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BIBLICAL CRITICISM IN NAHMAN KROCHMAL'S WRITINGS. Between Rabbinical Tradition and Galician Enlightenment*

Introduction

Nachman (ha-Kohen) Krochmal, born 1785 in Brody, at that time part of the Habsburg realm, is among the forerunners of the science of Judaism, *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.[1] His main work, called *More nevukhe ha-zeman*, in imitation of the title of the great philosophical work of Maimonides (d. 1204), "Guide for the Perplexed of the time,"[2] was edited posthumously by Leopold Zunz in 1850.[3] On account of its thematic breadth and linguistic freshness, it was counted from an early stage among the classics of modern Hebrew. In it, in 17 *she'arim* or gates, on approximately 600 closely printed pages, Krochmal, or Ranak as he was known after his acronym, develops a philosophy of the history of the Jews as the "eternal nation," the *'am 'olam*, that treads its path through all the ups and downs of history, running in cyclical paths.[4] In contrast to the nations, it is not subject to the laws developed, among others, by Herder, according to which a nation can only live through a period of climax once.[5] Apart from such clear influences of contemporary idealistic philosophy and historiography, Krochmal, who learned German as an autodidact,[6] also took numerous exegetes into account, in particular also those of non-Jewish origin.[7] In his environment, the East Galician Judaism shaped by *Hassidism* and *Mitnagdim*, this meant progress towards a more rational view of the genesis of the Bible and thus of the beginnings of the Judaism of which Krochmal considered himself a scion.[8]

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* In memory of Professor Dr. Margarete Schlüter, Frankfurt on Main, who heard an earlier version of this paper at the Eighth EAJS Congress in Moscow, July 23rd–27th 2006 and supported my interest in Krochmal from its early beginnings.

[1] For a short biographical sketch and bibliography see Lehnardt 2007a, 941–952. Krochmal died 1840 in Tarnopol.

[2] On Krochmal's reception of Moshe ben Maimon's thought see Lehnardt 2004, 427–448.

[3] The influence of Krochmal on Zunz is difficult to discern. See however Zunz 1845, 113–122, reprinted in Zunz 1878, 150–159, reprinted Hildesheim, New York 1976, 150–159.

[4] For a survey of this cyclical historiosophy see Schlüter 1990, 175–205. In Lehnardt 2007b, 374–375 a schematic analysis of his concept of history is presented.

[5] For a general introduction see Harris 1991; Feiner 2000, 115–137.

[6] On Krochmal's attitude toward German see, e.g., the letters he wrote in German, and also Krochmal, *The Writings*, p. 452, letter 17.

[7] He explicitly cites the works of Dähne 1834 and Neander 1818 (a neophyt!). In one instance he quotes Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräisches und chaldäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, Vol. 1–2, 4th edition, Leipzig 1834.

[8] On the development of *Hasidism* in East Galicia at that time see Mahler 1985. An informative description of the situation is also provided by Krochmal's disciple J.-H. Schorr (1883, 283–284).

In the following I would therefore like to examine Krochmal's handling of Biblical texts as the source of his cyclical philosophy of history, developing in synthetic phases in each case. In the first section, I shall deal with Krochmal's predecessors; I shall then present the typical from Krochmal's point of view; finally, I shall attempt to fit the findings into place in Krochmal's age and his whole work.

Krochmal's predecessors

Krochmal's access to Biblical texts (or the *Tanakh*) and his relationship to the growing critical Biblical scholarship of his age – both in the Christian and in the Jewish world – has been little examined up to now.[9] On the one hand, this is certainly due to the fact that his work cannot be described as being exegetic in the real sense of the term. Krochmal probably did not consider himself as a *parshan* in the original sense of the word, and this even if one recognizes that he did present numerous individual exegeses in the *More* and also attempted to incorporate their results directly into his account of history.[10] Perhaps he saw himself more as a *darshan*, a preacher, since we know that he used to preach in the synagogue of his hometown. However, exegetical studies of the Biblical text were not the main goal of his thinking, and we must always bear in mind that the *Tanakh* served him mainly as a historical source and the starting point of his historiosophical thinking.

Nevertheless, the Galician scholar himself clarifies his intentions even at the beginning of the second gate, emphasizing that it "is not for instance" our intention "here and subsequently to raise exegetic questions and to interpret Biblical passages in the sense of the *darshanim.*"[11] Rather it is explained that what really matters for him is just an explanation of such verses and words in the Bible which could support his system and his interpretation of history.

What is of interest for us here initially is which Jewish precursors he had with regard to his dealings with Biblical texts and to what extent he was able to take up from his predecessors. The Jewish Biblical exegesis in the epoch of the Haskala, the emancipation or enlightenment, had already fundamentally changed compared with that of the Jewish Middle Ages.[12] In particular, responsible for this can be held the fact that the science of exegesis, which had become an independent discipline in the

[9] See on this especially Lilienblum 1970, 149. On Krochmal as Bible scholar see Soloveitchik/ Rubatschov 1925, 150–154; Weissblueth 1981, 7–82 (Hebrew); Greenbaum 1983, 101–105. See also Tirosh-Samuelson 2004, 1948–1975, esp. 1968–1969.

[10] See on this Weissblueth 1981, 23.

[11] Cited according to Krochmal 1961, 10. This edition is based on the second and corrected edition: *More neboche ha-seman sive Director errantium nostrae aetatis, Opus ad illustrandas Judaeorum antiquitates et leges, Philosophiamque, inprimis celeberrimi Aben Esrae doctrinam de divino scripsit Nachman Krochmal incola Zolkieviensis jubente Auctore digestumg praefatione instructum et editum a L. Zunz, secunda emeliorate editio augmentata per biographiam ejus et alcunis litteris ejusdem a Michael Wolf magistri religionis*, Lemberg 1863 (Hebrew). On the making of the *More nevukhe ha-zeman* see Schorsch 1986, 281–315.

[12] On the development, which started already in the early modern period, see e.g. Elbaum 1990, 82– –153.

Christian, in particular the Protestant sphere – also moving, among other things, historic questioning to the centre of interest – was exercising an ever greater influence on its environment. As a consequence, the Biblical text became an object of *literary* analysis, and also linked with this in the Jewish sphere was the fact that the exegesis no longer had to serve solely homiletic or halakhic concerns, but also had an educational effect, i.e. it could also benefit the propagation of the objectives of the Haskala.[13]

In this connection, the two most important representatives of an "enlightened" Biblical criticism in Germany, Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) and Naftali Hartwig Wessely (also known as Weisel or Wesel) (1725–1805), had already considered the Biblical text not only in terms of its literary aspects. As is well known, Mendelssohn, who, with the help of numerous scholars, had translated the Hebrew Bible into German (using Hebrew script),[14] wanted to achieve an "improvement" in the living circumstances and the intellectual state of his Jewish co-religionists with this "Commentary": the translation commentary, published under the title *Sefer netivot ha-shalom*, was intended to replace the Yiddish and Christian translations in circulation, thus making the Bible the centre of studies, and pushing the study of the Talmud into the background. In addition, Mendelssohn intended to give a modern commentary, in keeping with his age, on dark passages.[15] In this connection, he saw the Torah quite traditionally as a reliable and holy source of historiography which was identical, with regard to its ethical statements, to the eternal rational truths. Thus he writes at the beginning of his introduction to the *Bi'ur*:

> Whether now immediately this divine Book, which we have received through Moses, is really intended to be a book of the law, and to contain ordinances, rules of life and regulations; it does, as is well known, nevertheless also include an unfathomable abundance of rational truths and religious instructions which are so closely connected with the Laws that they constitute just one. All the laws refer to, or are based on, eternal rational truths, or recall and provoke reflection on the same; so that our rabbis rightly say: the laws and teachings behave towards one another like body and soul.[16]

Consequently, according to Mendelssohn, the Torah was transmitted by God directly to Israel, yet only with respect to its principles, without any commentary and explanations, verbally to Moses; it was only through him that it was written down in the form known to us today, i.e. with a commentary.[17]

Krochmal seems to have particularly clearly adapted this fundamental insight, which was based ultimately on rabbinical traditions, through Mendelssohn's mediation.[18] However, whereas in Mendelssohn's work the commandments were given so that one would examine one's deeds in order thus to come to the real goal, namely to the recognition of the "divine truths" – to be precise in part the "eternal truths" and in part the "historical truths"[19] – this idea specifically of Mendelssohn's recedes into the background in Krochmal's work in favor of his historical-philosophical account.

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[13] Cf. Segal 1952, 114–116.

[14] On this epochal work see Altmann 1973, 368–420; see also Feiner 2002, 127–134.

[15] On the aims of the *Bi'ur* cf. The foreword in the first volume by Mendelssohn 1846. See also Horowitz 1983, 113–136, esp. 114; and now cf. also Feiner 2002, 118.

[16] Mendelssohn 2001, 95.

[17] Cf. Mendelssohn 1846, VII–VIII (in the foreword of the Bi'ur).

[18] Cf. Weissblueth 1981, 12.

[19] Cf. Mendelssohn 2001, 123.

To what extent Wessely, a native of Hamburg, also influenced Krochmal is more difficult to elicit than in Mendelssohn's case. Wessely belonged, as is well known, to Mendelssohn's circle, and compiled, for example, the commentary on the Book of Leviticus for the *Bi'ur*.[20] However, despite his close co-operation with Mendelssohn, he was also an exegete in his own right, who, with his work *Levanon* (or *Gan Na'ul*; Vilnius 1772), compiled an independent grammatical commentary on the synonyms in the Bible. Krochmal seems to have known this work, even if he does not mention or quote Wessely in any place. However, in his foreword to the work, written in Hebrew, Wessely expresses himself on the method in a form which closely recalls Krochmal:

> And my soul knows very exactly that this is the Torah, which Moses gave to the Children of Israel, together with the Commentary, as our fathers, of blessed memory, received it. They are the words of the living God, none of which will fall to the ground. However, if they are far removed from the understanding of the scholars or the knowledge of the wise in their insight, in that they show themselves arrogant in their understanding and in their impiousness even doubt their truth, then they shall walk in darkness...[21]

For Wessely, the written *and* oral Torah are accordingly the signposts for man's correct behavior: "therefore God gave the Torah and the Mitzvot so that man shall sanctify and cleanse himself."[22]

The Torah is divine and is also able to show man the right way, even if he cannot always understand this, and this contradicts his nature. Indeed, man is not at all capable of recognizing the truth of the Torah to its full extent, even if he is a great scholar. In this connection, the Torah was not just given to individual human beings, but to Israel as a people; in this respect Israel was "an adornment among the nations."[23] The Torah was given to Israel by Moses; he alone possessed the special prophetic gift of interpreting it – that gift that was also claimed by later generations, in order to understand the laws. These "Secrets of the Commentary" – incidentally similar to a chapter in *More nevukhe ha-zeman* – were "passed on orally, from generation to generation, down to the present day."[24] Like Mendelssohn, Wessely thus adhered to the absolute divine inspiration of the Torah; however, it required an interpretation which was itself no longer divine.

In contrast to the older tradition, though, as had been set down, for instance, by Maimonides in his foreword to *Mishne Torah*,[25] according to Wessely and Ranak not all oral "commentaries" on the Torah, i.e. the Oral Torah, were revealed already to Moses on Sinai, but just their most important principles. The details and explanations of cases could not have yet been handed down to Moses. Rather they were only found subsequently and added to the Oral Torah. While according to the Rambam all the commandments together with their implementing regulations had already been revealed to Moses, Wessely and then also Krochmal state that, even after the *matan*

[20] Cf. e.g. Klausner 1952, I, 95; Lachower 1955, 65–77. On his personality and point of view in the haskala cf. also Schulte 2002, 85–88.

[21] Wessely 1772, 10 (in the foreword).

[22] Wessely 1772, heder 3, halon 7, p. 50.

[23] Wessely 1772, heder 5, halon 5, p. 66.

[24] Wessely 1772, heder 7, halon 5, p. 102.

[25] Cf. *Mishneh Torah. The Book of Knowledge by Maimonides*. Edited According to the Bodleian (Oxford) Codex with Introduction... and English Translation by M. Hymanson, Jerusalem 1965, p. 1b.

Torah, the presentation of Torah on Sinai, they were left to a further interpretation and an organic development process.[26]

As a result, not only on account of the choice of language, but also because of his organic history of law thinking, Wessely will thus have to be regarded as being more likely a precursor of Krochmal than Mendelssohn.[27]

Krochmal's exegesis and dealings with the Bible

As explained at the beginning, the examination of the Bible in Krochmal's work does not represent a goal in itself; Ranak does not, for instance, write a continuous commentary on Biblical books, but merely integrates exegetic comments into the individual chapters of his account of history and, finally, in Gate 17 ("The Wisdom of the Poor") of his book, also adds transcripts from the commentary of the great Sephardic scholar Avraham Ibn Ezra (d. 1164) on some sections of the *Tanakh* that are of interest for him. Some explanations are also to be found implicitly in his recording of history, thus above all in the comments in Gate 11 ("The Study of the 'Fathers'").[28] However, these "additional comments" on the historiographical chapters 9–10[29] mainly serve historical research, especially with regard to the period of the Second Temple, not for instance the Halakhah finding or the haggadic edification; at first glance they do not follow any historiosophical concern either. In them, Krochmal deals just with such passages from the Scriptures which settle something for his recording of history, while he does not go into more detail on the other parts of the Bible. Particular attention should be drawn to the studies on the Deutero-Isaiah, in which, however, his dependence on Ibn Ezra is most clearly to be recognized, especially with regard to the question whether the Book of Isaiah was written by one or more authors.[30] He also explains some psalms, from which, in his opinion, something is to be deduced about the state of the nation at the time of the Babylonian Exile, the return from exile and the Hasmoneans.[31] Finally he deals with the question of the origin of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Books of Chronicles, the Book of Ezekiel, the Book of the Twelve Prophets, the Book of Daniel, the Book of Esther and of Kohelet. He did indeed

[26] See on this also the chapter of the introduction to my forthcoming translation of the *More nevukhe ha-zeman*. Cf. also Weissblueth 1981, 13, and see also Bialoblozky 1941, 345–380, here p. 346.

[27] Cf. Weissblueth (1981, 11), who correctly remarks that the title *honoris causae* "Der galizische Mendelssohn" coined by M. Weissberg (1927, 371–379) is misleading. More adequately he might be nicknamed the "Wessely of Galicia." Remarkably, Harris does not even consider Wessely's influence on Krochmal.

[28] On this cf. also Harris (1991, 159), who concentrates on Krochmal's exegetical work in chapter 11 of the More only. He does not deal with the other chapters and passages with a clear exegetical character.

[29] It means not only in the preceding chapter as mentioned in the subtitle of sha'ar 11. See Rawidowicz, Mavo, in: Krochmal 1961, 125.

[30] Cf. Krochmal 1961, 114 ff (note 2 – to p. 43); see also his citations of the commentary of Ibn Ezra on Isaiah in chapter 17, Krochmal 1961, 351 ff. In my view Harris 1991, 163 (and elsewhere) overlooks the dependence of Krochmal from Ibn Ezra's commentaries. Instead he emphazizes the challenge of Lutheran Bible criticism, especially that of J.G. Eichhorn, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, Vol. 1–5, Leipzig 1780––1783, 4th edition 1823–1824. This widely spread introduction is, however, never cited explicitly by Krochmal.

[31] Cf. Krochmal 1961, 118 ff (note 3 – to p. 46).

announce that he would also deal with the Book of Job, but he does not seem to have got round to this any more, and this although he does point out elsewhere that the "the importance of the Book of Job exceeds that of the Book of Kohelet as greatly as the distance between Heaven and Earth."[32] He also announced a study of the Proverbs of Solomon and the Song of Songs, without their being found in his work.[33] He leaves other books practically disregarded, because they do not provide anything for his historiographical and philosophical questions. Thus he remarks, for instance, with regard to Joel 4:6.

> From this it is apparent for the intelligent person that the prophecies of Joel are not among the oldest and that on no account were they written earlier than Ezra, which would, admittedly, drag out their explanation here, and this is not necessary for our desired objective.[34]

The traditional order and chronological sequence of the Books of the Prophets is not even questioned by him in this respect,[35] although this was already very widespread especially in the Christian exegesis of his age. Rather, he summarizes his dealings with Biblical scriptures and the objectives followed by him by this with respect to the Book of Kohelet as follows:

> For the sake of the exertion lying before us in this gate devoted to the examination of the generations [viz. Gate 11] and in order to be able to show everything in it correctly, we must now talk about the content of the Book of Kohelet: who wrote it when, and who included it among the Ketuvim.[36]

However, apart from such historiographical interest in Biblical scriptures, a further aspect of dealing with the *Tanakh* appears: the Bible is one, if not *the* source of tradition.[37] And from this it follows for him almost inevitably that he is only prepared for criticism of the Biblical text in those places in which he points out an obvious historical inconsistency which could jeopardize this tradition. By contrast, in places where no danger for the tradition is to be discerned, he follows the Biblical wording, in particular with regard to the wording in the Five Books of Moses.[38] The historical and traditional truth of the Torah is irrefutably certain for him, and also for Mendelssohn and Wessely:

> When writing our Holy Scripture, however, in particular when writing the Torah of the Lord – every sensible and sagacious person knows this – every form of formulation and copying in our work for two thousand years, despite all the discoveries and inquiries which we have made, has always been the

[32] Cf. Krochmal 1961, 148.

[33] Cf. Krochmal 1961, 102.

[34] Krochmal 1961, 160. See also the partial translation of this crucial passage by Harris 1991, 160.

[35] Cf. Krochmal 1961, 130: "Those [Biblical] books with a known date were put into the order of the lives of the prophets, from Hosea, the first after Moses according to our tradition, peace upon him, and the first who wrote down prophecies in a separate book, up to Maleachi, who was the last of the explaining and well-known prophets."

[36] Krochmal 1961, 130. See on this also his remarks on his forthcoming book in the maskilic journal *Kerem hemed* 4 (1839), p. 275 (reprinted in: Krochmal 1961, 403): "In our writing (‚*Sha'are emuna tzerufa*') there will be found two chapters (i.e. chapters 9 and 10) containing words of Midrash and Haskala on the courses of time and its background etc., and in addition to that there will be a special chapter (*sha' ar* 11), containing additional notes and explanations on all matters explained before."

[37] This is not emphasized enough by Harris 1991, 160. He assumes that Krochmal's interest in certain Biblical books is historiographical only: "Krochmal's agenda demands studies of those books, and only those books, that can advance his historiographical agenda." However, see also p. 163 f.

[38] Cf. on this Rawidowicz, Mavo, in Krochmal 1961, 126.

> work of the divine will [literally "fingers"][39] and special providence. And therefore, before Him, may He be praised, every letter and every character in [the Torah] is counted, numbered and laid down. Because everything happens in accordance with the will of His wisdom, and is written and copied in accordance with His providence, as handed down to us from the beginning.[40]

Ranak can, it is true, emphasize on another occasion that one does [not] "need to conceal or even deny the change in script from Old Hebrew to Assyrian that took place in Ezra's time,"[41] which is why there are diverging vocalizations in some places in the Bible. However, one may not judge the Torah like "profane books." Even the changes made to the text after the gift of the Torah did not take place by chance, but were carried out by prophets and intellectually gifted scribes.

Krochmal differentiates accordingly between the external form of the Torah and its content, and its "spirituality" [רוינחות]. Whereas the former can be changed by human hand, the latter is no longer subject to being capable of change and thus of historical criticism. From our contemporary point of view this may appear antiquated, yet in Krochmal's time and environment precisely this insight meant an important step towards a reflected perception of history.[42]

By comparison, Krochmal can subject other Biblical books, which are to be ascribed neither to the Torah nor the *Nevi'im rishonim*, to a more thorough historical criticism, and thus, for example, establish with regard to the Book of Kohelet that Solomon could not possibly be its author. Rather "clear and well-known evidence spoke in favor of the contrary."[43]

This kind of criticism becomes especially important also with respect to chapters 40 f. of the Book of Isaiah, because here, too, Ranak comes to the conclusion that they could not be by the prophet, even if he later moves away again somewhat from this position, which he had initially presented as being very reliable, by remarking that this contradicts "everything that had been known in the people from time immemorial, and, namely, not only in the Talmud and the Midrashim, but also in the works of Yosef, the priest [i.e. Josephus] in his book *Antiquitates*, who expressly ascribed these consolatory prophecies to Isaiah."[44]

However, because such important scholars as Shmu'el David Luzzatto (d. 1865), who taught in Padua,[45] with whom he had conducted a detailed argument on this question by correspondence, rejected this opinion as inappropriate, he expressly refers in *More nevukhe ha-zeman* to some of Ibn Ezra's observations which seem to coincide in part with those of non-Jewish exegetes of more recent times. The second part of the Book of Isaiah could thus only be correctly understood if it were read as the source for the reconstruction of the intellectual revival in the period of the Second Temple.[46]

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[39] On the expression "God's finger" see Exod. 8:15, and see the commentaries on this particular verse in *Torat Hayyim. Hamisha humshe Tora*, Vol. 2.2, ed. M.L. Katzenellenbogen, Jerusalem 1987, p. 88 (in particular the short commentary of Ibn Ezra).

[40] Krochmal 1961, 199.

[41] Krochmal, ibid.

[42] On the meaning of "spirit" in Krochmal's perception of history see Turner 2005, 289–323.

[43] Krochmal 1961, 140.

[44] Krochmal 1961, 114.

[45] On him and his relationship with Krochmal see e.g. Margolies 1979, 103–106. See also Feiner 2004, 151 f.

[46] Cf. on this Harris 1991, 160.

As his most important argument for the existence of a "second" Isaiah he puts forward an observation on prophetic literature as a whole which seems to have been borrowed directly from Christian commentaries:

> Because one of all the prophets' stylistic devices is that, as a rule, their prophecies do not contain any details, apart from those referring to the not too distant future; however, with regard to the far distant days and conditions far in advance, their eyes foresee only general things for the future, nothing exactly determinable in time, and no specific actions or events, and even with regard to the names of persons and places, which they intimate [their prophecies remain vague]. The prophet stands, as his designation as "seer" implies, on the peak of a holy mountain and looks around in broad daylight, but the greater the distance becomes between his vantage point and that, what he is looking at, the more or less his prophecy lacks in clarity. As in the case of a human being who only sees general things on his horizon, without being able to distinguish and differentiate between individual things.[47]

Admittedly, in view of such argumentation, the impression could arise that Krochmal was disputing the Holy Scriptures' divine inspiration in general. And this was apparently also one of Luzzatto's reproaches against him. Therefore for Luzzatto, whose attitude, despite a non-fundamental aversion to the sciences, can be described as being conservative, Krochmal's criticism went too far.[48] And this may, incidentally, also have had an influence on the somewhat lackluster history of Ranak's reception. Be that as it may, against Luzzatto's criticism Krochmal states that the prophets would not have been understood on principle if they were to have referred to a matter lying far in the future.[49] Why, indeed, did a prophet have to speak prophetically?

In the prophecies it is precisely not a matter of concrete individual events, but of general things which will come about in the future. Because how could Zachariah's contemporaries have understood anything of the details whose coming to pass he would prophesy?[50] The prophecies are thus based on a general form, as Krochmal can then also state with regard to Moses' song, Deut. 32, which he declares "to be the form and the model for all the prophetic accusations after it:"[51]

> Therefore... everything [viz. all the prophecies] can be explained as being based on a general way of thinking and intellectual reflection; the song [viz. Deut. 32] does not, however, [itself] contain any recollections of any historical events in our history.

On account of these not undisputed insights, it was very important for Krochmal to reconcile his critical comments on individual Biblical records with tradition. Therefore, he does not only look for proof for his opinions in Ibn Ezra, Rashi and in the Ramban,[52] but also in the Talmud and Midrash. Thus he would like to find support for his opinion of the different time of the writing of the Torah in the Midrash from Sifre

[47] Krochmal 1961, 117.

[48] Luzzato described his exegetical methodology in the foreword to his commentary to the Pentateuch, first edition Padua 1871, newly edited by P. Schlesinger, Jerusalem 1993, 11–22.

[49] Cf. Krochmal 1961, 118: "... therefore the words of the prophets, who were spoken in that time, were uttered in a totally different world, and therefore they are like an absolutely locked book. However, how could the people have understood only one word of these prophecies, if not all of them had been prophets? In this case, however, there would not have been the need for any prophet."

[50] Cf. Krochmal 1961, 132.

[51] Krochmal 1961, 117.

[52] For a full scale discussion of the reception of these medieval authors see the detailed introduction to my forthcoming translation of the *More nevukhe ha-zeman* into German.

Devarim ʿEqev 48,[53] placed at the beginning of the 13th Gate as a motto, because: "just as Shafan arose in his time, thus Ezra in his, and Rabbi ʿAqiva in his." According to this, the wise men of the rabbinical age already knew something of the truth behind the Biblical texts. However, they only passed this truth on "to the most virtuous among their pupils."[54]

Krochmal thus starts out from the assumption that there are basically two truths: on the one hand, the truth which applies only for the pupils suitable for the same; and a second truth that was intended for "the broad mass of the people" and which had come down to us solely through tradition.[55] Only this construction, that was important for Krochmal, enabled him, as the protector of tradition, to simultaneously counter the polemic directed against him and, on the other hand, to adhere to a moderate Biblical criticism which could benefit his account of history. In addition, because there are indications of the correctness of the Biblical criticism in the Rabbinical writings, criticism of the Biblical texts cannot and should not be completely damned or completely dispensed with.[56]

With this differentiation between a basically "exoteric" tradition for the masses and an "esoteric" tradition for "suitable pupils," Ranak, like his great model Maimonides, attempts to let the historiographical insights gained by him on the basis of critical considerations of the Bible appear as if they were based on tradition.[57] He tries to reconstruct and restore the original tradition that had been known to the rabbis, but has been lost in the meantime. In doing this, he proceeds occasionally in such a manner that he initially takes up the arguments of scholars from the most recent period, but then searches for indications for the correctness of these opinions in tradition. On the other hand, he does not accept traditions which contradict the historical truth, even if he does seem to attempt, again and again, to explain the obvious historical errors in tradition as being rationally comprehensible, and thus to protect and defend the cultivators of tradition, such as the teachers of the Talmud and medieval Bible commentators.[58] According to this, the correct measure of criticism exists when it proves possible to reconcile one tradition with the other, or, as he says with regard to the Book of Kohelet:

> And indeed – may glory be bestowed on our early wise in eternity [cf. Proverbia 3:35]! – after the book had already once been included among the Ketuvim, they endeavored to interpret it in such a manner that the younger scholars could and would no longer cast it out of its place. May the benedictions also be bestowed on the first among the literal exegetes, among them, in particular, Rabbi M[oshe] ben Menahem [Mendelssohn], of blessed memory, who strove so very much to interpret it in such a manner that it would not contradict the true faith. However, each [of these exegetes] said learned things in his way, and the researcher's understanding was based on them, and while doing so their heart got along with [their understanding]. But was this in fact the book's intention and purpose? Earlier generations did not ask themselves this question; however, on account of the research [in] the present time, we find ourselves compelled to answer it. We must therefore once again repeat and say that just as

[53] Cf. *Sifre ad Deuteronomium*, ed. L. Finkelstein, Berlin 1939 (reprint New York 1969), 112 (Hebrew).
[54] Krochmal 1961, 157.
[55] Cf. Rawidowicz, Mavo, in Krochmal 1961, 130; Weissblueth 1981, 16.
[56] Cf. Krochmal 1961, 130, where he refers to Kohelet Rabba 12:12 [31b] and Yerushalmi heleq [ySan 10,1 (28a)]. These texts are proof that "the book of Kohelet was the last one of the accepted writings [of the Bible]."
[57] Cf. on this Harris 1991, 177, who is alluding here to Rawidowicz, Mavo.
[58] Cf. Krochmal 1961, 143.

> there was the danger in preceding generations of opening the concealed, there is [also] the danger in our generation of concealing what has already been made public by other [researchers/scholars], which would be completely futile and very detrimental, and would not have any justification whatsoever. The true help consists, however, in researching further and seeking, namely by means of an object that serves the divine truth, of which it is true that it does not leave those who seek it. Happy are we, and how great is our interest, that the Lord gave us His Torah, according to which one does not need to fear research and examination in accordance with any manner?![59]

Historically, Krochmal thus does not assume the Biblical book to have been "given by Sinai," but only its message, its content; the latter can – we might imagine quite idealistically – no longer be questioned. However, despite all the misunderstandings which could arise as a result, the objective is to further research and seek in order to press forward to the relevant statements and teachings with respect to the spirit of a sentence or book of the Bible.

Conclusion

As explained, it is understandable that Krochmal's biblical critical comments and observations do not contain very much "original material" to still concern present-day Jewish Biblical exegesis, as cultivated in Israel or the USA. Krochmal's dealings with the Biblical text are also not to be explained as an independent attempt at a critical exegesis, but initially as a reaction to the challenges of the predominant opinions of his time, above all among non-Jewish exegetes and historians. Contemporary German biblical scholarship, in particular, had set standards which could not be ignored by Krochmal, as this would only have led to further errors and confusion with regard to the historical backgrounds and "conformity with the law" of Jewish history and its cycles. Krochmal's biblical critical studies serve, in so far, primarily historical philosophical contemplation, but they do reveal the relevance of the linking of tradition and "enlightened" scholarship. He saw this as having been prepared, for instance, in the work of the medieval exegete Ibn Ezra. However, he goes one step further than the latter, by taking up the historical and philosophical findings of his time and incorporating them into a complete model of Jewish history. He thus succeeded in what has been demanded, in particular by some Israeli researchers, with regard to modern Biblical scholarship, namely to pay attention to a greater relatedness of "Biblical Study" and "Jewish Thought" in order thus to question the claim raised in particular by Protestant exegesis to the historical and religious historical work on the "Old Testament."

As already stated, what was fundamental for Krochmal was the conviction gained in the dispute with the medieval sources that all the biblical critical insights pointed out by modern research were already known to the rabbis in Talmudic times, although they could not or would not say so openly. Although the rabbis, for example, always maintained that the Book of Kohelet had been written by Solomon, according to Krochmal there are sufficient indications that they did in fact know that this could not be the case. Even if some of the reasons given for this alleged knowledge of the rabbis appear very far-fetched from today's point of view, they do indicate Krochmal's true

[59] Krochmal 1961, 143 f.

intention: the rabbis representing the tradition, who according to Krochmal were best versed in the Biblical text, basically already knew exactly what German-speaking scholars later found out. However, the rabbis could not yet impart this knowledge to the people, the broad masses, of their time. The revelation of this to a certain extent esoteric or elite knowledge to the broad masses of readers with a good knowledge of Hebrew is thus the real concern which Krochmal pursued in his biblical critical observations and conclusions serving historiosophy.[60]

In this, Krochmal's access to the Bible already clearly differs from that of Maimonides, who always started out from the assumption that his findings were really only accessible to a small group of intelligent persons. Ranak's idealistic Biblical criticism thus proves itself to be a further indication of his philosophy of intellectual revival directed towards the whole people, which fell on such fertile ground, in particular in the cultural Zionistic circles in Eastern Europe, for instance in the case of Ahad ha-'Am (alias Asher Ginsburg) (1856–1927) and Nachman Bialik (1873–1934), and later also in Berlin and in the United States, for instance in the case of Simon Rawidowicz.[61]

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[60] Cf. Harris 1991, 189–191.

[61] See on this my article: Lehnardt 2009, forthcoming.

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More neboche ha-seman sive Director errantium nostrae aetatis, Opus ad illustrandas Judaeorum antiquitates et leges, Philosophiamque, inprimis celeberrimi Aben Esrae doctrinam de divino scripsit Nachman Krochmal incola Zolkieviensis jubente Auctore digestumg praefatione instructum et editum a L. Zunz, secunda emeliorate editio augmentata per biographiam ejus et alcunis litteris ejusdem a Michael Wolf magistri religionis, Lemberg 1863 (Hebrew).

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