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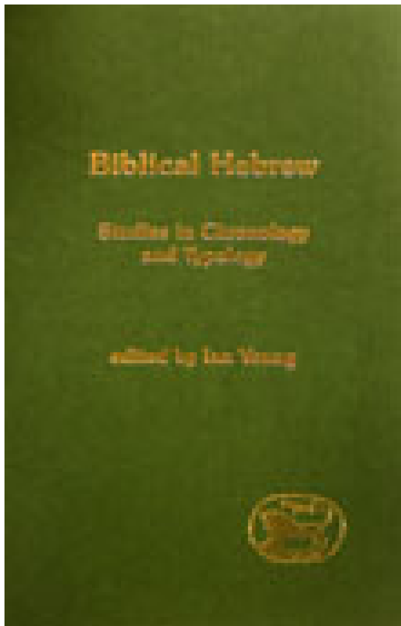

Young, Ian, ed.

Biblical Hebrew: Studies in Chronology and Typology

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This book contains eleven essays presented in two parts. Part 1 (7–148), entitled "Studies Within the Chronological Framework: Pre-exilic Standard Biblical Hebrew and Post-exilic Late Biblical Hebrew," contains five essays; part 2 (149–311), entitled "Challenges to the Chronological Model," has six essays. The book starts with an introduction (1–6) by its editor Ian Young. After the essays come the editor's concluding reflections (312–17). These are followed by a comprehensive bibliography (318–66) listing all the references given in the papers. Finally, there is an index of references to the Bible and other ancient sources (367–82) and an author index (383–89). Here I briefly discuss each of the essays in the book. Short summaries of the papers are also found in Young's introduction.

The first paper of part 1, "The Importance of Loanwords for Dating Biblical Hebrew Texts" by Mats Eskhult (8–23), confronts the relatively new challenging view that all biblical books were composed in postexilic times. Eskhult assumes that if all the books were composed in one period, all the Akkadian, Egyptian, Aramaic, or Persian loanwords would have be rather uniformly spread in them. The data show harmony between a biblical story setting and the foreign vocabulary it contains, and certain loanwords, especially Persian, are found only in books considered late according to the traditional

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view. This, according to Eskhult, proves that loanwords can assist in dating a text. Chronological variation exists among biblical texts: books containing Persian vocabulary are indeed late, and books lacking it are earlier.

The second essay (24–37) is “Hebrew and Aramaic in the Biblical Period: The Problem of ‘Aramaisms’ in Linguistic Research on the Hebrew Bible,” by Avi Hurvitz, many of whose works are cited in the bibliography (338–40). This is an English version of a 1996 paper. Hurvitz deals with the history of connections between Hebrew and Aramaic in the Bible, and he indicates several groups of “Aramaisms” in the latter. These are vocabulary and grammatical forms that appear in poems in the Pentateuch and the early Prophets that are not necessarily Aramaic and in any case cannot be regarded as features of a late period; Aramaic dialectal features that might be related to a northern dialect and again cannot be considered late; Aramaic features that appear in non-Israelite contexts; and Aramaic features that appear in the wisdom literature and are probably influenced by wisdom literature originally written in Aramaic. The only Aramaic features left that may be considered late, according to Hurvitz, are those found in postexilic texts from the sixth century B.C.E. on.

The third essay, “Style Is More Than the Person: Sociolinguistics, Literary Culture, and the Distinction between Written and Oral Narrative,” by Frank Polak (38–103), posits that large sections of biblical narrative are based on a substratum of oral literature that can be traced in syntax and style. The study syntactically and stylistically analyzes and compares features of oral and written texts, including parallel texts from Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and their social and cultural backgrounds. The conclusions are that the syntax and style vary according to prose types: a rhythmic-verbal style is a characteristic of an oral narrative, while a complex-nominal style characterizes a written language. As for social and cultural aspects, the rhythmic-verbal style is more typical in texts from the time of the Judean kingdom, while the complex-nominal style is more dominant in later texts and reflects professional style.

The fourth essay, “Hurvitz Redux: On the Continued Scholarly Inattention to a Simple Principle of Hebrew Philology,” by Gary A. Rendsburg (104–28), tackles once more the question of using Aramaic loanwords and forms for dating Biblical Hebrew texts as late. More categories are added of contexts that contain not necessarily late Aramaic features to those previously introduced by Avi Hurvitz.

The fifth essay, “Further Evidence for North Israelite Contributions to Late Biblical Hebrew,” by Richard M. Wright (129–48), adduces six Late Biblical Hebrew linguistic features that sporadically occur in earlier Biblical texts that also hold Israelite Hebrew characteristics. The connections between Late Biblical Hebrew and Israelite Hebrew,

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according to this paper, raise questions regarding the origins of this relationship and its implications for Biblical Hebrew chronology.

