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**Entering the Orchard:
Interacting with Shir HaShirim in Study and
Worship**

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Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
March 2000 / Adar 5760
Referee, Professor Dr. David Weisberg**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for ordination

For Jeff
My husband, my lover, my friend

זה דודי וזה רעי
בנות ירושלים

You have drawn me into the orchard and awakened my heart
and mind to love

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Precis

This thesis studies the issue of sacred literature through the vehicle of one particular book in the Tanakh – Shir HaShirim. I have asked the questions – Why do we need sacred texts? How should we read our sacred texts? What processes are involved in the creation and preservation of these texts? How do our sacred texts continue to have meaning in our lives today?

This journey takes me from a general look at the process of canonization and specifically at the arguments and reasons including Shir HaShirim, to the process of preserving and transmitting the texts and the work of the Masoretes. I have been blessed with the opportunity to study a rare manuscript, known as the Ibn Musa Bible, written in Lisbon, Portugal, by Shmuel ben Shmuel Ibn Musa, in 1475. I have endeavoured to delve into the mind of this particular *sofer* to try to understand how he approached his task. I have studied the way that Shir HaShirim has been used in our liturgy and have concluded with a chapter on my own personal approach and experience with sacred literature in a particular congregation.

Philip Davies, in Scribes and Schools, accurately depicts scholarly research when he says;

To understand a problem is not to answer it, nor is answering it necessarily the same as understanding it. Indeed, I have often introduced lectures by remarking that scholarship exists to create problems and not to solve them.

I feel that I have come up with more questions than answers in working with the Ibn Musa Bible. This manuscript was a liturgical Bible and contains the Torah, the Haftorot, the five Megillot and Megillat Antiochus.

I have approached this manuscript in three different ways:

1. I have used Dr. Lehman's categories to provide a description of the complete manuscript, (Appendix I), noting the codicology of the manuscript - the type of writing and binding, the content, the masorah *gadola* and the masorah

- katana* and the *sha'arim*. I have also noted some peculiarities and points of interest for further scholarly pursuit.
2. The next approach was "delving into the mind of the *sofer*" (Chapter Two), and trying to understand what authoritative works he had in front of him to complete the manuscript. I applied the rules of Masekhet Soferim and Rambam's Hilchot Sefer Torah, as two independent collections of masorah to determine whether or not this manuscript could be considered a model codex.
 3. The final approach I took was to compare the book of Shir HaShirim in the Ibn Musa Bible to that in B19a, the Leningrad Codex, (Chapter Three). I wanted to determine whether or not this is a model codex as compared to one that the scholarly world has claimed is the best text that we have of the complete Bible. In this section I looked at breaks in the text, defective and plene spellings, and summaries of verses.

This research has left me with many questions for which I have proposed a few theories. However, this is still a work in progress and many more scholars could find a lifetime of research with this manuscript.

In my discussions of Shir HaShirim, I have alluded to many different interpretations of the text, but I have not tried to compete in this field due to the many fine treatments and commentaries that exist on this book. Shir HaShirim has been my inspiration and my window into the many varieties of fruits that are part of our heritage, in our orchard of Jewish texts.

Lori Macklis

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My friends at Cedar Village who have supported me during my years of studying at Hebrew Union College.

To all of these people I wish to say תודה רבה !

Spring 1475

The early morning rays of the sun were just beginning to dance with the dust particles that floated across the whitewashed windowsill of his room as he carefully and lovingly unwound his tefillin - "I will betroth you to Me forever, and I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in loyalty and in love..."¹ The last few lines of the tefillah were being murmured as the box slid down his left arm and over his ink-stained fingers.

For seven months now Shmuel² had woken up to the prospect of another day of writing -- transferring the sacred text onto the freshly lined parchment -- letter by letter, word by word, book by book. He was being paid handsomely for this task by a very wealthy and influential member of the Lisbon³ Synagogue, selected over other soferim from the city. Shmuel was well respected -- for his observance, for his artistic hand and for his reverence for the text. This knowledge comforted him when the cold damp days of winter made his fingers ache and his back cry out in pain. He yearned to spend these warm spring days in the marketplace or the garden instead of hunching over the little wooden desk by the window. And yet he loved the feel of the quill and how the ink flowed and created the sacred letters.

Today he would begin a new book, Shir HaShirim, the Holy of Holies⁴, the

¹ Hosea 2:21-22

² This is the name of the sofer who wrote the Ibn Musa Bible, manuscript #2 Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Rare Book Room.

³ The Ibn Musa Bible was written in Lisbon, Portugal in 1475 CE. The name of the patron has been erased from the colophon. We do not know why this is the case but there have been both modern and ancient examples of a person's name being erased from a public place due to the embarrassment that the individual caused the community. We also know from the case of Ya'akov ben Chayim ben Yitzhak Ibn Adonijah, the scholar that worked with Daniel Bomberg on the Second Rabbinic Bible that his name was erased in further editions because he converted to Christianity (Introduction to the Rabbinic Bible, C.D. Ginsburg, p. 14-15)

⁴ Rabbi Akiva calls Shir HaShirim the Holy of Holies, Yadayim 3:5

pinnacle of the sacred writings. This garden of heavenly delights would now be a part of his heart and soul for the next several days. He would be transported to the orchards and feel love throbbing in his veins. All of his innermost passions would be interwoven in the letters - his love of G-d, his reverence for the text and his devotion to his wife.

Shmuel had never written this text before but he would make sure that he copied it letter for letter from the manuscript that he had before him. Each letter would be noted, each vowel, each accent, following in the ancient tradition that had been handed down to him. His father, a hazan and sweet singer of Israel⁵, taught him to love the sweet melodies of words, putting him to sleep each night of his childhood with his songs and words of scripture.

He awoke from his reverie into childhood days and readied himself for the task before him. He stood before the basin of freshly drawn rain water and repeated, "*Baruch Ata Adonai...al netilat yadayim*"⁶, purifying himself in body and mind for his holy work. He made a few flowing lines at the side of the parchment⁷ to make sure that the ink was properly prepared. And then he began....

שיר השירים אשר לשלמה

⁵ In the colophon of the Ibn Musa Bible it says: "I, Shmuel the Younger, son of the honourable Rav Shmuel, the hazan, sweet singer of Israel, son of Musa....". This name suggests the minhag of the Sephardic community to name a newborn after a living relative.

⁶ It is a custom for many soferim to go to the mikveh before writing a sacred text. In this case the b'racha would be "al ha-tvillah". For the purpose of this story I have had the sofer do the ritual hand washing.

⁷ Several pages of the manuscript are marked with slender flowing lines at the sides of the columns. The reason behind them is pure conjecture, but gathered from reading Umberto Eco, The Name of the Rose, which takes place at a medieval scriptorium.

Chapter One: Our Sacred Texts

For thousands of years we have cherished our sacred texts. We have studied them, worshiped with them, and based our communities on their values. Their words and stories have shaped our beliefs and practices. These texts have been able to transcend time and geography and have helped us to connect with the Divine. In times of joy and of sorrow, we have turned to the texts in our canon to find words to help us celebrate and words to help us mourn.

I find myself intrigued by questions such as; Why do we need sacred texts? How do we decide which texts are sacred? How should we read our sacred texts? What processes were involved in the creation and preservation of these texts? How do they maintain their eternal message for us today? These are fundamental questions that help us define the ultimate truths of our existence as Jews. We exist today because we preserved their existence.

Our sacred writings, known as Tanakh (תנ"ך), began with the affirmation that the rabbis gave at the council of Yavneh, in the second century of the common era, to a group of writings that were considered religiously authoritative. However, before Yavneh, there was already a general consensus that certain writings influenced and created the religious milieu of the Jewish people. These were the words of the God of Israel, spoken either to Moses at Sinai, or through the mouths of the prophets. They also included the wisdom of the sages of Israel, who were blessed with understanding the world and our place within it. Thus Israel was connected to God through the priests, prophets and sages, that recorded the details of that relationship in the Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim. These divisions were delineated first by Gamliel II, the Nasi between 80-117

CE, as recorded in the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 90b, as "the law, the prophets and the writings".

The affirmation that was granted by the early rabbis was significant because it established the end of the era when God's words would be recorded. By stating what was considered holy, they set the boundary against those writings that were not considered holy. This sealed our book. From that point on no other text would have the same status.

We are called the "People of the Book" because of our relationship with the text. Since the council of Yavneh, we have seen ourselves as a community of interpreters, as we continue to glean the laws, the traditions and our values from these books that comprise our canon - our body of sacred writings.

It is possible to delineate many types of arguments for why particular books were included in our canon - historical, divinely written, divinely inspired, sociological, cultural and ethical. However, my thesis is that as much as all of these reasons have merit, there is one overriding consideration --- we as a people have loved these writings so much that we have declared them sacred. With a profound feeling of love and attachment, these writings have been preserved with care; they have spoken to our lives or experiences; they have given voice to our deepest and most vulnerable feelings, and we have listened to the voice of the God of Israel echoing through every word. We have loved their words so much that we have offered our complete and total fidelity to them. Our story is their story.

The History of the Canon:

We are not the only people with a religious canon. Religious communities need a canon of sacred literature in order to define who they are and how they perceive their reality.¹ In many ways we can compare the formation of our canon with that of other ancient communities. Philip Davies, in his book Scribes and Schools, talks about the 'canonization process' that has taken place in Mesopotamia, Greece, Egypt and Israel, each culture developing a body of literature that gives shape and meaning to their particular community. Davies focuses on the preservation of the text rather than its formation. He sees similarities in all of these ancient communities in regards to several features of this process:²

1. the classification and cataloguing of texts
2. the use of archaic language and a veneration for the ancient
3. conservatism in transmitting the texts over a long period of time
4. the association of the literature with an event or festival
5. the authority of particular schools of scribes
6. producing a definitive text
7. the preservation of the text through models and copying
8. the creation of libraries
9. a sense of the classical age already past
10. the formation of a social identity

¹ Ninian Smart and Richard Hecht, Sacred Texts of the World; p.XI.

² Philip Davies, Scribes and Schools; p. 33-35.

I disagree with Davies, and other Biblical minimalists, that claim that the literature was written solely by scribes as a religious document apart from any historical events and persons. I do believe in the historical underpinnings of the text and the Divine inspiration behind the words, but I agree that the text was preserved through the diligent work of those *soferim* that were inspired and religiously bound to preserve the integrity of the words of the text and to hear God's voice in the words.

In the light of these views, I would like to maintain that we have sacred texts that were canonized and preserved by the *soferim*. In this way I would view these two categories as distinct -- the formation period and the canonization period. For the purposes of this work I will begin with the canonization period since the matter of the formation is one based more on faith than scholarship and can not be proved. I personally would rather take my leap of faith on the side of tradition.

The categories that Davies delineates are helpful for two reasons - one because they reflect a process over a period of time, and two because they take into account the many different reasons that the texts have come together as a body of literature - historical, cultural, liturgical, and sociological. This separation between the formation of the text and the canonization, allows the reader of sacred literature to know that it is possible to "subscribe to the notion of Torah as divine and immutable even while recognizing, as a twentieth century person must, that the Bible is human and historically contingent".³ Thus Divine and human meet in the midst of the words that have been lovingly preserved.

³ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, What is Scripture?, p. 113.

We have within our tradition a story in Pirkei Avot that explains the history of our sacred literature:

משה קבל תורה מסיני ומסרה ליהושע ויהושע לזקנים וזקנים לנביאים
ונביאים מסרוה לאנשי כנסת הגדולה. הם אמרו שלשה דברים, הוו מתונים
בדין והעמידו תלמידים ועשו סיג לתורה.⁴

"Moshe received Torah at Sinai and מסר it to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets מסרו it to the members of the Great Assembly. They stated three principles: Be deliberate in judgment, educate many pupils, and set a fence around the Torah."

It is possible to understand this mishnah in many different ways but for the purpose of this work I would like to comment on four things: One, that this mishnah itself makes a distinction between the Divine process and the human process. Moshe "קבל", "received" Torah from Sinai but he "מסר" it to Joshua. (We will discuss the possible translations of this word later and the repercussions for our work.) Thereafter it becomes our human responsibility to hand it on to the next generation. Two, that Torah here represents God's words to us and is not limited just to the five books of Moshe. Three, that the Torah was given first to one person but that later it became the property of all people. The Great Assembly, comprised of 120 members from the time of the return from the Babylonian exile, and they in turn saw it as their responsibility to raise up, or support, through Torah, many students. And finally, that the scholars were responsible for putting a fence, a protective wall, around the Torah. They were to preserve it so that it would not become corrupted.

⁴ Pirkei Avot 1:1. Note: Guttman in his article "Tractate Abot", p. 111, states that this mishnah is a later addition from geonic times and was a direct way for the Jews living in Islamic countries to defend their Torah according to the principal of "hadith" - an historical account, and "isnad"- the chain of transmitters in the Islamic tradition. According to Islamic law this guaranteed the truth of a tradition.

Now it is possible to set our mishnah against the categories of canonization that Davies specifies. Our tradition also understands this as a process over a long period of time; it reflects the ideas of preserving and venerating the ancient text; it is set within a particular historical framework -- the experience at Sinai; it specifies a particular text that is preserved and it defines a social identity of people who see their heritage as stemming from Sinai. It also preserves the concept of a group of scholars and students that will continue the tradition and preserve it for future generations.

Now let us come to this enigmatic word מסר. It can be translated "to offer up", "to transmit", "to deliver". Thus from the moment of Moshe on through the generations we have a concept of God's message being "offered", "transmitted" or "delivered", from one person to the next, from one group to the next. This word, however translated, gives us the notion of both the preservation of the original as well as the individual role of the person or group in the chain of tradition. This מסורה -- masorah, or tradition of passing on God's message, has been maintained for us in two ways - the first is in the preservation of the unified message as well as the voice of all of those who transmitted it.

Our sacred texts today then retain the preservation of God's message as well as the voice of all of the scholars throughout the ages. Today this is our rabbinic Bible, a culmination of the work and understanding of our heritage, instructions and traditions about the text. Our sacred texts then are a product of more than their origin. They are a reflection of our morning liturgy, מחדש בכל יום תמיד, "the One that continues to renew each day" the significance of the words.

Let us return now to the work of the earliest rabbis and the council of Yavneh in

the first century of the common era. Although our mishnah ended with the men of the Great Assembly and the text of Ezra and Nehemiah, our rabbis of the first century CE felt a need to settle any ambiguities about what texts were or were not a part of our canon. Scholars have debated over whether the assembly of Yavneh convened in order to set the canon, or rather to approve that which was already accepted. Some scholars say that the question was still open for debate into the second century CE for some books. It is still undecided as to the role that this council performed and how much authority was granted to them. History tells us that Rabbi Yohanan b. Zakkai escaped from the siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE and asked the Romans for permission to establish a school at Yavneh. This school did not call themselves the Sanhedrin, after the group of 72 sages that existed during the Second Temple, but they did appear to take on some of its legal functions. There is a discussion recorded in Mishnah Yadayim 4:6 between Rabbi Yohanan and the Saducees over whether the scriptures "defile the hands", so it is likely that this term was first used with sacred writings by him.⁵

This term "defiling the hands" is a difficult concept for us to appreciate since we have long left the rituals of Temple times. Solomon Zeitlin⁶ tries to understand the significance of this term. He asks the question, 'Why should just the hands be defiled and not the whole body?' In the Torah we learn that if any part of the body touches something unclean then the whole person is considered defiled and must go through the process of purification. Zeitlin claims that the concept 'defiling the hands' in regards to scripture, came as a result of a *takannah*, a ruling, made by the schools of Hillel and Shammai against the Saducees and the

⁵ Jack Lewis, "What Do We Mean By Yavneh?"

⁶ Solomon Zeitlin, "An Historical Study of the Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures".

priesthood. If something that was impure by the second degree touched the *terumah*, the food set aside for the priests, it became impure and had to be burned and not eaten.

Therefore, he claims that if the priests studied the holy books then their hands would become unclean in the second degree and they therefore could not eat the *terumah*. Zeitlin sees this as a political-religious battle and the way that the Pharisees could claim superiority and access to the holy books. This could then be seen as beginning of the radical departure in theology, from the concept of a sacred place, to a sacred text.

We may never be able to fully appreciate the use of this term, and certainly Zeitlin's view is still one that is filled with uncertainty and speculation, however, it is the definitive term used in the Talmudic sources in describing those books which were seen as sacred and those which were not. The rabbis themselves never discussed the word 'canon', rather using either the three part designation "the law, the prophets and the writings" or the books that "defile the hands".

Most scholars will admit that the first section, the Torah, was already seen as authoritative and binding by the time of Ezra. There are more disagreements over the canonization of the Prophets. Some scholars believe that the prophets were already canonized in a very early period, whereas others say that it was into the Hellenistic period, around the third century BCE. Some claim that some of the dispute was over particular books in the prophets, like Ezekiel, that appears to conflict with the Torah in some of the halakhic rules over the sacrifices.⁷

⁷ Solomon Zeitlin, "The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures", in regards to Ezekiel 45:18 and Num.28:11.

However, the dispute was not necessarily whether or not they were authoritative, but whether or not they should be read by the public or "hidden way", לגנוז, because of the nature of some of the passages, like the vision of the chariot, in Ezekiel. Freedman⁸ states that the date for the acceptance of a text's authoritative stature is the same as the date for canonization and therefore believes in an early date for the process.

The third section of the Tanakh, the writings, is the area where there is the most discension as to the date of canonization. If we take Freedman's argument, we can state that the writings were quoted by the early *tannaim* in support of the law, and therefore, were authoritative by the first century. What has become a basis for the dispute is the evidence that we have over the number of books in the Tanakh. Josephus lists 22 books in the canon⁹, whereas, the Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 14b, lists 24 books. This may be a discrepancy with the number of books in the canon, or it may be a matter of which books were attached to others in the same scroll, for example Jeremiah and Lamentations, and Ruth and Judges. It may also be which books were a part of Prophets, perhaps Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah, and which books were in the section called Writings. We do not have exhaustive lists of the scrolls by name and their categories, so we cannot state conclusively why there is this difference.

⁸ David Noel Freedman, "The Law and the Prophets".

⁹ Josephus, Against Apion, 1:8, "Jews have 22 books - 5 of Moses, 13 are prophetic and the remaining 4 contain the hymns to God and the precepts".

Shir HaShirim as a Sacred Writing:

Since the area of Ketuvim, the Writings, is the most controversial aspect of our canon, in terms of dates of inclusion in the canon, and to its own inherent value as authoritative literature, then I will proceed with this discussion looking particularly at the case of Shir HaShirim, perhaps one of the last to be included as part of the sacred literature. In terms of setting the discussion of its inclusion it would be helpful to ask the following questions based on Smart and Hecht¹⁰:

1. Did Shir HaShirim support or contradict something already in the canon?
2. Was the authorship clearly discernable?
3. What was the status of the book in the contemporary community?

I would also add the following:

4. Did the status of sacredness proceed canonization or does canonization confer the status of sacred?
5. Why was Shir HaShirim included in the canon?
6. Is there a difference in the way that Shir HaShirim functions as a sacred text and the way that it has been treated in the commentaries, the interpretation of the text?
7. What evidence do we have of the authoritative status of Shir HaShirim prior to Yavneh?
8. How could a piece of poetry, so obviously erotic, be included as part of the sacred literature?

¹⁰ Ninian Smart and Richard Hecht, Sacred Texts of the World, p. 46-47.

We can look at what our classical sources have to say about Shir HaShirim. In Avot d'Rabbi Natan we read the following:

Originally, Mishle, Shir HaShirim, and Kohelet were suppressed; since they were held to be mere parables and not part of the Holy Writings the religious authorities arose and suppressed them; and so they remained until the men of Hezekiah came and interpreted them.¹¹

From this work by one of the earliest *tannaim* we can see that certain books, including Shir HaShirim, were suppressed or hidden away by the authorities for some reason until they were later interpreted. We also read in the Mishnah Yadaim 3:5 that:

Rabbi Judah said that the Book of Kohelet defiles not the hands, and with respect to Song of Songs there was a difference of opinion. Rabbi Jose said, Song of Songs defiles the hands, and with respect to Kohelet there is a dispute.

Against doubts expressed about the inclusion of some of these books in the first century we have the words of Rabbi Akiva:

אמר רבי עקיבא: אין כל העולם כדאי כיום שניתן בו
שיר השירים לישראל שכל כתובים קדש ושיר השירים קדש
קדשים.¹²

Heaven forbid! No Jew ever questioned the sanctity of Shir HaShirim; for all of creation does not compare in worth to the day on which Shir HaShirim was given to Israel. Indeed all Scripture is holy, but Shir HaShirim is the holiest of the holy.

¹¹ Avot d'Rabbi Natan, Chapter 1.

¹² Mishnah Yadayim 3:5.

It may equally be the case that the discussions in the Talmud were not so much about whether the books would be included in the canon, but rather about whether they should have been included, a fait accompli. All subsequent rabbis and commentators traditionally have accepted the opinion of the highly respected Rabbi Akiva, who was also reported to say, "Had not Torah been given Shir HaShirim would have sufficed to guide the world".¹³

So from the time of Rabbi Akiva on, there has not been any dispute as to the sacredness of Shir HaShirim, but before his time there were some disputes. So we can ask - Why was the book of Shir HaShirim so controversial before the first century? It seems from another quote of Rabbi Akiva's that the song was being sung in secular places: "He who trills his voice in chanting Song of Songs, in the banquet house and treats it as a sort of song has no part in the world to come".¹⁴ For this statement to have been made it seems as if people were treating Shir HaShirim as a piece of erotic poetry, and from a surface and literal meaning it is understandable that people thought it to be so -- "Kiss me, make me drunk with your kisses! Your sweet loving is better than wine" (SHS 1:2 - All quotes are from the translation by Chana and Ariel Bloch unless specified.). In the words of Gerson Cohen who said in regards to the position of the early rabbis:

How, then, could they have been duped -- or better yet, have deluded themselves and others ---into regarding a piece of erotica as genuine religious literature, as the holy of holies!!¹⁵

It seems from the evidence that we have gathered, that Shir HaShirim was sufficiently different from all other books of the Tanakh to have made its

¹³ Agadat Shir HaShirim, as translated by Marvin Pope in The Anchor Bible - Song of Songs, p. 92.

¹⁴ Sanhedrin 101a. (Translation by Dr. Jerusalemi)

¹⁵ Gerson D. Cohen, "The Song of Songs and the Jewish Religious Mentality", p.2.

inclusion a matter for discussion. We also have the contradiction that stems from the fact that there was a severe prohibition against anthropomorphisms when depicting God, and we have before us a book that is purely anthropomorphic in its descriptions according to its interpretation!

If such is the case, then we still need to ask the question, why was Shir HaShirim included in the canon when it seemed to contradict the writings which were already considered holy? One, was the traditional belief according to the superscription, that it was written by King Solomon. Tradition taught that King Solomon wrote Shir HaShirim, "The Song of Songs by Solomon" (SHS 1:1) in his youth, Mishle in his middle years and Kohelet in his old age.¹⁶ There are numerous possibilities for translating the phrase "אשר לשלמה". It could be "by Solomon", "for Solomon", "belonging to Solomon". Any one of these gave Shir HaShirim some measure of status and authority.

