3. Conclusion

The annals of Judaism do not encourage faith in the OT's text. Most of the rulers were idolaters who sought by various means to turn their subjects away from God, while the very progenitors of Israel were hardly any better, dealing treacherously with their kith and kin. Moses, the greatest Israelite prophet, had to contend with a nation tremendously ungrateful to the Lord and to him: after the presentation of numerous miracles, the plagues and the parting of the sea, he had only to leave for forty days before the Israelites set up their infamous golden calf. Such an attitude casts serious doubt on the Jews' preservation of Moses' teachings during his own lifetime, let alone in later eras. The text itself was lost more than once, each time for centuries while the kings and their subjects reverted to outright paganism. Let us now shift our focus, and examine the extent to which the Jewish Scriptures were preserved.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS CORRUPTION

In heaven God and the angels study Torah just as rabbis do on earth. God does phylacteries like a Jew and prays in the rabbinic mode. He carries out the acts of compassion Judaic ethics call for. He guides the affairs of the world according to the rules of Torah, just as the rabbi in his court does. One exegesis of the creation legend taught that God had looked into the Torah and created the world from it.¹

It is customary that when a human being builds a palace, he does not build it according to his own wisdom, but according to the wisdom of a craftsman. And the craftsman does not build according to his own wisdom, rather he has plans and records in order to know how to make rooms and corridors. The Holy One, blessed be He, did the same. He looked into the Torah and created the world.²

1. History of the Old Testament

The previous chapter afforded a glimpse of the historical circumstances which subverted any efforts to safeguard the OT. In this section I will provide a history of the text itself. The extensive quotes I utilize here and in other chapters, concerning the histories of the OT and NT, are purely from the Judeo-Christian camp. Contrary to the outdated notion that Easterners cannot represent themselves and must be represented, I will let these scholars represent themselves and have their say before I bring forward my own arguments regarding their views.

In Hebrew the OT consists of three parts: the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Writings, and these are reckoned as twenty-four books. The received text of the Hebrew OT is called the Massoretic text (MT).³

¹ Jacob Neusner, The Way of Torah, p. 81. For Neusner, this is the central myth underlying classical Judaism. But myth does not necessarily mean something untrue; he quotes Strong's definition, that myth is "the essential structure of reality [that] manifests in particular moments that are remembered and repeated from generation to generation." (Ibid, p. 42.)


³ Dictionary of the Bible, p. 972. For a definition of the Masoret refer to p. 275.
i. History of Torah According to Jewish Sources

A. Moses Delivereth the Torah to Levites Who Place It Beside the Ark

9 And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and unto all the elders of Israel.

10 And Moses commanded them, saying, at the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles,

11 When all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing.4

24 And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished,

25 That Moses commanded the Levites, which bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying,

26 Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.

27 For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the Lord; and how much more after my death?

29 For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands.5

b. Torah Lost and Rediscovered

Proving the existence of the text of the Torah and its usage prior to the Exile is very difficult. To quote Aaron Demsky:

Another feature of the sabbatical year is the public reading of the Torah during the holiday of Booth (Tabernacles), which concludes the year (Deuteronomy 31:10-13). There is no textual evidence attesting to the observance of the sabbatical and jubilee years in First Temple times. In fact, the author of Chronicles... makes the claim that the 70 sabbatical years from the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites until the destruction of the Temple were not observed.9

According to the Damascus document (of which seven copies were found in the Dead Sea Scrolls) the Lord gave the Torah to Moses in its entirety in written form. These writings were sealed in the Ark for approximately five centuries, however, and were therefore unknown to the masses. Discussing the puzzle of David's relationship with Bathsheba and why he was not put to death, the Damascus document answers, "the books of the Law had been sealed in the Ark from the time of Joshua [c. 1200 B.C.E.] until the time of King Josiah of Judah [seventh century B.C.E.], when they were rediscovered and republished."8 Meaning that David and the rabbis who were his contemporaries were completely unaware that adultery was a punishable offense, and indeed were oblivious to everything else that lay written in the Torah.

Whether we conjecture that the Torah was placed within the Ark or simply beside it, the subject is highly convoluted. The Ark itself was lost to the Philistines for seven months during the Philistine invasions (c. 1050-1020 B.C.E.); upon its recovery, fifty-thousand and seventy Israelites from the town of Beth-shemesh were wiped out by God for daring to peek into the Ark.7 By the time King Solomon ordered that the Ark be moved to the First Temple, 1 Kings 8:9 informs us that its sole contents were the two tablets which Moses had brought back from Sinai—not the entire Law. Even if the Torah was housed separately from the Ark, it disappeared entirely from Jewish life for centuries. Seventy sabbatical years (five centuries), if not more, passed without any public recital of the Law, culminating in the introduction of foreign gods and pagan rites. A clear sign that the Torah had long since been erased from the nation's collective memory. Not until the eighteenth year of King Josiah's reign (640-609 B.C.E.) was the Torah 'miraculously rediscovered',10 prompting the king's sweeping reforms against child sacrifice and other pagan rituals. But the Torah was still not in common use for another two centuries at least, disappearing from Jewish consciousness as abruptly as it appeared. There is strong evidence that the first reading and expounding of the Law to the general public (after Moses) did not occur until Ezra's promulgation c. 449 B.C.E. Note that this leaves a massive gap of over 170 years from the time of the Law's rediscovery in the Temple (621 B.C.E.) to Ezra's recital.11

April 1996, p. 33.

7 For the story of Bathsheba see 2 Samuel 11.
9 See 1 Samuel 6:19.
11 Dictionary of the Bible, p.954.
ii. History of the Torah According to Modern Scholars

Let us start with a chronological outline of the OT books based upon generally accepted conclusions of biblical criticism. The following table is from C.H. Dodd, *The Bible To-day*.12

Note: the dates given are rather sketchy and seem inclined to shift up and down on occasion. Rowley has discussed the different trends in the dating of OT books,13 but such discrepancies will not have much bearing on the outcome of this discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Century B.C.E.</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XIII (or earlier?)</td>
<td>Exodus from Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII (?)</td>
<td>Settlement in Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI</td>
<td>Wars with Canaanites, etc. (David, 1000 B.C.E.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Court chronicles begin (incorporated in later books).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>Early laws and traditions written down: Jewish collection ('J') and材ite collection ('E'), later incorporated in Genesis-to-Joshua.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah. (Fall of Samaria, 721 B.C.E.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Chronicles, Ecclesiastes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Book of Psalms completed (largely out of much earlier poems). Ecclesiasticus, Daniel, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Book of Wisdom, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The collection and codification of the ancient Israelite laws resulted in the so-called Pentateuch, or the Five Books of Moses (covering Genesis to Deuteronomy). According to C.H. Dodd these received their final shape around the fourth century B.C.E. The works of the prophets were also edited, with historical records often being altered in the interest of bringing them into line with the prophets’ teachings.14

A. Biblical Sources Edited in the Fifth to Second Century B.C.E.

William G. Dever, Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Arizona, presents another view. He contends that the biblical sources were edited in the late Persian (fifth-fourth centuries B.C.E.) and Hellenistic (third-second centuries B.C.E.) eras. And there are others such as Tom Thompson of Copenhagen, his colleague Niels Peter Lemche, Philip Davies of Sheffield, and a number of other scholars, both American and European, who believe that the Hebrew Bible was not only edited in the Persian/Hellenistic periods but was written then.15

Meanwhile Professor Frederick Cryer of Copenhagen, concludes that the Hebrew Bible “cannot be shown to have achieved its present contents prior to the Hellenistic period”. The people we call Israel did not use that term for themselves, he says, before the fourth century B.C.E. The Saul and David narratives, for example, were written under “the probable influence” of Hellenistic literature about Alexander the Great. That these biblical texts were composed so late “necessarily forces us to lower our estimation of the work as an historical source”.16

