Hebrew between Jews and Christians

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Daniel Stein Kokin

Introduction

At the heart of this volume is the recognition not only that both Judaism and Christianity have deep interest and a long history of engagement with the Hebrew language, but that Hebrew itself has played a significant role in the relations between them. While this may come as no news to those reading these lines, it is nonetheless rare to encounter an academic treatment of this role committed to examining the two religious traditions as equal partners in this story across the *longue durée*. Of course, one volume cannot cover every aspect of this story, and there are inevitably major holes, some that I unsuccessfully tried to fill, others that I may not even have thought of, but in assembling it I have tried to adopt as broad as possible a perspective, and to consider topics that have perhaps not achieved sufficient attention, as well as to place antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modernity, and scholars of Judaism and Christianity, theologians, historians, and others in dialogue with one another. The reader will decide if it has succeeded. The risk, of course, is that each contribution will largely stand or fall on its own, in isolation from the others. But I hope that the articles comprising this volume serve to create and convey something of a common language that will prove stimulating. For it is clear to me that a number of major themes cut across the chronological and disciplinary lines that so frequently divide the objects of our research from one another. After first offering a brief summary of each contribution, I would like to devote some pages to an exploration thereof, accompanied by some of the various sources, questions, and images that have interested me over the course of the many years during which this volume took shape. I confess at the outset that this will be an impressionistic presentation, but hopefully one that will entice its readers to examine *Hebrew between Jews and Christians* in greater detail.

At the root of any consideration of the place of the Hebrew language among Jews and Christians must be an examination of Hebrew's status as *the*, or possibly merely *a*, language of revelation. Is divine revelation to be understood as inherently Hebraic in character, only incidentally so, or perhaps even at some root level polyglossic? In the first contribution, "The Torah Inscribed/Transcribed in Seventy Languages," Steven Fraade explores the rich early rabbinic meditations on these questions by examining interpretations of the biblical injunction (Dt 27:8) to inscribe the words of the Torah "most distinctly" (*"be'er heitev"*) as referring to their translation into the seventy languages of mankind, i.e. all human tongues. As Fraade shows, this rabbinic understanding reflects two contrasting approaches to thinking about the revelation-Hebrew-translation nexus. According to one, this translation process is actually essential for drawing out the full meanings and sig-

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nificance of Scripture. For the other, this translation is primarily a concession to the reality of a multilingual world into which some degree of dissemination of Israel's Torah is required. Thus, if one understanding questions, at least to some degree, Hebrew's status or sufficiency as a language of revelation, its counterpart clings to and reinforces it. We can summarize the point (and simultaneously "translate" it for translation studies writ-large) as follows: can a translation potentially improve upon its original or is it inherently a pale reflection thereof? Fraade concludes that there is no single rabbinic viewpoint with regard to Hebrew's status as prior to, or preferred over, other languages, at least with regard to divine revelation.

In either case, the sources explored by Fraade give witness to a striking rabbinic openness to the revelation and interpretation of Scripture as a potentially polylingual phenomenon. In the second contribution we examine a related foundational issue, the question of Hebrew's potential status of the original or Adamic language, albeit from the perspective of a rival religious and linguistic community, that of Syriac Christianity.

In her contribution "'Hebrew, beloved of God': The Adamic Language in the Thought of Jacob, Bishop of Edessa (c. 633–708 CE)," Alison Salvesen notes and sets out to explain why, in contrast to nearly all other Syriac writers, Jacob believed that Hebrew was the original and universal human language. Most prominently, she links this rare position to the general theological animosity that abided at the time beween Jacob's Syrian Orthodox Church and that of the "Church of the East" concerning the critical question as to the separate or united character of Christ's human and divine natures. Because the eastern Syrian Church had been strongly influenced by the Greek theologian Theodore of Mopsuestia (350–428 CE), who had derogatively described Hebrew as the language mixed of Aramaic and Canaanite elements that emerged when Abraham settled in Canaan, Salvesen posits that Jacob felt compelled to adopt the opposing view.

Alongside this "horizontal" explanation, Salvesen introduces a "vertical" one, namely the special significance of biblical geography and of the patriarch Abraham's Aramean lineage for the Syrian Christians of Jacob's Emessa and environs, which likely rendered the Syriac language less important as an identity marker for them as compared with the Syriac East. When considered from these dual perspective, Jacob's seemingly strange position becomes eminently reasonable.

Salvesen also proceeds to explore some of the signature cases in which Jacob references both "Hebrew etymologies and Jewish exegetical traditions within his vast literary output," further discounting that they reflect potential encounters or relations with contemporary Jews, with whom Jacob would likely have had only limited contact and who would, in any case, have prompted little concern in contrast to both heterodox Christianity and Islam. Finally, Jacob's high regard for the

Hebrew language, as reflected in the above-mentioned etymological and exegetical references repeated references, ironically induced many modern scholars to mistake him for an actual Hebraist, at a time when this assessment had potential value for raising the perceived status and value of Syriac Studies. In point of fact, Jacob knew very little, if any, Hebrew.

Turning to the medieval period, in his "'Lingua sacra et diabolica': A Survey of Medieval Christian Views of the Hebrew Language," Irven Resnick shows that despite – or precisely because of – its status as a holy tongue for Latin Christians, Hebrew provoked fear, owing both to its perceived magical power and potential for misuse. Evidence suggests that Hebrew was understood to be capable of exorcising demons, curing illness, and providing bodily protection, but also at times had Satanic associations. Furthermore, Christians were well aware of their Hebrew "language deficit" in comparison with Jews, provoking yet further anxiety. In response, Christians often alleged that Jews had corrupted Hebrew, in some cases adding that its restoration will occur with the return of Jesus.

Resnick is particularly interested in visual evocations of Hebrew through pseudo-Hebrew, speculating that such representations at times linked Christians to Hebrew's primordial sacrality, while on other occasions highlighting the language's corruption and, by extension, that of the Jews. Finally, while the majority of his analysis is concerned with the views of scholarly and religious elites, he closes with an analysis of the appearance of Hebrew in the ritual murder tale *The Passion of Adam of Bristol*, presented here as reflective of popular attitudes. Interestingly, this tale replicates the dual diabolical/sacral theme concerning Hebrew, for while the Jews in the text converse in this language amongst themselves, they fail to acknowledge God when He does as well. For this reason, the tale can also be regarded as an implicit response to, or neutralization of, the Christian "language deficit."

This notion of Hebrew potentially representing for Christians two diametrically opposed valences is nicely matched on the Jewish side by competing conceptions of Aramaic, a theme considered in detail in Gabriel Wasserman's "Aramaic: Between Heaven and Earth." Highlighting the uses medieval European Jews made of this closely-related Semitic tongue, this piece argues that sources from the period discuss Aramaic in two contrasting ways: as either an archaic vernacular, formerly understood by common people; or as a mystical, arcane language of even greater sanctity than Hebrew, owing to the fact that it is understood only by God Himself, and not by His angels. Wasserman traces how the notion of the angelic ignorance of Aramaic, which in Talmudic times deterred prayer in the language, came in the Middle Ages to justify it in special circumstances, further observing that it was precisely Aramaic's perceived lowly character early on that paradoxically enabled its later "hyper-sacralizaton."

If the first portion of his study explores the status of Aramaic vis-à-vis Hebrew in general, its second part turns specifically to the two occasions in medieval Ashkenaz on which Aramaic was most prominently deployed in liturgy, the seventh day of Passover, known as Yom Vayyosha‘, and Shavu‘oth. Wasserman explores the continued presence of Aramaic in worship on these dates in light of his earlier suggestions, concluding that it was intended both to create a mystical experience for the worshipper by "[transcending] the limits [of] ordinary language" and symbolically, albeit not directly understandably, to disseminate the respective stories of Yom Vayyosha‘ and Shavu‘oth to the Jewish masses. Through a close of reading of Aramaic piyyutim composed for these occasions, including the famous *Aqdamuth* poem, Wasserman is able to deduce further support for his reconstruction of the likely motivations for this medieval liturgical use of Aramaic. In a final section, this article points to the potential relevance of its discussion for the decision to employ Aramaic as the language of the Zohar and also encourages further study of piyyut as ritual, in addition to merely as literature.

Entitled "Choice and Determinism at the Crossroads of Early Modern Hebraism," Irene Zwiep's contribution positions itself at three points of intersection, at the nexus of the medieval and early modern, the Ashkenazi and Sephardic, and the Jewish and the Christian. It begins by emphasizing the often-overlooked tradition of distinctive "Ashkenazi appropriations of Sephardi linguistic lore," for which the correct reading of Scripture (especially pronunciation) served as the key "starting point for grammatical description." Thereafter, it shows how influential this approach was for both the content and structure of the scholarship of two pivotal figures in early modern Hebraism, one Jewish, one Christian: Elijah 'Baḥur' Levita (1469–1549) and Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522). Finally, her article also notes that while the legacy of this Ashkenazi approach to grammar was largely superseded among Christian scholars within a century of Reuchlin, it endured in Jewish contexts down to the Haskalah. In short, Zwiep demonstrates the relevance for Christian engagement with the holy tongue of what we might style "Hebrew between Ashkenazim and Sephardim." Alternatively, it can be suggested, when examining "Hebrew between Jews and Christians," one needs to inquire *which* or *whose* Hebrew.

Drawing upon the extensive autobiographical accounts furnished by early Modern scholars – Christian and Jewish alike – concerning their study or teaching of Hebrew, Saverio Campanini sets out in "Learning Hebrew in the Renaissance: Towards a Typology" to explore both the practical models of Hebrew learning present among the first generation of Renaissance Christian Hebraists as well as the intellectual and theological motivations for this study. With regard to the former, he proposes four basic situations: 1) a Christian teacher, 2) a Jewish-convert teacher, 3) a Jewish teacher, or 4) learning directly from books, and

inquires at length as to how these categories are reflected and/or intersect in the scholarly biographies of several well-known and lesser-known Hebraists. Concerning the latter, Campanini stresses Kabbalah as the primary factor responsible for the wave of Christian interest at the height of the Renaissance Hebraism, and explores how Jews responded to this interest, in particular how they attempted to steer Christians towards the much less sensitive study of grammar, which of course only prepared their students to access the Kabbalah on their own. Campanini also offers a number of interesting correctives, rejecting the common assumption of a special climate in Italy in this period particularly conducive to the Jewish teaching of Hebrew to non-Jews and also suggesting that Christians never fully accepted the notion of the holiness of Hebrew.

While we typically associate interest in the collection of Hebrew books with at least some degree of desire to read and directly engage with their contents, Ilona Steimann's study "Hebraism without Hebrew: Hartmann Schedel and the Conversion of his 'Jewish' Books," demonstrates that this need not be the case. A physician and humanist best known for his role in compiling the noted Nuremberg *Weltchronik*, Hartmann Schedel (1440–1514) knew no Hebrew, yet amassed nonetheless a sizeable library of Hebrew texts. Even more striking, he was hardly content merely to own these materials, but invested great effort in their "reshaping," through the addition of both prophetic biblical verses and Christian visual imagery at their respective beginnings and ends. Steimann points out that precisely because Schedel was unable to read the contexts of these works, he couldn't help but conceive of them as in essence "Jewish" objects in need of transformation. Particularly illuminating in this regard is Steimann's contextualization of Schedel's collection practices against the backdrop of the recent expulsion of the Jews from Nuremberg, where he lived. Because no Jews were present by the time of acquisition (which indeed was facilitated precisely by their absence), Schedel's additions can be said to have been "directed inwards, towards the books themselves" and at "Schedel himself." One can thus discern the application of the longstanding rhetoric of conversion present in Nuremberg and elsewhere to these Hebrew books, and perhaps surmise a degree of satisfaction in the ease with which this could be accomplished, especially in light of the pre-expulsion failure of such rhetoric to win more than but a handful of converts. Steimann's study thus reveals the relevance of prevailing patterns in Jewish-Christian relations for the fate of Jewish objects in Christian hands, even objects that could not in any way be read or understood.

As suggested by its title, "Hebrew Caught Between? Sebastian Münster's Edition of Elia Levita's *Sefer ha-Baḥur* as Evidence of Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue," Melanie Lange's contribution is primarily concerned with the renowned Christian Hebraist and general polymath's 1525 translation of the

equally noted Jewish grammarian's 1517/18 *Sefer ha-Baḥur*, assessing the work in the context of the surviving correspondence between Münster and Levita as well as contemporary traditions of Christian Hebrew study. After first stressing Münster's avid pursuit of Jewish-Christian encounter— including his principle of "ocularitar videre" ("seeing with one's own eyes"), and his respect for Hebrew and Jewish sources – nicely reflected in his practice of dating his publications according to both the Christian and Jewish calendars—, she helpfully notes the mutual dependence between the two figures: Levita benefitted from Münster's dissemination of his scholarship in the non-Jewish world, whereby Münster also served his own career.

Thereafter she turns directly to the *Baḥur*, or – as Münster entitled it in his translation – *Grammatica Hebraica Absolutissima* itself, before concluding with an analysis of the prominent christological elements in the introductory grammar Münster prefaced to his publication of Levita's treatise. Lange shows how the reception of the Jewish treatise was likely profoundly shaped by its inclusion alongside an explicitly Christianizing grammar. Thus, Levita's treatise was rendered accessible to the non-Jewish world, but at a very high cost. Hebrew was truly "caught between" and amidst Jewish-Christian controversy.

