Prophetic Lapses and the *Ketiv-Qere* Conundrum: Jacob ben Hayyim ibn Adoniyahu Versus Isaac Abarbanel

The question—says Moshe Greenberg— is: when a prophet says: “Thus said the Lord” and proceeds to deliver a speech, what is the relation of that speech to what God told the prophet? This ambiguity regarding “the human factor ”in prophecy (as Greenberg calls it, following S. R. Driver) has a long history. Indeed, Benjamin Sommer thinks it goes back to the biblical authors themselves, who saw in prophecy a divine message that could not simply be absorbed but “had to be contended with”; that is, a “sacred enigma.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

Recognition of prophecy’s human side was one thing; identification of flaws in a prophet’s oral or written discourse another. Though traditional exegetes, Jewish and Christian, agreed on scripture’s origins in divine inspiration, this conviction did not stop them from pondering the role of human agents in the production of sacred texts.[[2]](#footnote-3) Still, they maintained that though transmitted by fallible human beings, was nevertheless devoid of serious error due to its ultimately divine origin.[[3]](#footnote-4) Breaking this mold in one notable case was Judaism’s leading biblical commentator at the turn of the sixteenth century, Isaac Abarbanel (1437–1508), who found ascribed persistent and serious lapses in the oracles of a prophet of Israel, and a major one at that: Jeremiah.

Abarbanel is often seen, with much justification, as the “last great representative” of medieval Jewish biblical commentary; yet recent research has uncovered how some of the many novelties attested in his exegesis were born of a blend of medieval and Renaissance learning and new humanist habits of mind.[[4]](#footnote-5) Abarbanel’s account of Jeremiah’s lapses is a striking case in point, wedding as it does a range of medieval teachings at the interface of philosophic poetics, psychology, and prophetology with various Renaissance, and especially humanist, sensibilities.[[5]](#footnote-6) Among elements of Abarbanel’s portraiture of Jeremiah that suggest the impress of a humanist sense of historicity on his exegetical thought processes is his claim that Jeremiah’s oratorical and compositional deficiencies can be traced to aspects of the prophet’s biography and shaping circumstances, especially his early education. As evidence of his deficiencies as a writer, Abarbanel adduces what he takes to be the inordinate number of “written” and “read” forms in Jeremiah’s book.

Abarbanel’s account of Jeremiah had a long afterlife, attracting at least a dozen critical responses over the ages, down through the current century. The earliest of these issued from the pen of Jacob ben HayyimibnAdoniyahu, editor of the second “rabbinic Bible” produced in Venice at the print shop of Daniel Bomberg in 1524-25. This study explores Ibn Adoniyahu’s reaction to Abarbanel’s teachings on Jeremiah’s lapses and the theory of the origin of “*ketiv-qere*” forms that informs it. In addition to Ibn Adoniyahu’s critique, it puts the lineaments of his argument in a variety of larger intellectual and sociocultural settings. Before turning to the critique, however, we must recapture the ideas to which it was responding.

*Jeremiah and the Three “Ḥiqquyim”*

As part of his introduction to his commentary on Jeremiah, Abarbanel describes three forms of “representation” with regard to which human beings can attain what prove to be highly varied levels of perfection. This discussion’s key term of reference is “*ḥiqqui*,”a product of the Arabic-to-Hebrew translation movement of earlier centuries. Abarbanel would have known the term best from Samuel ibnTibbon’s Hebrew translation of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, where it figured centrally in the chapter in which Maimonides, building on ideas of Alfarabi, set forth his formal definition of prophecy, which spoke of “an overflow overflowing from God … through the intermediation of the Active Intellect, toward the rational faculty in the first place and thereafter toward the imaginative faculty.”[[6]](#footnote-7) In the understanding developed by Alfarabi, prophets used imaginative symbols to communicate concepts to the general run of people whose powers of rational conception were highly constricted.[[7]](#footnote-8) Having accorded a significant role in (non-Mosaic) prophecy to the imagination, Maimonides went on to describe this faculty’s essentially threefold activity: “retaining things perceived by the senses, combining these things, and imitating them.”[[8]](#footnote-9) It was in describing the imagination’s specifically imitative function that Maimonides used the Arabic term “*muḥākāh*,” traceable to Greek “*mimesis*,” which Ibn Tibbon rendered using the neologism “*ḥiqqui.*” This term became commonplace in later Hebrew rationalist literature, including Bibles commentaries such as those on Song of Songs by Moses ibnTibbon and Gersonides.[[9]](#footnote-10) Abarbanel knew writers like Ibn Tibbon and Gersonides well, and at times even used their writings, without attribution, in explaining matters of prophecy and poetry.[[10]](#footnote-11)

Abarbanel was also a discerning and persistent investigator of prophetology steeped in Maimonidean tradition. Already at the earliest stage of his literary his career, he embarked on a work bearing the title *MaḥazehShaddai* devoted solely to this topic. Although this tract was lost at the time of the Spanish expulsion, Abarbanel came back to it, under a new name (*Lahaqatnevi’im*), at the very end of his life. This new attempt also never came to final fruition but Abarbanel’s accounts of it and its forerunner leave no doubt that both comprised a critical engagement with ideas of Maimonides and his interpreters.[[11]](#footnote-12) It is no surprise, then, to see principles of Maimonideanprophetology being deployed in the introduction to the commentary on Jeremiah. What is surprising is the more Maimonidean naturalistic concept of prophecy seemingly operative there, which stands at odds with Abarbanel’s strong anti-Maimonidean stance elsewhere, in which he insisted that prophecy was a purely supernatural phenomenon. This naturalism gives rise to the daring ideas expressed in the introduction, to which we now turn.

Abarbanel begins by presenting, in the abstract, a threefold theory of “*ḥiqqui*,” which he then applies to Jeremiah.[[12]](#footnote-13) The first “*ḥiqqui*” involves representation of intelligibles in the “soul,” with levels of perfection measured in terms of the degree of correspondence between the mental representation of a thing and the extra-mental thing to which the representation refers.[[13]](#footnote-14) By contrast to the first form of representation, which entails a process of internalization of truths, the other *ḥiqquyim* involve their externalization orally or in writing. As with the first “*ḥiqqui*,” Abarbanel stresses the vast range of abilities that different individuals display when it comes to these forms of representation. It remains to inquire about Jeremiah’s levels of perfection with respect to the different *ḥiqquyim*.

As regards Jeremiah’s status with respect to the first “*ḥiqqui*,” Abarbanel is unequivocal: “It will be demonstrated for certain that this prophet [Jeremiah] was perfect in the first . . . *ḥiqqui* . . . such that with regard his prophecy’s rank he approaches . . . the master of the prophets [Moses] in many respects.” To document Jeremiah’s lofty status, Abarbanel lists fourteen similarities between Jeremiah and Moses. None, however, pertain to his powers of prophecy.[[14]](#footnote-15) Still, Abarbanel’s first word on Jeremiah amounts to an insistence on the indubitable accuracy of representations in his soul.[[15]](#footnote-16)

By contrast, with regard to the second “*ḥiqqui*,” Abarbanel, speaking in emphatic first person, offers a harsh assessment, in part by comparing Jeremiah with his peers:

As for perfection in the second *ḥiqqui* … I think that Jeremiah was not very perfect in the ordering of speeches or embellishment of poetic figures like the prophet Isaiah as well as other prophets. For this reason, you will find in Jeremiah’s words many verses that, according to all of the commentators, are missing a word or words …. You will find in his words very, very frequently use of the word *‘al* in place of *’el*, the masculine [form] instead of the feminine [form], feminine instead of masculine, plural instead of singular, singular instead of plural, past instead of future, future instead of past, and a single statement sometimes using the second person and sometimes the third person.[[16]](#footnote-17)

