

The Living, Material Bible: A Module on the History of the Hebrew Bible

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This module aims to introduce students in an undergraduate Hebrew Bible survey course to the questions of scribal practices and material scripture.² This assumes no knowledge of Hebrew. It was designed and taught for a two class sessions of a semester-long course that meets for 75 minutes each class. However, it can easily be adapted for other courses in biblical studies or Jewish studies, or expanded for upper-division or graduate courses. This module also draws inspiration from a forum in *Teaching Theology & Religion* on “teaching the materiality of scripture” and a module designed by Michael Freeman engaging similar questions regarding ancient Greek papyri.³

The goals of this module:

- Relate biblical manuscripts to the complexities of the *scribal transmission* of the Hebrew Bible in different eras, its relation to textual criticism, and the concept that “the Bible” is not a static, unchanging, or perfectly transmitted entity, but constantly in flux;
- Engage biblical manuscripts as windows into the *materiality of scripture*, or the entire life of a manuscript, often referred to as manuscript culture: their users’ religious and cultural lives, including the uses of manuscripts, the context of region and time period, the scribal practices used to create manuscripts, and the ritual uses of religious codices and scrolls;
- Gain familiarity with the collections and archives of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript library.

Before beginning this module, students will already have read essays from *The Jewish Study Bible* (2nd ed.) which supply a broad background:

- Emanuel Tov, “Textual Criticism” (pp. 2149-2152);
- Jordan S. Penkower, “The Development of the Masoretic Bible” (pp. 2159-2165); and

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² Dorina Miller Parmenter, “Material Scripture,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and the Arts*, ed. Timothy Beal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/obso/9780199846511.001.0001/acref-9780199846511-e-97>.

³ S. Brent Plate et al., “Forum of Tactics for Teaching the Materiality of Scripture,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 19 (2016): 210–18, <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12331>; Michael Freeman, “Papyrology Module,” 2019, https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/sites/default/files/rubenstein/users/kate.collins/Freeman_Papyrology_AE.pdf.

- Esther Eshel, “The Bible in the Dead Sea Scrolls” (pp. 1850-1859).

These readings are challenging to students, as they introduce many unfamiliar terms and historical facts. Broadly, students should already grasp the big picture that although the Hebrew Bible is much older, the story of textual witnesses to the Hebrew Bible begins at Qumran.

The first class will introduce the manuscripts themselves, and orient students to the two major goals of the exercise: using these manuscripts to study scribal transmission, and contextualizing them as a window into Jewish communities and practices over time. Students will be divided into groups, each assigned to work with a different manuscript. Though I have created nine worksheets for nine groups, the instructor can choose from these without detracting from the broader value of the exercise.

Each of these groups will have a different worksheet and readings to complete the assignment. These should be completable in 2 hours. All of them, with the exception of the Qumran group, will have to use the resources of the Rubenstein for their project.

The second class should be at least two weeks after the first, to give students time to meet in groups and complete the assignment. Here each group will briefly share the insights they learned from their manuscript. As they present, the instructor can help them elucidate connections between different groups’ manuscripts, and more broadly reflect on the broader questions of scribal transmission and material scripture.

Day 1: Introducing the Material History of the Hebrew Bible

This class should be held in one of the Rubenstein classrooms, with library staff present.

Items to use from Rubenstein:

- Ashkar-Gilson 2
- Hebrew Manuscripts 1, 2, 13, 14
- *The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition* (Eerdmans, 1998) (LSC BS715.5 .L46 1998)
- *The Kennicott Bible* (Facsimile Editions, 1985) (Rubenstein BS715.5 .K46 1985)
- Complutensian Polyglot Bible, vol. 1 (Rubenstein BS1 .B535 1522 folio v.1 c.1)

Readings: Leila Avrin, *Scribes, Script & Books* (American Library Association, 1991), 101–129; Ethelyn Simon and Joseph Anderson, *Teach Yourself to Read Hebrew* (EKS Publishing, 2008), whole book; see also video with the sounds of the letters: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uz_m118Yheg.

Sakai assignment: 1. Copy out Genesis 1:1 in Hebrew by hand (see <https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0101.htm>), without making any erasures; take a photo and insert it in your assignment. 2. In a paragraph, briefly write up what you learned from this exercise.

Be prepared for an in-class discussion on the issues related to your Sakai assignment, and any questions about the Hebrew alphabet.

Class time:

- 5 minutes: Introduce Rubenstein and librarians present; explain policies for handling collections.
- 15 minutes: Review the assignment; what happened? What did you learn? What mistakes were most common? Review easily confused letters.
- 30 minutes: Introduce students to the primary sources they will work with
 - If class size allows, you can divide students into groups.
 - Give each group some time to look at their manuscript. In groups, they should discuss: What is this manuscript? From when and where does it originate? Even if you cannot identify what they are, what features appear on the page(s)?
 - Encourage students to take photos of items and slips.
- 20 minutes: brief lecture introducing this exercise:
 - Begin by explaining that each manuscript is a witness to the Bible. We have no perfect Bible – only thousands and thousands of witnesses.
 - Define concept of *scribal transmission* and relationship between textual stability and scribal practices, e.g., Was it copied carefully or carelessly? What

manuscript used as exemplar? Did scribe have freedom to fix a perceived error?

