

## Acrostic Signatures in Masoretic Notes

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### Abstract

The practice of creating an acrostic to spell out the name of the author of a Hebrew liturgical poem started in the classical period (5th or 6th century). An acrostic may sometimes indicate the name of the scribe who copied the manuscript. In recent years some examples of acrostics have been discovered in the Masoretic notes accompanying ancient manuscripts of the Bible. David Lyons exposed three acrostic signatures in MS British Library Or. 4445. I have discovered two further acrostics: one in a biblical manuscript, the other on a page of a Masoretic work. The article addresses the ways in which the Masoretes create their acrostic signatures, and what we may deduce from these acrostics concerning the location of their creators and their time. The main point is that the place of the masorete of MS Or. 4445 is included in his acrostic, and has not been recognized before.

### Keywords

acrostic – Masora – manuscripts – MS BL Or. 4445

### I

Thirty years ago Dr. David Lyons examined masoretic lists in a famous, ancient manuscript of the Torah in the British Library in London (Ms. Or. 4445; below:

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\* Most of the issues dealt with in that paper were presented at the tenth congress of the European Association for Jewish Studies (EAJS) that took place in Paris on July 22nd 2014.

Ms. B),<sup>1</sup> and identified three acrostic signatures in it. All of these acrostics were identified in masoretic lists of the kind called “accumulative masora”, and the name that they provide is “Nisi ben Daniel Hakohen” ([or: נִיִּסִי בֶן דָּנִיֵּאל הַכֹּהֵן]). Alongside every list it says “by the name of the scribe, vocalizer and writer of the masoretic notes” (עַל שֵׁם הַכֹּתֵב וְהַמְנַקֵּד וְהַמְסִיִּים). Since the manuscript lacks both the beginning and the end, before the discovery of the acrostic the identity of the scribe and Masorete was unknown. At the same time Prof. Aron Dotan studied the manuscript, and he also noted the acrostic signatures in it.<sup>2</sup>

An accumulative masoretic note is one which combines several short notes that have a common denominator. Most of these notes includes unique occurrences of words in Scripture, and are marked by the letter *lamed*, an abbreviation for לִיֵּת דְכוּוֹתֶיהָ (“none like it”), indicating the uniqueness of the word in Scripture. The common denominator for unique words collected in an accumulative masoretic note may be of different kinds, such as words that begin with the same letter, words that end with the same syllable, words that are like each other (and look like they have a common root) and the like.<sup>3</sup>

In 1996 Yosef Ofer discovered an acrostic signature of another Masorete, Sa’id ben Kadroi (שַׁעִיד בֶּן כַּדְרוּי), followed by the blessing *Hazaq* (חֲזַק—“may he have strength”). The masoretic note in which this acrostic appears is in a leaf from the Geniza that contains masoretic notes, most of them accumulative. Various clues indicate that these masoretic lists were copied from a manuscript of the Torah, from which the scribe selected choice accumulative notes from Genesis and Exodus.<sup>4</sup>

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- 1 The manuscript contained 128 original folios and 58 later additions—which replaced original pages that decayed and were lost. The total manuscript today contains 186 folios. The additional pages, written in 1540, are fols. 1-28, 125, 128, 159-186.
  - 2 Cf. Lyons, 1983, pp. 411-413; Lyons, 1987; Dotan, 1993, pp. 48-49; Lyons (1987, n. 12) pointed out that already in 1899 Margoliouth noticed that the Masorete wrote “on the name of the vocalizer and Masorete” (Gen. 49; fol. 40r), but did not notice the acrostic, and thus did not catch the Masorete’s intention (Margoliouth, par. 64, vol. 1, pp. 38-39).
  - 3 Regarding accumulative Masora, cf.: Yeivin, 1980, pp. 78-80; and in greater detail, Lyons, 1999; Dotan, 2005a.
  - 4 The signature of the page with the masoretic note is Oxford, Bodl. D. 62, 7v, and in Yeivin’s book, *Babylonian Tradition*: 10 בסט (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 206). Regarding this acrostic signature, cf. Ofer, 1996, pp. 78-81; Ofer, 2001, pp. 253-259. The acrostic signature is indicated in the following words: שַׁרְתִּי (Lam. 1:1), עוֹתֵתִי (Lam. 3:59), יִקְשֵׁתִי (Jer. 50:24), דַּעֲתִי (Deut. 9:24), בְּקִשְׁתִּי (Est. 5:8), רַקְמֵתִי (Ps. 139:15), כְּרִיתִי (Gen. 50:5), דְּלוֹתִי (Ps. 142:7), רַפִּיתִי (11 Kings 2:21), וְהִמְתִּי (Ex. 23:27), יִרִיתִי (Gen. 31:51), חֲמַדְתִּי (Cant. 2:3), זַחֲלֹתִי (Job 32:6) קִשְׁתִּי (Gen. 9:13).

