

*A New Intermediate Text of Rabbinical-Hebrew Matthew:
The Harley Manuscript*

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The Harley Manuscript 7637 of the British Library is described as a punctuated Hebrew translation of the Gospel of Matthew from 1700–1799 CE, which “agrees with the Basle edition of 1537 and the Paris text of 1551,” as edited and published by Sebastian Münster, allegedly based on a manuscript given to him by Jewish conversos. This all might stand to reason; however, closer examination shows that the Harley Manuscript (H) has many divergences from Münster’s edition (M) which are not mere copyist errors. Furthermore, while M has sometimes come under suspicion of being a Christian translation into Hebrew,¹ H significantly evinces tendencies and readings in agreement with medieval rabbinical-Hebrew texts of the Gospel of Matthew. General differences distinguishing H from M and a collation of specific instances wherein H better agrees with other Hebrew Matthew texts demonstrates that H is not just a copy of M, but better understood as something intermediate to Shem-Tob’s rabbinical-Hebrew text-type (based on the Plutei Manuscript [5]) and the manuscript of Jean Baptiste du Tillet [1].

General Differences

Among the differences of H with M, it can first be noted that while M is a printed text with many peculiar errors of vocalization (presumably by Münster himself), H does not always

¹Pinchas Lapide concludes: “While these and many similar latinisms point to a Christian hand, the following un-Jewish errors add support to the hypothesis that neither a Jew familiar with the Torah, nor even an ex-Jew, could have been responsible either for the translation of this text or for its intentional distortion.” Since Lapide, no one has seriously considered this second disjunct.

duplicate M's vocalizations, but sometimes provides better vocalizations for its readings, and sometimes defective ones of its own. Indeed, it seems as if H were copying from an unvocalized text and supplying vocalizations on the fly, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. Some scribal habits are so particular and prevalent in the manuscript that it would seem to betray either an ignorance of H's scribe with M, or a disregard of H's scribe with M's vocalizations and a willingness to change them. Secondly, H has tendencies not common to M. For one, the Tetragrammaton is never fully written out, but instead its abbreviation (יהו) is substituted in nineteen places, according to traditional Jewish reverence for the Name of God—a trait which is interestingly common to other rabbinical-Hebrew Matthew texts. M does not conform to this practice but includes the full spelling of the Tetragrammaton in every instance (probably some of Münster's undocumented changes to his prototype). Third, the common Hebrew verb for the “hanging” of Jesus (תליה), rather than “crucifying” (צליב), is conspicuously present in H (Mt 18:6, 20:19, 27:22), unlike in M. These interesting readings are more or less in agreement with the tendency of the other rabbinical-Hebrew versions employed in anti-Christian polemics (and also notably both the Talmudic Yeshu material and the Hebrew gospel parodies known as the Toldot Yeshu) which describe Jesus' execution as a “hanging” (and having allusion to the execution of Haman). Fourth, unlike M, H presents the questionable moments of faith of individuals not as mere doubting, but hyperbolically as “turning away” (Mt 14:31, 28:17), playing up the disbelief of Jesus' closest associates. Altogether, these unusual differences of H's text from M serve to demonstrate a unique affinity of H's scribe for Jewish tradition and either an unacquaintance or disregard for the vocalized text of M.

Collation of Agreements of H with Shem-Tob and Du-Tillet

A more technical analysis can be given. The following readings help to contrast H from M and highlight its connections to the medieval rabbinical-Hebrew texts of Matthew: Shem-Tob's (S) and Du-Tillet's (D). Some of the agreements between H, S, and sometimes D against M are not so striking; but many of them are, and altogether they provide additional strong evidence against a dependency of H on M.²

² This is not a comprehensive list of disagreements between H and M. There are many more unique disagreements that can be found, but the focus here is specifically on agreements with S.

Key

S = Hebrew Shem-Tob, R. Isaac ben Shaprut, 5145 AM/1385 CE: 16c (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, MS ebr. Plut.2.17, fols. 134r–162r.)

D = Hebrew Du-Tillet, anonymous, 1325 CE: 14-15c (Paris, Bibliotheque nationale de France, MS hebr. 132, fols. 1r–38v.)

M = Hebrew Münster: 16c (Münster, Sebastian, ed. Torat ha-Mashiah: Evangelium Secundum Matthaeum in Lingua Hebraica. Basel: Heinrich Peter, 1537.)

H = Hebrew Harley, anonymous: 18c (London, British Library, Harley MS 7637, fols. 1r–52v.)

