The Independent Scholar Vol. 10 (December 2023) ISSN 2381-2400

THE HEBREW GOSPEL IN THE HEBREW SCRIPT: FOURTH-CENTURY INTERPRETATION OF *HEBRAIDI DIALEKTO* AS ALPHABET

Jordan Lavender, Ph.D.

(Millbury, Massachusetts, USA)

Correspondence should be addressed to: jordan.lavender@ncis.org

Date submitted: 26 March 2023

Accepted following revisions: 25 August 2023

First published on line 28 August 2023

Abstract

Various early Church Fathers reference a Gospel written in "Hebraidi dialekto [Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ]" which has been interpreted as referring to either a Gospel written in the Hebrew or Aramaic language, or even in a uniquely Jewish way of speaking ancient Greek. This analysis considers previous work on understanding both of these words, in addition to applying concepts from modern linguistics, to understand the nature of what the early Church Fathers were claiming about the earliest sources of Christian literature. This paper proposes that the Greek phrase "Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ" came to be interpreted as referring to either a Hebrew or Aramaic document written in the Hebrew block script, as opposed to the older paleo-Hebrew script, which was regarded as having both claims to antiquity and a higher degree of sacrality.

Keywords: Hebrew Gospel; bilingualism; linguistic variation; early Church Fathers

The Independent Scholar Vol. 10 (December 2023) ISSN 2381-2400

INTRODUCTION

Behind the Synoptic problem and in studies to understand the historical Jesus is a problem of language.[1] It is generally understood that Jesus was a multilingual person[2] in a multilingual society,[3] in which Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek[4] existed in a diglossic relationship. This refers to two varieties of the same language, such as classical Arabic and its dialectal forms, which have different purposes in society and in people's interactions with others so that each language has a defined role in society.[5] While there has been intense debate about the use of each of these languages in Greco-Roman Palestine, most scholars support the notion that Aramaic was the common vernacular at the time.[6] If Aramaic was perhaps not used in writing, but used together with Hebrew as Semitic vernaculars,[7] then Jesus would have taught and spoken Aramaic on a day-to-day basis and would have taught in that language. Even if Hebrew were a vernacular, as some have argued,[8] positing that Aramaic was used by upper classes and Hebrew by lower classes,[9] a problem still remains. How did the Semitic teaching of Jesus go from oral form in Aramaic or Hebrew to its written form in Greek?

This problem was felt by the Church Fathers, who maintained a tradition that the Gospel of Matthew, in particular, was originally written in Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ (*Hebraidi dialekto*). That is, that the sayings of Jesus were originally recorded in a Semitic language *before* being translated into Greek, at some point at the end of the first century CE. A relatively small group of scholars have proposed that Jesus spoke and taught in Greek.[10] Even so, the tradition of an early version of the Gospel in Hebrew exists among the Church Fathers and persists from the earliest records of Christian writing in the second century to the ascent of Christianity to become the imperial religion in the fourth century.

This tradition is separate and distinct from the known phenomenon of individual Gospel texts associated with Jewish Christian groups. There are known to have been three such documents: The Gospel of the Hebrews, the Gospel of the Ebionites and the Gospel of the Nazoraeans.[11] The terminology is somewhat confusing in that Papias seems to refer to

---

[1] The Synoptic problem refers to the three canonical Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, referred to as *synoptic* because of the literary relationship among these texts. There is quite a bit of overlap in their material which can be seen in a parallel presentation of each Gospel and its contents.

[2] Porter, S. E. (2004). Criteria for authenticity in historical-Jesus research. *Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research*, 1-306.

[3] Rydbeck, L. (1998). The Language of the New Testament. *Tyndale Bulletin*, *49*, 361-368; James, J. C. (1920). *The Language of Palestine and Adjacent Regions*. T. & T. Clark; Porter, S.E. (2003). Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament with Reference to Tense and Voice. *Studies in Biblical Greek I;* 111-56; Porter, S. E. (1991). Introduction. The Greek of the New Testament as a Disputed Area of Research. *The language of the New Testament*, 11-38.

[4] Gundry, R. H. (1964). The language milieu of first-century Palestine: its bearing on the authenticity of the gospel tradition. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, *83*(4), p. 405.

[5] Ferguson, C. A. (1959). Diglossia. *Word*, *15*(2), 325-340; Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies* (No. 1). Cambridge University Press.

[6] Bock, D. L. (2002). *Studying the historical Jesus: A guide to sources and methods*. Baker Academic.

[7] Birkeland, H. (1954). *The Language of Jesus*. Oslo: Jacob Dybward, p. 11, 39

[8] Segal, M. H. (2001). *A grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew*. Wipf and Stock Publishers; Rabin, C. (1958). The historical background of Qumran Hebrew. *ScrHier* 4, 144–161.

[9] Segal, M. H. (1908). Mišnaic Hebrew and its relation to Biblical Hebrew and to Aramaic. *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 647-737.

[10] Porter, S. E. (1993). Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek? *Tyndale Bulletin*, *44*, 199-235.

[11] Ehrman and Plese (p. 100) note that Jerome and Eusebius explicitly refer to an Aramaic document, whereas most Church Fathers did not read Semitic languages, presuming a version of those documents existing in Greek. They divide the quotations related to these texts into three groups. One is found in Origen, Eusebius and Jerome involving quotations closely aligned to Matthew and coming from a Semitic document. The second group consists of Alexandrian authors (Clement, Origen and Didymus the Blind) who have no relation to Matthew and derive from a Greek source. A third group of quotations found in Epiphanius seem to come from a different gospel harmony. The first group is proposed to be a Semitic version of Matthew, which was

the Hebrew version of Matthew as the "Gospel of the Hebrews" and the latter document, the Gospel of the Nazoraeans, is sometimes referred to as the "Gospel of the Hebrews." In any case, the first two of these non-canonical Gospels were written in Greek; according to Jerome, the latter was composed in Aramaic.

I have specifically used the phrasing *Semitic language* because the phrase Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ (*Hebraidi dialekto*) is ambiguous; it is not clear what *Hebraidi* means nor what a *dialektos* is. This had led some scholars to propose that *Hebraidi* could have referred to either Hebrew *or* Aramaic; in fact, interpreting this as referring to Aramaic is probably the more common option. Maurice Casey is perhaps the strongest advocate for an Aramaic original source for both Mark[12] and the Q sayings tradition, meaning that these texts were originally written in Aramaic and subsequently translated into Greek.[13] Behind Casey's proposals for an Aramaic source for much of the Gospel tradition is the assertion that Jesus taught in Aramaic, a proposition that, although widely accepted, has not been universally accepted by scholars. Casey proposes that, behind both Mark and Q, there is an Aramaic source that can be reconstructed through careful analysis of the current Greek text, which he proposes was translated directly from the Semitic source. Others have proposed similar ideas but with a Hebrew original instead of an Aramaic source.[14] James Edwards is perhaps the most known advocate of a Hebrew *ur*-gospel. Edwards claims that the original Hebrew source is behind the Jewish Christian Gospel(s) and the special material of Luke (called L in the multiple source theory).[15] Edwards' theory, in particular, relies on a literal reading of the relevant material in the Church Fathers' writings about the origin of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew or Aramaic.

This paper compares analyses of the words *Hebraïdi dialektos* to explore how this phrase was understood by the fourth-century Christian authors who mention this tradition about a Gospel being composed in Hebrew. This is accomplished through a close analysis of the writings of Jerome and Epiphanius in particular, with previous analyses of both Greek words and a theoretical background in modern sociolinguistic research into bilingualism and multilingualism. By examining how the words *Hebraidis* and *dialektos* were used by authors in antiquity, we can firmly establish that the reference is most likely referring to composition in the Hebrew language, although the word *dialektos* is quite ambiguous and could point to a Jewish variety of Greek. Inscription evidence from the period suggests that Aramaic was not used in religious compositions and was used for more mundane, vernacular purposes, pointing away from Aramaic as the source of the composition. However, since no text survives, the question is ultimately unanswerable. This shifts our focus from uncovering something that was lost to understanding how the Hebrew Gospel served an interpretive function for the growing Christian community, particularly the proto-orthodox faction, which sought to establish its dominance over other varieties of Christianity in existence up until the fifth century. This research suggests that the tradition of the origins of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew were invented to lend credibility to the growing Christian movement and to perpetuate its claims to authenticity and antiquity as a religious movement.

---

geographically located in Berea and Aleppo Syria; the second is thought to be the so-called Gospel according to the Hebrews, written in Greek and found among Jewish Christians in Egypt; the third is said to be the Gospel of the Ebionites, a Greek gospel harmony used among Christians in the East of the Jordan River, reported by Epiphanius; Ehrman, B. and Z. Plese. (2013).

[12] Casey, M. (1999). *Aramaic sources of Mark's Gospel* (Vol. 102). Cambridge University Press.; Casey, M. (2002). *An Aramaic approach to Q: Sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (Vol. 122). Cambridge University Press.

[13] Referring to a hypothetical source text for the common sayings of Jesus found between Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark.

[14] Carmignac, J. (1987). *The Birth of the Synoptics*. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press; Van Cangh, J. (2005). *L'Evangile de Marc : un original hébreu?* Bruxelles: Editions Safran.

[15] The term "L Source" is used in the multiple source theory to explain the literary relationships among the canonical Gospels. Both Matthew and Luke copy from Mark, incorporating most of Mark in their own works. Matthew and Luke additionally share a large body of sayings material called the Q (from the German *Quelle*, 'source'). However, both Matthew and Luke incorporate their own unique material called "M" and "L" respectively; c.f. Edwards, J. (2009). *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

CONCEPTS IN MODERN LINGUISTICS

One of the many subfields within the broader discipline of sociolinguistics seeks to understand how and why bilingual speakers use multiple languages. These theoretical assumptions will here be maintained to analyze historical text. One of the key assumptions of sociolinguistic research is that language has always exhibited the same properties throughout time, meaning that the principles that describe modern speakers of multiple languages will also be applicable to ancient speakers of multiple languages.

The nature of the topic of analysis leads to a consideration of multilingualism from a sociolinguistic point of view. Multilingualism does not fit one simple pattern in a community. Speakers may be proficient in grammar and pronunciation but lack literacy, or there could be lexical gaps in a speaker's communicative competency in one of their languages, or bilingual speakers may have communicative competence but lack full control over their use of forms.[16] One important pattern of multilingualism to note here is *diglossia*:[17] a superposed 'high' language and another 'low' variety. Diglossia is relatively *stable*, meaning the role of each language is not subject to much social change. The *high* language is usually a standardized variety with a body of literature and taught in formal education, but not used in regular conversation.[18] Diglossia is classified as either *classical* or *extended*, with the former referring to varieties of the same linguistic family (Modern Standard Arabic vs. Arabic dialects) and the latter referring to those cases where unrelated languages existed in high and low varieties according to domain.[19] In diglossia, the high and low languages have functional purposes in normal interactions in society. One is usually written and formal and the other vernacular, oral, and informal. The different ways that languages are used in these contexts is called *domains*, "an abstraction which refers to a sphere of activity representing a combination of specific times, settings and role relationships."[20] Common domains can be family, friendships, religion, employment, and education, and each domain may invoke the use of one language or another in a bilingual speaker's mind.[21] There is usually a one-to-one relationship between language choice and social context, so that each variety can be seen as having a distinct place or function within the local speech repertoire. In such cases, language selection tends to be socially stable and speakers know these unwritten rules and only use one language in a given situation. Other factors such as discourse function, where some topics are better handled in one language than another because either the speaker might be competent in discussing a certain topic in only one of the languages or one language might lack the necessary vocabulary for a given topic.[22] Speakers also take into account their audience's language preference and proficiency, as well as ethnolinguistic identification.[23]

---

[16] Myers-Scotton, C. (1990). Suzanne Romaine, Bilingualism. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. Pp. 337. *Language in Society*, *19*(4), 557-561.

