

MASORETIC TEXT I

*CONSONANTS

*VOWELS

*PUNCTUATION

*[מָסַר] **vb.** si vera l. **deliver up, offer** (NH מָסַר; Aramaic ܡܫܦܐ *deliver up, denounce, betray*, מָסַר; Hom^{xlvi.} 1892, 530 comp. Sab. מַסַר *take away*);

*מִסְרָת **n.f.** cstr. הַבְּרִית מ' *bond of the covenant* Ez 20:37 (= מִסְרָת; text dub. cf. Lag^{GN} 1882, 168 f. 61; Co reads מוֹסַר, i.e. מוֹסַר v. sub יָסַר; so S).

A comparison between a contemporary printed text of the Tanakh and the identical work as it passed from beneath the hand of its first writer would reveal four major areas of contrast:

- 1. Writing materials and the form of the book;
- 2. Alphabet and orthography;
- 3. Divisions within the text;
- 4. Vocalization and accentuation/punctuation of the text.

I. WRITING MATERIALS AND THE FORM OF THE BOOK

- Parchment
- Papyrus (Byblos)
- Ostraca (Samaria, Lakhish)
- Stone (Mesha)
- Clay Tablets
- Wooden Slates (Ezekiel 37:16)

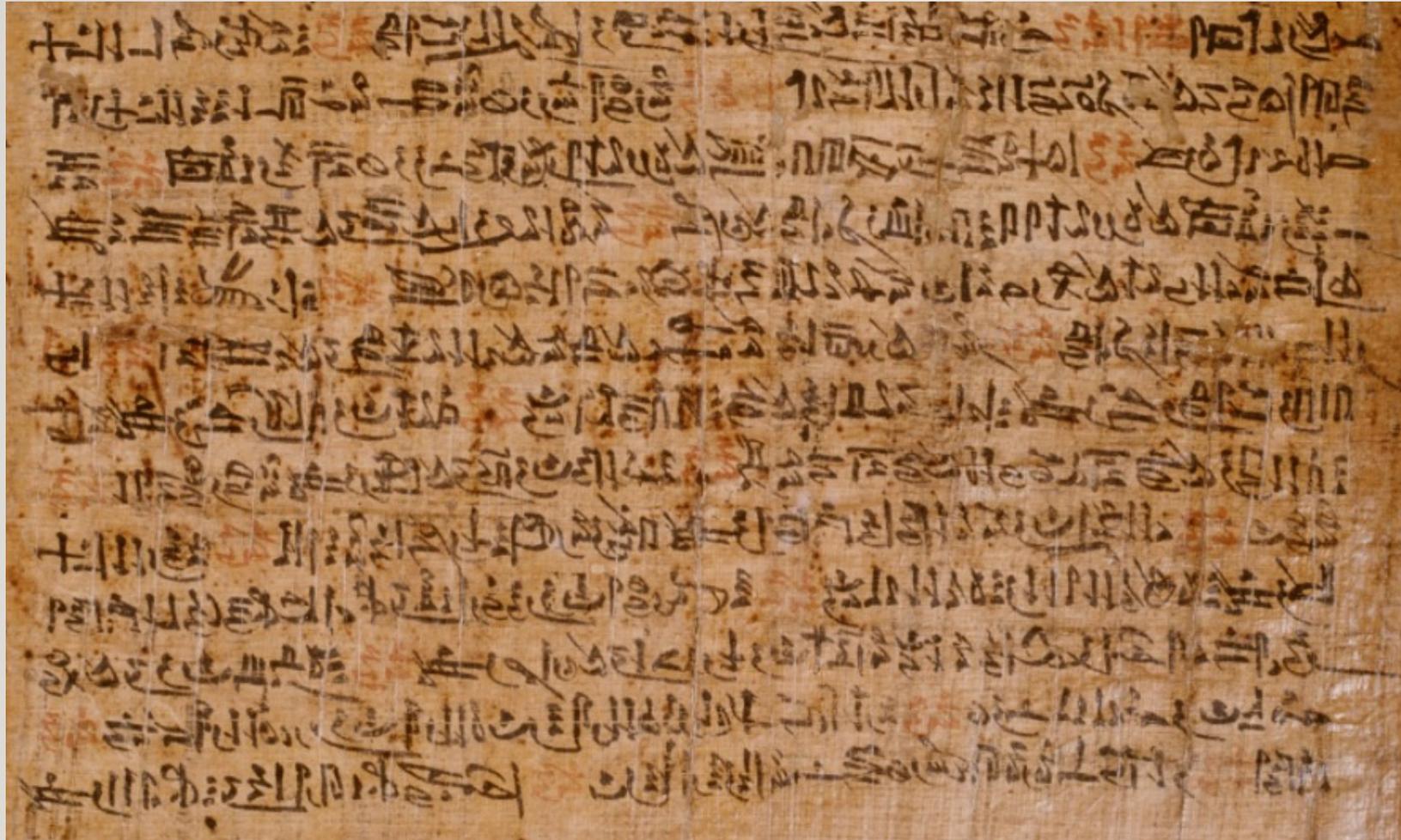
PARCHMENT TORAH



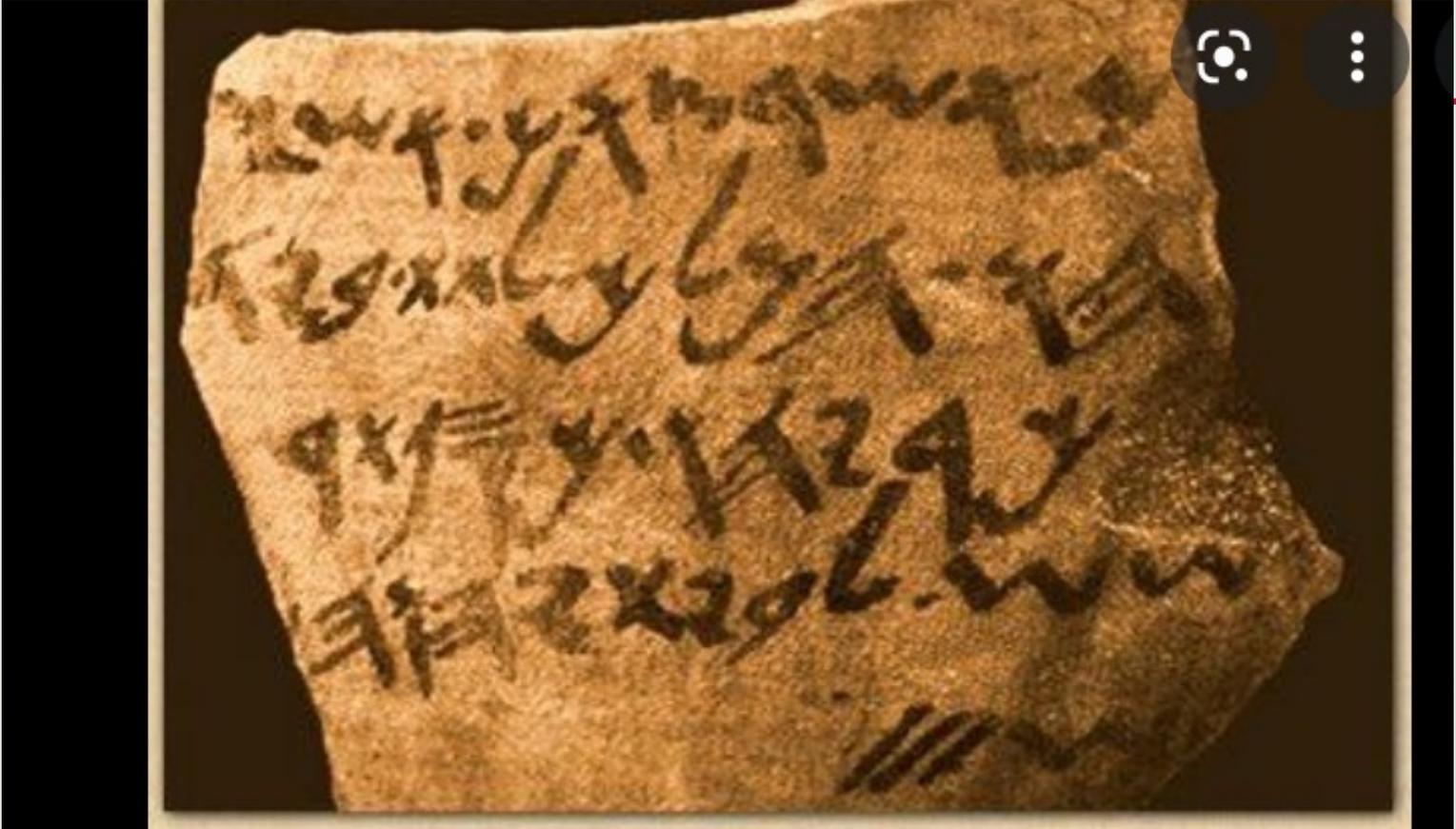
A construction of two layers of papyrus fibers, which were laid perpendicularly to each other, made up a papyrus sheet. The process began from the act of separating the entire triangular stalk into very thin, but broad strips. The papyrus strips were then flattened onto a board, wet from the Nile. Then, the ends of the strips were squared off to form neater borders of the two layers. The strips were then pounded with a mallet to remove the excess water. The layers were then pressed forming sheets. After the sheet was formed, the sheet was left to dry in the sun. On individual sheets, any rough spots were rubbed smooth using ivory and shell, so writing surface was not as scaly. In order to create a roll, the sheets were glued together with a paste made from flour that dissolved in boiling water and mixed together with vinegar.



