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## Shem-Tob versus Greek manuscripts

The 14th century polemical treatise Even Bochan written by Shem-Tob ben-Isaac ben-Shaprut Ibn Shaprut, a Castilian Jewish physician, living later in Aragon (Spain). 12th/ 13th book contains a Hebrew version of the complete text of Matthew. EB completed in 1380 CE, revised in 1385 & 1400. This is not to be confused with the Sebastian Münster (1537; dedicated to Henry VIII under title The Torah of the Messiah); or Jean du Tillet (1555) versions of Hebrew Matthew. In 1690 Richard Simon mistakenly identified Shem-Tob's Matthew with the version of Münster and du Tillet.

The book titled *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* was edited, translated, and introduced by George Howard (University of Georgia).

Tratatul polemic Even Bochan (Piatra de Testare) din secolul 14 scris de Shem-Tob ben-Isaac ben-Shaprut Ibn Shaprut, un doctor evreu Castilian, care a trăit mai târziu în Aragon (Spania). Cartea a doisprezecea / a treisprezecea conține o versiune Ebraică a textului complet din Matei. EB terminată în 1380 e.n., revizuită în 1385 și 1400. Aceasta nu trebuie confundată cu Sebastian Münster (1537; dedicată lui Henry VIII sub titlul Tora lui Messia); ori Jean du Tillet (1555), versiuni ale Matei în ebraică. În 1690 Richard Simon a identificat din greșeală Matei Shem-Tob cu versiunea Münster și du Tillet.

Cartea intitulată “Evanghelia Ebraică după Matei a fost editată, tradusă, și introdusă de George Howard (Universitatea din Georgia).

1. Verses from Shem-Tob different from the Greek text - with Romanian translation of verses  
(Versete din Shem-Tob diferite de textul grec - cu traducere în română a versetelor)

Matt 12:37

"According to your words you will be judged, and according to your deeds (gr: words) you will be convicted. "  
“Conform cuvintelor tale vei fi judecat, și conform faptelor (gr: cuvintelor) tale vei fi osândit.”

Matthew 23:2-3

“Upon the seat of Moses the Pharisees and Sages sit, and now, all which he will say unto you-keep and do; but THEIR ordinances and deeds do not do, because THEY say and do not.”

“Cărturarii și Fariseii șed pe scaunul lui Moise, și acum, tot ce el vă spune înspre păziți-le și faceți-le; dar ordinele și faptele lor să nu faceți, pentru că ei zic și nu fac.”

Matt 24:40-41

The standard Greek text reads:

40. Then two will be in the field; the one is taken, and the other is left.

40. Atunci doi vor fi la câmp; unul este luat, și celălalt este lăsat.

41. Two women are grinding in the mill; the one is taken, and the other is left.

41. Două femei vor măcina la moară, una este luată și alta este lăsată..

Shem-Tob, however, reads:

40 Then if there shall be two ploughing in a field, one righteous and the other evil, the one will be taken and the other left.

40. Atunci dacă vor fi doi plugari la un câmp, unul cinstit și unul rău, unul va fi luat și altul va fi lăsat.

41 Two women will be grinding at a mill; one will be taken and the other left. This is because the angels at the end of the world will remove the stumbling blocks from the world and will separate the good from the evil.

41. Două femei vor măcina la moară, una va fi luată și alta va fi lăsată. Acesta este fiindcă îngerii la sfârșitul lumii vor scoate blocurile împiedicate din lume și vor separa binele de rău.

As can be seen, Shem-Tob interpolates an explanation which stipulates who the two are (one is righteous, the other evil [the Greek text makes no such identification]), and gives a new--and inconsistent--definition of "stumbling blocks": they are the evil people who will be removed (the parallelism of v. 40 in Shem-Tob suggests--and standard understanding is--that it is the good who will be "taken" [to heaven] and the evil who will be "left"; but Shem-Tob's v. 41 states that it is the evil who will be "taken," presumably leaving the good here!).

