

Biblical Hebrew Poetry and Word Play

Reconstructing the Original Oral, Aural and Visual Experience

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VI Reconstruction of EBHP

1. Introduction

It goes without saying that the pronunciation of pre-exilic [Biblical Hebrew](#) (c. 1000-600 BCE) varied with "...socio-economic class, professional standing, degree and type of education, religious affiliation, ethnic origin, generation, and even sex."¹ **We should aim at recovering, as closely as possible, the pronunciation that a scribe in Jerusalem 700-600 BCE would have used in reading poetry to upper class Judeans or members of the king's court ([EBHP](#)).** For poems of northern origin this might have included some features of northern pronunciation which would share some of the phonetic features of [Phoenician](#) and [Aramaic](#) such as the contraction of diphthongs. The clearest example of such a poem is the [Song of Deborah](#).

Scribes trained in [Jerusalem 700-600 BCE](#) were likely the authors of the bulk of surviving [JEH](#) e.g. [Siloam Inscription](#), [Lachish ostraca](#), [Arad ostraca](#) etc. The same circles were likely the composers and/or transmitters of most of the pre-exilic biblical texts. JEH documents have been preserved in their original language and orthography

and, [within limits](#), can serve as a guide to pronunciation. Except for archaisms used in poetry, the pre-exilic biblical texts would very likely have conformed to the norms of JEH.

I aim to do the following listed in rough order of importance:

(1) Distinguish the [consonantal and vowel phonemes and indicate their likely pronunciation](#). This will require, among other things, differentiating between:

- long ([geminated](#)) and short consonants;
- different [qualities of vowels](#) with emphasis on qualitative differences that are [phonemic](#); and,
- between [diphthongs](#), [long vowels](#) (phonological or phonetic²), short vowels and the absence of vowels.

(2) Establish the number of syllables and their [boundaries](#) and [syllable length](#); and,

(3) Establish the syllable carrying the word [stress](#) ([primary](#) or [secondary](#)).

This will require an understanding of:

i) Pronunciation – the main differences between:

- the probable [phonology](#) and [use of vowel letters](#) of Biblical Hebrew at time of writing;
- the pronunciation tradition embodied in the [Tiberian vocalization](#); and,
- Hebrew as it is [pronounced in modern Israel](#).

ii) Script and Orthography:

- the appearance of the text in different historical periods and the latitude this provided for mistakenly replacing one letter by another; and,
- the development of orthography and its impact on the range of meanings and pronunciations that could be attributed to the original consonantal skeleton.

Can Biblical Texts be Linguistically Dated?³

Regrettably the answer must be no⁴. For many years the careful research of Avi Hurvitz⁵ seemed to indicate that pre-exilic [CBH](#) could be linguistically distinguished from the very similar post-exilic [PCBH](#) with the Hebrew of Jeremiah and Ezekiel falling between the two. However, recent scholarship (see [Young 1993](#), [Zevit 2004](#), [Zevit 2005](#), [Zevit 2006](#)) has made it clear that what Hurvitz had taken as indicators of chronological change in the language could also have been caused by [different degrees of openness to spoken dialects](#) (of which we know almost nothing) and Aramaic forms⁶, differences due to genre⁷, preferences of different scribal circles, author's [idiolect](#) etc. etc.⁸

At the current state of play we can say the following;

- Probably [CBH](#) represents a literary dialect current in Jerusalem scribal and ruling circles in the late eighth to early sixth centuries BCE.⁹ It was likely the literary register corresponding to the official governmental register - [JEH](#). However, CBH continued to be written into the Persian period. **In the pre-exilic period the normal formal speech used by these scribal and ruling circles [may or may not have been substantially different from CBH](#).** Nb. all pre-exilic CBH texts would have undergone orthographic modernization and an unknown amount of editing in the Persian period¹⁰.
- Probably [PCBH](#) represents a literary dialect current in Jerusalem scribal circles in the Persian period. During this period the spoken languages would have been [proto-Mishnaic Hebrew](#) and/or Aramaic and the administrative language was [Imperial Aramaic](#). Both CBH and PCBH would have been so distant from proto-Mishnaic spoken Hebrew that they would have had to be learned virtually as another language form.
- Probably [ABH](#) represents a poetic literary register, including stock archaic forms, used for poetry set in the remote past by scribes who would normally write CBH or even PCBH¹¹.

It is now clear that much additional work must be done before the usefulness of language analysis in dating biblical passages can be reassessed. This is well described in the last paragraphs of [Zevit 2004](#).

2. Changes in the Pronunciation Tradition of Biblical Hebrew Between EBHP and that Recorded in the Tiberian Masoretic Tradition (early 10th century CE)

Justification of Proposals for Early Biblical Hebrew Pronunciation

If we assume that the Tiberian Masoretes simply encoded a traditional pronunciation, it is reasonable to insist that any proposals regarding the grammar and pronunciation of EBHP and JEH must be supported by a reconstruction of how the form could have developed into attested TH given our understanding of the linguistic changes that took place between EBHP/JEH and TH. (Of course, the same requirement separately exists for BH_{Qum}, BH_{Pal}, and BH_{Gk-Lat})¹².

Tiberian Masoretic Text (MT) has in general satisfactorily preserved the consonantal system of pre-exilic Hebrew. However, it is clear that the vocalization of the MT differs systemically in many ways from the pronunciation of EBHP of over a millennium earlier. These systemic differences, many of which were influenced by Aramaic, can often be identified through comparative grammar. **Among the most important changes, mainly phonetic, which can be detected in Hebrew after 600 BCE, are the following. As you will note, some of these changes had already begun to take place before the exile¹³.**

a) The process whereby the place of stress replaced vowel and consonant length as phonemic went to completion¹⁴. The Tiberian vocalization system (/TH/⁺) marked:

- all the phonemes in their reading tradition;
- such allophones (eg. $\text{פ} = \text{p}$ [f] and gemination) as were required for “correct” reading of the biblical text according to the Tiberian reading tradition.

The Tiberian system did not explicitly mark vowel length - see *Were there Long and Short Vowels in Tiberian Hebrew (TH)?*

b) Disappearance of intervocalic /h/.

- This had been well advanced in the pre-exilic period¹⁵. E.g.

*/laḥas'su:s/ > /las'su:s/ לסוס <lsws> “for the horse”¹⁶;

*/yahaš'mi:d/ or */yəhaš'mi:d/ > /yaš'mi:d/ יִשְׁמַד <yšmys> “he will destroy”.

- In a few cases it is unknown when the intervocalic /h/ disappeared. The most important case is that of the [third person masculine pronominal suffix](#).

- In the post-exilic period this went further – e.g. /lahaš'mi:d/ (EBHP); /ləhaš'mid/ (TH⁺); /laš'mi:d/ לִשְׁמַד <lhšmyd> (MH) “to destroy”¹⁷

c) Elision of syllable- or [word-final glottal stop \(/ʔ/\[ʔ\]\)](#) and /y/ – usually with a lengthening of the preceding vowel

d) <שׁ> /ś/ [ʃ] > <שׁ, ס> /s/ [s] this commenced before the finalization of the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible as is shown by a number of cases where original שׁ ś is written ס s. E.g. ספק = שפּק = “to be sufficient etc.”.

e) [The insertion](#) of a [short vowel into non word-final diphthongs](#)

e.g. בית */'bayt/ (EBHP) → בַּיִת /'bayit/ (TH⁺); מות /'mawt/ (EBHP) → /'māwɛt/ ['mɔ:wɛθ] (TH) מוֹת.¹⁸

f) ['Segolation'](#)¹⁹

g) [Philippi's law](#)

h) [Law of attenuation](#)

i) [Spirantization of the bgdkpt Consonants](#)

j) [Neutralization of velar and pharyngeal phonemes \(/ħ/>/h/, /ǧ/>/ç/\)](#)²⁰. This resulted in the elimination of the phonemic distinction between some words. (See [Lexicon of Unmarked Consonantal Phonemes in Biblical Hebrew /ǧ/\[ç\]](#) AND [Lexicon of Unmarked Consonantal Phonemes in Biblical Hebrew /ħ/>/\[x\]](#))

E.gs.

