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Ancient Emendations in MT

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L'Écrit et l'Esprit

Études d'histoire du texte
et de théologie biblique
en hommage à
ADRIAN SCHENKER

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Ancient Emendations in MT

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1. In this contribution in honour of Adrian Schenker I would like to discuss a few cases of deliberate emendation in the masoretic text (MT) of the Hebrew Bible. As is well-known there is a tradition attested in several Jewish writings about cases of emendations, or corrections, in the Hebrew Bible. Recent research has made clear that the cases listed in the sources only in some instances reflect a genuine emendation, while in others it is more a matter of interpretation founded on techniques such as the *al-tiqre* device.¹ This tradition – the most ancient lists are found in Mekhilta of R. Ishmael and in Siphre Numbers – testifies in one way or another to the fact that the Hebrew text has been emended at some places, but in view of the fact that not all cases listed are to be seen as emendations this tradition only preserves the memory of the phenomenon in a modest number.² Apparently, the most ancient lists do not go back to scribal circles, which may have been fully acquainted with, or even responsible for, the emendations.

As has been pointed out by scholars, there are cases of deliberate changes in the MT which are not referred to in the (ancient) lists.³ It is my aim to discuss a few instances of these changes with particular attention to the following questions: first, at which stage in the transmission history have they been introduced, and second, who might have been responsible for the early emendations. As to the former issue, scholars have suggested that roughly speaking these emendations are to be located in the period of the

¹ See in particular C. McCarthy, *The Tiqqune Sopherim and Other Theological Corrections in the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament* (OBO 36; Freiburg/Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981).

² Cf. C. McCarthy, *Tiqqune Sopherim*, 247.

³ See D. Barthélemy, "Les tiqquné sopherim et la critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament", *Congress Volume Bonn 1962* (ed. J.A. Emerton; VTSup 9; Leiden: Brill, 1963) 285-304 (republished in D. Barthélemy, *Etudes d'histoire du texte de l'Ancien Testament* [OBO 21; Fribourg/Suisse: Editions Universitaires, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978] 91-110); C. McCarthy, *Tiqqune Sopherim*, 197-243.

the second century BCE up to the first or second century CE.⁴ The instances to be discussed in this contribution have been chosen in order to try to provide an answer to both questions. The passages are Isa 10:32 and 19:18, and Deut 32:8, 43 (and related texts).

2. MT Isaiah contains a small number of readings which are the result of a deliberate emendation. Two of them are Isa 10:32 and 19:18.

2.1. The text of 10:32 contains the expression *הר ביה ציון*, "the mountain of the house on Zion." The reading *ביה* is unusual as part of this collocation. It should be *בה* as is not only the view of the later Masoretes (hence the Qere; cf. Isa 16:1), but as is also attested by early witnesses such as 1QIsa^a, 4Q57 (4QIsa^c), and 4Q161 (4QpIsa^a). The reading *ביה* represents a small but subtle change of the underlying *בה*, introducing in this way "the house," i.e. the temple, into the verse.

Interestingly, in one of the ancient versions, this reading has been taken seriously: the Targum (Tg) to Isaiah. It reads "(He stood over it shaking his head, waving back and forth with his hand) against the mount of the sanctuary which is in Zion" (*נצח ביה מקדשא דבציון*). According to the interpretation of Tg, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, is here the one who threatens the city and its temple with his armies, thereby boasting that this city is "fainter than all the fortresses of the peoples which I have suppressed with the strength of my hands." As is said in the next verse, Tg v. 33, God will "cast slaughter among his armies as grapes trodden in the press" (cf. Tg Isa 63:3!). Sennacherib seems to represent here the image of a Roman leader.⁵ God will take vengeance on Rome and his armies for the destruction of the city in the year 70; cf. Tg Isa 34:8 ("a year of recompense, to take just retribution for the mortification of Zion"; in v. 9 Rome is explicitly mentioned). So the last verses of Isa 10, as understood in the Tg, are a prophecy about the destruction of the armies of Rome, just before the appearance of the Messiah (11:1ff.). Compare also Tg Isa 10:27: "the armies of the nations (i.e., Rome) will be shattered before the Messiah." The reading *ביה* is best understood as related, somehow (see below), to this interpretation of the passage.

