A NOTE ON LEVITICUS XXVII 28

Towards the end of Torat Kohanim we read: ¹)

Notwithstanding, every devoted that a man shall devote unto the Lord of all that he bath. (Leviticus xxvii 28) and not ‘all that he has’. Of Man, to include his Canaanitish manservant and maidservant. Or [one might have said]: Man to include his Hebrew manservant and maidservant, therefore it is said: Of Man and not ‘all Man’. Of beast and not ‘all beast’. And of the field of his purchase, and not ‘all the field of his purchase’. One might have assumed that if he had devoted them all they should be [considered validly] devoted, therefore it is said: Notwithstanding.

From the above we see that the Rabbis derived from the word המאת—hebdomah—of beast—the law that a man may not devote all of his cattle, only a part thereof. Such a derivation presupposes a text reading המאת—beast—the argument could well have been disputed, and the alternative suggestion would have been that while it is correct that one may devote only of one’s servants, meaning some of them, or (part) of one’s land, one may devote all one’s cattle. The Torat Kohanim however records no such suggestion, or indeed any argument against the above derivation, and hence we may conclude first, that the text presupposing this derivation read המאת and secondly that it was generally accepted as such. And yet the Massoretic text as we know it reads המאת—and beast—in this verse, and the critical editions (GINSBURG, KITTEL) cite no variants for this word.

That the text in Torat Kohanim is correct as regards the citation of this verse may be proven by a comparison with B. Arakhin 28a. There the Mishna states that ²):

A man may devote [part] of his flock or his herd, of his Canaan- itish manservants or maidservants, or of the field of his possession; but if he devoted the whole of them they are not considered [validly] devoted. This is the view of R. E[Liezer (b. Hyrcanus, flor. c. 80-110 C.E.)] (Transl. Soncino ed. p. 166).


²) M. Arakhin viii. 4. (DANBY translation p. 166).
The Gemara there continues: 1

Whence do we know these things?—Because our Rabbis taught: ‘Of all that he hath’, i.e. but not that he has; ‘Of Man’, but not ‘all Man’; ‘or [of](!) beast’, but not ‘all beast’; ‘of the field of his possession’, but not ‘all the field of his possession’. One might have assumed that he may not at the outset devote [the whole], but if he had done so, it should be [considered validly] devoted, therefore it is said: Notwithstanding. These are the words of R. Eliezer (Ibid).

We may then safely conclude that in Palestine during the time of R. Eliezer, i.e. at the turn of the second century C.E. there was a reading of המבמה. His fellow scholar R. Eleazar b. Azaria did not dispute this reading (Mishna and Gemara ibid), nor indeed is any other Tanna recorded as having done so.

On the other hand we can be fairly certain that the Amoraim of Babylonia knew the text as we have it in the Massoretic version. This becomes quite evident in the subsequent discussion in the Amoraic stratum of the same Gemara (ibid):

And all [the details] are necessary. For if the Divine Law had but written: Of all that he hath, I might have said: He may not devote all that he has but of one kind he may devote all [objects]. Therefore the Divine Law said: Of Man, i.e. but not ‘all Man’. And if the Divine Law had but written of Man [I would have said]: Because with labour no one can manage, but [in the case of] a field he can still make a living by working as a serf, [therefore it is written: Of the field of his possession]. And if [the Divine Law] had taught us about these two, [I would have said: The reason in both these cases] is that each is vitally necessary, but as for movable property, let him be allowed to devote it all, therefore it was necessary [to teach about that as well]. Why was or beast necessary?—In accordance with what was taught: One might have assumed that a man may devote his son or daughter, his Hebrew manservant or his field of purchase. Therefore it is said: or beast, i.e., just as a beast is something he may sell, so [may he devote] only such things as he is permitted to sell. (Soncino, ibid., pp. 166-7).

In the above argument quite pointedly nothing is derived from

1) Cf. Yalkut Shim'on I, 678, for slight variants. Cf. also Midrash Lekach Tob, ed. Burber, Leviticus, p. 159, also demonstrating the correctness of our text. See Midrash Haggadol, Leviticus, ed. E. N. Rabinowitz (New York, 1932), p. 695, where the reading has been altered to accord with the Massoretic version, but the self-same argument nonetheless retained. The editor did not note this point.