Emanuel Tov

Hebrew University
Jerusalem
emanuel.tov@mail.huji.ac.il

The Essence and History of the Masoretic Text

Abstract: In the presented paper author presents an extensive and multilayered explanation of what Masoretic Text (MT) is. Having located MT in the core of great majority of the Bible editions, the author firstly presents the MT as the only text used by organized Judaism from the first century CE onwards. Since it is a medieval text with roots in antiquity, but capable enough of reflecting a thousand year old ancient tradition, a relationship between the forerunners of the medieval MT and the medieval text is further explained. A particular attention is given to the work of the scribes, especially with the reference to the proto-MT. The presentation continues with a respective but condensed presentation of the nature of MT and finally ends with a hermeneutical comparison of MT with the other texts, like Septuagint (LXX), Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) and Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS). ► *Key words:* Masoretic text, Bible, Torah, translation, spelling, scribe

1. Where do we find the Masoretic Text?

In modern times, the Masoretic Text (MT) is found all over. Even if one thinks that one does not know what MT is or where to find it, one cannot miss it, so to speak, because MT is found in multiple sources. All the printed editions of the Hebrew Bible and most of its modern translations present a form of MT. Put differently, from the invention of the printing press, all the editions of the Hebrew Bible have been based on a text form of MT, with the exception of Bible editions that have a different content.[1] However, the great majority of the Bible editions present MT. Nevertheless, when one starts comparing these editions, one will findthat they differ from

---

[1] For example, the editions of the Samaritan Pentateuch and a few so-called eclectic editions, that is modern Bible editions that reconstruct a scholar's vision of the original text of the Hebrew Bible, such as the series *The Sacred Books of the Old Testament: A Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text Printed in Colors with Notes*, P. Haupt (пpp), J. C. Hinrich: Leipzig 1893–1904.

oneanother in many small details. Such details are created because these editions are based on different medieval Masoretic manuscripts or because modern editors follow different concepts in representing these manuscripts.[2]

2. Most Modern Translations Reflect the Masoretic Text

The influence of the Masoretic Text is so pervasive that most modern translations reflect that text, either exactly or "more or less." The judicious translation of the Jewish Publication Society (*NJPS*)[3] is a good example of this trend. More than most translations, the *NJPS* translation represents the exact text of MT except for those cases in which it considers MT textually corrupt (that is, resulting from an error). In such rare cases the reader will find editorial notes.[4] That translation claims to represent MT, but this ideal cannot always be achieved. When encountering textual problems, *NJPS* uses several techniques when not providing a straight forward translation of MT. *NJPS* thusoften playfully manipulates the English translation of textually difficult words to create an acceptable meaning. Thus in Ezek 10, 2 MT includes an awkward repetition of *wayo'mer*, which is not felt in *NJPS,* which reads "spoke … and said," translating the same word slightly differently in its two occurrences.[5] In another case, the last words in Josh 10, 39 MT are a clear afterthought, lacking in the LXX, and presented here in italics: "just as they had done to Hebron, they did to Debir and its king, *and as they had done to Libnah and its king.*" *NJPS* produces a smooth: "just as they had done to Hebron, and as they had done to Libnah and its king, so they did to Debir and its king"—the *NJPS* accomplishes this fine translation by adding a connecting word "and" not found in the manuscripts and reversing the elements in the verse.[6]

In some especially difficult cases, *NJPS* includes Hebrew variants (non-MT readings) in the translation against its principle of always representing MT; this is accompanied by a textual note. Thus MT Ps 64, 7 *tamnu*, usually rendered "they have accomplished," is mentioned only in the note in *NJPS*, while the translation is based on a variant with a *tet*, namely *ṭamnu* ("they have concealed").[7] Gen 4, 8 *wayo'mer qayin 'el hewel aḥiv* (Cain said to his brother Abel) is not problematic by itself. But Cain's words are not cited, so this becomes a textually difficult passage. The missing

---

[2] For example, the *Ketiv*/*Qere* readings are presented in different ways. Some editions present a selection of variant readings. Editions differ in their coverage of the details of the Masorah.

[3] תנ״ך *JPS Hebrew — English Tanach: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation*, Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia ²1999.

[4] For examples, see E. Tov, *Textual Criticism*, in: A. Berlin / M. Z. Brettler (הפפ), The Jewish Study Bible, Oxford University Press: Oxford — New York ²2014, 2149–52.

[5] The LXX omits the second word, which indicates that there is a textual problem here, of which the reader of the *NJPS* is unaware.

[6] For similar examples in *NJPS*, see Josh 1, 15; 5, 2. 6; 10, 4.

[7] For this reading the note in *NJPS* quotes "some mss. (cf. *Minhat Shai*) and Rashi."

words, probably originally included in the text but lost in transmission, are preserved in the ancient versions, as mentioned in a note in *NJPS*. The ellipsis in *NJPS* "Cain said to his brother Abel … and" reflects an unusual technique attempting to overcome this problem. The resulting translation is artificial, apparently close to MT, but in fact far removed from it. Finally, the contextually difficult phrase in 1 Sam 2, 11 "Then Elkanah went home" was corrected in *NJPS* to "Then Elkanah [and Hannah] went home." The addition of Hannah, which would involve a plural verbal form in Hebrew, creates a new context.[8]

A few confessional translations, such as *NIV*,[9] are closer to MT than *NJPS*, as they disregard the contextual problems deriving from a literal translation.

Most modern translations deviate more from MT than *NJPS*, when the translators experienced difficulty with the text of MT. In such cases they adopted details from other textual sources. This practice is usually named an eclectic presentation of the text of the Hebrew Bible, that is the modern translation chose from among the textual sources the reading that best represents the original reading, usually adopted from the Septuagint, and in recent years also the Dead Sea Scrolls. For all these translations MT is the basis of the translation, and when they adopt a reading from another source, they will sometimes notify the reader in a note, but more often they will not. These modern translations thus amount to the reconstruction of the original text of the Bible in translation. Translators do not consider this procedure problematic; they simply feel they are translating the MT and occasionally correct its text when to the best of their judgment they have no other choice. Actually, we witness passing fashions in the translation of the biblical text. Different tendencies in the inclusion of non-Masoretic readings in the translations are visible throughout the decennia, and in the words of Daley, "English translations from 1611 to 1917 reflect but few textual departures from MT, English translations from 1924 to 1970 reflect a consistently high number, and English translations from 1971 to 1996 reflect a mixed, generally moderate number of departures from MT."[10] When focusing more specifically on variants in the Qumran scrolls and on conjectural emendations, similar trends are visible in the inclusion of non-Masoretic readings in the translations.

