

# Kings or Messengers? The Text of 2 Samuel 11:1 in the Light of Hebrew Historical Phonology\*

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## 1. Introduction

A fundamental problem that historical linguists face when dealing with ancient languages is the need to discern between different linguistic phases that are superimposed one upon the other in the received sources. Since ancient literary texts were often canonized as sacred scripture, they were transmitted for many generations, and by the time they reach their final form, they contain various features that were infused into them by successive tradents. Another common problem is the inadequacy of native scripts to convey the full grammatical picture of the language encoded in them. The task of distinguishing early features from late ones is then complicated by the fact that many words are recorded in their historical spelling, which was likewise canonized by later generations. Such spellings do not necessarily betray the actual form of the words in later periods. The attempt to uncover the underlying forms is shared by both linguists and

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\* The core of this paper was published originally in Hebrew in *Textus* 25 (2010), 13–36, but the present version has been substantially revised and expanded in a number of essential points, befitting, among other things, from valuable comments made by several colleagues to whom I wish to extend my thanks: David Talshir and Stefan Schorch commented on an early draft; Jan Joosten and Kevin Trompelt reacted to the published Hebrew version; Orin Gensler remarked on my presentation at the 14th Italian Meeting of Afroasiatic Linguistics (Turin, June 2011). Translations from the Bible and other primary sources are mine, unless indicated otherwise. The following abbreviations have been used throughout the paper: **BH** = Biblical Hebrew; **MT** = the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible; **TH** = the Tiberian vocalization tradition of BH; **SP** = the Samaritan Pentateuch; **SH** = the Samaritan oral tradition of BH; **K** = *kətib* / **Q** = *qarē*.

philologists: the former wish to reconstruct the original *form of the language* recorded in the ancient texts, while the latter wish to penetrate into the original *meaning of the texts* as they were intended—or at least would have been understood—at the time they were first composed, and to trace their transmission history until they reached their present form.

The following discussion owes its inception to a philological—not linguistic—question, but I submit that it cannot be solved without utilizing the tools offered by historical linguistics. Thus an effort will be made to combine both perspectives. As I hope to demonstrate, a philological clarification of an obscure textual detail necessarily contributes something new to the linguistic description of a certain historical phase of the Hebrew language.

## 2. The Textual Problem

Two episodes of the David narratives are linked to one another by a transitional passage in 2 Sam 11:1. The first episode concerns the diplomatic incident experienced by David's envoys to the Ammonite king, which soon deteriorated into war between Israel on the one hand and the Ammonites and Aramaeans on the other (2 Sam 10:1-19). The second episode tells about the love affair between David and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, due to which David sent Uriah to meet his death in the battlefield during the siege imposed on the Ammonite capitol. The transitional passage concludes the chain of events described in the first episode, and sets the scene for the drama that is about to take place in the second:

וַיְהִי לְחֻשְׁבַּת הַשָּׁנָה לַעֵת צֵאת הַמְּלָאכִים וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד אֶת־יוֹאָב וְאֶת־עֲבָדָיו עִמּוֹ  
וְאֶת־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּשְׁחָתוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וַיִּצְרוּ עַל־רֵבֶה וְדָוִד יוֹשֵׁב בִּירוּשָׁלַם.

A year after the departure of the *הַמְּלָאכִים*, David sent Joab, his servants with him, and all of Israel. They ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah, while David was sitting in Jerusalem.

The main exegetical and textual difficulty encountered in this passage lies in the identity of the people referred to as having departed one year before the described events. This difficulty results from the ambiguous nature of MT, *הַמְּלָאכִים*,<sup>1</sup> vis-à-vis the clear-cut testimony of the other textual witnesses:

(a) The so-called consonantal text of MT seems to read *הַמְּלָאכִים* “the messengers”, referring to David's envoys to Hanun, the Ammonite king, whose dispatch ignited the war in the first place (2 Sam 10:1-18, esp. 2-4).<sup>2</sup>

1 This is the reading according to the Aleppo Codex, the best representative of MT, whose text serves as the basis for the present discussion. Other readings are discussed below.

2 Admittedly, these messengers are not referred to by the term *מְלָאכִים* in the first episode, but are rather called *עֲבָדֵי דָוִד* “David's servants” or *עֲבָדָיו* “his servants”. But the term *מְלָאכִים* is used in the second episode to designate Joab's messenger from the battlefield (2 Sam 11:4, 19, 22). Note

(b) The vocalization of MT seems to read הַמְּלָכִים “the kings”. This term may refer to the coalition of Aramaean rulers who were mentioned in the preceding verse: כָּל הַמְּלָכִים עֲבָדֵי הַדָּדָעֶזֶר, “all the *kings*, servants of Hadadezer” (2 Sam 10:19).<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, and perhaps preferably, the term may refer to “*kings*” in general, and the entire expression לָעֵת צֵאת הַמְּלָאכִים “when the *kings* go out” should be interpreted as referring to the war-time season, a certain period of the year that fits best the execution of military campaigns.<sup>4</sup> Be it as it may, this reading is also attested in the parallel account of the Chronicler (1 Chr 20:1):

וַיְהִי לְעֵת תְּשׁוּבַת הַשָּׁנָה לְעֵת צֵאת הַמְּלָכִים וַיִּנְהַג יוֹאָב אֶת חַיִּל הַצָּבָא וַיִּשְׁחַת  
אֶת אֶרֶץ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וַיָּבֵא וַיִּצַר אֶת רַבָּה וַדָּוִד יוֹשֵׁב בִּירוּשָׁלַם

And a year after the departure of *the kings*, Joab led the force of the army. He ravaged the land of the Ammonites, and came and besieged Rabbah while David was sitting in Jerusalem.

In addition, this reading underlies all the ancient versions of Samuel: the Septuagint (τῶν βασιλέων), the Vulgate (*reges*), the Peshitta (ܡܠܟܝܐ) and Targum Jonathan (מלכיא).

Even though semantically the two readings differ greatly, they are very similar in terms of their spelling; the only element that distinguishes between them is the presence of a single letter, the medial *aleph*. Moreover, both readings fit the context well, and can be justified on internal, literary grounds. No wonder, then, that scholars and commentators have raised all the self-evident exegetical possibilities embedded in such a situation: most of them prefer “the kings”,<sup>5</sup> some lean toward “the messengers”,<sup>6</sup> and a few try to hold to both options and argue

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further that the same verb, שלח, “to send”, is used to denote both the dispatching of David’s envoys to Hanun (2 Sam 10:2-3) and of Joab’s messenger to David (2 Sam 11:18, 22). This usage demonstrates that, from a semantic point of view, the terms מלכאים and עבדים are synonymous and interchangeable within the David narratives. (The implication of this stylistic variation for the literary growth of the David narratives is a different matter that does not pertain to the present linguistic analysis.)

- 3 Note that the infinitive used in the expression לָעֵת צֵאת הַמְּלָאכִים echoes the verb used previously in a reference to the Aramaean kings gathered by Hadadezer: וַיִּשְׁלַח הַדָּדָעֶזֶר וַיִּצַא אֶת אֲרָם “Hadadezer sent and brought out the Aramaeans” (v. 16); cf. וַיִּצְאוּ בְנֵי עַמּוֹן וַיַּעֲרְכוּ מִלְחָמָה “the Ammonites went out and drew up in battle array” (v. 8).
- 4 Note the similar construction לְעֵת צֵאת הַשָּׂאֲבָת, “the time when women go out to draw water” (Gen 24:11). One should not be misled by the definite article, whose function in this syntagm is not anaphoric but rather generic. The specific women with whom Abraham’s servant conducts his conversation were not mentioned yet, so the expression in v. 11 cannot refer to them but rather to women in general.
- 5 See, e.g., P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel* (AB 9; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 279, 285; U. Simon, *Reading Prophetic Narratives*, trans. L.J. Schramm (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 103 and 291 n. 6.
- 6 See especially H. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden* (12 vols.; Leipzig: Leiner, 1853–76; 2nd edn. 1911), 1:230 n. 2; E. Kautzsch (ed.), *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, trans. A.E. Cowley (2nd edn.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 81 §23g.

that the text is deliberately ambiguous, tying as it is both readings together.<sup>7</sup> The literary analysis does not allow favoring one option over the others, and the preference of either remains a subjective decision dependent upon the personal sensitivities of each exegete.

Less attention has been given to the intriguing fact that MT itself also evades clear-cut explication, and it is in fact more illusive than one recognizes at first glance. Some manuscripts and printed editions contain at this point a masoretic note of the *katīb* (K) and *qarē* (Q) type (המלאכים K, המלכים Q), and other manuscripts simply read המלכים.<sup>8</sup> Many commentators therefore take this passage to be a regular case of K/Q.<sup>9</sup>

However, a different picture emerges upon closer inspection of the most important Tiberian manuscripts. Thus, for instance, in the Aleppo Codex (MS A) the word is vocalized as המלֵאִכִּים, with a *rafé* sign above the *aleph* to mark its quiescence, and the accompanying *masore parva* note reads לֵא כתיב אֵ, “there is no other instance in which this word is written with an *aleph*”.<sup>10</sup> In MS St. Petersburg B19<sup>A</sup> (Leningradensis, MS L)—which serves as the basic text of the standard critical editions of the *Biblia Hebraica* series (BHK, BHS and BHQ)—the word is vocalized as המלֵאִכִּים, again with a *rafé* sign, and the masoretic note states simply לֵא, “there is no other instance of this spelling/form”. Significantly, the schwa seems to be written on a darker spot, and apparently it was corrected from an original *qāmeš*. Strangely enough, the two manuscripts seemingly contradict each other concerning their preferred reading: “the kings” in MS A,<sup>11</sup> vs. “the messengers” in MS L. Nevertheless, it is a telling fact that none of these manuscripts treats the word as a case of K/Q. This abstention is surely meaningful, yet its meaning has never been addressed.

The purpose of the present discussion is to disambiguate the twofold textual testimony of MT by way of linguistic analysis. How and why did this textual witness combine the two readings into one word? Is it possible to establish the

7 See especially R. Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993), 109–112; K. Bodner, “Layers of Ambiguity in 2 Samuel 11,1”, *ETL* 80.1 (2004), 102–111, esp. 104–108.

8 See C.D. Ginsburg, *The Earlier Prophets: Diligently Revised according to the Massorah and the Early Editions with the Various Readings from MSS. and the Ancient Versions* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1926), 230; B. Kennicott, *Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum cum variis lectionibus* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1776–80; repr. Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 2003), 1:573.

9 As such it was also included in the comprehensive analysis of R. Gordis, *The Biblical Text in the Making: A Study of the Kethib-Qere* (Philadelphia: Dropsie College, 1937; 2nd edn. New York: Ktav, 1971), 140, List 80.

