

Published version: ‘The Origins and Emergence of Midrash in Relation to the Hebrew Scriptures’ in *The Midrash. An Encyclopaedia of Biblical Interpretation in Formative Judaism* eds. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), pp. 595-612.

The Origins and Emergence of Midrash in Relation to the Hebrew Bible

Timothy H. Lim
University of Edinburgh

Most scholars would probably agree with a statement like “the origins and emergence of midrash are to be found in the Hebrew Bible”.¹ Ask them to elaborate what they mean by that phrase and they will disagree not only about what is midrash and when the authoritative texts became “the Bible”, but also other points implied in the summary statement, including the distinctiveness of midrashic exegesis and its affinities to late biblical texts and Jewish and Christian interpretations, old and new.

Definition of Midrash and its Origins in the Hebrew Bible

There is no consensus on the definition of midrash. One of the seminal publications in the last century comes from the pen of the French scholar, Renée Bloch who in 1957 described midrash as constituting “a reflection, a meditation on sacred texts, a ‘study’ of scripture”.² Contending against the view that takes midrash pejoratively in the sense of “a fable” or “fictitious legend”, Bloch states that “[i]n reality, it designates an edifying and explicatory genre strictly related to Scripture, in which the portion of amplification is real but secondary and always remains subordinate to the essential, religious end, which is to place full value on the work of God, the Utterance of God.”³

¹ See, for example, I. L. Seeligmann, “Voraussetzungen der Midraschexegese” *Midraschexegese* in *Congress Volume, Copenhagen, 1953. Vetus Testamentum Supplement 1* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953):151, who states that : “Es wird sich—um das vorweg zu nehmen—ergeben, dass sich die älteste Midraschexegese organisch aus der Eigenart der biblischen Literatur entwickelt hat.”

² “Midrash” in *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible. Volume 5 “Kalt-Mycènes”* ed. H. Cazelles. (Paris-IV: Libraire Letouzey et Ané, 1957), col. 1265. English translations are those of the present author.

³ *Ibid*, col. 1263.

Bloch believes that midrash is a genre, like prophecy, that is unique to Israel, outside of which there is no parallel, since it presupposes faith in revelation which is found only in Holy Scripture.⁴ But this definition is not restrictive, since for Bloch “Israel” is understood in a broad sense that includes not only the Israelites of the biblical texts, the Jewish people from the post-exilic period onwards, but also the followers of Jesus and members of the early Church. Quite the contrary, Bloch is to be credited for enlarging the definition of midrash beyond the classical rabbinic texts to include late biblical exegeses, translations, post-biblical Jewish interpretations of the late Second Temple Period and the New Testament Gospels and Epistles.⁵ Subsequent scholarship can be divided along the lines of those who support her extension of the definition of midrash and those who advocate a stricter demarcation of the genre along the lines of the rabbinic midrashim.

Bloch delineates five characteristics of rabbinic midrash: 1) *It takes scripture as the point of departure*—a fundamental characteristic of the genre. 2) *It is homiletic in character*. Those who scrutinize Scripture in this manner are not scholars who work in their rooms; nor is midrash a genre of the school. Its origins are to be found in the liturgical reading of the Torah on sabbaths and during feasts. The Palestinian targum, which is thoroughly midrashic, is not to be conceived independently of the liturgical reading. 3) *It is a study that is attentive to the text*. Since the sacred text is read in the synagogue, it is necessary to comment on it, to preach it, and to try to understand it better. Obscurities are clarified and the sense of the text is grasped by scrutinizing it. Rare or difficult terms are explained by the use of synonyms from a cognate language. The principal process which permits the rabbis to explain scripture

⁴ Ibid, col. 1265: “Il y a donc là un genre propre à Israël, comme le prophétisme....Le midrash ne peut en effet se reconstruire en dehors d’Israël, puisqu’il suppose la foi en la révélation consignée dans les Livres saints.”

⁵See, eg, Roger Le Déaut, “A propos d’une définition du midrash” *Biblica* 50 (1969):399, n. 3.

is the recourse to parallel passages, since for them the Bible is a unity. They knew scripture by heart; they constantly explained the Bible by the Bible. 4) *There is an adaptation to the present*, because the goal of midrashic exegesis is not purely theoretical, but practical. Its aim above all is to bring out the lessons of faith and of the religious life that are hidden in the biblical texts, and this practical preoccupation to reinterpret scripture is to contemporise or “to actualise it” (*l’actualiser*). The tendency to make the message of the biblical texts relevant for contemporary life is not particularly evident in the biblical midrash, since the need for adaptation was not felt in the same way during that time. It is, however, already found in certain apocryphal writings like *Jubilees*, the *Damascus Document* and the *Rule of the Community* and also in the New Testament and the writings of the Church. And 5) *Haggadah and Halakhah* are two types of midrashim which have their origins in the synagogue and schools respectively. The liturgical reading provides the material for the sermon which immediately follows it and comments on the text that is read. Whereas in the schools, which is often beside the synagogue, the same text serves the instruction by commentary and study in order to draw out the rule of life or *halakha*. These two types of midrashim are distinguished by the kind of biblical material that they comment on. The legal portions of the Bible are interpreted by a midrash that can be designated “midrash halakha” or the halakhic interpretation of the Torah. The midrash that uncovers the relevance of the narrative sections of the Torah and their historical events is called “midrash haggadah”.

Having defined rabbinic midrash thus, Bloch goes on to show how the birth of the midrashic process is to be found during the Persian period when the Hebrew Bible was canonized. Through the post-exilic period, the life of Israel was reorganised around the sacred texts which began to be codified into a canon of Holy Scripture.

Between the rebuilding of the Temple during Cyrus's reign and the Maccabean revolt, many other writings were excluded from the canon of the Old Testament as the Pentateuch took its final form, the former prophets were definitively edited, the latter prophets reworked and put in order. Many of the writings date back to this time. She states: "The fixation of the Scripture is of the greatest importance for the genesis of the midrashic genre. Henceforth, there was a 'canonical' text on which one will reflect, with which one will pray, which will become the object of study, of transmission, instruction, and preaching."⁶

The closing of the canon will be discussed below, but it should be noticed at this point that despite Bloch's own articulation of the process as "the fixation of the Scripture", her formulation, especially as regards the writings, shows that she does not hold the view of a closed, tripartite canon. She considers an open ended 'writings' category with many of the texts dating back to this period. It should be noted that this is a very early dating of the closing of the canon and while vital to her understanding of the origins of midrash it is not argued but merely asserted. Bloch concludes her synthesis of midrash by an illustrative examination of selected texts from Ezekiel, Isaiah, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ben Sira, Qohelet, Psalms, the Habakkuk Peshier, Septuagint, and the New Testament.

In two lengthy articles published in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* nine years later, Addison G. Wright criticizes Bloch for being imprecise before advancing his own definition of the literary genre.⁷ His criticisms centre on the way that Bloch's definition of midrash as "a homiletic reflection or meditation on the Bible" becomes very broad when she includes a wide variety of texts under the rubric, including

⁶ "Midrash", col. 1268.

