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Prologue

Judging by the efforts made by generations of researchers, and evaluating their achievements in Bible research, one may say without great hesitation that *Textkritik* is *Kopfschmerz*.

Since time immemorial scholars of great stature have invested their energy in seeking the "original" form of the Bible, scrutinizing manuscripts, copies of manuscripts, ancient translations of the Biblical text, daughter-translations (*i.e.*, translations of translations), quotations from the Bible in Patristic literature, inscriptions and other archaeological remains, in order to obtain what they considered to be the *Urtext*. They manifested a remarkable optimism, considering the approach of Benedictus de Spinoza, who already in the year 1670 has expressed his pessimistic view saying that all we can reach from scripture is just copies, while the original is lost for eternity.[1] And since copies are products of human action, there is no wonder that even the most accurate copy bears the traces of the person who produced it.

For example:
Sometimes a ד is taken for a ר unintentionally. After all, only a tiny stroke of feather distinguishes one from another. In the Dead Sea Scrolls script they are barely discernible. The Syriac script has the the same letter for both, the distinction being achieved by means of a diacritic extra-linear point. Thus, the people named דודנים in Gen 10:4 becomes רודנים in 1 Chr 1:7 referring to the same ethnic group:

Gen 10:4: וּבְנֵי יָוָן אֱלִישָׁה וְתַרְשִׁישׁ כִּתִּים וְדֹדָנִים, "The descendants of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim".

1Chr 1:7: וּבְנֵי יָוָן אֱלִישָׁה וְתַרְשִׁישָׁה כִּתִּים וְרוֹדָנִים, "The descendants of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim".

A host of scholars delved into the problem searching for a solution. Is this just a mistake, as Friedrich Delitzsch suggested?[2] This is the reason for the BHS recommendation to emend the text of Genesis and align it with Chronicles: "read רודנים", leaning on the reading of the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint. After all, some Hebrew Masoretic manuscripts *do* have רודנים in Genesis too according to the testimony of Benjamin Kennicott.[3] Is this the correction of scribes or redactors in the spirit of

the Book of Chronicles, or the original reading distorted by an incompetent ancient scribe in the Masoretic Genesis? Significantly, the New Revised Standard Version (1989 edition) equalizes the text, reading Rodanim in both places, following the Septuagint, Ῥόδιοι, while King James version opts for Dodanim in both places, naturally, according to the Vulgate. It is followed by Luther's translation (1545), and the Spanish translation (1909). All other translations English (RSV, ASV, JPS), French, Italian, German (Elberfelder 1905), follow the Masoretic difference: Dodanim in Genesis, Rodanim in Chronicles. The Syriac version called Peshitta apparently went astray: it reads Doranim in Genesis, but Doniram in Chronicles. The medieval Jewish Aramaic translations (called Targumim) have דרדניא, perhaps referring to the Roman province of Dardania (North of Macedonia). However, the old Aramaic Targum (Onqelos) sticks to the MT in Genesis: דודנים.

This may give an idea of the confusion produced by diversity of approaches.

To be sure, the difference between the readings of Genesis and Chronicles was known by Jewish Rabbis in late antiquity. The sixth century CE collection of homilies, *Genesis Rabba* ("the Great Genesis") explains it as two variant names of the same two-faced ethnic group, each related to its position vis-à-vis Israel: כתוב אחד אומר דודנים וכתוב אחד אומר רודנים. ר׳ סימון אומר דודנים שהם בני דודיהם של ישראל רודנים שהן באים ורודים אותן. אמר ר׳ חנן

בשעה שישראל נתונים בעליה אמרין להון בני דודכון ובשעה שהן בירידה באין ורודין אותן. "One verse says דודנים, and one verse says רודנים. R. Simon says: Dodanim (means) that they are cousins of Israel (דוד = uncle; בן דוד = cousin); Rodanim (means) that they come and oppress them (the verb רדה means "to oppress"). R. Hannan adds: When Israel are elevated, they say to them 'we are your cousins'; when they are in descent, they come and oppress them" (ch. 37, §4). Naturally, rabbinic sources reluctant to admit a scripture mistake, sought for an extra-textual explanation. Note that Javan is the representative of Greece, the ancient enemy, whom the Maccabees fought, and one of his sons is Kittim, a sobriquet of the hated Rome.[4]

This abundance of renderings in various sources implies that somewhere, sometime, people intervened into a certain text. This text is not detectable any longer, but the intervention of human beliefs, linguistic habits, and accidents resulted in a plurality of versions, each in its own right.

Now, let's examine some issues, keeping in mind that recommending to emend the reading of one version according to the reading of another version, *requires modesty*.