2.2. The second passage is Isa 19:18 where MT reads "One of these (cities) will be called 'City of destruction' (*עיר ההרס*)." The reading constitutes an

⁴ Cf. D. Barthélemy, *Etudes d'histoire*, 369; C. McCarthy, *Tiqqune Sopherim*, 249.

⁵ This is most likely in the light of passages such as Tg 1 Sam 2:5, Isa 54:1. It may well be that Sennacherib as image of a Roman leader is modelled after Titus (see L. Smolar and M. Aberbach, *Studies in Targum Jonathan to the Prophets* [New York: Ktav, 1983] 76f.). The idea of Chilton that the text may refer to Parthian or Sassanid hegemony (B.D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum* [The Aramaic Bible 11; Edinburgh: Clark, 1987] 27) does not recommend itself in the light of the passages just mentioned.

emendation of the original reading הַחֶרֶס, "the sun," which is attested among others by 1QIsa^a and 4Q56 (4QIsa^b). In this case too, Tg is of great interest. It reads "Of the city, the house of the sun, which is about to be desolate, it shall be said, This is one of them." Tg actually offers a rendering of both readings, הַחֶרֶס and הַהֶרֶס, in this way reflecting a specific knowledge of the emendation. As has been argued by scholars, the emendation is to be related to the destruction of a Jewish temple in Egypt, in the year 73 by the Romans (see Josephus, *Jewish War* 7, 421.433-436).⁶ As we know from Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* 13,68), the founder of this temple, Onias, a member of the high priestly family (first half second century BC), claimed that the Jewish temple in Egypt (in Leontopolis) was fully legitimate, as it had been prophesied by Isaiah (i.e., Isa 19:18). So it seems that Tg reflects the opinion that although this temple might have been forsaid by Isaiah, the prophet also announced the destruction of this temple.

In both places, 10:32 and 19:18, Tg testifies to a specific knowledge of the emendations. As I have argued elsewhere, it is most likely that (proto-) Tg Prophets has been produced – at least its basic text – in the milieu of the "chief priests" (in Greek ἀρχιερείς, and in Aramaic אַמְרֵי כְּהֵנִי),⁷ presumably in the first decades of the second century AD.⁸ Together with the high priest and the second priest they were the leading priests in office in the temple. Although after 70 they no longer had the temple as their institutional base, this does not mean that they had lost their authority in Jewish society.

The chief priests were responsible for the keeping of the sacred books in the temple (Josephus, *CAp* 1:29; see also Tg Zech 11:13), and it therefore is reasonable to assume that they were responsible for the emendations in the text of the books that were, and had been, kept in the temple. If indeed this was also the milieu in which Tg Prophets was produced, it explains why this text reflects a precise knowledge of the emendations discussed

⁶ See e.g. R.P. Gordon, "The Targumists as Eschatologists", *Congress Volume Göttingen 1977* (ed. J.A. Emerton; VTSup 23; Leiden: Brill, 1983) 113-130, 123f.; D. Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament*, vol. 2, (OBO 50/2; Fribourg/Suisse: Editions Universitaires, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986) 149.

⁷ A. van der Kooij, *Die alten Textzeugen des Jesajabuches* (OBO 35; Freiburg/Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981) 197-203. On the priestly milieu of the targumim in general, see E. Katsumata, "Priests and priesthood in the Aramaic Bible", *JAB* 3 (2001) 139ff. It may well be that Tg Prophets was read in the elementary school (W.F. Smelik, *The Targum of Judges* [OTS 36; Leiden: Brill, 1995] 29), but the fact that it contains actualizing interpretations of prophecies points to the milieu of learned priests as translators (compare Josephus, *Jewish War*, 3.352).

