

A FRESH LOOK AT DEUT 34,6 (MASDEUT)

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1965, during the second excavation season at Masada, some fragments of the book of Deuteronomy (catalogued as MasDeut or 1043/a-d) have been discovered by Yigael Yadin and his team in the so-called *genizah* of the Masada synagogue ¹. Nevertheless, one had to wait until 1998 for the preliminary publication of these Deuteronomy fragments by Shemaryahu Talmon ². One year later, Talmon published the text in the 6th volume of the comprehensive edition of the Masada excavations ³.

MasDeut is a collection of four fragments of parchment, labelled as a, b, c, and d. They are the remains of two columns of a *de luxe* scroll that contained the three final chapters (32–34) of the book of Deuteronomy ⁴. Fragment a, being the largest one, contains on seven lines remains of two columns. In the first column, (parts of) four letters from Deut 32,46–47 are readable, whereas the second column contains remains of Deut 33,17–21. Fragment b has a large blank stretch of parchment, which probably served as

¹ With regard to the identification of locus 1043 as a synagogue and the burial pits as a *genizah*, see Y. YADIN, “The Excavation of Masada – 1963/64. Preliminary Report”, *IEJ* 15 (1965) 1–120, here 76–79. See also Y. YADIN, *Masada. Herod’s Fortress and the Zealot’s Last Stand* (London 1966) 184–189; Y. YADIN, “The Synagogue at Masada”, *Ancient Synagogues Revealed* (ed. L.I. LEVINE) (Jerusalem 1981) 19–23, here 22. See also E. TOV, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert* (STDJ 54; Atlanta, GA 2009) 123; 318. M. POPOVIĆ, “Qumran as Scroll Storehouse in Times of Crisis? A Comparative Perspective on Judaean Desert Manuscript Collections”, *JSJ* 43 (2012) 551–594, here 584 has questioned the fragment’s hiding place as a *genizah*.

Yadin did not mention the fragments of Deuteronomy in the first excavation report. See Yadin, “The Excavation of Masada”, 79–82; 103–105. He referred to them for the first time in the published version of his ‘Qumran and Masada’ conference: Y. YADIN, “*Qwmr’n wmsdh – ntwynm ’rky’wlgym lqby’t zmn hmgylwt (mtwk hrs’h bkynws hk’’b lydy’t h’rs)* [Hebrew]”, *BIES* 30 (1966) 117–127, here 126. Many years later, Yadin very briefly referred to the Deuteronomy fragments in Y. YADIN, “Masada”, *Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* 3 (1977) 793–816, here 810.

² S. TALMON, “Fragments of a Deuteronomy Scroll from Masada: Deuteronomy 33.17–34.6 (1043/A-D)”, *Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World. A Tribute to Cyrus H. Gordon* (ed. M. LUBETSKI – C. GOTTLIEB – S. KELLER) (JSOTSup 273; Sheffield 1998) 150–161. Nevertheless, in the critical apparatus of the edition of 4QDeut¹ within the 1995 DJD volume, Julie Duncan already referred to MasDeut: J.A. Duncan, “4QDeut¹”, *Qumran Cave 4. IX. Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Kings* (ed. E. ULRICH, *et al.*) (DJD 14; Oxford 1995) 109–112, here 112.

³ S. TALMON *et al.* “Hebrew Fragments from Masada”, *Masada VI: Yigael Yadin Excavations 1963–1965. Final Reports* (ed. S. TALMON *et al.*) (Jerusalem 1999) 1–58, here 51–58.

⁴ For a detailed description of the fragments, see TALMON, “Fragments of a Deuteronomy Scroll”, 152–157. As to the characterisation of MasDeut as a *de luxe* scroll, see TOV, *Scribal Practices*, 126.

a handle sheet and a protective wrapper of the scroll. Moreover, it contains on seven lines fragments of the text of Deut 33,18-24. Fragments a and b can be conjoined. Similarly, fragments c and d, both being parts of the second column, can be aligned. Fragment c reads fragments of Deut 34,4-6 on five lines, whereas fragment d has remains of Deut 34,2-5 on six lines.