- טַע = “as far as” - */'cad/ (EBHP) > /'cad/ (TH⁺)
- טַע = “permanently, forever” - */'ǧad/ (EBHP⁺) > /'cad/ (TH⁺)
- חַלַּשׁ <ħlš>. Two distinct roots are found in EBHP which merge when [/ħ/>/h/](#)
 - [√ħlš](#) “to be weak”

- *√h|š "to defeat"

k) Pretonic vowel lengthening

l) Reduction of certain vowels to *shewa* (**/yid'rušū/* (EBHP/) → */yidre'šū/* (TH/) **[yiðrə'ju:]* (TH) יִדְרְשׁוּ "they sought etc.") or, in the environment of a laryngeal consonant, to another ultra-short vowel (e.g. **/yim'caṭu:/* → Tiberian */yimcä'tu/* (TH/) יִמְעֹטוּ)

m) Weakening of the pharyngeal and laryngeal consonants²¹ which resulted in:

➤ The loss of the ability of these consonants to geminate²² which in turn often caused a lengthening of the preceding vowel²³. E.g. בֵּרַךְ = "he was blessed" **/bur'rak/* (EBHP/) → */bo'rak/* (TH/) **[bo:'rɛ:x]* (TH).

➤ Vowel changes before gutturals (laryngeals) E.g.s.

- שמע "hearer, hears" (ms. *qal/a.p.*) **/šō'me:ʕ/* (EBHP/) → */šo'məʕ/*²⁴ **[ʃo:'mɛ:ɐʕ]* (TH). Cf. to the parallel forms in a root identical except that it does not have a guttural - שמע = "hearer, hears" (ms. *qal/ap.*) **/šō'me:r/* (EBHP/) → */šomer/* **[ʃo:mɛ:r]* (TH).
- שמעת "hearer, hears" (fs. *qal/ap.*) **/šō'maʕt/* (EBHP/) → */šo'ma.aʕt/* **[ʃo:'mɛ:.ɐʕθ]* (TH). Cf. to the parallel forms in a root identical except that it does not have a guttural - שמר "guard, guarding" (ms. *qal/ap.*) **/šō'mart/* (EBHP/) → */šo'mɛrɛt/* **[ʃo:'mɛ:rɛθ]* (TH).
- At times these changes eliminate important distinctions maintained in pre-exilic Hebrew - e.g. TH *qal* and *hiphil* PC 3ms. is יַעֲלֶה while the EBHP would have been - *qal* **lyi'c'lel* ; *hiphil* **lyac'lel*.

3. Guidelines I Have Used in Reconstructing the EBHP Vocalization of the First Temple Period Hebrew

(1) *Syllables*

a. *Syllabic Structure* ²⁵

Every syllable in EBHP had one of the following patterns²⁶ which are similar to some varieties of spoken Arabic²⁷:

- **CV = consonant – short vowel** e.g. */la/ "to, for" TH /lə/ לָ;
- **CVV = consonant – long vowel** e.g. /šō/, the first syllable of TH שׁוֹמֵר (* /šō'me:r/ (EBHP));
- **CVC = consonant – short vowel – consonant** e.g. /yim/ in יִמְעָט pre-exilic */yim'caṭū/ > /yim^cä'tu/ [yim^cä'tu:] (TH);
- **CVVC = consonant – long vowel OR diphthong – consonant** e.g. (EBHP) /'sūs/ "horse"; */'bayt/ "house"
- **CVCC = consonant – short vowel – consonant – consonant** e.g. */'malk/ (EBHP) > /'mɛ'lɛk/ ['mɛ:lɛx] (TH). (In TH these mostly developed later into segolates (see <http://www.houseofdauid.ca/problem5.pdf>) though some final consonantal clusters remain e.g. יְיָיְהוָה).

From the point of view of **syllable length** these can be divided into 3 quantities;

- **Short Syllables** - i.e. **CV** = consonant – short vowel;
- **Medium Length Syllables** - i.e. **CVV** = consonant – long vowel OR diphthong; *or* **CVC** = consonant – short vowel – consonant;
- **Long Syllables** - i.e. **CVVC** = consonant – long vowel – consonant; *or* **CVCC** = consonant – short vowel – consonant – consonant .

Words Significantly Different in Pronunciation in EBHP

Numerals in Pre-Exilic Hebrew

c. Background to Syllabic Stress - (See excursus *Evolution of Pronunciation and Stress Patterns*)

d. Marking of Syllabic Stress

- I will assume that primary word stress in BH was limited to: (a) verbs and, (b) nouns (substantives, adjectives, numbers, and pronouns²⁸) in the absolute case. In the transcriptions, the syllable carrying primary word stress are generally in bold with the IPA symbol ' preceding the primary stressed syllable;
- All other words (nouns in the construct case and particles²⁹ - adverbs (including negatives), prepositions, conjunctions etc.)³⁰ other than mono-syllabic prepositions and

conjunctions (see below) are assumed to carry a secondary stress which I indicate by the IPA symbol , preceding the syllable carrying the secondary stress;

➤ Mono-syllabic prepositions and conjunctions, almost always connected to the following word in the MT by a *maqeph/makef* (מקף) clearly stand midway between inseparable prepositions, which are never stressed, and ordinary nouns in the construct (See *Gesenius Hebrew Grammar* 16.1) which carry secondary stress. I have assumed that the following, except when they have become independent forms by being combined with prefixes (other than *wa*), carry no stress. In the transcriptions I have replaced the *makef* by a hyphen.

<u>TH</u>	<u>/EBHP/</u> ³¹ <u>[EBHP]</u> ³²	Meaning
לְ-	/il/ [ʔɛl-]	to
לֹ-	/al/ [ʔɛl-]	don't
מִ-	/im/ [ʔɪm-]	if
תְּ-	/at/ or /it/ ³³ either possibly pronounced [ʔɛt-]	(sign of direct object of verb)
כָּל-	/kul(l)/ [kʊl-]	all of
מִן-	/min/ [mɪn-]	from
עַד-	/ad/ [ʔɛd-]	up to
עַל-	/al/ [ʔɛl-]	upon
פְּ-	/pan/ or /pin/ either possibly pronounced [pɛn-]	lest

(2) Phones and Phonemes (see excursus [Phonemic Structure of Pre-Exilic, Tiberian and Israeli Hebrew Contrasted](#); box [Phones and Phonemes](#))

It must be always remembered that:

- phonemic reconstructions, in our case /EBHP/, show the functional structure of the language's sound system while phonetic reconstructions, in our case [EBHP], attempt to represent how it may have sounded;

- the reconstruction of [EBHP] must be largely based on [Tiberian pointing](#), which is [mainly phonemic](#)³⁴, the consonantal (PMT) text, which is phonemic and comparative Semitic linguistics. This necessitates the reconstruction of /EBHP/ which then serves as the base for the reconstruction of [EBHP];
- phonemic reconstructions will always be more certain than phonetic reconstructions. In our case [EBHP] represents one, out of many, possible reconstructions of how /EBHP/ may have sounded. The most important guide in delineating the range of phonetic variation associated with the vowel phonemes are their ranges of values in modern varieties of Arabic (see [Aramaic and Arabic as Guides to Reconstructing EBHP](#)).

a. Consonants

i. [Table - Consonantal Phonemes in Biblical, Tiberian Masoretic and Israeli Hebrew](#)

ii. [Box - Consonantal Polyphony in Biblical Hebrew](#)³⁵

These are marked as follows in the *Transposed into Tiberian Graphemes* columns. I.e.

