

ABSTRACT

The Number of Generations in Matthew 1: A Proposition Based on the Peshitta

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Matthew says the genealogy of Jesus at the beginning of his Gospel has three sets of 14 generations. However, the third set seems to have only 13. This thesis reviews propositions regarding the number of generations, and introduces another proposition, based on two words in the Syriac Peshitta. Before explaining the proposition, it explicates the two words and other pertinent vocabulary. In this proposition, the third set has 14 generations, but most versions of the genealogy misrepresent it. For background, this thesis reviews the statuses of Syriac witnesses in New Testament textual criticism. For a more complete picture, it compares the genealogy in Matthew 1 to those in 1 Chronicles 3 and Luke 3; and it describes the theological purpose of the genealogy in Matthew 1. The proposition based on the Peshitta is given as the most likely explanation.

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THE NUMBER OF GENERATIONS IN MATTHEW 1: A PROPOSITION BASED ON THE
PESHITTA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	iv
Dedication	v
Chapter One: Review of Literature	1
<i>Introduction and Outline</i>	1
Prima Facie	2
<i>Proposed Understandings of the Number of Generations</i>	3
<i>Numerology</i>	6
<i>Some Names Shared by the Hebrew Bible and Matthew 1</i>	9
<i>Other Notes on the Genealogy in Matthew 1</i>	14
<i>Conclusion</i>	15
Chapter Two: Use of the Peshitta for Matthew	17
<i>A Brief History of New Testament Textual Criticism</i>	18
<i>Aramaic Versions</i>	24
<i>Lamsa</i>	34
<i>Conclusion</i>	38
Chapter Three: The Proposition Based on the Peshitta	39
<i>Vocabulary</i>	39
<i>The Meaning of ܡܝܢ in Matthew 1.16</i>	44
<i>ܡܝܢ in Matthew 1.16 Compared to ܡܢ in Matthew 1.19</i>	44

<i>Comparing the Genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3</i>	46
<i>Establishing a Genealogy of Mary</i>	53
<i>Conclusion</i>	54
Chapter Four: Conclusion	56
Bibliography	58

LIST OF TABLES

Generations of Matthew 1	2
1 Chronicles 3 vs Matthew 1	9
The Reverse Genealogy in Luke 3	47

אמרו כי לא יראו אדם עושה
מעשה צדקה ולא יראו אדם
עושה צדקה ולא יראו אדם
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עושה צדקה ולא יראו אדם

—Isaiah 11.1-5 in Codex Ambrosiano

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my grandfather Albert Jacob Mueller (February 3, 1913 – March 7, 2014). At four years old, he began working on his family’s farm. During World War II, he supervised engineers at a major aerospace company. Then he became a welding foreman. All this he did before graduating from college. In retirement, he continued working diligently from his garage well into his 90s.

Pleasing him was difficult, and he did not pass out compliments. I once showed him some of my academic work. He uncharacteristically affirmed to me, “Good work! Good work! Good work!”

He wanted me to get a college education early in life so I would not have to work the ground like he did. He died two months before I received my associate degree. I felt honored to be one of his pallbearers. This thesis completes the next step of my education. I intend to continue.

CHAPTER ONE

Review of Literature

Introduction and Outline

This thesis examines the problem of the number of generations in the genealogy in Matthew 1. It introduces a proposition based on the Peshitta's use of ܡܘܨܘܪܐ (*gavrah*) in Matthew 1.16 and ܡܘܨܘܪܐ (*ba'alab*) three verses later. Both words describe the relationship of 'Joseph' to Mary. They are both usually translated as *husband*. However, the first one is a more general term for a man that may not strictly mean *husband*.

Matthew 1.16 and 1.19 may refer to different people named 'Joseph.' In this proposition, Matthew includes 14 generations in the third section, but most copies of the genealogy misrepresent it. This proposition is not asserted, but offered as another idea.

The first chapter presents the general details of the matter, and reviews what others have said about it. This includes the significance of the number 14, and comparisons to genealogical information in the Hebrew Bible. To reference the Sinaitic and Curetonian Syriac manuscripts, and the Peshitta, instead of the standard notations Syr^s, Syr^c, and Syr^p, this thesis uses *S*, *C*, and *P*, respectively.

The second chapter gives an overview of different views on the origins and transmission of the New Testament from the late 1800s to the present, with special attention to the status of the Peshitta.

The third chapter explains the proposition based on the Peshitta. Toward the end, it includes comparison with Luke 3 regarding the ancestry of Mary and her husband, as it holds significance for this proposition.

The fourth chapter reviews and concludes.

Prima Facie

The genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 descends from Abraham to Jesus. It has three sections. The first section is Abraham to David. The second is David to the Babylonian captivity. The third is the Babylonian captivity to the Messiah. Verse 17 says each section has 14 generations. Table 1 counts the generations in each section, counting David and Jechoniah only once each, using the reading in almost all versions of the genealogy:

Table 1. Generations of Matthew 1

	Section 1 (vv. 2-6)	Section 2 (vv. 6-11)	Section 3 (vv. 12-6)
1	Abraham	Solomon	Salathiel
2	Isaac	Rehoboam	Zerubbabel
3	Jacob	Abijah	Abiud
4	Judah	Asaph (or Asa)	Eliakim
5	Perez	Jehoshaphat	Azor
6	Hezron	Joram	Zadok
7	Aram	Uzziah	Achim
8	Aminadab	Jotham	Eliud
9	Nahshon	Ahaz	Eleazar
10	Salmon	Hezekiah	Matthan
11	Boaz	Manasseh	Jacob
12	Obed	Amos (or Amon)	Joseph (husband of Mary)
13	Jesse	Josiah	Jesus
14	David	Jechoniah	-

The apparent absence of a fourteenth generation in the third section seems conspicuous. Many scholars have attempted to understand the number of generations in the genealogy. Below I explain two main ideas.

The scholar cited most in this thesis is Marshall Johnson (1935-2011). He had a Th.D. in New Testament from Union Seminary, New York. Cambridge University Press published his dissertation as the first edition of *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies* in 1969. He was also a Fulbright lecturer and researcher at the University of Bergen, Norway. Doubleday and Eerdmans have published other works of his on biblical studies.

Proposed Understandings of the Number of Generations

Jechoniah

‘Jechoniah’ appears at the end of the second section (v. 11) and at the beginning of the third section (v. 12). Marshall Johnson supposes the first ‘Jechoniah’ might have been meant to be ‘Eliakim’ (a different person from the Eliakim of the third section).¹ Perhaps the genealogist in their handling of the Hebrew Bible mistook יהויקים (Jehoiakim = Eliakim) for יהויכין (Jehoiachin = Jechoniah).² The Hebrew Bible mentions no brothers of Jechoniah, but several brothers of Eliakim.³

E. Lohmeyer observes the Septuagint uses Ἰωακίμ throughout for both Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin, which may have set a precedent of using the same name for both.⁴ Johnson claims traits of the genealogy in Matthew 1 suggest Greek originality.⁵ A. Schlatter contends

¹Marshall Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies: with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus*, 2 ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 183

²Ibid., 183

³Ibid., 183

⁴Ibid., 183

⁵Ibid., 183

the genealogist wrote the same name in verse 11 as in verse 12 even though they knew they were different people.⁶

A. Vögtle, paraphrased by Johnson, proposes:

The author of the genealogy (identical with the evangelist) wrote in verse 11, ‘Josiah begat Jehoiakim and his brothers’, but could not continue the scheme with ‘*After* the deportation Jehoiakim begat Jeconiah⁷’ because he knew that Jeconiah was born considerably *prior* to the exile. So he continued, ‘Jeconiah begat Salathiel...’ An early copyist of the genealogy (rather than a translator) was responsible for the error of replacing Jehoiakim in verse 11 with Jeconiah.⁸

In Vögtle’s proposition, ‘Jechoniah’ in the fourteenth generation of the second section should instead be ‘Jehoiakim’ (= Eliakim), and Jechoniah should appear before Salathiel as the first generation of the third section. This adjustment would make each section have 14 generations.

Johnson gives Vögtle’s proposition slightly less credit than it deserves. Johnson asserts, “One weakness of this explanation is the lack of any manuscript evidence for an alternative reading in verse 11.”⁹ Such a statement is untrue. Eight Greek records¹⁰, Syr^h with *, Syr^{pal}, Irenaeus’ Latin, and Epiphanius support the reading “And Josiah begot Jehoiakim, and Jehoiakim begot Jechoniah” in v. 11. Granted, this reading is the *addition* of ‘Jehoiakim’ along with ‘Jechoniah,’ not the *replacement* of ‘Jechoniah’ with ‘Jehoiakim’; but it is still a

⁶Ibid., 183

⁷Alternate spelling of ‘Jechoniah’

⁸Ibid., 183

⁹Ibid., 183

¹⁰Θ Σ 33 205 1006 1342 1505 (All the information in this sentence is cited from the critical apparatus of UBS’ GNT, 4th edition.)

significant variant. This support may be despairingly weak, but it is still more than “lack of any.”

Christ

Another proposed understanding of the number of generations in Matthew 1 uses eschatological periodization. It pertains to Ἰησοῦς, ὁ λεγόμενος χριστός¹¹ in verse 16. K. Stendahl supposes Matthew might count χριστός (‘Christ’) as the fourteenth generation right after Ἰησοῦς (‘Jesus’).¹² In Stendahl’s proposition:

“‘Christ’ would then refer to Jesus in his risen state and/or at his Coming (parousia) at the end of time’, in the sense in which the futuristic eschatology of the early church could include a prayer that God would ‘send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old’ (Acts 3:20; cf. 2:36).¹³

The preceding block quote, if I understand it correctly, means Jesus will not be known in Matthew’s eschatology as the Christ until he has completed his ministry on earth and returned to heaven for a while, and then returned to earth in the Parousia.

Stendahl notes the distinct way in which Matthew uses Ἰησοῦς, ὁ λεγόμενος χριστός.¹⁴ Matthew 4.18 and 10.2 use the same expression for Simon being called Peter. The renaming of Simon as Peter (16.17-8) signifies his establishment as the head of the

¹¹“Jesus, who is called Christ”

¹²Johnson, 221-2

¹³Ibid., 222

¹⁴Ibid., 222

Church. Perhaps Jesus is proleptically called ‘Christ’ like Simon is proleptically called ‘Peter.’¹⁵ Among the Gospels, only Matthew has this exact expression.¹⁶

Johnson notes the potential significance of v. 17 saying the third section ends with ‘Christ,’ not with ‘Jesus.’¹⁷ However, *Christ* and *Jesus* can be interchangeable.

Numerology

Why did Matthew consider the number 14 significant? Most interpreters of the genealogy believe this number recalls a character in the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew language has no symbols for numbers separate from symbols for letters, so the letters sometimes represent numbers. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet has its own standard, predetermined numerical value. This feature of the Hebrew language facilitates *gematria*, the practice of calculating numerical values of words by their constituent letters.

