

**EXILING ANCIENT BIBLICAL VERSIONS: ARGUMENT FOR THE AFRICAN
ROOTS OF ANCIENT BIBLICAL VERSIONS**

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Abstract

Throughout the history of the Church, the text of the New Testament has been preserved in many translations and in different languages. Most of the early biblical versions that support the text of the New Testament are predominantly connected to Alexandria and North Africa but such understanding has not been fully appreciated in Textual studies of the New Testament. This makes the text of the New Testament to sound foreign to the African people. This paper, using descriptive and historical methods, discusses the ancient biblical versions of the text of the New Testament and argues that most of these early biblical versions were copied by African scribes and some of these versions were linked with Alexandrian scribes or other parts of North Africa. It also argues that understanding the contributions of the scribes in these African cities will shape the face of Biblical studies in Africa and enhance the translation of the Bible in many African languages as being indigenously preserved documents, which can be used by our Bible translation agencies and will be appreciated by many African Christians in our educational institutions.

Keywords: Ancient, Versions, LXX, transmission, text-types

Introduction

It is obvious that God has preserved the text and the message of the Bible for posterity despite attempts at textual corruption. This was done through copying or translating the text of the Bible into various languages. Such an effort has been seen in the modern discoveries of biblical fragments of papyri and scrolls, which have survived over the years. The preservation of the text of the Bible has been in many translations. The Samaritan Pentateuch and the LXX set the paces for Bible translations. Other ancient versions, which came from the four pointers (North, South, West and East) of the world were also significant.

Following the textual types and the significant places these versions played in retrieving the original text of the Bible, it is clearly argued, in this paper, that most of these ancient biblical versions had some African nature and some African ties, which were reflected in the production of these ancient versions. The paper argues for the African nature of the ancient versions of the Bible in view of the genealogical categorization and influence of the Alexandrian text-type on other text-types and the historic development of the ancient biblical versions.

The Emergence of Ancient Bible Versions

By versions, the idea captures complete transmission of the Bible into

another language not within the context of the original language. There were quite a number of versions, which came during the Greek Hellenistic reign and in the early centuries of the Church. These versions are surveyed below:

The Samaritan Pentateuch

Although not a version, the Samaritan Pentateuch became the Hebrew version of the early books of Moses, the Books of the Law. It was meant to serve the Samaritan community in modern Nablus in Palestine (Victor, 2012). It follows the Masoretic text, which became the basis for the King James Version but the Samaritan text is believed to contain differences in about six thousand places compared to the received text or the Masoretic Hebrew text. The Samaritan text is dated to the fourth century before the coming of Christ (Walter 2012). It would be good to consider it significant if it agrees with the Septuagint or any of the ancient versions of the Bible. There are two available copies of the Samaritan Pentateuch, which are all codices. One is found in the John Rylands Library in Manchester dated AD 1211 or 1212 and the other is dated 1149 at the University of Cambridge, England. Two translations reflected the translation called Aramaic Samaritan Targum and an Arabic translation which is dated to about the eleventh century (Walter, 2012: 317).

The Septuagint

Bible translation began before the advent of historical Jesus. The Bible was written in pieces as the Torah was composed. The age of the scrolls ushered in new ideas for preserving the text of the Bible. The Masoretic Text of the Hebrew

Bible has also witnessed translation into Greek (Septuagint, LXX) predominantly by Alexandrian scholars. It became the work of seventy-two scholars around 250-100 B.C., which became the first translated version of the Hebrew Bible to another language (Tambiyi, 2014:10; de Vries & Karrier, 2013:3-20; Walter, 2012:317). It is also generally thought to have been translated by 70 scholars in Egypt with the intention of providing the Jews with an alternative text; hence, many of them could not speak Hebrew as a result of Hellenism. These scholars were gathered among the people; six elders of each tribe and their texts were sent and prepared for this work. Such a transmissional story is told in "The Letter of Aristeas" written around 150-100 BC, Aristeas was one of the officials of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-247 BC). The *Septuaginta* is the Greek version of the Old Testament which was translated to enhance the religion of the Jews (Judaism); hence, the Diaspora Jews could not speak their original language (Hebrew). It was used during worship in the synagogue and later became the Bible of the young Church in the first century before the composition of the New Testament. Throughout history, besides the *Septuaginta*, there were various versions of the Bible manuscripts; these were Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, Codex Alexandrianus, the Vulgate Latin version, the Masoretic Hebrew Scrolls of the Old Testament, Syriac Peshitta, the Targums, Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion and Juxta Hebraica of Jerome for the Psalms.

