

An Overlooked Printed Peshitta New Testament from Germany after the Thirty Years War: Christian Knorr von Rosenroth's Sulzbach Edition of 1684

Par

Robert J. Wilkinson

Valley House, Temple Cloud, Somerset, United Kingdom

I am grateful to Jean-Claude Haelewyck for having invited me to contribute to the fourteenth volume of *Études syriaques, Le Nouveau Testament en syriaque*, of which he was the editor.¹ I offered there an overview of printed editions of the Peshitta New Testament from the *editio princeps* of 1555 onwards, but I was at the time quite unaware (*confiteor!*) of the edition I wish to discuss in this paper. Indeed the 1684 Sulzbach edition of the Peshitta New Testament seems to have excited *no* modern attention at all until now, when its importance is at last being recognized. Thus, remarkably, the in Sulzbach-Rosenberg *Rathaus* last August an international conference was devoted entirely to *Das Syrische Neue Testament und die Kabbala in Sulzbach: Jüdische und Christliche Kultur in Barocken Sulzbach* as the 30th *Jahrestagung* of the Christian-Knorr-von-Rosenroth-Gesellschaft.² I am delighted to be

¹ WILKINSON 2017. Jean-Claude was also kind enough to publish WILKINSON 2016 and the first announcement of the discovery of Knorr's *Messias Puer* in VILENO, WILKINSON, 2018a.

²The papers of the conference are to be published in the association's journal *Morgen-Glanz* in 2022. The archive of the association's earlier journals constitutes an indispensable account of Von Rosenroth studies over the past thirty years.

able to offer this paper and the story of the 1684 Sulzbach Peshitta in honour of Jean-Claude's 70th birthday.

The publisher of the 1684 edition of the New Testament Peshitta was Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1636-1689). He was born the son of a protestant pastor near Glogów, a Silesian city in present day Poland. Subsequently he was appointed to the prestigious post of privy counsellor to Herzog Christian Augustus in the Palatine Court of Sulzbach, one of the old Imperial towns of the Holy Roman Empire in the Oberpfalz.³ There he also enjoyed the close friendship and productive collaboration of the Belgian alchemist Mercurius van Helmont. If Knorr is famous at all today, it is as the editor of *Kabbala Denudata*, an anthology of Latin translations of kabbalistic texts, many taken from the Lurianic tradition, published between 1677 and 1684.⁴ This anthology remained, right until the end of the Nineteenth Century, the principal (if not the only) source through which readers could access kabbalistic studies without mastering the Hebrew (and Aramaic) languages.

1. *The Year 1684*

We have long known that the year 1684 was a significant year for Knorr's publications. The newly-recovered text of Knorr's last work *Messias Puer* enables us now to see the activity of that year quite clearly as part of a larger (if you will) pedagogical programme. So, let us begin our introduction to Knorr's work by examining the publications of that year.

Outstanding was the printing in Sulzbach of Knorr's own Hebrew edition of the Zohar with Moshe Bloch's type.⁵ In 2002 Boaz Huss drew attention to the extent and significance of this achievement:⁶ the edition offers us access to both the Mantuan and the Cremona texts, and it provides at the foot of the page the *Imrei Binah* of Yissakhar Baer which functions as a Zoharic Lexicon.⁷ I have noticed that when Knorr quotes from the Zohar in *Messias Puer* he generally gives both Mantuan and Cremona text forms: I assume he was exploiting the synoptic facility of his own edition, as I know of nowhere else where he could have found them so conveniently side by side.

The same year of 1684 saw the appearance of the second volume of *Kabbala Denudata*, Knorr's Latin anthology of kabbalistic texts.⁸ The volume also contains a work which is *not* a

³ See, FINKE 1998.

⁴ The anthology was published in two volumes: *Kabbala Denudata I* (Sulzbach 1677) and *Kabbala Denudata II* (Frankfurt 1684), KNORR 1677 and 1684.

⁵ *Liber Sohar siue Collectanea de dictis et gestis R. Schimeon, Filii Iochai, Doctoris Tannaei, s. Mischnaici, et discipulorum eius aliorumque coetaneorum... Typis Moysi Bloch, & opera Johannis Holst Prostat Norinbergae apud Wolfgangum Mauritium Endterum 1684* (KNORR 1684a).

⁶ HUSS 2002. The foreword was written in Latin and signed by the *Collaborantes*. It is generally taken to have been written by Knorr (so, SCHOLEM 1927, p.168). The edition repeats the Halakhic decision (*pesaq*) in favour of printing the book, issued by Isaac Lattes and included in the Mantuan edition. Perhaps as another sign of a little nervousness that the part of non-Jews in the production might be considered improper, Moses Bloch, the printer, apologies for the Latin title page and defends the use of that language by its appearance in printed copies of the Midrashim and Palestinian Talmud. See also subsequently, HUSS 2016.

⁷ See GONDOS 2020, p. 139-150, for this work.

⁸ In 1677 Abraham Lichtenthaler printed Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala denudata, seu Doctrina Hebraeorum Transcendentalis et metaphysica atque Theologica*, a translation of the Zohar and related works into Latin. The second volume, in question here, was printed in Frankfurt am Main in the significant year of 1684 by Johann David Zunner. See now, FUCHS 2020.

translation but an original composition, *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae*, a dialogue between a *Christian Philosopher* and a companion characterized a *Kabbalist*⁹ They (predictably) take a philosophical approach in discussion to topics of contention between Jews and Christians: in particular there are discussions of the transmigration of souls (reincarnation), but on the other hand certain obviously controversial doctrines – the significance of Christ’s Passion, for example – are given a wide berth. We now know that there is nothing arbitrary about this selection. *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae* has a sequel: it is the dialogue between a simple *Christian* and an interlocuter, who has now become a *Kabbalist Catechumen*, which is *Messias Puer*. In this case we are no longer dealing with a philosophical propaedeutic, but are now engaged in the close exegesis of canonical New Testament texts in the light of the doctrines of Lurianic Kabbalah.