Today, scholars debate the date of Shir HaShirim based on the vocabulary, loan words from other languages, grammatical structures, geographic names, and comparative literature and come up with dates that range from the time of King Solomon in the mid-900s BCE up to the 218 BCE.¹⁷ Those who date the book early do so on the basis of influence from Egyptian as well as Indian culture, the role of Tirzah (SHS 6:4) as the capital of the northern kingdom, and the affluence of the city of Jerusalem in King Solomon's time. Those who date it late do so on the basis of some words, like *'pardes*, coming from Persian, the Greek ideas within the song and the grammatical structure, for example using the prefix 'ש' instead of אשר. Other scholars present reasons for why they believe that it is

¹⁶ Song of Songs Raba 1:1.

¹⁷ Marvin Pope, Song of Songs, p. 22-33. Pope gives a good summary of the history and reasoning behind all of these positions and the scholars involved.

composed of ancient songs that were collected and written down in their present form in about the fourth century. From all of the arguments and theories it is safe to assume that there are equal but insufficient grounds for all positions. Thus the date of the writing becomes less important than the role that it later assumes. Robert Altar states that trying to find the "sitz im leben", the life setting is "a prime instance of the misplaced concreteness that has plagued biblical research, which naively presumes that the life setting, if we could recover it, would somehow provide the key to the language, structure and meaning".¹⁸

Another question concerning canonicity was how the writing was perceived by the contemporary community. We have evidence that Esther was also a controversial book, but it was a story that the people loved and recited so much that it could not be kept out of the canon!¹⁹ We might infer from this evidence that community appeal was indeed one factor to consider in the inclusion of Shir HaShirim in the canon, especially in regards to Rabbi Akiva's admonition against its place in the local drinking houses.

Gunkel first used the phrase "sitz im leben", in relation to a particular text and its life setting in a community, but he differentiated between two aspects of its position -- one was how the text grew out of a particular life setting, and two, how a text was used in a particular setting.²⁰ This provides us with the flexibility

¹⁸ Robert Altar, The Art of Biblical Poetry, 122.

¹⁹ Solomon Zeitlin, "Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures", p. 133, "The Book of Esther was recited annually on Purim, but nevertheless it was not considered 'inspired', and so was not included in the Scriptures. The rabbis, however, after the Hadrianic period could not keep this Book out of the canon any longer, due to the importance which was laid on the reading of the megillah on the Festival of Purim, and thus they were compelled to include it in the Bible. The canonicity of Esther was due, therefore, to pressure of public opinion, and did not originate in the academies."

²⁰ Gunkel, Prophecy and Society, p. 15.

then to say that even if one could prove that it was written originally for non-religious purposes, its validity could still come from the way that the text has henceforth been interpreted and used in liturgy and worship.

So what do we know about the place of Shir HaShirim in the time before Yavneh? We know that it was translated from the Hebrew into a very literal Greek as part of the Septuagint in Alexandria about the year 100 BCE,²¹ and thus must have been included in the Hebrew scriptures at that time. We also have found fragments of it in Cave IV at Qumran²², which again would seem to indicate that the work was seen as part of the sacred literature from an early date. This again would support the idea that the rabbis at Yavneh were not debating whether it was included in the canon, but whether it should have been.

Shir HaShirim was unique compared with the other sacred writings and yet there had to have been something about its character that made it "fit" into the canon as part of one integrated and unified message from God. What was it then about this poetic description of love that made it sacred?

Gerson Cohen's essay on the Song of Songs, makes the point that "it is not the canonization of Shir HaShirim that needs to be explained but the Jewish conception of the bond of love between God and Israel that made the canonization possible".²³ The time was ripe for this text to be seen not only as holy, but the holy of holies! It fulfilled a need and a place that no other text in the Tanakh could!

²¹ Marvin Pope, Song of Songs, p. 19.

²² Marvin Pope, Song of Songs, p.22. Pope quotes from M.Burrows, More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls, 1958.

²³ Gerson Cohen, "Song of Songs and the Jewish Religious Mentality", p. 4.

Cohen's theory is that given the concepts already embedded in the Torah and the *Nevi'im*, it would have been impossible not to read *Shir HaShirim* as a description of the love shared between God and Israel. There was a midrashic development that began in the decalogue with "You shall have no other gods beside Me"²⁴, a concept of complete love and fidelity between God and Israel. We are told "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might"²⁵. The only human relationship that is known with these characteristics, of love and absolute loyalty was the marriage relationship. Thus when the prophet Hosea who spoke in God's voice saying, "And I will betroth thee unto Me forever, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness and in justice, in loyalty and love"²⁶, we have already assumed the love bond between God and Israel. When Israel sins, she is an adulterer, God is the husband. In fact the history of the people of Israel has gone back and forth between one of love and loyalty to one of adultery or idolatry. In Hosea, Israel, the wife says; "I will go and return to my first husband; for then it was better with me than now".²⁷ The religious experience is able to be depicted as the most precious love relationship known to us.

However, where "all the other books of the Bible do indeed proclaim the bond of love between Israel and the Lord, only the Song of Songs is a dialogue of love, a conversation between man and God that gives religious faith a kind of intensity no other form of expression can".²⁸ In all other books, Israel sings praises to God but in *Shir HaShirim* God sings praises to Israel.

²⁴ Exodus 20:2.

²⁵ Deuteronomy 6:5.

²⁶ Hosea 2:21-22.

²⁷ Hosea 2:9.

²⁸ Gerson Cohen, "The Song of Songs and the Jewish Religious Mentality", p. 13.

When the Targum for Shir HaShirim was written²⁹ it went almost unnoticed that it was not a translation of the text, but rather, used the words of the text as a springboard from which to express the love, the longing, the separation and the pain in the relationship between God and Israel. It expressed in feelings what had previously been expressed in law.

To summarize the situation, it would seem that despite the ambiguities over the meaning of Shir HaShirim and its place in the canon, its date and authorship, we have to assume that the human language, that expressed in allegory, the relationship between God and Israel, was the loving Divine force that bestowed sacredness upon it.

From this moment on each word, each phrase would be treated with awe and respect. There has been no other comparable sized text that has generated the amount of commentary, sermons, or interpretations as Shir HaShirim. Sa'adia spoke about the work as "a lock whose keys have been lost",³⁰ and each generation since has tried their hand at unlocking the treasure. It is with no surprise then that Rabbi Akiva, the advocator of Shir HaShirim, was the only rabbi out of four that went into *pardes* in peace came out in peace.³¹ He was

29 Dr. Jerushalmi, The Song of Songs in the Targumic Tradition, p. viii . The dating of the Targum is very difficult. Scholars present the idea that in its present form it may be late, into the 7th or 8th century, but given the text of Shir HaShirim it is highly probable that homiletical translations of this type were widely used long before this was written down.

30 Sa'adia Gaon Al-Fayyum (882-942), תחש מעילת; quoted in Dr. Jerushalmi's Song of Songs, p.xii.

31 Tosefta Hagiga 2:3, as translated by Jacob Neusner - Four entered the garden (Paradise) - Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, the other (Elisha ben Abuya) and Rabbi Akiva. One gazed and perished, one gazed and was smitten, one gazed and cut down sprouts, and one went up whole and came down whole. Ben Azzai gazed and perished. Concerning him Scripture says, *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints* (Psalm 116:15). Ben Zoma gazed and was smitten. *If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you be sated with it and vomit it* (Proverbs 25:16). Elisha gazed and cut down sprouts. Concerning him Scripture says, *Let not your mouth lead you into sin*. (Ecclesiastes 5:5). Rabbi Akiva went up whole and came down whole. Concerning him Scripture says, *Draw me after you, let us make haste. The king has brought me into his chambers*. (Song of Songs 1:4).

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The sacred character of our literature is due to its history of being cared for, like a family heirloom that gains love and preciousness through the generations. The original owners did not always appreciate the value of what they had because they could not anticipate its effect. Yes, it was seen as special, but not sacred, until it had been passed on.

The Transmission of the Sacred Text Through Time and Place:

From the time of Ezra, in the 5th century BCE, there existed a very strong connection between those who were the guardians of sacred literature, the priests, and those who were able to transmit the literature, the scribes, or *soferim*. In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, Ezra is referred to many times as a priest in his performance of priestly functions, but he is also equally described as a *sofer*. In Ezra 7:6 we read, "Ezra came up from Babylon, a scribe expert in the Teaching of Moses which the Lord God of Israel had given". We do not know his exact role in respect to the Torah, but we do know that he was considered knowledgeable both in the Teaching and in the promulgation of the Teaching. In Nehemiah 8:8 we read; "They read from the scroll of the Teaching of God, translating it and giving the sense; so they understood the reading". Thus we have evidence that there was the written word and then there was the equally important oral translation and understanding given to the text.

We learn in the Talmud that Ezra developed a new script for the writing of Torah. He had it re-written in Assyrian characters leaving the old Hebrew characters to the Samaritans.³² It is difficult for us to know what motivated this change.

³² Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 21b. This refers to the switch from the older cursive, to the Aramaic script that we use today.

Theories proposed run the gamut from political motivation over the land of Israel and the separation of the north and the south, to religious motivation and the desire to preserve the sacred literature by those who were educated to do so.³³ Whatever the reason, we do have the beginning of the Tanakh as we know it today. The square script that Ezra introduced is basically the one that we use today, although it did see some modifications between the 5th and the 2nd centuries BCE.³⁴

The Hebrew term for scribe is *sofer* from the Hebrew root ספר, which comes from the word "to count". The word is first found in the Song of Deborah, which is considered one of the earliest written sections of our Tanakh, and it refers to one that is a secretary or official and responsible for taxes and levies.³⁵ We have evidence that the scribes learned in schools or guilds and were attached to government and temple offices depending on competency. Some of the returnees to Judea from Babylon are listed as "בני הסופרת",³⁶ the members of the (school) of *soferim*. The highest position for a *sofer* to attain was the royal scribe.

Without the *Beit HaMikdash* in Jerusalem after the year 70 CE, the whole focus of Judaism transitioned from one which celebrated a holy place to one that celebrated a holy text. Before the destruction there was a desire to preserve the sacred writings, but afterwards it was literally God's work. With the same precision and detail as the Temple sacrifices required, so the *soferim* brought forth the word of God.

³³ Bernard Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament.

³⁴ Jacob Maimon, Encyclopedia Judaica, "Alphabet".

³⁵ Judges 5:14.

³⁶ Ezra 2:55.

In later times the role of a *sofer* was someone who was an expert in writing Torah scrolls, *tefillin* and *mezuzot*, known by the acronym of סופר סת"ם. There were very strict rules as to the way the scroll was to be written, the type of parchment, the type of ink and the feather quill. The *sofer* had to prepare himself both physically and mentally for the task of writing the name of God by going to the *mikveh* before he began his work. The rules for writing are recorded in Masekhet Soferim, Maimonides' Hilchot Sefer Torah and various sections of the Talmud. The work of the *sofer* was considered so important it was called God's work. In the Talmud we read, "My son, what is your occupation? I told him, 'I am a scribe', and he said to me, Be meticulous in your work for your occupation is a sacred one; should you perchance omit or add one single letter you would thereby destroy all the universe".³⁷

For a period of about 900 years we had the development of a community of rabbis who saw their main task as writing and counting each word of the sacred text of the Tanakh. These people were called the Masoretes, from the Hebrew root מסר meaning "to transmit" or "to hand over" the sacred works from one generation to the next. They saw themselves as guardians and part of the chain of tradition from the time that the words were first passed on from Moshe to Joshua, as recorded in Pirkei Avot. There were groups of Masoretes throughout the ancient near east, and masoretic systems developed in Palestine, Babylon and Tiberias.³⁸

³⁷ Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 13a, Soncino Press translation.

³⁸ It is not my intention to present a full history of the Masoretes, but rather a sketch in order to put the rest of my thesis into perspective. There are many fine accounts of Masoretic work from which I have drawn information. Please see, Kelly, Mynatt and Crawford, The Masorah of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia and Aaron Dotan, "Masorah" in Encyclopaedia Judaica as two good sources.

The Masoretes saw their role as preserving the exact pronunciation of the original Hebrew, although over the course of a thousand years or more, differences occurred in the oral language. In about the 6th century the Masoretes added the *nikkudot*, or vowel signs, to the words. The nikkudot gave a uniform sound to the written word whether it was prose, poetry or laws.³⁹ At one point the Tiberian school took precedence, but even within the Tiberian school there were differences of opinion, as represented by the school of Ben Naftali and Ben Asher, with both schools wanting to get back to the original and ancient text.

The Masorah developed over the course of time and went from preserving the consonantal text, through counting verses, words and letters, and the pronunciation through the *nikkudot*, to creating and developing the voices of the rabbis within the text, by the use of the *ta'amim*, the trope marks. The accentuation system is an early exegetical commentary because it shows the relationships of words and phrases to each other.⁴⁰

The writing of the scrolls and manuscripts took on an esthetic quality with the use of unusual forms, like miniscule and majiscule letters, and *taggin*, crowns (שעטניז גי"ץ). Gradually the masorah developed around the page of the text and included information about the grammar, and providing a concordance to similar or same words or phrases in other locations in the Tanakh.

39 P. Werner-Moeller; "Aspects of Masoretic Vocalization", p.122-123; Werner-Moeller claims that we should distinguish between Biblical Hebrew and ancient spoken Hebrew, and that there was no possibility of the early Masoretes pointing the text to the same aural sounds of the ancient Hebrew. The Tanakh developed over 1000 years and the Hebrew sounds also changed over that time period.'

40 David Freedman and Miles Cohen, "The Masoretes as Exegetes".

The ancient Masoretes faced many problems. The manuscripts and oral traditions that were recorded were not always the same. There were different and sometimes divergent traditions. How did they decide which spelling or which word to choose if they had different traditions before them? One clue might come from Masekhet Soferim in the description of the three scrolls that were found in the Temple:

R. Simeon b. Lakish said: Three scrolls of the Torah were found in the Temple court: the *Ma'on* scroll, the *Za'atute* scroll, and the *Hu* scroll. In one of these they found the expression of '*ma'on*', and in the other two it was written, *The eternal God is 'me'onah'*, so they adopted the reading of the two scrolls and discarded that of the one scroll. In another of the scrolls they found it written, *And he sent the 'za'atute' of the children of Israel*, and in the other two they found written, *And he sent 'na'arey' the children of Israel*, so they retained the reading of the two and abandoned that of the one. In one of the scrolls '*hu*' was written eleven times, and in two '*he*' was written, so they adopted the reading of the two and discarded that of the one.⁴¹

This text shows that at an early point, before the destruction of the Temple, there were already divergent traditions, albeit in very miniscule ways. These may not have been the only differences, but the ones that set them apart from each other. This text also tells us the methodology that the early rabbis used in their decision making. Sometimes, the answer lay in the majority opinion. Although

41 Masekhet Soferim 6:4, as translated by Soncino. Variations on this text are also found in Palestinian Talmud Ta'anith 4:2;68a, Avot d'Rabbi Natan Version B, ch.46 and Sifre II, 356. There are some essays written that speak specifically about the Three Scrolls - Jacob Lauterbach, "The Three Books Found in the Temple at Jerusalem" and Shemaryahu Talmon, "The Three Scrolls of the Law that were Found in the Temple Court". Lauterbach maintains that the report, although very ancient, does not deal with Torah scrolls, but rather with genealogical records. Talmon discusses the various reports and concludes that it does indeed refer to actual Torah scrolls, however, he disagrees that the methodology cited was in fact used, but rather after the fact decision had been made, it was a convenient method to cite.

there are different theories in regards to this text and its meaning, I think that it does represent one of the challenges that the early Masoretes faced, as well as the early tradition to seek the perfect reading, a model text.

As the centuries progressed certain schools of Masoretes took precedence over others. Gradually the Tiberian school was seen as the most authoritative and the Palestinian and the Babylonian systems of vocalization were sublimated. In Tiberias we had two schools, Ben Naftali and Ben Asher. These were families that existed over several generations. Today there are many disputes as to why one school won out over the other, but the result for us is that the "winning" was so complete and pervasive that we do not have a single Ben Naftali manuscript. We only know of the existence of the school through a list of variants, Sefer HaHilufim, or Book of Variants.⁴² It is pure conjecture today as to why there are no Ben Naftali manuscripts preserved. They must have been seen as so subversive that all evidence of them was eradicated. We have a "black time" of Hebrew manuscripts between 130 - 895 CE ⁴³ which could almost make us believe in a conspiracy!

Today we have four principal pure Ben Asher manuscripts -- The Cairo Codex (895CE), British Museum 4445, The Aleppo Codex (late 900s), and The Leningrad Codex or B19a (1008 CE). They have been identified as such by scholars, however, none of them are one hundred percent Ben Asher according to the list of variants.

42 This book was written by Misha'el ben Ouziel around the mid 11th century to the 12th century. We know very little about this work. It was written after B19a and the Aleppo Codex were written. There were many lists that were being circulated by HaOuziel's was the most complete. Today we only have it in fragments.

43 Lazarus Goldsmidt, The Earliest Editions of the Hebrew Bible.

All of these manuscripts have a fully developed masorah. This includes the vowels and the accentuation that is within the main body of the text as well as masoretic notes. The notes within the margins of the text are called *masorah katana* and usually function to tell us if it is a *kere/ketiv*⁴⁴, a hapax legomena⁴⁵, an *otiot katana* or *otiot gadola*⁴⁶, and the breaks in the text, like different parshiyot.⁴⁷ The *masorah gadola* is a developed system of notes that surrounds the page of the text, usually written in two to three lines in the top and bottom margins. This information does not always correspond to the particular text on that page but is usually within close proximity. This information provides notes on grammar and other similar words or phrases within the Tanakh.

Manuscripts, which were not used for liturgical purposes, were written with the masoretic notes surrounding the text, but we also have fragments of collections and lists of masoretic notes, called independent masorahs. Some of them are concurrent with the oldest full manuscripts, like Masekhet Soferim, Dikdukei HaTa'amim, possibly written by the Ben Asher family in the 10th or 11th century and Ochla v'Ochla, possibly written in Marburg in the 1100s. A question to be asked is, Which is the most authoritative, the book of rules or the best manuscript?⁴⁸

44 A word that is written one way in the text but is pronounced a different way. One common example is God's name which is always pronounced "Adonai" in a public reading.

45 A unique word not found anywhere else within the Tanakh.

46 Unusual letters that are either made smaller or larger than the surrounding letters.

47 The weekly Torah portions set by the early Babylonian rabbis in order that the Torah be read through once in a given yearly cycle.

48 This is a question that would take a book to attempt to answer, however, it was the overriding concern for the editors of the first Rabbinic Bibles, Jacob ben Chayim and Elias Leviata, when they published through the Bomberg Press, in 1524 and 1538. Ben Chayim believed that there was one correct masorah and that it could be found by finding the most authoritative manuscripts. Although not listed he found the Sephardic manuscripts to be the best. Leviata believed that the most authoritative traditions were found in the grammatical rules of the independent masorahs. In my thesis I have tried to apply both of these methods to the study of the Ibn Musa Bible, first by comparing it to two independent collections of rules, Masekhet Soferim and Hilchot Sefer Torah, and second by comparing it to B19a and the Aleppo Codex.

The masoretic notes are not consistent from one manuscript to the next. The masoretic system worked to preserve the consonantal text, however, it was also the way that the rabbis could add their own voices to the text. Thus we cannot talk about THE masoretic text but rather about masoretic traditions. "There never was, and there never will be, a single fixed masoretic text of the Bible! It is utter futility and pursuit of a mirage to go seeking to recover what never was!...All that at best, we might hope to achieve, in theory, is "a masoretic text" or "a text of the masoretes", that is to say, a text worked up by Ben Asher, or by Ben Naftali, or by someone in the Babylonian tradition, or a text worked up with the aid of the masoretic notes of an individual scribe or a school of scribes." ⁴⁹

Given this theory, that I also personally subscribe to, then the question to be asked is, If there is no one masorah, is there a sacred text? There is a sacred text that was given to us, but we, as a people, have added our own voice to the text. The masoretic notes have a life of their own. Throughout the generations we have used the consonantal text to d'rash, to give voice to our feelings, to expand upon our knowledge of God and ourselves and our world. But it has been through our voices, that we have learned. The miracle of God is that our manuscripts are so close. Yes, we can find minute differences but there has been both a Divine and a human impulse towards wholeness.

Our *sofer*, Shmuel ben Shmuel Ibn Musa, took the traditions from before him, and wove together the ancient sacred words with his own. He entered the orchard of Torah, and added the leaves of the masorah, in order that we would be able to live by its fruit.

⁴⁹ Harry Orlinsky, "Prolegomenon: Masoretic Text - A Critical Evaluation". This is an excellent essay that details the reasons for why we cannot go back to an original and fixed masoretic text.

Chapter Two: Delving into the Mind of the Sofer

When Shmuel sat down to write his manuscript in the spring of 1475 in Lisbon, Portugal, he held in his quill the future of a Jewish community. He was commissioned to write a Bible and to research and inspect all of the minute details¹. It was assumed and known that he had reverence for the sacred text, knowledge of the *halakhot* of writing and an artistic hand. His transmission of the sacred text depended on his adherence to the rules that governed its writing and yet he was a member of a specific geographic community with its own traditions and knowledge. He was an individual with his own experiences and creative abilities. The confluence of these two concepts, the *sofer* as the link of tradition and the *sofer* as a creative individual, effected both the particular text, known as the Ibn Musa Bible, as well as future generations who have used or will use this particular text for study or worship.

The following questions arise from this investigation about the methodology that the *sofer* used when writing his manuscript:

Did Shmuel have a particular masoretic text, a model codex, before him when he wrote his manuscript or did he choose between two or more traditions that were known to him?

Did Shmuel have any of the classical texts of independent masorah before him that provided the laws for writing a scroll / codex?

¹ This information is found in the colophon, page 290, of the Ibn Musa Bible, where he speaks of the man who commissioned him to write the manuscript.

In what way did Shmuel want to preserve the masoretic traditions before him, and in what ways can we understand his manuscript as a new interpretation of the tradition?

Can this text, the Ibn Musa Bible, be considered a "model codex"?²

What was the role that this manuscript played in the life of its community?

In what ways did the Lisbon community influence his orthography, the choice of texts, the order of the *megillot*, or his manner of presentation?

There are two main theories regarding the purpose of the masorah. One is the theory held by Aron Dotan and his students, that the masorah is needed to preserve or to conserve the Biblical text. "The purpose of the masorah, whether it be oral or written, was clearly and undoubtedly the precise preservation of the holy text"³. Thus it was only the result of the careful work of the masoretes the text was preserved over the years. They saw their role as preserving the oral traditions by religiously and meticulously documenting them.

The other theory, which is held by Paul Kahle and his students, states that the masoretes were innovators. They took the received, and divergent traditions, and added their own "voice" to the text through the use of the masorah. In fact Kahle states, that the Masoretes did everything in their power to foster the idea that the pronunciation of the Hebrew text that they fixed was exactly that handed down from time immemorial from the days of Ezra. They did this by

² A model codex is one which sets a community standard by which all others are judged.

³ Aaron Dotan, "Masorah"; *Encyclopedia Judaica*, p.1414.

completely irradicating any competing or differing texts.⁴ Thus the masorettes believed in their own authoritative voice in setting the standards for the generations to come.

I approached the above questions by applying the rules of Masekhet Soferim⁵ and Hilchot Sefer Torah⁶ to the text of the Ibn Musa Bible, to see whether it was possible to draw some firm conclusions. Masekhet Soferim is considered the authoritative voice when it comes to the rules regarding the writing of a scroll or a codex. In fact, in places where the Talmud and Masekhet Soferim are in conflict the rule is to follow Masekhet Soferim.⁷ There is some dispute over the date of Masekhet Soferim, some dating it as early as the eighth century and others dating it as late as the 10-11th century, after authority had already been given to the Ben Asher masoretic school of tradtion. Based on the observations of C.D. Ginsberg, that there is no mention of the *nikkudot* in Masekhet Soferim⁸, then I would support an early date for its compilation.

