RETHINKING THE CONCEPT OF 'BIBLE': SOME THeses AND PROPOSALS

James E. Bowley, Millsaps College, Jackson
John C. Reeves, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

"Unless and until we are forced by strict philological evidence to regard a certain reading as secondary or corrupt, we have to look upon conflicting readings in our primary sources as alternative readings, none of which must be considered as superior to the other, simply because it is contained in one special tradition (such as the Septuagint)." 2

"The whole question of canonicity, and the date of the fixing of the canon, will have to be re-studied." 3

I. Introduction

The justly famous manuscript discoveries of the past century are transforming the scholarly study of the literary history of ancient Judaism. Nowhere is this metamorphosis more evident than in the academic study of the textual integrity of the Hebrew Bible. As we enter the twenty-first century, biblical scholars are in the process of gauging the significance and assessing the implications of a vast treasurehoard of primary texts which shed a penetrating light on the very centuries surrounding the emergence and production of what eventually becomes the canonical form of the Hebrew Bible. The evidence supplied from such diverse resources as the Cairo Geniza, the Oxyrhynchus papyri, the Nag Hammadi corpus, major European and Middle Eastern manuscript collections, various rabbinic and post-rabbinic citations, and especially the Dead Sea Scrolls has stimulated a number of intriguing questions regarding the possible relationships of one text or

1 Small portions of the following essay have been adapted from the electronically published version of J.C. Reeves, "Toward a Rapprochement of Bible and Qur'an," Religious Studies News—SBL Edition (December 2001), at http://www.sbl-site.org/Newsletter/12_2001/. The authors are grateful to Karin Rochester for her critical comments on earlier drafts of the essay.


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group of texts to another, both within and across the ideological boundaries of the biblically based religious communities. 4

But perhaps one of the more arresting of these newer queries centers upon the very idea of 'Bible' itself. The label 'Bible' rarely merits or even requires definition among most social circles in Western culture, whether religiously or secularly based. It is customarily applied by scholars to a collection of Jewish books whose composition and textual content achieved relative stability during the final centuries of the Second Temple period (515 B.C.E.-70 C.E.) of Jewish history and which then were transmitted as an integral collection (i.e., as 'Bible') to subsequent generations. The scholastic attention devoted to such a bibliographic enterprise suggests that what we eventually inherit as 'Bible' acquired and maintained a type of cross-cultural institutional authority lacking in other potentially rival assemblages of texts. The notion of Bible as 'sacred scripture,' as 'written Torah,' plays a crucial ideological role in the gradual shift in focus within early Judaism from a religion based on the sacrificial service of the deity in the Temple to a religion which centers itself in the study and interpretation of a sacred scripture.

For the typical modern western mind, 'Bible' connotes a tangible, definable entity. People carry 'the Bible' to a university or religious school class, read from 'the Bible' in synagogue or church, see 'the Bible' in the hands of television preachers, and place their right hands on 'the Bible' to be sworn into public office. Yet however it functions as a cultural icon, one must recall that what we as moderns term 'the Bible' in actuality displays a wide variety of formats which feature conflicting tables of contents, different texts, variant forms of the 'same' texts, texts translated from diverse languages, and divergent arrangements of parts or groups of texts. These discrepancies are not minor and they make loose references to 'the Bible' unfortunate. Instead of 'the Bible,' there are 'Bibles,' containing particular forms of certain texts in one or more specific arrangements used in individual communities. Nothing of a concrete nature warrants the common use of the singular number and the definite article as if there was an inalterable form and content to 'the Bible.' Succinctly stated, 'the Bible' is not and furthermore never was. 5

Sustained reflection upon the implications of the manuscript discoveries and textual analyses mentioned above has prompted us to 'rethink' several of the terminological categories and methodological assumptions employed within the modern discipline of biblical studies and to subject the notion of Bible, as it functions within both ancient Judaism and the modern world, to a more critical scrutiny. 6 We therefore offer the following theses and proposals as a way of encouraging a new discussion of terminology and classificatory tropes.

II. What we can no longer say

1. We can no longer speak of 'the canon' without extensive qualifications.

'Canon' as a technical term for a 'list' of books, one which favors some and excludes others, was not a category employed by ancient Judaism, and it is therefore anachronistic to apply it to collections of scrolls preserved by ancient Jewish groups where the genres of writings were variegated and the issues and motivations surrounding their collection(s) cannot be assumed to be the same as those of later religious communities. 7 At Qumran there is no evidence for a canon as a definable collection of scrolls which were demarcated as distinct, much less support for 'the canon' (however one defines that). 8 There is no list. There is no codex which assembled copies of authoritative writings. There is no discussion weighing the relative value or authority of different 'writings.' 9 Some scrolls were clearly used more than others, and some of these scrolls correspond to (but are not identical to) books printed in modern Bibles. 10 Some Qumran writings were

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4 By 'biblically based religious communities,' we have in mind not simply the 'great traditions' of Judaism and Christianity, but all those religious movements which endorse aspects of the biblical universe of discourse for their own purposes, such as certain gnostic currents and islam.


