The transmission of forms of biblical proper names in their origin and 
early development concerns the manner in which the pre-Masoretic 
text of the Hebrew Bible and ancient translations in the crucial period 
for the history of the biblical canon were handed down. The presence 
of variants in the Dead Sea biblical scrolls, which presumably origi-
nated before the Qumran period, confirms the view that in pre-Mas-
oretic times the Hebrew and Aramaic texts were transmitted only in 
popular, unauthorized forms. This view is supported by the substantial 
divergences in some cases of the LXX text-forms, such as Samuel, Jer-
emiah, and Job, which invites the conclusion that the LXX followed a 
different, pre-Masoretic Hebrew text. It is all the more striking that at 
least the Torah was sacrosanct and inviolable in text-form even before 
the close of the Old Testament. This fact helps us to understand why 
differences between the Dead Sea biblical scrolls, the multiplicity of 
text-forms of unauthorized pre-Masoretic texts, and the standardized 
Masoretic text hardly pertain to the forms of biblical proper names.1

In the Textus Receptus of the Hebrew Bible, variant readings of 
the forms of biblical proper names are so few that the Hebrew and 
Aramaic forms of these names must have been basically standardized 
already in the early Hellenistic period. From a methodological point of 
view it is therefore of utmost importance to consider with equal care 
all the material available, both the Masoretic and the non-Masoretic 
forms of pronunciation. It is possible that there are phonetic connec-
tions and interdependences of the variously pronounced grammatical

1 Unfortunately, the first English translation of the biblical Dead Sea Scrolls does 
not bring to light evidence concerning the forms of Hebrew names in the notes. See 
Martin Abegg Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The 
Oldest Known Bible: Translated for the First Time into English (New York, N.Y.: Har-
perCollins Publishers, 1999). The text critical editions of the Hebrew Bible also do not 
provide a complete state of forms of biblical proper names from the biblical texts in 
Hebrew/Aramaic and ancient versions.
forms. There are compelling reasons for assuming the existence of two or more independent ways of pronunciation or dialects.

The relative uniformity of biblical proper names in the Hebrew Bible is remarkable in view of the excessive variety of their forms in various ancient versions. Where does this variety come from? This question is particularly urgent for the whole history of the transmission of Greek and Latin forms of biblical proper names, as Greek and Latin much more strongly shaped European cultural and linguistic traditions than did Hebrew and Aramaic. Any evaluation of the forms of biblical proper names in ancient translation languages raises the question of the relationship between the respective original forms and the way they were transcribed or translated into other languages. The uniformity or the variety of the forms of biblical proper names are both attributable to several factors in the original and in translations: uniform prototypes, different linguistic backgrounds, the existence of different dialects, phonetic variation in the course of transmission, multiple textual traditions, the more or less extensive use of the names in communities constituting living traditions, active and intentional alterations, different Bible translators, and different approaches among the original translators.

We may rightly speak of the relative individuality of history and tradition of each version, although the individual forms of biblical proper names are only to a certain extent a result of historical circumstances and extant traditions. More important seems to be the individuality of phonetic systems of the most influential ancient languages in the transmission of the biblical texts, i.e., of Hebrew/Aramaic, Greek, and Latin. On the one hand, the Greco-Latin alphabets are inadequate for rendering some Semitic sounds, insofar as these alphabets do not have exact equivalents for Semitic gutturals or sibilants. On the other hand, the pre-Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible caused translators many phonological problems, because originally it did not contain vowel sounds.

I. Historical and Linguistic Factors of Forms of Biblical Proper Names

Ancient translators sometimes render differently the same Hebrew name forms in the various biblical books or even within the same book. There are indications that even the most famous translators and