

The Old Testament Text Beyond Qumran

by Dr David Instone-Brewer, (Faith and Thought 52, April 2012)

Summary

The discovery of the Qumran Bible manuscripts helped confirm the theory that there were many different forms of the Hebrew Bible before a Standard one was chosen to be preserved as the Masoretic text, so first century Jews had many Hebrew Bibles available to them. Subsequent discoveries have reversed that conclusion. It now appears likely that first century Jews had already decided which text form of the Hebrew text was the oldest, and that many of the variant readings were conscious paraphrases of this older text.

Introduction

Scholarly consensus is that the Hebrew text of the Old Testament was still fluid in the early first century, with many versions in circulation which are often significantly different. And yet Jesus says in Matthew and Luke that not one letter or penstroke will ever be lost from the text of the Torah (Matt.5.18; cf. Lk.16.17). Josephus claims similarly about the books of the whole Old Testament that "during so many ages as have already passed, nobody dared to add to them, to take from them, or to make changes" (C. Ap. 1.38, 42).

If the Hebrew scriptures were still being edited at this time, so that first century readers might never come across two identical texts, they would regard these as absurd claims which discredit everything else these authors say.

With hindsight we can apply these sayings to the remarkable way in which the Hebrew text was transmitted letter-perfect by rabbis in future centuries, culminating in the amazing work of the 9th century Masoretes.

These rabbis produced our Masoretic manuscripts, the most important of which are now called Leningrad and Aleppo after the places cities in Russia and Syria where they were remained until Aleppo moved to Jerusalem and Leningrad reverted to St Petersburg. These comprise not only of the letters which Jesus and Josephus referred to, but also a complex system of vowel pointing which fixed their pronunciation, and an unsurpassed system of 26 levels of punctuation. Just as our periods, commas and semicolons divide our sentences into subordinate clauses, lists, and subject-verb-object groups, they used 18 differently defined symbols to create a complex hierarchy of very small units, as well as 8 different strengths of conjunction which linked words like our hyphen does. The result was a text in which almost all ambiguity was removed for both vocabulary and grammatical structure.

The accuracy with which the vowels had been orally transmitted can be confirmed by the correct pronunciation of Assyrian proper names such as Tiglath-pileser and Sargon which hadn't been outside the Hebrew Bible for more than a millenium.¹ To preserve the letters themselves they added the Massorah – a system of abbreviated marginal notes which

¹ Alan R. Millard, "In Praise of Ancient Scribes", (*Biblical Archeologist* 1982, 45): 143-153.

provided checksums and warnings for the scribe copying the manuscript. For example, the middle word and letter of each book was calculated and marked, so that the scribe could count back and check that no letters had been missed, and any strange spellings which the scribe might be tempted to 'correct' were noted, along with a list of any other places where this same spelling occurred. A careful scribe could, by means of all this help, produce a letter-perfect copy of the Hebrew scriptures – a feat achieved for no other text before the invention of the printing press.

We don't know when such practices started but we do know they succeeded, because these 9th century manuscripts are letter for letter identical to 2nd century ones. These ancient copies cannot be called Masoretic texts because they use a different method for vowels – instead of adding vowel points they occasionally add vowel letters such as a *vav* for "o" or *yod* for "i" – so they are called Standard texts. The largest of these (MurXII) is a complete scroll of the twelve minor prophets, which differs from the medieval Leningrad codex in only 37 details, almost all of which are variations in spelling. As Emanuel Tov summarises it: "The only differences with the medieval text pertain to orthography, a few minute details, paragraphing, and the layout of individual Psalms, and these variations resemble the internal differences between the medieval manuscripts of MT themselves".²

However, this tidy situation in the second century contrasts markedly with previous centuries illustrated by the Dead Sea Scrolls which exhibit huge variety.

So, if everything was still fluid in the first century, why did authors like Matthew, Luke and Josephus make such absurd claims which could be easily falsified? This paper will argue that the solution lies in the great Standardisation Project which was as important to first century Jews as the modern-day genome project.

The Old Testament Text found at Qumran

The Dead Sea Scrolls discovered near Qumran were a monumental addition to our knowledge of the first century world. They were immediately datable by the fact that the community was destroyed by the Romans in 68 CE, and subsequent work on palaeography established that the collection held manuscripts originating back as far as 250 BCE.

The types of biblical texts at Qumran had, in many way, been predicted by scholars. They had inferred that many of the differences between the Masoretic Hebrew text and its early translations into the Greek Septuagint, the Aramaic Targums and Samaritan Pentateuch were due to different Hebrew originals and not due to inaccurate or inventive translators. This is not to say that the translators weren't inaccurate or inventive, but when two or three of these ancient versions agreed with each other against the surviving Hebrew text, the natural conclusion is that they had known a different Hebrew original.

² Emanuel Tov, "The Biblical Texts from the Judaean Desert" in Edward D. Herbert and Emanuel Tov, eds. *The Bible as a Book: The Hebrew Bible and the Judaean Desert Discoveries* (London: British Library; New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 2002): 146

The discoveries at Qumran helped confirm this, though they also added new layers of complexity to the picture. Some of the Bible manuscripts appeared to have features similar to the Greek Septuagint, suggesting that they were similar to the Hebrew text which lay behind that translation. In the same way, some had features similar to the Samaritan Pentateuch and many manuscripts shared readings with the Aramaic Targums,³ and of course many manuscripts were similar to the later Masoretic text. All this had been predicted but the surprise was that there were also a large number of manuscripts which fitted into none of these groups and which differed significantly from each other. The Old Testament text was much more fluid than expected.

