

**Windows into the Text:  
Majuscules and Minuscles in the Hebrew Bible**

**by  
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**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for Ordination**

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
Iyar, 5760      June, 2000**

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To Eliana

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The inspiration for this project came during a class taught by Dr. Stephen A. Kaufman at the Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in the fall semester of 1998. While studying the Book of Ruth, the large *nun* in the word *lini* (Ruth 3:13) captured my attention. It was Dr. Kaufman's concentration on the details of the biblical language and his willingness to pursue critical inquiry of the text that launched me down this path. I am indebted to him as a teacher and a role model.

I extend my sincere thanks to my thesis advisor, Dr. David Weisberg, Professor of Bible at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. A scholar and a gentleman, his keen insight and words of encouragement motivated me at every stage of this endeavor.

I wish to thank my friend and colleague, Lori Macklis, who shared my enthusiasm for venturing down the paths of Masorah and who was a constant support throughout this process.

Finally, special thanks are due to my daughter Eliana who patiently shared her mommy with the "alien" called the thesis. All done now – let's go play.

## DIGEST

In the Hebrew Bible certain letters occasionally appear as larger or smaller than the other letters. These intriguing letters, known as majuscles and minuscules, raise a number of issues that serve as windows into the biblical text. This paper focuses exclusively on describing and analyzing these features.

In the first chapter these features are situated in the larger context of the Masorah. The emphasis is on understanding the Masorah and the work of the Masoretes. In addition to the majuscles and minuscules, other features such as suspended letters, the spiraled א, the inverted ל, and letters with extraordinary points are described.

In the second chapter, the appearance of majuscles and minuscules throughout history is traced in both biblical and extra-biblical sources. The evidence highlights periods in the development of the text when these features waxed and waned. Though the sources are limited for certain periods, there is enough material to begin to trace these trends and to ask what may have caused them.

The third chapter examines where these features appear in the Bible and their possible function. Several theories regarding their function are offered, though no one theory fits all the examples. However, one possibility is that these features were intended to convey additional meaning to the text as homiletical or exegetical markers.

The fourth chapter follows this line of thinking and explores the relationship between these features and midrash. This section provides a background on midrash, a description of techniques used to expound on these letters and an alphabetical anthology of midrashim that focus on these features. The concluding chapter summarizes the main issues and findings of the thesis.



## CHAPTER ONE

### GENERAL BACKGROUND ON MASORAH

The Bible is infused with layers of meaning by those who revere it. Within the Jewish tradition, every nuance of the inspired Word has been regarded as charged with potentiality. A lesson to be learned, a gift to be received, a thought to ponder exists within each written stroke. Therefore, from the earliest of times, reverence has characterized the entire process of transmission of the written Bible. The result of this transmission is the Bible that we read today which consists of two layers: the text written in Hebrew consonants and a more recent layer of information called the Masorah that helps the reader pronounce and interpret that text.<sup>1</sup> In this first chapter the following four sections establish an overview of the Masorah in the context of this project.

- Section I: This section defines the various meanings associated with the term Masorah from the broadest to the most specific.
- Section II: This section details the scope of word and the time frame of the Masoretes, the people responsible for developing the Masorah.
- Section III: This section introduces two features of the Masorah, the majuscles and the minuscules, which are the focus of this research.
- Section IV: This section describes other features of the Masorah, which similar to the majuscles and minuscules, are known as orthographic peculiarities.

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew consonants are written in these thesis in either Hebrew letters or using the transliterations found in Marcus Jastrow's *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature* (New York: The Judaica Press, 1992). Hebrew transliteration that is part of a quote is maintained in the language of the author quoted.

## Section I

### Understanding the Term Masorah

#### Etymology of the term Masorah

The origin of the word Masorah can be traced to several Hebrew roots. The fact that there is not agreement on the etymology of the word is indicative of the richness of this term. One of the earliest interpretations traces the word Masorah to the root מסר meaning, “to hand over.”<sup>2</sup> This explanation focuses on the exacting task of transmitting the text with all its details from one generation to the next. Another explanation relates the term to the root אסר meaning, “to bind.”<sup>3</sup> The Masorah serves as a collection of guidelines for reading and interpreting the bible, bound to the text itself. Yet another possibility is that the term מסורת is synonymous with the word סימן (sign). For example, “ he handed (מסר) a sign (סימן) to them and later the sign which was transmitted was called masoret.”<sup>4</sup>

A further interpretation is that the term Masorah is related to the root ספר, meaning, “to count” both in Hebrew and in Samaritan Aramaic.<sup>5</sup> Counting was an important part of the scribal function in copying precisely the correct number of letters, words and verses in the Torah. Thus the ancient scribe was known as a *sofer*, and the body of knowledge he drew upon to execute his task became known as Masorah.

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<sup>2</sup> Christian David Ginsburg, *The Massorah*, c.a.1868, [press and printing location unknown] p. 2

<sup>3</sup> A. Dotan, “Masorah,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 16, (Jerusalem, NY: MacMillan Co.,1971) p. 1418

<sup>4</sup> Dotan, “Masorah,” p. 1418.

<sup>5</sup> Israel Yevin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah*, trans. E.J. Revell (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1980), p. 34.

All of these possible explanations of the etymology of the word point to different aspects of the Masorah. For indeed, Masorah is concerned with the faithful transmission of the details of the biblical text, the relationship of the notes to the text, the written signs in the text and counting different elements of the text. By the beginning of the tenth century C.E., the term Masorah was used as both the verb for writing this material as well as the noun defining this body of material.<sup>6</sup> Following this overview of how the term Masorah originated, the next section defines the numerous ways that the term is used today.

#### Various Meanings of the term Masorah

The term Masorah refers to several different concepts. This section will examine the various usages of this term from the broadest to the most narrow. The following chart, labeled Table 1, is organized into five levels of definition. This chart is designed to help the reader visualize the different meanings of the term Masorah.

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<sup>6</sup> Dotan, "Masorah," p. 1418.

Table 1.

DEFINITIONS OF THE TERM MASORAH			
<b><u>LEVEL 1: Masorah in its broadest sense:</u></b>			
Masorah means everything transmitted with the consonantal text except the consonants themselves, including vowels, accents, unusual letter shapes and sizes, spacing and counting of words and verses, scribal emendations, notes on how to read the text, etc.			
<b><u>LEVEL 2: Masorah according to modern biblical studies:</u></b>			
<b>Masorah Parva =Mp</b>  *located on the side margins of the text.  *abbreviated notes on how to read the text.	<b>Masorah Magna = Mm</b>  *located on the top and bottom margins of the text.  *more extensive information about the text.	<b>Masorah Finalis = Mf</b>  *located at the end of the section or of the book.  *additional material from the Mm or Mp, also contains lists of features that aid in reading and memorizing the text.	
<b><u>LEVEL 3: Masorah as related to a manuscript:</u></b>			
<b>Case 1</b>	<b>Case 2</b>	<b>Case 3</b>	<b>Case 4</b>
*a manuscript exists *it has a masorah *they match	*a manuscript exists *it has a masorah *they do not match	*a manuscript exists *it has no masorah with it	*an independent masorah exists without a specific manuscript
<b><u>LEVEL 4: Masoretic Traditions:</u></b>			
<b>Babylonian Masorah</b>  *slightly different than the Tiberian system in terminology.  *much less comprehensive, little or no masorah for many parts of the Bible	<b>Palestinian Masorah</b>  *masoretic signs usually written between the lines above the relevant word  *almost no masoretic notes except for qere notations	<b>Tiberian Masorah</b>  *most comprehensive *most widely accepted *two famous schools: -Ben Naftali -Ben Asher (dominant)	
<b><u>LEVEL 5: Masorah in its narrowest sense:</u></b>			
The masorah of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible, also known as the second Bromberg edition of the Bible, printed in 1525 by Jacob ben Chayyim ibn Adoniya is sometimes referred to in older scholastic works as “the masorah” or “the printed masorah.”			

### Level 1: Masorah in its broadest sense

In its most general sense, the term Masorah describes an enormous tool box. Inside this box are instruments that aid the reader in pronouncing, interpreting, understanding, and analyzing the biblical text. In *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, authors Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford explain the most inclusive meaning of this word:

In its broadest sense, Masorah refers to traditions and rules, passed down in Judaism for generations, which regulate all aspects of copying and use of Bible manuscripts.... The Masorah in this broad sense could be oral or written. Written Masorah is the collected body of information transmitted with the text of the Hebrew Bible. It includes everything transmitted with the consonantal text except the consonants themselves (even vowel and accent signs).<sup>7</sup>

### Level 2: Masorah according to modern biblical studies

From this most general definition, we narrow down to the next level of understanding of the term Masorah. The focus at this level is how the term Masorah is used in modern biblical studies. From this perspective, the term Masorah refers specifically to the body of marginal notes transmitted with the text. These notes for the most part look like little balloons floating above certain letters in the body of the text. These circles, as they are called, mark certain letters, words or phrases that are further annotated in notes that appear either in the sides, top, or bottom of the same page, or in a separate list at the end of the section or book.<sup>8</sup> To carry the tool box metaphor a bit further, the tools are located in different parts of the toolbox. If someone were looking for a screwdriver or a pair of pliers she would know just where to find them in the

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<sup>7</sup> Page H. Kelley, Daniel S. Mynatt, and Timothy G. Crawford, *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p.1.

<sup>8</sup> E.J. Revell, "Masorah," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol .4 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), p. 592.

toolbox. Similarly, the tools of the Masorah are located in different parts of the text, which the reader can easily locate.

When these notes appear in the side margins of the page they are called Masorah Parva abbreviated as Mp. "Parva" means small since they tend to give limited information in an abbreviated form concerning the word or phrase marked.<sup>9</sup> These notes are primarily concerned with the issue of how to read the text. In addition, the Mp also points out unusual forms which the reader or copyist might easily mistake.

When the notes appear in the upper and lower margins of a page of text they are called Masorah Magna, abbreviated as Mm. "Magna" meaning large, refers to the fact that unlike the Mp which are often notes that consist of only a few letters or symbols, the Mm is a more extensive discussion of the issue under examination and often consists of a few lines of description.<sup>10</sup> The topics covered in the Mm include: 1) further details on an issue raised in the Mp, and 2) mnemonic devices to assist the scribes in remembering biblical verses.

Sometimes, when there was not enough space on the page to accommodate the more lengthy explanations, they were included separately at the end of a section or book as Masorah Finalis (Mf).<sup>11</sup> Jacob ben Chayyim ibn Adonijah (dates uncertain late fifteenth century to sixteenth century C.E.) a biblical scholar, editor and printer is credited with the invention of the Masorah Finalis.<sup>12</sup> The Mf consists primarily of extensive lists that note every occurrence of a particular word, phrase, spelling or orthographic feature raised in the Mp or the Mm.

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<sup>9</sup> Dotan, "Masorah," p. 1419.

<sup>10</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Yeivin, p. 80.

<sup>12</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p.24

### Level 3: Masorah as related to a manuscript

The next level of understanding of how the term Masorah is used concerns the relationship of a specific manuscript or printed text to a particular Masorah. It is possible to extend the tool kit metaphor as a means to understand this aspect of the term Masorah. We can envision four possible scenarios of how a Masorah might relate to a particular text.

First of all, the term Masorah can be used in reference to a specific manuscript, for example the Masorah of Harley 1528, a circa 1300 C.E. manuscript in the British Museum in 424 folios.<sup>13</sup> Presumably, the Masorah of Harley 1528 would contain information describing that specific text. As manuscripts vary, so would the accompanying Masorah for each manuscript. This first case depicts a situation where there is a text with a Masorah that describes the actual text that it accompanies. By analogy, this would be a situation where a tool kit comes with an appliance and all the tools in that kit perfectly fit the appliance.

However, there are also Masorah that accompany specific manuscripts, but the Masorah does not actually reflect the text. In this situation, portrayed as Case 2 on the chart the two do not match. This would be similar to the situation of a tool kit accompanying an appliance. However, the tools in the kit do not fit the parts of the appliance.

Of course the analogy of these two cases is an oversimplification for the point of illustration. In reality, the relationship between various texts and manuscripts is not

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<sup>13</sup>Christian D. Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* (New York, NY: Ktav, 1950), reprint 1966. p.477.

usually as black and white. Rather the Masorah more or less fit the text depending on the specific case. Dotan suggests that:

As the years passed the Masoretic material increased by virtue of the innovations and additions of each generation, while the selectiveness of the Masoretes became less and less severe. The degree of coordination between the Masorah itself written in different places and between the Masorah and the text of the Bible decreased as the quantity of the notes grew.<sup>14</sup>

Referring back to the chart, Case 3 describes another possibility, a situation where there exists a manuscript with no accompanying Masorah. This situation is similar to an appliance that has no accompanying tool kit. People would have to use the appliance without the help of any instruments. Similarly, one would have to read the text without any Masoretic aids.

Finally, Case 4 defines a Masorah which has no manuscripts known as an independent Masorah. The most famous of which is *Okhlah we-Okhlah*, a work that contains over four hundred Masoretic lists without an accompanying biblical text.<sup>15</sup> This last case is like a tool kit that stands alone. It does not come with any appliance, however some of the tools in it fit some parts of some appliances. Therefore, when the word Masorah is encountered, it is important to understand whether there is also a text to which it relates. Once this determination is made one can then analyze the nature of the relationship between the specific text and the Masorah in question.

In addition to these numerous ways that the word Masorah is used, it is important to note that different practices that developed in various parts of the world regarding the notations for reading the Bible. There were Masoretic traditions that originated in

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<sup>14</sup> Dotan, "Masorah," p. 1426.



Palestinian, Babylonian and Tiberian, that became generally known as the Palestinian Masorah, the Babylonian Masorah and the Tiberian Masorah respectively.<sup>16</sup> By far the system that became the most widely accepted was the Tiberian system. However, even within this system there were variations based on particular scribal schools or families. The under the Tiberian system, the Ben Asher tradition became the standard.<sup>17</sup> Using the tool box analogy again, we might say that people from one location or another had a preference for which tools they used, what they called those tools and how frequently they used them. These differences will be discussed further in the following section on the work of the Masoretes.

Finally, there is yet another understanding of the term Masorah. Although it is a very narrow definition of the term, it is worth explaining because the reader in this field quickly realizes that the term Masorah can be confusing. The most accurate way to use the term Masorah is in relationship to either a text or a specific context. Nonetheless, occasionally the reader will encounter the term “the Masorah” without any context. Used in this way, the term Masorah has a special meaning. In 1525, Jacob ben Chayyim ibn Adonijah printed the *Second Rabbinic Bible* also known as the second Bomberg edition along with its accompanying Masorah for that text.<sup>18</sup> There is a convention among older scholastic works to refer to the Masorah to the *Second Rabbinic Bible* as “the Masorah”. Often when the phrase “the printed Masorah” is encountered, it refers to this specific Masorah.<sup>19</sup> At the end of this discussion on the different meanings of the word Masorah,

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<sup>15</sup> *Okhlah we-Okhlah* was published by S. Frensdorff in Hanover in 1864. A second edition of this work is the translation by F.D. Esteban, (Madrid:Consejo Superior De Investigaciones Cientificas, 1975.)

<sup>16</sup> Dotan, “Masorah,” p. 1423.

<sup>17</sup> Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford, p. 20

<sup>18</sup> Gérard E. Weil, ed. prolegomena, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997) p. xiv

<sup>19</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 1

the reader is aware of the possible uses and misuses of the term. With this perspective in mind, we now turn our attention to the composers of the Masorah in the general sense of the word.

## **Section II**

### **The Work of the Masoretes**

Scholars are in agreement that the content of the Bible was passed down from generation to generation orally long before it was ever committed to writing. Most experts also agree that the first written transmission of the Bible consisted solely of the consonantal text. However, there is a range of dates given for when the consonantal text became established. E.J. Revell writes that: "The date of the 'Synod of Jabneh' (90 C.E.) is conventionally given as that from which the form of the consonantal text can be regarded as fixed."<sup>20</sup> Earlier dates trace the origins of the consonantal text back to the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran (ca. 300 B.C.E. – 68 C.E.). But, at this early date, the form, spelling and wording vary among the Qumran scrolls and they are different from the received standard consonantal text.<sup>21</sup> However, the scrolls found in Wadi Murabba'at from 135 C.E. are virtually identical with the later standard text.<sup>22</sup>

Clearly there were a number of textual traditions, but according to Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford, "the consonantal text which is the basis of the Masoretic text attained ascendancy over other Hebrew textual traditions during the Second Temple period and became authoritative by the second century C.E."<sup>23</sup> For roughly five to six hundred years after this period, the text was read without any written notations on how to

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<sup>20</sup> Revell, "Masorah," p. 598.

<sup>21</sup> Revell, "Masorah," p. 598.

<sup>22</sup> Revell, "Masorah," p. 598.

<sup>23</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 31.

punctuate or pronounce it. During this period, readers relied on the oral traditions of how to pronounce the consonantal text.<sup>24</sup>

The next stage of development of the Hebrew Bible is called the Masoretic period. During this phase, the Masoretes developed a written system of vowels and accents, as well as the *Maqaf* and *Mem*, which preserved in writing how the text was read. Experts debate whether the vowels and accents were developed at the same time or whether they were developed in different stages. However, the evidence is inconclusive.<sup>25</sup>

The process of creating and preserving the method for reading and interpreting the Bible began with the oral transmission of the text and continues up till today. It is difficult therefore, to set specific beginning and ending dates for a Masoretic period. The notion of a Masoretic period should be understood rather as a phase of intense productivity in formalizing the written Masoretic systems. The people responsible for these efforts are known as Masoretes. Therefore, the Masoretic period is most clearly delineated by the years when these individuals thrived.

Nonetheless, determining a beginning for the Masoretic period is challenging because there is very little evidence about the generations and generations of early Masoretes. Furthermore, the aim of the Masorah was to preserve the text and not necessarily the names of those who were responsible for establishing the system to do so.<sup>26</sup> However, several factors can be used to interpolate a starting date. The earliest evidence of discussion on issues with which the Masorah concerns itself can be found in

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<sup>24</sup> Dotan, "Masorah," p.1409.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion on this matter see, A. Dotan, "Masorah," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, p. 1412-1418, E.J. Revell, "Masoretic Text," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 599 and Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, p.14-16

the Talmud.<sup>27</sup> Such topics as the number of verses, the irregular size of certain letters, the plene and defective spelling of certain words, and the extraordinary points are mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud, which is generally believed to have been closed around 600 C.E. Through the Talmud does not treat these issues in an explicit manner, there are indirect references to the vowels and accents in the Talmud.<sup>28</sup> As the earliest possibility of a starting date, Yeivin and others believe that the work of the Masoretes may have begun toward the end of the Talmudic period.<sup>29</sup>

The upper limit as to when the beginning of the Masoretic period began is established by examining the oldest existing codexes and by accounting for when the earliest known masoretes lived. One of the few early Masoretes about whom there is any information is Asher the Elder. He lived in the second half of the eight century C.E. and is best remembered for his work on vowels and accents.<sup>30</sup> The dates of his life establish that the earliest masoretes were active around 750 C.E.

Prior to the development of the codex, the scroll was the main form of preserved writing. By 700 C.E., codices were used commonly among Jews, and scrolls were becoming more frequently used for ritual reading.<sup>31</sup> The codex was a critical development in the Masorah, since the margins of a book format allowed increase space for making notations. The oldest known codex preserved today is the Codex of the Prophets from the Karatie Synagogue in Cairo. According to its colophon, it was written

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<sup>26</sup> Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Dotan, "Masorah," p. 1405.

<sup>28</sup> Dotan, "Masorah," p. 1412. The practice of musical accents and vocalization of the Hebrew biblical text is attested to in the following talmudic passages: Nedarim 37a "A teacher of children should not receive payment for teaching Torah, but he can take a fee for accentual division 'שכר פיסוק טעמים'."

<sup>29</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Dotan, "Masorah," p. 1416.

in 896 C.E. by Moshe ben Asher, the father of Aharon.<sup>32</sup> Because the vowels and accents in this document are completely developed, scholars speculate that these aspects of the Masorah had been established for quite some time prior. Therefore, a starting date for the Masoretic period around 600-750 C.E. accounts for the full range of considerations.<sup>33</sup>

Establishing an ending date for the Masoretic period presents a different set of difficulties. During the Masoretic period, key individuals and families in various geographic locations were responsible for developing a number of systems. Amongst the Palestinian, the Babylonian and the Tiberian system of Masorah, the Tiberian system became the most comprehensive system. Within the Tiberian system, two families of Masoretes, Ben Naftali and Ben Asher were the most active.<sup>34</sup> They developed two slightly different Masoretic traditions. In time, the Tiberian system ascribed to the Ben Asher family became the standard system. Maimonides in his work *Hilchot Sefer Torah* 8:4 clearly shows a preference for the Ben Asher system of spacing regarding how to write the open and closed verses of the Torah. However, it is not clear from this evidence whether the Rambam is prescribing or describing a scribal practice of his time. Furthermore, we cannot be sure whether his preference is for the Ben Asher system overall or only in regards to the issue of spacing for open and closed verses. Nonetheless, by the year 1000 C.E., most Jewish communities around the world accepted the Ben

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<sup>32</sup> Yeivin, p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> Yeivin, p. 141.

Asher tradition.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the end of the Masoretic period is conventionally marked by the end of the activity of the Ben Asher dynasty around 950 C.E.<sup>36</sup>

After this date, the remainder of the Masoretic work can be divided into two periods according to Israel Yeivin.<sup>37</sup> These two categories are: work done from the end of the Masoretic period upto 1100 C.E. and work done after 1100 C.E. The manuscripts written prior to 1100 C.E., in general, carefully follow the tradition of one specific Masorete. These manuscripts were produced closer to the time when the Masoretes lived and their influence was more immediate. In contrast, later works are often based on a compilation of older manuscripts. The scribes consulted several model codices and frequently copied the text with less care.<sup>38</sup>

Scholars also debate what the exact role of the Masoretes was regarding the text. The conservative view holds that their role was simply one of preservation. They put in writing as carefully as possible the oral traditions received with the Proto-Masoretic text, namely the tradition of accentuation, pronunciation and correct reading of the text. Other scholars suggest that the Masoretes played an innovative role in developing the features of the Masorah. These experts suggest that the Masoretes were instrumental in deciding which words to read and which to omit, how to punctuate phrases and where to make scribal emendations.

This modern debate harkens back to the earlier disagreement regarding the authenticity of the punctuation of the Bible. The question is whether the pointing was a

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<sup>35</sup> Yeivin, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Yeivin, p. 12-14.

<sup>38</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 23.

part of the divine revelation at Sinai or a latter human addition by the scribes. Johann Maier on his work on the Hebrew biblical pointing writes that:

According to the Zohar (2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E.), the punctuation had not been introduced by the scribes, because even if all the prophets had been as great as Moses, who received the Law on Sinai, they would not have been entitled to change the smallest point in a single letter, though it be the most insignificant in the whole Bible.<sup>39</sup>

However the debate became part of the overall disagreement between the Karaites and the Rabbinites. The Karaites date the vowels and accents as well as the letters, the writing and the language as a whole back to Adam according to Judah Hadassi's book *Eskol ha-Kofer* (1149 CE).<sup>40</sup> Therefore, any copy of a Torah with out them is defective. The Rabbinites on the other hand consider only the consonantal text to be holy since that was the only part given at revelation. From this perspective, a Torah scroll with vowels and accents is considered invalid for public reading.<sup>41</sup> Today, as in most matters of ritual practice, the Rabbinite view has prevailed.

Scholars also dispute who the Masoretes actually were, perhaps scribes, perhaps rabbis, perhaps some other group of people. There is very little information about them as individuals. Only a few are even recorded by name such as Phinehas the Head of the Academy, Hillel, Muga, Moshe Mokhe and the Men of Tiberias.<sup>42</sup> Though the Masoretes remain to a great extent shrouded in mystery, their work lives on preserved as the Masoretic features in the Hebrew Bible.

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<sup>39</sup> Johann Maier, *The Emergence of Hebrew Biblical Pointing: The Indirect Sources*, (Frankfurt: Verlag Peter D. Lang, 1979) p.5

<sup>40</sup> Maier, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Dotan, "Masorah," p. 1417.

<sup>42</sup> Dotan, "Masorah," p. 1423.

### Section III

#### Majuscles and Minuscles in the Masorah

Two of the curious features that have been conserved are known as majuscles and minuscles. These aspects of the text are very old and are mentioned as early as the Talmudic period.<sup>43</sup> Though they are considered masoretic features, they are part of the consonantal text and may have been inherited as part of the Proto-Masoretic text.

A majuscle is a letter in a word that is written larger than the other letters. It is different from a letter at the end of a line that may be written longer in order to maintain a consistent margin. Those stretched out letters are only written longer, but not taller or larger overall. A true majuscle may appear at the beginning, middle or end of a word and anywhere in a line of Torah. It is overall noticeably larger than the other letter.

Similarly, a minuscule is a letter that is written smaller than the normal letter size. It too may appear in any part of the word or line. Minuscles should not be confused with letters that are simply written narrower in order to fit a portion of text on one line.

Majuscles and minuscles do not appear to be scribal corrections- neither textual insertions nor deletions. The Masorah accounts for these types of deliberate alterations through a number of other mechanisms such as:<sup>44</sup>

*Tiqqune Sopherim* - which are scribal emendations for theological reasons,

*Itture Sopherim* which are places that the scribes deleted the letter vav because they felt that they did not belong there.

*Qere we-la Ketiv*- which are passages where a word is to be read although it is not written in the text, usually in order to make the passage more explicit.

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<sup>43</sup> Chapter Two of this thesis will trace in great detail the earliest mention of the majuscles and minuscles.



*Ketiv we-la Qere*- which are words that are written, but should not be read to correct grammatical matters or issues of dittography.

Both majuscles and minuscules are integral parts of the word in which they appear. Without them, the pronunciation and meaning of the word would, in most cases, be rendered unintelligible. Many questions arise when observing these letters: Why are they there? What purpose, if any, do they serve? Who put them there? When did this practice begin? How many of these large and small letters exist? Where are they located in the text? What has scholarship uncovered regarding these unusual features?

By asking these questions and more, the majuscles and minuscules become windows for us to peer more deeply into the text. For example, studying these letters leads one to analyze the historical development of the text we call the Hebrew Bible. Who codified the consonantal text? When were the Masoretic features added and by whom? Why do later manuscripts have more majuscles and minuscule? By attempting to unravel the mystery of these letters, one is drawn into the historical issues related to the time and place of the development of the Hebrew Bible.

These same letters give the reader insight into the midrash of the text. Many of these instances of unusual letter size have an associated midrash or aggadic explanation with them. What are these stories? When did they develop? Who was responsible for creating them? Is it possible that the letter size serves as some sort of homiletical marker for these stories? The role of midrash and these unusual letters will be explored in greater depth further in Chapter Four of this thesis.

In addition, these letters challenge our understanding of how the scribe functioned in society. What was the scribal mandate? Was he an innovator or a conservator? Did

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<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of these features see Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 37- 43.

this role change over time? The post-Talmudic tractate *Soferim*, as well as several places within the Babylonian Talmud, gives specific instruction to the scribe on how to write the text. In the post-Masoretic period, various treatises were written to give scribal guidance in accurately writing the text. The content of these works and the function of the scribe are other issues that surface upon closer study of the majuscules and minuscule.

Through the study of a particular phenomenon in the text, the totality of the Masorah and a plethora of related issues open up. This model of focusing on a specific Masoretic feature as a window into the larger Masorah has precedent among several leading modern biblical scholars. For example, Robert Gordis in his work *The Biblical Text in the Making*, which examined the *qere*, and *ketiv* in detail, contributed greatly to the overall understanding of the biblical text and the Masorah.<sup>45</sup> Another example of this model is Romain Butin's book called *The Ten Nequdoth of the Torah*.<sup>46</sup> This work specifically investigates the meaning and purpose of the extraordinary points of the Pentateuch, while illuminating various general aspects of the social and historical context in which the biblical text developed. Similarly, Manfred Lehmann's work on the spiraled letter *feh* focuses on that particular scribal oddity, at the same time shedding light on the various scribal traditions based on cultural differences.<sup>47</sup> A further example of this methodology of focusing on an unusual feature as a window into the text is David

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Gordis, *The Biblical Text in the Making: A Study of the Kethib-Qere* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1937)

<sup>46</sup> Romain Butin, *The Ten Nequdoth of the Torah: The Meaning and Purpose of the Extraordinary Points of the Pentateuch* (New York, NY: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1969)

<sup>47</sup> Manfred R. Lehmann, "The 'Spiraled' Letter Feh – A Scribal Oddity," a paper delivered at the International Organization for Masoretic Studies, New Orleans, LA, Nov. 18, 1990.

Weisberg's article on the rare accents of the twenty one books which probes the relationship between the rare trope and Rabbinic exegesis.<sup>48</sup>

Although most of the comprehensive work on the subject of the Masorah (i.e. Ginsburg, Yeivin, Dotan, Revell) mention the majuscles and minuscules, there has been no effort to date that I am aware of that makes these particular features the focus of a study.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the aim of this work is to cull the existing scholastic work for theories on the majuscles and minuscules and to further the body of knowledge on this subject through original research. Ultimately, the purpose of studying the majuscles and minuscules is the hope that it will lead to a greater understanding and appreciation of the biblical text we have today.

#### Section IV

##### Other Orthographic Peculiarities

The remainder of the thesis will concentrate on the majuscles and minuscules in the larger context of the Masorah. However, for the sake of thoroughness, the following section briefly examines several other unusual orthographic features. I will note where they occur and summarize the scholarly opinions concerning how they function in the text. The common point of all these phenomena is that although they are all considered Masoretic features, though they are not part of the notes, vowels, or accents that the Masoretes added. Rather, these are features that deal with the size, shape, and configuration of the consonants themselves. They are considered very old, some

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<sup>48</sup> David Weisberg, "The Rare Accents of the Twenty-One Books," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. LVI No. 4, April 1966.

mentioned in the earliest rabbinic sources.<sup>50</sup> It is possible that they originated in the Proto-Masoretic text. Also, unlike other Masoretic features, they appear in scrolls used for ritual purposes.

### Extraordinary Points

In fifteen places in the Bible, (ten in the Torah, and five in Prophets and Scriptures) dots are written over individual letters or words. In one case, they are written over an entire group of words and in another case dots are written both over and under a word. Scholars have offered a variety of explanations for these phenomena, yet no one explanation fits all the cases. Authors Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford have summarized the explanations of several scholars and offer the following four possibilities<sup>51</sup>:

- 1) The dots indicate that the letters should be erased. Dots were used for this purpose in various early codices and in the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- 2) The dots indicate some doubt about the textual tradition for these words.
- 3) The dots relate to midrashic commentary and indicate nothing about the certainty of the text tradition. They were intended to emphasize a special interpretation of the word.
- 4) These words were dotted because of doctrinal reservations.

Butin in his work on this subject dates the extraordinary points to the second century B.C.E.<sup>52</sup> He begins with the premise that, "Assuming that from an early date, unavoidable errors have crept into the text of the Hebrew Scriptures, the question arises,

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<sup>49</sup> See Chapter Two, Section Eight of this thesis for a review of these modern biblical scholar's work on the majuscules and minuscules.

<sup>50</sup> Dotan, "Masorah," p. 1407-1409. Some examples of these features from early rabbinic sources include: the extraordinary points mentioned in *Sifrei* Numbers 69, a majuscule mention in *Megillah* 16b, suspended letters mentioned in *Berachot* 9:3, inverted *nunim* mentioned in *Shabbat* 115b and in a *baraita* in *Sifrei* Numbers 84, and a minuscule mentioned in *Kiddushin* 66b.