10 Similarly MS Cairo of the Prophets vocalizes the word in the same way, and its *masora parva* states לֵא יתיר, “an extra *aleph*”. However, masoretic notes of the יתיר type already come close—sometimes even overlap—notes of the K/Q type.

11 That this is the way in which the reading was understood by the vocalizer of the MS A is evident from the masoretic note he added.

precedence of one reading over the other or at least to detect the phase in which this mixed reading came into existence? And is this really a case of a mixed form, or should one explain differently the relation between the consonantal text (which admits the existence of an *aleph*) and the vocalization (which seemingly ignores it)?

### 3. Lexical Variants?

As a rule, most commentators interpret MT in one of two ways. The vast majority takes it to mean **הַמְלָאֲכִים**, “the messengers”; such scholars tend to overlook the subtle difference between the consonantal text and its vocalization, and are satisfied with explaining the former alone. Only a few critical commentators—especially of the 19th century—had noticed the difference between the two aspects of MT, and acknowledged the variant reading embedded in it (as presented above).<sup>12</sup>

However, there are grounds for reconsidering the actual meaning of this inner-masoretic variance, and for rethinking the idea that in its current form MT embeds two different readings within one ‘mixed form’. Admittedly, MT contains many cases of disagreement between the consonantal text and the vocalization, cases that testify to variant textual and linguistic traditions that were infused into one another by tradents throughout the complicated—and in its earliest phases largely unknown—process of the crystallization of MT and the transmission of all its components as one system from one generation to the next. But such disagreements usually reflect *grammatical* differences (e.g. in number, definiteness or alternation between verbal stems or nominal patterns), and as a rule they result from linguistic developments that occurred in Hebrew in its transition from the ‘classical’ or pre-exilic phase(s) of the language, in which the early biblical texts were written, and later, post-exilic phase(s) of Hebrew, that stand at the background of the various oral traditions.<sup>13</sup>

By its nature, MT contains only a limited number of variant readings that pertain to lexical differences. To the extent that such *lexical* variants had been preserved in MT, tradition usually treated them within a special transmission framework, namely, the masoretic notes of the K/Q type.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the very form in which MT

12 See, e.g., J. Wellhausen, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1871), 180–181; H.P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899), 317–318. Smith prefers the K, while Wellhausen prefers the ‘Q’, which he believes is aimed at correcting the K (in accordance with his general understanding of the K/Q phenomenon).

13 See, e.g., the seminal analysis of H.L. Ginsberg, “Through the Tradition”, *Tarbiz* 5 (1934), 208–223; 6 (1935), 543 (in Hebrew).

14 Like any generalization, this one also is not without its exceptions. Consider, for instance, **כָּל הַבְּאִישׁ** (Isa 30:5): underlying the consonantal text is the reading **הַבְּאִישׁ** (derived from the strong

2 Sam 11:1 is being presented—an internal lack of concord between the consonantal text and its vocalization—does not favor the assumption that it adjoins two lexical readings.

NB. The above formulation does not intend to claim that *all* masoretic notes of the K/Q type preserve *only* lexical reading. The contrary is true: K/Q notes also cover other types of readings, such as orthographical and grammatical ones.<sup>15</sup> It only wishes to highlight the fact that lexical readings, if preserved at all as part of MT, were *usually* transmitted as part of K/Q notes,<sup>16</sup> not by way of ‘mixed forms’ in which the vocalization refers to a lexeme different from the one encoded in the consonantal text. Indeed, even Robert Gordis, who thinks that preservation of lexical variants was not the only or original purpose of the K/Q, agrees that it eventually became its typical function, and that this is how most K/Q notes are to be explained in the form attested in actual manuscripts.<sup>17</sup>

This is not the place to make a decision in complex issues such as the source of lexical readings preserved in MT, identification of their original channels of transmission, and analysis of their place among other components of the K/Q notes. For the present purposes suffice it to acknowledge that such lexical readings belong to an old stratum in the history of this transmissional mechanism, for they are reflected already in Talmudic literature. An example is furnished by *b. Erub. 26a* (quoted according to MS Vatican 109):

verb **ב-א-ש**), whereas the vocalization reads **הביש** (derived from the II-w/y verb **ב-ו-ש**), or less likely **היביש** (derived from the I-w/y verb **י-ב-ש**). Nevertheless, the fact that this case as well depends on the presence (or absence) of a medial *aleph* may be significant. Note that MS A registers there a masoretic note identical to the case under review: **א כתיב א**. For another possible example see J. Joosten, “A Note on the Anomalous Jussive in Exodus 22:4”, *Textus* 25 (2010), 9–16, but he too admits that this is a very rare phenomenon.

- 15 See the classified lists of K/Q appended to the exhaustive study of Gordis, *The Biblical Text in the Making* (above, n. 9). Examples from the book of Samuel include the orthography of the negative particle, using either the historical (**א**) or the phonetic (**ל**) spellings (e.g., 1 Sam 20:2); differences of grammatical number (e.g., 2 Sam 1:16); morphological alternation of pronominal bifurms (e.g., 1 Sam 18:1); presence or absence of the definite article (e.g., 1 Sam 14:32); interchange of near-synonymous syntactical constructions such as the adverbial expressions **בְּ/בִּ** + infinitive construct + pronominal suffixes (e.g., 1 Sam 11:6, 9; 2 Sam 5:24), and many other cases.
- 16 For the book of Samuel see, e.g., **עפלים/טחרים** (1 Sam 5:7, 10, 12; 6:4, 5); **ויעש/ויעט** (1 Sam 14:32); **ממערות/ממערכות** (1 Sam 17:23); **עמיהור/עמיהוד** (2 Sam 13:37); **ולהלהם/והלהם** (2 Sam 16:2; K is the infinitive **וילהלחם**, “to fight”, cf. the preceding **לרוב**) etc. That some such cases are due to textual phenomena—such as metathesis, interchange of similarly shaped letters, etc.—is irrelevant for the fact that the end result gets the form of *lexical* differences (and that such variant readings are presented in MT as part of K/Q notes).
- 17 Gordis, *Biblical Text in the Making* (above, n. 9), esp. 40–54. Cf. E. Tov “The *Ketiv-Qere* Variations in Light of the Manuscript Finds in the Judean Desert,” in idem, *Hebrew Bible, Greek Bible, and Qumran* (TSAJ 121; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2008), 199–205. For a different view see Y. Ofer, “*Ketiv* and *Qere*: The Phenomenon, Its Notation, and Its Reflection in Early Rabbinic Literature”, *Leš* 70 (2008), 55–73; 71 (2009), 255–279 (in Hebrew). For K/Q specifically in Samuel see also Jong-Hoon Kim, “The Tradition of *Ketib/Qere* and Its Relation to the Septuagint Text of II Samuel”, *ZAW* 123.1 (2011), 27–46, although cases of quiescent *aleph* are explicitly excluded from this discussion (*ibid.*, 31 n. 21).

אם ר' חנין [נח"א: יוחנן]: ושניהם מקרא אחד דרשו, דכ' ויהי ישעיהו לא יצא הצר תיכונה כת' העיר וקרינן 'הצר', מוכאן לאיסטריא של מלכים שהן כעירות בינוניות.

R. Hanin (*var.* Yoḥanan) said: both of them interpret the same scriptural passage, namely, “and Isaiah did not leave yet the middle *court*” (2 Kgs 20:4). It is written “the city”, but we read “the court”. From here (one can infer that) royal courtyards are (as big) as middle-sized towns.

MS A indeed includes at this passage a K/Q note. There is no reason to assume that it was added under the influence of the Babylonian Talmud, since the masorete responsible for the vocalization and masoretic notation of MS A was a Karaite, and thus denied the authority of rabbinite tradition.<sup>18</sup> The *masora* of MS A is therefore independent of Talmudic tradition, and corroborates the antiquity of the inclusion of lexical variants within the K/Q notes.

#### 4. Orthographic Alternatives?

A different position to the problem at hand was taken by Samuel Rolls Driver, who suggested (by using the equal sign) that both aspects of MT refer to one and the same reading, הַמְלָכִים “the kings”, just like the ancient versions and the parallel text of Chronicles.<sup>19</sup> Driver’s cross-references imply that the consonantal text represents nothing but a *plene* spelling for the long vowel /ā/; if so, there is no lexical difference whatsoever between the consonantal text and the vocalization tradition.<sup>20</sup> Driver also noted that a similar *plene* spelling occurs again in the book of Samuel, and even in the very same episode: as against the place name הַיְלָם (2 Sam 10:16), one finds in the next verse the spelling הַלְאָמָה (v. 17). Thus, according to Driver, the reading “the messengers” is not represented in any textual witness and the consonantal text of MT agrees with its vocalization—as with all the other witnesses—in reading “the kings”.

4.1 Driver’s explanation, however, becomes problematic upon closer investigation of some details that fail to fit his explanation.<sup>21</sup> First of all, Driver was not fully cognizant of the internal diversity among manuscripts of MT. Accordingly

18 R.I. (Singer) Zer, “Was the Masorete of the Aleppo Codex of Rabbinite or of Karaite Origin?”, *Textus* 24 (2009), 239–262.

19 S.R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and Topography of the Books of Samuel* (2nd edn.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 289. He was followed, in this regard, by some later commentators.

20 In this view Driver was preceded by medieval Jewish grammarians, most notably Judah Ḥayyuj; see his *Kitāb al-Nuṭaf*, ed. N. Basal (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2001), 108–109 (in Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew). Cf. Qimhi *ad loc.*: “האלף נוספת למשך” “the *aleph* is added for lengthening (the preceding vowel)” (for this formulation compare his comments to 2 Sam 10:7, 17; Joel 2:6 et al.).

21 It should be stressed at the outset, however, that some of these details became known—or could have been properly appreciated—only long after Driver published his classic philological commentary on the book of Samuel, which remains one of the most insightful and instructive studies of this biblical text.

he did not offer any explanation to the puzzling difference between the vocalizations of MS A (הַמְלָאֲכִים) on the one hand and MS L (הַמְלָאֲכִים) on the other. While the former is seemingly explained by his hypothesis, the latter does not fit it at all, since the *aleph* does not correspond to an /ā/ vowel. To be sure, one can press it to *mean* “the kings” as well, by assuming that it follows another plural form of this lexeme, which is the regular plural in Aramaic (מְלָכִין < \**malk-īn*).<sup>22</sup> Such an explanation, however, assumes the existence of two alternative plural forms that in either case do not match the *spelling*: one which is very exceptionally spelled *plene* (הַמְלָאֲכִים), and another which contradicts the spelling completely (הַמְלָאֲכִים), since the *aleph* does not correspond to /ā/, or in fact to any vowel at all.