6 Some trenchant comments and criticisms which preface a number of the issues broached herein, particularly with regard to the text-critical issues surrounding the 'canonization' of Hebrew Bible, have been offered over the past fifty years by figures like P. Kahle, M.I.H. Coogan-Gottstein, H. J. Zenger, M. Greenberg, J.A. Sanders, E.M. Stein, S. Talmon, E. Tov, and P. Ulrich. Much of what is expressed in the present essay simply reiterates or builds upon their foundational labors.

7 We would object to the loose use of the term 'canon' to designate almost any use of previous literature as in some sense religiously authoritative. Under such usage dozens, if not hundreds, of texts (exant or non-exant) used authoritatively in ancient Jewish writings would need to be classified as 'canonical.' B.S. Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 57-60 attempts to distinguish between authoritative writings and canon but ultimately reverts to an essential identification (p. 60). It seems to us that the use of the term 'canon' or 'canonical process' or 'process of canonization' (not easily confined to the ideology of the church for this or that community) is thought to stand as the inevitable outcome of decisions or as the goal or as the implicit ideals of persons in much earlier times. By way of analogy, in the history of book production the codex format, with its several connections with the roll format, eventually came to dominate. But surely it would obscure matters to refer to the 'process of codexization' at Qumran or in Judaism of the Second Temple period. Discussion of wider cultural canons and 'classical literature' may have merit but one must judiciously avoid reading later ideas into ancient minds. See P.R. Davies, Scribal and Schools (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998); J. Gorak, The Making of the Modern Canon (London: Athlone, 1991).


9 Such as we find, e.g., in m. Jad. 3:5; b. Meg. 7a.

10 T.C. VanderKam concludes that the Qumran community likely 'accepted 1 Enoch and Jubilees as divine, authoritative revelations,' and probably 'many' others as well ('Authoritative Literature in the Dead Sea Scrolls,' EZSR 5 (1998): 400-2). P. Flint identifies some of those 'many,' concluding that the following works "enjoyed scriptural status": Psalm 151A, Psalm 151 B, Psalm 154, Psalm 155; the canticle of 11 QP ( = Ben Sira 51:13-30). 1 Enoch, Jubilees, possibly also Tobit and the Letter of Jeremiah ("Apocrypha," Other Previously-Known Writings, and "Pseudepigrapha"

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associated with the speech of God, and some writings are quoted as being in some
sense authoritative. Divine inspiration is claimed for the pesherim, surely enough
to qualify them for favored status. But these practices and rhetorical markers,
supplying as they do some evidence for the community's reading habits and some
of the relevant mental categories they employed in thinking about certain texts,
also illustrate the conceptual complexity of the problem and should caution us
about attempting to impose upon the texts' authors and/or readers alien categories
which were operative in later religious communities. Given that there could be no
one centralized 'canon-making' authority for the pluriform Judaism of the Second
Temple period, we can also make no canonical claims for Judaism at large during
this same era. While it is true that we now possess some textual evidence for the existence of almost every 'biblical' book by the time of the First Jewish Revolt, it is by no
means certain that what later generations conceptualize as 'Bible,' or that even
the notion of a 'canonical form' for any 'biblical book,' was analogously
operational during this period. Citation formulas and the number of times a particular 'book'
is physically instanced or was copied supply some clues for assessing relative
religious importance, or at least popularity, among literary texts. Yet the same
criteria also raise problematic questions. Just how should we understand the scope of common referential designations like torat Mosheh ('law of Moses'; cf. 1QS 5:8,
8:22; CD 15-16 pasim) or ha-nevi'im 'the prophets'; cf. 1QS 1:3, 8:17; CD 7:17)
when the usual referents of those labels are simultaneously exemplified in a variety


14. A number of works repeatedly make such claims; e.g., R.T. Beckwith, "Formation of the Hebrew Bible," in Mekor Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity (ed. M.J. Mulder; CBINT 2.1; AmstelMaastricht and Philadelphia: Van Gorcum and Fortress, 1988), 39-86. Rather, in the words of Sanders, 'there were as many canons as there were communities' ('Scripture as Canon for Post Modern Times,' TBT 25 [1985]: 58). J. Barton argues at length that 'the word 'canon' itself is a most inappropriate term to describe the Scriptures of Jews and Christians in the first few centuries of our era' (Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel After the Exile [London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1986], 44; see also 55-75).

