

THE SONG OF
DEBORAH:
POETRY
IN DIALECT

A Philological Study of

JUDGES 5

with

Translation and Commentary

By

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עֵטְרֵת זְקֵנִים בְּנֵי בָנִים

To Erica, Ian, Owen, and Lauren

May they always be free

to cherish and challenge

tradition

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PREFACE

With a single stroke of the pen, an ancient editor or scribe added the conjunction ו (the vowel *u*) before the name of Barak in Judges 5:1, and in so doing diminished the stature of Deborah as a judge and as a person wielding real power in early Israel. By adding the ו (*u*) to the text, the scribe forced Deborah to join Barak in singing a duet: ותשר דבורה וברק “then sang Deborah and Barak.” Without the ו, the phrase ותשר דבורה ברק would have to be read as a verb-subject-object sequence: “then Deborah made Barak sing” (or do something else), the only question being the precise meaning of the verb. Without the ו, Deborah was clearly in charge; and were the verb “to sing,” Deborah would have been the conductor who made Barak sing. But the addition of the conjunction ו placed Barak on a par with Deborah; they acted in concert.

This slim editorial note created disharmony between the Song of Deborah in Judges 5 and the prose account in Judges 4, where Deborah had the authority to summon Barak and deliver to him the command of Yahweh to go to war. The addition set the tone for the entire poem, making Deborah primarily a songstress whose major role was to encourage the troops in battle.

Folk etymology reduced Deborah’s stature even more. Her name was popularly derived from דבורה “bee,” which may have sweet overtones, but lacks the status of דִּבְרָה “leader, governor, guide.” In a similar way, popular etymology associated Yael’s name with יעל “goat,” missing the more basic meaning “the pre-eminent one” and its derivative “noble, strong.”

A clear understanding of the role of Deborah and Yael in early Israel remains hidden in the obscure lines of the Song of Deborah. Until there is some consensus on the literal meaning of the poem itself, there can be little agreement on the value of the poem for understanding the history, sacred literature, and social institutions of pre-monarchical Israel.

Exegetical tradition—provided by the scribes who added vowel letters and divided the consonant clusters into words—and the early Greek translations for Jews of the Diaspora, which provide a myriad of textual variants, have not made the task of the modern interpreter an easy one.

PREFACE

I offer here a translation of the Song of Deborah which adheres closely to the consonants of the Masoretic text, though I have re-divided many of the consonant clusters in order to restore certain poetic lines. Exegetical traditions, early and modern, have been carefully examined; but with a number of the more obscure lines there has been no compelling reason to stay with traditional translations or exegesis. At times it became necessary to step away from the guesswork reflected in the ancient variants and the speculative emendations of more recent commentators. Looking at the poem as if it were found in a newly discovered scroll provided constructive alternatives for a number of the more obscure passages. The obscurities in Judges 5 are diminished once the poem is read as dialectal Hebrew and the interpreter makes use of a larger lexicon than that traditionally used for classical canonical Judean Hebrew. This approach provided new insights, not only on the names of Deborah and Yael, but also on the meaning of many lines in the poem.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A-text	Codex Alexandrinus
AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research, New Haven
AB	Anchor Bible, New York
<i>AbrN</i>	<i>Abr-Nahrain</i> , Melbourne
<i>AfO</i>	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i> , Berlin
<i>AHW</i>	W. von Soden, <i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> , Wiesbaden
<i>AJSL</i>	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i> , Chicago
<i>AJT</i>	<i>American Journal of Theology</i> , Chicago
ALUOS	Annual of Leeds University Oriental Society
AnBib	Analecta Biblica, Rome
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> , ed. by J. B. Pritchard, Princeton
AOS	American Oriental Society, New Haven
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch, Göttingen
AV	Authorized Version of the Bible, 1611 (same as KJV, 1611)
B-text	Codex Vaticanus
B [†]	Codex Vaticanus and one undesignated minuscule supporting the reading cited
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i> , New Haven
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i> , Washington, D. C.
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i> , Philadelphia
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge, Bonn
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, C. A. Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , New York
BH ³	R. Kittel, <i>Biblica Hebraica</i> , third edition, Stuttgart, 1937
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia, Rome
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i> , Manchester, England
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament, Neukirchen-Vluyn
<i>BO</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i> , Leiden
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i> , Freiburg i. Br. and Paderborn
BZAW	Beihefte zur <i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i> , Gießen and Berlin
<i>CAD</i>	I. Gelb, L. Oppenheim, et al., eds., <i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i> , Washington, D. C.
CD	Cairo (Geniza text of the) Damascus (Document)
<i>CIH</i>	<i>Inscriptiones himyariticas et sabaeas Continens. Pars Quarta of CIS</i> , Paris
<i>CIS</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i> , Paris
<i>CTA</i>	A. Herdner, <i>Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques</i> , Paris
<i>EBib</i>	<i>Études bibliques</i> , Paris

