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The Canonization Process of the Masoretic Text

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Abstract
This article discusses the process that gave canonical status to the Masoretic Text. The discussion will start from the present reality and continue backwards. Because the Masoretic Text is a creation of rabbinic Judaism and because the rabbis did discuss the status of various books within the Masoretic Text, this article will argue for a late dating both of the text as a collection and of its canonization. However, within Christian canons, the Masoretic Text acts as a canonical text in a limited way, in the sense that it is only a part of those canons. Besides, there is no moment in history where any authority declared the Masoretic Text canonical. Therefore, it is nowadays widely accepted as a canonical text, but without authorization.

Keywords
Masoretic Text, biblical canon, Hebrew Bible

Introduction

This article will discuss the Masoretic Text as canon.[1] When asked, most educated people would probably say that the Masoretic Text (MT) is canonical. This seems to make it possible to speak about the "Masoretic canon." The Masoretic canon means the MT as a canonical collection. People do not disagree about the canonical status of the books belonging to the Hebrew

[1] I had the privilege of discussing the topic with several colleagues and friends. These discussions were helpful in understanding the issues at stake and in presenting my point. I am especially grateful to Sarah Lind, Robert Bascom, and Stephen Pattemore for their suggestions and comments.

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Scriptures. There may be some variation as to the order of the books, but we do not question their authority. But the matter is not as simple as this. In order to understand the challenges relating to the term "Masoretic canon," we must start from the definition of "canon." What is a canon and how can the MT act as a canon?

The term "canon" is a (late) Christian term (Barr 1983, 50–51).[2] In Christian theological language, "canon" normally means a set of authorized books as organized in the form of a *list*.[3] The collection thus formed can be called the Bible, another Christian term, and its content has the huge religious value of being divine and binding.[4] A religious authority declares the canonical list, but the list itself does not say anything about the details of the text in any of the books in the list nor does it give any key to understand them. The Christian Bible includes two parts, the Old and the New Testaments. These belong together as Christians read the Old Testament in the light of the New. Such thinking is alien to Judaism.[5] The Bible and the canon are in Christian language almost synonymous and inseparable. As this article deals with the MT, an essentially Jewish concept, I will try to avoid using Christian terminology. I shall not speak about the Old Testament, or even the Hebrew Scriptures, but use the Jewish term Tanakh[6] for this collection. To my knowledge the Tanakh as such has not been declared canonical by any Christian church. For churches the Tanakh is one part of their canon. The Masoretic canon is therefore an exceptional canon and the term canon is used in an exceptional way. I shall discuss part of the process that led to the present situation. The process under discussion created the MT,

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[2] As Barr so eloquently points out, it is not self-evident that the term "canon" should be used for the Hebrew Bible (Barr's terminology).

[3] Here I follow Ulrich 2002, 28–29. According to him, canon in this usage means "the *list* of books accepted as inspired scripture (= *norma normata*), the list that has been determined, the authoritative list of books which have been accepted as scripture" (emphasis his). Cf. Ulrich 2006, 97: "A strict definition of canon includes the concepts of comprehensive but exclusive list, conscious decision, unique authoritative status, and permanent binding."

[4] This is the traditional understanding of the terms; see, e.g., Barr 1983, 49 n. 1. There are, however, churches where the Bible can include books that are not canonical in the sense of being doctrinally binding. As strange as it might sound, this means that the Bible can include non-canonical texts, and therefore one should not identify the canon with the Bible.

[5] See, e.g., Leiman 1976, 14. Leiman, however, understands canon in very broad terms. His canon includes also Mishnah and Talmud, for example.

[6] The term Tanakh is an acronym based on the tripartite division of our Hebrew-Aramaic collection into Torah (Law), Nevi'im (prophets), and Kethuvim (writings). In spelling the terms, I am following the custom of the Jewish Publication Society.

which became the standard text of the Tanakh. My aim is to illustrate the exceptionality of the term Masoretic canon.

