A HISTORY OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

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Chapter 1

HEBREW IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SEMITIC LANGUAGES

1.1 *Hebrew, a Semitic language*

Hebrew is a Semitic dialect or language which developed in the northwestern part of the Near East between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea during the latter half of the second millennium BCE. The country comprising this area was known as Canaan, a name that is also associated with the language in its earliest written sources: שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן (śᵉpaṯ kᵉna'an) 'the language of Canaan' (Is 19:18). Elsewhere, the language is called יְהוּדִית (yᵉhūḏīṯ) 'Judaean, Judahite' (2 K 18:26, 28, etc.). In the Hellenistic period, writers refer to it by the Greek term *Hebraios, Hebraïsti* (Josephus, *Antiquities* I, 1:2 etc.),[1] and under the Roman Empire it was known as עִבְרִית ('iḇrīṯ) 'Hebrew' or לָשׁוֹן עִבְרִי(ת) (lāšōn 'iḇrī[ṯ]) 'Hebrew language' (Mishnah, Gittin 9:8, etc.), terms that recalled Eber (Gn 11:14), ancestor of the people that would become known, like Abraham (Gn 14:13), by the name 'Hebrew'.[2]

From a cultural perspective, this language was to play an extremely important rôle, not only in the history of the people who spoke it, but also within Western culture in general. It was to be

[1] However, G.H. Dalman (1905, 1) points out that Josephus and the author of John's Gospel use this term for both Hebrew and Aramaic.

[2] The origin of the name has still not been adequately explained. Understanding it as related to the root עבר ('br) 'pass', an allusion to a transition from the other side of the river, smacks of popular etymology. A more widespread modern view relates it to the Ḫabiru or Ḫapiru mentioned in numerous sources from Egypt and the Near East, although this implies that the name was originally an appellative and only later a gentilic. Clearly, such a theory would need to be specified in great detail. See Greenberg 1970; Loretz 1984.

the language of the Bible as well as the idiom in which the Jewish people would compose a large part of its literature, both prose and verse, a language which in spite of periods of obscurity has never completely disappeared, and survives in our own time with the cultural trappings of more than 3,000 years.[3]

A special aura soon developed around the language. For Jews it was לְשׁוֹן הַקֹּדֶשׁ (lešōn haq-qōḏæš) 'the language of sanctity, the holy tongue'.[4] They also considered, like many Christians, that it was the very first language, the 'language of creation' in the words of the rabbis and the early Church Fathers: 'And all the inhabitants of the earth were (of) just one language and (of) just one speech, and they spoke in the language of the Temple, for through it the world was created, in the beginning.'[5] In a more rationalizing vein, this claim was justified by pointing out that only in Hebrew is the wordplay on אִישׁ ('īš) 'man' and אִשָּׁה ('iššā) 'woman' (Gn 2:23) possible – from this, the midrash concludes, the world must have been created through Hebrew.[6]

In the age of Rationalism, Hebrew was able to free itself from the reverential epithets it had accrued over centuries, and was viewed instead as simply another of the languages or dialects spoken in the extreme southeast of Asia, known from the eighteenth century

[3] See Chomsky 1969, 206ff.; Federbush 1967.

[4] Thus designated during the rabbinic era: Mishnah, Sotah 7:2, Targum Yerushalmi on Gn 31:11, etc. The name was widely used during the Middle Ages, and is standard in Hebrew literature. Sometimes it created conflicts in the realm of philology, so that certain mediaeval linguists, for example Menaḥem b. Saruq, refrained from comparing it with other languages.

[5] Targum Neofiti on Gn 11:1, according to the edition and translation of A. Díez Macho (Madrid/Barcelona, 1968), p. 56. A similar attitude is found in Targum Jonathan (see the translation of E. Levine in *Neofiti II: Exodus* (Barcelona, 1970), p. 550) and Pirke Rabbi Eleazar 24. See Díaz Esteban 1982.

[6] Bereshit Rabbah 18. The text was to be noted by Rashi in his commentary on the passage. However, alongside this tradition runs another, again widespread among Jews, Arabs, Syriac Christians, and the Church Fathers, according to which Aramaic or 'Syriac' is the oldest language and the language of creation. See Renan 1855, 223. For example, Theodoret of Cyrrhus claimed that the names of the earliest people were Aramaic, whereas Hebrew was the holy tongue given to Moses by God at the same time as the Torah, and was, thus, a taught rather than a natural language (*Quaestiones in Octateuchum*, in the edition of N. Fernández and A. Sáenz-Badillos (Madrid, 1979), pp. 56f.).

onwards as the 'Semitic' languages. This name, as is well known, derives from A.L. Schlözer,[7] who based his classification of the languages of this group on the list of Noah's descendants in Gn 10:21ff. Thus, Schlözer was taking up a much earlier idea about the family relationship of Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Later, knowledge of new languages would lead to other names being added to the Semitic family, giving it a more appropriate position within the framework of the 'Afro-Asiatic' languages.

Nowadays, about seventy different languages or dialects are recognized as Semitic. They are spread unevenly in space and time, and vary greatly in their importance, from languages which have existed across large areas for centuries to small, scarcely documented, dialects, known only through recent epigraphic discoveries. But recognizable in all of them are common features of phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary, at times considerably more significant than those shared by languages of other families, such as Indo-European.

In terms of geography, the Semitic languages are found throughout a large area, extending from Mesopotamia in the northeast down to southern Arabia and the coastlands of Ethiopia, and including the Syro-Palestinian region to the northwest.

Four and a half thousand years ago, in the northeast, Old Akkadian replaced Sumerian, a non-Semitic language which influenced Akkadian in a number of ways and from which Akkadian borrowed its system of cuneiform writing. In the northwest, in cities like Ebla, a Semitic language was also used during this period. In the second millennium BCE, while in the northeast Akkadian split into the Babylonian and Assyrian dialects, an area further to the west witnessed the rise of Amorite and, later, Ugaritic and other languages known through the Proto-Canaanite inscriptions, the inscriptions from Byblos and Sinai, and from the El-Amarna glosses. At the close of the second millennium, the

[7] In J.G. Eichhorn's *Repertorium für biblische und morgenländische Literatur*, VIII (Leipzig, 1781), p. 161.

differences between two families, Canaanite and Aramaic, became more pronounced, and both developed independently throughout the first millennium BCE. Hebrew, like Phoenician and some other less well-known languages, is a member of the Canaanite group. With its long and complicated history, it is, together with a minor Aramaic dialect, one of the few Northwest Semitic languages to survive to the present day.

In the southwest, from a later period, we find South Arabian, Arabic, and Ethiopic with their various dialects. The oldest inscriptions from this region may go back to the eighth century BCE. Historically, it is the most widespread of the groups, and has made the most noticeable impression right up to the present day.

The geographical area occupied by the Semitic languages is neither absolutely fixed nor completely sealed, as traces of non-Semitic languages are also found in it. Moreover, there are some extreme cases where it is difficult to decide whether or not a language should be regarded as Semitic. For example, some years ago it was argued that Libyan was Semitic,[8] although this has since been generally rejected – similar comments apply to other efforts to classify as Semitic the language of Mycenaean Linear A, Hittite, etc.

Following various attempts to describe the main characteristics of the Semitic languages, E. Ullendorff, in a well-known work,[9] reviewed the criteria which might be used in identifying a given language as Semitic. For Ullendorff, none of the principles standardly employed are by themselves conclusive. For example, the claim that in the Semitic languages there is a special relationship between consonants and vowels, with the former in the majority, often does not correspond with the statistical evidence. The claim that in the Semitic languages only the consonants convey meaning is not entirely true either, as the vowels can function as more than mere semantic 'modifiers' in

[8] See Rössler 1952; 1964.
[9] Ullendorff 1958.

connexion with nouns and particles, especially those that have a biliteral structure. Moreover, claims about the triliteralism of the Semitic root are clearly questionable, given that the phenomenon is known from other languages, and has not been proved to be of greater antiquity than the biconsonantalism preserved in various Semitic nouns and even verbs. The guttural and emphatic consonants, which are sometimes presented as typical of Semitic, are also found elsewhere, for example in the Cushitic languages. Parataxis, a characteristic of earlier stages of the Semitic languages, has lost its dominant rôle in a number of modern Semitic languages, and cannot therefore be regarded as a definite criterion.

Ullendorff's criticisms are offset by his positive suggestions. The Hamito-Semitic languages should be regarded as a single whole, in which the sharing of major linguistic features enables statements not merely of affinity among the languages but of 'genetic' relationship as well. Language identification and classification can be aided by, for example, examination of structural patterns, phonological incompatibilities, etc., cautious comparison of vocabulary, application of statistical analysis to various linguistic features, detection of isoglosses and bundles of isoglosses, and even investigation into whether speakers of Hamito-Semitic languages share a typical way of conceptualizing.

From the beginning of the tenth century, many Jewish scholars who lived in an Islamic cultural environment realized that comparison of Hebrew with other related languages, specifically Arabic and Aramaic, could assist in the understanding of the more obscure passages of the Bible and especially its *hapax legomena*. Thus began the study of Comparative Semitics, in which for various reasons Hebrew initially had a dominant rôle, but which was later to develop a more scientifically philological character.

In the Christian world, the polyglot Bibles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as well as multilingual dictionaries like E. Castell's *Lexicon Heptaglotton* laid the foundations of

comparative study, which was spurred on in the eighteenth century by the Dutchman A. Schultens.

In the nineteenth century, Comparative Semitics reached a peak with the important works of F.H.W. Gesenius, E. Renan, T. Nöldeke, A. Dillmann, C. Brockelmann, and others. This was the same period that saw the advance of Comparative Linguistics in general and the discovery of new Semitic languages thanks to archaeology and the laborious process of decipherment. Thus, due in large part to their efforts, it would nowadays be unthinkable to study any one of these languages without regard to the perspective offered by comparison with the structure and development of the rest.[10]

The present century witnessed the emergence of many famous Semitists, including most notably G. Bergsträsser, M. Cohen, W.F. Albright, G.R. Driver, and H.J. Polotsky, to whom we shall be referring later, as well as a number of outstanding scholars who are still alive today.[11]

1.2 *The Semitic languages*

Although interest in the Semitic languages started off as strictly linguistic, many investigators, including some of the best, have ventured into the fields of ethnic origins, anthropology, or culture, including religion. Thus, various modern scholars have argued that the linguistic unity of the different members of the Semitic family is explicable only as the result of a common origin.[12] According to them, there is sufficient evidence – for example, common geographical habitat and unity of language, history, and

[10] See Brockelmann 1944; Polotsky 1964; Hospers 1966; Ullendorff 1961; 1970. There is a bibliography in Hospers 1973, 365ff.

[11] See Hospers 1966; Sáenz-Badillos 1975.

[12] This has been defended by, for example, S. Moscati in numerous works, listed in the Bibliography. His view is shared by writers like E. Renan, G. Levi della Vida, W.R. Smith, and E. Nielsen.

culture – to regard speakers of the various Semitic languages as comprising a single people and perhaps even embodying a particular racial type.

Without entering too deeply into argument about these theories, we do not think it possible to progress beyond mere hypothesis in such matters, given that they refer to historically inaccessible times. And whether or not it is correct, this image of a Semitic people speaking the same language and living in the same culture is not the only possible one. Historical data can only take us back to a stage in which there is already more diversity than unity, with distinct peoples across a wide area speaking languages which have certain elements in common, sharing some aspects of culture, but also undergoing a number of independent developments as well.

Approaching the issue from a would-be 'historical' perspective, the ancient Semites' homeland or point of origin has long been debated. The plains of Central Asia, Mesopotamia, Syria-Palestine, North Africa, and finally and most commonly, Arabia, have all received support in this kind of study.[13] A quite widespread view would identify the ancient Semites with the nomads of the Arabian desert – from here there would have been a number of migrations towards the periphery, with various groups gradually settling in neighbouring cultivatable lands. Some experts have claimed that groups of Semites had established themselves in the area of Syria before the third millennium BCE.[14] And given the notion of Hamito-Semitic unity, it is hardly surprising that various scholars have argued that the first speakers of Semitic came from the north of Africa, and that they then could have settled in a single place or immediately spread out across the Near East.[15]

The difficulties associated with this historical problem have left their mark on strictly linguistic issues – supporters of the 'historical' approach have to assume the existence of a series of

[13] The different theories are listed in Hadas-Lebel 1981, 10f.

[14] See R. Meyer 1966–72, I, 13f.

[15] See Rabin 1982, 339f. The thesis of a possible African origin had already been formulated by T. Nöldeke (1899, 11).

proto-languages (Proto-Northwest Semitic, etc.), for which we have no documentation at all, while attempting to draw up a precise 'family tree' of the Semitic languages. In contrast, a more sober and objective approach to the comparative data offers an image of distinct Semitic languages sharing a range of features.

The diversity of the Semitic languages is especially problematic for supporters of the 'historical' theory, and has led to various versions of the hypothesis, widespread for several decades now, that successive waves ('Invasionswellen') of Semites proceeded from the Arabian desert to the surrounding territories, imposing their particular dialects in these places. Thus, between 2000 and 1700 BCE there would have been an Amorite (early West Semitic) wave, and between 1400 and 1900 an Aramaean (late West Semitic) wave; finally, in the eighth century CE, there was an Arab wave.[16] The historical basis for the first two 'invasions' is not as clear as that of the last one, leading some authors,[17] in more recent studies, to develop a theory of 'infiltration' which is less rigid than the 'wave' theory.

Even if it is clear that the migration of Semitic-speaking groups did play a part in spreading the various languages, it is difficult to account in this way for the origins of the substantial differences that can exist between one Semitic language and another. As emphasized some time ago,[18] there are no clearly defined boundaries between the languages of the different 'waves' and no inherited features shared between distant areas, which we should expect if the 'wave' theory were correct.

The actual situation is better explained by reference to, for example, dialect geography, according to which the spread of linguistic features generally moves from the centre outward towards the margins, resulting in clear differences between the dialects of one zone and another as well as clear and consistent isoglosses. Thus, for example, when a feature which is not the

[16] See R. Meyer 1966–72, I, 14f.
[17] S. Moscati and others.
[18] See Rabin 1963, 106.

result of internal development within the language is found in areas far apart from one another, it should be regarded as a preserved common, primitive, element, whereas novel linguistic features have succeeded in diffusing themselves in the territory between such areas.

Using this method we can distinguish a central zone in the Semitic area, namely the Arabian peninsula, and two peripheral regions, first, from Palestine to Mesopotamia including Ugarit, and second, Ethiopia. In the northern periphery, circumstances led to major cultural development which turned the area into the least conservative zone and the most important centre of innovations. In this way, the divisions among the Semitic languages are explicable in terms of diffusion of such innovations within the region from a conglomeration of homogeneous dialects, geographically located from the beginning in the same situation as that in which they are historically attested. Isoglosses and bundles of isoglosses separate some Semitic languages from others, while other equally important isoglosses pass through the various language groups.

However, the 'wave' theory has recently been defended less controversially,[19] not by assuming migration of ethnic groups but by reference to the existence of *linguae francae*, like Akkadian in the second millennium BCE or Aramaic in the first, which would have fostered cultural contacts and parallel developments in different Semitic dialects. Phenomena regarded by proponents of dialect geography as evidence for the spread of innovations can also be explained by contacts among languages and parallel developments.

The classification of the Semitic languages has been the object of long debate and continuous revision because of new discoveries. The traditional view which distinguished five principal languages, Akkadian, Canaanite, Aramaic, Arabic, and Ethiopic, is clearly inadequate today. And if, thanks to dialect geography or a highly

[19] See Blau 1978.

modified version of the 'wave' theory, we can explain why Akkadian and Ethiopic or Arabic and Ugaritic share certain features, there remain problems concerning the grouping and classification of dialects about which there is still no basic agreement.

A common view is that the first division within the Semitic area happened before 3000 BCE, separating Northeast Semitic (Akkadian) from the rest. It seems likely that before 2000 BCE West Semitic had already split into two branches, Northern and Southern. At the end of the second millennium the Canaanite and Aramaic groups emerged within Northwest Semitic. In the south, differences developed among Arabic (North Arabian), South Arabian, and Ethiopic. Each one of these branches eventually evolved into the languages and dialects we know today.

