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This symbol is the Aramaic character to designate Deity (Three Persons in One) and appears on most ancient Syriac manuscripts.

INTRODUCTION

When the King James Version was made, Europe was just emerging out of dark clouds. The political and religious situation was still chaotic. Nation after nation was eagerly striving for freedom. The ecclesiastical structure and its hierarchy were weakening under the impact of scientific and religious research. The time was ripe for a spiritual revival in all lands. There was also an eager demand for the Scriptures, and this was promptly met by devout scholars who offered translations.

These changes were largely stimulated by the industrial and commercial activities, which greatly incited hopes for a better understanding of the Orient and the world at large. Hitherto the East was practically unknown. Since the rise of Islam and the growth of the Turkish power, the East was isolated from Europe. It was this isolation which prompted Columbus to make his notable voyage in search of a way to the Orient and which resulted in the discovery of America. Indeed, there were but few adventurers who had crossed unknown seas and lands in search of fame and fortune. In those days travel was hazardous and expensive, and transportation was beset with severe difficulties. The world was uncharted and a few good roads were found only in some regions. The races of the Near East were, moreover, hostile to the peoples of Europe, due doubtless to the devastations caused by the Crusades in the name of Christ. Indeed, when a man undertook a long journey he was hardly expected to return alive. It took Marco Polo an Italian adventurer, twenty years to visit the great Khan in the Far East and return home. The delay was no doubt caused by wars, revolutions, lack of caravans, severe winters in the several countries through which he passed. While he was learning the Asiatic languages he forgot his own mother tongue.

It was only after the conquest of India by Great Britain and the rise of British power that any worthwhile contributions came from the Orient. In this particular period European nations were more interested in the search for gold and in acquiring new lands than in investigating the wisdom and religions of the East.

Under these circumstances, it is apparent how Eastern manners and customs continued to be as mysterious to the Occident, as those of the latter were to the Orient. Indeed, this strange misunderstanding still prevails. This is because Christianity is an Eastern religion and the Bible an Oriental book. This is why early and mediaeval artists portrayed Jesus and his disciples at the Last Supper, sitting on chairs at a luxurious table in the Western style; instead of sitting on the floor with their legs folded under them, their hats on their heads, their shoes removed, and a large tray containing two dishes, a few spoons and a jar of wine in front of them. These artists and authors of books were not aware that many things which were in good taste in the Occident were in bad form and even repulsive in the Orient. For instance, in the West men help and honor their wives; in the East wives are virtually the servants of their husbands, and never sit at a common meal with them. The Oriental retains his hat and removes his shoes when entering a house; this order is altogether reversed among Occidentals. In the East it would be scandalous to play music during the Church or Mosque services; the absence of music is almost inconceivable in Western services. If an Occidental observes an Oriental praying five times a day he would conclude that he is lazy or crazy; on the other hand, an

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Oriental is puzzled when the Occidental has to be urged to pray. Moreover, in some Eastern countries women are still purchased or acquired. Men often marry girls who are under age, but by an oral pledge the men do not take them as their wives until the age of maturity is reached. Wives are often driven out of their homes by their husbands with or without cause. All this is totally different in Western lands where women are respected and have more to say than their husbands.

Indeed customs constituted a great barrier between the East and the West; to this was added the barrier of distance. This is one reason why so much misunderstanding exists between the Orient and the Occident. This is why some of the things in the Bible are magnified. For instance, the little lake in Galilee looks as if it was an enormous body of water, and the tiny boats appear as large ships. Tiny states of only a few square miles are regarded as kingdoms. Joshua conquered thirty-one kingdoms east of the Jordan, which had a territory of not more than a few hundred square miles, whose inhabitants were mostly shepherds and farmers (Joshua 12:24). Travellers are often disappointed when they see holy lands, which are so different to what they had pictured.

These and like differences illustrate the difficulties of Occidentals in understanding the languages and customs of Orientals. All the greater is our indebtedness to those translators of the Scriptures, who, in the face of unsurmountable difficulties, have given us versions which stand as monuments to their scholarship, zeal and devotion; and who challenge us to follow in their steps.

