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Edited by G. W. H. Lampe

Excerpt

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## CHAPTER I

THE OLD TESTAMENT:  
MANUSCRIPTS, TEXT AND  
VERSIONS

The Old Testament textualist is today more concerned with the story of the textual transmission up to the middle ages than ever before. It is from its manuscripts that he derives both the text itself and the variants for his *apparatus criticus*, and his interpretation of the medieval transmission controls, to a large extent, his choice of readings. Consequently, the relevance of the present survey of the medieval transmission lies not so much in providing information about textual activities but in an appraisal of their use in the contemporary textual situation. The topic as a whole falls into two fairly exclusive sections, namely the Hebrew (Massoretic) text, and the Versions.

## THE HEBREW (MASSORETIC) TEXT

The traditional view of the Hebrew transmission was that the textual minutiae of the Law as the most significant part of the Scriptures were fixed for all time under the influence of Rabbi Aqiba (c. A.D. 55–137), and the standardization of the remainder followed soon afterwards, to produce the official Massoretic text. From that time onward all manuscripts were scrupulously transcribed according to the archetype, and scrutinized by official scribes, so that a correct transmission was assured. Rabbinic evidence, it was said, supported this reconstruction.

On four occasions in rabbinic writings we are told, with a few variations, that three scrolls of the Law, with minor textual divergences, were deposited in the Temple court, and in each case of divergence it was ruled that the majority reading was authoritative. The fact that the legend is set in the Temple area shows that discussion about text standardization goes back at least to the time before A.D. 70, the date of the sack of Jerusalem. Again, it is stated that Rabbi Aqiba studied each instance of the use of the grammatical particles and based his exegesis on

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their usage, and this, it is argued, must surely represent a definitive phase in the standardization. The fact that the comment is derived from the Babylonian Talmud (*Shebu'oth 26 a*), a standard rabbinic work redacted in the sixth century, shows that the rabbinic tradition was soundly based.

During the past hundred years, however, and especially because of the work of Paul Kahle in the present century, the tradition has been challenged, and counter-challenged. At present, experts who can rightly claim outstanding authority are not only contradictory but often mutually exclusive in their testimony. The present survey cannot pretend to offer a verdict on either side, but rather, by means of introducing an independent perspective, seeks to tell the story as a whole with a reasonable sense of proportion.

The discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls provides a suitable starting-point, because they provide actual specimen texts from the time before Aqiba's 'standardized' text-form. But the fact that there are two distinct groups of 'Dead Sea' biblical texts is highly important. On the one hand we have the texts from Qumran, which are sectarian and probably from the pre-Christian and early Christian era, and, on the other, we have the texts from Murabba'at and Masada, which represent the orthodox rabbinic transmission from the second century A.D.

The latter are less well known to the average reader, but for the present survey they demand pride of place. It is beyond dispute that they form part of the literary remains of the Jewish army in the bar Cochba revolt in A.D. 132–5, the last vain attempt to oppose Roman domination. Not all the texts are available for general scrutiny, but it is reported that they contain fragments from the three sections of rabbinic scriptures, the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, and are identical with the text which became recognized as standard. Rabbi Aqiba, whose name figures so prominently in the so-called standardization, was directly involved in the revolt, and consequently it is reasonable to assume that the standardized text was available before his time. The relevance of the conclusion, however, will be discussed when the question of standardization must once again be raised.

The Qumran biblical manuscripts do not represent the orthodox transmission, and consequently it is only by implication that they relate to the Massoretic text. They belong to a dissident sect, whose independence of orthodoxy was fundamental and is to be observed in such important issues as the religious calendar, the priestly hierarchy, apo-

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calyptic teaching and the interpretation of Scripture—all matters on which orthodox Judaism of those times held rigid views. It lies to hand to suggest that in its transmission of Scripture the sect of the scrolls was no less non-conformist, and consequently it is at least precarious to use the Qumran scrolls indiscriminately to demonstrate the early history of rabbinic textual transmission.

