REWRITTEN BIBLE AS A BORDERLINE
PHENOMENON—GENRE, TEXTUAL STRATEGY,
OR CANONICAL ANACHRONISM?

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1. FROM “REWITTEN BIBLE” TOWARDS “REWITTEN SCRIPTURE”

It is a delight to celebrate and honour Florentino García Martínez, who by the quality and number of his works on the Dead Sea Scrolls has placed himself as one of the most outstanding scholars on the subject. In addition, his amicable nature, his straightforwardness, and his open-mindedness to new ideas is exemplary of an academic habitus. Let me also express my gratitude to Professor García Martínez for his interest in my work and for his friendship during the past years.

The subject of this paper has also attracted the scholarly attention of García Martínez: the phenomenon that he—among others—has aptly designated the problem of borderlines.1 I shall focus on one distinct aspect of this discussion that recently has become a controversial subject of scholarly debate, the understanding of the category of rewritten Bible. The subject of the debate has been about whether the concept—originally coined by Geza Vermes in 1961—is most adequately conceived of in terms of a genre or in terms of a textual strategy.2

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Both perceptions have some basis in Vermes’ own understanding, since it is not altogether clear in what sense he speaks of rewritten Bible as a genre. Whereas most scholars have understood him to see rewritten Bible as a distinct genre, he actually seems to oscillate between the two approaches—genre or textual strategy—that have constituted the bone of contention in contemporary discussions. My essay is part of a larger project aimed at a determination of the analytical relationship between the generic categorisations that have been used with regard to the intertextual influences exerted by authoritative scriptural antecedents on subsequent compositions of the later Second Temple Period. At this stage of the project, I shall restrict myself to the discussion of the category in terms of a genre or a textual strategy as a predominantly theoretical problem.

First, I shall raise the supplementary question to what extent the category itself is a slightly distorting misnomer. If an increasing number of scholars—not least on the basis of the entire corpus of Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts—acknowledge that the borders between alleged biblical writings and non-biblical texts were conspicuously more fluid than acknowledged at the time when Geza Vermes coined the concept, should that not call the continued use of the term into question? To push my point to the extreme, if one acknowledges the anachronistic nature of the category biblical with regard to the historical situation during which the majority of the writings relevant for the discussion of rewritten Bible were composed, it is reasonable to abandon the term. Such abandonment, however, does not necessarily entail that the idea underlying the concept should be given up. It would, on the contrary, be futile to renounce the heuristic value which the term has had during almost half a century of scholarship. On the other hand, I find it problematic that scholars today have to initiate their employment of the label by first distancing themselves from the anachronistic and canonical

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