C. Rabin, from the viewpoint of dialect geography, divides the Semitic languages into two marginal areas, Northern and Southern, and a Central area stretching from the Mediterranean to Arabia.[20] I.M. Diakonoff prefers to speak of the Northern Peripheral (Akkadian) and Northern Central (Northwest Semitic) zones as distinct from the Southern Central (Arabic) and Southern Peripheral (South Arabian and Ethiopic) zones.[21]

However, there remain many problems within each of these areas. In Northwest Semitic, for example, the correct identification and characterization of the language of Ebla, which was only discovered in 1974, has still not been properly resolved. One of its discoverers, G. Pettinato, proposed that Eblaite be regarded as a third group within Northwest Semitic.[22] But there have also been many other suggestions – a notable one argues for the relative independence of Eblaite from East and Northwest Semitic, labelling it as Northeast, or simply Northern, Semitic.[23]

[20] See Rabin 1963, 107.
[21] See Diakonoff 1965, 11f.
[22] See Pettinato 1975.
[23] See, for example, Hecker 1982, 8. A sign of growing interest aroused in the language of Ebla are the international congresses dedicated to it, in which very diverse opinions have been expressed – see Cagni 1981; 1984; Fronzaroli 1984. I.M. Diakonoff (1990) suggests that Eblaite was a part of the Common Proto-Semitic dialect continuum, positioned between East and West Semitic. C.H. Gordon (1990) calls it a 'border language'.

Furthermore, the traditional distinction between Canaanite and Aramaic dialects is in crisis. The evidence of languages like Amorite, Ugaritic, Ya'udic, Nabataean, and Palmyrene have also considerably disrupted earlier classifications.[24]

Our knowledge of Amorite, attested solely in proper names which appear on cuneiform tablets and which display features of Northwest Semitic, is far from adequate, and recent studies have complicated the issue further by suggesting that languages as far apart as, for example, Ya'udic, the Aramaic dialects, Hebrew, Phoenician, and North Arabian, may be regarded as dialects of Amorite.[25]

The discovery of Ugaritic in 1929 also required a revision of traditional theories. In the first years following its decipherment, C. Virolleaud, Z.S. Harris, C.H. Gordon, and others placed it among the Canaanite dialects.[26] M. Cohen assigned it an intermediate position between West and East Semitic,[27] N.H. Ṭur-Sinai concluded that it was a branch of South Semitic,[28] and A. Goetze, J. Cantineau, and, in later studies, C.H. Gordon, emphasized Ugaritic's special characteristics and advocated its autonomy.[29] M.J. Dahood insisted in numerous works on a close relationship with Hebrew.[30] Nowadays Ugaritic is regarded as a Northwest Semitic language, but it is a matter of debate as to whether it should be considered as a special subgroup having a more or less close relationship with Eblaite and forming a type of 'North Semitic', or whether it should be placed within the

[24] See, for example, Moscati 1956; Friedrich 1965; Ginsberg 1970.
[25] Following G. Garbini (1972, 43f.), who also proposes a new classification of the Semitic languages: (1) Canaanite, (2) Akkadian, (3) the Amorite group, (4) South Arabian, (5) Ethiopic (155ff.). See von Soden 1960.
[26] See Virolleaud 1931; Harris 1939, 97ff.; Gordon 1940a, 88.
[27] See M. Cohen 1952, 104ff.
[28] See Ṭur-Sinai 1951–52.
[29] See Goetze 1941; Cantineau 1932–40; 1950; Gordon 1947a, etc.
[30] See Dahood 1959, etc.

Canaanite group, as suggested by, for example, H.L. Ginsberg,[31] who attempted to class it with Phoenician in contrast to the subgroup formed by Hebrew and Moabite.

The differences between Aramaic on the one hand and the Canaanite group and Ugaritic on the other seem to have gained general acceptance nowadays. However, the distinction between Aramaic and Canaanite is not valid before the end of the second millennium, as in the earliest stage of Northwest Semitic there were still no fundamental differences between the two groups.[32] Moreover, the traditional unity of the Aramaic dialects has been threatened by attempts to include Ya'udic, attested in the north of Syria from at least the end of the second millennium BCE, with archaic features similar to those of the Canaanite dialects.[33] Also in connexion with the Aramaic group, there is debate about the nature of the Palmyrene and Nabataean dialects, which use an Aramaic script and which are usually included within the Aramaic group, but which in the opinion of some experts might really be dialects of Arabic.[34]

The validity of the Southern Semitic group is still often disputed. Certain scholars have claimed, somewhat uncovincingly,[35] that Arabic is genetically related to Canaanite, Ugaritic and Aramaic,[36] while others believe that South Arabian and Ethiopic have special ties with Northeast Semitic.[37]

In the northeast, Old Akkadian (*c.* 2800–1950 BCE) was replaced by the Babylonian and Assyrian dialects in the second millennium; Akkadian spread over a vast area, until finally conceding entirely to Aramaic around the sixth century BCE. The influence of its

[31] 1970, 105.
[32] See Garbini 1960, 9ff.; Moscati 1969, 4ff.
[33] See Dion 1974.
[34] See Hecker 1982, 9.
[35] See Blau 1978, 31ff.
[36] R. Hetzron (1974, 191) proposes a new Central Semitic group which would include Arabic, Canaanite, and Aramaic, in contrast to a Southern Semitic group comprising South Arabian and Ethiopic.
[37] See Hetzron 1974, 183f.

Sumerian substratum is obvious not only in the use of a cuneiform system of writing, but also in the weakness of the laryngeal and pharyngeal consonants in Akkadian. In contrast to the other Semitic languages, Akkadian does not use as a verbal form the pattern *qatala*, known throughout the western area, or the internal passive pattern *qutila*.[38]. It is not certain whether its second prefix-conjugation of the verb, *iparras* (= *yaqattal*), represents a special new formation, or whether, as many specialists believe, it is a Proto-Semitic or even Hamito-Semitic form.[39] The spread of Akkadian as the language of administration throughout the Near East led to contacts with Indo-European languages and also facilitated the borrowing of hundreds of its lexical items by languages like Hebrew.

The results of recent investigations into Eblaite are still not sufficiently clear to permit an adequate classification. The almost 15,000 tablets that were uncovered in 1974–1975 were written between 2500 and 2300 BCE and contain numerous proper names of a Northwest Semitic type along with many words and phrases in a language that is still the object of much debate.[40]

Amorite, again a language under dispute, is attested in Syria and Mesopotamia between 2250 and 1000 BCE, and is known mainly because of the proper names and some common nouns found in the tablets from Mari and other places nearby. Despite the many difficulties connected with Amorite, the common view is that it is the oldest Northwest Semitic language yet discovered.

Contrary to the Northeast variety, West Semitic presents as a characteristic innovation the use of *qatala* as a verbal form; regarding the form *yaqtulu*, opinions are divided, with the majority

[38] See Blau 1978, 25.
[39] See von Soden 1952, 126ff., and, on this specific problem, Polotsky 1964, 110f.
[40] See Pettinato 1975. Studies about Ebla have since multiplied. Apart from the works cited in note 23, see, for example: Pettinato 1981; Dahood 1982; H.-P. Müller 1984, etc. The Missione Archeologica Italiana in Syria has begun to publish the series *Archivi reali di Ebla: testi*, of which volumes I (Archi 1985), II (Edzard 1981), III (Archi and Biga 1982), and V (Edzard 1984) have appeared. See also Beld, Hallo, and Michalowski 1984; Gordon, Rendsburg, and Winter 1990. There is a regularly appearing journal dedicated to Ebla.

of Semitists viewing it as Proto-Semitic or Hamito-Semitic, while others claim that it is a western innovation.[41]

Among the peculiarities of the Northwest Semitic languages as a whole, which we shall examine in greater detail in Chapter 2, particularly noteworthy is the change of initial *w* to *y*, which cannot very easily be explained on phonetic grounds, as well as the complete assimilation of unvocalized *nun* to the following consonant (although this feature is not unique to the Northwest area). Some experts would also include the development of 'segolate' vocalization of certain monosyllabic nouns.[42]

Arabic clearly shares certain features with Northwest Semitic, like the verbal form *yaqtulu*, suffix-conjugation suffixes in *-t* (as opposed to *-k* in Southern Semitic), the development *-at* > *-ah* in the feminine noun suffix (which did not occur in, for example, Ugaritic or Phoenician), the interrogative *mah*, etc. However, it does not appear that Arabic should be included in the same 'Central' group to which Canaanite and Aramaic belong,[43] given that such similarities might be due to parallel development, while on the other hand features shared by Arabic with other languages of the Southern group are much more decisive – notable among these are the broken plurals[44] and the special development of the verbal form *qatala*, which are innovations in morphology that distinguish this group from other branches of Semitic. It has been accepted for some time that South Arabian and Ethiopic should be regarded as a single unit distinct from Arabic.[45]

Within the Southern area, the earliest South Arabian inscriptions are usually dated between the eighth and fifth centuries BCE.[46] Ancient dialects include Sabaean, Minaean, and Ḥaḍrami, which

41 See Blau 1978, 27ff., with its bibliography on this subject.
42 See Ginsberg 1970, 103.
43 As suggested in Hetzron 1974, 191.
44 See Blau 1978, 29f.
45 See, for example, Cantineau 1932.
46 See Hecker 1982, 9f.

disappeared around 1000 CE. The present-day languages of Meḥri, Shḥawri, etc. represent a branch of the same language family.

The coastlands of East Africa were colonized from South Arabia, leading to the development of Ethiopic dialects like Ge'ez (third to twelfth centuries CE), from which, in the north, Tigriña and Tigre are descended; in the south we should note Amharic (first attested in the fourteenth century CE) as well as other dialects like Harari and Gurage, the origins of which are uncertain.[47]

To the north, the North Arabian inscriptions from Thamud, Liḥyan, etc., date from between the fifth century BCE and the fifth century CE, with Classical Arabic appearing relatively late – the inscription of King Mar'alqais, found south of Damascus and dated at 328 CE, is usually said to be the first document in Arabic.[48] Of the various dialects of the Arabian peninsula, Classical Arabic arose as a potential *lingua franca* halfway through the first millennium CE, progressing from its earliest literary manifestations in the pre-Islamic poetry of the sixth century CE and especially in the Koran to extend its dominion in spectacular fashion with the conquests of the Caliphate, and continuing alive and active in a great variety of dialects until the present day.

1.3 *Common or Proto-Semitic*

Consistent with the idea that the Semitic peoples have a single ethnic origin, the tendency has been to regard Common Semitic as a proto-language with particular characteristics which can be reconstructed, on the basis of features held to be primitive in the various historically-documented Semitic languages.[49]

Nowadays, however, the validity of the family-tree image and the idea often associated with this that one or more languages can

47 An important attempt at genealogical classification, especially of the Ethiopic languages, is Hetzron 1974.
48 See Hecker 1982; Altheim and Stiel 1965, 313ff., 357ff.
49 See, for example, Moscati 1960.

'give birth' to another tend to be regarded with suspicion as they go beyond the evidence of the extant linguistic data. Various attempts to reconstruct this alleged common language have not met with scholarly acceptance.[50]

If, nonetheless, the term 'Proto-Semitic' is still to be used, it simply refers to the totality of common features – isoglosses – exhibited by the historically-observable Semitic languages, which might have been shared by this group of dialects at its earliest period.[51] Thus, 'Proto-Semitic' is more a postulate or linguistic convention than an actual ancient language spoken by a recognizable group.

The ancient Semitic languages have no common system of writing, and the sorts of writing that exist do not correspond exactly with the classification of the Semitic languages by other criteria. In the northeast, Akkadian adopted cuneiform from the non-Semitic Sumerians, and this was to have a major influence on the language. In the northwest and south a new system evolved, later to be passed on to Greek, Latin, and other Indo-European languages. During the second millennium BCE, however, certain languages in the northwest still used the Akkadian writing system or a cuneiform alphabet, like the one at Ugarit.

According to J. Naveh,[52] the Semitic alphabets originated with Proto-Canaanite (eighteenth to seventeenth centuries BCE), from which there was derived around 1300 BCE the Proto-Arabic script, the ancestor of the systems used in the South Arabian and Ethiopic scripts. Phoenician writing is a continuation of the Proto-Canaanite system, and from these developed the Palaeo-Hebrew script (*c.* 800 BCE) and the Aramaic script (*c.* 700 BCE), which was adopted by Hebrew after the Babylonian exile. Around 200 BCE there emerged

[50] See R. Meyer 1966–72, I, 17, etc., and Garbini 1972, 162f.: 'una lingua comune alla base del semitico, e ancora più alla base del semitico-camitico, mi sembra che sia assolutamente da escludere.'
[51] See Ullendorff 1961; 1970; Moscati 1969, 15.
[52] 1982, 9ff.

a variety of Aramaic script known as Nabataean, from which the system used by Arabic would later develop.

These genuinely Semitic writing systems are historically later than Mesopotamian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphics, and more or less contemporary with Hittite and Cretan pictographic writing. A further system is attested in the inscriptions from Byblos and Balu'ah, both in the Syria-Palestine region, which probably date from the second millennium BCE. Although these texts have still not been deciphered, they seem to represent an attempt at a syllabic script that was later abandoned.[53]

The Proto-Canaanite pictographic texts from Shechem, Gezer, and Lachish (seventeenth to sixteenth centuries BCE), like the Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions from Serabit el-Khadem (*c.* 1500 BCE), again pictographic, are the oldest examples of alphabetic writing in the Northwest Semitic area. The signs used are often acrophonic, and it is clear that the inventors were acquainted with Egyptian hieroglyphic texts. In its origins, the system was exclusively consonantal, and seems to have employed twenty-seven different characters. The Ugaritic alphabet from around the fourteenth century BCE uses thirty characters – at Ugarit, and to a lesser extent at other sites in Palestine, the techniques of cuneiform writing have been adapted to an alphabetic principle.

Generally, a writing system was adapted to the phonemics of a particular language – in this respect, it is noteworthy that the system employed by Phoenician, the ancestor of the Hebrew and Aramaic scripts, had by the twelfth century BCE already dropped five characters, reflecting the fact that Phoenician has just twenty-two consonantal phonemes.[54]

Although vowels are indicated in the cuneiform syllabaries, they are lacking from the alphabetic scripts of the northwest and south. Ugaritic has three different characters to represent *alef* with the vowels *a*, *i*, and *u*. Other alphabets gradually introduced a system

[53] See Naveh 1982, 21f.
[54] See Naveh 1982, 31ff.

of *matres lectionis* to indicate vocalization, at first only at the end of a word, later on within the word as well. The introduction of special vowel signs came much later, employing a wide range of systems, frequently of a very limited character.

The Proto-Semitic phonological system contains perhaps twenty-nine consonantal phonemes,[55] which despite certain modifications have been conserved with great fidelity in languages like Arabic.

According to their point of articulation, the Proto-Semitic consonants can be bilabial (/p b m/), high alveolar, that is, interdental or predorsal (/t̲ d̲ ṯ ḏ/), low alveolar or dental (/t d ṭ/), liquid (/r l n/), sibilant (/s z ṣ/),[56] prepalatal (/š/), lateralized (/ś/), dorsopalatal or mediodorsal (/k g q/), velar or postdorsal (/ḫ ġ/), pharyngeal (/ḥ ʿ/), or laryngeal (/ʾ h/). There are also the semiconsonants /w/ and /y/.

According to manner of articulation, seven pairs are distinguished as voiced : voiceless – /p/ : /b/, /t̲/ : /d̲/, /t/ : /d/, /s/ : /z/, /k/ : /g/, /ḫ/ : /ġ/, /ḥ/ : /ʿ/. Other pairs exhibit the contrast normal : emphatic – /t/ : /ṭ/, /t̲/ : /ṯ/, /s/ : /ṣ/, /k/ : /q/. The exact nature of the emphatic phonemes is, however, a matter of debate. It is unclear whether they represent glottal occlusion as in Ethiopic or, instead, velarization as in Arabic, although the sort of glottal ejective found in Ethiopic seems to be older.[57] In diagrammatic representation, part of the system is occasionally displayed as a triangular pyramid, in accordance with the opposition voiceless : voiced : emphatic.[58]

According to their degree of aperture, the Proto-Semitic consonants can be plosive (/p b t d ṭ k q g ʾ/), fricative (/t̲ d̲ ṯ s z ṣ š ḫ ġ ḥ h/), lateral (/l/) or lateralized (/ḏ ś/), vibrant (/r/), or nasal (/m n/).

[55] The most important study of the Semitic consonantal system must be that of J. Cantineau (1951), which was followed by the works of A. Martinet (1953) and S. Moscati (1954).

[56] Regarding the affricate realization of *ṣade* in the Semitic languages, see the important work by R.C. Steiner (1982). On the sibilants in general there is a large bibliography. See Faber 1984 and the references there.

[57] See Moscati 1969, 23f.

[58] Thus, Cantineau 1951, although A. Martinet disagreed with this model.

