

# The Language Environment of First Century Judaea

*Jerusalem Studies in the Synoptic Gospels*

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# *Hebraisti* in Ancient Texts: Does Ἑβραϊστί Ever Mean “Aramaic”?\*

*Randall Buth and Chad Pierce*

There is a methodological problem with the lexical entry Ἑβραῖς in the standard lexicon for New Testament studies. Under Ἑβραῖς BDAG says “the Hebr[ew] language Ac[ts] 21:40; 22:2; 26:14; Papias (2:16). These pass[ages] refer to the Aramaic spoken at that time in Palestine.”<sup>1</sup> The present study will investigate the claim of BDAG. It will be shown that there is reliable, lexicographical and contextual support for the meaning “Hebrew language” for the word group Ἑβραῖς, Ἑβραϊστί, Ἑβραϊκή and especially for the passages cited in BDAG. It also will be shown that there is no methodologically sound support for the meaning “Aramaic language.” This is a classic example where *a priori* assumptions have led a field to ignore the evidence and to misread it.

The present study focuses on the meaning of Ἑβραῖς and the language that it references in various Greek authors during the Second Temple period up to the beginning of the Byzantine period. This essay does not deal with which language(s) Jewish teachers used for teaching in the first century, nor which language was most common in the markets in Capernaum or Jerusalem, nor which language was Jesus’ first language, nor when and where Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew were used, nor the relative percentages of usage of Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew. Our quest is more modest and more reliably achieved: To which language or to which languages did Ἑβραῖς, Ἑβραϊστί, Ἑβραϊκή refer?

For the past 450 years, the idea that the Ἑβραῖς, Ἑβραϊστί, Ἑβραϊκή group of words could refer to Aramaic in the first century has grown and solidified. The late nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed a continuation and

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\* The present study arose out of an on-going discussion and correspondence. This work is one of joint authorship and mutual responsibility.

1 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 Griechisch-deutsches 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).

expansion of such an Aramaic hypothesis.<sup>2</sup> One of the influential scholars to advocate an Aramaic understanding of Ἑβραῖς was Gustaf Dalman. In his work *Jesus–Jeshua*, Dalman concluded that Aramaic had become the language of the Jews to such an extent that Aramaic words were designated “Hebrew.”<sup>3</sup>

New Testament scholarship since Dalman’s day, although acknowledging that Ἑβραῖς literally means “Hebrew,” has continued this trend. As an example, Joseph Fitzmyer asserts two reasons why Ἑβραϊστί means *Aramaic*. First, he claims that “Greek writers of a later period refer to the language [Aramaic—RB/CP] as συριστί or συριακή. When, however, Greek writers of the first century refer to the native Semitic language of Palestine, they use Ἑβραϊστί, ἑβραῖς διὰλεκτος, or ἑβραϊζῶν. As far as I can see, no one has yet found the adverb *aramaïsti*.”<sup>4</sup> Second, he makes the claim “As is well known, it [ἑβραϊστί *et al.*—RB/CP] is used at times with words and expressions that are clearly Aramaic.”<sup>5</sup>

This study will demonstrate that Ἑβραῖς means Hebrew. It will address the claims that allegedly support an Aramaic understanding of Ἑβραῖς. It also will demonstrate that Ἑβραῖς only means Hebrew, and it will challenge both of the assumptions, represented by Fitzmyer, supporting an Aramaic understanding of Ἑβραῖς. First, it will show that there is a clear distinction in the writings of ancient Greek authors between the Hebrew and Aramaic languages beginning in the Persian period through at least the third century C.E. Second, it will determine whether any words labeled as Ἑβραῖς are in fact Hebrew or Aramaic. Thus, it will refute the claim that Greek writers commonly used the term to describe Aramaic.<sup>6</sup>

2 For a discussion of the history of the hypothesis of Aramaic replacing Hebrew as the language of the Jewish people, see Guido Baltes’ contribution to the present volume, “The Origins of the ‘Exclusive Aramaic Model’ in the Nineteenth Century” (pp. 9–34).

3 Gustaf Dalman, *Jesus–Jeshua: Studies in the Gospels* (trans. P. Levertoff; New York: KTAV, 1971, originally published in 1898). See also Arnold Meyer, *Jesu Muttersprache: Das galiläische Aramäisch in seiner Bedeutung für die Erklärung der Reden Jesu* (Freiburg i.Br./Leipzig: Mohr, 1896).

4 Joseph A Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 43. His comment on *aramaïsti* is ill-conceived and misleading since Greek already had a good word for “Aramaic,” Συριστί from pre-Christian times. In fact, as far as we can tell, Greek never called Aramaic Ἑβραϊστί, so its lack in first century Greek authors is simply correct Greek usage and to be expected.

5 *Ibid.*, 43.

6 Dalman, *Jesus–Jeshua*, 15: “Aramaic became the language of the Jews to such an extent that the Gospel of St. John *as well as Josephus* [italics ours—RB/CP] found it possible to designate such Aramaic words . . . as Hebrew.”

## 1 Ἑβραῖς and the Book of Acts

The book of Acts provides an interesting starting point for examining the term Ἑβραῖς/Ἑβραϊστί. The contexts provide enough signals for determining to which language the term referred.

Ἑβραῖς is found in Acts 21:40 and 22:2. After a riot developed around him in the temple, Paul requests that he be allowed to speak to the Jewish crowd. Acts 21:40–22:2 reads:

When he had given him permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the people for silence; and when there was a great hush, he addressed them *in the Hebrew language* (τῇ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ), saying: “Brothers and fathers, listen to the defense that I now make before you.” When they heard him addressing them *in Hebrew* (τῇ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ), they became even more quiet. (NRSV)

While the word Ἑβραῖς literally means “Hebrew” (Phil 3:5), many commentators suggest that “in the Hebrew dialect” refers to Aramaic.<sup>7</sup> Translations have made this explicit. The NRSV of Acts 21:40 and 22:2 translates Ἑβραϊδὶ “in Hebrew” in the main text but then includes a footnote clarifying, “that is, Aramaic.” The NIV translates Ἑβραϊδὶ “in Aramaic” in the main text with a footnote saying, “or possibly in Hebrew.” The Jerusalem Bible translates “Hebrew” with a footnote “i.e., Aramaic.” TOB translates *hebraïque*, with a footnote “c’est-à-dire, probablement, en Araméen.” Newcomers to the field of New Testament studies might reasonably conclude that the evidence for “Aramaic” must be quite strong and unambiguous for such a seeming consensus to rewrite “Hebrew” as “Aramaic.”

Dalman concluded that “the ‘Hebrew’ speech of St. Paul to the Jews who were gathered in the temple (Acts xxi. 40; xxii. 2) . . . [was] doubtless in Aramaic.”<sup>8</sup> Regarding Acts 21:40 and 22:2, Fitzmyer claims that Paul is “undoubtedly” speaking Aramaic.<sup>9</sup> While some have challenged these assumptions,<sup>10</sup> New

7 For examples of these commentators, see M. Parsons, *Acts* (Paedia: Commentaries on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 306; and R. Pervo, *Acts* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2009), 184.

8 Dalman, *Jesus-Jeshua*, 15.

9 Joseph A Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 701.

10 For examples of those who read Ἑβραῖς as signifying Hebrew, see J. M. Grintz, “Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language in the Last Days of the Second Temple,” *JBL* 79 (1960):

Testament scholarship has by and large followed the position exemplified by Dalman.

John Poirier has pointed out that a primary clue for understanding the events in Acts 21–22 is found in Acts 21:33–39.<sup>11</sup> Following a Jewish riot, the Roman tribune hears Paul ask a question in Greek and answers with a surprised question of his own: Ἐλληνιστὶ γινώσκεις; (“Do you know how to speak Greek?”). According to Poirier this little exchange points to a language switch and tells us that the previous riot and interrogations were not taking place in Greek, at least not with Paul. Presumably, the language of the Roman crowd control and of the interrogation was Aramaic, an international *lingua franca* known by many of the Roman soldiers who were recruited from the eastern Mediterranean areas.<sup>12</sup> Assuming that Paul had spoken something before Acts 21:37, the tribune’s surprise at hearing Greek from Paul tells us that the previous interrogation was probably not in Greek. Then, after the riot in one language, and the exchange in Greek between Paul and the tribune, a third language is recorded and labeled Hebrew. That third language would not be Aramaic (already used in the interrogation) or Greek, so the label Hebrew would be correct as written. All of this follows naturally from the context, if Paul had been speaking with the Romans before the conversation with the tribune in 21:37. However, even if Paul had been silent during this time before Acts 21:37, the context suggests that the language mentioned in Acts 22 is still most probably Hebrew.

In Acts 22:2 the crowd listened more intently to Paul, because he was speaking Ἑβραϊδὶ. Some scholars have argued that the crowd was surprised that Paul spoke Aramaic rather than Greek.<sup>13</sup> However, there was nothing remarkable about Jews from the Diaspora speaking Aramaic. Aramaic was known and used far and wide across the Middle East with not a few Greek-Aramaic multilinguals. It is much more probable that the astonishment came because Hebrew was being spoken by someone from the Diaspora. This Hebrew was not just a “tourist Hebrew” or “religious-use Hebrew,” but apparently an articulate and

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32–47, and S. Safrai, “Spoken Languages in the Time of Jesus,” *Jerusalem Perspective* 4, no. 1 (1991): 3–8, 13.

- 11 John C. Poirier, “The Narrative Role of Semitic Languages in the Book of Acts,” *Filología Neotestamentaria* 16 (2003): 107–16. Poirier concluded that the riot was in Aramaic and that Paul’s speech in Acts 22 was in Hebrew.
- 12 The use of Aramaic among Roman soldiers is found in Josephus’ account of the siege of Gamla in *War* 4.37–38. A more detailed description of this episode will be discussed below. Either Aramaic or Greek would be reasonable choices for addressing a Jewish crowd mixed with local Jews and those from the diaspora (Acts 21:27–36).
- 13 Pervo, *Acts*, 184; Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 701.

fluent Hebrew. The crowd was sufficiently surprised so that they stopped to listen. All of this can be argued from language shifts in the context. We note that Luke called this language Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ “in Hebrew.” After finishing our discussion on Acts 21–22, we will demonstrate that our understanding of this context is consistent with the use of Ἑβραϊστί/Ἑβραΐς in Greek literature of the Greco-Roman era.

The reason for the switch to Hebrew in this context has received some attention. John Poirier suggests that Paul spoke Hebrew rather than Aramaic in order to keep the content of his speech secret from the Roman authorities.<sup>14</sup> After Paul completes his speech to the crowd, Acts 22:24 records that the tribune questions why the crowd has reacted so negatively to Paul’s words. Poirier has correctly noted that both the tribune and his coterie would probably have been able to understand Aramaic. Poirier claims that the fact that he was not able to understand Paul’s speech further supports the theory that Paul spoke in Hebrew.<sup>15</sup> However, while secrecy is a possible factor in Paul’s language choice, we must remember that understanding a communication requires more than knowing the words and language, it requires knowing the cultural background and context. The Romans would presumably have been in the dark about the reason for the crowd’s anger, whether Paul spoke in Hebrew or Aramaic or Greek. We would add that Paul had mentioned being in the temple previously (Acts 22:17), without causing a riot. It was the seemingly innocuous statement that he would travel to Gentile areas that caused an uproar, and this would likely have confused a Roman officer in whatever language he had been listening. So the tribune ordered an investigation by scourging (Acts 22:24).