- Explain that some groups have ancient writings giving context to scribal practices of their time period; but be careful in the conclusions you draw about how these relate
- Define concept of *material scripture*; how each manuscript serves as a window into a particular time and place of Jewish community.
- Clarify that this exercise only concerns Hebrew textual history, not of ancient translations of Hebrew Bible
- At end of class, instructor will ask student if they have any questions about the worksheets. Be sure that students know how to visit the Rubenstein to access their manuscript, and that they know their manuscript's name and shelf number. (You can encourage them to take photos of their manuscript too.)

Day 2: Reviewing the Material History of the Hebrew Bible

This class should be held in one of the Rubenstein classrooms, with library staff present. We will need both a computer and projector (for the Qumran group) and a document projector.

Items to use from Rubenstein:

- Ashkar-Gilson 2
- Hebrew Manuscripts 1, 2, 13, 14
- *The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition* (Eerdmans, 1998) (LSC BS715.5 .L46 1998)
- *The Kennicott Bible* (Facsimile Editions, 1985) (Rubenstein BS715.5 .K46 1985)
- Complutensian Polyglot Bible, vol. 1 (Rubenstein BS1 .B535 1522 folio v.1 c.1)

Readings: As assigned in your worksheets.

Sakai assignment: Complete your worksheet.

Be prepared for an in-class discussion on the questions specified in your worksheet.

Class time:

- 5 minutes: greet students, explain today's exercise
- 40 minutes: each group presents their manuscript. As each group presents, instructor should ask questions guiding groups to see connections between their manuscript and others':
 - What is this manuscript?
 - When and from where did it originate?
 - What features appear on the page(s)?
 - What was it used for, and by whom?
 - More broadly: What did you learn about scribal transmission and the materiality of this manuscript? (Be specific in pointing to features of your manuscript!)
- 25 minutes: Broader class discussion:
 - What themes and connections emerge between different groups?
 - A new Torah scroll can cost anywhere from \$30,000 to \$60,000, and takes over six months of labor as well as many animal skins. Given the time and money required to write a Torah, what conclusions might you draw from that about the presence of the written Bible in Jewish life before the age of print?
 - Far from an idea of a scribe as a mere rote copyist, what kinds of literacy and textual knowledge would a scribe have needed in each of these stages?
- 5 minutes: Reflection: What do you take away from this class? What was most interesting or helpful?

Worksheet 1: The Great Isaiah Scroll: Scribal Practice in the Dead Sea Scrolls

Material witness: Not in Rubenstein, but online: The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a) from Qumran, accessible digitally at <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah#>

Readings: “The Dead Sea Scrolls - Stephen Fry's Planet Word,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9I2a1zuJznU>; Emanuel Tov, “Searching for the ‘Original’ Bible,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, July/August 2004; Emanuel Tov, “Scribal Marks,” *TheTorah.Com* (blog), December 8, 2017, <https://www.thetorah.com/article/scribal-marks>.

Background information:

The Dead Sea Scrolls are easily the most significant manuscript find for biblical scholars in the twentieth century. They have given scholars new insight into the history of the biblical text, and they are our oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible.

These manuscripts, discovered beginning in 1946, were found in caves around the Dead Sea (hence the name Dead Sea Scrolls). There is a nearby archaeological site named Qumran, and it is typically thought that the people who lived at Qumran also used and wrote these scrolls. The Qumran community abruptly ceased in 70 CE at the hands of the Roman military.

One of the important uses of the Dead Sea Scrolls for scholarship has been reconstructing the earliest text of the Hebrew Bible. Scholars discern the relationship between these scrolls and the next major surviving group of manuscripts, the Masoretic manuscripts, often abbreviated “MT” for “Masoretic Text.” The scrolls revealed a great continuity and stability between these two groups of manuscripts separated by roughly 800–900 years, but also demonstrate changes and corrections made over those centuries.

For this assignment we will look at the Great Isaiah Scroll. This was one of the first major manuscript finds from Qumran; it was found in Cave 1 in 1946. Even after the last cave, Cave 11, was discovered in 1956, this scroll remains one of the most significant biblical manuscripts from the Dead Sea. While most biblical manuscripts from the Dead Sea are fragments of books, this scroll contains all 66 chapters of the Book of Isaiah, one of the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible.

Sakai assignment:

1. Watch the Stephen Fry video where he visits the Shrine of the Book in Israel and looks at a scroll. What did you note of interest from the video?
2. Read Tov, “Searching for the ‘Original’ Bible,” and Tov, “Scribal Marks.” What is one example from each article that stood out to you regarding differences between

the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic Text (MT)?

