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ANOTHER EDITION OF THE HEBREW ECCLESIASTICUS.¹

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Quite a literature has gathered round the Hebrew Ecclesiasticus since its publication in February, 1897—though the daily press did not realize its importance (the *Times*, for example, not even reviewing it).² There have appeared no less than four other editions (two in Germany and two in France), in addition to the cheap reprint of the English translation published by the Clarendon Press. Of the two which have been noticed in these pages (April, 1897, pp. 211–19)³ one, that of Smend, embodied the results of a collation not only of the original photographs, but also of the original MS., for the carrying out of which all praise is due to Professor Smend for his enterprise and his careful work, as well as to those in the Bodleian Library, who generously afforded him such facilities as were necessary for the successful carrying out of his undertaking. The same praise is due to the edition of M. Lévi, which we are now to consider.

¹ L'ECCLESIASTIQUE ou La Sagesse de Jésus, Fils de Sira. Texte original hébreu, édité, traduit et commenté par Israel Lévi, Maître de conférences à l'école des hautes études (Section des sciences religieuses)=Bibliothèque de l'école des hautes études. Sciences religieuses, X^e volume, fasc. premier. Paris: Ernest Leroux, Éditeur, 23, Rue Bonaparte, 1898. Paper. lvii + 149 pp.; 8vo.

² Of the many reviews of the *editio princeps* of Cowley-Neubauer may, perhaps, be singled out (without offense), as of special value, the two notices of Smend (*Theol. Lit.-Zeitung*, March 20 and May 15, 1897), and the reviews, in April, of Perles (*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*); in May, of Fraenkel (*Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums*), of Mayer Lambert (*Journal asiatique*), and of Nöldeke (*Expositor*); and, in July, of Bacher (*Jewish Quarterly Review*). In addition to reviews, there have appeared, besides notes on special points by different scholars (Bevan, Gray, D. S. Margoliouth, D. H. Müller, etc.), several extensive studies of the whole series of questions raised by the recovery of the Hebrew text. Such are the elaborate and valuable articles of M. Jules Touzard, Professeur d'Écriture sainte et d'Hébreu au Séminaire Saint-Sulpice (*Revue biblique*, Vol. VI, 271–82, 547–73 [1897]; VII, 33–58 [1898]), since published as a volume (*L'original Hébreu de l'Ecclesiastique*, Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1898, pp. 78, 8vo); the notes of Ludwig Blau (*Revue des études juives*, Vol. XXXV, 19–29 [July–Sept., 1897]), and a series of articles (*Revue des études juives*, Vol. XXXIV, 1–50, 294–6; XXXV, 29–47 [both 1897]), by the author of the volume under review. [Attention is called to the former contributions on this subject by Mr. Hope W. Hogg, in the *Expository Times*, March, 1897, pp. 262–7, and *The American Journal of Theology*, Vol. I, 777–86; also to the summary of recent literature by Professor Levias, *American Journal of Theology*, II, 210–12; and review of Cowley-Neubauer, by Professor Ira M. Price, in this JOURNAL, Vol. XIV, pp. 49–50.—THE EDITOR.]

³ Professor Price's review of Smend, *Das hebräische Fragment der Weisheit des Jesus Sirach*, and Schlatter, *Das neu gefundene Hebräische Stück des Sirach*.

The book is a serviceable one. An introduction of fifty-three pages (v–lvii) discusses the problems solved or raised by the recovery of the text. In the body of the book (pp. 2–149) the upper part of the left-hand page gives the Hebrew text as M. Lévi has deciphered it, and the upper part of the opposite page a translation in French, while the lower (and larger) part of each page is devoted to a critical commentary, chiefly of a textual nature.

There is much that is interesting in the introduction. Many points that we had marked for notice must be excluded. We may pass over what is said of the oft-written history of the fragments (the still unwritten part of the story is romantic, but the time for telling it is not yet at hand) and of the appearance of the MS. (details must still be sought in Cowley-Neubauer and Smend), and come at once to what the author has to say of the remarkable marginal notes which are one of its most interesting features (pp. xi–xviii). Some of these notes, he says, are simply the copyist's corrections of his own mistakes: over a dozen of such are indicated (marked with an *A*) in the commentary. In many more cases, however, a second exemplar has furnished another hand with various readings—sometimes mere synonyms, sometimes distinct readings modifying the sense. Of these distinct readings M. Lévi gives a list of some eighty (pp. xii–xv). When, as in a majority of cases, the readings of the text and those of the margin, though distinct, can be traced to the same source, the original has generally been better preserved on the margin, though it contains also readings that give no sense at all (p. xv). Comparing the really distinct readings with the Greek and the Syriac versions, our author comes to the conclusion that there were, probably before the third century A. D., at least two distinct recensions of the Hebrew text, represented by the text and the margin, respectively, of our MS. (p. xvi). These, however, are to be traced back to a common source already somewhat modified from the original (p. xvi). In explanation of the presence on the margin of more than one variant recorded in the same handwriting, M. Lévi assumes, not that the copyist who recorded them had more than one additional MS. before him, but that the several variants are (his?) repeated attempts to decipher a single ill-preserved original.

