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Editing Medieval Ashkenazi Masorah and *Masora Figurata*: Observations on the Functions of the Micrography in Hebrew Manuscripts^{*}

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LA EDICIÓN DE LA MASORA ASQUENAZÍ MEDIEVAL Y LA MASORA FIGURATIVA: APUNTES SOBRE LAS FUNCIONES DE LA MICROGRAFÍA EN MANUSCRITOS HEBREOS.— Este artículo se enmarca en la Sección B04 del Proyecto CRC 933 de la Universidad de Heidelberg titulado *Material Text Culture*. Esta sección analiza la forma material de la Biblia y sus masoras en Askenaz, incluyendo el empleo de formas micrográficas figurativas. El ms. Vat. Ebr. 14, copiado por Elijah ha-Naqdan en 1239 en el norte de Francia, presenta una gran variedad de notas masoréticas, figurativas o no. En el presente artículo presentamos solamente las masoras figurativas del código y nos centramos en sus aspectos praxeológicos, para saber cómo se utilizaban dichas masoras figurativas, si podrían ayudar al estudio de la Biblia y si las formas y los contenidos estaban conectados entre sí o también con fuentes rabínicas clásicas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Biblia hebrea; Asquenaz; Edad Media; micrografía; masora figurativa; masora ornamental; Elijah ben Berakhiah ha-Naqdan.

This paper is part of the Subproject B4 of the CRC 933 from Heidelberg University entitled 'Material Text Culture'. It deals with the material forms of the Bible and its Masorah in Ashkenaz. The MS Vat. Ebr. 14 copied by Elijah ha-Naqdan in 1239 in Northern France offers a great variety of Masoretic notes: regular, ornamental or figurative. This paper presents an extension of the critical edition of Masoretic notes published in the monograph *The Masorah of Elijah ha-Naqdan: An Edition of Ashkenazic Micrographi-*

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cal Notes (forthcoming 2015). It assesses here about the praxeological questions of how Figurative Masorah served, in concrete manner, as an aid to the study of the Bible and whether forms and Masoretic contents in these drawings relate to one another or, also, to classical rabbinic sources.

KEYWORDS: Hebrew Bible; Ashkenaz; Middle Ages; Micrography; Figurative Masorah; Ornamental Masorah; Text-Image Relationship; Elijah ben Berakhiah ha-Naqdan.

The question of the presence of micrographical figurative Masorah in biblical medieval Hebrew codices recently received renewed interest in the scholarly community (LISS 2012; FRONDA 2013; HALPERIN 2013; HALPERIN 2014). This paper completes and extends the work done in the critical edition published as a monograph entitled *The Masorah of Elijah ha-Naqdan: An Edition of Ashkenazic Micrographical Notes* (forthcoming October 2015). For the first time, thirteen cases of figurative and alphabetical Masorah were studied from MS Vatican, BAV, Vat. Ebr. 14¹ and critically edited in comparison with seven other manuscripts, namely, *a*) the Leningrad Codex,² *b*) the Damascus Codex,³ *c*) the MS London, British Library, Or. 4445, *d*) the MS Madrid, Complutense University Library, 118-Z-42, also called M1, *e*) the MS London, Valmadonna Trust (private collection), Valmadonna 1, *f*) the MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Or. Qu. 9, *g*) the MS Vatican, BAV, Vat. Ebr. 482.⁴

In this forthcoming monograph, our editorial procedure allowed us to see four things. First, to trace the process involved in the writing of figurative Masorah. Second, to evaluate the kinds of Masoretic knowledge transmitted by *Masora Figurata*. Third, to evaluate the relation to the Tiberian tradition and to know if *Masora Figurata* was major impediment in the delivery of Masoretic informations. Fourth, to a reassessment of the relevancy of the Ashkenazic Bibles compared to Sephardic Bibles for studying Masoretic contents. However, the praxeological questions of how figurative Masorah served as an aid to the study of the Bible and

¹ See description in RICHLER (2008: 9-11).

² MS St. Petersburg, National library, Evr I B19^a, from the first collection of Firkovitch.

³ MS NLI (former JNUL), 24°5702 or MS Sassoon 507.

⁴ The Second La Rochelle Bible (probably dated 1216 C.E.).

whether form and content in these drawings are related to one another have not been dealt with in the forthcoming monograph. The present article will fill this gap.

To enter into these new aspects of the question, the MS Vat. Ebr. 14 (hereafter Vat14), copied in Northern France (Normandy) by Elijah ben Berakhia ha-Naqdan around 1239 C.E.,⁵ will be again our main source. Our program of analysis will first present the kinds of micrographical figurative elements delivered by Vat 14, their place in the manuscripts, and their features. The second step is to follow the analytic procedure from the ‘text-image relationship’ perspective, to evaluate the potential hermeneutic relationship between texts and the components, shapes and inner contents of *Masora Figurata*.

1. GENERAL FEATURES AND VAT14’S FIGURATIVE MASORAH

There is no extant typology of the micrography used neither in the medieval Hebrew codices nor in the biblical ones, beyond the detailed description of Kogman-Appel (2004) for Hebrew Bibles in Medieval Spain. The use of micrography is a phenomenon identified by art history as part of the embellishment and decoration program of the manuscripts. Recently, Dalia Halperin focused again on this art of using texts written in a very small shaped letters to draw some forms (HALPERIN 2013; HALPERIN 2014). She notes several uses of micrographic drawings like in the carpet pages,⁶ in word header illuminated and in isolated drawings.⁷ Each kind can endorse both abstract or figurative elements as well as decorative or illustrative functions (FERBER 1976-77: 18). The MS Vat14 has the tendency to display only isolated micrographic drawings, no carpet pages nor illuminated

⁵ See ATTIA (forthcoming 2015: Appendice 2) for a codicological and paleographical description.

⁶ Located at the beginning or end of a biblical book/codex, the micrography covers an entire page and endorses both abstract and figurative forms, with the latter displaying especially fictive animals. See also HALPERIN (2014).

⁷ The isolated drawings (abstract or figurative) usually joined on the bottom, but sometimes in the margins and on the upper part of the page. See SIRAT and AVRIN (1981: 9-15).

headers. In most cases, these drawings are located in the inner margins or at the bottom of the pages, thereby replacing the regular three to five lines of *Masora Magna*.