⁷ "The Literary Genre Midrash" (Parts one and two), volume 28 (1966):105-138 and 417-457, later republished as *The Literary Genre of Midrash* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1967).

historical works that gloss Scripture, meditation on history, reuse of sacred texts, anthological style, scriptural reminiscences based on a meditation of scripture, and a development of Old Testament texts.⁸ He notes that Bloch's article has influenced other scholars who now develop one or another aspect of her definition of midrash and apply it to other examples. "The result", states Wright, "is that the word midrash at present is an equivocal term and is being used to describe a mass of disparate material. Indeed, if some of the definitions are correct, large amounts, if not the whole of the Bible, would have to be called midrash. Hence, the word as used currently in biblical studies is approaching the point where it is no longer really meaningful and where some of the material designated as midrash resembles the later rabbinic midrash only in a very superficial way."⁹

What Wright advocates is a definition of midrash as a literary genre and not "a reflection" like Bloch's.¹⁰ Distinguishing between primary (literary structure) and secondary features (exegetical techniques), he suggests that the midrashim are compilations that can be classified into three categories according to their artificial structures: 1) Exegetical Midrashim, expositions that intersperse comments between a series of biblical verses from different books (eg *Bereshit Rabbah* and *Midrash Tehillim*), prefaced with or without an introductory proem. 2) Homiletic Midrashim, sermonic treatises that interpret select passages more extensively. 3) Narrative Midrashim or what Geza Vermes calls "rewritten Bible", a midrash that subsumes the biblical narrative under a well-nigh paraphrase, embellishing all the while extra-biblical material and legends (eg *Sepher ha-Yashar*, *Perke de Eleazar*).¹¹

⁸ "Literary Genre of Midrash", pp. 106-107.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 107-108.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 138.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 124-28.

In the second part of his article, Wright then examines various examples of pre-rabbinic midrash. He classifies as midrash several texts, including the *Passover Haggadah*, the *Pesharim*, *Liber Antiquitatem Biblicarum*, *Genesis Apocryphon*, some homilies of Philo, *Wisdom 11-19*, *Damascus Document 4.12-19*, and *Hebrews 7:1-10*.¹² But he rejects Bloch's suggestion that the Palestinian Targums are midrashim, since the former aim to provide translations with incidental material while the latter homiletic material that happens to have some connection to a biblical text.¹³ Wright also discards the characterization of Chronicles as midrash, since it is "a history and theology of history" independent of the Deuteronomic history.¹⁴

Wright defines midrash in the following way:

We may summarize the discussion to this point by saying that rabbinic midrash is a literature concerned with the Bible; it is a literature about a literature. A midrash is a work that attempts to make a text of scripture understandable, useful, and relevant for a later generation. It is the text of Scripture which is the point of departure, and it is for the sake of the text that the midrash exists. The treatment of any given text may be creative or non-creative, but the literature as a whole is predominantly creative in its handling of the biblical material. The interpretation is accomplished sometimes by rewriting the biblical material, sometimes by commenting upon it. In either case the midrash may go as far afield as it wishes, provided that at some stage at least there is to be found some connection, implicit or explicit, between the biblical text and the new midrashic composition.¹⁵

But this definition is similar to the one already offered by Bloch. As correctly pointed out by Le Déaut, the fundamental characteristics of midrash specified by Bloch are also to be found here, namely the use of scripture as a point of departure and the adaptation of the biblical text to the contemporary situation by "actualisation".¹⁶

In a review of his articles, Le Déaut correctly criticizes Wright's work for being reductive. According to him, Wright's attempt to define midrash strictly by its

¹² Ibid, pp. 417-38.

¹³ Ibid, p. 423.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 428.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 137.

¹⁶ "A propos d'une définition du midrash", p. 397.

literary genre is like (adapting a famous saying of Gustave Flaubert) destroying a forest in order to make a box of matches.¹⁷ He takes particular exception to Wright's view of the Palestinian targumim, stating that "[t]he Targum itself is *midrashic*, precisely in the measure where it proposes new imports (*significations nouvelles*) often very far from the texts from which they take the departure point."¹⁸ Le Déaut himself does not propose a definition of midrash, observing with I. L. Seeligmann, that it is not easy to define the complex phenomenon that is called "midrash".¹⁹ He suggests that for the period of the New Testament a good approach is to study the development of the traditions as Bloch had suggested.

Le Déaut's critique and refusal to define midrash are incongruous, for how can he know that a targum is midrashic when he finds it difficult to say what midrash is in the first place. He seems to be working with an implicit definition of midrash as a hermeneutical method and approach. His criticisms, however, are valuable in the way that they underscore how a discussion of midrash cannot be limited to a definition of its literary genre. To paraphrase him, midrash should not be restrained on a procrustean bed of literary genre.

Geza Vermes, in an influential article called "Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis",²⁰ develops the work of Renée Bloch.²¹ Like the latter, he dates the closing of the canon very early, to the third century BCE. Vermes states that at about that time the Palestinian religious authority decided to arrest the growth of sacred writings and establish a canon. With the exception of Daniel, their policy was carried through and from that point on the nation's religious leadership was entrusted

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 402.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 407.

¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 396 and 412 ("Noun ne proposerons d'ailleurs pas une autre définition du midrash").

²⁰ In *The Cambridge History of the Bible. From the Beginnings to Jerome* eds. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), pp. 199-231.

²¹ Cf. *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism. Haggadic Studies* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), pp. 9-10.

not to writers but interpreters. Similar to Bloch, Vermes describes the origin of midrash as found in the admonition of some of the Old Testament authors “to meditate on, recite, and rethink the Law”.²² This exegetical activity can be traced back to such passages as the deuteronomic injunction for the king to copy, continually read and observe the Mosaic code (Deut 17:18-19) and the command for all Israelites to meditate and do the law (Joshua 1:7-8).

Vermes describes what he regards as two basic types of post-biblical interpretation, pure exegesis and applied exegesis. The former arises from four primary and technical causes: 1) there is uncertainty about the meaning of a word; 2) there are perceived gaps in the biblical passage; 3) apparently contradictory passages need to be harmonised and explained; and 4) the meaning is unacceptable. As its name suggests, pure exegesis is that which the interpreter performs as he carefully reads and meditates on the word of God.

Applied exegesis, on the other hand, occurs when the interpreter adapts the Bible to contemporary life: “The point of departure for exegesis was no longer the Torah itself, but contemporary customs and beliefs which the interpreter attempted to connect with scripture and to justify.”²³ This form of interpretation plays a role in the determination of halakha, in doctrinal controversies and in the belief that the biblical prophecies have been fulfilled in the interpreter’s day.

Vermes’s division of all post-biblical interpretation into the categories of pure and applied exegeses has not been followed by many. What have been much more influential are the four causes that gave rise to pure exegeses: uncertainty about the meaning of words, perceived gaps in the scriptural narrative, the need to harmonise apparently contradictory passages, and unacceptability of the meaning. Repeatedly,

²² Ibid, p. 199.

these reasons are either re-iterated, expanded or adapted in subsequent scholarly discussions.

In an article completed in 1974, Gary Porton reviewed previous scholarship and defined midrash in the following manner: “midrash is a type of literature, oral or written, which has its starting point in a fixed, canonical text, considered the revealed word of God by the midrashist and his audience, and in which this original verse is explicitly cited or clearly alluded to.”²⁴ His definition highlights the importance of canon. Midrash as a literary genre is “based upon a canonical text” and “canon designates those texts which were accepted as authoritative by the community”.²⁵ This stress upon a canonical text echoes Bloch’s own emphasis upon the fixation of scripture, but important differences should be noticed in their conception and dating of the closing of the canon. Whereas Bloch assigns the closing of the bipartite canon to the period between the Persian period and the Maccabean revolt, thus defining late biblical texts and subsequent post-biblical exegeses as midrash, Porton holds to a first century CE date for the fixation of Scripture, in effect reserving the term midrash for post-70 writings.

Before the destruction of the Second Temple, according to Porton, Palestinian Jews did not consider the creation of midrash a central activity, since the Torah was not the sole source of authority nor was it “the constitution” in any meaningful sense.²⁶ Wisdom texts, like Ben Sira, used the Torah, but also drew knowledge from experience, travel and common sense. The priesthood also played a vital role, shaping the legal systems of various Jewish communities (eg at Qumran). There is

²³ Ibid, p. 221.