Cum se poate vedea, Shem-Tob interpoalează o explicație care stipulează care sunt cei doi (unul este cinstit, și celălalt rău [textul Grec nu face o astfel de identificare]), și dă o nouă—și inconsistentă—definiție a “blocurilor împiedicate”: ele sunt oamenii răi care o să fie scoși (paralelismul v. 40 în Shem-Tob sugerează—și înțelesul standard este—că sunt cei buni ca vor fi “luați” [în rai] și cei răi ca vor fi “lăsați”; dar Shem-Tob v. 41 afirmă că sunt cei răi care vor fi “luați,” probabil lăsând pe cei buni aici!).

Matt 28:9

The standard Greek Mehrheits text reads:

"And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, 'Hail!';

“Și cum ele s-au dus să spună ucenicilor, iată, le-a întâmpinat Iesus, zicând: 'Bucurați-vă!'”

Shem-Tob, however, reads:

"As they were going Jesus passed before them saying: 'May the Name deliver you.'"

“Cum ele au mers Iesus a trecut prin fața lor zicând: 'Fie ca Numele să vă predea.'”

Matt 28:19-20

In Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew, the "Great Commission" becomes: "Go and teach them to carry out all the things which I have commanded you forever." No mention is made of "making disciples of all nations," nor does Jesus promise to be "with you always, even unto the end of the world."

"Go and teach them to carry out all the things which I have commanded you forever."

“Mergeți și învățați-I să ducă mai departe toate lucrurile care Eu v-am poruncit pentru totdeauna.”

## 2. Puns (Jocuri de cuvinte)

**a.** Consider first some of the puns in Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew: In Matthew 7:6 the Shem-Tob text reads: "Do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you." "Swine" (פִּזְוִי) and "turn" (פָּזַר) are similar in Hebrew, both in sound and appearance, and form a wordplay in the text. The word used for "swine" is *hazir* and for "turn," *yahzeru*. Both come from the Hebrew root *h-z-r*. The pun is lost in the Greek language.

**b.** In Matthew 10:36 the Shem-Tob text reads: "The *enemies* will be *loved ones*." The word for "enemies" is *haoyevim*; for "loved ones," *ahuvim*.

**c.** In Matei 18:27, the Shem-Tob text reads: "Then his master *had pity* on him and *forgave* him everything." The word for "had pity" is *hamal*; for "forgave," *mahal*.

These puns are completely lost in Greek and could never work there.

**d.** A famous pun does occur in the Greek Matthew at 16:18: "You are Peter (*petros*) and on this rock (*petra*) I will build my church." Instead of the famous Greek pun, Πέτρος / πέτρα, the Hebrew reads, "You are a stone, and

upon you I will build my house of prayer." The pun consists of the word אבן "stone" and אבנה "I will build." Because of the *petros/petra* wordplay, some have argued that this saying originated in Greek and goes back to the Greek-speaking segment of the Church rather than to Jesus. In Shem-Tob's Matthew, however, there is a totally different pun—one that works in Hebrew but not in Greek. The Hebrew text reads: "You are a *stone (even)* and, upon you *I will build (evneh)* my house of prayer."

e. Matt 23:27-28: "For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." The pun involves the root קבר "tomb" and קרב "within."

### 3. Word-Connections

In addition to puns, the Hebrew text of Shem-Tob's Matthew is replete with Hebrew word-connections that intensify the text. Many of these are not reflected in the Greek text at all. They consist of words that are the same or of similar appearance and either give structure to individual sayings and episodes or tie together different sayings and episodes. Word connections are links made by the repetition of the same or similar words designed to tie separate sayings and pericopes together. Here are some examples taken from Shem-Tob's Hebrew text:

a. Matt 4:21-23: "He turned from there and saw two other brothers, James and John, brothers who were sons of Zebedee [זבדיאל from זבד "gifts" and אל "God," perhaps meaning "gifts of God"] . . . . Then Jesus went around the land of Galilee teaching their assemblies and preaching to them the good gift (זבד) . . . of the kingdom of Heaven." The repetition of זבד "gift" ties the pericope of the call of the disciples to the pericope of Jesus' first preaching tour in Galilee.

b. Matt 5:9-10: "Blessed are those who pursue [רודפי] peace for they shall be called the sons of God." "Blessed are those who are persecuted [הנרדפים] for righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "To pursue" is *radaph* [רדף = to pursue/to persecute] in Hebrew; "to persecute" is the same word.

c. Matt 8:28, 31: There met him [ויפגעו בו] two demon-possessed men. . . . Then the demons entreated him [ויפגעו בו] .

