The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Pre-Samaritan Scrolls:

Composition and Exegesis

In our first meeting, we made a preliminary acquaintance with the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP), an ancient version of the Torah that is preserved today by the Samaritan community. We have discussed the transmission of SP on two parallel paths – oral and textual – and illustrated the importance of orality in the traditional transmission of SP with regard to filling gaps in the consonantal framework of the text. We have additionally reviewed Samaritan manuscript culture, illuminating scribal practices reflected in medieval SP manuscripts, as well as detailing the main critical editions of SP. Finally, we have investigated various written aspects of this textual tradition, which include (to varying degrees) scribal interventions into the text in order to smooth out inconsistencies both in terms of content and language.

As I have previously mentioned, one of the most significant results of the discovery of the Qumran scrolls for studying the development and transmission of the scriptural text was the realization that the instances in SP where the text differs from other known versions are not generally attributable to a ‘sectarian’ recension of the Pentateuch by the Samaritans themselves. The presence at Qumran of Pentateuchal manuscripts that contain nearly all the variants previously regarded as unique to SP demonstrates that this ‘Samaritan’ version of the Torah must have circulated widely during the Second Temple period. Therefore, SP is an important resource for our understanding of the production and transmission of scripture in early Judaism.

In my talk today, I would like to concentrate on scribal processes that occurred in the transmission of the pre-Samaritan tests at a relatively early stage in the Second Temple period – namely, before their having been chosen as base texts for the Samaritan Pentateuch. In focusing on this period, I am avoiding the sectarian issue, which I will discuss in our next meeting. I will then present my theory regarding the origin and distribution of the pre-Samaritan tradition, as well my answer to the question of how and why the sectarian SP ended up being based on this particular textual tradition. Today’s focus will therefore deal with strategies and literary techniques that were deployed by scribes in the Second Temple period who belonged to pre-Samaritan circles, but who (as we will see) were part of broader circles as well.

SP and the pre-Samaritan texts are grouped together in a single textual tradition, as they reflect a single genre of scribal activity in the late Second Temple period. This activity comprises a set of strategies for textual manipulation that could be deployed across texts. Some of these strategies were mentioned and exemplified in our last meeting, such as small harmonizing changes and linguistic emendations. Today we will focus on two other prominent strategies: (a) rearrangements and (b) major editorial changes that involve the insertion of material from elsewhere in the Pentateuch.

Our discussion so far has focused for the most part on SP itself, even though in the majority of cases, the pre-Samaritan texts reflect the major details of the text attested to in SP. This is because the textual evidence seen in the pre-Samaritan texts is in a more fragmentary format. Even with regard to minor alterations, it is easier to understand the precise nature of a change when its complete context is preserved. In order to illustrate the textual proximity between the pre-Samaritan texts and SP, we will turn to the pre-Samaritan texts and compare them with SP, as well as compare these both with the Masoretic text (MT).

In the first part of my talk, I would like to introduce cases of variants that are the result of rearrangements and major editorial changes which appear both in SP and pre-Samaritan text. These cases will stress the textual proximity between the texts, which is essentially the reason why the Qumran manuscripts are called pre-Samaritan – because they reflect the earlier exemplars of the textual tradition on which SP is based. Then, I shall demonstrate that despite their close affinities, the pre-Samaritan texts are not identical with SP: on occasion, a pre-Samaritan text preserves a unique reading not shared by SP, and in other instances, SP presents significant reading that is not documented in the pre-Samaritan texts. These points of divergence will be noted in the discussion that follows, with particular attention to their implications for the compositional development of the Pentateuch.

The pre-Samaritan version of the Torah is represented in Qumran by a small group of scrolls, mainly 4QExod-Levf, 4QpaleoExodm, and 4QNumb. The oldest is 4QExod-Levf, dated on paleographical grounds to the mid-third century BCE, while the most recent is 4QNumb, dated to the late first century BCE. Several additional manuscripts show textual proximity to the pre-Samaritan group as well, such as 4QDeutn, 4QRP, and 4QTest (which is not a scriptural manuscript), but they are not classified as pre-Samaritan scrolls as they also reflect unique textual characteristics (some of which will be discussed below).

**1. Rearrangements**

Rearrangements in the SP tradition (SP and pre-Samaritan texts) are not frequent. Only two cases of large-scale rearrangements are found in SP, both of which aim to harmonize a passage with another biblical text. The technique of rearrangement implies an exegetical concern pertaining to the sequence of the text since rearrangements imply dissatisfaction with the sequence of the source text as it stands.