- ח = ḥ [ħ] ; 'ח = ḥ (other transcriptions x, kh , k) [x]
- ע = ʿ [ʕ]; 'ע = ǵ [ɣ]
- ש = š [ʃ] ; שׁ = ś [ʃ̄]

iii. *Behaviour of Gutturals and Resh*

In [TH](#) the letters אהחער do not [geminate](#) and in compensation, often lengthen the preceding vowel. In addition ע, ח, and consonantal ה when they end a word, are generally preceded by a helping vowel usually the [furtive pataḥ](#). Regarding א see [Tequ](#). It is probable that in [pre-exilic times the phonemes represented by ה, ח, ע, ר](#) and א behaved similarly to the other consonants³⁶.

iv. [Spirantization of the bgdkpt Consonants](#)³⁷

b. Vowels

i. I have followed the vocalization that I laid out in:

- [Table - History of Stress and Pronunciation of the Hebrew Pronoun](#)

- [Table - Stressed Noun Suffixes in Biblical Hebrew](#)
- [Table - Locative ה](#)
- [History of Stress and Pronunciation of the Hebrew Verb](#)
- [Biblical Hebrew Numbers](#)

ii. ['Segolates'](#)

iii. *The dual* is formed upon the singular stem. For feminine nouns with the dual suffix was added to the feminine form preserving the original *t* e.g. שְׁנַיִם 'two years'³⁸.

iv. [Vowel Quality](#)³⁹

v. [Vowel Length](#) etc.

- It is a rule of thumb that languages which distinguish words by vowel length (English, Classical Arabic) do not distinguish words by the location of the stressed syllable within the word and the reverse is also true i.e. that languages which distinguish words by the location of the stressed syllable within the word (Tiberian⁴⁰ and Israeli Hebrew) do not distinguish words by vowel length⁴¹. **In Biblical Hebrew syllable stress and vowel length were both phonemic but neither carried much of a phonemic load.**
- Vowel length was certainly a prominent feature of the Hebrew language at least until late antiquity. Nb. [Word-final Vowels of intermediate or uncertain length](#). In most cases I [have replaced the murmured-vowel](#)⁴² ("šəwa mobile" = ə) with a short vowel (dotted below) of the quality of the original vowel (/a/, /u/ /i/) that probably occupied that position in pre-exilic Hebrew. Thus, in EBHP, בָּבֶלְיָא [are represented as](#) /ba/ [bɛ], /ka/ [kɛ] and /la/ [lɛ] respectively⁴³. Similarly conjunctive *waw* is represented as /wa/ [wɛ]⁴⁴.
- The use of vowel letters provides a partial guide to the presence of many of the long vowels with the exception of long *a*. In Canaanite, including proto-Hebrew, [in most positions long a had shifted to long o by the 14th century BCE](#). Thus the [cases in which ā was frequent in pre-exilic Hebrew](#) were the result of morpho-phonetic changes post-14th century BCE:
 - the third person perfect masculine singular of the *III-H* verbs - e.g.

*/ra'šâ/ (EBHP/+) < */ra'šaya/ (PH) "he wanted etc."⁴⁵.

- the third person feminine singular of the *Qal*/suffix conjugation - e.g.

**/ya'laḏâ/* (/EBHP/+) < **/ya'laḏat/* (PH) "she gave birth"⁴⁶.

- the feminine singular noun/adjective suffix - e.g.

**/yal'dâ(h)/* (/EBHP/+) < **/yal'datu/* (PH) "girl".

- the second person masculine singular pronoun -

**/'at.ta(:)/* (EBHP) < **/'an.tã/* (PH)

- a number of suffixes might have been *anceps*.

- Long proto-Semitic vowels remained long in Biblical Hebrew⁴⁷. Contracted diphthongs are also long. In other cases, it is not always clear when some of the originally short vowels were lengthened.

- [Heterogeneous Diphthong Contraction](#)

vi. [Word-Final Short Vowels](#)

vii. Vowel Qualities of Reconstructed [\[EBHP\]](#)

<i>*/EBHP/+</i> <i>Vowel Phonemes</i>	<i>*[EBHP]</i> <i>Used in Transcriptions and Sound Files</i>	<i>Transposition into Adapted Tiberian Graphemes⁴⁸</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<i>ī, î /i:/</i>	[i:]	בִּי	Word-final stressed, Non-word-final
<i>ī/ or /i:/</i>	[i]		Word-final unstressed
<i>ī/</i>	[ɛ]	בִּי	In a syllable: (a) not carrying primary word stress (marked with '); (b) not being word-final ending in a geminated consonant; and, (c) the vowel corresponding to TH /e/ or /ɛ/.
	[ɪ]	בִּי	In all other cases .
<i>ē, ê, e /e:/</i>	[e:]	בֵּי, בֵּה, בֵּי	In all cases.
<i>ā?, â, a /a:/</i>	[ɛ:]	בֵּה	Word-final stressed
	[a:]	בֵּי	Non-word-final
<i>/a/ or /a:/</i>	[e]	בֵּה, בֵּי	Word-final unstressed
<i>/a/</i>	[a]	בֵּי	Where it corresponds to TH /ɛ/
	[ɛ]	בִּי	First element of the diphthong /ay/ [ɛy] corresponding to TH /e/ [e:] or /ɛ/ [ɛ:].

<i>*[EBHP]/+ Vowel Phonemes</i>	<i>*[EBHP] Used in Transcriptions and Sound Files</i>	<i>Transposition into Adapted Tiberian Graphemes⁴⁸</i>	<i>Comments</i>
	[ɔ]	בֿ	First element of the diphthong /aw/ [ɔw] corresponding to TH /o/ [o:]
	[e]	בֿ	In all other cases.
<u>ō</u> , <u>ô</u> , <u>o:</u> /o:/	[o:]	בוּ, בֿ	Word-final stressed, Non-word-final
/o/ or /o:/	[oː]	בוּ	Word-final unstressed
/u:/	[u:]	בוּ	Word-final stressed, Non-word-final
/u/ or /u:/	[uː]	בוּ	Word-final unstressed
/u/	[ɔ]	בֿ	In a syllable: (a) not carrying primary word stress (marked with ' '); (b) not being word-final ending in a geminated consonant; and, (c) the vowel corresponding to TH /o/ or /ɔ/.
	[u]	בֿ	In all other cases.
<i>non-phonemic</i>	[e] or [∅] (i.e. silent)	בֿ	[e] when it follows initial consonant of a syllable. eg. <i>qa/ms. imp.</i>

- Vowel length - [see this link](#)
- Vowel quality - see [What quality were the Short Vowels in \[EBHP\]?](#)
- Since the בגדכפ"ת letters were always hard (see [Spirantization of the bgdkpt Consonants](#)) during this period, I use the *dagesh* exclusively to indicate gemination.
- Word-final א = /ʔ/ [ʔ]; and, ה = /h/ [h] (equivalent to MT ה).

(3) Short and Long Forms of Prepositions etc.⁴⁹

אל, על-על, אל-אל, עדי-עד, אזי-אז, והנה-הן. The Albright-Cross school assumes that since the long and short forms of these word pairs probably would not have been distinguished in the hypothetical earliest Hebrew orthography of the north, we can freely substitute long and short forms based on Cross' idea of early Hebrew metrical norms. **We should note that the long and short forms would, almost certainly, be distinguished in [JEH](#) were we to have epigraphic**

remains of the kind of poetry that uses archaic forms (i.e. אֵלִי, עָלִי, עָדִי, אֲזִי) in the Bible. In my view, the use of both long and short forms in the same poem (e.g. הֵן Num. 23:9; הִנֵּה Num. 23:20) suggests that the [PMT](#) must be respected in this matter.

(4) Pre-exilic Jerusalem and Samaritan Dialects

[As discussed elsewhere](#), it is probable that the pre-exilic Hebrew literary dialects of Jerusalem and Samaria differed in that in the Samaritan dialect, as in Ugaritic and Phoenician, the diphthong *ay* had contracted to \hat{e} and *aw* may have contracted to \hat{o} in all positions, accented and unaccented, medial and final, except when another *-y* or *-w* followed whereas in Jerusalem Hebrew these diphthongs did not contract before the orthography had stabilized (see [Heterogeneous Diphthong Contraction](#)).

(5) Proper Nouns

Unless I have a specific reason to do otherwise, I usually follow [Richter 1996](#) with the [usual modifications](#).