There is no certainty or agreement over the exact authorship of *Adumbratio*, though little doubt that it is a product (to some undecided extent) of collaboration between Knorr and his friend Van Helmont.¹⁰ Others more familiar than I with both authors will decide this question, if anyone does; but I would make one observation: the scriptural quotations in *Adumbratio* are not generally taken from the ubiquitous Vulgate, the authorized Bible of the post-Trentine Roman Church, as were biblical quotations in Knorr’s previous works. In *Adumbratio*, for the first time, he cites the New Testament in his own improvised Latin translation of the Syriac Peshitta New Testament text. Moreover, these quotations are surely undoubtedly the work of Knorr. There is no reason to think Van Helmont read Syriac.

This brings us to the third publication of this pivotal year, which is our primary interest: Knorr’s own edition of the Syriac Peshitta New Testament.¹¹ It is a book which, as we have said, has historically attracted little, indeed *no*, significant attention: yet remarkably it has now been the subject of an international conference.

In itself the book is perhaps rather an ‘ugly duckling’, which no doubt explains its failure to have drawn attention to itself. It comprises the Syriac text of the New Testament in the Peshitta version transcribed into unvocalised Hebrew letters. It appears to be printed from an edition of the Antwerp Polyglot Peshitta New Testament published separately from the rest of that bible, but similarly in Hebrew rather than Syriac characters: it is not, in that case, an original edition of any sort. The text in Hebrew characters however seems to be competently presented, as we would expect from what we know of the printer Johann Holst. Presumably it was set from an exemplar of the previous edition. It has, frustratingly, no introductory material at all. It tells us nothing about its production or purpose. This is in itself perhaps worth pondering: it is rare in the Seventeenth Century that ‘exotic’ texts like the Peshitta were produced without any paratextual explanation. My suspicion is that this was produced for local consumption: those supplied with this text, I suggest, already knew exactly what it was for. It was there to facilitate and promote the quite extraordinary programme towards which all of

⁹ *Adumbratio*’s full and programmatic title is: *A Sketch of Christian Kabbalism, that is the Hebraic Basis for Syncretism or Brief Application of Hebrew Kabbalistic Doctrine to the Teaching of the New Covenant for the Formation of Hypotheses that Lead Towards the Conversion of the Jews*.

¹⁰ For debate over the authorship of *Adumbratio* see VILENO, WILKINSON 2021, p. 68-69.

¹¹ The *DYTYQ’ HDT’ Novum Domini Nostri Jesu Christi Testamentum Syriace (Sulzbach: Ex Officina Johannis Holst. MDCLXXXIV. Prostat Norinbergae apud Wolfgangum Mauritium Enderum 1684)* (KNORR 1684b) is a 12° volume of 192 leaves following the shorter New Testament canon as found printed in Widmanstetter’s *editio princeps* of 1555, the Antwerp Polyglot of 1574 and Guy Lefèvre de la Boderie’s 1584 Paris edition. For detailed support of what is written here: VILENO, WILKINSON 2018b, p. 210-230.

the publications of this remarkable year were aimed. What that goal was, we did not know until the recovery of *Messias Puer*.

The Peshitta volume was barely noted by Richard Simon in his *Critical History of New Testament Versions*¹². Though later bibliographers made a connection to Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, one may query how many had actually seen the volume. Masch, at the end of the Eighteenth Century, preferred to follow the observation of C. Schaaf who had personally inspected three exemplars and as an editor of the Peshitta New Testament knew what he was looking for. He found that the text was that of Plantin's Antwerp Polyglot in Hebrew characters¹³. This seems in fact to be the case: similar volumes are also attested, though other improbable suggestions may be found in the older literature.¹⁴

2. *Syriac*

Syriac is a late dialect of Aramaic, principally used by Eastern Christians in the Middle East, Kerala and even attested in China. It is not a national language, nor was its use confined to particular Churches: rather it has been common to conflicting denominations. It is principally a literary and cultural language though it is still spoken in places. However, as a cultural language, it may claim to distinctive wealth and resources and was significantly instrumental in the transmission of Greek learning to the Arabs.¹⁵ There is however to my knowledge no trace of an interest in Jewish Kabbalah or anything similar to be found in the later Syriac tradition. In saying that, I do not exclude, of course, the fascinating possibilities that some early Hebrew kabbalistic texts may have found their origins in *milieux* familiar with early Syriac Christianity, but merely record that by and large later Syriac Christians lack any apparent interest in such things.¹⁶

The case however was different in Europe. The half-century or so after the introduction of some (often rather sketchy) knowledge of Syriac into Rome at the time of the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517) was characterised by an intense interest in the language's mystical potential. An excellent example, of course, is Teseo Ambrogio's *Introductio in Chaldaiam linguam* of 1593¹⁷. Syriac at this time was seen as a language capable of conveying kabbalistic mysteries in the same way as Hebrew was known to do. I have told this story before and

¹² 'Verbulo tantum meminit recentissimae, Ebraicis typis in Germania excusae; unde dubium est, an eam inspexerit - noritve, perillustri Kabbalae Nudatae auctori Christiano Knorrrio L. B. a Rosenroth in acceptis esse ferendam'. Review of SIMON 1690 by Anonymous 1690, p. 97.

¹³ LE LONG 1791 (First Volume of Second Part), p. 94: 'Meliora nos docet, qui illam manibus tractavit, Carolus Schaaf, qui postquam undecim recensuerat editiones, demum addit: 'Duodecima editio impressa est in 12. Sultzbaci anno 1684. literis chaldaicis, absque vocalibus. Cum varias lectiones colligerem, haec editio in manus meas nondum devenerat; postea ab amico percaro communicata est. Oculis meis eam perlustrans comperi convenire cum Plantinianis in 8. et 12. deesse quoque in ea omnia ista loca, quae in eis editionibus desunt; ideoque nullum inde detrimentum passus sum, quod serius mihi ejus copia facta sit'.

¹⁴ SCHRÖDER 1857, Vol. III, p. 33-35 (No. 1377) held that the Syriac New Testament of Gutbrier of 1663 or 1664 was reprinted by Knorr and published in Hebrew script together with Gutbrier's Lexicon of 1684, or better 1694. MICHAELIS 1788, p.144 declared: 'Die Ausgabe des Gutbiers hat Christ. Knorre von Rosenroth in Jahre 1684 zu Sulzbach mit hebräischen buchstaben abdrucken lassen'. However, Gutbrier's edition had a fuller canon than the 1684 edition.