Daniel Marguerat suggests that Paul switched to Hebrew at the temple in order to demonstrate his commitment to the Jewish religion amid charges that he broke the Jewish law by bringing a Gentile beyond the appropriate boundary.<sup>16</sup> This provides a reasonable and culturally appropriate motivation for Paul’s speech in Hebrew. As a corollary, this motivation also supports the conclusion that Hebrew was the language of the speech in Acts 22.

Taken together, these arguments point to the contextually sound conclusion that Paul’s speech to the crowd in Acts 22 was in fact in Hebrew rather than

14 Poirier, “The Narrative Role,” 109–11. See also John C. Poirier, “The Linguistic Situation in Jewish Palestine in Late Antiquity,” *JGRChJ* 4, no. 3 (2007): 80. For such a use of Hebrew, see the discussion on *4 Macc* 12:8–9 below.

15 Poirier, “The Narrative Role,” 112, 113.

16 Daniel Marguerat, *The First Christian Historian: Writing the “Acts of the Apostles”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 197.

Aramaic. This conclusion will be strengthened by external references to Ἑβραῖς in early Jewish and Christian literature where Ἑβραῖς means Hebrew and cannot be established to mean Aramaic. So both the context and Luke's choice of wording point directly to Hebrew.

## 2 The Use of Ἑβραῖς in Early Jewish and Christian Literature

### a *The Septuagint*

In order to better understand the use of Ἑβραῖς in Acts, it is beneficial to observe how the word was used in other early Jewish and Christian literature. The LXX consistently distinguishes between Aramaic and Hebrew. Furthermore, there is no instance in which Ἑβραῖς refers to Aramaic. The first example of a clear distinction between the languages can be found in 2 Kgs 18:26–28. The LXX's rendering of 2 Kgs 18 preserves the differentiation in the Hebrew text between Hebrew and Aramaic. This is expressed in a dialogue between the officials of the Assyrian King Sennacherib and the Judean king Hezekiah. Second King 18:26–28 reads:

Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in the Aramaic language (Συριαστὶ), for we understand it; do not speak to us in the language of Judah (Ιουδαϊστὶ) within the hearing of the people who are on the wall." But the Rabshakeh said to them, "Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the people sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and to drink their own urine?" Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in the language of Judah (Ιουδαϊστὶ), "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria!"

In this story Eliakim, one of Hezekiah's officials, requests that the Assyrians speak in Aramaic (Συριαστὶ) rather than in Hebrew (Ιουδαϊστὶ), so that the common people would not be able to understand the conversation. The word Ιουδαϊστὶ is used here to refer to the language of Kingdom of Judah, the main dialect of Classical Hebrew. The Hebrew language as a whole was named "the language of Canaan" (שפת כנען) in Isa 19:18. The *rabshakeh*, the Assyrian official, ignores this request and speaks to the Judeans in Hebrew (Ιουδαϊστὶ). It is evident that at the time of the composition of the LXX, the translators understood a difference between Hebrew (Ιουδαϊστὶ) and Aramaic (Συριαστὶ). This

passage demonstrates that Jewish Greek writers distinguished between the Hebrew and Aramaic languages before the Christian era.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, this distinction in Greek contradicts Fitzmyer's surmise that Greek writers in the first century lacked a good word for Aramaic. There is no attestation of *aramaisti* anywhere in Greek because Συριστί already existed.

Wherever it is discernible in the LXX, Ἑβραΐς never describes Aramaic, only Hebrew. *Fourth Maccabees* relates the stories of the martyrdoms of Eleazar, as well as the seven brothers and their mother (presumably drawn from 2 Macc 7), at the hands of Antiochus IV. Chapter 12 records the martyrdom of the seventh and youngest brother. After Antiochus tries to persuade the youngest son to renounce his Judaism and thus to spare his life, 4 Macc 12:7 states that "his mother encouraged him in the Hebrew voice" (τῆς μητρὸς τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ φωνῇ προτροπεψαμένης αὐτόν). Similarly, 4 Macc 16:15 recounts the words spoken by the mother to the seven young men before their deaths: "you were speaking to them in Hebrew" (ἔλεγες τοῖς παισὶν ἐν τῇ Ἑβραϊδὶ φωνῇ).

Although it is possible that Antiochus used a translator, it appears that all of the Jews mentioned in the story understood the common language spoken by the Seleucid king. The specific references that something was said "in Hebrew" suggests that Hebrew was not a language in common between Damascus and Jerusalem that was being used in the main body of discussion. Rather, it indicates that the young men and the mother switched from one language, presumably Aramaic, to Hebrew. While the text itself does not indicate the reason for the change, it is possible that Hebrew was used by the Jews to keep Antiochus and his company from understanding their conversations.<sup>18</sup> The popular language around Damascus was Aramaic and Antiochus' officers can be presumed to be Aramaic speakers, whether or not they were using Aramaic or Greek in the conversation up to this point. Therefore, the switch to Hebrew would have kept the conversation between the mother and her child out of the understanding of the enemy soldiers. The use of Hebrew is also heightened in this context because it is associated with staying true to Jewish laws and customs in the midst of foreign persecution. In this context, Ἑβραΐς fits a Hebrew

17 The parallel accounts in the LXX of 2 Chr 32:18 and Isa 36:11–13 also differentiate between Hebrew (Ιουδαϊστί) and Aramaic (Συριστί). Ιουδαϊστί is also used to describe the Hebrew language in Neh 13:24 (καὶ οἱ υἱοὶ αὐτῶν ἤμισυ λαλοῦντες Ἀζωτιστί καὶ οὐκ εἰσιν ἐπιγινώσκοντες λαλεῖν Ιουδαϊστί). When Josephus discusses these stories he uses the more generic Ἑβραϊστί.

18 Cf. Poirier, "Narrative Role," above. While Poirier's secrecy motif in Acts 22 is unnecessary, his reasoning here is on target.

reference better than Aramaic and, more importantly, this passage cannot be used as support for the assumption that Ἑβραῖς could mean Aramaic.<sup>19</sup>

The synonym Ἑβραῖστί is used one time in the LXX. The Greek prologue to the translation of Ben Sira refers to the original language of the book and indicates that what was once spoken in Hebrew (Ἑβραῖστί) is not as effective when translated into another language (οὐ γὰρ ἰσοδυναμεῖ αὐτὰ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς Ἑβραῖστί λεγόμενα καὶ ὅταν μεταχθῆ εἰς ἑτέραν γλῶσσαν). The Hebrew fragments of Ben Sira, discovered in the Cairo Genizah, Qumran cave 2, and Masada, indicate that in the second century B.C.E., the date ascribed to Ben Sira and its translation, Ἑβραῖστί undeniably designates Hebrew and again there is no support for it to refer to Aramaic.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned examples in which Ἑβραῖς signifies Hebrew, it is also important to note the instances in the LXX in which the Aramaic language is clearly identified. Nowhere in the LXX is Ἑβραῖς used for Aramaic. Ezra 4:7 records a letter that was written to King Artaxerxes in Aramaic (ἔγραψεν ὁ φορολόγος γραφὴν Συριστί καὶ ἡρμηνευμένην). Similarly, Dan 2:4 records the Chaldeans speaking to the king in Aramaic (καὶ ἐλάλησαν οἱ Χαλδαῖοι πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα Συριστί Κύριε βασιλεῦ, τὸν αἰῶνα ζῆθι).<sup>21</sup> In the Old Greek version of Dan 2:26, Aramaic might also be called Χαλδαῖστί (ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς εἶπε τῷ Δανιηλ ἐπικαλουμένῳ δὲ Χαλδαῖστί Βαλτασαρ) but Akkadian (Assyro-Babylonian) would seem more likely as Χαλδαῖστί.<sup>22</sup>

In the colophon to Job in the Greek Bible we have another important reference to Aramaic. Job 42:17b LXX reads: Οὗτος ἐρμηνεύεται ἐκ τῆς Συριακῆς βίβλου (“This is being translated from the Aramaic book”). This is a statement of the translator that he did not rely (solely?) on the Hebrew text of Job, a Hebrew dialect that has long been noted as special.<sup>23</sup> We are fortunate to have two stories

19 *Fourth Maccabees* was probably composed in the first centuries B.C.E. or C.E. For a discussion on the date of *4 Maccabees*, see J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 202–4.

20 For a discussion on the date of Ben Sira, see D. Williams, “The Date of Ecclesiasticus,” *VT* 44, no. 4 (1994): 563–66.

21 Behind the Greek Συριστί at Dan 2:4 we find תַּיִרְמִיָּא. It is irrelevant to our discussion whether or not תַּיִרְמִיָּא was a gloss to the original book. No form of Ἑβραῖς is used for Aramaic in Greek *Daniel*, Συριστί is used.

22 The fact that Συριστί is used at Dan 2:4 for Aramaic suggests that Χαλδαῖστί refers to Akkadian (Babylonian). See also Dan 1:4 in which the Old Greek text uses διάλεκτον Χαλδαϊκὴν and Theodotion records γλῶσσαν Χαλδαίων to refer to what appears to be Assyro-Babylonian.

23 Origen appeared to be troubled by this statement because he thought that it referred to the canonical text (Hebrew) and he knew that Συριστί did not actually mean “Hebrew.”

concerning Gamaliel in the first century and a “translation to Job.” These help to explain this unique Greek Bible translation process. Two Aramaic copies of Job have also been found at Qumran (4Q146 ar Job, 11Q ar Job). It appears that there was an Aramaic translation of the book of Job that was in fairly wide circulation in the late Second Temple times.<sup>24</sup> The only thing that concerns us here is the name of the language. The Greek version of Job called it “Aramaic” (Συριακή).

Thus, consistently throughout, the LXX clearly distinguishes between Hebrew and Aramaic, and there is no evidence to cause us to consider Ἑβραϊς as anything other than “Hebrew.”

The transliteration of Hebrew words and names is one more phenomenon in the Old Greek Bible that needs discussion before moving on to other texts and authors. There are transliterated words in the Greek Bible that end in [-α], an ending that resembles the common Aramaic suffix [-א], “the.” There are six different ways that a Greek citation form could have a final *alpha*, and the first five of these may refer to a Hebrew source text: (1) euphony; (2) assimilation to a commonly known Aramaic form; (3) a loanword in Hebrew with an Aramaic etymology; (4) a borrowed name that carried an *alpha*; (5) a “Hebrew” name that carries an *alpha*; (6) Aramaic as the original source, with *alpha*.

(1) For euphony. Names may have -a in the LXX even though they are without an Aramaic precedent. Μαθουσαλάל מתושאל, Σιδωνά צידן (Syr. ܡܬܘܫܐܠܐ, Γεραρα (הגרה, “to Gerar,” גרר), Οδορρά הדורם (dropping “m” ), Θαρά τρη (the first “a” preserves

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The Targums were a relatively new feature in Origen’s day and he may have been unaware that a pre-Christian Aramaic targum to Job existed or that it would be used by translators. Accordingly, he tried to explain why a Hebrew text might be called “Aramaic” (which is the opposite of the phenomenon alleged by modern scholars for Ἑβραϊστῖ). Origen, *Homiliae in Job*, states: Συριακήν νῦν τὴν Ἑβραίων διάλεκτον καλεῖ, ἐπειδὴ καὶ Συρίαν τὴν Ἰουδαίαν, καὶ Σύρους οἱ πολλοὶ τοὺς Παλαιστινοὺς ὀνομάζουσιν (“He now calls the language of the Hebrews ‘Syrian,’ since even Judea is called Syria, and many call the Palestinians ‘Syrians’”). We wish to thank Ken Penner for calling our attention to this reference. By means of a *qal va-Homer* argument, it also reinforces the fact that Συριαστῖ would certainly be appropriate for Aramaic.