II. THE TEXT OF MASDEUT

In his edition, Talmon is rather unequivocal as to the text of MasDeut. On several instances, he accentuates that the Hebrew text of Deut 33,17 – 34,6* according to MasDeut is identical to the Masoretic Text (MT) ⁵. Moreover, he emphasises that the textual agreement between MasDeut and MT is strengthened by the agreement with regard to the Masoretic section system. In MasDeut (fragment a, line 4), the word חול, which concludes the blessing of Issachar (Deut 33,19), is followed by a blank. According to Talmon, this concurs with the ‘closed section’ (פרשה סתומה) system in MT (both in the Leningrad [L] and in the Aleppo [A] codex) ⁶. Thus, on the basis of this single occurrence of a *parashah* in the extant text of MasDeut, Talmon concludes “that MasDeut probably contained the MT sections throughout” ⁷.

Notwithstanding his firm accentuation of the textual identity of MasDeut and MT (as witnessed in L and A), Talmon has to mention a “sole slight divergence” between the text of MasDeut and MT ⁸. In Deut 33,19 (fragment b), MasDeut has a defective reading (שפני), contrary to the *plene* reading in MT (שפוני) ⁹. Apparently, in this instance, Talmon was only looking

⁵ TALMON, “Fragments of a Deuteronomy Scroll”, 152 (“The extant text is identical with MT”); 156 (“The preserved text of MasDeut is identical with MT”); 157 (“The textual identity of MasDeut with MT”). See equally TALMON, “Hebrew Fragments from Masada”, 55 (“The preserved text of MasDeut is identical to MT” and “the overall textual agreement of MasDeut with MT”); 56: “The textual similarity to MT”.

⁶ On the difference between ‘open’ and ‘closed’ sections in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see E. TOV, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. Third Edition. Revised and Expanded (Minneapolis 2012) 48-49; 198-201; TOV, *Scribal Practices*, 143-163.

⁷ TALMON, “Fragments of a Deuteronomy Scroll”, 157; see equally TALMON, “Hebrew Fragments from Masada”, 55.

⁸ TALMON, “Fragments of a Deuteronomy Scroll”, 156. For MT, see D.N. FREEDMAN, *The Leningrad Codex*. A Facsimile Edition (Grand Rapids, MI – Leiden 1998) 250 – See C. MCCARTHY, *’lh hdbrym – Deuteronomy* (BHQ 5; Stuttgart 2007) 102.

⁹ MCCARTHY, *Deuteronomy*, 102 mentions MasDeut and 4QDeut^h as reflecting the reading of B19^a, thus neglecting that both manuscripts have a defective reading for שפני. In accordance with MT, the Samaritan Pentateuch (SamP) also has a *plene* reading: A. VON GALL, *Der hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner*. Fünfter Teil: Deuteronomium (Giessen 1918) 436; A. TAL, *The Samaritan Pentateuch Edited According to MS 6 (C) of the Shekhem Synagogue* (Tel Aviv 1994) 210.

at codex L. Codex A, on the contrary, has a defective reading (וּשְׁפָנִי) as well¹⁰.

Moreover, also with regard to the section system, Talmon has to nuance his presupposition that MasDeut contained MT section divisions throughout. In his reconstruction of the last line of fragments a and b, he admits that there is not enough space left to insert a ‘closed section’ before the blessing of Asher (Deut 33,24), as it is the case in MT (both in codex L and A).

Nevertheless, despite these exceptions – both the defective reading of שְׁפָנִי in Deut 33,19, and the absence of the ‘closed section’ in the same verse –, Talmon argues that the extant text of MasDeut – as well as the text of the other biblical scrolls found at Masada¹¹ – “is identical with MT”¹²:

“The Masada biblical fragments exhibit uniformly the text of some books of the Hebrew Bible in the Masoretic tradition (MT), with only a few ‘true’ variant readings and a larger number of minor differences, pertaining mostly to plene and defective spelling. (...) This identity contrasts sharply with the abundance of textual variants in biblical scrolls and fragments from the Qumran caves”¹³.

Talmon’s view has been shared by several scholars, and has become the prevailing view. Emanuel Tov accentuates that “all the texts found in the Judean Desert, except for the ones found at Qumran, reflect $\mathfrak{M}$ ”¹⁴. David

¹⁰ See <http://www.aleppocodex.org/> (access 18 June 2020). B. ZIEMER, “A Stemma for Deuteronomy”, in *The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. M. LANGOIS) (CBET 94; Leuven – Paris – Boston 2019) 127-197, here 190 even argues that “it cannot be excluded that this manuscript [MasDeut – H.A.] has itself been a parent text for a parent text of the Aleppo Codex”.

