

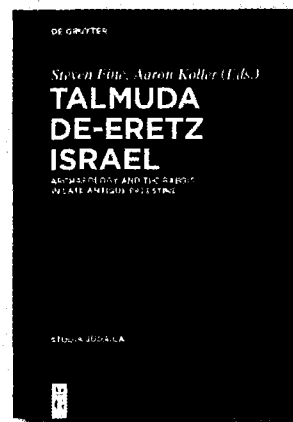
Steven Fine, Aaron Koller (Eds.)

TALMUDA DE-ERETZ ISRAEL

Archaeology and the Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine

Talmuda de-Eretz Israel: Archaeology and the Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine brings together an international community of historians, literature scholars and archaeologists to explore how the integrated study of rabbinic texts and archaeology increases our understanding of both types of evidence, and of the complex culture which they together reflect. This volume reflects a growing consensus that rabbinic culture was an “embodied” culture, presenting a series of case studies that demonstrate the value of archaeology for the contextualization of rabbinic literature. It steers away from later twentieth-century trends, particularly in North America, that stressed disjunction between archaeology and rabbinic literature, and seeks a more holistic approach.

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The Rehov Inscriptions and Rabbinic Literature – Matters of Language

1 Introduction

When we think of comparing and contrasting ancient rabbinic literature of the Land of Israel with archaeological finds of the same time and region, we might think that we are comparing apples and oranges. The former has been transmitted through the millennia and across continents by tradents who often sought to improve upon what they received before passing it on, while the latter is largely frozen in space and (as it were) in time. The former, at least initially, was intended for the ears, while the latter was intended for the eyes. One thing that *both* media contain, however, is words (whether we call them texts or inscriptions), and words are conveyed, whether by hearing or by sight, through *language*. Or, we might better say, *languages*, since both early rabbinic literature and the inscriptional repertoire of late antique and Byzantine Jewish Palestine are deeply multilingual, with Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek (the last less expressly in rabbinic literature), reflecting the multilingual nature of their broader cultural milieu, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Here I define “multilingual” as “the knowledge of more than one language by a person or a social group and the ability to switch from one language to another in speech, in writing, or in reading.”¹

2 Early Rabbinic Texts Practice Internal Jewish Bilingualism

Early rabbinic literature (especially that of the Land of Israel, which is the focus here) has much to say about language: the language of creation, the language of the first humans, the language of revelation, the language of scriptural recitation, translation, and interpretation, the language of ritual perform-

¹ Benjamin Harshav, *The Polyphony of Jewish Culture* (Stanford, 2007), 23–40, (“Multilingualism”), citing from 25. Harshav further clarifies that multilingualism can be “personal, social, or inter-subjective”, that is, not all members of a society need to be equally multilingual to characterize that society as being multilingual.

ance, the language of prayer, the language of daily speech, and the language of mourning, among others. Once again, I should have said that early rabbinic literature has much to say about *languages*, that is, the multiplicity of languages that might be or have been employed in each of the aforementioned domains of speech, whether elevated or mundane. For although Hebrew, as לשון הקודש, theologically and culturally occupies a place of supreme privilege, it shares stage with a variety of other languages, principally Aramaic (often referred to as סורסית or לשון סורסי in rabbinic sources), which too is honored for its inclusion within sacred Scriptures, כתבי הקודש, the “writings of holiness,”² as throughout Jewish cultural history to the present. For present purposes, I will not expand upon the multiple ways that early rabbinic literature, especially of the Land of Israel, thematizes the multiplicity of human languages and their relation to Hebrew and Aramaic, in large part because I have done so elsewhere.³

Early rabbinic Judaism not only thematizes and legislates regarding multiple language use, but its own discourse is deeply demonstrative of an “internal bilingualism” of the closely related dialects of rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic.⁴ I will deal here with only one of three types of Hebrew/Aramaic internal bilingualism within rabbinic literature, that being internal code-switching (the other two being “interpenetration” between Hebrew and Aramaic language and “internal translation” between the two).⁵ Here I wish to emphasize that

² For biblical Aramaic in all three sections of the TaNa”Kh, see Genesis Rabbah 74:14 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 871) to Genesis 31:47; y. Sotah 7:2, 21c.

³ Steven D. Fraade, ממצאים ספרותיים: ישראל בעת העתיקה: ממצאים ספרותיים, *Leshonenu* 73 (5771/2011), 273–307 (English version: “Language Mix and Multilingualism in Ancient Palestine: Literary and Inscriptional Evidence”, *Jewish Studies* 48 [2012], 1*–40*); idem, “Before and After Babel: Linguistic Exceptionalism and Pluralism in Early Rabbinic Literature”, *Diné Israel* 28 (2011), 31*–68*.

