ed. by W. Cureton (London 1885).

\(^10\)The examples from Ephraem are listed in the Thesaurus syriacus and in the Lexicon syriacum of C. Brockelman (Halle 1928).


\(^12\)E. Beck, Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen contra Haereses, (Louvain 1957), vol. 1. Another example occurs in the same hymn, ibid. p. 119.
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Isa. 36:10
Jer. 13:12
Job 1:9
Job 6:22
Job 21:9

All these clauses are rhetorical questions (introduced in Hebrew by תֶּן [Gen 4:9, Isa. 36:10, Jer. 13:12, Job 1:9], יְהַע [Job 6:22] and יְהַע [Job 21:29]) which require the answer 'no' (or 'yes' in case the question contains a negation). It is difficult to say whether this use of ger imitates a certain use of ĕp or whether, as I would rather think, it reflects the original meaning of this Semitic particle. What is certain is that this use of ger is highly idiomatic: the particle does not correspond to any formal equivalent in the Hebrew and was freely added to enliven the style.

Outside the OT Peshitta I have noted the following instances of this usage:

Apoc. Bar. 21:16. "Or is it not so that as we were before we are now no more?"

Acts of Thomas, vol. 1, p. 214, l. 14. "Is there (ever) a madman that is interrogated?"

Cur. Anc. Doc.15, p. 56, l. 19. "Is there (ever) a madman that is interrogated?"

3. יְהַע in wish and apodosis

What is true for ger is true for den: it is of such current usage in the connection of phrases (imitating שֶּׁה), that one rarely pays attention to it. In the meaning 'but, and' den is fairly rare in the OT Peshitta (e.g. Exod. 21:21, 32:19, Deut. 18:14, Isa.

13Ger is probably akin to Arabic jayr which presumably means 'yes', 'truly', 'I know' or sim., see Lexicon syriacum, s.v.

14The text is difficult and may not be totally in order, see the note to the passage in the edition of M. Knosko in Patrologia syriaca, pars 1, tomos 3 (Paris 1926).

23:15, Ezek. 37:16, Hos. 1:7, 2:8, Psalm 11:3, 13:6), but alongside this usage we also find den with a different meaning, which cannot be derived from δέ.  

Gen. 43:10 ἀνέβησαν οὖν οἱ πάντες τοὺς ἁπάντες καὶ ἠγάπασαν αὐτούς.
Num. 11:29 καὶ δὲ δέχθη ἔρχοντας καὶ ἐστίν οὐδὲν ἔμελλεν ἡμῖν.
Ps. 119:5 ἐκζερούσις ἀποθέτησαν αὐτούς.
Gen. 31:27 ὥσπερ ἀνθρώπων ἡμῖν ἐκ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐστίν.
Job 10:18f ὅτι οὐκ ἦσαν ἐν τοῖς ἄνθρωποις καὶ τῷ οὐδὲν ἐπέτρεψαν καὶ ἐπεσυνάβατεν ἡμῖν.

Here den is used in wishes (Num. 11:29, Ps. 119:5) or in apodoses (Gen. 43:10, 31:27, Job 10:18), uncapable of fulfillment. This use of den is attested mainly in stereotyped expressions like kebar den, 17 man den + perfect (= Hebrew יָבוּשׁ בָּנָן), 18 estop den, 19 and leway den. 20 Now and then, however, it is used freely, i.e. outside these fixed expressions (as in Gen. 31:27 and Job 10:18). 21

We should not hesitate to see in these cases a survival of the original Semitic meaning of den: 'then, thereupon'. 22 To the translators of the OT Peshitta this meaning was still well-known as is shown especially by those verses in which the particle is used freely.

The fixed expressions noted above with the 'Semitic' particle den are found sporadically in Syriac writers from different periods. On the other hand, the free use of it (i.e. outside these stereotyped expressions), which is found in the OT

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16See Lexicon syriacum, s.v.

17Gen. 43:10; Job 3:13.

18Num. 11:4; 11:29; Jud. 9:29; 2 Sam. 19:1; Isa. 27:4; Jer. 8:23; 9:1; Ps. 55:7; Job 11:5; 13:15; 14:13; 19:23; 23:3; 29:2; 31:31; 31:35.

19Gen. 17:18; Num. 14:2; 20:3; Deut. 5:26; Ps. 119:5; Job 9:33.

201Sam. 20:14; Isa. 48:18; Job 6:2.

21Gen. 31:27; Deut. 28:67; Ps. 41:6; Job 10:18f.

