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## CURRENT TRENDS AND TENSIONS IN OLD TESTAMENT TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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Proofreading typeset materials for publication and participating in a Bible translation project are good exposure to the problems of scribes and manuscripts. An error in typesetting or transcription may be solved if the proofreader is familiar with the mechanics involved in the particular method of production, the language or languages of the manuscript, and the psychology of the scribe (or, typesetter).

Compare the following pericopes:

The initial euphoria generated by the epochal discoveries at Ras Shamra a half century ago was in some measure at least due to the conviction *ène* for one of the principal works (the *Krt* poem) was biblical Canaan.

The initial euphoria generated by the epochal discoveries at Ras Shamra a half century ago was in some measure at least due to the conviction staunchly defended by two of the foremost Ugaritic scholars of the day, Virolleaud and Dussaud, that the *mise-en-scène* for one of the principal works (the *Krt* poem) was biblical Canaan.

The first excerpt contains the error and the second is the correct edition of the original text. Given the knowledge that the text was being reproduced on an electronic phototypesetter, the process of "scribal" error may be reconstructed.

It is obvious that "ene" does not coincide with "due to the conviction". This would be suspected on the grounds of English grammar which would expect "due to the conviction that". It is also evident that "ène" is probably French and that it should have been italicized. On this particular phototypesetter it was possible for the typist to type faster than the machine and to overflow the memory buffer which preserves a small amount of script till the machine can handle the next line of text at its own speed. The omission of "that the *mise-en-sc*" was due to the typist's excessive typing speed. The memory buffer was exceeded by the 21 missing key strokes. (The strokes include word spaces and font change commands as well as the characters.) The omission of "staunchly defended by two of the foremost Ugaritic scholars of the day, Virolleaud and Dussaud," was due to the unconscious thought of the typist whose mind was

moving at a rate in excess of his own speedy fingers. The typist automatically supplied "that" after the construction "due to the conviction". It was also the typist's speeding thought process which led him to look for what he expected. Perhaps he looked away from the manuscript for a moment to check the video module screen. When his eyes returned to the manuscript he committed parablepsis (looking aside to a different point in the manuscript) and carried through with the logical sequence of "conviction that" without realizing he had committed an omission.

Three aspects of Old Testament textual criticism are illustrated by this example from the modern publication house:

1. The text critic should be familiar with the mechanics of the ancient scribal trade. Materials helpful in this area include: J. Philip Hyatt, "The Writing of an Old Testament Book", *Biblical Archaeologist* 6 (1943) 71–80; Ernst Posner, *Archives in the Ancient World* (Cambridge USA: Harvard University Press, 1972); and, R. Reed, *Ancient Skins, Parchments, and Leathers* (London: Seminar Press, 1972).

2. The text critic must be familiar with the language(s) of the manuscripts whose text is to be established. Familiarity with the pertinent grammars, syntaxes, and comparative studies commonly used in Hebrew and Aramaic is required for Old Testament studies. Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Samaritan should be included if reference is to be made to the Septuagint, Hexapla, Vulgate, Peshitta, and Samaritan versions. Utilization of other ancient translations and comparative materials could require Arabic, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Sumerian, Akkadian, Persian, Egyptian, Hittite, Ugaritic, and, more recently, Eblaite. Acquaintance with palaeography and orthography is also valuable. Materials which may be consulted in these last two areas include: I. J. Gelb, *A Study of Writing* (revised edition; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, *Early Hebrew Orthography* (New Haven, Connecticut: American Oriental Society, 1952); Solomon A. Birnbaum, *The Hebrew Scripts*, 2 volumes (London: Palaeographica, 1954–57); F. M. Cross, "The Development of the Jewish Scripts", in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, edited by G. Ernest Wright (reprinted; Winona Lake, Indiana; Eisenbrauns, 1979), pp. 133–202. A specialized study of the palaeography of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Malachi Martin, *The Scribal Character of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2 volumes (Louvain, Belgium: Université de Louvain, 1958).