<sup>51</sup> Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford, p. 33.

have the Jews tried to restore the text to its primitive purity?"<sup>53</sup> In his book, he discusses several theories including the ones mentioned above. In the end, he rejects all other theories except for the idea that these dots "were devised by their author or authors, to condemn, as spurious, the words or letters over which they were placed."<sup>54</sup> Once these letters were canceled out, "whether or not anything had to be inserted in their stead, should be judged from different sources."<sup>55</sup>

### Inverted or Isolated Nunim

There are nine cases of isolated or reversed nuns in the Bible called by different names such as *nun menuzenet*, *nun nakud*, *simaniyyot*, and *shippur*.<sup>56</sup> The inverted *nun* is discussed in the ancient sources as a "sign" rather than a letter. They perhaps served as brackets to mark a passage that was out of place or that should be deleted from the text and possibly re-inserted in another place. The shape of the bracket might have evolved into the nun shape or the letter nun might have been an abbreviation for the word *niqud*, dotted. Sifre on Numbers, section 84 relates that Num 10:35-36 "is dotted before it and after it because this is not its place."<sup>57</sup>

### Suspended Letters

Three places in the Bible have the letter *ayin* written above its normal position and one place has a *nun* written in this suspended position.<sup>58</sup> The *nun* in Menasseh, Judges 18:30 appears to be an insertion to change Moses name to Menasseh and thus

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<sup>52</sup> Butin, p. 22

<sup>53</sup> Butin, preface (no page number)

<sup>54</sup> Butin, p. 117.

<sup>55</sup> Butin, p. 116-117.

<sup>56</sup> So Yeivin, p. 46.

<sup>57</sup> Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition*, p. 342

<sup>58</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 35.

avoid linking Jonathan (an idolatrous priest) to Moses's lineage.<sup>59</sup> The suspended *ayins* may have also been inserted to correct the spelling of the consonantal text since the weak letters *aleph* and *ayin* were often unintentionally omitted. Yeivin notes that "This is a form of correction common in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and particularly common with *ayin*."<sup>60</sup> One of the suspended *ayins* may have been originally a large letter to mark the midpoint of the book of Psalms or may have originally been a large letter that was mistaken for a suspended letter. A single theory that explains all of the occurrences of the suspended letter has yet to be developed.

### Rolled up Peh

The Hebrew word for the rolled up or spiraled *pé* is *hilufeh*. This word appears in the Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 66B, Shabbat 129B, Shabbat 147b in reference to the crooked position of a newborn and the need to manipulate its body for the purpose of straightening it.<sup>61</sup> This letter appears like a regular letter *pé*, with the inside piece written as a spiral. Maimonides, in *Hilchot Sefer Torah*, chapter 7 and 8, page 43 warns the scribes of the necessity to accurately preserve the special orthographic features including the spiraled *pé* as the ancient scribes copied them and as they have been transmitted from person to person.<sup>62</sup> A list of ornamented letters in the eleventh century *Mahzor Vitry* prescribes the number and location of spiraled *pés* for its work.<sup>63</sup> There are discrepancies between biblical manuscripts regarding this phenomenon, yet in general the spiraled *pé* appears more frequently in manuscripts of Sephardic origin. Although the spiraled *pé*

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<sup>59</sup> Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford, p. 35.

<sup>60</sup> Yeivin, p. 47.

<sup>61</sup> Manfred Lehmann, "A Scribal Peculiarity – The Pe'in Lefufin," a paper delivered at the International Organization for Masoretic Studies, Jerusalem, August 24, 1986, p. 43 – 46.

<sup>62</sup> Lehmann, "The Spiraled Letter Feh", p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Lehmann, "The Spiraled Letter Feh, p.10.

occurs through out the Bible, in different manuscripts, one of the places where it can be more commonly found is in *Shirat Hayam*, the Song of the Sea.<sup>64</sup>

#### Other special orthographic features

The Masorah mentions other special orthographic features which occur a limited number of times in the text such as an attached *kof* in Exodus 32:25 and Number 7:2, and a crooked *nun* in Exodus 3:19.<sup>65</sup> However, there is very little information about these letters in both the ancient and modern sources.

#### Conclusion

The Torah states that the world came into being with words, created with building blocks of letters. In the Jewish tradition, the letters in the Torah have had a significance that exceeds merely grammatical or spelling concerns. The system of transmitting these letters and a careful accounting of all of them is contained within the Masorah. In this first chapter a general explanation of the Masorah sets the background for a more thorough investigation into the majescules and miniscules. The next chapter details the recorded evidence of the majescules and miniscules throughout history as another framework to place these phenomena.

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<sup>64</sup> Lehmann, "The Spiraled Letter Feh, p. 20-31.

<sup>65</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 37.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE MAJUSCULES AND MINUSCULES

#### Introduction

The continuous stream of time, which the Hebrew Bible rides upon, begins at some point in the distant past so far back that its origins are a mystery. This eternal river washes through today and flows into the future, carrying the text on its current. Letters, scraps of parchment, scholarly studies, ancient scrolls float past us as we wade upstream, against the current of time, searching the swirling excerpts for a particular detail. We are painstakingly looking for historical evidence of the majuscules and miniscules in the sacred text, going as far back in time as the earliest evidence of these features.

The intention of this chronological search is multifaceted. The first goal is to try to determine the dating of these large and small letters. There is, however, an inherent dilemma concerning the dating of these particular features. Namely, they are part of the consonantal text by definition, which implies that they are part of the Proto-Masoretic text that the Masoretes received. However, majuscules and minuscules are considered Masoretic features of the text. Unlike the vowels and accents, which are clearly identified as Masoretic innovations, it is less clear who initiated the practice of the large and small letters. As Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford write:

One of the basic difficulties with treating the large and small letters in this section [Chapter 3, The Proto-Masoretic Text] comes in determining whether these instances are part of the Proto-Masoretic tradition at all, or whether they are the work of the Masoretes themselves.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 37.



Among the many possibilities that exist concerning this aspect of the text, three alternatives stand out. The first option is that the Masoretes received a written text which already had certain consonants written larger or smaller than the average letter. The writing of certain letters as larger or smaller may have evolved concurrently with or at a later date than the assembling of the consonantal text, but prior to the Masoretes receiving it. If this is the case, the Masoretes' role was to preserve this tradition of large and small letters in the consonantal text as they developed their comprehensive system. They may or may not have known why these letters existed in these sizes, but their task was to authentically maintain the received text.

A second possibility is that the consonants in the text that the Masoretes received were all the same size. In which case, they were the ones responsible for making certain letters larger or smaller for specific reasons. Though there is no scholarly consensus, we may hypothesize on what these reason might be. Chapter Three in this thesis looks specifically at the possible functions of these letters in the text.

There is yet another possibility; scribes may have added some or many of the majuscles and minuscules after the Masoretic period. Though there is evidence of the majuscles and minuscules from the Masoretic period, there is a great proliferation of both categories of letters in latter manuscripts. These possibilities will be discussed at length in this section as the evidence is analyzed.

The second purpose of this chronological tracing is to place the majuscles and minuscules in the context of other events in the evolution of the biblical text. By examining the process of transmitting the written text, we might discern whether the technique of transmission had any impact on the occurrence of majuscles and

minuscules in the text. For example, how did the development of the written Hebrew alphabet effect the majuscles and minuscules? Did the invention of the codex influence these features? How universal were the majuscles and minuscules in the model codices which scribes used to write new manuscripts? How did the printing press impact these textual phenomena? These questions are part of the historical examination of the majuscles and minuscules.

The method used in this chapter to gather historical evidence is twofold – from biblical as well as extra-biblical sources. Whenever possible, direct observation of biblical texts from different historical periods is preferred. When this is not possible, I will rely upon reports of scholars who have had first hand observation of the texts. The second technique employed is to comb non-biblical sources that refer to majuscles and minuscules to glean additional information. These extra-biblical sources come from an ancient, medieval and modern time periods. In this chapter there are eight major sections containing biblical and extra-biblical evidence of majuscles and minuscules from various periods in history.

- Section I: This section describes the evidence from Hebrew artifacts dated from ca 300 B.C.E – 135 C.E.
- Section II: This section presents evidence from the Babylonian Talmud and the early midrashim dated from the third to seventh centuries C.E.
- Section III: This section examines the evidence from tractate *Soferim* and *The Alphabet of Rabbi Akivah*, dated from the seventh to ninth centuries C.E.
- Section IV: This section provides evidence from biblical manuscripts, pre-1100 C.E.

- Section V: This section focuses on the evidence from the Masoretic works entitled *Diqduqe Ha-Te'amim* and *Okhlah we-Okhlah*, from the tenth to thirteenth centuries C.E.
- Section VI: This section looks at evidence from biblical manuscripts, 1100-1524 C.E.
- Section VII: This section draws on the evidence from Jacob ben Chayyim ibn Adonijah, Elias Levita and the earliest printed Hebrew Bibles from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries C.E.
- Section VIII: This section concludes this historical survey with the work of six modern biblical scholars: Ginsburg, Kahle, Weil, Dotan, Revell and Yeivin.

As we enter this river of history in search of pertinent material, it is relevant to note that the information is scarce and unconsolidated. There is no central, authoritative source on the subject of the majuscules and minuscules from any period of time that I have found. Furthermore, there are precious few references or evidence of these phenomena at certain times in history. Therefore, the challenge is to: discover that which is knowable, determine what we cannot know at this time, raise questions that further this investigation and offer plausible hypothesis when there is sufficient grounds to do so.

## Section I

### Evidence From The Artifacts,

ca 300 BCE- 135 C.E.

The earliest archeological evidence to date of Hebrew writing that contains biblical verses is the discovery made by Gabriel Barkay at the site of Ketef Hinnom just

outside of Jerusalem's walls.<sup>67</sup> During a series of three digs in 1975-1980, two miniature silver scrolls both containing portions of the Priestly Blessing (Numbers 6:24-26) were uncovered. Based on the type of Hebrew writing, the scrolls date from the First Temple Period, from approximately the mid-seventh century B.C.E.<sup>68</sup> The text of these lines is similar in language to the Masoretic text. However, these biblical verses are not locations for any majuscles or minuscles according to the Masoretic tradition. Therefore, based on this shred of evidence, it is not possible to determine whether or not majuscles or minuscles were in the Proto-Masoretic text at the time of the First Temple Period.

The next physical pieces of evidence of written Hebrew biblical texts are the group of manuscripts known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. The first scrolls were discovered in the winter of 1946-1947 by three Bedouin shepherds who found them in a cave in Qumran.<sup>69</sup> During the following year, further excavations in the area west of the Dead Sea have uncovered more than five hundred books, including over one hundred copies of books of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>70</sup>

Scholars offer a range of dates for these materials. The earliest pieces include the Exodus fragment known as 4QEx<sub>f</sub> dated around 250 B.C.E. The latest pieces date from around 100 C.E., for example the paleo-Hebrew manuscript known as 11QpaleoLev.<sup>71</sup> In order to look for majuscles and minuscles in the text, we must be aware of the kinds of scripts used. The types of scripts found in the biblical manuscripts are primarily paleo-

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<sup>67</sup> For more information on this discovery and the other archaeological material uncovered at this site see Gabriel Barkay, *Ketef Hinnom: A Treasure Facing Jerusalem's Walls*, (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1986)

<sup>68</sup> Barkay, p. 29-30.

<sup>69</sup> John C. Trevor, *The Untold Story of Qumran*, (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, no date, after 1964), p. 9.

<sup>70</sup> "Dead Sea Scrolls", *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 5 (New York, Jerusalem: MacMillan Co., 1971), p. 1399. Note: the only Biblical book not found has been the Book of Esther.

Hebrew script and square character Hebrew. In addition, there are a few manuscripts written in Cryptic A script a development from the Late Phoenician scripts.<sup>72</sup> There are four types of orthography found in the Qumran material. Their main differences between these orthographies relate primarily to spelling, the use of vowels and the use of *matres lectionis*. The type of orthography is particularly relevant because only one type develops into the Proto-Masoretic text. The four types are:<sup>73</sup>

- Conservative Orthography – an archaic spelling pattern that closely parallels the Judahite orthography at the time of the Exile. This system is not adopted later by any socio-religious community and falls out of use.
- Proto-Rabbinic Orthography – the parent of the Rabbinic spelling pattern adopted in the Masoretic Text (MT) with some systematic spelling changes and the standardization of various forms throughout the Bible made in the first century C.E. By the time of the Bar Korkhba Revolt (132 –135 C.E.) the biblical texts are uniformly of Proto-Masoretic type.
- Proto-Samaritan Orthography- the parent of the Samaritan spelling pattern adopted in the Samaritan scriptures known as the SP with some minor changes.
- Hasmonean Orthography – a system that reflects the linguistic tradition of Judah in the second to first century B.C.E. This system is not adopted by any later socio-religious community and falls out of use.

As I examine both the photographs of the actual texts and research the scholarly works of those who have studied these manuscripts firsthand, it appears that these earliest

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<sup>71</sup> D.N. Freedman and K.A. Mathews, *The Paleo-Hebrew Leviticus Scroll*, (Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake Indiana: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1985) p. 23

<sup>72</sup> Emanuel Tov, "Letters of the Cryptic A Script and Paleo-Hebrew Letters Used as Scribal Marks in Some Qumran Scrolls," *Dead Sea Discoveries* Vol 2, No. 3 (November 1995), p. 330-331.

pieces of Hebrew biblical text do not show the presence of majuscles and minuscules as we find them in the Masoretic text. It is true that in some of the scrolls, the scribe systematically enlarges the final *mem*, elongates the *kof* or lengthens the top of the *lamed*. However, these letters are written throughout the text in this way. Therefore, though they may look like majuscles, they actually reflect the shape of those letters at that period of time or in that particular scribe's pen.<sup>74</sup>

Nonetheless, there are some aspects of these texts that may bear relevance in the discussion of the evolution of the majuscles and minuscules of later texts. Three categories of features bear mentioning at this point:

#### Correction of scribal errors

Looking at a majuscule, one might think that this large letter was the result of an early scribe writing over a mistaken letter. The next scribe, not realizing that this large letter was the result of a mistake, would simply copy the large letter. One might hypothesize that this is the way that majuscule letters originated and were transmitted. Similarly, a minuscule might be interpreted as a scribal omission. The first time this oversight was corrected, the scribe might have inserted a little letter which future scribes copied as a small letter without knowing its original purpose. This theory of majuscles and minuscules as methods to amend scribal mistakes is not found in the evidence of early scribal practices. Even as early as the Qumran material, there were already mechanisms for correcting errors due to scribal mistakes.

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<sup>73</sup> D.N. Freedman and K.A. Mathews, p. 55-57, 68-69.

<sup>74</sup> This characteristic is noticeable, for example, in the prints of the Great Isaiah Scroll in the book *Scrolls from Qumran Cave I* by The Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and The Shrine of the Book, Jerusalem, 1972. Trevor also comments on the large final *mem* and the long *kof* on p.24.

Several methods for scribal corrections can be readily found in the Qumran material. The first method attested to by the texts is simple erasure. These erasures can be detected even today, especially if they were hastily done as in the case of two erasures of the dittograph  $\Pi\aleph$  in the Leviticus scroll 11QpaleoLev at Columns 3:6 and 6:9 which show traces of the erased *tavs*.<sup>75</sup>

A second method of scribal correction in the Qumran scrolls is to place corrections in the interlinear space above the errors. This method usually involved recopying the whole word and not just the incorrect letter. Examples of this practice can be found throughout the Qumran scrolls. One such example is from The Great Isaiah Scroll the last word on line 14, of 21:1. This word is simply marked out by placing a line through it and the correct spelling is written above it.<sup>76</sup> Another version of this technique that is quite common in the Qumran manuscripts is to place dots either above or below the word to be deleted and the correct spelling is written in the interlinear space. In some cases, the word is simply to be deleted, with no replacement offered.<sup>77</sup>

Yet another method of scribal corrections involved using brackets to delete a word or phrase, a custom found in ancient Greek papyri as well.<sup>78</sup> An example of this technique from the Qumran material can be found in Fragment I:2 of 11QpaleoLev. In copying Lev 18:27 the scribe anticipated Lev 20:23-24, where the context and words are similar, and inserted a misplaced phrase.<sup>79</sup> Rather than erase the whole line, the scribe bracketed the phrase to draw attention to its misplacement. Another possibility is that the scribe deliberately inserted that line there because "he believed this sentiment was fitting

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<sup>75</sup> D.N. Freedman and K.A. Mathews, p. 12.

<sup>76</sup> *Scrolls from Qumran Cave I*, p. 47.

<sup>77</sup> Butin, *prolegomenon*, p. xix

in chapter 18 as well and interjected it, but out of reverence for the text he informs the reader of its displacement.”<sup>80</sup> In that case, the scribe was making an innovative statement rather than correcting a copying blunder.<sup>81</sup>

In summary, there appears to be several methods for resolving scribal errors in the Dead Sea Scrolls. We see evidence of erasures, dotted letters and brackets. The evidence in these early remnants of scriptural writing does not support the idea of majuscules and minuscules functioning as corrections to the text.

#### The enlarged *vav* - a paragraph marker

The Leviticus Scroll (11QpaleoLev) exhibits a paragraphing system that combines a peculiar feature with more common procedures found among Qumran manuscripts. Of special interest to us in search of majuscule and minuscule predecessors is the unique use of the enlarged *vav* as a paragraph marker. This scroll exhibits several methods for marking the beginning of paragraphs. However,

The primary method involves ending the last line of the preceding section short of the left-hand margin and placing an enlarged *waw*, hanging from the ruled line, in the middle of the remaining, incomplete space. The beginning words of the new paragraph start at the right-hand margin of the following line. The *waws* are part of the text and not merely an extraneous sign appended by an editor; each attested case of the enlarged *waw* is the *waw* consecutive and, therefore, its verb (without the prefixed *waw*) begins the new paragraph on the subsequent line. The use of the enlarged *waw* for paragraphing is not unique to the Leviticus scroll; it is attested in 4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup> and in the “square”-letter manuscript of 4QPs<sup>b</sup>.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> D.N. Freedman and K.A. Mathews, p. 12.

<sup>79</sup> D.N. Freedman and K.A. Mathews, p. 12.

<sup>80</sup> D.N. Freedman and K.A. Mathews, p. 13.

<sup>81</sup> D.N. Freedman and K.A. Mathews, p. 12 - 13.

<sup>82</sup> D.N. Freedman and K.A. Mathews, p. 10.



In this earliest example of an enlarged letter within the text, the letter functions as a division marker. The enlarged *vavs* of 11QpaleoLev as well as those found in 4QpaleoExod<sub>m</sub> are found in the context of a word. But,

The *waw* of 4QPs<sub>b</sub> is not part of the original context and thus is solely a division marker. Perhaps we can see a progression in its usage in which initially the *waw* functioned both syntactically in the sentence and served as a division marker and then later was employed only for paragraphing.<sup>83</sup>

In summary, of the four *vav* paragraph marker sites from the Leviticus Scroll (Lev. 20:1,23:23,24:10, 24:13) none of these appear in any Masoretic lists as majuscules or minuscules. However, the concept of using an enlarged letter that is an integral part of a word as a division marker will appear later in the development of the Masoretic text as a possible function of the majuscules. Thus, this enlarged *vav* of certain Qumran scrolls may be an early ancestor of the majuscule.

#### Letters as markers for additional meaning or special interest

Letters in Qumran scrolls that serve non-syntactical functions are of interest because they may foreshadow a possible function of the majuscules and minuscules. Emanuel Tov has written on the presence of certain letters and marks as part of an extensive study of scribal practices reflected in the Qumran scrolls. He has identified six categories of marks as follows:

(1) Marks, almost always in the margin, and other scribal systems, pertaining to the content division of the text into paragraphs; (2) marks pertaining to scribal intervention, mainly for the correction of errors; (3) marks drawing attention to certain matters; (4) marks written at the ends of lines as line-fillers; (5) separation dots between words; (6) marks numbering content units and sheets.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> D.N. Freedman and K.A. Mathews, p. 10, from their footnote 18.

<sup>84</sup> E. Tov, p. 337.

In his article entitled, "Letters of the Cryptic A Script and Paleo-Hebrew Letters used as Scribal marks in some Qumran Scrolls" Tov has identified two additional categories of marks which are specifically letters from the Cryptic A Script and from the Paleo-Hebrew letters. Regarding the Cryptic A Script, he writes that these letters which are written in the margins or between the lines of certain Qumran texts "may well refer to a sectarian code message of some kind."<sup>85</sup> In the Great Isaiah Scroll he suggests that "these signs may refer to the sectarian reading of certain passages, or to matters of sectarian interest."<sup>86</sup> However, it is not clear whether the original scribes, later scribes or the reader wrote these signs.<sup>87</sup> Tov suggests that in the paleo-Hebrew script, there are:

Several individual letters written in the margins of some compositions (1QIsaa, 1QS, 4QpIsac, and 5QLama) and at the ends of lines in 4QCant<sup>b</sup>, [which] probably draw attention to certain matters or to passages of special interest. It must be admitted that the exact purpose of these letters has not been established.<sup>88</sup>

Thus, he treats both of these phenomena as similar markers of additional meaning. They do not appear within the context of a word. Therefore, they do not possess a syntactical value of the letter. Rather, these letters carry another kind of message.

This use of a letter as an additional meaning marker may foreshadow the use of majuscules and minuscules as exegetical markers in later biblical texts. There is no direct correlation between where these letter signs occur in the Qumran material and the Masoretic lists of majuscules and minuscules. Tov categorically states that, "there is no evidence for the collation of any of the Qumran scrolls with the Masoretic text."<sup>89</sup> However, the concept that a letter can serve as a marker for additional meaning or special

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<sup>85</sup> E. Tov, p. 331.

<sup>86</sup> E. Tov, p. 331.

<sup>87</sup> E. Tov, p. 332.

<sup>88</sup> E. Tov, p. 335.

<sup>89</sup> E. Tov, p. 331.

interest is similar to one of the possible functions of the majuscles and minuscules in the Masoretic text. This function may find its antecedents in these mysterious letters.

Tov also points out another feature of these letters that makes it hard to distinguish them at times, namely that they are sometimes ornamented or stylized.<sup>90</sup> This aspect of these letters is similar to some of the majuscles, which are sometimes referred to as ornamented, "crowned" or stylized as well.<sup>91</sup> Perhaps this additional aspect of ornamentation is intended to call the reader's attention to a matter of particular interest beyond the actual words of the text.

In summary, though there do not appear to be any majuscles or minuscules in a Masoretic sense in The Dead Sea Scrolls, Tov has identified the presence of letters within the text of several Qumran scrolls that may be markers for additional meaning. This feature of the text is noteworthy because it bears a resemblance to the midrashic aspect of the majuscles and minuscules that will be explored further on in this thesis.

A final piece of evidence from a different location supports the idea that the majuscles and minuscules were not yet a part of the Proto-Masoretic text. The Nash Papyrus was the oldest biblical text known until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. This single sheet of papyrus fragment measuring about 3" by 5" contains the Decalogue and the *Shema*. In W.F. Albright's extensive research on the subject he dates it from around the second half of the second century B.C.E., with the outer limits for it roughly

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<sup>90</sup> E. Tov, p. 335.

<sup>91</sup> The subject of the ornamented letters and their relationship to majuscles is intriguing. There are examples of some letters in specific verses that appear as ornamented in one manuscript and majuscule in another. These variations may be the result of individual scribes or regional customs. For an in-depth study of ornamented and other unusual forms of letters found in the Torah see Yitzhak Razhabi, "The Script of the Torah and its Characters," *The Torah Shlelema*, Vol. 29, Jerusalem: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, Inc. 1978.

coinciding with the Maccabean Age (165 – 37 B.C.E.).<sup>92</sup> Although its origin is uncertain, he believes that it came from Egypt and was copied from a synagogue scroll.<sup>93</sup>

Most importantly for our search, in the *Shema*, Deut 6:4-5, neither the “ע” in שמע nor the “ד” in דוד are written larger than the other letters as they are in the Masoretic text. According to Albright, the specific wording and ordering of the Decalogue, suggest that the Nash Papyrus reflects a form of the original Hebrew text that does not agree completely with either the Tiberian nor the Palestinian recension, but is perhaps a blend of the two.<sup>94</sup> Other scholars emphasize that the text of the Nash Papyrus accords more closely with the Septuagint version than the Masoretic text.<sup>95</sup>

Artifacts from a slightly later date, the scrolls and fragments from Masada (66-73 C.E.) and from Wadi Murabba'at and Nahal Chever (both from 132-35 C.E.) attest to a stabilized text which corresponds to the Masoretic text.<sup>96</sup> However, I have not found any scholarly discussion on the presence or absence of majuscules or minuscules in these materials. I suspect that they were not a part of the consonantal text at this time.

At the conclusion of this section on the evidence from Hebrew artifacts several relevant items emerge. First, it does not appear that majuscules or minuscules as they exist in the Masoretic text were used. Even, in text types that are considered “Proto-Masoretic” or “Proto-Rabbinic” these features are not described in the text. Secondly, we do find in some of the early biblical texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls letters playing two specific roles beyond their normal syntactical one. First, letters have been used as section

<sup>92</sup> W.F. Albright, “A Biblical Fragment from the Maccabaen Age: the Nash Papyrus,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. LVI, 1937, p. 172.

<sup>93</sup> F.W. Albright, p. 172, 175.

<sup>94</sup> F.W. Albright, p. 176.

<sup>95</sup> “Nash Papyrus,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 12, (New York, Jerusalem: MacMillan Co., 1971), p. 833.

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markers and second, letters have been used as markers for extra-textual messages. These two traits later become identified as characteristics of the majuscles and minuscules as described in the next chapter. Is it just a coincidence that the Qumran scribes and later scribes both used letters in this innovative way? Alternatively, is it possible that these techniques, detected in the Qumran scrolls, foreshadow the use of letters in more than a syntactical role in the Masoretic text? There is not sufficient information at this time to conclusively prove that there is any relationship between these letters of the Qumran texts and the majuscles and minuscules in the Masoretic text. However, the similarities between the two are fascinating and merit further study.

## **Section II:**

### **Evidence From The Babylonian Talmud And Early Midrashim,**

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> Centuries C.E.**

There is a gap of about six hundred years between the latest archaeological finds of ancient Hebrew biblical material and the earliest Hebrew biblical manuscripts from around 900 C.E.<sup>97</sup> During this period, we must rely upon extra-biblical sources to find

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<sup>96</sup> "Bible," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 2, (New York, Jerusalem: MacMillan Co., 1971), p. 835

<sup>97</sup> There are several other sources of information that can help fill in the gap of this time period. One set of material consists of early, non Hebrew biblical texts such as the Aramaic targumim including the most famous one, the Targum Onkelos (2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E.), or the Greek Septuagint (3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E.) Does the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, Arabic, Aramaic and Latin make any effort to preserve majuscles and minuscules, if in fact these were features of the Hebrew text at the time? The material I have examined so far suggests that these non-Hebrew biblical texts do not have anything like majuscles or minuscules in them, nor can I detect that they are referred to in any way. However, this is an area that needs further investigation outside the scope of this thesis. Another possible source of information that can help fill this time period are Hebrew biblical fragments from the Cairo Geniza. Based on Paul Kahle's findings, I do not think we will find majuscles and minuscules in here either. Although this is another area that would require additional investigation. Much of what Kahle writes in *The Cairo Geniza* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1959) refers to the Palestinian and Babylonian masoretic traditions before the Tiberian system became dominant. He writes mostly about the pronunciations and vowels in these traditions. I have not seen reference to the majuscles or minuscules in any of his findings. It is possible that the Palestinian and Babylonian systems did not include majuscles and minuscules at all. Investigating the Geniza material is

evidence of majuscules and the minuscules. The two main sources of information that testify to these features are the Babylonian Talmud and various ancient midrashim. This section will examine the Talmudic evidence, and the next section will look at some of the midrashic evidence.

The period during which the Talmud was compiled is generally held to be between 300 – 700 C.E.<sup>98</sup> The end of this period corresponds with the earliest estimates of the beginning of the Masoretic period (600-950 C.E.) Yeivin writes:

In the Talmudic period, the rules for writing the Biblical text in general and for the writing of particular passages were established. This is also true for a considerable proportion of the traditions on the unusual features of the text, among them the *tiqqune soferim*, the dotted words, inverted nun, and early categories of *qere/ketiv*.<sup>99</sup>

The features that Yeivin singles out as being established in the Talmudic Period clearly have precedence in the Dead Sea biblical texts. Scribal corrections, dotted words, brackets (which some scholars have interpreted as the origins of the inverted *nunim*) and alternative readings are all found in the Qumran material. Based on the previous section of this thesis, perhaps the majuscules and minuscules also have predecessors in the Qumran texts. Furthermore, although Yeivin does not list the majuscules and minuscules specifically as features whose rules are established in the Talmudic period, I have come across several examples from the Babylonian Talmud

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also difficult because many of the texts seem to have been later corrected by Tiberian influenced scribes according to Kahle. Revell in his book *Biblical Texts with Palestinian Pointing and Their Accents*, (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977) in analyzing some of the biblical manuscripts from the Geniza writes that in regard to the consonantal text “there was no specifically Palestinian textual tradition distinct from the Tiberian.” (p. 160) Nonetheless, Revell does not note any majuscules or minuscules in the Palestinian pointed texts from the Geniza.

<sup>98</sup> H.L. Strack and G Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, (Minneapolis: First Fortress Press, 1992), p. 233.

<sup>99</sup> Yeivin, p. 132.

which do focus on these particular features. These sites constitute the earliest evidence that I have uncovered of specific reference to the subject of this study.

### Megillah 16b

*Megillah*, meaning "Scrolls" is the tenth tractate in the order *Mo'ed* (Appointed Times) of the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds. There are various topics covered in this tractate, however the main subject is the Scroll of Esther which is read on Purim. Issues of the appropriate way to write and read the Scroll of Esther are discussed along with other liturgical concerns. The piece of text which is of interest to us, *Megillah* 16b, is found within a section of extensive *aggadic* Midrash on the book of Esther (10a-17a). This *aggadic* material is more plentiful in the Babylonian Talmud than in the Jerusalem Talmud.<sup>100</sup>

In this section of the Talmud, the Gemara follows the Purim story as told in the Esther Scroll and offers exegesis on parts of the narrative. In Esther 9:7-9, the *Megillah* lists the ten sons of Haman, whom the Jews killed and whose corpses they later either hung on the gallows or impaled on a stake. The line in the *Megillah* reads as follows: "And they also slew Parshandata, and Dalfon, and Aspata, and Porata, and Adalya, and Aridata, and Parmashta, and Arisay, and Ariday, and Vayzata the ten sons of Haman."

The Gemara states a ruling concerning the reading of this verse<sup>101</sup>:

Rav Adda of Yaffo said: "The names of the ten sons of Haman cited in the verse, and the word 'ten' which follows must be pronounced by the reader of the *Megillah* in one breath."

<sup>100</sup>"*Megillah*," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 11 (Jerusalem, NY: MacMillan Co., 1971), p. 1229.

<sup>101</sup> Translation of the Babylonian Talmud, *Megillah* 16b according to the Schottenstein Edition, Hersh Goldwurm, ed. (Brooklyn, NY, Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1991).

The Gemara explains:

“What is the reason?”

“For they all died at the same moment.”

The Gemara states another pertinent ruling:

Rav Yochanan said: “The letter *waw* of Vayzata [the last son on the list] must be elongated, like a pole used by boatmen on the river Libros.”