Beyond glaring and persistent linguistic lapses, Jeremiah’s speeches are replete with another sort of flaw, chronological disorder: “You will also find in his words a matter that occurred earlier [spoken of] later and a matter that occurred later [spoken of] earlier.” In so saying, Abarbanel assumes that the written versions of speeches in the book of Jeremiah faithfully reproduce the original oral delivery.[[17]](#footnote-18) In a statement made in passing that might be easily missed, Abarbanel indicates that “such anomalies exist in the other prophets.” The difference between Jeremiah and other prophets is, then, not qualitative. At the same time, Abarbanel draws a quantitative distinction, finding “a great disparity” in the frequency of faux pas. In the case of other prophets they are rare *(‘al ha-me‘at*) whereas in Jeremiah’s case they are “widespread” (*‘al ha-rov*); hence “many times more than what is found in the rest of the prophets.”[[18]](#footnote-19)

Not content simply to classify Jeremiah’s oratorical lapses, Abarbanel traces their etiology by recurring to aspects of the prophet’s *Sitz-im-Leben*. Basic was Jeremiah’s early assumption of the prophetic office: “I believe that the reason for this is that Jeremiah was young in years when he began to prophesy such that he was not yet perfect in the ways of language, neither its arrangement nor oratorical embellishment.” Reading the two halves of Jeremiah 1:6 in a causal relationship, Abarbanel even has Jeremiah make this point: “I don’t know how to speak” because “I am still a boy.”[[19]](#footnote-20)

Yet as Abarbanel presents things, Jeremiah’s early call was but one factor limiting his capacities as a preacher, with other aspects of his upbringing also playing a role. A comparison of Jeremiah with Isaiah—or with prophets possessing pedigrees less exalted than Isaiah who nevertheless had ample life-experience before assuming their missions—brings the point into high relief:

Now Isaiah, being of royal pedigree and having been raised in the royal court, was therefore sweet of speech and eloquent of tongue. The rest of the prophets prophesied after becoming accomplished in matters of the world . . . . Jeremiah, however, was of the priests of Anatoth and while in his youth, before becoming accustomed to [eloquent] speech, … prophecy came to him.[[20]](#footnote-21)

Isaiah’s (rabbinically ascribed) roots in royalty and the training this formative environment conferred[[21]](#footnote-22) as well as the prior worldly achievements of other prophets enhanced a capacity for eloquence. By contrast, Jeremiah was necessarily hobbled by the parochial surroundings of his boyhood. Abarbanel speaks of him being “compelled” to use the language—with all its limitations—“to which he was accustomed.” Moshe Greenberg finds in this account nothing less than an anticipation of the modern hermeneutic principles that “the language of prophecy is conditioned by the personal circumstances and talent of the prophet—his biography, his experience, and his education.”[[22]](#footnote-23)

Turning to representation in writing, the third *hiqqui*, Abarbanel once more finds Jeremiah wanting—again, through no fault of his own but due to circumstance.[[23]](#footnote-24) His youthful calling meant “he did not study properly precision in speech and compositional technique.” To evidence Jeremiah’s lapses as a writer, Abarbanel points to what he considers an inordinate number divergences between written versions of words and the traditions according to which they are read in Jeremiah’s book; that is, to instances of “*ketiv-qere*.”[[24]](#footnote-25)As this phenomenon is not limited to Jeremiah, Abarbanel again focuses on the quantitative difference between him over and against “the rest of the prophets.”Not leaving his claim at the level of generality, Abarbanel relays results of a statistical analysis, setting the book of Jeremiah alongside a comparably long passage in the Torah (“from [the pericope of] *Bereshit* to the beginning of the pericope *Bo’*”) and the books of Joshua and Judges taken in tandem. His finding is that “the aforementioned part of the Torah contains twenty-one discrepancies between ‘read’ and ‘written’ [forms]” whereas Jeremiah “contains eighty-one such instances.” Similarly, combined Joshua-Judges witnesses “forty-one such instances,” half the number in Jeremiah.[[25]](#footnote-26)

Having set off a train of inferences—“*ketiv-qere*” reflects linguistic carelessness or error, hence serve as a sign of imperfection in a prophet’s mastery of the third “*ḥiqqui*”—Abarbanel much explain his assumption that an inordinate number of “written” and “read” forms is tantamount to evidence of linguistic deficiency. This necessity leads him deep into speculation regarding this feature of the biblical text’s transmission, a feature for which he has a novel—and decidedly daring—explanation. From the thickets of his characteristically prolonged probe, we will retrieve only those insights crucial for understanding Jacob ben HayyimibnAdoniyah’s objections to Abarbanel’s theory and the larger conception of prophecy in which it is embedded.

Abarbanel begins by refuting (in ways we shall not rehearse) an understanding of the origins of “*ketiv-qere*” advanced by two predecessors, the thirteenth-century grammarian and exegete, David Kimhi, and the converso linguist and anti-Christian polemicist, Moses Halevi (Perfeyt Duran).[[26]](#footnote-27) On this basic understanding, which each thinker imbued with nuances, confusions arose in sacred texts due to the upheaval occasioned by the Babylonian exile. Where doubts remained, variants were relayed without resolution.[[27]](#footnote-28)Abarbanel strongly rebuffs this interpretation on both theological and logical grounds. He also laments its implied proposition that even the Torah suffers from textual uncertainties, a view he sees as sure to nourish national despair.[[28]](#footnote-29)

As for Abarbanel’s approach, it begins with the insistence that “Ezra and the men of the Great Assembly” received scriptural texts in a “perfect and pristine state, as they had been written.” The existence of “*ketiv-qere*” is certainly not a case of competing traditions arising from textual confusion. It is also clear to Abarbanel that “a prophet or individual speaking under the auspices of divine inspiration doubtless expressed himself in a single way, not two.” It follows for Abarbanel that the written texts reflect the original prophetic speeches while the read comprise later accretions. By whom, and to what end?

To address the conundrum, Abarbanel engages in vivid reconstructions of what he takes to be the thought processes of he who edited scriptural writings with the aim of adding vowels points, cantillation marks, and verse endings: Ezra. As he worked, Ezra stumbled on locutions that seemed “strange to him based on the nature of the language and the intent of the story.” He “thought to himself” (at least so Abarbanel surmises) that the aberrancies owed to one of two causes. As Ezra understood the first of these, “the writer” deliberately used an anomalous term to communicate “a profundity (*sod*) from among the profundities of the secrets of scripture [lit. the Torah].” Since Ezra assumed the written anomalies bore deep esoteric meanings, he was hardly of a mind to “expunge” them. Instead, his procedure was to retain the original text “inside” while placing “outside [in the margin] the *qere*, it being an explanation (*perush*) of the aberrant written text.”[[29]](#footnote-30)As Abarbanel understands it, Ezra treated all anomalous forms in the Torah as the product of an intentional effort to allude to a secret.[[30]](#footnote-31)

With respect to the rest of scripture, Abarbanel posits the possibility of a very different understanding on Ezra’s part. According to it, the irregularities prompting Ezra’s intervention were unintentional; nay, the result of a prophet expressing himself with “undue imprecision.” The cause of the imprecision may have been a “dearth in the knowledge of Hebrew language” or “dearth in the knowledge of precise writing, be it with respect to [proper] arrangement or correctness.” Using a biblicism, Abarbanel does not hesitate to call such anomalies “an error made by a master” (cf. Eccl. 10:5). Nor, invoking a Maimonidean distinction, does Abarbanel consider there to be any difference on this score between full-fledged prophets or individuals speaking under the lesser inspiration of “the holy spirit.”[[31]](#footnote-32) Even as he identified such aberrancies as acts of ignorance or error, Ezra remained loath to tamper with them, yet he also knew they would generate perplexity among later readers. His solution was to retain the “sanctified errors” (to use Barry Levy’s felicitous term) present in the text while placing clarifications in the margin as “an explanation that he devised on his own.”[[32]](#footnote-33) Abarbanel posits that “most”—nay “all”—instances of “*ketiv-qere*” in Jeremiah’s book were of the second sort, namely born of Ezra’s assessment that this prophet wrote “by way of a mistake or an error” (שכתבם ירמיהו כן בטעות ובשגגה).[[33]](#footnote-34)