(6) Script and Textual Emendations

I have included textually emendation only where the [MT](#) is incomprehensible or very clearly corrupted⁵⁰. All such cases have been noted in endnotes.

When considering emendations I have borne in mind that **all pre-exilic writings which became part of the Hebrew Biblical, or were used in its preparation, were originally written in the [Paleo-Hebrew alphabet](#) with the sort of spelling found in [JEH](#) of the First Temple period.**⁵¹ In the post-exilic period, Paleo-Hebrew scriptural texts were transliterated into the [Aramaic/Square Hebrew script](#) and its [present \(PMT\) orthography](#) i.e. with the addition of many internal [vowel letters](#). A very few texts⁵², may have been originally written first in the [purely consonantal Phoenician style](#) before being transcribed into the orthography of JEH. For each of these stages, the text must be seen in the relevant alphabet and orthography to understand likely confusion of letters and the range of meanings possible. N.b. as the use of vowel letters increased, the range of possible vocalizations and meanings of the text was reduced.

To show the variation of appearance of the texts written in the various forms of script I have chosen the following:

1) *Pre-[EBHP](#) (1000-700 BCE)*

For this period⁵³ which probably saw the recording of the earliest Biblical literature, I have used the script of the [Moabite Mesha Stele](#) (9th century BCE). Note the following:

- Ada Yardeni⁵⁴ classifies the script of the Mesha Stele as “Hebrew Script” already beginning to slightly to diverge from contemporary Phoenician Script.
- Encyclopedia Judaica states, “As strange as it may seem, the earliest clear Hebrew features can be discerned in the scripts of the ninth-century Moabite inscriptions, namely the stele of Mesha (the Moabite Stone) ...”. The Mesha script is not much different from the contemporary script used in the Tel Dan stele. Both the Mesha and [Tel Dan](#) scripts have fonts available on the Internet.

2) *EBHP (700-586 BCE)*

a) **Formal Book Hand** - we do not have any examples of the formal hand likely to have been used for highly respected texts. As a proxy, I have used the script of the [Siloam Inscription](#) (late 8th century BCE).

b) **Judean Official Epistolary Script of early 6th century**. The Arad and Lachish letters are examples of this script and the related orthography ([JEH](#) style spelling) of the last decades of the kingdom of Judah. To represent this form of writing I have used the script of the Lachish inscriptions (c. 600 BCE)⁵⁵.

3) *Post-Exilic (586 BCE-70 CE)*. This was the period of progressive conversion from the Paleo-Hebrew to the Aramaic/Square Hebrew script.

- As representative of the late Paleo-Hebrew tradition I have used the 11QpaleoLev script (second c. BCE)⁵⁶;
- Representative of the Aramaic/Square Hebrew scripts:
 - for the early post-exilic script, I have used:
 - Persian Empire Imperial Aramaic script (6th-4th c. BCE)⁵⁷; and,

- [Egyptian Aramaic script](#) of the fifth century BCE.
- for the later Jewish book hands I have used the [Habakkuk Peshet](#) script (150-100 BCE).

4. Examples of Reconstructed EBHP Vocalization of Biblical Hebrew Texts

a. [Archaic or Archaizing Biblical Hebrew](#) (ABH) *Poetic Texts*

i) Blessing of Jacob (Genesis 49:1-27)

Table 1 - [Reconstructed First Temple Vocalization \(EBHP\) and Transposition into Tiberian Graphemes](#)

Table 2 - [Reconstructed Pre-Exilic Orthographies](#)

Table 3 - [Proto-Masoretic Orthography](#)

ii) Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1b-18)

Table 1 - [Reconstructed First Temple Vocalization \(EBHP\) and Transposition into Tiberian Graphemes](#)

Table 2 - [Reconstructed Pre-Exilic Orthographies](#)

Table 3 - [Proto-Masoretic Orthography](#)

iii) The Oracles of Balaam (poetic portions of [Numbers 23](#) - [Numbers 24](#))

Table 1 - [Reconstructed First Temple Vocalization \(EBHP\) and Transposition into Tiberian Graphemes](#)

Table 2 - [Reconstructed Pre-Exilic Orthographies](#)

Table 3 - [Proto-Masoretic Orthography](#)

iv) *Ha'azinu* (Deuteronomy 32:1-43)

Table 1 - Reconstructed First Temple Vocalization (EBHP) and Transposition into Tiberian Graphemes

Table 2 - Reconstructed Pre-Exilic Orthographies

Table 3 - Proto-Masoretic Orthography

v) Blessing of Moses (Deuteronomy 33)

Table 1 - [Reconstructed First Temple Vocalization \(EBHP\) and Transposition into Tiberian Graphemes](#)

Table 2 - [Reconstructed Pre-Exilic Orthographies](#)

Table 3 - [Proto-Masoretic Orthography](#)

vi) Song of Deborah (Judges 5)

Table 1 - [Reconstructed First Temple Vocalization \(EBHP\) and Transposition into Tiberian Graphemes](#)

Table 2 - [Reconstructed Pre-Exilic Orthographies](#)

Table 3 - [Proto-Masoretic Orthography](#)

Table 4 - [Metrics](#)

vii) Lament of David (II Samuel 1:19-27)

b. Various Short Poems: Genesis 2:23; Genesis 3:14-19; Genesis 4:6-7; Genesis 4:23b-24; Genesis 8:22; Genesis 9:6; Genesis 9:25-27; Genesis 12:2-3; Genesis 14:19-20; Genesis 16:10-12; Genesis 24:60; Genesis 25:23; Genesis 27:28-29; Genesis 27:39-40; Genesis 35:10-12; Genesis 48:15-16; Genesis 48:20; Exodus 32:18; Numbers 6:24-26; Numbers 10:35-36; Numbers 12:6b-8a; Numbers 21:14,15,17-18; Numbers 21:27-30; Joshua 10:12-13 (poetic portion); Judges 9:8-15; Judges 14:14, 18; Judges 15:16 (poetic portion); Judges 16:23-24 (poetic portion); 1 Samuel 15:22b-23; 1 Samuel 18:7 (poetic portion); 2 Samuel 3:33-34 (poetic portions); 2 Samuel 20:1 (poetic portion); 1 Kings 8:12-13; 1 Kings 12:16 (poetic portion); 2 Kings 19:21b-28; 2 Kings 19:31; 2 Kings 19:32b-34.

Table 1 - [Reconstructed First Temple Vocalization \(EBHP\) and Transposition into Tiberian Graphemes](#)

Table 2 - [Reconstructed Pre-Exilic Orthographies](#)

Table 3 - [Proto-Masoretic Orthography](#)

c. Psalmic Poetry

i) II Samuel Chapt. 22 (Second version Psalm 18)

Table 1 - Reconstructed First Temple Vocalization and Text in Pre-9th BCE Orthography

ii) Psalm 23

iii) Psalm 114

iv) Psalm 121

v) Psalm 122

vi) Psalm 130

d. Song of Songs Chapt. 1

e. Prophetic Poetry

i) Jer. 1: 11-12; Jer. 1: 18-19; Jer. 19:14-15; Zeph. 3:1-2; Deut 15:1,4

- [Reconstructed First Temple Vocalization and Transposition into Tiberian Graphemes Based on Harris](#)
- [Reconstructed First Temple Vocalization \(EBHP\) and Transposition into Tiberian Graphemes by David Steinberg -](#)

ii) Amos 3:3-6; 3:8; 5:5-7; 5:10-12; 5:16b-17; 6:12; 8:7-10; 9:5-6; 9:13

- [Reconstructed First Temple Vocalization and Transposition into Tiberian Graphemes Based on Stuart](#)
- [Reconstructed First Temple Vocalization \(EBHP\) and Transposition into Tiberian Graphemes by David Steinberg](#)

f. Prose Texts

i) Genesis 2:18-24

- [Reconstructed First Temple Vocalization and Transposition into Tiberian Graphemes Based on Beyer](#)
- [Reconstructed First Temple Vocalization \(EBHP\) and Transposition into Tiberian Graphemes by David Steinberg](#)

ii) [Vocalization of: Genesis 4:1-3; Genesis 13:4-14; Joshua 7:1-3 - Reconstructed First Temple Vocalization and Transposition into Tiberian Graphemes](#)

iii) Siloam Inscription

- [Text of the Siloam Inscription](#)
- [Vocalization of the Siloam Inscription Based on Beyer](#)
- [Vocalization of the Siloam Inscription by David Steinberg](#)

¹ [Mitchel 1993](#) p. 10.