²⁴ “Midrash: The Palestinian Jews and the Hebrew Bible in the Greco-Roman Period” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* eds. H. Temporini and W. Haase (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979), volume II.19.2, p. 112.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 111.

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 112-118.

little evidence that midrashic activity accompanied the public reading of Torah in synagogues before 70. It was after the destruction of the Temple and its priestly cult that the Pharisees and rabbis focused on the Bible, stirred as they were by the competing Christian appropriation of the Hebrew Bible.

Porton defines midrash proper as a post-70 phenomenon, but admits that midrashic activity may be found before that time. He believes that the superscriptions to certain psalms can be classified as midrashic, but is less certain about other biblical texts like Deuteronomy or Chronicles, as has been claimed by scholars. His hesitation is based on the difficulty of determining “whether or not the original passage had achieved canonical status and was considered part of God’s revelation at the time it was reworked or commented upon.”²⁷ He allows as midrashic, the targumim, rewritten biblical accounts (*Genesis Apocryphon* and *Liber Antiquitatem Biblicarum*) and the pesharim, but observes that the flourish of midrashic activity occurs after 70.

Porton’s cautious approach to the definition of midrash is laudable and while his stress upon the canonical text reflects a long standing recognition of its importance, Le Déaut²⁸ and Günther Stemberger²⁹ have pointed out that the events of biblical history are equally as important as the texts that furnish the stimulus for a midrashic creation. He also assumes that the Pesharim is a well-defined genre when in fact there is much scholarly disagreement about the distinctiveness of its literary form and comparison to dream interpretations, revelatory exegesis and, not least, midrash itself!³⁰ Moreover, as will be discussed more fully below, it is important to distinguish between canon as a list of texts, the authority of individual books and verses and the textual form of those biblical passages.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 119.

²⁸ “A propos d’une définition du midrash”, p. 406.

²⁹ *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), pp. 256-7.

In 1987, Jacob Neusner articulated three different meanings that are commonly attributed to midrash. Midrash can refer to: 1) a concrete unit of scriptural exegesis; 2) a compilation of these exegeses; and 3) a process of interpreting a particular text.³¹ In doing so, he has summarised the areas of previous disagreements and encapsulated the nub of the problem, since midrash as a term, both in its ancient and modern usage, has several signifiers—it can serve as the title of a literary genre; it can mean the specific exegesis of a particular verse; or it can connote an exegetical process.

Frederic Manns, in his 1990 study that traces the development of midrash from its biblical origins to the rabbinic works, likewise distinguishes midrash as ‘an approach of scripture’ and the result of this method in the form of commentary or a literary work.³² Recently, Philip Alexander too has noted that the term midrash is fundamentally ambiguous, even within its narrower rabbinic usage, denoting a hermeneutical method, a concrete text that exemplifies that method, and its literary form of lemma plus comment.³³ He observes that midrash is now commonly applied to the whole of Second Temple Bible interpretation and this midrashic period is to be distinguished from the next phase of Jewish bible commentary known as the *parshanut*. In this loose sense of the term, it means no more than “an example of early Jewish Biblical interpretation.”³⁴

³⁰ See my discussion of the genre in *Pesharim* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press/Continuum, 2002), pp. 44-53.

³¹ *What is Midrash?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 9-12.

³² *Le Midrash. Approche et Commentaire de l'Écriture* (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 1-2.

³³ “The Bible in Qumran and Early Judaism” in *Text in Context. Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Studies* ed. A. D. H. Mayes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 37.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 37, n. 3.

Midrash and Literary Criticism

The phenomenon of midrash has also been discussed in the context of literary theory. Among the contributions to the important volume entitled *Midrash and Literature* is James Kugel's introduction to midrash³⁵ in which he states that while the term has been used to designate both interpretative activity and result, "[a]t bottom midrash is not a genre of interpretation but an interpretative stance, a way of reading the sacred text."³⁶ This midrashic stance can manifest itself in diverse genres belonging to almost all of classical and much of medieval Jewish literature, from the Aramaic targumim and retellings of biblical passages to the exegetical portions of the Mishnah and Gemara to homilies, sermons, prayers and poetry.

He refuses to define midrash, quipping sarcastically that since many recent studies "have already not defined midrash in ample detail, there is little purpose in our not defining it again here."³⁷ Kugel does, however, make two points about midrash: 1) The precise focus of this interpretative stance is the surface irregularities of the biblical text. This point is similar to Bloch's attentiveness to the text and Vermes's category of pure exegesis. 2) Basic to midrash is an exegesis of individual verses and not whole books. Each verse of the Bible is as connected to a verse sequential to it as to one far away from it. Thus, a midrashist may illuminate a verse from Genesis by another verse in the immediate context or by a line from the Psalms. This point is not unlike Bloch's articulation that the darshan's primary process of interpretation is to be found in drawing on parallel passages, since the Bible is considered a unity. But the emphasis upon individual verses over biblical books or the canonical list is important.

³⁵ "Two Introductions to Midrash", edited by Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 77-103.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 91.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 91.

In a recent, study of biblical motifs,³⁸ he reformulates and develops these points by suggesting that there are four assumptions shared by all ancient interpretations: 1) All ancient interpreters held that the Bible is a fundamentally cryptic document that requires interpretation. 2) Scripture is seen as one great book of instruction that is ethically relevant for its readers. 3) The biblical text is free of errors and is harmonious, therefore no detail, however small, is insignificant. And 4) despite the questionable conduct of heroes or the content of its own teachings, at a later time it was assumed that all Scripture was divinely inspired.

Kugel's understanding of midrash and ancient biblical interpretation includes many of the elements already found in the writings of scholars. It is relatively conventional and many of the elements can be found in previous studies. In so far as it does, it is not distinctive, even though it is frequently seen by others in the context of literary criticism. The strength of his work, especially of *Traditions of the Bible*, is in demonstrating in detail how various motifs can be traced through the diverse genres of ancient biblical interpretation.

A study that is more³⁹ literary in its approach to midrash is Daniel Boyarin's *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*.⁴⁰ Following the deconstructionist agenda of Jacques Derrida, Boyarin articulates an eclectic theory of midrash. He advances an intertextual reading of midrash:

Were I to attempt to define midrash at this point, it would perhaps be radical intertextual reading of the canon, in which potentially every part refers to and is interpretable by every other part. The Torah, owing to its own intertextuality, is a severely gapped text, and the gaps are there to be filled by

³⁸ *Traditions of the Bible. A Guide to the Bible As it Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 14-19.

³⁹ Literary critics too have taken up the term midrash. In a review of Kugel's book, Frank Kermode has suggested *en passant* that Milton's poem is in effect "an enormous midrash" (*Pleasing Myself from Beowulf to Philip Roth* [London: Penguin, 2001], p. 162). Cf. Golda Werman, *Milton and Midrash* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1995) who argued that Milton knew a latin midrash.

⁴⁰ (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

strong readers, which in this case does not mean readers fighting for originality, but readers fighting to find what they must in the holy text. Their own intertext—that is, the cultural codes which enable them to make meaning and find meaning, constrain the rabbis to fill in the gaps of the Torah’s discourse with narratives which are emplotted in accordance with certain ideological structures.⁴¹

Boyarin’s analysis focuses on one document, the *Mekhilta*, whose exegeses he explores with categories and terms drawn from literary theory, including paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures, gap-filling, reading repetition, verbal ambiguity, dual sign, and double reading. He also attempts to demonstrate that while the midrashic process allows the darshan to cross over into the biblical world, he nevertheless remains in his own sphere.