The Gemara explains:

“What is the reason?”

“Because all of them were hanged on one pole, one above the other.”

The Gemara then goes on to explain another unusual feature of the text concerning the way that Haman’s sons’ names are written in this verse as one long column.

Within this short passage there are several points worth noting. First, a letter of the biblical text is specified as written larger than its usual size. This same designation is prescribed in the Masoretic text and this *vav* is still written as a majuscule in most Hebrew Bibles to this day.

Second, concerning the dating of this evidence, the entire tractate of *Megillah* is composed of various strata.<sup>102</sup> With regard to the specific comment of the elongated *vav*, we can safely assume that this comment is attributed to the second generation Palestinian Amora known as Rav Yochanan bar Nappacha who taught in Sepphoris and died in 279 C.E. At the time of his death, records show that he had been head of an academy for 80 years.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, assuming that at a minimum, he was not a minor (13 years old) at the

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<sup>102</sup> “*Megillah*,” E.J., p. 1228

<sup>103</sup> Strack and Stemberger, p. 95.



time that he assumed this prestigious position, he lived from roughly 185 – 279 C.E.<sup>104</sup>

Rav Yochanan's comment appears to be describing a textual feature that was already in existence, at least in some texts.<sup>105</sup>

The third point that follows from this Talmudic reference is that a reason is given for why this letter must be written larger. The reason is an *aggadic* one. The long *vav* marks a place where rabbinic exegesis embellishes or explains a part of the story.

Finally, the designation of this first majuscule is explicit. The letter *vav* is clearly identified and the text clearly indicates to make it longer. The next example of Talmudic evidence refers to a minuscule and differs in a number of ways from this first example.

#### *Kiddushin* 66b

The next example comes from *Kiddushin*, the last tractate in the order of *Nashim* (Women) in the Mishnah, Tosefta and both Talmuds. In this tractate a number of issues concerning marriage are discussed. The manner, in which this tractate is edited, suggests that perhaps the first chapter, as well as parts of the third and fourth chapter, may have been from a separate, older collection of rulings.<sup>106</sup>

The particular section that we are focusing on deals with defining categories of Jews for the purpose of allowing or forbidding marriages between them. The highest category is the priestly class, the Kohanim. The Gemara then discusses a side issue dealing with the members of the priestly class who are unfit to serve as priests. One type

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<sup>104</sup> Though it is a common practice among scholars to use Rabbis' names as aids for dating Talmudic material, everyone acknowledges that this method is fraught with difficulties. Similar names, anonymous statements, conflicting reports and other issues of oral transmission must be factored into any consideration of this type. For more information on this subject see Strack and Stemberger, p. 62-68.

<sup>105</sup> Most Talmudic scholars maintain that the presence of midrash in support of a particular view or ruling in the Talmud indicates that the rule existed prior to the midrash. The original reason for the rule may have been forgotten, thus giving rise to the need for the midrashim to be created. A minority view among Talmudic scholars is the reverse position, namely that first the midrash was created, then the rule. For more information on this subject see Strack and Stemberger, p. 142-143.

of disqualification for serving as a priest deals with physical handicaps and blemishes. In *Kiddushin* 66b the following discussion takes place:<sup>107</sup>

The Gemara asks:

“Regarding a blemished Kohen [Priest], from where is it known that the service he performed before his disqualification became known to him is invalid?”

The Gemara answers:

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel: “For the verse states: Therefore, say [to the Children of Israel], Behold, I give him My covenant of peace. [from Numbers 25:12] This implies that when he is whole, a Kohen is included in the covenant of priesthood. But not when any part of him is missing. Thus, a blemished Kohen is excluded.”

[There is a play here on the word שלום “peace” and שלם “whole”]

The Gemara objects to this derivation:

“But the word is not written *shalem* [which would have meant “whole”]; it is written *shalom* [which means “peace”]!”

The Gemara answers:

Rav Nachman said: “The letter *waw* that appears in the word *shalem* is severed. [i.e. written small.] Therefore, we can expound the word as if it were written *shalem*, without the *waw*.”

In analyzing this section of Talmud several aspects stand out. First, this is the first reference I found to a minuscule. The language used to describe the *vav* is *ketiah*, meaning cut or severed.<sup>108</sup> This *vav* is preserved as a minuscule in the Masoretic text.

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<sup>106</sup> “Kiddushin,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 10, (Jerusalem, NY: MacMillan Co., 1971), p.987.

<sup>107</sup> Translation of the Babylonian Talmud, *Kiddushin* 66b according to the Schottenstein Edition Hersh Goldwurm, ed. (Brooklyn, NY, Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1991).

Second, the names of the sages quoting this material give us a rough time period of when this small *vav* existed. Rav Yehudah is most likely Rav Yehudah bar Yehezkel, a second generation Babylonian Amora who died in 299 C.E. and was most active around 250-290 C.E.<sup>109</sup> He is transmitting a statement from Shmuel, who is most likely Mar Shmuel, a first generation Babylonian Amora who died in 254 C.E. and was active around 220 – 250 C.E.<sup>110</sup> Concerning the use of a midrash to explain a piece of text, it is most likely that the text with a small *vav* existed long before the midrash came along to explain it. Therefore, the custom of writing this small *vav* may be even older than 220 C.E. Although Rav Shmuel does not state the midrash, he clearly knows it, because the understanding of the midrash is the basis of his explanation. Rav Nachman who actually states the midrash, is most likely Rav Nachman bar Ya'acov, a third generation Babylonian Amora who died in 320 C.E. and was most active as an Amora from 290 C.E. until his death.<sup>111</sup>

The third noteworthy point is that a reason is given for why this *vav* is written smaller and it is an *aggadic* reason. And fourth, the specific letter referred to, namely the *vav*, and its small size are explicitly stated in the text of the Talmud. As we shall see in the next few examples, the Talmudic text is not always this clear in regards to specifying these early majuscules and minuscules.

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<sup>108</sup> There are a number of terms both in Hebrew and Aramaic that are used to describe majuscules and minuscules throughout the literature. In some Masorah, this *vav* is described as broken, and it is written with a blank space in the middle of the vertical line. Other texts simply write it as a minuscule *waw*. The various terms to designate majuscules and minuscules will be explained in detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>109</sup> Strack and Stemberger, p. 96-97.

<sup>110</sup> Strack and Stemberger, p. 94.

<sup>111</sup> Strack and Stemberger, p. 101.

### Kiddushin 30a

The next few examples from the Babylonian Talmud also come from tractate *Kiddushin*. On page 30a the Gemara departs from the discussion concerning issues of marriage and begins discussing the issue of writing a Torah scroll.<sup>112</sup>

The Gemara begins a new topic of discussion:

Because of this reason the Early Sages were called *soferim*, for they counted all the letters of the Torah. They used to say:

-The letter *waw* of the word *gachon* [Lev. 11:42] was the halfway point of the letters of a Torah scroll.

-The words *darosh darash* [Lev. 10:16] represent the half-way point of the Torah's words.

-The verse that begins with the word *vehitgalach* [Lev. 13:33] represents the halfway point of the Torah's verses.

-In the passage *y'charsemenah chazsir miya'ar* [Ps. 80:14], the letter *ayin* of the word *ya'ar* is the half-way point of the Book of Psalms.

-The verse *vehu rachum yechaper avon* [Ps. 78:38] represents the half way point of the verses in the Psalms.

Rav Yosef seeks to clarify the first of the above statements:

Rav Yosef inquired: "The *waw* of the word *gachon*, said before to represent the mid-point of the Torah's letters- Is it part of this [first] side of the Torah's letters, or part of this [second] side of the Torah's letters?"

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<sup>112</sup> Translation of the Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 30a according to the Schottenstein Edition (Brooklyn, NY, Mesorah Publications, Ltd. ,1991).

They said to him: "Let us bring a Torah scroll and count [its letters], and we shall find the answer! For in regard to a similar question, did not Rabbah bar bar Chanah once say: 'They did not move from there until they brought a Torah scroll and counted [its letters]?' So too, let us do the same!"

Rav Yosef replied to them: "They, to whom you refer, were versed in the knowledge of deletions and additions, and were therefore able to accurately tally the Torah's letters. We, however, are not versed in such knowledge, and therefore, cannot make this calculation."

This section continues discussing tallies of the number of verses in the Torah. The sages conclude that they are not knowledgeable in either the correct number or the limits of the verses themselves.

In this section of the Talmud, we learn several new pieces of information about the earliest examples of these Masoretic features. First of all, there are five sites that are referenced in this passage of Talmud: Lev. 11:42, Lev. 10:16, Lev. 13:33, Ps. 80:14 and Ps. 78:38. In these passages, though individual letters are singled out, none are described as majuscules or minuscules explicitly. However, two letters are preserved as majuscules in the Masoretic text: the *vav* of *gachon* in Lev 11:42 and the *gimel* of *vehitgalach* of Lev. 13:33<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> It is curious to note that the Talmud refers here to tallies in the Torah in general, then includes a discussion of half-way points in the Psalms. Though the MT does not preserve the *ayin* in Ps. 80:14 as a majuscule, the word *vechanah* in Ps. 80:16 has a majuscule in either the *chaf* or the *nun* as preserved in two variations of the MT. Since the exact counting of letters, words and verses in the Bible is imprecise as this section of the Talmud alludes to, the word *vechanah* may be marked with a majuscule as a half-way point in the Book of Psalms by some tally other than the one used in *Kiddushin* 30a.

The second issue that stands out in this text as compared to the previous pieces of Talmudic evidence is that there is no discussion concerning midrashim. Rather, these sites are all singled out for attention for reasons of scribal counting. It appears that at this time letters, words and verses were all features that were accounted for by Torah scribes. This type of counting later became a role of the Masoretes who, in addition to counting letters, words and verses, note the place and number of times certain spellings and words occur in the Bible.

The third issue regarding this passage concerns the dates of the sages involved in this discussion. Rabbah bar bar Channah is most likely the first generation Babylonian Amora by that name who was a student of Rabbi and was most active around 220 – 250 C.E.<sup>114</sup> It appears that Rav Yosef, is Rav Yosef bar Chiyya a third generation Babylonian Amora who died in 333 C.E. and was active around 290 – 320 C.E.<sup>115</sup> The knowledge of some of the details of the Torah seems to have been lost in the time that separates Rav Yosef and Rabbah bar bar Channah, a period of less than one hundred years. Modern biblical scholars suggest that the establishment of the consonantal text of the Masoretic text, which harmonized various previous text-types, took place in the first century C.E.<sup>116</sup> During this process of standardization reconciling plene and defective spellings, for example, would account for a difference in the total number of letters in different versions of the Bible. These are the kind of details that perhaps the first generation of Amoraim knew. But based on this piece of Talmud, by the third generation of Amoraim, this information had been lost.

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<sup>114</sup> Strack and Stemberger, p. 94.

<sup>115</sup> Strack and Stemberger, p.102.

<sup>116</sup> "Bible", *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 2, (Jerusalem, NY: MacMillan Co., 1971), p. 833.

In conclusion, the evidence of majuscules and minuscules from the Tannaitic and Amoraic period is strongest in the period of the hundred years between 220 –320 C.E. We clearly see in this period references in the Talmud to letters that become both majuscules and minuscules in the Masoretic text. Two types of reasons are given for their demarcation: 1) as midrashic markers or 2) as scribal counters. We also note that there are only a handful of examples, which do proliferate as time goes on.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, in the future development of the biblical text, all the letters of the *aleph bet* will at one time or another appear as majuscules or minuscules in the Masoretic text. However, at this stage of development, the letter *vav* is conspicuously dominant as the letter most affected. Is it a coincidence that the enlarged letter functioning as a paragraph marker in the Dead Sea Scrolls was also a *vav*? Further research is required on this subject, however it is noteworthy at this point.

#### Early Midrashim (5<sup>th</sup> –7<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E.)

Another source that references the majuscules and minuscules are some of the midrashim from the fifth to seventh centuries C.E. Chapter Five of this thesis is devoted entirely to the subject of midrashim concerning majuscules and minuscules. Therefore, in this section, a few illustrations will suffice to demonstrate how these early materials witnessed these features. Two different types of examples will be presented: 1) a midrash that specifically mentions a minuscule in the biblical text; and 2) a midrash that speaks about a particular letter in the text, but does not describe it as majuscule or minuscule. But, in later midrashim, this same letter is described as majuscule or minuscule and the reason that is given for this feature is this earlier midrash.

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<sup>117</sup> See Appendix I-IV of this thesis for a comparison of lists using majuscules and minuscules.

### An explicit example from Leviticus Rabbah and Numbers Rabbah

The first example comes from *Vayyikra Rabbah*, a collection of ancient Palestinian homiletic midrashim concerning the Book of Leviticus. Scholars differ as to the exact date when this collection was redacted. Some say as early as the fifth century C.E.; others as late as the middle of the seventh century C.E.<sup>118</sup> The midrash in *Vayyikra Rabbah* 23: 12-13 is concerned with the issue of adultery. In the following story however, our interest is in Deut. 32:18 which is brought as a proof text in discussing this topic.

R. Judah son of R. Simon in the name of R. Levi b. Perata commented: It is written, "Of the Rock that begot thee thou wast unmindful – *teshi*" (Deut. 32:18) '*Teshi*' implies: You have weakened (*hittashtem*) the power of the Creator. It is like the case of an artist who sat and fashioned the features of the king. When he finished the work, people came and told him: 'The king has been changed.' Whereupon the artist's strength failed him. He thought: Whose image shall I fashion? That of the first or the second? Similarly, during the whole of the forty days [following conception] the Holy One, blessed be He, is engaged upon the fashioning of the embryo's image, and at the end of the forty days, the woman goes and disgraces herself with someone else [i.e. commits adultery.] Whereupon the strength of the Creator fails Him. He thinks: Whose image shall I fashion? That of the first man or of the second? This explains the phrase, 'The Rock that begot thee *teshi*' as meaning, You have weakened (*hittashta*) the strength of the Creator. The *yod* [of the word *תשי*] is small, this being the only such case in Scripture. R. Isaac explained: We find in the case of all other transgressions that, for instance, the thief gains while the victim of the theft loses, the robber gains while his victim loses. Here, however, both benefit [i.e. the adulterer and adulteress.] Who loses? The Holy One, blessed be He, who destroys the identification marks [of the embryo. Hence the diminutive *yod*, the initial letter of the Tetragrammaton, alluding to loss by God.]<sup>119</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Strack and Stemberger, p. 316-317 suggest dates from the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century to the early 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. Meyer Waxman in *A History of Jewish Literature*, Vol. I (New York, London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960) p. 137 suggests a date of the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. *Midrash Rabbah, Leviticus* in the Soncino edition (London, NY: The Soncino Press, 1983) on pg.viii of the Introduction suggests a date as late as the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE.

<sup>119</sup> Translation of Leviticus Rabbah as found in *Midrash Rabbah, Leviticus*, trans. Judah J. Slotki (London, NY: The Soncino Press, 1983) p. 303.



Clearly, the author of this midrash was familiar with a text that had a minuscule *yod*. As reported in this story, this is the only case of a minuscule *yod* in the Bible that this author knows. Another midrash concerning this same verse, Deut. 32:18, from another collection of midrashim, Numbers Rabbah 9:1, also testifies to a minuscule *yod*. However, in this newer collection of midrashim dated from the twelfth century C.E., a slightly different version of the story is offered.

Nor must you suppose that the features of the infant resemble those of the adulterer only when the adulteress conceives from the adulterer. No! Even if she conceived from her husband and the adulterer then cohabited with her, the Holy One, blessed be He, transforms the features of the child into those of the adulterer. Accordingly it says, 'Of the Rock that begot three thou wast unmindful. (meaning forgetting that God would expose you.)'

R. Isaac said: The adulterer, if one may say so, weakens the power of the Divine Presence. How? The embryo of which she is conceived from her husband has had its features fashioned within forty days, and after forty days the adulterer cohabits with her. The Holy One, blessed be He, stands perplexed and says: Of whose features shall I fashion a likeness? That of the features of the husband or that of the features of the adulterer? If the expression be permissible, 'The Rock who begot thee dost weaken (*teshi*). The *yod* of *teshi* is small to imply that the adulterer weakens the hands of the Designer. (The smallness of the *yod* symbolizes the feeblest of the hands, *yadaim*, being the plural of *yad*.)<sup>120</sup>

The story then continues with the allegory of the painter of the king, similar to the *Vayyikra Rabbah* version. Apparently, this legend of the small *yod* survived from the fifth or sixth century to the twelfth century C.E. with only slight modifications. Furthermore, this *yod* is preserved as a minuscule in the Masoretic text. However, as in many instances where there is Talmudic or midrashic evidence of a majuscule or minuscule, not all biblical manuscripts, especially the earlier ones, preserved this feature.<sup>121</sup>

#### A less explicit example from *Genesis Rabbah*

<sup>120</sup> Judah J. Slotki, trans. *Midrash Rabbah, Numbers* (London, New York: The Soncino Press, 1983) p. vii. The translation that follows is from this text, pg. 237.

<sup>121</sup> Yeivin, p. 135-136.

The following example comes from *Genesis Rabbah*, the earliest of the exegetical midrashim dated from around the first half of the fifth century C.E.<sup>122</sup> This midrash expounds specifically on the letter *he* in the word *behibare 'am* in Genesis 2:4, but in the midrash itself, the *he* is not described as minuscule. In later midrashim, however, the reason for the small size of this *he* as it appears in the Masoretic text is this same midrash from *Genesis Rabbah*.

‘When they were created- *behibbaram*’

R. Abbahu said in R. Yochanan’s name: He created them with the letter *heh* (reading בַּהֲבַרְאָם as two words: בַּהֲ. בָרָא.) All letters demand an effort to pronounce them, whereas the *heh* demands no effort (being a mere aspirate); similarly, not with labour or wearying toil did the Holy One, blessed be He, create His world, but ‘By the word of the Lord’ (Ps. 23:6) and ‘The heavens were already made.’ (ibid) [Meaning that with a mere word, the work was finished.]<sup>123</sup>

At the conclusion of this section on evidence of majuscules and minuscules from the ancient midrashim we can summarize the following findings. First, there appears to be direct evidence of majuscules and minuscules in some early midrashim from the fifth to seventh centuries C.E. Second, the early midrashim speak of majuscules and minuscules that are not mentioned in the Talmud. Third, the evidence is scarce for these features. Yet, based on the material we have from this period, there appears to be only a handful of majuscules and minuscules in the biblical text at this time. In the next time period which does overlap somewhat with this period, we will look at examples of extra-biblical sources that begin to show a proliferation of the majuscules and minuscules in the biblical text. This next period from roughly the seventh to ninth centuries C.E. coincides with the Masoretic period. Although the consonantal text that the Masoretes

<sup>122</sup> Strack and Stemberger, p. 304.

receive is supposedly fixed by the end of the first century C.E., it appears that the use of majuscules and minuscules continues to be fluid well past this date.

### Section III

#### Evidence From Tractate *Soferim* and *The Alphabet of Rabbi Akivah*,

#### 7<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> Centuries C.E.

Two sources of information about majuscules and minuscules from this time period are the collection of short midrashim known as *The Alphabet of Rabbi Akivah* and the Minor Tractate *Soferim*. Both of these pieces of evidence testify to the proliferation of majuscules and minuscules in the Biblical text.

#### Tractate *Soferim*

*Soferim* (Scribes) is one of the Minor Tractates printed in most Talmud editions at the end of the order of *Nezikin* (Damages). It is primarily concerned with the correct way for scribes to write a Torah and other sacred texts. In its present form, the compilation of *Soferim* is dated to some time after the final redaction of the Babylonian Talmud. Most experts estimate that tractate *Soferim* was finished during the Gaonic period, around the middle of the eighth century to the ninth century C.E.<sup>123</sup> The importance of this tractate for our purposes is that as an authoritative source for scribes it does specifically mention certain majuscules and minuscules as the correct way to write the text. Furthermore, it gives reasons for the presence of these features which combine both the midrashic as well as the counting functions that have been observed in earlier sources. Chapter Nine of

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<sup>123</sup> So Translation from H. Freedman, trans. *Midrash Rabbah, Genesis* (London, New York: The Soncino Press, 1983) p. 95.

<sup>124</sup> Abraham Cohen, ed. *Minor Tractates, Soferim*, (London: The Soncino Press, 1984), introduction. Yeivin dates *Soferim* to the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, p. 136.

tractate *Soferim*, the section which contains the rules regarding the majuscules and minuscules, is translated as follows:

Rule 1. On the *beth* of *bereshit* (Genesis 1:1) there must be four crownlets, and the letters [some editions read 'letter' in the singular] of the word must be extended above all the other letters, because by its means the world came into existence.

Rule 2. The *waw* of *gachon* (Lev. 11:42) must be enlarged, because it is the middle of the letters of the Torah, *darosh darash* (Lev. 10:16) is the middle of the words of the Torah. *Darosh* is written at the end of the line and *darash* at the beginning of the next line.

Rule 3. *Wayyishchat* (it is uncertain whether this refers to Lev. 8:15 or Lev. 8:23, both begin with the same word) must be enlarged, because it is half of the verses of the Torah.

Rule 4. *Shema Yisra'el* (Deut. 6:4) must be written at the beginning of a line, and all its letters are to be enlarged, while *'echad* (Deut. 6:4) must come at the end of [the same] line.

Rule 5. The *lamed* of *wayyashlikem* (Deut. 29:27) must be long.

Rule 6. The *heh* of *haladonai* (Deut. 32:6) must be longer than any other *heh* because it is a word on its own.

Rule 7. The *yod* of *teshi* (Deut. 32:18) must be smaller than any *yod* in the Scriptures. The *yod* of *yigdal* (Num. 14:17) must be bigger than any *yod* in the Torah. *Yisra'el* at the end of the Torah (Deut. 34:12) must be enlarged, while the *lamed* in it must be higher than any other *lamed*.<sup>125</sup>

In summary, this section contains eight or nine majuscules (depending on how one counts Rule 7) and one minuscule. In seven out of ten cases, reasons are given for why the letter should be written a special way.<sup>126</sup> Two of these reasons are explicitly midrashic and three of the reasons deal with a counting function.<sup>127</sup> Of the four cases where a reason is not explicitly given, three have well known early midrashim that are

<sup>125</sup> Translation of Chapter 9, *Soferim* is from Abraham Cohen, ed. *Minor Tractates, Soferim*, (London: The Soncino Press, 1984) p. 38b.

<sup>126</sup> Deut. 6:4, Deut. 32:18 and Num. 14:17 do not include reasons why a majuscule or minuscule is necessary.

<sup>127</sup> The midrashic reasons are found in: Gen. 1:1, and Deut. 32:6. The counting reasons are found in Lev. 11:42, Lev. 8:15 or 8:23, and Deut. 34:12.

associated with them.<sup>128</sup> Therefore, the reason for their size may not need to be specifically mentioned. Of all the majuscules and minuscules described in this section, only two do not appear in the Masoretic text.<sup>129</sup> As we shall see in the next time period, the evidence from the early biblical manuscripts shows a lack of uniformity in applying these rules.

### *The Alphabet of Rabbi Akivah*

The previous examples of midrashim come from large collections of homiletical and exegetical midrashim that follow the order of the Bible. The following example does not follow this pattern. Rather, this is a small collection of short midrashim called *The Alphabet of Rabbi Akivah* that is dated some where between the seventh and ninth centuries C.E.<sup>130</sup> This collection of midrashim focuses on the mystical role of letters in the Bible. There are several sections; two of particular interest to us are: the midrashim on the large letters and the midrashim on small letters in the Hebrew Bible. These two sections are arranged in alphabetical order, giving first the featured letter, the word and verse in the Bible in which it appears, then a brief story about the reason for its special size based on a midrash. Chapter Four of this thesis will contain many of these midrashim in translation. However, of particular interest to us at this point is that in

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<sup>128</sup> The midrashim with Deut. 6:4, Deut. 32:18 and Deut. 29:27 are well attested to and early. See Chapter Four for full details of these midrashim.

<sup>129</sup> The two that do not appear in the MT are Deut 34:12 and Lev. 8:15 or Lev. 8:23. However, some masorah do include the *lamed* in *yisrael* in Deut 34:12 as a majuscule.

<sup>130</sup> Waxman, p. 149. See also Raphael Patai, *Gates to The Old City: A Book of Jewish Legends* (Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, c 1988) p. 261. Strack and Stemberger also date this collection from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century, p. 381.

Rabbi Akivah's *Alphabet* there are 30 examples of majuscule letters and 26 examples of minuscule letters.<sup>131</sup>

It is not clear who really is the author of this collection. Though it is ascribed to Rabbi Akivah, modern scholars do not presume that he is in fact the author. Some scholars suggest that most of the material in this collection dates from older sources and this collection represents only a shifting and arranging of this material.<sup>132</sup> Nonetheless, whoever the author was of this collection, he was familiar with a great number of majuscules and minuscules in the biblical text. Many, although not all, of the sites he describes do in fact match the majuscules and minuscules in the Masoretic text.<sup>133</sup>

#### **Section IV**

#### **Evidence From Biblical Manuscripts,**

#### **dated pre-1100 C.E.**

During the Masoretic period (ca 600 – 950 C.E.) the system of the Tiberian Ben Asher family gained dominance over all other Masoretic systems. Manuscripts that are dated prior to 1100 C.E., though few in number, tend to preserve the Ben Asher system more faithfully than those written after 1100 C.E. according to Yeivin. Regarding the manuscripts written after 1100 C.E. he writes:

These MSS are generally copies based on one or more older MSS. In most cases neither the text nor the masoretic additions are uniform, but reflect a mixture of different traditions. The influence of grammarians, and even of commentaries, can be recognized.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Shlomo Aaron Weirtheimer, *Leket Midrashim: Midrash Rabi Akiva al Hatagim Veziyunin ve Otiyot Gedolot ve Ketanot Shebetorah*. (Jerusalem: Yosef Demaskai, 1863) p. 20a-23b.

<sup>132</sup> Waxman, p. 149.

<sup>133</sup> See Appendix I-IV of this thesis for a comparison of lists of majuscules and minuscules.

<sup>134</sup> Yeivin, p. 12 –13.

Scholars believe that the Ben Asher traditions are best preserved today in the following manuscripts: the Aleppo Codex (A) - lacking the Pentateuch, estimated date: first half of the ninth century CE<sup>135</sup>, the British Museum Codex Or. 4445 (B) - covering the Pentateuch, estimated date: ca 820-850 C.E.<sup>136</sup>, the Cairo Codex (C) - covering the Prophets, dated 895 C.E.<sup>137</sup>, and the Leningrad Codex B19a (L), - the only complete representative of the Ben Asher tradition available, dated 1008 C.E.<sup>138</sup> In this section these early manuscripts will be examined for majuscules and minuscules.

### The Aleppo Codex

This codex originally consisted of the entire Hebrew Bible and was accepted by Maimonides as the standard codex for determining *halachah* (rules) concerning the writing of a Sefer Torah. Though the colophon of this codex is missing, the text is ascribed to Aaron ben Asher. Tragically, about one quarter of it was lost during the anti-Jewish riots in 1948. Today we only have a small piece of Deuteronomy, the Prophets, and some Scriptures. I did not find a separate edition of a Masorah for this manuscript, however, I was able to examine a facsimile firsthand.<sup>139</sup> Yeivin writes that this text has very few majuscules and minuscules and that was my observation as well.<sup>140</sup> Three small final *nunim* are observed at (1) *oren* in Isa. 44:14, (2) *Unvushazban* in Jer. 39:13 and (3) *venirgan* in Prov. 16:28. In addition, several sites that are known as majuscules or minuscules in the Masoretic text but do not appear as such in this codex are marked by circles in this codex. For example, in the facsimile I studied Deut 32:6, Deut 32:18,

<sup>135</sup> Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford, p. 19.

<sup>136</sup> Ginsburg, *Introduction*, p. 469.

<sup>137</sup> Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford, p. 15.

<sup>138</sup> Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford, p. 19.

<sup>139</sup> Moshe Goshen-Gottstein ed, (Facsimile) *The Aleppo Codex*, (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1976)

<sup>140</sup> Yeivin, p. 48.

Isaiah 56:10, and Jeremiah 14:2 have a circle over the exact letter which appears as a majuscule or minuscule later in the Masoretic text.

#### The British Museum Codex Or. 4445

I did not find a facsimile or a separate Masorah for this manuscript that I could examine first-hand therefore I relied on Ginsburg's observations. Ginsburg describes this manuscript in detail in *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible*.<sup>141</sup> Although he does not write that the text is lacking any majuscles or minuscules, I suspect that this is the case. In other manuscripts that Ginsburg describes in this section of his book, he notes majuscles and minuscules when they occur.

#### The Cairo Codex

I was able to study a facsimile of this work. This codex is a slightly different subtype than the Aleppo Codex. Goshen-Gottstein ascribes this codex to Moshe ben Asher, the father of Aaron ben Asher.<sup>142</sup> According to Goshen-Gottstein and other scholars, it is Aaron ben Asher's sub-type that becomes the dominant type for the Tiberian Massoretic Text. I was able to examine first-hand a facsimile of the entire Cairo Codex as well as study the Mp in a separate edition.<sup>143</sup> I found no majuscles in this manuscript. However, I did find two minuscule final *nunim* in Isaiah 44:14) *oren* and Jeremiah 39:13 *Unvushazban*. These sites are identical to L and are also included in the Masoretic text. In addition, several other sites that are noted in the Masoretic text as

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<sup>141</sup> Ginsburg, *Introduction*, p. 469-474.

<sup>142</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 18. On the same page see the view of other scholars who suggest that the Cairo Codex is closer to the ben Naftali than the ben Asher system.

<sup>143</sup> The facsimile was D.S.Loewinger, intro. *Codex Cairo of the Bible*, (Jerusalem, Makor Publishing Ltd., 1971) The masorah for the Cairo Codex of the Prophets is described in detail in María Josefa de Azcárraga Servet, *La Masora Parva del Códice De Profetas De el Cairo*, (Madrid: Instituto de Filología del CSIC, 1997) [see page 617 and 620 for minuscule *nuns*] and Emilia Fernández Tejero, *La Masora Magna del Códice De Profetas De el Cairo*, (Madrid: Instituto de Filología del CSIC, 1995)



minuscules had Mp as ׀ (giving an alternative reading) or ֿ (indicating that this word only occurs once in this particular form).<sup>144</sup>

#### The Leningrad Codex B19a

Though I did not observe this text first-hand, Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford summarizes the Leningrad Codex B19a majuscles and minuscules in *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. This codex contains very few of the features under study. There are three majuscles: (1) a large final *nun* in *mishpatan*, Num. 27:5; (2) a large *ayin* in *Shema*, Deut. 6:4 and (3) a large *daled* in *echad*, Deut. 6:4.<sup>145</sup> There are also three minuscules in this text. All of them are final nuns: (1) *oren* in Isa. 44:14, (2) *Unvushazban* in Jer. 39:13 and (3) *venirgan* in Prov. 16:28.<sup>146</sup>

In summary, the early manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible, which are allegedly the most representative of the Ben Asher, tradition show very few instances of the majuscles and minuscules. Though these manuscripts are later than such as the Babylonian Talmud, *Masechet Soferim* and midrashim that describe majuscles and minuscules, these features are not reflected in these early manuscripts. Did the scribes of these early manuscripts intentionally ignore these guidelines? Were these scribes unfamiliar with these features? Did the scribe have the latitude to determine whether or not to use the majuscles and minuscules? Perhaps there were still divergent schools and

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<sup>144</sup> See for example Azcárraga Servert, *La Masora Parva del Códice De Profetas De el Cairo*, p. 28. In this example, I Sam 17:7 written as ףן with a minuscule ף in the MT appears with a ׀ in the Mp of C with ףן offered as the reading. The use of the minuscule as a method for marking variant textual traditions is discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>145</sup> Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford, p. 36.