This specific series of isolated micrography in Vat14 led us to propose for it a new terminology of micrographical elements, summarized in this schema, and to define ‘ornamental Masorah,’ ‘figurative Masorah’ and ‘alphabetical Masorah’.

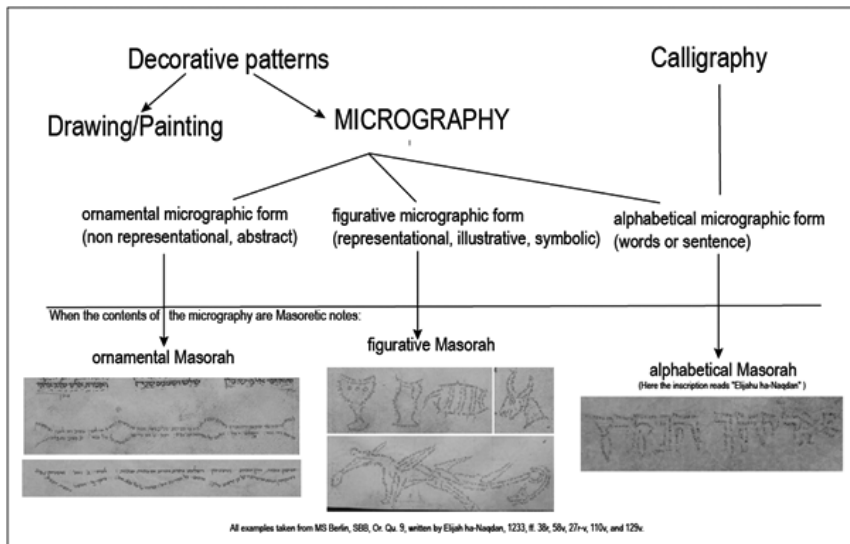


Figure 1: Categories of Micrographical Masoretic Notes according to Shape.

Of course, some purely ornamental micrographic motives resemble geometrical interlaces, typical line-rolls appear also in MS Vat. 14.⁸ But these will not be the focus of this study. The core of this study is precisely the forty-seven figurative elements composed of micrographical letters in addition to eleven figures that were simply drawn and are not built from micrographical letters. The following table (Table 1) sums up the repartition of these elements.

⁸ The use of micrography exists in ancient manuscripts such as the Cairo Codex (894-5?), see FERBER (1976-77) and BEIT-ARIÉ, SIRAT and GLATZER (1997: 48-52).

| Book of Vat14 | Figurative Masorah | Alphabetical Masorah | Simple figurative drawing (SD) |
|----------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Genesis | 21 | 1 | 1 |
| Exodus | 11 | 1 | 2 |
| Leviticus | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| Numbers | 7 | 1 | 2 |
| Deuteronomy | 3 | 15 | 4 |
| Haftarot Parts | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 47 | 19 | 10 |

Table 1: Repartition of the Figurative, Alphabetical and Simply Drawn Elements.

Some of the figurative drawings in Vat14 encompass small recognizable detailed elements like animals, objects, plants, and human beings, particularly from Genesis and Exodus, where the biblical text is the most narrative. The following table (Table 2) enumerates the figurative elements (micrographical as well as simply drawn) found in these micrographical drawings. As Alphabetical Masorah elements are not figurative according to the definition above, these are removed from the Table 2.⁹

⁹ The MS Vat14 is planned to be on-line available (see the Polonski Project at <http://bav.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/digitized-items-hebrew-manuscripts> [last visit, June 2015]). The reader will be able to find some of the figurative Masorah in GOLB (1976) or in ATTIA (forthcoming 2015) for the figurative elements from Exodus. Only the detailed described example will be here published. The number of the first column is to be found in the list of ATTIA (forthcoming 2015: Appendice 2). As stated, the alphabetical Masorah have been erased here, hence the lacks of some of the numbers. Rows nr. 7, 11, 14, 20, 38, 40, 41, 42, 44 and 48, as well as those referred with SD and marked in grey in 217r and 223v were published in GOLB (1976: Plate 21); nr. 20 was included in METZGER (1982: 156, fig. 205) too.

