

THE SONG OF DEBORAH:
POETRY IN DIALECT

CHAPTER ONE

THE INTEGRITY OF
THE HEBREW TEXT

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THE INTEGRITY OF THE HEBREW TEXT

One of the seemingly most firmly established conclusions concerning the Song of Deborah is that the Hebrew text of the poem is “hopelessly corrupt.” Most contemporary critics would concur with Moore’s statement (1900b: 129):

Probably few scholars would now agree with Ewald (*Dichter*, i. p. 178 n.) and E. Meier (*National-Literatur der Hebräer*, p. 89) that the text of the poem has been transmitted to us substantially intact—not to mention the more extravagant notions of its impeccability entertained, e.g. by [J.] Bachmann ([*Das Buch der Richter*, 1868] p. 517 ff.). August Müller (*Das Lied der Deborah*, 1887, i. ff.) has proved, on the contrary, that the corruption is extensive and deep-seated. Whether it also is beyond all remedy, is a question about which opinions will differ.

Albright (1936: 26) noted, “So old is the Song that part of the text is hopelessly corrupt, both in the Greek and Hebrew versions, and the meaning of individual words was evidently lost long before the Christian era.” Lindars (1995: 222) asserted, “The LXX presents a maze of strange readings, which are often difficult to relate to the Hebrew text. . . .” but concluded that the tendency of some to accept every word of the MT was unwise, even though the MT was preferable to the LXX. But the consensus about the poem’s textual corruption really needs to be reconsidered, and Albright’s earlier opinion can now be revived: “its textual state is excellent” (1921: 54) and “the text of the Song in its Masoretic form is excellent, as attested by the LXX, but the pointing is often impossible, and the pronominal suffixes and other endings have suffered more than once from dittography” (1922: 73).

A coherent reading of the Song of Deborah, with logical progression and stylistic uniformity, is possible, and the integrity of the consonantal MT can be demonstrated as ninety-nine percent reliable (or about ninety-eight percent correct if the confusion of the vowel letters ם and ן is included and *scriptio plena* introduced for archaic *scriptio defectiva*). The major textual problem lies not in the consonants per se, but in the spacing of the consonants, i.e., the word division provided by tradition.

I. Clues from the “Book of the Wars of Yahweh”

The fragment of the ספר מלחמות יהוה, the “Book of the Wars of Yahweh,” which has survived in Num 21:14–15, provides not only a parallel reference to Yahweh’s activities associated with Seir (alluded to in Deborah’s exhortation in Ju 5:4–9), but also clues for restoring the text of the Song of Deborah. It contains examples of a mixed and inconsistent orthography with reference to vowel letters and words rarely found in the classical dialect.⁶

The difficulty of the text is evident in the nearly meaningless RSV: “Wherefore it was said in the Book of the Wars of Yahweh, ‘Waheb in Suphah, and the valleys of the Arnon, and the slope of the valleys that extends to the seat of Ar, and leans to the borders of Moab.’” The KJV read the וַהֲב בַסּוּפָה “Waheb in Suphah” as “what he did in the Red sea” (following the Vulgate *fecit in mari rubro*) as though the Hebrew were שִׁיְהַב בַּיַם סוּף instead of the MT וַהֲב בַסּוּפָה.

The LXX is no less problematic. It reads in part, διὰ τοῦτο λέγεται ἐν βιβλίῳ πόλεμος τοῦ κυρίου τὴν Ζωοβ ἐφλόγισεν “On account of this it is said in the book, the war of the Lord, he/she burned Zōob.” It seems that the LXX *Vorlage* may have had וַהֲב זוּהַב סַרְפָה, in which case the feminine מַלְחָמָה could have been read as the subject of the feminine verb סַרְפָה = שַׂרְפָה (although G. A. Smith [1912: 62] suggested that the LXX translated סַרְפָה, not שַׂרְפָה).

More important than the translations offered is the manuscript and versional evidence for uncertainty in regards to word division. Despite Noth’s (1968: 160) claim that this text “defies all explanation,” Christensen (1975: 50–51) made significant progress in understanding the text. With only slight modification of Christensen’s scansion, I vocalize and scan Num 21:14–15 as follows:⁷

⁶ See Cross and Freedman 1952: 57; also note G. B. Gray 1903: 287. Compare Tur Sinai’s (1960: 146–148) reading “wherefore it is said in the book: There were wars of the Lord . . .,” thereby eliminating the מַלְחָמָה יְהוָה.

⁷ Christensen followed Dahood in identifying MT וַהֲב “benefactor” as a participle of וַהֲב = יְהַב. Compare Weippert 1979: 17, who deleted seven vowel letters, three conjunctive ך’s, two ה’s, emended three letters (including reading יְהוּ for וַהֲב), and translated, “Yhwh came in a tempest, He came to the Arnon river, crossed the river, crossed it. Deviated (from the way) to dwell in Ar, Established himself in the land of Moab.” Milgrom (1990: 177) noted that

אָתָּה וָהֵב בְּסוּפָה
וְאָתָּה נָחֳלִים אֶרְנוֹן
וְאִשְׁדָּה נָחֳלִים
אֲשֶׁר נָטָה לְשֶׁבֶת עַר
וְנָשַׁעַן לְגִבּוֹל מוֹאָב

The Benefactor came in a storm.
Yea, He came⁸ to the wadis of the Arnon,
He caused the wadis to rush forth.⁹
He marched (in an) earthquake to destroy Ar.¹⁰
Then we easily entered the very borders of Moab!¹¹

Christensen's view "commends itself" but he retained Waheb and Supah as place names, following the eleventh century philologist Ibn Janah.

