CONCORDANCE AND DIVERGENCE IN THE HEBREW BIBLICAL TRADITION:

A Comprehensive Textual-Critical Analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls,

the Aleppo Codex, and the Leningrad Codex

A Scholarly Research Paper in Hebrew Bible Textual Criticism

Drawing on the Hebrew University Bible Project, the Biblical Qumran Scrolls,
the Masoretic Text, and the Critical Apparatus of BHS/BHQ

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Abstract

The textual history of the Hebrew Bible is inseparable from three monuments of manuscript tradition: the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), discovered at Qumran between 1947 and 1956 and dated approximately 250 BCE to 68 CE; the Aleppo Codex (Codex A; Keter Aram Tzova), produced ca. 920 CE by the Masorete Aaron ben Moses ben Asher; and the Leningrad Codex (Codex L; Codex Petropolitanus), completed in 1008/9 CE and serving as the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible. Together, these three corpora bracket more than a millennium of text transmission and collectively preserve the data essential to modern critical editions — the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) and the Biblia Hebraica Quinta (BHQ). This paper undertakes a systematic examination of the variances among these three traditions across five dimensions: (1) orthographic and scribal conventions; (2) consonantal text (ketiv) differences; (3) vocalization, accentuation, and Masoretic apparatus; (4) book order and canonical boundaries; and (5) specific loci of textual divergence with text-critical implications. The analysis draws on the scholarship of Emanuel Tov, Frank Moore Cross, Eugene Ulrich, Shemaryahu Talmon, Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, and Israel Yeivin, among others, and situates the variances within the broader history of the proto-Masoretic, Septuagintal, and Samaritan textual families.

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I. Introduction: The Problem of the Text

No question in the history of religion and literature is more consequential or more technically demanding than the question of what the Hebrew Bible originally said. The surviving manuscript evidence is extraordinarily rich — richer than for any other ancient Near Eastern corpus — yet also irreducibly complex. Three corpora stand at the heart of the modern textual-critical enterprise: the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Aleppo Codex, and the Leningrad Codex. Each represents a different moment in the history of transmission; each preserves information that the others cannot supply.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered between 1947 and 1956 in caves along the northwest shore of the Dead Sea, provide a window onto the textual plurality of Second Temple Judaism. The approximately 220 biblical manuscripts recovered from the eleven Qumran caves (and a smaller number from Masada, Murabba'at, Nahal Hever, and Wadi Sdeir) date from roughly 250 BCE to 68 CE, when the Qumran community was destroyed by Roman forces. They antedate our medieval Hebrew witnesses by more than a millennium and attest a period when the text had not yet been standardized.

The Aleppo Codex, written and pointed by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher around 920 CE in Tiberias, was for centuries the most authoritative manuscript of the Hebrew Bible — so authoritative that Maimonides relied upon it as the normative witness for matters of scribal law. Though tragically mutilated in the Aleppo pogrom of 1947, the surviving portions (approximately 294 of an original 487 leaves) preserve the purest expression of the Ben Asher Tiberian vocalization tradition. The Leningrad Codex, completed in 1008/9 CE by Samuel ben Jacob and now housed in the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg, is the oldest complete codex of the Hebrew Bible and is the primary base text for BHS and BHQ.

The relationship among these three bodies of evidence has preoccupied scholars for decades. What do the DSS tell us about the prehistory of the Masoretic Text? How faithfully does Leningrad reproduce the Ben Asher tradition of Aleppo? Where the three corpora diverge, which reading is likely older, and which is more theologically significant? These questions have no simple answers, but they have been substantially illuminated by the work of the Hebrew University Bible Project (HUBP), the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert series (DJD), and scholars such as Emanuel Tov, Frank Moore Cross, Eugene Ulrich, Shemaryahu Talmon, and Moshe Goshen-

Gottstein. This paper synthesizes that scholarship and provides a systematic account of the variances.

II. Manuscript Profiles and Provenance

A. The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran and Beyond

The biblical Dead Sea Scrolls comprise approximately 220 manuscripts representing every book of the Hebrew Bible except Esther (and possibly Nehemiah, if reckoned separately from Ezra). The great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa[a]), discovered in Cave 1 in 1947 and now in the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem, is the largest and best-preserved, running 7.34 meters in length and containing all 66 chapters of Isaiah. It dates paleographically to approximately 125-100 BCE. The scrolls derive from multiple hands, multiple periods, and, critically, multiple text-types.

Emanuel Tov's foundational taxonomy in Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible (3rd ed., 2012) identifies five text-types attested at Qumran: (1) the proto-Masoretic text; (2) texts reflecting the Hebrew Vorlage (parent text) of the Septuagint; (3) texts related to the Samaritan Pentateuch; (4) non-aligned texts with no consistent affiliation; and (5) texts displaying what Tov calls "Qumran scribal practice" — a distinctive orthographic style characterized by full spellings (scriptio plena), additional vowel letters (matres lectionis), and other features. Tov estimates that approximately 35% of the Qumran biblical scrolls are proto-Masoretic, 5% align with the LXX Vorlage, 5% align with the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the remaining 55% are either non-aligned or reflect Qumran scribal practice.

The non-Cave 1 and non-Qumran scrolls found at Masada, Wadi Murabba'at, Nahal Hever, and Wadi Sdeir (Bar Kokhba period, ca. 132-135 CE) are strikingly different: they are uniformly proto-Masoretic. This strongly suggests that standardization of the consonantal text occurred between the Herodian period (ca. 37 BCE - 70 CE) and the Second Revolt. Frank Moore Cross and Shemaryahu Talmon's work in Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text (1975) laid the groundwork for understanding this trajectory as the triumph of the proto-Masoretic text over competing textual families following the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.

The Qumran scrolls were written on animal skins (and one on copper) using carbon-based ink. Carbon-14 dating corroborates the paleographic dates established by Cross, placing most biblical scrolls between 250 BCE and 68 CE. The orthographic and textual diversity within the corpus reflects the pluralism of Second Temple Jewish scripture use: different communities possessed different textual traditions, and there was no single authoritative text.

