A LESSON IN TEXTUAL CRITICISM AS LEARNED FROM A COMPARISON OF AKKADIAN AND HEBREW TEXTUAL VARIANTS

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Cuneiform texts provide us with the rare advantage of vowel representation which in duplicate texts renders significant information on textual criticism. Moreover the cuneiform duplicates frequently come from the same period in which the text originated, perhaps from the same hands. Multiplied generations of copyists and families of MSS are not a part of the picture. Sennacerib's Annals, for example, confront us with variants which throw an interesting light on O.T. textual criticism. I propose to introduce the results of a cataloging of the types of variants used in the duplicate accounts of Sennacerib's campaigns. Not every variant but a sampling of the types will be compared with the variants in that most significant piece of parallel literature in the O.T., Psalm 18 and II Sam. 22. Free use was made of Luckenbill's critical apparatus in his book, *The Annals of Sennacerib*, and abbreviations for the duplicates follow his system. Also constant reference was made to Cross and Freedman's article, "A Royal Song of Thanksgiving, "II Sam. 22—Psalm 18," Vol. 72, JBL. Hereinafter S stands for II Sam. 22 and P for Psalm 18.

A common variant in the resensions of Sennacerib's Annals are those of the graphic type where the cuneiform orthography allowed for words to be written differently but pronounced the same.

Graphic Variants (H_2 = Oriental Inst. Prism, etc. See Luckenbill)
1. Choice of signs with the same phonetic value. H_2 1:17
   The text H_1 has šu whereas text H_2 has šú, while in a nearby line H_1 has šu where H_2 uses šú. Hence the complete arbitrariness of such graphic variants where one cannot even assume that a scribe had a preference in his use of a given sign. This is by far the most common type of variant in these texts.
2. Use of determinatives. H_2 1:10
   H_2 has ᶜḪar-sag-kalam-ma
   H_1 omits "city determinative" and adds "the post determinative ᵏⁱ, to indicate place.
3. Choice of logograms in proper names. H_2 1:20
   H_2 has ᵐᵈMarduk (ŠIT)—apla (A)—iddina
   H_1 and E ᵐᵈMarduk (AMAR-UD)—apla (TUR-UŠ)—iddina
4. Logogram vs. syllabic writing. H_2 1:52
   H_2 has și-e-ni
   E_1 șêni ᶜᵒˡ
5. Choice of phonetic compliment. H_2 1:1
   H_2 has šarru rabû (ú)
   H_1 & E_1 omit (ú)

6. Abbreviated writing. H_2 IV:24

H_2 has ummânâte ^{col}

E_1 col is written A for ḪI-A

Exact compliments obviously could not appear in the O.T. alphabetic text but a closely related phenomenon is homophony where *spelling differs* put pronunciation pecularities render the words the same or similar.

Graphic-Auditory Variants

1. Case-endings were not pronounced in Sennacerib's time or at least confused and therefore are written or left out depending on the knowledge of the scribe in his attempt to conform to earlier writing.

   H_2 III:15 Ur-sa-li-im-mu (not pronounced)

   E_1 and H_1e Ur-sa-li-im-ma

   This case should be genitive following "ul-tu ki-rib"

2. Use of half-vowels at the end of words (like Hebrew use of vocal shewa) allowed for variation of final vowels.

   H_2 V:9 šal-gi

   H_1 šal-gu (perhaps pronounced salg.)

3. Confusion of final syllables in verbs.

   H_2 1:77 la i-šú-u

   H_1 la i-šú-i

   A vacillation between singular and plural or perhaps due to a peculiar pronunciation of this vowel.

4. The use of long vowels and double consonants. The orthography allows for long vowels to be written short and double consonants to be written single but not vice-versa.

   H_2 II:81 ri-ṣu-su-un

   H_1 ri-ṣu-us-su-un

5. The interchange of the i and e vowels which are nonphonemic in Akkadian.

   H_2 1:26 ú-maš-ši-ru

   H_1 ú-maš-še-ru

6. Non-significant variants due to the choice of sign-type offered by the syllabic writing.

   CVC for Cv-vC H_2 1:38 sal-la-sun

              H_1 and E_1 sal-la-su-un

   CvC for Cv-Cv H_2 IV:3 na-ad-bak

              E_1 na-ad-ba-ki (final vowel not pronounced)

A purely auditory variant in the Biblical text is somewhat the reverse of the above. The well known Ketib vs. Qere where pronunciation varies as in vs. 15 where P has wayᵉhummem but S has the variant tradition in pointing wayyahomm. Or as in II Sam. 22:51 the Qere reads migdol (a tower) the Ketib is mgdyl which agrees with Ps. 18:51 magdil.

