

# The Historical Depth of the Tiberian Reading Tradition of Biblical Hebrew

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Cover image: T-S AS 8.129. A leaf from a Cairo Geniza biblical codex containing Gen. 30.17–20 and showcasing Moshe Mohe's non-standard Tiberian pointing of the standard Tiberian pronunciation of *Issachar* (see within, ch. 4), courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Cover design: Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

## 4. THE PROPER NAME *ISSACHAR*

In the case of the proper name *Issachar*, the relationship between orthography and phonetic realisation is famously anomalous.<sup>1</sup> Put simply, the name's pronunciation according to most biblical reading traditions is at odds with the dominant Hebrew spelling. The mismatch is blatant in the standard Tiberian *qere perpetuum* יִשָּׂכָר, wherein readers are consistently instructed to ignore the form's third consonant in favour of the articulation *yissāḱār*,<sup>2</sup> as if the form were written יִשְׁכָּר\*.<sup>3</sup>

The dissonance in question is evidently a result of secondary phonological development. It seems to be a case of gemina-

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<sup>1</sup> Early awareness of variation in the name's pronunciation is evidenced in Misha'el ben 'Uzzi'el's tenth- or eleventh-century Judaeo-Arabic *Kitāb Al-Khilaf* 'Book of Differences' (Hebrew *Sefer ha-Hillufim*), which focuses on points of dispute in the respective biblical reading traditions of the leading Masoretes Ben Asher and Ben Naftali. The first difference that Ben Uzzi'el cites is that of the name *Issachar* (see the edition by Lipschütz 1964; 1965).

<sup>2</sup> For ancient realisations of ש ז, especially its Second Temple phonetic identity with ס s, see Khan (2020, I:62–65, fn. 59, 234–36).

<sup>3</sup> The vocalisation of יִשְׁכָּר is consistent in the extant cases in the A. In about one-third of the cases in L (14 of 43), the dagesh is missing from the ש: Gen. 46.13; Num. 10.15; 34.26; 1 Kgs 4.17; Ezek. 48.25–26; 1 Chron. 2.1; 6.47, 57; 7.1, 5; 12.41; 26.5; 27.18. A *rafe* is marked over the second ש once in L (Exod. 35.23), never in the extant portions of A. Yeivin (1985, 1090) lists several graphic representations of the name's vocalisation in the Babylonian tradition, all of which correspond to the accepted Tiberian convention.

tion due to anticipatory assimilation of the first of two originally distinct sibilants—likely  $\text{śś} < \text{šš}$ —possibly reflecting the contraction of an earlier compound, such as  $\text{יֵשׁ שָׂכָר}$ \* ‘there is a wage’ or  $\text{אִישׁ שָׂכָר}$ \* ‘man of wage’.<sup>4</sup> Aharon ben Moshe ben Asher’s representation of the standard Tiberian realisation  $\text{yíśśāḱār}$  by means of the accepted (but highly irregular) consonant-diacritic combination  $\text{יֵשׁשָׂכָר}$ , was not the only possibility. Another early Masorete, Moshe Moḥe, opted for the alternative graphic representation  $\text{יֵשׁשָׂכָר}$  (see the image on the front cover), which in Tiberian Hebrew would have had the same phonetic value as Ben Asher’s  $\text{יֵשׁשָׂכָר}$   $\text{yíśśāḱār}$  (see below on the alternative Tiberian realisation given by Ben Naftali).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See BDB sub. voc. and HALOT sub. voc. for these and other suggestions. Ancient interpretations can be found in Jerome’s commentaries: *unde et issachar, qui interpretatur: est merces, ex uirtutibus nomen accepit* ‘Whence is also Issachar, which is interpreted: there is a wage, has taken the name from manliness’; *unde et issachar interpretatur: est merces; et sachar μέθυσμα, id est ebrietas, ceteri que ebrios; soli lxx mercenarios transtulerunt* ‘Whence is also Issachar interpreted: there is a wage; and sachar as μέθυσμα, that is, intoxication, others also as drunken ones; only the Seventy have translated it as those hired for wages’ (on Isaiah, lib. 6, 14.24–25; Migne 1844–1855, XXIV, col. 227); *et de issachar legimus, quod supposuerit humerum suum ad laborandum, et uir agricola sit* ‘And from/about Issachar we read, that he placed his upper arm to work, and was a farmer/agricultural man’ (on Hosea, lib. 2, 6.9; Migne 1844–1855, XXV, col. 871); *issachar enim interpretatur merces ut significetur pretium proditoris* ‘For Issachar is interpreted as wage so as to signify the price of a traitor’ (on Matthew, lib. 1, 10.4; Migne 1844–1855, XXVI, col. 63).

