

Theology on *the Web.org.uk*

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes.
Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit
or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the
copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the
ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the
links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbadshaw>

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found
here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

A FORGOTTEN CONTROVERSY

"Haec controversia licet pure Grammatica sit, a Theologica samen originem duxit" (Brian Walton, *Proleg.*, p. 186).

IN 1675 the Swiss Calvinist Church in the Helvetic Consensus Formula, enacted that no man be licensed to preach the Gospel in the churches under their control unless he had previously testified to his belief in the divine inspiration of the Vowel-points in the Hebrew Bible. This crystallisation of the belief in the divine inspiration of the Vowel-points into a dogma, was the result of a long controversy which raged in most European countries from at least the early days of the Reformation, and which continued even after 1675 to be a perennial topic of earnest if not very enlightened discussion throughout the whole eighteenth century. Now no Biblical scholar would subscribe to such a view; few theological students and ordinands have ever heard of the controversy. Almost complacently we accept the fruits of the labours of those who have preceded us.

The history of the controversy is not well-known. W. E. H. Lecky says in his *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* (vol. i, p. 299, footnote): "Spinoza was, as far as I know, the first writer who dwelt much on the possible or probable falsification of some portions of the Old Testament by the insertion of wrong vowel-points." Of course, Spinoza's suggestion was anything but new.

We may say at the outset that the controversy was not waged in a manner now regarded as befitting objective scholarship. Had they been able to have regarded the question of the origin of the Vowel-points as merely an interesting but somewhat narrow field of research, there might have been no controversy. But to the Reformers nothing which was connected with the Bible, the one and only source of Revelation, could be regarded as merely an interesting topic of research. The question was important and far-reaching, as on the authority of the Vowel-points might hang the salvation of the souls of men. We can in humility learn from the seriousness of our fathers in the faith. We must note with regret, however, that the very serious manner of prosecuting their researches brought

with it the dangerous tendency to polemicise. It was the age of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. What was espoused by Roman Catholic could not be upheld by Protestant. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the question of the origin of the Hebrew Vowel-points in the seventeenth century became as burning an issue between Protestant and Catholic as had indulgences or even the Mass in the days which led to the Reformation.

The official view arrived at by Protestants was that the points were of Divine Origin, given at Sinai with the Law. The Roman view was that the points were the late invention of the Rabbis. The irony of the situation was that Calvin and Luther¹ had not accepted the belief in the divine origin of the Vowel-points, and indeed it was a Protestant, Capellus, of whom we shall have more to say, who first demonstrated to the Christian World that the introduction of the points was late.

It would be quite erroneous, however, to form the opinion that the Protestants and Roman Catholics held opposing views on the points, merely to be consistent in their opposition to one another. The skein is more tangled than that. In claiming the late origin of the Vowel-points, the Roman Catholics saw a way of championing the Vulgate translation as more reliable than the present Massoretic Hebrew Text, which latter was regarded by the Protestants as the very word of God. Further, if the introduction of the Massoretic points was late, no one could have learned the Scriptures without the Oral Tradition of the Jewish Church. The Protestants were professed Anti-traditionalists; they refused to accept the Tradition of the Church of Rome, yet accepted the results of the Tradition of the Jewish Church. In this way the Catholics sought to show Protestant inconsistency. But this second argument was not always pressed as it seemed more telling to discredit the integrity of the Massoretic Tradition in favour of the Vulgate and Septuagint. In so doing they went too far that polemic might be served.

The controversy did not arise among either Protestants or Roman Catholics. It was the great Jewish scholar, Elias Levita (b. 1468, d. 1549),² the Hebrew teacher and friend of Cardinal Egidio and Reuchlin, and fellow-worker of the celebrated printer,

¹ Cochlæus, *Lib. de Auth. Scripturæ*, cap. 5, commends Luther for saying that the Jews had corrupted the Bible with the Vowel-points.

² Elijah Levita was born at Neustadt near Nuremberg; he died at Venice. His full name is Elijah ben Asher ha-Levi Askenazi. He is sometimes referred to as Elijah Medakdek (the grammarian) or Elijah Tisbi.

Daniel Bomberg of Venice, who in his *Massoreth Ha-Massoreth* showed that the invention and introduction of the Vowel-points was far from being either Mosaic, or even from the time of Ezra, but post-Talmudic. Levita did not thereby impugn the antiquity of the Vowel *sounds* or their authority; he merely argued that the Vowel *signs*, the points representing the sounds, were late. Levita's arguments therefore did not unsettle the belief of Jews in the authenticity of the punctuation. Roman Catholic writers on the whole went beyond Levita to impugn the trustworthiness of the Oral Tradition of the Vowel sounds which the Massoretes had received.

Actually Levita was the first to demonstrate with cogent arguments that the Vowel-points must be post-Talmudic. He had not been the first to assert it. Ibn Ezra (b. 1092-3, d. Jan. 28, 1167), the famous Spanish Jewish commentator and grammarian, in his Hebrew grammar (*תְּחִזּוֹת*),¹ had ascribed the Vowel-points to the Massoretes of Tiberias. Actually there is no mention of Vowel-points in the Talmud, despite *Nedarim* 37b which at the best claims Sinaitic origin for cases of Qere and Kethibh only; though afterwards, it is true, Azariah de Rossi used this very passage in his *Meor Enayim* as one of the proofs of the existence of Vowel-points in Talmudic times. Further *Baba Bathra* 21a-b, a curious story of David and Joab and Joab's Rabbi (*sic*) and a somewhat violent argument Joab had with his Rabbi on the pronunciation of זָכָר in Deut. xxv. 19, would seem to point, by the way in which it is told, to the Talmudic Rabbis themselves having no Vowel-points.² In fact this passage was adduced by Levita himself as a proof of the non-existence of the points in Talmudic times. The Buxtorfs and others, however, sought to use the story as a proof of the antiquity of the points.

Before Levita, the typical Jewish view regarding the Vowel-points was that the points went back to Sinai; even Kimchi seems to have at least shown acceptance of the belief. A few like Abravanel (b. 1437, d. 1508) may have ascribed them to Ezra and the Men of the Great Synagogue, but certainly no later.

¹ *Cahoth* was the best of Ibn Ezra's grammars.

² Whether זָכָר "memory", or זָכָר "male"; the point of the story being that Joab,

understanding זָכָר in Deut. xxv. 19 as the males of Amalek, had slain only all the males of Edom (1 Kings xi. 15, 16). David held זָכָר should be interpreted "memory". The story is told to emphasise the need for proper clear pronunciation in those who teach the Bible text.

