

CHAPTER ONE

THE VARIABLE SPELLINGS OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

James Barr, *The Variable Spellings of the Hebrew Bible* (The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1986; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) pp. XII + 239 (including 66 figures)

Few scholars would be able to discuss the spelling of the Hebrew Bible in such a lucid way as James Barr has done in his monograph based on his Schweich lectures of 1986. The work on this topic is a direct corollary of the author's editorial work on the *Oxford Hebrew Lexicon*, which, however, has been suspended in the meantime (p. 13). This is a very important monograph, providing data that are basic for several disciplines, so that a detailed discussion is in order.

The basic concepts and the issues under investigation are outlined in Chapter One. The discussion refers only to MT, although the title of the work, as well as the analysis itself, constantly refers to "the biblical" text and spelling. In Chapter One, the author describes what is meant by spelling and "variable spelling," a concept around which the whole book is built. The data are amply illustrated, such as in figures 1 and 2 which list the distribution of the different spellings of *ephod* (אֶפֶד and אֶפֹד) and *tol'dot* in the construct state (that is, תלדה, תולדה, תלדות and תולדות). Words can be spelled with or without *waw*, with or without *yod*, etc., and often these possibilities are multiplied when the variation pertains to two or more positions in the same word. These different spellings are described as "variable," and in Barr's words:

One out of every few words is a word of potentially variable spelling, so that there are many thousands of cases in the biblical text . . . the variability of the biblical spelling is one of its fundamental characteristics, and for that reason the recognition of it has been placed in the title of this work . . . (p. 2).

The author contrasts his own approach with that of Cross and Freedman.¹ These two authors were especially involved in the

¹ F. M. Cross, Jr. and D. N. Freedman, *Early Hebrew Orthography* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1952).

comparison between the spelling of MT and that of *external* sources, while Barr aims at giving an *internal* description of the biblical spelling. Thus, the major stress of this book is on the distribution of the different spellings within each of the biblical books as well as between them. These are graphically presented in 66 “figures” or “maps,” as they are named on p. 4. These figures refer to select examples, and no attempt is made to provide an exhaustive description of the evidence.

The topic must have been “in the air,” since at the time when Barr’s Schweich lectures—on which the monograph is based—were delivered, another book was published on the same topic.² This book likewise analyzes the distribution of the spellings, this time with the aid of computerized data. Its two authors worked independently of Barr, and Barr’s views on their work have been published in an extensive review.³

When the distribution of the spelling patterns in MT is studied, it is important to agree upon a base text. Scholars realize that there is no such thing as *the* Masoretic Text. Rather, different Masoretic texts are recognized, and it is well known that these texts differ in spelling, not only in the medieval Masoretic codices (e.g., the Leningrad codex B19^A [L] and the Aleppo codex [A]), but also in the much earlier Judean Desert scrolls belonging to the same (proto-)Masoretic family. These Judean Desert scrolls could bring us closer to the source of the Masoretic spelling, but since none of these is preserved in its entirety, not even the more complete ones among them, they have not been considered by Barr as a source for his research. Rather, although not spelling out this approach, he has started directly from the best medieval Ben-Asher text which has been preserved in its entirety, viz., the Leningrad codex B19^A (L) as recorded in *BHS* and Dothan’s edition. Alongside these printed editions, the facsimile editions of L and A have also been used together with the concordance of Mandelkern. The very differences between these editions and tools are problematic, and Barr is aware of this. On p. 6, he gives some examples of such differences, and he demonstrates how they affect the statistical picture in the case of low-frequency words. But these differences in spelling between the mentioned editions are the exception rather than the rule. In Barr’s words:

A smallish percentage of divergence must commonly be allowed for, often two or three per cent, sometimes rising to five or so; but I have not found that divergence to be of such a magnitude as to obscure the main lines of the spelling patterns in the Bible as a whole (p. 6).

² F. I. Andersen and A. D. Forbes, *Spelling in the Hebrew Bible* (BibOr 41; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1986).

³ *JSS* 33 (1988) 122–31.

The book is divided into two parts of unequal length. The first and major part consists of an introductory chapter (“The Problem and the Approach,” pp. 1–43) and the main body of evidence (Chapter Two, “The Central Groups of Evidence,” pp. 44–167). Chapter One introduces the basic issues and problems. Chapter Two is concerned with locating some general rules within the labyrinth of biblical spelling. The second part (Chapter Three: “Parallels and Combinations,” pp. 168–85), on the other hand, stresses the unsystematic character of that spelling.

