Introduction to Hebrew Linguistics

('Inleiding Hebreeuwse Taalkunde')

UvA, Week 5, March 16, 2012

Biblical Hebrew

"Did King David speak like the Bible?"

Tamás Biró

Homework for this week

1. RAM Tanakh versus Masoretic Text

2. Read the following two articles on translating the Hebrew Bible to Modern Hebrew / a.k.a. Israeli:
   Ghil'ad Zuckermann, and reaction by Shira Leibowitz Schmidt.
   What is *your* opinion?

Homework: Do Israelis speak like the Bible?

Today: Did King David speak like the Bible?

Hebrew: prehistory and four periods

0. Proto-Semitic, proto-NW-Semitic, proto-Canaanite, and proto-Hbrw: *"The family tree: ancestors and relatives."*
1. Biblical Hebrew: *"Did King David speak like the Bible?"*
   Pre-classical BH, classical BH, post-exilic BH; Qumran
   Masoretic Hebrew = Tiberian Hebrew
2. Mishnaic/Rabbinic Hbrw: *"A spoken language written".*
3. Medieval Hebrew: *"Dead or alive?"*
4. Modern Hebrew, Israeli Hebrew (Israeli language)
   Haskala, language revival, contemporary IH
   "Is it obvious that Hebrew is the language of Israel?"

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PROBLEMS

Sources of linguistics

- (Prescriptive linguistics: the “Academy”)
- Descriptive linguistics Data = whatever native speakers say.

  L1*vs.* L2. Adult *vs.* child.
- In contemporary linguistics:

  observation vs. controlled experiments.

- But what about past languages?
  - Written documents only. No tape rec. No chance to ask.
  - Written style often differs from oral style. Copyist’s errors.
  - Universals of *Homo sapiens* also apply to older languages.
  - Comparison with related languages (e.g. Hebrew vs. Arabic).
  - Internal reconstruction: irregularities explained by regular form in past?

Sources of Hebrew linguistics

We are lucky: really lots of data, from 3 millennia!

But, can we trust our sources?

- Hebrew Bible written during almost a millennium. Memorized + copied.
- Languages change much in 1000 years: Was the Hebrew Bible linguistically copy-edited?
- BH, RH: almost exclusively medieval manuscripts.
- Masoretes (8-10th century CE), the Ben-Asher and Ben-Naphtali families. How reliable were they?
  - Biblical Hebrew? “Tiberian Hebrew”.

Questions in Hebrew linguistics

- What can we reconstruct regarding past stages of the Hebrew language?
- Do written sources reflect the spoken language?
- When was Hebrew used as L1? What other languages were used by Jews? What was the role of Hebrew language and the Hebrew Bible, as a normative corpus?

What is “Biblical Hebrew”?

- The language of the masoretic version of the Hebrew Bible (MT)? → “Tiberian Hebrew”
- The language common to various masoras, etc.?
- The language of the Hebrew Bible when it was canonized? (When was it canonized?)
- The language spoken/written when the Bible was written? The language spoken by the author(s) of the Bible? Which author?
  - Moses? King David? God at Mount Sinai?
  - First Temple period authors? Second Temple period authors?