Exod 29, verse 21 (text number 1 in your handout), which describes the sprinkling of the priests’ garments with blood from the purification offering, is removed from its location in MT and relocated after verse 28, which concludes the description of the elevation offering. As seen elsewhere, the new sequence matches a command to its execution (like in Leviticus 8:29-30 when it is only after the raising of the breast as an elevation offering that the priests’ garments are sprinkled). As can you see in the handout, this rearrangement is also partially attested to in 4QpaleoExodm, where the text goes directly from Exod 29:20 to verse 22. Unfortunately, the section of the text where verse 21 would have been relocated from (after verse 28) is not preserved.

Another case of rearrangement involves the instructions for the making of the incense altar (). In SP, these instructions are located after Exod 26:35, while in MT they are located in Exod 30:1–10. 4QpaleoExodm attests to the same arrangement of the instructions for the incense altar as well, containing text from MT-Exod 30:10 followed by Exod 27:1. Arguably SP and 4QpaleoExodm improve the logical sequence of the section since now the instructions for the incense altar occur along with the other instructions for the Tabernacle and its appurtenances (which appear in chapters 25–27). However, the move also partially confirms the commands for the construction of the Tabernacle to the record of their fulfillment in Exod 37, where the incense altar is made directly after the table and the lampstand that also are located in the Tabernacle but outside the Holy of Holies. The relocation of the instructions for the incense altar in the SP tradition, locating them after the instructions for the table and the lampstand, harmonizes the sequence in chapter 26 with the sequence in chapter 37.

**2. Major editorial changes (expansions)**

The pre-Samaritan and the Samaritan text of the Pentateuch are famous for the insertion of large-scale editorial changes. As is well known, the larger editorial changes generally have been carried out with the help of passages taken from Deut 1–9 inserted into Exodus and Numbers. The one exception is when material from Numbers was imported into the text of Deuteronomy (). In Deut 2:1–8, Moses recalls the Israelites, following God’s command, avoided the territory of Edom. However, in the parallel account in Numbers 20, Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom, asking permission to cross the territory (which was refused). The SP’s text of Deuteronomy inserts Moses’ request from Num into Deut 2 after verse 7, bringing the two accounts into harmony.

As has already been suggested by Michael Segal, the major editorial changes are not simply harmonizations. They do not offer a compromise between contradicting narratives, but often just the opposite, creating an awkward narrative consisting of two different versions of a story in the same pericope. We saw this in a previous meeting in the different episodes of sending the spies in the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy. Instead of harmonizing the narratives, the scribes that inserted the major editorial changes appear to be concerned with increasing the consistency of the recurring Pentateuchal narratives and creating a text of the two accounts that illuminate one version with the help of the other. In the words of Molly Zahn, these scribes wish to “increase the self-referentiality of the Torah.” Other major editorial changes reflect a formalist tendency of SP and the pre-Samaritan texts to record both a speech and an act, particularly (as in the plague narrative) in cases of a divine commandment and its fulfillment.

Most of the major editorial changes in the text of Exodus in SP are also documented in 4QpaleoExodm, while most of these changes in the text of Numbers in SP are documented in 4QNumb. For the sake of illustration, I will offer some examples from both books that are documented both in the pre-Samaritan and the Samaritan text of the Pentateuch.

The first example is found in SP-Exod 18 (). According to the Masoretic text, it was by Jethro’s counsel that Moses’ delegation was granted some responsibility in the matter of hearing the people’s problem. However, in the parallel account in Deut 1:9–18, Moses does not mention Jethro at all. The reason behind the need to delegate responsibility in Deut 1 is directly related to the Lord’s fulfillment of his promise to increase the number of people. Hence, it became an increasingly difficult task for Moses to undertake all aspects of leadership (both judiciary and military) by himself. Driven by the need to illuminate the earlier narrative by the later story, SP-Exod 18 (as well as 4QpaleoExodm) combines Jethro’s counsel with the reason mentioned by Moses in Deut 1. Thus, according to the SP tradition, Exod 18 is a composite text, in which Moses speaks to the people and describes his inability to deal with their problems on his own—as detailed in Deuteronomy—*after* receiving Jethro's counsel. Moreover, the instructions to the judges in Deut 1 are also integrated into the text of Exod 18.

The next example is seen in text num. ##. In the golden calf episode in Exod 32, both SP and 4QpaleoExodm insert text from the parallel account in Deut 9, revealing that Moses interceded on behalf of Aaron, on whom the immediate responsibility for the Israelites’ sin rested. This is a new detail, first introduced in MT only in the account found in Deut. The scribes who transmitted the SP tradition prevented the introduction of the new information occurring only in the later version of the story by copying it into the earlier version.