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EH	Exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament, Münster
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> , ed. E. Kautzsch, tr. A. E. Cowley, Oxford
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament, Tübingen
HJ	<i>Hibbert Journal</i> , Boston, London
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament, Göttingen
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs, Cambridge, Massachusetts and Missoula, Montana
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i> , Cambridge, Massachusetts
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i> , Cincinnati
ICC	International Critical Commentary, Edinburgh
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i> , Jerusalem
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i> , Boston
JANESCU	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i> , New York
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i> , New Haven, Boston
JB	Jerusalem Bible, New York, 1966
JB�	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> , Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Missoula, Montana
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i> , New Haven
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i> , London
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i> , London
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i> , Chicago
JPOS	<i>Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society</i> , Jerusalem
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i> , Philadelphia
JSOR	<i>Journal of the Society of Oriental Research</i> , Chicago
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> , Sheffield
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i> , Manchester
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> , Oxford
KAI	H. Donner and W. Röllig, <i>Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften</i> , Wiesbaden
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament, Leipzig and Gütersloh
KB ³	L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, <i>Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros</i> , 3rd ed., Leiden
KJV	King James Version of the Bible (same as the AV, 1611)
LXX	Septuagint
LBA	Late Bronze Age
MBA	Middle Bronze Age
MT	Masoretic Text
NAB	New American Bible, Paterson, New Jersey, 1969, 1970
NEB	New English Bible, Oxford and Cambridge, 1961, 1970
NJV	New Jewish Version (<i>Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures</i>), New York, 1985 (5740)
NorTTS	<i>Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift</i> , Oslo
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, New York, 1992
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications, Chicago

ABBREVIATIONS

OLZ	<i>Orientalische Literaturzeitung</i> , Berlin and Leipzig
Or	<i>Orientalia</i> , Rome
OTL	Old Testament Library, Philadelphia and London
OTS	<i>Oudtestamentische Studien</i> , Leiden
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i> , London
PG	J. Migne, <i>Patrologia graeca</i> , Paris
PRU	<i>Palais Royal d'Ugarit</i> , Paris
PW	Pauly-Wissowa, <i>Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> , Stuttgart
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i> , Paris and Rome
RivB	<i>Rivista biblica italiana</i> , Brescia
RSV	Revised Standard Version of the Bible, London and New York, 1952
RR	<i>Review of Religion</i> , New York
RV	English Revised Version of the Bible, London, 1885
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology, Nashville, and London
Syria	<i>Syria. Revue d'Art Oriental et d'Archéologie</i> , Paris
TEV	Today's English Version, New York, 1979
ThLitZ	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i> , Berlin
ThZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i> , Basel
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i> , Münster
UT	C. H. Gordon, <i>Ugaritic Textbook</i> , Rome
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i> , Leiden
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements, Leiden
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i> , Philadelphia
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i> , Leipzig and Berlin
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i> , Gießen and Berlin
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i> , Leipzig and Wiesbaden
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i> , Leipzig, Stuttgart, and Wiesbaden
1QapGen	Genesis Apocryphon from Qumran Cave 1
1QIsa ^a	Isaiah Scroll A from Qumran Cave 1
1QS	Manual of Discipline from Qumran Cave 1
11QpaleoLev	Paleo-Hebrew Leviticus Scroll from Cave 11
ערוך השלם	<i>Aruch Completum sive lexicon vocabula et res, quae in libris targumicis, talmudicis et midraschicis continentur, explicans auctore Nathane filio Jechielis</i> , A. Kohut, ed., Vienna, 1878
()	Explanatory additions in English translation
[]	Editorial deletion from the Hebrew text
< >	Editorial addition to the Hebrew text
*	Denotes the original writing of the scribe when used with a manuscript symbol; when used with a Semitic word, it indicates the original (proto-Semitic) form.