¹¹ Next to MasDeut, fragments of four other biblical books have been found at Masada. A fragment of the book of Ezekiel (MasEzek) has been discovered in the ‘genizah’ of the ‘synagogue’ as well, whereas fragments of the books of Genesis (MasGen), which probably is rather a fragment of the book of Jubilees – see I. YOUNG, “The Stabilization of the Biblical Text in the Light of Qumran and Masada. A Challenge for Conventional Qumran Chronology?”, *DSD* 9 (2002) 364-390, here 371 –, Leviticus (MasLev^a and MasLev^b), and Psalms (MasPs^a and MasPs^b) have been found in the so-called ‘Casemate of the Scrolls’ (locus 1039).

¹² TALMON, “Fragments of a Deuteronomy Scroll”, 152; 156.

¹³ TALMON, “Hebrew Fragments from Masada”, 25.

¹⁴ E. TOV, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. Second Revised Edition (Minneapolis – Assen 2001) 191. See equally TOV, *Textual Criticism. Third Edition*, 179. However, Tov also has nuanced this view, in accentuating the fact that ‘the’ MT actually is an illusion: “The fact that all the texts left by the Zealots at Masada (dating until 73 CE) reflect $\mathfrak{M}$ is also important. But there is a snag in this description. While on the one hand it was claimed (...) that those involved in the transmission of $\mathfrak{M}$ did not insert any change in $\mathfrak{M}$ and as a result its inconsistency in spelling as well as its mistakes have been preserved for posterity, on the other hand, there never existed one single text that could be named *the* Masoretic Text. In fact at a certain stage there was a *group* of Masoretic texts (...)” (Tov, *Textual Criticism. Second Edition*, 28).

Seely notes that the texts found at Masada are “virtually identical” to MT¹⁵. Benjamin Ziemer characterises MasDeut as “one of the outstanding proto-masoretic manuscripts”¹⁶. Also Lawrence Schiffman accentuates that, “the general character of these texts is almost identical to the Masoretic text”¹⁷. Ian Young goes in the same direction, when he states that, contrary to the Qumran biblical scrolls representing a wide textual variety, “the Masada texts present a corpus of biblical texts made up entirely of text with a clear and close relationship with the MT”¹⁸. As such, “the finds from Masada (...) only attest proto-Masoretic texts”¹⁹. Hence, Young speaks in terms of an “exclusive relationship of the Masada (and later) texts to the MT”²⁰. Nevertheless, although not questioning Talmon’s general assumption that the Masada biblical scrolls represent the proto-MT, Young also seems to nuance the presumed differences between MT-related Masada biblical manuscripts on the one hand and the Qumran biblical scrolls’ pluriformity on the other one: “The question arises whether the Masada texts really do represent a corpus significantly different in nature from the Qumran texts, or whether their apparent dissimilarity is based more on chance”²¹. A close and renewed look at MasDeut, which will be offered in the next paragraph, will make clear that this doubt is more than justified, at least with regard to MasDeut.

III. A RENEWED LOOK AT MASDEUT

In Deut 34,5-6(MT), Moses’ death and burial are narrated. At the end of Deut 34,5, it is said that “Moses died in the land of Moab, according to the word of YHWH” (וימת שם משה [...] על פי יהוה). The next verse (MT) continues with the words ויקבר אותו (“he buried him”). The question here arises who should be considered as the subject of this verbal form ויקבר (vocalised as ויקָבֵר). Within the entire pericope of Deut 34,1-8, three subjects are mentioned: Moses, YHWH, and the Israelites. It is Moses who went up (יעל)

¹⁵ D.R. SEELY, “Masada and the World of the New Testament”, *Brigham Young University Studies* 36 (1996/97) 287-301, here 291.

¹⁶ ZIEMER, “A Stemma for Deuteronomy”, 190.