3. Turning to the Great Isaiah Scroll, spend some time looking at the digital reproduction of the manuscript supplied above. Find two different examples of the scribal marks which Tov discusses; take screenshots of them and paste them into your assignment. These could include dots over words or words inserted above or below the line indicating a correction.
4. Spend 5-10 minutes looking through the Israel Museum's side-by-side English translations of the Great Isaiah Scroll and the Masoretic Text of the Isaiah Scroll, available at http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/chapters_pg. Find two differences between the two and paste them here. Do either of them seem significant to the meaning of the book? Are they large differences?
5. What do your findings in the previous two questions suggest about the stability of the Hebrew Bible at this time?

Be prepared for an in-class discussion of your manuscript; you should answer these questions, using your analysis of the manuscript and the information found in your worksheet and the secondary reading:

- What is this manuscript?
- From when and where does it originate?
- What features appear on the page(s)?
- What was it used for, and by whom?
- More broadly: What did you learn about scribal transmission and the materiality of this manuscript? (Be specific in pointing to features of your manuscript!)

Worksheet 2: The 'Silent Era': Scribal Practice between Qumran and the Masoretes

Material witness: Ashkar-Gilson 2 (aka MS London-Ashkar)

Readings: David Stern, *The Jewish Bible: A Material History* (University of Washington Press, 2017), 27–32 (on Hebrew Bible in the rabbinic period), 39–41 (on symbolic significance of Torah scroll in this period), available at <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE008046745>; Paul Sanders, “Missing Link in Hebrew Bible Formation,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, November/December 2015, 46–52, 74–75, https://www.academia.edu/18160355/Missing_Link_in_Hebrew_Bible_Formation; Mordechai Veintrob, “More Fragments of Early Torah Scroll Come to Light,” *Genizah Fragments*, April 2019, https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/files/genizah_77.pdf.

Background information:

The period between 70 CE and 1008 CE was a hugely formative time for rabbinic Judaism as we know it today. In this period, key works of rabbinic literature were written and compiled over centuries: the Mishnah, the Talmuds of Babylon and Jerusalem which comment on the Mishnah, and the midrashic literature which comments on the Tanakh. Penkower, in “The Development of the Masoretic Bible” (in *JSB*), refers to this as “the era of the Sages” (2159–2160).

However, we have very little manuscript evidence from this millennium of the Hebrew Bible itself. This period begins with 70 CE, the destruction of the Second Temple, which also roughly ends the period of the Dead Sea Scrolls. It ends with the Masoretes, the medieval scribes who added vowels, cantillation, and other annotations to the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible. 1008 CE is the date of the St. Petersburg Codex (aka Leningrad Codex), a Masoretic copy of the entire Hebrew Bible. This is the oldest extant complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible. Modern critical editions of the Hebrew Bible used by scholars rely on this manuscript.

Because we have so little manuscript evidence from this period, some scholars call it “the silent era.” Much of our knowledge comes from rabbinic writings about scribal practices, not actual manuscripts. The relationship between these prescriptions and scribes’ actual practices was likely quite complicated and messy. You should also assume that practices varied by region and time period, possibly quite a bit.

At Duke we are fortunate to one of the few manuscript witnesses to this era. This manuscript is a fragment from a Torah scroll. The style of this manuscript’s writing and a carbon analysis of a small fragment of it put the date of this fragment at the seventh or eighth century CE.

Sakai assignment:

1. Read Stern, 27–32 and 39–41. What does Stern say about the development of the Torah scroll? What meaning does the scroll as material object have for Jewish life?
2. Read Exodus 15, the Song of the Sea. What is this song? What is its place in the story of Exodus?
3. Read this portion of the Talmud (b. Megillah 16b), a work of Jewish law from the first millennium:

“All the songs [in Scripture] are written in the form of a half-brick over a whole brick, and a whole brick over a half-brick.”

The “songs” referred to here are what we would call poetic passages in the Hebrew Bible. Exodus 15, the Song of the Sea, is one of these, and is found in Ashkar-Gilson 2. Find it and take a photo; paste it here. You can identify it visually without knowing Hebrew, because it looks different from the rest of the manuscript.

4. Turning to Ashkar-Gilson 2, read Sanders, “Missing Link in Hebrew Bible Formation.” What does he say about the significance of the Song of the Sea in Ashkar-Gilson 2? What does Sanders surmise about the accuracy of the Torah’s transmission during the “silent era”?

Be prepared for an in-class discussion of your manuscript; you should answer these questions, using your analysis of the manuscript and the information found in your worksheet and the secondary reading:

- What is this manuscript?
- From when and where does it originate?
- What features appear on the page(s)?
- What was it used for, and by whom?
- More broadly: What did you learn about scribal transmission and the materiality of this manuscript? (Be specific in pointing to features of your manuscript!)

Worksheet 3: The Leningrad Codex and Masoretic Scribal Practice

Material witness: *The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition* (Eerdmans, 1998) (LSC BS715.5 .L46 1998)

Readings: David Stern, *The Jewish Bible: A Material History* (University of Washington Press, 2017), 65–70 (on Masoretes and the birth of the Jewish codex); 87–90 (on three main genres of medieval Hebrew Bible); 78–87 (on micrography), available at <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE008046745>; Marc Zvi Brettler, “The Masoretes at Work: A Tradition Preserved,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, August 1997, 38–39; James A. Sanders and Astrid B. Beck, “The Leningrad Codex,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, August 1997, 32, 34–41, 46.