Biblical Hebrew: historical overview

The West-Semitic language continuum

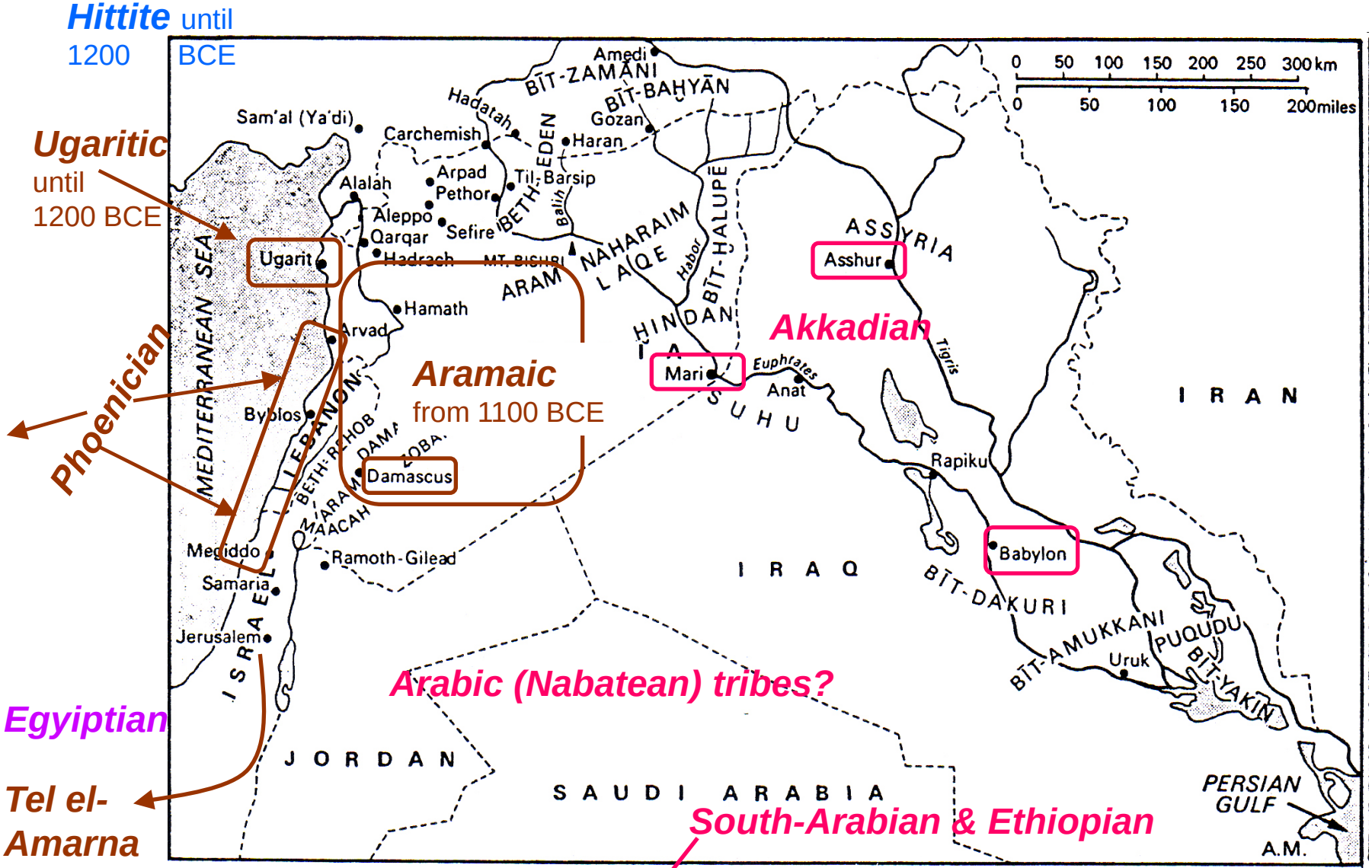


FIG. 4 The Aramaean cities and states.

Source: http://www.aramaic-dem.org/English/History/THE_ARAMAEANS-filer/image001.jpg

History of Biblical Hebrew

- Northwest Semitic language continuum:
  - Temporal differences:
    - 2nd millennium BCE: Ugaritic, Old Canaanite (Amarna glosses)
    - 1st millennium BCE: Aramaic, Phoenician, Hebrew, Moabite, etc.:
      - innovations (e.g. definite article)
      - loss of archaic features (e.g., case system)
  - Geographic differences:
    - Ugaritic (to the Northwest), Aramaic (to the Northeast): [ā]
    - Canaanite languages (to the West and South: Old Canaanite = Tel el-Amarna glosses, Phoenician, Hebrew, Moabite, etc.):
      - Major isogloss: [ā] > [ō] *Canaanite sound shift*
  - Stylistic differences:
    - Literary or official language variety: CBH ≈ language of Mesha stele
    - Colloquial (= spoken) language variety