MT is not only at the base of all Bible editions and most Bible translations, it is also in the center of scholarly critical editions. These editions provide ancient variants to the text of MT, and they are also involved in the correction of the biblical text when no reasonable variants have been preserved (this procedure is called

---

[8] The note in *NJPS* refers to a note in 1, 28 where the text of MT is emended (corrected). In 1 Sam 1, 28 *wayishtaḥu* (and he bowed low) is translated in *NJPS* as a plural form ("and they bowed low" = *wayishtaḥavu*) against all evidence. The *NJPS* note "A reading in the Talmud (*Berakot* 61a) implies that Elkanah was there" reflects an exegetical notion, and not an ancient manuscript. Likewise, the Vulgate (not mentioned in the *NJPS*) has a plural form, but this rendering, too, may be based on exegesis.

[9] *The New International Version*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids/Michigan 1978.

[10] S. C. Daley, *The Textual Basis of English Translations of the Hebrew Bible*, Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University: Jerusalem 2007, 420.

the emendation of the text). However, although in principle the critical editions remove our thinking away from MT, in practice they make MT even more central than before the creation of these editions because they compete with each other in producing an ever more precise version of the codex Leningrad or the Aleppo codex that are in the center of these editions. The Leningrad codex is in the center of the *Biblia Hebraica* series,[11] while the Aleppo codex is the base for the edition of the Hebrew University Bible Project. In other words, MT is in the very center of the thinking of Jewish and Christian religious communities, through editions and translations, and the academic community.

3. What is the Bible?

The Masoretic Text contains the Bible, but also non-Masoretic texts contain the Bible. Actually, many scholars prefer to speak about Scripture or Scriptures, which is less specific than Bible, because different religions understand different things when referring to the "Bible." When using the words "Bible" or "Scripture" we refer to the group of authoritative writings that was accepted by some or all Jews and Christians as authoritative. In principle, the authoritative form of Scripture has no necessary connection with its textual form. In other words, the MT was accepted as an authoritative form of Hebrew Scripture, but other forms were also accepted as authoritative, though not by the same people, and not in the same period.

With a different formulation, from the first century of the Common Era onwards the shape of the MT, including all the books that are contained in those manuscripts, had been accepted as authoritative by all streams of the Jewish people. Before that period only the proto-rabbinic (Pharisaic) movement held on to MT, while other streams in Judaism held on to other Hebrew textual traditions. Before the first century of the Common Era, we thus witness a textual plurality. However, all these text forms were conceived of as "the Bible," or Scripture. Needless to say, also the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, was considered as Scripture when that text was accepted as holy writ by the new religion of Christianity in the first century of the Common Era.

4. The Masoretic Text is a Jewish Text

The MT is the only text that was used by organized Judaism from the first century of the Common Era onwards. It is the only text that is quoted in rabbinic literature. There is thus no doubt that MT is a Jewish text. Actually this was never a point of

---

[11] The most well-known edition in this series is the W. Rudolph / K. Elliger (עפפ), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart 1967–1977; last printing to date: 1997. The *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* is incomplete (seven volumes until 2015): A. Schenker (עפפ), *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart 2004 — .

discussion, but there werealso two other Jewish Scripture texts that in due course were not consideredJewish any more.These texts became the basis of other religions, in one case a very closely related religion.

a. The Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) is until today the holy writ of the Samaritan community whose holy writings comprise solely the Torah, the Pentateuch, and this situation has been stable since the second century BCE. The text of SP is known from medieval texts dating to the ninth century onwards and undoubtedly going back to ancient texts. The Israelite Samaritans, as they call themselves, are closely related to the Jews, but they are not Jewish and therefore the SP is not a Jewish text, or as I would say, not a Jewish text any more. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were written the predecessors of the SP were authoritative Jewish texts just like the other texts that were found in the Judean Desert. These predecessors of the SP such as found at Qumran, named pre-Samaritan by scholars, share all the major features with SP and in antiquity, probably in the second century BCE, SP was created by slightly rewriting one of these pre-Samaritan texts.

b. The ancient Jewish translation of the Torah into Greek named the Septuagint. The enterprise of rendering the Torah into Greek in the beginning of the third century BCE in Alexandria was a Jewish enterprise on behalf of King Ptolemy II Philadelphus and the Jewish community of Alexandria.The LXX translation was a Jewish venture, created by Jews for Jews and probably also for Gentiles. This translation was probably used in Alexandria by Jews in their weekly ceremonial reading from the first century BCE onwards. The Jewish background of the Greek translation of the Torah is well established, while that of the post-Pentateuchal books is not, although this assumption is almost certainly correct.

At an early stage Judaism had changed its approach towards the Jewish-Greek translation, when the Jews turned their back to the LXX in the pre-Christian period, and to an even greater extent after the rise of Christianity. Already in the first century BCE it was realized that the Greek translation did not reflect the Hebrew Bible current in Palestine, that is, the text that later became the MT and at that time, the process of revision of the LXX, also named Old Greek, towards the proto-Masoretic Text started to take shape.

In the first century CE, when the NT writers quoted the earlier Scripture, they used the wording of the LXX. That was a natural development since the NT was written in Greek, and under normal circumstances its authors would quote from earlier Scripture written in the same language.

At the same time, as a result of abandoning the Jewish-Greek translation by Jews in the first centuries CE, that translation was held in contempt in its own environment in spite of its being a Jewish biblical version. The LXX thus lost its central position in Judaism from the first century CE onwards and this process was accelerated when that translation was used as the official source for Scripture in the writings of early Christianity. The Christians accepted the LXX as such, generally without changing its wording.

Except for the SP in Hebrew and the LXX in Greek several other Scripture texts were considered Jewish as well. Of the ancient translations especially the Targumim came to be identified with Judaism since they reflected, more or less officially, the exegetical views of the "Rabbis" on the Bible. Saadia's (882–942) Arabic translation of parts of Scripture was also Jewish. The Latin translation the Vulgate was Christian and so was the Peshitta, although in several Scripture books the latter was based on initial Jewish versions.

In any event, the text that came to be identified most clearly with Judaism is the Masoretic Text.

