

The Hebrew community was rather forced to return to its own tongue to defend itself against the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament as based on the Septuagint. This dilemma increased after 150 AD when the newer Greek translations (Aquila, etc.) could not or did not satisfy the Jewish scholars. The return to the Hebrew text must have posed considerable problems and these would only multiply as time went on but the rise of the Masora presented an elite corps of persons who would superintend the tradition and give the text a finished flavor.

As they were dispersed in the world, the Jews soon were faced with cultural problems...customs changing in different social levels. In the middle ages we often find one group of Hebrews writing to another to establish proper customs, prayers, etc., and this would have been the case with the Scripture as well save for the Masoretic work...and these scholars also helped preserve the culture as noted earlier. The Masoretes met the need of continuity strikingly.

The possibility that older Hebrew mss, no matter how fragmentary, or targums would cloud the true text picture was something not to be overlooked. The Masoretic move provided a means (system) for dealing with any such textual irregularities or possibilities.

b. Major Masoretic Texts

(1) The Ben Asher texts Perhaps the most famous group or family of the Masoretic text tradition, is the ben Asher group...the name coming from the head of the rabbinic family that probably represented a Karaite group (not certain) about 900 AD. Aaron Asher died in 940 having continued the work of his grandfather. They are "western" Jews in terms of articulation and were an influential family whose views eventually influenced Maimonides and others. The following manuscripts are the representatives of the ben Asher family that concern us:

--Codex Cairensis...a codex containing the former and latter prophets and dated about 895.

--Prophets Codex, Petersburg, dated about 916 and showing the older Babylonian system of vocalization.