THE PROTO-SEMITIC CONSONANTAL PHONEMES

Point of articulation	Manner of articulation Voiceless	Voiced	Emphatic	Degree of aperture
Bilabial	p	b		Plosive
		m		Nasal
Interdental	t̲	d̲	ṯ	Fricative
			ḏ	Lateralized
Dental	t	d	ṭ	Plosive
	s	z	ṣ	Fricative
		l		Lateral
	ś			Lateralized
		r		Vibrant
		n		Nasal
Prepalatal	š			Fricative
Dorsopalatal	k	g	q	Plosive
Velar	ḫ	ġ		Fricative
Pharyngeal	ḥ	ʿ		Fricative
Laryngeal	ʾ			Plosive
		h		Fricative

Proto-Semitic also possessed two semiconsonantal (or semivocalic) constrictive phonemes, bilabial /w/ and prepalatal /y/, which underwent a number of changes in the various languages. Of particular significance is the development of /w/ to /y/ in initial position in the northwest – thus, Akkadian, Arabic, Ethiopic *wld*; Ugaritic, Hebrew, Aramaic *yld*.

The Proto-Semitic vowel phonemes are /a/ (open, velar), /i/ (closed, front palatal), and /u/ (closed, back velar), each of which has short and long forms.

From a diachronic perspective, among the more notable changes in the Proto-Semitic consonantal phonemes are the replacement of the voiceless bilabial plosive /p/ by the fricative /f/ in the south and, in the northwest, the spirantization of the series /b g d k p t/ and weakening of the pharnygeals and laryngeals, from the second half of the first millennium BCE. It is also clear that the interdentals /ṯ ḏ ṱ ḍ/ underwent a particularly large number of modifications, especially from the first millennium BCE – thus, in Hebrew /ṯ/ shifts to /š/ (cf. Ugaritic *ṯr*, Hebrew *šor*), /ḏ/ to /z/ (Ugaritic *ʾḫḏ*, Hebrew *ʾḥz*), /ṱ/ to /ṣ/ (Ugaritic *ṱl*, Hebrew *ṣel*), and, similarly, /ḍ/ shifts to /ṣ/ (South Arabian *ʾrḍ*, Hebrew *ʾereṣ*). The sibilants, which number at least five distinct phonemes (a sixth has been proposed),[59] have also evolved in an odd way – this is particularly true of /s/, /ś/, and /š/, in respect of which, in most of the languages, there has been a reduction from a ternary to a binary system of contrasts, with the neutralized contrast varying from one language to another (cf. Akkadian *ešir*, Hebrew *ʾeśer*; Hebrew *ḥameš*, Arabic *ḫams*).[60] The velars also underwent significant changes, especially in Hebrew and Aramaic, where the contrast with the pharyngeals was neutralized (Akkadian *aḫu*, Hebrew *ʾaḥ*; Ugaritic *ġlm*, Hebrew *ʿelem*).

[59] See Goetze 1958.
[60] See Rabin 1963, 107f.

In morphology, the (synchronic) study of the compatibility of consonants within the Semitic triconsonantal root has been of particular significance, and has been conducted with great precision in various modern works.[61] Among the conclusions are the following: identical or homorganic consonants do not appear in first and second positions; even though identical consonants can appear there, homorganic consonants do not appear in second and third positions (although this rule is not as strictly followed as the preceding one); similarly, with regard to positions one and three, homorganic consonants are not so rigorously excluded.

Any word from a Semitic language can be completely defined in terms of root and pattern.[62] Although in their historically-documented forms, the Semitic languages generally use triliteral morphological roots, various studies have stressed the importance of biliteralism in Proto-Semitic, including its Hamito-Semitic phase.[63] The existence of biliteral roots, especially in certain classes of nouns and in the 'weak' verbs, and of semantic connexions which hold among various triliteral roots that have two radicals in common is now regarded as clear proof of the importance of biconsonantalism in the earlier stages of Semitic, although there is perhaps insufficient evidence to claim that all Hamito-Semitic roots were originally biconsonantal, with the Semitic languages evolving later in the direction of triconsonantalism.

In contrast to the traditional idea that the consonants are the basic and most typical elements of the Semitic root and have a unique position in the expression of meaning, several recent works have emphasized the considerable importance of the vowels. J. Kuryłowicz has tried to apply to the Semitic languages the same methods that have produced excellent results in connexion with

[61] See J.H. Greenberg 1950. Although this study is based mainly on the analysis of some 4,000 Arabic roots, its conclusions apply equally to Proto-Semitic, at least in respect of verb morphemes. See the notes and the additional material of J. Kuryłowicz (1972, 9ff.).
[62] As emphasized in Cantineau 1949.
[63] See Moscati 1947, Botterweck 1952, and the refinements of Kuryłowicz 1972, 6ff.

the Indo-European language family,[64] attempting to explain the Semitic verbal system as a function of apophony. In a similar way, P. Fronzaroli has stressed the rôle of the vowels in Proto-Semitic, suggesting that they might be present in the lexeme, as well as having morphological and semantic functions.[65]

A detailed study of internal inflexion in the Semitic languages was conducted by K. Petráček.[66] Using Prague School methods, he paid special attention to the origin and development of infixed grammatical morphemes in noun and verb in the different Semitic languages. In his discussion of the noun, particular consideration is given to the internal or 'broken' plurals which have been much debated in recent years and for which many explanations exist:[67] singular collective (C. Brockelmann and others), abstract (T. Nöldeke), a function of apophony (J. Kuryłowicz), etc. A. Murtonen provides a detailed analysis of these plurals and the singular forms with which they are associated. Petráček's view was that in the plural two independent lexical units are combined, one singular, the other collective or abstract, and between these two a formal relationship is established of such stability that it eventually develops into a paradigm, with the formal relationship becoming a morphological marker of plurality. Thus emerged a formal, more or less mechanical, system of marking the plural in which plural forms which were originally purely lexical (collectives) have evolved into the basis for regular, morphological, marking of the plural.

F. Corriente questioned whether this type of construction occurs outside South Semitic, as similar instances from other areas lack the characteristic apophony of the South Semitic broken plurals. Nonetheless, he argued for the antiquity of the phenomenon and its possible Hamito-Semitic origin. Synchronically, he regarded the broken plurals as exemplifying apophony, although diachronically

64 See Kuryłowicz 1957–58; 1972, 32ff.
65 See Fronzaroli 1963.
66 1960–1964.
67 See especially Murtonen 1964 and Corriente 1971.

they represent a type of external inflection which only appears to be internal.

The case endings have also given rise to a variety of arguments. Many specialists accept that Proto-Semitic has a declension system of sorts, using cases parallel to those of Indo-European: nominative (sg. *-u*, pl. *-ū*, du. *-ā*), genitive (sg. *-i*, pl. *-ī*, du. *-ay*), accusative (sg. *-a*, pl. *-ī*, du. *-ay*).[68] However, C. Rabin is dubious of this widespread view and approaches the function of these endings in a different way.[69] The main purpose, he believes, is not the same as that of the Indo-European case endings, but rather reflects a peculiarly Semitic system of 'states' (absolute, emphatic, predicative, governed).

A striking phenomenon of a different kind is the similar development within many different Semitic languages, albeit by various routes and at different times, of the feminine ending *-at*, so that the *-t* is dropped in the absolute state but retained in the construct. However, J. Blau has demonstrated that in the various languages this process reflects parallel developments from a very similar basic structure.[70]

The Semitic verb remains controversial, with the problems raised by H.P. Bauer's classic 1910 study still unresolved. According to Bauer, the oldest form of the verb is the imperfect, which does not indicate 'subjective' or 'objective' time but rather 'every possible moment', since it is completely atemporal. The 'apocopated' form *yaqtul* is actually the more original, being lengthened later to *yaqtulu*.

In contrast to Bauer's defence of the old idea that the Semitic tenses refer to points in time, S.R. Driver, partly on the basis of Indo-European studies, such as G. Curtius's grammar of Greek, had earlier argued for an 'aspectual' theory of tenses in Hebrew.[71]

68 See Moscati 1969, 94ff.
69 See Rabin 1969.
70 See Blau 1980.
71 See S.R. Driver 1892.

For C. Brockelmann,[72] the 'tenses' are subjective aspects whereby a speaker refers to a process as having occurred (perfect) or as in the process of unfolding (cursive, imperfect). F. Rundgren,[73] while warning of the danger of employing the concept of 'aspects', drawn from a very different linguistic context, accepts that in the Semitic verb there are two aspects, stative/fientive or cursive/constative, which can only be understood in relationship to one another.

Nowadays, it is generally accepted that the verb form *qatala* (and its variants *qatila*, *qatula*) existed in Proto-Semitic, although in the light of Akkadian this is thought to have originally been a nominal form with suffixes; in West Semitic it developed into a truly verbal form which expressed a state or a condition that had been brought to completion. The number of prefix-conjugations in existence at this stage is a matter of debate – while some argue for a single conjugation, of the type *yaqtulu*, which would have indicated an action without specifying whether or not it had been completed (and which became specialized in West Semitic to express incomplete action in particular), others claim a second prefix-conjugation *yaqattal*, a durative present corresponding to the Akkadian *iparras* and attested as well, according to them, in other West Semitic dialects.[74] It is very likely that these conjugations would have expressed through their affixes different moods of the verb (indicative, subjunctive, jussive, energic), as seems to be indicated by Arabic on the one hand and Ugaritic on the other.[75]

[72] 1951.
[73] 1963.
[74] See Goetze 1938, Rössler 1961; R. Meyer 1966–72; Friedrich and Röllig 1970; Blau 1978. An opposing view is taken in Goshen-Gottstein 1969 and T.L. Fenton 1970.
[75] See Moscati *et al* 1969, 134f.

1.4 *The Hamito-Semitic or Afro-Asiatic group*

The Semitic languages are not an isolated language family, but are closely related to other groups of languages found throughout northern Africa. These African language families differ not only from the Semitic group, but from one another as well. The idea of a possible 'family relationship' among Semitic and African languages appeared in the eighteenth century,[76] and pioneering studies were conducted by, for example, Volney and the Spanish Jesuit Hervás y Panduro. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries this idea gradually gained strength,[77] eventually being developed in a fully scientific fashion.

The publication of M. Cohen's classic 1947 study, *Essai comparatif sur le vocabulaire et la phonétique du chamito-sémitique*, opened a new era in the comparative study of the Hamito-Semitic languages, the existence of which as a definite language community is now virtually beyond doubt. The name Hamito-Semitic, derived from the Bible, is deliberately vague. Its greatest disadvantage is that it suggests the existence of two large groups of languages, Semitic and Hamitic, which is inappropriate given that there are many groups within Hamitic itself. Apart from other names which have not fared any better,[78] the designation that today enjoys general acceptance is 'Afro-Asiatic', which was first proposed by J.H. Greenberg[79] and is now widely used in the English-speaking world.[80]

[76] A detailed bibliography can be found in M. Cohen 1947.
[77] Thanks to the sometimes controversial studies of specialists like T. Benfey, J.C. Adelung and J.S. Vater, U.F. Kopp, M.G. Schwartze, T.N. Newman, E. Renan, J.G. Müller, M. Schultze, F. Müller, F. Praetorius, H. Zimmern, T. Nöldeke, and, in the twentieth century, C. Brockelmann, H. Möller, De L. O'Leary, W. Schmidt, J. Pedersen, and especially the members of the Hamito-Semitic linguistic groups founded in Paris (1931) and Leningrad (1934).
[78] Such as 'Eritrean' proposed by M.A. Bryan (1947) and A.N. Tucker (1967).
[79] 1952.
[80] See, for example, Hodge 1970.

The most representative Hamitic groups are Egypto-Coptic (documented from the fourth millennium BCE), Libyco-Berber (with an inscription from the second century CE),[81] Cushitic (from East Africa), and, according to some, Chadic.[82] The problems of classification of the almost 200 different languages which make up this *phylum* have been examined in important studies by J.H. Greenberg, who used statistical methods, A.N. Tucker, and, in particular, I.M. Diakonoff.[83]

Comparative study raises many difficult issues mainly because of the vast differences in time among the various languages, almost 6,000 years in some instances, and because many African languages were not properly documented until the last or even the present century. In addition, comparative methods themselves, based primarily on morphology, phonetics, and vocabulary, are under constant review.[84] Interference arising from contact between different groups, like Cushitic and Semitic in Ethiopia, makes this kind of study even more complicated.

In the field of phonology, there has been some agreement since the appearance of Cohen's work that the Hamito-Semitic system of consonant and vowel phonemes differs little from that proposed for Proto-Semitic, although I.M. Diakonoff has suggested the existence of two new phonemes, a glottalized voiceless bilabial, /p'/, and a further sibilant, /s̲/.[85]

In comparative morphology, special attention has been given to the Hamito-Semitic root, verb, noun, and pronoun,[86] all of which

[81] Included in this group is Guanche, spoken in the Canary Islands until the seventeenth century.

[82] See D. Cohen 1968.

[83] See J.H. Greenberg 1952; Diakonoff 1965; Tucker 1967. A good description of the development of the issue from its beginnings can be found in Hodge 1970.

[84] See, for example, von Soden 1965. Not so long ago, linguists like H. Möller and V. Christian were still concerned with the problem of where and when the putative ancestors of the Hamito-Semites settled after their various migratory movements (cf. A. Cuny 1946), although this kind of issue is now regarded as outdated.

[85] See Diakonoff 1965; see as well D. Cohen's general study (1968, 1300ff.) of Hamito-Semitic phonology.

[86] See Hodge 1970, 243ff. Cf. D. Cohen 1968, 1307ff.

are still under discussion. However, despite differences in emphasis and presentation, it is generally accepted that a biconsonantal root predominated in the Hamito-Semitic languages, and it is also argued that there was at least one prefix-conjugation, and that there may have been a further conjugation with duplicated second radical. The existence of a suffix-conjugation, although defended by, for example, O. Rössler,[87] is regarded by others as very doubtful.[88]

Because of the greater difficulty involved, syntactic analysis has made much slower progress. Comparative lexicology continues to depend on the relevant material in Cohen, although there are also some more recent studies, especially on the relationship of Egyptian to the Semitic languages.[89]

The vitality of the Groupe Linguistique d'Études Chamito-Sémitiques in Paris, whose *Comptes rendues* continue to appear regularly, and the conferences devoted specifically to the field of Hamito-Semitic studies, are an indication of continuing scholarly interest and of the many tasks which still lie ahead.

1.5 *Hamito-Semitic and Indo-European*

Starting with the publications of H. Möller at the beginning of the twentieth century,[90] there have been a number of studies on the relationship of the Afro-Asiatic *phylum* and Indo-European, despite the problems associated with this kind of study. Although the lexical comparisons of Möller and M. Honnorat[91] did not seem particularly compelling, pioneering studies of comparative phonetics and morphology, such as those of A. Cuny,[92] have

[87] 1950.

[88] See D. Cohen 1968, 1307ff.; Hodge 1970, 247ff.

[89] For example, Lacau 1970.

[90] See, for example, Möller 1906; 1911.

[91] 1933.

[92] 1943; 1946.

helped clarify the relationship. However, as a result of assumptions about racial history then prevalent, Cuny, and other scholars like H. Pedersen and G.I. Ascoli, went beyond the evidence of shared linguistic features in developing the hypothesis of a proto-language which was the common ancestor of both Indo-European and Hamito-Semitic. Ascoli called this putative language 'Aryo-Semitic', whereas Pedersen and Cuny preferred 'Nostratic'. Other scholars, such as P. Meriggi, also came to support this idea, which, however, should not be regarded as well-founded.

In this type of analysis the methods used are of primary importance, and nowadays the approach of Möller and Cuny is rightly viewed with suspicion. But there are difficulties as well with the more recent analysis by S. Levin, who, basing himself primarily on vocalized texts, concluded that there are many common features among Hebrew, 'an aberrant Semitic language',[93] Greek, and Sanskrit. Other studies, like that of M. Fraenkel,[94] which follow in the path laid down by Möller, are excessively simplistic, limited to a rather crude, unscientific, comparison of vocabulary.

Much more acceptable is the work of M.L. Mayer,[95] who, without employing the image of a family tree, examined the zones of contact between the two language groups, drawing attention to Akkadian-Hittite and Ugaritic-Hittite isoglosses, Semitic loanwords in Greek, and so on. We agree with his conclusion that it is becoming ever more likely that in prehistoric times groups of Indo-European and Semitic languages co-existed or at least existed in close proximity to one another, and that perhaps, after the completion of the necessary investigations, it might be possible to speak not of a 'mother language' (in the sense intended by Ascoli, Möller, Pedersen, or Cuny), but of a range of isoglosses across the Indo-European and Semitic languages.

[93] S. Levin 1971, 704. The work is reviewed in von Soden 1974.
[94] 1970. See Sáenz-Badillos 1974.
[95] 1960.