Barr redefines known concepts and introduces new concepts in the analysis of the Masoretic spelling on pp. 21 ff. He distinguishes between a group of identical spellings (*block spellings*) of a given word in a certain context (“where a body of text uses the same spelling throughout” [p. 12]) and *rapid alternation* (“where a text passes rapidly back and forward between two or more spellings” [p. 12]). The example given in figure 3 refers to the different spellings of *sh^hmot* in the Torah, with or without the article, but in the absolute state only. The word is spelled שמה in Num 1:26–32 (4 x), 36–42 (4 x), but שמה in 1:2–24 (6 x). On the other hand, rapid alternation for this word is found in Gen 26:18, where the different spellings appear in the same verse. The latter pattern of spelling is “extremely common and pervasive” (p. 24). According to Barr, the presence of both of these systems or habits in the same context shows that one scribe, and not different ones, was at work. Variety and inconsistency rather than a systematic approach must have characterized the work of the individual scribes.

Another concept described by Barr is the *affix effect* (pp. 14, 25–32). In Barr’s words (p. 14), “when words have plural terminations or other suffixes added, this often alters the characteristic spelling away from that found in the absolute singular.” The main phenomenon recognizable in this regard is that words that are otherwise spelled *plene*, that is with *waw* or *yod*, lose their *mater lectionis* when an element is affixed to the word. Thus in 215 instances *‘olam* is written *plene* (עולם), but when a *lamed* is prefixed to the word, it is usually spelled defectively in the Torah (ten times as against two instances of a full spelling—see figure 9). In another case, too, the “affix effect” is at work in the Torah. In that corpus, הגרל, with the article, is more frequent than הגרול, while גרול is the frequent spelling in that word without the article. Outside the Torah, the word is always spelled *plene*. The *-im* endings of masculine nouns written without *yod* (p. 47) are a special case since they often preserve the middle *mater lectionis*. In the formulation of this “affix effect,” Barr tries to reach a better understanding of what previously has been taken as the avoidance of juxtaposing two *plene* spellings.

On the basis of these new definitions and perceptions the author formulates “the central question” in the evaluation of these spellings (pp. 32–3). The formulation of this central question actually pertains only to the issues raised by the “affix effect,” although the following pages are not limited to this issue. The two possible explanations suggested by Barr refer either to the linguistic level (differences in stress between the defective and *plene* forms) or to the scribal level (differentiation between words that were “alone” and those that had affixes).

In section 12 of Chapter One the author notices a very special feature of the Masoretic spelling. Certain words are spelled consistently in a certain way, a situation that is quite unusual within the inconsistent Masoretic practice. Thus the following words are always spelled defectively: נאם, מאד, כהן, משה, אלהים. The latter three cases are described by Barr as a “lexically selective convention” (p. 36); the first two are described as possibly reflecting a different pronunciation.

The author also suggests that the book in MT, above all else, should be considered as the basic unit for spelling analysis. After all, spelling pertains to scribal activity, and not to the level of composition of books or of their constituting layers. In principle, we would thus expect books to be more or less homogeneous in their spelling practices. Thus the ancient songs in the Torah and the surrounding chapters, written at a later time, are expected to reflect the same spelling patterns. Indeed, the ancient song of Deborah contains various *plene* spellings “in words in which a shorter spelling would be possible and even normal” (p. 37).

Barr presents very interesting insights into the nature of the spelling patterns of the Torah which are more substantial than generalizations previously made in the literature on the subject. It is usually said that the Torah has more short spellings than the other (later) books, but Barr points out that this characterization is imprecise: the spelling of the Torah oscillates between full and defective where other books present a full spelling only. Short spellings are actually a minority within the Torah as a whole (pp. 39–43), but they do abound in Exodus.

After these preliminary deliberations the author reaches the main body of evidence (Chapter Two: “The Central Groups of Evidence”) comprising the bulk of the book. In 123 pages, the author discusses 21 categories of variable spellings, “especially, those which seem to yield important clues for the understanding of biblical spelling in general” (p. 44). In the course of the analysis, concepts are employed which have been introduced in the first chapter; the material is significant, though not exhaustive, and it is meant to lead to general conclusions on the spelling. The basic pattern of analysis in this chapter is descriptive, but

the common denominator of the examples is that a certain pattern behind the spelling practices can be determined. In spite of the basic problems in the analysis of the Masoretic spelling, patterns can be recognized, and these present an important contribution by Barr. He does not say how often his findings agree with those of the Masoretes, such as in Elias Levita's *Massoreth ha-Massoreth*, for some rules had already been detected by them. Often the author simply presents the material, but more frequently it is accompanied by an explanation of the variable spellings, usually in the realm of linguistic features.