In actual fact, the Qumran biblical scrolls, mainly from caves one, four and eleven, range from near-identity with the Massoretic text to a text-form which closely approximates to the parent text of the oldest of the Versions, the Greek Septuagint, with instances, too, of variations between the two. That is, there is a considerable variety of text-forms, with far-reaching divergences; it does not appear that the sect subscribed to any one traditional or established text-form of the Hebrew Old Testament.

But among the variety the one text-form which is predominant has strong affinities and probable identity with the rabbinic text. One of the Isaiah manuscripts from cave one is particularly relevant, namely *1 QIsb*. It belongs to the first century A.D. and, though it is badly worn and consequently has lost a substantial amount of text, it is generally regarded as practically identical in both text and orthography with the current text. Indeed, so similar are they and so insignificant are the divergences that the scroll has hardly been given the notice it deserves from scholars. But from the text-historian's point of view it is just these features that make it one of the most significant of the Qumran scrolls. Its comparatively late date places it in a period when any tendency by the sect to accept an orthodox text-form can be discounted. By the same token, it is very unlikely that orthodox Judaism at that time would have chosen as archetype for its own text-form a text out of those transmitted by the Qumran sect. The obvious conclusion is that its existence among the scrolls points to its existence also in orthodox circles long before the time of Aqiba, and it could be as early as the beginnings of the Qumran sect itself.

Another Isaiah text from cave one indirectly supports this view, namely *1 QIsa*. Compared with the accepted text, the divergent readings in this scroll are numerous and more far-reaching than in *1 QIsb*. In the main, however, they fall into clearly defined categories of grammar, orthography and normal textual corruption, scribal errors and the replacement of difficult readings by simple ones; only rarely do they

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point to recensional divergences in the sense presupposed, for instance, by some of the Samuel texts from cave four. That is, *1QIsa* again postulates the existence, at a time earlier than its own date, of a text which agrees essentially with the Massoretic text. Thus the cumulative evidence of Qumran, albeit by implication, points to the existence in the period before Christ of a text which approximates as nearly as is possible to the Massoretic text.

Finally, it may be noted that other fragments of biblical texts from caves one and four, and the lengthy scroll of Psalms from cave eleven, agree to such an extent with the Massoretic text that what was said above about *1QIsb* may well apply to the whole of the Old Testament.

We cannot discover how orthodox Judaism functioned in the period before Christ, but it is unlikely that the authorities countenanced such a wide freedom of textual transmission as that which obtained in Qumran. Josephus, in *Contra Apionem* i. 8, from the second century A.D., says that one mark of the sacred writings of the Jews is their textual inviolability, and it is consistent with what we know of Judaism, with its particularism and its strict hierarchical control, that it transmitted one text-form, whereas the sects were accustomed to the transmission of popular variant versions.

Historical data from rabbinic writings suggest how the rabbis proceeded with the task of transmitting the text. After the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 the Pharisees, relieved of preoccupation with the Temple-bound Sadducees, turned their wrath on the apocalyptic sectarians such as the Zealots, the Essenes and the Christians, persecuted them and expelled them from the Synagogue. Constructively, they established under Johanan ben Zakkai of the first generation of Tannaite teachers (c. A.D. 10–80) a centre of study and piety at Jamnia (Jabne-el of biblical times) on the coastal plain, and this became the prototype of similar academies throughout Palestine. It is often assumed that final questions connected with the canonicity of some of the books of Scripture were settled at the Synod of Jamnia, but it is still an open question whether the interpretation is correct. It is still more difficult to decide whether or not steps were taken to establish the definitive text of the Old Testament. What Jamnia does show is that henceforth orthodox Judaism was to be rigidly controlled by the rabbis, who, in turn, were themselves bound to the Massorah, i.e. the tradition. There was freedom within the Massorah to debate and to decide, as is abun-

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dantly shown by references within the complex of rabbinic writings down to the middle ages, and controversy waxed strong, but it was always ordered and controlled and never again was orthodoxy to be torn asunder by schism or secession.