History of Biblical Hebrew

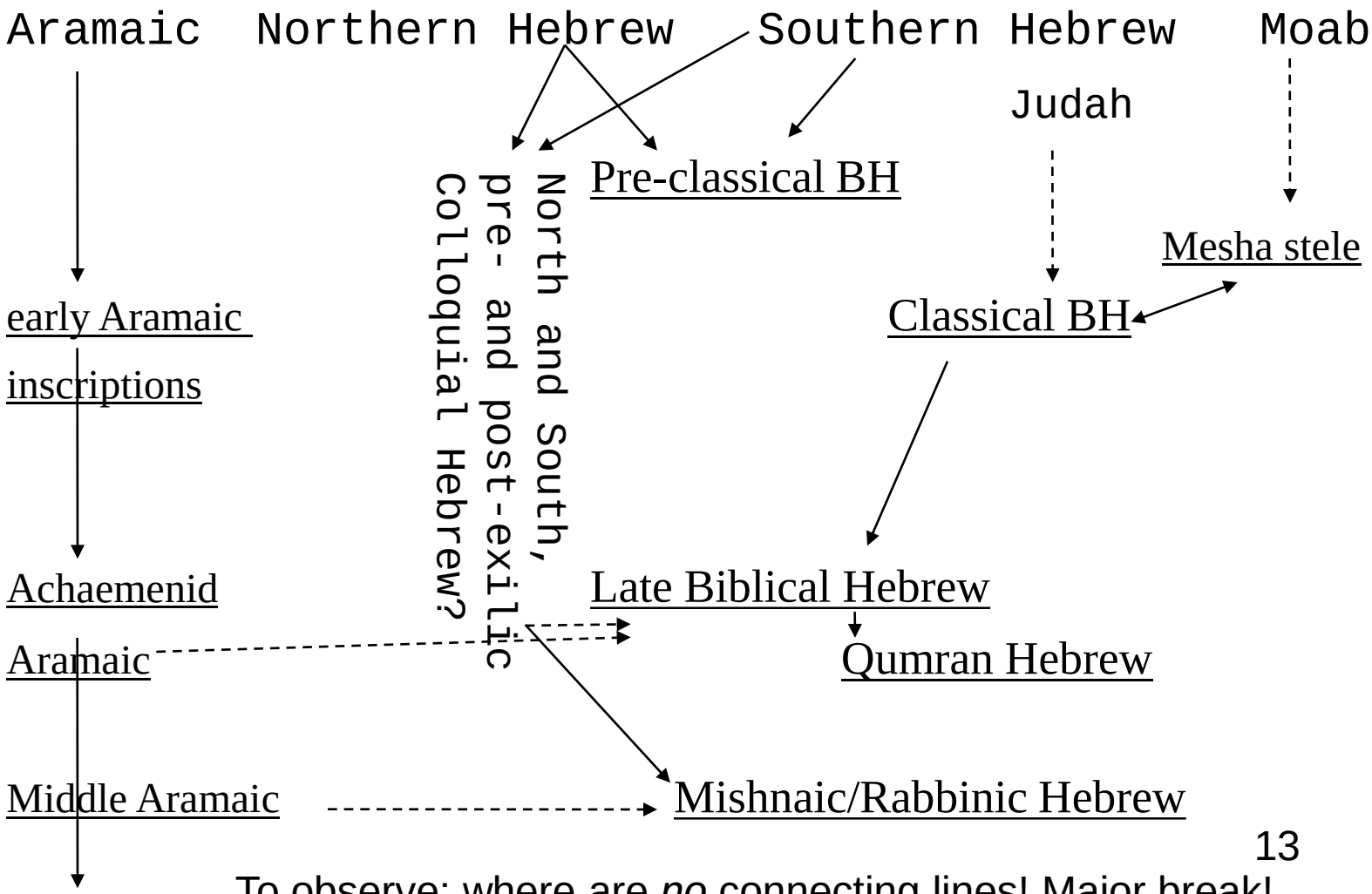
- Regional and tribal dialects of proto-Hebrew:
  - Tribal dialect in Judge 12:6? Ephraim: sibbolet ~ šibbolet
  - Southern vs. Northern dialects

    Northern must have resembled Aramaic and Phoenician in many respects:
    - sound changes ([aw] > [ō], [ay] > [ē], pun in Amos 8:2 קֵיץ vs. קֵץ),
    - lexicon (Samarian ostraca: *št* [*šatt*] ~ BH *šānā* 'year' < * *šanātu*), etc.
- "Aramaic" features found in pre-classical BH poetry, Late BH (e.g. Song of Songs) and Mishnaic Hebrew:
  - Arameism? Maybe, maybe not. Don't judge too quickly!
  - Maybe influence of Northern dialects:
    - In pre-classical poetry: ok.
    - Northern dialects after Babylonian exile? Samaritans: descendants of Northern Kingdom + people settled there by Assyrians.
  - Even in colloquial (spoken) language in the South, but avoided in the written language for stylistic reasons?