¹⁵ For a succinct introduction, BRIQUEL-CHATONNET, DEBIÉ 2017. More extensively: KING 2019.

¹⁶ WEISS 2018, p. 55-75, for an early Syriac context for *Sefer Yesirah*.

¹⁷ AMBROGIO 1593.

shall not repeat myself here.¹⁸ But I would stress that that the kabbalistic reception of Syriac we are merely mentioning here was not some obscure, hole-in-the-corner phenomenon, but rather the interest of cardinals and indeed of Leo X, the Holy Father himself. Changes of pontiff and in the interests of the Curia, however, resulted in an eclipse of these interests. By the end of the century the reception and function of Syriac in Rome had completely changed and all interest in the language's kabbalistic potential simply disappeared. Or so it seemed. And lest I appear too critical of others, so it appeared to me also.¹⁹

But to return to Knorr's printing of the Peshitta New Testament. We have merely the unvocalised text in Hebrew characters without, as I have said, any introduction or preface to explain its presence in the world. Nor, as I have also indicated, is there any reliable bibliographical tradition from the Seventeenth Century or later to provide at least some received wisdom as to its purpose:²⁰ no one, it seemed, had paid any attention to it at all.²¹ This presented a problem: how could one give an account or an explanation of this unexpected work within the context of Knorr's life and writings?

3. *The so-called Historiae Evangelicae initium, secundum quatuor Evangelistas*

The answer was to examine the scriptural citations in Knorr's work moving both back and forward from the year of the Peshitta edition, 1684. We could at least see if he used this version and in what way. Thus, we discovered that in his vast kabbalistic lexicon, *Loci Communes*, found in the first 1677 volume of *Kabbala denudata*, Knorr was content to use the expected Latin Vulgate. But in the contemporary *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae* of 1684 he generally cited the New Testament in his own Latin translation of the Syriac.²² The obvious question then was: did he continue to do this subsequently? Well, there are not many subsequent works: so, one inevitably turned one's attention to the so-called *Historiae Evangelicae initium, secundum quatuor Evangelistas* (KNORR 1689) which Knorr was apparently seeing through the press at the time of his death on 4 May 1689.

The *Historiae...*, one suspects, exists only in a sole copy now in Munich.²³ It is a curious fragment, which breaks off part way through, because, so a manuscript note at the end tells us, the author died and no more was printed. Fabricius mentions this work, but in all probability, he was talking about the same Munich exemplar.²⁴ Perhaps this was the printer's proof-text, an explanation which would account for many of its singularities.

There is a manuscript of Knorr in the library in Wolfenbüttel (HAB Cod. Guelf 126 Extrav.) similarly named *Historiae...*, which is demonstrably the larger manuscript from which the fragmentary Munich exemplar had been set by its printer. It was the examination of this ignored manuscript which quickly revealed that it was Knorr's supposedly lost last work,

¹⁸ WILKINSON 2007a and WILKINSON 2007b.

¹⁹ WILKINSON 2012, p. 55-74.

²⁰ Extant bibliographical notices are discussed in VILENO, WILKINSON 2018b, p. 210-230.

²¹ For a detailed discussion see *ibid.*

²² The few exceptions to this are discussed *ibid.*

²³ KELLER, SPETHMANN 1996 p. 539-541.

²⁴ FABRICIUS 1724, p. 526. On this see VILENO, WILKINSON 2021, p. 5-6.

Messias Puer.²⁵ Knorr's final masterpiece had long been hidden under the spurious title of *Historiae*....

4. *Messias Puer*

Several important discoveries followed from the identification of the manuscript of *Messias Puer*. First this was a companion dialogue to the *Adumbratio*. But this time, as we said above, the fictive debate had moved on. No longer was it a discussion between a *Christian Philosopher* and a *Kabbalist*: now the *Philosopher* had become simply a *Christian* and the *Kabbalist*, a *Kabbalist Catechumen*. Moreover, the discussion was no longer focused on a philosophical introduction, the issue was the exegesis of the canonical New Testament text itself. Next: that text was the Syriac Peshitta New Testament. Knorr had himself cut out the New Testament Gospel passages dealing with the young Jesus from an exemplar of his printed 1684 Peshitta and glued them into his manuscript. He put this text into Latin himself and then commented on it. This Syriac in Hebrew characters, for obscure reasons, never made it into the printed stub we have in Munich, but it is the very basis of the manuscript work. The whole point was that his New Testament commentary was based upon the Syriac text of the New Testament, markedly different from the Vulgate. It was a bizarrely concrete use that Knorr had made of his Peshitta edition: he physically cut the book up and stuck it into his manuscript because it was on this Syriac text he wished to base his utterly unprecedented kabbalistic exposition of the New Testament passages in question. The obvious question is: why did Knorr want to base his exposition upon the Syriac Peshitta text of the New Testament?

The answer is that Knorr not only saw the doctrines of the *Zohar* represented in the Syriac New Testament, but saw them presented *in essentially the same language also*. The *Zohar* is written in a somewhat distinct Aramaic, but its family proximity to the dialect of the Peshitta is unmistakable. Knorr was conscious of the different forms of Aramaic, their different dates and geographies, yet for his purposes he was prepared to stress the similarities rather than the differences. He was not of the opinion that the Peshitta was in any way the original version of the New Testament, as compared with the Greek; but he thought its similarity of expression to the *Zohar* an essential feature in the exposition of the *Zoharic* nature of the New Testament text. That the Peshitta text was presented in square Hebrew characters and without vocalization made the similarities more salient.

The following passage from the Introduction to Knorr's *Zohar* sets out the rationale behind what we might call Knorr's pedagogic programme of 1684. Volume Two of *Kabbala Denudata* was to provide vocalised and annotated *Lesestücke* which would constitute reading practice and a summary of Kabbalah. This reading exercise was to be reinforced by reading the unvocalised Hebrew script of the Peshitta New Testament.

