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Standardization of the Biblical Text and the Massoretic Tradition of the Leningrad Codex

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STANDARDIZATION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT AND THE MASSORETIC TRADITION OF THE LENINGRAD CODEX

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The Biblical writings were carefully transmitted over the millennia by Jewish schools of scribes, known as the Massorties who devoted their lives to the preservation of the sacred text. They did more than copy the original wording from the Second Temple period, when textual standardization emerged. Biblical scribes, moreover, were committed to the preservation of the compositional intent, its sacred ritualistic usage and its religio-exegetical significance. The actual text was transmitted by consonantal letters of the Assyrian square script, which was introduced by the former scribe Ezra in the 4th century B.C.E. This was done in contrast to the earlier rendition of the Hebrew Bible in Canaanite script, as it appeared in a modified form of the Samaritan scrolls. The compositional intent was captured by the Massoretic scribes in their introduction of signs for vowels and cantillation marks. Vocalization came to fix the exact wording morphologically and the cantillations determine the syntactical meaning in each verse. However, the religio-interpretive significance for the reader was recorded in word lists, unique signs, peculiar expressions, particular cross-references, emendations, circumlocutions and variants.

These two features capture in Hebrew the designation for scribalism: Massorah suggests both cantillations, from the root yasar, as well as tradition from the root masar. Soferim indicates both enumerations and scribes. This unique work came to determine the proper reading and proper understanding of the Biblical works for future generations. A third area of their concern was to preserve the tradition of the past that was no longer in practice. This represents the liturgical and ritualistic usage of scripture during the Temple service. Such usage determined the canonical significance of Scripture. For the writings became sacred due to the appearance of God's unpronounced name, that only the High Priest was permitted to use. Furthermore, the scrolls were subject to the laws of purity and sanctity, which governed Levitical life. Thus, the appearance of the text on the vellum by its calligraphic design and arrangement produces the reverential effect on the community to behold in time of public recitation. The very scroll was lifted for all the worshippers to see and then it is carried to be adored. The scroll is holy or set apart and from all other writings, which determined canonicity and careful transmission.

Torah scrolls were penned by open and closed paragraphs, poetic and prosaic arrangement, that relate lectionary reading, rather than a chronological account of the historical development. Likewise, the prophetic volumes were arranged by a lectionary division of topical, correlative and prospective texts, which came to support the Mosaic tradition. The hagiography opened with poetic works of Psalms, Proverbs and Job, which are governed by a different set of cantillations. Five scrolls are placed in this collection as they were read on particular festivals and on the national fast day. The massoretic arrangement of said books in a tripartite division rests on early tradition that betrays particular usage. Thus, in addition to the preparation of holy writing as scrolls for synagogal service, the scribes after the

Destruction recorded their tradition in codices on the margins, the top and the bottom of each page, as well as at the end of each division.

Such codices appear in medieval times, which eventually also preserved at the end of the work their esoteric guides in the form of calligraphic carpet pages. These secret manuals contain Massoretic information on the language of the Bible and scribalism that were crafted in a poetic formulation on the three types of transmission. Similarly, early liturgy and mystical writings were transmitted orally in poetic formulation for worship and spirituality. Two famous codices appeared at the end of the first millennium and they came from the known Tiberian school of Ben Asher. The earlier one is now designated as the Aleppo Manuscript, where it was kept as a precious, sacred work by the old Jewish community in Syria. During the War of Israel's Independence of 1948, this manuscript was damaged by the Syrians and eventually the incomplete work reached Jerusalem. A facsimile was published by Prof. Gershon-Gottstein. The grandson's edition of the codex is now known as the Leningrad Manuscript. This work was preserved complete and it is a jewel of the Fustat community. It was called the *keter* or crown, which the karaitic merchant Firkovitch brought to Petrograd, that is now Leningrad, where it was placed in the Russian national Library. This manuscript serves as the *textus receptus* for the critical edition of *Biblica Hebraica*, under the editorship of Prof. Kahle, my teacher Prof. K. Elliger and my colleague Prof. Rieger of Tuebingen University.

