

# The Folio

Bulletin of the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center, a research center of the Claremont School of Theology

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## The Leningrad Codex—*and Me*

Rabbi David E. S. Stein  
freelance editor and proofreader of Judaica

Editor's Note: ABMC fielded a photographic team to Russia in 1990 to photograph the Leningrad Codex ("L"). The Leningrad Codex is the world's oldest complete Jewish Bible. This project, done in collaboration with West Semitic Research, continues to have a vital effect on the study of the Hebrew Bible.



I am an editor and proofreader of Hebrew Bible-related books. I am also an amateur historian. In both capacities I am grateful for the recent facsimile edition of the Leningrad Codex ("L"; *The Leningrad Codex*, Eerdmans, 1998). As the reader may know, that awesome volume features reproductions of high-resolution photographs produced by ABMC.

### Speaking as an Editor

An editor like me must determine "what the Bible says" in the most basic sense of that phrase: how does the text actually read? Sometimes this question is not easily answered, for no thoroughly reliable "gold standard" exists. Meanwhile, if a given reading seems puzzling, that may be the result of a copying mistake somewhere along the line, or it may be that the anomaly actually was intended. (Because the Bible's spiritual subject matter is in many ways beyond words, we can expect its word choice to be at times metaphoric, allusive, and improbable.) This uncertainty makes proofreading the Hebrew Bible a particular challenge.

Enter the manuscript called L. Completed by a scribe nearly a thousand years ago, it is now the oldest complete extant manuscript of the Hebrew Bible in the form crystallized by the Masoretes ("Traditionalists")—the punctilious textual experts based in Tiberias in the Galilee whose work culminated in the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE. Because L is so

above photo courtesy, Carole Martin

## A Tribute to Jean-Dominique Barthélemy

James A. Sanders  
President, ABMC

Editor's Note: On February 10, 2002, Jean-Dominique Barthélemy, a leading biblical scholar died after a long illness. Barthélemy was revolutionary in bringing a new understanding to the early history of the biblical text. The following is an excerpt from a tribute by James Sanders for his good friend and colleague.

"Scholars will always associate the name of R.-P. Dominique Barthélemy, OP, of Fribourg with the Minor Prophets scroll because of his masterly treatment of its contents in *Devanciers*, a book which in many ways has revolutionized scholarship." So wrote Emanuel Tov of Hebrew University in *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* (DJD, vol. 8 [Oxford: Clarendon, 1990]).

*continued on page 3*

old and of higher quality than later manuscripts, several modern Bible students have sought it out, hoping to avoid some of the transmission errors that have arisen in more recent centuries. That is why an international team of Christian and Jewish scholars edited L for publication, producing *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS, 1967–1977).

BHS is a splendid resource for Bible publishers, yet its publication involved opportunities for some errors to be introduced. That is why by 1987, scholars had flagged places where they thought the reading given by BHS (or L itself) was suspect. A decade later, when the ABMC photographs of L became available, scholars eagerly used those high-resolution images to check the flagged locations. Not surprisingly, the BHS team had occasionally misinterpreted characters in the manuscript. (Consider the challenges they faced: reliance upon a microfilm of L that was not always clear; overlapping and lookalike handwritten characters; erasures;

*continued on page 7*

# The Folio

The Newsletter of  
The Ancient Biblical  
Manuscript Center

## Table of Contents

<i>The Leningrad Codex—and Me</i>	1
Rabbi David E. S. Stein	
A Tribute to Jean-Dominique Barthélemy	1
<i>James A. Sanders</i>	
<i>shedding light</i>	Honor Roll of Donors 4
Retirement Plans Can Provide a Legacy for ABMC	6
	Publications/Events 6
<i>on the</i>	Staff News 6
ABMC is Now Accepting Donations by Credit Card	7

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### *Dominique Barthélemy cont.*

Barthélemy's work has indeed revolutionized scholarship, especially textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible and of its earliest Greek translations, the so-called Septuagint.