At least part of Matthew’s goal with the genealogy was most likely to portray Jesus as a Davidic Messiah. David’s name has two forms in the Hebrew Bible—דָּוִד, and דָּוִד. The former occurs primarily in Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, and Jeremiah; the latter occurs primarily in Zechariah, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah.¹⁸ The former has the letter Dalet twice and the letter Vav once. The latter has the letter Dalet twice, the letter Vav once, and the letter Yod once. Dalet has a numerical value of four, Vav has a numerical value of six, and Yod has a numerical value of 10. Thus

¹⁵Ibid., 222

¹⁶Ibid., 222

¹⁷Ibid., 222-3

¹⁸*The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, s.v. “דָּוִד,” (1906; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008)

the numerical value of the former is $4+6+4=14$, while the numerical value of the latter is $4+6+10+4=24$. One can presume Matthew was referencing the former.

Verse 17 says the genealogy has 14 thrice. Matthew likely paired three with 14 to emphasize completion. Raymond Brown knows of no special symbolism to 14 being seven twice.¹⁹

Herman Waetjen supposes Matthew formed the genealogy according to two eschatologies.²⁰ In one of these eschatologies, “history is structured into four ages on the basis of the pattern in Daniel 2 and 7 [...]”²¹ The other eschatology is “‘the numerical scheme of twelve plus two’, after the pattern of 2 Baruch 53-74.”²²

Heer proposes the three sets of 14 in Matthew 1 parallel the three sets of 14 in Numbers 23.²⁴ Thrice, Balak sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams, to become an ancestor of Ruth. However, the haggadic tradition to this effect is “rather late” and has no significant Messianic aspect.²⁵

H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck propose the three sets of 14 in Matthew 1 parallel the “Ten-week apocalypse” in 1 Enoch 91, 93.²⁶ The first seven weeks are in chapter 93, and the

¹⁹Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 75

²⁰Johnson, xxiv (see also 193-5)

²¹This sentence continues, “(except that Jesus, the son of David, introduces the kingdom of God at the end of the third age).”

²²Ibid., xxiv (see also 193-5)

²³Ibid., xxiv (see also 193-5)

²⁴Ibid., 195

²⁵Ibid., 195

²⁶Ibid., 195-6

last three are in chapter 91, so S–B reconstruct the weeks in order.²⁷ In their reconstruction, “[F]rom Isaac to Solomon (weeks 4-5) fourteen generations pass; from Solomon to the exile the same (weeks 6-7); and, after another fourteen generations (weeks 8-9), the Messianic age is inaugurated.”²⁸ However, 1 Enoch does not say each week has 14 generations, nor do the pertinent passages therein emphasize the number 14.²⁹ Also, one pivot in 1 Enoch 91 appears to be “the building of the temple under Solomon,” while the corresponding pivot in Matthew 1 would be King David; they do not match.³⁰

A. Schlatter and J. H. Ropes propose the three sets of 14 in Matthew 1 parallel “the seventy weeks of years (490 years) of Daniel.”³¹ They suppose each generation has 35 years ($14 \times 35 = 490$).³²

Some commenters have proposed significance to $3 \times 14 = 6 \times 7$. They have suggested Matthew wanted to express “six periods of seven generations preceded Jesus and he opens the seventh or final period, a division of time attested in the *Book of Enoch*.”³³ However, Matthew did not speak of 6×7 , nor does the infancy narrative in Matthew describe Jesus as initiating another period.³⁴

Ultimately, the genealogist of Matthew 1 may have had multiple inspirations for three sets of 14. We do not need to narrow it down to one. As Johnson explains, “There is

²⁷Ibid., 195-6

²⁸Ibid., 195-6

²⁹Ibid., 195-6

³⁰Ibid., 195-6

³¹Ibid., 200

³²Ibid., 200

³³Raymond Brown, 75

³⁴Ibid., 75

no good reason to suppose that a Christian author, acquainted with apocalyptic speculation, should have slavishly adopted any one system; the meaning of the periodization of Matt. 1 would be easily understood by those to whom such systems were no novelty.”³⁵

Some Names Shared by the Hebrew Bible and Matthew 1

Table 2. 1 Chronicles 3 vs Matthew 1

1 Chronicles 3.4-19 (from the Hebrew)	Matthew 1.6-12
David	David
Solomon	Solomon
Rehoboam	Rehoboam
Abijah	Abijah
Asa	Asa
Jehoshaphat	Jehoshaphat
Joram	Joram
Ahaziah	-
Joash	-
Amaziah	-
Azariah	Uzziah
Jotham	Jotham
Ahaz	Ahaz
Hezekiah	Hezekiah
Manasseh	Manasseh
Amon	Amon
Josiah	Josiah
Jehoiakim	-
Jechoniah	Jechoniah
-	Salathiel
Pedaiah	-
Zerubbabel	Zerubbabel

Some of the genealogy in Matthew 1 is telescoped from 1 Chronicles 3. Table 2 charts the differences.

Zerubbabel

The Hebrew of 1 Chronicles 3.16-9 lists Zerubbabel as a son of Pedaiah and a nephew of Shealtiel, while the Septuagint there lists

³⁵Johnson, 197

Zerubbabel as a son of Salathiel³⁶. The genealogist may have used the Septuagint, or altered the Hebrew genealogy to reflect levirate marriage. However, the Septuagint at 1 Chronicles 3.19 is not the only part of the Hebrew Bible that calls Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel; so do Ezra 3.2,8, Nehemiah 12.1, and Haggai 2.23 in the Hebrew text.

Codex Ambrosiano³⁷ at 1 Chronicles 3.18 has ܦܪܝܐܗ ('Peraiah'), not ܦܕܝܐܗ ('Pedaiah'). In Syriac, the only difference between the letters Dalet (ܕ) and Resh (ܪ)³⁸ is whether the dot is at the top or at the bottom of the letter. I suppose they are different spellings of the name, not different people.

Also, Codex Ambrosiano at 1 Chronicles 3.19 has ܢܕܒܝܐܗ ('Nedabiah'), not ܦܪܝܐܗ ('Peraiah'). Nedabiah is a son of Jechoniah listed in v. 18. Codex Ambrosiano in v. 19 lists Zerubbabel as a son of Nedabiah, not of Peraiah/Pedaiah or of Shealtiel. However, Codex Ambrosiano lists Zerubbabel as a son of Shealtiel in Ezra 3.2,8, Nehemiah 12.1, and Haggai 2.23, just like the Hebrew text.

Three Absent Kings

Johnson suggests parablepsis caused the exclusion of Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah.³⁹ He argues such based on "confusion" between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint in 2

³⁶Alternate spelling of *Shealtiel*

³⁷A record of the ancient Syriac version of the Hebrew Bible

³⁸The consonants for the 'D' and 'R' sounds, respectively. Similarly, in Hebrew, the only difference between the letters Sin (שׁ) and Shin (שׂ) is whether the dot is at the top left or at the top right of the letter.

³⁹Johnson, 181-2

Kings⁴⁰, 2 Chronicles⁴¹, and 1 Chronicles 3.⁴² In this view, the sequence of three sets of 14 began with an accident.

Raymond Brown proposes essentially the same accident: He suggests Matthew compiled the genealogy from two smaller genealogies already in circulation.⁴³ He notes the pre-monarchical information in the genealogy resembles Ruth 4.18-22 and 1 Chronicles 2.1-15, and suggests this information was circulating as an independent list.⁴⁴ For the list of kings in the genealogy, he notes “errors and omissions” suggest this portion was in circulation more popularly than archivally.⁴⁵ He suggests Matthew noticed the two lists had 14 generations each, and that Matthew then repeated this total in the third section.⁴⁶

What makes me uneasy about Raymond Brown’s proposition is the apparent suggestion that Matthew did not consult the Hebrew Bible itself, but relied only on circulating lists. I would be extremely hesitant to suggest Matthew shirked any research.

I concur with Agnes Smith Lewis that Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah—along with Queen Athaliah⁴⁷—are excluded not accidentally, but deliberately because they descend from King Ahab to the fourth generation.⁴⁸ The Hebrew Bible portrays Ahab as wicked.⁴⁹ The

⁴⁰8.16; 8.25; 9.29; 12.1; 13.1; 14.1; 15.1,13; 15.5,7

⁴¹21.1; 22.1,2; 24.1; 25.1; 26.1; 27.1

⁴²Ibid., 181-2

⁴³Raymond Brown, 69-70

⁴⁴Ibid., 69-70

⁴⁵Ibid., 69-70

⁴⁶Ibid., 69-70

⁴⁷2 Kings 11

⁴⁸Mark Dumdei, *The Original Gospels* (n.p.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 59

⁴⁹1 Kings 16.29-40

presumed inspiration for such exclusion is Numbers 14.18: “The LORD is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation” (NRSV).

Natures of the Genealogies

Raymond Brown calls Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus more “artificial” than historiographic, with the caveat that biblical genealogies rarely concern themselves with strictly biological descent: “The spans of time covered by the three sections of the genealogy are too great to have contained only fourteen generations each, since some 750 years separated Abraham from David, some 400 years separated David from the Babylonian Exile, and some 600 years separated the Babylonian exile from Jesus’ birth.”⁵⁰ The western mindset struggles with gaps in genealogies, but such gaps are common in ancient and modern tribal genealogies.⁵¹

Similarly, Lewis describes the genealogy as “purely official” to validate the Davidic Messiahship of Jesus.⁵² Lewis says the absence of concern for biological descent shows in “the statement that [Joram] begat his own great-great-grandson Uzziah,” and the statement that “childless Jeichonia” begot “his successor Shealtiel.”⁵³ Lewis adds, “It must not be forgotten that among Semitic people the habit prevails of reckoning the young children of a

⁵⁰Ibid., 74-5

⁵¹Ibid., 75

⁵²Agnes Smith Lewis, *The Old Syriac Gospels: or Evangelion Da-Mepharreshé* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1910), xiv

⁵³Ibid., xiv

Other Notes on the Genealogy in Matthew 1

Mark Dumdei notes two ancient sources that exclude the genealogy of Jesus from Matthew: “The Jewish-Christian Nazorean sect, who existed before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., had no genealogy (1:2-17) in their version of *Matthew*. Theodoret’s 5th century Diatessaron had no genealogy.”⁵⁸ Dumdei excludes the genealogy from his English translation of Matthew, leaving the note “2-17: Interpolation” in its place.⁵⁹

Dumdei adds, “The disagreements with 1 Chr. 3:11-24 and 2 Kgs. 8-23, and Jer. 22:30 that no descendant of king Jeconiah would ever sit on the throne suggests that this was an Ebionite addition.”⁶⁰ The suggestion that the genealogy is unoriginal to the Gospel has not gained widespread acceptance.

S at Matthew 1.16 reads, “*ⲁⲛⲁⲗ ⲁⲓⲟⲩ ⲛⲁⲗⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲛⲓⲛⲓ ⲙⲓ ⲁⲓⲟⲩ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲟⲩ.*”⁶¹ Dumdei calls it “an Ebionite reading,”⁶² as did J. Rendel Harris.⁶³ However, Lewis agrees with Frederick Conybeare that if the reading had such theological motivation, the scribe would have also altered vv. 18 and 20, which say Mary became pregnant by the Holy Spirit instead of by Joseph. I am inclined to agree with Lewis and Conybeare.

