

Reviews

Kim, Dong-Hyuk. *Early Biblical Hebrew, Late Biblical Hebrew, and Linguistic Variability – A Sociolinguistic Evaluation of the Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, 156). Leiden 2013. XVII + 184pp. Brill.

“The bigger, the better.” This rule seems to be the guiding principle of many doctoral dissertations published recently. Hence, it is so encouraging to see a dissertation which is concise and lucid, applies a clear methodology to deal with a specific problem, uses a wisely delimited body of evidence and arrives at conclusions which contribute to the current discussion on the topic. This is the case with Dong-Hyuk Kim’s book, which originated as a dissertation at Yale University. Its publication in the prestigious series of *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* is an honour not only to the author but also to the series itself.

The author tackles a thorny issue which has recently become the topic of a vigorous debate: the linguistic dating of biblical texts. He sees correctly that the current discussion requires not a reevaluation of the same arguments that go back and forth between the proponents and opponents of linguistic dating but rather a fresh re-examination of the data with a new methodological approach which has not yet been applied to the biblical texts. Therefore, Kim chooses to draw on methodology established during the last fifty years by sociolinguists. He proceeds as follows.

After an introduction which defines the problem and shortly presents the variationist approach, the author offers an essential survey of scholarship. This part reads almost as a novel. It introduces the *dramatis personae*, the scholars with opposing views, and tension between them. The same tension will accompany the reader through the entire book and make its reading even more exciting. The contenders can be divided into two contrasting groups: the followers of Robert Polzin and Avi Hurvitz and their challengers, especially Ian Young, Robert Rezetko and Martin Ehrensverd. In 2008, these three scholars coauthored two volumes in which they denied categorically any possibility of the linguistic dating of biblical texts (Young, I., R. Rezetko and M. Ehrensverd. *Linguistic*

Dating of Biblical Texts. 2 vols. London 2008. Equinox). They concluded that all features understood in diachronic terms as differences between early and late biblical Hebrew are simply due to the stylistic choices of individual authors. The last five years of research witnessed a virtual stalemate between two camps that have been unable to come up with new argumentation which would compel another side to modify its position.

In the next forty pages, in chapter four, the author expounds his methodology. This part is necessarily long because he must introduce the basic concepts of sociolinguistics to the reader, whom he supposes to be rather ill versed in that field. His definitions are essential and present the commonly accepted and authoritative views. Some of his points are crucial for biblical scholars, in particular for those educated in a traditional, prescriptive philology. In keeping with what is now current in linguistics, Kim explains that variation is a natural and essential component of language and that it is a main mechanism of language change. More importantly, variation is not random or chaotic but it has “structured heterogeneity,” that is, it occurs in statistically predictable patterns which can reveal linguistic and social factors behind the speaker’s choices of seemingly free variants. The graduality of language change is the key concept discussed in this chapter. Indeed, changes in a language happen gradually, through stages which witness the coexistence of usually two competing forms which occur in variation. Moreover, the form that eventually becomes obsolete rarely disappears from language completely; it rather survives as an archaic or dialectal variety. Already at this point the reader can anticipate Kim’s main conclusion. The challengers, who argue against the linguistic dating of biblical texts and against the possibility of spotting linguistic changes in biblical texts in general because of the coexistence of two forms assigned to different periods in the same text, cannot be right since they do not take into account the very nature of linguistic change.

Next, as is typical in every project, the author discusses the corpus of texts chosen for investigation and their dating. His corpus is constituted by the Hebrew portion of the Hebrew Bible as witnessed by the Masoretic text. Following three recent English introductions to the Hebrew Bible by Werner Schmidt, John Collins and Michael Coogan and their historical-literary (extra-linguistic) considerations, he divides the biblical texts into five periods: preexilic, late preexilic to early exilic, exilic, postexilic, and disputed or undecided. He also discusses narration and recorded speech, two basic types of texts which constitute one of the independent variables that are to be taken into consideration in his research.