⁸ Christensen is correct in identifying the MT וָאָתָּה with אָתָּה "to come," but he is incorrect in deleting the ה of הַנְּחָלִים. The words have been misdivided. The ה goes with the preceding וָאָתָּה as the vowel letter *ô* (see Cross and Freedman 1952: 57). This וָאָתָּה is the infinitive absolute having the force of a finite verb (see GKC 75 and 113, McDaniel 1968b: 208–210).

⁹ Christensen emended MT וָאֲשֶׁר to read אֲשֶׁר "he marched through." But the emendation is unnecessary. The noun שׂוּר "torrent" may also occur in Isa 13:6, כִּשְׂדֵי מִשְׁדֵי יְבוּא, "(the day of Yahweh) shall come like a raging torrent." Another good possibility is the Amorite and South Arabic cognate *asad/asd* "warrior" and the denominative verb, "to fight" (see Huffmon, 1965: 169; P. D. Miller, 1973: 79). For שׂוּר/שָׂדָה, see note 268.

¹⁰ Christensen is correct in reading MT אֲשֶׁר as the verb "to march forth." But his tentative proposal to delete the word is unnecessary since the verb אֲשֶׁר need not be emended to אֲשֶׁר, nor does the text have a redundant use of אֲשֶׁר "to march forth." The MT נָטָה is better read as an adverbial accusative, either the participle "quaking" or the noun "(earth) quake," from the biliteral base נָט, with probable by-forms נָטַט, נָטָה, like stems נָךְ and נָד (GKC^a 77, Dahood, 1968: 368). Here the *hiph'il* לְשֶׁבֶת "to destroy" reflects the elision of the ה after the preposition (GKC 53^a), like the לְשִׁבִית in Amos 8:4.

¹¹ Christensen follows a traditional reading of this line. The proposal here calls for reading נָשַׁעַן as the energetic *qal* 1cpl imperfect of שָׁעַע, a cognate of Arabic سَوَّعَ "to enter easily" (Lane 1872: 1468b, 1469a, especially noticing the quotation *سَعِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَا وَجَدْتَ مَسَاغًا* "Enter the land while thou findest a place of entrance"). For the vocalization of the energetic, see Gordon 1965: 11; Dahood 1965: 21; 1970: 377–378; McDaniel 1968b: 205–206; and Blommerde 1969: 15. The ל is an emphatic ל, and this occurrence should be added to the list cited by Dahood 1965: 22; 1970: 406–407; McDaniel 1968b: 206–208; and

The meter here is 3 + 3 + 2 / 2 + 2 + 3,
with a syllable count of 7:8:6:7:8.

The verb הָיָא “he came” was written simply הָא , without the vowel letter, but the infinitive absolute הָיָא was written הָיָא , with the ה serving as the sign for \hat{o} . (Interestingly, a variant הָיָא , with the elision of the initial ה , is attested in Deut 33:21 for הָיָא and הָיָא appears for הָיָא in Isa 21:14.) The ה of הָיָא is an emphatic ה (see Blommerde 1969: 29), the same as the preceding הָיָא “yea, he came.” The MT הָיָא can be parsed as the aph^{el} (Dahood, 1965: 24–25; 1968: 31; 1970: 58, 389) of הָיָא “to rush forth with force,” which has been identified by Gordis (1940: 35–43) in 2 Sam 1:21; Jer 18:14; Ps 91:6; and Job 5:21. The reconstructed הָיָא has a ה for the e vowel.

The antiquity of this poetic material, reflected in its lexical and syntactical obscurities, favors its historical integrity. The archaic lexical items, rare grammatical forms, misdivided words, and the inconsistent use of final vowel letters alert one to look for similar features in the archaic Song of Deborah.¹² The rare initial waw stem, והב , also alerts the critic that this poetic fragment contains elements of a dialect distinctly different from the Jerusalem dialect. Sensitivity to dialectal differences will also serve well any reader or interpreter of the Song of Deborah.

Blommerde 1969: 31. הָיָא is possibly attested in Ezek 23:23, where MT הָיָא הָיָא , traditionally read as place names, “Pekod, and Shoa and Koa,” could better be read: הָיָא הָיָא “attacking (see Isa 26:14) they will easily enter the plain,” reading an infinitive absolute הָיָא , used with the yql of הָיָא , followed by the adverbial accusative הָיָא , which is related to Arabic فَاع “an even place, a depressed plain” (Lane 1893: 2994).

¹² Ju 5:4–5 reflects the tradition of Num 21:14–17 and 24:17–19, indicating that Israel entered Moab in an atmosphere of violence and destruction. This fragment of the “Book of the Wars of Yahweh” correlates well with the prophetic oracle of Balaam (Num 24:17–19, NEB), which announced the impending destruction of Moab and Ar at the time of the tribal migration through the Trans-Jordan. These passages cannot be easily reconciled with the tradition of Deut 2:9, 16, 27, which claims a peaceful passage through Edom and Moab. On Num 24:17–19, see Albright 1944: 218–227 and van Seters 1972: 182–197.

