

[Bible] Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (incomplete)
In Hebrew, manuscript on paper
Yemen, c. 1400-1450

ii (modern paper) + 154 + ii (modern paper) folios on Oriental paper, expertly restored and mounted in modern paper, primary modern foliation in pencil in Arabic numerals in upper-left corner of recto (leaves following ff. 65 and 124 were skipped and not foliated) (cited) and secondary modern foliation in pencil in Arabic numerals (9-11 numbers off from primary) in lower margin of recto (original collation indeterminate, but missing about twenty-eight folios, modern collation i⁸ [-1] ii⁶ iii-iv⁸ v² vi⁸ vii⁶ viii-xi⁸ xii² xiii⁸ xiv² xv-xvi⁸ xvii-xviii⁴ xix⁶ xx⁶ [+ 2 leaves added at the end] xxi⁶ xxii-xxiii⁴ xxiv⁸ xxv⁶ [-6]), catchwords on f. 23v only, unruled (justification 170-180 x 100-110 mm.), written in neat Yemenite square (body of biblical text) and semi-cursive (Masorah parva) scripts in black ink in seventeen long lines (except f. 23, fifteen-eighteen lines), complete Tiberian vocalization and accentuation of biblical text, Masorah parva written in micrography in outer margins, no chapter or verse numeration, marginal corrections (e.g., ff. 8, 101) and aliyah (lectionary break) markers in hands of primary and secondary scribes throughout, beginnings of new Torah portions marked by marginal decorative flourishes in the shape of a samekh, special decorative Masorah notations on ff. 1v (marking the middle two words of the Pentateuch at Lev. 9:16), 12v (marking the middle of Leviticus at Lev. 15:7), 70 (marking the middle of Numbers at Num. 17:20), Torah portion headings added later on rectos and some versos of ff. 1-2, 4-22, 24-29, 31-32, 34-35, 37-38, 63, occasional justification of lines using verbal and ornamental space holders (e.g., ff. 100v-101v, 107v) and stretched letters, upside-down and backwards letters pe filling a blank line on f. 44v, marginal note on f. 18 quoting a passage from bKiddushin 30a, some losses throughout, especially in corners and margins, due to fragmentary state of leaves, ff. 5, 30, 35-36, 54, 104-105, 148, 150, 152 feature more serious losses of text, f. 23 replaced probably in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth centuries and written in a different hand, f. 131 bound upside-down and backwards, slight dampstaining in upper and outer margins on ff. 1-29, 110-152, stains from earlier mildew (ff. 1v-5v, 92-93v, 110-111v, 114-117v, 119-120r, 121v-132v, 134-135, 137-138v, 142-145v), some words rubbed, intermittent worming expertly repaired throughout, small tear in upper corner of f. 129. Bound in modern red morocco, profusely blind-tooled with floral designs, spine in five compartments with raised bands, title and date on spine, marbled flyleaves and pastedowns. Dimensions, modern page size 220 x 175 mm., binding 234 x 180 mm.

A beautiful and early Yemenite manuscript from the famous Cairo Genizah that skillfully reproduces both the biblical text and its accompanying *Masorah* (in micrography). Because of the high degree of exactitude with which Yemenite biblical manuscripts were copied and their adherence to the prescriptions reflected in the *Masorah*, modern researchers consider Yemenite manuscripts particularly faithful witnesses to the Masoretic Text. *Tijan* from before or around the year 1500 are relatively rare.

PROVENANCE

1. While the manuscript has no colophon, it is possible to date and localize it approximately to the first half of the fifteenth in Yemen based on the Yemenite scripts in which it is written (Oriental paper has no watermarks). A comparison of this text with that sold by Kedem Auctions in Jerusalem (May 2, 2011 [lot 515]) suggests that they derive from the same period, perhaps even having been written by the same (anonymous) scribe.
2. Considering the fragmentary nature of the manuscript, as well as its modern provenance (see below), it seems likely that this book was brought at some point to Egypt and ultimately deposited in the Cairo Genizah.

