

THE TRANSITION PERIOD IN BIBLICAL HEBREW

– A STUDY IN POST-EXILIC HEBREW AND ITS IMPLICATIONS
FOR THE DATING OF PSALMS –

by

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This book comprises two parts: the first (pp. 13-63) is methodological, and deals with methods of determining linguistic patterns at the time of the Second Temple; in the second part (pp. 67-184) the author applies these methods to dating the psalms composed (or having acquired their final form) at that time. He concludes with a discussion of general questions consequent on his method. The appendix includes a detailed bibliography (pp. 185-189), a list of editions used for citation of sources in the book (pp. 189-190) and an index of words and grammar discussed in the book (pp. 191-196).

In the methodological part the author shows how to trace Second Temple language, using both biblical and extra-biblical sources. For this purpose he uses different methods:

- a) a comparison of texts in the Book of Chronicles, which originated in the period of the Second Temple, with their parallels in Samuel and Kings, noting especially the peculiar usages of Chronicles.
- b) in order to exclude the accidental factor, the author compared expressions, forms and usages to the style of those biblical books which were definitely written, as generally accepted, in the Second Temple period (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, Ecclesiastes) and to extra-biblical sources such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Book of Ben-Sira, Mishnaic language, the language of prayers and the style of documents and sources written in Aramaic. The linguistic and stylistic bases preserved in those sources is the real language stratum which crystallised and was generally used only in the Second Temple period.

The author stresses that the importance of certain linguistic and stylistic characteristics in determining the late date of a chapter or source lies in the degree of accumulation of these phenomena in the said sources.

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On discussing the specific question of the time of different psalms and needing to justify the legitimacy of comparing prose and poetry, he removes all methodological doubts in maintaining that despite the generally archaic character of poetry, the decisive point for this research is the occurrence of the few late usages which are contained in certain psalms.

In the second part, Hurvitz applies his system in establishing eight psalms as from the Second Temple period. In Psalm 145, nine linguistic usages are reviewed (single words and phrases) like: *be-khol dor wa-dor la' asot kirtzon* . . . , and the verbs *sh-b-ch*, *z-q-p* and others. The author points out that from a syntactical, stylistic point of view Second Temple language prefers the pattern: *be-khol X we-X* (e. g. *be-khol dor wa-dor*; *be-khol shanah we-shanah*) over the expression extant in First Temple language.

In Psalm 119 the author deals with twelve linguistic elements which give it a late character. These include the form *le-qayyem*, the root of which is from the group which tend in the heavy conjugations to act like the regular verbs. This is typical for Aramaic and rabbinical Hebrew, as opposed to the usage in the ancient books. A second element is the form *nachamah*, analogous to *qattalah* which is the verbal noun of the Pi'el conjugation in the different Aramaic dialects and in Mishnaic language, like *kapparah*, *baqqashah* and others.

The lateness of a psalm can also be determined by the frequency with which a word is used. The verb *maschal* of the earlier books gives way to *shalat* in the later ones.

The author thus examines all eight psalms and in each of them he discovers an accumulation of late usages which is sufficient to prove that they are from the Second Temple period. However, in more than twenty other psalms (pp. 170-176) in which he found but a few late usages he hesitates to declare them to be late.

In the last chapter of this part (pp. 177-184) the author deals with some principles arising out of his research.

- a) Firstly: the question whether these psalms are in fact from the Second Temple period or perhaps from the end of the First Temple. The answer to this question is found in epigraphical material (the Lachish letters and sherds from the stronghold of Chashavyahu). This material proves that in the later First Temple period classical Hebrew was used and that it does not bear the characteristics of late Hebrew.
- b) Secondly: the question whether the psalms with the characteristics of late Hebrew as used in Judah were not actually written in the North (the Kingdom of Ephraim) in the First Temple period (since the relative pronoun *she-* instead of *asher* used in late Mishnaic language can be found in old texts held to be of northern origin). Hurvitz's answer is that the northern dialect is still only a conjecture

and we have no real knowledge about it. Moreover the psalms under discussion are related to Jerusalem and Judah.

- c) Thirdly: the question whether the characteristics of late language in these psalms only testify to their final form acquired in the Second Temple period, while the time of their composition could have been that of the First Temple. He illustrates this possibility with the example of II Samuel 22 = Psalm 18, accepting the reasonable assumption that Psalm 18 is the liturgical form given to the original poem in II Samuel 22.

The linguist will certainly find a great deal to interest him in this book, even though he might not agree everywhere with what is said. However, the importance of the work reaches much further than the modest ground the author set out for himself. The biblical scholar may learn here that the point of departure in discussing the late language of the Bible is by no means the linguistic structure of the Priestly source, whose date is only hypothetically late, but those books and sources whose period is known beyond doubt. The language of those is further removed from the Priestly source than was originally thought. In any case, the lateness of the Priestly source has yet to be proven.

Reviewed by Moshe Bar-Asher

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