B. The Aleppo Codex: The Crown of Scripture

The Aleppo Codex (Hebrew: כתר ארם צובא, Keter Aram Tzova, "the Crown of Aleppo") was produced in Tiberias around 920 CE. The consonantal text was written by Shlomo ben Buya'a, while Aaron ben Moses ben Asher (the last and most authoritative of the five generations of the Ben Asher Masoretic dynasty) supplied the vocalization, accentuation, and Masoretic notes. Ben Asher himself attested its accuracy in a colophon: he checked the manuscript and corrected it, making it the authoritative exemplar of his tradition.

For over five centuries, the codex was preserved in the Rabbanite synagogue in Aleppo, Syria, where it was venerated but rarely examined. Access was restricted and in many periods photography was forbidden. Following the United Nations partition vote in November 1947, riots in Aleppo resulted in the destruction of the synagogue and the dispersal of the codex. When it arrived in Israel in 1958, approximately 196 leaves (out of an original ca. 487) were missing, including the entire Torah section from Genesis 1:1 through Deuteronomy 28:17, and portions of several other books.

The surviving portions of the Aleppo Codex are the primary base text of the Hebrew University Bible Project (HUBP), and the Israel Museum facsimile edition (published by Moshe Goshen-Gottstein in 1976) and the subsequent critical edition provide the standard scholarly access. Goshen-Gottstein's magisterial work on the codex established that, despite its losses, the Aleppo Codex preserves a more pristine Ben Asher tradition in vocalization and accentuation than any other surviving manuscript, including Leningrad.

Critically, the Ben Asher tradition carried authority not only among Rabbanite Jews but was explicitly endorsed by Maimonides in the twelfth century as the normative authority for Torah scrolls, confirming its status as the apex of the Tiberian Masoretic tradition. The orthographic and pointing decisions of Aaron ben Asher have thus shaped Jewish liturgical and scholarly tradition to the present day.

C. The Leningrad Codex: The Complete Witness

The Leningrad Codex (also known as Codex Petropolitanus Hebraicus B19A, or simply L) was completed in Cairo on 6 Sivan 4769 AM (27 May 1009 CE) by Samuel ben Jacob. Its colophon records that Samuel copied and pointed the codex from manuscripts corrected by Aaron ben Moses

ben Asher. It is thus an indirect witness to the Ben Asher tradition — one step removed from Aleppo, which was the direct product of Ben Asher himself.

The codex was acquired by the Imperial Public Library in Saint Petersburg (now the Russian National Library) in 1863 as part of the Firkovich collection. It contains the complete Hebrew Bible in 487 leaves of fine vellum, measuring approximately 38 x 30 cm per leaf. The text is arranged in three columns per page for prose sections and in a distinctive stichal (half-verse) arrangement for the poetic books (Psalms, Proverbs, Job). The Masorah Parva appears in the margins between columns; the Masorah Magna runs in larger script above and below the text columns.

Rudolf Kittel selected the Leningrad Codex as the base text for his third edition of the Biblia Hebraica (BHK3, 1937), a decision continued in Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS, 1977) and Biblia Hebraica Quinta (BHQ, in progress). The practical reason was simple: Aleppo, the superior manuscript, was not fully accessible and was missing major sections. Leningrad, as the oldest complete manuscript, became the most practicable base text for a critical edition.

Paul Kahle's scholarship, which preceded BHK3, established that the Ben Asher tradition was the authoritative Tiberian tradition, a conclusion refined by Goshen-Gottstein and Israel Yeivin. Yeivin's Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah (1980) remains the standard technical reference for understanding the Masoretic apparatus as preserved in both Leningrad and Aleppo.

III. The Masoretic Text and Its Families

A. Origins of the Proto-Masoretic Text

The term "proto-Masoretic" designates the consonantal text tradition that ultimately became the Masoretic Text (MT), the textual tradition that underlies the Aleppo and Leningrad codices. This text-type is attested at Qumran (where it predominates among the non-Pentateuchal books), at Masada, and in the Bar Kokhba-period finds. The emergence of the proto-MT as the dominant text in rabbinic Judaism is associated with the normative activity of the scholars of Yavneh (Jamnia) following 70 CE and the rabbis of subsequent generations.

Frank Moore Cross's "local text" theory, articulated in his 1964 essay "The History of the Biblical Text in the Light of Discoveries in the Judaean Desert" and developed in subsequent work, argued that three major textual families correspond to three geographic centers: the Egyptian family (reflected in the LXX), the Palestinian family (reflected in the Samaritan Pentateuch and some Qumran texts), and the Babylonian family (the proto-MT). While Cross's geographic labels have been critiqued — Talmon in particular argued for a more complex sociological model based on community affiliations rather than geography — the tripartite schema remains a useful heuristic.

The standardization of the consonantal text, achieved by approximately the second century CE, fixed the ketiv — the written text. The subsequent Masoretic activity, conducted over several centuries by scholars in Tiberias, Babylon, and Palestine, added the vocalization (nikud), accentuation (ta'amim or cantillation marks), and an elaborate system of notes (masorah) designed to preserve and transmit every detail of the fixed text. The Tiberian tradition, of which the Ben Asher system is the apex, became the dominant form.

B. The Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali Traditions

The Tiberian Masoretes of the eighth through tenth centuries CE produced competing systems of vocalization. The most important rivalry was between the Ben Asher family — five generations of Masoretes culminating in Aaron ben Moses ben Asher — and the Ben Naphtali tradition, represented by Moses ben David ben Naphtali. Mishnah Yoma 7:1 and later rabbinic sources mention the scrupulous care of those who preserved the text, and the Masoretes saw themselves as heirs to this custodianship.

The differences between Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali were catalogued already in the medieval period; the classic list is attributed to Mishael ben Uzziel (Kitab al-Khilaf, ca. 10th-11th century CE). These differences number in the hundreds and concern primarily vowel pointing, the placing of dagesh and rafe, hatef vowels, and sheva. They do not involve the consonantal text. The Aleppo Codex, as the direct product of Aaron ben Asher himself, represents the Ben Asher tradition at its source; the Leningrad Codex, as a copy made from Ben Asher exemplars, is a faithful but secondary witness.