⁴ Here I will not address the well-trod ground of the frequent appearance of Greek and Latin loan-words within Hebrew and Aramaic rabbinic texts, nor the way in which Greek and Latin terminology has influenced rabbinic parlance. For a recent overview, with a bibliography of past scholarship, see Daniel Sperber, “Rabbinic Knowledge of Greek”, in *The Literature of the Sages: Second Part: Midrash and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature*; ed. S. Safrai, Z. Safrai, J. Schwartz, P. J. Tomson (Assen, 2006), 627–39. On the internal multilingualism of rabbinic literature, see Daniel Boyarin, “Bilingualism and Meaning in Rabbinic Literature: An Example”, in *Fucus: A Semitic/Afrasian Gathering in Remembrance of Albert Ehrman*, ed. Yoël L. Arbeitman, Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science, Series 4, Current Issues in Linguistic Theory 58 (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 1988), 141–52.

⁵ I intend this typology heuristically since the boundaries between my tree types are porous. For example, what is here designated as “interpenetration” could also be seen as a sub-type (or level) of “code-switching”, as could what is designated as “internal translation”.

aside from the interpenetration of Hebrew-Aramaic lexicon and grammar, rabbinic literature is noteworthy for the degree to which it “code-switches” between Hebrew and Aramaic in a variety of ways, that is, with each language assigned particular discursive tasks to be performed, this being more pronounced in amoraic than in tannaitic collections.⁶ For example, sayings (*pitgamim*) are typically in Aramaic, while anecdotes (*ma’asim*) are in Hebrew, regardless of the language of their textual contexts. Especially in the Talmuds, Hebrew and Aramaic are assigned particular functions by the redactors of those documents. Hebrew is generally the language of teaching, whether that teaching is in the form of a *barayta* or a saying of an amoraic sage, even an *’amora* of the later generations, while Aramaic is the language of debate, question and answer, and the editorial connecting and framing structures. Although both Talmudim contain more Hebrew than Aramaic words, their structuring frameworks favor Aramaic. It is as if the text is written in two colors, or two scripts, so as to distinguish its layered voices, those of the tannaitic and amoraic teachers from those of the anonymous redactors who interwove their teachings so as to create a cross-generational dialectic.⁷

6 “Interlinear” translation, as in the case of targum, is also a type of “code-switching”. However, for present purposes, I am using the term here, and below, to denote cases where the switching is not between expressions that are representations of one another. Code-switching is also evident in ancient Jewish/Aramaic magical texts, which are sometimes framed in Hebrew, while their spells are in Aramaic (thought to be incomprehensible to angels). For examples, see Joseph Naveh, “A Good Subduing: There is None Like It: An Ancient Amulet from Ḥorvat Marish in the Galilee”, *Tarbiz* 54 (1984/5), 378–79 (Hebrew); Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1985), 222–24, 237–38; Lawrence H. Schiffman and Michael D. Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts from the Cairo Geniza: Selected Texts from Talyon-Schechter Box KI*, STS 1 (Sheffield, 1992), 69–82. Note as well a bilingual magical bowl which is inscribed with alternating biblical verses and their Aramaic translations: Stephen A. Kaufman, “A Unique Magic Bowl from Nippur”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 32 (1973), 170–74. For angels not understanding Aramaic, see *b. Shabbat* 12b (with *tosafot*); *b. Sotah* 32b–33a.

7 See Eliezer Margoliot, “Hebrew and Aramaic in the Talmud and Midrash”, *Leshonenu* 27 (1962–63), 20–33 (Hebrew). Abba Bendavid (*Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew*, vol. 1 [Tel Aviv, 1967], 134–35 [Hebrew]) follows Margoliot in this regard, going on to draw a connection between the bilingualism of the Talmud and that of those who attended the synagogue. However, as much as Hebrew and Aramaic are somewhat functionally differentiated in the Talmud, they are also more complexly intermixed than Margoliot’s study would suggest. See in this regard, Shamma Friedman, “A Critical Study of Yevamot X with a Methodological Introduction”, in *Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America*, vol. 1 (New York, 1977–78), 301–302 (Hebrew), in criticism of Hyman Klein, “Gemara and Sebara”, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 38.1 (1947), 67–91. See also Jacob Neusner, *Language as Taxonomy: The Rules for Using Hebrew and Aramaic in the Babylonian Talmud*, South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism (Atlanta, 1990). Until recently there had not been similar discussions of the mix of

To give one specific example, in a recent article,⁸ Isaiah Gafni convincingly demonstrates that letters from Jewish Patriarchs to communities outside of the Land of Israel (covering matters of appointments, collections, and calendar), are almost always quoted in Hebrew within talmudic texts, even though the narrative frames in which they appear are usually Aramaic.⁹ In other words, the talmudic texts “code-switch” from Aramaic to Hebrew when citing such patriarchal letters. Gafni raises the question of whether this reflects the actual language of such letters or the literary-rhetorical work of the transmitters of these traditions. In the end, he leaves tantalizingly open and unanswered the historical question of whether such letters were, in fact, composed in Hebrew, and therefore read in Hebrew by or for their recipients, or only literarily presented as such. I too will bracket for now this historical question, but shall return to it later. For my present purpose, suffice it to say that this is an excellent example of the sort of “code-switching”, at least as a literary device, which is so widespread in early rabbinic literature.

