**Preliminary *Prolegomenon* to the Hebrew Bible Critical Edition (HBCE) of Samuel:**

**On the Need for a New Critical Edition**

The HBCE edition poses many challenges to its editors as they work on the text of Samuel. One of these is the challenge of improving upon the current diplomatic editions of Samuel, namely the Biblia Hebraica editions, including Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS), as a tool for studying the different phases of textual transmission. By incorporating an eclectic text, extensive text-critical apparatus and commentary, and in some cases a two-column format, this project makes possible a better representation of the textual evidence, in order to extract from it all possible data concerning the history of the texts and the worldviews of their scribes. Since the editorial team of HBCE Samuel is now undertaking its initial steps after the passing of the former editor, Zipora Talshir, I will discuss in this paper a series of examples in which the BHS edition represents a problematic textual picture: first, several variants that emerged due to textual errors; and then, two variants that came about due to theological revision of the text. In all these cases this paper will present new arguments regarding the text-critical issues and suggest that the HBCE can supplement and improve upon the weak points of the BHS edition.

**A. Graphic Errors**

One of the well-known problems with the BHS edition is its selectivity. BHS does not claim to cite every textual variant, and it frequently does not give expression to versions that are important and sometimes even preferable to the Masoretic text (MT). In the case of the book of Samuel, the BHS edition also gives insufficient expression to important variants that appear in the Samuel scroll from Qumran Cave 4. It may well be that not every part of that scroll as we know it today was available in sufficiently good form to the editors of BHS as they prepared their edition of Samuel. HBCE will attempt to correct that situation, and at least give clear expression to all the substantive versions of Samuel—as well as offering extensive discussion in a critical apparatus and accompanying notes.

The situation is quite apparent, for example, in the simple textual variants that stem from graphic errors, such as the interchange of letters. For example, in the story of Amnon and Tamar in 2 Sam 13:16, after Amnon has raped Tamar, the text tells us that he felt a great loathing, or hatred—שִֹנְאָה—for her, sending Tamar away with the words קוּמִי לֵכִי (at the end of v. 15). Now, according to a prevalent norm in the Ancient Near East, one that is reflected, for example, in the Middle Assyrian Laws (section 55) and in the Hebrew Bible (Ex. 21:15–16 and Deut. 22:28–29), a man who has had forcible sex with a young woman who had never been married was required to marry her. For that reason, apparently, Tamar says in response to her being sent away by Amnon that what he was doing was worse than the previous horrid deed he had just perpetrated. The wording in the Masoretic text, though, is problematic:

**'**וַתֹּ֣אמֶר ל֗וֹ אַל־אוֹדֹ֞ת הָֽרָעָ֤ה הַגְּדוֹלָה֙ הַזֹּ֔את מֵֽאַחֶ֛רֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂ֥יתָ עִמִּ֖י לְשַׁלְּחֵ֑נִי וְלֹ֥א אָבָ֖ה לִשְׁמֹ֥עַֽ לָֽהּ׃

The prepositional phrase אַל־אוֹדֹת does not easily make sense in this context. The word אוֹדֹת in the Hebrew Bible always appears in the phrase **עַל**־אוֹדֹת, spelled *‘ayin-lamed* (Gen. 21:11 and 26:32, Ex. 18:8, Num. 12:1 and 13:23, Josh. 14:6, Judg. 6:7, and Jer. 3:8). But the spelling in the Masoretic text of our verse, *aleph-lamed*, is certainly most unusual, and the phenomenon of the uprooting of the guttural consonants cannot provide a sufficient explanation. It appears that the Septuagint’s rendering of the text at this point reflects a preferable version: [citation]. This version is now known in part from the Samuel scroll from Qumran Cave 4 as well:

[ו]תואמר [לו] ת֯[מר אל] א֯ח֯[י כי גדולה הרעה האחרונה מן ראשונה אשר עשית עמי ל]ש֯לח֯[ני]

[…which should be understood as:] “But she said to him, ‘No, my brother; for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you did to me.’”

