I. Young, R. Rezetko, with the assistance of M. Ehrensvärd. *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts. An Introduction to Approaches and Problems*, 2 vols. London–Oakville: Equinox, 2009. xii, 361, x and 379 pages.

One of the by-products of the historical-critical approach to the Hebrew Bible as developed over the 17th–19th centuries was the appreciation of the fact that biblical Hebrew is not a single homogeneous language but shows—alongside differences in genre and dialectal variation—signs of diachronic development. Early in the modern era, a few fundamental benchmarks, such as the massive increase of Aramaic borrowings in texts from the exilic-postexilic period and the presence of Persian loanwords only in the latest texts of the canon, gained widespread acceptance. In 1815, Wilhelm Gesenius produced a synthesis of all that was known in his time, adding many observations of his own and setting the endeavor on a sure footing (*Geschichte der hebräischen Sprache und Schrift*. Leipzig: Vogel).

The historical perspective on the language of the Hebrew Bible was occasionally used, even very early on, in discussions on the dating of disputed books such as Ecclesiastes and Daniel: although Ecclesiastes was traditionally ascribed to Solomon, it clearly shared many linguistic features with books that were by common consent considered to be much later; and although the man Daniel is presented as a contemporary of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the language of the book places it closer to Ezra or Esther. In the nineteenth century, other controversial books or corpora, notably the priestly code (P), also attracted attention in this respect. But the study of the Hebrew language in diachronic perspective was never geared primarily towards the dating of texts. Scholars were content to observe that books widely considered to be of pre-exilic origin (such as the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets) exhibited a different form of Hebrew—estimated to be purer and more elegant—than did books of postexilic date such as Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles or Esther. When epigraphic texts from the monarchic period, such as the Siloam inscription, came to light, scholars felt vindicated in associating the "classical" Hebrew of the Pentateuch and Former Prophets with the pre-exilic period. But this was not considered a polemical or controversial inference.

In recent times, however, the general turmoil in biblical studies has affected the diachronic study of Hebrew as well. While several Hebraists

have argued that linguistic data continue to militate in favor of the pre-exilic/postexilic division along traditional historical-critical lines, a small but active group asserts that the diachronic study of Hebrew cannot be used as a control against the recent tendency in biblical studies to date more and more texts of the Hebrew Bible to the postexilic period. The monograph under review directly addresses this very specific, and rather recent, debate.

Volume one contains an introduction to the project of the book, a short overview of the history of research, and a series of methodological chapters in which methods used in earlier publications to date Hebrew texts are discussed and critiqued. Young and Rezetko contest the language-historical scheme elaborated since the eighteenth century: the distinction of two main phases of Hebrew in the biblical period, "classical" (CBH) and "late" BH (LBH); the relation of the phases to the pre- and postexilic periods respectively; the existence of a transitional period historically connected to the Babylonian exile. They also criticize the procedure which has been used to apply the historical scheme to the specific issue of dating. Scholars usually focus on features of LBH: a text that has such features in sufficient number is regarded as postexilic, while texts that do not exhibit them, or only a few, are regarded as earlier. The reason for considering only LBH features to be diagnostic in terms of dating is that texts written in CBH must have been known to LBH authors so that the presence of CBH features might be due to imitation, thus making their testimony inapt for determining a passage's date. Instead of distinct phases, however, Young and Rezetko see individual features of diversity that coexist: synonyms such as שש and בוץ both meaning "byssus, fine linen," morphological variations such as *Polel* or *Piel* formations from hollow roots, and variations in syntax. Such instances of variation, in their view, cannot and should not be related to distinct periods, because all of them can be found in texts from any period. The clustering of certain features in given texts or groups of texts are to be described in terms of author's choice. "CBH" and "LBH" represent respectively a conservative and a non-conservative style-form, each of which might freely be chosen by authors of any period.

A number of special issues are then discussed in detail: the importance of Hebrew inscriptions from the monarchic period; the possible existence of geographical dialects in the biblical period (notably, Northern versus Judaic Hebrew); the influence of Aramaic; the use of Mishnaic Hebrew, Qumran Hebrew and Ben Sira as terms of comparison; the

question of loanwords; the likelihood that a few old poems (Gen 49, Ex 15, Judg 5) reflect an archaic poetic dialect; and the possibility that different textual witnesses attest different stages in the history of text and language.