Most important is the fact that Aleppo manuscript was seen by Maimonides, the great rabbinic codifier in the 13th century, who used it as the official Halakhic guide for all future preparation of the sacred text. That is why most manuscripts of the European, North American and Yemenite Jewry enjoy similar wording of the Hebrew Bible. This fact is confirmed by Christian Ginzberg, who offers a masterful account of this development in his *Prolegomenon to the Massoretic Tradition of the Bible*.

My focus in this presentation will be limited to the third area of the formative usage, as preserved in the Massorah of the Leningrad Codex. Significantly, the sacred usage affects the very understanding of the poetic work of the Psalms. Since the very book concludes with the Halleluyah (praise to the Lord) to be accompanied by musical instruments. From early sources it appears that the affective use of Psalms in the Temple was connected with the Choral and musical arrangement, that were conducted by Levitical masters, musicians and singers. Thus, the very text of Psalms offers particular ways of reading the verses or more correctly the poetic lines and their members. Words are in balance and they produce harmony either by various voices and modulations or with pauses, responses, reflections and refrains. All these features are secreted in the peculiar cantillations as well as in the design and arrangement of the text. Psalms indeed offer introductory attributions, inserted musical notations, particular formulations and concluding instructions, benedictions and doxologies. The forgotten knowledge of their usage was not considered by the past critical studies of the psalms. However, the recent discoveries at Qumran point to this experimental setting and phenomenological use of Psalms, which now challenge all future studies.

Recently, a Qumran edition of the Psalms was published, translated and annotated by Prof. James Sanders. However, it is not a canonical version of the Biblical text, as he assumes, but a priestly manual for usage of the Psalms. Its colophon reveals the purpose: "David wrote 3600 Psalms, 364 songs to sing before the altar, upon the whole burnt Tamid offering everyday, throughout the days of the year and for the Sabbath sacrifices 52 songs and the offerings for the New Moons and the festivals including the Day of Atonement, 20 songs. All these songs that he formulated are 446 in addition to 4 songs to be played

musically for exorcism, totalling 4050." These numbers reflect the Qumran fixed solar calendar of sacrificial services, which are described in the Temple Scroll of Qumran. This scroll related the Zaddokite-priestly Midrashic account of the Pentateuch. Their formulations are distinct from the intercalated lunar calendar of the Pharisaic-rabbinic tradition, which determines the Massoretic text.

The Qumran edition of Psalms reveals various applications of Levitical usage of songs that accompany the sacrificial services in the presence of the crowds. The visiting worshippers indeed participated in the sacred liturgy, with particular doxologies, refrains and exclamations. These responses appear both in Qumran and early rabbinic sources. Most important for the priestly manual are the other poetic collections of sacred songs that were also discovered at Qumran. They indeed fascinate the scholars with their mystical formulations, for the Sabbath sacrificial service within the Temple. The critical study was prepared carefully by Prof. Carol Newsome. It reveals curious practice of meditative, repetitive prayers, as well as the oracular usage of gazing by the priests in the sanctuary. The latter experience was examined by me, as it relates to the effective focusing on the divine name, in the manner of Urim and Thumim, that sheds light in their interpretative Midrashic approach. My scholarly presentations were published by the past two Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies, which was held at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Apparently, the forgotten practice of the past was deliberately secreted into Biblical scrolls and can now be pursued in a careful analysis of the Massoretic account of the poetic text of the Psalms in the Leningrad Codex.

A facsimile of the Leningrad Codex is now available for scholarly study. It was edited by Prof. Noel Friedman (Leiden: Bull, 1998) with introductory studies. Prof. Atrud B. Beck of Ann Arbor observes: "Poetry is laid out in poetic stichs, as one of the early examples of prosody in the Bible. From earliest time certain poems of the Bible were written stich metrically, such as the Song of the Sea (Exod 15) or Song of Moses (Deut 32), so documents from Qumran also indicate. A similar poetic format is exhibited in the three poetic books of the Hebrew Bible in the Leningrad Manuscript." His observation relates to the design of the Massoretic text, which deserves further scrutiny.

