Hila Dayfani Postdoctoral Research Proposal

The Transmission of 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 demonstrate that the Torah was widely accepted in the late Second Temple period. The finds from the Judean Desert present us with a sheer number of manuscripts of the Torah from the period. The literature of Second Temple Judaism attests to the importance of the Torah in Jewish thought, quoting, alluding, interpreting, and reusing the text in various ways. However, although the books of the Torah were authoritative in the period, 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 process of the Torah by an analysis of variants due to graphic similarity between the two comprehensive Hebrew witnesses of the Torah – the Masoretic text and Samaritan Pentateuch. This study yielded significant conclusions regarding the growing of scribal activity in the transmission of the Torah in the late Second Temple period. In the proposed study, I intend to use a different method in order to explore the shape in which the Torah was transmitted in the period. The study employs digital methodologies that were developed as part of the *Scripta Qumranica Electronica* (SQE) project, a German-Israeli collaboration in which I have participated as a postdoctoral fellow. In this study, I propose to make use of the digital methodologies we developed for the SQE project, previously applied to post-biblical literature from the Second Temple period, for reconstructing Pentateuchal scrolls from Qumran. The material reconstruction of the scrolls will hopefully shed new light on broader questions regarding the transmission of the Torah in the late Second Temple period: Was the Torah transmitted as a complete literary unit, or were the five books transmitted as different literary compositions? Might we point to clusters in the books of the Torah, in which they were frequently subdivided?

Although scholars generally assume that the Torah was transmitted as a unit in the late Second Temple period, the Qumran evidence neither supports nor contradicts the existence of a complete Torah scroll (with the two possible exceptions of 4QRPb,c, see below). Thus, the question of whether the Torah was transmitted as a complete literary unit in the period remains unanswered. My study aims to use the material philology of the ancient manuscripts of the Torah to bring a fresh approach to this issue.

The purpose of this study is to utilize material reconstruction of fragmentary Pentateuchal scrolls as a means to estimate which text was originally included in each individual scroll. The reconstruction is based on the Stegemann method, which locate fragments within a digital canvas according to repeated damage patters that formed prior to the fragmentation of the scroll: the distance between corresponding points of damage is treated as the scroll’s circumference at that particular point. The circumference constantly increases or decreases between consecutive layers in the rolled scroll, in accordance with the direction of the rolling. Given the distances between corresponding points of damage, one may estimate the amount of the missing text between the discussed fragments and the distance between these fragments and the end of the scroll. The later allows to evaluate the hypothetical quantity of text that was 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 challenged the use of the Stegemann method for the estimation of the overall length of the scroll. They have shown that measurements between corresponding points of damage in scrolls that remain comparatively intact do not show incremental growth and therefore do not represent the circumference of the scroll. However, I believe that the inconsistencies in measurements were derived mainly from technical issues regarding the preservation of the discussed scrolls, the images that were used by the authors, and the subjective choice of the points of damage in the scrolls. Therefore, my work will start with a methodological study that will constitute a response to Ratzon-Dershowitz’s paper.

2. Material reconstruction of Pentateuchal scrolls that meet two criteria: (1) scrolls that had a large or very large writing block (more that 25 lines per column), for which there is a possibility that they included more than one book of the Torah or even the whole Torah; (2) scrolls that have sufficient evidence for material reconstruction. The scrolls that will be discussed are: 4QGen-Exoda; 4QGenb; 4QExodb; 4QpaleoGen-Exodl (already reconstructed by meand will publishedin a forthcoming publication, but the question of whether it was a Torah scroll was not discussed so far); 4QExodc; 4QpaleoExodm; 4QLevb; 4QLev-Numa; 4QNumb; 4QDeutc; 4QDeuth; 4QplaeoDeutr; 11QplaeoLeva. Some of these scrolls were not reconstructed so far, while others were reconstructed by the original editors in the *DJD* series. Nonetheless, we are now fortunately privileged to have access to new advanced digital tools that were not accessible to the editors, such as digital canvas, digital font based on typical letters in the scribe’s hand, advanced images, and graphic manipulation programs. The use of these tools provides more accurate and established conclusion regarding the state of the original scroll and its content. Moreover, one may hope that the intensive treatment of the materiality of the scrolls will provide new insights about their text, such as new identifications of hitherto unidentified fragments, and new joins and readings. Thus, it might point to textual affinity of a specific scroll to a known textual tradition of the Torah.

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

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

The Israel Antiquity Authority laboratory (IAA), which is placed in Jerusalem, preserves most of the findings of Qumran manuscripts. In my past research, I have worked in a close collaboration with the Qumran Scrolls team in IAA, when they kindly enabled me to visit the laboratory and examine the evidence in person. The proximity of the Hebrew University to the laboratory may facilitate the possibility to arrive at the laboratory when it will be necessary.

Significance of the Study

The study integrates research into the material culture of the Qumran findings with the digital humanities – two leading disciplines within the broader contemporary humanities landscape. In addition to contributing to existing trends, the study brings a new methodology for the study of the Torah. It integrates the material study of the Pentateuchal scrolls with the broader issue of the transmission process of the Torah in the late Second Temple period. The primary importance of this study lies in the conclusions that it will produce through the material reconstruction of each Pentateuchal scroll. However, it will hopefully present new findings on the shape in which the Torah was transmitted in the late Second Temple period.

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.

Moreover, the proposed study bears a methodological importance. It uses methods of material philology to answer an old question in the study of the Torah. The interdisciplinary approach proposed for this study will hopefully serve as a point of departure for future research. It may invoke new questions and new issues that material philology can speak to, which I hope will lead to new directions and approaches in the criticism of the Hebrew Bible.