Such is the case with the different spellings of the masculine plural ending *-im*, which presents a special type of "affix effect" in which often the final *yod* is lacking, while the internal one is written (p. 47). This situation is explained by the assumption of different stress patterns. The spelling תמימים presents the stress on the ultimate syllable, while תמימם (the majority spelling for this word, yet a minority spelling for the pattern as a whole) reflects the penultimate stress. This suggestion is presented with all due caution.

A linguistic explanation has also been attached to several of the occurrences of the *qatol* pattern. Most of the words of this pattern are spelled in different ways, though mainly *plene*. In the Torah, the "affix effect" is also visible (pp. 53–4). Linguistically interesting is a small group of words belonging to the same pattern which are never spelled *plene*: נבה, עמק, קטן and probably also עגל (with one exception: 2 Chr 4:2). These cases are not explained as lexically determined. Rather, Barr prefers to see in them a different pattern (*qatal*): they did not have the long vowel which could produce long spellings, but an *a* vowel or a short *u* vowel, also present in קטנה, etc.

The different spelling patterns of the *qal* participle *qotel*, *qotelet*, etc., written either with or without *waw* are discussed as well. Defective forms are four times more frequent in MT than full forms. There are, however, words that go against this trend. Thus יושב is more frequently full than the other words, probably because of a possible conflict between יֹשֵׁב and יָשֵׁב. The distribution pattern differs from word to word, so that the behavior of individual words ("lexicalization" [p. 80]) has to be taken into consideration together with the general trend. Beyond the behavior of individual words, Barr suggests a linguistic solution for the different spelling patterns. He cautiously surmises (p. 77) that "the Canaanite sound shift from *a* to *o* had not yet taken uniform effect in Hebrew." Therefore some participles were actually of the pattern *qatēl* and *qatīl* and accordingly spelled without *waw*. These spellings thus reflect a different linguistic reality, which was later misunderstood by

the Masoretes as reflecting *qotel*. But Barr immediately adds: “Yet it is difficult to suppose that the shift in question was still incomplete as late as this hypothesis would demand. Nor would it easily explain why *so many* participles, even in late books, are defective.” (p. 77). Another possible explanation of the defective spellings is that many verbs were at a certain time of the stative type, that is אִוְּקַל instead of אִוְּקַל . But the issue cannot really be decided. Possibly there nevertheless existed a scribal tradition that made the scribes decide to prefer *plene* forms for nouns and defective forms for verbal forms. Since, however, this solution is applicable only to a certain percentage of the evidence, Barr cannot form a conclusion in any one direction.

The *yod* of the *hiph'il* is not mandatory, or, in other words, *hiph'il* forms are either defective or full. The defective forms are explained as possible remnants of a different pronunciation, viz., with an *a* instead of with an *i* (pp. 84–5).

Explanations along these lines abound in the book. But Barr did not start his investigations with a linguistic theory in mind. In his words, “My main concern is not to discover an explanation of how the biblical spelling patterns arose but to describe what these patterns are: in that sense the work starts out by being descriptive rather than historical” (p. 3). However correct these words, which introduce the present work, were when the author embarked upon his research, it would appear that as the research continued, he found himself opting more and more for a historical-linguistic solution. Thus Barr’s real approach is better reflected in those introductory words in which he realizes with some surprise that he actually accepts a historical approach:

Nevertheless I must say that, having started off in this rather non-historical direction, I found in the course of my studies that the evidence gradually led me round to a more historical assessment, and that a study based on the Masoretic patterns alone led to more historical and developmental suggestions than I had originally thought likely, or wished [my italics, E. T.]. This is how it should be: the examination of the patterns of the basic body of evidence, the traditional biblical text, should provide a strengthening of the base for historical understanding (p. 4).

Therefore, in actual fact the author’s approach, not his results, is not as different from that of Cross–Freedman as he would have liked it to be.