Chapter 2

HEBREW, A NORTHWEST SEMITIC LANGUAGE

2.1 *The Northwest Semitic languages*

The geographical and historical facts of Hebrew place it within the Northwest Semitic group of languages. Recent archaeological and epigraphic discoveries have been of critical importance in increasing our knowledge about the linguistic geography of this group, although on occasions the scarcity of evidence still prohibits a precise evaluation of the characteristics and peculiarities of these languages or dialects and of the relationships they have with one another.[1]

As against the traditional classification of Northwest Semitic into two subgroups, Canaanite and Aramaic, the tendency nowadays is to accept the proposition of S. Moscati and G. Garbini that before the first millennium BCE one cannot speak of a contrast between Canaanite and Aramaic, but rather of a group of languages with various features in common.[2] Less disputable is the exclusion from Northwest Semitic of Eblaite, attested in the north roughly halfway through the third millennium BCE, as already noted in Chapter 1.

The end of the third millennium saw the arrival in the east of Amorite. This language was spoken by a nomadic group called in cuneiform texts *Amurru*,[3] who settled west of the Euphrates around Mari and used Akkadian in writing. A large number of proper names as well as some common nouns are virtually the sole

[1] A good recent study is Garr 1985.
[2] See Moscati 1956, etc.; Garbini 1960, 11f.
[3] On the meaning of the name, see Altman 1980.

Chapter 3

PRE-EXILIC HEBREW

3.1 *The historical unity and development of Hebrew*

Hebrew has a long history. It has persisted as a written language for more than 3,000 years. As a spoken language, it has had to survive in many different situations, following the complicated historical course of the Jewish people, which has spent more than half its existence in a bilingual setting, adapting to a wide range of cultural and linguistic environments. Such a history has left obvious and important marks on the language.

Nonetheless, from one perspective, especially if we concentrate on the written language, it is possible to speak of the historical unity of Hebrew throughout its existence. The language has remained substantially the same down the years, undergoing changes that have appreciably affected its vocabulary but not, on the whole, its essential morphological, phonological, or even syntactic structure. The truth of this statement even extends to the Hebrew spoken and written today, following a fascinating process of revival. The fundamental unity of Hebrew, both its language and its literature, is beyond doubt.

Not only have the basic structures of the language, its morphological system, and especially its verbal morphology, been preserved without major changes over the centuries, but it is also possible to claim that the vocabulary of the Bible has been the basis for all later periods, despite the numerous innovations of each era.[1]

Nonetheless, we cannot ignore the deep differences that also characterize each stage of the language, and the many factors that

[1] See especially Ben-Ḥayyim 1985.

have led historically to its diversification. It might be said that diversity and unity have been constant companions during the language's 3,000-year life. However, when attempts are made to establish a clear division of this history into different periods, it is difficult to reach a general consensus, as the criteria used can differ greatly.

We definitely have to take into consideration the main language spoken by a writer, be it Hebrew (during the centuries it survived both as a spoken and as a written language), Aramaic, Arabic, or the vernacular of the various peoples among whom the Jews lived in the diaspora.[2] We might also include, in addition to purely linguistic criteria, other socio-historical considerations which have had a substantial bearing on the various stages of the language, leading to distinctive 'consolidations of the language'.[3] There are also other factors that have left their mark on the language and most definitely have to be taken into account if an adequate classification of Hebrew in its various stages and traditions is to be achieved. These include such matters as differences of dialect, historical changes that led to the dominance of one dialect over others, and the diversity of different groups and communities who continued to make use of Hebrew.

In the rest of this book, mainly for practical reasons, Hebrew will be divided into four periods corresponding to four quite different linguistic corpuses: Biblical Hebrew (BH), Rabbinic Hebrew (RH), and Mediaeval Hebrew (MH), as well as Modern or Israeli Hebrew (IH), which is only afforded summary treatment in this work. However conventional and unadventurous this classification might seem, it does serve as a framework for our goal of providing a diachronic view of the language, while at the same time implying acceptance of the argument that RH is clearly distinguished from BH by many factors, especially in morphology and lexis. We also recognize that the status of MH is much less clearly defined than

[2] This is the basic criterion established by Z. Ben-Ḥayyim (1985).
[3] Thus, C. Rabin (1985).

that of either of the two earlier stages, given that it frequently uses both BH and RH in varying degrees for its basic elements. As an example of the revitalization of a language in almost complete disuse, IH is an extremely interesting phenomenon. However, it breaks the pattern of the language's natural development and lies outside the main scope of the present work.

Within BH itself, subdivisions can be made according to the period or stage of the language. The earliest Hebrew texts that have reached us date from the end of the second millennium BCE. The Israelite tribes that settled in Canaan from the fourteenth to thirteenth centuries BCE, regardless of what their language might have been before they established themselves there, used Hebrew as a spoken and a literary language until the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. It is quite likely that during the First Temple period there would have been significant differences between the spoken and the written language, although this is hardly something about which we can be exact. What we know as BH is without doubt basically a literary language, which until the Babylonian exile existed alongside living, spoken, dialects. The exile marks the disappearance of this language from everyday life and its subsequent use for literary and liturgical purposes only during the Second Temple period. The latest biblical texts date from the second century BCE if we disregard BH's survival in a more or less artificial way in the Dead Sea Scrolls, for example, and in certain kinds of mediaeval literature.

The Hebrew of the poetic sections of the Bible, some of which are very old despite possible post-exilic revision, as well as the oldest epigraphic material in inscriptions dating from the tenth to sixth centuries BCE, we call Archaic Hebrew, although we realize that there is no general agreement among scholars regarding this term. The language used in the prose sections of the Pentateuch and in the Prophets and the Writings before the exile, we call Classical Biblical Hebrew, or BH proper. Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) refers to the language of the books of the Bible written after the exile.

It has often been stated that BH is not a language in the full sense of the word but merely a 'fragment of language',[4] only a part of the language actually used by the Israelites prior to the exile. This is without doubt one of the most serious limitations for an adequate study of its history. Ten centuries ago, the Jews of Spain were fully conscious of this, as demonstrated by the words of some Cordoban scholars: 'Had we not left our country as exiles, we should today possess the whole of our language as in former times.'[5] The approximately 8,000 lexical items preserved in the books of the Bible would not have been enough to meet the needs of a living language.

3.2 *The origins of Hebrew*

The historical problem of the origins of Hebrew, sometimes raised as a question of the kind 'What was the language spoken by the Patriarchs?' or 'What was the language of the conquerors of Canaan?' is beyond the scope of this study, which is concerned only with more narrowly linguistic issues. Whatever the truth of the matter, we have to recognize that the exact beginnings of the Hebrew language are still surrounded by mystery.[6]

From the moment of its appearance in a documented written form, Hebrew offers, as we saw in the previous chapter, clear evidence that it belongs to the Canaanite group of languages, with certain peculiarities of its own. Possibly this means that when the Israelite tribes settled in Canaan they adopted the language of that country, at least for their written documents. Ancient, and certainly anachronistic, traditions about these semi-nomads allude to Aramaean ancestors (see Dt 26:5), but inferences of a linguistic nature should not, in principle, be drawn from this. In the passage where Jacob and his descendants are portrayed as making a final

[4] See Ullendorff 1971.
[5] S. Benavente, *Tešubot de los discípulos de Menaḥem contra Dunaš ben Labrat* (Granada, 1986), 20.
[6] See Rabin 1979, 71.

break from Laban (Gn 31:47), various writers have seen an allusion to the time when the Israelites abandoned Aramaic and adopted the Canaanite language of the country they were living in. In any case, there is a clear continuity between Hebrew as it is historically attested and the language of the El-Amarna letters, which date from before the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan. This is not to deny that Israel's monotheism could have had clear implications for particular semantic fields, thus distinguishing Hebrew from the languages of other Canaanite peoples.[7]

Combining historical and linguistic issues, it was suggested in the first decades of this century that Hebrew is not a homogeneous linguistic system but a *'Mischsprache'*,[8] in which it is possible to distinguish an early Canaanite layer, very close to Akkadian, and another more recent layer, closer to Aramaic and Southern Semitic. The clearest evidence for this theory, it was argued, was the existence of forms like קָם (qām) 'he arose' and רָם (rām) 'he was raised', in which the transition *á* > *ó* had not taken place as it had in the other Canaanite dialects, and which contrasted with other forms like נָקוֹם (nāqōm) 'we shall arise' and מָרוֹם (mārōm) 'height', where the change has occurred. In the noun צאֹן (ṣōn) 'flock', the same transition has taken place, as was normal in Canaanite, although the consonantal form צאן (ṣ'n) continues to indicate a different pronunciation, probably reflecting the situation holding at an earlier period.

This theory aroused fierce debate. Its opponents believed that the data adduced in its favour could be explained either as resulting from an unaccented *a* or as dialect forms, without needing to accept the notion of two levels of morphological structure in the hollow verb (of which the verbal forms cited above are examples). Moreover, the kind of linguistic borrowing

[7] See Morag 1985.

[8] The first to formulate this theory was H.P. Bauer who in 1910 (23ff.) was already arguing that some elements of Hebrew, such as the consecutive tenses, had a close relationship with Akkadian. In the *Historische Grammatik* (H.P. Bauer and Leander 1922, 16ff.), the hypothesis is developed in the clearest terms.

proposed would be more probable in connexion with words closely related by meaning (due to socio-cultural factors) rather than, as was the case in Hebrew, by morphology – for example, nouns of the type *qaṭṭāl* denoting profession or ending in ן־ (-ān). Neither could it simply be admitted that the consecutive tenses of the verb belonged to the earlier stratum and the other forms to the later.[9]

As well as modified versions of the *'Mischsprache'* hypothesis which continued to receive a measure of support until recently,[10] there have also been claims by various scholars, often led by considerations of an allegedly historical nature, that clear traces of Aramaic can be found in the origins of Hebrew.[11] However, the various rebuttals of the *'Mischsprache'* theory[12] have ensured that it is no longer generally regarded as very plausible nowadays, and a different kind of approach to the problems which fuelled the theory is favoured.

Various recent studies[13] have emphasized that Aramaic might have influenced Hebrew very strongly, not when Hebrew first emerged but many centuries later, in the second half of the first millennium BCE up to the beginnings of the Common Era. Thus, it is generally accepted that in the phonology, morphology, and lexicon of LBH, as well as in RH, there is a significant Aramaic component. Similarly, in the linguistic system of the Masoretes features of Aramaic pronunciation have been superimposed on Hebrew.

[9] See Bergsträsser 1923, 253ff. Bauer's response (1924) presents no substantially new arguments in favour of his theory.

[10] Thus, for example, G.R. Driver (1936, 151) claims 'Clearly the two main strands of which Hebrew is woven are Accadian and Aramean'; in G.R. Driver 1953 he lays great emphasis on the influence of Aramaic on Hebrew poetry, although he also accepts that some 'Aramaisms' might go back to Common Semitic.

[11] See, for example, Birkeland 1940; Baumgartner 1959, 222–25. R. Meyer (1966–72, I, 29) appears to offer some support to these claims, but in his 1957 article, Meyer clearly distanced himself from them, even though he recognized the existence of various levels, from old Canaanite, through an intermediate Amorite stage, to Israeli Hebrew.

[12] See Landsberger 1926; Harris 1939, 11, n.; Beyer 1969, 12ff.

[13] For example, Beyer 1969; Vogt 1971.

If, in various ways, we recognize in Hebrew elements that differentiate it from the neighbouring Canaanite dialects, we do not believe that these are derived from the Aramaic or Amorite that the Israelites might perhaps have spoken before they settled in Canaan, but instead that they result, for example, from linguistic conservativism, from independent linguistic developments within Hebrew, and from dialect diversity (about which we are acquiring ever more evidence). Increasingly it is believed that whereas BH was the language of literature and administration, the spoken language even before the exile might have been an early version of what would later become RH.[14] There are notable differences between the type of language used for poetry (which seems to be closer to the languages found in neighbouring countries) and that employed by classical prose,[15] as well as differences between the northern and southern or Jerusalemite dialects. A further significant feature is the influence of various foreign languages on Hebrew over the centuries.[16]

3.3 *The language of archaic biblical poetry*

The poetry of the Bible, like that of other Northwest Semitic literatures, employs a language which differs in various ways from the language of prose, reflecting, in general, an earlier stage of Hebrew and with a closer affinity in language, style, and content with neighbouring dialects, especially those to the north.

Notable among the biblical passages that best reflect Archaic Hebrew are the Song of Moses (Ex 15), the Song of Deborah (Jg 5), the Blessings of Jacob (Gn 49) and of Moses (Dt 33), the Oracles of

[14] See M.H. Segal 1936, 7; Bendavid 1951, 69ff.

[15] See G.R. Driver 1953.

[16] Thus, for example, C. Rabin: 'It is ... possible to surmise that some of the fusional character of Hebrew may be due to interdialectal borrowing and to continuous exposure to outside influence, rather than to what happened at the very moment the local Canaanite language was adopted by the Israelite settlers.' (1970, 313)

Balaam (Nm 23–24), and the Poem of Moses (Dt 32), as well as Ps 68 and other early psalms. The written corpus is relatively small, and has been altered over the centuries to accommodate changes in orthographic practice, although it still clearly preserves certain archaic features. In recent decades the consonantal text has been the object of many studies, based on analysis of its metrical structure and on the spelling reflected in contemporary inscriptions, in an attempt to clarify these documents and to restore archaic forms that the Masoretes failed to recognize.[17]

Included among these is the widespread use of the third person pronominal suffix מוֹ- (-mō), for example יְכַסְיֻמוּ (yᵉḵasyūmū) 'they cover them' (Ex 15:5), with preservation of the original י (y) of the root, and יֹאכְלֵמוֹ (yōḵlēmō) 'it consumes them' (Ex 15:7), the second person feminine suffix כִי- (-ky), the third person singular masculine suffix ה- (-h) instead of ו- (-w), as in עִירֹה ('yrh, pron. 'īrō) 'his donkey' (Gn 49:11), and with הוּ- (-hw), for example יהוּ- (-yhw, pron. -ēhū), instead of יו- (-yw, pron. -āw) in the plural, the infinitive absolute with temporal value, as in *ne'dori* for Masoretic נַאְדְּרִי (næ'dārī) '(is) glorious' (Ex 15:6), energic forms of the kind וַאֲרֹמְמֶנְהוּ (wa-'ᵃrommænᵉhū) 'I shall exalt him' (Ex 15:2) and תִּשְׁלַחְנָה (tišlaḥnā) 'she extends' (Jg 5:26), as well as זֶה (zæ), זוֹ (zō), and זוּ (zū) used as relative particles (Ex 15:13; Jg 5:5), and the relative -שֶׁ (šæ-) or -שַׁ (ša-), as in שַׁקָּמְתִּי (šaq-qamtī) '(the time) that you arose' (Jg 5:7), which also exemplifies the use of the second person feminine in תִי- (-ty). Other archaic features include the negative בַּל (bal) instead of לֹא (lō'), the indefinite or interrogative pronoun מִן (mn) in מִן־יְקוּמוּן (min yᵉqūmūn) 'whoever rises up', (Dt 33:11), the verbal suffix ת- (-ṯ) in the third person feminine, as

[17] In this connexion, the works of W.F. Albright and his school stand out. Examples include Albright on the Balaam Oracles (1944), the Psalm of Habakkuk (1950), and Ps 68 (1950–51), F.M. Cross and D.N. Freedman on the Blessings of Moses (1948), Ps 18 (1953), and the Song of Miriam (1955), and B. Vawter on Gn 49 (1955). Among general studies are Albright 1945, Cross and Freedman 1952, Freedman 1960, 1972, 1980, and Hummel 1957. See, however, D.W. Goodwin's criticisms (1969) about the methods employed in this type of work. There is a good presentation of the issues raised by the Song of Deborah in Soggin 1981.

Chapter 4

BIBLICAL HEBREW IN ITS VARIOUS TRADITIONS

4.1 *The transmission of Biblical Hebrew*

The preservation of classical Hebrew is inseparably connected with how the text of the Bible was transmitted down the centuries. After a long period of formation in which the various texts were expanded, modified, and, after the exile, adjusted in a variety of ways,[1] and in which the palaeo-Hebrew script gradually gave way to Aramaic square characters, the text of each book began to stabilize. Originally, this was not a totally uniform process, as is evident from the variants found in early manuscripts and the versions, but it did become more obvious and thoroughgoing, especially in the Tannaitic period.