The significance and reception of Münster's Hebrew scholarship also looms large in the subsequent chapter, "Luther and Hebrew." Here Stephen Burnett takes the great reformer off his pedestal (literally: he opens by noting the numerous statues of Luther one encounters across Germany), to examine afresh the scholarly contexts and community in and among which Luther learned Hebrew, and conducted (and revised) his famous German translation of the Hebrew Bible. What emerges unmistakably here is Luther's "own decades-long disciplined reading of the Hebrew Bible," at least three-times through from start to finish; his general openness to the use of Christian Hebrew scholarship, even in cases of theological disagreement with the authors; and the highly collaborative nature of the translation endeavor, which often featured long discussions involving Luther and his colleagues.

Burnett also treats Luther's deeply ambiguous stance vis-à-vis the Hebrew language as such, as perhaps best reflected in his assertion as to the importance of the noted Jewish Kimhi grammarians, immediately followed by his avowed refusal to be bound by the rules of grammar. Along the same lines, Luther emphasized the incomplete knowledge of Hebrew common to both Jews and Christians and – anticipating many of his Protestant followers – insisted that the "above and below of the rabbis," i.e. the Hebrew vowel points, were but an untrustworthy Jewish invention, preferring to focus instead on Scripture's "inside."

Perhaps most significantly, Burnett shows how during the 1530s Luther became increasingly concerned about the degree to which Jewish biblical inter-

pretation had insinuated itself into Christian biblical scholarship, especially translation. Though Münster was a key target of his wrath, in particular for his willingness to entertain multiple interpretations of Scripture – a rabbinic defect, according to Luther – rather than zeroing in on its single, i.e. Christian, meaning, Luther openly admitted that he himself was not exempt from this tendency. Burnett thus leaves us with a strikingly contradictory Luther. Few, if any, Christians spent as much time reading and translating the Hebrew Bible as did he; few, if any, were as outspoken concerning the theological dangers of this activity.

While the previous two chapters remind us of the tendency to regard Christian Hebraism as primarily a Protestant phenomenon, Guido Bartolucci's consideration of the cases of Caesar Baronius and Gilbert Génébrard offers an important corrective to the common notion of a decline of interest in, and engagement with, Hebrew and the Jewish tradition in the context of post-Tridentine Catholicism. Bartolucci points, for example, to the cardinal Baronius' eclectic, even eccentric, use of Jewish sources, which included references to works that the Catholic Church had recently burnt! He further accounts for Baronius' practice by drawing a distinction between biblical exegesis and consideration of the early history of Christianity. In the former, the drawing upon Hebrew and Jewish sources was problematic for Catholicism; for the latter, their use "was not only permitted, but essential."

With regard to Génébrard, Bartolucci exemplifies the high academic level of the Collège de France in Paris, the only such college that maintained its independence in the Counter-Reformation and remained an important center for the study and teaching of Hebrew. Génébrard used his mastery of Hebrew to challenge his myriad opponents across the theological and geographical spectra as well as in pursuit of his own scholarly interests. He composed the first-ever grammar of rabbinic Hebrew (designed to assist those desirous of reading rabbinic biblical commentaries), translated Jewish historiographical works into Latin, and also explored Hebrew prosody. In addition, he demonstrated particular interest as to the history of the Hebrew vowel markings, in which he struck a rather unique middle position, agreeing as to the lateness of these points, but at the same time showing how the Hebrew text could legitimately be read without them. Furthermore, in engaging directly with the biblical text, Génébrard aroused great controversy, but managed nonetheless to produce scholarly works so respected that Protestant scholars made use thereof. Hebrew scholarship may have suffered during the Counter-Reformation, but was at times cultivated at a level that matched, and perhaps exceeded, that undertaken by Protestants.

In his contribution, Stefan Schorch takes us to the much less traveled territory of Christian Hebraism in Central and Eastern Europe, focusing in particu-

lar on Hungary and Transylvania from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. He emphasizes features unique to Hebrew study in these regions during this period, including among members of the Sabbatarian Movement (a Judaizing offshoot of Unitarianism that emerged in late sixteenth-century Hungary) and in the context of scholarship that emphasized links between the Hungarian and Hebrew languages.

For example, as Schorch shows, it was an early Sabbatarian, Miklós Bogáti Fazekas, who produced the first full Hungarian translation of the Psalter, drawing extensively upon Midrash and the Jewish biblical commentary tradition in the process. Subsequently, Simon Péchi translated a wide range of Jewish texts into Hungarian, including the entire Tanakh, Pirkei Avot, and liturgy in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and has been described by some modern scholars as one of the leading Hebraists of all time. Schorch links the attainments of Hebrew scholarship in Transylvania at this time to the greater liberty and intellectual freedom that abided there in comparison with other regions of Europe, and to the extensive access enjoyed to Sephardic Jewish culture, thanks to Transylvania's status at the time as an Ottoman vassal state.

With regard to Hungarian itself, Schorch observes that the earliest surviving grammar or grammatical schoolbook for the language, the 1539 *Grammatica Hungarolatina*, draws extensive parallels with Hebrew thanks to which it arrives at what appears to be the first account of the features that distinguish Hungarian from other European languages. Indeed, on the basis of similarities such as the use of possessive markers and the incorporation of the object into the verbal form, this text concludes that the Hebrew and Hungarian languages are closely related. Such claims appeared also in subsequent Hungarian grammars published in the seventeenth century, and were accompanied by assertions as to Hungarian's status as an oriental and cardinal language that originated at the time of the post-Babelian confusion of the tongues. In certain cases, it seems that some of Hebrew's holiness is even applied to Hungarian. In demonstrating the manner in which early scholars of Hungarian drew upon Hebrew in order to buttress the status of a vernacular language, Schorch's contribution greatly enhances our knowledge of a phenomenon encountered with regard to other emergent languages in the early modern period, e.g. Castilian and Tuscan,[1] while at the same time showcasing the vibrancy of Hebrew study in early modern Hungary and Transylvania.

1 See, for example, Antonio de Nebrija, *Gramatica dela Lengua Castellana*, ed. Ig. González-Llubera (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 3-4; Claudio Tolomei, *Il Cesano de la lingua toscana*, ed. Maria Rosa Franco Subri (Rome: Bulzoni, 1975), 51.

Turning to late eighteenth-century Germany, Yael Almog's paper ("Hamann and Herder on Hebrew") inquires as to the role played by the Hebrew language in the *Sturm und Drang* literary movement, especially in the context of Georg Hamann (1730–1788) and Johann Gottfried Herder's (1744–1803) respective theories of aesthetics. Almog positions Hamann's inspirational, revelatory approach to reading Hebrew Scripture – what she styles his "theory of imaginative reading" – as a polemic directed against the then-regnant scholarly approach to biblical Hebrew, and further observes how Herder's secularized or naturalized stance (his "hermeneutics of contextualization") differs from that of his friend, in emphasizing the significance of the cultural norms of the society that produced the Bible for comprehension of the Hebrew text.

Hamann, in particular, highlights Hebrew's esoteric and fragmented character as an "invitation" to readers the world over, whom he calls upon to become "Kabbalists," i.e. to fill in the text's gaps through inspiration and faith. As such, Scripture is transformed in essence into a universally subjective text, in which individual perspectives inevitably reflect individual circumstances. While sharing Hamann's assessment as to the obscurity of the Hebrew Bible, for Herder this constitutes an invitation to each individual, not to plumb the depths of their own imagination, but rather to investigate the culture that produced it, concerning which it is possible to arrive at objective truth. Hebrew thus emerges a model for deciphering the foreign. Herder views empathetic identification with the ancient Hebrews as essential for this process and also sings the praises of the unique aesthetic qualities of the Hebrew language in its prime, especially of its poetry, which for him constitutes the key access point to the Hebraic "Denkart," or way of thinking.

For all their differences, both Hamann and Herder's approaches to Hebrew and Scripture also intend to refute any notion of privileged or special "Jewish knowledge" and as such participate in a longstanding tradition of Christian appropriation. Herder, in particular, emphasizes that it is post-exilic Jews who have hybridized and thus corrupted Hebrew, implying that Christians are better positioned properly to appreciate it.

In his highly nuanced contribution, "Gustaf Dalman as Aramaicist: In Search of the Language of the New Testament World," Thomas Willi examines the tension between Hebrew and Aramaic study in the noted late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theologian, philologist, and orientalist's *writings*, and explores how it both casts light on his development as a scholar and reflects the scholarly context in which this development took place. In particular, Willi shows that it was precisely Dalman's extensive knowledge of the different strata of Hebrew that rendered participation in Franz Delitzsch's Hebrew New Testament translation project distasteful to him. For while Dalman appreciated philologically that this translation

should be in Rabbinic Hebrew, this conflicted with his theological understanding of the New Testament as belonging to the world of biblical literature. Willi further demonstrates that it was Dalman's involvement in the revision of the Delitzsch translation that paradoxically led him to become a pioneer in the study of Aramaic, especially Rabbinic Aramaic. On Willi's account, it appears that Hebrew functioned at one and the same time as both a bridge and an obstacle for Dalman's engagement with Judaism.

If Willi's contribution touches tangentially upon the potential missionary value of Christian recourse to Hebrew – the Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament had of course precisely this intention – such concerns are front and center in "Apostasy, Identity, and Erudition," Shalom Goldman's article devoted to the fascinating spiritual and scholarly life of Paul Phillip Levertoff (1875–1954). Scion of a Hasidic family, convert to Christianity, and proponent of what he styled "Hebrew-Christianity," Levertoff's productive and eclectic career spanned Poland, Palestine, Turkey, Germany (including a few years teaching at the institute in Leipzig founded by Delitzsch) and England. While offering a valuable summary of Levertoff's life as a whole, this study devotes particular attention to his efforts to create a Hebrew-Christian liturgy and congregation, his role as an educator about Judaism to Christians and about Christianity to Jews, and – most especially – his vast scholarship. For example, Goldman discusses his Modern Hebrew biographies of Jesus and Paul, Hebrew translation of Augustine's *Confessions*, and participation in the Soncino translation of the *Zohar* into English. As demonstrated by Goldman, especially prominent throughout Levertoff's works are his simultaneous efforts to enrich Hebrew literature and scholarship, and to position the Hebrew language (and to some degree Aramaic as well) as a bridge between Judaism and Christianity.

The volume concludes with "Sacredness and Profanity in Modern Zionist Discourses about Hebrew and other Tongues," Liora Halperin's exploration of the paradoxes inherent in Zionism's attempt to re-fashion Hebrew as a national language. Halperin shows that the very attempt to flatten Hebrew's traditional sacrality for both Jews and Christians in order to render it suitable as the Yishuv's vernacular opened it to potential competition from other tongues that could claim various advantages over it. This situation, she further argues, led to Hebrew's re-sacralization, now as a prized and imperiled national possession. Following Giorgio Agamben, she thus suggests that, under Zionism, Hebrew merely came to occupy "a new 'closed-off area' within a broader system that included both sacred and profane elements." In engaging with Zionist efforts to negotiate the national role of Hebrew in a multilingual (Jewish) world, Halperin's piece at this volume's close nicely echoes Fraade's consideration of the rabbinic exploration of the potentially polyglossic character of divine revelation at its outset.

One key issue underlying Fraade's opening contribution – and relevant to this volume as a whole – concerns the character and capacity of Hebrew in comparison with prominent imperial and literary languages. For this reason, I would like here briefly to introduce two subsequent Jewish sources that can profitably be placed in dialogue with it. The eleventh-century (or earlier) Midrash Tehillim compares four languages, noting that whereas Roman (i.e. Latin) is best for battle, Greek best for song, and Persian best for lamentation, the Hebrew language is best for prayer.[2] Unlike the sources discussed by Fraade, this passage is concerned not with the role of Hebrew and other languages in the consummation and dissemination of divine revelation, but rather focuses on their respective strengths for different domains of human activity, which there is no reason not to acknowledge. Nonetheless, the reference to prayer points us toward the human-God relationship and suggests that these four tongues are presented in order of ascending status. As such, it is tempting to see in this list a social justification of Hebrew's importance despite its political irrelevance, and thus a linguistic "response" to Jewish exile and worldly weakness.

If Midrash Tehillim implies that each (or at least many a) language has a particular domain in which it excels, a 1435 letter of R. Elijah of Ferrara instead explores the relationship between Jewish mono- or multlingualism and the successful pursuit of religious text study. This document forms part of the vast literature concerned with the fate of the Ten Lost Tribes and/or Sons of Moses,[3]

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2 Midrash Tehillim (Buber), Psalm 31 ("R. Yonatan said there are four languages: Latin for battle, Greek for song, Persian for lamentation, Hebrew for prayer"). Translation mine. See Buber, Salomon. ed. *Midrash Tehilim: ha-mekhuneh Shoḥer tov*. Jerusalem: Ḥ. Vagshal, 1976/7. While the dating of this work is uncertain, its existence is attested, at the latest, in the eleventh century. What is translated here as "Hebrew" is actually, in the original Hebrew text, denoted as "leshon Ashurit." That Hebrew is nonetheless intended can be deduced from the earlier, albeit somewhat different version of this passage found in Tractate Megillah of the Jerusalem or Palestinian Talmud 1,10,71b. There the passage closes with the statement: "Assyrian (lit. Ashuri) has a script but no language. Hebrew has a language but no script. They chose for themselves the Assyrian script and the Hebrew language." The identification of the language according to its written character perhaps intends a positive contrast with the ephemeral elements (battle, song, lamentation) for which the rival languages are renowned. I am grateful to Gunter Stemberger for making me aware of this earlier source and providing the translation thereof.