4.2 Another problem for Driver’s explanation becomes evident if one considers all other cases in which an *aleph* is used to mark medial /ā/, and not only in the Bible but also in the epigraphic evidence that has been enriched tremendously during the last century, mostly thanks to the Dead Sea scrolls, which have broadened significantly our perspective and understanding of the scribal practices that underlie MT.<sup>23</sup>

One should first set aside all cases in which a quiescent *aleph* is a vestige of a historical form of the word, e.g. forms such as “heads” רִאשִׁים *rāšīm*,<sup>24</sup> etc. In such cases the presence of an *aleph* is due to historical spelling, i.e. it does not reflect a scribal habit to represent the vowel /ā/, but rather the other way round: it is reminiscent of the an old glottal stop that once existed in these words, but elided because of phonological developments, and caused a compensatory lengthening of the near-by short /a/ vowel.

Since an etymological /ʔ/ never existed in any form of the lexeme מֶלֶךְ “king”, we should rather isolate only those cases in which /ā/ is represented by a *non-etymological aleph*. A scrutiny of such cases reveals that they can be classified into two distinct groups:

- (a) The first, and more comprehensive one, includes participial forms of II-w/y verbs: (רִאשִׁים) “poor one(s)” (2 Sam 12:1, 4; Prov 10:4; 13:23);

22 This formation is also found sporadically in Hebrew in some segolate nouns; see, e.g., P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Subsidia Biblica 27; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), 270–271 §96Ab. However, as far as I know, it is not used in any tradition of BH to pluralize the word for “king”.

23 E.Y. Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>)* (STDJ 6; Leiden: Brill, 1974), 160–162; E. Qimron, “Medial *Aleph* as a *Mater Lectionis* in Hebrew and Aramaic Documents from Qumran in Comparison with other Hebrew and Aramaic Sources”, *Leš* 39 (1975), 133–146, esp. 134 (in Hebrew). See also F.I. Andersen and A. Dean Forbes, *Spelling in the Hebrew Bible* (BibOr 41; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1986), 81–91. The discussion in the following three paragraphs summarizes those of their findings that are relevant for our concern.

24 < Proto-Hebrew \**raʔaš-īm*, with the ‘broken plural’ of ראשׁ *roš*, as usual in Northwest Semitic with nouns of the *qVil* patterns (as is well-known, *roš* is the Canaanite reflex of \**rāš*- < Proto-Northwest-Semitic \**raʔš*-).



הַשְּׂאֵטִים (Ezek 28:24, 26), הַשְּׂאֵטוֹת (Ezek 16:57), שְׂאֵטָה (Ezek 25:6); וְקָאָם (Hos 10:14); וְאִמּוֹת (Prov 24:7), וְאִמּוֹת בְּגִלְעָד (1 Chr 6:65).<sup>25</sup>

- (b) The second group, of a more limited scope, includes isolated forms that have no grammatical common denominator: בְּלֵאֵט (Judg 4:21), חַלְאֵמָה (2 Sam 10:17), הַמְלֵאכִים (2 Sam 11:1), וְאֵג (Neh 13:16).<sup>26</sup>

The fact that all forms of the first group belong to the same grammatical category is hardly incidental. It implies that the usage of the *aleph* in these forms is not purely orthographical, but rather has a morpho-phonetic background. Indeed, II-*w/y* participles contain an *aleph* in other Semitic languages as well, most importantly in Aramaic, whose vocalization traditions explicitly reflect the consonantal articulation of this *aleph*.<sup>27</sup> The historical question whether this formation in Hebrew is a reflex of the original Proto-Semitic form or rather a late analogy to Aramaic goes beyond the scope of the present discussion and needs not concern us here. The crucial point for us is that also elsewhere in Semitic one finds a consonant—or at least a glide<sup>28</sup>—in the morphological slot of the second radical of II-*w/y* participles.<sup>29</sup> Even though the *aleph* in such forms is not etymological in the strict sense of the term, it testifies nevertheless to the historical presence a certain sound. Thus this *aleph* did *not* mark originally an /ā/ vowel, and such forms should be left out of consideration in the present context.

25 Contrast the place name וְאִמּוֹתָהּ (Zech 14:10).

26 Perhaps the word פְּאִרְוֹר (Joel 2:6) should also be added to the list, but its etymology is debated, and the *aleph* may be etymological.

27 See, e.g., Biblical Aramaic: קָאָם (Dan 2:31). The same phenomenon is found in other Aramaic dialects, as well as in other Semitic languages. This essential point was overlooked—and as a result its linguistic signification was not comprehended—by F.I. Andersen and D.N. Freedman, “*Aleph* as a Vowel Letter in Old Aramaic”, in D.N. Freedman, A. Dean Forbes and F.I. Andersen, *Studies in Hebrew and Aramaic Orthography* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 82.

28 The exact phonological nature of this sound is a matter of speculation. In Biblical Aramaic there is a systematic K/Q interchange in plural participles of II-*w/y* verbs: forms are written with an *aleph* as their second radical, but are read with /y/, e.g. דְּאִרְיָן/דְּיָרִין (Dan 2:38), זִאֲעִין/זִיֵּעִין (5:19), קִאֲמִין/קִיֵּמִין (3:3). Usually these forms are interpreted as reflecting different historical stages and/or Aramaic dialects that left their marks over Biblical Aramaic; see especially S.E. Fassberg, “The Origin of the *Ketib/Qere* in the Aramaic Portions of Ezra and Daniel”, *VT* 39.1 (1989), 9–12. Yet it is not impossible that this very interchange reflects also a situation in which these letters may have stood not for distinct consonantal phonemes, but rather for an indistinguishable glide.

29 Cf. Jonah Ibn Janāh, who defined in his grammar (§7[6]) a class of cases in which an *aleph* substitutes for *waw* and *yod* in hollow verbs. For the original Judeo-Arabic version (כְּתָאב אֱלֵפִינִי) see J. Derenbourg, *Le livre des parterres fleuris: Grammaire hébraïque en Arabe d’Abou’l-Walid Merwan Ibn Djanah de Cordoue* (Bibliothèque de l’École des hautes études: Sciences historiques et philologiques 66; Paris: Vieweg, 1886), 88; For the medieval Hebrew version of Judah Ibn Tibbon (סֵפֶר הַרְקֻמָּה) see the edition of M. Wielenski (2nd edn. by D. Tène and Z. Ben-Hayyim; Jerusalem: Academy of Hebrew Language, 1964), 1:105. For a French translation see *Le livre des parterres fleuris d’Abou’l-Walid Merwan ibn Djanah*, trans. M. Metzger (Bibliothèque de l’École des hautes études: Sciences historiques et philologiques 81; Paris: Vieweg, 1889), 81.

Evidently, the usage of non-historical *aleph* for the orthographic representation of medial /ā/ is extremely rare in BH (according to MT). Since the very few words in which this phenomenon is attested do not resemble each other from any linguistic respect, they need to be explained on individual basis, and the explanation of one is not necessarily valid for the other. Accordingly it is difficult to accept Driver's position that the spelling המלאכים is nothing but an orthographic alternative of המלכים "kings". There is no evidence that such an orthographic practice was operative in any phase of the formation of MT, and the less than handful of occurrences in which a non-historical *aleph* stands for medial /ā/ call for different explications. It is doubtful, therefore, if one is entitled to use the near-by form of הלואמה—whatever it means—in order to elucidate המלאכים.<sup>30</sup>

We may conclude that the strange form witnessed by MT, המלאכים, is not adequately explained either by the assumption that it is a mixture of two lexical readings (המלאכים "the messengers" and המלכים "the kings") or by the assumption that this is a single reading ("the kings") represented in two alternative spellings. The first assumption does not conform to the usual channel of transmission of lexical readings within MT, while the second is not sustained by the negative evidence that suggests that unlike other textual corpora, MT reflects no awareness of a scribal practice of marking medial /ā/ by an *aleph* as a *mater lectionis*.

### 5. New Solution: Perspective from Historical Phonology

In light of the weaknesses of the alternative explanations surveyed above, one is entitled to consider another option, namely, that both the consonantal and the vocalized readings reflect, indeed, one and the same lexeme, but this one is none other than "the messengers". If both aspects of MT are intended to denote the same lexeme (as assumed by Driver), then there are no lexical variants and there is no wonder that this case is not treated by a masoretic note of the K/Q type. And if this lexeme is "the messengers" (contrary to Driver's view), then the spel-

30 This difficulty was also recognized by R.P. Gordon, "Aleph Apologeticum", *JQR* 69.2 (1978), 112–116. His own solution, however, is equally difficult. He believes that the original reading was "the kings", and that the *aleph* was inserted for an apologetic reason, to prevent the reader from realizing the harsh criticism, implied in the biblical account, of David's conduct, who sent his men to war while remaining safe in Jerusalem, free to fornicate with the wife of one of his officers. I find it difficult to accept his comparison of this case with the famous theological correction of the pagan epithet מלכת השמים "Queen of Heaven" to השמים [מלאכת] "work of Heaven" (Jer 7:18; 44:17-19, 25). If this is a tendentious emendation (as held by many), then it would surely belong to a different order of theological apologetics. It is possible, however, that originally this was nothing more than a biform of "queen", as suggested long ago in an overlooked footnote of J. Barth, *Die Nominalbildung in den Semitischen Sprachen* (2nd edn.; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1894), 165 n. 2, on the basis of the well-attested alternation between *malk/malik* "king".

ling presented in MT poses no orthographic difficulty whatsoever. This hypothesis will then escape all the problems encountered by the previous explanations surveyed above, and all that one needs to do in order to prove it is to demonstrate that the vocalization can indeed refer to the same lexeme reflected in the consonantal text. Put differently, one needs to demonstrate that the original form of this lexeme had lost at some point the original /ʔ/. It goes without saying that this hypothesis will gain further support if it can be shown that the suggested phonological development was not limited to a single occurrence of the word in the corpus of BH, but rather was part and parcel of a larger linguistic trend discernible in other sources as well.

**5.1** It is a well-known fact that the Second Temple period saw a growing weakening of the guttural consonants in general and of the glottal stop (represented by the letter *aleph*) in particular, in various phonetic environments. This phonological development is attested in numerous sources, the most important of which are the Dead Sea scrolls, penned in the Greco-Roman era, that is, the latter part of the Second Temple period (3rd century BCE – 1st century CE). The scrolls contain many dozens of cases in which the letters marking gutturals—and especially the *aleph*—have been omitted, added supralinearly, or even corrected to a letter that is supposed to represent another (guttural) consonant. The scope of this scribal activity leaves no room for doubt that it reflects an actual phonological process that took place in the vernacular(s) spoken by scribes; obviously the articulation of the glottal stop was weakened, and at least in certain environments it was lost completely.<sup>31</sup>

**5.2** Against this general background, one will not be surprised to see that in various derivatives of the root לֶאֱכַל the medial *aleph* has indeed weakened. This is evident in all the reading traditions of BH, albeit to a different degree in each and every such tradition.

