

C H A P. IV.

*Of the Antiquity of the Vowel-Points,
and Accents.*

I Put the vowel-points and accents together, because, according to the doctrine of them, they have a dependence on each other; the points are often changed according to the position of the accents, and therefore the one must be as early as the other; and as *Elias Levita*^b himself observes, “there is no syllable without a point, and there is no word without an accent.” About the antiquity of these there has been a controversy for a century or two past, and which is not yet decided; nor do I expect it will be by this essay of mine; all that I propose is, to try how far back, or how high, in point of antiquity, these things can be traced and carried.

THERE have been divers opinions concerning them. Some think they are of a divine original; and others, that they are of human invention. Some suppose that they
were

^b Sepher Tob Taam, five, de accent. c. 4.

were first invented by *Ben Apher* and *Ben Naphtali*, about the year 1037^e; others, that they were devised by the Jews of *Tiberias*, 500 years after Christ at least, or however were invented after the *Talmud* was finished^f; others ascribe them to *Ezra* and the men of the great synagogue^g; who they suppose, at least revived and restored them, and fixed them to the consonants, which before were only delivered and used in a traditionary way; and others are of opinion, they were given to *Moses* on mount *Sinai*, as to the power of them in pronouncing and reading, though not as to the make and figures of them in writing, but were propagated by tradition to the times of *Ezra*; whilst others believe they were *ab origine*^h, and were invented by *Adam* together with the letters, or however that they were coeval with the letters, and in use as soon as they were: which account is most probable, may appear by tracing them step by step, from one period of

^e So Morinus de Sinceritate Heb. & Gr. Text. l. 2. Exercitat. 14. c. 1. Genebrard. chronolog. p. 81. Calmet. &c. ^f Elias Levita, præfat. 3. ^g Ben Chayim præfat. Bibl. in principio & multi script. Jud. ^h Cosri par. 4. f. 25. Muscatus in ib. fol. 229. 1. Meor Enayim. c. 59.

of time to another ; and to begin with the lowest of them,

A. D. 1037.

IN this year, according to *R. Gedaliah** and *David Ganz*†, flourished two famous Jews, *Ben Asher*, and *Ben Naphtali*, to whom some have ascribed the invention of the vowel-points ; and so early, however, it is owned that they existed, even 700 years ago and more : but that these were the inventors of them is not probable, since in the following century lived many eminent Jewish doctors, *Jarchi*, *Kimchi*, and *Aben Ezra*, who often make mention of the points, but never as a novel invention ; which, had these been the authors of, it can hardly be thought, but that they would have made mention of them as such, and commended them for it. *Kimchi*‡ observes against those that read *Adonai* lord, and *im-mecha* with thee, in *Pf. cx. 1, 3.* instead of *Adoni* my lord, and *ammeca* thy people, “ that from the rising of the sun to the setting of it, (i. e. throughout the world) “ you

* *Shalshalat Hakabala* fol. 28. 2. † *Tzemach David*. par. 1. fol. 37, 1.
 ‡ *Apud Pocok. Porta Mosis* miscell. not. p. 53.

“ you will find, in all copies, *Nun* with “ *cbirek*, and *Ain* with *patbach* :” so that in his time pointed bibles were in common and general use. Besides, he charges *Jerom* with an error on account of the points, and therefore must believe they were in his time. The author of the book of *Cofri*,^h even if *R. Judah Hallevi* was the author of it, lived about 1140, or as others, 1089; and he speaks of punctuation as a divine thing, as the effect of divine wisdom, and does not appear to have the least notion of its being of human invention, and much less the invention of the present age or preceding century; nay *R. Judah Chijug*, saidⁱ to be the first grammarian and the chief of them, he found the Bible pointed and accented, as *Elias Levita*^k says; and he was coeval with *Ben Asher*, and wrote a book of the double letters, and another of pointing,^l as if it was of long time and generally received, and was become an art; he makes not the least mention of *Ben Asher* being concerned in it; and so *R. Jonab*, another grammarian, a little after him, is silent concerning this matter^m; and