Recently I discovered an additional acrostic in an accumulative masoretic note in Ms. St. Petersburg, National Library, Evr. 11 56, from the tenth century, containing all the Early Prophets and comprising 178 leaves.<sup>5</sup>

In the Masora Magna on I Sam. 24:11 there is an accumulative masoretic note. The note is ornamented with triangles, and exceptional in form. It is also unusual because the Masorete of the manuscript included very few accumulative masoretic notes. The manner of writing indicates that the note was written at the top of the page at a later stage, after two masoretic notes had already been written. But that is the way in which the Masora was written in all the manuscripts, and consequently we may conclude that the Masorete who wrote this note is the same one who wrote the rest of the masoretic notes in the manuscript. This is what the Masora says:

		אלין לית כל חד
Is. 44:16	ראיתי אור	חמותי ל'
Job 30:15	תרדף כרוח	נדיביתי ל' (!)
Ps. 38:7	שחותי עד	נעויתי ל'
Gen. 31:51	אשר יריתי	יריתי ל'
II Chr. 35:23	כי הח' מאד	החליתי ל'
Cant. 3:4	אל חדר	הורתי ל'
Lam. 3:56	קולי שמעת אל תעל'	לרוחתי ל'
Jos. 18:6	לכם גורל	ויריריתי ל' (!)
Zac. 11:3	אדר היקר	יקרתי ל'
The biblical-text link verse—I Sam. 24:11	ואבי ראה	בכרתי ל'
Ps. 77:5	ולא אדבר	נפעמתי ל'
Is. 10:13	כי אמר בכח ידי	שוסיתי ל'
Lam. 3:56	קולי שמעת	לשועתי ל'
Is. 65:12	לחרב וכלכם	ומניתי ל'
Cant. 3:4	כמעט שעברתי מהם עד	הורתי ל'

5 In the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in Jerusalem (Henceforth: Institute) the manuscript was photographed twice and its numbers are 65051 and 63226. The manuscript has no colophon and the dating proposed here is taken from the catalogue of the Institute. According to Dr. Ezra Chwat of the National Library of Israel, the manuscript has similar characteristics to a manuscript written by Shelomo ben Buya'a from 929 (St. Petersburg, National Library Evr. 11 B17). Among the characteristics: narrow columns and identical graphic fillers.

The Masora lists unique words, all of which end with the syllable  $\text{תִּי}(-ti)$ .<sup>6</sup> The acrostic provides the name of the Masorete: **Hananya Halevy ben Shalwa** (or *ben Shelomo*, if we presume that two letters—*shin* and *mem*—in the next to last word are included in the acrostic).

As in the case of the two other Masoretes whose names are preserved in the acrostic, here too I did not find any other evidence that could be connected with the Masorete Hananya Halevy ben Shalwa (or Shelomo). I did find the name Hananya Halevy in two ancient sources: in the second half of the eleventh century one of the communal leaders in Fustat was named Hananya Halevy, also known as Hunayn, Abu Eltayib and Abi Sit Ad-Dar.<sup>7</sup> He is mentioned as a distinguished person in many letters, but there is no hint that could connect him to masoretic work or to copying manuscripts. The second source is Ms. L2 (St. Petersburg, National Library, Evr. 11 B 159), written in 943 by Itzhak Hakohen son of Yohai Hakohen heHaver, which was bought afterwards by Berachyahu ben Hananya Halevy from the city (*medina*) of Nezivin and donated to Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup> This data too is insufficient for connecting this Hananya Halevy with the Masorete of our manuscript.

From the masoretic point of view, there are many flaws in this list. The writer cited one word twice (הוֹרְתִי) in order to insert the letter *he* into the acrostic once more; in three cases he erred in copying the word cited: נְדִיבִיתִי (Job 30:15; in masoretic text: נְדָבָתִי = “my honor”); וִירִירִיתִי (Jos. 18:6; should be: וִירִיתִי = “I will cast [lots]”); שׁוֹסִיתִי (Is. 10:13; in masoretic text: שׁוֹשִׁיתִי = “I have plundered”). In two cases he cited a word that is not unique (נְעוּיִתִי—Ps. 38:7 = “I am all bent”; הַחֲלִיתִי—II Chr. 35:23 = “I am wounded”).<sup>9</sup> All this because he wanted to sign his name and not to deal with the Masora . . .

Thus five acrostic signatures by three Masoretes have been identified. That enables us to discuss the phenomenon in general, comparing these five instances to each other, and comparing the acrostic signatures in masoretic notes to the two other areas in which acrostics were used: in early *piyyut* (liturgical poetry) and by scribes copying manuscripts.

6 The masoretic note in Ms. 10 מס also puts together words that end in *-ti*. Both notes include verbs in first person past (with or without conversive *waw*) as well as feminine nouns with first person pronominal suffixes. Some of the words have penultimate stress and some ultimate. Only one word appears in both lists: יִרִיתִי (Gen. 31:15).