An example is furnished by the noun מְלֹאכָה.<sup>32</sup> The historical development of this form is not uncontroversial, but the simplest reconstruction seems to be the following. The original, Proto-Hebrew form can be reconstructed confidently as *\*malʔak-at* (> *\*malʔak-ā*). Regardless of the exact form of the feminine ending, the syllabification of this form is CVC|CV|CV(C), namely, *\*mal|ʔa|kat* (>

31 Kutscher, *Linguistic Background of IQIsa<sup>a</sup>* (above, n. 23), 505–11, esp. 505–6; tellingly, his material concerning /ʔ/ is almost equal in quantity to that concerning the /h/, /ħ/ and /s/ taken together. Cf. Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (above, n. 23), 25 §200.11; cf. *ibid.*, 23 §100.63 and §100.64\*.

32 For the semantic development of this noun from the basic meaning of the verb לֶאֱכַל “to send” see the comparison to the collocation יָד מְשַׁלַּח (lit. “sending the hand”, but idiomatically “occupation, work”) drawn by Z. Ben-Hayyim, “Lexical Entries II”, in *Henoah Yalon Memorial Volume*, ed. E.Y. Kutscher, S. Liberman and M.Z. Kadari (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1974), 46–52 (in Hebrew); cf. W. Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, ed. U. Rütterswörden, R. Meyer, J. Renz and H. Donner (18th edn.; 6 vols.; Berlin: Springer, 1987–2010), 3:679; E.L. Greenstein, “Trans-Idiomatic Equivalency and the Derivation of Hebrew *ml'kh*”, *UF* 11 (1979), 329–336.

\*mal|ʔa|kā). The vowel of the penultimate, open syllable is expected to undergo a pretonic lengthening: \*mal|ʔa|kā > \*mal|ʔā|kā. Keeping in mind that \*ā was realized as [ɔ] in most Jewish reading traditions, one is able to account for the following evidence:

(a) The above form, \*malʔākā, is the direct ancestor of the form attested in the Babylonian tradition, which still preserves the consonantal *aleph*: מַלְאָכָה [malʔəkə].<sup>33</sup>

(b) A different situation is revealed in the Tiberian tradition, which is younger than the Babylonian one. While the consonantal text of MT preserves the etymological *aleph* in all the occurrences of the word, according to TH it is realized as /ʔ/ (with the help of an anaptyctic vowel) only in the construct plural form מַלְאָכֹת [malʔəkot] (Ps 73:28; 1 Chr 28:19).<sup>34</sup> By contrast, in the singular form it became quiescent: מְלָאכָה [mələkə].

The crucial difference between this form and the Babylonian one is the elision of the glottal stop. Once the /ʔ/ elided, the canonical structure of Hebrew syllables, CV(C), necessitated a re-syllabification of the word; the /l/, which originally closed the first syllable, has become the opening consonant of the second syllable: \*mal|ʔā|kā > \*ma|lā|kā. The first syllable therefore turned to be an open one. As usual in (Pre-)Tiberian phonology, its short vowel could not be retained in its prepretonic position, and it has reduced into a schwa: \*ma|lā|kā > \*mə|lā|kā, which is the direct ancestor of what we have in TH: מְלָאכָה [mələkə].

NB. The above explanation seems to me to be simpler—and hence more compelling—than the alternative assumption that the loss of the glottal stop was compensated by lengthening of the following vowel.<sup>35</sup> The Babylonian form shows clearly that this vowel was already lengthened (evidently due to its pretonic position) before the glottal stop was lost. Moreover, that the vowel length was not determined by the loss of the preceding consonant but rather by the position of the stress is proven by the construct singular form, which likewise lost the *aleph*, and yet the following vowel was not lengthened, evidently because it was not in a pretonic position: מְלָאכֶת [mələkət] /mələkat/ < \*malakat < \*malʔakat.<sup>36</sup>

There is also yet another reconstruction of the development of the form מְלָאכָה, which resorts to the hypothesis of an irregular metathesis of the /ʔ/ and the /a/ (in order to get the more common sound change of \*aʔ > \*ā).<sup>37</sup> This assumption, however, creates an

33 I. Yeivin, *The Hebrew Language Tradition as Reflected in the Babylonian Vocalization* (Jerusalem: Academy of Hebrew Language, 1985), 1:262; 2:1015 (in Hebrew).

34 No absolute plural of this word occurs in BH.

35 As I assumed in the original, Hebrew version of this paper.

36 This analysis assumes that, in TH, [ɛ] is an allophone of /a/. See Z. Ben-Hayyim, “Reflections on the Vowel System in Hebrew”, *Sefarad* 46.1-2 (1986), 71–84, esp. 78–83.

37 H. Bauer and P. Leander, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testaments* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1922; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1965), 218 §23b, following C. Brockelmann, “Zur hebräischen Lautlehre”, *ZDMG* 58 (1904), 523; cf. idem, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen* (2 vols.; Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1908–13; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1966), 1:275 §98β. See also Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*

unnecessary complication, and the form can be accounted for by the normal phonological rules that were operative in BH in general and in TH in particular (as suggested above).

(c) The Samaritan tradition reflects an even later development: *mālākā*. This form also reflects the loss of /ʔ/—and accordingly we find in manuscripts of SP that this word is often spelled without the etymological *aleph*<sup>38</sup>—but it also evinces the appearance of a full vowel instead of the schwa, and this is a development that took place within SH at a relatively late stage.<sup>39</sup>

The various realizations of the lexeme מלאכה testify to the loss of the glottal stop, at least in the environment of word-medial, syllable-initial position. Since the final split between the Samaritans and the Jews—from which on the transmission of their linguistic traditions went on their separate ways—occurred sometime during the Second Temple period, and no later than the second half of the 2nd century BCE,<sup>40</sup> it seems that the essential agreement between SH and TH confirms that the elision of /ʔ/ in the aforementioned environment can be dated to the Hellenistic period, at the latest.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, the evidence of the Babylonian tradition demonstrates that this phenomenon did not extend to all varieties of Hebrew, and some may have escaped its influence.

**5.3** A similar picture, albeit with a different distribution of the outcomes among the various traditions, is revealed when one examines the word “messenger” מלאך [malʔək] (/malʔāk/ < \*malʔak), which is the base form of מלאכה. SH reflects the expected situation: in all its forms the word has lost the glottal stop. But in this case the spelling of SP almost invariably preserves the etymological *aleph*.<sup>42</sup>

(above, n. 22), 83, §24f.

- 38 Sometimes the omission is left as it is, while occasionally it is corrected. See, e.g., the readings culled in von Gall's edition (A.F. von Gall, *Der Hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner* [Giessen: Töpelmann, 1914–18]) to Exod 20:9; 22:7, 10 et al. This common orthographical interchange needs to be distinguished from the unique spelling המלהכה recorded in Gen 33:14; indeed, the oral tradition reads there a different word, *ammālēkā*, derived from ה-ל-ך. See Z. Ben-Hayyim, “Some Problems of a Grammar of Samaritan Hebrew”, *Biblica* 52.2 (1971), 231–232; S. Schorch, *Die Vocale des Gesetzes: Die samaritanische Lesetradition als Textzeugin der Tora*, 1: *Das Buch Genesis* (BZAW 339; Berlin – New York: de Gruyter, 2004), 191–192.
- 39 Z. Ben-Hayyim, *A Grammar of Samaritan Hebrew: Based on the Recitation of the Law in Comparison with the Tiberian and other Jewish Traditions* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000), 53–60 §1.3.
- 40 The hostility between Jews and Samaritans reached its critical peak during the reign of John Hyrcanus I (135/4–104 BCE), who destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim (Josephus, *Ant.* 13:254–256; cf. *War* 1:62–63). This event is now commonly dated to 111/110 BCE; see, e.g., the survey of R. Pummer, *The Samaritans in Flavius Josephus* (TSAJ 129; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 200–210.
- 41 This dating is corroborated by the fact that the same phenomenon is reflected in *aleph*-less spellings in Punic, a cognate and roughly contemporaneous dialect that has numerous similarities with Second Temple Hebrew. See J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* (2 vols.; HdO 1.21; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 2:629–630, s.v. *mlʔkh*<sub>1</sub>.
- 42 There seems to be a linguistic motivation for the consistent preservation of the *aleph* in the orthography of the SP. According to the analysis of Ben-Hayyim, *Grammar of Samaritan Hebrew* (above, n. 39), 290–293 §4.4, prior to the loss of the gutturals and especially the glottal stop, they were usually supported by an auxiliary vowel that created an additional syllable, and

NB. The above assertion concerning the stable spelling of מלאך in SP is based on a perusal of the apparatus of von Gall's edition, which reveals no fluctuation in the orthography of this word. However, one such variant is indeed recorded in a medieval list that compiles variant readings of SP in Arabic script.<sup>43</sup> These were culled from a manuscript considered as ancient by the compiler, and its readings may therefore represent a textual witness of SP that is much earlier than the extant manuscripts. The relevant item for the present discussion relates to Gen 16:7 (MT מְלֶאכֶךָ יְהוָה = SP יהוה מלאך, *mā'lāk šēmā*), and it reads ملك يهوه (fol. 1b, line 1),<sup>44</sup> i.e. מְלֶאכֶךָ יְהוָה.

By contrast, the Tiberian tradition preserves the consonantal *aleph* also in its vocalization in all its forms:<sup>45</sup>

		MT and TH <sup>46</sup>		SP and SH <sup>47</sup>	
sg	abs	* <i>malʔák</i> > * <i>malʔāk</i>	מְלֶאכֶךָ <i>malʔak</i>	vs.	מְלֶאכֶךָ <i>mā'lāk</i> <sup>48</sup>
	cstr	* <i>malʔak</i>	מְלֶאכֶךָ <i>malʔak</i>	vs.	מְלֶאכֶךָ <i>mā'lāk</i>
Pl	abs	* <i>malʔak-īm</i> > * <i>malʔākīm</i>	מְלֶאכֶכֶם <i>malʔakīm</i>	vs.	מְלֶאכֶכֶם <i>mālākkām</i> <sup>49</sup>
	cstr	* <i>malʔak-ay</i> > * <i>malʔākē</i>	מְלֶאכֶכֶי <i>malʔakē</i>	vs.	מְלֶאכֶכֶי <i>mālākki</i>

their subsequent loss left different traces in the absolute and declined forms. In absolute forms, it caused an ultimate stress (as against the penultimate stress, which is the rule in SH phonology), while in declined forms—especially the plural—it caused a gemination, which resulted from the full assimilation of the guttural to the following consonant. Thus, even though the *aleph* was no longer pronounced, its orthographical presence was still required to mark the morphophonological contrast between ultimate and penultimate stress (in ground forms) and between the presence or absence of gemination (in declined forms).

