



BIBLE V. SOGDIAN TRANSLATIONS

BIBLE

v. Sogdian Translations of the Bible

The following manuscripts containing biblical texts in Sogdian have been made known. None of them survives in anything like complete form, and some are mere fragments.

(1) The Gospel lectionary C5, comprising substantial portions of the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John. (No reading from Mark happens to be preserved.) The main part of the text is in Sogdian only, but the rubrics and the opening words of each pericope are given in Syriac.

(2) Several bilingual Gospel lectionaries, in which the original Syriac and the Sogdian translation alternate phrase by phrase.

(3) Two small fragments from a single page (C13), the verso of which contains the beginning of the gospel of Matthew in Syriac and Sogdian. The fact that the recto was left blank has been taken to indicate that this was the first page of the manuscript, which would then be likely to have contained a continuous gospel text; but it is equally possible that the manuscript was a lectionary in which, as in some Syriac books from Central Asia, the first and last pages of each quire were left blank.



(4) A bilingual lectionary of the Pauline epistles (C23), with rubrics indicating the psalm verses to be sung before and after the Epistle.

(5) A psalter including the East Syrian psalm-headings but not the canons or antiphons of Mār Ābā. The first verse of each psalm is given in Syriac as well as in Sogdian.

(6) A unique fragment containing part of Psalm 33 (32 according to the numbering of the Septuagint), whose opening words are cited in Greek as a headline.

Apart from this last manuscript, whose text generally agrees with that of the Septuagint, all of the Sogdian translations depend on the Syriac Peshitta version. This is self-evident in the case of the bilingual texts which incorporate the Syriac original and almost equally clear in the case of the monoglot lectionary C5, since the translation is usually literal enough to allow the wording of the underlying Syriac to be inferred. Occasionally C5 seems to attest non-Peshitta readings which may be traced back to the Old Syriac versions or to Tatian's *Diatessaron*, though the number and significance of such readings have been somewhat exaggerated.

All these manuscripts come from the ruined Nestorian monastery at Bulayiq near Turfan. Psalters in Syriac, Middle Persian, and New Persian were discovered at the same site. This linguistic diversity reflects the development of the Christian church in Transoxiana and Central Asia. Since the Nestorian mission to the east derived from the Syrian church in Iran, it is probable that the newly-founded Christian communities initially employed Syriac and Middle Persian in their liturgy, the latter being gradually displaced by the successive local vernaculars, firstly Sogdian and ultimately New Persian.

The canonical texts which we have in Sogdian are almost exclusively those required for liturgical use, namely, the Psalms and those portions of the gospels and epistles which were appointed to be read on Sundays and holy days. There is only the fragmentary C13 (see no. 3 above) to suggest that even the gospels were translated as a whole. Many biblical quotations and echoes are found in the Christian (and Manichean) Sogdian literature, notably in the *Antirrheticus* of [Evagrius Ponticus](#). However, such quotations were probably transmitted as part of the texts in which they are embedded, and cannot be taken to imply the existence of a Sogdian version of the complete Bible.



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