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 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 Torah'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 in its two comprehensive Hebrew textual witnesses—the Masoretic text and Samaritan Pentateuch. In that work, I focused on those variants that arose due to graphic similarity between letters. The dissertation 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, digital methodologies for material reconstruction. These methodologies were developed as part of the *Scripta Qumranica Electronica* (SQE) project, a German-Israeli collaboration in which I have been participating as a postdoctoral fellow. I propose to use these methodologies to reconstruct Pentateuchal scrolls from Qumran. The material reconstruction of the scrolls in question will hopefully shed new light on broader questions regarding the way in which the Torah was transmitted in the Second Temple Period: Was it transmitted as a complete literary unit, or were its five books transmitted as discrete literary compositions? Were certain books of the Torah copied together frequently, indicating subdivisions in the Torah?

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 so far. My study, however, takes a fresh approach to the problem by turning to the material philology of ancient Torah manuscripts.

The purpose of this study 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 apply 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. Nevertheless, their study demonstrates that the method does give good results when we speak about the average growth between layers. I believe that the inconsistencies in specific measurements arose mainly from technical issues pertaining to the preservation of the scrolls in question, the subjective choice of points of damage in the scrolls, and the images used by the authors. 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 conclusions regarding the state and content of the original scroll. The study of these scrolls involves identification of hitherto unidentified fragments and new joins and readings (which will possibly point to textual affinity between a specific scroll and a known textual tradition of the Torah). The hope is that this intense examination of the scrolls' materiality will provide new insights about the scope of the text of the original scroll.

 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 possibly included the entire Torah: 4QRPb preserves fragments of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, while 4QRPc preserves fragments of all the Torah books. The material reconstruction of both 4QRPb and 4QRPc will offer a sequence of the preserved fragments and an estimation of the amount of the missing text between them.

 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 of material philology to answer an old question in the study of the Torah.

The importance of this study lies, first and foremost, in the conclusions it draws from the material reconstruction of each Pentateuchal scroll. Hopefully, it will also lead to new findings regarding the form in which the Torah was transmitted in the late Second Temple Period.

Moreover, the study’s innovativeness lies also in the fact that it employs technological aids in order to decode fragmentary scrolls whose investigation could not be completed for many decades. By means of cutting-edge technology it is possible to achieve a breakthrough in the study of these scrolls, adding to the existing scholarly work.

Finally, the interdisciplinary approach in this project 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.