Studies in Semitic Vocalisation and Reading Traditions

Edited by Aaron D. Hornkohl and Geoffrey Khan

Cover image: Detail from a bilingual Latin-Punic inscription at the theatre at Lepcis Magna, IRT 321 (accessed from https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Inscription_Theatre_Leptis_Magna_Libya.JPG). Leaf of a Syriac prayer book with Western vocalisation signs (source: Wikimedia Commons). Leaf of an Abbasid-era Qurʾān (vv. 64.11–12) with red, yellow, and green vocalisation dots (source: Wikimedia Commons). Genizah fragment of the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 11–12, Cambridge University Library T-S A1.56; courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library). Genizah fragment of a Karaite transcription of the Hebrew Bible in Arabic script (Num. 14.22–24, 40–42, Cambridge University Library T-S Ar. 52.242; courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library). Greek transcription of the Hebrew for Ps. 22.2a in Matt. 27.46 as found in Codex Bezae (fol. 99v; courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library).

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BIBLICAL QUOTATIONS IN THE ARAMAIC INCANTATION BOWLS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF THE BABYLONIAN READING TRADITION

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

The Aramaic incantation bowls are a corpus of spells written on earthenware bowls and composed in several archaising literary dialects of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic.[1] The vast majority of these artefacts were found in the historical region of Mesopotamia. We have positive evidence that these incantations were being produced in the sixth and seventh centuries CE. It is likely, however, that the practice had started already in the fifth (or perhaps even fourth) century.[2]

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[1] Ford (2012, 215). The most recent comprehensive study of the language of the incantations is that by Juusola (1999).

[2] Shaked, Ford, and Bhayro (2013, 1). An overview of the research on the dating of the bowls is available in Faraj (2010).

In order to bolster the process of asserting dominion in the spiritual realm, biblical verses were often quoted as part of the incantation. In the vast majority of cases passages were cited in the original Hebrew.

These biblical quotations in the incantation bowls (henceforth 'quotations') constitute a very valuable source for the study of pre-Masoretic pronunciation traditions of the Bible in Babylonia.[3] The most extensive testimony to the Babylonian pronunciation tradition[4] is found in medieval biblical manuscripts pointed with the Babylonian vocalisation system. The pronunciation types which the Babylonian system reflects are themselves ancient pronunciation traditions. In general, the medieval Babylonian and Tiberian (as well as Palestinian) pronunciation traditions are typologically close. This suggest that they all reflect the continuation of the various pronunciation traditions which existed in Palestine in the late Second Temple period. The pronunciation traditions that developed into the medieval Babylonian tradition, then, were exported to Babylonia, perhaps following the downfall of the Bar Kochba revolt.[5]

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[3] For an introduction to the Babylonian reading tradition, see Khan (2013c). The most comprehensive study of this type of pronunciation is that by Yeivin (1985).

[4] The singular form 'tradition' is used here as the collective designation of manuscripts that use the Babylonian signs, despite the fact that these manuscripts reflect relatively diverse types of pronunciation (Khan 2013c).

[5] Khan (2012, 50).

It is at this point that the significance of the quotations in the incantation bowls becomes apparent: they constitute the only epigraphic source of the Hebrew Bible from Late-Antique Babylonia, and are one of the few sources dated to the period following the standardisation of the text and preceding the period of Masoretic activity. Thus, they are a reliable source for the study of the pronunciation traditions that existed prior to the Masoretic period.[6] They are suitable for that purpose because—though unvocalised—they display a partial tendency toward phonetic spelling.

In this paper, therefore, I present a few case studies that illustrate the contribution of the quotations to the study of pronunciation traditions. The corpus likewise sheds light on the character of the transmission of the biblical text at the time, highlighting the prominence of orality.[7] In the study, my method is to

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[6] We possess only about seven biblical manuscripts that can be dated with certainty to the this period (Lange 2016, §§1.2.2.4.2–3). Biblical passages are also found in rabbinic literature. For these, however, we rely on medieval manuscripts. These, in turn, as is commonly recognised, were at a later stage subject to correction towards the increasingly more prestigious and authoritative Tiberian Hebrew (Shaked 2013, 18). For recent hypotheses on the standardisation of the biblical text, see Tov (2012) and Ulrich (2015).

