

Book Review

The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction of Kittel-Kahle's Biblia Hebraica, by Ernst Würthwein (in English translation by Peter R. Ackroyd). Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957, pp. xi, 173, 17s. 6d.

The translator of any document, especially one as ancient as the Hebrew Old Testament, will be enabled to produce a rendering more sympathetic to the original if he understands something of the history of its transmission and the textual problems inherent in it. Any aid, therefore, to the translator's understanding of such matters must assuredly facilitate his work. The study which is herein reviewed seeks to provide such aid.

Though not without some criticism from experts, the *Biblia Hebraica* of Rudolph Kittel is a widely used critical edition of the Masoretic version of the Hebrew Scriptures. In his third edition Kittel, with the expert assistance of Paul Kahle, produced a text which both men believed to represent one of the most ancient Masoretic traditions, that of Ben Asher. This edition, incidentally, was completed and published after Kittel's death, under the direction of Albrecht Alt and Otto Eissfeldt, with the continued supervision of Kahle as regards the text and the Masora.

The *Foreword* of this third edition (noted hereafter as BH₃) gives the history of the production of this completely revised edition, with a brief statement as to the more important textual witnesses employed and the principles governing their use. Following this is a list of symbols which appear in the critical apparatus accompanied by the name of the manuscript which each designates. An index to the symbols and abbreviations of the Masora parva is also provided, with the meanings given in Latin. It was to give students help in the intelligent use of the apparatus of BH₃ in particular, and to set forth the need for, and methods of, textual criticism in general, that Würthwein produced *Der Text des alten Testaments*, published in 1952.

This useful work has now been made available in English by Peter R. Ackroyd of Cambridge under the title *The Text of the Old Testament* (hereinafter cited as *TTOT*). References to pertinent literature in the field of a more recent date have been incorporated into this English translation. Before proceeding with this review, it should be pointed out for those who are interested that the original German-language edition (of 1952) was briefly commented on in *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft (ZAW)* 24 (1954), p. 108, was reviewed in *Journal of Biblical Literature (JBL)* 73.2 (1954), while its appearance was also briefly noted and commented on in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research (BASOR)* 131 (Oct. 1953).

TTOT is laid out in four chapters, preceded by a brief *Introduction* and followed by forty-one plates. All but two plates are reproductions of inscriptions or of sections or fragments of MSS, useful for textual studies. Each plate is faced by a page of explanation.

The *Introduction* briefly presents reasons why textual criticism is

necessary: inadvertent scribal errors, on the one hand, and editorial emendations, on the other, have introduced variations in the transmitted copies of the text. The textual critic seeks to work back through these to a textual form as near to that of the original as is scientifically possible.

Chapter I deals with the transmission of the text in the original language. The aforementioned plates admirably supplement this chapter. Here, as Dr. W. F. Albright noted in *BASOR* 131, p. 32, one finds "an admirable survey of Hebrew epigraphy and paleography, the history of the Hebrew Bible and the ancient versions." Such matters as forms of script and materials of writing, the history and peculiarities of the Masoretic textual traditions, and the history and character of the Samaritan Pentateuch are discussed.

Two features which characterize the book as a whole, and which enhance its value, appear first in this chapter. These are: (1) marginal citation of the plate(s) which provide illustration for points discussed in the text; and (2) a running marginal citation of the symbols used in the apparatus of BH₃ for each textual feature discussed, at its first introduction in the text. For instance, *Mp* appears in the margin where the *Masora parva* is first mentioned; *L* appears where *Codex Leningradensis* is discussed, etc. This feature enables one to become familiarized with the significance of these symbols as one reads along in *TTOT*.

The second chapter deals with translations from the original language, namely, the Septuagint (LXX), the Aramaic targums, and the Syriac version (Peshitta). Besides the usefulness of the discussion of these textual witnesses, their MS. representatives, and their respective characters and values, modern translators will undoubtedly appreciate Würthwein's general remarks at the beginning of this chapter. They are set down in a cautionary vein relative to the uncritical use of the ancient translations of the OT for text-critical purposes, but they are also applicable to the work of today's translators who are seeking to render the OT into modern languages. The justice of the following remarks will be readily recognized:

Anyone who translates interprets at the same time. In a translation there appears not only the underlying text but also the translator's own comprehension of it. Every translator is a child of his own time and of his own culture. Each translation must first be considered and valued as an intellectual achievement in its own right. This is especially true in the case of Bible translations which were produced to meet the practical needs of the community. (p. 33)

The author then goes on to point out that because of the plurality of translators who worked to produce these ancient versions, plus the many cultural pressures which affected their work, it becomes necessary to "distinguish between what belongs to the original and what is to be attributed to the translator." This proves to be a "complex task which ought really be completed before criticism of the Hebrew text is undertaken on the basis of the Versions." Not only that, but students "must reckon, in almost every case, with a series of written stages in the evolution of the translation."

Unfortunately, however, these stages are difficult to determine accurately and may never be fully recovered, a fact which makes final solutions of textual problems a remote possibility, in many cases. These considerations must surely have a sobering effect upon the modern translator who realizes that he must, for his people, arbitrate these problems and make at least a quasi-final decision in many a case so as to produce an intelligible translation.