Paul Kahle's work in the Cairo Genizah (Die Masoreten des Westens, 1927-1930) revealed that the Tiberian vocalization itself had a history: earlier systems, represented by Palestinian and Babylonian vocalization traditions also found in the Genizah, preceded the full Tiberian system. The Aleppo and Leningrad codices represent the final, mature form of the Tiberian tradition.

C. Masoretic Apparatus: Masorah Parva, Magna, and Finalis

The Masoretic apparatus accompanying the biblical text in the Aleppo and Leningrad codices consists of three layers. The Masorah Parva (Mp, "small Masorah") appears in the margins beside each line, recording information about specific words: how often a word appears with a particular spelling, whether a reading is unusual, corrections to potential errors, and qere/ketiv notations. The Masorah Magna (Mm, "large Masorah") appears in the upper and lower margins of the page and provides fuller treatment of items noted in the Mp, with cross-references and lists. The Masorah Finalis (Mf) appears at the end of books or at the end of the entire Bible and provides summary statistics — total verse counts, word counts, and identification of the middle word or letter of the book.

Both Aleppo and Leningrad preserve this threefold apparatus, but with differences. The Leningrad Codex has a more elaborate and in some respects more complete Masorah Magna than the surviving portions of Aleppo. However, Israel Yeivin's analysis demonstrates that where both can be compared, the Aleppo Masorah is the more authoritative. The Masorah of Leningrad occasionally contains errors, repetitions, and inconsistencies that reflect Samuel ben Jacob's reliance on multiple sources not uniformly coordinated.

Gerard Weil's critical edition of the Masorah Magna of Leningrad (published alongside BHS, 1971) is the standard reference. More recent scholarship, including the ongoing BHQ

project, has identified numerous instances where the Mp notes in BHS/Leningrad are in error and must be corrected against Aleppo and other witnesses. This work of Masoretic criticism is separate from but complementary to the textual criticism of the consonantal text itself.

IV. Orthographic and Scribal Variances

A. Plene versus Defective Spellings

Perhaps the most pervasive category of variance across the three corpora is orthographic: the choice between plene (full) spelling, which uses matres lectionis (the vowel letters waw ו and yod י) to indicate vowels, and defective (chaser) spelling, which omits them. In Biblical Hebrew, plene and defective spellings are in complementary or free distribution for certain vowel categories and are largely controlled by scribal convention rather than grammatical rule.

The DSS, particularly the scrolls reflecting "Qumran scribal practice," are characterized by a dramatically increased use of plene spellings compared to the MT. Emanuel Tov, in The Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judaean Desert (2004), demonstrates that the Qumran scribes inserted matres lectionis at a much higher rate than the proto-Masoretic tradition. For example, the great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa[a]) writes אותות ("signs," plene) where the MT writes אתת (defective) in numerous passages. It writes יושבים where MT has ישבים.

Between Aleppo and Leningrad, orthographic differences are of a different order — they concern the precise distribution of a relatively small number of waw and yod letters in words where both codices follow the MT consonantal tradition. Goshen-Gottstein's analysis identified numerous such differences. In some cases, Leningrad has a plene spelling where Aleppo has defective, and vice versa. These do not affect the reading of the text but are significant for establishing the precise form of the Ben Asher tradition.

B. Scribal Conventions at Qumran

Beyond plene spellings, Qumran scribes employed several conventions not found in the MT. These include: (1) the writing of the divine name יהוה (YHWH) in paleo-Hebrew letters within an otherwise square-script (Herodian) text, attested in 4QPsb, 4QPs[d], and other manuscripts; (2) the use of horizontal and vertical para-textual marks indicating section divisions (parashiyyot) that sometimes differ from the MT paragraph divisions; (3) scribal corrections above the line or in the margins indicating recensional activity; and (4) the use of vacat (blank space) to mark section divisions, sometimes in different positions than the MT indicates.

The scribal corrections visible in 1QIsa[a] are particularly instructive. The original scribe made numerous errors, corrected by a second hand (or possibly the original scribe in a second pass). Some corrections bring the text closer to the proto-MT; others move away from it. Tov's analysis suggests that the correctors consulted multiple exemplars, implying that even at Qumran there was awareness of different textual traditions and concern for accuracy.

Aleppo and Leningrad, as products of the fully developed Masoretic tradition, preserve the division of the text into open (petuhah) and closed (setumah) sections, indicated by paragraph-like spacing in the text. While both codices generally agree on these divisions, there are instances of disagreement — particularly in books like Samuel, where the tradition is less stable. The DSS parashiyyot divisions sometimes align with Aleppo against Leningrad, sometimes with Leningrad against Aleppo, and sometimes with neither.

C. Waw and Yod Confusion

A distinct orthographic issue concerns the confusion of waw (ו) and yod (י), two letters that were graphically similar in many script styles and whose confusion is among the most common scribal errors in Hebrew manuscript transmission. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, particularly in the Herodian and early Roman scripts, waw and yod were written distinctly enough that confusion, while not unknown, was relatively rare. In the medieval script of Aleppo and Leningrad, however, the letters are distinguished more clearly.

At the consonantal level, waw/yod confusion can produce genuine textual variants: a waw can serve as the conjunction "and" or as a mater lectionis for the /o/ or /u/ vowels, while a yod can be a verbal prefix, a pronominal suffix, or a mater for the /i/ vowel. Between Aleppo and Leningrad, there are documented cases where one codex reads a yod where the other reads waw in the consonantal text, and these have real semantic import. For example, the difference between third-person singular masculine suffix (-o, written with waw) and third-person singular feminine suffix (-ah, written with he) can produce different readings of who is the referent of an action. Waw/yod variants between the DSS and the MT similarly can indicate different morphological forms (e.g., second plural masculine versus third singular masculine in certain verbal forms).

V. Consonantal Text Divergences

A. Additions and Omissions in the DSS

The most dramatic consonantal text differences visible in the DSS are additions and omissions relative to the MT. These are attested across multiple books and represent genuine textual plurality rather than mere scribal variation.