Further specifics of the remainder of Abarbanel’s presentation need not detain us but are worthy of mention. Perhaps seeking to muffle its untraditional character, Abarbanel reduces the audacity of his theory (while increasing confusion about its bottom line) by contending that while Ezra introduced corrections into scriptural texts on his own initiative, he “doubtless received” these corrections from “the prophets and the sages of the preceding generation.” His next operation of interpretation is to go example by example, explaining for each the rationale for Ezra’s intervention in light of his own broader understanding of the purpose of the “read” forms. To cite an instance (the only one) later referenced by Jacob ben Hayyim, in reading Jeremiah’s characterization of Israel’s apostasy in terms of the lust of “a wild ass used to the desert, snuffing the wind in her eagerness” (Jer. 2:24), “Ezra saw that all of this verse employs is in the feminine such that it was unbefitting to say in it ‘*nafesho*’ in the masculine, so he wrote outside [in the margin] ‘*nafeshah*.’”[[34]](#footnote-35) At this point, Abarbanel offers a detailed excurses on his statistical finding regarding “*ketiv-qere*,” the better to use this comparative data to clinch his claim of Jeremiah’s unique inferiority as a writer. Finally, at the last moment, Abarbanel introduces an alternative view for his reader’s consideration. According to it, the theory he had earlier posited regarding all instances of “*ketiv-qere*” in the Torah—that they reflect deliberate allusions to profundities rather than inadvertent lapses—could be applied to Jeremiah and, indeed, all instances of “*ketiv-qere*” in any scriptural book, with the result being that nothing in “the Torah, Prophets, or Writings was written by way of mistake or error.” In light of the detailed account of Jeremiah’s lapses and their causes, this last-minute entry of a pious alternative seems designed to ensure that the faith of Abarbanel’s readers—or perhaps his own reputation—is not grievously harmed by the bold theory of prophetic lapses as attested (among other things) in the phenomenon of “*ketiv-qere*” he has set forth. At all events, the first person to react to these ideas in writing laments that Abarbanel so much as entertained, let alone espoused, them. Though clearly an admirer, Jacob ben Hayyim felt that for his teachings on prophetic lapses and misguided understanding of “*ketiv-qere*,” this great luminary of biblical scholarship must be held to account.

*“For The Life Of Me I Cannot Believe This”: Ibn Adoniyahu Responds*

After wandering in Italy following the 1492 Spanish expulsion, Abarbanel completed his commentary on Jeremiah in 1504 in Venice, his final place of residence prior to his death in around 1508.[[35]](#footnote-36) In 1520, in nearby Pesaro, the *editio princeps* of the work was published in the famous print shop of the Soncino family as part of a larger volume containing Abarbanel’s commentaries on Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.[[36]](#footnote-37) In that same year, or thereabouts, another wandering scholar, Jacob ben HayyimibnAdoniyahu, landed in Venice, there to join the up-and-coming Hebrew printing establishment of the wealthy Christian businessman, Daniel Bomberg. It 1517, under the editorship of the Jewish convert turned Augustinian monk, Fra Felice de Prato (Felix Pratensis), this printing house had produced what would come to be called the first “rabbinic Bible.” After working on other volumes, Ibn Adoniyahu now ventured to produce a new edition of the rabbinic Bible.[[37]](#footnote-38) His multiply innovative work, published in four parts in 1525, proved epochal. Not only did it quickly become the Jewish Bible par excellence, influencing Jewish Bible study in multiple ways. It established the *textus receptus* for nearly all students of the Hebrew Bible, Jew and Christian, for four centuries.[[38]](#footnote-39)

By the time Ibn Adoniyahu introduced his magisterial work with a preface, he had delved deeply into Abarbanel’s introduction to his commentary on Jeremiah. Whether he did so on the basis of the just published *editio princeps* or a manuscript circulating in Venice is unclear. What is beyond cavil is that Abarbanel’s portrait of Jeremiah greatly alarmed Ibn Adoniyahu. So did his innovative theory of What remains to be clarified is the nature of his concerns and the complex interlacing of contextual elements that helped to shape them.[[39]](#footnote-40)

That Ibn Adoniyahu’s main interest in Abarbanel had to do with his novel theory of “written” and “read” forms occasions no surprise. Masorah lay at the very heart of Ibn Adoniyahu’s pathbreaking enterprise. While his Bible combined the text of scripture, Aramaic Targumim, two or three medieval commentaries on each book, and various Masorah apparatuses (*masoraharva*, *masorahagna*, and *masorahinalis*), it was, in Ibn Adoniyahu’s mind, the latter that held pride of place among his achievements. The introduction to his Bible, which would prove influential, comprises, as Jordan Penkower noted long ago, the first compendium devoted completely to Masorah studies ever to appear in print.[[40]](#footnote-41) It begins by lamenting the fact that ordinary Jews, and even “many groups of our sages in our own time,” are oblivious to the Masorah, such that this crucial element of the scriptural bequest has become “nearly forgotten and lost.”[[41]](#footnote-42)

Abarbanel comes to light in the preface as part of the “war” that Ibn Adoniyahu promises to wage against “latter-day scholars” whose understanding of the origins of the Masorah he finds mistaken and even fraught with danger. To refute David Kimhi’s and Perfeyt Duran’s idea that “written” and “read” forms in particular arose due to confusion in consequence of historical upheaval, Ibn Adoniyahu has recourse to Abarbanel, whom he cites at length, finding his objections to this argument “right and just.”[[42]](#footnote-43) By contrast, when it comes to Abarbanel’s “resolutions” to the matter at bar, Ibn Adoniyahu states that they are “remote from me.”

As a first step, Ibn Adoniyahu takes issue with Abarbanel’s notion that matters masoretic are a “late” development of the time of Ezra. To this teaching Ibn Adoniyahu counterposes a radical alternative based on a talmudic dictum (Nedarim (37b). That dictum stated (while giving a few examples) that *miqrasoferim*, *‘ittursoferim*, *qereve-laketiv*, and *ketivve-laqere* were “a law of Moses given at [Mount] Sinai” (הלכה למשה מסיני). On Ibn Adoniyahu’s understanding, the dictum put the authority of the Talmud behind the idea that the Masorah’s origins lay in the same Sinaitic revelation that yielded scripture in the first place.

Ibn Adoniyahu’s next step is to expand the Sinaitic coverage supposedly conferred by the Talmudic dictum to masoretic notations in all of their forms and in their ensemble. Though the talmudic statement to which he appealed only mentioned four classes of masoretic phenomena, and gave only a handful of examples, Ibn Adoniyahu thought it logical (or at least found it congenial) to imbue all masoretic notations with Sinaitic authority. This understanding was easily deployed to fend off the pernicious misconceptions of his predecessors:

Whence we derive that all of them are a law of Moses from Sinai rather than [Abarbanel’s idea] that Ezra the scribe placed the read form in the margin and that it is an explanation of an aberrant scriptural term, whereas it was not aberrant in his [Ezra’s] eyes, heaven forfend nor [as per Kimhi and Duran] was he [Ezra] confronted by any [textual] doubt or confusion, for the whole of it [the Masorah] is a law given to Moses at Sinai.[[43]](#footnote-44)

In so saying, Ibn Adoniyahu not only defended the integrity of the Masorah but elevated it to heights never seen before, creating a point of no return in its long and somewhat mysterious march to ever growing—and eventually ultimate—primacy over the Middle Ages and early modern times.[[44]](#footnote-45)

As the pious shudder “heaven forfend” indicates, Ibn Adoniyahu deemed Abarbanel’s idea of Ezra’s correction of imprecisions or deficiencies in the words of the prophets shocking. Though he initially claims that he will not respond to it, he is unable to resist. His first comment is not so much an objection as a*cri de coeur* from a pained and astonished admirer: “I am amazed at him [Abarbanel], that such a thing should have issued from one such as him, of blessed memory! Could one entertain the notion that the prophets were deficient in such matters?”

