3. THE VOCALIZATION OF QERE-KETHIV IN A

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One aspect of the vocalization of the Qere-Kethiv in A draws our attention, for it varies somewhat from the ordinary practice in our bibles. It is well known that the usual MSS and editions of the Bible give the Kethiv in the text proper, the Qere in the margins, and vocalize the Kethiv according to the Qere. In A the system is similar, but in certain cases the consonant and its vowel sign are linked more closely than is practised among us. This is particularly striking when consonants of the Qere-Kethiv are inverted (מקדים ממאחר; in the language of the Massora; Okhlah we-okhlah, List 91) and above all when the two inverted letters are pointed with different vowels (less when the inverted letters include one of the matres lectionis יוֹר). E.g., 1 Kings vii. 45: Kethiv:

 bäיּינ — Qere תַּחאנה. The internal vocalization of L is: פְּלָשׁוּת, whereas in A פְּלָשׁוּת. In L (and in our bibles generally), the letters of the Kethiv are inverted in relation to the Qere, but the vocalization (and accent) are not inverted but follow the order of the Qere. In A, however, both the order of the letters and the vocalization (and accent) are inverted, as if the vocalization and the accent were tied to particular letters and a change in the position of the letters meant a corresponding change in the position of the vocalization. The “artificial words” created by the hybrid combination of Kethiv letters with Qere vocalization are thus more peculiar in A than in L. For example, in 1 Chron. xxvii,

29, A: יֵשׁר Qere; L: תְּנִינָה. Other examples:

ןַנְבָּה (1 Sam. xxvii, 8) — תְּנִינָה Qere; L: תְּנִינָה.

גֶּשֶׁם (Jer. xv, 4) — תְּנִינָה Qere; L: תְּנִינָה (also 2 Chron. xxix, 8).

יִשְׁפַּל (2 Sam. xx, 14) — תְּנִינָה Qere; L: תְּנִינָה.

יִשְׁפַּל (Ezek. xlii, 16) — תְּנִינָה Qere; L: תְּנִינָה.

גֶּשֶׁם (Ezek. xxiii, 26) — תְּנִינָה Qere; L: תְּנִינָה.

יִשְׁפַּל (1 Sam. xiv, 27) — תְּנִינָה Qere; L: תְּנִינָה.

יִשְׁפַּל (2 Sam. xxiv, 16) — תְּנִינָה Qere; L: תְּנִינָה.

and others. And one exception in which A is vocalized as in L:

טַפָּנָה (2 Sam. xv, 28) — תְּנִינָה Qere. Thus L (but C: תְּנִינָה).
This system is evident in several other categories of Qere-Kethiv, e.g. Okklah we-oklah, Lists 101–102:

(2 Sam. v, 2) — הָיָה הַמַּשָּׁתִי מִצְקִי אֵצְא Qere; L: מִצְקִי אֵצְא
(2 Sam. xxi, 12) — שָׁמַם פְּלָשְׁתִּים Qere; L: פְּלָשְׁתִּים

(the pashṭa in A is on its proper letter but not so in L). In one exception A is vocalized as in L:

(םהנה אָלָשְׁתִּים) (Ezek. lxii, 9) — מִתָּחַת אָלָשְׁתִּים Qere.

W. Wickes has interestingly enough pointed out a similar phenomenon in A, in A Treatise on the Accentuation of the 21 So-called Prose Books of the O.T., Oxford 1887, p. ix. He relates that while he was attempting to clarify several places in A’s text, he was told, *inter alia*, that A’s vocalization in Eccl. ix, 4 was: יִבְשָׁם (Qere), as opposed to בִּבְשָׁם in our books. On this reading (and another) Wickes states: “both mistakes which we may be sure would never have been made by Ben Asher”. Unfortunately, the Book of Ecclesiastes has not survived in A, but the word Wickes mentions is vocalized according to the system of A.

Although this method of vocalizing Qere-Kethiv is interesting, I would not have attributed it undue importance had I not by chance come across a note by the 18th-century scholar Raphael Ḥayyim Bazila, who corrected an edition of the Bible with שִׁמְעַת Mantua 1744. He added several notes at the end of the second part of the volume (in addition to those of Norzi); in one he comments on Prov. xxiii, 26: "וּרְבִּיאת, וְהָיָה has a holem with the line called sof pasq below it and the ה has a shewa; and this is as it should be, because Qere and Kethiv involve the letters and not the accents and vowel signs."¹

This remark can explain the reason for the two different systems of vocalization of Qere and Kethiv. Those who vocalize as in L regard the Qere-Kethiv as affecting only the consonant skeleton and not the vowel signs and accents, as in the statement of Bazila. If there is an inversion in Qere-Kethiv, the letters and not the vowel signs or accents are inverted. The vocalizers of A, on the other hand, regard the Qere-Kethiv as also affecting the vocalization and the accents, so that if there is an inversion of the letters, the vocalization and accents must be correspondingly inverted.²

