

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE *KETIV/QERE* VARIATIONS IN LIGHT OF THE MANUSCRIPTS FROM THE JUDEAN DESERT

1. *Background*

This study deals with the background of the *Ketiv/Qere* variations in MT, addressing some of its aspects from the angle of the Judean Desert finds and rabbinic literature. Since these variations belong exclusively to the medieval Masorah and Masoretic manuscripts, they should be compared with or looked for in the forerunners of these very manuscripts, that is the so-called proto-Masoretic scrolls. Such scrolls have been found at almost all manuscript sites in the Judean Desert, and a differentiation between the various types of ancient scrolls is in order for a better comparison with the Masoretic *Ketiv/Qere* variations.

When comparing the medieval MT manuscripts with the Judean Desert texts we distinguish between two types of proto-Masoretic scrolls, an *inner circle* of scrolls and a second circle of such scrolls that are rather similar to them. The inner circle of texts, so named because of their proximity to rabbinic circles, is found in all Judean Desert sites except for Qumran, while a second circle of scrolls was found at Qumran. The texts of the inner circle are identical to the medieval MT text, while *those of the second circle are* very similar to them. For a detailed description of these two groups of texts, see chapters 10* and 12*.

2. *Ancient and Medieval Texts*

The consonantal framework of the medieval manuscripts is identical to that of the proto-Masoretic Judean Desert scrolls from sites other than Qumran, but there is more to these texts than their consonants. For the medieval tradition also carefully preserved all the scribal features included in its ancient source and they are now part and parcel of the Masorah: *puncta extraordinaria* (originally: cancellation dots), paragraphing (open and closed sections), raised letters originally meant as corrections, broken letters representing damaged elements, majuscule

and minuscule letters representing different sizes of letters, and a pair of *sigma* and *antisigma* signs in Num 10:35-36 indicating superfluous elements, transformed in the Masoretic tradition to inverted *nunim*.¹

All these features must have been copied from a proto-MT source—such as the Judean Desert scrolls—by the scribe(s) of MT responsible for the creation of the text that was perpetuated until the Middle Ages. These features are early since they are mentioned in rabbinic literature (see below), and they are so much an integral part of tradition that if, for example, a scribe changed the paragraphing of the scroll, it was no longer considered acceptable for reading.² By the same token, a manuscript indicating verse division also was not acceptable.³ It stands to reason that all these Masoretic phenomena were carefully transferred from an early scroll or scrolls, since the Judean Desert scrolls evidence *sigma* and *antisigma* signs, paragraphing, *puncta extraordinaria*, etc., but a *caveat* is in order. Masoretic manuscripts and ancient sources sometimes differ in the details of paragraphing,⁴ and no known scroll evidences the *puncta extraordinaria* or the *sigma* and *antisigma* parenthesis signs in exactly the same places as in MT.⁵ However, this lack of evidence probably derives from the fact that no proto-MT manuscript has been preserved that covers the specific verses in which these Masoretic features are found.

3. Ketiv/Qere Variations and the Ancient Sources

Having reviewed the correlation between the Masoretic features and the Judean Desert scrolls, we note that one major feature of the rabbinic traditions and medieval manuscripts is *not* reflected in any proto-MT

¹ For details and bibliography, see *TCHB*, 59–87.

² See *b. Shabb.* 103b פתוחה לא יעשנה סתומה סתומה לא יעשנה פתוחה (An open section may not be written closed, nor a closed section open). Likewise *Sof.* 1.15: פתוחה שעשאה סתומה סתומה פתוחה (If an open section was written as closed or a closed section as open, the scroll must be stored away). See further, *Sifre* Deuteronomy 36.1 on Deut 6:9.

³ See *Sof.* 3.7 ספר שפסקו ראשי הפסוקים שבו אל יקרא בו (If a Torah scroll has spaces <to mark> the beginning of verses, it may not be used for the lections). Indeed, all ancient Hebrew scrolls and unvocalized medieval Bible codices do not indicate verse division, which is now part of the Masorah.

⁴ Since columns are of a different size, open and closed sections are bound to occur in different places in different scrolls, and accordingly they could not always be reproduced exactly in the next round of copying. Among other things, open and closed sections occurring at the end of the line or just before the end cannot be distinguished well. Systems used in the Middle Ages as compensation for these situations had not yet been developed.