| Nr. | Folio | Subject | Related to | Human | Place / Architect. | Object | Animal |
|-----|--------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 7r | Ark of Noah | Gen. 6:16 | 2 (a man and a woman) | 1 (Ark) | | 1 (bird) |
| SD | 8v | Birds (sent by Noah) | Gen. 7:21-8:9 | | | | 2 (birds) |
| 2 | 9r | Noah performing a sacrifice | Gen. 8:20 | 1 (Noah) | | 1 (altar) | 1 (taurus) |
| 3 | 12r | Abraham leaves (as horseman) | Gen 11:23-12:4 | 1 (Abraham) | | | 1 (horse) |
| 4 | 16v | Gateway / hands | Gen. 12:4 | | 1 (gateway) | | |
| 5 | 17r | Calf, Table, Tree | Gen. 18:4-7-8 | | 1 (under the tree) | 3 (table, pot, cup) | 2 (calf, bird) |
| 6 | 23r | Cave of Machpela | Gen. 23:9 and 23:15 | | 1 (the cave) | 1 (centenier) | |
| 7 | 24v | Eliezer, the servant, on a horse | Gen. 24:29-24:30 | 1 (Eliezer) | | 1 (magen David) | 1 (horse) |
| 8 | 25r | Rivka | Gen. 24:43 and 24:20 | 1 (Rivka) | 1 (well) | 1 (hollow lip of well) | |
| 9 | 27r | Esau hunts a deer | Gen. 25:27 et 28 | 1 (Esau) | | 1 (hunter clothes) | 1 (doe) |
| 10 | 31r | Jacob's scale | Gen. 28:12 and 28:18 | | | 2 (scale, stone) | |
| 11 | 33r | Reuben and the mandrakes | Gen. 29:34, 30:39, 30:7 and 30:20 | 2 (newborns) | | | 1 (folk) |
| 12 | 36v | Ox and Donkey of Jacob | Gen. 32:6 | | | | 2 (ox, donkey) |
| 13 | 39bisv | Graves | Gen. 35:8 and 35:19 | | 2 (tree Alon Bakhut – Rachel's Tomb) | 1 (tombstone) | |
| 14 | 41r | Esau's cattle | Gen. 36:6 | | | | 3 (oxen and goat) |
| 15 | 42v | Sun, moon (Jacob's dream) | Gen. 37:9-11 | | | 2 (sun, moon, 11 stars) | |
| 16 | 48v | Chief baker hanged | Gen. 40:22 | 1 (Chief Baker) | | 1 (gallows) | |
| 17 | 49v | Joseph Chief of Egypt | Gen. 41:43 | 1 (Joseph, as horseman) | | | 1 (horse) |
| 18 | 50 r | Joseph's brothers prostrating | Gen. 42:6 | 2 (men prostrating) | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| 19 | 52bisv | Joseph's goblet in the bag | Gen. 44:12 | | | 2 (cup, bag) | |
| 20 | 59v | Ploughman | Gen. 47:23 | 1 (ploughman) | | 1 (plough) | 2 (oxen) |
| 21 | 60r | Bird, two stars | Gen. 47:29 | | | 2 (stars) | 1 (black bird) |
| SD | 67v | Bird with two heads (Moshe/Aharon) | Ex. 4:22-5:4 | | | | 1 (bird) |
| 23 | 67r bis | Two stars (Moshe/Aharon), Key of David's House | Ex. 5:4 -5:15 | | | 2 (stars) 1 (key) | 1 (dro-lerie) |
| 24 | 72v | Locusts (Eight plague) | Ex. 9:34-10:8 | | | | 2 (lo-custs) |
| 25 | 75v | Unleavened Bread, Lintel, Burnt Offering | Ex. 12:7-12:17 | | 1 (lintel) | 1 (altar) 2 (breads) | 1 (goat) |
| 26 | 77v | Donkey (redeem of firstlings) | Ex. 13:7-13:19 | | | | 1 (male donkey) |
| 27 | 85v | Altar of stone with stairs | Ex. 20:25-21:11 | | | 1 (altar) | |
| 28 | 89v | Scale (contributions for the sanctuary) | Ex. 24:9-25:3 | | | 1 (scale) | |
| 29 | 93r | Pillars from the court of the tabernacle | Ex. 27:10-19 and 38:10-19 | | 1 (gate-way) | | |
| 30 | 98r | Key (census tax?) | Ex. 30:1-30:14 | | | 1 (key) | |
| 31 | 100v | Broken tables beneath the Mount Horeb | Ex. 32:13-25 | | 1 (mount) | 2 (tables entire, then broken) | |
| 32 | 101r | Humans and swords | Ex. 32:26-33:1 | 2 (humans melted with swords) | | | |
| 33 | 104r | Menorah (7 lamps) | Ex. 35:1-35:15 | | | 1 (menorah) | |
| SD | 109v | Bezalel | Ex. 38:10-24 | 1 (man) | 1 (ark) | 1 (axe) | |
| 35 | 124v [before ff. 123bis and 124bis] | Fish (clean and unclean animals) | Lev. 11:43-12:7 | | | | 1 (fish) |

| | | | | | | | |
|----|--|---|--------------------------|---------|-----------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| SD | 124v [before f. 125r, third fo- lio 124] | Bird (laws for cleansing lepers) | Lev. 14:1- 14:12 | | | | 1 (bird) |
| 36 | 139r | Key (redemption of property) | Lev. 25:18-31 | | | 1 (key) | |
| 37 | 140r | David's star | Lev. 25:55 | | | 1 (magen david) | |
| 38 | 143v | Alph. Masorah (קרן), Griffon | Lev. 27:32 -Num. 1:16 | | | | 1 (grif- fon) |
| 39 | 149r | Altar (Gershonites' services) | Num. 4:20-32 | | | 1 (altar) | |
| SD | 155r | Bulls / Male goats | Num. 7:88 | | | | 2 (bull, male goat) |
| 40 | 155v | The Seven Lamps (Menorah) | Num. 8:1-15 | | | 1 (menorah) | |
| SD | 166r | Korach | Num. 15:33- 16:3 | 1 (man) | | 1 (talit) | |
| 41 | 170r | Red heifer | Num. 18:24- 19:3 | | | | 1 (red heifer) |
| 42 | 173v | Key (King Og defeated) | Num. 21:26- 22:3 | | | 1 (key) | |
| 43 | 178r | Pinhas with spear piercing the man of Israel and a Midianite | Num. 25:7-26:2 | 1 (man) | | 1 (spear) 1 (house) | |
| 44 | 191v | Male goat (for the sin offerings) | Num. 29:28- 30:3 | | | 1 (picket, roap) | 1 (male goat) |
| 45 | 196r | Tower (camps of Israel) | Num. 32:41- 33:14 | | 1 (tower) | | |
| 47 | 209v | Young of your oxes | Deut. 7:13 | | | 1 (feeder) | 1 (ox) |
| 48 | 216bisv | Camel (unclean food) | Deut. 13:16- 14:7 | | | | 1 (camel) |
| SD | 217r | Pig, Fish with fins and scales, eagle (clean and unclean food) | Deut. 14:8- 14:24 | | | | 3 (pig, fish, eagle) |

| SD | 223v | Heifer | Deut. 21:3 | | | | 1 (heifer) |
|-------|------|----------------------|------------|----|-----------|--------------------------|------------|
| 49 | 224v | Rule for a new house | Deut. 22:8 | | 1 (house) | 1 (parapet for the roof) | |
| TOTAL | | | | 19 | 13 | 43 | 38 |

Table 2: Detailed Figurative Forms (simply drawn forms, in grey).

Generally speaking, the figurative forms (micrographical or not) in Vat14 are more realistic than those in the MS Berlin, SBB, Or. Qu. 9, copied in 1233 also by Elijah ha-Naqdan.¹⁰ The MS Vat14 remains the richer as far as complexity of the drawing is concerned. We find nineteen human being forms (from recognizable men and women to newborns and metaphors of men melted with swords (illustration Ex. 32:27). We find thirteen figurative forms representing recognizable places or architectural elements of some specific places (for instance the pillars of the Tabernacle, or the tombs of Rachel and Deborah). The category “objects” is the richest with forty-three different elements. It should be stressed that some of them, as we will see in the detailed examples, are directly inspired from medieval times, attesting to the Northern French cultural milieu of Elijah ha-Naqdan. Trying to understand the motivation of such drawings apart a strict function of illustrating the biblical text, we will enter into the complexity and the richness of the composition of some of these micrographical isolated figures by presenting six detailed examples.