II. Identifying the textual difficulties in the Song of Deborah

A survey of the previous commentaries and studies on Judges 5 would lead one (wrongly, as I shall argue below) to conclude that, aside from the matter of glosses, the textual problems in the poem stem primarily from scribal misreadings of the consonants, rather than scribal misdivision of words. Few critics have challenged the correctness of the 288 spaces currently used for word division and the 52 line divisions in BHS. Efforts to correct the text by emendation of the consonants, coupled with the treatment of the MT vowel letters ם and ן as late additions to the text, compounded the problems of understanding the poem. For example, it was customary for Albright, Cross, and Freedman to delete all vowel letters from the MT in their attempt to restore a purely consonantal text as would have been written before the ninth century B.C.E.¹³

However, some of the vowel letters removed were originally consonants that had been incorrectly vocalized. Their removal precluded a correct restoration of the text. Since it cannot be assumed that vowel letters were introduced uniformly at one particular period in the transmission of the text, recognition of the partial and inconsistent use of vowel letters is essential. Each ן and ם must be judged on its own merits. The reconstruction of the text offered in this study calls for *only* thirty changes in the consonantal MT, twenty-five of which involve ן and ם. Included in the twenty-five changes of ן and ם are nine cases where the ן and ם were pointed in the MT as vowel letters although they were originally consonants.¹⁴

The MT of Judges 5 can be corrected and brought into conformity with the normative *plena* spelling by the addition of merely seven internal and eight final vowel letters.

The poem can be restored to its more “original” consonantal form and provided with later *plena* spellings by the following:

¹³ Albright 1944: 209–223; 1950–51: 12–16; Cross 1948: 192–196; and Cross and Freedman 1955: 237–250.

¹⁴ On the inconsistent use of vowel letters, note the inscriptions from the mid-ninth to mid-eighth centuries from Kuntillet Ajrud and Kirbet el-Qom. See Emerton 1982: 2–20 (especially 2–3), as well as Zevit 1984: 39–47.

- (1) the addition of two consonants (a ך and a ן) and fifteen vowel letters,
- (2) the deletion of one consonant, four vowel letters, and one ן conjunction,
- (3) changing ן to ך twice and changing ך to ן twice,
- (4) the emendation of five consonants to graphically similar letters,
- (5) the redivision of thirty words (eleven of which involve the transfer of only one letter to the preceding or following word), affecting the formation and vocalization of thirty-seven new words.

Aside from the commonly recurring errors involving ך and ן (see Delitzsch 1920: 103–105), the problem of *plena* and *defectiva* spellings, and the transposition of verses 3:31, 5:6–7 and seven other words, only eight changes by addition, deletion, and emendation to the consonantal text need be made to read the poem as an integrated battle ballad. The transpositions call for the addition of only one ן and one ך.

III. Corrections needed in the consonantal text and with the vowel letters

A. Additions to the text

The two consonants to be restored in the poem are a ך prefix on ם לח in 5:8 and a ן suffix in 5:23, where שבייה “her riders” needs to be read as שביהן “their riders.” Although most words in the MT of Judges 5 are written *scriptio plena*, defective spellings survive in thirteen words which, for the most part, were improperly divided. They are as follows:

- (1) Three cases of internal *scriptio defectiva*:

v 6	יעל	for יעיל	“he used to attack,”
v 11	צדקת	for צדקות	“victories,”
v 14	שרשם	for שרשים	“hastening (ones).”

(2) Six plural verbs lacking the final *û* vowel:

v 8	לחם for ילחמו	“they (will) battle,”
v 9	לבי for לביו	“respond to the call!”
v 13	לי for ליו	“they were accompanied,”
v 14	אחרוך	“after you” divided to read
	אחר יכו	“at the rear they strike,”
v 21	עו for עוו	“they sought refuge,”
v 23	לא for לאו	“they prevailed.”

(3) One singular verb lacking the final *e* vowel:

v 14	בעמורך	“with your kin” divided to read
	בעמם יכה	“from concealment he attacks.”

(4) Four cases of misdivision and *scriptio defectiva*:

v 11	מקול מחצצים	“to the sound of musicians” divided and emended to read
	מקלים חצצים	“(on) mountain-roads, hurrying”
v 22	סוס מדהרות	“horse gallopings” divided to read
	סוסימו דהרות	“their horses, (and their) chariots,”
v 23	מרוז אמר מלאך	“Meroz said an angel” divided to read
	מרוזאים רים לאך	“doomed, he sent cloudbursts.”

B. Deletions from the text

(1) Vowel letters:

Even fewer deletions are required. The ו of מקול in 5:11 is deleted in restoring מקלים “mountain roads.” The ן of the third עורי in 5:12 is deleted, changing the MT *qal* imperative into the *pi^cel* infinitive construct עיר or עור “to overwhelm, to rout.” In 5:16, the ו in שרקות “hissings” is deleted in restoring the lengthened construct infinitive of שרק, a metathetic variant of שקר “to look for.” In 5:23, the ו of the plural imperative אורו “curse ye” has been deleted to read a 3mpl perfect אורו

“they panicked.” The ך prefixed to Barak’s name in 5:1 has been deleted as a pseudo-correction once וְהִשָּׁר was identified with שִׁיר “to sing,” instead of אָשַׁר or שׂוּר “to march forth.” (The א has been inserted for clarity in the revision, but the elision of א occurs frequently enough and early enough that one cannot be certain it would have been in the original spelling.)