3 Like the Northern Israelite tribes, the Sons of Moses are a legendary lost Jewish population, exegetically inspired by God's suggestion (Exodus 32:10) during the Golden Calf episode that He destroy the Israelites and instead make Moses directly into a great nation. In the Bible this never takes place, but Jewish folklore gladly took God up on his offer. For a general treatment of the Ten Lost Tribes and for additional bibliography, see Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *Ten Lost Tribes: A World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Specifically on the Sambatyon legend, see my

in which this folkloristic motif provides an opportunity to reflect upon different forms (attested or fantasized) of Jewish existence.

> The Sons of Moses reside on an island located near the Sambatyon River and across from them is the tribe of Menasseh. Across the Sambatyon River are the tribes of Dan, Naftali, Gad, and Asher. The Sons of Issachar inhabit their own land and have no contact with other men. They excel in the Torah and speak Hebrew, Arabic, and Persian, and are surrounded by fire-worshippers. The tribe of Simeon is at the edge of the south; they too rule over themselves. The tribes of Zebulon and Reuben are on the Euphrates River, some on one side, some on the other side, and they have the Mishnah and Talmud, and speak Hebrew and Arabic. The tribe of Ephraim is to the south of Babylonia and they are heroic fighters, living off of booty. Hebrew is their language.[4]

While this is not the place for a comprehensive analysis of this passage, I wish here to highlight its implicit link between multilingualism and fruitful Torah study. The heroic fighters of Ephraim, living off of booty, appear to know Hebrew alone and are not credited with any scholarly accomplishments. By contrast, the bilingual tribes of Zebulon and Reuben "have the Mishnah and Talmud," and alone of the trilingual "Sons of Issachar" is it stated that they "excel in the Torah." While Hebrew is clearly a prerequisite for Jewish study, it alone – this source seems to argue – does not suffice and requires nourishment from other tongues. For all its linguistic openness, however, the passage does at the same time appear keen to guard against the social pressures that typically accompany multilingualism: the tribe of Issachar is described as being "surrounded by fire-worshippers" and said to "have no contact with other men."

In addition, while not addressed in either of these sources, the specific question as to the relationship between Hebrew and Aramaic (including Syriac, a version of Aramaic) as attested in the contributions of Fraade, Salvesen, Wasserman, and Willi is particularly rich and merits further discussion given the latter's overlapping and historically evolving status as a biblical, vernacular, and liturgical language. From the perspective of Judaism, we might in general describe the challenge posed by Aramaic as follows: how does a particularistic community understand the presence in its textual and liturgical midst of a language that constitutes a bridge – sometimes useful, sometimes un – welcome to the larger non-Jewish world.

Wasserman's indication of the contrasting, and at times coinciding, medieval strategies of the hyper-vernacularization and hyper-sacralization of Aramaic

"Toward the Source of the Sambatyon: Shabbat Discourse and the Emergence of the Sabbatical River Legend," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 37.1 (April 2013): 1–28.

4 Judah David Eisenstein, ed., *Otsar Masa'ot* (New York: Eisenstein, 1926), 122. Translation mine.

raises the question of its status via-à-vis Hebrew in other historical contexts. For example, a former Israeli colleague once described Aramaic to me as "our Latin," suggesting its role in contemporary Hebrew as akin to that played in English and other Western tongues by the West's traditional learned language. Indeed, there are good grounds for the analogy, as both Latin and Aramaic primarily serve today as sources of more sophisticated, scholarlu vocabulary for related languages in more active contemporary use. And yet the Hebrew-Aramaic relationship is far more interesting, since the present situation represents to a large degree a reversal of the situation that abided in antiquity, when Aramaic served for Jews primarily as the vernacular, with Hebrew the holy language of religious life and study.

Indeed, in light of Aramaic's status as the ancient vernacular, it is interesting to compare my colleague's above comment with the anecdote reported by the Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin in his account of the Nahal Hever excavations conducted in 1960 and 1961. Upon viewing letters from the Bar Kokhba revolt discovered there that had been written in Aramaic, David Ben-Gurion is said angrily to have responded: "Why did they write in Aramaic and not Hebrew?"[5] For Ben-Gurion, the value for the Zionist present of an ancient national Jewish uprising was, one could say, squandered by the choice for these missives of the non-uniquely Jewish Aramaic. Ironically, of course, the name Bar Kokhba is itself Aramaic; one can almost imagine Ben-Gurion conditioning (after the fact) support of the rebellion that bore his name on its Hebraization!

The notion of Hebrew as the pure "Jewish" tongue and of Aramaic as spanning the Jewish and non-Jewish remains relevant today for language discourse in the context of contemporary Middle Eastern politics. This was on full display at a public meeting held by then Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu and Pope Francis in Jerusalem on the occasion of the latter's May 2014 visit to the Holy Land. When the Israeli premier referred to Jesus as a Hebrew speaker, the pontiff quietly interjected, "Aramaic," to which Netanyahu in turn responded, "He spoke Aramaic, but he knew Hebrew."[6]

In brief, against the backdrop of the contemporary Palestinian nationalist tendency to embrace Jesus as one of their own, Netanyahu's articulation of the *dover ʻivrit* Christian Messiah sought to reaffirm his Jewishness and to enlist him as evidence as to the eternal connection of the Jewish people with the Land of

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5 Cited in Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 30.

6 "Pope, Netanyahu Spar over Jesus' Native Language," Reuters (May 26, 2014) https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-pope-holyland-jesus-idUKKBN0E618X20140526 [Accessed June 29, 2021].

Israel. Thus, whereas Ben-Gurion famously intoned, "The Bible is our mandate,"[7] referring specifically to the Tanakh or Hebrew Bible, here Netanyahu appeared eager to supplement the world of the New Testament. (If Bibi's Zionist backdating was clear but merely implied, it was explicitly stated by one well-known right-wing commentator, who in covering the pope's alleged "outrage," referred to Jesus as an "Israeli Jew."[8]). Undoubtedly aware of the politicization to which Jesus was being subjected, the pope attempted to neutralize the situation. As a language common to both Jews and various Christian communities, and closely linked to both Hebrew and Arabic, Aramaic – *pace* the above-mentioned BarKokhba letters – lacks Hebrew's easy association with Jewish nationalism and sovereignty. It also happens to have been Jesus' actual spoken language, according to the current scholarly consensus. Not wishing to contradict the pontiff outright, and probably also well aware of the fundamental accuracy of his statement – the Israeli prime minister had to content himself with the undoubtedly correct, if far-less satisfying, assertion of Jesus' mere Hebrew *knowledge*.[9]

If this episode testifies to Zionism's interest in backdating Hebrew's status as an explicitly national Jewish language, there is at least some indication of a similar, albeit contrasting, tendency among the movement's ultra-Orthodox opponents. The founding Rebbe of Satmar Hasidism Joel Teitelbaum (1887–1979) asserted in his *Vayoel Moshe* (dating to 1959 or 1960) that even in biblical times, Hebrew had never been a spoken language and that, back then, Aramaic had served as the vernacular.[10] This position matches the contemporary practice of

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7 Ben-Gurion made this statement in testimony to the British Peel Commission (Palestine Royal Commission) on Jan. 7, 1937. See Palestine Royal Commission, *Minutes of Evidence Heard at Public Sessions* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1937), p. 288. See also his Dec. 6, 1967 letter to Charles de Gaulle, viewable at: https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/ben-gurion-letter-to-french-general-charles-de-gaulle-december-1967 [Accessed June 29, 2021].

8 Caroline Glick, "Our World: Pope Francis's Unfriendly Visit," *The Jerusalem Post* (May 27, 2014); https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Pope-Franciss-unfriendly-visit-354557 [Accessed June 29, 2021].

9 If Netanyahu's concession reflected acknowledgement of the fact that at the time Aramaic was the general vernacular and Hebrew primarily, or at least increasingly, a learned language, it is striking how Glick insisted on precisely the reverse in her gloss on the prime minister's statement: "True, at the time, educated Jews spoke and wrote in Aramaic. And Jesus was educated. But the language of the people was Hebrew. And Jesus preached to the people, in Hebrew" (ibid.).

10 *Vayoel Moshe*, "Ma'amar leshon ha-kodesh," par. 16, cited in Ari Shvat, "The Commandment to Speak Hebrew and the Use of the Holy Tongue for Secular Matters," *Shema'tin* 177 (Nov.-Dec. 2010), p. 28 (Hebrew), also available at http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/v-articles/shvat-lashon.pdf [Accessed June 29, 2021]. I am grateful to Gabriel Wasserman for drawing my attention to this source.

this community, which maintains Yiddish as its vernacular tongue, restricting the use of Hebrew to prayer and the study of holy texts. We might say that in advancing this argument, the late Satmar Rebbe was likewise deploying the Bible as the "mandate" for his rejection of Zionism, including the revival of spoken Hebrew it spearheaded.

Ultimately, at its core, this volume is most concerned to inquire to what degree Hebrew can in fact be positioned "between" Christians and Jews as a language of Scripture and sacrality, as a language of revelation upon which both religious traditions are ultimately dependent. It is of course common to conceive of Hebrew as a perennially Jewish language, for which lesser or greater numbers of Christians periodically cultivate a passion, learn, and attempt to appropriate as their own. There is of course a large degree of truth in this picture. But as there have also been Jewish cultures in which Hebrew has played or plays a very minor or even no role, and moments in the history of Christianity in which Hebrew assumed a rather significant importance, at least on a symbolic and scholarly level, we should be careful not to over-emphasize or essentialize this difference. Indeed, can we not conceptualize the history of Hebrew across the *longue-durée* in both religious cultures as a similar one of recurrent revivals and neglect? To be clear, my aim in this proposal is not to minimize the great quantitative difference between the two religious contexts (Jews have obviously used Hebrew more), but to ask if we might frame their overall engagement in somewhat similar terms. Paradoxically, celebration of the modern revival of Hebrew in the context of Zionism and the State of Israel has in many quarters served to cast an unnecessarily dark shadow over Hebrew's past, obscuring the fact that there have been other Hebrew revivals, albeit primarily of Hebrew as a literary, as opposed to vernacular, language. I have in mind here the Hebrew literary revival of medieval Spanish culture or, say, the situation that abided in Southern Italian Judaism. By the early Middle Ages, this culture had well-nigh lost its Hebraic character (epitaphs were only inscribed in, and the liturgy only recited in, Greek), but towards the close of the first millennium Hebrew literacy made a dramatic comeback as attested in the flowering there of Hebraic literary production. (One might also mention in this regard the modest revival of Hebrew letters that transpired among Jews in late 19th and early 20th century America, which has been overshadowed by that of the Yishuv and subsequent State of Israel.[11])

11 See, for example, Michael Weingrad, *American Hebrew Literature: Writing Jewish National Identity in the United States* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011).

Mutatis mutandis, the flowering of Christian Hebraica in early Modern Europe has led many non-specialists to discount the significance of medieval Christian engagement with Hebrew, especially as the phenomenon of Christian Hebraica is understood against the backdrop of, and as closely aligned with, Renaissance Humanism. But, again, discounting the issue of the quantity of study or scholarly production, which in any case the further back in time we proceed is to at least a certain extent a question of what has survived in writing, this volume wishes to ask how fundamental a difference divides late antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and beyond in terms of Christian thinking about Hebrew. What, for example, do we do with the albeit little-known, but clearly important, figure of the canon and Cistercian monk Nicolaus Maniacutius or Maniacoria (fl. ca. 1130s–1160s), who in mid twelfth-century Rome achieved a solid command of Hebrew; conducted scholarly exchanges with Jewish scholars (including, it seems, Abraham ibn Ezra); and examined and corrected, according to the Hebrew text, Latin biblical manuscripts.[12] Even if he was an isolated figure, how fundamentally different is his activity from that of his Renaissance-era counterparts? To ask this question is in essence to inquire concerning Campanini's article in this collection and his claim there as to the significance of the Kabbalah as a motivating factor for Christian Hebrew study. In other words, was the Christian discovery of the Jewish mystical tradition a game-changer, opening up a fundamentally new raison d'être for Christian engagement with both Hebrew and Jewish sources? Or is it best understood as but a new variation on a long-standing theme?

Maniacutius is, however, but one of many possible examples that can be broached here. Campanini's transcription and analysis together with Giulio Busi of a remarkable set of Hebrew letters exchanged between Marco Lippomano and Meir Crescas around 1420 raises the possibility of far more chronological continuity between Hebraism medieval and early modern,[13] as does my own research into

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12 On Maniacutius, see Cornelia Linde, "Basic Instruction and Hebrew Learning: Nicolaus Maniacoria's *Suffraganeus bibliothece," Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 80 (2013): 1–16, and Marie-Thérèse Champagne, "Christian Hebraism in Twelfth-Century Rome: A Philologist's Correction of the Latin Bible through Dialogue with Jewish Scholars and their Hebrew Texts," *Studies in Church History* 53 (2017): 71–87.

13 Giulio Busi and Saverio Campanini, "Marco Lippomano and Crescas Meir: A Humanistic Dispute in Hebrew," in *Una manna buona per Mantova: Studi in onore di Vittore Colorni per il suo 92 compleanno*, ed. Mauro Perani (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2004), 169–202; and Giulio Busi, "Marco Lippomano e Crescas Me'ir: Una disputa umanistica in ebraico," in *L'enigma dell'ebraico nel Rinascimento* (Turin: N. Aragno, 2007), 13–23. The Italian is a slight revision of the original English article.

the scholarly relationship between Lippomano and Isaac Cohen of Syracuse.[14] And what do we do with a figure like Simone Atumano, the fourteenth-century Greek scholar who produced a new translation of the Hebrew Bible in Greek, as well as a rendering of the New Testament into Hebrew?[15] Once again, at issue here is not whether Atumano represents an isolated case of a Greek Christian Hebraist (though the nature of his activity does indeed raise the question as to whether more Hebraism was present among Greek Christianity than has hitherto been appreciated and/or than our surviving documentation attests), but to what degree a case like his points to the need to conceive of Hebrew as a perennial factor in Jewish-Christian relations.