The Jeremiah scrolls from Cave 4 (4QJer^{a}, 4QJer^{b}) are among the most significant witnesses to a text-type substantially shorter than the MT. 4QJer^{b} reflects a version of Jeremiah approximately one-seventh shorter than the MT of Jeremiah, closely paralleling the Hebrew Vorlage behind the Septuagint's Jeremiah (LXX), which is similarly abbreviated. This is not a case of scribal omission but of a genuinely shorter text tradition — a different literary edition of the book of Jeremiah. Eugene Ulrich's work on multiple literary editions (The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible, 1999) has established that Jeremiah, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, and several other books circulated in multiple literary editions in the Second Temple period, both of which were considered authoritative scripture.

Conversely, some DSS texts contain additions absent from the MT. 4QNum^{b} has a lengthy expansion after Numbers 27:23 that parallels Deuteronomy 3:21-22 and is also found in the Samaritan Pentateuch. The Temple Scroll (11QT) contains massive expansions and reorganizations of the Pentateuchal legal material. While the Temple Scroll is better classified as a rewriting of scripture than a biblical manuscript per se, texts like 4QNum^{b} demonstrate that some textual traditions expanded the proto-MT.

Between Aleppo and Leningrad, major additions or omissions are extremely rare. The two codices share the same consonantal tradition and differ primarily in ways that do not affect verse or word count. Where differences exist, they are typically limited to a letter or short word, and they reflect either scribal error in one manuscript or divergence in the exemplars used by Samuel ben Jacob.

B. Substitutions and Transpositions

Consonantal substitutions — the replacement of one letter or word with another — are attested across all three corpora. In the DSS, substitutions sometimes reflect genuine alternative

readings preserved in different text-types, while at other times they reflect graphic confusion, scribal interpretation (interpretation woven into copying), or phonological change (e.g., the confusion of aleph and ayin in the late Second Temple period, when the pharyngeal distinction between these letters was weakening in some dialects).

The scroll 1QIsa[a] contains numerous substitutions relative to the MT. Some align with the LXX and may preserve an older reading; others are unique to 1QIsa[a] and appear to be secondary. In Isaiah 53:11, 1QIsa[a] reads "he shall see light" (אור) — a reading supported by the LXX and 1QIsa[d] — whereas the MT reads simply "he shall see" (omitting "light"). The BHS critical apparatus records this variant; the BHQ apparatus evaluates it in light of all known witnesses. Most critical scholars now accept "he shall see light" as the more original reading, a remarkable instance where the DSS have improved upon the MT tradition.

In Samuel, the DSS scroll 4QSam[a] frequently agrees with the LXX against the MT, preserving readings that appear to be superior. The MT of 1 Samuel 11 lacks a passage found in 4QSam[a] describing Nahash the Ammonite's campaign against Gad and Reuben before his siege of Jabesh-Gilead. Josephus (Antiquities 6.68-71) also knows this passage. This is not a scribal error but a genuine loss from the MT tradition — a passage present in an older text that was dropped in the proto-MT.

Transpositions — the reordering of words, clauses, or larger units — are less common but attested. The most famous example is in the book of Jeremiah, where the oracles against the foreign nations (Jeremiah 46-51 MT) appear after 25:13 in the LXX version (and thus presumably in the Hebrew Vorlage behind it), and in a different sequence. This rearrangement reflects two different editorial arrangements of the Jeremiah material, both of which were authoritative in different communities.

C. Harmonizations and Expansions

Harmonization is the scribal tendency to smooth out apparent contradictions between parallel passages by assimilating the wording of one to the other. It is among the most common secondary developments in textual transmission and is a major concern in evaluating DSS readings. The DSS — particularly scrolls showing Samaritan affinities — contain numerous harmonizing expansions of the Pentateuch. The Samaritan Pentateuch itself is characterized by

extensive harmonizations (e.g., expanding the commands in Exodus with the corresponding fulfillments from elsewhere in the Pentateuch, and vice versa), and some Qumran texts show similar tendencies.

The proto-MT, and therefore the Aleppo and Leningrad codices, generally preserve a less harmonized text. This is consistent with the principle of lectio difficilior (the more difficult reading is to be preferred), which holds that scribes were more likely to smooth difficulties than to introduce them. Thus, where the MT preserves a reading that differs from a parallel passage and the DSS harmonize the two, the MT reading is typically regarded as more original.

However, this principle cannot be applied mechanically. There are instances where the MT itself reflects harmonization relative to the LXX Vorlage, and where the shorter or divergent DSS/LXX reading preserves the earlier text. The text-critical judgment must be made case by case, weighing internal and external evidence together.

VI. Vocalization, Accentuation, and the Masoretic System

A. Tiberian Vocalization in Aleppo and Leningrad

The Tiberian vocalization system, developed by the Masoretes of Tiberias between approximately the sixth and tenth centuries CE, is the most precise phonological notation system developed for any ancient Semitic language. It uses a set of sublinear and supralinear diacritical marks — including seven vowel points (patah, qamats, tsere, segol, hiruq, holam, shureq/qubbuts) plus the half-vowels (hatef patah, hatef qamats, hatef segol), sheva, dagesh, rafe, mappiq, and others — to represent with extraordinary precision the phonological form of each word as the Masoretes understood it.

The DSS, predating the Tiberian system by approximately eight centuries, contain no Tiberian vocalization. A small number of DSS texts (particularly some from the Nahal Hever and Murabba'at sites) contain rudimentary supralinear vowel marks (Palestinian pointing), but the vast majority of the Qumran scrolls are unvocalized. This means that differences in vocalization between the DSS and the Masoretic tradition cannot be determined from the consonantal text alone; they must be inferred from comparative study with the ancient versions (LXX, Peshitta, Targumim, Vulgate), which preserve the oral reading tradition of their respective communities.

Between Aleppo and Leningrad, vocalization differences are numerous but generally minor in their semantic impact. Both codices use the full Tiberian system; the differences concern the precise application of the system to individual forms. Israel Yeivin's systematic comparison in Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah (1980) and Moshe Goshen-Gottstein's work on Aleppo against Leningrad identified approximately 700-900 significant vocalization differences between the two codices, depending on criteria for what constitutes "significant."