<sup>146</sup> Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford, p. 36-37.

Masoretic traditions in practice. These questions remain unanswered at this point.<sup>147</sup> In the next section material from independent Masorah and treatises, some of which are contemporaneous to these early manuscripts, add another layer to the picture.

### Section V:

#### Evidence from *Diqduke ha-Te'amim* and *Oklah ve-Oklah*,

#### 10<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E.

The two Masoretic works that will be examined next, *Diqduke ha-Te'amim* and *Oklah ve- Oklah*, were written either at the end of the Masoretic period or immediately following it. Both works contain extensive information on the Masorah, including lists of a number of majuscules and minuscules. In this section, these works will be analyzed from the perspective of the features under study. This evidence shows a huge increase in the number of majuscules and minuscules from the handful of evidence to date.

#### *Diqduke ha-Te'amim*

This treatise covering Masoretic, as well as grammatical, issues is traditionally attributed to Aaron ben Asher (first half of the tenth century C.E.), the son of Moses ben Asher.<sup>148</sup> Although as Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford point out:

All of the rules and principles articulated in *Diqduke ha-Te'amim* did not originate with Aaron; he collected them and adapted them to his system from manuscripts and other independent treatise. No doubt, he also included some original material in order to elaborate his tradition.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Further study is required on the subject of majuscules and minuscules in pre-1100 C.E. manuscripts. One list of manuscripts dated from before 1100 C.E. can be found in Yeivin, pgs. 21-29 where he describes about 20 manuscripts from this period, but he does not mention the majuscules or minuscules at all.

<sup>148</sup> Dotan, "Masorah," p. 1474.

<sup>149</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 18.

There have been at least five published versions of this work, beginning in 1517 through 1970 with some differences.<sup>150</sup> In the version that I examined, the majuscles and minuscules are found in two lists under section 61. There are twenty five majuscles and twenty eight minuscules listed in this treatise.<sup>151</sup> Both the majuscles and minuscules are found across the spectrum of the entire Hebrew Bible. All of the letters are represented at least once as both a majuscule and a minuscule, with the exception that some final letters are not represented and *vav* is represented twice on the majuscule list.

### *Okhlah we-Okhlah*

Unlike the previous treatise described above, *Okhlah we-Okhlah* is considered an independent Masorah from an anonymous source. Though it contains some material that is quite ancient, it also contains some lists from relatively late periods. Scholars date its compilation somewhere between the ninth century and tenth centuries C.E.<sup>152</sup> Fragments of the Masoretic lists included in this work have been found in the Cairo Geniza.

S. Frensdorff first published *Okhlah we-Okhlah* in its entirety in 1864 and later E.F.

Diaz Esteban published a version in 1975.<sup>153</sup> This work contains over four hundred lists including:

List 82 which contains the majuscles in the Torah, total 27

List 83 which contains the majuscles in the Prophets and Scriptures, total 15.

List 84 which contains the list of minuscules in the entire Hebrew Bible, total 26.

List 178 which contains the minuscule final *nunim* in the entire Hebrew Bible total 3.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>150</sup> See Ginsburg, *Introduction*, p. 278-286 for a comparison of five versions. The version that I am using is the 1970 edition of *Dikduke Ha-Te'amim* edited by S. Baer-H.L. Strack with notes and appendix by D.S. Loewinger, (Leipzig: Metzger & Wittig, 1879)

<sup>151</sup> S. Baer-H.L. Strack, p. 47-49.

<sup>152</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 21.

<sup>153</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 21. See S. Frensdorff, *Das Buch Ochlah W'ochlah* (Hanover, 1864; rpt. New York: Ktav, 1972) and E.F. Diaz-Esteban, *Sefer Oklah we-Oklah* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, 1975). I consulted both editions for this thesis, but I am using the Frensdorff edition in this section.

<sup>154</sup> S. Frensdorff, p. 88, 89, 117.

In summary, there are great similarities between these two sources. However, the Frensdorff list contains seventeen more majuscules than the *Diqduqe ha-Te'amim* list. However, there are three majuscules on the *Diqduqe ha-Te'amim* list which do not appear on the *Okhlah we-Okhlah* list. The *Okhlah we-Okhlah* list has one more minuscules than the *Diqduqe ha-Te'amim* list, including one word which has two minuscules in it.<sup>155</sup> Both of these works stand as Masorah with out any accompanying text.

These two works are dated close to the Masoretic period and they contained information that was readily accessible regarding the majuscules and minuscules. In addition, there are several later Masoretic treatises that need to be further investigated for their comments on this subject. Some examples of these works include: *Masoret Siyag la-Torah*, by Meir ben Todros ha-Levi Abulafia (1180 –1233), which is concerned with the consonantal text in the Torah; *Kiryat Sefer*, a two-part treatise dealing with rules for writing Torah scrolls and with Masoretic matters by Menahem ha-Meiri (1249-1306) and *'Ein ha-Qore* a study of concerned with the correct reading, vowels and accents in the bible by Jekuthiel ha-Naqdan.<sup>156</sup>

## **Section VI:**

### **Evidence From Biblical Manuscripts,**

#### **dated 1100 - 1524 C.E.**

This next section is devoted to the issue of majuscules and minuscules in actual Hebrew biblical manuscripts from 1100 C.E. until 1524 C.E. These two dates have historical importance from a masoretic perspective to define this period. Yeivin

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<sup>155</sup> See Appendix I-IV of this thesis for a comparison of lists of majuscules and minuscules.

establishes 1100 C.E. as the end of the period when model codices were written which subsequent scribes used.<sup>157</sup> This date made an appropriate beginning point to define this period. The terminus of this historical period is 1524 C.E., a time when interest in the Masorah was revived by Jacob ben Chayyim ibn Adonijah, with the printing of the *Second Rabbinic Bible*.

This is a particularly difficult period to investigate for a number of reasons. First, I have not been able to observe any manuscripts first hand. I am relying on the work of several scholars who have observed these early manuscripts. However, their reports on the manuscripts tend to fall into the following four fairly unsatisfactory categories for the purpose of this thesis:

- 1) They do not report at all on whether there are or are not any majuscles or minuscules in the text.
- 2) They report that there are some majuscles and minuscules but do not say which ones.
- 3) They report that there are some majuscles and minuscules, and describe only a few of them.
- 4) They report that there are no majuscles or minuscules at all in the text.

Secondly, this period is difficult to gather evidence because of the state of the Masorah and the scribal practices of this time. In describing the state of the Masorah in this time period Dotan writes:

As time passed copying the text became a less skilled work, and there were copyist who lacked all understanding of the Masorah, to the extent that some of them used the material of the Masorah for mere ornamentation of the text....Manuscripts like these, some of which are most ornate, are worthless for the study of the Masorah.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 23-24.

<sup>157</sup> Yeivin, p. 12-14.

<sup>158</sup> Dotan, "Masorah," p.1427. Yeivin expresses the same sentiment in *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah*, pg 31.

A quintessential example of this practice is the Kennicott Bible written in Corunna, Spain by Moses ibn Zabara in 1476 C.E.<sup>159</sup> There is lavish ornamentation on the borders and throughout the body of the text. In this manuscript majuscles are used for aesthetic reasons, with no regard to the Masorah or the meaning of the text.<sup>160</sup> Mp notes on the side margins become part of a dragon's body and are cut off in the middle of a note.<sup>161</sup> Although artistically impressive, one cannot help but wonder what consideration the scribe and/or illustrator had given to the Masorah.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the following evidence suggests that in this period of early manuscripts the majuscles and minuscules were present in some manuscripts, although it is unclear to what extent. Ginsburg in his *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* surveys sixty hand written manuscripts from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries C.E. These manuscripts are mostly from the British Museum, plus six were from his own collection. When describing these manuscripts, in only four of the manuscripts does he mention the majuscles or minuscules. It is not clear whether these features are present or not in the other manuscripts.<sup>162</sup> However, the following information summarizes his findings with regard to the majuscles and minuscules. I have also noted when Ginsburg mentions other features of the consonantal text such as inverted *nunim* or extraordinary points.

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<sup>159</sup> *The Kennicott Bible*, introduction by Cecil Roth. (Oxford:University Press, 1957) p. 3. The ornamentation of scribal Hebrew work is not limited to this period, nor is it necessarily in contradistinction to the precision of the Masorah. For example, the Cairo Codex of the Prophets described above included ornamentation as well as accurate masorah. For a detailed study on the ornamentation in the Cairo Codex see, Leila Rachel Kopstein Avrin, *The Illuminations in the Moshe Ben-Asher Codex of 895 CE*, PhD Dissertation (Ann Arbor, MI: Xerox Univ. Microfilms, 1975)

<sup>160</sup> *The Kennicott Bible*, plate 5 and plate 6.

<sup>161</sup> *The Kennicott Bible*, plate 11a, and pg. 9.

### Examples from Ginsburg's collection

- Add. 21160 - is a manuscript containing the Torah, haftarot, five megillot and Job from ca 1300 C.E. written in a German hand. It is ornamented and each book has the first word written in large letters.<sup>163</sup> Ginsburg writes that:

The text as corrected by later Nakdanim is practically the same as that exhibited in the present Massoretic recension, though the traces of certain forms and readings show that the prototype from which it was made belonged to a school of textual critics which had still retained different traditions about the orthography and the consonants in sundry passages. Thus for instance on *shema* Deut. 6:4 which according to our massorah is written with a majuscular *Ayin*, the Massorah in this MS tells us that the *Shin* is minuscular [also the *Ayin* is majuscular in the footnote which contains the actual Mp note.]<sup>164</sup>
- Oriental 2201 - is a manuscript of the whole Bible written in a Sephardic hand dated Toledo 1246 CE.<sup>165</sup> In an appendix to Kings, designated as Appendix 2, Ginsburg writes that it contains various massoretic rubrics, including a list of majuscles and minuscles. However, Ginsburg does not say which ones are included, rather he footnotes his own list of majuscles and minuscles in his four volume work, *The Massorah*. It is not clear from this note if the majuscles and minuscles in Oriental 2201 match his list.<sup>166</sup> Ginsburg also notes the appendix in this manuscript which contains words in the Bible with extraordinary points.
- Oriental 4227 - is a manuscript of the whole Bible written in a German hand dated to ca. 1300 C.E.<sup>167</sup> In a supplement to Chronicles, designated as Appendix 2, there are two lists, one of the majuscles and one of the minuscles. However, as in the

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<sup>162</sup> In Ginsburg's four volume work *The Massorah Compiled from Manuscripts*, Vol. 4, (Vienna: Georges Brög, 1880-1905) pgs 39-41 contain lists of majuscles and minuscles from several medieval manuscripts. He provides his own list of majuscles and minuscles in Vol. 1, pgs. 35-37.

<sup>163</sup> Ginsburg, p. 625.

<sup>164</sup> Ginsburg, p. 627.

<sup>165</sup> Ginsburg, p. 667.

<sup>166</sup> Ginsburg, p. 672.

<sup>167</sup> Ginsburg, p. 721

previous example, Ginsburg simply references his own lists and it is unclear if this manuscript is identical to his list or not.<sup>168</sup> Ginsburg also notes the appendix that contains fifteen words in the Bible with extraordinary points.

- The Earl of Leicester's Codex - is a Sephardic codex containing the Torah and the Hagiographa dated to 1250-1300 C.E.<sup>169</sup> The scribe records in a poetic Epigraph that he has copied the Torah from the Mugah Codex and "furnished it with the vowel points, the Massorah, minuscular and majuscular letters, plenes and defectives...."<sup>170</sup> Again, Ginsburg does not provide the actual list of these features.

#### The Torah Scrolls of the Chinese Jews

Another set of manuscripts from an entirely different source and a possibly later date add some further dimensions to the discussion of majuscules and minuscules in manuscripts from this period. The Torah Scrolls of the Chinese Jews are a collection of scrolls from the now defunct Kaifeng community whose first synagogue was established in 1163 C.E.<sup>171</sup> There is scholarly debate concerning the exact date of these scrolls. Most scholars who have studied them agree that they are not all necessarily from the same date. I.O. Lehman suggests a range of fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries CE.

Concerning these scrolls, he writes:

The disregard of small letters [minuscules] and capitals [majuscules] is also paralleled in the tenth and eleventh century codes. We therefore have to conclude that the surviving Chinese scrolls belonging to this group, even if copied in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, may point back to traditions which are about three quarters of a millennium older.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Ginsburg, p.728.

<sup>169</sup> Ginsburg, p. 728.

<sup>170</sup> Ginsburg, p. 733.

<sup>171</sup> Michael Pollak, *The Torah Scrolls of the Chinese Jews*, (Dallas: Bridwell Library, Southern Methodist Univ., 1975), p. 25.



Pollak comments on this same lack of majuscles and minuscules, although he is less assertive in his conclusions:

It seems unlikely, of course, that the scribes of Kaifeng could have completely overlooked such strikingly oversized or undersized characters if they were present in the Torah(s) from which the surviving Kaifeng exemplars copied. [He asks:] Question: Should the inference be drawn that the Kaifeng scrolls are patterned after an original (or originals) which came from an area (or from areas) where the use of Large and Small Letters was not part of the soferic tradition?<sup>173</sup>

With regard to other features of the consonantal text, the Kaifeng scrolls do not show as much consistency as the absence of the majuscles and minuscules. Pollak describes some of the scrolls as having some of the inverted *nunim* and the extraordinary dots in some of the places, while others do not.<sup>174</sup>

In summary, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the manuscripts from this period based on the available material. It appears that there were majuscles and minuscules used, however it is not clear which, if any, masoretic tradition their placement followed. There seems to be a contradiction in the scribal practice concerning these features. There appears to be a gap between the small number of these features in the earlier manuscripts which most closely resembles the Ben Asher tradition, and the large number of them listed in *Okhlah we-Okhlah* and *Diqduqe ha-Te'amim*. Another source from this period, a collection of midrashim by Jacob b. Asheri (also called *Baal Ha-Turim*, ca 1280-1340 C.E. ) relies heavily on majuscles and minuscules in interpreting the Torah.<sup>175</sup> Asheri's interpretations reflect a large number of majuscles and minuscules, similar to the amount found in *Okhlah we-Okhlah* and *Diqduqe ha-Te'amim*

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<sup>172</sup> I.O. Lehman, "A Study of the Oldest Dated Oriental Bible Texts", 1972 and 1973 *Proceedings of IOMS*, Masoretic Studies, No. 1 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974), pg. 53.

<sup>173</sup> Pollak, p. 93-94, illustrations on pg. 108.

<sup>174</sup> Pollak, p. 95-105.

lists. It appears that the manuscripts of the period dated from 1100 to 1524 C.E. reflect the ambiguous status of the Masorah in regards to the majuscles and minuscules. In the following section, due to the efforts of two individuals, the precision of the Masorah, including the use of majuscles and minuscules is re-introduced into the Hebrew Bible.

## Section VII

### Evidence From Jacob ben Chayyim ibn Adonijah, Elias Levita

#### and the Earliest Printed Bibles,

#### 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E.

Jacob ben Chayyim ibn Adonijah (dates uncertain, late fifteenth to sixteenth century C.E.) is credited with rescuing the Masorah, and restoring it to its original function, the preservation of the text tradition.<sup>176</sup> He arrived in Venice around 1510 C.E. as a refugee from Tunis and started working for the Hebrew press of Daniel Bomberg as a corrector. They began work on the *Second Rabbinic Bible* (the *First Rabbinic Bible*, published in 1517 had been only a moderate success).<sup>177</sup> Ben Chayyim wanted to recreate an accurate Masorah for this new edition based on as many existing manuscripts as he could acquire. Though Bomberg was quite generous in financing the acquisition of these manuscripts, Ben Chayyim was disappointed with what he found.<sup>178</sup> He writes,

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<sup>175</sup> Jacob b. Asheri, *Perush Ha-tur Ha-shalem al Ha-torah*, in two volumes, (Jerusalem, Horev Publishing House, 1998). Elias Levita cites Asheri's work to make the same point in his *Massoreth Ha-Massoreth*, trans. C.D. Ginsburg, (London: Longmans, Green Reader & Dyer, 1867) p. 142-143.

<sup>176</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 24.

<sup>177</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 24.

<sup>178</sup> Lazarus Goldschmidt, *The Earliest Editions of the Hebrew Bible*, (New York: Aldus Book Co., 1950), p. 45-46.

"After mastering their content, I found them in the utmost disorder and confusion, so much so, that there is not a sentence to found without a blunder."<sup>179</sup>

In spite of these difficulties, Ben Chayyim was able to work through these manuscripts and create a Masorah to accompany the *Second Rabbinic Bible* published in 1525 C.E. The Ben Chayyim text is not identical with the Ben Asher text. Rather this Masorah is a composite of the medieval manuscripts that he was able to gather, plus his own editorial efforts. Nonetheless:

He was convinced that there was only one correct Masora, that this Masora was in agreement with the Masora compiled by himself, and that the text arranged by him according to this Masora was the very text which had been established by the great Masoretic authorities of Tiberias, especially by Ahron b. Asher who flourished in the first half of the tenth century. Yakob ben Chayyim had never seen any old manuscript of the Bible, so that he could not be aware of the distinct differences between his text and that of Ben Asher.<sup>180</sup>

In the Masorah of the *Second Rabbinic Bible* there are 25 majuscules and 23 minuscules.<sup>181</sup> Ben Chayyim's version of the Hebrew Bible became the *textus receptus* and the unquestioned authority of the correct Hebrew text from the sixteenth century up until the most recent generation of biblical scholars.<sup>182</sup>

Another individual who contributed greatly during this period to the revival of interest and accuracy in the Masorah was Elias Levita, (known as Elijah Bachur, Elijah ben Asher ha-Levi Ashkenazi and a few other names, 1468-1549 C.E.) a Hebrew philologist, grammarian and lexicographer.<sup>183</sup> From 1527-1540 C.E. he worked at

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<sup>179</sup> Jacob ben Chayyim Ibn Adonijah, *Introduction to the Rabbinic Bible ... In Hebrew with an English Translation and Critical and Explanatory Notes* by Christian David Ginsburg (New York: Ktav, Inc., 1968, reprint of London, 1867 edition of the original Venice, 1525 work), p. 78.

<sup>180</sup> Goldschmidt, p. 46. See also the following section on modern Masoretic scholarship.

<sup>181</sup> Ginsburg, *The Massorah*, Vol 4, p. 39-41. Also see Appendix I-IV of this thesis for a comparison of lists of majuscules and minuscules.

<sup>182</sup> Goldschmidt, p. 47.

<sup>183</sup> "Levita, Elijah," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 11, (Jerusalem, NY: MacMillan Co., 1971), p. 132.

Bomberg's press as a corrector after Ben Chayyim left in 1527 C.E.<sup>184</sup> In 1538 C.E. he wrote *Massoreth ha-Massoreth*, a three- part guidebook and commentary on the Masorah. In this work he lists twenty-five majuscles and thirty-three minuscules.<sup>185</sup>

These two individuals along with the development of the printed Bible have greatly shaped the Hebrew Bible as we know it today. Though the *Bomberg Bible* is often called the first printed Bible, in fact there were twenty- two previous editions, eight of them complete.<sup>186</sup> In his *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible*, Ginsburg surveys more than twenty early printed editions of the Hebrew Bible (from 1477 to 1517 C.E.), all printed before the Second Rabbinic Bible. Out of all of these early editions, in only one of them, the *Lisbon 1491 Bible*, are some of the majuscles and minuscules exhibited. There are three majuscles in: Exod. 34:7, Exod. 34:14 and Lev 13:33 and four minuscules in: Gen. 2:4, Gen. 23:2, Gen. 27:46 and Deut. 32:18.<sup>187</sup>

In conclusion, this period represent the pre-modern state of the Masorah. In regards to the majuscles and minuscules, we see that they are primarily absent from the early printed versions of the Hebrew Bible until the appearance of the *Second Rabbinic Bible*. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries there does not appear to be many new developments with regard to the majuscles and minuscules. Biblical scholars, for the most part, accepted the *Second Rabbinic Bible* and studied the material that was

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<sup>184</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 25.

<sup>185</sup> Levita, p. 230-231. Also see Appendix I-IV of this thesis for a comparison of lists of majuscles and minuscules.

<sup>186</sup> Kopstein Avirin, p. 72. See also Goldschmidt p. 38-39 for a thorough list of early printed editions of the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>187</sup> Ginsburg, p. 840.

available to them without a great deal of scholarly criticism.<sup>188</sup> We will now turn, in the final section of this chapter, to the most recent generation of Masoretic scholars to analyze their contributions to the subject of majuscules and minuscules.

### Section VIII

#### Recent Work: Ginsburg, Kahle, Weil, Dotan, Revell and Yeivin

Scholars from the twentieth century have continued to advance the field of Masoretic studies. In this section, individual scholars will be discussed in particular reference to the subject of majuscules and minuscules. One of the most prolific writers of this period, Christian David Ginsburg (1831-1914), believed that the Ben Chayyim text was the authoritative source for all issues regarding the Masorah. He wrote, "it is the only Massoretic recension. No textual redactor of modern days who professes to edit the Hebrew text according to the Massorah can deviate from it without giving conclusive justification for so doing."<sup>189</sup> In spite of his massive contributions to this field, Ginsburg's limitations were: 1) He was not systematic in collecting his material; 2) His sources were not normally cited; 3) His manuscripts were usually not very old; 4) He

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<sup>188</sup> The Masoretic scholars from this period, for example Menahem Ben Judah Di Lonzano (end of th 16<sup>th</sup> century), Jedidah Solomon Raphael ben Abraham of Norzi (first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century), Yachya Bashir (end of 17<sup>th</sup> century), Yachya b. Joseph Salih (second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) Wolf Benjamin Ze'ev Ben Samson Heidenheim (1757-1832), Seeligmann Isaac Baer (1825 -1827) all wrote on various aspects of the Masorah . Some of these scholars, in particular Jedidiah Solomon in *Minchat Shay* and later Wolf Benjamin in *Mishpetei ha-Te'amim* discuss problems in the Masorah. Most of these works, though valuable contributions in their own right, are not systematic, critical analysis of the Masorah . Only with the most recent scholars and the discoveries from the Dead Sea and the Cairo Geniza has the critical study of the Masorah advanced to a new level. For more information on these works see the Dotan article "Masorah" in the *Encyclopadeia Judaica*, p. 1478 or Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 26-27.

<sup>189</sup> Goldschmidt, p. 47 quoting from an earlier edition of Ginsburg's *Introduction to the Massoretico-critical edition of the Hebrew Bible*.

blended material from various sources; and 5) He often introduced changes in the text based on his material.<sup>190</sup>

Though he comments on other features of the consonantal text such as the suspended letters, the inverted *nunim*, the scribal emendations, and the extraordinary points, in his *Introduction*, he does not explicitly mention the majuscles and minuscules, nor does he offer any theory for their existence.<sup>191</sup> Ginsburg has assembled several lists of majuscles and minuscules into one rubric in his four volume work, *The Massorah* which is included in the Appendix I-IV of this thesis.<sup>192</sup>

With Paul Ernst Kahle (1875-1965) a new level of Masoretic study began. He is credited with "emphasizing the necessity of distinguishing between different individual traditions and studying them separately. Kahle recognized the value of the ben Asher tradition and he was responsible for using a single ben Asher manuscript, Leningrad B19a, as the basis for the BHK 3 [Biblia Hebraica Kittel, third edition] ."<sup>193</sup> The first and second edition of the Kittel Bible, long the standards of critical editions of the Bible, used the Ben Chayyim text as their basis. However, under Kahle the number of majuscles and minuscules in Kittel's third edition represented the handful found in Leningrad B19a. Gérard E. Weil (1929-1986) who edited the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia followed the same practice in regards to the majuscles and minuscules. However, some modern editions of the Hebrew Bible such as the *Jerusalem Bible*, first published in 1953 by Magnes Press, (originally prepared by Umberto 'Moses David' Cassuto prior to his

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<sup>190</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 27.

<sup>191</sup> Ginsburg, p. 308-349.

<sup>192</sup> Ginsburg, *The Massorah*, pg. 39-41.

<sup>193</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 27.

death,) still rely heavily on the Ginsburg text and therefore have many more majuscles and minuscules than the BHS.<sup>194</sup>

Three other modern scholars, Aron Dotan, E.J. Revell and Israel Yeivin are currently very active in the field of Masoretic studies. They have all commented, albeit briefly, on the subject of the majuscles and minuscules in their respective works. In the next chapter of this thesis, their comments will be analyzed as part of the discussion on the function of these features in the biblical text.

In summary, the presence of majuscles and minuscules in the Hebrew Bible has ebbed and flowed with time. There may have been pre-cursors to these features as early as the Dead Sea Scrolls. They are certainly present at the time of the Talmud and onward. The earliest manuscripts from the ninth through eleventh centuries C.E. such as the Aleppo Codex and Leningrad B19a show very few of these features. In extra-biblical sources there is evidence that their numbers increase greatly during the eleventh to fifteenth centuries C.E. However, actual manuscripts from this period vary regarding the evidence of how many and which ones are found in the text. They are almost completely absent in the earliest printed editions of the Bible, until the printing of the *Second Rabbinic Bible*. The Masorah for this edition of the Bible, based on a compendium of medieval manuscripts, remained the Masoretic source for most modern versions of the Hebrew Bible, until quite recently. In modern times there has been an interest in distinguishing between different individual Masoretic traditions. The preference for a tradition closer to the original Ben Asher system is stimulating the use of older codices that contain fewer majuscles and minuscules. The Aleppo Codex, Leningrad B19a, the

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<sup>194</sup> Kopstein Avrin, p. 87-89.

Cairo Codex of the Prophets and Oriental 4445 are now the preferred source for publishing new critical editions of the Bible such as the BHS.

Viewed from this historical perspective, one might ask why have these features fluctuated so over time. This question is particularly significant because the majuscule or minuscule consonants, as part of the consonantal text, are considered the oldest and least fluid part of the Hebrew biblical text. Continued research is necessary in order to answer this question, if it can be resolved conclusively at all. However, the subject of the next chapter, the function and location of the majuscules and minuscules in the Hebrew Bible, may shed some light on this question.



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PHENOMENON OF MAJUSCULES AND MINUSCULES

#### Introduction

The previous chapter traced the historical evidence of majuscules and minuscules in the Hebrew Bible. This next chapter will examine the phenomenon of the majuscules and minuscules themselves. Up until this point, we have considered these two features together. Though they are both features related to the size of particular consonants in the text, we will now explore them in greater detail as two distinct phenomena. This chapter contains three sections with this aim in mind:

- Section I – This section discusses the various terms that are found in the literature to designate a majuscule or minuscule letter.
- Section II – This section analyzes where in the biblical text the majuscules and minuscules occur.
- Section III – This section examines the possible function of the majuscules and minuscules and their purpose in the text.

This chapter offers more questions than it does answers. Many of the issues presented in this chapter have not been approached systematically in the modern study of the Masorah. Consequently, I am challenged to propose theories to explain the evidence at hand, without published scholarly support. Whenever possible, I will highlight the theories of the experts in this field. However, there is not much written material on the phenomenology of the majuscules and minuscules. Notwithstanding these limitations, it

is beneficial to methodically search and organize the data for the purpose of better understanding these features.

## Section I

### Definition of Terms

In English, the large letters in the Hebrew Bible are called majuscules and the small letters are called minuscules. Occasionally, these nouns are used as adjectives, as in a “majuscular *beth*” or “minuscular *aleph*.” Sometimes these features are simply referred to as “large” or “small” letters.

In Hebrew the terminology describing these letters is a bit more complicated. There are several words or phrases used to designate both the majuscules and minuscules. The following information describes the various terms used to describe these phenomena beginning with their oldest references. In the Babylonian Talmud, *Megillah* 16b which discusses the majuscule letter *vav* in the word *vaizata* in Esther 9:9, it says:

ו"ו דויתא צריך למימתחה בזקיפא כמורדיא לברות.

The *vav* of *vaizata* must be elongated

like a pole used by the boatmen on the river Librot.<sup>195</sup>

At this early stage in the development of the terminology, there is no single term directly equivalent to majuscule. The literal meaning of the word למימתחה is from the root מתח “to stretch or extend.”<sup>196</sup> The meaning of the word בזקיפא is from the root

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<sup>195</sup> Translation of the Babylonian Talmud, *Megillah* 16b according to the Schottenstein Edition (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd. 1991.) modified by author.

<sup>196</sup> Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature* (New York: The Judaica Press, Inc., 1992), p. 861.

זקף “erect or raise.”<sup>197</sup> The Schottenstein edition of tractate *Megillah* notes that the *Rishonim*, the rabbinical authorities who were active in the Diaspora from the mid-eleventh to fifteenth centuries, differed in the interpretation of this ruling. Some said that it meant that the letter *vav* must be written larger than normal. Others explain that it means that the reader of the *Megillah* should prolong the *vav* to assure that the name is pronounced properly. Yet others explain that it means that the top of the *vav*, which is usually bent, should be erect.<sup>198</sup> In later sources, this *vav* is simply identified as a majuscule.

Another example from Babylonian Talmud is found in *Kiddushin* 66b which refers to the miniscule *vav* in Numbers 25:12 as: וי' דשלום קטיעה היא.<sup>199</sup> Again, there is no mention of the equivalent word “minuscule.” Rather, a close translation of this phrase would be “The *vav* in shalom is severed.” קטיעה usually means to “cut off, lop or mutilate.”<sup>200</sup> Later authorities have interpreted this expression to mean either that the *vav* should be written with a small blank space interrupting the stem of the letter, or that the *vav* should be cut off entirely and written as a letter *yod*.<sup>201</sup> In the case of this *vav*, eventually קטיעה came to mean קטנה, which is how most lists represent this letter, as a minuscule *vav*.

Another descriptive term for a minuscule that we find in a source from approximately the same period as the Babylonian Talmud comes from the collection of

<sup>197</sup> Jastrow, p. 409-410.

<sup>198</sup> Schottenstein edition, *Megillah* 16b<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>199</sup> Translation of the Babylonian Talmud, *Kiddushin* 66b according to the Schottenstein Edition (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1991.)

<sup>200</sup> Jastrow, p.1351.

<sup>201</sup> Schottenstein edition, *Kiddushin* 66b<sup>3</sup>.

midrashim known as *Leviticus Rabbah*. Here we find the minuscule *yod* in “*teshi*” from Deut. 32:18 described as יוד זעיר.<sup>202</sup> The term זעיר means “to be slender, small, reduced or diminished.”<sup>203</sup> In later sources, זעיר is often used to describe the minuscules.

In the minor tractate, *Soferim*, Chapter Nine, there are several rules regarding both majuscules and minuscules. Of particular interest is the fact that the author uses four different Hebrew terms to describe majuscule letters: פשוט, זקוף, ארוך and גדול.<sup>204</sup>

- Rule 1 states that the letters of the word *bereishit* in Gen. 1:1 must be written פשוטין.
- Rule 2 states that the *waw* in the word *gachon* from Lev. 11:42 must be written: זקוף.
- Rule 3 states that the word *vayishat* from Lev. 8 either verse 15 or 23 must also be written פשוט.
- Rule 4 also uses the term פשוטין to describe the majuscules in Deut. 6:4.
- Rule 5 states that the *lamed* of the word *vayashlichem* in Deut. 29:27 must be written ארוך.
- Rule 6 states that the *hey* in the word *haladonai* in Deut. 32:6 must be written פשוט.
- Rule 7 states that the *yod* in *yigdal* from Num. 14:17 must be written גדול,

while the whole word *Yisrael* at the end of the Torah in Deut 34:12 must be written פשוט and the *lamed* in this word must be written זקוף.