Background information:

This manuscript, the Leningrad Codex, is the oldest extant manuscript of the entire Hebrew Bible. All modern critical study of the Bible employs it as the starting-point, and our preferred translation, *The Jewish Study Bible*, derives from it. Duke is fortunate to have a facsimile (photographic reproduction) of the Leningrad Codex. The original lives in St. Petersburg in Russia, which used to be called Leningrad—hence the Leningrad Codex.

Sakai assignment:

1. Read Stern, 65–70, and Brettler.
 - a. Who were the Masoretes?
 - b. What are the *masorah magna*, *masorah parva*, *niqqud*, and *te'amim*?
 - c. What is the difference between a codex and a scroll?
 - d. When and in what context did the codex emerge as a format for the Jewish Bible?
 - e. Why was the codex not used before?
2. Turning to the manuscript, take a photo of a page and paste it here. Try to identify the various elements on the page: the text, the *masorah magna*, the *masorah parva*, the *niqqud* and *te'amim*.
3. Read Stern, 78–87. What is micrography? What part of the text is typically done in micrography?
4. Turning to the manuscript, find a page of biblical text that includes micrography. Take a photo of the micrography and include it here.
5. At the very end of the manuscript, there are several pages with elaborate decoration. These are called “carpet pages” and contain micrographic patterns of Masoretic

treatises. Why, drawing from Stern 83–87, do you think these are here? What is their purpose?

6. Read Stern, 87–90. Which of the three genres of the medieval Hebrew Bible does this codex belong to? What do you think it was used for?
7. Read Sanders and Beck, “The Leningrad Codex.” This article has a lot of information about the politics of creating and studying manuscripts. What role has the Leningrad Codex played in conflicts between Karaites and Rabbanites? How did more recent political issues between America and Soviet Russia play into the work of Sanders’ team photographing the Leningrad Codex?

Be prepared for an in-class discussion of your manuscript; you should answer these questions, using your analysis of the manuscript and the information found in your worksheet and the secondary reading:

- What is this manuscript?
- From when and where does it originate?
- What features appear on the page(s)?
- What was it used for, and by whom?
- More broadly: What did you learn about scribal transmission and the materiality of this manuscript? (Be specific in pointing to features of your manuscript!)

Worksheet 4: A Fragment from a Later Medieval Bible Codex

Material witness: Duke Hebrew MS 13

Readings: Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole, “Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shHlMp6VbsA>; David Stern, *The Jewish Bible: A Material History* (University of Washington Press, 2017), 65–70 (on Masoretes and the birth of the Jewish codex); 87–90 (on three main genres of medieval Hebrew Bible), available at <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE008046745>; Marc Zvi Brettler, “The Masoretes at Work: A Tradition Preserved,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, August 1997, 38–39.

Background and context:

Duke Hebrew MS 13 is a leaf from a medieval codex containing the text of 1 Samuel 13:18–14:21. It is most likely from the 12th-15th centuries, and its script is Western European (“Ashkenazi”).

This fragment was donated to Duke University by Ernest Muro in 2008. Muro purchased it from a seller on Yahoo! Auctions who claimed it to be a fragment from the Cairo Genizah. Though it is best to view these sellers’ statements with suspicion, this is the *kind* of fragment one might find in the Cairo Genizah, so can relate it to that context.

In traditional Jewish practice, any document which contains the name of God cannot be thrown in the trash. It must be buried or disposed of in a genizah, a special disposal area for sacred documents. The Cairo Genizah is one such disposal site from an old synagogue in Cairo with documents that date back a millennium. Although the Dead Sea Scrolls are more important for biblical scholarship, for Jewish history as a whole the Cairo Genizah is certainly the most famous manuscript discovery of modern times: 200,000 different items, ranging from the most sacred Torah scrolls to the most mundane items related to daily life.

Sakai assignment:

1. Watch Hoffmann and Cole, “Sacred Trash,” which briefly introduces the Cairo Genizah. What is a genizah? What kinds of materials appear in the Cairo Genizah? Why might it be significant for scholars of the Bible, of Jewish history, and of the Bible in medieval Judaism?
2. Read Stern, 65–70, and Brettler.
 - a. Who were the Masoretes?
 - b. What are the masorah magna, masorah parva, niqqud, and te’amim?
 - c. What is the difference between a codex and a scroll?

- d. When and in what context did the codex emerge as a format for the Jewish Bible?
 - e. Why was the codex not used before?
3. Turning to the manuscript, take a photo of a page and paste it here. Try to identify the various elements on the page: the text, the *masorah magna*, the *masorah parva*, the *niqud* and *te'amim*.
4. Looking at the ink and the letters, do you think that the same scribe did all of these elements, or did more than one scribe work on this manuscript? What might this suggest about the transmission of the text?
5. Read Stern, 87–90. Which of the three genres of the medieval Hebrew Bible does this fragment belong to? (Hint: 1 Samuel 13:18–14:21 is not a traditional haftarah reading.) What would it have been used for?