Niels Lemche has gone even further, tracing the conception of ancient Israel to “19th-century German historiography that saw all civilizations in terms of its own concept of the nation-state”.17 To him the social and political patterns of an ancient Israel are thus whimsical dreams born of Europe’s own preoccupation with nation-statehood in the 1800s.18

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14 C.H. Dodd, *The Bible To-day*, pp. 59-60.
18 Muslims do not practice such cynicism. They must believe in the existence of David, Solomon, and the Torah as revealed to Moses (whose traces may lurk in some books of the OT).
2. The Sources of Jewish Literary Culture

i. Original Language of the Old Testament was Not Called Hebrew

The pre-exilic language used by Jews was a Canaanite dialect not known as Hebrew. The Phoenicians (or more accurately, the Canaanites) invented the first true alphabet c. 1500 B.C.E., based on letters instead of descriptive images. All successive alphabets are indebted to and derivative of this Canaanite accomplishment.19

In general culture the Canaanites are no less remarkable, and not a little of that culture was taken over by the Hebrews.20 The Hebrews were not great builders, nor very apt in the arts and crafts. As a result they had to rely heavily on the Canaanites in this field, and in others as well. Whatever language the Hebrews spoke before settling in Palestine, it was a dialect of Canaanite that became their language after the settlement.21

Some scholars believe that Hebrew and Aramaic are simply two dialects of Canaanite.22 The pre-exilic Jewish script was in fact Canaanite,23 although it is now falsely designated as old Hebrew or paleo-Hebrew. Abraham and his descendants formed too small a clan in Canaan to establish their own unique language, and by necessity they must have used the predominant Canaanite; it is very unlikely that the Israelites, present in such small numbers and forced to endure hardship and slavery in Egypt, were in a position capable of setting up a new language. At best they may have adopted a particular Canaanite dialect, but certainly nothing separate and unique. In fact the OT itself never refers to the Jewish language as Hebrew, as illustrated by these two verses from Isaiah 36:

11 Then said Elakim and Shebna and Joah unto Rab-shakeh, Speak, I pray thee, unto thy servants the Syrian language; for we understand it: and speak not to us in the King's language, in the ears of the people that are on the wall.
13 Then Rab-shakeh stood, and cried with a loud voice in the King's language, and said, Hear ye the words of the great king, the king of Assyria.

Such is the rendering in the King James Version. The same phrase is found in the New World Translation,24 the Holy Bible from the Ancient Eastern Text,25 the Revised Standard Version26 and the Arabic Edition. These last three substitute 'Aramaic' for 'Syrian language', but none of them designates the other as Hebrew.27 2 Kgs 18:26 and 2 Ch 32:18 chronicle the same incident and incorporate the same expression. In another chapter of Isaiah we read:

In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction.28

The above translations unanimously agree on this phrasing. Had Hebrew existed as a distinct language at the time, the OT would bear testimony to it instead of a blank reference to the 'Jews' language' or the 'language of Canaan'.29 Given that the text alludes to the language of Canaan generically— which, simply put, is Canaanite— we can infer that the Israelites did not possess a unique tongue at the time of the Divided Kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

In fact the word 'Hebrew' was indeed in existence, but it predated the Israelites and did not signify anything remotely Jewish. The words 'Ibri (Habiru) and 'Ibrani (Hebrew) were in usage even before 2000 B.C.E. and referred to a group of Arab tribes from the northern reaches of the Arabian Peninsula, in the Syrian desert. The appellation spread to other Arab tribes in the area until it became a synonym for 'son of the desert'. Cuneiform and Pharaonic texts from before the Israelites also use such words as 'Ibiri, Habiri, Habiru, Khabinu, and 'Abriru. In this sense the term 'Ibrani, as ascribed to Abraham in the Bible, means a member of the 'Abriru (or nomadic Arab tribes), of which he was a member. The phrase 'Ibrir, denoting Jews, was coined later on by the rabbis in Palestine.29

ii. The Early Jewish Script: Canaanite and Assyrian

The pre-exilic Jewish script was Canaanite.30 When Aramaic became the predominant tongue of the ancient Near East, the Jews adopted this

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19 Irad Philo Zeitoun, Tarikh el-Loghity wa-Samiyya (History of Semitic Languages), Dar al-Qalam, Beirut, Lebanon, P.O. Box 3874, ND, p. 54. Cited thereafter as Zeitoun.
20 Philo Zeitoun, p. 75.
21 Zeitoun, p. 91.
23 George M. Lanca's translation from the Aramaic of the Peshitta, Harper, San Francisco.
25 The Revised Standard Version uses "language of Judah".
26 KJV, Isaiah 19:18.
27 Of all the Bibles in my collection only the CEV explicitly writes Hebrew in Isaiah 19:18, Isaiah 36:11-13, 2 K 18:26, and 2 Ch 32:18. But the accuracy of this work is highly suspect, see pp. 326 - 27.
28 Zeitoun, pp. 73-79.
29 Ibid., p. 91.
language and soon assumed its script as well — which was then known as Assyrian.31

This כֹּלְנַד או значит "Assyrian script" was so called because it was the originally Aramaic form of the "Mesopotamian script" which had been coming into use... since the 8th century B.C. and which was brought back by Jews returning from the Exile. The "square script" (עֵינָקִים מָעִין) was derived from this form of the alphabet.32

This square script was not formally designated as Hebrew until the writings of Bin Sira and Josephus in the first century C.E., and in the Mishna and Talmud,33 all of which are very late developments.

So which language was the OT originally written in? From the information above we see a process of scriptural evolution: Canaanite, Aramaic (Assyrian), and finally square, which later on was renamed Hebrew. We can conclude that, prior to their return from the Babylonian Exile in 538 B.C.E., Jews did not have any means of written communication distinctively their own. Interestingly Würthwein annexes the Canaanite alphabet by declaring, "This was the Phoenician-Old Hebrew script, the ancestor of all the alphabets of past and present"34. This is quite frankly meaningless in light of the above history.

iii. The Sources of the Torah

A. Jewish Sources
Just as it remains fashionable to search for ulterior influences in the Qur’ān (a subject I will tackle later),35 Western scholars busied themselves in the past with finding sources for the Torah. Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) points out four basic origins: J (the Yahwistic Prophetic narrative,

32 ibid., p. 2, footnote 4.
33 Würthwein, p. 75.
34 Würthwein, p. 2, Italicized added. There is yet another twist to this history of falsifications. Now in Wadi el-Hol in Egypt, near Luxor, a "Semitic inscriptions" dated somewhere between 1900 and 1800 B.C.E. has been discovered by Dr. Darnells and his wife Deborah. The director of the West Semitic Research Project at the University of California, Dr. Zuckerman, traveled to the spot to take detailed pictures of the inscription. [J.H. Wilford, "Discovery of Egyptian Inscriptions Indicates an Earlier Date for Origin of the Alphabet", The New York Times, Nov. 13, 1999]. As the word "Semitic" is nowadays reserved exclusively for Jews (rather than Arabs or Aramaeans), it appears that the credit for inventing the alphabet may gradually be taken away from the Phoenicians and given to the ancient Israelites.
35 See Chapter 19.