B. Differences in Pointing Between Aleppo and Leningrad

The categories of vocalization difference between Aleppo and Leningrad fall into several classes. The most common involves the distinction between qamats gadol (קָמַץ גָּדוֹל, the long /a/ vowel) and qamats qatan (קָמַץ קָטָן, the short /o/ vowel), which are graphically identical but phonologically distinct. The Masoretes distinguished them through their position in the word (stressed versus unstressed syllables) and through Masoretic notes, but later copyists sometimes

confused them. Leningrad contains more instances of ambiguity or apparent error in this area than Aleppo.

A second major category involves the sheva (שְׁוָא): whether it is quiescent (sheva na, silent) or mobile (sheva na, pronounced as a brief vowel). The rules for this distinction, while codified, admit of borderline cases. Aleppo and Leningrad sometimes disagree on whether a specific sheva is na (mobile) or nah (quiescent). Related to this is the question of hatef vowels (composite shevas) — whether a sheva under a guttural letter is simple or composite.

A third category involves the dagesh: whether a consonant receives a strengthening dagesh forte (doubling) or not. The rules for dagesh forte are complex and admit of exceptions (e.g., the "light" dagesh in the beginning of words after certain particles). Leningrad and Aleppo sometimes differ in the placement of dagesh forte in rare or ambiguous environments. Additionally, the dagesh lene in the Begadkefat letters (b, g, d, k, p, t) — which originally marked a plosive versus fricative distinction — is applied with slight differences between the two codices.

A fourth category involves the qamats versus patah distinction in pausal forms. Biblical Hebrew distinguishes "contextual" forms (used in non-final positions) from "pausal" forms (used before major disjunctive accents), with pausal forms typically having lengthened vowels. The application of pausal forms is governed by the accentuation system, and since Aleppo and Leningrad sometimes differ in accent placement, their pausal/contextual vocalization must differ correspondingly.

C. Accentuation Variances and Their Hermeneutical Significance

The Tiberian accentuation system (ta'amim, also called cantillation marks or trope) serves three functions simultaneously: it marks word stress, provides syntactic parsing of the clause (each accent is either conjunctive, joining a word to the following word, or disjunctive, separating it), and prescribes a specific melodic motif for liturgical chanting. The system is elaborate: there are approximately 26 distinct disjunctive accents (arranged in a hierarchy from most to least disjunctive) and 14 conjunctive accents, applied differently in the 21 prose books versus the 3 poetic books (Psalms, Proverbs, Job — the system for these is called te'amim elyonim or "higher accents").

Accentuation differences between Aleppo and Leningrad are not infrequent, and they carry hermeneutical weight because the accentuation determines how the clause is syntactically divided. For example, in Genesis 1:1, if the disjunctive accent under "beginning" (בְּרֵאשִׁית) is a strong disjunctive, the clause reads "In the beginning, God created..." (temporal clause); if it carries a different accent value, the syntactic relationship can be read differently. The precise accent notation in Aleppo is therefore a matter of exegetical consequence.

Goshen-Gottstein's critical apparatus for the HUBP Isaiah volume (1995) systematically records the accentuation differences between Aleppo and Leningrad for that book. Similar documentation for other books is in progress under the BHQ project. The general pattern is that Aleppo is more reliable as a witness to the Ben Asher accentuation tradition; Leningrad contains approximately 1,200-1,500 accentuation differences from Aleppo across the biblical books, based on estimates derived from the portions where both are extant and have been compared systematically.

VII. The Qere/Ketiv Apparatus

The qere/ketiv system is one of the most distinctive features of the Masoretic Text. "Ketiv" (K̄ṯbī, "what is written") designates the consonantal text as written in the scroll; "qere" (Q̇rē’, "what is read") designates an alternative reading that the Masoretes prescribed for oral reading, indicated by a marginal note (in the Masorah Parva) with the vowels of the qere placed on the ketiv consonants. The system preserves both the ancient written text (which the Masoretes were unwilling to alter) and the received oral reading tradition (which differed from the written text in certain places).

The qere/ketiv apparatus in Aleppo and Leningrad generally agrees, but there are instances of disagreement — cases where one codex has a qere/ketiv notation and the other does not, or where the qere or ketiv reading differs between them. The most famous permanent qere is the substitution of Adonai (or occasionally Elohim) for the divine name YHWH throughout the text — a practice not indicated case by case but universally understood. Beyond this, there are approximately 1,300 individual qere/ketiv notations in the MT.

The DSS contribute to understanding the qere/ketiv system in two ways. First, some DSS texts write what corresponds to the MT ketiv as their consonantal text, corroborating that the ketiv represents an ancient written form. Second, other DSS write what corresponds to the MT qere, suggesting that the qere reading was sometimes also attested in writing in the Second Temple period. This implies that in at least some cases, the qere/ketiv apparatus preserves a genuine textual variant (different textual traditions, one of which preserved the reading in the margins) rather than merely a tradition of how to pronounce an archaic written form.

Among the most studied qere/ketiv instances are: the "strange/foreign women" in 1 Kings 11:1, where K̄ṯbī has נשים נכריית and Q̇rē’ has נשים נכריות; the verbal forms in 2 Samuel 14:16 and numerous other places; and the famous tiqquney soferim (scribal corrections), an ancient list of eighteen passages where the Masoretes identified that scribes had "corrected" the text to avoid theologically offensive expressions. These scribal emendations are documented in both Aleppo (where extant) and Leningrad, and they represent a category of variance between the original text and the transmitted text that predates the medieval manuscripts by many centuries.

VIII. Specific Books and Passages: A Locus-by-Locus Analysis

A. Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy)

Genesis

The Aleppo Codex is missing all of Genesis, as the Torah section was lost in the 1947 pogrom. The Leningrad Codex therefore serves as the sole complete Masoretic witness for Genesis. Against the DSS, the primary Genesis scrolls are 4QGen^{h} and several others. The differences from the MT in the DSS Genesis texts are relatively minor — orthographic (plene spellings in the DSS), occasional variants in proper names, and a few cases of waw-conjunctive differences. The famous Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen) is not a biblical manuscript but a rewriting of Genesis and is not directly relevant to the textual tradition of Genesis itself.