The second volume contains an extensive overview of dates attributed to different books and corpora of the Hebrew Bible in modern scholarship. This chapter illustrates the well-known fact that there is little consensus on the dating of biblical texts nowadays. A synthesis of the main argument is then presented, recapitulating many points of volume 1, followed by 50 pages of case studies, a list of linguistic features attributed to LBH in earlier research, a bibliography of 70 pages and several indexes.

The book rests upon an enormous amount of work. The authors have tried to develop a comprehensive approach, covering all the ins and outs and including a reference to practically all diachronic features that have been discussed over the years. Nevertheless, several weaknesses mar the book, and it is difficult to regard it as a landmark publication. The chief reservations of this reviewer relate to the authorial project and to the quality of the philological analysis.

In the introductory chapter, the book is presented as a kind of handbook: "Our objective in this book is to introduce the field of linguistic dating of biblical texts, particularly to intermediate and advanced students of BH (…) but also to scholars of the Hebrew Bible in general who have not been exposed to the full range of issues" (vol. 1, p. 2). It would perhaps have been better to devote the book to the history of Hebrew in the biblical period and to present the issue of dating as a specialized question, not a field of research. But the intention to introduce the matter in a comprehensive handbook is certainly laudable. At the same time, however, the authors never hide the fact that they are completely opposed to the linguistic dating of biblical texts as it has been practiced up to their time: "(…) in addition to over-viewing this field of research (…), this book is also a critique of scholarly assumptions and conclusions and an argument for a new approach to linguistic variety in BH" (vol. 1, p. 4). Predictably, the joint pursuit of these two intentions does not work well. The function of a handbook is to introduce students into a field where procedures—some of which may be complicated and opaque to the non-initiated—are hallowed by a long-standing consensus. Parts of the theory may be revised along the way—Emanuel Tov's handbook, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, springs to mind—but such innovations should emerge from the discourse in an organic way. Writing a handbook that at

the same time changes all the rules of the game is ill-advised. Although the stated intention of the authors is to give both sides of the debate, in practice their own approach is in every instance presented as superior to that of other scholars. It is difficult to be an evenhanded judge when one is at once a participant in the debate.

But the problem of the book's intention is even more deep-seated than has been suggested so far. For the project of Young and Rezetko is not merely to critique earlier approaches to the use of linguistics in dating biblical texts, but to obliterate them entirely. While criticism is an essential prerequisite for scientific progress, the wholesale dismissal of an entire body of knowledge is unhelpful. There is something disconcerting in Young and Rezetko's suggestion that all scholars, from Gesenius to Mats Eskhult, who worked on the development of Hebrew in the biblical period—except for some very few scholars of their own generation such as Philip Davies and Frederick Cryer—were completely wrong in all respects. It is true that scientific paradigms change, sometimes dramatically (Thomas Kuhn). But even in the case of such shifts, it is usually possible to understand why earlier scholars held to their erroneous ideas, why the earlier paradigm seemed cogent to them. In the presentation of Young and Rezetko, however, earlier scholars like Samuel Driver, Arno Kropat, Yehezkel Kutscher, Robert Polzin and Avi Hurvitz were simply mistaken. None of the case studies on which those scholars based their approach, none of the various and at times opposing avenues of argumentation they essayed, none of their ideas (insofar as they argue in favor of the principle that linguistic features can be used for dating) is acceptable to Young and Rezetko. It might be argued, perhaps, that from a minority position they conceived their book as a sort of *Streitschrift* designed merely to show up deficiencies in the regnant approach—the truth might lie somewhere in the middle. The least that can be said, however, is that this take-no-prisoners style sits uncomfortably with the idea of a handbook presenting "(t)he arguments of both sides of the recent debate" (vol. 1, p. 2).

