

## PRE-MASSORETIC HEBREW

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The Hebrew text of the Bible with which we are familiar has asserted itself in the course of time so completely that we have almost entirely ceased to be aware that previously there were other methods of pronouncing Hebrew, which are no longer current and which have been altered according to the later form of pronunciation. I have kept a lookout in the course of many years for texts which reveal this pre-massoretic punctuation, and now I, and some of my friends and pupils, have discovered many manuscripts and fragments which give clear proof of this earlier vocalization.

I recall here a parchment folio with the end of Ecclesiastes (Kohelet) and the beginning of Lamentations (Threni), which Professor Diez Macho of Barcelona discovered in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York and which I published in Appendix III of the second edition of my *Cairo Geniza*, pp. 336-344. The folio is written in very fine square characters with reddish ink, and was originally provided with Palestinian punctuation in the same colour as the text itself. I have published this fragment, printing each line twice. In the upper line is the Palestinian punctuation, while in the lower line are the added Tiberian signs, in both cases as they appear in the original. We are still, however, far from understanding completely all the details of this punctuation, and must hope to find similar examples, which may lead us further and make clearer to us the development of this punctuation in order that we may gradually come to a more exact understanding of it.

Quite an interesting parallel is offered by a text of Joshua consisting of four folios in the Geniza fragment at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Heb. d.29, fols. 17-20. I have printed one page of the text (Josh xviii, 8-xix, 9) with the original Palestinian punctuation, as deciphered in Oxford by Dr. Manfred Dietrich of Tübingen, in my book *Der Bibeltext seit Franz Delitzsch*, published by Kohlhammer in Stuttgart, 1961. We can see here fairly clearly how this text, originally provided with Palestinian vocalization, was gradually changed to a text with apparently normal Tiberian vocalization. Dr. Dietrich has very exactly examined all the 8 pages of this text of Joshua and has shown how in this case through most careful work a Tiberian Bible text has been developed from a Bible text which originally had Palestinian vocalization.

Still more characteristic is the Geniza material containing Biblical texts dealt with by him, illustrating in detail for us the transition from Palestinian

to Tiberian vocalization. Some Geniza fragments from the "New Series" of Cambridge University Library present particularly instructive material.

When Dr. A. Murtonen was sent to me in Oxford in 1953 by his teacher, Professor Lauha of Helsinki, with a view to continuing and intensifying his Hebrew studies, I proposed that he should investigate old liturgical Geniza texts with Palestinian vocalization. He made the discovery, surprising to himself, that these texts composed and vocalized by Jews showed a pronunciation of Hebrew as used by the Samaritans up to the present day when reciting the Torah in their religious services.

These old liturgical texts are often difficult to understand, and it seems that nobody was sufficiently concerned to adapt them to the Tiberian pronunciation which later became authoritative. Today there can be no doubt that the Torah text as still used by the Samaritans is in the main in the same language as was used by the Jews; and that the scientific grammar of Hebrew to be published by Murtonen in *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* (Brill, Leiden) is, on the whole, the same kind of Hebrew as was formerly spoken in Palestine at large, certainly a much older form of Hebrew than that which became in the 9th century the official language in Tiberias, and is much more closely connected with the language used by the Biblical authors than the form of Hebrew created by the Tiberian Massorettes as represented by the work of the Ben Ashers.

We have an important statement from the Ḳaraite author Ja'qūb al-Ḳirḳisānī (who wrote in the first half of the 10th century) to the effect that there was to be found, besides the Palestinian pronunciation of Hebrew (*al-ḳirā'at ash-shāmī*), the Babylonian pronunciation (*al-ḳirā'at al-'irāḳī*). Ja'qūb al-Ḳirḳisānī, who refers here to the authority of Ja'qūb ben Ephraim ash-Shāmī, states that certain differences between the reading of the Bible by the Palestinians on the one hand and by the Babylonians on the other do not exclude the possibility that both ways of reading may have been correct. He says:

فان كان الشامى هو الحقف دون العراقى والعراقى باطل فقد وقع فى قراءة العراقى نقصان واذا كان ذلك كذلك لم نأمن ان يكون كما سقط ذلك عن العراقى وهو فى أيدى خلق كثير ان يكون قد سقط ايضا مما فى أيدى أهل الشام أشياء اذ كانوا فى القلة دون من يقرأ قراءة اهل العراق بكثير: وذلك ان قراءة العراق ملاء العالم اذ كان ذلك من حد الرقة الى حد الصين طولا وعرضا وأكثر من فى الجزيرة وخراسان وفارس وكرمان واصفهان واليمامة والبحرين واليمن وغير ذلك فاذا كان ما فى أيدى هؤلاء بأسرهم قد سقط منه شيء كان ما فى أيدى أهل الشام على قلتهم أولى بأن يسقط منه أشياء واذا

كان (ذلك) كذلك لم نأمن أيضا ان يكون قد سقط من الكتاب أشياء من أخبار وفرائض... ومحال ان يكونوا يستعملون قراءة ولغة ان لم يتعبد الله بها...