The existence of the Massorah can be traced back as far as any rabbinic activity; its usage in the Mishna, the earliest codification of rabbinic teaching, produced in the second century A.D., shows that it had always functioned in the disputations. 'The Massorah is a fence to the Law', said Rabbi Aqiba, who, though he belonged to the third generation of teachers, was primarily concerned with the maintaining of the Massorah, the tradition which he had received. The academy to which he belonged was at Bne Baraq (to the east of Joppa), although he had also attended those of Lydda and Jamnia. Obviously Massoretic studies in this period were pursued at a number of centres and under the guidance of a variety of families of rabbis in Palestine, and their *dicta* were treasured and transmitted, to a large extent orally, until the final redaction of the Mishna in the second century, and later in the Talmuds of Palestine and Babylonia, and in other rabbinic works down to the middle ages. And it is in this sense that biblical scholars always refer to the Hebrew Old Testament as the Massoretic text.

Rabbinic studies flourished also in Babylonia, for from the second century and later there is evidence of centres at Nehardea and at Sura. The former was destroyed in 259 and was replaced by the academy at Pum Bedita. Verdicts of the rabbis in these centres, too, were included in the collections referred to. It is from these sources that data are recoverable for the historical reconstruction of the textual transmission, and it is significant that they contain no hint of any divergent recension of the text, but rather assume that every care and attention was devoted to the transmission of the accepted, 'correct' form. The Babylonian Talmud, *Kethuboth* 106a, from the sixth century included among the officers who had been paid by the Temple authorities the 'book readers', men who corrected biblical manuscripts, and it is apparent that the office persisted into later Talmudic times.

This account, however, is oversimplified, as we have been forcibly reminded in a recent survey (1966) by H. M. Orlinsky of the Hebrew Union College, New York. Most of the material he uses as evidence was previously known, but his conclusions are new and quite sensational. He summarily denies that the Massoretic text as such ever

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actually existed, or can ever be constructed; divergences within the transmitted texts, as witnessed by rabbinic discussions and also by collations in subsequent biblical editions, demonstrate traditional and legitimate divergences. For Orlinsky, then, all that can be claimed for any given edition is that it represents *a* Massoretic text, and not *the* Massoretic text. This is hardly the right occasion to enter into the controversy: what may be stressed, however, is that the key-word is still Massoretic—whether it be *a* or *the* Massoretic text.

In a general sense, then, it is correct to think of the transmission as the work of the scribes, including, possibly from the time of Ezra, an expertise in matters of interpretation. At the same time, the title *sopher*, ‘scribe’, is both traditionally and etymologically attached to the official copyists. A ninth-century rabbinic work, *Massekheh Sopherim*, contains the traditions of scribal instructions and data; and numerous Talmudic references connect with the word *sopher* the work of counting. Thus, the scribes reckoned every letter of the Torah, established that the middle consonant in the Torah was in Lev. xi. 42, the middle word in Lev. x. 16, the middle verse Lev. xiii. 33. The middle of the Psalter was Ps. 78: 38.

These and other products of scribal activity came to be inserted in the margins of manuscripts, at the top and bottom of columns, and at the end of individual books. Much later they were assembled in separate collections, of which a few have survived. Particular interest attaches to three or four which, in part at least, are still extant. They include the above-mentioned *Massekheh Sopherim*, *Diqduqe Ha-te'amim* attributed to Aaron ben Asher in the tenth century, and *Ochla we-Ochla* which was edited from manuscripts and published by Frensdorff in 1864; but the most convenient for current usage, despite some serious basic misconceptions, is the collection made by C. D. Ginsburg, and published in four volumes, *The Massorah*, 1880–1905. Appropriately, the scribal notes contained in these collections are collectively called *Massorah* or *Massoreth*—‘the body of tradition’—and the persons responsible for its transmission *ba'ale ha-massoreth*, ‘the masters of the tradition’. The notes include such items as irregularly shaped letters and unusual features of grammar, and draw attention to textual interference by the scribes in matters of exegesis, especially where the traditional, consonantal text was still retained. But it must be stressed that they are not uniform, nor do they always agree with the texts they accompany.