3. The text critic should be familiar with the psychology of the scribe and the character of scribal error. The standard introductions to the textual criticism of both Old and New Testaments describe the various kinds of errors committed by scribes. However, little is really available which investigates the problem from the standpoint of the science of psychology. M. P. Weitzman, in a review of V. A. Dearing's *Principles and Practice of Textual Analysis* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1974), wondered "why Dearing, in common with most other writers on textual criticism, does not mention in this connection J. Stoll's valuable paper 'Zur Psychologie der Schreibfehler', *Fortschritte der Psychologie* (1913), pp. 1–133."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps an English translation of

<sup>1</sup> *Vetus Testamentum* 27 (1977) 226 n. 8.

this "valuable paper" would help bring it to the attention of those interested in or involved in text-critical studies.

These three areas with which the text critic must familiarize himself have been the objects of concentrated studies. It is obvious that such studies must come to grips with differences of scholarly opinion, new manuscript discoveries, modern technological applications, and the correlation of related sciences. What are the various schools of thought today in the realm of Old Testament text-critical studies? What are the scholars discovering, studying, publishing, and debating?

### **New Discoveries and Scholarly Debate**

The last thirty years of Old Testament text-critical studies have produced a moderating influence with regard to the nineteenth-century excesses of conjectural emendation. The finds at Qumran initiated much of this moderation. Early reactions to the discoveries ranged from talk of a new Bible to announcements that the scrolls proved the unquestionable reliability of the Massoretic Text (MT). Indeed, the present state of Qumran studies is still somewhat unsettled. One evaluation of the St. Mark's Isaiah scroll from Cave 1 (1QIs<sup>a</sup>) indicates that some of the variation from the MT may well have been a simplified interpretive popularization of the traditional text. That popularization may have been a catering to special-interest groups. It removed some of the difficulties that the MT would present to an audience whose primary language was not Hebrew.<sup>2</sup> The various daughter versions of the Septuagint (LXX) manifest similar characteristics. Even today there are English translations of the Bible with the same basic philosophy, as for example the evangelicalism of NIV, the new reader audience of TEV, and the ecumenism of TOB (French: Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible). These variations are in the category of free translations rather than paraphrases. These free translations choose to emphasize or commit themselves to one particular meaning of the text which they consider as having multiple meanings. Of course, the meaning which was made explicit by that version suited the purpose of its editors (as in the Dead Sea Scrolls) or translators (as in the Greek daughter versions and many modern English versions).

Manuscripts of biblical texts at Murabba'at have also occasioned some disagreement. It has been safely stated that those manuscripts "represent in all essentials the textual tradition which is later attested by the medieval masoretes" but that "there is a certain tendency to overstate the agreement with MT, which is certainly striking but not complete."<sup>3</sup>

Scholarly debate and fluctuations in methodologies have also involved comparing the Ugaritic materials with the biblical text. Much of the debate over the application of Semitic philology to biblical studies has arisen as a result of the plethora of materials attempting to describe the relationship between Ugaritic and Hebrew. In 1979 the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of Ras Shamra

<sup>2</sup> Joseph R. Rosenbloom, *The Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll: A Literary Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1970), pp. xiii, 81-84.

<sup>3</sup> Bertil Albrektson, "Reflections on the Emergence of a Standard Text of the Hebrew Bible", in vol. 29 of *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, edited by J. A. Emerton, et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), pp. 57-58.

was observed by a symposium of scholars at Madison, Wisconsin. During the concluding session a panel continued the verbal fencing over the validity and extent of comparative studies. The general consensus was that Ugaritic studies are still young and there is much to learn before the debate can be decided in any one direction.<sup>4</sup>

More recently, the Ebla tablets from Tell Mardikh have produced a number of extreme statements, retractions, and modifications. With less than a thousandth of the material even published, the debates over ultimate significance have already surfaced.