5. The Forerunners of the Medieval Masoretic Text and the Medieval Text

Strictly speaking, MT is a medieval text with roots in antiquity. The principal component of MT is that of the letters, evidenced in antiquity in the fragmentary Judean Desert texts, and to this text other elements were added during the early Middle Ages. Therefore, although the medieval form of MT is relatively late, its consonantal framework reflects an ancient tradition that was in existence more than a thousand years beforehand. Scholars usually designate the consonantal base of MT (evidenced in the Second Temple period) as *proto-Masoretic* although sometimes also, anachronistically, as the Masoretic Text. The terms proto-rabbinic and rabbinic are used less frequently, although they actually describe the nature of MT and its forerunners more precisely.

The medieval shape of MT contains:
1. The consonantal framework already attested in proto-Masoretic texts from the Judean Desert;
2. Vocalization;
3. Para-textual elements, such as *Ketiv-Qere* and the division of the text;
4. Accentuation (*teʾamim*);
5. The apparatus of the Masorah.

MT has served as the most commonly used form of the Hebrew–Aramaic Bible ever since its acceptance as authoritative by all Jewish communities in its consonantal form probably in the 1st century CE, and several centuries later in conjunction with its vocalization, accentuation, and the apparatus of Masoretic notes. Because of this acceptance, initially of the proto-Masoretic text by rabbinic Judaism and later of MT by all sections of the Jewish people, MT is attested in a very large number of sources.

It is easy to establish that the full Masoretic Text with all the elements that are described above as elements 1–5 was created in the early Middle Ages starting with the ninth century because the elements 2, 4–5 were not in existence previously in a

written form. Before the Dead Sea Scrolls were found scholars were not aware that the MT existed in the exact same form already in the last centuries BCE. This has now been established from the finds in the Judean Desert. These proto-MT texts were not the only texts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, as we shall see below, but we focus first on the proto-MT texts.

Since the medieval MT consisted of several layers, and since some of them were created in the Middle Ages, the medieval layers can be removed and the base layer, that is, the consonantal text can be compared with the Judean Desert texts. Because the medieval texts differ very slightly among one another, scholars usually take the most complete medieval Masoretic source that is closest to the Ben-Asher school of Masoretes, as a yardstick for comparison, namely the codex Leningrad B 19[A] (codex L) from 1009. The second source for comparison is the Aleppo codex from approximately 925, closer to the Ben Asher school, but lacking the Torah. We find a striking difference between the Judean Desert scrolls from places other than Qumran and the Qumran scrolls. The Qumran scrolls display textual diversity, while the twenty-five texts that were found in the Judean Desert at sites other than Qumran display almost complete identity in consonants with codex L.[12]

The latter texts were found at both the earlier site of Masada (texts written between 50 BCE and 30 CE)[13] and the later sites of Wadi Murabbaʻat, Wadi Sdeir, Naḥal Ḥever, Naḥal ʻArugot, and Naḥal Seʼelim, dating to the period of the Bar Kochba revolt in 132–135 CE (texts copied between 20 and 115 CE). 4QGen[b], probably deriving from one of the Judean Desert sites, needs to be added to this group, as well as the recently opened En-Gedi scroll agreeing with codex L in *all* of its details. The identity between the early scrolls and the medieval texts can be seen best in an examination of the well-preserved texts MasPs[a] (end of the 1st century BCE), MasLev[b] (30 BCE–30 CE), 5/6ḤevPs (50–68 CE), MurXII (*c.* 115 CE) and the En-Gedi scroll, ascribed to the 1st–2nd century CE as shown by Young,[14] Lange,[15] and Segal et al.[16]

---

[12] The agreement between MasLev[b], one of the manuscripts in this group, and codex L pertains to the intricacies of orthography, including details of a special though not unique orthography such as the defective תמי[מם in Lev 9, 2–3 (col. I 11, 13) and the defective *hiphʼil* form ויקרבו in Lev 9, 9 (col. I 21). Likewise, all the Qumran manuscripts represent the anomalous MT form הוא as היא, while only MasLev[b] has הוא (Lev 10, 17. 11, 6).

[13] Especially MasPs[a] and MasLev[b].

[14] I. Young, *The Stabilization of the Biblical Text in the Light of Qumran and Masada: A Challenge for Conventional Qumran Chronology?*, DSD 9 (2002), 364–90. Young records the number of variants from MT (L) included in each text, and then calculates the ratio of variation for each text by dividing the number of preserved words by the variants. The lower that number, the greater is the divergence from L. In this way, he demonstrates the clear difference between the status of the Qumran scrolls as somewhat remote from MT, and those from the other Judean Desert sites as identical to MT.

[15] A. Lange, *The Textual Plurality of Jewish Scriptures in the Second Temple Period in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, in: N. David / A. Lange (הפפ), Qumran and the Bible: Studying the Jewish and Christian Scriptures in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls (CBET 57), Peeters: Leuven 2010, 43–96.

[16] M. Segal et all, *An Early Leviticus Scroll from En-Gedi: Preliminary Publication*, Textus 26 (2016), 1–30. Also: http://www.hum.huji.ac.il/units.php?cat=5020andincat=4972.

Recognizing that few differences exist between L and the other medieval sources of MT, we note that these differences are of the same nature as those between L and the Judean Desert texts. Therefore, the relation between L and the ancient Judean Desert texts is one of almost complete identity since the consonantal framework of MT changed very little over the course of one thousand years.

In less abstract terms, the text of the En-Gedi scroll agrees exactly with the medieval text of Leviticus 1–2, although the evidence is fragmentary pertaining to these chapters only. This text was deciphered and published only in 2016, and this was the first time an ancient text was published that agreed totally with the consonantal medieval text. The other texts of the same type differed in a few details from a central manuscript like codex L but never more than the medieval texts differed among each other. If the degree of divergence between the proto-MT scrolls and the medieval text would be measured statistically, it probably would be in the region of up to 2% of the text words. The categories of differences pertain to details of spelling, small linguistic differences, and minute content differences.

To the facts described above we add the following interpretations. There is a strict differentiation between the proto-MT texts found in the Judean Desert sites and the site of Qumran where no such texts are found. The key to understanding the background of the different scrolls found in the Judean Desert lies in the correlation between their nature and the socio-religious background of the archeological sites. What the earlier site of Masada (scrolls written between 50 BCE and 30 CE) and the Bar Kochba sites (scrolls written between 20 BCE and 115 CE) have in common, in contradistinction with the Qumran scrolls is that the people who left the scrolls behind at these sites (the Masada rebels and the freedom fighters of Bar-Kochba) closely followed the guidance of the (proto-)rabbinic spiritual centers in religious matters. Among other things, they used exclusively the proto-Masoretic text embraced by the spiritual leadership. Some scholars even stress the priestly influence on the leadership of the revolt. A close link between the Rabbis and the proto-Masoretic text is also reflected in the content of the *tefillin* written in the MT style that reflect the instructions of the rabbis.