15. This is the typical understanding of the designation by most modern researchers.


18. For the phenomenon of 'prophesiation,' see Reaves, 'Scriptural Tradition,' 72-7, where it is defined as 'the seemingly arbitrary bestowal of prophetic rank upon a number of literary or even historical figures who do not normally enjoy such status within the traditional scriptures' (pp. 72-3).


20. For a vibrant yet ultimately futile attempt to reify this questionable construct, see G.J. Brooke, "Rewritten Bible," in Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls (ed. Schiffman and VanderKam), 2:777-81.

of formats among their users, as for example, at Qumran? Is torat Mosheh to be
limited to what we recognize as a forerunner of the later Masoretic text of the
Pentateuch? What about the Samaritan or Septuagintal prototypes of the
Pentateuch, both of which were also archived at Qumran? Or what about the
various so-called pentateuchal "paraphrases" or "parabiblical" texts which combine
and weave elements from different parts of the Pentateuch into new textual
complexes? Or what about other parallel works ascribed to the authorial or
editorial activity of Moses, such as the Book of Jubilees or the Temple Scroll
(note 11QT 44:5) or the so-called Apocryphons of Moses (4Q575-376)? Might not
the label torat Mosheh cover some or all of this material as well? When we similarly
scrutinize the employment of the label ha-nevi'im ipre' face no better, given that
Qumran literature bestows the epithet 'prophet' and presumably its concomitant
aura of authority on more characters than does canonical biblical literature. David
andDaniel undergo a 'prophetization' at Qumran. Was Enoch or Noah also
numbered among the prophets? How about Joshua, whose 'psalms' (4Q378-379)
are quoted in the so-called Testimonia (4Q175)? Summarily dividing the
Qumran literature between 'canonical' and 'non-canonical' (or 'biblical' and 'non-
biblical') based upon the later restrictive definitions of these terms is unnecessarily
obfuscating, for it imposes foreign and indeed obstructive categories upon these
literary texts. The conceptual problem for modern researchers is further aggravated
by a largely unreflective use of other popular classificatory terminology like that of
'rewritten Bible' for works like Jubilees or 1 Enoch. Surely one must first have
'Bible' before one can 'rewrite' it: the taxonomic category presupposes and subtly
endorses both a chronological sequence and an intertextual relationship, neither of
which is demonstrably the case.

Finally—and this has been known for a long time—it is not even accurate to
speak of 'the modern canon' of biblical books, for in fact there are many diverse 'canons' endorsed by contemporary faith communities (ranging from five to eighty or more books) from a variety of textual families. Just as there are only Bibles, so also there are only canons.  

2. Under these circumstances we can no longer rely upon certain longstanding and usually unquestioned assumptions about the editorial structure, the contents, the date of final formulation, and the textual integrity of those literary works presently collected together under the rubric of 'Bible.'  

We would suggest that the notion of 'Bible' as a privileged category functioning as the fixed point of reference and discussion for the labeling, analysis, and evaluation of 'non-canonical'; i.e., non-biblical, works, requires a radical revision and reformulation. Our descriptive language must be altered in order to express this revision; instead of biblical 'expansions' or 'rewritings,' we should perhaps speak of 'biblically allied,' 'biblically affiliated,' or 'biblically related' literatures in order to avoid imposing uncritical notions of priority. Moreover, our accustomed way of perceiving and categorizing how 'Bible' interacted with these 'parallel' literary corpora will require a serious overhaul. Instead of measuring all biblically allied or affiliated literatures against 'the Bible' and then assigning labels like 'expanded Bible,' 'rewritten Bible,' 'paraphrased Bible,' 'distorted Bible,' and the like to those renditions which depart textually and/or thematically from 'the Bible' of the Masoretic text, we should rather consider the bulk of this material, both biblical and non-biblical, as a single culturally variegated literary continuum which juxtaposes a number of alternative or parallel ways of recounting a particular story or tradition.  

21 In addition, in both Judaism and Christianity, the issue of canon is complicated by actual usage, or what has been termed 'functional canon.' Note, for example, what is included and excluded when L.B. Wolfenson writes, 'The term Jewish Canon, properly understood, means those writings which were adopted as legally and morally binding. Such writings are the Pentateuch, or 'Law,' the Mishna and Gemara, and since the Pentateuch is properly the Hebrew Canon, the Jewish Canon is really the Mishna and Gemara. Implications of the Place of the Book of Ruth in Editions, Manuscripts, and Canon of the Old Testament,' HUCA 1 (1924): 177-8.  

22 The Christian 'canonical approach' advocated by B.S. Childs has long been rightly criticized for designating as 'the canon' for the Christian community a form of canon which does not even exist in any Christian manuscripts until well after the rise of Protestant churches and has never existed as 'the canon' of Christianity, certainly not for all Christian communities, nor even for a simple majority of them.  