^h Par. 3. c. 32. ⁱ Balmesii Mikneh Abraham p. 24. lin. 10. Eliæ præfat. Methurgeman, fol. 2. 1. ^k Ib.
^l Wolfii Bibliothec. Heb. p. 338. 424. ^m Vid. Buxtorf. de Punct. Antiq. par. 2. p. 329.

and *Aben Ezra* speaks ^a of *Ben Labrat*, who was before 'em both, as having found *הרבות* with *pathach* in *Pf.* ix. 6. in an antient pointed copy; so that there was an *antient pointed* Bible before these men were in being: and what puts it out of all doubt that these men could not be the inventors of the points is, as *Elias Levita* observes, ^o that their dissentions and disputes were about the points and accents, and about words before pointed, and not then pointed; wherefore it is not reasonable to suppose that they would disagree and dispute about what they themselves had invented; so that it most evidently appears, that the points must be in use before their time.

A. D. 927.

ABOUT this time lived *Saadiab Gaon*, who wrote a book concerning pointing, which *Yarchi*, on *Pf.* xlv. 9. makes mention of, and says he saw it; the points therefore must be before his time; for it cannot be thought that he should write a book concerning an art, and the rules of it, which did not exist: the accents also must then be in use, since, as *Gaon* was for dividing

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^a Comment. in *Pf.* 9. 6.

^o Præfat. 3.

Jehovah from *righteousness* in *Jer.* xxiii. 6. making the latter to be the name of the Messiah, and the former the name of God, who called him so. *Aben Ezra*^p replies to him, that he mistook or perverted the author of the accents, and made him guilty of an error, who put *Tarcha* (or *Tiphca*) on יקרא; and again, whereas the word *Jehovah* is repeated in *Exod.* xxxiv. 6. *Gaon* observes that the first name is to be connected with ויקרא, *proclaimed*; but *Aben Ezra*^q replies, if it should be so, why did not the author of the accents connect it? but says he, it is right to repeat the name, as *Abraham Abraham, Jacob Jacob, Moses Moses*. Now it would have been absurd in *Aben Ezra* to have charged *Gaon* with a mistake or perversion of the accents, if they were not in being in the times of *Gaon*: he lived many years before *Ben Asher* and *Ben Naphtali*; this proves that they were not the inventors of them; and *Aben Ezra* himself lived in the next century to them, and he speaks of the accents not as a novel invention, but of as early use as the men of *Ezra's* great synagogue; and
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^p Comment. in *Exod.* 18. 3.

^q *Ib.* in *Exod* 34. 6.

expresses such an high opinion of them; that he advises not to acquiesce in any exposition that is not according to them, nor hearken to it.

A. D. 900.

IN the church of St. *Dominic* in *Bononia*, a copy of the *Hebrew* scriptures is kept with great care, which is pretended to be the original copy written by *Ezra* himself, and is valued at a high rate; so that sometimes the *Bononians* have borrowed large sums of money upon it, and repaid them for the redemption of it. It is written in a very fair character, on calf-skin dress'd, the letters retaining their blackness, and it is made up in a roll, according to the antient manner. This copy was presented by the Jews to *Aymericus*, the then master of the order of St. *Dominic*, who exercised that office about the year 1308, as *Montfaucon* * relates, who saw it; and who further observes, that besides a *Latin* inscription sewed to it in the middle of the volume, which he gives, there is also one in *Hebrew*, “ this is the book of the law of *Moses*,

* *Diar. Italic.* p. 399. 400. vid. ejusdem *Præliminar.* in *Hexapla Origen.* p. 22.

“ *ses*, which *Ezra* the scribe wrote, and
 “ read before the congregation, both men
 “ and women; and he stood in a wooden
 “ pulpit.” *Montfaucon* says not whether it
 is pointed or no, but dean *Prideaux*[†] says,
 it has the vowel-points; and *Franciscus*
Tissardus Ambaceus asserts[‡] the same, who
 says he often saw it; as did also *Arias Mon-*
tanus,[§] and who affirms that it has the *Ma-*
sorab, the same as in the *Venetian* and
Bombergian editions. Now though there is
 no reason to believe it to be the autograph
 of *Ezra*, nor near so early, yet, according
 to the account of it; it must be antient;
 for it is near 460 years ago since it was pre-
 sented by the Jews to the monastery, and
 as they presented it as a very antient copy,
 even as the autograph of *Ezra*, it must
 have had then marks of antiquity on it,
 and must have been written some ages be-
 fore; and as Dr. *Kennicott*[¶] observes, it
 is a moderate supposition to imagine it was
 written as long before it was presented, as
 it has been since, and so must be of as
 early a date as where I have placed it.