Among the 25,000 fragments of 900 manuscripts found at Qumran, there are about 200 which are recognisable as Bible texts, ranging from the large Isaiah scroll to tiny fragments containing just a few letters. This represents only a fraction of the original collection. Alongside the four manuscript fragments found in cave 8 were leather tabs belonging to 68 scrolls which had either decayed or disappeared. This indicates that we now have only a tiny sample of the original library. We have fragments from most books but also large gaps – for example there is only one fragment from the whole of Chronicles. Therefore the fact that we have no fragments from two of the smaller Bible books – Esther and Nehemiah – should not be regarded as significant.

The easiest way to evaluate this material is in the so-called *Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* – a wonderfully accessible translation of all the Judean Desert Bible texts.⁴ This marks differences to the Masoretic text by italics, with footnotes indicating which manuscripts the difference is found in. This useful feature exaggerates the number of variants because every variant found in any manuscript is noted. So, for example, at Genesis 1.15 it translates "*they were* for signs and for seasons", whereas the Masoretic text reads "let them be...", but the footnote points out that only one out of three manuscripts at Qumran actually has this variant. These footnotes also usefully tell you if variants agree with the Septuagint translation and Samaritan Pentateuch.⁵

Of the fragments which have been recovered, about 121 are large enough to analyse their text type. Emanuel Tov has found that 4 are similar to the Septuagint, 3 to the Samaritan Pentateuch, 57 to the Standard text, but another 57 do not fit into any known text family.⁶ The larger fragments demonstrate the uncertainty of such assignments by having some features from one text family and some from another. For example, of those which are Standard text, 20 have some Samaritan features and 13 have some Septuagint features. Even more variant readings can be found among the Qumran commentaries on Bible

³ No individual texts have been identified as possible precursors for the Targums in the way that some have been identified as similar to Septuagint and Samaritan Pentateuch. However, readings which are only found in the Targum can be found in the Qumran Scrolls, such as "like" in Is.29.13 later in this paper.

⁴ *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* by by Martin Abegg Jr, Peter Flint and Eugen Ulrich (HarperCollins; New York: 1999)

⁵ The note says that 4QGen^g has this variant but 4QGen^b and 4QGen^k agree with the MT, as does the SP. The LXX also agrees with MT though in this case the note neglects to mention it. Unfortunately these notes do not mention agreement with Targumic readings.

⁶ Emanuel Tov. *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert* (*Studies on the texts of the desert of Judah (STDJ)*; Leiden: Brill, 2004). pp. 332-335; Tov "The Biblical Texts" p.153.

books. These not only quote Hebrew texts which are different to the Standard text, but they also base interpretations on these different readings, so it is clear that they regard these variants as having equal value to other readings.

Scholars agree that the Bible manuscripts were largely collected from outside Qumran and only some were produced by scribes there. All this helped confirm that the Hebrew text of the Old Testament was still very fluid during the first century. However, subsequent discoveries have thrown doubt on this conclusion.

The Old Testament Text found Outside Qumran

The Dead Sea Scrolls are published in a series called *Discoveries in the Judean Desert*⁷ – a title which indicates that manuscripts were found at other sites as well as Qumran. Other important texts were discovered soon after at Massada, Wadi Sdeir, Naḥal Se'elim, Naḥal Hever and Murabba'at. Among these were 23 Bible manuscripts though these have received less attention because they are all Standard texts. However, this apparently uninteresting feature has prompted a re-evaluation of the Qumran biblical texts.

We now have a situation which looks completely different. Every site in Palestine where ancient Bibles have been found contains manuscripts which are Standard texts – ie they are almost or exactly like the Masoretic text. The collection of texts at Qumran now stand out as distinct from all the others in a country which was rejecting non-Standard texts.

This throws new light on the fact that half of the manuscripts at Qumran are similar to the Standard text, because it suggests that the other half are the odd ones and were perhaps already regarded as inferior. Our view of the variety of texts at Qumran was disproportionately influenced by the great Isaiah scroll (1QIsa^a) – the only complete scroll found at Qumran – which receive the most attention initially and clearly diverged from the Standard text. However, in retrospect, we could regard the Standard text as the de facto majority text at Qumran. The non-Standard texts form a very disparate group, and only very few can be categorised into other families of texts. Only about 4% are close to the Septuagint and another 6% are close to the Samaritan text,⁸ which means that the Standard text family is represented by more than ten times as many texts than the next largest family of texts.

Different scholars have constructed different histories to account for this which has been well surveyed by Armin Lange.⁹ Some older scholars theorised that all the Standard text reflected a single ancient text from which the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Hebrew text behind the Greek Septuagint had diverged, and which Jews had rightly rejected by the

⁷ D. Barthélemy, J. T. Milik, P. Benoit et al, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955-).

⁸ See Tov “The Biblical Texts” p.153: there are 6 texts which mirror the LXX more than MT out of 121 analysable texts, and 3 texts which mirror the SP more than MT out of 46 analysable Torah texts.

⁹ Armin Lange “They Confirmed the Reading” (y. *Ta'an.* 4.68a): The Textual Standardization of Jewish Scriptures in the Second Temple Period” in Nóra Dávid and Armin Lange (eds.), *Qumran and the Bible: Studying the Jewish and Christian Scriptures in the Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology* (CB. Leuven: Peeters, 2010) 29-80. The following summary of scholarship is based on his survey.

time the Temple was destroyed at 70 CE.¹⁰ More recently the Standard text has been regarded as one text among many which somehow came to prominence.¹¹ Some saw this process starting in the second century BC when the Maccabean wars had destroyed all but a few scrolls which became the exemplars for future copying and created a new interest in a single text form,¹² but more recent scholars doubt that any single text was considered as a 'standard' during the first century, and regard the Standard text as the only text which survived the almost total destruction of Judaism at 70 CE.¹³

By whichever means the history of these texts is explained, all scholars recognise that during the first century a wide variety of texts were available, and variant readings were widely known through translations and manuscripts and possibly through popular preaching, as witnessed by the Gospels and Josephus.