It appears, then, that in the Hebrew text that preceded the Masoretic text, the original words אַל אחי (which had appeared earlier, as well, when Tamar spoke to Amnon in v. 12, אל אחי אל תענני) were corrupted and changed, because of the similarity of the letters, from אל אחי(*aleph-lamed… aleph-ḥet-yod*) to אל אדת (*aleph-lamed… aleph-dalet-tav*). As a result, the order of the words גדולה הרעה was reversed in the Masoretic text, apparently to form, in a somewhat forced manner, a logical word order in the corrupted version: אַל־אוֹדֹ֞ת הָֽרָעָ֤ה הַגְּדוֹלָה֙ הַזֹּ֔את *et cetera*. BHS is lacking any documentation of that reading, not even a reference to the Greek text, other than references to secondary versions in Hebrew manuscripts that attempt to correct the difficult spelling of “*al”* from *aleph-lamed* to *‘ayin-lamed*. So the reader of BHS will not know that there is another, better reading of the verse in other versions of Samuel.

Another, similar example can be found in the same chapter, in the last verse of the story of Amnon and Tamar. After Avshalom has killed Amnon and fled to Geshur and taken up residence there (2 Sam 13:38), we read:

וַתְּכַל֙ דָּוִ֣ד הַמֶּ֔לֶךְ לָצֵ֖את אֶל־אַבְשָׁל֑וֹם כִּֽי־נִחַ֥ם עַל־אַמְנ֖וֹן כִּי־מֵֽת:

The Masoretic version is unintelligible, since the feminine verb form וַתְּכַל *[vav-tav-khaf-lamed]* does not accord with any noun in the verse, and certainly not the name of King David, which appears immediately after the verb. The Masoretic version is unusual in another way as well: the phrase דוד המלך, with the personal name preceding the role definition “המלך”, is a distinctive feature of Late Biblical Hebrew. In classical Biblical Hebrew, we would expect המלך to precede the name דָוד. So, for example, we find the form המלך דוד in Kings (1 Kings 1:28) as opposed to דויד המלך in Chronicles (1 Chr 29:1), or המלך שלמה (1 Kings 4:1) as opposed to שלמה המלך in Chronicles (1 Chr 29:24). The common form from Late Biblical Hebrew that appears in the Masoretic version of our verse is close to the form common in Biblical Aramaic, such as דריוש מלכא in Daniel 6:7 and אתרחשסתא מלכא in Ezra 7:21, among other examples. It appears that the preferable reading is found in the Septuagint’s version of 2 Sam 13:39, and is now documented in the Samuel scroll from Qumran Cave 4 (even if the latter is not preserved in its entirety):

[ותכל **רו]ח** המלך לצ֯[את אל אב]שלום כי [נ]ח֯ם֯ א[ל אמנון בנו כי מת]:

which can be rendered, “**And the spirit of the king** went out, yearning for Avshalom; for he was now consoled over the death of Amnon.” It seems that the similarity between the letters (*resh-vav-ḥet* and *dalet-vav-dalet*) and the location next to the word המלך led the scribe who produced the version reflected in the Masoretic text to replace רוּח with the implausible word (in that context) דָוד. The beginning of the next chapter confirms the reading רוח המלך in its paraphrase (in 2 Sam 14:1) describing the situation with the words וַיֵּ֖דַע יוֹאָ֣ב בֶּן־צְרֻיָ֑ה כִּי־לֵ֥ב הַמֶּ֖לֶךְ עַל־אַבְשָׁלֽוֹם (“Now Yoav son of Zeruiah perceived that the king’s mind was on Avshalom”). The BHS edition does not present the Qumran version at all. It does not offer a reconstruction of the *Vorlage* of the Greek version—as it does for other textual variants in Greek and other manuscripts without evaluation, and obviously, therefore, the reading רוח המלך is not presented as the preferable reading. In this instance BHS does not present the textual data in an efficient way.