36 Dictionary of the Bible, p. 104.
37 ibid., p. 506; italics added. The Book of the Covenant or Covenant Code is roughly Ex 20:22-23:19 [ibid., p. 508]. Frédéric Delitzsch, the founding father of Assyriology, in his works Bible and Bible and Die Gnesse Totarchung has shown that the sources for Israelite faith, religion and society were mainly derived from Babylonian sources. [See S. Butzweitz, "How Mute Stones Speak: Interpreting What We Dig Up", Biblical Archeology Review, March/April 1995, vol. 21, no. 2, p. 61.]
both originated at the time of Moses; the latter provided all the necessary explanations for implementing the former. The Mishnah is a compilation of this Oral Law.\textsuperscript{39}

The Mishnah’s own account of the origin and history of the Oral Law is given in the tractate Aboth. 1. At the same time that the Written Law was given from Sinai, the Oral Law, too, was delivered to Moses, and handed down (orally) in turn to the leaders of successive generations.\textsuperscript{40}

Below is the tractate Aboth, 1, containing the traditional history of the Oral Law:

1. Moses received the Law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets committed it to the men of the Great Synagogue. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgement, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Law.

2. Simeon the Just\textsuperscript{41} was of the remnant of the Great Synagogue ....

3. Antigonus of Soko received [the Law] from Simeon the Just ....

4. Jose b. Josezer of Zeredah and Jose b. Johanan of Jerusalem received [the Law] from them ....\textsuperscript{42}

And so on. “Excepting the last four paragraphs the sayings are anonymous.”\textsuperscript{43}

This traditional account of the Oral Law, of its transmission from Moses in an unbroken chain to the rabbis of post-Exile Jerusalem, is easily disproved by a glance at Jewish history. The discovery of a ‘Book of the Law’ during King Josiah’s reign (640-609 B.C.E.)\textsuperscript{44} prompted wide-ranging reforms.\textsuperscript{45} The nature of these – purging the Temple of heathen altars, eliminating child sacrifices, destroying the pagan house of male prostitutes, and so on – bears witness that even the most obvious fundamentals of the Law had been wiped clean from Israelite consciousness. The extent of these practices belies the existence of Jewish teachers who were supposedly memorizing and transmitting the Oral Law for centuries. The Oral traditions are clearly

an exponent of the Written Law; even if the latter had disappeared, any faithful preservation of the former, orally, would have sufficiently informed rabbis that such pagan rituals constituted sacrilege. Where were the religious leaders who were transmitting the Law generation after generation? Indeed Josiah’s grandfather, King Manasseh, thought that by restoring the altars to Baal which Hezekiah had destroyed, he was “returning to the early worship of the nation, and the Baal whom he worshiped was probably identified in the minds of the people with the national God Yahweh.”\textsuperscript{46}

Whatever the form of Oral Law originally received by Moses, it was lost several millennia ago and no longer exists. The current Oral Law, probably dates from the time when the Written Law was first read and expounded to the people [by Ezra]. This oral expounding inevitably led to differing explanations. Hence in later times it was necessary to reduce to writing the explanations considered authoritative and correct. This process began in the time of Hillel and Shammai (end of 1st century B.C.E.) and came to be called mishnah .... Frequently, each teacher would compile his own mishnah.\textsuperscript{47}

Benefit of any original source from which to draw, and given that disputes over meaning led individual teachers to compile their own Oral Law, how valid then is the Mishnah (Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi’s redaction) which survives today? On what methodological basis did it supersede all others?


The OT’s Hebrew text is termed Masoretic because in its present form it is based on the Masorah, the textual tradition of the Jewish scholars known as the Masoretes.

The Masorah (Hebr., “tradition”) refers to the system of vowel signs, accent markings, and marginal notes devised by early medieval Jewish scribes and scholars and used in copying the text of the Hebrew Bible in order to guard it from changes.\textsuperscript{48}

i. Only Thirty-One Surviving Masoretic Texts of the OT

The Masoretic text (MT) alludes to the end product, a text wherein the vowelless, consonantal body of the Hebrew Bible was adorned with vowel

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Dictionary of the Bible, p. 954.
  \item \textsuperscript{40} Herbert Danby (trans), The Mishnah, Introduction, Oxford Univ. Press, 1933, p. xvii.
  \item \textsuperscript{41} Either Simeon son of Onias, High Priest c. 280 B.C.E., or Simeon II, High Priest c. 200 B.C.E.
  \item \textsuperscript{42} H. Danby (trans), The Mishnah, p. 446.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} ibid., p. 446, footnote no. 1.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Dictionary of the Bible, p. 382.
  \item \textsuperscript{45} ibid., p. 616.
  \item \textsuperscript{46} ibid., p. 954.
  \item \textsuperscript{47} Oxford Companion to the Bible, p. 500; emphasis added.
\end{itemize}
and accent marks in the early Middle Ages. The total number of Hebrew Bibles written in Masoretic form (either complete or fragmentary) is only 31, dating from the late 9th century to 1100 C.E. The symbol £ designates the Masoretic text in both the Biblia Hebraica edited by Rudolf Kittel (BHK) and the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS). These constitute the most critical editions of the OT and are highly revered; in fact they both represent the text of the same manuscript, B 19A, in the Slatkova-Schedrina State Public Library of St. Petersburg, written in 1008 C.E.

Figure 16.1: Sample page from the Leningrad Codex. The shown folio covers Genesis 12:1B-13:7A. Note the lack of separators (markers) between chapters as well as verses. Reprinted with the publisher's kind permission.

48 ibid, p. 501.
49 Wurthwein, p. 10.

One remarkable aspect of the Leningrad Codex, as it is known, is its dating system. V. Lebedev states,

The manuscript begins with a large colophon, which gives the date of the manuscript copy, cited in five different eras: 4770 from Creation, 1444 from King Jehoiachin's exile, 1319 from 'Greek dominion' (maddun ha-yavanim), 946 from the destruction of the second Temple of Jerusalem, and 399 from Hijrah (quran ar-irah). The month is Siwan. 51

One comment worthy of note here comes from Wurthwein, that "verse divisions were already known in the Talmudic period, with differing Babylonian and Palestinian traditions." 52 By lacking any form of separation between verses, this medieval codex (written so many centuries after Talmudic times) casts a pall on Wurthwein's assertion. Moreover, verse separators were not given numbers as subdivisions of chapters until the 16th century, while the division of the Hebrew text into chapters was adopted from the Latin Vulgate two centuries earlier. 53

The Leningrad Codex is alarmingly recent given the age of the OT. The oldest existing Hebrew manuscript of the entire OT hails, in fact, from only the 10th century C.E. 54

A number of substantially earlier Hebrew manuscripts, some dating from the pre-Christian era, were hidden during the first and second centuries a.d. 55 in various caves in the Judean desert ... near the Dead Sea and remained there for nearly two millennia, to be found in a succession of discoveries beginning in 1947. 56

These findings include fragments from nearly all the OT books, but for a full copy of the OT scholars are still entirely dependent on manuscripts dating from the 10th century and onwards. 57

5. In Search of an Authoritative Text

It is well known that for many centuries the Hebrew text of the Old Testament existed as a purely consonantal text. Vowel signs

51 V.V. Lebedev, "The Oldest Complete Codex of the Hebrew Bible", The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition, pp. xxi-xii. The codex bears no Christian date because, even up to that point, there was no calendar system based on Jesus.
52 Wurthwein, p. 21.
53 ibid, p. 21.
54 ibid, pp. 10-11. More accurately it should be assigned to the early 11th century as the Leningrad Codex bears a copying date of 1008 C.E. [ibid, p. 10].
55 These dates are insecure; see pp. 289-92.
56 Wurthwein, p. 11.
57 ibid, p. 11.
were not added to the text until a later stage, when the consonantal text was already well established with a long history of transmission behind it.98

The history of the various textual variations, the subsequent inclusion of vowels, and the final emergence of an authoritative text, require detailed scrutiny.

i. The Role of the Council of Jamnia - Late First Century C.E.