The idea of a canon as a list includes the idea of selection. Some texts were accepted to the list, others were not. While people have emphasized the antiquity of the Tanakh as a canonical collection, they have forgotten that in the case of the Tanakh we have hardly any evidence from the ancient sources that would point to any kind of process of selection. It seems that the collection gradually grew to be the Tanakh merely by adding new material, not by excluding anything (Barr 1983, 51–53). It is also remarkable that the ancient Jewish evidence for a list of canonical books hardly exists. There seems to be only one passage in the literature suggesting it, as I shall show later.

Normally the term "canon" carries a flavor of authority. A canon is a normative list. One is supposed to take it as given and not criticize the list. The formation of a canon, however, is a long process and an authority can declare a book as canonical only under certain conditions. The book can become canonical only after the community has recognized it as authoritative (Davies 2002, 36–37).

The term "Masoretic" limits the canon to a very specific collection. The MT is a particular form of the Tanakh. The canonical list and the special form of the text relate to each other in this case, but one ought not to draw further conclusions from this fact. Nevertheless, in practical terms the MT is the Masoretic canon. In order to trace the process of canon formation, it is best to start from today and work backwards. In doing so, we need to keep in mind that there is no commonly shared authoritative list of books belonging to the MT. The people who created the MT did not leave behind a canonical list of its contents.

Biblia Hebraica as the Masoretic Text

Most contemporary scholars, students, and translators start their work on the Tanakh from a printed edition. The most often used printed edition is the *Biblia Hebraica* (*BH*), especially its fourth edition, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (*BHS*).[7] Starting from this edition has consequences for how we perceive the text, understand its background, and interpret it. For us, the printed edition, *BHS*, is in practice the Tanakh and also the Masoretic canon.[8]

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[7] On the history of *BHS*, see, e.g., Schäfer and Voss 2008, 9–13.

[8] We can go as far as to think that the printed edition is the *Urtext* of the Tanakh and even organize our work accordingly. Then the printed edition becomes the sole representative of the Masoretic canon.

When the printed edition has such a huge importance, it is natural to ask where the text in the edition comes from. Since 1929[9] the basis of the Hebrew-Aramaic text of the Tanakh has been one particular manuscript, the Leningrad Codex. However, the printed text is not a direct copy of the text of the manuscript, but an edited version of it. Although the printed edition and the manuscript share the same books of the Tanakh, the editors made numerous changes to the text of the manuscript.[10]

The order of the books in the edition deviates from that of the manuscript. In the printed edition, 2 Chronicles is the last book of the Tanakh, whereas in the manuscript the last book is Ezra–Nehemiah. *BHS* follows the order of the Second Rabbinic Bible, an earlier printed edition of the Tanakh. Theoretically speaking there is no fixed order for the Latter Prophets and Writings (Yeivin 1980, 38–39), but the order in the Second Rabbinic Bible is in practice the order in which the *BH* text now appears.[11]

The Second Rabbinic Bible was published in Venice by Daniel Bomberg in 1524–1525. Despite several problems it remained the received text for the Tanakh for centuries. The basis for *BH* was initially the Second Rabbinic Bible.[12] The change of the base in the late 1920s was related to advances in studies in the history of the Hebrew text. By the end of the nineteenth century, new findings added to the available sources and brought about new evaluations of their relationship to one another. It became clear that the history of the MT was complex, and that in many cases later manuscripts were not as well preserved as older ones.

The Leningrad Codex is the oldest complete manuscript of the MT. We have access to some older manuscripts of the same tradition, including the Aleppo Codex, but they are not complete. Either part of the text was lost or manuscripts did not include the whole Hebrew Bible. Kahle described the rationale for turning to older manuscripts in his famous book, *The Cairo Geniza*. In short, people did not want to move away from the MT, but wanted to use a version of it that was as old as possible. The reasons for turning to the Leningrad Codex were simple. The text of the codex included the whole Tanakh. It represented an older and more reliable form of the Tanakh than that of the text of the Second Rabbinic Bible. Because the Leningrad library was willing to give scholars access to the codex (Kahle

[9] This is the year when the first fascicles of the third edition of *Biblia Hebraica* appeared. The third edition was published as one volume in 1937.
[10] The same will be the case in the forthcoming *BHQ*.
[11] This is the case not only for *BH* but also for other printed editions and Jewish versions of the Tanakh. On the differences, however, see Tov 2012, 4.
[12] Now available at https://archive.org/details/The_Second_Rabbinic_Bible_Vol_1.