As a background explanation for the virtual lack of differences between the copies of MT in early times and through the centuries, one should point to rabbinic traditions regarding precision in the copying of scrolls, the existence of a master copy of the Torah in the Temple Court, and the correction procedure of scrolls according to this master copy. On the basis of these traditions, it may be postulated that the Judean Desert scrolls were in fact "corrected copies" that circulated in ancient Israel. The textual unity described above has to start somewhere, and the assumption of a master copy is therefore necessary.

The Judean Desert sites display only the proto-MT texts. The Qumran texts, on the other hand, display a wide textual variety, among which we see texts that are closer to MT than to other texts. They are not as close to the medieval text as the

proto-MT text, but they differ in up to 10% of their words from MT. I have named these texts "MT-like" texts. These texts, from Qumran, are further removed from the proto-MT texts, but they belong to the same text family.

In ancient Israel from the last centuries BCE such as known from the Dead Sea Scrolls we thus know a variety of text forms, especially in Qumran, where in addition to the proto-MT texts and the MT-like texts we find several groups of texts and individual texts among the 230 biblical texts found there. Most of these texts were considered authoritative Scripture texts, and if they had not been discovered in the Judean Desert, they would not have been known to us. The only texts that have been transmitted through the centuries were the texts that have been embraced by religious groups, that is, the MT by Judaism, the SP by the Samaritans and, in Greek, the LXX by early Christianity.

6. The Scribes of the Masoretic Text

As the central text of Judaism, MT is better known than the other ones. The same pertains to the scribes of MT that are better known than other scribes, not only because there are many more copies of the medieval MT than of any other Scripture text, but also because they are often mentioned in the rabbinic literature. That literature does not tell us that the scribes that are mentioned there are the ones that produced MT, but since the rabbinic literature only quotes from MT, its references pertain only to the scribes of MT. Besides, the information given about the precision of these scribes exactly fits the scribes of MT.

When speaking about the scribes of MT we have in mind the scribes of the proto-MT scrolls, the scribes of the medieval scrolls and manuscripts, and the scribes of the texts preceding the proto-Masoretic-texts. Best known are the scribes of the proto-MT that have been studied more than those of the medieval texts.

When focusing on the scribes, we refer to their general approach to the text which may be examined with the aid of such criteria as precision, number of mistakes, amount of scribal intervention in the text (corrections, additions and erasures in the text), and the approach to orthography. The scribes of the proto-MT texts differ from other scribes in these criteria, but there is no sharp line of demarcation between the different scribes. The amount of scribal intervention tabulated in appendix 8 of my book *Scribal Practices* shows that three proto-MT texts display little scribal intervention (MurXII, 5/6ḤevPs, MasPsᵃ),but so do a number of other texts.[17] There is probably a more important criterion that can be examined for the MT group and not for the other texts, and that is to what extent the scribes changed the texts from which they were copied. This cannot be examined for most texts

---

[17] 4QpaleoGen-Exodˡ (MT-like), 4QpaleoExodᵐ (SP), 4QLevᵇ (MT/SP), 4QpaleoDeutʳ (MT-like), and 4QSamᵃ (independent).

since we do not know their *Vorlagen*, but for the proto-MT texts we know a little more. If these texts display the same text as the medieval MT, by implication they copied their *Vorlagen* precisely.

The precision of the scribes of MT is often mentioned in the rabbinic literature. On several occasions, rabbinic literature mentions a "corrected scroll" (ספר מוגה). Furthermore, the Temple employed professional "correctors" whose task it was to safeguard precision in the copying of the text: מגיהי ספרים בירושלים היו נוטלים שכרם מתרומת הלשכה, "*maggihim* of books in Jerusalem received their fees from the Temple funds" (*b. Ketub.* 106a). This description implies that the correcting procedure based on the master copy in the Temple was financed from the Temple resources that thus provided an *imprimatur*. This was the only way to safeguard the proper distribution of precise copies of Scripture. These scrolls must have been used everywhere in Israel, for public reading as well as for instruction, public and private, as suggested by *b. Pesaḥ.* 112a, where one of the five instructions of R. Akiba to his student R. Simeon was: "and when you teach your son, teach him from a corrected scroll." Another such precise copy was the "Scroll of the King," which accompanied the king wherever he went. *Y. San.* 2.20c and *Sifre* Deuteronomy 160[18] tell us that this scroll was corrected to "the copy in the Temple Court in accordance with the court of seventy-one members." In my view, the Judean Desert texts that are closely related to MT are in the nature of such corrected copies.

7. The Forerunners of the proto-Masoretic Text and the Inconsistent Spelling of MT

The proto-MT text was copied with great precision (see §§6 and 8). That precision is not contradicted by the inconsistency of MT in orthography (spelling). Since the generations prior to those of the proto-MT scribes created an inconsistent text in matters of spelling, it was precisely this inconsistent spelling that was transmitted exactly to the next generations.

The lack of internal consistency within MT is visible in the following two areas: (1) differences between the relatively defective orthographic practice of the majority of the biblical books and the fuller orthography of the late books such as Chronicles, Ezra–Nehemiah, Qohelet, and Esther, and (2) internal differences within the various books. These differences pertain to the insertion of the so-called *matres lectionis*, the vowel letters אהו"י, that were inserted gradually in the Hebrew language in the course of the centuries. It is clear that for ancient scribes consistency in the use of these vowel letters was not as important as it was in later centuries. The lack of unity in MT is shown by examples of inconsistency in the spelling of words appearing in the same context or belonging to the same grammatical category, and of unusual spellings.

---

[18] I. Finkelstein (פפ), Jewish Theological Seminary: New York-Jerusalem 1969, 211.

This inconsistency also characterizes the textual traditions of SP, the so-called Qumran Scribal Practice of many Qumran scrolls, and most individual Qumran scrolls. The inconsistency comes to light, e.g., in the representation of the feminine plural ending *-ot* in the participle *q(w)tl(w)t,* e.g. ש(ו)מר(ו)ת. A computer sampling shows that these forms are written with the full spelling of the final syllable in 22.41% of all instances in the Torah, while in 100% of them in the Hagiographa. We also find inconsistency in MT in the spelling of words belonging to the same grammatical category appearing in one context, e.g. Ezek 32, 29 ירדי בור as opposed to v. 30 יורדי בור. Many words appear in different spellings in the same context, e.g. Judg 1, 19 שריו compared with ויורש in the next verse. Unusual spellings include such forms as Num 11, 11 מצתי (for מצאתי) and Josh 10, 24 ההלכוא (for הלכו [אשר]). These are no mistakes, but irregularly written forms.