The encounter with Sihon in Num 21 constitutes another example (). MT reports a simple plot: the request of envoys sent to Sihon to allow the Israelites to pass through his country are rejected and instead Sihon marches to war – only to be countered by the Israelites and defeated. SP adds elements from the parallel account in Deut 2:24–33. It introduces divine speeches directed at Moses, commanding him to make war with Sihon not once but twice. This addition corresponds to the formal tendency of detailing both commands and their fulfillment. The Sihon section in SP-Num also contains additional verses from Deut, all constituting a command that needs to be reaffirmed. In this case, this is not a divine command but rather Moses’ own command, referring to parts of the envoys’ message regarding a specific request from the host nation and mentioning previous arrangements with other nations (Deut 2:27–29).

Although the relevant column in 4QNumb is highly damaged, according to the readings and the reconstruction proposed by Nathan Jastram, the editor of the scroll in the DJD series (), it seems that the interpolations of text from Deut 2 did originally appear in 4QNumb.

Recapping our progress so far, we have demonstrated that unique variants documented in SP – mainly rearrangements and major editorial changes – are also documented in two copies of Exodus and Numbers from Qumran (4QpaleoExodm and 4QNumb). While I have mentioned only three examples, in fact, most of the major editorial changes documented in SP were originally included in 4QpaleoExodm and 4QNumb. Therefore, we may conclude that SP is a later exemplar of a textual tradition that already existed in the late Second Temple period. This tradition attests to literary techniques that have been applied by the scribes who were responsible for its transmission. Significantly, as a comprehensive text of all the five books of the Pentateuch, SP offers collective evidence of the expansive version of the Pentateuch, allowing for a much better conceptualization of the purpose and application of the scribal strategies and the interpretative processes that the texts underwent.

The major editorial changes in the SP tradition involve the insertion of material from elsewhere in the Pentateuch, with almost no new material interpolated into the text. The scribes carried this out by copying the exact wording of the Pentateuch and pasting it in places where it seems to be required. Only minimal changes are inserted in order to fit the duplicated material in the new context, such as monitoring the grammatical person of the speaker. Moreover, the major editorial changes never occur to biblical law, a classical locus for the harmonization of contradictions, but rather only in narratives. Put differently, the freedom that the scribes responsible for the SP tradition took upon themselves to improve the text was limited to the narrative blocks and did not extend to the pericopes involving laws. The latter were copied faithfully. This fact might imply that the scribes theologically distinguished between the genres of prose and law.

However, a comparison between SP and the pre-Samaritan texts reveals that certain pre-Samaritan texts underwent more comprehensive editing than SP. For instance, in SP we find in Exod 20 the Israelites instructed to remember or observe the Sabbath day because God refrained from His labor on this same day, while in Deut 5 they are commanded to do so to honor the memory of the exodus from Egypt. But the pre-Samaritan 4QDeutn supplements the Sabbath commandment in Deut with the parallel passage from Exod, creating a composed text in which the two reasons for the commandment appear side by side.

The duplication of text from one version of the Decalogue to its second version fits the editorial practices evident in the major changes found in pre-Samaritan texts. Yet this addition is not documented in SP, nor in other copies of Deuteronomy from Qumran. Moreover, the expansion in 4QDeutn deviates from the pre-Samaritan editorial changes in two ways: first, the expansion appears in the Decalogue, which is not a narrative block but rather a law pericope. Second, the *direction* of the duplication of the material is exceptional, as commonly material from Deuteronomy is duplicated in Exodus or Numbers but not the opposite. Thus, 4QDeutn shows further textual developments beyond SP. The scribe of this copy (or one of his predecessors) used the same literary techniques of the scribes that transmitted the SP tradition, but took a step beyond in inserting an editorial change into the text of the laws revealed on Mount Sinai.

Conversely, there are also instances in which SP reflects changes that are not documented in the preserved pre-Samaritan texts. Take for instance Num 25:4. According to MT, God commands Moses to punish those worshipping Baal Peor: “Take all the ringleaders and have them publicly impaled before the LORD.” Moses, in turn, commanded the Israelites to “slay those of his men who attached themselves to Baal Peor.” SP changes God’s command and replaces it with the same words of its fulfillment by Moses in the next verse, creating a connection between the command and its fulfillment. This reading is unique to SP, reflecting a textual development that is not documented in the pre-Samaritan 4QNumb.

Molly Zahn suggests that the divergence in the editorial changes across SP and the pre-Samaritan texts evinces several stages of composition and gradual development of the text. I have mentioned that in many cases the minor alterations of SP share readings with the Septuagint, pointing toward some sort of early shared tradition. At a certain stage, this tradition split in two: the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Septuagint was translated into Greek while the pre-Samaritan tradition has been revised and expanded by the insertion of major changes (mainly to the plagues and the wilderness narratives that exhibit a consistent and systematic character). In the second century BCE, a certain pre-Samaritan copy of the Pentateuch was chosen by the Samaritans as the base text of their Pentateuch. Yet the pre-Samaritan texts continued to be edited, using the same strategies and scribal techniques that yielded the major editorial changes, while SP has also continued to be manipulated by the scribes who transmitted it. These processes yielded the differences seen across the pre-Samaritan and Samaritan texts of the Pentateuch.