[7] Despite the apparent significance of the quotations, research thereon is still sorely lacking. For overview articles on the topic, see Abudraham (forthcoming), Mishor (2007), and a section in Elitzur (2013). For a comprehensive study of the contribution of the quotations to the study of pre-Masoretic Babylonian reading traditions see Molin (2017).

focus on orthographic features which are different from the con-
sonantal text of the Masoretic Text (MT), as represented by the
Leningrad Codex (I Firkovitch B19A), and consider their linguis-
tic significance.[8]

Most of the orthographic features found in the corpus of
the quotations reflect a distinctly 'Babylonian'[9] phonology or
morphology of Biblical Hebrew. An example of this is discussed
below. Moreover, the quotations point to some interference of
contact languages on the reading tradition of the Bible. Most of-
ten, we observe the influence of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, the
main vernacular of the Jewish scribes who wrote the bowls. How-
ever, when we consider the gutturals—a class of consonants
which underwent different forms of weakening in Jewish Baby-
lonian Aramaic—there is extremely little orthographic evidence
for any weakening in the corpus of texts available to me. I discuss
the likely linguistic significance of such a conservative orthogra-
phy. Third, a handful of spelling features may reflect a particular
type of reading which is attested in the medieval Tiberian as well
as, probably, Babylonian tradition. This reading is a careful one,

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[8] This methodology rests on the widely accepted assumption that at the
time of the bowls' production, the existing proto-Masoretic text had al-
ready been established as authoritative, and on the hypothesis that this
text was highly similar to the consonantal text of the Leningrad Codex.
In the course of my study of the topic, I have collected and analysed
around 155 biblical verses available in a number of publications of tran-
scribed bowl spells.

[9] That is, it contains linguistic features which are parallel to those found
in the medieval Babylonian manuscripts.

characterised by what is technically referred to as 'orthoepy'. And finally, some forms, spelled as pausal, bear witness to the prominence of orality in the transmission of biblical passages.

2.0. CASE STUDIES

2.1. A Distinctively Babylonian Instance of Epenthesis in Deut. 29.19

The majority of features attested reflect a phonology or morphology which is distinctly Babylonian. This in turn indicates that at least as early as Late Antiquity, there already existed traditions which were very close to the medieval Babylonian tradition. This linguistic proximity will be illustrated with the following form (the word in question appears underlined):

(1)   כִּי אָז יֶעְשַׁן אַף־יְהֹוֶה BHS || (AMB, 176; B9.11) כי אז <u>יעישן</u> אף יייי
'but rather the anger of the Lord (…) <u>will smoke</u>' (Deut. 29.19)

In the form יעישן, a *yod* appears where the Tiberian tradition has a silent *shewa*. The letter in question represents an epenthetic *i*-vowel, the expected vowel in the Babylonian reading tradition. In the Babylonian tradition, such an epenthetic *i* occurs in the *yiqṭal* forms of *qal* I-ʿayin verbs.[10] For instance, the verb עש"ר is vocalised in the following ways in different Babylonian manuscripts:

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[10] A parallel morphology is attested also in the *yiqṭol* (Yeivin 1985, 462–63).

(2)   יִעְשֵׂר [jiʕiˈʃaːr] (Old Babylonian)

(3)   תִעְשֵׂר [tiʕiˈʃaːr] (New Babylonian)[11]

In view of this, the pronunciation of יעשן is best reconstructed as
[jiʕiˈʃaːn]. Such a realisation is an example of more general pho-
nological processes which occurred in this pronunciation tradi-
tion.