4 P. Kahle, "The Masoretic Text of the Bible and the Pronunciation of Hebrew"; The Journal of Jewish Studies; p. 504.

5 Masekhet Soferim is part of the Babylonian Talmud in the Minor Tractates. It seems clear that Masekhet Sofrim was compiled after the close of the Babylonian Talmud, after 600 CE. Some people date it to the Gaonic period - 8th century, while others would prefer an even later date into the 11th century. I.W.Slotki, the translator and commentator of the Soncino version, gives it an earlier date. Dr. David Weisberg, professor at Hebrew Union College, proposes the later date.

6 Hilchot Sefer Torah by Maimonides is part of the Mishneh Torah. These rules for the most part only apply to the writing of the scroll of the Torah.

7 I.W. Slotki, "Introduction to Masekhet Soferim"; Soncino Press.

8 C.D. Ginsberg, C.D.; Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible; p. 451 Ginsberg quotes Masekhet Soferim 4:8,9 and the discussion of the sacred and secular nature of the word אֵל. If Masekhet Soferim had been written after the introduction of the vowel signs then this discussion would be redundant. We know that vowel signs were not mentioned in the Midrash and Talmud and our first evidence of them is in manuscripts from 650-680. Therefore, the tractate had to have been written in the interval, the early 7th century.

Maimonides wrote his Hilchot Sefer Torah as part of his Mishneh Torah in the 12th century. Many of the laws that he cites are based on the breaks in the text, the *petuchot* and the *setumot* sections, which he considers the most important masoretic feature. There is some overlap between Masekhet Soferim and Hilchot Sefer Torah, so for purposes of this comparison I have chosen a few laws that have relevance to the focus of my masoretic study - the Book of Shir HaShirim.

The following is a partial list of rules, those most applicable to the writing of a codex, from Masekhet Soferim, (I have used the abbreviation MaS), with corresponding descriptions from the Ibn Musa Bible. Some of the rules were followed meticulously, some seem to partially fulfill the requirements, and at other times there is no consensus between the tractate and the manuscript. I have tried to give a fair and thorough description of the manuscript understanding that for each page one could devote a life time of work.

After this "walk" through the manuscript I would like to return to some of the original questions and to try to draw some conclusions.

MaS 1:1 - *It is not permitted to write sacred books on the skins of unclean animals or sewn with their sinews. The parchment has to be ruled with a reed and the letters written in ink.*

The parchment used for the Ibn Musa Bible is a fine vellum that is semi-translucent. The pages are scored both horizontally and vertically in order to justify the columns. The ink used is brown and fairly consistent throughout the

manuscript. The writing of the masorah is done with a finer quill and is slightly lighter in colour.⁹

MaS 1:6 - The writing must be in the Assyrian script (square Hebrew script).

The characters are written very similar to the example of the Italkian square script of 1482 that is pictured in the Encyclopedia Judaica in the article "Alphabet - Hebrew", Ja.M. p.726, but it is called a sephardic hand. The Assyrian square script was first introduced by Ezra the Scribe after the return from Babylon. Prior to this the ancient Hebrew script had been used. It seems that there was controversy over the script for at least 200 years before the square script was seen as authoritative.¹⁰

MaS 1:9 - The scrolls may not be written in gold.¹¹

The Ibn Musa Bible is written in brown ink for all lettering. The ink used for the consonants is slightly darker and thicker than that used for the masorah. There are green and red geometrical and floral designs used on the front and back pages.

MaS 1:10 - Shirat HaYam and Ha'azinu have special arrangements and may not be the written the same.

Shirat HaYam is written to the same detailed arrangements as proscribed by

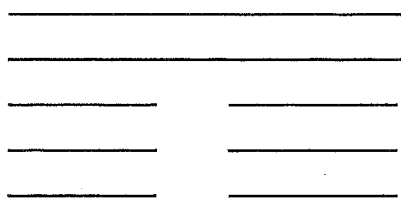
9 Vellum is a finer quality of parchment and was originally developed by King Eumenes of Pergamum, 197-159 BCE, a city in Asia Minor..

10 There is a midrash in Jerusalem Megillah 1:9 that says: "Rabbi Yehuda says; The Torah was first given to Israel in square letters, but when they sinned, the characters were changed into Ra'atz (Samaritan), and when they repented in the days of Ezra the square letters were again restored to them as it is written, 'turn you to the stronghold you prisoners of hope, even today will I restore to you' (Zechariah 9:12) the forgotten characters of the Mishnah = the Law".

11 At one time deluxe parchments were died purple and the lettering done in gold and silver ink. St. Jerome admonished against the use of these deluxe editions. (Metzger; The Text of the New Testament, pg.5) It is of interest to note that in the Letter of Aristeas we have the record that the priest Eleazar dispatched the 72 elders to Alexandria to produce a Greek translation and he sent with them "a present of his own copy of the Law written in letters of gold".

Maimonides and Maseket Soferim, called לבנה על גבי לבנה, 'brick over brick'. The interesting detail is that the masorah gadola -- *masoret metachtan*, at the bottom, is written with a geometric design of three triangles in the first and the third lines.

Ha'azinu is written according to the proscribed pattern, אריח על גבי אריח, in two columns on each page. To differentiate the song from the text preceding it the *sofer* wrote one wider column instead of the two that he uses throughout the manuscript.



MaS 1:13 - *Petuchot and Setumot sections must be left in the appropriate places.*

All of the *petuchot* and *setumot* sections that I checked in random order were according to the rule. The columns that needed to start with petuchot were marked with two large פ s to show that there is a reason that the column did not start on the top line.

MaS 2:1 - *Sufficient spaces between words and letters. There must be sufficient space between letters so that they are not mixed.*

Most of the words are easy to differentiate from one another and there is a hairsbreadth between the letters. There is slightly less than my thumb-width between the two columns. In Numbers 7:66 (page 122 verso) there is one word that appears like two letters together:...בני דן, it appears like and aleph and a tav together, or like an elongated tav.

There is also a ligature in *parashat Acharei Mot* in the words:

" איש איש מבית ישראל "

If a word at the end of the column was copied at the beginning of the next column...

Throughout the manuscript there are letters that are used as "fillers" to justify the line. In some cases the letter that is used as a filler is the first letter of the word beginning in the next line, but this is not consistent. Often the letter is a partially written aleph or shin, which is a common method in sephardic manuscripts, other forms are a backward dalet, one and a half letters, and sometimes it is two marks that look like quotation marks.

MaS 2:4 - Spaces between books of the Torah and books of the Prophets.

There are 4 lines left between *B'reishit* and *Shemot*, 4 lines between *Shemot* and *Vayikra*, 5 lines between *Vayikra* and *B'Midbar*. *B'Midbar* begins on a new page at the top. There are 3 lines left between each of the Haftorot sections. Within this space is written an enlarged title for the *haftorah* that matches the *parasha* title. Sometimes it is written in full and other times it is abbreviated.

MaS 2:6 - Lines in a Torah scroll should be 42 corresponding to the journeys, 60 corresponding to the myriads of Israel, 72 corresponding to the elders of Israel, or 98 corresponding to the reproofs in Deuteronomy.

The columns of the Ibn Musa are 22 lines each, which does not correspond with any of the possibilities for a scroll.

MaS 2:9 - Half the length of a column must not be greater than its width, nor its width greater than half its length.

The length of each column is about 110 mm and the width about 40 mm. This is not the same ratio as recommended for the Torah scroll.

MaS 2:11 - *The writing of the final letters - .ץ,ף,ך,ם,ן*¹¹

Everywhere that I observed, these letters were written correctly, with the non-final forms in the beginning and middle of the words and the final form at the end.

MaS 3:1 - *Joining the Torah and the Prophets in one scroll. The sages declared that they should be written in separate scrolls.*¹²

The Ibn Musa Bible contains the Torah, the Haftorot (the sections of the Prophets that are connected to the weekly Torah readings), the *five Megillot* - Ruth, Esther, Shir HaShirim, Aicha and Kohelet as well as Megillat Antiochus. These are all bound together in the codex.

MaS 3:2 - *There should not be the same space between the books of the Torah and the books of the Prophets.*

There are 4-5 spaces between each of the books of the Torah and there were 3 spaces between each of the Haftorot sections.

MaS 3:5,6 *Binding together the Torah, Nevi'im and the Ketuvim. This is not permitted for a liturgical scroll. In regards to a codex they can be bound together because they are not given the same degree of sanctify.*

The Ibn Musa Bible was used for private liturgical study or services and thus all of the books can be written in the same codex.

¹¹ C.D. Ginsberg, Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition; p 297. Ginsberg's theory is that the final letters were developed because of the disputes over the divisions of the words. By 200 BCE there was still no authoritative text. There is a midrash from Jerusalem Megillah 1:9 regarding the introduction of the 5 final letters - "To indicate the Law was given by G-d speaking to Moses and Moses speaking to Israel מאמר-מאמר, from the faithful to the faithful נאמן נאמן, from the Righteous One to the righteous צדיק צדיק, by mouth to mouth פה פה, by the hand of the Holy One to the hand of Moshe כף כף.

¹² In ancient times a scroll could not be more than about 35 feet or it would become too cumbersome to use. (Metzger; The Text of the New Testament). However, a papyrus scroll was found in Egypt that measured 133 feet.

MaS 3:13 - *Beautifying the Torah scroll.*

The Ibn Musa Bible is a beautifully crafted text with geometric and floral designs and a boxed binding. The handwriting is uniform and well written. The boxed binding is a single piece of reddish brown leather that has geometric tooled designs. It also has a gold clasp. This is a very specialized type of binding, most known in the period by Spanish book binders.

MaS 5:10 - *The following names from the Torah are to be divided: Beth-El (Gen. 12:8), Beer-sheba (Gen. 21:31), Poti-fera (Gen. 41:45), Ben-oni (Gen. 35:18).*

I checked these words and they are all written as divided words.

MaS 5:17 - *All occurrences of the name Solomon in the Song of Songs are sacred (referring to G-d in the rabbinical interpretation of the book), except one which is secular. Which one is it? "Behold it is the litter of Solomon" (SHS 3:7). Others say; "You O Solomon shall have the thousand" (SHS 8:12).*

If this is the case then it means that I should not be able to find any instances of corrections in the writing of שלמה. I was not able to locate any erasures of any of the words שלמה in the text of Shir HaShirim.

MaS 6:1 - *A distinguishing mark (usually an inverted nun) at the beginning and end of the section "And it came to pass when the ark set forward" (Num. 10:35).*

There are distinguishing marks separating this section on pages 126 recto and verso of the manuscript. They are similar but not exactly like inverted nuns.

MaS 6:2 - *The scribe must leave a prescribed space at the beginning and ending of the section "And the people were as murmurers" (Num. 11:1).*

There is a break in the text but there are no other distinguishing marks.

MaS 6:3 - *Ten words in the Torah are marked by dots: ובינך (Gen. 18:9), אליו (Gen. 16:5), ובקומה (Gen. 19:33), וישקהו (Gen. 33:4), את (Gen. 37:12), ואחרן (Num. 3:39), רחקה (Num. 9:10), אשר (Num. 21:30), ועשרון (Num. 29:15), לנו ולבנינו עד עולם (Deut. 29:28).*

There are dots over all of the letters of these words except in Genesis 19:33-
 וּבִקְמָה is written lacking the vav which is the dotted letter. There is a sign over
 the word that refers to the *masorah katana* which said that the word is חס ,
 written without the vav. This is an interesting find given that the *sofer* was so
 meticulous with the other 9 dotted words.

MaS 9:1 - *The first letter of בְּרֵאשִׁית is to be enlarged and with 4 crowns.*

There is only a very slight difference in the size of the ב in the Ibn Musa Bible,
 so little that I would be reluctant to call it an enlarged letter, and it does not have
 any crowns. In fact there are no crowns on any of the letters of the manuscript.

MaS 9:2 - *The vav of the word גֵּהוֹן (Lev. 11:42) must be enlarged because it
 is the middle of the letters of the Torah. In Lev. 10:16 the first word דֵּרֶשׁ must
 be written at the end of the line and the next word דֵּרֶשׁ must be written at the
 beginning of the next line, because they are the middle of the words of the
 Torah.*

The word גֵּהוֹן is written with the enlarged vav (pg. 94). The words דֵּרֶשׁ דֵּרֶשׁ
 are written on the same line and at the beginning (p. 92), so this does not follow
 the rule for the the middle words of the Torah.

MaS 9:4 - *Shema Yisrael must be written at the beginning of a line, and all its
 letters are to be enlarged, while אֶחָד must come at the end of the same line.
 (According to the masorah only the ע of שָׁמַע is enlarged and the ד of אֶחָד.)*

In the Ibn Musa Bible the ע and the ד are enlarged, and it is written on one line.
 There is a space prior to the word שָׁמַע.

** Note: There is also an enlarged mem in מִה טָבוּ in Num. 24:5 -

מה טוב.¹³ There is also an obvious section of elongated letters in the verses preceding these words, for which I can find no explanation.

MaS 9:5- *The lamed of וישלכם (Deut. 29:27) must be long (enlarged).*

It is possible that this is an elongated ל, however it is difficult to tell because the style of his writing always includes an elongated ל.

MaS 9:6 - *The hey of ה ליה-וה (Deut. 32:6) must be enlarged.*

The ה is enlarged and set apart from the next word.

MaS 9:7 - *The yod of תשי (Deut. 32:18) must be smaller than any other yod in the Torah, and the yod of יגדל (Num. 14:17) must be larger than other yod in the Torah. ישראל at the end of the Torah (Deut. 34:12) must be enlarged and the lamed in it be larger than any other in the Torah.*

The sofer follows the rules for both the smaller י and the large י, however, the end of the Torah does not have an enlarged ישראל with an elongated lamed.

The following rules do not effect the writing of the scripture but are of of interest regarding Shir HaShirim:

MaS 14:3 - *In the case of Ruth, the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations and Esther it is necessary to say the blessing 'על...מקרא מגילה', (for the reading of the megillah).*

****Note:** Present practice is just to say the blessing before the reading of Esther because it is read from a scroll and not to say it before the other megillot because they are read from a book. One could infer from this that if one was to read the others from a scroll then one should say the blessing.

¹³ There are several midrashim based on Ma Tovv - most have some variation based on the tents referring to tents as being the houses of worship or study halls and the dwelling places referring to G-d's presence, the Shekhina, dwelling within them.

MaS 14:18 - *In regards to the Song of Songs, it is read on the last two nights of the Pesach festival, half of it on the first night and half on the second night.*

Today there are many different customs in regards to when Shir HaShirim is read during the festival.

MaS 16:4 - *R. Isaac Nappaha began his discourse as follows: "Stay me with dainties" (SHS 2:5) refers to the well-founded halakhot; "Refresh me with apples" refers to the aggadot whose fragrance is pleasant like that of apples. "For I am love-sick" - Rabbi Isaac said: In the past when money was plentiful, and people enjoyed leisure, one longed to hear a word of the halakha, but now that money is scarce, and there is a struggle to earn a living, one longs to hear words of aggadah.*

MaS 20:5 - *It is a religious precept to place the Hanukah lamp by the door which is near to the public domain, in such a manner that the mezuzah should be on the right hand the Hanukah lamp on the left, to fulfil what is stated, "How fair and how pleasant art thou (SHS 7:7) - how fair with the mezuzah and how pleasant with the Hanukah lamp.*

Maimonides' Hilchot Sefer Torah

The following represents laws that are not in Masekhet Soferim which add to our understanding of how our *sofer*, Samuel Ibn Musa, wrote the manuscript:

7:1 - *It is a positive commandment for each and every Jewish man to write a Torah scroll for himself.*

I can infer that Samuel Ibn Musa knew and followed this law in regards to the writing of his codex. We also know that he took it upon himself to write at least one other Bible since there is an illuminated manuscript in the British Museum in London, England, known as the Lisbon Bible, in 3 volumes written in 1483. (Or. 2626, 2627, 2628)

7:7 - *One should complete the entire Torah in the middle of the line at the bottom of the column.*

The Ibn Musa Bible does end with לעיני כל ישראל at the bottom of a column and in the middle of the line.

7:15 - *This is the order of the sacred writings; Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Chronicles.*¹⁴

The order of the 5 *megillot* in the Ibn Musa Bible is: Ruth, Shir HaShirim, Lamentations, Esther and Kohelet.

7:1 - *There are two forms of petuchot in the Torah:*

1

2

7:2 - *There are 3 forms of setumot in the Torah:*

1

2

3

¹⁴ Maimonides maintains the same order as recorded in Bava Batra 14b-15a..

According to Maimonides the most important feature of a kosher scroll, beyond the letters and words, were the breaks, *petuchot* and *setumot*, in the passages. We do not know why this particular feature should be considered the most important and Maimonides does not tell us. I might surmise that this is an easily identifiable feature - one that could be ascertained with little investigation, therefore, it is not necessarily the most important feature, but rather that it is the first feature to check before identifying a scroll as kosher.¹⁵

Maimonides used as his model a codex that contained all 24 books of the Tanakh, that was stored in Egypt, written by the *sofer* Solomon ben Abujah and pointed by Aharon ben Moshe ben Asher in the 10th - 11th century, who lived in Tiberias after the generation of Rav Sa'adiah Gaon. Scholars today believe that this is the manuscript known as the Aleppo Codex or A. Maimonides does not give us the reasons for why he chose this particular manuscript other than it was a well-known codex from which many other manuscripts had been written, and that he had relied on it because it was examined by Aaron ben Asher.

What conclusions can we draw from the above investigation? It would appear that the *sofer* was absolutely meticulous in following some of the rules of Masekhet Soferim and Hilchot Sefer Torah, and then just when one expects him to continue, he either disregards the rule or else does not seem to know about it. For example, the *sofer* made dots over the exact letter or letters in nine of the dotted words (MaS 6:3) and then not only did not dot the vav in the

¹⁵ For the sake of interest I compared the *petuchot* and *setumot* sections of Hilchot Sefer Torah to the first two parshiyot in the Ibn Musa and found that in all cases they agreed.

word *וּבְקוֹמָה*, but rather spelled the word defective, without the vav. Again, the *sofer* was very careful about all of the enlarged letters and then does not seem to have put one in *בְּרֵאשִׁית*, a place where it would seem obvious.

From this evidence I can infer that the *sofer* did not have before him a copy of these independent masorahs, even though they were probably well known by his time, because then he would have been absolutely consistent. One might argue that Maimonides' Hilchot Sefer Torah consists of rules only applicable for writing a scroll and not a codex. However, since many of the rules are followed consistently, I believe that the *soferim* tried to use these laws as a basis for writing the codex. This may have added a level of sanctity and authority to their work that would not have been the case if they strayed from many of these forms. Thus we see efforts to preserve the special characteristics like the forms for the songs. If our *sofer* did not have before him a copy of these independent masorahs I have to assume that he used another authoritative source or sources. I can also infer, that since so many of the rules have been followed that the source or sources that he did use were probably familiar with these texts.

As for the matter of there being one masorah, I think that we have seen enough indications that neither prior to this manuscript nor after it can we assume that we can trace THE masorah. I agree with Harry Orlinsky who has traced the development over time in many manuscripts to say that there is a masoretic tradition but no single masorah. "There never was, and there never can be, a single fixed masoretic text of the Bible! It is utter futility and pursuit of a mirage to go seeking to recover what never was." ¹⁶ This is not to in any way belittle

¹⁶ H. Orlinsky, "Prolegomenon, The Masoretic Text: A Critical Evaluation", p. 18.

the accomplishments of the masoretes and *soferim* who worked painstakingly to copy letter by letter and word for word their tradition, but it is their particular tradition that is being reproduced.

After investigation into this particular manuscript, the Ibn Musa Bible, I would maintain that we do not need to categorize the masorah of a particular *sofer* as serving only to conserve, or only to innovate, but rather that a particular feature of the masorah lends itself to being pulled towards the direction of innovation, or the direction of conservation. I understand that the masorah is used in many different capacities and plays different roles. The features that work towards conservation would be the preservation of the consonantal text, the final letters, the *nikkudot* to preserve pronunciation, the breaks in the text and the counting of the words, verses and letters in the manuscript. The features that work towards innovation and creativity would be the rare accents¹⁷, and the minuscule and majuscule letters, that perform a homiletic function, as well as the presentation of the manuscript.¹⁸ It is in these areas that the individual spirit of the *sofer* can make its mark.

This manuscript, the Ibn Musa Bible, is a combination of both of these tensions. Shmuel felt that he had the authority to write using the *matres lectiones* or not, or else the manuscript that he copied from felt free, as we will see when we do a specific analysis of Shir HaShirim. He wrote in his colophon that he was

¹⁷ David Weisberg, "The Rare Accents of the Twenty One Books". Dr. Weisberg maintains that the rare accents were a later development and that they really constitute a homiletical statement of the text.

¹⁸ C.D. Ginsberg, Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible; Ginsberg writes that even the consonantal text can be at the whim of the *sofer*; "It is, moreover, perfectly certain that the presence or absence of these letters (*matres lectiones*) in our text is in many instances entirely due to the idiosyncrasy of the scribe", p.137 This statement is based on the words of Ibn Ezra, "the sages of the masorah evolved from their inner consciousness reasons why some words are plene and some defective which, however, only serves to satisfy the ignorant who seek reasons for the plenes and defectives. Behold the scribe could not do otherwise than write plenes when he wanted to preclude the word from being mistaken for its homonym, for instance עולם, or defective when he wanted to be shorter."

commissioned to write and to research the manuscript. This would imply that he had more than one manuscript available to him from which to study and make decisions about specific features. We can also see that he chose some enlarged letters and not others. His presentation of the text in terms of his orthography, the binding of the text, and his choice of texts is all reflective of the community in which he lived.

Shmuel lived in the 15th century in Lisbon, Portugal. The Jews were fairly well established in Portugal from the 12th century on. They lived in relative tranquility in the country for a period of about two hundred years. They had prominent places in the court circles. This period of prosperity came to an end during the reign of King Ferdinand I (1367-1383) when the Jewish quarter was sacked and many Jews were killed. Later, although they were protected from these violent acts, they never did regain their prestigious and trusted positions in the society. The 1400s were a time of rioting and rebellions against the Jews and restrictions against them. There were serious outbreaks of violence in 1449 and in 1482. Lisbon allowed Jews from Spain to enter after their expulsion in 1492, but it was short-lived because the Jews were expelled from Portugal in 1496-7. Lisbon became the only port from which they could depart, and thus the living quarters became offensive and the plague broke out.¹⁹

From this we can understand that our *sofer* lived in a time of uncertainty and violence against the Jews, with some movement of people in and out of Portugal during this century. The specific binding that is used for this manuscript is of a

¹⁹ Cecil Roth, "Lisbon"; Encyclopedia Judaica, p 297-304.

Spanish style²⁰, so it would be right to assume that this was possible as a result of the migration of people throughout the Iberian peninsula.