Such tensions, however, normally contribute to the ultimate stability of later interpretive conclusions. In the meantime, those same tensions may also produce permanent differences of opinion in the text-critical analysis of the Old Testament. It is a little bit like the American space program. The "race into space" has produced a bonanza of practical benefits in electronics, aviation, medicine, and a number of other areas. The use of miniaturized circuitry has catapulted the human race into the computer age. Along with the concepts of supercomputers and robots have come the possible applications for computerized mankind: test tube babies, genetic engineering, bionic limbs, nuclear medicine, laser surgery, satellite warfare, and a dozen other issues. In the field of biblical studies, the large numbers of newly discovered documents at Qumran, Murabba'at, Ras Shamra, and Ebla have flooded us with as much unassimilated data as landing on the moon did for natural science. The methodologies which are being formulated for handling this mass of data are sometimes as opposite as laser surgery and laser weaponry. The attempt to relate modern space-age science to human ethics is like the attempt to relate the current archeological discoveries to the text-critical study of the Old Testament. In some aspects there is no identifiable relationship; in others the relationship can be defined. In still other aspects the relationship is not yet in focus and is subject to varying degrees of speculation and various kinds of interrogation.

Caution and patience behoove the Old Testament text critic. Recovering and assimilating the archeological materials bearing on the Old Testament text usually require a half century or more to be properly published and described. Perhaps an additional half century is required for interpretation and evaluation.

### **Schools of Text-Critical Theory**

The debates and the varying methodologies of the last three decades have led to some identifiable schools of thought. Granted, it is somewhat risky to parcel out scholars, schools (institutions), and books so that they are arranged in handy compartments. However, it is undeniable that certain individuals, institutions, and publications do dominate certain studies or so affect them that a segment of the literature available can be traced back to their influence.

Even when the schools of thought have been identified it is necessary to realize that text critics might partially adopt the systems of two or more

<sup>4</sup> Gordon Douglas Young, ed., *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981).

schools so that a synthesis results. Likewise, schools tend to fluctuate and metamorphose in the process of time due to the influx of new leaders, new materials, and new theories.

In current Old Testament text-critical studies there appears to be four basic text-critical theories and/or practices. Each of the four current schools may be identified with an individual spokesman whose academic relationship may be identified with the geographical location of the academic center. For the sake of convenience the four schools will be called the Jerusalem School, the Edinburgh School, the Baltimore School, and the Rome School.

### 1. The Jerusalem School (Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein)

The textual philosophy and methodology of the Hebrew University Bible Project (HUBP) is characterized by a cautious conservatism. The basis for the critical text in the HUBP is the Aleppo Codex. The critical apparatus does not propose any emendations of the MT. It also manifests an aversion to retroversions.<sup>5</sup> Any reading derived from the ancient versions of the Old Testament are treated as inferred variants since material variants<sup>6</sup> are considered virtually nonexistent in premedieval Hebrew manuscript tradition. *Textus* (1960—) is the publication most representative of the Jerusalem School.

### 2. The Edinburgh School (James Barr)

The primary expression of this school of Old Testament text-critical thought is Barr's *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1968). The emphasis of this approach is on the semantic transmission of the text. When an apparent textual problem is encountered, the Edinburgh School normally opts for cognate elucidation if it is available. Always there is the possibility that a so-called *hapax legomenon* (or, *eiremenon*) might be merely *hapax phainomenon* (revealed only once in the currently available materials). It may, however, appear in some document or inscription yet to be discovered or yet to be examined and published. The Edinburgh School would reserve the option of solving a textual problem by means of some future appearance of a problematic term or form in extrabiblical materials rather than recommending emendation.

### 3. The Baltimore School (William Foxwell Albright)

This school of text-critical methodology may be described as taking a mediating position between the Edinburgh School and the Rome School (yet to be discussed). Since the death of Albright, the chief heirs and proponents of this text-critical approach have been Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman. Recently, Ralph W. Klein has become a popularizer of this form of Old

<sup>5</sup> A retroversion is the retranslation of a versional text back into a deduced reading or *Vorlage* (the copy of the text used as the source being copied or translated).

<sup>6</sup> A material variant is a divergent reading of major import or circumstances. It may also be called a real variant. Such a variant involves more than the recurring minor differences of grammar or syntactical structure, simplification of expression, contextual adjustment, and other similar sources of minor textual variants.