A more substantive complaint is that Abarbanel’s theory carries the implication that he may sit in judgement on the merits or deficiencies of prophetic speeches, meaning in effect that he holds himself “greater than them [the prophets] in the precision of the Hebrew language.” This is hubris of a high order. Here, too, exclamation replaces argument, with Ibn Adoniyahu proclaiming: “for the life of me I cannot believe this!” Ibn Adoniyahu then does enter a more searching objection. If some speeches uttered prophetically or through the holy spirit initially contained infelicities, why should these mistakes have been left uncorrected before inspired words were handed down to posterity? How could it be that the book of Jeremiah remains, on Abarbanel’s reckoning, marred by eight-one errors as reflected in its “written” and “read” forms and the book(s) of Samuel, the authorship of which rabbinic tradition also ascribes to Jeremiah, by one hundred and thirty-three such lapses? To Ibn Adoniyahu, it is unfathomable that a prophet about whom God states, “Before I created you in the womb, I selected you; Before you were born, I consecrated you” (Jer. 1:5) “would sink into such errors.”[[45]](#footnote-46) Later, in another objection made by way of rhetorical question, Ibn Adoniyahu adds as evidence liturgical practice: “How can it enter one’s mind that we should read the *qere* that, according to his [Abarbanel’s] understanding, his memory be blessed, Ezra the scribe specified as an explanation of an aberrant scriptural usage, and set aside what is written by the finger of God?”[[46]](#footnote-47)

Seemingly to save his forerunner’s honor (though at the cost of asserting his ignorance), Ibn Adoniyahu airs the possibility that Abarbanel may have been unaware of the talmudic dictum that Ibn Adoniyahu considers probative in the matter of the Masorah’s origins: “Bottom line, it seems, heaven forfend, as if the prince (many his memory be blessed) did not see the Talmud, since based on the Talmud what he offered as a solution is groundless.” Ibn Adoniyahu has another way to justify Abarbanel. Perhaps he did know the talmudic source but, in a quest for novelty (of a sort that, without elaboration, Ibn Adoniyahu chalks up to Abarbanel’s imitation of a trait of Maimonides exemplified in the *Guide of the Perplexed*), Abarbanel offered his idea in order “to display his skill” for independent explanation even as he deviated from the talmudic account that Ibn Adoniyahu deems both true and binding.[[47]](#footnote-48)

Returning to Abarbanel one last time in his preface, Ibn Adoniyahu gives a clue as to the overriding reason for his own boundless preoccupation with and valorization of the Masorah, something that remains in the shadows both in the preface of his Bible and beyond: its connection to Kabbalah. Reverting to Abarbanel’s first hypothesis for “written” and “read” forms, that they reflect “a profundity from among the profundities of the secrets of scripture,” Ibn Adoniyahu states that this is an approach that “it is certainly incumbent upon us to believe. To understand how Ibn Adoniyahu understood the secrets in question, it suffices to note that he immediately adduces support for this proposition from the introduction to the Torah commentary of the “chief of the latter-day kabbalists,” Moses ben Nahman.[[48]](#footnote-49)

To what did Ibn Adoniyahu refer? In the introduction to his Torah commentary, Nahmanides indicated that one way to read the Torah, according to a “[secret] tradition of truth,” was as a continuum of divine names. In this context, he noted the supremely important role of “the masters of scripture,” that is the Masoretes, explaining that this understanding is “what brought them to count every full and defective spelling in the Torah and scripture and to compose books about the Masorah.” In such an understanding, the reason for the halakhic disqualification of a Torah scroll if even a single letter was missing was also clear.[[49]](#footnote-50)

While not mentioning the matter of “written” and “read” forms, Nahmanides and other kabbalistic works, including ones Ibn Adoniyahu and edited prior to undertaking his rabbinic Bible, especially the Torah commentary of MenachemRecanati, inspired Ibn Adoniyahu to view the Masorah as a repository of kabbalistic lore. So understood, the stakes in Abarbanel’s misunderstanding of *ketiv-qere* were high indeed. As a case in point, Ibn Adoniyahu adduces Jeremiah 2:24, with its written form, “*nafesho*,” and read one, “*nafeshah*.” As was seen already, Abarbanel’s explanation was prosaic in the extreme. Where Jeremiah had slipped in using a masculine form in a way that disturbed the figure, Ezra entered a simple corrective. For Ibn Adoniyahu, this account showed Abarbanel’s obliviousness to a kabbalistic profundity alluded to in this case; namely, “the secret of levirate marriage.” While Ibn Adoniyahu cryptically left the discussion there (merely adding that “the enlightened one will understand”), a knowing reader would grasp the connection that Nahmanides and other kabbalists had made between the law of levirate marriage and the doctrine of reincarnation of souls.[[50]](#footnote-51) Even if Abarbanel missed the mark in this particular case, it remained beyond Ibn Adoniyahu why he should have remained “in doubt” as to the reason for “*ketiv-qere*” occurrences when he correctly cast some of them as a matter of esoteric purport. This being so, there was no reason to retain the “second cause” for “written” and “read” forms in the case of Jeremiah, that being “aberrancy” due to linguistic inadequacy. With this puzzle, Ibn Adoniyahu draws his discussion of Abarbanel to a close, leaving those gazing back on it to step back from particulars and place it in some or its larger contexts and evolving aspects of biblical scholarship in Ibn Adoniyahu’s day.

*Ibn Adoniyahu’s Critique in the Early Sixteenth-Century Round*

One setting in which Ibn Adoniyahu’s critique of Abarbanel was forged has just been identified: his devotion to Kabbalah and strong sense of its tight connection to Masorah. By the time he produced his rabbinic Bible, Jacob ben Hayyim had already seen to press an edition of Abraham Saba’s Torah commentary in which he had stressed that “part of it is by way of the concealed sense, statements of the book of the Zohar, and Kabbalah.” He had also overseen the publication of the Torah commentary of MenahemRecanati, a work that, he noted, was composed “by way of truth”; that is, Kabbalah.[[51]](#footnote-52)

As rival disciplines jostled in Renaissance Italy, Kabbalah gained increasing prominence not only among Jews but a segment of Christian cognoscenti. The catalyst was an explosion in the diffusion of kabbalistic texts due to the still relatively young medium of printing. Esteem for the Zohar reached new heights, including among such leading Christian intellectuals as Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Reuchlin.[[52]](#footnote-53) The demand for kabbalistic knowledge among Jews and Christians created an “indelible nexus between Christian and Jewish scholars.”[[53]](#footnote-54) As Moshe Goshen-Gottstein observed, the more one follows the path from Pico and Reuchlin to the Bomberg Bibles, especially in Ibn Adoniyahu’s edition, the more one sees that overt traditions of Jewish interpretation of scripture and covert kabbalistic ones are “constantly interwoven.”[[54]](#footnote-55)