Readings shared by H with S (and sometimes D), but not with M: [H + S (+ D)] – M

1. Mt 4:6 ישאנך HS] ישאנך DM
2. Mt 7:9 יתן H] יתן S, ומסר D, ומסר M
3. Mt 7:23 אן HSD] ען M
4. Mt 8:5 לו HSD] אותו M
5. Mt 8:14 בקדחת HD] מקדחת S, בחמה M
6. Mt 8:23 באניה HS] בספניה DM
7. Mt 8:34 בגבולם HSD] מגבולם M
8. Mt 9:3 בלבם HS] בקרבם DM
9. Mt 9:9 ויקם וילך HS] omit DM
10. Mt 9:16 חרש HS] הפסול DM
11. Mt 10:11 ובכל HS] ובאיו DM
12. Mt 10:25 לבעל HS] בעל את DM
13. Mt 10:30 בלם H] בלם S, בלן DM
14. Mt 11:7 מה HS] למה DM

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15. Mt 11:22 מִמָּכֶם M, מִמָּכֶם D, מִכֵּן S, H] מִמָּכֶם
16. Mt 12:2 דַּמ DM רֹאִי HS] נִכּוֹן
17. Mt 12:13 דַּמ DM הַשְׁנִית, S, הָאֲתֶרֶת H] אֲתֶרֶת
18. Mt 12:16 דַּמ DM יִפְרֹסְמוּהוּ HS] יִגְלוּהוּ
19. Mt 12:28 דַּמ DM וְכִי, S, וְאֵם H] אֵם כִּי
20. Mt 12:45 דַּמ DM מֵאוֹתָהּ, S, מִמֶּנּוּ H] מִמֶּנּוּ
21. Mt 13:31 דַּמ DM לְגִרְעִין, S, לְגִרְגָּרִים H] לְגִרְגָּרִים
22. Mt 13:33 מ, סֹלֶת D, סֹלֶת HS] קֶמַח
23. Mt 13:57 דַּמ DM אֵלָּא HS] אֵם כִּי
24. Mt 14:22 דַּמ DM פָּצָר HS] צָוָה
25. Mt 15:25 דַּמ DM הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי HS] עֲזָרְנִי
26. Mt 16:1 מ, לוֹ HSD] אוֹתוֹ
27. Mt 16:4 דַּמ DM לָהּ HS] לוֹ
28. Mt 16:17 מ, אֶתָּה אֶשְׁרִי HSD] אֶשְׁרִיךְ
29. Mt 17:14 מ, אֶת־בְּרִכְיוֹ HSD] בְּרִכְיוֹ עַל
30. Mt 18:12 דַּמ DM בְּמִדְבָּר HS] בְּהָרִים
31. Mt 18:18 מ, כֹּל־מָה, S, אֶשֶׁר וְכֹל HD] מָה וְכֹל
32. Mt 19:4 מ, נִקְבָּה וְאֵת HSD] וְנִקְבָּה
33. Mt 20:19 מ, הַשְׁלִישִׁי HS] הַשְׁלִישִׁי | דַּמ DM וְלֹהֲצֹלֵב, S, omit H] וְלֹהֲתֹלֵה
34. Mt 21:1 מ, לִירוּשָׁלַיִם, D, לִירוּשָׁלַם, S, יְרוּשָׁלַם אֶל H] יְרוּשָׁלַיִם אֶל
35. Mt 21:13 דַּמ DM, omit S, הַעֲמִים לְכֹל H] וְאֶתָּם לְכֹל
36. Mt 21:12 דַּמ DM הִלְסִטְסִין, S, פָּרִיצִי' H] הַפָּרִיצִים
37. Mt 21:18 דַּמ DM וַיָּשׁוּב HS] וַיָּשׁוּב