“Anyone who is repelled by the difficulty of the style or of the material contained in this work should know that in the second volume of Kabbala Denudata there are texts provided to be used as progressive exercises. The text of the books entitled Siphra de Zeniutha, Idra Rabba and Idra Suta—which constitute a summary of the whole Kabbalah—is given with vocalisation, divided into paragraphs and accompanied by a translation and commentary. The first three tractates of the Zohar in the Mantuan edition are similarly provided with a translation and commentary. If one practices a little with

²⁵ For full details and support for what is written here, see the edition: VILENO, WILKINSON 2021.

these texts (and especially if one at the same time regularly reads the New Testament printed in Hebrew Letters), one will very easily come to terms with this work which is neither vocalised nor furnished with a translation—though is still provided with a commentary. Finally, the reader should have to hand the Lexicon found in the first volume of Kabbala Denudata, which offers other necessary assistance."²⁶

In this way the imagined (though, in the event possibly quite real) reader(s) for whom the 1684 programme was devised would develop competence in the supposedly common language of the Zohar and the Peshitta New Testament. This linguistic fluency would ground the quite revolutionary and unique exposition which would in time be offered in the *Messias Puer*, Knorr's last work before his death.

5. *Peshittas for Jews?*

It was something of a commonplace amongst editors of the Syriac New Testament who preceded Knorr that, given that its language was a dialect of Aramaic not too dissimilar from other Jewish forms of that language, it might prove serviceable for the evangelisation of Jews. In the case of the *editio princeps* of the Peshitta New Testament produced by J. A. Widmannstetter in Vienna in 1555 that benefit may be considered quite a minor goal, as that the volume was in Syriac characters and intended principally to provide simultaneously for the needs of Syriac speaking Christians and the curiosity of Western Christian scholars.²⁷ Never the less the preface does mention a prospective edition in Hebrew type for that purpose. The later Antwerp Polyglot Bible, however, below a New Testament in Syriac characters, also had a vocalised transcription into Hebrew letters made by Guy Lefèvre de la Boderie.²⁸ The transcription is accompanied by 'roots', derived stems and Hebrew glosses, so that, as he remarks in the *Ad Lectorem ... Praefatio*, '*ut Iudaeos linguae sanctae peritos ad novi Testamenti lectionem alliceremus...*'. However, the 'Jews learned in Hebrew to be drawn to the Syriac New Testament' referred to here were in reality just as likely, if not more so, to be Christian scholars rather than Jews.

Guy Lefèvre de la Boderie produced another edition in Paris in 1584 with unvocalised Hebrew letters as no Syriac font was available in Paris.²⁹ It enjoys an inter-linear Latin gloss (to be read from right to left) and the more readable continuous Latin translation taken from the Antwerp Polyglot. Guy claimed the reason for the lack of vocalisation of the Hebrew text was to make it suitable for Jewish evangelisation as it enabled Jews to read the Syriac more as Hebrew or Jewish Aramaic and as little different as possible from the language of the Tal-

²⁶"Si quem absterreat difficultas sive styli, sive materiae hoc in opere propositae, is sciat, in Tomo secundo Kabbalæ Denudatæ certos exhiberi in usum hujus Exercitii gradus. Textus enim Librorum qui vocantur Siphra de Zeniutha: Idra rabba, & Idra suta, quæ sunt Compendia totius Kabbalæ, ibidem proponuntur punctati, & in Sectiones atque paragraphos dissecti, unà cum Versione & Commentariis. Tres autem Tractatus initiales libri Sohar Editionis Mantuanæ ibidem pariter proponuntur, sed cum versione tantum & Commentario. In quibus si paululum quis fuerit exercitatus; (præsertim si Novum Testamentum Syriacum literis Hebraicis impressum frequenter insimul perlegatur;) Opus hoc ipsum non punctatum sine versione, facillè intelliget; cum potissimum nec Commentario destituitur: & in Tomo primo Kabbalæ Denudatæ Lexicon etiam aliquale ad manus habeat, cum adminiculis necessariis aliis." (C. Knorr von Rosenroth, "Lectori benevolo salutem!" in Liber Sohar [KNORR 1684a] without pagination).

²⁷ WIDMANSTETTER 1555.

²⁸ On this edition see: WILKINSON 2007b, p. 101-120.

²⁹ LEFÈVRE DE LA BODERIE 1584.

mud.³⁰ This is not necessarily insincere, though it may also not be entirely free from *faute de mieux*³¹. Nevertheless, Guy's introductory material in the 1584 edition and his dedication to Henri III which set out large apocalyptic and missionary perspectives make it clear that Jewish evangelisation was not his only or necessarily primary purpose.

Emmanuel Tremellius, who was thoroughly educated as a Jew before his conversion to Rome and then to the Reform, produced his New Testament and his associated *Grammatica chaldaea et syra* in Hebrew letters in 1569 in Geneva where (again) there was no available Syriac font. Though his edition was not inaccessible to Jews, its primary purpose seems (I have argued elsewhere) to have been rather of a philological nature³².

Thus, though the claim that the Syriac New Testament might be useful in the conversion of Jews was not uncommon, that was not the principal purpose of any of the editions we have just mentioned. A *prima facie* case may, however, be made for evangelisation of Jews as a primary purpose of the Sulzbach Peshitta of 1684: the clarity of *Adumbratio*'s long title being telling when it advertises a *brief Application of Hebrew Kabbalistic Doctrine to the Teaching of the New Covenant for the Formation of Hypotheses that Lead Towards the Conversion of the Jews*. We may then at least speculate that the imagined (though, I insist, quite probably real) readers of the 1684 Sulzbach Peshitta were Jews in dialogue with Knorr, for whom he had prepared the publications of 1684 and for whom he prepared the exegetical demonstration from the Peshitta New Testament which is *Messias Puer*. If this was a local conversation, it might explain why the Peshitta edition was printed without any form of introduction: its recipients knew well what it was for, as Knorr explained (above) in his introduction to his Zohar. One has to admire the scholarship and effort which went into Knorr's pedagogic programme, which we shall see come to full fruition in *Messias Puer*, but probably we should not exclude Gentiles from the scope of this programme. *Adumbratio* explicitly seeks to make Kabbalistic idiom accessible to non-Jews, and the re-interpretation of the New Testament text and received doctrine in *Messias Puer* is so extensive and heterodox that one might imagine Christians also needed some convincing. Perhaps Knorr envisaged a real conversation with give and take on both sides, and made a considerable academic commitment to that cause?

