

Contreras, Elvira Martín, and Guadalupe Seijas de los Ríos-Zarzosa, *Masora: La transmisión de la tradición de la Biblia Hebrea* (Instrumentos para el estudio de la Biblia, 20; Estella [Navarra]: Verbo Divino, 2010). Pp. 326, Softcover, €36.54. ISBN 978-84-8169-998-8.

The Masoretes of the first millennium CE have preserved for the world the vocalization tradition of the Hebrew Bible. Students and scholars of Hebrew pay careful attention to the vowel points and other diacritical markings of the Masoretic text (*dageš*, *mappiq*, etc.), and so this portion of the Masoretes' meticulous efforts is widely known. The accentuation marks provided by the Masoretes, the *te'amim*, receive much less attention, though the diligent student of Hebrew will at least be aware of the *maqfef*, *paseq*, and the major pausal accents. Of course, the *te'amim* also have their place in the synagogue, as cantillation signs. In addition to these various signs and symbols used for reading or chanting the biblical text properly, the Masoretes also compiled a large number of critical annotations to the text, which appear as marginal notes above, under, and to the side of the text, as well as various notes and lists that appear as either appendices to biblical manuscripts or as separate works. These notes and lists are collectively referred to as the Masorah. (On the form of the word Masorah and its etymology, which remains disputed, see A. Dotan's article "Masorah" in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*², the relevant points of which can be found on pp. 37–38 of the volume under review.)

I do not think it is inaccurate to say that the study of the Masorah is neglected by nearly all students of the Hebrew Bible. A good teacher may occasionally point to some of those notes that appear in the left or right margins page (the so-called *Masora parva*), but the remainder of the

Masoretic material—the *Masora magna* that appears in the upper and lower margins, the *Masora finalis* that appears at the end of biblical manuscripts, and the independent Masoretic lists—are almost completely unknown to most students, and certainly are infrequently referred to in biblical scholarship. This is probably only in small part due to the fact that the most widely used scholarly Bible, the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (*BHS*), omits both the *Masora magna* and the *Masora finalis*. I say only in small part, because even though the new *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (*BHQ*) fascicles include the *Masora magna*, it will probably continue to be little noticed by most readers.

There are, of course, scholars who have concentrated their research on the Masorah, and though the field of Masoretic Studies remains quite small, the last few decades have seen a relatively large number of important publications, including editions of Masoretic texts, new studies of Masoretic material, and several handbooks for students. One center of Masoretic Studies in these last few decades—probably the most productive center—has been Madrid. This is obvious from the many relevant articles in the journal *Sefarad*, the numerous relevant volumes in the series *Textos y Estudios Cardenal Cisneros*, and scores of other works by Spanish scholars. One leading Masoretic expert, Aron Dotan, has even referred to the “Madrid School” or the “Spanish School” of Masoretic Studies. This means, as Dotan has also noted, that for anyone who wants to work on Masoretic Studies (not to mention other areas of Medieval Hebrew Studies), knowledge of Spanish has become essential. (See the quote by Dotan on p. 9 of the volume under review.) I might add that not only is Madrid an important center of Masoretic Studies, but it is notable for the number of women and younger Masoretic scholars.

This brings us to the new volume by Elvira Martín Contreras and Guadalupe Seijas de los Ríos-Zarzosa, both of whom are of the Madrid School. As noted by the authors at the beginning of their introduction (p. 13), several excellent works provide a description of the Masorah, namely, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah* by Israel Yeivin (1980; an updated version of the Hebrew original appeared in 2003); *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* by Page H. Kelley, Daniel S. Mynatt, Timothy G. Crawford (1998); and the outstanding *Manual da bíblia hebraica*³ by Edson de Faria Francisco (2008). To this list we could also add the long article by Dotan in *EJ*², mentioned above, as well as Christian Ginsburg's *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* (1897). Each of these is very useful as a reference, for learning what the Masorah includes, and for understanding the resources available. The volume by Martín and Seijas is a bit different. It does have much overlap with parts of the aforementioned volumes, but it is much more engaging. It is concerned as much with the “how” and “why,” as it is with the “what.” That is to say, the book explains to the reader how to use the Masorah effectively, and why the Masorah is important. Moreover, whereas the works of Kelley et al. and of Francisco focus specifically on the Masorah printed in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), this book uses a variety of primary manuscript sources, repeatedly illustrating the differences between the Masoretic notes of various important manuscripts.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part One (pp. 23–72), entitled “Texto bíblico y Masora,” the authors provide the background necessary for the study of the Masorah. In Chapter 1, “El texto bíblico” (pp. 23–36), they give the history of the consonantal text and its early sources, as well as some brief discussion of the different vocalization systems of Hebrew.

Chapter 2, “¿Qué es la Masora?” (pp. 37–49), simply defines what the Masorah is, and describes the various guises in which it appears. There is also some very brief discussion in this chapter about non-Tiberian Masoretic traditions, namely, the Masorot that accompany the Palestinian and Babylonian pointing traditions and the Masorah of Targum Onqelos. Chapter 3 (pp. 51–72) outlines the history of the Masoretic tradition, beginning with its forerunners in the early Rabbinic period. This chapter is very useful, in that it also treats the history of the study of the Masorah, up to the present day. Overall, the three chapters of Part One provide a convenient, up-to-date background for the study of the Masorah.