In several other issues, Barr provided a historical-linguistic explanation as well. All these pertain to the evidence provided in Chapter Two (“The Central Groups of Evidence”), the longest chapter in the book. In addition to the examples mentioned above, this explanation

pertains to the defective spellings of the *waw* consecutive of the perfect (pp. 97–103), the *o* vowel of the imperfect *qal* in trilateral verbs (pp. 103–7) and the second person masculine termination *-ta* and *-ka* (pp. 114–27). In a long discussion, the author suggests that the *plene* writings of this type reflect “an older style which had been reduced in numbers in the later history of the text” (p. 125). In this case, a different pronunciation is assumed. Barr always expresses his views with due caution and sometimes he almost rejects the historical solution he suggested himself; see, for example, his analysis of a *yod* before suffixes (אלהים, etc.) on p. 137.

Barr’s lengthy analysis of select patterns of variable spellings is but one aspect of this book. In Chapter Three, he turns to a different type of evidence, viz., “Parallels and Combinations.” Some of these data are presented in the conventional comparative way, while other data present a new approach. The material is analyzed from a completely different angle: while Chapter Two was concerned with detecting rules behind the Masoretic spelling, Chapter Three describes only a few such rules, while stressing its unsystematic character.

In this chapter, the author compares the spelling patterns of parallel sections in the Bible, viz., Chronicles // Samuel-Kings, Exodus 25–30 // 35–40, and 2 Samuel 22 // Psalm 18. There are various ways of looking at the material, and the author is especially intrigued by the shorter spellings in Chronicles. That book is obviously later than Samuel-Kings, and in accordance with the history of the development of the spelling procedures, a greater number of full spellings are expected in that book. This is indeed the case, but the situation is somewhat more complicated, as Chronicles sometimes has a shorter spelling. Since it is not logical that the author or scribe of this book would have inserted these shorter spellings, another type of solution should be attempted. In Barr’s formulation:

The hypothesis that, where parallel texts exist, they derived from an earlier form of the text that was generally shorter, and that was thereafter amplified in slightly different ways, and haphazardly rather than systematically, is the simplest explanation, and gives us means to understand the essential problem, namely the fact that the existing texts seem, in numerous individual cases, to go against their own dominant tendencies (p. 170).

This assumption is worked out in detail for Chronicles and its sources on pp. 178–82. A similar explanation is applied to a comparison of the two Exodus texts. Their spelling practices display a large amount of agreement, and in addition the two texts differ, as tabulated on pp. 174–

5. Both of the texts were derived from “an earlier text that was dominantly short, and . . . both of them independently added a certain number of *waws* and *yods*, both of them inconsistently and haphazardly” (p. 177). Although in this section the author discusses some select patterns, he describes the spelling practices in the traditional way, that is, assuming a development from a defective to a full spelling. At the same time there is room for exceptions, since the author has an explanation for defective spellings in Chronicles that, as far as I know, is novel (see the description above). He also describes a model for the possible distinction between layers of spelling within Chronicles based on certain literary assumptions.

In another section of this chapter, pp. 182–4, which deals with “combinations of variable spellings,” the author treats the parallel data as he did in Chapter Two, viz., word by word. The different patterns of behavior of several combinations of words in the parallel sections are studied in this section.

The final chapter, Four, deals with “Interpretation and Implications,” summarizing the author’s views on the rationale of the spelling of MT. The suggestion that the variable spellings should be explained as simply inconsistent (Bergsträsser, Bauer-Leander) is not acceptable to Barr. Nor does he accept a suggestion of Rahlfs (1916) that the *matres lectionis* have been added in order to overcome ambiguity. As counter arguments to the latter view, Barr provides several examples of ambiguous words in which scribes could easily have added a letter in order to remove an ambiguity in the text, but refrained from doing so (note e.g. the two occurrences of ימים in Num 9:22, of which the first one is vocalized as *yamim* and the second one as *yomayim*). At the same time, vowel letters were inserted in words that without them would not have been ambiguous (e.g., שופר). As a further argument against this view, the author refers to the “affix effect” described above. Barr rightly claims: “If yods or waws were put there in order to assist identification and reduce ambiguity, why were they so very often removed again as soon as the words in question became plural or had a pronoun suffix or even a definite article?” (p. 189). He also notes that the “massive use of defective spelling in the Bible” (p. 190) can only imply that the avoidance of ambiguity was not a major factor behind the spelling practices.

