Text, Canon and Qumran

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THREE studies of special significance to Old Testament scholarship have appeared in recent years. The first was the publication of the third edition of **Biblia Hebraica** in 1937, with its introductory study by Paul Kahle.[1]

Second, was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the subsequent discussions, which began with the initial discovery in 1946 or 1947[2] and now involve not only the Qumran Caves material but significant material from Wadi Murabba'at[3] and Khirbet Mird.[4]

Third, was the study made by Bleddyn J. Roberts of University College of North Wales and published by him under the title: **The Old Testament Text and Version,** in 1951.[5]

The relationship of these studies to each other and the significance of their combined findings form the basis of this particular paper. We turn first to a brief review of the events which led to the compilation of the Third Edition of **Biblia Hebraica.**

In an excellent summary of positions held in the 19th and 20th centuries, Roberts says:[6]

"Until the end of the nineteenth century, it was generally thought that the text of the Hebrew Bible had become fixed and standardized during the early Christian era. Indeed, one of the most eminent textual authorities of that century, Paul de Lagarde, stated categorically that about A. D. 130 the Hebrew text of the Old Testament was established, and a **Mustercodex,** an archetpye edition, produced which became the basis of every Hebrew manuscript of the Bible since that time."

He goes on to state that this position was universally accepted and is still held in many quarters. Many others held a contrary position, including the late Professor J. M. Powis Smith who stated, "It has long been held that the Massoretic text of the Hebrew Bible was fixed at a relatively early date and handed down faithfully from that time until now. But the work of Dr. Paul Kahle has brought out clearly that there no such uniformity of text as has been supposed until a very much later period."[7] In a book review "Studies of the Massoretes"[8] Smith agrees fully with the findings of Kahle that before the text of ben Chayyim in the second Rabbinic Bible of 1524-5, there was no accepted standardized Massoretic

[1] *Biblia Hebraica, edited by Rud. Kittel* (portions of which appeared as early as 1929).

[2] G. Lancaster Harding: *Qumran Cave I, Discoveries in the Judean Desert,* Barthelemy, Milik, et al., (Oxford, 1955); G. Ernest Wright: "A Phenomenal Discovery," *Biblical Archaeologist,* 11 (1948), 11.21-23.

[3] Harding: "Khirbet Qumran and Wady Muraba'at," *P. E. Q.* 84 (1952), pp. 104-109.

[4] See Milik: "Un inscription et une lettre en arameen christo - Palestrien," *Revue Biblique* 60 (1953), pp. 526-539.

[5] B. J. Roberts: *The Old Testament Text and Versions,* University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1951. See also Moshe Greeberg: "The Stabilization of the Text of the Hebrew Bible, *"J. A. O. S.* Vol. 76 (July, 1956) pp. 157-167, and the N. H. Snaith edition of the *Old Testament in Hebrew,* published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1958, displacing the Society's Letteris edition of 1866.

[6] Roberts: *O. T. Text,* p. 23.

[7] J. M. P. Smith: "The Recent History of Old Testament Interpretation," *Journal of Religion,* VI (July, 1926) 403-424.

[8] J. M. P. Smith: "Studies of the Masoretes." a review of Kahle: *Masoreten des Westens* in *A. J. S. L.* vol. 44 (April 1928) pp. 208-9 (Note-Roberts incorrectly refers to this review as appearing in *J. A. O. S.*

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text, and that the condition of the text was previously fluid.

Rudolf Kittel, in his foreword to the Third Edition of **Biblia Hebraica,** written shortly before his death, says, "So then in this edition, in place of the text of ben Chayyim or any other Massoretic text resting on manuscripts of the thirteenth or fourteenth century A. D., there is offered for the first time the text of ben Asher, several hundred years older, in the form in which MS. L[9] gives it. At the same time arrangements are being made for utilizing for this edition the two other standard MSS known to belong to the the family of ben Asher: that in Aleppo, and the MS. of the Prophets in the synagogue of the Karaites in Cairo.[10]

With the death of Kittel, the editorial work was assigned to Alt and Eissfeldt. Alt was responsible for the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets; Eissfeldt the Later Prophets and the Hagiographa. A 7th Edition was published in 1951 for the American Bible Society with no appreciable changes except to have introductory paragraphs in English as well as in German and Latin.

