

Concluding Remarks

This edition tackles the prevailing disregard for the philological features of Ashkenazic biblical manuscripts by examining the material characteristics of some of these codices. It represents the first attempt ever made to trace and evaluate the transmission of Masoretic knowledge in northern France. As described above, this knowledge, can be transmitted through micrographical figurative designs and shows to what extent the Masorah of Ben Asher Codices was followed in Europe.

A comparison between the Masoretic notes on Exodus located within figurative forms in Vat14 and the Masorah on Exodus found in a group of eastern Tiberian manuscripts (O, D, L, M) made it possible to create a critical apparatus, and therefore to evaluate how influential the standard Tiberian sources apparently had been on Elijah ha-Naqdan. Going one step further, the use of V, R and B in the apparatus introduces the possibility of interrogating early medieval Ashkenazic sources that might reflect an expanded Tiberian tradition. The thirteen case studies I examined are not sufficient to draw definitive or general conclusions on the Masoretic tradition transmitted by Vat14. A critical edition of the entire manuscript is needed before this can happen. Nonetheless, this partial edition sheds light on several issues, and suggests further steps for investigation.

I/ There is a close philological link between the Masorah of Vat14 and those of the eastern Tiberian sources

This critical edition demonstrates that, in the majority of cases I examined in Vat14, not only was it possible to identify the Masoretic notes but they were comprehensive and presented strong parallels with those of the oldest eastern Tiberian codices (O, D, L). Furthermore, this led me to discover a list of Masoretic notes compiled in the *Sefer Ochlah we Ochlah*.¹ More research is needed in order to ascertain whether or not this list was copied directly from an independent codex. Although this question lies beyond the scope of the present study, the present edition nevertheless strongly suggests that Naqdan had access to manuscripts containing ancient material. In particular, one of the notes that Elijah wrote in the margin of Vat14 (Vat14, f. 256r) provides evidence that, while reviewing a segment of text, he made a comparison with a Masoretic note (or biblical passage?)² in a *yashan noshan mugah*, a very old corrected

¹ See Case 4, on Exod 12:7, lemma וְעַל־הַמִּשְׁקָנָה.

² According to G. Khan, whom I thank for this comment, it is not totally clear whether the author is referring to a Masoretic note from an old manuscript or to the biblical text in an old manuscript. Although it would be more usual to understand the term *massoret* to refer to a Masoretic note, further research is needed on the use of the term *massoret* in the context of the 13th century.

Masoretic Bible (or exemplar).³ Is this a reference to an older Ashkenazic manuscript used as an exemplar in the area where Elijah was copying Vat14 or was it his way of referring to a model codex in the Ben Asher Tiberian tradition?⁴ Although it is not possible to answer this question here, it certainly seems probable that Elijah was familiar with Tiberian sources.

Comparing Vat14 to other Ashkenazic manuscripts (V, B and R) has familiarized me with their numerous variants. My edition demonstrates i) that Vat14 has both Ben Asher Tiberian philological features and other features which I will call for now ‘Anglo-Norman’, ii) that V and B also present Ben Asher Tiberian philological features but include more Anglo-Norman features than Vat14, and iii) that R displays only Ben Asher Tiberian philological features and has almost none of the Anglo-Norman features that appear in Vat14, V and B.⁵ There is much that we do not know about the origins of these variants, and this is largely due to the fact that not many of the oldest Hebrew sources produced in Europe have survived. In the frame of reference defined by the two hypotheses of European Masoretic transmission which I proposed in the Prologue,⁶ these elements (i, ii, and iii) could be interpreted both as local developments of the Ben Asher Tiberian tradition in northern France and as surviving traces of a preexisting non-standard Tiberian tradition, or indeed as exhibiting the hypothetical influence of non-Tiberian traditions. I am inclined to agree with the first interpretation, mostly in light of the fact that the variants of Vat14, V and B seem to be different from those found in Codex Reuchlinianus, which scholars consider to be representative of the non-standard (expanded) Tiberian tradition produced in Europe.⁷ Nevertheless, the variants found in Vat14, V and B call for further research in

3 In general, the term *mugah* (מגה) was used to describe an attribute of Masoretic Bibles in general but it could also refer to a ‘model’ codex. See Appendix 2, Annotations.

4 The sole purpose of exemplar manuscripts or model codices was to preserve the entire biblical tradition, i.e., both the written and the reading traditions. They were used as models for the copy of other manuscripts (or Torah Scrolls) and each region had books which were considered authoritative and copies were made of them. Olszowy-Schlanger 2012b, 23; Khan 2012, 7–8.