<sup>202</sup> Yeivin, p. 135.

<sup>203</sup> Jastrow, p. 407.

<sup>204</sup> Tractate *Soferim*, Soncino edition, Chapter 9. In this tractage, as well as in other source there is an inconsistency in the Hebrew and Aramaic adjectives to describe the letters- sometimes they are feminine and sometimes masculine, sometimes singular and sometimes plural. I will always represent the language

A close examination of the literal definitions of these words to describe majuscles may explain the subtle differences in their application in this tractate. The term פשוט literally means “stretched or straightened.”<sup>205</sup> In the rules stated above, this term is used to describe several different letters, including whole words. We might assume that this term implies that the shape of these letters was stretched above their normal height. However, it is not clear if these letters were also wider, ie. extended horizontally.

The second term used, זקוף, meaning “erect or raised” is similar to the example of the *vav* from *Megillah* 16b. This term indicates that the shape of the letter is extended vertically beyond its normal height. In the rules of *Soferim*, this term is specifically applied to a *vav* and a *lamed*. In both of these cases the term זקוף could be referring to the whole letter or could be referring to a part of the letter. In the case of the *lamed*, some of the older manuscripts show the top part lying flat, almost parallel to the line of writing. Perhaps a *lamed* זקוף has the top part of the letter raised up instead of lying flat. Similarly, a *vav* זקוף might mean that the top part of the letter, which is normally bent slightly forward, is written straight.

The term ארוך is only used once in these rules and it is in reference to the letter *lamed*. ארוך generally means “long, tall”, but it can also mean “well-balanced, well-

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from the source, even though technically speaking the word for letter and the names of the Hebrew letters themselves are feminine.

<sup>205</sup> Jastrow, p. 1245, 1246.

arranged.”<sup>206</sup> We can only speculate on what the difference is between a *lamed* זקוף and a *lamed* ארוך. Possibly, the outstanding feature of a *lamed* ארוך is that the upper portion was longer than normal, but still relatively horizontal, while the outstanding feature of the *lamed* זקוף is that the upper portion stood straight up. Or perhaps in both cases, the upper portion stood straight up. However, in the case of the *lamed* ארוך the length of the upper portion was longer than the *lamed* זקוף. It is also possible that these two terms are synonymous. Clearly this is a matter of speculation since we have no corresponding manuscripts to verify how these rules were applied at the time.

The last term used in these rules, גדול means “great, distinguished.”<sup>207</sup> This term is used only once and is applied to the letter *yod*. Possibly this term was selected because of the relative size and shape of the letter *yod*. Based on the others terms used in the previous rules, perhaps גדול was the logical choice because to make the *yod* longer (ארוך) or straighter (זקוף), might turn this letter into a *vav*. Furthermore, since *yod* is already a suspended letter, extending (פשוט) it above the height of the other letters perhaps did not make sense. The term גדול becomes the most popular term used to describe the majuscules in later sources. For example, *The Alphabet of Rabbi Akivah*, *Diqduqe Ha'Teamim*, *Okhlah we-Okhlah* and the *Second Rabbinic Bible* use גדול to describe their respective lists of majuscules.

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<sup>206</sup> Jastrow, p. 116.

<sup>207</sup> Jastrow, p. 211.

In tractate *Soferim* there is one reference to a minuscule. Rule 7 refers to the minuscule *yod* in *teshi* (Deut. 32:18) as קטן which means “small, young, inferior.”<sup>208</sup> The use of the term קטן to describe minuscules is also found in *The Alphabet of Rabbi Akivah*, *Diqduqe Ha'Teamim*, *Okhlah we-Okhlah* and the *Second Rabbinic Bible*. However, in the case of the three minuscule final *nunim*, *Okhlah we-Okhlah* does not include them in the general minuscule list. Rather, they are in a separate list of just those three sites under the heading נ"ן כתבין זעירין וסימניהון, meaning *Nunim* Written (זעירין) Small and Their Signs.<sup>209</sup>

A final example of how these terms are used comes from the *Massoreth ha-Massoreth* by Elias Levita who writes:

והנה ידוע כי נמצא א"ב מן אותיות גדולות וא"ב מן אותיות קטנות, ובמסורה קראו לכל אחת מהגדולות רבתא, והקטנות זעירא.

“Now it is well known that there is an alphabetical list of words with large letters and that there is an alphabetical list of words with small letter. In the Masorah, every one of the large letters is called *rabbe'tah* and of the small letters *zeira*.”<sup>210</sup> From this statement it appears that for Levita, *gadol* and *rabbe'tah* are synonymous and *katan* and *zeira* are synonymous.

There are several possible theories to account for the variety of terminology to describe the majuscules and minuscules. One idea is that the difference is based on the culture or geography of the person describing these phenomena. Different regions may

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<sup>208</sup> Jastrow, p. 1350.

<sup>209</sup> Frensdorff, p. 117.

<sup>210</sup> Levita, p. 230-231.

have had dialectical preferences for one term over another. Another possibility is that there were at one time finer distinctions between types of majuscules and types of minuscules. In time, these categories under the general umbrella of majuscule or minuscule became lumped together and the finer distinctions were lost. Another possibility is that the terminology reflects the development of language. For example, the same phenomena may have been called one name in one period and another name later on. Another possibility that is suggested by Levita is that the type of letter dictated the choice of terminology. Thus he says that: "As a rule, the Masorites do not apply the term cut-short (קטיעה) to any letter but *vav*, and hence, also, they call it in one place long (אריך)."<sup>211</sup> A final possibility is that the selection of terms was a stylistic choice of the writer describing the phenomena, similar to the choice that a writer in English might make when choosing between the terms big, large and majuscule or little, small and minuscule. This material is presented to familiarize the reader with the breadth of Hebrew terminology to describe these phenomena and to suggest some possible explanations for their different usage.

## **Section II**

### **Location**

As we examine these phenomena, another perspective to consider is where they occur in the text. Patterns of occurrence may shed some light on these features *raison d'être*. There are three criteria that will be analyzed in this section:

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<sup>211</sup> Levita, p. 232.



- 1) Letters - The first part analyzes which letters are effected. Do some letters appear more frequently as majuscles or as minuscules or are all letters equally represented?
- 2) Position in a word – The second part analyzes whether or not majuscles or minuscules are most commonly found at a specific position in a word, for example as the first or last letter of a word. Or perhaps, there is no correlation with the position of a letter in a word and the features we are studying.
- 3) Books of the Bible - The fourth part analyzes the frequency of majuscles and minuscules by books of the Bible. Do they tend to appear in some books more than others? Are there any books that completely lack these features?

These three categories of analysis can be objectively measured and aid in understanding where these phenomena occur. There are other ways to analyze these features according to their position. For example, where do they appear relative to other literary units of the text such as at the beginning, mid-point or end of a chapter or a verse. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the analysis will be limited to these three criteria.

The total number of majuscles considered is sixty-two and the total number of minuscules considered is also sixty-two. These totals represents a cumulative list of all the majuscles and minuscules listed in the Babylonian Talmud from tractate *Kiddushin*, *Megillah*, the minor tractate of *Soferim*, *The Alphabet of R. Akivah*, the Leningrad B19a manuscript, the *BHS*, *Okhlah we-Okhlah*, *Diqduqe Ha-Te'amim*, the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Rabbinic Bible*, *Massoreth ha-Massoreth* and Ginsburg's *Massorah*.

#### Letters Affected

There are twenty-seven letters in the Hebrew Bible including the five final letters. It is remarkable that both the majuscles and minuscules are fairly evenly spread across all the letters. In our combined list every letter is represented at least once as a majuscle and once as a minuscule. (The one exception is that I have not found a minuscule final *caf*.) A few letters are represented two-four times. No letter is represented more than five times, even on the most comprehensively combined list. (The one exception is that I have found six examples of minuscule nuns. However, one of these cites is described as a majuscle on other lists.) On most individual lists, each letter is represented approximately one time, as both a majuscle and a minuscule.

It is worth mentioning that if these phenomena, either the majuscles or the minuscules, were the result of some type of dittography or homeolecution it is unlikely that they would appear so evenly distributed across the whole alphabet. Presumably, the shape of some letters would lend themselves more readily to mistakes than others. One might assume that these easily mistaken letters would therefore, appear more often as majuscles or minuscules. However, that is simply not what the evidence suggests.

Nonetheless, we do find examples where there appears to be either some variant traditions or confusion about the designation of specific letters. Occasionally, a letter will appear as majuscle on one list and a minuscule on another. I have found two such examples. The *nun* in לִינִי (Ruth 3:13) is shown as a majuscle on both *Okhlah we-Okhlah* and *Massoreth ha-Massoreth*. Yet, in Ginsburg's *Massorah* this *nun* is designated as a minuscule.<sup>212</sup> A similar example is the *tav* in תָּקַר (Esther 9:29).

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<sup>212</sup> See Appendix II, pg. 3 and Appendix IV, p. 3.

*Diqduqe Ha Te'amim* shows this letter as a majuscule, while Ginsburg's *Massorah* shows it as a minuscule.<sup>213</sup>

Another type of variation is that for some words, various lists record the same word, but show different letters as majuscules or minuscules. For example, וְכִנֵּה in Psalm 80:16 has the *caf* as majuscule on six lists, however *Okhlah we-Okhlah* also lists the *nun* as majuscule in the same word.<sup>214</sup> In Exodus 28:36 the final *tzadé* in the word צִיץ is shown as a majuscule in three lists. However, in *The Alphabet of Rabbi Akivah*, the first *tzadé* is shown as a majuscule.<sup>215</sup>

This same type of phenomenon occurs with the minuscules as well. In Esther 9:7 the word פֶּרְשֵׁנִדְתָּא is shown with a minuscule *resh* on one list, minuscule *tav* on two lists and minuscule *shin* on another list.<sup>216</sup> To make matters even more puzzling, a very similar word found in close proximity also has multiple listings. In Esther 9:9, the word פֶּרְמִשְׁתָּא appears on three lists with a minuscule *shin*, on one list with a minuscule *tav*, on one list with the *shin* and *tav* as minuscule and on another list with the *shin* and *resh* as minuscule.<sup>217</sup> A final example of this type of situation involves both majuscules and minuscules as well as various letters of the word וִיזַתָּא in Esther 9:9. Six lists show the *vav* as majuscule and six lists show the *zion* as minuscule. (These are not all the same six lists.) However, one list shows the *zion* as majuscule.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> See Appendix II, p. 4 and Appendix IV, p. 3.

<sup>214</sup> See Appendix II, p. 3.

<sup>215</sup> See Appendix II, p. 1.

<sup>216</sup> See Appendix IV, p. 3.

<sup>217</sup> See Appendix IV, p. 3.

<sup>218</sup> See Appendix IV, p. 3 and Appendix II, p. 4.

A third situation that is curious is when two very similar sites are listed. For example, some lists have a majuscule *kof* in ק from Deut. 22:6, and other lists have a majuscule *kof* in ק from Psalm 84:4.<sup>219</sup> Some lists show a majuscule gimel in לגלגלתם found in Num. 1:2; other lists show a majuscule *lamed* in לגלגלתם from Num. 1:22.<sup>220</sup> Different lists show the letter *teth* in the word טוב as majuscule for either Exodus 2:2 or Ecclesiastes 7:1.<sup>221</sup> Depending on the list consulted, the word אלפים in either Proverbs 14:4 or Daniel 7:10 has a majuscule final *mem*.<sup>222</sup>

The same circumstance is found among the minuscules. For example, some lists show the *he* in וכבשה as minuscule in Lev. 14:10; some lists show the same word with a minuscule *he* in Num 6:14.<sup>223</sup> Likewise, ונפשו is shown with a minuscule *vav* on incongruous lists, either for I Kings 2:23 or for Psalm 22:30.<sup>224</sup>

These three types of disparities raise the question whether the variations of a majuscule or minuscule site are the preservation of different traditions, the result of human error or a mere coincidence. It may not be possible to say at this point. But, clearly the result of these types of discrepancies is an increase in the number of majuscules and minuscules when multiple or combined lists are consulted. Nonetheless, all these types of variations are extremely rare considering the number of majuscules and minuscules specifically and the total number of letters in the Bible.

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<sup>219</sup> See Appendix I, p. 3.

<sup>220</sup> See Appendix I, p. 1 & 2.

<sup>221</sup> See Appendix I, p. 2.

<sup>222</sup> See Appendix I, p. 2.

<sup>223</sup> See Appendix III, p. 1.

<sup>224</sup> See Appendix III, p. 1.

### Position in a word

In trying to detect a pattern in regards to where the majuscules and minuscules occur relative to their position in a particular word, we find the following results:<sup>225</sup>

Table 2

<b>Majuscules and Minuscules Relative to their Position in a Word</b>			
	<b>As the first letter in the word</b>	<b>As a middle letter in the word</b>	<b>As the last letter in the word</b>
<b>Majuscules</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Minuscules</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>25%</b>

Based on these findings, we can conclude that the majority of majuscules appear in the first letter position, and a slight majority of minuscules appear in the middle position. Both the majuscules and minuscules appear fairly evenly distributed across the remaining positions. For both majuscules and minuscules, the last letter appears to be the least likely to be affected. The large percentage of majuscules in the first letter position may have some bearing on one of the possible functions of the majuscules which will be explored in the next section. On the whole, however, the position of the letter does not suggest a particularly strong correlation to majuscules or minuscules.

### Books of the Bible

Majuscules and minuscules are not evenly distributed across all the books of the Hebrew Bible. Some books have more majuscules and minuscules than others. Some books have none at all. Based on the combined lists of majuscules and minuscules, we find the following pattern of distribution:

Table 3

<b>Distribution of Majuscles by Torah, Prophets and Writings</b>	
<b>Torah</b> <b>54%</b>	Genesis 10% Exodus 11% Leviticus 3% Numbers 10% Deuteronomy 20%
<b>Prophets</b> <b>6%</b>	All from Isaiah, with one exception
<b>Writings</b> <b>40%</b>	From: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel and I Chronicles
<b>Books with no majuscles at all:</b> Joshua, Judges, I & II Samuel, I & II Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Lamentations, Ezra, Nehemiah, II Chronicles.	

Table 4

<b>Distribution of Minuscles by Torah, Prophets and Writings</b>	
<b>Torah</b> <b>22%</b>	Genesis 8% Exodus 3% Leviticus 5% Numbers 3% Deuteronomy 3%
<b>Prophets</b> <b>19%</b>	From: I & II Samuel, I Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, and Nahum.
<b>Writings</b> <b>59%</b>	From: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther and Nehemiah.
<b>Books with no minuscles at all:</b> Joshua, Judges, II Kings, Hosea, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Song of Songs, Daniel, Ezra, I & II Chronicles.	

<sup>225</sup> See Appendix I-IV.

Part of the reason that these features are so unevenly distributed across the books of the Bible may be based on the relative size of the various books. Presumably, due to length alone, a longer book would have more of these features and a shorter book less. This assumption works for some of the shorter books such as the Minor Prophets that are devoid of these features. However, this assumption does not explain why a relatively short book, like Esther, has four majuscles and eight minuscules.<sup>226</sup> Nor does this theory explain the paucity of these features in the books of Leviticus and Numbers.

Another factor that might impact the distribution of these features by book relates to the frequency of use of certain sections of the Bible. For example, the weekly Torah portions, the sections read for *Haftarot* and the texts read on special holidays might have more of these features. Clearly, the majority of the majuscles appear in the Torah. However, additional research is needed to test the correlation between these features and the frequency of use of the different sections of the Bible.

A third possible factor is that the relative dating of the biblical book may effect the number of majuscles or minuscules in the book. This is a difficult hypothesis to test since dating the biblical contents is fraught with difficulties. At this point, all we can say is that unlike the relatively even distribution across the alphabet and across the various positions in a word, the majuscles and minuscules do not seem to be evenly distributed through out the books of the Bible. I have raised several possible factors that could be affecting this distribution. However, at this point in time I do not have a conclusive theory to explain the distribution of these data.

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<sup>226</sup> See Appendix IV, p. 3 and Appendix II, p. 4.

### Section III

#### Function

In this section we will examine the possible functions of the majuscles and minuscules in the text. I will make explicit my two operating assumptions underlying this investigation. The first assumption is that the occurrence of majuscles and minuscules is not completely random. It would be in keeping with neither the traditional understanding of the role of the Masoretes and the later scribes, nor with the scholarly research on this subject to assume that letters were written either larger or smaller as a matter of chance. The sacred text was simply not treated in such a cavalier manner. Furthermore, though sixty-two majuscles and sixty-two minuscules may appear to be a great number, considering the total of 815,280 of letters in the Bible, these features affect just a tiny selection of the total number of letters.<sup>227</sup>

A second assumption that underlies this study of the function of these features is that they are not the result of scribal errors. Although this assumption has been discussed earlier in the thesis, I will summarize its main points here. The issue is whether a scribe who had omitted a letter would simply write a small one in between the space of two letters. Conversely, if he had written a wrong letter, would he simply try to overwrite the letter thus making it larger than the others. The two main arguments against this idea are:

1) There are other mechanisms within the scribal practice of writing the text to deal with scribes "fixing" the text. These practices include: *Tiqqune Soferim* (The Emendations of the Scribes,) *Itture Soferim* (The Omissions of the Scribes,) *Qere we-la*

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<sup>227</sup> Ginsburg, *The Masorah*, p. 5. This reference includes a list of the total number of letters in the Bible, as 815,280.



*Ketiv* (Words Read but not Written,) *Ketiv we-la Qere* (Words Written but not Read,) and the *Qere/Ketiv* notation system.

2) If these features were based on human errors, it appears that there would be a pattern or at least a trend to these errors. For example, certain letters would be easy for a human scribe to repeatedly omit. Perhaps, letters appearing in the middle of a word would be easier to mistake. For example, the potential for human scribal error is acknowledged in the *Qere/Ketiv* system which accounts for transposed letters, overlooked *vav* conjunctives at the beginning of a word and the reverse, forgotten *hes* at the end of words and the reverse.<sup>228</sup> But what we find in the case of the majuscles and minuscules are that all the letters of the alphabet are equally likely to be majuscles or minuscules. Similarly, these features are distributed throughout different positions in individual words. There are other factors that might be analyzed to try to determine a pattern of human error. For example, looking at the letters of the words surrounding the word with a majuscule or minuscule to see if there are possible trends of miswriting letters based on surrounding letters. However, a cursory glance at the words that have majuscles or minuscules in them, in the context of the text, does not suggest any particular pattern.

Playing the devil's advocate for one moment let us consider if it is possible that the majuscles and minuscules are the result of human error or chance occurrence. Given the antiquity of these features, the complexity of the Masorah, the ambiguity of the number and location of the majuscles and minuscules based on the multiple lists and the infinite number of people involved in the process of transmitting the written Bible, one can not say conclusively that these features are the result of any single factor - even the

factor of human error. In addition, if one hypothesized that these features were random occurrences, it would still not answer the question why did they randomly occur.

Furthermore, by categorically stating that these features are the result of human error, we close this window on the text. We shut out the possibility that there could be additional meaning gleaned from the study of an aspect of the text which has been preserved for over one thousand years. Therefore, I would like to continue on the search for a purpose to these features and not dismiss them too lightly. For even if a single ultimate purpose cannot be proven, surely the process of searching and the insights found along the way enrich our understanding of the Bible.

With these two operating assumptions, therefore, this investigation will proceed with the notion that there was a purpose to creating these features. One ingenious theory propounded by Mr. W. H. Black, FSA in a paper read before the Chronological Institute of London (October 4, 1864), was that the sum total of the majuscular letters is designed to give the date of the composition of the Pentateuch.<sup>229</sup> There is an inherent attractiveness to this kind of unified, single theory, such as the majuscule letters are some kind of biblical code. However, most modern scholars who have looked at this subject before have been frustrated in their attempts to create a single explanation for either the majuscles or the minuscules. Rather, they have proposed a number of possible explanations, none that satisfy all the examples of these features. We will begin by reviewing their scholarly research.

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<sup>228</sup> Levita, p. 116-118.

<sup>229</sup> Ginsburg's translation of the *Massoreth Ha-Massoreth of Elias Levita*, p. 230-231, footnote 138.

Yeivin notes three possible reasons for the majuscules in his *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah*:

- 1) A large letter stands at the beginning of a book (Genesis, Proverbs, Chronicles) or at the beginning of a new section (as Qoh 12:13 **דבר** **סוף**.)
- 2) It draws attention to some significant point, as **גחון** (Lev 11:42) **והתגלח** (Lev 13:33) which mark the half-way point in the Torah in letters and in words, or **הליהוה** (Dt 32:6) where the *he* is written as a separate word.
- 3) It is a warning that reading must be precise, as in (Dt 6:4):

שמע <sup>230</sup> ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד

I would make the following additions in support of Yeivin's three categories based on the examples that I found:

- Reason One: The beginning of Song of Songs has a majuscule *shin* in **שיר**.<sup>231</sup>
- Reason Two: I would divide this category into two sections: Sub-set A - majuscules as markers for statistical points. I would add that perhaps some of the other majuscules also mark key statistical points that we are no longer aware of since we are not as versed in the ancient scribal counting practices. Sub-set b - majuscules as word dividers, to which I would add the majuscule *hey* in **הלעולמים** from Psalm 77:88.

<sup>230</sup> Yeivin, p. 47-48.

<sup>231</sup> The majuscule at the beginning of Song of Songs is a very common site. An example of this feature is described the HUC-JIR rabbinic thesis of Lori Macklis, "Entering the Orchard: Interacting with Shir HaShirim in Study and Worship." June 2000.

- Reason Three: I would add the majuscule *waw* in וִיחַתָּא since it is traditional to pronounce all the sons in one breath. I would also add the majuscule *resh* אַחֲרֵי in Exodus 34:14.

Yeivin is the most exhaustive of the modern scholars in searching for reasons for these features. Yet even he states that : “In most cases, however, there is no obvious reason for the large letters as in וְבַהֲעֵיטֶיךָ (Gen 30:42), וַיִּשְׁלַחְם (Dt 29:27), מִשְׁפָּטָן (Nu 27:5), וַיַּחֲדֵם (Nu 13:30).”<sup>232</sup> He does not propose any theory to explain the minuscules at all.

Dotan comments that: “The custom of writing some letters differently – smaller or larger than usual never became legally fixed. Thus there are several discrepancies between the various manuscript texts of the Bible. Even the lists of the Masorah are not uniform. The number of large letters is greater than the number of small letters....”<sup>233</sup> He does not propose any reason for these features however. Furthermore, I disagree with the idea that there are a greater number of majuscules than minuscules based on my findings.

Revell writes that the majuscules and minuscules, along with other features of the consonantal text such as suspended letters or inverted *nunim* are of “unknown origin and purpose.”<sup>234</sup> He does, however, note that they are the subject of a firm tradition, and appear in all carefully written scrolls, codices and many printed editions

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<sup>232</sup> Yeivin, p. 48.

<sup>233</sup> Dotan, p. 1408-1409.

<sup>234</sup> Revell, p. 598.

For Ginsburg, I have not found an explanation for either the majuscules or the minuscules in any of his material that I studied. However, in his work *The Masorah*, he connects the majuscules in some fashion to the numbering of the letters of the Hebrew text. He writes:

The numbering of the letters is of course an attempt to guard the Sacred Scriptures against losing a single *yod* or tittle. But though this zeal is more to be admired than imitated, and though the attempt has failed in its object, yet it explains some of the phenomena of the text. Thus, for instance, the fact the *Vav* in גחון (Levit. xi.42), is the middle letter in the entire Pentateuch, shows why it is written larger than the rest of the letters, and why it is found in the list of the Majuscular Letters. The same reason explains the phenomenon in מיער (Ps. lxxx.14), which has a suspended letter, because the *Ayin* is the middle letter in the Psalter. Indeed, it ought properly to be a majuscular letter, and should not be among the list of suspended letters.<sup>235</sup>

From this quote, we can speculate that Ginsburg thought the majuscules served some kind of counting function for the letters in the Bible.

Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford offer basically the same explanations for the majuscules that Yeivin proposed. However, they suggest two possible explanations for the minuscules:

- 1) the letters hint at an alternative textual tradition, or
- 2) the letters were intended as corrections but their meaning was forgotten.<sup>236</sup>

I think there is some merit to these minuscule theories, though like the majuscule theories, they do not explain all the cases. In some cases if the minuscule letter were dropped or changed to another letter, the meaning of the word or sentence would still make sense. Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford use the example of בַּהֲבֵרָאִם in Gen 2:4 to

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<sup>235</sup> Ginsburg, *The Massorah*, p. 6-7.

<sup>236</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 36.

demonstrate how the small *he* in this word changes the infinitive from a Nif'al to a Qal.<sup>237</sup> While considering the idea of minuscules as alternative textual traditions, I began to study the three cases of minuscule *nunim*. I discovered that they too might be markers that preserve variant traditions. In each of these three cases, the small *nun* could be changed to a *zion* and the meaning of the word and the sentence would still make sense. The following three cases demonstrate this theory:

Case I: Isaiah 44:14

“נטע אֶרֶן” meaning “He plants a ‘pine’ אֶרֶן or a ‘cedar’ אֶרֶז.”<sup>238</sup> It is easy to see how there could be two acceptable readings of this word. אֶרֶן appears in only one other location in the Bible, 1 Chr 2:25.<sup>239</sup> אֶרֶז, and various forms of this noun, appear in over seventy places in the Bible.<sup>240</sup> The Mp in the BHS notes that this is one of the three minuscule *nuns*. The Mm notes that two of the other manuscripts offer אֶרֶז in the *Ketiv* for this site.<sup>241</sup>

Case II: Proverbs 16:28

“איש תהפכות ישלח מדון ונרגן מפריד אלוף” meaning “A perverse man spreads strife, and “one who murmurs” ונרגן or “one who is angry” ונרגז separates close friends.” Both words could be used. נרגן comes from the root רגן meaning to “grumble,

<sup>237</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 36.

<sup>238</sup> Jastrow, p. 117, 123.

<sup>239</sup> Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), p.75.

<sup>240</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, p. 72.

<sup>241</sup> BHS, p. 744.

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complain or murmur.”<sup>242</sup> While נרגז comes from the root נרגז meaning agitated, anguished or enraged.<sup>243</sup> In the BHS, the Mp notes that this is small *nunim*. The Mm notes that in some fragments from the Cairo Geniza this word is נרגז, and there is no *qere*.<sup>244</sup> In this form, נרגז appears throughout the Bible in Prov 18:8, Prov 26:22, and Prov 26:20, however נרגז never

### Case III: Jeremiah 39:13

The name נבזשזר appears only once in the Bible and it is in contrast to other Babylonian names: “So Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards, and the Rab-saris, and Nergal-sarezer the Rab-mag .....” It is possible that traditions concerning this individual’s name: one with a final *nun* and the last letter. The minuscule *nun* preserves both versions.<sup>246</sup>

### Conclusion

After reviewing the existing theories of the function of these there is not one answer that is definitively the “right” one. Perhaps, originated to serve one purpose and over time they developed other possibly, one set of authorities used them in one way, and others used So much material has been lost to us that it is difficult to recreate how may have used the majuscules to count or mark key statistical points

<sup>242</sup> Reuven Alcalay, *The Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary* (Tel Aviv: Miskn, p. 2404.

<sup>243</sup> Alcalay, p. 2399.

<sup>244</sup> BHS, p. 1297.

<sup>245</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, p. 919, 920.

<sup>246</sup> Nun is the correct spelling of this common Babylonian name as evidenced according to Dr. David Weisberg. However, perhaps at some point in the tradition became less well known allowing for the variation with the *z*ion.

contents of the Bible exist first and when it came time to write the text, these legends where noted by means of the majuscles and minuscules? In the following section, these and other issues involving the topic of midrashim about the majuscles and minuscules will be explored.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### MAJUSCULES AND MINUSCULES IN MIDRASH

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter we looked at the phenomena of majuscles and minuscules - terms to describe them, where they occur and possible reasons why they appear in the text. At the end of the last chapter, the idea that these features might have a connection with midrash was introduced. In this chapter we will take a closer look at the relationship between majuscles, minuscules and midrash. Three areas will be explored in this chapter focusing on this pertinence:

- Section I: This section provides a brief background on the subject of midrash. What is midrash? How are midrashim arranged and classified?
- Section II: This section examines some specific interpretive techniques as applied to midrashim involving majuscles and minuscules.
- Section III: This final section illustrates samples of midrashim that expound on majuscles and minuscules in the Bible. This collection is gathered from various midrashic sources and arranged in alphabetical order.

## Section I

### The Enterprise of Midrash

Before we can determine a connection between the features of this study and midrash, it is necessary to take a look at the subject of midrash. From the outset, we must be aware that the term midrash, like the term Masorah, has many meanings. The term midrash comes from the root שׂרש meaning to “search or inquire.” When applied to the study of the Bible, שׂרש means to question or examine the text. This search for meaning in the Bible is known as expounding or interpreting the text. This process of expounding the text began as an oral tradition, but later was committed to writing.<sup>247</sup> As early as the third century C.E. the recording of these interpretations became known as midrash, מדרש, a distinct type of literature.<sup>248</sup>

Jacob Neusner explains that the term midrash can refer to several types of literary products that results from this interpretative process:

1) Midrash can mean the concrete unit, such as a paragraph, that is the write-up of the process of interpretation (exegeses) as it applies to a single verse or group of verses.

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<sup>247</sup> Barry W. Holtz, ed. *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*, (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1984), p. 178. See also Strack and Stemberger, p. 258 for a discussion on the prehistory of midrash before the rabbinic period as well as midrash in the Bible itself.

<sup>248</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Scripture and Midrash in Judaism*, Vol 1, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994), p. 7. In this introduction to midrash, Neusner defines three distinct periods of midrashic development in Rabbinic Judaism: 1) from the third and fourth centuries exegeses of biblical passages in sequence; 2) during the fifth and sixth centuries, compositions which not only give exegeses, but also set forth various concrete doctrines and 3) late antiquity systematic efforts made to set forth a single coherent theological position through exegesis of a sequential order. Beyond these efforts of Rabbinic Judaism, midrashic activity has continued into the present as a way to understand the Bible.

2) Midrash can also be a particular compilation of the results of that interpretive process, thus, the composite of a set of exegeses. In this sense, midrash is a sizable and sustained set of exegeses covering a broader selection of Scripture.<sup>249</sup>

Scholars have categorized the types of midrashim even further in order to understand this genre of literature. We will examine two of these systems of categorization since they are relevant for an analysis of the midrashim on the majuscles and minuscles. As with any system of classification that is applied to a subject as multifaceted as midrash, the examples do not always fit neatly into only one category.

However, these categories are useful for beginning to understand the nature of this genre.

#### Homiletical, Exegetical and Narrative Midrashim

Barry Holtz identifies three types of midrashim based on how they functioned in their original context. Thus, homiletical midrashim are based on the homilies preached by the ancient sages. Though we have no actual transcripts of ancient sermons in their entirety, fragments of these sermons reworked have become collections of homiletical midrashim such as *Leviticus Rabbah* and *Pesikta De Rav Kahana*.<sup>250</sup> Within the homiletical midrashim, occasionally the majuscles or minuscles are used as a point of departure for a homiletical interpretation. For example, the minuscule *yod* in the word *תשי* from Deuteronomy 32:18 is expounded on in *Leviticus Rabbah*.<sup>251</sup>

Another type of midrash Holtz identifies is the category of exegetical midrashim which are “a set of short, pithy comments on individual verses of the Bible, many of which may have been collected from a variety of sermons or public teachings of the

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<sup>249</sup> Neusner, p. 10-11.