(2) Consonants:

The only consonant deleted from the text is the ן of רְאוּבֵן in 5:16, reading the verb and preposition (“רְאוּ בִ” “to triumph over”) rather than the name רְאוּבֵן “Reuben.”

C. Confusion of ך and ך

In 5:12c, the restored שִׁיר “he marched forth” is read as the preterit of שׂוּר. In 5:17, the שִׁכּוֹן is corrected to שִׁכִּין “he attacked,” an energetic *shaph^eel* of נָכַח. In 5:22, MT עִקְבֵי “the heels of” is read as עִקְבוֹ, a dual noun with a 3ms suffix “its slopes,” i.e., the banks of the wadi. In 5:23, MT בָּאוּ is read as a participle in the bound nouns לְעוֹרֵת בָּאֵי “the ones going forth for the Warrior.”

D. Other emendations

Five other emendations involve the confusion of כ and ך in paleo-Hebrew, the confusion of a ך for a ך or ב, and a ך for a ך.

v 10	מְדִיִן	“rich carpets” (NRSV) is emended to
	כְּדִיִן	“mule(s),”
v 12	שְׁבִיִךְ	“your captives” becomes
	שְׁבִיִם	“captives,”
v 27	בְּאֶשֶׁר כָּרַע	“where he kneeled” is redivided to
	בְּאֵשׁ הַכָּרַע	“motionless, was made powerless” or to
	בְּאֵשׁ בְּכָרַע	“motionless, in a stupor,”
v 28	בְּעַד הָאֲשֵׁנָב	“out of the lattice” is redivided to
	בְּעַדָּה אֲשֵׁנָב	“out of (?) a lattice” and emended to
	בְּעַתָּה אֲשֵׁנָב	“she inquired (at the) lattice,”

- v 31 אויבֵיךָ יהוה “your enemies, Yahweh” is emended to
 אויבֵיִם יהוה “the enemies of Yahweh.”

Five by-forms are recognized which do not require emendation. In 5:10, צַחַר is read as a by-form of צַעַר “young,” and in 5:11, מִשְׁאַב appears as a metathetic variant of cognate South Arabic *msb* “mountain pass.” With the removal of the vowel letter ו and with the change of ש to שׁ, MT שִׁרְקוֹת in 5:16 is read as the infinitive of שָׁקַר/שָׁקַר “to look at, to gaze.” In 5:22, הִלֵּם is read as a by-form of הִלֵּא “to be at a distance, to retreat.” The second דַּהֲרוֹת of 5:22, with the metathesis of the ת and ו, is read דַּהֲרוֹתוֹ “his chariot.” In 5:8, שַׁעַר is read as the metathetic variant of Arabic شِعْر (= شَرِع) “to be courageous.”

E. Changes in word division

More than half of the proposed changes in word division have been cited above in sections A–D. For the sake of completeness, they are also included in this section, but without comment. The proposed redivisions are discussed individually in Chapter Six.

- v 5 יִשְׂרָאֵל “Israel” becomes
 יִשָּׂר אֵל “God will provide strength”;
- v 11 מִקּוֹל מַחְצְצִים “the sound of musicians” becomes
 מִקְלִים חֲצִצִים “(on) mountain passes, hurrying”;
- v 11 לְשַׁעְרֵים עִם “to the gates, the people” becomes
 לְשַׁעְרֵי מַעַם “the very storms from”;
- v 12 דְּבַרֵי שִׁיר “words of a song” becomes
 דְּבַר יִשִּׁיר “the pursuer” and “prepared”;
- v 14 אַחֲרֶיךָ “after you” becomes
 אַחֲרֵי כֹ “at the rear they would strike”;
- v 14 בְּעַמְּמֶיךָ “with your kinsmen” becomes
 בְּעַמְּם יִכֶּה “from concealment he attacks”;
- v 15 גְּדֹלִים “great ones” becomes
 גַּד לִים “Gad had joined them”;
- v 16 רְאוּבֵן “Reuben” becomes
 רְאוּ בִ “to triumph over”;

- v 18 על מרומי שדה באו “upon the heights of the field
they came” becomes
על מרום ישד הבאו “against Merom he moved,
they were forced to come”;
- v 21 קדומים “onrushing” becomes
קדום ים “surging seaward”;
- v 21 תדרכי נפשי עז “march on, my soul, with might”
becomes
תדרך נפש יעז “it overtook (them), it overflowed,
they sought refuge”;
- v 22 סוס מדהרות דהרות “horse galloping agalloping”
becomes
סוסימו דהרות דהרתו “their horses (and their) chariots,
his chariot”;
- v 23 אורו מרוז אמר מלאך “curse Meroz, says the angel”
becomes
ארו מרוזאים רים לאך “they panicked, doomed (to
die), he had sent cloudbursts”;
- v 25 בספל אדירים “in a lordly bowl” becomes
בסף לאדירים “in a truly magnificent goblet”;
- v 27 באשר כרע “where he fell” becomes
באש הכרע “made motionless, powerless” or
באש בכרע “in a stupor”;
- v 28 בעד האשנב “through the lattice” becomes
בעתה אשנב “she inquired (at) the lattice”;
- v 30 הלא ימצאו “are they not finding” becomes
הלאים צאו “the victors have forded
(the water).”