"Met" is *paga* [פגע = to meet/to entreat] in Hebrew; "entreated" is the same word.

#### d. Matthew 10:36-39

36 "The *enemies* will be *loved ones*."

37 "He who loves his father and mother more than me . . . ."

38 [lacking in Shem-Tob.]

39 "He who *loves* his life will lose it."

"Loved ones" comes from *ahav* in Hebrew; "to love" comes from the same word.

#### e. Matt 14:35-36:

35 "They brought to him all those who were sick [החולים] with various kinds of diseases."

36 "They implored [והלו] him".

"Sick" comes from *halah*; "implored" comes from *hilah*. [חלה = to be sick/to implore].

f. Matt 15:34-37: "They answered, seven [שבעה] and a few fish. So Jesus commanded the people to sit upon the grass. Then he took the seven [השבעה] loaves . . . . All of them ate and were satisfied [וישבעו] and from that which was remaining they filled seven [השבעה] seahs [שבעה = seven; שבע = to be satisfied] .

g. Matt 18:23-35: This parable is held together by the catch-word שלם, first meaning "to repay," then "perfect."

At that time Jesus said to his disciples: the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who sat to make a reckoning with his servants and ministers. As he began to reckon, one came who owed about ten thousand pieces of gold. But he had

nothing to give and his master commanded to sell him and his children and all that was his to repay [לשלם] the value. The servant fell before his master and implored him to have pity on him and to be patient with him because he would repay [ישלם] everything. Then his master had pity on him and forgave him everything. But that servant went out and found one of his comrades who owed him a hundred pieces of money and he grasped him and struck him saying . . . Trust me and be patient with me and I will repay [אשלם] everything. But he was not willing to listen to him; so they brought him to the prison until he repaid [שלם] him everything. The servants of the king saw that which he did and were very angry and went and told their master. Then his master called him and said to him: Cursed servant, did I not forgive you all your debt when you placated me? So why did you not forgive your servant when he supplicated you as I forgave you? His master was angry with him and commanded to afflict him until he should repay [ישלם] him all the debt. Thus will my Father who is in heaven do to you if you do not forgive each man his brother with a perfect [שלם] heart.

**h.** Matt 19:9-13: He who takes her who has been divorced [הגרושה] commits adultery. . . . Then they brought children to him . . . but his disciples were driving [מגרשים] them away [גרש = to divorce/to drive away].

**i.** Matt 26:28, 34-36:

28 “This is my blood of the new covenant which will be poured out for many for the atonement (לכפרת) of sins. . . .”

29 “Jesus said, Truly I say to you, this night before the cock-crow you will deny (תכפור) me three times.”

30 “Peter said to him: ‘If it is possible for me to die with you, I will not deny (אכפור) you . . . .’”

“Then Jesus came with them to the village (לכפר) of Geshemonim and said: ‘Sit now until I go there and pray.’”

This extended word connection is made up of the words כפרה (*kapharah*), meaning "atonement," and כפר, meaning either "to deny" (*kaphar*) or "village" (*kephar*).

#### 4. Alliterations

In addition to puns and word-connections, Shem-Tob’s Hebrew text of Matthew has many other words that are similar in appearance, rhyme, or are otherwise alliterative. Here is a sampling:

[Matthew 4:12](#)

“It came to pass in those days Jesus heard that John *had been delivered up (nimsar) into prison (bemaasar).*”

[Matthew 4:21](#)

“He turned from there and saw two *other brothers (ahim aherim).*”

[Matthew 9:8](#)

“The crowds *saw (vayiru) and feared (vayiru).*”

[Matthew 18:9](#)

“If your eye causes you to stumble (*takhshileha*) . . . cast (*tashlikheha*) it from you.”

There is another reason to believe the oldest layer of the Hebrew Matthew in Shem-Tob is an original composition, not a translation. Shem-Tob’s Hebrew Matthew contains a number of variances from the Greek text that have theological implications. These variances would never have been introduced by a medieval Jewish translator, especially someone who was engaged in polemical disputation with Christians, because they either portray Christianity more, not less, attractively or fail to enhance the Jewish polemic against Christianity. Instead, these variances appear to belong to a more primitive form of the Matthean tradition than the Greek Matthew. This is a powerful argument that Shem-Tob’s Hebrew Matthew is *not* a late medieval product.