Würtzheim writes,

The consonantal text which is preserved in the medieval manuscripts and forms the basis of our present editions goes back to about A.D. 100. As part of the great Jewish revival which marked the decades after the catastrophe of A.D. 70, the canonical status of certain disputed books of the Old Testament was defined at the Council of Jamnia (late first century A.D.), and an authoritative text of the Old Testament was also established.99

The text preserved after the Second Temple’s destruction in 70 C.E. was simply that of the most influential group, the Pharisees. The text types supported by lesser groups disappeared, making the current standard text a result of historical development and evolution.100 Würtzheim’s claim, that the Council of Jamnia established an authoritative text, is merely wishful thinking as it contradicts his statement elsewhere that the OT text was finally established in the tenth century C.E.101

ii. The Old Testament Text was known in a Variety of Differing Traditions

A false impression has been created among general readers that the OT has been transmitted through the ages exactly character for character, word for word.102 Such is hardly the case; even the Ten Commandments differ in two versions.103 Scholars concur that towards the end of the pre-Christian era, the OT text was known in a variety of traditions that differed from each

other to varying degrees. Attempts to resolve this puzzle of multiple text types have lead scholars to propose conflicting theories. "Frank M. Cross would interpret them as local Palestinian, Egyptian, and Babylonian textual forms,"46 meaning that each of these centers nurtured its own OT text, independent of whatever textual forms other centers were using. Shemaryahu Talmon objects to Cross’ theory and believes instead that "the ancient authors, compilers, tradents and scribes enjoyed what may be termed a controlled freedom of textual variation ... From the very first stage of its manuscript transmission, the Old Testament text was known in a variety of traditions which differed from each other to a greater or lesser degree."45 So whereas Cross endorses the view of each center establishing its own form of the text, Talmon argues that the variations are due not to different centers but to the compilers and scribes themselves, who from the start exercised a limited freedom in re-shaping the text. Whatever the answer may be, the existence of different textual forms is irrefutable.

iii. Approximately 6000 Discrepancies Between the Samaritan and Jewish Pentateuchs Alone

A separate religious and ethnic Hebrew sect, the Samaritans proclaimed Moses as their sole prophet and the Torah as their only Holy Book, the perfect recension of which they insisted they possessed to the exclusion of Jews.46 The exact date of the Samaritans’ split from the Jews remains unknown, but most likely occurred during the Maccabean Dynasty (166-63 B.C.E.) with the ravaging of Shechem and the Mount Gerizim sanctuary.47

The problem of the Samaritan Pentateuch is that it differs from [the Masoretic Hebrew text] in some six thousand instances. ... [Many] are trivial and do not affect the meaning of the text, yet it is significant that in about nine hundred instances [the Samaritan Pentateuch agrees with the Septuagint46 against the Masoretic text]. Some of the variants in [the Samaritan Pentateuch] must be

98 ibid., p. 12.
99 ibid., p. 13. Italics added.
100 ibid., p. 14.
101 See pp. 282-83.
103 See for instance Würtzheim’s analysis of the Nash Papyrus [Würtzheim, p. 34].

65 ibid., pp 14-15. Italics added.
66 Dictionary of the Bible, p. 880. Recension is the process of examining all available manuscripts, and forming a text based on the most trustworthy evidence.
67 Würtzheim, p. 45.
68 The Septuagint refers to the Old Testament as translated into Greek, supposedly during the third century B.C.E., and used by Jews living in the Greek diaspora to read their Scriptures in the language most familiar to them. Würtzheim writes that "what we find in [the Septuagint] is not a single version but a collection of versions made by various writers who differed greatly in their translation methods, their knowledge of Hebrew, their styles, and in other ways" [ibid, pp 53-54].
regarded as alterations introduced by the Samaritans in the interest of their own cult. This is true especially of the command inserted after Exod. 20:17 to build a sanctuary on Mount Gerizim, of Deut. 11:30 where סְדָרִים (םדָרִים) is added to וַהֲלָךְ (ribly בִּירָאָה), and of nineteen passages in Deuteronomy where the choice of the holy place is set in the past and the reference to Shechem is made clear.69

One is certainly tempted to question how many of these 6000 discrepancies are due to Samaritan alterations, and how many to Jewish ones. As we will see in p. 282, no single authoritative version of the OT existed prior to at least the first century C.E., let alone an authoritative version that was being transmitted with an appreciable degree of fidelity. Inter, at least in the nineteenth hundred instances of agreement between the Septuagint and Samaritan against the Masoretic, that the Jews altered this last text. The Septuagint came about in the 3rd century B.C.E. under the direction (according to traditional sources) of six translators from each of the twelve tribes of Israel.70 So a minimum of three or four centuries separates the Septuagint from the earliest possible date for an authoritative edition of the OT. Based on the deep-rooted enmity between Jews and Samaritans, and the latter’s insistence that they alone possessed the perfect recension, the probability of a Samaritan effort aimed at changing their Pentateuch to conform to the Jewish Septuagint seems very remote indeed. Clearly the logical conclusion is one of corruption in the Masoretic text in those nineteen hundred instances, after the 3rd century B.C.E., to say nothing of the corruptions prior to that date which must have been incorporated into the Septuagint.

iv. Unintentional Corruptions of the Text

Errors can creep into a text from every conceivable avenue, as even the most careful copyist will attest. Most are unintentional. In connection with this OT scholars have devised their own vocabulary to catalogue such mental lapses. Delving into the most common categories we find: confusion of similar characters (such as א and ו, א and י); ditography (accidental repetition); haplography (accidental omission when a character is present as a doublet in a word); homoioteleuton (omission when two words have identical endings and the scribe skips from the first to the second, omitting everything in between); errors due to vowels, and more.71 When perusing text-critical research, it is not unusual to find a modern-day author invoking homoioteleuton (for example) to dispel the notion that an error was deliberate on the scribe’s part; this may be proffered as an explanation even if the same omission is present in other important manuscripts.72

v. No Qualms Felt in Altering the Text for Doctrinal Reasons

We must be more concerned with intentional alterations however, as they are naturally far more serious. Until the Middle Ages the text of the OT was not yet established,73 and “before the text of the Old Testament was officially established, it was not regarded as unalterable”.74 Therefore the scribes and transmitters occasionally made deliberate alterations which, regardless of their intentions, served in a very real sense to corrupt the original text. Parallel manuscripts demonstrate that not even the Masoretic text, intended to safeguard the OT from further changes, was immune to this phenomenon.75

Yet the restoration of the early traditional text, reconstructing and preserving it even where it was open to criticism, is only one of the marks of (rabbinic) occupation with the [Masoretic] text. A second mark reveals an opposite tendency. There is clear evidence that no qualms were felt in altering the text when there appeared to be adequate doctrinal reasons.76

What were some of these pressing doctrinal reasons? Occasionally they were merely linguistic, changing an esoteric word into a more common synonym. Other times, the removal of religiously offensive wording or (most serious of all) the insertion of certain words to champion one possible interpretation of a verse over all others.77 Jewish tradition preserved a partial record of these textual alterations in notes known as the Targum sopherim and the Tiberian sopherim,78 which must of course be relatively late works.

a) The Targum sopherim catalogue some of the textual revisions carried out for doctrinal reasons. One Masoretic tradition, for example, mentions eighteen positions where the text was altered to remove "objectionable expressions referring to God".79

69 Ibid. p. 46. Version symbols have been translated and are placed inside square brackets.
70 For a total of 72 translators. 'Septuagint' translates to 'The Version of the Seventy' and is commonly denoted LXX [Dictionary of the Bible, p. 347].
71 Wurthwein, pp. 108-110.
72 See Wurthwein, p. 154.
73 See pp. 282-83.
74 Wurthwein, p. 111.
75 ibid., p. 111.
76 ibid., p. 17. Italics added.
77 ibid., pp. 111-112.
78 ibid., p. 17.
79 ibid., p. 17.
b) The *tose sopherim* catalogue some of the various words in the original text which were deliberately omitted by scribes. For instance, the Babylonian Talmud (Ned. 37b) names five passages where certain words in the text are to be skipped over, and another seven passages where particular words are to be read even though they are not in the original.\(^{80}\)

The existence of these traditions is simply one aspect, we can safely assume, of a far more elaborate process.\(^{81}\)

**vi. No Single Authoritative OT Text Existed Until 100 C.E.**

Some manuscripts from Qumran (source of the Dead Sea Scrolls) are quite close to the Masoretic text as finalized in the Middle Ages.