It was a master stroke on Eugene Nida's part to invite Barthélemy to join a group of six First Testament scholars to work on the really difficult text critical problems for which United Bible Societies (UBS) translation committees around the world most often turned to modern versions for solutions (just as ancient translators often turned to the Septuagint). It became clear to the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project (HOTTP) at its very first meeting in Arnoldshain in West Germany in 1969 that Barthélemy would set the tone and the pace of its work. (The other members were Hans Peter Rüger of Tübingen, Norbert Lohfink of Frankfurt, W. D. McHardy of Oxford, A. R. Hulst of Utrecht, and myself.)

Barthélemy had co-edited, with J. T. Milik, the first volume of DJD (1955), the Dead Sea Scrolls fragments from Cave 1 (other than the seven full scrolls published in America and Israel), and then was assigned the Dodecapropheton, or Greek Minor Prophets scroll, from Nahal Hever. It was Barthélemy's work on the Hever manuscript to which Tov referred, and it did indeed revolutionize textual criticism. *Les devanciers d'Aquila: première publication intégrale du texte des fragments du Dodécaprophéton* (Leiden: Brill, 1963) demonstrated Barthélemy's grasp of the field and turned it on its head. His work on the scroll from Nahal Hever brought unprecedented clarity to the early history of the transmission of the text of the Hebrew Bible and of its early Greek translations. The field had thought in largely theoretical and uncertain terms about the early transmission history of the text, but now it had through his work what he called "a missing link" between the early rather fluid Greek translations and the more formal, even rigid Greek translations of the second century of the common era. This matched the same observation the newly recovered Hebrew biblical scrolls had brought to light, that of a move from the early,

relatively fluid Hebrew texts of the Bible at Qumran to the more "stable" biblical texts from Murabbaat, Masada, and elsewhere—or from the second-century BCE 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> to the first century CE 1QIsa<sup>b</sup>.

The history of transmission of the text could now be stated in clear terms: the pre-Masoretic, the proto-Masoretic, and the Masoretic periods. Barthélemy stated the case not only in *Devanciers*, and elsewhere in French, but also in English in the supplementary volume to *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville:



Photo courtesy, Universitätsverlag  
Freiburg Schweiz

Abingdon, 1976). But the influence of his thesis had already been reflected in major critical works in the field in the late '60s, particularly those of the Hebrew University Bible Project (HUBP). It was indeed the basis of the thesis I then advanced that the concept of authority of the text changed from a vaguely shamanistic or dynamic understanding of inspiration to that of "verbal inspiration," by which the focus shifted from making the message of the text understandable for ever-changing believing communities to focus on accurate verbal transmission of the text ("Text and Canon: Concepts and Method," *Journal*

*of Biblical Literature* 98 [1979]: 5-29). *Devanciers* showed that the movement was from relative textual fluidity to accuracy of transmission of a particular text type, which would become the Masoretic Text. The focus shifted from the community to the text.

When the work of the HOTTP got underway it too was based on the new understanding. We made it clear to Nida that we were committed to the needs of the Translations Department of the UBS but that we also wanted to work out and elaborate the new understanding of text criticism. Beginning in 1970 the work of the committee took on a sense of excitement in seeing how the new understanding of textual criticism applied to the problems we were given to work on, which amounted finally to nearly 6,000 textual cases throughout the Hebrew Bible. The work continued annually, meeting for a month each year, usually in August, in Freudenstadt at the Erholungsheim of the Württembergische Evangelische Kirche. Rüger annually worked up sheets of ancient variants for each problem,

*continued on page 8*

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## Staff News

ABMC is proud to welcome its newest and youngest member, Ethan Alexander Schufer. Ethan was born March 15, 2002, at 7 pounds and 18 inches, to proud parents Michael and Jennifer Schufer.

Michael has served for the last seven years as ABMC's Research Assistant for Scholarly Services. Michael is a PhD student in New Testament Studies at Claremont Graduate University, and is approaching his qualifying exams. Jennifer has aided ABMC over the years with mailings and publications, not to mention having an endless supply of moral support.