43 It was published by Z. Ben-Hayyim, *The Literary and Oral Tradition of the Samaritans*, 1-2: *The Grammatical, Masoretical, and Lexicographical Writings of the Samaritans* (Jerusalem: Academy of Hebrew Language, 1957), 1:\*57–\*64 (Hebrew introduction); 2:405–433 (Arabic text). The only known manuscript containing this work dates from the 13th century; see *ibid.*, 1:\*97–\*98.

44 Ben-Hayyim, *ibid.*, 2:409.

45 The same is true for the Babylonian tradition; see Yeivin, *Babylonian Vocalization* (above, n. 33), 2:1010. The only exception is the proper name Malachi (מְלֶאכֶכֶי), in which the *aleph* has become quiescent in the Babylonian tradition, whereas the Tiberian tradition kept it as consonantal.

46 The following examples are taken from Num 20:16 (sg.abs.); Gen 16:7 (sg.cstr.); 32:4 (pl.abs.); 28:12 (pl.cstr.).

47 The corresponding examples from the Samaritan oral tradition are quoted from the transcription of Z. Ben-Hayyim, *The Literary and Oral Tradition of the Samaritans*, 4: *Words of the Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Academy of Hebrew Language, 1977), 500, 365, 383, 378, respectively.

48 The apostrophe used in the two singular forms marks the ultimate stress, not a consonantal *aleph*.

49 The gemination of the last radical in the declined forms of *maqal* nouns is also well-known in the Tiberian and Babylonian traditions; see Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (above, n. 22), 72, §18f; 281–282, §96Cb; Yeivin, *Babylonian Vocalization* (above, n. 33), 2:1027–1028. However, as mentioned above (n. 42), in this case it seems to result from another process, peculiar to SH: the assimilation of /ʔ/ to the following consonant.

The aforementioned data suggest that two contradictory trends were operative on scribes and tradents of the biblical text.<sup>50</sup> On the one hand, word-medial, syllable-initial /ʔ/ has elided in spoken Hebrew during the Second Temple period. This sound change is reflected in various ways in some reading traditions of the Bible: it is the rule in SH, while being applied only partly in TH (to some forms of the word מלאכה). On the other hand, we also witness a deliberate effort to preserve the original, consonantal articulation of the *aleph*. This is evident not only from the consonantal text but also in the traditional recitations of MT, both the Tiberian branch (concerning the word מלאך) and more consistently in the Babylonian branch (concerning both מלאך and מלאכה). The first trend stems from the natural tendency to adapt the reading of the biblical text to the pronunciation of spoken Hebrew. The second trend expresses a conservative attempt—whose *Sitz im Leben* might have been the abiding context of liturgical recitation of the Bible—to freeze an ancient reading tradition, and to preserve the consonantal *aleph* despite the changes that have occurred in the language since the texts were first written.

Another factor that might have contributed to the conservative trend is the need to distinguish in writing between lexemes that are pronounced in a similar way to one another. The historical spelling of מלאך/מלאכים is semantically transparent and unambiguous, and it allows both writers and readers to distinguish it easily from מלך/מלכים. Thus, despite the phonetic weakening of the etymological *aleph*, scribes were usually careful not to omit it, since its complete omission was bound to cause lexical ambiguity.<sup>51</sup>

Be that as it may, at least among certain speech communities, spellings such as מלאכי, מלאכים, מלאך were nothing but historical spellings that no longer corresponded to the actual pronunciation of these forms in the vernacular, and for the scribes' ear, the *aleph* was as quiescent as in the spellings of ראש, ראשים, ראשון. The consonantal *aleph* was probably articulated only in traditional, accurate recitation of the biblical text as part of liturgical performance. Thus one can offer the following schematic reconstruction of the forms of מלאך for at least some spoken varieties of Hebrew in the Greco-Roman period:<sup>52</sup>

50 Cf. M. Cohen, "The Orthography of the Samaritan Pentateuch", *Beth Mikra* 21.1 [64] (1976), 54–70; idem, "The Orthography of the Samaritan Pentateuch, Its Relation to the Orthography of the Masoretic Text, and Its Place in the History of Orthography", *ibid.*, 21.3 [66] (1976), 361–391. He gives ample examples for these contradictory trends within both MT and SP, and correctly emphasizes that some of the orthographic alternatives are to be explained against a linguistic background of the pronunciation that was current in the Second Temple period.

51 I thank David Talshir for this observation.

52 The above reconstruction is schematic because it is difficult to ascertain the first vowel. In singular forms it could have been lengthened (to a Samaritan-like form: \**mālāk*) or reduced (to an Aramaic-like form: \**mālāk*), and in fact both forms could have co-existed (in the absolute and construct states, respectively). It is possible that the first vowel was reduced in the plural (as in

sg	abs	מלאך	* <i>malāk</i>
	cstr	מלאך	* <i>malak</i>
pl	abs	מלאכים	* <i>malākīm</i>
	cstr	מלאכי	* <i>malākê</i> (or perhaps <i>malakê</i> )

It would seem, therefore, that MT 2 Sam 11:1 is phonologically similar to (although not phonetically identical with) the Samaritan tradition: the so-called ‘consonantal text’ preserves the archaic spelling with an *aleph*, but the actual pronunciation as encoded in the Tiberian vocalization reflects a typologically later phase—well-rooted in the phonetic reality of Greco-Roman Palestine—in which the glottal stop was no longer realized as a consonant.

5.4 This basic situation is only seemingly contradicted by the different forms attested by the Tiberian manuscripts, whereas a closer inspection will show that they all stem from the same tradition. The reading מְלַאכִים of MS L marks explicitly the quiescent *aleph* by a *rafé* sign above it, but otherwise sticks to the expected vocalization of the word (i.e. מְלַאכִים), including the spirantized /k/, even though it follows now a quiescent schwa and its spirantization is therefore completely enigmatic on a synchronic level. By contrast, the reading מְלַאכִים of MS A not only marks the quiescent *aleph*, but also echoes the preceding long vowel, whose very presence motivated the spirantization of the /k/ that follows.<sup>53</sup> It would seem, therefore, that in this detail MS A preserves more faithfully a pronunciation of the word that goes back to the Second Temple period, although its real meaning and origin were no longer understood by the masorete who vocalized the text and marked this unique reading with a masoretic note that reflects its interpretation as “the kings”,<sup>54</sup> just as he did not grasp the true meaning of the spelling of הַבְּאִישׁ (Isa 30:5).<sup>55</sup>

It is therefore possible to conclude that the interpretation of both aspects of MT, namely, the consonantal text and the Tiberian vocalization, can indeed refer to the very same reading, “the messengers”.<sup>56</sup> Q.E.D.

the Tiberian tradition: *malākīm*), but this is related to the wider issue of the realization of the schwa in Qumran Hebrew, which goes beyond the confines of the present study.

53 The reduction of the first vowel in מְלַאכִים (*mālākīm* < \**malākīm* < \**malʔak-īm*) results from the same phonological rule that was operative in the formation of מְלַאכֶה (cf. above, §5.2), and the outcome is homophonous with מְלַכִים (*mālākīm* < \**malākīm* < \**malak-īm*). However, this homophony is secondary, and peculiar to TH or rather to the unique (and originally non-Tiberian) form now embedded in MT. In contradistinction, SH distinguishes between “kings”, מְלַכִים *mālēkām*, and “messengers”, מְלַאכִים *mālākām*.

54 Cf. above, n. 11.

55 Cf. above, n. 14.

56 This conclusion may look similar to the method devised by D.T. Tsumura, “Scribal Errors or Phonetic Spellings? Samuel as an Aural Text”, *VT* 49.3 (1999), 390–411; idem, “Some Examples of Linguistic Variants in 1-2 Samuel”, *Orient: Report of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan* 38 (2003), 36–50. However, one cannot accept as critical his attempt to find any linguistic justification—including very forced ones—to passages that are nothing but textually corrupt. An even stronger apologetic tendency governs the book of M. Cohen, *The Kethib and Qeri*



## 6. Linguistic Background of MT-Samuel

The aforementioned linguistic development took place, so it seems, only during the Second Temple period. The footprints it left on biblical texts that belong to the corpus of classical BH are only far and few. As such, they do not reflect the language of the original compositions, since some measure of late interference into the language of early texts is unavoidable, even among the most conservative and careful scribal circles.

The book of Samuel, however, constitutes a special case of this rule. The number of late linguistic features is somewhat greater than in the other narrative books of the classical corpus, and at the same time their distribution is chaotic and unpredictable.

**6.1** Most relevant for the present discussion are cases that demonstrate a loss of the glottal stop. These are particularly common in phonetic environments that in TH take the form of *-əʔV-*.<sup>57</sup> Tellingly, such cases sometimes find exact parallels in the Dead Sea scrolls. Consider the following examples:

*I-ʔ verbs*: [i] K וייהר / Q ויִוְהַר (2 Sam 20:5), where one would have expected ויִאָהַר (cf. Hab 2:3); [ii] וְתִזְרְנִי (2 Sam 22:40), while the parallel text reads the expected וְתִזְרְנִי (Ps 18:40; so also 4QSam<sup>a</sup>).

*III-ʔ verbs*:<sup>58</sup> [iii] כָּלוּ (1 Sam 6:10), instead of the expected כָּלְאוּ (cf. Hag 1:10). Similarly, 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> reads וּמְלוּ (XII 23) where MT Isa 14:21 reads וּמְלֹאוּ. [iv] הַטְּאִים (1 Sam 14:33), while one would have expected הַטְּאִים (cf. יִצְאִים in v. 11; נִשְׂאִים in 2 Sam 15:24). The same pronunciation may be revealed in the double use of *yod* for marking the *ī* vowel, both before and after the *aleph*, in some Second Temple copies of biblical books. Compare MT Exod 13:4 יִצְאִים with 4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup> יִצְאִים (4Q22 XI 21),<sup>59</sup> and XHev/SePhylactery יִצְאִים (XHev/Se5 1 2),<sup>60</sup> Gen 45:23 MT נִשְׂאִים, vs. 4QRP<sup>b</sup> נוֹשִׂאִים (4Q364 11 3).<sup>61</sup>

*System in the Biblical Text: A Linguistic Analysis of the Various Traditions Based on the Manuscripts 'Keter Aram Tsava'* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007) (in Hebrew). In any case, both authors do not mention the form discussed here.