This *sofer* also used a sephardic square writing. This type of writing may have originated in North Africa and then migrated with the Jews up to Spain and Portugal. The sephardic square is contrasted with thick horizontal strokes and thin vertical strokes, and there is very little change in the writing from the 12th century through the 15th century.²¹

The techniques that are used in this manuscript, from the methods of filling the lines, the signatures of the quires, his method of justification, and the method of binding, all are consistent in proving a Sephardic background for the writing of this manuscript in particular, as well as the places where this *sofer* might have studied.²²

In the study of Hebrew Codicology by Malachi Beit-Arie, we read that "we can achieve a much more complex and precise identification - the script reflects the origin of the scribe, the techniques, when they do not correspond to the same area, attest to the area of his actual activity".²³ This *sofer* shows a consistency between his writing and his techniques for presentation, therefore, we can draw a very firm conclusion that he was born and studied in Spain or Portugal and that

20 Leila Avrin, "The Box Binding in the Klau Library of the Hebrew Union College"; "What is significant is that these bindings are in Spanish style, that is, Mudejar, or Hispano-Moresque. Yet they were made in Lisbon, with the binder working in Toledo style"...."From the evidence of these five bindings and what is known of Spanish and Portuguese bookbinding in the fifteenth century, we may assume that the box binder was a Jew trained in Spain, most likely in Toledo, and that when he left, in about 1475, he took his tools and possibly a supply of morocco with him"...."The Lisbon box binder worked for Jewish patrons only, between 1475-1492". p. 32-33.

21 Jacob Maimon, "Alphabet", Jewish Encyclopedia; p. 708-709.

22 Please see the particular details of the writing and binding in Appendix I.

23 Malachi Beit-Arie, Hebrew Codicology; p. 110.

the people with whom he associated for this work, also were from these same areas.

This is important to our understanding of the role of the *sofer* in this community. He was one that was trained in the customs of the area and would therefore have been a natural choice when it came to commissioning a Biblical manuscript. If there were problems to be faced in the execution of this text then he could be trusted to solve them.

An example of his problem solving methods, might be in the way that he handled the question of the order of the megillot. Despite the fact that the Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 14b, provides the canonical order of the writings, there does not seem to have been an authoritative and binding rule. Ginsberg looked at several manuscripts and found 5 different orders for the *megillot*.²⁴ The choice of order could be based on 1) chronology 2) liturgical calendar 3) size or 4) theme. However, the order of the five *megillot* in Ibn Musa is different than all of the different orders researched by Ginsberg. In this manuscript they are listed as Ruth, Shir HaShirim, Aicha, Esther, Kohelet and then after the colophon Megillat Antiochus. This order is not based on traditional chronology, otherwise Kohelet would have followed Shir HaShirim; it is not based on the liturgical calendar, whether *Nisan* or *Tishrei* is considered the first month; it is not based on size. The only options left would be a thematic connection between the works in the eyes of the *sofer*, or the order that was preserved in the manuscript that he used as his model codex. The other option would be that this is a

24 C.D. Ginsberg, Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible; p. 3-4

serendipitous decision of this *sofer*, and that there was no particular thought given to this problem, due to the fact that there was no official consensus.

The following is a chart listing the order of the megillot based on possible criteria. We can see that the order in the Ibn Musa Bible is different from all of the possibilities listed.

IBN MUSA	LITURGICAL	CHRONOLOGICAL	SIZE	SOLOMONIC AUTHORSHIP
Ruth	Kohelet	Ruth	Ruth	Mishle
Shir HaShirim	Esther	Shir HaShirim	Aicha	Shir HaShirim
Aicha	Shir HaShirim	Kohelet	Shir HaShirim	Kohelet
Esther	Ruth	Aicha	Esther	
Kohelet	Aicha	Esther	Kohelet	

I conclude that this manuscript, known as the Ibn Musa Bible, was a model codex for the community, at least until seven years later when this same *sofer* wrote, what has come to be known as, the Lisbon Bible.²⁵ A model codex is one that sets the standard for a community both in its manner of presentation, its accuracy to the traditions, and its place in the religious life of the community. This was a text that was used for prayer and study in the synagogue because of its choice of books - The Torah, the *Haftorot* and the *Megillot*. It could not have

²⁵ Shmuel ben Shmuel Ibn Musa; Lisbon Bible; Manuscript Or. 2628 in the British Museum. This is an illuminated manuscript completed in 1482 in Lisbon.

been used for ritual public reading, but it may very well have had its place on the *bimah* with an important member of the community.

Research done by Goldschmidt with the earliest editions of the Bible, supports the high regard that was given to the Portuguese and Spanish *soferim* as well as the early printers. He says, "Not only the Spanish and Portuguese prints of the Pentateuch enjoyed the highest reputation for accuracy amongst Jewish scholars, but also the manuscripts from which these and the scholarly polyglots were printed".²⁶ Unfortunately, the earliest printed editions did not cite which manuscript or manuscripts were used.

When Shmuel sat down to write Shir HaShirim in the spring of 1475, he entered the orchard. He strolled through the orchard of sacred texts that have blossomed and given forth fruit to their communities. He selected the ripest of the fruits and his body and soul were nourished. "G-d spoke and the world came into being" - a world that would protect the "voice" of G-d through cherishing, loving and honouring each word, each sound, that sprang forth out of the growing relationship between G-d and His people.

Today we can stroll in the orchard, watching the caretakers of the trees - from the fertilizing, to the watering, to the pruning, admiring their skills and drawing nourishment from their labour. Come "let us go early to the vineyards; Let us see if the vine has flowered, if the pomegranates are in bloom." ²⁷

²⁶ Lazarus Goldschmidt, The Earliest Editions of the Hebrew Bible; p. 22.

²⁷ Shir HaShirim 7:13.

Chapter Three:

Labouring in the Vineyard: Shir HaShirim in the Ibn Musa Bible

The work of the vineyard is evident when we study the minute aspects of our texts. The *sofer* labours within its leaves and vines, pruning and grafting, tradition upon tradition. We have looked at the work of Shmuel ben Shmuel Ibn Musa from the larger picture of the whole manuscript, but now we will begin to focus closer upon a particular text in the manuscript - Shir HaShirim.

I will compare the text of Shir HaShirim in the Ibn Musa Bible to the text of Shir HaShirim in the Leningrad Codex, also known as B19a.¹ The reason that I choose to make this comparison is because of the status of B19a within the world of Biblical scholarship. This is the earliest full manuscript that we have of the Bible. It was written in Old Cairo in the year 4770 of the Jewish calendar or 1009 CE. It was written by the *sofer*, Shmuel ben Ya'akov, who says in the colophon that "he wrote, pointed and provided with masorah this complete Bible from the codices corrected and provided with masorah, which the master, Aaron ben Asher, had written".² Aaron ben Asher ben Moshe was the last of the family of masoretes that worked in Tiberias during the 9th and 10th centuries. He was also the author of the first masoretic treatise that we have, Sefer Dikdukei HaTa'amim.³ Both the grammatical treatise and the manuscript B19a are the culmination of centuries of masoretic work and present the masorah and the text in its full blown glory.

¹ I will be working with the facsimile edition of the Leningrad Codex published by R. Ben Publishing Co. Canada, Makor Publishing Jerusalem 1971. This was a limited edition of 135 copies.

² This is a quote from the colophon of B19a but translated by Izhak ben Zvi in his article "The Ben Asher Manuscripts".

³ Dikdutei HaTa'amin was written about the same time as B19a and its purpose is to make clear the Biblical rules. Its organization is based on the musical accents.

I will methodically compare several masoretic features in the two texts as well as at times comparing them to the Aleppo Codex and the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, which is considered the most scholarly Bible today. BHS draws its authority from its claim to be based entirely on B19a⁴, although we will see that that is not always the case.

I will look at the *petuchot* and *setumot* breaks in the manuscripts, enlarged letters, and the final tally of verses, in relation to the full text of Shir HaShirim, and then I will compare the consonantal text, accents, vowels, masorah *gadola* and masorah *katana* for Chapter Five of Shir HaShirim. It is possible to delve deep enough into each one of these features to write a book, so it is my goal to magnify these features in a small segment of the manuscripts.

Shir HaShirim is written in the same beautifully crafted handwork of the rest of the Ibn Musa Bible. It begins on page 266 recto and continues until 269 verso. It consists of 13 full columns and 2 partial columns, the beginning and the end. It follows the book of Ruth and there are 7 lines left blank between the two books. This is the largest space left between any of the *megillot*; others spaces were comprised of 6 lines before the book of Ruth and only 4 blank lines between any of the other books. It would be difficult for me to speculate the reason for the different spacing but it seems that the *sofer* was not consistent throughout the manuscript on the spacing between books. Between the books of the Torah there were 4-5 spaces left and between *haftorot* there were 2-3 lines left. What the evidence does say is that the space before Shir HaShirim is

⁴ Gerard E. Weil, "Prolegomena" to the BHS - "There is no need to defend the use of the Leningrad Codex B19a as the basis for an edition of the Hebrew Bible...", "We can here at last fulfil Kittel's promise to present the Masorah of Codex L in its entirety", p.XII-XIII.

the longest separation between any of the sections of the manuscript. This may be just a coincidence, or it may mean that the *sofer* himself set aside more time to prepare before he wrote this book.⁵ In contrast, B19a has only three spaces between the book of Ruth and Shir HaShirim.

In the very earliest fragments of ancient Hebrew writing, that have been found from 1st Temple times, we have discovered there are no spaces between words or between sections.⁶ Over time there developed a tradition to mark breaks in the text. The Qumran documents show breaks in the text, although these do correspond to the breaks that we have now. We do not know exactly why or when the breaks developed to their present form, but we do know that as late as the 15th century the spaces were not followed consistently from manuscript to manuscript.

There are three different forms of breaks in the text - spaces between books, spaces within a body of text that can take either a *petuchot* or a *setumot* form, and the special song forms. Maimonides was very concerned about each particular form and when it was to be used in the five books of the Torah and wrote it in Hilchot Sefer Torah. Some manuscripts mark these breaks by the way they write the text, other manuscripts write the ׀ or ׁ. If the letters are written then it is not a kosher scroll for public reading.

I am not sure that we had the same degree of consistency with the breaks in the Ketuvim section of the Tanakh. Below I have compared the *petuchot* and *setumot* breaks in the Ibn Musa Bible and B19a, as well as in the Aleppo Codex, for the book of Shir HaShirim.

⁵ This gives credence to my frame story when I talk about the amount of physical and spiritual preparation the *sofer* needed before beginning this book of the manuscript.

⁶ There have been several fragments of writing found - some on pottery shards like the Arad ostraca, others on silver, like the Keter Bar Hinnon fragment of the Priestly Blessing. Information about these can be found in many works, one author being W.F. Albright.

The following is a chart that compares the *piskot*, (the breaks), in the text of Shir HaShirim. The ס marks a *setumot* break, פ marks a *petuchot* break.

CHAPTER & VERSE	BI 9a	ALEPPO CODEX	IBN MUSA
1:4 - 1:5	אהבוך---ס---שחורה	אהבוך---פ---שחורה	אהבוך---ס---שחורה
1:8 - 1:9	הרעים---ס---לססתי	הרעים---פ---לססתי	הרעים---ס---לססתי
1:14 - 1:15	עין גדי---ס---הנך	עין גדי---ס---הנך	the sofer begins a new column without leaving a space
2:7 - 2:8	שתחפץ---ס---קול דודי	no space	שתחפץ---ס---קול דודי
2:13 - 2:14	ולכי לך---ס---יונתי	ולכי לך---ס---יונתי	ולכי לך---ס---יונתי
2:14 - 2:15	נאווה---ס---אחוז לנו	נאווה---ס---אחוז לנו	נאווה---ס---אחוז לנו
2:17 - 3:1	בתר---ס---על משכבי	בתר---ס---על משכבי	בתר---ס---על משכבי
3:5 - 3:6	עד שתחפץ---ס---מי זאת	עד שתחפץ---ס---מי זאת	עד שתחפץ---ס---מי זאת
3:8 - 3:9	בלילות---ס---עיפרון	בלילות---ס---עיפרון	בלילות---ס---עיפרון
3:11 - 4:1	שמחת לבי---ס---הנך	The Aleppo codex breaks off at the words צאינה וראינה בנות זיון	There is no break at all in this place
4:7 - 4:8	אין בד---ס---אתי		עין בד---ס---אתי
4:11 - 4:12	לבנון---ס---גן נעול		לבנון---ס---גן נעול
5:1 - 5:2	דודים---ס---אני ישנה		דודים---פ---אני ישנה
6:3 - 6:4	בשושנים---ס---יפה		בשושנים---ס---יפה
6:9 - 6:10	ויהללוה---ס---מי זאת		ויהללוה---פ---מי זאת
7:11 - 7:12	תשוקתו---ס---לכה		תשוקתו---ס---לכה
8:4 - 8:5	עד שתחפץ---ס---מי זאת		עד שתחפץ---ס---מי זאת
8:7 - 8:8	לו---ס---איותי לנו		לו---ס---כרם היה** ** This is from 8:11 Missing 8,9,10
8:11 - 8:12	שלום---פ---כרם		

In comparing the three manuscripts, Ibn Musa, B19a and the Aleppo Codex, we can see that there is less than a 60 percent agreement as to the *piskot* in the texts. I also looked at the Snaith Bible, which is based on the Lisbon Bible, also written by our *sofer*, and again we find less than a 60 percent agreement. Upon closer examination it can be shown that there is one place in the Ibn Musa manuscript where there is no break (3:11-4:1), and one place where there does not appear to be a break (1:14-1:15). There is one place in the Aleppo Codex (2:7-2:8) that has no break. There are two places where B19a has *setumot* breaks which are *petuchot* breaks in the Ibn Musa (5:1-5:2 and 6:9-6:10). There is a section from 8:8-8:10 that has a break in B19a and is completely missing in the Ibn Musa!!

This information leads us to several questions: If the *piskot* are very ancient, as Yeivin claims⁷, then why do we have discrepancies in manuscripts written centuries of years later? Ben Wacholder claims that the *piskot* are not as old as previously believed⁸ but they are still far older than the two manuscripts with which we are dealing. I believe that we have enough evidence from Qumran to support the fact that the concept or feature of *piskot* is one of the earlier masoretic features, but the exact placing of each individual *petuchot* or *setumot* section was not consistently followed even in the middle ages.

As previously mentioned, it is surprising to note that there are three verses completely missing from the Ibn Musa manuscript. These verses are set apart by *piskot* in B19a, so it is possible that our *sofer* skipped erroneously from one

⁷ Israel Yeivin, Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah, p. 41; "The marking of piskot is old. It is mentioned in the halakhic midrashim (about 3rd C. CE) "Why were the piskot introduced? To give Moses time to reflect between parasha and between each subject" (Sifra Lev. 1:1)

⁸ Ben Wacholder, "The Date of the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael"; HUCA; Dr. Wacholder challenges the date of Sifra and claims that the halakhic midrashim are from the latest strata from about 6-8 C CE.

section to the next. This would seem to be plausible except for the information that I have about the way that this *sofer* wrote. It appears, from one of the haftorot sections, that he wrote the consonantal text first, and then went back and added the masorah afterwards.⁹ If this assumption is correct, than it may have been possible for the *sofer* to miss the verses the first time, but it seems far less likely that when he went back to insert the masorah, that it was missed a second time. There is a tradition that says "מסורת סייג לתורה",¹⁰ masorah is a fence for the Torah. In this particular case the masorah did not act as a fence to protect the Torah.

It is interesting to note that BHS diverges completely from the B19a form of Shir HaShirim. I do not know why they chose a different form, perhaps because they wanted to reflect the text as poetry, however, they did mark the *setumot* and *petuchot* sections with a ׀ or ׆ at the end of the line.

There is a tradition of writing some letters in an unusual form. These are first attested to in the Talmud and Midrash. We do not have complete agreement among manuscripts or among independent masoretic lists about each particular case. It was customary to write these unusual forms in both the scrolls and the codices.¹¹ We have lists of some of these forms in Masekhet Soferim and we have others listed in an ancient collection of masoretic notes Ochla v'Ochla.¹²

9 On page 196 of the Ibn Musa Bible the *sofer* wrote half of B'reishit haftorah. The consonantal text is there without the vowels, accents and masorah. On the next page he re-wrote the haftorah with different spacing in the columns.

10 Avot 1:1.

11 Israel Yeivin, Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah; p.47-48.

12 Zalman Frensdorff edited Ochla v'Ochla, which is the largest ancient collection of masoretic notes. It contains 400 lists of masoretic notes. These were used as a basis for the Second Rabbinic Bible edited by Jacob ben Chayim printed by Bomberg in 1524/25.

There are some letters written in a large form, אותיות גדולות, and some letters in small form, אותיות קטנות. In some cases there is a logical reason given and in other cases we do not know why they chose to write them this way. In some cases we learn through homiletic midrash. One reason for a large letter is that it stands at the beginning of a book, for example the ב in בראשית or perhaps the ש in שיר השירים.

In comparing this aspect in the Ibn Musa Bible and B19a, we find that there are only three large and three small letters in B19a¹³, despite the fact that Ochla v'Ochla was probably compiled in about the 9th to 10th century. In the Aleppo Codex we have an enlarged ש at the beginning of Shir HaShirim. There is a large ש at the beginning of שיר השירים, in the Ibn Musa Bible, just as recorded in the list in Ochla v'Ochla.¹⁴ The form of the letter is only slightly larger than the other letters but the masorah *katana* beside the column says שין רבתי, shin is larger than normal.

We have several possible theories for the use of enlarged letters: 1) the letter stands at the beginning of a book or a section; 2) the letter draws attention to a significant point, eg. Lev. 11:42; 3) the letter shows that the reading must be precise, eg. Deut.6:4.¹⁵ There are other times when we really do not understand why this is the case. In the case of the large ש in שיר השירים we do not even have a midrash for its appearance.

In the Ibn Musa Bible we have far more unusual letter forms than the older

¹³ Kelly, Mynatt and Crawford; The Masorah of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia; p. 36. Here they mention that BHS has added one additional large letter over the ones in B19a - גחון in Lev. 11:42. This is mentioned as the middle of the letters of the Torah. This is one example of how BHS has varied from the text of B19a..

¹⁴ Zalman Frensdorff, Ochla v'Ochla; p. 88.

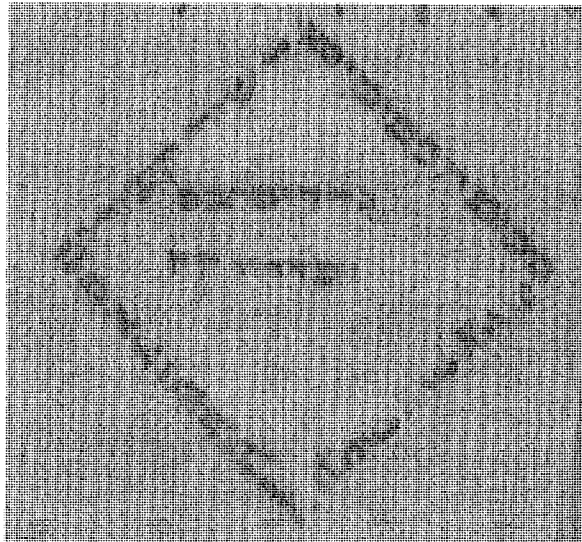
¹⁵ Israel Yeivin; Tiberian Masorah; p. 47-48.

manuscripts - the Aleppo Codex and the B19a. From this evidence I would infer that the numbers of small and large letter forms increased over time, and that again there was no uniformity from manuscript to manuscript. If these special letter forms were created to support homilies, then it would make sense that those with "the best" story caught on over time and became more consistent throughout the manuscripts.

I would like to propose for my purposes, that our *sofer*, Shmuel, chose to include a large letter in this case, at the beginning of Shir HaShirim, in order to magnify the importance of this text. He had precedence for the decision in Ochla v'Ochla and the traditional practice today is to put a large letter in this place.

Another feature of the masorah is the final count of the verses that occurs at the end of a text. In the B19a we have a very simple form at the end of Shir HaShirim - קי - the dotted letters that represent 117. At the end of Shir HaShirim in the Ibn Musa Bible, p. 269 verso, we have an elaborately designed final count. The following is an image of this masorah which is a summary list, where the *sofer* tallies the verses and the half-way point of the text. The diamond-shaped design of the information portrays his own individual style and acts as a divider between the text of Shir HaShirim and Aicha.

A translation of this summary list would read as follows: "The sum total of the verses of Shir HaShirim is one hundred and seventeen and the half-way point is "nard and saffron" [verse 4:14]. Its verses are 117". The masorah is written in the Aramaic language and the number given on the second line of the middle section is marked by dots above the letters, ק, ג, and ו, to represent their numerical equivalent.



At the end of B19a there is a final tally of the verses and other information about each of the books in the manuscript. For Shir HaShirim we find:

117	ק"ז
and its centre is "nard and saffron, fragrant reed and cinnamon"	וּחֲצִיו נָרְד וְכַרְכֶּם קִנָּה וְקִנְמוֹן
and 2 sedarim -	וּסְדָרִים ב'
"Song of Songs" - 1 "I was asleep" - 2	שִׁיר הַשֵּׁשׁ אֲנִי יָשְׁנָה ב'

This agrees with the tally and half-way point given in the Ibn Musa Bible and then it gives us the additional information that the book is divided into two *sedarim* - major sections.

Thus far we have been comparing features of the masorah in the two manuscripts from the macro level of the full text of Shir HaShirim. At this point I want to look at different features from the micro-level of one chapter in the text, chapter five. I am hoping that by giving a description of the full manuscript of the Ibn Musa Bible, according to the independent masoretic text Masekhet Soferim, then by comparing the book of Shir HaShirim with B19a in accordance with some features, and then chapter five according to other features, that I will be able to make some broad comments about this particular work. Now I will be looking at the consonantal text, the accents, the nikkudot, the masorah *katana* and the masorah *gadola*.

The following is a chart of the differences in the consonantal text of B19a and Ibn Musa with masorah katana of chapter five:

VERSE	B19a	MASORAH OF B19a	IBN MUSA	MASORAH OF IBN MUSA
5:1	דודים	מל - full spelling	דדים	ל מל - one time full spelling
5:5	מור עבר	?	מור עובר	ד מל - four times with full spelling
5:12	ישבות	ד - four times	יושבת	ד וסימ כתי
5:13	לחיו	ל - one time only	לחייו	no masorah
5:13	עבר	no massorah	עובר	no masorah
5:15	מיסדים	?	מיוסדים	ל' - one time only

From this chart we can see that the only differences in the consonantal text between these two manuscripts is in the full (מלא) or defective (חסר) spellings using the letters vav and yod. There is one instance of defective spelling (5:1), 4 instances of full spelling (5:5, 5:13, 5:13, 5:15) and one instance where it appears that the *sofer* made an orthographic mistake, switching the letters (5:12). I might surmise that the masorah for 5:1, where the *sofer* wrote that in this case there is a full spelling, might have been his way of correcting the

mistake that he made in the manuscript of the text. If this is indeed the case, then the masorah functions individually for each *sofer* as part of their own checking system. On what basis did the *sofer* make these notes? Could it possibly be a reflection of the manuscripts that he had before him and the differences between the manuscripts?

In the introduction to the facsimile edition of B19a, by E.J. Revell, he says that there is no uniformity in the vowel letters. All manuscripts, including the Aleppo Codex and B19a differ in their use of internal vowel letters. There is also very little consistency within each manuscript as to the use of them according to grammatical principles. It may be the case that this was not considered important. The efforts to regulize spelling first concentrated on morphological, then consonantal text and only later, with the printing press, on the vowel letters.

However, we need to balance these statements with what Maimonides wrote in his Hilchot Sefer Torah. In Chapter 7:11 it reads:

All the above matters were mentioned only because this is the most perfect way of performing the mitzvah. If one deviated from them, the scroll is not disqualified. In contrast, if one wrote the short form of a word that should be spelled using a long form, or the long form of one that should be spelled using a short form, the scroll is disqualified.