3 Documentary and Inscriptural Multilingualism

We have no way of knowing whether or to what extent rabbinic rules and conventions of language selection were followed by anyone other than some rabbis. However, inscriptural and documentary evidence do provide us with

Hebrew and Aramaic in the Palestinian Talmud, but see now, Nurit Be'eri, Nurit. *Exploring Ta'anot: Yerushalmi, Tractate Ta'anot – Forming and Redacting the Traditions* (Ramat-Gan, 2008/2009), 23–64 (Hebrew). On the combination of Hebrew and Aramaic in the Palestinian homiletical midrashim, see Fraade, “Rabbinic Views”, 276, n. 53; Burton L. Visotzky, *Golden Bells and Pomegranates: Studies in Midrash Leviticus Rabbah*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 94 (Tübingen, 2003), 41–47. On interpenetration of Hebrew and Aramaic in the Babylonian Talmud on the linguistic level, see Breuer, “The Hebrew Component in the Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud”, *Leshonenu* 62 (1999), 23–80 (Hebrew). For linguistic code-switching in the modern performance of Talmud study, see Samuel C. Heilman, “Sounds of Modern Orthodoxy: The Language of Talmud Study”, in *Never Say Die. A Thousand Years of Yiddish in Life and Letters*, ed. Joshua A. Fishman (The Hague and Paris, 1981), 227–53; idem, *The People of the Book: Drama, Fellowship, and Religion* (Chicago, 1983). For the interplay of Hebrew and Aramaic in the shaping of the *Bavli*'s redacted discourse, see most recently, Moulie Vidas, “Tradition and Formation of the Talmud” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2009).

8 "על איגרותיהם של הנשיאים", in *Follow the Wise: Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee I. Levine*, ed. Zeev Weiss, Oded Irshai, Jodi Magness, and Seth Schwartz (New York and Winona Lake, IND., 2010), 3*–10* (Hebrew section).

9 His prime examples are drawn from *y. Sanhedrin* 1, 19a (= *y. Nedarim* 6, 40a); *b. Berakhot* 63a–b; *y. Hagigah* 5, 76d; and perhaps *b. Sanhedrin* 12a; *b. Rosh ha-Shanah* 19b.

valuable windows onto broader linguistic usage. Correlating these two types of evidence, rabbinic and non-rabbinic, with one another is no simple matter. Jonathan Price and Haggai Misgav at the conclusion of their excellent recent survey of “Jewish Inscriptions and their Use”¹⁰ state: “[I]t is clear that the current corpus of Jewish inscriptions – both those from the Land of Israel and those of the Diaspora – reflect a different world from the one of the rabbis.”¹¹ My interest here is not in whether or to what extent the rabbis determined what went on in synagogues and burial places (our two main sources of inscriptions), but to what extent they cohabited a *shared* world of Jewish (and broader) multilingualism.¹²

I choose this way of asking the question because of two well-known methodological difficulties, each stemming from one of the two sorts of evidence that I wish to allow to reflect upon one another. 1. We cannot presume that rabbinic literature, given its highly inflected rhetorical and multivocal nature, is representational in any simple way of how non-Rabbis conducted their lives or communal institutions. In particular, in our case, we cannot presume that rabbis (even if they could have agreed among themselves) governed how non-rabbis employed the three main languages (restricting myself here to the Land of Israel) available to them: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. 2. Neither are inscriptions (or ancient documents) simple representations of how their creators, readers, or viewers employed the same three languages in a wide variety of functions. They too serve particular rhetorical purposes, are the creations of a limited subset of the larger Jewish population, and by-and-large follow stylistic conventions of their particular genre. In short, they are expressions

10 Jonathan J. Price and Haggai Misgav, “Jewish Inscriptions and Their Use”, in *The Literature of the Sages: Second Part*, 461–83. Note especially the sections, “Epigraphic Cultures: Content and Language” (468–80) and “Relation to Rabbinic Literature” (480–83).

11 *Ibid.*, 481. For other recent surveys of ancient Jewish inscriptions, see Hayim Lapin, “Palestinian Inscriptions and Jewish Ethnicity in Late Antiquity”, in *Galilee Through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures*, ed. Eric M. Meyers (Winona Lake, IND, 1999), 239–68; Haggai Misgav, “Synagogue Inscriptions from the Mishnah and Talmud Period”, in *And Let them Make Me a Sanctuary: Synagogues from Ancient Times to the Present*, ed. Y. Eshel, E. Netzer, D. Amit and D. Cassuto (Ariel, 2004), 49–56; Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen, 2001), 356–421.