23 S. Talmon has eloquently endorsed just such an interpretive position: 'The new evidence proves convincingly that not all variants in Hebrew non-masoretic and translational witnesses resulted from scribal mistakes or the deliberate interference of emendators, revisers and copyists. Rather, variants in an ancient version preserve at times primitive readings which were accidentally lost in the course of time or were designately suppressed by later transcribers. Accordingly, in tracing the transmission history of the biblical books and submitting them to critical analysis, the evidence of the ancient versions must be carefully weighed.' He states further: '... it is my thesis that the presumably re-told,' re-read,' re-written,' etc. Bible-related works should mostly be viewed as crystallizations of

The inadequacy of the currently fashionable terminology becomes immediately clear when one considers that Chronicles, by any descriptive standard, is unmistakably 'rewritten Bible' (being a temporally subsequent rewriting of Samuel and Kings), just as Jubilees is characterized as a 'rewriting' of Genesis and Exodus. But while Chronicles is represented by only one scroll at Qumran (4Q118 Chr) and is never quoted in the other scrolls, Jubilees is extant in fourteen or fifteen manuscripts, claims to be a divine revelation to Moses (prologue; 1:26-28: 2:1), is quoted and/or referenced by name in other texts, and clearly exerted a marked influence on the sectarian community. It does no justice to the historical reality to impose demonstrably later theological judgments and terminology by classifying Chronicles as 'Bible' and relegating Jubilees to the category of 'rewritten Bible.'
It follows that if we wish to remain faithful to our physical evidence, we should cease distinguishing between 'biblical' and 'non-biblical' scrolls both at Qumran and even for the Second Temple period in general. These labels are anachronistic, serving only to confuse and distort our understanding of this literature. There is no unambiguous evidence among the Dead Sea Scrolls that the book of Genesis was any more (or any less) 'Bible' than was the Book of Jubilees or portions of 1 Enoch or even 1Q Genesis Apocryphon. 'Bible' is not a category invoked by the writings at Qumran. There would appear to be no equivalent term within the Scrolls for what is later identifiable (from parochial perspectives) as 'the Bible.'

3. We can no longer speak of the 'final form' of any particular text.

No such entity exists for any particular text in Jewish or Christian antiquity. The Dead Sea Scrolls have provided scores of authentic manuscripts which are a thousand years older than almost all the other Hebrew manuscripts underlying modern printed editions of the Bible. If we had not already learned from our comparative study of the Septuagint and Samaritan Pentateuch manuscripts, we have certainly now been taught: that each 'book' currently represented in modern Bibles possesses a complex and distinct textual history. Each of the ancient forms of a text found in any single manuscript of a competing linguistic tradition (MT, LXX, etc.) represents only one peculiar 'shape' at a certain point in time and can make no claim to being 'the final form.' Any particular text one might use is one exemplar from one stage ('generation') in a long and complicated genealogy. Branches may have completely separated from others belonging to the same stem for centuries (what we term 'Jeremiah,' 'Psalms,' 'Exodus,' etc.) or may have 'intertwined' at other times. It is simply wrong to declare or to assume the Masoretic Text to be 'the final form' when in fact its various components ('books' in modern terms) represent ancient scrolls selected at varying stages of their individual redactional history. Taken as a whole, the Masoretic Text has not served in any universal sense at any time in Christian history as the final (read 'authoritative') form, and a unilateral claiming of such status by uninformative Christian exegetes is arbitrary at best and arrogant at worst. Multiple textual and reading traditions survived in various Jewish communities for centuries after the alleged 'fixing' of the biblical text. Even those texts associated with the scribal

31 Some scholars are beginning to recognize that terms like 'canon' and 'scripture' are meaningless at Qumran; see, e.g., S. White Crawford, "Reworked Pentateuch," 2:777.

32 Much less subject to such claims by modern scholars.

33 Or, as M.S. Jaffe has recently expressed it, 'accepting as a fact of nature the textual disparity of the printed Bible' (Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE-400 CE [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 19).

34 One thinks of the notorious 'book(s)' of R. Meir (see S. Lieberman, Hellenism in Jewish Palestine [2d ed.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962], 24-7) as well as the so-called Severus Scroll which reportedly featured numerous variant readings (see H. Albeck, Midrash Ben Sira Rabba [Jerusalem: Mekizeh Nirdanim, 1946], 299-12). According to Sifte Dour $556 (ed. acumen of the Ben Asher family of Tiberias, such as the invaluable Aleppo Codex (915 CE) which was praised by Maimonides as a 'sefer upon which all other sefer torahs may rely for correction,' represent only a small portion of the vast spectrum of Masoretic tradition and activity.

