Masoretic Notations of Personal Names

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Of the approximately fifteen-hundred personal names in the Hebrew Bible the Masorah designates only ninety or so with a notation that they are personal names. The reason why the Masorah selects these ninety names for special mention is because they are all homonyms. They have the same form, same consonants and vowels as other words, and thus are liable to be confused with those words. This article will survey the usages of Masoretic personal name notations, examine the type of names covered by these notations, and explore names that are selected because of specific accents or spelling. One of the surprising results of our analysis of the Masoretic personal naming notes is the discovery that the Masoretes had identified a name that has been ignored by modern scholarship.

KEYWORDS: Masorah; Hebrew Bible; Homonyms; Book of Chronicles; Leningrad Codex; Genealogies.

NOTAS MASÓRETICAS DE ANTROPÓNIMOS.— De los aproximadamente quinientos nombres propios que aparecen en la Biblia hebrea, sólo en noventa casos hay una anotación masóretica que indica que lo son. La razón por la que la Masora selecciona estos noventa nombres es porque todos son homónimos, es decir, tienen la misma forma, las mismas consonantes y vocales que otras palabras y, por lo tanto, pueden ser confundidos con ellas. Este artículo examina los usos de las anotaciones masóreticas sobre los nombres propios, el tipo de nombres que tienen anotaciones de este tipo, y estudia los nombres que se seleccionan debido a su ortografía o a sus acentos específicos. Uno de los resultados más importantes del análisis de las anotaciones masóreticas sobre nombres propios es el descubrimiento de que los masoretes ya habían identificado como tal un nombre que ha pasado desapercibido a los investigadores modernos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Masora; Biblia hebrea; homónimos; Libro de Crónicas; Códice de Leningrado; genealogías.

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1. **Introduction**

Of the approximately fifteen-hundred personal names in the Hebrew Bible the Masorah designates only ninety or so with a notation that they are personal names.\(^1\) The reason why the Masorah selects these ninety names for special mention is because they are all homonyms.\(^2\) They have the same form, same consonants and vowels as other words, and thus are liable to be confused with those words. For example, the personal name Mispar, one of the returning Judean exiles (Ezra 2:2), might be confused with the common word פָּרָה ‘number.’ Anan, one of the signatories of Nehemiah’s covenant (Neh 10:27), might be confused with the common word ענן ‘cloud.’ And Ephod, one of those chosen by Moses to allot the division of the land (Num 34:23), might be confused with the term דשן, the priestly ephod garment.

This article will survey the usages of Masoretic personal name notations in both the Masorah parva and Masorah magna,\(^3\) examine the type of names covered by these notations, explore names that are selected because of specific accents or spelling, and will show that the Masoretes had identified a name that has been ignored by modern scholarship.

The Masorah has two ways of noting personal names. The first is by commenting on the actual name by stating how many times it occurs as the name of a person. The standard formula is: שם אנ ‘unique as the name of a person,’ or שם אנ בב ‘twice as the name of a person.’ Thus Sheber, a Judean listed in the genealogies of the book of Chronicles (1 Chr 2:48), has a note שם אנ ‘unique as the name of a person,’ thereby

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\(^1\) Many other names have masoretic notations, but these are primarily notations regarding number of occurrences or spelling. Most of these types of notations may be found in Solomon Friedenberg, *The Massorah Magna* (Hannover, 1876; repr., New York: Ktav, 1968) pp. 261-326.

\(^2\) However, not all personal names that have homonyms are given naming notes. For example, there are no naming for the following personal names found in Chronicles genealogies although they are homonyms of common words: Allon (1 Chr 4:37 = אילון ‘an oak tree’), Ur (1 Chr 11:35 = אור ‘fire’), Ahi (1 Chr 5:15 = אחי ‘brother of’), Naarah (1 Chr 4:5 = נראיה ‘girl’), and many more.

\(^3\) Except where noted all references are to the Masoretic notes in the Leningrad Codex.

