

THEME SECTION / SEZIONE MONOGRAFICA

Scribal Activity and Textual Plurality

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(eds.)

A SHORT INTRODUCTION

This special issue of the journal *Henoah* is the product of a network of scholars and a research project that aims to focus on various aspects of textual plurality. This consortium offers a methodological and hermeneutical reflection on the question of textual plurality in ancient Jewish Literature. Its principle objective is to bring together practitioners involved in critical editions, lexicographers and specialists in translation studies, in order to rethink the theoretical framework of critical editions, textual formation and transformation in ancient Jewish literature. Following a conference held in Metz in 2018, which addressed the question of textual plurality in the non-biblical Dead Sea Scrolls, this conference at the Centre Sèvres (Jesuit Faculties of Paris) addressed the question of scribal practices in textual transmission and transformation: how these scribes worked, how they dealt with their textual material, when and why they were at times more creative and to what purpose, whether they were aware of the existence of several textual traditions and how they addressed this.

Prior to the mid-twentieth century, scholars were aware of the divergence between the Masoretic text and the Septuagint, to which the Samaritan Pentateuch could be added. They addressed this problem by appealing to the concept of an alleged *Urtext*, from which all textual traditions were thought to derive through faulty transmission. As a result, the Hebrew Masoretic text, which was regarded as closer to this *Urtext*, was set in opposition to other ancient translations, such as the Septuagint, which were understood as “secondary.” Within this framework, a sharp distinction was made between the “author,” or the “final editor” who was worthy of being studied, and the “scribes,” whose only function was to copy the text. The scribes were somewhat reviled, as they were seen as only introducing mistakes. Yet, the groundbreaking discovery of Qumran and the publication of the totality of the corpus has revived the question of divergent textual forms, not only for the texts that constitute the Hebrew Bible, but also for cognate ancient Jewish literature. They have demonstrated that crucial divergences existed between textual witnesses until a later date, so that it is now no longer possible to safely speak of an *Urtext* or “final edition.” A variety of Hebrew texts have come to light that cannot be easily reduced to one single version. The sharp distinction between authors or editors on one hand and scribes on the other has also been blurred. Moreover, the renewal of Septuagint studies has given rise to the idea that the process of translation should be understood as a scribal practice of transmission. Finally, studies of the “non-biblical texts” and the

deconstruction of the notion of authoritative texts has caused the distinction between biblical texts and non-biblical texts to fade away, at least between those circulating prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. In other words, the people who copied these texts are the same people who also composed, edited or translated them. Apparently, the scribes did not understand transmission as producing an exact textual copy.

The first part of this issue is devoted to the study of scribal practices in Mesopotamia (Martin Worthington) and Greece (Graeme Bird). A general introduction to the scribe during the second Temple period follows (Corrado Martone), as well as essays that focus on the book of Kings as a model case for research (Andrés Piquer Otero & Pablo Torijano Morales, Matthieu Richelle). Needless to say, the notoriously difficult textual history of Ben Sira provides an impetus to studying the work of the scribes who wrote and transmitted it (Frank Ueberschaer, Jennifer Andruska & Jean-Sébastien Rey). The next two articles deal with issues specific to the translations, the Septuagint (John Screnock) and the Old Latin (Jean-Marie Auwers). Texts that are not part of existing canon are also addressed, as Psalms of Solomon shows that their authors were also scribes (Pouchelle). The final two essays delve deeper into the question of scribal practices in the New Testament (Claire Clivaz, Peter Malik).

Scholars from a number of different research areas have come together to speak to and question ancient scribal practices. We hope that the quality of these contributions will help the reader to be aware of the central place of the scribes in the overall process of the creation, edition, transmission and translation of an authoritative text. The results of this conference were shaped, not by the organisers' expectations or careful planning, but rather by what the participants have done and created through their presentations, and during the discussion and debates. We offer it as a great tribute to the work of the scribes, these anonymous people who gave their lives to writing in antiquity. We are indebted to them for these texts to which we, like modern scribes, dedicate our lives to as scholars.

In addition to the Consortium, the organization of this conference was the product of the collaboration of several institutions: the Centre Sèvres, the department of Theology and the Centre Écritures at the University of Lorraine, MSH Lorraine, the ANR/DFG project PLURITEXT. We would like to thank all of these institutions that have made this project possible. We also humbly thank Piero Capelli, who agreed to publish these peer-reviewed articles in this issue of the *Henoch Journal*.

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