Testament textual criticism. Freedman makes a clear statement of the Baltimore School's approach to emendation:

We do not question the importance or validity of the emendatory process as a scholarly enterprise or obligation. Certainly we do not imply that the preserved Hebrew text is intact. Admittedly numerous errors have occurred in the transmission of the text, as well as deliberate editorial and scribal changes. The difficulty lies in locating, defining, and then correcting them. All too often, the prescribed cure is only another form of the disease, sometimes more virulent. . . . extreme caution should be exercised, and emendation should be avoided if at all possible. . . . even changes in vocalization, or the redivision of words and phrases should be justified with care. Recourse to more drastic procedures should be recognized as a last and desperate resort. Conjectural emendations are more likely to be remembered as exercises in scholarly ingenuity than as serious contributions to the recovery of the original text.<sup>7</sup>

It is the view of Freedman and other scholars representative of this approach that emendations reflect the state of scholarship current at the time of their proposal. Such emendations tend to restrict the advancement of discoveries regarding new features of the language of the text. The result may be the obscuring or elimination of deliberate linguistic and literary devices utilized by the authors. The emphases of this school of thought are in the areas of orthography, Hebrew poetry, and archaisms.

In general, *The Anchor Bible* may be considered the representative publication of the Baltimore School. Allowances, however, must be made for the inclusion of individual volumes in this series which are more representative of other schools (e.g., the volumes by Mitchell Dahood on Psalms and the volumes by Marvin H. Pope on Job and the Song of Solomon).

As with New Testament text-critical methodologies, so in the Old Testament textual studies, the practitioners sometimes leave themselves open to charges of inconsistency. Donald Goodwin has criticized the Albright School for the lack of scientific procedure in his *Text-Restoration Methods in Contemporary U.S.A. Biblical Scholarship* (Istituto Orientale di Napoli, 1969). Goodwin's criticism, however, is careful to point out the valuable contributions of this type of methodology.

#### 4. The Rome School (Mitchell Dahood)

In many ways this approach to Old Testament textual criticism could be classified as a variation of the Baltimore school. Goodwin pointed out this relationship in his critique and two of the leading proponents of the Rome school (Dahood and Pope), have contributed volumes to *The Anchor Bible*. However, separate classification seems best in view of the notable extremes of philological methodology to which this school has gone. This extremism has separated the Rome school from both the Edinburgh and Baltimore schools.

No other area of application has caused as much stir as Ugaritic and Hebrew comparative studies. The ongoing debate between the Edinburgh and Rome schools is best exemplified in the various exchanges between the two

<sup>7</sup> David Noel Freedman, "Prolegomenon" in *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry*, George Buchanan Gray (reprinted; New York: KTAV Pub. House, 1972), pp. xl-xli.

principals of these schools, Barr and Dahood.<sup>8</sup> The charges of "pan-Ugaritism" have arisen in this debate and have prompted many a response.<sup>9</sup> The Old Testament translation of *NEB* displays many of the innovative philological suggestions proposed by adherents of the Rome school.

In view of these four schools of textual theory and practice, how should the underlying textual theories of *Biblia Hebraica* edited by Rudolf Kittel (*BHK*), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (*BHS*), and the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project (HOTTP) be classified?

Kittel's critical apparatus would best be classified under a nineteenth-century school of conjectural emendation rather than associating it with any of the current schools of thought. The critical apparatus of *BHK* has proven to be a disappointment. It is pock-marked with omissions, miscitations, prejudices, and carelessness. Many scholars have lamented this sad state of affairs: C. C. Torrey, J. A. Montgomery, M. Margolis, J. Ziegler, J. W. Wevers, J. B. Payne, A. M. Honeyman, H. Orlinsky, P. Katz, H. S. Gehman, D. W. Thomas, A. Sperber, B. J. Roberts, M. Goshen-Gottstein, J. A. Sanders, J. Barr, and many others. Orlinsky declared that "no single publication has had such detrimental effect on the lower textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible" as *BHK* in its second and third editions.<sup>10</sup> "The careful scholar will distrust these footnotes, and go to the sources whence they are alleged to derive."<sup>11</sup>