Prior to and since the Reformation many attempts have been made to translate the Holy Scriptures and to explain their message, which in the original language was simple and lucid; and to throw light on some obscure passages which have lost their original meaning when interpreted in terms of modern civilization and European customs. In spite of these numerous undertakings, the Bible still continues to perplex people. This fact explains why new translations of the Bible have continued to appear from time to time.

During all the centuries of scholarly endeavor and controversy the East has practically been silent. Hardly anything has been said for or against what the West has done with the Scriptures. This silence has been maintained from the days of Tatian, Ephraim Syrus, and Narsis, Assyrian writers who were noteworthy commentators. The reason for this was not lack of interest in what constitutes the basic principles of religion and thought. It was rather due to certain unavoidable circumstances.

Eastern Christianity was prosecuting its work with vigorous enthusiasm, in the assured confidence that Christianity would soon become the universal religion in the East and the West. In those early days the Persian Empire alone had seven metropolitan provinces and eighty bishoprics, all the way from Armenia to India. Moreover, Christianity was winning favor in the eyes of the Persian Court. There was no thought that any reverses might interfere with the spread of the gospel message.

The horizon was then suddenly darkened by a cloud which appeared in South-west Arabia. The claims of Christianity and of the victorious Roman Empire were strenuously challenged. What at first appeared to the Christians as a despised heresy, espoused by a nomadic chief, assumed big proportions and vanquished the Christian forces in the East. Schools of Christian learning were closed, monasteries were deserted, churches were converted into mosques, books which did not agree with Moslem doctrines were burned, and writers of new books were punished. Christian scholars were conscripted to translate works of Greek and Syriac authors into Arabic, for propagating the new and militant faith of Islam, which was steadily ousting Christianity. Writers of commentaries, which even incidentally or unwittingly disagreed with the Koran, were promptly exiled or put to death. Christian authorship was under a severe ban. These unhappy events, accompanied with constant persecutions, put an end to any further attempts to throw light on the Holy Scriptures. In sheer destitution the Christians were ready to relinquish everything for the alternative of a restricted freedom to worship Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Although deprived of schools and learning, the

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teachings of Jesus were largely preserved by customs and practices, which Islam could not displace, and by copies of the Scriptures, which escaped destruction.

The providence of God, however, wrought an extraordinary miracle. Other Christian literature suffered, but the Gospels of Jesus stood unchallenged. Even though the Koran became the revered book of the Moslems, Mohammed (570-632 A.D.) accepted the Gospels as the veritable word of God, as also did his successors, and all Moslems throughout the world. However, the version of the Gospels, honored by Mohammedans, is not the Vulgate of the Western world, which they repudiate as second-hand and as an unreliable translation. But it was the Eastern version of the Gospels, the Peshitta, which means clear, straight and popularly accepted. This name is justified by its clarity of style, directness of expression and simplicity of language. This was the version which the people of this region knew and used before they became Mohammedans. This is, moreover, the authentic and official version of what once constituted the original Eastern Church, the Mother Church of Christendom.

Years later when other peoples accepted Christianity, translations of the Peshitta were made into Greek, Armenian, Arabic, Persian, and other languages. Even the Christians of Malabar, India, who are known as the Christians of St. Thomas one of the apostles of our Lord, adopted the Peshitta from the earliest centuries. Indeed, it was the universally accepted version among all Christians in the East. And it has so continued down to the present day. Furthermore, the Eastern Christians never used the Vulgate Latin translation. It appeared in the East only after the coming of Western missionaries to the East a few decades ago, and it has been used by their converts.

