



Fragment of the Month: August 2016

Who Wrote the Bible?

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According to Jewish tradition, who wrote the Bible? The well-known baraita in b.Baba Bathra (b.BB) 14b–15a has the following to say regarding the authorship of the biblical books:

Moses wrote his book, the Bil'am narratives, and the book of Job. Joshua wrote his book, and eight verses in the Torah. Samuel wrote his own book, as well as Judges and Ruth. David wrote the book of Psalms, by means of ten elders... Jeremiah wrote his book, the book of Kings, and Lamentations. Hezekiah and his associates wrote Isaiah, Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. The men of the Great Assembly wrote Ezekiel, the twelve Minor Prophets, Daniel, and the scroll of Esther. Ezra wrote his book and the genealogy of Chronicles...

The passage above is regularly cited in—and commands the monopoly of—discussions of traditional Jewish views concerning the authorship of the various biblical books.¹ Jacobs, for example, claims that “the passage is unique in that it is the only full-scale treatment of the question [of the authorship of the biblical books] in the whole of the Rabbinic literature.”²

So great is the shadow cast by this passage from the Babylonian Talmud that it appears to have all but eclipsed a closely related, yet distinct, discussion of the authorship of the biblical books. This alternative discussion (in various recensions) has survived in several masoretic treatises, and in the masoretic material of various Hebrew Bible manuscripts. It has been published in at least two separate locations in the past century and a half: Ginsburg's Masora,³ and Baer and Strack's edition of *Diqduqe ha-Te'amim*,⁴ where it is erroneously attributed to that work.

This marginalised, alternative discussion of the authorship of the biblical books also survives in a fragment from the Genizah: T-S D1.37:⁵

Moses wrote the five books of Torah and the book of Job. Joshua wrote his book, and eight verses, from: "So Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there" to the end of the Torah. Samuel wrote his book, the book of Judges, and Ruth. Isaiah wrote his book, the book of Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. Jeremiah wrote his book and the book of Kings, as well as the scroll of Lamentations. David and ten elders wrote the book of Psalms.

The men of the Great Assembly [wrote] the book of Ezekiel, the twelve Minor Prophets, the book of Daniel and the scroll of Esther. Ezra wrote his book, and the genealogical record in Chronicles, as far as: "Now Jehoram had brothers—the sons of Jehoshaphat."

This masoretic note shares numerous, obvious parallels with the baraita in b.BB 14b–15a. Nonetheless, it varies from the talmudic passage in several interesting ways. First, and most obvious, is the disappearance of Hezekiah and his associates; Isaiah is now granted the merit of writing his own book, as well as editing Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. Second, and of no less interest, is the order in which the various authors are introduced.

In the talmudic passage, Hezekiah and his associates are credited with writing (presumably the task we would refer to as *editing*) the books of Isaiah, Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. Regarding the attribution of the latter three works to Hezekiah and his associates, it seems that the rabbis are relying on an extension of the sense of Proverbs 25:1: גַּם־אֵלֶּה מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱתִיקוּ אַנְשֵׁי חֶזְקִיָּה "These, too, are Solomon's proverbs, which Hezekiah king of Judah's men copied."

In the masoretic version, Hezekiah and his associates have disappeared. These four books are all attributed to Isaiah's authorial-editorial labours. It is quite understandable that Isaiah should be credited with having written his own book, but what qualifications can he claim for editing the other three books? It is just possible that these have been appended to Isaiah's CV on the basis of the various Love Poetry and Wisdom themes found in his prophecy (e.g. Isa 5:1–7; 28:23–29). More likely is the hypothesis that the talmudic wording of the tradition lies somewhere in the pre-history of this masoretic tradition. At some point, Hezekiah and his associates were omitted from the wording (accidentally or otherwise), leaving Isaiah with the burden of editing Solomon's works, as well as writing his own book. Under the pressure of the fact that Joshua, Samuel, Jeremiah and Ezra are claimed to have written the books that bear their names, it is easy to understand how such a mutation would credit Isaiah with writing his own book. That is to say: it makes sense to see the talmudic tradition as prior to the masoretic tradition in this case. It is harder to imagine the mutation occurring in the opposite direction.

It has recently been argued that when the author(s) of b.BB 14b–15a used the verb כתב, they were not referring to the composer of the texts in question, but simply those responsible for writing the composition down. This would explain, for example, why no mention is made of Solomon as the author of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.⁶ If the talmudic tradition does indeed lie behind this masoretic tradition found in T-S D1.37, as suggested above, then the latter may offer an interesting early commentary on the former. For, behind the removal of Hezekiah and his associates (whether accidental or intentional), and the insertion of the claim that, in fact, Isaiah wrote his own book, may lie the beginnings of the understanding of כתב as concerning *authorship*, rather than simple scribal activity.⁷

The second clear difference between the note in T-S D1.37 and its talmudic parallel is the order in which the various authors of the biblical books are introduced:

b. BB 14b–15a	T-S D1.37
Moses	Moses
Joshua	Joshua
Samuel	Samuel
David	Isaiah
Jeremiah	Jeremiah
Hezekiah and his associates	David
The men of the Great Assembly	The men of the Great Assembly
Ezra	Ezra