But despite all the superficial similarities there is one decisive difference: the Qumran text of the Masoretic type was only one of several different types in common use... and there is no indication that it was regarded as more authoritative than the others. We may infer that for Qumran, and evidently for the text of Judaism as well, there was not yet a single authoritative text.\(^{82}\)

Only during the ensuing Jewish revival did one text type gain prominence, eclipsing the others that had remained in circulation prior to the first century C.E. In fact the Qumran caves contain three distinct text types: the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Septuagint, and the Masoretic text. Würthwein states that the last of these three must have risen to authority sometime between 70-135 C.E., though this conclusion is based on the erroneous dating of several caves in Qumran and Wadi Murabba‘at, as I shall explain on pp. 289-92.

**vii. Jewish Scholars Established the Text of the OT in the Tenth Century, Actively Destroying Earlier Manuscripts**

Jewish regulations required the destruction of worn and defective manuscripts. And when scholars had finally established the text in the tenth century, *all* older manuscripts which represented earlier stages of its development were naturally considered defective, and in the course of time they disappeared.\(^{83}\)

\(^{80}\) *ibid.* p. 18.

\(^{81}\) *ibid.* p. 18.


\(^{83}\) *ibid.* p. 14.

\(^{84}\) *ibid.* p. 11. Italics added.

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The choice of a single text type in the 10th century coincides with the introduction of the Masorah—the system of vowel signs and accent markings used as a check against further changes. This system, along with the purging of ‘defective’ manuscripts, was easier to implement once the major Jewish colony in Babylonia (the Eastern schools of Sura, Nehardea and Pumbeditha) had lost its significance and melded away by the 10th and 11th centuries.

Once again the West assumed the spiritual leadership of Judaism, and the Western Masoretes sought to eliminate all traces of textual traditions that differed from their own. The views of the [Western] school of Tiberias became determinative for the future, and the Eastern tradition was forgotten for a millennium.\(^{85}\)

These pivotal Hebrew manuscripts from the 10th and 11th centuries, incorporating the Masorah and finalizing the text type for all future generations, are exceedingly rare; they number only 31 and most are fragmentary.\(^{86}\)

**viii. The Masorah and Textual Integrity**

With one particular text type chosen above all others, the textual freedom previously granted had to be replaced with stringency. Such was the function of the Masorah, comments Würthwein. He quotes Rabbi Akiba’s statement that,

> "The Masora is a (protective) fence about the Law." This was the purpose of the scribes’ meritorious work. They counted the verses, words, and letters of the Law and other parts of the Scriptures as a procedural aid in monitoring manuscripts and in checking their accuracy.\(^{87}\)

Rabbi Akiba’s statement is not entirely clear: certainly the counting of verses and letters was impractical in his time (c. 55-137 C.E.), and most likely did not take place until the late 9th and early 10th centuries when the Masorah system made its first true appearance. Würthwein himself remarks:

We should therefore assume that when the consonantal text was established ca. A.D. 100, it did not result in the immediate suppression

\(^{85}\) *ibid.* p. 12. Italics added.

\(^{86}\) See pp. 275-76.

\(^{87}\) Würthwein, p. 19. Würthwein qualifies himself in the footnote: "It is not certain, however, whether in Rabbi Akiba’s statement (Pirkei Abot 3:13) the word ‘Masora’ refers to the activities of textual transmission, as it is usually understood... R. Akiba would mean that the Tradition of the Fathers (the Oral Law) was intended to prevent the violation of the Written Law". [p. 18, footnote 24.]
of all other forms of the text, but that manuscripts with variant texts continued to circulate for a long time, especially in private hands. The impressive unity of ninth-century and later manuscripts is due to the work of the earlier and later Masoretes who championed the established text and assisted it to victory over all the variant forms of the text.88

It is clear from Würthwein’s own words that this impressive unity of text was achieved in the 10th century C.E. and later, not in the first century C.E.

6. The Jewish Revival: a Legacy of Islamic Literary Advancements

i. Pointing and Vocalization Induced by Islamic Achievements

In the matter of vocalization...there was no written tradition of symbols [i.e. diacritical marks, or ‘pointing’] for indicating the pronunciation or intonation of a text. It is not known when pointing originated.89

Initial claims that written signs for vocalization were founded in the 5th century C.E. have now been discarded. Noting that the Babylonian Talmud contains no references to pointing, Bruno Chiesa places the date between 650-750 C.E. But in this he assumes that the Babylonian Talmud was completed around 600, which amounts to little more than personal guesswork, and all he can really infer is that pointing began afterwards, not any sort of precise date. Indeed, the Dictionary of the Bible suggests 590, while Neusner maintains that the final editing of only four parts (out of six) was finished c. 700. Based on the start of pointing on the completion of the Babylonian Talmud is therefore hopeless. Moshe Goshen-Gottstein,

assumes a time around A.D. 700 as probable. He believes the invention of vowel signs and accents was induced by the Islamic conquests which threatened to extinguish the tradition of precise liturgical recitation.90

That vowels were invented as a reaction to the threat of Islamic invasion is silly. Far more realistic is that they were inspired by and derived from the Arabic vowel system, which was coming into widespread recognition at the time due to the spread of Islam.

90 ibid, p. 20; emphasis added.
91 ibid, p. 21.
92 ibid, p. 21.

Eventually from the seventh century A.D. a system of vowel signs written above and below the consonants was adopted, patterned perhaps after Syriac usage. This system was called ‘pointing’, from the Jewish technical term.91

I deliberated this point at length in Chapter 10.92 Despite an active university in Nisibis, along with colleges and monasteries established since 450 C.E., the Syrians failed to invent diacritical marks until 700 C.E. Moreover, Hunain ibn Ishaq (194-260 A.H./810-873 C.E.), the father of Syriac grammar, was a student of one of the pupils of the famous Arab grammarian al-Khalil b. Ahmad al-Fihriyy (100-170 A.H./718-786 C.E.). This compelling sequence shows pointing to be a Muslim invention which, once adopted by the Syrians, then passed on to the Jews.

The date at which the vowels were attached to the consonants of the Hebrew text can be determined only within broad limits. Neither the Talmud (c. A.D. 500) nor Jerome (c. A.D. 420) knows anything about the written vocalization. C.D. Ginsburg says that introduction of the graphic signs took place c. A.D. 650-680 and that the work of the Masoretes was complete about A.D. 700.93

Though I have reservations about the accuracy of these dates, I must note that they (as suggested) correspond perfectly with the dawn of Islam. One major concern nevertheless lies in the accuracy of the pointing system, since,

more than a millennium separates the Masoretes of Tiberias from the days when Hebrew was a living national language, and it is altogether probable that the pronunciation of Hebrew had undergone some change in this interval, especially considering that it was written without vowels... It would seem necessary, then, to expect a fair number of artificial forms in the Tiberian system, related to the Masoretes’ desire to produce a correct pronunciation which made them susceptible to such outside influences as Syriac and Islamic philology.94

ii. Masoretic Activity Flourished in the West Under Islamic Influence

Masoretic activity flourished again in the West in the period A.D. 780-930, evidently stimulated by Karaites, influence.... A new Tiberian system was created, based on the experience of the Palestinian system.