24 The origin of the pre-Christian Job targum was probably in the East. See also Takamitsu Muraoka, “The Aramaic of the Old Targum of *Job* from Qumran Cave XI,” *JJS* 25 (1974): 425–43. See also Eibert Tigchelaar, “Aramaic Texts from Qumran and the Authoritativeness of Hebrew Scriptures: Preliminary Observations,” in *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism* (ed. Mladen Popović; JSJSup 141; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 155–71 (160): “linguistic analysis suggests that the Targum of Job (4Q157; 11Q10) originated in the East.” Tigchelaar adds a footnote “T. Muraoka, . . . (1974): 425–43; a position which is still held by Muraoka today.”

a different dialect of Hebrew), Σοδομα . . . Ζογορα סדם . . . צער, Αμορραιων האמרי (note the gentilic Greek -αι- vowel), Σαχαωθα סכתה (directional [-α] preserved in a Greek name), Σαβαθα שבטן (-n deleted), Χεναρα כנרת (-t deleted), and Οζα ען (-n deleted).<sup>25</sup> Greek words, other than proper names, prefer to end in the final consonants ν, ρ, σ. The Greeks apparently did not like the sound of words ending in other consonants.<sup>26</sup> Often, either the final consonant would drop off, or the vowel “α” would be added to ease pronunciation.<sup>27</sup>

(2) Assimilation to a commonly known Aramaic form. Hebrew words like בֵּיִר (“beer”) and פֶּסַח (“passover”) have forms like σιαερα and πασχα in the LXX translation. Euphony might seem applicable to explain the [-α], but it is an insufficient explanation. The shape of the word πασχα with CVCCV (C = consonant, V = vowel) fits Aramaic over Hebrew, and the vowel of “e” in σιαερα does not fit Hebrew as closely as Aramaic. These and other Semitic forms look like the LXX translators chose a form that was also circulating in a bilingual Aramaic–Greek environment in Alexandria.<sup>28</sup> This is not surprising since Greek and Aramaic interfaced all over the Middle East from the Indus Valley to the Nile and especially within Jewish communities where Jewish religious terms would be needed in Greek. In the case of the LXX it is important to remember that they chose these citation forms in their translation while working from the Hebrew text.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the shape of a citation form does not determine the ultimate source language, nor the language that an author

25 See Guido Baltes’ contribution to the present volume, “The Origins of the ‘Exclusive Aramaic Model’ in the Nineteenth Century,” n. 25 : “the frequent use of the final -a in Greek transliterations as evidence for an Aramaic *status emphaticus* is a non sequitur: it is obvious from the practice of transliteration in the LXX that the final -a is a common Grecism rather than a unique Aramaism, cf. Gen 4:18; 10:15, 19, 27; 11:25; 13:10; 48:22; Exod 12:37; Num 34:24.11.26 et al.”

26 Such a tendency was not absolute. For a counter-example, the Greek transliteration εφουδ comes from the Hebrew אפוד in Judg 8:27; 17:5; 18:14, 17, 18, 20; 1 Sam 2:18, 28; 14:3, 18; 22:18; 23:6.

27 H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (rev. ed; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), §133, 33; and R. Funk, *Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (rev. ed; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), §141 (3), 78: “Σάββατα = תַּבְּשָׁתַי + α to make it pronounceable in Greek; accordingly first σάββατα in the Hexateuch, thereafter also σάββατον.”

28 The word σάββατα is already found in a papyrus from the mid-third century B.C.E., P.Cair. Zenon 4 59762. For an image: <http://ipap.csad.ox.ac.uk/PCZ-colour/300dpi/P.Cair.Zen.IV.59762.jpg>.

29 While the Exodus translators chose πασχα, the translators of Chronicles chose φασεχ (2 Chr 30:1, 2, 5, 15, 17, 18), and φασεχ (2 Chr 35:1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 16, 17, 18), and Jer 38:8 has φασεχ.

may be referring to. An Aramaic-friendly citation form in Greek does not make a word Aramaic. See below for examples of this principle with Babel, Persian, and even with Jesus in Aramaic and English.

(3) Loanwords. A word whose etymology may trace back to Aramaic but that has become a part of the Hebrew language may also produce an [-α] ending in a transliteration: Αββα (אבא “father,” a word that entered Hebrew during the Second Temple period, though it was also used as a name already in the Old Greek of the Hebrew Bible (Αββα θυγάτηρ Ζαχαρία, 2 Chr 29:1).<sup>30</sup>

(4) Names and place-names, a borrowed name that carried an *alpha*. Proper names are a special kind of loanword. Names may come from any language, including Aramaic, and be assimilated into Hebrew. Names cross source language boundaries with unpredictable amounts of assimilation or preferred shapes. For example, in the Hebrew Bible we have a name בָּבֶל, *Babel*, regularly transcribed as Βαβυλών in Greek.<sup>31</sup> Babel בבל is treated like a Hebrew name in the Bible, so much so, in fact, that its meaning is interpreted according to Hebrew vocabulary, where the verb בָּלַל/יָבַל, “to mix with a liquid; confuse,” is used to explain the meaning of the name. In this case we can truly call the name *Babel* “Hebrew.” However, after the discovery of Akkadian texts we can now confidently say that the name was originally Akkadian *bab-ilu* and meant “gateway of God.” If someone explains the name Babel/Babylon as “gateway of God,” then they are treating the name as Akkadian *bab-ilu*, not Hebrew or Greek, regardless of the citation form or intervening history of transliteration. If someone explains the name as “confusion,” then they are probably treating the name as Hebrew and following Gen 11 and/or later Hebrew and Aramaic בלבל (“to confuse”).

This process of crossing language boundaries can work in many directions. For example, the Chronicler, though writing Hebrew, uses an Aramaic form of the name “Damascus” in Hebrew, דרמשק. However, the Greek translator continued to use the Greek form Δαμασκός, closer to the older “Hebrew” form of

30 A couple of Mishnaic Hebrew examples will suffice: אבא גדול מאבך (“[my] father is bigger than your father!,” *m. Sanh.* 4:5); וזהגין היו בית אבא שהיו: נוחגין בני גמליאל: (“Rabban Shim’on b. Gamliel said, ‘[my] father’s house had a practice that they used to give white clothes to a gentile laundryman three days before Shabbat,’” *m. Shab.* 1:9).

31 The LXX uses Βαβυλών [< Akkadian/Neo-Babylonian *bab-ilani* “gate of the gods”] at Gen 10:10 and frequently in the Hebrew Bible, but at Gen 11:9 the LXX translates the name in order to bring out the popular Hebrew etymology: Σύγχυσις, ὅτι ἐκεῖ συνέχευεν κύριος τὰ χεῖλη (“*Synxysis* [Confusion], because there the Lord confused the languages...”). One can truly say that the LXX is based on Hebrew at Gen 11:9, rather than Akkadian. However, Βαβυλών is a Greek adaptation that is based on Akkadian, not Hebrew.



σαβαχθανι); Acts 1:19 (ακελδαμαχ חקל-דמא, “field of blood”); and 9:36, 40 (ταβιθα טביתה, “gazelle”). Incidentally, none of these were called “Hebrew” by a New Testament author.

There is also newer, more local evidence than the LXX on the use of names. The *Bar-Kokhba* letters, which date to the early second century C.E. contain works composed in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The Hebrew letter, Naḥal Hever 49, contains two “Aramaic names,” בר כוסבא שמעון and מסבלא.<sup>37</sup> In Naḥal Hever 54 we have the opposite phenomenon, a “Hebrew title” in an Aramaic letter ישראל על הנסי בר כוסבא הנסי על ישראל (“Shimon bar Koseba the leader of Israel”).<sup>38</sup> In Muraba‘at 30 we have Aramaic names in a Hebrew letter: חותמים . . . יהונתן בר יהוסף שמעון בר סימי . . . (“signatures: Yonatan fils de Yoseph, Sim‘on fils de Simai . . .”).<sup>39</sup> The list of false prophets in 4Q339 composed in Aramaic uses the Hebrew בן for “son” rather than the more expected בר.<sup>40</sup> The names cross language boundaries. Before proper names can be relied on as evidence that Ἐβραϊστί can mean “Aramaic,” we need to find examples of the unquestioned use of Ἐβραϊστί for common words in early Jewish or Christian literature.

37 E. Y. Kutscher, “The Language of the Hebrew and Aramaic Letters of Bar Koseba and His Contemporaries, first article: the Aramaic Letters, second article: the Hebrew Letters” (Hebrew), in *Hebrew and Aramaic Studies* (ed. Z. Ben-Hayyim, A. Dotan, and G. Sarfatti; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), 36–70 (55).

38 Ibid., 38. More recently an Aramaic document has been published that incidentally keeps a Hebrew name. Esther Eshel, Hanan Eshel, and Ada Yardeni, “A Document from ‘Year Four of the Destruction of the House of Israel’: A Rare Testimony of Religious Decisions After the Bar Kochba Rebellion?” (Hebrew) *Cathedra* 132 (2009): 5–24; Moshe Bar Asher, “Concerning the Language in the Document from Bet ‘omer” (Hebrew), *Cathedra* 132 (2009): 25–32. Lines 1–3 of the text have a Hebrew name ענב העלינה in an Aramaic sentence that reads:

בתרי <ן> עשר לכסילו שנת ארבע לחרבן בית ישראל  
בית עמר מרים ברת יעקוב מסעלב ארמלת  
שאוּל בר שמעון שועל מענב העלינה אמרת

“In the twelfth of Kislev, year four of the destruction of the house of Israel at Bet ‘omer, Miryam daughter of Ya‘aqov from Sha‘alav, the widow of Shaul son of Shim‘on [of the house of] Shu‘al from ‘Enav the Upper, said . . .”

Somewhat unexpectedly, the content of the declaration, lines 4–10, is in Hebrew, although with two apparently legal loanwords from Aramaic (התקבלת, “I have received,” שאיזהב, “who gives”).

39 J. T. Milik, “Textus hébreu et araméens,” in P. Benoit et al., eds., *Les grottes de Murabba‘at* (DJD 2; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 145–46.

40 M. Broshi and A. Yardeni, “4Q339: List of False Prophets,” in *Qumran Cave 4 XIV Parabiblical Texts Part 2* (ed. M. Broshi et al.; DJD 19; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 77–79.

The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible is an important witness for transliterations and citations from a Hebrew text. The options and patterns are more varied than often assumed and need treatment beyond the superficial assumptions frequently seen in New Testament studies. In particular, points 2 through 4 above are situations where the shape of the Greek may show some contact with Aramaic in a multilingual environment, even though a translator is working from Hebrew or discussing a Hebrew text. Proper names are especially problematic for New Testament studies because they pass over language boundaries and their etymological shape cannot be used conclusively for identifying a language being discussed.

