

HISTORY OF THE PRINTED EDITIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, TOGETHER WITH A DESCRIPTION OF THE RABBINIC AND POLYGLOT BIBLES.

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The following pages are intended to give a complete history of the printed text of the Old Testament. The works of Le Long-Masch,¹ and of Wolf,² contain a great deal of matter, good enough as far as it goes; recent writers as Keil³ dispose of it in a few lines; thus the latter speaks of the principal editions of the Old Testament on five and one-half pages, including the notes, or after deducting the notes, in fifty-seven lines including the additions made by the English translator. My aim is to give not only a complete history of the editions of the Old Testament, but what seems to be more important, a genealogy of the different editions, thus enabling the student to trace back the origin of the one or the other edition.

The first complete Hebrew Bible was given to the public in the year 1488, or twenty-eight years before the first Greek New Testament was published by Erasmus. It is true, that the first Greek New Testament, found in the fifth volume of the Complutensian Polyglot was completed at press in 1514, but this stupendous work was not given to the public until the year 1520. Prior and subsequent to the publication of the first Hebrew Bible, parts of the Old Testament were published, but the text was far from being complete. They were printed from manuscripts as far as they could be obtained, and these were comparatively modern, none of them, including those extant now, can compare with the Sinaitic or Vatican Greek manuscripts.

The Hebrew text as we have it now proceeded from the Massorettes or those scholars who, after the completion of the Talmud, betook themselves to fix the text, whence it is called the "Massoretic." To the labors of these men are due the accents, vowels, ornamentations, etc. of the present text, and at a very early time we already find two schools, the Babylonian and Palestinian, respectively represented by Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali, in which differences existed as to certain readings of the text. These differences or variations are now correctly given in the edition of the Hebrew text by Baer and Delitzsch. Other helps in that direction are the *Dikduke ha-Te'amim* of Aaron ben Asher, edited by Baer and

¹ *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Halle, 1778-1790.

² *Bibliotheca Hebraea*, Hamburg, 1715-1733.

³ *Manual of Historico-Critical Introduction to the Canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament*. 2 vols. Edinburgh, 1870.

Strack (Leipsic, 1879), and the book *Oclah we-Oclah*, a Massoretic work quoted already towards the end of the 12th century, published by Freusdorf (Hanover, 1864) and described in my article s. v. *Oclah* in McClintock and Strong's Cyclop.

The text as it stands now is a relatively correct one, differing greatly from that which the Alexandrian translators had before them. Some critics attach therefore greater importance to the Alexandrian version than to the Massoretic text. Others have undertaken to correct the Hebrew text by means of ancient versions, especially the Septuagint. Whether or not criticism will ever succeed in restoring the text as it was in the pre-Massoretic times, is a question which can not now be decided, but it is certain that criticism has brought about a better judgment as to the merits or demerits of the Massoretic text, than it was two centuries ago, and even the most conservative theologian must make allowance to textual criticism. In the year 1678, a law was enacted that no person should be licensed to preach the gospel unless he publicly declared that he believed in the integrity of the Hebrew text, and in the divinity of the vowel-points and accents ("codicem Hebr. Vet. Test. tum quoad consonas tum quoad vocalia sive puncta ipsa sive punctorum saltem potestatem θεόπνευστον esse," *Formula Consensus*, Art. IV. can. ii.); but no one will subscribe to such a law to-day in Switzerland or in other parts of the continent. Textual criticism, therefore, need not be feared. It tends as far as possible to bring before us the oracles of God in their original state. "True criticism never disregards the letter, but reverently and tenderly handles every letter and syllable of the Word of God, striving to purify it from all dross, brushing away the dust of tradition and guarding it from the ignorant and profane. But it is with no superstitious dread of magical virtues or vices in it, or anxious fears lest it should dissolve in the hands, but with an assured trust that it is the tabernacle of God, through whose eternal courts there is an approach to the Lord Jesus himself.... Such criticism has accomplished great things for the New Testament text. It will do even more for the Old Testament so soon as the old superstitious reverence for Massoretic tradition and servitude to the Jews has been laid aside by Christian scholars," (Briggs, *Biblical Study*, New York, 1883, p. 162).

After the invention of the art of printing, many were desirous to publish correct editions of the Holy Scriptures, although the first entire Hebrew Bible was not published until the year 1488, after all the parts had been previously published.

The first part was

The Psalter

With the commentary of Kimchi (fab. 1240), in quarto, or small folio, in the year 237 i. e. A. D. 1477, *sine loco*.

This very rare edition is printed on 149 folios, each page containing 40 lines but without division of verses, minuscular and majuscular letters. Only the first four psalms have vowel-points, and these but clumsily expressed. Each verse is