The solution accepted by Barr is of a different nature. “Spelling varied because the scribes liked it to vary . . . In other words, biblical spelling . . . is a kind of art form. It is somewhat comparable to calligraphy” (p. 194). The distinction between conscious and unconscious is very important in this regard. Some variations will have been made

unconsciously, but many of them were conscious. For example, there are many variable spellings fitting patterns that probably existed in the Hebrew language in the pre-Masoretic period (p. 195). The aforementioned words which show no variable spelling (אלהים, נאם, etc.) also show a design behind the spelling patterns. There are also very clear patterns of differences between the books. Accepted spellings changed from time to time, such as the two major spellings for the name of David, and this, too, shows an overall design. Usually the earlier works were more defective than the later ones, but books were revised, copied, and recopied so that the usual chronological criteria do not hold. All these factors, then, explain the different spelling patterns, but at the same time they show a conscious procedure behind the spelling habits.

At the same time, Barr makes some suggestions with regard to the chronological background of the Masoretic spelling. As remarked, there is no necessary relation between the time of composition of the books and the spelling of the copies included in MT. *Grosso modo*, Barr considers the period between 400 and 100 BCE as the time of origin of the spelling practices of MT. The author did not find evidence for the concept of “archaizing” (p. 203).

In his final remarks, Barr draws together the different observations gathered in the course of his research. There is but one orthographic system reflected in MT. Within that system, there were often different options that could be chosen, each as valid as the other. Barr thus talks about “one orthography, which included a zone of optional spelling” (p. 205). This zone included the variable spellings.

Barr appends a few notes (pp. 209–11) about the practical consequences of his research. He suggests that grammars should discuss spelling patterns, that a full-scale grammar and concordance of the spellings of MT should be written, and finally that the commentators of individual books should pay special attention to spelling patterns. In an appendix (pp. 212–15), Barr describes a “specimen profile of one book: the Psalms.”

We now turn to some further matters of evaluation.

Every reader of the book will be impressed by its thoroughness, novelty, lucidity and Barr’s pleasant way of discussing the different options. Scholars who think that these minutiae are unimportant are mistaken, as Barr has shown that they may pertain to many aspects of biblical studies: the date of composition and copying of the biblical books and textual as well as linguistic analysis. For the insider, this book can be read as a novel which one reads in one sitting, as the reviewer has done. It is actually quite surprising that a book like this has not been

written earlier, since so many studies have been written which should actually have been preceded by a monograph like the present one. Probably the magnitude of such an undertaking prevented others from embarking upon research of this kind. Others may have thought that the main facts are actually known, and yet others may have thought that the “inconsistency” of MT makes such research impossible. Hence, scholars have had to wait for the novel insights, wide knowledge and patience of J. Barr who has applied to the material new categories of thinking, as outlined in the beginning of this review. Some of these run parallel to work carried out independently by Andersen and Forbes in their aforementioned work, but equally often the two studies go in different directions. Barr leads us to the period of the writing of the proto-Masoretic texts, although he does not elaborate on this issue. The book provides much food for thought on the background on the different spelling patterns in MT as well as between the different books. And finally, attempts are made—and this is quite novel, as far as I know—to connect the different spelling habits with practices of pronunciation and language. Barr suggests that many of the phenomena described do not reflect different spelling practices, but different linguistic habits.

One of the important insights of Barr is to look beyond the mere statistics of spelling patterns. General statistics of *plene* and defective spellings are of limited value. Of more relevance are statistics of certain patterns, such as the endings *-im* and *-ot*, the participle and the *hiph ‘il*, but even here certain words go against the usual practice. Examples of these have been given above. These select words, whose spelling goes its own way, make the study of this topic particularly interesting.

In our evaluation of this study, we first turn to the textual base of the investigations, which is the Leningrad codex with some exceptions (see above). According to Barr, the differences between the *medieval* sources are negligible, but at the same time the reader would like to know which text is actually quoted throughout the work. The implication of a statement on p. 7 seems to be that the textual base for the research is a combination of A and L (mentioned in this sequence). But on p. 19, the author says that the spellings in the diagrams are “generally” those of “BHS, following the Leningrad Codex.” Are we to assume that in those cases in which a spelling other than that of BHS (L) is mentioned, it is the spelling of the Aleppo codex? Probably not. The reader should realize that this detail is of minor significance, since the number of consonantal differences between L and A is small, but nevertheless he should have more clarity about the textual base of the “figures.” We should probably assume that the textual base is always the BHS (not always identical with