ABMC would also like to welcome two new work-study students:

- Jana Davis, a senior at Pomona College
- Lauren Hilgers, a junior at Pomona College

Both Lauren and Jana contribute to the detailed task of compiling and verifying information for the Dead Sea Scrolls Database.

## Publications and Upcoming Events

### Jim Sanders

"Intertextuality and Dialogue: New Approaches to the Scriptural Canon," in *Canon vs. Culture: Reflections on the Current Debate*, ed. by Jan Gorak (New York: Garland, 2001) 175-90.

"Canon as Dialogue," in *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation*, ed. by Peter W. Flint (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 7-26.

"The Family in the Bible," *Biblical Theology Bulletin*. Dedicated to the memory of Professor Fr. Leland White. May 2002 issue.

### Bill Schniedewind

"Linguistic Ideology in Qumran Hebrew," in *Diggers at the Well: Proceedings of a Third International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira* (eds. T. Muraoka and J. F. Elwolde; Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 245-255.

"Melchizedek, Traditions of," in *Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds* (ed. Craig Evans; Intersarsity Press, 2000), pp. 693-5.

"Rule of the Congregation/Messianic Rule," in *Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds* (ed. Craig Evans; Intersarsity Press, 2000), pp. 1024-1026.

"Sociolinguistic Reflections on the Letter of a 'Literate' Soldier (Lachish 3)," *Zeitschrift für Althbraistik* 13 (2000), pp. 157-167.

"Orality and Literacy in Ancient Israel," *Religious Studies Review* 26/4 (2000), pp. 327-332.

"A Possible Reconstruction of the Name of Hazael's Father in the Tel Dan Inscription," (co-authored with Bruce Zuckerman), *Israel Exploration Journal* 51 (2001), pp. 88-91.

"Explaining God's Name in Exodus 3," *Congress Volume of the IOSOT Meeting*, Basel 2001, forthcoming.





### **Leningrad Codex cont.**

blemishes in the parchment; and even flaked-off ink.) As a result, the fourth edition of BHS (1997) incorporated dozens of corrected readings.

One scholar who worked on that BHS correction project, Harold Scanlin of the American Bible Society, kindly provided me with a list of those changes, so that I could incorporate those corrections into the books I have worked on. In that oblique manner, my work has benefited from the ABMC photographs.

In addition, I myself directly consulted the facsimile edition in certain places where the reading in BHS caught my eye as somewhat strange. As a result, I have found several more instances where BHS editors had misread the manuscript, including a few they had footnoted as probable scribal errors (“sic L”). Apparently in those places the cited anomaly was merely an artifact of the microfilm upon which BHS relied.

In short, I have employed the ABMC photographs both directly and indirectly in the preparation of three books issued or co-issued by the Jewish Publication Society (JPS), a non-profit educational publisher located in Philadelphia: *The JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* (1999); *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary* (2001); and *The JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarah* (forthcoming in April 2002). As a result of my having recourse to the facsimile edition of L, the JPS has been able to provide readers with a more accurate representation of the biblical text.

Furthermore, these new corrections have generally coincided with the reading found in the “received” Jewish textual traditions as transmitted in the centuries since L was copied. The ABMC-supported facsimile edition has enabled scholars to conclude that L and the “received” traditions are more alike than previously thought. This finding not only affirms the “quality control” of Jewish textual transmission but also improves L’s standing as a candidate base text for contemporary Jewish Bible editions.

### **Speaking as an Historian**

I have also benefited from those ABMC photographs as an amateur historian. Thus I have learned about the provenance of this important manuscript by studying, among other things, a deed of purchase that was recorded beneath the opening colophon. Victor Lebedev’s introduction to the 1998 edition describes this note of sale but (I believe) he misunderstood it. He did not realize that two names mentioned there are well known from the Cairo Geniza, and that what historians know about those two persons places the transaction in a different light.