A. D.

[†] Connection, par. 1. p. 362.

Hottinger. Thesaur. Philolog. p. 512, 513.

fat. de ver. Lect. in Heb. Lib.

1. p. 310.

[‡] Gram. Heb. apud

[§] Præ-

[¶] Dissertation, vol.

A. D. 740.

IF the book of *Cofri*, before-mentioned, was not only compiled from loose sheets and put together by *R. Judah Hallevi*, as some think; but that the dialogue itself was had between a Jew, whose name, some say, was *Isaac Sangari*, and a *Persian* king, whose name was *Chofroes*, and which *R. Judah* says, was 400 years before his time, so he suggests in the beginning of the book; and whereas he flourished about the year 1140, this book must be composed, or this dialogue held, about the year 740. Now in this work the points and accents are much spoken of, in which the author commends the excellence and elegance of the *Hebrew* tongue on account of them; gives many of the names of both, and declares the usefulness of them; asserts that they were received by tradition from *Moses*; that they are the production of admirable wisdom, and would never have been received had they not come from a prophet, or one divinely assisted^{*}; and he does not give the least hint of their being of an human, and much less of a modern
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* *Cofri*, par. 2. f. 80. & par. 3. f. 31, 32.

invention ; yea, expressly ascribes the seven kings or vowel-points, as *Aben Ezra* also calls them, to *Ezra* and the men of his synagogue, and which he supposes they received by tradition from *Moses*.

A. D. 600.

THOSE who ascribe the invention of the points to the Jews of *Tiberias*, suppose that this was after the year 500, when the *Babylonian Talmud* was finished. Their reason for it is, because, as they affirm, no mention is made of them in that work, and therefore the invention of them must be later than that ; but of this more hereafter. However, according to this hypothesis, one would think they must have been invented and in use by the time above given ; though indeed those who espouse this hypothesis, are at a very great uncertainty about the exact time of this invention. The first person that broached this notion was *Elias Levita*, a *German Jew*, who lived in the 16th century, contrary to the sentiments and belief of his whole nation ; who either suppose the points were from *Ezra*, and the men of the great synagogue, or from *Moses* at mount *Sinai*, or from *Adam* who had

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them from God himself. This man asserted,^y that after the finishing of the *Talmud*, which he places in the year 436, after the desolation of the second temple, arose the men of *Tiberias*; wise and great men, expert in the scripture, and in purity and in eloquence of language excelled all the *Jews* in those times; and after them did not arise any like them, and that these were the authors of the points: this is said without offering the least proof of it, and by one that lived near a thousand years after; it is strange that he only should be in this secret; that no history, Jewish nor Christian, should make mention of it for such a course of years: it is not probable that there were such a sett of men at *Tiberias* about the time suggested, since a great destruction of the *Jews* was made at it, in the year 352, by *Gallus*, at the command of *Constantius*; and since promotion to doctorship ceased in the land of *Israel* with *Hillel* the prince, who flourished about the year 340, as the *Jewish* chronologers^z observe: and since the flourishing university of the *Jews* was at *Babylon* at the

^y Prefat. 3. ad Masoret. ^z Shalshalet Hakabala
fol. 25. 2. Gan 2. Tz. mach. David, fol. 33. 1.