- 57 It is uncertain whether the loss occurred in all these forms while the vowel preceding the glottal stop was still a full one, or rather after it had been reduced into a schwa.
- 58 These examples also reflect the morpho-phonological merger of III-ʔ and III-y verbs, a process that has its roots in BH, but reached its full deployment only in Mishnaic Hebrew. That this process was well under way by the time the archetype of MT-Samuel was copied is demonstrated by forms such as וְהִתְנַבְּחָה and הִתְנַבְּחוּ (1 Sam 10:6, 13; cf. the spelling in Jer 26:9) for the expected וְהִתְנַבְּחָה and הִתְנַבְּחָה; הִתְנַבְּחָה (2 Sam 3:9; the statement made by Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar* [above, n. 22], 186 §78c, which denies the existence of such a form in BH is erroneous); and the telling case of K חֲלוּם / Q חֲלֹמוֹם (2 Sam 21:12). All these forms are highly exceptional in BH, but they are normal members of the verbal paradigm in Mishnaic Hebrew.
- 59 P.W. Skehan, E. Ulrich and J.E. Sanderson, "22. 4QpaleoExodus<sup>m</sup>", in *Qumran Cave 4, IV: Paleo-Hebrew and Greek Biblical Manuscripts* (DJD 9; Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 88, pl. xiii.
- 60 M. Morgenstern and M. Segal, "5. XHev/SePhylactery", in *Miscellaneous Texts from the Judaean Desert* (DJD 38; Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 184, pl. xxx. The editors mention there an

6.2 Perhaps the most conspicuous example is attested in the very opening narrative of the book, which tells about the birth of Samuel. See ואלהי ישראל יתן אֶת שְׁלֹחֶךָ אֲשֶׁר שָׁאַלְתָּ בְּעַמּוּי ויתן ה' לי אֶת שְׁאַלְתִּי אֲשֶׁר שָׁאַלְתִּי בְּעַמּוּי “may the God of Israel fulfill your *request* that you have requested from Him” (1 Sam 1:17) vs. ויתן ה' לי אֶת שְׁאַלְתִּי אֲשֶׁר שָׁאַלְתִּי בְּעַמּוּי “God gave me my *request* that had requested from Him” (v. 27). The word שְׁאַלְתָּ “request” appears 14 times in the Hebrew Bible, but the *aleph* was omitted only once, in the above quoted passage from Samuel.

That this example betrays a late linguistic background is suggested by similar interchanges in two late corpora. An inner-biblical parallel is furnished by the alternation of two forms of the name of Zerubbabel’s father in the book of Haggai, whose superscription dates it to the Persian period, and more specifically to the second year of Darius (presumably Darius I), i.e. 520 BCE: שְׁאַלְתְּהֶאֱל (Hag 1:1; 2:23) vs. לְהִיאֵל (Hag 1:12,<sup>62</sup> 14; 2:2).<sup>63</sup> An extra-biblical parallel appears in the Qumran Hebrew forms of the noun נִאָּזָה (cf. 2 Kgs 19:3; Isa 37:3), which offers a phonetic environment comparable to that of שְׁאַלְתָּ. In the *Joshua Apocryphon* one reads ונאצה גדולה (4Q379 22ii 14), while the quotation from this work in *Testimonia* reads ונצה גדולה (4Q175 28).<sup>64</sup> Thus two Hebrew sources that reflect Second Temple Hebrew corroborate the interchange witnessed by MT-Samuel, and indicate that its linguistic background is to be found in the spoken Hebrew of the Second Temple period.

Scholars have long recognized that in numerous cases MT-Samuel offers such an unintelligible text, that it clearly represents an inferior textual witness compared to the Septuagint. Its shaky textual status may also be reflected in the fact that Samuel is the book that contains the largest number of K/Q notes among the older historical books of the Hebrew Bible. The *textual* situation is thus corroborated by the *linguistic* evidence: The archetype of MT-Samuel goes back to a *late copy* of the book that was produced during the Second Temple period by a relatively careless scribe.<sup>65</sup> This feature explains why it is specifically in MT-

alternative interpretation suggested to them by Elisha Qimron: the additional *yod* may testify to a phonetic realization of the schwa as an [i], due to assimilation to the following vowel. However, in TH such a realization was the rule only before a consonantal [y].

61 E. Tov and S. White, “Reworked Pentateuch”, in *Qumran Cave 4, VIII: Parabiblical Texts, Part I* (DJD 13; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 218, p. xv.

62 In contradistinction, the Minor Prophets scroll from Wadi Murabba‘at—a proto-masoretic copy of the book, in terms of its textual affiliation—probably reads שְׁאַלְתְּהֶאֱל (Mur88 XXII 1). So perhaps also in Hag 2:2 (*ibid.*, line 16).

63 See Andersen and Forbes, *Spelling* (above, n. 23), 88.

64 For the collocation cf. Neh 9:18, 26. For further examples of this sound change (? > ø / -ə V-) in Qumran Hebrew see Qimron, *Hebrew* (above, n. 31), 25 §200.11; cf. Kutscher, *IQIsa<sup>a</sup>*, 498–500.

65 It should be emphasized, however, that the number, type and scope of the late linguistic elements do not amount to what one finds in books that are indisputably dated to the post-exilic period. Linguistically, then, the book of Samuel as a whole reflects pre-exilic Hebrew (without excluding the possibility that, in a very limited number of cases, it contains some late interpolations). Indeed, the syntax of the book is classical throughout, as is its lexical and phraseological profile.

Samuel that one finds the single evidence of the late pronunciation of the word “messengers”. This statistical curiosity is not a mere product of random chance, but rather a direct result of the special linguistic profile of the textual source in which it is documented.

## 7. Counter Arguments

One may still be uncomfortable with the indications adduced above for the conservatism of scribes when writing the various forms of מלאך—a conservatism that explains why the *aleph* was still written, even though it has long disappeared from normal speech—and raise two methodological objections against the hypothesis presented here.

7.1 If indeed a phonological process took place, one would have expected it to occur in all forms that historically had contained the appropriate phonetic environment (*-Cʔa-*), or at the very least in all the many other occurrences of the lexeme “messenger”,<sup>66</sup> and not only in a single occurrence that happens to be attested in the book of Samuel. Since the suggested phonological process is not witnessed by any other occurrence in MT, one should avoid proposing it for the ambiguous form הַמְלָאִים of 2 Sam 11:1 as well.

However, such an objection relies on both inaccurate data and misguided presumptions. Although very rare, TH knows other cases of a loss of syllable-initial glottal stop. Note in particular שְׂמאל “left, north”: the reduction of the first vowel suggests that this form underwent a re-syllabification that resulted from the elision of the glottal stop: *\*šim|ʔāl > \*ši|māl > šəmol*.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, when one deals with an ancient text that had a complicated history of textual transmission like the Hebrew Bible in general and the book of Samuel in particular, it is illegitimate to draw negative conclusions from statistical evidence. Unique grammatical forms should be fully accounted for and not simply dismissed. Numerous studies have demonstrated that contrary to the impression of a unified linguistic nature that is often attributed to TH, in reality it abounds with unique forms that are inexplicable from the point of view of TH grammar, while they find their best parallels in other, non-Tiberian traditions of BH. Such cases are sometimes traces of extinct varieties of Hebrew, scattered remnants of which have infiltrated into the ‘official’ recitation tradition that was codified as TH.

It is only the specific *copy* represented by MT which is late, not the literary composition it contains.

66 The word מלאך occurs 215 times in BH, of which 64 are in the plural (in the absolute and determined states).

67 The quality of the second vowel prior to the operation of the Canaanite Shift (i.e. stressed *\*ā > o*) is revealed when it is unstressed, as in the derived adjective: שְׂמאלי *šəməli*.

This methodological principle can be illustrated with an example that bears phonological similarity to the one discussed here.<sup>68</sup> The lexeme for “offering” קָרְבָּן [qorbōn] (< \*qurb-ān) is very common in BH with 82 occurrences. The /b/ is marked with a *dagesh lene*, i.e. according to TH it is always realized as a stop. This is indeed the expected situation, since the /b/ is not preceded by any vowel but rather by a consonant, and therefore there was no reason for its spirantization to take place. Nevertheless, there is one occurrence that breaks this rule: בְּשֵׁר הַקָּרְבָּן (Ezek 40:43). From the point of view of TH phonology, the realization of /b/ as a fricative [v] indicates that it is preceded by a vowel, but no such vowel exists in the vocalized form. Thus there is no simple synchronic way to explain this mysteriously deviating form on the basis of TH grammar.

A solution to the difficulty is found in SH, in which this word is *always* pronounced as *qārābān*, with a full vowel before the /b/. Evidently, the former caused the spirantization of the latter.<sup>69</sup> This case demonstrates how MT could have preserved in only a single passage a variant reading tradition—in fact, an echo of a different variety of Hebrew—that was current in Palestine in Antiquity. Seen in this light, the seemingly erroneous form is no longer irregular but rather part and parcel of another, non-Tiberian tradition. One can only be amazed by the fact that it survived at all within MT and was not leveled down by all the other, many dozens of occurrences that conform to TH phonology.<sup>70</sup>

This case supplies a full analogy to the reading of MS L, הַמְלִאכִים, in which also the spirantized /k/ is unexplained from the point of view of TH, and it similarly echoes the existence of a vowel preceding the /k/ (as indeed we have in the reading of MS A, הַמְלִאכִים). In both cases MT has preserved a single example for a different pronunciation of a very common word, one that has its attested background in SH.

Such a preservation of non-Tiberian linguistic properties should be added to the ever growing stock of indications concerning the heterogeneous nature of TH, which is not at all a unified tradition as commonly assumed. On the contrary, it

68 For other examples see, e.g., S. Morag, “On the Historical Validity of the Vocalization of the Hebrew Bible”, *JAOS* 94.3 (1974), 307–315.

69 Z. Ben-Hayyim, *The Literary and Oral Tradition of the Samaritans*, 3.1: *Recitation of the Law* (Jerusalem: Academy of Hebrew Language, 1961), 41. Since the conditioned sound changes related with the phenomenon of spirantization have been neutralized in SH at a much later stage of its development (see Ben-Hayyim, *Grammar of Samaritan Hebrew* [above, n. 39], 32–34 §1.1.4), the /b/ is no longer realized as a fricative in this form by modern Samaritan reciters, and as a result the phonological identity of the two forms is not immediately perceived by the uninitiated.