From the point of view of syllable structure, forms such as
יעשן [jiʕiˈʃaːn] can be described as a product of the moving of the
guttural *ʿayin* from syllable coda (where it is in Tiberian
[jɛʕˈʃaːn]) to syllable onset. This process, in turn, has phonologi-
cal causation. Namely, it most likely reflects an attempt to pre-
serve the 'weak' consonant *ʿayin*. From a phonetic viewpoint,
consonants in syllable-coda positions are especially susceptible to
weakening.[12] Therefore, through the insertion of a vocalic seg-
ment after the *ʿayin*, the guttural is removed from its original syl-
lable-coda position and is thereby strengthened. Indeed, the me-
dieval Babylonian tradition reflects a wide susceptibility to the
weakening of *ʿayin* and *ʾalef* (that is, apparently, a decrease in
muscular pressure in their production). Thus, for instance, these
two consonants typically do not receive a *shewa* (whether silent
or *ḥatef*), but are instead vocalised with a full short vowel.[13]

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[11] Yeivin (1985, 464).

[12] Bybee (2015, 30–31).

[13] Yeivin (1985, 287).

2.2. Examples of Cross-linguistic Interference in Deut. 29.22 and Isa. 44.25

While the quotations reflect a tradition which continued over centuries, they also bear witness to the interference of the synchronic vernacular. In several instances we find what is most probably matter-borrowing from, inter alia, Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, the language of Babylonian Jews in Late Antiquity.

A group of linguistic processes which are known to have taken place in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic are those which are normally referred to as 'weakening of gutturals'.[14] The category of gutturals includes the consonants *heh* [h], *ḥet* [ħ], *ʿayin* [ʕ], and *ʾalef* [ʔ]. From the perspective of articulatory phonetics 'weakening' is defined as a decrease in muscular pressure during a phoneme's production.[15] This is reflected in various phonetic phenomena, such as the loss of ability for the consonant to be geminated, its complete elision, or a shift in the place of its articulation.

In my corpus, however, orthographic evidence for any form of guttural weakening, and therefore, for the interference of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, is extremely sparse. In the corpus—which comprises about 155 biblical verses—there are eight possible manifestations of different forms of guttural weakening. In addition, it should be noted that the graphic forms of the letters *heh* and *ḥet* are usually identical in the incantation bowls. This

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[14] For further details of such processes in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, see Juusola (1999), Morgenstern (2011), and Bar-Asher Siegal (2013).

[15] Khan (2013a).

has been interpreted by certain scholars (e.g., Mishor 2007) as a possible sign of the weakening of *ḥet* (that is, presumably, a shift in the place of articulation of *ḥet* towards *heh*). However, I believe that, for reasons which are beyond the scope of this paper, this shift of *ḥet*—at least on such a sweeping scale—is unlikely.[16] I now present and comment on two possible cases of guttural weakening in my corpus. First, consider the form

(4)   ויבפו (BM 91767, 15, ln. 16) || BHS בְּאַפּוֹ
        'and in his anger' (Deut. 29.22)

This form presumably constitutes a textual variant with the additional ו 'and', which is lacking in the MT. Also, ʾalef is missing in the orthography, presumably reflecting elision of the glottal stop. This verse occurs twice in this incantation (the second time the words are given in the inverse order). The other attested spelling is באפו, that is, without either the linguistic or the textual variant.

    The *yod* in ויבפו reflects the typical Babylonian pronunciation of ו 'and' when it precedes a consonant with *shewa*—[wi]. However, since this form would most likely have been pronounced [wivapˈpoː],[17] there would have been no *shewa* after the *bet*. One way of explaining the fact that the conjunction ו was still pronounced [wi] would be to hypothesise that the glottal stop existed at an underlying level, which may be referred to as the

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[16] My discussion on the issue is available in Molin (2017). A summary of the existing research on the topic of *ḥet* and *heh* in the Aramaic of the incantations is available in Juusola (1999).

[17] Morgenstern (2007, 24).