As Dr. Lebedev correctly wrote, L was purchased about 870 years ago by a certain Matsliach ben Solomon ha-Kohen. The Geniza evidence tells us that at the time of purchase, Matsliach was one of the most famous—and most powerful—Jews alive. He was the president-for-life of the venerable “Palestinian” denomination of Rabbanite Jews, which comprised congregations not only throughout the Levant but also in North Africa, Spain, Italy, Yemen, and India. Each morning in every one of those synagogues, cantors led prayers for “His Eminence Matsliach.” Likewise, public gatherings and formal legal documents would open with mention of his name. As president, Matsliach was the final authority for interpretation of the Bible within his denomination, and he had wide-ranging administrative and judicial authority. He was also part of the retinue of the caliph in Cairo. Several of his ancestors had served as presidents before him; and his family traced its descent back more than a thousand years to a president of the legendary rabbinical council at Yavneh, following the destruction of the Second Temple.

Such a leader could have purchased any Bible codex in the realm (if it wasn’t presented to him as a gift). Therefore, that Matsliach bought L probably reflects his confidence in that manuscript. Arguably he deemed it to be the best privately owned Hebrew Bible available.

Dr. Lebedev went on to state that the next three names recorded were those of successive owners. However, I would argue that they were actually witnesses attesting to Matsliach’s purchase. This was standard practice at the time; and the second person listed, Halfon ben Menashe ha-Levi, is known to have been a court clerk and a contemporary of Matsliach. For example, about a year-and-a-half later, Halfon witnessed Matsliach’s purchase of a tractate of the Talmud, as recorded in a similar colophon entry there (found in the Cairo Geniza).

Although the 1998 facsimile edition may have presented these few background details incorrectly, its publication gave that opening page the wider circulation needed so that it could receive due attention as a historical document.

Before 1998, I already felt that the present era is a wonderful one for Jewish scholars, due to the many and burgeoning new resources that serve as fresh gateways into the past. I feel fortunate to be alive right now. Both professionally and personally, the first-rate work of ABMC has only added to my delight.

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Rabbi Stein welcomes readers to contact him regarding this article. His email address is [ravsulomm@earthling.net](mailto:ravsulomm@earthling.net).

*Dominique Barthélemy cont.*

Lohfink provided recent critical scholarship on each problem, and I provided extant readings from those Dead Sea Scrolls that had not yet been published, while Barthélemy probed and analyzed all the pertinent ancient, medieval, and early critical treatments of each problem. It was clear from the beginning of our work that Barthélemy was a rare master of the medieval Judeo-Arabic (Qaraite or rabbinic) commentaries, many of which had not been published. Barthélemy had accumulated scores of microfilms of extant manuscripts of ancient, medieval, and early critical works on the Hebrew Bible, which he also used to check against those that had been published.

I shall never forget my first visits to his study in Fribourg. It was in those visits and out of my admiration for his quest for accuracy in textual work that I conceived of the idea of making such films available to scholarship generally. We often found in our work on the HOTTP a perpetuation of errors copied from one published apparatus to another in even the finest of scholarship, simply because there was lack of access to images of many manuscripts to check against. Dominique's collection, while admirable in its extent and depth, was for his personal and professional use in Fribourg. I grew increasingly convinced that all scholars had to have access to such images for the sake of the field and for the sake of the churches and synagogues, which benefit from the work of textual scholar-

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ship. This was the motivation behind my accepting Elizabeth Hay Bechtel's invitation to join her in 1977 to establish the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center in Claremont, where we have accumulated photographic images of the most important manuscripts of the Bible, both testaments, including all the Dead Sea Scrolls, for distribution to scholars around the world who request copies of them. Now, of course, we are moving to manuscripts for distribution on the web and by compact disk. The mission of the Center is "to acquire, preserve and distribute images of biblical and related manuscripts," and the inspiration for it came from Dominique Barthélemy's passion for accuracy.

*James Sander's entire text of the tribute can be found on the WWW at [purl.org/TC/vol107/Barthelemy2002obit.html](http://purl.org/TC/vol107/Barthelemy2002obit.html).*



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