THE FIXATION IN WRITING OF VARIOUS PARTS
OF THE PENTATEUCH

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The study, the results of which are proposed here is incomplete, but because I must for certain reasons break it off for an indefinite time, I considered it better to publish the results arrived at up till now hoping that they will be of some use to others.

As we know, in the O.T. there have been used certain consonants, viz. ḫ, b, w, and y as so-called matres lectionis to show the colorit of the vowel of the consonant preceding such a vowel-consonant. Further, it is generally recognized that their use increases when we pass from older writings to younger ones. Ges-B remarks of many words that they have been written plene only in the Chronicles. The present writer has established that Amos makes the least use of the vowel-consonants among the Twelve Prophets while Jonah uses them more than any one else among them, the relation between Amos and Jonah being about 1 : 2, 2 (according to the principles given farther down).

Nobody, however, has dared build anything upon this fact. And it seems actually to be meaningless considering the long interval between the times the various books of the O.T. were fixed in writing and when the manuscripts preserved to us were written. Moreover, on the ground of the Dead Sea Scrolls we know that there has been a period during which in the manuscripts there have been used vowel-consonants much more than in the manuscripts preserved to us. The Samaritan Pentateuch seems to point in the same direction. On the other hand, LXX presupposes without doubt a defective writing in very many places where our manuscripts have the plene one, a feature which is common also to all the ancient Canaanitic inscriptions preserved to our time.

None of these objections, however, can be proved as absolutely tenable. To begin with the last argument, the slight use of the vowel-
consonants may be due to the hardness of the writing material: because they were not necessary for understanding the text, they were not used in order to lighten the work. As regards the Hebrew original of the LXX, their avoidance might be due to the circumstance that, as we know from the mention of Jerome, the manuscripts were often written sparing the space as much as possible in order that the volume would not grow too large in size. In Jerome’s times it happened usually by means of reducing the size of the characters, but earlier, when the text had not yet been sanctified up to and including the characters, it might also be done by dropping out all the characters not necessarily needed. The Samaritan Pentateuch is, as we know 1), a popular edition of the original text. So we can regard its more copious use of the vowel-consonants as assisting in reading and understanding the text, especially because the Samaritans apparently lost the ability to understand Hebrew already relatively early 2). The same is true of the Dead Sea scrolls 3). As to the long interval between the writing of our manuscripts and of the original text, in the first place it might be referred to the careful conservation of the text about A.D. 100 proved by the small number of the differences between various manuscripts, especially in the Pentateuch where there appear no real variants at all. The text was fixed ca. A.D. 100 no doubt on the ground of the best manuscripts at one’s disposal at that time. There is no real reason to deny the existence of the temple archive in Jerusalem—as we know, in Babylonia there were temple archives hundreds and thousands of years before. In such an archive there is naturally also the code of laws concerning the temple and cult exercised there, in Jerusalem at least the Pentateuch. A manuscript, even if it were written on papyrus, can, carefully conserved, reach an age of many hundred years—in the Vatican there are papyri of nearly an age of a thousand of years. If that be so, it is not surprising if a first copy of Ezra’s or a contemporary manuscript of the Pentateuch was among the manuscripts upon which the Masoretic text of the Pentateuch was based ca. A.D. 100, and we can take for granted that there was a second or at least a third copy of it among them.

Further, it is most reasonable to suppose that a man copying a manuscript follows usually the original text if he has no particular

2) Cf. KAHLER, op. cit., p. 405.