Finally the Bahir¹ and the Zohar,² believed to be revelations of God to early Tannaim, regarding the Vowel-points, names and all, of absolutely divine origin. The Zohar and Qabbalistic studies enjoyed great vogue among Christians in the period immediately preceding the Reformation. The amazing thing is that despite the great reverence felt by even Popes and Cardinals for the Qabbala, any Roman Catholic could still have accepted the views of the Spanish Dominican Raymond Martinus (b. 1220, d. 1287), author of the *Pugio Fidei*, that neither Moses nor the prophets pointed the Law, but that Nephtali (*sic*) and Ben Ascher are said to have pointed the whole Old Testament;³ it is even more amazing that they accepted the more moderate but nevertheless Anti-Massoretic views of the converted Jew, Nicholas de Lyra, culled from Ibn Ezra. But so they did, and so did the early Reformers, Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, Beza, Mercerus, who were as much if not more indebted to Lyra than any. The protagonists of the Roman polemic found it worthwhile to reiterate the charges of Raymond Martinus, Nicolas de Lyra, and the even wilder charges of Jacob Perez de Valencia (1420–1491) who had held that no reliance at all could be put on the Scriptures as interpreted and punctuated by Jews. One thinks of such a work as *A discovery of the Manifold Corruptions of Holy Scriptures by the Heretics* (1582) by Gregory Martin, the Englishman, famous for his work in producing the Douay Version. Were not the Protestants putting all their faith in their vernacular translations from the Hebrew text vocalised and corrupted by Jews? The Scottish Jesuit, James Gordon,⁴ surnamed Huntlaeus (b. 1543, d. 1620), held with Gregory de Valencia that the Hebrew text ought to be corrected

¹ The Bahir בָּהִיר, Exod. xiii. 17, said that the points are to the letters of the Law of Moses as the breath of life in a human body. The Bahir is a pseudonymous Midrash on the early chapters of Genesis attributed to a contemporary of Johanan b. Zakkai, Nehunya b. ha-Kanah (later part of the first century). It was unknown till the thirteenth century and may have been written by Isaac the blind: cf. *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, vol. ii. pp. 442–3.

² The Zohar i. 15 b declares the letters are the body, the Vowel-points the soul. The Zohar on the Song of Songs is even more explicit, maintaining that the Vowel-points proceeded from the Holy Spirit along with the Scriptures (*Sepher Zohar Hadash*, Warsaw, 1885, *Shir ha-Shirim*, p. 145, col. 2). This passage is consciously apologetic and denies that the Scribes could have invented the points, when no prophet could dare alter even the smallest point in a single letter. The Zohar is a pseudepigraphic work pretending to be the revelation of God through R. Simeon b. Yohai to his disciples. If this were so it would belong to the beginning of the second century A.D. Actually it became first known in the thirteenth century in Spain, and in its present form dates from about that period. It is in the guise of a commentary on the Pentateuch. Undoubtedly it does contain mystic and theosophic teaching which in a less developed form may well go back to the Geonim or even before them to the Amoraim or even Tannaim.

³ *Pugio Fidei*, Pars iii, Dist. iii, cap. xxi, p. 895 (Carpzov's edition).

⁴ Gordon divided the history of the text into four distinct periods:

by the Vulgate, not only because the Church approved the translation, but because it had been made by Jerome before the invention of the points. Much the same view, but somewhat more moderately expressed, was advanced by Cardinal Robert Francis Bellarmine, the Jesuit Theologian (1542-1621) in his *De Verb. Dei*, lib. 2, cap. 2—"the Hebrew Scriptures are not universally corrupted by the malicious work of the Jews, nor yet are wholly pure or entire, but that they have errors, which have crept in partly by the negligence and ignorance of the transcribers, partly by the ignorance of the Rabbins who added the points; whence we may, if we please, reject the points or read otherwise". There were those who thought otherwise: Petrus Galatinus apparently held that the Bible original was corrupted but must be restored by the Talmud!

Actually, however, there had been those who held that the Vulgate text must be corrected in the light of the Hebrew. One thinks of Stephen Harding (c. 1060-1134), an Englishman and second abbot of Citeaux, and real founder of the Cistercian order, who revised the Latin text with the help of the Jews.¹ Another reviser of the Latin on the basis of the Hebrew was Nicholas of Manjacoria (late thirteenth century). Roger Bacon, the Franciscan (1213-1294), argued for the study of Hebrew to remove the errors with which he held the Vulgate to abound. Such voices were rare after the Reformation. It was of course the Council of Trent which on the 18th April, 1546, proclaimed that the Vulgate version contained the authoritative text of Holy Scripture; within the Church too was an infallibly correct mode of interpreting Scripture. Their zeal against the Reformers is patent in these pronouncements. After 1546 the Roman Catholic Church spoke with one voice in preferring the Vulgate to the Hebrew.

1. The text in the Synagogue before Christ's coming was preserved uncorrupted by the Jews.

2. From Christ's ascension till the days of Jerome and Augustine the Jews corrupted the Septuagint, but preserved uncorrupted the Hebrew text.

3. Conveniently, according to Gordon's scheme, it was after Jerome's death that corruptions came into the Hebrew text. From his death till the completion of the Talmud, there were contentions, he held, between Oriental and Occidental Jews because of diversity of readings and textual corruptions. In 508 the Jews met at Tiberias and set down the points and made the Masora to prevent further corruption.

4. Gordon held that after Tiberias, when only copies corrected by the Masora were allowed, from then on the text was free from further corruption; but the text had been corrupted before. The Vulgate, however, was free from all corruption from the beginning and continued, so Gordon thought, in its pristine purity.

Needless to say there was a certain artificiality about the above scheme.

¹ *Legacy of Israel*, p. 292.

In defence of their cherished doctrine of the supreme authority of the Bible as the sure Revelation of God, English Protestant scholars like William Fulke, a Puritan divine (d. 1589), and "the great Albionian Divine, renowned in many nations for rare skill in Salem's and Athen's Tongues, and familiar acquaintance with all Rabbinical learning", Hugh Broughton (b. 1549, d. 1612) argued both the certain antiquity and sure authority of the vowels from the words of Jesus in Matt. v. 18. The same argument¹ is said to have been used by John Piscator, Professor of Divinity at Herborn (b. 1546, d. 1626). So the Protestants were now committed as never before to defend the points.

A great champion arose in the person of John Buxtorf, Professor of Hebrew in Basle (b. 1564, d. 1629). In his *Tiberias; sive Commentarius Massoreticus etc.* (Basil, 1620), in the ninth chapter of this book, he upheld with great erudition the divine origin of the Hebrew vowels. In his attack on Levita he was greatly helped by the only effective Jewish counterblast to Levita, namely that in Azariah de Rossi's (b. 1513, d. 1577) *Meor Enayim, Imre Binah*, ch. 59.² Even so Buxtorf's *Tiberias* can still stand on its own feet as a work of original scholarship. Buxtorf, however, erred in seeking to prove too much. His triumph over the Catholics was short-lived. It did not even silence rebellious voices in his own camp. Jos. Scaliger in his *Epist. ad Joh. Buxtorfum seniorem* pointed out that the points must be of late invention, inserted when the language was falling into disuse. Just as the Turks, Arabs and Persians can read their books without vowels, so could the Jews of an earlier period. Nothing was to be proved from the mention of vowels by the Zohar, for this work was more recent than the Talmud. Scaliger's views on the points were shared by Joh. Drusius who, in his *De recta lectione linguae Sanctae*, c. 4, while admitting that the Vowel sounds were coeval with the letters, held that the Vowel signs were later than Jerome. But the most devastating attack against the divine origin of the Vowel-points came only four years after the publishing of Buxtorf's *Tiberias*. The attack

¹ So C. Ginsburg in his preface, p. 51, to his translation of Levita's *Massoreth Ha-Massoreth*. But Walton in his *Proleg.* cites Piscator as Anti-Massoretic, referring us to his Scholia to Genesis xv. 8.