**B.** **Large Deletions/Additions**

BHS also fails to provide good documentation of more extensive deletions or additions among the various versions, apparently due to a lack of space or because in such instances the editors of BHS thought that these were unimportant differences. At the end of the story of Jonathan and the honeycomb in the woods (1 Sam 14), there are two fairly extensive sections of text in the Septuagint version that are not found in others. BHS characteristically marks them simply with the note “plus-m-l-t v-b” (plus multiple verbs) and nothing more—no reconstruction of the additional words and no evaluation of the textual differences. The Masoretic version, though, is unintelligible in these places, while in the Septuagint version we find a snippet of lost biblical literature preserved.

According to the narrative there, when Saul “inquired of God” and received no reply, he understood that someone among the people had sinned and set out to cast lots in order to ascertain the identity of the sinner. First of all, Saul sought to find out that way whether the sin belonged to him and his son, standing together as a group, or to the rest of the people, as a second group, as we read in 1 Sam. 14:39:

אַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לְעֵבֶר אֶחָד וַאֲנִי וְיוֹנָתָן בְּנִי נִהְיֶה לְעֵבֶר אֶחָד:

After the people agreed to this, Saul uttered what is, in the Masoretic version, a puzzling statement:

וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל-ה׳ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: הָבָה תָמִים:

In the wake of this statement, we read that Saul and Jonathan were indicated by the lot, while the people were cleared of suspicion. The quotation from Saul that I just read from the Masoretic text, הָבָה תָמִים, has no logical meaning, and there is no sensible way to explain it. By contrast, if we have a look at the Septuagint’s reading there, we discover a more extensive statement that *is* comprehensible and that explains the situation in a tidy fashion.

The Greek text’s *Vorlage* may be reconstructed to read as follows:

ויאמר שאול, ״ה' אלהי ישראל, למה לא ענית את עבדך היום? אם בי וביונתן העוון, ה' אלהי ישראל,

הבה אורים, ואם כזאת יאמר, בעמך ישראל, הבה תֻמים״, וַיִּלָכְדוּ יונתן ושאול והעם יצאו:

This text is not only smoother, but it also casts light on the technique of the אורים ותֻמים, otherwise known to us from a very limited list of short biblical references. This Septuagint passage informs us that Saul made use of the אורים ותֻמים instrument as a technique for casting lots between two groups each time. In the Masoretic text, the copyist’s eye skipped from the first appearance of the word ישראל in the verse to its later appearance, then taking in the words that followed that second appearance, הבה תֻמים, and continuing from there. Since, as time passed, the word spelled *tav-mem-yod-mem* was no longer understood (or at least, no longer recognized as תֻמים), it came to be pronounced—and vocalized—as תָמִים and took on a different meaning from its original denotation. Krauss and Ulrich think that the full version of the verse appeared in the Samuel scroll at Qumran as well, but it is difficult to judge this with any certainty, since the fragment remaining of that source is too small. In any case, BHS says absolutely nothing about that Qumran reading or about the reading that can be reconstructed from the Septuagint. Here once again, then, the BHS edition does not provide the reader with a sufficient picture of the available textual variants. It should be noted that in the next verse (v. 42), there is again a longer version in the Septuagint than in the Masoretic text, and here too BHS does not cite the extra reading but only notes the addition there of “mlt vb” [“multiple verbs”], but given the limits of my time today and the need to present phenomena of yet another sort, I cannot delve into that instance in this lecture.

**C. Theological Changes**

The preceding examples presented textual differences that resulted from graphic errors. The next two difference we will examine are changes introduced into the text because of theological considerations. Here too we will see that BHS does not assist the reader with good documentation of the variants, so that the reader of that edition misses out on understanding the theological changes over the course of religious development that are reflected in the various versions of the biblical texts.

An example of a change in wording brought about by a theological reworking can be found in the story of Nathan’s parable of the poor man’s lamb, כבשת הרש. When David heard of the incident that Nathan related to him, David responded immediately in anger, saying *[this is 2 Sam. 12:5–6]*:

'חַי־ה֕׳ כִּ֣י בֶן־מָ֔וֶת הָאִ֖ישׁ הָֽעֹשֶׂ֥ה זֹֽאת׃

וְאֶת־הַכִּבְשָׂ֖ה יְשַׁלֵּ֣ם אַרְבַּעְתָּ֑יִם עֵ֗קֶב אֲשֶׁ֤ר עָשָׂה֙ אֶת־הַדָּבָ֣ר הַזֶּ֔ה וְעַ֖ל אֲשֶׁ֥ר לֹֽא־חָמָֽל׃