The Bible used by Jesus

Although Josephus believed in a single unchanging Bible text, he often retells Bible stories in accordance with variants found in Targums and the Septuagint,¹⁴ and we also find Jesus using variant readings portrayed in these versions. For example, in Matthew 15.9, Jesus cites Isaiah 29.13 in a form which reflects the Septuagint:

Matthew 15:9

μάτην δὲ σέβονται με διδάσκοντες διδασκαλίας ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων.
they revere me in vain, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men

Isaiah 29:13 LXX

¹⁰ Some said that SP and LXX diverged separately – see E. F. C. Rosenmüller, *Handbuch für die Literatur der biblischen Kritik und Exegese*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1797) esp. 244 and maintained after the Qumran discoveries by P. W. Skehan, "The Qumran Manuscripts and Textual Criticism," in *Volume du Congrès: Strasbourg 1956* (VTSup 4; Leiden: Brill, 1957), 148-60, 148. Some explained common features between the SP and LXX by theorising that they both divergences from a common earlier divergent text – see W. Gesenius, *De Pentateuchi Samaritani origine, indole, et auctoritate commentatio philologico-critica* (Halle: Rengersche Buchhandlung, 1815).

¹¹ See P. de Lagarde, *Anmerkungen zur griechischen Übersetzung der Proverbien* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1863), 2 who regards it as a single text with many variant readings and P. Kahle, "Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Pentateuchtextes," in *Opera Minora* (Leiden: Brill, 1956) 3-37. He regarded the variants as coming from many separate families of texts.

¹² See M. H. Segal, "The Promulgation of the Authoritative Text of the Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 73 (1953): 35-47 and Kreuzer, "Von der Vielfalt zur Einheitlichkeit: Wie kam es zur Vorherrschaft des masoretischen Textes?" in *Horizonte biblischer Texte: Festschrift für Josef M. Oesch zum 60. Geburtstag* (ed. A. Vonach and G. Fischer; OBO 196; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2003), 117-29.

¹³ Expressed most forcefully by E. C. Ulrich, "The Qumran Biblical Scrolls: The Scriptures of Late Second Temple Judaism," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in their Historical Context*, 67-87. This was also accepted by D. Barthélemy *Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament*, vol 3: *Ézechiel, Daniel et les 12 Prophètes* (OBO 50.3; Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 1992), cxiii

¹⁴ See Louis H. Feldman. *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism; Leiden: Brill, 1998). He has several examples where Josephus follows Septuagint traditions, eg: p.536, Ant.11.247 follows the Septuagint's explanation that God stopped the king sleeping at Esther 6.1; p.505, Ant.11.202 cites the date added by the Septuagint Esther 2.16 though makes it into their marriage date. Josephus is also shown to follow Targumic traditions, eg p.405, Tg.Jonah 3.5 that the Ninevites had faith in Jonah rather than in God; p.274, Tg.1King.21.27 which is the basis for Josephus' "went barefoot" at Ant.8.362 whereas Hebrew says "softly" and LXX says "bent over"; p.325, Josephus follows Tg.2 Kings 9.20 where Jehu drives "in good order" rather than "madly" (MT & LXX).

μάτην δὲ σέβονται με διδάσκοντες ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων καὶ διδασκαλίας
they revere me in vain, teaching the commandments and doctrines of men

Isaiah 29:13 *MT* יִרְאֲתֶם אֹתִי מִצְוֹת אַנְשִׁים מִלְמֶדָה

their reverence for me [is] a commandment taught by men

Isaiah 29:13 *Tg* וַיְהִי דַחֲלֵתְהוֹן קִדְמֵי כְתַפְקִידַת גְּבַרִין מִלְפִּינֵי

they do reverence for me like a commandment taught by men

Isaiah 29:13 *1QIsa^a* [CHECK] יִרְאֲתֶם אֹתִי כַמְצוֹת אַנְשִׁים מִלְמֶדָה

their reverence for me [is] like a commandment taught by men

The Septuagint form was not chosen simply because the Gospel was written in Greek, because Jesus' saying depends on the variant reading. Jesus claimed that the teaching of the Pharisees consisted of merely human commands. This text forms the basis of his complaint only in the version represented by the Septuagint, which says these worshippers are teachers of human commandments, whereas the Masoretic text implies they are recipients of such teaching while the Targum Pseudo Jonathan (and one text at Qumran) merely compares their worship to such teaching.

In Mark 4.12 we find an example of Jesus using a reading which is found in the later Targum of Isaiah 6.10 which ends "they may be forgiven", though in this case Matthew changes the quote to conform to the Standard Hebrew text: "I will heal them".¹⁵

Mark 4:12 ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἄφεθῆ ἀυτοῖς
they may turn and [their sins] may be forgiven them

Matthew 13:15. ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς
they may turn and I will heal them

Isaiah 6:10 *Tg* וַיִּתִּיבוּן וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּיֵן לְהוֹן
they may turn and [their sins] be forgiven them.

Isaiah 6:10 *MT 1QIsa^a 4QIsa^a* וַיִּשְׁבּוּ וַיִּרְפְּא לִי
they may turn and I will heal them

Isaiah 6:10 *LXX* ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς
they may turn and I will heal them

What language did Jesus quote the Bible in? This is a long and continuing debate, but on the cross Jesus clearly cites an Old Testament text in Aramaic - *elôî elôî lema sabachthani*. This is particularly noteworthy because it follows the Hebrew vocabulary rather than that found in the traditional Targum.¹⁶

Mark 15:34 ελωι ελωι λεμα σαβαχθανι (*elôî elôî lema sabachthani*)
ὁ θεός μου ὁ θεός μου, εἰς τί ἐγκατέλιπές με;

My God, my God, to what [purpose] have you forsaken me?