² Quoted from [Joüon-Muraoka 1991](#) p. 38.

“ In addition to phonetic length, i.e. length which can be measured by some mechanical device, one can also speak of phonological length. For instance, one can regard ך of the adjective כָּבֵד as long, since it is not subject to the vowel deletion rule as in, say, the m.pl. כְּבִדִים, whereas the vowel notated by the same sign would be phonologically short in the verb כָּבַד, as is evident from, say, the Qal pf. 3pl. כָּבְדוּ.

Analogously, if *pataḥ* is to be regarded as phonologically short, paradigmatic analogy requires that *šeré* and *holem* are to be so considered יִלְבַּשׁ as against יִשְׁמַר and יִתֵּן; שָׁמַר as against קָטַן and כָּבַד; שָׁעַר as against קָדַשׁ and סָפַר....

Whilst this is not a historical grammar, it can be helpful to have some understanding of how the Tiberian Hebrew vowel system relates to its hypothetical Proto-Hebrew or Proto-Semitic. Thus the variation between the absolute form דָּם and its construct form דָּמִי can be said to reflect a pre-Tiberian pre-stress lengthening of an earlier short /a/. Again, the holem in טֹב and אֱלֹהִים can be traced back to an earlier long /ā/ (as preserved in Arm. טֹב, and Arm. אֱלֹה or Arb. /'ilāh/. It is for this reason that we shall have occasion below to speak about short or long vowels in hypothetical "primitive" or "original" forms. One can also observe that a long vowel causes an original /i/ to drop out: **širār* > צָרוּר *bag*, on the other hand, **cinab* > עֲנַב *grapes*. Likewise **ruḥāb* > רְחוֹב *square...* but **šur* > שָׁר *horrible...*

[T]he transition from quantitative to qualitative distinction in the Hebrew vowels appears to have taken place relatively late. Transcription of Hebrew in the Septuagint and the second column of Origen's Hexapla as well as explicit statements by St Jerome (4th cent.) all point to quantitative distinction.”

³ See general discussion in [Kofoed 2005](#) chapt. 3.

⁴ The following is quoted from [Young 2005](#) (full references in original) -

Standard Biblical Hebrew, therefore, was used in the post-exilic period, very likely being written at the same time as other works were being produced in Late Biblical Hebrew. Avi Hurvitz and Mark Rooker have demonstrated that the language of the exilic prophet Ezekiel displays a considerable Late Biblical Hebrew element. Ezekiel's setting in the first half of the sixth century B.C.E. puts him earlier than other biblical books which were written in Standard Biblical Hebrew, such as the final redaction of the book of Kings, Second Isaiah, or the aforementioned Haggai and Zechariah....

The differences between Standard Biblical Hebrew and Late Biblical Hebrew are often very subtle. I sampled parallel passages in both the Standard Biblical Hebrew books of Samuel and Kings and the Late Biblical Hebrew book of Chronicles. I found that in my sample passages, there was a typical Late Biblical Hebrew linguistic variation roughly every fifty words. Taking into account all linguistic variations, I found one linguistic variation every twenty-three words. To put it another way: **in these passages, twenty-two out of every twenty-three words are identical whether found in Standard Biblical Hebrew or Late Biblical Hebrew. Standard Biblical Hebrew and Late Biblical Hebrew are substantially the same, with only occasional linguistic differences.**

I have argued that the stabilized MT emerged as the sole Jewish Hebrew Biblical text by the late first century C.E. Before this, however, our Hebrew textual evidence indicates that Biblical Hebrew linguistic features were transmitted by the scribes with a great degree of fluidity. A fifth of Qumran Biblical manuscripts, the so-called Qumran practice scrolls, are characterized by their systematically different linguistic features. In the columns I sampled, 1QIsa (a) differed from the MT in a linguistic variation once every seven to eighteen words. In other words, more often than Samuel-Kings differs from Chronicles. ...

Only about 15% of the Qumran Biblical scrolls have a notably close relationship with the MT. The rest, even when only displaying sporadic, not systematic linguistic differences, still indicate that language was a fluid element of the transmission of the Biblical text... All of our evidence, therefore, for the pre-stabilization text of the Hebrew Bible exhibits linguistic fluidity.

I recently conducted a study of the text of the standard Babylonian Gilgamesh epic, an example, it is said, of a stabilized text in the ancient Near East. Again, I found, even while the content was relatively stable, the language of even this text was in a state of high fluidity. Typically the manuscripts of the Gilgamesh epic differed from each other in a linguistic variant every ten or less words, again much more frequently than Samuel-Kings differs from Chronicles.

... Let me sum up the argument of this paper. Linguistic evidence is just that: evidence. It is permissible to use it as one of a series of arguments in attempting to date biblical texts. However, linguistic evidence cannot be decisive. We cannot be certain that the linguistic profile of the text we have is that of the original author. Nor, even if it is original, is any aspect of linguistic evidence necessarily indicative of only one chronological period of the Hebrew language. Linguistic evidence is evidence, but it is not strong enough on its own to compel scholars to reconsider an argument made on non-linguistic grounds

⁵ The following are quotes from Avi Hurvitz who has argued that it is possible to date pre-exilic texts on the basis of language type -

On several occasions we have attempted to demonstrate the significance of a certain type of linguistic analysis, for discussing biblical texts whose date of composition is questionable. The main advantage of this analysis lies in the fact, that, being an autonomous and independent criterion, one may use it without subscribing to any particular theory prevailing in biblical Higher Criticism. Most of the complicated and unresolved problems of Higher Criticism — literary, historical and theological — simply have no bearing upon its procedures. This analysis seeks to identify linguistic elements, the very existence and the unusual concentration of which may reveal the late origin of chronologically problematic texts. It is the distinct corpus of unquestionably late compositions written in post-exilic times — as manifested by the historical episodes and persons mentioned therein — which provides us with reliable data for determining just exactly what late Biblical Hebrew (= LBH) is. Examples are the book of Esther ... or Ezra... The late linguistic elements in such compositions are unmistakably discernible

Quoted from THE DATE OF THE PROSE-TALE OF JOB LINGUISTICALLY RECONSIDERED by AVI HURVITZ, HARVARD THEOLOGICAL REVIEW 67 (1974), 17-34.

A. External Controls for the Classical Phase of BH

The number of Hebrew inscriptions dated to the First Temple period is indeed relatively small; yet these epigraphical remains, few as they may be, are by no means negligible. These texts provide us with a were quick to emphasize the striking unity and close affinities between the epigraphical material on the one hand and classical BH [Biblical Hebrew] on the other ... confirmed and substantiated the conclusion that both of these linguistic corpora are to be taken as manifestations of the same ancient "classical Hebrew".

To sum up, our evidence indicates that the closest parallels to the Hebrew inscriptional materials dating from pre-exilic times are to be found specifically in that linguistic layer which is commonly categorized as "Classical BH" and widely assigned to the First Temple period. Furthermore, in many cases the isoglosses shared by the epigraphical and biblical sources are altogether missing from the linguistic layer known as "Late BH", which flourished in the Second Temple Period. We have, therefore, to conclude that "Classical BH" is a well-defined linguistic stratum, indicative of a (typologically) distinctive phase within biblical literature and a (chronologically) datable time-span within biblical history-.... In other words, the linguistic viability of "Classical BH" may safely be established through external controls provided by the non-biblical sources at our disposal.