History of Biblical Hebrew: hypothesized spoken vs. written documents

Time: 2nd Temple; Bab. exile; 1st Temple; Judges

Geography: Northwest Semitic spoken language continuum



To observe: where are *no* connecting lines! Major break!

Biblical Hebrew: sources

History of the text in Biblical Hebrew

- Sources: oral tradition(s) and/or written tradition(s)
  - Source criticism of the Pentateuch (= Torah)
    J. Wellhausen (1880s): four sources: J, E, D, P.
- Several/final redaction(s) of the text.
- Transmission of the text: orally and/or in written form. Yet: no vocalization, no delineation of sentence borders, no intonation (is it a statement or question?), no tune – to be remembered orally!
- Canonization: gradual process. Torah canonized by Ezra & Nehemiah. Hebrew Bible canonized by Javne.
- Copied: extreme care, but still errors.
- Antique and modern translations. Masorah.

Traditions of Biblical Hebrew

Hebrew Bible = TaNa”Kh (תנ"ך = תּוֹרָה נְבִיאִים כְּתוּבִים) = OT

- Ancient fragments. Qumran and other old manuscripts, inscriptions.
- Tiberian masorah: Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali families.
  - Ben Asher school: Aleppo Codex, Leningrad Codex.
- Other masoretic traditions: Babylonian, Palestinian
  - Different signs, describes different pronunciation.
  - Survived in the Cairo Geniza and in Yemenite manuscripts.
- Samaritan Hebrew
- Transliteration to Greek (“Secunda”) in Origen's Hexapla.
- Translations: Greek (Septuagint, Aquila, Symachus, Theodotion), Latin (e.g. Vetus Latina and Vulgate), Syriac (e.g. Peshitta), etc.

Traditions of BH: pronunciation

- Ancient fragments. Qumran and other old manuscripts: no vocalization (*nikkudim*)!
- Tiberian masorah: probably had a tradition of pronunciation that did not survive.
- Other masoretic traditions: Babylonian, Palestinian
  - Different and fewer signs, not distinguishing between certain vowels.
  - Different signs. Reflect different traditions of pronunciation again.
- Samaritan Hebrew, Medieval and modern pronunciations: extreme diversity (see 2nd half of course).
- Grk transliterations. Transcriptions in translations:
  - Not every Hebrew sound could be transcribed to Greek/Latin.

Biblical Hebrew: Classical Biblical Hebrew

The language of the Torah, most of the historical books, most of the prophets, etc.

Classical Biblical Hebrew

- First Temple Period, until 586 BCE.
- Why is CBH linguistically so homogeneous?
  - It covers half a millennium. Language must have changed a lot.
  - Written at the same time? (Say, in the 6th century?)
  - Final edition at the same time?
  - Gradual linguistic “updating” until canonization?
  - Was CBH a standard literary language, which changed much slower than colloquial language?

Classical BH: Shma

- Shma: Deut. 6:4-9 *(NB: we shall need it next weeks, too.)*

דברים פרק ו, ד-ט

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְקֹוָק אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְקֹוָק אֶחָד: וְאָהַבְתָּ אֵת יְקֹוָק
אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדֶךָ: וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים
הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל לְבָבֶךָ: וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדִבַּרְתָּ
בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשָׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמֶךָ: וּקְשַׁרְתָּם
לְאוֹת עַל יָדֶךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטָפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ: וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל מְזוּזֹת
בֵּיתֶךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ: ס

To observe: waw consecutive, possessive suffixes, object suffixes, possession expressed by construct state (smichut), infinitive construct with preposition ב.

CBH: Shma

- Shma: Deut. 6:4-9 *(NB: we shall need it next weeks, too.)*

דברים פרק ו, ד-ט

4. Luister, Israël: de HEER, onze God, de HEER is de enige!
5. Heb daarom de HEER, uw God, lief met hart en ziel en met inzet van al uw krachten. 6. Houd de geboden die ik u vandaag opleg steeds in gedachten. 7. Prent ze uw kinderen in en spreek er steeds over, thuis en onderweg, als u naar bed gaat en als u opstaat. 8. Draag ze als een teken om uw arm en als een band op uw voorhoofd. 9. Schrijf ze op de deurposten van uw huis en op de poorten van de stad.