12 I chose a similar tack in relating rabbinic texts to contemporary realia in “The Temple as a Marker of Jewish Identity Before and After 70 CE: The Role of the Holy Vessels in Rabbinic Memory and Imagination”, in *Jewish Identities in Antiquity: Studies in Memory of Menahem Stern*, ed. Lee I. Levine and Daniel R. Schwartz (Tübingen, 2009), 235–63; and “Local Jewish Leadership in Roman Palestine: The Case of the Parnas in Early Rabbinic Sources in Light of Extra-Rabbinic Evidence”, in *Halakha in Light of Epigraphy*, ed. Albert Baumgarten and Hanan Eshel (Leiden, 2010), 155–173.

of, what has been called, the “epigraphic habits” of particular times, places, and social groups, making extrapolation and generalization with regard to language use for Jewish society as a whole a very risky business, even as distinctions between patterns of use in the Land of Israel and the Diaspora, between urban and rural locations, or between Jewish and non-Jewish Greco-Roman epigraphic habits can be instructive.¹³ Would that it were so simple as tallying the numbers of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Jewish inscriptions (assuming we could tell in each case which is Jewish and which not, which is Hebrew and which Aramaic) for Palestine as a whole and thereby being able to answer the question of “How much Greek” (or Hebrew or Aramaic) “in Jewish Palestine.”¹⁴ Even as the evidence from Roman Palestine of the amoraic period clearly points to an overall ascendancy of Aramaic over Hebrew in daily use, the preponderance of one over the other (as well as of Greek) is likely to have varied depending on geographical location, functional domain, and social class, as well as time.

Moving away from an attempt to judge any one language the winner of such a popularity contest, what is most noteworthy is the very *ubiquitousness* of multiple language usage in a wide range of locations and across several centuries. While not every synagogue site has preserved inscriptions in all three languages, many, if not most, have two of the three, with obvious differences in concentration depending on region (coastal or inland) and type of settlement (city or village).¹⁵ As Fergus Millar has emphasized, “The first important feature, which is evident on even the most cursory inspection, is the tendency of the synagogue mosaics to incorporate inscribed texts in two or three different languages.”¹⁶ I shall restrict my remaining discussion of multilingual language use to the synagogue at Rehov in the Bet Shean valley,

13 See Ramsey MacMullen, “The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire”, *American Journal of Philology* 103 (1982), 233–46; E. Meyer, “Explaining the Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire: The Evidence of Epitaphs”, *Journal of Roman Studies* 80 (1990), 74–96. For other methodological cautions regarding the identification and use of Jewish inscriptions, see Price and Misgav, “Jewish Inscriptions”, esp. 461–68; Willem Smelik, “Language Selection and the Holy Tongue in Early Rabbinic Literature”, in *Interpretation, Religion, and Culture in Midrash and Beyond: Proceedings of the 2006 and 2007 SBL Midrash Sessions*, ed. Lieve Teugels and Rivka Ulmer (Piscataway, NJ, 2008), 144; Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, 400–401; Lapin, “Palestinian Inscriptions”, 240–43.

14 I am playing on the title of Saul Lieberman, “How Much Greek in Jewish Palestine”, *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA, 1963), 123–41. The same point is made by Hayim Lapin, “Palestinian Inscriptions”, 246.

15 See below, n. 24.

16 Fergus Millar, *Rome, the Greek World, and the East*, vol. 3: *The Greek World, the Jews, and the East*, ed. Hannah M. Cotton and Guy M. Rogers (Chapel Hill, NC 2006), 399.

discovered in the 1970s, which, contra Price and Misgav, can hardly be said to “reflect a different world from the one of the rabbis.”

4 Linguistic Code-Switching in the Rehov Synagogue Inscriptions

Much discussion has rightly been focused on the lengthy “halakhic” mosaic inscription found in the narthex of the synagogue at Rehov, 7 km south of Beth Shean (Scythopolis), dating to the 6th–7th century.¹⁷ It should be emphasized