Now of course, Young and Rezetko might choose any style they liked if what they wrote was true. But their demonstration can hardly be said to be cogent. The book is tainted with specious reasoning. So, for instance, the idea that the book of Ezekiel represents a transitional stage between CBH and LBH, and that this strengthens the case for the sixth century as the dividing line between the two, is dismissed on the basis of two observations (vol. 1, pp. 48–52): first, not all biblical scholars accept that the book of Ezekiel was written in the exilic period; second, other

books, too, have been identified as reflecting transitional Hebrew (e. g., Jeremiah, Second Isaiah, Lamentations). Now, the second objection is no objection at all, since the works named come from the same general period as Ezekiel. As to the first objection, the authors appear not to have envisaged the possibility that the book of Ezekiel might indeed be exilic in spite of scholarly dissent. The fact that someone at some time has argued against a position in scholarship does not necessarily put that position out of bounds forever. In fact, however, Young and Rezetko use this argument again and again: if a hypothesis has been disputed by anyone at any time, it is unfit to serve in scientific reasoning. Anyone who has worked in biblical studies, or more widely in historical studies, knows this is nonsense: there are no undisputed views that one can build on. A good scientific theory is one that integrates many data in such a way that a meaningful scenario emerges. Typically, such a scenario will itself incorporate earlier hypotheses—confirming, rehabilitating, or modifying them.

There is no doubt that Young and Rezetko are arguing in good faith. Nevertheless, their discourse at times dangerously borders on sophistry. Thus in the final "Synthesis of the Argument" (vol. 2., pp. 72–105), they argue that Aramaisms and Mishnaisms may no longer be used to date a text to the post-exilic period:

> … the theoretical background that allowed Aramaisms and Mishnaisms to be used as chronological markers in older scholarship no longer exists. Scholars of the Hebrew language have radically different understandings of the relevance of Aramaic, Aramaisms, MH and Mishnaisms for BH. However, these new ideas are apparently unappreciated by the majority of non-language scholars who continue to follow the old arguments as if nothing had changed (vol. 2, p. 73).

This looks very convincing: if specialists of Hebrew have abandoned "Aramaisms" and "Mishnaisms" as proofs of lateness, then surely non-speciaists should follow suit. But the picture is misleading. In fact the scholars clinging most strongly to the "old arguments" are linguists, not biblical scholars. In the following paragraphs, Avi Hurvitz is first presented as the champion of the new approach, doing away with Aramaisms and Mishnaisms as data in the discussion on the history of Hebrew, and then as one of the backsliders who still use Aramaic elements in dating Hebrew texts. Aware of the contradiction, Young and Rezetko argue they are using Hurvitz against Hurvitz because "the new paradigm is an outgrowth of Hurvitz's own principles" (vol. 2, p. 84). All of this is incor-

rect. Avi Hurvitz has taken full cognizance of Young and Rezetko's approach and has stated in no uncertain terms that he disagrees with it (see, e.g., A. Hurvitz. The Recent Debate on Late Biblical Hebrew: Solid Data, Experts' Opinions, and Inconclusive Arguments. *Hebrew Studies* 47 (2006):191–210). As to the substance of the argument: while it is true that the study of Aramaic influence on Hebrew, and the study of Mishnaic Hebrew, have made great strides, thus adding complexity to the debate, there is still a very wide consensus among Hebraists that the massive influx of new Aramaic words into written Hebrew did not set in before the exilic-postexilic period. It is simply wrong to say that "The presence of Aramaisms in a text (…) has no bearing on the date of that text" (vol. 2, p. 73). The question of Mishnaisms is different, but there too, the out-of-hand dismissal of the evidence is not in accord with the complexity of the issue, nor with the views of other Hebraists.

In the end, reading this book gives the impression that the authors are not so much interested in the truth as they are in refuting the regnant approach in all its forms. Thus they argue at once that CBH and LBH do not exist as distinct varieties of the language (since any Hebrew text exhibits both CBH and LBH features), and that CBH and LBH are not chronological phases but contemporary style forms (of more conservative and more innovative authors or scribes respectively). Anything as long as it contradicts the older consensus. In taking this position, the authors appear to be happy to do away with the entire idea that the Hebrew language developed over the biblical period. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the book contains almost no references to general linguistic studies on language evolution (such as the standard texts of Joseph, B. D.; Janda, R. D. (eds.). *Handbook of Historical Linguistics*. Oxford–Blackwell, 2003; Campbell, L. *Historical Linguistics*: *An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004[2]).