² De Rossi, while maintaining that Hebrew had always had Vowel-points, held that Moses wrote the Law without points, that no one might understand its precepts except along with the oral tradition.

De Rossi seems to have allowed for restorations of the Vowel-points in the days of Ezra and again after the completion of the Talmud; such restorations did not mean innovation.

came from an unexpected quarter. Lewis Capellus (b. 1585, d. 1658), a learned French Protestant, Professor of Hebrew at Saumur, and one of the most distinguished men of the seventeenth century, published his *Arcanum punctuationis revelatum* ("The Mystery of the Punctuation Revealed"). So clearly and fully were all the arguments stated that the subject was really settled.¹ Unfortunately there were those who did not want to perceive this. After the publishing of the *Arcanum*, the Protestant phalanx was decidedly riven in two. Though the book was published anonymously, Buxtorf well knew the author; the blow was not unexpected as far as he was concerned, for Capellus had, before publishing, sent his MS. to Buxtorf, who returned it—and asked him not to print it. He knew that he could not reply to it. The author showed Erpenius, Professor of Oriental Languages at Leyden, the work, and Erpenius had it printed.

Buxtorf lived but another five years; on his deathbed he enjoined his son, John Buxtorf the younger, to answer Capellus. In the meantime Arnold Boot, a Dutch physician (d. 1650), in a letter to Archbishop Ussher, championed the Massoretic cause, and sought to overthrow Capellus' conclusions. Capellus replied to Boot's "temeraria censura". Boot did not take this lying down and counter-attacked, but seems finally to have been convinced, after reading Capellus' book, that he himself had made a mistake.²

Capellus, though he doubtless appeared to some to have let down the side, served true scholarship in the end. In that age of party contests science was nothing unless applied. To the embarrassment of Protestants, the Roman scholars were not dilatory in drawing the moral. John Morinus, ex-Protestant and French priest of the Oratory, in his *Exercitationes Ecclesiasticae et Biblica*e (Paris, 1633, 4to.), reiterated that God gave the Old Testament without vowels because He desired men to follow the Church's interpretation, not their own, for the Hebrew tongue without vowels as it was given is a "very nose of wax". In short, it is God's will that men depend on the priest. He does not accuse the Jews of wilful corruption of the Bible, but of negligence. Morinus was soundly attacked by the Catholic

¹ He restated and elaborated Levita's arguments. The full force of these arguments had never been appreciated before even by Roman Catholics, despite, or because of, the Protestant Munster's translation.

² So at least Walton tells us (*Proleg.*, p. 192), and praises him for his admission of error.

scholar Simon de Muis, in his *Assertio Veritatis Hebraicae* (1634), and in his *Castigatio Animadversionum Morini* (1639).¹ Morinus in his admiration for the Vulgate did not go as far as Cardinal Ximenes had gone. The Roman view of the Vulgate's pre-eminence has hardly been more forcefully expressed than by Cardinal Ximenes who in his prologue to his Complutensian Polyglott (where the Vulgate is placed between the Hebrew and the Greek) compares the Vulgate to Christ crucified between two thieves. Though it is true Morinus preferred the Septuagint, and what is new, the then recently discovered Samaritan, to the Hebrew text; for actual emendation of the Hebrew, the Vulgate is of course still paramount.

Petro della Yalle had in 1616 brought from Damascus copies of the Samaritan Pentateuch and Targums. Not very good copies they were, but they served to stimulate critical investigations of the versions. The discovery too of the existence of the old Hebrew script brought a new element into the Massoretic Controversy. Certainly the Talmud knew of the change from the old script (כתב עברית) to the Assyrian Script (כתב אשורי). This latter, our square character, was, according to one view in P. T. *Megillah* i, 71b, so called because the Jews brought it back from the Babylonian Exile. In fact T. B. *Sanhedrin* 21b ascribes the change of Script to Ezra. This was not unknown to the Church Fathers. But as there is but seldom reference to the older alphabet in Talmud² and as Christian and Jew for long had forgotten the existence of the Samaritans, the square character was generally regarded as the only Hebrew script that there ever had been.

The plight of the Protestant champions of the divine origin of the Vowel-points was desperate when even the letters, the shape of the consonantal text, was challenged by Roman Catholics and even by what must have seemed disloyal Protestants. The younger Buxtorf, his father's mantle having fallen on him, rushed first to the defence of the Hebrew letters in his *Dissertatio de Literarum Hebraicarum genuina Antiquitate*. But it was only to be rebuffed by Capellus in the *Diatribe de veris et antiquis*

¹ It must be remembered that even after Trent not all Roman Scholars impugned the validity and integrity of the Massoretic text. Even Owen (*Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text*) lists "Arius Montanus, Johannes Isaac, Pineda, Masius, Ferarius, Andradius and sundry others who speak honorably of the originals."

² In fact the Gemara in at least one place thinks of the square character as God-given at Sinai, i.e. T. B. *Menahoth* 29b which tells how Moses saw God adorning some of the letters in the Torah with crowns, and on asking why God did so, he was told that one day one called Akiba (c. A.D. 50-132) would deduce further laws even from them.

Hebraeorum literis, in which Capellus felt justified in agreeing with Morinus that the original Hebrew alphabet was Samaritan. Seemingly undaunted, as if he had not had enough of refutation from the pen of Capellus, the younger Buxtorf, mindful of his father's unsettled score, sought to reply to Capellus on the subject of the Vowel-points. So appeared Buxtorf's *Tractatus de punctorum vocalium et accentuum in libris Veteris Testamenti Hebraicis origine, antiquitate, et autoritate, oppositus "Arcano punctuationis revelato" Ludovici Capelli*. This immediately evoked a reply from Capellus, his *Arcani punctuationis Vindiciae*. But fate was kinder to Buxtorf the younger than to his father, who had tried to dissuade Capellus from ever publishing the *Arcanum* in the first instance. For some reason the "Vindication" was still in MS. form when Capellus died, and in fact was not published by Capellus' son till 1689, when Buxtorf the younger had been in his grave a quarter of a century.