the time of this pretended invention, very unlikely it is, that it should be done without their knowledge, advice, and assistance, and without either approbation of it, or opposition to it by any of them, for ought appears; and that it should be universally received by the *Jews* at once every where, and not one *Momus* to find fault, this is very extraordinary; yea, that it should be received by the *Karaite Jews* themselves, enemies to tradition and innovation, as will be seen hereafter. It is strange that, according to this scheme, as many persons must be employed in this work, that there should be but one sort of pointing; that they should all take the same method, throughout the whole Bible, without any variation, except some anomalies, and which are to be observed in letters as well as in points; and that this should be always continued with the *Jews*, and never any other scheme proposed and attempted; and that it should not be known who began it and when. And indeed we are left at a very great uncertainty about the place where this wonderful affair was transacted; *Elias*, the relator of it, should he be pressed

hard, seems to have found a subterfuge to retreat unto, and therefore he tells us that *Tiberias* is *Moesia** ; but where that is he says not, but leaves us to seek for it where we can, and take a wild goat's chace into *Asia Minor*, to *Pontus*, or *Bitbunia*, or *Paphlagonia*, where *Moesia* or *Mysia* is said to be ; but never famous for *Jewish* doctors, nor have any been heard of in it : the *Tiberias* of the scripture, and of *Josephus*, and of the *Jewish* writers in general, was a city in *Palestine*, situate on the lake of *Genesaret* ; famous in their writings for the last sitting of the *Sanhedrim* in it, for a very considerable university there, for the residence of *R. Judah*, the saint, in it, where it is probable he compiled the *Misnah*, and of many others of their celebrated doctors, in the 2d and 3d centuries ; and where it is certain the *Jerusalem Talmud* was finished, in the 3d century ; after which the university in it began to decrease, and we hear but now and then of a doctor in that place, the universities in *Babylon* bearing away all the glory ;
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* Præfat. 3. ad Masoret. he seems to have taken this name of *Tiberias* from Ben Chayim in Masor. Mag. Lit. ¶ fol. 31. 2. or from David Kimchi, in Miclol. fol. 108. 2.

years before the finishing of the *Talmud*, according to the most early account of it; whereby he has destroyed the hypothesis on which this notion is built. It is incredible that men under a judicial blindness, and the curse of God, ignorant of divine things, should form a scheme which so well ascertains the sense of the scriptures; that they should hit on such an invention, and publish it, so subversive of their own religion, and so serviceable to christianity and its doctrines, and which in no one instance opposes it; and that after they had seen, as they must in the age they are supposed to invent them, what use the christians had made of various passages of scripture against *Judaism*, and in favour of christianity; and yet should point and accentuate those very passages against themselves, and for the christians: take one instance in the room of many as to accents. in *Gen. xlix. 10.* how gladly now would they have the *Athnach* removed from רגליו to עך and then read the words, as they have attempted to do^b, *the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between*

^b Vid. Menasseh. ben Israel. Conciliat. in Gen. Quæst. 65. § 3.

between his feet for ever ; for Shiloh shall come : but the accents are against them, and forbid this reading ; of what use they are in *Jer.* xxiii. 6. has been already observed : nor is it credible, that the accents should be invented by the *Jews* about the time supposed ; since one use of them was to lead and direct in music, and that the use of accents should in prose and verse be different, as they be in metrical and prose-writings of the Bible, when at the time supposed, metre was disused, and the metre of the *Hebrews* lost and unknown. He that can believe such a romantic story as all this is, need not be squeamish to believe the most arrant lye and notorious fable, to be met with in the whole *Talmud* ; a greater I know not ; a louder lye I believe was never told by a *Jew*, nor by any other, that ever met with the least degree of credit in the world ; it is amazing it should be believed by any : some *Protestants* at first received it, through their too great credulity, and through their high esteem for the above-mentioned *Elias*, by whom they were taught the *Hebrew* language, of the usefulness of which they were sensible. Many of the *Papists* greedily caught at it,

and commended the *Protestants* for receiving it; who might hope, in the issue, to avail themselves of it, since it would appear from hence, that the sense of scripture the *Protestants* had given into, depended on the invention of men, even of some *Jews*, long since the time of Christianity; and they might hope that on this account, they would reject the points, and then, as words would be subject to various senses without them, and some contrary to each other, they would at last be convinced of the necessity of one infallible interpreter of scripture. *Morinus*, a papist, and a very principal opposer of the points, in a book^c, highly commended by some *Protestant* writers, speaks out plainly; he says, “ the reason
 “ why God would have the scriptures writ-
 “ ten in the ambiguous manner they are,
 “ (i. e. without points) is, because it was
 “ his will that every man should be sub-
 “ ject to the *judgment of the church*, and
 “ not interpret the scriptures in his own
 “ way; for seeing the reading of the scrip-
 “ tures is so difficult, and so liable to va-
 “ rious ambiguities, (i. e. a mere nose of
 “ wax,

^c De Heb. & Græc. Text. Sinceritate, l. 1. Exercitat, 6. c. 2. §. 8. p. 198, 199.