Kahle had made an agreement with Kittel to prepare the ben Asher text with the condition that the text should be published with the ben Asher Massora, which differed from the Massora of ben Naphtali. In his Schweich Lectures,[11] Kahle states "the basis of the text was the Leningrad MS. B19a, dated 1008." After listing several other manuscripts of importance to his work he states, "So I had for nearly every part of the Bible two ben Asher MSS. at my disposal, and with their help I tried to publish the text of the Hebrew Bible as fixed by Ahrin b Asher in his later period, with the Massoretic notes added very accurately on the margins of the Ben Asher Ms."[12]

[9] Kittel refers to MS. L by which he means Leningrad MS. B19a.

[10] Kittel: *Biblia Hebracia,* 7th edit. 1951, Leipzig, p. XVII.

[11] Paul Kahle: *The Cairo Genizah* — The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1941, London, Oxford University Press, 1947.

[12] *Ibid.,* p. 74.

However, he does not indicate that he used the Aleppo manuscript referred to by Kittel.

The manuscript referred to by Kittel as L, and by Kahle as B 19a, is from the collection made by Firkowitsch, a Karaite Jew, born in 1785, in the village of Lutsk, Volhynia, southwest Russia. He is described as "a fanatical Qaraite, and also an expert forger."[13] For this reason the Firkowitsch collection has been suspect and with good reason. As Kahle points out in his Schweich Lectures on **The Cairo Geniza,** "This Karaite Jew from the Crimean Peninsula is somewhat ill famed on account of the falsifications he made on dates of gravestones and on Hebrew manuscripts in order to show that the Karaites had been settled in the Crimea for a much longer time than was previously accepted, and had had a greater importance than was usually conceded to them. But Firkowitsch has the credit of bringing together the largest collection of Hebrew manuscripts which exists in the world. The manuscripts form the two Firkowitsch Collections in the Russian Public Library at Leningrad; the first was sold to the library by Firkowitsch himself, the second was acquired by the library in 1876 soon after his death in Tshofotkale on 26 May 1874."[14]

Kahle then calls attention to two interesting comparisons. First he notes that the entire number of Hebrew manuscripts described in the Catalogue of the British Museum total one hundred sixty one. In the Bodleian Catalogue there are listed 146 Hebrew Biblical manuscripts, counting both those written on parchment and on paper. By contrast the second Firkowitsch Collection holds 1,582 written on parchment and 725 on paper.[15] Second, he notes that Kennicott, in his great **Vetus Testamentum Hebraice cum variis lectionibus,** (1777-1780), sought to use all available Hebrew manuscripts in

[13] *Ibid.,* p. 74.

[14] *Ibid.,* pp. 2-3.

[15] *Ibid.,* p. 3; note also his footnote 2 in which there is reference to more than six thousand Hebrew and Arabic MSS.

Europe and "was not able to collate even as many as one-third of the number of MSS. which are today to be found in this one collection."[16]

Roberts also makes note of the fact that in the earlier editions of **Biblia Hebraica** there were more than three thousands suggested emendations, whereas the Third Edition contains "upward of 17,000 variant forms, and 15,600 emendations."[17] It should be observed that in the present edition the apparatus criticus has been divided into two sections: variants, and emendations.

For the moment we would simply note that there is now available a text different from that used as the basis of most current translations, and that the critical apparatus is much more extensive than has previously been provided. Whether or not Bible scholars will finally approve this change remains to be seen but in the meantime the text has been readily available.

Since the first discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls were announced there have been spectacular additions to the materials now available for study and evaluation. Hundreds of books, monographs, and articles have appeared, and are readily available to biblical scholars. Excellent bibliographies are given in the two volumes by Professor Millar Burrows,[18] and in Christoph Burchard: **Bibliographie zu den Handschriften vom Toten Meer.**[19] This last bibliography is particularly useful in listing, by key in a special summary, the articles pertaining to the individual Dead Sea Documents.

