

# Prologue

The present book is an edition of micrographical Masoretic notes. I started work on this project during the first phase of the project on “Material Text Cultures” at the Collaborative Research Centre 933 of the Heidelberg University.<sup>1</sup> The main purpose of the Center is to promote textual anthropology in the study of material artefacts in non-typographic societies.<sup>2</sup> This rigorous theoretical and practical approach focuses on various material artefacts that display written texts, and seeks to understand not only the written texts themselves (as with textual philology), but also the significance of the textification and textualization<sup>3</sup> produced by the context of their production, as well as their meaning and practical reception in the specific social and cultural backgrounds that produced the artefacts.<sup>4</sup> There is therefore an active relationship between the texts (considered as philological units), the artefacts (the material objects on which the texts are written and which are operative within the social space), the producers of the textartefact (*Textproduzent*), and the recipients of the text (*Textrezipient*).<sup>5</sup> Within this framework, the meaning of a written text is never “immanent”. Instead, it is the result of various human practices of reception, as when we “annotate, read, memorize, quote, extract, dramatize, illustrate, copy, comment, interpret, hide, [and] react to” a text.<sup>6</sup>

The focus of the Subproject B04 (“Scholarly Knowledge, Drollery or Esotericism? The Masorah of the Hebrew Bible in its Various Material Properties”) of the CRC 933

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1 The *Sonderforschungsbereich 933 – Materiale Textkulturen. Materialität und Präsenz des Geschriebenen in non-typographischen Gesellschaften* is being financed by the DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) between 2011 and 2015. <http://www.materiale-textkulturen.org/> (seen 14.7.2014).

2 Hilgert 2010; Meier et al. 2015.

3 See Oesterreicher’s terminological distinction between *Verschriftung* (*textification*) and *Verschriftlichung* (*textualization*): “the former applying to the shift in medium and the latter to the gradual change in conception of a discourse or discourse tradition, whereby ‘writteness’ plays an increasingly important role in its transmission and reception”; See Bakker 1999, 32 note 5 and Oesterreicher 1993.

4 Metzeltin 2013, 446: “La socialisation et la sociabilité des êtres humains sont basées sur la communication verbale. Celle-ci se réalise par la textification de descriptions, d’argumentations et de narrations. Les textifications stables ont besoin de supports matériels. On ne peut les comprendre que dans des contextes de production et de réception. Dans ce sens, l’anthropologie textuelle de Metzeltin et This, avec leur focalisation sur la structuralité signifiante des textes, et l’anthropologie des textes de Hilgert, avec sa focalisation sur la contextualisation des textifications, fournissent des instruments élaborés de travail pour l’analyse et la compréhension des textifications des systèmes de connaissance.”

5 For H. Jauß, the ‘Author-Text-Reader’ relationship is essential to understanding a text. The Reader socializes the text. The text must be read, in order to enter history and have a socio-cultural function. Consequently, we seek to discover what a text meant for its readers a given time and what constituted their horizon of expectations (*Erwartungshorizont*); Jauß 1978, 12.

6 Hilgert 2010, 90 and 97.

is on the material properties of an important textual tradition that accompanies the biblical text. In this project, we approach the reception practices associated with the Hebrew Bible through the ‘textualization’ of Masoretic knowledge in the Middle Ages. The Masorah of the Ashkenazim often takes specific ornamental or figurative micrographical forms,<sup>7</sup> which have yet to be analyzed within the context of ‘Masoretic studies’, an area of research which focuses on the transmission of the biblical text.<sup>8</sup> Our project seeks to clarify whether the relationship between the Masorah included in biblical manuscripts and Masoretic traditions a) remained constant throughout the textual tradition conserved in biblical artefacts; and b) whether its reception varied when we consider an expanded field of applications, especially rabbinical commentaries.<sup>9</sup> This general framework allows for different approaches. While one of my colleagues seeks to discover how much Masoretic knowledge rabbinical commentaries exhibit,<sup>10</sup> I analyze the philological content of micrographical drawings in Hebrew Bibles. This has led me to focus on a specific Ashkenazic manuscript (MS Vat. Ebr. 14) and to prepare the critical edition of micrographical Masoretic notes presented in this book. On another level, the results of this philological analysis have also led me to evaluate the relationships between texts and images in the micrographic Masorah and its concrete functions in light of the reception practices associated with such biblical manuscripts, a question illuminated at an international conference organized in Heidelberg in November 2013.<sup>11</sup> The results of my analysis of the relationship between texts and images in the micrographic Masorah can be found in a separate article.<sup>12</sup>

The Masorah (or *massoret*) is, in a broad sense, a compilation of information which preserves the biblical text from corruption: it includes details on the vocalization and accentuation of the consonantal text, as well as Masoretic notes and handbooks.<sup>13</sup> Strictly speaking, the Masorah “denotes an apparatus of instructions for

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7 See the Introduction for further definitions.