“ wax, to be turned any way) ; from the
 “ very nature of the thing, he observes, it
 “ is plain, that it was not the will of God,
 “ that every one should rashly and irreve-
 “ rently take upon him to explain it, nor
 “ to suffer the common people to expound
 “ it at their pleasure, but, that in those,
 “ as in other things respecting religion,
 “ his will is, that the people should de-
 “ pend upon *the priests.*”

A. D. 500.

ABOUT this time the *Babylonian Talmud* was finished; according to *Scaliger* *, in 508; in which it is said no mention is made of the points and accents: but, upon enquiry, it will be found to be otherwise; for though the *Talmudists* do not mention the names, nor express the figures of the vowel-points, they manifestly suppose them; which shew they were in being in their times; as when they say, *read not so, but so*, it is plain they have no reference to the consonants, which are the same one way as another; they must have respect to the difference of the vowel-
 points,

* De Emend. Temp. l. 7. p. 323.

points, the doctrine of which is the foundation of their remarks, and therefore must be known by them : so the *Karaites* charge the *Rabbins* with perverting the commands of God by their *Al-tikra's*, read not so, but so, not changing the consonants but the vowels and accents ; for having said that the copies of theirs and the *Rabbins*, with respect to punctuation were the same ; they observe, that otherwise in the places where they change the vowels and accents, and say, do not read so, but so, they would not have said, do not read, but absolutely would have pointed according to their pleasure ; but that it is suggested they dared not do ; which, the *Karaites* add, is a proof, that before the finishing of the *Talmud*, from the days of old, the law was pointed and accented^b ; thus when they say^c, with respect to *Pf.* 1. 23. do not read ויש but ויש, they mean do not read *Shin* with a point on the right hand, but with a point on the left ; so quoting *Prov.* xix. 23. they direct^d, do not read שבע but שבע that is, do not read the word with the point on the left hand

^b Dod Mordecai, c. 11. p. 137. c. 12. p. 152. 153. ^c T. Bab. Sotah, fol. 5. 2. Moed Katon, fol. 5. 1. ^d T. Eab. Beracot, fol. 14. 1.

hand of *Shin*, when it would signify *satisfied*, as the common punctuation reads; but with the point on the right hand of it, and then it signifies *seven*; and so proves what it is quoted for, as they think, that that man that lies seven nights without a dream, is an evil man, and so read what follows; *he shall not be visited, he is an evil man*: and so in *Is. ii. 22.* *Ula* says^e, don't read *במה* but *במה*, that is, to serve his own purpose, don't read as if it was *Bamah*, (i. e. pointed with a *Patach* and *Segol*) which would signify *wherein*, but *Bamah*, (i. e. with two *Kametz*s) and so signifies an high place; likewise in *Is. liv. 3. 1.* it is said^f, don't read *בניך* (i. e. with a *Kametz*) thy children, but *בוניך*, (i. e. with a *vau*, and *cholem*) thy builders; so quoting *Ezekiel, xlvi. 25.* it is observed^g, don't read *שמה*, *Shammah* there (i. e. with two *Kametz*s) but *שמה*, *Shemah*, his name, (as if with *Shevah*, and *Kametz*) and this form does not suppose any corruption of the text, nor even a various reading; but is a kind of allegorical sport of these *Rabbins* among themselves as *F. Simon* * calls it; when to shew their *acumen*,
observe,

^e T. Bab. Sotah fol. 4. 2.

fol. 64. 1.

^g T. Bab. Bathra, fol. 75. 2.

Crit. c. 3. p. 17.

^f T. Bab. Beracot,

* *Disquis.*