



# Rediscovered Fragments Shed New Light on a Proto-Masoretic Torah Scroll

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Article abstract

After Edna Engel and Mordechai Mishor had discovered that two fragments with excerpts from the book of Exodus belonged to a single Torah scroll dating from the seventh or eighth century CE, Mordechai Veintrob identified thirteen additional fragments of the same scroll, most of them coming from the Cairo Genizah. This article shows that in the preserved fragments no orthographic differences occur with the (partially reconstructed) text of the more recent Aleppo Codex, while there are such orthographic differences with the other ancient Bible codices. The relationship between the ancient scroll and the Aleppo Codex is looser as far as the sectional division by means of *petuḥot* and *setumot* is concerned. However, the tradition according to which five specific lines must be written above the text of the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1–19) seems to have this very scroll as its source. This tradition was followed in the Aleppo Codex and other ancient codices.

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הַעֵינַיִם הַגְּדוֹלִים אֲשֶׁר  
יִשְׁ-בָּה הַרְבֵּה מִשְׁתַּ



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PAUL SANDERS

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## REDISCOVERED FRAGMENTS SHED NEW LIGHT ON A PROTO-MASORETIC TORAH SCROLL\*

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During the past decade, two fragments of a single Torah scroll caught much attention, since they date from the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>1</sup> They are among the extremely rare remnants of Hebrew Bible manuscripts from the so-called “silent era,” the period of more than seven centuries between the writing of the latest Dead Sea Scrolls (ca. 135 CE) and the production of the earliest Hebrew Bible codices.<sup>2</sup>

The first fragment, MS London, Jews’ College #31, displays Exod 9:18–13:2 in seven columns. Salomon Asher Birnbaum discussed the sheet already in 1959.<sup>3</sup> The other fragment, MS Durham, Duke University, Ashkar-Gilson #2, was disclosed more recently in a *JHS* article by myself<sup>4</sup> and a study by Edna Engel and Mordechay Mishor.<sup>5</sup> It contains excerpts of Exod

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Richard S. Hess, *The Old Testament: A Historical, Theological, and Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 12; Ronald Hendel, *Steps to a New Edition of the Hebrew Bible*, TCSSt 10 (Atlanta: SBL, 2016), 203–04; Armin Lange and Emanuel Tov (eds), *Textual History of the Bible: The Hebrew Bible*, Vol. 1A: *Overview Articles* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 121–22; Vol. 1B: *Pentateuch, Former and Latter Prophets* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 54–55, 60–61; Graham I. Davies, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Exodus 1–18*, ICC, Vol. 1: *Exodus 1–10* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 8.

<sup>2</sup> For the date of the Torah scroll, see also James H. Charlesworth, “Ashkar Manuscript 2: Introducing a Phenomenal New Witness to the Bible,” *Israel Museum Studies in Archaeology* 7 (2015), 66–69, <https://museum.imj.org.il/journal/archive/2015/contents.html>. For the “proto-Masoretic” Dead Sea Scrolls, which are virtually identical to the mediaeval Masoretic text, see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (4th ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022), 37–40.

<sup>3</sup> Salomon Asher Birnbaum, “A Sheet of an Eighth Century Synagogue Scroll,” *VT* 9 (1959), 122–29.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Sanders, “The Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript: Remnant of a Proto-Masoretic Model Scroll of the Torah,” *JHS* 14 (2014), article 7, 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2014.v14.a7>.

<sup>5</sup> Edna Engel and Mordechay Mishor, “An Ancient Scroll of the Book of Exodus: The Reunion of Two Separate Fragments,” *Israel Mu-*

13:19–16:1, including a well-considered “brickwork” arrangement of the Song of the Sea (15:1–19).

In the meantime, Mordechai Veintrob has identified thirteen additional fragments of the same scroll by palaeographical criteria and with reference to the 42-line height of the columns.<sup>6</sup> Two pieces – Cambr. T-S AS 36.19 and T-S AS 37.8 – fill the entire gap between Jews’ College #31 and Ashkar-Gilson #2. Most of the newly identified fragments come from the Cairo Genizah<sup>7</sup> and are kept in the Taylor-Schechter Collection (T-S) in Cambridge. A single Genizah fragment (ENA 4117.13) is property of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Ashkar-Gilson #21 is part of the same collection at Duke University as Ashkar-Gilson #2. Since all the fragments belonged to the same scroll, it stands to reason that Ashkar-Gilson #2, Ashkar-Gilson #21 and Jews’ College #31, whose origins were unknown, were also discovered in the Cairo Genizah.

The fragments show sections from all the books of the Torah except Leviticus and cover ca. 10% of the text of the Torah. Mordechai Veintrob has identified the following fragments:

1. Cambr. T-S AS 36.30: Gen 10:28–13:9 (incomplete)
2. Cambr. T-S AS 36.31<sup>8</sup> + Cambr. T-S AS 37.26: Gen 44:23–46:20 (incomplete)
3. Cambr. T-S AS 37.1 + Cambr. T-S AS 37.22: Gen 47:17–50:23 (incomplete)
4. Cambr. T-S AS 36.36: Exod 2:14–3:21 (incomplete)
5. Jews’ College #31: Exod 9:18–13:2 (almost complete)
6. Cambr. T-S AS 36.19 + Cambr. T-S AS 37.8 + Ashkar-Gilson #2: Exod 13:2–16:1 (incomplete)
7. Cambr. T-S NS 282.88: Exod 17:5–18:14 (incomplete)
8. Cambr. T-S AS 36.10: Num 10:16–35 (almost complete)
9. Ashkar-Gilson #21: Deut 2:9–3:12 (incomplete)
10. Cambr. T-S AS 37.10 + ENA 4117.13: Deut 32:50–34:12 (incomplete)

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*seum Studies in Archaeology* 7 (2015), 24–61, <https://museum.imj.org.il/journal/archive/2015/contents.html>

<sup>6</sup> Mordechai Veintrob, “More Fragments of Early Torah Scroll Come to Light,” *Genizah Fragments* 77 (April 2019), 1–2, <https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/taylor-schechter-genizah-research-unit/genizah-fragments>

<sup>7</sup> For the biblical texts from the Cairo Genizah, see Lange and Tov (eds), *Textual History of the Bible*, Vol. 1A, 101; Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 58–59.

<sup>8</sup> The words of two lost sections have been supplemented by a clumsy hand in the bottom margin, which suggests that the sheet was still used after it had been damaged.