By the end of the first or the beginning of the second century CE,[2] the consonantal text seems to have become completely stable, bringing to an end a period of textual diversity, which had arisen due perhaps to the existence of various local texts[3] or more probably to the use of particular versions within different religious or other groups.[4]

Within the Jewish community, awareness of the sacred character of the biblical text, ultimately extending to its smallest details, helped to guarantee its transmission from one generation to

[1] See, for example, Eissfeldt 1965, 562ff.; Fohrer 1968, 488ff.; McCarthy 1981.
[2] See M. Greenberg 1956; Barthélemy 1978, 341ff.
[3] Following a theory first stated by W.F. Albright (1955), F.M. Cross (1958; 1964; 1966) became a notable advocate of this view, which, however, has found little favour in more recent scholarship.
[4] See Talmon 1970; Cross and Talmon 1975, 321ff.

another in the home and especially among the community's teachers and religious officers. Long before precise notes about the conservation of the text had been set down in writing, a much older oral tradition had developed in order to ensure the transmission in exact detail of the text, which could not be modified or undergo addition or deletion of a single letter.[5]

The *soferim* or professional scribes played a major rôle in the careful conservation of the text and in determining the precise form in which it was to be read and pronounced. The rabbinic writings allude to the painstaking work of the *kotvanim* and *lavlarim*, copyists and clerks charged with reproducing the text in every detail, while other specialists worked out the exact significance of more obscure features.[6]

In the era of the *Amoraim*, the *halakhah* had already established precise guidelines about how the text of the Bible was to be read and written. Without touching the received consonantal text at all, certain indications and signs were introduced into copies of the text to make it easier to understand. The rules about pauses and accents, which enable a correct melodic recitation of the text, also seem to date from this time.[7]

The first Masoretic observations to help establish the use of *scriptio plena* or *defectiva* in the text were listed in manuscript form before the eighth century CE. Vocalization systems and various traditions of reading the biblical text had been fixed and then transmitted orally many centuries before it was felt necessary to embody it in graphic notation. The various systems of accentuation and vocalization introduced into the text of the Bible by the Masoretes had started to develop by about the sixth or seventh century CE.[8] As is well known, from the tenth century one such system eventually imposed its authority over the others, spreading from Tiberias to the entire Jewish world. This was the system

[5] See the words of Josephus in *Contra Apionem* 1:42.
[6] See Dotan 1971, 1405.
[7] See Dotan 1971, 1412f.
[8] See Morag 1974; Chiesa 1979, 37; Dotan 1981a.

devised by the Masoretic family of Ben-Asher in the wake of painstaking scholarly analysis, which essentially reflected a highly-developed tradition of pronunciation and synagogue reading handed down over the centuries. The most important editions of the Hebrew Bible, from that of Jacob b. Ḥayyim[9] to those of the present day, have been based on the various codices that preserve the Ben-Asher system of pointing. And it is on the basis of these texts, reproducing more or less exactly the Ben-Asher tradition, that analysis of BH has been conducted, albeit with some attention being paid to other traditions.

There can be little doubt about the general trustworthiness of the process of transmission as outlined. Even apparently heterogeneous or 'anomalous' forms in the biblical text are actually reflections of phenomena known from LBH, of dialect-forms, or of obvious influence by cognate languages.[10] Nonetheless, there was a long period between the editing and canonization of the biblical texts and their pointing by the Masoretes. Over many centuries it was possible for the original vocalization, transmitted only in oral form within a multilingual environment, to alter considerably. Partly this was due to developments within Hebrew itself and partly because of the influence of dominant languages, particularly Aramaic and, later, Arabic. The formation of a unified standard text probably also involved the elimination of terms and structures that were too archaic to be understood so many centuries after the material had first been composed.

According to Paul Kahle's well-known thesis,[11] the Masoretic, especially the Tiberian, system of punctuation is not simply a representation of how Hebrew was actually pronounced in the sixth to eighth centuries; it also bears witness to the active intervention of the Masoretes, who deliberately introduced various corrections or reconstructions intended to guarantee that Hebrew

9 Published by Daniel Bomberg in Venice, 1524/25. It represents a text that embodies a variety of Masoretic traditions.

10 See Morag 1972a; 1974.

11 First formulated in Kahle 1921; see Kahle 1959 (1st ed., 1947), 164ff.

would be 'pronounced as it should be', and not as it actually had been during the previous centuries, influenced by Aramaic.[12] The Masoretic innovation or reconstruction of a phonological system that had fallen into disuse had been of particular relevance to the pronunciation of the gutturals (reconstructed on the basis of Arabic), the dual pronunciation of the *bgdkpt* consonants, the pronominal suffix ־ָךְ- (-ḵā), and the verb suffix ־ָתָה- (-tā). Although reflected in other studies,[13] such an image of Masoretic activity is generally rejected nowadays.[14] However, it is possible, independently of Kahle's thesis, to accept that there might be important differences between Masoretic Hebrew and the language of the pre-exilic writings.

Before examining how BH has been handed down by the various Masoretic traditions – Palestinian, Babylonian, and Tiberian – it is worth viewing the process of transmission from the other end, by looking at material which takes us as near as possible to the pre-exilic period and which represents traditions of a 'pre-Masoretic' type. Apart from making comparisons with, for example, the Qumran and Samaritan traditions (see Chapter 5), or, as we have done in earlier chapters, comparing phenomena and processes in Hebrew with those of other Northwest Semitic languages, additional information about pre-Masoretic Hebrew can also be obtained by analysis of the many Greek and Latin transcriptions from the third century BCE to the fourth century CE.

12 In Kahle 1921, 1927–30, 25ff., and 1959, 156ff., Kahle based his theory on examination of, for example, the Palestinian and Samaritan traditions, the Greek transcriptions in A. Sperber 1937–38, and *piyyuṭ* rhymes.

13 See Leander 1936; R. Meyer 1951; Murtonen 1968a.

14 The response of eminent Semitists was diametrically opposed to Kahle's theory; see, for example, Bergsträsser 1924, and, more recently, Brønno 1940, etc., E.Y. Kutscher 1949–52, III, 43f., 1982, 19ff., Ben-Ḥayyim 1954, 63f., 97ff., and Dietrich 1968, 124ff.

4.2 *The testimony of the Greek and Latin transcriptions*

The numerous Greek and Latin transcriptions of Hebrew names and other expressions, which date mainly from the third century BCE to the fourth century CE, undoubtedly provide first-hand information about pre-Masoretic BH.[15] Because we know far more about the phonology and pronunciation of Greek and Latin than of the Semitic languages, these transcriptions represent an invaluable witness to the Hebrew of this period. On the other hand, it has to be recognized as well that there are considerable difficulties involved. In the first place, the phonology of Greek and Latin is very different from that of Hebrew, and these languages do not possess graphemes that can exactly represent the sounds of Hebrew. And although we do not know what judgements were actually made when transcribing so different a language, the authors of the transcriptions would certainly have approached Hebrew from the phonological perspective of their own language. The variation of place and time is also a problem, as we cannot simply accept that BH, which had already ceased to be a living language, underwent a unified development in places as diverse as Alexandria and Palestine. Neither do we know if the data afforded by the transcriptions correspond to the standard, more or less official, pronunciation of Hebrew in this period or to dialect or substandard forms. On top of all these difficulties is the fact that the transcriptions have to be studied in manuscripts that are frequently late and defective, presenting many variants and corruptions in names that the copyists found completely alien.

The transcriptions in the Septuagint, which reflect the intellectual and linguistic climate of Alexandria in the third to second

[15] Examples of the many studies on this subject are: Frankel 1841; Siegfried 1884; Könnecke 1885; Mercati 1895–96, etc.; Růžička 1908; Margolis 1909–10; 1925–26; Schlatter 1913; Wutz 1925, etc.; Speiser 1925–34; Pretzl 1932; A. Sperber 1937–38; Staples 1939; Lisowsky 1940; Brønno 1940, etc.; Sutcliffe 1948; Kahle 1961; 1962; Barr 1966–67; 1967; 1967a; Emerton 1970; Wevers 1970; Sáenz-Badillos 1975a; Harviainen 1977; Janssens 1982; Murtonen 1981–82; 1986.

centuries BCE, might cast some light on the neutralization of the Proto-Semitic velar phonemes /ḫ/ and /ġ/ with their corresponding pharyngeals, a process which still does not seem to have been fully completed by the time that the Greek translation of the Pentateuch was made. According to one modern study,[16] whereas in almost all instances of names that include an original /ḥ/ this phoneme is transcribed by zero or by vowel mutation, in the majority of names with an original /ḫ/, the usual transcription is *kappa* or *chi*. Thus, there was still a perceived difference between the two Hebrew phonemes, even though both were represented by a single grapheme. Somewhat similar comments apply to /ġ/: except in the last books of the Bible /ʿ/ is transcribed in a fairly systematic way by zero or vowel mutation, whereas original /ġ/ is represented by *gamma*.[17] Thus, when the Greek translation of the Pentateuch was made, /ġ/ was still a distinct phoneme, but when the remaining books were translated, it may no longer have been pronounced, surviving exclusively in public reading of the Bible before finally disappearing completely.[18]

Paul Kahle and his followers, in particular A. Sperber,[19] assessed the evidence in a quite different way. According to Sperber, at the time the Septuagint was composed the gutturals did not have real consonantal value,[20] and were normally transcribed as vowels. The *bgdkpt* consonants had just one realization in Greek,[21] namely, as fricatives. Analysis of the Greek transcriptions in Origen's *Secunda*

[16] See Wevers 1970. Although in this study Wevers clearly distances himself from earlier positions, like that of Růžička (1908), his conclusions have generally been well received (see, for example, Steiner 1977, 120, n. 28), and have also been further developed and refined, particularly in J. Blau's decisive 1982 article (pp. 146ff.).

[17] See Blau 1982, 113ff.

[18] See Blau 1982, 143f.

[19] 1937–38.

[20] Even though /ḥ/, according to Sperber, was transcribed in an earlier period by *chi* (but see Wevers 1970).

[21] Occasionally, however, *kappa* appears in place of *chi*, and where there is gemination, sequences like *tau-theta* are found in the Septuagint.

(third century CE)[22] and of the Latin transcriptions of Jerome (fourth century CE) corroborated for Sperber Kahle's theory concerning the gutturals and the *bgdkpt* consonants.

Both gutturals and *bgdkpt* aroused great controversy. In the first place, the transcription data are not entirely unequivocal, and, in any case, they do not have to be interpreted in the way proposed by Kahle's followers. Regarding the *bgdkpt* consonants, in the second-century CE transcriptions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, 'the Three',[23] the tendency is for just one transcriptional equivalent for each consonant, but there are also clear signs of a dual realization, especially when the consonants have *dagesh*. A more uniform system of transcription is found in the *Secunda*, which systematically uses *chi*, *phi*, and *theta*, and in Jerome's transcriptions, which employ *ch*, *ph*, and *th*.[24] However, as various scholars have pointed out,[25] it cannot be inferred from this type of data alone that the relevant Hebrew consonants were realized only as fricatives. The fact that in the transcriptions of the Septuagint or of 'the Three' we can also find *kappa*, *pi*, and *tau*, which have always had exclusively plosive value in Greek, is evidence of a dual, plosive/fricative, pronunciation of *kaf*, *pe*, and *taw* at the time. The examples from the *Secunda* or Jerome are more difficult to evaluate. Here, a single series of Greek or Latin graphemes, corresponding to an aspirated or fricative pronunciation, is used. But again, there is no reason to assume that the absence of overt indications of allophonic differences in these transcriptions means that the only realization of the Hebrew phonemes was fricative.[26]

Looking at the problem from a wider perspective, we find that the data cited correspond to information provided by Greek

[22] On the second column of Origen's *Hexapla*, see Jellicoe 1968, 106ff. and Fernández 1979, 191ff.

[23] See Sáenz-Badillos 1975a.

[24] With the well-known exception of *appadno* at Dn 11:45.

[25] Especially E. Brønno (1943, etc.) in respect of the *Secunda* and J. Barr (1967) for Jerome.

[26] See, for example, Brønno 1968, 195f.; Barr 1967, 1ff.

transcriptions of other Semitic languages from the same era. Although throughout the region from the sixth century BCE the *bgdkpt* consonants first underwent a process of aspiration, followed later by spirantization of those occurring after a vowel, there are clear signs of dual realization in the majority of contemporary Aramaic dialects and in every tradition of Hebrew. There is no proof that the plosive realization ever ceased, or that Hebrew suffered significant phonological changes, and this means that the Masoretes' intervention could not have been as radical as Kahle and his school claimed.

In the laryngeals and pharyngeals, there is again a gradual process of weakening and merger. Although in the Septuagint consonantal graphemes are used to indicate the presence of /ḥ/, /ḫ/, or /ʿ/, in 'the Three' this occurs rarely, and only in connexion with /ḥ/, while in the *Secunda* just one example of the same procedure has been detected. The standard technique of 'the Three' and the *Secunda* is to retain only the vowel following a laryngeal or pharyngeal. Jerome systematically employs *h* to reproduce the *adspiratio* of /h/ or the *adspiratio duplex* of /ḥ/, and he indicates that the laryngeals and pharyngeals were each pronounced as an *adspiratio* or with *rasura gulae*, pointing out that the Jews of this period were amused by the inability of Christians to pronounce correctly the gutturals and various other letters. Other statements of Jerome are less clear. For example, when he indicates that /ʿ/ is merely a *vocalis littera*, this probably has to be understood in the context of an attempt by Jerome to prevent /ʿ/ being read as a *g*.[27]

It seems then that we may not infer from Origen (the *Secunda*) or Jerome that the laryngeals and pharyngeals were no longer pronounced at all in their time. To begin with, it has to be remembered that the Greek alphabet cannot adequately express

[27] See Barr 1967. Barr believes that the statement that the gutturals were 'adspirationes suas vocesque conmutant' (*De nominibus hebraicis*, PL 23, 773) should not be understood to mean that they were confused with one another, but that each was pronounced differently in Hebrew.

the pronunciation of these consonants.[28] Moreover, throughout the transcriptions there are at least indications that the sounds had not entirely disappeared from pronunciation. It should be pointed out, however, that a process of weakening affecting these consonants can be detected from the second half of the first millennium BCE up to the beginnings of the Common Era in many Canaanite and Aramaic dialects close to Hebrew, as well as in every tradition of Hebrew, even though in some areas their values were better preserved. It is possible to determine two centres from which the phenomenon of guttural-weakening spread out, an eastern (Babylonian Talmud, Mandaean) and a western (Samaria, Qumran, various sites in Galilee). The existence of an Akkadian substratum in the east and a Greek in the west would also have played a part.[29] But it is difficult to find support from the material cited for the theory of the complete disappearance of the gutturals and their restoration by the Masoretes, as held by Kahle and his school.[30]

The transcriptions offer us substantial information about many other aspects of contemporary Hebrew phonology and morphology. Vocalization does not always coincide with that established later by the Tiberian Masoretes, but occasionally comes closer to what is found in other Hebrew traditions. Tiberian *qameṣ* is sometimes represented by *alpha*, sometimes by *omicron*, *pathaḥ* and *segol* by *alpha* and *epsilon*, and occasionally *omicron*, *ṣere* generally by *eta*, and *ḥireq* by *iota*, although at times for various reasons this is replaced by *alpha* (where the 'law of attenuation' has not operated) or *epsilon*. *Ḥireq gadol* is represented by *epsilon-iota* or simply *iota*, *ḥolem* by *omicron* or *omega*, and *qibbuṣ* and *shureq* normally by *omicron-upsilon*. *Shewa mobile* is sometimes expressed by zero, but more often by *epsilon* or occasionally *alpha* or another vowel. *Shewa quiescens* is represented not by zero but by a full vowel, and this is true as well of the *ḥaṭefs* or ultrashort vowels.

[28] See Brønno 1968, 193.
[29] See Sáenz-Badillos 1975a.
[30] See Janssens 1982, 41ff.

This material and similar data also suggest that penultimate stress was dominant, as in other Hebrew traditions. 'Philippi's law' did not operate, at least in the transcriptions of the *Secunda*.[31]

At the start of a word, *waw* is usually transcribed as *omicron-upsilon*, with this sequence or *omega* in non-initial positions. At an early period, *zayin*, like the other sibilants, was represented by *sigma*, but later by *zeta*.