<sup>5</sup> In the Tiberian pronunciation tradition, *shewa* on the second of two identical consonants was silent after a short vowel, e.g.,  $\text{הִנְנִי}$  *hinnī* (Khan

The question that the present study seeks to answer involves the antiquity of the dissonance between the Tiberian written and reading traditions, specifically, how far back the reading tradition reflected by the Masoretic vocalisation signs reaches.

## 1.0. Diversity in Antiquity

### 1.1. Double-sibilant Realisations

The first thing to note is that, while converging lines of evidence point to the early emergence of a phonetic realisation similar to what was to become standard in the Tiberian tradition, there are also traditions reminiscent of the Tiberian orthography, i.e., that reflect the pronunciation of two distinct sibilants.

#### 1.1.1. The Samaritan Tradition

For example, though the Samaritan Hebrew consonantal spelling is identical to that of Masoretic Hebrew, the Samaritan phonetic realisation is *yāšīšākār*. As Samaritan Hebrew preserves just one phoneme represented by the grapheme *š*, namely *š*, the *quality* of the sibilant is unsurprising. The Samaritan realisation of a vowel between the two sibilants is, however, unique among pronunciation traditions. The vowel in question not improbably developed from an earlier *shewa*, as Samaritan Hebrew routinely parallels Tiberian *shewa* with a full vowel, long in open syllables

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2013, 100; 2020, I:352–53; cf. Ofer 2018, 196). The *Maʿagarim* website of the Academy of the Hebrew Language’s Historical Dictionary Project lists a number of variant spellings in agreement with the standard received pronunciation.

(Ben-Hayyim 2000, 53–55). If so, this seems to have been an alternative to the gemination due to assimilation known from other traditions, one that allowed for the preservation of the distinct realisation of once-adjacent sibilants.

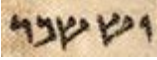


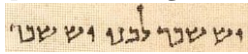
### 1.1.2. The Tiberian Tradition according to Ben Naftali

Possible evidence of a pre-assimilation realisation may also be reflected in the alternative Tiberian vocalisation advocated by Ben Naftali, namely, יִשְׁשָׁכָר *yīššāḱār*, which shows the sequence of two distinct sibilants, i.e., šš (Khan 2020, I:94). Such a realisation might be characterised as purist and/or etymological, possibly an attempt to combat the perceived ‘lax’ or ‘slurred’ *yīššāḱār* pronunciation recorded by Ben Asher and eventually accepted as the standard. Khan (2020, I:103), however, emphasises the possibility that the realisation advocated by Ben Naphtali rather represents an innovative attempt at orthoepy, and that it may not preserve a genuinely archaic pronunciation.

### 1.1.3. The Temple Scroll (11QT<sup>a</sup> = 11Q19)

Similar purist and/or etymological tendencies may also have factored in the writing of the name in the Temple Scroll from Qumran (11QT<sup>a</sup> = 11Q19). In all five of its occurrences in this manuscript (and nowhere else in the Dead Sea Scrolls), the name is written as two separate words, i.e., יֵשׁ שָׁכָר. These are reproduced

in examples (1)–(4) (note that the final example includes two tokens).<sup>6</sup>

- (1)   
 יש שחר (11Q19 24.15)
- (2)   
 יש שחר (11Q19 39.13)
- (3)   
 יש שחר] (11Q19 41.4)
- (4)   
 יש שחר לבני יש שחר (11Q19 44.16)

This written representation may be an early example of orthoepic effort, that is, the attempt to promote correct enunciation, presumably in the face of the perceived threat of hurried and/or lax articulation.<sup>7</sup> Alternatively—or, additionally—the word spacing possibly reflects exegetical concerns. Crucially, if the division of the name into distinct graphic words reflects a realisation like *yīś sakar*, it comes as indirect early evidence of alternative realisations to Ben Asher's Tiberian *yīśśākār*.

<sup>6</sup> The images in examples (1)–(4) are from the Temple Scroll, 11Q19, Qumran, late 1st century BCE–early 1st century CE, reproduced here with permission of the Shrine of the Book, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

<sup>7</sup> On the orthoepic character of the Tiberian vocalisation system see Khan (2018b).

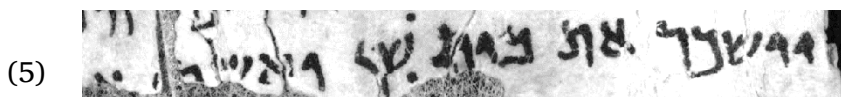
## 1.2. Single-sibilant Realisations

### 1.2.1. The Versions

But additional direct early evidence is also available. First, in contrast to the double-sibilant realisations in Samaritan *yāšīšākār*, Ben Naftali's *yiššākār*, and 11QT's יששכר, other ancient traditions agree on forms of the name with a single sibilant sound. Thus, Greek has Ισσαχαρ, Latin *Isachar*, TA יששכר, and Syriac ܝܫܫܚܐܪ. Clearly, this evidence points to the relatively early emergence and diffusion of a realisation (or realisations) in which the presumably original sequence of discrete sibilants indicated by the dominant spelling יששכר and preserved in a minority of traditions (like Samaritan, Ben Naftali, and the Temple Scroll) was realised as a one sibilant, whether geminate or singleton.

