THE MASSORETIC TEXT IN THE LIGHT
OF QUMRAN

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It has often been observed that the authors of the nonbiblical Qumran texts had a fine command of the Hebrew language of their day and were thoroughly acquainted with Scripture. In numerous places, especially in the Thanksgiving Hymns, the texts are couched in biblical Hebrew and sound virtually like a mosaic of biblical phrases and quotations 1). Their stylistic features belong specifically to the post-exilic books of the Old Testament. These writings are therefore of considerable value for the textual criticism of the Massoretic Text 2). This is one of the areas in which the discoveries are


proving to be of tremendous value 1). The Qumran texts of the Bible now enable us to see at first hand some of the recensions of biblical texts which were current in Palestine and Egypt in the centuries just before and after the turn of the Christian era 2). These texts, as we all know, preserve numerous variant readings of all kinds. 4Q Testimonia, for instance, is a document many times discussed. It has been pointed out that of its four biblical passages, the first is from the Samaritan recension of Exodus, the second from the Massoretic Text, and that its third and fourth paragraphs, from Deuteronomy and Joshua, show Septuagintal characteristics 3). "What is exceedingly valuable in these manuscripts and fragments is their evidence for the antiquity and reality of variants whose existence, attested to heretofore only by the versions, had been questionable" 4). The Greek Samuel, so different at times from the Hebrew, seems now to have a relative in the Samuel manuscript of Cave IV. The antiquity of the Samaritan Pentateuch, hitherto regarded as a late version, is now supported by an Exodus manuscript. We are still awaiting the final results of F. M. Cross' investigation of the Qumran texts of Samuel (4Q Sam.) 5). His discussion of the many fragments of Samuel is of special importance because our Massoretic text of these books is textually most difficult and because the Qumran text has many interesting affinities with the LXX, and the Books of the Chronicles. These affinities with the tradition, to which the Vorlage of the Old Greek belongs, are most important and cannot be neglected in developing new methods and evaluations in future critical studies of the text of Samuel. For instance, the most extraordinary characteristic of the text of 4Q Sam 6, according to Cross 7), is the high proportion of


1) For the literature on this problem, the reader is referred to the excellent study and bibliographies by F. M. Cross, op. cit., pp. 120-145 and to some extent J. P. Hyatt, op. cit., pp. 6 ff.

2) For detailed discussion, see especially the works by Cross, Greenberg, Rabin, and Skehan referred to in the above footnotes.

3) Cf. P. W. Skehan, op. cit., p. 23. Van der Ploeg concludes in this connection that the Habakkuk Commentary, with its numerous variant readings represents a tradition quite different from any attested by the versions of the MT. Cf. also M. Burrows, The Dead Sea Scrolls, p. 313.

4) M. Greenberg, op. cit., pp. 164-165.