[17] Ferguson, C. A. (1959). Diglossia. *word*, *15*(2), 325-340; Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies* (No. 1). Cambridge University Press.

[18] Fishman, J. *Sociolinguistics*. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House (1971), p. 16.

[19] Fishman, J. (1980). Bilingualism and biculturism as individual and societal phenomena. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1(1), 3- 15. doi:10.1080/01434632.1980.9993995

[20] Fishman, Joshua A. and Cooper, Robert Leon. and Newman, Roxana Ma. *Bilingualism in the barrio [by] Joshua A. Fishman, Robert L. Cooper, Roxana Ma, et al* Indiana University Bloomington 1971, p. 29.

[21] Hoffman G (1971) Puerto Ricans in New York: A language-related ethnographic summary. In Fishman J, Cooper R and Ma R (eds), *Bilingualism in the Barrio*, p. 29.

[22] Fishman, J. A. (2020). Who speaks what language to whom and when? In *The bilingualism reader* (pp. 55-70). Routledge.

[23] Hamers, J., & Blanc, M. (2000). *Bilinguality and Bilingualism* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511605796, p. 253.

Other salient features of multilingualism are the use of both languages in the same discourse, called *code switching* and linguistic borrowing, the incorporation of elements of one language in another.[24] There are different ways that speakers borrow words from one language or another and how they use code switching in their discourse. There are also different linguistic types of code switching with different properties associated with them.[25]

Identity is a key issue in multilingualism and often reflects the linguistic policies of a place. Speakers can demonstrate their own linguistic, social, and cultural knowledge through their use of language, as well as their socioeconomic status and social standing.[26] Speakers might also use language to express their own identity.[27]

Newer understandings of how languages are used and function question some of the structuralist assumptions of previous research, which considered "languages" as discrete units. This skepticism has led to a new theoretical orientation in understanding multilingualism, which comes under many names. I rely on the concept of *polylanguaging*[28] to describe this theoretical orientation. This refers to the use of "features" associated with different "languages" even when speakers purportedly only know features associated with one of those languages. This theoretical background focuses on the use of languages and not languages as static systems.[29] The benefit of this approach is that we can postulate that speakers can learn a number of "features" and assemble them together into one *linguistic repertoire*, but a speaker need not acquire an entire language system in order to use the features associated with that language in a socially appropriate way. This research was born out of the unique circumstances of the twenty-first century and the experience of language use on social media. However, the principles have been applied to other uses of language both historically and in other contemporary contexts. The features associated with language can refer to many aspects of language use, for example, in certain Romance languages, there is a politeness factor with second person address (*tu* vs *vous* in French, Spanish, Italian, etc.).

---

[24] Grosjean, F. (1982). *Life with two languages: An introduction to bilingualism*. Harvard University Press.

[25] For a sociolinguistic understanding of code switching, the work of Shana Poplack is highly recommended: Poplack, S. (1978). Syntactic structure and social function of code-switching, vol. 2. *Centro de Estudios Puertorriquenos,[City University of New York]*; Poplack, S. (2013). "Sometimes I'll start a sentence in Spanish Y TERMINO EN ESPAÑOL": Toward a typology of code-switching. *Linguistics*, *51*(s1), 11-14; Poplack, S. (1988). Contrasting patterns of code-switching in two communities. *Codeswitching: Anthropological and sociolinguistic perspectives*, *48*, 215-244; Poplack, S. and D. Sankoff. (1984). Borrowing: the synchrony of integration. *Linguistics* 22.99-135; Poplack, S., D. Sankoff , & C. Miller. (1988). The social correlates and linguistic processes of lexical borrowing and assimilation. *Linguistics*, 26(1). 47–104; Poplack, S., & Meechan, M. (1995). Patterns of language mixture: Nominal structure in Wolof-French and Fongbe-French bilingual discourse. *One speaker, two languages*, 199-232; Poplack, S., & Levey, S. (2010). Contact-induced grammatical change: A cautionary tale. *Language and space: An international handbook of linguistic variation*, *1*, 391-419; Poplack, Shana, David Sankoff and Christopher Miller. 1988. The social correlates and linguistic processes of lexical borrowing and assimilation. *Linguistics* 26. 47-104; Poplack, S, L. Zentz, and N. Dion. (2012). What counts as (contact-induced) change? *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 15(2). 247-254.

[26] Heller, M. (1995), Language, Minority Education and Gender Linking Social Justice and Power. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 5: 105-106. https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.1995.5.1.105; Heller, M. (2007). Bilingualism as Ideology and Practice. In: Heller, M. (eds) *Bilingualism: A Social Approach*. Palgrave Advances in Linguistics. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230596047_1

[27] Sebba, M., Mahootian, S., & Jonsson, C. (Eds.). (2012). *Language mixing and code-switching in writing: Approaches to mixed-language written discourse*. Routledge.

[28] Jørgensen, J. N., Karrebæk, M. S., Madsen, L. M., & Møller, J. S. (2015). Polylanguaging in superdiversity. In *Language and superdiversity* (pp. 147-164). Routledge.

[29] Møller, J. S., & Jørgensen, J. N. (2012). Enregisterment among adolescents in superdiverse Copenhagen. *Tilburg papers in culture studies*, *28*, 1-15.

This conceptualization of language denies the ontological reality of language, instead favoring a viewing of them as social constructs that serve a specific purpose.[30] That is, this perspective denies the existence of any independent entity known as "Spanish" or "Greek" but only what speakers *associate* with those terms. A speaker can access a diverse set of linguistic resources to use at their discretion in a variety of social contexts. A *native speaker* would lay claim to all of the "rights" associated with a set of linguistic resources and a *language learner* would be in the process of being accepted by those with those linguistic rights, along a continuum. The concept of diglossia is crucially important to understanding the linguistic situation in Greco-Roman Palestine, which can help to understand the language of composition of Gospel texts. There is some overlap in the claims made by Church Fathers regarding the composition of Matthew in either Hebrew or Aramaic with the claim that there was a Jewish Gospel composed in Hebrew or Aramaic, sometimes called the Gospel of the Hebrews. Additionally, the borders between languages will become important in this study, as well as the types of variation found therein. This paper's analysis will continue to answer the question of which languages were used in first-century Greco-Roman Palestine, and how they were used.

LANGUAGES IN FIRST-CENTURY PALESTINE

Before being able to understand the nuances of language use in the first century CE, a brief historical chronology should be provided to orient the reader to the various periods of history referenced in this section. The scope of analysis in this paper refers to the Greco-Roman period in Palestine, which began in the fourth century BCE and lasted well into the second century CE with the Bar Kokhba revolt. This paper includes references to the Hasmonean period, which began with the Maccabean revolt in 167 BCE and led to the establishment of an independent state ruled by the Maccabean family until its incorporation into the Roman Empire as a vassal state in 63 BCE. The Roman period began in 63 BCE and was marked by two conflicts. First, the Jewish-Roman war from 66 to 73 CE resulted in the destruction of the Second Temple and the Bar Kokhba revolt from 132 to 136 CE. Both of these led to the depopulation of Jews in Jerusalem and the establishment of the Roman colony of Aelia Capitolina in Jerusalem.

The linguistic situation in Palestine has been summarized in the following way,

> "That some measure of Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek was in use among the Jews of late Second Temple Judaea is thus agreed. Any attempt to move a single step beyond that banality, however, and consensus dissipates like fog in the morning sun."[31]

As previously mentioned, Aramaic is assumed to have been the common vernacular. However, the discovery of Hebrew documents from the Bar Kokhba period from Murabba'at[32] are given as evidence for the use of Mishnaic Hebrew at that time, referring to the variety of Hebrew used in the rabbinic document called the Mishnah. This text purported to contain the text of the oral Torah, believed by rabbinic Jews to have been given by God with the Five Books of Moses and contained the valid interpretation of the Torah's commandments. Some scholars from the early twentieth century maintain that Aramaic was used by the upper classes, but that Mishnaic Hebrew was used by the lower classes.[33] Textual evidence exists to show the use of Aramaic in Greco-Roman Palestine, including literature found at Qumran. The Talmud records dialectal variation in Galilean Aramaic, which are ascribed negative social values, i.e. improper pronunciation

[30] Androutsopoulos, J. (2014). Languaging when contexts collapse: Audience design in social networking. *Discourse, Context & Media*, *4*, 62-73.

[31] Wise, M. O. (2015). *Language and Literacy in Roman Judaea: A Study of the Bar Kokhba Documents*. Yale University Press, p. 20.

[32] Referring to a series of caves near the Qumran settlements where soldiers in the Bar Kokhba revolt hid from the Romans.

[33] Segal, M. H. (1908). Mišnaic Hebrew and its relation to Biblical Hebrew and to Aramaic.

which was perceived as "uneducated."[34] The Judeans are praised for maintaining the teachings of Torah by carefully maintaining the distinction between the Hebrew letters *'ayin* and *alef*, the former a guttural consonant, common in Arabic, and the latter a glottal stop, whereas the Galileans were not careful in their speech, and assumed to be less so in their religiosity.[35]

Returning to the idea of extended diglossia, it seems likely that there were two languages in a diglossic situation: Aramaic and Greek, with the former being the low language and the latter the high language, with the possibility of pre-war usage of Hebrew in some capacity, resulting in a trilingual diglossic linguistic situation. Greek was a written language before 70 CE and Aramaic was an oral language. There seems to have been a change of status in the domain usage after the war, with Jews beginning to write in Hebrew and Aramaic and Christians electing Greek.[36] The type of Hebrew used by rabbinic Jews in the composition of the Mishnah around 200 CE has been characterized as "artificial" in the sense that it points to the assumption that speakers of Aramaic and Greek *intentionally* revived Hebrew from its status as a dead classical language.[37]

Greek was the lingua franca of the Greco-Roman world of the time. Some point to the multicultural nature of Galilee of the time as evidence of the possible prevalence of Greek at the time, noting its status as a bilingual province. The importance of knowing Greek, primarily for commercial purposes cannot be overstated.[38] However, there are few archeological remains from Galilee to confirm these scholarly assumptions.[39] Lower Galilee was called the "Galilee of the Gentiles" and more heavily influenced by Greek (Matthew 4:15). It was surrounded by Greek culture in the Decapolis, Caesarea Tyre and Sidon, etc. Greek was used by the elite[40] and considered the *prestige language* of that society, dominating the educational, political and economic domains.[41] Many coins in Greek have been found from the 1st century CE, beginning with the Hasmoneans, until exclusive Greek coinage under the Herodians. A number of papyri have been found in Greek that were written by Jews. Sacred literature such as the Greek versions of Daniel and Esther were composed around this time, including the Septuagint[42], as well as non-sacred writers, such as Josephus, among many others. Jerusalem was the locus of Hellenized native cities and the process of Hellenization continued throughout the Hasmonean period until Greek had become the administrative language by the first century CE.[43] Archaeological and textual evidence confirms the importance of Greek, with recent statistics pointing to the proliferation of Greek in inscription data, with around 70% of inscriptions being composed in that language, even in Jerusalem, where Greek inscriptions are equal in number to Semitic inscriptions.[44] For a period of approximately 300 years, from around 200

---

[34] Similar to the way that some dialects of English are perceived today. One can think of the stereotypes of Southern US English varieties for a contemporary comparison.