Another witness that portrays Joseph as the father of Jesus in Matthew 1.16 is the Greek minuscule Θ^{f3} , of the Ferrar group. Despite the similarity between the *meanings* of the readings of *S* and f^{f3} at Matthew 1.16, the *syntaxes* of the readings have usually been

⁵⁸Dumdei, 1

⁵⁹Ibid., 1

⁶⁰Ibid., 1

⁶¹“Joseph, to whom Mary the virgin was betrothed, begot Jesus”

⁶²Ibid., 1

⁶³Lewis, xiv

viewed as contrasting—i.e., neither reading could be a translation of the other. Thus, *S* has been cited in critical apparatuses as supporting a reading different from that of *f*⁴³. However, this approach does not account for the syntactical trends and limitations of Syriac.⁶⁴ I concur with P. J. Williams’ explanation of how *S* and *f*⁴³ are not so different at Matthew 1.16.⁶⁵

The only scholarly source of which I know that accepts a reading such as “Joseph begot Jesus” is *The Four Gospels: A New Translation* (1933) by Charles Cutler Torrey. Torrey believed the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John were originally Aramaic, while Luke used only Semitic sources and translated them into Greek for his Gospel.⁶⁶ However, Torrey made little if any use of Syriac versions; the preface to *The Four Gospels* does not even mention the Syriac dialect or any Syriac witness. Torrey reconstructed the Gospels in Aramaic by backtranslating them from Greek—almost always the Greek text of Westcott and Hort⁶⁷, which does not indicate Joseph begot Jesus. Despite the similarity between Torrey’s reconstruction and the Sinaitic reading, it is unlikely that Torrey used *S*. He may have used *f*⁴³. Ultimately, I consider Torrey’s work on the Gospels unreliable.

Conclusion

The genealogy in Matthew 1 seems not to have 14 generations in the third section like Matthew says it does. Johnson suggests the first mention of Jechoniah should instead be Jehoiakim (=Eliakim), citing Lohmeyer and Vögtle. K. Stendahl proposes ‘Christ’ is the

⁶⁴ P. J. Williams, *Early Syriac Translation Technique and the Textual Criticism of the Greek Gospels* (n.p.: Gorgias Press, 2004), 240-4

⁶⁵Ibid., 240-4

⁶⁶Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Four Gospels: A New Translation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1933), ix

⁶⁷Ibid., xi

fourteenth generation. Raymond Brown and Lewis note the theological, instead of historiographic, purpose of the genealogy. This thesis introduces another potential explanation, while trying not to disregard the theological purpose.

CHAPTER TWO

Use of the Peshitta for Matthew

Before presenting the idea based on the Peshitta, I explain the use of the Peshitta for Matthew.

Today, New Testament (NT) scholars generally agree the whole NT was originally written in Greek. However, the primary language of Jesus and his disciples was Aramaic. At least most or all the words of Jesus and his disciples must have been translated before or during development of the Gospels in Greek. Additionally, some narrative portions of the Gospels in Greek have seemed to some scholars as though they might be translations of Aramaic. This presents a ‘problem’: “The ‘Aramaic problem’ of the Gospels is to determine, by internal evidence, to what extent the Greek Gospels are written in or embody ‘translation Greek’ or how much Aramaic influence can be detected in them.”¹

In the early and mid-twentieth century, many scholars theorized partial or whole Aramaic originality for the Gospels and Acts. In 1926, William Jennings praised C. F. Burney for “demonstrat[ing] the practical certainty that [John’s] Gospel was written first in the North-Palestine vernacular [a dialect of Aramaic], not in Greek.”² Jennings adds, “I am inclined to believe that parts of [Matthew’s] Gospel were also originally so written.”³

Today, such ideas are less common. A more typical approach is that of Matthew Black in *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*; its first edition came in 1946, and its

¹Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 3rd ed. (1967; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 16-7

²William Jennings, “Preface,” in *Lexicon to the Syriac New Testament* (1926; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 5

³Ibid., 5

third and final in 1967. No work has replaced it. Black believed the Gospels and Acts were Greek originally, but he searched for Aramaic insights into them, since their contents have much association with Aramaic-speaking people. A 1998 reprint of Black's work includes an introduction by Craig Evans, who remarks, "Black's more cautious method and conclusions served as a corrective to the ultimately unpersuasive claims of C. F. Burney and C. C. Torrey, who had argued that our Greek Gospels are translations of Aramaic originals."⁴

Regardless of the original language(s) of the NT, ancient Aramaic versions thereof can assist textual criticism and philology. Before presenting the Aramaic versions, I provide background on NT textual criticism.

A Brief History of New Testament Textual Criticism

Textual criticism is the attempt to ascertain the original reading of a piece of literature that has at least one variant reading between its copies. It is an extremely specialized field. This section of my thesis is too brief for all the nuance, so I simplify for brevity. All that follows pertains specifically to the NT.

No original autographs still exist. More than 5,000 ancient and medieval copies exist in Greek. The clear majority of them are copies of copies of copies of copies, and so on. Many ancient and medieval copies exist in other languages. No two of these "copies" agree on every jot and tittle. They have enough agreement on the clear majority of the text, though, that this should not cause anyone to distrust the transmission of the NT.

⁴Craig Evans, "Introduction: An Aramaic Approach Thirty Years Later," in *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 3rd ed. (1967; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), v-vi

Many of the differences between copies are insignificant—like “I have a yellow house” versus “my house is yellow.” Some are misspellings, not different readings. Most variants have no doctrinal bearing. Some variants were made for doctrine.

For some variants, it is easy for textual critics to ascertain the original reading. For some other variants, textual critics have great difficulty arriving at a conclusion. Sometimes, the best textual critics can do is present readers with multiple possible readings and describe the strengths and weaknesses of each.

In the early 1500s, the century after the invention of the printing press, Erasmus published the first printed edition of the NT in Greek. For his collation, he had a limited selection of late manuscripts. He published multiple versions over a few years. Other Greek editions in the same tradition as Erasmus’ collation became known as the Textus Receptus (TR), Latin for ‘Received Text.’ The TR became the basis for the King James Version (KJV) NT. The KJV was the standard for English-speaking Christians until the twentieth century.

The first scholar to reject the TR was Karl Lachmann (1793-1851).⁵ In 1831, he published his edition that was meant to reproduce the Greek text current in the fourth century.⁶ It went over like a lead balloon.⁷

In 1881, two scholars threw a monkey wrench into the scholarly community’s understanding of the text. B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort (WH) published their two-volume *The New Testament in the Original Greek*. The first volume has their Greek version that

⁵Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4 ed., Ed. Bart Ehrman (Oxford; London; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 170

⁶*Ibid.*, 170-1

⁷*Ibid.*, 171

differs markedly from the TR; the second volume explains their reasons. WH praise Lachmann's work:

A new period began in 1831, when for the first time a text was constructed directly from the ancient documents without the intervention of any printed edition, and when the first systematic attempt was made to substitute scientific method for arbitrary choice in the discrimination of variant readings. In both respects the editor, Lachmann, rejoiced to declare that he was carrying out the principles and unfulfilled intentions of Bentley, as set forth in 1716 and 1720.⁸

WH based their version chiefly on two Greek records—Alef (Ⲁ) and B—that are centuries older than the bases of the TR. These two are also known as ‘Codex Sinaiticus’ and ‘Codex Vaticanus,’ respectively. WH did not believe Alef and B were necessarily more accurate just because they were older. They took great care to examine from multiple angles the strengths and weaknesses of variant readings. Who is to say the texts of Alef and B were not corrupted early on, while the line of transmission to the TR was more accurate? Older means *likely* more accurate, not *certainly* more accurate.

The perceived accuracy of a copy depends on many more factors than just age: Who copied it? For what purpose was the copy intended to be used? Where was it found? Did copyists tend to add words, or did they tend to remove words? Is the text prone to being misread in a certain way, and subsequently miscopied in this way? How do early Church fathers quote verses in their writings? What could be the theological or sociopolitical motivations for intentional changes? Where one variant is difficult to understand but the other is easy, did a copyist create the difficult one by mistake, or make the difficult reading

⁸ B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, [ii,] *Introduction [and] Appendix* (London, 1881), 13

easier? *Ad nauseam*. And multiple factors must be considered simultaneously. Therefore, textual criticism is highly specialized.

The TR is one example of the Byzantine text-type, so named because it was preserved primarily in the Byzantine Empire (330-1453). Another name for the Byzantine text-type is ‘the Majority Text,’ since it comprises the clear majority of extant NT witnesses. However, just like age alone is not a decisive factor, neither is quantity. An unoriginal reading does not become original however many times it is copied.

The type to which WH’s text belongs is today known as the Alexandrian text-type, because it was preserved primarily in the city of Alexandria in Egypt. In WH’s time, though, it was known as the ‘neutral’ text. WH claimed the city of Alexandria preserved two text-types; one they called ‘neutral’ because they considered it the most faithful to the original readings, and the other they called ‘Alexandrian’ because its readings seemed largely unique to the city of Alexandria. Johann Griesbach (1745-1812) was the first scholar to use the categories of ‘Alexandrian’ and ‘Byzantine.’⁹ WH were the first to use ‘neutral.’ In more recent literature, I have not noticed ‘neutral.’

Lachmann had simply published his edition without explaining his reasons. WH prudently explained their reasons in the second volume. Accordingly, WH’s publication had a more favorable reception. Scholars debated the matter at large for a few decades, and the Alexandrian text-type eventually won the most scholarly acceptance.

Today, most NT textual critics believe WH were correct for the most part, but went too far in a few areas. Most of them, with great care, select scattered readings from both the

⁹Metzger, 165

Byzantine and the Alexandrian text-types; though they clearly lean toward the Alexandrian.¹⁰ This position is known as ‘reasoned eclecticism.’

Currently, the standard Greek NT text is Nestle-Aland’s *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th edition, published in 2012. Its first edition, published in 1898 by Eberhard Nestle, primarily uses the Majority Text.¹¹ In 1927, after Eberhard Nestle died, his son Erwin Nestle published the 13th edition, which puts less stock in the Majority Text.¹² Kurt Aland joined the project in the 1950s.¹³ Since the 26th edition of 1979, it has primarily used the Alexandrian text-type.¹⁴

Many NT textual critics today are content to speak of how modern scholarship has demonstrated the flaws of the Majority Text, and has almost completely ascertained the original readings via more informed approaches. The standard text is *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th edition, by Bruce Metzger; Metzger alone wrote the first three editions, while Ehrman reworked it into the fourth. For a more balanced perspective, I suggest the following sources from the turn of the twentieth century, listed in chronological order:

1. “The Origin of Codices **Ⲁ** and **B**” (1893) by J. Rendel Harris
2. *Some Thoughts on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (1897) by George Salmon

¹⁰For simplicity, I do not mention the Western or Caesarean text-types.