Many of the features underscored by Boyarin have already been discussed by previous scholars. For example, the so-called “ungrammaticality”⁴² of the biblical text of Exod 15:22-26 and the *Mekhilta*’s exegesis of its ambiguities is similar to Vermes’s classification of pure exegesis which arises from textual ambiguities, perceived gaps and contradictions. In fact, most of the concepts, but perhaps not the terminology, have been anticipated by early studies. In an ironic, perhaps intended, sense Boyarin’s own study of midrash is an example of precisely the intertextuality that he has been advocating.

Boyarin underscores the importance of the intertextual nature of midrashic exegesis in which the supporting biblical verses are not simply to be understood as prooftexts, but as part of a distinctive strategy of “cocitation” that enriches the exegesis and creates new contexts and meanings in its intention to preserve the relevance of old texts.⁴³ Boyarin does not concern himself with pre-rabbinic midrash, but he does sense an important distinction that needs to be made between midrash

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 16.

⁴² Ibid, p. 57-70.

⁴³ Ibid, pp. 26-38.

after the canon was established and pre-canonical inner biblical exegesis: “[I]t is misleading to speak of inner-biblical midrash. There is something else that is going on when the text being interpreted is canonized, than in the precanonical situation”.⁴⁴

Authoritative Texts and Midrashic Exegesis

As noted by several scholars, ‘the canon’ is a vital element in the study of midrash. This, of course, is self-evident, since midrash is primarily an interpretation of the biblical text. But the concept of ‘canon’ in the scholarly discussions is surprisingly unclear. For example, what Bloch defines by ‘canon’ is not the same as what Porton means when he uses the same term. As mentioned, by canon Bloch has in view the fixation (during the Persian and Hellenistic periods) of the torah and prophets and a large part, but not all, of the writings.⁴⁵ Porton’s definition of midrash as a literature which has as its starting point a fixed, canonical text and his dating of the biblical text to the first century show that he has in mind the closed, tripartite, Hebrew Bible. He reserves the term ‘midrash’ for those writings that interpret a canonical text, arguing that “if the prior text had not achieved canonical status, the later comment is not midrash”.⁴⁶

Part of the unclarity is due to the slipperiness of the concept of authoritative texts and the debates surrounding the fixation of the canon. Orthodox and conservative scholars, both Jewish⁴⁷ and Christian⁴⁸, tend to date the closing of the rabbinic canon early to approximately 160 BCE. More liberal scholars argue that the

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 136 n. 12.

⁴⁵ “Une grande partie des <<Écrits>> remontent à ce temps-là” (“Midrash”, col. 1268).

⁴⁶ “Midrash: The Palestinian Jews and the Hebrew Bible”, p. 111.

⁴⁷ Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture. The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1976), pp. 131-135.

⁴⁸ Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 434-437.

canon remained open well into the first centuries of the common era.⁴⁹ Between these polar positions lies a range of views. The majority of scholars continue to date the more or less closing of the canon to the first century CE.⁵⁰

Additionally, there has been insufficient attention paid to the variety of canons in the ancient period. The Samaritans, for example, recognized only the authority of their Pentateuch which, in light of the publication and study of 4QpaleoExod^M, appears to have been a version of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.⁵¹ The Qumranians regarded Jubilees, Enoch and possibly the Temple Scroll as authoritative in addition to books that were eventually included in the Hebrew Bible. As is well known, Esther is not found in the Qumran corpus and the recent claim by J. T. Milik that 4Q550 is a prototype of the book has found few supporters.⁵² Alexandrian Jewry too had a longer list of books in the Septuagint including Tobit, Judith, Esdras, 1-4 Maccabees, Baruch, Epistle of Jeremiah, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon. These books are regarded by the Orthodox and Catholic Church as deuterocanonical books, meaning that they are authoritative. Or again the New Testament quoted the book of Enoch (Enoch 1:9 quoted in Jude 14) in the same way as it did other books of the Old Testament.

Much has been made of the recently published Qumran scroll 4QMMT, ‘some precepts of the torah’, which reads in section C, line 10, ‘the book of Moses, [and] the book[s of the p]rophets and Davi[d]’. This phrase has been seized on by scholars as

⁴⁹ Albert C. Sundberg, Sundberg, *The Old Testament of the Early Church* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1964) and John Barton, *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel After the Exile* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1986) and “Canon” in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* eds. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (London: SCM Press, 1990), p. 102.

⁵⁰ See, eg, James Barr, *Holy Scripture. Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

⁵¹ See Judith E. Sanderson’s *An Exodus Scroll from Qumran. 4QpaleoExod^M and the Samaritan Tradition* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986).

⁵² See now, Sidnie White Crawford, “4Qtales of the Persian Court (5Q550^{A-E}) and its Relation to Biblical Royal Courtier Tales, Especially Esther, Daniel and Joseph” in *The Bible As Book. The Hebrew Bible and the Judaean Desert Discoveries* eds. E. D. Herbert and E. Tov (London: British Library, 2002), p. 121.

evidence for the tripartite division of the canon, but its understanding is doubtful when interpreted by other Qumran scrolls and MMT in particular. I have argued that within the context of the Qumran community ‘and Davi[d]’ does not refer to the psalms which were called *shirey david* (in 11QMelch) or *sepher ha-tehilim* (in a version of the War Scroll, 4Q491), but is probably an elliptical reference to ‘(the deeds of) David’.⁵³

Several of the studies mentioned above discuss midrash in relation to the biblical and post-biblical text as though all of the communities held the same view of authoritative texts. Manns, for instance, discusses midrash in the Greek Bible alongside the targumim, Ethiopic book of Enoch, Jubilees, Qumran sectarian biblical interpretations, Pseudo-Philo, Psalms of Solomon, Philo of Alexandria and Josephus without the slightest hint that there may have been different understandings of the biblical text and canon.⁵⁴

Midrash is an interpretation of the biblical texts. Some would prefer using the descriptor ‘scriptural texts’⁵⁵, since for them the term ‘biblical’ connotes the closing of the canon and is anachronistic. But the term ‘biblical’ (in lower case) need not be so, if it is recognised that it describes those authoritative texts that eventually became part of the canon.

Another way of circumventing terminological impropriety is to say, as Kugel has done, that basic to the interpretative stance of midrash is the exegesis of individual verses and not whole books. While this observation is true, it does not entirely resolve the problem, since Kugel also holds that for the darshan each verse of

⁵³ “The Alleged Reference to the Tripartite Division of the Hebrew Bible” *RevQ* 20.1 (2002):23-38.

⁵⁴ *Le Midrash. Approche et Commentaire*.

⁵⁵ Although he does not discuss terminology in connection with midrash, Eugene C. Ulrich argues for the descriptor “scriptural” over “biblical” in “The Qumran biblical Scrolls—the Scriptures of Late Second Temple Judaism” in Timothy H. Lim et al (eds), *The Dead Sea Scrolls in their Historical Context* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), pp. 69-72.

scripture is equally related to another sequential to it as it is to another one far removed from it. The concept of canon underpins this view, even if it is implied rather than explicit. The darshan could only draw on parallel biblical passages in the way that Kugel has described it, if he had already considered authoritative those books that were eventually included in the Hebrew Bible.

Is the solution, then, to distinguish, as Porton has done, between pre- and post-canonical exegeses, reserving the term ‘midrash’ exclusively for exegesis after 100 CE? One difficulty is that the term ‘midrash’ does occur before 100 CE. As is well known, the root *drsh*, meaning ‘to seek, investigate, study’, occurs several times in the Hebrew Bible. The masculine substantive *midrash* is found twice in 2 Chr 13:22 (“in the *midrash* of the prophet Iddo’) and 24:27 (‘are written in the *midrash* of the book of kings’), referring respectively to the Chronicler’s source for his account of Abijah and to a work containing the many oracles against Joash and the acts of his sons. Much scholarly attention has been trained on these two references and it is generally accepted that *midrash* here should be understood in the context of Biblical Hebrew and means something like ‘story’ or ‘commentary’ in the non-rabbinic sense of the term.⁵⁶

The term ‘midrash’ is also found in the apocryphal Psalm of the Wisdom of Ben Sira 51:23 in which the sage admonishes the unlearned to lodge ‘in my house of learning’ (Masada MS B *be-beyt midrashi*⁵⁷), and to the *yeshibah* (v. 29) in which his soul delights (*tismach naphshi bishy bathi*). Ben Sira is dated to the second century BCE.