[35] From the Talmudic witness, it seems that other guttural consonants were weakened in Galilee. See, Safrai, S. (2006). Spoken and Literary Languages in the Time of Jesus. In *Jesus' Last Week* (pp. 225-244). Brill., c.f. b. Eruv. 53a–b; y Ber. 4d, etc.

[36] Hezser, C. (2020). Jewish literacy and languages in first-century roman Palestine. *Orientalia*, *89*(1), 58-77.

[37] Schwartz, S. (1995). Language, power and identity in ancient Palestine. *Past & Present*, (148), 3-47, p. 14.

[38] Argyle, A. W. (1973). Greek among the Jews of Palestine in New Testament Times1. *New Testament Studies*, *20*(1), p. 88.

[39] Chancey, M. A. (2005). *Greco-Roman culture and the Galilee of Jesus* (Vol. 134). Cambridge University Press, pp. 122-165.

[40] Lester Grabbe. *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992, p. I:158.

[41] Porter, S. E. (1993). Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?. *Tyndale Bulletin*, *44*, 199-235.

[42] The ancient translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek.

[43] Hengel, M. (2003). *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their encounter in Palestine during the early Hellenistic period*. Wipf and Stock Publishers; Schwartz, S. (1995). Language, power and identity in ancient Palestine. *Past & Present*, (148), 3-47; Smelik, W. (2010). The Languages of Roman Palestine, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. C. Hezser. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 122-41.

[44] Rahmani, L. Y., Rahmani, L. Y., & Sussmann, A. (1994). *A catalogue of Jewish ossuaries: in the collections of the State of Israel*. Israel Antiquities Authority.

BCE. Onwards, only twelve pieces [in Galilee] are listed. Of these twelve, nine are in Greek, one in Aramaic, and two in a "Semitic" language. From the six pieces attributed to the first century CE (including the thirty years after 70 CE), only one ostracon[45] from Jotapata has an unidentified "Semitic" inscription, the rest are in Greek.[46] There is also a noticeable lack of Hebrew in non-literary writing from pre-70 CE Judea, when consulting ossuaries[47] and inscription evidence from the archaeological record. However, Wise's recent study on funerary inscriptions in Jerusalem shows a slightly stronger preference for Semitic inscriptions, showing 32.5% in Greek, 27.8% in "indistinct Semitic", 21.8% clearly in Aramaic and 7.7% in Hebrew, with the rest being some bilingual combination or other possibilities.

The implications of these data point to the status of Greek as widely spoken, even by Palestinian Jews.[48] However, Hebrew and Aramaic had well-defined roles in society of the time. Aramaic was the language of daily writing, primarily for legal documents and signing one's name. Ordinary people likely did not read Aramaic either: it was scholars and the elite who read Aramaic like they read Hebrew. Wise's study of the Bar Kokhba letters notes that witnesses signed in Hebrew in 25% of the cases, which he notes as a high number, countering scholars who disagree with the possibility of a vernacular Hebrew. The Jerusalem scribes were the most proficient in Hebrew with twenty-seven 27 of 33 able to sign in Hebrew. Wise bases his conclusion that Hebrew was still a vernacular language in Roman Judaea on these data. Those who were not able to speak the language might have been from the Galilee and the Diaspora, where Hebrew knowledge was lower. Wise concludes that 65-80% of Judaeans spoke a form of Hebrew, with a proposed dialect continuum with a variety of Mishnaic Hebrew used for speech, and a form of biblical Hebrew used in writing, and only elites would use the standard biblical variety. This suggests that Hebrew was the language of literature in multilingual Judaea, looking at the Dead Sea Scrolls literature in that language. The ruling class would have acquired Hebrew literacy, and these elites would be spread throughout the country with each village housing someone able to read the Torah. Wise's study shows a lack of literate Judaean ability to sign in Greek, with about 25% of the time this occurred. They did not learn Greek only for signing purposes. Wise proposes "alternative literacies" with two parallel tracks, one Semitic and one Hellenic with the ability to read the scriptures in Hebrew and the ability to read the classics in Greek in literary literacy. There were Judaean literary works in Greek and the scriptures were available in Greek translation in circulation in Judaea in the first century CE. Knowledge of Greek was useful (and perhaps necessary) for village elites. Wise concludes that around 16% of Judaean adults were signature literate, with that including around 65% of the male elite.

To conclude, while the study of language use in Greco-Roman Palestine is fraught with difficulties and the lack of an abundance of evidence, the available data seem to point to the use of Aramaic as a common vernacular, with elites having particular access to Greek and Hebrew. Greek, in particular, might have served some economic utility for members of non-elite classes that Hebrew did not. It is unclear how prevalent Hebrew would have been used by non-elites. Having this background into the complex linguistic situation of first-century CE Palestine, we now turn towards the issue at hand, first unpacking the meaning of *dialektos* in ancient Greek literature.

---

[45] Referring to broken pieces of pottery from earthenware vessels that have writing on them.

[46] Adan-Bayewitz, D., & Aviam, M. (1997). Iotapata, Josephus, and the siege of 67: preliminary report on the 1992-94 seasons. *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, *10*, 131-165.

[47] Referring to small containers for human remains in burial. In Judea, they were used in the first century CE as a secondary burial after being entombed in a cave or similar place. Analysis of the names found on ossuaries is an important aspect of studying both language use and the frequency of certain names used in that period.

[48] Avigad, N. (1976). *Beth She'arim: Report on the Excavations During 1953-1958. Catacombs 12-23* (Vol. 3). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

The Independent Scholar Vol. 10 (December 2023) ISSN 2381-2400

THE GREEK WORD *Dialektos* **[**Διάλεκτος]

Van Rooy[49] provides an excellent analysis into the use of the word, διάλεκτος (*dialektos*), in the ancient world, together with other authors discuss the issue of how διάλεκτος was understood in the Greco-Roman world.[50] His work shows how this word was used by ancient authors in a way that approximates the way that sociolinguists use the term *variation*, with several different axes. Ancient authors were aware of linguistic variation, as Herodotus makes clear, "But they [i.e. the Ionians of Asia Minor] do not use the same speech, but four modes of variations."[51] This is not an instance where the word διάλεκτος is used but the author labels the four varieties of ancient Greek in Asia Minor as "τρόποι παραγωγέων" (*tropoi paragogeon,* 'modes of variation').[52]

The word διάλεκτος seems to carry a general meaning which is something like *manner of speech* or *way of speaking*. This is attested by several authors (Aristophanes, ca. 450-385 BCE, Plato 428-347 BCE, etc.).[53] The term can certainly have *diastratic* connotations, meaning the variation in language found between different social groups (age, sex, profession, etc.).[54] This use of διάλεκτος is mentioned by Sextus Empiricus (190-210 CE), "His language is the normal ***dialektos*** of the city: not the fancy high-society accent, nor uneducated, rustic talk."[55] In addition to this clear reference to diastratic variation, in the sense that the author contrasts the *dialektos* of the city, especially between the accents of "high society" individuals versus uneducated individuals, Sextus Empiricus also references *diatopic* variation across geographical locations.

Diogenes of Babylon makes a clearer reference to *diatopic* variation, "*Dialektos* is *lexis* ['discernable voice'] 'stamped' 'tribally' and 'Greekly', or lexis of a certain country, that is, having a certain quality according to a ***dialektos***, as *thalatta*[56]

[49] Van Rooy, R. (2016). "What is a 'dialect'?" Some new perspectives on the history of the term διάλεκτος and its interpretations in ancient Greece and Byzantium. *Glotta*, *92*(1), 244-279.

[50] Cassio, A. C. (1984). Il "carattere" dei dialetti greci e l'opposizione Ioni-Dori: Testimonianze antiche e teorie di età romantica (su Arist. Quint. 2. 13, Iambl. v. Pyth. 241 sgg., sch. in Dion. Thr. p. 117, 18 sgg. Hilgard). *AIΩN: Annali del Dipartimento di Studi del Mondo Classico e del Mediterraneo Antico. Sezione linguistica*, *6*, 113-136; Cassio, A. C. (1993). *Parlate locali, dialetti delle stirpi e fonti letterarie nei grammatici greci*. Ediciones de la Universidad Autonoma; Fenoglio, S. (2009). La riflessione sui dialetti nei Commentari all'Odissea di Eustazio di Tessalonica. *Quaderni del dipartimento di filologia, linguistica e tradizione classica*, 239-254; Fenoglio, S. (2012). *Eustazio di Tessalonica, Commentari all'Odissea: glossario dei termini grammaticali*. Edizioni dell'Orso; Lambert, F. (2009). Les noms des langues chez les Grecs. *Histoire Épistémologie Langage*, *31*(2), 15-27; Morpurgo Davies, A. (1987). The Greek notion of dialect. *Verbum*, *10*(1), 2; Morpurgo Davies, A. (1993). Geography, history and dialect: the case of Oropos. *Dialectologica Graeca. Actas del II Coloquio Internacional de Dialectología Griega (Miraflores de la Sierra [Madrid], 19–21 de junio de 1991)*, 261-279; Munz, R. (1921). Über γλῶττα und διάλεκτος und über ein posidonianisches Fragment bei Strabo. Ein sprachwissenschaftlich-philologischer Exkurs zu Posidonius bei Strabo C 176 über dialektische Verschiedenheiten bei den Galliern. *Glotta*, *11*(1./2. H), 85-94;

[51] Γλῶσσαν δὲ οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν οὗτοι νενομίκασι, ἀλλὰ τρόπους τέσσερας παραγωγέων; Greek citations are taken from the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG) online database, unless mentioned otherwise.

[52] Hainsworth, J. B. (1967). Greek views of Greek dialectology. *Transactions of the Philological Society*, *66*(1), p. 66.

[53] Mackridge, P. (2009). Mothers and daughters, roots and branches: Modern Greek perceptions of the relationship between the ancient and modern languages. *Standard languages and language standards: Greek, past and present*, 259-276.

[54] Coseriu, E. (1981). Los conceptos de dialecto, nivel y estilo de lengua y el sentido propio de la dialectología. *LEA: Lingüística española actual*, *3*(1), 1-32.

[55] διάλεκτον ἔχοντα μέσην πόλεως, οὔτ' ἀστείαν ὑποθηλυτέραν οὔτ' ἀνελεύθερον ὑπαγροικοτέραν; Colvin, St. (1999): Dialect in Aristophanes and the Politics of Language in Ancient Greek Literature. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 283.