L!) with the exception of those cases for which codex L is mentioned explicitly (see however Barr's preference for A on p. 210). These exceptions could easily be traced with the aid of the index, and if this assumption that *BHS* is the base is correct, the reader has more clarity with regard to the textual base of Barr's investigations. And to what extent has Dothan's edition of codex L been used? Mandelkern's concordance does not serve as a base for these investigations, although Barr has used this tool in order to locate the different words. On the whole, he prefers this concordance to other tools (p. 210), but the reason is not stated. Lisowski's concordance, which is based on the text of *BH*, could have brought the author closer to that source (I do not know how precise this concordance is). Often Barr states (for examples, see the index *s.v.* Mandelkern) that the data in Mandelkern differ in details from *BHS*. This is not surprising since the textual base for that concordance (*Biblia Rabbinica*, the edition of Baer, and other sources) differs from *BHS*, but the mentioning of these details will be useful to the readers, many of whom use Mandelkern.

The reason for the choice of codex L is not mentioned. One can easily conjecture that this manuscript is chosen as the best complete representative of the Ben-Asher tradition. However, that choice pertains to matters of vocalization and Masorah, and not necessarily to its consonants. The choice is actually not discussed. Possibly another source would have presented us with a better base for an investigation of the consonantal Masoretic tradition. It is not impossible that the detailed research carried out by Menahem Cohen on subgroups within the Masoretic manuscripts (for some references, see Barr's bibliography) would lead to the choice of another manuscript or even of two or more manuscripts. Even if such a different choice was made, the contents of the tables would not differ from the present ones by more than 3–5 percent, that is the margin which Barr is willing to accept according to the aforementioned quote from p. 6. But here and there an additional block might be recognized and, conversely, the assumption of a spelling block might sometimes have to be cancelled.

There is one further issue pertaining to the textual base for the research performed. It is never fair to expect from authors who performed so much research to point to other areas that should have been researched as well, but it seems that at least some guidelines or sample studies are needed in the area of the ancient scrolls. The spelling patterns of MT were not created in the Middle Ages. The only reason why the earliest medieval manuscripts are studied is that they form the best extant complete source for the study of early orthographic patterns.

After all, the Masoretic manuscripts have been transmitted very carefully so that they are probably an excellent base for the study of earlier practices. The ancient scrolls belonging to the same (proto-)Masoretic family reflect an almost identical consonantal text (see chapter 12*) especially the Judean Desert scrolls from sites other than Qumran. If differences between codices L and A are taken into consideration, why should one disregard much earlier, and hence better, representatives of the same Masoretic family from Masada, Murabba‘at, and Naḥal Ḥever, and also Qumran? Sample studies of ancient scrolls could indicate possible trends at an earlier period. This pertains to such well-preserved texts as 1QIsa^b, the Minor Prophets scroll from Naḥal Ḥever, and several of the Masada texts. For example, the unusual *plene* spelling יַעֲקֹב in the MT of Lev 26:42 and Jeremiah (30:18; 33:26; 46:27; 51:19 [note also ten defective spellings in that book]) is also found in other places in 4QJer^c (30:7; 31:7, 11 [?], 18; other instances are not known because of its fragmentary status); the defective spelling occurs 345 times in MT. The exact status of the spelling of this name in 4QJer^c is of course not clear, but this and similar data are very relevant to the discussion on p. 162 of the book because they antedate the medieval manuscripts by at least one millennium. It should be stressed once again that I do not refer to the relevance of any earlier text; I refer only to those texts from the Judean Desert, which according to the scholarly consensus belong to the (proto-)Masoretic group (family). See further chapter 10* below.

We now turn to the samples provided, their description, and the accompanying theories in Chapters One and Two. The existence of the “affix effect” previously described as the avoidance of *plene* spellings in two successive syllables, has certainly been established before Barr and by Barr himself, but since the author presents special aspects of this phenomenon, our only source of information is provided by the examples given, and these are sometimes problematic. The data provided are far from exhaustive for completeness was not the author’s intention. Nevertheless enough relevant material is provided. No information is hidden, but the reader should always read the samples carefully. Often they do not pertain to the Bible as a whole, but to certain books only, or only to a certain form of the noun (absolute or construct only), often in certain books only. Thus figure 9, mentioned above, quotes “all cases in the Torah” of *l^e‘olam* (forever) and it pertains to the “affix effect.” The author notes that there are some 205 instances of *‘olam* written *plene* in MT. He then continues to say: “But, when preceded by *l^e-* (not עַד), in the familiar phrase *l^e‘olam* “for ever,” this proportion changes sharply: within the Torah we have the defective, לְעֹלָם, ten times, and the