PAPYRUS IPUWER (13TH CENTURY BCE)



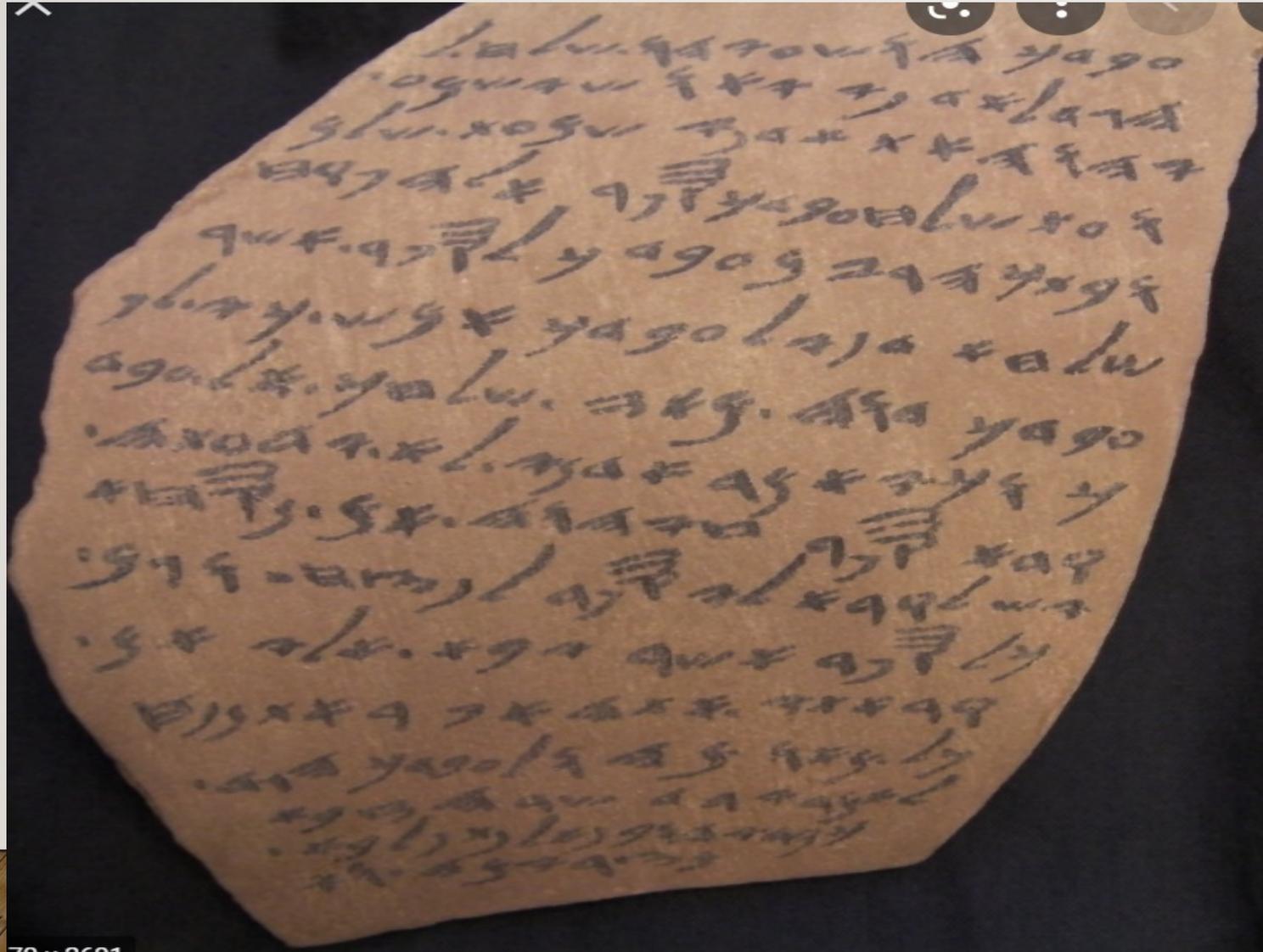
SAMARIA OSTRACA (8TH CENTURY BCE)