Thus, according to Maimonides, a scroll could be disqualified by the wrong spacing between the texts, the wrong spelling, or if the songs were not written according to the prescribed pattern. It seems that with the codex form there was

more flexibility in using the matros lexicones, and this did not disqualify the codex for use or study.

Under these circumstances I can only assume that there was the "perfect" way of executing the mitzvah of writing a scroll (or codex), and then there was reality, which was influenced by many other factors, such as the particular proclivities of the *sofer*, the geographical location, the manuscript or manuscripts before the *sofer* and the specific function that the manuscript would perform within its community.

The following is the masorah *gadola* for chapter 5 as it is written in the Ibn Musa Bible. It consists of two lines at the top of the page and three lines at the bottom. The masorah for chapter five begins on p. 267 verso. This is the page after the text of chapter five begins.

p. 267 verso bottom

ארייתי לית כותי - מורי לית כותי - דופק לית כותי - פתחי לית כותיה -
 "ארייתי" no other time written like this > "מורי" no other time written like this
 > "פתחי" no other time written like this.

ישנה ב וסמנהון ואמתך ישנה - אני ישנה ולבי עור קול דודי דופק
 פתחי לי אחתי רעיתי

"ישנה" two times and their signs (mnemonic devices) [this phrase is used in 1 Kings 3:20] > "I am asleep but my heart is awake" עור [in the manuscript this is written ער] "Hear my beloved knocks, 'Let me in my darling'"

שראשי לית כותיה - טל לית קמ - רסיסי לית כותיה - אלבשנה לית
כותיה - מצאני לית חס

"שראשי" no other time written like this > "טל" there are no other times it is
written with kametz > "רסיסי" there are no other times written like this >
"אלבשנה" there are no other times written like this > "מצאני" there are no
other times when it is written defective.

p. 268 recto top

איככה ד ב מלע וב ממלר וסימנהון פשטתי את כתנתי איככה ב בו כי
איככה אובל ב בו

"איככה" four times, two times מלעיל and two times מלרע [this word is written
two times with the accent on the penultimate syllable and two times on the final
syllable of the word, and their mnemonic devices are "I had taken off my robe,
should I dress again?", two times in this place (SHS 5:3) and "how shall I bear to
see the disaster..." two times in this place (Esther 8:6).

מור החור ד מלע וסימנהון אלק לי אל הר המור ואל - וידי נטפו מור ב
בו נטפות מורי

"וידי נטפו מור" two times in this place (5:5) and "they drip with myrrh" (5:13)

p. 268 recto bottom

יושבות ד וסימנהון יושבות הארץ - והנה שם הנשים - רחצות בחלב
יושבות על מלאת

"dwelling" (5:12) - 4 times and their signs "dwelling in the land" - "behold there
are the women" > "bathed in milk, dwelling by the full pool" (5:12)

ה מלין בטע וסימנהון חקת עולם בכל מושבותיכם את כל ההרותיה -
מבלי נתי עלי יגון

5 times the word is spelled with this accent and these are their signs - "an eternal law in all their dwellings"

גלוליכם מעל כל תועבותיכם כי למבראשונה - כמחלת לית כותיה -
ככרמל לית כותיה

- "Like the Mahanaim dance" (7:1) - only once written like this > "like carmel"
(7:6) - only once written like this.

Page 268 recto - vertically down outer margin

מעלפת לית כותיה וללקוט לית כותיה

"מעלפת" - only one time written like this, and "ללקוט" written only one time like this.

The masorah *gadola* is not always on the same page as the text that it is citing but it is in close proximity. The masorah in these cases is used to note spelling, peculiar accents, and as a concordance for other places that the word is used in the Tanakh or in this particular book. What is difficult for me to understand is why there are comments on these particular words. There could be a comment made on each word in the book and yet some are set aside for a specific note.

Again, we can ask the question - Why these particular notes? Is it a reflection of the manuscript or manuscripts that are before the *sofer*? Did he copy the masoretic notes verbatim or is it his comments on the manuscript?

We can draw a few broad conclusions from this investigation. It appears that by

the middle ages that there was a consistency, at least among good manuscripts, in the number of words in the text, and therefore the half-way point, the number of verses, and the *piskot* in the Torah portions. However, we still find divergent traditions for the large and small letters, the *piskot* in the Writings, the masorah, and the vowel letters.

Our *sofer* was a conservator of the tradition when it came to the wording and many of the standardized features, and yet he added his own innovative voice to the text, basing it on traditions, but using the features to enhance his own work.

Shortly after this period was when the first Rabbinic Bibles were printed in Venice: Felix Pratensis edited the first Bible in 1516-17, Jacob ben Chayim Ibn Adonijah in 1524-25, and Elijah Levita in 1527. All of them attempted to harmonize the traditions that were available to them at the time.

Jacob ben Chayim tried to find the best manuscripts available and worked on the assumption that the manuscripts were the most authoritative source. In his introduction he wrote:

When I explained to Bomberg the advantage of the Massorah, he did all in his power to send into all the countries in order to search out what may be found of the massorah, and praised by the Lord we obtained as many of the massoretic books as could possibly be got. He was not backward, and his hand was not closed, not did he draw back his right hand from producing gold out of his purse to defray the expenses of the books and of the messengers who were engaged to make search for them in the remote corners...

Therefore, I felt that I must not rely upon my own judgment but examine two or three codices, and follow them wherever they agree;

and if they do not agree, must choose from among the readings those which appear to me unobjectionable, and sift them till I am convinced that they are correct and clear.¹⁶

Unfortunately, Jacob ben Chayim did not list the manuscripts that he chose for his Bible, but it was generally accepted that the Sephardic manuscripts were the best. Spain was a centre for Jewish grammarians, and therefore took the copying and the masorah the most seriously.

Not only the Spanish Portuguese prints of the Pentateuch enjoyed the highest reputation for accuracy amongst the Jewish scholars, but also the manuscripts from which these and the scholarly polyglots were printed.¹⁷

A few years later Elijah Levita edited another Rabbinic Bible. He chose to work from the authoritative voice of the independent masorahs and the grammatical rules because he found the manuscripts full of mistakes:

As for the Masorah, written round the margin in the Codices, it contains numberless errors. The copyists have perverted it, as they did not care for the Masorah, but only thought to ornament their writing, and to make even lines, so as not to alter the appearance, in order that all the pages should be alike....and hence they had to break off in the middle of a sentence, thus leaving the whole edifice incomplete, and greatly defective.¹⁸

¹⁶ Jacob ben Chayim; Introduction to Jacob ben Chayim's Rabbinic Bible; as translated by C.D. Ginsburg, Introduction to the Rabbinic Bible and the Massoreth HaMassoreth of Elias Levita, p.39.

¹⁷ Lazarus Goldsmidt, The Earliest Editions of the Hebrew Bible, p. 22.

¹⁸ Elijah Levita, Introduction to the Massorah, 1538, as translated by Ginsburg, Introduction to the Rabbinic Bible and the Massoreth HaMassoreth of Elias Levita, p.19.

From this we can learn that there were still divergent traditions and different theories about the masoretic text even after the time of our *sofer*. Our *sofer* was a link in this tradition towards writing and producing the most perfect Tanakh, preserving the Divine voice, throughout the generations. These texts were sacred, a part of the Divine, but passed on to be used for sacred purposes. The text could not stand on its own without us making the decision to include them in our worship and in our life defining moments.

My own translation of Chapter Five:

Perhaps then it is best in this context to make a somewhat serendipitous decision to concentrate on one particular chapter of Shir HaShirim for my own translation. As previously said, all chapters, and every word, deserve a special note, a comment, in fact a whole *d'rash*, however, one is limited in time and space and needs to choose based on some rational explanations and some other "tugs at the heart". In the course of my reading of Shir HaShirim the chapter that tugged at my feelings and emotions was chapter five. It is also a chapter that is used in some interesting liturgical ways. Thus the decision has been made to try my hand at translating for this particular chapter.

I have come to my garden, my sister bride.
 I have plucked my myrrh with spices.
 I have eaten honeycomb with honey.
 I have drunk my wine with my milk.
 Eat friends, Drink your fill loves.

I am asleep but my heart is awake.
 The voice of my beloved knocks.
 "Open for me my sister, my friend, my dove, my perfect one,
 for my head drips with dew, my locks with night drops".

But I have spread out my robes
 How shall I dress?
 I have washed my feet
 How shall I soil them?

My love stretched forth his hand through the door
 and my insides stirred for him.

I arose to open for my love
with my hand dripping myrrh
and my fingers streaming myrrh
on the palm of the lock.
I opened for my love
But my love turned away and left.

My soul departed when he spoke.
I sought him but couldn't find him.
I called him but he didn't answer.
But I was found by the guards who surrounded the city.
They struck me and wounded me, the keepers of the walls.

Swear to me, daughters of Jerusalem
If you find my love
Please tell him that I am sick with love.

How is your love better than another, O fairest of women!
Why is your love better than another, that you should adjure us!

My love is pure and glowing
A symbol among many.
His head is fine gold.
His locks flowing black as a raven.
His eyes like doves surrounding the waters,
bathed in milk, dwelling in fullness.
His cheeks are like terraces of spices, towering perfumes.
His lips like lilies, with dripping myrrh.
His hands are rolling gold, filled with precious stones.
His belly is polished ivory, rippled with sapphires.
His thighs pillars of alabaster, founded on gold pedestals.
His appearance like the mighty cedars of Lebanon.
His mouth only sweetness
All of him so lovely.
This is my love and this is my friend.
O daughters of Jerusalem.

Chapter Four: The Place of Shir HaShirim in Our Worship

Sacred literature takes a Divine message that is given a voice by the way that it is transmitted from generation to generation by the *soferim* and the rabbis. When we celebrate with its words, during our prayers, our festivals, and our transforming moments, then we have given them life.

Shir HaShirim has a very exalted place in our liturgy; it infuses our prayers and our thoughts during Shabbat, Pesach, weddings and funerals. In fact its words have once again spilled over into popular culture, "your kisses are sweeter than wine" in song lyrics and art. Generations of people have found its poetic words, personally and collectively meaningful, whether it is to welcome in Shabbat, to celebrate freedom, to understand their sufferings, to form a human covenant under the huppah, or in the final moments of 'kavod ha-guf', giving honour to the deceased person's body.

Shir HaShirim in our Shabbat Liturgy:

It appears that Shir HaShirim was first introduced for Shabbat by the mystics of Safed in the middle ages. Each day they would try to meet with their fellow mystics to discuss the true way to serve God, and then they would conclude with a confession of their sins. On Friday they would do an accounting for the week, and then go out into the fields to welcome in Shabbat by chanting the verses of Shir HaShirim and the song L'cha Dodi.¹ All sins for the week were forgiven if they said the 117 verses of Shir HaShirim, and thus they were saved from

¹ Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, p.292.

gehinnom. If one was not able to complete all of the verses he could say the four verses, 1:2, 4:16, 2:8, 5:1, which begin with the words, **ישקני, עורי, קול**, **באתי**, of which the acrostic spells, **יעקב**, Ya'akov our ancestor, who taught us the evening service.²

It would seem natural for the kabbalists to intone the verses of the love affair between God and Israel and then welcome in the Shabbat Queen, *Shabbat HaMalka*. The words of Shir HaShirim continuously sing the praises of the Bride. The kabbalists developed "erotic mythology that would shock not only the respectable Maimonidean, but even the earlier and more daring midrashic masters themselves".³ According to them, while the prophet Moshe was responsible for bring the *Shekhina*, God's presence, into the lower world with the Torah, Solomon was the attendant or officiant at the sacred union between the bride and bridegroom, God and Israel.

Today there are still many communities that recite Shir HaShirim after *minha* on Erev Shabbat. This is reflected in our siddurim by the many that contain either selected verses or the whole text. Some of the siddurim give additional commentary as to the "proper" way that one is to recite the verses. The following represents a sampling of our siddurim today and how they see the role of Shir HaShirim in the Shabbat liturgy.

² Macy Nulman, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer*, p.306.

³ Arthur Green, "The Song of Songs in Early Jewish Mysticism", *Orim* 2, no. 2, Spring 1987, p. 141.

SIDDUR	BRANCH	TEXT OF SHIR HASHIRIM
The New Union Prayerbook	Reform	None
Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals	Conservative	No verses, but an acknowledgement of the tradition to recite SHS
Kol HaNeshama	Reconstructionist	1:1-4, 2:10-17 with notes
Siddur Rinat Yisrael	Israeli Traditional	The whole text at the back of the book and a note in its place in the Kabbalat Shabbat service.
Avodah She'b'Lev	Israeli Progressive	17 selected verses
Artscroll	Orthodox	The whole text in Kabbalat Shabbat
HaSiddur HaShalem(Birnbaum)	Orthodox	The whole text in Kabbalat Shabbat

One can see from this chart that there are divergent traditions that are not always dependent on a specific movement within Judaism, although it is clear that Shir HaShirim is given more prominence, within the siddur, in the more Orthodox traditions. Although we have seen that many siddurim have dropped the full text of Shir HaShirim, what has retained a central position within each movement and siddur is the poetic piece, L'cha Dodi, based on Shir HaShirim 7:12, "Come my Beloved". At one time there existed many songs of this type but the one that has been retained by all prayerbooks was written by Rabbi Solomon Alkabez HaLevi, in 1540, which pleased Rabbi Isaac Luria.⁴ So despite the fact that the actual recitation of the verses have not always been liturgically done in all communities, the interpretive themes behind the words of Shir HaShirim have been retained by all. On Friday night, during the Kabbalat

⁴ Ismar Elbogen, Jewish Liturgy, p.92.

Shabbat service, almost every congregant will turn to face the door and bow, with the words, "בואי כלה, בואי כלה", "Come O Bride".

In the Shabbat morning liturgy we have a poem, performed by some congregations, titled, "אנעים זמירות" or "Hymn of Glory", which uses phrases from Shir HaShirim, written by Yehuda HeHasid, a twelfth century kabbalist. It is a "tapestry of praises to God"⁵, using the descriptions of God found in Shir HaShirim 5:10-16. It is a declaration of love that the people Israel sing to God despite never having seen God;

With dignity and kindness, with splendor that they share,
Yisrael, God's people, crown Him with their prayer.
Encircled is God's head with curly locks of youth,
Hair black as any raven, splendid as the truth...

On Shabbat, when we have the taste of the world to come, we imagine being intimately connected to God. Now in this world, we yearn for God, praising Him using the human language and metaphors that we know.

Shir HaShirim as the Megillah read for Pesach:

The earliest evidence that we have of Shir HaShirim being connected to our Pesach liturgy is from Mahzor Vitry, which was written by Rabbi Simcha ben Samuel of Vitry, from the circle of Rashi, in about 1100.⁶ This is the most reliable evidence that we have of the old French rite, which is a part of the

4 Ismar Elbogen, Jewish Liturgy, p.92.

5. Siddur Sim Shalom, p. 185.

6 Ismar Elbogen, Jewish Liturgy, p.8.

Ashkenazi rituals. In this mahzor we have rules about the prayers and their orders. For Shir HaShirim it says;

ומגילת שיר השירים אומרים : אותה בשבת שחלה להיות בחולו המועד :
ואם אין שבת בחולו המועד או' אותה יום שביעי של פסח. ולכך אנו אומרי'
אותה בפסח על שם ששיר : השירים מדבר מגאולת מצרים, שנר' : לסוסי
ברכבי פרעה.⁷

Mahzor Vitry takes some of its rules from Seder Rav Amram Gaon, which was written in 875 CE and sent to Spain. Thus this may reflect earlier customs as well. This refers to the reading of Shir HaShirim during Shabbat Hol HaMoed, the intermediate Shabbat of the Pesach festival, or if there is none on a particular year, that it be read on the seventh day. The reasoning given is that Shir HaShirim speaks about the redemption from Egypt with the verse, "as a mare among Pharaoh's chariots", in SHS 1:9. This may reflect the oldest connection between the megillah and Pesach because of the story of the exodus from Egypt. The Zohar also describes this verse, (1:9) as being a central idea. According to it, the verses of Shir HaShirim encompass the whole Torah: the secrets of love of God, the exile of the Israelites among the nations and their deliverance, and the resuscitation of the dead.⁸

Today we can find many reasons for why Shir HaShirim is read during Pesach:

1) agricultural motifs and the time of the year, 2) based on the midrash that says that God and Israel began their courtship at Pesach and were married when the Torah was given on Sinai at Shavuot, 3) and the historical redemption from Egypt.

⁷ Mahzor Vitry, p.304.

⁸ Macy Nulman, The Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer, p.305.

The words of Shir HaShirim reflect the early spring, "Look, winter is over, the rains are done, wildflowers spring up in the fields", (SHS 2:11-12). We are told that Pesach must be held in the spring because it is a spring festival, *Hag HaAviv*, based on the verse in Devarim 16:1, "Observe the month of Aviv and keep the Passover of the Lord your God". We can see here that the literal meaning of the words of Shir HaShirim support the festival of Pesach, and integrate wonderfully with other Pesach rituals, like dipping the green vegetable, in honour of the spring at the seder.

Rabbi Akiva gives Shir HaShirim the exalted status when he says:

"In all of eternity there is not a day like when Shir HaShirim was given to Israel. All of the writings are holy but Shir HaShirim is the holy of the holies".

The song is also filled with vivid descriptions of the end of the winter rains, blossoming spring flowers and rebirth, a theme that is present in our Pesach liturgy and according to the cosmic calendar.

The allegorical interpretation of Shir HaShirim, works nicely with the theme of the relationship between God and Israel. The Targum of Shir HaShirim begins with the ten songs that Solomon sang while in the spirit of prophecy before God.⁹

It says that according to Isaiah 30:29, "this song shall be joyous for you, as on the night of the sanctification of the festival of Passover". The Targum then proceeds with the history of the relationship from the miracles performed in Egypt, and into the future, the world to come. Maimonides declared in his Mishneh Torah that "all of Shir HaShirim is a parable on the verse - 'For I am lovesick' ¹⁰ (2:5), and that it refers to the love that we have for God. We are

⁹ Isaac Jerusalemi, *Song of Songs in the Targumic Tradition*, p. 11.

¹⁰ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah - Hilchot Teshuva* 10:3.

motivated by our emotions towards service to God, love and fear, and both can the paths to Him.¹¹

Today we have various customs about the reading of the *megillah* of Shir HaShirim. The traditional Ashkenazi custom is to read it according to Mahzor Vitry, on the intermediate Shabbat of Pesach, before the reading of the Torah, or if not possible, then on the seventh day. Since we have two days of Yom Tov, it has become custom to read one half of the *megillah* on the seventh day before or after mincha, and then completed on the eighth day at the same time. This is the reason that our text is divided into two *sedarim*, and that has been the case since the writing of the Leningrad Codex.¹² There is also a custom to read it after the seder on Pesach. In the Spanish and Portuguese tradition it is customary for different congregants to recite it prior to mincha on the first two days of Pesach. In Israel it is often read on Shabbat, if it is the first day of Pesach, because Shir HaShirim includes the final redemption, 'which will be all Shabbat'.¹³

In Masekhet Soferim we read that, "in the case of Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations and Esther, it is necessary to say the benediction, 'concerning the reading of the megillah', although it is included in the Writings".¹⁴ It appears that the rabbis enacted this in regards to Megillat Esther, but not reading the other scrolls. Perhaps because over time it was only Esther that was read from the scroll. In Israel, if they are reading Shir HaShirim from the scroll, then they say both the blessing, על מקרא מגילה, as well as the

11 Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 31a, "He said to them: Both you will become perfectly righteous rabbis; one motivated by love, the other by fear".

12 See chapter three where I have included the final tally of verses from the Leningrad Codex that mentions that it is divided into two *sedarim* with the words, "ישנה אני".

13 Macy Nulman, The Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer, p.305

14 Masekhet Soferim 14:3

sheheyanu. However, traditionally in the diaspora, even if it is from a scroll, no blessing is recited. In the Reform version of the Five Scrolls, it lists both blessings before reading it from a scroll.¹⁵ Thus we see that there have been divergent traditions both in the timing of the reading of Shir HaShirim during Pesach and how to recite it liturgically.

Piyyutim in the Pesach Liturgy:

Perhaps it was not always possible for people to hear the full reading of Shir HaShirim, but the verses were familiar through the *piyyutim* that developed integrated verses of Shir HaShirim, into the liturgy. *Piyyutim* are the poetic insertions that were created to enhance the worship service and to embellish the liturgy for the holidays.

These *piyyutim* were inserted within the rubrics of the liturgy, and take their names from the place of insertion. The main categories are those included in the *Shema* and its *Brachot* rubric and the *Kerovot* which are added to the *Amidah* prayer.

These *piyyutim* usually accentuate the theme of that section by interweaving it with other themes from the particular holiday. The *piyyutim* for Pesach include the themes from the Exodus story and the themes from Shir HaShirim. With the verses of Shir HaShirim interwoven with the poem the people would become familiar with the words from the megillah combined with the rabbinic interpretation of them.

¹⁵ Leonard Bronstein and Albert Friedlander, The Five Scrolls, p. 162-163.

There are three main *piyyutim* that developed from Shir HaShirim: ברח דודי , אור ישע מאשרים and שחורה ונאורה. All of these *piyyutim* are found in the *Shaharit* service.

I have found three different versions of the ברח דודי *piyyut*: Each one begins with ברח דודי. One was written by Solomon b. Judah HaBavli in the 10th century and the end of each of the three stanzas ends with another line from Shir HaShirim. Another was written by Simeon b. Isaac b. Abun, with five stanzas, in which the line from *Shir HaShirim* is combined with verses from Deuteronomy, Psalms and the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. The third is written by Meshullam b. Kalonymus about 1000 CE. This four stanza *piyyut* contains his name as an acrostic at the beginning of each line.

ברח דודי:

One version of ברח דודי was written by Simeon b. Isaac b. Abun of Mainz, Germany about 1000 CE. He was also called "The Great" because he was considered one of the great men of his age. He was an important poet, a renowned miracle worker, and he earned the gratitude of the community by preventing a persecution of the Jews of Mainz in the year 1012 CE. His *piyyutim* were accepted throughout France and Germany.¹⁶

The opening words of each of the five stanzas - ברח דודי are taken from Shir HaShirim 8:14. This *piyyut* is recited as part of the *Shema* on Shabbat Hol HaMoed. Each of the stanzas of 5 lines each end with a rhyming word. There can be some question whether the word ברח can mean either "hurry" my love, or

¹⁶ Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, p. 253-254.

"flee" my love. One seems to be a sense of departing and the other of coming to, or hurrying to accomplish something. This tension in the word reflects the theological tension of wanting G-d to be present with us and also to flee to Jerusalem to prepare a place for us.

The Targum of Shir HaShirim provides the theology for this poem. The Aramaic Targum interweaves the words and phrases from the text and then interprets them to fit the theology of the rabbis. They could not take Shir HaShirim literally, for them it had to represent the relationship between G-d and Israel. It is interesting to compare the similar or like words found in the original text with the Targum. Here I have underlined the words in English translation so that we can understand how the rabbis read them. The verse is the last in Shir HaShirim and it represents the separation between the lovers. The Targum takes the *sitz im leben* of the Jews in the diaspora and their hope that G-d's presence is dwelling in Jerusalem and yet G-d continues to hear His people. The ultimate hope is then retained that G-d will liberate His people and bring them back to the Holy Land.

Shir HaShirim 8:14 -

"Hurry, my love! Run away, my gazelle, my wild stag on the hills of cinnamon."