Coming back to the forerunners of the proto-MT texts, the area of the spelling is one area from which we get to know these texts. The theoretical background of our analysis runs as follows. The scribes of the MT texts precisely copied their texts as we can see from (1) the fact that a large number of texts remained unchanged over the course of 2000 years (see § 6); (2) the exact copying of scribal features such as described in § 8. At the same time, other features seem to contradict this image of precision, namely (a) the inconsistent spelling and such content features as (b) the frequent mistakes in MT in the first chapters in 1 Samuel when compared with the LXX and 4QSamᵃ and in 2 Sam 22//Ps 18 and 2 Sam 23//1 Chr 11. Conditions (1) and (2) apply only if the scribes of MT started applying their rigid precision in copying a text that already contained the features described as (a) and (b). This could have happened at any time before the third century BCE.

In principle we do not know anything about the forerunners of MT, because we have no written evidence. However, from MT we can extrapolate their existence, and they tell us something about the scribes of MT.

8. Scribal Marks Used by the Scribes of the Masoretic Text

The scribes of MT indicated several marks that showed their careful approach. These practices were not invented by them, but they were used also in many of the biblical and nonbiblical texts found in the Judean Desert, including texts that did not have a Masoretic character. The innovation of the scribes of MT was that they sanctified the totality of the written surface of the texts they copied and thus included these scribal marks. Several of these details were not meant to be copied into a subsequent copy, but in the perception of the Masoretic scribes these signs needed to be copied as well, and they thus became an important tool in order to understand their approach.

For example, MT includes scribal dots under or above letters serving to denote letters that had been deleted by the scribes, as often occurring in the Dead Sea

Scrolls (see for example frequently in 1QIsaᵃ, e.g. Isa 35, 10 בֹה יׁשׁיֹגוֹ (with dots on the last two letters[19]). These dotswere meant to correct details in the text because it was difficult to erase letters in a leather scroll, and they were not meant to be copied to the next scroll. Nevertheless because of the extreme care taken in copying MT the dots that appeared in the text from which the proto-MT text was copied were now included in the new copies until the medieval texts and our printed editions. Almost by necessity these dots had to be reinterpreted by the Masoretic tradition as doubtful letters. This pertains for example to the *waw* of ובקומה in Gen 19, 33 and to the complete word וׁיׁשׁקֹהֹוֹ in Gen 33, 4. Named "special dots" (*puncta extra-ordinaria*) within the Masoretic tradition, these dots, above the letters, show the strength of that tradition in preserving the smallest scribal details. In all these cases the text can be maintained without the dotted letters that were originally meant to be erased. In one case, Num 3, 39 the dotted word is lacking in the Peshitta and SP which shows that there was a textual tradition of a shorter text. One of the dotted words (המה, in Isa 44, 9) occurs in 1QIsaᵃ as a supra-linear addition without dots.

Also the so-called inverted *nunim* (also named *nunim menuzarot*, "separated" or "isolated" *nunim*), found in manuscripts and printed editions before and after Num 10, 35–36, are actually misunderstood scribal signs for the removal of inappropriate segments, viz., the Greek letters *antisigma* [ )] and *sigma* [( ], known from Alexandria and the Qumran scrolls. The inverted *nunim* in this place indicated that these verses (the "Song of the Ark") did not appear in their correct place, as is indeed indicated by a tradition in *'Abot R. Nat.*[20] Also these signs were not meant to be transferred to the next copying.

9. The Nature of the Masoretic Text

Sometimes it is difficult to define the simplest things in life. All the Scripture texts are compared to MT, but we do not usually ask ourselves what MT itself is. We will try to do so in this paragraph, but in many ways the background of MT remains enigmatic. This text is far from being a unified or consistent text, but compared with the other known texts it is generally the best text available. If we say "generally," we mean that this is not the case in all words or all verses, nor in all books. Much depends on the views of this or that scholar, because who can determine what *is* the best text? We should be open to differences of opinion on this matter.

Traditional Judaism knew and knows that in antiquity there were several texts of the Hebrew Bible from the last centuries before the Common Era onwards, but they did not pose a threat to the supremacy of the Masoretic Text. Organized Judaism from the Rabbinic period onwards always considered that text as the only

---

[19] The corrected form ישיגו equals MT.

[20] *'Abot R. Nat.* A, 34; p. 51 in Schechter's edition; cf. *y. Pesaḥ.* 9.36d.

text of the Bible, and therefore by implication as the "original text" of the Hebrew Bible. Written vocalization signs appeared in the early Middle Ages and they could not have been extant in the earliest copies of the Torah, but according to tradition they were there in a metaphysical sense as an oral tradition accompanying the written Torah. There were slight complications in modern times when critical orthodox scholars realized that it is difficult to speak about a single Masoretic Text, since the medieval text of MT is known in many almost identical manuscripts. These small complications were accepted as reality by Menahem Cohen, a specialist in Masorah from Bar-Ilan University.[21]

The rabbis knew about other witnesses of the ancient biblical text, but they did not pose a threat to the supremacy of MT. The Greek translation known as the Septuagint (LXX) was mentioned in very few places in rabbinic literature, but those traditions were accompanied by descriptions that the translators falsified the translation and therefore the LXX was disregarded. The LXX was not quoted in rabbinic literature, while the Jewish Greek translator Aquila (from Asia Minor, 125 CE) was quoted very rarely in that literature. The Samaritan Pentateuch did not pose a threat to MT since that text was described as a falsification of the Jewish Torah and its text was never quoted in rabbinic literature. The targumim were often quoted in rabbinic literature, not as witnesses to their text, but to their exegesis. Traditionally, the Targumim were considered the in-house commentaries of rabbinic Judaism of Hebrew Scripture, and their exegetical traditions were taken as supplementary to MT. The evidence of the Latin Vulgate, later to be sanctified in the church tradition, was beyond the horizon of ancient Judaism.

In short, none of these texts, or "versions," posed any challenge to the notion that within Judaism the MT served as the only text of Hebrew Scripture. In modern times, the Dead Sea Scrolls could have posed such a threat to MT, but in practice they did not, at least not for organized Judaism. These scrolls were and are, as a rule, disregarded by organized Judaism. In my view wrongly so, because the proto-MT scrolls from the Judean Desert sites strongly support the ancient roots of the medieval Masoretic tradition and they therefore support that tradition. On the other hand, the *NJPS* translation, although in a very positive way based on MT, also provides editorial notes on readings from the LXX and the scrolls when according to the editors of *NJPS* these sources may present a reading better than the one of MT.