The Eastern Version originally consisted of twenty-two books of the New Testament. The Revelation and the four Epistles of II Peter, II John, III John and Jude were not included. The Revelation was accepted after the Council of Nicaea, 325 A. D., but many of the Eastern bishops in Persia rejected it. The argument for priority on the basis of fewer books might be illustrated from the amendments to the Constitution of the United States. Suppose a thousand years hence two texts of this instrument were discovered, one containing the twelve early amendments and the other with twenty amendments, and these two texts were not dated. Surely the one with fewer amendments, even though a later copy of the original, would be accepted as the older, even though the other text with the twenty amendments was an earlier copy. Another argument for priority is that copies of the Eastern version, used for the training of the clergy, would suffer the loss of the first and last pages of the book by their careless handling and constant use of the book, and the date of their writing would become unknown. In the East when documents and books are worn out they are copied exactly and the originals are burned. This is due to the belief of the Eastern people that it is a sin to allow a book to fall to pieces. Then again, the dating of documents was unknown to earlier writers. Even if authors wished to date their writings, they would have hesitated because of the prejudice against dating them in the years of persecuting emperors, and because the teachings of Christianity were regarded as hostile to the Roman Empire. In such circumstances, even the authors of the Four Gospels omitted their names for fear of reprisals. Thus dates were not important. Furthermore, the originality of a document is not determined by the year but by the native context, the customs, the structure of the sentences, and the clarity of thought. That is to say, by internal and not external evidence.

It would seem that the appearance of other Aramaic versions, which differed from the Eastern Version, was due to the defeat of Rome and the treaty made by the Emperor Jovian with the Persian King Sapor (363 A.D.). By this pact Rome ceded five provinces in the Euphrates valley to Persia. The Christians of these provinces had hitherto been under Rome and subject to the ecclesiastical authority of Antioch. After the treaty they automatically came under the jurisdiction of the Eastern patriarch, whose See was at Seleucia, the imperial capital of the Persian Kings of the Sassanian dynasty. The patriarch of the East and his associates not only welcomed these Christian refugees, but

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also permitted them to use their own versions. These versions included portions of the New Testament not found in the Peshitta. This was doubtless due to the fact that such parts originated in the Eastern Roman Empire after the compilation of the Peshitta, and could not be sent to Persia because of the conflict which began soon after the death of Constantine and lasted for many years. It is unfortunate that these later versions, and the versions which the Jacobite Christians made in the fifth century, should be confused with the ancient Peshitta text, which was used in the native church of Persia, centuries before, and was quoted by Eastern writers of the second and third centuries.

Some illustrations of difficulties in translating the Aramaic text into Greek may interest the modern reader. These difficulties also prove the originality of the Eastern version.

(1) The Aramaic word for seed is *zara*, and the word for sower is *zarua*. The differences in the Aramaic formation of these words is so slight that the Greek translators overlooked and confused the word "seed" with the word sower (Matt. 13:18). It reads "the parable of the seed" according to the Eastern version, and not "the parable of the sower," according to the Western text. Such mistakes are unavoidable in a language like the Aramaic, where a word has many meanings and a dot misplaced altogether changes the meaning. This was especially true before vowel points were introduced, and when punctuation was not observed, and there was no uniformity in writing and copying.

(2) The Aramaic word *gamla* is the same word for "camel" and "a large rope." Matt. 19:24 should read, "It is easier for a rope to go through a needle's eye, etc."

(3) The Aramaic word for a certain large piece of money called *Kakra*, talent, is like the word used for province. The difference is distinguished by a single dot, according to the letter over which it is placed. Thus ܟܟܪܐ means coin, and ܟܟܪܐ means province. The confusion is seen in the parable of the nobleman, who rewarded his servants not with coins but with cities, which is improbable (Luke 19:13,17,24). This error was no doubt due to a copyist who placed the dot over the wrong letter. Such an error could not have occurred in the Greek version if it was the original, because the Greek has two different words for coin and for city. Thus if the Peshitta was a translation from the Greek, the word would have been *medinata*, which means cities. In the case of the parable of the seed, likewise, it would have been "the parable of the sower." This further proves that the Peshitta is consistent in its report of the teachings of Jesus, which harmonized with contemporary customs.

It is also of interest to note the differences between versions. In the Greek version of St. John 12:40, we read:

"He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart; and be converted, and I should heal them."

The Eastern Version reads:

"Their eyes have become blind and their heart darkened, so that they cannot see with their eyes nor understand with their heart, let them return and I will heal them."

The Aramaic word *avaro* means have become blind. The grammatical differences between "He made them blind" or "had become blind" is indicated by the final letter o which is the third person plural.