1959, 131–32),[13] the editors changed the basis of the Hebrew-Aramaic text of the *BH* from the Second Rabbinic Bible to the Leningrad Codex. The change was not as dramatic as one might think. Both the Second Rabbinic Bible and the Leningrad Codex represent the same type of the MT, the Ben Asher text.

The Masoretic Text

A few hundred years before the printing of the Second Rabbinic Bible, Moses Maimonides, one of the most influential figures of rabbinic Judaism, had declared one particular form of the Tanakh as authoritative.[14] Authoritative here means that the particular form of the Tanakh offered the best starting point in matters of textual divisions and poetic layout of the text. This authoritative form for Maimonides was the Ben Asher text. Ever since Maimonides, people have read the Tanakh in the Ben Asher form. For our practical work, the Ben Asher text is the MT (Tov 2012, 24).

The MT is in reality an abstract entity. No single representative of it is superior to all others in such a way that a particular manuscript could serve as the basis for a uniform text (Tov 2012, 24–25). Scholarly practice, however, treats the Leningrad Codex as if it constitutes such a uniform text.

It is useful to keep in mind that the full form of the MT includes elements of different age and function. The main body of the text includes the consonants, vowels, and accents. One can see their different functions by looking at the process of creating a manuscript and the different roles within that process.[15] The scribe (*sofer*) wrote only the consonantal text and a specialist called a *naqdan* then added the vowels and accents. The *naqdan* was the real guardian of the textual tradition. He knew how to read the text. The scribe was more of a mechanical copyist. Masoretic manuscripts also include paratextual material. The paratextual material was added by a Masorete (*ba'al ha-masorah*). This material is intended to safeguard the integrity of the text itself. Most of the material of this kind occurs in three forms of Masorah.[16] The Masorah Parva appears as very short notes in the margin of the text. The Masorah Magna consists of longer notes normally placed at the top and bottom of each page. The Masorah Finalis is placed at the end of each book, at the end of each main part of the Tanakh, and at the

[13] The library even lent out the codex for two years (Kahle 1959, 135).
[14] On Maimonides's role concerning the text of the Tanakh, see, e.g., Sáenz-Badillos 1993, 107–8.
[15] On the different roles in making the manuscript, see Würthwein 1995, 10–13.
[16] For a handy explanation about the parts of the Masorah, see Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford 1998, 1–2.

end of the manuscript. Printed editions of the *BH* family include the Masorah Parva and part of the Masorah Finalis. Gérard Weil published the Masorah Magna as a separate volume for *BHS* in 1971.[17] However, the Masorah printed in *BHS* is not a copy of the Leningrad Codex, but a "corrected" version of it.

Beyond the Masoretic Text

Strictly speaking, the Masoretic canon cannot exist apart from the MT. Otherwise, it would be odd to call it the *Masoretic* canon. There seems to be a consensus that the Tanakh as a single document cannot be much older than the MT proper, because before that time the collection was in the form of several scrolls.[18] This would connect the canonization of the Tanakh with the creation of the MT.[19] However, the Masoretes themselves did not declare their text to be canonical. They were only guardians of the tradition they had inherited.

There is evidence in the Babylonian Talmud that seems to refute the idea that the Tanakh as a single document was linked to the creation of the MT. The Gemara[20] of the tractate *Baba Batra* (13b–14b) gives rules concerning the scrolls for the Tanakh. According to these rules, it is possible to combine the Torah with the other parts of the Tanakh in one scroll, even though some rabbis did not agree. Then the Gemara adds rules on how much space a scribe must leave between various parts of the Tanakh when he writes them on a scroll. One cannot therefore exclude the possibility of a scroll containing the whole Tanakh before the time the MT was put together. In any case, the idea of using a codex instead of several scrolls may have had profound consequences. When creating a codex one has to decide what to include in the final product and in which order to organize the individual books. Once a codex is finished, it is not easy to add or remove entire books from it. In the case of a collection of separate scrolls, it is easier to be flexible in this respect.