2. DETAILED EXAMPLES OF TEXT-IMAGE RELATIONSHIP IN VAT14

The figurative forms in Vat14 have been described once as “unskillful illustrations of the biblical text” (METZGER 1986: 386), what is probably true from a pure aesthetic point of view, as we will not discuss the artistic merits of the drawings of Elijah ha-Naqdan in this paper. Let us see whether they could be something more than illustrative elements.

¹⁰ See ATTIA (forthcoming 2015: Appendice 3) for a complete list of the micrographic elements found. There, the figurative elements are only vegetation, fantastic animals (griffon, hydra) or architectural elements (gateways).

2.1. Noah's ark refers to Rashi's commentary (fol. 7r)

The biblical text in the folio 7r continues from Gen. 6:6 to 6:17 (beginning of Parasha *Noah* 6:9).



Figure 2: MS Vatican, BAV, Vat. Ebr. 14, f. 7r (bottom of the folio).

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The drawing shows a triangular shape, presumably the Ark, and three levels inside it labeled תחתיים *tahtiyim*, שנים *shenim*, שלישים *shelishim*, meaning the first, second, and third decks. In the figure, *shelishim* represents the upper stage, and *tahtiyim* the lower one. Some simple drawings are added: a man and a woman in the upper part, animals (a mouse and a bird?) in the middle stage, and an undecipherable object on the bottom. These micrographic figures illustrate the end of Gen. 6:16:¹¹

... , “[...] and the door of the ark you will make in its side; with lower, second, and third decks you will make it.”

Rashi's commentary (BERLINER 1905: 14) relies upon these three categories, beginning with the upper level:¹²

תחתים שנים ושלישים גי עליות זו על גב זו עליונים לאדם אמצעים למדור [למדור Lower, second and third [stories]: three [stories], one above the other; the uppers [stories were] for human beings, the middle ones for animal dwelling, the bottom [ones] for waste matter.”

¹¹ The Hebrew biblical verses are quoted from the BHS, 5th edition. Translations are adapted from the Bible of the Jewish Publication Society (1917) and from the English Standard Version (2001).

¹² If not otherwise specified, English translations are ours.

TBSan 108b shows the same comments, with a reversed order of the description of the compartments, beginning with the lower level for waste matter.¹³ The *Midrash BerR* on Gen. 6:16 provides an explanation of the meaning of the three parts of the Ark with another combination of the level:

תחתיים שניים ושלישים תעשה תחתיים לזבלים ושניים לו ולבניו ולטהורים ושלישים לטמאים, ויש שמחליפים תחתיים לטמאים שניים לו ולבניו ולטהורים העיליונים לזבלים, כיצד הוא עושה, אלא כמין קטרקטין היה לו והיה פוססן מן הצד (ALBECK and THEODOR 1903: §31, 285), “The bottom story is for garbage, the second for him [=Noah] and his family along with the clean animals, and the third is for unclean ones. Others reverse it: the bottom story for the unclean animals, the second for himself and family and the top for the garbage. How did he manage it? He arranged a kind of trapdoor through which he shoved it sideways” (FREEDMAN and SIMON 1939a: 245).

As regards philological contents, this MFig contains four Masoretic notes. The central part of the figurative Masorah (note 1) includes three horizontal lines made of MM, related to Gen. 5:26 on וּשְׁמוֹנִים:

- [1] וּשְׁמוֹנִים ו' מלי בקריה מתושלח (Gen. 5:26) ותכנע מ[ואב] (Judg. 3:30) ויהי בשמונים שנה (1 Kings 6:1) ויצא מלאך ייי (2 Kings 19:35) ימי שנותינו (Ps. 90:10) בהראותו (Est. 1:4) ויצא מלאך ייי (2 Kings 19:35) וכל דברי הימים מלי בר מן חד חסר ויעש מהם (2 Chr. 2:17) וכלי.

Note 1 says: “The term וּשְׁמוֹנִים [occurs] six times *plene* [spelling] in the Bible, [then gives seven occurrences but 2 Kings 19:35 is repeated twice (so only 6)], [and] in Chronicles [the term is] always *plene* except one time, in 2 Chr. 2:17.” Here, the six first occurrences record *plene* spelling, which doesn’t include the repetition of 2 Kings 19:35, and then points out the exception in 2 Chronicles. This note appears previously written on folio 6v (only six occurrences quoted, and the exception is not mentioned). In this case, the repetition of 2 Kings 19:35, probably made to complete the drawing, does not alter the philological contents of the note. Furthermore, there are no apparent connections of meaning between the triangle of the Ark and the levels inside it and this specific Masoretic note on the term *shemonim* from Gen. 5:26.

The roof of the Arch is partially decipherable, containing several notes:

¹³ TBSan 108b: תחתיים שנים ושלישים תעשה, תנא: תחתיים לזבל, אמצעיים לבהמה, עליונים ללאדם.

- [2] וזה [אשר תעשה] ב' (Gen. 6:15) על המזבח (Ex. 29:38).
- [3] תחתיים ל' (Gen. 6:16) וחד [ו]אל ארץ תחתים (2 Sam. 24:6).
- [4] [ואני?...] (Gen. 6:17) ר"פ בפרשת ואני י"א בקריה וסימני [...].

According to note 2, the expression *וזה אשר תעשה* is used twice in the Pentateuch, which is accurate according to the concordances. This list as such is not recorded in L in verse Gen. 6:15 nor Ex. 29:38. GINSBURG (1880-1905) recorded a larger list on *we-zeh* (Tome I: 460) and a commentary (Tome IV: 356). The note 3 on Gen. 6:16 (*tahtiyim*, once with *daghesh* and one without [in 2 Sam. 24:6]) is accurate. The note 4 is written a bit in disorder, but probably its lemma is *ואני* (from Gen. 6:16), and the note says that this lemma is placed at the beginning of the verse in this section (*be-parshat* [HYVERNAT 1902: 101]), and eleven times in the Bible (*be-Qeryah*) and their references are [...]. The feet of the Ark have been cut and remain undecipherable.