Morphological developments did not always proceed in a straightforward way. For example, in connexion with segolate nouns, whereas in the Septuagint and 'the Three' the vocalization *a-e* predominates, forming a bisyllabic word with anaptyctic vowel, the *Secunda* better reflects their originally monosyllabic shape. There is a more uniform transcription of nouns of the type *maqṭāl*, which did not shift to *miqṭāl* as in the Tiberian tradition.[32] The article is reproduced as *a-*, with gemination of the following consonant indicated in the *Secunda* and later works. The prefixed particles have the form *ba-*, *cha-*, *la-*, although they can also appear with *e-* or without a vowel.[33] The second person singular masculine pronominal suffix is *-ach*. As in other traditions of Hebrew, verbs, including suffixed forms, retain both vowels in the stem. The second person singular masculine of the suffix-conjugation normally ends in *theta*; in the prefix-conjugation, the prefix usually takes *a* or *e*.[34] The first vowel of the *Pi'el* and *Hif'il* is *e*.[35]

There are, of course, problems in interpreting the different data, even setting aside the position of Kahle and his followers. E. Brønno believed that the *Secunda* confirms the reliability of the Tiberian tradition, although he recognized that certain developments had taken place in the interim.[36] For E.Y. Kutscher,

[31] See Brønno 1943, 448. But cf. Ben-Ḥayyim 1988–89, 119f.
[32] See A. Sperber 1937–38, 135ff., 191f.; Brønno 1943, 451.
[33] See A. Sperber 1937–38, 194f.; Brønno 1943, 452.
[34] See A. Sperber 1937–38, 156f.
[35] See A. Sperber 1937–38, 164ff.; Brønno 1943, 448.
[36] See Brønno 1943, 462f.

on the other hand, the transcriptional material differs from Tiberian Hebrew because it does not correspond to the official or standard version of Hebrew, represented exclusively by synagogue readings of the Bible, but rather to dialect or 'substandard' forms.[37] But given that we have no information whatever about the tradition of synagogue reading, Kutscher's distinction is difficult to prove. The Greek and Latin transcriptions represent an earlier stage of Hebrew than do the Masoretic traditions, and they coincide in several ways with conservative features found in various traditions of Hebrew. The nature of the data we possess suggests we value each and every tradition rather than creating a dichotomy between the normative tradition and the others. The wide range of features we have noted indicates that linguistic development was far from uniform. Even though they share a number of common tendencies, a variety of Hebrew traditions is seen to have co-existed during this period.

4.3 *Biblical Hebrew according to the Palestinian tradition*

In 1839, S.D. Luzzatto first drew attention to the *Maḥzor Vitry*'s use of the expression נקוד ארץ ישראל (niqqūḏ 'æræṣ yiśrā'ēl) 'the pointing of the Land of Israel, Palestinian pointing',[38] in contrast to the Tiberian system and to 'our pointing'.[39] From that time, even though texts with this kind of vocalization were unknown, the

[37] See E.Y. Kutscher 1974, 61–71.

[38] In the edition of S. Hurwitz (Berlin, 1889–93), p. 462.

[39] See *Kerem Ḥemed*, IV (1839), 203. After long debate, this passage is today interpreted in very different ways: M. Friedländer (1896, 94f.) believed that 'our pointing' refers to the Babylonian system, a view accepted by P.E. Kahle (e.g. 1927–30, 24). N. Allony (1964) thought it referred to the Palestino-Tiberian pronunciation. I. Eldar (1978, I, 172ff.) showed that the supralinear Palestinian pointing system was not known at the time in Europe, and that the author used the expression 'Palestinian pointing' with reference to the type of pronunciation that Allony called Palestino-Tiberian, widespread in central Europe during the Middle Ages – 'our pointing' would, therefore, have been another system found only in France and parts of Germany.

term 'Palestinian pointing' started to gain currency, with reference to the supralinear notation of one of the three most important Masoretic traditions and reflecting a Hebrew dialect or group of dialects from Palestine dating from at least the seventh century CE. From the end of the last century, thanks to the momentous discovery of the Cairo Genizah documents, various biblical and *piyyūṭ* texts which employ at least a partial Palestinian system became known.

The first Palestinian texts were published by A. Neubauer.[40] Shortly afterwards, M. Friedländer wrote two studies of the pointing system employed,[41] and C. Levias edited a number of liturgical texts.[42] The beginning of the twentieth century saw the appearance of Paul Kahle's first study on the subject to which he would later make so decisive a contribution.[43] His great work *Masoreten des Westens*[44] contains important analyses of the Palestinian system as well as editions of liturgical and biblical texts which use it. Kahle's views were developed in his contribution to Bauer and Leander's *Historische Grammatik*[45] and, later, in *The Cairo Genizah*.[46] For him the pronunciation underlying the Palestinian system is that used by official circles in Palestine in the sixth to eighth centuries CE. It constitutes an early, rather impractical, stage of Tiberian pointing, which in turn represents no more than a correction of the earlier system on the basis of an idealized model of a form of language that never actually existed.[47]

Over the decades, other scholars have continued the work of editing and studying new fragments.[48] Works of particular

[40] 1894–95.

[41] Friedländer 1894–95; 1896.

[42] See Levias 1898–99.

[43] Kahle 1901. See also Kahle 1901a; 1925.

[44] Kahle 1927–30.

[45] Kahle 1922, 98ff.

[46] Kahle 1959 (1st ed., 1947), 66ff., 336ff.

[47] See Kahle 1921; 1922, 84.

[48] See, for example, Spanier 1929; Kober 1929; Edelmann 1934; Ormann 1934; Leander 1936; Bar 1936; Murtonen 1958; Weil 1961–62. See also Dotan 1971, 1433ff.; Morag 1972, 34ff.

Chapter 5

HEBREW IN THE PERIOD OF THE SECOND TEMPLE

5.1 *Post-exilic Biblical Hebrew*

The Babylonian exile marks the beginning of a new stage in the development of Hebrew. The spoken and written languages had been drifting apart before the exile, and the social and political turmoil brought about by the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the First Temple produced a significant change in the linguistic *status quo* to the detriment of Biblical Hebrew, a compromise literary language. Returning exiles from the upper and better-educated classes, who had been exposed for several decades to an Aramaic cultural and linguistic environment, would have preferred Aramaic, which had spread throughout the Assyrian empire as the language of administration, commerce, and diplomacy. Quite probably, though, their contemporaries from the lower classes, who had remained in Judah, would still not have been able to understand Aramaic, just as they had been unable to understand it a century and a half before.[1]

During the period of Persian domination, from the edict of Cyrus (538 BCE) up to the victory of Alexander (332 BCE), due to historical and political circumstances the Jewish community experienced a degree of multilingualism. Aramaic became standard for communication with the outside world and in certain kinds of literature, although at the same time a late form of Biblical Hebrew (LBH) was often used in literary composition, maintaining

[1] Cf. 2 K 18:26=Is 36:11.

a style found in earlier works of scripture. In addition, it is very likely, at least in the south, that people continued to speak a vernacular form of Hebrew which some centuries later would be written down and receive the name of Rabbinic Hebrew (RH).[2]

LBH is the language of most of the books of the Bible written after the exile. Right up to the time of the destruction of the First Temple, classical Hebrew had continued in use, as demonstrated by biblical texts and, especially, by inscriptions and ostraca reflecting contemporary usage. The exile, which meant an end to the monarchy and led to the breakdown of social structures, signalled a time of profound change which also significantly affected the Hebrew language. In the writings that followed this event an attempt was made at first to imitate pre-exilic works, repeating their formulas and vocabulary. A degree of modernization, though, was unavoidable. The impact of the colloquial language is very obvious, as is the growing influence of Imperial Aramaic. In Galilee and Samaria, Aramaic dialects became the day-to-day means of communication, whereas Judah held on to Hebrew. It is likely that by this time square Aramaic characters had already begun to replace the palaeo-Hebrew script, although the process was not completed until the Hellenistic period, and remnants of the old system were maintained right down to the Bar-Kochba revolt.[3] The continued use of Hebrew as a literary idiom despite all these changes resulted principally from a sense of veneration which compelled authors of religious works to look for models in the pre-exilic language. During half a millennium LBH was used for the closing books of the canon, most of the deutero-canonical literature, a number of pseudepigraphic and apocalyptic compositions, and the Qumran documents. The Pharisees deliberately avoided LBH, presenting their teaching in the language of the spoken vernacular. Due to their labours, this

[2] See Rabin 1958; 1976; Naveh and Greenfield 1984.

[3] See M. Wagner 1966, 7; Naveh and Greenfield 1984, 125ff.

form of Hebrew would soon develop into a literary language (RH), which later replaced LBH.[4]

There are, however, obvious differences of language and style in the various books composed in LBH. In some, great efforts have been made to reproduce the earlier biblical language faithfully, whereas in others we can see clear traces of the colloquial idiom, an early form of RH. In the majority of works, though, the most outstanding feature is the dominating influence of Aramaic.[5] LBH did not develop in a straightforward way. As an exclusively literary language, isolated from the real world, nothing prevented the authors of later works, like Esther and Daniel or some of the Dead Sea Scrolls, from trying to adhere more closely than earlier, exilic, works, like Chronicles and Ezra, to the language of the Torah.

The researcher's first major difficulty is to establish exactly what the LBH 'corpus' is. Of course, textual criticism is of great help in ascertaining which books may be regarded as post-exilic, but there are often serious disagreements among the experts. On the other hand, arguments from linguistic analysis can also be problematic – if a large number of Aramaisms within a book were to be accepted as a criterion for its lateness, this would lead to the grouping together of archaic poetic texts, which retain vestiges of an early shared vocabulary, and later texts, which have been influenced by Imperial Aramaic. Aramaisms of themselves cannot be used as proof that a work is post-exilic.[6]

[4] See Rabin 1976, 1015.

[5] See Bendavid 1967, 60ff.

[6] A very similar position was adopted by, for example, E. Kautzsch (1902, 104), whose study of Aramaisms was standard for many years. In our view, though, a much more precise and valid analysis is that of A. Hurvitz (1968, 235ff.), who agrees with the remarks directed at Kautzsch by T. Nöldeke (1903) and establishes the rule that an Aramaism may be used as evidence that a work is late only if it occurs with some regularity in late Hebrew. Furthermore, such a form ought not to be isolated, but should be found in the context of other Aramaisms, and there should be no other explanation for its presence within a text – for example, the Aramaisms of Job or Proverbs may derive from Old Aramaic, and are, therefore, very different from post-exilic Aramaisms, whereas the language of the Song of Songs may appear to have Aramaic features because of its origins in the northern kingdom.

Practically every biblical book in its present state has some trace of Aramaic, in vocabulary, morphology, or syntax. In certain instances, this may be due to late reworking of material or to the activity of the Masoretes, but often Aramaisms are also found in the original form of a book. Aside from ancient poetic texts, the works in which Aramaisms are relatively abundant are Esther, Koheleth, Song of Songs, Ezra, Job, Daniel, Nehemiah, and 1 & 2 Chronicles.[7] Job is peculiar in that archaic elements appear alongside features that are late and perhaps dialectal, and so it is advisable at present to set this book apart from other works that are clearly post-exilic. We should bear in mind, though, that some books written after the exile, like Ruth and Lamentations, contain hardly any Aramaisms, and that a number of the Psalms, as well as some other post-exilic sapiential and prophetic works, are not especially affected by them.

Of special interest for the linguistic study of this period are post-exilic loanwords from Persian and Greek, taken into Hebrew indirectly *via* Aramaic.[8]

Various scholars have tried to show that the original language of a number of books from the Persian and Hellenistic periods was Aramaic, and that they were later translated into Hebrew. This view has been defended, although never entirely convincingly, in connexion with Job, Koheleth, Daniel, Esther, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Proverbs, and even Ezekiel.[9] The same issue is met in respect of pseudepigrapha from the Hellenistic, Hasmonaean, and Roman periods.[10]

Work in this field demands precise methods. If we begin by comparing writings that we know for certain to be post-exilic, such as 1 & 2 Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, with parallel pre-exilic

[7] See M. Wagner 1966, 145.

[8] See M. Wagner 1966, 152f.

[9] See the list of attempts in M. Wagner 1966, 146ff.

[10] See Rost 1971, 22ff.

texts, like Samuel-Kings (which runs parallel to Chronicles), we can discover many differences between the two periods. Analysis should then be extended to passages which do not have parallels but are independent compositions of the Chronicler and linguistically more representative, seeing that they do not rely on other sources.[11] Without needing to assume that they are all completely homogeneous, it then becomes possible to examine other books that might be post-exilic for characteristics shared with the definitely post-exilic material, for late features, and for Aramaisms, so that we can draw firm conclusions about a given work's date of composition. Comparison with the Dead Sea Scrolls, Ben Sira, liturgical texts, Samaritan Hebrew, and RH then allows us to identify the main features of this stage of the Hebrew language.[12] Ultimately, though, it is difficult to arrive at a completely secure analysis, as there is always the possibility that what appear to be late features, akin to those of the spoken vernacular, might be interpreted as dialectal, originating in the north, for example.[13] Only by detailed study, using both literary and linguistic criteria, can a fair degree of certainty sometimes be achieved.

The Book of (1 & 2) Chronicles is especially instructive about the nature of LBH, as on many occasions it rewrites passages from Samuel-Kings, bringing the language up to date and adapting it to post-exilic usage. Regarding orthography, we see in Chronicles a tendency to employ a more *plene* form of writing, with *matres lectionis* more widespread than in BH. There are also changes in

[11] Whereas A. Kropat's classic study (1909) is based on an analysis of the parallel texts in Chronicles and Samuel-Kings, R. Polzin's more recent work (1976) argues that it is the non-parallel texts of 1 & 2 Chronicles that more genuinely represent the essential characteristics of post-exilic Hebrew. We believe that the two approaches are complementary rather than contradictory, although, from a methodological perspective, it is easier to begin by using Kropat's technique.

[12] The fullest and most convincing study of this subject is undoubtedly that of A. Hurvitz (1972).

[13] See Gordon 1955a.

noun patterns, with archaic forms replaced by late ones[14] – for example, מַמְלָכָה (mamlāḵā) 'kingdom' is systematically replaced by מַלְכוּת (malḵūṯ). Another difference is that instead of the usual form דַּמֶּשֶׂק (dammæśæq) 'Damascus', found in Kings and other writings from the earlier period, the Chronicler uses on six occasions the form דַּרְמֶשֶׂק (darmæśæq).[15] Some archaic particles which had been used almost exclusively to express emphasis, such as אַךְ ('aḵ) 'surely' and נָא (nā') 'pray', have been eliminated from the parallel texts in Chronicles, and many expressions regarded as archaic have been replaced by more modern equivalents.[16] Particularly widespread are changes in pronouns and particles, so that, for example, אָנֹכִי ('ānōḵī) 'I' is systematically replaced by אֲנִי ('ᵃnī), with אֶל ('æl) 'to' being replaced by -לְ (lᵉ-), מִפְּנֵי (mip-pᵉnē) 'from before' by מִלִּפְנֵי (mil-li-p̄nē), and אֵיךְ ('ēḵ) 'how' by הֵיךְ (hēḵ). There are also differences in more general vocabulary, with, for example, גְּוִיּוֹת (gᵉwīyyōṯ) 'bodies' being replaced by גּוּפוֹת (gūp̄ōṯ) and אֶשֶׁל ('ēšæl) 'tamarisk' by אֵלָה ('ēlā) 'terebinth' at 1 C 10:12.[17]

Certain morphological features clearly reflect late usage, such as the 'double plural' בִּירָנִיּוֹת (bīrānīyyōṯ) 'fortresses' (2 C 17:12; 27:4) formed from בִּירָה (bīrā), itself a late term.[18] Some nouns, like חֶדְוָה (ḥæḏwā) 'joy' (Ne 8:10; 1 C 16:27), אִגֶּרֶת ('iggæræṯ) 'letter', and פֶּחָה (pæḥā) 'governor', only, or nearly only, appear in post-exilic books. This is also true of expressions like טוֹב עַל (ṭōḇ 'al) '(show) goodness towards'[19] and of the use of certain particles, such as עַל ('al) for אֶל ('æl) 'to'. All the above features are characteristic of LBH. The replacement of singular forms by plurals in parallel texts, for example פְּסָחִים (pᵉsāḥīm) for פֶּסַח (pæsaḥ) 'Passover' and

[14] See E.Y. Kutscher 1982, 81.

[15] See Hurvitz 1972, 17f.

[16] See Bendavid 1967, 67ff.

[17] On vocabulary, see Polzin 1976, 123ff., a study of 84 expressions from Chronicles which might be regarded as representative of LBH because of meaning or usage.

[18] See Hurvitz 1972, 18f.

[19] See Hurvitz 1972, 22ff.

דָּמִים (dāmīm) for דָּם (dām) 'blood', or the use of double plurals in genitive constructions, such as חָרָשֵׁי עֵצִים (ḥārāšē ʿēṣīm) 'workers of woods' (1 C 14:1) and אַנְשֵׁי שֵׁמוֹת (ʾanšē šēmōṯ) 'persons of reputes' (1 C 12:31), foreshadow similar developments in RH.[20]

The syntax of Chronicles contains a number of features that are clearly late. Some are due to Aramaic, others to natural developments within Hebrew.[21] The author systematically avoids impersonal constructions of the sort וַיִּקְרָא לְ- (way-yiqrāʾ leˢ-) 'and one named (the city)' (i.e. 'and [the city] was named'; 2 S 5:9), replacing this by קָרְאוּ לְ- (qāreʾū leˢ-) lit. 'and they named (the city)' (1 C 11:7), or עַד בּוֹאֲךָ (ʿaḏ bōʾᵃḵā) 'until you come' (lit. 'until your coming'), as well as the passive of *Qal*, so that, for example, יֻלַּד (yullaḏ) 'he was born' is replaced by the *Nif'al* form נוֹלַד (nōlaḏ). Instead of compound expressions of the sort בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (bᵉnē yiśrāʾēl) 'children of Israel' or בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל (bēṯ yiśrāʾēl) 'house of Israel', the Chronicler simply writes יִשְׂרָאֵל (yiśrāʾēl) 'Israel'. The infinitive absolute is not employed for expressing orders and its use as an emphatic, in conjunction with finite forms, is also avoided. Lengthened forms of the verb, ending in ן- (-n) or cohortatives, for example, are hardly used at all.