Furthermore, some Aramaic words were not translated into Greek because they were not clearly understood. Such words are *rakah*, to spit; *mammon*, wealth; *ethpatak*, be opened. In other places Aramaic phrases are retained in their original form. Some Aramaic words, again, are translated to agree with the usage of the languages into which they were put. For instance, the Aramaic *tova*, means envied, expressing emulation, but it is translated "blessed" in the Beatitudes, for which the Aramaic is

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brekha. This word “blessed” and a few others are retained by me in this translation because there are no equivalents to express their meanings. On the other hand, some of the Aramaic colloquial and idiomatic expressions could hardly be translated into other languages without the loss of thought.

It is a well known fact that languages undergo changes. Many words become obsolete and lose their meaning, especially when translated into other languages expressing different cultures. These original meanings could often be obtained by examining the phraseology and thought conveyed by the words. For instance, medical terms were unknown in the East, and even today they are little known. Indeed, the people still use ancient terms when describing various diseases. An insane man is called *dewana*, which literally means that he is possessed of a devil, or has become wild. Mark 1:34, according to the King James Version, reads that Jesus “suffered not the devils to speak because they knew him”; the Aramaic is that “he did not allow the insane to speak,” after he had healed them, “because some of these were his acquaintances,” and he did not want them to praise him. Mark 9:17 states that the boy had “a dumb spirit”; it means that this particular disease had caused dumbness in the boy and not that the spirit was dumb. Luke 11:14, in the King James Version, states that Jesus “was casting out a devil and it was dumb”; the Eastern version, which reflects the Aramaic style of speech, states that Jesus “was casting out a demon from a dumb man.” In Luke 4:41, in the King James Version, “the devils came out of many, crying out and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God”; the translation from the Aramaic is, “demons also came out of many, who cried out saying, You are the, Christ the Son of God”; the sick did this after they were healed. It is hardly credible that the devils, who were cast out, would acknowledge Jesus as the Christ.

It is interesting to know that Eastern people still believe that every sickness is caused and controlled by demons. This crude belief is no doubt due to the fact that the actual causes of diseases were not known. Such beliefs, in demonology are found not only among Semites but among all peoples living even today under primitive conditions, in Asia as well as in Europe and the United States. We are, however, grateful to science and truth for demonstrating that diseases are due to physical and nervous causes, delusions and fears, and have nothing to do with demons and evil spirits.

There are other instances which cause confusion when taken literally. The Aramaic *al* means “enter into,” “attack,” “chase”; but it has been exclusively translated “enter into,” so as to imply, as in Matthew 8:31, that the demons entered into the swine. According to the context and the style of Aramaic speech, the word *al* here means that, not the demons but the lunatics attacked the swine. These lunatics were Syrians or Gadarenes, whose people kept swine, which were an abomination to the Jews. Jesus was a Jewish prophet. As a mark of appreciation of what Jesus was doing for them and as a proof of their conversion, these lunatics were willing to destroy the herd of swine which belonged to their people. This was doubtless one reason why the owners of the swine got into a panic and urged Jesus to leave their land, lest their business be completely destroyed by more conversions to the Jewish faith. On the other hand, the demons did not need the permission of Jesus to enter into the swine any more than they needed any permission to enter into the lunatics.

This word *al* is still used when it is said that “the oxen are entering into each other,” or, “the men are entering into each other,” where the reference is to their attacking one another in a fight. So also when a wolf attacks a fold, it is still said that “the wolf has entered into the sheep.”

There are similar difficulties in the matter of colloquialisms. “He breathed on them,” means that he stimulated their courage (John 20:22). “The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up” means the zeal for your house has made me courageous (John 2:17). Such difficulties are also evident in American colloquialisms, which could hardly be translated into Eastern languages. In English the word fire has several meanings, such as “to set fire to a house,” “to fire a gun,” “to fire a worker.” In the last instance, an Eastern, unfamiliar with American customs, would understand that the worker was either burned or shot instead of being dismissed.