7 Gil, cf. Index on p. 675.

8 Cf. Kahle, 1927, pp. 59-60; Yeivin, 1982; Penkower, p. 55. nos. 23057 and 63239 in the Institute.

9 נְעוּיִתִי appears also in Is. 21:3. הַחֲלִיתִי appears also in I Kings 22:34 and II Chr. 18:33. The Masorete may have seen the unique form הַחֲלִיתִי (Mic. 6:13) and reading it with different vocalization listed it erroneously.

## II

*Acrostic Signatures by Poets and Copyists*

The use of acrostic signatures was practiced in *piyyut* (liturgical poetry) from the classical period (the seventh century on). In the pre-classical period poets refrained from signing their names in their poems, and consequently nearly all of the poets who were active in this period remained anonymous (except for Yosi ben Yosi, for whom the evidence is derived from other sources). The early poets who signed their names in acrostics were Yanai and Hadwata, who inserted only their first names. Gradually poets added additional elements: the name of the father of the poet (e.g. Shim'on berabi Megas, Yosef berabi Nisan), lineage of the poet (such as Hakohen, i.e. of priestly descent), his profession (*hazan* = cantor), his provenance (e.g. *kafra*, *qiryat sefer*, *shave qiryatayyim*) or words of blessing (e.g. *hazaq* = "may he be strong", *yizke* = "may he attain merit"). Some signed the names of others, presumably relatives. Signing a name in a *piyyut* confirmed the poet's ownership of his work and protected his rights. The fact that the signature was part of the *piyyut* gave it a high level of resilience, much more than an inscription attributing a work to a certain poet, but which may be lost in the copying of manuscripts and transmission of the poem over time. The signature pertains to the poem in which it was inserted and not to the manuscript in which it was found. The poet's artistic achievement depends of course on the contents of the work and not on the external features of the poem, such the rhyme scheme and the acrostic. He was expected to demonstrate his ability to create a beautiful work of high quality despite the limits put on him by the required rhyme scheme and the demands of the acrostic order.<sup>10</sup>

Acrostic signatures were occasionally inserted by the copyists of manuscripts:<sup>11</sup> Sometimes the scribe emphasizes words in the text he is copying in order to hint at his name. Such emphasis can be made in different places in the manuscript, and it lasts better than explicitly inscribing the name of the copyist in a colophon at the beginning or the end of the manuscript, which is more subject to random damage due to use or intentional damage by owners of the manuscript. The emphasis is executed by use of larger letters than ordinary or adding ornamentation to a word. Some later Masoretes indicated their names this way when copying masoretic notes.<sup>12</sup> Occasionally the copyist plans the beginning of lines in such a way as to create an acrostic of his

<sup>10</sup> The description here is based on Fleischer, pp. 128-129.

<sup>11</sup> The description and the citations here come from Beit-Arié, pp. 113-114.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

name, using graphic means to emphasize the letters that comprise the acrostic. Some scribes even took liberty and introduced minor changes in the text they were copying in order to suit it to the acrostic at the beginning of the lines. This phenomenon led to condemnation of the practice in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The author of *Sefer Hasidim* wrote “Some who write books or commentaries, sometimes plan and write their name in the initials of the words. And they transgress. In order to hint at their names can they omit words or change words? And regarding them it says ‘the name of the wicked rots’ (Prv. 10:7), ‘You blot out their name forever’ (Ps. 9:6)!” (*Sefer Hasidim*, ed. Wistinitzky, p. 184, par. 706). And Rabbenu Jonah Gerundi writes: “If you are a scribe, do not delete and do not add a letter or a word in order to sign your name at the beginning of the line.” Of course the scribe who creates an acrostic signature is not creating a new text, but only arranging the copy so that his signature will appear. Such a signature pertains only to the copied manuscript, and there is little probability that it will be copied by another scribe in another manuscript.

Masoretic acrostic signatures are somewhere between signatures of poets and those of copyists. The signatures of Masoretes discovered thus far carry the same elements with which we are familiar from the sphere of *piyyut*: the name of the writer and his father’s name, his lineage and even his provenance (see below). The acrostic signatures also carry a blessing such as ‘*hazaq*’ or ‘*yishmerehu el*’ (“may God protect him”). Most of these features are lacking in the signatures of scribes, which are more limited by the text they are copying and from which they may not deviate. An additional similarity between the signatures of poets and Masoretes is the use of rhyme, which is normal in poetry and also found in two of the acrostic signatures in masoretic notes. In these two cases the rhyme is the common denominator for the words included in the masoretic note.<sup>13</sup>

But the primary difference between the poets and the Masoretes is in the degree of creativity and originality demanded of them. The poet is not restricted by the acrostic and the rhyme scheme: He is expected to demonstrate originality and creativity. Not so the Masorete: He has to find words that appear only

13 It is reasonable to presume a connection between the spread of rhyme in Hebrew liturgical poetry and the compilation of accumulative masoretic lists in which all the entries conclude in the same syllable. Dotan, 2005a, pp. 44-47 cautiously suggested that one of the intentions of the Masoretes in compiling these lists may have been to help the poets find rhymes. Ofer, 2005, pp. 400-401, suggested a different explanation: Maybe the increasing popularity of rhymes led the Masoretes to sense a connection between words that end with the same syllable and, appreciating them, to prepare lists of rhyming words.

once that suit the rhyme and the acrostic, but putting them together does not create a new message, and it is difficult to regard a masoretic note he created as a new work. It is nothing more than a stratagem to insert his name, and in this respect he resembles to a degree the scribe who plans the lines of the text he is copying so that they conform to the letters of his name. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that one of the acrostic signatures was copied from one source to another: The list that includes the name Sa'id ben Kadroi (in Ms. 10סמ) was evidently created in the margins of a biblical manuscript, and some Masorete or copyist copied it into another manuscript. He may not have noticed the acrostic at all.