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An outline of such Massoretic annotations obviously needs to be illustrated from actual texts, but the following will serve to indicate the kind of material included in them: *Tiqqune Sopherim*—scribal emendations—which often avoid anthropomorphism in the original text; *'Itture Sopherim*—scribal omissions; *Qre* and *Kethib*—divergences between what was recited and the written consonantal text (although most of these first became obvious only after the introduction of vocalization). There are also scribal marks which denote that the text was corrupt or wrong, and such passages were designated (in the Babylonian Massorah) *Demish*. Lists of such marks—actually dots, *puncta extraordinaria*—have been transmitted and their existence is postulated even as early as the Mishna.

Other scribal peculiarities, such as the suspended consonants *nun* in Judges xviii. 30, and *ayin* in Ps. 80: 14, and a number of enlarged and diminished consonants, have only incidental significance and denote the initial or the middle consonant of a book. Some interest may attach to the presence in some manuscripts of an enlarged initial consonant for Isa. xl. 1.

The survival of the two main traditions of Massoretic activity in Babylon and Palestine is seen in the two divergent Massoroth, those of *Madinhae* (eastern) and *Ma'arbae* (western) respectively. Failure to recognize the distinction between them resulted in the erroneous view, prevalent until the work of Paul Kahle in the present century, that the Massorah of the text was uniform because it reflected a basic uniformity in the text transmission. Nowhere is the divergence more obvious or more relevant than in the systems of vocalization which were superimposed on the consonantal text and which were developed both in Palestine and Babylon between the late fifth century and the ninth century A.D. In Babylon sporadic use of vocalic consonants and dots was made to assist and to formalize the correct recitation of the hitherto unvocalized, consonantal text in synagogue worship. In the eighth century, probably under the influence of the Qaraites, a non-rabbinic Jewish sect, refinements were introduced into the vocalization which ultimately produced the complicated scheme of supralineal pointing which still survives in the so-called Babylonian vocalization. During the same period, and under the same impetus, a parallel process was applied to the texts transmitted in Palestine. A primitive Palestinian supralineal vocalization was in due course replaced by the Tiberian

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pointing which is the one normally used today for the Hebrew Bible. The supremacy of the Tiberian system over the Babylonian is to be explained mainly by the disappearance of Babylon from Jewish history as a result of the Islamic conquest of Mesopotamia, though it is to be noted in passing that Babylonian influence, inspired by the Qaraite movement and perpetuated by outstanding personalities such as Saadya Gaon and the academies at Pumbedita and Sura, played an important part in the subsequent history of European Judaism.

The earlier, primitive phases of the vocalization in both transmissions are almost wholly unknown, except for incidental and until recently incomprehensible references in late rabbinic works, but actual examples were discovered in fragments of biblical texts from the Cairo Genizah, an ante-chamber in the synagogue in which discarded manuscripts were deposited. The account of their significance forms an important part of Kahle's Schweich Lectures (published as *The Cairo Geniza*, 1947, and its second edition, 1959). Subsequent scrutiny of important fragments of these texts has been published in the *Annual of the Hebrew University, Textus*.

The Genizah fragments—over 200,000 in all—were removed from the Cairo synagogue, where they had been assembled in the ninth and tenth centuries A.D., and deposited in the main in libraries in Leningrad, and in England, notably at the Cambridge University Library, the Bodleian at Oxford, the British Museum and the John Rylands Library, Manchester (which acquired what previously formed the Gaster Collection), and in the U.S.A. They range from about the sixth century to the tenth and relate to all aspects of synagogue worship and pedagogy, and include biblical texts (many of them vocalized), Mishna, Talmuds, Targums, liturgies, hymns and prayers, and even private papers. Recent discoveries among the Genizah fragments contain texts with both Babylonian and Tiberian vocalizations, and form a valuable addition to other fragments by which it is now possible, albeit tentatively, to reconstruct the framework for the whole history of vocalization. They also include fragments where the words are only partly written and vocalized, the so-called 'abbreviated system'; and whereas specimens of Palestinian and Tiberian pointings had been available since early in this century, a recent fragment with Babylonian abbreviated texts has thrown further light on this interesting phase. Moreover both this and another fragment from the Rylands collection contain both



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Babylonian and Tiberian vocalizations. From the standpoint of textual transmission, it might be argued that the main body of the fragments generally supports the traditional view that the text had long been fixed. But the exception of one very significant feature, namely the transmission of the divine name, indicates that such a generalization is misleading. It is remarkable how frequently the manuscripts show divergences not only in the change from Yahweh to Adonai and conversely, but also of interchange between Elohim and Yahweh. That there were ancient divergent transmissions of the divine name is shown by the Elohistic and Yahwistic redactions in collections of Psalms, but it is remarkable that a similar divergence was allowed to persist long after the text was apparently established in other respects, and this underlines the need to scrutinize other, less obvious, inconsistencies.