<sup>250</sup> Holtz, p. 186.

various sages."<sup>252</sup> These interpretations of individual verses are often collected into one edited work such as *Genesis Rabbah*. However, these collected works with their line-by-line interpretations may mislead the reader into thinking that the midrashim presented are treating the whole text. James Kugel warns that midrash is primarily a "verse centered literature" and edited in this well organized way, the reader might lose sight of this fact.<sup>253</sup>

Collections of exegetical midrashim are the most common source for midrashim about the majuscules and minuscules. Midrashim about majuscules and minuscules can be found in collections that are general works, such as *Genesis Rabbah*, or in collections that focus specifically on the majuscules and minuscules such as *The Alphabet of Rabbi Akivah*.

The final type of midrash that Holtz designates is the narrative midrash, for example *Pirkei De Rebbe Eliezer*. Holtz writes:

In these books we see little connection in a direct or organized fashion to the task of explicating the Bible, but instead there is occasion for stories and legends, either about individual rabbis or about biblical characters. Some of these works are known as 'rewritten Bible,' since they replicate and expand upon the biblical narrative. Because of the noninterpretive style of the texts, some scholars would prefer not to call these works midrash at all.<sup>254</sup>

I did not find any midrashim about majuscules and minuscules among the narrative midrashim. However, some may be discovered with further investigation of these sources.

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<sup>251</sup> Translation of *Leviticus Rabbah* as found in *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus*, trans. Judah J. Slotki (London, NY: The Soncino Press, 1983) p. 303.

<sup>252</sup> Holtz, p. 186-187.

<sup>253</sup> James Kugel, "Two Introductions to Midrash," *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History*, vol. 3, no. 2 (May 1983), p. 147.

<sup>254</sup> Holtz, p. 187-188.

### Halakhic vs Aggadic Midrashim

Another way to categorize the types of midrashim is to distinguish between *halakhic* and *aggadic* midrashim. Strack and Stemberger explain the differences between these two categories as follows:

Halakhic exegesis not only has to supply details which are missing in the Bible but which provide instructions for the application of a biblical rule; it must also resolve contradictions, reconcile the biblical text with current practice, and find biblical support for regulations not yet envisioned in Scripture. Haggadic exegesis is freer and more characterized by a playful element; yet in its own way it is strongly bound by tradition and at the same time open to contemporary influences (such as apologetic and polemical needs). The differences between halakhic and haggadic exegesis, at any rate, are due less to matters of principle than to different orientations.<sup>255</sup>

The midrashim concerning the majuscles and minuscules on the one hand may appear to be *halakhic* since they focus on a specific feature of the text which must be written in a prescribed manner. However, I would classify these midrashim as predominantly *aggadic* since their main concern is in telling a story, rather than in justifying or reconciling a rule. The distinction between these two categories is not precise, inasmuch as *halakhic* midrashim also contain *aggadic* material and vice versa, but the distinction does signify the dominant interest of a given midrash.<sup>256</sup> In this regard, the midrashim about the majuscles and minuscules are primarily *aggadic* and exegetical, though some do come from homiletical sources.

In understanding midrash as a specific kind of interpretation of Scripture, we distinguish it from other types of interpretive works. Gary G. Porton, a scholar in the field of midrash writes:

Midrash is a type of literature, oral or written, which has its starting point in a fixed, canonical text, considered the revealed word of God by the Midrashist

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<sup>255</sup> Strack and Stemberger, p. 259.

<sup>256</sup> Strack and Stemberger, p. 261.

and his audience, and in which this original verse is explicitly cited or clearly alluded to. --- For something to be considered Midrash it must have a clear relationship to the accepted canonical text of Revelation. Midrash is a term given to a Jewish activity, which finds its locus in the religious life of the Jewish community. While others exegete their revelatory canons and while Jews exegete other texts, only Jews who explicitly tie their comments to the Bible engage in Midrash.<sup>257</sup>

With regard to the midrashim about the majuscules and minuscules it is usually easy to see the direct connection to the biblical text. In making these connections to the text, the interpreter, known in Hebrew as the *darshan*, uses creative license to bring together different verses. Though the starting point may be the majuscule or minuscule letter, the reader is invited to make sense of the larger story through the *darshan's* interpretation. In reading these midrashim, the issue is how does the proof-text or transposed text work in this context.

For example, there is a midrash about the minuscule *kof* in Genesis 27:46 that illustrates this point.<sup>258</sup> In the biblical text, Rebecca wishes to send her son Jacob back to her homeland to find a wife. Both Rebecca and Abraham have expressed their disapproval of their sons marrying local women. Rebecca says in Genesis 27:46, "I am disgusted with my life because of the Hittite women." קצתי בחיי מפני בנות חת. Commentators have given various interpretations of this verse. Most agree that Rebecca wants to use the search for an appropriate wife as a pretext to send Jacob away. In truth, she knows that his brother Esau would like to kill him in revenge for stealing his birthright.

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<sup>257</sup> Gary G. Porton, "Midrash: The Palestinian Jews and the Hebrew Bible in the Greco-Roman Period" in Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (eds.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (Berlin & New York, 1979), II. 19.2, 104.

<sup>258</sup> Weirtheimer, *Alphabet*, p. 22b

The midrash says that the *kof* in כֶּפֶר is small to teach us that Rebecca had a prophetic vision and saw through the Holy Spirit that Titus would lay waste to Israel; he would destroy the Temple whose height was one hundred *amas* (כֶּ equals one hundred) and diminish the glory of Israel. To create this story, the *darshan* uses the gematria of *kof*, plus a traditional understanding that Esau is the prototype for Rome. The subtle point that this midrash makes is that the enemy of Israel (Jacob) is predictably Esau (read Rome, Edom, and a host of other prototypical enemies of Israel throughout the generations.) Rebecca saw that fact in the present and predicted its outcome for the future.

What prompted the rabbis to engage in this type of highly interpretative activity? Holtz identifies two factors that were the impetus for generating midrashim on the Biblical text: first, the laconic style of the Bible and second, the need for continuity. Regarding the Bible's sparse use of words, he writes:

Midrash comes to fill in the gaps, to tell us the details that the Bible teasingly leaves out: what did Isaac think as his father took him to be sacrificed? The Bible doesn't tell us, but Midrash fills it in with rich and varied descriptions. Why did Cain kill Abel? Once again the Bible is silent, but Midrash is filled with explanation. How tall was Adam as he walked in the Garden? Look to the midrashic materials, not to Bible for such details. Where the Bible is mysterious and silent, Midrash comes to unravel the mystery.<sup>259</sup>

Holtz writes that the second reason for the creation of midrash is because:

Over time any tradition is faced with the problem of discontinuity. The Bible is a very old document. It reflects its time of origin, the world of the early history of Israel. By the time of the rabbis much had changed. The social and political realities of the biblical world had given way to Greek culture, and the influence of Hellenism was crucial in the world of rabbinic Judaism. Midrash

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<sup>259</sup> Holtz, p. 180.

arose as an attempt to keep a sense of continuity between the ancient traditions of the Bible and the new world of Hellenistic Judaism.<sup>260</sup>

At the conclusion of this section on the background of midrash, it is important to bear in mind that the rabbis in creating midrash thought that they were only uncovering what was already there, not making it up. As Strack and Stemberger point out, "What may appear to be an arbitrary treatment of the biblical text arises in reality from the view that everything is contained in the Torah as Ben Bag Bag said in Avot 5:22, 'Turn and turn it, for everything is in it.'"<sup>261</sup> In the following section, we will examine how the rabbis used their interpretative skills to turn the text and to understand the majuscles and minuscules in the Bible.

## **Section II**

### **Techniques of Expounding on the Majuscles and Minuscules**

Isaac Heinemann, a midrash scholar of the early part of this century, spoke about two characteristics of midrash style: "creative historiography" and "creative philology."

Creative historiography is the imaginative filling in of the gaps, the search for reasons, the explication of meaning and motivation. This aspect of Midrash translates well for the modern reader.<sup>262</sup>

However, the vast majority of the midrashim on the majuscles and minuscules which I have read are not characteristically of the this style. Rather, these midrashim tend to fall into the category of creative philology:

For the English reader, creative philology is a good deal more difficult to catch. For here we see the rabbis using puns and wordplays, reversals of letters and convergence of sounds. This aspect of explication may be foreign to our sensibility and difficult to capture in translation. The important point, however, is

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<sup>260</sup> Holtz, p. 181.

<sup>261</sup> Strack and Stemberger, p. 260.

<sup>262</sup> Strack and Stemberger, p. 189.



to see this method as something not merely quaint or obscure. ...The unlocking of the Bible's secret mystery was their enterprise, the very holiness of the text is what allowed them to let their imaginations roam - even if it meant interpreting through puns and letter reversals. Moreover, it is essential that we factor out the method from the content. Although the rabbinic method of creative philology may be strange to us, we should learn to take quite seriously the particular point that is being made by the Midrash.<sup>263</sup>

Regardless of which style the *darshan* uses, the starting point of a midrash is usually a "problem" in the text or a "surface irregularity" to use Kugel's term.<sup>264</sup> Midrash comes as an answer to a question. In our case the obvious question is, "Why is this letter larger or smaller than the others?" However, even before we consider the specifics of the answer, we must question the question. Is the impetus of the midrash the letter size, or is there a larger problem in the text which the *darshan* wishes to explicate? There is another possibility that arises when considering midrash of any type. Perhaps the *darshan* was practicing isogesis, an insertion into the text of a particular message, rather than practicing exegesis, a drawing out of a particular message from the text. It appears that both techniques are operative regarding midrashim about majuscles and minuscules.

The midrashim that focus on the majuscles and minuscules rarely mention a "problem" in the text; they usually only note the presence of the large or small letter. For example, Genesis 23:2 states, "And Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her." The "problem" is the seemingly redundant use of "to mourn" and "to weep." However, the midrashim concerning the small *caf* in "to weep" do not address the

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<sup>263</sup> Strack and Stemberger, p. 189.

<sup>264</sup> Holtz, p. 190.

redundancy issue. Rather, the different midrashim on this minuscule *caf* focus on Abraham and Sarah's respective actions as individuals in the larger narrative.<sup>265</sup>

In other cases, there are midrashim on a particular word or verse where the obvious "irregularity" in the verse is only the size of the letter. Thus in Esther 9:29, "Then Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, and Mordechai the Jew, wrote with full authority" the irregularity in this verse is the size of the letter *tav* in the word "wrote." The midrash from *The Alphabet of Rabbi Akivah* says that "The first *tav* in *vatichtov* is large for she said, 'I am writing for the future generations.'"<sup>266</sup> From a midrashic point of view, what Esther was writing was so important that it needed to be preserved for future generations. A large letter marked the significance of her recording.

However, objectively speaking, we are left with a key question regarding this example: Which came first the large *tav* in the Masorah, or the midrash about the large *tav*? At this point, let us disregard the possible dates that both the midrash and the Masorah became committed to writing. Dates for midrash and Masorah are only approximate and scholars offer a wide range of possibilities. In addition, there were developments in both midrash and Masorah when they were still in the oral stages which would be difficult to trace at this point. We might jump to the conclusion that first the letter was written large, then the story came to explain why this was so. However, the reverse is also possible. Perhaps, before the written version of the story was codified in the Masoretic text, the midrash was part of the whole story. The large *tav* may serve as a marker either indicating a part of the original story that was not included in the codified

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<sup>265</sup> See midrashim on this minuscule *caf* at the end of this chapter.

<sup>266</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 24a.

version or serving as a note to the reader to remember the midrash associated with that particular word.

At this point, I have not found a method to conclusively prove which came first in this chicken and egg argument. One answer is that the Masoretic text was codified with certain majuscles and minuscules. Later, *darshanim* sought to explain their presence with midrashim or to use their presence as an opportunity to create midrashim for the purpose of reading into or revealing certain ideas from the text. However, this explanation is not sensitive to the fluid nature of the majuscles and minuscules in the biblical text, nor does it explain why these features got there in the first place. Over time more of these features appeared and in different manuscripts they appeared differently. Did the appearance of more of these features generate more midrashim, or were more of these features added after the Masoretic period in order to preserve midrashim that existed previously? As we read the anthology of midrashim on the majuscles and minuscules at the end of this chapter, we might bear these questions in mind.

Regardless, of which came first, the midrash or the majuscule and minuscule, we do find certain patterns of interpretation regarding midrashim about these features. Just as there are techniques that the *darshan* typically used to expound a particular verse or word, so too there are specific techniques that repeatedly emerge as the midrashic mind applies itself to interpreting a majuscule or minuscule letter. After studying a wide array of midrashim on these feature, I have identified the following five techniques which are frequently used.

## Gematria

Gematria is the practice of ascribing a predetermined numerical value to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Its origins as an exegetical tool can be traced to one of the thirty-two principles of exegesis used by the sages to interpret the Torah as set forth by R. Eliezer, the son of R. Yossi HaGalili.<sup>267</sup> There are several types of gematria, involving different mathematical configurations of the values of the letters. However, for the purpose of using gematria to expound on a majuscule or minuscule, the midrashim frequently use the simple numerical value of the letter and relate it to either a list of items with that same value or to another fact that involves that value.<sup>268</sup>

For example, the midrash about the small *daleth* in Proverbs 28:17

אדם אשק בדם נפש “A man that is burdened with the blood of any person” uses the numerical value of four which is the equivalent of *daleth* in gematria to interpret that “The one who spills blood, it is as if he actually killed four people meaning: 1) the murdered one, 2) his wife, 3) his son and 4) his future offspring through his daughter.”<sup>269</sup> In addition to the use of gematria to interpret the text, this example also demonstrates how midrashim concerning the majuscules and minuscules are sometimes created. The teaching that one who murders a person actually kills four people comes from the Talmud.<sup>270</sup> However in the Talmud passage, neither the small *daleth* nor the Proverbs 28:17 verse are mentioned. The *darshan* creatively applied this well known Talmudic

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<sup>267</sup> Strack and Stemberger, p. 32.

<sup>268</sup> For examples of midrashim that use gematria to interpret the biblical text see the following midrashim in the anthology at the end of this chapter: the small *vet* in Prov 30:15, large *gimel* in Lev 13:33, small *daleth* in Prov 28:17, large *daleth* in Deut 6:4, large *he* in Deut 32:6, large *chet* in Esther 1:6, small *chet* in Job 33:9, large *yod* in Num 14:17, small *mem* in Deut 9:24, large *ayin* in Deut 6:4, large *kof* in Ps 84:4 and small *kof* in Gen 27:46.

<sup>269</sup> Weirtheimer, “Alphabet,” p. 21a.

<sup>270</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Sahnhedrin* chapter 4, page 37a mentions the deceased, his wife and his offspring..

teaching to this particular minuscule. Many of the midrashim that I found that deal with majuscules and minuscules use this technique of borrowing a teaching from another authoritative source and relating it to a majuscule or minuscule in the text. Sometimes a midrash that appears in one location, is grafted on to a majuscule or minuscule, and the feature becomes a part of the story in another version of the midrash.

Though the use of gematria can become very elaborate, perhaps even mystical, it is always grounded in mainstream values of the tradition. This concept is explained by Rav Yaakov Emden, in his commentary on *Pirkei Avot* entitled *Lechem Shamayim*, where he sets forth the following basic principles for the use of gematria:

One cannot use gematria to introduce into the Torah innovations which are not confirmed by our forefathers, who had direct and trustworthy traditions. One may, however, use gematria to uphold the teachings of our Sages and the traditions of our forefathers, and whoever originates such gematrias more power to him, and his reward will be great. For his purpose, the scholar is allowed to search tirelessly for a gematria with which to support the words of truth.<sup>271</sup>

#### Word Divider (Notarikon)

Another interpretive technique that is used with these features is to designate the large or small letter as a break in the word, thus creating a reading from one word into two or more words. For example, Deuteronomy 29:27 states "The Lord uprooted them from their soil in anger, fury and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as is still the case." The phrase "and cast them" is written with a majuscule *lamed* in the middle position, "וישלכם." By making the *lamed* larger than the other letters the *lamed* is treated as the beginning of a word consisting of it and the following two letters. *Lakem* which means 'to you,' implies homiletically God's promise, 'I will be a God **to you** even

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<sup>271</sup> Matityahu Glazerson, *Repentance in Words and Letters*, (Jerusalem: Yerid HaSefarim, 1992), p. 24.

after you have been **cast into another land**.<sup>272</sup> Though this technique is less commonly used than gematria, it does appear in a number of midrashim.<sup>273</sup>

### Shape of the Letter

Perhaps one of the more ingenious methods of interpreting the text is when the shape of the majuscule or minuscule letter itself serves as an exegetical point of departure. Thus we "see" midrashically that the long *vav* in Esther 9:9 evokes an image of a pole that is long enough on which to impale all ten sons of Haman.<sup>274</sup> The enclosed shape of the large *samech* in Numbers 13:30 inspires an image of the fortified cities of the Caaninites which the Israelites captured with Divine assistance.<sup>275</sup> The large *beth* in *bereishit* is open on one side allowing us to inquire only about matters that are ahead of us, not those that have come before us, or are above or below us.<sup>276</sup> This technique is used with both majuscules and minuscules letters, and like the use of gematria, this method of interpretation always discovers in the shape of the letter support for an existing theological or moral precept.

### Largeness of the Letter

There is a theme that runs throughout, most, but not all of the midrashim that expound on the majuscules. Namely, in midrashim about majuscules, large letters often signify great, victorious, first, premier or important.<sup>277</sup> Frequently the large size of

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<sup>272</sup> Minor Tractates: *Soferim* (London, The Soncino Press, 1984), p. 38b(2) This midrash appears in footnote 20 on page 38b(2) however the original source is not cited.

<sup>273</sup> For examples of midrashim that use these features as word dividers see the anthology at the end of this chapter: the small *aleph* in Lev 1:1, large *he* in Deut 32:6, small *he* in Gen 2:4, and large *lamed* in Deut 29:27.

<sup>274</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 16b.

<sup>275</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II, p. 778.

<sup>276</sup> *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, translated by R. H. Freedman (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), Vol. I, p.9.

<sup>277</sup> For examples of the majuscule letter signifying a degree of primacy, greatness or Divine intervention see the anthology at the end of this chapter: the *aleph* in I Chr 1:1, the *beth* in Gen 1:1, *teth* in Job 9:34 and

the letter is expounded upon in light of the greatness of God and the Divine relationship with Israel. This theme is illustrated in the midrash about the large *tav* in Esther 9:29. Her official recording was represented both a victory and an important message for future generations. Some other examples include the majuscule *yod* in *yigdal*, "Therefore I pray let my Lord's forbearance be great." The *yod* is large for "God's great forbearance is upon all the creatures of the world."<sup>278</sup> The *teth* in *shivto* from Job 9:34 "Let Him not take his rod away from me" is large because "there has never been any affliction as great as the one suffered by Job."<sup>279</sup>

### Smallness of the Letter

Similarly, there is a strong exegetical theme associated with the minuscules. In many cases a minuscule letter is used to interpret a reduction or a smallness of some nature.<sup>280</sup> We saw this theme illustrated already with the small *kof* in Genesis 27:46 which was a prediction of the Roman destruction of the Temple and the small *daleth* in Proverbs 28:17 which represented the killing of four people. In other examples of midrashim, the small *caf* in *velivkotah* in Genesis 23:2 represents Abraham's curtailed weeping for Sarah.<sup>281</sup> The small *aleph* in the word *vayikra* in Leviticus 1:1

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Ex 2:2, *yod* in Num 14:17, *lamed* in Deut 29:27, *mem* in Num 24:5, final *nun* in Num 27:5, *samech* in Ecc 12:13 and Num 13:30, *ayin* in Deut 6:4, final *feh* in Gen 30:42, *tsade* in Isaiah 56:10, *sin* in Deut 3:11, and *tav* in Esther 9:29 and Deut 18:13.

<sup>278</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 23a.

<sup>279</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 23a.

<sup>280</sup> For examples of the minuscule letter signifying a degree of reduction or smallness see the anthology at the end of this chapter: *aleph* in Lev 1:1, *veth* in Prov 30:15, *gimel* in Job 7:5, *daleth* in Prov 28:17, *he* in Gen 2:4, *vav* in Num 25:12, *zayin* in Esther 9:9, *chet* in Job 33:9, *teth* in Gen 32:11, *yod* in Deut 32:18, *caf* in Gen 23:2, *lamed* in Lam 1:12, *mem* in Deut 9:24, *nun* in Gen 49:21, *tsade* in Jer 14:2, *kof* in Gen 27:46, and the *resh* in Esther 9:7.

<sup>281</sup> See the end of this chapter for examples of midrashim on this minuscule *caf*.

represents Moses' self abasement.<sup>282</sup> The little *yod* in *teshi* in Deuteronomy 32:18 signifies God's diminished power as a result of human beings' adulterous actions.<sup>283</sup>

In the following section, these five interpretive techniques will be illustrated with samples of actual midrashim about the majuscules and minuscules. Some midrashim make use of several techniques at the same time. A few of the midrashim are not readily categorized by any of these. In most cases the length of the midrash is quite short. In some cases the point of the midrash is fairly straightforward, however some of the seemingly simple ones are more subtle than may appear on a first reading.

### **Section III**

#### **An Alphabetical Collection of**

#### **Midrashim on the Majuscules and Minuscules**

The previous section described the various midrashic techniques used to explain the majuscules and minuscules in the Bible. In this section, I have gathered a collection of midrashim that use majuscules and minuscules as their focal point. These midrashim represent only a sample of the material available on the subject. Furthermore, these midrashim, for the most part, directly state the relationship of the feature to the midrash, for example "the *beth* is small because" or "therefore the *gimel* is large."

There are other midrashim which expound on a particular word or verse with a majuscule or minuscule in it. However, they do not directly relate the explanation

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<sup>282</sup> See the end of this chapter for examples of midrashim on this minuscule *aleph*.

<sup>283</sup> Judah J. Slotki, trans. *Midrash Rabbah, Numbers* (London, New York: The Soncino Press, 1983) p. 237.



of the text to these features. Sometimes, the connection to the feature is implied. For the purpose of setting limits to this thesis, only a few of these midrashim with implied or potential connections to the feature are included here.

In addition, the reader will observe that for some features there are several midrashim. Sometimes these midrashim contradict each other. Bear in mind that the purpose of the midrash on a majuscule or minuscule is rarely to give the "reason" for the feature, although that is often the stated purpose of the midrash. Rather, these features gave our sages opportunities to uncover a wide variety of meanings in the text. There may not be one "real reason" or "true story" associated with a feature. Midrash is not objective in that way. Midrash is an ongoing realization of the significance of the Bible and therefore varies depending on who is interpreting the text. Regardless of the specifics of the interpretation, for the *darshan* "the ultimate concern is always to let the Bible be the intellectual and religious milieu in which the Jew lives."<sup>284</sup>

These midrashim have been accumulated from a number of sources and are arranged here in alphabetical order. For each letter of the alphabet, midrashim about the majuscules proceed the ones about the minuscules. Many of the midrashim can be traced to several sources. Though all of these midrashim are footnoted, the following is a background sketch of some of these sources which were most helpful.

**The Alphabet of Rabbi Akivah-** This is a small collection of short midrashim dated somewhere between the seventh to ninth centuries C.E. This collection of midrashim focuses on the mystical role of letters in the Bible. Two sections of particular interest are the midrashim on the large letters and the midrashim on small letters in the Hebrew Bible. These two sections are arranged in alphabetical order, giving first the featured letter, the

word and verse in the Bible in which it appears, then a brief story about the reason for its special size based on a midrash. In *The Alphabet of Rabbi Akivah* there are thirty examples of majuscules and twenty six examples of minuscules. Most of the sites he describes match the majuscules and minuscules in the Masoretic text. The edition used for this thesis is the Hebrew text of Shlomo Aaron Weirtheimer, *Leket Midrashim: Midrash Rabi Akiva al Hatagim Veziyunin ve Otiyot Gedolot ve Ketanot Shebetorah*. (Jerusalem: Yosef Demaskai, 1863).

**Ba'al Ha-Turim**- is the name of both the author and the work of Jacob ben Asheri who wrote a commentary on the Torah known as *Perush Ha-Tur Hashalem al Ha-Torah*. Born in Germany circa 1280 C.E., he died in 1310 C.E. His exposition of the text pays close attention to the Masoretic notes and usually expounds on the majuscules and minuscules when they are present in the verse. He often incorporates and summarizes the great medieval commentators such as Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Ramban, as well as providing relevant midrashim from both the early rabbinic collections as well as from the Talmud. His unique contribution in interpreting the majuscules and minuscules in the text is his use of gematria and other more mystical hermeneutical methods. The edition I used for this thesis is the two volume Hebrew text *Perush Hatur Hashelemah al ha-Torah*, compiled by Rabi Yaakov ben Rabi Asher the Ba'al Ha Turim (Jerusalem: Horev Publishing House, 1998).

**Legends of the Jews**- by Louis Ginzberg is a seven volume anthology of midrashic texts in English including two volumes of notes which trace the origins and parallels to the midrashim. The edition that I used was *The Legend of the Jews* (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.)

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<sup>284</sup> Strack and Stemmerger, p. 259.

א Aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

אדם שת אנש  
“Adam, Seth, Enosh,”  
(I Chronicles 1:1)

The *aleph* in Adam is large because he was the first to be created.<sup>285</sup>

ויקרא אל משה וידבר יהוה אליו  
“The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him”  
(Leviticus 1:1)

There are a number of interpretations of this minuscule *aleph* including:

What difference is there between the prophets of Israel and the prophets of the heathen nations of the world? R. Chama b. Chanina and R. Issachar of Kefar Mandi both gave explanations. R. Chama b. Chanina said: The Holy One, blessed be He, reveals Himself to the heathen nations of the world by an incomplete form of address, even as it is said in Leviticus 23:16: “And the Lord called unto Balaam” using ויקר – from the root קרה meaning ‘met.’ Whereas to the prophets of Israel God reveals Himself in a complete form of address, as it is said in Leviticus 1:1: “And the Lord called unto Moses” using ויקרא. R. Issachar of Kefar Mandi said: Shall such be their reward? Do the heathens deserve that God should address them even by an incomplete manner of address? No, rather ויקר is an expression denoting uncleanness as it is said in Deuteronomy 23:2: “That is not clean, by that which chanceth by night –using the word *mikreh*, from the same root

<sup>285</sup> Weirtheimer, “Alphabet,” p. 22b. Also note that this *aleph* is the first letter of the book of Chronicles.

as ויקר. But with regard to divine speech to the prophets of Israel, the expression used is one of holiness, an expression of purity, a choice expression, an expression used by the ministering angels in praising the Holy One, blessed be He even as thou sayest, "And one called *kara* (from קרא the same root as ויקר) to another and said: Holy, holy holy is the Lord of hosts (Isaiah 6:3)"<sup>286</sup>

Based on this midrash we learn that:

The *aleph* of ויקר is small because Moses, though a man of great learning and status, was very modest. He did not want to write this word except as ויקר [without an *aleph*], using the language of a chance or occasional incident. In this way, Moses wanted to act as if the Holy One, Blessed be He, did not speak to him except for in dreams, similar to the way that it is said God spoke to Balaam in Numbers 23:4. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, told Moses to include the *aleph* in the word. And again Moses said to God, because of his great modesty that he would not write it except smaller than the other *alephs* in the Torah. In his monumental humility, Moses wished to describe God's revelation to him with the same uncomplimentary word used for Balaam-without an *aleph*. But, since God instructed him to include the *aleph* as an expression of His affection, Moses complied. Too humble to do so wholeheartedly, Moses wrote a small *aleph*.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus*, translated by Judah J. Slotki (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), p. 15.

Another interpretation is that:

The smallness of the *aleph* is meant to give prominence to the letter, as if it were a separate word. The word *aleph* means to teach, thus implying that one should learn always to be “small” and humble. No man was better qualified to teach this lesson than Moses, who was not only the greatest of all prophets, but the humblest person who ever lived.<sup>288</sup>

ב, ב Veth, Beth, the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ  
“When God began to create heaven and earth”  
(Genesis 1:1)

There are several midrashim on the majuscule *beth* in *bereishit*, including:

The *beth* in *bereshit* is large because it is the beginning of the whole Bible.<sup>289</sup>

Another interpretation:

“In the beginning (*Be-reshit*) God created.” R. Jonah said in R. Levi’s name:

Why was the world created with a *beth*? Just as the *beth* is closed at the sides but open in front, so you are not permitted to investigate what is above, what is below, and what is behind, only what lies before you. Bar Kappara quoted: “For ask now of the days past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth”“(Deut 4:32): you may speculate from the day that days were created, but you may not speculate on

<sup>287</sup> *Perush Hatur Hashelemah al ha-Torah*, compiled by Rabi Yaakov ben Rabi Asher the *Ba'al Ha Turim* (Jerusalem: Horev Publishing House, 1998), Vol. II, p. 551-552. Future references to this source will be noted by *Ba'al Ha Turim* and the page number in this edition.

<sup>288</sup> *The Stone Edition of the Chumash*, ed. Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz Artscroll Chumash, p. 544-545. This midrash is attributed here to R'Bunam of P'schish'cha.

<sup>289</sup> Weirtheimer, “*Alphabet*,” p.23a.

what was before that. "And from one end of heaven unto the other" (ibid.) you may investigate, but you may not investigate what was before this.<sup>290</sup>

Another interpretation:

Why was it created with a *beth*? To teach you that the world was created for the sake of (ב) two worlds - for this world and for the world to come.<sup>291</sup>

Another interpretation:

For the sake of the two (ב) Torahs was this world created – the written one and the oral one in order to teach you that because of the merit of the Torah and those who study it the world was created.<sup>292</sup>

Another interpretation:

Why with a *beth*? Because it connotes blessing (ברכה). And why not with an *aleph*, the first letter of the alphabet? In order not to provide a justification for heretics to plead, 'How can the world endure, seeing that it was created with the language of cursing (ארור)? Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'Lo, I will create it with the language of blessing, and would that it may stand!'<sup>293</sup>

Another interpretation:

Why with a *beth*? Just as a *beth* has two projecting points, one pointing upward and the other backward, so when we ask it, 'Who created thee?' it intimates with its upward point, 'He who is above created me.' And if we ask further, 'What is His name?' It intimates to us with its back point: 'The Lord is His name!' *Beth* points back to *aleph*

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<sup>290</sup> *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, translated by R. H. Freedman (London: Soncino Press, 1983), Vol. I, p.9.

<sup>291</sup> *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, p. 9, also in *Ba'al Ha Turim*, p. 1-4.

<sup>292</sup> *Ba'al Ha Turim*, p. 1. This midrash is traced to the Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 88a.

meaning either אֲדֹנָי, "the Lord" is His name or אֱלֹהִים is His name, meaning the Lord is "One." R. Leazar, b. Abinah said in R. Aha's name: For 26 generations the *aleph* complained before the Holy One, blessed be He, pleading before Him: Sovereign of the Universe! I am the first of the letters, yet Thou didst not create Thy world with me! God answered: The world and its fullness were created for the sake of the Torah alone. Tomorrow, when I come to reveal My Torah at Sinai, I will commence with none but three: I (אֲנִי) am the Lord your God (Ex. 22:2).<sup>294</sup>

לעלוקה שתי בנות הֵב הֵב  
 "The leech has two daughters, 'Give!' and 'Give!' "  
 (Proverbs 30:15)

The *veth* of the first *hav* is small because the Temple of the Lord (בֵּית) was destroyed two times (ב equals two) which twice diminished the glory of God's dwelling place.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, p. 9.