The Targum Shir HaShirim on 8:14 writes:

At that moment, the elders of the Community of Israel will say: "Flee for Yourself, my Beloved, Master of the World, from this defiled land, and settle Your Shekhina in the uppermost heavens! But when we are in distress and pray

before You, be like a gazelle which, when it sleeps, has one eye closed and the other eye open! Or like a young stag which, when it runs away, keeps looking behind! Thus may You look after us, sensing our misery and our affliction from the uppermost heavens, until You are reconciled with us and can liberate us, and let us enter the Mountain of Jerusalem! There, the Kohanim will offer up before You the aromatic incense! ¹⁷

Another version of ברח דודי was written by Solomon b. Judah HaBavli and is a three stanza version of five lines each ending with a line from Shir HaShirim. The theology in the poem again reflects both the historical situation that the Jews are experiencing in the diaspora being "destroyed and mocked by foreign kings", the hope that G-d will soon send the Messiah who will "scatter the oppressor nations" and that Israel not be shamed anymore before the nations when they see that her "Beloved is close again".

This version of the *piyyut* does not place any blame on Israel for G-d's estrangement but rather sees itself as the victim of the oppression of the other nations. Here Israel is asking for G-d not to forget the time of redemption.

A third version of ברח דודי was written by Meshullam b. Kalonymus about 1000CE. We find the Meshullam's name spelled out with the first letter of the fourth word in each of the four stanzas - מ,ש,ל,מ. Again the theology of the poem is taken from the idea that the Jewish people are in desperate straights in the diaspora because they have "strayed from Your path", but please "peer at us through Your lattice" and save us. These are examples of lines taken from both the Targum and Shir HaShirim.

¹⁷ Isaac Jerusalemi, Song of Songs in the Targumic Tradition, p. 239.

This version is slightly different than the others because it has an element of revenge. Not only is Israel asking that G-d should redeem her but also that G-d hear the voice of her enemies and "sate their earth with blood, and enrich their soil with their fats; may their corpses raise a stench". This is Israel not just wanting to be redeemed but also wanting the other nations to be punished for their sins against Israel.

In all of the versions of ברח דודי the final redemption of Israel is modeled on the first redemption from Israel. G-d betrothed Israel by redeeming her from Mitzrayim and then signed the marriage ketubbah at Sinai. Even if Israel has been separated from her Beloved she holds out the promise of the ketubbah and demands love and forgiveness.

אור ישע מאשרים

This *piyyut* was also written by Solomon b. Judah HaBavli who wrote in the mid-tenth century. This is probably his best known work. Each stanza contains a line from Shir HaShirim. The poem also has the alphabetical acrostic, with the first word of two stanzas having the א, the next two stanzas beginning with a ב and so on. The name of the author is found in alternating lines. This *piyyut* was done as part of the *Shaharit* service within the Shema rubric.

שחורה ונאורה

This *piyyut* was written by Solomon b. Judah HaBavli of Rome, from the 10th C for the first day of Pesach. Solomon b. Judah was one of the first Hebrew *payyatanim* in Europe. He lived in northern Italy but his family was originally from the east. He was said to be able to convey the oriental secrets of prayer from Italy to Germany. He is known for his very polished rhyme. The third part of each stanza is a quote from Shir HaShirim. His name can be found in the first

letter of lines 1, 2, 4, and 5 of the first stanza.

The poem has lines from Shir HaShirim again interwoven with the theology of the Targum. Israel has sinned but G-d still loves Israel and will take her back. However, the line that is repeated three times in Shir HaShirim seems prominent here: "O daughters of Jerusalem, swear to me that you will not awaken love until it is ripe". This line is now reinterpreted to mean that Israel should not push the end, but rather wait in hopeful expectation that G-d will again come back and purify her, take her back to Jerusalem and comfort her.

In contrast to the *piyyut* ברח דודי, this one is very dense with several meanings. G-d continues to take pleasure in Israel even when she sins. Most of the verses from Shir HaShirim 7 and 8 are split, and the poem actually acts as a midrash on those verses by filling in the missing pieces.

My translation of שחורה וגו':

I am blackened (by sins) but still beautiful and desired by G-d
Not because of my numbers does G-d desire me
I am my Beloved's and His desire is only towards me

From the ones who are shamed (Israel)
 Look instead to those who have defied You
Come my Beloved and let us go out to the field
and lie all night among the villages

Take note of those who cause favour to be found
 The ones that support the world
Let us go early to the vineyards (the house of study)

Loud voices cried out
 The good and the bad together
The dodaiim have filled the air with their fragrance

My Beloved refreshes me
 He comforts me and forgives me
Would you be like a brother to me?

Let us behold You as then Your Heavenly Hosts
 May we behold the brilliance of your Shekhina full of awe
I shall lead you and bring you

Bring close the people who clings to You
 Satisfy me with your praises every day
Your left hand under my head your right arm embracing me

After you will cleanse our impurities
 And hurry the time of the thrice repeated oath
Swear to me O daughters of Jerusalem

Zion flaming fire we passed through for You
 Who is this like You in our hearts?
Place me like a seal upon Your heart.

The multitudes saw signs
 In crossing the path
Through the great seas

Look at this poor people with compassion
 Our sister laid bare like a wall
I am a wall.

Then Yehudah will plant my vines
 As before in front of the sanctuary
My vineyard as before me

One thousand shields for protection
 Adorning noble princes
The one that sits in the gardens

From out of the swamps that stain my veil
 Nard, rose, is my Beloved
Hurry my love

Be like the the travelers
 Courage like the strength of warriors
Like a gazelle or stag

Like the one who measures the spices
 Like the fragrance of myrrh
On the mountain of spices

I have detailed these *piyyutim* , although it is not an exhaustive accounting, in order to show how the words of a sacred writing can be used in liturgical settings, and brought to life depending on the current life situation and the prevailing theologies. The words of Shir HaShirim supported the medieval European Jews through the dark ages of persecutions and sufferings, as they interpreted them to their needs. They did not know what the morrow would bring, but were comforted with the promise that God still loved them and would return to them.

Shir HaShirim in Weddings:

Shir HaShirim during weddings is the perfect opportunity for it to shine at its literal best. The words of the poem are perfect for the new-found and budding relationship between two people. They are full of passionate emotions and loving feelings. This is the Shir HaShirim that was first sung by the common people. In the mishnah we read that Shir HaShirim was used as part of the festivals of Yom Kippur and Tu'B'Av when the girls went out into the fields to meet boys:

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says; There wasn't any better days for Israel then the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur, when the daughters of Jerusalem would go out with borrowed white clothes. The daughters of Jerusalem would go out dancing in the vineyards. And what did they say? Young man, raise up your eyes and look! Who do you choose for yourself? O beauty, place your eyes towards family. "Grace is deceptive, beauty is illusionary, it is for her fear of God that a woman is to be praised. Extol her for the fruit of her hand, and let her works praise her in the gates" (Proverbs 31:30). And thus he says; "Come out O daughters of Zion, and gaze at Solomon the King! See the crown that his mother placed on his head on the day of his wedding" (SHS 3:11) - This was the giving of Torah - "The day of his heart's great joy" - this was the building of the Beit HaMikdash, that he built in his days.¹⁸

Beyond the surface meaning it is still infused with the concept of covenant and the covenant formed between two people under the huppah is the strongest human relationship that we choose to participate in. In fact the marriage relationship should not be severed lightly, even when there appears to be cause, because just as we hope for God to return to us after our sins, so we hope to be the case with the marital relationship. In Shir HaShirim Raba we read:

Rav Idi said, It is reported of a woman of Zidon in Phoenicia who lived ten years with her husband and had no child. They came to Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, and they wanted to be divorced from each other. He said to them, As you have been married with festivities, so shall you separate with festivities. So they went and declared a festival for themselves and they made a great feast, and she made him drink more than enough. When he became clear-minded, he said to her: My daughter, select the most precious article that I have in the house, and take it with you to your father's house. What did she do? When he fell asleep, she made gestures

¹⁸ Mishnah Ta'anit 4:8.

to her servants saying, Carry him in his bed, and bring him to my father's house. At midnight, he awoke from his sleep, and when he overcame the effect of the wine he said to her: My daughter where am I placed? She said; In my father's house. He asked; What have I to do in your father's house? She replied, Did you not tell me to take the most precious article from the house to my father's house? There is nothing in this world more precious to me than you.¹⁹

This was based on the verse in Shir HaShirim 8:2 says, "I will bring you to my mother's house".

There is one ritual that was observed in Damascus, Syria. On the morning following the nuptial night, the bridal party brings the threshing sled out and cover it in a fancy rug and two gold embroidered ostrich-feather cushions, for the "king" and the "queen", for the seven days of celebration. Then a dance was begun with a song that was in the style of the *wasf*, totally dedicated to the physical perfection of the bride and groom.²⁰

There are no direct references to Shir HaShirim in the wedding liturgy of any of the movements, from progressive to orthodox, perhaps because the words would be so obviously erotic for the public ear. However, the music throughout many ceremonies is based on the Hebrew phrases. The phrase "Dodi li, v'ani lo", "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine", (SHS 2:16), is engraved on many items associated with marriage, from the rings, to the ketubbot. Each bride searches her mind and heart and answers the question posed by the daughters of Jerusalem, "How is your lover different than any other?" (SHS 5:9)

¹⁹ Shir HaShirim Rabba I:31.

²⁰ Sheldon Blank, "Prolegomenon", *The Song of Songs and Coheleth*, p. XXXVI.

Shir HaShirim in Funerals:

After a person dies, the *Hevra Kadisha*, participates in the *tahara*, the ritual cleansing of the body. This is a way of honouring and showing reverence for the dead. In fact the sanctity of the body is compared to that of a Torah scroll that retains its holiness even after it is no longer of any use. The *tahara* is accompanied by the recitation of prayers and psalms. All parts of the body, from head to foot, are thoroughly washed. The body is turned side to side but is never allowed to lie face down.²¹

While the *tahara* is being performed some of the verses that are recited are from Shir HaShirim. When the body is laid on the "bed" where the *tahara* will be performed they recite, "Oh the splendors of King Solomon! The bravest of Israel surround his bed, threescore warriors, each of them skilled in battle, each with his sword on his thigh against the terror of the night" (SHS 3:7-8). Each of the seven jugs of warm water for the ritual washing require a word from B'reishit, "בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ" (B'reishit 1:1).

While washing each part of the body, verses are recited from the Tanakh - head, feet, face, eyes, nose, mouth, soles of feet. Each part of the head is washed with the verse, "His head is burnished gold, the mane of his hair black as the raven" (SHS 5:11). The verse for washing the eyes is "his eyes are like doves by the rivers of milk and plenty" (SHS 5:12). While the nose is washed, "Your nose like the tower of Lebanon, that looks toward Damascus" (SHS 7:5). The face is, "His cheeks a bed of spices, a treasure of precious scents, his lips red lilies wet with

²¹ Isaac Klein, A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice; p. 276-277.

myrrh" (SHS 5:13). "His arm a golden scepter with gems of topaz" (SHS 5:14). And finally with the legs, "His thighs like marble pillars on pedestals of gold, tall as Mount Lebanon, a man like cedar" (SHS 5:14). Finally are the words, "His mouth is sweet wine, he is all delight. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem" (SHS 5:16). These same verses are recited whether it is a woman or a man.

It is traditional to robe the body in *tachrichin*, white shrouds, that are composed of several parts. This tradition, begun by Rabbi Gamliel in the first century, shows that all people are equal before God in death, wealthy or poor. They symbolize purity, simplicity and dignity.²² In some traditions the verses from Shir HaShirim are recited with each of the clothing pieces. For example, when the head covering is placed, "His head is burnished gold, the mane of his hair black as the raven" (SHS 5:11). With the pants is, "His thighs like marble pillars on pedestals of gold, tall as Mount Lebanon, a man like cedar!" (SHS 5:15). The shirt is put on with the words, "His arm a golden scepter with gems of topaz, his loins the ivory of thrones inlaid with sapphire" (SHS 5:14). The jaw bone is carefully tied up with, "His cheeks a bed of spices, a treasure of precious scents, his lips red lilies wet with myrrh" (SHS 5:13).

These words from Shir HaShirim, are known by the Arabic word, "*wasf*", because they are descriptions of the lover. It was common in Moslem mystic circles in the early middle ages to use a code when writing these "*wasfs*". For example, when the poet describes the hair he is talking about the angels, the head was representative of God. Spanish poetry had two types, שירי חול and שירי קודש, holy songs and secular songs. What is interesting is that on a surface level they

²² Maurice Lamm, The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning, p. 6-8

can often sound very similar, it is their interpretations that make them different.²³ There were some rabbis and theologians that wrote both kinds of poetry. This is an interesting observation because so much of what can be described as sacred or holy then is dependent on its interpretations and on its use.

The particular verses of Shir HaShirim, where the lovers describe each other, (4:1-5, 5:10-16, 6:4-7), were a challenge to the rabbis and their understanding of the song. If the song is not really about two human beings, but really about God and Israel, then what do we do with the descriptions of God!? We learn from the Torah that we "shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below".²⁴ So the question was raised, whether this God, that we are not allowed to make an image of, is really without image or form? We know that God speaks, but does God have a mouth? We know that we were created "בצלם אלהים", in the image of God, so what does that mean?

The early mystics were intrigued by Ezekiel's vision of the *merkavah*, and sought to understand what his prophecy meant; "And upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above".²⁵ They conceived the idea that it was possible to have a vision of God that revealed an aspect of God's true form, the Divine "kavod", glory.

This mystical form was believed to be the Godhead, the שיעור קומה, the

²³ This information was gleaned from the discussions that I had with Dr. Isaac Jerusalmi during his class on the Targum to Shir HaShirim. At that time he discussed parallel works in the Islamic world that would shed light on our own understanding and use of Shir HaShirim.

²⁴ Exodus 20:4

²⁵ Ezekiel 1:26

measure of God's stature. Not only did they believe that it was possible to see a vision of God's form but also to be able to give exact measurements of each limb! Gradually they developed a system of sephirot, which corresponded to God's actual presence. It was written:

The Holy One, blessed be He, has seven sacred forms, all of which have their counterpart in man, as said, "In the image of God He made them"...These are: the right and left thighs, the right and left hands, the torso, the phallus and the head.²⁶

The verses in Shir HaShirim, especially 5:10-16, were set aside as the description of God. This interpretation was believed to have been originally conceived, and experienced, by Rabbi Akiva when he went into *pardes* and came out whole.

For our discussion, it is intriguing that we have these very vivid descriptions of God's body being used by the *Havra Kadisha* during the *tahara*. Could this have been conceived because the body and soul then are returned to God from whence they came?

When we use the words of our Tanakh for holy purposes - to praise God, to try to understand God, to honour another human being or to raise the level of holiness in our lives, then we are adding more sacredness or holiness to the words. Their effect on our lives reinvigorates them with holiness.

²⁶ Gersom Scholem, Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah - "The Mystical Shape of the Godhead", p. 15-57. All of the above discussion is taken from this chapter in Scholem's book. The quote is taken from his translation of one of the Shi'ur Komah fragments.

Chapter Five:
Shir HaShirim as a Source of Hope and Renewal
A Personal Approach

We add holiness to the words of our sacred scripture when we lovingly care for them, when we pass them on to future generations, and when we use them to enhance important moments in our lives. The words of our sacred scripture add holiness to us; when we use them to help us to feel, to understand, to comfort, and to believe. We as a Jewish people reflect the words of our scriptures, and they have become a reflection of us. We see God through them, and God sees us.

Shir HaShirim is part of those words that we define as sacred. It is different than many of the other texts that we have, and yet in many ways it is the same. It has been preserved lovingly as part of the God's words, it has been interpreted throughout the generations, perhaps more than any other book, and it has been sung by us at our weddings, and whispered to us at our graves. Its words have effected who we are as a people and we continue to be drawn in by them. They beckon to us, "Come my love, my friend, and come away" (SHS 2:10), and we are carried back and forth between this world and the world to come. Perhaps that is the challenge to every person seeking to live in this world, and yet to raise it up to the standards of the world to come. It is also the challenge of our leaders who can help guide us. Shir HaShirim bridges that gap from this world to the next, "Who is that leaping over the mountains?... rising up over the desert like a pillar of smoke?" (SHS 2:8, 3:6) It is the voice of our love and our beloved.

It is hardly surprising that a book that is filled with similes and metaphors, should itself have been interpreted as an allegory. Shir HaShirim has taught us to look

at, and appreciate life. It asks us to see a little beyond, a little inside, a little around.

We peek through the "crevices of the wall" (SHS 2:9), and we imagine and find joy in living. Through the words of Shir HaShirim we are asked to feel -- to long, to yearn, to rejoice, to desire, to be comforted, and to give comfort. By feeling we are living in the present, even when we reflect on the past or look forward to the future. Shir HaShirim has taught us to feel.

With Shir HaShirim you can enter the orchard, פרדס. These letters represent the Persian word for orchard, but they are also an acronym for the rabbinic way of interpreting a text. They represent פשט, רמז, דרש, סוד, which can be translated as "literal", "hint", "expound", and "hidden". We have seen that the rabbis traditionally did not want to read Shir HaShirim literally, but rather only used the other forms of interpretation, reading it all as an allegory. In fact they also did not use רמז, since they felt that it was explicitly about the relationship between God and Israel.

My own understanding of Shir HaShirim is that it can be read and understood in all of these ways, and that each level represents the complex beauty that can be found within it.

I have been blessed with the opportunity to be the student rabbi at Cedar Village, a Jewish home for the elderly, just north of Cincinnati, Ohio, for the past three years. It has been a mutually wonderful and growing time for both the residents and myself. We have taught and learned from each other. As part of my responsibilities there, I do weekly Torah studies. Every Shabbat morning we

study the *Parshat HaShavua*, and on Friday afternoons we study other classical Jewish texts, mishnah, the megillot, Talmud and Hebrew literature.

Last year I had the opportunity during the week of Pesach to study Megillat Shir HaShirim with a group of people. I have included here an article that I wrote for the Cedar Village Voice just a few days after our study session, and it reflects what we did that day:

From the Desk of
Student Rabbi Lori Cohen

On Shabbat afternoons before Kabbalat Shabbat and during Pesach it is traditional to read Shir HaShirim – The Song of Songs. About 20 residents of Cedar Village gathered with me on a Friday afternoon, for almost two hours, to read this book in our Tanakh.

It is a poetic book that at first reading brought sighs and blushes from the residents because it is a love poem. It is a dialogue between two people about their budding love, their trust and their commitment. During the reading many people commented on the poem's ability to arouse their feelings and recall experiences with their spouses and how that initial love developed into the commitment that they continued to feel even in old age.

After reading through the poem we turned to the Targum – the Aramaic interpretation that was written several hundred years later by the rabbis that showed their understanding of the poem as being a story of the love between God and the Jewish people. We read the first chapter of the Targum where we studied the beginning of the relationship between the Israelites and God when God brought us out of Egypt and gave us the Torah. Even though the Israelites sinned, when they turned back to God they were forgiven and beloved.

That afternoon taught me about the special qualities of everlasting love – the love that develops and is sustained between a husband and a wife and the love that is never quenched between us and God. In a relationship where there is dialogue, commitment, understanding and forgiveness, then love is holy.

From this experience I learned it was important to respond to both the literal and the allegorical interpretations of the words of Shir HaShirim. Scholars continue to disagree over the original intent of the song and whether one should only read it allegorically or not. In fact some of the siddurim have cautionary notes to inform the worshipper that one is only to read it as a metaphor for the relationship between God and Israel. However, especially for the elderly, who have had a life time of love and experiences, I feel that it is appropriate to read it, and respond on both levels.

I have, over the course of my duties at Cedar Village, been involved in many funerals. I have comforted many spouses and children over the death of their loved one. During the intake process when we talk about the deceased's life, it is invariably the relationships between the family, and the loving acts that they performed that are remembered. Seldom at the end of life is one concerned about the career or accomplishments in the public scene, this is the purpose of an obituary, but it is the small loving gestures, the affection shown, the acts of kindness, the zest for life, that is recalled. It is the grandmother who braided her granddaughter's hair. It is the father who told the children bedtime stories. I have learned that "great seas (or death) cannot extinguish love" (SHS 8:7), for "love is as fierce as death" (SHS 8:6).

This *peshat* level of the text, gives voice to those feelings, that a husband and

wife share. It gives voice to the woman who says, "He has always treated me as a queen, and I love him". It is that special and loving relationship between two people that gives them the confidence to play together. It is a moving experience to witness an elderly woman longingly and lovingly looking at her husband as if to say, "Come out, O daughters of Zion, and gaze at Solomon the King" (SHS 3:11), or to see a man caress his wife's hand knowing that he is thinking, "One alone is my dove, my perfect, my only one" (SHS 6:9). This is love in its most pure form, and it is holy.

The words also work at the literal level because they give women a voice. Most of the texts that we have preserved in our Tanakh are with a man's voice. But here we have more lines devoted to the female. Over and over I have seen elderly women find their voice. Although tradition tended to muffle their voices, over time they have gained the confidence to speak using religious language. Women in our society tend to live longer than men, so it is often the women who are looking after their frail husbands, and outlive them. Not only can women learn to use their voices to study and to think, but they are using their voices to pray and to read Torah. One woman told me that when her husband was well that he would lay tefillin and daven every day, but now that he can't do it she needs to do it. At the age of 90 she studied with me to learn to read Torah. She attended classes every week and was always ready first with her books and her notes. When she felt comfortable with the Hebrew she asked if she could read Torah. I gave her a copy from the *Tikun* with the portion she was learning. Every day she would find a quiet place at Cedar Village, whether it was in the front lobby, in the synagogue, or by the Israeli monument, and she would take the folded sheet out of her purse, and read the words of the Torah over and over again. On the Shabbat morning when she was reading, she donned her

husband's *tallit*, and with tears in her eyes, she slowly began to chant the *b'rachot*. She found her voice. For months after, she continued to take the same crinkled paper out of her purse and read it. It was her daily prayer - for her husband and to her God.

The words also give voice to the man or woman who have lost their spouse and yet continue to want to experience the feelings that were aroused in their marriage. Oh how many times I have heard it said that the hardest thing about losing your spouse is learning how to sleep alone, rolling over in bed and reaching out to an empty space. They remember the "left hand under the head and his right arm holding her close" (SHS 2:6) Life can feel empty when you lose your life's partner, but the song provides vivid memories to relive. So, some of the words were embarrassing, and made people blush. It was the blushing that says, I feel those sensual feelings, but in a good way. They needed to hear that these words and feelings are in our sacred book.

Within our Jewish tradition it is also important to read and understand Shir HaShirim allegorically, as the relationship between God and Israel. This enables us to be a part of the rabbinic chain of our people and to understand ourselves as part of the Jewish people. Thus with the allegory we move from Shir HaShirim as a text of individual desires, longings and love, to a collective understanding of ourselves in history. Shir HaShirim helps us make that transition from the knowledge of our own soul to the knowledge of God. Shir HaShirim helps us to understand that we are living "God's plan".

Elderly people have a unique perspective on life because of their experiences. They have been through the trials and the tribulations and then have often

experienced the joys and happiness of success. Many people need to be comforted with the idea that what happens to them personally is for the greater good of the Jewish people, or that they have contributed to it. Those who have survived the Holocaust are often haunted with questions about where was God at that time. One woman, who spent months hiding in an attic with her husband, with little food or water wondered where God was and felt that they had "sought him everywhere and could not find him. I called his name but he did not answer" (SHS 5:6). They felt beaten and bruised and and this woman continues to be fearful and feel abandoned even today. We need the assurance of Shir HaShirim that God continues to think of us, the people of Israel as "my dove, my perfect one".