IV. The modification of the Masoretic vocalization

In challenging the cavalier treatment of the Masoretic vocalization in many studies, Barr (1968: 194) noted:

The picture implied in philological treatments is one of (a) a long period during which the consonantal text was carefully cherished and transmitted, and (b) a late and arbitrary process by which vocalization was more or less imposed on this text by men who were handicapped by the limitations of their knowledge of Hebrew.

Although Barr doubts that this is a credible picture for the MT as a whole,¹⁵ it is certainly the case with Judges 5. The widely varying translations of the LXX A and B texts, coupled with variants in other Greek recensions and in the Latin tradition, indicate that the poem was not well-understood at an early period. As Albright (1936: 26) noted, “the meaning of individual words was evidently lost long before the Christian era.” The vocalization and meaning were obviously restored at many points by conjecture. Nevertheless, the Masoretic vocalization is about eighty percent reliable. Corrections to the MT proposed above in sections A to E modify the vocalization of 48 of the poem’s 360 words. Elsewhere in the poem, 24 changes in the MT, requiring no consonantal emendation, are suggested or adopted.

v 1	וּתְשֵׁר	= וְתִשֵּׁר or וְתִשֵּׁר or וְתִשֵּׁר “she caused to march forth,” from either שֹׁר or אֲשֵׁר,
v 2	בְּפָרַעַ	“when (she) called for heroism,” the preposition ב and the <i>pi^cel</i> infinitive absolute,
v 4	מֵיִם	“the water of/from (the mountains),” the construct מֵי with an enclitic ם or the preposition מ in a construct chain,
v 5	אֱלֹהֵי	“my God,”
v 6	אֲרָחוֹת	“caravans,”
v 11	יִתְּנוּ	“they were given,” <i>qal</i> passive <i>yqtl</i> of נָתַן,
v 11	פְּרוֹזְנוֹ	3ms suffixed dual “his two warriors,”
v 12	עוֹרֵי	infinitive absolute, “aroused themselves,”
v 12	עוֹרֵי	plural construct, “the troops of,”
v 12	עוֹר	<i>pi^cel</i> “to rout,”
v 12	עוֹרֵי	plural construct, “the troops of,”
v 12	וּשְׁבָה	infinitive, “to take captives,”

¹⁵ Rabbinic traditions in *Megillah* 18b and *Rosh Hashanah* 26a–b, to which Barr (1968: 56) called attention, speak of the uncertainty of the meaning of five biblical or mishnaic words about which it was said לֹא הָיוּ יְדְעֵי רַבָּנִין בְּמֵי לֹא “our teachers did not know the meaning,” until they heard the words being used by a handmaid in the household of (the) Rabbi or by an Arab at the market. Note Pollack’s proposal, accepted by H. Gevaryahu (1987: ix), to interpret סִלָּה in the Psalms in light of current Arabic usage in northern Israel where سله means “to be clear . . . to be without a doubt.”

v 13	שָׂרִיד	with a shift of שׁ to שׂ, “caravan leader,”
v 13	יָרַד	3ms with עַם יְהוָה as the subject, “Yahweh’s militia descended,”
v 15	וְשָׂרִי	“and the officers of,”
v 15	יִשְׁכַּר	<i>shaph^eel</i> of שָׂכַר “to defeat,”
v 15	כָּן	<i>qal</i> passive 3ms of כָּוַן “conceal,”
v 16	לְמֹה	infinitive absolute “to surround,”
v 16	יִשְׁבַּת	infinitive construct of יָשַׁב “to wait,”
v 17	לְמֹה	emphatic ל “verily” with an enclitic ׀ and the vowel letter ה affixed,
v 17	יָשַׁב	from שָׂבַב “he scattered, he assailed,”
v 28	וְתִיב	<i>taqtil</i> nominal form of יָבַב “a vacant place,”
v 29	אִמְרִיהָ	participle “soothsayer” with the archaic feminine ך (-ay) ending and 3fs suffix,
v 30	שָׁלַל	masculine singular participle “despoiler.”

V. The value of the LXX and later versions for establishing the text

It has long been recognized that the corruption found in the Masoretic text “. . . is in the main older than the Greek translators, who in the worst places read substantially as we do and therefore give us little help toward a restoration of the text” (Moore 1900b: 129). The widely differing translations in Codex Alexandrinus and in Codex Vaticanus demonstrate how difficult the Hebrew text of Judges 5 was for the early translators. Even Lindars (1995: 222) noted, “The LXX presents a maze of strange readings, which are often difficult to relate to the Hebrew text.” Yet numerous revisions of the MT have been proposed on the basis of variant readings in the LXX or other versions. Kittel (BH³) proposed or accepted six such emendations. Other commentators adopted these or offered alternative translations to bring the MT into conformity with the Greek textual variants.¹⁶ But a survey of all the textual variants cited in Brooke and McLean’s (1917: 801–809) critical edition of the LXX provides

¹⁶ Note Cooke 1892: 24–56 (passim); Moore 1900: 32–39; Burney 1918: 112–157 (passim); J. Gray 1967: 278–285; and Lipinski 1967: 185–200.