The LXX was translated because most of the Jews, who returned from exile, could not speak the Hebrew

language fluently and consequently could not read the Hebrew Bible in Hebrew language. It should be noted that Alexandrian Jews knew Greek and Hebrew quite well and were advanced in philology, exegesis and translation. This was the influence of the exile and the domination of Greek Hellenistic practices under Ptolemy II Philadelphus as Egypt was among the Greek's conquered nations.

Jordaan (2013) of Northwest University notes that Africa was an early location of text transmission, much of it centered in Alexandria, Egypt. Similarly, Africa was an early location of Bible translation for the LXX around 250 BC in Alexandria. Carthage played a role in ancient Latin versions. Ethiopic and Coptic versions were also very important ("New Testament Textual Criticism"). Most of these versions first were translations of the Hebrew Bible. The Syriac versions were first of all comprised of the Old Testament. The Septuagint became the Bible of the early church Christians, Jesus and the disciples as attested to by Walter (2012).

The Septuagint follows a different order of the English Bible and contains fifteen apocryphal books. But the text was rivalled in a number of four different ways as outlined by Walter (2012:319). 1) The traditional Septuagint of the Christians took over and the Jews consequently abandoned; 2) A Jewish retranslation done by Aquila in the second century AD that translated the Hebrew very literally; 3) a free Jewish revision of the traditional Septuagint by Theodotian; and 4) a translation in more idiomatic Greek by Symmachus.

The *Hexapla* by Origen of Alexandria was a text meant to find the best text behind the Septuagint. This Bible preserved in six parallel columns; Hebrew, Hebrew transliterated into Greek, the text of Aquila, the text of Symmachus, his own text of the Septuagint and the text of Theodotian. Jerome vehemently used this text to compose the Vulgate. Paul of Tella, a city in Mesopotamia, also used the *Hexapla* in the library of Caesarea in AD 616-617 to produce a Syriac version of Origen's fifth column of the corrected Septuagint. The *Hexapla* disappeared in AD 638 during the Islamic hordes in Caesarea but a fragment of Bishop Paul's Syriac translation of the work of Origen fifth column survives (Walter, 2012:320). An eighth century copy of Bishop Paul is extant in a Museum in Milan. Other uncial manuscripts are codices; a fourth century Vaticanus in the Vatican library, mid-fourth century Sinaiticus and fifth century Alexandrianus both in London's British Museum. These have borne witness to the Masoretic text or the received text.

The Aramaic Text

This is the third Old Testament version, which has survived. It is also called Chaldee, a language of the conquerors and it survived up to the nineteenth century. The Jewish people brought Aramaic with them from Babylon to the land of Israel in 536 BC. One finds paraphrasing of those passages from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Aramaic remained the language of Palestine until the Bar-Kochba revolt against the Romans in AD 132-135 when Hebrew also regained its place as the language of

religious activities in the Synagogues and the Temple. Priests and scribes made the reading of the Aramaic text popular called the Targums. The rabbi collected and standardized the texts with the famous standardized Law was known as Onkelos around the second or third century AD. Portions of the historical and prophetic books came up in the third and fourth centuries AD dominantly and importantly is the work of Jonathan ben Uzziel. Nothing is known about the wisdom literature being completed before the fifth century AD. The Targums were completed but the Islamic invasion of the Middle East marshalled Arabic as a new language but the rabbis engaged in oral Arabic Targums as Aramaic faded from religious history and the Synagogues (Walter, 2012:320-321).

The Transmission of Ancient Versions

During the missionary activities in the first century and the subsequent centuries, the Bible was translated by the missionaries into different languages as means of meeting the needs of the people and enabling the people have access to God's Word in their own mother tongues. It was a tedious work because the missionaries had to learn the languages of the people in different geographical locations in Africa.