INTRODUCTION

Although the Song of Deborah (Judges 5), like the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15), is recognized as one of “the oldest substantial compositions preserved in the Hebrew Bible” and offers “valid historical data for a reconstruction of the initial phases of Israelite history” (Freedman 1975: 19), paradoxically no scholarly consensus exists at present as to the poem’s structure and meaning. Many of the best studies of Judges 5 are characterized by extensive emendation of the text, restoring a presumably corrupt text to read as the particular scholar would imagine a hymn of victory should read in classical Judean Hebrew. The translation of Cheyne (1904: 453–455), who was preoccupied with Jerahmeel, is given in the Appendix as an example of how a critic could take extreme liberties with the MT. Critical “restorations,” common in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, are summarized in the studies of Moore (1900a, 1900b) and Burney (1918). They were modified and improved upon by some of the twentieth century’s best scholars, including Albright (1922, 1936, 1968a, 1968b), Richter (1963, 1964), and Boling (1975).

Of the poem’s 1,485 letters in the MT (5:1–31a), Burney (1918: 160–165) deemed it necessary to delete 158 letters as secondary additions or scribal errors and emended an additional 33 letters (for a 12.9 percent rate of error). Albright’s first study (1922) resulted in his deleting 204 letters and emending 12 others (for a 14.5 percent rate of error). Richter (1963: 69–81; 1964: 400–402) isolated 202 letters as additions to the original poem and altered the reading of 10 other letters (for a 14.3 percent rate of error).

In addition to these changes, Burney added 17 consonants and 10 vowel letters, Albright added 12 consonants and 10 vowel letters, and Richter added 6 consonants. The total number of changes to the MT by additions, emendations, and deletions according to Burney, Albright, and Richter are 218 (14.7 percent), 238 (16.0 percent), and 218 letters (14.7 percent), respectively. These figures reflect a very high level of presumed errors, glosses, and editorial accretions and omissions for this poem. These revisions do not exhaust the corrections needed to make the poem fairly intelligible. Words and verses were also transposed. Richter transposed two verses and eleven words, Burney transposed one verse and four words, and Albright transposed four words.

Building on the contributions of Albright's earlier studies, Cross (1950) made significant methodological progress in the study of early Hebrew poetry. Although the Song of Deborah received only limited attention in his work on metrical structure, Cross's use of orthographic and linguistic analysis based upon epigraphic evidence introduced critical controls absent in earlier studies of Judges 5. Though dealing only with a reconstructed unvocalized text of the less problematic sections of the poem (5:2–3 and 17–30), Cross made numerous emendations, frequently for metrical reasons. He added 24 letters, deleted 34 and emended 3. In addition, he considered five tribal names and the יהודה ברכו repeated in 5:2 and 5:9 to be extra-metrical.