The preliminary result of this analysis is that Elijah ha-Naqdan uses the Ark as a way to illustrate the Biblical verse in Gen. 6:16 and also as a way to recall Rashi's interpretation of the three levels of the Ark. It confirms Rashi as the source and textual inspiration for this precise representation of the Ark.

2.2. Noah's offering and the altar refer to Midrash (fol. 9r)

The biblical text on fol. 9r displays the verses running from Gen. 8:10 to 8:21.



Figure 3: MS Vatican, BAV, Vat. Ebr. 14, f. 9r (bottom of the folio).

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The main figurative element displays the exit from the Ark, and the burnt offering that Noah offered on an altar in Gen. 8:20:

ויבן נח מזבח ליהוה ויקח מכל הבהמה הטהורה ומכל העוף הטהר ויעל עלת במזבח, “Then Noah built an altar to YHWH, and took some of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and he offered burnt offerings on the top of the altar.”

Only the left side of the note is figurative.¹⁴ It displays a human being (Noah) standing in front of an altar on which a *taurus* (שור) is burned. Ibn Ezra’s short commentary evokes the ten species of pure beasts in general (without the more exhaustive enumeration contained in Deut. 14: 5) as well as the place where the altar was built, Mount Ararat. The long version of Ibn Ezra’s commentary describes the top of the altar.¹⁵ However, it seems that Midrash BerR on Gen. 8:20 provides the clearest explanation, referring explicitly to ox (שור) or bull (פר):

[ויעל עולות במזבח] ר' אליעזר בן יעקב א' על מזבח הגדול שבירושלם ששם הקריב אדם הראשון ותיטב ליי' משור פר מקרין מפריס (תהלים סט לב),¹⁶ “[He offered burnt offerings on it] R. Eliezer ben Jacov said: [like] on the great altar which was in Jerusalem, where there the first man made a sacrifice and *this will please YHWH more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hoofs* (Ps. 69:31).”¹⁷

In the outer margin, another form depicts a key melded together with a decorative drawing.

The MFig contains five notes with a repetition of the fourth that contains a Masoretic note. The figure of Noah entails that some letters are combined with simple drawings and one can decipher written words on (1) his back, (2) his hat, and (3) his belly:

¹⁴ The Masorah on the right is decorative (MM on Gen. 8:20 and 8:22).

¹⁵ I thank Hanna Liss for drawing my attention to Ibn Ezra’s long commentary: On *burnt offerings*: (are those) that all ascend from on top of the altar, as it is said in Lev 6:2: *It is the burnt offering, because of the burning upon the altar.*

¹⁶ *Bereshit Rabba*, §34, 317.

¹⁷ *Midrash Rabba*, 245.

- [1] ומזבח נוח עשה וזה דמותו והמזבח, “Noah made an altar, and this is its form and the altar;”
- [2] מזבח עמודים, “Altar [are?] standing;”
- [3] [ב?] שור [ע?] שר¹⁸, “Bull ?”

The text inside the figures of Noah explains the image. The phrase on his abdomen probably reads ‘ox’ (שור). The altar is composed of micrographic letters that are barely legible due to the blurring of the manuscript’s ink. In its lower right part, we find a long MM note on imperfect *hiphil* אָסַף in Gen. 8:21:

- [4] אָסַף גי חסי וכולהון ייט וסיי וסיי (Gen. 8:21-22) דברת (Ex. 10:29) לקום (Jos. 7:12) גם אני (Judg. 2:21) עזבתם (Judg. 10:13) העמיס (1 Kings 12:11; 2 Chr. 10:11) כעצת (2 Chr. 10:14) להניד (1 Kings 12:14; 2 Chr. 10:14) עי[ניד?] (Am. 7:8; Am. 8:2) עב[ור?] (Ho. 1:6) בת[] (Jona 2:5) [???].

The contents of the key, partially blurred, repeat instances of the list that is written inside the altar:

- [5] כלהון ייט וסימני וירח בי [בו?] (Gen. 8:21-22) דברת (Ex. 10:29) לקום (Jos. 7:12) גם אני (Judg. 2:21) עזבתם (Judg. 10:13).

In f. 9r of Vat14, note 4 states: “Three instances of the term אָסַף [in Gen. 8:21] are defective out of nineteen occurrences, which are as follows [...]” The list then begins with the three defective forms of Gen. 8:21 (where the term occurs twice) and the one of Ex. 10:29. The next instances listed refer to the half-defective אָסַף or *plene* forms אָוּסַף. Some of the items are missing due to the blurring of the ink.

As regards preliminary results, the figurative Masorah matches Gen. 8:20-21. Elijah chose to draw a *taurus* (bull with horns and hoofs) upon the altar because he meant to remind the reader of the midrashic explanation of BerR on Gen. 8:20. As far as contents, the *Masora Figurata* shows three explanatory notes (notes 1, 2, 3 are about Noah standing in front of a Taurus) and note 4 (which expands upon the *Masora Parva*).

¹⁸ We can hardly read עֶשֶׂר in this part.

2.3. A gateway as an illustration (fol. 16v)

The biblical passage in fol. 16v is from Gen.17:10 to 17:23 (end of Parasha *Lekh lekha*).



Figure 4: MS Vatican, BAV, Vat. Ebr. 14, f. 16v (bottom of the folio).

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The figurative Masorah consists of an architectural element: a gateway. Elijah drew it on left side of a decorative shape. Ornamental form's contents:

לו וְלו כִּיב סִימְנִיהוּן לוֹ יִשְׁמְעָאֵל יִחִיהּ לִפְנֵיךְ (Gen. 17:18) וְלוּ [ב]אֲזַנִּינוּ
 לוֹ (Gen. 30:34) שְׁמַעֲנִי (2 Sam. 18:12) (Gen. 23:13) לוֹ יִהְיֶה כְּדַבְּרְךָ (Gen. 30:34) לוֹ
 יִשְׁטַמְנוּ יִסְףּ וְהִשָּׁב יִשִּׁיב לֹו (Gen. 50:15) לוֹ מִתְּנוּ (Num. 14:2) לֹא גִבְעֵנוּ
 בְּגֹבַע (Num. 20:3) לוֹ יֵשׁ חָרַב בְּיָדֵי כִי עֵתָה הִרְגַתִּיךְ (Num. 22:29) [ו] לוֹ
 קָר קָרַעַת (Is. 63:19) לוֹ חֲכָמוֹ (Deut. 32: 29) לְהִאֲבִידֵנוּ לוֹ הוֹאֲלֵנוּ
 וְנִשָּׁב (Jos. 7:7) לוֹ הַחַיִּיתֶם אֹתָם (Judg. 8:19) לוֹ חֲפֵץ יִהוּהּ לְהַמִּיתֵנוּ
 (Judg. 13: 23) אֲכֹל (1 Sam. 14:30) אֲבִשְׁלוֹם (2 Sam. 19:7) לוֹ שְׁקוֹל יִשְׁקֵל
 כַּעֲסִי (Job 6:2) לוֹ הַקְּשַׁבְתָּ לְמִצּוֹתַי (Is. 48:18).