plene לעולם only twice . . .” After the table, the author mentions ובעולם in Isa 57:11 in a similarly short spelling. However, the mentioning of this one example is problematic since the great majority of the instances of this word are spelled *plene* (17x, not mentioned by Barr). Likewise, העולם, with the article, is mentioned as an example for the “affix effect.” But the latter case actually runs counter to the author’s claim, since it is represented only in two cases with the short spelling “out of about a dozen.” Also the massive information about *’olam* with *l^e*, not mentioned by the author, goes against his rule. That is, the great majority of the spellings of *l^e’olam* are actually *plene*, to be precise 175 times in all the books of the Bible, most of them in Psalms, as against a mere seven defective spellings in 1 Kings (4 x) and Psalms (3 x). In spite of all this, the information in figure 9 is basically correct, as it pertains only to the Torah, where the basic information is not contradicted, but the information concerning the other books is imprecise, and this may have some repercussions for the situation in the Torah as well.

The preceding example may or may not render the case of the “affix effect” less convincing. Actually Barr does not say in so many words whether the “affix effect” is found throughout the Bible or merely in a certain unit, in this case the Torah. If, by default, one believes that the “affix effect” is found in all of the Bible, one would have to admit that the data are less convincing, for they pertain mainly to the Torah with contrary evidence from the other books. On the whole, in our view the case would be stronger if one should claim that the phenomenon is particularly discernable in a given book and if its presence there is well demonstrable. But one does not know whether this is Barr’s intention for, in the discussion in Chapter Two, reference to the “affix effect” also pertains to books other than the Torah.

The examples given for the “affix effect” are not always convincing, in my view. As one of the examples of the “affix effect,” the author mentions on p. 27 עשה, which when preceded by a *lamed* is written defectively (לעשה). For this phenomenon, Barr quotes twelve examples, which in normal conditions would be convincing, but when remembering that there are at least two hundred instances of the *plene* writing of this word (לעשה), *not* mentioned on p. 27, one wonders whether the example is at all valid. The data mentioned by Barr thus refer to a minority of the instances; how can we use them as proof for an assumption that is contradicted by the bulk of the evidence?

The numbers of the defective spellings of *qol* deriving from the “affix effect” as listed on p. 29 are correct, but they form a small minority. But Barr adds an important observation: “. . . there is not a single case of the

defective spelling קל except where there is an affix conjoined with the noun.”

The author thus does not stress the statistical data, but he follows a different type of logic, spelled out with regard to *qol*, and which has much to be commended. According to that logic it is not the number of defective affixed forms that count, but the fact that these defective forms occur mainly with affixes and often in unexpected places, such as in a late book. The addition of affixes, so the argument goes, influenced the scribe to write the word defectively, even if this happened in a small number of cases only. In our view, however, this position, logical as it may seem to be, can only be upheld by strong evidence relating either to a given word or morphological pattern or to a given biblical book.

Another example mentioned in favor of the present formulation of the “affix effect” is *qadosh*, mainly spelled *plene* as קדוש—but why is this example mentioned in this chapter? What is the “affix effect” here? The author notes “. . . with the article this adjective is always קדוש *plene* . . .” (p. 27).

On pp. 28–9, the author mentions several examples of words that are *plene* in their construct forms, as opposed to their defective absolute forms, e.g. the construct ארון as opposed to the absolute ארן, in the Torah only (as opposed to all other books in which only the *plene* forms occur). But here, Barr notes, the “affix effect” works in the opposite direction, and one wonders whether these data actually do not weaken the initial assumption.

There certainly is evidence for some form or other of the “affix effect,” which has been recognized also before Barr, but possibly it was operational only for certain scribes in certain cases. Barr shows (pp. 25–6) that the phenomenon which previously has been described as the avoidance of *plene* spelling in two successive syllables, is imprecise and not warranted by the data. Instead, he provides a better description of the evidence. But, it seems to us, there remain some open questions. Thus the existence of the “affix effect” in all of the books has not been established, and it is not clear whether this was Barr’s intention. The case made would have been stronger if we could say that in a certain book or group of books the “affix effect” is used exclusively, and not contradicted by negative evidence. An alternative explanation could be that the “affix effect” would be operational in all of MT for certain words only, so that negative evidence relating to other words would not be relevant.