In my 2014 article, I analysed an illustration of the right side of Jews' College #31<sup>9</sup> (first four columns with Exod 9:18–12:6) and an exceptionally clear infrared photo of Ashkar-Gilson #2, which the Israel Museum and the Rubenstein Library of Duke University had allowed me to consult and publish.<sup>10</sup> In January 2015, after the publication of my article, a clear photo of the entire sheet Jews' College #31 was graciously placed at my disposal by Stephan Loewentheil, the sheet's owner. Furthermore, access to the additional fragments thanks to Veintrob's clever identification has made it possible to test my previous suggestion that there is an exceptionally strong relationship between the Torah scroll and the more recent Aleppo Codex.

In my article, I concluded that the first four columns of Jews' College #31 and Ashkar-Gilson #2 show conspicuous correspondences with the parallel sections of Exodus in the Aleppo Codex, while the relationship with other early Hebrew Bible codices appeared to be weaker. The comparison included the three aspects that Yosef Ofer considers relevant for establishing the relationship between Hebrew Bible manuscripts:

The manuscripts can be compared from a number of perspectives. We can compare matters of writing the text, such as plene (מלא) and defective (חסר) orthography, the spacing of sections, and the manner of writing poetic passages in Scripture.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, virtually the whole Torah text of the Aleppo Codex has been lost, except for Deut 28:17–34:12.<sup>12</sup> However, we still have much information about the missing sections, including the plene and defective spellings, the sectional division of the prose texts by blank spaces (*petuhot* and *setumot*), and the brickwork layout of Exod 15:1–19. Thanks to that evidence, I was able to draw the conclusion that the correspondences between the two fragments of the Torah scroll and what we still know of the Aleppo Codex cover each of the three aspects mentioned by Ofer.

Due to the discovery of the additional fragments, it is now possible to describe the relationship of the Torah scroll with the Aleppo Codex and other Hebrew Bible manuscripts on a much more solid basis. I was able to consult an excellent infrared photo of Ashkar-Gilson #21 (Deut 2:9–3:12) from the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University (see Plate 1), and photos of the other twelve new fragments of the Torah scroll on <https://fjms.genizah.org/>. Unfortunately, certain parts of these photos were not clear enough to be analysed with certainty. Therefore, I have limited my examination to the

<sup>9</sup> אנציקלופדיה מקראית – *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, Vol. 5 (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1968), Plate 14 after pp. 847–48.

<sup>10</sup> See the illustration in Sanders, “Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript,” 24.

<sup>11</sup> Yosef Ofer, *The Masora on Scripture and Its Methods*, FSBP 7 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 35.

<sup>12</sup> A small fragment with some text from Exodus 8 has also been preserved; see Yosef Ofer, “A Fragment of the Aleppo Codex (Exodus 8) that Reached Israel,” *Textus* 26 (2016), 173–98.



sections of the illustrations in which the textual layouts and spellings were beyond doubt.

In the following analysis, I will designate the Torah scroll as AS. The orthography and textual layout of AS were compared with the orthography and textual arrangements in several early Bible codices. The following survey includes the abbreviations used to designate the Hebrew Bible manuscripts implicated as well as a short description of these manuscripts.<sup>13</sup>

- AS Torah scroll that occupies central space in this article, fifteen fragments, 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century CE.
- AC Aleppo Codex, Tenakh, ca. 925-935 CE. The surviving part begins in Deut 28:17.<sup>14</sup> The reconstructed orthography represented in the *Jerusalem Crown* was consulted for the rest of the Torah.<sup>15</sup> Maimonides listed where the *petuhot* and *setumot* occurred in this codex.<sup>16</sup>
- GP EVR II B 17, Pentateuch, 929–930 CE. The consonantal text of the codex was written by the same scribe as the consonantal text of AC. Many folios are damaged, especially at the top, while a few folios are missing entirely.<sup>17</sup>
- DP Damascus Pentateuch, late 10<sup>th</sup> century CE. The surviving part begins in Gen 9:26.<sup>18</sup> It has “only one lacuna from Exod 18:1 to 18:23”.<sup>19</sup>
- HP EVR II B 10, Pentateuch, before 946 CE. The surviving part begins in Gen 11:29.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>13</sup> In the present article I do not discuss the 10-century codex Sassoon 1053 (SC), whose arrangement of the columns displaying Exod 15:1–19 was described in Sanders, “Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript,” 11, 16–18.

<sup>14</sup> See Sanders, “Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript,” 11–12, and <https://barhama.com/ajaxzoom/viewer/viewer.php?zoomDir=/pic/AleppoWM/>

<sup>15</sup> See כתר ירושלים: תנ"ך האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים – *Jerusalem Crown: The Bible of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: N. Ben-Zvi, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Book II, *Abavah, Hilkhot Sefer Torah* viii:4. Cf. Jordan S. Penkower, “Maimonides and the Aleppo Codex,” *Textus* 9 (1981), 39–128; עדות חדשה – נוסח התורה בכתר ארם-צובה: – *New Evidence for the Pentateuch Text in the Aleppo Codex* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1992), 50–53; Dominique Barthélemy, *Studies in the Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, TCT 2 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 242–54.

<sup>17</sup> See Sanders, “Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript,” 10. The text can be consulted via <https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nlis/en/manuscript/>.

<sup>18</sup> See Sanders, “Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript,” 12–13, and <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/11364/>.

<sup>19</sup> Barthélemy, *Studies*, 241.

<sup>20</sup> See Barthélemy, *Studies*, 327–28; Lange and Tov (eds), *Textual History of the Bible*, Vol. 1A, 118. The text can be consulted via

- BP Codex British Museum Or. 4445, Pentateuch, probably late 9<sup>th</sup> or early 10<sup>th</sup> century CE. The original folios displaying Gen 39:20–Deut 1:33 have been preserved, except for those with Num 7:46–73 and Num 9:12–10:18. The beginning and end of the codex are secondary.<sup>21</sup>
- LC Leningrad Codex (EVR I B 19a), Tenakh, 1008–1010 CE.<sup>22</sup>

The following sections imply a careful comparison of the manuscripts' spellings (§ 1) and of their sectional divisions (§ 2). This is followed by a brief discussion of the textual layouts in the columns with the text of Exod 15:1–19 (§ 3). Unlike my discussion in 2014, it includes an examination of the textual arrangement in the columns with Exod 15:1–19 in the codex HP.