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Hebrew from around the 8th Century BC ideas | paleo hebrew,

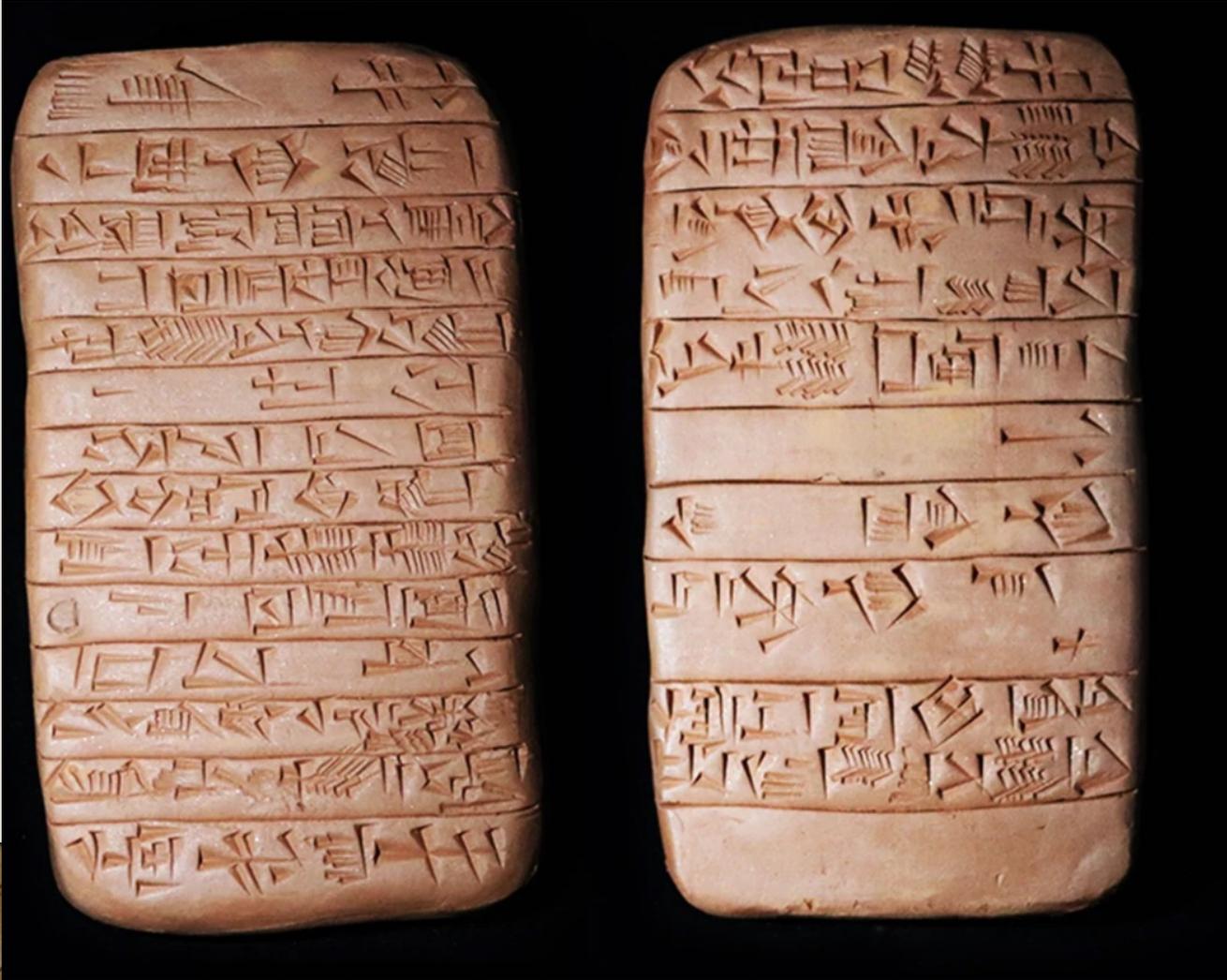
LAKHISH OSTRACA (6TH CENTURY BCE)