In addition to this weakness of strategy and rhetoric, the book shows unevenness in philological analysis. Rather than to critique this property in general I will illustrate it with characteristic examples.

– On pp. 72–74 of vol. 1, the syntax of 2 Chr 30:1, 5 occasions a discussion of the construction in which an infinitive construct, representing indirect speech, replaces direct speech. As has been argued most recently by Mats Eskhult, this construction is much more prominent in LBH than in CBH. Young and Rezetko object to this, among other things, that the construction is rather frequent in CBH as well, quoting 12 examples from the books of

Samuel and three from Kings (vol. 1, p. 74, notes 56–57). Now, some of these examples are debatable (to my mind, none is really analogous to the construction one finds in 2 Chr 30:1, 5). But several should never have been included in the discussion. In 2 Sam 24:21, the infinitive represents the (elliptic) direct speech of David: "(And Araunah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant?) And David said, 'To buy (*liqnot*) the threshing floor of thee …'" (KJV). The clause does not mean "David said that they should buy …" the way 2 Chr 30:1 means "Hezekiah wrote (…) that they should come …" A similar analysis applies to 1 Sam 10:14.

– On p. 104 of vol. 1, the syntax of 2 Sam 6:16 is analyzed as involving the "periphrastic use of היה + participle." As the accents indicate, however, this is not an instance of periphrasis. The verb *haya* and the following participle (or perfect) belong to distinct clauses. The translation is not "The ark of YHWH was coming into the city of David," but: "And it happened, while the ark of YHWH was entering the city of David" (cf. the Septuagint, καὶ ἐγένετο τῆς κιβωτοῦ παραγινομένης ἕως πόλεως Δαυιδ, "And it happened, as the ark was entering the city of David" [NETS], and see Driver, S. R. *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses*, § 165).
– On p. 114 of vol. 1, the LBH usage of קבל, *Piel*, 'to receive,' is said to be attested outside of the LBH corpus on the strength of the *Hiphil*, meaning 'to be opposite' or 'to correspond,' in Ex 26:5; 36:12. Since both the form and the meaning differ, this is a vacuous assertion.
– On pp. 303–304 of vol. 1 it is argued, apparently in all earnest, that the Hebrew text of Deut 33:2 contains the Persian loanword *dat*, 'law.' The text-critical problems of the verse are acknowledged: in the MT, the word is conjoined with the preceding one, and the Septuagint appears to have read something altogether different. However, since "(n)one of the proposed interpretations of the text that have been devised to avoid reading the Persian loanword here have commanded widespread assent," it is concluded that the presence of the word is "unequivocal." This is really taking things too far. Even without consideration of the etymology and putative date of the word *dat*, the reading is indefensible for text-critical and contextual reasons. Scholars may disagree on the original reading of the verse, but they do agree

that it contains a textual problem (see the note on Deut 33:2 in *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* for a far superior analysis).

– On p. 129 of vol. 2, Eccl 4:17 is cited as attesting the use of the infinitive absolute with imperative meaning in a postexilic book. The verse is difficult, however, and it would be better to give קרוב the force of a substantive: "To draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice offered by fools" (NRSV; cf. 1 Sam 15:22). The verse is not a secure basis for asserting the existence of the imperatival usage.

Inaccuracies like these do not inspire confidence in Young and Rezetko's ability to deal seriously with the linguistic data. Against those who have argued that the verbal system of LBH is systematically different and typologically later than that of CBH, their only defense is that "the BH verbal system is very difficult to classify" (vol. 2, p. 158) and that there is no consensus among scholars. The question of historical developments in the biblical Hebrew corpus is extremely complex. It cannot be settled merely by the repeated observation that there is no consensus among specialists on many points.

In the narrow field of Hebrew linguistics, Young and Rezetko would like to take us back to the time before the historical-critical approach. Hebrew is again the eternal language of creation. Or rather, it is a big omnitemporal soup from which authors and scribes might scoop up linguistic elements according to their taste and inclination. No correlation exists between linguistic diversity and the varying historical backgrounds of the writings attesting it. The approach corresponds perhaps to the winds of post-modernity that are blowing in the academic world. But it is not progress.

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