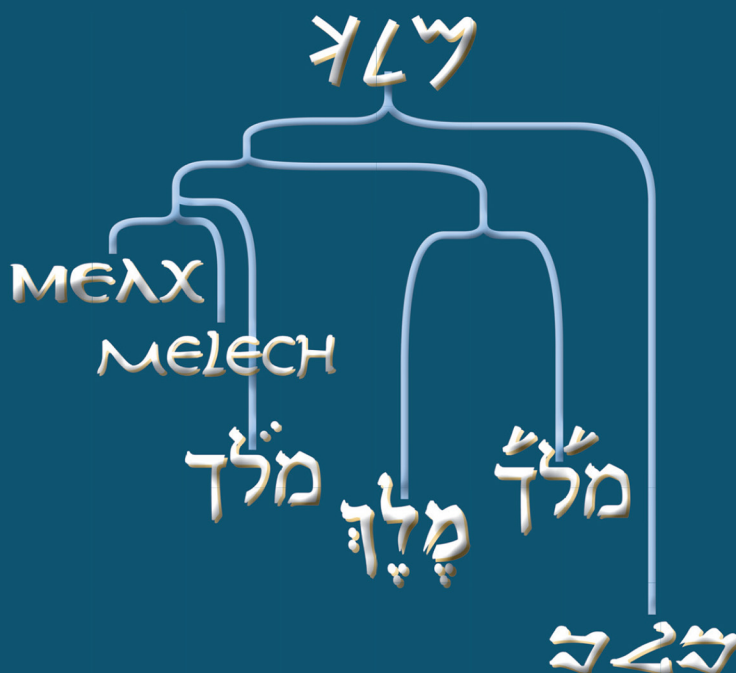


# The Linguistic Classification of the Reading Traditions of Biblical Hebrew A Phyla-and-Waves Model

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Benjamin Paul Kantor, *The Linguistic Classification of the Reading Traditions of Biblical Hebrew: A Phyla-and-Waves Model*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0210>

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Semitic Languages and Cultures 19.

ISSN (print): 2632-6906

ISSN (digital): 2632-6914

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-78374-953-9

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-78374-954-6

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-78374-955-3

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0210

Cover image designed by Benjamin Kantor with help of Draw.io and Adobe graphic tools. The Biblical Uncial font (used for the Secunda) and Coptic Uncial font (used for Jerome) on the cover were developed by Juan-José Marcos.

Cover design by Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

The main fonts used in this volume are SIL Charis, Scheherazde New, SBL Hebrew, SBL Greek, Kahle, SBL Hebrew, Hebrew Samaritan, Hebrew Paleo Gezer and Keter Aram Sova.

## 6. RELATIONSHIP OF THE READING TRADITIONS

The scope of the present book has by no means allowed for a full treatment of the history of the Biblical Hebrew reading traditions and their relationships to one another. A full treatment would continue to trace the relationship between the various branches of the Sephardi and Ashkenazi traditions, on one hand, and the various branches of the Yemenite traditions, on the other.<sup>129</sup> This is to say nothing of the scores of traditions attested around the world of which we have made little or no mention at all.

Nevertheless, we have outlined what may be regarded as a working framework for understanding the overall relationship between the main substantial pronunciation traditions attested throughout history. Central to this framework has been both the grouping together of various traditions based on shared innovations and the identification of features that likely arose due to the influence of vernacular Hebrew and/or Aramaic. Overall, it is the ‘popular’ branch of the Jewish reading traditions and the Samaritan tradition of Biblical Hebrew that exhibit the highest proportion of vernacular features. In fact, this may be regarded as one of their most important distinctives. This, in turn, raises the question about whether features resulting from language contact may also rightly be considered shared innovations. After all, such features can be adopted from the vernacular or the vernacular can

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<sup>129</sup> For a fuller treatment of some of the features of these various branches of modern traditions, see Morag (2007).

merely reinforce (or bring to prominence) features that already existed in the tradition. Moreover, the fact that more ‘prestigious’ traditions were, in a way, more ‘isolated’ from influence of the vernacular may be at least somewhat relevant for subgrouping. This may be a special methodological feature of classifying reading traditions of a sacred text that develop alongside vernacular languages. Such questions require more detailed treatments in the future. What we have outlined here, however, may be summarised as follows:

1. **PROTO-BIBLICAL HEBREW RECITATION:** In early Second Temple times, various Jewish communities began to publicly recite the biblical text, which resulted in the gradual development of recitation traditions with certain features.
2. **JEWISH–SAMARITAN SPLIT:** Also during Second Temple times, between the fourth and second centuries BCE, the Samaritan community broke off from the Jewish community. From this moment on, the Samaritans would transmit their own distinct linguistic and recitation tradition.<sup>130</sup> It would be influenced strongly by vernacular Hebrew and Aramaic in antiquity and by Arabic during the Middle Ages and later. There were no further significant splits in the **Samaritan** tradition, at least none that have been preserved until modern times.
3. **POPULAR-MASORETIC SPLIT:** The Jewish traditions, however, would undergo several more significant splits. Already in Hellenistic-Roman times, there appears to have

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<sup>130</sup> But see the nuanced discussion in chapter 4, §1.4.

been a division between more ‘popular’ traditions and ‘(Proto-)Masoretic’ traditions:

- a. POPULAR: The ‘**popular**’ branch exhibits greatest convergence with vernacular Hebrew and Aramaic. In antiquity, it is reflected in the traditions of the **Secunda** and **Jerome**, which are closely related. In the Middle Ages, the **Palestinian** tradition appears to develop from this same general branch, though convergence with the Tiberian tradition makes discerning authentic Palestinian difficult.
  - i. SEPHARDI-ASHKENAZI: From the strands of the Palestinian branch would develop the Sephardi and Ashkenazi traditions.<sup>131</sup>
    1. SEPHARDI: The Sephardi branch is made up of communities from the Middle East and North Africa, who traditionally had Arabic, Aramaic, Persian, and Georgian as their vernaculars. This branch also includes some European communities who have Ladino, Italian, and Dutch as vernaculars.
    2. ASHKENAZI: The Ashkenazi branch is made up primarily of communities from central and eastern Europe. German, Yiddish, and other European languages are their traditional vernaculars. In later (modern) periods, however, one should note that Ashkenazi takes on quite a

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<sup>131</sup> For the various modern Sephardi and Ashkenazi traditions, see Morag (2007).

different flavour from medieval Palestinian, perhaps due to influence of the Tiberian vowel points on the reading tradition.

3. MODERN ISRAELI: It should be noted that Modern Hebrew, which falls within the stream of ‘popular’ traditions, reflects a hybrid of Sephardi and Ashkenazi traditions. In large part, it draws its vowels and syllable structure from the Sephardi branch but its consonants from the Ashkenazi branch.
- b. MASORETIC: The more formal ‘**(Proto-)Masoretic**’ branch of Jewish traditions, which may have been connected with Temple circles,<sup>132</sup> would eventually split into two branches, **Tiberian** in Palestine and **Babylonian** in the eastern Diaspora. Tiberian would eventually die out by around 1200 CE.
  - i. YEMENITE: The Babylonian branch, on the other hand, continues into modern times in the Yemenite tradition.

The historical and genetic relationships between the diverse set of Biblical Hebrew reading traditions attested throughout history is displayed in the chart below. Note that arrows mark historical attestations, lines mark hypothesised traditions, clouds mark contact languages, and dotted arrows mark influence of various traditions or contact languages:

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<sup>132</sup> For this argument, see Khan (2020b, 104–05, 507).

Figure 3: Chart displaying relationships between Biblical Hebrew reading traditions