MESHA STELE
(9TH CENTURY BCE)



CUNEIFORM TABLETS (42.81)



B.THE FORM OF THE BOOK

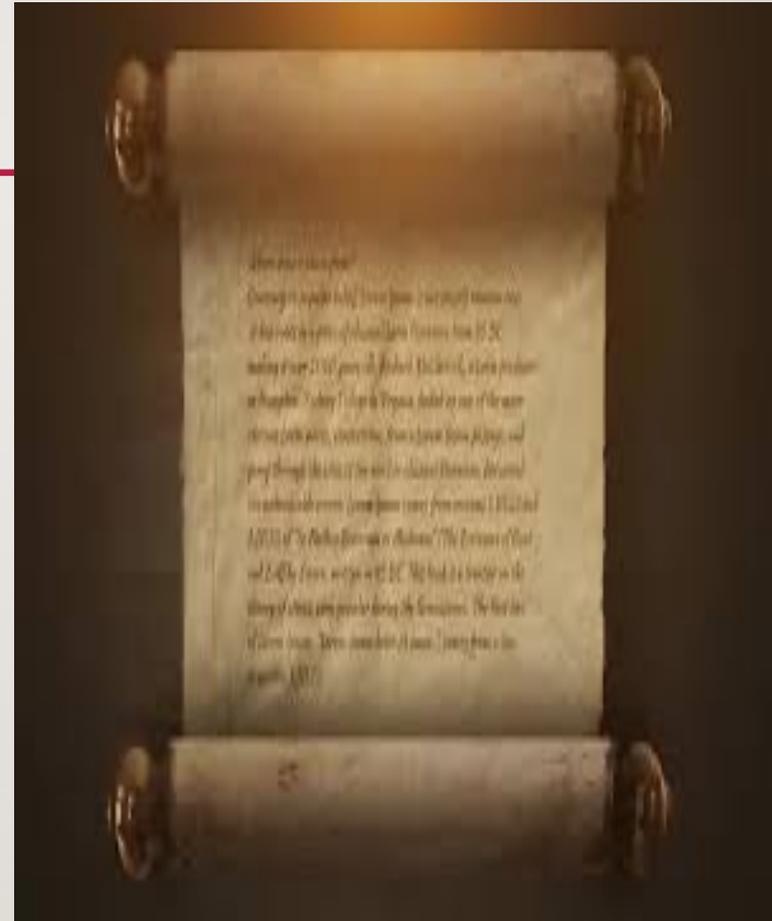
- **Scroll (מגילה)**

A conventional roll was sold as twenty sheets pasted together. However, a scribe possessed the ability to determine the length of the roll by cutting off or adding individual sheets to their desired length for the text. With that in mind, the longest Ancient Egyptian roll was around 40 meters (131 feet). Also, a Greek roll did not exceed more than 11 meters (36 feet).