A closer correspondence with cuneiform arises from the use of the matres lectionis in the Psalm resensions. Final vowels began to be indicated by the matres lectionis after the 10th century B.C. But the real variants appear as a result of the contraction of medial diphthongs which took place in the Israelite (northern) dialect in 9th and 8th centuries but was preserved in Judahite until the Exile. This means the waws and yodhs representing diphthongs are missing in northern texts. II Sam. 22 is thus defectively written while Psalm 18 preserves the diphthong which was treated as a mater lectionis after the Exile. Both texts then would be read the same after the Exile though differently written.[1]

For example, medial diphthong aw becomes ō

Ps. 18:6 mōwksēy = II Sam. 22:6 mōksēy

Ps. 18:19 wayyōwsiyʾēniy = II Sam. 22:20 wayyōsēʾ

Another variant of the homophonous class is found in vs. 30 where P has bᵉkā and S has bᵉkāh. Kahle in *The Cairo Geniza* gives evidence to show final vowels like this were not commonly pronounced but that later the Massoretes from their studies came to understand the older grammatical form and thus supplied the vowel as in P (bᵉkā). Both the Palestinian pointing found in *Cairo Geniza* and the transliteration into Greek of the Second Column of Origin's Hexapla show the final "a" vowel here and in 2 ms perfect and 3 fs suffix pronoun were not pronounced. This variant then is created by an orthographic-auditory peculiarity. This was originally written bkh but pronounced bak and therefore written bk in Ps. 18:30. The Lachish Letters being in common as against grammatical speech also follows the short form.[2]

A most interesting variant of this type is represented in the strange spellings of two verbs in II Sam. 22:27 tittābār stands for the simpler form titbārār in P; and tittappāl stands for titpattāl in P. The most satisfactory explanation is that the spellings in S represents either popular speech or a particular dialect while the P is a strictly grammatical spelling. Once again the variant is created by the auditory-graphic problem; the word as spoken and heard over against the proper spelling.[3]

Another host of variants in Sennacerib comes from the use of mimmation which again was not pronounced.

H_2 II:47 ᵐTu-baʾ-lum

H_1 and E_1 ᵐTu-ba-ʾ-lu

Enclitic mem (not pronounced) appears to be present in Ps. 18:16 where S has ʾᵃpikēy yām but P has ʾᵃpikēy (ma)yim.[4] In pronunciation these need not be variants at all. However, this does not cancel out their significance to the textual critic for it shows scribes either memorized or read off these texts to each other. Such definitely was the case in Ugarit:

Text 62:54, 55   spr.il.mlk.sbny   The scribe is 'Il-Mlk the Sbnite

                 lmd.atn.prln   The instructor (dictator) is Atn-Prln.

Finally in the Sennacerib texts, a passage (such as H_2 II:23) confronts us with a number of types of variants.

H_2 Ma-da-ai ru-ku-te
Hla Mad-a ru-ku-te
H_1 Ma-da-ai ru-ku-ti
E_1 Ma-da-ai ru-ku-u-ti

All four texts differ yet every variant is of a non-significant graphic nature. From the same pronunciation each scribe chose his own legitimate spelling. This could not be the case if the scribe's eye were following individual signs.

Other types of cuneiform variants like those, for example, of a grammatical nature may be either simple homophony or a true variation written and pronounced.

1. Classical genitive vs. late genitive (this again is purely graphic).
   H_2 i-na ûme (me)
   H_1 i-na u-um

2. Use of the ventive (not pronounced therefore graphic).
   H_2 IV:5 aš-tah-id
   E_1 aš-tah-hi-d (am)

3. Plural vs. singular pronoun suffix (changing the pronunciation).
   H_2 III:37 ú-kin și-ru-uš-šu
   E_1 u-kin și-ru-uš-šu-un
   cf. Ps. 18:15 hișșāyw = II Sam. 22 hișșiym
       Ps. 18:16)appekā = II Sam. 22)appōw

4. Compound preposition vs. simple preposition (changing the pronunciation).
   H_2 II:31 ina ^{am}šu-ut-rēši-ia
   H_1 and E_1 ina kata^{da} ^{am}šu-ut-rēši-ia

Corruptions (errors) versus the true variant. Genuine corruptions are few in Sennacerib and the Psalm. Examples in the cuneiform.

