

Josef Dobrovský's Contribution to Hebrew Studies

Stanislav Segert (Los Angeles)

The later part of the 18th century was an important period in the development of the study of the Hebrew Bible. Johann David Michaelis and Giovanni Bernardo de Rossi are still quoted in modern literature. The name of Josef Dobrovský who was in contact with these two scholars is virtually unknown among Hebrew scholars. There are two reasons for this: His attempts to introduce new material and methods were not published; they remain among the manuscripts in his estate. And Dobrovský's renown as founder of Slavic studies as a scholarly discipline overshadowed his achievements in Hebrew philology.

Josef Dobrovský was born in Gyarmat in Northwestern Hungary. He died in 1829 in Brno in Moravia, but he spent most of his life in Prague, the capital of Bohemia. After a short period of novitiate which ended by the dissolution of the Jesuit order in 1773, Dobrovský continued his studies of Hebrew at the Faculty of Theology of the Prague University. Then he spent many years as tutor of young sons of the Family of Count Nostitz in their Prague residence. This position gave him ample opportunity for research and publications. For his mastery of Hebrew Dobrovský was considered as a candidate for the Old Testament chairs at various universities. Dobrovský criticized neglect of the study of the original Biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek, at the Prague University. His criticism, published in the literary journal that he edited, caused him some troubles, and probably prevented the possibility of his professorial appointment.

Dobrovský, in close cooperation with his friend Fortunat Durych (1735-1802), devoted then more attention to the study of Old Church Slavonic Bible texts. He continued in this direction by publishing basic studies in many fields of Slavic studies: languages, literatures, history, and archaeology.

The Slavistic works of Dobrovský have been described and evaluated in many books and articles. From the viewpoint of Biblical studies those dealing with his publications on the Slavonic and Latin Bible texts and on the methods that he applied are of interest. Dobrovský's contribution to other fields, such as Ugro-Finnic linguistics, have also received due attention.

Dobrovský's works are being published with notes and introductions in a series under the auspices of the Czechoslovak Academy. One of these volumes, edited by Bohumil Ryba, presents Dobrovský's study – published originally in 1783 – in which he has demonstrated that the parts of the Latin Vulgata manuscript of St. Mark's Gospel, kept since the 14th century in Prague, cannot be the autographs of St. Mark.

The Hebraistic works of Dobrovský did not attract attention which they deserve, even though in 1833 the historian František Palacký (1798-1876), one of the first biographers of Dobrovský, pointed to Dobrovský's use of Semitic methodology as model for Slavic linguistics; Dobrovský applied the concept of roots for the study of

word formation. Palacký himself has learnt Hebrew as student at the Protestant Lyceum in Bratislava (Pressburg).

The one-hundredth anniversary of Dobrovský's death motivated many important publications in 1929 and shortly after. Theodor Frankl in his article about Dobrovský as Orientalist and his way to Slavistics has evaluated Dobrovský's work in Semitic philology and its importance. Only published material was used in this article.

The two-hundredth anniversary of Dobrovský's birth also motivated many publications in 1953 and after. In 1954 Heinrich Kunstmann published three letters of Dobrovský to Johann David Michaelis, Professor in Göttingen, written between 1776 and 1786.

When Stanislav Segert began to collect material for the book on Oriental studies at Prague University, he was able to use manuscripts from Dobrovský's estate. An article about Dobrovský's Hebraistic work appeared in 1960. The book on Oriental studies co-authored with the historian Karel Beránek and published by the Charles University in 1967, contains a section on Dobrovský.

After preliminary arrangements for the edition of Dobrovský's *Hebraica* Segert obtained sabbatical leave from the University of California, Los Angeles, and the Fulbright Award to work on this project. He was able to collect material in the second half of 1990.

The edition is to contain all Hebraistic publications of Dobrovský, as well as his correspondence and manuscripts from his estate, connected with Hebrew and related fields. Major publications will be presented in photomechanic reproductions, minor texts and manuscripts in ordinary print, all with notes and introductions. An index of persons and their publications is planned.