Early rabbinic Massorah of the treatise Soferim indicates the distinction between the Song of the Sea and the Song of Moses. The former is to be laid out as a wall of bricks and the latter to appear as two pillars. This distinction can be explained from early Mishnaic sources that reveal how the Song of the Sea was publicly recited. Tosefta Soatah 6:3 points out that the song is introduced by the cue. "Moses sang and the children of Israel completed each verse" (Exod 15:1). Thus, each poetic line is structured like laid out bricks, side by side. This structure offers two possible arrangements: 1.) Moses began with the call: "I sing to the Lord" and the people repeated it, adding, "For He is highly exalted;" or 2.) Moses began with the call: "I sing to the Lord" and the people only completed with the exaltation. In this manner, the peak verse (15:11), that separate the two parts of the Song is repeated in the text. "Who is like You, among the powers, O Lord?" and "Who is like You magnified in holiness?" The first fourteen lines refer to God's overwhelming power, which creates for the sake of good and can destroy evil. The last fourteen lines refer to God's set-apartness (Hebrew: Qaddosh), whose transcendence generates awe and ultimate kingship. Thus, the last lines of the Song speak of God's reign in contrast to the horse of Pharaoh and his charioteers who were drowned in the Sea. This contrast is misunderstood, since the word sws can be vocalized in two ways. It is not the "sus," the horse, who was drowned but "swes." The Egyptian pagan god of war, that entered the sea, was eliminated. Thereby the Song effectively ends with the proclamation that only the transcendental God of Creation reigns and none of Nature worship prevail.

This song of Moses also suggests in its appended verse, how Miriam sang her praise to the Lord in the accompaniment of women and their musical instruments, the tambourine and the flute. Miriam offers the call "I sing to the Lord" and the women respond with the exaltation. The exaltation repeats that word in Hebrew, Ga'oh Ga'ah, for emphasis and thereby it becomes the refrain that is accompanied by the beat of the drum. Such repeated exclamations appear in Temple liturgy, offering a third possibility in the interchange between the Levites and the people. The cries of Hosannah, Hallelujah and Amen are the known refrains.

In the other Song of Moses, the poetic structure of two columns exhibits the Hebraic formation of complete thought, to be captured by parallelism membrorum. Let me demonstrate with a few examples that reflect dynamical understanding. The first is synonymous parallelism that appears in the first line of the Song of Moses (Deut 32:1) "Hearken heaven and I shall speak" is parallel to "Listen earth to the words of my mouth." Three by three accented words in the line preserve the complete thought. In this manner, the reference to both heaven and earth, offers a total effect on the hearers, both physically and spiritually. The second is the complementary third line of the song that suggests the call and the response. "When I call out the name of the Lord" is in the first column. Its complement is in the second column: "scribe greatness to our God." The Tannaitic tradition designates a public response to calling God's name, as "ascribing greatness." Priestly pronouncement of God's name elicits a doxological response on the act of prostration in the Temple. The Tannaitic tradition (Taanith 16b, cf Berakhot 63a) record the response as "Blessed be the name of this glorious kingdom for ever and ever."

This formulation is found in the Qumran manual of the Psalms, and records the public doxology as response to each line of the Alphabetic Psalm 145. This Psalm is one of the great Hallelujahs of the Psalmic completion. It praises God as King and blessed His holy name, and this defines His attributes of lovingkindness. The Psalm reflects this in the beginning: "I shall extol My God, the King and I shall bless His name for ever more." This public oblique address to God in early Jewish liturgy is a dual form, Our father representing His name of love not to be spoken, and Our King, representing His authority. In light of such beginnings, when God's name is spoken, the doxological response obliquely captures His name and His kingship.

The Psalm of praise offers lines beginning with the Hebrew letter of the Aleph Bet. Each line is to be recited as a mantra, to affect a praying focus (Kavanah) for the worshippers. For examples, the "p" line spells out God's providence. "You open Your hand and you satiate the need of each living being." One concentrates on the intent to experience total dependence on God's blessings, which he acknowledges with the doxology. No wonder such doxology still exists in Jewish daily liturgical exercise of receiving God's Kingdom in the recitation of Shema. The recitation acknowledges total commitment to the "Lord God," the dual aspects of this presence, as a transcendental but immanent reality in one's life. It echoes the words of Deut 6:4, where the Massorah enlarges two letters of "ayin" in the opening word and of "dalet" at the end of the last word. This peculiar feature spells out the Hebrew word "ed" (testimony), this is the rabbinic designation for the liturgical use since Temple time. It influenced the impressionable seer Muhammad who saw Jews reciting the Shema daily. His Tawhid formulation at the end of the Kuranic Suras reflects how Jews interpreted the intent. Islam too picked up the Jewish designation to refer to their primary pillar of faith, as testimony (Sahadath). This very act of attestation is a most serious engagement of a religious Jew daily and therefore the doxology is to be whispered following the intense forum of declaration. The only practice of the Temple that remained now was a whisper, a

mnemonic device not to forget the original affective usage. This example suffices to show how Massorah secrets the ancient practice, in the prospect of renewal in the rebuilt Temple of Jerusalem.