Matthew 27:46 ηλι ηλι λεμα σαβαχθανι (*éli éli lema sabachthani*)

Θεέ μου θεέ μου, ἵνατί με ἐγκατέλιπες;

¹⁵ Matthew appears to make up for the lost theme of "repentance" by adding the explanation of the parable of the weeds which emphasises the punishment of sin (Mt.13.36-43)

¹⁶ The Psalms have only one Targum which is undatable but is generally regarded as relatively late, so the precise wording in the first century is impossible to determine with any certainty. However the Targum version is more typically Aramaic than the transliteration in the Gospel account based on the Hebrew vocabulary.

Oh my God, oh my God, why have you me forsaken?

Psalm 22:1 LXX ὁ θεὸς ὁ θεὸς μου πρόσχες μοι ἵνα τί ἐγκατέλιπές με;
God, my God, listen to me; for what [purpose] have you forsaken me?

Psalm 22:2^{MT} אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי לָמָּה עֲזַבְתָּנִי (*eli eli lamah 'atzabtani*)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Psalm 22:2^{Tg} אֱלֵי אֱלֵי מֵטוּל מַה שְׂבַקְתָּנִי (*eli eli metul mah sabaktani*)

My God, my God, for what have you abandoned me?

The Gospels portray both a reverence for the Standard text as well as an acceptance of variants. Even when Jesus quotes in Aramaic he is portrayed as following the Standard text, and Matthew feels the need to change Jesus' citation back to the Standard text when he can, though he is willing to portray Jesus using variants when necessary. To understand this we need to look closer at processes of standardization during the early first century.

Rabbinic Evidence for the Standardisation Project

Rabbinic stories are much less reliable than rabbinic legislation. They were transmitted in a less systematic and careful way, without the rigors of courtroom methodology and testing. For this reason the following story has often been rightly treated with suspicion, but we will find that there are good reasons for regarding it as having a basis in history.

Three scrolls were found in the [Temple] courtyard:
the "*maon*" scroll, and the "*zaatuti*" scroll,
and the "*hi*" scroll.

In one [scroll] they found written [at Deut.33.27]

"A habitation [masc. *maon*] is the eternal God";

and in two [scrolls it] was written,

"A habitation [fem. *me'onah*] is the eternal God";

and they confirmed the two and abrogated the one.

In one they found written, [at Ex.24.1]

"And he sent the young men [*zaatuti*] of the sons of Israel";

and in two [scrolls it] was written,

"And he sent the young men [*na'ari*] of the sons of Israel"

and they confirmed the two and abrogated the one.

In one [scroll] they found written

"she" [spelled as "he" corrected] nine [times]

and in two [scrolls it] was written

"she" [spelled as "he" corrected] eleven [times]

and they confirmed the two and abrogated the one.

(y.Taan.4.2, 20b; cf Sifre Deut. 356; ARN B 46; b.Sof.6.4)

שלשה ספרים מצאו בעזרה

ספר מעוני וספר זעטוטי

וספר היא

באחד מצאו כתוב

מעון אלהי קדם¹⁷

ובשנים כתיב

מענה אלהי קדם

וקיימו שנים וביטלו אחד:

באחד מצאו כתוב

וישלח את זעטוטי בני ישראל

ובשנים כתוב

וישלח את נערי בני ישראל

וקיימו שנים וביטלו אחד:

באחד מצאו כתוב

תשע היא

ובשנים כתיב

אחד עשר היא

וקיימו שנים וביטלו אחד:

This tells us that the Temple displayed three exemplars of the Standard text in the courtyard where they could be examined. None of them were exactly identical, so whenever one differed from the other two, they let the correct reading be decided by the majority of texts. They give three instructive examples.

¹⁷ Some MSS read קדש "holy" instead of קדם "ancient" ie "eternal".

First the feminine *me'onah* (מַעֲנָה), which normally means “answer”) was used at Deuteronomy 33.27 where the masculine *maon* (מַעוֹן, “dwelling”) would be expected. The unusual majority reading was accepted, though the Masoretes pointed it as *me'onah* (מַעֲנָה) rather than the normal *ma'aneh* (מַעֲנֶה) so that it resembled the masculine form as much as possible without changing the letters.

Second, the Aramaic word *zaatut* (זַאֲטוּט), “young man”, was used in one manuscript instead of the normal Hebrew *na'ar* (נַעַר) which also means “young man” but it could possibly mean “a slave”.¹⁸ This was represented in the LXX as νεανίσκοι instead of παῖδες and was regarded as one of the changes which shows these translators were inspired by God (b.Meg.9a).

Lastly, they found eleven corrections of the archaic form of the feminine or neuter pronoun *hi* (הִיא) corrected to the identically sounding *hi* (הֵיא) but in one manuscript it had been corrected on only nine occasions.¹⁹

This shows that there was no attempt to find reasons for making changes. In the first case the feminine form was clearly wrong, so a helpful scribe (ie one who wants to help the reader by modernising and tidying the text) would want to correct it to the masculine but a modern text critic would wish to keep the more difficult reading on the assumption that this was unlikely to occur in more than one manuscript if it wasn't older than the correction. In the second case the Aramaic form has clearly been introduced for apologetic reasons, so a modern text critic would want to revert to the normal Hebrew. In the third case a helpful scribe would want to modernise all eleven instances, and a text critic would want to preserve the least amount of modernisation. However, in each case the decision was made on the basis of the numbers of manuscripts and not on the merits of the case.

This rabbinic tradition is very difficult to date. There are no clues in the context of the passage. It is simply inserted between two traditions which concern “two things and a third” – the former about rabbis (R. Hanina bar Hama and Rab, ie Abba b. Aibu, both from about 220-250 CE) and the latter about two couches and a third (quoted from t.Ber.5.5). Between these traditions which have nothing in common except their concern about “two things and a third”, lies two traditions which are also linked by a common theme – documents found in the Temple. The first is this one about the two scrolls and a third found in the Temple, and the other concerns genealogies found in the Temple. The tradition about genealogies has nothing to do with twos or a third, so it is presumably included because it was already firmly attached to the tradition about the scrolls and they had been inserted as a single unit.²⁰ Unfortunately this tradition about genealogies has nothing to commend itself as a genuinely ancient tradition. It is transmitted late and it

¹⁸ Marcus Jastrow, ed. *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Authorised ed; London: Chereb; New York: E. Shapiro, 1926) 407.

