

BOOK REVIEW

Textual History of the Bible: The Hebrew Bible: Volume 1A – Overview Articles, Armin Lange and Emanuel Tov, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 448 pp. Reviewed by Simcha Rosenberg.

This monumental work is the first volume of a planned series bringing together all available information regarding the manuscripts and textual history of each book of the Bible and its translations. Most textual study of the Bible is very specialized and compartmentalized; this book serves as a one volume collection of the latest research in all aspects of the field. It is a massive textbook type volume, printed in double columns, basically an encyclopedia on the Bible as a text.

This volume provides an overview of the subject, presented as entries written by different scholars, including a detailed history of both the Jewish and Christian canon, a history of the textual research of the Bible from its beginnings until today, a history of the Masoretic Text (MT), and the history of the major translations of the Bible. These articles provide summaries of all the major theories proposed over the years, as well as a picture of the current state of research in the field. This is very important, considering that "[t]here is no comprehensive history of research on the textual criticism and textual history of the Hebrew biblical text in existence" (p. 82). What is meant by "textual criticism" is the analysis of the text to arrive at the most correct, ancient and authentic readings.

It should be noted that this book is written from a purely academic perspective, and the Bible here is in no way considered a Divine work. However, even for a faith based reader of the Bible, there is much important and interesting material here. Topics which may be of particular interest to JBQ readers are discussions of the orthographic and textual matters dealt with by the Masoretic scholars through the ages, such as variable spellings, *kri u'ketiv* and the preservation of the consonantal text of the Bible. After detailing the many textual variants, one scholar concludes that "only after a variant analysis of all secondary readings in all Hebrew texts of a given biblical book can further exegetical approaches be applied" (p. 165).

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The book covers researchers of all faiths, as well as those who are not believers themselves. Whenever a researcher's personal beliefs have affected his scholarship and theories, it is pointed out. Particularly in the case of "Christian text-critical studies" which were "influenced by confessional polemics" as well as "anti-Semitic bias" (p.91). These researchers accused Jewish sages of "intentional falsifications by Jewish scribes" (p.98) in order to prove Christianity is erroneous.

For this field, a major turning point in textual research was the "discovery" of the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) in 1616, before which "a basic consensus existed among Protestant and Jewish biblical scholars that the consonantal text of the Torah and its vocalization were revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai... Due to this faith-based approach, scholars mostly did not compare individual Hebrew manuscripts with one another" (p. 92). With the Samaritan Pentateuch, "an alternate Hebrew biblical text was brought to the attention of European scholars. It posed the question of how MT and LXX (the Septuagint) were related to SP" (p. 94), as besides differences of a polemic nature between the texts, there are also purely textual differences as well. This led to the various theories of how the text of the Bible was formed, was there one urtext that all following texts emerged from, were there a few main textual versions, each ultimately adopted by a different group (MT for Jews, LXX for Christians and SP for Samaritans), or was there not even a concept of an "authorized text" in the ancient world at all. Of course the field would be punctuated by major shifts as new discoveries were made, from the Cairo Genizah manuscripts to the Dead Sea Scrolls. These discoveries led to reevaluations and large scale changes regarding the proposed reconstruction of the textual history of the Hebrew biblical text.

Particularly interesting was a comparison of the orthography of the Dead Sea Scrolls to that of the MT. The two dominant writing styles of the Second Temple period are the "baroque system, which is characterized by a lavish use of plene spellings and a morphology that prefers elongated suffixes and affixes" which is preferred in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and "a conservative system, which is...known from the MT and uses fewer plene spellings and a shorter morphology" (p. 140), representing an earlier form of Hebrew orthography.

As in any work of this scope, there are bound to be a few errors that crept into the text, such as mislabeling of the tables on pages 78 and 80, and lack of

an index is surprising, but any such quibbles are easily overlooked in the face of the massive achievement in scholarship that this book represents.