The adoption of one scheme of vocalization from the rather chaotic multiplicity of Simple and Complex Babylonian, and the Palestinian and Tiberian, and various modified forms within each group—for they were not in any way homogeneous—was not the end of a phase in the struggle for supremacy, for controversy still persisted. There were disputes between two contemporary families of Tiberian Massoretes, ben Asher and ben Naphtali. The former flourished in the ninth and tenth centuries, presumably also the latter, though so apparently complete was the ultimate supremacy of ben Asher that most of the traces of the history of the ben Naphtali tradition have been expunged, and the main evidence of its existence lies in Massoretic lists of variations between the two transmissions. In their present form, the lists indicate that the conflict dealt mainly with minutiae of vocalization and especially accentuation, but underlying these apparently innocuous variants are issues of more far-reaching significance. What might appear to be the concern of the Massoretes simply for the ‘correct’ rendering of Scriptures in synagogue worship was actually their desire to retain divergent traditions. For the general purposes of the Old Testament textualist, however, its main importance lies in its providing the means of identifying biblical manuscripts from the middle ages. The oldest and best list of differences between ben Asher and ben Naphtali is that by Mishael ben Uzziel, *Kitab al Khilaf*, probably composed in the tenth century but now reconstructed from later works and Genizah fragments. This work is now completely edited by L. Lipschütz; the first part, *ben Ascher–ben Naphtali*, appeared in 1937, and the remainder was

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published as an appendix to *Textus*, vol. II, in 1962, with an introduction in vol. IV, 1964.

With the introduction of the name ben Asher we move into the period when lengthy and complete manuscripts of the text are available, for there are codices extant which carry ben Asher colophons. They are the oldest copies of the Old Testament Scriptures apart from the Dead Sea scrolls and the Genizah fragments, and consequently need to be listed separately; they also form the basis of most modern editions of the text, or at least provide important sources for the *apparatus criticus*. They are:

1. The British Museum manuscript *Or 4445*, which consists of the Pentateuch, written probably in the early tenth century, on the authority and during the lifetime of Aaron, the chief though not the first of the ben Asher family.

2. The so-called Babylonian codex of the Prophets, actually dated A.D. 916. At one time it was known as the St Petersburg Codex, but it is now catalogued in the Leningrad Library, *MS Heb. B. 3*. It was edited and published under the title *The Petersburg Codex of the Prophets* by H. L. Strack, 1876.

3. The Cairo codex of the Prophets, preserved in the Qaraite synagogue in Cairo from 895, is the oldest dated Hebrew manuscript extant, and was produced by Moshe ben Asher, the father of Aaron.

4. The Aleppo codex comes from the first half of the tenth century, and once contained the whole Old Testament; consequently it is the most significant of all the ben Asher manuscripts. Furthermore it is argued that this text was acclaimed by Maimonides in the twelfth century as the model codex. At least from the fifteenth century it was preserved in the Sephardic synagogue in Aleppo, and so carefully was it guarded that it was almost impossible to consult. Even so, one page was photographed, and in 1887 formed the frontispiece of a book on Hebrew accents (Wickes, *A treatise on the accentuation of the twenty-one so-called prose books of the Old Testament*). The codex was reported destroyed in the upheavals in the Lebanon in the 1940s, but in 1960 the President of the State of Israel proclaimed that it had been recovered, and it has now become the basis of a new edition of the Massoretic text edited by M. H. Goshen-Gottstein in the Hebrew University, and in 1965 a *Sample edition of the Book of Isaiah* appeared.

5. Finally, the *Leningrad Codex, B 19a*, written in 1008 and vouched