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 prior to 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 past 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 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, that is SP and the pre-Samaritan texts, are not frequent. Only two large cases of large-scale rearrangements are found in SP, both aim to harmonize a passage with another biblical text. Yet, the technique of rearrangement implies an exegetical concern pertaining the sequence of the text, since rearrangements, that is, alterations of the sequence, automatically imply dissatisfaction with the sequence of the source text as it stands.

In Exod 29 (text number 1 in your handout), verse 21, 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. The new sequence matches command to execution, since in Leviticus 8:30 (), 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 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, 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. In a way, 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 conforms 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 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, with one exception, when material from Numbers was imported into the text of Deuteronomy (). In Deut 2:1–8, Moses recalls the Israelites avoided the territory of Edom, following God’s command. However, in the parallel account in Numbers 20, Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom, asking permission to cross the territory, permission that is refused. The SP’s text of Deuteronomy inserts Moses’ request from Num into Deut 2 after verse 7, bringing the two accounts in harmony.

As has already been suggested by Michael Segal, the major editorial changes are not simply harmonizations. They do not compromise contradicting narratives, but often the opposite, creating an awkward narrative consisting of the two different versions of the story in the same pericope. We saw it in the past meeting, in the different episodes of sending the spies in the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy. Instead, the scribes that inserted the major editorial changes were 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, 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 bring numerous 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 by the later story, SP-Exod 18, as well as 4QpaleoExodm, combine Jethro’s counsel with the reason mentioned by Moses in Deut 1. Thus, according to 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, firstly introduced in MT only in the account in Deut. The scribes who transmitted SP tradition prevented the introduction of the new information only in the later version of the story by copying it to the early version.

The encounter with Sihon in Num 21 constitutes another example (). MT reports a simple plot: envoys being sent to Sihon and rejected, he 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 to Moses, commanding him to make war with Sihon not once but twice. This addition corresponds to the formal tendency of detailing both command and its fulfillment. The Sihon section in SP-Num also contains additional verses from Deut, all constituting command that needs to be reaffirmed. In this case, this is not a divine command but rather Moses’ command: parts of the envoys’ message pertaining to a specific request from the host nation and mentioning previous deals 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 edited of the scroll in DJD series (), it seems that the interpolations of text from Deut 2 did originally appear in 4QNumb.

As a preliminary conclusion, the purpose of this part of the paper was to demonstrate 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. I have mentioned here only three examples, but, 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 – rearrangements and major changes. Significantly, SP, as a comprehensive text of all the five books of the Pentateuch, offers collective evidence of the expansive version of the Pentateuch, allowing for a much better conception of the purpose and application of the scribal strategies and the interpretative processes that the texts underwent.

The major editorial changes in SP tradition involve that insertion of material from elsewhere in the Pentateuch, while almost no new material is interpolated into the text. The scribes are carried 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, for instance, to monitor the grammatical person of the speaker. Moreover, the major editorial changes never occur in 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 to themselves to improve the text was limited for the narrative blocks, but not for the laws pericopes. The latters were copied faithfully. This fact might imply that the scribes theologically distinguished between the two genres of prose and law.

A comparison between SP and the pre-Samaritan texts reveals that certain pre-Samaritan texts underwent more comprehensive editing than SP. Thus, for instance, in the text of the Decalogue in 4QDeutn (). While in Exod 20, the Israelites are instructed to remember or to observe the Sabbath day because God refrained from His labor in this same day, in Deut 5 they are commanded to do so due to the memory of the exodus from Egypt. 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 pre-Samaritan major changes. Yet, this addition is not documented in SP, nor other copies of Deuteronomy from Qumran. Moreover, the expansion in 4QDeutn deviates from the pre-Samaritan editorial changes in two points: firstly, the expansion appears in the Decalogue, which is not a narrative block, but rather a law pericope. Secondly, the direction of the duplication of the material is exceptional, as commonly material from Deuteronomy is duplicated into Exodus or Numbers but not the opposite. Thus, 4QDeutn shows further textual development beyond SP. The scribe of this copy, or one of his predecessors, used the same literary techniques of the scribes that transmitted SP tradition, but he took a step beyond, in the sense that he inserted an editorial change into the text of the laws revealed on Mount Sinai.

Conversely, there are instances in which SP reflects changes that are not documented in the preserved pre-Samaritan texts. Thus, for instance, in 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 commands 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. As stated, this reading is unique to SP, reflecting 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 of minor alterations SP shares readings with the Septuagint, pointing toward some sort of early shared tradition. At a certain stage, this tradition has split in two: the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Septuagint was translated into Greek and the pre-Samaritan tradition has been revised and expanded by the insertion of the major changes, at least those who exhibit a consistent and systematic character, mainly the plagues and the wilderness narratives. 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 differences across the pre-Samaritan and the Samaritan texts of the Pentateuch.

Zahn’s thesis explains the differences between the pre-Samaritan texts and SP by 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 for content editing. The details of this intervention may vary from witness to witness (although there is much overlap). What makes these texts a group is their common scribal practices and literary techniques, rather than an exact copy of the Pentateuch represented by them.

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

An example of an insertion of new material, though not so large, is preserved in 4Q158 (). 4Q158 preserves 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, the latter describes the Israelite’s request that Moses acts 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. 4Q158 contains God’s command to Moses to tell the Israelites to return their tents. This command appears in Deut 5:30. While in all other known 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 here is not documented in SP tradition, and the fact that it takes a further step in addition of new material, it addresses precisely the problem that SP tradition is famous in addressing, that is, 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 numerous lines, which shares vocabulary with the Song of Moses and Israel, but is not identical to it. Significantly, this text is not known from elsewhere and exhibits a large-scale addition of new material to the Pentateuchal text.

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

4QRP texts are relevant for our discussion, as these texts, similarly 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 formers are foil to the latter, reflecting more conservative editing. The scribes responsible for SP used only the text of the Pentateuch, the freedom that they took in order to improve the text was restricted to Pentateuchal materials, while the RP scribes felt free to add new materials in the course of their reworking.

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 saw, scribes were not passive conduits of a fixed text but active partners in shaping the text long after that it had ostensibly received its ‘final’ form (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 processed that manipulated the texts in SP tradition. Nearly all the variants in SP tradition reflect a broad concern for the coherence, unity, and self-referentiality of Pentateuchal text. This attitude towards the Pentateuchal text seems to have been widespread in the Second Temple circles responsible for the transmission and interpretation of scripture. We certainly see the same basic attitude in the 4QRP manuscripts. Therefore, SP tradition is a fundamental source of evidence in the discussion of expanded versions of biblical books, showing an editorial work of the comprehensive corpus of the Pentateuch, as well as a comparative source for understanding the genre of ‘Rewritten Scripture.’