### III

Masoretic notes that include acrostic signatures may be clearly divided into two categories, which are parallel to the two kinds of accumulative Masora that Lyons pointed out.<sup>14</sup> The signatures of Sa'id ben Kadroi and Hananya Halevi ben Shalwa/Shelomo appear in masoretic notes that conclude with the syllable “-ti”. Lists of words that conclude with a uniform syllable are not found in the lists of *Okhla weOkhla*, but only in the accumulative masoretic notes in the margins of codices of Scripture. Both masorettes chose the suffix -ti, which is “easy” and widespread. The number of unique words in Scripture that end with that suffix exceeds six hundred. Apparently both Masorettes compiled these lists independently without the help of prior lists of accumulative Masora they had. This is particularly notable in the flawed list by Hananya Halevy, as pointed out above.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, all of the acrostic lists by Nisi ben Daniel (in Ms. B) are based on lists found in the masoretic compilation *Okhla weOkhla*. The Masorete did not collect the unique words himself, but used the lists found in that compilation. In these lists, which are arranged alphabetically, he could easily find the letters he needed to create the acrostic. Since the words were selected from different lists, they no longer shared the same common denominator, and he did not cite a unique characteristic that they had in common. They only shared the fact that these words had unique occurrences in Scripture.

14 Regarding two kinds of accumulative masoretic notes, cf. Lyons, 1999, pp. 8-10.

15 Accumulative masoretic lists of words ending in the syllable “-ti” were not found in Lyons' examination of Ms. Cairo or Dotan's examination of seven manuscripts. Cf. Lyons, 1999, p. 10; Dotan, 2005a, pp. 50-51.

The first list is given on Gen. 49 in the left margin of fol. 40r of the manuscript.<sup>16</sup> The entries are written horizontally, each one below the previous word, in such a way that the acrostic stands out. All of the words come from the opening list in *Okhla weOkhla*, the one that gave its name to the entire compilation. This list provided the Masorete a wealth of words beginning with every letter. The Masorete ignored the characteristic quality of the items in this list, which is comprised of pairs of words, and used the (unique) words in the list to create the acrostic. Lyons pointed out the list has no connection to the page on which it appears: None of the words in the list are found on that page in the codex, as opposed to the basic principle that guided the placement of masoretic notes in general and accumulative masoretic notes in particular.<sup>17</sup>

The second list appears in Lev. 26 at the top of fol. 113v of the manuscript, once again without any connection to the contents of that page.<sup>18</sup> Lyons pointed out the similarity of the words in the list to those in one list in *Okhla weOkhla*, an alphabetical list of monosyllabic words that contain the vowel *a* (mainly *qamas*, sometimes *patah*).<sup>19</sup> A detailed comparison reveals the way in which the Masorete worked: He looked in the masoretic list for a word that opened with the letter he needed, and when he did not find a suitable word that he had not used yet, he looked in another list in *Okhla weOkhla*, that also

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- 16 The page numbers are indicated in the manuscript, and they include the pages that were added to the manuscript at a later date. These are the words included in the list: ברובה (11 Kings 10:5), יוטה (Jos. 21:16), ספר (11 Sam. 24:10), יריתי (Gen. 31:51), נמליך (Ruth 3:10), נסעה (Gen. 33:12), דשן (Is. 30:23), נשמה (Ps. 69:26), יריבון (Ex. 21:18), אכלה (1 Sam. 1:9), ליוצא (11 Chr. 15:5), "on the name of the scribe and vocalizer", יתגדל (Is. 10:15), והדל (Gen. 6:16), מגרנד (Deut. 16:13), רפאתים (Hos. 11:3), האנפה (Lev. 11:19), שנים (Ex. 30:15), אשמים (Gen. 42:21), להציב (1 Chr. 18:3). Thus the resulting acrostic signature is: אל ישמרהו / ניסי בן דניאל = Nisi son of Daniel / May God protect him.
- 17 Maybe the Masorete erroneously thought that the entry שנים in his list belonged to the verse ולבן שנים מחלב on the next page (Gen. 49:12 = "His teeth are whiter than milk"). In fact שנים is not a unique occurrence, and the Masora was referring to שנים (Gen. 6:16 = "second [stories]"). And indeed the word is vocalized correctly: שנים.
- 18 And these are the words included in the list: נס (Dan. 1:12), יך (Hosea 6:1), סמר (Ps. 119:120), יחם (Deut. 19:6), בל (Dan. 6:15), נתן (Gen. 38:9), דש (1 Chr. 21:20), נחר (Jer. 6:15), יהל (Job 31:26), אט (Job 23:11), לישא (Is. 10:30), הס [should be הה—Ezek. 30:2 (Lyons)], כלו (Ps. 72:20), הורם (Dan. 8:11), נחר (Ezek. 15:4), ישק (Gen. 41:40), שר (Ps. 7:1), רר (Lev. 15:3), הנחת (Joel 4:11), וכעס (Ps. 112:10), אט (1 Kings 21:27), למצד (1 Chr. 12:9). At the end of the list it says: "on the name of the scribe, vocalizer and Masorete".
- 19 This is list no. 40 in *Okhla weOkhla*, Ms. P (ed. Frensdorff, pp. 49-50) and list no. 41 in Ms. H (ed. Diez-Estaban, p. 82). And cf. Lyons, 1987, note 19.