(Kitāb al-anwār wal-marāqib, ed. L. Nemoy, New York 1939, p. 135. ll. 10-20.)

“If the text of the Palestinians is right, we have a deficiency among the Babylonians as we cannot be certain whether what had dropped out of the text of the Babylonians, which was in the hands of so many people, may have been retained by the Palestinians who are so few in number. He continues that the reading of the Babylonians covers the whole world extending from the border towns of ar-Raḡḡa (on the Euphrates) to the frontier of China, and including the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Khorasān, Fāris, Kirmān, Iṣfahān, Yamāma, Baḥrain, Yemen and other countries. He says that it would have been far better if something of the text of the Bible (the book) which is in the hands of the Palestinians had dropped out because they are few in number than that anything should have been lost of what is in the hands of all these... and it is inconceivable that they (the Babylonians) should have used a reading and a language by which it would not have been possible to worship God.”

From this account we see that at the time of Ja‘qūb b. Ephraim ash-Shāmī, to whom al-Ḳirḳisānī refers, a great number of people were known who used the Babylonian methods of reading the Bible and only a very restricted number of people who used the Palestinian method of reading.

We have no detailed information about the time of Ja‘qūb b. Ephraim ash-Shāmī. But of course, one can only speak of “a small number” of Jews occupied with the text of the Bible in Palestine during a period which preceded the work of the Massoretes in Tiberias.

We know that the great Jewish scholar Saadiah (who, towards the end of his life, as Saadiah Gaon, was the chief of the Jewish Talmudic Academy of Sura in Babylonia) had for a while been personally acquainted with the Massoretes of Tiberias. This was after he had fled from his home country, Egypt, and was living in Tiberias, where he studied under Abū Kathīr, the Kātib (secretary), his teacher. Saadiah was the only Jewish scholar who still knew anything of the Babylonian transmission of the text of the Bible.

In a commentary to the *Sefer Yeširah* (ed. Mayer Lambert, Paris 1891), p. 76, Saadiah explains: “As for the gutturals, they have in the Bible 42 peculiarities of which 17 are common to the reading of the people of Palestine and Babylonia and 25 are only found in the Palestinian reading”. Saadiah refers expressly to the differences in the treatment of the gutturals in Palestine and in Babylonia.

The first genuine Babylonian manuscript of the Bible discovered was the



manuscript brought by Schapira in 1879 to Berlin from South Arabia and bought by Richard Lepsius for the Berlin Library. This was a MS of parts of the Kethubim, and since then it has been in the Berlin Library as MS or. qu. 680.

Being a Babylonian MS, it shows naturally only the 17 characteristics of the gutturals which (according to Sa'adya) were common to the Babylonians and the Palestinians. In the characteristics peculiar to the Palestinians we evidently have to see characteristics newly introduced by the Tiberian Massoretes, which they employed so as to establish the new peculiarities which appeared desirable to them in the pronunciation of the gutturals.

I examined the Berlin Babylonian MS very carefully and described it in my book, *Der Masoretische Text des Alten Testaments nach der Ueberlieferung der Babylonischen Juden* (Leipzig, 1902), giving numerous extracts from it. Seven further folios from the same MS are to be found in the Glaser Collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and are kept in New York as MS 510, so that we now know 101 folios of this MS. In my book *Die Masoreten des Ostens* (Leipzig, 1913) I discussed a further great quantity of genuine Babylonian material. This for the most part, had been assembled from fragments out of the Cairo Geniza, but it also comprised fragments of MSS which had been brought together by Firkovitsch and belong now to the Public Library in Leningrad. To this collection belonged also MS Firk.II 1546, the second Babylonian MS which was sent by Professor Kokovzov from Leningrad to Halle and was published in ZAW 26 (1906), 49-84 by Johannes Weerts who gained thereby the degree of Dr. Phil. in Halle under Franz Praetorius.