Zahn’s thesis explains the differences between the pre-Samaritan texts and SP via a diachronic explanation. Although this explanation is possible, in my view we should consider the textual evidence from a synchronic point of view as well. In other words, the fact that we have manuscripts from the pre-Samaritan tradition that contain editorial changes that do not appear elsewhere in the tradition, as well as editorial changes documented only in SP but not in pre-Samaritan texts, indicates that we are dealing with a *wide* tradition of scribal intervention with respect to content editing. Although there is a high degree of overlap, the details of this intervention may vary from witness to witness. Rather than an exact copy of the Pentateuch, what makes these texts a group is their common scribal practices and literary techniques.

There is a group of texts named the Reworked Pentateuch, consisting of five manuscripts – 4Q158 and 4Q364–367 – which reflect the same scribal techniques of content editing found in the pre-Samaritan texts. However, these manuscripts are grouped together and differentiated from the pre-Samaritan tradition because in addition to the scribal techniques of content editing described above they exhibit a further phenomenon: the addition of completely new material to the text.

Though not large in length, an example of the insertion of new material is preserved in 4Q158 (). The text reflects a version of the theophany at Mount Sinai that is based on the pre-Samaritan tradition – a composed text of Exod 20 and Deut 5, where the latter describes the Israelites’ request that Moses act as a mediator and speak to them instead of God. In 4Q158 the scribe has made a further modification to the expanded version of the Sinai pericope: it contains God’s command to Moses to tell the Israelites to return to their tents. This command appears in Deut 5:30. While in all other extant texts of Deut it is not mentioned whether or not the Israelites obeyed, 4Q158 makes it clear that they did by adding the phrase “and the people returned, each man to his tent.” Despite 4Q158’s intervention not being documented in the SP tradition, and the fact that it takes a further step in the addition of new material, the addition does address the problem that the SP tradition is famous for reconciling – namely a command without the record of its fulfillment.

Another substantial addition of new material appears in the Song of Miriam in 4Q365 (). In MT and SP, Miriam’s Song is a short one-verse song. Apart from the change in the form of the opening verb —שירו, “sing!” (a second-person plural command) instead of אשירה, “I will sing” (a first-person singular assertion), Miriam’s song is identical with the song sung by Moses and Israel. 4Q365 presents a much larger song, extending for many additional lines, which shares vocabulary with the Song of Moses and Israel but is not identical to it. Significantly, this text does not exist elsewhere in the tradition and exhibits a large-scale addition of new material to the Pentateuchal text.

In the view of some scholars, the addition of new materials may push the boundaries of the text beyond an acceptable limit, taking 4QRP into a gray area with fluid boundaries between scriptural and rewritten manuscripts. While some scholars such as Michael Segal claim that 4QRP texts are simply Pentateuchal manuscripts, others like Sidnie Crawford think that the authoritative nature of these texts remains unresolved.

4QRP texts are relevant to our discussion as these texts (similar to the pre-Samaritan texts and SP) revised the Pentateuch according to a standard set of literary techniques. A comparison between the pre-Samaritan and Samaritan texts of the Pentateuch and RP indicates that the former are foils to the latter, reflecting more conservative editing. While the RP scribes felt free to add new materials in the course of their reworking, the scribes responsible for SP used only the text of the Pentateuch, and the liberties they took to improve the text were restricted to Pentateuchal materials.

To sum up, the process of transmission of scriptural texts in the Second Temple period was characterized by revision and expansion of the texts. As we have seen, scribes were not passive conduits of a fixed text but active partners in shaping it long after it had ostensibly received its ‘final form’. (Indeed, the term ‘final form’ is quite anachronistic, since the text continued to be interpreted and reshaped during its transmission.)

In my talk, I have demonstrated some of the scribal processes involved in the manipulation of the texts in the SP tradition. Nearly all the variants in the SP tradition reflect a broad concern for the coherence, unity, and self-referentiality of Pentateuchal text. This attitude seems to have been widespread in the Second Temple circles responsible for the transmission and interpretation of scripture, and we see the same basic outlook in the 4QRP manuscripts. Therefore, the SP tradition offers a fundamental source of evidence when discussing expanded versions of biblical books, offering an illustration of the editorial work performed on the comprehensive corpus of the Pentateuch as well as a comparative source for understanding the genre of ‘Rewritten Scripture’.