Continuation of the note in the figurative form (gateway's form):

לוֹ חִיהּ רַעָה לִי (Ez. 14:15) לוֹ אִישׁ הוֹלֵךְ (Mich. 2:11) לוֹ עָמִי שׁוֹמַע לִי (Ps. 81:14)
 לוֹ יִשְׁקוֹל (Job 6:2) נִפְשָׁכֶם לוֹ יֵשׁ נִפְשָׁכֶם תַּחַת נִפְשִׁי (Job 16:4) לוֹ יֵשׁ נִפְשָׁכֶם תַּחַת
 נִפְשִׁי וְחִבְרָה (Job 16:4) לוֹ יֵשׁ (Job 16:4).

These words correspond to a unique Masoretic note on the terms לו וְלו from Gen. 17:18. It begins on the decorative side and ends on the figurative one. The decorative form presents seventeen occurrences, and the gateway form presents five occurrences, but the last one (Job 16:4) is copied three times, but this repetition does not alter any philological contents. These

twenty-two occurrences are mentioned in the MP of the same folio.¹⁹ Here, the Masoretic contents of note 1 match several spellings on the term לו/ולוא/ולו in Gen. 17:18. At first view, the figure of the gateway evokes probably God gi-ving commandments. The narrative presents important theological features, although of course the figurative representation of God remains strictly prohibited.²⁰ It may be suggested here that the use of a complex micrography, endorsing a long Masoretic list, may have guide the scribe to prepare a figurative micrography instead of a regular lay out in horizontal lines.

2.4. Abraham as a medieval horseman (fol. 12r)

The biblical passage in fol. 12r is from Gen. 11:23 to 12:4 (i.e., the beginning of Parasha *Lekh lekha* in Gen 12:1).



Figure 5: MS Vatican, BAV, Vat. Ebr. 14, f. 12r (bottom of the folio).

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The micrography represents Abraham as a horseman dressed like a knight (with helmet, spurs and horse). A label under it indicates וילך אברם (Gen. 12:4), quoting the biblical text written in the folio. In the inner mar-

¹⁹ See GINSBURG (1880-1905, Tome I), where list nr. 304 includes all items, list nr. 305 records the *plene* spelling לוּא and list nr. 306 the term וְלוּ; see also WEIL (1971: 1444).

²⁰ Ex. 20:4, fourth Commandment.

gin, a list is written. Regarding the contents, the *Masora Magna*, located inside the horse's back, relies on Gen. 12:1, לך לך:

לך לך, “*Lekh Lekha* is a *casus let* because of *status constructus* [with *segol* in Gen. 12:1], and appears one time [under the form] *we-Lekh lekha* [also with *segol* in Gen. 22:2].”

The head of the horse contains a description, repeating a *Masora Magna* remark, placed in the upper margin on Gen. 11:29, יסכה לי. Other notes are blurred but obviously refer to *Masora Magna* because the word סימניהון / *simanehon* is illegible.²¹ The list written at the left of the figurative forms comes from Sefer *Okhla we-Okhla* (FRENSDORF 1864: list 35; DÍAZ-ESTEBAN 1975: list 36). This example illustrates the strong influence of the European Christian milieu on Jewish Culture.

2.5. Calf, tree, table referring to the Midrash & Rashi (fol. 17r)

The biblical passage in fol. 17r goes from Gen. 17:23 to 18:8 (i.e., the beginning of Parasha *Vayyera* in Gen. 18:1).



Figure 6: MS Vatican, BAV, Vat. Ebr. 14, f. 17r (bottom of the folio).

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The *Masora Magna*, located in the lower margin, runs from right to left and is divided into a decorative part, a calf and a tree; under the

²¹ This word always precedes occurrences.

tree, a table is set. A cup and a pot are drawn on it. This complex figurative form illustrates Gen. 18:7, which tells about the calf's preparation for the messengers' meal. The tree illustrates the expression of the biblical text itself *under the tree* (תחת העץ / *taḥat ha-'eṣ*) that is mentioned twice, in Gen. 18:4 and Gen. 18:8. The details of the table set under the tree could be an allusion to Rashi: the expression in Gen. 18:4 "under the tree" (תחת העץ / *taḥat ha-'eṣ*) is explained by Rashi with the words תחת האיילן / *taḥat ha-'ilan*, in which *'ilan* is a synonym of *'eṣ*. The bird in the tree, drawn with a simple line, seems to be decorative.

The contents of the forms are partially decipherable because the ink is blurred. Near the calf, a biblical verse is partly legible (Gen. 18:7). Inside the form of the calf's head, occurrences should be written, but as the ink is blurred, only the generic term סימנהון / *simanehon*, introducing occurrences, is easily decipherable. The triangular element on its left also derives from Gen. 18:7 and Gen. 18:4. The tree, partially decipherable, contains several Masoretic notes, such as one on the term האהלה (Gen. 18:6) as well as one on the term וחלב (Gen. 18:8). In a certain disorder, there are three repetitions of the verse in Gen. 18:7. The table under the tree is labeled זה השלחן, "It is the table."

This figurative micrography has been built with Masoretic lists, and is first an illustration of a biblical episode (preparation of the meal for the angels) and the place of a meal (under the tree). In our opinion, the tree also emphasizes Rashi's commentary. The additional details of the table, with pot and cup (not quoted in the biblical text and looking out as medieval objects), probably match the midrashic commentary also repeated in the Rashi's comments *ad loco* to show that the meal followed local meal customs.²²

²² See BERLINER (1905: 33) on Gen. 18:6, where three *langues à la moutarde* (לשונות) (בחרדל) were prepared for the Messengers. Further, the angels seemed to eat, to follow the customs.