[56] Pronounced *thalassa* in Koiné and later varieties of Greek

(sea) in the Attic and hèmerè in the Ionic."[57] This reference associates διάλεκτος with the *lexis* [λέξις, speech] of Greece, or any country for that matter, thus making the comparison that διάλεκτος as language that has distinct categories based on geographical location. Διάλεκτος can also have *diaphasic* meaning, referring to variation in style and register, which is marked in Greek as a deviation from formal language, identified with *koine*.[58]

Διάλεκτος can also be used to refer to the ethnic Other when contrasted with the speech varieties of non-Greek peoples, functioning as a type of ethnic identity marker. The second to third-century CE theologian, Clement of Alexandria, adds a further clarification that the speech of other peoples is considered different from διάλεκτος and in fact is called γλώσσα (*glossa*), a "tongue," as he states, "The Greeks contend that the *dialektoi* with them are five in number, Attic, Ionic, Doric, Aeolic, and as a fifth the koiné, but that the sounds of barbarians, which are incomprehensible, are not even to be called *dialektoi*, but *glossai*" (Stromata 1, 21, 142, 4).[59] One can think of the ways that non-native English varieties are often stigmatized by native speakers of English as Other to understand the ways that native Greek speakers thought of the *dialektoi* of other peoples.

All of this suggests a rather broad definition for διάλεκτος, which could only be inadequately translated into English as a *linguistic variety*, relying on modern terminology, although it includes all of Coseriu's dimensions. These reflections are also observed in Christian literature, where *dialektos* refers to a distinct *language* as commonly understood in the Septuagint, New Testament and early Church Fathers.[60] However, it can also be used to mean a dialect.[61] That Nevertheless, one previously unmentioned usage of *dialektos* can also be found in Eusebius, where he uses the term to refer to an idiolect, a personal way of speech, including the errors one makes in a second language:

> "Moreover, it can also be shown that the diction of the Gospel and Epistle differs from that of the Apocalypse. For they were written not only without error as regards the Greek language, but also with elegance in their expression, in their reasonings, and in their entire structure. They are far indeed from betraying any barbarism or solecism, or any vulgarism. For the writer had, as it seems, both the requisites of discourse — that is, the gift of knowledge and the gift of expression — as the Lord had bestowed them both upon him. I do not deny that the other writer saw a revelation and received knowledge and prophecy. I perceive, however, that his dialect and language are not accurate Greek, but that he uses barbarous idioms, and, in some places, solecisms."[62]

The inherent ambiguity in the Greek word *dialektos* complicates any attempt to understand what could be referred to in the reference to a *Hebraïdi dialektos* as the language of composition of the Gospel. It could refer to a dialect,

---

[57] διάλεκτος δέ ἐστι λέξις κεχαραγμένη ἐθνικῶς τε καὶ Ἑλληνικῶς, ἢ λέξις ποταπή, τουτέστι ποιὰ κατὰ διάλεκτον, οἷον κατὰ μὲν τὴν Ἀτθίδα Θάλαττα, κατὰ δὲ τὴν Ἰάδα Ἡμέρη; Vitae philosophorum, 7, 56.

[58] Versteegh, C. H. M. (1986): "Latinitas, Hellenismos, 'Arabiyya". Historiographia Linguistica 13 (2–3): p. 431-432; Tribulato, O. (2014): "Dialectology (diálektos), Ancient Theories of". In Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek Language and Linguistics, edited by G. K. Giannakis, 1:457–461. Leiden: Brill.

[59] Φασὶ δὲ οἱ Ἕλληνες διαλέκτους εἶναι τὰς παρὰ σφίσι ε′, Ἀτθίδα, Ἰάδα, Δωρίδα, Αἰολίδα καὶ πέμπτην τὴν κοινήν,ἀπεριλήπτους δὲ οὔσας τὰς βαρβάρων φωνὰς μηδὲ διαλέκτους, ἀλλὰ γλώσσας λέγεσθαι... However, Clement does use *dialektos* to refer to the "Hebrew way of speaking": Ἔχει δ' οὖν καὶ ἄλλας τινὰς ἰδιότητας ἡ Ἑβραίων διάλεκτος, καθάπερ καὶ ἑκάστη τῶν λοιπῶν, λόγον τινὰ ἐμπεριέχουσα ἐθνικὸν ἐμφαίνοντα χαρακτῆρα. διάλεκτον γοῦν ὁρίζονται λέξιν ἐθνικῷ χαρακτῆρι συντελουμένην. (Stromata, 6, 15, 129, 2) Thus, the διάλεκτος of Hebrews also has a number of other properties, like each of the remaining [διάλεκτοι], entailing some λόγος ['meaningful speech'] that shows the ethnic character. In any case, one defines διάλεκτος as λέξις ['speech, discernable voice'] that is realized through the ethnic character.

[60] Esther 9:26; Daniel 1:4; Acts 1:19; 2:2, 6, 8; 22:2; 26:14 4Eusebius 22:7; 5Eusebius 8:2,11-12

[61] Epistle to Diognetus 5:2

[62] 7Eusebius 25:24-26; a *solecism* is an ungrammatical utterance in writing or speech.

The Independent Scholar Vol. 10 (December 2023) ISSN 2381-2400

language, or linguistic style. We must turn to the word *Hebraisti* to be able to determine if it could shed any light on the possible meaning of *dialektos* in this context.

Ἑβραΐς, Ἑβραϊστί, Ἑβραϊκή AND RABBINIC UNDERSTANDINGS OF SEMITIC LANGUAGE VARIETIES

Other terms to consider are the related words *hebrais, hebraisti, hebraike* [Ἑβραΐς, Ἑβραϊστί, Ἑβραϊκή], which is commonly thought to refer to the Aramaic language.[63] Buth and Pierce[64] question this assumption through an extensive analysis of texts from the Greco-Roman period. Their analysis of 2 Kings 18:26-28 in the Septuagint clearly demonstrates that the previous terms should be thought of as referring to *Hebrew* rather than *Aramaic*, as commonly assumed. This is due to the contrast between Συριστί (*Suristi,* Aramaic language) and Ιουδαϊστί (*Ioudaisti*, Judean language) in the text.[65] Pseudepigraphical literature[66] consistently uses the term, ἑβραϊστὶ (*hebraisti*), to refer to Hebrew, rather than Aramaic. 4 Maccabees states, "But after his mother had exhorted him in the Hebrew language, as we shall tell a little later (4 Maccabees 12:7)."[67] Here the meaning is clearly in reference to the *Hebrew language*, as distinct from other languages. In earlier literature, we have, "For what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have exactly the same effect when translated into another language"[68] from the translated text from Hebrew into Greek.

The testimony of Josephus is crucial, as he clearly distinguishes between the two varieties in his writings, most clearly in the following example:

> "Accordingly Moses says, That in just six days the world, and all that is therein, was made. And that the seventh day was a rest, and a release from the labor of such operations; whence it is that we celebrate a rest from our labors on that day, and call it the Sabbath, which word denotes rest in the Hebrew tongue" (Josephus, Antiquities 1:33).[69]

This shows his translation of a Hebrew word clearly into Greek.[70] In other cases, though, his usage is inconsistent. In another case, he refers to individuals speaking "Hebrew" in Susa, a city in Persia, which seems unlikely.

---

[63] Frederick William Danker, editor and reviser, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature, Third Edition (BDAG), based on Walter Bauer's Griechischdeutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur, 6th edition (ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann) and on previous English editions by W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[64] Buth, R., & Pierce, C. (2014). 3 Hebraisti in Ancient Texts: Does Ἑβραϊστί Ever Mean "Aramaic"?. In *The language environment of first-century Judaea* (pp. 66-109). Brill.

[65] Other references to Aramaic (Συριστί) in the Septuagint can be found in Ezra 4:7; Daniel 2:4; Job 42:17.

[66] An unfortunately broad term that strictly refers to works that are falsely claimed to be written by an author, perhaps best exemplified in the so-called "Pastoral Epistles which are claimed to be written by Paul, not accepted by most scholars. However, this category can include other works that do not strictly fit this definition.

[67] ὁ δὲ τῆς μητρὸς τῇ **Εβραΐδι** φωνῇ προτρεψαμένης αὐτόν ὡς ἐροῦμεν μετὰ μικρὸν ὕστερον.

[68] οὐ γὰρ ἰσοδυναμεῖ αὐτὰ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς **ἑβραϊστὶ** λεγόμενα καὶ ὅταν μεταχθῇ εἰς ἑτέραν γλῶσσαν (Sirach, Introduction 1:21-22).

[69] καὶ τὸν κόσμον ἓξ ταῖς πάσαις ἡμέραις Μωυσῆς καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ φησὶ γενέσθαι, τῇ δὲ ἑβδόμῃ ἀναπαύσασθαι καὶ λαβεῖν ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων ἐκεχειρίαν, ὅθεν καὶ ἡμεῖς σχολὴν ἀπὸ τῶν πόνων κατὰ ταύτην ἄγομεν τὴν ἡμέραν προσαγορεύοντες αὐτὴν σάββατα: δηλοῖ δὲ ἀνάπαυσιν κατὰ τὴν Ἑβραίων διάλεκτον τοὔνομα C.f. "καὶ ὁ Ἰώσηπος, ὡς ἂν εἴη μὴ τῷ Ἰωάννῃ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς ἐν ἐπηκόῳ, τά τε τοῦ Καίσαρος διήγγελλεν **ἑβραΐζων**, *[6.97]* καὶ πολλὰ προσηντιβόλει φείσασθαι τῆς πατρίδος καὶ διασκεδάσαι τοῦ ναοῦ γευόμενον ἤδη τὸ πῦρ, τούς τ᾽ ἐναγισμοὺς ἀποδοῦναι τῷ θεῷ / Upon this Josephus stood in such a place where he might be heard, not by John only, but by many more; and then declared to them what Cæsar had given him in charge: and this in the Hebrew language" (Josephus, War 6:96-97).

[70] In other places, he refers to Aramaic by "characters of the Syrians, "δοκεῖ μὲν γὰρ εἶναι τῇ ἰδιότητι τῶν Συρίων γραμμάτων ἐμφερὴς ὁ χαρακτὴρ αὐτῶν καὶ τὴν φωνὴν ὁμοίαν αὐτοῖς ἀπηχεῖν, ἰδιότροπον δὲ αὐτὴν εἶναι συμβέβηκεν. οὐδὲν οὖν ἔλεγεν

The Independent Scholar Vol. 10 (December 2023) ISSN 2381-2400

> "Now there was one of those Jews that had been carried captive who was cupbearer to king Xerxes; his name was Nehemiah. As this man was walking before Susa, the metropolis of the Persians, he heard some strangers that were entering the city, after a long journey, speaking to one another in the Hebrew tongue" (Josephus, Antiquities 11.159).[71]

In addition to the slight confusion among Greek speakers, it seems also that there was ambiguity among speakers of Semitic languages. Rabbinic literature[72] does not refer to *Hebrew* and *Aramaic* with explicit references to the name of each language, but uses other means. The language "Aramaic" is mentioned explicitly only in a few passages throughout the rabbinic corpus. One such reference occurs in m. Shekalim 5:3, where the inscriptions on Temple seals are being discussed. The side comment of Ben Azzai[73] explicitly references Aramaic.