I have said these theological variances in Hebrew appear to belong to a more primitive form of the Matthew tradition—one that antedates the tradition preserved in the Greek Matthew. We know that during the early Christian centuries the disparity between Judaism and Christianity gradually increased. But the theological variances in Shem-Tob’s Hebrew text often reflect less disparity between the two religions than does the Greek text.

#### 5. Jesus and the Law

For example, let’s look at Jesus’ attitude toward the law, a subject treated in [Matthew 5](#). In [Matthew 5:17–19](#) we read Jesus’ famous statement about the perdurability of the law:

“Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called

least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

In [Matthew 5:21–48](#) the so-called antitheses follow. Each antithesis (except the last one) first quotes from the law and then gives Jesus’ extension or comment on the law. The form is basically the same in each antithesis: “You have heard that it was said .... But I say to you ....” The subjects are killing, adultery, divorce, false swearing, the *lex talionis* (an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth) and hating your enemies.

In the Greek text of Matthew, Jesus’ comment on some of the antitheses—like killing and adultery—seems to radicalize and internalize the law without, however, revoking it. In other antitheses—divorce and false swearing—Jesus’ comment seems to revoke and annul the letter of the law. At least this is true in the Greek Matthew. But in Shem-Tob’s Hebrew Matthew that is not the case with respect to divorce and false swearing. Instead, in these instances, Jesus’ comment on the antitheses suggests he is radicalizing and internalizing the law but not revoking it. It may well be that the Greek Matthew represents a later corrective to the more ancient statements in the Hebrew, made only after the disparity between Church and Synagogue grew.

Compare the Greek Matthew and Shem-Tob’s Hebrew Matthew on divorce and false swearing:

### **Divorce**

#### **Greek**

[\(Matthew 5:31–32\)](#)

“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress ....” [\(RSV\)](#)

#### **Hebrew**

[\(Matthew 5:31–32\)](#)

“Again Jesus said to his disciples: “You have heard what was said to those of long ago that everyone who leaves his wife and divorces [her] is to give her a bill of divorce ... And I say to you that everyone who leaves his wife is to give her a bill of divorce. Except [however] for the cause of adultery he commits adultery ....”

### **False Swearing**

#### **Greek**

[\(Matthew 5:33–37\)](#)

“Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall, not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not swear *at all*, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God ....” [\(RSV\)](#)

#### **Hebrew**

[\(Matthew 5:33–37\)](#)

“Again you have heard what was said to those of long ago: You shall not swear *by my name* , falsely, but you shall return to the Lord your oath. But I say to you not to swear *in vain by anything*, either by heaven because it is the throne of God ....”

The differences between the Greek and the Hebrew are striking. In the Greek Jesus seems to revoke the law. In the Hebrew, he internalizes and radicalizes it, but does not revoke it. John the Baptist Another difference between the Greek and Hebrew Matthew is in the character of John the Baptist. We know from extra-biblical sources there was a John the Baptist sect that existed from early times and continued perhaps for centuries. In Shem-Tob’s Hebrew Matthew John the Baptist emerges as a much more important figure than in the Greek Matthew. The Greek Matthew may well represent a later corrective to the more primitive statements made about John the Baptist in the Hebrew Matthew before the followers of John the Baptist were seen as a threat to trunkline Christianity. Look at some of the differences between the Hebrew and Greek texts in the portrayal of John the Baptist.

#### **Greek**

[\(Matthew 11:11\)](#)

“Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist: *yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*” [\(RSV\)](#)

#### **Hebrew**

[\(Matthew 11:11\)](#)

“Truly I say to you, among all those born of woman none has arisen greater than John the Baptizer.” (The last phrase in Greek is lacking in Shem-Tob’s Hebrew text.)

#### **Greek**

[\(Matthew 11:13\)](#)

#### **Hebrew**

[\(Matthew 11:13\)](#)

“For all the prophets and the law prophesied  
until John.” (RSV)

**Greek**

([Matthew 17:11](#))

“Elijah does come, and he is to restore all

things.” (RSV) [[17:13](#) tells us that “the disciples understood that [Jesus] was speaking to them of

John the Baptist.” (RSV)]

“For all the prophets and the law spoke  
concerning John.”