6. Knorr's use of the Peshitta in *Adumbratio*

Shortly after the programmatic title, *a brief Application of Hebrew Kabbalistic Doctrine to the Teaching of the New Covenant for the Formation of Hypotheses that Lead Towards the Conversion of the Jews*, Knorr in *Adumbratio* introduces a quotation from the Syriac text: 'in order that little by little we may be conformed to that dialect, we have on several occasions used quotations from it'.³³ The Syriac text is not only a similar dialect to Zoharic Aramaic, its use enables students (or perhaps rather their discourse) to 'be conformed' to a form of expression more suitable for the proposed synthesis of Christian and kabbalistic doctrines. The pro-

³⁰ Dedicatio p. XX.

³¹ Guy interestingly considered that the Hebrew Script was original to the Peshitta New Testament and that Syriac letters were a scribal innovation of orthodox Syriac scribes undertaken with the deliberate aim of distinguishing themselves from Ebionites: the ductus of the Syriac script leading the scribe to make the sign of the cross while writing. WILKINSON 2007b, p. 84-85. The idea is taken up by Knorr in *Messias Puer*: VILENO, WILKINSON 2021, p. 46 n. 11.

³² WILKINSON 2007c, p. 9-25.

³³ '...juxta textum Syriacum qui scriptis vestries kabbalisticis maxime est conformis, unde ut paulatim in Dialecto conformemur aliquot citations ex illo instituemus' (p. 4 2.3).

ject is not simply the evangelisation of Jews, but facilitating that by a text in a language expressive of the idioms of Zohar. Thereafter citations are taken from the Peshitta. They are given first in unvocalised square Hebrew letters and then followed by a Latin gloss which usefully indicates how the Syriac has been understood. A systematic examination of the Latin glosses indicates that they are indeed made freely from the Syriac³⁴.

The dialogue between a ‘Christian Philosopher’ and a ‘Kabbalist Catechumen’, *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae* (often, as we have seen, attributed to van Helmont), can be seen as a substantial work of Christian Kabbalah and offers a clear example of the application of kabbalistic doctrines to Christian theology. Its goal, as stated at the beginning, was to achieve linguistic common ground shared by both interlocutors and thus to provoke the conversion of the Jews.³⁵ But that conversion is impossible as long as such differences remain between the Christian and the Jewish manner of ‘articulating the teachings’ and between the terms used by both parties. Thus, the matter of terminology and formulation is raised: the Kabbalist offers to explain the abstruse teachings of the Kabbalah in such a way that a common understanding can be found - both to allow the Kabbalists to understand the Christian doctrines, and to help Christians to get used to the Kabbalistic way of explaining the mysteries. Therefore, the Christian Philosopher is expected at the request of the Kabbalist to look to the New Testament for passages offering a parallel or an equivalent to key concepts and formulations often taken from Lurianic Kabbalah.³⁶ In this regard, Syriac turns out to be particularly useful precisely because of its linguistic similarity with Kabbalistic writings. The Christian Philosopher therefore relies on the Syriac version of the New Testament, the one that Knorr himself printed in Sulzbach in 1684.

The simple fact of departing from the Vulgate has an unsettling effect on anyone who knows that text as Scripture and suggests perhaps a more authentic text and certainly one whose terminology and phraseology is better fitted to accommodate and resonate with kabbalistic doctrines.³⁷ Moreover, several strategic and important hermeneutic gains are made possible by the use of the Peshitta, and have been described in detail elsewhere:³⁸ most significant and widespread is the facilitation of detection of the *Sephiroth* in the New Testament. Frequently occurring New Testament common nouns when read in Syriac become synonymous with the *Sephiroth*. The passages in which these quite common words appear suddenly

³⁴ HEDESAN 2015, p. 152-155, rightly chides SPECTOR 2012 for using the English Standard Version for these citations. Spector does admittedly undertake to observe differences from the Syriac (p. 164) but does not always do so. But Hedesan herself is quite wrong when she asserts that the Latin Vulgate is the version used here. In addition to Hedesan’s objections, see also SPECTOR 2012, p. 41, which does not follow the Latin gloss ‘*Unigenitus Dei*’ on John 1.18 (3.7 p. 8) but gives ‘only begotten God’ the reading of the papyri *p66* and *p75* and the English Standard Version. The Vulgate has ‘*Unigenitus Filius*’. This is not a trivial difference. See EHRMAN 1993, p. 78-82.

³⁵ ‘*Nosti, amice, nihil urgeri acrius, quam conversionem nostram, quam tamen nos statuimus impossibilem, quamdiu tantopere dissidemus in methodo proponendi dogmata, terminorumque utrinque necessariorum usu. Cum itaque intelligam, te dogmatum nostrorum Philosophicorum haud adeo esse ignarum, scire velim, an non inveniri queat hypothesis aliqua, cujus beneficio sive nos melius intelligere possemus doctrinam vestram; sive vos assuescere queatis modis loquendi nostris ænigmaticis.*’ (Adumbratio, 3).

³⁶ For example: ‘*Kabbal. – Nos eandem Dei naturam symbolice describimus, tanquam lucem infinitam, quae adimpleverit omne Ubi, ita ut nullus in ea esset locus vacuus [...] admittuntne haec libri vestri Evangelici? Phil. Christ. – Sane hic modus loquendi etiam occurrit, I. ad Timoth. 6. v. 16 [...]*’ (Ibid., 4).

³⁷ Thus, for example, the Syriac turn ‘sons of man’ (for the Vulgate ‘*homines*’) is exploited in corroboration of the role of Son of Man in argument: VILENO 2016, p. 144.

³⁸ VILENO, WILKINSON 2018b and VILENO, WILKINSON 2019.

assume a profound kabbalistic significance. Thus: Wisdom (Hochmah/Sapientia) is an attribute of Messiah.³⁹ By use of the Peshitta of Lk 2.47, where the young Jesus is asking questions in the Temple, this occasion is added to examples of his wisdom, *hekmtheh* which is the transparently cognate word the Syriac has there. In Hebrew type the relation to Hochmah is obvious: but the Vulgate's '*prudencia*' suggests no link whatsoever to the sephirah.