### 1. ORTHOGRAPHY

In 2014 I listed seven orthographic differences within a somewhat smaller group of manuscripts, which included the scroll AS and the codices AC, DP, BP, and LC.<sup>23</sup> The analysis was restricted to differences in the text of Exodus as far as it has been preserved in Ashkar-Gilson #2 and the first four columns of Jews' College #31.<sup>24</sup> The present analysis covers a wider group of manuscripts, including GP and HP, and also the text of the readable parts of the thirteen additional fragments of AS. Thanks to this wider scope, the amount of verifiable textual differences has risen to 37. All of these differences still relate only to the use or non-use of the letters *waw* and *yod* as *matres lectionis*. Actually, in view of the relatively large amount of text this orthographic variation is rather limited.<sup>25</sup>

<https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nlis/en/manuscript/>

<sup>21</sup> See *Biblia Hebraica Quinta Editione*, Fasc. 18: *General Introduction and Megilloth* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004), xxi–xxii; Sanders, “Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript,” 9–10. The text can be consulted via the website of the British Library: <https://bl.uk/>.

<sup>22</sup> See Sanders, “Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript,” 10–11. The text can be consulted via <https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nlis/en/manuscript/>

<sup>23</sup> See Sanders, “Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript,” 20–21. My analysis also included a scroll sheet from the Loewentheil collection (ES). Since it displays only Exod 10:10–16:15, I omit it in the present article. My discussion was based on Jordan S. Penkower, “A Sheet of Parchment from a 10<sup>th</sup> of 11<sup>th</sup> Century Torah Scroll: Determining its Type among Four Traditions (Oriental, Sefardi, Ashkenazi, Yemenite),” *Textus* 21 (2002), 235–64. In Exod 12:3 ES has the unusual spelling אבות instead of the defective spelling אבת, which occurs in AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, BP, and LC.

<sup>24</sup> Engel and Mishor, “An Ancient Scroll,” 34 and 40, point to AS's apparent writing of לכונא (Exod 10:11), אחריון (Exod 11:1), and ואחריון (Exod 11:8) as single words instead of two words separated by a space, but this is less relevant for the present discussion.

<sup>25</sup> These are some random examples of defective spellings in Exodus that are uniform in AS and the six codices: קלת (9:23), מהית, קלת (9:28), והקלת (9:34), לראת (10:5).

The following survey presents the results of my analysis. The second column displays the spellings in AS and the other manuscripts listed in the third column. The fourth column shows the alternative spellings occurring in the manuscripts mentioned in the fifth column. An asterisk (\*) after the designation of a manuscript in the fifth column indicates that in this manuscript the deviation was eliminated by adding or removing a *mater lectionis*.

The survey is interesting for several reasons. In the first place, it shows that no textual variants could be found from comparing the scroll AS with the reconstruction of the text of the codex AC in the *Jerusalem Crown*.<sup>26</sup> The readable parts of the text of AS appear to be identical to the parallel consonantal text in AC. Thanks to the discovery of the additional fragments, this could be demonstrated for much more text than in 2014. Furthermore, the spellings of AS and AC are always spellings that are found in most of the manuscripts that have been analysed, while the deviating readings occur mostly in only one manuscript and occasionally in two of these manuscripts (HP/BP or BP/LC).

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<sup>26</sup> With regard to the orthographical correspondence between AC and Jews' College #31 / Ashkar-Gilson #2, see also Engel and Mishor, "An Ancient Scroll," 35.



Genesis				
45:8	וישימני	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, LC	וישימני	BP
45:15	עלהם	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, BP	עליהם	LC
45:22b	חלפת	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, LC	חלפות	BP*
46:2	במראת	AS, AC, GP, DP, BP, LC	במראות	HP*
46:9	וחצרן	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, BP	וחצרון	LC
46:12	חצרן	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, BP	חצרון	LC
46:13	ושמרן	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP	ושמרון	BP, LC
46:14	זבלון	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, BP	זבולן	LC
46:14	ואלון	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, LC	ואילון	BP
46:16	ואצבן	AS, AS, GP, DP, HP, BP	ואצבון	LC*
49:6	כבדי	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, LC	כבודי	BP
49:13	אנית	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, BP	אניות	LC
49:15	מנחה	AC, AC, DP, HP, BP, LC	מנוחה	GP*
50:13	עפרן	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, LC	עפרון	BP
Exodus				
2:18	ותבאנה	AS, AC, GP, DP, BP, LC	ותבואנה	HP*
10:9	ובבנותנו	AS, AC, GP, DP, LC	ובבנותינו	HP, BP
10:25	ועלת	AS, AC, DP, HP, BP	ועלות	LC
11:6	גדלה	AS, AC, GP, DP, BP, LC	גדולה	HP

12:4	מהיות	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, BP	מהית	LC
12:14	לזכרון	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, LC	לזכרן	BP
12:15b	הראשן	AS, AC, DP, HP, BP	הראשון	LC*
12:15b	השבעי	AS, AC, GP, DP, BP, LC	השביעי	HP
12:23	לבא	AS, AC, DP, BP, LC	לבוא	HP*
13:19	והעליתם	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, LC	והעלתם	BP
14:3	עליהם	AS, AC, GP, DP, BP, LC	עלהם	HP
14:13	תספו	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, BP	תסיפו	LC
14:14	תחרשון	AS, AC, DP, HP, BP	תחרישון	LC
14:22	חומה	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP	חמה	BP, LC
14:22	מימינם	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, LC	מימנם	BP
15:4	מרכבת	AS, AC, GP, DP, BP, LC	מרכבות	HP*
18:8	אודת	AS, AC, GP, LC	אדות	HP, BP
Numbers				
10:16	חלן	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP	חלון	LC
10:24	גדעוני	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP, LC	גדעני	BP*
10:32	יטיב	AS, AC, GP, HP, BP, LC	יטיב	DP*
Deuteronomy				
2:23	מכפתר	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP	מכפתור	LC
33:12	כתפיו	AS, AC, GP, DP, HP	כתיפיו	LC
33:13	ומתהום	AS, AC, GP, HP, LC	ומתהם	DP

The following survey indicates the number of deviations from AS in the six codices.