91 ibid, p. 22; italics added.
92 See pp. 160-63.
93 Dictionary of the Bible, p. 972.
94 Würthwein, pp. 36-7; italics added.
which combined the accent system with a means of indicating finer nuances, and could represent the pronunciation and intonation of the biblical text in its minutest details.  

If the Karaitic movement, a sect that emerged in the shadow of Islamic civilization and under its influence, was the stimulus behind the creation of this Tiberian system, we can conclude that the entire scheme was derived from Muslim literary practices. Usage of elaborate diacritical marks in the Qur'an (to represent the correct intonation of each word) in fact predate the rise of this Tiberian system by over one hundred years.  

### iii. The Talmud and Islamic Influence

Thirteen centuries after the Exodus, rabbinical literature struggled to fill the need for an explanation of the Scriptures while simultaneously trying to eliminate the pandemonium caused by the multitude of Mishnahs in circulation. It was Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi's redaction, c. 200 C.E. (as further amended by his pupils and a few unknown individuals) which eventually supplanted all others. The Talmud contains this Mishnah at its core, adding to it further commentary and explanation.

Hence the Talmud is considered, at least by orthodox Jews, as the highest authority on all matters of faith. The comments and explanations declare what Scripture means, and without this official explanation the Scriptural passage would lose much of its practical value for the Jew. It is, therefore, hardly an exaggeration to say that the Talmud is of equal authority with Scripture in orthodox Judaism.

Two Talmuds, the Palestinian and the Babylonian (with the latter enjoying greater prominence) were composed, but the exact date of completion remains highly contentious. We are given 400, 500, 600 and 700 C.E. as anchoring dates for the Babylonian Talmud, which (if anything) implies lack of certainty and evidence, though if Neusner's dates are valid then the completion of this final editing occurred in Islamic Iraq under the auspices of Tahir ibn-Umar. In fact commentary on the Mishnah appears to have been ongoing - a process which had not desisted even by the 13th century C.E. - with Muslim culture playing an extensive role in this Jewish endeavor. In the words of Danby:

**For several centuries after the Moslem conquest Babylon continued to be the chief centre of rabbinical learning. Contact with Arab scholars served in some measure as a renewed stimulus, and the ninth and tenth centuries saw the beginning of the philological and grammatical study of the Hebrew literature; and it is Hai Gaon who is responsible for the earliest extant commentary (in the ordinary sense) on the Mishnah ... He deals almost entirely with linguistic problems, and in his search for derivation of obscure words he makes much use of Arabic.**

Maimonides (1135-1204), one of the great figures of the Middle Ages, wrote in early manhood an introduction and commentary to the entire Mishnah. It was composed in Arabic under the title *Kisah es-Siraj, 'The Book of the Lamp'... Not content with explaining details he endeavours also to keep before his reader the general principles governing the subject of study, so removing one of the chief difficulties in the way of understanding the Mishnah.**

To extract the general principles relating to a subject is to employ *wad al-fish* (principles of jurisprudence). This is the established Islamic methodology for religious studies, one which Maimonides clearly harnessed. From these examples we are made aware of a great discrepancy between what Orientalists allege and what, in fact, actually took place: Muslims are often accused of borrowing shamelessly from Christians and Jews, and even the Prophet Muhammad, when not being taken to task for 'stealing' from biblical sources, is cast as a fictitious character based on rabbinical prototypes. In reality Jews and Christians both benefited heavily from the advancements of Islamic methodology and culture, using these as catalysts for their own future achievements.

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95 *ibid.*, p. 24.  
96 According to Y. Qoqan, *Qanun lihi Arabia*, Beirut, 1976, p. 835) 'this is a Jewish sect that believes only in Torah while discarding Talmud'.  
97 Islamic influence over Jewish society was not limited to a handful of developments however, but was the catalyst for an enormous revival touching all aspects of Jewish culture. The flowering of Medieval Islamic civilization in many ways facilitated the evolution of Judaism into the religious culture that exists today. Synagogue traditions and rituals, along with the legal framework governing Jewish life, were all standardized: conceptions of Jewish philosophic thought, including Saadia's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* (c. 936) and Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed* (1190), were also written at this time. See Norman A. Stillmann, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book*, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1979, pp. 40-41, where the author quotes multiple Jewish sources.  
98 *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 934.  
99 ibid., p. 956.
7. Establishing the Date for a Fixed, Authoritative OT Text

i. Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls: The Western View

Certainly the most significant biblical event of recent times has been the discovery of manuscripts at Qumran and Wadi Murabba'at, near the Dead Sea, starting in 1947. Several centuries older than any material which scholars previously possessed, and coming from an era when no single form of the text was considered absolutely authoritative, these manuscripts have spawned a frenzy of interest.\(^{103}\) Progress has been made, to the satisfaction of most biblical scholars, concerning the authenticity and age of these documents. The Qumran cave is closely associated with the settlement of Khirbet Qumran, which was razed in 68 C.E. during the First Jewish revolt, and archaeological examination of relics found in the cave places them roughly within this period. A piece of linen, for example, has been dated via Carbon-14 to somewhere between 167 B.C.E. and 233 C.E. Excavations to the site have thus concluded it most probable that the manuscripts in Qumran were deposited during this First Jewish revolt of 66-70 C.E.\(^{104}\)

The second set of caves, in Wadi Murabba'at, have their own history. This tale begins in the autumn of 1951 when Bedouins discovered four caves in an area almost twenty kilometers south of Qumran. Subsequent excavations revealed that "the caves had been inhabited repeatedly from 4000 B.C. to the Arab period."\(^{105}\) Several of the documents found within indicated that these caves had served as refuge for insurgents during the Second Jewish revolt. Fragmented scrolls of the OT were uncovered in these caves as well, though the script was more advanced than that found in Qumran; in fact, the text in these scrolls was very akin to that of the Masorah (i.e., the text type that eventually displaced all others and formed the basis for the OT as it exists today).\(^{106}\) Western consensus holds that these manuscripts "may be dated with certainty at the time of the [Second Jewish revolt] (A.D. 132-135)".\(^{107}\) Among the finds is a Minor Prophets scroll which dates (according to J.T. Milik) from the second century C.E., though the script is so advanced that it even bears "striking similarities to the script of medieval manuscripts.... The text is in almost complete agreement with [the Masoretic text type], suggesting that an authoritative standard text already existed in the first half of the second century A.D.\(^{108}\)

Having highlighted Würthwein's own contradictory remarks, wherein he shifts from proclaiming the Wadi Murabba'at scrolls as authoritative to stating that no authoritative text existed before the 10th century C.E., in this next section I will focus my arguments against the validity of the Qumran and Wadi Murabba'at terminus dates,\(^{109}\) presenting the necessary evidence.

ii. The Counter View: The Terminus Dativum of Qumran and Other Caves is False

Western scholars claim that where the recovered fragments disagree with the Masoretic text, they must have been deposited in Qumran prior to the First Jewish revolt (66-70 C.E.), since that is when the nearby town of Khirbet Qumran was decimated by Roman troops. Fragments agreeing with the Masoretic text come from the cave at Wadi Murabba'at, which was sealed after the Bar Kochba (Second Jewish) revolt in 135 C.E. Thus the inference is that the text of the OT was standardized sometime between 70-135 C.E.

But the very basis for this conclusion is false, as we can discern from the following two points:

- The caves were never made inaccessible, for the obvious reason that a young Bedouin discovered the scrolls without any digging. The Bedouin in question, Muhammad Dhi'b, was fifteen at the time and either a shepherd or a smuggler, venturing off in search of a lost sheep or whilst taking shelter from the rain. Joined soon after by his friends, their cursory exploration yielded sight of the Dead Sea Scrolls. They had no recourse to any shovels or axes (let alone more sophisticated gear), but their hands proved sufficient and they visited the cave more than once to retrieve all the parchments. It may even be that they entered the cave barefoot. Though the caves were supposedly sealed in 135 C.E., this in no way guarantees that the site was inaccessible given how easily and coincidentally the scrolls were discovered. With this in mind we can conclude that the scrolls may well have been deposited at any time, and that the suggested terminus datuon of 135 C.E.\(^{109}\) has no legitimacy.