Chapter four is dedicated to the specifics of the historical-linguistic analysis of texts, with particular attention to the problems involved in the analysis of biblical writings. It also introduces two types of linguistic changes according to their sources. The first type is “changes from below,” that is, those which pass unnoticed, are caused by internal, linguistic factors and usually originate from

lower social classes. The second type is “changes from above,” which occur with full public participation, usually by the initiative of higher social classes, and often take the form of the importation of a new prestigious feature foreign to the speech community. Kim assumes that changes “from below” are more prominent in oral communication and thus detectable in biblical recorded speech while changes “from above” are characteristic of a more formal register and thus noticeable in biblical narration. Following this assumption, he checks whether a new variable is more prominent in recorded speech or narration and on this basis he decides which type of change it represents.

Chapter five contains the main part of the author’s research. It consists of an examination of eight morphological, syntactical, phraseological, and lexical variables that appear often in the polemic about the feasibility of the linguistic dating of biblical texts. For each variable Kim discusses its distribution throughout biblical texts assigned to the different epochs and establishes whether there is or not a meaningful correlation between the variable itself and the time period. When required, he introduces into the picture the second independent variable, that is, the type of text, in order to determine if the variation of a particular variable is a case of a change “from below” or “from above.” His conclusions concerning each of the eight examined variables can be summarized as follows:

1. זֹתָם vs. זֹתֵיהֶם: a true variable with regard to time; the shorter form was gradually replaced by the longer; an example of change “from below.”

2. וְהָיָה/וְיָהִי + כִּ/כִּי + inf. const. vs. וְיָהִי + וְיָהִי + inf. const.: the progressive abandonment of the formula without the introductory verb is an example of change “from below.”

3. הַמֶּלֶךְ + king’s name vs. king’s name + הַמֶּלֶךְ: if idiolectal, it is without chronological significance; more probably a change “from above;” if so, it requires caution because its use may reflect stylistic choices, not chronology.

4. בֵּין...וּבֵין vs. בֵּין...לְ: there is a gradual transition from the first to the second variable; variation between them during the exilic/postexilic period should be understood as a change in progress; it is difficult to decide the nature of the change (from “below” or “above”).

5. בֵּית הַ" vs. בֵּית הָאֱלֹהִים: a example of a change from “above;” it cannot be used as a reliable chronological indicator because the first variable, although gradually replaced by another, remains a fully available stylistic option.

6. מִמְלָכָה vs. מְלָכוֹת: the shift from an almost exclusive use of the first form to a preference for the second one is an authentic linguistic change; this shift was a non-irreversible, conscious change from “above” and thus it cannot be used as a chronological indicator.

7. עֲדָה vs. קְהָל: the first variable fell out of use in the late literature but this does not mean that it gave way completely to the new variable because קְהָל had been always available while the use of עֲדָה was typical of the Deuteronomist. Consequently, this pair is not a reliable marker of a linguistic shift.

8. צעק vs. זעק: concerning this pair, the Bible documents a change in progress; the second variable is newer and becomes predominant around the late preexilic period; this was a change from “below” and it can generally be considered a chronological indicator of the development of biblical Hebrew.

The last chapter contains the author’s conclusions and a summary of his arguments. Kim points out correctly that the variability in the biblical evidence, which is taken by the challengers as the main argument against the analysis of biblical Hebrew in chronological terms, is actually a proof of an authentic linguistic change from early to late biblical Hebrew because the state of variation is characteristic of every linguistic change. In assessing the evidence, it is, however, necessary not only to ascertain the existence of a change but also to determine its nature. Indeed, a change “from below” can be taken as an indicator of a chronological change, while a change “from above” is conscious and hence may constitute a stylistic choice. Kim also notices that three of the seven authentic changes are “from above.” This ratio comes as a surprise because, according to historical and present-day sociolinguistics, changes “from above” are very rare. The author ascribes this phenomenon to scribal influence on the language of the Bible. I would like to add that the discovery of this unexpected ratio is a further confirmation of the value of his research and the method itself because it is unexpected from the sociolinguistic view but it is comprehensible considering the nature of the biblical text. Moreover, according to Kim the evidence pictures not two distinct bodies of early and late biblical Hebrew but a multidimensional continuum with a great deal of variability. He concludes, therefore, that there is no watershed moment in the history of biblical Hebrew such as the exile (contra Hurvitz) and that, although it is legitimate to describe different chronological layers of biblical Hebrew, it is not practicable to use linguistic data for the dating of a problematic text.

