CHAPTER 14

The Textual Plurality of the Book of Joshua and the Need for a Digital Complutensian Polyglot Bible

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Obvious Signs of Textual Plurality?

At the time of the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Polyglot of Madrid, the most commonly used Hebrew text of the Book of Joshua is the BHS edition, which is based on the Codex Leningradensis. In the reproduction of the latter text, the editors imposed modern layout on the text. At first sight, the Book of Joshua in the BHS looks rather normal and standard, at least in comparison with other prose texts. There are however some pages where the layout suggest something special. For instance, the layout of the BHS Joshua indicates that in 10:12b–13 there is some poetry and that in 12:9–24, there is a list, printed in three columns. More importantly, however, is that in 21:36–37 the layout, i.e. the smaller print, indicates that the text itself is special. A note explains that this verse was neither in Codex Leningradensis, nor in Codex Cairensis, nor in the Bombergiana 1524/5 edition of the Hebrew text. The insertion of the text however is based on its appearance in the Greek, Aramaic and Vulgate texts, the parallel text in 1 Chron 6:63. Moreover it is obvious that the current verses must have dropped out from the Hebrew text due to homoioteleuton (the scribe reading (עברית) at the end of v. 35 and continuing after (עברית) at the end of v. 37, with v. 38).

The above rather unimportant details do not point as such to the existence of multiple Books of Joshua. Reading, however, the text of the Hebrew Book of Joshua alongside the Greek version, one immediately notices that the latter is a bit shorter than the former: “Gegenüber seiner masoretischen Fassung

2 These two verses have been added back into the text based on their presence in the Greek text, the Targum and the Vulgate; they also have a parallel in 1 Chron 6:63f. The Syriac text also has these additional verses, albeit positioned after v. 34a. It is remarkable that the Syro-hexapla has marked these verses sub obeli.
erscheint das Buch Josua in der LXX deutlich gekürzt,”3 writes Den Hertog; he continues: “Die quantitativen Differenzen sind nicht gleichmäßig über das Buch verteilt, sondern konzentrieren sich in einigen Kapiteln, namentlich 2, 5–8, 10, 17–18 und 20.”4 Not only is the text of the Greek Book of Joshua shorter, it also has a section after 9:2 which is positioned in 8:30–35 in the MT and before 5:2 in 4QJosh5 (plus 5X).5 The fact that a text is positioned in different places in different witnesses does not necessarily imply, however, that there is plurality of text. It could initially only indicate that the text of the Book of Joshua was not yet stabilized and that this section was not yet set in stone in a specific context. Similarly, the fact that there is a repetition of 19:49–50 after 21:42 does not necessarily imply plurality of text, as a scribe or author could have decided to move a text to another place, but again that a specific text was not yet fixed. That the scribe or author, however, not only transposed a text, but also repeated it in another place, does seem to point that there must have been two different texts.6 Plurality of texts, hence, comes into the picture of the Book of Joshua due to its Greek translation. A further comparison between OG and MT reveals that the two texts also differ from each other on the qualitative level, albeit that the overall translation can be characterized as faithful.7 With regard to the Greek translator, Michael van der Meer notes: “Even though he did not straighten out all ... textual difficulties, he introduced a large number of small modification (sic) of the original text”8 and then offers a list of examples of different renderings for the same Hebrew word, unusual renderings, clarifications, condensations, etc.9

5 See for the discussion of this text below.
9 Ibidem, 103–105.