"The final form" as a historical phenomenon is a chimera. If one community at a particular time and place adopts a certain form of a book or group of books, that choice may be arbitrary or reasoned, socially modulated or voluntarily imposed, but it cannot be claimed that the choice is 'the final form' of the text, for such a description implies that particular form possesses some inherent finality that extends beyond the borders of that community at that time. 'Our chosen form' or 'my chosen form' (or even 'a final form') should replace the currently popular 'the final form' or 'the canonical form' for the sake of accuracy and the avoidance of hegemonic exaggerations.

4. We can no longer speak of 'the Masoretic Text' as the benchmark of Hebrew texts which best represents a pristine original form.

There are several issues which are too often overlooked here.

First, within the Masoretic tradition itself, there is no such thing as 'the Masoretic Text.' This lesson was repeatedly stressed long ago (1966) by H.M. Orlinsky:

There never was, and there never can be, 'the masoretic text' or 'the text of the Masoretes.' All that, at best, we might hope to achieve, in theory, is 'a masoretic text,' or 'a text of the Masoretes,' that is to say, a text worked up by Ben Asher, or by Ben Naftali, or by someone in the Babylonian tradition, or a text worked up with the aid of the masoretic notes of an individual scribe or of a school of scribes. But as matters


36 A good summary of these issues can be found in S.W. Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews (2d ed.; 18 vols.; New York/Philadelphia: Columbia University Press/The Jewish Publication Society, 1952-83), 6:235-55 and the relevant notes.

37 Jaffe again: the "correct" text of a book was linked to the social boundaries of the community that preserved it (Torah in the Mouth, 19).

stand, we cannot even achieve a clear-cut text of the Ben Asher school, or of the Ben Nafzger school, or of a Babylonian school, or a text based on a single masoretic list; indeed, it is not at all certain that any such ever existed. All that an editor can claim with justification is that he has reproduced the text of a single manuscript, be it Aleppo (Hebrew University Bible Project), or Leningrad B 19a (BH).", or British Museum Or 2626-27-28 (Snith), and the like ... at the same time, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that none of these manuscripts or of the printed editions based on them has any greater merit or 'masoretic' authority than most of the many other editions of the Bible, than, say, the van der Hooght, Hahn, Letteris, Baer, Rabbinic and Ginsburg Bibles.39

Second, the celebrated precision and accuracy of the Masoretic copists is frequently exaggerated, and/or is conveniently but illegitimately retrojected to earlier (but poorly documented) periods. This fosters the illusion that Masoretic scribes invariably produced xerographic-quality copies of the manuscripts which they handled and that a similar meticulousness was true in the centuries before them.40 Furthermore, the textual choices of rabbinic Judaism during the early Christian centuries were not motivated by the modern critical concerns for the 'oldest' or 'best' or 'most pristine' texts. Their selections for textual standardization were sometimes of relatively late, longer, and conflated texts, but sometimes of relatively early, briefer, and non-repetitive texts.41

Third, given what has been concretely demonstrated about the organic (as opposed to mechanical) growth of ancient Israelite 'biblical' literature,42 is it even a meaningful enterprise to seek after the 'original' form?43 Which of the various attested written forms of Daniel or Esther is its 'original'? What represents the 'original form' of the book of Isaiah: its Masoretic version, as most interpreters uncritically assume, or the 'older' 1QIIsa scroll?44 What is the 'original' Psalter? The Septuagint and the Syriac versions of the book of Psalms bear witness to a longer work than that currently reproduced in Protestant Christian translations of that work. What about the shorter Psalters found at Qumran?45 or the fact that some early Psalms collections certainly ended at what is now Ps 72:20? The 'modern' 150-psalm Psalter is demonstrably neither the 'original' nor the 'final form' of that anthology of hymns.46

But the issue reaches probably every 'book' of a modern Bible. In what sense does the book of Chronicles have an 'original' form, given that so much of its material is demonstrably 'unoriginal', being derivative from Samuel and Kings? What would be the 'original' form of the text of Jeremiah? Its first oral performance(s) in a public setting?47 One of Baruch's reconstructive drafts? One of the shorter and older Hebrew versions found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, or the apparently similar Hebrew Vorlage reflected in the Septuagint translation preserved by fifth century Greek codices? Or the substantially longer and later Hebrew rendition represented in the Masoretic codices of the tenth and eleventh centuries? And what is the 'original' Torah? Is it a successfully reconstructed hypothetical Pentateuchal source (or JEDP), or what Nehemiah references as 'found written in the torah which God commanded by the hand of Moses,' but which is not found in a Masoretic Text of the Pentateuch or in any other extant document (Neh 8:14; cf. Lev 23:39-43)?48

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40 For a more balanced assessment, see the discussions of Baron and Ortlinsky cited above, as well as Tov, Textual Criticism, 21-79. See also F.M. Cross, "The Fixation of the Text of the Hebrew Bible," in his From Epic to Canon (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 205-18. He states therein (p. 207) ‘...the history of the text of the Hebrew Bible has been obscured by an assumption or dogma on the part of the ancients, rabbis and church fathers alike, that the Hebrew text was unchanged and unchanging, unaltered by the usual scribal realities that produce families and recensions over long periods of transmission.’


