

Review: On the Masorah

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Review by: Ludwig Blau

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subject of תמלא is תמורתו (according to Hoffmann's excellent emendation, who very properly refers to xiv. 7). This agrees well with בפתו, in v. 32.

xv. 34. A community can very well be *hard as stone*, according to the figure of speech used here. It is childless, i.e., *dies out* (Is. xl. 21 — שכולה). The question might as well be asked of לילה, iii. 7.

I break off here, as this notice has already become too long. In such a difficult book as is Job, it is natural that opinions should vary greatly. It is unfortunate that the plan of the work permits of so little space being given up to the notes. I am sure that Professor Siegfried has made a complete collation of all the "witnesses" to the text. Would it not be a good thing for the Editor of each part to publish his prolegomena in some magazine? A conspectus like that in Workman's Jeremiah would be very valuable.

The typographical work on this part shows great care and foresight. It is a pity that the book was somewhat hurried in passing through the Press. Both Professor Siegfried and Professor Haupt are usually so exact and painstaking in such matters that it is a surprise to see so large a list of *additions and corrections* (page 50). It is especially annoying that the colouring of two passages (x. 18-22, and page 16l. note β) has been omitted in the text.

Professor Haupt is to be congratulated upon the appearance of this first part of his great undertaking. I hope that the other parts will follow in quick succession.

RICHARD GOTTHEIL.

Columbia College, in the City of
New York, January 26th, 1894.

On the Masorah.

Aus Masorah und Talmudkritik. Exegetical Studies by BERNHARD KOENIGSBERGER. Part I.: Introduction. § 1. The "dotted" passages; § 2. Concerning the "inverted" Nun; § 3. The "suspended" letters. Berlin: Mayer and Müller. 1892.

THE work before us follows most closely my *Masoretische Untersuchungen*, which appeared in 1891, and deals with the materials contained in the first four chapters. There is indeed so close a connection between the two, that the deductions made by the author

are scarcely intelligible without a reference to my work. The treatise before us must therefore be regarded rather as a polemical than as an independent work. I should on this account have preferred to leave its notice to someone disinterested, but, in the absence of any such, I feel myself called upon to notice it, in order that the said Masoretic questions should not prove to the uninitiated a new source of difficulty and obscurity. For brevity sake I shall only touch upon the chief points, and pass over in silence all secondary matter, and such passages in particular, of which there are several, which remain unintelligible to me, in spite of my having read them over several times.

The author asserts that the dots in the case of some letters and words occurring in Holy Writ (noted by the Masorah on Numbers iii. 39—for all the passages *vide* my treatise, p. 6, etc.) possess no value for the text criticism, but that their sole purpose is “to call attention to something striking.” “If we let alone the Midrashic interpretations . . . we shall arrive at the important conclusion that the Masorah, in employing these dots, wished simply to call attention to something that was striking” (p. 9). No proofs are adduced in favour of this argument, though the word “conclusion” occurs in the statement. Why should we disregard the explanations of the Midrash? Is the explanation an Agadic one, which is given in such concise and clear terms by the Sifre on Numbers ix. 10 (ed. Friedmann, 18*a*)? Besides, would the inventors of these dots have singled out only ten passages in the Pentateuch as serving to call our attention on account of their striking character? We could scarcely believe that, for the purpose of arresting attention, something additional (though it be only in the form of dots) not really belonging to it would have been added to the text of the Pentateuch.

In truth, the question is not concerning the explanations of the Midrash, but to determine the text upon which the Midrash based its interpretation. In this connection, the sayings of the Midrash afford some valuable testimony, and I have often dwelt upon this circumstance in my investigations.

The author suggests (pp. 6, 7) yet another explanation for the origin of these dots, namely, that they are something like the glosses of R. Meir. He seriously considers the question, whether these signs did not originate from R. Meir, and we can the more easily understand how R. Simon b. Eleasar, pupil of R. Meir, was the first to give us information concerning the Agadic treatment of the נקודות. The author, who spins out this hypothesis according to pleasure, has overlooked the point that, in Sifre to Numbers ix. 10 (Friedmann, 18*a*), Simon b. Jochai already opposes some anonymous explanation

which had been adduced to Genesis xxxiii. 4 ; while R. Jose (ben Chalaftha) explains also the dot in Numbers ix. 10 (Mischna Pesachim ix. 2), in Numbers xxix. 15 (Menachoth 87*b*), and in Psalms xxvii. 13 (Berachoth 4*a*). Matters must accordingly have proceeded at a pretty good rate in regard to these dots and their meaning, when we find a contemporary of their inventor already busying himself with offering a counter-explanation to one brought forward at the time.