⁵ One instance comes close, and even though the scroll in question is far from being proto-Masoretic (1QIsa^a), the data are striking: 1QIsa^a XXXVII 15 (Isa 44:9) הַמֶּה. This word, dotted in MT, was written in 1QIsa^a as a supralinear addition without dots (עֲדִיהֶמָּה^א).

source or, for that matter, in any text from the Judean Desert, namely the procedure of *Qere* notations. These notations range from 848 to 1566 instances in the different medieval manuscripts, and this practice involves the replacement of a reading in the text (*Ketiv*) with a *Qere* reading. These *Qere* readings of MT have not been found as corrections in the margins of the proto-MT scrolls 1QIsa^b and MurXII (other proto-MT scrolls do not cover relevant verses in MT).⁶ By the same token, no scroll⁷ or translation⁸ reflecting all or most of the *Qere* readings in the *running* text is known. More generally, the very phenomenon of marginal notations is not known in the scrolls and the biblical scrolls record no variants, either in the margins or elsewhere.⁹

The only partial parallel in the scrolls to *Ketiv/Qere* variations is the appearance in the Qumran scrolls of linear and supralinear corrections of mistakes, both elements omitted with cancellation dots or other systems, and elements added above the line (see especially 1QIsa^a and 4QJer^a).¹⁰ But there are differences between the two systems. *Qere* readings mainly represent early variants, while the corrections in the scrolls primarily pertain to scribal errors. Some of these corrections in the scrolls are substantial, namely long additions between the lines of erroneously omitted segments, such as in 1QIsa^a and 4QJer^a.¹¹ Other correcting additions pertain to words, clusters of letters, and single letters added to the base text. It is here that the Qumran evidence differs from the *Qere* readings, since only some of the latter may be conceived of as corrections of errors. Furthermore, most of the *Qere* readings pertain to single letters (added, omitted, or changed), while most of the corrections in the scrolls are more substantial.

⁶ In the preserved sections of 1QIsa^b parallel to the MT of Isaiah, none of the eight *Qere* readings has been denoted as a correction in the margin or supralinearly, and this pertains also to the five instances of *Qere* covered by MurXII.

⁷ This issue can be examined for 1QIsa^b (2x K, 4x Q, 1x different reading) and MurXII (3x K, 2x Q).

⁸ According to the statistics of Gordis, *Biblical Text*, 66, the Peshitta and Vulgate reflect some 70 percent of the *Qere* readings and the LXX some 60 percent, while in some books the percentage is higher for the LXX. These data imply that the translations were made from manuscripts that happened to contain many *Qere* readings in the texts themselves.

⁹ See *Scribal Practices*, 224–5.

¹⁰ For the former, see the evidence collected by Kutscher, *Language*, 531–6. For the latter, see, for example, *DJD* XV, 153.

¹¹ E.g., 1QIsa^a XXX, between lines 11 and 13 and vertically in the margin of the following sheet; XXXII 14 at the end of the line vertically in the margin; XXXIII 7 at the end of the line and vertically in the margin; 4QJer^a III 6 (Jer 7:30–8:3).

Some scholars rightly admit that the background of the *Qere* readings remains enigmatic,¹² but some aspects may nevertheless be clarified. One of the problems inherent with the *Qere* readings is the fact that the corpus of its readings is of a varied background and no single solution can explain all of its types. One line of thought is the assumption that the *Qere* readings, presented by the Masorah as corrections, started off as manuscript variants that did not carry any binding force. At one time, these variants may have been included in the running text of one or more important manuscripts that differed from the equally important *Ketiv* text.¹³ In any event, the *Qere* readings should not be considered corrections, since they intervene in the text inconsistently, and sometimes are inferior to the *Ketiv*.¹⁴

We now turn to the background of these *Qere* readings. In chapter 12* we suggest that the proto-MT scrolls from the Judean Desert sites were copied from the master copy in the temple court. These scrolls, probably part of a group mentioned in rabbinic literature as “corrected copies,” represented precisely the copy in the temple court, including its smallest details such as cancellation dots above the letters. These scrolls must have been copied very precisely since otherwise the manuscripts could not have been identical.

However, if, as I have hypothesized, the carefully written proto-MT scrolls from the Judean Desert were copied from the master copy in the temple, including the preservation of *minutiae* such as these dots, one wonders why no ancient parallel has been found for the *Qere* procedure that is so characteristic of the medieval manuscripts. Therefore, can we still claim that the temple court copy was the basis for the corrected scrolls and the medieval tradition? I suggest that we can hold to our view if we differentiate between most Masoretic notations that had an ancient origin and the *Qere* readings that were added to the Masorah at a later period. According to this assumption, neither the temple scroll nor the so-called corrected scrolls included any *Qere* readings in the margins; they were introduced for the first time in written form in the medieval

¹² For example, I. Yeivin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah* (trans. and ed. E. J. Revell; SBLMas 5; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1980) 61.