But there was still another controversy between Capellus and Buxtorf. In 1650 Capellus had had published for him at Paris his life's work, the fruit of thirty-six years of study, his *Critica Sacra; sive de variis quae in sacris Veteris Testamenti Libris occurunt, Lectionibus, libri sex, etc.* It was thanks to the efforts of Morinus and other Catholics that it was indeed published, for the Protestant States refused. In this work he goes further than in his *Arcanum*, where he had merely argued against the divine origin of the points; here he actually postulates corruption of the text not only by *lapsus calami* of copyists, but as a result of the introduction of the square characters and the Vowel-points. It was an epoch-making work. He was hampered and limited by not having Hebrew MSS. at his disposal. What others had merely alleged, he however by more objective scholarship demonstrated. With Capellus and Grotius, his contemporary, we see the beginning of scientific Biblical textual criticism. Since he had no axe to grind in favour of the Vulgate, we may take his remarks on the value of ancient versions for emending the text as conclusions arrived at as a result of his studies. He is probably to be regarded as the Father¹ of modern conjectural emendations, to say nothing of the findings of eighteenth-century Hebraists who fancied that they emended with the blessing of Capellus.

Buxtorf the younger penned in reply the grand defence of

¹ Cf. *Critica Sacra*, Lib. vi.

the Hebrew verity, his *Anticritica, seu Vindiciae Veritatis Hebraicae, adversus Ludovici Capelli Criticam quam vocant sacram, ejusque Defensionem*, urging the absolute purity of the sacred text. He claimed too much, pressing arguments apparently sound enough for his own day, but which have not withstood the acid of time. Had he concentrated on correcting mistakes and more exaggerated conclusions in Capellus' work, scholarship had been directly served. It was, however, in the long run, for by refusing to admit what in Capellus was true, and by claiming too much for Massora, the weakness of even his defence became evident and Capellus' principles were established. It is not our purpose here to do more than notice in passing the discussions on the Hebrew text and its worth in comparison with the Versions and *vice versa*, except in so far as such discussions touch on the Vowel-point controversy. Suffice it to say that Kennicott (b. 1718, d. 1783) and his friend de Rossi, Professor of Hebrew at Parma, by their collations of Hebrew MSS. and versions, finally made Buxtorf's view untenable. These two scholars were the immediate forerunners of the great Old Testament critical scholarship of the nineteenth century.

John Weemes (b. 1579, d. 1636), a graduate of St. Andrews and minister of Lathocker in Scotland, probably should be given the credit for being the first to propagate in Britain in print the views of Capellus. Not that he refers to Capellus by name; it is, however, indeed possible that he had read Levita's *Massoreth Ha-Massoreth* and drawn his views directly from there.¹ Weemes was an accomplished Hebraist, at home in Talmud and Bible alike. He was the Scottish Lightfoot. Like Lightfoot he was a voluminous writer. In his *Exercitations Divine proving the Necessitie, Majestie, Integritie, perspicuitie and sence of the Scriptures*, in volume III of *The Workes* (London, 1636)² he discusses in Exercitation XI ("In what languages the Scriptures were written originally") the question of what was the original character in which the Old Testament was written, and decides on the Samaritan. He returns to this topic in Exercitation XIII ("That the Hebrew Text is not corrupted"). But he is not very consistent. In Exercitation XI (p. 88) we find:

¹ In his *Treatise of the Foure Degenerate Sonnes*, p. 350, he refers in another connection to the Second Preface of Elias in "Mazoreth".

² "The Workes of M. John Weemes of Lathocker in Scotland. London. Printed by M. Dawson for Iohn Bellamie and are to be sold at his Shop at the signe of the three golden Lyons in Cornehill, neare the Royall Exchange. 1636."

The Character, in which the Old Testament was written first, was the Samaritane Character; It was called the Samaritane Character, not because the Samaritans used it first, but because it was left to the Samaritans after the Iews refused it. This Samaritane Character, was the first Character, as may be seene by the inscriptions upon their shekels (set downe by Arius Montanus, Beza, and Villalpand upon Ezekiel). . . . The Character at the first was the Iews and not the Samaritans, as is proved by the inscriptions of the shekels. The inscription is this, *Ierusalem hakkodesh*, but no Samaritan would have put this inscription upon it; for they hated Ierusalem and the Iewes, therefore this inscription must be the Iewes, and not the Samaritans.

In Exercitation XIII ("That the Hebrew Text is not corrupted") after dealing with the views of "Master James Gordon our country man" (Huntlaeus whom we have mentioned above) and those of Bellarmine, Weemes sets out to counter Morinus "who hath set himselfe to improve the original Hebrew Text, and to prefer the Samaritan to it as the original". We shall not go into his arguments; suffice it to note his remarks in so far as they touch on the change in the form of the alphabetic character. Weemes tells us (p. 112):

We must put a difference betwixt Hebraeo-samaritana and Hebraeo-samaronito-samaritana. Hebraeo-samaritana is that which Moyses wrote from the Lord and delivered to the Jews; it is called Hebraeo-samaritana, because the Hebrew was written in the Samaritan Character at the first, and so kept still till after the captivity,¹ and this we grant to be the first and originall writing by which the Church should be ruled. But that this Hebraeo-samaronito-samaritana should be the first originall, that in no way must we grant.

The "Hebraeo-samaritana" and the "Hebraeo-samaronito-samaritana", one feels, are terms which make a distinction without a difference. Weemes is to a great extent right, but Weemes could not concede that Morinus was near the truth, lest he thereby seem to prefer with him the Samaritan text, so he let himself over-emphasise the slight modifications made by the Samaritans in the old Hebrew writing. We might have thought that he was under the opinion that there was greater diversity between them, had he not printed examples of both kinds of both varieties of script. It would appear from his observations as to the differences between the Massoretic and Samaritan texts that Weemes indeed had actually studied the Samaritan Pentateuch.²

¹ Cf. R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (p. 101), who dates the discarding of the old alphabet in copying the Torah "soon after 200 B.C."

² Joseph Mede of Christ's College, Cambridge (1586-1638), the great "Hebrician", in his *Epistles and Discourses* (1652), p. 496, tells how Archbishop Ussher of Armagh acquired from the Samaritans by an agent of his "that admirable Monument, the

His final argument that the Hebrew text is not corrupted, is of course Matt. v. 18, and here he comes near to contradicting himself to prove his point (p. 116):

Christ speaking of the originall Text, and the perpetuity of the Law which we have, he saith, one jot, or one tittle of the Law shall not passe. . . . The meaning is then, that not one part of a letter, neyther the least letter, not any part of the least letter shall perish; hence we may reason from Christ's words. In that copie whereof the Lord speaketh, " or Iod must be the least letter; but in the Samaritan copie Iod is not least, but the biggest of all the Letters: therefore the Samaritan copie is not the copie of which Christ spake of, but the Hebrew. . . . Hence we may gather that this Samaritan letter was abolished in Christ's time, and therefore wee ought neyther to imbrace the copie nor the characters, as authenticke or original.

