

The Dead Sea Scrolls in Scholarly Perspective: A History of Research

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“REWRITTEN BIBLE” IN NORTH AMERICAN SCHOLARSHIP

SIDNIE WHITE CRAWFORD

The subject of “Rewritten Bible” or, better, “Rewritten Scripture,” has been part of North American Qumran scholarship since the late 1970s.¹ Publications on the subject have approached the question from different angles, either keeping the relatively narrow focus of Geza Vermes’s original definition,² or embracing a much broader definition that included many more Second Temple Jewish works. For the latter position, the work of George Nickelsburg and Daniel Harrington stand out. Nickelsburg, in “The Bible Rewritten and Expanded,” discusses “literature that is very closely related to the biblical texts, expanding and paraphrasing them and implicitly commenting on them.”³ He thus includes under his rubric works such as *I Enoch* and the *Book of Giants* and the *Apocalypse of Moses*, as well as *Jubilees* and the *Genesis Apocryphon*. Daniel Harrington likewise expands Vermes’s definition to include such works as the *Paralipomena of Jeremiah* and the *Life of Adam and Eve / Apocalypse of Moses*.⁴

In recent years American scholars have favored a more narrow definition of the term Rewritten Bible/Scriptures. Moshe Bernstein began this trend with articles beginning in 1979.⁵ His interest in the subject grew out of his training in rabbinic midrash, and led him to wrestle with questions of both genre and purpose. Bernstein wishes to retain Vermes’s genre definition, but with modifications, broadening it to include legal as well as narrative

¹ For a discussion of the more appropriate nomenclature “Rewritten Scripture,” see Sidnie White Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 6-9.

² See Geza Vermes, *Scripture and tradition in Judaism: Haggadic studies* (StPB 4; Leiden: Brill, 1983; 2d rev. ed.).

³ George W. E. Nickelsburg, “The Bible Rewritten and Expanded,” in Michael E. Stone, ed., *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (CRINT 2; Assen-Philadelphia: Van Gorcum-Fortress, 1984), 89.

⁴ Daniel J. Harrington, “The Bible Rewritten (Narratives),” in Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg, eds., *Early Judaism and its Modern Interpreters* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 239-47. Harrington is uncomfortable with using “Rewritten Bible” as a genre designation, stating “it seems better to view rewriting the Bible as a kind of activity or process than to see it as a distinctive literary genre of Palestinian Judaism...” (243).

⁵ Moshe J. Bernstein, “Midrash Halakah at Qumran? 11QTemple 64:6-13 and Deuteronomy 21:22-23,” *Gesher* 7 (1979): 21-31.

texts. He states, "My own preference, it should be clear, is for a Vermes-like narrowness in the employment of the term, demanding comprehensive or broad scope rewriting of narrative and/or legal material woven into the fabric implicitly."⁶ Thus, Bernstein would, unlike Vermes, include the *Temple Scroll* in the category, but exclude works like *1 Enoch* or the *Life of Adam and Eve*.

Sidnie White Crawford, a younger contemporary of Bernstein's, began publishing in the area of Rewritten Scripture with the critical edition of the 4QReworked Pentateuch manuscripts (4Q364-4Q367) in 1995.⁷ The *Reworked Pentateuch* manuscripts, as their name implies, are manuscripts containing all or parts of the Pentateuch, expanded and reworked in various ways. Their early history had an impact on the entire discussion of what constitutes a Rewritten Scripture manuscript. When these cave 4 manuscripts were first identified, they were assigned to Frank Cross as "biblical" manuscripts. After examining them, Cross turned them over to John Strugnell as "nonbiblical."⁸ When Crawford and Tov first published the manuscripts, they spoke in terms of a single "author" of a "composition," who extensively altered a "biblical base text."⁹ However, further study of the manuscripts led some scholars, notably Eugene Ulrich, to argue that 4QReworked Pentateuch was actually simply a collection of expanded Pentateuch texts, which should have retained their "biblical" label.¹⁰ Crawford has moved much closer to this position in recent years, stating, "we can say with almost complete certainty that 4Q364 and 4Q365 were meant by the scribes who prepared them to be read as regular pentateuchal texts." However, she cautions that their acceptance as scriptural texts is still uncertain.¹¹

⁶ Moshe J. Bernstein, "Rewritten Bible': A Generic Category which has Outlived its Usefulness?" *Textus* 22 (2005): 169-96 (195).

⁷ Emanuel Tov and Sidnie White, "Reworked Pentateuch," in Harold Attridge et al., *Qumran Cave 4. VIII: Parabiblical Texts, Part 1* (DJD XIII; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 187-352.

⁸ John Strugnell, oral communication.