\(^4\) There are also variants נכלו, סכלו for a man, and נכלו, סכלו for a woman.
contrasting his name with its homonym, the more common word שֶׁבֶר ‘breach’ or ‘grain.’ Or Mehir, another Judean listed in these Chronicles genealogies (1 Chr 4:11), has the same note ‘unique as the name of a person,’ contrasting his name with its homonym the common noun מְחִיר ‘price.’ Similarly, Rehob, one of the signatories of Nehemiah’s covenant (Neh 10:12), has the identical note שׁם אנ ‘unique as the name of a person,’ contrasting his name with its homonym the common noun בַּרְחָב ‘a street.’ This formulation with slight variation is by far the most common, and is attached to over half of the personal names.

The second way that the Masorah notes personal names is by doing the reverse. It lists the number of occurrences of the more common word, then states that a personal name also has this form. The standard formula for this type of naming is: תכ שׁם ברנוּל ‘twice, and similarly all occurrences of personal names.’ For example, there is a note at 1 Sam 26:20 on the word שׁפַּר ‘a flea’ that it occurs twice, in addition to times when it is the personal name Parosh. This personal name Parosh occurs six times in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. There is a Parosh who was one of the returnees from exile (Ezra 2:3; 8:3; 10:25), and another Parosh, who was one of the signatories of Nehemiah’s covenant (Neh 10:15). Thus, this personal name Parosh is a homonym of the word פַּרְעֹ ‘a flea.’

Another example is at Ruth 3:13 where there is a note on the verbal form יִגְאָל ‘he will redeem’ that it occurs once, in addition to times when it is the personal name Igal. The note reads שׁם ברנּל ‘unique and similarly every personal name.’ This personal name Igal occurs three times. There is an Igal, who was one of the spies from the tribe of Issachar (Num 13:7), there was an Igal who was one of David’s heroes (2 Sam 23:36), and an Igal listed in the Chronicles genealogies as a distant descendant of David (1 Chr 3:22). The personal name Igal is thus the homonym of the verbal form יִגְאָל ‘he will redeem.’

The vast majority of these personal name notations occur in the Masorah parva (Mp) notes, but a few of them are included in the notes of the Masorah magna (Mm). For example, at Joel 2:2 there is a Mm note on the verbal form יִשְׁפַּך ‘he will or may he increase’ that reads: 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For that which he was remiss (... he shall add, סף, Lev 5:16)</td>
<td>לפש ומל לא בשלום</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And it shall never happen again (סף, Joel 2:2)</td>
<td>ופש</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May the Lord increase his people (סף, 1 Chr 21:3)</td>
<td>ופש יوحد על עמו</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And similarly every personal name (סף, Joseph)</td>
<td>וכל שם בכובדנוה</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The note observes that the verbal form סף occurs three times plene, that is, with a waw, and these three forms are listed in the Mm note. At the end of the list there is an additional notation to the effect that this form סף (with a waw) is also the normal spelling for the personal name Joseph. So, the personal name Joseph, that occurs almost two-hundred times in the Bible, is a homonym of the verbal form סף meaning ‘he shall increase’ or ‘may he increase.’

Another example is in a Mm note at 2 Kgs 6:5 on the verbal form שאול a passive participle meaning ‘borrowed’ or ‘lent.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All (his) days ... he is lent (שעואר) to the Lord (1 Sam 1:28)</td>
<td>כל הימים ... שאול ליהוה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(As one of them was) felling a trunk, the iron (ax head fell into the water. He cried aloud, ‘Alas, master, it was borrowed, שאול, 2 Kgs 6:5)</td>
<td>והלף חקור באדנברעם שאול</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And similarly every personal name (שעואר, Saul)</td>
<td>וכל שם ברבש בכובדנוה</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Mm note states that the verbal form שאול occurs twice in the meaning of ‘borrowed’ or ‘lent’ but that every personal name also has the same form שאול. This personal name is, of course, Saul whose name occurs more than three-hundred times in the Bible. The homonym of Saul is thus the qal passive participle form שאול meaning ‘borrowed’ or ‘lent.’

