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The discipline of philology focuses on the text of ancient documents. It includes several fields: language (including etymology and grammar), textual criticism, the desirability of emendations, the establishment of age and authenticity, and the interpretation of the document in question. In the case of the Old Testament, this discipline goes back to a very early age. In the two volumes of his study, Bruno Chiesa aims to describe the main historical developments in this field, without making a claim to completeness. Chiesa demonstrates that many Old Testament scholars are inclined to underestimate the relevance of the philological research into the Hebrew Bible that was undertaken by Jews and Christians before the past two centuries.

In the first volume, Chiesa discusses the development of the philology of the Hebrew Bible from Origen of Alexandria until the end of the Middle Ages. In chapter 1, he shows that Origen (ca. 185–253) and other early church fathers recognized the existence of textual variants in the Septuagint, their Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. They also realized that the Greek of this translation was often ungrammatical, as was the language of the Greek New Testament. However, they were not willing to emend the Greek text, assuming that the grammatical errors by the original authors do not affect the authority of the Scriptures. As early as in the patristic era, some exegetes showed a preference for less

grammatical textual variants, basing themselves on ideas similar to the modern *lectio difficilior* principle.

In chapter 2, Chiesa describes how the church fathers approached obscure passages in the Holy Scriptures. Exegetes such as Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) and Origen believed that the function of the obscurities was pedagogical. If interpreting the Scriptures were easy, exegetes would no longer be encouraged to study in depth the treasures that lay hidden there. Several ancient Christian exegetes supposed an indispensable connection to exist between the obscurities in the Scriptures and the obscurity of God himself. For studying obscure passages in the Scriptures, Origen emphasized the importance of thorough grammatical analysis and comparison with the context, in accordance with the classical rule “to explain Homer from Homer.” However, he also assumed that all passages, including those that have a self-evident message, contain a hidden, allegorical truth that only the advanced may discover. Inconsistencies in the biblical text posed a challenge for the wise to uncover this deeper meaning. Chiesa does not restrict his discussion to the patristic exegesis of the Old Testament but also adduces remarks by early exegetes about the interpretation of the New Testament, if these are illustrative for their exegesis of the Christian Bible as a whole.

Chapter 3 describes the continuation of the Christian debate on the exegesis of the Old Testament until the eighth century. Contrary to Gregory of Nyssa, who interpreted the Scriptures in line with Origen’s approach, the Antiochean school promoted the literal interpretation of the texts, using their significance in their original, historical context as a starting point. Antiochean exegetes such as Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia considered an allegorical exegesis permissible only if the text itself called for such an alternative interpretation. Their contemporaries Augustine and Jerome, who made a new translation of the Hebrew Bible into Latin, the influential Vulgate, subscribed to this point of view. Though they differed from the Alexandrians in this respect, the Antiocheans as well as Jerome and Augustine shared their view that Scripture does not contain any ideological contradictions. Also, the assumption that the obscurities in Scripture were intentional was still expressed explicitly by many exegetes. The Antiochean-Alexandrian controversy continued to play an important role in the Syrian churches, although the Nestorian exegete Isho‘dad of Merv did include some elements of the allegorical method into his Antiochean approach.

In chapter 4 Chiesa extensively discusses the exegetical method of two important Jewish scholars whose works are wrongfully neglected in most monographs on the history of the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible: Saadya Gaon (ca. 882–946) and al-Qirqisani (first half tenth century). Saadya Gaon was a representative of the rabbinical tradition of exegesis, but he propounded several innovative points of view. He stated that the sources

of religious knowledge are, in order of importance, (1) reason, (2) the Hebrew Bible, and (3) the rabbinical tradition. If there seem to be discrepancies between these sources or within Scripture, these cannot be ascribed to reason or the infallible rabbinical tradition, but only to Scripture, whose language is human and, for that matter, ambiguous. In Saadya's view, the use of language from daily life for expressing profound religious ideas is inadequate. Saadya prefers a literal interpretation of the text in cases where such an interpretation is possible, as, for instance, for Isa 26:19: "your dead ones will live; (they and) my corpse will rise." Only when a literal interpretation contradicts reason, other passages from the Hebrew Bible, or the rabbinical tradition is it permitted to resort to a nonliteral interpretation of the text. However, Saadya considers a literal interpretation of the anthropomorphisms used for God as incorrect.