Finally, imagine a situation where an ancient Greek wrote that “the king’s name was Ἀρθασασθα, which means ἐν τῇ Περσικῇ ‘whose reign is through truth.’”<sup>41</sup> Then, suppose that a modern scholar comes along and says that the Greek transcription is actually taken from the LXX of Ezra 4:7 (Hebrew) and 4:8 (Aramaic) rather than common Greek Ἀρταξέρξης (Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.1.1 Ἀρταξέρξης) or from the Persian itself. Therefore ἐν τῇ Περσικῇ/Περσιστί means “Hebrew or Aramaic” rather than Persian. Scholars would quickly point out the fallacious conclusions. Again, what should one say, if an ancient Greek historian said that Ἀσσηρος is Persian (Περσιστί) for “ruling over heros,”<sup>42</sup> and then a later scholar says that that shows that Περσιστί really means “Hebrew” because Ἀσσηρος is from a Hebraized form of the name (Ezra 4:6) rather than common Greek Ἐξέρξης or Persian *Xšayaršā* (approximately *Χισαίρασα*). Translators already did something similar in Aramaic. Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA, late first millennium C.E.) uses יסוס for Hebrew/Syriac ישוע. The name יסוס is obviously based on an intervening Greek form Ἰησους, which further hides the “salvation-ישוע” wordplay underlying Matt 1:21, *יחא קהלה, גר יסוס הו גר יחא קהלה, בון סיכלתהון*, “you shall call his name *Yesous* for he will give his assembly life from their sins/follies.” But this does not change the fact that the name יסוס is Hebrew, and now in CPA it is also Aramaic. Preachers do something similar today and may say that “Jesus” means “salvation” in Hebrew.<sup>43</sup> But no one says that “in Hebrew” means English just because the preacher used a citation form

41 According to *Encyclopedia Iranica*, “whose reign is through truth” (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/artaxerxes-throne-name-of-several-persian-kings-of-the-achaemenid-dynasty> [retrieved 12 February 2012]).

42 *Encyclopedia Iranica*, “with the primary meaning ‘ruling over heroes’” (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/xerxes-1-name> [retrieved 12 February 2012]).

43 The names ישוע and יהושע actually come from a root י.ש.ו, not י.ש.י. “salvation.” Matthew 1.21 reads: “he shall save his people from their sins,” is a popular etymology based on the similar sounding word ישועה.

of the name in English “Jesus.” That is the kind of misreading that is frequently applied to Greek transliterations of names and words in the LXX, Josephus, Jewish literature, and the New Testament. Scholars seem to miss the full logic of a speaker because Hebrew and Aramaic are so close that the meanings of their names and words are often transparent in both languages (like *golgolet*, “skull,” to be discussed below). But sometimes the illogical claim of the scholarly hypercritical “rereading” becomes visible and can be exposed, exactly as will be discussed below with Josephus on “*shabbat*,” where Aramaic does not provide the correct etymological meaning. The meaning of the ancient author must be carefully ascertained in context, and it may be different from the history of a word’s shape or its citation form.

An example of the above misapplication of logic occurs in the otherwise useful article by André Pelletier.<sup>44</sup> He correctly shows that the LXX Greek transliterations are primarily based on Aramaic forms that were common in a Greek-Aramaic community in Egypt. However, he incorrectly uses that observation for dismissing the claims of Jehoshua Grintz:

A lui seul, ce texte de Josèphe (*AJ* III 252) dément formellement la théorie de J. M. Grintz, selon qui, là où nos textes disent “en hébreu, en langue hébraïque, en langue des Hébreux,” il s’agirait toujours bel et bien de l’hébreu biblique, à l’exclusion de toute autre langue et spécialement de l’araméen.<sup>45</sup>

By itself, this text of Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.252 [Pentecost, which the Hebrews call ἄσραρθα—RB/CP]) formally refutes the theory of J. M. Grintz, according to whom, wherever our texts say “in Hebrew, in the Hebrew language, in the language of the Hebrews,” it always, well and truly, deals with Biblical Hebrew, to the exclusion of any other language and especially Aramaic.

Those are strong words by Pelletier, but are they appropriate? We may ask: Who is right, Pelletier or Grintz? Several points are telling. First, Grintz included both Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew together when he talked about Hebrew, not just Pelletier’s “Biblical Hebrew.” Grintz was aware of subtleties of a multilingual situation that seem to have escaped Pelletier. Second, the pure Hebrew forms cited by Pelletier (μεχωνωθ [“bases,” *Ant.* 8.85], Αναθωθ [place name], p. 437) as proof that Josephus could not have referred to Hebrew when

44 André Pelletier, “Σαββατα: Transcription grecque de l’Araméen,” *VT* 22 (1972): 436–47.

45 *Ibid.*, 437.

citing  $\sigma\alpha\beta\beta\alpha\tau\alpha$  or  $\alpha\sigma\rho\theta\alpha$ , appear to reflect words for which no Aramaicized citation forms were available. Third, Grintz never denied that some of the forms that Josephus cited are Aramaic by form:

It is true that Josephus sometimes cites words and names in their Aramaic form, . . . Asartha (III.10.6 §252) for Pentecost . . . [this is—RB/CP] a natural inclination on the part of Josephus to use the Aramaic forms as being more adaptable to the special transliteration he chose for his Greek readers (both languages making use of vowel-endings).<sup>46</sup>

Fourth, specifically on *shabbat* Grintz quoted Josephus and pointed out the obvious:

*Ant[iquities]* 1.1 §33: “. . .  $\sigma\alpha\beta\beta\alpha\tau\alpha$  . . . For which reason we also pass this day in repose from toil and call it the sabbath, a word which in the Hebrew language means ‘rest.’” Josephus derives, as had the Bible, the word sabbath from the Hebrew שבת. In Aramaic the verb שבת does not exist. Aramaic translators use instead: נח.

Grintz is entirely correct on *Sabbath*. Josephus was referring to the Hebrew language when he gave the meaning of “Shabbat” as “rest,” even though he used a citation form from Aramaic that was more amenable to Greek and that was already in widespread use in Greek.<sup>47</sup> This undermines Peletier and directly supports Grintz because the actual word שבת<sup>48</sup> did not mean “rest,

46 Grintz, “Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language,” 44.

47 As for  $\alpha\sigma\rho\theta\alpha$ , the word עֲצֻרָה, “assembly,” was a Hebrew word that had been borrowed in Aramaic and was used by Jews for major feasts. Payne Smith (J. Payne Smith [Mrs. Margoliouth], *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, founded upon the *Thesaurus Syriacus* of R. Payne Smith, D.D., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903) recognizes the loan status: “ܥܘܘܪܗܐ f. Heb. a religious assembly.” The Hebrew verb means to “restrain, stop walking, stop movement” and fits the religious nature of a Jewish holiday. The Aramaic verb referred to “crushing, squeezing.”

48 In Aramaic the word was שבתה, already in the Persian period. The Aramaic form שבתה only comes from adding an article, “the Shabbat.” שבתא was not the most neutral, basic form at that time. We have five fifth-century B.C.E. papyri with the form שבה, “Shabba.” יום שבה, “the day Shabba” (TAD D7.10, line 5), שבה (TAD D7.12 line 9), מחר בשבה, “tomorrow on Shabba” (TAD D7.16, line 2), בשבה, “on Shabba” (TAD D7.28, line 4), עד יום שבה, “until the day of Shabba” (TAD D7.35, line 7). There are two with [ . . . א] שבת “the [first, second . . .] Shabbat of the month Pauni” (North Saqqara 72, twice). This also contradicts the statement of Dupont-Sommer quoted by Pelletier: “sans doute plus fréquent

cessation” in Aramaic. *Shabba* was only a borrowed name in Aramaic. A better perspective is reached when we view the options that were available for Jews in Alexandria when making their choices. Greek *Shabbat* from Hebrew and Aramaic could have been σαββαθ (σαββατ) שבש, ασαββαθ (ασαββατ) תשבש, σαββα שבש, or σαββαθα (σαββατα) שבתא. The Jews in Egypt did not chose the simple Aramaic form without an article, σαββα, for Greek. They chose a form that was adapted for a Greek neuter plural ending (τὰ) σαββατα and that also reflected the Hebrew word. Undoubtedly, Σαββατα was chosen in Greek over Aramaic Σαββα because of being able to reflect the Hebrew shape better. The problem with Pelletier’s analysis is that he leaves no room for an author to use a citation form that may have been different from the original etymological shapes of the word. Pelletier did not seem to make allowance for a tri-lingual environment. From this discussion we may conclude that Grintz was correct, and that Josephus was referring to Hebrew in these cases, even though he was using popular Greek citation forms that go back to Aramaic in Alexandria. The conclusion becomes stronger after investigating Josephus more completely, below.

## b *Jewish Pseudepigrapha*

References to Aramaic or Hebrew are relatively sparse in the Pseudepigrapha. However, those that exist remain consistent with the above discussion concerning the LXX. The Greek fragment of *Jub.* 12:26 reads: ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ λαλῶν τῷ Μωϋσῆ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, ὅτι τὸν Ἀβραάμ ἐγὼ ἐδίδαξα τὴν Ἑβραϊδα γλῶσσαν κατὰ τὴν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς κτίσεως λαλεῖν τὰ πάτρια πάντα (“The angel speaking to Moses said to him ‘I taught Abraham the Hebrew tongue according to what was from the beginning of creation to speak all the ancestral things’”). Here a form of Ἑβραῖς is used to describe the “Hebrew” that was taught to Abraham and spoken at the creation of the world.<sup>49</sup> It is generally accepted that the book of *Jubilees* was originally composed in Hebrew.<sup>50</sup> Since the book of Genesis was part of

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à l’époque où le mot passa en grec” (“without a doubt more frequent in the time period that the word passed into Greek”) (“Σαββατα,” 441). The form שבש appears to us to have been the more frequent and more basic in the centuries leading up to the LXX, though the evidence is only suggestive, it being too sparse to be definitive. The increased use of the Aramaic article is primarily a feature of later Aramaic dialects and characteristic in the East.

49 William Dindorf, *Georgius Syncellus et Nicephorus ex recensione Guilielmi Dindorffi* (Corpus Scriptorum historiae Byzantinae 1; Bonnae: Impensis Ed. Weberi, 1829), 185.

50 For a discussion of the original language of *Jubilees*, see James C. VanderKam, “The Manuscript Tradition of *Jubilees*,” in *Enoch and the Mosaic Torah: The Evidence of Jubilees* (ed. G. Boccaccinni and G. Ibbas; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 12–17.

the Torah and was written in Hebrew, there is no reason to assume that in the Greek translation of *Jubilees* τὴν Ἑβραϊδα means anything other than Hebrew.

The *Testament of Solomon* MS A 14:7 uses Ἑβραϊστί to denote the language of the angel Bazazath: Τῷ μεγάλῳ ἀγγέλῳ τῷ ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ οὐρανῷ καθεζομένῳ τῷ καλουμένῳ Ἑβραϊστί Βαζαζάθ (“By the great angel who is seated in the second heaven, who is called in Hebrew, Bazazath”). The name Bazazath does not give any indication that Ἑβραϊστί here would mean Aramaic rather than Hebrew.