	Deviation (uncorrected)	Deviation (corrected)
AC		?
GP		1
DP	1	1
HP	5	4
BP	11	2
LC	14	2

Most of the deviations from the spellings in AS and AC occur in LC, which has been preserved completely. Also in BP the orthographic deviations are relatively numerous. Since in BP the original text of two sections in Numbers and virtually the whole book of Deuteronomy has not been preserved, there may have been additional deviations from the consonantal text of AS and AC.<sup>27</sup>

There are nine orthographic deviations in HP<sup>28</sup> and only two deviations in DP.<sup>29</sup> Finally, in GP only a single deviation could be found.<sup>30</sup> Since most of the folios of GP are damaged, there may have been more deviations. For instance, it is unclear whether in some verses of Exodus (10:25; 12:15, 23; 14:14) this codex had the more defective spellings of AS and AC, or the fuller spellings of HP or LC.

The illustrations of the manuscripts show traces of ten deviating spellings that were later corrected. In each of these ten cases, the secondary elimination or insertion of a *mater lectionis* resulted in a text that is identical to the text of the scroll AS and the majority of the codices. Most of these corrections seem to have been inspired by the Masorah of the codex itself. In GP, for instance, the elimination of the letter *waw* in the word *מנוחה* in Gen 49:15 corresponds with the Masorah of this codex, which reads *חַסָּדָה*, “four defective”.<sup>31</sup> Virtually all the other corrections also seem to have been instigated by the Masorah.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> In the codex BP traces of correction may also be visible under the *taw* of *מצת* in Exod 12:18 and 13:6 (merging of *waw* and *taw*?), but this remains uncertain. The copyist of the consonantal text of BP seems to have been relatively inattentive, which sometimes necessitated even the correction of complete lines, e.g., in Exod 12:40–41.

<sup>28</sup> Of the readable sections of AS, only Gen 10:28–11:29 is missing in HP; see p. 4 above.

<sup>29</sup> Exod 18:1–32 has been lost; see p. 4 above.

<sup>30</sup> In GP the *res* of *אסורה* in Exod 3:3 is quite wide, which is possibly due to the merging of an original sequence of *waw* and *res* (*אסורה*), but this remains uncertain.

<sup>31</sup> The same Masorah is found in LC. The other three defective spellings occur in Isa 11:10; Zech 9:1; Ps 23:2.

<sup>32</sup> See the following Masoretic notes: DP Num 10:32: *מל*, “plene”; BP Gen 45:22: *ב*, “two”; BP Num 10:24: *ל מל*, “once plene”; LC Gen 46:16: *ל חס*, “once defective”; LC Exod 12:15: *ב חס*, “two defective”; HP Gen 46:2: *ב חס*, “four, two defective”; HP Exod 12:23: *ט חס*,

Inappropriate *matres lectionis* were sometimes simply erased, but before a *het* or a *taw* a *waw* could be eliminated by turning the *waw* and the following *het* or *taw* into an exceptionally wide *het* or *taw*. The right vertical stroke of the original *het* or *taw* was erased and its upper stroke was extended to the top of the *waw*.<sup>33</sup>

No orthographic corrections could be observed in the scroll AS itself, which illustrates its excellent quality. However, traces of orthographic corrections do occur in each of the codices. In the readable parts of GP there is a single deviation that was adapted (Gen 49:15).<sup>34</sup> There have also been corrections in the surviving parts of the codex AC, but unfortunately not in the sections that are readable in AS. In AC Deut 28:59 a *waw* has been inserted in the word **מכ(ו)ת**, while in AC Deut 33:6 the *waw* of the word **ימ(ו)ת** has been eliminated by turning the *waw* and the following *taw* into a wide *taw*; see Plates 2 and 3.<sup>35</sup> In AC, there may have been similar corrections in the rest of the Torah. This possibility is indicated by the question mark in the survey above under “Deviation (corrected)”. The relationship between the codex AC and the scroll AS might have been described with greater precision if Deut 28:59 and 33:6 had still been available and readable in the scroll.<sup>36</sup>

In view of the possible orthographic differences between the manuscripts, the strong correspondence between the scroll AS on the one hand and the more recent codex AC on the other can hardly be a coincidence. AS must belong to a textual tradition that the copyist of AC regarded as authoritative. The authority of this tradition is confirmed by the Masoretic notes and the orthographic corrections in the other codices: if in the other codices a correction is accompanied by a Masoretic note that concerns the spelling, this note always prescribes the spelling that occurs also in AS. This evidence suggests that the consonantal text of AS, as far as it can be read, consistently represents the most authoritative tradition.<sup>37</sup> It is to be hoped that clear infrared photos of all the surviving fragments of AS will be made

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“nine defective”. In HP, the elimination of the second *waw* in **ותבואנה** (Exod 2:18; Mas. HP: ה, “five”) and the *waw* in **מרכבות** (Exod 15:4; Mas. HP: ד, “four”) were not instigated by the Masorah of the codex itself. Some deviations remained uncorrected despite the Masorah; e.g., **אניות** in LC Gen 49:13; **השביעי** in HP Exod 12:15. For the discrepancies between the spellings and the Masorah in LC, BP, and other codices, see Ofer, *The Masora*, esp. 43.

<sup>33</sup> See GP Gen 49:15; BP Gen 45:22; HP Gen 46:2; Exod 15:4. Cf. Plate 3 (AC Deut 33:6).

<sup>34</sup> An uncorrected deviation from the standard occurs in GP Deut 2:28: **תשברני** instead of **תשברני** (AC, DP, HP, LC). Unfortunately, the word has not been preserved in AS.

<sup>35</sup> **מכות** is also the spelling in GP, DP, HP and LC. Not only in AC but also in GP, **ימות** was corrected into **ימת**. The latter spelling is found in DP, HP and LC.

<sup>36</sup> Deut 33:6 has been preserved in AS, but the spelling of **ימ(ו)ת** is unclear in <https://fjms.genizah.org/>.

<sup>37</sup> This mediaeval orthographic tradition is not yet attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Even in the proto-Masoretic Bible scrolls there are some deviations; see Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 37–40. An example in

available, so that the spellings in the parts that are not yet readable can also be examined.<sup>38</sup>

## 2. PETUHOT AND SETUMOT

As far as the sectional division of the text is concerned, there is more diversity within the group of selected manuscripts. In the scroll AS and the codices that were analysed, blank spaces divide the text in prose format into separate sections. If a new textual unit starts at the beginning of a line and the preceding line ends with a blank space or is left completely blank, we are dealing with a *petuhab* (P), an “open” section. However, if the new section does not start at the beginning of a line but after a blank space within the line, we are dealing with a *setumab* (S), a “closed” section. The section that precedes the *setumab* may end before the blank space in the line where the new section begins, or in the preceding line, where the last word may touch the left margin or where the end of the line may have been left blank. Two examples of *setumot* can be seen in Plate 1, before Deut 2:17 (first column) and Deut 2:31 (second column).