The MT is a result of a long process. When looking at the history of the text, one needs to realize that the consonantal text is older than the vocalization, the accentuation, and the paratextual materials. This is partly because

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[17] In *BHQ* the Masorah of the Leningrad Codex is presented according to the manuscript.
[18] See, e.g., Ofer, §1.2, "Scroll and Codex."
[19] According to Alexander 2007, 65–66, the order of the books in the Tanakh "reached stability" only when the MT was created and famous manuscripts of it were written, but as I have already pointed out, this is not entirely true.
[20] The Talmud is divided into tractates, each of which has two parts, Mishnah and Gemara. The Gemara refers to discussions in the Talmud that are connected with the text of the Mishnah.

of the languages and their history, but also partly because of the history of the text. When paratextual materials become linked to particular places in the text, it becomes necessary to have a fixed text to maintain the coherence of those paratextual materials.

The period during which the Masoretes created and organized the Masoretic paratextual materials coincides with the period when the Hebrew writing system was finally standardized.[21] We do not know how or exactly when the standard Tiberian system came into existence, but while the MT was developing into the form that we now know it through the Leningrad Codex, the Tiberian system was becoming the usual method for writing Hebrew.

Vocalization and punctuation systems appear to have emerged around the sixth century C.E. (Sáenz-Badillos 1993, 77), but the systems were based on earlier ways of reading unvocalized texts. It is a matter of debate if the paratextual materials are older or younger than the vowels and accents. This is because very little is known about the activities of the Masoretes who created the paratextual materials. One can speculate that the introduction of the codex for religious texts within Judaism affected the formation of the paratextual materials, because a codex allows wider margins and thus more space for the comments. This might have taken place about 700 C.E. (Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford 1998, 14–16). The full MT cannot be older than that. Therefore, the Masoretic canon is not older, either.

Rabbinic efforts in relation to the canon

The Masoretes based their work on earlier rabbinic efforts to preserve and interpret the sacred texts. These texts, by definition, do not belong to the MT. As they belong to the prehistory of the MT, scholars commonly call them proto-MTs.[22] This is where the *prehistory* of the Masoretic canon begins.

The Talmud and contemporary midrashic literature do not contain any systematic account of the formation of the collection that later became the MT (Leiman 1976, 51), but do offer information about the historical process that led to the creation of the MT. The tractate *Baba Batra* in the Babylonian Talmud (sixth century C.E.) gives us a list of books belonging to the Tanakh:

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[21] Sáenz-Badillos 1993, 76–111, speaks of traditions, meaning that each writing system was connected to the way the language was actually spoken. Thus, the differences between the systems reflect the differences between the various dialects of early Medieval Hebrew.

[22] On the term "proto-Masoretic," see Tov 2012, 25.

> Our Rabbis taught: The order [סדרן] of the Prophets is, Joshua and Judges, Samuel and Kings, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve Minor Prophets [שנים עשר] . . . The order of the Hagiographa [כתובים] is, Ruth, the book of Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel and the Scroll of Esther, Ezra and Chronicles. (*b. B. Bat.* 14b)[23]

This is the oldest and the only list of the books of the Tanakh in rabbinic texts. The Gemara in 14b lists the content of the Tanakh, minus the Torah, and suggests a fixed order of the books. The list and the discussion relating to it in the Babylonian Talmud do not appear in the Jerusalem Talmud. This may mean that only the compilers of the Babylonian Talmud shared the list, and not others. It nevertheless shows that at least some religious authorities had an idea of the fixed content of the Tanakh already during the sixth century C.E., when the Talmud was compiled. Whether this fact should be identified with the existence of the Masoretic canon is of course a different matter. When interpreted in a positive way, the list in *Baba Batra* includes the same books as the Masoretic manuscripts (like the Leningrad Codex), which are younger than the Talmud, but in a different order. Maybe, then, the idea of the canon was already there. On the other hand, the list does not clearly refer to the idea of a canon. Because the list appears in the Babylonian Talmud, we might take it as a canonical list for later times, because the Babylonian Talmud is so crucial to any form of later Judaism.[24]

