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DAVID LEE PHILLIPS, *The Samaritan Version of the Book of Numbers with Hebrew Variants: A Close Textual Study*. Lewiston, NY; Lampeter, UK: Edwin Mellen Press, 2014. XV + 302 pp. ISBN 978–0–7734–4317–4. USD 179,95.

The present study claims to have two goals: 1) "to determine the autograph Hebrew letters for each word, the grammar of its pronunciation, and the end of each sentence"; and 2) "to express ancient Hebrew in modern English" (I). Of the two goals, only the second can be achieved with any kind of certainty; the first presents an impossibility or at least a general uncertainty, and the difficulties associated with it are barely reflected in Phillips' monograph. Even the most optimistic biblical scholar would hardly claim to reconstruct "the autograph," *i.e.*, the very first edition of a biblical book, going back to its initial author. Nonetheless, Phillips seeks to undertake such a reconstruction on the basis of the Samaritan text presented in the critical editions. Beyond this, he translates his presumed "autograph" and marks distinctions between the various witnesses (primarily LXX and MT). In general, this study presents a flawed methodology and contains many inaccuracies, which certainly advise against purchasing the volume at its overwhelming cover price of USD179,95 (according to the publisher's website). To clarify this position, this review will exemplarily discuss several problems with the volume.

The book opens with a confusing series of introductions containing significant speculation and even substantial errors. To this first category, one can assign the dating of the pre-Samaritan textual tradition identified in Qumran manuscripts: the Samaritan passages in 4Q22 and 4Q27 were "from a copying tradition going back to the beginning of the monotheistic ... Temple of Jerusalem in the 6th century BCE under the Persian regime of Darius I" (II). Such an assertion demonstrates that Phillips evaluates the transmission of texts over time as most stable and that he does not distinguish between elements that can be viewed as "pre-Samaritan" and elements that must be rec-

ognized as Samaritan. In general, he seems to believe that the manuscript 4Q27 essentially presented a text identical to the medieval Samaritan manuscripts used as the basis for the critical editions such as von Gall¹ or Tal² (an example of this will be discussed below).

To the second category, substantial errors, one can ascribe such drastic failings: “The speeches of Yahweh [attested in Numbers] are in the same Hebrew language as Mesha [*i.e.*, the Mesha inscription]” (III). The Mesha inscription was composed in Moabite, which—while certainly related to Hebrew—remains distinct from Hebrew and certainly distinct from the Hebrew found in the Bible. Beyond the errant linguistic attribution, one finds significant historical errors: “By the end of the Iron II period all speakers of Hebrew dialects [here, he is referring to the peoples of Moab, Ammon, Samaria, Judah, and Edom—JMR] were paying tribute to the Assyrian empire” (III). He removed the Babylonians from the equation, or at least failed to distinguish them from the Assyrians, an error that recurs throughout the volume; cf. his subsuming the “Chaldean Period” within the Assyrian period in his “Chronology” (287–288).

Yet the errors and curiosities do not end there. “Moses has a Cushite wife... The Cushite kingdom of Egypt parallels the historical period for the writing of the Five Books [of Moses]... Moses is said to marry a Cushite woman during these decades, which is the time of the writing of the autograph” (IV). It remains unexplained how Phillips arrived at this speculation and to what degree the mention of Moses’ having a Cushite wife fulfills the demands of dating the original version of the book to the eighth century BCE, particularly as Phillips does not indicate the need to relate this event to the reigning Egyptian dynasty. Does he suppose that Egypt ruled Palestine at this time? Or does he conceive of Judean or Israelite scribes composing this in Egypt? Such questions remain entirely unanswered and lacking critical reflection.

His understanding of textual authority remains unclarified: “The apparatus of BHS is authoritative if partial” (VII). One wonders, to what degree—if any—can one speak of a critical edition as “authoritative”, and for whom? These questions remain unaddressed. Finally, many of the explanations raise more questions than they answer, such as “A Strong’s reference is an MT copying mistake which has turned into a dictionary entry” (XV), a statement which makes no sense, regardless of its context.

¹ von Gall 1916.

² Tal 1994.

Turning to the primary portion of the book, the odd-numbered pages present a translation of the Samaritan text, distinguishing cases where the Samaritan text varies from all other witnesses or agrees with another witness or witnesses. In these cases, the other witnesses addressed are MT, LXX, and Qumran manuscripts. The overwhelming majority of differences are orthographic in nature, unsurprising to anyone familiar with the Samaritan Pentateuch. The even-numbered pages proffer explanations of forms and the manuscripts reflected, describe the differences between the witnesses, and sometimes offer reasons for the particular translation chosen or other pertinent or even impertinent data.

To address some of the problems in the main portion of the book, it seems most appropriate to consider a more extensive passage, using it as an example for the rest. In this case, Numbers 22–24 presents an appropriate example of the standards of the monograph, in that the Samaritan text of Numbers 22–24 contains several significant departures from MT or LXX, while often supporting one reading against the other. One encounters several errors and unclear matters in Phillips' treatment of Numbers 22–24. Considering the translation first, one notes that Phillips translates the Hebrew הנהר in Num 22:5 with "Euphrates" without comment (125), which is certainly a possibility, but not the apparent meaning for the simple noun "the river." In Num 22:28, he inappropriately translates the phrase "and the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey" (attested in all witnesses) with "Yahweh changed the nature of the donkey" without further explication (129); the same could be said for his translation of 22:31 ("Yahweh changed the eyes of Balaam"; 129). Generally imprecise, Phillips sometimes lacks the article where it is attested in the Hebrew of the Samaritan Pentateuch (*e.g.*, 24:1) and even changes the antecedent of pronouns without explanation. For example, Phillips translates 24:2 "and the spirit of God was on them", using an English plural to reflect the Hebrew singular for "him" or "it"; this changes the apparent meaning from God's spirit being on Balaam to God's spirit being on Israel, a substantial interpretive—probably even eisegetical—judgment requiring an understanding reflecting an unmarked change of subject. In 24:14 Phillips uses the singular "day" in the phrase "at the end of the day," while the Hebrew presents an obviously plural noun, "in the last / later days", again without explanation. In 24:24 he translates incorrectly, stating that "God will come forth," when the Samaritan text—should one choose to divide it syntactically with Phillips—must be translated "God will bring them", *i.e.*, a Hiphil instead of a Qal. While some