Because of the importance which the LXX has assumed in OT textual criticism, a large section of this chapter is devoted to it. Attention is given to the views of Paul de Lagarde and those of Paul Kahle regarding the possibility (1) of the reconstruction of the original form of LXX from the MS. witnesses, and (2) of its use in arriving at the original Hebrew text. Lagarde thought the first possibility realizable and that once the original LXX had been recovered it could be used to point the way to the true Hebrew text. Kahle's view is that there was no one single LXX *Urtextus*, but that a standard form developed generally from a plurality of earlier texts, in a manner similar to that of the Aramaic targums.

At this point it is regrettable that the author, although taking into account the Qumran Isaiah MSS., was not able to cite the results of later studies in the Biblical scrolls and fragments from Qumran such as appeared in the following: *BASOR* 132 (Dec. 1953), pp. 15-26; *ibid.*, 141 (Feb. 1956), pp. 9-13; and *JBL* 74 (Sept. 1955), pp. 147-172. Dr. W. F. Albright, summarizing some of these results in *BASOR* 140 (Dec. 1955), pp. 27-33, points out two important facts. First, that "most of the scrolls and fragments present a consonantal text which is virtually indistinguishable from the text of corresponding passages in our Masoretic Bible." He goes on to state that "the new material carries Hebrew exemplars of the proto-Masoretic text back into the second century B.C., and there are many manuscripts . . . of this type from the last century and a half of the Second Temple."

Secondly, portions of Exodus, Deuteronomy, and of Samuel in particular, appear in recensions much closer to the LXX than they are to MT, "though they usually differ from both and sometimes exhibit a text which is obviously older than either." He concludes from the evidence that (1) the LXX shows greater fidelity to its Hebrew prototype than has formerly been assumed by many critics; (2) differences between the LXX of Codex B and related MSS. "are not inner Greek additions or corruptions, but go back to an older Hebrew recension which differed from MT." This dictum stands in at least partial opposition to the opinion in which Würthwein acquiesces, namely, that the LXX exhibits exegetical translations suited to the changed conditions of life of the Alexandrian Jews, and adapted to missionary purposes.

Chapter III continues the survey of translations significant for OT textual criticism. These include the Old Latin, the Vulgate, the Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, and Arabic versions. A brief history of each is given, the leading MS. representatives are identified, and a word indicative of the weight each can be expected to have as textual evidence

is offered. Henry S. Gehman, reviewing the German edition of *TTOT* in *JBL* 73:2:123-24, felt that this chapter was rather too brief to do justice to the last four translations named. He accordingly listed several valuable articles supplementary to Würthwein's treatment, as well as other journal articles significant for LXX studies. This is a real service to those who wish to pursue this matter further.

In the concluding chapter, the aims of textual criticism are set forth, the causes of textual corruptions are explained and illustrated, and the methods of textual criticism are given a brief, but careful, exposition. The author believes the attempt to recover what he calls the "traditional text" must be made by the serious student. He feels that this traditional text, which is the only text proper for a basis of exegesis and translation, finds its best and most consistent witness in MT. He warns sharply against a text which is established on the basis of presupposition or prejudice:

Arbitrary procedure which hastily and unnecessarily sets aside the traditional text and puts personal conjecture in its place, results in a subjective form of text which remains historically unsound and cannot claim any theological relevance. It is further likely to lead to a basic distrust of textual criticism as such, even where it is justifiable and necessary. (pp. 75-76)

Proper cognizance is taken of the fact that the knowledge of OT times is still in a very imperfect state, so that hasty rejections of difficult or incomprehensible readings as "corrupt" are to be avoided. Consideration of the fact that archaeological researches have supplied meanings for many heretofore mysterious terms, and are continuing to do so, leads to extreme caution in having recourse to conjectural emendation.

In relation to the BH₃ apparatus, Würthwein criticizes it because it does not give a clue to which of the extant MSS. of the MT favors a particular reading, thus limiting the value of the apparatus at this point. The value of the apparatus, as he sees it, is to provide the student with pointers which are to be followed up by a thorough study of the evidence. The introduction given in this book to the MSS. cited makes it possible to use these pointers with greater critical intelligence.

Those who are engaged in the task of translating the Bible so that God's message of life may come to men in their own native tongues will appreciate the author's statement of the motives for engaging in OT textual criticism: "We are concerned to discover the original form of the Old Testament record, and of the Bible as a whole, because we wish to be confronted with the Word itself, and not merely with that which fallible men have made of it in the process of transmission." (p. 82) In his view, valid theology must be based upon a valid text; literal understanding and spiritual understanding cannot be divorced.

This book is valuable, not only for the beginning student of textual criticism, but also for the modern Bible translator and a wider audience of Bible students. First, it gives a better understanding of

the process by which our Bible came to us. It will serve as a manual of introduction to the study of OT textual criticism for those who know little about the subject. It is, as it was intended to be, a necessary supplement to the BH₃ apparatus, and a guide to its intelligent use. The plates contained in it furnish clear and useful examples of OT paleography and MS. transmission. The bibliography, supplemented by the footnote references, directs the serious student to much valuable literature in the field. Finally, its sane and balanced viewpoint and its definitely evangelical tone is a restraining voice against subjectivism and irresponsible methods in OT criticism, while at the same time it will make everyone who reads it more sympathetic to the great task confronting the reverent critic who is earnestly attempting to provide the best possible basis upon which to found OT exegesis, theology, and translation.

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