43 In speaking of texts which originated centuries before the turn of the era, it seems an invalid and equivocal use of the word 'original' to mean texts 'of the first century,' as does Childs, Introduction, 101.

44 Most critics simply presume without argument the archetypal status of the received text of Isaiah, but are there any empirical grounds buttressing such a presumption? For a valuable corrective, note now E. Ulrich, "The Developmental Composition of the Book of Isaiah: Light from 1QIIsa on Additions in the MT," ZDPV 8 (2001): 288-305.


46 To B. Waltke's (How We Got the Hebrew Bible: The Text and Canon of the Old Testament) 295-297.47 As Cross states (p. 207) ‘...the history of the text of the Hebrew Bible has been obscured by an assumption or dogma on the part of the ancients, rabbis and church fathers alike, that the Hebrew text was unchanged and unchanging, unaltered by the usual scribal realities that produce families and recensions over long periods of transmission.’

47 See Jer 36:2-18, 21-23, 27-32.

48 Compare M. Greenberg, "The notion of "the hypothetical textual form" (in the singular) that existed at the time of canonization posits an identity between canonization and text standardization that is flatly contradicted by all the evidence we have," Quotation taken from his 'The Use of the Ancient Versions for Interpreting the Hebrew Text: A Sampling from Ezekiel 2:1-3:11,' reprinted in his Studies in the Bible, 209-25. The quote is taken from p. 218. W.P. Brown has recently argued that the LXX Vorlage to Genesis is older than our MT traditions (Structure, Role and Ideology in the
III. What we can say

1. While the term ‘the Bible’ without qualifiers may be confusing and clumsy, the adjective ‘biblical’ still proves useful as a classificatory tool.

The field of ‘biblical studies’ as understood and practiced today comprises more than the examination of the textual expression of those works featured in a ‘biblical canon.’ It also includes the study of those works’ historical, literary, and cultural backgrounds as illuminated by archaeology, social science models, and the scholarly reconstruction of the contours of the transmission history of the work(s) in question. The various linguistic versions, the so-called apocrypha and pseudepigrapha (both Jewish and Christian), rabbinic midrash, compilations of narratological folklore by Christian and Muslim antiquarians, and the classic medieval commentaries form legitimate facets of ‘biblical studies’ as it has been and is currently practiced. If anything, a responsible pursuit of the discipline of ‘biblical studies’ should produce the removal of the artificial boundaries drawn among some of these facets of professional activity by many modern researchers.

2. The history of ‘books’ in the Second Temple period in their diverse textual forms is qualitatively similar to the hypothesized earlier developments in the composition of biblical texts by classic source criticism.

The changes witnessed in the textual remains of works like Jeremiah, Psalms, and Samuel have been profitably and instructively compared with the editorial developments exhibited between Chronicles and Samuel-Kings and also between Deuteronomy and Exodus-Numbers. The empirical evidence for many books (including that contributed by so-called ‘non-biblical’ or ‘parabiblical’ scrolls) provides ample testimony for the compositional evolution of texts in Jewish antiquity, confirms many of the guiding assumptions of modern source criticism, and suggests plausible models for conceiving the growth of other ‘books’ whose tradition and transmission history is less well known, such as that of Genesis or Deuteronomy. The sociological and cultural forces which apparently supported and nourished a great diversity of Jewish literature and a plurality of textual traditions in the late monarchical, exilic, and early postexilic periods were still at work in the late Second Temple period. Were it not for the monumental

historical accident of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls by a Bedouin shepherd in 1947, we would likely still be ignorant of the plethora of ‘authentic’ and sacred Jewish texts which were read as ‘words of God’ or ‘revelations to Moses’ (or other prophets) by at least one Jewish community during the latter centuries of the Second Temple era. However, for the earlier period, we are still waiting for the archaeological space to unearth the written exemplars for ‘God’s commands through his prophets,’ ‘the law which the Lord commanded through Moses,’ and the ‘book of the law of God,’ one or more works which a group of Jewish returnees from Babylon in the fifth century undoubtedly viewed as peculiarly authoritative (cf. Ezra 9:10-11; Neh 8:14, 18). Had history been merciful and seen to the survival of the Quaranic Yah adu an influential textual community, perhaps our Bibles would now contain some of these less familiar ‘words of Moses’ (cf. 1Q22) in lieu of other books. Or, alternatively, perhaps there would be more than one dominant textual and/or ‘canon’ tradition even within Judaism.