little evidence that the LXX and its derivative versions offer reliable clues for altering the consonantal MT.¹⁷

The rich repertoire of archaic syntactic, lexical, and grammatical forms which were part of the Hebrew poetic tradition was available only down to the time of the Babylonian exile.¹⁸ The LXX translators in the Hellenistic period had but limited knowledge of archaic and/or dialectal Hebrew. One must concur with Barr (1968: 268), “. . . the ancient translators did their task remarkably well, considering the circumstances. Their grasp of Hebrew, however, was very often a grasp of that which is average and customary in Hebrew.” Generally, archaic and archaistic elements, dialectal variations, or loanwords in the Song of Deborah were not obvious to the LXX translators. Therefore, the most that can be expected of the LXX and its variants is a hint to the presence or meaning of an enigmatic word or phrase, as demonstrated below.

A. The LXX and lexicography

Knowledge of lexical elements lost *after* the early translations were made can be recognized in several of the textual variants. Three examples illustrate this type of help available from a study of the LXX and other versions. Section C, below, provides an example of the way the doublets and triplets in the Greek manuscripts reflect the translators’ diverse understanding of a difficult poetic Hebrew word.

1. Ju 5:4 ׁ and δρόσους

The LXX B-text reads καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς ἔσταξεν δρόσους, “and the heaven dripped dews” in 5:4b for MT גַּם שִׁמִּים נִטְפוּ. In the LXX, δρόσους usually translates טל “dew” or שלג “snow,” and

¹⁷ See also Brooke and McLean 1897: 9–12. For detailed bibliographies covering studies of the Greek text of Judges, see Schreiner 1961: 173–200, 333–358; Brock, Fritsch, and Jellicoe 1973: 104. Cross (1973: 213) noted, “As recent text-critical study of the Qumran manuscripts has shown once again, the overwhelming majority of textual differences in Hebrew and Greek manuscripts are the result of inadvertent or unconscious errors — as should be expected.”

¹⁸ See McDaniel 1968b: 216–217.

although Arabic *طل* means “light rain,” Hebrew *טל* occurs in parallelism with *רַבִּיבִים* “copious showers,” as in Deut 32:2 and Mic 5:6. Although Lindars (1995: 232) concluded that *δρόσους* here in 5:4 is just a gloss “to complete the sense,”¹⁹ it probably translates the particle *גַּם*, and this can be accepted as the preferred meaning in light of the Arabic usage of *جم بعش*, as well as *جم البعاق*²⁰ “to rain copiously” and “a copious, unexpected torrential rain.”

The MT *גַּם* is an adverbial substantive, like the Arabic *جم* “abundantly,” used with the ellipsis of the direct object. The LXX B-text captured the meaning by treating *גַּם* as the direct object rather than as an adverb. The *καὶ . . . καὶ* in 5:4 represents a later correction to the more common reduplicated *גַּם . . . גַּם*.

2. Ju 5:12 *עורר* and *μυριάδας μετὰ λαοῦ*

The doublet in the MT of 5:12,

<i>עורי עורי דבורה</i>	Awake, awake, Deborah;
<i>עורי עורי דברי שיר</i>	Awake, awake, utter a song!

is read in most Greek manuscripts as a triplet (e.g., the A-text, Lucianic MSS *gnwdptv*, and the Origenic MSS *abcx*, supported by the Armenian, Ethiopic, Old Latin and Syro-Hexapla):

ἔξεγείρου ἔξεγείρου Δεββωρα
ἔξεγείρου (or ἔξέγειρον) μυριάδας μετὰ λαοῦ
*ἔξεγείρου ἔξεγείρου (or λάλει) μετ' ὤδης.*²¹

Burney (1918: 121) corrected the LXX by deleting the third line of the text, assuming that it was an insertion of the Hebrew

¹⁹ Compare Albright's interpretation (1922: 75), “. . . ‘drip’ is an anticlimax, and here so absurd that a scribe felt impelled to add the remark *גַּם עֲבִיבִים נִטְפְּוּ* ‘the clouds (also) dripped water,’ that is, the heavens did not leak, but the clouds distilled a gentle rain.” Note also Cooke 1892: 30; Moore 1900a: 32, 1900b: 141; Burney 1918: 112; and J. Gray 1967: 278.

²⁰ Lane 1872: 228a, 449a, noting especially 449c, *بئير جموم* “a well of much (water).”

²¹ See Brooke and McLean 1917: 804; Burney 1918: 120; Schreiner 1961: 196.

and B-text tradition. The Greek doublet which survived led Burney to conclude that the *Vorlage* behind this recension was

עורי עורי דבורה	Awake, awake, Deborah;
העירי רבבות בעם	Arouse myriads among the people!

However, a better explanation which does not demand a different *Vorlage* can be offered. The A-text ἐξεγείρου μυριάδας μετὰ λαοῦ, which contains a doublet (μυριάδας and μετὰ λαοῦ) is a translation of the second עורי עורי. The ἐξεγείρου (ἐξέγειρον) translates the first עורי of this second pair, and the doublet (μυριάδας and μετὰ λαοῦ) translates the other עורי, i.e., the fourth עורי of the bicolon. It is cognate with the Arabic غار/غور “a numerous company of men, a numerous army,” which was used with reference to those involved in quick or sudden moves in a hostile or predatory incursion (Lane 1887: 2307–2308). The translators of the A-text were evidently aware of this (now) rare root which can be labeled עור IV, “a large company of people.”