70 Perhaps the persistence of this unique form in TH was aided by the fact that Ezek 40:43 is the only verse in the Hebrew Bible in which קָרְבָּן appears at its end, and thus stands at the highest level of pause. As is well-known, pausal forms exhibit various unique features due to their strategic position within the accentuation and prosodic scheme of the complete verse.

preserves many cases of non-Tiberian forms, which capture linguistic features that were originally characteristic to several ancient varieties of Hebrew.

7.2 Another methodological objection might be the seemingly unnecessary theoretical complication it creates: The form *mālākīm* normally denotes in TH the plural of מֶלֶךְ “king”, and this is an extremely common form; so common, in fact, that it is difficult to speculate that it fell together with the plural of an entirely different lexeme such as מְלַאךְ “messenger”. Even less likely is the scenario according to which it happened in only one occurrence. The semantic blur that is created by such an assumption would have been an internal pressure that could prevent the two forms from falling together phonetically.

However, this general consideration again does not stand to the test of the heterogeneous linguistic reality that is attested in MT, in which one finds many examples for morpho-phonological neutralizations of the kind suggested here. Again, one famous example of this sort will suffice to demonstrate the point.<sup>71</sup>

Two different verbal forms coincide in their vocalization, both realized as [wayyósef]:

1 Sam 18:29      וַיֹּאסֶף שָׂאוּל לְרֹא מִפְּנֵי דָוִד עוֹד וַיְהִי שָׂאוּל אִיב אֶת דָּוִד כָּל הַיָּמִים  
 “Saul feared David *even more*, so Saul was hostile towards David all days.”

2 Sam 6:1      וַיִּסָּף עוֹד דָּוִד אֶת כָּל בְּחֹר בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁלֹשִׁים אֲלָף  
 “David *gathered* every lad in Israel, 30,000 (men).”

The meaning of both verbs can be securely established based on the context, and interestingly enough it directly contradicts their unequivocal spellings: in the first passage one is forced to render the verb as “and he continued, kept on, did ... again”, and take it to be a derivative of י-ס-ף (< \*w-s-p), even though it is spelled with a quiescent *aleph*, whereas in the second passage the verb can only be translated as “and he gathered”, deriving it from א-ס-ף, even though no *aleph* is written.

The reason for this counter-intuitive situation is that both forms fell together morphologically. The verb א-ס-ף usually behaves in TH as a strong verb whose first radical is a guttural.<sup>72</sup> However, I-ʔ verbs in TH can also behave as weak verbs, as demonstrated by as common a verb as א-מ-ר “to say” (i.e. וַיֹּאמֶר), and this conjugation is indeed attested in other verbal forms derived from א-ס-ף.<sup>73</sup> Weak forms such as these turned to be identical with the weak I-w/y verbs such

71 Cf. Ben-Ḥayyim, *Recitation of the Law* (above, n. 69), 72.

72 For example: וַיִּגַּד לְדָוִד וַיֹּאסֶף אֶת כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל “David was told [of the Aramaean advance], so he *gathered* all of Israel” (2 Sam 10:17); וַיִּלָּכְדָהּ וַיִּלָּחֶם בָּהּ וַיִּלְכְּדָהּ “David *gathered* all the people, went to Rabbah, fought it and captured it” (*ibid.*, 12:29).

73 See especially Ps 104:29, again with the *aleph* omitted from the spelling: תִּסְפֶּי רִיחָם וַיִּנְעֹן “(if) you *collect* (i.e. take away) their breath, they will die”.

as  $\text{י-ס-ף}$ .<sup>74</sup> This morpho-phonological neutralization allowed the confusion between the two roots: the *aleph*, which was no longer pronounced, could have been omitted from a form derived from  $\text{אסף}$  (2 Sam 6:1), or been added secondarily to a form derived from  $\text{יסף}$  (1 Sam 18:29). Thus in both cases the orthography cannot reflect the original forms, and the outcomes—in these specific passages—blur completely the fundamental lexical difference between two verbs that are equally common, despite the fact that usually they are kept morphologically and orthographically distinct.<sup>75</sup>

One must conclude that the scribal tendency to stick to historical spellings in order to mark lexical distinctions was not an indefensible wall that always separated between different lexemes in writing, and it could have been broken, at least occasionally, due to phonological processes and morphological analogies. I submit that such a thing happened in the case of  $\text{מלכִים/מלאכִים}$  under review here.

## 8. Parallel Cases

The almost complete lack of the phonetic spelling (i.e. the *aleph*-less writing) of the lexeme  $\text{מלאך}$  testify to the pervasiveness of the conservative trend among scribes of the Second Temple period, who usually clung to the historical spelling. Such a tendency could have been amplified by the theological load of the term, whose semantic scope has gradually decreased already in biblical literature, until it eventually came to denote mostly divine messengers, i.e. angels. Nonetheless, a few intriguing cases of relevant orthographic variants can be culled from contemporaneous Hebrew sources, which bear directly on the present discussion.

**8.1** The construct plural form  $\text{מלאכי}$ , “angels of...”, has been written systematically without an *aleph* in Jub 2:2, a passage whose angelological nature is indisputable. Interestingly enough, one can also see a no less systematic attempt to correct this spelling by adding the *aleph* supralinearly. This is attested in one of the copies of the book of Jubilees that were found in Qumran (4QJub<sup>a</sup> V [4Q216, frgs. 12-13] 4-8):<sup>76</sup>

74 For example:  $\text{אֶת שְׂאֵוֹ לְעֹנֵוֹת אֶת הַנְּעָר הַנֶּעַר}$ , “and the servant answered Saul *again*” (1 Sam 9:8),  $\text{וַיִּוְסֶף יְהוֹנָתָן לְהַשְׁבִּיעַ אֶת דָּוִד}$ , “and Jonathan made David to vow *again*” (*ibid.*, 20:17).

75 The form  $\text{יִי(ו)סֶף}$  (from  $\text{י-ס-ף}$ ) occurs 28 times in BH, while  $\text{יִיאֶסֶף}$  (from  $\text{א-ס-ף}$ ) is attested 24 times.

76 J. VanderKam and J.T. Milik, “Jubilees”, in *Qumran Cave 4, VIII: Parabiblical Texts, Part 1* (DJD 13; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 13–14, pl. i. The plate omits a small fragment that was joined by Milik to the left of frg. 13 (end of line 5), even though its text has been included in the official transcription. The additional fragment can be seen on the photograph included in the preliminary edition: J.C. VanderKam and J.T. Milik, “The First *Jubilees* Manuscript from Qumran

4 *vacat* ] כי ביום הראשון ברא את השמן<sup>ים</sup> העליונים ואת האר<sup>ץ</sup>]  
 5 [ואת המים ואת כל הרוחות המשרתים לפניו מל<sup>כי</sup> כי [הפנים ומל<sup>כי</sup> כי הקו<sup>ן</sup> רש  
 6 ומ<sup>ן</sup> ל<sup>כי</sup> כי רוחות האש ומל<sup>כי</sup> כי הרוחות הנושבי<sup>ם</sup> ׀ [ו] מל<sup>כי</sup> כי רוחות ה[עננים]  
 7 לער<sup>ף</sup> פל ולאגביש ולכפור ולשל ולשלג ולברד ולק<sup>ץ</sup> ויח ומל<sup>כי</sup> כי הקולו<sup>ן</sup> ת]  
 8 ולמל<sup>כי</sup> כי הרוח<sup>ות</sup> הסערים ומל<sup>כי</sup> כי הרוחות לקר ולחום ולחרף ולקיץ [...]

Not only the literary context but also the unequivocal testimony of the ancient versions of Jubilees witness that all four secured occurrences of the form מלאכי in this passage (underlined in the above transcription) indeed refer to “angles”, not to “kings”.<sup>77</sup> It is clear, then, that this correction aims at adapting the language of the text to the standards of conservative orthography. Nevertheless, the fact that the original spelling without an *aleph* has been applied again and again along a whole passage is a direct piece of evidence that the pronunciation of this word no longer contained a glottal stop in the scribe’s vernacular,<sup>78</sup> but shortly after writing he corrected himself in order to adhere to the conservative standard discussed above.<sup>79</sup>

**8.2** A single and ambiguous case is found in the biblical scrolls from Qumran. While MT Isa 14:32 reads ומה יענה מלאכי נוי, “what will one answer the *messengers* of the nation?”,<sup>80</sup> 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> reads מה יענו מלכי נוי.

Kutscher, who discussed this variant among all others of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, has already seen that it is related to the general weakening of the gutturals in the Second Temple period, and even mentioned very briefly its relation to the passage of 2 Sam 11:1.<sup>81</sup> He lists this variant among other cases of “substitution of roots”, and interpreted the reading of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> as referring to “kings”, probably under

Cave 4: A Preliminary Publication”, *JBL* 110.2 (1991), 244. The editors’ restorations are based on the ancient versions of Jubilees, most notably the Ge’ez version.

77 Two ancient translations made directly from the Hebrew original have survived for this passage: (a) The Greek version—from which the Ge’ez version was later translated—has been quoted by Epiphanius of Salamis in his work, *On Weights and Measurements* (written in 392 CE), and the term it uses is ἄγγελοι, the usual equivalent of מלאכים. (b) The Syriac version, quotations from which were embedded in an anonymous Syriac chronicle (from the 13th century CE), and the term used there is ܡܠܟܝܢ. For both versions see J.C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (CSCO 510–511, *Scriptores Aethiopici* 87–88; Louvain: Peeters, 1989), 1:258.

78 The language of the book of Jubilees has not been subjected to a systematic study, but it is clear that it represents the Greco-Roman period. There is a consensus among scholars that the book was composed during the 2nd century BCE (although there is no agreement when exactly). The paleographic dating of the manuscript section quoted above is the last quarter of the 2nd century BCE (see VanderKam and Milik, “Jubilees”, 2). Hence, it was copied not long after the book was composed, and it may be regarded as a faithful witness to the language of the original. See, for the time being, N. Mizrahi, “Hebrew of the Book of Jubilees”, in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, ed. G. Khan (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 2:385a–386a.