Be prepared for an in-class discussion of your manuscript; you should answer these questions, using your analysis of the manuscript and the information found in your worksheet and the secondary reading:

- What is this manuscript?
- From when and where does it originate?
- What features appear on the page(s)?
- What was it used for, and by whom?
- More broadly: What did you learn about scribal transmission and the materiality of this manuscript? (Be specific in pointing to features of your manuscript!)

Worksheet 5: The Kennicott Bible: A Deluxe Late Medieval Biblical Manuscript

Material witness: *The Kennicott Bible* (Facsimile Editions, 1985) (Rubenstein BS715.5 .K46 1985)

Readings: PBS, “The Kennicott Bible,”

<https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/sotj14.socs.tworld.kennicottbible/kennicott/#.XdGqhTJKjMI>; David Stern, *The Jewish Bible: A Material History* (University of Washington Press, 2017), 65–70 (on Masoretes and the birth of the Jewish codex); 78–87 (on micrography), available at <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE008046745>; 87–90 (on three main genres of medieval Hebrew Bible); 90–101 (on the Bible in Sefarad); Marc Zvi Brettler, “The Masoretes at Work: A Tradition Preserved,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, August 1997, 38–39.

Background information:

The Kennicott Bible is one of the most lavish and beautiful medieval Jewish manuscripts. It witnesses to a lost Jewish world: the Spanish Jews who would be expelled from their country in 1492, within two decades of this manuscript’s creation in 1476.

Duke owns a high-quality facsimile (photographic reproduction) of the Kennicott Bible. The original is at the Bodleian Library of Oxford University.

Sakai assignment:

1. Watch the PBS video. What is the Kennicott Bible? From where does it get its name? Who produced it, and for whom?
2. Read Stern, 65–70, and Brettler:
 - a. Who were the Masoretes?
 - b. What are the masorah magna, masorah parva, niqqud, and te’amim?
 - c. What is the difference between a codex and a scroll?
 - d. When and in what context did the codex emerge as a format for the Jewish Bible?
 - e. Why was the codex not used before?
3. Turning to the manuscript, take a photo of a page and paste it here. Try to identify the various elements on the page: the text, the *masorah magna*, the *masorah parva*, the *niqqud* and *te’amim*.
4. Read Stern, 78–87. What is micrography? What part of the text is typically done in micrography?

5. Turning to the manuscript, find a page that includes micrography (and not just the *masorah parva* or *masorah magna*). Take a photo of the micrography and include it here.
8. Read Stern, 87–90. Which of the three genres of the medieval Hebrew Bible does this codex belong to?
9. Read Stern, 90–101. What does Stern say about the kinds of visual motifs found in manuscripts in Sefarad manuscripts? Find three different visual motifs on three different pages in this codex and be ready to share them with the class.
10. What do you think was the main use or purpose of this manuscript? What does the creation of this expensive, highly decorated manuscript tell us about its creators and their community?

Be prepared for an in-class discussion of your manuscript; you should answer these questions, using your analysis of the manuscript and the information found in your worksheet and the secondary reading:

- What is this manuscript?
- From when and where does it originate?
- What features appear on the page(s)?
- What was it used for, and by whom?
- More broadly: What did you learn about scribal transmission and the materiality of this manuscript? (Be specific in pointing to features of your manuscript!)

Worksheet 6: The Complutensian Polyglot: A Printed Christian Hebrew Bible

Material witness: Complutensian Polyglot Bible, vol. 1 (Rubenstein BS1 .B535 1522 folio v.1 c.1)

Readings: “Converging Visions,” *Duke Magazine*, May/June 2003, <https://alumni.duke.edu/magazine/articles/converging-visions>; Joshua Teplitsky, “Crypto-Jews” at *My Jewish Learning*, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/crypto-jews/>; Eveline van Staaldoune-Sulman, *Justifying Christian Aramaism: Editions and Latin Translations of the Targums from the Complutensian to the London Polyglot Bible (1517-1657)* (Brill, 2017), pp. 17–23; Ronald Hendel, “From Polyglot to Hypertext,” in *The Text of the Hebrew Bible and Its Editions: Studies in Celebration of the Fifth Centennial of the Complutensian Polyglot*, ed. Andrés Piquer Otero and Pablo A. Torijano Morales (Brill, 2017), pp. 19–33.

Background information:

For much of the history of the Hebrew Bible, Jews read and recited their Bible in Hebrew and Aramaic while European Christians read and recited their Old Testament in Greek and Latin. However, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries many Christians sought to study the Bible in Hebrew and Aramaic. Their motives differed. Some wanted to go back to the original language to correct inaccuracies in received translations. Some felt that the manuscript tradition had become too sloppy and inaccurate, and wanted to rediscover the original text. A new field of study developed, called *textual criticism*. These textual critics sought to reconstruct the most accurate original text of the Bible. This field of study continues in biblical scholarship.