In many instances, all the codices show a *petuhab* where AS also has a *petuhab* and a *setumab* where AS also has a *setumab*. The sectional division is identical before the following verses:<sup>39</sup> Gen 11:1 (P); 11:20, 22, 24 (3x S); 12:10 (P); 46:8 (S); 48:1 (P); 49:16, 21, 22 (3x S); 49:27 (P); Exod 2:23 (P); 10:21 (P); 13:1 (P); 13:17 (S); 14:1 (P); 15:1, 20 (2x P); 15:22 (S); 17:8 (P); Deut 2:17 (S); 33:12, 13, 18 (3x S); 34:1 (S).

The following survey shows the sectional division in Genesis 49, with the division in the scroll AS in the first column. The verses in the first column occur *after* the blank spaces indicated in the following columns. The grey fields indicate where the sectional divisions in the codices deviate from the division in AS. The horizontal strokes indicate that there is no *petuhab* or *setumab* at this position in the manuscript. There appears to be much diversity among the codices. In some instances, the manuscripts are unanimous (before Gen 49:16, 21, 22, 27), but elsewhere they are not.

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4QGen<sup>b</sup> (4Q2) is the spelling למארת instead of למאורת (Gen 1:15, not preserved in AS); see *DJD* 12 (1994), 32–34. The Bible scrolls that are not proto-Masoretic show more orthographic deviations; for 4Qpaleo-Gen-Exod<sup>l</sup> (4Q11), cf. *DJD* 9 (1992), 21–22; for 4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup> (4Q22), cf. *DJD* 9, 62–64; for 4QExod<sup>c</sup> (4Q14), cf. *DJD* 12, 101–02.

<sup>38</sup> Among the spellings that are variable in the codices but not yet readable enough in the preserved fragments of AS are אתנ(ו)ת in Gen 45:23 (spelled as אתנת in AC, GP, DP, HP, LC; אתנות in BP, *waw* later erased), and ושלש(ו)ם in Exod 14:7 (spelled as ושלשם in AC, GP, DP, HP, LC; ושלשים in BP, *yod* later erased). For ימ(ו)ת in Deut 33:6, see n. 36 above.

<sup>39</sup> Note that the original text of BP is missing before Gen 39:20 and after Deut 1:33 and in some sections in Numbers. The text of HP is missing until Gen 11:29. In GP the textual arrangement before Gen 11:24 and Exod 11:4 is not discernable, but the division before Exod 11:4 can be reconstructed with certainty.

Gen	AS	AC	GP	DP	HP	BP	LC
49:1	P	P	P	P	S	P	P
49:5	P	P	P	S	P	P	P
49:8	S	P	S	S	P	S	S
49:13	P	P	P	S	S	S	P
49:14	S	P	P	S	P	S	S
49:16	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
49:19	S	S	S	S	S	S	–
49:20	S	S	S	S	–	S	S
49:21	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
49:22	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
49:27	P	P	P	P	P	P	P

In other parts of the Torah, there is also diversity, as is shown by the following more comprehensive survey, in which all the uniform divisions mentioned above are omitted. The black fields in the survey indicate that some relevant sections are missing from BP. The survey shows that each sectional division of the scroll AS, the oldest manuscript implicated, corresponds with the sectional division of at least one other manuscript. In other words, AS never stands alone.



	AS	AC	GP	DP	HP	BP	LC
Gen							
49:1	P	P	P	P	S	P	P
49:5	P	P	P	S	P	P	P
49:8	S	P	S	S	P	S	S
49:13	P	P	P	S	S	S	P
49:14	S	P	P	S	P	S	S
49:19	S	S	S	S	S	S	–
49:20	S	S	S	S	–	S	S
Exod							
3:1	S	S	S	S	P	S	S
9:22	P	P	P	S	P	P	P
10:1	P	P	P	P	S?	P	P
10:12	S	S	S	–	S	S	P
11:1	P	P	P	P	S	P	P
11:4	S	S	S	S	P	P	S
11:9	S	S	S	S	S	– or P	S
12:1	P	S	S	S	P	S	P
12:21	P	P	P	P	S?	P	P
12:25	–	–	–	–	–	S	–
12:29	S	S	S	P	S	P	S
12:37	P	P	P	P	P	S	P
12:43	P	P	P	P	P	S	P
12:51	S	S	S	S	S	–	S

13:11	P	P	P	P	P	P	S
14:15	P	P	P	P	S	S	P
14:26	P	P	P	P	S?	P	P
15:27	S	S	S	S	P	S	S
Num							
10:18	S	–	–	–	–		S
10:21	–	–	–	–	–	S	–
10:22	S	–	–	–	–	S	S
10:25	–	–	–	–	–	S	S
10:29	S	S	S	S	P	S	S
Deut							
2:31	S	S	S	S	P		S
33:8	S	P	P	P	P		S
33:23	S	–	S	S	S		–
33:24	S	S	S	S	P		S

Since most of the text of the Torah is missing from the codex AC, the data with regard to its sectional division are based on the lists in Maimonides's renowned halakhic code *Mishneh Torah*.<sup>40</sup> In HP, with some of its folios slightly damaged, there are three cases in which a new section begins in a new line after a minor blank space with the width of one or two letters between the right margin and the first letter, namely before Exod 10:1, 12:21, and 14:26. These cases have been listed as uncertain instances of *setumot* (S?), but they can also be interpreted as *petuhot*, which would correspond with the *petuhot* at the same positions in AS and the other codices. In BP, it is uncertain whether there is a sectional division before Exod 11:9, which was written at the beginning of a new column. In the last line of the preceding column, the blank space between ף׃, the final word of 11:8, and the left margin line is approximately two letters wide. It may be a coincidence that 11:9 begins at the beginning of a new line, but this may also be an instance of a *petuhab*.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> See n. 16 above.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Penkower, "Sheet of Parchment," 249. BP's omission of a *setumah* before Exod 12:51 seems to be due to negligence. A secondary

The following table lists the number of deviations from the sectional division of AS in each manuscript.