Sometimes in a Mm note the reference where the personal name occurs in a list is specified by a phrase such as ‘one is a personal name’ or ‘the last one is a personal name. An example of such a naming note stating that

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6 See Weil, Massorah Gedolah, §2075.
one name in the list is a personal name is in the Mm notation at Gen 4:4 on the form הבל. The note reads that the form הבל occurs three times: \(^7\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>three times</th>
<th>special note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>הבל ג</td>
<td>1. הבל הביא גם ה</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abel (הבל) likewise brought (Gen 4:4)</td>
<td>I have spent my strength for naught and vanity (Hebrew הבל) (Isa 49:4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One (הבל Abel) is a personal name</td>
<td>One (הבל Abel) is a personal name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second and third references of this note from Isa 49:4 and Prov 31:30 the form הבל means ‘and vanity’ ‘and illusory,’ but the first reference refers to the personal name Abel. The last line of the note lit. ‘one is a personal name,’ is where the Masorah confirms that the personal name הבל Abel is in one of the above three references. That is, in the verse cited as first in the list from Gen 4:4, Abel (הבל) likewise brought,’ the form הבל refers to the personal name Abel. \(^8\)

An example of a naming note stating that the last name in the list is a personal name is in the Mm on the form פרש at 1 Chr 7:16. \(^9\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>three times</th>
<th>special note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>פייש</td>
<td>1. הוריתי פרש עלgeist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will strew dung (פרש) on your faces (Mal 2:3(^a))</td>
<td>Twice in it (the dung פרש of your festal sacrifices, Mal 2:3(^b))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^7\) See Weil, Massorah Gedolah, §26.

\(^8\) The form consists of the personal name Abel plus the waw cj. (הבל). Some other names that are included in the notes with a waw cj. are: va-Ahuzzath (אַהוּצַת), an ally of Abimelech, King of Gerar (Gen 26:26) [in the Rabbinic Bible]; ve-Amal (אַמָל), an Ashurite (1 Chr 7:35); u-Barak (בָרָק), Deborah’s army general (Judg 4:16, etc. [see the Mm in MA at Job 20:25 פֶּרֶשׁ ב כ ג ז three times, twice as the name of a person’]); u-Beracah (בְָרָכָה), one of David’s warriors (1 Chr 12:3); va-Hod (הוֹד) an Asherite (1 Chr 7:37 [in the Rabbinic Bible]); ve-Jipthah (גּוֹחַת) one of the major judges (Judg 11:1); and many more.

\(^9\) See Weil, Massorah Gedolah, §3186.
In this note the form שׁרֶפֶּ in the first two references in the list from Mal 2:3 signifies the noun ‘dung,’ whereas the third reference in the list from 1 Chr 7:16 represents the personal name Peresh, a person from the tribe of Manasseh listed in the Chronicles genealogies. The end of the Masoretic note accordingly states: ‘the last is a personal name.’

2. Type of Names

The personal names that the Masorah observes in its naming notes range from the royal to the ordinary. Some of the royal names noted are: Amon ( אמנון), King of Judah, Hadar ( חדד ‘splendor of’), King of Edom (Gen 36:39), Reba ( ראב ‘robber’), King of Midian (Num 31:8; Josh 13:21 [the note is at 1 Sam 9:8]), and Rehob ( ראב ‘a wide place’), King of Zobah (2 Sam 8:3; 8:12 [in the Aleppo Codex]).