¹⁹ These passages are listed at ARN A 34.5 (or .7 in some editions): Gen.14.2; 20.5 38.25; Lev.11.39; 13.10, 21; 20.17; 21.9; Num.5.13 (x2), 14 – though the MT corrects one of the instances in Num.5.13.

²⁰ This is a common phenomenon in the development of Talmudic literature. However, this tradition about the genealogies has not remained attached when the tradition of the three scrolls is cited elsewhere (ie at Sif.Deut.356; b.Sof.6.4; ARN B 46).

looks like fanciful ideas rather than real genealogies. It assigns glorious ancestors or similar-sounding ancestors to various famous rabbis, eg: Hillel descended from David, R. Yannai from Eli, Ben Kalba from Caleb, R. Nehemiah from Nehemiah the Tirshathite. This only helps to cast doubt on the attached tradition of the three scrolls in the Temple.

However, traditions in rabbinic collections are a mixed bag, and it is too easy to dismiss them. One has to ask: would anyone have invented them? With regard to these genealogies, the answer is clearly, Yes. With regard to the tradition about three scrolls, the answer is, No, because they imply something embarrassing about the state of the biblical text. They imply that at the time of the Second Temple there existed no single authoritative perfect copy of the Hebrew scriptures which could be used as an exemplar.

An invented account would say something like, “In the Temple courtyard were twenty perfect scrolls” or something more fanciful like “in the days of the Temple, no scribe ever made an error”. The rabbis were perfectly capable of writing and believing such stories, as illustrated by Aristaeus’ story of the seventy who all produced an identical Greek translation. The rabbis not only believed this story – they even extended it by listing theologically useful changes which the translators had each independently been inspired to make:

King Ptolemy brought together seventy-two elders and placed them in seventy-two [separate] rooms, without telling them why he had brought them together, and he went in to each one of them and said to him, Translate for me the Torah of Moses your master. God then prompted each one of them and they all conceived the same idea and wrote for him [...a list of welcome changes] (b.Meg.9a).

The story of the three scrolls is also believable because it helps to explain the references to correcting scrolls: “When you teach your son, teach him from a corrected scroll [**מִדְּהַר**] **בְּסֵפֶר**”;²¹ “A scroll that is not corrected: R. Ami says it can be kept [for only] 30 days”.²² There are also references to those who “read” or “correct” scrolls in the Temple court: “they correct [his scroll by comparing it] to the scroll of the [Temple] Courtyard [**וּמְגִידֵי אֹתוֹ מִסְפֵּר עֲזָרָה**]”;²³ “Readers of scrolls [**מְגִידֵי סְפָרִים**] in Jerusalem received their fees from the Temple funds”; “Readers of the scroll [of the Temple] court [**מְגִידֵי סֵפֶר הָעֲזָרָה**] receive their fees from the heave-offering of the chamber”.²⁴

All of these are recorded late though they clearly relate to an earlier tradition about scrolls in the Temple. The likelihood that they relate to authentic traditions from the Temple period is paradoxically strengthened by a rabbinic ruling which misunderstands them. This tradition, which is likely to originate at the start of the second century, says: “They do not correct a single letter [even] in the scroll of the [Temple] court [**בְּסֵפֶר**]

²¹ Attributed to R. Akiva at b.Pes.112a, but this is a biographical story about Akiva’s last words, not a legal tradition, so it is likely to originate much later than Akiva.

²² This is a legal tradition from b.Ket.19b but from a very late authority.

²³ This is a late invention at y.San.2.6 inspired by m.San.2.4 which says the ideal king will write out his own Torah.

²⁴ These related traditions are both parts of collections of similar traditions at b.Ket.106a and y.Sheq.4.3 contributed by various rabbis of various generations, so the final form of the list is late. In both of them one tradition is questioned because it contradicted another, so it is likely that these were being presented in a legal context in a more rigorous way than normal non-legal agadot.

עזרא]”.²⁵ This is a rule about how much one may write on an intermediate festival day and it is clearly referring to the traditions concerning the scrolls in the Temple Courtyard and the Temple employees concerned with them, but it assumes that these scribes were employed to correct the exemplar belonging to the Temple rather than the scrolls brought along for checking against the exemplar. The fact that these traditions about the three scrolls and the Temple employees were already being misunderstood suggests that they originated at least two generations before this misunderstanding – ie in the mid first century or earlier.

Each of these rabbinic traditions are of dubious value individually, but they tell a consistent story: that the Temple owned three manuscripts which were used as exemplars by Temple employees who corrected scrolls which were brought to them. If this story had been invented it would have referred to a single scroll which was perfect or perhaps many perfect scrolls. We can already see this kind of myth developing in the Jerusalem Talmud which refers to a single Temple scroll.²⁶ This tradition about three scrolls is believable because it implies that the Temple did not own even one perfect ancient copy, which is an admission that the prior status of the text is not as changeless as Josephus claimed or as perfectly preserved as the rabbis would have liked to have believed.

Evidence for Standardisation at Qumran

When we bring this evidence back to the texts at Qumran, it is not difficult to find examples of the Standardisation process taking place in the Dead Sea scrolls themselves.