17 See Jacob Sussmann, “A Halakhic Inscription from the Beth-Shean Valley”, *Tarbiz* 43 (1974), 88–158 (Hebrew) (English summary, V–VII); idem., “Additional Notes to ‘A Halakhic Inscription from the Beth-Shean Valley’”, *Tarbiz* 44 (1975), 193–95 (Hebrew) (English summary, VIII); idem., “The Inscription in the Synagogue at Rehov”, *Qadmoniot* 8 (1975), 123–28 (Hebrew); idem., “The Boundaries of Eretz-Israel”, *Tarbiz* 45 (1976), 213–57 (Hebrew) (English summary, II–III); idem., “The Inscription in the Synagogue at Rehov”, in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, ed. Lee I. Levine (Jerusalem, Detroit, 1982), 146–53; Saul Lieberman, “Regarding the Halakhic Inscription from the Beisan Valley”, *Tarbiz* 45 (1976), 54–63 (Hebrew) (English summary, IV); idem., “A Note to *Tarbiz* XLV, p. 61”, *Tarbiz* 45 (1976), 331 (Hebrew) (English Summary, VII); Fanny Vitto, “Ancient Synagogue at Rehov”, *Atiqot*, Hebrew Series 7 (1974), 100–104, Pls. XXXIII–XXXVII (English Summary, 17*–18*); idem., “The Synagogue at Rehov”, *Qadmoniot* 8 (1975), 119–23 (Hebrew); idem., “The Synagogue of Rehov, 1980”, *Israel Exploration Journal* 30 (1980), 214–17; idem., “A Byzantine Synagogue in the Beth Shean Valley”, in *Temples and High Places in Biblical Times*, ed. Avraham Biran (Jerusalem, 1981), 164–67; idem., “The Synagogue at Rehov”, *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, ed. Lee I. Levine, 90–94; idem., “Le Décor Mural des Anciennes Synagogues à la Lunière de Nouvelles Découvertes”, *XVI Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress, Akten II/5, Jahrbuch der Sterreichischen Byzantinistik* 32/5 (Vienna, 1981), 361–70; idem., “Le Décor Mural des Anciennes Synagogues à la Lumière de Nouvelles Découvertes”, *XVI Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress, Akten II/5, Jahrbuch der Sterreichischen Byzantinistik* 32/5 (Vienna, 1981), 361–70; idem., “Jewish Villages around Beth Shean in the Roman and Byzantine Periods”, *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 1 (1981), 11–14; idem., “Rehov”, *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern (Jerusalem, 1993), 4: 1272–74; idem., “The Interior Decoration of Palestinian Churches and Synagogues”, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21, ed. A. M. Hakkert and W. E. Kaegi, Jr. (Amsterdam, 1995), 283–300; Ze’ev Safrai, “The Rehov Inscription”, *Immanuel* 8 (1978), 48–57; Joseph Naveh, *On Stone and Mosaic: The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues* (Jerusalem, 1978), 79–85 (Hebrew); idem., “The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues”, *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies. Volume Twenty: Yigael Yadin Memorial Volume* (ed. Amnon Ben-Tor, Jonas C. Greenfield, and Abraham Malamat; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989), 308 (Hebrew); Aaron Demsky, “The Permitted Village of Sebaste in the Rehov Mosaic”, *Israel Exploration Journal* 29 (1979), 182–93; idem., “Holy City and Holy Land as Viewed by Jews and Christians in the Byzantine Period: A Conceptual Approach to Sacred Space”, in *Sanctity of Time and Space in Tradition*



Fig. 1: Halakhic Inscription from the Synagogue Mosaic at Rehov (Wikipedia Commons).

that this is the longest Jewish inscription from late antiquity. The inscription deals with practical matters of whether certain types of produce, from villages of mixed Jewish-gentile populations, are subject to the laws of tithing and sabbatical years (*Shemittah*). In other words, which fruits and vegetables from which locations could or could not be consumed without requiring tithing and compliance with the laws of *Shemittah*. Much of the inscription is remarkably similar to passages from tannaitic and Palestinian amoraic rabbinic literature,¹⁸ making it the earliest surviving attestation of rabbinic literature, albeit without the normal debate between named rabbinical sages, as found in its talmudic parallels.¹⁹ However, two sections of the mosaic inscription, dealing with the parameters of Bet Shean (lines 5–9) and towns within the region of

and Modernity, Jewish and Christian Perspectives 1, ed. A. Houtman, M. Poorthuis, and J. Schwartz (Leiden, 1998), 285–96. Most recently, see Chaim Ben David, “The Rehov Inscription: A Galilean Halakhic Text Formula?” in *Halakhah in Light of Epigraphy*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten, Hanan Eshel, Ranon Katzoff, and Shani Tzoref, *Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements 3* (Göttingen, 2011), 231–40.

¹⁸ Sifre Deuteronomy 51 (ed. Finkelstein, 117); *t. Shevuot* 4:10–11 (ed. Lieberman, 181); *y. Demai* 2.1, 22c–d; *y. Shevuot* 6.1, 36c.

¹⁹ But note the attribution to Rabbi (Judah the Patriarch?) in line 10.

Sebaste (Samaria) (lines 26–29), thereby having particular local relevance to the region of Rehov, are without direct parallels in rabbinic literature.

While the overall language of the inscription is Hebrew, many of the names of produce are in Aramaic and aramaicized Greek. Given the applicable nature of its contents, especially the fact that the inscription's verbal map focuses on Bet Shean and villages in the vicinity of Rehov, as well as the area around Sebaste, most scholars who have commented upon this inscription presume that it was of *practical* consequence to those who gathered in this synagogue and who observed the laws of tithing and *Shemittah*. As Yaakov Sussmann characterizes the mosaic inscription, it is formulated in a “straight-forward and unambiguous” way, as “befits a text intended for the instruction of practical law ... [T]he pavement was utilized to bring to the notice of the community important matters concerning adherence to daily precepts, especially those of such importance to the Beth-Shean region.”²⁰ This is not to say that everyone who entered the synagogue, and therefore had to traverse this inscription, could necessarily read or understand (the two not being the same) its contents. But certainly there were those who could, and who would have rendered the contents of the inscription for those who could not. Which is simply to say that this mosaic inscription cannot be dismissed as mere symbolism or ornamentation. At the very least, the inscription establishes the deep and lasting connection between the village and the region of Rehov and the halakhic geography of *בבל עולי* *בבל*; “the territory of the Land of Israel, the place which was se[cured] by those who came up from Babylonia” (line 13), thereby expressing and reinforcing a sense of what Sussmann terms, “regional ‘patriotism’”,²¹ coupled perhaps to what I would call “linguistic patriotism”. Those who frequented this synagogue were repeatedly reminded of their strong connection to the Land of Israel in geographic, halakhic, and linguistic terms.²²

However, even more significant for our purposes are two inscriptions that have *not* yet been published. Sharing the narthex with the Hebrew halakhic inscription was an as yet unpublished mosaic dedicatory inscription of four

²⁰ Sussmann, “The Inscription in the Synagogue at Rehob”, 150–51.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 151. See also Safrai, “The Rehov Inscription”, 57; Ben David, “The Rehov Inscription”, 234.