Plural forms generally replace archaic collectives and other grammatically singular items from BH. When a word is repeated, the resulting phrase has the distributive value of Latin *quivis* or 'each one of': compare BH גֻּבִים גֻּבִים (gēḇīm gēḇīm) 'many pools' (lit. 'pools, pools') at 2 K 3:16 with LBH לַבֹּקֶר לַבֹּקֶר (lab-bōqær lab-bōqær) 'each morning' (lit. 'in the morning, in the morning') at 1 C 9:27. Transitive forms are preferred to intransitives and the infinitive construct with proclitic לְ- (leˢ-) 'to' has almost completely replaced its simple equivalent and is used in preference to the prefix-conjugation or participle. The infinitive construct preceded

[20] See Bendavid 1967, 70f.

[21] Although it has been severely criticized in certain respects, the classic study of the syntax of Chronicles is that of A. Kropat (1909). See also the more recent analysis by R. Polzin (1976, 28ff.), which distinguishes thirteen 'grammatical and/or syntactic features' that are clearly late and not due to Aramaic influence and another six that may be Aramaisms.

by the proclitic particles בְּ- (bᵉ-) 'in, when' or כְּ- (kᵉ-) 'as, when' is found less often, as is עִם (ʿim) 'with' followed by a verbal noun, etc., and there is also a marked reduction in the use of the narrative formula וַיְהִי (wa-yᵉhī) 'and it came to pass' at the beginning of a sentence.

Certain particles acquire different uses – אֲבָל (ʾᵃḇāl) is no longer asseverative ('indeed'), but adversative ('but'), אַךְ (ʾaḵ) has almost disappeared, and when it is used its value is adversative or restrictive ('only'), not asseverative, the use of כִּי אִם (kī ʾim) as a restrictive ('but only, except') is more widespread, and אָז (ʾāz) 'then' is nearly always used with the suffix-conjugation (cf. 1 C 16:7). Nouns denoting materials are usually placed in front of numerals, not after them, and they are normally in the plural. Asyndetic juxtaposition has already become a rarity. Various forms of conjunction are used, sometimes with וְ- (wᵉ-) 'and' preceding the first element. There are many elliptical sentences, lacking an explicit subject or verb, and the infinitive construct with preposition is preferred to subordinate clauses introduced by a conjunction. Pronominal suffixes with accusative function are more often attached directly to the verb than to the object-marker אֵת (ʾēṯ), the use of which progressively diminishes. Second and third person plural feminine suffixes are replaced by their masculine equivalents in the verb and the noun. The use of proleptic pronouns to express possession has become more widespread. As in Aramaic, names of weights and measures come before expressions of quantity, in appositional relationship. Also perhaps of Aramaic origin is the use of רַבִּים/וֹת (rabbīm/ōṯ) 'many' (masc., fem.) as an attributive adjective before the noun (Ne 9:28; 1 C 28:5, etc.) and of the particle עַד לְ- (ʿaḏ leˢ-) 'until' before a noun, as well as the non-assimilation of *nun* when the preposition מִן (min) 'from' precedes a noun without the definite article.[22]

Sometimes the particles אֵת (ʾēṯ), as in RH, and לְ- (leˢ-), as in Biblical Aramaic, are used to emphasize the subject of a sentence or

[22] See Polzin 1976, 61ff.

the final expression in a sequence. *Waw*-consecutives are frequently replaced by copulative forms and *waw apodosis* has disappeared. As in Aramaic, -לְ (le-) often functions as object-marker. Occasionally, an attributive adjective precedes a noun, and there are instances of unusual word order within sentences, so that, for example, a noun in the accusative can precede an infinitive verb. An attributive clause may be joined in asyndetic parataxis to a noun preceded by the article. Genitive relationships are sometimes constructed asyndetically, especially after כֹּל (kōl) 'all' or a preposition, and the article can occasionally introduce a noun clause or a verb in the suffix-conjugation (1 C 29:8, 17, etc.).[23] The uses of the particle עַל ('al) to indicate direction, of -לְ (le-) '(in order) to' in final clauses, and of מִקְצָת (mi-qṣāṯ) instead of מִן (min) 'from' may be regarded as Aramaisms. Significant differences in vocabulary, especially technical terms, in style, and in the use of particles endow the work with a quality which clearly distinguishes it from pre-exilic compositions.

Some of the language used when Chronicles was written might have been influenced by RH, for example the use of the preposition אֵצֶל ('ēṣæl) 'beside' with the verb יָשַׁב (yšb) 'sit, dwell', instead of בְּקֶרֶב (bᵉ-qæræḇ) or בְּתוֹךְ (bᵉ-ṯōḵ) 'in the midst of', or with the verb בּוֹא (bw') 'come', instead of אֶל ('æl) 'to'. The same is true of word order, for example שְׁלֹמֹה הַמֶּלֶךְ (šᵉlōmō ham-mælæḵ) 'Solomon, the King' at 2 C 10:2 instead of הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה (ham-mælæḵ šᵉlōmō) 'the King, Solomon' at 1 K 12:2. Sometimes there is a significant correspondence with liturgical usage, as in the accumulation of virtually synonymous verbs or nouns (cf. 1 C 16:4; 29:11), marking a major departure from the norms of pre-exilic Hebrew.[24]

Although it is commonly held that Ezra and Nehemiah should be grouped together with 1 & 2 Chronicles in a single 'Work of the Chronicler', there is considerable divergence in language and style

[23] See Kropat 1909, 72ff.
[24] See Hurvitz 1972, 45ff.

between these two sets of books.[25] Not only do the Aramaic sections of Ezra (4:8–6:18; 7:22–26) and 'the Nehemiah memoirs' (Ne 1:1–7:5; 12:27–13:31) clearly differ from the other material, but there are also notable differences from Chronicles in the rest of Ezra-Nehemiah as well. Although contemporary works tended to dispense with shortened forms of the verb, 1 & 2 Chronicles always use these in consecutive tenses. Whereas Ezra-Nehemiah and Daniel frequently employ a form analogous to the cohortative preceded by -וְ (wᵉ-) 'and' – וְנֹאכְלָה (wᵉ-nōḵᵉlā) 'and we shall eat' (Dn 1:12), for example – such constructions are normally avoided in 1 & 2 Chronicles. Ezra-Nehemiah systematically employs the contracted form יָ (yā) in theophoric names, whereas Chronicles alternates this with the older form יָהוּ (yāhū), as, for example, in יְשַׁעְיָהוּ (yᵉša'yāhū) 'Isaiah'. There are also striking differences in vocabulary, especially of a technical nature, and in style. Although Chronicles might present linguistic features that are later than those found in Ezra-Nehemiah, the author often diverges, intentionally it would seem, from the general tendencies of his time. Nonetheless, Ezra-Nehemiah and 1 & 2 Chronicles share so many linguistic features that a similar origin for all four books is at least a reasonable possibility.[26]

In the Book of Nehemiah, and particularly in 'the Nehemiah memoirs', already mentioned, the influence of Aramaic is clear. It is found in vocabulary, like אחז ('ḥz) 'shut', זְמָן (zᵉmān) 'appointed time', as well as in longer expressions, which are really calques – הַמֶּלֶךְ לְעוֹלָם יִחְיֶה (ham-mælæḵ lᵉ-ʿōlām yiḥyæ) 'may the king live forever' (2:3), אִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב ('im 'al ham-mælæḵ ṭōḇ) 'if it please the king' (2:7), נִשְׁמַע לְ- (nišma' lᵉ-) 'it was heard by', etc. As in Chronicles and Ezra, cardinal numbers come after the noun. There might also be some examples of influence by the spoken vernacular, coinciding with later RH usage, for example הָיוּ אֹמְרִים (hāyū 'ōmᵉrīm) 'they used to say' (6:19), אֶצְלָם ('æṣlām) 'among

[25] See Japhet 1968; Williamson 1977; Braun 1979; Throntveit 1982; Talshir 1988.
[26] See Talshir 1988.

them' (4:6), וַיִּכְעַס הַרְבֵּה (way-yiḵ'as harbē) 'and he became very angry' (3:33), and the use of the relative particle אֲשֶׁר ('ašær) in a way that corresponds to RH -שֶׁ (šæ-) and Aramaic דִּי (dī).

The same is true of Ezra which has similar linguistic features, with Aramaic calques like הַהֱרִימוּ (ha-hērīmū) 'which they raised' (8:25) for אֲשֶׁר הֵרִימוּ ('ašær hērīmū) or לִירוּשָׁלַם (l-īrūšālayim) '(bring) to Jerusalem' (8:30) for יְרוּשָׁלַיְמָה (yᵉrūšālaymā), as well as RH-type expressions such as עַד לַשָּׁמַיִם ('aḏ laš-šāmayim) 'up to heaven' (9:6), כֵּלִים לַזָּהָב (kēlīm laz-zāhāḇ) 'vessels of gold' (1:11), and תַּעֲנִית (ta'ᵃnīṯ) 'fast' (9:5).[27]

Turning to Daniel, the central issue is no longer the very obvious influence of Aramaic, but the possibility that those sections that have reached us in Hebrew were also originally written in Aramaic, and then translated.[28] Such a thesis has not, however, been proved beyond doubt. Whatever the case, in their present form these sections display an attempt to imitate BH.[29]

Certain of the Psalms present clear examples of late usage, containing a considerable number of words and longer expressions that only occur in the post-exilic books, RH, or Aramaic. This is not to say that other compositions within Psalms are not representative of pure BH.[30]

More difficult to place, from a linguistic perspective, is the short Book of Jonah, which is generally agreed to be post-exilic.[31] For some, the book exemplifies a fundamentally biblical type of Hebrew, although it also displays a number of RH features, especially in vocabulary.[32] In contrast, other scholars have emphasized Aramaisms like עשת (ʿšt) htp. 'think' (1:6), זַעַף (za'ap̄) 'rage' (1:15), and טַעַם (ṭa'am) 'decree' (3:7). They have also pointed

[27] See Bendavid 1967, 64ff.
[28] See Rowley 1932; Zimmermann 1938; 1939; 1960–61; Ginsberg 1948.
[29] See Archer 1974.
[30] See the magnificent study by A. Hurvitz (1972), which may be regarded as one of the most important contributions to our knowledge of LBH. His analysis shows that Psalms 103, 117, 119, 124, 125, 133, 144, and 145 contain post-exilic linguistic features.
[31] See Fohrer 1968, 442.
[32] Thus, Bendavid 1967, 60f.

to other late items of vocabulary, such as סְפִינָה (sᵉp̄īnā) 'ship' (1:5), טול (ṭwl) hi. 'hurl' (1:4), שתק (štq) 'be quiet' (1:11), and מנה (mnh) pi. 'appoint' (2:1; 4:7),[33] and to some grammatical usages similar to those already noted in Chronicles. The author's habit of switching between אֲנִי ('ᵃnī) and אָנֹכִי ('ānōḵī) 'I' (1:9) and אֲשֶׁר ('ᵃšær) and -שֶׁ (šæ-) 'who, which' (4:10-11), together with his use of such obvious Aramaisms as בְּשֶׁלְמִי (bᵉ-šæl-lᵉ-mī) or בַּאֲשֶׁר לְמִי (ba-'ašær lᵉ-mī) 'on account of whom' (1:7-8), contribute to the idiosyncratic character of this book.

In the Song of Songs, the popular spoken language is for the first time given literary and poetic representation.[34] It is a post-exilic collection of poems celebrating love and marriage, containing words from Aramaic, like עֶרֶשׂ ('æræś) 'couch' (1:16), Persian, for example פַּרְדֵּס (pardēs) 'orchard' (4:13),[35] and Greek, for example אַפִּרְיוֹן ('appiryōn) 'palanquin' (3:9), from *phoreion*. There are clear differences from BH: *waw*-consecutive is avoided, the relative -שֶׁ (šæ-) is used instead of אֲשֶׁר ('ašær), and the infinitive construct with proclitic particle is hardly found at all. Some BH expressions are employed, however, if only for rhetorical effect. Sometimes BH forms are used alongside others that would later be found in RH – compare, for example, the conjunctions כִּי (kī) and -שֶׁ (šæ-) 'that' at 2:5 and 5:8. There are numerous instances of vocabulary lacking in BH but known from RH – שׁוּק (šūq) 'marketplace' (3:2), אָמָּן ('ommān) 'craftsman' (7:2), כֹּתֶל (kōṯæl) 'wall' (2:9), מֶזֶג (mæzæḡ) 'mixture' (7:3), קְוֻצּוֹת (qᵉwuṣṣōṯ) 'locks of hair' (4:2), and תאם (t'm) hi. 'bear twins' (4:2) are examples of forms that occur only in the Song of Songs and the rabbinic literature; furthermore, such expressions give the impression of being living words, not the results of archaic or artificial usage. There are also longer phrases typical of RH, such as כִּמְעַט שֶׁעָבַרְתִּי ... עַד שֶׁמָּצָאתִי (ki-m'aṭ šæ-'āḇartī ... 'aḏ šæm-māṣāṯī) 'I had scarcely passed ...

[33] See A. Werner 1979; Qimron 1980.
[34] See Bendavid 1967, 74ff.
[35] See Jepsen 1958.

when I found' at 3:4, or with a very different word order from that of the classical language, exemplified in אַל־תִּרְאוּנִי שֶׁאֲנִי שְׁחַרְחֹרֶת ('al tir'ūnī šæ-'ᵃnī šᵉḥarḥōræṯ) 'do not look at me because I am dark' (1:6).

The Book of Koheleth (Ecclesiastes), probably from the second half of the third century BCE, has its own peculiarities combined with a language very close to RH and a degree of Aramaic influence. Thus, it uses noun patterns in ־וֹן (-ōn), such as חֶסְרוֹן (ḥæsrōn) 'lack' at 1:15 and שִׁלְטוֹן (šilṭōn) 'dominance' at 8:4, and in ־וּת (-ūṯ), as in סִכְלוּת (sikₗūṯ) 'folly' at 2:3, both characteristic of RH (the latter possibly under Aramaic influence), and others that are clearly Aramaic – כְּבָר (kᵉbₗār) 'already' (1:10), קְרָב (qᵉrābₗ) 'war' (9:18). As in other late works, the article is not elided after a particle, for example כְּהֶחָכָם (kᵉ-hæ-ḥākₗām) 'like the sage' (8:1), and the pronoun אָנֹכִי ('ānōkₗī) 'I' is never used. זֶה (zō) is sometimes found for the demonstrative pronoun זֹאת (zōṯ) 'this' (2:2, etc.). Other features of Koheleth include the use of the particles עֲדַן ('ᵃdₗæn) and עֲדָנָה ('ᵃdₗænā) 'still' (4:2, 3), quite alien to BH but well known in RH, and a tendency to create compounds by the elision of word-initial and word-final consonants. Similar RH-type features are the accumulating of particles, for example, בְּשֶׁכְּבָר (bᵉ-šæk-kᵉbₗār) 'given that already' (2:16), and the use of אִי ('ī) instead of אוֹי ('ōy) 'alas' (4:10; 10:16). The use of the relative particle is also striking – although there are slightly more instances of BH אֲשֶׁר ('āšær), RH -שֶׁ (šæ-) is very common too, especially with new roots that are not used in BH. As in RH, -שֶׁ (šæ-) also attracts other particles, for example כְּשֶׁבָּא (kᵉ-šæb-bā) 'as he came' (5:14) and מִשֶּׁתִּדּוֹר (miš-šæt-tiddōr) 'than that you should vow' (5:4), and there is a tendency not to distinguish roots with final י (y) and those with final ה (h).