In any case, it seems clear that both Jews and Christians have used engagement with Hebrew as a means of thinking about, reaching, and also critiquing one another. St. Jerome, in particular, famously bewailed the difficulty of reproducing Hebrew's "hissing, breath-demanding words,"[16] helping spawn a Renaissance-era legend according to which the Church father filed down his teeth in order to do so.[17] Such critique was echoed or reciprocated in reported Jewish ridicule of non-Jewish Hebrew pronunciation.

Resnick's contribution here specifically reminds us that the holiness of Hebrew created the conditions for its subversion as satanic. And the related notion of Hebrew as a negative marker for Jews and Judaism extends down to modern times, in which it has been secularized as suggestive of Jews' alleged foreignness to, and malicious influence upon, their host societies. Witness, for example, this Nazi campaign poster from the 1932 German presidential election in which Hindenburg voters are derided as Jews through the use of German font designed to approximate the Hebrew letters, in start contrast to the Hitler voters, for whom emboldened Gothic script is selected. See Figure 1.

In ending with an examination of internal Jewish discussions concerning Hebrew's relationship with other languages, *Hebrew Between Jews and Christians'* close echoes its opening. However, whereas Fraade's "The Torah Inscribed/ Transcribed" was concerned with the translation of revelation – potentially to all mankind – and thus with passage (potential or actual) from Hebrew to other

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14 Daniel Stein Kokin, "Isaac ha-Kohen's Letter to Marco Lippomano: Jewish-Christian Exchange and Arabic Learning in Renaissance Italy," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 104.2 (2014): 192–233.

15 On Atumano, see Giorgio Fedalto, *Simone Atumano* (Brescia, 2007).

16 J.N.D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975), 50.

17 Matteo Bossi, *De instituendo sapientia animo* (Bologna, Plato de Benedictis, 1495), sig. P. I, cited in Eugene F. Rice, Jr., *St. Jerome in the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 205 n. 26.

Figure 1: "Wir wählen Hindenburg! Wir wählen Hitler!" Wahlplakat der NSDAP zur Reichspräsidentenwahl 1932 ("We're voting for Hindenburg! We're voting for Hitler!" Nazi Party election poster for the 1932 German presidential election.). © Deutsches Historisches Museum/S. Ahlers.

tongues, Halperin's "Sacredness and Profanity" engages instead with Zionism's attempt to move from traditional Jewish linguistic diversity to Hebraic uniformity. While Zionism has of course achieved great success in re-establishing Hebrew as a mother tongue for millions of people, it has at the same time expanded and thus complicated the language's valences: still alive and well as a holy tongue of

Scripture and liturgy, Hebrew now functions in addition as both a sacred national language and a fully secularized vernacular. Paradoxically, in seeking to assert national Jewish control over Hebrew, Zionism has to some degree actually undermined Jewish exclusivity vis-à-vis the language. I came face-to-face with these ironic consequences of the Zionist Hebrew revival in an unforgettable manner some years ago at the Shabbat dinner table of friends in, of all places, Rome. My hosts, observant Jews, speak little to no Hebrew, but are familiar with Hebrew as a language of prayer and are fluent in Italian, the de facto official language of the contemporary Catholic Church. Their other guest, an Israeli-Arab Roman Catholic from Haifa, is fluent in Hebrew, but knows no Italian. — A Catholic Hebrew-speaker what an incredible inversion, I thought to myself, and a fascinating having Shabbat dinner with Italian-speaking Jews in the Eternal City – and a fascinating moment in the ever-evolving story of "Hebrew between Christians and Jews."

This volume has its ultimate origins in a conference of the same name held all the way back on July 2–3, 2012 in Greifswald, Germany. I am grateful to all those who made their way on that occasion to Greifswald and participated in what was, at least for me, a very memorable two days of intellectual exchange. This conference was financed by the Alfried Krupp Wissenschaftskolleg Greifswald and it is my great duty and pleasure to thank the "Krupp Kolleg," in particular its Academic Manager, Dr. Christian Suhm, for its support and encouragement, both with regard to this specific academic meeting and beyond. The University of Greifswald would not be nearly the intellectually stimulating place that it is, were it not for the activities of the Krupp Kolleg. In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to my former Greifswald colleagues, particularly those in the Theology Faculty, for their support, hospitality, and friendship. It is, after all, not every day that an American Jew shows up at a German Protestant Theology Faculty to work. Despite the inevitable difficulties and awkwardness, they succeeded in making my years in Greifswald both enjoyable and productive, and facilitated Jewish-Christian and Jewish-German exchange and collaboration of the highest caliber. Though I no longer serve on the Greifswald faculty, I look back fondly upon the time I spent there and am proud still to consider myself, in some sense, a Greifswalder.

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Steven D. Fraade

The Torah Inscribed/Transcribed in Seventy Languages

1 Introduction: The Biblical Base(s)

The following study[1] will look at early rabbinic passages that interpret a set of biblical instructions and narratives regarding the ritual inscription of the Torah (variously understood) on stones soon after the Israelites entered the Land of Israel under Joshua's leadership and following Moses's death. I will do so against the backdrop of the recent plethora of scholarship on multilingualism and translation in ancient Judaism and its broader Greco-Roman cultural context.[2]

1 I had the privilege to present earlier versions of this article to academic audiences at Alfried Krupp Wissenschaftskolleg, Greifswald, Germany, Tel Aviv University (in two formats), Yale University, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the University of Haifa. My thanks to the organizers of those fora and to the faculty and students who provided valuable feedback therein, some of whose specific suggestions are noted below. Special thanks to Daniel Stein Kokin for his perceptive comments and suggestions over multiple readings. After completion of this article, Katell Berthelot kindly shared with me a draft of what was then her forthcoming article, "Rabbinic Universalism Reconsidered: The Roman Context of Some Rabbinic Traditions Pertaining to the Revelation of the Torah in Different Languages," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 108 (2018): 393–421, which deals with many of the same texts, but from a somewhat different contextual perspective. After this article was finally out of my hands, Yair Furstenberg provided some insightful comments that I was only minimally able to incorporate into the printed version.

2 I will focus on rabbinic texts of Palestinian provenance, making reference to the Babylonian Talmud where relevant. For my own previous publications on these intersecting subjects see as follows: Steven D. Fraade, "Rabbinic Views on the Practice of Targum, and Multilingualism in the Jewish Galilee of the Third–Sixth Centuries," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York and Jerusalem: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992); "Scripture, Targum, and Talmud as Instruction: A Complex Textual Story from the Sifra," in *Hesed Ve-Emet: Studies in Honor of Ernest S. Frerichs*, ed. Jodi Magness and Seymour Gitin, Brown Judaic Studies (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998); "Locating Targum in the Textual Polysystem of Rabbinic Pedagogy," *Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies* 39 (2006); "Before and after Babel: Linguistic Exceptionalism and Pluralism in Early Rabbinic Literature," *Diné Israel* 28 (2011); "עירוב לשונות ורב־לשוניות בארץ ישראל בעת העתיקה: ממצאים ספרותיים ואפיגרפיים," *Leshonenu* 73 (2011); "Language Mix and Multilingualism in Ancient Palestine: Literary and Inscriptional Evidence," *Jewish Studies* 48 (2012); "Moses and Adam as Polyglots," in *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Klaus Hermann, Raʿanan S. Boustan, Reimund Leicht, Annette Yoshiko Reed, and Giuseppe Veltri (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013); and "The Rehov Inscriptions and Rabbinic Literature: Matters of Language," in *Talmuda De-Eretz Israel: Archaeology and the Rabbis in Late Antique Pales-*

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110339826-002

The main biblical base text, for our present purposes, is Deut 27:1–8, part of Moses's final instructions to the Israelites, in the Land of Moab, in preparation for their entry into the Promised Land. As in much of the book of Deuteronomy, Moses's concern is for the continuity of their memory of and adherence to the narratives and laws that constitute the preceding content of that book, especially in preparation for the absence of his charismatic, prophetic leadership and of God's visible presence in their midst:

[1] וַיְצַו מֹשֶׁה וְזִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הָעָם לֵאמֹר שָׁמֹר אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם׃

[2] וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר תַּעַבְרוּ אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ וַהֲקֵמֹתָ לְךָ אֲבָנִים גְּדֹלוֹת וְשַׂדְתָּ אֹתָם בַּשִּׂיד׃

[3] וְכָתַבְתָּ עֲלֵיהֶן אֶת־כָּל־דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת בְּעָבְרֶךָ לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר תָּבֹא אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לְךָ אֶרֶץ זָבַת חָלָב וּדְבַשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי־אֲבֹתֶיךָ לָךְ׃

[4] וְהָיָה בְּעָבְרְכֶם אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן תָּקִימוּ אֶת־הָאֲבָנִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּהַר עֵיבָל וְשַׂדְתָּ אוֹתָם בַּשִּׂיד׃

[5] וּבָנִיתָ שָּׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִזְבַּח אֲבָנִים לֹא־תָנִיף עֲלֵיהֶם בַּרְזֶל׃

[6] אֲבָנִים שְׁלֵמוֹת תִּבְנֶה אֶת־מִזְבַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהַעֲלִיתָ עָלָיו עוֹלֹת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ׃

[7] וְזָבַחְתָּ שְׁלָמִים וְאָכַלְתָּ שָּׁם וְשָׂמַחְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ׃

[8] וְכָתַבְתָּ עַל־הָאֲבָנִים אֶת־כָּל־דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת בַּאֵר הֵיטֵב׃

[1] Moses and the elders of Israel charged the people, saying: Observe all the Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day.

[2] As soon as you have crossed the Jordan into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones. Coat them with plaster

tine, ed. Steven Fine and Aaron Koller, Studia Judaica (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014). More recently and extensively, see Willem F. Smelik, *Rabbis, Language and Translation in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For the broader recent study of multilingualism in Greco-Roman antiquity, see James N. Adams, Mark Janse, and Simon Swain, eds., *Bilingualism in Ancient Society: Language Contact and the Written Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); James N. Adams, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Hannah M. Cotton et al., eds., *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman near East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Arietta Papaconstantinou, ed., *The Multilingual Experience in Egypt, from the Ptolemies to the Abbasids* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Alex Mullen and Patrick James, eds., *Multilingualism in the Graeco-Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Randall Buth and R. Steven Notley, eds., *The Language Environment of First Century Judaea: Jerusalem Studies in the Synoptic Gospels*, vol. 2. *Jewish and Christian Perspectives* 26 (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

> [3] and inscribe upon them all the words of this Teaching. When you cross over to enter the land that the Lord your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you –
>
> [4] upon crossing the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, about which I charge you this day, on Mount Ebal, and coat them with plaster.
>
> [5] There, too, you shall build an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones. Do not wield an iron tool over them;
>
> [6] you must build the altar of the Lord your God of unhewn stones. You shall offer on it burnt offerings to the Lord your God,
>
> [7] and you shall sacrifice there offerings of well-being and eat them, rejoicing before the Lord your God.
>
> [8] And on those stones you shall inscribe every word of this Teaching most distinctly.[3]

Interpreters have long recognized that two sets of stones appear to be mentioned here.[4] Verses 1–4 would seem to refer to the erection of stelai, large stones with flat surfaces, which are coated with plaster, onto which are to be inscribed the words of "this Teaching," presumably the book of Deuteronomy or some antecedent form thereof. This is to take place soon, if not immediately, after crossing the Jordan River, although the specification, in v. 4, of this occurring at Mt. Ebal (more than a day's travel from the river crossing) would seem to suggest general but not immediate chronological (and geographic) proximity between crossing the Jordan and erecting, plastering, and inscribing the stones.[5] Mt. Ebal is also the site, along with Mt. Gerizim, of the immediately following ritual of blessings and curses as prescribed in Deut 27:11–28:68.

Verses 5–7 of chapter 27 would appear to refer to a different set of stones, altar stones that are unhewn (cf. Exodus 20:21–22), that is, without flat surfaces that can easily be plastered and inscribed. Therefore, to which stones (altar or stelai) does "those stones" of v. 8 refer, the altar stones as the immediate antecedents to that verse or the stelai stones of vv. 2–4 as being more appropriate for inscribing? While we might presume that v. 8 resumes the instructions for writing of vv.

3 Translation from NJPS. "Teaching" here renders *torah*. Except for such citations from NJPS, I will use "Torah," without necessarily implying (pre-mishnaically) that the Pentateuch as a whole is intended. Unless otherwise noted, biblical citations are from NJPS, whereas translations of rabbinic texts are my own.

4 The Palestinian Talmud (*Soṭah* 7:5, 21d) and the Babylonian Talmud (*Soṭah* 35b) both count three or more (but different) sets of stones.

5 The Babylonian Talmud (*Soṭah* 36a) considers it a miracle that Israel would have covered so much ground in one day.

2–4, with the building of the altar of unhewn stones in vv. 5–7 being a narrative digression or insertion, it cannot be denied that the immediate antecedent of the stones of v. 8 are those of the altar in v. 6.[6] However we understand the editorial process (and purpose) behind the seemingly composite text as it is canonically composed,[7] later interpreters, already inner-biblically, had to determine how to understand what exactly was prescribed, that is, what was to be inscribed and where. Of course, the passage as we have it does not indicate the purpose of the inscribed stones (whichever they were), except to stress at the end of v. 8 that they were to be inscribed "most distinctly" (בַּאֵר הֵיטֵב), a phrase whose interpretation will preoccupy us shortly. At the very least, we can presume that the publicly inscribed words were intended to be read (and understood), but by whom and for how long?