Other scholars had already produced alternative solutions to resolve the enigmata of the poem. I. W. Slotki (1932) advanced a theory of "repetition, antiphony and blanks." For him the difficulties of the meter and meaning were removed by the recognition of repetitive antiphonal responses which had been written only once. The repetitions were originally indicated in the text by blank spaces serving as the equivalent of our ditto marks. Sometime during the process of transmission, the blank spaces were removed and thus the clues for the responses were lost, resulting in confusion about the poem's meter and meaning.

Slotki reasoned that once the antiphonal responses are re-inserted into our apocopated version of the poem, the meter and sense can be satisfactorily restored. He did not deal with the entire poem, nor with its most difficult sections. However, in the eight verses which he developed (5:6, 21, 22–24, 27–30), 232 letters (making up 44 words of antiphonal responses) were presumed to have been lost. This method, like that of extensive emendation, won only limited acceptance because, as Barr (1968: 301) noted with reference to textual emendation, "the impression given was that the interpreter in many cases was rewriting the text rather than explaining what was written."

Gerleman (1951: 168–180) denied that difficulties existed in the text of Judges 5 and rejected the use of textual emendation. He asserted that the MT was not as corrupt as critics "eager to make brilliant conjectures" claimed. For him ". . . most of the textual emendations which have been made seem to fit ill the characteristic style of the Deborah Song" (168, 180). He defended the Masoretic tradition with his own brilliant conjecture that the poem belongs to a genre of early poetic impressionism which manifested neither the characteristics of logical reflection

and intelligibility, nor even syntactically disciplined logical form. “The impressionism of the Deborah Song is of a primitive unconscious type, a naive spontaneous art” (180). The song has a certain unity for Gerleman which “lies more in the emotional coloring than in the outline.” This impressionism reflects, in his opinion, the natural unconscious style of the original poet who, with an “atomizing technique” (177), “reproduces merely his [*sic*] own momentary impressions (173).¹ Therefore, argued Gerleman, the perspective of the poet was not fixed but movable, and consequently the poem lacks logical progression and reflection.

Unfortunately, Gerleman did not deal with the most enigmatic passages of the poem. His study treated only 5:2–6a, 7a, 11, 17b, 19a, 20, 22, 24, 28, 30. The weakness in his thesis is that, since most scholars find much in the poem to be incomprehensible, the impressionistic creativity may reflect no more than the talent of the exasperated translator, rather than the style of the original poet. The absence of other early “impressionistic” poetry in the Hebrew literary corpus cautions one against calling *illogical* in the original wording what scholars currently find *incomprehensible* in their current texts. It can only be said that impressionistic translations have been created from the enigmata in the Song of Deborah. Until these cruxes are resolved, it will be impossible to determine whether the impressionism comes from the poet or from the poet’s translators.

Gerleman’s denial of any real literary unity in the poem has been reinforced by Blenkinsopp (1961: 65), who stated

The unity of the poem is theological rather than literary, and we can be certain in any case that whoever gave the Book of Judges its final form as we have it was less concerned with producing an integrated work of art than with preserving what was of value in the traditions of the past for the purpose of edification, and that just as the victory song of Moses and Miriam underwent transformation into what can be called a liturgical canticle, so it is not unlikely, a priori, that something of the same took place here.

Blenkinsopp (1961: 67–76) isolated verses 5:2–5 and 31a as psalmic elements which were added to an original war ballad to

¹ Compare Ackroyd 1952: 160–162, who argued that elements of the poem, like the curse on Meroz, may be “quotations” from older traditions utilized by the poet who composed the poem about a hundred years after the event.

produce a liturgical piece celebrating “the great liberating act of God both in society and in the individual soul.” Removal of these psalmic elements “leaves us with a clear-cut ballad [*sic*] in five moments or ‘fits’ interlaced with short lyric, choral elements.” But, according to Blenkinsopp, even if the poem does not demonstrate a literary unity or appear to be an integrated work of art, it “is not a hotch-potch or a witch’s brew of ill-assorted literary herbs” (76). Blenkinsopp’s adoption of Slotki’s reconstruction of 5:27 and his identifying 5:15b–16 as a “perfect little taunt-song” that had had an independent existence outside the Song of Deborah reflect his eclectic approach. His most significant contribution may well be his insistence that much of the poem is a war ballad. His identifying several passages as psalmic elements, in conformity with exegetical tradition, precluded his identifying the entire work as such.