22כָּנָּם is an original Semitic particle, related to biblical Aramaic כָּנָם. For the use of כָּנָּם in an apodosis compare the use of Hebrew כָּנָּם in Ps. 124:1-5, and of Arabic idam in Koran 12:14.
Peshitta, is probably limited to the oldest writings. It occurs a few times in the Old Syriac version of the New Testament.23

Mat. 17:20S ἐὰν πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πά

Mat. 23:23CS ἐὰν πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πά

Luk. 19:23CS ἐὰν πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πά

Luk. 19:42C ἐὰν πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πά

As in the OT Peshitta, den is used in the Old Syriac version of the NT, in wishes (Mat. 23:23, Luk. 19:42) and in apodoses to conditional clauses (Mat. 17:20, Luk 19:23)24. In all the cases cited above the NT Peshitta has omitted den, which indicates that the correctors did not recognize the genuine Semitic use of the particle.

From other writings the following instances have been gleaned of the free use of den in wish and apodosis:

Spic., p.27, l.4 ἐὰν πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πά

For translation see above §1.

Acts of Thomas25, vol. 1, p.286, l.12 "Would that someone had blinded one of my eyes and that your eyes looked on me as they used to."

Ahiqar26, p. 63, l.1 ἐὰν πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πάντες ἢ πά

"If a house could be built with a loud voice, the donkey would build two houses in a day."

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23 The Semitic use of den in the Old Syriac Gospels is treated by Burkitt, Evangelion da-Mepharreshe, vol. 2 p. 74.

24 In addition to the cases cited there are 2 cases of kebar den, Mat. 11:21CS and its particle was preserved in the Peshitta (in a stereotyped formula).

25 Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, vol. 1-2, ed. by W. Wright (London 1865). The preceding and following clauses have the same structure, which provides 4 more cases of den.

26 The Story of Ahiqar from the Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Greek and Slavonic Versions, ed. by F.C. Conybeare et al. 2nd ed. (London 1914).
Aphrahat, vol. 1, p. 108, l. 20 "Would that you had feared this, o Jezebel, and then had been zealous about injustice."

The first clause in Acts of Thomas uses *den* in a stereotyped expression (man *den* + perfect), but the use of *den* in the apodosis shows that to the poet the primitive meaning of the particle was well known.

4.  גַּּ 준 used as a conjunction (+ imperfect)

The preposition 'ad is not usually, in Syriac, employed as a conjunction. To express "until",  נ is used, including the OT Peshitta, even where the Hebrew has נ + imperfect (or + perfect). At the same time a few cases are evidenced of what is probably an older syntagm, namely 'ad + imperfect. Here are the examples from the OT Peshitta:

Isa. 36:17 נָלַכְתִּי וְצִוִּיתִי פרָצִי יִשְׂרָאֵל.
Cant. 2:17 (= Cant. 4:6) נָלַכְתִּי וְצִוִּיתִי.
Dan. 2:9 נָלַכְתִּי וְצִוִּיתִי גַּרְזֶה יִשְׂרָאֵל.
Dan. 11:36 נָלַכְתִּי וְצִוִּיתִי וְאָסַפְתָּב יִשְׂרָאֵל.

This is not an imitation of the Vorlage because in none of these places does the Hebrew (or, in Dan. 2:9, the Aramaic) text have נ + imperfect.

The syntagm 'ad + imperfect is extremely rare also outside the OT Peshitta. It seems to be found only in old works. Here are the examples that have come to my attention:

Acts of Th., vol 1.p.275, l.8 נָלַכְתִּי וְצִוִּיתִי גָּלְגָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶאֱמָר: "Around his lodging I dwelt, until he would sleep and I could take from him my pearl."
Ahigar p. 1.4 נָלַכְתִּי וְצִוִּיתִי יִשְׂרָאֵל: "Until you complete your days."
Aphrahat, vol. 1, p. 97, l. 11 נָלַכְתִּי וְצִוִּיתִי בְּאִצַּר הָאָכַף גַּרְזֶה יִשְׂרָאֵל: "For some fast from bread and water until they get hungry or thirsty."
II p. 8, l. 19 נָלַכְתִּי וְצִוִּיתִי וְאָסַפְתָּב יִשְׂרָאֵל: "Until the time set by the Most High is completed."

28 There are some cases of 'ad + participle, e.g. Jud. 19:8; Isa. 26:20; Hos. 10:12.
Conclusion

We cannot base any far-reaching conclusions on what are after all a few instances of "marginal syntax". What we can say is that what may appear at first sight to be idiosyncrasies of the OT Peshitta are actually marks of genuine Syriac style of the oldest period known to us.

In the use of these particles the OT Peshitta apparently reflects the oldest stratum of Syriac literature.