(De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling)

Biblical Hebrew:
Pre-classical Biblical Hebrew

The language of some poetical passages:

Song of Deborah (Judges 5), *Prayer of Hannah* (1Sam 2),

Blessing of Jacob (Genesis 49),

Song of the Sea (Exodus 15),

Bileam's blessings (Numeri 24-25),

Song of Moses (Deut. 32), *Blessing of Moses* (Deuteronomy 33)

Pre-classical poetry: Judges 5

(ג) שִׁמְעוּ מְלָכִים הַאֲזִינוּ רֹזְנִים אָנֹכִי לַיקֹוָק אָנֹכִי אָשִׁירָה אֲזַמֵּר
לַיקֹוָק אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

(ד) יְקֹוָק בְּצֵאתְךָ מִשֵּׂעִיר בְּצַעְדְּךָ מִשְּׂדֵה אֱדוֹם אֶרֶץ רָעָשָׁה גַּם
שָׁמַיִם נָטָפוּ גַּם עָבִים נָטְפוּ מָיִם׃

(ה) הָרִים נָזָלוּ מִפְּנֵי יְקֹוָק זֶה סִינַי מִפְּנֵי יְקֹוָק אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

(ו) בִּימֵי שַׁמְגַּר בֶּן עֲנָת בִּימֵי יָעֵל חָדְלוּ אֳרָחוֹת וְהֹלְכֵי נְתִיבוֹת יֵלְכוּ
אֳרָחוֹת עֲקַלְקַלּוֹת׃

(ז) חָדְלוּ פְרָזוֹן בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל חָדֵלּוּ עַד שַׁקַּמְתִּי דְּבוֹרָה שַׁקַּמְתִּי אֵם
בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל׃

Parallelism: CBH words vs. literary/Aramaic/Northern (near-) synonyms.

“še” and other features: not in CBH, but in late BH, and often in Mishnaic Hebrew (and also MedH and IH): Northern feature? Colloquial, non-literary feature?

Pre-classical poetry: Judges 5

3. Koningen en vorsten, luister en hoor toe hoe ik de HEER bezing, een lied zing voor de HEER, de God van Israël.
4. HEER, de aarde beefde toen u voortschreed vanuit Seïr; toen u optrok vanuit Edom stortte water uit de hemel en de wolken neer.
5. Voor de heerser van de Sinai wankelden de bergen, voor u, HEER, u, de God van Israël.
6. Onder Samgar, de zoon van Anat, in de tijd van Jaël, begaf geen karavaan zich nog op weg. Wie toch op reis moest, nam de kronkelpaden.
7. Aanvoerders ontbraken, het land kende geen leiding totdat jij, Debora, kwam en Israël tot leidsvrouw werd.

(De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling)

Pre-classical poetry: Exodus 15

(יז) תְּבִאֵמוֹ וְתִטָּעֵמוֹ בְּהַר נַחֲלָתְךָ מָכוֹן לְשִׁבְתְּךָ פָּעַלְתָּ יְקֹוָק
מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי כּוֹנְנוּ יָדֶיךָ׃

U brengt hen naar de berg die uw domein is, HEER, en daar zult u hen planten, in uw eigen woning, het heiligdom door u gebouwd. (De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling)

-mo suffix: archaic, instead of –hu

paal, instead of *asa*.

Pre-classical poetry: Deuteronomy 33

(ב) וַיֹּ֣אמַר יְקֹוָ֗ק מִסִּינַי֙ בָּ֣א וְזָרַ֣ח מִשֵּׂעִ֔יר לָ֖מוֹ הוֹפִ֣יעַ מֵהַ֣ר פָּארָ֑ן
וְאָתָ֞ה מֵרִבְבֹ֣ת קֹ֗דֶשׁ מִימִינוֹ֙ אשדת [Q: אֵ֣שׁ דָּ֔ת]לָ֖מוֹ׃

lamo ~ **lahu* > *lo*.

ba ~ *ata* (standard in Aramaic)

<u>Ktiv</u> vs. <u>Qrei</u>: "*write* אשדת *but pronounce* אֵ֣שׁ דָּ֔ת*!*"

Original meaning is unclear (אשרת??). "Fire of law" is mistaken. The origin of the word *dat* 'law' is LBH, from Persian origin. (Not **dint*, feminine of *din.*) LBH 'law' > MedH 'law' and 'religion' > IH 'religion'.

