CHAPTER TWO

LINGUISTIC DATING OF BIBLICAL HEBREW TEXTS:
A SURVEY OF SCHOLARSHIP

This chapter surveys scholarship on the diachronic approach to BH, with attention to the linguistic dating of BH texts. It will roughly follow a chronological scheme, with the discussion of Avi Hurvitz at the center. Hurvitz is the most important figure to consider on this subject, since he is thought to have perfected the method for the linguistic dating of BH texts. The main body of this chapter comprises three sections. The first section discusses the scholars whose works laid the foundations for Hurvitz’s project. The second section treats Hurvitz, his method, and those who follow him. The third section surveys the recent challenges raised against Hurvitz and Hurvitz’s responses to them. I will conclude the chapter by highlighting some basic issues in the current debate.

1. Toward the Method: Scholarship before Avi Hurvitz

Among those whose findings and achievements became foundational for Hurvitz, four scholars are important: Wilhelm Gesenius, S. R. Driver, Arno Kropat, and E. Y. Kutscher.

1.1. Wilhelm Gesenius

Wilhelm Gesenius is noted for freeing the study of Hebrew from theological considerations.¹ His works pioneered the diachronic study of BH, and so paved the way for the linguistic dating of BH texts. For example, Gesenius surveys the history of the Hebrew language in his *Geschichte der hebräischen Sprache und Schrift* (1815), which Mark F. Rooker considers to be the beginning of a diachronic approach to BH.²

In this work, two points are important to our discussion. First, Gesenius notes in BH two distinct layers, which fall into two successive periods: one used before the exile, the other during and after the exile. He believes that BH changed through time and that late Hebrew differed from early Hebrew in grammar, vocabulary, orthography, and style. Thus, in analyzing the language of the later books in the Hebrew Bible, Gesenius points out the linguistic features that he believes to be late. Second, as for method, Gesenius emphasizes the importance of parallel passages in observing the late features of BH. For example, he believes that one might find the characteristics of late Hebrew by analyzing the passages in Chronicles that are parallel to the ones in Samuel–Kings, because the Chronicler replaced earlier expressions and spellings in Samuel–Kings, which had become difficult and rare in his own day, with more commonly used later forms.

To the eye of today’s student, it is clear how Gesenius’s contribution has stood the test of time. Not only did the above two points become foundational for the studies that soon followed Gesenius’s, but they are still so for many of today’s studies.

1.2. S. R. Driver

By the beginning of the twentieth century, a few scholars continued Gesenius’s research and studied BH from a diachronic perspective. Representative is an extensive study by S. R. Driver. In his *Introduction* (first edition in 1891), Driver pays close attention to the language of each book in the Hebrew Bible. He notes that the style of earlier books is contrasted with the style of postexilic books such as Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi, Chronicles, Esther, Daniel, and Ecclesiastes:

The purest and best Hebrew prose style is that of JE and the earlier narratives incorporated in Jud. Sam. Kings: Dt. (though of a different style) is also thoroughly classical: Jer., the latter part of Kings, Ezekiel, II Isaiah, Haggai, show (though not all in the same respects or in the same degree) slight signs of being later than the writings first mentioned; but in the “memoirs” of Ezra and Nehemiah (i.e. the parts of Ezra and Neh. which are the work of these reformers themselves) and (in a less degree) in the contemporary prophecy

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