Many obscure names are homonyms of very common Hebrew words. These include Hod ( חוה ‘glory,’ an Asherite (1 Chr 7:37 [in the Rabbinic Bible])), Ir (עיר ‘a city,’ a Benjaminite (1 Chr 7:12 [in the Rabbinic Bible])), Heleb ( חלבל ‘fat,’ one of King David’s thirty select warriors (2 Sam 23:29)), and Tikvah ( חקיק ‘hope,’ father-in-law of the prophetess Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14 [in the Aleppo Codex]), and ancestor of one of Ezra’s aides (Ezra 10:15). 10

However, some personal names noted are homonyms of rarer words. For example, the homonym of Shua, father-in-law of Judah (Gen 38:2; 38:12), is the rare form שׁועשׁ ‘cry for help’ (Job 30:24); that of Adam’s son Seth (Gen 4:25, etc.) is שות, either Hebrew ‘buttocks’ (Isa 20:4) or Aramaic ‘six’ (Ezra 6:15); and that of Tahash, son of the concubine of Nahor (Gen 22:24), is שׁוח ‘a dolphin skin’(Num 4:6; 4:14).

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10 And many more such as Chelub ( חלב ‘basket,’ ‘bird cage’), father of the person appointed by David to be in charge of the royal vineyards (1 Chr 27:26); Mahol ( מחלל ‘dance’), one of the legendary wise men in Solomon’s day (1 Kgs 5:11); Mirmah ( מירמה ‘deceit’), a Benjaminite (1 Chr 8:10 [in the Aleppo Codex]); and Zeror ( זרו ‘bag or pebble’), great-grandfather of King Saul (1 Sam 9:1).
3. **Women’s Names**

A number of women’s names are included in the naming notes. They include the well-known names of **Michal** (מיכל ‘a container or collection of water’), **Rahab** (רחב ‘wide’), **Ritzpah** (ריפח ‘a glowing coal’), **Sarah** (שרה ‘he strove’) and **Shiphrah** (שפיר ‘[winds] became fair [were calmed], Job 26:13), as well as lesser known names such as **Abi** (אב ‘father of’), mother of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:2), **Abijah** (אביָה), another name for the mother of Hezekiah (2 Chr 29:1) and wife of a Judean in the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chr 2:24), and **Chodesh** (חדש ‘a month’), a Benjaminite wife in the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chr 8:9).

It is noteworthy that the name **Abijah** is also a man’s name, such as **Abijah**, King of Judah. Paralleling this phenomenon is the fact that the common woman’s name **Miriam** (מרים) is designated as a man’s name for a Judean in the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chr 4:17), a fact not always recognized in many modern commentaries.\(^\text{11}\)

4. **Homonymous Doublets**

Some personal names and their homonyms only occur twice, once as a personal name and once as a homonym in a noun or verbal form. These types of names are called homonymous doublets, and are described in Masoretic notes with the notation ניַבֵּרַי לָּבָּשָׁה ‘twice and in two meanings.’\(^\text{12}\)

Here are some examples of these homonymous name doublets:


\(^{12}\) This notation is common in various Masoretic lists designating homonymous doublets. See, for example, Solomon Frensdorff, *Das Buch Ochlah W’Ochlah (Mas sorea)* (Hannover, 1864; repr., New York: Ktav, 1972) §59, and Aron Dotan, “Homonymous Hapax Doublets in the Masora,” *Textus* 14 (1988) pp. 131-45, and *The Awakening of Word Lore: From the Masora to the Beginnings of Hebrew Lexicography* (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language, 2005 [in Hebrew]) p. 73 and pas-sim. See also Fernando Díaz Esteban, *Sefer ʿOklah wĕ-ʿOklah – Colección de Listas de Palabras Destinadas a Conservar la Integridad del Texto Hebreo de la Biblia entre los Judíos de la Edad Media* (Madrid: CSIC, 1975) §60; Aron Dotan, “Masora’s
Beracah (ברך), one of David’s warriors, occurs only once (1 Chr 12:3) and likewise its homonym ברכות ‘and a blessing’ occurs only once (Prov 11:26). Both these forms are noted as homonymous doublets in their respective Mp notes at Prov 11:26 and 1 Chr 12:3 with the notation ב בתרי לי שלש ‘twice and in two meanings.’