While there is no evidence that Daniel Bomberg was a kabbalist, he did know Hebrew (having learned it from Felix Pratensis) and he certainly was aware of the phenomenon of Christian Kabbalah, as a Latin introduction that he composed for a Hebrew volume published at his press makes clear.[[55]](#footnote-56) At the end of his preface to his rabbinic Bible, Ibn Adoniyahu relates how he urged the “great benefit” of the Masorah on Bomberg, apparently harnessing this point, in addition to evidence of inaccuracies in the rabbinic Bible issued by Pratensis, to persuade his patron to underwrite a new edition only eight years after the first one. Already at the beginning of the preface, by way of a biblical allusion, Ibn Adoniyahu cast Bomberg as a modern-day Cyrus; that is, a gentile agent of God. In so doing, he endowed his kabbalistically inspired Masoretic Bible with a providential glow.[[56]](#footnote-57)

When, then, Ibn Adoniyahu evaluated Abarbanel’s theory of “*ketiv-qere*,” he could not have but found it sorely wanting, given the utter remove at which it stood from his own kabbalistic conception. Ibn Adoniyahu may also have sensed that Abarbanel remained an outsider to Kabbalah. While at times stating his admiration for it, he often did so more as a matter of rhetoric than substance, especially when he could use Kabbalah as a cudgel with which to attack more extreme forms of Jewish rationalism that he deplored.[[57]](#footnote-58) Seen thus, one way to understand Ibn Adoniyahu’s stark opposition to Abarbanel is as part of a stage in a growing trend among Italian Jewish and Christian scholars to view biblical phenomena through a kabbalistic lens.

The phenomenon that scholars call “Christian Kabbalah,” and Christian Hebraism more broadly, was closely tied to humanism, the classi­cizing literary and educational movement that became the dominant intellectual force in the Renaissance, altering literature, art, and scholarship in Italy beginning in the fourteenth century and spreading to other European seats of learning in centuries following.[[58]](#footnote-59) Among the forces propelling humanist approaches to ancient texts was a deepened sense of history. Humanist “historical thinking” took many forms, but some of its main features include an appreciation of temporal perspective, an interest in causation, and a willingness to examine the past on its own terms.[[59]](#footnote-60)

Abarbanel’s account of Jeremiah and “*ketiv-qere*” fit snugly with new humanist emphases and ideals. In the Renaissance, classic authors were treated “less as disembodied texts, more as individuals.”[[60]](#footnote-61) Applied to an understanding of the Bible, this meant a greater focus in Renaissance exegesis on scripture’s human bearers and less on its divine side.[[61]](#footnote-62)As we saw, Abarbanel’s goes out of his way to identify the causes that explain Jeremiah’s limitations as an orator and writer in all their individuality. He does so by attending to the prophet’s historical situation, understood in (what Abarbanel takes to be) its own terms. For that matter, Abarbanel’s vibrant and even riveting account of Ezra’s activities and thought processes as he went about his work as a scriptural editor also reflects this yen for historical reconstruction.

This humanist historical impulse seemingly provides another important context for understanding Ibn Adoniyahu’s critique of Abarbanel, if in complex ways. By Ibn Adoniyahu’s day, the call of Christian humanists for a return “*ad fontes*” yielded a felt need to restore biblical texts to their original pristine splendor. This aspiration went hand in hand with growing debates, and anxieties, surrounding the textual stability of different aspects of the inherited versions of the Bible, in both Old and New Testament forms. The editor of the first rabbinic Bible of 1517, Pratensis, proudly hailed his work as one that restored the Bible’s “*verus et nativus candor*”—though his optimism on this score proved excessive.[[62]](#footnote-63) At the same time, some Christians accused Jews of willfully distorting the original Hebrew, a claim that helped to explain divergences between the Hebrew Old Testament and Vulgate, and thence justify the accuracy of the latter. It was a charge Ibn Adoniyahu took it upon himself to rebut at some length, and with much fervor, in his preface.[[63]](#footnote-64)

How much such humanist currents spurred Ibn Adoniyahu’s concern to produce a new version of the Hebrew text is uncertain. Barry Levy sees in Ibn Adoniyahu’s efforts evidence of a “Renaissance interest in restoring ancient literary works.”[[64]](#footnote-65) Similarly, Stern speaks of a humanistic context for Ibn Adoniyahu’s enterprise while stressing his “conservative” approach to textual criticism.[[65]](#footnote-66) At the same time, Ibn Adoniyahu’scriticisms of Abarbanel, and his assertion of the Masorah’sSinaitic origin, while historical in nature, can be seen as a mark of the limits of his humanist impulses, at least of the historicizing kind. As we have seen, Ibn Adoniyahu was determined to deny the origins of the “*ketiv-qere*” phenomenon either in historical accident, as Kimhi and Duran maintained, or as a late historical accretion, as Abarbanel held. Like the approach of Kimhi and Duran, Abarbanel’s view could provide fodder for Christian claims that Jews failed to preserve scripture pristinely, claims embroidered in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the charge that Jews knowingly distorted scriptural texts to remove placed that proved Christian truths.[[66]](#footnote-67) Here was another reason why Ibn Adoniyahu was bound to reject Abarbanel’s approach.

There is another element in Ibn Adoniyahu’s response to Abarbanel that links up with debates over humanism as they unfolded in the first half of the sixteenth century: his claim that Abarbanel’s misguided theory of linguistic imperfections on the part of prophets may have been born in a quest for novelty. This claim is reminiscent of anti-humanist tropes, in the sphere of biblical scholarship and beyond, that sounded repeatedly in Abarbanel’s and Ibn Adoniyahu’s day and beyond. In 1505, for example, the year after Abarbanel completed his commentary on Jeremiah, a decree issued at the University of Tübingen stated: “We desire that teachers refrain from … pursuing novelties, scandalously finding fault with the text of the Bible.”[[67]](#footnote-68) Similarly, the accusatory epithet “lover of novelty” (*novitatisamator*) appears no less than five times in negative verdicts on the orthodoxy of the writings of Abarbanel’s younger contemporary, the Dutch humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam.[[68]](#footnote-69) Indeed, Ibn Adoniyahu’s fear of Abarbanel’s subversively novel theory of “written” and “read” forms might be compared to charges of innovation made against Abarbanel’s older contemporary, Lorenza Valla, and younger one, Erasmus, when they sought to establish the correct text of the New Testament on the view, denied by their opponents, that Jerome’s Latin translation—the authority of which had hitherto scarcely been disputed—could not always be trusted.[[69]](#footnote-70) The irony is that in proposing a Sinaitic origin for the Masorah, in part to oppose the novel explanations of figures like Kimhi, Duran, and Abarbanel that he saw as betrayals, Ibn Adoniyahu himself set forth an idea without precedent in earlier Jewish scholarship.