¹⁷ L.H. SCHIFFMAN, “Masada and its Scrolls”, *The Jerusalem Post* (December 10, 2019). (<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/masada-and-its-scrolls-610486> – cited 18 June 2020). See also L.H. SCHIFFMAN, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*. The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran (Philadelphia, PA 1994) 172. See also H.M. PATMORE, “Masada, Texts from”, in *T&T Clark Encyclopedia of Second Temple Judaism*. Volume II (ed. D.M. GURTNER – L.T. STUCKENBRUCK) (Edinburgh 2019) 469-472, here 469: “The texts the manuscripts [of Masada] contain is essentially identical with the Masoretic Text tradition.”

¹⁸ YOUNG, “The Stabilization of the Biblical Text”, 370.

¹⁹ YOUNG, “The Stabilization of the Biblical Text”, 364.

²⁰ YOUNG, “The Stabilization of the Biblical Text”, 366.

²¹ YOUNG, “The Stabilization of the Biblical Text”, 372.

משה – v. 1) Mount Nebo, and dies (וימת שם משה – v. 5) in the land of Moab when he was 120 years old (ומשה בן מאה ועשרים שנה במתו – v. 7). It was YHWH who showed Moses the promised land (ויראהו יהוה – v. 1) and spoke to him (ויאמר יהוה – v. 4). Finally, the Israelites are mentioned as weeping for Moses (ויבכו בני ישראל – v. 8).

Within the history of interpretation, all three – Moses, YHWH, and the Israelites – have been considered as being the subject of the verb ויקבר in Deut 34,6 (MT). For each of these options, arguments have been given, albeit that these arguments are either problematic from a grammatical and/or theological perspective, either far-fetched, or not convincing²².

As it is often the case, also the ancient textual witnesses seem to struggle with the problematic character of Deut 34,6. Indeed, the text of MT, reading a singular form (ויקבר), and thus at least suggesting that YHWH buried Moses, is not shared by all textual witnesses. 4QDeut¹ – the only preserved Qumran fragment of Deut 34,6 – reads the plural form ויקברו (“and they buried”)²³. From the perspective of the content, it is not clear who is to be understood by this impersonal 3rd person plural “they”, in particular when challenged by the fact that the continuation of Deut 34,6 explicitly states that “no one knows his burial place to this day” (ולא ידע איש את קברתו עד היום הזה). 4QDeut¹ stands not alone with this reading. Although August von Gall in his eclectic edition of SamP follows the reading of MT (ויקבר)²⁴, his critical apparatus makes clear

²² For a detailed overview of the history of interpretation, see C. HOUTMAN, “De dood van Moses, de knecht des Heren. Notities over en naar aanleiding van Deuteronomium 34:1-8”, *De Knecht*. Studies rondom Deutero-Jesaja door collega’s en oud-leerlingen aangeboden aan Prof. Dr. J.L. Koole (Kampen 1978) 72-82, here 72-77. Besides the view that it has been YHWH who buried Moses, one has argued that Moses buried himself, or has been buried by some Israelites or by one or more angels.

Although theoretically possible, a vocalisation deviating from MT does not solve the problem. In this respect, one could vocalise the proto-MT ויקבר אתו as ויקברו אתו (3rd person singular *Nifal* – “and he was buried”) instead as ויקברו אתו (3rd person singular *Qal* – “and he [YHWH?] buried him”). However, when vocalising the verbal form as such, the object אתו will be very problematic. Moreover, the question as to who precisely has buried Moses remains upright. According to B. KENNICOTT, *Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum, cum variis lectionibus*. Tomus Primus (Oxford 1776) 442, some manuscripts read ויקבור instead of ויקבר.

²³ See K. FINSTERBUSCH, “Identität in der Differenz. Anmerkungen zur Textüberlieferung der Deuteronomium-Handschriften vom Toten Meer”, *Juda und Jerusalem in der Seleukidenzeit*. Herrschaft – Widerstand – Identität. Festschrift für Heinz-Josef Fabry (eds. U. DAHMEN – J. SCHNOCKS) (BBB 159; Göttingen 2010) 339-362, here 359-360 with regard to 4QDeut¹: “Der Gedanke drängt sich auf, dass die Vorstellung des Mose begrabenden Gottes zu ‘anthropomorph’ erschien und der Text entsprechend geändert wurde (...) So war ein Schreiber in Dtn 34,6 wohl so frei, gegen seine Vorlage zu entscheiden, das *nicht* Gott selbst Mose beerdigte”. The plural form can be compared to Josh 24,29-30: “Joshua died (...) and they buried him (ויקברו אתו)” See also Josh 24,33: “Eleazar died (...) and they buried him (ויקברו אתו)”

²⁴ See also TAL, *The Samaritan Pentateuch*, 211.

that several manuscripts of SamP – all dating, however, from the 15th and 16th centuries – also read the plural form ויקברו²⁵. With the exception of one single manuscript, all preserved Septuagint (LXX) manuscripts as well read a plural form (καὶ ἔθαψαν αὐτόν)²⁶. Finally, Targum Neofiti and the Fragmentary Targum also read a plural form²⁷.

