THE HISTORY OF ISRAELITE RELIGION AND THE BIBLICAL TEXT: CORRECTIONS DUE TO THE UNIFICATION OF WORSHIP*

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I

The present article is premised on the understanding that there is an intimate relationship between religion and text, namely—between the beliefs held by scribes and copyists of holy scriptures and the texts that they produce. It is well known that the intellectual world of a copyist may leave its stamp on his handiwork. If this rule applies to the scribe’s universe of thoughts, feelings and mental associations, how much more so when articles of faith are at stake and when the texts in question are not merely secular compositions, but rather holy writings, which both the copyist and his community expect to conform with their beliefs. In applying this principle to our area of research, I wish to discuss the transmission of the biblical text in light of the history of Israelite religion.

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* Translated by Ilana Goldberg, M.A. Excerpts from the Hebrew Bible and Talmud have been adapted from the NJPS and the Soncino Talmud, respectively. Retroversions from the TXX are marked with an asterisk.

1 G. Pasqualli, Storia della tradizione e critica del testo (2nd ed.; Firenze: Le Monnier, 1952); S. Timpanaro, Il lapsus freudiano: psicanalisi e critica testuale (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1974, repr. 1975). In Timpanaro’s opinion, the Freudian lapsus is not present in the copying of texts.

2 An interesting instance how present-day associations cause textual corruptions can be found in: R. Weiss, Studies in the Text and Language of the Bible (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981) [IV], n*. לַעֲוָי נְבֶל לְוָי נְבֶל was corrupted into לַעֲוָי נְבֶל לְוָי נְבֶל, since Hanoch Lewin was a well-known Israeli playwright.

The relationship between religion and text must be seen as one dimension of a larger complex of cultural relations. Any crucial development in the religious life of a faith community will inevitably have an impact on several areas—law and administration, historiography and storytelling, and also upon the area that concerns us here—textual transmission. We wish to trace developments and transformations as they occurred in these different cultural realms. Moreover, one can expect that each one of these areas will illuminate the other, by supplying the context for understanding the full extent of any given transformation. Religion, law, historiography, literature and text will mutually inform one another, interweaving to create a unified picture.

This sort of comprehensive contextual approach is sorely needed in biblical studies. The discipline’s problems are well known: the Bible is a limited literary corpus; external sources which illuminate scripture are few; archaeological discoveries from the Land of Israel are mostly mute, i.e. epigraphic findings are scanty; entire historical epochs remain enigmas. As far as the text—our current subject of inquiry—is concerned, the textual witnesses are late (e.g. the Massoretic Text = MT), or tendentious (the Samaritan Pentateuch = SP), or fragmentary (Qumran scrolls) or secondary and indirect (the Septuagint = LXX, and other ancient translations, citations and paraphrases in later literature). Given this predicament, scholars are obliged to complete the evidence through conjecture. Conjecture, I wish to emphasize, is permissible and even necessary in every branch of historical science. This applies to conjectural text emendations as well. But which conjectures should be considered legitimate in textual criticism? In my opinion, only a conjecture which is consistent with

