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Pentateuch (Genesis 1:16b-32:10)
In Hebrew, manuscript on parchment
Yemen, 1400-1500

28 folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil in Arabic numerals in upper margins and/or upper-outer corners, incomplete (modern collation: i^s ii² iii^s iv² v^s), midpoints of quires generally dotted in the upper-outer corner of the middle opening (ff. 4v, 14v, 24v), ruled in blind (justification approximately 210 x 155 mm), prickings visible in outer edges toward rear of volume, double-column text written in Yemenite square script in brown ink in 22 lines to a column, justification of lines via dilation or contraction of final letters, full Tiberian vocalization and accentuation of biblical text, Masorah magna and Masorah parva written in a smaller hand in upper, outer, and lower margins and between columns, parts of some notes written in a zigzag pattern (ff. 3v, 4, 6, 7v, 8, 14v, 17, 23), Tetragrammaton abbreviated (in the Masorah only) to three letters yod in a triangle formation, new parashiyyot indicated via enlarged, flourished, hollow marginal letters samekh accompanied by a verse tally and mnemonic for the previous parashah, later marginal aliyyah markers, addition by primary hand of missing line of text on f. 26v, vowel points re-inked(?) on, e.g., ff. 18, 22, 27v, all leaves separated and mounted on guards, staining and dampstaining throughout, particularly strong on ff. 1, 8v-11, 19v-20, 28v, damage in outer columns of ff. 1-3 affecting several lines of text, damage in edges of several other leaves usually without loss of text, dampstaining obscuring some text in inner columns at head of ff. 1-8, small hole in inner column of f. 18 affecting a couple words, small hole in inner column of f. 25 affecting a couple letters. Modern binding, three-quarters morocco over cloth boards, warped and very slightly scuffed, spine in six compartments with raised bands, Montefiore shelfmark (4) lettered in gilt in second-lowest compartment, modern paper pastedowns and flyleaves, Montefiore shelfmark ticket adhering to pastedown of lower board. Dimensions 290 x 215 mm.

A sizable portion of the book of Genesis, accompanied by the text of the *Masorah*, copied by a skilled, careful scribe in accordance with traditions preserved by the Yemenite Jewish community. This copy is one of only a handful of pre-1500 biblical Yemenite manuscripts produced on parchment known to have been offered publicly for sale in the last half-century. That and its sound provenance make it a valuable and rare witness to the transmission of the Hebrew Bible.

PROVENANCE

1. While no colophon has been preserved, it is possible to approximately localize and date this manuscript on paleographical grounds to Yemen of the fifteenth century. (According to the National Library of Israel, it may date from as early as the fourteenth century.)
2. The Judith Lady Montefiore College in Ramsgate, England, a Jewish theological seminary founded in 1869, owned an important library of Hebrew printed books and manuscripts. The present manuscript features a faint impression of the library stamp of the institution, known in Hebrew as Yeshivat Ohel Mosheh vi-Yehudit, on f. 2.

3. Between 1898 and 2001, most of the Montefiore manuscripts, including ours, were placed on permanent deposit at Jews' College in London. A catalogue was published in 1904, and in it our manuscript is described as comprising 89 folios containing the text of Genesis (from 1:16), Exodus, and Leviticus (through 2:3a), bound in an "Oriental binding." A microfilm of the codex sent to Jerusalem in 1956 (see Online Resources) would seem to indicate that by that point only 28 folios remained, though the older binding, with numerous inscriptions in Arabic characters, appears to be intact. This was subsequently replaced with the book's current binding, and a paper ticket bearing the manuscript's shelfmark was attached to the pastedown of the lower board.
4. In 2001, the manuscripts deposited at Jews' College were returned to the trustees of the Montefiore Endowment Committee of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation in London.
5. New York, Sotheby's, *Important Hebrew Manuscripts from the Montefiore Endowment*, October 27-28, 2004, lot 1.

TEXT

ff. 1-28v, Genesis 1:16b-32:10, incipit, "le-memshelet ha-yom ve-et ha-ma'or ha-katon le-memshelet ha-lailah ve-et ha-kokhavim... shuv le-artsekha u-le-moladtekha ve-eitivah immakh."