Al-Qirqisani shared the view that a literal interpretation of the Hebrew Bible is preferable as long as it does not cause incongruities. This Al-Qirqisani being a Karaite, he did not recognize the authority of the rabbinical tradition and assigned a greater role to reason. Like several Christian exegetes before him, al-Qirqisani expressed the view that the obscurities are there for encouraging people's quest for the true meaning of Scripture.

Unfortunately, Chiesa does not systematically compare Saadya's and al-Qirqisani's approach with the previous rabbinical discussion of incongruities, inconsistencies, and textual variants in the biblical text. A more thorough comparison with earlier Jewish treatment of such textual problems, as it is reflected in the Targum and the Talmud, would have shown to which extent the exegetical approaches by Saadya and al-Qirqisani were innovative. The absence of this comparison is especially deplorable, as the historical contextualization of the exegetical method of these two medieval Jewish scholars was among Chiesa's main objectives when he embarked on writing this book (12).

Chapter 5 addresses the medieval Jewish discussions on matters such as the divine inspiration of the Hebrew Bible. Also the discussion on the authorship of Deut 34:5–12, which describes Moses' death, is brought up. Whereas the Talmud, Midrash *Sifre*, and Saadya ascribed the passage to Joshua, al-Qirqisani held to the view that God dictated the passage to Moses before his death.

The subtitle of volume 2 indicates that this part addresses the period from the end of the Middle Ages until the present day. Though the Renaissance opened the door to hermeneutics, the philological approach of the biblical text was less innovative than some may be inclined to think. In the first chapter of volume 2 Chiesa shows that the Jewish scholar Maimonides (1135–1204) systematically addressed the question why the writings of ancient authors are often difficult to interpret. The Jewish philosopher and exegete Ibn Kaspi (1279–1340) argued that God was the author of the Hebrew text of the Torah and

that all translations are inevitably of a minor quality. In the same vein, Christian philologists propounded the view that the Vulgate should be purified on the basis of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and the Greek text of the New Testament.

In this context, Chiesa deals extensively with the work of Nicola Maniacutia, who lived in Rome in the first half of the twelfth century and whose contribution to textual criticism was rescued from oblivion only in the 60s of the twentieth century. Maniacutia believed that the text of the Vulgate was in need of correction due to erroneous additions, omissions, and alterations. In the case of textual variants, he preferred the variant that was closest to the Hebrew text, also if this variant was only found in a minority of the Latin manuscripts. As he ascribed a decisive role to the Hebrew text, just like Jerome when he made his Latin translation of the Old Testament, Maniacutia considered his endeavors to correct the Vulgate as completely legitimate.

In chapter 2 Chiesa describes how Erasmus (1466–1536) based his printed editions of the Greek New Testament to a large extent on the text-critical method developed by Lorenzo Valla (1407–57). Both Valla and Erasmus wanted to revise the Latin New Testament, as it was found in the Vulgate, on the basis of the Greek evidence. When their endeavors met with resistance from more conservative circles in the church, they replied that what they did was nothing short of diffusing the Christian truth. Humanistic preference for the original texts was also at the basis of the editions of the Hebrew Bible, such as the first Rabbinic Bible, by Felix Pratensis, and the second Rabbinic Bible, by Ya‘aqov ben Hayyim, both printed by Daniel Bomberg. The publication of polyglots was another phenomenon typifying the Renaissance spirit.

Chapter 3 shows how seventeenth-century scholars endeavored to apply the profane philological method to the Old Testament in precisely the same fashion as Erasmus had done with regard to the New Testament. As the Hebrew text that Jerome had consulted was much older than the surviving documents of the Masoretic Text, the Roman Catholic philologist Jean Morin believed that the discrepancies between the Vulgate and the Masoretic Text are commonly due to a less reliable Jewish transmission of the Hebrew text. However, both Protestants and Roman Catholics rejected his point of view and attached much more value to the Masoretic Text.

