

Response to Nick Perrin

I am grateful that Nick has chosen to engage with my little review of his work in *EJT*.

I do indeed chide Perrin for arbitrariness in reconstruction and GT9-10 is a good example of this. We have two different Coptic words (*pkah* and *pkosmos*, normally rendered ‘earth’ and ‘world’ respectively), which most naturally are derived from two different Greek or Aramaic words. My point is that *Im* would be a more natural word to reconstruct behind Greek/Coptic *kosmos* in GT10. Even if the likelihood of *r* vs. *Im* were 50/50 (which it is not), Perrin would be choosing between possibilities in order to get a word play. He cites OS Luke 12:49a as proving his point and says ‘It seems to me rather hubristic – not to mention methodologically suspect – to try to improve on the word choice of the OS composer himself’. I am certainly not doing that. Rather, the OS supports *my* point: Greek ‘earth’ is rendered by Syriac ‘earth’, not by the word ‘world’. It is consistent with my position *not his* that speakers of Coptic, Greek and Syriac, and consequently translators between these languages, generally distinguished between the words ‘earth’ and ‘world’. However, I am open to the possibility that these words were sometimes interchanged if someone can adduce examples.

NP: ‘Before I leave off with Williams, we note that he is unhappy with my translating ΠΤΩΜΑ (body/flesh/corpse) with ܦܠܫܐ (flesh): ‘similarly tendentious renderings from Coptic back to Syriac are ‘corpse’ rendered by ‘flesh’ (p. 106).’ The Coptic term has a wide range so there are other ways to go with the Syriac. But are there any Syriac options necessarily *better* than ܦܠܫܐ (flesh)? Not in my mind.’

I would reply that Coptic ΠΤΩΜΑ would most naturally represent Syriac *sheladda* (*šld*?; cf. OS Matthew 14:12); or failing that *pagra* (*pgr*?; cf. OS Matthew 24:28). ‘Corpse’ and ‘flesh’ are not the same thing.

NP: ‘A number of scholars, for example, feel that there is a Hebrew or Aramaic wordplay going on behind Matt. 7:6. Perhaps you feel – because there is no way of eliminating experimental bias in discerning semitic puns there – that such arguments are a priori unsustainable? I am not so prepared to send the likes of Dalman and Black packing.’

One of the problems for those who reconstruct Aramaic behind Greek (and other) texts is that they have relatively few ways of demonstrating Aramaic. Alleged word play and mistranslation are two of the most common. Thus, of necessity, they reconstruct a punning Jesus, and mistranslating evangelists. Even while we acknowledge success in their arguments, we also acknowledge that, given their mission, it would have been hard for them to have reached any other conclusion.

NP: ‘Finally, while there are errors in the book (I am painfully aware), and while I am not the Aramaicist that Williams is, and confess to my error of adding a , to ܦܠܫܐ (p. 105). One example does not constitute ‘scores of errors.’ Even if Jesus felt that one *yod* was of crucial importance (Matt. 5:18), Williams is going to need more than a

misplaced *yod* to overturn my argument. (For the record, I had two Syriacists diligently serving on my dissertation committee – one being a leading Aramaicist / Syriacist – and they both expressed general satisfaction with the technical aspects of my argument, at least as far as the Syriac went.)’

I cannot comment on the committee’s competence in Aramaic, nor have I seen the thesis that they saw. I have only seen the published version. If you want an example of errors we could just focus on three pages from pp. 65 to 67, which deal with GT9-12.

p. 65.

- 1) *’rmywn* – delete *n*
- 2) *b ’wr’* – I presume that *b ’r’* was meant
- 3) fn. 37: *beth* lacks ligature with *alaph*

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- 4) *’rmt* wrongly written for *’rmyt*
- 5) *b ’r’* used when *b ’lm’* would be more natural
- 6) fn. 38 *nuhra* and *nura* described as ‘homophonous’

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- 7) first three Syriac words lack ligatures
- 8) *zdyq* should be in the emphatic state
- 9) fn. 40: ‘It is of added interest that in Syriac the phrase “from us” (... *man*) would hardly be distinguishable from the following vocable “who?” (... *man*). Thus the Syriac text would exhibit anadiplosis (the rhetorical device of beginning a sentence with the same sound that completed the previous sentence).’ Unfortunately ‘from us’ in Syriac is *menan* not *man*, which rather spoils things.

Points 5) and 9) are the only ones that significantly affect the argument. Now I am prepared to admit that it may be that my snobbery prevents me from seeing some of the better arguments in Perrin’s work since I am put off by the fact that most pages of his section on catchwords contain technical errors. However, Perrin does need to clean the presentation up, remove a number of spurious arguments and then present us with what remains. If he does not like my choice of pp. 65-67 and feels that I have not done him justice, perhaps he could suggest some other pages which he believes contain fewer errors.

P.J. Williams