There were four seals in the Temple, and on them was inscribed [respectively]: 'calf', 'ram', 'kid', 'sinner'. Ben Azzai says: there were five and on them was inscribed in Aramaic	אַרְבָּעָה חוֹתָמוֹת הָיוּ בַּמִּקְדָּשׁ, וְכָתוּב עֲלֵיהֶן, עֵגֶל, זָכָר, גְּדִי, חוֹטֵא. כָּתוּב עֲלֵיהֶן בֶּן עַזַּאי אוֹמֵר, חֲמִשָּׁה הָיוּ, וַאֲרָמִית

However, in other cases, the name of the language is not said explicitly. Typically, a variation of the root תַּרְגּוּם (*targum*, 'translation')[74] is used to convey the use of the Aramaic language. On some occasions, this is only implied. In b. Berakhot 40b, the Rabbis discuss the permissibility of using the Aramaic language to recite a religious blessing. The text of the Aramaic prayer is included without any reference to the language of the blessing.[75] Later in the text, the language of the blessing, in לָשׁוֹן חוֹל (*lashon hol*, "secular language") is contrasted to *lashon kodesh* ("holy language", i.e. Hebrew). The Talmud later mentions the Aramaic language in more explicit ways[76], while also still relying on the alternative *targum*.[77] In one case, the Gemara translates Hebrew words into Aramaic, stating simple "גוּלְבָּא — כּוּסְמִין (*gumla, kusmin*)" without explicitly saying either *this is Hebrew or Aramaic*; a similar case is found in b. Berakhot 32a and b. Pesachim 39a.

While the evidence is not conclusive, one could read the textual evidence in rabbinic literature to indicate that Hebrew and Aramaic were considered separate ends of a spectrum, rather than different discrete "languages." This is coupled with an early Christian disregard for the status of Aramaic and Hebrew as separate languages. This would also combine

---

κωλύειν καὶ ταῦτα μεταβαλόντα, δύνασθαι γὰρ τῆς εἰς αὐτὸ χορηγίας εὐποροῦντα, ἔχειν ἐν τῇ βιβλιοθήκῃ καὶ τὰ παρ᾽ ἐκείνοις / But be said he had been informed that there were many books of laws among the Jews worthy of inquiring after, and worthy of the king's library, but which, being written in characters and in a dialect of their own, will cause no small pains in getting them translated into the Greek tongue; that the character in which they are written seems to be like to that which is the proper character of the Syrians, and that its sound, when pronounced, is like theirs also; and that this sound appears to be peculiar to themselves" (Josephus Antiquities 12:15).

[71] Τῶν δ᾽ αἰχμαλωτισθέντων τις Ἰουδαίων οἰνοχόος τοῦ βασιλέως Ξέρξου Νεεμίας ὄνομα περιπατῶν πρὸ τῆς μητροπόλεως τῶν Περσῶν Σούσων, ξένων τινῶν ἀπὸ μακρᾶς ὁδοιπορίας εἰς τὴν πόλιν εἰσιόντων ἐπακούσας ἑβραϊστὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους ὁμιλούντων προσελθὼν αὐτοῖς ἐπυνθάνετο, πόθεν εἶεν παραγενόμενοι; Philo does not distinguish between Hebrew and Aramaic, referring to the language that the Torah was composed in as "Chaldean" (Moses 2:26).

[72] Roughly dated from around 200 CE to 600 CE.

[73] Second-century CE rabbinic figure.

[74] m. Megillah 2:1; 4:6; m. Yadayim 4:5

[75] The matter of the debate centers on the nature of the structure of blessings (*berakhot*) which must include the name of God in rabbinic legislation.

[76] y. Megillah 1:9; b. Sanhedrin 21b; b. Shabbat 12b

[77] b. Berakhot 28a; b. Megillah 3a; 21b; b. Yoma 69b

well with Wise's proposition that *Hebrew* was spoken along a linguistic continuum in the first century CE, with speakers alternating between "high" and "low" varieties but with the addition of Aramaic as the farthest end of the continuum against biblical Hebrew.[78] Perhaps as evidence for this, the Jerusalem Talmud (c. 350-400 CE) shows a clear diglossic separation of different languages into domains:

y. Sotah 7:2

אָמַר רִבִּי יוֹנָתָן דְּבֵית גּוּבְרִין. אַרְבָּעָה לְשׁוֹנוֹת נָאִין לְהִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בָּהֶן הָעוֹלָם. וְאֵילּוּ הֵן. לָעַז לְזֶמֶר. רוֹמִי לְקֶרֶב. סוּרְסִי לְאֵילִיָּא. עִבְרִי לְדִיבּוּר. וְיֵשׁ אוֹמְרִים. אַף אָשׁוּרִי לִכְתָב.

Rabbi Jonathan from Bet Gubrin said, four languages are good for use: The foreign language for song, Latin for war, Syriac for elegies, Hebrew for speech. Some people say, also Assyrian for writing.

To summarize, the evidence from Greek usage supports the assertion of *Hebraïsti* as referring to the *Hebrew* language, i.e. the language of the Bible (and later rabbinic literature). The Rabbis distinguished clearly between Hebrew and Aramaic through the diglossic terminology of referring to Aramaic as *targum* ('translation'). However, Josephus' and Philo's inconsistency gives enough room to suspect that not all Greco-Roman authors clearly distinguished between Hebrew and Aramaic.

THE HEBREW GOSPEL AND *DIALEKTOS*

Early Christian authors make several claims around the provenance of the Gospel of Matthew, which is claimed to have originally been composed in Hebrew and then translated into Greek. Eusebius (d. c. 339 CE) preserves the comments of Papias (d. c. 130 CE) concerning the claim that Matthew was first written in Hebrew, when he states,

> "But concerning Matthew he writes as follows: So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew manner of speech, and every one interpreted them as he was able. And the same writer uses testimonies from the first Epistle of John and from that of Peter likewise. And he relates another story of a woman, who was accused of many sins before the Lord, which is contained in the Gospel according to the Hebrews. These things we have thought it necessary to observe in addition to what has been already stated (3Eusebius 39:16; c.f. 5Eusebius 8:2)."[79]

Papias' comments note that he had a tradition that stated that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew and translated into Greek. The matter is complicated by the reference to the Gospel of the Hebrews in the second half of the fragment. It seems that he is referencing a different book at this point but the use of both names in the same discourse further complicates the nature of his claims.

Iranaeus also commented on the origin of Matthew in Hebrew, "Matthew also issued a written gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect" (Against Heresies 3:1). However, his comments complicate things further with the allusion to the Gospel of the Hebrews, the separate non-canonical text used by Jewish Christian groups. Eusebius also quotes Origen to the same effect,

---

[78] In rabbinic parlance, this would create a continuum from *targum* (Aramaic, 'translation') to *miqra* (Hebrew, 'scripture').

[79] ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἱστόρηται τῷ Παπίᾳ περὶ τοῦ Μάρκου: περὶ δὲ τοῦ Ματθαίου ταῦτ' εἴρηται: 'Ματθαῖος μὲν οὖν **Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ** τὰ λόγια συνετάξατο, ἡρμήνευσεν δ αὐτὰ ὡς ἦν δυνατὸς ἕκαστος.' Κέχρηται δ ὁ αὐτὸς μαρτυρίαις ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰωάννου προτέρας ἐπιστολῆς καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς Πέτρου ὁμοίως, ἐκτέθειται δὲ καὶ ἄλλην ἱστορίαν περὶ γυναικὸς ἐπὶ πολλαῖς ἁμαρτίαις διαβληθείσης ἐπὶ τοῦ κυρίου, ἣν τὸ καθ' Ἑβραίους εὐαγγέλιον περιέχει. καὶ ταῦτα δ' ἡμῖν ἀναγκαίως πρὸς τοῖς ἐκτεθεῖσιν ἐπιτετηρήσθω

> "Among the four Gospels, which are the only indisputable ones in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that the first was written by Matthew, who was once a publican, but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, and it was prepared for the converts from Judaism, and published in the Hebrew language" (Church History 6.25.4).[80]

Eusebius' comments are, by far, the clearest of the Church Fathers' statements regarding the linguistic origins of Matthew. Despite the complications, it seems reasonable to assume that these authors are referring to the canonical Gospel of Matthew. This points to an early understanding, if Eusebius preserves Papias' words faithfully, that the Gospel of Matthew was either *originally* composed in "Hebrew *dialektos*" or that a Greek and Hebrew version were prepared for circulation at the same time.

Papias refers to the language variety of the original Hebrew Gospel as Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ whereas Origen uses Ἑβραϊκοῖς. In the descriptions of this Gospel, there is a potential conflict between the analysis of Van Rooy and Buth and Pierce. Applying Van Rooy's analysis of *dialektos*, Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ should be understood as *in the Hebrew manner of speech* or even *variety*. This should be understood as an ethnic identity marker usage of *dialektos* for non-Greek speech, which conforms with modern understanding of how linguistic varieties are used by speakers to construct their own social identities.[81] This means that the use of *dialektos* would point us to the conclusion that Papias is referring to a particularly Jewish way of speaking Greek, or even by emphasizing Jewish themes.[82] This might imply a certain number of Semitisms and a lexical style characterized by the use of Semitic loanwords, characteristic of the Septuagint.[83] This is a characteristic of modern Jewish linguistic varieties, which consist of specialized repertoires "that Jews deploy selectively as they present themselves as Jews and as various types of Jews."[84] However, using Van Rooy's analysis, one issue is not resolved, which is to ascertain whether or not Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ refers to a distinct Semitic language in contrast to Indo-European Greek, or some other meaning. In this sense, the use of *Hebraidis* points to the composition of the text in the Hebrew language, i.e. the language of the Bible.

Another issue to consider is the process that Papias described. First, Matthew composed the sayings of Jesus in the Hebrew *dialektos* and the others "translated" or "interpreted" them "as he was able." Gundry reads the term ἡρμήνευσεν (*ermeneusen*) as referring to "interpret", rather than "translate." This is how the word is used in broader Greek literature, to refer to the interpretation of dreams and oracles, with a separate word for *translation*. This reading should be considered, especially given a lack of evidence to point towards a translation of Gospel texts from a Semitic variety into

---

[80] ἐν παραδόσει μαθὼν περὶ τῶν τεσσάρων εὐαγγελίων, ἃ καὶ μόνα ἀναντίρρητά ἐστιν ἐν τῇ ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅτι πρῶτον μὲν γέγραπται τὸ κατὰ τόν ποτε τελώνην, ὕστερον δὲ ἀπόστολον Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ Ματθαῖον, ἐκδεδωκότα αὐτὸ τοῖς ἀπὸ Ἰουδαϊσμοῦ πιστεύσασιν, γράμμασιν **Ἑβραϊκοῖς** συντεταγμένον

[81] Sebba, M., Mahootian, S., & Jonsson, C. (Eds.). (2012).

[82] Gundry, R. H. (2005). The apostolically Johannine pre-Papian tradition concerning the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. *The Old is Better*, 67-68; Kürzinger, J. (1963). Irenäus und sein Zeugnis zur Sprache des Matthäusevangeliums 6. *New Testament Studies*, *10*(1), 108-115.

[83] The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible used by Jews in the Diaspora.

[84] Benor, S. B. (2008). Towards a New Understanding of Jewish Language in the Twenty-First Century. *Religion Compass*, *2*(6), 1062-1080.