'lexical level' according to the framework of Lexical Phonology. The vocalisation of the conjunction would have been determined at this lexical level. The elision of the glottal stop would have occurred post-lexically and, on account of this rule ordering, did not have an impact on the vocalisation of the conjunction.[18]

The second instance of a likely guttural weakening is the insertion of *ʿayin* in the following phrase:

(5)   מעפר אותות (BM, 74; 035A.8) || BHS מֵפֵר֙ אֹתֹ֔ות

'frustrates (m) the signs' (Isa. 44.25)[19]

It appears that this additional *ʿayin* is a case of hypercorrection which, in turn, indicates a tendency for *ʿayin* to reduce towards zero in this scribe's dialect. The scribe would have heard the form [meːˈfeːr]. He then assumed that there had originally been an *ʿayin,* which was subsequently elided, and he thus spelled the word מעפר.[20] This hypothesis assumes imperfect acquisition of Biblical Hebrew, and the resultant misunderstanding of the form.[21]

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[18] For the theory of rule ordering, see Booij and Rubach (1987, 1).

[19] It should be remarked that, though this transcription appears to be correct, the rest of the quotation is highly illegible. Therefore, this reading is not absolutely certain.

[20] The alternative explanation, which is a textual one, is highly unlikely. This explanation would have it that the form in question is a participle derived from the root עפ"ר, with the supposed meaning 'casting dust'. However, there is only one attestation of a verbal form derived from this root (2 Sam. 16.23) and it is not a semantic fit for this context.

[21] Cf. Winford (2005).

Overall, while there are a few orthographic indications of certain phenomena associated with guttural weakening, their number is rather insignificant in relation to the size of my corpus. How do we best interpret this situation? Of course, the six attested forms most probably do not reflect the entire scope of guttural weakening in the pronunciation traditions represented by the quotations. This is inferred from the fact that in the corpus of the quotations as such historical spellings are attested. We may therefore assume that the gutturals were also sometimes spelled historically, though their pronunciation may have changed somewhat. On the other hand, it should also be borne in mind that several scholars—including the author of this paper—suppose that many of the biblical verses are likely to have been quoted from memory.[22] If this were indeed the case, and had weakening processes taken place on a larger scale, we would perhaps expect to find more symptoms thereof in the orthography.[23] Moreover, a similar conclusion can be reached even if we assume that the scribes had access to a biblical text, but deliberately chose to deviate from it in order to reflect synchronic pronunciation.[24] In this case, too, would we not expect to find phonetic spellings of the gutturals, such as their omission or interchange?

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[22] For a discussion of the significance of orality in the transmission of the quotations see Mishor (2007, 211), Shaked (2011; 2013, 18), Lanfer (2015), and Molin (2017, 78–87).

[23] For discussion of possible manifestations of guttural weakening in the Aramaic of the spells and an interpretation of this orthography see Juusola (1999).

[24] See the discussion of Bhayro (2015, 1–2) in this connection.

Thus, overall, the quotations appear to reflect pronunciation traditions in which the gutturals were largely preserved,[25] even though various forms of weakening had taken place in the synchronic vernacular. Indeed, a similar picture emerges from the Secunda, Origen's transcription of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. There also we find a tradition in which the gutturals appear to have been widely preserved, though, admittedly, the evidence for this is indirect.[26] A similar conservative approach to a sacred language is found, for instance, in the contemporaneous Biblical Hebrew reading traditions among the Jewish speakers of North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic. For instance, though the realisation of *ḥet* as [ħ] and of *ʿayin* as [ʕ] is largely lost in these Aramaic dialects, the pharyngeal realisation of these two phonemes is preserved in their reading of the Bible.[27] This preservation of the phonemes doubtless relates to the status of Biblical Hebrew as the sacred language, and the consequent attempts to pass it on as received.

2.3. A Case of Careful Reading (Orthoepy) in Num. 10.35?

In my corpus some quotations may be taken as reflecting various degrees of carefulness in reading. Here, I shall consider a partic-

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[25] Of course, a partial loss of muscular pressure must have occurred at some stage, leading to loss of gemination, etc. Cf. Blau (1980).

[26] Yuditsky (2013).

