Hila Dayfani Postdoctoral Research Proposal

The Transmission of the Torah in the Late Second Temple Period:

Material Reconstructions of Pentateuchal Scrolls from Qumran and their Contribution to the Concept of the Torah as a Unit

 Various pieces of evidence indicate that the Torah was widely accepted as canon in the late Second Temple Period. Finds from the Judean Desert present us with multiple manuscripts of the Torah from that time. By quoting, alluding, interpreting, and reusing its text in various ways, the literature of Second Temple Judaism attests to the work's importance in Jewish thought. However, although the books of the Torah were authoritative in that era, their text was still growing and developing, undergoing a long process of continual rewriting and inner-scriptural interpretation.

 In my dissertation, I explored the transmission of the Torah by analyzing variants that arose from graphic similarities in the two comprehensive Hebrew textual witnesses of the Torah—the Masoretic text and Samaritan Pentateuch. This study yielded significant conclusions on the growth in scribal activity in the transmission of the Torah in the late Second Temple Period. In the research proposed here, I will use different means to explore the form in which the Torah was transmitted in this same period, namely, the digital methodologies developed as part of the *Scripta Qumranica Electronica* (SQE) project, a German-Israeli collaboration in which I have been participating as a postdoctoral fellow. These methodologies have already been applied to the study of post-biblical literature of the Second Temple Period. I propose to use them to reconstruct Pentateuchal scrolls from Qumran. The material reconstruction of the scrolls in question will hopefully shed new light on broader questions regarding the transmission of the Torah in this era: Was it transmitted as a complete literary unit, or were its five books transmitted as discrete literary compositions? If the latter, were certain books of the Torah copied together frequently, indicating subdivisions in the Torah?

Although scholars generally assume that the Torah was transmitted as a unit in the late Second Temple Period, the evidence from Qumran neither supports nor contradicts the existence of a complete Torah scroll (with the two possible exceptions of 4QRPb,c, see below). The question as to whether the Torah was transmitted as a complete literary unit at the time has thus remained unresolved. My study, however, takes a fresh approach to the problem by turning to the material philology of ancient Torah manuscripts.

Its purpose is to utilize material reconstruction of fragmentary Pentateuchal scrolls in order to determine which text was originally included in each individual scroll. The reconstruction will be done with the Stegemann method, in which fragments are plotted on a digital canvas according to repeated damage patterns that occurred prior to the scroll's fragmentation: the distance between corresponding points of damage is treated as the scroll’s circumference at that particular point. This circumference constantly increases or decreases in the consecutive layers of the rolled scroll, in accordance with the direction of the rolling. The distances between corresponding points of damage enable one to estimate the amount of missing text between the fragments as well as the distance between these fragments and the end of the scroll. The second of these estimates allows one to determine the hypothetical quantity of text included in the original scroll.

The study will be carried out in several stages:

 1. Re-validation of the Stegemann method. In a recent study, Eshbal Ratzon and Nahum Dershowitz challenge the use of the Stegemann method for calculating the total length of a scroll. They have shown that measurements between corresponding points of damage in relatively intact scrolls do not show incremental growth and thus do not indicate the scroll's circumference. However, I believe that the inconsistencies in their measurements arose mainly from technical issues pertaining to the preservation of the scrolls in question, the images used by the authors, and the subjective choice of points of damage in the scrolls. My study will thus begin with a methodological study that will constitute a response to Ratzon-Dershowitz’s paper.

 2. Material reconstruction of Pentateuchal scrolls according to two criteria: (1) scrolls with a large or very large writing block (more than 25 lines per column), which may have included more than one book of the Torah or even the entire Torah; (2) scrolls for which there is sufficient evidence for material reconstruction. The scrolls under discussion are: 4QGen-Exoda; 4QGenb; 4QExodb; 4QpaleoGen-Exodl (which I have already reconstructed and will publishin a forthcoming study, although I did not discuss in that study whether it was a Torah scroll); 4QExodc; 4QpaleoExodm; 4QLevb; 4QLev-Numa; 4QNumb; 4QDeutc; 4QDeuth; 4QplaeoDeutr; and 11QplaeoLeva. Some of these scrolls have not yet been reconstructed, while others have been reconstructed by the original editors of the *DJD* series. Nonetheless, we now have access to new advanced digital tools that were unavailable to the editors. These include digital canvases, digital fonts based on typical letters in the scribe’s hand, advanced images, and graphic manipulation programs, all of which enable us to reach more accurate and established conclusions regarding the state and content of the original scroll. The hope is that this intense examination of the scrolls' materiality will provide new insights about their texts, including the identification of hitherto unidentified fragments, as well as new joins and readings. This, in turn, may point to a textual affinity between a specific scroll and a known textual tradition of the Torah.

 3. The 4QReworked Pentateuch manuscripts will be discussed separately. Although 4QRPa-d are widely accepted as scriptural manuscripts, they belong to a grey area between scriptural text and rewritten bible. 4QRPb,c apparently included the entire Torah. 4QRPa-d preserves fragments of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, while 4QRPb,c preserves fragments of all the Torah books. The material reconstruction of both 4QRPb,c and 4QRPa,d will offer a sequence of the preserved fragments, based on their extant material signs.

 4. After examining each Pentateuchal scroll, this study will present a statistical analysis of the data, including such information as, for instance, the estimated original length and content of each scroll; a survey of the preserved books of the Torah and the reconstructed contents of all the Pentateuchal scrolls; different combinations of the Torah’s books; and the existence of clusters in the books of the Torah and complete Torah scrolls.

Located in Jerusalem, the Israel Antiquity Authority laboratory (IAA) preserves most of the findings of the Qumran manuscripts. I have already worked in close collaboration with the Qumran Scrolls team at IAA on some of my earlier research after they kindly let me visit the laboratory and examine the evidence in person. The proximity of Hebrew University to the laboratory will make it easier for me to access it whenever necessary.

Significance of the study

 The study combines research on the material culture of the Qumran findings with digital humanities—two leading disciplines within the broader field of contemporary humanities. In addition to contributing to existing trends, it will introduce a new methodology for the study of the Torah and integrate the material analysis of the Pentateuchal scrolls into the broader problem of the transmission of the Torah in the late Second Temple Period. Most important will be the conclusions it draws from the material reconstruction of each Pentateuchal scroll. Hopefully, it will lead to new findings regarding the form in which the Torah was transmitted in the late Second Temple Period.

The innovative aspect of the study also lies in its employment of technological aids to decode fragmentary scrolls whose interpretation has defied scholars for decades. Cutting-edge technology has made possible a breakthrough concerning these scrolls and provided an opportunity to add to the existing scholarship.

Finally, the proposed project is of significant methodological importance as it uses the methods of material philology to answer an old question in the study of the Torah. Its interdisciplinary approach will hopefully serve as a point of departure for future research and invoke new questions and problems to which material philology can respond, and which, I hope, will lead to new directions and approaches in the criticism of the Hebrew Bible.