In line with Talmon's transcription of MasDeut, all critical editions of the manuscripts that make reference to the Deuteronomy scroll of Masada mention MasDeut as a textual witness that supports the reading of MT. Thus, for example, the critical apparatus of the DJD-edition of 4QDeut¹ proposes²⁸:

²⁵ VON GALL, *Der hebräische Pentateuch*, 437.

²⁶ See J.W. WEVERS, *Deuteronomium*, Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum III/2 (Göttingen 2006) 374. Only minuscule 500 (11-12th century) reads the singular ἔθαψεν. The plural form in LXX has often been interpreted as evidencing the antianthropomorphic tendency of the LXX translator of the book of Deuteronomy. See J.W. WEVERS, *Notes on the Greek Text of Deuteronomy*, (SBLSCS 39; Atlanta, GA 1995) 559: "According to MT it was Yahweh who buried Moses. That this was the original account is clear from the next clause: 'no one knew his grave.' This was too much for LXX, so it used a plural verb ἔθαψαν so as to avoid the direct statement that the Lord buried him by using an indefinite plural". Further C. DEN HERTOG – M. LABAHN – T. POLA, "Deuteronomion / Deuteronomium", *Septuaginta Deutsch*. Erläuterungen und Kommentare zum griechischen Alten Testament. Band 1: Genesis bis Makkabäer (eds. M. KARRER – W. KRAUS) (Stuttgart 2011) 523-601, here 601: "... die LXX wollte den Anthropomorphismus vermeiden und Gott nicht mit der Berührung eines Toten belasten". See also C.T. FRITSCH, *The Anti-Anthropomorphisms of the Greek Pentateuch* (Princeton 1943) 53: "The LXX, by making the verb plural, avoids all doubt as to whether the form was impersonal or had Jehovah as subject". According to E. OTTO, *Deuteronomium 23,16–34,12*, (HTKAT; Freiburg im Breisgau 2017) 226, the plural form already was present in the Vorlage of the LXX translator: "(...) ist in diesem Falle (...) mit einer theologischen Korrektur des Motivs, JHWH sei Totengräber, nicht nur der Übersetzer, sondern schon der hebräischen Vorlage der LXX, wofür die Qumran-Handschrift spricht, zu rechnen". As to the (anti)anthropomorphic tendency of the LXX version of Deuteronomy, see H. AUSLOOS, "You Saw no Form When YHWH Spoke to You at Horeb" (Deut 4,15). Antianthropomorphisms in the Greek Deuteronomy", *Toward a Theology of the Septuagint* – Stellenbosch Congress on the Septuagint, 2018 (eds J. COOK – M. RÖSEL) (SBLSCS 74; Atlanta, GA 2020) 163-177 and H. AUSLOOS, "Human Activities Attributed to God in Deuteronomy MT and LXX", *Tempel, Lehrhaus, Synagoge*. Orte jüdischen Lernens und Lebens – Festschrift für Wolfgang Kraus (eds. C. EBERHART – M. KARRER – S. KREUZER – M. MEISER) (Paderborn – Leiden 2020) 181-192, here 187.

²⁷ Targum Onqelos, as well as the Peshitta and the Vulgate read a singular form. On Deut. 34,6 in the Targum, see W.F. SMELIK, "The Lost Tomb of Moses Revisited: Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Deut. 34.5-6", *The Targums in the Light of Traditions of the Second Temple Period* (eds. T. LEGRAND – J. JOOSTEN) (JSJSup 167; Leiden – Boston 2014) 141-172, here 145.

