The English poet John Donne (1572–1631) became an Anglican priest in 1615. His *Essays in Divinity being Several Disquisitions interwoven with Meditations and Prayers; before he entered Holy Orders* (Richard Merriot, London, 1651) has a section on the name of God. At the beginning of Essay VII (Of the Name *Jehovah*) we learn that “how this name should be sounded is now upon the anvil, and everybody is beating and hammering upon it.”

The question of the pronunciation and vocalization of the Tetragrammaton to which Donne refers here is but one instance of a wider controversy over the status of the Massoretic vocalization as a whole: were the Massoretic vowels ancient, authoritative, and ultimately inspired? Or was it a mediaeval innovation, the product of later Jewish scholarship? The question was of considerable moment: for Protestants it touched upon the issue of *scriptura sola* none too obliquely. The vocalization of the text reduces its ambiguity and determines a sense. And *scriptura sola* requires a determinate sense. It was, of course, precisely this ambiguity that the Massoretes themselves had sought to control. Protestants worried about consequences for exegesis, but for Catholics the recent date of the vocalization was an easy way to reaffirm the canonical authority of the Vulgate. Robert Bellarmine in his often quoted *De Controversiis* (1581, 1582, 1593) pointed out that the whole business showed that Church tradition, which was of divine origin, antedated the canonical Scriptures; that the biblical text was imperfect and insufficient; and that it was also obscure. Moreover, Catholic apologists were able to assert that the Jews had introduced their later vocalization to hide prophesies of Christ. The Vulgate simply did not have all these problems. The Buxtorfs,
whom we shall shortly consider, were ardent Protestants, and thus eager to defend what they saw as the certain truth of Scripture. Cappell was also a Protestant, less learned than Buxtorf, but opposed him on the issue of the date of the vowels. The logic of his argument assured him of ultimate victory.

The question of the integrity of the Hebrew Bible Text had occurred to Christian scholars during the Middle Ages. Raymund Martin thought the vowel points were late, and on occasion were evidence of deliberate Jewish corruption to obliterate prophesies of the Incarnation. He was followed by Nicholas of Lyra and Petrus Galatinus.

The earlier Reformers had not been terribly exercised over the issue of the vowel points. Luther realized that they must have been invented after Jerome, who did not know them, and were therefore only an imperfect aid. Zwingli, in addition to Jerome's silence, considered the variety of spellings of Hebrew names in the Septuagint and the Vulgate a clear sign that the translators were doing their own vocalization. Calvin similarly believed they were an invention of the rabbis but held them in higher regard.

The matter was decisively settled (in our eyes at least) by Elias Levita, whose enormous contribution to Hebrew learning both among Jews and Christians we have already discussed. His Massoret ha-Masoret (Venice, 1538) noted Talmudic ignorance of the written vowels, and discussions of the qere/kethib in Eastern or Western vocalizations. The vowels were absent in the Sepher Yetzirah alphabet (c. 700 A.D.) and were not known before the 8th century. He came to his conclusion while working on Sepher ha-Zikronot, a Massoretic commentary finished in 1536, and presented it in a third preface to Massoret ha-Masoret in 1538. In 1539 Sebastian Munster printed Masoret ha-Masoret and put the prefaces (but not the rest) into Latin, which brought them a wider readership. Wilhelmus Lindanus put the work to polemic purposes but was sharply rebuked by a Johannes Isaac Levita, a Jewish convert who was professor of

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5 *Pugio* pars iii, dist. iii cap. Xxi. See Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies*, p. 204.
6 *Enarratio in Genesin (1535–1545) WA* 4, p. 683.
8 *Praelectionum in Duodecim Prophetas Minores* Part 1 in *Opera Omnia*… Cr vol. 72 (Braunschweig, 1890), pp. 98–101.
9 L. Geiger, *Studium der hebraischen Sprache in Deutschland* (Breslau, 1870), p. 56ff. Aranoff, “Elias Leviita”: the viability of Levita’s scholarship was no longer contingent solely upon Jewish reception alone, but he availed himself of an increasingly sophisticated sustained discourse on Hebrew not bound by traditional Jewish views.
10 I use extensively Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies*, pp. 203–228.