3. Belonged to Solomon Aaron Wertheimer (1866-1935), a Jerusalem-based rabbinic scholar and antique book dealer who, with the printing of his *Battei midrashot*, vol. 1, in 1893, became the first person to publish manuscripts discovered in the Cairo Genizah *and* openly acknowledge their source – three years before Solomon Schechter (1846-1915) made his famous journey to Egypt to acquire over one hundred thousand Genizah fragments on behalf of Cambridge University Library. Though he himself never traveled to Egypt or Yemen, he seems to have had an agent who supplied him with antiquities from those locales (Bar-Ilan, 2013).

TEXT

- f. 4v, Beginning of the Torah portion *Tazria* (Lev. 12:1-13:59);
- f. 9, Beginning of the Torah portion *Metsora* (Lev. 14:1-15:33);
- f. 14, Beginning of the Torah portion *Abarei mot* (Lev. 16:1-18:30);
- f. 19, Beginning of the Torah portion *Kedoshim* (Lev. 19:1-20:27);
- f. 23, Beginning of the Torah portion *Emor* (Lev. 21:1-24:23);
- f. 29v, Beginning of the Torah portion *Be-bar* (Lev. 25:1-26:2);
- f. 33, Beginning of the Torah portion *Be-bukkotai* (Lev. 26:3-27:34);
- f. 36v, Beginning of the Torah portion *Be-midbar* (Num. 1:1-4:20);
- f. 44v, Beginning of the Torah portion *Naso* (Num. 4:21-7:89);
- f. 54v, Beginning of the Torah portion *Be-ba'alotekha* (Num. 8:1-12:16);
- f. 62v, Beginning of the Torah portion *Shelab* (Num. 13:1-15:41);
- f. 66v, Beginning of the Torah portion *Korah* (Num. 16:1-18:32);
- f. 72v, Beginning of the Torah portion *Hukkat* (Num. 19:1-22:1);
- f. 78, Beginning of the Torah portion *Balak* (Num. 22:2-25:9);
- f. 83v, Beginning of the Torah portion *Pinbas* (Num. 25:10-30:1);
- f. 92v, Beginning of the Torah portion *Mattot* (Num. 30:2-32:42);
- f. 98v, Beginning of the Torah portion *Mas'ei* (Num. 33:1-36:13);
- f. 104, Beginning of the Torah portion *Devarim* (Deut. 1:1-3:22);

- f. 117, Beginning of the Torah portion *Ekev* (Deut. 7:12-11:25);
- f. 124v, Beginning of the Torah portion *Re'eh* (Deut. 11:26-16:17);
- f. 137, Beginning of the Torah portion *Ki tetse* (Deut. 21:10-25:19);
- f. 144, Beginning of the Torah portion *Ki tavo* (Deut. 26:1-29:8);
- f. 149v, Beginning of the Torah portion *Nitsavim* (Deut. 29:9-30:20);
- f. 152, Beginning of the Torah portion *Va-yelekh* (Deut. 31:1-30).

In antiquity, the Hebrew Scriptures were written in scroll form entirely without punctuation, vocalization, or accentuation. Words were separated by spaces, paragraph divisions broke up the flow of the narrative, and four letters (*alef*, *he*, *vav*, and *yod*) were frequently used to mark certain vowels, but even with these devices, the correct pronunciation and parsing of the biblical text into intelligible units were not readily apparent from its appearance. Instead, Jews in that period relied on inherited oral reading traditions, passed down from one generation to the next, in order to determine how exactly the Bible should be properly understood.

In the early Middle Ages, between the sixth and seventh centuries, systems of committing the reading traditions to writing in biblical codices (but not scrolls) developed in Palestine, Babylonia, and eventually specifically in Tiberias (Palestine). The last system (referred to as Tiberian) would, with time, become the standard one used throughout the Jewish world to record the vowels and accents of the biblical text.

