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This book is a revised and slightly extended version of Guido Baltes' dissertation (*summa cum laude*; supervised by Rainer Riesner), which was written while B. and his wife served as directors of the Hospice of St. John in the Old City of Jerusalem from 2003–2009. B. is also a research fellow of the *Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research* which generally advocates the study of the Semitic language back-ground of the gospels, most notably in the work of Robert Lindsey and David Flusser. This, then, sets the direction of the study, which assumes and reasons for the Hebrew background of the gospels with the implication that this sheds new light on the Synoptic Question. B. argues for a complex first century multilingual milieu in Israel, with the likelihood of Hebrew as the language of (esp. written) religious discourse. While he repeatedly asserts that it is not his intention to endorse a particular Synoptic model, he effectively advances the »tentative« proposition of a proto-Matthean Semitic *Urvorlage* (most likely in Hebrew) of which its Greek variant(s) became the *Vorlage* for all canonical Synoptics (he holds to Markan priority for the canonical Mt and Lk, but not for their respective proto-versions, see his stemma on p. 597). B.'s position is thus close to that of Hugo Grotius and Alfred Resch, though he also follows Lindsey, Flusser, and Malcome Lowe (to whom the book is dedicated).

The study begins by examining the dissatisfactory state of the Synoptic Question in light of the multilingual context (6–14) as a way to advance a new methodological approach, which the larger part of the study exemplarily showcases in four pericopes: Mt 3:1–6 parr; Mt 12:22–32 parr; Mt 18:21–35; Mt 26:17–20 parr. In the main part of the study these are retroverted into a hypothetical Hebrew proto-text in order to demonstrate the possibility that the Synoptic variations are the result of a common *Vorlage* (composed in Greek or Hebrew).

Before doing so, B. reviews the history and deficiencies of the thesis of an exclusively Aramaic language background as initially proposed by H. F. Pfannkuche and esp. upheld by Matthew Black, Joachim Jeremias, Klaus Beyer, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Maurice Casey (14–44), which is followed by a survey of those who have assumed a Hebrew source for the gospels, paying special attention to the works of Franz Delitzsch, A. Resch, Hubert Grimme, Harald Sahlin, and Jean Carmignac *et al.* (44–68). He then discusses multilingualism in general, seeking to bring current linguistic studies to bear on the New Testament, and criticizes how little this research has featured in textual studies of the

Synoptic Question (70–85). After pointing out that a significant number of documents of the period were written in Hebrew (Qumran, Bar Kochba; he dates the [Aramaic] Targumim later), and that almost all local coinage of the period had Hebrew inscriptions, B. surveys and tabulates all available contemporary epigraphy to provide hard data for his argument of trilingualism (95–110, esp. 102). He then considers lexical Hebraisms and Aramaisms in the New Testament (110–32, esp. 121) and concludes that both languages were equally in use in the first century (of special interest here is the argument that the occurrence of the suffix - α [and -θα] is not necessarily a sign of the translation of an Aramaic *status emphaticus*, see 118–20.127–30). A discussion of the term »Hebrew« (ἑβραϊστί/ἑβραϊδί) in the New Testament, Philo, and Josephus follows (133–44) in order to contend that the term correctly designates Hebrew, esp. focusing on Acts 21:40, 22:2, and 26:14 (though the argument reads too much into the text here: that Paul switches between three languages is a *possible* reading, but the argument rests entirely on the assumption that the Roman officer had a *conversation* with Paul in Acts 21:33 [in Aramaic] which is not explicit, cf. 134–35). He finishes this first chapter with a few observations on the historical Jesus' quests and their earlier anti-Jewish tendencies (e. g. seen in the criterion of »double dissimilarity«). In particular, the Third Quest's appreciation of the Jewishness of Jesus, he argues, should supply sufficient reason to reconsider the Hebrew language background of the (written) gospel sources afresh (151–65).