dealt with *qamas* and *patah*.<sup>20</sup> This list provides pairs of words that are identical except for the use of *qamas* in one and *patah* in the other. Here too the Masorete ignored the common feature of the items in the list of pairs, and used it as an alphabetical source of unique words. He selected eight words from the first list: נס, יד, בל, דש, אט,<sup>21</sup> הה (Corrupted to הס), שר, רר. The remaining 13 words were taken from the second list.<sup>22</sup>

This acrostic list creates the combination אל ישרהו following the name of the Masorete, and Lyons already presumed that the letter *mem* was accidentally omitted and the Masorete intended to write אל ישמרהו (= “may God protect him”) as he wrote in the first list. Following the way in which the Masorete worked, it may be determined that the missing word was מָ, the only word in the list of monosyllabic words that begins with the letter *mem*. The word, which means poor, appears in a verse on the next page of the codex: וְאִם מָּ הוּא מְעַרְבֵּךְ (Lev. 27:8—“but if one cannot afford the equivalent”). Evidently the Masorete prepared the list first in some kind of draft. This word, which he erroneously omitted, linked the list to the page, and the entire acrostic list moved from one page to the previous one. Lyons has pointed out (Acrostic, p. 145) that in the case of an additional accumulative masoretic note at the bottom of the page, the linking word belongs to the next page (Lev. 26:44—געלתיים [“spurn them”]), and that this phenomenon occurs several times in Ms. B.

#### IV

The third list is the most important of all. It appears on 139r, and was written in two lines at the top of the page. The linking expression is לְמִי נְדָה ( “for water for impurity”, Num. 19:9), which occurs on the same page.

And these are the combinations included in the list:

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- 20 This is list no. 23 in Ms. P (ed. Frensdorff, pp. 40-41) and list no. 24 in Ms. H (ed. Diez-Estaban, pp. 65-67).
- 21 The word אט occurs in Scripture once with a *qamas* and once with a *patah*. The list of *Okhla weOkhla* includes the word vocalized with a *qamas*. However the Masorete brought both words as single occurrences.
- 22 Cf. also: Lyons, 1983, p. 365. List no. 23 (in *Okhla waOkhla* Ms. P) is richer than list no. 40, and includes in most cases more than one pair of words for each letter of the alphabet, but nevertheless the Masorete could not have relied on it exclusively because he needed an item for the letter *dalet*, and list no. 23 does not have that letter.

לנפש חיה	Gen. 2:7—"a living being"
לשר הטבחים	Gen. 41:12—"of the chief steward"
ליום השלישי	Ex. 19:11—"on the third day"
לבן קיש	I Sam. 10:11—"to the son of Kish"
לנגד ה'	Pro. 21:30—"against the Lord"
לדבר רע	Ps. 141:4—"to an evil thing"
לאל גבר	Ps. 81:10—"to an alien god"
ליושבי הארץ	Jud. 2:2—"the inhabitants of the land"
לאל חי	Ps. 42:3—"to the living God"
ללחם המערכת	Neh. 10:34—"for the rows of bread"
על שם הכתב והמנקד והמסיים	"on the name of the scribe, vocalizer and Masorete"
למי נדה	Num. 19:9—"for water for impurity"
לשש מאות	Ex. 35:26—"for the six hundred"
לאשר הוא	Lev. 5:24—"to its [owner]"
לקול ה'	Ex. 15:26—"to the voice of the Lord"
לאל זר	Ps. 44:21—"to a foreign god"
למעשי ידיך	Job 14:15—"on your handiwork"
לאין מספר	I Chr. 22:4—"without number"
למאני דהבא	Dan. 5:2—"gold vessels"

In this note as well the basis for the Masorete's work was an alphabetical list in *Okhla weOkhla* (list no. 20 in Ms. P and no. 21 in Ms. H), also included in Ginsburg's collection of Masora.<sup>23</sup> This masoretic list presents unique combinations of pairs of words, the first of them beginning with the prefix *lamed*. In most cases a similar combination does appear more than once in Scripture, but without the prefix, and the Masora points out here the unique combination with the prefix.