As the list above demonstrates, b. BB 14b–15a follows the biblical chronology in introducing the writers of the various biblical books—with the striking exception that Hezekiah and his associates are mentioned *after* Jeremiah. That the order of the list is dictated by the biblical chronology, rather than (primarily) the canonical order of the books, can be seen by the position of David in the list. The curious post-positioning of Hezekiah and his associates was apparently precipitated by an earlier part of the baraita in b.BB 14b, which stipulates that the order of the latter prophets must be: “Jeremiah and Ezekiel; Isaiah and the Twelve.”⁸

Interestingly, the masoretic version of the tradition places Isaiah in his expected chronological position—before Jeremiah. This apparently trivial, obvious reordering raises some intriguing questions. If the talmudic order (Jeremiah, Hezekiah and his associates) is indeed due to the influence of the earlier part of the baraita now found in b.BB 14b, does the reordering found in the masoretic version (Isaiah, Jeremiah) imply that the masoretic version was free from the influence of the earlier part of the baraita (perhaps due to an extended period of transmission independent of the talmudic context)? Was the reordering in the masoretic version influenced by the Tiberian order of the latter prophets,⁹ or by purely chronological considerations, or both, or neither?

There is some evidence that the masoretic version of the tradition did indeed enjoy a period of transmission isolated from the talmudic context. This masoretic version of the discussion of biblical authorship is found in at least three masoretic notes recorded by Ginsburg: Samekh, §§ 175, 177, 180.¹⁰ In all three cases Isaiah is said to have written his own book, as well as Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes, and in all three cases Isaiah's authorial-editorial labours are mentioned before those of Jeremiah. The wording of the tradition in § 175 is virtually identical to that found in T-S D1.37. §§ 177 and 180 contain manifestly the same tradition, though with various minor alterations in wording and arrangement. Now, in the Genizah fragment T-S D1.37 this discussion of biblical authorship is preceded by an extended discussion of the number of years covered by each of the biblical books from Genesis to Kings. Significantly, in two of Ginsburg's parallel texts (§§ 175 and 177) this same collocation of notes is found: the discussion of biblical authorship is preceded by a discussion of the number of years covered by each biblical book.¹¹ Likewise, in Baer and Strack's edition of *Diqduqe ha-Te'amim*, the discussion of biblical authorship (which, again, corresponds to that found in T-S D1.37) is collocated with a discussion of the number of years covered by each of the biblical books, though in this case the chronological discussion *follows* the discussion of authorship. These textual witnesses support the contention that (at least one strand of) the masoretic version of the tradition of biblical authorship did indeed enjoy a period of transmission isolated from the talmudic context, bound, as it evidently was, into a new masoretic context.¹²

So, who wrote the Bible, according to Jewish tradition? It seems to depend on whom you ask. T-S D1.37 has helped to uncover this nearly-eclipsed alternative answer to that found in b.BB 14b–15a. This masoretic tradition appears to have its roots in the talmudic parallel, yet to have developed into a separate tradition in its own right. It is interesting to note that this sub-tradition (if that is what it turns out to be) seems to have survived only in masoretic material. Perhaps there is a causal relationship between the fact that this alternative tradition is so little-known, and the fact that it was preserved in masoretic circles. As Qimhi

already complains, at the beginning of the 13th century: "Many do not understand... due to their lack of concerted effort in engaging with... the masters of Masora and tradition."¹³



T-S D1.37 recto

5 T-S D1.37 is a single paper leaf containing 23–24 lines of masoretic notes in a casual square script on both sides of the leaf.

6 Jacobs, *Structure*, 40; Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 45.

7 Only the beginnings, inasmuch as Isaiah's role still includes the editing of Solomon's three compositions.

8 For a discussion of this apparently curious order, see Jacobs, *Structure*, 34–35. He concludes: "The only satisfactory way of accounting for Hezekiah coming after Jeremiah in the authorship section is that it is a parallel to the 'order' section where Isaiah, one of the books written by Hezekiah and his associates, comes after Jeremiah and Ezekiel", 35.

9 There were two main centres for the preservation and development of the proto-masoretic biblical text from antiquity to the Middle Ages—Babylonia and Tiberias. The order of some of the biblical books differed between the two traditions.

10 Ginsburg, *The Massorah*, II, 338–340.

11 In the third case (§ 180), the tradition concerning biblical authorship is presented in isolation, with no other notes preceding or following.

12 Having thus attempted to demonstrate the divergence of these two traditions, talmudic and masoretic, we also note a striking example of their later confluence. In Shabbetai Bass' influential *Sifte Yeshenim* (1680) he gives authorial details concerning the biblical books. He was evidently aware of both the talmudic and masoretic traditions discussed above, and attempts to harmonise them. He introduces the section on the authorship of the books of the Latter Prophets with the words: נביאים אחרונים כתבו חזקיה וסייעתו ובני דורו "The Latter Prophets, which Hezekiah and his associates and the men of his generation edited." Nonetheless, he then immediately claims, in now familiar terms: ישעיהו כתב ספרו וספר משלי ושיר השירים וקהלת "Isaiah wrote his own book, and the book of Proverbs, as well as Song of Songs and Qohelet." Shabbetai Bass, *Sifte Yeshenim*, (Amsterdam: David Tartas, 1680), פג.

13 David Qimhi, *Et Sofer* (Lyck: Rudolph Siebert, 1864), 1.

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