Lindars (1995: 212–213) supported the “emotional unity” of Gerleman and the “thematic unity” of Blenkinsopp, asserting

The poem is not merely descriptive, but conveys the emotions of the participants Thus the hearers of the poem are left sharing the experience of those who were actually involved, and can feel that this is their own victory. All this can be felt by the modern reader without the aid of critical analysis. Moreover, the progress of the poem is logical in relation to its subject matter, and there is no *prima facie* reason for drastic rearrangements.

A theological and cultic unity for Judges 5 was proposed by Weiser (1959: 67–97). His suggestion differs from the “emotional unity” proffered by Gerleman and the “thematic unity” of Blenkinsopp in that Weiser predicated a uniform composition for the poem derived from diverse literary elements, including (a) verses 2–18, which form Deborah’s recitation of the war and the victory and the tribes’ participation (or non-participation) in the cultic festival of covenant renewal, and (b) verses 19–30, which, in a cultic celebration of Yahweh’s recent victory, deal with the conflict between Barak and Sisera.

Weiser’s views have gained limited acceptance, most recently in the study of J. Gray (1988: 421–455). But Mayes (1969: 356), in a convincing critique of Weiser’s conclusions, noted, “This cultic view provides a rather ‘blanket explanation’ of the Song

which is partly acceptable only for the final stage of its history.”² Mayes doubted that the original poem was a unified composition. He preferred to follow H.-P. Müller (1966), who analyzed Judges 5 as a composite of an original poetic narrative of the battle (5:12–31) coupled to a later psalmic introduction (5:2–11). Through a process of double Yahwistic editing, the poem’s elements have been transformed into the present hymn of praise.³

Lindars (1995: 218, 222–223) isolated 5:1 as an editorial introduction and identified 5:2–5 as “an assortment of introductory material, appropriate to liturgical celebration of the event, but without internal unity.” Of the remaining verses, Lindars noted that 5:6–8 “may have been the original opening stanza” and verses 9–11 “may well be a liturgical addition, inviting celebration of the victory at cultic occasions” (234, 241). Verse 31, not surprisingly, was also identified by Lindars as a liturgical addition.

Objections have been raised by Globe (1974b) both to the cultic interpretation of Weiser and to the views of Müller and Mayes which deny the literary unity of Judges 5. Although Globe admitted that this poem “could be a synthesis of ancient poems composed at different times” (like Genesis 49), he argued for its literary unity. On the basis of the poem’s content, form, and context, Globe found no reason why the poem cannot be viewed as an integrated literary unit. He asserted (1974b: 508, 511–512)

In the final analysis, the stylistic coherence of Judges 5 gives the impression of a single poetic intelligence mustering all the craft at its disposal, always varying the technique, but often returning to devices used earlier . . . the poem has a carefully composed structure employing a significant number of recurring literary forms . . . There is every reason to believe that the poem was composed, much as it has survived, shortly after the battle it commemorates.

But Globe was able only to predicate, not demonstrate, the unity of the entire poem. In two studies (1974a, 1975), he attempted to demonstrate the unity of 5:4–5 and 5:13–18. What he

² Note also Mayes 1974: 85–92.