1. H_2 1:36 75 alani
   H_1 76 alani   Slight clerical error

2. H_2 VI:1 ú-pal-lik-šu-nu-ti ma
   H_1 ú-pal-šu-nu-ti-ma   Omission of lik
   cf. Ps. 18:11 wayyēde) = II Sam. 22:11 wayyēre).

   II Sam. "and he was seen upon the wings of the wind" does not do justice to the context and simplifies a known but rarer word which completes the parallelism.
   Ps. 18:12 hеškat mayim (dark waters) = II Sam. 22:12
   hašrat mayim (sieve-of-water = rain cloud)
   S is clearly the better more difficult reading with Ugaritic support (htr = sieve).

3. Ps. 18:43)ariykem =)adikkem

)adikkēm is obviously the correct reading here. Cross and Freedman suggest that there are three variant readings, the third being)erkā(ēm (I spread) and that two of them are corruptions, the latter entering the picture as a correction of the admittedly wrong)ariykēm.[5] This seems doubtful since repeated verbal synonyms are a common practice in Ugaritic this may be an arbitrary variant, not a correction at all. Such arbitrary variants are found in all ancient duplicate texts. Many variants appear which cannot be explained as graphic or auditory and yet should not be explained as corruptions. Dittography and haplography have been overworked especially where entire words are involved. The annals did not have a long history of manuscript copying and yet the variants are similar to those in Ps. 18 and II Sam. 22.

For example:
1. Variants due to transposition.
   H_2 III:19 46 alāni^{pl}-šu dan-nu-ti bit dûrāni^{pl}
   E_1 46 alāni^{pl}-šu bit-dûrāni^{pl}(ni) dan-nu-ti

2. Choice of synonyms
   H_2 IV:29 na-gi-šu
   E_1 li-me-ti-šu
   cf. Ps. 18:1 yad = II Sam. kap
       Ps. 18:7)^{a}šawwēa(= II Sam.)ekrā)

3. Omission of words
   H_2 L:60 si-hir-ti ali
   H_1 omits si-hir-ti

4. Optional cliche
   E_1 at one point may be translated, "people, cattle, sheep, asses I carried away, I destroyed, etc.
   H_2 IV:29 reads, "people, asses, cattle and sheep I carried away from them as spoil, I destroyed, etc.

5. Optional formulae
   At the equivalent to H_2 III:65, Hla adds two lines identical to lines 59 and 60 of the Rassam Cylinder. These lines are a very general reference to additional booty with the statement that it was divided among the army. Delitzsch shows a similar variant at the end of campaign III which follows two other lines in Rassam (56 and 57). We may conclude that optional formulae reflecting customary procedures could be added or omitted at the discretion of the scribe.

Not all groups of texts pose the same problems. Variants in Nebuchadnezzar's building inscriptions indicate that this king put out editions of these texts much like the Pharaohs issued commemorative scarabs. In these the scribes were free to choose certain standardized formulas from an accepted repertoire.

6. Optional formulae in the Psalms.

Verses 2-4 of the Royal Thanksgiving Psalm seem to have received some such treatment. Cross and Freedman suggest a conflation of two early versions (one in 2nd person, the other in the 3rd). Their reference to Psalm 144:2 as a possible third version confirms the idea that such a stanza was made up of from standard phraseology.[6] My main departure from Cross and Freedman is that they speak of an attempt at restoring the more original texts. The authors were at liberty to choose their own variations from a well-known repertoire of accepted epithets of God. There is no question that all three passages represent the same poetic expression but each has a lengthy variation.

Scribal freedom between the Phoenician versions of the Karatepe Inscriptions has been noted. (G. D. Young, *Oudtestamentische Studien* VIII, p. 298) The Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa) substitutes ṭôb for šalōm without any change in sense (Isa. 45:7). S. Segert in his article on the Habbakuk Scroll in *Archiv Orientalni* XXI, 1953, lists variants which can only witness to non-Massoretic text behind some of the Scroll material. Typical is the use of the prep ʾel for ʿal which are quite normally interchangeable in O.T. Hebrew.