The mere explanatory glosses are for the most part in Aramaic or late Hebrew (p. xvii), and words quoted from the context are

frequently abbreviated. Sometimes, however (though rarely—only two cases being cited), the abbreviations represent some word other than that in our own present text. M. Lévi does not point out what this seems to imply, viz., that the reading is cited, not from the text, but from the margin of another MS. Moreover, he expressly declines to draw any conclusion (as M. Touzard has done) from the fact that, after the point at which, as the copyist himself tells us, the main source of the marginal notes was exhausted, we have a gloss agreeing with the Greek (p. xviii).

We need hardly say anything of the nature of the proof that has convinced M. Lévi (in spite of the initial skepticism of his brief notice in the *Revue des études juives*, April–June, 1896, Vol. XXXII, 303 sq.), to which he naturally does not refer, and others that our Hebrew fragment is not a translation, but an original (pp. xviii sq.). He is tempted, however, to conjecture, as Blass does in the case of Acts, that the author himself may have revised his own work (p. xx).

The language used by Ben Sira M. Lévi describes as biblical, but crammed (*farcié*) with Aramaic and Rabbinic modes of expression. He concludes that Hebrew was still in common use when Ben Sira wrote. The many misinterpretations of the younger Ben Sira, he argues, imply, not that he did not know Hebrew, but (from their occurring, for the most part, in passages resembling, or founded on, earlier writers) that the older Hebrew was not so well known to him as that of his own time—a thesis to which M. Lévi is constantly returning. He regards this as a serious difficulty in the way of assigning certain of the Old Testament writings to a very late date. He argues that the mixed classical and unclassical style of a well-educated man like Ben Sira makes it unsafe to assume that other writers could avoid betraying themselves in the same way. On this, however, two remarks may be made: firstly, it is one thing to write a large, independent treatise, and it is a very different thing to insert a few sentences in some other man's work; and, secondly, is not M. Lévi coming very near erecting a fortress in order to have the satisfaction of demolishing it? It is surely misleading to speak of criticism bringing down "Job and Proverbs" to the time of Ben Sira—if by that is meant the second century B. C.—and is Ben Sira more or less unclassical than Chronicles or Ecclesiastes?

In another respect M. Lévi sees an advance on the Old Testament writers also—in the ordering of the subject-matter and in the free use of titles of sections (p. xxv).⁴ He may rather unduly accent the features that distinguish Ecclesiasticus from other Old Testament writings; but it is perhaps well that attention should be directed to such points, since, with most who have written on the subject, the emphasis has naturally been laid on the other side.

On the question of the date of Ben Sira, M. Lévi's theory naturally makes it easy for him to meet the objection to the received view urged by M. Halévy, who demands a considerable interval of time between the composition and the translation of the book to account for the misunderstanding of the translator.

Passing over what is said of the bearing of Ecclesiasticus on the history of the canon, which limits of space forbid our discussing, we note that M. Lévi points out the agreement, in the main, of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament writings used by Ben Sira with the present Massoretic text. With reference, however, to the case adduced by him, where Ben Sira seems to follow the *Kêrê* in preference to the *Kêthib*, M. Lévi seems to go too far when he infers that there was already a Massoretic tradition: Ben Sira may have been following, not a tradition, but a text.

We cannot stay to speak of M. Lévi's suggestive discussion of the famous panegyric (chaps. 44–49)—note in particular the theory of 44:3–9 (pp. xxxix and 82), but must hasten on to what he has to say of the versions. After making allowance for corruption of the Greek text in the course of transmission, Lévi finds that in some seventy-eight cases the translator has misread his original (pp. xlii–xliv), that in some cases he has misheard it (pp. xlv sq.), that he has repeatedly misresolved abbreviated forms, inverted the arrangement of words, and even shown his imperfect command of classical Hebrew by translating the first member of a construct phrase as a genitive. But, surely, any one of these blunders might be already present in the Hebrew MS. used by the translator (in the last case a simple accidental inversion of the order of two Hebrew words would explain his apparent blunder). When M. Lévi asks what way he learned of the

⁴ He also makes something of the abandonment of anonymity.

condition of the Septuagint at the time of the younger Ben Sira, he does well not to attach too much importance to some resemblances in the Greek translation (note, however, that most of them are in passages omitted in the Septuagint) to certain phrases in the Greek Pentateuch (p. xlix). With regard to the very interesting verse 49:7b, the close agreement of which with Jer. 1:10 is pointed out on p. 146, it should be noted that, in the Hebrew, it is not divided into hemistichs, and in the Septuagint it is omitted altogether.