On the occasion of the 5th German Orientalist Congress in Bonn I discussed a further number of Babylonian texts in ZAW 46 (1928), 113-137; these were accompanied by seventy illustrations of Babylonian MSS made available by a special grant from the Prussian *Kultusminister*, Prof. C.H. Becker.

In the Introduction to *Biblia Hebraica* I listed further Babylonian material under the title: "Index Codicum Veteris Testamenti Babylonicorum".

We can say that the material from the Cairo Geniza which was bought in Cairo for Oxford, by those indicated in Cowley and Neubauer's *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, Vol. II, was a special selection. On the other hand Solomon Schechter who was sent from Cambridge to Egypt in December 1896, had the opportunity of taking everything with him. He was allowed to put all that he found together and send it by the British Agency in Cairo to Cambridge. What came in this way to Cambridge is really a sample of the whole of the Geniza material.

Further, it happened that after Dr. Schechter had left Cambridge in 1902

in order to become President of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, a large quantity of material sent from Cairo to Cambridge was forgotten for nearly 60 years and has been found only recently. I refer here to the notice given by Professor Schirmann of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem which I have mentioned in the new edition of my *Cairo Geniza* Preface, p. viii. Whether Solomon Schechter had looked into these boxes for material which may have been of interest to him we do not know. We may suppose that he did. But of the contents of these boxes we only now begin to learn something after a period of nearly 60 years. In this way our knowledge of the Geniza material which came to Cambridge has been considerably enlarged.

I asked Dr. Rüger and Dr. Dietrich, who had come from Tübingen to England in order to look for Bible fragments from the Geniza for the new edition of the *Biblia Hebraica*, to go to Cambridge in 1959 and to investigate the so-called "New Series" for texts provided with Babylonian and Palestinian vocalization. They found quite a number of specimens of both kinds, as they told me when they returned from Cambridge to Oxford. But they said that they had been able to see only a part of the material which existed, and their impression was that much of the material had still to be investigated.

Dr. Dietrich, who had looked especially for fragments with Palestinian vocalization, sent me a great number of photostats which he had ordered in Cambridge for himself. I had dealt with similar material in my *Masoretens des Westens*, vol. II (1930) pp. 14\*–45\*, but I feel that we shall have to investigate this great amount of material in a somewhat different way. These texts illustrate excellently the development of the older method of Palestinian vocalization into the Tiberian method of vocalization newly created by the Massoretes of Tiberias.

Of great interest are the liturgical texts with Palestinian vocalization of which A.E. Cowley gave me some photographic specimens on my first visit to England in 1899. They were *Ḳerobas* devoted to the 24 divisions of priests (*משמרות*), each *Mishmar* provided with a *Ḳeroba* for the particular Sabbath day on which the *Mishmar* would have been in office had the Temple still been standing. This practice must have been in use at that time for the synagogue services. For us it was surprising news, as rites of such a kind are mentioned nowhere else.

Of these *Ḳerobas* nearly one half are preserved in Geniza fragments. From the acrostics in certain parts of the poems Dr. Spanier in *MGWJ* (1929), p. 68 pointed out that they were composed by a certain Hedwatha (*הדוּתָהּ*). Nothing is known about this poet. But it may be that he was a contemporary of Yannai, and it is almost certain that the poems were composed in the time of Byzantine rule over Palestine.

I began to work on these texts in Giessen, first with the help of Dr. Israel Rabin, whom I met there in about 1915, and I continued the work with many Jewish friends, fellow students and pupils in Giessen and Bonn. In 1925 I was able to study the originals of the manuscripts in England (Bodleian Library Heb.d.63, fol 82–88; Cambridge University Library T-S, H 16, 2–3) and I published the texts in *Masoreten des Westens*, vol. I (1927), pp 1–23 of the Hebrew text, pp. 1\*–59\* of the German translation; some more fragments belonging to the same MS were discovered by Dr. Menachem Zulay in the Moseri-Collection in Cairo 171–172, and were published by him in *Studies of the Research Institute of Hebrew Poetry*, vol. V, (1939), pp. 113–118.