In addition, lists of information containing the details of the consonantal skeleton of the Bible, as well as its proper vocalization and accentuation – collectively known as the *Masorah* – were drawn up in order to ensure that scribes would copy the text correctly. The tradition of Aaron Ben-Asher (first half of the tenth century), scion of a famous family of Tiberian *Masorah* scholars, was considered particularly authoritative, especially after Rabbi Moses Maimonides (1138-1204) wrote of his decision to use a codex edited by Ben-Asher (the famous Aleppo Codex) as the exemplar for a Torah that he himself copied.

While the Jewish community of Yemen, whose roots stretch back to antiquity (and possibly to Second Temple times), had long used the Babylonian (supralinear) system of vocalization and accentuation when transcribing Torah codices, with time, it gradually switched over to the Tiberian system (Goshen-Gottstein, 1962), probably in part under the influence of Maimonides, whom Yemenite Jews respected greatly as a halakhic (Jewish legal) authority (Qafih, 1950). Because of the high degree of exactitude with which Yemenite biblical manuscripts were copied and their adherence to the prescriptions reflected in the *Masorah*, modern researchers regard these texts as valuable witnesses to Ben-Asher's original tradition (Ya'akov, 2013; though cf. Goshen-Gottstein, 1962 and 1963). Indeed, the famous Bible scholar Mordechai Breuer considered the fact that the eclectic version of the Bible that he had edited turned out to match the text reflected in Yemenite manuscripts to be proof of the soundness of the methodology he had employed in making his determinations (Breuer, 1989).

According to Yosef Tobi, Yemenite Jews have been referring to their codices of the Bible, and especially of the Pentateuch, as *tijan* (singular, *taj*; Arabic for "crown") since the High Middle Ages (Torah scrolls, by contrast, were called *sefarim*) (Tobi, 2004-2005). As explained by David Stern, the term originated as a superlative epithet specifically referring to the Aleppo Codex, perhaps under the influence of rabbinic comparisons of the Torah to a crown, and was subsequently extended to describe all deluxe model biblical codices (Stern, forthcoming).

As mentioned briefly above, *tijan* differ from Hebrew Bibles copied in other parts of the Jewish world mainly in connection with their version of the biblical text, as well as its proper vocalization and accentuation. In addition, Yemenite Jews broke up the weekly Torah portions into different *aliyyah* units than did other communities. Because print technology only arrived in Yemen at a relatively late stage as compared with Europe, the text of the *taj* remained in manuscript until the end of the nineteenth century, when Yemenite Jews began arriving to Palestine in large numbers. The *editio princeps* was published in Jerusalem by Rabbis Shalom Eraki Katz and Abraham Naddaf in 1894-1901. Since then, it has been reprinted many times, including in a semi-critical edition published by Aaron Amram in 2004-2005, for which the editor used sixteen manuscript *tijan* from before 1500, as well as six others copied thereafter.

The present manuscript *taj* is the second volume of a presumed two-volume set of the Hebrew Pentateuch that contains most of the text of the books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, as well as the traditional Yemenite breakup of the Torah portions and their *aliyyot*. Between each Torah portion a line is skipped, in which are written the number of verses in that portion as well as a mnemonic device for remembering that number; in addition, a special decorative flourish in the shape of the letter *samekh* (standing for *seder* = "[Torah] portion") has been inserted in the margin next to the start of the new portion. In those instances where a full-line paragraph break occurs in the first or last lines of a page of text, a *pe* (standing for *petubah* = "open") is written on that line to indicate that it has been intentionally left blank and was not simply carelessly skipped by the copyist.