One notable variant occurs at Genesis 4:8, where the MT's Cain says to Abel "and Cain spoke to Abel his brother" without recording what Cain said (the "speech" is left incomplete — a reading preserved in both Aleppo [from the fragments] and Leningrad). The LXX and Samaritan Pentateuch both supply the content: "Let us go out to the field." This reading is also preserved in the Peshitta and Vulgate. While no DSS fragment preserves this verse, the evidence strongly suggests that the proto-MT dropped a short clause that was present in the older tradition, creating an awkward asyndeton.

Exodus

The Exodus scrolls from Qumran are particularly important. The scroll 4QpaleoExod^{m} (written in paleo-Hebrew script) contains a text closely related to the Samaritan Pentateuch, with numerous harmonizing expansions. 4QExod^{b} also reflects a text related to the LXX Vorlage in certain passages. The MT of Exodus (preserved in Leningrad and in Aleppo where extant) is demonstrably shorter in the Tabernacle construction narrative (Exodus 35-40), where the LXX is in a different order and uses different terminology. Scholars generally regard the MT order as earlier in Exodus 35-40, with the LXX reflecting a later rearrangement.

Between Aleppo and Leningrad in Exodus, the most studied differences involve the Decalogue text (Exodus 20) in its qere/ketiv annotations and the accentuation of certain key verses. The HUBP edition for Exodus (in preparation) will provide the definitive comparison.

Numbers

4QNum[b] is the most important Numbers scroll from Qumran. Its text is strongly harmonized in a direction parallel to the Samaritan Pentateuch, with major expansions after Numbers 10:10, 27:23, and at other points. The MT of Numbers, preserved in Leningrad and Aleppo, is substantially shorter at these points. The text-critical judgment here is that the MT preserves the earlier, shorter text, and the 4QNum[b]/Samaritan expansions are harmonizations introducing parallel material from Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy is the most abundantly attested book in the DSS, with approximately 30 manuscripts. The proto-MT text of Deuteronomy is well represented. The famous "Song of Moses" (Deuteronomy 32) is preserved in 4QDeut[h], whose text agrees with the LXX against the MT at verse 43, which in 4QDeut[h] reads "Rejoice, O heavens, with him, and bow down to him, all you gods; for he will avenge the blood of his sons..." The MT lacks "O heavens" and the reference to "gods" (plural), apparently toning down the polytheistic imagery. The NT quotation of this verse in Hebrews 1:6 follows the LXX/4QDeut[h] form, providing a remarkable cross-confirmation. Both Aleppo and Leningrad follow the shorter MT reading.

B. Prophets (Nevi'im)

Isaiah

Isaiah is the most important prophetic book for the comparison of DSS and MT. Two Qumran Isaiah scrolls survive: 1QIsa[a] (the great scroll, ca. 125-100 BCE, complete), and 1QIsa[b] (partial, representing a text closer to the proto-MT). The differences between 1QIsa[a] and the MT are numerous — the DJD edition lists approximately 2,600 differences — but the vast majority are orthographic (plene versus defective spellings). True consonantal variants number approximately 300; genuine semantic variants perhaps 50-70.

Among the most significant Isaiah variants: (1) Isaiah 7:11, where 1QIsa[a] reads "ask a sign for yourself from your God," MT reads "ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God" — the DSS omitting "the LORD"; (2) Isaiah 21:8, where MT reads "a lion" (אריה) and 1QIsa[a] reads "he who sees" (הראה) — 1QIsa[a]'s reading makes better contextual sense, is supported by LXX, and is adopted in most modern translations; (3) Isaiah 40:12, where the DSS supports the MT against LXX; (4) Isaiah 49:24, where 1QIsa[a] and LXX read "tyrant" (עריץ) where MT reads "righteous" (

צדיק), with most critical scholars preferring the DSS/LXX reading as contextually superior; (5) Isaiah 53:11 discussed above.

The Aleppo Codex Isaiah is the best-preserved section of the surviving manuscript, and Goshen-Gottstein's 1995 HUBP critical edition provides a full comparison with Leningrad. The two codices differ approximately 50 times in vocalization or accentuation within Isaiah alone; the consonantal text between them is nearly identical, differing in a handful of letters.

Jeremiah

The Jeremiah textual situation is unique. As discussed above, the MT of Jeremiah is approximately 3,000 words (one-seventh) longer than the LXX and is in a different order in the oracles against the nations. 4QJer^{b} confirms that a Hebrew text corresponding to the shorter LXX existed at Qumran ca. 150-100 BCE. 4QJer^{a} and 4QJer^{d}, by contrast, reflect a text close to the longer MT. Both literary editions are thus attested in the DSS, demonstrating that the two-edition situation is not merely a Greek translation phenomenon but represents two Hebrew Vorlagen.

The MT tradition of Jeremiah, preserved in both Aleppo (partially) and Leningrad, is the longer edition. Between Aleppo and Leningrad in the Jeremiah portions where Aleppo is extant, the differences are primarily in vocalization and accentuation. One notable consonantal difference occurs at Jeremiah 6:13, where the Masoretic tradition in both codices reads a form that the BHS apparatus notes is differently attested in a Hebrew manuscript (MSS) — a variant confirmed as genuine by the Qumran evidence.

Samuel and Kings

4QSam^{a} is a large and important Samuel scroll dating to approximately 50-25 BCE. It frequently agrees with the LXX against the MT, indicating that the LXX was translated from a Hebrew Vorlage close to 4QSam^{a}. In 1 Samuel 11 (the Nahash episode discussed above), 4QSam^{a} has the longer text absent from the MT. In 2 Samuel 13 and 21, 4QSam^{a} contains readings supported by LXX that appear to resolve textual difficulties in the MT. P. Kyle McCarter's Anchor Bible commentary on Samuel (1980, 1984) systematically evaluates the 4QSam^{a} variants and often prefers them.

Between Aleppo and Leningrad in the Samuel books, there are well-documented differences in chapter 2 Samuel particularly in vocalization. The HUBP edition of Samuel will incorporate the Aleppo evidence wherever the manuscript is extant.