When discussing the work of the Protestant Louis Cappel, Chiesa demonstrates his ability to take an independent position. Many modern philologists, such as Barthélemy, reject Cappel’s preference for the *lectio commodior*, which seems to contradict the common *lectio difficilior* principle. In line with Tov, Chiesa shows that when Cappel used the term *lectio commodior* he referred to the textual variant that best suits the style and the ideas of the biblical author or of the Bible as a whole rather than to the smoothest variant.

Contrary to others who confine themselves to discussing Richard Simon's innovative literary criticism, Chiesa addresses Simon's contribution to textual criticism, which concerns predominantly the New Testament. In Simon's approach, a prominent role is assigned to the establishment of the age and the geographical provenance of manuscripts, as it may demonstrate that a minority of manuscripts, especially if they are from different geographical backgrounds, deserve more credit than an overwhelming majority.

Chiesa demonstrates that Jean Le Clerc (1657–1736) was the first to introduce explicitly the *lectio difficilior* principle, though similar considerations are already found with previous philologists, for instance with several church fathers and with Erasmus. It is interesting, however, that Chiesa successfully demonstrates that Le Clerc implemented this principle only in those cases where other evidence, such as the age and the quality of the manuscripts concerned, does not tip the scales. Chiesa endorses the view that in many cases the *lectio difficilior* principle does not apply, as each case of textual variation is unique and may be more complex than would be suggested if only one principle were applied. Also, a reading that one philologist may find "difficult" may not be so difficult for others, which shows that the principle is subjective.

Chapter 4 of the second volume stresses the importance of Kennicott's and De Rossi's collections of variants in the consonantal text of the Masoretic biblical manuscripts (both last quarter of the eighteenth century). However, their importance is partly reduced by three factors: (1) errors (especially with Kennicott); (2) the relative young age of the manuscripts they consulted; and (3) the absence of a critical evaluation of the value of the variants with the help of the Masorah. The nineteenth century saw the insight emerging that the extant medieval manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible, save the Samaritan ones, all went back to the Masoretic recension and that most variants to be found there were only of minor importance. The idea that there was more variation before this recension was later confirmed by the discovery of the biblical texts from Qumran.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the focus of exegesis started to shift from philology to literary criticism and hermeneutics. Chiesa argues that textual criticism and literary criticism have different tasks. Textual criticism, which in Chiesa's view deserves a positive reevaluation, tries to establish the oldest documented form of the given text, whereas it is the role of literary criticism to establish its original form. Chiesa believes that the time is ripe for the creation of critical editions of the books of the Hebrew Bible, especially of those for which a historical archetype can be reconstructed. During the past decades, several Italian scholars, such as Paolo Sacchi, have undertaken preliminary work in this field, but their studies have received too little attention.

In these two volumes, Chiesa has shown himself to be an independent expert who is thoroughly acquainted with the existing literature, both old and modern. Chiesa offers a magnificent overview of the history of the philology of the Hebrew Bible, paying due attention to periods that are usually disregarded by other authors. He even discusses the contribution of scholars, such as John Philoponus (sixth century), whose biblical studies have only recently been brought back into the limelight (104–9).

In the case of several early scholars, such as Clement of Alexandria, Saadya Gaon, and al-Qirqisani, it would have been convenient for the reader if Chiesa had mentioned when exactly they lived. In some cases, Chiesa leaves some obscurity as to whose work he is discussing (see 405–6: presumably Gabriel Fabricy's). As philology includes several subdisciplines and as, especially in the patristic era, exegetes were concerned with very different philological questions, Chiesa's depiction of this era is somewhat confusing now and then. It would have been helpful if a more thorough recapitulation had followed the discussion of this period. However, these critical remarks by no means mar the importance of Chiesa's work. The yield of his research deserves to be made available also for an audience that is not familiar with Italian.