⁵⁶ Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicle: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1993), pp. 699-700 and 954.

⁵⁷ The Hebrew text is conveniently published in *The Book of Ben Sira: Text, Concordance and an Analysis of the Vocabulary* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language and Shrine of the Book, 1973).

In the Qumran scrolls, the term ‘midrash’ is used variously to designate communal study (1QS 8:14-16; 8:26), judicial inquiry (1QS 6:24), communal regulation (CD 20:6; 4QD^a [4Q266], frag 18, col. 5:18-20), and the title for authoritative interpretation (4QS^d [4Q258] frag 1, col. 1:1 ‘midrash for the Maskil’; 4QS^b [4Q256] frag 5, col. 1:1; compare 1QS 5:1 where the variant title reads ‘this is the rule (*serekh*) for the men of the community’).⁵⁸

Stephen Pfann has suggested that 4Q249, ‘midrash sepher Moshe’, is related to *midrash ha-torah* of 1QS 8:15 and that the latter may have referred to the writings issuing from the Qumran community’s nightly deliberation of the way of the Torah.⁵⁹ On the verso or back of this text, written in cryptic script across the grain, is the first clear instance of the titular use of midrash for an extant text. Unfortunately, the scroll itself is badly mutilated and we have little idea of what this text is about or whether it is comparable to the rabbinic midrash.

4Q174, frag 1, line 14, also attests to the term: ‘*midrash of How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked* (Ps. 1:1). Interpreted (*peshet*), this saying [concerns] those who turn aside from the way [of the people]’.⁶⁰ Though the double use of ‘midrash’ and ‘peshet’ is rather awkward, William Brownlee, the principal editor, has suggested that this line is the *incipit* for the entire section and that it evidences a hybrid genre called ‘midrash peshet’. The existence of the ‘midrash peshet’ has been questioned and line 14 may well refer to the interpretation (*peshet*) not just of Ps 1:1 but also the accompanying communal deliberations.⁶¹ In my view,

⁵⁸ For the evidence of the Qumran scrolls, see my “Midrash Peshet in the Pauline Letters” in *The Scrolls and the Scriptures. Qumran Fifty Years After* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 280-292.

⁵⁹ See in *Qumran Cave 4. Halakhic Texts* (DJD 35; eds. J. Baumgarten et al. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999]), pp. 1-3.

⁶⁰ Restorations after Michael Knibb, *The Qumran Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 259 and 261.

⁶¹ See my *Pesharim*, pp. 48-51.

‘midrash’ is not used in its titular sense in 4Q174; it rather means ‘an explanation of’ a communal tradition related to Ps 1:1.

Hitherto there is no decisive evidence to prove that the term ‘midrash’ was used before 100 CE to designate a genre of biblical interpretation like those of the classical rabbinic texts. But this does not mean that a similar kind of exegesis (both in structure and techniques) could not be found before the canonization of the Hebrew Bible. Continuity of exegetical traditions before and after 100 CE is evident.

The problems of delimiting midrash is analogous to the difficulties faced in defining the genre of peshar. Peshar is a distinctive genre of biblical interpretation of the Qumran community, but it also shares commonalities, both in structure and exegetical techniques, with dream interpretations, revelatory exegesis, and not least the rabbinic midrashim. Likewise, midrash as a genre is properly attested among the rabbinic midrashim after the canonization of holy scripture. However, the structure of lemma plus comment is also found in pre-100 CE texts, above all among the pesharim, and its exegetical techniques are attested by writings that may or may not use the term ‘midrash’.⁶²

Intratextual Exegesis

It has long been recognised that the origins and emergence of midrash are to be traced back to the Hebrew Bible. An important milestone in the history of scholarship is to be found in the influential work of the French scholar André Robert who wrote a series of articles on “the anthological method” (*le procédé anthologique*).⁶³ Robert’s

⁶² For a discussion of the pesharim in relation to midrash, Ibid, ch. 3.

⁶³ “Littéraire (genres)” in *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*. Volume 5 “Kalt-Mycènes” ed. H. Cazelles (Paris-IV: Libraire Letouzey et Ané, 1957), col. 411-412.

research, first published in the 1930s,⁶⁴ preceded Bloch's seminal definition of midrash and Vermes's important study on the haggadic midrash.

He first turned his attention to the way that the literary links (*les attaches littéraires*) to both later and earlier material, especially the books of Deuteronomy, Jeremiah and Isaiah, can be observed in the first nine chapters of Proverbs. Literary parallels can be found both in terminology (eg, the religious and traditional sense of the terms *moreh* and *melamed* in Prov 5:13 and 6:13) and moral teaching (eg, exhortations against the seductive evils of money and adultery and the links with the Decalogue). Robert discusses the difficulties of establishing them as borrowings (*les emprunts*) as such rather than the common currency of terms and ideas that the redactor found in his environment. But according to him the extensive similarity of terminology and thought between Proverbs and its biblical sources is the justification for seeing them as direct borrowings.⁶⁵ The earlier material has been integrated in such a way as to give Proverbs the impression of being an entirely new work: the idea of the Torah has been transposed to that of Wisdom; Wisdom assumes the messianic role traditionally ascribed to the davidic descendants; and the Temple of Jerusalem is transposed into the house of Wisdom study.

Robert extended his literary analysis to the Song of Songs⁶⁶ and Ezekiel 16.⁶⁷ He described the type of study that he is advocating as “intrabiblical comparativism” (*le comparatisme intrabiblique*), defining precisely the borrowing of earlier material by later biblical authors as the anthological method—“As the expression indicates, it consists of re-using, literarily or by equivalence, the words or formulas of earlier

⁶⁴ André Robert, “Les Attaches Littéraires Bibliques de Prov. I-IX” *Revue Biblique* 43 (1934): 42-68, 172-204, 374-384, 44 (1935):344-365.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 44 (1935):345-346.

⁶⁶ “Le Genre Littéraire du Cantique des Cantiques” *Vivre et Penser* 1-3 (1941-1945=*Revue Biblique* 50-52):192-213.

scriptures”.⁶⁸ The term midrash was not originally put to use by Robert until it became evident that what he was describing was a method of intrabiblical exegesis that was similar to haggadic midrash.⁶⁹ Only in Robert’s later works and in the studies of his followers did the term midrash become prominent.

Bloch was influenced by Robert’s pioneering research into intrabiblical exegesis. She felt, however, that insufficient attention had been paid by Robert to “the reflection of the new authors”.⁷⁰ Exilic and post-exilic authors were not content simply to reproduce or re-use the thought of their predecessors; they also developed, enriched and transposed the primitive message. Believing in the unfolding nature of divine revelation, the authors often re-interpreted their source material and gave a sense to their writings different from the original.

For example, Ezekiel 16, dated to the beginning of the exile, concerns the disquiet of God over Israel, his unfaithful wife. It is manifestly an allegory based upon Hosea and Jeremiah and has several literary links to Deuteronomy. But the historical allusions in vv. 3, 27-29 to the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, daughters of Philistines, and Assyrians, show that the exilic author had reworked previous biblical sources into “an historical allegory”, following the events of sacred history, such as it is recounted in Genesis to Kings (v. 3, the travels of the Patriarchs in Palestine; v. 6, the covenant with Abraham; vv. 7-8, the covenant with Moses, etc.). According to Bloch, this later writer, with consummate art, used earlier biblical material by “mixing constantly and intentionally the remembrance of the past, the problems of the present

⁶⁷ “Ezéchiel XVI. Exemple parfait du procédé midrashique dans la Bible” *Cahiers Sioniens* 9 (1955):193-194.