One implication of recognizing the organic similarity between the compositional habits of the scribes at Qumran and those of earlier ‘biblical’ writers is a blurring of distinctions among what are for us the formally separate processes of authoring, redacting, reading/rectifying, and copying, all of which blend into a unified enterprise which in turn erases for modern scholarship the traditional boundaries erected between literary criticism and textual criticism as usually conceived. Consequently the literary categories, rubrics, and distinctions presumed by a later age may be of little value for gaining a proper understanding of the production and circulation of early Jewish literature.

3. There is an urgent need for a thoroughgoing reassessment and revision of the current terminology used in the study of early Judaism’s rich literary traditions.

Labels like ‘canonical’ and ‘non-canonical’ are meaningless categories for Second Temple Judaism. An analogous bifurcation between the ‘biblical’ and ‘non-biblical’ or ‘parabiblical’ Dead Sea Scrolls is likewise unwarranted for that collection of texts. Most intellectual circles, it is true, were moving in the direction of demarcating certain writings as ‘sacred’ and others as ‘profane,’ but this development (at least within classical Judaism) postdates by a century or more the latest Dead Sea Scrolls. Eventually a ‘list’ of ‘scriptures’ does appear within at which time the text must have been much more fluid (Textual Criticism, 169). But certainly the Qumran diversity is closer to that of these ‘earlier periods’ than it is to later conceptions of canonical and textual uniformity. According to Cron, ‘In no case, however, do the Hebrew manuscripts from Qumran exhibit the developed and fixed form of the text that emerged in the Rabbinic tradition, nor can we detect any clear drift toward or narrowing down to, that recursion’ (Textual Criticism, 211).


55 See especially Tov, Textual Criticism, 313-50.

56 Note m. Sanh. 10:11; t. Yad. 12:13; y. Sanh. 10:1, 28a; b. Sanh. 100b. As an example of a ‘profane’ book, the latter three sources offer Ben Sira. On the other hand, it is well known that the...
Jewish literature (b. B. Bat. 13b-15b), but the purpose of that roster of titles is not so much to provide the identities of the biblical books as it is to guarantee their antiquity and cultural authority. A label like ‘apocrypha’ or ‘apocryphal’ retains utility only in contexts where a scriptural canon has been clearly defined, and even then care must be exercised in its application. The notion of ‘pseudepigrapha’ (and allied formations) becomes problematic only when its reference is tacitly restricted (as it normally is) to ‘non-canonical’ works, since practically the whole of the Hebrew Bible in all of its extant forms, strictly speaking, is either ‘pseudepigraphic’ or ‘anonymous’. As previously articulated above, the loose usage of presumptuous descriptive labels like ‘rewritten Bible’ or ‘paraphrased Bible’ should be immediately discarded.

A number of interesting implications emerge from the adoption of this drastic recasting of vocabulary and theoretical framework. The most intriguing one for our present purposes pertains to the analysis of so-called narrative ‘gaps’. Under the old scheme of analyzing ‘gaps’ in biblical narrative, one almost invariably viewed so-called ‘expansions’ or ‘embellishments’—gap-fillers, if you will—such as are found in rabbinic midrash or the works belonging to the pseudo-genre of ‘rewritten Bible’ as post-textual responses to the interpretive problems posed by puzzling features of the biblical text. Under the new perspective we are advocating, we no longer obligated to view these ‘gap-fillers’ as interpretive responses to a base text. We can instead entertain the distinct possibility that midrash, so-called ‘rewritten Bible’, and other biblically allied collections of traditions may preserve certain features or motifs or even in some cases provide more cohesive and thematically consistent presentations of stories than those eventually attested in what became Bible.

book of Ben Sira is cited as ‘scripture’ numerous times by the rabbinic Sages (for the location of these citations, see L. Zunz and M. Albeck, Ha-midrash be-Yisrael [2d ed.; Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1954], 49-50, 280-4; also M. Z. Segal, Sefer Ben Sira be-shalem [2d ed.; Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1958], 57-42). In the tenth century, Saadia Gaon describes in the preface to his Sefer ha-galuy how he was in possession of a copy of the ‘book which Ben Sira authored’ which displayed parashiyot, verse divisions, and vocalization and accentual markings. Saadia also supplies a small number of quotations from this work. See Segal, Sefer Ben Sira, 43.

57 R. Qasher, ‘The Interpretation of Scripture in Rabbinic Literature,’ in Minhah (ed. Maldeh), 549. The famous discussion by Josephus of Jewish sacred texts (C. Ap. 1.37-43) does not match later lists and it cannot be said to represent a unified (or official) Jewish Torah; it does represent a post-Second Temple explanation for a Greco-Roman audience. Cf. Barrow, Oracles of God, 26-7, 48, 58-60.

58 The ‘canon lists’ supplied by such sources as the Muratorian Canon, Origen (Apud Eusebius, Hist. ecc. 6.25), or the thirty-ninth festival epistle of Athanasius provide information which is relevant only to their local sectarian orientation and circumstances, as a comparative examination of early manuscript codices and testimonia from other locales in Christendom proves.