This list is not the only passage that deals with the books of the Tanakh. Still at the time when the Talmud was being compiled, there was discussion on the status of several books. Among the books mentioned are Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, and Ruth (Leiman 1976, 132–33).[25] These books belong to the Writings and this may suggest that the two other parts of the Tanakh were already fixed and that people did not disagree on the books that belonged to them.

If we define canon as a list, we should not be too hasty in considering the fixation of parts of the Tanakh as a part of canonization. It is obvious that the different books and different parts of the Tanakh are of different ages. There is an unshaken consensus that the Torah as a collection is very old. Linking the creation of the Torah with the creation of the canon makes the process long and complicated. It would mean that there was a list that was

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[23] For the text and its translation, see Leiman 1976, 51–53.

[24] On the Babylonian Talmud, see, e.g., Neusner 1992, 1.

[25] Leiman states that the status of these books was "confirmed, not discussed," but one confirms only issues that need confirmation. We do not confirm issues that are clear to all.

supplemented over time by the addition of new books. This idea is hard to prove, because our list in *Baba Batra* is relatively late.

The rabbinic discussion was not limited to the books that now belong to the Tanakh. The literature contains references to the status of Sirach and some other books not belonging to the MT (Leiman 1976, 132–35).[26] This is a clear indication that the canonical list, if one can call the list in *Baba Batra* canonical, was not universally accepted among the Jews during the sixth century C.E. This also means that the traditional number of books in the Tanakh (24)[27] tells us relatively little about which books were included in the number.

The status of Sirach actually kept changing. Early rabbis such as Akiba banned it (*j. Sanh*. 28a, etc.), but later on it was accepted (Leiman 1976, 134–35). We know from the manuscript evidence that people still used Sirach as an authoritative text after the Masoretes had already fixed the MT, because the manuscripts of Sirach in the Cairo Genizah material date to the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Marböck 2006, 409). Unlike the MT, Sirach appears to have been used in various versions during this late period (deSilva 2002, 156–57). Efforts to unify and safeguard the integrity of Sirach were clearly not as devoted as the efforts with the material belonging to the MT.

If we insist on the idea that a canon appears as a list, our evidence for the Jewish sources does not allow us to go much farther. The discussion about the status of several books is older than the Talmud, though. The central text for modern scholarly literature on the canon of the Tanakh is a section in the Mishnah tractate *Yadaim* describing a debate about the status of the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes among early rabbis.

> All the holy Scriptures [כל כתבי הקדש] defile the hands. The Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes defile the hands. R. Judah says: the Song of Songs defiles the hands, but there is a dispute concerning Ecclesiastes. R. Jose says: Ecclesiastes does not defile the hands, but there is a dispute concerning the Song of Songs. R. Simeon says: Ecclesiastes is among the lenient decisions of the School of Shammai and among the stringent decisions of the School of Hillel. R. Simeon b. Azzai said: I heard a tradition from the seventy-two elders on the day that R. Eleazar ben Azariah was appointed head of the academy, that the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes defile the hands. R. Akiba said: God forbid: No man in Israel ever disputed the status of the Song of Songs saying that it does not defile the hands, for the whole world is not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given

[26] The tractate *Sanhedrin* in the Jerusalem Talmud mentions the mysterious books of Ben Laaga (ספרי בן לעגה) as being banned by Akiba. Leiman 1976, 181–82, offers a discussion about the identity of Ben Laaga.

[27] See Leiman 1976, 53: "That the canon consisted of twenty-four books is well established throughout talmudic literature."