I did a memorial service for a man who died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of 51 years. After the service his wife confessed to me that she had been so angry with God for taking away her husband that she blew out the memorial candle. I told her that it was okay for her to be angry at God, that it was a tragedy that her husband died so young. I assured her that God was "big" enough to take all of our emotions, even the angry and hurtful ones, and that are Tanakh was filled with traditions of us beckoning God, questioning God, looking for God, being angry at God. She said that she felt immediate relief, always having believed that we should only praise and say good things about God.

The elderly that are plagued with suffering and illness, feeling "bruised and beaten by the watchmen", continue to say "It is all part of God's plan". It is the understanding that even if it is not good today for them, that in the end it will be okay for the Jewish people. That God knows even if we don't.

Many people that I have been involved with have had a broken relationship with God over the years and then find themselves coming back to religion and to mitzvot later in life. They have begun to experience the power of ritual in their lives and the value of studying Jewish texts. Some are shy about coming back, feeling that they know so little, even at their age. More than any other purpose that I have had is to convince them that God loves and waits for them at all times and that the God wants all of us to come "to the house of wine" (SHS 2:4), which is Israel's house of study.¹ For study, just like wine, gladdens the heart.

Life contains pains and sorrows, but God is surely our "fountain in the garden and a well of living waters" (SHS 4:15). These words can infuse our lives with meaning, and the ability to interpret ourselves with our relationship to God and others.

In some of my relationships over the past year, I have directly used words from Shir HaShirim, and in other cases I have used the ideas and concepts both in its literal and allegorical interpretations to enhance my ability to deal with personal and religious issues. I know that I have been able to give comfort and to provide hope for some of the Jewish elderly who live or have lived at Cedar Village. It would be my desire and my prayer to one day be able to feel that the words of our sacred literature are a part of me.²

¹ Isaac Jerusalmi, *The Song of Songs in the Targumic Tradition*, p. 53.

² I would like to thank Dr. Jerusalmi who told me stories about learning and reciting weekly the words of Shir HaShirim from the age of seven years. They have become a part of his soul and his being - he breathes them.

Fall 1999

I'm waiting impatiently for the librarian to bring the book from the Rare Book Room. I don't even have to cite the number, this has been a frequent visit. She knows, and with her comfortable saunter she leads me back into the bowels of the library to find a desk where I might sit in quiet, surrounded by the buzz of all of those scholars of ancient languages.

I am equipped for this task - magnifying glass, white gloves, pencils, paper. But is this enough? I bring the book to the centre of the desk, so that we are sitting opposite each other. It is familiar looking, the smooth brown leather, the little brass clasp. I have so many questions. Am I ready?

I anxiously pull on the white gloves that are a necessary nuisance. I want to feel the book with my fingers, sometimes I do. I touch the book and bring it a little closer to my body. I reverently, but with a slight embarrassment, mumble the words, "Baruch Ata....asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'asok b'divrei Torah". We are commanded to engage ourselves in the study of Torah; not just to read the words, but to struggle with them, to question them, to look for the minutest details. And this I have begun to do.

I strain my eyes, looking for the little clues, the key that might open up the mystery of these words. I am pulled toward them, and slowly the rest of the world starts to fade away. I become a part of the words. I feel myself going back in time - 500 years, 1000 years, 2000 years...listening for sounds, a voice, in the silent world of words. "קול דודי הנה-זה בא", "the voice of my love", I'm listening.

Description of Ibn Musa Bible

Collection:

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH, Rare Book Room, Klau Library; Manuscript #2.

Title and Contents:

This manuscript is a model codex known as The Ibn Musa Bible, written by Samuel ben Samuel ibn Musa in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1475 CE. The manuscript contains the five books of Torah, the Haftorot, the five megillot and Megillat Antiochus. The text contains the *masora gadola* and the *masora parva*. The *masora gadola* is written in 2 lines at the top of the page and 3 lines at the bottom.

Dating System Used:

The dating system used is either called "Anno Mundi" or לבריאת העולם. It is recorded as having been written in 5235 in the colophon, which we can then calculate:

$$\begin{array}{r} 5760 \\ - 5235 \\ \hline 735 \text{ years ago} = 1475\text{CE} \end{array}$$

Size of Volume:

Binding:

192 X 146 mm - Upper box
200 X 152 mm - Lower box
150 X 51 mm - Head and Tail Rim
200 X 48 mm - Foreridge

Pages:

There are 296 pages, including verso and recto sheets measuring approximately 180 mm x 140 mm each. The pages are bound together into quires of 4 sheets or 8 leaves. This is common in Sepharad from the middle of the 14th century. The sheets are enumerated by signatures on the upper right corner of the recto

page of each quire. These are Hebrew letters with the dot over them to indicate numbers. They begin with the ך but the system appears to end after ם. After this there is no evidence that any system of pagination was used. This method is a common sephard practice.

Description of Binding:

Box binding, brass clasp, originally reddish-brown Moroccan leather binding (now dark brown), one piece of leather for the binding, worm holes on the cover, parchment pages attached to the box binding.¹

Parchment:

This manuscript is written on both sides of vellum, a fine quality of parchment. Some sheets are thicker than others. Fine manuscripts have the codex sewn so that the hair side of the parchment faces an opposing hair side, and the flesh side of the parchment faces an opposing flesh side. I am not able to tell whether this manuscript meets this criteria.

Number of Columns per page:

There are two justified columns on each page that are approximately 11 cm X 4 cm each.

Lines per column:

22 lines per column.

Techniques for justification:

The columns are justified by different means: sometimes there is an elongated letter that rises up through a line above, the first letter or a partial letter of the word that begins the next line (common letters for this are ם and ן, which is common in sephardic and oriental manuscripts), a backwards dalet, a filler mark, or the compression of letters.

On many pages it is possible to see both the horizontal as well as the vertical scoring of the parchment done by a blunt instrument. It is also possible to see some vertical scoring for the masorah katana.

¹ This information is detailed in the article written by Leila Avrin, "The Box Binding in the Klau Library Hebrew Union College", *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore*, Vol. 17, 1989.

Number and Breakdown of pages:

This manuscript contains 296 parchment pages. The numbering reflects both the recto and verso leaves of the book.

Book	Page Number
Opening Sha'arim	1 recto and verso, 2 recto
B'reishit	3 verso - 46 verso
Shemot	46 verso - 84 recto
Vayikra	84 recto - 112 recto
B'Midbar	112 verso to 156 recto; begins with ch. 1:11; verses 1:1-10 are missing
B'Midbar 36:7-13	156 recto; verses 36:7-13 are written in a different style - inverted triangle shape
Devarim	157 recto - 194 verso
1/2 of B'reishit Haftorah	195 verso - 196 recto
Haftorot	197 verso - 243 verso
Special Haftorot for Holy Days	243 verso - 262 verso
Ruth	262 verso - 266 recto
Shir HaShirim	266 recto - 269 verso
Aicha	269 verso - 273 verso
Esther	273 verso - 282 recto
Kohelet	282 recto - 289 recto
Colophon	289 recto
Megillat Antiochus / Haftorah L'Pinchas	291 recto - 295 verso
Back Cover	296 recto

Number of Hands:

There was one scribe, Shmuel ben Shmuel Ibn Musa of Lisbon, Portugal. There is also an illuminated manuscript, written by the same sofer, called the Lisbon Bible in the British Museum, London, England - Or. 2628-8, 1482.

Hebrew Script:

This manuscript is written in the square sephardic script. We can describe the script as, "downstrokes slant somewhat to the right. The difference in thickness between them and the horizontal is greater, giving the script a less heavy appearance. The downstroke is very thin, the letter looks much smaller. The vertical is wavy - a neck developing under the head. The middle stroke issues from the middle of the head".²

Marginal Comments:

There is masorah katana on both outside margins of the columns as well as between the columns. Some of the outside comments are written vertically up the page.

Artistic Renderings:

On the front, back and rim of the book binding we have geometric leather tooled designs. On the inside of the binding on both the front and back we have geometric and floral designs. The designs at the front have green and red ink paintings.

Description of Vocalization:

The trope marks are more rounded than what is generally printed today but are composed of the same marks.

Description of Accentuation:

The accent follows the Tiberian masorah of the ben Asher school. The kamatz is written in two parts instead of in one.

² Solomon Birnbaum, The Hebrew Scripts, #243

Front Matter (Sha'arim):

There are 3 pages of geometric designs with words surrounding them in rectangular shape. These are called "carpet pages" in other manuscripts because they are done in the regular and intricate designs of near eastern carpets. The ones in this manuscript are not as elaborate as those found in other manuscripts, like the Leningrad Codex.

The first, on page 1 recto, has green, red and black floral designs. Originally these words were placed in an ornate fine lined frame. Today it is only visible in the bottom right hand corner, probably due to water damage. It is difficult to understand what the sofer was trying to do with these front plates. Even if one is able to translate the words and the quotes the meaning is not immediately known.

1st Sha'ar:

תיבותא ולא קרין וסימנהון פלטי בן רפוא -
 החלכוא אתו ולא אבוא שמוא איפת הקליא -
 והחיות רצוא ושוב ואתיקחא דם נקי -
 א' וערכד ונוא ומניא ושיצא ומניא שים

The words and (those) not read, and their mnemonic signs. Palti son of Rafua (Numbers 13:9 from tribe of Benjamin) and the ones who walk with him and I will not come hear the fiery character and was running back and forth among the creatures² seizing the blood of the innocent³ and beautifying and counting and prickly twig and counting value.

² This is a quote from Ezekiel 1:14 "This fire, suggestive of torches, kept moving about among the creatures; the fire had a radiance, and lightning issued from the fire. Dashing to and fro among the creatures was something that looked like flares".

³ This is a quote from Devarim 19:13 "Thus you will purge Israel of the blood of the innocent and it will go well with you."

2nd Sha'ar:

ומלכו אחרי ארעא מנך אים איפוא חכמי -
 ד"כ זונים חד קרי שין וחד קרי סמך וסימנהון -
 השיחים הם יחים בשירים בסירים -
 בושם בוסים בשום אלה ישראל בשים.

Then they ruled after the land () wise ones () one read shin
 and one read samekh and their signs. Ditches - conversations, with songs - with
 officers, the ashamed - the (), because of this the Jews are ashamed.

Note: This seems to be a pun on the words that sound the same but are spelled
 and mean something different.

3rd Sha'ar:

אלוה נר שירחים נר שכרמל השביעני -
 לאמר השביעני במרורים וישכו המים ויסכו -
 הכרובים וישירו בדרכי 'ה ויסירו אביר -
 ישיר על אנשים יסור במשא יושר אשיר.

G-d, ()
 "made me swear, saying" (Gen.50:5) "he filled me with bitterness" (Lam.3:15)
 "and the waters subsided" (Gen.8:1) "the cherubim covered" (1 Kings 8:7) "and
 they shall sing the ways of the Lord" (Psalm 138:5) "even great men are
 removed" (Job 34:20) "he declares to men" (Job 37:27) " ()
 "this song will be sung" (Isaiah 26:21)

I have been trying to discern a reason for these sha'arim, and the best that I can discover is that they are a way that the *sofer* was being both creative and playful. The first sha'ar seems to be a comment on those that count each sign and the second sha'ar seems to be a pun to tease those who mix up the letters, especially the *sin* and the *shin*.

As much as I believe that the *sofer* treated his role with the utmost of respect, I do believe that he was in a way poking fun at himself and other people who were intimately connected to the sacred texts. I am reminded of the way that my Leah Cohen and I discussed the masorah and called ourselves "masoretic nuts". We could make fun of the very serious pursuit that we were engaged in.

Colophon:

This colophon is on page 289 recto of the manuscript:

אני שמואל הקטן בן כבוד י' שמואל החזן נעים
 זמירות ישראל ין מוסא משכבו בכבוד סיימתי אלו
 חומשי התורה והפטרות וחמש מגילות בעזרת יושב
 תהלות לבחור הנחמד אשר לכל מדה טובה נצמד
 טוב עם השם ועם אנשים ואמיץ לבו בנכרים בן
 כבוד י' *
 וצוה לחקור דקדוקם ולבקר לכל אשר און חוקר
 אשרהו ואשרי בניו אחריו ויראהו ביאת הגואל
 ובימיו יושע יהודה וישראל אמן כן יהי רצון.
 וסיימתיים בירח שבט ערב שבת בין השמשות שנת
 חמשת אלפים ומאתים ושלש' וחמשה במדינת
 ליסבונה.
 יטעיקיפ"

I, Shmuel the Younger³, son of the Honourable Rav Shmuel the Hazan, sweet singer of Israel ⁴, son of Musa who lies in honour. I finished the five books of Torah, the Haftorot, and the five megillot with the help of the One to be Praised, to the pleasant man to whom adheres to every good quality, who is good with God, and with the Jewish people and with the gentiles, son of Rav *
 *, for he has commissioned me to check all of its details and to do all the research, may he be happy and his sons after him and may he see the coming of The Redeemer in his days, the Savior of Judah and Israel. Amen. May this be His will. I have finished this in the month of Shevat, on Erev Shabbat, in the twilight, of the year 5235 in the land of Lisbon.

*There is what appears to be an acronym following the colophon but I do not know what it means. It may be a blessing for the city of Lisbon.

³ The Hebrew word "קטן" may refer to "Younger" or "Junior" or it may also be used as a term of humility.

⁴ This is a quote from 2 Samuel 23:1 and is a description of David. This phrase in the colophon then represents praise to his father a hazan.

Additional Comments:

The following is a list of other unusual or interesting features to be found in the manuscript. I have questioned and attempted to explain a few of them in the body of my thesis.

1. The manuscript contains several pages of masorah that are written in geometric designs or in small drawings.
2. There are a number of pages that contain "doodlings" of various kinds.
3. On page 195 verso and 196 recto there is half the haftorah for Breishit. It begins with כה-אמר האל and ends with מי עורכי אם עברי from Isaiah 42. There are 14 lines in the first column, 22 lines in the second column and then 9 lines on the opposing leaf. There is no masorah, vowels or accentuation in the text. On page 196 verso and 197 recto the haftorah is repeated in full, with masorah, vowels and accentuation.
4. Shir HaShirim 8:8-10 - these verses are missing from the manuscript.
5. In this manuscript there are several letters that it is easy to confuse: resh and the dalet, vav and yod, and hey and het. (The confusion between letters, especially yod and vav, can also be seen by the reader of the Dead Sea Scrolls.)
6. There are no crowns (taggim) in the manuscript.
7. Ligatures with the aleph and the lamed are found in the colophons and opening matter of the manuscript. There are two ligatures that I have located in the text itself on page 100 recto in the parasha of Acharei Mot (מבית ישראל), and on page 118 verso בני ישראל, although in deed there be instances. It is interesting that both of the ligatures that I have located are in the word ישראל.
8. There is Rashi script used in place of the haftorot for Pinchas, Ki Tetze and Vayeleg Moshe.

9. There is an enlarged mem for *מה טבו* in Numbers 24:12

10. In some places in the Torah the *parshiot* are marked by *פרש* and in other places in the manuscript they are marked by *פר*. The shortened abbreviation appears in the books of B'Midbar and Devarim and are only in the space between the two columns. The reason I might suspect is for the economy of space, although this does not seem to have been the case in the first three books of the Torah.

11. There are tiny letters in the left hand top corner page every 8 leaves, beginning with *ב* and ending with *יא*, each with a dot over it representing it as a number. I believe that they are signatures to be used to preserve the order of the pages when they would be sewn into the codex form. The *sofer* appears to have stopped using this system for some reason.

12. The *sofer* has corrected his mistakes in a few places. It is obvious because the letters are closer together.

13. The *sofer* decorates the words of the masorah which describe the half-way point of the individual books, verses, the Torah etc.

14. There are a number of pages that contain words at the bottom that seem to have no relevance to the text or the masorah. This may be due to the *sofer* testing his quill and ink - "בחינת הקולמוס". Following is a list of some of them:

Page 136 verso *טריפת קקטקת*

Page 144 verso *בני*

Page 170 verso *יפקד*

Page 172 verso *ויד* or possibly *ניד*

Page 260 verso *וראיתס*

15. The book was a gift to Hebrew Union College by Mr. Joseph Schonthal of Columbus, Ohio, from the Hermine Schonthal Memorial Collection, and there is a dedication plate in the front of the manuscript to this effect.

Appendix 2

Glossary of Masoretic Terms

codex / codices - a book form meant for private study not for liturgical purposes of the scriptures (or a classical work); first used by the Jews in the 6-7 centuries CE.

colophon - ending notes, often including information about the scribe

defective spelling - writing a word without the matres lexicones; also known as חסר.

dikduk - the study of grammar

economy of space - a term that I use to describe the purpose for an abbreviation

extraordinary points - the special dotted words or letters; eg. Deut. 29:28

full spelling - writing a word using the matres lexicones; also known as מלא

graphemes - the nikkudot and the ta'amim for reading

incunbula / incunabulum - a book printed before 1501 CE; artifact of an early period

ligature - when two letters, especially נ and ל are written attached

manuscript - religious or secular books, letters or documents, handwritten on papyrus, paper, parchment or hide

masorah - the traditional notes that are written with the consonantal text noting such features as grammar, spelling, accentuation, similar words, etc.

masorah gadola - the notes written in the upper and lower margins of a book or manuscript; also known as masorah magna or masorah elyona or the top and masorah metachtana for the bottom

masorah finalis - notes at the end of the manuscript

masorah katana - the notes written in between the columns and in the side margins of a book or manuscript; also known as masorah parva

matres lexicones - the vowel letters - ו,י,יוד

nikkudot - the vowels added to the consonantal text for correct pronunciation

orthography - the art or study of correct spelling according to established usage; the aspect of language study concerned with letters and their sequence in words

otiot gadolot - the large or majiscule letters

otiot katanot - the small or miniscule letters

paleography - the study and scholarly interpretation of ancient written documents

parasha - the section of the Torah that is apportioned for a particular week of the Jewish Torah reading cycle

petucha /petuchot - the open break in the text

piska / piskot - the breaks in the text

quire - the leaves of a codex that are sewn together

recto - the front side of the page

setumah/setumot - the closed break in the text
sofer / im - scribe

sha'ar / sha'arim - the front and back pages of a manuscript that often have designs, quotes, pictures etc.

signatures - the letters, words or numbers that are written so that the binder will know the order of quires when binding the manuscript or book.

ta'amim - the accentuation of the words that is often chanted that marks the differences in phrases and sentences; also known as trope

taggin - the crowns that adorn some letters - שעטני"ז ג"ץ

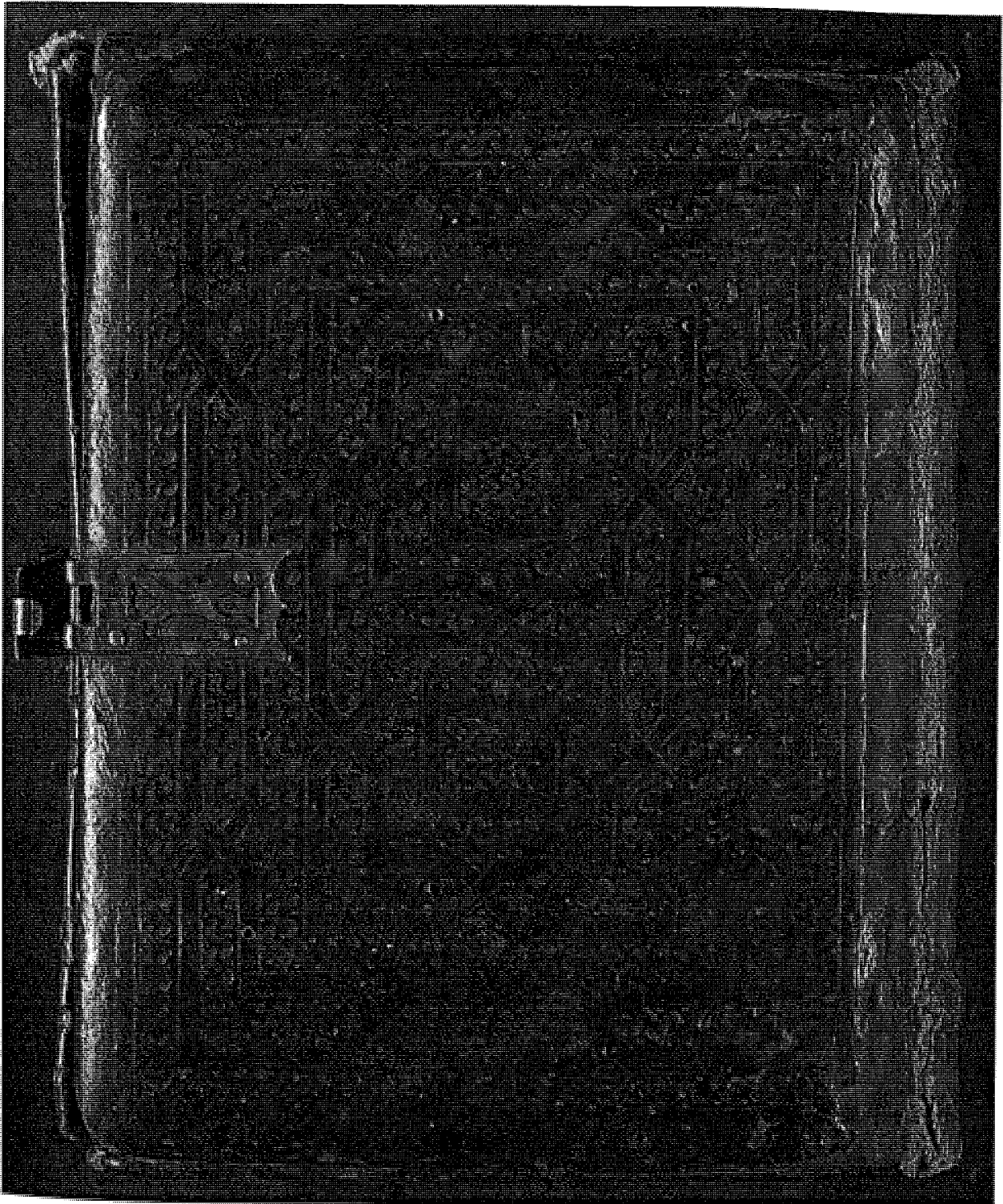
vellum - a fine parchment made from the skins of calf, lamb or kid and sued for the pages and binding of fine books