The mantra, like the affect of each line for Psalm 145, comes to explain an intriguing phenomenon. The rabbinic Massorah of Leningrad manuscript does not record the "n" line; but the Qumran manual clearly preserves it. The early Amoriac master, R. Yochanan of Tiberias explains why the "n" line is missing (Bab Tal Berakhot 4b). The reason is given due to focussing on "n" line that may affect dysfunctionally the worshipper. Amos 5:2 offers a lament beginning with "n" (naflah lo tosfif kum); "Fallen, will not rise again the virgin of Israel." This lament originally referred to the northern Kingdom of Israel, when the ten tribes were removed from the land never to return. Now the remaining Jews of Judea and Benjamin tribes, following the destruction of the Second Temple may pick up this devastating lament. So 'n' line was intentionally skipped over.

However, in the Qumran edition 'n' line is found referring to words of hope which wording is still present in the Septuagint, Greek translation of the Hebrew by priests before the Destruction. "Neeman Attah, you are faithful O Lord and holy in all his works. The Qumranites lived before the destruction, but they rejected the polluted Temple serviced by the corrupt priests. They relocated in the wilderness of Judea facing the Dead Sea, where they established their holy encampment. They were awaiting a return to Jerusalem to reclaim the Temple and to purify it. In their apocalyptic scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness, they spell out their prospect, which they related to God's faithfulness that demands their holy worship. Indeed the dynamical meaning of Qumran's life as holy or as Essenes was governed by their laws of purity and holiness and is secreted in their manual, which can serve the scholar in the understanding of their praxis and thought.

The very schism between the Sadducees and the Pharisees on key faith position can be gathered from the careful study of the Messorah. Priestly benedictory pronouncements appear to separate the five books of the Psalter (44:14; 72:18, 19; 89:53; 106:48; 150) and these stamp the priestly expression of hope. The first and the fourth refer to God's blessings "from this world to the next world," but the second and the third speaks only of this world. The early rabbis explain that the Pharisaic teaching of reward and punishment relates to this world as well as to the world to come. The greater reward is received posthumously and at the end of human history in the event of resurrection and final judgment. Their teaching affected deeply the rise of Christianity. The Sadducean view, however, limited the reward to this world only, bio-socially. Thus, the Tosefta Taanith 1:10-12 relates how the Pharisaic teaching influenced in the last century of Second Temple revising Psalmic phraseology for priestly benedictions and the public response. Thus, the Massorah preserves in the middle sections of the Psalter the earlier forms of the Sadducean practice, but in the opening and closing sections the Pharisaic practice is recorded. This is verified by the public response of Amen that is still preserved in the concluding sections. The Tosefta states "one does not respond with Amen to the priestly benediction in the Temple, but offers a doxology." When "Blessed is the Lord, God of Israel from this world unto the next world" is said, the response of the crowd is "Blessed is the name of the glorious kingdom forever more." "For ever more" spells out the Pharisaic teaching of the two worlds (va'ed), (ve'ad) in the public acknowledgement.

I can continue with an illustration of different voices in the Psalter, which are preserved in the design and the structure. This will demonstrate additional dynamical meaning due to the affective and dramatic use of sacred poetry. I reserve such examination for future examination of poetic structure as well as a

prosaic presentation of Leningrad Codex. For the challenge of Massoretic dynamics offers a new agenda for phenomenological study of Scripture. One must move beyond the literary formation due to a documentary hypothesis, so heavily plowed over the past century of Critical Study in the past rests on surface understanding of the Biblical text that was established by the Massoretic schools, but with no recourse to their dynamical understanding of the deeper signification of the sacred text.

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