Abbe J. T. Milik has recognized many values to Biblical scholarship in the discovery of the scrolls, including: linguistic, paleographic, historical and onomastic, legal and textual.[20] Significantly he states that this new body of material includes documents or parts of documents covering nearly two thousand years of history. The earliest is a palimpsest on papyrus, the underwriting of which can probably be dated as early as the eighth century B. C. (though he confesses that the underwriting has not yet been fully deciphered). The latest material so far identified consists of fragments in Arabic on cotton paper, from the 10th century A. D., and comes from Khirbet Mird.[21] Whether or not the extreme range of dates suggested by Milik are sustained, the fact remains that we have a rich collection of material which on the one hand can give significant comparative material for studies in paleography, and on the other provides us with information concerning changes in the Hebrew language, particularly orthography and grammar. For the Bible scholar is the still further value that every book in the Old Testament is now represented in whole or in part,[22] as are some books of the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and some probable sources of such books.

An interesting example in the study of text development is the article by Marc Philonenko: "Les interpolations chretiennes des Testament des douz patriarches et les Manuscrits de Qoumran" (1959).[23] The title clearly describes the direction of the author's thinking.

It is unfortunate that the full implications of the Dead Sea Scrolls for textual studies have not been made clear either to teachers of Bible or to the general public. Instead the impression has been left that these discoveries have nothing in them which will change any

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[17] Roberts: *op. cit.* p. XV.
[18] Burrows: *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, Viking, New York, 1955; *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Viking, New York, 1958.
[19] Beihefts Z. *A. W.* 76, Topelman, Berlin, 1957.
[20] J. T. Milik: *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judea*, (translated from the French by J. Strugnell), Allenson, Naperville, 1959.
[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.
[22] An oral report from Dr. Frank M. Cross, Jr., now includes the book of Esther.
[23] Reprinted as a monograph from *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* (1959).by Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1960.

basic dogma in Christianity or Judaism. This is by no means true. Both in the synagogue and the church are large groups of sincere believers who still cling to the belief in the literal inspiration of the Bible. Some Jews accept without question the ancient tradition that a fully pointed text was delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai, and that the rabbis and Massoretes have faithfully guarded and transmitted a perfect text across the centuries. In Christianity there are large groups and countless individuals who accept not only the "verbal inspiration of the Bible," but who believe also that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the "word" has been faithfully transmitted to our own day without change, though it should be noted that there has been a noticeable shift in this last position in recent years.

The fact is that not only did the principles of sound scholarship contribute richly to the decipherment, interpretation and preservation of the Dead Sea Scrolls, but much of the work of the textual critic of the Bible has been sustained. Perhaps the most startling demonstration of the validity of methods of textual analysis and interpretation on the basis of internal evidence is found in a comparison of Schechter's conclusions given in his Schweich Lectures in 1910,[24] and the recent discoveries in the Covenant Community at Qumran.

Dr. Burrows has said, "There are those who believe or assume that the Greek and Hebrew texts from which our translations are made are infallible. No person who has studied textual criticism at all could believe that."[25] Dr. Burrows, however, is entirely too optimistic in his apparent conclusion that there are relatively few who have not been converted to the results of modern Biblical scholarship. And we as scholars need to be much more vocal to the general public otherwise we leave the men we train to pastors, priests, and rabbis with meagre intellectual support.

One other observation should be made concerning the Qumran documents and the community from which they came. There is every indication that the community was founded and maintained by those who sought to know the truth of Torah. It is inconceivable that the members of such a community would either carelessly copy Holy Writ or introduce non-authentic variants into biblical books. That they may have had variant traditions is altogether possible, but as variants are discovered we shall need to check carefully to see if dependable tradition is reflected.

The work of Bleddyn J. Roberts needs to be looked at again just briefly. He supports the contention of Kahle that a new edition of **Biblia Hebraica** should be based upon more ancient and dependable texts than those formerly used. It was unfortunate that his book could not take full advantage of the rich study material from the Judean Wilderness. It is more unfortunate that, having his manuscript ready for publication, he hastily prefixed a first chapter evaluating the first scrolls, chiefly Isaiah (IQIsaa). In the rest of the volume there is careful and adequately documented data.