**Hebrew**

([Matthew 17:11](#))

In [Matthew 21:32](#) Jesus speaks some harsh words to those who failed to heed the warnings of John the Baptist: “For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him; and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him.” In the Greek Matthew these harsh words are said to the chief priests and the elders of the people (verse 23), but in Shem-Tob’s Hebrew Matthew these harsh words spoken to Jesus’ own disciples (verse 28) and the following comment, omitted from the Greek text is added, “He who has ears to hear let him hear in disgrace.” This series of readings can hardly be taken lightly. They point to an ancient tradition in which John the Baptist was even more important than the portrayal of him given in the Greek text of Matthew. Divine name of God Another characteristic of Shem-Tob’s Matthew indicates it is not a translation, but an original Hebrew composition. This is its use of the divine name. In Hebrew the ineffable, unpronounceable name of the Israelite God is written with four Hebrew consonants, YHWH, known as the tetragrammaton. Modern scholars pronounce and write it Yahweh. In ancient times it was pronounced only once a year—on the Day of Atonement—by the high priest in the Holy of Holies in Temple. In prayer, ancient Jews—and modern ones well—read (or pronounced) these four consonants *adonai*; that is, even though the text contains the letters YHWH, the reader reads *adonai*. *Adonai* is a more generic word for lord.

In Shem-Tob’s Hebrew Matthew a common abbreviation for the divine name of the Israelite God YHWH appears some 15 times. The abbreviation is *H* (yyh) which stands for *ha-shem*, “the name,” a circumlocution for the tetragrammaton. If this were a Hebrew translation of a Greek Christian document, we would surely expect to find *adonai* in the text, not an abbreviation for the ineffable divine name YHWH. For Shem-Tob the Gospel of Matthew was an object of attack, a heretical writing that needed to be exposed for fallacies. For him to have added the ineffable name would be inexplicable. The repeated appearance of an abbreviation for the divine name strongly suggests that Shem-Tob received his Matthew with the divine name already in the text; he probably preserved it rather than run the risk of being guilty of removing it. I do not mean to suggest that the Hebrew in Shem-Tob’s text is pure first-century A.D. Hebrew, for it clearly is not. The first-century text must be linguistically excavated, so to speak. Shem-Tob’s Matthew is written in biblical Hebrew with a healthy mixture of mishnaic Hebrew and later rabbinic vocabulary and idiom. It also reflects changes by medieval Jewish scribes who, among other things, attempted to make it read more like the Greek. Moreover, the most primitive layer of Shem-Tob’s Matthew is written in an unpolished style and is filled with ungrammatical constructions and Aramaicized forms and idioms. In these characteristics it resembles many of the Dead Sea Scroll fragments and gives the appearance of belonging to the same time frame. Reading Shem-Tob’s Matthew is often like reading one of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Hebrew style Despite the numerous medieval revisions, Shem-Tob’s Matthew basically consists of the kind biblical and mishnaic Hebrew that one would expect to find in a first-century document. The linguistic layers in Shem-Tob’s Matthew are similar to those found in another medieval text for which an earlier first-century B.C. manuscript was subsequently found. In the late 19th century, fragments of a Hebrew text were discovered that a Cambridge University scholar named Solomon Schechter identified as coming from the Book of Ben Sira, a Jewish writing of the second century B.C. Also known as Ecclesiasticus, the Book of Ben Sira is considered part of the Bible by Catholics, but as an apocryphal writing by Protestants and Jews. These fragments were traced to the *genizah* of an old Cairo synagogue and were dated to sometime before the 12th century A.D. Until the discovery of these Hebrew fragments, however, Ben Sira had been known primarily in its Greek form, just as was true of the Gospel of Matthew until my examination of Shem-Tob’s Hebrew Matthew. When the Hebrew fragments of Ben Sira were found in 1896, some scholars contended they represented a medieval Hebrew translation from the Greek. Others, using the kind of analysis I have used here, argued that they reflected an original Hebrew composition. Then in 1964 Yigael Yadin, excavating at Masada, unearthed fragments of Ben Sira in Hebrew from the first century B.C., which clearly demonstrated that the medieval copies were descended from an original Hebrew composition. This was true even though there were clear differences between the first-century B.C. fragments from Masada and the medieval