2.6. *Korach on Numbers 16:1 (fol. 166r)*

The biblical text is from Num. 15:33 to 16:3, end of Parasha *Shelah*.



Figure 7: MS Vatican, BAV, Vat. Ebr. 14, f.166r (bottom of the folio).

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This last example may give a key of how the figurative forms were chosen.²³ It is not a micrographical figurative form but only a simple line drawing, letting us focus on the image-main text relationship. The end of the text mentions the commandment of wearing a blue tassel (*talit*) with a fringe (*šišit*) at each corner (see Num. 15:38 to 15:41):

דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת להם ועשו להם ציצת על כנפי בגדיהם לדרתם ונתנו
 על ציצת הכנף פתיל תכלת
 “Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them
 that they make them throughout their generations fringes in the corners of
 their garments, and that they put with the fringe of each corner a thread
 of blue” (Num. 15:38).²⁴

Column two (same folio) begins the *Parasha of Korach* (Num. 16:1), the rebellion against Moses uttered by Korach. In this folio, Korach is carefully drawn standing like a proud and arrogant man. He wears a priest cloak with *šiš* that has four fringes containing four knots at each corner. The word *ציצית* / *šišiot* is written on his chest. Nevertheless, the paleographic *ductus* does not indicate the script of Elijah in this word but a script of a second hand. This word has been written afterwards like some glosses in the mar-

²³ I thank Hanna Liss for her interest on this example.

²⁴ Jewish Publication Society’s translation.

gins that are clearly not from Elijah. Furthermore, the ink is darker than the rest of the drawing. The word ציצית written by Elijah ha-Naqdan is defective (with only one *yod*) in the biblical main text. Consequently, the Masoretic note, also written by Elijah on this term, records four occurrences of this word in defective spelling.²⁵ Undoubtedly, Korach was drawn at the beginning of the biblical section to recall the episode. For what purpose would someone add the word ציציות in *plene* orthography? First, the second reader may have been wished to remember Rashi's commentary on Num. 15:39:

[וזכרתם את כל מצות ה'] שמנן גימטריא של ציצית שש מאות ושמונה חוטין וציצית היא שש מאות ושמונה חוטין, וחמשה קשרים הרי תרי"ג "Since the numerical value of the word ציצית is six hundred [90+10+90+10+400], [to which you might add] eight threads and five knots, behold, this sums up to [a total of] six hundred and thirteen [i.e., the traditional number of commandments in the Torah]."

But, in the commentary, the word ציצית in *plene* orthography is explained by a *gematria* based on *BamR* 18:21.²⁷ That is why it is uncertain why a scribe would quote the plural feminine form (ציציות) instead of the form employed by Rashi (ציצית) if he wanted to relate it to his drawing. Moreover, the *gematria* in Rashi's commentary refers to eight threads and five knots, but our drawing clearly presents four fringes with only four knots each. If the question of the form of ציציות remains unsolved, an explanation of the drawing by Elijah of four fringes and four knots might be found in the *BamR*, "Parashat Korach" 18:3. The Midrash reports the polemic uttered by Korach about the commandment of wearing *šišit* (Num. 15:38):

ג ויקח קרח מה כתיב למעלה מן הענין ועשו להם ציצית קפץ קרח ואמר למשה טלית שכולה תכלת מהו שתהא פטורה מן הציצית א"ל חייבת בציצית א"ל קרח טלית [Korach... took] What is written in the preceding passage? *Bid them they shall make [...] a thread of blue* (Num. 15:38). Korach jumped up and asked Moses: "If a cloak is entirely of blue, what is the law as regards its being exempted from the obligation of fringes?" Moses answered him "it is a subject to

²⁵ See the lower margin. The notes indicate three times in Num 15:38 and one in Ez. 8:3 in defective writing.

²⁶ According to BERLINER (1905: 311).

²⁷ *BamR*, Vilna edition, on 18:21: ותורה תרי"א ויראה: ובכל נפשך יראה בגמטריא תרי"א ותורה תרי"א ויראה: וציצית ת"ר ח' גרורין, יראה וה' קשורין הרי תרי"ג ותורה עמם הרי תרי"ג.

the obligation of fringes.” Korach retorted: “A cloak that is entirely composed of blue cannot free itself from the obligation, four blue threads do free it!” (FREEDMAN and SIMON 1939b: 709).

This final example represents an interesting aspect of the will of Elijah ha-Nadan to create a figurative (human being) form by illustrating the biblical text but also referring to a midrashic interpretation.

3. FUNCTIONS OF FIGURATIVE MICROGRAPHICAL MASORAH IN VAT14

All the detailed examples show clearly that the scribe always had in mind first to write Masorah (here Masoretic notes) illustrating the Bible and not simply decorating it. In addition, these examples show that he wanted also to allude to meta-text within details of the micrographical images and to refer to some scholarly knowledge of the Bible. All of the most detailed figurative forms were made in Genesis, and it is there that we discovered a frequent use of figurative Masorah to allude to metatexts.²⁸ Here is a list of the cases where we could trace allusions to other texts than only the biblical written around the form.²⁹

| Nr. | Folio | Subject | Biblical text around illustrated | Allusions to other texts | References |
|-----|-------|----------------------|----------------------------------|--|------------|
| 1 | 7r | Ark of Noah | Gen 6:6-6:17 | Rashi / Midrash Rabba / Talmud (example 1) | |
| SD | 8v | Birds (sent by Noah) | Gen 7:21-8:9 | - | |

²⁸ The use of figurative form as allusion to metatext occurs less in the Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. As the lists of Table 2 shows, the elements became more simple and less detailed and they are related directly to one element if the biblical text. We find only one allusion to *Midrash Rabba* for the simple drawing on fol. 67v (an eagle with two heads) in addition to the case of Korach (example 6). The figurative forms from Exodus to Deuteronomy reflect objects or animals of the Middle Ages.