As regards the age of these dots we have the classic passage in Sifre in which no Tannaite is mentioned side by side with Simon b. Jochai—a point which could scarcely be the case with regard to questions brought forward in the golden age of tradition for the first time. We would expect in such cases differences of opinion.

Another evidence not to be sight lost of in determining the age of these dots is the fact of their being met with in the copies of the Law appointed for public use in the Synagogue. The signs invented by R. Meir would have been able to find their way into these Synagogue scrolls just as little as the well-known glosses of R. Meir, *e.g.*, Genesis iii. 32, כתנות אור (עור), a matter of comparatively less difficulty.

In order to support his explanation of the origin of these dots in the conservative interest, the author declares in various passages of his work that the Masorah, and the statements of the Talmud referring to it, cannot be traced to one and the same source. In the introduction (p. 4) it is stated, without further proof :—“ *It is determined beyond doubt that the Masorah generally did not derive its statements originally from the Talmud and Midrash, but that a critical examination, laying claim to recognition, has to recognise just the reverse relation.*” How are we to understand this assertion? There existed among Jews but one tradition, which comprehended everything that had reference to Jewish lore and life.

The two Talmuds and the Midrashim are, as it were, the precipitate of this tradition: how, then, can it be asserted that the traditional statements in Masoretic questions are of a secondary character, and of inferior value? Were the Tannaites and the Amoraim no adequate authorities upon questions affecting the text of the Bible? But the most cogent proof is the fact that the origin of the Masoretic statements, as they are contained in the Masorah in their present form, may be explained by the statements in the Talmud and Midrash, while the contrary is not possible. In my investigations I have given the sources, and shown the transitions through which the several statements passed, till they reached their present form in the Masorah. And, at the same time, the motive for these intentional and unintentional changes has been discovered, namely, to admit as doubtful as few words and letters as was at all possible. I must refer the reader to

my work on the subject, instead of dwelling upon particular points. The author should have refuted the numerous proofs *seriatim* which I there adduced, instead of insisting, without more ado, upon a statement for which he has no support beyond the infallibility of the Masorah as it exists at the present day, for surely we cannot accept the Sohar chadasch (page 9) as such. After this general discussion concerning the meaning of the dots, I will briefly touch upon several points of detail contained in this peculiar treatise. Its author favours tacitly the view that *the vowel-points and accents were already known to the Talmud*. Cf., page 13, a remark of Bechai's, considered "interesting," and "an adequate support," that *the dot* (Gen. xviii. 9), *was mixed up with the Sakef-sign*: page 25, n. 2—"In course of time (the passage is speaking of the Talmud) people forgot, etc., but found on the middle Waw a dot, which signified nothing else but the Chôlem which belonged to it, and ultimately styled it נקוד.

On page 15 we read, "The conclusion is undoubtedly that the Masorah wished only to point to the Plene-form of the word (Gen. xix. 33) ובקומה" (cf. too page 11); while on page 24 the author has already changed his opinion, for he teaches that the נקוד does not serve to call attention to the Plene-form. The statement on page 11 is perfectly unintelligible:—"Gen. xvi. 5 (cf. Blau, page 17, etc.). The second Yod in וביניך was brought into prominence because וביניך *never* occurs in any other instance as the feminine with a (second) Yod." But, I would ask, is וביניך, according to the plain text, a *feminine-form*? Surely it refers to Abraham! Is, moreover, any difference made, in the orthography of this word, between feminine and masculine?

The very rudiments of Hebrew grammar are violated in the following cases:—"That וביניך is intended as a plural, we find in Ewald, *Ausf. Lhb. der hebr. Sprache d. A.B.* (7th edition), p. 647; *vide* also Geiger, *Ges. Schr.* IV. 45. Is the word אלו also plural?" (p. 12, note 1). Further (p. 15): "The question now was to explain אי (Gen. xviii. 9), and it was declared, *though without any grammatical justification, as the masculine of* איה (cf., further, Ezek. xl. 48, אפּו, and xl. 49, חפּה)." But אי is the 3rd p. sing. masc., and with suffix (e.g. Exod. ii. 20)=Where is he? One should really not offer such assertions to one's readers.

I will now quote *verbatim* a few characteristic passages:—Page 4, note:—"Perhaps יעבץ (1 Chron. ii. 55), is identical with Tiberias. Both words in reality mean 'height,' etc." How can one hit upon such an idea? Does not the author know after whom the city Tiberias was named, and when it was founded? In the same passage we have the following: "Cf., however, the remark in יוהס' ד' 21 ב

(וטבריה עמוקה מכולם).” How can a man follow Buxtorf so blindly and quote a Talmudic passage (*Rosch Haschana* 31b) out of the Juchasin, and furthermore with the page in Buxtorf?