One last angle from which to consider Ibn Adoniyahu’s opposition to Abarbanel’s teaching on Jeremiah and prophetic error is the often intricate allegiances to different sources of authority abroad on the Italian Jewish scene in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. To illustrate, a major thrust of Ibn Adoniyahu’s preface was to assert the authority of the masoretic text over talmudic readings of biblical texts in cases of conflict, a position that would prove influential in nigh all later discussions of the issues, even where Ibn Adoniyahu’s view was not accepted, and which eventually won a decisive victory.[[70]](#footnote-71) Yet in pillorying Abarbanel, he appeals to the Talmud as the highest authority. To give another example, Ibn Adoniyahu reproves Abarbanel for his impertinent stance towards prophets, incredulous that he entertained the notion that prophets could be linguistically deficient, all the more that he arrogantly held himself “greater than them in the precision of the Hebrew language.”[[71]](#footnote-72) Here, too, complication reigns, as Abarbanel himself had elsewhere asserted the inestimable superiority of prophets to non-prophets, generating an attack on him by an Italian kabbalist writing not long before Ibn Adoniyahu.[[72]](#footnote-73)

*Conclusion*

In the sixteenth century, writes Kalman Bland, “Judaism underwent the kinds of experiences and absorbed the varieties of new knowledge that usually compel religious communities to reassess their sacred scriptures.”[[73]](#footnote-74)Jacob ben Hayyim ibn Adoniyahu’s response to Abarbanel reflects this truth while raising issues, many intersecting, that would arise in future reactions to Abarbanel’s portrait of Jeremiah and novel theory of of “written” and “read” forms: regarding the human factor in prophecy, the authority of classical rabbinic sayings, the right of later scholars to refute their predecessors, and more. It also underscores the need to understand any given critique a series of wider contexts, most evidently the scholarly profile and religious outlook of the critic but also larger developments in biblical studies and intellectual history in that figure’s time, place, and situation. When the full story of responses to Abarbanel’s teaching on Jeremiah is told, it should afford revelatory glimpses not only about evolving Jewish conceptions of the human factor in prophecy but about ebbs and flows in the history of scriptural interpretation, Jewish and Christian, writ large.

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שאלות להחכם כה"ר שאול הכהן, (וינציאה של"ד), דף ח', עמ' ב..

1. . See Sommer, “Prophecy as Translation: Ancient Israelite Conceptions of the Human Factor in Prophecy,” K. F. Kravitz and D. M. Sharon (eds.), *Bringing the Hidden to Light: The Process of Interpretation: Studies in Honor of Stephen A. Geller*, Winona Lake, IN 2007, pp. 289–290 (where it is noted that the phrase “sacred enigma” owes to Stephen Geller). For Greenberg, see “Jewish Conceptions of the Human Factor in Biblical Prophecy,” in *Justice and the Holy: Essays in Honor of Walter Harrelson*, ed. Douglas A. Knight and Peter J. Paris (Atlanta 1989), p. 146 n. 5. For the original formulation in Hebrew, see

   מ' גרינגרג, "תפיסות יהודיות של הגורם האנושי בנבואה המקראית", בתוך: ספר היובל לרב מרדכי ברויאר: אסופת מאמרים במדעי היהדות, בעריכת משה בר-אשר, ירושלים תשנ"ב, כרך א', עמ' 64 הערה 5 .

   Greenberg’s usage “human factor” is taken from S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 8th edition (Edinburgh 1909), p. xi. For Greenberg’s conception of scripture, see M. Z. Brettler, “Concepts of Scripture in Moshe Greenberg,” in *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. B. D. Sommer (New York 2012), pp. 247–266. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. . For a collection of Jewish texts relating to this and many cognate issues, see

   י׳ פרג׳ון, ׳"החכמה והמדע נתון לך": אסופת מקורות מוערת׳, י׳ ברנדס, ט׳ גנזל רח׳ דויטש (עורכים), בעיני אלוהים ואדם: האדם המאמין ומחקר המקרא, ירושלים תשע״ה, עמ' 17–161 .

   An earlier such collection is

   א״י השל, תורה מן השמים באספקלריה של הדורות, ב, לונדון וניו יורק, תשכ״ב-תש״ן

   For medieval Christian examples, see, e.g., G. R. Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Road to the Reformation* (Cambridge 1985), pp. 15–19; A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot 1988), pp. 40–117. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. . For the Jewish case, see EranViezel, “Context, Harmonization, and the Uniqueness of the Commentaries to the Book of Chronicles,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 22 (2015), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. . For Abarbanel as the last of medievals, see E.I.J. Rosenthal, “The Study of the Bible in Medieval Judaism,” in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. G.W.H Lampe (Cambridge 1969), p. 272. For similar assessments, seeS. Grünberg: “Eine LeuchtederBibelexegese um die Wende des Mittelalters,” *Jeschurun* 15 (1928), pp. 21–32, 213–25, 297–312; G. Ruiz, “Las introducciones y cuestiones de don Isaac Abrabanel,” in *SimposioBiblico Español*, ed. N. Fernandez Marcos, et al. (Madrid 1984), p. 707. For his status as a transitional figure, see E. Lawee, “Isaac Abarbanel: From Medieval to Renaissance Jewish Biblical Scholarship,” in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. II: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, ed. M. Sæbø (Göttingen 2008), pp. 190–214 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. . See

   א' לווי, "מגבלותיו של נביא: ר׳ יצחק אברבנאל על המרכיב האנושי בנבואותיו של ירמיהו - בין ימי ביניימיות לפרשנות הומניסטית", ערן ויזל, נפתלי ש' משל וברוך יעקב שורץ (עורכים), שנתון לחקר המקרא והמזרח הקדום כו תש"ף, עמ' 365–401. . [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. . See

   מורה הנבוכים ב, לו בתוך: ספר מורה נבוכים להרב רבינו משה בן מיימון הספרדי ז״ל ... עם ארבעה פירושים, ורשה תרל״ב, דף עו ע״א.

   as in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines, 2 vols. (Chicago 1963), 2:368.

   For Alfarabi, see R. Walzer, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: Abu Nasr al-Farabi’sMabadi’ Ara’ Ahl al-Madinaal-Fadila: A Revised Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford 1985), chap. 15, para. 10 (pp. 244–45). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. . *Farabi on the Perfect State*, chap. 14, para. 2 (pp. 210–11). For discussion, see R. Walzer, “Al-Farabi’s Theory of Prophecy and Divination,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 1 (1957), pp. 142–48. For this side of Alfarabi’s and Maimonides’s teaching on prophecy, see J. Macy, “Prophecy in al-Farabi and Maimonides: The Imaginative and Rational Faculties,” in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. S. Pines and Y. Yovel (Dordrecht 1986), pp. 185–201. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. *Guide*, 2.36 (Pines, 2:370). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. . For Moses ibn Tibbon, see O. Fraisse (ed.), *Moses ibn Tibbons Kommentarzum Hohelied and seinpoetologisch-plrilosophisches Programm* (Berlin and New York 2004), pp. 128-129. For Gersonides, see

   לוי בן גרשום, פירוש לשיר השירים, מהדורת מנחם קלנר, רמת גן תשס״ב, עמ' 176, מפתח כללי, הערך "חיקויים".

   As a usage born of the embryonic stage of philosophic Hebrew, Ibn Tibbon felt constrained to explain “*ḥiqqui*” in the lexicon of terms that he appended to the version of the *Guide* translation of 1213. See

   שמואל אבן תבון, "פירוש המלות הזרות אשר במאמר הרב זצ״ל", בתוך: בספר מורה הנבוכים לרבנו משה בן מימון, מהדורת י׳ אבן־שמואל, ירושלים תשס״ז, עמ' 54..

   On this work, see J. T. Robinson, “Samuel Ibn Tibbon’s ‘Perushha-Millotha-Zarot’, and al-Fārābī’s ‘Eisagoge’” and ‘Categories’”, *Aleph* 9 (2009), pp. 41–76. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. . See, e.g., for Moses ibnTibbon, I. Adler, *Hebrew Writings Concerning Music in Manuscripts and Printed Books fromGeonic Times Times to 1800*, Munich 1975, pp. 1-5. 186-190. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. . See

    שאלות להחכם כה"ר שאול הכהן, (וינציאה של"ד), דף ח', עמ' ב.

    For Abarbanel on prophecy, see most recently

    ד' בן זזון, נבוכים הם: מסע בביאורו של דון יצחק אברבנאל למורה הנבוכים, ירושלים תשע"ה עמ' 207–274. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. . See

    פירוש על נביאים אחרונים, ירושלים תשל"ט, עמ' רצז.

