



Ben Zvi, Nahum, ed.

Jerusalem Crown: The Bible of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Jerusalem: Ben Zvi, 2000. Pp. 874 + 35. Cloth. No Price Available. ISBN 380557004.

Companion volume edited by Mordechai Glatzer. Pp. 117 + 87. N.p. ISBN 3805570066

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The *Keter Jerushalayim* is an attempt to render a Masoretic manuscript, the Keter Aram Tsova (Codex Aleppensis), into a Rabbinic Bible. (Aram Tsova is the Hebrew name for Syrian Aleppo.) The publisher and editor, Nahum Ben Zvi, has happily provided a bilingual “Companion Volume” (2002) to explain his intention in undertaking this project and the method by which he carried it out. With the latter in hand I compared passages in the Keter Bible (KeterJ) with the 1976 Hebrew University/Magnes Press facsimile edition of Aleppensis (A) and with the 1998 Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center/Eerdmans facsimile edition of Leningradensis (L) to see how the transformation took place. The KeterJ is a noteworthy effort on the part of a number of Israeli experts, assembled by the printer, Nahum Ben Zvi (none associated, however, with the Hebrew University or its Bible Project [HUBP]).

Aron Dotan, the noted Masoretic scholar, did the same for Leningradensis (see my review of Aron Dotan’s *Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia* in *Bible Review* 17/5 [2001]: 40). Dotan’s edition of L (Hendrickson, 2001) is not referred to in the Companion Volume to the Keter J (2002). That may be because of the closeness of the two publication dates, but the two editions obviously have very similar purposes. Both Dotan and Ben Zvi have left out a lot of what is in each respective MT manuscript, corrected some textual readings, inserted later rabbinic notations and sigla, and streamlined the *mise-en-page* to make it all readable and useful to modern Jewish readers.

It is still debated whether the Masoretes were Rabbanite or Qaraite. The Hebrew Old Testament Text Project (which prepared the foundation for the forthcoming *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* [BHQ]) team, after much debate, finally decided to finesse the question by saying that they were Rabbanite but greatly influenced by their neighbors, the Qaraites of Tiberias. That statement was purposefully tenuous because we appreciated both sides of the debate, as did and do the HUBP team, especially Goshen-Gottstein and Shemaryahu Talmon. They too finally see the Masoretes as basically Rabbanite despite the difficulties involved.

The KeterJ is beautifully and aesthetically done. For the first time that I know of in printed editions the editors managed to put three columns of text on a normal page, just like the manuscript itself in the prose portions. This achievement Ben Zvi attributes to advances in computer science and to the experts he assembled in that field. The great anthems (the Song of the Sea, the Song of Moses, the Song of Deborah, and the Song of David) and the three poetic books are presented differently. In the case of the anthems they use two columns to a page, one of double-width for the poem, and the third a single column. In the case of Psalms, Job, and Proverbs, they use one column per page with a caesura, following the Masoretic *te'amim* (accents) of each verse, so wide that one has to be careful to keep one's eye in the same verse while reading across. Open and closed sections are clearly indicated by a whole line skipped before the open (*petuchah*) section, and a simple indentation of a line for the closed (*setumah*). Traditional *parashiot* titles and *sidrot* numbering have been added and inserted in the appropriate places, usually to the right of each column, with the *samekh* itself on the left.

Zvi Narkiss created an easy-to-read and quite elegant new font for the KeterJ, imitating the script of A amazingly well. The vowels and *te'amim* are smaller in size by half than the consonants, easily legible and well positioned among the consonants. The text of the KeterJ reads well. In addition to adding titles and sigla of traditional *sedarim* and *parashiot*, the editors also inserted the late medieval numbering (in Hebrew) of chapters and verses. A *sof pasuq* is provided at the end of each verse where often the manuscript has only the *silluq*. Where the manuscript has *p-r-sh* in the margin, between two artistic sort-of necklace drawings above and below, the KeterJ provides the conventional name or title of the *sidra* or *parashah*. Also, as in a Rabbinic Bible each division within the *parashah* is numbered. The text, on the whole, is beautifully presented and a pleasure to read, but it is not truly the text of Aleppensis, nor its *mise-en-page*, though the KeterJ comes closest to looking like an actual page of a folio of any printed effort I have seen.