Agur (אגור), an ancient wise man in the book of Proverbs (Prov 30:1) has the note ב בחרה לי שלש ‘twice and in two meanings’ (in the Rabbinic Bible), and its homonym occurs in Deut 32:27 with the meaning ‘I fear.’

The same formulation is to be found in a naming notation in the Mm on the name Shiphrah. For example, the Mm note on the word שפראה at Job 26:13 reads as follows:¹⁴

| Twice, and in two meanings | ב בחרה לי שלש |
|----------------------------|-----------------
| One as a personal name, and one in a meaning of pleasantness, and (their) references are: | חז שמש ברוכי והד לשון |
| The name of one was (שפראה, Exod 1:15) | נאם וסימ |
| By his wind the heavens were calmed (שפראה, Job 26:13) | אשר שם האחת |
| בחרה שפימה שפירה | בחרה שפימה שפירה |

5. Names that are Verbal Forms

Some names are homonyms of verbal forms. In addition to names already mentioned above such as Igal (יגאלה ‘he will redeem’), Joseph

¹³ Other examples of names with the notation ב בחרה לי שלש ‘twice and in two meanings’ are שור ‘Heresh,’ a Levite in the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chr 9:15 [in the Rabbinic Bible]), whose homonym is חרש ‘in secret’ (Josh 2:1); חשים ‘Hushim,’ son of Dan (Gen 46:23 [in the Rabbinic Bible]), whose homonym is חשם ‘hastening’ (Num 32:17); חלם ‘and Telem,’ a gatekeeper (Ezra 10:24), whose homonym is טל ‘and Telem’ a Judean town (Josh 15:24).

¹⁴ See Weil, Massorah Gedolah, §375.
(‘he adds or will add’), Saul (‘borrowed’), Sarah (‘he strove’), and Shiphrah (‘winds were calmed,’ Job 26:13), there is Hillel, the father of Abdon, one of the minor judges (Judg 12:13; 12:15), whose homonym is Ḥilik ‘he praised,’ Hushah, a Judean in the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chr 4:4), whose homonym is Ḥevvash ‘hasten!’, Shaphat, most notably the father of Elisha (1 Kgs 19:16, etc.), whose homonym is Ḥaph ‘he judged,’ and others of this type.

6. Names that are homonyms of place names

Some names are homonyms of place names. Thus, the homonym of Addar (‘Adar), a Benjaminite listed in the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chr 8:3), is part of the place name Hazar-addar (‘Ḥazar ‘Adar, Num 34:4) and of the place name Atroth-addar (‘Ḥatirat ‘Adar, Josh 16:5; 18:13). The homonym of Jaakan, an Edomite listed in the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chr 1:42 [in the Aleppo Codex]) is part of the place name Bene-jaakan (Num 33:31). The homonym of Keilah, a Judean in the genealogies (1 Chr 4:19), is the place name Ḥeve‘ilah ‘Keilah’ (1 Sam 23:2, etc.). And the homonym of Telem, a gatekeeper (Ezra 10:24) is the Judean town Telem (‘Ḥelēm, Josh 15:24).