Kim’s argumentation and conclusions are in general solid but several points should be added.

On page 98, Kim discusses shortly a well know variable, the alternation of the two forms of the independent pronoun of the first per. sing., אנכי and אני. The longer form is often held as a marker of early biblical Hebrew while the shorter is considered a characteristic of late biblical idiom. Kim chooses to exclude this variable from his study not because it has no potential chronological significance but because it is virtually unattested in narration and thus it is impossible to discuss the kind of change (from “below” or “above”) which this variable could represent. Now, concerning this variable, it is necessary to refer to the following paper: Revell, E. J., “The Two Forms of First Person Singular Pronoun in Biblical Hebrew: Redundancy or Expressive Contrast?” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 40/2 (1995):199-217. Revell accepts that there is a chronological factor in the distribution of this pair of pronouns in the Bible. Additionally, he

proposes that the choice also had a sociolinguistic motivation: the shorter form was the marked form that signalled that the speaker had a right to expect attention from the addressee, either due to status difference, or due to the importance of the speech for the speaker. Because of its excessive use, the marked form was eventually replaced by the unmarked longer form of the pronoun. Regardless of the correctness of Revell's proposal, his analysis is very instructive in the context of diachronic research on biblical Hebrew. It shows that variation, and consequently a linguistic change, can be due to sociolinguistic factors, not necessarily to the contact with another language or to the inner quality of languages that are subjected to change by their very nature. Naturally, such a possibility renders diachronic research more complicated and, at the same time, more fascinating. In comparison with the challengers of the linguistic dating of biblical texts, Revell's research is exemplary for yet another reason. Unlike the challengers, Revell not only proposes that variation between the two pronouns of the first pers. sing. is stylistic but, mostly importantly, he gives possible reasons for the stylistic choice of the pronouns. The lack of such explanations for variables treated by the challengers as stylistic variants renders their research unconvincing and their use of the concept of "stylistic" variants simply abusive.

In his conclusions, on pages 158-159, Kim makes a very important claim which requires further research and probably a more subtle formulation. Kim states in categorical terms that the exile was not a watershed moment in the history of biblical Hebrew, not a period that decisively separates its varieties, early and late. His argumentation is, however, somewhat tortuous. On one hand he recognizes that in the case of six of the seven authentic changes he examined the use of a new form increased decisively during or after the exile; on the other hand, he states that not all of the changes can be ascribed to this critical period. Moreover, he observes that there changes "from above" were consciously imposed and not-irreversible. In his mind, the non-irreversibility and conscious nature of these changes frustrate their use as evidence in favour of the exile as a decisive period of the history of biblical Hebrew. He admits that the exile provided a favourable context for the initiation of many changes because of contact with other languages (principally with Aramaic) and because of a social upheaval which had to have serious repercussions on the Hebrew speech community, its size and composition. However, he rejects the significance of external factors in favour of the decisive impact of the exile on the history of Hebrew because he thinks that this is common sense thinking that is contradicted by the findings of his research. How should one evaluate Kim's claim about the impact of the exile? On one hand, the picture of organic and progressive changes that emerges from his research is convincing. On the other hand, Kim also admits that a significant number of changes as well as their intensity are to be connected with the exile. Hence, one must logically conclude that it had to impact the history of Hebrew somewhat. Two observations are in order. First, in the wake of Kim's research, it seems plausible that we should stop think-

ing about the exile as influencing the Hebrew language in almost a catastrophic manner. Second, since Kim analysed just eight variables, in order to radically re-evaluate the role of the exile, it is necessary to extend the same kind of analysis to a larger number of features.