Sectional Division	AC	GP	DP	HP	BP	LC
Deviations from AS	7	5	9	16/19	12	5

The codices HP and BP display the most differences in the delimitation of the sections. In BP there may have been some additional deviations in the lost sections. The number of deviations is lowest in GP and LC, with five deviations in each. The number of deviations in AC is higher than I expected in 2014, when I discovered only the deviation before Exod 12:1 and suggested that AC's sectional division in general could be relatively close to the arrangement of the text in the scroll AS.<sup>42</sup>

Remarkably, there are also two differences between the codex AC and the codex GP, although their consonantal texts were written by the same scribe. The first deviation occurs before Gen 49:8, where AC had a *petuḥab* while GP has a *setumab*. Before Deut 33:23 there is a *setumab* in the scroll AS and the codex GP, but this *setumab* is omitted AC and LC. This omission seems to be erroneous, since it ignores that Deut 33:23 is a separate saying about Naphtali. Such omissions of a sectional division occur also before Gen 49:19 in LC and before Gen 49:20 in HP. The latter omissions ignore that Gen 49:19 is a separate saying concerning Gad.

Within the selected group, there are no two manuscripts that correspond completely with regard to the sectional division. The exact transmission of the sectional division seems to have been considered important, but probably less important than the exact reproduction of the spellings. In some of the proto-Masoretic Dead Sea Scrolls, the sectional divisions of the Torah text seems to have been quite close to the divisions in the scroll AS and the mediaeval codices,<sup>43</sup> but there is no evidence suggesting that the division in one of these mediaeval manuscripts has older roots than the divisions in the other manuscripts.

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note in the margin indicates that a *setumab* is required. Initially, the copist also omitted the words *הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה* in 12:51.

<sup>42</sup> Sanders, "Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript," 19–20; similarly Engel and Mishor, "An Ancient Scroll," 35, 40–41.

<sup>43</sup> In 4QGen<sup>b</sup> the sectional division of Genesis 1 by means of *petuḥot* is identical to the divisions in codices AC and LC; see *DJD* 12, 32–34. In 4QExod<sup>c</sup> and 4QpaleoGen-Exod<sup>l</sup> (both MT-like, but not proto-Masoretic; cf. Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 63) there are deviations from the divisions in AS and the medieval codices, such as an additional line left blank to the left after Exod 12:39 in 4QExod<sup>c</sup> (*DJD* 12, 99–100, 114) and after Exod 14:18 in 4QpaleoGen-Exod<sup>l</sup> (*DJD* 9, 19–20, 34). For the sectional division in 4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup>, see *DJD* 9, 58–61.

Apparently, it was also relatively easy to make mistakes in the sectional division. The diversity sheds light on the background of the warnings in the Talmud not to confuse a *petuḥab* and a *setumab*.<sup>44</sup> The correct transmission of the “accurate” sectional division seems to have become crucial only after Maimonides’s rules in *Mishneh Torah* (ca. 1175 ce) had become authoritative.<sup>45</sup>

### 3. COLUMNS WITH THE SONG OF THE SEA

The textual layouts within the columns that include the text of the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1–19) were discussed extensively in my previous article,<sup>46</sup> with the exception of the arrangement in the codex HP. Plate 2 at the end of that article displays AS’s damaged sheet Ashkar-Gilson #2, which includes a carefully planned layout of the Song of the Sea in a wide column.<sup>47</sup> The thirty-line “brickwork arrangement” of this section belongs to the type the Talmud describes as **על גבי לבינה ולבינה על אריח על גבי אריח**, “half-brick over whole brick, and whole brick over half-brick”.<sup>48</sup> The blank spaces in the lines mark the ends of cola, while the line-breaks do not coincide with the ends of cola.

The brickwork arrangements of Exod 15:1–19 in the codices AC,<sup>49</sup> GP, BP, and LC correspond closely with the arrangement in the scroll AS. The same arrangement of the text appears to occur also in the codex HP.<sup>50</sup> The scroll AS is the oldest surviving representative of this tradition.<sup>51</sup> DP shares the same layout in the first 28 lines, but shows some deviations in lines 29 and 30. Contrary to the other codices, DP does not show any

<sup>44</sup> E.g., *b. Shabb* 103b: **לא יעשנה סתומה סתומה לא** פרשה פתוחה **לא יעשנה פתוחה** “an open paragraph, one may not render it closed; a closed one may not be rendered open”. See further Josef M. Oesch, “Skizze einer formalen Gliederungshermeneutik der Sifre Tora,” in Marjo C.A. Korpel and Josef M. Oesch (eds.), *Unit Delimitation in Biblical Hebrew and Northwest Semitic Literature*, Pericope 4 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003), 162–203, esp. 164–78.

<sup>45</sup> In the 11<sup>th</sup>-century Washington Codex, orthographic deviations were corrected, while deviations in the sectional division were still left untouched; see Jordan S. Penkower, “An Eleventh-Century Eastern Masoretic Codex of the Pentateuch,” *Textus* 30 (2021), 152–70, esp. 165–67.

<sup>46</sup> Sanders, “Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript,” 4–18.

<sup>47</sup> Sanders, “Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript,” 24. See also Engel and Mishor, “An Ancient Scroll,” 27.

<sup>48</sup> *b. Megillab* 16b and *Soferim* XII:10; cf. Sanders, “Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript,” 4–5 nn. 15–17. The Talmud suggests that Rav, who died in the mid-third century CE, already required a brickwork layout for the Song of the Sea; cf. Engel and Mishor, “An Ancient Scroll,” 34.

<sup>49</sup> The layout of the Song of the Sea in Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah*, Book II, *Abavab*, *Hilkebot Sefer Torah* viii:4, was copied from the codex AC; see Sanders, “Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript,” 12.

<sup>50</sup> In HP, there are traces of a correction in line 24, where **בגדל** (15:16) was probably written immediately after the first word **ופחד**. The mistake was apparently corrected instantly by the scribe himself.