²⁹ As we already said for Table 2 (see nt. 9 above), rows nr. 7, 11, 14 and 20 were published in GOLB (1976: Plate 21), and nr. 20 was included in METZGER (1982: 156, fig. 205) too.

| | | | | | |
|----|-----|----------------------------------|-----------------|---|----------------------------|
| 2 | 9r | Noah performing a sacrifice | Gen 8:10-8:21 | Midrash Rabba / Long commentary of Ibn Ezra ? (see example 2) | Medieval clothes |
| 3 | 12r | Abraham leaves / Horseman | Gen 11:23-12:4 | - | a medieval lord (horseman) |
| 4 | 16v | Gateway / hands | Gen 17:10-17:23 | - | christian architecture |
| 5 | 17r | Calf, Table, Tree | Gen 17:23-18:8 | Rashi / Midrash Rabba (example 5) | European eating customs |
| 6 | 23r | Cave of Machpela | Gen 22:21-23:10 | Rashi / Midrash Rabba (centenarium is mentioned explicitly there on Gen. 23:9 and 23:15) | |
| 7 | 24v | Eliezer, the servant, on a horse | Gen 24:16-24:30 | - | Horse instead of a camel |
| 8 | 25r | Rivka | Gen 24:31-24:43 | Rashi describes the hollow stone on the lip of the well on Gen. 24:43 et 24:20 | |
| 9 | 27r | Esau hunts a deer | Gen 25:18-25:30 | Midrash refers to trapping wilde animals (like the doe on Gen. 25:27-28). | Medieval clothes Horn |
| 10 | 31r | Jacob's scale | Gen 28:9-28:20 | - | |
| 11 | 33r | Reuben and the mandrakes | Gen 30:7-30:20 | Midrash Rabba on 29:35: 2 tribes exalted Juda and Levi, probably represented by the newborns | |
| 12 | 36v | Ox and Donkey of Jacob | Gen 31:52-32:9 | According to Midrash Rabba (FREEDMAN and SIMON [1939a] vol. II, 698, §12), the ox alludes to Joseph and the donkey to Issachar. | |

| | | | | | |
|----|--------|-------------------------------|-----------------|--|---|
| 13 | 39bisv | Graves | Gen 35:13-35:28 | Midrash Rabba on Deborah's grave (Allon Bakhut), the link between the two tombs is drawn as a way ('In the Way to Ephrat as exile way'), Rachel's grave is represented by a stone. | |
| 14 | 41r | Esau's cattle | Gen 35:29-36:14 | | |
| 15 | 42v | Sun, moon (Jacob's dream) | Gen 37:1-37:11 | | |
| 16 | 48v | Chief baker hanged | Gen 40:12-40:23 | | Medieval potence, head of the baker covered |
| 17 | 49v | Joseph Chief of Egypt | Gen 41:38-41:50 | | Medieval lord (horseman) |
| 18 | 50 r | Joseph's brothers prostrating | Gen 41:51-42:6 | Rashi describes precisely the arms and legs on the ground | |
| 19 | 52bisv | Joseph's goblet in the bag | Gen 44:5-44:17 | | |
| 20 | 59v | Ploughman | Gen 47:15-47:23 | | Medieval plough |
| 21 | 60r | Bird, two stars | Gen 47:24-48:3 | Midrash Rabba on Gen 47:29 alludes to the shadow of a bird at Joseph's death. The stars represent Manasse and Ephraim. | |

Table 3: Texts and Metatexts in Vat14 (Book of Genesis).

In Genesis, twenty-one details of micrographical drawings are direct illustrations of the biblical text – like our example 3; six details are direct allusions to Rashi commentary – like in our examples 1 and 2; eight details are direct allusion to the Midrash; one detail is possibly an allusion to the Talmud, and seven more are details related to a medieval object (currently in use in 1239).

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, this analysis justifies expanding research on Ashkenazi Masorah, encompassing figurative micrographical Masorah, as a valid and underutilized historical source in the development of the Hebrew textual universe of Judaism. Our quintessential case study, the MS Vat. 14, gives us a glimpse of the complexities of the use and function of the figurative Masorah in thirteenth Ashkenazi century, which was sometimes meant as more than decoration.

First, the figurative Masorah is all connected by strong hermeneutic and semantic bonds to the biblical text. Like visual elements and practical *signets* in a book, they remind the reader precisely of the beginning of biblical weekly sections (*parashah*), or emphasize a specific episode in the biblical narration. Second, in the most detailed cases found in Genesis, the designs transmit some scholarly information: (a) the form serves to remind the reader of the Rashi commentary (b) the form indicates the Midrash Rabba or other rabbinic literature (c) the form signals a contemporary visual element of the thirteenth century. The two first visual elements (a-b) may have certainly served educational functions by pointing to traditional Jewish sources (Midrash, Rashi), which invites the reader to discover, study, and interpret the texts that form the core of medieval Jewish rabbinic culture at a time (1239 C. E.) when difficulties multiplied for French Jews.³⁰

Our content analysis demonstrates that Elijah ha-Naqdan copied Masoretic notes also in complex forms, similarly to what he did in the book of Exodus (see our monograph). From that, we deduce that most of the notes in Vat14 were considered reliable an Ashkenazic Masoretic tradition. Some repetitions do occur in completing the drawings (see examples 1 and 3). But, in these cases, they represent no impediment to the philological contents. Finally, in most of the cases, the biblical text, the figure, and the Masoretic notes written on the same folio correspond to each other (except in Note 1 in the Ark's case).

³⁰ The confiscation and the burning of the Talmud will take place in Paris in 1240; see DAHAN (1999).

To conclude, in this context, *Masora Figurata* of MS Vat14 could have functioned as: *a*) a pedagogical visual tool to learn the sections of the biblical text as they often appear at the beginning of pericopes; *b*) a pedagogical tool to learn the Masoretic note (mnemonic device), or challenging other experts in Masorah, and *c*) a manner to physically represent the rabbinic literature around the biblical text, as a way to preserve it as well as a tool to teach interpretations of the Bible.

The Masorah copied by this thirteenth-century Ashkenazi scholar encourages further research in this field. Our analysis shows one thing conclusively: the figurative Masorah in Ashkenaz, especially performed by Elijah ha-Naqdan in 1239 C.E., fulfills more than purely aesthetic function: these were real media for transmission of Masoretic knowledge and of Biblical hermeneutics.

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