We might say that in Koheleth there has been a conscious blending of BH and RH, with the latter perhaps predominating. Koheleth avoids using *waw*-consecutive and introduces a late usage of the participle as present tense, negated by אֵין ('ēn) 'not'. It is not unusual to find a form of expression from one period of the

language alongside its equivalent from another, in the case of the demonstratives or the relative particle, for example. At times the writer attempts to give a veneer of BH to typically RH expressions, as with אֲשֶׁר־רָאִיתִי אֲנִי טוֹב ('ᵃšær rā'īṯī 'ānī ṭōbₗ) 'that which I have seen to be good' at 5:17, טוֹב אֲשֶׁר תֶּאֱחֹז בָּזֶה (ṭōbₗ 'ᵃšær tæ'ᵃḥōz bā-zæ) 'it is good that you hold onto this' at 7:18, or, at 12:1, עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא ('aḏ 'ᵃšær lō') 'before (something does) not (happen)' instead of עַד שֶׁלֹּא ('aḏ šæl-lō'). Elsewhere, the impact of RH is very clear, for example וְיֹתֵר שֶׁהָיָה (wᵉ-yōṯēr šæ-hāyā) 'and in addition to being', at 12:9, has no parallel in BH.[36] It has been claimed that the language of Koheleth was influenced by the northern dialect,[37] or by Phoenician or Canaanite.[38] Although these possibilities cannot be excluded, they do not sufficiently account for the book's linguistic peculiarities.

A number of factors supports the view that other biblical works were also written during or after the exile, although their late features are not so clear. Ezekiel,[39] Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi,[40] Isaiah 55–66, Proverbs, parts of Job,[41] Lamentations,[42] Ruth,[43] etc.[44] come into this category.

Although uncertainties remain about whether the Book of Esther was composed in the Maccabaean or Hasmonaean periods, it is, in

36 See Bendavid 1967, 77ff.; du Plessis 1971.

37 Thus, Gordon 1955a.

38 See Dahood 1952; 1952a; 1962.

39 See Hurvitz 1982. In this exilic book there are still no clear features from LBH, although it does provide evidence of the beginning of processes that would reach full development in the Persian period.

40 A.E. Hill (1981) places Malachi around 500 BCE, but points out that its language does not contain many grammatical or lexical features from LBH.

41 See Hurvitz 1975, where it is shown that at least the narrative sections at the beginning and end of the book contain linguistic features that are clearly late.

42 See Löhr 1894.

43 Many Aramaisms have been found in the text of Ruth, for example לָהֵן (lāhēn) 'therefore' (1:13) and לְקַיֵּם (lᵉ-qayyēm) 'to establish' (4:7). See Eissfeldt 1965, 483.

44 Although since the time of Wellhausen, the priestly redaction of the Pentateuch – the 'Priestly Codex' (P) – has been included in the same category, the linguistic analysis by A. Hurvitz (1974) shows that in its present state the work is better regarded as a product of the pre-exilic period.

any case, one of the latest biblical writings. Linguistic features may point to a date well into the second century BCE, although the fine points of this judgement are open to debate. There are those who regard the book as written in a fundamentally biblical idiom, with RH-type modifications,[45] and others who view it as a RH text with influence from BH.[46]

In Esther, new elements from the period are found alongside others typical of the older language and representative of pure BH. There are instances of BH usage in connexion with, for example, the tenses of the verb, *waw*-consecutive, the infinitive construct preceded by proclitic particle, the infinitive absolute, the narrative formula וַיְהִי (wa-yᵉhī) 'and it came to pass', the genitive construction, interrogative *he*, the relative אֲשֶׁר (ʾᵃšær), and basic sentence syntax. A deliberate imitation of classical biblical style can be perceived, although it is not carried out in an absolutely consistent way. Many of Esther's linguistic features correspond to usages noted in Chronicles. These include repetition of a noun to signal distributive value, pluralization of collective nouns, frequent use of the infinitive construct preceded by -לְ (lᵉ-) 'to' in structures that replace the imperative or other finite forms of the verb, disuse of the infinitive absolute in commands, direct attachment of accusative suffixes to the verb, and overlapping uses of the particles.

Nonetheless, in other respects, beyond those already noted, the language is closer to BH than to that of Chronicles. For example, Esther does not employ the particles -לְ (lᵉ-) or אֵת (ēṯ) before a subject for emphasis, retains the feminine form of the third person plural suffix, and places cardinal numbers before the noun.[47] Such features indicate to what extent we are dealing here with an artificial literary language. On the other hand, there are also some important features that are shared with RH. These include word

[45] Thus Bendavid 1967, 61.
[46] See Rabin 1958, 152f.
[47] See Striedl 1937.

order, for example אֲשֶׁר־הוּא יְהוּדִי (ʾᵃšær hū' yᵉhūḏī) 'that he was a Jew' at 3:4, the substitution of עמד ('md) 'stand up' for קום (qwm), the periphrastic use of היה (hyh) 'be' with the participle, and the employment of the relative particle אֲשֶׁר (ʾᵃšær) on the analogy of RH -שֶׁ (še-), as in יוֹדְעִים אֲשֶׁר (yōḏᵉʿīm ʾᵃšær) 'knowing that' at 4:11. Sometimes a different preposition is preferred, as in בֵּין הָעַמִּים (bēn hā-ʿammīm) 'among the peoples' at 3:8; the same verse also witnesses to the use of אֵין ('ēn) 'not' negating a participle. There are also several late items of vocabulary not used in BH, for example, עָתִיד (ʿāṯīḏ) 'ready' (3:14), רָצוֹן (rāṣōn) 'desire' (1:8), כשר (kšr) 'be right' (8:5), and אִלּוּ ('illū) 'if only' (7:4), as well as words from Aramaic, such as יְקָר (yᵉqār) 'honour' (1:20) and אנס ('ns) 'compel' (1:8), and from Persian – דָּת (dāṯ) 'law' (1:13) and אֲחַשְׁתְּרָן (ʾᵃḥašᵗᵉrān) 'royal' (8:10), for example.[48]

From the second to first centuries BCE come the Hebrew fragments of Ben Sira, Jubilees, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, most of which were discovered in caves near the Dead Sea. For Ben Sira we also have some mediaeval fragments preserved in the Cairo Genizah. In Ben Sira, the main tendency is to imitate BH, although clear traces of RH are also recognizable.[49] Its orthography attempts to follow the BH model, although occasionally it accords with the practice of contemporary works, as with מזנים (mznym) for BH מאזנים (mʾznym, pron. mōzᵉnayim) 'scales' in the Massada manuscript of Ben Sira, 42:4. The relative pronoun can be אֲשֶׁר (ʾᵃšær) or -שֶׁ (šæ-), and Ben Sira's vocabulary contains BH elements, including both archaisms and terms from LBH, as well as components from RH and Aramaic.[50]

[48] See Bendavid 1967, 62ff. In a doctoral thesis, R.L. Bergey (1983) analysed a total of fifty-eight late features in the phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary of Esther, pointing out, for example, that at least seventeen do not occur in the other post-exilic books but are found in RH. In its language, then, Esther would come closer than any other book of the Bible to RH.
[49] See Strauss 1900; M.H. Segal 1958; Torrey 1950; Ackroyd 1953; Rabin 1958, 152. T. Penar (1975) tries to shed light on the Hebrew text of Ben Sira from parallels in Northwest Semitic, along the lines established by M.J. Dahood. His approach complements our own.
[50] See E.Y. Kutscher 1982, 87ff.

Chapter 7

MEDIAEVAL HEBREW

7.1 *Historical and geographical background*

It is not easy to establish precise boundaries for that stage of the Hebrew language generally known as Mediaeval Hebrew (MH). We have already said that RH stopped being used as a living vernacular around the end of the second century CE, surviving for several centuries, however, alongside Aramaic, as a literary language.[1] Although the transition to MH cannot be clearly defined, sometime during the sixth to seventh centuries and with the advent of Arab domination, there was a first movement towards the revitalization of Hebrew which may be considered as marking the beginnings of MH, even though the language remained deeply rooted in its past. This was the heyday of the Palestinian *payṭanim*, liturgical poets who employed a highly idiosyncratic, prayerlike language pervaded by biblical allusion and neologism.[2] The same period sees the redaction of some late *midrashim* and the beginning of Masoretic activity.

The new vitality was limited to Hebrew as a literary language, but this does not mean that the language had disappeared entirely from daily use. Even though across the world Jewish communities tended to adopt the language of the host country for normal communication, they continued to pray and to read the Bible in Hebrew. This means as well that Hebrew must still have been

[1] See Rabin 1970, 324ff.

[2] However, the beginnings of *piyyuṭ* are to be found several centuries earlier, as shown by H. Schirmann (1953, 123).

taught in Jewish schools, and the testimonies of various mediaeval travellers show us that the use of the language in conversation had not ceased completely, as there were some communities, admittedly few in number, that used Hebrew in everyday life. We now possess a considerably greater quantity of financial documents written in Hebrew, including, for example, merchants' notes and papers concerning trade, taxation, and loans and other commercial transactions. From the same period there are also numerous Hebrew inscriptions, especially on gravestones.[3] Sending letters in Hebrew to people or communities in distant countries was a standard practice, and travellers from other countries arriving in a Jewish community would normally employ the language for purposes of communication. Although certain writers made efforts to 'revive' Hebrew, there are many indications that it had never completely died out as a spoken language.[4]

A new phase in the revival of Hebrew as a literary language began in the tenth century. Starting in the east, it very soon reached the western limits of the Islamic world, and, in particular, Andalusia. Advances in Arabic grammar which awoke interest in the philological study of Hebrew, as well as Karaite concentration on BH and Rabbanite efforts not to be outpaced, contributed to this linguistic renaissance.[5]

Thus, we see that MH was not simply an artificial, derivative continuation of such traditional genres as *piyyuṭ*, which had gained new strength in ninth-century Italy. The Hebrew used by the Jews of Al-Andalus developed a previously unknown vitality both in poetry – a new secular verse inspired by Arabic genres as well as a different brand of religious poetry – and in prose – philological studies, commentaries on Bible and Talmud, and works of a theological, philosophical, polemical, scientific, and medical nature. However, Hebrew was not the only language used in these

[3] See, for example, Cantera and Millás 1956.

[4] See Chomsky 1969, 206ff.

[5] See Allony 1973; 1974a; 1975; 1979; Roth 1983.

fields, as Jewish writers also employed Arabic, occasionally for poetry, but much more often in prose.

The overall picture is complex and lacks a single clear pattern of development. Closely connected with the historical and social milieu in which the literature was produced and the formation of a distinctive tradition which very soon imposed limits on the various genres, there is a more or less marked tendency for writers to fall back on the linguistic inheritance of BH and RH. Thus, they transform the senses of old words, create new ones by analogy, expand grammatical forms in order to adapt them to new requirements of expression, and accept some degree of modification of Hebrew under the influence of such languages as Arabic, Aramaic, Latin and other members of the Romance family, and German.

MH is not, properly speaking, a 'language' comparable to BH or RH. It did not possess sufficient vitality in daily life or even in literature to develop into a reasonably complete and homogeneous system. MH written works display many differences, but not enough to speak of different dialects. This is because MH was never a language in the full sense, but rather a revival of linguistic usages and traditions, developed according to each writer's judgement, depending on his particular social and cultural background, and in line with his own ideas about the language.

It is clear that throughout this revival a major rôle was played by the rise of philology, originating in the east and encouraged on the authority of Saadiah and other scholars from North Africa, which developed with incredible vigour in Andalusia in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that all the resulting studies were primarily concerned with BH and do not necessarily attempt to encourage the use of Hebrew as a living language, but rather to describe its grammar and vocabulary in the best way possible. Only passing reference is made to RH, and philologists do not usually discuss the revitalization of the language that was taking place before their eyes. It is not surprising, then, that these works are often written in Arabic, not

Hebrew. However, there were some powerful personalities, including Solomon ibn Gabirol, who felt a sort of divine calling impelling them to rescue their people from its blindness and to serve it with a tongue which spoke the worthiest of languages.[6]

It has been correctly pointed out that Jews in the Middle Ages held a variety of attitudes towards Hebrew.[7] Those who lived under Islam approached the issue very differently from those in Christian lands. The latter, although sometimes employing Romance languages, preferred Hebrew for their literary works, even though this was often at the expense of poor style, dubious morphology, and questionable syntax. Jews living under Islam, in contrast, had tended since the beginning of the tenth century to use Arabic for prose but Hebrew for poetry in an obvious attempt to distinguish this from contemporary Arabic poetry, written in the language of the Koran. This could have had an ideological basis, expressly stated by certain writers as an attempt to promote their own linguistic heritage, BH, as no less aesthetically pleasing than the language of the Koran. There was also a religious factor – a scrupulously orthodox Jew would have found it difficult to express his feelings in the sacred language of another religion. However, an additional important factor relates to the level of competence in Arabic itself – whereas authors and readers had no difficulty in writing and understanding standard Arabic prose, Arabic poetry, based much more closely on the language of the Koran, was considerably more demanding.

Many voices were raised throughout the Middle Ages in defence of the use of Hebrew. Among others, Saadiah, Solomon ibn Gabirol, Moses ibn Ezra, Judah al-Ḥarizi, Judah ibn Tibbon, and Profiaṭ Duran lamented in one way or another the abandonment of the language. Some connected it directly with the sad situation of the Jewish people in exile. At one point in his life, we find Maimonides regretting that he had written most of his

[6] Thus, in Ibn Gabirol's *Sefer ha-'Anak*, vv. 14–22. See Sáenz-Badillos 1980, 16.
[7] See Halkin 1963.

work in Arabic, perhaps because he had become increasingly aware that many European readers had no access to his works.[8] Nevertheless, when dealing with particular philosophical or scientific topics, most Jews living in Muslim countries resorted to Arabic (generally written with Hebrew characters),[9] which remained during this period the language of scholars, both Jewish and Muslim.

In Christian territories, certain translators, like those of the Ibn Tibbon family, who felt keenly the problem of using both languages, complained that Hebrew had an excessively limited vocabulary in comparison with Arabic. However, Al-Ḥarizi and Profiaṭ Duran countered by blaming the situation on the ignorance of those using the language. While the Jews of central Europe were taking great liberties with the rules of Hebrew grammar, authorities like Ibn Janaḥ and Moses and Abraham ibn Ezra exerted themselves in a variety of ways in order to recover the language in its full purity. The legitimacy of RH as a means of expression, on its own or mixed with BH, was doubted by the most extreme purists, although Ibn Janaḥ, like Tanḥum b. Joseph Yerushalmi and others, defended it.

The point at which MH ends is as uncertain as its beginnings. Setting aside the part played by some Jews in the Renaissance, Judaism as such, after the expulsion from Spain in 1492 and the difficulties experienced by Jewish communities elsewhere, did not undergo any significant major social or cultural changes until the second half of the eighteenth century. For many historians, the Jewish 'Middle Ages', and thus, in some sense, MH as well, did not end until then. It is only with the *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) that genuine modernization begins, although in respect of language this was just as much tied to the past as was the Hasidic literature of the time.[10]

8 See his letter to the Jewish community of Lunel in A. Lichtenberg, *Kovec̣ teshuvot ha-RaMBaM we-iggerotaw* (Leipzig, 1859, repr. 1969), pp. 44 a–b. See Halkin 1963, 238f.

9 See Baron 1958, 3ff.

10 See Rabin 1973, 57ff.

MH spread as extensively as Jewish communities themselves, throughout the civilized world. With regard to MH literature, we should distinguish an eastern area which includes Palestine, Babylonia, and Egypt, a western area including North Africa and Spain, and a central European, or Ashkenazi, area from Italy to England and from France to eastern Europe.

The study of MH has only begun relatively recently. In the West, until the nineteenth century, primarily theological motives ensured an almost exclusive concentration on BH, and, occasionally, particularly among Jewish grammarians and lexicographers, on RH as well. From the middle of the last century, some basic works of mediaeval Hebrew literature started to appear in the West, along with a number of important studies on MH literary and linguistic features due to the labours of, for example, M. Sachs, W. Bacher, L. Zunz, J. Derenbourg, A. Neubauer, S.G. Stern, P. Kokowtzow, and M. Jastrow. The manuscripts of the Cairo Genizah, now housed in libraries throughout the world, have enormously increased our knowledge of this literature.

Even so, it still has to be said that the systematic and rigorous study of MH began only a few decades ago, and our present improved state of knowledge owes much to work undertaken in recent years in Israel and by Jewish scholars from other countries. Thus, we are still in the initial phase of a new discipline, where we lack as yet the necessary detailed studies of MH writers and works to develop a complete picture of the various linguistic forms which are included under the general name of MH.

For the language of the *payṭanim*, we rely on the listings of L. Zunz,[11] the embryonic dictionary of J. Kena'ani,[12] studies by M. Zulay, S. Lieberman, A. Mirsky, S. Spiegel, and most importantly in recent years, Y. Yahalom.[13] The language of Saadiah

11 1920 (1st ed., 1855), 116ff., 367ff.

12 1930–31.

13 See Zulay 1936, etc.; Lieberman 1939; Spiegel 1963; Mirsky 1965–66; Yahalom 1974, etc., especially 1985.