The following passages are quite amusing:—Page 16, “In order to free innocent Lot as far as possible from this reproach (the disgrace mentioned in Genesis xix.), the Midrash adds the significant note בקומה לא ירע בשכבה ירע). The Midrash could do no more (better remains away).”

The Midrash has really done precious little to redeem the honour of Lot, for the passage in question, as it occurs in Scripture, distinctly states ולא ירע בשכבה ובקומה. What then is so “significant” in the note of the Midrash, if ירע בשכבה remains away?

On p. 17 we read: “We, therefore, propound the following conclusion: It probably appeared remarkable to the Masorites to have the singular of וישקו (Gen. xxxiii. 4), and this for two reasons; in the first place it would seem strange that Jacob, on being kissed by his brother, *should not have moved his lips in order to return the kiss*, etc. In order, therefore, to call attention to the fact that in this instance, in spite of the use of ויבכו the singular is rightly used, the Masorah dotted the *He* (ה) in וישקהו.”

Were this the case, the Masorah would indeed be too lavish in the distribution of its dots.

We would rest content with these examples. I ought in truth to proceed to the polemical statements of the author directed against my assertions, which are now open, now veiled.

But, in order to keep within the limits of a review, I must omit all such considerations. A few examples will, nevertheless, suffice to elucidate how the matter stands.

In my article (p. 23, etc.) I attempted to show that originally, in Genesis xxxvii. 12, not only the particle את, but the three words, את צאן אביהם, had dots. In the work under review we read as follows:—“Because Blau in this case also proceeds from the Midrash, and *without fully understanding its Masoretic substratum* seeks to correct it, he falls into a conjecture which proves to be wrong, because it is unnecessary. We affirm, by the above-mentioned principle of comparison, that in this instance not only the little word את—the omission of which would in no way render the Agadic explanation any the more intelligible—but, according to Sifre (cf. Blau, pp. 25 and 33), את צאן אביהם have to be regarded and marked as striking,” etc. In the former sentence, accordingly, it is said that I have not understood the “Masoretic substratum” of the Midrash; and yet, in the sentence following immediately upon it, my conjecture as regards the dots is adopted, quoting expressly the proof I

adduced for my hypothesis, as contained in the words in parenthesis, viz., according to Sifre, etc. ! The author acts in the same spirit towards the end of his work (pp. 63, 64), in which he quietly adopts my conclusions, while ostensibly he discusses and opposes my statements. I call special attention to the fact that the author possesses the peculiar art of presenting things in such a manner as to lend to them the appearance of independent research. In order, therefore, to arrive at a true estimate of his opinions, it is necessary to consult his predecessors. I must express my gratitude to the author for having so carefully studied my work ; that for the most part he was able to work with my thoughts and assertions, which he did in a sly manner by employing them in contexts differing from my own.

That he did not arrive at any specially acceptable conclusion is in truth to be deplored ; but it is no wonder.

Even with regard to the explanation and translation of Talmudical and Masoretic texts, the author is very unfortunate. We shall instance just a few. On page 30, where the question is about the dots above and below the word לולא in Psalm xxvii. 13, it says :—“ This is also derived from the Masoretic note adduced by Buxtorf (42*b*), which runs as follows : והוא נקוד בכתובים נקוד והוא ד כתיב כן לית בכתובים נקוד והוא נקוד למטה ולמעלה, and is only to be understood thus : “ Four times it is so (with נ)—Genesis xliii. 10 ; Judges xiv. 18 ; 2 Samuel ii. 27 ; Psalm xxvii. 13—and it does not occur again in the Hagiographa : *for this reason it is dotted.* (The words והוא נקוד למ' ולמ" are simply an addition to the usual note.)” We have underlined the error. The words in parenthesis are beyond our comprehension.

Why, furthermore, is לולא not dotted in the remaining passages ? It is no argument to reply that “ the Masorah to the whole Bible was not published at one and the same time ” (p. 31, note 1). In *Numeri Rabba* (cf. 3, §13, ed. Wilna), it is stated, after the enumeration of the ten dotted passages of the Pentateuch, וי"א למה נקוד אלא כך אמר, עזרא אם יבא אליהו ויאמר למה כתבת אותן אומר לו כבר נקדתי עליהם, ואם יאמר לי יפה כתבת כבר אמחק נקודותיהם מאליהן.