Similarly, our author establishes that 'Glory' *Tipheret* is translated as *doxa* by the LXX and discovers the words which translate it in the Syriac Old Testament: in this way the sephirah *Tipheret* can be perceived behind the Vulgate's '*gloria*'. Plenty of examples are cited⁴⁰. Again, quotations from the Peshitta Rev 7.12 and 19.1 are translated to include *Potentia* amongst honours ascribed to Messiah (unlike the Vulgate). *Potentia* is, of course, like *Sapientia* and *Gloria* one of the *Sephiroth* (Geburah) to which reference is now found here⁴¹. Examples like this, we now know, can be found also throughout *Messias Puer*.⁴²

Genesis 1.1 is cited and both the Hebrew *br'šyt* ('in the beginning') and the Syriac *bršt* are given, but translated '*per principium (i.e., Messiam) creavit Deus coelum & terram*'⁴³. The point here is that God created through the *principium* (*Bereshit*) which is Messiah. Copious New Testament citations indicate how several assertions of Christ's cosmic role in creation are now to be understood as congruent with, if not simply expressing, this understanding.⁴⁴

Several translations become important when seen in connection with the doctrine of Adam Kadmon:

In translating 1 Cor 15.45 '*Factus est Adam primus homo in Psychen viventem...*'⁴⁵ the opportunity of departing from the Vulgate is taken to substitute '*Psychen viventem*' for the familiar '*in animam viventem*'. *Psyche* is used as a technical term in distinguishing the types of souls within Adam Kadmon⁴⁶, both in the *Adumbratio* and in *Messias Puer*. The Apostle now appears to speak in the very terms of the kabbalistic hierarchy of types of soul, that is: Psyche: Nefesh / Spirit: Ru'aḥ / Neshamah: Understanding / Hayyah: Vitality.

In 1 Cor 15.47 where the Vulgate reads '*Primus homo de terra, terrenus: secundus homo de caelo caelestis*' the Latin gloss of the Syriac has '*Primus homo terrenus de terra: secundus homo DOMINUS (sive tmy' Tetragrammaton) de caelo*'⁴⁷. This (without the reference to the Tetragrammaton) is the Peshitta reading which is clearly more serviceable here. The Quotation is repeated at p. 44.

³⁹ (3.45.2 p.16) (SPECTOR 2012, p. 57).

⁴⁰ (3.45.6 p.17) (SPECTOR 2012, p. 59).

⁴¹ (3.45.8 p.18). (SPECTOR 2012, p. 59).

⁴² VILENO, WILKINSON 2021, p. 108-113.

⁴³ (1.13 p.9) (SPECTOR 2012, p. 44).

⁴⁴ Spector's grammatically impossible translation 'In the beginning God (i.e., the Messiah) ...' appears to make Messiah God here. The (correct) interpretation given above, however, is central to the argument and appears also near the beginning of *Messias Puer*.

⁴⁵ (3.25 p.10) (SPECTOR 2012, p. 45-46).

⁴⁶ (3.50 p.28) (SPECTOR 2012, p. 69).

⁴⁷ (3.25 p.11) (SPECTOR 2012, p. 46).

Hebr 1.3 in the Vulgate describes the Son as *'portansque omnia verbo virtutis suae'*, the Peshitta and its Latin gloss have *'and contains all things'*⁴⁸. This 'containing' is essential: *'Adam ille primus etiam vocatur Macrocosmus, quod contineat omnia causae primae causata'* the Kabbalist tells us. The Christian's reply is that likewise the Christians' Messiah has *contained* in him all things. The point cannot be made from the Vulgate. There are then given a number of other places in the Peshitta New Testament where this Syriac phrase occurs, thus demonstrating the ubiquity of the parallel.

If these instances may be summarised: the Aramaic idiom of the Peshitta facilitates the discovery of Zoharic terms in its very words and expressions. Once these key terms are identified, the New Testament is seen to be talking about Zoharic matters in Zoharic terms.

7. Knorr's use of the Peshitta in *Messias Puer*

Messias Puer continues to exploit the potential of the Peshitta that arises from the similarity of language, expression and proper names (Elizabeth, Zechariah, John, Jesus *etc.*) to those in other Semitic and particularly kabbalistic texts. The dialogue format, we recall, is retained but a *Christian Philosopher* no longer speaks with a *Kabbalist*; rather Christian speaks with a Kabbalist who has now become a Christian catechumen and cooperates in emphasising the similarities between the Kabbalah and Christianity. The work takes the form of a verse-by-verse commentary on the introductory passages of Luke, John and Matthew⁴⁹, where the (Syriac) phrases, teaching and *realia* are all illuminated either from von Rosenroth's kabbalistic translations or other, rabbinic, texts. In contrast to *Adumbratio*, the printed fragment of *Messias Puer* (otherwise known as the *Historiae...*) does not have extensive quotations of Syriac, though the Syriac *lemmata* chosen from the gospel passages for comment are given in square Hebrew characters. In the manuscript, however, we have seen that the relevant Syriac text is cut from the pages of the 1684 Peshitta and stuck in.

The Peshitta is described as 'a most ancient translation' in another discussion of *Bereshith* as the *principium* of Creation in Jn (1.1) where the Syriac rendering is preferred⁵⁰. There the Peshitta heading, attributing the Gospel to the Apostle and claiming it was written in Greek in Alexandria, is accepted, but it is suggested either that the Apostle or someone else very soon put it into Syriac. It is considered apparent that John was not very fluent in Greek, but expressed himself naturally in the idioms of his native Syriac. Comment at Lk 1.28 indicates that Syriac was considered the vernacular of the time and the language in which Gabriel addressed Mary. The traditional heading of the Syriac Bible is also entertained when it suggests that Luke too wrote in Alexandria⁵¹, but the author does not wish to decide between this and Jerome's view that it was written in Achaea. In places the writer is content to find agreement between the New Testament Greek, the Syriac and the usage of an Old Testament Targum (*e.g.*, at Lk 1.1), but in other places he finds the Syriac preferable. Elisabeth's name is rendered by the Greek *corrupte* and the Peshitta is preferred. (Syriac names, of course permit

⁴⁸ (3.31 p.12) (SPECTOR 2012, p.49).