Weemes gives the appearance of wanting to be critical and to show himself *au fait* with the most recent views of his time; he however clings surprisingly tenaciously to the old paths.

We have shown that the Scriptures are not corrupt, and that no essentiaill or integraill part is wanting in the holy Scriptures: Now it resteth to show that the Points, the accidentall ornaments were not from the beginning.

So Weemes begins his Exercitation XV (" That the points were not originally with the Letters from the beginning "). " The Iewes who are faithfull keepers, but bad interpreters of the Scriptures," Weemes sees, were wrong in basing on Neh. viii. 8 the claim that Ezra added " the points and

Samaritan Pentateuch, or five Books of Moses ; which may be presumed to be that which they received from the captived ten Tribes, when they first learned from them, to worship the God of Israel, 2 Kings xvii. 27". " This wondrous and non-paril of Manuscripts, he brought hither to Cambridge amongst us; and during his stay here some time, was most ready to shew it to all Scholars that came unto him." Actually Ussher obtained not one but six Samaritan Pentateuch MSS. from the East. Mede says of the Samaritan Pentateuch (*ibid.*, p. 496), " It is the same Hebrew tongue and words (saving the diverse readings) with our Bibles, but written in a strange character, namely the Samaritan, which is supposed to have anciently been the Hebrew, till it was changed by Ezra at the return from Captivity." Mede was interested in the question of Biblical Chronology and was aware of the differences between the Samaritan, Septuagint and Hebrew on this score. " Howbeit, far be it from me to affirme any thing thereof, or of the verity of the Samaritan computation, or to prefer it in the generall before our Hebrew, though some things be found therein, which dissolve a knot or two which makes our Chronologers at their wits end " (*ibid.*, p. 497). Mede does not take the Massoretic text as the last word, however ; cf. an undated letter to Archbishop Ussher *Touching some corruption crept into the sacred Text of Scripture* (*ibid.*, pp. 524-7). In this he is mainly interested in endeavouring " To reconcile the Hebrew Text and Septuagint, with the New Testament ". He favours the N.T. versions of O.T. quotations. " And if one of the Apostles of our Lord play here the Critick, it is no sin to follow him, say the Massorites what they will " (p. 526). In conclusion he says (p. 527) : " I durst show no such conceits as these, but to so great an Antiquary as your Lordship, to whom the possibility of corruption by writing is so well known or rather the impossibility of the contrary ; who knows what time will discover, *cum Elias venerit?*" However, there was at least one other to whom he did shew " such conceits as these ", and that was Ludovicus de Dieu (1590-1642), the famous Orientalist at Walloon College, Leyden (cf. Mede's letter to him *Touching corruption crept into the Hebrew Text*, pp. 629 ff.). Mede nevertheless was by no means a disparager of the value of the Massoretic text, as all his studies show.

distinctions. Hee neither added Points nor Targum or Kabbala to it." He then lists reasons why the points were late, to wit, the evidence that the ancient character akin to the Samaritan had " no vowell subjoyned "; also the fact that in the Synagogue roll of the Law " which is the cheefe booke in their estimation, and whereof they account more than of any other Hebrew Bible, yet there is neither Point nor Accent in this booke but onely Consonants." The third objection is that the names of the Points and Accents " which are Chaldee names " must be post-exilic. This would on the face of it indicate that the points belonged to the same period, though Weemes realises this is not conclusive, " for the names of the Moneths are Chaldee names, imposed after the captivity, and yet the Moneths were from the beginning ". The fourth reason he finds is that the Septuagint translators must have read the Hebrew text without the points for " they differed very farre from the Hebrew in many things ". The fifth reason is taken from " Ketibh welo keri ", when the words are written one way, and read another. This diversity of reading and writing arose, he points out, because the letters wanted the Vowel-points from the beginning; " this made them to reade one way and write another way ". " The Chaldee, Arabian, and Assyrian language, which are but daughters (*sic*) proceeding from the Hebrew tongue, have no points; therefore it is not probable that the Hebrew Text had Points from the beginning."

Weemes' final reason is the Talmudic story of Joab and Joab's Rabbi's erroneous pronunciation and its dire consequences.

Weemes, considering the question of the novelty of the points adequately settled and established, in the rest of this exercitation has perforce to engage himself with the Qere and Kethibh. After all he had given as one of his reasons for their existence that the Hebrew had had no points. Lest it appear from this that the text has been misread, he defends the reading of the Text (p. 127):

Because the Text wanted the Vowels before the Masoretes time hence arose these diverse readings marginall and Textuall, here we must take heed of two errores; The first is of those who hold, that both the Textuall and Marginall readings were from the beginning, and both authenticke and originall from Moses.¹ The second error which we must shun is this, that the marginall reading implyeth some corruption whereas it serveth for illustration of the Text. There is but small difference betwixt the Marginall and the line reading.

¹ Isaac Abravanel (b. 1437, d. 1508), cited in Jacob ibn Adonijah's Introduction to the Rabbinic Bible, assigns the origin of the Qere and Kethibh to Ezra. Kimchi (b. 1160, d. 1235), cited *ibid.*, does likewise, but maintains Ezra's action was necessary because

In the examples which he gives, Weemes displays considerable knowledge of the Massorah.

Despite his advanced views on the Vowel-points, he is aware that he, Presbyterian and Episcopalian, must endorse the Protestant view (p. 128):

These diverse readings make not up diverse senses but help us better to come to the right sense of the Scripture. When it is objected to us by the Church of Rome, that we have no true meaning of the Scriptures, because of our diverse translations: Our Divines answer that these diverse translations make not diverse senses in the Scriptures; for the sense is still one and the same; but these diverse translations helpe us onely to come to the true meaning of the Scriptures, and we must use these marginall and line readings, as we use these interpretations.