¹¹“History of the Nestle-Aland Edition,” Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://www.nestle-aland.com/en/history/>.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

3. *The Oxford Debate on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament Held at New College on May 6, 1897: with a Preface Explanatory of the Rival Systems.* It features Edward Miller, G. H. Gwilliam, Albert Bonus, William Sanday, A. C. Headlam, and W. C. Allen.
4. *Praxis in Manuscripts of the Greek Testament* (1898) by Charles Sitterly
5. *The Palaeography of Greek Papyri* (1899) by Frederic Kenyon
6. “Two Lectures on the Gospels” (1901) by F. C. Burkitt
7. *The Criticism of the New Testament: St. Margaret’s Lectures* (1902), ed. Henson Hensley, featuring Sanday, Kenyon, Burkitt, and F. H. Chase
8. “The Freer Gospels and the Shenute of Atripe” (1909) by Edgar Goodspeed

And the following twenty-first century sources, listed in chronological order:

1. The preface to *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform* (2005) by Maurice Robinson and William Pierpont, and its appendix containing Robinson’s 2001 essay “The Case for Byzantine Priority”
2. “Equitable Eclecticism: The Future of New Testament Textual Criticism” (2010) and “A Defense of ‘In the Prophets’ in Mark 1:2” (2010), both by James E. Snapp, Jr., in “Assorted Essays on New Testament Textual Criticism”
3. *The Original Ending of Mark: A New Case for the Authenticity of Mark 16:9-20* (2014) by Nicholas Lunn

Snapp’s wonderful compilation “Assorted Essays on New Testament Textual Criticism” has most of these sources. Snapp prefaces the compilation: “These essays have been edited, slightly condensed, updated, and formatted for digital reading. They are in the public domain.” Where this thesis quotes any work included in Snapp’s compilation, it quotes the official version, not Snapp’s compilation.

Aramaic Versions

The only extant ancient Aramaic versions of the NT are in Syriac. Richard Taylor explains the position generally afforded to them:

The early versions of the NT are usually divided into two categories: those which are “primary” and those which are “secondary.” Three versions are traditionally assigned to the “primary” category: the Latin, the Coptic, and the Syriac. Thus the Syriac has long been recognized as a significant area for NT textual research, as can be seen by its inclusions in the old polyglots such as the London Polyglot (1655-1657), the Paris Polyglot (1629-1645) and the Antwerp Polyglot (1569-1572).¹⁵

The Syriac primary versions are generally understood to be three: Tatian’s Diatessaron, the *Vetus Syra* (‘Old Syriac’), and the Peshitta. Taylor notes the Philoxenian, the Harklean, and the Palestinian versions are too late to be considered primary.¹⁶ The Diatessaron is a conflation of the four canonical Gospels, and now exists only in fragments. This thesis concerns itself with the ‘Old Syriac’ and the Peshitta.

Vetus Syra

The two extant manuscripts that represent the ‘Old Syriac’ are *S* and *C*. Metzger gives the generally held assessment that they “were copied in about the fifth and fourth centuries, respectively, [though] the form of text that they preserve dates from the close of

¹⁵Richard A. Taylor, “The Relevance of Syriac for Biblical Studies” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Chicago, 19 November 1988), 5-6

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 6

the second or beginning of the third century.”¹⁷ Burkitt is “inclined to ascribe *S* to the end of the 4th century, and *C* to the beginning of the 5th.”¹⁸

They have only the four canonical Gospels. They have also been known as the “*Evangelion da-Mepharreshe* (i.e., “The Separated Gospels”)”¹⁹, perhaps in contrast to the Gospels combined in the Diatessaron. The texts of *S* and *C* “differ widely from each other and from the Peshitta.”²⁰

Peshitta

Peshitta and *Peshitto* have often been used interchangeably. The common notation for either is Syr^p, while this thesis uses *P*. Taylor explains the common understanding:

Syriac may be [...] divided into a western form, sometimes known as Jacobite, and an Eastern form, sometimes called Nestorian. One of the main distinctions between these two concerns the retaining of the long /a/ vowel in the East, but the shifting of long /a/ to long /o/ in the west. This phonetic development is similar to the so-called “Canaanite shift” attested by BH [Biblical Hebrew]. It is this pronunciation difference which explains why the Syriac Bible is called the “Peshitto” by the Jacobites, but “Peshitta” by the Nestorians.²¹

This thesis uses *Peshitta* and *Peshitto* interchangeably, until a differentiation of them is explained later in this chapter.

From Burkitt to Metzger. *P*, in the Gospels, agrees closely with the Byzantine text-type against the Alexandrian. Thus, the age of *P* has significance for ascertaining the ages of

¹⁷Metzger, 96-7

¹⁸F. C. Burkitt, *St. Ephraim's Quotations from the Gospel* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1901), vi

¹⁹Ibid., v-vi

²⁰Ibid., vi

²¹Taylor, 2

Byzantine readings in the Gospels. Additionally, the dating can go both ways: One can loosely use the age of *P* as a factor for dating the Byzantine text-type, or loosely use the age of the Byzantine text-type as a factor for dating *P*.

The age of *P* has been much debated. Burkitt explains it must be “older than the latter half of the fifth century” because of its unanimous recognition among branches of Syriac Christianity that split then.²² Some branches would reject it if it originated after the schisms.

In 1901, Burkitt noted “two schools of opinion”: “The traditional opinion, now represented in England by Mr G. H. Gwilliam, places it in the second century: Dr Hort, on the other hand, put [*si*] it between 250 and 350 AD [...]. Thus according to either view the Peshitta N.T. was extant in S. Ephraim’s day, as he died about 373 AD.”²³

Defying both camps, Burkitt claims *P* “is the result of a revision made and promulgated by Rabbula, bishop of Edessa from 411—435 AD.”²⁴ Burkitt doubts the writings of Ephraim show awareness of *P*.²⁵ Burkitt’s claim gained widespread acceptance.

However, in 1988, Taylor noted a manuscript dated to 411 that “has shown Peshitta patterns,” denying time for Rabbula’s initiation.²⁶ Taylor strongly doubts Rabbula’s involvement except in revision.²⁷ Taylor proposes *P* originated in the last quarter of the fourth century.²⁸

²²F. C. Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity* (London: John Murray, 1904), 41

²³Burkitt, *St. Ephraim’s Quotations from the Gospel*, 2

²⁴*Ibid.*, 2

²⁵*Ibid.*, 2

²⁶Taylor, 6

²⁷*Ibid.*, 6

²⁸*Ibid.*, 6

Metzger in 2005 explained the origins of *P* slightly differently, though still compatible with Taylor's explanation:

Until recently, scholars thought that Rabbula, bishop of Edessa (c. A.D. 411-31), was responsible for the Peshitta; but it is more likely that his revision marked an intermediate stage between the Old Syriac text and the final form of the Peshitta. Because the Peshitta was accepted as the standard version of the Scriptures by both Eastern and Western branches of Syrian Christendom, one must conclude that it had attained some degree of status prior to the split in the Syrian Church in A.D. 431.²⁹

Oxford debate. In the 1897 Oxford debate, Edward Miller argues for priority of the Byzantine/Majority Text, which he calls the 'Traditional Text.' He mentions the age of *P*. Miller claims by the end of the sixth century, the number of *P* manuscripts exceeded the number of Greek manuscripts of the Gospels.³⁰ William Sanday counters:

There is one question Mr. Miller has raised which is of considerable importance, viz. the character of the Peshitto, which is the sheet anchor³¹ of Mr. Miller's theory. It is the oldest text in any case which is of that particular [Byzantine/Majority/Traditional] type. So you see it is a question of considerable importance when this version was made. Was it made towards the end of the third century, or was it made in the second? No doubt it is an argument, and an argument of considerable weight, which impresses the imagination, to quote the fact that there were so many MSS. of the Peshitto in existence as early as the sixth century, and even one or two I think in the fifth century. Still this is not supported by the evidence of ecclesiastical writers, and in any case there is no proof that the Peshitto goes back to anything like the second century.³²

²⁹Metzger, 98

³⁰*The Oxford Debate on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament Held at New College on May 6, 1897: with a Preface Explanatory of the Rival Systems* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1897), 16

³¹An old seafaring term. The sheet anchor of a ship was its heaviest anchor, used only as a last resort, when the ship was imperiled and no other anchor was working.

³²*Ibid.*, 28

If I am reading it correctly, Sanday denies Miller's assessment of the number of *P* manuscripts in the sixth century. Sanday considers *P* the oldest text of the Byzantine type, and seems to suggest it may have originated in the third century. Sanday denies any "proof" it originated in the second century.

Some scholars had claimed *P* is the product of a revision of readings preserved in *S* and *C*. G. H. Gwilliam, a Peshitta specialist, counters. Gwilliam does not deny *P* came from another text, but asserts it was something other than *S* or *C*:

[Samuel] Tregelles made a great mistake when he said the Syrians constantly revised their MSS. In co-operation with the late Philip Pusey I [...] found they did not so revise them. But there is a mass of evidence carrying the Syriac Text back to very early times, and supporting what the Margaret Professor [Sanday] has been kind enough to call the sheet anchor of the position. [...] I say that the Curetonian and Lewis [i.e., Sinaitic] MSS. were not the origin of the Peshitto as we have it. The Margaret Professor spoke of them together as if they represented one kind of translation. If he will be so kind as to study a book³³ [...] in which the two are compared, he will see that the Lewis and the Curetonian MSS. were no two MSS. of some one version which necessarily preceded the Peshitto. [...] I have never said the Peshitto was not preceded by some other form of text. All I say is that we have not got it now, and that the Lewis and Curetonian MSS. were not the origin of the Peshitto.³⁴

Then A. C. Headlam challenges Gwilliam on how far back evidence shows *P* going. Gwilliam answers: "At least it carries us back to the fifth century, and it may be granted that the translation was not made before the second century. Have you any MSS. of Sophocles which carry you back to the date of his original writings?"

³³Gwilliam references *Collatio codicis Lewisiani rescripti Evangeliorum sacrorum syriacorum cum codice Curetoniano* (*Mus. brit. add. 14, 451*), cui adiectae sunt lectiones e Pesbitto desumptae by Albert Bonus.

³⁴*The Oxford Debate*, 31-2

Gwilliam explains at the debate that he speaks dogmatically because he has already given his reasons in published sources. The sources include *Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica* 2 and 3, and *Critical Review of Theological and Philosophical Literature* 6. He later added more in *Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica* 5.