⁸ A. Van der Kooij, *Textzeugen*, 192-197. For datings to the early (post-70) period, see e.g. K.J. Cathcart and R.P. Gordon, *The Targum of the Minor Prophets* (The Aramaic Bible 14; Edinburgh: Clark, 1987) 18; Smelik, *The Targum of Judges*, 74; E. van Staaldoune-Sulman, *The Targum of Samuel* (Studies in the Aramaic Interpretation of Scripture 1; Leiden: Brill, 2002) 46.

above. Since both emendations fit in with the interpretation of Tg Prophets it seems likely that both changes in the text have been introduced in the official text kept in the temple, in the beginning of the second century CE. As to Isa 10:32, an additional element which is in favour of this assumption is the fact that the expression "the daughter of Zion" – the reading of the original text – is always taken by the targumist in the sense of "the congregation of Zion." And regarding Isa 19:18 one can imagine that the leading priests who were convinced that the Jerusalem temple would be rebuilt in the near future (cf. Tg Isa 53:5) introduced the notion that the temple in Egypt would be destroyed, thus making clear that this temple was illegitimate.

Both new readings in Isaiah (10:32 and 19:18) are characteristic of the main and official tradition of the MT as they are attested by the later model codices such as L and A. Of course, as is clear from citations in rabbinic sources and from later, Medieval MSS, the primary readings still remained part of the transmission history.⁹ It is noteworthy that the period of time in which both emendations have been made – the beginning of the second century CE – is also the time of the production of texts such as Mur XII Prophets, texts that show a remarkable agreement with the later MT.¹⁰

3. In this section I would like to discuss emendations that go back to an earlier period in the transmission history of the biblical text. They appear in the following passages in the Pentateuch :

- Gen 46:27 MT "70 persons" - LXX "75"
- Ex 1:5 MT "70 persons"
4Q1 (4QGen-Exod^b), 4Q13 (4QExod^b) "75 persons" (cf. LXX)
- Deut 32:8 MT "the number of the sons of Israel"
4Q37 (4QDeut^f) "the number of the sons of God" (cf. LXX)
- Deut 32:43 MT "Rejoice you nations about his people
for he will avenge the blood of his servants
and will take vengeance on his adversaries
and make expiation for his land (and) his people"
4Q44 (4QDeut^g) "Rejoice with him, you heavens,
bow down, all you gods, before him,
for he will avenge the blood of his sons
and take vengeance on his adversaries ;

⁹ See HUB Isaiah, *ad locum*.

¹⁰ See D. Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament*, vol. 3, (OBO 50/3 ; Fribourg/Suisse : Editions Universitaires, Göttingen : Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992) c-cii.

he will punish those who hate him
and make expiation for his people's land" (cf. LXX¹¹)

Barthélemy has pointed out that the scribal emendation in Deut 32:8 is related to corrections in Gen 46:20,27¹² and Exod 1:5, since all these corrections attest a great interest in the number of the 70 descendants of Jacob, Israel, instead of the number 75 in the earlier tradition. In an article on the ending of the Song of Moses, I have come to the conclusion that the editorial emendations in Deut 32:43 also belong to this group of corrected texts in the Pentateuch. It is to be noted that the shortening of v. 43 had the effect of yielding a total of 70 verse-lines in the Song of Moses (instead of 71 in the original version), which again is the number of the sons of Israel.¹³

Recently, in a detailed discussion of the readings in Gen, Exod and particularly in Deut 32:8, Himbaza argued that the corrections in Gen and Ex should not be seen as related to the emendation in Deut 32:8.¹⁴ In his view, the former ones are better explained as due to harmonization with Deut 10:22 – a passage concerning 70 persons of Israel who went to Egypt – , and presumably to be dated in the Hasmonean era, whereas the correction in Deut 32:8 is of a much later date, viz. the first century CE. He bases this dating on the assumption that the new reading – “the sons of Israel” – was inspired by the interpretation of the expression “sons of God” (e.g. Gen 6:2) at that time, as referring to human beings (and not to angels). However, the difficulty with the view of Himbaza on Deut 32:8 is twofold: (a) the reading “the sons of Israel” is also attested by SamPent, a text tradition that is commonly held to go back to the first century BCE, and (b) the text of Deut 32:8 is about “the number of the sons of Israel,” thus displaying an explicit interest in the issue of the number (70).¹⁵ It therefore stands more to reason to consider the correction in Deut 32:8 as related to the ones in Gen and Exod, and, as I believe, to the emended version of Deut 32:43.

