Check list for observation and evaluation of Hebrew script

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This Check-list is a shortened English version of a more detailed guide of the description of Hebrew handwritings “Petit guide de description des écritures hébraïques : identifier la main du scribe”, see www.hebrewmanuscript.com.

Some useful terms

1. The line of writing:
   headline
   baseline

2. average letter
   the body of the letter
   Beth: upper horizontal bar
   Beth: base
   Beth: vertical downstroke
   Beth: serif
   Lamed: ascender
   Lamed: the body of the letter
   Qoph: the body of the letter
   Qoph: descender
I Presentation

1. Identification of the documents
   - Collection
   - Shelfmarks

2. Writing material
   - papyrus
   - leather
   - parchment
   - paper
   - textile
   - wood
   - other

3. Ink and pigments

4. State of conservation

5. Style and quality of the script
   - square
     - calligraphic
     - informal
     - documentary
     - calligraphic
     - informal
     - bookhand
     - calligraphic
     - informal

6. Type of script

7. Text

II External features

1. Format
   - books
     - scroll
     - rotulus
     - codex
     - leaf
     - uncertain
   - documents
- carta transversa
- carta non transversa
- slip - chirograph
- other

2. Dimensions

3. Dimensions of the written text

4. Page layout

5. Text layout

6. Lines management

III Text density

1. Stable or variable

2. Number of lines per page

3. Number of lines in 50 mm (vertically)

4. Number of characters (+spaces) in 50 mm (horizontally)

5. Space between the lines
   - regular - variable
   - higher than the height of the line of writing
   - equal to the height of the line of writing
   - smaller than the height of the line of writing

6. Space between words
   - regular - variable
   - broader than the width of an average he
   - equal to the width of an average he
   - smaller than the width of an average he

7. Spaces between letters in a word
   - regular - variable
   - no space
- broader than the width of an average vav
- equal to the width of an average vav
- smaller than the width of an average vav

**IV Text rapidity**

1. **General impression**

2. **Number of movements to trace a given letter (ductus)**

**V Lines**

*Ruled manuscripts*

1. **Pricking**
   - yes
   - no
   - instrument
   - regularity of the row
   - pattern

2. **Ruling**
   - yes
   - no
   - instrument
   - pattern

3. **Number of written versus ruled lines**

4. **Position of the written line in respect to the ruling**
   - in the middle
   - in the upper part
   - in the lower part
   - attached to the upper/lower line
   - ascenders go beyond the upper line
   - descenders descend below the lower line

*Manuscripts without ruling*

1. **The line is:**
   - regular
   - irregular
   - throughout the page
   - in a part of the page
   - parallel to the line of writing
lifting towards the end
sinking towards the end
sinking in the middle
undulating

VI Letters

1. Letters and the line of writing
   - upper horizontal strokes are parallel to the headline
   - bases are parallel to the baseline
   - they are not parallel
   - vertical downstrokes are perpendicular to the baseline
   - they lean (to the right, to the left, how much?)
   - average letters descend below the baseline
   - average letters go above the headline

2. The width of the letters
   - regular - irregular

3. Vertical downstrokes are parallel:
   - in a word - in a line - on a page
   - ascenders/descenders are parallel to the downstrokes
   - ascenders/descenders are parallel between them:
     - in a word - in a line - on a page

4. Ascenders and descenders: proportions
   - ascenders/descenders are longer than the height of the average letter (how much)
   - ascenders/descenders are equal to the height of the average letter
   - ascenders/descenders are shorter than the height of the average letter (how much)

5. The width of the strokes
   - thick (full width of the tip of the calamus/pen - thin
   - shading: differences between the width of strokes in a letter

6. Ligatures (list, shape, frequency)
VII Morphology of the letters

1. **Vertical downstrokes**
   - straight
   - leaning to the right/left
   - rounded (open to the right/left)
   - undulating
   - thickened at the end
   - thinner at the end
   - variable
   - turned or broken at the end

2. **Horizontal bases**
   - straight
   - lifted to the right/left
   - convexe
   - concave
   - variable

3. **Horizontal upper bars**
   - straight
   - convexe
   - concave
   - variable
   - longer/shorter/equal to the bases
   - diamond shaped

4. **Additional strokes**
   - serifs
     - relative width
     - relative length
     - shape (like a coma, triangle, hook, diamond, straight stroke)
- feet (at the extremity of vertical downstrokes in aleph, gimel, tav)
- flag (on the ascender of the lamed)
- nose (pe)
- hook (top/bottom end of the vav, yod, some vertical strokes)

5. Meeting point between the strokes in a letter
- shape
  - cross
  - angular
  - rounded
  - loop
  - with a neck
- meeting place
  - the strokes touch/do not touch each other
  - (if they touch) in what part of the stroke (middle, upper, lower part)
  - they continue beyond the meeting point
  - place of a stroke in respect of the other strokes of the letter (ex. Shin: middle stroke)

VIII Regularity

1. Number and shape of the different forms of the same letter

2. Distinction/ no distinction between similar letters:
beth and kaph, daleth and resh, he and heth, vav, yod and final nun, vav and zayin, final mem and samekh.

IX Vowels and accents

1. Frequency

2. Vocalisation system
   - Tiberian   - Extended Tiberin   - Babylonian   - Palestinian   - Hybrid
X Punctuation

- yes - no - graphic shape

XI Abbreviations, Corrections, Glosses