Then W. C. Allen explains why he considers the correct historical order to be first *S*, then *C*, and finally *P*. He uses Matthew 4.1-17 as an admittedly brief test passage. He says *P* agrees with *C* against *S* ≈ 26 times, and with *S* against *C* ≈ 13 times. This makes *P* seem closer to *C* than to *S*. And he provides reasoning against two other potential hypotheses from these data:

I find that in these seventeen verses the Peshitto agrees with the Curetonian against the Lewis [Sinaitic] Codex about twenty-six times, with the Lewis against the Curetonian about thirteen times. That is to say, the Curetonian stands very much nearer to the Peshitto than does the Lewis Codex. Now is it possible that the right order is the Peshitto, Curetonian, Lewis? or that the Curetonian and Lewis are two independent offshoots of the Peshitto? The latter hypothesis is precluded by the close verbal agreement of the Lewis and Curetonian against the Peshitto, the former by some cases where the Lewis Codex has a harsh or unexpected rendering which cannot be explained as an alteration of the Peshitto-Curetonian Text, but are intelligible if the Lewis Codex formed the first stage in the series.³⁵

Then Allen admits the limited scope of the data cited, but notes such phenomena seem generalized throughout the Gospels:

It is of course difficult to prove much from a section of seventeen verses only, and I do not mean to say that difficulties do not sometimes arise which it is not easy to explain, the cases e.g. where the Peshitto and Lewis combine against the Curetonian. But every page of the Gospels confirms the impression [...] that the Lewis Codex represents a prior stage in the Version,

³⁵Ibid., 33-4

that it has been subjected to revision in the Curetonian, and that this again has been revised to harmonize with the Greek Text. And this might be supported by such considerations as that the Lewis Codex gives a much shorter text than that of the Curetonian, and that cases occur where renderings in Lewis which seem to be mistranslations of the Greek have been corrected either in the Curetonian and the Peshitto or in the latter only[.]³⁶

Albert Bonus counters Allen's assessment of the relationship between *S* and *C*, noting their interdivergence is more complicated than Allen conveyed:

[I]n places where the Lewis and Curetonian MSS. differ, the latter agree or tend to agree with the Peshitto in SS. Matthew and John many more times than Lewis agrees or tends to agree with the Peshitto in the same Gospels; whereas in St. Luke the respective agreements or tendencies to agreement between Cureton and the Peshitto, and between Lewis and the Peshitto, are fairly equal. This is a remarkable circumstance, which demands careful attention. Connected with this there is another point of interest. Lewis, as you are aware, is characterized in parts by the use of the word 'Lord' instead of the word 'Jesus.' This is the case in St. Matthew, and especially in St. John [...] but in St. Luke the case seems reversed. Thus, whilst in St. Matthew and St. John Lewis inclined to the use of 'Lord' and Cureton to the use of 'Jesus,' in St. Luke Lewis inclined to the use of 'Jesus' and Cureton to the use of 'Lord.' These, and some other kindred facts which my collation³⁷ of the Syriac Gospels brought before me, are important. Do they not indicate that the texts of Lewis and of Cureton are not homogeneous, or at least that they have been subjected to a varying textual influence?³⁸

Then Bonus remarks on dating *P*:

It is generally allowed—I believe by Dr. Sanday among others—that MSS. and quotations carry back our knowledge of the Peshitto roughly speaking to the beginning of the fourth century, say for convenience A.D. 310; and the

³⁶Ibid., 34

³⁷Bonus references his own *Collatio codicis Lewisiani rescripti*.

³⁸Ibid., 36

question is how and when did it come into existence. It would appear that there were, speaking broadly, only two alternatives containing four possibilities—revision or translation. It might then have been the result of the revision of previously existing Syriac texts—a revision conducted gradually, without any one authority; a revision extending over a long period of time, until at last the Peshitto, as we know it, was evolved.³⁹

Then Bonus provides a strawman argument. Bonus counters the imagined claim that *P* was revised, by saying it has no traces of revision.⁴⁰ Sanday objects, noting nobody had claimed *P* itself was revised, but that it is the product of revision.⁴¹ Bonus continues countering the claim that *P* is a product of revision:

[T]he Peshitto may be the outcome of an authoritative revision of the Syriac Text. This appears to be Dr. Hort's view, and Dr. Hort seems inclined to suppose that it may have taken place not far from 300 A.D., that is soon after the supposed first Syrian (Greek) revision. I have always felt that there were at least two formidable objections to this theory, for while fully recognizing the precariousness of arguing from silence, it is certainly hard to understand, if such an authoritative revision had taken place at so comparatively late a date, why no notice was taken of it by Syriac writers. Nor is there merely the difficulty of accounting for the silence of Syriac writers as to any such definite revision, but there is the further difficulty—supposing such a revision had been made—of accounting for their silence as to any authoritative removal of 'old Syriac' Texts and the imposition of the revised Text on the Syriac Churches, and on the supposition of a definite authoritative revision something of this kind must have taken place. [T]he Peshitto may be a direct translation made from the Greek somewhere about 300 A.D., that is soon after Dr. Hort's supposed first Syriac (Greek) revision, and based upon that revision. But the objections to the previous suppositions apply with equal force to this.⁴²

³⁹Ibid., 36

⁴⁰Ibid., 36-7

⁴¹Ibid., 37

⁴²Ibid., 37-8

Then Bonus suggests *P* may have originated so early in Church history that matters of Syriac Christianity were considered unimportant to note at the time:

Lastly, there is the possibility that the Peshitto is a direct translation from the Greek made at a time long anterior to 300 A.D., at a time that is to say when literary and ecclesiastical activity in the Syriac Churches was, by comparison with that of a later age, feeble, when, in the language of Canon Cook, ‘such a transaction might have escaped notice of have been passed over as of slight historical importance, not bearing upon the external organization of the Church, or upon controversies which occupied almost exclusively the minds of its chief representatives.’⁴³

Finally, Bonus concludes his arguments from silence that *P* must have originated “scarcely later than the latter half of the second century”:

In conclusion, the only reasonable interpretation of the evidence—largely negative and inferential, no doubt—seems to be that the Peshitto, whether it were the result of revision or whether it were a direct translation from the Greek, must have come into existence long before the beginning of the fourth century -scarcely later than the latter half of the second century. But if this were so, the Greek text on which it was based must have existed at or before that date. I may add that I quite admit that Texts like those of Lewis or Cureton may have existed in the second century, but even if it were beyond doubt that Aphraates and Tatian used only such Texts that would be no evidence that the Peshitto Text did not exist when either of those writers lived. We could merely argue that if the Peshitto version then existed it was not in the proper sense of the word a Vulgate.⁴⁴

Then Headlam counters Bonus’ early dating of *P*:

Mr. Gwilliam and others constantly asserted that all the arguments were against Westcott and Hort. I have listened with great care to what has been said to-day, and I particularly asked Mr. Gwilliam for the evidence of the

⁴³Ibid., 38

⁴⁴Ibid., 38-9

early date of the Peshitto. I saw at once that the evidence he quoted was perfectly useless. He told us his evidence dated back as far as the fifth century, and argued that therefore it must go back to the second, further saying that there was a clear Text without any sign of mixture. Upon referring to the earliest Texts of the Vulgate you will find those Texts possess hardly any signs of mixture. Mixture means that a Text has grown up and had a long history. If in the fifth century there were a considerable number of MSS. of the Peshitto which agreed in a remarkable manner, that shows almost conclusively that the Texts must have been derived from one source, which could not have been very remote. [...] It is admitted on both sides that [the Peshitta] might go back to the beginning of the fourth century. We want some evidence to connect the Peshitto with an earlier period.⁴⁵

I object to Headlam's reasoning. It is well known that great care was taken in the copying of Peshitta manuscripts, as Kenyon attests.⁴⁶ The remarkable agreement of Peshitta manuscripts does not indicate they were near to a mutual source as Headlam says; instead, it speaks to the faithful preservation of the tradition.

Later in the Oxford debate, Miller supports "a very early date" for the Peshitta by saying it lacks books that were disputed that early on:

[The Peshitta] occurs in the readings of Aphraates and Ephraem Syrus according to accounts, but there is no time to argue the question now. I would rather refer to an article in the *Church Quarterly* and to a chapter in my first volume.⁴⁷ But there is one thing I think ought to be borne in mind, that the Peshitto has not got the ἀντιλεγόμενα, or books once not universally received, and that is a very strong reason for supposing that the translation from Greek took place at a very early date—indeed, before those books were generally in use.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Ibid., 39-40

⁴⁶Frederic Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 2 ed. (London: Macmillan, 1912), 161

⁴⁷I suspect he references "The Text of the Syriac Gospels" in *Church Quarterly Review* LXXIX and "History of the Traditional Text till the Era of St. Chrysostom" in *A Guide to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*.

⁴⁸*The Oxford Debate*, 42

The ἀντιλεγόμενα (antilegomena) are 2 Peter, 2-3 John, Jude, and Revelation. The Church of the East encourages its members to study the antilegomena, but they apparently were not recognized when *P* was made. I am inclined to believe *P* originated no later than the second century.

Lamsa

In 1929, George M. Lamsa came out of left field saying the whole NT was originally written in Aramaic. He remarks, “If you were to ask Christians in Bible lands in what language the New Testament was originally written, the immediate reply would be, ‘In Aramaic, the language that Jesus and his disciples and immediate followers spoke and wrote’.”⁴⁹ He claims, “Paul did not write in Greek. There is no evidence or reason to assume that because Paul was ‘learned’ he necessarily was able to read or write Greek.”⁵⁰

Lamsa considers the Peshitta the “authoritative and authentic” compilation of the NT in Aramaic.⁵¹ He believes it originated in the year 150.⁵² He accounts for the absence of Peshitta manuscripts from the second century by saying they were copied and then burned when their physical conditions became poor.⁵³ This practice is like the Boy Scouts of America burning American flags that are in poor physical condition.

⁴⁹George M. Lamsa, *The Deluxe Study Edition of the Modern New Testament from the Aramaic*, Ed. Daniel Jon Mahar (Martinez, GA: Aramaic Bible Society, 2001), 349

⁵⁰Ibid., 366

⁵¹Ibid., 386

⁵²Ibid., 386

⁵³Ibid., 351

'Peshitta' and 'Peshitto'

Above, I note *Peshitta* and *Peshitto* have often been used interchangeably. However, Lamsa differentiates them. He says, “The ancient Peshitta (Aramaic) text should not be confused with a similar Aramaic text used by Western Assyrians or Monophysites and called the Peshitto.”⁵⁴

Lamsa claims the Peshitto “has undergone slight alterations since the fifth century,”⁵⁵ a time of schism in Syriac Christianity. A theological motivation, per Lamsa, was Monophysite denial of the humanity of Christ following the Nicene Creed of 325.⁵⁶ Lamsa claims the changes were “to facilitate the union between the Monophysites in Western Mesopotamia and the Greek Byzantine Church.”⁵⁷

Lamsa claims Rabbula initiated the Peshitto.⁵⁸ Lamsa decries Rabbula as a heretic for having many Christians call Mary *theotokos* (God-bearer) instead of *christotokos* (Christ-bearer).⁵⁹

To support his claim that Rabbula initiated the Peshitto but not the Peshitta, Lamsa misuses the following quote from Burkitt: “Another objection to regarding the Peshitta as the work of Rabbûla is the acceptance of it by the Nestorians. How should the Nestorians accept a revision set forth by the ‘tyrant of Edessa?’”⁶⁰ Lamsa portrays Burkitt here as

⁵⁴Ibid., 387

⁵⁵Ibid., 387

⁵⁶Ibid., 387

⁵⁷Ibid., 388

⁵⁸Ibid., 388

⁵⁹Ibid., 388

⁶⁰Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity*, 59

contending Rabbula did not initiate the Peshitta.⁶¹ However, Lamsa misinterprets Burkitt. Burkitt was *anticipating* this objection, not *making* this objection. Later in the book in which Lamsa found this excerpt, Burkitt answers the objection, explaining why he believes Rabbula initiated the Peshitta.