In the section devoted to the Syriac version (p. l), after urging the critical treatment of its text (p. li), and enumerating passages where the translator shows, by misreading it, that his original was Hebrew (pp. l sq.), M. Lévi makes some interesting suggestions as to the many lacunæ of the Syriac. Certain differences in the character of different parts he explains by supposing that the version is the work of several hands; down to the end of chap. 42 the translation carefully follows the Hebrew; 43:1-10 (which is all S. has of chap. 43) is a piece translated from the Greek;⁵ from chap. 44 onward the translation becomes less faithful; finally the whole has been revised and brought into close agreement with the Greek.

What we have said shows that M. Lévi has made a useful contribution to the critical study of Ecclesiasticus. His defense of the readings on the margin is in striking contrast to the depreciatory estimate of Smend, who describes them as *meistens werthlos*. Fraenkel (*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, Vol. XI, 96) takes a medium course, urging that, where the margin gives an older or a rarer word than the word in the text, the latter is an interpretation, while D. H. Müller (*ibid.*, pp. 103 sq.) urges the converse.

Whether Lévi is justified in his estimate of the Hebrew of Ben Sira is doubtful. He seems to exaggerate, being, perhaps, tempted to do so by his theory of the deviations of the Greek.

Having said so much of the first part of Lévi's work, we have little room to deal with the second. This is naturally much more technical. The text and commentary are a careful and discriminating piece of work. The text is, as in the case of the *editio*

⁵ So Fraenkel in his review of Cowley-Neubauer in the *Monatsschrift für Gesch. u. Wiss. d. Judenthums*, Vol. 41, 384 (May, 1897), who suggests that the passage (he says vs. 3-10) may have been inserted later to fill up the lacuna. So also Schlatter, p. 5.

princeps, that of the MS.: doubtful letters are overlined; purely conjectural restorations of lacunæ are in brackets; proposed emendations are reserved for the notes. The purpose of the author differs, therefore, fundamentally from that of Halévy, who describes his object as being to restore the Hebrew “sous la forme qu’il devait revêtir à l’époque où il servit de base aux versions grecque et syriaque.” There is room for all workers. The great agreement between the texts of the *editio princeps*, of Smend, and of Lévi gives confidence that a strong foundation is being laid on which to rest such hypothetical constructions as Halévy’s. On the other hand, the fact that the Oxford editors have accepted some of Smend’s readings in place of their own, and have admitted the uncertainty of others of those challenged by him, shows the positive gain of such laborious work. M. Lévi frankly discusses suggestions of other scholars when they appear to him to merit such attention, and his notes are useful for a study of the versions, though they hardly lend themselves easily to a general account. The author’s critical judgments will be valuable, even where they are not accepted. We have already had occasion to refer to the brief introductions to the different sections. They show careful work. On p. 62, however, as we may note in closing, there seems to be a lack of clearness of view in the representation that “néologismes” abound in chap. 43, and that, therefore, the Greek translator has gone astray. Has not M. Lévi told us that it is the “néologismes” that the translator understood best? Or does he mean a different translator?

The printing of the volume is accurate—such misprints as we have noted being rarely of a kind to mislead anyone—and the type is clear.

We shall welcome with interest the second half of M. Lévi’s work. Meanwhile all who are interested in the subject, as any real student of the Old Testament must be, are eagerly awaiting the appearance of the late Cambridge fragments—detached pieces of earlier chapters of the book⁶—the text of which is, we believe, now in type.

Mention may, perhaps not inappropriately, be made here of an interesting fact to which my friend Dr. Neubauer has very kindly

⁶The leaf immediately following the fragments discovered in 1896 was published by Dr. Schechter in the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. X, 197 sq. (1898). It contains Ecclus. 49:12—50:22.

called my attention. From a passage in Harkavy's edition of "Responen der Geonim, zumeist aus dem X.-XI. Jahrhundert" (*Studien und Mittheilungen aus der Kaiserlichen Oeffentlichen Bibliothek zu St. Petersburg: Vierter Theil, Erstes Heft*, p. 145, l. 13) it appears that, in the tenth–eleventh century, of several works entitled דברי מוסר, there was one known as דברי מוסר בן סירא. This may, accordingly, be the real Hebrew title of the work.⁷

⁷ Cf. the remark in Cowley-Neubauer, p. ix, note 4.