I now proceed to describe some of the features of MT.

a. *Consistency in spelling.* In §7 we focused on aspects of the inconsistent spelling of MT. Here we note that in spite of these inconsistencies the Masoretic corpus should be taken as constituting one organic unit because early and late books reflect the same practice unlike other texts, mainly those found at Qumran. Thus, it

---

[21] M. Cohen, *h'ydy'hbdbrqdwšthnwsḥl'wtywtywwbyqwrthṭksṭ*, Deoth 47 (1978), 83–101; repr. U. Simon (пpp), *The Bible and Us*, Dvir: Tel Aviv 1979, 42–69.

is remarkable that the following words are consistently spelled defectively in MT starting with the proto-MT scrolls:

i. /o/ sounds in כח, משה, כל, מאד,[22] כהן, אלהים,

ii. /o/ sounds in the *quṭl* pattern: קדש,[23] אהל, חדש ש, בקר

iii. the archaic form of the name of Jerusalem as ירושלם[24]

iv. /u/ sound in נאם

Likewise, it is remarkable that the following two words are always spelled *plene*: נביא in the singular and מדוע.[25] Especially notable is the full spelling of סחניפ in MT.[26] The pattern *qatol* is almost always spelled *plene*, e.g., שלום.[27] כבוד, טהור,[28]

It seems to me that these spelling practices were developed when the first books were penned down, i.e., the Torah, from where they were accepted in the later books.

SP, although often as inconsistent as MT, displays a similar unity to that of MT.[29]

b. *Diversity within MT.* Diversity in MT should not surprise us, since also the other collections of the Hebrew and translated Bible, such as the LXX, Peshitta and the Targumim, do not form a unity. This lack of unity of he Scripture corpora was created by the combination of a large number of diverse scrolls in the archetype of each corpus. MT was no exception, showing internal diversity in the following practices:

(i) *Section divisions*, named in MT "open section" (*parashah petuhah*) at the end of a line and "closed section" (*parashah setumah*) in the middle of the line occur frequently i n the Judean Desert fragments.

There is no rule regarding the length of a section demarcated by preceding and following section breaks that depended much on the scribe's understanding. The two extremes of frequent and infrequent section divisions can be seen in the Qumran scrolls as well as in MT. While most books in MT average one section unit per 7–10 verses, some books stand out having a substantially lower or higher percentage, when compared with other units in the same literary genre:[30]

- The book of Ruth has only one section break in MT, after 4, 17, separating the main story from the genealogy of David in 4, 18–22. Such section breaks are called for at several points in the story, especially after 1, 22 and 3, 18.

---

[22] With the exception of Dan 11, 6; Exod 32, 11; Lev 26, 20 (all: כח).

[23] The only exception is Dan 11, 30 קודש.

[24] With the exception of Jer 26, 18; Esth 2, 6; 1 Chr 3, 5; 2 Chr 25, 1.

[25] With the exception of Ezek 18, 19.

[26] פנחס in 1 Sam 1, 3 is an exception.

[27] In MT, כבוד is almost always *plene* (177x). With suffixes or in the construct state, it is mainly defective (12x).

[28] שלום is almost always *plene* (197x), but in twelve instances it is defective, mainly with suffixes.

[29] The pre-Samaritan scrolls are more defective than SP, which implies that SP was based on a single copy that was more conservative in spelling than the known pre-Samaritan scrolls.

[30] See the figures for codex L summarized in E. Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert* (STDJ 54), Brill: Leiden-Boston 2004, 153–54. These statistics should be consulted for the data described in the next paragraphs.

- Genesis has far fewer sections than the other narrative books. This is illustrated by a comparison of Genesis 14 with the parallel version in the Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen ar). There are no divisions at all in this chapter in MT, while the parallel pericope in 1QapGen ar has several such sections.[31] The paucity of sense divisions is visible especially in the Joseph story (Genesis 37–48) in MT.[32] There are no divisions at all between 41, 1 and 44, 18. The difference between the scarce use of sense divisions in Genesis and the next books is unclear. This relation can also be expressed statistically: In Genesis we find one section per 17.04 verses, while in the other narrative books it is between 6 and 8 verses.

- Among the books of the Minor Prophets, Nahum and Jonah stand out having very few section units: (one division after an average of 15.66 and 16.0 verses respectively), in both cases only 3 instances, matched by MurXII.

Some Scripture books thus stand out in having much more or much less divisions than other books in the same literary genre. Since the different paragraphing systems go back to the personalities of the scribes, the scribes of the MT books must have differed among themselves.

(ii) *Dotted letters*. The Torah contains more scribal dots above letters (see above, § 8) than the other books, although the numbers are small. In fifteen places all the medieval manuscripts of MT denote dots above certain letters and words and in one place (Ps 27, 13) also below them. Ten of these instances are found in the Torah, four in the Prophets, and one in the Hagiographa. The background of this unusual distribution is unclear. Possibly the custom of canceling letters was more or less discontinued in the later Scripture books.

(iii). *Pisqa be-emsa pasuq*. The great majority of the section divisions in MT coincide with the ends of verses but, in addition, the *Masora Parva* to Gen 4, 8 notes 28 instances of a *pisqa beemsaʿ pasuq* (= *pbp*), "a section division in the *middle* of a verse."[33] The indication of a *pbp* signifies a break in content similar to that indicated at the end of a section (note the term).

The occurrences of *pbp* are unevenly distributed in the Bible, since 65 percent of them (according to the Aleppo codex) occur in one book, viz., Samuel.[34] The

---

[31] XXI 23 — XXII 26 has two closed sections (after 14, 21 = 1QapGen XXII 20; 14, 23a = 1QapGen XXII 22), one indented section (after 14, 20 = 1QapGen XXII 18), and one open section (after 14, 8 = 1QapGen XXI 30).

[32] Exceptions appear in 38, 1; 39, 1; 40, 1; 41, 1; 44, 18; 46, 28; 48, 1.

[33] E.g., Gen 35, 22. The *MP* to Gen 35, 22 lists 35 such instances, indicated in some or all of the manuscripts and editions by a space the size of either an open or a closed section. The various sources give different numbers for the *pbp*, and combining these cases Ohr arrives at 72: A. Ohr, *Pisqa be-emsapasuqmahu?*, in: Essays in Biblical Research Presented to EliyahuAuerbach in Honor of His Seventieth Birthday, Kiryat Sefer: Jerusalem 1955, 31–42 (Heb.).

