

# Introduction: The Contribution of John Emerton to Hebrew and Biblical Studies

John Emerton's numerous publications are listed in the two *Festschriften* that were presented to him in 1995 and 2010.<sup>1</sup> Only about one-third of them could be included in the present selection of his work, but this short review will take into account his full *oeuvre*, which covers a remarkably wide range of topics and in all of them displays the exceptional depth of his scholarship. The selection is intended to be a representative one, and its subdivisions can serve well (with one exception) to identify the different aspects of his contribution to Hebrew and biblical studies. We begin with the exception: John Emerton was an early contributor to the Leiden edition of *The Old Testament in Syriac*. Having on his own initiative produced an edition of the Peshitta of the Wisdom of Solomon (with an introduction of over 100 pages) in 1959, he edited the Song of Songs (1966 [sample edition]; 1979 [with D.J. Lane]) and the Wisdom of Solomon (1979 [again with D.J. Lane]) for the official series of volumes. In these years he also published several articles on the Peshitta (1962 [included here under 'Old Testament Issues']; 1967) and on the Syriac text of the Odes of Solomon (1967; 1977 [here, pp. 636–48]; 1981), as well as a translation of the latter work (with a critical introduction) in *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (ed. H.F.D. Sparks, 1984). Some of his publications on the New Testament and Early Christianity (1955 [here, pp. 589–90]; 1962 [here, pp. 594–99]; 1964; 1967) drew on his expertise in Syriac and other dialects of Aramaic, and he also contributed an 'Appendix on the Numerals' to the second edition of W.B. Stevenson's Aramaic grammar (1962). Further studies of themes in early Christianity discussed the language

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1 See J. Day, R.P. Gordon and H.G.M. Williamson (eds.), *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in honour of J.A. Emerton* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 289–99; K.J. Dell, G.I. Davies and Y.V. Koh (eds.), *Genesis, Isaiah and Psalms: A Festschrift to honour Professor John Emerton for his eightieth birthday* (VTSupp 135; Leiden, 2010), pp. xi–xiv. By an oversight, the Presidential Address at the Cambridge Congress of I.O.S.O.T., the editorship of the Paris Congress Volume 1992 (VTSupp 61; Leiden, 1995) and (with D. Frost and A.A. Macintosh), *'A Daft Text': The Psalter 1998. A Critique of the New Psalter* (Cambridge, 1999) were omitted from the list in the second of these volumes. Two additional items have appeared since 2010: 'The Contribution by Graham Davies to Old Testament Studies', in J.K. Aitken, K.J. Dell and B.A. Mastin (eds.), *On Stone and Scroll: Essays in Honour of Graham Ivor Davies* (BZAW 420; Berlin and New York, 2011), pp. 11–19; 'The Achievements of Hugh Williamson', in I.W. Provan and M.J. Boda (eds.), *Let us Go up to Zion: Essays in Honour of H.G.M. Williamson on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (VTSupp 153; Leiden, 2012), pp. xi–xv. See also note 9 on p. 5.

situation in Palestine in the first century and whether Jesus spoke Hebrew (1961; 1973 [here, pp. 614–35]), the interpretation of various New Testament passages (1958 [here, pp. 591–93]; 1960; 1962; 1966) and the transliteration of the Hebrew text in the second column of Origen's Hexapla (1956; 1971 [here, pp. 600–613]).<sup>2</sup>

If these publications of John Emerton's early years as a scholar might seem to have been pointing in different directions from the fields in which he achieved his widest reputation, the latter were also already showing themselves in the form of articles on central Old Testament issues (1958 [here, pp. 433–51]; 1962; 1966) and in examples of the philological notes and longer linguistic studies which account for over half the items included here (1960; 1963; 1964; 1965; 1966 etc.).

To take the latter group first: the short philological note on a difficult word or passage had long been a favoured vehicle for Greek and Latin scholarship and it was also the form taken in many of the publications of John Emerton's teacher at Oxford, G.R. Driver, and of his own immediate predecessor in the Hebrew chair at Cambridge, D. Winton Thomas. In John Emerton's hands it came increasingly to exhibit characteristics which were also seen in his regular lectures on the Hebrew and Aramaic text of the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> There was a clear and methodical progression from a translation of the Masoretic text and the identification of the problem(s) in it which were to be dealt with (and the explicit exclusion of others) to a consideration and criticism of previous attempts at a solution and a review of the evidence of the main ancient Versions (Septuagint, Targum[s], Peshitta and Vulgate) and other textual traditions. Then the new solution would be proposed, on the basis of the nuances of Hebrew grammar (with references especially to 'GK'), possible meanings of the Hebrew terms in question, careful use of evidence from the cognate languages (in which the excesses and errors of others were likely to be criticised), and, where there seemed good grounds for it, emendation (usually of a minor

2 John Emerton has informed us that a number of his studies on the New Testament were the result of his regular participation in C.F.D. Moule's New Testament seminar during his first period in Cambridge (1955–62).

3 For the record we will give here a list of the passages treated and the dates of publication for the items not included in this volume (for fuller details see the *Festschriften* cited in note 1): Judg. 6.25–28 (1978); 11.24, 16.28 (1973); 1 Kgs 16.32 (1997); 2 Kgs 23.8 (1994); Isa. 5.14 (1967); 8.23 (1969); 25.2 (1977); 28.10, 13 (2001); 30.5 (1981, 1982) 34.11–12 (1982); 35. 9–10 (1977); Jer. 6.23 (1972); 12.9 (1969); 50.42 (1972); Hab. 2.4–5 (1977); Ps. 2.9 (1978); 64.4 (1976); 74.5, 11 (1963); 74.15 (1966); 76.11 (1974); 77.11 (1994); 78.41 (1963); 87 (2000); 127.2 (1974); Prov. 1.22–23 (1968); 2.18 (1979); 12.26 (1964); 13.2 (1984); 14.31, 19.16 (1969); 21.28 (1988); 24.21, 26.9, 28.12 (1969); Lam. 4.1 (1967); Dan. 5.12 (1960).