A similar consideration of a general nature pertains to a concept introduced by Barr, viz., that of block spellings as opposed to rapid

alternation. According to Barr, the combination of block spellings and rapid alternation is one of the characteristic features of the Masoretic spelling system. Examples are given from both the Torah and the historical books. The data speak for themselves, and they are impressive. But the issue at stake, in my mind, is the question to what extent the described phenomena were intentional. For Barr, they probably reflect a conscious process, since he speaks about rapid alternation and in various places he describes the spelling as a conscious process. Although Barr does not say so in so many words, the assumption behind his description seems to be that someone created the alternation between block spellings and rapid alternation. But in order to prove this point much more evidence needs to be adduced, in my view. The examples themselves are not numerous enough. Alternatively, can one point to a certain book or group of books in which the block spelling is a clear-cut phenomenon? Furthermore, what is the logic behind the presumed alternation? After all, if the suggested view cannot be demonstrated convincingly, we may have to return to the old-fashioned view that inconsistency is at stake. Simple “inconsistency” is another way of formulating the combination of block spellings and rapid alternation. But inconsistency cannot be proven. It is an assumption in itself.

This leads to even more general thoughts about the book under review. In the two main sections of the work, Barr discusses different aspects of the Masoretic spelling by approaching the evidence from different angles. In the greater part of the book (Chapters One and Two), the author discusses individual patterns of spellings, pointing out time and again the reasons for the variable spellings. The discussion in the second part (Chapter Three), on the other hand, stresses the unsystematic nature of that spelling on the basis of an analysis of parallel sections. The haphazard nature of the spelling is stressed especially in the concluding section (see below). In other words, the implication of Chapters One and Two actually differs from that of Chapter Three. Barr is aware of this, and he always phrases his thoughts carefully. But one wonders whether the results of the second part of the book are sufficiently taken into consideration in its first part. In his general conclusions, Barr writes:

For the obvious character of biblical spelling is its *haphazardness*. Consistency is at a discount, and variation at a premium. As we have repeatedly observed and insisted, the variations run across all books, all sources, all periods. Exceptions are not exceptional but are the normal thing (pp. 202–3).

But if this is the case, should this perception not influence the concepts and analysis developed in the first part of the book as well? In other words, if variation is the rule (“spelling varied because the scribes liked it to vary” [p. 194]), can the concepts of “block spelling” and “rapid alternation” as conscious procedures be maintained, especially since the examples are not clear-cut? Or would it be better to simply talk about various forms of inconsistency? And does the very fact of the inconsistency not cast any doubts on some of the evidence explained otherwise in Chapters One and Two? After all, the evidence is not always convincing (see also above). Would it not be better to turn to an assumption of inconsistency?

This is a very important study. Barr has discovered several spelling features and he offered attractive suggestions for single phenomena and lexemes. Accordingly, the main question for discussion is not the validity of these single phenomena and spelling patterns for certain lexemes, but the validity of the generalizations behind the description of these single phenomena. Can the overall explanations of Barr (alternation of block spelling and rapid alternation, the special nature of the “affix effect”) be maintained? Barr has taught us not to look at mere statistics, but to consider general trends and to look separately at the words behind these statistics. Accordingly, one can probably accommodate both an assumption of inconsistency in general and the consistent behavior of certain words and patterns. In a way, however, judgment should be delayed until each of the books of MT is discussed separately and thoroughly.

These doubts and precautions beyond the already cautious approach of Barr do cast further doubts on the validity of the linguistic-historical explanations of the spelling practices so often suggested in this work (e.g., the assumption of a pattern *qatal* behind the defective spellings of the Masoretic *qatol*, see above). If inconsistency is the rule for MT, rather than the exception, why can we not ascribe many of these unusual spellings to the inconsistencies of scribes, rather than to a different linguistic reality? Scribes of individual books had their idiosyncrasies (this is also visible in MT as a whole; see the consistently defective spellings of e.g., *בִּזְאֵר*, *כִּהֵן*, *בִּזְאֵר*), and why should other idiosyncrasies not be ascribed to the same scribes rather than to a different linguistic reality? Do we have to assume different pronunciation patterns for the *hiph'il*, for the participle, and for the plural formations *-im* and *-ot* if we can equally well work with the assumption of scribal conventions and (in)consistency? Besides, these linguistic explanations are ascribed to spellings found in all of MT, and Barr is aware of the fact that the

different linguistic reality so often mentioned in the book would have to be assumed for quite a long period and at quite a late stage of the language.

Although there remain some open questions, they do not detract from the fact that this is a masterly study, which will remain a basic work for the study of the Masoretic spelling for many years to come.