The *Letter of Aristeas* further supports both a distinction between Aramaic and Hebrew and also refers to the continued use of Hebrew among some Jews. It is important to pay attention to the context rather than some widely quoted interpretations of this text. First, line 3 points out that the Jewish laws were written in Hebrew (διὰ τὸ γεγράφθαι παρ’ αὐτοῖς ἐν διφθέραις Ἑβραϊκοῖς γράμμασιν). This is unremarkable and certainly refers to Hebrew. Lines 9–11 describe the king’s questioning of Demetrius concerning the size of the royal library. Demetrius informs the king that he intends to increase the number of volumes from 200,000 to 500,000. He mentions that the laws of the Jews are worthy of translation and of inclusion in the library (προσήγγελται δέ μοι καὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων νόμιμα μεταγραφῆς ἄξια καὶ τῆς παρὰ σοὶ βιβλιοθήκης εἶναι). When the king questions Demetrius as to why this has not yet been done, Demetrius responds that translation is needed because the law uses letters (writing) characteristic of the language of the Jews:

Τί τὸ κωλύον οὖν, εἶπεν, ἐστί σε τοῦτο ποιῆσαι; πάντα γὰρ ὑποτέτακται σοὶ τὰ πρὸς τὴν χρείαν. ὁ δὲ Δημήτριος εἶπεν Ἑρμηνείας προσδεῖται· χαρακτηρήσει γὰρ ἰδιοῖς κατὰ Ἰουδαίων χράνται, καθάπερ Αἰγύπτιοι τῇ τῶν γραμμάτων θέσει, καθὸ καὶ φωνὴν ἰδίαν ἔχουσιν. ὑπολαμβάνονται Συριακῇ χρῆσθαι· τὸ δ’ οὐκ ἔστιν, ἀλλ’ ἕτερος τρόπος. Μεταλαβῶν δὲ ἕκαστα ὁ βασιλεὺς εἶπε γραφήναι πρὸς τὸν ἀρχιερέα τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ὅπως τὰ προειρημένα τελείωσιν λάβη.

“What is there to prevent you from doing this?” he said. “Everything for your needs has been put at your disposal.” Demetrius replied, “Translation is needed. They use letters characteristic of the language of the Jews, just as Egyptians use the formation of their letters in accordance with their own language. The Jews are supposed to use Syrian language, but this is not so, for it is another form of language.” The king, in answer to each point, gave orders that a letter be written to the high priest of the Jews that the aforementioned project might be carried out.<sup>51</sup>

51 Translation by R. J. H. Shutt, “Letter of Aristeas,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 [ed. James H. Charlesworth; ABRL; Garden City: Doubleday, 1985], 12.

The *Letter of Aristeas* claims that the Jews in Jerusalem were speaking a language different than Aramaic (Συριακή). At the beginning of the twentieth century, Billerbeck contended that the peculiar alphabet and dialect of the Jews mentioned in line 11 refers to a distinct form of Aramaic spoken by the Jewish people. Regarding the language of the Jews in line 11, Billerbeck suggests:

Diese Gleichsetzung konnte übrigens um so leichter erfolgen, als man, wie der Aristeasbrief §11 zeigt, geneigt war, das von den Juden gesprochene Aramäisch als eine besondere Sprache neben der aramäischen Weltsprache anzusehen. Wenn die „Hebräer“ ihr besonderes Aramäisch sprachen, warum hätte man diese ihre Sprache nicht auch die „hebräische“ nennen sollen, obgleich sie in Wirklichkeit die aramäische war?<sup>52</sup>

This equation was able to result all the easier when someone was inclined, as the Aristeas letter shows, to view the Aramaic spoken by the Jews as a special dialect of the Aramaic international language. Whenever the “Hebrews” spoke their own Aramaic, why wouldn’t someone name this “Hebrew,” even though in reality it was Aramaic?

The error in Billerbeck’s rhetorical question is that *Aristeas* is not referring to Aramaic, but to Hebrew, the language of the Torah. The difficulty in the translation of the Jewish laws is that they are composed in Hebrew rather than Aramaic. Demetrius reports that the Jews speak this language rather than the more common Aramaic. Billerbeck’s comments are a complete misreading of *Aristeas*.

Matthew Black also argued that the peculiar alphabet and dialect of the Jews represents a distinct form of Aramaic that had grown up in Palestine rather than a description of two different languages, Aramaic and Hebrew.<sup>53</sup> Black has apparently based his reading upon his presumptions that at that time Jews only used Aramaic and not Hebrew. He did not consider the context of the work sufficiently. The text itself gives no indication that a peculiar form of Aramaic is intended. Rather, the text claims that the Jews were speaking a distinct language that corresponds to the language of the Torah. The language of the Torah can only be Hebrew. So, paragraph 11 does not suggest a different dialect of Aramaic. It appears that the *Letter of Aristeas* purposefully empha-

52 (H. Strack)-Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, II (Munich: C.H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1924), 444.

53 Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (3rd ed; Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1967), 48.



end of the discussion. Unfortunately, many have overlooked this basic context and have been misled by focusing only on the form, which is close to an Aramaic form שבתא/שבתה.<sup>57</sup> As mentioned in the discussion under the LXX, this form may simply reflect euphony in Greek, or more probably, may reflect the common choice in Greek for a word that was used over a wide area of Greek and Aramaic interface, in Egypt and throughout the Levant. The LXX had already made that choice and both *σάββατα* and *ἀνάπαυσις* occur in Exod 16.33 LXX. Josephus is thus using the common LXX Greek citation form when he is discussing the Hebrew word. And, just like *Ἀσουηρος* and *Ἐέρξης* remain a Persian word in their meaning regardless of the form of transliteration that an author uses, so does *σάββατα* remain uniquely a Hebrew word when discussing its etymological meaning, “cessation, rest.” Look at the question from Josephus’ perspective. What did he mean? How do we exegete him? He did not refer to the Aramaic “meaning” of the word, where it was only a borrowed Hebrew name, but to the Hebrew meaning. As to the form, he took the common available form in Greek. Did Josephus care about whether or not there had been Aramaic influence on the Greek transliteration? Obviously not. But can lexicographers come along and say that here Josephus meant Aramaic when he said “language of the Hebrews”? No. That would misrepresent Josephus, no matter how many times an Aramaic interpretation of the “language of the Hebrews” is repeated in scholarly writings. This is an example where Josephus clearly refers to the Hebrew language for his choice of the phrase “dialect of the Hebrews,” even though he has been widely misquoted as if he had intended

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formed out of the noun as a technical term meaning “to observe the Shabbat,” not as a general word for “stopping, resting.” Rajak, in *Josephus*, 231, is ambiguous in her description of Josephus’ Hebrew words: “Mostly it is, of course, the Hebrew word that is in question in the etymology, though in the case of the word Shabbath (1.34 [*sic*—RB/CP:1.33]) it is the form with the Aramaic termination, ‘*Sabbata*,’ which Josephus’ gives.” Since she was discussing the problem of language names, for a more representative picture she should have added that *Sabbata* is also the Greek form in use in the LXX. It is not likely that Josephus personally reinvented a transliteration that was already established for Greek by the LXX, so that *sabbata* is the clearest, most natural way for Josephus to refer to Hebrew תּשַׁבַּת in Greek.

57 The base form of the loanword in Aramaic was *shabba* שַׁבָּה, already attested several times in Official Aramaic in Egypt (בשבה, ביום שבה) as well as more locally in Qumran, Nahal Ḥever 50:5–6: קדם שבה, “before *Shabba*.” Thus, had the LXX and Josephus only been thinking about the Aramaic word as their base they would have developed the form *σαββα*. The form *σάββατα* was apparently chosen over *σαββα* out of deference to the Hebrew, contra Pelletier, “*Σάββατα*,” as pointed out in the discussion on the LXX.

Aramaic. The reference to Hebrew in this passage also fits harmoniously with the rest of Josephus.

In *Ant.* 1.34 Josephus states that the name Adam signifies “red” in the Hebrew language (ὁ δ’ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος Ἰαδαμος ἐκλήθη. σημαίνει δε τοῦτο κατὰ γλώτταν τὴν Ἑβραίων πυρρόν). In Aramaic “red” would be ܐܪܡܝܬܐ. So again, Josephus means uniquely “Hebrew.” In 1.36 Josephus also claims that “in the Hebrew tongue a woman is called *essa*” (ἔσσα δὲ καθ’ Ἑβραίων διάλεκτον καλεῖται γυνή). This comes from the Hebrew word for woman (השׂא) rather than the Aramaic (ܐܫܬܐ) and in this case Josephus may be providing his own transliteration. There was no Septuagintal precedent and apparently no loan word or citation form available in a Jewish Greek.<sup>58</sup>

Transliterations can have a complex history. In *Ant.* 3.252, Josephus describes Pentecost, “which the Hebrews call Asartha” (Ἑβραῖοι ἄσαρθά καλοῦσι). It is probable that ἄσαρθά stems from an intermediate Aramaic form ܐܫܪܬܐ. The word ܐܫܪܬܐ occurs in both Hebrew and Aramaic, though in Aramaic it appears to be a loan word from Hebrew.<sup>59</sup> The Aramaic form has been chosen in Greek. Yet difficulties with the etymology remain, because Josephus (*Ant.* 3.252) states “Ἀσαρθά denotes fiftieth.” Superficially, that is not true, the word in both its Hebrew and Aramaic forms refers to an “assembly.” In neither Aramaic nor Hebrew does ἄσαρθά literally mean “fifty.” Louis Feldman contends that Josephus’ use of σημαίνει for “denotes” here does not indicate that Ἀσαρθά means fiftieth, but rather that it is associated with the fiftieth day.<sup>60</sup> His explanation is acceptable but not dependent on σημαίνει. Furthermore, ܐܫܪܬܐ was also used for the end of Passover and the end of Sukkot, it was not limited to Shavuot.

Something similar happens in Josephus’ use of πάσχα.<sup>61</sup> The Greek comes from the LXX. It is probable that this is a technical Greek transliteration of a hypothesized Aramaic form ܫܫܬܐ\* in Alexandria. It was apparently introduced into Alexandrian Greek in an environment where Aramaic word shapes were also widely known. The syllable pattern of the Greek correspond better to Aramaic than to Hebrew ܫܫܬܐ. The Hebrew word was ܫܫܬܐ with an “e” in the first syllable and a vowel between “σ” and “χ.” Aramaic, on the other hand, is attested as ܫܫܬܐ ܫܫܬܐ (ܫܫܬܐ\*), with no vowel under the “s.” So, the Greek form πάσχα appears to be following an Aramaic syllable structure, not the Hebrew form of

58 For other examples of Josephus describing Hebrew words as written in the γλώττα Ἑβραίων or Ἑβραίων διάλεκτον, see *Ant.* 1.333; 5.121.

59 See n. 47, above.

60 Flavius Josephus, *Judean Antiquities: Books 1–4* (trans. L. Feldman; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 305 n. 735.

61 E.g. *War* 2.10; 6.243; *Ant.* 2.313.

the name. These observations, however, are put in context and clarified by the fact that the LXX often uses τὸ πάσχα when transliterating the Hebrew פֶּסַח.<sup>62</sup> The “Aramaic” form shows up in Greek even when the translator is known to be working from Hebrew. Thus, the scholarly “correction” that Josephus is really referring to Aramaic is a mistake. Πάσχα, אַהַפֶּסַח, is not a natural Aramaic word, it appears to be a transliterated loanword from Hebrew. The verb פֶּסַח does not occur in Syriac and only occurs in Jewish Aramaic in the targums to Exodus. Likewise, in Syriac the name of the feast even changes into אַפְסַח (related to a root “cheerfulness,” “shine forth”). Josephus, writing two to three centuries after the LXX, explained the meaning of the feast name according to the Hebrew (*Ant.* 2.313), and naturally chose the already accepted Greek form of the Hebrew word when he took up pen and ink. So, the word in the LXX and Josephus is a loanword from Hebrew, but its form has come into Greek through a more euphonic Aramaic intermediate form.