<sup>51</sup> For the different layouts of the Song in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Sanders, “Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript,” 7 n. 21.

blank spaces in these last two lines, probably since 15:19 was not regarded as part of the poem proper.<sup>52</sup>

For an accurate determination of the setting of the scroll AS, an analysis of the lines written above the Song of the Sea is crucial. The 42-line column in AS begins with the word **הבאים** (Exod 14:28). It includes five written lines, then a single blank line and the thirty lines with Exod 15:1–19, then again a blank line, and finally once again a set of five written lines. This means that there is vertical symmetry between the top and the bottom of the column. This vertical symmetry is beautiful, but I have argued that it is coincidental:

There is neither exceptional spacing out nor compression of words at the end of the preceding column so that the new column would start with the word **הבאים**.<sup>53</sup>

In some of the later codices, this is clearly different. In the four codices GP, HP, BP and LC, the first line of the column with the first part of the Song of the Sea begins also with **הבאים**, but also the following four lines begin with the same words as the corresponding lines in the scroll AS (**במצרים, מת, יהוה, ביבשה**, respectively). The copyists of these manuscripts had to make a special effort to enable the new column to begin with the word **הבאים**.<sup>54</sup> This is clearly the case in LC, where the copyist spaced out the text on the preceding page to obtain a page break before **הבאים**, and in BP, where the copyist compressed a part of the text on the preceding page and spaced out another part for the same reason.<sup>55</sup> Also in GP, the page with the beginning of the Song of the Sea begins with **הבאים**, thanks to the conspicuous compression of the text on the preceding page. In HP, the measures are less exceptional, but there are some compressed lines in the final column of the page preceding the page beginning with **הבאים**.<sup>56</sup>

The question is whether this tradition with regard to the writing of the lines above the Song of the Sea began in the scroll AS. Engel and Mishor have suggested that the tradition existed already before AS was written:

In many manuscripts, the width of the last lines at the end of the preceding column is modified so that the column with the Song of the Sea can begin with **הבאים**. (.....) The

<sup>52</sup> Sanders, "Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript," 13.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Sanders, "Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript," 14.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Penkower, "Sheet of Parchment," 255: "They often had to resort to various subterfuges in the column preceding the column of the Song of the Sea (e.g. dilating letters, or on the contrary compressing them) in order to begin the column of the Song with **הבאים**."

<sup>55</sup> Sanders, "Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript," 14–15.

<sup>56</sup> Two more recent scrolls, labelled as "ES" and "BS", include an additional line of text under the preceding column to allow the new column to begin with **הבאים**; see Sanders, "Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript," 14. In the Washington Codex, a page break before **הבאים** was achieved with the help of meaningless line-fillers; cf. Penkower, "An Eleventh-Century Eastern Masoretic Codex," 168.

scribe of MS London–Ashkar calculated the previous column precisely and did not have to modify the letters or spaces in order to comply with this tradition.<sup>57</sup>

In my view, however, AS does not show any indications that the copyist needed to make an effort to comply with an existing writing tradition.<sup>58</sup> The text in the five written lines above the Song of the Sea did not need to be compressed or spaced out to allow these lines to begin with specific words. In the preceding column, which has a usual width, there are some lines in which the text has been compressed, but this is due to the wish to prevent the last word from protruding into the left margin (e.g., line 25 ending with the long word **וּמִשְׁמַאֲלִים**). In other lines of this column there is a blank space after the final word, or an intermediate blank space before the final word which was inserted to prevent a blank space between the final word and the left margin line. Such spaces occur only when the inclusion of an additional word in the same line would have led to the text protruding into the left margin. Similar lines that are compressed or that include a blank space before or after the final word occur also in many other columns of the scroll.

It seems useful to compare the textual arrangement in the final column of the scroll, which has largely survived. The text of the scroll ends in the last line of this final column (visible in ENA 4117.13). When he wrote this column, the copyist presumably made a deliberate effort to let the end of the text of the Torah coincide with the end of the column.<sup>59</sup> At the end of line 19 (visible in Cambr. T-S AS 37.10) he apparently wrote almost the entire word **תַּעֲבֹר** (Deut 34:4) in the – now lost – left margin. There may have been additional cases of protrusion into the left margin of this column, but this remains uncertain due to the damage. It is significant, however, that the copyist did not take such unusual measures in the column before the column with the Song of the Sea.

Since there are no indications that the copyist of AS made a deliberate effort to comply with an older tradition regarding five clearly defined lines to be written above the Song of the Sea, I still assume that the vertical symmetry in this column of AS is a coincidence. I suppose that AS is probably the first representative of this tradition. Thanks to its exceptional beauty, the textual

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<sup>57</sup> Engel and Mishor, “An Ancient Scroll,” 40. Engel and Mishor’s remarks may have been influenced by the claim in *‘Adat Devorim* that in “the Torah scroll revised by Ezra Hasofer” the column already began with **הַבָּאִים** (“An Ancient Scroll,” 40). Note, however, that *‘Adat Devorim* was certainly not composed before the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE.

<sup>58</sup> AS also shows no knowledge of the tradition implying that the word **יְהוּדָה** or the word **יְהוּדָה** in Gen 49:8 (others: **יִשְׁשַׁכַּר** 49:14) should come at the beginning of a column. For this tradition, see Barthélemy, *Studies*, 316–17.

<sup>59</sup> Many later copyists inserted blank spaces in the last column of the Torah in order to allow the text to end in the last line; see AC (conspicuous blank spaces in last nineteen lines), GP (blank spaces in last two lines), and HP (several lines left blank).



arrangement in AS must have become the standard for later copists, including those of the consonantal text of GP, HP, BP and LC.<sup>60</sup> In GP, HP, and BP the text which in AS was written in a single 42-line column was reproduced in two 21-line columns. The five written lines at the bottom of the second column correspond only partially with those in the scroll AS, but the ideal of vertical symmetry was maintained.<sup>61</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

After Edna Engel and Mordechai Mishor had discovered that Jews' College #31 and Ashkar-Gilson #2 must have been part of the same Torah scroll, Mordechai Veintrob's clever identification of thirteen additional fragments of the same scroll has made it possible to test my assumption that there is a close relationship between this scroll, here labelled as AS, and the more recent Aleppo Codex, here designated as AC.

My previous impression that the scroll AS and the codex AC are quite similar in terms of plene and defective spellings is confirmed by the new evidence. In the readable parts of the preserved fragments of AS, the orthography is not only close to the orthography of AC, it is identical with it without any exception. In the other codices there are orthographic deviations, especially in BP and LC, and to a lesser degree in HP. The authority of the orthographic tradition to which AS and AC belong is confirmed by notes in the Masorah and the corrections in the other manuscripts, which apparently were made to bring the text into conformity with the authoritative tradition represented by AS and AC.