³ Compare Soggin (1981a: 625–639 and 1981c: 94) who identified two strata in the poem: (1) a heroic poem from the early monarchy (5:2–5, 9–11, 13, 23 [“as an unclear insertion”], and 31a); and (2) a later pre-Josianic theological revision (5:6–8, 14–22, 24–30).

succeeded in demonstrating was the fact that individual strophes of the poem, as they appear in the MT, have characteristics typical of early Hebrew poetry, whatever the enigmatic Hebrew may mean. Recognition of structural balance within several strophes and the calling of attention to aural coherence, normative parallelism, and details like assonance and puns cannot demonstrate unity of the contents per se. Such unity may only reflect a common style found in disparate poetic fragments collected by an editor or redactor. Nevertheless, I concur with Globe's assertion (1975: 178) that "poetry of this order is rarely the product of textual corruption. Nor does the passage look like later editorial activity."

Hauser (1980: 25) concurred with Globe's arguments for the unity of the poem and rejected Blenkinsopp's proposals to divide the poem into a secular ballad and a later liturgical psalmic reworking of the ballad. His study focused on only half of the verses of the poem (the less problematic verses: 3–5, 11, 19–22, 24–30) and led him to conclude that "parataxis is best suited as a key to understanding the poet's style." He defined parataxis as the "placing side by side of words, images, clauses, or scenes without connectives that directly and immediately coordinate the parts with one another," noting that parataxis presents an incomplete picture, elements of which "at first glance do not appear to correlate well with one another." Since parataxis "tends toward disjointedness," Hauser concluded, "Judges 5 employs a variety of rhythmic techniques without presenting a consistent metrical structure." Hauser's "paratactic key," was endorsed by Gottwald (1985: 252–254) and certainly provides a means for making some sense out of the Song of Deborah as it now stands in the MT, the versions, and the varied modern translations. However, it has the same limitations as Gerleman's "poetic impressionism." Paratactic translations have emerged from the enigmata in the song, but until these enigmata are resolved it remains uncertain whether the parataxis comes from the poet or from the poet's translators or from both.

Contrary to the views of Gerleman, Mayes, Müller, and others, and in support of the arguments of Globe, my study demonstrates that the Song of Deborah is a brilliantly logical and stylistically uniform epic fragment, employing a much richer repertoire of lexical, syntactic, and grammatical elements than has been realized. While there may be some parataxis employed by the poet, there is much more syntax in the poem than has been

recognized in the past. What Globe was able to achieve for only several strophes can, in my opinion, be established for the whole poem.

Current philological studies, even with their failures and excesses, provide many clues for resolving the enigmata of early Hebrew poetry.⁴ Such studies are forcing Hebraists to recognize that ancient poets had a larger vocabulary and more syntactical options than were formerly recognized. One can concur with Hauser (1980: 28), “Rather than trying to emend the obscure sections [of Ju 5], it seems best to assume that they point more to our lack of knowledge of ancient Hebrew vocabulary than to problems of textual corruption.” As the long-standing cruxes of Judges 5 are resolved, the unity of the poem becomes more transparent.

Just as the various strophes of the poem cannot be treated in isolation from one another, Judges 5 cannot be treated in isolation from the prose story in Judges 4, which is surely the oldest “commentary” or *midrash* on the Song of Deborah.⁵ The priority of Judges 5 has been reasserted by Halpern (1988: 95) who noted, “Virtually every element of the prose account stems directly, or by a dialectical process, indirectly, from SDeb Every facet of the prose account can be derived from a reading of SDeb.” However, Judges 4 has its own problems, including what Yadin (1975: 250) has rightly called “one of the most irksome questions of biblical research,” namely, the difference in the accounts of the destruction of Hazor and the death of Jabin in Judges 4 and Joshua 11.

Archaeological studies have supported the integrity of the account of Joshua 11, leading Yadin (1975: 255) to conclude, “The narrative in the Book of Joshua is, therefore, the true historical

⁴ For bibliographic material, see Blommerde (1969); Dahood and Penar (1970); Robertson (1972); and Bal (1988a).