59 Please note that we are not saying it is never the case that ‘expansions’ or ‘embellishments’ occur, but only that the scholar is not obligated to limit his or her exegetical studies to this scenario. Each instance requires close analysis and study on an individual basis.

60 E.g., the widespread tradition that the fatal dispute between Cain and Abel involved their rivalry for the affections of one or more women.

none of which bore any inherent authoritative status as ‘canonical scripture’ for all Jews, dispersed as they were over a vast geographic and cultural expanse since the age of Sargon.

Within this rich literary environment which spanned centuries and outlived the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and (later) Rome, writings which enjoyed some measure of authority for at least one social group or locale were invariably updated or ‘replaced’ by other scrolls better suited to new and ever-changing cultural concerns and issues. Just as the bulk of the Chronicler’s carefully documented ‘references’ no longer exist as separate sources (with the prominent exception, of course, of Samuel and Kings),62 the archival sources undoubtedly exploited by most authors in ancient Israel to produce the ‘books’ which survive in modern Bibles have also perished. Yet thanks to the remarkable modern-day retrieval of a representative assemblage of Second Temple writings that had been concealed within some caves near the Dead Sea, we now have a much more nuanced grasp of the intellectual and literary environments amidst which our earliest exemplars of texts, later to be called ‘Bible,’ were emerging.

Riassunto

Gli autori di questo articolo dimostrano che molte affermazioni moderne, in gran parte date per scontate, sul concetto di ‘canone’, sulle origini e l’integrità della "Bibbia" e la sua relazione con altre "letterature" nate in seno al giudaismo antico e al cristianesimo sono teoricamente errate e necessitano di una drastica riformulazione. Gli autori presentano alcune proposte in merito alla direzione che tale riformulazione dovrebbe prendere e indagano le implicazioni delle loro proposte per la pratica futura degli studi biblici. [Sul tema si veda ora la puntales disamina di J. Maier, Le Scritture prima della Bibbia. "Introduzione allo studio della Bibbia, Suppl" 11, Paideia, Brescia 2003 (N.d.R.).]


LA GESTION DE LA COLÈRE ET DE L’AGRESSION DANS L’ANTIQUITÉ ET DANS LE SERMON SUR LA MONTAGNE*

Petra von Gemünden, Augsburg

A

Bien des auteurs antiques estiment que la colère est la pire des passions.1 Selon Sénèque, par exemple, elle est forte et contagieuse,2 affreuse, sauvage et mortelle,3 horrible et atrocement grinçante.4 Elle précipite l’âme dans l’abîme,5 et anéantit des peuples entiers.6

Dans le Sermon sur la montagne, il est dit que: "Tout homme qui est en colère contre son frère (ὄφγι, ὑφευς) en répondra au tribunal" (Mt 5,22). C’est donc par le motif de la "colère" que s’ouvre la série des antithèses, motif qui sera repris

1 Je remercie vivement Denise Stephanus et son mari pour le soin apporté à la traduction de cet article.
2 Selon Sénèque, De iia II, 36. (Sénèque, Dialogues, t. 1, De iia, texte établi et traduit par A. Bourgey, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1961), il n‘y a pas une passion "sur qui la colère ne règne en maîtresse" (cf. Plutarque, De ohs. iia 9, mor. 435 C.D) et dans De iia I, 2,1, il souligne que "nulla peitis humano generi pluris etest - aucun fléau n‘a coûté plus cher au genre humain"; cf. Philodème, col. VI, 25-29; col. XX, 16a; Plutarque, mor. 453 E; 454 A; 455 C.D.E; cf. Plut., De capienda et intimac. utilitate 8, mor. 90b (...τα καπας των παιδον, ὃν ιστόν ἢ ὑφευς). Sénèque le le texte spécial de la colère à quatre points: 1) elle est supérieure aux autres passions (De iia II, 36,6) ; 2) elle surpasse brusquement (De iia II, 36,6; III, 1,3-5, cf. I, 1, 5-7); 3) elle ressemble à la folie (De iia I, 2,1) et 4) elle s’étend à tout l’univers et à l’âge de la personne: tous les peuples et tous les individus en sont victimes (De iia III, 2, 1; III, 4, 5; III, 5, 1), cf. aussi Philodème, col. XXX, 31a (éd. Indelli) ainsi que R. Huber, Senecas Schrift de ira, Untersuchungen zum Aufbau und zu den Quellen, München 1973, p. 98. Diffèrentement: Aristote, L’Éthique à Nicomaque VII, 1149b.
4 Sénèque, De iia III,2.
5 Sénèque, De iia III,6.
6 Sénèque, De iia III, 1,4s.
6 Sénèque, De iia I, 2,2a, III,19,5.