Not all of Josephus’ references to Hebrew words are taken from contexts paralleled in the Hebrew Bible. Describing an attack on the temple in *War* 5.272–74, Josephus reports that Jewish watchmen were stationed at the towers in order to alert the Jews inside of Jerusalem when the Roman army fired one of their massive catapults. Important for this study is the phrase used by the watchmen to warn the population that the projectile was in the air. According to Josephus, the guards shouted ὁ υἱὸς ἔρχεται (“The son is coming”). This phrase is an interesting wordplay on the Hebrew באבן באה. It appears that a shortened form of the Hebrew phrase (-באבן-) was included by the author as local color. The soldiers on guard would have intended to shout “a stone is coming,” though their words would literally sound like “the son is coming” (באבן) when spoken quickly in a clipped manner.

The wordplay between “stone” and “son” is well-known in Hebrew and is even attested in the Gospels.<sup>63</sup> None of the options for stone in Aramaic (בן or

62 The LXX transliterates the Hebrew פֶּסַח with πάσχα on over forty occasions, especially in the Pentateuch (e.g. Exod 12:11, 13, 21, 23, 27, 43, 48; Lev 21:18, Num 9:2, 4, 10, 12).

63 The באבן/בן wordplay is also found in the parable of the tenants in Matt 21:33–46 and parallels, where the synoptic authors record Jesus quoting from Ps 118:22–23 in which the “stone that the builders rejected” is used to explain the murder of the landowner’s son. Both John Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine* (WUNT 195; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), and Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 363, have explicitly rejected this scripture in the parable on the grounds that it is based on a wordplay that is not possible in Aramaic: “The effort of Snodgrass and Lowe to rescue Ps 117 [*sic*—RB/CP] for the original parable by positing a wordplay between *ben* (son) and *stone* (eben) collapses with Hultgren’s observation that this wordplay is impossible

אבן) would be confused with the Aramaic word for “son” (בר). Also, the Aramaic words for “come” (fem.), אָתָה *atá*, and “come” (masc.), אָתָה *até*, have different vowels and would not be as easily confused as in Hebrew where the masculine (*ba*) and feminine (*baa*) use the same vowel. Thus, the report of Josephus provides a compelling example of Hebrew spoken in a non-religious, public context where Josephus refers to Hebrew as “the patriarchal language.” Moreover, this was being spoken in a life and death situation when understanding by the populace of Jerusalem was imperative, suggesting that Hebrew was the language of choice to warn the public in peril.<sup>64</sup> While this Hebrew story does not attest to the word Ἑβραϊστί, it does undermine a recurring presupposition documented above in which scholars assume that only Aramaic was a possible option for Semitisms and popular language use.

Josephus’ mention of the use of Hebrew during battle differs from an encounter in Aramaic among adversaries during the siege of Gamla, east of the

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in Aramaic, presumably Jesus’ language” (Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 236). Kloppenborg and Hultgren illustrate again, like others in Acts 21–22, how a too-restricted view of the language situation can negatively affect interpretation. Neither scholar tried to explain why all attested tannaitic story parables are in Hebrew. See now R. Steven Notley and Ze’ev Safrai, *Parables of the Sages, Jewish Wisdom from Jesus to Rav Ashi* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2011). New Testament scholarship needs to update itself after embracing the advances in Mishnaic Hebrew scholarship over the last century.

Matthew 3:9 and Luke 3:8 records John the Baptist saying, “God is able from these stones (האבנים) to raise up sons (בנים) to Abraham.” The plural of Aramaic בר, “son,” is בנין. While the wordplay in the plural would be possible in Aramaic in a different context, the anarthrous בנים fits better with Hebrew האבנים than Aramaic בנין with אבנייא.

- 64 Dalman, in *Jesus-Jeshua*, 15, claims that Josephus obviously means Aramaic (“the shouts ‘in the language of the fathers’ of the watchmen in the towers of Jerusalem, giving warning of the Romans, were doubtless in Aramaic”), even though such a reading is insupportable. However, if our proposed reading above is correct, it impacts on the references to the “patriarchal language” in other places in Josephus. The “patriarchal language,” like Ἑβραϊστί, appears to be uniquely Hebrew. In *War* 5.361 Josephus was sent to talk with his countrymen and Hebrew would be fitting. The Romans had other officers who could speak Aramaic, though not necessarily Hebrew. Of course, Josephus was a compatriot of the rebels, which could explain the choice. In *War* 1.3–6 Josephus says that he wrote a first edition in the patriarchal language. Since the intended audience were Jews and others all over the Middle East, most assume that such a work was in Aramaic. However, the scope of his audience appears to be an exaggeration. Since he specifically named the language “patriarchal,” it would appear that he more probably wrote something in Hebrew, perhaps as a language choice parallel to the language of 1 Maccabees, and first sent it to Jewish communities in these areas. In any case, the current Greek work does not appear to be a translation, but must be considered a new edition, a complete re-working of the first writing and likely a considerable expansion.

Sea of Galilee. Josephus records (*War* 4.37–38) that in the midst of the Roman assault, a certain Roman centurion named Gallus, along with ten other soldiers infiltrated a home of one of the inhabitants of Gamla. While in hiding, the Roman soldiers, who are described as Syrians, overheard the occupants of the house discussing what they would do to the Romans. In the night, the Roman soldiers killed the house's residents and retreated to their ranks.<sup>65</sup> Worthy of note here is the apparent use of Aramaic at Gamla among its inhabitants and by the Roman soldiers. Josephus assumes that his readers would understand that the language common to the Roman soldiers, who are described as Syrians, and Jewish residents of Gamla would be Συριστί, "Syrian" (i.e. Aramaic). This further supports the hypothesis that when Josephus uses Ἑβραϊστί, he is deliberately referring to the Hebrew language.

Elsewhere it appears that Josephus uses Ἑβραϊστί to designate the Hebrew language. In his account of the discussion between the Assyrian and Judean officials from 2 Kgs 18 and Isa 36 mentioned above, Josephus maintains the distinction between Hebrew and Aramaic. In *Ant.* 10.8, following the LXX version of 2 Kgs 18:26 and/or Isa 36:11, Josephus uses Συριστί to signify the Aramaic language. However, unlike the accounts in the LXX (2 Kgs 18:26, 28 and Isa 36:11, 13) that use Ἰουδαϊστί for Hebrew, Josephus replaces Ἰουδαϊστί with Ἑβραϊστί.<sup>66</sup>

Josephus also uses Ἑβραϊστί for Hebrew in *Ant.* 11.159.<sup>67</sup> In this account Nehemiah comes across two men who are speaking Hebrew to one another (ἐπακούσας Ἑβραϊστί πρὸς ἀλλήλους ὁμιλούντων). Presumably it is because these men are speaking Hebrew, rather than Aramaic, that Nehemiah pauses to question them about Jerusalem. While one might argue this refers to a Palestinian dialect of Aramaic, there is no reason within the text itself to assume that anything other than Hebrew was intended. Speculation about Aramaic runs up against the problem that Josephus never refers to Aramaic unambiguously as Hebrew.

In addition to specific references to words and phrases written in the γλῶττα Ἑβραίων or Ἑβραίων διάλεκτον, Josephus also mentions items composed in

65 It is not clear how ten soldiers could hide in one house, overhear dinner talk, kill the inhabitants, and not be detected. Perhaps Gallus did the listening and later arranged a ten-man ambush.

66 As noted above, Ἑβραϊστί had already been used as the equivalent of Hebrew in the Prologue of Ben Sira. By the time that Josephus wrote, there is no longer a political need to distinguish the southern Judean dialect (Ἰουδαϊστί) of Hebrew from the northern.

67 This appears to be an expansion of Neh 1:1–3. The mention of the men speaking Hebrew is not found in the biblical account. Therefore, it appears that Josephus adds the details that they were speaking in Hebrew as the reason Nehemiah questioned them about Jerusalem.

“the ancestral language” (τῆ πατριῶ γλώσση). In *War* 6.438, Josephus explains that the city of Jerusalem had been founded by a Canaanite chief named the “righteous king” in the ancestral language (ὁ τῆ πατριῶ γλώσση κληθεὶς βασιλεὺς δίκαιος). This is a reference to the Hebrew name Melchizedek (מֶלְכִּיצֶדֶק) found in Gen 14:18.<sup>68</sup>

An interesting anecdote occurs at *Ant.* 18.228. “Now Marsyas, Agrippa’s freedman, as soon as he heard of Tiberius’s death, came running to tell Agrippa the news; and finding him going out to the bath, he gave him a nod, and said, in the language of the Hebrews ‘The lion is dead’ (συννεύσας πρὸς αὐτόν γλώσση τῆ Ἑβραίων τέθνηκεν ὁ λέων φησίν).” Technically, there is no information given here that distinguishes Hebrew from Aramaic. However, there is an implication of privacy and they are in a public area that would include Gentiles. Hebrew, perhaps in a soft voice, would add to the privacy, and appears to be an implication from Josephus’ specifying the language. So Hebrew fits, and without an unambiguous attestation where “Hebrew” refers to Aramaic, any suggestion of Aramaic here would need to be rejected.

In *Ant.* 3.151–78 Josephus describes the priests and temple activities with some forms that are clearly Aramaic (e.g. τῶ ἀρχιερεὶ ὄν ἀραβάχην προσαγορεύουσι where ἀραβάχην is Aramaic אַרְבָּא [כְּהֵנָה]). However, it must be pointed out that Josephus did not call these words “Hebrew” and he specifically distinguished Hebrew from Aramaic where appropriate in the immediate context. In *Ant.* 3.156 (3.7.2.1) we find Μωυσῆς μὲν οὖν ἀβαῖθ αὐτὴν ἐκάλεσεν, ἡμεῖς δὲ παρὰ Βαβυλωνίων μεμαθηκότες ἐμίαν αὐτὴν καλοῦμεν, “Moses calls this belt *Aba-[n]-ith*,<sup>69</sup> but we learned from the Babylonians and we call it *Emia*.” These are words known in Biblical Hebrew, אַבְנֵי, and Mishnaic Hebrew, רִמְה, and Aramaic אַבְנֵי. This passage reinforces our position that Josephus was aware of the distinction in languages.

It seems that in the writings of Josephus, there is no instance in which Ἑβραῖς can be shown to mean Aramaic. Rather, the word group Συριστί/Συριακή/Σύριος is used for the Aramaic language. Additionally, despite casual rebuffs that contain no direct textual refutations of Grintz’s assertions about the Hebrew of Josephus, Grintz’s assertions about Josephus’ Hebrew words remain

68 While Jewish Aramaic had Hebrew loanwords based on Hebrew קֶצֶד, Aramaic did not use these words more widely (they do not appear in Syriac), so Josephus’ presumed reference for the “patriarchal language,” here, too, is most probably Hebrew.