On page 155, Kim states again that the linguistic dating of a biblical text is unfeasible. He takes this position not only because the features presented traditionally as characteristic for early or late biblical Hebrew are not reliable. He adds an unassailable linguistic argument. Since the language change is variationist in its nature, the adoption of a single variable in a text is unpredictable and can occur during any moment of the period in which the change took place. Obviously, it is impossible to know if a given text is an early adopter of the change or whether it lags behind and adopts the change only in the final period of the change. Consequently, if a text is an early adopter, its dating using the linguistic variables will result in a too low date; if a text is a late adopter, its dating will be too high. Moreover, as Kim observes, many changes in biblical Hebrew are “from above,” that is conscious. Therefore, these changes can reflect the scribes’ manipulation of the language and not a genuine linguistic change that would constitute a reliable indication of the antiquity of a text. A relatively high number of changes “from above” is yet another argument in favour of abandoning the linguistic dating of a particular text. Without doubt, this is the case with the dating of a short text. However, it is still possible to build a linguistic profile of an entire book, especially if it has a unitary composition and did not undergo too many revisions (for example, Qoheleth), and use such a linguistic profile to assign to it a place in the history of biblical Hebrew which, of course, is also related to the time of creation of the book. Kim is, however, not explicit about the relevance of such general characterizations.

Because of his cautious approach and limited scope, Kim also does not comment on a broader significance of his research for the field of biblical studies. What Kim patiently documented is the composite nature of the biblical evidence, with layers and features that must be assigned to different periods. Most logically, the linguistic history of Hebrew detectable in the biblical text indicates that the biblical text itself had a long history of formation and cannot be dated to one period, as it is done by some schools of thought that assign the composition of the Hebrew Bible exclusively to the Persian and Hellenistic periods. Kim’s book is another convincing proof of the falsehood of such a vision of the literary history of the Hebrew Bible.

In conclusion. Kim introduces a new quality to the discussion about the linguistic dating of biblical texts thanks to his proper use of sound sociolinguistic methodology rather than the common sense philological approach that has dominated the controversy till now. Since he examined only selected variables, his research must be continued and expanded to include other relevant data and problems, such as loanwords, semantic changes of particular words or expres-

sions, and scribal alterations. However, already as it stands, Kim's book is a solid contribution to the debate and it must be consulted by anybody who wants to participate in it.

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Gideon Goldenberg, *Semitic Languages – Features, Structures, Relations, Processes*. Oxford 2013. Oxford University Press. XIX + 363 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-964491-9

The book under review appeared just a couple of months before the death of its author who was a great scholar, a great man and a great friend. Gideon Goldenberg was famous first of all thanks to his numerous articles which combined most remarkable originality, immense erudition, depth of thought as well as methodological precision and clarity. In a quite unusual way he was at the same time conservative (in the best sense of the word!) and open to the newest ideas which he could critically evaluate and develop. It was his wisdom and fascination with the achievements of our predecessors which made him discover forgotten treasures of the past and make them function and shine in modern times – this was quite exceptional in the times when there is a general tendency or even a common practice not to refer to publications which are more than five years old. He had a very profound knowledge of so many languages and he abstained from the use of data from languages he did not know well enough which was a very unusual practice in times when almost everybody feels obliged to use second- or even third-hand data from languages which he practically ignores. This explains why he has almost never used data from the non-Semitic languages of the Hamitosemitic/Afroasiatic macrofamily although he had no doubts about the existence of this macrofamily and supported the research on it. He had courage to give us the signal 'I do not know' without being hypercritical.

The book under review is rather a collection of essays than a complete and systematic comparative grammar of the Semitic languages. It is not a sketch or an 'Introduction' either, although it can be used by both slightly advanced students (there is a wealth of paradigms and examples in transcriptions!) and 'grown-up' linguists. Its composition is rather unorthodox. The book starts with the general 'Introduction' (pp. 1-9) discussing such basic issues as 'Semitic languages in general linguistic research', 'Linguistic approach and a few features found in Semitic languages', 'Data, transcriptions and glossing'; then comes the general presentation of the Semitic languages (pp. 10-20), then there are chapters on 'Distribution of the Semitic Languages' (pp. 21-29), on 'Writing systems and scripts' (pp. 30-43), on 'Genetic classification' (pp. 44-57), and on 'Special achievements of Semitic Linguistic Traditions' (pp. 58-63). Then comes a part