In my edition of the Book of Genesis according to the Leningrad Codex, I tried to limit myself to the presentation of the Masoretic Text vis-à-vis the divergent versions avoiding speculative emendations. However, sometimes, an

obvious scribal error determined me to suggest a variant, as displayed by a version. This happened mainly when a certain form was in striking conflict with the rules of the language of this very codex. As for example in Gen 2:18 אֶעֱשֶׂה has a dot in the last letter, which habitually marks a feminine possessive pronoun. As no possessive pronoun is required by the syntax of the verse, I recommended the reading of other codices: אֶעֱשֶׂה. The problem is that one never can be sure that what appears to be an "obvious scribal error" is in fact a matter that he failed to understand its logic.

Such is the famous case of Genesis 4:8, where the account of the murder of Abel is given in the following terms: וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיָּקָם קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ.

The text looks as if something is missing, so that a plain translation hardly makes sense: "Cain said to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him". Consequently, many versions add the missing link: "Let us go out to the field". The Samaritan Version for example has נלכה השדה, the Septuagint διέλθωμεν εἰς τὸ πεδίον, the Vulgate: *egrediamur foras*, and so do the Jewish Aramaic Targumim: איתא ונפק תרינן לאפי ברא, "Let us go out, both of us, to the field".[5] Only Onqelos, the old Jewish Targum, follows the Masoretic Text: וַאֲמַר קַיִן לְהֶבֶל אֲחוּהִי וַהֲוָה בְּמֶהֱוֵיהוֹן בְּחַקְלָא וְקָם קַיִן בְּהֶבֶל אֲחוּהִי וְקַטְלֵיהּ. This issue is the subject of a lasting debate between

scholars: Is the MT deficient or are the versions edited?

If I may, I would suggest to consider KJV. This old translation takes the first word, וַיֹּאמֶר, not in the sense "said", but in the sense "talked", just like the frequent וַיְדַבֵּר: "And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him". Thus, the first part of the verse is not necessarily the opening of the second part, and the wholeness of the passage is maintained: nothing is missing. This was arguably Luther's understanding too (1545 edition): "Da *redete* Kain *mit* seinem Bruder Abel. Und es begab sich, da sie auf dem Felde waren, erhob sich Kain wider seinen Bruder Abel und schlug ihn tot".

I am trying to make clear at least one issue: I am not concerned with the "original" text, nor with its prehistory. All I am going to treat is the actual form of the Hebrew Bible, the BIBLIA HEBRAICA, and what the versions represent.

To end this prologue, allow me to quote a very instructive passage taken from a recent book written by a young researcher, Brennan W. Breed: *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), pp. 50-51:

"At one point in time, there was a text— either an original text, an autograph, a pristine copy, an archetype, a text that was considered authoritative, a final form of

the text or merely a relatively more original version—that stood at the end of a process of composition and simultaneously at the beginning of a process of copying. Everything was as it should be. It was, in some sense, perfect. But at that paradoxical point in time, alterations to the text ceased to be compositional and henceforth became corruptions. Authors became copyists. From that point on, the long history of the post original text becomes a history of transmission and reception. Thus, the perfect thing was not immutable. The many changes to the text in the last several millennia include both intentional and unintentional changes, expansions and emendations, translations and misspellings. But whatever their cause, they pose a problem for textual criticism by detracting from the purity and authenticity of the text. Paradise is lost. Textual critics mourn for the lost original and marginalize non original texts by means of several literary tropes: namely, the binary tropes of degradation (corrupt text, incorrect text, or errors versus pristine text or correct text), pathology, and perversion (deviating texts versus corrected texts or texts with textual integrity), and decline (transmitted text versus original text), among others".

ENDNOTES

1 Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, ch. 8.

2 Friedrich Delitzsch, *Die Lese- und Schreibfehler im Alten Testament*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1920, p. 170.

3 As reproduced in Giovanni Bernardo de Rossi, *Variae lectionis Veteris Testamenti Librorum, vol. 1*. Parma: Bodoni, 1784, p. 13.

4 Mentioned as such in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Bilha Nitzan, *Pesher Habakuk (1QpHab). Text, Introduction and Commentary.* Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1986, pp. 123-128 (in Hebrew).

5 See Bjørn Olav Grüner Kwam, "Come, Let the Two of Us Go Out into the Field", the Targum Supplement to Genesis 4:8a - a Text Immanent Reading? in P. V. M. Flesher (ed.), *Targum and Scripture: Studies in Aramaic Translations in Memory of Ernst G. Clarke*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2000, pp. 97-103.

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