⁵ Amit’s study (1987: 89–111) provides a good introduction to and bibliography of issues surrounding Judges 4. Note Kaufmann’s conclusion (1962: 114), “But this opinion [that the poetry was the basis of the prose] is also not correct. We cannot see why the author of the prose reduced the number of the fighting tribes from 6 to 2. We cannot also understand how he knew all the details which are not mentioned in the song. There is no doubt that the prose and the poetry are *two independent forms* [italics mine] of the tradition about the war with Sisera.” (I thank Gilad Gevanyahu for this quotation from Kaufmann.)

nucleus, while the mention of Jabin in Judges 4 must have been a later editorial interpolation.” The present study supports the argument of Yadin for the historical value of Joshua 11, but it also offers an alternative solution to the problems related to Judges 4.

In Chapter One, the integrity of the consonantal Masoretic text is defended, followed in Chapter Two by an analysis of the literary units which make up Judges 4 and 5. In Chapter Three, it is argued that Shamgar was an *Israelite* overseer, and that Judges 3:31, which also mentions him, was originally a part of the poem of Judges 5. In Chapter Four, Deborah is identified as the (Hittite) “Mother in Israel” (alluded to in Ezekiel 16) whose name also survives in a name list of Ramesses III, providing a chronological reference point for the Israelite battle against Sisera. Chapter Five contains my reconstruction and translation of the Song of Deborah (with metrical and syllabic patterns outlined), and this is followed by a philological commentary in Chapter Six. In Chapter Seven, as part of the closing summary, the question of authorship of the poem is addressed, and a case is made for Yael or another Kenite being the author, even though tradition has credited Deborah and some scholars have argued for a composite poem of anonymous fragments.

An analysis of the meter (both accentual and syllabic) of this poem in comparison with Ugaritic poetry or with other biblical poetry will require a separate study. Only brief descriptive statements, following the “traditional school” of Ley (1875), Budde (1882), and Sievers (1901–1907), have been included in Chapter Six. The accentuation and vocalization of the MT, with its recognized limitations, has been utilized (with vocal *šewā* counting as a full vowel).

Quotations from the Septuagint have been accented according to the critical editions of Brook and McLean (1917) and Rahlfs (1935). No effort has been made to add accents and breathing marks to the variants cited from these works.

The Appendix includes eleven English translations of the Song of Deborah (nine of which are frequently referred to but are not as available as the RSV, NEB, NAB, and the like). A *targum* in Modern Hebrew of my English translation found in Chapter Five provides an abstract in Israeli Hebrew of my conclusions, as well as a text by which to compare the changes in Hebrew over the three millennia.

CHAPTER ONE

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 ם 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 סרפָה, in which case the feminine מלחמה could have been read as the subject of the feminine verb סרפָה = שרפה (although G. A. Smith [1912: 62] suggested that the LXX translated סרף, not סרפה).

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 ספר מלחמות יהוה.

⁷ Christensen followed Dahood in identifying MT וַהֲב “benefactor” as a participle of וַהֲב = יַהֲב. Compare Weippert 1979: 17, who deleted seven vowel letters, three conjunctive ך’s, two ה’s, emended three letters (including reading יַהֲב 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
 וְאַתָּה נָחֲלִים אֶרְנוֹן
 וְאַשְׁדָּה נָחֲלִים
 אֲשֶׁר נָטָה לְשַׁבַּת עַר
 וְנָשַׁעַן לְגְבוּל 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 וָהֵב with אָתָּה "to come," but he is incorrect in deleting the ה of הַנְחָלִים. The words have been misdivided. The ה goes with the preceding אָתָּה as the vowel letter *ô* (see Cross and Freedman 1952: 57). This אָתָּה is the infinitive absolute having the force of a finite verb (see GKC 75 and 113, McDaniel 1968b: 208–210).

⁹ Christensen emended MT וָאֲשַׁד to read אֲשַׁר "he marched through." But the emendation is unnecessary. The noun שׁוּר "torrent" may also occur in Isa 13:6, כִּשְׂדַּי מִשְׁדֵּי 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 שׁוּר/שָׁדָה, see note 268.