Lamsa claims the Peshitto was known to the West before the Peshitta, and has been mistaken for the Peshitta.⁶² Most scholars do not see the textual changes as warranting such a distinction between two text-types. However, the Peshitta and what Lamsa would call ‘the Peshitto’ have the same readings in Matthew 1.16 and 1.19 anyway.

Claims of Forgery

Lamsa claims *S* was forged in 1599.⁶³ He claims the date was written near a hole in the manuscript, increasing its apparent age by 900 years.⁶⁴ He remarks on a supposed folly of a young Burkitt: “Dr. Burkitt (then a young student), at the time of its discovery, thought that the hole in the date was natural, that is, in the skin when dated. He failed to realize that no responsible scribe would date a manuscript near a hole in such a way as to leave the reader in doubt as to the exact date.”⁶⁵

Lamsa also remarks on the overwriting of *S*, as it is a palimpsest. Some of it tells “of Santa Augenia, believed to be a European Saint never heard of in the East.”⁶⁶ Accordingly, Lamsa claims, “The book evidently was introduced by the Roman Catholic missionaries after

⁶¹Lamsa, 388

⁶²Ibid., 387-8

⁶³Ibid., 390

⁶⁴Ibid., 390

⁶⁵Ibid., 390

⁶⁶Ibid., 390

the union of the Chaldeans with the Church of Rome in the sixteenth century.”⁶⁷ Lamsa supposes a scribe-in-training made it for practice: “The work underlying the super-writing is that of a student who copied the Gospels for penmanship. No layman or priest in the East would destroy a sacred text of the Four Gospels just to write a history of the Saints. Such an act would be considered sacrilegious.”⁶⁸

Lamsa has similar reasons for considering *C* a late forgery.⁶⁹ He cites Gwilliam for showing *C* came later than *P*.⁷⁰

Reception

Lamsa had many critics, including Edwin Yamauchi. In 1974, Dallas Theological Seminary published Yamauchi’s article criticizing Lamsa⁷¹ in their scholarly journal *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Yamauchi cites inscriptional evidence to show the prevalence of Greek.⁷²

Some of Yamauchi’s reasoning is flawed. For example, he mentions, “[Q]uotations from the Septuagint in the New Testament [...] are even more numerous than quotations from the Masoretic type texts.”⁷³ This is true for Greek versions, but not early Syriac versions. Jan Joosten notes, “The text of Old Testament quotations in the early Syriac versions of the New Testament very often follows the OTP [Old Testament

⁶⁷Ibid., 390

⁶⁸Ibid., 390

⁶⁹Ibid., 390

⁷⁰Ibid., 388

⁷¹I say “criticizing Lamsa” instead of “critiquing Lamsa’s claims” because the article is rife with ad hominem attacks and other emotionally immature remarks. Such an article does not befit a scholarly journal.

⁷²Edwin Yamauchi, “Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, or Syriac? A Critique of the Claims of G. M. Lamsa for the Syriac Peshitta,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131 (1974): 321

⁷³Ibid., 328

Peshitta/Peshitta Tanakh]⁷⁴ against all attested text-forms of the Greek New Testament.”⁷⁵ Yamauchi’s argument for Greek originality circularly presumes Greek originality. He could have tried to explain the Peshitta NT’s agreements with the Peshitta Tanakh by supposing it was altered that way, but he made no such attempt. Maybe he did not know of the Peshitta NT’s agreements with the Peshitta Tanakh.

Lamsa’s claims gained only marginal stock in his day, just as they have only marginal stock now. Many scholars would see me as giving undue weight to Lamsa’s claims for even mentioning them. I explain his views because the proposition this thesis presents uses the Peshitta NT much like Lamsa did.

Conclusion

The idea in the third chapter would amend the text of the NT based solely on *P*. No Greek witness has such readings. Lamsa amended the text of the NT many times based solely on *P*, though he never addressed this specific idea. Both of Lamsa’s translations of Matthew 1 seem to have only 13 generations in the third section just like almost every other version.

While I am not convinced any of the original autographs on the NT were in Syriac, I am inclined to believe Matthew was originally written in some form of Aramaic. And I consider *P* the most reliable witness to it. Even if I became convinced of Greek originality, the arguments for Byzantine priority would likely still impress me more than those for Alexandrian-leaning reasoned eclecticism.

⁷⁴The ancient Syriac version of the Hebrew Bible

⁷⁵Jan Joosten, *Language and Textual History of the Syriac Bible* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 123

CHAPTER THREE

The Proposition Based on the Peshitta

I first learned of this proposition from Andrew Roth¹. However, this thesis does not cite him again.² I have developed my own explanation. The proposition based on *P* involves four factors:

- 1) The meaning of ܡܘܨܪܐ in Matthew 1.16
- 2) ܡܘܨܪܐ in Matthew 1.16 compared to ܡܘܨܪܐ in Matthew 1.19
- 3) Comparing the genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3
- 4) Establishing a genealogy of Mary

First I explain the pertinent vocabulary. Then I explain each of the four factors in its own section.

Vocabulary

Seven words are pertinent to define here: ܡܘܨܪܐ (*gavra*), ܡܘܨܪܐ (*ba'ala*), ܡܘܨܪܐ (*enosb*), ܡܘܨܪܐ (*av*), ܐܢܬܪܘܦܘܨ (*anthropos*), ܐܢܬܪܘܦܘܨ (*aner*), and ܡܘܨܪܐ (*gune*). In that order, I explain them below with one paragraph for each.

¹Andrew Roth, *Ruach Qadim: Aramaic Origins of the New Testament* (San Bernardino, CA: Tushiyah Press, 2005), 84-91

²*Ruach Qadim* is an unreliable source. While I initially got the idea from it, no part of this thesis depends on it.

William Jennings defines ܘܒܝܐ as “a man, a person [...] Also a husband, Mt. i 16.”³ J. Payne Smith defines ܘܒܝܐ as “man (especially a strong or mighty man = Lat. *vir* [...]).”⁴ A derivative, ܘܒܝܐܐ, means “vigour, force, manhood; the virile member⁵; pl. exploits, deeds of renown, mighty acts, miracles.”⁶ A verb form, ܘܒܝܐ, means “to use force.”⁷ An adjective form, ܘܒܝܐܐ, means “masculine, valiant, heroic; subst. a valiant man or woman, hero, heroine.”⁸ It relates to these three Biblical Aramaic words: ܘܒܝܐ (“be strong”⁹), ܘܒܝܐ (“man”¹⁰), and ܘܒܝܐ (“mighty one”¹¹). Psalm 127.4 in Hebrew uses ܘܒܝܐ, from the same Semitic root, for *warrior*.

Jennings defines ܘܒܝܐ as “husband, lord, master.”¹² Smith defines ܘܒܝܐ as “lord, owner, head of a family, hence husband.”¹³ It comes from ܘܒܝܐ, which means “to own, take for one’s own,

³*Lexicon to the Syriac New Testament*, s.v. “ܘܒܝܐ,” (1926; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001)

⁴*A Compendious Syriac Dictionary: Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith, D.D.*, s.v. “ܘܒܝܐ,” (1903; repr., Lexington, KY: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013)

⁵i.e., *the penis*

⁶*Ibid.*, s.v. “ܘܒܝܐܐ”

⁷*Ibid.*, s.v. “ܘܒܝܐ”

⁸*Ibid.*, s.v. “ܘܒܝܐܐ”

⁹*The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, s.v. “ܘܒܝܐ,” (1906; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008)

¹⁰*Ibid.*, s.v. “ܘܒܝܐ”

¹¹*Ibid.*, s.v. “ܘܒܝܐ”

¹²*Lexicon to the Syriac New Testament*, s.v. “ܘܒܝܐ”

¹³*A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, s.v. “ܘܒܝܐ”

i.e. *to marry*.”¹⁴ It relates to the Biblical Aramaic **ܒܥܝܠ**, which means “owner, lord.”¹⁵ It also relates to the Biblical Hebrew **בָּעַל**, which means “marry, rule over.”¹⁶

Jennings defines **ܪܘܢܐ** as “*a man, (homo)*.”¹⁷ Smith defines **ܪܘܢܐ** as “*a man, human being, mortal = homo as ܪܘܒܐܐ = vir*.”¹⁸ It comes from the Biblical Aramaic **ܪܘܢܐܝܫ**, which means “man, mankind.”¹⁹ It relates to the Biblical Hebrew **אָנוּשׁ**, which means “man, mankind.”²⁰ From what I can tell, neither Syriac nor Biblical Aramaic have a word related to the Biblical Hebrew **אָדָם**, which also means “man, mankind.”²¹

Jennings defines **ܐܘܪܐ** as “*father*.”²² Smith defines **ܐܘܪܐ** as “*father, parent, progenitor, forefather*.”²³ Its means the same as **ܐܘܪܐ** in Biblical Aramaic and **אב** in Biblical Hebrew.

¹⁴Ibid., s.v. “ܐܘܪܐ”

¹⁵*The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. “בָּעַל”

¹⁶Ibid., s.v. “בָּעַל”

¹⁷*Lexicon to the Syriac New Testament*, s.v. “ܪܘܢܐ”

¹⁸*A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, s.v. “ܪܘܢܐ”

¹⁹*The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. “אָנוּשׁ”

²⁰Ibid., s.v. “אָנוּשׁ”

²¹Ibid., s.v. “אָדָם”

²²*Lexicon to the Syriac New Testament*, s.v. “ܐܘܪܐ”

²³*A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, s.v. “ܐܘܪܐ”

Joseph Thayer defines ἄνθρωπος as “without distinction of sex, *a human being, whether male or female.*”²⁴ It is the most generic Greek term for a human.

Thayer defines ἀνὴρ thus: “*a man, Lat. vir.* The meanings of this word in the N. T. differ in no respect [from] classical usage.”²⁵ Thayer notes it is used “with a reference to sex, and so to distinguish a man from a woman” and “with a reference to age, and to distinguish an adult man from a boy.”²⁶

Thayer defines γυνή as “*a woman* of any age, whether a virgin, or married, or a widow.”²⁷

Summary: ܐܢܫܐ is the most generic Syriac word for *a man* or *a person*. ܪܘܚܡܐ is gender-specific, speaking of *a man* in regard to strength; context determines the role of the man. ܪܘܚܡܐ is the most specific term for *husband*. ܐܒܐ is the most specific term for *father*. ἄνθρωπος is the most generic term for a human. ἀνὴρ refers to a man, and γυνή refers to a woman. Ancient Greek uses ἀνὴρ as both a general term for a man and a specific term for a husband, since it has no word that strictly means *husband*; using ἀνὴρ with γυνή, or with other contextual elements, can imply *husband*.