7. Homonyms that depend on certain restrictions

Some name notations specify that a particular form is a personal name if it has a certain accent. In that way it is distinguished from other forms that do not have this accent. An example of a personal name being distinguished from its homonym by means of accents is the name Nathan (‘Ḥanan). The form Ḥanan is a pausal form of the 3rd pers. masc. perfect of the verb ‘to give,’ and it occurs once with a zaqep accent at Ezek 18:16. At this Ezekiel 18 reference there is a Masoretic note that reads לִשָּׁחַף חַפּוּךְ עֵלֶל קָשַּׁפָה קָמָ֑ל ‘unique with a zaqep accent, and similarly with every personal name.’ That is, there is only one occurrence of the form Ḥanan in the meaning ‘he gave’ with a zaqep accent, but this form with a zaqep is the one elsewhere employed as a personal name Ḥanan. And indeed the form Ḥanan with a zaqep occurs four times as a personal name, twice with the prophet Nathan.
(2 Sam 12:5; 12:13), once with a certain Nathan mentioned in the Chronicles genealogies (1 Chr 2:36), and once as the name of a brother of one of David’s warriors (1 Chr 11:38). There is another occurrence of the verbal form נתן with an ’atnah accent (Num 7:9) but there are no occurrences of the personal name נתן Nathan with an ’atnah accent. It is only when the personal name has a zaqep accent that it becomes a homonym with the verbal form נתן with a zaqep.

Another example of a name having a different accent than its homonym is Beerah, a descendant of Reuben in the Chronicles genealogies, which in a naming note at 1 Chr 5:6 is distinguished from its homonym a town named ‘Beer’ by the placement of the accent. With the personal name the accent is on the ultimate syllable (בראה), with the town name the accent is on the penultimate syllable (ברא and ברה, ‘to Beer’).

8. **Differences in spelling with its homonym**

The Masoretic naming notes sometimes often a helpful explanation of the difference in spelling between a name and its homonym. At 1 Chr 1:4 on the name Noah (נوح) there is a note which reads: ‘Every occurrence of the name (Noah) is spelled defective (that is, without a ℓ), whereas every form of the verb ‘to be at ease’ is spelled plene (that is, with a ℓ).’ This means that every occurrence of the name Noah נوح does not have a ℓ, whereas every form of its homonym from the verb חפץ, that is, נחמ does have a ℓ. The name Noah is always written without a ℓ (נوح), whereas parallel forms of the verb ‘to be at ease’ such as חפץ (Num 11:25; Josh 3:13), (Esth 9:16; 9:17; 9:18), or (Neh 9:28) are written with a ℓ.

In the Cairo Codex at 1 Kgs 16:21 there is a note on the name Ginath, who was the father of Tibni, a rival of King Omri. The note reads:

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15 An apparent exception to the note stating that the homonym has the same accent as the personal name is with the 3rd pers. masc. verbal form ידע ‘he knew.’ The note on Isa 42:5 reads: ‘unique with games (vowel) and zaqep (accent), and similarly every personal name.’ According to the note, when ידע has a zaqep accent it is the homonym of the personal name Jada, a Judean. The problem is that on the two occasions that Jada occurs, it does not have a zaqep accent, rather it has a pashṭâ (יָדָע) at 1 Chr 2:32, and an ’atnah ידָ֑֙עְ at 1 Chr 2:28.
every occurrence of the name Ginath is written plene (י).’ This note implies that every occurrence of Ginath’s homonym is written defective (גינת). The name Ginath occurs twice at 1 Kgs 16:21 and 16:22 written with a י (גינת), whereas its homonym ‘garden of’ occurs three times written without a י (Cant 6:11; Esth 1:5; 7:7).

9. **New Name**

One of the surprising results of our analysis of the Masoretic personal naming notes is the discovery that the Masoretes had identified a name that has been ignored by modern scholarship. It is not to be found in any of the modern published lists of biblical names, nor is it to be found in the vast majority of translations or biblical commentaries. The name is **Aboth**, and it occurs in 1 Chr 24:31. The text of that verse reads:

1 Chr 24:31

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>נַפְרִ֨יָּל יִּֽכְבּ֥ה נַֽכְלָיִּֽת</th>
<th>אֵֽלֶ֣ם נַֽכְלָיִּֽת לְֽעֻרָ֛ל נָֽרָא֗</th>
<th>מַלֶּ֣ךְ נַֽכְלָיִּֽת נִֽאֲחְ֣רֵי קִֽנְשָׁ֑ים</th>
<th>קֵֽרְחֵ֠י חוֹי</th>
<th>אָבָֽךְ</th>
<th>קֵֽרְחֵ֕י לְעֻרָ֛ל נָֽרָא֗</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>These too cast lots exactly as their kinsmen, the sons of Aaron, under the eye of King David and Zadok and Ahimelech and the chiefs of the clans of the priests and Levites.</td>
<td>אָבָֽךְ</td>
<td>קֵֽרְחֵ֕י לְעֻרָ֛ל נָֽרָא֗</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboth the chief exactly as his younger brother</td>
<td>אָבָֽךְ</td>
<td>קֵֽרְחֵ֕י לְעֻרָ֛ל נָֽרָא֗</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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This verse deals with assigning duties to a list of Levites by casting lots. All the Levites were subject to the lot, both young and old: heads of clans and younger members of clans. The point of the lots is to avoid favoritism or giving special privileges to any one party neither the head of a clan nor anyone in family, exemplified by his younger brother. The text personifies the head of a clan with a name: the name **Aboth**.

The last phrase of this verse is translated differently in many modern translations. Here are three representative English translations and commentaries.

**Three modern translations of 1 Chr 24:31**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JPS (1917)</td>
<td>‘the fathers’ houses of the chief even as those of his younger brother’ 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanakh (1985)</td>
<td>‘on the principle of ‘chief and youngest brother alike’.” 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRSV (1989)</td>
<td>‘the chief as well as the youngest brother’ 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Three modern commentary translations of 1 Chr 24:31**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commentary</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B<strong>RAUN</strong> (1986)</td>
<td>‘The chief of the fathers alongside of his youngest brother’ 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J<strong>APHET</strong> (1993)</td>
<td>‘These also, the head of each fathers’ house and his younger brother alike, cast lots’ 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K<strong>NOPPERS</strong> (2004)</td>
<td>‘The ancestral head exactly as his youngest kinsman’ 22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

None of these translations takes the phrase שׁת האב literally. The Tanach and the NRSV translating ‘chief’ omit completely, whereas the JPS version interprets שׁת אב as ‘the fathers’ houses’ The three commentators invert the phrase ראש שׁת אב to שׁת ראש אב ‘chief of the fathers’ (BRAUN), ‘head of each fathers house’ (JAPHEt), ‘the ancestral head (KNOPPERS). Furthermore, JAPHEt places the entire phrase at the beginning of the verse. She translates: ‘these also, the head of each fathers’ house and his younger brother alike, cast lots....’

In contradistinction to these modern scholars, the Masorah takes the word שׁת אב as a personal name, and provides a standard naming note that reads שׁת אב ‘unique as a personal name.’ The homonym of Aboth is the plural form שׁת אב ‘fathers’ that occurs twenty-eight times in the Bible. In favor of the Masoretic interpretation contextually is the fact that the modifying noun שׁת האב ‘the head’ ‘the chief’ occurs numerous times in the book of Chronicles with other proper names, for example, Joel the chief’ (1 Chr 5:12); ‘Shallum the chief’ (1 Chr 9:17); ‘Ezer the chief’ (1 Chr 12:10); Asaph the chief (1 Chr 16:5); Shebuel the chief (1 Chr 23:16), etc. Also taking the modifying noun as ‘the chief’ provides a neat antithetic parallelism with שאן הבן ‘the younger’ in the second part of the verse: Aboth, the chief, exactly as his younger brother. The phrase represents a summing up of those who cast lots. Everyone did, including Aboth and his younger brother.

To sum up, the Masoretic notations of personal names in the Bible are restricted to names that are homonyms. The name notations have standard formulas and can be found in both Masorah parva and Masorah magna notes. The names selected by the Masoretes for notation ranged from royal names to ordinary ones, and included both male and female names. Some of the names were selected because of specific accents or spelling, and finally it can be seen that the Masoretes had identified the name Aboth, a name hitherto unrecognized by most modern scholars.

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