⁹ See, e.g., Emanuel Tov, "The Textual Status of 4Q364-367 (4QPP)," in Trebelle Barrera and Vegas Montaner, *The Madrid Qumran Congress*, 43-82, and Sidnie A. White, "4Q364 & 365: A Preliminary Report," 217-28 in the same volume.

¹⁰ Eugene C. Ulrich, "The Qumran Scrolls and the Biblical Text," in Schiffman, Tov and VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years*, 51-59.

¹¹ Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times*, 56-57. Tov has also changed his mind, accepting the 4QRP manuscripts as regular biblical manuscripts. Emanuel Tov, "Reflections on the Many Forms of Hebrew Scripture in Light of the LXX and 4QReworked Pentateuch," in Armin Lange, Matthias Weigold and József Zsengellér, eds., *From Qumran to Aleppo: A Discussion with Emanuel Tov about the Textual History of Jewish Scriptures in Honor of His 65th Birthday* (FRLANT 230; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 11-28.

Crawford has written more broadly on the phenomenon of Rewritten Scripture in the Second Temple period, concentrating on the Pentateuchal texts. In agreement with Bernstein, she favors a narrower definition of what constitutes a Rewritten Scripture text: “These Rewritten Scriptures constitute a category or group of texts which are characterized by a close adherence to a recognizable and already authoritative base text (narrative or legal) and a recognizable degree of scribal intervention into that base text for the purpose of exegesis.”¹² She sets those works that fall under that definition along a spectrum, beginning with the existing base text, and moving further away until recognizably new compositions are created (e.g. *Jubilees*, the *Temple Scroll*, and the *Genesis Apocryphon*). She also makes a sharp distinction between Rewritten Scripture texts and “parabiblical” texts, which “use a passage, event, or character from a scriptural work as a ‘jumping off’ point to create a new narrative or work,” such as *1 Enoch* or *Joseph and Asenath*.¹³

In the past decade several younger American scholars have furthered the work begun by the earlier generations. Daniel Falk has explored the methods that scribes/editors/authors used to extend (Falk’s term) scriptural traditions in the Second Temple period.¹⁴ Falk recognizes that the sharp boundaries scholars such as Cross and Strugnell originally drew between what was “biblical” and what was “nonbiblical” are no longer tenable, and it is difficult finally to be absolutely certain as to a particular work’s scriptural status in this period.¹⁵ However, he recognizes that there was at this time a “Scripture consciousness” which affected the way texts were approached by their scribes/editors/authors.¹⁶ He also rejects the term “Rewritten Bible” as a literary genre, preferring to focus on the strategies that were used, and to think of the phenomenon as an activity.¹⁷

Most recently, Molly Zahn has concentrated on questions of exegesis, composition, and textual authority in the major works most frequently cited as belonging to the category “Rewritten Bible”: 4QReworked Pentateuch, *Jubilees*, the *Temple Scroll*, and the *Genesis Apocryphon*.¹⁸ She notes

¹² Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times*, 12.

¹³ Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times*, 14.

¹⁴ Daniel Falk, *The Parabiblical Texts: Strategies for Extending the Scriptures among the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 2-3.

¹⁵ For example, he agrees with Crawford as to the uncertainty of the scriptural status of 4QRP. Falk, *The Parabiblical Texts*, 119.

¹⁶ Falk, *The Parabiblical Texts*, 2.

¹⁷ Falk, *The Parabiblical Texts*, 17. This is similar to Harrington’s “process.”

¹⁸ Molly M. Zahn, *Rethinking Rewritten Scripture: Composition and Exegesis in the 4QReworked Pentateuch Manuscripts* (STDJ 95; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011); “Rewritten Scripture,” in Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2010), 325-6.

that all these texts are characterized by “their steady interaction with the text of scripture,” and common compositional techniques, such as minor additions and alterations, rearrangement, harmonization, addition of new material, and paraphrase.¹⁹ She acknowledges the difficulty of determining the authoritative status of these rewritten texts, and argues for a type of “reader-response” method to uncover the place of these texts in Second Temple Judaism: “In order to advance the discussion, it seems most profitable to abandon the notion of a continuum of reworking and think instead about how exactly readers or hearers construe texts.”²⁰

Several other young North American scholars have become active in this field in the last decade, and their work promises new and different insights in the years to come.²¹

¹⁹ Zahn, “Rewritten Bible,” 329; *Rethinking Rewritten Scripture*, 234-5.

²⁰ Zahn, *Rethinking Rewritten Scripture*, 241.

²¹ Among these are Hindy Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (SJSJ 77: Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), whose work is influenced by contemporary genre theory and discourse analysis, and David Andrew Teeter, *Exegesis in the Transmission of Biblical Law in the Second Temple Period: Preliminary Studies* (Unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2008).