<sup>294</sup> *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, p. 9-10.

<sup>295</sup> Weirtheimer, p. 21a. The juxtaposition of this verse with the destruction of the two Temples addresses the role that greed played in bringing about these tragic events.

ג

*Gimel*, the third letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

והתגלח ואת הנתק

"The person with the scall shall shave himself"

(Leviticus 13:33)

The *gimel* is large in "*vehitgalah*" "then he shall shave himself" because there are (ג) 3 type of people who need to shave on all places where they have hair- the Nazarite, the leper and the Levite.<sup>296</sup>

לבש בשרי רמה וגיש עפר

"My flesh is covered with maggots and clods of dirt"

(Job 7:5)

Do not read "*vegush*" meaning a clod of dirt rather read it as "*vegish*" meaning a familiar matter. In Job 7:5 the *gimel* is small because Job's **family** was greatly diminished. Supposedly Job's wife bore him six sons, but which were really legitimate? Which sons were actually from his wife and which were from the forbidden woman referred to throughout the book of Proverbs? In fact, three (ג) were from this other woman. And those three (ג) sons died three (ג) days after the forbidden woman was buried in her grave.<sup>297</sup>

<sup>296</sup> *Ba'al Ha Turim*, p. 607. This explanation is not entirely clear because the Nazarite does not in fact shave, nor have I seen other references to the shaving practices of the Levite.

<sup>297</sup> Weirtheimer, "*Alphabet*," p. 21a. In addition, according to some Masoretic lists, this *gimel* marks the middle of the verses in the Torah.



ד

*Daleth*, the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד

"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is One!"

(Deuteronomy 6:4)

There are several midrashim on the majuscule *daleth* in *echad* including:

The *daleth* in *echad* is large because our sages tell us that it is necessary to lengthen its sound when pronouncing it.<sup>298</sup>

Along this same line of thinking:

The *daleth* in *echad* is large so that you do not mistake the *daleth* for a *reish*, and accidentally arrive at the meaning "Hear O Israel, The Lord is our God, Another god."

And thus in Exodus 34:14 it says "Do not prostrate yourselves to another god." In this verse, the *reish* is large in order that you do not mistake it with a *daleth*.<sup>299</sup>

Another interpretation:

The *daleth* in *echad* is large to tell you to proclaim God's sovereignty in the heavens and on earth and throughout the four (ד) winds of the world.<sup>300</sup>

Another interpretation:

The *daleth* and *ayin* are large to remind us concentrate on the thought that lies between them.<sup>301</sup>

<sup>298</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 23a

<sup>299</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II., p. 933.

<sup>300</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II., p. 933. This midrash is traced to *Berachot* 13b.

Another interpretation:

Both the *ayin* and the *daleth* are large, and together they spell טו meaning “witness.” And this is what is meant in Isaiah 43:10: “You are my witnesses declares the Lord.” And also, the Holy One Blessed be He, is witness to Israel as it is written in Malachi 3:5, “And I will be a swift witness.”<sup>302</sup>

Another interpretation:

The verse begins with *shin* and ends with *daleth*, and together this spells שד meaning “demon”, because the demons flee from one who recites the *Shema* with intention, with *kavanah*.<sup>303</sup>

אדם אשק בדם נפש

“A man that is burdened with the blood of any person”  
(Proverbs 28:17)

The *daleth* is small in *adam* because the one who spills anothers’ blood, it is as if he actually killed four (ד) groups of people. These people are: 1) the murdered one, 2) the wife of the deceased, 3) the sons of the deceased and 4) the daughters of the deceased.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, ed. W. Gunther Plaut (New York: UAHC, 1981), p.1373. The editor attributes this midrash to “Sforno and others.”

<sup>302</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II., p. 933.

<sup>303</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II., p. 933. This midrash is traced to *Berachot* 5a.

<sup>304</sup> Weirtheimer, “*Alphabet*,” p. 21a. This midrash is traced to *Sanhedrin*, chapter 4, page 37a. which mentions the deceased, his wife and his offspring.

ה

He, the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

הליהוה תגמלו זאת

"Do you thus requite the Lord?"

(Deuteronomy 32:6)

There are several midrashim on the majuscule *he* in *haladonai* including:

The *he* in *haladonai* is large for it marks a separation in the word and divides it into two words. Yet it is impossible for *ha* to be a word without its companion. *Ha* cannot stand by itself without being attached to another word. However, the *he* does have a separate meaning as if it were a separate word.<sup>305</sup> The *he* stands for הוי meaning "alas."<sup>306</sup>

Another interpretation:

In *haladonai* the *he* is large to tell you that thus the Lord does good for you in five (ה) ways, that he has given you the five books of the Torah.<sup>307</sup>

Another interpretation:

This majuscule *he* in Deuteronomy 32:6 is detached from the word that follows because it is a separate word denoting Moses' signature. If one takes the first letters of verses 1-6 (ה,י,כ,ה,ש,ה) they add up to 345 by way of gematria which represents the

<sup>305</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 23a.

<sup>306</sup> *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus*, translated by S.M. Lehrman, (London: The Soncino Press, 19xx), p. 294.

<sup>307</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II, p.1063.

value of the letters in Moses' name (משה). In this way, Moses affixed his name to the book, ending with his "signature" - the detached *he*.<sup>308</sup>

אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם

"Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created"  
(Genesis 2:4)

There are several midrashim on the minuscule *he* in *behibare 'am* including:

*Behibaram* - "When they were created" R. Abbahu said in R. Johanan's name:

God created the heavens and the earth with the letter *he*. In this way, reading *behibaram* as two words: *behey baram*, meaning with the letter *he* God created them. Why with a *he*? Because all the letters demand an effort to pronounce them, where as the *he* demands no effort, [being merely an aspirate. Similarly, not with labor or wearying toil did the Holy One, blessed be He, create His world, but "By the word of the Lord" (Ps. 33.6) and "the heavens were already made" (ibid). Just a mere word, and the work of Creation was finished. Jewish though knows nothing of recalcitrant matter fighting against God and refusing to be shaped into a world.<sup>309</sup>

Another interpretation:

Now we do not know whether this world was created with a *he* or the next world, but from what R. Abbahu said in R. Johanan's name it follows that this world was created by means of a *he*. Now the *he* is closed on all sides and open underneath. This is an indication that all the dead descend into She'ol. Its upper hook pointing heavenward is

<sup>308</sup> Plaut, p. 1564. This midrash comes from *Tanch. Ha'azinu* 5.

<sup>309</sup> So *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, p. 95.

an indication that they are destined to ascend there. And the opening at the side is a hint to penitents that the way is open for a return to God.<sup>310</sup>

Another interpretation:

The *he* in *behibare'am* is small because we are made small and subordinated by God's hand. That is the meaning of the verse in Psalm 139:5, "And laid Your hand upon me."<sup>311</sup>

Another interpretation:

*B ehibare'am* is composed of the letters of *b'Avraham* because on the basis of his merit was the heavens and earth created.<sup>312</sup>

In the above context, it may be that the letter ך of this word is small to symbolize that Abraham's name Abram had a ך added to it.<sup>313</sup>

ו Vav, the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

כל הולך על גחון  
"Anything that crawls on its belly"  
(Leviticus 11:42)

The *vav* of *gachon* is large because it reminds us of the snake who was cursed by God in the Garden of Eden. And although here, there is no specific mention of a snake, the snake that is lurking between the lines in this verse is also cursed by God.<sup>314</sup>

<sup>310</sup> *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, p. 96.

<sup>311</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 21a. This meaning of this midrash is also traced to passages in: *Chagigah* 12, *Sanhedrin* 38, and *Bereishit Rabbah* Chapter 8.

<sup>312</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. I, p. 17. This midrash is traced to *Genesis Rabbah* 12:9.

<sup>313</sup> *The Stone Edition of the Chumash*, p. 11. This midrash is attributed to R. Avie Gold.

Another interpretation:

The letter *vav* in the word *gachon* is written in an elongated form in the Torah. The early sages, who were called *soferim*, because they would count the words and letters of the Torah, noted that the elongated *vav* of *gachon* is the middle letter of the Torah.<sup>315</sup>

פרמשתא אריסי ואת ארידי ואת ויתא  
"Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha"  
(Esther 9:9)

Rav Adda from Joppa said: The ten sons of Haman and the word ten which follows should be said in one breath. What is the reason? Because their souls all departed together. R. Jochanan said: The *vav* of *vaizatha* must be lengthened like a boat-pole of the river Libruth. What is the reason? Because they were all strung on one pole.<sup>316</sup>

הנני נתן לו את בריתי שלום  
"Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace"  
(Numbers 25:12)

There are several midrashim on the minuscule *vav* in *shalom* including:

The *vav* is small in *shalom* because this verse should be read as: Behold I give to him and not to another my full [שלם] covenant since only he among all the other priests met all the conditions of priesthood.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Weirtheimer, "*Alphabet*," p. 23a.

<sup>315</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Kiddushin*, 30b.

<sup>316</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Megillah* 16b.

Another interpretation:

The *vav* is small because this verse should be read as: I am giving him a complete [שלם] present, there are ten gifts in the Sanctuary, and ten in the State.<sup>318</sup>

Another interpretation:

Some suggest that the text ought to read *shilum* reward, instead of *shalom*. The translation would then read: "I will grant to Phinehas the covenant of priesthood as a reward." Great was this gift for the world is maintained by peace and th Torah is peace itself, as it is said: "All her paths are peace" (Proverbs 3:17)<sup>319</sup>

Another interpretation:

The *vav* is small because Phinehas is really Eliyahu. The legend is derived from the fact that *shalom* peace is written with a small *vav*, which suggests the reading *shalem* (whole). Phinehas passed "whole" into heaven. Phinehas did not really die but reemerged in a miraculous transformation like the prophet Elijah, who also slew idolators (I Kings 18.)<sup>320</sup> [Note that the story of Elijah is read as the Haftarah portion on the Sabbath when the story of Phinehas is the assigned Torah selection.]

Thus Eliya is written in Malachi 3:23 missing the *vav*, and Jacob is written with a *vav* in Leviticus 26:42 because the *vav* of Eliyahu was carried off as a pledge until he comes

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<sup>317</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 21a. This midrash is in accordance with what is written in *Zevachim* 101b: Phineas did not act like a priest until he had killed Zimri and this deed only Phineas did. But with the other priests, we find that after awhile, they do not act like priests anymore.

<sup>318</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II, p. 850. Note: The midrash does not elaborate on what the ten gifts of the Sanctuary or State include.

<sup>319</sup> Plaut, p. 1194 and 1197. This midrash comes from *Numbers Rabbah* 21:3.

<sup>320</sup> This idea that Phineas passed whole into heaven and therefore is like Elijah can be found in many midrashic sources including *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers* 21:3, *Matnah Kehunah*, *Ba'al Ha-Turim* on Num. 25:12..

with the Messiah and causes his sons to rejoice. And that is what "Jacob shall rejoice and Israel shall be glad" means in Psalm 14:7.<sup>321</sup>

And the word שמח "be glad" has the same letters as משיח "Messiah" for all will rejoice in the days of the Messiah which will cause the return of the *vav* and Eliyahu will be complete. *Shalom* in gematria is *Messiah*.<sup>322</sup>

Another interpretation:

The *vav* is cut off in order to teach us about the acceptability of a blemished Priest. We learn that the service that he performed before his disqualification became known to him is invalid. For Rav Yehuda said in the name of Shmuel: "Behold, I give him My covenant of peace" (Numbers 25:12) which implies that when he is whole, a Priest is included in the covenant of priesthood. But not when any part of him is missing. Thus, a blemished priest is excluded.

But the gemara objects, the word is not written *shalem* "whole" it is written *shalom* meaning "peace." Rav Nachman replies: The letter *vav* that appears in the word *shalem* is severed [written small.] Therefore, we can expound the word as if it were written *shalem*, without the *vav*.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II, p. 850.

<sup>322</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II, p. 850.

<sup>323</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Kiddushin* 66b.



ז

*Zayin*, the seventh letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

פרמשתא אריסי ואת ארידי ואת ויתא

"Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha"

(Esther 9:9)

The *zion* in *vaizata* is small because Haman spoke evil regarding seven (ז) things which are found in Haman's report to the king concerning the Jews (Esther 3:8) – 1) there is a certain people; 2) scattered abroad; 3) dispersed; 4) in all the provinces of your kingdom; 5) their laws are different from all people; 6) and as for the king's laws; 7) therefore it is of no benefit for the king to tolerate them.<sup>324</sup>

ח

*Cheth*, the eighth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

חור כרפס ותכלת

"[There were hangings of] white cotton and blue wool"

(Esther 1:6)

The *chet* in *chur* is large to tell us that this word refers to a kind of white hangings which were found in the Temple and one could never find any like it anywhere else. Perhaps these hangings had been stolen from the Temple of the Lord.<sup>325</sup>

<sup>324</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 21a.

<sup>325</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 23a.

Another interpretation:

The *chet* in *chur* is large to tell us that on that climactic day that Ahasuerus prepared the feast, he adorned himself with the eight (ח equals eight) garments of the High Priest. In punishment for this, he suffered the multiple evils of the resulting episode with Vashti, her death, his embarrassment and his subsequent depression.<sup>326</sup>

זך אני בלי פשע חף אנכי  
"I am guiltless, free from transgression;  
I am innocent, without iniquity"  
(Job 33:9)

The *chet* in *chaf* is small to teach us that its normal value of eight is reduced to seven. For before the giving of the Torah, humankind had seven commandments that they were not to transgress. All seven of these commandments, known as the Noahide Laws, are included in the verse "And the Lord God commanded Adam, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat." (Genesis 2:16) This commandment to Adam, (i.e. to all humans) implies that all humans can have a concept of God and are therefore forbidden to do certain things. The words in Genesis 2:16: "לאמר מכל עץ הגן אכל תאכל" form an acrostic that corresponds in a homiletical fashion to the seven Noahide Laws:

- 1) One may not worship idols = ויצו
- 2) One may not blaspheme God = יהוה

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<sup>326</sup> Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz, *M'not HaLevi*

- 3) One must establish courts of justice = אלהים
- 4) One may not kill = על האדם
- 5) One may not commit adultery = לאמר
- 6) One may not steal = מכל עץ הגן
- 7) One may not eat flesh cut from a living animal = אכל תאכל<sup>327</sup>

ט

*Teth*, the ninth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

יסר מעלי שבטו

"Let Him take his rod away from me"

(Job 9:34)

The *teth* in *shivto* is large for there was no affliction as great as the one suffered by Job.<sup>328</sup>

ותרא אתו כי טוב הוא

"When she saw that he was goodly"

(Exodus 2:2)

These midrashim which interpret the word "good" טוב do not directly mention the majuscule *teth* however indirectly they may be alluding to it.

[Why is the *teth* large in *tov*? insert mine] R. Judah says: Because Moses was fit for prophecy. Others say: He was born circumcised. The Sages say: When Moses was born the whole house became flooded with light; for here it says: "And she saw him that

<sup>327</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 21b. This midrash is based in part on the Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 56b.

<sup>328</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 23a.

he was a goodly child” and else where [in the Creation story] it says: “And God saw the light, that it was good” (Gen 1:4)<sup>329</sup>

Another interpretation:

The primordial light, which God had hidden shortly after its creation, shone upon Moses during the first three months of his life. It was withdrawn from him as soon as Pharoah’s daughter took him to her house. It came back to him when he ascended on mount Sinai, and remained with him till the end of his life. It was by means of this light that he was able to survey the whole of Palestine in the twinkling of an eye.<sup>330</sup>

קטנתי מכל החסדים

“I am unworthy of all your kindness”  
(Genesis 32:11)

The *teth* is small in *katonti* to show us that though one may humble himself as Jacob did in prayer, he is usually still smaller that he makes himself out to be. In the midst of “unworthy” there is often something unworthier yet. <sup>331</sup>

Another interpretation:

The *teth* is small in *katonti* to teach us that pious people think they are unworthy of God’s gifts; while others think they are deserving of such gifts and even more.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus* 1:20, also *Sotah* 12a

<sup>330</sup> Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews*, also *Mekilta* RS., 71; *Sotah* 12 a; *ShR1*, 20, *Yashar Shemot*, 130b; *Zohar* II, 11b

<sup>331</sup> Plaut, p. 222, quoted in *Ma'yanah shel Torah*, Vol. I, p. 148.

<sup>332</sup> Plaut, p. 222, from *Sefat Emet*, 12 quoted in *Itture Torah*, Vol I, p. 293.

י

*Yod*, the tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

ואתה יגדל נא כח אדני

"Therefore, I pray, let my Lord's forbearance be great"

(Numbers 14:17)

The *yod* in *yigdal* is large for God's forbearance is raised over all the creatures of the world.<sup>333</sup>

Another interpretation:

The *yod* is large to say, God, let your forbearance be great upon us in remembrance of Abraham our father, whom you tested with ten (*yod*) trials. He successfully stood these tests, please then remember his righteousness for our sake.<sup>334</sup>

צור ידלך תשי

"You neglected the Rock that begot you"

(Deuteronomy 32:18)

The *yod* is small in *teshi* because God's power has been diminished by the adulterer as explained in this midrash: R. Judah son of R. Simon in the name of R. Levi b. Perata commented: It is written, "Of the Rock that begot thee thou wast unmindful – 'teshi' implies: You have weakened (*hittashtem*) the power of the Creator. It is like the case of an artist who sat and fashioned the features of the king. When he finished the work, people came and told him: 'The king has been changed.' Whereupon the artist's strength failed him. He thought: Whose image shall I fashion? That of the first or the second? Similarly, during the whole of the forty days [following conception] the Holy One, blessed be He, is engaged upon the fashioning of the embryo's image, and at the

<sup>333</sup>Weirtheimer, "*Alphabet*," p. 23a

end of the forty days, the woman goes and disgraces herself with someone else [i.e. commits adultery.] Whereupon the strength of the Creator fails Him. He thinks: Whose image shall I fashion? That of the first man or of the second? This explains the phrase, 'The Rock that begot thee teshi' as meaning, You have weakened (*hittashta*) the strength of the Creator. Thus, the *yod* [of the word יָשָׁה] is small, this being the only such case in Scripture. R. Isaac explained: We find in the case of all other transgressions that, for instance, the thief gains while the victim of the theft loses, the robber gains while his victim loses. Here, however, both benefit [ie. the adulterer and adulteress.] Who loses? The Holy One, blessed be He, who destroys the identification marks [of the embryo. Hence the diminutive *yod*, the initial letter of the Tetragrammaton, [alluding to loss by God.]<sup>335</sup>

A slightly different interpretation:

Nor must you suppose that the features of the infant resemble those of the adulterer only when the adulteress conceives from the adulterer. No! Even if she conceived from her husband and the adulterer then cohabited with her, the Holy One, blessed be He, transforms the features of the child into those of the adulterer. Accordingly it says, 'Of the Rock that begot thee thou wast unmindful. (meaning forgetting that God would expose you.)'

R. Isaac said: The adulterer, if one may say so, weakens the power of the Divine Presence. How? The embryo of which she is conceived from her husband has had its features fashioned within forty days, and after forty days the adulterer cohabits with her.

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<sup>334</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II. p. 782-783.

<sup>335</sup> Translation of *Leviticus Rabbah* as found in *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus*, trans. Judah J. Slotki (London, NY: The Soncino Press, 1983) p. 303.

The Holy One, blessed be He, stands perplexed and says: Of whose features shall I fashion a likeness? That of the features of the husband or that of the features of the adulterer?' If the expression be permissible, 'The Rock who begot thee dost weaken (*teshi*). The *yod* of *teshi* is small to imply that the adulterer weakens the hands of the Designer. (The smallness of the *yod* symbolizes the feeblest of the hands, *yadaim*, being the plural of *yod*.)<sup>336</sup>

כ,פ,ך      *Kaf, Chaf, Final Chaf*, the eleventh letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

ויבא אברהם לספד לשרה ולבנותה

"And Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her"  
(Genesis 23:2)

There are several interpretations of the minuscule *chaf* in *velivcota*, including:

The *caf* in *velivcota* is small to say that all who do not weep over the death of one whom it is appropriate to mourn, "*Chaf, chaf, chaf*" upon that person! These hands [*caf* means hands] may mean that many will oppress him or many hands will be smitten as an ancient practice of mourning, for he will die prematurely. Why three *cafs*? Because in the Hebrew alphabet there are three *cafs* : the spotted one (with the dagesh), the healed one (no dagesh) and the long tailed one.<sup>337</sup>

<sup>336</sup> Judah J. Slotki, trans. *Midrash Rabbah, Numbers* (London, New York: The Soncino Press, 1983) p. vii. The translation that follows is from this text, pg. 237.

Another interpretation:

The *caf* in *velivcotah* is small because Abraham mourned for Sarah for a short time only, as immoderate mourning is not fitting for the wise who should not feel sorry when restoring to God the deposit entrusted to them.<sup>338</sup>

Another interpretation:

The word *velivcotah* is written with a small *caf* to suggest that the full extent of Abraham's weeping was kept private. His grief was infinite, but the full measure of his pain was concealed in his heart and the privacy of his home. Because the death of Sarah was a loss not only for Abraham and his family, but for the whole country. So long as she was alive, all went well in the land. After her death confusion ensued. The weeping, lamenting, and wailing over her going hence was universal, and Abraham, instead of receiving consolation, had to offer consolation to others. He spoke to the mourning people, and said: "My children, take not the going hence of Sarah too much to heart. Death is one event unto all, to the pious and impious alike. He spoke to the mourning people, and said: "My children, take not the going hence of Sarah too much to heart. There is one event unto all, to the pious and impious alike."<sup>339</sup>

Another interpretation:

The *caf* is small to teach that it is not fitting for a sage to weep in the presence of ordinary people, particularly for women.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 21b.

<sup>338</sup> *Legends of the Jews*, Vol. VII, p. 255 from Philo, *De Abrahamo*, 44.

<sup>339</sup> *Legend of the Jews*, Vol. I, p. 287-288. Also found in Stone and Hirsh commentaries of the Bible.

<sup>340</sup> *Torah Shelemah*, Vol. 3, p. 171. Nevertheless Meg. 28b states that Rafram, a certain scholar, pronounced the funeral eulogy on his daughter-in-law. See also *Shulhan Aruk Yoreh Deah* 340, 6, which rules that a woman must be honored with a funeral eulogy just like a man.



Another interpretation:

The *caf* is small because Abraham only wept a little bit since Sarah was already old and brought God's judgement of death upon herself. Sarah died during Abraham's lifetime, her great piety notwithstanding, because she accused her husband of being unfair to her (Gen. 16.5). R. Hanan said: He who invokes the judgment of Heaven upon his fellow man will be punished first. Thus, after reporting, "Sarai said unto Abraham: My wrong be upon thee... the Lord judge between thee and me (Gen. 16:5) Scripture goes on to tell us, "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her" (Gen. 23:2)."<sup>341</sup>

By her premature death it was proved that her accusations were unfounded as this following legend about Sarah's death tells. Satan appeared to Sarah and asked her whether she knew where Isaac was. "He went with his father to be instructed in the laws of sacrifices" was her reply. "No," rejoined Satan, "he himself is the sacrifice." She betook herself to the three giants, Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmi and asked them to look into the distance, far, far, away and see if they could not discern an old man accompanied by two lads. They obeyed and informed her that they saw an old man with a knife in his hand and next to him a youth bound as a sacrifice. She was so terrified that her soul flew out of her body.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. I, p. 116. See also Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Kamma* 93a.

<sup>342</sup> *Legends of the Jews*, Vol. VII, p.256 from *Sifte Kohen* on Gen. 23.2.

ל

*Lamed*, the twelfth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

וּשְׁלַכְתֶּם אֶל אֶרֶץ אַחֶרֶת

“And cast them into another land”

(Deuteronomy 29:27)

There are several interpretations of the large *lamed* in *vayashlichem*, including:

By making the *lamed* larger than the other letters the *lamed* is treated as the beginning of a word consisting of it and the following two letters. *Lakem* which means ‘to you,’ implies homiletically God’s promise, ‘I will be a God **to you** even after you have been **cast into another land**.’<sup>343</sup>

Another interpretation:

The *lamed* in *vayashlichem* is large because God did not cast them away eternally, but just for that one day, meaning for a short or particular length of time.<sup>344</sup>

Another interpretation:

In *vayashlichem*, the *lamed* is large and the word is written with out a *yod* to tell you that there has never been such a great dispersion as this one for 10 [*yod*] of the tribes.<sup>345</sup>

לֹא אֵלֵיכֶם כָּל עַבְרֵי דֶרֶךְ

“May it never befall you, all who pass along the road”

(Lamentations 1:12)

In *lo aleichem* the *lamed* is small for in the beginning Israel was the head and now it is the tail.<sup>346</sup>

<sup>343</sup> Minor Tractates: *Soferim* (London, The Soncino Press, 1984), p. 38b(2) This midrash appears in footnote 20 on page 38b(2) however the original source is not cited.

<sup>344</sup> Weirtheimer, “*Alphabet*,” p. 23b.

מ, ם *Mem, Final Mem*, the thirteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

מה טבו אהליך יעקב משכנתיך ישראל

"How fair are your tents, O Jacob, Your dwellings, O Israel!"  
(Numbers 24:5)

The *mem* is large in "How goodly are your tents.." for Jacob is in the tent below and in the tent above, God is in the chair of honor.<sup>347</sup>

ממרים הייתם עם יהוה מיום דעתי אתכם

"As long as I have known you, you have been defiant toward the Lord"  
(Deuteronomy 9:24)

The first *mem* of *mamrim* is written small to hint that though Moses accused the people of defiance, he himself took part of the blame.<sup>348</sup>

In addition, the verse begins with *mem* and ends with *mem* in order to say to you that all 40 (*mem*) years that you were in the wilderness, you were *mamrim*, rebels.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II, p. 1052.

<sup>346</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 21b.

<sup>347</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II, p.843 from *Bereshit Rabbah* 82:2..

<sup>348</sup> Plaut, p. 1402-1403 from *Itture Torah*, Vol. VI. p. 71.

<sup>349</sup> *Ba-al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II, p. 952.

נ, ן *Nun, Final Nun, the fourteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.*

נֶצַר חֶסֶד לְאַלְפִים נֶשָׂא עֵוֹן וּפְשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה

“Extending kindness to the thousandth generation,  
forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin”

(Exodus 34:7)

Why is the *nun* in *nozter* “extending kindness,” written large? Perhaps to prevent it from being read עֶצֶר “withholding kindness.” This is similar to verse Exodus 34: 14, where the *resh* in אֶחָד is also written large.<sup>350</sup>

וַיִּקְרַב מֹשֶׁה אֶת מִשְׁפָּטָן לִפְנֵי יְהוָה

“Moses brought their case before the Lord”

(Numbers 27:5)

There are several interpretations of the large final nun in *mishpatan* including:

The final *nun* in *mishpatan* is large because Moses said, “And the case that is too difficult for you, bring it to me and I will hear it.” (Deut. 1:17) Moses implied with his boastful words that it would be too hard for them, but not for him. But God said, “As I live, it is higher than you, the matter that the women know, thus it is said, “the daughters of Zelofhad speak right.” (Num 27:7)<sup>351</sup>

Another interpretation:

The *nun* in *mishpatan* is large because this case was tried by God. Zelophehad’s daughters did not place their case before Moses, because they feared lest he should be prejudiced against them on account of the enmity their father showed toward Moses.

<sup>350</sup> Plaut, p. 665.

<sup>351</sup> Weirtheimer, “Alphabet,” p. 23b

They therefore preferred to have their case decided by the lower authorities. But when none of the judges was able to render a decision, and the case was brought before Moses, he, in his great modesty, did not wish to display his superior knowledge, and said that he would put the case before God.<sup>352</sup>

Another interpretation:

The *nun* in *mishpatan* is large because God took it ill of Moses for having withdrawn himself from the case of Zelophehad's daughters. Therefore, immediately after this episode, God informed Moses of his impending death, saying unto him, "Thou couldst withdraw thyself from acting as a judge in the case of Zelophehad's daughters, but thou will have to submit thyself to My judicial decree against you."<sup>353</sup>

נפתלי אילה שלחה  
"Naphtali is a hind let loose"  
(Genesis 49:21)

The *nun* is small in *naftali* because the image of the hind (a symbol for Israel) harkens to the quote: The virgin of Israel is fallen (*nafla*), she shall no longer rise. (Amos 5:2)

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<sup>352</sup> *Legend of the Jews*, Vol. VII, p. 140 from Zohar III, 205.

<sup>353</sup> *Legends of the Jews*, Vol. VII, pg. 140 from Midrash Aggada, Num. 27.5.

**ד** *Samekh*, the fifteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

**ד** וף דבר הכל נשמע את האלהים ירא ואת מצותיו שמור

“The sum of the matter, when all is said and done:

Revere God and observe His commandments”

(Ecclesiastes 12: 13)

The *samech* in *sof davar* is large for The Holy One Blessed Be He swore to reveal all who had persecuted others as it says in Job 20:27 “Heaven will expose his iniquity.”<sup>354</sup>

ויהי **ד** כלב את העם אל משה

“Then Caleb hushed the people before Moses”

(Numbers 13:30)

The *samech* in *vayahas* is large because it is closed on all sides like a fortified city. Caleb stilled the people saying “It is true that the people are strong, but we will overcome them and their fortified cities.”<sup>355</sup> How could the spies tell whether the Canaanites were strong or weak? Moses had instructed them: “if the people dwell in open communities they are strong, for they are confident of their own strength; if in fortified cities, they are weak and their hearts timid.”<sup>356</sup>

<sup>354</sup> Weirtheimer, “Alphabet,” p. 23b. Note this verse marks the end of Ecclesiastes.

<sup>355</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II, p. 778 from *Hameshek*, middle of verse 31 “*lah*” feminine single pronoun refers to overcoming the city.

<sup>356</sup> Plaut, p.1116 from *Midrash Rabbah*: Numbers 16:12.

ע *Ayin*, the sixteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is One!”  
(Deuteronomy 6:4)

There are several interpretations of the majuscule *ayin* in *shema* including:

The *ayin* in *shema* is large because the sages said that one recites the Shema outloud. It is not just said silently for one’s own ears. Rather you need to make an audible sound when pronouncing this declaration of faith.<sup>357</sup>

Another interpretation:

The *ayin* (equal to the number seventy) in *shema* is large because:

Israel has seventy names.

God gave the Israelites the Torah which has seventy names.

The Torah can be interpreted in seventy facets.

The Torah was given in order to separate them from the seventy nations of the world.<sup>358</sup>

Another interpretation:

The *ayin* in *shema* is large so that one should read שמע “Hear, O Israel” and not

שמא “Perhaps, O Israel...”<sup>359</sup>

<sup>357</sup> Weirtheimer, “Alphabet,” p. 23b .

<sup>358</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II, p. 933 from *Midrash Zuta*, and *Numbers Rabbah* 13:15.

<sup>359</sup> Plaut, p. 1373 from Sforino and others.