In 1657 Brian Walton, Bishop of Chester (b. 1600, d. 1661), published his *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta* in 6 folio volumes. In his *Prolegomena* he advocated the views of Capellus on the comparative modernity of both Vowel-points and script. But even though in his view the points were introduced c.A.D. 500, they represented for Walton the true reading of the text as inspired by the Holy Ghost, and therefore Massoretic readings had to be accepted. Only the forms of the points were late, not "their force and signification". Walton was not the first to expound Capellus's views in England. John Prideaux (1578–1650), three times Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, and Bishop of Worcester, lectured publicly in Oxford on Capellus' views. He adopted them though he saw how they could be used to the disadvantage of Protestants.¹ Walton (*Proleg.*, p. 191), after citing a list of continental Protestant anti-Massoretic scholars, says "quibus adjungere possum Reverendissimum Usserium, τὸν μακρίνην, et Joh. Selenum, virum ex scriptis satis notum, qui saepius mihi affirmarunt 'se hujus esse sententiae'; et vix

of textual corruption during the Babylonian Exile. Abravanel held Ezra "found the law entire and perfect, but before betaking themselves to make the vowel-points, the accents and the divisions of verses" he found that there were words which according to the genius of the language and the design of the narrative, appeared irregular. Abravanel held this was either because the sacred writer conveys by these anomalous expressions some of the mysteries of the Law, or was due to the carelessness of the sacred speaker or writer (i.e. such forms were not scribal errors). Ibn Adonijah, in his Introduction to Bomberg's Rabbinic Bible, was shocked at the views of both Kimchi and Abravanel; he therefore follows the Talmud Babli Nedaram 37 b that the Qeres and Kethibhs are Halakah le-Mosheh mis-Sinai. (R. Isaac said that the pronunciation of certain words according to the Scribes, the removal of *Waw* by the Scribes, Qere weло Kethibh, and the Kethibh weло Qere, are laws of Moses from Mount Sinai.) Such views had been under the fires of criticism from Capellus and Morinus; but the history of the discussion on Kethibh and Qere would require a separate article.

On Qere and Kethibh, etc., see Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 83–8.

¹ See Owen's *Epistle Dedicatory to the Divine Original, Authority, Self-evidencing light and power of the Scripture* (1658).

fere quemquam novi, qui judicium cum eruditione Hebraica conjunxit, qui aliter sentit".

Walton's *Prolegomena* decided Protestant England generally in favour of the modernity of the Vowel-points. That is not to say that there was not a struggle, protracted but unavailing. The great John Lightfoot, Master of St. Catharine's Hall, Cambridge, wrote (*Works*, II, p. 1014):

Some there are who think that the vowels were not invented for many years after Christ; which to me seemeth to be all one as to deny sinews to a body, or to keep an infant unswaddled, and to suffer him to turn and bend any way till he grow out of fashion.

In his *Centuria Chorographia* (cap. 81, p. 146), after recapitulating the names and characteristics, as he saw them, of some of the Rabbis of Tiberias, he commented:

The pointing of the Bible savours of the work of the Holy Spirit, not the work of lost, blinded, besotted men.

This was hardly a rebuttal of Walton, Capellus or Levita, but it gave heart to John Owen (b. 1616, d. 1683), Presbyterian Dean of Christ Church (1651–1660) and Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University (1652–1658), to publish his treatise *Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of Scripture with considerations on the Prolegomena and Appendix to the late Biblia Polyglotta*. As Owen himself tells us, he had just completed a treatise on the *Divine Original of the Holy Scriptures*, about the "providence of God in the preservation of the original copies of the Scripture", when Walton's *Prolegomena* and appendix to the *Polyglott* came to his hand. He was forced to reply "lest from that great appearance of variations in the original copies, there might some unconquerable objections against the truth of what I had asserted, be adduced". His reply is essentially practical polemic. It marks the highwater mark of the attempt in England to hold to the divine origin of the points, just as the Helvetic Confession was to mark it in Switzerland:

What use [says Owen], hath been made, and is as yet made, in the world, of this supposition, that corruptions have befallen the originals¹ which those various lections at first view seem to intimate, I need not declare. It is, in brief, the foundation of Mahometism, the chiefest and principal prop of Popery, the only pretence of fanatical antiscripturists, and the root of much hidden atheism in the world.

¹ By "originals" Owen does not mean *Αρτόγραφα*: cf. Russell's edition of *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (1826), vol. iv, p. 458.

While Owen spoke highly of Walton's Polyglott (cf. *ibid.*), p. 451, he was perturbed at the proximity of the views in the *Prolegomena* to the text of Holy Writ—"This brand brought yet nearer to the church's bread-corn." Therefore he reiterates Buxtorf's arguments for the integrity of the scriptures:

We went from Rome under the conduct of the purity of the originals, I wish none have a mind to return thither again under the pretence of their corruption.

He skates over the vexed questions of Kethibh and Qere, Tikkune Sopherim and Itur Sopherim. He does not know the origin of the Kethibh and Qere:

Nor [says Owen], (to profess my ignorance) do I know any that do, it may be some do, but in my present haste I cannot inquire after them. . . . Besides these there are no other various lections of the Old Testament.

In any case in his eyes conjectures of men are not on the same level. On the Vowel-points, now but one part of the controversy, he says:

And as I shall not oppose them who maintain that they are coaevous with the letters, which are not a few of the most learned Jews and Christians; so I no ways doubt, that as we now enjoy them, we shall yet manifest that they were completed by נזירים כנסת גדרולָה, אונשי, the men of the great synagogue, Ezra and his companions, guided therein by the infallible direction of the Spirit of God (*ibid.*, p. 478).

Actually he felt tolerably certain that Buxtorf the younger had finally settled their divine origin. Owen had to say something about the Samaritan letters, as "it is manifest that the invention of the points must be of later date than the change of the letters" (*ibid.*, p. 499). But that the letters were changed he does not allow, despite Eusebius, Jerome and the Talmud; he dismisses it as "a groundless tradition and mere fable". In fact in another place (*ibid.*, p. 500) he says that it is unknown whether there are any Samaritans left.

Owen's name, rather than his hasty arguments, carried weight. Walton had need to justify himself, restating his case somewhat abusively, but cogently, in *The Considerator Considered* (1659). The matter was settled, though Owen was not without supporters and followers in his views, or rather convictions, right on into and practically throughout the eighteenth century. Humphrey Prideaux, Dean of Norwich at the end of the seventeenth century, in his *Connection of the Old and New Testament*, was more scholarly. He very fairly sets out the views of Capellus

and his opponents, the Buxtorfs, then gives his own. Prideaux's views are that the points are a human invention of the Massoretes shortly after the time of Ezra, setting down, however, the true tradition. Prideaux is not sure whether they used the same points as now; he rather thinks not. The Massoretes used the points privately, and only after the completion of the Talmud were they recognised in the Rabbinic schools. He stressed, however, concerning the points,

that this work hath been done in the perfectest manner that can be done by man's art, and that none who shall undertake a new punctuation of the whole can do better.¹

In his anxiety to defend the usefulness of the points he asserts:

It is acknowledged on all hands that the reading of the Hebrew language could never have been learned, after it ceased to be vulgarly spoken, without the help of the vowels (*ibid.*, p. 138).

But in his desire, however, to deny that Rome had any claims to the authoritative understanding of the Bible, he tells us that

though the Hebrew Bibles had never been pointed, we need not be sent either to the church of Rome, or anywhere else, for the fixing of the readings of it, the letters alone with the context being sufficient.

He saves himself from the charge of absolute inconsistency by adding:

when we thoroughly understand the language (*ibid.*, p. 148).