The papyrus scroll was replaced by the parchment codex because parchment was far stronger, flexible, and did not deteriorate with age. Despite its heavy use, the disadvantages of the roll were far too many compared to the parchment. Parchment was immensely easier to copy onto than the papyrus as the parchment did not have any visible fibers, making a rough surface like the papyrus.

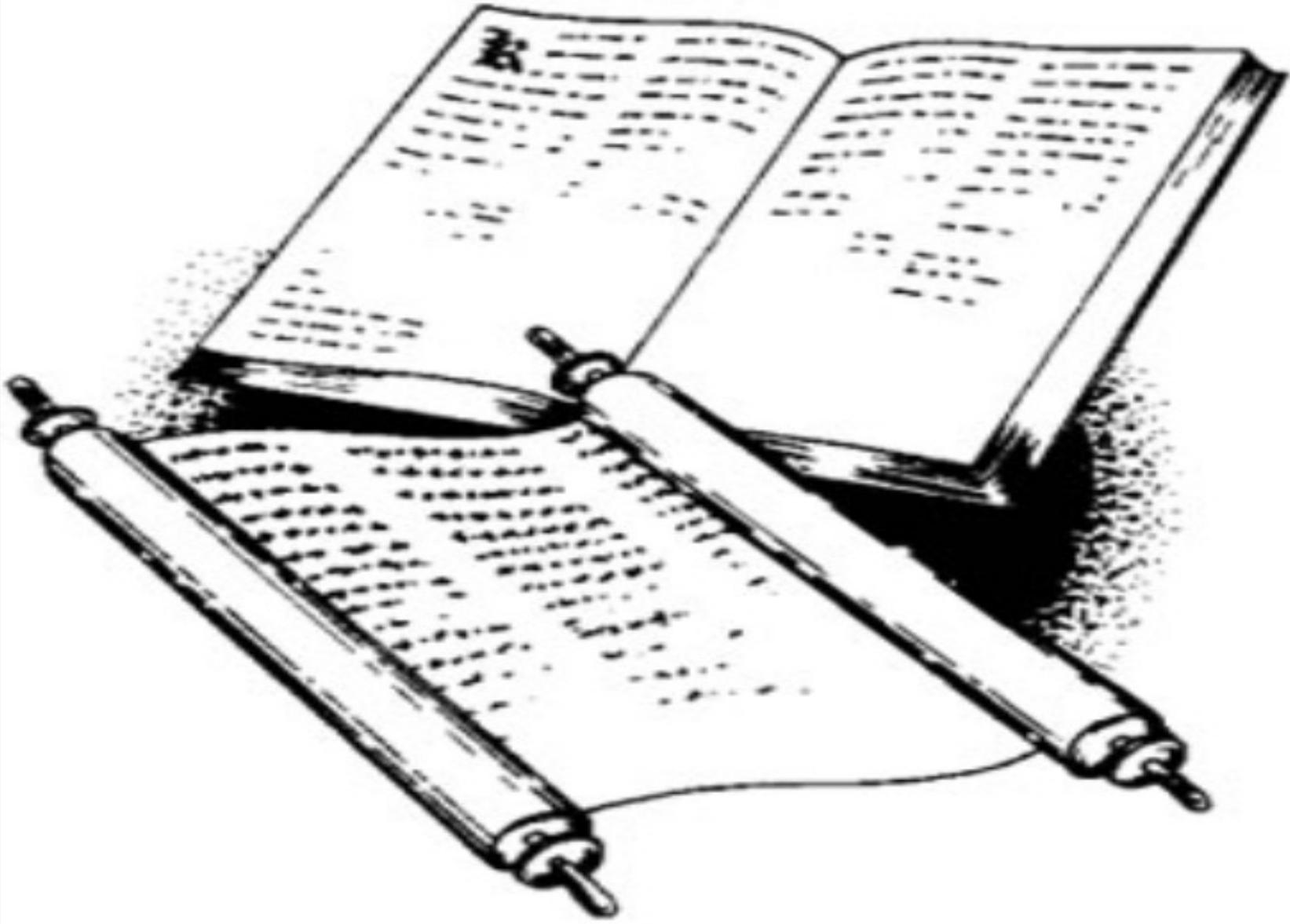


Rolled-up Scroll. Courtesy of
[http://artifaqs.co.uk/collections/ancient-egyptians.](http://artifaqs.co.uk/collections/ancient-egyptians)