²⁸ DUNCAN, "4QDeut¹", 112. Idem E. ULRICH, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls*. Transcriptions and Textual Variants (VTSup 134; Leiden – Boston 2010) 246. See also FINSTERBUSCH, "Identität", 359: "In v. 6 ist in Mas1c das erste Verb im Singular überliefert (ויקבר, »und er hat begraben«). In 4Q39 [= 4QDeut¹] hingegen ist erkennbar, dass dieses Verb

34:6 (3) ויִקְבְּרוּ [מִסֵּס^{ms} ט^{NF}] MasDeut מִסֵּס ט^O ט^B.

A similar text-critical apparatus can be found in the BHQ edition of Deuteronomy²⁹:

6 ויִקְבְּרוּ Smr MasDeut V S T^{OJ} | 3 pl 4QDeut^I G T^{NF} (exeg)³⁰.

Although, in general, Talmon's transcription of MasDeut is accurate³¹, with regard to the first word of Deut 34,6, his transcription does not do justice to the manuscript. This is all the more important because it concerns a very crucial word within the final verses of the book of Deuteronomy, both from the perspective of its interpretation as from a text-critical point of view, and even more because of the fact that 4QDeut^I and LXX have a variant reading in comparison to MT.

Talmon's transcription of the remaining words of Deut 34,5-6 (fragments c and d – lines 6-8) is as follows³²:

וְשָׁמַח [ה] לֹא תַעֲבֹד וַיִּמָּת שֵׁם	6
יְהוָה וַיִּקְבְּרוּ	7
אֵשׁ	8

In particular the transcript of line 7, is not completely correct, as the

im Plural steht (ויִקְבְּרוּ)”. See also M. ABEGG – P. FLINT – E. ULRICH, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible. The Oldest Known Bible Translated for the First Time into English* (New York, NY 1999) 195, putting MasDeut on one line with MT and SamP (contra 4QDeut^I), LXX and some manuscripts of SamP.

²⁹ MCCARTHY, *Deuteronomy*, 104.

³⁰ Mc Carthy even goes further than simply listing the variant readings. She evaluates MT reading as more original, in characterising the 3rd person plural reading of 4QDeut^I G T^{NF} as “exeg”, i.e. “an initiative on the part of a witness to develop the meaning of the lemma” (MCCARTHY, *Deuteronomy*, XXII). She equally refers to the “midrashic expansion of T^I” that “clearly illustrates the tradition that it was none other than God who buried Moses” (MCCARTHY, *Deuteronomy*, 168*).

³¹ TALMON, “Fragments of a Deuteronomy Scroll”, 155; Talmon, “Hebrew Fragments”, 54. For pictures of fragments a, c, and d, see <https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/image/B-299501>; for fragment b, see <https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/image/B-299505> (access 06 April 2020).

The exact origin of this transcription of MasDeut is difficult to retrieve. Duncan's edition of 4QDeut^I dates from 1995 (DUNCAN, “4QDeut^I”, 112), whereas Talmon's critical edition of MasDeut only dates from 1998 (TALMON, “Fragments of a Deuteronomy Scroll”, 155).

³² Compare, moreover, to TALMON, “Hebrew Fragments”, 56, where Talmon's placement of the bracket in line 7 makes a plural reading impossible: וַיִּקְבְּרוּ [אֵשׁ בָּגִי]. The underlined letters in line 6 are part of fragment d; all the rest belongs to fragment c.

picture³³ of MasDeut (fragment c) makes clear ³⁴.

On the basis of the manuscript evidence, it is impossible to determine which verbal form MasDeut has read. Both ויקבר (singular) and ויקברו (plural) are theoretically possible. From a text-critical perspective, having two possible readings, a singular or a plural, is not unimportant, especially as this has implications for the interpretation of the contents of Deut 34,6.

This conclusion is not contradicted by Talmon's calculations with regard to the length of the lines of MasDeut. According to Talmon, a line in MasDeut holds an average of 33 letters and 7 inter-word spaces (the largest line in the reconstructed scroll contains 37 letters and 8 inter-word spaces) ³⁵. The reconstructed line that contains the word ויקבר/ויקברו contains 34 letters (without ן) or 35 letters (with ן) and 9 inter-word spaces. Hence, quantitatively both readings are possible.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The implications of the above analysis of Deut 34,6 in MasDeut are threefold:

(1) Firstly, the remains of the manuscript do not allow to draw a conclusion with regard to the number of the verb. Because the parchment is ripped off in the middle of the letter ך, both ויקבר and ויקברו – the last one being the reading of 4QDeut^l and (of the *Vorlage*) of LXX – are possible in MasDeut.