5 R, which is related to Vat. Ebr 468 and dated 1215, is written in an Ashkenazic palaeographical script. Its Masorah is closer to the Masorah of O, D, and L than to the Masorah of Vat14, V and B. In this case too, these differences may be explained by the manuscript’s material and cultural context: La Rochelle was a famous Atlantic harbor, and this maritime activity may have meant that a number of manuscripts were in circulation, along with other goods. Although he wrote in an Ashkenazic script, the scribe may have had more contact with non-Ashkenazic manuscripts (and therefore been more familiar with the Tiberian tradition).

6 See end of the Prologue.

7 A direct comparison with Codex Reuchlinianus (i.e. with the expanded Tiberian tradition) was not possible because the Book of Exodus is missing from Codex Reuchlinianus. However, Vat14 contains parts of the Book of Prophets (Haftarot), and a short comparison of Isa 42:5 in both manuscripts (f. 257r in Vat14 and 217r in a facsimile reproduction of Codex Reuchlinianus) shows that Vat14 does not follow the same rules of vocalization as Codex Reuchlinianus.

the fields of grammar, linguistics, vocalization,⁸ Masoretic notes (specific Masoretic annotations from England or northern France) and Hebrew paleography.⁹

In the perspective of textual anthropology, the variants that exist between the four Ashkenazic (Vat14, V, B and R) and the eastern manuscripts that I have examined could also be explained by the original purpose of these manuscripts and the kinds of sources they were copied from. Of course, the fact that the scribes themselves did not leave us any direct information on these questions means that any interpretation is necessarily speculative. It is known in the particular case of Vat14, that R. Asher, the manuscript's patron, wanted Elijah to make a copy of a Pentateuch with Five Scrolls and Haftarat (as opposed to a complete Bible), whether because this kind of Bible had become traditional in Ashkenazic communities¹⁰ or because they had a specific purpose (for the liturgy, to study, or for teaching children or women?).¹¹ Elijah mentions that he had a look into a *mugah* (exemplar) in one specific case (f. 256r, see above). This small annotation might be an indication that he was not copying Vat14 from a complete Masoretic Bible but directly from another 'Pentateuch-Five Scrolls-Haftarat' exemplar.

II/ The presence of figurative elements in the Masorah represents neither a loss nor a distortion of Masoretic knowledge, but instead illustrates a development in the transmission of the Masorah

As this critical edition demonstrates, the use of figurative Masorah in Vat14 does not imply a loss of Masoretic knowledge or a semantic distortion of the Masorah. Only

8 Cf. S. Blapp's lecture, "The Diversity of the so-called Non-standard Tiberian Vocalization Tradition of Biblical Hebrew", Xth EAJIS Congress, Paris, 22d July 2014.

9 A type of script (i.e. one of the material features of an artefact) does not always systematically attest to the influence of an original, local, cultural milieu. Likewise, the absence of a Sephardic feature in an Ashkenazic manuscript does not prove that there was no contact between these communities: on the contrary, travel and cultural (mystical) exchanges between Provence, Spain and Ashkenazic communities were common at that time. That is why researches focused on both the codicological and the palaeographical features of manuscripts, as well as their philological elements and the interpretations they induced, will help to determine the geographical origin and date of many currently undated biblical manuscripts. We still lack a reconstruction of the biblical textual culture of every Ashkenazic sub-geo-cultural area, see Olszowy-Schlanger 2003, 118.

10 Ashkenazic Bibles often include the Pentateuch, the Five Scrolls, the Haftarat, and a verse-by-verse arrangement of the Targum, see Olszowy-Schlanger 2012b, 34.

11 A typology of late medieval biblical manuscripts has yet to be created. See Goshen-Gottstein 1963; Stern 2012; Khan 2012, 8; Kogel 2014. According to G. Khan, there are only three kinds of biblical manuscripts: liturgical scrolls, model codices (exemplars to be copied), and popular Bibles (which include translations, commentaries, etc. in addition to the biblical text). Any further research on this question should take into account the oldest European manuscripts, the biblical fragments of the Cairo Genizah (see Davis Outhwaite 1978–2003), and those discovered in the European Genizah (Books within Books Data Base project).

two of the 160 biblical lemmas which I edited in this book and which were the subject of a MP or/and MM note, were illegible figurative Masoretic notes (Case 1: marks I and II; Case 11: marks II).¹² All the other textual uncertainties highlighted by the present edition (e.g. illegible passages, unidentified text or unclear graphic signs) are independent from the use of figurative or ornamental micrographic forms.¹³ In other words, Vat14 is a northern French manuscript dated 1239, where the use of figurative forms is not at odds with the transmission of the Masorah in the Ben Asher Tiberian tradition: instead, its Masoretic notes are comprehensive and do not really depart much from the Ben Asher Tiberian tradition.