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\(^{103}\) Würthwein, pp. 31-32.
\(^{104}\) Ibid, p. 31.
\(^{105}\) Ibid, p. 164.
\(^{106}\) Ibid, p. 31, footnote 56.
\(^{107}\) Ibid, p. 31, footnote 56. I have yet to find the proof behind this 'certainty'.
\(^{108}\) Ibid, p. 164.
\(^{109}\) The 'terminus dates', signifying the cut-off points after which no further parchments were deposited in these caves.
\(^{110}\) See Würthwein, p. 164.
• Reviewing a book titled *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*, H. Shanks writes that two of the authors (Cross and Davila) believe one of the Genesis fragments they studied came, not from Qumran as they were originally informed, but from Wadi Murabba‘at.

Cross and Davila base their suspicion not only on a palaeographical analysis of the script, but on the fact that the leather is coarse and poorly prepared, unlike the Qumran manuscripts. Davila tells us that the Bedouin may have inadvertently mixed up this manuscript with their [Qumran] finds.112

This suspicion is furthered by an artifact (a piece of linen) supposedly taken from Qumran, but which a recent Carbon-14 test revealed came from Wadi Murabba‘at, leading Shanks to wonder, “What else did the Bedouin mix up?”113

Conclusively proving which scroll belongs to which cave is therefore tremendously difficult. Archaeology is not a precise science; a great many things can easily be interpreted one way or another.114 Additionally, different carbon dating protocols do result in conflicting data (sometimes by centuries), so the accuracy of such tests remains suspect.

Yet the greatest problem one faces in dating these caves is the existence of Arabic fragments found in the same cave of Wadi Murabba‘at, or very close by (one hesitates to accept in good faith which fragments come from which caves). Of these Arabic fragments, moreover, one has a clear Hijra dating of 327 a.d. (938 c.e.; see Figure 16.2).115 To the best of my knowledge, this is the only fragment in the entire hoard with a clear, explicit date of any kind.

The dated Arabic fragment reads (translation):

In the Name of Allah Most Gracious Most Merciful. I have collected from the inheritors of Abi Ghanim the taxes which were due on the Sansin property, totaling one-third and one-eighth of one dinar for

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113 Ibid., p. 8.

114 For a detailed analysis of this subject, including dozens of text cases, look for my forthcoming book *Islamic Studies: What Methodology?*


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Figure 16.2: An Arabic fragment from a cave in Wadi Murabba‘at with a clear Hijra dating of 327 a.d./938 c.e. along with a line for line transcription. Image source: Eisenman and Robinson, *A Facsimile Edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, vol. 1, plate 294.

The year seven and twenty and three hundred. Written by Ibrahim bin Hammia in the month of Rabia’ al-Awwal of this same year. I have placed my faith in Allah.116

A total of seven Arabic fragments have been reproduced in the *Facsimile Edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, the one above is the most legible and complete. At least five other Arabic fragments, one of them of considerable length, were found in the Wadi Murabba‘at cave but were not seen fit by the authors for inclusion in their work, although they have been reproduced elsewhere.117

Whatever the explanation for these Arabic fragments – that the caves were never properly sealed, or were sealed but rediscovered over ten centuries ago, or that portions were sealed and others were not – the fact is that absolutely none of the OT fragments can be pigeonholed definitively into one of the two golden periods of 66-70 c.e. and 132-135 c.e.118 This sheds new light on J.T. Milik’s appraisal of the Minor Prophets Scroll, that “there

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117 Ibid., pp. 342-346.

118 The parchments taken from Qumran, which on occasion differ considerably from the Masoretic text, were written by members of the Essene community. This was a monastic order that sought to practice the stricter Judaism, believing for example that “the bowls must not perform their wine functions” on the Sabbath. [Dictionary of the Bible, p. 268.] The eventual disappearance of this order means that all the material from Qumran which follows the textual variants preferred by the Essenes, must have been scolled whilst the order was still alive. On the other hand, the Wadi Murabba‘at texts coincide more or less with the one text type that is still current, and so could have possibly originated at any point up until the Middle Ages.
are even striking similarities to the script of medieval manuscripts. If within these caves lay an Arabic fragment from the 10th century C.E., what would prevent someone from depositing biblical fragments in any century up to and including the tenth as well? Excavations from the 1950s already concluded that these caves were inhabited repeatedly from 4000 B.C. to the Arabian period. So unless the implication is that Jews wholly abandoned the caves from 135 C.E. to the 20th century, even as medieval Muslims enjoyed access to them, the premise for assigning dates is utterly void. What conceivable proof is there that no Jews entered the Wadi Murabba‘at in 300, 500, or even 700 C.E.? The preliminary assessment of some scholars, such as Oxford’s Sir Godfrey Driver, initially dated the Dead Sea Scrolls to the 6th/7th centuries C.E., before others wrenched this back to the 1st/2nd centuries C.E. And by no means is this uncommon: a fragment of Leviticus taken from Qumran, and written in Old Hebrew script, ignited a controversy among scholars concerning its date of origin. Suggestions ranged from the fifth to the first century B.C.E., with the final consensus being that it could be as recent as the first century C.E., thus giving this fragment a total breathing space of six hundred years. Analysis of this sort suffers from subjectivity on a massive scale. Based on the concrete evidence above, the contention that the OT text was standardized between 70-135 C.E. is completely unsustainable.

8. God’s Covenant: Examples of Deliberate Textual Corruption

Let us examine a passage in the OT which I believe illustrates a very early deliberate corruption, specifically, chapter seventeen of Genesis. Abraham’s wife, Sarah, gave him her handmaid Hagar “to be his wife”, and from her was born his first son Ishmael. We pick up the story thirteen years later.

Genesis 17 (King James Version)

1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

119 See Wurthwein, p. 164.
120 ibid., p. 164.
121 This is quite possible, since “some Jewish groups had continued to live in Palestine probably right through the Muslim domination.” [Dictionary of the Bible, p. 720.]
123 Wurthwein, p. 160.

2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.
3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,
4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.
5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.
6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.
7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.
8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.
9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.
10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee: Every man child among you shall be circumcised.
11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.
12 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.
13 And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.
14 And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.
15 Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?
16 And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!
17 And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.
18 And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee; Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.
19 But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.
20 And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.
23 And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him.

25 And Ishmael was three years old; when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

26 In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son.\(^{124}\)

The objective reader will discern a problem with this narrative. God pledges, confirms, and reassures Abraham repeatedly about His covenant, the symbol of which is circumcision. Now the only son Abraham had at that time was Ishmael, a boy of thirteen, and father and son were both circumcised on the same day. Regardless of whether he bears this stamp or not however, Ishmael is thrown entirely out of the covenant — and for no fashionable reason. God expels a boy out of His covenant against His Own dictates.

Returning to Genesis, in 17:16-21 Abraham is given the glad tidings that Sarah shall have a child named Isaac "at this set time in the next year". But in the next chapter we read:

10 And [the Lord] said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.

11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old; and Sarah stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.

12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?

13 And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?

14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

The news took Sarah by surprise, whose shock gave way to quiet laughter. But this divine promise was only a reiteration of the previous chapter: "And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him". If the narrative bears out then Sarah had no cause for astonishment in the next chapter. That she really had no prior knowledge of this incident establishes a strong case for the deliberate interpolation of these verses in Genesis 17, which ows Ishmael from God's covenant regardless of whether or not he is circumcised.