The Complutensian Polyglot Bible, published in the 1520s in Spain, exemplifies this early modern Christian interest in the Hebrew text of the Bible. Its patron, Cardinal Cisneros, used his political power in the Catholic Church to fund the project. It is worth noting that Cardinal Cisneros was closely tied to the Christian rulers of Spain at the time they expelled the Jews from Spain 1492, and he later served as Grand Inquisitor promoting Catholic orthodoxy in Spain and persecuting heretics, including Jews and Muslims.

This polyglot Bible is not only a huge undertaking of biblical scholarship, but a window into Jewish-Christian relations in its day. Only three decades before, in 1492, the crown of Spain had given all the Jews of the nation a tough choice: either leave the country, or convert to Catholicism. Many of the scholars who worked on this project were from *conversos*—Jewish families who had decided to stay and convert.

Sakai assignment:

1. Read “Converging Visions.” What is the Complutensian Polyglot Bible, and when was it published? How long did it take? Who was its main sponsor?
2. Read Staalduine-Sulman, 17–23. This work translates some of the Latin introductions to the Polyglot Bible that spell out its aims and assumptions. Reading its “Introduction to the Reader,” find a page of the Polyglot, take a photo of it, and identify each of the sections of the page. What languages are represented here?
3. How do you think this Bible was used? Was it used for religious ritual, or for scholarly study?
4. Read Teplitsky and Hendel, 19–33. Who were the Crypto-Jews, also known as *conversos*? How were they involved in the production of the Complutensian Bible? What attitudes towards Jews and the Hebrew language do you see at work in this polyglot Bible?

Be prepared for an in-class discussion of your manuscript; you should answer these questions, using your analysis of the manuscript and the information found in your worksheet and the secondary reading:

- What is this manuscript?
- From when and where does it originate?
- What features appear on the page(s)?
- What was it used for, and by whom?
- More broadly: What did you learn about scribal transmission and the materiality of this manuscript? (Be specific in pointing to features of your manuscript!)

Worksheet 7: Manuscripts in the Age of the Printed Bible: The Torah Scroll

Material witness: Duke Hebrew MS 1

Readings: BBC, “In Pictures: Writing a Torah Scroll,” <https://www.bbc.com/news/in-pictures-23409254>; David Stern, *The Jewish Bible: A Material History* (University of Washington Press, 2017), 33–61 (on medieval Torah scrolls and their ritual significance), available at <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE008046745>; Moses Maimonides, *The Code of Maimonides, Book Two: The Book of Love*, trans. Menachem Marc Kellner (Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 73–110 [portions].

Background information:

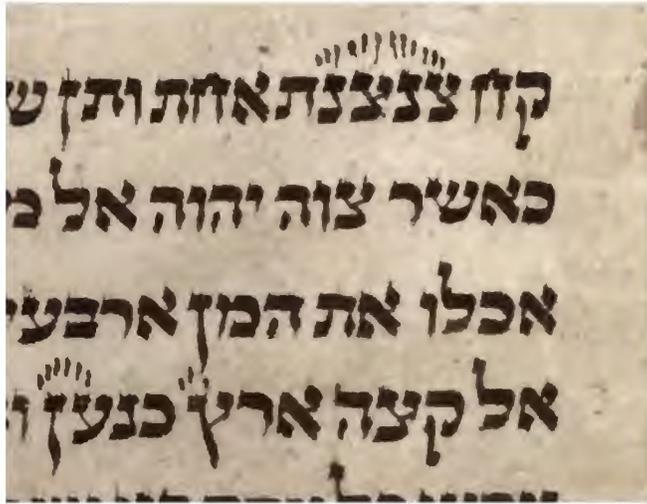
The invention of the printed Hebrew Bible has not replaced the need, in Jewish law, for a handwritten Torah scroll to be used in the synagogue for public reading. Every Jewish community has at least one such scroll. The Torah scroll is hugely significant not only for its text, but as a ritual object.

The scribe who writes these scrolls is called a *sofer* in Hebrew. The *sofer* writes Torah scrolls, mezuzot (scrolls on the doorpost of a Jewish home), and tefillin (little boxes containing biblical verses worn on the arms and forehead during prayer). The *sofer* must be an expert in the craft of calligraphy, able to make consistent and well-shaped letters. The *sofer* must also be knowledgeable in all of the rabbinic law applying to the writing of Torah scrolls, mezuzot, and tefillin.

Turning to the manuscript, we will look at Duke Hebrew MS 1. This is an eighteenth-century Ashkenazi (Western European) Torah scroll. It is not known how it came to Duke.

