
The maximalist–minimalist debate, as it has come to be known, has been argued mostly within the domain of archaeology. Ian Young has brought together a number of essays that engage the debate in the area of language. Two groups of essays in this volume address the question: Is it possible to date the texts of the Hebrew Bible based on their particular linguistic features?

The first group of essays addresses the question from “within the chronological framework”—especially as constructed by Avi Hurvitz. It includes Mats Eskhult, “The Importance of Loanwords for Dating Biblical Hebrew Texts” (pp. 8-23); Avi Hurvitz, “Hebrew and Aramaic in the Biblical Period: The Problem of ‘Aramaisms’ in Linguistic Research on the Hebrew Bible” (pp. 24-27); Frank Polak, “Style Is More than the Person: Sociolinguistics, Literary Culture, and the Distinction between Written and Oral Narrative” (pp. 38-103); Gary Rendsburg, “Hurvitz Redux: On the Continued Scholarly Attention to a Simple Principle of Hebrew Philology” (pp. 104-8); and Richard Wright, “Further Evidence for North Israelite Contributions to Late Biblical Hebrew” (pp. 129-48).

The essays in the second group present “challenges to the chronological framework.” This group consists of Philip Davies, “Biblical Hebrew and the History of Ancient Judah: Typology, Chronology, and Common Sense” (pp. 150-63); Martin Ehrensvärd, “Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts” (pp. 164-88); Jacobus Naudé, “The Transitions of Biblical Hebrew in the Perspective of Language Change and Diffusion” (pp. 189-214); Robert Rezetko, “Dating Biblical Hebrew: Evidence from Samuel-Kings and Chronicles” (pp. 215-50); David Talshir, “The Habitat and History of Hebrew during the Second Temple Period” (pp. 251-75); and Ian Young, “Late Biblical Hebrew and Hebrew Inscriptions” (pp. 276-311). In addition, Young provides introductory (“Introduction: The Origin of the Problem” [pp. 1-7]) and concluding (“Concluding Reflections” [pp. 312-17]) remarks.

The “chronological framework” that characterizes the first group of essays refers to the scholarly consensus of the past century and more that (at least) two distinct stages of Hebrew can be discerned in the Bible: Standard Biblical Hebrew (SBH), represented by much of Genesis–Kings, and Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH), found in Chronicles and other postexilic writings. Several of the essays (Eskhult, Hurvitz, and Rendsburg) affirm the importance of loanwords in demonstrating this chronological distinction.

The minimalists present two basic challenges to this consensus in the second group of essays. First, they charge that the chronological explanation of the linguistic differences between, for instance, Samuel-Kings and Chronicles, is assumed but not proven. For example, Davies affirms the typological distinction between SBH and LBH, but challenges the assumption that chronology is the only or best explanation. Instead he suggests that SBH and LBH may have coexisted in the Persian period.

Second, they minimize the distinction between SBH and LBH through an analysis of the pertinent data. Both Ehrensvärd and Rezetko examine features customarily used to distinguish between SBH and LBH and find most of them unconvincing. What distinguishing features remain, they claim, are susceptible to nonchronological explanations such as
dialect, diglossia, or scribal activity. In addition, Young dismantles the assumed close connection between SBH and the Hebrew of the preexilic epigraphic discoveries.

This volume makes a contribution to the maximalist–minimalist debate in several ways. First, it clearly delineates the point of controversy between the two camps. Most starkly, Rendsburg claims that the "default" dating of texts without clear Persian influence should be preexilic (p. 111); by contrast, Ehrensivård argues that some clearly postexilic works are written in SBH, and that therefore disputed SBH texts should be dated to that same period (p. 187). In other words, maximalists claim that texts should be dated to the preexilic period unless there is evidence to the contrary, while minimalists claim the exact opposite—that texts should be considered postexilic unless the evidence demands otherwise. Second, several of the essays provide a list of features customarily used to distinguish LBH from SBH that readers can examine for themselves. Finally, several of the essays explore nonchronological explanations for the typological distinctions in the Bible, including oral/written (Polak) and dialectic (Wright, Talshir) distinctions.

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This collection of papers presented at the Lille colloquium is an international effort, and this is signaled at the very beginning of the volume: Christian-B. Amphoux offers "Preface: Vers la rédaction finale du Nouveau Testament" (pp. 5-8) in French, and J. Keith Elliott follows with "Introduction: The Nature of the Evidence Available for Reconstructing the Text of the New Testament in the Second Century" (pp. 9-18) in English. The papers are evenly divided between French and English, though the authors represent a range of European and North American institutions. Form follows function in this collection, since a paper by Amphoux ("Une édition plurielle de Marc" [pp. 69-80]) aims to describe and defend the multilingual Mark project, in which versions will be published in adjacent paragraphs (see Filologia neotestamentaria, forthcoming, for more information on the project). The papers are divided into three groups: editions of the NT, witnesses to the text, and variants. All deal with some form of the second-century text of the NT, whether through manuscript fragments or patristic citations. Some papers then go on to make a case for priority or nonpriority of a text and pursue the consequences for exegesis.

In the first group (Editions of the New Testament) are the following papers: D. C. Parker, "The Principio Project: A Reconstruction of the Johannine Tradition" (pp. 21-29); K. Wachtel, "Colwell Revisited: Grouping New Testament Manuscripts" (pp. 31-43); M. A. Robinson, "In Search of the Alexandrian Archetype: Observations from a Byzantine-Priority Perspective" (pp. 45-67); C.-B. Amphoux, "Une édition plurielle de Marc" (pp. 69-80) mentioned above. The articles by Parker and Amphoux outline new projects that will eventually produce editions of the NT text that do not favor one tradition but instead put all early evidence on an equal footing.