> to Israel; for all the writings are holy but the Song of Songs is the holiest of the holy. If there was a dispute, it concerned Ecclesiastes. R. Johanan b. Joshua, the son of R. Akiba's father-in-law, said: Ben Azzai's version of what they disputed and decided is the correct one. (*m. Yad.* 3:5)[28]

If we accept that the expression "defiles the hands" (מטמא את הידיים) means that a text is seen as canonical,[29] the Mishnah can be taken as evidence that much of the Tanakh had already been canonized and that there was perhaps a list of books, but that list included two books discussed by the early rabbis. Such a conclusion is in my opinion hasty and groundless. The discussion was ongoing and the status of books other than the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes was questioned, as well. However, we can take the Mishnah as confirmation that the rabbis got their text from their ancestors. *The discussion about the history of the canonization of the Tanakh can be ended here*. There is hardly any point in further tracing the canon within Judaism without new evidence.

No canonization at Jamnia

The standard theory in the twentieth century about the canonization of the Tanakh associated it with Jamnia[30] and an assumed rabbinic synod that was said to have discussed the boundaries of the canon. Pagán stated the basics of the theory in a short sentence: "Finally, the last section of the Hebrew Bible, the *Ketubim*, was included [in the canon] at the end of the first century A.D., at the conclusion of the so-called Council of Jamnia" (2001, 158). The conclusion of the council closed the canon of the Tanakh. Thus, according to the theory, here we have the authorization of the canonical list of the Tanakh. According to Pagán (and many others), however, this theory is now "discredited" (157). The very basis of the theory has collapsed and therefore the theory is obsolete.

This theory is not particularly old; it was Heinrich Graetz who introduced it in his commentary to Ecclesiastes (1871). Graetz challenged the earlier *common view* that the canon of the Hebrew Bible was very old. The earlier view held that either Ezra, Nehemiah, or the men of the great synagogue (אנשי כנשת הגדולה) had closed the canon of the Tanakh (Graetz 1871, 147). The older view is also that of the rabbis and appears in rabbinic literature. Graetz pointed out that the Tanakh includes books that are much later

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[28] For the text and the translation, see Leiman 1976, 105–6.
[29] But see the reservations in Barr 1983, 50–51.
[30] Jamnia is a small town in central Israel, where rabbis established an academy after the destruction of Jerusalem; see Leiman 1976, 121–22.

than Ezra or Nehemiah. Among the later books is Ecclesiastes, which Graetz dated to the early first century C.E. (1871, 149, 172). Since Ecclesiastes is canonical, the earlier theory simply could not be true.

Graetz theorized that canonization actually proceeded in three stages. He dated the first stage to the fifth century B.C.E. This stage involved the closing of the Prophets (1871, 158).[31] The second and third stages are much later. He dated them to the first century C.E. (1871, 149). The final closure of the canon took place at the Jamnian Synod (*Synode in Jamnia*). Graetz quoted *m. Yad*. 3:5 as proof of this (163, 167–68).[32]

The theory about the Council of Jamnia was widely accepted until recent decades, but now many see it as groundless and outdated. The change in scholarly consensus is mainly due to the efforts of Lewis and Leiman, who in the 1960s and 1970s demonstrated weaknesses in the foundation of the theory (Lewis 1964; Leiman 1976). In short, if the rabbis closed the canon in Jamnia, why would they then keep on talking about its boundaries?[33]

The closer reading of *m. Yad.* 3:5, the central piece of evidence for the supposed council and its decisions, has made it clear that even the existence of a council is not at all certain (Leiman 1976, 125–26, 158).

The prehistory of the rabbinic text

The rabbis used a textual tradition that later produced the MT. That tradition gained a superior status to other forms of the sacred texts rather early, possibly even before the rabbis.[34] The fact that the rabbinic text served as the basis for the Targums, the Peshitta, the Vulgate, and various revisions of the Septuagint, including the Hexapla, beautifully illustrates this (Tov 2012, 27). Thus, while there were concerns about the boundaries of the collection, for most of the books there was already a fixed text. Other textual traditions of the Tanakh remained in use only among those who were not rabbinic Jews, typically among Christians and Samarians. Some segments of the early Christian church continued to use the Septuagint in its