¹ The final mem has in both MSS a dagesh, here omitted for typographic reasons.
² Raphael Ḥayyim Bazila’s note shows, at any rate, that books existed in this time which vocalized the Qere-Kethib according to the system of A.
One reason alone can account for this type of disagreement, namely, dissenting opinions as to the time of origin of the vocalization. The written Law, its letters as well as the Qere-Kethiv, were given at Sinai. For those who hold that the institution of the vocalization and accents was late, these are not bound to the letters, i.e., if the Qere-Kethiv appears in a text with inverted letters, the vocalization and accents are not tied to specific letters, but are to be written in the corrected Qere order and not in the inverted order of the consonants. On the other hand, those who hold that also the vocalization and accents were given at Sinai together with the letters, must conclude that the consonants and the vocalization are tied to one another, i.e., if the letters were given in inversion, then the vocalization and the accents were as well given in inversion. The Prophets and the Hagiographa follow the rules for the Pentateuch; for whenever any one book of the Bible was composed, according to this theory, the letters and the vocalization were written together. This can certainly explain the reason for the system of A, where the vocalization and accents are tied to specific consonants.

The controversy over the time of the institution of the vocalization took place between the Rabbanites and the Karaites. The former considered the vocalization a later addition, whereas a basic tenet of the Karaites is that the vocalization was given at Sinai.3 The manner of vocalizing Qere-Kethiv in A derives from the view that the vocalization was given together with the consonants, i.e. at Sinai, a view which follows from the ideology of the antiquity of the vocalization current in Karaism.

These considerations prove, in my opinion, that the vocalizer of A was most certainly a Karaite.

Additional Notes

1. The method of A in cases of “Qere and not Kethiv” should also be pointed out. Fortunately, all the ten cases in the Bible which have “Qere and not Kethiv” (Okhlah we-okhlah, List 97) have survived in A. Our books, as well as L in these cases, follow the practice of presenting only the vocalization and the accent of the missing word (without the letters) in the text proper and listing the missing word in the margins. In A, since the consonants are not in the text (not given at Sinai) and the vocalization is tied to the consonants, it is to be expected that also the vocalization not be marked in the text.

3. A discussion on the Karaite view of the antiquity of the vocalization can be found in recent studies on the Karaitism of Ben Asher: B. Klar, עות’וקי יניב ומרוצ, Tel Aviv 1954, pp. 295-297; A. Dothan, Sinai 41 (1957), p. 309 (on page 306, n. 175, he mentions opinions of the Karaites on Qere-Kethiv, but does not treat the vocalization); M. Zucker, Türkiz 27 (1958), p. 64.
In six of the ten places in A, this is indeed the practice, *e.g.*  (2 Sam. xvi, 23) — and in the margin: “ to be read and not written”. In four of these places (2 Sam. xvi, 23; Jer. xxxi, 38; 1, 29; Ruth iii, 17) there is the comment: “read and not written”, and in two (2 Sam. viii, 3; Ruth iii, 5) — only: “Qere”. In three other places, A gives the vocalization in the text proper without noting “read and not written”, but only “Qere”, *e.g.*,  (Jud. xx, 13) — also in 2 Kings, xix, 31, 37). Once (2 Sam. xviii, 20) the vocalization is marked with the note “read and not written” exactly as in L. The reason for this is not clear to me.

2. The practice in other MSS. As mentioned above, L follows the practice found in our books today, but it has several deviations which correspond to the system of A, *e.g.* Job xxxviii, 12: דֶּשֶׁת תַּעַשׂ רֶשׁ Qere.

C, on the whole, follows A, *e.g.* 2 Sam. xx, 14: בְּּבָאָא, and others. It often follows L; thus the vocalization is not given in the text in only one of the ten places of “Qere and not Kethiv” — 2 Sam. viii, 3; in Jud. xx, 13, the accent is given but not the vocalization; the other eight places give the accent and the vocalization as in L. At times it follows a system intermediate between A and L, *i.e.*, wherever possible, the vocalization is moved close to the letter it fits, but the order is not inverted, *e.g.* in 1 Sam. xiv, 27, in contrast to (A), and (L), C has in Ezek. xlii, 16, in contrast to (A), (L), C has (L), at times, also follows this system.

The nine-page Leningrad MS Firkowitch II, 225 follows the system of A. Described by P. Kahle, *Masoreten des Westens*, Stuttgart 1927, pp. 67–69, and photographed in the Institute of Hebrew Manuscripts, this book was dedicated to the Karaite community in Jerusalem in the year 1017. I found there: (Jer. xxix, 18) — Qere:  (Jer. xxix, 23) — Qere (L; ) — both according to the system of A.

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4. I wish to thank the Institute of Hebrew Manuscripts for permission to use this photograph.