[27] For the phonology of North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic dialects see, e.g., Mutzafi (2002, 44–45).

ular verse which may constitute an example of a careful, deliberate reading, referred to technically as orthoepy. Orthoepy appears to be reflected in certain Babylonian manuscripts, and is characteristic of the standard Tiberian tradition.[28] It should be noted that my interpretation of the quotation discussed below remains conjectural. This uncertainty notwithstanding, the verse in question is unique and deserves renewed attention.

(6)   והיהי בין נסוע הארון וימר משה קומא יהוה יופוצו איבאך וינסו מ[] מפנך

וַיְהִי בִּנְסֹעַ הָאָרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה קוּמָה‖ יְהוָֹה BHS || (3.5 ;146 ,AMB)

וְיָפֻצוּ אֹיְבֶיךָ וְיָנֻסוּ מִפָּנֶיךָ

'And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you."'

The two issues on which I wish to focus at present are: the form והיהי instead of ויהי and the phrase בין נסוע instead of בנסוע (or בנסע). First, let us consider the form והיהי. The inserted *heh* may, of course, be a result of scribal error. For instance, it is possible that the scribe initially confused this form with the corresponding *weqaṭal* verb והיה.[29]

However, *heh* in this form may also serve as *mater lectionis* for the *a*-vowel represented by Tiberian *pataḥ*.[30] Though this is possible, the use of *heh* for word-internal *a* is rare—it appears to be unattested elsewhere in the incantation bowls. Therefore, an

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[28] Khan (2018).

[29] This is a possibility offered by Mishor (2007, 214).

[30] There is one possible parallel case in the DSS: ואהסתר 'hiding' (1QIsaᵃ 47.17 ‖ MT הַסְתֵּר Isa. 57.17).

explanation for its alleged employment in this form should be sought. There are two possibilities.

Mishor supposes that the scribe may have inserted the *mater lectionis* to disambiguate this form from the jussive ויהי (Tiberian וַיְהִי [wiːˈhiː]).[31]

Alternatively, it could be hypothesised that this *mater lectionis* reflects a lengthening of the relevant *a*-vowel—a likely feature in a word at the beginning of a *parasha* section. In other words, *heh* may mark not only the quality of the vowel, but also its quantity.[32] In both the Tiberian and the Babylonian traditions the corresponding *a*-vowel, i.e., *pataḥ,* has both long and short allophones.[33] In Babylonian manuscripts with 'complex vocalisation', long *pataḥ* is indicated by the *pataḥ* sign without a *ḥitfa* (*shewa*) sign beneath.[34] In Babylonian manuscripts with complex vocalisation where the verse in question occurs, the *pataḥ* in question is indeed marked long, even though it occurs in a closed unaccented syllable:
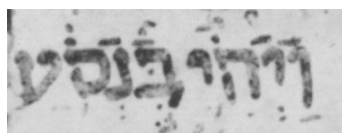
[waːjˈhiː][35]

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[31] Mishor (2007, 214).

[32] The use of *ʾalef* for long, word-internal *a* parallel to Tiberian *pataḥ* is attested once in my corpus. See Molin (2017, 13–14).

[33] Khan (2013d, §9).

[34] Khan (2013c, §15).

[35] Yeivin (1973, 1:343).

A parallel lengthening of *pataḥ* is also attested in Tiberian Maso-
retic manuscripts,[36] where it may be indicated by the insertion of
a phonetic *gaʿya* next to the vowel sign.[37] This vowel lengthening
occurs in cases where a vowel is followed by contiguous conso-
nants of 'weak' articulation. It therefore serves to prevent the eli-
sion of those 'weak' phonemes.[38] A 'weak' consonant is a sono-
rous one, which is therefore prone to lenition. In this case, these
weak consonants are the approximant *yod* [j] and the guttural
heh [h]. The lengthening of *pataḥ* therefore serves to prevent the
elision of those consonants.

The second form which I discuss here—בין נסוע—may also
reflect a type of careful reading. In this phrase, the most striking
variant is the doubling of *nun.* Mishor (2007, 214) offers us one
possible explanation for this doubling—he proposes that it re-
flects hypercorrection. He supposes that the scribe may have
thought that there had been two *nuns* next to each other across a
word-boundary, but that these collapsed into a single segment
[n]. The scribe therefore spelled the form בין נסוע, believing that
he was thus restoring the original structure. Mishor conjectures
that the scribe may have understood this form in parallel to בֶּן
הַכּוֹת 'deserving of a beating' (Deut. 25.2), presumably meaning
here 'when [the ark] was about to set out'.