Greek.[85] This could be the reason for Eusebius' mention of the Gospel of the Hebrews, presumably the lost Gospel text of the Ebionite sect[86], although some contest this interpretation.[87]

That would explain one part of the phrase, however. However, Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ[88] also uses the terms that Buth and Pierce argued refer *exclusively* to Hebrew. However, there is reason to introduce some doubt into Buth and Pierce's certainty, which is to note that the Gospel of John does not use the term as consistently as other sources.[89] Yet, the authors conclude that because other authors of the period used the terms consistently, that the Gospel of John must be considered to have done so as well, even when the evidence is inconclusive. Within Buth and Pierce's analysis, it seems that the linguistic proficiency of the authors mentioned in ancient sources is of some importance. It does seem that known *bilingual* speakers clearly distinguished between Hebrew and Aramaic when using the terms, Ἑβραΐς, Ἑβραϊστί, Ἑβραϊκή, (i.e. Josephus) but monolingual speakers did not consistently distinguish (if Philo is considered not proficient in Hebrew). It is unclear whether or not Papias was proficient in Hebrew or Aramaic, but it seems unlikely that he was and, even if he was proficient in either language, he does not cite any material from the Hebrew version of Matthew.

In fact, the only Church Father to *cite* any texts from a Hebrew Gospel is Jerome (d. 420 CE). His comments surrounding the linguistic origins of the Gospel could perhaps enlighten some important details about this document. He went to Palestine to complete his translation of the Old Testament from the Hebrew for the Vulgate Latin Bible. He states, "Matthew, who is also Levi, and who from a publican came to be an apostle, first of all composed a Gospel of Christ in Judaea in the **Hebrew language and characters** for the benefit of those of the circumcision who had believed. Who translated it after that in Greek is not sufficiently ascertained. Moreover, the Hebrew itself is preserved to this day in the library at Caesarea, which the martyr Pamphilus so diligently collected. I also was allowed by the Nazarenes who use this volume in the Syrian city of Beroea to copy it (On Illustrious Men, chapter III)." That is, Jerome claims that the Gospel of Matthew was written in the Hebrew language and in Hebrew script and that the Nazoraeans still used that document in his own day.

In another case, Jerome clarifies what Papias and Eusebius might have meant by "Hebrew." He states, "In the Gospel according to the Hebrews, which is written in the Chaldee and Syrian language, but in **Hebrew characters**, and is used by the Nazarenes to this day (I mean the Gospel according to the Apostles, or, as is generally maintained, the Gospel according to Matthew, a copy of which is in the library at Cæsarea)" (Jerome, Against Pelagius III, 2). A brief note that this reference complicates the association of Matthew with the Hebrew language, as Jerome refers to this document as "the Gospel according to the Hebrews," although he clarifies that this is the same text as the "Gospel according to the Apostles" or as perhaps more commonly known as "the Gospel according to Matthew," which existed in Caesarea. Since Jerome is the only source for the Hebrew Gospel, we will take a moment to analyze one of his comments as an example of the type of material found in the document.

---

[85] Sim, D. C. (2007). The Gospel of Matthew, John the elder and the Papias tradition: A response to RH Gundry. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, *63*(1), 283-299.

[86] Referring to the group of believers in Jesus who continued to observe Jewish law, to some degree. This is sometimes referred to as "Jewish Christianity", even if that name might be somewhat problematic, in that the second-century group of Jesus-believers who called themselves *Christianoi* defined themselves and their understanding of Christ *against* Judaism, c.f. Jackson-McCabe, M. (2020). *Jewish Christianity: the making of the Christianity-Judaism divide*. Yale University Press.

[87] Kok, M. J. (2017). Did Papias of Hierapolis Use the Gospel according to the Hebrews as a Source?. *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, *25*(1), 29-53.

[88] This exact phrase is also used ambiguously by the author of Luke-Acts (Acts 21:40; 22:2; 26:14).

[89] The authors discuss the inconsistency of the Gospel of John in pp. 97ff.

Jerome comments on Matthew 6:11, "In the so-called Gospel according to the Hebrews, for "bread essential to existence" I found "mahar," which means "of tomorrow"; so the sense is: our bread for tomorrow, that is, of the future, give us this day (*Commentary on Matthew 6:11*)." This fragment gives an explicit citation of the word *mahar*, meaning 'tomorrow' in both Hebrew and Aramaic. This variant of this clause of the Lord's Prayer is unique from all other versions. It differs from the Greek manuscript tradition, but, perhaps more significantly, also from existing Semitic translations of the Greek New Testament. I refer to the Syriac translations of the Curetonian Old Syriac translation and the Peshitta translation into Syriac, both presented below.

(*hab lan lahma deshunqanan yawmana)*ܗܒ ܠܢ ܠܚܡ ܕܣܘܢܩܢܢ ܝܘܡܢܐ ܠ ܕܡPeshitta

(*welahman amina deyawma hab lan*)ܠ ܕܡ ܗܒ ܠܢ ܕܝܘܡܐ ܠܚܡ ܥܡܝܢܐ ܘܠCuretonian

Give us bread for our needs from day to day (Lamsa Edition of the Peshitta).

And our daily, constant bread, give us.[90]

That is, the use of *mahar*, is a unique variant, found only in Jerome's quotation of the Hebrew version of Matthew that he reports to have seen in Caesarea.[91] The type of comment here is an elucidatory remark meant to present the proper interpretation of Jesus' prayer. In comparing Jerome's text with the Syriac Gospel tradition, it might be possible to assume that Jerome was working with an early translation of Matthew *into* Hebrew. The types of variants found in what Jerome variously calls "Matthew", "the Gospel of the Hebrews" and "the Gospel of the Nazoraeans" provide elucidatory remarks, harmonization between Synoptic texts, and condensation of material. The Syriac Gospel tradition also presents several interesting variants from the Greek manuscript tradition, even more so in the Old Syriac manuscripts, which were "regularized" and brought into agreement with the Greek manuscripts in the Peshitta.[92]

Returning to the issue of language and script, in this case, Papias and Eusebius *might* have referred to the script used in the text. This probably refers to the use of Aramaic block script to write the Hebrew language, traditionally written in a separate script. Literature in Hebrew varies between the imperial block script and the older paleo-Hebrew script, as the Dead Sea Scrolls testify. Additionally, in the second century, Christian Aramaic texts began to be written in the Syriac alphabet, a separate script used for the Syriac dialect of Aramaic, used by Christians only. Jerome conflates the Gospel of the Hebrews with the Gospel of Matthew in this text. However, even though there is an additional piece of evidence pointing towards the language, there is still considerable ambiguity if the two statements are compared together. Perhaps the second statement is a clarification of the first so that he did mean that it was written in Aramaic ("Chaldee and Syrian" language) but with Hebrew script. Jerome's comments are important because he claims to have seen the text in Caesarea.

Jerome's comments complicate our understanding of Matthew's origins in Hebrew. His remarks point to the existence of a physical text, at least in Caesarea, that he viewed and cited from in his writings. Jerome is typically thought of as having advanced Hebrew proficiency[93], but this might not be as clear-cut as traditionally thought.[94] If Jerome was

[90] My translation of the Curetonian Old Syriac version. The transliteration follows the Eastern vocalization scheme.

[91] The rabbinic translation of Matthew into Hebrew, called the Shem Tob version of Matthew, uses 'continually'.

[92] Williams, P. J., & Tyndale House, C. (2008). An Evaluation of the Use of the Peshitta as a Textual Witness to Romans. TC, 13, 3.

[93] Graves, M. (2007). *Jerome's Hebrew philology: a study based on his commentary on Jeremiah* (Vol. 90). Brill, pp.196–198: "In his discussion he gives clear evidence of having consulted the Hebrew himself, providing details about the Hebrew that could not have been learned from the Greek translations.

[94] Froehlich, K. (2014). *Sensing the scriptures: Aminadab's chariot and the predicament of Biblical interpretation*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing., pp. 31-32, "Jerome tells of his toil in trying the learn Hebrew and Aramaic, the sweat to translate, his consultations

correct, he was proficient enough to recognize the difference between block and paleo-Hebrew script, showing some literacy in the language. In both of his contributions to the question, Jerome emphasizes the use of Hebrew *characters*, while differing on the *language* used – in the first case referring to Hebrew and the second to Aramaic ("Chaldee and Syrian language"). In any case, his comments are the most detailed of any reports on the Hebrew Gospel. However, his comments alone do not establish the original existence of Matthew in Hebrew, only the existence of such a version in the fourth to fifth centuries.

Epiphanius of Salamis (d. 403 CE) also links the composition of the Gospel in Hebrew to the specific use of *Hebrew letters or alphabet*, although without any reference to the Gospel being written in Aramaic unlike Jerome. Epiphanius writes, "They have the Gospel according to Matthew in its entirety in Hebrew. For it is clear that they still preserve this as it was originally written, in the Hebrew alphabet. But I do not know whether they have also excised the genealogies from Abraham to Christ" (Panarion 29.9.4).[95] Epiphanius clarifies that the language was understood to be *Hebrew* and this was the *original* version of Matthew, which was subsequently translated into Greek. His comments indicate that the text was still used but he does not say that he has seen the text. The comment can be broken down into two claims. First, that the Nazoraean Christians have a copy of Matthew in Hebrew. Second, that they have preserved the original version of Matthew in Hebrew against the Greek version known to Epiphanius. The first claim can be easily verified. It is certain that there was a version of Matthew in Hebrew in use among the Nazoraeans. Throughout history, there were a number of translations of Matthew into Hebrew, used by rabbinic Jews in polemical attacks against Christianity, from as early as the ninth century, in the first anti-Christian Jewish polemical work, *The Book of Nestor the Priest*, with many more in the medieval period. Given the lack of any direct textual evidence earlier than the fourth century, it cannot be established that the Nazoraeans' Gospel was the original. It is important to note that the Nazoraeans were regarded more favorably by Christian heresiologists than the other Jewish Christian groups, such as the Ebionites.[96] The positive commentary they (Eusebius, Jerome, etc.) give to their Hebrew text should be read within the context of fourth-century heresiology. That is, the ascription of antiquity to *their* Gospel text must be read as a *condemnation* of the "heretical" Jewish Christian Gospels of the Hebrews and Ebionites.

Fourth-century Christian writers add an interesting thought to the debate about the possibility of the existence of Christian literature in Semitic languages in the first century. Up to this point, it seems like that the references to the Gospel of Matthew (or the Hebrews alternatively) in Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ, could equally refer to either Hebrew *style,* linking back to the stylistic uses of *dialektos* as described by Van Rooy *or* composition in the *Hebrew language*, as Buth and

---

with a Jewish acquaintance ('Hebraeus meus') who came to him by night for fear of the Jews. Yet most of this storytelling seems to be hyperbole, if not outright fabrication. Pierre Nautin voiced the suspicion two decades ago, and subsequent studies tend to confirm it: Jerome really did not know Hebrew. He certainly learned Greek well during his first stay at Antioch, where grammatical concepts, textbooks, and teachers were available for this purpose. But nothing like this existed for Hebrew, Jerome could not learn, and thus 'know,' Hebrew, as we define the term 'knowing a language'—that is, having a grasp of the system of forms as well as syntax—except by living in a linguistic community where learning would happen through use. Like Aristarchos, he was a gifted philologist, curious about the meaning of words, and certainly decipher text written in Hebrew letters. He knew numerous words and phrases, and could ask about etymologies and name lore. But could one call this dilettantism 'knowing Hebrew'? The few sections of the Vulgate that can be attributed to Jerome's own labors are revisions of existing translations, done by comparing one or more Greek translations, and constantly consulting Origen and Eusebius. His introductions to biblical books and his treatise on the etymology of Hebrew names, which formed part of practically every medieval Bible, were compiled from the same sources and are a dubious contribution to the comprehension of the real literal sense of the Hebrew Scriptures. This does not mean that Jerome's philological passion had no positive influence. It does suggest, however, that Jerome misled generation after generation into vastly overrating his expertise."