The third line of the A-text, ἐξεγείρου ἐξεγείρου λάλει μετ’ ὧδης is a separate doublet of the MT עורי עורי דברי שיר, which matches the B-text ἐξεγείρου ἐξεγείρου λάλησον ὧδήν. A different *Vorlage* behind the A-text, as suggested by Burney and followed in BH³ and by Lindars (1995: 290), need not be assumed.

3. Ju 5:12 שיר and ἐνισχύων and its variants

In 5:12a, the A-text and the Lucianic recension have a doublet for MT קום ברק. It consists of (a) ἐνισχύων, which has been identified as the Greek equivalent of קום or בחזק (if one reads εν ισχυι) and (b) ἐξανίστασο Βαρακ for the B-text ἀνάστα Βαρακ.²² The κατισχυσον εξειρου “overpower, arouse” in MS k is a variant of the A-text ἐνισχύων ἐξανίστασο “strengthening, arise.” Moore (1900a: 34–35) reconstructed the text as קום קום ברק “Barak, be strong, arise.” But this doublet and its allegedly differing *Vorlage* can be better explained in the light of the

²² See BH³. MSS dgnptvw have (and the Old Latin and Ethiopic must have read) εν ισχυι (Brooke and McLean 1917: 804 and Schreiner 1961: 196).

A-text of Hos 12:4–5. The occurrence of ἐνίσχυσεν there for שרה and וישר indicates that some translators understood שר, שרה, and שרר to mean ἐνίσχυω or κατισχύω. Similarly, in the A-text of Ju 5:12, ἐνίσχύων ἐξάνιστασο Βαρακ and its Lucianic variants are the translation of the MT שיר קום ברק. The doublet that survives in the A-text for שיר is then (a) μετ' ὤδης “with a song” and (b) ἐνίσχύων “strengthening.”

B. The LXX obscures the genre

The LXX translators inadvertently obscured the meaning of the Song of Deborah and steered exegetical tradition in a wrong direction when they translated the initial words of Ju 5:1, ותשר וברק by καὶ ἦσαν Δεββωρα καὶ Βαρακ (possibly using Ex 15:1 as the parallel since שיר משה ובני ישראל was translated τότε ἦσαν Μωσῆς καὶ οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραηλ). This translation has reinforced the long-standing tradition that *all* of Judges 5 is the Song of Deborah. But this designation is actually a misnomer when applied to the entire poem. The MT ותשר of Ju 5:1 and the שיר of Ex 15:1 must be attributed to different roots. The latter is certainly from שיר “to sing,” but the former is from אשר (like the ויאתא = ויאתא in Deut 33:21) or שיר/שור “to march forth.”

To be sure, Deborah delivered a hortatory address (possibly at a cultic assembly) or dispatched a summons to the tribal leaders. However, her words (found only in the exhortation in 5:3–5 and 8–9) did not constitute a “song of victory.” Rather they were a call-to-arms for an Israelite militia so that they might achieve a victory.²³ Consequently, Deborah, as composer or singer, need not be associated with the entire poem (see below, page 247).

The psalmic elements found in translations and created by exegetical tradition were, in my opinion, not psalmic elements in the original poem. Words that appear to be hymnic (זמר and שיר) can now be demonstrated to be homographs of military and combative terms. The poem can be best identified as a short

²³ Deborah’s role was analogous to that of a سجد “speaker, orator” among the ancient Bedouins. The سجد filled a nonhereditary position of civil leadership (see Buccellati 1967: 90) as well as a religious role (see Lane 1872: 1308).

epic fragment dealing with a “Yahweh war” and would have been a likely candidate for inclusion in the ספר מלחמות יהוה, the “Book of the Wars of Yahweh,” or a similar work.

The essential integrity of the Hebrew text can be maintained only when the entire poem is read as a battle ballad, in epic style, which elaborated (1) the causes leading to military confrontation, (2) the mobilization (including Deborah’s exhortation), (3) the strategy of the Israelites, (4) descriptive scenes of the route and rout of Sisera, and (5) the victory of Yahweh’s militia—including the help of Yael, a fellow Yahwist, in Sisera’s assassination.

C. Doublets and triplets

The varied transliterations and translations in the LXX and the versions are very helpful in recovering the Hebrew vocabulary of the translators, but provide little justification for emending the MT. A good example of this limited usefulness can be demonstrated by the variants for הלמו in Ju 5:22, including the numerous doublets and triplets scattered in 5:21–23, as cited by Brooke and McLean (1917: 806).