Some of these could arise from memorization or dictation. Others like the choice of stems where the meaning is not affected, the transposition of word order, or for example mēʿim for mēʾēt points to freedom of expression as found in cuneiform texts. None of this was done to change the meaning but simply because no one felt these alternatives were significantly different.

The modern "vorlage" assumption that there was only one authentic letter for letter archetype of each text and that everything which deviated from it was in error must be questioned. Obviously there are two authentic versions of Psalm 18. As the O.T. Text was brought up-to-date by men of the caliber of Ezra, certainly more than one authoritative text resulted. Yet even scholars like Cross and Freedman speak of a master-copy and assume all deviations are corruptions. They see in II Sam. 22:7 a triple haplography (footnote 13).

S. wešawʿatiy beʾāzhāyw   P. wešawʿatiy lepanāyw
                                                  tābōwʾ beʾāznāyw

They assume that tābōwʾ was in II Sam. and was completely lost being absorbed in the final t of šawʿatiy and the bʾ of beʾāznāyw. It is much simpler to take this as a variant by one who was not bound to a word for word vorlage. The second colon "My cry (was) in his ears" is a perfectly acceptable nominal sentence. The psalm version also added lepanayw which is not accounted for by the haplography.

· Was there not an original master-copy of Ps. 18—II Sam. 22? Certainly there was an original but it did not remain the only authoritative copy since we have two of them. We are not saying here that there were not originals but simply that in the practice of textual criticism we

should keep open the possibility of more than one authoritative version since both Biblical evidence and common scribal practice in Old Testament times lean in this direction. Hence we need not pit the LXX against the MT where a non-contradictory variant appears for each may go back to an authentic original.

That canon of textual criticism which assumes an archetype to which the scribe was bound in letter for letter faithfulness must explain all variations as scribal errors. It is here proposed that a limited freedom was the rule. It is of added interest to note that the temple school of Nippur practiced principles of transcription which support our thesis. In Edward Chiera's work on personal names from the temple school of Nippur, he points out that all the translations from Sumerian into Akkadian show considerable freedom. In these texts where three items of similar meaning follow each other the scribe simply translates the first and says of the other two "ša-a-na" (meaning "another way of expressing it"). The scribe also uses the term ḫi-pu-u (destroyed) which may mean "omitted" when he wants to omit a number of names. Chiera says, "Parallel texts do not show any gaps and include the names which the scribe here describes as destroyed. Moreover, they are the work of pupils, whom we may not expect to be skilled in deciphering an old text as the scribe who so beautifully copied this tablet (no. 7). Are we to suppose that the original text was no longer accessible to this scribe, and that he had to content himself with a poor or damaged student's copy?" Further on Chiera states, "Judging from all these variants, I believe that the text which the scribe of number 7 had before him was on the whole as good as that which the students used. If the scribe omitted here some of the names this was probably due to an error of judgement. He wanted his copy to include only such names as were well written and therefore absolutely correct. The students, on the other hand, who cared very little for the possible errors of their copies, unconsciously adopted the best method, and copied everything which they saw on their model."[7]

Professor Chiera's problem solves itself when we look upon it with the realization that the students were not advanced enough to be free from slavish literalism, while only the learned scribe who produced the text in question knew enough to practice the accepted canon of freer transcription. The O.T. scribes like Ezra copied with such freedom but the less knowledgable Massoretes of the Middle Ages were like the young students. We can therefore be thankful that under the providence of God the Massoretes were addicted to letter accuracy.

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FOOTNOTES
1. Cross and Freedman comment on this in their introductory remarks in JBL 72, pp. 15, 16.
2. ibid., p. 29, ftnt. 66.
3. ibid., p. 29, ftnt. 61.
4. ibid., p. 26, ftnt. 41.
5. ibid., p. 32, ftnt. 95.
6. ibid., p. 21, ftnt. 2.
7. Un. Mus. Pub. of Baby. Sec. Vol. XI, No. 1 *A Syll, of Personal Names* by Edward Chiera, Philadelphia 1916.