    For ease of reference, I refer to thisedition. For a more recent but less prevalent edition, see

    פירוש הנביאים לרבינו יצחק אברבנאל,כרך ה: ירמיהו (ירושלים תשע"ד). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. . For differentiation between the representation of the intelligible and the intelligible itself, which explains Abarbanel’s reference even to the mental impression as a type of representation, see J. Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides’ Guide* (Cambridge, MA 2013), pp. 195–96. See further D. Rabinowitz, “The Prophetic Method in the *Guide*,” in *Maimonides’* Guide of the Perplexed*: A Critical Guide*, ed. D. Frank and A. Segal (New York 2021), p. 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. . Indeed, drawing on a Maimonidean distinction, Abarbanel elsewhere indicates in the introduction to his commentary on Isaiah (which he completed in Corfu around a decade before the commentary on Jeremiah) that Jeremiah’s powers of prophecy were certainly inferior to Isaiah’s, let alone those of Moses. See

    ראו: פירוש על נביאים אחרונים, עמ׳ ו-ז.

    (For the date of completion of the Isaiah commentary, see ibid., 296.) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. . See

    פירוש על נביאים אחרונים, עמ' רצז-רצח. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. . See

    פירוש על נביאים אחרונים, עמ' רצח

    Earlier grammarians noted the*‘al*-*’el* interchanges but did not ascribe them to ignorance, carelessness, or error. See

    יונה אבן ג׳נאח, ספר השרשים, מהדורת ב״ז באכר, ברלין תר״נ, עמ׳ 31, 370; דוד קמחי, ספר השרשים, מהדורת ה״ר ביזנתל ופ׳ לברכט, ניו יורק תש״ח (ברלין תר״ז), עט׳ 17, 266. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. . Cf. J. R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: Prophet Like Moses*, Eugene, OR 2015, p. 76: “Poetic discourse probably gets us as close as we can get to actual words the prophet was speaking, but even here we must be careful in assessing Jeremiah as a public speaker. We have only written discourse in the Bible on which to form a judgment, and written discourse is not the same as oral discourse.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. . See

    פירוש על נביאים אחרונים, עמ' רצח

    In particular, speaking of Ezekiel, Abarbanel reprises the notion that he was not “expert (*baqi*) in the holy tongue nor in its writing,” with the result being “very frequent” linguistic lapses, be it in the form either of “strange words” or “extra or missing letters.” See

    פירוש על נביאים אחרונים, עמ' תלד [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. . See

    פירוש על נביאים אחרונים, עמ' רצז-רצח. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. . See

    פירוש על נביאים אחרונים, עמ' רצח [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. . On which, see G. G. Porton, “Isaiah and the Kings: The Rabbis on the Prophet Isaiah,״ in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah,* ed. C. C. Broyles and C. A. Evans (Leiden 1997), vol. 2, pp. 694–95. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. . Greenberg, “Jewish Conceptions,” p. 159.   [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. . Abarbanel greatly circumscribes the scribal activity of Baruch ben Neria. See (פירוש על נביאים אחרונים [שם], עמ׳ שצט, על יר׳ לו 4):

    "והנה ראה ירמיהו לכתוב זה על ידי ברוך ולא עשה כן בשאר נבואותיו שהוא ירמיהו בעצמו כתב כל ספרו זה" [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. . See

    י' עופר, "כתיב וקרי: פשר התופעה, דרכי הסימון שלה ודעות הקדמונים עליה", לשוננו ע (תשס"ח), עמ'55–73; עא (תשס"ט), עמ' 255–279..

    For an English overview, see Y. Ofer, *The Masora on Scripture and Its Methods* (Boston 2018), pp. 85–107. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. . See

    פירוש על נביאים אחרונים, עמ' רצח–צרט. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. For Perfeyt as the spelling of the name in archival documents recently brought to light, see

    י' הקר, "פרופייט דוראן באיטליה וגורל הספרים העבריים אחרי מאורעות קנ"א (1391)", בתוך אבריאל בר־לבב, דב סטוצ'ינסקי ומיכאל הד (עורכים), בדרך אל המודרנה: שי ליוסף קפלן, ירושלים תשע"ט, עמ' 61–92. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. For the texts, see Fargeon, “Annotated Anthology,” 98–99. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. See

    פירוש על נביאים אחרונים, עמ' רצח–רצט

    Abarbanel’s formulation of the last point is full of pathos:

    כי איך אוכל בנפשי להאמין ואיך אעלה על שפתי, שמצא עזרא הסופר ספר תורת האלהים וספרי נביאיו ושאר המדברים ברוח הקדש מסופקים בהפסד ובלבול. והלא ס״ת [ספר תורה] שחסר ממנו אות אחת הוא פסול, כל שכן בקרי וכתיב שבאו בתורה, שכפי הקרי יחסרו בתורה כמה וכמה מהאותיות. והנה זאת נחמתנו בעניינו שתורת ה׳ אתנו בגלותנו ואם נחשוב שעבר על ספר התורה ההפסד והבלבול כדברי האנשים האלה, לא ישאר לנו דבר קיים שנסמוך עליו". [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. As noted by Ofer (“"כתיב וקרי", עמ' 55–56), Abarbanel writes here (like others) anachronistically, assuming the appearance of read forms in margins from ancient times whereas this aspect of the biblical text’s material layout dates only to the advent of Masoretic codices in the early Middle Ages. On the integral connection between the Masorah and codex, see D. Stern, “The First Jewish Books and the Early History of Jewish Reading,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 98 (2008), p. 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. See

    פירוש על נביאים אחרונים, עמ' רצט [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. In *Guide* 2.45, Maimonides enumerates eleven progressively higher degrees of the non-Mosaic prophecy, distinguishing prophecy strictly speaking from two forms of sub-prophetic expression that he designates using the term “holy spirit.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. B. B. Levy, *Fixing God’s Torah: The Accuracy of the Hebrew Bible Text in Jewish Law* (New York 2001), p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. See

    פירוש על נביאים אחרונים, עמ' ש

    Abarbanel initially speaks of “most” examples in Jeremiah belonging to the second class of linguistically problematic formulations but then twice says that “all” of them fit this category. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. See

    פירוש על נביאים אחרונים, עמ' ש [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. . For the work’s date of completion, see the colophon in

    יצחק אברבנאל, פירוש על נביאים אחרונים, ירושלים תשל"ט, עמ' תלא

    For ease of reference, I cite this more commonly available edition. For the introduction to the commentary as it appears in the more recent edition, see