It seems likely that the text of Deut 10:22 has played an important role, since this text says, both in MT and in the LXX, that “your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons” (cf. also 4Q138 ; 4Q143 ; 8Q3 and 8Q4).

¹¹ LXX has two extra lines ; see A. van der Kooij, “The Ending of the Song of Moses : on the pre-masoretic version of Deut 32:43”, *Studies in Deuteronomy in honour of C.J. Labuschagne on the occasion of his 65th birthday* (ed. F. García Martínez, A. Hilhorst, J.T.A.G.M. van Ruiten, A.S. van der Woude ; VTSup 53 ; Leiden : Brill, 1994) 93-100.

¹² Unlike the LXX, MT does not mention the sons of Manasse and Ephraim. See D. Barthélemy, “Les tiquné sopherim”, 301.

¹³ A. van der Kooij, “The Ending of the Song of Moses.”

¹⁴ I. Himbaza, “Dt 32,8, une correction tardive des scribes. Essai d'interprétation et de datation”, *Bib 83* (2002) 527-548.

¹⁵ Furthermore, the interpretation of the expression “the sons of God” as human beings (“great ones,” “judges”) is not attested before the second century CE.

It is interesting to note that this text was part of the selection of passages that was characteristic of the most ancient phylacteries that have been found at Qumran. It concerns a selection of passages that seems to go back to the Hasmonean period. Anyhow, this may have been added to the interest in the number 70 as has been suggested by Himbaza.

But why this interest in "the number of the sons of Israel"? The text of Deut 32:8 is revealing in this regard as this text testifies to an emphasis on the significance of the people of Israel among, or for, the nations: "he (God) laid down the boundaries of every people according to the number of the sons of Israel." The same applies to Deut 32:43: "Rejoice you nations about his people ..." It has been suggested by scholars that the changes in Deut 32:8, 43 were due to demythologization, but this does not account for the overall element, viz. the issue of the number of the sons of Israel and the position of Israel among the nations.

One wonders when these emendations may have been introduced into the text of the Pentateuch. The fact that LXX Pentateuch, dating to the third century BCE, does not yet attest the new readings involved, whereas the SamPent – first century BCE – does, points to the second century BCE. Meyer has suggested that the textual changes in Deut 32:43 might be related to the politics of John Hyrcanus (135-104) and of Alexander Jannai (103-76). Both Hasmonean leaders were waging holy wars, "und (sc. haben) durch Zwangsbescheidungen das Land 'entsühnt', während andererseits die Nichtjuden entweder beseitigt oder des Landes verwiesen wurden."¹⁶ According to Barthélemy, who also thinks of the (second half of the) second century BCE, the book of Jubilees reflects a plea for the correction of 75 into 70 (Jub 44:33). This suggests, as he puts it, "comme origine de cette correction les milieux sacerdotaux et piéistes entourant en ses débuts la dynastie hasmonéenne."¹⁷ Unlike the suggestion of Meyer, the view of Barthélemy has the advantage of referring to a literary document of the time – Jubilees – which explicitly refers to one of the passages involved (Genesis 46). However, there is no reason to assume that Jub 44:33 pleads for 70 instead of 75. The text relates that the sons of Jacob who entered Egypt were 70 persons, and that five died in Egypt. The number five does not refer to five persons in addition to 70, but to five of them (cf. v. 29). Furthermore, Jub 44 offers a version of Genesis 46 which is in line with MT, and not with the Hebrew text underlying the LXX, for unlike the latter, Jub 44 does not mention the sons of Manasse and of Ephraim, just as in MT (see above, note 12).