The *Stuttgartensia* critical apparatus has made a few advances in form and accuracy but still exhibits the same philosophy in spite of restraint in both retroversion and conjecture. Still, there are the errors of commission and omission as well as conjectural emendations with no versional or manuscript support. As James Barr writes: "The *BHK* apparatus drew a great deal of criticism over the years, and it is to be feared that the new apparatus will draw just as much, if not more."<sup>12</sup> "In general, in spite of many improvements at certain points, it is sad to have to say that the critical apparatus of *BHS* represents a step backward rather than forward in comparison with *BHK* (which itself was not so very good)."<sup>13</sup> "The apparatus of *BHS* is disappointing, especially in that it shows so little advance on *BHK*; its faults stem not from amateurishness but from lack of good sense among professionals."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Mitchell Dahood, "Comparative Philology Yesterday and Today", *Biblica* 50 (1969) 70-79 (a review of James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament*). See also, Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II*, vol. 17 of *The Anchor Bible*, edited by William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1968), pp. xiii-xxvii; G. R. Driver, Review of M. Dahood, *Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Philology*, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 10 (1965) 112-17; James Barr, Review of L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament* (3rd edition), *Journal of Semitic Studies* 13 (1968) 260-67.

<sup>9</sup> See, P. C. Craigie, "Ugarit and the Bible: Progress and Regress in 50 Years of Literary Study", in *Ugarit in Retrospect*, pp. 99-111; and the panel discussion concluding this symposium volume, pp. 182-200.

<sup>10</sup> Harry M. Orlinsky, "The Textual Criticism of the Old Testament" in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, edited by G. Ernest Wright (reprinted; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1979), p. 115.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> James Barr, Review of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, in *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1979) 213.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

HOTTP cannot yet be fully evaluated since the *Technical Report* has not been published to date. The *Preliminary Report*, however, demonstrates a more conservative text-critical theory than *BHK* or *BHS*. It has some kinship to HUBP in its professed concept of the proper arrangement and content of a critical apparatus. HOTTP's classification of chosen readings are basically a measure of the degree of conjecture involved in opting for certain readings (including some emendations). HOTTP is not a critical apparatus. It is designed as an aid to OT translators. Therefore it has avoided (unfortunately) giving versional evidence in the *Preliminary Report*.

Although conjectural emendation has not maintained its prominence in OT text-critical study, it continues to be an influential viewpoint and practice. Its continued influence is guaranteed by the absence of any reasonably priced (or reasonably sized) conservative alternative to *BHK* and *BHS*. As long as *BHK* and *BHS* dominate the market, a fifth school of text-critical theory must be discussed: the **Göttingen School** (Julius Wellhausen).

It should be noted that the Göttingen School antedates Wellhausen who became its popularizer. This theory of Old Testament textual criticism is characterized by its free employment of conjectural emendation. Accusations of extreme conjecturalism are just as apropos to radical philological applications as they are to non-philological conjectural emendations. Quite often the criticism levelled at either practice in its extreme ought to be aimed at the individual practitioners whose conclusions and methods may differ greatly even within the same basic school of thought. Individual extremism led Joseph Reider to write: "It is a game every candidate for a degree in Semitic philology likes to play with great gusto, and each one endeavors to outdo the others in exuberance of imagination and fecundity of fancy."<sup>15</sup>

In the strictest sense of the term, conjectural emendation is "a reading for which no authority can be found in any text-tradition, direct or indirect, known to us at the present time."<sup>16</sup> Conjecturalism is evident in exegesis as much as in textual criticism. Both conjectural practices seem to be based on a pre-supposition that the text of the Old Testament, as transmitted, is not final in either its form or meaning. Ultimately, conjecturalism is humanistic (or, at least anthropocentric) and denies the text any prima-facie status. Textual criticism, in the strictest sense, should have no place for conjectures with reference to the autographa.

In decrying the excesses of the Göttingen school, however, it must not be forgotten that it has had some beneficial effects upon biblical text-critical studies. "While deploring the mutilating effects on the text of their labors, we may agree that scholars so inspired stimulate response and reaction, and in their way they contribute to progress in the field."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Reider, "The Present State of Textual Criticism of the Old Testament", *Hebrew Union College Annual* 7 (1930) 297.

<sup>16</sup> Sidney Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (reprinted; Ann Arbor: Eisenbrauns, 1978), p. 20. The statement represents the viewpoint of Joseph Ziegler who wanted to limit the use of the term "conjecture".

<sup>17</sup> Freedman, "Prolegomenon", *op. cit.*, p. xxiii.