[34] See S. Talmon, *PisqahBeʾemsaʾ Pasuq and the Psalms Scroll from Qumran Cave 11 (11QPsᵃ)* (Text and Canon of the Hebrew Bible: Collected Studies), The Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies, The Hebrew

high frequency of this phenomenon in Samuel probably implies that the textual tradition of this book was less stable than that of the other books. These instances show that in some cases the written tradition of the *pisqaot* clashed with the oral verse division.

(iv) *Spelling.* The distribution of full and defective orthography shows some peculiarities of the individual books. The statistics of Andersen–Forbes[35] show that the Torah and the book of Kings in MT reflect the most conservative (defective) orthography and that they also contain the greatest degree of internal consistency—in the Torah, this description applies especially to Exodus and Leviticus, in particular the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 21–23).[36] Murtonen notes that among the Minor Prophets, Amos is the most defective, and Jonah is the fullest.[37] The books with the fullest orthography in MT are Qohelet, Canticles, and Esther, followed by Ezra–Nehemiah and Chronicles.

(v) *Orthographic features of the Torah*. Four archaic spellings and forms characterize the Torah as a whole:

i. The*Ketiv* הוא, representing the majority spelling of the third person single feminine pronoun in the Torah,[38] is always accompanied by its *Qere perpetuum* היא (e.g., Gen 2, 12).[39] This *Ketiv* (probably pronounced *hu'*) possibly represents an early dialectal form in which the masculine and feminine forms (both: *hu'*) were not distinguished (thus Fassberg[40]). However, for the present analysis, it makes no difference how this *Ketiv* is explained, and what counts is that this frequently occurring ancient form is more or less limited to the Torah.[41]

University of Jerusalem/Eisenbrauns: Jerusalem-Winona Lake/Indiana 2010, 369–82 with earlier literature. Also in the more extensive list of Ohr (see n. 33) the high percentage for Samuel (40 instances) remains the same.

[35] F. I. Andersen / A. D. Forbes, *Spelling in the Hebrew Bible*, 312–318.

[36] Thus A. Murtonen, *The Fixation in Writing of Various Parts of the Pentateuch*, VT 3 (1953), 46–53. This scholar also found differences between the various Pentateuchal sources.

[37] For precise data, see F. I. Andersen / A. D. Forbes, *Spelling in the Hebrew Bible* and A. Murtonen, *On the Interpretation of the "MatresLectionis" in Biblical Hebrew*, AbrN 16 (1973–1974), 66–121.

[38] This *Qere* occurs 120 times in the Torah as well as three times in the Prophets and Writings. There are eleven exceptions to this majority spelling in the Torah, e.g., in Gen 14, 3; 20, 5; 38, 25.

[39] Among the ancient witnesses, only the proto-Masoretic scroll MasLev[b] contains the anomalous MT form הוא (Lev 10, 17; 11, 6) for the third person feminine pronoun, while all other Judean Desert manuscripts represent this word as היא.

[40] S. E. Fassberg, *The Ketiv/Qere* הוא*, Diagony and Dialectology*, in: C.L. Miller-Naudé / Z. Zevit (הpp) Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew, Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake/Indiana 2012, 171–80, with earlier literature.

[41] According to Fassberg (n. 40), the evidence shows that the text of the Torah had been fixed (in his words: canonized) at an earlier stage than the other books. By the same token, F. I. Andersen / A. D. Forbes, *Spelling in the Hebrew Bible*, 317 suggested that "the more archaic the spelling, the earlier the completion and publication (canonization, if you like) of the work, and the greater the veneration that shielded it from drastic changes from that time onward."

ii. The *Ketivna'arah*. The unusual *Ketiv* נער accompanied by a *Qere* נערה occurs twenty-two times in the Torah, as opposed to a single occurrence of נערה in Deut 22, 19 (also occurring elsewhere in MT). The archaic spelling of the *Ketiv* is paralleled by the *qatalta* forms written without *he*,[42] but it remains unexplained why this archaic spelling was limited to נערה.[43] The ancient spelling is evidenced in the first hand of the scribe in Deut 22, 15 in 4QDeutf frgs. 20–23 in the phrase אבי הנערה, referring to a girl. The *he* was added above the line and appears to have been written in a different hand.

iii. The archaic pronominal suffix ‑ה of the type of אהלֹה is much more frequent in the Torah than in the later books (e.g., Gen 9, 21). The fourteen instances in the Torah should be compared with thirty-seven in the remainder of the books.[44] In addition, the unique spelling כֻּלֹּה also occurs eighteen times outside the Torah.[45]

iv. The demonstrative pronoun הָאֵל for האלה occurs only in the Torah (8x),[46] including three times in the phrase הערים האל (Gen 19, 25; Deut 4, 42; 19, 11) and twice in הארצת האל (Gen 26, 3, 4).

(vi) *mistakes in MT*. Scribes err all the time, but when a book contains a high number of mistakes, this feature is part of the scribal character of the book, as in the following instance: A long list of scholars from O. Thenius[47] and J. Wellhausen[48] in the nineteenth century to McCarter[49] and Cross–Parry–Saley[50] in modern times paid attention to the frequent scribal errors in the MT of 1–2 Samuel, as compared with the LXX and 4QSamᵃ. Cf. § 7.

10. The Masoretic Text Compared with the Other Texts

The Masoretic Text does not stand by its own. *NJPS* compares small details with the contents of other textual sources on a very small scale, while scholars compare on a large scale. When comparing, one finds thousands of small differences

[42] See E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* § 17c.

[43] Alternatively, this form does not designate an archaic *Ketiv*, but at one time there was no distinction between the masculine and feminine *na'ar*. For a discussion, see M. Cohen, *The Kethib̠ and Qeri System in the Biblical Text: A Linguistic Analysis of the Various Traditions Based on the Manuscript 'Keter Aram Tsova'*, Magnes: Jerusalem 2007, 27–28 (Heb.).

[44] For the data, see Young, *Observations*, 228 with earlier bibliography.

[45] See F. H. Polak, *The Interpretation of "Kulloh/Kalah" in the LXX: Ambiguity and Intuitive Comprehension*, Text 17 (1994), 57–77.

[46] Gen 19, 8. 25; 26, 3. 4; Lev 18, 27; Deut 4, 42; 7, 22; 19, 11. This word also occurs once with a different meaning in 1 Chr 20, 8.

[47] O. Thenius, *Die Bücher Samuels* (KEH 4), Weidmann'sche Buchhandlung: Leipzig 1842, xxviii–xxix.