However, I have to add two additional points: first, my preliminary work may create the impression that there are fewer MP and MM notes in manuscripts Vat14, B, and V than in the Ben Asher Tiberian manuscripts I examined (O, D, L, M, or indeed R, as the apparatus shows). In other words, it may seem that annotations are relatively scarce in the Ashkenazic Anglo-Norman manuscripts I examined (Vat14, B, V).¹⁴ However, it should be noted that we still do not know what constituted the model codex of the Anglo-Norman Jewish community¹⁵ between the 11th and the 12th centuries.¹⁶ It would be an overinterpretation to assume that this lack of sources necessarily points to the Anglo-Norman Ashkenazic community's lack of biblical, grammatical or Masoretic knowledge. During Elijah ben Berechiah ha-Naqdan's lifetime, the activities of Moshe Yom Tov of London¹⁷ (author of the Masoretic treatise *Sefer Derakhey ha-Niqud we ha-Neginnah*) and his disciple Moshe ben Isaac ha-Nessiya (author of the biblical dictionary *Sefer ha-Shoham*) had fostered the creation of a thriving grammatical and Masoretic school.¹⁸

Second, as Levita pointed out,¹⁹ the *masran* (i.e., the scribe who specialized in the addition of Masoretic notes) also produced figurative forms involving both drawing and writing, which sometimes required the repetition of some occurrences inside a Masoretic list²⁰ or the inclusion of related biblical verses.²¹ We found very few instances of truncated or unidentified Masoretic notes.²² The Masoretic notes

¹² See Figures 1 and 11.

¹³ See Appendix 4, Illegible section.

¹⁴ See above n. 7.

¹⁵ See above n. 5.

¹⁶ On the scarcity of sources, see Introduction n. 35; on the fact there is no typology of the Hebrew Bible in the Middle Ages, see Introduction n. 54. See also above n. 11.

¹⁷ Died in 1268; Löwinger 1929; Roth 1949, 36, 44.

¹⁸ Klar 1947; Roth 1949, 44–46, 49–50; Olszowy-Schlanger 2003, 7; Olszowy-Schlanger 2012a. Elijah's father, Berechiah ben Natronai ha-Naqdan, seems to have been an important punctuator and Masorete: ha-Nessiya, alive in 1260, mentions his name.

¹⁹ See Introduction, n. 1.

²⁰ See the additional material marked by a {} in the edition.

²¹ See Case 4, Other text.

²² For instance, the unidentified lists in Case 2 (inside the MMor, see fig. 6), Case 4, Case 10 and in

included in the figurative forms of Exodus in Vat14 are almost invariably related to lemmas located inside the same folios where they appear. If a lemma does appear on a previous or following folio of its associated figurative form, this does not disrupt the text's philological discourse. Instead, such discrepancies are considered to constitute isolated occurrences, just as in manuscripts without figurative Masorah, where they can also be found. In one specific case (see Case 8), Elijah ha-Naqdan seems to have elaborated a special figurative form, by using a collection of Masoretic notes related to the word *'amudim* (pillars) in order to draw an architectural structure (i.e., the gates and pillars of the court of the Tabernacle). This creates a relationship between the figurative form he drew and the Masoretic list he chose.

In conclusion, this critical edition demonstrates that in the 13th century, the Ben Asher Tiberian tradition was comprehensively transmitted to the Ashkenazic community through figurative and ornamental forms. The ornamental or figurative textualization of the Masorah, which is a specific characteristic of Ashkenazic artefacts from the 13th century onwards, probably did not originally impede the transmission of Masoretic knowledge, so much as represent a singular development in the transmission of the Ben Asher tradition. I show in another publication that the function of these figurative forms was not simply decorative. Instead, they had a range of uses, including illustrating the main text, helping with memorization, alluding to Rabbinic Medieval biblical literature, and challenging Masorah learners and experts.²³ The departures from the Ben Asher Masoretic tradition which my critical apparatus highlights probably reveal how difficult it was to homogenize and standardize the Masorah during the Middle Ages. Local scribal subtraditions probably go some length toward explaining this fact. Nevertheless, the dearth of studies on Ashkenazic Bibles and the late medieval Masoretic tradition in Europe suggests that it may be worth considering the possibility that some of these variants may be evidence of a specific northern French tradition. If so, this may have implications for our understanding of the exegesis and the rabbinical commentaries of the period, particularly on those of Rashi and his school.²⁴

Case 12.

²³ For further details on the relationships between text and image and the functions of the micro-graphical elements in Vat14, see Attia 2015.

²⁴ See for instance Himmelfarb 2011.