In his introduction he states that "one of the major reasons for embarking on the present study is the fact that there are passages in the Hebrew Bible which are textually corrupt, and that there are variants and emended forms of the text which have always been recognized."[26] He believes also that textual study should not be confined to lower criticism but should also be concerned with the history of the transmission of the text. In this judgment I would fully concur.

Roberts' earlier studies had led him to conclude that "there was a standardization of the text, perhaps before the time of our Lord, but more likely after the fall of Jerusalem, and under the guidance of

[24] S. Schechter: *Fragments of a Zadokite Work,* Cambridge, 1910.

[25] Burrows: *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls,* 1958, p. 75.

[26] Roberts: *op. cit.,* p. XIV.

Rabbi Aquiba. But this text had numerous divergent readings and varying forms of orthography, morphology, and, later, vocalization, and the story of the Massoretic text is one of tracing the history of these variant forms, and identifying the various stages until the final emergence of the standard archetype text of the ben Asher Massoretes, which received official status by the decree of Mainonides in the 12th century A. D."[27] It was to this task of tracing development that he addressed himself.

In the succeeding sections of the book he deals similarly with the versions and translations. A 28 page bibliography makes the volume doubly useful. The particular importance of the volume for the purposes of this study is the additional information it gives concerning the scholarly work of Paul Kahle and the manuscripts used in the preparation of the text and apparatus critica of **Biblia Hebraica**, Third Edition.

It is apparent that there are now new and rich resources for the textual critic and it is to be hoped that far greater emphasis will be given to this particular discipline in the years immediately ahead. A quick check of recent summaries of biblical studies in the twentieth century reveal that little work has been done in this area. Emphasis is, however, changing, as is indicated by the work of The American Textual Criticism Seminar, associated with the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis. Parallel interest is developing also through the National Association of Professors of Hebrew.

Whether we follow the path suggested by Kahle, Roberts, Alt, Kittel, Eissfeldt, and others will be determined after much study and research, but in the meantime the tools are at hand for more careful work in the field of textual criticism. Source materials are also at hand for a reconstruction of the history of the Biblical text, and eventually for the construction of a received text upon which sound translation may be based.

Establishment of text has been primarily the work of scholars. Canonization, however, of necessity is a matter of primary concern to religious groups. The scholar must be interested in the history of canon because of its relationship to the problem of text, but establishment of canon is the function of ecclesiastics.

There were three major steps in the process of canonization. First, there was acceptance of religious writings by common consent of the religious group. In a very real way there was canonization by the people. Later, as varying positions came into conflict, official canonization by an authorized body became necessary. But one need only review the history of canonization to recall the rationalizations by which the council justified accepting books already approved by the people, for example, Ezekiel, Song of Songs, etc. There were, of course, cases of unresolved conflict.

Acceptance into the canon put its approval upon the book or collection of books, but this does not mean, necessarily, that the text of the book or collection was immediately fixed and unchangeable. There are indications that the state of the text was fluid for some time. It was quite logical, that having approved a book, efforts should begin immediately to stabilize the text of that book. How long that process took is one other problem that remains unsolved and upon which some light may be given from the materials now available to us.

We need also to raise question concerning the extent of the authority of the Council of Jamnia in establishing the body of material we now call the Old Testament. After the destruction of Jerusalem the Sanhedrin assembled in Jamnia (Jebna). Presumably it replaced the authority formerly centered in Jerusalem. It has been assumed that the Council of Jamnia spoke for the whole of Palestinian Judaism, and that the canon accepted

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
task of tracing development that he ad-

at Alexandria was unacceptable anywhere in Palestine. Yet the content of the Qumran caves suggests that at least one group read outside of what was later to be the approved body of literature. The Qumran community was destroyed twenty years or more before the findings of the Council of Jamnia, and it is possible to assume that the Council by its action curtailed the number of officially recognized books. We must also beware lest we assume that anything found in the library of a religious group, no matter how devout, be said to have been canonized. Nevertheless, where writings are used to defend the teachings and practices of a group, and particularly where writings are quoted to support the hopes and expectations, messianic or apocalyptic, such writing is considered to be authoritative and is in the first step of canonization for that particular group. Closer examination of the "proof-texts" of the Qumran community should give us pertinent information on the history of canonization in Palestine.

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