These seeming textual irregularities and ambiguities in our unhewn scriptural text are smoothed out, as it were, in the account of the fulfillment of these instructions in Josh 8:30–32, but not without leaving other questions unanswered:

[30] אָז יִבְנֶה יְהוֹשֻׁעַ מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהַר עֵיבָל׃

[31] כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מֹשֶׁה עֶבֶד־יְהוָה אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּכָּתוּב בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה מִזְבַּח אֲבָנִים שְׁלֵמוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־הֵנִיף עֲלֵיהֶן בַּרְזֶל וַיַּעֲלוּ עָלָיו עֹלוֹת לַיהוָה וַיִּזְבְּחוּ שְׁלָמִים׃

[32] וַיִּכְתָּב־שָׁם עַל־הָאֲבָנִים אֵת מִשְׁנֵה תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר כָּתַב לִפְנֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

[30] At that time Joshua built an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal,

[31] as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded the Israelites – as is written in the Book of the Teaching of Moses – an altar of unhewn stone upon which no iron had been wielded. They offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord, and brought sacrifices of well-being.

[32] And there, on the stones, he inscribed a copy of the Teaching that Moses had written for the Israelites.

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6 Compare the covenantal ritual of Exod 24:4–8, which similarly combines the erecting of twelve (cf. Josh 4, below) stelai (but without any mention of writing upon them) and the construction of an altar (presumably of unhewn stones) for sacrifice.

7 Michael Fishbane suggests that vv. 5–7 were inserted here so as to divert attention from the possible idolatrous nature of such erected stones (as *matsevot*; see Deut 16:22) to the more proper form of worship though sacrifice on an altar; see Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 161–162. Conversely, Jeffrey H. Tigay suggests that vv. 2–4 and 8, stipulating inscribed stelai, serve as brackets to vv. 5–7, stipulating sacrifices, to the effect that "the text makes clear that the terms of the Teaching, and not the sacrifice, constitute the heart of the ceremony"; see Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deutoronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 250 and 488.

In this passage, with clear reference to the earlier passage in Deuteronomy ("as is written"), the inscribed stelai (or plaster) are not mentioned at all, leaving the only antecedent to "on the stones" to be the unhewn altar stones. It is upon those stones, at Mt. Ebal, that a "copy of the Teaching of Moses" (perhaps referring to the book of Deuteronomy) was inscribed in fulfillment of Moses's prior instructions. Should we presume from the textual sequence that the inscription on the altar stones followed sacrifice thereupon?

Prior to this passage, we find another ritual involving stones, this one without direct reference to Moses's prior instructions (Josh 4:1–8, 19–24). Here, immediately after crossing the Jordan River, God instructs Joshua to have twelve men, representing the twelve tribes, each take a stone from the river, from the places where the priests placed their feet in crossing the parted waters, and to bring them to their night encampment (מָלוֹן) at nearby Gilgal. These stones are to serve as a memorial to the miracle of the parting of the waters of the Jordan as the priests, carrying the Ark of the Covenant, crossed it. In addition, according to 4:9, another set of twelve stones were erected by Joshua in the middle of the river. However, the twelve stones set up at Gilgal are to be a reminder of God's miracle not only to the Israelites, and especially to their children who ask about their meaning,[8] but to "all the peoples of the earth" (כָּל־עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ) (4:24). These stones, both at Gilgal and in the Jordan, unlike those of Deut 27:1–8, are entirely separate from those with which an altar is built and upon which the words of God's/Moses's Torah are inscribed (according to Josh 8:30–32), but are similarly associated with the crossing of the Jordan and the entering into the Promised Land, with the difference that those that are erected at Gilgal are to be a *permanent* reminder of God's miraculous deeds on behalf of Israel, for the future benefit of both Israel and the other peoples. What is less clear, in the book of Joshua's narration of the fulfillment of Moses's instructions, is what happened to the large plastered stelai upon which, according to the book of Deuteronomy, were to be written, very clearly, the words of the Torah.

2 Sparse Second Temple Retellings

Before turning to our earliest rabbinic sources, it should be noted that the inscribing of the Torah, or a part thereof, whether as Moses's command or Joshua's deed, leaves very few interpretive traces in the Jewish writings of the late Second Temple period that have survived, and none that focus on the manner (or purpose) of the

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8 As in Exod 12:26; 13:14; and Deut 6:20.

writing per se. For example, Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 21:7–8 harmonistically paraphrases Josh 8:30–35 in conjunction with Deut 27:1–8:

> [7] Et descendit Ihesus in Galgala, et edificavit sacrarium lapidibus fortissimis, et non intulit in eos ferrum sicuti preceperat Moyses. Et statuit lapides magnos in monte Gebal et dealbavit eos et scripsit super eos verba legis manifesta valde. Et congregavit omnem populum in unum, et legit in aures eorum omnia verba legis. [8] Et descendens cum eis levavit supra sacrarium sacrificia pacifica, et hymnizaverunt omnes valde.

> [7] And Joshua went down to Gilgal and built an altar with very large stones and did not lift an iron tool to them as Moses had commanded. And he set up large stones on Mt. Ebal and whitened them and wrote on them very plainly the words of the Law. And he gathered all the people together and read out loud before them all the words of the Law. [8] And he came down with them and offered peace offerings on the altar; and all sang many praises.[9]

This retelling resolves several interpretive cruxes in the scriptural sources by carefully differentiating between the plastered and clearly inscribed stone stelai erected on Mt. Ebal, and the sacrificial altar of unhewn stones at Gilgal. By contrast, our only other significant interpretation of our passages from Second Temple times, by Josephus, conflates the two, curiously combining Moses's instructions for reciting the blessings and curses of the covenant at Mts. Ebal and Gerizim with their being written, *by Moses* (perhaps conflating Deut 27:1–8 with vv. 9–10), on a sacrificial altar:

> ἀνέγραψε δὲ τὰς εὐλογίας καὶ τὰς κατάρας αὐτός, ὡς μηδέποτε ἐκλιπεῖν τὴν μάθησιν αὐτῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ χρόνου, ἃς δὴ καὶ τῷ βωμῷ τελευτῶν ἐνέγραψε κατὰ πλευρὰν ἑκατέραν, ᾗ καὶ στάντα φησὶ τὸν λαὸν θῦσαί τε καὶ ὁλοκαυτῶσαι καὶ μετ᾽ ἐκείνην τὴν ἡμέραν οὐκ ἐπενεγκεῖν ἱερεῖον ἕτερον, οὐ γὰρ εἶναι νόμιμον.

> These blessings and curses he [=Moses] put on record himself, to the end that their lesson might never be abolished by time, and indeed at the last he inscribed them upon the altar, on either side even where he said that the people were to stand and offer sacrifices and whole burnt-offerings, but after that day they should offer no further victim thereupon, that being unlawful.[10]

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9 For the Latin text, see Daniel J. Harrington, ed., *Pseudo-Philon, Les Antiquités bibliques, tome 1: Introduction et texte critiques*, vol. 229, Sources Chrétiennes (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1976), 174. English translation by Daniel J. Harrington in James H. Charlesworth, ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 330.

10 Josephus, *Ant.* 4.307–308 (LCL 4:625). Josephus has one other interesting conflational paraphrase relevant to our subject. In *Ant.* 5.20 (LCL 5:11), in the context of narrating the crossing of the Jordan River under Joshua's leadership (Josh 4), Josephus states: Ἰησοῦς τε τόν τε βωμὸν ἐκ τῶν λίθων ὧν ἕκαστος ἀνείλετο τῶν φυλάρχων ἐκ τοῦ βυθοῦ τοῦ προφήτου κελεύσαντος ἱδρυσάμενος τεκμήριον γενησόμενον τῆς ἀνακοπῆς τοῦ ῥεύματος ἔθυεν ἐπ᾽ αὐτοῦ τῷ θεῷ ("And Joshua, with the stones which each of the tribal leaders had, by the prophet's orders, taken up

Here, clearly, the inscribed words of the Torah, now limited to the blessings and curses, are inscribed on the stones of the sacrificial altar, as might be inferred from the sequence of Deut 27:1–8, and as is understood by Josh 8:30–32. Josephus stresses that the sacrifices at this altar are a *one-time* occurrence, presumably because they are not performed in a central temple, as required by the book of Deuteronomy (e.g., 12:8–12). Once the sacrifices were offered on this single occasion, the altar's only function was to continue to bear the inscription. In contrast to these sparse exegetical "rewritings" of Scripture, the early rabbinic sources to which we now turn are more explicit and direct in engaging the actual words of Scripture in its several locations, producing thereby multiple mishnaic, midrashic, and talmudic understandings of what transpired and why.

3 Mishnah Soṭah 7:5 (MS Kaufmann)

In the context of determining which ritual recitations must be said in Hebrew ("the Holy Language") and which are permitted to be recited in "any language," the Mishnah describes the procedure for the ritual recitation of blessings and curses of Deut 27:15–28:68 (which it deems can be recited only in Hebrew). As a continuation of this narrative, the Mishnah describes the inscribing of stones with the words of Torah as follows:[11]

ואחר כך הביאו את האבנים ובנו את המזבח וסדום בסיד וכתבו עליהן את כל דברי התורה הזאת [ב]שבעים לשון שנאמר "באר היטב". ונטלו את האבנים ובאו ולנו במקומן.

from the river-bed, erected that altar that was to serve as a token of the stoppage of the stream, and sacrificed thereon to God"). There is nothing in Scripture, except perhaps geographic proximity, to suggest that the commemorative stones taken from the Jordan River in Josh 4:1–8 were the ones used to construct the altar in Josh 8:30–32.

11 There are no textual variants of significance between MSS Kaufmann and Parma, or the printed versions. I have treated this and the following rabbinic texts more briefly in Fraade, "Before and after Babel"; "עירוב לשונות"; "Language Mix," 9*–10*. See also Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshuṭah: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta, Part 8, Order Nashim* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1973), 699–702; Marc Hirshman, *Torah for the Entire World* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999); Azzan Yadin, "The Hammer on the Rock: Polysemy and the School of Rabbi Ishmael," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 10 (2003); *Scripture as Logos: Rabbi Ishmael and the Origins of Midrash*, in *Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Smelik, *Rabbis, Language,* 29–32; Berthelot, "Rabbinic Universalism," 396–97 with notes.

> And afterward they brought the stones and built the altar and plastered it with plaster. And they wrote on them all the words of this Torah in seventy languages, as it is written, “very clearly” (Deut 27:8). And they took the stones and came and spent the night in their own place.

This mishnaic “rewritten” scriptural narrative is perplexing in several regards, in large part due to its brevity. 1. Contrary to Deut 27 and Josh 8, it suggests that the stones were inscribed *after* the ritual recitation of the blessings and curses. 2. It makes no mention of the stelai of Deut 27, but assumes that the words of Torah were inscribed on the plastered altar stones (in accord with Josh 8 and with Josephus’s understanding of where Moses inscribed the blessings and curses, neither of which mentions plaster). 3. After the stones were inscribed, they were removed and brought to the place of the night encampment, presumably at Gilgal, following Josh 4:3,8, with respect to the twelve stones taken from the Jordan River. Were they there reassembled or abandoned? Perhaps the Mishnah reflects an understanding similar to that expressed by Josephus, that the altar stones inscribed with words of Torah could only serve as a sacrificial altar on one occasion. In accordance with the book of Deuteronomy’s insistence on a single, centralized place for sacrificial worship, altars prior to the establishment of a centralized place of worship would be deemed temporary and in need of disassembly following their one-time use.[12] Here, as previously, the impracticality of plastering and inscribing unhewn altar stones is not considered.

4. Most striking and significant for our purposes, however, is the Mishnah’s concise claim, not only that all of the words of the Torah (presumably the complete Pentateuch) were inscribed on the unhewn plastered altar stones, but that they were so inscribed in “seventy languages,” that is, the full roster of human languages (of the seventy nations of Genesis 10, as rabbinically understood), with each nation identified by its language. This is explicitly said to derive from the scriptural words “most distinctly,” or “very clearly” (בַּאֵר הֵיטֵב), which phrase had not attracted attention previous to the Mishnah in any of our extant sources. While the verb באר is biblically understood to refer to the physical clarity with which the words of the Torah were to be inscribed,[13] post-biblically the same verb increasingly acquires meanings relating to interpretation, as in to clarify the meaning of a text. Thus, the Mishnah seems to be saying that obtaining the clearest and fullest under-

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12 See below, n. 42; and Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshuṭah*, 701.