The *masorah* is jettisoned entirely except for Qere/Ketiv notations put in the bottom margin, noted by an upside-down triangle in the text and in the margin beside the text. Even the *masorah finalis* is omitted. In the case of Codex A the *masorah* is arguably its

most precious asset. I have often seen amazement on the part of Jewish students in my classes at both Jewish Theological Seminary and at Union Theological Seminary when I ask them to obtain and use *BHS*. It is usually quite strange to them, and I have to teach the basics in how to read the apparatuses, including the *masorot*. They grew up on the Koren edition of the TaNaK, and a critical edition looks strange to them. The KeterJ, while looking a little different, will be much more familiar to them, an effort to convert an MT into a Rabbinic Bible.

The appendices to the KeterJ volume include a synoptic presentation of the two Decalogues in four columns, with both the upper accent system and the lower accent system for each, even though they already appear in the texts of Exod 20 and Deut 5 with the lower system. (Of course, neither survives in A, which begins only at Deut 28:17, due to the fire in the synagogue in Aleppo in late 1947.) Dotan in his edition of L put only the upper system in an appendix because the lower appears in the text *ad loc*.

This first appendix in the KeterJ is followed by an essay by Rabbi Mordechai Breuer on the concept and method whereby the missing parts of A were reconstructed. Breuer had already published a “corrected edition” of A in three volumes in 1977, revised in 1996. Breuer contributed to the making of the KeterJ edition because he understood that the president of Hebrew University at the time, Menahem Ben Sasson, wanted this edition as “The Bible of Hebrew University.” Breuer’s work is well articulated by Yosef Ofer in both Hebrew and English in the bilingual Companion Volume, which is edited by Mordechai Glatzer.

In the Companion Volume former President Ben Sasson explains that there have been three “Hebrew University Bibles”: the simple, facsimile edition from the Magnes Press of 1953 (not the large facsimile edition of 1976); the Hebrew University Bible being prepared by the Hebrew University Project headed formerly by Moshe Goshen-Gottstein and now by Shemaryahu Talmon, of which two volumes have been published (Isaiah and Jeremiah) and a third in the press (Ezekiel); and now this Keter Jerushalayim edition of Nahum Ben Zvi.

The facsimile edition of A printed by the Hebrew University in 1953 was published based on a contract with the Aleppo community, edited with only a few comments by M. Goshen-Gottstein but no critical observations whatever and published by the Defus Merkaz (Central Press) in Jerusalem. Only some four to five hundred copies were produced, and nearly all have been given away by the university to visiting dignitaries and donors. I have not seen it, and Professor Talmon informs me that he cannot now locate his own copy.

The text of the Hebrew Bible presented in the KeterJ is not strictly speaking that of A. While A is the base text, only 294 pages of the original 480 pages of Codex Aleppensis survived the 1947 burning of the synagogue in Aleppo, where it had been preserved and jealously guarded for six centuries. And while a couple of fragments have been identified as belonging to the missing portions, it means that barely 62 percent of Aaron ben Moshe ben Asher's text of 915 C.E. survives, and some of that has here been "corrected." The text is basically the work of Mordechai Breuer of 1996, which has been roundly criticized by Menachem Cohen of Bar-Ilan University, the editor of a new *Biblia Rabbinica*, who has shown, according to Talmon, that Breuer's reconstruction is flawed. The Bar-Ilan Press Bible, which began publication in 1992 with Joshua and Judges and now covers Genesis (1997–2001), 1-2 Samuel (1993–95), 1-2 Kgs (2000), Isaiah (1996–2003), and Ezekiel (2000), with Psalms in the press, is called *Miqra'ot Gedolot Ha-Keter* and contains the entire *masorah* of the still-extant Codex A, to my knowledge an unusual if not unique feature for a Rabbinic Bible.

Breuer and Yosef Ofer discuss the process of reconstruction for KeterJ of the missing portions and of the emendations. While Aaron ben Moshe was without question the most consummate Masorete of the six generations of the Ben Asher family in the seventh to tenth centuries, there are anomalies in his text, and these are "corrected" in KeterJ. The process used for correction and reconstruction was that of following extant texts where possible, especially L, but also to probe the *masorah* in A, as well as the *masorot* in other manuscripts, such as L, in order to make judgments on the best reading in problem cases. One of the great values of A, in contrast even to L, is the congruence and harmony between its text and its *masorah*. This was in large part the reason for the respect Maimonides had for the manuscript produced by Aaron ben Moshe ben Asher, arguably Codex A. Other sources used in reconstructing the text include notes by scholars on studying A *in situ* before it was partially destroyed in 1947: from the medieval Rambam's notes to those of Umberto Cassuto, on a trip to Aleppo in 1943 when A was supposedly still intact. There is a controversy over whether the 1947 fire or fungus did most of the damage (see I. Polachek et al., "Fungi Not Fire Damaged Aleppo Codex," *Nature* 335 [15 Sept 1988]: 203_).