פ, פ, ף

*Fé, Pé, Final Fé*, the seventeenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

אֲדִין מֶלֶכָא בִשְׁפָרָא יְקוּם בִּנְגְהָא

"Then at the first light of dawn, the King arose"

(Daniel 6:20)

The second *pé* in *bishfarpara* is large since in this story the king did not behave the way that kings customarily behave. Kings do not usually wake up until later in the morning, not until the end of the third hour of the day. However, in this case we see that the king rose at day break to take Daniel out of the den of lions.<sup>360</sup>

וּבְהֶעֱטִיף הִצָּאן לֹא יָשִׁים וְהָיָה הָעֲטָפִים לִלְבָּן וְהַקְשָׁרִים לִיעֶקֶב

"But with the feeble ones he would not place them there,  
thus the feeble ones went to Laban and the sturdy to Jacob"

(Genesis 30:42)

The final *fé* in *uvha'ahatif* is large. The Kobriner Rabbi said: Those who waver in their beliefs and whose attachment to their God and His Torah is feeble, belong to Laban, the insincere. But those who are strong in their faith and firm in their adherence to the Lord and His teachings, belong to Israel.<sup>361</sup> In the next line we read that Jacob grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, maidservants, and men servants, camels and asses. God is the one who made him prosperous, by strengthening his flock and weakening the others.

<sup>360</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 23b.

<sup>361</sup> *The Hasidic Anthology*, p. 110.



צ, ץ *Tsadé*, Final *Tsadé*, the eighteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

צפו עורים כלם לא ידעו

“His watchmen are blind, all of them, they perceive nothing”  
(Isaiah 56:10)

The *tsadé* in *tzofav* is large because they are not really blind, but only temporarily appear so as a result of Divine intervention for they have eyes, but do not see. As it says, “for He has shut their eyes that they cannot see” (Isaiah 44:18)<sup>362</sup>

וצווחת ירושלם עלתה

“And the outcry of Jerusalem rises”  
(Jeremiah 14:2)

In *vetzochat* the *tsadé* is small. The subordination of the righteous [*tzadikim*] caused them to cry out for their lives, but as it says in Proverbs 10:30 “the righteous shall never be removed.”<sup>363</sup>

ק *Kof*, the nineteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

גם צפור מצאה בית ודרור קן לה

“Even the sparrow has found a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself”  
(Psalm 84:4)

The *kof* in *ken* is large because Israel is symbolized as the swallow and the Temple as her nest. After the destruction of the Temple which was one hundred *amas* high (ק equals one hundred), she will not rise again from her downfall.<sup>364</sup>

<sup>362</sup> Weirtheimer, “Alphabet,” p. 24a.

Another interpretation:

The *kof* is large in *ken* because David pleaded on behalf of the Temple whose height was one hundred *amas* that it not be destroyed.<sup>365</sup>

קצתי בחיי מפני בנות חת

"I am disgusted with my life because of the Hittite women"  
(Genesis 27:46)

The *kof* in *katzti* is small to teach us that Rebecca had a prophetic vision and saw through the Holy Spirit that Titus would lay waste to Israel; he would destroy the Temple whose height was one hundred *amas* (ק equals one hundred) and diminish the glory of Israel.<sup>366</sup>

ר

*Resh*, the twentieth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

כי לא תשתחוה לאל אחר

"For you must not worship any other god"  
(Exodus 34:14)

The *resh* in *acher* is large because it is forbidden to establish idol worship.<sup>367</sup>

Another interpretation:

The *resh* is written large in *acher* so as to distinguish the word from אֶחָד meaning "one." Instead of reading "Do not bow down to any other god" it would be perverted into: "Do not bow down to the One God."<sup>368</sup>

<sup>363</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 22a-b.

<sup>364</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 24a.

<sup>365</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. I, p.156.

<sup>366</sup> Weirtheimer, p. 22b.

פרשנדתא ואת דלפון ואת אספתא  
"[They also killed] Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha"  
(Esther 9:7)

The *resh* in *parshandata* is small because they reduced him, then hung him.<sup>369</sup>

ש, ש *Shin, Sin*, the twenty-first letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

כי רק עוג מלך הבשן נשאר מיתר הרפאים הנה ערשו ערש ברזל

"Only Og King of Bashan was left of the remaining Rephaim,  
and behold his bedstead was an iron bedstead"

(Deuteronomy 3:11)

This midrash, which expounds on the legendary bedstead "ערש" and the giant Og, does not directly mention the majuscule *sin* however indirectly it may be alluding to it.

[The *sin* in *eres* is large because, insert mine] The giant never in all his days made use of a wooden chair or bed, as these would have broken down beneath his weight, but sat upon iron chairs and lay upon iron beds. He was not only of gigantic build and strength, but of a breadth also that was completely out of proportion even with his height, for his breadth was one half his height, whereas the normal proportion of breadth to height is as one to three.

However, despite Og's enormous stature, and proficient survival skills, Moses and the Israelites prevailed over him with God's help. The victory over Og and his hosts was as great as that over Pharaoh and his hosts.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 24a.

<sup>368</sup> Plaut, p. 659.

<sup>369</sup> Weirtheimer, "Alphabet," p. 22b.

ת

*Tav*, the twenty-second letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

ותכתב אסתר המלכה בת אביחיל ומרדכי היהודי את כל תקף

“Then Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail,  
and Mordechai the Jew, wrote with full authority”  
(Esther 9:29)

The first *tav* in *vatichtov* is large for Esther said, “I am writing for the future generations.”<sup>371</sup>

Another interpretation:

The first *tav* in *vatichtov* is large to indicate that just as *tav* is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, so is the story of Esther the end of all the miracles to be included in the Bible.<sup>372</sup>

תמים תהיה עם יהוה אלהיך

“You must be wholehearted with the Lord your God”  
(Deuteronomy 18:13)

The *tav* in *tamim* is large because if you will pursue whole-heartedness with God, it is as if you fulfill every mitzvot from *aleph* to *tav*.<sup>373</sup>

<sup>370</sup> *Legends of the Jews*, Vol. VII, pg. 346-347.

<sup>371</sup> Weirtheimer, “*Alphabet*” p. 24a.

<sup>372</sup> R. Yaakov Culi, *Me'am Loez*.

<sup>373</sup> *Ba'al Ha-Turim*, Vol. II, p.997.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

The Hebrew Bible has been transmitted throughout the ages with the utmost reverence and attention to details. Around 600- 950 C.E. the Tiberian Masoretes added their contribution to this transmission with the inclusion of the written Masorah. These features not only provide information about how to pronounce, chant and punctuate the text, they also serve as a "rudimentary form of literary criticism."<sup>374</sup> The focus of this thesis has been to examine in full two of these features of the Masoretic text that have not received a great deal of scholarly investigation. My assumption from the outset has been that studying the majuscles and minuscules would not only offer insight into these features, but would also provide glimpses into the process and content of the Hebrew Bible. As a result of this research, perhaps more questions than answers have been uncovered. Nonetheless, the following paragraphs summarize the findings of this examination.

The first chapter analyzes the majuscles and minuscules as features of the Masorah. The key assumption is that the Masoretes inherited a consonantal text and added to it features with specific functions. When we consider the subject of the majuscles and minuscules as part of the Masorah two issues arise. One, were the consonants in the received text of a uniform size or did majuscles and minuscules already exist in the text the Masoretes inherited? Two, if the majuscles and minuscules were intentionally added to the text by the Masoretes (or by someone else, either earlier or later than the Masoretes) what was the purpose of these features?

In order to begin to answer these questions Chapter Two makes a sweeping overview of the history of majuscules and minuscules in both biblical and extra-biblical sources. Early artifacts dated ca 300 B.C.E to 135 C.E. including the silver amulets from Ketef Hinnom, the Dead Sea scrolls, the Nash Papyrus and the discoveries from Wadi Murabb'at do not show evidence of majuscules and minuscules. However, I identified two features of the Dead Sea Scrolls that could be precursors to the development of the majuscules and minuscules in the Masoretic text. One is the occasional enlarged *vav*, which was used as a section marker in the Leviticus Scroll (11Qpaleo Lev) and other scrolls uncovered from the Dead Sea area. Another potential precursor is the letters in the Qumran scrolls that do not serve a syntactical function, but rather have been identified by scholars as possible scribal markers for additional interest or meaning related to the text.

Chronologically, the next set of evidence comes from the Babylonian Talmud and the ancient midrashim from the third to the seventh centuries C.E. Other sources from the seventh to ninth centuries C.E. such as tractate *Soferim* and *The Alphabet of Rabbi Akivah* show evidence of these features proliferating. Still later, the independent Masoretic treatises such as *Diqduq ha-Te'amim* and *Okhlah we-Okhlah* from the tenth to thirteenth centuries C.E. list even more of these features.

By 900 –1000 C.E. there is direct evidence of these features in biblical manuscripts. However, only a handful of these features exist in the actual texts that survived as evidenced by the Aleppo Codex (ca first half of the ninth century C.E.), the British Museum Codex Oriental 4445 (ca 820-850 C.E.), the Cairo Codex (895 C.E.) and the Leningrad Codex B19a (1008 C.E.)

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<sup>374</sup> Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford, p. 3.

The number and location of the sites for the majuscles and minuscules proliferated during the middle ages as testified by *Masoreth ha-Masorah* (1538). However, early printing conventions once again limited the number of these features. The earliest printed editions of the Hebrew Bible show few or none of these features. Nonetheless, these features re-emerged in the printed text as time went on.

Based on these findings, there is some fluidity in the text even past the Masoretic period. Though later texts have more of these features, this observation, by itself, is an oversimplification. The question of authority in scribal practice must be considered. For example, *Diqduque Ha-Te'amim* ascribed to one of the last great Masoretes, Aaron Ben Asher, lists more than one majuscle and one minuscule for each letter of the alphabet. Yet, the early manuscripts dated from this same time period show only three or four of these features. Not even all the features listed in tractate *Soferim*, presumably a guideline for scribal practice with nearly the same weight as the Talmud, were incorporated into the early manuscripts.

However, when later manuscripts do begin to include more of these features, majuscles and minuscules do not randomly appear anywhere in the text. Rather these later manuscripts and printed editions rely heavily, but not exclusively, on the sites listed in the early treatise such as *Diqduque Ha-Teamim*, and *Okhlah we-Okhlah*. Clearly, there is the central authority of the Masorah as represented within the guidelines of these works. Yet, there is some latitude to deviate from these prescriptions. Certainly later in time this is obvious, but it is also true even during the time when these treatise were composed - as evidenced from the contemporaneous biblical manuscripts.

Today critical editions of the Hebrew Bible such as the BHS contain only a handful of these features, reflecting the pre-1100 C.E. model codices. More popular editions such as the *Koren Tanach* and the Hebrew part of the Plaut commentary reflect the broader lists, going back to the extensive use of these features in the influential *Second Rabbinic Bible* of Chayyim ibn Adonijah (1524 C.E.)

Regarding the possible function of these features, clearly more work is required. However, at this point we can say that the most compelling possibilities are that the majuscles may have served as some type of scribal marker for the purpose of counting key statistical points in the text. Several of them highlight beginnings, middles and ends of sections of the text. In addition, some of the majuscles may serve this purpose, but we may not be familiar with the distinct literary units that they serve to mark. As a result, we may have lost what was the original point marked by a particular majuscule.

In regards to the minuscules, a strong possibility is that they marked a variant tradition in the reading. However, as in the case of the majuscles, there is not one compelling explanation that covers all the examples. It is also possible that majuscles and minuscules served different functions in different time periods or in the hands of different scribes.

Throughout the thesis the possibility has been considered that these features were the result of scribal errors which became codified as part of the text. Though this is always a possibility, after a careful analysis of the location and frequency of these phenomena, I do not believe that it is a strong probability. In addition, the tradition has other mechanisms for correcting and accounting for scribal errors.



Another possibility is that these features served as markers for some kind of homiletical or exegetical purpose. The earliest understanding of these features from the Babylonian Talmud and from Tractate *Soferim* include both counting and midrashic explanations. There are early midrashim from the third to the ninth centuries C.E. which specifically mention these features. When expounding on the majuscules and minuscules, some of the midrashim borrow ideas or language from other sources and tie them to the feature in the verse. Other midrashim associated with these features appear to be speaking uniquely about the site.

The issue of midrash raises the question of the chicken and the egg- namely did the feature exist first, then a midrash was created to explain it. Alternatively, was there a message that needed to be conveyed as part of the text and the feature was created to transmit this meaning? Though the first argument may be easier to make, especially when the midrash is of a much later date, the second one cannot be simply dismissed. In light of the fact that the written text began as an oral tradition and we do not know what parts may have been lost when the tradition became committed to writing. Especially in light of Emmanuel Tov's work on letters as markers for additional meaning in the Dead Sea Scrolls, this concept of the majuscules and minuscules originating as homiletical or exegetical markers needs further examination.

At the end of this extensive study, many aspects of the majuscules and minuscules remain shrouded in mystery. However, in reading Nachmanides' introduction to his commentary on the Torah I found a quote that expresses my experience of grappling with the text in this way:

Everything that was transmitted to Moses our teacher through the forty-nine gates of understanding was written in the Torah explicitly or by implication

in words, in the numerical value of the letters or in the form of the letters, that is, whether written normally or with some change in form such as bent or crooked letters and other deviations, or in the tips of the letters and their crownlets, as the Sages have said: "When Moses ascended to heaven he found the Holy One, blessed be He, attaching crownlets to certain letters of the Torah. Moses said to God, "What are these for?" "God said to him, "One man is destined to interpret mountains of laws on their basis."<sup>375</sup>

I would paraphrase this to say, "One woman is destined to write a thesis on their basis." Throughout this exercise, the process of discovery has been as important, if not more so, than the results of the discovery. In this regard, the majuscles and minuscules have truly served as windows into the text.

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<sup>375</sup> *Ramban: Commentary on the Torah*, trans. Dr. Charles B. Chavel, (New York: Shilo Publishing House, Inc., 1971), p. 10 from *Menachot* 29b.

# **APPENDIX I: Lists of Majuscule Letters by Alphabet (pg. 1)**

Name of list Dates	Talmud & Soferim (*) 4-8 <sup>th</sup> C.E. 8-9 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	Alphabet of R. Akivah 7-9 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	Len.B19a & BHS (*) 1008 C.E.	Okhlah we- Okhlah 9-10 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	Diqduq Ha- Te'amim 9-10 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible 1524 C.E.	Massoreth ha- Massoreth 1538 C.E.	Ginsburg's Massorah 1880-1905
אשריך Deut 33:29				X				X
אדם 1 Chr 1:1		X		X	X	X	X	X
בראשית Gen 1:1	*	X		X	X	X	X	X
ברה Cant 8:14								X
והתגלח Lev 13:33	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
גן Cant 4:12								X
לגלגלתם Num 1:2								X
אהד Deut 6:4	*	X	X, *	X	X	X	X	X
דברי Koh 1:1								X
הליי Deut 32:6	*	X		X	X	X	X	X
הלעולמים Ps 77:8								X
וילורו Ex 5:25								X
גחון Lev 11:42	X, *	X	*	X	X	X		X
ויתא Est 9:9	X	X on י			X	X	X	X
הכזונה Gen 34:31		X		X				X
זכרו Mal 3:22		X		X	X	X	X	X
ויחיו Gen 47:28		X						
חכלילי Gen 49:12		X		X				X
חור Est 1:6		X		X	X	X	X	X

# **APPENDIX I: Lists of Majuscule Letters by Alphabet** (pg. 2)

Name of list	Talmud & Soferim (*)	Alphabet of R. Akivah	Len.B19a & BHS (*)	Okhlah we-Okhlah	Diqduqe Ha-Te'amim	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible	Massoreth ha-Massoreth	Ginsburg's Massorah
טוב Ex 2:2				X				X
שבטו Job 9:34		X		X	X		X	
טוב Koh 7:1		X				X		X
יגדל Num 14:17	*	X		X	X	X	X	X
יקבהו Prov 11:26								X
וחתמכרתם Deut 28:68				X				X
וכנה Ps 80:16		X		X, X also on נ	X	X	X	X
ונך (ובך?) Deut 2:33				X				X
ושלכם Deut 29:27	*	X		X	X	X	X	X
ישראל Deut 34:12	*							
לגלגלתם Num 1:22								X
לעיני Deut 34:12								X
למרבה Isa 9:6								X
מה Num 24:5				X				X
משלי Prov 1:1		X		X	X	X	X	X
שלשים Gen 50:23				X				X
אלפים Prov 14:4					X			
אלפים Dan 7:10				X				
נצר Ex 34:7		X		X	X	X	X	X

# **APPENDIX I: Lists of Majuscule Letters by Alaphet** (pg. 3)

Name of list	Talmud & Soferim (*)	Alphabet of R. Akivah	Len.B19a & BHS (*)	Okhlah we-Okhlah	Diqduq Ha-Te'amim	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible	Massoreth ha-Massoreth	Ginsburg's Massorah
נחמו Isa 40:1								X
ליני Ruth 3:13				X			X	
משפטן Num 27:5		X	X *	X	X	X	X	X
ויהס Num 13:30				X				X
סוף Koh 12:13		X		X	X	X	X	X
שמע Deut 6:4	*	X	X *	X	X	X	X	X
על Ps 18:50								X
ופתלחל Deut 32:5				X				X
בשפרפרא Dan 6:20		X		X	X	X	X	X
ובהעטין Gen 30:42		X		X		X	X	X
צא Ex 11:8				X				X
צפו Isa 56:10		X		X	X		X	
ציץ Ex 28:36		X on first צ		X				X
קו Deut 22:6				X				X
קו Ps 84:4		X		X	X	X	X	X
אחר Ex 34:14		X		X	X	X	X	X
ראשית Prov 8:22								X
ערש Deut 3:11				X				X

**APPENDIX I: Lists of Majuscule Letters by Alphabet** (pg. 4)

Name of list	Talmud & Soferim (*)	Alphabet of R. Akivah	Len.B19a & BHS (*)	Okhlah we-Okhlah	Diqduq Ha-Te'amim	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible	Massoreth ha-Massoreth	Ginsburg's Massorah
שיר Cant 1:1		X		X	X	X	X	X
תמים Deut 18:13				X		X		X
ותכתב Est 9:29		X		X		X	X	X
תקף Est 9:29					X			
Totals: 62	3, (8*)	30	3, (4*)	42	25	25	25	52

## APPENDIX II: Lists of Majuscule Letters by Biblical Book (pg. 1)

Name of list Dates	Talmud & Soferim (*) 4-8 <sup>th</sup> C.E. 8-9 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	Alphabet of R. Akivah 7-9 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	Len. B19a & BHS (*) 1008 C.E.	Okhlah we- Okhlah 9-10 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	Diqduqe Ha- Te'amim 9-10 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible 1524 C.E.	Massoreth ha- Massoreth 1538 C.E.	Ginsburg's Massorah 1880-1905
<b>Genesis</b>								
בראשית Gen 1:1	*	X		X	X	X	X	X
ובהעטיר Gen 30:42		X		X		X	X	X
חכזונה Gen 34:31		X		X				X
ויהיו Gen 47:28		X						
חכלילי Gen 49:12		X		X				X
שלשים Gen 50:23				X				X
<b>Exodus</b>								
טוב Ex 2:2				X				X
ויורחו Ex 5:25								X
צא Ex 11:8				X				X
ציץ Ex 28:36		X on first צ		X				X
נצר Ex 34:7		X		X	X	X	X	X
אחר Ex 34:14		X		X	X	X	X	X
<b>Leviticus</b>								
גחון Lev 11:42	*, X	X	*	X	X	X		X
והתגלח Lev 13:33	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
<b>Numbers</b>								
לגלגלתם Num 1:2								X
ויהס Num 13:30				X				X

# **APPENDIX II: Lists of Majuscule Letters by Biblical Book (pg. 2)**

Name of list	Talmud & Soferim (*)	Alphabet of R. Akivah	Len. B19a & BHS (*)	Okhlah we-Okhlah	Diqduq Ha-Te'amim	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible	Massoreth ha-Massoreth	Girzburg's Massorah
יגדל Num 14:17	*	X		X	X	X	X	X
מה Num 24:5				X				X
משפטן Num 27:5		X	X, *	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Deuteronomy</b>								
ונך (ובך?) Deut 2:33				X				X
ערש Deut 3:11				X				X
שמע Deut 6:4	*	X	X, *	X	X	X	X	X
אחד Deut 6:4	*	X	X, *	X	X	X	X	X
תמים Deut 18:13				X		X		X
קו Deut 22:6				X				X
וחתמכרתם Deut 28:68				X				X
וישלכם Deut 29:27	*	X		X	X	X	X	X
ופתלתל Deut 32:5				X				X
הליי Deut 32:6	*	X		X	X	X	X	X
אשריך Deut 33:29				X				X
ישראל Deut 34:12	*							
לעיני Deut 34:12								X
<b>Prophets</b>								
נחמו Isa 40:1								X
למובה Isa 9:6								X



# **APPENDIX II: Lists of Majuscule Letters by Biblical Book (pg. 3)**

Name of list	Talmud & Soferim (*)	Alphabet of R. Akivah	Len. B19a & BHS (*)	Okhlah we-Okhlah	Diqduqe Ha-Te'amim	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible	Massoreth ha-Massoreth	Ginsburg's Massorah
צפו Isa 56:10		X		X	X		X	
זכרו Mal 3:22		X		X	X	X	X	X
<b>Scriptures</b>								
על Ps 18:50								X
הלעולמים Ps 77:8								X
וכנה Ps 80:16		X		X,X also on J	X	X	X	X
קו Ps 84:4		X		X	X	X	X	X
משלי Prov 1:1		X		X	X	X	X	X
ראשית Prov 8:22								X
יקבחו Prov 11:26								X
אלפים Prov 14:4					X			
שבטו Job 9:34		X		X	X		X	
שיר Cant 1:1		X		X	X	X	X	X
גן Cant 4:12								X
ברה Cant 8:14								X
ליני Ruth 3:13				X			X	
דברי Koh 1:1								X
טוב Koh 7:1		X				X		X
סוף Koh 12:13		X		X	X	X	X	X

# **APPENDIX II: Lists of Majuscule Letters by Biblical Book** (pg. 4)

Name of list	Talmud & Soferim (*)	Alphabet of R. Akivah	Len. B19a & BHS (*)	Okhlah we-Okhlah	Diqduq Ha-Te'amim	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible	Massoreth ha-Massoreth	Ginsburg's Massorah
חור Est 1:6		X		X	X	X	X	X
ויתחא Est 9:9	X	X on י			X	X	X	X
ותכתב Est 9:29		X		X		X	X	X
תקף Est 9:29					X			
בשפר פרא Dan 6:20		X		X	X	X	X	X
אלפים Dan 7:10				X				
אדם 1 Chr 1:1		X		X	X	X	X	X
Totals: 62	3, (8*)	30	3, (4*)	42	25	25	25	52

### APPENDIX III: Lists of Minuscule Letters by Alphabet (pg. 1)

Name of list Dates		Talmud & Soferim (*) 4-8 <sup>th</sup> C.E. 8-9 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	Alphabet of R. Akivah 7-9 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	Len. B19a & BHS (*) 1008 C.E.	Okhlah we- Okhlah 9-10 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	Diqduq Ha- Te'amim 9-10 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible 1524 C.E.	Massoreth ha- Massoreth 1538 C.E.	Ginsburg's Massorah 1880-1905
ויקרא Lev 1:1	א		X		X	X	X	X	X
בנות Prov 30:15	ב						X		X
הב Prov 30:15	ב		X		X	X	X	X	X
בני Lam 4:2	ב								X
וגוש Job 7:5	ג		X		X	X	X	X	X
אדם Prov 28:17	ד		X		X	X	X	X	X
חוד Koh 1:4	ד								X
בהבראם Gen 2:4	ה		X		X	X	X	X	X
וכבשה Lev 14:10	ה						X		X
וכבשה Num 6:14	ה								X
המרו Ps 107:11	ה								X
שלום Num 25:12	ו	X	X		X		X	X	X
ונפשו I Kings 2:23	ו					X			
ונפשו Ps 22:30	ו				X			X	
לשוא Ps 24:4	ו							X	
ויזתא Est 9:9	ז		X		X	X	X	X	X
זרמו Ps 77:18	ז								X
חתול Ezek 30:21	ח								X
חף Job 33:9	ח		X		X	X	X	X	X
טבעו Lam 2:9	ט		X		X	X	X	X	X
וטהרתים Neh 13:30	ט						X	X	X

### APPENDIX III: Lists of Minuscle Letters by Alphabet (pg. 2)

Name of list		Talmud & Soferim (*)	Alphabet of R. Akivah	Len. B19a & BHS (*)	Okhlah we-Okhlah	Diqduq Ha-Te'amim	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible	Massoreth ha-Massoreth	Ginsburg's Massorah
תשי Deut 32:18	י	*	X		X	X	X	X	X
כרם Gen 9:20	כ								X
ולבכתה Gen 23:2	כ		X		X	X	X	X	X
לוא Lam 1:12	ל		X		X	X	X	X	X
מוקדה Lev 6:2	מ					X		X	
ממרים Deut 9:24	מ				X	X		X	
וטהרתים Neh 13:30	ם				X	X		X	
ביום Ps 27:5	ם								X
נפתלי Gen 49:12	נ		X						
נפלה Amos 5:2	נ		X						
נעו Nahum 1:3	נ							X	
יצפני Ps 27:5	נ				X				
ליני Ruth 3:13	נ								X
נעו Lam 4:14	נ					X			
אורן Isa 44:14	ן		X on previous ן	X, *	X	X	X	X	X
ונרגן Prov 16:28	ן		X on ן	X	X	X	X	X	X
וגבושזבן Jer 39:13	ן		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
סורו Isa 30:11	ס								X
בסופה Nahum 1:3	ס		X			X		X	
בסכה Ps 27:5	ס		X		X		X	X	X
לעות Lam 3:36	ע		X		X	X	X	X	X
בשפרפרא Dan 6:20	פ		X		X	X	X	X	X

### APPENDIX III: Lists of Minuscule Letters by Alphabet (pg. 3)

Name of list		Talmud & Soferim (*)	Alphabet of R. Akivah	Len. B19a & BHS (*)	Okhlah we-Okhlah	Diqduqe Ha-Te'amim	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible	Massoreth ha-Massoreth	Ginsburg's Massorah
בשצף Isa 54:8	ף								X
וצוחת Jer 14:2	צ		X		X	X		X	
צרי Job 16:9	צ								X
יפרצני Job 16:14	צ		X						X
וחץ I Sam 17:7	ץ				X				
פרץ Job 16:14	ץ				X	X		X	
קצתי Gen 27:46	ק		X		X	X	X	X	X
בקמיהם Ex 32:25	ק							X	
יערי II Sam 21:19	ר					X			
ראשית Ex 34:26	ר							X	
ראש Ps 119:160	ר								X
פרמשתא Est 9:9	ר ש ת		X,X ת,ש		X,X ר,ש	X ש	X ש	X ת	X ש
פרשנדתא Est 9:7	ר ש ת		X ר		X ת	X ת		X ש	
תקף Est 9:29	ת								X
אשנבי Prov 7:6	ש								X
תם Lam 4:22	ת								X
Totals: 62		1, (*1)	26	3, (*3)	29	28	23	33	40

# **APPENDIX IV: Lists of Minuscule Letters by Biblical Book** (pg. 1)

Name of list Dates		Talmud & Soferim (*) 4-8 <sup>th</sup> C.E. 8-9 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	Alphabet of R. Akivah 7-9 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	Len. B19a & BHS (*) 1008 C.E.	Okhlah we- Okhlah 9-10 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	Diqduqe Ha- Te'amim 9-10 <sup>th</sup> C.E.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible 1524 C.E.	Massoreth ha- Massoreth 1538 C.E.	Ginsburg's Massorah 1880-1905
<b>Genesis</b>									
בהבראם Gen 2:4	ה		X		X	X	X	X	X
כרם Gen 9:20	כ								X
ולבכתה Gen 23:2	כ		X		X	X	X	X	X
קצתי Gen 27:46	ק		X		X	X	X	X	X
נפתלי Gen 49:12	נ		X						
<b>Exodus</b>									
בקמיהם Ex 32:25	ק							X	
ראשית Ex 34:26	ר							X	
<b>Leviticus</b>									
ויקרא Lev 1:1	א		X		X	X	X	X	X
מוקדה Lev 6:2	מ					X		X	
וכבשה Lev 14:10	ה						X		X
<b>Numbers</b>									
וכבשה Num 6:14	ה								X
שלום Num 25:12	ו	X	X		X		X	X	X
<b>Deuteronomy</b>									
ממרים Deut 9:24	מ				X	X		X	
תשי Deut 32:18	י	*	X		X	X	X	X	X
<b>Prophets</b>									
וחץ I Sam 17:7	ץ				X				
יערי II Sam 21:19	ר					X			
ונפשו I Kings 2:23	ו					X			

# APPENDIX IV: Lists of Minuscule Letters by Biblical Book (pg. 2)

Name of list		Talmud & Soferim (*)	Alphabet of R. Akivah	Len. B19a & BHS (*)	Okhlah we-Okhlah	Diqduqe Ha-Te'amim	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible	Massoreth ha-Massoreth	Ginsburg's Massorah
סורו Isa 30:11	ס								X
אורן Isa 44:14	ן		X on previous ך	X, *	X	X	X	X	X
בשצף Isa 54:8	ף								X
וצוחת Jer 14:2	צ		X		X	X		X	
וגבושזבן Jer 39:13	ן		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
חתול Ezek 30:21	ח								X
נפלה Amos 5:2	נ		X						
בסופה Nahum 1:3	ס		X			X		X	
נעו Nahum 1:3	נ							X	
<b>Scriptures</b>									
ונפשו Ps 22:30	ו				X			X	
לשוא Ps 24:4	ו							X	
יצפנני Ps 27:5	נ				X				
בסכה Ps 27:5	ס		X		X		X	X	X
ביום Ps 27:5	ם								X
זרמו Ps 77:18	ז								X
המרו Ps 107:11	ה								X
ראש Ps 119:160	ר								X
אשנבי Prov 7:6	ש								X
ונרגן Prov 16:28	ן		X on ך	X	X	X	X	X	X
אדם Prov 28:17	ד		X		X	X	X	X	X
בנות Prov 30:15	ב						X		X

APPENDIX IV: Lists of Minuscule Letters by Biblical Book (pg. 3)									
Name of list		Talmud & Soferim (*)	Alphabet of R. Akiyah	Len. B19a & BHS (*)	Okhlah we-Okhlah	Diqduqe Ha-Te'amim	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible	Massoreth ha-Massoreth	Ginsburg's Massorah
הב Prov 30:15	ב		X		X	X	X	X	X
וגוש Job 7:5	ג		X		X	X	X	X	X
פרץ Job 16:14	ץ				X	X		X	
יפרצני Job 16:14	צ		X						X
צרי Job 16:9	צ								X
חף Job 33:9	ח		X		X	X	X	X	X
ליני Ruth 3:13	נ								X
לוא Lam 1:12	ל		X		X	X	X	X	X
טבעו Lam 2:9	ט		X		X	X	X	X	X
לעות Lam 3:36	ע		X		X	X	X	X	X
בני Lam 4:2	ב								X
נעו Lam 4:14	נ					X			
תם Lam 4:22	ת								X
חדו Koh 1:4	ד								X
פרשנדתא Est 9:7	ר ש ת		X  ר		X  ת	X  ת		X  ש	
פרמשחא Est 9:9	ר ש ת		X,X ש,ת		X,X ש,ר	X ש	X ש	X ת	X ש
ויתא Est 9:9	ז		X		X	X	X	X	X
תקר Est 9:29	ת								X
בשפררא Dan 6:20	פ		X		X	X	X	X	X
וטהרתים Neh 13:30	ט						X	X	X
וטהרתים Neh 13:30	ם				X	X		X	
Totals: 62		1, (*1)	26	3, (*3)	29	28	23	33	40



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