    פירוש על נביאים לרבינו יצחק אברבנאל, כרך ה: ירמיהו, ירושלים תשע"ד, עמ' 1–8

    For Abarbanel’s itinerary in Italy after 1492, see Eric Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel’s Stance Toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue* (Albany 2001), pp. 19–25. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. . For the Pesaro edition, see *BHB* 182167. For 1520 as the likely date of Ibn Adoniyahu’s arrival in Venice (which occurred no later than 1522), see Y. S. Penkower, “Yaakov ben Ḥayyimu-ṣemiḥatmahaduratha-miqra’otha-gedolot,” PhD diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1982,vol. 1, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. . The indispensable major studyremains Penkower, “Jacob ben Ḥayyim.”For recent study, see D. Stern, “The Rabbinic Bible and Its Sixteenth-Century Context,” in *The Hebrew Book in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Joseph R. Hacker and Adam Shear (Philadelphia, 2011), pp. 76–108. For what is largely a summary of this article, see D. Stern, *The Jewish Bible: A Material History* (Seattle and London 2017), pp. 147–57. See also Levy, *Fixing*, pp. 143–148. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. . Here is hardly the place for a full-orbed account of the impact of the second rabbinic Bible. Suffice it to note that on the Jewish side Ibn Adoniyahu’s layout became the model for many subsequent Bibles while his choice of commentaries—and the idea to supply at least two commentaries for each biblical book—shaped Jewish Bible study forever more. See B. Barry Levy, “Rabbinic Bibles, ‘Mikra’ot Gedolot,’ and Other Great Books,” *Tradition* 25 (1991), pp. 65–81; Benjamin Williams, “The 1525 Rabbinic Bible and How to Read It: A Study of the Annotated Copy in the John Rylands Library,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*92 (2016), pp. 53–72. For Christian engagement, see S. G. Burnett, “The Strange Career of the BibliaRabbinica Among Christian Hebraists, 1517–1620,” in *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation: Books, Scholars and Their Readers in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. B. Gordon and M. McLean(Leiden 2012), pp. 63–83. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. . Despite excellent treatment of Ibn Adoniyahu, his detailed critique of Abarbanel has garnered only passing notice (e.g., Penkower, ““Jacob ben Ḥayyim,” vol. 1, p. 27; Levy, *Fixing*, p. 144). It is treated in slightly greater depth, though still summary fashion, in Stern, “Rabbinic Bible,” pp. 104–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. . Penkower, “Jacob ben Ḥayyim,” vol. 1, pp. 27–50 (40–49 for the introduction’s influence). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. . Christian D. Ginsburg, *Jacob Ben Chajim Ibn Adoniyah’s Introduction to the Rabbinic Bible and the MassorethHa-Masssoreth of Elias Levita*, reprint of the 2nd ed. (New York 1968), p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. . Ginsburg, *Jacob Ben Chajim*, p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. . Ginsburg, *Jacob Ben Chajim*, p. 50. On a more minor note, Ibn Adoniyahu objects to a specific application of Abarbanel’s theory as being at odds with a talmudic statement: “Moreover, I object to Abravanel’s assertion that Ezra, finding the wordבעפולים , which denotes heights, and which conveys no meaning to us, he had to put in the margin the wordטחורים ; and that this is also the case with the word ישגלנה the root of which is used with regard to a queen, he therefore put in the margin ישכבנה. This statement is not correct, since we are distinctly told in the Talmud: “Our sages submit, all the verses wherein are written indecent expressions, decent expressions are read in their stead.” [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. . Levy (*Fixing*, 102–36) traces this uneven but rising ascendancy through Ibn Adoniyah’s day. On the tension between the Masorah and halakhic teachings and eventual total triumph of the former, see S. Z. Leiman, “Masorah and Halakhah: A Study in Conflict,” in *Tehillahle-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg*, ed. M. Cogan, B. L. Eichler and J. H. Tigay (Winona Lake 1997), pp. 291–306. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. . Ginsburg, *Jacob Ben Chajim*, pp. 51-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. . Ginsburg, *Jacob Ben Chajim*, pp. 54–55. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. . Ginsburg, *Jacob Ben Chajim*, p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. . Ginsburg, *Jacob Ben Chajim*, pp. 56–57. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. . *Miqra’otgedolotha-keter: Sefer Bereshit*, ed. Menachem Cohen, 2 vols. (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1997–1993), vol. 1, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. . In fact, Abarbanel was quite aware of the kabbalistic understanding of levirate marriage and even defended it in the face of rationalist opposition, asserting that the “secret” embedded in the commandment of levirate marriage turned on the idea of the soul’s transmigration as espoused by “the ancients and the kabbalists [as received] from the mouth of Moses.” See *Perush ‘alha-torah*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem 1964), vol. 3, p. 231. Perush, 3: 231. For discussion, see M.Idel, “Qabbalahu-filosofiyahqedumah ’esel R. Yishaqve-Yehudah ’Abravanel,” in *Filosofiyat ha-’ahavah shel Yehudah ’Abravanel*, ed. M. Dorman and Z. Levi (Haifa 1985), pp. 73–112; B.Ogren, “Circularity, the Soul-Vehicle and the Renaissance Rebirth of Reincarnation: MarsilioFicino and Isaac Abravanel on the Possibility of Transmigration,” *Accademia* 6 (2004), pp. 79–88. For the passage in Ibn Adoniyahu and its background, see Penkower, “Jacob ben Ḥayyim,” vol. 1, pp. 6–12. For metempsychosis and Kabbalah in early modern Jewish thought, see in the index of Brian Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth: Reincarnation in Early Modern Italian Kabbalah* (Leiden 2009), p. 318 (s.v. “kabbalah”). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. . Penkower, “Jacob ben Ḥayyim,” vol. 1, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. . Boaz Huss, *The Zohar: Reception and Impact*, trans. Y. Nave (Oxford 2016), pp. 90–92. For Pico and Reuchlin, a convenient summary (focusing on the latter) is G. L. Jones, “Introduction” to Johann Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah = De Arte Cabalistica*, trans. S. (Lincoln and London 1993), pp. 7–33. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. . Andrea Gondos. *Kabbalah in Print: The Study and Popularization of Jewish Mysticism in Early Modernity* (Albany 2020), p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. . Goshen-Gottstein, “Foundations,” 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. . Penkower, “Jacob ben Ḥayyim,” vol. 1, pp. 12–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. . Ginsburg, *Jacob Ben Chajim*, pp. 77–78, 38 respectively (Stern, “Rabbinic Bible,” 90, for the Cyrus allusion). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. . Lawee, *Stance*, p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. . For up-to-date bibliography, see P.Grendler, “Humanism,” in Oxford Bibliographies Online (http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0002.xml). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. . D. R. Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship: Language, Law, and History in the French Renaissance* (New York 1970), p. 7; P. Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (New York 1970), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. . A. Grafton, “Humanist Philologies: Texts, Antiquities and Their Transformations in the Early Modern West,” in *World Philology*, ed. S. Pollock, et al. (Cambridge, MA 2015), p. 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. . J. L. Kugel, “The Bible in the University,” in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters*, ed. W. H. Propp, B. Halpern, and D. N. Freedman (Winona Lake, IN 1990), p. 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. . Stern, “Rabbinic Bible,” p. 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. . Ginsburg, *Jacob Ben Chajim*, pp. 66–69. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
64. . Levy, *Fixing*, p. 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
65. . Stern, “Rabbinic Bible,” pp. 104-105. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
66. . Penkower, “Jacob ben Ḥayyim,” vol. 1, pp. 30–31; Levy, *Fixing*, pp. 147–148. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
67. . Erika Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* (Cambridge MA, 1995), p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
68. . Rummel, *Debate*, 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
69. . Jerry H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance* (Princeton 1983); A. Hamilton, “Humanists and the Bible,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. J.Kraye (Cambridge 1996), pp. 100–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
70. . Penkower, “Jacob ben Ḥayyim,” vol. 1, pp. 42–45. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
71. . He could have added that criticism of Jeremiah along the lines sketched by Abarbanel lacked any rabbinic precedent. See I. Rosen-Zvi, “Like a Priest Exposing His Own Wayward Mother: Jeremiah in Rabbinic Literature”, H. Najman and K. Schmid (eds.), *Jeremiah’s Scriptures: Production, Reception, Interaction, Transformation*, Leiden 2017, pp. 570-590.For medieval images of Jeremiah, see S. Nir, ‘The Development of the Literary Character from Late Midrash Literature to Medieval Exegesis, as Exemplified in the Characters of Balaam, Jeremiah and Esther’. Ph.D. dissertation. Tel Aviv University 2019, pp. 205-221. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
72. . E.Lawee, “Abarbanel in Italy: The Critique of the Kabbalist Elijah Hayyim Genazzano,” *Jewish History* 23 (2009), pp. 223–53. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
73. . Kalman Bland, “Issues in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Exegesis,” in *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. David C. Steinmetz (Durham, NC 1990), p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)