Most of the translation exercise was on the Old Testament. However, a special attention was given to the text of the New Testament. The New Testament also was translated to enable the people of the geographical terrain have a complete text of the entire Bible. Some of these versions were translated before the official selection of the canon, particularly at the council of Nicaea (AD

325). Before the Latin edition of Jerome's Bible, it was believed that the Copts had a complete Bible as earlier as AD 200 (Kenyon, 1926:178). Christianity in Egypt had already developed its frontiers and produced biblical text for the natives to engage with God in their own cultural context. There were translations of the Bible into major languages within major textual cities such as Syria, Rome, Egypt, Ethiopia and many others. Especially during the protestant reformation of the sixteenth century when missionaries considered the movable printing of Johannes Gutenberg, which was invented in 1454 as a means to produce many translations of the Bible.

Latin Versions

It was not easy to have another language apart from Greek despite that the Roman Empire was in control of the territories. Even Roman Bishops preached and wrote their works in Greek. But as time went on, Latin began to gain strength over Greek in the Roman Empire. In the West, the priests and bishop began to engage in the translation of Greek biblical text into Latin and this made the New Testament and the Septuagint to be translated into Latin. There was also the old Latin version.

Vulgate

The Vulgate came as a result of the concern from church leaders in order to have a uniform Latin translation of the Bible. It was Pope Damasus I (366-384) who commissioned Jerome, who was his school secretary, to make a translation of the Gospel in AD 382. Jerome completed the translation in the following year. He later completed Acts and the rest of the

New Testament text. The Gospels were translated from the European Old Latin and Alexandrian Greek text. It has been argued that the rest of the New Testament was not the work of Jerome (Walter, 2012:322).

Jerome later left Rome and a follower, Paula, started two religious houses near Bethlehem and of course, Jerome was a presiding one. Jerome turned and retranslated the Old Testament from the Hebrew rather than the Greek Septuagint. He consulted Jewish Rabbis and worked on the book of Kings in AD 390. He later translated the rest of the Old Testament and some of the apocryphal literature before he passed away without seeing the work of his hand being used and respected worldwide.

Cassiodorus compiled the works of Jerome into one book in his monastery at Scylacium in Italy. Codex Amiatinus, which was written in the monastery at Jarrow, England around 715 is the oldest complete surviving manuscripts and was second to the Septuagint in terms of significance for the Hebrew Bible. This was made an official Roman Catholic Bible at the Council of Trent in 1546 following the first issued edition of Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590). The Vulgate has remained the Bible of the Roman Catholic Church.

Arabic Version

It was very difficult to translate the Bible into Arabic as it was outlawed but Jews and Christians translated it undercover. The oldest known Arabic manuscript is Codex Vaticanus Arabicus 13, which contains a portion of the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles from the eighth or ninth century (Wegner,

1999:252). The earliest and last Arabic translation of the Old Testament, which also aligned with the Masoretic text is that of Saadia Gaon (882-942 BC). Saadia was born in Fayum, Egypt in 882 and died in Babylon in 942. Arabic version relied on a number of versions of earlier Hebrew text, the Septuagint, the Peshitta, and other versions, which the New Testament Arabic version is also a combined text which has a unique saying of Jesus "Each day has enough trouble of its own, and each hour has enough pain of its own" (Matt. 9:34). It has a great value in textual criticism in the area of history of interpretation; hence, it was derived from a number of African related sources (Wegner, 1999:252).

Syriac Version

Acts 2 records that Parthians, Medes and Elamites) were witnesses of the Day of Pentecost's event. According to Wegner (1999:244), Bruce suggested that there were probably seven million Jews in these regions in the first century. It was argued that these people heard the gospel and probably took it to their homeland. It was also argued that the gospel might have reached those regions through the Christian persecution of the first century.