fragments that came from the Cairo Genizah. On the original biblical and mishnaic Hebrew base medieval scribes had made numerous changes to bring the text into a more contemporary form in regard to spelling, vocabulary and other linguistic phenomena. The same thing happened in the case of the Hebrew Matthew preserved in the Shem-Tob manuscript. Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew does not preserve the original Hebrew in a pure form. It was edited and emended by Jewish scribes in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, enough of the original text is left intact to reveal its original character. Even though it often reflects a later style, it is clear that its base is biblical and mishnaic Hebrew. Comparison to other Hebrew quotations I have also compared Shem-Tob's Matthew with Hebrew quotations from Matthew preserved in earlier Christian and Jewish documents. In the work of Irenaeus, Origen, Eusebius, Epiphanius and especially Jerome we find a number of quotations from the so-called Hebrew/Aramaic Matthew and from apocryphal Hebrew/Aramaic gospels. A comparison of these texts with Shem-Tob's Matthew shows little or no relationship between them. But the situation was quite different when I compared Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew with quotations from or allusions to Matthew in a series of early Jewish writings beginning with the Talmud and extending through the late 13th century A.D. This comparison revealed a number of unique textual links between Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew and the Hebrew Matthew preserved or alluded to in these Jewish sources. The conclusion seems inescapable that the Hebrew Matthew preserved by Shem-Tob was known to Jews and perhaps Jewish Christians in the early medieval period, but not to gentile Christians. When I arranged the Hebrew quotations of Matthew from early Jewish writings in chronological sequence, it became clear that a gradual evolution in the Hebrew tradition had taken place beginning with the earliest quotations, and continuing through Shem-Tob's Matthew. The evolution involves two kinds of changes: (1) stylistic modifications consisting primarily of improvements in grammar and the substitution of synonymous words and phrases, and (2) revisions designed to bring the Hebrew into closer harmony with the Greek. Perhaps these latter revisions were for the purpose of establishing a common textual base for discussion and debate between Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages. Once the course of this textual development is understood, the task of the linguistic excavator is to recapture as much of the unrevised text as possible. Those Hebrew readings that are furthest from the Greek Matthew and least polished stylistically are considered as belonging to the oldest form of the text. Those that are closest to the Greek and are in polished style, especially when these elements reflect a later rabbinic hand, are rejected as later revisions. The task is aided by the fact that we have numerous manuscripts of Shem-Tob's text that themselves contain variations. Although stylistic and literary criticism is more easily said than done, by exercising caution we are able to get a fair picture of the original Hebrew text of Matthew preserved by Shem-Tob. The final question we must ask is whether the Greek Matthew is a translation from the Hebrew. This does not appear to be the case. Although the Greek and the Hebrew are accounts of the same events, basically in the same order, careful analysis of their lexical and grammatical features—and their lack of correspondence—indicates the Greek is not a translation. All efforts to prove that the Greek Matthew is a translation (and that the other canonical Gospels are as well) have utterly failed to convince. Although the canonical Gospels reflect a Semitic background, they are nonetheless Greek compositions, not translations. It appears that both the Hebrew and the Greek Matthew represent compositions in their own original language. The two texts appear to be two editions in different languages of the same traditional material; neither is a translation of the other. The existence of two basically identical compositions in different languages is not a unique occurrence. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus tells us that his *Jewish War* was first written in Aramaic or Hebrew and then translated into Greek. An examination of the Greek text, however, reveals that Josephus did not actually translate the Semitic original in a literal sense but basically rewrote the whole account. The Aramaic/Hebrew apparently served only as a model for the Greek versions to follow. The same thing appears to have occurred with regard to the Gospel of Matthew. The similarities in arrangement and wording of the Hebrew and Greek texts of Matthew clearly suggest that one text served as a model for the other. Which came first, however, we do not know. But whether Greek or Hebrew, the second was written as an original composition, not as a translation.

Partial translated by Bodin Florin Ciprian - 2006 -