The word אַרְבַּעְתָּיִם that appears in the Masoretic text of David’s pronouncement is unusual. It has no parallel in the Bible or in other Semitic texts. The Septuagint here reads instead ἑπταπλασίονα, which we can reconstruct as the familiar word שבעתיים (“sevenfold”). In this instance, the editors of BHS do present the Septuagint version, but they did not reconstruct the Hebrew word and did not think it was a preferable reading. Once can speculate that they thought this was a more banal reading introduced because of scribal familiarity with the more common term. But שבעתיים is the reading appropriate to the literary character of the story in question. The meaning of the term is generic; it means “several times over” (as it does in Genesis 4:15 and 4:24 [Cain’s punishment], Isa. 30:26, Ps. 12:7 and 79:12, and Prov. 6:31). Generally it serves as a way of indicating a punishment multiplied beyond proportion as compared to the damage caused, in order to impose a heavy sentence. In this case, David says that the one who stole the lamb deserves to die, and he should pay back what he stole several times over. The version that appears now in the Masoretic text is too technical—precisely four times over—and it makes us suspicious that the scribe who created this version (whether intentionally or without noticing) was aware of the law in Ex. 21:37:

כִּ֤י יִגְנֹֽב־אִישׁ֙ שׁ֣וֹר אוֹ־שֶׂ֔ה וּטְבָח֖וֹ א֣וֹ מְכָר֑וֹ חֲמִשָּׁ֣ה בָקָ֗ר יְשַׁלֵּם֙ תַּ֣חַת הַשּׁ֔וֹר וְאַרְבַּע־צֹ֖אן תַּ֥חַת הַשֶּֽׂה

… and he [the scribe] fashioned our verse accordingly. This scribe assumed that David was suggesting that the perpetrator be judged according to Mosaic law, and thus came up with the *hapax legomenon* ארבעתיים—exactly four. This scribe assumed, apparently, that David was seeking to judge according to Mosaic law, and thus he produced the unique form ארבעתיים—four head of sheep in place of the poor man’s single lamb. This textual difference, which is not appropriately documented in BHS, reveals the processes of the acceptance of the Pentateuch during the Second Temple period and its transformation into an obligatory legal document that establishes legal and religious norms.

The next example is found not only in Samuel but in Kings as well. Three times in the Samuel-Kings continuum (what the Septuagint calls the Kingdoms), the Septuagint text refers to חזירים (“swine”), references that are missing from all those places in the Masoretic version. The longest textual difference appears in the story of Avshalom’s rebellion against David, described in 2 Sam. 17. חושי הארכי (Hushai the Archite), who is Avshalom’s advisor after Aḥitophel, said, according to the Masoretic text *[of 2 Samuel 17:8]*:

אתה ידעת את אביך ואת אנשיו כי גִבֹּרִים המה ומרי נפש המה כְּדֹב שַׁכּוּל בשדה

ואביך איש מלחמה ולא ילין את העם:

In the Septuagint there is another phrase after the image כדב שכול בשדה (“like a bereaved bear in the field”): καὶ ὡς ὗς τραχεῖα ἐν τῷ πεδίῳ, which can be reconstructed in Hebrew as something like וכחזירה זועפת בבקעה (“like an angry sow on the plain”). Words for swine are mentioned two other times: in the famous prophecy of Elijah to Ahab at the end of the story of the theft of Navot’s vineyard (in 1 Kings 21:19) and in the fulfillment of that prophecy (in 1 Kings 22:38), in the Septuagint version of each. In the version with which we are familiar from the Masoretic text, Eliyahu says:

הרצחת וגם ירשת [...] במקום אשר לקקו הכלבים את דם נבות ילקו הכלבים את דמך גם אתה:

In the Septuagint, though, in both the prophecy and its fulfillment, we find not just כלבים but the pair חזירים וכלבים. We might have said that the word חזירים was added here by a later scribe in order to accentuate the nature of the curse upon Ahab, but that pair, “dogs and swine,” is common in contemporary Assyrian inscriptions in a similar context. So, for example, among the curses found in Essarhadon’s vassal treaty for one who violates the treaty is the threat “dogs and swine will consume your flesh” *[in line 451 there]* and “dogs and swine will drag your corpses in open squares of Ashur. The earth will not receive them. Instead, the bellies of dogs and swine will be your burial places” *[lines 482–484]*. Given that the pair “dogs and swine’ appears in a similar context in other contemporary writings as well as later sources (for example, Matt. 7:6 and Bavli Shabbat 155b), it is not unthinkable that the Septuagint preserves here an expression that was common in such a context in Ancient Near Eastern literature—and in Hebrew—and that the word חזירים was deleted by a late scribe from the prophecy of doom pronounced for Aḥab and from the narrative of its fulfillment. In the story of David and Avshalom as well, there is no reason to assume that the image of the pig was added at a late stage for no apparent reason. It seems, therefore, that there too the word חזיר was deliberately deleted, and with it the whole phrase around it (וכחזירה זועפת בבקעה or the like), in the stages of transmission that are reflected now in the Masoretic version.

Why did a scribe see fit to delete the word חזיר in these three texts in Samuel and Kings? The matter seems to be connected to a theological transformation that took place in the Hellenistic period. In the Pentateuch, the pig is mentioned as one of the “unclean” animals that may not be eaten, together with a long list of other “unclean” animals such as the hare, the hyrax, and the camel *[the pig is in Lev. 11:7 and Deut. 14:4]*, and nothing in particular makes the pig stand out among all the other forbidden foods. Without getting into the question of the extent to which this was actually in effect, as an obligatory prohibition or at all, during the First Temple period, it seems from the textual evidence that only from the Hasmonean period on was the pig perceived as a horrid abomination and even as a symbol of the violation of the Pentateuch as a whole. The stories describing the consumption of pig as a sign of the violation of all the Torah’s commandments appear only in the stories that relate to the period of the Maccabees or later, such as 1 Macc. 1:47, 2 Macc. 6:18–7:42, and Bavli Sotah 49b. It seems, then, that a copyist working at a time when even the mention of the word חזיר was considered a serious taboo, a symbol for the violation of the Torah *in toto*, found this image applied to David in his manuscript to be an intolerable insult and refrained from copying it, and thus was this original text about a pig eliminated from the Hebrew text that has made its way to us. Even the mention of the pig in the text describing Ahab was deleted, perhaps in order to keep the idea that pigs ran loose in Israel’s cities out of the mind of the reader. It appears, then, that the text reflected in the Masoretic version in the places I have just mentioned reflects the Maccabean period or later, after the word “pig” itself became taboo, while the Septuagint, in those places, preserves an earlier reading. In any case, the BHS edition of Samuel does not present the reader with the long *plus* in the Septuagint version of Ḥushai Ha-Arkhi’s words at all. As is standard in that edition, the critical apparatus lists only “+mlt vb.”

**Conclusion**

One of the first goals of the HBCE edition is to correct the selective character of the BHS edition and its tendency to ignore important variants, and even, in many cases, preferable readings. In the book of Samuel there is plenty of reason to pay attention to the wealth of information to be gained from the Samuel scroll from Qumran Cave 4, as well as to various Greek versions, particularly the Lucianic and Vetus Latina manuscripts. In keeping with the plans for this new edition, in HBCE’s Samuel the preferred readings are to appear in the body of the text, and extensive discussion of the considerations underlying the editors’ choices and the implications of the secondary readings will be included in the apparatus and in the accompanying commentary. In this new critical edition it will be possible to present all the important variant readings, and even to revive forgotten Hebrew versions that circulated during the Second Temple period parallel to the those reflected in the Masoretic text, for the sake of continued scholarly discussion of them and the full recognition of their importance for historical, religious, and literary questions that arise from the various versions. The HBCE edition also has unique characteristics that cannot be compared with BHS, constituting an essential change in comparison with diplomatic versions of the Hebrew Bible, but these will have to be explored in another setting.