The Syriac Peshitta came up although it was argued to be Jewish, Christian or Jewish-Christian origin. Although the gospel spread to Syria around AD 40-70 and the Old Testament was translated as stated by Josephus and Würthwein (1979:80-81; Wegner, 1999:244; Kahle, 1959:270-72) but Eusebius believed Pantaenus went to India as a missionary about AD 180 (Wegner, 1999:244). A notable Syrian

scholar by name Titian made significant contributions here. Titian had lived around A.D. 110-180 and was a Syrian Christian who was educated at Rome with Justin. He was the person who translated the four Gospels into Syriac called the *Diatessaron* around A.D. 150-160. The word *Diatessaron* means 'through four'. Titian arranged the materials to fit the single life of Christ.

The Syrian church accepted Titian's *Diatessaron* (the harmony of the four Gospels), which was an early testimony to the four canonical Gospels. The *Diatessaron* was greatly used in the churches within the Syrian region up to the fourth century. It gained popularity because Ephraem, a Syrian church leader wrote a commentary using it (Wegner, 1999:245). A fragment of this text was discovered and it bore proof for the movement of the Gospels in the middle of second century and later, it became the basis for translating the Persian, Arabic, Latin, Old Dutch, Medieval German, Old Italian, and the Middle English (Wegner, 1999:245). Norman Perrin (1967:159) argues that *Thomas'* most likely source is the *Diatessaron* of Titian, which is dated the mid-2nd century.

In addition, other Theodore of Mopsuestia wrote on the Syriac Peshitta. The Syriac Peshitta is significant for textual criticism, for it is fairly an earlier version of the Old Testament from a separate Jewish tradition and the text has been modified to collaborate with the Septuaginta and other related versions of the New Testament as the Church in Syria engaged the translation of the New Testament from the Greek New Testament.

Coptic Versions

The Coptic versions came because of the founding and growth of the Church in Egypt (Oden, 2011). Egypt got to know about Christianity on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10). The growth of Christianity in Egypt led to the preservation of the Bible by scribes, monks and lay-people. Egypt is known for the manufacture of the papyrus and recently for discovery of papyri which the climate helped in the preservation (Wegner, 1999:246). The natives of Egypt devoted their time and engaged the text of the Bible. They spoke Coptic which is the last phase of Egyptian hieroglyphics with few adopted letters from Greek and Demotic (Lambdin, 1983).

Coptic generally had five different dialects; Sahidic, Bohairic, Fayumic, Akhmimic and sub-Akhmimic. The dominant dialects were Sahidic and Bohairic which were spoken in Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt respectively. Fragments of Akhmimic, sub-Akhmimic and Fayumic in their biblical forms have been discovered but there is no evidence yet whether the complete Bible sustained those Egyptian dialects. Both the Sahidic and Bohairic versions got their roots from the Septuagint of the Old Testament; giving textual criticism some light from the Septuagint's perspective. The emergence of Egyptian Christianity witnessed the flow of early versions which have been of significance to the study of the text of the Bible.

Coptic versions were the products of Egyptian Christians' missionary ventures to their non-Greek-speaking neighbours. A significant number of those

manuscripts came up in the third and fourth centuries.

Ethiopic Version

The acceptance of the gospel by the Ethiopian official through Philip in Acts 8:26-39 formed the evangelization of Ethiopia. There are pieces of evidence that Christianity was well founded in Ethiopia by the fourth century following the inscription of King Ezana on his victories, which are dedicated to the Most High and his beliefs on the triune God who helped him to conquer all his enemies. The record of Cosmas Indicopleustes showed Christianity was popular in Ethiopia by the sixth century (Wegner, 1999:251).

The monophysite monks are known to have translated the Bible into Ethiopic by the fifth or sixth centuries. These monks are known to have fled from Ethiopia because of the persecuted hands of the Byzantine rulers. The Coptic and Ethiopian Churches adopted monophysitic views because of these monks as they had influenced these regions with their monophysitic beliefs. Abba Garima's MS. 1 is a copy of the Gospel in Ethiopic. The Ethiopic Old and New Testaments got their roots from the Greek texts but the New Testament contains Byzantine and Western readings with Syriac influence. It includes two apocryphal books *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* but has some sense of original and accurate readings (Wegner, 1999:251). According to Walter (2012:328), the Ethiopic version is of significance in two ways; it is the Bible of the Falashas, a remarkable group of people of African Jews who migrated to Ethiopia since the time of King Solomon and Queen Sheba.

and the Old Ethiopic version of the Old Testament contains several books not in the Hebrew Apocryphal.