⁶⁸ “Littéraire (genres)”, col. 411.

⁶⁹ Cf. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition*, p. 4, observes that “What Robert calls ‘style anthologique’ is, in fact, a process strangely similar to the midrash”.

⁷⁰ “Midrash”, cols. 1270-1272.

and poetic allegory.”⁷¹ The prophet sought to explain the cause of the catastrophe of the exile in the unfaithfulness of the people, at the same time deepening and developing the central notion of the covenant into a “matrimonial allegory”.⁷²

Michael Fishbane was more critical of Robert’s method, arguing that “these proposed instances of *écrits midrashiques* are not so much citations of biblical texts as disjointed textual fragments, schematizations or résumés”.⁷³ He notes that while there is ground for textual interdependence for certain sources, as say between Prov. 6:20-35 and Deut. 5:6-6:9, the references that Robert and others (M. Delcor, A. Feuillet, M. Löhr) adduce are “generally so vague and disconnected, with virtually no clusters of parallel terms or analogous contexts, that little is gained by calling them exegetical or ‘midrashic’”.⁷⁴

Careful to avoid the same methodologically questionable procedures as Robert,⁷⁵ in *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* Fishbane has written the most comprehensive treatment of how the Bible interprets itself. He eschews the term “midrash”, choosing instead to describe the phenomena with Nahum Sarna as “inner biblical exegesis”.⁷⁶ Sarna had previously published a study of Psalm 89 in which he argued that the oracle found between verse 20 and 38 is not a version or recension of Nathan’s oracle to David (cf. 2 Samuel 7) but an interpretation of it.⁷⁷ Fishbane also steers clear of the terms ‘biblical’ and ‘post-biblical interpretations’, but rather

⁷¹ Ibid, col. 1271.

⁷² See further, her study “Ezéchiel XVI: Exemple parfait du procédé midrashique dans la Bible” *Cahier Sionien* 9 (1955):193-223.

⁷³ *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 286-289.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 287.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 12 n. 32.

⁷⁶ Ibid, pp. viii, 7, n. 21.

⁷⁷ “Ps. 89: A Study of Inner Biblical Exegesis” in *Biblical and Other Studies*, edited by A. Altmann (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 29-46.

distinguishes with Douglas Knight between *traditum*, the content of the tradition, and *traditio*, the process of transmission.⁷⁸

This method circumvents some of the pitfalls related to the biblical canon, since the *traditum* “was not at all monolithic, but rather the complex result of a long and varied process of transmission, or *traditio*”.⁷⁹ Conceptually Fishbane’s method has much to be commended, but it has to be admitted that in the praxis of his exegesis—identifying the source texts, the variants from the versions (like the Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Targum or Peshitta) and the Qumran biblical scrolls and their interpretation in later biblical texts, rabbinic literature and mediaeval commentaries—it is essentially the Masoretic Text that forms the basis of his intratextual comparisons. This method is sensible, given the high authority of the MT, but it is not necessary. It is equally defensible to conduct, say, an intratextual study on non-MT biblical texts found among the Qumran scrolls.⁸⁰

Fishbane divides inner biblical exegeses into four broad overlapping categories (scribal, legal, aggadic and mantological) and brings a wealth of examples under consideration. It is, of course, in the trench warfare of details that the battle of exegesis is won or lost. Not all of the examples that Fishbane adduces are equally convincing, but by common estimation he has advanced the frontline. A selection of examples includes⁸¹:

- a) scribal updating of toponyms: “Luz: it is Bethel” (Joshua 18:13).
- b) translation of foreign terms: “Pur: it is the lot” (Esther 3:7).

⁷⁸ *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 6 and n. 17.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁸⁰ Intimations along this line of thinking are found in Alexander Rofé, “Moses’ Mother and Her Slave-Girl According to 4QExod^b” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 9.1 (2002):38-43, who sees in the Qumran biblical text midrashic exegesis at work in the addition of a nursemaid to the well-known story of Moses’s mother placing him in a basket among the bulrushes (Exod 2:3).

c) explanation of grammatical ambiguity: “this is the Temple” clarifies the pronoun in the phrase “when *it* was founded” (Ezra 3:12).

d) segmentation and identification of the divine oracle: “For YHWH has poured out over you a spirit of stupefaction: He has closed your eyes—*namely, the prophets*—and cloaked your heads—*the seers*” (Isaiah 29:10).

e) deuteronomic revision of a priestly rule prohibiting different forms of mixtures: *kilayim* (“mixtures”) in Lev. 19:19 is supplanted in favour of the pleonastic term *sha’atnez* (“mixed material”) in Deut. 22:9-11.

f) exegetical extensions of sabbatical legislation: the rule on leaving agricultural land fallow after six years (Exod 23:10-11) is extended (“you shall do likewise”) to include vineyards and olive groves (Exod 23:11b). The formula that introduces this innovation is then dropped and the addendum becomes normalized in Lev. 25:3-7.

g) legal clarification of the meaning of “work” in the sabbatical prohibition (Exod 20:18-21; Deut 5:12-14): the law applies even during plowing and harvest time (Exod 34:21); starting fires is considered work (Exod 35:1-3). Legal clarification is also evident in the narrative when work is defined as gathering food (Exod 16:27-30) or wood (Num 15:32-36). Prophetic oracles further define work to include the bearing of any burden from homes (original formulation) to the gates of Jerusalem (secondary addition) (Jer. 17:21-22). This innovation is made authoritative by the appeal to its apparent antiquity (“as I commanded your forefathers”, v. 22).

h) strategic revisions of earlier traditions: Jeremiah reinterprets an obscure priestly legislation on consecrated offerings when it declares that:

⁸¹ As highlighted by Fishbane himself in “Inner Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interpretation in Ancient Israel” in *Midrash and Literature* edited by G. H. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 19-37.

Israel is consecrated (*kodesh*) to Yahweh, the first fruits of his (ie Yahweh's) produce; whoever destroys him (*okhelav*) will be judged guilty (*ye'eshanu*), and evil will befall them: oracle of Yahweh (Jer 2:3).

Fishbane argues that this is dependent upon Lev 22:14-16:

And if a man eats consecrated (*kodesh*) donation by accident, he must add one-fifth to its value and give the consecrated item to the priest. And they [the priests] shall not allow the consecrated donation of the Israelites to be desecrated, and thereby cause them [the Israelites] to bear [their] iniquity of guilt [*ashmah*] when they [the Israelites] eat [*okhelam*] their [own] consecrated donations...

He believes that the use of all three technical terms (*okhel*, *kodesh*, *'asham*) shows that Jeremiah has metaphorically transformed this cultic law concerning the inadvertent eating of consecrated offering by the laity into a divine oracle about Israel's holiness and the punishment of her enemies. In the prophecy Israel has become the consecrated offering and Yahweh's first fruits. The term *okhel*, which literally meant the eating of consecrated food, is understood figuratively as "to destroy". And the cultic sense of *'asham*, guilty, is transposed to historical accountability.

Such a revision, Fishbane avers, was probably drawn from the same deuteronomic reinterpretation of the status of Israel as holy. In Exod 19:5-6 it states: "if you heed my (ie Yahweh's) voice and observe my covenant then you will be my special possession among the nations...and my...holy [*kadosh*] nation." Israel's holy status is dependent upon her obedience to the commandments given through Moses. In Deut 7:6, however, the requirement of obedience is dropped and Israel stands

unconditionally as a holy nation: “For you are a holy [*kadosh*] people to Yahweh, your God...[his] special people among the nations.”