13 See Hab 2:2; Ze’ev Ben-Hayyim, “The Contribution of the Samaritan Inheritance,” in *Proceedings of the Israeli Academy of Sciences and Humanities* (1969): 166–68.

standing of the meaning of the words of the Torah requires their being inscribed (and read) in all (seventy) human "tongues."[14] Compare in this regard the use of

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14 Compare the use of the verb בֵּאֵר in Deut 1:5, understood by medieval exegetes (e.g., Rashi on this verse as on Deut 27:8) to mean that Moses explicated the words of Torah that he taught (to Israel) in seventy languages. See my article, "Moses and Adam as Polyglots," esp. 192–93, for the tradition that the number seventy derives by *gematria* from the word הֵיטֵב. For the typological significance of the number seventy, see Fraade, "Before and after Babel," 39*, n. 18, 48*, n. 41. For the typological significance of the "seventy nations" of Gen 10, see Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 69, 317. For the association of nationhood with language, each nation having its own language, see Esther 1:22; 3:12; 8:9; Neh 13:23–24; Adele Berlin, *JPS Bible Commentary: Esther* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001), 76. For the same association, see 4Q266 (4QD[a]) 11 10. For the maintenance of Israelite identity through the maintenance of Hebrew while slaves in Egypt, see Mek. of R. Ishmael Pisḥa 5: Saul Horovitz and Israel Abraham Rabin, eds., *Mechilta d'Rabbi Ismael* (Frankfurt: J. Kauffmann, 1931), 14–15; but cf. Jacob Z. Lauterbach, ed., *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1934–1935), 1:34–36, following MS Oxford). For its typological significance in later Jewish mysticism, see Moshe Idel, *Old Worlds, New Mirrors: On Jewish Mysticism and Twentieth-Century Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 172. On the later expression "seventy faces of (to) the Torah," see Hananel Mack, "The Torah Has Seventy Aspects: The Development of a Saying," in *Rabbi Mordechai Breuer Festschrift: Collected Papers in Jewish Studies*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1992): 449–62; and Shmuel Askhenazy, "Shivim Panim Le-Torah," in *Alfa Beta Kadimta De-Shmuel Zera* (Jerusalem: 2011): 844–45. For the rabbinic idea that revelation at Sinai was in simultaneously multiple (either four or seventy) languages, see Fraade, "Before and after Babel," 45*–49*. I have not been able to find any reference to "seventy languages" prior to rabbinic literature. I consider *Hebrew Testament of Naphtali* (8:3–6; 9:1) to be a medieval work in its extant form. For the Hebrew text, see Salomon A. Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute, 1950–1953), 196. For an English translation, see Harm W. Hollander and Marinus de Jonge, "Appendix I," in *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 449. Compare *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (*Tg. Ps.-J.*) Gen 11:8; *Pirqe R. El.* 24 (Warsaw ed., 57b; Gerald Friedander, ed. trans. *Pirke of Rabbie Eliezer (the chapters of Rabbie Eliezer the Great): according to the text of the manuscripts belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna*. London: Paul Treuch Timbner, 1916. trans. Friedlander, 176–77). Interestingly, the phrase is inscribed in an Aramaic magical bowl (possibly Manichaean): Charles D. Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975); Jason D. BeDuhn, "Magical Bowls and Manichaeans," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 1995): 419. My thanks to Sara Ronis for bringing this to my attention. For an early Christian, but possibly Jewishly dependent, reference, see *Pseudp-Clementine, Homilies* 18.4 (brought to my attention by Yakir Paz), where the seventy languages of the seventy nations are linked to the seventy descendants of Jacob who went to Egypt (as per Gen 46:27; Exod 1:5; Deut 10:22). The same association is made in *Tg. Ps.-J.* Deut 32:8, as in Sarna, *Genesis, 69.* For further on seventy languages, see Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 5 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1953), 194–95, n. 72. For there being 140 nations/languages (brought to my attention by Gideon Bohak), see *Sifre Deut*. 311 (ed. Finkelstein, 352); *Song. Rab.* 6.19 (to 6:8); *Num. Rab*. 9.14; Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Philipp Feldheim, 1965); Daniel Sperber, *Magic and Folkore in Rabbinic Literature*

מְפֹרָשׁ in Neh 8:8 for Ezra's clear reading of the Torah, rendered as "made distinct" by BDB, as "with interpretation" by NRSV, and as "translating it" by NJPS.[15]

Leaving aside, again, the seeming impracticality of such a vastly multilingual inscription, we might want to speculate on what philosophy of language in general, or of revelatory language in particular, is being suggested or presumed here. The mishnaic text in its extreme but characteristic brevity provides little direct assistance to us in this task.[16] There is, as already noted by Willem Smelik,[17] an irony here, that in the mishnaic context of emphasizing that the ritual recitation of the scriptural blessings and curses was to be in Hebrew alone, the proximate (and in some sources, interlaced) ritual of writing the words of Torah as a whole was to be performed in all seventy languages, an irony with which other rabbinic versions of this tradition, as we shall soon see, appear to wrestle. Which is to say that in all of these regards, the Mishnah is as much interpreting (and interweaving elements of) its three biblical antecedents (Deut 27:1–8; Josh 4:1–8; Josh 8:30–32) as offering up, as it were, its own text for subsequent interpretation.

4 Mishnah Sheqalim 5:1 (MS Kaufmann, with later gloss)

The expression "seventy languages" appears only once elsewhere in the Mishnah, unrelated to the inscribed stones of Deuteronomy and Joshua, but very telling for our purposes nevertheless:[18]

(Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1994); Ginzberg, 5, 195. For an association between nation and language, already before Babel, see Gen 10:31. Gen 11:7 could be read similarly. For the rabbinic view that humans spoke seventy languages even before Babel, based on Gen 11:1, see y. (= Jerusalem or Palestinian Talmud) Meg. 1:11 (71b) (ed. Academy of the Hebrew Language, 748), discussed by Fraade, "Before and After Babel, 42*–43*.

15 For the last, see *y. Meg*. 4.1, 74d and parallels: מפורש זה תרגום ("'clearly,' that is the translation [*Targum*]"), as rendered by Smelik, *Rabbis, Language*, 195. See below, n. 44.

16 The idea seems remarkably similar (*mutatis mutandis*) to Walter Benjamin's conceptions of language and translation, as expressed in his essays, "The Task of the Translator," in *Selected Writings, Vol. 1: 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Block and Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 253–262; and "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," in *Selected Writings, Vol. 1: 1913–1926*, 62–74. For explication, see Carol Jacobs, *In the Language of Walter Benjamin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), esp. 75–90.

17 Smelik, *Rabbis, Language*, 32.

18 There are no textual variants of significance between MSS Kaufmann and Parma. The words in parentheses, presumably an explanatory gloss, appear in the printed versions.

> אלו הן הממונין שהיו במקדש . . . פתחיה על הקינין (פתחיה זה מרדכי) למה נקרא שמו פתחיה שהיה פותח בדברים ודורשן ויודע שבעים לשון . . .
>
> These are the officers who served in the Temple: . . . Petaḥiah was over the bird-offerings. (This same Petaḥiah was Mordechai.)[19] Why was his name Petaḥiah? Because he would "open" (*poteaḥ)* matters, and interpret (*doresh*) them, and/for he knew seventy languages.

As in the previously considered mishnah, seventy languages are again associated, although less directly, with the activity of interpretation, previously expressed by *beʾer*, now by *darash* (and *pataḥ*). Although not linked explicitly, Petaḥiah's interpretive renown is associatively connected to his knowledge of seventy (that is, all human) languages.[20] Mordechai, which, according to a second-hand explanatory gloss, is Petaḥiah's cognomen, refers to the person by this name who is mentioned in Ezra 2:2 and Neh 7:7 as being among those who returned with Zerubbabel from the Babylonian Exile. His name is immediately followed by that of Bilshan. However, if the two are taken as one name, then, by a word play it could mean that said Morechai was a master of languages (*baʿal lashon*), or even a mixer of languages (*balal lashon*). Thus, in both mishnaic passages, the knowledge of seventy languages is of assistance (or even necessity) in being able to fully clarify/interpret the meaning of texts or matters in general (*m. Sheqalim*), and of Scripture in particular (*m. Soṭah*).

5 Tosefta Soṭah 8:6–7 (MS Vienna, ed. Lieberman, 205)

We turn next to the Tosefta that is closely connected to Mishnah Soṭah 7:5. As is often the case with Mishnah-Tosefta "parallels," the precise nature of their relationship (and chronological priority) is difficult to determine. To indicate two commonly proposed possibilities, does the Tosefta presume the Mishnah (or

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19 This gloss is not in MS Kaufmann or the other early manuscripts.

20 For other individuals who are said, in rabbinic literature, to have known all seventy languages, see Fraade, "Before and after Babel," 55*–58*; and Fraade, "Moses and Adam as Polyglots." On this expression, see above, n. 14. For the knowledge of multiple languages as an aid to interpreting Scripture through multilingual word plays, see Fraade, "Before and after Babel," 47*, n. 38; Fraade, "Moses and Adam as Polyglots," 188. For the verb *pataḥ* denoting exegetical activity, see Paul Mandel, "על 'פתח' ועל הפתיחה: עיון חדש", in *Higayon L'Yonah: New Aspects in the Study of Midrash, Aggadah and Piyut in Honor of Professor Yona Fraenkel*, ed. Joshua Levinson, Jacob Elbaum, and Galit Hasan-Rokem (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2006), 49–82, esp. 56.

an antecedent), which it seeks to expand and/or interpret, or does the Tosefta represent the sort of "raw materials" from which the more concise and tightly-structured Mishnah was editorially fashioned?[21] In the present case, either is possible but neither is certain.[22] Therefore, I will treat them as autonomous texts in their own rights. Unlike the anonymous Mishnah, the Tosefta takes the form of *two* accounts of the inscribing of the stones, each attributed to a different (but contemporaneous) tannaitic sage:[23]

> [6] ר׳ יהודה אומ׳ על אבני מזבח כתבוה. אמרו לו היאך למדו אותן אומות העולם את התורה. אמ׳ להן מלמד שנתן המקום בלב כל אומה ומלכות ושלחו נטורים[24] שלהם והשיאו את הכתב מגבי אבנים בשבעים לשון. באותה שעה נתחתם גזר דינם של אומות העולם לבאר שחת.
>
> [7] ר׳ שמעון או׳ על הסיד כתבו. כיצד, כירוהו וסדוהו בסיד, וכתבו עליו את כל דברי התורה בשבעים לשון, וכתבו מלמטה "למען אשר לא ילמדו אתכם" וגו׳, אם אתם חוזרין בכם, אנו מקבלין אתכם.
>
> [6] R. Judah says: They inscribed it [=the Torah] on the stones of the altar. They said to him: How did the nations of the world learn the Torah? He said to them: This teaches that the Omnipresent inspired every nation and kingdom to send their notaries (scribes) and they transcribed the writing from the stones in seventy languages. At that moment the verdict was sealed for the destruction of the nations of the world.
>
> [7] R. Simeon says: They wrote it on plaster. How so? They laid it out and plastered it with plaster, and they wrote on it all the words of the Torah in seventy languages,[25] and they wrote below, "That they teach you not [to do after all their abominations]" (Deut 20:18): "If you [non-Jews] repent, we shall receive you."

Unlike *m. Soṭah* 7:5, which, I have argued (especially in light of *M. Sheqalim* 5:1) understands the recording of the Torah in seventy languages to have an interpretive function (within Israel), both views in the Tosefta understand the purpose of the inscription (or transcription) of the Torah in seventy languages to have been to make it accessible to the (seventy) "nations of the world." Note that *unlike in the Mishnah*, neither R. Judah nor R. Simeon makes reference to "seventy languages" as deriving from the scriptural words בַּאֵר הֵיטֵב ("very distinctly") of Deut

21 For discussion of this question, with extensive bibliography of recent scholarship thereto, see Fraade "Before and after Babel," 54*–55*.
22 Cf. Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Mishnah: A New Approach to Ancient Jewish Texts*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2005), 109–24. She sees our Mishnah as a condensing of our Tosefta; Smelik rejects this view in *Rabbis, Language*, 32, n. 69.
23 Smelik strangely treats what is attributed to R. Judah, but not what is attributed to R. Simeon, in Smelik, *Rabbis, Language*, 31.
24 I read as נוטרים = *notarii*. MS Erfurt has נוטירין. See Lieberman's note ad loc.
25 "In seventy languages" does not appear in MS Erfurt.

27:8.[26] It may be that in an earlier version of the disagreement between R. Judah and R. Simeon, their dispute was limited to the question of where the words of the Torah were inscribed (stones or plaster), without reference to the nations as readers or copyists of the inscription. Whereas R. Judah is explicit in saying that the words of the Torah were written upon the altar stones, R. Simeon says that they were written upon the plaster, which in light of Deut 27:2,4 would seem to mean on the stelai, but in light of *m. Soṭah* 7:5 could mean on the altar.

In its present redacted setting, R. Judah seems to be saying (the syntax is somewhat ambiguous) that what was written on the stones was the Torah in Hebrew alone, and that God inspired the (seventy) nations to send their (seventy) scribes (*notarim*, notaries) to transcribe (literally, "lift"[27]) through spontaneous translation the Hebrew writing, each one into the language of his particular nation.[28] However, the purpose of making the Torah available to the nations in their own languages was hardly altruistic, but to guarantee their divine punishment for transgressing its laws by denying them the claim that they were innocent by virtue of not having had access to (that is, comprehension of) the Torah in their native tongues. Without such an excuse (that is, with a Torah in their own languages), their doom is *immediately* sealed for their lawlessness, as it were.[29]

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26 However, it is likely that the phrase בְּאֵר שַׁחַת ("nethermost pit"; e.g., Ps 55:24) is an ironic word play on בַּאֵר הֵיטֵב ("very distinctly") of Deut 27:8, based on their sharing the consonantal homograph באר.