\(^{124}\) Emphasis added.

Let us turn our attention to Josephus. Earlier he describes Ishmael as the first son of Abraham, then suddenly claims Isaac as the legitimate son of Abraham and his only begotten.\(^{125}\) On what basis does Isaac become the legitimate son, to the exclusion of Ishmael? Does that imply Ishmael being illegitimate and, by extension, Abraham being adulterous? Josephus' intentions are not transparent, but what is clear is that he mirrors the OT's aversion of Ishmael, an aversion which rears its head in a few other verses as well. In Genesis 22:2 we find:

> And [the Lord] said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

How is it possible for Isaac to become the only son, when Ishmael was at least thirteen years older? 'Most beloved' one could grasp, but the two obviously do not equate. And if this verse implies that Isaac is the only worthy or legitimate son because Ishmael's mother was a slave, then what about the twelve sons of Jacob, all of whom have the same status as progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel, regardless of whether they were born of wives or concubines? To my mind this is another clear case of textual corruption within the OT; perhaps motivated in no small measure by the Israelite hatred of Ishmaelites. Nowhere is this animosity more glaring than in Psalms 83, a few verses of which are rendered here from the Revised Standard Version:

1 O God, do not keep silence; do not hold thy peace; or be still, O God!

2 For lo, thy enemies are in tumult; those who hate thee have raised their heads.

4 They say, 'Come, let us wipe them out as a nation; let the name of Israel be remembered no more!'

5 Yes, they conspire with one accord; against thee they make a covenant—

6 the tens of Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagrites,

7 Gebal and Ammon and Amalek...;

13 O my God, make them like whirling dust, like chaff before the wind.

17 Let them be put to shame and dismayed for ever; let them perish in disgrace.\(^{126}\)

Could Jewish scribes, bearing such abhorrence towards the Ishmaelites, have shown generosity (or even fairness) towards Ishmael himself in transmitting the OT text? Or would they have made him out as an 'unbegotten', an

\(^{125}\) Josephus, \textit{Ant.}, Book 1, Ch. 12, No. 3 (215), and Book 1, Ch. 13, No. 1 (222).

\(^{126}\) Emphasis added.
inferior, and in the process raised the rank of their own ancestor Isaac if the opportunity afforded itself.\(^{127}\)

Being cast out of the covenant was not only Ishmael’s lot however, but also that of half of Isaac’s family, as can be seen by the inclusion of ‘Edom’ in verse 6 above. Based on the OT Isaac had twin sons: (a) Esau (or Edom), who was born first from the womb, and (b) Jacob, who is the recognized ancestor of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Oddly enough, Jacob managed to cheat his brother twice: first when he refused him red lentil soup though he was in danger of collapsing from hunger, until Esau had relinquished his rights as first-born,\(^{129}\) second, when Jacob and his mother stole the blessing that was intended for Esau by fooling Isaac in the darkness, in a scheme involving a tuft of fake hair (as Esau’s hands were hairier than his brother’s).\(^{130}\) Despite this treachery, Jacob’s descendants were to become the sole progenitors of the tribes of Israel while Esau’s children were to have no share.

The Israelites were conscious that the Edomites were their near kinsmen and an older nation... [The enmity between Esau and Jacob] is an actual reflection of the hostile relations of the Edomites and Israelites, for which the latter were to a considerable degree responsible.\(^{131}\)

With this historical enmity at play, it is perhaps no surprise that God’s final words to Moses skip over the names of Ishmael and Esau:

Moses, this is the land I was talking about when I solemnly promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that I would give land to their descendants. I have let you see it, but you will not cross the Jordan and go in.\(^{132}\)

At the first stage Ishmael was expelled from the covenant on the pretext that God, amending His plan, would include all of Abraham’s progeny through Isaac only. Subsequently even this did not hold true and Jacob, through his wives, managed to oust half of Isaac’s progeny, securing the covenant for himself and his twelve children—whether born of wives or concubines.\(^{133}\) This casting out of Ishmael and his progeny, and Esau and

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127 Once again I quote Würthwein’s The Text of The Old Testament: “There is clear evidence that no scholars were felt in altering the text when there appeared to be adequate doctrinal reasons”: (p. 17.)


130 Genesis 25:29-34.

131 Genesis 27


133 GEV, Deuteronomy 34-4.

134 Eight of the twelve children were born to his two wives and the other four to his two concubines. For details see p. 252 (Jacob’s family).

his progeny, appears to be a systematic fabrication emanating from sources that were strongly partial to only Jacob and his descendants.

If one argues that the covenant is the mercy and gift of God, then He possesses the full right to bestow it wherever He pleases and exempt whosoever He pleases. But this exclusion of Ishmael and Esau do not fit God’s Own edict: “And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession.”\(^{135}\) The historical reality is that ‘all the land of Canaan’ was not ruled by the Israelites for more than 250 years, beginning from the time of David (c. 1000-962 B.C.E.) and ending with the surrender of Samaria and the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel (721 B.C.E.). God’s promise of an everlasting ownership is contradicted by history. One has to discard either God’s proclamation or the interpolated verses which banish Ishmael and his progeny. And if we choose to discard the latter then God’s promise is fulfilled, since Canaan has always been in the custody of the children of Abraham.

Genesis 13 states:

14 And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.\(^{136}\)

This passage, and a similar one that occurs two chapters later, place additional weight against the interpolated verses of Genesis 17. Throughout history there have been far fewer Jews than Arabs, descendants of Ishmael, so that the appellation ‘dust of the earth’ cannot be used to depict only the former. History compels us to view the expulsion of Ishmael from God’s covenant as a deliberate distortion fuelled by prejudice.

9. Conclusion

In the numerous centuries that lapsed between Moses’ ascent to Mount Sinai and the eventual standardization of a Hebrew text, by nothing short of a miracle could the text have been preserved free of changes or interpolations.

134 Genesis 17:8. Indices added.

135 Genesis 13:14-16; emphasis added. See also Genesis 15:3-5.
Every facet of Jewish history proclaims that no such miracle occurred. We note that the political situation in Palestine, even during a unified Jewish state, was not at all favorable for the proper and sanctified propagation of the OT; rarely did a king bestow any devotion on it, with the majority erecting idols instead and indulging in all manner of pagan rituals. On top of all this the text itself disappeared repeatedly, and for centuries at a time.

The foundations of Jewish literary and religious culture were themselves derivative of other societies, causing further infiltration into the OT from the very outset of Israelite history. For example: (a) the Hebrew language was borrowed from the Phoenicians; (b) the script was appropriated from the Aramaic and the Assyrians; (c) the diacritical system of the Hebrew Torah was taken from the Arabic; (d) the Book of the Covenant (roughly Exodus 20:22-23:19) was possibly adapted from the Code of Hammurabi, etc.

The text itself remained fluid till the 10th century c.e., nearly 2300 years after Moses’ death: fluid in that it remained open to alterations given sufficient doctrinal needs. And once the change was complete, the original became ‘defective’ and was destroyed, eliminating all traces of a trail which might otherwise have led back to something older and more integral.

Turning our attention towards the Qur’an, we read the verse:

(Qur’an 7:157)

Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own (Scriptures), in the Torah and Gospel...

This affirms that even the corrupted texts of the Old and New Testaments contained clear references to the forthcoming prophet. Such references were noted by many of the Prophet’s Companions and successors, but have since been largely cleansed.

I will close this chapter with two interesting quotes:

The central myth of classical Judaism is the belief that the ancient Scriptures constituted divine revelation, but only a part of it. At Sinai God had handed down a dual revelation: the written part known to one and all, but also the oral part preserved by the great scriptural heroes, passed on by prophets to various ancestors in the obscure

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136 Qur’an 7:157.
137 For details see Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, iii:329-334.