Nisi ben Daniel, the Masorete of Ms. B, made use of an extant alphabetical list in order to create his acrostic. All 18 verses that he presented in his

23 Ginsburg, 1885, par. ל 21d. The source is unknown. In the list in Ms. P there are 71 entries, among them three that do not appear in other lists (לכל גוים [Ps. 59:9]—added by another hand; לשנת חמש [I Chr. 15:10]—no verse without the letter *lamed* exists in Scripture; לתשעת המסות [Num. 34:14; Jos. 14:2—not unique]). In the list in Ms. H there are 71 entries, three of which do not appear in the list in Ms. P (למאה ועשרים [I Chr. 5:12], למשה איש [Ps. 90:1], למעשה ידיך [Job 14:15]). Ginsburg's list includes all the entries in Ms. H (which may have been the basis of his list) and three additional entries (לחנכת [Num. 7:11], לגבול מואב [Num. 21:15], לגבול ארנן [not found in Scripture!]).

list appear in the alphabetical list published by Ginsburg;<sup>24</sup> thus it does not appear that the Masorete searched Scripture for appropriate combinations for his note, but only quoted verses from lists that were available to him. For the letter *nun* he found only two verses (Gen. 2:7 and Pro. 21:30—that is the case in all three lists). However, he needed three verses in order to create an acrostic of his name (Nisi ben Daniel), so he used a verse in which the *second* word begins with a *nun*: לאל נכר (Ps. 81:10).

The note has three parts: the first ten combinations, giving the acrostic of the Masorete's name; the title "on the name of the scribe, vocalizer and Masorete" and seven additional combinations. Do they also constitute an acrostic? Putting together the appropriate letters gives a meaningless combination: משאקאמאם. Since the other two masoretic notes end with the blessing אל יש[מ]רהו אל, Lyons presumed that in this list the blessing is suggested in four of the verses, and to do so the Masorete used several letters in each verse, but not systematically.<sup>25</sup> But had he wanted to create the blessing "yishmerehu el", he could have used the same technique he implemented in all three acrostics and found the letters in the alphabetical lists in *Okhla weOkhla*. He also had enough space for writing; on the contrary, according to Lyons' explanation, he continued and gave four "superfluous" combinations that are beyond the acrostic.

Thus it is only reasonable to look for a continuation of the acrostic signature in the part that follows the name of the Masorete. In the first acrostic he also wrote "on the name of the scribe and vocalizer" after the Masorete's name and continued with the blessing "yishmerehu el". One should note that the second signature is not identical to the first, since it has the additional epithet "Hakohen"; perhaps the third signature offers additional information not provided in the first two signatures. But what could be the meaning of the letters משאקאמאם? Could they represent the provenance of the Masorete?

I would like to suggest that the acrostic signature should be read with one slight change: משאקאמאד (the final letter *dalet* instead of *mem*). From the last combination דהבא דמאני, the *dalet*, the first letter of the second word, should be used rather than the *mem*, the second letter of the first word, as he did in the combination לאל נכר (see above, the combination from Ps. 81:10), and for the same reason. In the masoretic list he was using there is only one combination beginning with the letter *dalet*, and he already used it in order to write his father's name Daniel. Therefore he looked for another combination

24 The verse לאל זר (Ps. 44:21) is found only in Ginsburg's list and in neither of the two lists in *Okhla waOkhla*.

25 למי נדה, לשש מאות, לאשר הוא, לקול ה', לאל זר.

in which the second word begins with *dalet*, and cited the only combination that suited that requirement.

The town Shaqlawa (Kurdish: شه قلا وه; syriac: عملاق) is in the Kurdish region of northeastern Iraq, at the foot of Mount Safeen, about 50 km. north of Erbil. Today it has a population of about 25,000, most of them Kurds and a small Assyrian minority.<sup>26</sup> The ancient, documented name of the town is Shaqabad.<sup>27</sup> The suffix *abad* means “city, a settled place” and is very common in place names in Iran, Pakistan and India.<sup>28</sup> The suffix *amad* may be a phonetic equivalent of *abad*, in which the labial letters *b* and *m* are interchanged.