- **Codex (ספר)**

The codex was favored because the codex was more economical compared to the roll. The act of copying onto parchment was more advantageous because the act would have ensured the text's survival as the re-rolling caused significant fraying. The supersession of the papyrus scroll by the codex form was gradual and took many years to become the more popular book form used. Around 4 AD, the number of codices outnumbered the number of scrolls as the advantages of the codex was more attractive to the Christians, since the codex was stronger, more flexible, and more durable to hold their texts than papyrus scrolls.



Here too, our present day *sefer torah* suggests that the most probable form of an original biblical book was a *megillah*, or scroll. In the first century CE, the codex—papyrus or parchment leaves laid one atop another and bound together on one side—was introduced, and by the early post-Talmudic period this medium was widespread throughout the Greco-Roman world. In fact, it stands to reason that the question of the order of the biblical books (Baba Batra 14b) is related to the transition from scrolls, which usually were laid out side by side, to codices—the forerunners of books—which could be piled up.

Technically, in a rolled up scroll too, some portions of the text will appear to be above others. This consideration is reflected in a passage in the Talmud (Megillah 27a) that discusses the hierarchies of sacred objects: “מיכרך היכי כרכינן? והא קא יתיב דפא אחבריה!” (“How can we roll [scrolls], given that one panel sits atop another?”)



SCRIBAL PRACTICES

- Scrolls were written in pen (Jeremiah 8:8; Psalms 45:2) or inscribed by a stylus (Isaiah 8:1), with an iron stylus used on particularly hard surfaces (Jeremiah 17; Job 19:24). From Jeremiah, who employed a *sofer*, or professional scribe, we receive several additional glimpses into scribal practices in the biblical period. The scribe would carry a razor with which he would cut papyrus or parchment sheets (36:23); the author would read the text aloud and the *sofer* would transcribe his words in the scroll (36:18). From Ezekiel (9:2–3) we learn that a scribe would keep his ink in a pouch attached to his belt.

2. ALPHABET AND ORTHOGRAPHY

- The “Phoenician”
Alphabet
(כתב עברי)

	Early Phoenician	Greek		Early Phoenician	Greek
ʾ	𐤀	Α	ι	𐤁	Λ
b	𐤂	Β	m	𐤃	Μ
g	𐤄	Γ	n	𐤅	Ν
d	𐤆	Δ	s	𐤇	Ξ
h	𐤈	Ε	ς	𐤉	Ο
w	𐤊	Υ	p	𐤋	Π
z	𐤌	Ζ	ς	𐤍	Μ
h	𐤎	Η	q	𐤏	Θ
t	𐤐	Θ	r	𐤑	Ρ
y	𐤒	Ι	ς	𐤓	Σ
k	𐤔	Κ	t	𐤕	Τ

(a) The Homestead

<i>'alef,</i>	'ox (head)'
<i>bet</i>	'house'
<i>gimel</i>	'camel' (?)
<i>dalet</i>	'door'
<i>heh</i>	human form (with raised hands)?
<i>waw</i>	'hook', 'hinge' or 'bolt' (of the door) (Exod 27:10)

Four out of the first six names in this group are clear and generally accepted. Attention should be paid to the alternating pattern and the descending order of the structure of the house: *bayit, delet, waw*, i.e., "house", "door", "hook/jamb" (2nd, 4th and 6th letters),⁵⁸ contrasting with the other three names borrowed from the animate world: *'alf, gaml, hu'*, i.e., "ox", "camel" and a "person" (?) (1st, 3rd, and 5th letters).