[31] For Graetz, Torah was self-evidently canonized before the Prophets and he did not even mention the canonization of it.
[32] He failed to say, however, what the passage is.
[33] See, e.g., Alexander 2007, 64.
[34] Cf. Lim 2013, 15. Lim argues in his monograph that the "Jewish Canon" was fixed around 100 C.E. Because of the problems in defining the canon and its history, he admits that this canon is only a "majority canon," a canon not everyone accepted (Lim 2013, 179–81).

earlier forms[35] and Samarians followed an archaic tradition linked with the Samarian Pentateuch (SP).[36]

There is a widely accepted view that rabbinic Judaism stopped using the Septuagint because of the rise of Christianity.[37] According to this view, the Septuagint was rejected because of anti-Christian polemics during the early rabbinic era (Dorival 1988, 122–24).[38] For the sake of clarity, it is worth keeping in mind that the polemics were not about the books in a list, but about the interpretation of several passages (Chadwick 1993, 66–67). The controversy was only partly based on the differences between the Septuagint and the rabbinic text. The Christian side, however, accused its Jewish counterpart of falsifying the Bible.[39] The basic assumption, then, was that the wording of the Septuagint was authentic and any deviation from it a malicious corruption. If one considers that the Septuagint offered a widely used alternative to the rabbinic text, it is understandable that if the Septuagint was rejected, the rabbinic text was the only real alternative. Thus, one could conclude that the polemics actually created a situation where the rabbinic text became the universally accepted text for Judaism.[40]

On the contrary, though it is true that Christian polemics accused Jews of falsifying the Bible, this does not mean that polemics were the real reason that the Septuagint fell into disuse among Jews. Jews apparently did not stop using the Septuagint. What did happen was that the Greek text was edited to bring it into alignment with the rabbinic text. The fact that the efforts to correct the Greek text had already started before Christianity was born provides ample support of the idea that the process of correcting the Septuagint was based on inner-Jewish needs and not on polemics with Christians (Schenker 2007, 256–57). The crucial evidence for this comes

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[35] Jerome, in his famous comment in the introduction to Chronicles, says that the church in his time—during the fourth century—read the LXX in three different forms, creating nothing but trouble: *totusque orbis hac inter se trifaria varietate compugnat* (the whole world is in conflict over this threefold variety). On the three forms and the problems associated with them, see Munnich 1988, 162–73.

[36] The idea that the Samarians themselves had changed the text of the SP must be abandoned as outdated, because we have manuscripts from the Dead Sea Scrolls that represent the same tradition as the SP; see, e.g., Flint 2002, 95.

[37] See, e.g., Chadwick 1993, 11–12.

[38] See also Trebolle Barrera 1998, 312–13, among many others.

[39] Trebolle Barrera 1998, 510–12, mentions examples of the polemics. Claims like this are still told in some Christian circles. Not very many years ago, I heard people saying that ch. 53 is missing from Isaiah in Jewish Bibles because the chapter so clearly tells the reader that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. This claim is based on misunderstanding and ignorance. Isaiah 53 is not in the *haftarot* (liturgical readings), but it is in the Tanakh.

[40] See, e.g., Lim 2013, 181–83, who concludes, though, that "the influence was wider than Christianity alone."

from the famous Greek Minor Prophets scroll from Naḥal Ḥever, dated to the first century B.C.E. The text of the scroll represents a form of the LXX that had been edited according to the tradition that later became the MT.[41]

The same fact shows that the roots of the rabbinic text and its position lie much more deeply in the text's prehistory than some people like to think. Rabbis inherited their text from their predecessors, the Pharisees. Pharisees did give a text to rabbis, but not a canon.

The Pharisaic movement ceased to exist during the first century C.E.[42] The second half of the first century was a turbulent time for Jews. Judaism was dynamic and diverse, but the political realities changed all of this. The Romans put an end to the revolt known as the Jewish War, according to the historian Josephus, destroyed the basic institutions of religion, including the temple in Jerusalem. The destruction had far-reaching consequences for religious life. Several forms of Judaism present in pre-war Judea ceased to exist, and people could not follow the earlier regulations concerning a proper cult anymore.