B. External controls for the post-classical phase of BH

... Unlike the relatively small number of available epigraphical Hebrew sources dated to the First Temple period, the extra-biblical sources related to the Second Temple phase of BH i.e., to LBH are rich and highly diversified. Most prominent among these are the Dead Sea Scrolls ..., whose language is commonly referred to as "Qumran Hebrew"..., the fragments of Ben-Sira ..., the letters of Bar-Kokhba...; and, of course, Mishnaic Hebrew This rich repertoire of post-biblical Hebrew sources is further supplemented by a wealth of texts and documents written in the Persian period in "Imperial" (or "Official") Aramaic ... and slightly later, in Hellenistic-Roman times, in dialects belonging to "Middle" Aramaic (Qumran Aramaic ...; Palmyrene inscriptions ...".

It is this vast collection of sources Hebrew and Aramaic, literary and epigraphical, Jewish and non-Jewish which faithfully reflects the linguistic milieu of "post-classical Hebrew" in general; it is this linguistic environment which largely shaped the profile of LBH in particular. Our diachronic enterprise, which seeks to trace and identify imprints of LBH within the OT, is thus securely established upon-and extensively sustained by-the combined evidence of both biblical and non-biblical data; the non-biblical sources providing us ... with the required "external control"....

The distinctive post-classical biblical books provide us with plenty of such linguistic neologisms-in all the divisions of language (grammar, vocabulary, syntax) which have counterparts in contemporary extra-biblical sources.

Quoted from THE HISTORICAL QUEST FOR "ANCIENT ISRAEL" AND THE LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE OF THE HEBREW BIBLE: SOME METHODOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS by AVI HURVITZ, *Vertus Testamentum*, vol. 47, fasc. 3 (July 1997), pp. 301-315

⁶ Imperial Aramaic being known to the scribal, governmental and merchant elite since the mid-eighth c. BCE.

⁷ An interesting modern example is -

'On almost every page three - or at the very least two - literary strata are discernible: Biblical quotations, Rabbinic dicta, and the author's own comments, analysis, and general discussion. To reflect this threefold literary tapestry, I have employed Elizabethan English ... for the Biblical citations; the Rabbinic passages I translated myself in a slightly antiquated English ... and for the writer's own discourse I used the modern English idiom.'

Quoted from the Translator's Foreword of *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* by Ephraim E. Urbach translated by Israel Abrahams, Harvard UP, 1987, pp. vii-viii.

⁸ For a fuller list see From [Young, Rezetko, Ehrensverd 2008](#) p. 59.

⁹ See [Kofoed 2006](#) p. 114.

¹⁰ See [Young, Rezetko, Ehrensverd 2008](#) chapt. 13.

¹¹ Some interesting information from [Vern 2008](#) -

a) What is "archaic poetry"?

"For the purpose of this study and for comparative reasons, an archaism is defined as a rare morphological form found in poetic Biblical Hebrew in the Masoretic Text and also found in Ugaritic and/or the Canaanite of the Amarna letters. Both of these latter sources are dated to the latter half of the second millennium BCE. This definition implies a non-specific time interval between the standard use of linguistic forms in one language or dialect, and their subsequent use as archaisms in another language or dialect."

a) "Archaic features" might be added or deleted by scribes -

" Young's study highlights the uncertainty surrounding the current distribution of archaisms in our texts with regard to the most ancient version of the ABH poetry (Young 1998:75). He discusses the editing of some ABH poetry which is relevant to this study in the Masoretic Text, the Samaritan Pentateuch and 4QExod^c. He indicates the unpredictable and inconsistent nature of scribal processes which have shaped the text. With regard to archaisms in particular, Young discusses their different treatments in the three textual traditions across the poetic texts of Exodus 15, Deuteronomy 32 and 33. He finds that overall, the Samaritan Pentateuch largely preserves the archaic nature of Exodus 15 in the Masoretic Text, but for Deuteronomy 32 and 33, there is a marked loss of archaisms in the Samaritan Pentateuch when compared with the Masoretic Text (Young 1998:79). In the preserved text in 4QExod^c (Exodus 15.9-21) the treatment of the archaisms in Exodus 15 is analogous to the treatment of archaisms in the Samaritan Pentateuch Deuteronomy 32, in that there is a reduction in their numbers (Young 1998:80). The evidence presented here indicates that there is an argument for archaisms not only to be edited out of a text, but also for archaisms to be introduced into a text. An example concerns the archaism for the 3mp pronominal suffix *יָמֵי*."

c) Vern's key conclusion -

"Linguistic evidence indicates that the poetry of this corpus is typologically more representative of first millennium sources. This does not imply that an individual poem cannot be of second millennium provenance. What it does show is the lack of relevance of linguistic evidence as a tool for the early dating of this poetry."

¹² Quoted from [Huehnergard 1992](#) pp. 215 -

We have ... several traditions of Hebrew vocalization; from the standpoint of historical linguistics, these ought, a priori, to be considered equally valid dialects, parallel descendants of a proto-Biblical Hebrew that exhibit divergent developments. [n. 25 - See eg. Janssens, *Hebrew Historical Linguistics*, 11; Lambdin, "Philippi's Law," 136-137.] The methodology of historical reconstruction requires that the reflexes of a form posited for the parent language be accounted for by regular processes in each of the descendant dialects.

¹³ See [Sáenz-Badillos](#) 1993 pp. 69-70; [Bergsträsser](#) 1918-29, I, 11ff., 163ff.; [Harris 1941](#); [Beyer 1969](#), 37f.

¹⁴ One may note the very interesting parallels to present day Egyptian Arabic -

"The oldest stage of the Egyptian Arabic, which is no more Old Arabic, must have been a linguistic system where every word ended in a long vowel or in a consonant. Thus no word ended in a short vowel. [Birkeland 1952](#) pp 12-13

"In Stage IV ... every word ended in one or two consonants or a short vowel. Long final vowels did not exist. Within the word every long unstressed vowel and every long vowel before two consonants was shortened." [Birkeland 1952](#) p 28

" ... (early Arabic) quantity of vowels must have been of the greatest importance to a man who wished to be understood... (however, in modern Egyptian Arabic) nobody can be well understood in Egypt today without the accent used by the natives. As a matter of fact all long, unaccented vowels are shortened.... Reading the literary language of newspapers etc.... (Egyptians) often shorten unaccented long vowels, because the accent they are accustomed to is very marked. Also in reading the Koran they use a marked accent. But in that case it is reckoned as bad pronunciation if they shorten unaccented long vowels." [Birkeland 1952](#) p 32

"Briefly the question is whether quantity is dependent on accent or accent on quantity. The only method of solving this problem consists in an examination of the cases where oppositions of short and long vowels are possible and of the cases where they are impossible. Where such oppositions are impossible vowel quantity is, of course, irrelevant. Thus in unstressed syllables only short vowels occur. In this position, therefore, vowel quantity is irrelevant. Only in stressed syllables both long and short vowels are possible. But stressed final vowels are out of question, too, because they are always long.... Similarly a stressed vowel before two consonants is always short.... Further: An opposition between long and short vowel in a final syllable is impossible... The result, therefore, is that only one position is left where an opposition between long and short vowel is possible. This position is an accented, open, non-final syllable...." [Birkeland 1952](#) p. 36.

"In any case it cannot be doubted that two systems are struggling against one another in the present dialect, one system claiming dependence of quantity on accent and relevance of accent only, another quantity system claiming dependence of accent on quantity and relevance of quantity only. The dialectal tendency has conquered the territory to so great an extent that quantity is independent on accent only in stressed, open, non-final syllables.

Even in the syllables last mentioned the phonetic opposition of long and short vowels does not ... seem to be utilized semantically. ...

The insignificant role of vowel quantity is on the whole, as we know, revealed in the fact that long vowels are shortened as soon as they lose the accent. Take, e. g., the frequent word 'aal "he said". In fluent speech it almost always sounds 'äl. Even if long vowels do not lose the accent, but appear before two consonants, they are shortened." [Birkeland 1952](#) p 28

"Now we summarize: In the Egyptian Arabic dialect of to-day the opposition between long and short vowels does not seem to have any grammatical or semantic function. Even in stressed non-final, open syllables, the only position in which both long and short vowels may occur, the opposition between them does not appear to have any actual function, originally short vowels being occasionally lengthened and originally long vowels being occasionally shortened in this position. The accent, however, has a most important functional value. Diachronically this value has its basis in the marked accent which produced the numerous reductions and elisions of vowels in Stage IV. But the accent did not become relevant before Stage V. Then the elision of the suffix -h after long vowels created forms with an unstressed final vowel, so that the stress nosy signifies the meaning of the lost suffix.