²² For the practical purpose of the information conveyed in the halakhic inscription, see in particular the articles by Sussmann, Safrai, and Demsky (above, n. 17) and especially Demsky, “The Permitted Village of Sebaste”, for the usefulness of the inscription to travelers from the north to Jerusalem who would need to traverse Samaria. Demsky (“Holy City and Holy Land”) also emphasizes the symbolic meaning of the inscription for those who viewed it, in defining and securing their relationship to the halakhic geography of the Land of Israel.

lines in Aramaic, standard in its language, but including, we are told, a *Hebrew* reference to the Temple.²³ Thus even before entering the nave of the synagogue, one would encounter a large Hebrew inscription containing Aramaic elements, alongside a smaller Aramaic inscription with Hebrew elements. To the extent that Hebrew was the dominant language in a “literary” inscription and Aramaic was the dominant language in a dedicatory inscription, this scene would have been consistent with the bilingual division of labor, yet interpenetration, of these two languages (and Greek) in other synagogues as well, an epigraphic habit that I have detailed elsewhere.²⁴

But that is not all. In an earlier phase of the synagogue, about a century earlier (fifth century), one would have seen within the Rehov synagogue eight columns each with a different inscription written with ink on plaster, of which only fragments survive. Seven of those inscriptions were in Aramaic, including at least two dedications, a list of fast days, a list of priestly courses (משמרות), a list of dates in the life of the congregation, denoted according to Sabbatical years, and a liturgical or magical text.²⁵ The only column with a Hebrew inscription had one that was virtually identical to the halakhic inscription that was cast as a mosaic about a century later in the narthex. However the fresco inscription lacked the final three lines listing towns within the region of Sebaste (which have no parallel in rabbinic literature). Without those lines, the inscription begins and ends with the word שלום. Following the closing שלום, in place, as it were, of the lines listing towns within the region of Sebaste (in the mosaic inscription), the Hebrew fresco inscription concludes with an *Aramaic* blessing of the community, “Peace upon all the people of the town ...” This led Fanny Vitto, the archaeologist of the site, to conjecture:

23 For allusion to this unpublished inscription, see Naveh, “The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues”, 308; Vitto, “Rehov” (1993), 1273. My more specific knowledge is from a forthcoming article by Haggai Misgav, “The List of Fast Days Found in the Synagogue of Rehov”, *Israel Museum Studies in Archaeology* (forthcoming), which he was kind enough to share with me.

24 See my article, “Language Mix and Multilingualism in Ancient Palestine: Literary and Inscriptional Evidence”. The following cities and larger villages have ancient synagogue inscriptions in both Greek and Aramaic/Hebrew: Caesaria, Ashqelon, Gaza, Tiberias, Hammat Tiberias, Sepphoris, Bet Alpha, and Bet Shean. Smaller villages, regardless of location (but non-coastal), tend to have Aramaic/Hebrew only (no Greek), Kefar Habra, Kefar Kanah, Qorazim, Churbat Kanaf, Kefar Birim, Churbat Ammudim, Alma, Abellin, Er-Rama, Kefar Bar’am, Yesod Hama’alah, Chammat Gader, Naveh, Kokhav ha-Yarden, Bet Gubrin, Hebron, Estemoa, Churbat Susiya, Jericho, ‘En Gedi. These lists are from Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, 400.

25 From Misgav, “The List of Fast Days.” Misgav is preparing the plaster fragments for publication under the auspices of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

It seems that this [painted] inscription is a copy of a letter sent to the local community in answer to questions about certain localities in their region – Beth-Shean, for example, which had a mixed population of Jews and pagans. This is indicated by the first word of the inscription (*shalom*, or “peace”), the emphasis on Beth-Shean (the region of the synagogue) [lines 5–9], and the blessings at the end.²⁶

Vitto’s suggestion (seconded by Saul Lieberman²⁷) is tantalizing, especially in light of Gafni’s recent study of rabbinic texts in which Hebrew patriarchal letters are set off by language from their Aramaic narrative frames (see above). However, שלום at the beginning and end of the Hebrew fresco inscription is not sufficient to characterize it as a letter. Its opening and closing with שלום, together with its prominent position (both as fresco and as mosaic) within the synagogue space, does at the very least suggest, whatever its origin, that it was intended as a public notice of interest and importance to those who attended the synagogue, both practically and symbolically. As Catherine Hezser notes:

The inscription must be seen in connection with inscriptions in pagan temples, where treaties and laws were publicly exhibited, the engraving of Roman edicts – which already existed in document form – on stone, and also, perhaps, with the Christian practice, observable from the fourth century CE onwards, of inscribing *tituli* on the walls of churches. The inscription on stone of texts which already existed in written form, at places where they were generally visible, will have served the purpose of a greater publicity and an *expression of power* [emphasis added].²⁸

Although we find no evidence in rabbinic literature for the practice of inscribing rabbinic edicts, laws, or Patriarchal missives on floors or walls of synagogues (as we do for pictures²⁹), it is noteworthy that once in the Palestinian Talmud (*y. Kilayim* 1:1, 27a), we find the view that a list of kinds of produce (for purposes of observing the law of “diverse-kinds”): אשכחון כתיב על כותלא; דר' הלל ביר' אלס/וולס (Eles/Valis ...)³⁰

²⁶ Vitto, “Rehov” (1993), 1274.

²⁷ Lieberman (“Regarding the Halakhic Inscription from the Beisan Valley”, 54) suggests of the Mosaic inscription that it is probably a transcription of a letter sent by the rabbinical court (אגרת בית דין) to congregations that had doubts about their halakhic obligations.

²⁸ Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, 411, with references in nn. 465–68.

²⁹ See *y. Avodah Zarah* 3.3, 42d, as found in a Cairo Geniza text first published by J. N. Epstein (“Yerushalmi Fragments”, *Tarbiz* 3 [1931], 15, 16, 20 [Hebrew]).

³⁰ The Academy of the Hebrew Language’s edition of MS Leiden, 145: ר' יונה בשם ר' חייא: אלס ר' וולס (Valis). A preceding tradition, attributed to R. Yose in the name of R. Ḥiyya b. Va, says that the list was written in a notebook (פנקס) of R. Hillel b. R. Eles/Valis.” The list of produce that follows is in Aramaic, even though its Mishnaic parallel (*m. Kilayim* 1:1) is in Hebrew. Poirier (“The Linguistic Situation”, 77), farfetchedly uses this as evidence that the Hebrew Mishnah is a

For present purposes it is sufficient to note that code-switching from a Hebrew “literary” inscription to an Aramaic blessing formula is very reminiscent of the second-longest synagogue inscription from ancient Palestine, that being from ‘En Gedi (also found in a mosaic in the narthex, also in a synagogue with only Aramaic and Hebrew inscriptions, but from an entirely different region). The first eight lines of that inscription comprise lists of names of thirteen “universal” (pre-Abrahamic) scriptural ancestors (from 1 Chronicles 1:1–4), of twelve zodiac signs, of twelve Hebrew months, and of two triads of Israelite biblical figures, ending respectively with שלום and על ישראל, all in Hebrew. The second half of the inscription (ten lines but occupying the same amount of space as the first eight lines) following a horizontal line for a break, *switches from Hebrew to Aramaic* as it turns to communal affairs: two dedications naming members of the community (presumably benefactors of the mosaic), bracketing a set of curses of members who act wrongly toward one another or who reveal רזה דקרתה (line 12; “the secret of the town”), the whole inscription ending with שלום.³¹

While these two synagogues are noteworthy for the absence of any Greek inscriptions therein (as is more typical of larger and coastal towns), their use of Hebrew for “literary” and “liturgical” inscriptions is typical, including, as previously mentioned, scriptural verses or labels to scriptural scenes, and priestly courses, but also, though less frequently, for *communal* blessings and dedications.³²

translation of an Aramaic original. See Baer Ratner, *Ahawath Zion We-Jerusholaim*, vol. 4 (Vilna, 1907; rep. Jerusalem, 1967), 2, who cites the Mishnah commentary of Samson b. Abraham of Sens (12–13th century), the commentary of R. Isaac b. Malkisedeq of Siponto (ca. 1090–1160) to *Mishnah Zera'im*, and *Arukh Ha-Shalem* (s.v. פול), where the talmudic text is said to include the Hebrew name for each plant followed by its Aramaic equivalent. I owe this reference to *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: A Preliminary Translation and Explanation*, Vol. 4: *Kilayim*, trans. Irving J. Mandelbaum (Chicago), 295 n. 50. For other rabbinic references to writing, including writs, on walls (but not of synagogues), see *t. Shabbat* 17: 5, 6, 8; Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah*, vol. 3 (New York, 1962), 285.

31 For text and further analysis of the relation of the parts to one another, and the meaning of the whole, see Lee I. Levine, “The Inscription in the ‘En Gedi Synagogue”, in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, 140–45; as well as Naveh, *On Stone and Mosaic*, 105–109 (no. 70). It should be noted fifth (Aramaic blessing) inscription on the floor of the ‘En Gedi synagogue has been noted but never published. See Dan Barag, “The Synagogue at Ein Gedi”, in *Ein Gedi: “A Very Large Village of Jews”*, ed. Yizhar Hirschfeld (Haifa, 2006), 18*–19* (English) or 23–24 (Hebrew).