⁴⁹ Mark is not separately treated (though is extensively quoted throughout): this is no doubt because it does not have a birth narrative or any account of the early life of Jesus.

⁵⁰ Also at Luke 1.1.

⁵¹ Material from both the Arabic and Persian superscriptions is also entertained. The Arabic New Testament and the Persian Gospels were available in the London Polyglot Bible. The Arabic cognate is cited to explain Syriac *rhb* at Lk 1.29.

numerical manipulation for kabbalistic purposes: see on the name Johannes at Lk 1.13)⁵². More significantly in the phrase ‘the word was God’ in John 1.1, the Greek preposition *pros* is considered as inadequate marking only an external relationship, whereas the preferred Syriac *lwt* (allegedly) points to a more intimate union. The Greek of Lk 1.35 unfortunately suggests two activities of the Holy Spirit (‘come upon you’ and ‘overshadow you’). The Syriac by contrast correctly suggests the fact and then the method of one single act. Where the Greek has *hora* (an hour) in Lk 1.10, the Syriac is preferred as more accurately suggesting merely a short period of time (it did not take an hour for Zechariah to incense the altar!). An idiom in Syriac at Lk 1.26 is explained by a reference Daniel 5.24. (The text of Daniel is in Aramaic at this point.) The meaning of *škr* in Lk 1.15 is illuminated (not entirely convincingly) from a comparison between the Hebrew Text and Targum in Judg 13.14, from which it is concluded that *škr* is made from wine. The Greek of Lk 1.17 ‘to prepare a people prepared’ is dismissed as a mere tautology in favour of the Syriac. The Syriac word ‘*štgš*’ in Lk 1.12 is found most suitable for emotional upheaval and its meaning is exposed by extensive citation of its other New Testament usages. The meaning taken from the text is thus based upon the usage of the Syriac word, rather than the Greek. This is then supplemented by widening the investigation of the word’s semantic field to the Aramaic Targums. As well as the Targums, our author also has access to a Syriac Old Testament and (at Lk 1.11) cites copious passages to show that *mry*’ in the Syriac New Testament is the equivalent of the Tetragrammaton (see also on Lk 1.16).

Thus, our author looks for linguistic consistency in the wider corpus of Aramaic Scripture to find the precise New Testament meaning. The sheer number of references to Aramaic usage in the Targums, Syriac Old Testament and New Testament suggest a desire to establish this approach beyond doubt. It would appear that the references have come from a Lexicon and Buxtorf’s *Chaldean Lexicon* to which explicit reference is made would have served nicely here⁵³.

Within this consistent field of Aramaic scripture (which includes, of course, the primaevial teaching of Kabbalah) all sorts of numerical and etymological connections are possible. We have mentioned the numerical relationships between words. As an example of etymological possibilities, one might consider the exploitation of the root *gnz* mentioned when the Spirit covers Mary (at Lk 1.35). There is evoked: a tabernacle, the Incarnation (Jn 1.14), the Shechinah and a canopy (*gnz*’) for a (mystical) wedding.

Such a unified language field facilitates the articulation of the coherencies von Rosenroth seeks to emphasise. Outstanding here are the continuities (and on occasion, differences) between the Jewish Ecclesia of the Old Covenant, and the Ecclesia of the New; the consistent underlying theology found in Old and New Testaments and exposed in the light of Kabbalah; and the re-occurrence of souls incarnated repeatedly within the narrative of Scripture. This later doctrine is, of course, central to von Rosenroth’s theology and hermeneutic. Yet perhaps most striking of all, is the way the use of the Peshitta, simply by virtue of its Semitic vocabulary, repeatedly enables the recognition in the New Testament of the names of the *Sephiroth* which are so central to Lurianic Kabbalah and von Rosenroth’s doctrines. *Kingdom, Wisdom etc.* are not merely the names of the divine emanations, but also common nouns found

⁵² The numerical equivalence of Mary and Virgin (in Hebrew) is noted at Lk 1.27, that of Emmanuel and Jeshua (by one method of calculation) at Lk 1.31.

⁵³ BUXTORF 1645. The alphabetic (and unnecessarily full) nature of the list of Greek words in which Hebrew *tzade* is transliterated by Greek *sigma* at Lk 1.26 perhaps also suggests recourse to a lexicon.

throughout the large field of Aramaic Scripture and particularly in the Gospels. These occurrences are generously documented, and the lists of references in this way provide a key to the detection of mystical secrets which may lie in other passages where the same vocabulary occurs.