It appears that the Pharisaic movement, which was now developing into rabbinic Judaism, had the authority to take the leading role in the changed situation. The text of the Pharisees became most central and other existing forms of the Tanakh *gradually* disappeared.[43] It is assumed that the Pharisees were using the text of the temple.[44] However, there is little evidence for this.[45]

From the existing evidence, we can see that during the first century C.E. there was a plurality of authoritative texts in use; this means several different collections and several different text types. The Torah was the text accepted by everyone; for the other collections there seems to have been more fluidity. This is because the Torah was—and still is—the most important text for common Judaism.[46]

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[41] The Minor Prophets scroll played a key role in the discovery of the so-called *kaige*-recension. On its significance for our discussion, see Tov 2008, 186.

[42] On the history of the Pharisees, see, e.g., Sanders 1992, 380–88.

[43] Trebolle Barrera 1998, 152, claims that the Pharisees "had to draw up a list of books" to safeguard the Jewish identity against other groups within Judaism. Such a list is not extant.

[44] Tov 2012, 28, 30–31, hints at the possibility of the Masoretic Text being based on one single master copy in the temple of Jerusalem, but cf. *y. Ta'an*. 4:2. This has nothing to do with the question of the canon; Lim 2013, 179: "I have found no evidence to support the view that scrolls found at the Temple were used to define the canon."

[45] The idea for the role of the temple scrolls is based on *y. Ta'an*. 4:2, which speaks about these scrolls and how scribes used them to establish a textual tradition. On the significance of the passage for the present questions, see Lim 2013, 33–34.

[46] For the pre-war time in Palestine, see Sanders 1992, 48.

The discovery of the manuscripts around the Dead Sea has affected scholarly work regarding the history and canon of the Tanakh. We have learned that the textual situation during the first century C.E. was much more complicated than anyone could have guessed. The plurality of textual variation is surprising especially if we think that most of the material comes from one location only. This leads us to two important conclusions. First, the textual tradition that later produced the MT was not the only possibility available at that time, and second, there were people who regarded texts not belonging to the later Masoretic canon as authoritative.[47] Thus, the collection of books that later became the MT did not exist as a collection at this time and references to authoritative books during this time tell us little about the current canon.[48]

Conclusion: Canonization without a list

This investigation shows how important it is to define the starting point of the discussion carefully. Starting from the term "Masoretic canon" obliged us to associate the fixing of the canon with the creation of the MT. Because the MT is not an invention of the late Masoretes but has a long history, a further discussion about the prehistory of the MT followed quite naturally. I believe we can gain from starting with the limited concept, because, as Lim writes, "there is not a definition of 'the Bible' that is universally agreed upon by Jews and Christians" (2013, 15). The same applies, basically, to the issue of canon, too, but not to the Tanakh. Jews and most Christians share it. For us, the Tanakh is sacred.

The idea that there are sacred texts is older than the Tanakh as a collection of sacred texts. Further, the textual tradition, as one would expect, is older than the canonical collection of the Tanakh. The canonization of the Tanakh has hardly anything to do with the textual tradition that the MT represents. That the MT can be equated with the canon today is only a result of the long historical process sketched in this article.

The discussion has shown the complexity connected with the term "Masoretic canon." Much of that complexity relates to the fact that a traditional Christian understanding of the concept of canon does not easily fit with the MT and the Masoretic canon. At the same time, when looking at

[47] Ulrich 2010, ix, mentions 4Q (Reworked) Pentateuch, Jubilees, 1 Enoch, and Sirach as books that "may have been considered Scripture." Because of 4QTest one also wonders if 4Q Apocryphon of Joshua should be included; see also Newsom 1996, 238–39.

[48] See the very helpful discussion in Crawford 2006, 132–33. Her point is to find a definition of the concept of a "rewritten Bible." If the Bible did not exist, how can one rewrite it?

history, one sees a logical path that led to the creation of the MT and its prominent place among both Christians and Jews. This process—we might call it canonization—is more important than any list approved by any religious authority.

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