69 Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus, Volume I:A—Δ* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), lists [ἀβαῖθ] and ἀβανήθ.

valid.<sup>70</sup> While there are occasions in which the precise meaning of Ἑβραῖς is indiscernible from the context, in every instance where one is able to distinguish whether it signifies Hebrew or Aramaic, the clear meaning is Hebrew. Thus, the usage in Josephus accords with what we have seen in the LXX and Pseudepigrapha; namely, Ἑβραῖς means “Hebrew.” J. M. Grintz summed this up over fifty years ago:

An investigation into the writings of Josephus demonstrates beyond doubt that whenever Josephus mentions γλώττα Ἑβραίων, Ἑβραίων διάλεκτον, etc., he always means “Hebrew” and no other language.<sup>71</sup>

Since Grintz wrote his article, evidence has grown to support Grintz’s contentions.

#### d *Philo*

While the LXX, the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, and Josephus all appear to differentiate between Hebrew and Aramaic, Philo does not. He routinely claims that the Hebrew Bible was written in the language of the “Chaldeans.” In *Mos.* 2.26 Philo comments that in “ancient times, the laws were written in the Chaldean tongue” (τὸ παλαιὸν ἐγράφησαν οἱ νόμοι γλώσση Χαλδαϊκῆ).<sup>72</sup> Describing the LXX translation he also claims that the translators worked between Chaldean and Greek:

ὅπερ ἐπὶ ταύτης τῆς νομοθεσίας οὐ φασι συμβῆναι, συνεχθηναὶ δ’ εἰς ταῦτόν κύρια κυρίοις ὀνόμασι, τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ τοῖς Χαλδαϊκοῖς

But this, they say, did not happen at all in the case of this translation of the law, but that, in every case, exactly corresponding Greek words were employed to translate literally the appropriate Chaldaic words. (*Mos.* 2.38)

At first glance this appears to confuse Akkadian and Hebrew, or possibly Aramaic and Hebrew. Philo even calls Moses a Chaldean: Μωυσῆς γένος μὲν ἐστὶ Χαλδαῖος (“Moses was a Chaldean by race,” *Mos.* 1.5). However, two points are worthy of note. First, Chaldean (Akkadian, Aramaic, or some language)

70 For example, Joseph Fitzmyer in *Acts of the Apostles* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 701, glosses over Grintz’s claims that Ἑβραῖς means Hebrew as “a highly questionable attempt” without actually refuting any of Grintz’s evidence.

71 Grintz, “Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language,” 42.

72 For similar examples, see *Mos.* 2.31, 40.

is confused with Hebrew, not vice-versa.<sup>73</sup> Even in Philo, there is no example in which Aramaic is called “Hebrew.”<sup>74</sup> It is the Hebrew *Torah* that is called “Chaldean.” Second, and more importantly, Philo is not a reliable source for this discussion, because it is possible, even likely, that he was unfamiliar with the Hebrew language.

The extent to which Philo was familiar with Hebrew is a debated topic among scholars. It seems unlikely that someone devoted to Scripture and who traveled to Jerusalem would be ignorant of the original language of *Torah*. Yet, as David Runia asserts, it appears to be true.<sup>75</sup> Apparently, Philo did not know Hebrew. Those who disagree with this opinion often point to the many etymologies of Hebrew words found throughout Philo’s works.<sup>76</sup> However, some scholars believe that the etymologies in Philo are not from his own hand, but rather from a source of collected names and their etymologies.<sup>77</sup> If so, these etymologies cannot be used to prove that Philo knew Hebrew, and neither can they advance our understanding of the distinctions or confusions between Hebrew and Aramaic at the turn of the era.

73 Philo sometimes discusses the “language of the Hebrews” when discussing Hebrew names in the Bible (*Sobriety* 45; *Confusion* 68; *Abraam* 27, 57; *Decalogue* 159; *Laws* 2.41, 145, 194), but he never explicitly explains the relationship between “Chaldean” (*Dreams* 1.161; *Abraam* 8, 12, 82, 99, 201; *Moses* 1.5; 2.26, 31, 38, 40, 224; *Rewards* 14, 23, 44; *Gaius* 4) and “Hebrew,” and neither of them with “Syrian.” At *Abraam* 27 “Noah” is explained according to “the language of the Hebrews,” while at *Rewards* 23 “Noah” is called a Chaldean name.

74 The closest potential reference may be at *Husbandry* 95, where a “snake” and “life” come together, and “Eve” is called part of the “patriarchal language” [= Chaldean?, = Hebrew?]. הַיָּהוּבָה, “Eve,” is related to הַיָּהוּבָה, “to be alive,” and הַיָּהוּבָה, “snake,” in Aramaic (and possibly proto-Hebrew as background to the Genesis tradition). Cf. *Husbandry* 95: . . . οὐ μὴν τῷ φίλῳ καὶ συμβούλῳ ζωῆς Εὐαν πατρὶω γλώττῃ καλεῖν αὐτὴν ἔθος, “. . . not to that friendly [serpent], the counselor of life, Eve as she [‘life’?, feminine; or ‘friendly’?, masculine] is customarily called in [Moses’] national language.”

75 D. Runia, “Etymology as an Allegorical Technique in Philo of Alexandria,” *SPhilo* 16 (2004): 112. The main argument against Philo’s knowledge of Hebrew comes from V. Nikiprowetzky, in *Le commentaire de l’Écriture chez Philon d’Alexandrie: son caractè et sa portée; observations philologiques* (ALGHJ 11; Leiden: Brill, 1977), 50–96.

76 For example, see *Abraam* 99 and 201. For a complete discussion of the etymologies in Philo, see Runia, “Etymologies.”

77 See Y. Amir, “The Interpretation of Hebrew Names According to Philo” (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 31 (1961–62): 297; L. Grabbe, *Etymology in Early Jewish Interpretation: The Hebrew Names in Philo* (BJudSt 115; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 73–85; and Runia, “Etymology,” 113.

### e *Rabbinic and Patristic Works*

While the Rabbinic and Patristic literature is subsequent to the time of the use of Ἑβραϊς in Acts 21–22, it is helpful to note briefly that the distinction between Aramaic and Hebrew described above continues in the centuries following the New Testament. The Mishnah uses תרגום for Aramaic in *m. Yad.* 4:5. Additionally, *y. Sotah* 7.2 distinguishes between “Aramaic/Syrian for elegy” (עבורי לדיבור) and “Hebrew for speech” (עבורי לדיבור).

Similarly, early Patristic writers also continue to differentiate between Hebrew and Aramaic. Origen, in *Contra Celsum* 3.6, differentiates between Aramaic (Σύρων διαλέκτω), “the Syrians’ dialect,” and Hebrew (Ἑβραϊδα). Through the second century C.E. there is no record of confusion between Hebrew and Aramaic in Jewish or Christian writings.<sup>78</sup>

Of only marginal interest for our study, the *Acts of Pilate*<sup>79</sup> 1.5 has one passage, based on Gospel texts of the triumphal entry, with the crowd shouting Ἑβραϊστί in Hebrew: ὠσαννα μεμβρομη βαρουχαμμα αδοναι. The interpretation, “He who is in the highest places, just save! Blessed is the one coming in the name of the Lord.” The transliteration is confused (μεμβρομη for מבמרומים/במרומוי, αμμα for הבא) and broken (βεσεμ בשם is missing), but it obviously refers to a Hebrew retroversion (βαρουχ is distinctly Hebrew, ὠσαννα is plain Hebrew

78 Even a late fourth-century Church writer was able to maintain the distinction. Epiphanius, in the *Pan.* 68.3 (Frank Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Books II and III* [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 386), states: “Indeed, the Lord prophesied this when he said, in Hebrew, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani.’ On the cross the Lord duly fulfilled what had been prophesied of him by saying ‘Eli, Eli,’ in Hebrew, as had originally been written. And to complete the companion phrase he said, ‘lema sabachthani,’ no longer in Hebrew but in Aramaic . . . by saying the rest no longer in Hebrew but in Aramaic, he meant to humble <the pride> of those who boast of Hebrew.”

Nevertheless, Epiphanius, *Pan.* 26, does have a confusing statement that appears to use a qualified “deep Hebrew” as referring to Hebrew itself in contrast to “Noura in Hebrew . . . in Syriake dialect” for Aramaic: ἵνα δὴ καὶ ἐρμηνείαν ποιήσωσι τοῦ τῆς Πύρρας ὀνόματος, Νωρίαν ταύτην ὀνομάζοντες. ἐπειδὴ γὰρ νοῦρα ἐν τῇ Ἑβραϊδὶ πῦρ οὐ κατὰ τὴν βαθείαν γλώσσαν ἐρμηνεύεται ἀλλὰ Συριακῇ διαλέκτω (ἡσαθ γὰρ τὸ πῦρ παρὰ Ἑβραίοις καλεῖται κατὰ τὴν βαθείαν γλώσσαν). We are indebted to Ken Penner for this reference, which comes from his SBL paper, “Ancient names for Hebrew and Aramaic: A Case for Lexical Revision.” Thus there is a hint that the language distinction was starting to break down in the fourth century C.E.

79 The date for the *Acts of Pilate* is normally thought to be fourth century C.E. For a discussion of possible early material, see Felix Schneidweiler, “The Gospel of Nicodemus, Acts of Pilate, and Christ’s Descent into Hell,” in *New Testament Apocrypha*. Vol. 1, *Gospels and Related Writings, Revised Edition* (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; English trans. ed. R. McL. Wilson; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 501–4.

ⲁⲛ ⲡⲱⲥⲁⲓ, “please save” [not a quotation from Ps 118, but not necessarily independent from the Gospels]). In fact, the phrase in the interpretation, σῶσον δὴ ὁ ἐν τοῖς ὑψίστοις, “may he who is in the highest places save!,” is clearer than in the Markan and Matthean ὠσαννα ἐν τοῖς ὑψίστοις, “*hosanna* in the highest.”

The early Church Father Papias mentions Hebrew in a discussion of the Gospel of Matthew. Papias was the Bishop of Hierapolis, near Laodicea, in the Lycus Valley in the Roman province of Asia. His one major work, *Exposition of the Logia of the Lord*, was a five-volume tome that has not survived except for fragments cited in Eusebius’ *Historia ecclesiastica*.<sup>80</sup> It is thought that Papias wrote his exposition sometime around the turn of the second century (ca. 110–140 C.E.).<sup>81</sup> More important than the actual dating of the work itself, Bauckham suggests that Papias records testimony from the time that the oral traditions concerning Jesus were being written in the Gospels (ca. 80 C.E.).<sup>82</sup>

Relevant for this study is one fragment in which Papias, commenting on the Gospel of Matthew, claims:

Ματθαῖος μὲν οὖν Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ τὰ λόγια συνετάξατο, ἡμῆνευσε δ’ αὐτὰ ὡς ἦν δυνατὸς ἕκαστος.<sup>83</sup>

Therefore Matthew put the logia in an ordered arrangement in the Hebrew language, but each person interpreted them as best they could. (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.16)

Here it appears that Papias is suggesting that Matthew ordered his Gospel in a manner different from the others.<sup>84</sup> Especially interesting is the mention that Matthew ordered the words of Jesus “in the Hebrew language.” J. Kürzinger argued that the Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ was a reference to the canonical

80 For a discussion of the person and work of Papias, see W. R. Schoedel, “Papias,” in *ABD* 5:140–42, and R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 12–15.

