

**Introduction  
to Hebrew Linguistics**  
(‘Inleiding Hebreeuwse Taalkunde’)  
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Qumran Hebrew, Samaritan Hebrew.  
Rabbinic (Mishnaic) Hebrew

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# 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 Hebrew:  
*“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?”*

# Biblical Hebrew: Historical overview

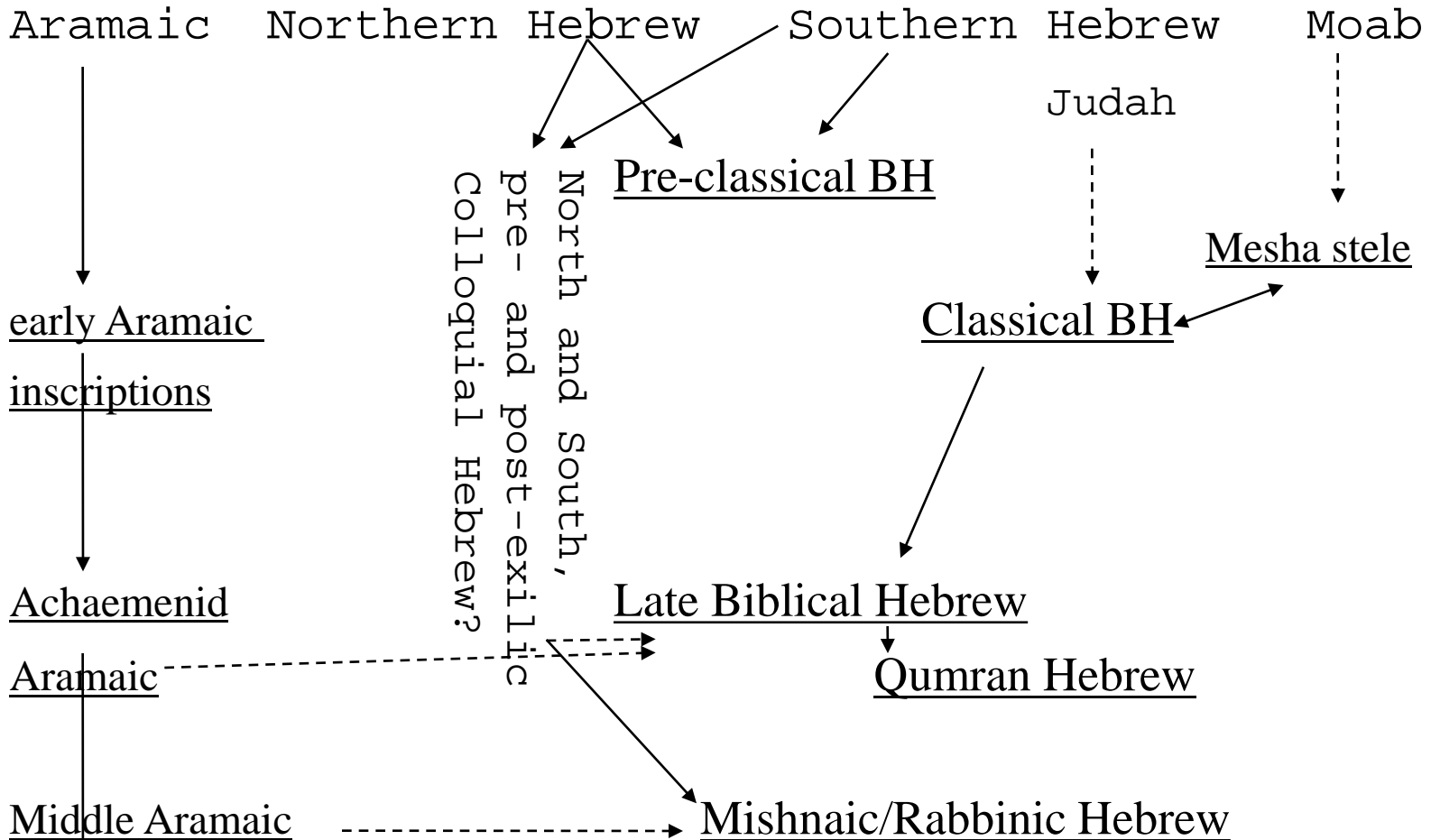
- 721: Northern Kingdom conquered by the Neo-Assyrian Empire.
- 598/7: First exile of Judah by the Neo-Babylonian Empire.
- 587/6: Destruction of first Jerusalem temple, second exile.
- 539: Persian Empire conquers Neo-Babylonian Empire. (Cf. Daniel)
- 538: Cyrus decree: Jews may move back to Israel.
- 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: 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