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A comparison between the Aramaic and Greek texts, in the light of the above illustrations, cannot but lead to the conclusion in favor of the Aramaic origin of the Gospels. The strongest argument, however, offering indisputable evidence, is that our Lord and his disciples spoke Aramaic. It was also the language of the Church in Jerusalem, Syria, and Mesopotamia. The "Hebrew tongue" means Aramaic, in which St. Paul spoke to the people of Jerusalem, and in which the ascended Jesus spoke to Saul on his way to Damascus (Acts 21:40; 22:2; 26:14). Indeed, this was the Apostle's mother tongue in which he prayed and expressed his deepest emotions. Compare Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6; I Corinthians 16:22, where occur such Aramaic words as *abba*, father, and *marana tha*, O Lord come.

Even so far back as the seventh century B. C., Aramaic was the language of communication for commerce and diplomacy between the nations in Mesopotamia, Asia Minor and Palestine (cf. 2 Kings 18:26). The Greeks referred to this language as Syriac, because they confused Syria which is in the north of Palestine, with Assyria which is a totally different country between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, east of Syria. This confusion exists even today in the United States. It is moreover a historical fact that Aramaic was the colloquial and literary language of Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, from the fourth century B. C. to the ninth century A. D. After the Assyrian and Babylonian exile, Hebrew ceased to be spoken and gave way to Aramaic, which became the widely prevalent popular language. Jewish writers, from the days of Nehemiah and Ezra, wrote in Aramaic. This is further seen in the books of Daniel, the Psalter, and in the composition of other Old Testament books. Attempts were made to restore Hebrew by some Jewish scholars, who warned the people that the angels do not understand prayers offered in Aramaic and would therefore be handicapped in acting as their mediators with God. Other Jewish scholars defended Aramaic against such criticisms, adding that God himself spoke to Adam in Aramaic, and that Abraham was an Aramaean. Jacob's children were born and raised in Assyria, and later sojourned in Canaan, after which they migrated with him to Egypt.

During the reigns of the Achaemenian dynasty in Persia, beginning with Cyrus, 528 B. C., Aramaic was used as the official language for correspondence between the kings and their provincial governors as far as Egypt. As a matter of fact, Jewish literature after Christ was written mainly in Aramaic, and works in Hebrew were translated into Aramaic. Josephus, the Jewish historian, used Hebrew and Aramaic words indiscriminately. This is because Hebrew was an Aramaic dialect, and the differences between them were largely in matters of pronunciation rather than of meaning. After the destruction of the second Temple, the Jews became wholly an Aramaic-speaking people, and Hebrew became the language of the scholars.

Greek was seldom spoken except by the cultured few and by government officials. Indeed, the Jews obstinately resisted every attempt at Hellenization, as the Maccabean struggle clearly indicates. The brief Greek rule over Syria and Mesopotamia might be compared with British rule in India, Mesopotamia and Palestine. British officers, governors and soldiers invariably acquire the native languages, but only a few natives know English. Some natives who do not speak English nevertheless adopt English names, such as George, Smith, Victoria, Henry. Their purpose in doing so is to win favor with their rulers. The same was true during the Greek conquest. Jews and Syrians adopted Greek names without necessarily implying that they used the Greek language in daily intercourse. The same course was followed by the Jews during the Babylonian exile. The Jews adopted Babylonian names. This custom is no doubt confusing to the Western mind, unfamiliar with the characteristic temperament of the Oriental. The Assyrians, for many centuries, have been ruled by Turkey, but they still speak and write their own language. A few Assyrians speak Turkish when dealing with officials of the government.

It is furthermore significant that the Aramaic text contains not a single reference to the Greek people. The Greek text of St. John's Gospel mentions that some "Greeks" desired to see Jesus (12:20). The word in the Eastern Version is *ammey* people, and the reference is to Gentile Idumaeans and Syrians. The woman of Zarepath was a Syrian, according to the Eastern version, and not a Greek (Luke 4:26). These changes were probably made by the Greek translators, who wished to introduce some references to their own

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people in the Gospels. The Aramaic word for Greek is Yonaye (Cf. Ionian), but it never occurs in the Gospels, except in the single reference to the Greek language in the inscription on the Cross. Nor is there any mention of Greek culture, philosophy or customs, proving that they did not influence Jesus and his disciples, nor the early Christians.