There is an appendix in the KeterJ volume that lists the emended words in the various sections according to whether the base text was A, where extant, or L for the portions missing from A. If this list is accurate and reliable (I have not had time to check it all) it in itself is a very valuable aspect of the KeterJ. I understand that the list is the work of Mordechai Breuer.

This is a good method, and I have no quarrel with it if reconstruction is the intention. But I am sure that this would irritate a true text critic such as Talmon, who does not believe in

modern efforts at “rewriting the Bible.” This is the reason he was upset at what Ulrich et al. did in claiming to publish *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1999) despite the different recensions and considerable variants represented among the Judean Desert biblical scrolls, most of which date to the pre-MT period, with only a few to the proto-MT period. This is also the reason he is equally disturbed by what Ronald Hendel (following Frank Cross’s hermeneutic of text criticism) is doing in the forthcoming *Oxford Hebrew Bible* (OUB).

In our work on the HOTTP we found that the *masorah* helped solve a number of anomalies we encountered. The *masorah* of a manuscript such as A, or L, is a treasure of readings where scribes and their “pointers” may have erred, but where there is no other indication they did so. My first impressions are that the editors of the KeterJ did a good job with the reconstructions but also that in a few instances they followed traditional readings from the Bomberg Second Rabbinic Bible of 1524, or the Koren Bible, in cases where convenient. Locating such instances and other deviations will take time as KeterJ is read and scrutinized by interested scholars.

The appendices include a listing of the *haftarah* portions to be read with the Torah portions and the blessings to be recited when reading them as well as is a list of contents of the biblical books, a list of the *parashiot* of the Torah, and a table of contents for the eight appendices.

Finally, the reconstruction of the text of A to create the KeterJ included abandoning the Masoretic order of the biblical books. Like Dotan’s edition of L, the Keter keeps the traditional rabbinic order of books, notably putting Chronicles last in the Ketuvim rather than first, as all the classical Masoretic manuscripts have it, including A and L. I personally think there were reasons to have Chronicles first in the Ketuvim, followed by the Book of Psalms. This is a parade instance of manipulating a Masoretic manuscript into a Rabbinic Bible. Both editions also rearranged the three poetic books (from the order, Psalms, Job, Proverbs in the MTs, to Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the traditional Rabbinic order) and also changed the five Megillot into the rabbinic order following the sequence of the calendar when they are read in Schul (whereas A has The Song following Ruth). Dotan did the same traditional rearrangement in his edition of L, and I imagine Menahem Cohen does the same in his *Biblia Rabbinica* (*Miq. Gedol. Ha-Keter*), but I have not seen all of his edition.

I personally hope that the purposes for which Dotan, Breuer, Ben Zvi, and Cohen have labored will be well served throughout Judaism, but as Talmon is quoted in the Companion Volume as saying, he did not see “what scientific advantage such a Bible would bring to Bible scholars in Israel and throughout the world” (12). Talmon is right if

the quote is accurate. In fact, he wrote me that he said a lot more than that! This is not the text of Aleppensis; it is a corrected and supplemented text of A. That should be as clearly stated as possible so that students not think it is. It is a scholarly manipulation of Masoretic manuscripts, A and L, into a beautifully edited “Third Rabbinic Bible,” if you will. Like Talmon, my prayer would be that it or Dotan’s effort replace the Koren Bible on the shelves and in the hearts of Jews everywhere. But none of these Rabbinic editions can be used for scholarly purposes without considerable caution; that is the mission of the Hebrew University Bible Project, the real “Hebrew University Bible,” as I understand it, and the reason it is taking many decades to produce. Talmon’s Ezekiel volume should appear soon, and Richard Weis informs me that the first approved fascicle of *BHQ* should be ready in time for the IOSOT meeting in Leiden August 1–6, 2004.