

STICHOOMETRY

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Stichometry by J. Rendel Harris

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J. RENDEL HARRIS

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STICHOMETRY.

Introduction.

THE following investigations have been undertaken in the hope of obtaining some critical conclusions with regard to the extent of early documents, chiefly Biblical, from the apparently insignificant, yet highly important data furnished by certain numbers appended by ancient scribes to the books which they copied. It is only lately that I have come to regard, with any other feeling than complacent pity, the labors of those Masoretic editors of the Hebrew Bible who so carefully inform us as to the number of verses and the points of bisection of the separate books; the natural impulse of one's mind being towards the conclusion that such work might perhaps be agreeable at some period of involuntary incarceration accompanied by a most plentiful lack of books. The Masoretes themselves, however, seem to have been sensible of the importance as well as of the arduous nature of the work of book-measuring, since they preface their annotations with the word פּוֹתֵן, which is generally understood to be an encouragement (*fortis esto*) either to themselves or their readers. How much more strongly would they have expressed themselves if their task had been, like ours, the inverse problem of restoring the ancient books from their accredited measurements! Doubtless their sympathy would have flowed (after the approved Rabbinic fashion, which I remember to have noted somewhere) in votive offerings of midnight oil for the labors of the devoted calculator.