(2) Although this observation seems to be a minor detail, its implications for the textual criticism of Deut 34,6 are significant: MasDeut can no longer irrefutably be used to support the reading of MT. The reading of MasDeut is indefinite: it is impossible to determine whether MasDeut has read a singular (ויקבר) or a plural (ויקברו) form. As a result, the text-critical apparatus of the critical editions of the BHQ and of the Qumran Deuteronomy fragment for Deut 34,6 should be adjusted. From a text-critical perspective, this is all the more important because there are indeed some very important textual witnesses (4QDeut^l and LXX) that read a plural verbal form.

(3) At least with regard to MasDeut, the generally accepted view that the text of the Masada manuscripts is “identical with MT” ³⁶ should also be

³³ Courtesy of The Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library, Israel Antiquities Authority – photo: Magen Broshi.

³⁴ Contrary to what Talmon's transcription suggests, the final letter (ך) of the verb ויקבר is only partially preserved. A correct transcription of this word, in accordance with Talmon's “technical convention” of transcribing partially preserved letters, therefore, should be ויקברׇן, thus putting a dot above the ך. See TALMON, “Hebrew Fragments”, 11: “– Partially preserved letter”, in distinction to a *circellus* that indicates that only “traces of a letter” are preserved.

³⁵ TALMON, “Hebrew Fragments”, 57.

³⁶ TALMON, “Fragments”, 156.

challenged³⁷. Already Tov has been pointing into that direction, albeit by focusing on ‘the’ MT, which he considers to be an illusion³⁸.

The indefinite reading of Deut 34,6 in MasDeut also undermines Talmon’s conclusions as to this presumed textual identity between MasDeut and MT, arguing that “the Masada biblical fragments give witness to the existence of a stabilized proto-masoretic textual tradition which had taken root in ‘normative Judaism’ of the time”, and that “at the latest in the 1st century CE, this text was recognized as the exclusively legitimate version of the biblical books, the definitive *textus receptus*”³⁹. Due to the fact that, on the basis of Deut 34,6 in MasDeut, one can no longer claim the identity between MasDeut and MT, Deut 34,6 (MasDeut) becomes irrelevant as an argument in favour of a stabilized proto-MT in Masada, not the least because it does concern “an instance in which an ancient version exhibits a variant reading”⁴⁰.

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SUMMARY

In his publication of MasDeut, Shemaryahu Talmon argued that the text that is transmitted in the said manuscript is identical to the Masoretic Text. The present contribution, in particular focusing on Deut 34,6, argues that this view should be nuanced. A close look at fragment c of MasDeut necessitates a nuanced footnote to be added to the transcription of the first word of Deut

³⁷ Moreover, also with regard to the defective reading of שפני in Deut 33,19, a reading that MasDeut shares with 4QDeut^h, (J.A. DUNCAN, “4QDeut^h”, *Qumran Cave 4. IX. Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Kings* [eds. E. ULRICH *et al.*] [DJD 14; Oxford 1995] 61-70, here 68) the relationship between MasDeut and Qumran seems to be closer than Talmon suggests.

³⁸ Cf. *supra* n. 14.

³⁹ TALMON, “Hebrew Fragments from Masada”, 25.

⁴⁰ TALMON, “Hebrew Fragments from Masada”, 25. Talmon’s view has been followed by e.g. SCHIFFMAN, “Masada and its Scrolls”, who states that “because the general character of these texts is almost identical to the Masoretic text – the Tanach used today – we can conclude that this text had essentially become the only recognized biblical text by the period of the revolt”. It has been criticised, however, by e.g. YOUNG, “Stabilization”, 368, who suggests that “the Masada finds do not give us an ‘uncontaminated’ sample of the ‘normative’ Bible text”. See also E. ULRICH, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Developmental Composition of the Bible* (VTSup 169; Leiden – Boston 2015) 251, who argues “that there was no ‘stabilization’ of the text but rather a ‘freezing of the development’ of the text”.

34,6 (ויקבר), which may have some consequences for the text-critical apparatus of the textual editions of Deuteronomy, as well as the text-critical evaluation of the variant reading of this verse.