C. Writings (Ketuvim)

Psalms

The Psalms Scroll from Cave 11 (11QPsa) is among the most surprising DSS discoveries. It contains 41 canonical psalms, several psalms known from other sources (including the apocryphal "David's Compositions" and "Apostrophe to Zion"), and a prose section listing David's compositions. More significantly, the arrangement of the psalms in 11QPsa differs substantially from the MT's arrangement — Psalms 146, 148, and others appear in different positions. Psalm 151 (apocryphal in the Hebrew tradition but canonical in the LXX and Syriac) appears in 11QPsa in a Hebrew form.

Peter Flint's studies of the DSS Psalter (The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms, 1997) argue that the book of Psalms was still "open" — its contents and arrangement still fluid — in the Qumran community of the first century BCE to first century CE. Books I-III (Psalms 1-89) were relatively fixed by this period, while Books IV-V (Psalms 90-150) were still being arranged. This conclusion has been contested by scholars who regard 11QPsa as a liturgical collection rather than a Psalter per se, but the debate has productively illuminated the history of the Psalter's formation.

Both Aleppo and Leningrad preserve the standard MT Psalter arrangement. The accentuation system for Psalms (ta'amim elyonim, the "upper accents") is more complex than the prose system and shows interesting variation between the two codices. The HUBP Psalms project will provide the definitive comparison.

Job, Proverbs, and Song of Songs

4QJob^{a} (in paleo-Hebrew) and 11QJob (an Aramaic Targum of Job) illuminate the textual history of Job. The Hebrew text of Job at Qumran is generally close to the MT, with orthographic differences and occasional word-level variants. Between Aleppo and Leningrad in Job, the poetic accentuation system produces a relatively high number of accentuation differences —

approximately 150 in Job alone, by estimates based on partial comparison data. Proverbs shows similar patterns.

Song of Songs (Song of Solomon) is preserved in one Qumran scroll (6QCant) and one from the Masada collection. The Masada scroll is strictly proto-MT. 6QCant is fragmentary but aligns with the MT. Between Aleppo and Leningrad, the vocalization of certain forms in Song of Songs differs in ways that reflect different judgments about the morphology of rare or poetic forms.

Daniel

Daniel is unique among the Hebrew Bible books in containing substantial Aramaic sections (Daniel 2:4b-7:28). Eight Daniel manuscripts were found at Qumran (4QDan^{a} through 4QDan^{b} and two others). These are closely proto-Masoretic and confirm the antiquity of the Hebrew/Aramaic bilinguality of the book. One important finding: the Qumran Daniel manuscripts do not contain the additions to Daniel (Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Azariah) that appear in the LXX, confirming that these were not part of the Hebrew/Aramaic Daniel text known at Qumran.

Between Aleppo (which has Daniel where it is extant) and Leningrad, the Daniel text shows differences primarily in the vocalization of the Aramaic sections — a particularly challenging area because Tiberian pointing of Biblical Aramaic developed somewhat differently from the Tiberian pointing of Biblical Hebrew.

IX. Book Order, Canon, and Missing Sections

The question of book order — the sequence in which the books of the Hebrew Bible are arranged — reveals differences among all three corpora that illuminate the history of canon formation. In the DSS, the evidence is indirect: since the scrolls are individual book-scrolls (not codices), their order cannot be determined from their arrangement within a single codex. However, the relative quantities of attested manuscripts and certain compositional issues suggest that the canonical boundaries of the Writings (Ketuvim) were not yet settled at Qumran.

The Leningrad Codex follows a specific book order for the Ketuvim: Chronicles, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah. This order differs from the order found in many other medieval Hebrew manuscripts and from the order reflected in the Talmud (Bava Batra 14b-15a), which is: Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Chronicles. The Aleppo Codex, in the portions that survive, follows a slightly different arrangement.

The famous Masoretic note at the end of the Pentateuch in Leningrad (and its parallel in Aleppo) gives a total verse count for the Torah. These totals, preserved in both codices, agree exactly — one of many confirmations that Aleppo and Leningrad share a common Masoretic tradition for matters of textual enumeration. However, the totals for other books sometimes differ between the two codices, indicating that the Masoretic counting tradition was not fully unified even between these two Ben Asher manuscripts.

The most famous missing section is the loss of approximately 196 leaves from the Aleppo Codex. The missing sections include: the entire Torah (Genesis 1:1 through Deuteronomy 28:17); the book of Song of Songs; most of Ecclesiastes; the book of Lamentations; most of Esther; parts of Daniel; and the book of Ezra-Nehemiah. Scholars have long debated whether the missing leaves were destroyed in 1947 or whether some were hidden or removed before the riots. Israeli academic and governmental investigations have not resolved this question definitively, though research by Matti Friedman (The Aleppo Codex, 2012) has shed significant light on the manuscript's fate.

The DSS contribute a different kind of canonical evidence. Certain texts found at Qumran — notably the Temple Scroll, the Rule of the Community (1QS), the War Scroll (1QM), and the Hodayot (Thanksgiving Psalms, 1QH) — appear to have had scriptural or quasi-scriptural status in

the Qumran community. Several copies of Jubilees and 1 Enoch were found, indicating that these were authoritative texts for the community. This confirms that in the Second Temple period, "scripture" was a broader category than what was subsequently defined as the Hebrew Bible.

X. Text-Critical Implications for Modern Scholarship

The comparative study of the DSS, Aleppo, and Leningrad has transformed the practice of Hebrew Bible textual criticism and has produced several major implications for modern scholarship.

A. The Pluriformity Paradigm

Before the DSS, textual critics operated with the assumption that the Masoretic Text represented essentially a single tradition with minor scribal variations, and that the LXX and other ancient versions might preserve some older readings but were generally inferior witnesses. The DSS shattered this assumption. The discovery that multiple textual families — proto-MT, LXX-related, Samaritan-related, and non-aligned — coexisted as authoritative scriptural texts in the Second Temple period inaugurated what Eugene Ulrich calls the "pluriformity paradigm": the recognition that the text of the Hebrew Bible was not a single original that was subsequently corrupted, but rather a multiply-branching tradition in which different literary editions and textual forms were all considered legitimate scripture by different communities.