Part Two (pp. 75–232) gets to the core of working with the Masorah. Chapter 1 introduces the most important, basic Masoretic resources in detail. These are: the Cairo Codex, Leningrad Codex, Aleppo Codex, and Codex M1 of Madrid; C.D. Ginsburg's four-volume *Massorah* (1880–1905); *Sefer Oklah ve-Oklah*; the *Masora Finalis* of the Second Rabbinic Bible (1524–25); and the various modern concordances. For each of these resources, the authors describe in detail not only how to find them, but also how to use them. This section is well illustrated with photographs, a fact about which I will say more below. Chapter 2, “Cómo trabajar una notica masorética” (pp. 99–119), is really the heart of the book, since the authors clearly want to see readers engaged in using and understanding the Masorah, not merely to be passively aware of it. This chapter describes how to locate and understand a Masoretic note, how to match the *Masora parva* with the *Masora magna*, and how to use published resources to confirm a note. All of this is very well illustrated with numerous examples from *manuscripts*; as noted above, this book is not limited to *BHS* or *BHQ*. And many of the examples have actual

photographs of manuscripts. This is one of the most exciting features of the book: the multitude of images—clear, readable images, some even in color—that are extremely valuable as an aid to comprehension of the material. As also noted above, images are also used to great profit in Chapter 1 of Part Two, in describing how to use various resources, as well as elsewhere in the book.

Chapter 2 ends with a section entitled “El masoreta te desafía” (“The Masorete challenges you”), with exercises that test the reader's ability to understand Masoretic notes on his or her own. There are numerous such sets of exercises throughout the book, with a grand total of about fifty questions. Happily, an annotated answer key is included towards the end of the book (pp. 249–74), which means that the book can be easily used by an independent learner. And since very few institutions offer courses on the Masorah, most readers will fall into this category. These exercises are a great feature of the book.

The remainder of Part Two (pp. 121–232) is devoted to the various categories of Masoretic notes: *ketiv-qere*, numerical notes, notes pertaining to spelling, notes pertaining to vocalization, *sebirin*, and about a dozen other categories. Each of these sections is full of clear examples, from multiple sources, as well as the exercises mentioned above. Anyone who thinks that the Masoretic notes consist only of numbers and spelling variants will be quickly set straight. Perhaps most surprising to many readers will be the section entitled “Gramática y masora” (pp. 201–11), in which the authors discuss the various types of grammatical information that can be gleaned from Masoretic notes. There is no doubt that the Masoretes had a solid understanding of Hebrew grammar, and that the

study of the Masorah is linked to the beginnings of the medieval Hebrew grammatical tradition. This latter point could perhaps have been emphasized even more in the book, to help stress that the Masorah is not an isolated field of study. Still, that the information is included at all is a very good thing.

Part Three of the book (pp. 235–77) is essentially a set of appendices. Several are just reference lists, like the lists of disjunctive and conjunctive accents, lists of the *Parašiyot* and *Sedarim* in order, and a basic glossary of Masoretic terms and abbreviations. Also included in Part Three are the answers to the exercises, as well as an additional set of exercises. This additional set does not come with an answer key; instead, the authors offer their e-mail addresses to the reader who wishes to check his or her answers. I like this tactic, which engages the authors directly with the readers.

Following Part Three are two indices, listing all biblical and Rabbinic passages cited in the book. Then there are two bibliographies, one with all of the works cited in the book and one with additional relevant works. The final page of the book gives a list of internet sites that are useful for Masoretic studies, including a half dozen digitized texts and the website of the International Organization for Masoretic Studies. It goes without saying that the digitization of expensive and hard-to-find books (like Ginsburg's *Massorah*) and of manuscripts like the Aleppo Codex is a tremendous boon to any student of the Masorah, and no doubt the list of web resources will continue to grow. Missing from this list is the link to the digitized version of manuscript M1, cited on p. 86, fn. 23; this is

perhaps intentional, since the Masorah is, regrettably, not readable in the digitized version.

In case there is a second edition, I have three minor suggestions that would make the book all the more helpful, particularly for students. First, there are a number of abbreviations missing from the list of abbreviations of Rabbinic texts, including ARN, MasSof, GenR, NumR, and RutR. Second, I find having two separate bibliographies a bit inconvenient; a single bibliography would be much more expedient. Third, a more comprehensive table of contents would be highly desirable, and would make it much easier to use the book for reference. This is probably most important for the section dealing with the different types of Masoretic notes (Part Two, Chapter 3). For example, as it stands now, someone just looking at the table of contents might think that the book does not deal with many topics, like inverted *nun* and extraordinary points (*nequdot*), both of which appear under the section vaguely labeled “irregularidades ortográficas.”

In sum, this is a unique and attractive volume, and anyone interested in the Masorah will gain much from it. And those who think that the Masorah is of little value or little interest would do well to read this book; many of them will likely feel differently afterwards. This book is not a comprehensive guide to the Masorah, and it is not meant only to be used as a reference. Instead, the reader is carefully and skillfully guided through the world of the Masorah, and given clear instructions on how to use the Masorah profitably. The reader is left with a clear sense of what the Masorah contains and how it can be used.

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