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[36] This type of orthoepic lengthening is likely to have its roots in the
(late) Second Temple Period (cf. Khan 2020, §§I.2.5.8 and I.2.10).

[37] Yeivin (1980, 262–63).

[38] Khan (2013d).

Mishor's hypothesis, however, is problematic. Firstly, the construction that the scribe was supposedly correcting the form towards (בין, i.e., בֶּן, with an infinitive construct) is by no means a common syntagm. Would the scribe really have known it? Moreover, from orthographic features such as והיהי and from the general tendency to phonetic spellings in this quotation, it is clear that the scribe was not concerned with restoring the original meaning or form, but rather with representing (somewhat mechanically) what he had heard.

Thus, I propose that the orthography in בין נסוע is in fact phonetic, or at least partly so. This explanation is in line with the overall phonetic orthography of this quotation. More specifically, this spelling may reflect a vocalic pronunciation of *shewa*, or gemination of *nun*. Although in the medieval reading traditions *shewa* in this context was silent, at an earlier stage, it had been vocalic. This is demonstrated by Tiberian forms such as בִּכְתוֹב 'in writing' (Ps. 87.6). The *rafe* pronunciation of *taw* is a reflex of a vocalic *shewa* at an earlier stage in the language. A similar process accounts for the *rafe* pronunciation of *kaf* in forms such as מַלְכֵי 'kings of' (Gen. 17.16).[39] In the case of our form, therefore, we could hypothesise that the scribe heard the form [binaˈsoːʕ],[40] rather than [binˈsoːʕ]. Such a *nun* followed by a vocalic element, in turn, was perceived by the scribe to be acoustically similar to a geminated *nun*, since in both there were two phonetic segments.

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[39] Khan (2013b, §4).

[40] Note that [a], rather than [ə] is used here for vocalic *shewa*, since [a] is a more accurate representation of its quality.

The form in question might, therefore, reflect a stage of pronunciation earlier than that attested in the medieval Maso-retic manuscripts—one at which the *shewa* was still vocalic. Such retention of vocalic *shewa* would also appear to hint at a slow, careful reading.

Alternatively, if we wish to assume that the orthography is fully phonetic, we can postulate that the double *nun* reflects gem-ination. In other words, we can assume that the scribe heard the form [binnaˈsoːʕ], rather than [bin(a)ˈsoːʕ]. One could, perhaps, compare this to the orthoepic gemination of the first of two weak consonants in contact in the Tiberian tradition in forms such as מִקְרֵה־לָ֑יְלָה (< מִקְרֵה) 'accident of the night' (Deut. 23.11), וּנְתַקְנֻ֫הוּ (< וּנְתַקְנֻהוּ) 'and we shall draw him away' (Judg. 20.32). The pur-pose of this *dagesh* was to separate the two weak consonants by forcing the insertion of an epenthetic vocalic *shewa* between them.[41] Some parallels to this use of gemination are attested in a few medieval Babylonian manuscripts, especially with the sonor-ants *lamed, mem,* and *nun* (as well as with *ṣade* and *qof*).[42] It is found, for example, in the form מֹחֲלִ֖י 'Mahli' (Middle Babylo-nian).[43] Therefore, it is probably not a coincidence that the pho-neme in question in the phrase בין נסוע—[n]—is also a sonorant. In non-standard Tiberian manuscripts the sonorants, especially

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[41] Khan (2020, §I.3.1.11.1).

[42] Yeivin (1985, 359–61).

[43] Yeivin (1985, 359).

lamed, *mem*, and *nun*, are strengthened by *dagesh* even when not in contact with other consonants.[44]

Thus, if the hypothesis of secondary gemination is correct, the orthography in this quotation would reflect a slow, careful reading. This type of pronunciation, though non-standard, appears to have parallels in the Babylonian as well as Tiberian traditions. The fact that two features which may be interpreted as reflecting the practice of orthoepy are attested within one quotation lends this interpretation some weight.