"It is, as we know, beyond doubt that in stressed, open non-final syllables we have to distinguish phoenetically, between long and short vowel, at least in the speech of the educated classes, especially in Cairo." [Birkeland 1952](#) pp. 43-44.

¹⁵ [Gogel](#) pp. 47, 140.

¹⁶ See [Joüon-Muraoka](#) p. 75.

¹⁷ There are a few cases of this form in Biblical Hebrew – see [Joüon-Muraoka](#) p. 161. See also [Segal](#) 1927 p. 68.

¹⁸ See [Beyer 1969](#), 38f.; Rabin "Ivrit" *EBVI*, 51-73, 1971a. [Harris](#), [Bergstärsser](#), [Birkeland](#), [Manuel](#).

¹⁹ See [Muraoka 1976](#) and [Garr 1989](#)

²⁰ See [Wevers 1970](#), [Steiner 2006](#) and [Blau 1982](#), which show that at the time of the Greek translation of the Pentateuch (around the third century BCE), the difference between these two groups of phonemes was still felt.

²¹ See [Blau 2010](#) §3.3.3.

²² See [Blau 2010](#) §3.3.3.1.

²³ See [Harris 1941](#), 145; [Blau 1976](#), 31f.

²⁴ My Arabic teacher a [Melkite Greek Catholic](#) from the [Beqaa valley](#) in Lebanon, pronounces "house" as ['ba.yit] and "street" as [ša.ri.a^c] which exactly parallels Tiberian pronunciation norms.

²⁵ [Lipinski 1997](#) §24.4 - 24.6

24.2. Assuming that every syllable begins with a consonant, one can distinguish three types of syllables in Semitic: 1. an open syllable consisting of a consonant or a consonant cluster followed by a vowel, short (Cv, CCv) or long (Cv:, CCv:); 2. a closed syllable consisting of a consonant or a consonant cluster followed by a vowel, short or long, which is followed in its turn by a consonant (CvC, CCvC, Cv:C, CCv:C); 3. a doubly closed syllable consisting of a consonant followed by a vowel, which is followed either by a long or geminated consonant or by a two-consonant cluster, the first member of which is often a liquid (CvCC)....

24.3. Quantitatively, a syllable may be short, long or ultra-long: 1. a syllable is short when it ends in a short vowel (Cv, e.g. *bá*, "in"); 2. a syllable is long when it ends either in a long vowel or in a

consonant following a short vowel (Cv:, e.g. *la:*, "not"; CvC, e.g. *min*, "from"); 3. a syllable is ultra-long, when it ends either in a consonant following a long vowel, or in a geminated or long consonant, or in a two-consonant cluster (Cv:C e.g. *qa:m*, "he stood up"; CvCC, e.g. *ʿamm*, "paternal uncle"; *kalb*, "dog").

24.4. The vowels are always short in a closed unstressed syllable and long vowels show a tendency to become short when their syllable closes

24.5. Also long or geminated consonants show a tendency to become short, especially at the end of a syllable This shortening is a general feature in Hebrew at the end of a word (e.g. *ʿam* < *ʿamm*, "people", with a plural *ʿammi:m*), while modern Ethiopian dialects can avoid it by splitting the long or geminated consonant by means of an anaptyctic vowel (e.g. *qurər* < *qurr*, "basket" in Gurage). In Arabic, this shortening appears, e.g., in *fa-qaṭ* < **fa-qaṭṭ*, "only", and in verbs with a second long or geminated radical (e.g. *zaltu* or *ziltu* < **zall-tu*, "I became"), unless the long consonant is split by an anaptyctic vowel (e.g. *zaliṭtu*).

2.1.6. Short vowels tend to become long in open and in stressed syllables.... this is the case in certain forms of West Semitic verbs with last radical ʾ when the latter loses its consonantal value, e.g. Hebrew *qa:raʾ* > *qa:ra:* "he called": Arabic *nabba:* < *nabbaʾ(a)* "he announced"

24.7. There are also some cases of consonant doubling after a short open syllable ... e.g. in the Hebrew plural *gamalli:m* < **gemali:m* "camels".... This results in a change of the nature of the syllable in question which becomes closed and long....

24.8. There is a wide tendency in classical Semitic languages to eliminate two-consonant clusters at the beginning or at the end of a word by adding a supplementary vowel either between the two consonants or at the beginning, respectively at the end of the word. Beside the anaptyctic vowels of *qurər* and *zaliṭtu* (§24.5), one can refer to the Hebrew verbal form *nifʿal*, "was made", differing from the corresponding Arabic form *ʾinfaʿala*, by the place of the supplementary vowel *i* which is added in Arabic at the beginning of the word, while it is inserted in Hebrew between the prefix *n-* and the first radical of the verb. In both cases, the addition of the vowel results in a new syllable *ʾin/faʿala* or *nifʿal*. A vowel can also be added at the end of a word, e.g.... The Assyro-Babylonian imperative *duhub*, "speak!", has an anaptyctic vowel *u* splitting the geminated consonant. In all these cases, the addition of a vowel results in the appearance of a new syllable."

²⁶ [Jouön-Muraoka](#) p. 91 does not fully agree with this –

Alef is the weakest of the gutturals. In the period of the history of Hebrew we are concerned with, it is very often no longer pronounced; sometimes it is not even written....

Alef is actually pronounced in a syllable that is closed in one way or other, namely: 1) in a properly closed syllable, e.g. *לְשֹׁאֵל* /*ye'-šam*/ *he will make himself guilty*

Alef, when it is a word-medial or final radical, is pronounced when followed by a vowel: e.g. *כִּסֵּי* = [kissê] *chair*, but *כִּסֵּי* [kis'i] *my chair*, and *שָׁאַל* [šâ'al] *he asked*. Morphophonemically it makes some sense to

analyse a form such as מָצְאוּ *he found* as /māṣāʾ/, resulting in a neat picture of the paradigm vis-à-vis, say, מָצְאוּ /maṣʾu/ *they found*.

Everywhere else Alef is not pronounced. Silent Alef occurs either after the vowel of a syllable which it once closed, e.g. מָצְאוּ from /*maṣaʾ/ (Alef *quiescens*), or before the vowel of a syllable of which it was once the first constituent, [In this case the χ has become a mere prop for a vowel, like the Arabic Alif without hamza. It would be rather strange if, in the stage of the language when Alef was no longer pronounced at the end of a word, where it is easy to pronounce, it should have been pronounced at the beginning of a word or a syllable where it is more difficult to pronounce. But many authors give to Alef at the beginning of a word or a syllable a consonantal value, even at the latest stage of the language.] e.g. אָמַר from /*ʾamar/, now pronounced /ʾamar/, as if the vowel were the first sound of the sequence.

²⁷ See e.g. *An Introduction to Egyptian Colloquial Arabic* by T. F. Mitchell, OUP, London-NY-Toronto, 1956 pp. 110-112.

²⁸ An exception is the relative pronoun אשר (with or without prefixes) (cf. [Blau 2010](#) §4.2.6) which I assume to always be EBHP /ʾa.šar/ [ʔe.ʃer]. Similarly, its rare poetic equivalent וַיְזַר /,zu:/ is assumed to always carry a secondary stress.

²⁹ See [Joüon-Muraoka](#) §132, 133; [Blau 2010](#) §4.2.3.3.2, 4.4.4.7, 4.6; [van der Merwe et al.](#) chapt. 6.

³⁰ Eg. נגד מול למען למו לכן לולי לו לא כן כי כמו כה יען הנה הן בעד בעבור כמו בין בלתי כל בגלל את אשר אצל אם אל אי אחרי אחר אז או אבל תחת עם על-כן על סביב נגד

³¹ See [Phones and Phonemes](#).