A good illustrative passage for the pertinent vocabulary is 1 Corinthians 7.1-2. First I quote it in Greek, and explain some of it. Then I quote it in Syriac, and explain some of it.

²⁴Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4th ed, s.v. “ἄνθρωπος,” (1896; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009)

²⁵Ibid., s.v. “ἀνὴρ”

²⁶Ibid., s.v. “ἀνὴρ”

²⁷Ibid., s.v. “γυνή”

The Meaning of ܡܘܨܪܐ in Matthew 1.16

No ancient Syriac version uses ܡܘܨܪܐ, ܡܘܨܪܐ, or ܡܘܨܪܐ to describe the relationship of 'Joseph' to Mary in Matthew 1.16. In Matthew 1.16, *P* reads “ܡܘܨܪܐ ܡܘܨܪܐ ܡܘܨܪܐ,” which means “Joseph, the *gavrah* of Mary.”³⁰ ܡܘܨܪܐ (*gavrah*) is a possessive form of ܡܘܨܪܐ. *S* reads “ܡܘܨܪܐ ܡܘܨܪܐ ܡܘܨܪܐ ܡܘܨܪܐ,” which means “Joseph, to whom Mary was betrothed.” *C* reads “ܡܘܨܪܐ ܡܘܨܪܐ ܡܘܨܪܐ ܡܘܨܪܐ ܡܘܨܪܐ,” which is a wordier way of saying “Joseph, to whom Mary was betrothed.” *S* and *C* both say in no uncertain terms that this Joseph and Mary were engaged. *P* has a less clear reading with ܡܘܨܪܐ here.

ܡܘܨܪܐ in Matthew 1.16 seems to refer to the male person responsible for Mary in their patriarchal society. This person could be her brother, uncle, father, husband, nephew, *et cetera*. It has almost always been understood as *husband* in this verse. Any non-spousal relationship would fit this proposition.

If Matthew wrote in Aramaic, why might he have avoided a word that strictly means *father*, such as ܒܘܨܐ (Syriac ܒܘܨܐ), in v. 16? Why did Matthew not write something like “Jacob begot Joseph, Joseph begot Mary, and Mary birthed Jesus, who is called Christ”? Perhaps Matthew knew Joseph was not the father of Mary, but had another male role with her.

ܡܘܨܪܐ in Matthew 1.16 Compared to ܡܘܨܪܐ in Matthew 1.19

In Matthew 1.19, *P* reads “ܡܘܨܪܐ ܡܘܨܪܐ ܡܘܨܪܐ,” which means “But Joseph her husband was righteous.” ܡܘܨܪܐ (*ba'alab*) is a possessive form of ܡܘܨܪܐ. *S* reads “ܡܘܨܪܐ

³⁰The proclitic Lamed preposition on Joseph's name only marks him as the direct object of Jacob's begetting.

”*كَلِمَةُ جَدِّهَا بِحَسَبِ رِيسَتِهِ*,” which means “But because Joseph her husband was righteous.” *C* reads “*بِحَسَبِ رِيسَتِهِ جَدُّهَا*,” which means “But because Joseph was a righteous *gavra*.” *P* and *S* are clear via their use of *كَلِمَةُ* that this Joseph and Mary were engaged³¹. *C* uses the same word, *يَدُّهَا*, in v. 19 that *P* uses in v. 16.

Thus, in *P*, the Joseph in v. 19 is certainly the husband of Mary, while her relationship to the Joseph in v. 16 is less clear.

Now I note the literary structure of Matthew 1. Verse one is an introduction that seems to apply more to the genealogy specifically than to the whole Gospel. Verses 2-16 have the genealogy. Verse 17 summarizes the genealogy. Verses 18-25 are the only narrative portions.

‘Joseph’ is named first in the genealogy, and then again in the narrative. Considering this literary separation, it seems reasonable to me to wonder whether the Joseph in the genealogy and the one in the narrative are different people. ‘Joseph’ was a common name. The fact that different words, *يَدُّهَا* and *كَلِمَةُ*, are used for their respective relationships to Mary further piques my curiosity. Furthermore, the semantic ranges of these words fit this proposition.

The Joseph in the genealogy could be Mary’s legal guardian, while the Joseph in the narrative is her fiancé. Under this proposition, Joseph would be the twelfth generation, Mary the thirteenth, and Jesus the fourteenth.

³¹In this culture, betrothal was a binding agreement, which is why he is called her ‘husband’ even before the wedding.

The Greek reading in Matthew 1.16 is “Ἰωσήφ τὸν ἀνδρὰ μαριας,” which means “Joseph, the husband of Mary.” ἀνδρὰ is a form of ἀνὴρ, and its use with the name of a woman in this context implies marriage. The Greek reading in Matthew 1.19 also has ἀνὴρ, with the same meaning. Thus, the Greek text has no such possible differentiation of two people named Joseph.

Comparing the Genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3

Table 3 on the next page lists the 77 names in the reverse genealogy of Luke 3. Asterisks mark the names that are absent in some versions as explained below. Most of Table 3 is essentially copied from Raymond Brown³².

P and RP 2005 have 76 names in the genealogy. In v. 33, instead of ‘Admin’ (#49) and ‘Arni’ (#50), they have ‘Aram.’ However, the marginal apparatus of RP 2005³³ includes ‘Admin’ and ‘Arni’ together as an alternative to ‘Aram’ because the Byzantine tradition is significantly divided.

Nestle-Aland’s *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th edition (NA28), has 77 names in the genealogy; it has ‘Admin’ and ‘Arni’ in v. 33.

S has 72 names in the genealogy. In v. 24, it excludes ‘Levi’ (#4), ‘Melchi’ (#5), and ‘Joseph’ (#7). In v. 26, it excludes ‘Maath’ (#13).

³²Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 76

³³RP 2005 has two apparatuses. The marginal apparatus shows variants within the Byzantine tradition. The lower apparatus shows variants from the main text of Nestle-Aland’s *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th edition/United Bible Society’s *Greek New Testament*, 4th edition.

Table 3. The Reverse Genealogy in Luke 3

Post-monarchical (vv. 23-7)	Monarchical (vv. 27-31)	Pre-monarchical (vv. 32-4)	Pre-Abrahamic (vv. 34-8)
1. Joseph	22. Neri	43. Jesse	57. Terah
2. Eli (Heli)	23. Melchi	44. Obed	58. Nahor
3. Matthat	24. Addi	45. Boaz	59. Serug
4. Levi*	25. Cosam	46. Sala (Salmon)	60. Reu
5. Melchi*	26. Elmadam (Elmodam)	47. Nahshon	61. Peleg
6. Jannai	27. Er	48. Amminadab (Amminadam)	62. Eber
7. Joseph*	28. Jesus (Joshua)	49. Admin*	63. Shelah
8. Mattathias	29. Eliezer	50. Arni*	64. Cainan
9. Amos	30. Jorim	51. Hezron	65. Arphaxad
10. Nahum	31. Maththat (Matthat)	52. Perez	66. Shem
11. Hesli	32. Levi	53. Judah	67. Noah
12. Naggai	33. Simeon	54. Jacob	68. Lamech
13. Maath*	34. Judah	55. Isaac	69. Methuselah
14. Mattathias	35. Joseph	56. Abraham	70. Enoch
15. Semein	36. Jonam	-	71. Jared
16. Josech	37. Eliakim	-	72. Mahalaleel
17. Joda	38. Melea	-	73. Cainan
18. Joanan	39. Menna	-	74. Enos
19. Rhesa	40. Mattatha(n)	-	75. Seth
20. Zerubbabel	41. Nathan	-	76. Adam
21. Shealtiel	42. David	-	77. God

The leaf of *C* that contains the genealogy is lost.

However, the part significant to this thesis is that *S*, *P*, RP 2005, and NA28 list Eli (#2) as the father of Joseph (#1). This contrasts with all versions of Matthew 1, which list

Jacob as the father of Joseph. The Joseph in Luke 3.23 is definitely the husband of Mary, and the Joseph in Matthew 1.16 has almost always been understood as her husband, too, creating an apparent discrepancy.

Most interpreters of the genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3—including Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Marshall Johnson—consider harmonizing them impossible.³⁴ Nevertheless, several harmonization attempts have been made. I explain four kinds³⁵:

1. Matthew Reflects Joseph's Biological Ancestry, While Luke Reflects His Legal Ancestry

Africanus³⁶ explains it with two supposed instances of levirate marriage: Matthan married Estha, and begot Jacob. Matthan died. Melchi married Estha, and begot Eli. Eli married, but died childless. Jacob married Eli's widow, and begot Joseph. By the principles of levirate marriage, Joseph would be the legal son of Eli, even though Jacob is his biological father.³⁷

An important Christological consideration, in addition to Davidic kingship³⁸, is Levitical priesthood. One early view, in a manuscript of the Didache, holds that the presence of 'Levi' (#32) in the genealogy in Luke 3 means Levitical and Davidic lines converge therein.³⁹ Africanus seems to argue against this view. Africanus still affirms Jesus

³⁴Marshall Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies: with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus*, 2 ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), xxvi

³⁵An idea that does not fit any of these four categories is recounted in Johnson 144 and n. 4.

³⁶Greek *Letter to Aristides*, III (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf06.pdf>)

³⁷Raymond Brown (503-4) believes this explanation creates more of a difficulty than it resolves.

³⁸'Messiah' was a royal title, so *messiahship* and *kingship* are interchangeable in this context. Because of modern use of the terms, I use the latter to differentiate the concept more clearly from *priesthood*.

³⁹Johnson, 273-5

is both a Davidic king and a Levitical priest, but he claims such is known from “the patriarchs and the prophets,” not from genealogies.⁴⁰

2. *Matthew Reflects Joseph’s Legal Ancestry, While Luke Reflects His Biological Ancestry*

Karl Bornhäuser claims some instances of ἐγέννησεν in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus can mean ‘adopted’ instead of ‘begot.’⁴¹ According to Bornhäuser, “Jeconiah, who was irrevocably condemned to childlessness in Jer. 22:24-30, adopted Shealtiel, actual son of Neri [...]”⁴² Luke 3.27 calls Shealtiel (#21) a son of Neri (#22), and Bornhäuser considers this biological. Bornhäuser contends the royal lineage was explicit before the deportation to Babylon, but became a “secret royal line” between Zerubbabel and Joseph.⁴³ Bornhäuser claims Matthew followed this line to Jacob, and then “appointed” Joseph as Jacob’s heir, similarly to how Shealtiel was appointed as Jeconiah’s heir.⁴⁴

Arthur Hervey, Theodor Zahn, and Vincent Taylor support this view, following B. F. Westcott, F. C. Burkitt, Box, Allen, Barnard, A. J. Maclean, and Moffatt.⁴⁵ So does P. Gaechter, following Hervey and Bornhäuser.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Greek *Letter to Aristides*, I (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf06.pdf>)

⁴¹Johnson, 142

⁴²Ibid., 142

⁴³Ibid., 142

⁴⁴Ibid., 142

⁴⁵Ibid., 142

⁴⁶Ibid., 142 and n. 5

3. Matthew Has Joseph's Ancestry, While Luke Has Mary's

This explanation was “first set forth in an explicit way by Annius of Viterbo (c. 1490) and Luther, and subsequently adopted by Bengel in his *Gnomon*, F. Godet, B. Weiss, and, most exhaustively, by Joseph M. Heer[.]”⁴⁷ It involves “a rather forced exegesis” of Luke 3.23.⁴⁸ Since the genitive definite article meaning “son of” (τοῦ) in the genealogy applies to every name except ‘Joseph,’ the phrase ὡς ἐνομιζέτο (“as was thought”) may apply only to Joseph.⁴⁹ This proposition emphasizes punctuating the sentence as “ὄν υἱός, ὡς ἐνομιζέτο Ἰωσήφ, τοῦ Ἡλὶ τοῦ Ματθαῖ τοῦ Λευί, etc., ‘being the son, supposedly of Joseph (but actually) of Eli, son of Matthat, son of Levi...’”⁵⁰ Eli would be understood as the grandfather of Mary, and the rest of the list would then be her ancestry.⁵¹

However, in two of the three places in the NT in which Jesus is called the son of Joseph⁵², Joseph’s name has no article for “son of.”⁵³ Moulton notes “a close parallel to this verse from a bilingual inscription” in Palmyrene-Aramaic and Greek that similarly excludes the article.⁵⁴ Johnson notes “the total lack of the article in the Jewish papyri collected by V.