¹³ For an analysis of the various possibilities, see Gordis, *Biblical Text*, e.g., Prolegomenon, p. XXIX: “By the side of the archetypal manuscript they selected a small number of others of high repute. From them they [scil., the early Masoretes] copied the variants they regarded as worthy of attention and noted them on the margins of the archetypal manuscript.” In his summary on p. XLI, Gordis says: “The Kethibh thus preserved the reading of the archetype, while the *Qere* is a collection of variants from other manuscripts.” See further the analysis in *TCHB*, 58–63.

¹⁴ See Gordis, *Biblical Text* and Tov, *TCHB*, 58–63.

manuscripts.¹⁵ This implies that the *Qere* differs from the other Masorah features, all of which are evidenced in the Judean Desert scrolls. The background of the *Qere* thus needs to be sought outside the realm of the Judean Desert scrolls. A few remarks on this suggestion are in order:

a. We should not look for parallels to the *Qere* readings in the *margins* of ancient scrolls, for they were not written there. We are probably misled by the manuscripts of MT and by modern editions, both of which represent the *Qere* as marginal corrections or footnotes.¹⁶ But the Masoretes had no such intention; they simply included the *Qere* in the *Masorah parva*, and that apparatus as a whole was positioned in the margin. The Masoretic practice does not imply that the individual *Qere* readings were also positioned in the margin at an earlier stage.

b. Another reason for not looking for the *Qere* readings in the margins of scrolls is because the *Qere* procedure was from the outset an oral, not a written, procedure and was therefore necessarily represented by a single reading. The major argument in favor of this view is the traditional terminology creating an opposition between a *Ketiv*, a written form, and a *Qere*, an element which is read.¹⁷ In the past, this view was presented

¹⁵ H. M. Orlinsky, "The Origin of the Kethib-Qere System: A New Approach," *VTSup* 7 (1960) 184–92 likewise suggested that the *Qere* was not written in manuscripts before the second half of the first millennium of our era.

¹⁶ This notion permeates the literature. E.g., in his influential handbook, Ginsburg, *Introduction*, 183 notes: ". . . Accordingly the marginal variant or the official reading, called the *Keri* (קרי), is to have the vowel-points . . ." Likewise, on p. 184: "It is to be remarked that this corpus of official various readings has been transmitted to us in three different forms. (1) Originally each of these variations was given in the margin of the text against the word affected by it. The word in the text was furnished with a small circle or asterisk over it, which directed the reader to the marginal variant. This ancient practice still prevails in all Massoretic MSS of the Bible and is adopted in all the best editions." Likewise, Gordis, *Biblical Text*, Prolegomenon, p. XXVII and passim talks about the *Qere* as being? written in the margin of MT.

¹⁷ The theory that the *Qere* represents an oral tradition is not without problems because, according to this view, all *Qere* readings should be orally distinguishable from the *Ketiv* forms. However, this is not always the case, as in:

- K/Q readings involving haplography, such as:
2 Sam 5:2 K והמבי אה / Q והמביא אה (Gordis, *Biblical Text*, list 7)
- third person singular pronominal suffix, such as:
Gen 9:21 K אהלה / Q אהלו (Gordis, *Biblical Text*, list 4)
- interchange between *holam* and *qametz hatuph* (Gordis, *Biblical Text*, lists 30 and 31), such as Josh 9:7 K אברה לך / Q אבריה לך, 2 Chron 8:18 K איייה / Q אייה
- interchanges of ל/ל.

The background of this non-distinction in pronunciation between some K/Q variations is that even though the *Qere* reflects a reading tradition, it was originally based on manuscripts that included variants that are not distinguishable orally.

by Levin and Breuer and, with more clarity, by Barr.¹⁸ The procedure of *Ketiv wela Qere* (a word written but not read) and *Qere wela Ketiv* (a word read but not written) makes this view even more likely, since zero consonantal readings could not be recorded in the margin or text before the invention of vocalization.

c. The oral tradition of *Qere* readings is at least as old as rabbinic literature, in which reading traditions differing from the written text are referred to as “we read” (קרינו). For example, *b. Erub.* 26a records, referring to 2 Kgs 20:4, “It is written ‘the city,’ but we read ‘court.’”¹⁹ In the discussion, the *Ketiv* is mentioned, but disregarded: נאמר ויהי ישעיהו לא: יצא (אל) חצר התיכונה כתיב העיר וקרינו חצר.