# History of Biblical Hebrew: <sup>hypoththesized</sup> spoken vs. written documents

Geography: Northwest Semitic spoken language continuum



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

# Post-Biblical Period

(a.k.a. intertestamental period,  
Hellenism and early Roman period)

## and Qumran

# Post-Biblical Hebrew

- Books that were written in the (late Persian), Hellenistic and early Roman period, but which did not make it into the canon of the Hebrew Bible => apocrypha
- Deutero-canonistic books: which were nevertheless canonized by the catholic church (and orthodox churches and eastern churches) as part of their Old Testament. The Jews and the protestants do not accept them as canonical.
- Similar style and similar language to LBH books: trying to imitate classical Biblical texts.
  - Pseudepigraph: claiming the authorship of a classical biblical book.
- *Ben Sira, 1st Book of Maccabees, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon...*
- *...2-4Maccabees, Tobit, Psalms of Solomon, Book(s) of Enoch, Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, Testament of Solomon...*
  - Much of these argued to have / might have been written in Greek. Some written in Hebrew or Aramaic, but survived only in Greek, Coptic, Syriac, Old Church Slavic, etc. Some discovered in Qumran or Cairo Geniza in Hebrew.

# Qumran Hebrew

- Qumran and other Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS):
  - Discovered in/since 1947.
  - Qumran community: 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE – 1<sup>st</sup> century CE
  - Scrolls contain
    - Portions of Biblical books (except Esther), maybe slightly different textual traditions. NB: some of these texts had not been canonized yet.
    - Apocryphal books: probably still having similar status to the Biblical books that were later canonized.
    - Books written by the community itself, or by similar communities (e.g. Damascus Covenant: already known before 1947)
    - Other documents of the community itself.
  - Not to confuse with other “Discoveries in the Judean Desert” (DJD), such as Bar-Kokhba letters from 132-135 CE.



# Qumran Hebrew

- Some scrolls in Aramaic (pl. Genesis Apocryphon). Some scrolls in/closer to colloquial language, to be known as Mishnaic Hebrew.
- **Qumran Hebrew:** books authored by the Qumran community, but at least discovered among their documents. (Not the Hebrew of the Biblical books.)
  - Similarly to the authors of the late Biblical books, the Qumran community also used BH as literary model.
  - Probably spoke some variety between LBH and Mishnaic H. And also Aramaic?
  - Similar linguistic features to LBH: for instance,
    - Less waw consecutive, aspect > tense in verbal system.
    - Pronouns and verbs may get a final ה suffix.
    - Use of *she-*
    - מן instead of מ- . דרמשק instead of דמשק.
    - Extremely plene spelling: ירושלים, דוניד

# Rabbinic (Mishnaic) Hebrew

# Mishnaic (Rabbinic) Hebrew

- Significantly differs from Biblical Hebrew. Why?
  - Bab. Talmud Avoda Zara 58b, Chulin 137b: לשון קודש vs. לשון חז"ל.
  - 19<sup>th</sup> century theories: Aramaic influence in Roman times? Artificial language by Aramaic speaking rabbis? No!
  - M.H. Segal, early 20<sup>th</sup> century: Spoken language during the second temple period, but never written down earlier.
  - Hebrew spoken in Judea (Jerusalem), while Aramaic spoken in Galilee during Persian, Hellenistic and Roman times?
  - Nationalistic language renaissance in 1<sup>st</sup> century CE? Maybe.
- Gradual development of post-exilic spoken Hebrew:
  - Inner development: e.g., *anaxnu* > *anu*.
  - Forms prohibited in earlier literary norm (in CBH): *lel*, *zo*, *še*.
  - External influence: Aramaic + some Greek, Persian, few Latin, Akkadian (Late Babylonian), etc.