of these translations may be justified in English usage (particularly regarding the use of the article), it remains conspicuous that no explanation is ever offered for even significant departures from the Hebrew. Some of them appear simply to attest errors. These examples could be readily multiplied.

While the marking of variants in the English translation could seem like a helpful aid, Phillips carries it out with marked imprecision. For example, he has underscored the verb “found” in Num 23:4 and formatted it in small capitals, meaning it is attested in both Qumran and the Samaritan Pentateuch (131). However, this form has only been *reconstructed* in the Qumran editions on the basis of the pre-Samaritan character of the text; it is not actually attested at Qumran. Precisely this problem turns up again in 24:8 (139); the cited Qumran text presents a reconstructed text within a lacuna and not the actual text found in 4QNum^b. Thus, rather than help the scholar, these distinguishing markings mandate additional work: the scholar engaging with Phillips’ translation cannot always trust it and is thus forced to consult the editions anyway. It would be simpler to just consult the editions in the first place and avoid Phillips’ book.

Turning to the material offered on the even-numbered pages (left-hand pages in the monograph), one finds explanations of terms (“the plains of Moab”; 122), reference to an extrabiblical source (the inscriptions from Tell Deir ‘Alla; 124), quotes from the secondary literature (Wevers,³ Ben-Hayyim;⁴ 124), quotes from other English Bible translation (NETS; 124; Budd’s commentary;⁵ 128; KJV; 134; NRSV; 136), and a variety of other disparate material, often organized without rhyme or reason. For example, without explanation, Phillips begins a graphic presentation of the themes of Numbers on page 132 (“Ideal Tribes, Levites, Gender Inequality, Trek in the Wilderness, Balaam the Prophet). The previous datum was a quote from Ben-Hayyim’s aforementioned grammar (130). Following the main themes, Phillips presents an overview of the contents of Numbers (132, 134), upon which follows a quote from Tyndale’s translation and the translation of the KJV. Why these elements were incorporated here remains entirely mysterious. The same could be said of his “Glossary vis-à-vis Offerings” found on page 140, in a context that has nothing to do with offerings; the apposed translation consists of Num 24:13–21. In general the data offered on the even-numbered pages is often unclear or irrelevant, sometimes even incorrect.

³ Wevers 1998.

⁴ Ben-Hayyim 2000.

⁵ Budd 1984.

Following the translation and explication, Phillips offers three appendices: L (readings of Smr also attested in Greek); M (readings of Smr also found in Masoretic manuscripts); and U (readings of Smr unattested elsewhere). Again, many of these differences are orthographic in nature or attest variant readings of names. Thereupon follows Phillips' chronological overview, which is structured into unclear periods: from 3500 BCE to the fall of Samaria in 722 BCE; the establishment of Samaria as a province to the end of the Cushite Dynasty in Egypt; the beginning of the 26th Dynasty in Egypt to the fall of Babylon to Cyrus in 540 BCE [sic!], in which it is spuriously noted "All Semitic people speak Aramaic dialects"; Persian Jerusalem, Ptolemaic Jerusalem; Seleucid Jerusalem; Rabbinic Judaism's beginning, Judas Maccabee and Hellenized Jerusalem (ending with the Battle of Actium); the Herodian Period; and Imperial Roman Jerusalem + Byzantine Jerusalem + Islamic Jerusalem (including the death of Muhammad in 632, apparently in Jerusalem?) ending in roughly 1300 with the delineation of chapters in the Bible in Paris. As the overview shows, particularly the beginning and end of the chronology demonstrate exceptional imprecision. The combining of imperial Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic Jerusalem is curious, as is the complete absence of the Babylonian period. Phillips identifies the year 586 BCE as the end of Hebrew polytheism without explaining the origin of this datum or how he can be so certain of this detail; other textual and archeological evidence could suggest otherwise.⁶ The monograph presents a bibliography that is missing some fundamental literature for this topic, such as the third edition (or even the second edition, for that matter) of Emanuel Tov's *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*,⁷ Gary N. Knoppers' *Jews and Samaritans*,⁸ any of the works of Stefan Schorch,⁹ and the most recent edition of the Samaritan Pentateuch from Tal and Florentine.¹⁰ Additionally problematic, he references barely any literature from the past 15 years. Finally, the book concludes with an index that includes authors, subjects, and manuscripts under one rubric.

In sum, this monograph represents an incomplete attempt to cover the subject matter and does not really advance scholarship beyond the material upon which it relies. The author fails to appreciate the nuanced and difficult text-historical background of the various traditions behind his translation. Even the

⁶ Cf., e.g., Kratz 2013.

⁷ Tov 2012

⁸ Knoppers 2013

⁹ E.g., Schorch 2000.

proffered translation of the Samaritan Pentateuch lacks precision and cannot be regarded as trustworthy. Exegetes and scholars would be better served simply consulting the available critical editions of the various versions and the normal commentary literature. The suggested price for the volume exceeds by far what scholars or libraries should be willing to pay for it. Ultimately, no need for this book in any academic or private library presents itself.

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¹⁰ Tal and Florentine 2010.