As far as the sectional division is concerned, there appears to be much confusion of *petuhot* and *setumot* in the selected group of manuscripts, while several sectional divisions were introduced or omitted entirely in some of them. This diversity explains why the Talmudic warnings against confusing *petuhot* and *setumot* were considered necessary. Although the scroll AS and the codex AC represent the same authoritative tradition, my new analysis reveals more differences between them regarding the sectional division than could be expected in 2014, when only Jews' College #31 and Ashkar-Gilson #2 had been identified as parts of the scroll.

There is much more uniformity within the group of selected manuscripts concerning the textual arrangement of the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1–19). In DP there are some divergences in the last two lines, but this is the only exception to the rule that the distribution of the words and blank spaces over the lines is identical in the selected manuscripts. As far as the Song of the Sea itself is concerned, the scroll AS is probably the oldest

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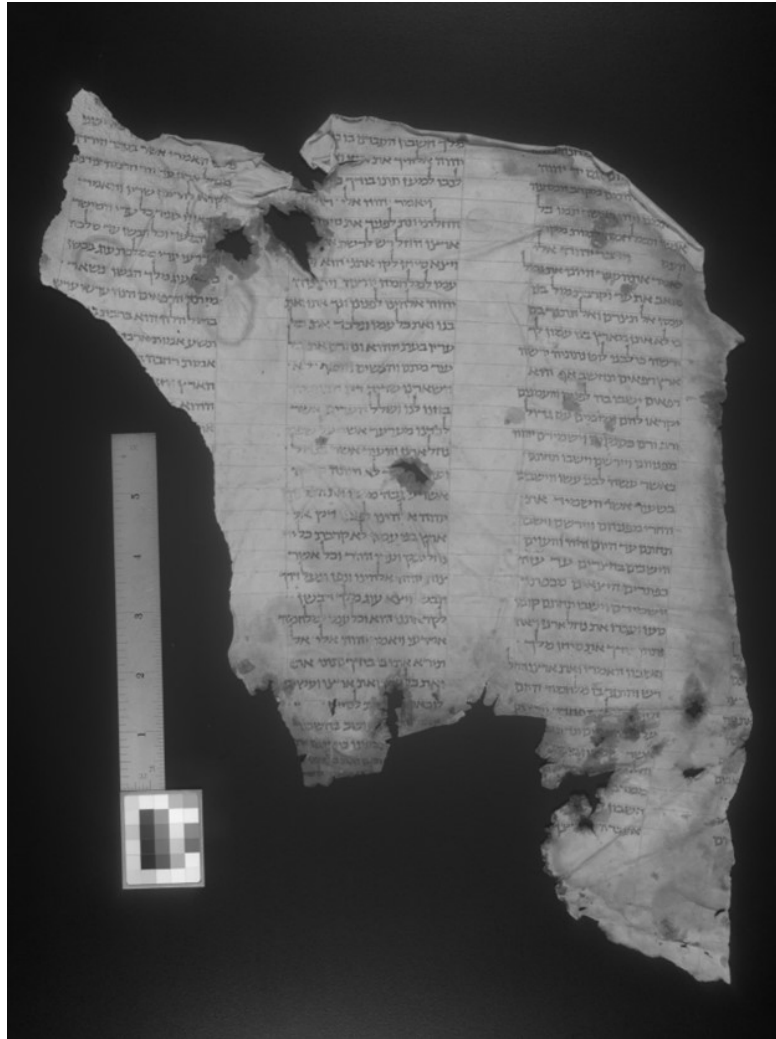
<sup>60</sup> The same writing tradition was apparently also followed in the codex AC; see Sanders, "Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript," 16 n. 47. For DP and the codex Sassoon 1053 (SC), see Sanders, "Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript," 16.

<sup>61</sup> For the lines underneath the text of the Song of the Sea in the various manuscripts, see Sanders, "Ashkar-Gilson Manuscript," 17–18.

surviving representative of this authoritative writing tradition, but it is possible that the same arrangement of the text occurred already in older manuscripts.

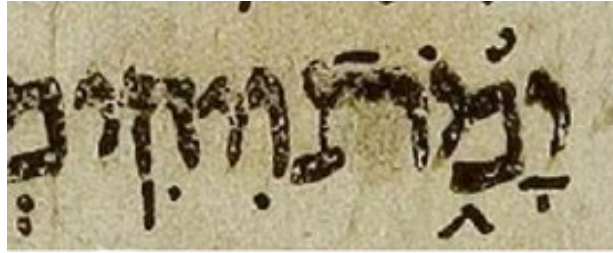
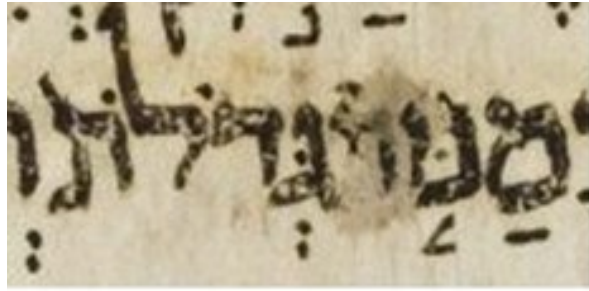
As in 2014, I see no reason to assume that in AS the vertical symmetry in the column with the Song of the Sea is due to precise calculations before the copyist embarked on copying the text of this column. The new evidence suggests that it is indeed a coincidence that this column begins with the word **הבאים**. The fact that the copyists of many later manuscripts made a deliberate effort to enforce a column break before **הבאים** and to begin the new column with five lines identical to those in the scroll AS suggests that they were inspired by the beautiful layout of the column in this specific scroll, either directly or from using a faithful copy. This means that the authoritative writing tradition with regard to the five lines to be written above the Song of the Sea probably began with the scroll AS itself.

It stands to reason that the Tiberian Masoretes selected the best available biblical scrolls when they embarked on their project of producing model biblical codices. It is quite reasonable to suppose that the first-class scroll AS was indeed among the manuscripts that they consulted.



*Plate 1: Ashkar-Gilson Hebrew Manuscript #21*

*David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library,  
Duke University*



*Plates 2 and 3: Aleppo Codex (AC), parts of Deut 28:59  
(top) and Deut 33:6 (bottom)*

*Ben-Zvi Institute Jerusalem*