The edition of Dobrovský's *Hebraica* will be provided with introductory chapters, in which the importance of Hebrew studies in Dobrovský's scholarly career, the circumstances of his Hebraistic works and his correspondence with Hebraists will be presented. The importance of Hebraistic works prepared by young Dobrovský will be evaluated with respect to both Semitic and Slavic studies.

The edition of the Prague fragments of Hebrew Bible manuscripts appeared in the leading scholarly periodical *Orientalische und exegetische Bibliothek*, in 1777. The editor J.D. Michaelis published it without indicating the author's name.

To demonstrate his competence for a professorial chair in Old Testament, Dobrovský published in 1783 *Iosephi Dobrowsky de Antiquis Hebraeorum Characteribus Dissertatio* on 54 pages and one plate. With many references to scholarly literature Dobrovský argued that the preexilic script of the Hebrews was identical with that of the Canaanites, i.e. Phoenicians, and that through minor changes the Samaritan script developed from this base. Main arguments were based on the authority of Church Fathers, Origenes, Eusebius and Hieronymus. Dobrovský did not consider the tradition from the Talmud reliable enough and did not use allegedly ancient coins. The reference to the data from Flavius Josephus about the inscriptions on priestly garments can be considered Dobrovský's specific contribution.

J.D. Michaelis reviewed this book in his journal without delay. He acknowledged clear presentation and good documentation, but did not agree with the main result. He pointed to the gradual development of these scripts.

From the present standpoint it can be seen that Dobrovský's opinion was in principle correct and confirmed by later finds of older Samaritan inscriptions.

The article about the tombstone of Sarah in the Prague Jewish cemetery appeared – without the author's name – in the journal *Hyllos* in 1819 and was reprinted – with initials „J.D.“ only – in another journal in 1828. Dobrovský correctly interpreted the Hebrew inscriptions as indicating the date according to the Jewish era as 5366, not 4366 as mentioned in previous publications. Thus the inscription was written in the year 1606 of the Christian era, and speculations motivated by the alleged date of 606 were shown to be without substance.

Dobrovský studied Hebrew Bible manuscripts kept in Prague, *Egrentis* in the University Library – which belonged in the 14th century to the Jewish community of Cheb (Eger) in Western Bohemia – and *Nostitzianus* in the palace where he was staying as tutor of Count Nostitz's sons. He sent selected variant readings to Giovanni Bernardo de Rossi who used some of them in his collection *Variae lectiones Veteris Testamenti* (I-IV, Parma 1784-1788).

In his literary journals which he both wrote and edited, Dobrovský presented information about instruction of Hebrew and other Semitic languages at Universities in Bohemia and Moravia, with data about teachers and their publications. In reports about libraries he mentioned oriental books and manuscripts. In sections dealing with recent literature he published reviews of Bible translations, of books about Jews and of Hebrew books published in Bohemia and Moravia. Dobrovský edited his *Böhmische (und Mährische) Literatur* for years 1779 and 1780, and after delays caused by reaction to his critique of University authorities published there, he used for the 1786 and 1787 volumes another title, *Litterarisches Magazin von Böhmen und Mähren*.

The correspondence between Dobrovský and two leading Hebrew scholars, Michaelis and de Rossi, will be published completely. From the letters of Dobrovský to other correspondents and their letters to Dobrovský passages will be selected concerning the Hebrew Bible and related matters.

Three letters of Dobrovský to Johann David Michaelis (1717-1791) from 1776-1786 have already been published in 1954 by Heinrich Kunstmann, but because of many printing errors in the Hebrew words a new publication is necessary. These letters are kept in the University Library in Göttingen. Two letters from Michaelis to Dobrovský, written in 1776 and 1778 respectively, are in Dobrovský's estate kept in the Literary Archive of the Museum of Czech Literature in Prague.

Giovanni Bernardo de Rossi, Professor of Oriental languages in Parma, sent to Dobrovský eight letters in the years 1785-1790. They are kept in Prague. Ten letters from Dobrovský to de Rossi, from the same period, are preserved in the Bibliotheca Palatina in Parma.

Dobrovský was sending to both these scholars variants from Hebrew Bible manuscripts accessible to him in Prague; some of these data were published. In later letters the shift of Dobrovský's activity from Hebrew Bible to Old Slavonic Bible is clearly visible.

Among Dobrovský's other correspondents, Fortunat Durych was most interested in Hebrew. He and Dobrovský studied Arabic together. Their correspondence contains a great number of matters related to these languages and texts; Syriac is also quoted there.

Another correspondent of Dobrovský, Augustin Helfert, was interested in Hebrew, at least in his earlier letters. In correspondence with other persons mentions of Hebrew are rather rare.

Insofar as this correspondence is accessible in printed editions, especially in those by Adolf Patera and František M. Bartoš, the selections are taken from them. A few selections from letters preserved in original in Prague may be added.

The edition of Dobrovský's *Hebraica* will also contain selections from considerable manuscript material from Dobrovský's estate preserved in the Literary Archive in Prague. Two projects which were not completed deserve special attention.

Following a suggestion published by Michaelis, Dobrovský started excerpting works of Hieronymus (St. Jerome). He planned to write a systematic survey of Hieronymus' data concerning Hebrew language. The titles of the excerpts from the Maurine and Vallarsi's editions point to this purpose. Dobrovský was also considering to prepare the edition of Hieronymus's *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos*.

Other excerpts from Hieronymus and also those from Flavius Josephus and from Eusebius' *Onomastikon* attest Dobrovský's interest in the study of personal names.

Only a few sheets in the estate are devoted to the study of Hebrew and other Semitic roots. Dobrovský computed the possible number of combinations of roots consisting of three consonants each: if the number of consonants is 22, then 22^3 , i.e. 10,648. He tried to find which combinations are realized in Hebrew.

From the viewpoint of the 18th century, the published contributions of Dobrovský to Hebrew studies can be evaluated as relevant, especially so his „dissertation“ on ancient Hebrew letters.

But more relevant would be those contributions which were not completed and published and remained in his estate. They appear as even more relevant from the perspective of more than two hundred years.

Studies of Hebrew pronunciation according to Hieronymus were published in 1884 by Carl Siegfried, in 1948 by E.F. Sutcliffe, and in 1967 by James Barr who is continuing this research. A quantitative analysis of roots in Hebrew and related languages was performed by Joseph Greenberg in 1950.

While Dobrovský did not continue his research in Hebrew, he used his experience most effectively for laying foundations of comparative Slavic studies, at a time when Semitic comparative linguistics had already been cultivated for hundreds of years – three comparative dictionaries were published in the 17th century –, while the Indo-European linguistics was still in its cradle.

Abstract:

Josef Dobrovský (1753-1829) ist als Begründer der Slavistik als eines wissenschaftlichen Faches berühmt, doch seiner Beteiligung an der Hebraistik wurde verhältnismäßig wenig Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet. Jetzt befindet sich die Veröffentlichung von *Hebraica* in der von der Tschechoslowakischen Akademie besorgten Reihe seiner Werke in Vorbereitung. „Dissertatio“ über die althebräische Schrift (1783), Mitteilungen über Varianten der Prager

hebräischen Bibelhandschriften, kleinere Nachrichten und Korrespondenz mit J.D. Michaelis und G.B. de Rossi sowie Auszüge aus Dobrovskýs handschriftlichem Nachlaß sollen dort veröffentlicht werden – mit Einleitungen und Anmerkungen. Die Bedeutung dieser Werke sowohl für die Hebraistik als auch für die Slavistik soll in den Schlußkapiteln behandelt werden.

Address of the author:

Prof. Dr. St. Segert, University of California, Los Angeles, Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, 405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles/California 90024-1511, U.S.A.