A number of special features, aside from the version of the text itself (see, e.g., f. 141 for the spelling of the word *dakka* [crushed] in Deut. 23:2 with a final *alef*), mark this manuscript as characteristically Yemenite. First, the scribe carefully observed the ancient custom of writing certain letters in specific verses in a slightly unusual fashion. The most common of these is the so-called "spiral *pe*" (see ff. 14rv, 19-20, 21, 22v, 32v, 61, 67, 76v-77, 79-80, 103v, 104v, 111v, 113, 114v, 116rv, 119v, 120v, 126v, 127v, 129v-130v, 134rv, 143), but also present are the forward-bent *lamed* in Num. 31:5 (f. 93v), the bent *bet* in Deut. 9:19 (f. 120v), the large *tsade* in Deut. 11:21 (f. 124), the large *kof* in Deut. 22:6 (f. 138v), and the backward-bent *lamed* in Deut. 23:21 (f. 141) (Ratzaby, 1981). Second, he used the *rafeh* symbol, which takes the shape of a supralinear horizontal line, not only to mark the fricative realization of the letters *bet*, *gimel*, *dalet*, *kaf*, *pe*, and *tav*, but also to indicate instances where the letters *alef* and *he* have no consonantal value (Tobi, 2004-2005). Third, he copied the text in columns of seventeen lines, since it is common Yemenite practice to this day to write Torah scrolls of fifty-one lines to a column, just as Maimonides himself had done. Thus, a subsequent scribe would be able to use every three pages of this model *taj* ($17 \times 3 = 51$) as an exemplar for a single column of a new Torah scroll. Finally, on several occasions, both the scribe of the replaced f. 23 and that of the rest of the book (see, e.g., ff. 96v, 101v, 102v-103, 104v, 141v) used the Tiberian vowel signs *segol* and *patah* interchangeably, presumably because, for Yemenites, the two symbols have the same phonetic realization: either [æ] or [a] (Ya'akov, 2013).

This manuscript is missing about twenty-eight leaves that would have contained the text of Lev. 1:1-10:3a (approximately fourteen-fifteen leaves), Lev. 26:40b-27:8 (one leaf), Num. 13:17b-33a (one leaf), Num. 31:1b-13 (one leaf), Deut. 3:21-4:6a (one leaf), Deut. 16:18-17:10a (one leaf), Deut. 28:36-68a (two leaves), and Deut. 31:10-34:12 (approximately five-six leaves). (One wonders, in this context, whether the foliation present at the base of the recto of each leaf, whose count is consistently 9-11 numbers ahead of the count in the upper-left corner of the recto, indicates anything about the manuscript having previously contained more leaves when it was first discovered in the Genizah.) In addition, some of the leaves that do survive have nevertheless suffered significant damage that affects the text of Lev. 13:3b, 13:10b (f. 5); Lev. 25:3-25:20a (f. 30); Lev. 27:9-Num. 1:15 (ff. 35-36); Num. 7:80-83, 7:88-89 (f. 54); Deut. 1:7-8, 1:15-17, 1:22-25, 1:31-35 (ff. 104-105); Deut. 28:18b-19, 28:27-28a (f. 148); and Deut. 30:16b-31:9 (f. 152).

The skill of the scribe, as well as the age of the text, render this *taj* both distinctive and highly valuable. While it is true that Yemenite biblical codices are relatively plentiful, especially in American collections (as explained by Goshen-Gottstein, 1962; see Isaac, 1999, for a survey of several American and European libraries), the vast majority of these manuscripts were copied in the seventeenth century or later (see, for example, the catalogues of Yemenite manuscripts compiled by Golb, 1972, and Tobi, 1982). By contrast, *tijan* from before or around the year 1500 are relatively rarer. Indeed, in the past thirty-five years, only six complete Yemenite Pentateuch manuscripts are known to have been sold by major auction houses, and if incomplete but substantial copies, like ours, are taken into consideration, that number rises to just nine. Moreover, the present manuscript also distinguishes itself in having survived as part of the famous Cairo Genizah – and in relatively good condition for such an artifact.

Written in elegant scripts and staunchly faithful to the Yemenite biblical manuscript tradition, this work truly embodies the superlative meaning of the term *taj* as that community originally meant it.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

The Aleppo Codex from Tiberias, c. 920 (MS Jerusalem, Ben-Zvi Institute, 1)

<http://www.aleppocodex.org>

TM 909