- (b) The Field

zayin As we learn from the parallel Greek letter *zeta*, the Canaanite name was most probably a monophthongized (contracted diphthong) *zēt*, meaning "olive (tree)". As stated above, the letter name *zayin* meaning a "weapon" was introduced under Aramaic influence.⁶⁶

het 'Wheat' (?), in Ugarit: *ḥt t*. The form and evolution of the letter make it more likely that the name is derived from *ḥt*, i.e., "wall", "fence",

"line" attested in Ugaritic as well as in Arabic حائط.⁶⁷ Either suggestion would place it in 'the field'.

tet Probably derived from *ṭiṭ ḥuṣot* (the "mire of the streets") (Zech 10:5; Nah 3:14) with the sign for "crossroads".⁶⁸

This second group is problematic because of the etymology of the names, but its place is well defined between the first group ending in *waw* and the third group, which clearly begins a new subject – "the hand". Attention should be paid to the fact that this group, like the following two, contains only three letters, in this case all rhyming. The exchange of *het-zayin* on the 'Izbet Şarṭah sherd as well as in the Tel Zayit abecedary testifies to a slight change in the poem for learning the alphabet, but does not disturb the proposed structural division of the alphabet.

(c) The Hand

<i>yôd</i>	"hand", "arm" ⁶⁹
<i>kaf</i>	"palm"
<i>lamed</i>	"(ox) goad", i.e., extension of the arm (cf. Jud. 3:31)

It does not seem to be arbitrary that the tenth letter in the twenty-two letter alphabet is *yôd*, since the fingers of the hand are the basis for elementary arithmetic counting up to ten (cf. commentaries on Isa 10:19). Other pedagogic considerations imbedded in this abecedary maybe related to the position of the *lamed* in twelfth place, corresponding to the letter 'alef (in a division of the alphabet into two equal halves, as in the *a-l, b-m* exercise), creating a parallel between the two roots *a-l-f* (meaning "to learn", "train") and *l-m-d* (meaning "to teach", "learn"). While the Tel Zayit abecedary reverses the *kaf* and *lamed* order, it retains the heading of *yôd*, i.e., "the hand", in its position as the tenth letter introducing this group of three letters.

d. Water

mem "water"

nun originally, *naḥaš* ('serpent') (compare the name of the letter in Ethiopian, *naḥas* and the Proto-Sinaitic and Proto-Canaanite pictographs)

samekh "fish (?)"

The sequence of *mem* and *nun* makes it clear that the subject of this group is "water". As mentioned above, the name of the letter *nun* is the word meaning "fish" in Assyrian and in Aramaic and apparently entered Hebrew in the wake of the adoption of Aramaic in Second Temple times. In Canaanite mythology,⁷⁰ which was also known in Israel, there is a clear connection between the primeval serpent, i.e., the *naḥaš*, and water: Cf. "On that day the Lord will punish with His great, cruel, mighty sword, Leviathan - the Elusive *Serpent*, and Leviathan – that Twisting *Serpent*; He will slay the *Dragon of the sea*". (NJPS: Isa 27:1; see also Isa 51:9-15; Amos 9:3; Ps 74: 13-15; 89:10-12 cf. also; Job 26:13).

e. The head

<i>`ayin</i>	"eye"
<i>peh</i>	"mouth"
<i>šade</i>	"temple of the head" (?)
<i>quf</i>	"skull" (?)
<i>reš</i>	"head"
<hr/>	
<i>šin</i>	"tooth"
<i>taw</i>	"mark" (upon the forehead, cf. Ezek 9:4)

This group includes seven letters, the names of five of which are clear. The first letter of the group is *`ayin*, in its Aramaic or Hebrew pronunciation, without contraction of the diphthong (compare *zayin* to Phoenician *bet* and *mem* which do follow the rule). Since the previous group centered on the subject of water, this letter – which also means a "spring" – serves as an appropriate link between groups four and five. As I have noted before, the transposition of several adjacent letters, like the secondary ancient tradition of the *peh* - *`ayin* order, does not disturb either the overall order or the internal division of the alphabet into subjects.