The first Greek text of any importance was introduced by Erasmus to the Western world in 1516. In the preparation of this edition he had only ten manuscripts, the oldest of which belonged to the twelfth century. He did not know Aramaic nor had he access to any other than the above Greek manuscripts. Indeed, at this time the East was practically unknown. It thus happened that Greek became known in Europe as the original language in which the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament were written. As much is implied by the translators of the King James version in their little known Preface, which sets forth the circumstances that induced their undertaking. But facts hitherto unknown and now uncovered lead to a totally different conclusion.

It is important to know that the Eastern version, the first compilation of the New Testament scriptures, was made in Edessa. This was the capital of the buffer state of Ur-Hai, near Harran, where Aramaic was the spoken language. This state exchanged hands during the conflicts between the Roman and Persian Empires. From the fourth century, however, it had a type of Christianity, which was independent of Western influence. But Christianity was established here long before that time. The Church in Edessa was founded by Addai or Thaddeus, one of the Twelve who was sent to that city as a missionary; and St. Thomas, another of the apostles of our Lord, later went through that region. This city moreover was the center of Syriac learning and literature from earliest times, so that it justifiably won the title of the "Athens of Syria." In course of time it became the seat of Christian scholarship under the leadership of St. Ephraim, who there founded a school or university. But even before his day the Gospels were well known in Mesopotamia and Persia, according to the testimony of Eusebius, who made quotations from the Aramaic writings of Hegesippus the defender of Christianity against Gnosticism. This is furthermore substantiated by the edition of the Gospels called the Diatessaron, prepared by Tatian an Assyrian, who lived in Mesopotamia about 172" A. D. But this compilation by Tatian was repudiated and copies burned.

Unfortunately those who associate the Aramaic text of the Peshitta with Rabbulas, bishop of Edessa in 435 A. D., overlook the fact that there were many bishops of this flourishing church at Edessa and Persia before he was born. How could these men have been elevated to the Episcopal See without written gospels, and how could Christianity have been propagated and survived throughout the East without the Scriptures? Rabbulas furthermore was an anti-Nestorian. If he had translated the gospels from the Greek, he would surely have included the Revelation, and the four omitted epistles of II Peter, II and III John, and Jude, and made the Eastern version to correspond with the Vulgate. But such was not the case. The version which existed before his day is known in some places as the Old Syriac. This is another name for the Peshitta because at this time Peshitta had already become old. Its origin is lost in obscurity, and references to this ancient version have doubtless been confused with another version called the *Damparshey*, derived from the Aramaic *parash* to select, and which was used as a lectionary. The existence of the Edessene Church from apostolic times and the venerable age of its Scriptures leads to the conclusion that the Aramaic version was a spontaneous growth, and that Edessa was the logical place for this growth. It might be said that this is merely tradition. But is not tradition another word for history? It is the living voice of the past conserving the values of its wisdom and experience, especially as during persecutions books were destroyed and burned. If we discount this voice then the past becomes a closed door, and we have no key to open it in the East or the West.

The original language of the Gospels therefore is the native Galilean Aramaic, the vernacular of northern Palestine, and not the Chaldean Aramaic which was spoken in southern Palestine. It was the same language that was spoken by the Assyrians, who were brought to the cities of Samaria and Galilee by the

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Assyrian kings after the ten tribes were carried into captivity (II Kings, 17:24 ff.). The manner of speech, the phraseology, the idioms, the orientation in the Gospels are vividly and distinctively northern Aramaic. Parables and allegories are all derived from Semitic customs, and there is no reference to incidents from alien sources. The constant repetitions are characteristic of Oriental usage. Such phrases as, "*Amen Amen amar na Lkhon*," "Truly, truly, I say unto you," "In those days," "And it came to pass," "And he said to them," are peculiarly Aramaic. Then again the original has fewer words because the thought is conceived in the native tongue and easily expressed to the people of the same language. This is not the case with a translation which of necessity must use more words to convey the meaning. Consider the first clause of our Lord's Prayer. The Aramaic uses two words, *Avon dvashmaya*; the Greek uses six words, *Pater hemon ho en tois ouranois*, as also does the English, "Our Father who art in heaven." If the Eastern text was a translation from the Greek, more words would have been used in the Aramaic, and the translation would have had obscure and confusing phrases. This is not the case with the Peshitta, which consistently sustains its title as "clear." A translation frequently misses the real meaning of the original and often has to use synonyms to bring out shades of meaning. This is obvious to me because for years I have translated letters and documents for the United States Government and for several institutions. It is therefore easy from constant practice to say whether a writing is a translation or written in the original, especially in the case of my mother tongue the Aramaic.