27 For this understanding of the *hiphʿil* of the verb נשא, see Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targum, the Talmud Babli and Jerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Choreb, 1926), 938, citing our passage. See also Saul Lieberman, *Studies in Palestinian Literature* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 57–58; Shlomo Naeh, "'טובים דודיך מיין': מבט חדש על משנת עבודה זרה ב, ה," in *Studies in Talmudic and Midrashic Literature in Memory of Tirzah Lifshitz*, ed. M. Bar-Asher, J. Levinson, and B. Lifshitz (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2005): 418, n. 24. Similarly, see Smelik, *Rabbis, Language*, 31 and 168–69. He ignores the view of R. Simeon (the whole Torah written in seventy languages) in t. (= Tosefta) *Soṭah* 8:7. According to the Babylonian Talmud (*Soṭah* 35b), and attributed to R. Judah, the inscription was made directly to the stones, after which it was plastered over. The notaries of the nations came and peeled off the plaster layer, onto which a (reverse) copy of the inscription was impressed, and carried this back (השיאוה) with them to their respective peoples.

28 Alternatively, the Torah is already written in seventy languages on the stones, and notaries simply transcribe the translation that suits their nation. It is a question of whether "in seventy languages" modifies adjectivally "the writing," or whether it modifies adverbially "lifted." I favor the latter as better fitting the word order, but cannot deny the possibility of the former. We will see the same ambiguity in the Palestinian Talmud, but there the wording seems to me to favor the former understanding. For the Babylonian Talmud's understanding of this "lifting," see above, n. 27.

29 Cf. Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Literary Transmission, Beliefs and Manners of Palestine in the I Century B.C.E. – IV Century C.E.*, 2nd ed. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962), 201.

By contrast, R. Simeon's understanding is that the Torah in all seventy languages was inscribed on plastered stones (whichever), but that the purpose of so doing was more irenic: the nations whose doom has not yet been sealed now have an opportunity to learn from Israel's Torah, translated into their languages, so that they may have the opportunity to repent (remove their abominations) and be received, rather than be destroyed (as per Deut 20:15–18).

In light of a recent (2012) study of notaries in the Greco-Roman world, particularly in Egypt,[30] more can be said of R. Judah's version of the story. Each such notary, sent by his respective nation (אומה ומלכות), need not have known all seventy languages, but only two: the Hebrew of the Torah and the language of the nation that sent him. That is, at the very least they can be presumed to have been bilingual. It is only collectively that they represented the linguistic totality of seventy languages (necessary, according to the Mishnah, for the full comprehension of the Torah). In real life, of course, such notaries would have had facility in the language of the ruling empire (e.g., Greek, or, in an earlier period, Imperial Aramaic) and their local language (e.g., Egyptian) and the ability to translate between the two in both directions. Thus, the story as attributed to R. Judah places Hebrew (Israel) in the position of the imperial language (and rulers), rather than that of one subject language/people among many, a fantasy of great significance for the privileged place of Hebrew (and the identity of Hebrew speakers, readers, or auditors) among the languages (and peoples) of the world.

I wish to emphasize that this version of the story might be thought of as a clever inversion of the famous story of the translation of the Torah into Greek (the "Septuagint") in Ptolemaic times (mid-third century BCE), as it was surely known to the early rabbinic sages.[31] Rather than the Jerusalemite priesthood sending seventy-two

30 Marja Vierros, *Bilingual Notaries in Hellenistic Egypt: A Study of Greek as a Second Language*, Collectanea Hellenistica (Brussels: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten, 2012).

31 See *Mekilta of R. Ishmael Pisḥa* 14 (ed. Lauterbach, 1:111–12); *y. Meg*. 1.9, 71d; *b.* (= Babylonian Talmud) *Meg*. 9a–b; *Mas. Sop.* 1.7 (6–8); *Mas. Sep. Torah* 1:6 (8–9) ; for the last two sources, see Michael Higger, ed., *Seven Minor Treatises; Sefer Torah, Mazuzah, Tefillin, Zizit, 'Abadim, Kutim, Gerim, and Treatise Soferim II* (New York, 1930), 100-05 and 22–24, respectively. There is extensive scholarly literature on the rabbinic use of this story, which originates with the *Letter of Aristeas* in the mid-second century BCE (but narrating events of a century earlier). Most recently, see Abraham Wasserstein and David J. Wasserstein, *The Legend of the Septuagint: From Classical Antiquity to Today* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Giuseppe Veltri, "Deconstructing History and Traditions: The Written Torah for Ptolemy," in *Libraries, Translations and "Canonic" Texts: The Septuagint, Aquila and Ben Sira in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri, JSJSup (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Moshe Simon-Shoshan, "The Task of the Translators: The Rabbi, the Septuagint, and the Cultural Politics of Translation," *Prooftexts* 27 (2007); and Richard Kalmin, "The Miracle of the Sep-

(but often referred to as seventy) elders from the Land of Israel to Alexandria at the bidding of the Ptolemaic king to produce there a single, authoritative (and possibly inspired) translation into Greek, for the benefit of Jews and non-Jews alike, here the seventy nations, at the bidding (and possible inspiration) of the sovereign of all nations, send each one a notary/translator to the Land of Israel so as to produce seventy[32] different translations of the Hebrew original with, according to R. Judah's telling, disastrous consequences for all but Israel.[33] Compare the expression used here for God's inspiring of the nations, שנתן המקום בלב כל אומה ומלכות (and in the version in the Palestinian Talmud, to be treated shortly: נתן הקב״ה בינה בלב כל אומה ואומה), with that used in *Mas. Sop*. 1:8 for the inspiration of the seventy-two elders gathered by King Ptolemy: נתן המקום עצה בלב כל אחד ואחד ("God placed guidance in the heart of each and every one"). Needless to say, this narrative places the origins of scriptural translation much earlier than Ptolemaic times, in the time of Joshua but in fulfillment of the command of Moses, as if to say that the totality of scriptural translation is a homegrown Israelite innovation, rather than a foreign import. Also, no single translation (e.g., into Greek) is privileged over any other, with the benefit of all such seventy translations to their intended foreign audiences being dubious at best.

6 Mekilta Deuteronomy (Geniza Fragment, ed. Kahana, 345)

We turn next to the last of our tannaitic sources, a Cairo Geniza fragment of a lost commentary to the book of Deuteronomy from the midrashic "school" of R. Ishmael. Discovered by Solomon Schechter and published by him in 1911, it was since lost, no small irony for our purposes, as we shall see. Saul Lieberman improved on Schechter's reconstruction, and it was most recently published by Menahem Kahana.[34] Any interpretations of the fragment must be qualified by recognition of its highly fragmentary and restored nature:

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tuagint in Ancient Rabbinic and Christian Literatures," in *Follow the Wise: Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee Levine*, ed. Zeev Weiss, et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010).

32 There is some ambiguity whether the seventy nations/languages include Israel/Hebrew or not. Needless to say (see above, n. 14), "seventy" is a typological number, regardless of whether it is "actually" sixty-nine, seventy-one, or seventy-two.

33 For the notion that the translation of the Torah into Greek had disastrous consequences for Israel, see *Mas. Sop.* 1:7; *Mas. Sep. Torah* 1:6; *Pesiq. Rab.* 5 (ed. Meir Friedmann, 14b; trans. William Braude, 93; ed. Rivka Ulmer, 51–52).

34 Solomon Schechter, "The Mekhilta Deuteronomy, Pericope Re'eh," in *Tif'eret Ysra'el: Festschrift Zu Israel Lewy's Siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. M. Brann and J. Elbogen (Breslau: M. & H.

> בו ביום עברו ישראל את הירדן ונטלו את האבנים והעבירום והעמידום וכתבו על [האבנים] אֶתֹ כל דברי
> התורה [בלשון הקודש]. ר׳ ישמעאל אומ׳ בשבעים לשון כתבו [שנ׳ ״באר היטב״]. רבי שמעון בן יוחאי
> א׳ לא כתבו עליה[ן א]ל[א את משנה] תורת משה שנ׳ ״ויכתב שם על האבנים את משנה תורת משה״ וג׳.
> ר׳ יוסה בן יוסי אומ׳ משום ר׳ אלעזר בן שמעון לא כתבו עליהן אלא מה שאומות העולם רוצין כגון ״כי
> תקרב אל עיר להלחם עליה וקראת עליה לשלום אם שלום תענך״ וג׳. ״כי תצור אל עיר ימים רבים״ וג׳.
> על [אבני] [המזב]ח כתבום דברי ר׳ יודה. ר׳ שמעון א׳ על האבנים כתבום. [אמ׳] [ר׳ נרא]ין דברי
> ר׳ שמעון שאמר על האבנים [כתבום] [שנ׳ ״על] האבנים״ מדברי ר׳ יודה שאמר על המזבח כתבום.
> שאלו [על] המזבח כתבום האיך היו אומות העולם רוצין לקרות דין. [ולמטה כת׳] עליהם ״כל הרוצה לקבל
> ימין יבוא ויקבל״ וגנזום בו ביום.
>
> On the same day that Israel crossed the Jordan, they took the stones, brought them across, and erected them and wrote on [the stones] all the words of the Torah [in the Holy Language]. R. Ishmael says, They wrote in seventy languages, [as it is said, “most distinctly” (Deut 27:8)]. R. Simeon b. Yoḥai says, They did not write on the[m bu]t [a copy] of the Torah of Moses (or: the book of Deuteronomy), as it is said, “And there, on the stones, he inscribed a copy of the Torah of Moses” (Josh 8:32). R. Yose b. Yosi[35] says in the name of R. Eleazar b. Simeon, They did not write on them but that which the nations of the world desired, such as, “When you approach a town to attack it, you shall offer it terms of peace. If it responds peaceably,” etc. (Deut 20:10–11); “When you besiege a city for a long time,” etc. (Deut 20:19). They wrote them on [the stones] [of the alta]r. These are the words of R. Judah. R. Simeon says, They wrote them on the stones (cf. Deut 27:2–4). [Said] [Rabbi (Judah the Patriarch?) I prefer] the words of R. Simeon, who said, They wrote them on the stones, to the words of R. Judah, who said, They wrote them on the altar. For if they had written them [on] the altar, how could the nations of the world who desired to read the law (been able to do so)? [At the bottom was written] on them: “Whoever wishes to receive right (forgiveness) shall come and receive!”[36] But the very same day they hid them (the stones of the altar) away.

To begin with, unlike the Mishnah and the view of R. Judah according to the Tosefta, the anonymous opening voice of the *Mekilta Deuteronomy* fragment endorses the view that the Torah was inscribed (presumably in Hebrew) on the stelai (or possibly the stones removed from the Jordan River according to Josh 4). By contrast, R. Ishmael, citing Deut 27:8 (and the Mishnah's interpretation thereof), affirms that the Torah was inscribed on the stones (without specifying which) *in seventy languages*. I assume that the only difference between the anonymous opening and R. Ishmael is whether what was actually written on the stones (presumably the stelai) was the Torah (in its entirety) just in Hebrew (anonymous) or in

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Marcus, 1911); Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshuṭah*, 700–01; Menahem I. Kahana, *The Geniza Fragments of the Halakhic Midrashim. Part I: Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmaʿel, Mekhilta d'Rabbi Shimʿon Ben Yohay, Sifre Numbers, Sifre Zuta Numbers, Sifre Deuteronomy, Mekhilta Deuteronomy* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005), 345.

35 As Lieberman notes (*Tosefta Ki-Fshuṭah*, 700, n. 17.), no tannaitic sage by this name is otherwise known to us, whether as Yose or Yosi, the two being variants of the same name.

36 On the difficulties of the text here, see Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshuṭah*, 701, n. 19.

all seventy languages (R. Ishmael, echoing R. Simeon of the Tosefta). By contrast, I understand R. Simeon of *Mekilta Deuteronomy* to say (following the wording of Josh 8:32) that it was only the book of Deuteronomy (מִשְׁנֵה תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה), and not the whole Pentateuch, that was inscribed (presumably on the stelai), leaving unclear whether it was just in Hebrew or in seventy languages.

Strikingly different from any of the views thus far expressed as to how much was inscribed, and without parallel elsewhere, is the view of R. Eleazar b. Simeon, as transmitted by R. Yose b. Yosi, that all that was written (presumably both in Hebrew and the other languages) were several scriptural verses that relate somewhat sympathetically to non-Israelites in time of war.[37] Alternatively, it is only such "universal" laws of warfare that would interest the bellicose nations, with anything else being wasted on them.[38] Since these verses, or at least their being recorded here, are intended for the "ears" of the nations, they are presumably recorded in seventy languages, although this is not stated explicitly. This is reminiscent of Josh 4:24, in which the erecting of commemorative stones is intended for the benefit of "all the peoples of the earth" (כָּל־עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ). Thus far we have seen three different attitudes toward the non-Jews for whom the translated words of Torah are intended: cynical (only to condemn them), irenic (so they might repent and be "received" by Israel), and apologetic (only to convey to them what they want to hear), the last being possibly insulting or mocking as well.[39]

Again we encounter the persistent question of which stones were written upon, with R. Judah favoring the stones of the altar (as in the Mishnah), R. Simeon favoring the stelai, and Rabbi (Judah the Patriarch?) preferring the words of R. Simeon (the stelai). Rabbi (Judah the Patriarch?) explains his preference for the view of R. Simeon (stelai; contra the Mishnah) as follows: had the words of Torah been written on the stones of the altar, they would not have remained there for long, since the inscribed altar stones would have been removed immediately

37 Lieberman (Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 201–02) refers to these as "international law." While we do not know, how many such verses R. Yose had in mind, what is cited being examples of a larger class, we can presume that the challenge of insufficient space for the inscription(s) was significantly mitigated by such a narrow selection of verses. Note that Deut 20:15–18, calling for the genocide of the native nations, is elided in this selection of verses. Compare *Gen. Rab*. 74.15 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 872–73), where it is said that in David's time, the Edomites and Moabites produced stelai (אסטליות) inscribed with Torah verses (Deut 2:3 and 2:9) that are favorable to these nations in avoiding combat with them.