Armenian Version

Armenian was first declared Christian at the conversion of Tiridates III (c. 287-314). Tiridates III persecuted Christians but was converted by Gregory the Illuminator (c. 257-331) by the end of the third century. It is speculated that Thaddaeus (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18), Bartholomew (Matt. 10:8; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13) had some influence on the Armenians (Wegner, 1999:248; Malan, 1898:66-103). A soldier named St. Mesrop who became a Christian and created the alphabets together with Catholicus Sahak (Isaac the Great, 390-439) and translated the version from the Greek text although Moses of Chorion believed it was from the Syriac text (Metzger, 1992:82-3).

The first version in the Armenian came up in the early part of the fifth century after the development of 36 letters by Mesrop Mashtotz (c. 361-439). Books within these regions were either in Syriac or Greek. This version goes back very early and contains several books, *History of Joseph and Asenath*, *4 Ezra*, and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* in the Old Testament and the *Epistle to the Corinthians to Paul* and a *Third Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* are part of the New Testament (Metzger, 1977:161). It is hard to determine which text was used to translate the Armenian text. For the Old Testament, the Septuagint with influence from the Peshitta and the New Testament contains some peculiar features the General Epistles (Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter,

1, 2, 3 John and Jude) appeared after Acts of the Apostles. In Mark 7:25, it is stated that the girl had an unclean spirit but the Armenian version says that the girl "was pressed" or "was squeezed" by an unclean spirit (Wegner, 1999:249).

Georgian Version

Georgia happened to hear the message of the gospel through the mouth of a slave woman called "Nino, who was captured by Bakur, the pagan king of Georgia, during the reign of the emperor Constantine" (Metzger, 1977:106; Wegner, 1999:250). It has been agreed among scholars that Christianity got into Georgia in the fourth century without much clarity as how the earlier versions of the Bible got to Georgia (Wegner, 1999:250). Because the language was not related to those surrounding it, alphabets had to be developed and it resulted to the translation of the Gospels by the mid fifth century although scholars are in contention as to which version formed the basis for the Georgian version (Wegner, 1999:250).

Some traditions point to the adaption from the Armenian version as in the works of Sidney Jellicoe which was later collated with the Greek version (Jellicoe, 1924-5:50-64). Georgian oldest manuscript (Geo¹) is the Adysh manuscript of 897 and it contains the Gospels but other fragments of Genesis, Deuteronomy, Judges, Proverbs, and Jeremiah have survived in Armenian between the fifth and eighth centuries (Wegner, 1999:250).

Gothic Version

The Goths happened to set up two empires by the Dniester River and the

Visigoths on the West. Visigoths heard the gospel and took it to their kinsmen in the East. There were Gothic warriors by the third century who raided the Roman Empire. The Gothic people heard the gospel through some Christian priests. A Gothic bishop Theophilus was at the council of Nicaea in 325. Wulfilas, who was ordained at thirty by Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia, engaged in the translation of the Gothic Bible according to historian Philostorgius (c. 368-430). Wulfilas created the alphabets which are predominantly of Greek, Latin and old German characters.

Wulfilas translated the text into Gothic. It is clear that Nehemiah 5-7 followed the Septuagint with major influence of the Byzantine text in the New Testament. Some see Wulfilas to be an Arian or a semi-Arian who denied the eternity of Christ predominantly in the works of Metzger (1977:376). His translation, which was done word for word in the third century, was for captured Christians who were deported to the Gothic Empire and it was used in Spain and Northern Italy in the fifth century which probably became a vernacular Bible for Europe. It is not certain whether he finished the translation as only fragments are preserved today of Genesis, Psalms and Nehemiah 5-7 and for the New Testament, the Byzantine text of about AD 350 with a Western influence on the text which agreed with the Old Latin version. The most preserved manuscript is Argentinus (the Silver Codex, fifth or sixth centuries) of the Gospels in Western order (Matthew, John, Luke and Mark) written on silver letters on purple vellum with the first three lines of each Gospel written in gold

and now located in the library of Uppala University, Sweden (Wegner, 1999:258; Walter, 2012:325).