# Mishnaic (Rabbinic) Hebrew

- Why writing down the spoken language?
  - Functional diglossia is a situation hard to maintain, especially when the difference grows larger.
  - National pride in 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, during the revolts? (Cf. Use of paleo-Hebrew script)
  - Oral genres, orally performed and transmitted texts:
    - Liturgy, prayers: *Shemone Esre (Amida)*, *Aleinu leshabeach*, blessings (e.g., of the *Shma*).
    - Oral Law (*Torah she-be-al-peh*): orally transmitted Biblical exegesis, and other traditions.
  - NB: Manuscripts are only medieval. When the text of the Mishna and of the midrashim were edited in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, they might have not been written down, but transmitted orally for centuries.

# Mishnaic (Rabbinic) Hebrew

Two periods of Rabbinic Hebrew:

- RH1: Tannaitic Hebrew (1<sup>st</sup> c. CE – 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE)
  - Hebrew was still spoken in Palestine
  - DJD: Bar Kokhba letters, Cooper Scroll...
  - Rabbinic texts of the *tannaim* in Palestine:
    - Mishna: Rabbi Judah ha-Nassi, around 210 CE.
    - *Tosefta*, and the *baraytot* in the Talmudim.
    - tannaitic (halakhic) *Midrash collections*.
    - Seder Olam Rabba, Megillat Taanit, etc.
  - (No tannaitic text from Babylonia)
- Earliest texts share some isoglosses with LBH, QH.
- Example: development of ל+ ש into לש.

# Mishnaic (Rabbinic) Hebrew

- RH2: Amoraic Hebrew (3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE – 6<sup>th</sup> c. CE)
  - Hebrew was not spoken anymore, even in Palestine. (Megilla 18a: “Take the broom, and sweep the floor!”)
  - Rabbinic texts of the amoraim in Palestine:
    - Hebrew in Palestinian Talmud (Talmud Yerushalmi)
    - Amoraic (aggadic) midrash collections.
    - Early mystical texts (*heikhalot*, *merkava*, *Sefer Yetsira*)
    - Early piyyutim (liturgical poetry)
    - Synagogue inscriptions, amulets, etc.
  - Amoraim in Babylonia: Hebrew in Babylonian Talmud
- After the amoraim: gaonic period (7<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> century) in Babylonia.

# Mishnaic (Rabbinic) Hebrew

## Characteristic features of the vocabulary

- Loanwords: from Latin, Akkadian... but mainly from:
  - Aramaic: e.g. שעה 'hour', אבא 'father' (vs. BH אב)
  - Greek: קטגור ('public prosecutor, openbare aanklager' from *kategoros*) and פּרֹקְלִיט ('advocate' from *parakletos*); לֶסְטִים ('robber' from *lestes*).
- Semantic shift (same form, but meaning changes)
  - עוֹלָם: BH: 'eternity' → shift to RH: 'world'
  - מַעֲשֵׂה: 'deed, action, practice' → additional meaning in RH: 'incident, happening, story'.
- New forms for old meaning: אשר < ש, אלה < אלו

# Mishnaic (Rabbinic) Hebrew

## Characteristic features of the grammar

- Expression of possession: של < ש+ל < אשר+ל  
Article proves reanalysis: še-la-... > šel-ha-...
- New nominal patterns:
  - -an for agent of action (רַצְחָן 'murderer', שֶׁקֶרָן 'liar')
- Semantic reanalysis of the verbal system:
  - BH Perfect > RH past tense, imperfect > future tense
  - Participle > present (and additional meanings)
- Change of gender of some nouns:
  - כּוּס 'cup' BH: feminine > RH: masculine (analogy)
  - שָׂדֵה 'field' BH: masc. > RH: masc and fem. (Aramaic influence)
- And much more...



# Reading and assignment for Medieval Hebrew

- Reading: Read Chaim Rabin: chapters 7 (medieval poetry), and 8 (medieval prose).
- Assignment: B. Goldstein on *Jacob's staff* see the website.

See you next time!