Sakai assignment:

1. Read Stern, 33–61. What kinds of ornamentation does a Torah scroll receive? How is it used in synagogue ritual? What textual features are part of a Torah scroll?
2. Read Maimonides 1.2; 1.12; 1.19; 7.4; 7.11; 7.12; 10.1. Maimonides’ twelfth-century handbook of Jewish law contains prescriptions still used by scribes today. What does Maimonides say about accuracy? What is the minimum level of inaccuracy to make a scroll unfit for synagogue use? What sense do you get from Maimonides about the stability of textual transmission of the Torah scroll?
3. Turning to the manuscript: first, find some letters that have small lines on the top. These are called *taggin* (sing. *tag*) and are a feature of *sofer* script. Generally, *taggin* are added to select letters: sin/shin (ש), ayin (ע), tet (ט), nun (נ), zayin (ז), gimel (ג), and tsadi (צ). This image, for example, contains seven letters with *taggin*:



What do the taggin suggest about scribal accuracy? Might they add to the accuracy of copying or of reading the Torah out loud? Or are they merely ornamental?

4. Another feature of the Torah scroll is that it lacks vowels. What does this suggest about the textual knowledge required to use a Torah scroll? What does it suggest about the transmission of the Hebrew text?

Be prepared for an in-class discussion of your manuscript; you should answer these questions, using your analysis of the manuscript and the information found in your worksheet and the secondary reading:

- What is this manuscript?
- From when and where does it originate?
- What features appear on the page(s)?
- What was it used for, and by whom?
- More broadly: What did you learn about scribal transmission and the materiality of this manuscript? (Be specific in pointing to features of your manuscript!)

Worksheet 8: Manuscripts in the Age of the Printed Bible: The Esther Scroll

Material witness: Duke Hebrew MS 2

Readings: “The Story of Purim” and “Reading the Megillah” on My Jewish Learning: <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-story-of-purim/> and <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/reading-the-megillah/>; David Stern, *The Jewish Bible: A Material History* (University of Washington Press, 2017), 160-164 (on Megillat Esther), available at <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE008046745>.

Background information:

Although we are used to the Bible as one book today, for most of Jewish and Christian history manuscripts were made only of particular books or groups of books. One of the most common Jewish biblical manuscripts is the scroll of the Book of Esther, chronologically one of the later books of the Bible. This book tells the story of Esther, a Jewish woman who became queen of Persia by charming King Ahasuerus. The book, which we might today call historical fiction, is set in a time when the Jews were living under Persian rule. Esther uses her wit and charm to save the Jewish people.

This scroll of the book of Esther is likely from the eighteenth century, and its script is Western European.

Sakai assignment:

1. Read Stern, 160–164, and the two articles on *My Jewish Learning*. What is Purim? What happens with the megillah (scroll) of Esther on Purim?
2. The scroll of Esther has a long history of being written in very specific layouts which relate to the way Jewish tradition understands the text. One such tradition concerns the sons of Haman (the villain of the story) who are executed. They are named in Esther 9:8–9: “Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha.” In Hebrew, without vowels, this looks like:

איש ואת פרשנדתא ואת דלפון ואת אספתא ואת פורתא ואת אדליא ואת ארידתא ואת פרמשתא
ואת אריסי ואת ארדי ואת ויזתא

One handbook for scribes, *Massekhet Sofrim*, explains:

“The ten sons of Haman ... are written in the form of a half-brick over a half-brick

and a brick over a brick. Such a structure does not endure.” (13:3)⁴

The idea here is that just as a tall, thin tower built of only one brick atop one brick cannot endure, so Haman and his lineage cannot endure. The way the letters are written reflects the meaning of the book!

Find this section in the scroll. It will be very obviously different from the rest of the scroll. Be ready to show it in class. What other oddities in the sizes and layout of the letters do you notice in these two columns?

3. *Massekhet Sofrim* was compiled in the last few centuries of the first millennium. What does it say about the transmission of the Hebrew text that this eighteenth-century scroll employs the same technique?
4. Given what you know about Purim, who might have owned this scroll, and for what was it used?

Be prepared for an in-class discussion of your manuscript; you should answer these questions, using your analysis of the manuscript and the information found in your worksheet and the secondary reading:

- What is this manuscript?
- From when and where does it originate?
- What features appear on the page(s)?
- What was it used for, and by whom?
- More broadly: What did you learn about scribal transmission and the materiality of this manuscript? (Be specific in pointing to features of your manuscript!)

⁴ Translation in Israel W. Slotki, “Masseketh Sofrim,” in *The Minor Tractates of the Talmud: Massektoth Ketannah*, ed. A. Cohen (London: Soncino, 1965), 211–324 at 270.

Worksheet 9: Manuscripts in the Age of the Printed Bible: A Yemenite Pentateuch

Material witness: Duke Hebrew MS 14

Readings: David Stern, *The Jewish Bible: A Material History* (University of Washington Press, 2017), 87–90 (on the three main genres of medieval Hebrew Bible), 132–135 (on Yemenite manuscripts), 171–174 (on Gaon’s *Tafsir*), available at <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE008046745>; Harry Freedman, “Saadia Gaon’s Bible Commentary and Translation,” at <http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/2016/04/fre408026.shtml>.