Slavonic Version

There is no clear history behind the conversion of the Slavs as everything is based on a legend. The Slavonic version came up in the mid ninth century Constantine and Methodius were brothers and sons of noble Greek man began the translation of the church liturgy into Slavonic. They got the approval and endorsement of Popes Adrian II (867-872) and John VIII (872-882) and translated the Bible with the help of Cyrillic alphabet, a form of alphabets developed by Constantine who later became Cyril (AD 827-869). Tenth or eleventh century manuscript portions have survived. The oldest copy of the manuscript of the Bible is the Codex Gennadius in Moscow dated 1499 unfortunately it is a later document to be considered for the reconstruction of the text of the Bible (Walter, 2012:330).

The African Roots of Ancient Versions: A Review of the Alexandrian Text

The Latin and the Syriac versions are given much more prominence by many textual scholars. It is on this front Perrin (1974:340) observes that, "Other ancient versions of the New Testament in Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopic and Georgian are less important than the Latin and the Syriac..." But why would the Latin and the Syriac texts be of significance more than even the Coptic and other related versions? Could it be because of the Western literary significance associated to Latin? Although the Syriac and Latin texts are of significance, they can be

argued to be part of Africa's involvements with religious manuscripts in the early church. Their significance is a part of African genealogical relevance in dealing with manuscripts by African Christian patriarchs in Egypt and North Africa.

To argue for the African root of ancient versions, which is the focus of this work, there is a need to understand the roles Egypt and Northern Africa have played on the text of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Origen of Alexandria devoted his life in working on the *Hexapla*, which comprised six columns of different Bible translations. The New Testament has been investigated within the regions and the Bible witnessed literary translations, emendation and transmission.

There are a number of classifications when it comes to dealing with ancient biblical texts depending on geographical locations. Some scholars see them as text-types or textual categories or textual families depending on the hand that copied or the geographical location from which the manuscripts came from. We currently have four major text-types: Western, Caesarean, Byzantine and Alexandrian texts (Epp, 2002:34-40). These were classified by Westcott-Hort and have been accepted and developed over the years by modern scholars. However, such nomenclatures employed in categorization of the textual centers and their traditions seem derailing. It is good to note that part of what was called 'Western' were major biblical scholarship and Christian activities which involved major cities in North Africa. Rome was the only site where manuscripts were duplicated, besides the marginalization of

North Africa which was configured and generalized to be 'Western' (Michael, 2011:5-8).

Alexandria in Egypt had a famous engagement with manuscripts and gave the best textual traditions (Codex Alexandrianus) in history, because the Alexandrian scribes were careful and expert emendators. Aland and Aland (1987:100) state that Alexandrian text is known to be a "strict text, somewhat carelessly written; category 1 consists of "manuscripts of a very special quality which should always be considered in establishing the original text (e.g. the Alexandrian text belongs here)." Such an important place occupied by the Alexandrian text and North Africa's engagement with the manuscripts, which are generated from Egypt can be called African text rather than classifying it as 'Western'. If the 'Alexandrian text' is maintained, the words 'Roman text' should be adopted to replace the designation 'Western text.'

It is clear in records that the Alexandrian Christians also were known as the first to engage in the task of emendation of the text of the New Testament through their unique skills as the Christian movement expanded to the Egyptian territories. Philip (2012:191-2) states that "The Alexandrian Christians were probably the first ones to attempt a recovery of the wording of the Greek New Testament. From the second century to the fourth century, the Alexandrian scribes worked to purify the text from textual corruption". Although the process of purification of the text resulted in corruption of the text, some efforts and better results were clearly recorded out of

the concerns for the text of the New Testament.

It is within this confine of Alexandrian textual concerns that one would discover that of all the fragments of manuscripts discovered and the various text-types derived by modern scholars, there is none which does not reflect the Alexandrian text. Sanders (1933:82) clearly puts it that "No fragment is free from Alexandrian affiliation..." Aland and Aland (1987:105, 155) state that the Alexandrian text-type consists of category 1 "manuscripts of a very special quality which should always be considered in establishing the original text (e.g. the Alexandrian text belongs here)." This Alexandrian affiliation can be considered and given a significant role as Egypt with its scribes and correctors have played a significant role in the transmission, preservation and editing of manuscripts which became the fountain of many text-types.