2.4. Evidence for the Prominence of Orality

And finally, my corpus contains four forms which bear strong witness to the prominence of orality in the transmission of the biblical passages in question, or even to quotation from (oral) memory.[45] Specifically, these forms are explicitly spelled as pausal, demonstrating that they were known to the writers from the liturgical (synagogue) readings or memorisation. Consider, for instance, the following word:

(7)   שומורו (HLIB, 213; 684.14) || BHS שָׁמָ֫רוּ
       'they kept' (Num. 9.23)

In this form, we find two *waws*, each serving as *mater lectionis* parallel to Tiberian *qameṣ*.[46] This spelling indicates therefore that

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[44] Blapp (2017, 165, 210).

[45] For references to literature on this topic, see footnote 20 above.

[46] Employment of *waw* as vowel letter parallel to Tiberian *qameṣ* is indeed attested in some incantation bowls (both in their Aramaic and Hebrew), and has been discussed at length by numerous scholars. For an

this form would have been pronounced [ʃɔːˈmɔːruː]. This pronunciation is expected in the pausal form; in a Babylonian manuscript, this form would be pointed שֹׁמֹ֣רוּ. A corresponding contextual form in a Babylonian manuscript is vocalised שֹׁמֹרוּ֤, and pronounced [ʃɔːmaˈruː].[47]

Similarly, the following form is also spelled as a pausal one:

(8)	תוכילו (AMB, 176; 9.9) || BHS תֹּאכֵ֖לוּ
	'you will eat' (Lev. 26.29)

Here, the *yod* indicates a vowel parallel to Tiberian *ṣere*, which is the expected vowel in the case of a pausal form. The form in question would be pointed תֹּאכֵ֣לוּ [toːˈχeːluː] in a Babylonian manuscript, while the corresponding contextual form would be vocalised תֹּאכֹלוּ֤ [toːχaˈluː].[48]

2.0. CONCLUSION

To summarise, the Biblical Hebrew quotations in the Aramaic incantation bowls, due to their status as the only Babylonian epigraphic source from Late-Antique Babylonia and their tendency to phonetic orthography, are a unique source for the investigation of pre-Masoretic reading traditions in Babylonia. Their study illuminates the relationship between the tradition found in the

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overview and evaluation of the existing research, see Juusola (1999) and Molin (2017, 17–22).

[47] Yeivin (1985, 427). Again, [a] here indicates *shewa*.

[48] Yeivin (1985, 585).

quotations and that reflected by the medieval Babylonian manuscripts. This, in turn, helps us deepen our understanding of the history of the reading tradition in Babylonia.

The aim of this paper has been to offer a few case studies which illustrate what we can infer from the quotations about the pronunciation of Biblical Hebrew. Specifically, I presented a type of epenthesis in verbs which is distinctly Babylonian. I also pointed to the fact that most features attested in the corpus are in line with the Babylonian tradition. I also studied possible orthographic evidence for guttural weakening in my corpus, which is very scarce. I submitted that this probably reflects a relative absence of guttural weakening, and thereby a degree of resistance to the influence of the phonology of the vernacular, Jewish Babylonian Aramaic. However, I pointed out that in other areas, the phonological (and morphological) interference of the vernacular Aramaic is apparent. Additionally, I discussed a verse with peculiar orthographic features which may attest the practice of orthoepy, that is, careful, deliberate reading. And finally, moving beyond language, I suggested that some of the forms in the bowls point to a particular mode of transmission of the biblical text. Specifically, spellings of pausal forms highlight the prominence of orality.

The study of these biblical quotations not only contributes to our understanding of Biblical Hebrew reading traditions, but also offers some insight into the textual history of the Bible and the transmission of the biblical text in Late Antiquity.

3.0. REFERENCES

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In brackets, I give abbreviations of the titles as used in the paper.

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