38 I thank Daniel Stein Kokin for this suggestion.

39 Respectively: R. Judah in the Tosefta, R. Simeon in the Tosefta, and R. Yose b. Yosi in the name of R. Eleazar b. Simeon in *Mekilta Deuteronomy*.

after the one-time sacrifices were completed, as stated in the Mishnah (reflecting Josh 4:3,8). On this reading of Rabbi (Judah the Patriarch?)'s reading of R. Judah, even the irenic view of the public writing of the Torah in seventy languages (on the altar stones), so as to provide an opportunity for the nations to follow the Torah and be received by Israel (as per the added subscript of the inscription), was in reality a cynical, if not duplicitous, ploy, since the altar stones (with the Torah inscribed in seventy languages) did not remain in place for long enough to accomplish that purpose, as the midrash's conclusion confirms in its statement that the altar stones were "hidden away" (*ganzum*, from the same root as *geniza*) on the very same day that they were inscribed. But what of R. Simeon's implied view that the Torah (or at least the book of Deuteronomy), inscribed on stelai, remained accessible to the nations for some time? Did its inscription similarly have a subscript (as per the Tosefta) holding out the hope of the nations' repentance and acceptance? Or was it too simply a cynical ploy? Our fragmentary text eludes us on these questions.

As for the other (non-irenic) views represented here, the inscribing of the Torah in seventy languages was either to condemn the nations for their transgression or to gain their appreciation (however briefly?), or, alternatively, to mock them for their war-making, but not to join with them in the practice of Torah since that opportunity, according to this midrash in its final lines, was not truly provided to them. Perhaps it is an irony of history that Rabbi (Judah the Patriarch?)'s frank uncovering of the duplicitous nature of the seemingly irenic public disclosure of the Torah in seventy languages is found only in this largely unknown ancient midrash, which was itself "hidden away" in the Cairo Geniza in medieval times, only to be discovered (and lost again) much more recently.[40]

40 I have incorporated here some suggestions of Daniel Stein Kokin. Menahem Kahana has argued that at least for some non-legal sections (*Hảazinu* and *Ve-Zoʾt Ha-berakha*) *Mekhilta Deuteronomy* is more "universalistic" in its attitude toward non-Jews than is *Sifre Deuteronomy* to the same verses. See "דפים מן המכילתא לדברים פרשות האזינו וזאת הברכה," *Tarbiz* 57 (1988). See also Menahem Kahana, "The Halakhic Midrashim," 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, et al. (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2006): 51–52. A similar argument, it seems to me, cannot be made here, in part because the *Sifre*'s commentary to Deut 27:1–8 is not extant.

7 Palestinian Talmud Soṭah 7:5, 21d (ed. Academy of the Hebrew Language, 935–36)

Several familiar traditions, but with some new twists, are found in the Palestinian Talmud, presented as a barayta, as follows:

> תני. על אבני המלון נכתבו. דברי רבי יודה. רבי יוסי אומר. על אבני המזבח נכתבו. מאן דמר על אבני המלון נכתבו בכל יום ויום אומ׳ העולם משלחין נוטריהן ומשיאין את התורה שהיתה כתובה בשבעים לשון. מאן דמר על אבני המזבח נכתבו. לא לשעה היו ונגנזו. עוד הוא מעשה ניסים. נתן הקב״ה בינה בלב כל אומה ואומה והשיאו את התורה שהיתה כתובה בשבעים לשון.

> It was taught: [The words of the Torah] were written on the stones of the lodging place (Josh 4:3,8). These are the words of R. Judah. R. Yosi says: They were written on the stones of the altar. [With respect to] the one who says that they were [permanently] written on the stones of the lodging: Every day the nations of the world would send their notaries, who would transcribe the Torah which was written in seventy languages . [With respect to] the one who says that they were written on the altar, [how can this be?] Were they not (there) for only a short time before they were hidden away? [Rather,] this was another miracle. The Holy One, blessed be He, gave insight into the heart of each and every nation so that they transcribed the Torah that was written in seventy languages.

The disagreement over which stones were inscribed with the words of the Torah continues, although here R. Judah is associated with the view that the inscribed stones were those of the night encampment (Josh 4:3,8), presumably the stelai at Gilgal, whereas in the Tosefta he was credited with the view that they were the altar stones at Mt. Ebal. Here that position is attributed instead to R. Yose. In the first case it is assumed that the inscription was on *permanent display*, and that every day (and without rush) the seventy notaries of the seventy nations could transcribe the Torah, each in his own native language.[41] However, this would not seem to be possible according to the view that the Torah was inscribed on the altar stones, since they would have been disassembled and hidden away once the sacrifices had been performed.[42] It is in this event that God needed to inspire the notaries (presumably) so that they could miraculously complete their task of transcription and translation in the shortest possible time. Thus, in either case, whether of inscribing on the altar stones (and being divinely inspired) or on the stelai (and having plenty of time), the notaries would have succeeded at their task of either transcribing or translating the Torah in seventy languages.

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41 On my understanding of this verb as to transcribe and translate, and of the ambiguous syntax, see above at and in nn. 27, 28.

42 See above, at and in n. 12.

However, the Palestinian Talmud does not indicate whether the intent of the translations (that is, of God's inspiring the nations or their notaries to transcribe the Torah) was to condemn the nations for their knowing transgressions (as attributed to R. Judah in the Tosefta), or to allow for their repentance and acceptance by Israel (as attributed to R. Simeon in the Tosefta and in *Mekilta Deuteronomy*). My sense is that the tone of the Palestinian Talmud is more irenic than that of either the Tosefta or *Mekilta Deuteronomy*, since it removes the obstacle of insufficient time to complete the task of transcription/translation, whether on altar stones or stelai, without indicating any others.

8 Palestinian Targumim to Deuteronomy 27:8 (Fragmentary Targum MS Paris, ed. Klein, 111)

Finally, let us hear from those who translated the Torah into Aramaic, choosing one example that is representative of the Palestinian tradition.

> ותכתבון על אבניא ית כל מילי שבח אוריתא הדא כתב חקק ומפרש טבא מתקרי בחד לישן ומתורגם בשבעין לישן.

> And you shall inscribe upon the stones all of the words of praise of this Torah, in engraved writing and very distinct; to be read in one language and translated into seventy languages.[43]

In rendering the key phrase בַּאֵר הֵיטֵב ("most distinctly"), the Targum employs a double translation, first fairly (but slightly expansively) literal as "in engraved writing and very distinct," before moving on to a more expansive gloss, "to be read in one language and translated into seventy languages."[44] This confirms my earlier understanding of the use of the verb נשא in the *hiphʿil* (by R. Judah in the Tosefta and, less certainly, in the Palestinian Talmud), as denoting that the words of Torah that were written on (and directly read from) the stones were in Hebrew alone, whereas what was "lifted" from the stones by the notaries were spontane-

43 Much the same translation is found in other manuscripts of *Fragmentary Targum* (*Frg. Tg.*) and from the Cairo Geniza, as well as in *Tg. Ps-Jon*. *Targum Neofiti* (*Tg. Neof.*) and *Frg. Tg*. MS Vatican are slightly different, as I will note below. *Tg. Onqelos*, the *Peshiṭta*, and the *Samaritan. Tg*. are all fairly literal, lacking the targumic glosses that I will highlight.

44 For מפרש here as denoting the clarity of writing (and not interpretive exposition), see Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period*, 2nd ed., (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002), 451 ("explicitly written"); Sokoloff, *A Dictionary*, 213 ("engraved writing"). See also above, n. 15.

ous translations into seventy (or sixty-nine) languages.[45] Only the Hebrew was privileged to be inscribed and read aloud (in public?) to all, whereas each of the individual translations was intended for the use of its particular linguistic society alone. Of course, given the relatively compact nature of the targumic translation, most of the questions that are addressed in other rabbinic sources (on which stones was the Torah inscribed?; how much of the Torah was inscribed?; for how long was it on public display?; for what purpose was the Torah made available in translation to the nations?) are not addressed here. That makes all the more remarkable what it *does* address: the difference between what was written on and read directly from the stones (whichever) – the Torah in Hebrew – and what was subsequently translated spontaneously – the seventy translations.[46] Significantly, this is very similar to the rabbinically prescribed practice of *reading* Scripture from a written scroll and orally *reciting* Targum, without such a written aid, as part of the synagogue service.[47] It is as if the written text of the Targum here authorizes its own oral liturgical practice.

9 Conclusions

We have seen two fundamentally different attitudes toward multilingual scriptural translation in the rabbinic texts herein surveyed. The first is typified by the Mishnah (and other early rabbinic texts on the multilingual nature of revelation, as I have discussed elsewhere[48]). According to it, it is in the very nature of the language of revelation (if not of language more broadly[49]) that inter-lingual translation (and maximally/ideally translation into every language) is necessary in order to fully uncover the deep plenitude of scriptural meaning. The second is typified (but with significant variations) by the other rabbinic texts that we have examined as interpre-

45 See above, nn. 27, 28, 32.

46 *Tg. Neof.* departs slightly from this translation, being less explicit in this regard: ומתקרא ומתרגם בשבעים לשן ("to be read and translated into seventy languages"). However, this most likely has the same meaning: "to be read [in Hebrew] and [thereafter] translated into seventy languages." The same is true for *Frg. Tg.* MS Vatican.

47 A similar point is made by Smelik, *Rabbis, Language,* 30. For the practice of Targum in ancient synagogues according to rabbinic literature, see Philip S. Alexander, "The Targumim and Rabbinic Rules for the Delivery of Targum," in *Congress Volume Salamanca 1983*, ed. John A. Emerton, VTsup 36 (Leiden: Brill, 1986); and Fraade, "Rabbinic Views on the Practice of Targum".

48 See above, n. 14. For the knowledge of other languages as helpful for the midrashic interpretation of Hebrew Scripture, see above, n. 20.

49 See above, n. 16.

tations of the covenantal-renewal ritual prescribed in Deut 27:1–8 and described in Josh 8:30–32, with assistance from Josh 4:1–8,19–24. According to it, scriptural revelation, via translation into the languages of the "seventy" nations, defines Israel's often ambivalent relationship to those nations, and thereby its social and cultural identity and status with respect to them. Posed as a question, these two attitudes can be conveyed as follows: does the translation of the Torah into all seventy languages enable its fullest possible meaning(s) to be apprehended, that is, for it to achieve its maximal polyglossic resonance, even if only *within* Israel, or is it simply a utilitarian concession to the nations so as to assure their punishment, enable their repentance (but not really), or, by sharing with them only so much Scripture as they desire/need to know, to gain their favor (however briefly) or, alternatively, to mock them?[50]

Does the recording of the Torah in all seventy languages suggest that Hebrew is just one language among seventy, each one conveying the Torah's meaning in the respective tongue of each people, as the Babylonian Talmud (*Meg.* 18a) in a different context states, "Egyptian for the Egyptians, Hebrew[51] for the Hebrews, Elamite for the Elamites, and Greek for the Greeks"? Alternatively, does the view that only the Torah was inscribed on the stones (whichever), and that the nations had to send their notaries to transcribe and/or translate the text in their own tongues (in some views by divine inspiration), affirm the superior, exceptional status of the Hebrew *original* and the inferior, *derivative* status of all other translations (as well as languages and national identities)? The fact that most of our rabbinic texts do not answer these questions in a monological voice (even the Aramaic Targum provides a "double translation"), suggests that the *polyglossic* nature of revelation might be more closely connected than otherwise thought to its *polysemic* divine origins, human reception, and transmission there, as it were, all along.[52]

50 The question of the extent to which the Torah was intended for all of humankind, or only a select part thereof, is a very old one. See, for example, Ben Sira (ca. 180 B.C.E.), as demonstrated by Seth Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 45–79; and Hirshman. See also my treatment of the story in *Sifre Deut* 344 (ed. Finkelstein, 400–01), and parallels, in Steven D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and Its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 51–54; and "Navigating the Anomalous: Non-Jews at the Intersection of Early Rabbinic Law and Narrative," in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, ed. Laurence J. Silberstein and and Robert L. Cohn (New York: New York University Press, 1994): 153–56 (= Steven D. Fraade, *Legal Fictions: Studies of Law and Narrative in the Discursive Worlds of Ancient Jewish Sectarians and Sages* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 153–56.)

51 "Hebrew" here may mean something other than the Hebrew of the Hebrew Bible or of the Rabbis, but for present purposes this question need not detain us.

52 See, in this regard, the following exchange: Steven D. Fraade, "Rabbinic Polysemy and Pluralism Revisited: Between Praxis and Thematization," *AJSR* 31 (2007): 1–40; Azzan Yadin-Israel,

Although this study has focused intensely on the exegetical aspects of the texts considered, as interpretations of both Scripture (already inner-biblically) and (inner-rabbinically) of received rabbinic traditions, they are very much part of a larger multilingual cultural world, as revealed not just by literature, but by the archeological uncovering of ancient inscriptions, coins, and documents.[53] The constant negotiation of “code-switching” and “bilingual interference,” and their necessary assumptions about the role and status of each language in relation to and in contact with the others, suggests that what is at stake in the texts we have examined is as much perennial *intellectual* questions of the contested role of language(s) in revelation and its decipherment, as perennial *practical* questions of the contested role of language in the arena of competing social interrelations and identities.

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53 See Fraade, “עירוב לשונות”; “Language Mix.” (translations of one another)

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