Tov has already pointed out that the texts which were already the family of Standard texts have been corrected to align with the Standard text even more carefully.²⁷ This suggests that these texts had been copied from an exemplar which was close to the Standard text, and then they had been corrected according to another better exemplar (perhaps one which the scribe did not have easy access to) in order to bring it closer to the Standard text. This process continued outside Qumran till fewer and fewer corrections were needed. The early second century manuscript of the Twelve Prophets found at Murabba'at has only 11 corrections, all of which correct it towards the Standard text.²⁸

However, these corrections did not only occur in manuscripts which were originally copied from Standard texts. We can find evidence for corrections towards the Standard text even in manuscripts which were copied by scribes who copied in a non-conservative way. Later scribes corrected such texts by fixing not only scribal errors but also removing variants, so that they corrected it towards the Standard text.

A good place to look for examples is Deuteronomy because several fragments of this much-loved book have survived so we can compare overlapping manuscripts. For example, in 11.8-10 the Masoretic text says:

²⁵ This undatable tradition in m.MQ.3.4 is earlier than R. Judah (b. Illai) who commented on it in the mid second century.

²⁶ The idealised story concerning the Torah of the king (y.San.2.6) and the tradition about Temple employees (y.Sheq.4.3) both refer to a single scroll.

²⁷ See his list of examples at Tov, *Scribal Practices* p. 224

²⁸ Tov, *Scribal Practices* 224

"go in and possess the land you [plural] are crossing over to possess...

(10) For the land which you [singular] are going in to possess is not like the land of Egypt from where you [pl.] came where you [sing.] sowed your [sing.] seed and watered it with your [sing.] foot like a garden of herbs".

At Qumran we find three changes which help the reader, underlined in the following:²⁹

"go in and possess the land you [plural] are crossing over the Jordan to possess...

(10) For the land which you [plural] are going in to possess is not like the land of Egypt from where you [pl.] came where you [sing.] sowed your [sing.] seed and watered it with your [sing.] feet like a garden of herbs".

1) The phrase "crossing over" sounds clumsy without an object. The Qumran manuscript which covers this verse (4QDeut^{k1}) has supplied it by adding "the Jordan". The Septuagint has this addition, but none of the Targums felt the need to add an object and both the Masoretic text and Samaritan Pentateuch lack it, so it likely that it was originally absent. It seems that the Qumran scribe has added something useful which was traditionally added (as reflected in the Septuagint). Interestingly, the NIV added this same helpful phrase in 1984 before this manuscript was published.

2) There is a mix-up between singular and plural "you": the Masoretic text reads "you [plural] are crossing over... to the land which you [singular] are going to possess". Perhaps a scribe was confused by the mixture of the many "you" who go into the land, and the example singular "you" who had a herb garden in Egypt. The Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint and Targum Neofiti³⁰ have plural in both cases, as it undoubtedly should be and probably was originally. Two Qumran scribes have a Hebrew plural (4QDeut^{k1 & j}), but at some point someone has corrected one of these (4QDeut^j) to the singular. This change makes it meaningless and the only possible reason for this 'correction' is in order to make it conform to the Standard text.

3) This herb garden in Egypt was so small it could be "watered with your foot", but this was an embarrassing phrase in Hebrew, because urine was called "foot water" (2 Kings 18:27; Is 36:12). Perhaps the original picture was meant to express the idea of a garden so small that you could water it with this euphemistic "foot", but such texts were difficult to read out in a worship service. However, if you change it to "feet", it conjures a completely different picture: it now refers to digging an irrigation channel – you don't need to use a spade, but you only needed to kick a bit of dirt aside to make a small grove. Therefore everyone changed "foot" to "feet" – the Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Targum Neofiti³¹ and the two Qumran scribes whose Hebrew manuscripts survive at this point (4QDeut^{k1 & c}). However, at some point someone has corrected one of them (4QDeut^c) so that it reads "foot", and the only possible reason is to make it conform to the Standard text.

These examples show that even at Qumran the text is undergoing standardisation, and that the Standard text is already the clear favourite even at Qumran. But is it simply the

²⁹ There are actually two additional words with variants within this section: the singular "you" alters the verb as well as the pronoun; and the pronoun for Egypt is masculine in MT but feminine (as expected) everywhere else.

³⁰ Targums PseudoJonathan and Onkelos follow the MT with a singular.

³¹ Targum PseudoJonathan had a different solution making it "by yourself". Onkelos characteristically follows the MT exactly and has "foot".

most popular, or it is also the oldest? To answer this, we have to consider where the variant readings come from.

The origin of variant readings

The vast majority of variants consist of different styles of spelling or grammar, but the really interesting variants are those which result in a different meaning or explain an obscure reading. It is generally recognised that the Standard text has the largest number of obscure or problematic readings and that the variant manuscripts tend to contain more intelligible and less problematic readings – as we saw in the examples above. It is a happy coincidence that modern scholars generally agree that the Standard text was probably the correct one for the rabbis to choose as an exemplar because it contains more archaic Hebrew and uncorrected corruptions. The other versions often offer solutions for these difficult passages which may well be correct, but they are probably corrections to the older more difficult text.

This suggests that one source of variants is scribes who wish to help the reader, and this theory has found support from a study aiming to show something completely different. Emanuel Tov has analysed the biblical fragments from the point of view of scribal practices used when writing the different manuscripts – such as the materials used and styles of writing – in order to identify manuscripts which were written by the scribes at Qumran and those which were collected from outside. In the process of doing this he identified a group of 'de luxe' manuscripts with features such as high quality vellum, lines drawn to guide the scribe, careful correction-free writing and wide margins. He concluded that these expensive editions were prepared for centers of worship or scholarship.³² This was based partly on the fact that these features largely conformed to the later rabbinic regulations for preparing Bible scrolls³³ and partly on the grounds that these scrolls would be too expensive for individual use.³⁴ He also found that these luxury scrolls tended to follow the Standard text, whereas the cheaper copies made for individuals tended to contain more variations away from the Standard text.³⁵

This means that when scribes were preparing a scroll for community worship and teaching, they chose a Standard text and copied it exactly. However, when making a copy for an individual, they made helpful changes when the Hebrew was corrupt or obscure. Tov's discovery works very well with this hypothesis but it still needs a lot of work to substantiate it.