The first essay of part 2, "Biblical Hebrew and the History of Ancient Judah: Typology, Chronology and Common Sense," by Philip R. Davies (150–63), defends the new typological method according to which the two existing different levels of Biblical Hebrew, known as Classical and post-Classical, can be explained as coexisting and can both be dated to the Persian period. Davies pungently tackles the view mainly expressed by Avi Hurvitz that post-Classical Biblical Hebrew replaced Classical Biblical Hebrew in the course of time. His arguments are based on his expectations to find language variety, such as written versus spoken language and cultural and geographical dialect variation, in one period, but he does not offer any linguistic data.

The second essay, "Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts," by Martin Ehrensvärd (164–88), reexamines some linguistic arguments that relate many Biblical Hebrew texts to an early date. While accepting the existence of two types of Hebrew, the author claims that most linguistic features believed to represent Late Biblical Hebrew also appear earlier and that certain biblical texts traditionally considered late are written in Early Biblical Hebrew style. Accordingly, the two types of Hebrew could have coexisted in the postexilic period.

The third essay, "The Transitions of Biblical Hebrew in the Perspective of Language Change and Diffusion," by Jacobus A. Naudé (189–214), describes and evaluates the viewpoints on the transition from Early Biblical Hebrew to Late Biblical Hebrew, the relationship of Biblical Hebrew to Qumran Hebrew, and the assumptions on language change and their relevance to Biblical Hebrew research. Lastly, Naudé examines the consecutive *waw* construction in Biblical and Qumran Hebrew as a test case for language change. He indicates its loss already in Biblical Hebrew and concludes that Early Biblical Hebrew, Late Biblical Hebrew, and Qumran Hebrew cannot be defined as languages in change and are probably different forms of one language in one period.

The fourth essay, "Dating Biblical Hebrew: Evidence from Samuel-Kings and Chronicles," by Robert Rezetko (215–50), examines the occurrence of several linguistic features believed to differentiate Standard from Late Biblical Hebrew in Samuel-Kings versus Chronicles. Rezetko concludes that these differences are stylistic idiosyncrasies and cannot be used for dating these biblical texts. One should note, however, that these linguistic features have been indicated as early or late not because they show specific qualities but because they appear in texts identified as early or late by other means, such as foreign vocabulary and mention, or lack of mention, of late events. Only after they

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have been identified as related to a certain period by other means can these linguistic features serve for dating biblical texts by themselves.

The fifth essay, “The Habitat and History of Hebrew during the Second Temple Period,” by David Talshir (251–75), is an English version of a Hebrew paper of 1993. Talshir suggests that Late Biblical Hebrew was developed by returnees from the Babylonian exile in Ezra’s time. He also argues that the differences between the two contemporary Second Temple period dialects, Proto-Tannaitic Hebrew, on the one hand, and Late Biblical Hebrew, including Qumran Hebrew, on the other, are due to a development in two different and separate regions: the former, which ultimately developed into Mishnaic Hebrew, in the lowlands, possibly the אשדודית dialect mentioned in the Bible, and the latter in the mountains. Talshir contends with Rendsburg’s assumption that Mishnaic Hebrew descended from the Galilean dialect of the First Temple period. In his opinion, there was a considerable political and geographical distance between Galilee and the cultural center of Israel at that time, and the evidence of a northern dialect is too scarce. In an excursus to his essay (270–75), Talshir tries to prove that Rendsburg’s alleged twelve characteristics of a northern dialect are not necessarily northern and can be explained as diverse Judean features.

The sixth essay, “Late Biblical Hebrew and Hebrew Inscriptions,” by Ian Young (276–311), first tackles the issue of the contribution of Hebrew inscriptions from the monarchic period to establishing the chronology of the Standard Biblical Hebrew texts Genesis–2 Kings and asserts that, even if these two sources show relative linguistic similarity, one of them, namely, the Biblical Hebrew text, could have been composed in a later period. Second, Young considers the language of the monarchic inscriptions, presents links with Standard Biblical Hebrew, with Late Biblical Hebrew, and inscriptional forms unattested or rare in the Bible, and points out the significant difference revealed between the orthography of biblical texts and inscriptional Hebrew. Then he indicates the uniqueness and independent nature of the Hebrew of the monarchic inscriptions.

This selection of papers present a broad picture of the current state of research and the intensity of the debate on the chronology of biblical texts and can also serve as a good introduction to those wishing to become acquainted with the main contemporary approaches to this topic. However, the presentation of these two approaches, traditional chronological and new typological, side by side in equivalent proportions does not mean that they enjoy equal status and share similar significance and legitimacy in the scholarly world.

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