¹⁰ Christensen is correct in reading MT אֲשַׁר as the verb "to march forth." But his tentative proposal to delete the word is unnecessary since the verb אֲשַׁר need not be emended to אֲשַׁר, nor does the text have a redundant use of אֲשַׁר "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, נָטַט, נָטָה, like stems נָךְ and נָךְ (GKC^a 77, Dahood, 1968: 368). Here the *hiph'il* לְשַׁבַּת "to destroy" reflects the elision of the ה after the preposition (GKC 53^a), like the לְשַׁבִּית 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 שׁוּע, a cognate of Arabic سَوَّع "to enter easily" (Lane 1872: 1468b, 1469a, especially noticing the quotation *سغ في الارض ما وجدت مساعا* "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	בעמוך	“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 וּתְשַׁר was identified with שִׁיר “to sing,” instead of אָשַׁר or שׁוּר “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 שׁוּר. In 5:17, the שְׁכֹן׳ is corrected to שְׁכִין׳ “he attacked,” an energetic *shaph^eel* of נָכַח. In 5:22, MT עֲקֵבֵי “the heels of” is read as עֲקֵבוֹ, 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 לְעֹזְרֵת בָּא׳ “the ones going forth for the Warrior.”

D. Other emendations

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

v 10	מְדִין	“rich carpets” (NRSV) is emended to
	כְּדִין	“mule(s),”
v 12	שְׁבִיךְ	“your captives” becomes
	שְׁבִים	“captives,”
v 27	בְּאֶשֶׁר כָּרַע	“where he kneeled” is redivided to
	בְּאֶשׁ הַכָּרַע	“motionless, was made powerless” or to
	בְּאֶשׁ 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 מִקוֹל מַחְצְצִים “the sound of musicians” becomes
 מִקְלִים חֲצִצִים “(on) mountain passes, hurrying”;
- v 11 לְשַׁעֲרֵם עִם “to the gates, the people” becomes
 לְשַׁעֲרֵי 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 גְּדֻלִּים “great ones” becomes
 גַּד לֵים “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	וּתְשִׁיר	= וּתְשִׁיר or וּתְשִׁר or וּתְאֲשִׁיר “she caused to march forth,” from either שִׁיר or אֲשִׁר,
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 רַבָּנֵן בְּאֵי 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 שׁ, “caravan leader,”
v 13	יָרַד	3ms with עַם יְהוָה as the subject, “Yahweh’s militia descended,”
v 15	וְשָׂרֵי	“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 שָׁבַב “he scattered, he assailed,”
v 28	וְתִיב	<i>taqtil</i> nominal form of יָבַב “a vacant place,”
v 29	אֹמְרֵיהָ	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):

ἐξεγείρου ἐξεγείρου Δεββωρα
ἐξεγείρου (or ἐξέγειρον) μυριάδας μετὰ λαοῦ
*ἐξεγείρου ἐξεγείρου (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 ἐξανίστασο 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' ὀδῆς “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 dgknpv
ομλιαι	(המל׳)	transliteration in l
αυτους	(למו)	“them” in dgklnptvw
5:22		
ομαλιει	(המל׳)	transliteration in Mnamyb ₂ ó
ενεποδισθησαν	(הלמו)	“they were foot-cuffed” in B
απεκοπησαν	(המלו)	“they were cut off” in Abcglx
ευθυνοντα	(הולם)	“steersman, driver” in dglnpv
εκστασεως	(הולם)	“a movement outwards” in Mnamyb ₂ dgklnptvw
αβλεψια	(העלם)	“blindness” (metaphor) in w
αυτου	(למו)	“of him” in dglptvw
αυτους	(למו)	“them” in Mnamyb 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 *ενευροκοπηθησαν* “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, *ενευροκοπηθησαν* 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.