I give here as a specimen the beginning of the Palestinian poetry of *Mishmar XII Jaḳīm* with the quotations from the Bible and some following prayers:

יְקִים שְׁנַיִם עֶשֶׂר

אֹהֶ מְפִיךְ יְקוֹם	אִמְרַת עֲתָה אֶקוֹם
בְּנִיךְ לְהוֹשִׁיעַ בְּכָל יְקוֹם	בְּמִשְׁמַר יְקִים תְּקוֹם
גִּבּוֹר קוֹם גְּרֵשׁ מְעַלְיָנוּ	גִּוִּים הַקְּמִים עֲלֵינוּ
דְּשַׁנְיָנוּ וְזָר לֹא יִבְלַעֵנוּ	דְּבַרְךָ יְקוֹם עֲלֵינוּ
הַכִּין יְקוֹם בְּמִקְוֵמִי	הַדְרִית קוֹ הַקְּמִי
וַתִּדְעַ שִׁבְתִּי וְקוֹמִי	וַתְהִיָּה עֲזוֹרָת אֶת יְקוֹמִי

כַּכְּ (Ps. cxxxix.2) אֲתָה יְדַעַת שִׁבְתִּי וְקוֹמִי בְּנִתָּה לְרַעִי מְרַחֵק  
וְזוֹ (Cant. v,5) –קְמִתִּי אֲנִי לְ[פְתוּחַ] לְדוֹדִי וְיָדִי נִטְפָּו מוֹר וְאַצְבָּעוֹתַי מוֹר עוֹבֵר עַל כַּפּוֹת  
הַמְנַעוֹל

וְזוֹ (Thr. iii, 63) שִׁבְתֶּם וְקִיַּמְתֶּם הַבֵּיטָה אֲנִי מִנְגִּינְתֶּם	
מִנְגִּינְתֶּם תִּגְדַּע	מִנְגִּינְתָּ לֵב לְהֵם תִּפְרַע
מִוֹגֵג עֵם לֵב יְקַרַע	מִנֵּן אֵיתָן אֲוֹרָה

The Hebrew grammar prepared by Dr. Murtonen based on the text of the Samaritans is restricted to the Pentateuch. We shall carefully have to investigate how far the text of the poetry of the *Mishmaroth* with Palestinian vocalization is connected with the text supported by the Samaritans. We shall also have to investigate all the liturgical texts with Palestinian punctuation preserved in the Geniza. All such texts will have to be edited with the greatest care.

On the other hand, we know that the Babylonian text of the Bible has been used by very large numbers of Jews. A careful edition of this text also needs to be made and investigated.

We are led back to even more remote times by the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew text incorporated by Origen into the Hexapla as the 2nd Column. Mercati believed that he could ascribe the authorship of the text of this trans



literation to Origen himself, but this was a mistake. Origen did not have such knowledge of Hebrew as was necessary for his task. I refer here to my discussion in *The Cairo Geniza* (2nd ed) pp. 157 ff. In my article "The Greek Bible MSS used by Origen" (JBL 79 (1960), 111–118), I have shown that the Greek manuscripts used by him and incorporated in his Hexapla must have been of Jewish origin, which is corroborated with certainty by the fact that the name of God consistently employed in these texts is  $\pi\pi\iota$ , the Tetragrammaton. We have probably to assume that the version used by Origen dated from pre-Christian times and had been used by such Jews as were unable to use the Hebrew text of the Bible, at that time still unvocalized—without a Greek transliteration. However, this cannot be proved since we know only so much of the Greek transliterated text as has been transmitted by Origen. I give here an example of the pronunciation of the 2nd Column which should be compared with the Hebrew text, Ps. xxx vss 1 and 2, xxix of the Greek Bible.

$\mu\alpha\zeta\mu\omega\rho$   $\sigma\iota\omega$   $\sigma\upsilon\nu\epsilon\chi\alpha\theta$   $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha\iota\theta$   $\lambda\delta\alpha\nu\epsilon\iota\delta$   
 $\epsilon\rho\omega\mu\epsilon\mu\epsilon\chi$   $\eta\eta\eta$   $\chi\iota$   $\delta\epsilon\lambda\lambda\iota\theta\alpha\nu\eta$   $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\omega$   $\sigma\epsilon\mu\epsilon\theta$   $\omicron\iota\epsilon\beta\beta\alpha\iota$   $\lambda\iota$

I have published the whole Psalm xxx (xxix of the Greek Bible) together with the Hebrew text in Hebrew letters in my *Cairo Geniza*, (Oxford 1959), p. 163 ff. But in the fragments discovered in the Milan palimpsest by Johannes Mercati we have about 150 verses of the Psalms. I have discussed some of their most important characteristics in my *Cairo Geniza* (Oxford 1959), in sections 20–24 of Chapter II, pp. 157–188.