Rabbinic law requires that a Torah scroll be written without punctuation, vocalization, or accentuation in order to be considered fit for ritual use in the synagogue. Words are separated by spaces, paragraph divisions break up the flow of the text, and four letters (*alef*, *he*, *vav*, and *yod*) are frequently used to mark certain vowels, but even with these devices, the correct pronunciation and parsing of the biblical text into intelligible units is not readily apparent from its appearance in a scroll. Instead, Jews in antiquity relied on inherited reading traditions, passed down orally from one generation to the next, in order to understand the Bible.

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

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

While the Jewish community of Yemen, whose roots stretch back to antiquity (and possibly to the Second Temple period), had long used the Babylonian (supralinear) system of vocalization and accentuation when transcribing Torah codices, it, too, gradually adopted the Tiberian method (Goshen-Gottstein, 1962), probably under the influence of Maimonides, whom

Yemenite Jews revered as a halakhic (Jewish legal) authority (Qafih, 1950). Because of the high degree of exactitude with which Yemenite biblical manuscripts were copied and their adherence to the prescriptions of the *Masorah*, modern researchers consider these volumes to be valuable witnesses to the Ben-Asher tradition (Ya'akov, 2013; though cf. Goshen-Gottstein, 1962 and 1963). Indeed, the great Bible scholar Mordechai Breuer saw the fact that the eclectic version of the Bible that he had edited turned out, post facto, to match the tradition reflected in Yemenite manuscripts as proof positive of the soundness of the methodology he had employed in making his editorial determinations (Breuer, 1989).

According to Yosef Tobi, Yemenite Jews have been referring to their codices of the Bible, and especially of the Pentateuch, as *tijan* (singular, *taj*; Arabic for "crown") since the High Middle Ages (Torah scrolls, by contrast, were called *sefarim*) (Tobi, 2004-2005). As explained by David Stern, the term originated as a superlative epithet specifically for the Aleppo Codex, perhaps under the influence of rabbinic comparisons of the Torah to a crown and was subsequently extended to describe all deluxe model biblical codices (Stern, 2019).

The main differences between *tijan* and Hebrew Bibles copied in other parts of the Jewish world concern minute details of the biblical text, its vocalization, and its accentuation. For example, *tijan* use of the plural form *va-yihyu* (they were), rather than the singular *va-yehi*, in Gen. 9:29 (see here, f. 7). In addition, Yemenites break up the weekly Torah portions into different *aliyyah* units than do other Jewish communities. Because print technology only arrived in Yemen at a relatively late stage as compared with most parts of Europe, the text of the *taj* remained in manuscript until the end of the nineteenth century, when Yemenite Jews began arriving in Palestine in large numbers. The *editio princeps* was published in Jerusalem by Rabbis Shalom Eraki Katz and Abraham Naddaf in 1894-1901. Since then, it has been reprinted many times, including in a semi-critical edition published by Aaron Amram in 2004-2005, for which the editor used sixteen manuscript *tijan* from before 1500, as well as six others copied thereafter.

The present manuscript *taj* comprises over half of the book of Genesis, accompanied by the text of the *Masorah magna* and *parva*. After each Torah portion a line is skipped, in which are written the number of verses in that portion, as well as a mnemonic device for remembering that number; in addition, a special decorative flourish in the shape of the letter *samekh* (standing for *sidrah* = "[Torah] portion") has been inserted in the margin to indicate the start of the next portion. As is typical in Yemenite manuscripts, the vocalizer used the *rafeh* symbol, which takes the shape of a short horizontal line, not only to mark the fricative realization of the letters *bet*, *gimel*, *dalet*, *kaf*, *pe*, and *tav*, but also to indicate (some) instances where the letters *alef* and *he* have no consonantal value (Tobi, 2004-2005).

While it is true that Yemenite biblical codices in general are somewhat plentiful, especially in American collections (as explained by Goshen-Gottstein, 1962; see Isaac, 1999, for a survey of several American and European libraries), the vast majority of these manuscripts were copied in the seventeenth century or later (see, for example, the catalogues of Yemenite manuscripts compiled by Golb, 1972, and Tobi, 1982). By contrast, *tijan* from before the year 1500, especially those written on parchment, are relatively rarer. Indeed, in the past fifty years, only five or six substantial Yemenite Pentateuch manuscripts copied in this period on vellum are known to have been sold by major auction houses.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

TM 1435, digitized black-and-white microfilm

[https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990001863820205171/NLI#\\$FL3175619](https://www.nli.org.il/en/manuscripts/NNL_ALEPH990001863820205171/NLI#$FL3175619)

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