⁴⁷Ibid., 143

⁴⁸Ibid., 143

⁴⁹Ibid., 143

⁵⁰Ibid., 143

⁵¹Johnson (143 n. 7) says the reading of the Koine/Byzantine group of Greek NT witnesses “would seem not to affect the exegesis at this point.” RP 2005 at Luke 3.23 has “ὄν — ὡς ἐνομιζέτο — υἱός Ἰωσήφ, τοῦ Ἡλί.”

⁵²Luke 4.22; John 1.45 and 6.42

⁵³Johnson, 143

⁵⁴Ibid., 143

A. Tcherikover and A. Fuks.”⁵⁵ Thus the anarthrous Ἰωσήφ in Luke 3.23 could fit the style of the time.

Furthermore, if Luke intended ὡς ἐνομιζέτο to apply only to Joseph, he could have made it clearer syntactically in one of several ways, such as thus: “υἱὸς ὧν—ἐνομιζέτο μὲν τοῦ Ἰωσήφ—ἀληθῶς δὲ (or ὀρθῶς δὲ, or ἦν δὲ, or ἀληθεία δὲ, or ἔργῳ δὲ) τοῦ Ἠλὶ τοῦ πατρὸς τῆς Μαριάμ.”⁵⁶

And “τοῦ is more naturally taken here in its obvious sense,” *son of*, not *grandson of*.⁵⁷

4. Matthew Has Mary’s Ancestry, While Luke Has Joseph’s

Tertullian⁵⁸ claims Matthew has Mary’s genealogy. H. A. Blair supports this view. Blair suggests v. 16 originally had “Jacob begat Joseph, and Joseph begat Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.”⁵⁹ Under this proposition, Matthew and Luke have the genealogies of different people named ‘Joseph’; Paula Seethaler accepts this view, which Raymond Brown calls a “rather desperate hypothesis.”⁶⁰

⁵⁵Ibid., 143 n. 9

⁵⁶Maximilian Lambertz, “Die Toledoth in Mt. 1:1-17 und Lc. 3:23 b ff.,” in *Festschrift Franz Dornseiff*, ed. H. Kusch (Leipzig, 1953), esp. pp. 223-4, quoted in Johnson 143-4

⁵⁷Johnson, 144

⁵⁸*De Carne Christi*, XX-XXII

⁵⁹H. A. Blair, “Matthew 1,16 and the Matthean Genealogy,” *Studia Evangelica* II (TU LXXXVII; Berlin: Akademie, 1964), 153, quoted in Johnson 144 n. 3

⁶⁰Raymond Brown, 89 n. 65

Evaluation of Attempts at Harmonization

Johnson calls each of the above attempts “unconvincing and strained.”⁶¹ He notes they do not account for “the function of the genealogical form in the first-century milieu.”⁶² The genealogy of Jesus in Matthew seems midrashic, meant to “comfort, exhort, and edify.”⁶³ *Midrashim* (plural of *midrash*) are rabbinic commentaries on the Tanakh. The purpose of the genealogy in Matthew is more theological than historiographic, as Johnson, Raymond Brown⁶⁴, and Agnes Smith Lewis⁶⁵ would say.

The proposition based on *P*, that the Joseph in Matthew 1.16 is the guardian of Mary, would seem to harmonize the two genealogies. The perceived discrepancy with Matthew 1.16 saying Joseph descends from Jacob, and Luke 3.23 saying Joseph descends from Eli, would be resolved because they are different people named ‘Joseph.’ Matthew would have Mary’s ancestry, while Luke would have Joseph’s.

Johnson’s criticism of ignoring the purpose of the genealogy in Matthew would still apply, though. I note that while theological purpose means harmonization is unnecessary, it does not necessarily *preclude* harmonization. In other words, the genealogies do not need to be harmonized to fulfill their functions, but why not harmonize them if we can?

The proposition based on *P* is like the “rather desperate hypothesis” that the genealogies have different people name ‘Joseph,’ but stronger. Blair and Seethaler provide no textual basis such as explained above with ܫܘܒܝܢ and ܫܘܒܝܢ.

⁶¹Johnson, 144

⁶²Ibid., 145

⁶³Ibid., 145

⁶⁴Raymond Brown, 74-5

⁶⁵Agnes Smith Lewis, *The Old Syriac Gospels: or Evangelion Da-Mepharreshé* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1910), xiv

One objection to the proposition based on *P* may be that the readings in Matthew 1.16 and 1.19 were probably altered deliberately to resolve perceived problems. If it was deliberate, the editor(s) did a poor job of making the significance of the new reading clear; the ambiguity still precludes certainty of what is meant. They could have instead made Matthew 1.16 read “*لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ وَلَدٌ تَحْتِهَا*.”⁶⁶

Maybe the creator(s) of *P* wanted it to remain ambiguous. If the vorlage of *P* did not have such a reading like *P*, I think the creator(s) of *P* saw the potential numerical and harmonic problems outlined above, and adjusted the text noncommittally.

Establishing a Genealogy of Mary

As both the genealogy in Matthew 1 and the genealogy in Luke 3 have usually been understood as showing the ancestry of Mary’s husband, many people have wondered about the ancestry of Mary.

The first attempt at a genealogy for Mary came in the second-century Protogospel of James. It began the tradition that her parents are Joachim and Anna. It places her in a Davidic lineage. Sebastian Brock says interest in Mary’s genealogy probably began with desire to show Jesus’ Davidic descent through her instead of through Joseph.⁶⁷ Epiphanius in the ninth-century *Life of the Virgin* provides a full genealogy for Mary, through Joachim and Anna.⁶⁸

⁶⁶“Joseph, the guardian—but not the husband—of Mary”

⁶⁷Sebastian Brock, “The Genealogy of the Virgin Mary in Sinai Syr. 16,” *Scrinium* 2 (2006), 60

⁶⁸Ibid., 60

The manuscript known as ‘Sinai Syriac 16,’ found at St. Catherine’s Monastery as *S* was, says Mary and her husband Joseph descended from different sons of Eleazar: Mary daughter of Zadoq son of Jotham son of Eleazar; and Joseph son of Jacob son of Matthan son of Eleazar.⁶⁹ It also names her mother as Dina.⁷⁰ It might be the earliest source to name Mary’s parents as Dina and Z/Sadoq, instead of Anna and Joachim, though its age is much disputed.⁷¹ Brock recounts other attempts at a genealogy for Mary in his article.

Above, the third and fourth categories of harmonization attempts would provide genealogies for Mary. The proposition based on *P* fits the fourth category—that Matthew has Mary’s ancestry, while Luke has Joseph’s. In this proposition, Joseph would be Mary’s legal guardian—perhaps her biological or adoptive father, though not necessarily—and her mother’s name is unknown.

Conclusion

Due to the semantic ranges of *ܐܘܨܬܐ* and *ܐܘܨܬܐ* in Matthew 1.16 and 1.19, respectively, Matthew 1 may speak of two people named ‘Joseph.’ This would make the third section have 14 generations. It would also harmonize the genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3, albeit with Joseph as Mary’s guardian instead of either tradition of Joachim or Zadoq as her father.

⁶⁹Ibid., 58-9

⁷⁰Ibid., 65

⁷¹Ibid., 65

This proposition may be unconvincing, perhaps depending on one's regard for *P*. It may disregard the midrashic nature of the genealogy in Matthew 1. Nevertheless, it is less strained than the other explanations, and the most likely.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Matthew, in his depiction of Jesus as a Davidic Messiah, may have left a numerical mystery. The problem—real or perceived—of the number of generations in Matthew 1 has puzzled generations of scholars.

One proposition—by E. Lohmeyer, A. Vögtle, and Marshall Johnson—supposes the genealogist misread the Hebrew Bible, and thus ‘Jechoniah’ in Matthew 1.11 should be ‘Jehoiakim.’¹ Another—by K. Stendahl—uses eschatological periodization to suppose ‘Christ’ in Matthew 1.16 is the fourteenth generation after ‘Jesus.’² This thesis interprets two words in *P* to propose the Joseph in Matthew 1.16 may be the guardian, not the husband, of Mary.

The comparison of Matthew 1 with Luke 3 has also proven puzzling. Africanus uses levirate marriage to contend Matthew reflects Joseph’s biological ancestry, while Luke reflects his legal ancestry.³ Karl Bornhäuser claims Jechoniah adopted Shealtiel, biological son of Neri; this would mean Matthew reflects Joseph’s legal ancestry, while Luke reflects his biological ancestry.⁴ Annianus of Viterbo *et. al.* suggest “as was thought” in Luke 3.23 may refer only to ‘Joseph,’ and the rest of the genealogy is Mary’s ancestry, while Matthew has

¹Marshall Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies: with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus*, 2 ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 183

²*Ibid.*, 221-3

³ Greek *Letter to Aristides*, III (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf06.pdf>)

⁴Johnson, 142 and n. 5

Joseph's ancestry.⁵ Tertullian⁶ claims Matthew gives Mary's ancestry; H. A. Blair⁷ and Paula Seethaler⁸ similarly suggest the genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 include different people named 'Joseph,' which the proposition based on *P* supports.

None of the above explanations approach certainty. Some of them conflict both with the tradition in the Protogospel of James that Mary's parents are Joachim and Anna, and with the tradition in Sinai Syriac 16 that they are Zadoq and Dina.

To accept the proposition based on *P*, one would have to regard *P* as a weightier witness than *S* or *C*. One would also have to be open to the possibility that a Syriac witness could preserve a part of the New Testament more accurately than any extant Greek witness. Thus, few scholars could accept this proposition. Nevertheless, it is the strongest of the given explanations.

⁵Johnson, 143

⁶*De Carne Christi*, XX-XXII

⁷Johnson, 144 n. 3

⁸Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 89 n. 65

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