In the second chapter B. surveys once more the studies of those who have assumed a written Semitic source for the gospels, now paying special attention to the role of Hebrew and the understanding of the Jewish context on the development of particular Synoptic models. He shows that very often these models were affected by a stereotypical image of Judaism (esp. J. G. Eichhorn, C. G. Weiß, Bruno Bauer, and Julius Wellhausen). He also argues that more contemporary research falls short in that it has detached the study of the Synoptic Question from the study of the Jewish context of the gospels with only a few scholars venturing into both territories (B. takes cues here from Lindsey, Flusser, Lowe, and Casey).

Informed in such a way, B. develops his own methodology: His study »does not attempt to demonstrate the existence of Semitic sources with *absolute criteria*, but asks for the *relative proximity* of individual texts to the Hebrew language and Jewish thinking, in particular in a synoptic comparison« (222, trans., emphasis original). He chose pericopes from the double and triple tradition, from Matthew's *Sondergut* (which he suggests might be the proto-Matthean text itself), and the passion narrative — not only to demonstrate that they can be retroverted into Hebrew, but also that this exercise can explain some of the more intricate textual variants and thus corroborate their common Hebrew language background (in places B. also consults *Even Boħan*, but without noting that there is no consensus on George Howard's thesis that the Shem Tov's text-tradition is early; there are several scholars who consider this text a medieval translation, e. g. William Horbury, José-Vicente Nicolás, and Libby Garshowitz, cf. 228–29.321. 342–43.383.432.482).

The next four chapters present extensive and challenging (al-though at times quite technical) studies of the aforementioned pericopes (s. a.): the appearance of John the Baptist (236–345), the Beelzebub controversy (346–402), the parable of the official who refused to forgive (403–86), and the preparation for Jesus' last Passover (487–586). For each B. presents a plausible approximation of the Hebrew *Urvorlage*, and in the process of retroverting each pericope he discusses the related Synoptic issues, attempting to show that the various Synoptic variants can be best explained by assuming a hypothetical Hebrew source. In a second step he outlines the ramifications for Synoptic research, including a stemma for each passage (344.401.486.586), all effectively postulating a Hebrew *Urvorlage*. B. identifies this text as proto-Matthean, for he repeatedly finds that the first gospel appears to preserve the structure of this Synoptic *Urvorlage* best. By contrast, Luke often

retains the wording better, while Mark is mostly an abbreviated Greek redaction which often conflates both the (proto-canonical) Lukan and Matthean *Vorlage* (that is, in the pericopes he investigates). One wonders, however, how B. envisions dating, chronology, authorship of the different versions, the continuing role of oral sources/orality, and probable historical settings for this complex scenario. While he appears reluctant to develop his own Synoptic model, he nevertheless draws up five stemmata, which makes his »tentative« model in the end somewhat unconvincing as it is not accompanied by a historical reflection on the actual process and timing behind these redactional stages.

Also his methodology could be questioned: The retroversion into a plausible, hypothetical Hebrew text as a potential *Vorlage* behind the Synoptic gospels is, as he readily admits, frequently conjecture at best. That this text, which has been arrived at by selecting from the Synoptics those variants which are most similar to Semitic syntax, wording, and thinking (e. g. by deducing that genuine Grecisms are later, or part of subsequent redactions), turns out to look plausibly Semitic is, then, no great surprise. Yet, in B.' defense it must be said that he is aware of these methodological pitfalls and proceeds with great care and considerable erudition. Noteworthy are i. a. his discourse of the timing of Passover in light of the language background (493–518), the observation of »Markan conflation« (= Mk's sourcing of both Mt and Lk; see 520–23.531–34.537.578), and his discussion of the eight minor agreements between Mt 26: 17–20 and Lk 22:17–20 (576). His approach yields plausible and persuasive explanations, and therefore, esp. in light of a probable multilingual (Semitic) background, his study should not be dismissed from the outset.

The two major achievements of this study, then, are 1. the presentation of a significant case for multilingualism in first century Israel with a much more prominent role of Hebrew than most New Testament scholars allow for, and 2. the demonstration that a retroversion (in particular of Matthew) is possible and fruitful, potentially indicating a Semitic language background to the gospels in general and Matthew in particular. In this sense, this study is an important methodological experiment in Synoptic research which should not go unheeded by the larger field of Synoptic and Matthean scholarship.