The Alexandrian text's circulation in Hellenistic Egypt affected the translation of the Bible in different Egyptian dialects. Consequently, the Sahidic version agrees with the Alexandrian text and somehow contains some Western text in the Gospels and Acts (Wegner, 1999:247). The New Testament Coptic versions are all products of the Alexandrian text and contain high value for text-critical analysis (Wegner, 1999:248). Such a significance cannot be disputed.

The Byzantine texts were of African origin for they were all compiled by Origen. These texts had Alexandrian influence: hence, Origen was influenced by Alexandria and also the Septuagint from Egypt. Origen spent early part of his

scholarly life in Egypt before he moved to Caesarea and engaged the compilation of the Byzantine texts under the commission of Emperor Constantine. This made the Alexandrian text to have surfaced in diverse ways as compared with the Byzantine text. The Byzantine text is known to have influenced the Vulgate and some early textual readings.

As stated above, the Septuagint has been an African product translated from the Hebrew Bible by variety of Egyptian-Jews in Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy IV. Such a work has proven significant and generated a number of textual support to the text of the Old Testament. The Septuagint has influenced the Old Latin and the Vulgate of Jerome.

The Ethiopic Version came from Africa and also one of the ancient important texts for recovering the text of the Bible. It is also a text, which followed the Byzantine or Western text-types. Its significance cannot be underestimated in considering the ancient witnesses to the text of the New Testament.

The Gothic version follows literally the Byzantine text with more implications for New Testament and its textual criticism. Most of the readings follow the Coptic versions. One sees the Coptic versions to have had variety of influence upon the Gothic version. Either it was edited against a Coptic version or that the Greek text used was already corrupted by Coptic translations (Wegner, 1999:258).

The role of the Alexandrian on Byzantine, Western and Caesarean texts which gave birth to the Slavonic version cannot be overemphasized. It is clear that the Slavonic version relied on a number of manuscripts. It is of more significance

to the history of interpretation and the transmission of the text in its later stages (Wegner, 1999:260). The Slavonic version is one of the important texts, which support the ancient readings of the New Testament.

The Arabic version, although not allowed, is an important ancient version when dealing with the text of the New Testament. The Arabic version was translated using Greek, Old Syriac, the Syriac Peshitta, Coptic and the Latin versions. According to Walter (2012:330), "New Testament translations into Arabic sprang up from Syriac, Greek, and Coptic sources between the seventh to the ninth centuries ... the final form of the Arabic New Testament rested most heavily on the Coptic Bohairic." The influence of Africa on the Arabic is paramount as it relied on versions, which had Africa's influence and the Coptic versions.

The influence of Syriac or Armenian on the Georgian version should also be considered. The Georgian version is considered to be a tertiary version of either the Syriac or Armenian versions with a high primary value in corroboration of the Old Syriac versions (Wegner, 1999:250). Such a reliance has generated significance to the Georgian version as it relied on versions which are of African descent.

Conclusion

If all these genealogical relationships are worth the argument, then there is a high sense of genealogical categorization of manuscripts and versions, which have proven to be of African descent. Such manuscript genealogies have given good reasons to

unveil the influence of North Africa and Egypt on the versions and the ancient manuscripts of the New Testament. Perhaps since the Alexandrian influence on various available manuscripts and versions cannot be proven otherwise, the African nature of the early versions of the Bible remains a thing of concern as argued in this work. Arguments from text-forms of the Bible and their genealogical relationships to the earlier versions of the New Testament showed that the African nature of the earlier versions should be given a second thought in order to refine or transform the textual transmissions and ascertain an adequate history of the text of the New Testament. When this is done, the contributions of the scribes in these African cities would be properly outlined and would shape the face of Biblical studies in Africa. Restructuring genealogical relationships of the manuscripts would redirect textual studies as a whole and would enhance the translation of the Bible in many African languages as the manuscripts are indigenously preserved documents, which can be used by our Bible translation agencies. It would also be appreciated by many African Christians in our educational institutions and the church.

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