38. Mt 21:33 S, לְדַרְכּוֹ H] מִרְחוֹק בְּדֶרֶךְ | DM יָקַב בּוֹ HS] בּוֹ חָצַב יָקַב וְגַם | omit DM HS] וְגַם Mt 21:33, DM לְגוֹר
39. Mt 21:44 DM מִי וְעַל, S וְאַשֶּׁר H] אֲשֶׁר וְעַל Mt 21:44
40. Mt 22:39 M אֶת־רֶעֶף תִּתְּנָהּ HSD] לְרֶעֶף וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ Mt 22:39
41. Mt 23:4 DM מִתְנַשְּׂאוֹת וּבִלְתִּי, S לְסִבְלָם יֻכְלוּ לֹא H] שְׂאֵת אָדָם יֻכַּל לֹא Mt 23:4
42. Mt 23:4 DM אוֹתָן יִגְעֻוּ, S לְנוֹעַ H] יִנְיֻעוּן Mt 23:4
43. Mt 23:16 D, מְאוֹמָה הוּא אֵין, S חֲזִיב אֵינוּ H] חוֹטֵא הוּא אֵין Mt 23:16
44. Mt 23:25 DM וְטִמְאָה HS] וְטִמְאָה Mt 23:25
45. Mt 23:36 M כָּל־הָאֵלֶּה HSD] אֵלֶּה כָּל Mt 23:36
46. Mt 24:12 M הָרַבִּים אֶהְבֶּה, D מִהָרַבִּים הָאֶהְבֶּה, S רַבִּים אֶהְבֶּתָּ H] הָרַבִּים אֶהְבֶּתָּ Mt 24:12
47. Mt 24:15 DM מְלוֹמָם אֶת־שִׁקוֹן, S שׁוֹמֵם שִׁקוֹן H] שׁוֹמֵם שִׁקוֹן Mt 24:15
48. Mt 24:23 DM בָּזָה, S לָשֵׁם H] שֵׁם Mt 24:23
49. Mt 24:50 DM הִתְיַחַל, S יִחַפֶּה H] חִפֶּה Mt 24:50
50. Mt 26:4 M וְלִהְיוֹג, S וְלִהְיוֹרְגוֹ HD] וְלִהְיוֹרְגוֹ Mt 26:4
51. Mt 26:15 DM כְּסָפִים HS] כֶּסֶף Mt 26:15
52. Mt 26:22 M וַיִּנְעֻפוּ, D אָפִם וַיִּחַר HS] וַיִּתְעַצְבוּ Mt 26:22
53. Mt 26:68 DM מְלֻשִׁית HS] הַמְלֻשִׁית Mt 26:68
54. Mt 27:19 DM בִּימָה עַל, S בְּכֶסֶא H] כֶּסֶא עַל Mt 27:19
55. Mt 27:22 DM יִצְלַב, S שְׁיִתְּלָהּ H] יִתְּלָהּ Mt 27:22
56. Mt 27:46 M שְׁבַקְתָּנִי, D שְׁכַחְתָּנִי HS] עֲזַבְתָּנִי Mt 27:46
57. Mt 27:63 M מִתְעָה, D הַמִּתְעָה, S הַשִּׁקְרָן H] שִׁקָּר אִישׁ Mt 27:63
58. Mt 28:2 DM גָּדוֹל רַעֲשׁ, S הָאָרֶץ וְנִרְעָשָׂה H] גָּדוֹל הָאָרֶץ רַעֲשׁ Mt 28:2
59. Mt 28:15 M יְהוּדִים HS] הַיְּהוּדִים Mt 28:15
60. Mt 28:17 DM הִסְתַּפְּקוּ וּקְצַת, S בּוֹ שֶׁנִּסְתַּפְּקוּ מֵהֶם H] פָּנוּ מֵהֶם וּקְצַת Mt 28:17

Conclusion

The above 60 instances of differences in the texts of H and M show that H is not a mere copy of M but has many readings intermediate to S and D. This needs explanation, and so it is useful to consider some hypotheses: (1) Perhaps H is a copy of M after all, but the scribe altered some readings due to familiarity with other rabbinical-Hebrew Matthew texts; (2) Perhaps H is from a manuscript antecedent to M; (3) Perhaps H is Münster's personal edited copy, or a copy of such. Assessing the strength of these theories requires using the criteria of adequacy.

Criteria	(1) H is from M but altered	(2) H is from an antecedent of M	(3) H is Münster's personal copy
Testable	No	Yes	Yes
Fruitful	No	No	No
Scope	No	Yes	No
Simple	No	Yes	No
Conservative	Yes	No	No

1 seems like an ad hoc hypothesis, being neither simple nor having explanatory scope beyond this one instance. It's not testable, since there is no way to disprove it, and it's not fruitful—even if true, it contributes nothing—but it is conservative. 2 is shockingly unconservative, yet it can be tested with further examination of disagreements between H, M, S, and D, and its simplicity appeals to our already well-supported expectations of textual evolution, having a greater explanatory scope than just one text. 3 is similar to 2, but with the exception of lacking simplicity and scope—again, more like an ad hoc hypothesis. In conclusion, the evidence is suggestive that the text of H is not dependent on M, but may have derived from the very manuscript (or its sources) that Münster claimed to have based his edition on, providing a window into a rabbinical-Hebrew ancestor uniting these disparate text-types. H can be better seen as intermediate to the texts of S, D, and M, rather than an offshoot of M.

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