

# Masorettes

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The **Masorettes** (Hebrew: בעלי המסורה *Ba'alei ha-Masora*) were groups of Jewish scribe-scholars who worked between the 6th and 10th centuries CE,<sup>[1]</sup> based primarily in present-day Israel in the cities of Tiberias and Jerusalem, as well as in Iraq (Babylonia). Each group compiled a system of pronunciation and grammatical guides in the form of diacritical notes on the external form of the biblical text in an attempt to standardize the pronunciation, paragraph and verse divisions and cantillation of the Jewish Bible, the Tanakh, for the worldwide Jewish community.


The ben Asher family of Masorettes was largely responsible for the preservation and production of the Masoretic Text, although an alternate Masoretic text of the ben Naphtali Masorettes, which has around 875 differences from the ben Asher text,<sup>[2]</sup> existed. The halakhic authority Maimonides endorsed the ben Asher as superior, although the Egyptian Jewish scholar, Saadya Gaon al-Fayyumi, had preferred the ben Naphtali system. It has been suggested that the ben Asher family and the majority of the Masorettes were Karaites.<sup>[3]</sup> However, Geoffrey Khan believes that the ben Asher family was probably not Karaite,<sup>[4]</sup> and Aron Dotan avers that there are "decisive proofs that M. Ben-Asher was not a Karaite."<sup>[5]</sup>

The Masorettes devised the vowel notation system for Hebrew that is still widely used, as well as the trope symbols used for cantillation.

## References

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- Louis Ginzberg, Caspar Levias, *Ben Naphtali* (<http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2884-ben-naphtali>), Jewish Encyclopedia
- Jewish Virtual Library: Aaron ben Moses ben Asher (<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/benAsher.html>)
- Khan, Geoffrey (2000). *Early Karaite grammatical texts* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=Ad0XAQAAlAAJ&q=masorettes+karaites>). Society of Biblical Literature. p. 52 ISBN 978-1589830004. cf. Khan, Geoffrey (1990). *Karaite Bible Manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=2jE9AAAAIAAJ&pg=PA20#v=onepage&q=masorettes%20karaites&f=false>). CUP Archive. p. 20 ISBN 978-0521392273.
- Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 3. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. p321.

## Further reading

- *In the Beginning: A Short History of the Hebrew Language*, Chapter 5. ISBN 0-8147-3654-8
- *The Text of the Old Testament*. ISBN 0-8028-0788-7
- *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah*. ISBN 0-89130-374-X
-  Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, §2, §3

## External links

- *Jewish Encyclopedia*: (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=246&letter=M>) Masorah
- The role of the Masorettes (PDF) ([http://lc.bfbs.org.uk/e107\\_files/downloads/masorettes.pdf](http://lc.bfbs.org.uk/e107_files/downloads/masorettes.pdf))
- Masorah ([https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0013\\_0\\_13385.html](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0013_0_13385.html)), *Encyclopedia Judaica*

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