8 Martín-Contreras 2013.

9 Cf. Liss, on-line MTK presentation.

10 I am referring to the PhD of my colleague Kay J. Petzold, *Die Idee des einen Textes. Die frühe Masorah der Hebräischen Bibel bei den mittelalterlichen jüdischen Bibelkommentatoren. Untersuchung schriftragender Artefakte der Masorah und ihres Verhältnisses zur Rezeptionspraxis der Hebräischen Bibel anhand ihrer Benutzung und Kommentierung durch Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi)* conducted within the framework of Subproject B04.

11 SFB 933 International Conference, Subproject B04: *Text-Image Relationship and Visual Elements in Written Hebrew Sources from the Middle Ages to Early Modern Period*, Heidelberg, 10–12 November 2013.

12 See Attia 2015.

13 For an exhaustive presentation of the Masoretic System, see Dotan 2007 [1977]; Tov 1992, 72–76; Martín-Contreras/Seijas de los Ríos-Zarzosa 2010, 37–49; Golinets 2012; Khan 2012. For an example of a Masoretic compilation, see the *Sefer Okhla we-Okhla*, edited in Frensdorff 1864; Graetz 1887; Díaz Esteban 1975; Ognibeni 1992 and 1995; Dotan 1967; Tov 1992, 74–75.

the writing of the biblical text and its reading [...] to ensure that special care would be exercised in the transmission of the text”.<sup>14</sup> This textual apparatus includes the *Masora Parva* (the ‘small Masorah’ located on the side margins),<sup>15</sup> the *Masora Magna* (the ‘great Masorah’, written on the upper and lower margins, as well as the ‘collative Masorah’), and the *Masora Finalis* (notes placed at the end of the book or codex).<sup>16</sup> Each of these types of Masorah serves a specific function in the transmission of the biblical text. The *Masora Parva* (hereafter MP) plays a central role in this tradition: it is composed of an abbreviated note which is placed directly adjacent to the word or expression concerned in the biblical text (called a *lemma*). It points to specific problems: it clarifies spellings (defective or *plene*), accents, or vocalizations, and explains whether a term is a *hapax legomenon* (ב), whether something should be read into the text even though it is not written down (*qere-we la-ketiv*), or conversely whether the reader should omit to read something that is written on the page (*ketiv we-la-qere*). It also states how many times this problem occurs in the biblical text. The *Masora Magna* (hereafter MM) is commonly composed of two to four ruled lines of text located on the upper and lower margins of the folios. Its function is to expound on the MP’s notes, which it repeats before giving a detailed list of the *simanehon* (i.e., a list of all the instances of a particular lemma). The ‘collative Masorah’ provides the reader with collected lists of specific phenomena, such as different types of *hapax* forms. Among other things, the *Masora Finalis* gives information about the number of verses in each book.

Masoretes are known to have been committed to writing down vowels, accents, and Masoretic notes prior to the 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> However, the vocalizations, accentuations, and Masoretic notes (MP and MM) they transmitted in these early manuscripts<sup>18</sup> did not necessarily concord.<sup>19</sup> There are no extant written sources before the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, these early manuscripts attest to the prevalence of the Tiberian (Ben Asher and Ben Naftali) tradition, even if “the Tiberian Masoretic tradition had not fixed on the school of one particular Masorete” at the close of the Masoretic period.<sup>20</sup> In his *Mishne Torah* compiled between 1170 and 1180, Maimonides, who was against

<sup>14</sup> Tov 1992, 72.

<sup>15</sup> “On two sides of the columns of the text in the eastern and Spanish codices, and on the side corresponding to the external margin of the page in the Ashkenazi Bible” (Olszowy-Schlanger 2012b, 31).

<sup>16</sup> According to Olszowy-Schlanger 2012b, 31, Masoretic notes were probably being inserted on the margins of Tiberian biblical codices by the ninth century. Cairo Genizah fragments suggest that before that, they were gathered in separate booklets.

<sup>17</sup> Dotan 2007, 613.

<sup>18</sup> Díaz Esteban 1954.

<sup>19</sup> Martín-Contreras/Seijas de los Ríos-Zarzosa 2010, 46. Scholars frequently find notes contradicting the main text and *vice versa* (see in this Edition, Case 5, note ii; Case 8, note vi; Case 12, note viii). Thus, while the consonantal text of the Masoretic Bible tended to have been standardized, the Masoretic apparatus seems to have remained rather heterogeneous.