Moreover, in Deut 14:1-2 the notion of Israel as a holy nation include the prohibition of a man cutting himself or pulling out the hair of his forehead during bereavement. This is the transformation of a law found in Lev 21:5-6 that forbids the sons of Aaron from practising bodily mutilation as part of the mourning rites. In its deuteronomic recasting the order is extended to apply to all Israelites, and not just to the priests, since they are a people holy to the Yahweh.

Fishbane sees symmetry in the transformation of Lev 22:14-16 to Jer 2:3: both the cultic donations and Israel are the consecrated offerings to Yahweh; the retribution against Israel’s enemies is analogous to the additional one-fifth that a man must add to compensate for his inadvertent desecration of priestly food. But he also recognises asymmetry: the accidental infringement of cultic law versus the intentional vengeance against Israel’s enemies; the delict is committed on the one hand by the donor and on the other by a third party; and reparation is made by the lay donor in the case of ritual desecration and while punishment is exacted on the nations who destroy Israel, the figurative donation to Yahweh. These, Fishbane claims, do not subvert the analogical power of the prophetic application, since the tension gives greater rhetorical force to the Jer 2:3 as it breathes new life into an old priestly legislation, providing an internal discourse between the divine voice that speaks through Moses and the same divine voice that proceeds from the mouth of Yahweh. But that is only one explanation. An alternative is that the passages are unrelated except for the coincidence of terminology.

i) anthological exegesis by the Chronicler: 2 Chr 15:2-7 report an otherwise

unknown oracle by a certain Azzariah ben Oded, admonishing the Judean King Asa to reform much like Hezekiah and Josiah before him.

²Yahweh will be with you when you are with him: for if you seek him (*tidreshuhu*), he will be present (*yimatse*) to you; but if you abandon him, he will abandon you. ³Now for a long time Israel was without a true God, without an instructing priest and without Torah. ⁴But when in distress (*bazar*) Israel turned (*vayashav*) to Yahweh, God of Israel, and sought him (*vayevakshuhu*), he was present (*vayimatse*) to them. ⁵On those times there was no peace for those who went out or came in [from battle], for tremendous disturbances (*mehumot rabot*) assailed the inhabitants of the lands. ⁶And nations and cities smashed each other to bits, for God confounded them with every distress. ⁷But now: be you strong and do not slacken: for there is a recompense for your deeds.

According to Fishbane, this pseudepigraphic oracle, dated to the Persian period, draws upon several earlier sources (cf. “Yahweh will be with you”; “be strong”), but the core of the passage is verse four which is a parallel to Deut 4:29-30 in which the Israelites are admonished to seek Yahweh who will be faithful to them: “[T]he Chronicler is actually alluding to the recent exile and reminding people that repentance may reverse the terror of divine abandonment.”⁸² The terminological similarity, according to him, is striking: beseeching (*uvikashtem*) and seeking (*tidreshenu*) Yahweh and repenting (*veshavta*) in distress (*batsar*) is the condition on which he will be present to you, the Israelites (*umetsa’ukha*). Framing the core are two verses that have been adapted from earlier prophetic oracles. Verse five is drawn from Amos 3:17 (*mehumot rabot*) and verse three is based upon Hos 3:4. In the latter

⁸² Ibid, p. 32.

case, the Chronicler has transposed the original oracle against the northern exiles (without king or prince, sacrifice or pillar, and image or household gods) in such a way as to emphasize the pedagogical, rather than the cultic, role of the priest. The mention of “Torah” is unparalleled in the Hosean text.

The dependence of 2 Chr 15:3 on Hos 3:4 has previously been noted with its parallel contexts of a state of confusion resulting from the absence of institutions.⁸³ Sara Japhet has argued that the source text is likely to have been Hos 3:5, except that the tenses have been changed from the future to the past: “they turned” (*yashubu* of Hos to *vayyashob*) and “they sought him” (*ubiqshu* of Hos to *vayyebaqsu*). Following a period of anarchy the Israelites should turn to the Lord.⁸⁴

It is difficult to say which source text was in the mind of the Chronicler. On the one side, Deut 4:29-30 show a number of additional terminological parallels: “you will seek him” (*tidreshenu*), “in distress” (*batsar*) and “they [ie all these things] will find you” (*umetsa’ukha*). But the first and third parallels echo verse two of 2 Chr 15: “you seek him” (*tidreshuhu*) and “he will be present” (*ymiatse*). On the other side, Hos 3:5 is the “natural sequel”⁸⁵ to the period of anarchy in verse 4 as Japhet has observed. Moreover, Jer 2:2 “the devotion of her youth” is dependent upon Hos 2:17.

In fact, it is unnecessary to choose one source over the other. The Chronicler may well have had in mind Hos 3:4-5 as one of the prooftexts when he composed verses 2-7 of chapter 15, but he was also familiar with Deut 4:29-30 which says something similar. He either included “in distress” intentionally to underscore the period of disorder or he added it as a lexical reflex in his composition.

Fishbane’s study is a worthy contribution to the phenomenon of intratextual exegesis. He, more than anyone else, has demonstrated how the Bible interprets

⁸³ I. L. Seeligmann, “The Beginnings of Midrash in Chronicles” (Heb) *Tarbiz* 49 (1979-1980):20-1.

itself. Though questions can be raised about particular examples, it is undeniable that he has with methodological care unpacked the complexities underlying the apparently straightforward thesis that from the beginning the biblical texts can be seen to interpret themselves.

Conclusions

The Bible is its own first interpreter. By this is not to say that from the beginning there was already a fixed canon of holy scriptures which fashioned its own hermeneutical and self-exegeting context. The original sources of the Bible are presumably to be traced back to the early history of Israel. One cannot be more precise than that. Many scholars view the Persian and Hellenistic periods as the time during which the various strands of the tradition were regularised into the first five books of the Bible by Ezra and other priestly scribes.⁸⁶ Several of the prophetic texts in part (eg Isaiah, Jeremiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Amos) originate from the pre-exilic or exilic context, but the formation of the shorter of these texts (eg. minor prophets) into a collection began in the centuries to follow. By the second century BCE, Ben Sira in his “Praise of the Fathers of Old” (49:10) mentions the shorter of these as “the twelve prophets”. The third division of “writings”, however, remained opened for much longer. By the first century CE most of the texts were considered authoritative, though debates continued about the holiness of Qohelet, Ben Sira, Song of Songs and Esther. To what extent this rabbinic canon was considered normative for all Jews remains unclear and is the subject of another study.

⁸⁴ *I&II Chronicles*, p. 719.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Another view is that of David Halperin who sees the importance of Ezra in revision of the maculated Torah (

The multifarious tradition, whether in oral or written forms, was from its inception interpreted by scribes, priests, prophets and teachers. These interpretations themselves were committed to writing and in turn became authoritative. They were included in the list of writings regarded as holy books from the first century CE onwards. In this sense, the Bible is its own exegete.

Much has been written about whether this process should be described as “midrashic”. The above survey of scholarship has shown that since the term was introduced by Bloch in the 1950s to describe intrabiblical exegeses it has lost its potency and freshness. Mention “midrash” nowadays and a whole set of objections immediately come to mind. It has been overused to such an extent that it has come to mean little more than a sexy synonym for exegesis.

Midrash, properly speaking, is a distinct genre of rabbinic exegesis. In this context, there was a fixed canon from which the darshan would draw his homiletic interpretation. However, both its hermeneutical stance towards scripture and the exegetical techniques that it uses are paralleled elsewhere, including the intertextual comparisons between biblical texts. It is in this broader sense that the origins and emergence of midrash are to be found in the Hebrew Bible.

Bibliography

Alexander, P. S. “Midrash and the Gospels” in *Synoptic Studies: The Ampleforth Conferences of 1982 and 1983* ed. C. M. Tuckett. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983. Pp. 1-18.