This hypothesis is not saying that Qumran scribes invented variant readings. No variants in support of specifically Qumran doctrines have been found, and Eugene Ulrich (who has specifically searched for them) points out that they would in any case be counter-

³² Tov "The Biblical Texts" 159-160.

³³ These rules are found in the post post-Talmudic tractate *Sopherim* and at y.Meg.1, 71b-72a. See Tov, *Scribal Practices* 274 for the details and analysis.

³⁴ Some of Tov's complex collections of correlations have been criticised, especially with regard to identifying the group of texts which were produced at Qumran – see Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, 'Assessing Emanuel Tov's "Qumran Scribal Practice"' in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Transmission of Traditions and Production of Texts*, ed. by Sarianna Metso, Hindy Najman and Eileen Schuller (Leiden; Brill: 2010)

³⁵ Tov "The Biblical Texts" 151, 158-9.

productive because they would convince no-one outside their community.³⁶ Neither would they need to invent ways to explain corrupt or archaic Hebrew, because these explanations would already exist. Every time someone preached on the text or translated it into Aramaic or Greek, they would need to interpret the Hebrew in a meaningful way, so each obscure passage would have one or more traditional explanations. This would explain why these variants so often agree with one of these translations. It would also explain why features of Aramaic and Greek translations find their way into texts which do not on the whole fit into these families of texts.

Conclusions

The differences between the Bibles found at Qumran and in the rest of Palestine are dramatic, and the explanation is not clear. Perhaps the separatists at Qumran simply did not recognise the primacy of the Standard text and revelled in variant readings and interpretations based on those readings. Perhaps the Qumran community were avid collectors who loved variety and quirky examples of manuscripts - like a modern-day stamp collector who wants a standard copy of everything, but also loves collecting misprints and rare varieties. Or perhaps Qumran Jews were just as keen on establishing a Standard text as anyone else in Palestine, but their isolation meant that they did not have access to the best exemplars. The truth is probably a combination of these.

However, the Standard text was undoubtedly important at Qumran. There were ten times as many fragments from the Standard text family as from the next closest family of texts and all types of text show corrections towards the Standard text though not as systematically or accurately as outside Qumran. The fact that scrolls made for individuals tended to contain more variants may suggest that some were deliberate emendations to help the reader.

Jesus and Josephus were just as willing to use such variants, though they did not go so far as to introduce them into the Hebrew text. Josephus and Jesus were willing to follow easier readings when the Hebrew was problematic. But they did not attempt to change the Hebrew text because Josephus wrote in Greek and Jesus was teaching in Aramaic before being recorded in Greek.³⁷ No one would imagine that they were trying to suggest a different Hebrew original – this was no different than a modern preacher choosing to use a different Bible translation because it had the same emphasis as that morning's sermon. Both Jesus and Josephus expressed confidence in the Standard text project. Josephus stated that it represented a text that had never changed in the past, and although this was certainly not so, scholars agree that the Standard text probably was one of the oldest text forms surviving at the time. Jesus affirmed that this text would remain the same for ever, and the identity between the Standard text and the Masoretic text is certainly remarkable.

This paper has gathered evidence that the Standardisation project was being carried out in the early first century so although the process was not complete, the statements of Jesus

³⁶ Eugene Ulrich "The Absence of 'Sectarian Variants' in the Jewish Scriptural Scrolls Found at Qumran" in Herbert & Tov *The Bible as a Book* 179-195, p. 181

³⁷ If Jesus is presented as citing the Old Testament in Aramaic on the cross, apparently for himself, this suggests that he certainly translated the text when preaching to the common people who were unfamiliar with scholarly Hebrew.

and Josephus about the exact continuity of the Hebrew scriptures would not have been regarded as absurd by their first readers. They all knew that the Standard text was likely to remain unchanged, because so many people were working to standardise manuscripts towards this text form. What they couldn't have predicted was that Jesus' apparent hyperbole about the preservation of every single letter would turn out to be so literal.

D. Instone-Brewer

Handout

Summary

The discovery of the Qumran Bible manuscripts helped confirm the theory that there were many different forms of the Hebrew Bible before a Standard one was chosen to be preserved as the Masoretic text, so first century Jews had many Hebrew Bibles available to them. Subsequent discoveries have reversed that conclusion. It now appears likely that first century Jews had already decided which text form of the Hebrew text was the oldest, and that many of the variant readings were conscious paraphrases of this older text.

Jesus in Matthew and Luke claims not one letter or penstroke will ever be lost from the text of the Torah (Matt.5.18; cf. Lk.16.17). Josephus claims similarly about the books of the whole Old Testament that "during so many ages as have already passed, nobody dared to add to them, to take from them, or to make changes" (C. Ap. 1.38, 42).

MurXII, a complete scroll of the minor prophets from the early 2nd C, differs from the medieval Leningrad codex in only 37 details, almost all of which are variations in spelling. But this contrasts markedly with previous centuries illustrated by the Dead Sea Scrolls which exhibit huge variety.

If everything was still fluid in the first century, why did authors like Matthew, Luke and Josephus make such absurd claims which could be easily falsified? This paper argues that the Standardisation Project was well under way in the 1st century.

The Old Testament Text found at Qumran

Among the 25,000 fragments of 900 manuscripts found at Qumran, there are about 200 which are recognisable as Bible texts, including fragments from all Hebrew OT books except Esther and Nehemiah. 121 fragments are large enough to analyse their text type:
4 are similar to the Septuagint,
3 to the Samaritan Pentateuch,
57 to the Standard text
another 57 do not fit into any known text family

The Old Testament Text found Outside Qumran

Early 2nd C texts were discovered at Massada, Wadi Sdeir, Naḥal Se'elim, Naḥal Hever and Murabba'at, including 23 Bible manuscripts. All are Standard texts.