Pre-classical poetry: Deuteronomy 33

De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling: Hij zei: ‘De HEER verscheen vanaf de Sinai, zijn licht bescheen hen vanuit Seïr, met luister kwam hij van de bergen van Paran. Talloze engelen vergezelden hem, bliksem flitste uit zijn rechterhand. (Talloze engelen vergezelden hem – Voorgestelde lezing. MT: ‘En hij kwam van tienduizenden van heiligheid’.)

Herziene Statenvertaling: Hij zei: De HEERE is van Sinaï gekomen, als de zon kwam Hij uit Seïr op. Hij verscheen blinkend vanaf de Paranbergen, Hij kwam met tienduizenden heiligen, aan Zijn rechterhand was een vurige wet voor hen.

NBG-vertaling 1951: Hij zeide: De HERE is gekomen van Sinai en over hen opgegaan uit Seïr; Hij is in lichtglans verschenen van het gebergte Paran en gekomen uit het midden van heilige tienduizenden; aan zijn rechterzijde zagen zij een brandend vuur.

Biblical Hebrew:
Late Biblical Hebrew

The language of the late Biblical books, those being written after the Babylonian exile, and whose language was affected by the spoken language(s) during this period.

Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH): History

721: Northern Kingdom conquered by the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

598/7: First exile of Judah by the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

587/6: Destruction of first Jerusalem temple, second exile.

539: Persian Empire conquers Neo-Babylonian Empire. (Cf. Daniel)

538: Cyrus decree: Jews may move back to Israel.

516: Start building second Jerusalem temple.

Persian period: Ezra, Nehemia; story of Esther.

336-323: Alexander the Great. Hellenism and Greek language.

323-198: Ptolemaic Empire. 198-140: Seleucid Empire.

140-63: Hasmoneans.

From 63 BCE: Romans.

66-70 CE: Jewish War. 70: Destruction of Second Temple.

Late Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic history

- During the Babylonian exile: Aramaic and some Akkadian.
  - Jews adopt the Aramaic language and the Aramaic script.
  - Were all Jews deported? or only the elite? or only the urban population? Hebrew speaking (rural) population remaining in Judea?
  - Hebrew speaking population in Northern Israel?
    Samaritans: those not deported after 721 + those settled down to the Northern territories by the Neo-Assyrian empire.
- 538: Cyrus edict. Zerubabel. Ezra: several waves of returnees from the Babylonian exile. Still, many Jews stay in the Diaspora.
- Persian empire: Aramaic and Persian (and Akkadian in writing). (Persian is Indo-European. Aramaic is also official language.)
- Hellenism: Greek, especially in cities. But Aramaic remains dominant *lingua franca* in the Middle East (until Arabic conquest).

Late Biblical Hebrew: Multilingualism

- Multilingual surrounding society:
  - Aramaic and Persian. Akkadian literary traditions. Later Greek.
- Multilingual Jewish society:
  - Hebrew (in Judah? + the language of the religious tradition)
  - Aramaic (in Galilee? + Most of the Diaspora; cf. Elephantine papyri)
  - After end of 4th century: Greek in Hellenistic cities.
- Functional diglossia within Hebrew: two language (varieties) used for two different purposes: spoken Hebrew vs. literary Hebrew. (Cf: Swiss German, Arabic, Persian, modern Greek, Middle Aramaic…)

  1. Colloquial varietie(s) of Hebrew, developing toward what will become Mishnaic (Rabbinic) Hebrew.

  2. LBH = literary language imitating CBH.
  But colloquial interference inevitable.

Late Biblical Hebrew: Texts

- Post-exilic story & many LBH features:
  Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, Daniel, last prophets.

- Believed to be post-exilic & some LBH features:
  Song of Songs (Shir ha-shirim, pace Rabin), Ecclesiastes (*Qohelet*),
  Proverbs (*Mishlei*), Chronicles, several psalms, frame story of Job.

- Usually believed to be post-exilic (on non-linguistic ground)
  but no (convincing) LBH features: Priestly code of Pentateuch (P),
  Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah, Ruth, Lamentations (*Eicha*).