-----, “The Bible in Qumran and Early Judaism” in *Text in Context. Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Studies* ed. A. D. H. Mayes. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Pp. 35-62.

Bacher, W. *Die exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditionsliteratur*.

- Leipzig:1899-1905.
- Barr, James. *Holy Scripture. Canon, Authority, Criticism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983.
- Barton, John. *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel After the Exile*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1986.
- , "Canon" in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* eds. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden. London: SCM Press, 1990. Pp. 101-5.
- Beckwith, Roger. *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and its Background in Early Judaism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
- Bloch, Renée. "Midrash" in *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*. Volume 5 "Kalt-Mycènes" ed. H. Cazelles. Paris-IV: Libraire Letouzey et Ané, 1957. columns 1263-1281. An English translation of this article is found in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice* ed. William Scott Green. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978. Pp. 29-50. References are to the French original and English translations are the present author's.
- , "Ecriture et tradition dans le judaïsme –aperçus à l'origine du midrash" *Cahier Sioniens* 8 (1954):9-36.
- , "Note méthodologique pour l'étude de la littérature rabbinique" *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 43 (1955):194-227.
- , "Ezéchiel XVI: Exemple parfait du procédé midrashique dans la Bible" *Cahier Sionien* 9 (1955):193-223.
- Boyarin, Daniel. *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Brooke, George J. "Qumran Peshet: Towards the Redefinition of a Genre" *Revue de Qumran* 10 (1979-80): 483-503.
- Brownlee, William H. 'Bible Interpretation among the Sectaries of the Dead Sea Scrolls' *BA* 19 (1951):54-76.
- Crawford, Sidnie White. "4Qtales of the Persian Court (5Q550^{A-E}) and its Relation to Biblical Royal Courtier Tales, Especially Esther, Daniel and Joseph" in *The Bible As Book. The Hebrew Bible and the Judaeon Desert Discoveries* eds. E. D. Herbert and E. Tov. London: British Library, 2002. Pp. 121-138.
- Fishbane, Michael. *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.
- , "Inner Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interpretation in Ancient Israel" in *Midrash and Literature*. Edited by G. H. Hartman and S. Budick. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. Pp. 19-37.

- . *The Garment of Torah*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989.
- . "Midrash and the Nature of Scripture" in *The Exegetical Imagination*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998. Pp. 9-21.
- Gertner, M. "Terms of Scriptural Interpretation: A Study in Hebrew Semantics" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 25.1 (1962):1-27.
- Hartman, Geoffrey H. and Budick, Sanford. *Midrash and Literature*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Japhet, Sara. *I & II Chronicles*. OTL. London: SCM Press, 1993.
- Kermode, Frank. "The Plain Sense of Things" in *Midrash and Literature*. Edited by Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. Pp. 179-194.
- . *Pleasing Myself from Beowulf to Philip Roth*. London: Penguin Press, 2001.
- Knibb, Michael A. *The Qumran Community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Kugel, James L. "Two Introductions to Midrash" in *Midrash and Literature*. Edited by Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. Pp. 77-103.
- . *Traditions of the Bible. A Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- . *Studies in Ancient Midrash*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Kugel, James L. and Greer, Rowan A. *Early Biblical Interpretation*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986.
- Le Déaut, Roger. *Introduction à la Littérature Targumique*. Rome: Institut Biblique Pontifical, 1966.
- . "A propos d'une définition du midrash" *Biblica* 50 (1969):395-413. An English translation appeared as "Apropos a Definition of Midrash" *Interpretation* 25 (1971):259-82. References are to the French original.
- Leiman, Sid Z. *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture. The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence*. New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1976.
- Lim, Timothy H. *Holy Scripture in the Qumran Commentaries and Pauline Letters*.

- Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
- , "Midrash Peshar in the Pauline Letters" in *The Scrolls and the Scriptures. Qumran Fifty Years After*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997. Pp. 280-292.
- , "The Alleged Reference to the Tripartite Division of the Hebrew Bible" *RevQ* 20.1 (2001): 23-38.
- , *Pesharim*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press/Continuum, 2002.
- Manns, Frederic. *Le Midrash: Approche et Commentaire de l'Écriture*. Jerusalem: no pub., 1990. Later edition published by Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem, 2001. References are to the first edition.
- Neusner, Jacob. *What is Midrash?* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.
- Pfann, Stephen. '4Qpap cryptA Midrash Sefer Moshe' in *Qumran Cave 4. Halakhic Texts. Discoveries in the Judean Desert 35*. Eds. J. Baumgarten et al. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999. Pp. 1-24.
- Porton, Gary G. "Midrash: The Palestinian Jews and the Hebrew Bible in the Greco-Roman Period" in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979. Volume II.19.2:103-138. Revised in "Defining Midrash" in *The Study of Ancient Judaism* ed. Jacob Neusner. New York: KTAV, 1981. Volume 1, pp. 55-92. References are to the original article.
- Robert, André. "Les Attaches Littéraires Bibliques de Prov. I-IX" *Revue Biblique* 43 (1934): 42-68, 172-204, 374-384, 44 (1935):344-365.
- , "Le Genre Littéraire du Cantique des Cantiques" *Vivre et Penser* 1-3 (1941-1945=*Revue Biblique* 50-52):192-213.
- , "Ezéchiel XVI. Exemple parfait du procédé midrashique dans la Bible" *Cahiers Sioniens* 9 (1955):193-194.
- , "Littéraire (genres)" in *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*. Volume 5 "Kalt-Mycènes" ed. H. Cazelles. Paris-IV: Libraire Letouzey et Ané, 1957. Columns 405-421.
- Rofé, Alexander. "Moses' Mother and Her Slave-Girl According to 4QExod^b" *Dead Sea Discoveries* 9.1 (2002):38-43.
- Sanderson, Judith E. *An Exodus Scroll from Qumran. 4QpaleoExod^M and the Samaritan Tradition* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986).
- Sarna, Nahum. "Ps. 89: A Study of Inner Biblical Exegesis" in *Biblical and Other Studies*. Ed. A. Altmann. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1963, pp. 29-46.

- Seeligmann, I. L. 'Voraussetzungen der Midraschexegese' in *Congress Volume, Copenhagen, 1953. Vetus Testamentum Supplement 1*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953. Pp. 150-181.
- , *The Septuagint Version of Isaiah*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1948.
- , "The Beginnings of Midrash in Chronicles" (Heb) *Tarbiz* 49 (1979-1980):14-32.
- Stuedel, Annette. *Der Midrasch zur Eschatologie aus der Qumrangemeinde (4QMidrEschat^{a, b}): Materielle Rekonstruktion, Textbestand, Gattung und traditions-geschichtliche Einordnung der durch 4Q174 ('Florilegium') und 4Q177 ('Catena A') repräsentierten Werkes aus den Qumranfunden*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994.
- Strack, H. L. and Stemberger, Günther. *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*. ET Markus Bockmuehl. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991.
- Sundberg, Albert C., Jr. *The Old Testament of the Early Church*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1964.
- Ulrich, Eugene C. "The Qumran biblical Scrolls—the Scriptures of Late Second Temple Judaism" in Timothy H. Lim et al (eds), *The Dead Sea Scrolls in their Historical Context* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), pp. 67-88.
- Vermes, Geza. *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism. Haggadic Studies*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961.
- , "Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible. From the Beginnings to Jerome*. Edited by P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans. Cambridge: CUP, 1970. Pp. 199-231.
- Werman, Golda. *Milton and Midrash*. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1995.
- Wright, Addison G. *The Literary Genre of Midrash*. Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1967. Originally published in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 28 (1966):105-138 and 417-457. References are to the original articles.