<sup>20</sup> Khan 2012, 5. The two known schools are the Ben Asher and the Ben Naftali’s traditions.

the influence of the Karaites,<sup>21</sup> declared a Ben Asher codex (the ‘popular in Egypt’) to be an authoritative reference work for those wishing to copy other Torah Scrolls.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, he asserted that this codex had been used as a model codex in Jerusalem.<sup>23</sup> As a matter of fact, the Ben Asher Tiberian manuscript version(s) of the Hebrew Bible gradually did become predominant.<sup>24</sup> This means that the Masoretic tradition developed in one of the two following ways: either the standard Ben Asher Tiberian and non-standard (expanded) Tiberian traditions (such as the tradition which appeared in the Codex Reuchlinianus) both reached Europe at the same time,<sup>25</sup> but the expanded Tiberian tradition eventually fell out of use and the standard Tiberian tradition alone survived; or else, the expanded (non-standard) Tiberian tradition is the older one and was in circulation in Europe long before the advent of the standard Ben Asher Tiberian tradition. These two hypotheses frame my reflections on the tradition of Ashkenaz, which developed sometime between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Today, the standard Tiberian tradition is widely attested and studied in manuscripts which in some cases predate the 12<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>26</sup> but the significance of the differences that exist between medieval manuscripts is still a matter for debate, especially in the case of late medieval sources, as their variants are less studied.<sup>27</sup> Some

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**21** The Karaites, defended by Judah Hadassi (writing in *Eshkol ha-Kofer*, in 1149), considered that everything in the biblical text was holy, including every detail of its vocalization and accentuation. See Dotan 2007, 2.2.4.

**22** Mishne Torah, *Sefer Ahavah, Hilkhot Sefer Torah*, 8:5: “The book/codex (*sefer*) on which I base myself for these matters [copy of the Scrolls] is a book/codex (*sefer*) which is popular in Egypt, which includes twenty-four books and which was in Jerusalem for some years, where it served as a model for correcting books/codices (*sefarim*). Everyone used to rely on it for Ben Asher had corrected and studied it for years, correcting it many times as he copied it. I used it for the liturgical scroll (*Sefer Torah*) that I copied according to it.”

הוספר שסמכנו עליו בדברים אלו, הוא הספר הידוע במצריים, שהוא כולל ארבעה ועשרים ספרים, שהיה בירושלים מכמה שנים להגיה ממנו הספרים; ועליו, היו הכול סומכין, לפי שהגיהו בן אשר ודיקדק בו שנים, והגיהו פעמים רבות כמו שהעתיקו. ועליו, סמכתי בספר תורה שכתבתי כהלכותו.

**23** An exemplar or model codex is a good quality Masoretic codex dedicated to the preservation of the entire biblical tradition, including both its written and reading traditions. It was used as a model for copying and revising liturgical Scrolls and codices. See Olszowy-Schlanger 2012b, 28; Khan 2012, 7–8. Maimonides does not conclude that all model codices should be Ben Asher codices, but just that the codex which he used for Torah scrolls was Ben Asher’s, which was popular in Egypt. Some scholars argue that this codex is what is known today as the Aleppo Codex. On the spread of the Mishne Torah in Ashkenaz, see Soloveitchik 2009; Woolf 2005.

**24** According to Martín-Contreras/Seijas de los Ríos-Zarzosa 2010, 33–34, the Ben Asher tradition became prevalent everywhere during the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

**25** For example, the Codex Reuchlinianus (dated 1105/6) shows an ‘extended infralinear Tiberian graphic system’ that allows us to trace its pronunciation back to the supralinear system of vocalization which was used until the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Morag 1959.

**26** Tov 1992, 35. Francisco 2008.

**27** Cohen 1980; Cohen 1986; Tov 1992, 37.

scholars have pointed out that later Ashkenazic manuscripts may have stemmed from a specific cultural background with its own ancient traditions, and suggested that these traditions may have resisted the process of Masoretic standardization. In other words, the fact that Ashkenazic traditions seem not to be authoritative (from a standard Ben Asher point of view) does not mean that their story should not be told or that they escape the scope of scholarly enquiry today. Furthermore, in the case of the tradition of Ashkenaz, biblical manuscripts often feature a wealth of ornamental and figurative micrographical Masorah which have not been properly examined up until now. The following edition seeks to plug these gaps by engaging with the difficult questions raised by the transmission of the Masoretic tradition in non-Sephardic and non-Eastern areas.