In conclusion Shaqabad/Shaqalawa was the town from which Nisi ben Daniel came, and to which he referred in his acrostic signature.<sup>29</sup>

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- 26 In the first half of the twentieth century there was a small Jewish community in Shaqlawa, and its populace immigrated to Israel in 1950-1951. Cf. Yonah, Vol. 1, p. 192.
- 27 Or other variants, such as Shqlabad, Shaqlabaz, Shaqlabund. The source for this assertion is in websites and I wish to thank my son Ido, for his help in locating them. Cf.: <https://www.facebook.com/Shaqalawa.Page/info>; <http://www.ishtartv.com/en/viewarticle,36256.html>.
- 28 Cf., for example, Farskicionary, English-Persian (Iranian History Glossary) in the website: <http://www.fouman.com/Y/Farsi4-Islamabad>, which says: “-abad is a Persian and Urdu place name suffix which means inhabited place or city”.
- 29 Aron Dotan presumed that the name of the scribe and Masorete of the manuscript, Nisi, alludes to his connection to Iran or Babylonia [Iraq], since there are figures from those places with that name: Nisi Nahawani, Rosh Hagola in Baghdad at the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the tenth, and Nisi ben Noah the Karaite, who lived in Iran in the eleventh century (Dotan, 2005b, p. 34; Dotan, 1993, p. 50). However, the name Nisi cannot be taken as evidence of the writer’s provenance because it is common throughout the East and documented in Egypt, Eretz Israel and Syria as well. **Egypt:** Cf., e.g., dedicatory inscription from 1017 in Ms. St. Petersburg, National Library Evr 11 B 225, in which a cryptic inscription reads: *אני נסי בן אהרן בן בכתוי כתבתי הקדשה הזאת* (“I Nisi son of Aharon son of Bakhtoi have written this dedication”; (Gil, I, p. 640, n. 927). **Eretz Israel:** Shelomo ben Yehuda, Gaon of Eretz Israel, wrote to Avraham Hacoheh ben Itzhaq ben Prat, a notable of Ramle in 1030, complaining about a man named Nisi who was entrusted with a sum of money, but denied it (Gil, pp. 138, 189). **Aleppo (Syria):** “Yosef ben Nisi, who is called Karkavi. A merchant in the city of Zova [Aleppo]”, Geniza fragment, Cambridge T-S 16.118 (Cf. Miriam Frenkel, *The Jewish Community of Aleppo according to Geniza Writings*, M.A. thesis, Jerusalem 1990, pp. 41, 172). Likewise mention should be made of a bill of sale for a Torah codex from 1197, location unknown, in which the name of the buyer was Abul’ala ben Nisi (Ms. St. Petersburg, National Library, Evr 11 B 52). Finally a fragment from the “Afghani Geniza” recently acquired by the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem (Ms. Heb 4°8333.4): a letter from Musa ben Ishaq to Abu Nasr Ahmed ben Daniel, regarding the purchase of land and a financial dispute with a man named “Nisi”.

## V

Where did Nisi ben Daniel write Ms. B? The fact that he signed his name “Nisi ben Daniel from Shaqamad” does not prove that it was the place where he lived and worked; frequently a person is named for the place from which he moved to another location.

In three masoretic notes Nisi ben Daniel mentioned “the great teacher Aharon ben Asher” (without a blessing for the departed) and his system for reading certain words in Scripture.<sup>30</sup> Scholars have concluded from this fact that the words were written during Aharon ben Asher’s lifetime.<sup>31</sup> If Nisi ben Daniel lived and worked in a distant country, how could he have known Aharon ben Asher, regarded him as “the great teacher” and known details regarding pronunciation and Masora attributed to him? It may be more likely that he originated from the mountains of Kurdistan, but at some point in his life moved to Eretz Israel, learned the reading techniques and Masora of its sages, and perhaps even knew the great teacher Aharon ben Asher personally and studied with him. Only after that did he write Ms. B in accordance with the Tiberian Masora.

In this context the question of the dissemination of Tiberian vocalization (and the cantillation signs and *ge'ayot* [stress marks] associated with it) should arise. Qirqisani’s testimony from 937 regarding the widespread dissemination of Babylonian vocalization in the East in the tenth century is well known: “In

30 These are the three notes that mention Ben Asher:

(1) Gen. 49:20:

מלמד הגדול בן אשר מעדני מלך יערפו טל ממערה גבע תערכו לו >נחלי מים< ויש אומרים מעדני מלך יערפו טל ממערה-גבע תערכו-לו.

(“The great teacher Ben Asher [reads the first word in every pair of words with the accent *merkha*]: royal dainties (Gen. 49:20) dripping dew (Deut. 33:28) from Ma’are Geva’ (Jud. 20:33) compare to him (Is. 40:18) <streams of water> (Deut. 10:7). And some say: [that these pairs of words should be combined by hyphens]”.

(2) Lev. 20:17:

מלמד הגדול בן אשר בת אביו או בת-אמו ויש אמרים בת אביו או-בת-אמו

(“The great teacher Ben Asher [reads]: “daughter of his father or daughter of his mother”, and some say “daughter of his father or daughter of his mother.”) Again the distinction regards the presence or absence of hyphens.

(3) Ex. 35:9: A lengthy accumulative masoretic note in the upper and left margins, including eleven pairs of words from Scripture: unique words in their appearance at the beginning of a verse, a similar word beginning with a conjunctive *waw*, also unique at the beginning of a verse, such as אבני/ואבני. At the end of the masoretic note the Masorete wrote “according to the great teacher”, attributing the note to Ben Asher.