³² **Note, in reconstructed [EBHP] transliterations and sound files -**

1. there is no spirantization of the bgdkpt consonants;
2. [vowel qualities are outlined here](#);
3. I use the most probable form. Where no one form stands out as most probable, I select the one closest to the MT vocalization.
4. when multiple forms are possible, the form used is underlined.

³³ Note Modern Standard and Classical Arabic *mašr* "Egypt" (Hebrew *mišraym*) is pronounced *mišr* in spoken Egyptian Arabic.

³⁴ From [Sáenz-Badillos 1993](#) (p. 111)

The resulting (Tiberian pointing) system is quite comprehensive, faithfully reproducing the phonological structure of the language while also providing sufficient phonetic information to read it correctly.

³⁵ For frequency counts of polyphonic consonants see [Blau 1982](#)

³⁶ See [Khan 1987](#) p. 34. In Phoenician the assimilation of /n/ to a following laryngeal or pharyngeal often occurs. See also [Joüon-Muraoka](#) § 20a. In Arabic the gutturals geminate.

³⁷ For rules see [Joüon-Muraoka](#) § 19.

³⁸ See [Blau 1972](#) p. 207 and Stuart, in [Studies in Early Hebrew Meter](#) p. 26.

³⁹ The character of a vowel sound determined by the size and shape of the oral cavity and the amount of resonance with which the sound is produced.

⁴⁰ Of course there were longer and shorter vowels in Tiberian Hebrew (see *Vowel Length and Syllable Structure in the Tiberian Tradition of Biblical Hebrew* by G Khan, *JSS* xxxii I 1987) however their length was no longer phonemic.

⁴¹ “It is a useful rule of thumb in phonological analysis (Jakobson & Halle, 1956: 24 f.) that vowel quantity and stress should not be assigned a distinctive function in the same language or in the same stage of a language. Our investigation confirms the rule's viability with regard to three separable stages of ancient Hebrew, a reconstructed initial stage (= PH) and the stages represented respectively by the Consonantal Text of the Old Testament without (= BH) and with TH) the vocalization signs. Only in the first does vowel quantity play a significant role, the position of the stress being fixed and dependent upon it. In the two later stages, on the other hand, it is stress that is distinctive, resulting in quality replacing quantity as the analysable feature of vowels and in fact determining the quality of particular vowels in particular environments.” [Gibson 1965](#)

⁴² Of great importance in defining the syllabic structure of Tiberian Hebrew is distinguishing between when the *šwa* (.) is actualized as zero, i.e. the absence of any vowel (*šwa quiescens*) and when it is a murmured half-vowel [e](#) or (*šwa mobile*). Though the opposition between *e* and zero may be phonemic, its functional load is light. The traditional explanation of when a *šwa* is a *šwa quiescens* and when it is a *šwa mobile* is very complex. It seems to me highly unlikely, given the Masoretes goal of setting a reading standard for the Hebrew Bible, that they would have developed such an unusable system. One is forced to the conclusion that It may be that Hoffman (p. 56) is right –

In the end, then, we find no support for two different kinds of shewa in Tiberian Masoretic Hebrew, in spite of very widespread claims to the contrary.... “Vowel reduction,” the process by which unstressed vowels become less pronounced than stressed vowels, is very common throughout the languages of the world.... However, the exact conditions under which vowel reduction takes place, as well as the degree of reduction, vary not only from language to language, but within a language depending on the register of speech.

So it looks like a shewa was used to indicate both the complete lack of a vowel and a reduced vowel, but we do not know the extent to which vowels reduced in Tiberian Masoretic Hebrew. As a guess, we can assume that the shewa was pronounced whenever it had to be, and only then. But it remains a guess.

However, this results in an insoluble dilemma since we do not know in what phonetic contexts the Masoretes, given their speech habits etc. would have felt the need for a half-vowel.

⁴³ See "Notes on the Use of the Definite Article in the Poetry of Job" by Nahum M. Sarna in *Texts, Temples and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* ed. M. V. Foc et. Al., Eisenbraus, 1996 p. 284 and [Joüon-Muraoka](#) § 103b.

⁴⁴ See [Joüon-Muraoka](#) § 104.

⁴⁵ [Manuel 1995](#) p. 52.

⁴⁶ [Manuel 1995](#) p. 51.

⁴⁷ See [Kutscher 1982](#) p. 22 ff.

⁴⁸ The purpose of this transposition of reconstructed [EBHP] into adapted Tiberian graphemes is to give the Hebrew reader an approximation of the reconstruction in familiar pointed characters.

⁴⁹ See [Blau 2010](#) §4.6.4.

⁵⁰ Stuart, in [Studies in Early Hebrew Meter](#) p. 26 writes "Several "Canaanite" particles (*Ju, la, limma, -mi*, etc.) are proper to early Hebrew poetry." Although this might be true, I would only propose such a reading if traditional Hebrew grammar cannot make sense of the text. N.b. Barr's discussion of the "enclitic mem" p. 31 ff.

It is worth bearing in mind the points made in the following quoted from a review of *Text-Restoration Methods in Contemporary U.S.A. Biblical Scholarship* by Donald Watson Goodwin; reviewer Ronald A. Veenker (*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 39, No. 2. (Jun., 1971), pp. 207-208) –

With regard to the orthographic theories of the so-called Albright "school," Cross and Freedman have stated that "orthographic patterns followed rigid laws, and like phonetic patterns can be classified historically" (p. 27). Goodwin objects to that assumption which implies a uniform and consistent scribal tradition throughout the area within which the Phoenician alphabet spread. He says that the evidence is much too scant to support the assumption that orthographic practice was determined by "rigid laws," embodied in "principles" of consonantal spelling and vowel representation which were uniformly employed by all scribes.

The greater part of the book (92 pp.) is given to the analysis of "archaic forms" which are thought to aid in the dating of Hebrew poetry. The school attempts to explain away the occurrence of certain classical forms (e.g., the relative *'asher*, the definite article) in poetic passages. When certain archaic grammatical forms (e.g., enclitic *mem*, vocative *lamed*, archaic pronouns and suffixes) do not appear, it is assumed that the scribes did not recognize these as authentic features and altered the text; consequently, the school restores them. Goodwin charges that the above techniques, as well as the assignment of archaic meanings to nouns and verbs, are motivated by a desire to find, whenever possible, an historical context for the poetry in the second millennium B.C.

Goodwin, analyzing the school's metrical theories, goes into considerable detail to synthesize their "observations" on meter into eight "rules for scansion." These he finds unorthodox and inconsistent as a comprehensive theory. In addition to providing "no precise differentiation between meter and style" (p. 157), he charges that they are guilty of misplaced concreteness when they attempt to alter the Masoretic Text by means of such speculative and uncertain tools.

Summarizing, Goodwin criticizes the school for being "too facile in formulating its own theories, too ready to accept uncritically the theories of predecessors, and too prone to suggest alterations in the text without having thoroughly examined the evidence which is offered in support" (p. 155).

⁵¹ See *A Grammar of Epigraphic Hebrew* by S.L. [Gogel](#), Atlanta/Georgia 1999

⁵² The most likely candidate is Exodus 14 see *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry* by David R. Robertson, SBL Dissertation Series 3, 1972. ISBN 0-88414-012-1

⁵³ The earliest known "Hebrew" script, if it is indeed Hebrew, is that of the [Gezer Calendar](#) (10th century BCE) which, if it is indeed Hebrew, would be the earliest known Hebrew inscription. This script is very similar to contemporary Phoenician inscriptions. The main differences between this script of c. 1000 BCE and that c. 850 BCE are confined to the letters נ ו.

⁵⁴ [Yardeni 2003](#) p. 17.

⁵⁵ Sources <http://web.infoave.net/~jwest/lachish.ZIP>; <http://www.historian.net/downloads/Lachish.ZIP>

⁵⁶ See *The Paleo-Hebrew Leviticus Scroll* by David Noel Freedman, K. A. Mathews, ASOR, 1985.

⁵⁷ [Archaica Aramaic-450](#)