79 As far as I can tell, the supralinear *alephs* were written by the original scribe, not by a different hand.

80 The term נוי “nation” refers presumably to Philistia, mentioned explicitly in vv. 29–31.

81 Kutscher, *Linguistic Background of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>* (above, n. 23), 257–258, no. 126.

the influence of the Septuagint reading, *καὶ τί ἀποκριθήσονται βασιλεῖς ἐθνῶν*, “what will the *kings* of the nations answer?” (NETS), and because he identified a harmonization with the expression מלכי גוים “*kings* of the nations” that recurs in the same chapter (vv. 9, 18).<sup>82</sup>

This is obviously a plausible interpretation, but in fact it is impossible to know for sure what was the intention of the scribe of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, especially in light of the rich evidence—collected meticulously by Kutscher himself—for the loss of the glottal stop in his vernacular. The reading of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> is ambiguous at best. It can refer to both “kings” and “messengers” (or “angels”). But one is allowed to assume that it probably represents the intermediate stage that bridges between the readings of MT on the one hand and the LXX on the other.<sup>83</sup>

**8.3** The careful treatment of Samaritan scribes as far as the spelling of מלאך is concerned attaches special importance to the fact that SP Gen 48:16 reads המלך הגואל אתי, “the *king* who redeems me”, while MT reads המלאך הגואל אתי, “the *angel* who redeems me”. Indeed, in their oral tradition the word is read as *ammālāk* “the king”.<sup>84</sup>

Neither the available manuscripts<sup>85</sup> nor the Samaritan ancient translations into Aramaic and Arabic present any variants concerning this word. It seems that it has been included in their version of the Pentateuch from the very beginning of its transmission among the Samaritans, that is, since the Second Temple period. It is very likely that this reading was included in the archetype of SP-Genesis, which was—as is evident nowadays—of the type of the harmonistic/expansive biblical scrolls found in Qumran, the so-called ‘pre-Samaritan’ scrolls.<sup>86</sup>

82 Note, however, that the form of the phrase מלכי גוים is not consistent with the assumption that it is the result of textual harmonization with the expression מלכי גוים: the *nomen rectum* גוים was not changed to the plural form גוים.

83 Similar readings are reflected elsewhere in the Septuagint. Consider Prov 13:17, MT: מלאך רשע “a bad messenger” (NRSV), LXX: βασιλεὺς θρασύς “a rash king” (NETS). For the reverse direction see 2 Kgs 7:17b, MT: בָּרַדַת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵלָיו “when the king came down to him” (cf. vv. 12, 17a, 18), LXX: ἐν τῷ καταβῆναι τὸν ἄγγελον πρὸς αὐτόν “when the messenger came down to him” (cf. v. 15, and especially 2 Kgs 6:33), and similarly also the Peshitta: ܩܘܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܝܚܐ ܕܥܝܢܐܝܗ.

84 For this reading of the verse compare Isa 44:6, מֵלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגֹאֲלֵנוּ, “thus said the Lord, the king of Israel and his redeemer”. A reverse case is unknown to me from SP. To be sure, there is one instance in which a manuscript of SP utilizes the spelling מלאכי for מלכי (see von Gall’s edition to Gen 17:16), but there the oral tradition agrees with MT, which reads “kings”.

85 In as much as the evidence recorded in von Gall’s edition is concerned, notwithstanding its incomplete coverage of the material.

86 See E. Tov, “Proto-Samaritan Texts and the Samaritan Pentateuch”, in *The Samaritans*, ed. A.D. Crown (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1989), 397–407; E. and H. Eshel, “Dating the Samaritan Pentateuch’s Compilation in Light of the Qumran Biblical Scrolls”, in *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov*, ed. S.M. Paul et al. (VT Supp 94; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 215–240; S. White Crawford, “The Pentateuch as Found in the Pre-Samaritan Texts and 4QReworked Pentateuch”, in *Changes in Scripture: Rewriting and Interpreting Authoritative Traditions in the Second Temple Period*, ed. H. von Weissenberg, J. Pakkala and M. Marttila (BZAW 419; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 123–136.



It would seem that what had started as an occasional orthographic variant (that is, מלך as a phonetic spelling of מלאך) in a Second Temple copy of Genesis, was eventually reinterpreted by the Samaritans as referring to a different lexeme altogether. At the same time, this reinterpretation, canonized as part of SH, testifies that the dominant spelling of the word for “messenger” or “angel” was indeed the historical one, otherwise the defective spelling מלך could not have been understood as referring necessarily to a “king”.

**8.4** The lesson to be learnt from all these cases is that the direction of orthographic development tends to be from מלאך/מלאכים to מלך/מלכים, since the phonological process that took place during the Second Temple period has caused the glottal stop to elide and as a result the letter *aleph* sometimes be dropped.<sup>87</sup>

It is less probable to assume a reverse direction of development, although this is not entirely impossible due to the common phenomenon of hypercorrection.<sup>88</sup>

This general consideration hints that if one is interested in making a judgment concerning the originality of the MT reading vis-à-vis the other textual witnesses in 2 Sam 11:1, it is perhaps linguistically easier to take MT as the older reading.<sup>89</sup> The other witnesses would then reflect a secondary reading that developed due to linguistic factors during the Second Temple period.<sup>90</sup> If so, then

87 The only example known to me in the reverse direction, namely, a case in which מלך in an old source had been replaced by מלאך in a later version, occurs in MT 2 Sam 24:20, וַיִּשְׁקֶף אֲרֻנָּה, וַיֵּרָא אֶת הַמַּלְאֲךָ וְאֶת עֲבָדָיו עֹבְרִים עָלָיו, “Araunah looked forth, and saw the *king* and his servants coming on toward him”, which is reworked in MT 1 Chr 21:20, וַיֵּשֶׁב אֲרֻנָּה וַיֵּרָא אֶת הַמַּלְאֲךָ, “Ornan turned back, and saw the *angel*” (although LXX-Chronicles reads καὶ ἐπέστρεψεν Ὀρνα καὶ εἶδεν τὸν βασιλέα, “And Ornan turned back, and saw the *king*”!). However, this case cannot be used as a counter-example for the linguistic trend discerned here, for two reasons: (a) Generally speaking, it is widely acknowledged that the dominance of the figure of the angel (and the word denoting it) in the reworked narrative now included in 1 Chronicles 21 is heavily affected by certain theological motivations, so that this case cannot be taken to be a reliable witness to the linguistic phenomenon discussed here. (b) More specifically, the comparison of 2 Sam 24:20 with 1 Chr 21:20 is, in fact, a false one; the Samuel text finds its real parallel in v. 21 of the Chronicler’s account: וַיִּבֹט אֲרֻנָּה וַיֵּרָא אֶת דָּוִד, “Ornan has looked and saw *David*”, and this reworking clearly assumes “the king” (as MT-Samuel), rather than “the angel” (I owe this observation to Zipora Talshir); v. 20 should therefore be viewed as part of the additional material introduced by the reviser, and it contributes nothing to the issue at stake.

88 Indeed, such an explanation may be preferable in a different context, namely, the relation between the various nicknames of Moses in post-biblical literature (מלאכיה, מלכיה etc.); see M. Kister, “Ancient Material in Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer: Basilides, Qumran, the Book of Jubilees”, in *Go Out and Study the Land’ (Judges 18:2): Archaeological, Historical and Textual Studies in Honor of Hanan Eshel*, ed. A.M. Maeir, J. Magness and L.H. Schiffman (JSJ Supp. 148; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 69–93, esp. 84–89, who builds on an earlier discussion of R. Duke, “Moses Hebrew Name: The Evidence of the *Vision of Amram*”, *DSD* 14.1 (2007), 34–48. (I am grateful to Menahem Kister for sharing his paper with me prior to its publication.)

89 In line with the neglected view of Graetz and Gesenius (cf. above, n. 6), who admittedly expressed it very briefly and without resorting to full argumentation for their position.

90 Interestingly, the word for “angel” (sg) in Classical Arabic is مَلَك (sometimes ملاك), with no *hanza*, or consonantal *ʿalif*. Although this form evidently results from borrowing, it is probably irrelevant for the present discussion. According to A. Jeffrey, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the*

the present case reaffirms the rule that the book of Chronicles and the ancient versions testify to the linguistic background of their time of composition, while MT (especially its consonantal text) preserves an older linguistic stage.

## 9. Conclusions

**9.1** Contrary to the initial impression, MT 2 Sam 11:1 does not embed two different lexical readings, imposing one upon the other by way of tendentious vocalization, and its reading is not the same as the one presented by all the other textual witnesses, namely, the parallel account of Chronicles and the ancient versions. Analysis of the linguistic evidence demonstrates that both the consonantal text and the Tiberian vocalization tradition refer to “the messengers”, while the other textual witnesses read “the kings”. Thus, according to MT, the Ammonite capitol was besieged one year after David dispatched his envoys to Hanun, the Ammonite king, while according to the other witnesses the siege started either one year after the Aramaean kings joined the war, or alternatively on the following war-time season.

**9.2** TH reflects, in this passage alone, a divergent pronunciation of the word מַלְאֲכֵי that goes back to the Greco-Roman period. This form finds its closest parallels in SH, and fits accurately the linguistic background implied by scribal errors documented in the Qumran scrolls. These sources testify to a considerable weakening of the glottal stop, and more specifically to its complete loss in word-medial, syllable-initial position.

This conclusion serves as an indication that TH is not a unified tradition that has leveled down all forms that do not correspond to its grammatical rules. Also, the oft advocated dichotomy between the consonantal text and the vocalization of MT—the latter being perceived as inherently later and significantly less reliable than the former—has been shown to be more complicated an issue than is usually appreciated by biblical exegetes.

**9.3** The trajectory of this linguistic development may serve as an indication that the reading “the kings” could have developed from “the messengers”, while the reverse direction is somewhat less likely.

If so, MT might preserve in this case a more original reading than all the other textual witnesses, in contrast to the view of most critical commentators, and in opposition to the generalization (which is correct in itself) that MT-Samuel is a relatively late and inferior witness to the text of the book of Samuel. This conclusion is valid regardless of the literary arguments adduced for—and against—the assumption that “the messengers” is indeed the original reading. Moreover, if

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*Qurʾān* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938), 269–270, the Arabic form betrays a borrowing from Ethiopian. Accordingly, its testimony regarding the underlying form of the Hebrew word can only be considered as indirect at best.

it is correct, it may serve to illustrate the well-known philological rule that individual original readings can be found even in inferior witnesses, and that each case should be examined in its own right.

*Abstract*

According to 2 Sam 11:1, David sent his troops to siege the Ammonite capitol one year after certain persons had left. These persons are identified by the ancient versions—as well as by the parallel account of 1 Chr 20:1—as “the kings” (mələkīm), a reading that seems to be reflected also in the vocalization of MT, while the consonantal text ostensibly refers to another identification, that of “the messengers” (mal’əkīm). Both readings fit their context well, and cannot be decided on literary grounds. It is suggested that despite the textual discrepancy between the two components of the biblical text, both readings refer to “the messengers”. The seemingly diverging vocalization reflects a late Second Temple pronunciation of this word following a phonological development that took place during that period, namely, the loss of the glottal stop: \*mal’ākīm > \*malākīm > mələkīm, which thus became homophonous with mələkīm “kings”. The same phenomenon is reflected in contemporaneous evidence, consisting of the Dead Sea scrolls and the oral tradition of the Samaritan Pentateuch.

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