32 See above, n. 24. Note the following Hebrew dedication from the synagogue in Kfar Bar’am (Bir’am) (which synagogue also has a dedicatory inscription in Aramaic, יהי שלום במקום, “May there be peace in this place and in all the places of Israel. Jose the Levite the son of Levi made this lintel. May his works be blessed. Peace”). See Naveh, *On Stone and Mosaic*, 19–20

At a synagogue in ‘Alma (upper Galilee) we have a bilingual inscription on a lintel, containing in Hebrew a collective blessing for inhabitants of that place and other places in Israel, and then, *switching to Aramaic* (but with some Hebrew), the artist’s identification of himself: יהי שלום על המקום הזה ועל כל מקומות עמו ישראל [אמן סלה אנה יוסה בר לוי הלוי]אומנה דעבדת [הדין ... שקופה]; “[In Hebrew:] May there be peace on this place and on all places of His people Israel. Amen, selah. [In Aramaic:] I am Jose the son of Levi the Levite (in Hebrew), the artist who (I) made [this lintel].” Yet this very same artist, “signs” virtually the same Hebrew blessing at nearby Bar‘am in *Hebrew*, speaking of himself in the third person: ;... יוסה הלוי בן לוי עשה השקוף הזה ;... “Jose the Levite the son of Levi made this lintel ...”³³ I would suggest that when he wished to identify himself in a more personal way (first person) he employed Aramaic, but when he wished to be more formal (third person) he employed Hebrew.

Seen within this larger context,³⁴ the linguistic code-switching within the Rehov synagogue is unremarkable in quality (if not quantity) when compared to either Jewish or non-Jewish public spaces in Greco-Roman antiquity.

5 Conclusion

We have barely scratched the surfaces (so to speak) of multilingualism in early rabbinic literature of the Land of Israel and in the chronologically and geographically proximate material evidence of ancient Jewish inscriptions, with particular attention to the Rehov synagogue’s Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions. Notwithstanding significant local variations, we have seen certain patterns, epigraphic and literary “habits”, if you will, that appear to have been widespread and persistent, *mutatis mutandis*, across chronology, geography, and social location. It is fair to say that the cultures reflected in both the rabbinic literary and non-rabbinic material evidence were deeply bi- or trilingual in several senses that we have examined in *both* sets of evidence, especially with respect to linguistic code-switching. That is not to say that all consumers of rabbinic literature or all who entered ancient synagogues in general, or any one in particular, were equally competent (whether in reading, writing, listening, or speaking) in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. But we can say that

(nos. 1–2) (Hebrew). For virtually the same inscription in nearby ‘Alma, by the same artist, see below.

³³ See Naveh, *On Stone and Mosaic*, 19–20 (nos. 1–2) (Hebrew).

³⁴ For the yet larger context, see my articles referred to above, n. 3.

they were all exposed, both through seeing and hearing, to multiple languages, and that that exposure exerted an important influence upon and projected a powerful expression of their intersecting identities, however complexly experienced and navigated, as citizens of both the “house of Israel” and the larger multilingual and multicultural world of Greco-Roman late antiquity. Instead of dual passports, they carried multiple languages, which they variously mixed and switched.

In summation, I cannot concur with the statement of Price and Misgav, that “it is clear that the current corpus of Jewish inscriptions – both those from the Land of Israel and those of the Diaspora – reflect a different world from the one of the rabbis.”³⁵ While the Rehov halakhic inscription is unique for its remarkable connection to passages in the *Tosefta* and *Yerushalmi*, with respect to the challenges of multiple language selection and combination, and the issues of identity and power thereby reflected and projected, rabbinic literature of the Land of Israel and the realia of synagogue inscriptions inhabited the same multilingual world, however differently navigated, whether experienced within the physicality of the synagogue walls and floors, or the discursive practices of *talmud torah*. The *diverse* multilingual practices of each can cast much light with which to illumine the other.³⁶ In the broadest sense, the important and complex story of Jewish multilingualism that began in antiquity, as evidenced both in rabbinic literature and in proximate epigraphic realia, continues through the centuries and across the continents to the present day.³⁷

35 Price and Misgav, “Jewish Inscriptions and Their Use”, 481. For other recent surveys of ancient Jewish inscriptions, see above, n. 11.

36 I should be careful to stress that I am not suggesting that the language, whether Hebrew or Aramaic, of non-rabbinic documents and inscriptions was the same as that of rabbinic literature (a comparison worthy of study in its own right), but that they share a common multilingual environment.

37 For references to important contributions to the study of Jewish multilingualism in modernity, as well as the relationship of Hebrew to Aramaic representing Jewish multilingualism across history, see Fraade, “Before and After Babel”, 68* nn. 90–91; idem, “עירוב לשוניות” ורב-לשוניות, 304–305 n. 100. Since this was completed, two major scholars of antiquity have published articles which come to opposite conclusions regarding the relevance of inscriptional evidence for our understanding of the place of the rabbis within their larger cultural milieu, with the synagogue at Rehov having either much or little to contribute to that understanding: Lee I. Levine, “Synagogue Art and the Rabbis in Late Antiquity”, *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 2 (2011), 79–114; Fergus Millar, “Inscriptions, Synagogues and Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine”, *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 42 (2011) 253–277.