### 1.2.2. 4Q522: Apocryphon of Joshua

Second, and of more immediate relevance to the possibly ortho-epic motivation for the Temple Scroll's explicit representation of the name *Issachar* as two discrete graphic words, is the form of the name as presented in an apparent allusion to Josh. 17.11 found in the Apocryphon of Joshua (4Q522 f8.3), where the name is written ישכר. See example (5).



[ -- ] וישכר את בית שן ואשר א[ת] (4Q522 f8.3)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Image used by permission of the Israel Antiquities Authority.



Cf. the Masoretic version in example (6).

- (6) וַיְהִי לַמְנַשֶּׁה בְּיִשָּׁשכָר וּבְאַשֶּׁר בֵּית־שֵׁאן וּבְנוֹתֶיהָ...  
 ‘And it was: to Manasseh were assigned **within** Issachar’s  
 and Asher’s territories Beth Shean and its villages (Josh.  
 17.11)

Under different circumstances, the spelling יִשכר for *Issachar*—unique in the DSS—might be considered a mere scribal lapse, the accidental graphic omission of a repeated consonant with no phonetic import. However, given the aforementioned versional evidence, which demonstrates the existence in antiquity of single-sibilant realisations, the DSS יִשכר orthography has the look of a phonetic spelling along the lines of [jis:akar] (< *yisśakar*)—apparently confirming the antiquity of the type of phonetic realisation also preserved in Tiberian יִשְׁשָׁכָר *yisśākār*.

To DSS יִשכר one may add later spellings of this type, such as those that crop up in texts from the Cairo Geniza, where a minority of forms with single-sibilant spellings evidently reflect phonetic realisations. While the single-sibilant realisation (with or without gemination) became conventional in most Hebrew (and foreign) pronunciation traditions, the classical double-sibilant orthographic tradition was successfully preserved. In Jewish Hebrew and Aramaic pronunciation traditions, this led to mismatch, first, between the written and reading traditions and, eventually, between the consonants and vocalic diacritics that combine to make up the written Masoretic tradition.

## 2.0. Historical Considerations

The historical depth of single-sibilant realisations is unclear. Judging by 11QT's author's apparent call for a realisation of the type *yiššakar* via the spacing in יש שבר—possibly in the face of the *yiššakar*-type realisation underlying 4Q522's ישבר—the single-sibilant pronunciation goes back to the late Second Temple Period, at the latest. Since such realisations were sufficiently widespread to achieve representation in the LXX and at Qumran (as well as in the later Latin, Aramaic, and Syriac traditions), they may well have emerged earlier.

It is likewise difficult to assess the extent of the penetration of the single-sibilant realisations. The five cases of יש שבר in the Temple Scroll and the lone case of ישבר in 4Q522 are transparent enough, but what of the more standard DSS orthography יששבר, which comes five times in the biblical DSS and twice in non-biblical material?<sup>9</sup> Does their double-sibilant spelling indicate a corresponding double-sibilant realisation, or should 11QT's יש שבר be construed as evidence that יששבר is mere historical spelling for what had already come to be pronounced as *yiššakar* or *yissakar*? Is there significance to the fact that classical double-sibilant spellings characterise DSS biblical material, while six of the eight forms in non-biblical texts (including the יש שבר cases from the Temple Scroll and ישבר from 4Q522) have unconventional orthographies? There seems no getting around the ambiguity of the DSS spelling יששבר. It could conceivably have been

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<sup>9</sup> BDSS: 4Q1 f17–18.1 = MT Exod. 1.3; 4Q11 f1 + 39.6 = MT Exod. 1.3; 4Q13 f1.4 = MT Exod. 1.3; 4Q27 f3ii + 5.1 = MT Num. 13.7; Mas1c faii + b.2 = MT Deut. 33.18. NBDSS: 4Q484 f1.1; 11Q20 6.14.

used by writers and scribes to reflect diverse phonetic realisations and may have been subject to various articulations on the parts of readers.

### 3.0. Conclusion

Be that as it may, the available evidence is plausibly interpreted as indicating relatively ancient dissonance between the standard double-sibilant Tiberian Hebrew orthography יִשָּׂשכָר and single-sibilant oral articulations, of which the Tiberian reading tradition's יִשְׂשָׁכָר *yīśśākār* is a well-known representative. In this case of divergence between the written and reading components of the Tiberian tradition, both are shown to reflect comparatively old realisations. The admittedly secondary single-sibilant articulation dates to no later than Hellenistic times, though there is arguable indirect evidence that it emerged and diffused earlier.