This paradigm has profound implications. It means that the goal of textual criticism cannot simply be to "restore" a single original text. For books like Jeremiah, where two distinct literary editions are attested, the question of which edition is "original" may be unanswerable — and perhaps not the right question. Both editions are authentic literary artifacts of ancient Israelite and Jewish religious life.

B. The Superiority of the Ben Asher Tradition

Within the Masoretic tradition, the Ben Asher system as represented by Aleppo is clearly superior to Leningrad as a witness to the authoritative vocalized text. The implications for critical editions are significant: wherever Aleppo is extant and legible, it should take precedence over Leningrad as the base text. The HUBP acts on this principle. BHS and BHQ, constrained by Aleppo's incompleteness, continue to use Leningrad as the primary base text but are increasingly transparent about the differences from Aleppo in the critical apparatus.

The practical consequence is that modern printed Hebrew Bibles — including the widely used Koren Jerusalem Bible, the Artscroll Tanakh, and the JPS Hebrew-English Tanach — rely on

slightly different Masoretic traditions. Editions based on Aleppo (such as the Koren Bible, which follows Aleppo for the portions it preserves and Leningrad-tradition for the rest) differ in minor ways from editions based purely on Leningrad. These differences are rarely semantically significant but are important for liturgical accuracy and scholarly precision.

C. Implications for Modern Bible Translations

Modern English translations of the Hebrew Bible have been significantly influenced by the DSS evidence. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV, 1989) and its successor the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVue, 2021) adopted numerous DSS readings where the evidence supports them over the MT. The English Standard Version (ESV), the New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE), and the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS) similarly incorporate DSS evidence in their textual decisions and footnotes.

Among the most visible translation changes based on DSS: the adoption of "he shall see light" in Isaiah 53:11 (NRSV, ESV); the inclusion of the Nahash passage in 1 Samuel 11 (NRSV footnote; adopted in the text by the New Jerusalem Bible); the preference for "tyrant" (עריץ) over "righteous" in Isaiah 49:24; and various readings in Psalms and Deuteronomy.

XI. Synthesis: A Taxonomy of Variance

The variances among the DSS, Aleppo Codex, and Leningrad Codex can be organized into a hierarchical taxonomy that serves both analytical and pedagogical purposes. The following table synthesizes the major categories, their frequency, and their relative significance for the meaning of the text.

Category of Variance	DSS vs. MT (Aleppo/Leningrad)	Aleppo vs. Leningrad	Semantic Impact	Critical Weight
Orthographic (plene/defective)	Very frequent (thousands)	Occasional (hundreds)	Usually nil	Low
Consonantal additions/omissions	Significant (some books)	Rare	High (affects content)	Very High
Consonantal substitutions	Moderate (hundreds)	Very rare	Variable	High
Multiple literary editions	Attested (Jeremiah, Psalms, etc.)	N/A	Very High	Very High
Vocalization differences	Not directly comparable	Frequent (700-900)	Usually low	Moderate
Accentuation differences	Not directly comparable	Frequent (1200-1500)	Moderate (syntactic parsing)	Moderate
Qere/Ketiv apparatus	Partially illuminated	Occasional differences	Variable	Moderate-High
Masorah (notes, counts)	N/A (DSS unvocalized)	Moderate differences	Nil for meaning	High for text history
Book order/canonical content	Fluid in DSS	Minor differences	High (canonical theology)	High
Paragraph divisions (parashiyyot)	Sometimes different	Occasionally different	Moderate	Moderate

The taxonomy makes clear that the most consequential variances are those that affect the consonantal text — additions, omissions, and substitutions that alter what the text actually says. These are most visible in the comparison of the DSS with the MT tradition of Aleppo and Leningrad. Between Aleppo and Leningrad themselves, the most significant variances are those in accentuation and vocalization that affect syntactic parsing and, in some cases, morphological identification (e.g., whether a form is a Qal or Piel, masculine or feminine, singular or plural).

XII. Conclusion

The Dead Sea Scrolls, the Aleppo Codex, and the Leningrad Codex are indispensable but incommensurable witnesses to the Hebrew biblical text. They are separated by a thousand years of transmission, by different communities and purposes of use, and by radically different scribal contexts: the pre-standardization plurality of Second Temple Judaism on one hand, and the rigorously controlled Masoretic tradition of medieval Tiberian scholarship on the other.

The DSS reveal that the text of the Hebrew Bible was not a monolithic original that was faithfully copied through time, but rather a living, pluriform tradition in which multiple literary editions and textual forms coexisted and were all considered authoritative. They have forced a fundamental revision of the history of the biblical text and have enriched the critical apparatus of every modern scholarly edition. Where the DSS diverge from the MT and their readings are corroborated by the ancient versions, they often preserve a text older and more original than what the medieval codices contain.

The Aleppo Codex represents the apex of the Masoretic achievement — a tradition of textual custodianship unparalleled in the ancient world for its precision, comprehensiveness, and duration. Its loss in 1947 was a catastrophe for the textual tradition; the surviving portions remain the primary standard for the Ben Asher vocalization and accentuation system. The Leningrad Codex, as the oldest complete Hebrew Bible, is an indispensable second witness to the Ben Asher tradition and, by virtue of its completeness, the practical foundation of modern critical editions.

The variances among these three corpora are not signs of failure in transmission but windows onto the richness and complexity of the biblical tradition. They invite the scholar, the theologian, and the interested reader to approach the Hebrew Bible not as a text fallen from the sky in a single, immutable form, but as the product of a centuries-long process of composition, collection, transmission, and interpretation — a process that continues in the critical and devotional engagement of every generation.

As Emanuel Tov concluded in the third edition of his Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible, the evidence from Qumran, from the medieval codices, and from the ancient versions all points in the same direction: the Hebrew Bible is the product of a rich, complex, and not fully

recoverable history, and the task of the textual critic is to navigate that history with scholarly rigor, intellectual humility, and a deep respect for the tradition's own self-understanding.

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