- NB: Aramaic portions of Daniel and of Nehemiah:
  Daniel 2,4b-7,28; Ezra 4,8-6,18; 7,12-26; Jer. 10,11; Gen. 31,47aβ.

LBH: Linguistic features

- Aramaic, Persian, and later Greek influence
  - Especially in the Diaspora (cf. Persian words in Book of Esther)
  - Aramaic portions of Daniel and Ezra.
- LBH = artificial literary language imitating CBH.

  → Colloquial interferences are inevitable.

Features:

- Persian loanwords. Greek loanwords (Songs 3:9 and Daniel 3:15-17)
- No consequent use of waw consecutive: verbs have CBH aspects (perfect, imperfect) => LBH tenses (past, future)
- Some colloquial or Northern features reappear, such as *she-*.
- Spelling is very *plene* (*male:* with *matres lectionis*).

Late Biblical Hebrew: Esther 9

(א) וּבִשְׁנֵים עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ הוּא חֹדֶשׁ אֲדָר בִּשְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם בּוֹ אֲשֶׁר הִגִּיעַ דְּבַר
הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ לְהֵעָשׂוֹת בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר שִׂבְּרוּ אֹיְבֵי הַיְּהוּדִים לִשְׁלוֹט בָּהֶם וְנַהֲפוֹךְ
הוּא אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלְטוּ הַיְּהוּדִים הֵמָּה בְּשֹׂנְאֵיהֶם׃

(כג) וְקִבֵּל הַיְּהוּדִים אֵת אֲשֶׁר הֵחֵלּוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר כָּתַב מָרְדֳּכַי אֲלֵיהֶם׃

Qibel: Persian loanword, no agreement (cf. also Ktiv in 9:27), waw is not a waw-consecutive.

(כד) כִּי הָמָן בֶּן הַמְּדָתָא הָאֲגָגִי צֹרֵר כָּל הַיְּהוּדִים חָשַׁב עַל הַיְּהוּדִים לְאַבְּדָם
וְהִפִּיל פּוּר הוּא הַגּוֹרָל לְהֻמָּם וּלְאַבְּדָם׃

(כו) עַל כֵּן קָרְאוּ לַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה פּוּרִים עַל שֵׁם הַפּוּר עַל כֵּן עַל כָּל דִּבְרֵי הָאִגֶּרֶת
הַזֹּאת וּמָה רָאוּ עַל כָּכָה וּמָה הִגִּיעַ אֲלֵיהֶם

Late Biblical Hebrew: Esther 9

1. De dertiende dag van de twaalfde maand, de maand adar, brak aan, de dag waarop het bevel en de wet van de koning zouden worden uitgevoerd, de dag waarop de vijanden van de Joden hen in hun macht hoopten te krijgen. Maar het omgekeerde gebeurde: het waren juist de Joden die hun belagers in hun macht kregen.

23. De Joden gaven gevolg aan wat Mordechai hun schreef, en maakten zo een vast gebruik van iets waarmee ze zelf al een begin hadden gemaakt.

24. Want zo was het gegaan: Haman, de zoon van Hammedata, een nakomeling van Agag en de vijand van alle Joden, had een plan beraamd om de Joden uit te roeien. Hij had het poer, dat wil zeggen het lot, laten werpen om paniek onder hen te zaaien en hen te kunnen uitroeien.

26. Het is naar het woord poer dat deze dagen Poeriem worden genoemd. (De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling)

Reading and assignment for next week

- Read Chaim Rabin: chapters 5 (Mishnaic Hebrew) and 6 (Hebrew in the diaspora).

- M.H. Segal: *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (originally 1926), Introduction (pp. 1-20).
- N. M. Waldman: *The Recent Study of Hebrew* (1989), The Historic position of Mishnaic Hebrew (pp. 109-114)

- Assignment: collect the languages mentioned by Segal (and Waldman) that could be the sources of Mishnaic Hebrew.

See you next week!

Motto for next week: אסתר פרק א

(כב) וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים אֶל כָּל מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל
מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה כִּכְתָבָהּ וְאֶל עַם וָעָם כִּלְשׁוֹנוֹ
לִהְיוֹת כָּל אִישׁ שֹׂרֵר בְּבֵיתוֹ וּמְדַבֵּר כִּלְשׁוֹן עַמּוֹ׃