Background information:

This manuscript is a unique witness to a Jewish community that developed largely in isolation from other Jewish communities, and in isolation from a Christian majority. It contains not one Bible, but three. First, it has the Hebrew text of Genesis and Exodus. Second, it has the Targum Onkelos, a postbiblical Jewish translation of the Hebrew Bible in Aramaic. Third, it has Saadia Gaon’s *Tafsir*, a medieval Jewish translation of the Hebrew Bible into Judeo-Arabic. Both of these translations brought the Hebrew Bible into the language spoken by that translation’s Jewish communities of the time. Although all three of these languages are written with the same script, they are written differently.

In the early medieval period, a group of Hebrew scribes known as the “Masoretes” added vowels to the text of the Hebrew Bible. Before this, biblical manuscripts (such as those found at Qumran) contained only the consonants, and the proper pronunciation with the correct vowels had to be taught. At the time of the Masoretes, there were multiple Masoretic schools with competing systems of adding vowels to the written text: the Tiberian school, the Palestinian school, and the Babylonian school. For most Jewish communities in Europe and North Africa, the Tiberian system won out, and every other manuscript in this class employs that system. The Tiberian system is also what you learned in your *How to Read Hebrew* book. But in Yemen, the Babylonian system persisted much longer. The easiest way to tell the two apart is that in the Tiberian system, the vowels are largely below the letters, while in the Babylonian system, the vowels are largely above the letters.

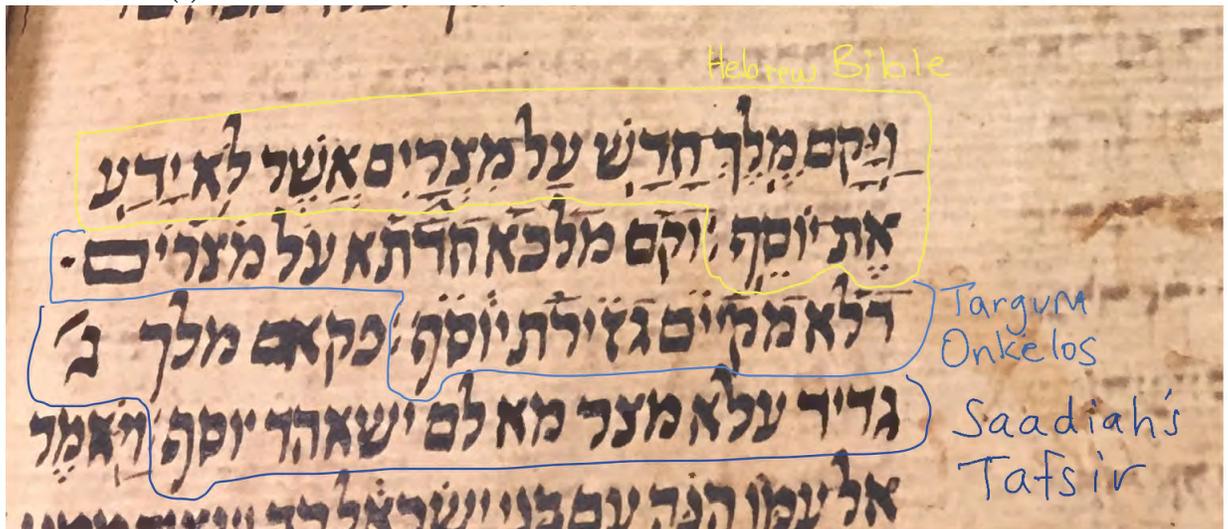
Finally, in the Judeo-Arabic translation of Saadia Gaon (882–942 CE), the Arabic is written in Hebrew script with no vowels. Below I will show you how to find each of these layers.

Sakai assignment:

1. Read Stern, 87–90 and 132–135. What are the three main types of medieval Jewish Bibles? What are some unique features of Yemenite Bibles? What is the relationship of the Yemenite scribes to the Babylonian masorah (132–133)? What are the three

components of the Yemenite *humash* or liturgical Pentateuch (134)?

2. Read Stern, 171–164, and Freedman. What is the cultural significance of Saadia Gaon’s translation of the Bible into Judeo-Arabic? Why does it use Hebrew letters?
3. Turning to the manuscript, let’s identify these three elements on a given page. Here is Exodus 1:8: “A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph.” The Hebrew is first, with Tiberian vowels beneath the letters. The Aramaic is next, with Babylonian vowels above the letters. The Judeo-Arabic is third, with no vowels. Each of them is separated by a “sof passuq,” a marker at the end of a verse, which looks like a colon (:).



Now it’s your turn. Find any given verse and identify these three different languages of that verse. Why do you think this manuscript has three languages?

4. Of the three types of medieval Jewish Bibles, what type do you think this manuscript is? Given your answer, what do you think it was used for?
5. You will also note marginalia in much more informal handwriting throughout this manuscript. Find one of these marginal notes. Why do you think those are present? (You do not need to know what it says!)

Be prepared for an in-class discussion of your manuscript; you should answer these questions, using your analysis of the manuscript and the information found in your worksheet and the secondary reading:

- What is this manuscript?
- From when and where does it originate?
- What features appear on the page(s)?
- What was it used for, and by whom?

- More broadly: What did you learn about scribal transmission and the materiality of this manuscript? (Be specific in pointing to features of your manuscript!)