¹⁶ R. Meyer, "Die Bedeutung von Deuteronomium 32,8f.43 (4Q) für die Auslegung des Moseliedes", *Verbanung und Heimkehr. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Theologie Israels im 6. und 5. Jahrhundert v.Chr.*, W. Rudolph zum 70. Geburtstag (Hg. A. Kuschke; Tübingen: Mohr, 1961) 197-209, 205.

¹⁷ D. Barthélemy, "Les *tiqquné sopherim*", 302f.

Since the book of Jubilees is usually dated about 150-140 BCE, the interrelated emendations have been made at an earlier date. I would suggest that they have been carried out together with other emendations in the Pentateuch, particularly the ones that reflect a great interest in matters of chronology. Scholars have pointed out that the chronology of the MT, esp. in Gen 5 and 11, has been edited in such a way that the restoration of the cult and the rededication of the temple in the year 164 BCE took place 4000 years after the creation of the world.¹⁸ Just as in Isa 40-55 and in Haggai, the restoration of the temple cult was regarded as a most important event in world history, marking the beginning of a new era.¹⁹ An emphasis on the significance of the people of Israel fits in well with this religious view (cf. texts such as Tobith 14:5b-6 and 2 Macc 1:10-2:18).

4. So far we have discussed a few cases of emendations, or corrections, in the early history, or more appropriately, "pre-history" of the MT. Although the number of cases is modest indeed, the above instances turn out to be of interest in view of the questions of date and milieu.

As to the former matter, they are of a different date: the cases in Isaiah (10:32; 19:18) go back to the beginning of the second century CE, but those in the Pentateuch (Deut 32:8, 43 and related passages) seem to have been introduced in the second century BCE, shortly after the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem. As to the matter of milieu, there is reason to believe that the cases in Isaiah have been made by leading priests of the time.²⁰ The same may apply to the emendations dating to the second century BCE (Deut 32:8, 43 and related texts). The leading priests were responsible for "the ancient books" that were kept in the temple.²¹ Such an "official" milieu strongly suggests that we are dealing with corrections in a text that may be regarded as an "official" one.²²

¹⁸ See e.g. M. Rösel, *Übersetzung als Vollendung der Auslegung* (BZAW 223; Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 1994) 129-144.

¹⁹ For a strong interest in the chronology of world history in literature of the time, see K. Koch, *Das Buch Daniel* (EdF 144; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980) 149-154.

²⁰ According to Jewish tradition, the corrections have been made by "the scribes" (cf. *tiqqune sopherim*). However, the term "scribe" is not clear: it may refer to a professional scribe (e.g. the scribes of the temple), but it can also refer to learned priests (e.g., Ezra; and see J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* [London: SCM Press, 1976] 233).

²¹ For the expression "the ancient books" as referring to the books of the Hebrew Bible, see A. van der Kooij, "The Canonization of Ancient Books Kept in the Temple of Jerusalem", *Canonization and Decanonization. Papers presented to the International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR), held at Leiden 9-10 January 1997* (eds. A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn; SHR 82; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 17-40.

²² Not to be equated with the "canonical" text, *pace* D. Barthélemy, *Etudes d'histoire*, 369.

In addition, the cases discussed are of a different type: the instances in Isaiah represent small, subtle changes, including a case of *Ketib / Qere*, whereas the changes in the Pentateuch attest another, less strict attitude towards the text. Particularly in view of the latter category, it is a pleasure to offer this modest contribution to the study of the textual history in honour of Adrian Schenker because he is the one who has drawn our attention to the issue of changes in the text of biblical books in the Hasmonean period.²³

²³ See e.g. A. Schenker, *Septante et texte massorétique dans l'histoire la plus ancienne du text de 1 Rois 2-14* (CahRB 48 ; Paris : Garibalda, 2000).