5:21		
ομαλιει	(המל׳)	transliteration in dgknp ₂ vw
ομλιαι	(המל׳)	transliteration in l
αυτους	(למו)	“them” in dgklnp ₂ vw
5:22		
ομαλιει	(המל׳)	transliteration in Mnamyb ₂ o
ενεποδισθησαν	(הלמו)	“they were foot-cuffed” in B
απεκοπησαν	(המלו)	“they were cut off” in Abcgl ₂ x
ευθυνοντα	(הולם)	“steersman, driver” in dgl ₂ np ₂ vw
εκστασεως	(הולם)	“a movement outwards” in Mnamyb ₂ dgklnp ₂ vw
αβλεψια	(העלם)	“blindness” (metaphor) in w
αυτου	(למו)	“of him” in dgl ₂ p ₂ vw
αυτους	(למו)	“them” in M ₂ Namyb ₂
αυτων	(למו)	“of them” in Mnamyb ₂

5:23		
αμα λαω	(המלו)	transliteration in k
αμα λαων	(המלו)	transliteration in k*
υβριστας	(הלם)	“violent (horses)” in glnptvw
απολεσατε	(המו)	“destroy!” in glnptvw [at the first אורו]
απολεσατε	(המו)	“destroy!” in k [at the second אורו]
εκστασιν	(הלם)	“a movement outwards” in k

A number of scribal errors are obvious:

- defective spelling of המלו as הלם
- inversion of letters: המלו and הלם for המלו
- inversion plus confusion of ו and י (המלי for המלו)
- loss of a letter: המו or למו for המלו
- *plena* spelling or inversion: המול for המלו
- confusion of ע and ה: עלם or העלם for הלם
- reduplication and inversion: מהללו (see below).

Furthermore, although the *ευεuroκοπηθησαν* “they were hamstrung” found in 5:22 in MSS MNadkmoptvyb₂ could possibly be a translation of המלו, it more likely reflects an original עקרו “they were hamstrung” for MT עקבי “the heels of.” Since these manuscripts have πτέρναι for the עקבי, *ευεuroκοπηθησαν* would have to be a doublet. If so, MT המלו would not be reflected in the translation of MSS MNadkmoptvyb₂.

In the Old Latin, *dementiae eius* in 5:22 reflects a *Vorlage* with מהללו “his insanity”; and the Armenian, translated into Latin *planabunt* “they will level,” is a translation of the transliteration, as though ομαλνει were from ομαλίζω “to make level.” The inverted המלו and המלי for MT המלו produced only transliterations in the Greek, no association having been made with the המלה “tumult” of Jer 11:16 (which was there translated περιτομῆς “circumcision,” similar to the ἀποτομᾶς for המלו in Ju 5:26a, discussed below) and Ezek 1:24 (which is lacking in the LXX). The eight translations of המלו (excluding απολεσατε and αυτου, etc. for המו or למו) provide for a better Hebrew lexicon, but require no changes to the MT, except for the matter of *scriptio plena*.

VI. Summary

The integrity of the consonantal MT can thus be accepted as ninety-nine percent correct, and the Masoretic vocalization as eighty percent reliable. Two major problems precluded a more accurate vocalization by the Masoretes, namely, (1) the misdivision of twenty words early in the process of transmission (which was comparable to the misdivision of words elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible examined by Delitzsch [1920: 2–10]), and (2) the pre-LXX transmission of the text without a uniformly consistent use of medial vowel letters (seven cases are attested) and final vowel letters with ך"ל verbs (defective spellings occur in seven or eight verbs).

The changes identified in this chapter, coupled with the transposition of 3:31 and 5:6–7 to the initial lines of the poem and the transposition of seven other words, exhaust all necessary changes to the text. The text of the poem appears to be free of other editorial activity. This slightly modified text now reads easily as a clearly written poem with syllable balance, normal metric patterns, and an extremely astute use of grammatical and lexical detail to build epic poetry of rare quality.

Transpositions coupled with excessive deletions such as those cited above in the “Introduction” or proposed by Caquot (1986: 55 [that 5:14–17 is “une insertion secondaire dans cette partie du Cantique”]) or Naʿaman (1990: 424–426 [who omitted 5:14–17 and transposed 5:18 to follow 5:13]) are attractive only when one is restricted to traditional word division and a limited vocabulary, or when one is insensitive to the inconsistent orthography in the MT and the possibility of dialectal elements and/or loanwords.

The LXX and the versions reflect the same basic text as that found in the MT. Where a significant variant occurs, it is more likely to reflect the early translator’s control of a larger lexical repertoire than that of later lexicographers. Words which were subsequently lost in ordinary Hebrew usage can now be recovered through appeal to cognates and/or the larger lexicon of post-biblical and rabbinic Hebrew (as well as by recognizing foreign words on the lips of non-Israelites).

The firmly established consensus of the commentators, recently reiterated by Lindars (1995: *passim*), that the text of the poem is hopelessly corrupt must now be abandoned. The only editorial activity in Ju 5:1–31a was limited to the intentional transposition

of two verses (5:6–7) by a Deuteronomic editor and the unintentional mislocation of several words and phrases. (The conspicuous editorial activity reflected in Judges 4 is a different matter and will be addressed briefly in the next chapter.)

The many “paratactic” or “impressionistic” translations of the Song of Deborah which have appeared—from the early one in proto-Lucianic MS k to the most recent one offered by Lindars (included in the Appendix)—have failed to appreciate the fact that the *entire* poem was a battle ballad. Orthographic inconsistency and scribal inaccuracies, no doubt, contributed to the confusion over the poem’s genre and lexical components. Because the inaccuracies were more in the *spacing* of the letters between the words than in the letters themselves, the critic can now reconstruct the *Vorlage* without the excesses of random or wanton emendation.