The Bible used by Jesus

Matthew 15:9

μάτην δὲ σέβονται με διδάσκοντες διδασκαλίας ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων.
they revere me in vain, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men

Isaiah 29:13 LXX

μάτην δὲ σέβονται με διδάσκοντες ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων καὶ διδασκαλίας
they revere me in vain, teaching the commandments and doctrines of men

Isaiah 29:13 *MT* יִרְאֵתֶם אֹתִי מִצְוַת אַנְשִׁים מִלְּמֶדָה

their reverence for me [is] a commandment taught by men

Isaiah 29:13 *Tg* וְהָיוּ דְחַלְתְּהוֹן קְדָמִי כְתַפְקִידַת גְּבֻרִין מִלְּפִינִי

they do reverence for me like a commandment taught by men

Isaiah 29:13 *1QIsa^a* יִרְאֵתֶם אֹתִי כְּמִצְוַת אַנְשִׁים מִלְּמֶדָה

their reverence for me [is] like a commandment taught by men

Mark 4:12 ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἀφεθῆ ἑαυτοῖς

they may turn and [their sins] may be forgiven them

Matthew 13:15. ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς

they may turn and I will heal them

Isaiah 6:10 *Tg* וִיִּתְיַבּוּן וִישְׁתַּבֵּיֵק לְהוֹן

they may turn and [their sins] be forgiven them.

Isaiah 6:10 *MT 1QIsa^a 4QIsa^a* וְשָׁב וְרָפָא לוֹ

they may turn and I will heal them

Isaiah 6:10 *LXX* ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς

they may turn and I will heal them

Mark 15:34 ελωι ελωι λεμα σαβαχθανι (*elôî elôî lema sabachthani*)

ὁ θεός μου ὁ θεός μου, εἰς τί ἐγκατέλιπές με;

My God, my God, to what [purpose] have you forsaken me?

Matthew 27:46 ηλι ηλι λεμα σαβαχθανι (*êli êli lema sabachthani*)

Θεέ μου θεέ μου, ἵνατί με ἐγκατέλιπες;

Oh my God, oh my God, why have you me forsaken?

Psalms 22:1 *LXX* ὁ θεὸς ὁ θεός μου πρόσχες μοι ἵνα τί ἐγκατέλιπές με;

God, my God, listen to me; for what [purpose] have you forsaken me?

Psalms 22:2^{MT} לָמָּה עֲזַבְתָּנִי אֱלֹהִי אֱלֹהִי (*eli eli lamah 'atzabtani*)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Psalms 22:2^{Tg} מַה שְׁבַקְתָּנִי אֱלֹהִי אֱלֹהִי (*eli eli metul mah sabaktani*)

My God, my God, for what have you abandoned me?

Rabbinic Evidence for the Standardisation Project

Three scrolls were found in the [Temple] courtyard:
the "*maon*" scroll, and the "*zaatuti*" scroll,
and the "*hi*" scroll.
In one [scroll] they found written [at Deut.33.27]
"A habitation [masc. *maon*] is the eternal God";
and in two [scrolls it] was written,
"A habitation [fem. *me'onah*] is the eternal God";
and they confirmed the two and abrogated the one.
In one they found written, [at Ex.24.1]
"And he sent the young men [*zaatuti*] of the sons of Israel";
and in two [scrolls it] was written,
"And he sent the young men [*na'ari*] of the sons of Israel"
and they confirmed the two and abrogated the one.
In one [scroll] they found written
"she" [spelled as "he" corrected] nine [times]
and in two [scrolls it] was written
"she" [spelled as "he" corrected] eleven [times]
and they confirmed the two and abrogated the one.
(y.Taan.4.2, 20b; cf Sifre Deut. 356; ARN B 46; b.Sof.6.4)

שלשה ספרים מצאו בעזרה
ספר מעוני וספר זעטוטי
וספר היא
באחד מצאו כתוב
מעון אלהי קדם
ובשנים כתיב
מענה אלהי קדם
וקיימו שנים וביטלו אחד:
באחד מצאו כתוב
וישלח את זעטוטי בני ישראל
ובשנים כתוב
וישלח את נערי בני ישראל
וקיימו שנים וביטלו אחד:
באחד מצאו כתוב
תשע היא
ובשנים כתיב
אחד עשר היא
וקיימו שנים ובטלו אחד:

Evidence for Standardisation at Qumran

MurXII Twelve Prophets has only 11 corrections, all towards the Standard text.

Examples at Qumran: Deut.11.8-10 the Masoretic text says:

"go in and possess the land you [plural] are crossing over to possess...

(10) For the land which you [singular] are going in to possess is not like the land of Egypt from where you [pl.] came where you [sing.] sowed your [sing.] seed and watered it with your [sing.] foot like a garden of herbs".

At Qumran we find three changes which help the reader, underlined in the following:

"go in and possess the land you [plural] are crossing over the Jordan to possess...

(10) For the land which you [plural] are going in to possess is not like the land of Egypt from where you [pl.] came where you [sing.] sowed your [sing.] seed and watered it with your [sing.] feet like a garden of herbs".

- see 4QDeut^{k1} 4QDeut^{k1} and 4QDeut^j

The origin of variant readings

The Standard text has the largest number of obscure or problematic readings. Other versions often offer helpful easier solutions for these difficult passages. Tov found that expensive 'luxury' scrolls at Qumran tended to follow the Standard text.

The Standard text was undoubtedly important at Qumran. All types of text show corrections towards the Standard text though not as systematically or accurately as outside Qumran. Jesus and Josephus were willing to use such variants, though they did not introduce them into the Hebrew text. The Standardisation project was being carried out in the early first century so although the process was not complete, the statements of the Gospels and Josephus about the exact continuity of the Hebrew scriptures would not have been regarded as absurd by their first readers.