[95] ἔχουσι δὲ τὸ κατὰ Ματθαῖον εὐαγγέλιον πληρέστατον **Ἑβραϊστί**. παρ' αὐτοῖς γὰρ σαφῶς τοῦτο, καθὼς ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐγράφη, **Ἑβραϊκοῖς γράμμασιν** ἔτι σῴζεται

[96] *Panarion* 29 7:5

Pierce conclusively show. However, the fourth-century authors place a great deal of stress on the issue of the *script* used to write the Gospel. The references in this time period make explicit mention of the "Hebrew script", most likely referring to the Aramaic block script, now commonly associated with Hebrew, but which was still in the process of transition from the earlier paleo-Hebrew in the first century.

To give a brief description of the differences in scripts, here is an example of each script. First, the paleo-Hebrew script, then the Hebrew block script and Syriac Estrangela alphabet, with the word *Yehudah* ('Judah') written in each script. Recall that the Hebrew block script was originally used with Aramaic.

יהודה

Both Aramaic and paleo-Hebrew scripts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, without any particular theological significance ascribed to the choice of script.[97] Others[98] have argued that the use of paleo-Hebrew and Aramaic block script had theological connotations based on a reading of rabbinic sources, which states, "The Jewish people selected *Ashurit* script and the sacred tongue for the Torah scroll and left *Ivrit* script and the Aramaic tongue for the commoners" (b. Sanhedrin 21b).[99] Others have proposed the same, that the paleo-Hebrew script was used for mundane purposes.[100] Even among the Dead Sea Scrolls, it seems that the preference is for the block script[101], even with a significant holdout for the paleo-Hebrew script, with books of the Torah written in that script and the name of God appearing in that script.[102] Other rabbinic texts seem to support the assertion made above. The Mishnah indicates that a book written in the block script is holy and suitable for public ritual use.[103] The paleo-Hebrew script might have had nationalistic connotations, which the Rabbis sought to avoid in their reconceptualization of Jewish identity after the Roman-Jewish war.[104]

If the use of Aramaic block script had religious significance, then it becomes much clearer to see why fourth-century Church Fathers wished to link their Hebrew Gospel traditions to the use of the sacred Aramaic block script of Hebrew. The second century CE *Apocryphon of James* also mentions writing in Hebrew letters but without a reference to Aramaic, perhaps with the same goal in mind, saying, "Since you asked me to send you a secret book which was revealed to me and Peter by the Lord, I could neither refuse you nor speak directly to you, but I have written it in **Hebrew letters** and have sent it to you – and to you alone. But inasmuch as you are a minister of the salvation of the saints, endeavor

---

[97] Schiffman, L (1994). *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their True Meaning for Judaism and Christianity*. New York: Doubleday, p. 176-178.

[98] Zissu, B., & Abadi, O. (2014). Paleo-Hebrew script in Jerusalem and Judea from the second century BCE through the second century CE: a reconsideration. *Journal for Semitics*, *23*(2), 653-664.

[99] Translations from the Talmud come from Koren Talmud Bavli, the Noé Edition. Jerusalem: Koren Publishers Jerusalem, 1965, 2019, which includes translated text in **bold** and commentary in regular font.

[100] Segal, M. Z. (1951). Problems of the Dead Sea Scrolls. *Eretz-Israel*, *1*, 39-44.

[101] Tov, E. (2018). *Scribal practices and approaches reflected in the texts found in the Judean Desert* (Vol. 54). Brill, p. 225.

[102] Siegel, J. P. (1971). The employment of Palaeo-Hebrew characters for the divine names at Qumran in the light of Tannaitic sources. *Hebrew Union College Annual*, *42*, 159-172.

[103] Zissu and Abadi, p. 660.

[104] Hanson, R. S. (1964). Paleo-Hebrew Scripts in the Hasmonean Age. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, *175*(1), 26-42.; Deutsch, R. (2017). *Jewish Coinage During the First Revolt Against Rome: 66-73 Ap. JC*. Leshon Limudim Limited.; Regev, E. (2013). *The Hasmoneans: ideology, archaeology, identity*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

earnestly and take care not to recount this book to many – this which the Savior did not desire to recount to all of us, his twelve disciples. But blessed are those who will be saved through faith in this discourse" (Apocryphon of James). That is, the nature of the *tradition* of Matthew's composition in Hebrew is one that shifted over time, with further details added to suit the theological needs of the audience in each subsequent generation. The tradition began as a way of emphasizing the mission to the Jews in particular the thoughts of Origen as quoted by Eusebius. Papias' and Iraneaeus' comments also point to the interpretation of the Hebrew version of Matthew as an appeal to apostolic succession in a sort of way by ascribing antiquity to the Gospel text and its transmission in the language of Jesus. In the fifth century, the focus has shifted to serve as a means of validating the antiquity of the Gospel of Matthew and perhaps its inherent sacrality vis-a-vis its composition in the sacred alphabet. Additionally, the appearance of the Nazoraeans, the more theologically "acceptable" Jewish Christians, for accepting the virgin birth, serves to heresiologically exclude other forms of Jewish Christianity but elevate the correct one according to proto-orthodox views and to lead authenticity and veracity to the proto-orthodox text and Matthew was particularly popular among early Christians based on the number of citations of that text in the Church Fathers.

CONCLUSIONS

The question of whether or not any Christian Gospels were written in Hebrew is left undetermined, with the caveats mentioned above; unfortunately, with the lack of any surviving manuscripts, its existence cannot be confirmed. It could easily be a *claim* not based in reality and only serving the theological needs of the proto-orthodox community of Christians. Josephus claims to have written in Hebrew/Aramaic before translating into Greek, a language in which he was not proficient;[105] however, no Aramaic text of Josephus' works survives. The claim of writing in Aramaic or Hebrew might serve to add further legitimacy and antiquity to a text.

Therefore, it is proposed that the issue at hand is the *interpretation* of a tradition that goes back to the early second century CE.[106] The tradition is that the Gospels were written in Hebrew by Matthew before being "interpreted" by others as best they could. The veracity of these claims is impossible to ascertain, due to the lack of extant texts. However, if Christian texts existed in Semitic languages in the first century, the weight would be given to Hebrew over Aramaic, considering Buth and Pierce's argumentation, as well as textual evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls, where only around 20% of scrolls were written in Aramaic. Additionally, Wise's study of the Bar Kokhba letters indicates that Aramaic was associated with the mundane, especially legal affairs, and the Gospels do not belong to this genre. This strongly indicates that *if* there were a Gospel text composed in a Semitic language in the first century CE, it would have been in Hebrew, not Aramaic.

Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ remains ambiguous, even with the strong claims made by Buth and Pierce about the clear association of the first word with the Hebrew language against Aramaic. However, the juxtaposition of *dialektos* complicates the interpretation of the meaning of this phrase because words acquire meaning based on their proximity to each other. While this argument could be leveled against introducing ambiguity to *dialektos* when it follows *Hebrais* (and equivalents), the inherent ambiguity in *dialektos* outweighs the supposed clarity in *Hebrais*. Due to the possibility of *dialektos* having diastratic or diaphasic meaning particularly introduces the possibility of Gundry's assertions of Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ meaning a particular *Hebrew* type of *dialektos*, perhaps referring to style or register.

---

[105] ...I have also taken a great deal of pains to obtain the learning of the Greeks, and understand the elements of the Greek language, although I have so long accustomed myself to speak our own tongue, that I cannot pronounce Greek with sufficient exactness..." (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 20.12.1)

[106] If Eusebius' quotations of Papias are entirely accurate.

Fourth-century authors take this tradition and further interpret it. Jerome contradicts the earlier traditions, and the certainty of Buth and Pierce, by interpreting the earlier statements of the Gospel written in "Hebrew" to mean "Aramaic" written in the "Hebrew alphabet" i.e. the Aramaic block script, associated with sacred text. Epiphanius supports this but does not assert that the Gospel was written in Aramaic, but Hebrew. These authors seem to want to associate the ancient Gospel traditions (to them) of a text written in Hebrew by the Jewish apostle, Matthew, to the sacred script, even if that language was originally Aramaic. The point of clarifying the script used seems to confirm the interpretation of block script as used in sacral contexts against the paleo-Hebrew text for mundane purposes. The Aramaic phrases in the Gospels, usually introduced with a variant of the word, μεθερμηνεύω, "to translate, interpret"[107] serve as an appeal to authority vis-a-vis the antiquity of Judean customs. Looking at the phrases, we see they are highly fossilized, indicating a lack of any proficiency in the Aramaic language.[108]

This suggests a trajectory of the interpretation of a tradition, which might serve as a means of establishing Christian antiquity by linking its texts to ancient and sacral languages. If Buth and Pierce's arguments are to be accepted, it must be asserted that there was some version of a Christian Gospel in the *Hebrew language* in the first century, which was translated into Greek. However, later Christian authors viewed this tradition in a different light and used the association of Hebrew with the sacred to establish the own veracity and sacred status of their own Scriptures.

WORKS CITED

Adan-Bayewitz, D., & Aviam, M. (1997). Iotapata, Josephus, and the siege of 67: Preliminary report on the 1992-94 seasons. *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, *10*, 131-165.

Androutsopoulos, J. (2014). Languaging when contexts collapse: Audience design in social networking. *Discourse, Context & Media*, *4*, 62-73.

Argyle, A. W. (1973). Greek among the Jews of Palestine in New Testament Times1. *New Testament Studies*, *20*(1), 87-89.

Avigad, N. (1976). *Beth She'arim: Report on the Excavations During 1953-1958. Catacombs 12-23* (Vol. 3). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Benor, S. B. (2008). Towards a New Understanding of Jewish Language in the Twenty-First Century. *Religion Compass*, *2*(6), 1062-1080.

Birkeland, H. (1954). *The Language of Jesus*. Oslo: Jacob Dybward.

Bock, D. L. (2002). *Studying the historical Jesus: A guide to sources and methods*. Baker Academic.

Buth, R., & Pierce, C. (2014). 3 Hebraisti in Ancient Texts: Does Ἑβραϊστί Ever Mean "Aramaic"? In *The language environment of first-century Judaea* (pp. 66-109). Brill.

Carmignac, J. (1987). *The Birth of the Synoptics*. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press

Casey, M. (1999). *Aramaic sources of Mark's Gospel* (Vol. 102). Cambridge University Press.

Casey, M. (2002). *An Aramaic approach to Q: Sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (Vol. 122). Cambridge University Press.

[107] Coincidentally the same word used by the Rabbis to refer to Aramaic, *targum*.