Now, as this passage follows upon the enumeration of all the dotted passages, including the last, Deut. xxix. 28 ; as, besides, the same argument applies to all the passages in an equal manner—no one can dream of explaining וי"א otherwise than as וי"ש אומרים. The author, on the other hand, in his polemical zeal, understands it to mean “ eleven letters ” ; and he further finds, in the interpretation of this word, “ a confirmation of the theory [it should be : Blau's theory] that originally the two names of God were dotted.” I am unable to see how this interpretation of וי"א can tend to confirm this new

theory, for even at present there are "eleven letters" dotted. Compare, too, *Aboth di R. Nathan*, 2 vers., c. 37 (ed. Schechter, p. 98), where it clearly states *ולמה נקוד על כל האותיות הללו*. The first version is faulty.

In a similar manner the author's translation (p. 42) is quite impossible as regards *Ab. d. R. Nath.* 1 vers., c. 34 (p. 99) *שני סמניות אמורות* 'וכן בתורה בפרשה קמנה וכו'. "Two sorts of signs are mentioned in the Torah." The one is (the הפוכה) in the small Paraschah (Num. x. 35, 36), and the other is the נקודות, which are cited in the next Mishna, xxxv. 5. Between the first and the "next" Mishna there is a whole passage, and the "next Mishna" begins with the introduction *עשר נקודות בתורה*.

Apart from such fiddle-faddle, how can we possibly understand, according to his translation, the *ב* in the word *בפרשה*? Surely it is unscientific to treat Masoretic texts homiletically.

The further references to the inverted Nun I have been unable to understand. It is but to be deplored that the simple truth that these signs are nothing else but an abbreviation for נקוד (=נ), as I proved (*Masor. Unters.*, pp. 40-45), and as the author himself adopts on p. 49, should again be observed from the view of those who look upon the Masorah as an occult science.

In the same part of his work the writer says:—"In Tract Soferim 6, 1, it states: The scribe must at the beginning of Numb. x. 35, have a שיעור (not שיפור, as Blau reads without understanding it), etc." Not I, but the editions read שיפור; besides, I myself stated twice that it was unintelligible (*Mas. Unters.*, pp. 41 and 44). The writer should, therefore, not have made it appear to his readers as though I adopted a reading which I did not understand, without mentioning my remark concerning it. Nor did the writer discover that שיעור was the right reading; Dr. Neubauer anticipated him in our Hungarian periodical, *Magyar Zsidó Szemle*, 1891, p. 360, in his review of my book in this periodical, III., 540. He explained the word שיעור in the same sense as I explained the unintelligible signs, namely, as the necessary space for the dots, and I fully agree with him.¹

The examples given above are samples of the scientific manner in which the Masorah is treated in the work before us. In face

¹ The writer quotes Neubauer's remark from our periodical, p. 15, note to Gen. xviii. 9, without understanding him, for Neubauer cites no reading "according to which איה has to be dotted (not to be deleted)." The words in parenthesis are nonsense. Why does the writer not quote שיעור from Neubauer's remarks, in which this word occurs in contradistinction to שיפור?

of the too scanty productions in this branch of learning, I would consider it a dangerous practice to allow to pass without notice any work bearing on the subject, be the character of that work what it may.

And a somewhat lengthy consideration of the subject (the present has assumed such proportions without any intention on my part, and in spite of my attempt to limit it), will certainly do the reader less harm than none at all, and I trust that the readers of this esteemed periodical, taking into consideration the circumstances of the case, will acquit me of the guilt of being prolix, and pardon the length of this notice.

LUDWIG BLAU.

Budapest.

Grammatical and Lexicographical Literature.

A.—*The Book of the Comparison of the Hebrew Language with the Arabic*, by ABU-IBRAHIM (Isaac) IBN BARŪN, a Spanish Jew of the end of the eleventh century and beginning of the twelfth, by P. KOKORISOV, with the edition of the original text of the fragment of the work of ibn Barūn, which has been preserved (Russian title: *Kniga Sravnenia Yevresiskago Yazika s' Arabskim*); St. Petersburg, 1893. Being Part I. of "Contribution to the History of Mediæval Hebrew Philology and Hebrew Arabic Literature."

THE Imperial Library of St. Petersburg became the greatest rival of the Bodleian Library, as regards Hebrew MSS., by the acquisition of the two collections of the late Firkowitz. The first one, which was bought about 1860, consists mostly of Karaitic literature, a collection which will remain unsurpassed. Out of it the late Pinsker composed his important work, with the title of *Liqutê Qadmoniôth*, published in 1860, when the collection was still in Firkowitz's private possession. Another short account of it appeared in the monograph with the title of *Aus der Petersburger Bibliothek*, by the present writer (Leipzig, 1860). Based upon Pinsker's book, Gottlober, Fürst, and Graetz wrote the history of the Karaites, in which many data have to be rectified. The second Firkowitz collection, acquired by the Imperial Library about 1876, consists mostly of a great number of fragments, more or less complete, of various departments of Hebrew

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