d. At an earlier stage, the most central *Qere* reading was accepted by the LXX translators. The employment of κύριος in that translation for the Tetragrammaton probably reflects the same custom that was later reflected in the Masoretic “perpetual *Qere*.” The Greek tradition was early, though not necessarily as early as the third century BCE as claimed by Gordis,²⁰ since the earliest manuscripts of the LXX probably contained the transliteration ΙΑΩ, as in 4QpapLev^b.²¹

e. The *Ketiv* text probably represents the ancient copy in the temple. That copy evidently could no longer be changed,²² as otherwise either the *Qere* readings themselves would have been incorporated into it or the whole scroll would have been replaced with the *Qere* scroll. The preference for the *Qere* scroll was perhaps due to its being a newer version,²³ replacing several groups of archaic *Ketivs* such as the female

¹⁸ S. Levin, “The קרי as the Primary Text of the תנך,” *Hagut Ivrit be’Amerika* I (Heb.; Yavneh, 1972) 61–86; M. Breuer, “אמונה ומדע בגיטת המקרא,” *Deoth* 47 (1978) 102–13; J. Barr, “A New Look at Kethibh-Qere,” *OTS* 21 (1981) 19–37.

¹⁹ Manuscripts and editions likewise indicate here: *Ketiv* העיר, “the city,” *Qere* חצר, “court.” For further examples, see *b. Yoma* 21b (on Hag 1:8); *ibid.* 38b (on 1 Sam 2:9); *b. Men.* 89b (on Lev 23:13). See also *Midrash Qere we-la Ketiv* included in the collection of A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* 5 (Vienna, 1873; repr. Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrman, 1967) 27–30.

²⁰ Gordis, *Biblical Text*, xvii.

²¹ Published by P. W. Skehan, E. Ulrich, and J. E. Sanderson, *DJD* IX. For an analysis, see chapter 23*.

²² This situation reminds us of the procedures followed by the Masoretes at a later period. When adding vowels to the text, the Masoretes could no longer change the consonantal framework because that was sacrosanct, requiring them sometimes to superimpose on the letters a vocalization that went against the letters themselves. For examples, see *TCHB*, 43.

²³ Thus also Gordis, *Biblical Text*, xxviii. In Gordis’s view, after the master copy was deposited in the temple, and when it was recognized that the scroll was occasionally in error, it was annotated with marginal corrections from other manuscripts. The procedure followed for the addition of these corrections was described in the *baraita* in *y. Ta’an.* 4.68a (see chapter 12*, n. 38) about the three scrolls found in the temple court (Gordis, p. xli). However, such a procedure is not described in this *baraita*.

Qere form *atti* (אָרִי) corrected to *at* (אָר) and the archaic third person plural feminine *qatlah* corrected to *qatlu*.²⁴ The nature of the *Qere* text differed from book to book as may be expected in a corpus composed of different scrolls.²⁵

Summarizing, we note:

1. The proto-Masoretic texts from the Judean Desert (except for Qumran) are identical to the medieval manuscripts and exactly represented their source, probably the scroll of the temple court.
2. These proto-Masoretic texts represent all the features of the medieval text and, presumably, of the temple copy, including all its scribal phenomena, with the exception of the Masoretic *Ketiv/Qere* variations.
3. The *Ketiv/Qere* variations were not included in the margins of any ancient text.
4. Rather, they reflect an oral tradition, which only at a late stage was put into writing in the Masoretic tradition.

²⁴ For the former, see, for example, Judg 17:2 and for the latter 1 Kgs 22:49 K נְבִירָה / Q נְבִירָה. For the full evidence, see Gordis, *Biblical Text*, lists 13–25. See also M. Cohen, *The Kethib and the Qeri System in the Biblical Text – A Linguistic Study of the Various Traditions* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007); S. E. Fassberg, “The Origin of the Ketib/Qere in the Aramaic Portions of Ezra and Daniel,” *VT* 29 (1989) 1–12.

²⁵ Probably the more stable the textual condition of the books, the fewer the variants that existed, and as a result fewer *Qere* readings were invoked. The fact that there are very few cases of K/Q in the Torah probably indicates that the textual transmission of that book was stable in the temple copy, while that of Samuel, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel was more fluid. Barr, “A New Look,” 32 (see n. 18), who was the first to pay attention to the statistical aspects, provided the following figures:

Low figures: Genesis (15), Exodus (10), Leviticus (5), Numbers (9), MP (29)

Medium figures: Isaiah (53), Psalms (68), Job (52)

High figures: Samuel (155), Kings (118), Jeremiah (142), Ezekiel (123).

These figures are based on Dotan’s edition of codex L. According to Barr, Daniel with 140 instances of K/Q is a special case, since most of them are in the Aramaic section.