[108] For example, Talitha cumi (Mark 5:35-43); Ephphatha (Mark 7:31-37); Abba (Mark 14:36):; Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani (Mark 15:34); Maran atha/ Marana tha (Didache 10:14; 1 Corinthians 16:22), etc.

Cassio, A. C. (1984). Il "carattere" dei dialetti greci e l'opposizione Ioni-Dori: Testimonianze antiche e teorie di età romantica (su Arist. Quint. 2. 13, Iambl. v. Pyth. 241 sgg., sch. in Dion. Thr. p. 117, 18 sgg. Hilgard). *AIΩN: Annali del Dipartimento di Studi del Mondo Classico e del Mediterraneo Antico. Sezione linguistica*, *6*, 113-136.

Cassio, A. C. (1993). *Parlate locali, dialetti delle stirpi e fonti letterarie nei grammatici greci*. Ediciones de la Universidad Autonoma; Fenoglio, S. (2009). La riflessione sui dialetti nei Commentari all'Odissea di Eustazio di Tessalonica. *Quaderni del dipartimento di filologia, linguistica e tradizione classica*, 239-254.

Chancey, M. A. (2005). *Greco-Roman culture and the Galilee of Jesus* (Vol. 134). Cambridge University Press, pp. 122-165.

Coseriu, E. (1981). Los conceptos de dialecto, nivel y estilo de lengua y el sentido propio de la dialectología. *LEA: Lingüística española actual*, *3*(1), 1-32.

Deutsch, R. (2017). *Jewish Coinage During the First Revolt Against Rome: 66-73 Ap. JC*. Leshon Limudim Limited.

Edwards, J. (2009). *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Ehrman, B. and Z. Plese. (2013). *The other Gospels: accounts of Jesus from outside the New Testament*. Oxford University Press.

Fenoglio, S. (2012). *Eustazio di Tessalonica, Commentari all'Odissea: glossario dei termini grammaticali*. Edizioni dell'Orso; Lambert, F. (2009). Les noms des langues chez les Grecs. *Histoire Épistémologie Langage*, *31*(2), 15-27.

Ferguson, C. A. (1959). Diglossia. *Word*, *15*(2), 325-340; Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies* (No. 1). Cambridge University Press.

Fishman, J. A. (1971). *Sociolinguistics*. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House (1971).

Fishman, J. A. (1980). Bilingualism and biculturism as individual and societal phenomena. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1(1), 3- 15. doi:10.1080/01434632.1980.9993995.

Fishman, J. A. (2020). Who speaks what language to whom and when? In *The bilingualism reader* (pp. 55-70). Routledge.

Fishman, J. A., Cooper, R.L. and Newman, R.M. (1971). *Bilingualism in the barrio.* Indiana University Bloomington.

Froehlich, K. (2014). *Sensing the scriptures: Aminadab's chariot and the predicament of Biblical interpretation*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

Grabbe, L. L. (1992). Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian/Vol. 2 The Roman period. *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian*.

Graves, M. (2007). *Jerome's Hebrew philology: a study based on his commentary on Jeremiah* (Vol. 90). Brill.

Grosjean, F. (1982). *Life with two languages: An introduction to bilingualism*. Harvard University Press.

Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies* (No. 1). Cambridge University Press.

Gundry, R. H. (1964). The language milieu of first-century Palestine: its bearing on the authenticity of the gospel tradition. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, *83*(4), 404-408.

Gundry, R. H. (2005). The apostolically Johannine pre-Papian tradition concerning the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. *The Old is Better*, 67-68.

Hainsworth, J. B. (1967). Greek views of Greek dialectology. *Transactions of the Philological Society*, *66*(1), 62-76.

Hamers, J., & Blanc, M. (2000). *Bilinguality and Bilingualism* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511605796, p. 253.

Hanson, R. S. (1964). Paleo-Hebrew Scripts in the Hasmonean Age. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, *175*(1), 26-42.

Heller, M. (1995), Language, Minority Education and Gender Linking Social Justice and Power. Journal of Linguistic Anthropology, 5: 105-106. https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.1995.5.1.105.

Heller, M. (2007). Bilingualism as Ideology and Practice. In: Heller, M. (eds) Bilingualism: A Social Approach. Palgrave Advances in Linguistics. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230596047_1.

Hengel, M. (2003). *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their encounter in Palestine during the early Hellenistic period*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Hezser, C. (2020). Jewish literacy and languages in first-century roman Palestine. *Orientalia*, *89*(1), 58-77.

Hoffman G (1971) Puerto Ricans in New York: A language-related ethnographic summary. In Fishman J, Cooper R and Ma R (eds), Bilingualism in the Barrio. Indiana University Press

James, J. C. (1920). *The Language of Palestine and Adjacent Regions*. T. & T. Clark.

Jørgensen, J. N., Karrebæk, M. S., Madsen, L. M., & Møller, J. S. (2015). Polylanguaging in superdiversity. In *Language and superdiversity* (pp. 147-164). Routledge.

Kok, M. J. (2017). Did Papias of Hierapolis Use the Gospel according to the Hebrews as a Source?. *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, *25*(1), 29-53.

Kürzinger, J. (1963). Irenäus und sein Zeugnis zur Sprache des Matthäusevangeliums 6. *New Testament Studies*, *10*(1), 108-115.

Mackridge, P. (2009). Mothers and daughters, roots and branches: Modern Greek perceptions of the relationship between the ancient and modern languages. *Standard languages and language standards: Greek, past and present*, 259-276.

Møller, J. S., & Jørgensen, J. N. (2012). Enregisterment among adolescents in superdiverse Copenhagen. *Tilburg papers in culture studies*, *28*, 1-15.

Morpurgo Davies, A. (1987). The Greek notion of dialect. *Verbum*, *10*(1), 2.

Morpurgo Davies, A. (1993). Geography, history and dialect: the case of Oropos. *Dialectologica Graeca. Actas del II Coloquio Internacional de Dialectología Griega (Miraflores de la Sierra [Madrid], 19–21 de junio de 1991)*, 261-279.

Munz, R. (1921). Über γλῶττα und διάλεαετος und über ein posidonianisches Fragment bei Strabo. Ein sprachwissenschaftlich-philologischer Exkurs zu Posidonius bei Strabo C 176 über dialektische Verschiedenheiten bei den Galliern. *Glotta*, *11*(1./2. H), 85-94.

Myers-Scotton, C. (1990). Suzanne Romaine, Bilingualism. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. Pp. 337. *Language in Society*, *19*(4), 557-561.

Poplack, S. (1978). Syntactic structure and social function of code-switching, vol. 2. *Centro de Estudios Puertorriquenos,[City University of New York]*.

Poplack, S. (1988). Contrasting patterns of code-switching in two communities. *Codeswitching: Anthropological and sociolinguistic perspectives*, *48*, 215-244.

Poplack, S. (2013). "Sometimes I'll start a sentence in Spanish Y TERMINO EN ESPAÑOL": Toward a typology of code-switching. *Linguistics*, *51*(s1), 11-14.

Poplack, S., & Levey, S. (2010). Contact-induced grammatical change: A cautionary tale. *Language and space: An international handbook of linguistic variation*, *1*, 391-419.

Poplack, S., & Meechan, M. (1995). Patterns of language mixture: Nominal structure in Wolof-French and Fongbe-French bilingual discourse. *One speaker, two languages*, 199-232.

Poplack, S. and D. Sankoff. (1984). Borrowing: the synchrony of integration. *Linguistics* 22.99-135.

Poplack, S., D. Sankoff, & C. Miller. (1988). The social correlates and linguistic processes of lexical borrowing and assimilation. *Linguistics*, 26(1). 47–104.

Poplack, S, L. Zentz, and N. Dion. (2012). What counts as (contact-induced) change? *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 15(2). 247-254.

Porter, S. E. (1991). Introduction. The Greek of the New Testament as a Disputed Area of Research. *The language of the New Testament*, 11-38.

Porter, S. E. (1993). Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?. *Tyndale Bulletin*, *44*, 199-235.

Porter, S. E. (2003). Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament with Reference to Tense and Voice. *Studies in Biblical Greek I;* 111-56.

Porter, S. E. (2004). Criteria for authenticity in historical-Jesus research. *Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research*, 1-306.

Rahmani, L. Y., Rahmani, L. Y., & Sussmann, A. (1994). *A catalogue of Jewish ossuaries: in the collections of the State of Israel*. Israel Antiquities Authority.

Regev, E. (2013). *The Hasmoneans: ideology, archaeology, identity*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Rydbeck, L. (1998). The Language of the New Testament. *Tyndale Bulletin*, *49*, 361-368.

Safrai, S. (2006). Spoken and Literary Languages in the Time of Jesus. In *Jesus' Last Week* (pp. 225-244). Brill.

Schwartz, S. (1995). Language, power and identity in ancient Palestine. *Past & Present*, (148), 3-47.

Schiffman, L (1994). *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their True Meaning for Judaism and Christianity.* New York: Doubleday

Sebba, M., Mahootian, S., & Jonsson, C. (Eds.). (2012). *Language mixing and code-switching in writing: Approaches to mixed-language written discourse*. Routledge.

Segal, M. H. (1908). Mišnaic Hebrew and its relation to Biblical Hebrew and to Aramaic. *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 647-737.

Segal, M. H. (2001). *A grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew.* Wipf and Stock Publishers; Rabin, C. (1958). The historical background of Qumran Hebrew. *ScrHier* 4, 144–161.

Segal, M. Z. (1951). Problems of the Dead Sea Scrolls. *Eretz-Israel*, *1*, 39-44.

Siegel, J. P. (1971). The employment of Palaeo-Hebrew characters for the divine names at Qumran in the light of Tannaitic sources. *Hebrew Union College Annual*, *42*, 159-172.

Sim, D. C. (2007). The Gospel of Matthew, John the elder and the Papias tradition: A response to RH Gundry. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, *63*(1), 283-299.

Smelik, W. (2010). The Languages of Roman Palestine, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. C. Hezser. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 122-41.

Tov, E. (2018). *Scribal practices and approaches reflected in the texts found in the Judean Desert* (Vol. 54). Brill.

Tribulato, O. (2014): "Dialectology (diálektos), Ancient Theories of". In *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek Language and Linguistics*, edited by G. K. Giannakis, 1:457–461. Leiden: Brill.

Van Cangh, J. (2005). *L'Evangile de Marc : un original hébreu?*. Bruxelles: Editions Safran.

Van Rooy, R. (2016). "What is a 'dialect'?" Some new perspectives on the history of the term διάλεκτος and its interpretations in ancient Greece and Byzantium. *Glotta*, *92*(1), 244-279.

Versteegh, C. H. M. (1986): "Latinitas, Hellenismos, 'Arabiyya". Historiographia Linguistica 13 (2–3): p. 431-432.

Williams, P. J., & Tyndale House, C. (2008). An Evaluation of the Use of the Peshitta as a Textual Witness to Romans. *TC*, *13*, 3.

Wise, M. O. (2015). *Language and Literacy in Roman Judaea: A Study of the Bar Kokhba Documents*. Yale University Press.

Zissu, B., & Abadi, O. (2014). Paleo-Hebrew script in Jerusalem and Judea from the second century BCE through the second century CE: a reconsideration. *Journal for Semitics*, *23*(2), 653-664.