[48] J. Wellhausen, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis*, Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht: Göttingen 1871, 16.

[49] P. Kyle McCarter - Jr., *I Samuel, II Samuel* (AB), Doubleday: Garden City/New York, 1980–1984, I, 5.

[50] Cross / Parry / Saley, in: F. M. Cross et all (πpp), *Qumran Cave 4.XII: 1–2 Samuel* (DJD XVII), Clarendon: Oxford 2005, 25–27.

between MT and the LXX, SP, Dead Sea Scrolls and all the other sources, and it is natural that scholars try to form an opinion on the reading that is "better" or "more original."

Scholars express different views on the comparative value of MT and the other texts. I hesitate to present my own views, not only because they change all the time, but also because it is very difficult to summarize one's views in a few words.

I will nevertheless present a few headlines.

a. *Grosso modo*, MT is an excellent text, and it is therefore no coincidence that this text has become the central text of Judaism. It has been copied very carefully from a certain point onwards, although we cannot pinpoint that moment. It probably preceded the time of our earliest evidence, namely the third century BCE.

b. Before that time, MT was copied less precisely, and these imprecisions in content (e.g., mistakes in 1 Samuel) and spelling (see §7) have beencarefully preserved in the proto-MT scrolls and the medieval MT.

c. *Torah*. The MT of the Torah lacks the frequent harmonizing pluses of most other texts, especially the LXX, SP and the exegetical and liturgical texts.[51] It also lacks the editorial pluses of SP and the frequent changes inserted by exegetical texts like 4QRP.[52] As a result, the preferential position of MT in the Torah is remarkable. It may well be that also elsewhere in Scripture MT reflects such a preferable text, but because of the lack of opposition with other texts, such a relation cannot be proven. In this important feature of the harmonizations in the Torah MT is thus conservative, since the other witnesses freely altered the earlier text.[53]

d. In several books, the LXX, in the case of Jeremiah joined by two Qumran scrolls, differs from MT not in small textual details, but in groups of related features that reflect a different stage in the literary development of the book than MT, probably preceding MT. These are exceptional within MT, relating to the short (and somewhat different) texts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the different text of Joshua, and sundry shorter or different texts. In other cases the Hebrew texts underlying the LXX were in the nature of exegetical texts commenting upon MT (1 Kings, Esther, and Daniel).

The upshot of this analysis is that MT is a mixed bag containing units that reflect a conservative tradition and those that do not, units that seem to be later than the

---

[51] I believe that the frequent harmonization of the non-MT sources in the Torah was created by its popularity causing an increased interest in its embellishment and improvement. This feature was developed in the Torah only, although there is enough occasion for harmonization elsewhere.To each of the five books of the Torah I devoted a separate study, summarized in *Textual Harmonization in the Five Books of the Torah: Summary* (Volume Stellenbosch)*,* forthcoming.

[52] See my analysis in E. Tov, *2.1. Textual History of the Pentateuch*, in: A. Lange / E. Tov (הרר), Textual History of the Bible 1B: Pentateuch, Former and Latter Prophets, Brill: Leiden 2017, 3–21.

[53] See my study E. Tov, *The Development of the Text of the Torah in Two Major Text Blocks*, Text 26 (2016), 1–27. Also: http://www.hum.huji.ac.il/units.php?cat=5020andincat=4972

LXX (Joshua, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), and units that are earlier than the *Vorlage* of the LXX (1 Kings, Esther, and Daniel). Each Scripture book was produced at a different time by a different scribe, displaying his personal character.

We do not know how the archetype of MT was compiled, but in any event I do not think that there was a selection process of manuscripts to be included in the archetype.[54] The differences between the books as described in §§8–9 necessitate the assumption that the original copy of MT was composed of scrolls of a different nature.[55] There probably was only one candidate for inclusion in the archetype of MT. Otherwise the specific text of Samuel would not have been included.

It should be remembered that the inclusion of scrolls in the archetype of MT depended on some coincidence. Likely the persons who created the archetype were not aware of the differences between the scrolls and did not pay attention to the small details under scrutiny in this study.[56] This process determined the character of the corpus that subsequently became known as MT. In this corpus we find books of different sizes. Large books consisting of several scrolls could coincidentally be combined from slightly different scrolls. Thus only two of the five books of Psalms are evidenced in an Elohistic revision. In this way also Jeremiah 27–29 differed from the remainder of the book. The same processes happened in the creation of the archetype of the LXX, whose books differ much from one another. We note that in a corpus that developed over the course of such a long period internal differences such as those in the LXX and MT should be expected. These differences cause us to wonder about the nature of the corpus, aspects that we named enigmatic.[57]

---

[54] Thus B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, SCM: London 1979, 103: "The most obvious implication to be drawn from this history of the pre-stabilization period is that the subsequent status accorded MT did not derive necessarily from its being the best, or the most original, Hebrew text. Its choice as the canonical text was determined often by broad sociological factors and internal religious conflicts (cf. Geiger), and not by scholarly textual judgments."

[55] See my study E. Tov, *The Enigma of the Masoretic Text*, in: Fs. S. Kreuzer (пpp) WUNT 2017, forthcoming.

[56] See my study E. Tov, *The Coincidental Textual Nature of the Collections of Ancient Scriptures*, in: E. Tov (пpp), *Textual* Criticism of the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, Septuagint: Collected Essays III (VTSup 167), Brill: Leiden 2015, 20–35.

[57] See the study quoted in n. 55.

Суштина и историја масоретског текста

Емануел Тов
Јеврејски Универзитет
Јерусалим
emanuel.tov@mail.huji.ac.il

Сажетак: У овом чланку, аутор нуди опсежан и вишеслојан одговор на питање шта је то Масоретски текст (МТ). Након што је лоцирао МТ у језгро велике већине издања Библије, аутор најпре приказује МТ као једини текст који је организовани Јудаизам користио од првог века надаље. Пошто је реч о средњовековном тексту који своје корене има у антици, а у себи одражава хиљаду година стару традицију, у наставку се образлаже однос између средњовековног МТ и његових претходника. Нарочита пажња придата је раду преписивача, с посебним освртом на прото-МТ. У наставку се даје сажето образлагање природе МТ и завршава се херменеутичким поређењем МТ са другим текстовима као што су Септуагинта (LXX), Самарјанско Петокњижје (SP) и Свици са Мртвог мора (DSS). ▶ *Кључне речи:* Масоретски текст, Библија, Тора, превод, правопис, преписивач