It is also worth noting that the Eastern version retains all the Semitic names in their original form and pronunciation, which correspond with the Hebrew names. Compare the names in Matthew, Ch. 1 and Luke Ch. 3 in the original Aramaic text. Another interesting fact is that the Eastern version in referring to Peter always speaks of him as Simon and at times as Simon Kepa, (Stone). It was natural for the Greek translators to use only the Greek term, thus translating the Aramaic word *Kepa* into the Greek word *Petrus*. Contemporary issues moreover are not considered in detail as they were not raised at the time. Our Gospels are only an outline of the teaching of Jesus. If they were written outside the Semitic atmosphere and its related situations, the writers would doubtless have furnished explanations, and the gospel narratives would have been much longer. But such a course was superfluous. A Greek writer would have made comparisons between Semitic and Greek culture and customs, thus making them clearer to Greek readers.

The Gospels were written much earlier than they are supposed to have been. If they were of a late date the writers would not have been able to make direct and accurate quotations, as is done in the Sermon on the Mount and other sayings of Jesus. The nearest and shortest way to trace the authorship of the Gospels and the place they were written is to rely upon internal evidence.

The writers must have been Jews for they are familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures and with customs and manners, such as the passover and other festivals, as well as with the topography of Palestine. The authors wrote to their contemporaries. This is why they did not stress the general issues because the public knew them. Had the Gospels been written at a later date, the writers would have undoubtedly explained some of the issues, such as head-tax, Messianic expectations, etc., and the documents would have been much longer than they are. The opening sentences in St. Luke's gospel clearly implies that there were many other gospels written on scrolls and extensively circulated, and that they were the work of eye-witnesses who knew Jesus and who were associated with him. The place where these writings were produced must have been either Palestine or Edessa, the two great centers where Aramaic was spoken. On the other hand, there is no reason why these Aramaic speaking countries should have their sacred scriptures written in a language which was alien to them. The evidence therefore is convincing and conclusive for an Aramaic original, and this is none other than the Peshitta.

My present translation is not intended to depreciate the noble work of European and American scholars, whom I hold in the highest esteem. My purpose is to present the thought and accuracy of the Eastern version while retaining its simplicity and directness, and reproducing as nearly as possible the shades

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of meaning in the original. Another purpose is to present the Eastern understanding of Jesus, as it is enshrined in the accepted version of the Four Gospels. It is moreover endorsed by the traditions and history of a people, distinguished by the sacrificial blood of martyrdoms, which date back to apostolic times and flows even to the present day. Though poor and reduced in numbers by incessant privations, these people once constituted what was recognized as the Mother Church. Today they are the only pure Semitic people in the Christian fold. They still speak the Aramaic language of our blessed Lord and Saviour with only a few inevitable changes, and they have retained the ancient and original version of the Holy Scriptures, without the change of revision. This has been endorsed by recent archaeological discoveries. With such a rich legacy they surely have the right to speak for themselves.

It is therefore a sacred privilege which has induced me, who belongs to this people, humbly to submit this translation to the fair judgment of Western people. I am happy to say that this is the first translation into English made from the Eastern version by a native, who was born and raised in a land where Aramaic continues to be spoken, as in the days of the first Christian century. The gratifying reception given my book, *My Neighbor Jesus*, encouraged me to believe that this translation of the Four Gospels would make the fair figure of Jesus more attractive and his teachings more acceptable.

My thanks are due to the Rev. Oscar L. Joseph, Litt. D., an American scholar and author whose literary counsel is valued by leading publishers. He has helped in the choice of English so as to make it exact and lucid.

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George M. Lamsa.