8. Conclusion

Finally let us return to 1684: the year that saw the publication of the Zohar, the Peshitta New Testament and the Second Volume of *Kabbala denudata*, which contains *Adumbratio*. With the perspective provided by *Messias Puer*, we can now evaluate the remarkable publishing programme of that year. The Zohar was provided in Hebrew; the Peshitta New Testament was printed in a Hebrew font and the first of the dialogues (the more philosophical) was provided to initiate the attempt to find commonality between the Zohar and the Peshitta in language and doctrine. In the absence of *Messias Puer* it was difficult to see the whole programme and its culmination in a close-reading of Peshitta Gospel passages which provide the exegetical justification of the whole project. In short, I wish to argue that *Messias Puer* is the goal prepared for in the publications of 1684. This makes the manuscript itself of central to the work of Knorr's later years. More to our purposes it enables us to see the critical role of Syriac in the facilitating of that project: in the Peshitta New Testament (Knorr attempted to show) one may encounter the doctrines of Zohar in the language and idioms of the Zohar itself. To display this thoroughly and in close exegesis could promote shared understanding and rapprochement between Jews and Christians around the shared commonalities of their faiths.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AMBROGIO, T., 1593: *Introductio in Chaldaiam linguam*, Padua.
- Anonymous 1690: Review of Richard Simon's *Historia Critica Versionum Novi Testamenti in Acta Eruditorum Lipsiensia*, p. 92-97.
- BRIQUEL-CHATONNET, F., DEBIE, M., 2017: *Le monde syriaque : sur les routes d'un christianisme ignoré*, Paris.
- BUXTORF, J., 1645: *Lexicon Hebraicum et Chaldaicum*, Basel.
- EHRMAN, B.D., 1993: *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, Oxford.
- FABRICIUS, J.A., 1724: *Historia bibliothecae Fabricianae qua singuli eius libri eorumque contenta VI*, Wolfenbüttel, Helmstadt.
- FINKE, M., 1998: *Sulzbach im 17. Jahrhundert Zur Kulturgeschichte einer süddeutschen Residenz*, Regensburg.
- FUCHS, T., 2020: "Die Sulzbacher Druckereien von Abraham Lichtenthaler und Johann Holst und der Buchhandel in der 2. Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts", *Morgen-Glantz* 30.
- GONDOS, A., 2020: *Kabbalah in Print: the study and popularization of Jewish mysticism in early modernity*, Albany.
- HEDESAN, G.D., 2015: "Review of Sheila A. Spector (ed., trans.). Francis Mercury van Helmont's *Sketch of Christian Kabbalism*", *Correspondences* 3, p. 152-155.
- HUSS, B., 2002: "Text und Context der Sulzbacher Zohar", *Morgen-Glantz* 16, p. 135-159.
- 2016: "Translations of the Zohar: Historical Contexts and Ideological Frameworks", *Correspondences* 4, p. 81-128.
- KELLER, S., SPETHMANN, A. (eds), 1996: *Historische Kataloge der Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München: Münchner Hofbibliothek und andere Provenienzen*, Wiesbaden.
- KING, D. (ed.), 2019: *The Syriac World*, London.
- KNORR VON ROSENROTH, C., 1677 and 1684: *Kabbala Denudata seu Doctrina Hebraeorum Transcendentalis et metaphysica atque Theologica*, 2 Vols, Sulzbach, Frankfurt.
- 1684a: *Liber Sohar siue Collectanea de dictis et gestis R. Schimeon, Filii Iochai, Doctoris Tannaei, s. Mischnaici, et discipulorum eius aliorumque coetaneorum...*, Nuremburg.
- 1684b: *DYTYQ' HDT' Novum Domini Nostri Jesu Christi Testamentum Syriace*, Sulzbach.
- 1689: *Historiae Evangelicae initium, secundum quatuor Evangelistas*, no place.
- LEFÈVRE DE LA BODERIE, G., 1584: *Novum Iesu Christi D. N. Testamentum*, Paris.
- LE LONG, J., 1791: *Bibliotheca Sacra ... ordine disposita, emendata, suppleta, confirmata ab Andr. Gottlieb Masch*, Halle.
- MICHAELIS, J.D., 1788: *Einleitung in die göttliche Schriften des neues Bundes I*, Göttingen.
- SCHOLEM, G., 1927: *Bibliographia Kabbalistica mit einem Anhang. Bibliographie des Zohar und seiner Kommentare*, Leipzig.
- SCHRÖDER, H., 1857: *Lexicon der hamburgischen Schriftstelleren* Vol. III, Hamburg.
- SIMON, R., 1690: *Historia Critica Versionum Novi Testamenti*, Rotterdam.

SPECTOR, S.A., 2012: *Francis Mercury van Helmont's Sketch of Christian Kabbalism*, Leiden.

VILENO, A.M., 2016: *À l'ombre de la kabbale*, Paris.

VILENO, A.M., WILKINSON, R.J., 2018a: "La dernière œuvre de Christian Knorr de Rosenroth : le Messias Puer", *BABELAO* 7, p. 137-147.

— 2018b: "Die Peshitta von 1684 im Kontext des Werkes von Christian Knorr von Rosenroth als Beitrag zu einem 'kabbalistischen Christentum'", *Morgen-Glanz* 28, p. 210-230.

— 2019: "'Looking for the Zohar in the New Testament': The Lost *Messias Puer* of Christian Knorr von Rosenroth between Kabbalah and Biblical Studies", *Numen* 66, p. 295-315.

— 2021: *Messias Puer: Christian Knorr von Rosenroth's Lost Exegesis of Kabbalistic Christianity*, Leiden.

WEISS, T., 2018: *Sefer Yesirah and its Context: Other Jewish Voices*, Philadelphia.

WIDMANSTETTER, J.A., 1555: *Liber sacrosancti Evangelii de Iesu Christo Domino et Deo nostro*, Vienna.

WILKINSON, R.J., 2007a: *Orientalism, Aramaic and Kabbalah in the Catholic Reformation*, Leiden.

— 2007b: *The Kabbalistic Scholars of the Antwerp Polyglot Bible*, Leiden.

— 2007c: "Immanuel Tremellius' 1569 Edition of the Syriac New Testament" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58/1, p. 9-25.

— 2012: "Syriac Studies in Rome in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century", *Journal of Late Antique Religion and Culture* 6, p. 55-74.

— 2016: "Constructing Syriac in Latin: Establishing the Identity of Syriac in the West over a Century and a Half" (c.1550-c.1700): An Account of Grammatical and Extra-linguistic Determinants", *BABELAO* 5, p. 169-283.

— 2017: "Les éditions imprimées de la Peshitta syriaque du Nouveau Testament", in Jean-Claude Haelewyck (ed.), *Le Nouveau Testament in syriaque* (Études syriaques 14), Paris, p. 269-289.

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the provenance and purpose of an overlooked, and superficially rather uninteresting, edition of the Peshitta New Testament published by the Christian Kabbalist Christian Knorr von Rosenroth in Sulzbach in 1684. The text printed in square unvocalised Hebrew letters is most probably that of Plantin's Antwerp Polyglot Bible, but its purpose is more obscure. By placing the edition in the context of precisely contemporaneous publications and tracing their use (in Latin) of the Syriac version, a picture is built up of Knorr's development of a pedagogical programme facilitating the reading of the Syriac New Testament as expressing Zoharic doctrines in Zoharic language. An examination Knorr's newly-recovered last work, *Messias Puer*, displays the exegetical consequences of this in a close reading of the canonical New Testament text: a unique rapprochement of Christian and Jewish Kabbalistic doctrines.

KEYWORDS

1. Syriac
2. Peshitta: New Testament
3. Christian Knorr von Rosenroth
4. Kabbalah