31 Ginsburg, 1897, pp. 249-250, 470; Margoliouth, p. 38; Kahle, 1951, p. 167; Dotan, 1993, pp. 43-44.

fact Babylonian reading has filled the world, since it has spread from the border of Raqa to the border of China, by length and by width and among most of the inhabitants of Aljazira and Khurasan and Faris and Kirman and Persia and Isfahan and Yamama and Bahrein and Yemen and beyond.”<sup>32</sup>

And what were the borders of the dissemination of Tiberian vocalization in the tenth century? There are very few manuscripts of Scripture from the tenth or eleventh centuries that contain colophons by which their provenance can be determined precisely. The Codicological Data-Base of the Hebrew Palaeography Project of the National Library of Israel and the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities (SfarData) cites five Biblical manuscripts written in Eretz Israel in the tenth and eleventh centuries, three from Egypt, one from Qairwan and only one, written by Walid ben Hassan Hacoheh from Kufa (in Iraq), but its place of writing is not given explicitly.<sup>33</sup> In my opinion it is difficult to presume that in Kurdistan a scribe would have had sufficient knowledge of Tiberian vocalization to be aware of such details of punctuation.

In a detailed article on the Masora of Ms. B, Dotan concluded that “even if the Manuscript maintains a clearly Tiberian text, its Masora reveals remnants of Eastern Masora”. In fact “there is hardly an ancient manuscript that does not contain Babylonian remnants . . . , but the weight of evidence is their total mass.”<sup>34</sup> Dotan did indeed detail notable and systematic “Babylonian” features in the Masora of this manuscript. However, massive Babylonian remnants in the Masora of a manuscript do not prove that its Masoretic reading tradition is Babylonian, and Shmuel ben Yaaqov demonstrates this: the Masora of Ms. L<sup>M</sup> which he copied is to a great degree based on Babylonian Masora, more so

32 وذلك ان قراءة العراق ملاء العالم اذ كان ذلك من حد الرقة الى حد الصين طولا وعرضا واكثر من في الجزيرة وخراسان وفارس وكرمان واصفهان واليامة والبحرين واليمن وغير ذلك

*Kitab al-Anwar*, II:16 (Nemoy, I, p. 135). The translation is based on Klar, pp. 33-34. According to Klar, Aljazira is the northern part of Mesopotamia, Raqa is one of the cities of Aljazira (Ar-Raqqah on river Perth, in Syria), Khurasan is in the east of Iran, Faris and Kirman in its south, Yamama and Bahrein are in The Arabian Peninsula.

33 Eretz Israel: Ms. Prophets, Cairo from 895 (many have cast doubts regarding the reliability of its colophon); Ms. Ben Boya'a from 929 (St. Petersburg Evr II B 17); Ms. Yosef ben Ya'aqov HaMa'arvi from 989 (St. Petersburg Evr II B 39); Ms. Zekharia haSofer ben 'Anan from the year 1021 (St. Petersburg Evr II B 8); and an additional manuscript by the same scribe from the year 1028 (from the Karaite synagogue in Cairo, Gottheil 13). Egypt: Ms. Sahalan ben Avraham from 954 (Gaster Geniza 2); Ms. L from 1009; Ms. Mevorakh ben Yeshu'a ben Sa'adya haLevi from 1023 (St. Petersburg Evr I 4160). Qairwan: Ms. St. Petersburg Evr II B 124. Iraq?: Ms. Walid ben Hasan HaCohen from the city of Kufa from 1022 (St. Petersburg Evr II B 59).

34 Dotan, 2005b. The citations are from that study—*Ibid.*, p. 40.

than any Tiberian manuscript known to us; however in Ms. L, which he also copied the influence of Babylonian Masora is not particularly noticeable.<sup>35</sup>

Dotan indicated that in one case the conjunctive *waw* before a letter vocalized with a *shwa* is vocalized both with a *hiriq* and a *shuruq* (וְשֵׁעִיר—Num. 29:16).<sup>36</sup> If this is not just a slip of the pen, it may be a trace of the Babylonian reading tradition of the vocalizer. According to the Babylonian version the letter *waw* before a letter vocalized with a *shwa* is always vocalized with a *hiriq* (Yeivin, 1985, pp. 1152-1156).<sup>37</sup>

If in fact Nisi originated in Kurdistan, in the East, but wrote his manuscript in Eretz Israel, it would be easier to explain his notably Tiberian Masora together with the Babylonian remnants that Dotan pointed out.

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35 Regarding Ms. L<sup>M</sup>, cf. Breuer.

36 Dotan, 2005b, p. 39

37 Dotan indicates there that in dozens occurrences the conjunctive *waw* is punctuated with *hiriq* before the letters װ or ם with *shewa* (e.g. וְשֵׁעִיר—Nu 28, 15). However, an examination of the manuscript's photograph shows that the dot in the letter *waw* indicates a *shuruq* and not a *hiriq*. The low location of the dot within the letter *waw* is a result of the graphic figure of the successive letter (װ, ם, ץ, and also ך and ן).

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