verso - the reverse side of the page

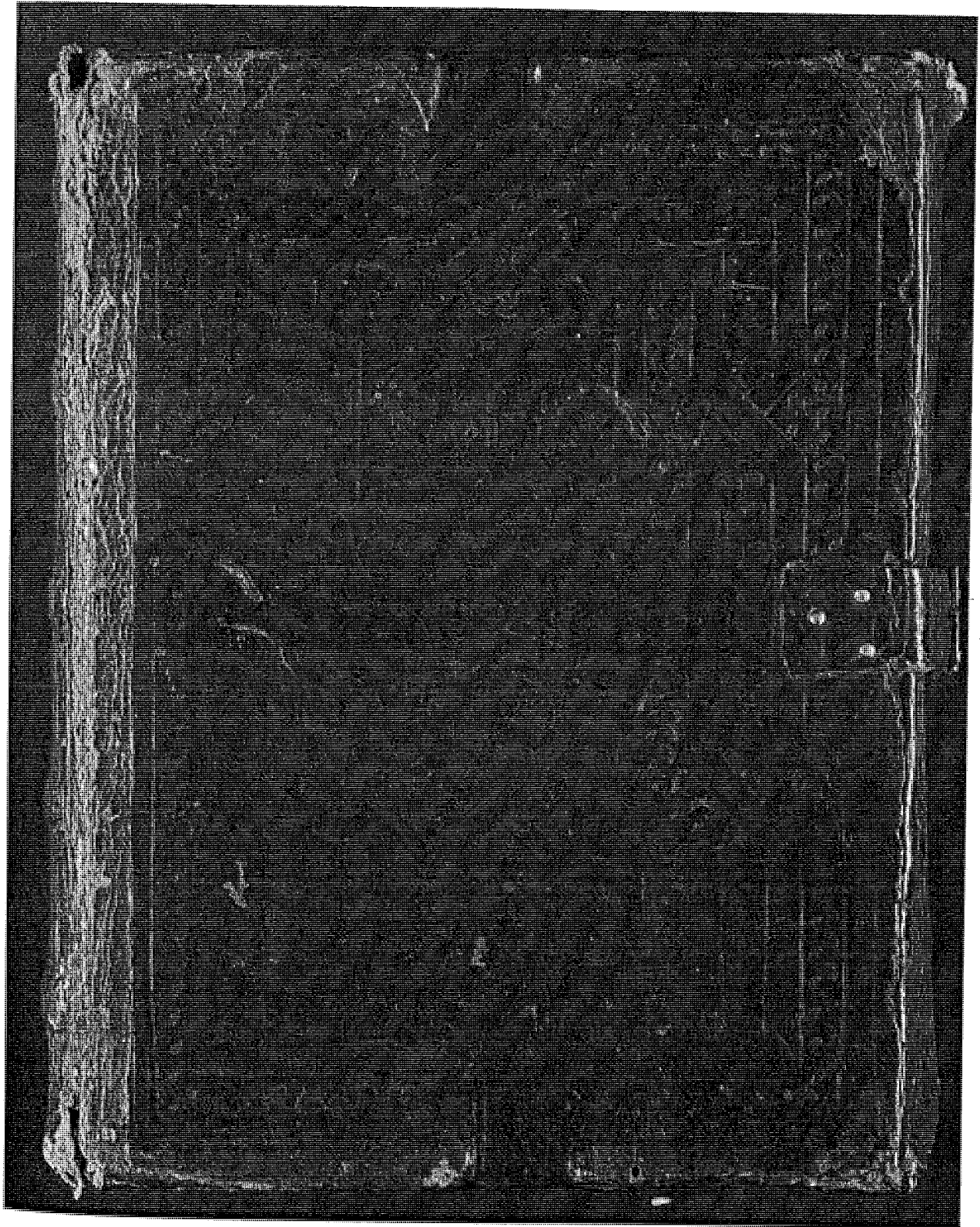
Appendix 3

Plates from the Ibn Musa Bible

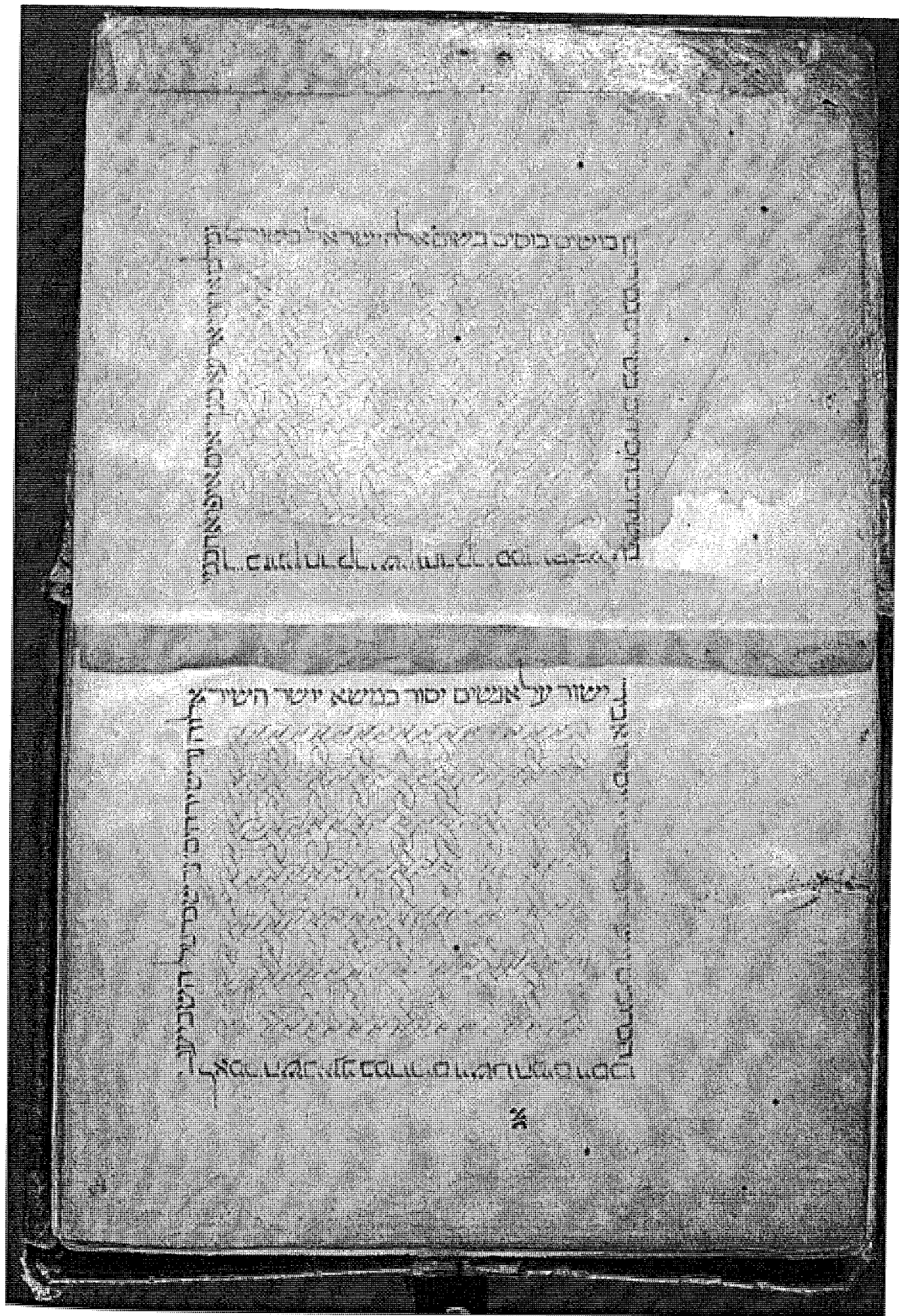
1. The front binding
2. The back binding
3. The inside front cover
4. The inside back cover
5. Page 266 recto – the beginning of Shir HaShirim
6. Page 266 verso and 267 recto containing Shir HaShirim
7. Page 267 verso and 268 recto containing Shir HaShirim
8. Page 268 verso and 269 recto containing Shir HaShirim
9. Page 269 recto with the summary tally of verses of Shir HaShirim and the beginning of the book of Aicha



Ms.2/back binding



Ms. 2/inside back cover

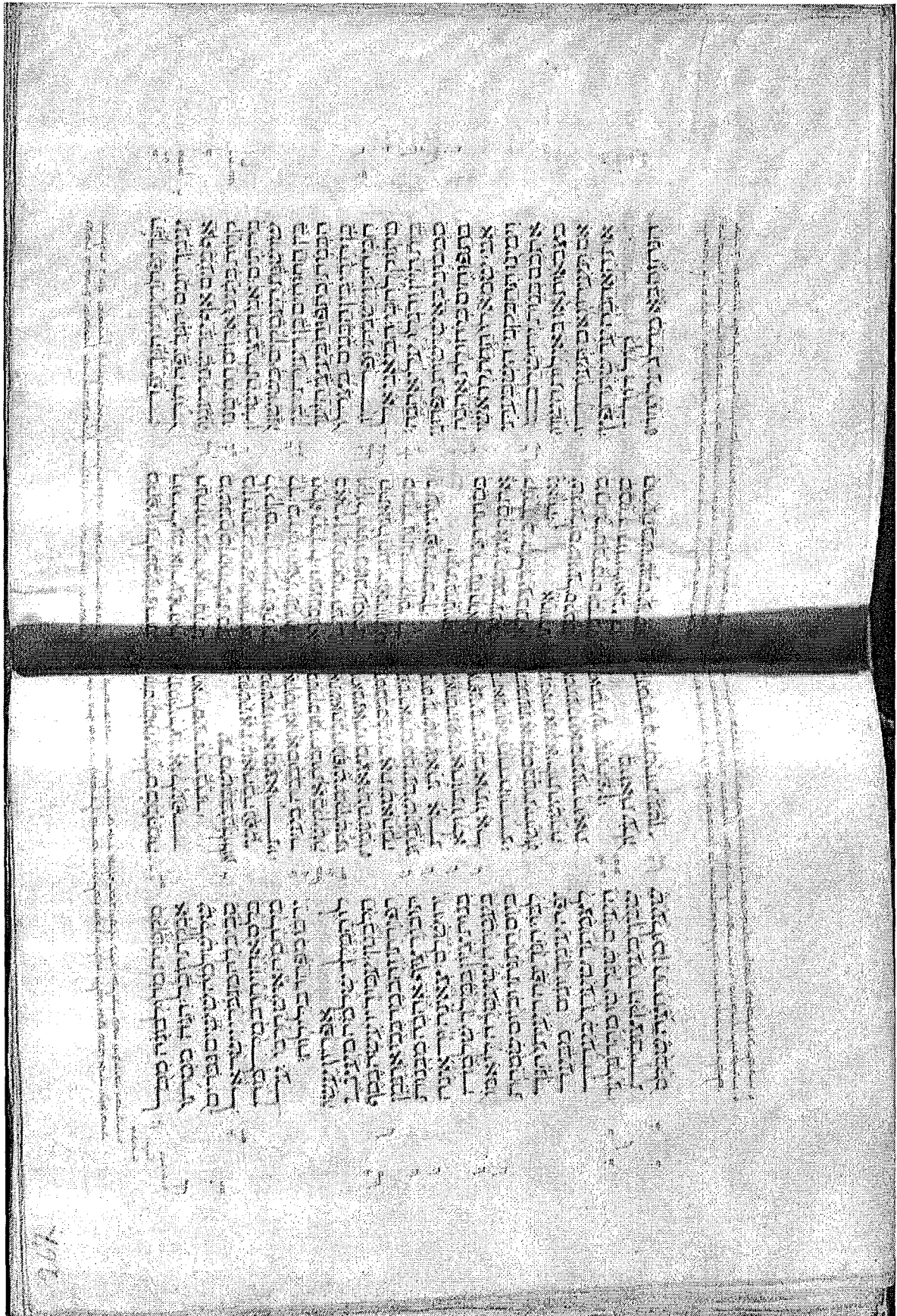


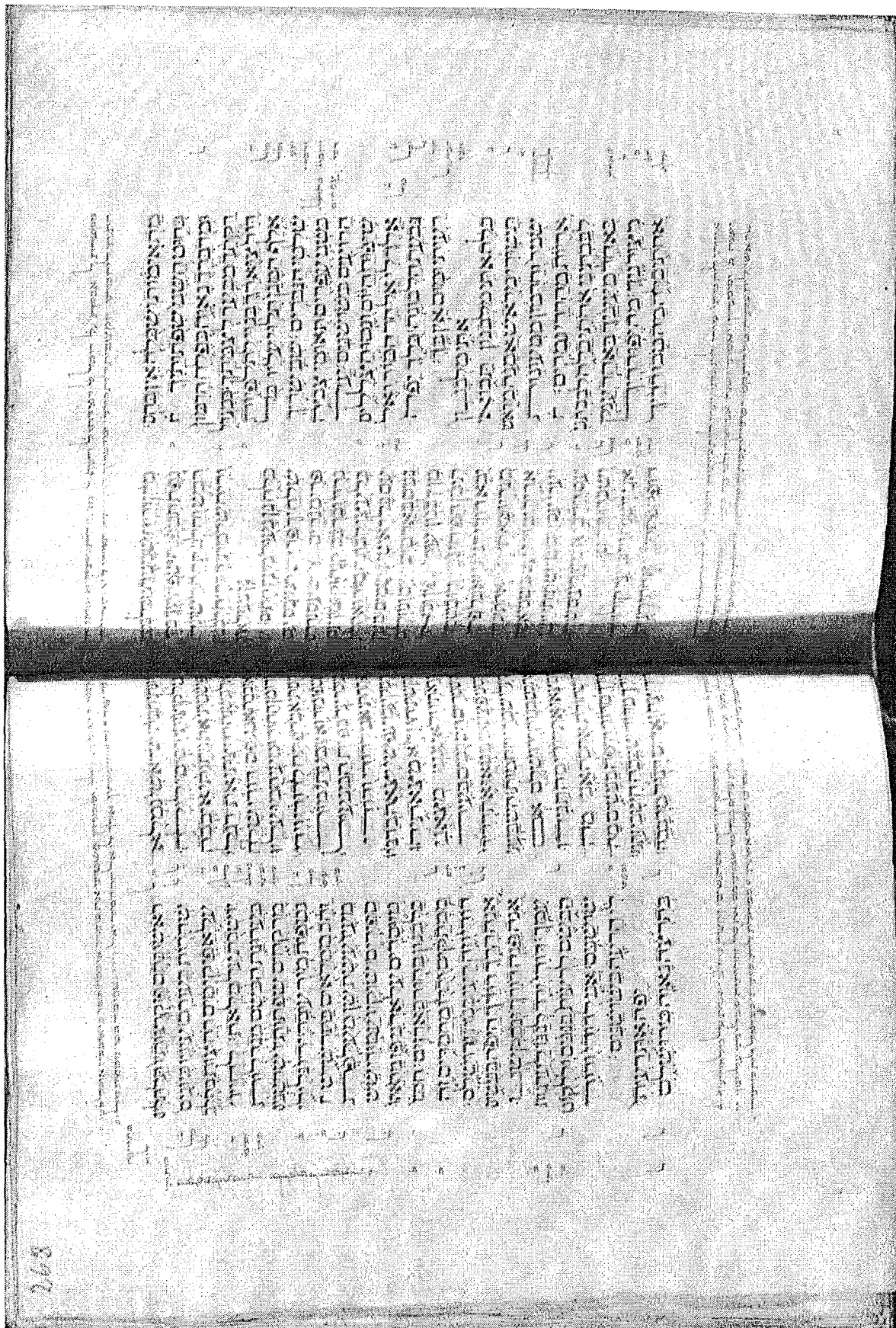
[illegible]

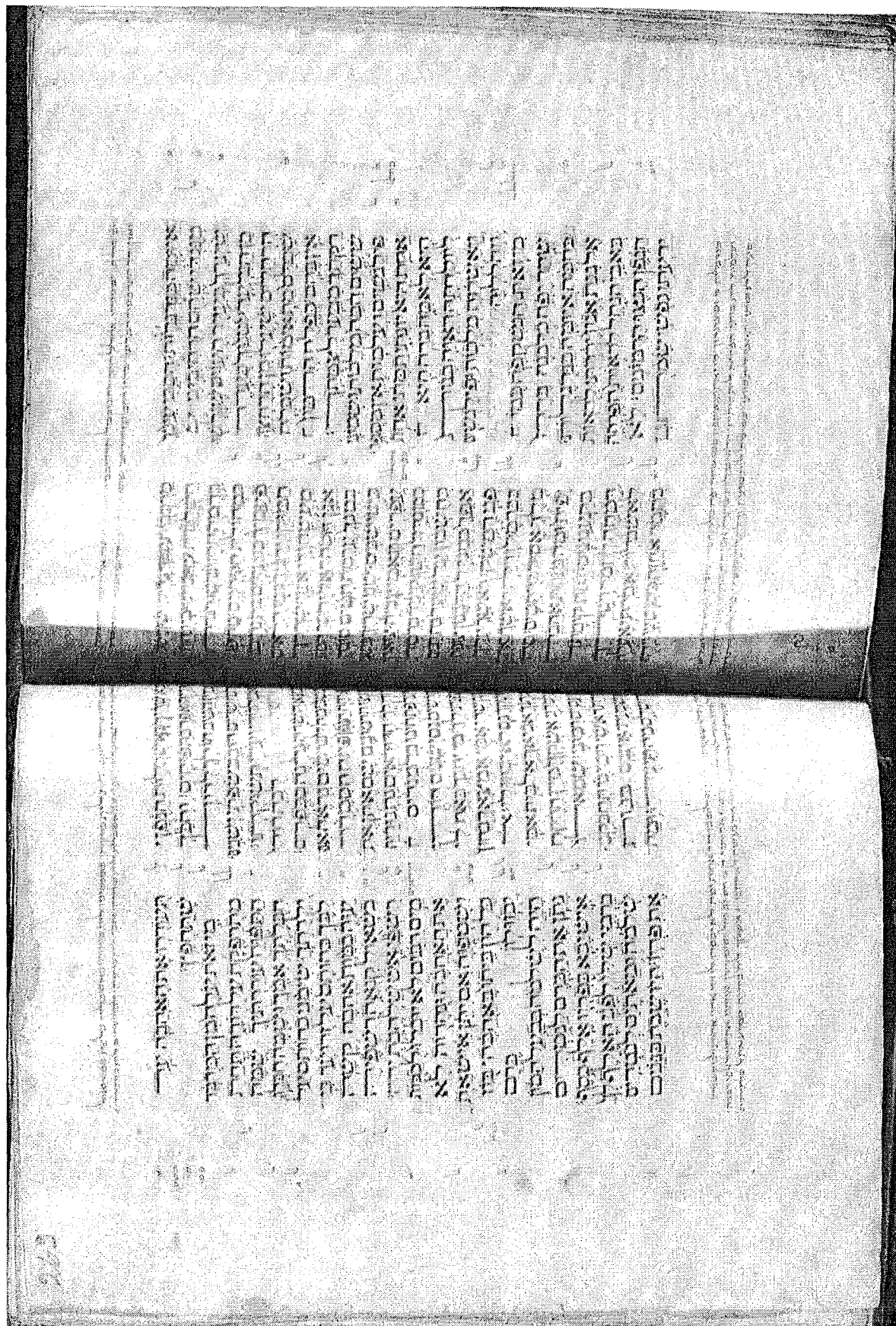
[Faint, illegible handwritten text from the reverse side of the page.]

The image shows a page from a historical manuscript, characterized by dense, handwritten text in a cursive script. The text is arranged in several columns, with some lines appearing to be part of a list or a series of entries. The image is heavily degraded, with significant noise and artifacts, making the text largely illegible. The overall appearance is that of a heavily worn or damaged document.

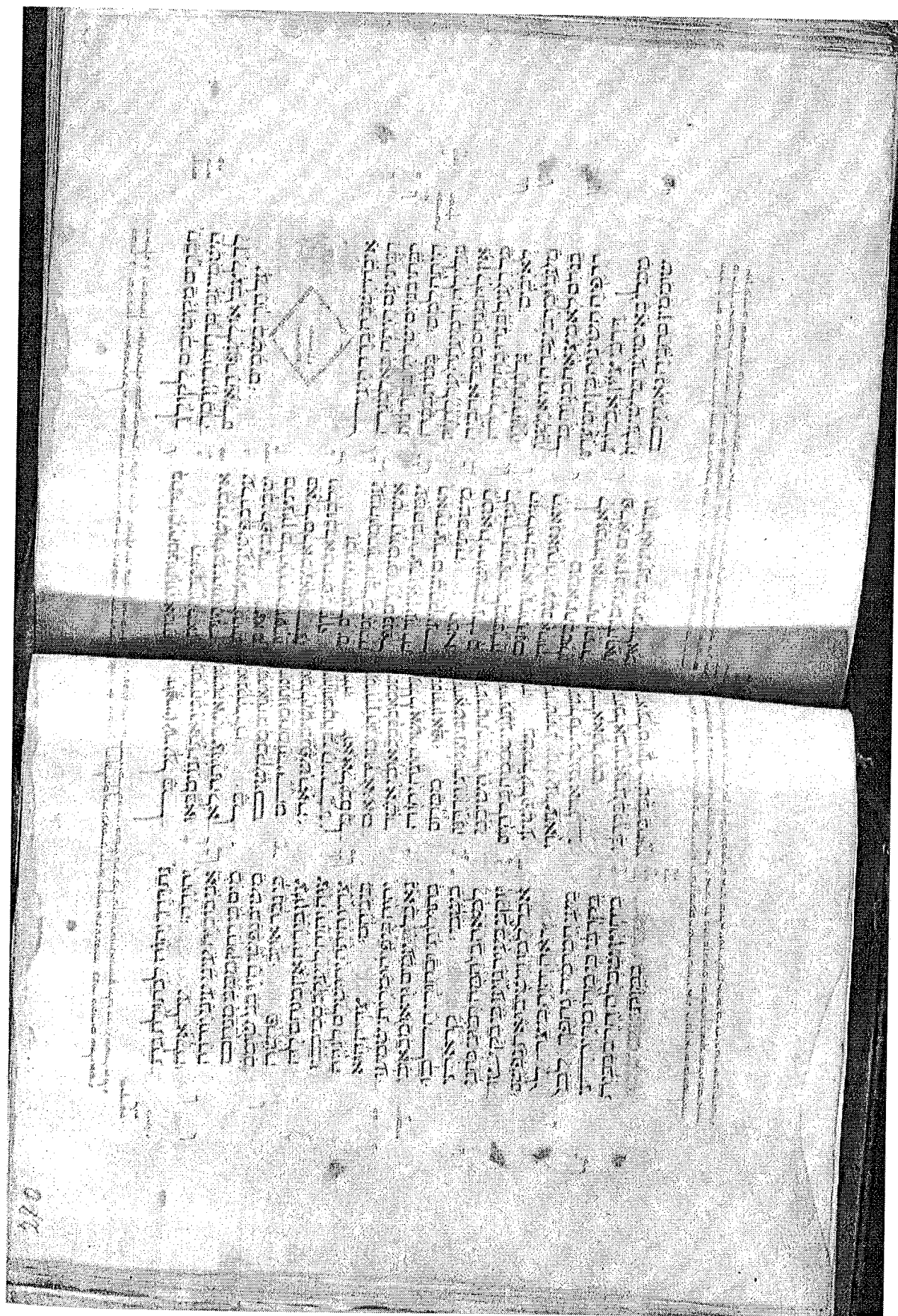
三、四、五、六、七、八、九、十、十一、十二、十三、十四、十五、十六、十七、十八、十九、二十、二十一、二十二、二十三、二十四、二十五、二十六、二十七、二十八、二十九、三十、三十一、三十二、三十三、三十四、三十五、三十六、三十七、三十八、三十九、四十、四十一、四十二、四十三、四十四、四十五、四十六、四十七、四十八、四十九、五十、五十一、五十二、五十三、五十四、五十五、五十六、五十七、五十八、五十九、六十、六十一、六十二、六十三、六十四、六十五、六十六、六十七、六十八、六十九、七十、七十一、七十二、七十三、七十四、七十五、七十六、七十七、七十八、七十九、八十、八十一、八十二、八十三、八十四、八十五、八十六、八十七、八十八、八十九、九十、九十一、九十二、九十三、九十四、九十五、九十六、九十七、九十八、九十九、一百。







Ms. 2 / leaf 269 verso - 270 recto



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