The lost cause of the antiquity of the Vowel-points was not without supporters; we may recall Joseph Cooper (b. 1635, d. 1699), author of *Domus Mosaicae Clavis*, for whom vowels, accents and letters were coeval. There was, too, Samuel Clarks (d. 1701), who thought he could prove the divine authority of the points by "new and intrinsic arguments". A Liverpool sugar-refiner, Whitfield, in 1748 sought to show that the Vowel-points are an original and essential part of the language. In 1707 Dr. John Gill (b. 1676, d. 1732), a Baptist minister, wrote *A dissertation on the antiquity of the Hebrew Language, letters, vowel-points and accents*. In Scotland, Thomas Boston (b. 1676, d. 1732), minister of Ettrick, held by the divine origin of the points in his *Tractatus Stigmatologicus Hebraeo-Biblico, etc.* (Amst. 1728). Even in 1770 James Robertson, Professor of Oriental Languages in the University of Edinburgh, was defending the

¹ Prideaux, *Connection*, vol. ii, pt. i, bk. v, p. 146.

Massoretes against the views of Capellus and Walton. Abroad, Olaus Gerard Tychsen, Professor of Philosophy and Oriental Literature in the united universities of Butzow and Rostock, in 1772 was upholding the real antiquity of the points. But this was rare, as most scholars now accepted that the Vowel-points were of post-Talmudic date. They, in the main, like the followers of Darwin in another matter, went far beyond what Walton claimed. Indeed many regarded the points as not representing the genuine sense and of no real authority and useless.¹ The results, however, were not so disastrous as Owen feared. Biblical critical scholarship found its legs in England with Capellus' *Critica Sacra* as a crutch. The significance of the question of the divine or Rabbinic origin of the points, in Protestant and Catholic polemic the burning issue of the seventeenth century, now lost its ardour. In most cases the majority of Protestant scholars had, since Walton, seen fit to follow Capellus. The ability of eighteenth-century textual criticism is not adequately realised to-day. They had to emancipate themselves from pre-conceived notions as to the Bible story and the scope of prophecy; but textual study was no longer in its infancy, thanks in England in large measure to Walton. The age of Kennicott, Durell, Lowth and Blayney was not lacking in balanced Hebrew scholarship. One result of the Vowel-point controversy was for long a too great depreciation of the true value of the points, whoever. Even in 1810–1816 Boothroyd, a Yorkshireman, chose to publish the Hebrew Bible without points. In his preface Boothroyd quotes Lowth with approval as saying:

The Massoretic punctuation by which the punctuation of the language is given the forms of the several parts of speech, the construction of the words, the distribution and limits of the sentences, and the connection of the several members, are fixed, is in effect an interpretation of the Hebrew text, made by Jews of late ages, probably not earlier than the eighth century, and may be considered as their translation of the Old Testament.

Lowth does add:

We do not deny the usefulness of this interpretation nor would we be thought to detract from its merit by setting it in this light; it is perhaps upon the whole preferable to any of the ancient versions; it has probably the great advantage

¹ Capellus proposed making a Hebrew grammar without Vowel-points. This was afterwards done by François Mascler (b. 1663, d. 1728) in his *Grammatica Hebraica, a punctis aliisque inventis Massorethicis libera*, Paris, 1716. According to him the proper way to read Hebrew was to insert after a consonant as its vowel, the first vowel in the name of that consonant. Daleth would give da, gimel gi, resh re. He held there were seven vowels; and they kept their value. P. Houbigant defended Mascler's system, though the Benedictine D.P. Guarin violently attacked it.

of having been formed upon a traditionary explanation of the text, and of being generally agreeable to that sense of Scriptures which passed current, and was commonly received by the Jewish nation in ancient times; and it has certainly been of great service to the moderns in leading them into the knowledge of the Hebrew tongue. But they would have made a much better use of it, and a greater progress in the explication of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, had they consulted it, without absolutely submitting to its authority; had they considered it as an assistant, not as an infallible guide.

If it was the age of Kennicott and Lowth, it was also the age of John Hutchinson (b. 1674, d. 1737) and his followers. They and their teaching can presumably likewise be traced to the emancipating views popularised by Walton. But that would hardly be fair; there are always those who press conclusions to extremes. John Hutchinson invented a system of religious symbolism for the development of which he found it expedient to discard the Vowel-points. The Jews, according to him, had deliberately introduced the points with the sole purpose of obscuring his interpretations. Not that he discarded the Hebrew Scriptures; on the contrary, he and his followers, in greater or less extent, regarded them as a mine for discoveries in philosophy as well as in divinity. Hebrew etymology, as interpreted by Hutchinson, was a guide to knowledge. Opposed to Newton, he wrote *Moses' Principia* in 1724. The Scotsman, Duncan Forbes (b. 1685, d. 1747), President of the Court of Session, and a considerable Hebraist, well represents the Hutchinsonian viewpoint in his *Thoughts on Religion, Natural and Revealed* (1735). George Horne (b. 1730, d. 1792), Bishop of Norwich, and Samuel Horsley (b. 1733, d. 1806), Bishop of St. Asaph's, were reckoned in their day sound Hebrew scholars though Hutchinsonians. On the other hand for this system's effect on Hebrew scholarship, one can refer to John Lookup's *Berasheth* (sic) or the First Book of Moses, called Genesis, translated from the original (1740). John Parkhurst (b. 1728, d. 1797), an Anglican clergyman and distinguished Hebraist, represents the Hutchinsonian animus to the points in his *A Hebrew and English Lexicon, without points* (London, 1762); but he had drunk as much at the fountain of Capellus as of Hutchinson, and while sharing Hutchinson's typological views of the Scriptures, his dislike of the points and fondness for bizarre etymologies, he followed Capellus in using the ancient versions for critical purposes. Another Hutchinsonian, Norman Sievwright, a Scots Episcopalian, in 1764 tilted at the points in *The Hebrew Text considered;*

being observations on the novelty and self-inconsistency of the Massoretic scheme of pointing the sacred Hebrew Scriptures, etc. (Edin., 1764).

In the main, Hutchinson's interpretation of the Bible retarded the development of criticism. We mention the Hutchinsonians here since they kept the Massoretic controversy alive. There were others of course with no discoverable Hutchinsonian tendencies, like David Jennings in his dissertation on the Hebrew language in his *Jewish Antiquities* (London, 1766), who kept pressing home the Anti-Massoretic teaching of Capellus. Thomas Lewis in his *Origines Hebraeae* (London, 1724), vol. 4, quoted by Boothroyd, argued

that it is almost impossible to know the rules and use of the points without the grammar; and secondly, that the Hebrew grammar is chiefly founded upon the knowledge of the points, which makes it evident that those two things must have been invented near upon the same time. So the Jews learned grammatical principles from the Arabs and with that the Vowel-points.