81 For a discussion of the history of dating of Papias’ work, see Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 14.

82 *Ibid.*, 14.

83 The Greek text is taken from M. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (rev. ed; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 568.

84 R. Gundry, in *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution* (2nd ed; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 614, argues that Papias is suggesting that Matthew was unhappy with Mark’s order and thus, changed it. He concludes that this is the first attestation of Markan priority. Bauckham disagrees, claiming that Eusebius has omitted material that would give a clearer understanding of what Papias meant (*Eyewitnesses*, 222).

Gospel of Matthew that was originally composed in Greek but in a Semitic style.<sup>85</sup> Bauckham suggests that the Papias' fragment supports the idea that a Gospel of Matthew was written in Hebrew/Aramaic and was then translated by others into Greek.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, Bauckham contends that Papias understood Matthew to have carefully recorded the *logia* of Jesus in order, based upon his own eyewitness, but that this order was spoiled by each (ἕκαστος) of those who translated the Gospel into Greek. The combination of ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ and ἡμῆνευσε suggests that a translation from one language to another is meant.<sup>87</sup>

If Bauckham and others are correct, then Papias believed that the original form of Matthew was Hebrew. Until now many have argued that the ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ simply meant Aramaic rather than Hebrew because of the predisposition in New Testament scholarship described throughout this study. However, the evidence in the first and second centuries C.E. indicates that ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ really means "Hebrew" rather than "Aramaic." If this is the case, then Papias suggests that a Matthean document was originally composed in Hebrew. There are good reasons that argue that the canonical Matthew cannot be such a Hebrew document.<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, a tradition of a "Matthean" document in Hebrew could provide some explanatory power for some of the pre-Gospel developments and for textual and comparative data in the Gospels. What can be stated as a product of this study is that there is no external evidence in Jewish and Christian literature that requires that ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ be understood to mean "Aramaic."

85 J. Kürzinger, *Papias von Hierapolis und die Evangelien des Neuen Testaments* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1983), 103. This interpretation is found earlier in Gundry, *Matthew*, 619–20, and is at least partially followed by S. Byrskog, *Story as History—History as Story* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 293.

86 See Bauckham, *Eyewitnesses*, 223, for his support for such a theory. See especially his note 69, page 223, for a list of other scholars who understand this in the sense of a translation from a Semitic original to Greek.

87 *Ibid.*, 222–24.

88 The canonical Matthew is not a translated document. See, for example, the studies of Raymond A. Martin, *Syntactical Evidence of Semitic Sources in Greek Documents* (Cambridge, Mass.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1974); *idem*, *Syntax Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 10; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1987). In addition, the evidence supporting Matthew's use of Mark argues that Matthew was written in Greek, not Hebrew.

### 3 'Εβραϊς and "Hebrew/Aramaic" Words in the New Testament

Despite the aforementioned examples from the LXX, Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, and early Rabbinic and Patristic works, which demonstrate a consistent distinction between Aramaic and Hebrew languages in early Jewish and Christian literature, one of the most frequent arguments for 'Εβραϊς signifying Aramaic is the use of 'Εβραϊς in association with words that appear to be Aramaic. However, a closer examination calls these assessments into question and undermines their validity.

Fitzmyer argues that references to 'Εβραϊς/'Εβραϊστί in the New Testament refer to Aramaic rather than Hebrew.<sup>89</sup> He points to seven occurrences in the New Testament where he alleges that the word 'Εβραϊστί is used for Aramaic. As noted, a number of these instances include 'Εβραϊς followed by a Greek word whose shape appears to be closer to Aramaic than Hebrew. But the three occurrences of 'Εβραϊς that he cites in Acts (21:40; 22:2; 26:14) contain no hint internally that Aramaic was intended. Fitzmyer, and those with a similar approach, merely assume their understanding.<sup>90</sup> We have shown above that the context of Acts 21–22 excludes Aramaic as a probable reading. Since Luke meant Hebrew at Acts 22, there is no reason or evidence to change that for Acts 26.

While ostensibly the use of 'Εβραϊστί with Aramaic words might appear to be support for reading 'Εβραϊστί as "Aramaic" throughout the New Testament, there are a number of reasons for pause before embracing such a premise. First, the book of Revelation uses 'Εβραϊστί for unmistakably Hebrew terms. Second, the only references of 'Εβραϊστί to what could be argued to be an Aramaic word are found in the Gospel of John. Thus, rather than being a widespread phenomenon in the New Testament, the possible use of 'Εβραϊστί for Aramaic is a potential feature for only a single author. Even these examples are not certain and they are incapable of becoming definitive evidence.<sup>91</sup> Finally, it is rarely

89 Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean*, 43.

90 Similarly, the *TDNT* entry on "Ἰσραήλ," 388–89, states that in Acts, as well as in John, references to 'Εβραϊς are almost without exception Aramaic. As is common, no evidence is given to support this claim.

91 Tessa Rajak (*Josephus: The Historian and His Society* [London: Duckworth, 2002], 232) noted this correctly and explicitly: "In the Gospel of John certain names are said to be 'in Hebrew': Bethesda (5:2), Gabbatha (19.13), Golgotha (19.17) and the appellation 'Rabbouni' (20.16). While the place-name forms look Aramaic, they could have served at the time in Hebrew too, if there was constant interaction between the two languages." David Bivin ("Hebraisms in the New Testament," in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and*

noted that all three of the potential Johannine examples are limited to proper names: John 5:2 (Βηθζαθά); 19:13 (Γαββαθα), 17 (Γολγοθα). Trying to determine the meaning of Ἐβραϊστί in conjunction with a proper name brings with it special problems as was shown in the discussions on the LXX. We now turn to consider these instances individually.

#### a *Ἐβραϊστί and Hebrew Names*

The book of Revelation utilizes Ἐβραϊστί in reference to a proper name that appears to be Hebrew. In Rev 9:11, Ἐβραϊστί is followed by the angelic name Ἀβαδδών, which is undoubtedly the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew אַבְדֹּן. The angelic name stems from the same Hebrew term, which is used regularly for the kingdom of the dead. The term is used as a parallel to *Sheol* (Job 26:2; Prov 15:11; 27:20), death (Job 28:22), the grave (Ps 88:11), and the abyss (4Q504 frg. 2 col. vii 8).<sup>92</sup> Therefore, the proper angelic name אַבְדֹּן seems to be a personification of the place of the dead.<sup>93</sup> 4Q286 frg. 7 col. ii 7 contains the only example of the Hebrew word אַבְדֹּן where it might be a proper name: וְהוֹסִיפוּ וְיֵצֵר וְאָמְרוּ אֲרוּר אַתָּה מְלֵאךְ הַשְּׁחַת וְרוּחַ הָאֵב [ח] בְּכוֹן [ל] מִחֲשׁוֹבוֹת יֵצֵר (“Then [they shall continue and say, Cursed are you, O ange]l of the pit, O spir[it of Aba]ddon, for al[1] the purposes of [your] g[uilt]y desire”). Though fragmentary, this line gives evidence that the name Abaddon is in fact Hebrew. Since Abaddon is only found in this work and Rev 9:11, which describes the name as being written in Hebrew (Ἐβραϊστί), it appears that in Rev 9:11 Ἐβραϊστί means the Hebrew language rather than Aramaic.

Similarly, Rev 16:16 uses Ἐβραϊστί followed by Ἀρμαγεδών, which appears to be a Greek transliteration of a Hebrew word. The precise meaning of Ἀρμαγεδών has challenged scholarship and has yet to attain consensus. Some suggest that it comes from the Hebrew name of the Israelite city Megiddo. In this instance the toponym would either come from Mt. Megiddo (הַר מְגִדּוֹ) or the city of Megiddo (עִיר מְגִדּוֹ).<sup>94</sup> However, the Greek vowels undermine the latter suggestion since the Hebrew עִיר would not be transliterated into the Greek Ἀρμαγεδών. If Ἀρμαγεδών refers to Mt. Megiddo, it is a compromised version of

*Linguistics* [Leiden: Brill, forthcoming] takes the same approach: “The author of John gives the Greek transliterations of three place names: Bethzatha, Gabbatha, Golgotha, and despite their Aramaic etymology, he accepts these proper nouns as part of the Hebrew language.”

92 For additional uses of אַבְדֹּן at Qumran, see 1QM col. xiv 18; xv 18; 1QHa col. xi 16, 19, 32; 4Q372 frag. 2:3; and 11Q col. iv 10.

93 S. Olyan, *A Thousand Thousands Served Him: Exegesis and the Naming of Angels in Ancient Judaism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 74–75.

94 See D. Aune, *Revelation* (WBC 52B; Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 898–99.

the name, adding a final “n” to the city name. Evidence of this spelling is found in the LXX of 2 Chr 35:22 (ἐν τῷ πεδίῳ Μαγγελῶν). It should be noted, however, that a “mountain” of Megiddo is not referenced anywhere else in early Jewish or Christian literature. Others have argued it stems from the Hebrew for “mountain of assembly” (הַר מוֹעֵד), noting that Hebrew *v* is often transliterated with the Greek *γ*.<sup>95</sup> While the precise meaning or origin of Ἀρμαγεδών is beyond the scope of this work, it is important to note that it is never suggested that it stems from Aramaic. The Hebrew for “mountain” (הַר) is undeniably behind the first part of the name here, as opposed to the Aramaic (ܡܘܬܐ, “mountain”). Therefore, Revelation only uses Ἐβραϊστί to signify words clearly drawn from the Hebrew language. While this does strengthen the notion of Ἐβραϊστί being used for the Hebrew language, the evidence may be qualified because in both instances in Revelation Ἐβραϊστί is used with proper names. As we will witness elsewhere in the New Testament, proper names are not the most reliable contexts for establishing the meaning of Ἐβραϊστί.<sup>96</sup>

### **b** *The Use of Ἐβραϊστί with Alleged “Aramaic” Names*

There is one author in antiquity whose use of Ἐβραϊστί is ambiguous and could have been used to support an Aramaic hypothesis if that writing, and only it, were available. The Gospel of John uses Ἐβραϊστί in conjunction with what have been claimed to be four different Aramaic words: Βηθζαθα [or Βηθεσδα], Γαββαθα, Γολγοθα, and ραββουεί.

Dalman, Fitzmyer, and many others refer to the four examples to suggest that Ἐβραϊστί was being used to describe the Aramaic language. While some of the words might, in fact, be related to Aramaic at some level, they do not provide support for conclusions about Ἐβραϊστί.

In John 20:16, Mary calls Jesus ραββουεί, which is recorded as having been spoken “in Hebrew” (Ἐβραϊστί). Traditionally, it has been argued that the Greek ραββουεί<sup>97</sup> comes from Aramaic רבבוי<sup>98</sup> rather than Hebrew רבבי, a word

95 E. Boring, *Revelation* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 177. This is not likely since γαμμα is usually connected to words that have *ghain* [ג] in the etymology.

96 After all, an English writer may claim that Los Angeles and Ian are English names meaning “angels” and “beloved,” respectively. Yes, we are aware that “Ian” is Scottish. That is part of the point. It belongs to the English language, now. And etymologically “Ian” goes back to Hebrew יָנָן, “deal graciously.”

97 The Greek texts have ραββουεῖ [B], ραββουεῖ [א, Byz], ραββουεