Roman Vielhauer, Reading Hosea in Qumran

Summary

An overview of explicit Hosea quotations present in the Qumran manuscripts shows an amazingly coherent pattern on how the book of Hosea was read in Qumran. Constitutive for the comprehension of the book seems to be a differentiation within Israel, separating the righteous from the sinners.

The bulk of quotations addresses the sinners. They are once identified as the hellenophile Jews living in the Acra (4QpHos A). Elsewise they mostly represent the supporters of the "Man of the Lie" (4QpHos B; CD I:11-17; IV:19-20; VIII:1-5/XIX:13-17; 4QMidrEschat; 4QpIsa C). One quotation addresses the Qumran community itself, i.e. the righteous ones (CD XX:13-20).

In detail, the Qumranic interpretation of Hosea shows a bifocal perspective: first, certain Qumran texts solely refer to Hosean passages, that are either dealing with the fratricidal war between Ephraim and Judah or concerned with a distinction within Israel by accusing one group only. In this context we might mention three references to Hos 5:8-11 (Hos 5:8a in 4QMidrEschat; Hos 5:10 in CD VIII:1-5/XIX:13-17; Hos 5:11b in CD IV:19-20), which deals with the fratricidal war, or Hos 6:9 (in 4QpIsa C), which addresses the delinquencies especially of the priests. Second, passages referring to the entirety of Israel in the Book of Hosea are limited to a single group within her midst (Hos 2:10-13 in 4QpHos A; Hos 3:4 in CD XX:13-20; Hos 4:16 in CD I:11-17, Hos 5:14 in 4QpHos B).

If we have thus rightly described the Qumran perspective of Hosea as one distinguishing between the righteous and the sinners, the question arises: How did the authors reach this conclusion? On the one hand, this reading is already suggested by the special historical situation of the Qumran community, namely one of serious conflict between opposing groups. On the other hand – and this is in my view the decisive fact – such an interpretation is inherent in the Book of Hosea itself. Especially seeing as the final verse of the book, Hos 14:10, already includes a separation of the righteous and the sinners as the hermeneutic key to the understanding of the entire book – a fact which has repeatedly been pointed out by various biblical scholars.

Thence, the Qumran exegetes might have interpreted the overall understanding of the book purported by Hos 14:10 while transferring it to their own, presently dolorous situation. Unlike the final verse of Hosea, however, the Qumran exegetes do not understand the comprehension of the scripture as a result of their own efforts. As other Qumran texts have shown, the comprehension is owing to a special revelation, offered to the Teacher of Righteousness by God himself (cf. e.g. 1QpHab II:7-10; VII:1-8). This divine revelation warrants the interpretation's authenticity and enables the Qumran exegetes to understand the prophetic book as a testimony for their own time given by the one and ever consistent God.