John Brekell in 1758 in his *Essay on the Hebrew Tongue*, besides being anti-Massoretic, was concerned "to show that the Hebrew Bible might be originally read by Vowel-letters without the Vowel-points", without the fears of Johannes Isaac of an earlier day that "he that reads the Scriptures without points is like a man that rides a horse without a bridle; he may be carried he knows not whither". And Hutchinson and his Covenant of the Cherubim was surely a warning. In the eighteenth century, scepticism as to the antiquity of the traditional vocalisation of the Hebrew Bible led not only to the abandonment of the points, but to the devising after Masclef of various systems for reading Hebrew without points. This was the new turn the old controversy took. Reviewing the results of such systems, one feels that as Grammarians, the few remaining champions of the Vowel-points were the more reliable. Some scholars with new systems of reading were convinced that theirs was indeed the actual "true and antient manner of Reading Hebrew", as was Dr. John Robertson. Philip Gell and Charles Wilson, professor of Hebrew in St. Andrews, were more modest. This last wrote a grammar in 1782¹ which was being used by Prof. William Moodie

¹ In the same year (1782) appeared Cornelius Bayley's *Entrance into the Sacred Language*, which still supports the vowel-points as part of the original text and essential for its understanding. He imputes Elias Levita's views on the lateness of the introduction of the points to anti-Christian motives. Without the points, says Bayley, the sense, "left vague and unsettled, opens a flood-gate to Popery". The Roman Catholics "embraced and eagerly propagated the *novel doctrine* of their *late* invention . . . to support the supremacy and infallibility of the Pope". The old partisan issue was not dead even then as far as Bayley was concerned!

of Edinburgh twenty years later; and he claimed that Wilson's hopes had been fulfilled as to the results. One can only wonder what the shade of James Robertson, who had upheld the grand antiquity of the points in Edinburgh some thirty years before, thought of it all. Wilson held that the true pronunciation of Hebrew was irretrievably lost, and lost long before the Septuagint translators did their work. Not only had the Massoretes obscured the true pronunciation, not to speak of the meaning of Hebrew, but they had made the language too difficult for the clergy of the Church of Scotland of his day. So Wilson, modifying the French Grammarian Masclef's system (itself apparently derived in essence from views attributed to Capellus), put forward his idea on how to read Hebrew. This amounted to recognising as a fact that $\aleph = a$, $\eth = e$, $\imath = i$, $\eth = o$, $\imath = u$; for did not the Greeks regard these letters as vowels? It was very plausible, too plausible. Then, for short vowels, Wilson would have us insert a or e apparently indiscriminately. The result is of course somewhat quaint, God being, *à la* Wilson, *Aleim* (as He was also for Parkhurst) instead of *Elohim*. Prof. Wilson dogmatically asserted that the Piel and Pual are just Rabbinic conceits. It is a pity he did not know Arabic or on this point he might have had more respect for Massoretic tradition. His book is interesting as providing an early suggestion of the proper pronunciation of יהוה. The view that Jehovah was not the proper pronunciation had, however, been put forward by Capellus, and before him by Mercerus, who in the sixteenth century suggested Yahwe. A book like Wilson's Grammar with its erroneous over-simplification only advanced Hebrew scholarship in bringing in a reaction in favour of the more orthodox study of Hebrew grammar.

To carry the tale further would be tedious. From the cave of forgotten controversies we come suddenly into the daylight of the nineteenth century. In 1839, old MSS. were discovered in the Crimea with a very different system of vocalisation—the Babylonian supralinear vocalisation.¹ The controversy had no longer any meaning. The claims for the uniqueness of the Tiberian, from post-Rabbinic times even, were dispelled. In fact the Tiberian was known now to be a later system than the recently discovered Babylonian. In 1894 yet another system of

¹ Further Babylonian vocalised MSS. in considerable numbers were discovered at the end of the nineteenth century in the Cairo Genizah.

vocalisation—the Palestinian (like the Babylonian a supralinear vocalisation)—was discovered on some few MSS. fragments from the Cairo Genizah. This system was perhaps derived from the earliest form of the Babylonian vocalisation, this last itself being derived from the Nestorian Syriac vocalisation. The Tiberian sublinear vocalisation was in large measure an advance on the less complete Palestinian supralinear system which it ousted¹; in fact though the Babylonian system was elaborated considerably, even it had to go down eventually before the Tiberian.

In connection with researches on the history of the Bible text and Massora, the work of C. D. Ginsburg last century will not be forgotten. Since then the scholarly world has had the benefit of the outstanding researches of Professor Paul Kahle. Prof. Kahle from his long study of the Cairo Genizah MSS. with Babylonian and Palestinian vocalisation has made plain the mystery of the history of the Massora and shown that the Tiberian system was the result of a long process and only by 900 or thereafter displaced the other systems.

While it is now clear that the pronunciation of Hebrew varied somewhat from the time of Origen's transliteration of the Hebrew in the second column of the Hexapla to the final fixing of the Tiberian system,² the differences are not such as would affect the sense or interpretation of the Scriptures. In any case the Massoretes sought to fix the pronunciation as best they knew, and we have reason to believe that on the whole they did their work faithfully. They regarded, perhaps rightly, the pronunciation of their day as slipshod; their own pronunciation was somewhat artificial, however. While in a few cases with rare words the Massoretes may have vocalized erroneously, or in a few cases deliberately altered the expression to avoid apparent blasphemy, by and large, modern scholars have not found them wanting. To-day when the value of the versions for textual criticism is recognised as a matter of course, when the Hebrew text is however still regarded as on the whole the most trustworthy guide, though we no longer claim for its points or its

¹ Cf. P. Kahle, *Masoreten des Westens und Masoreten des Ostens*, vol. i, pp. 23–36.

² Cf. Kahle's important contribution in Bauer and Leander's *Histor. Gram. der Hebr. Sprache*, Bd. i. It appears that to some extent the grammar of Hebrew as pointed by the Massoretes does differ from that at earlier stages. See also Einar Brönn, *Studien über hebräische Morphologie und Vokalismus auf Grundlage der Mercatischen Fragmente der zweiten Kolumne der Hexapla des Origines* (Leipzig, 1943).

script or even in every instance its readings divine sanction,¹ and when Protestant and Catholic scholars share those views, it is hard to believe that so many passions were roused, so many books penned and printed on a subject now apparently so obvious and for many, one fears, so uninteresting.

The conclusion of this is. A certaine Iewe gave God thanks for foure things. First, that he was a Iew and not a Samaritane. Secondly, that he was bred at Ierusalem and not at Pambiditha. Thirdly, that he said Shibbeth and not Shibboleth. Fourthly, that he needed not the helps of Tiberias, meaning the points and Accents. But we who are not naturall Iewes should be thankfull to God, because we have these helpes to further us in the reading (*Exercitations Divine*, 1636, by Mr. Iohn Weemes of Lathocker in Scotland).

JOHN BOWMAN.

University of Leeds.

¹ The bearing of the history of this controversy on the doctrine of the Verbal Inspiration of Scripture should keep us from regarding it as trivial.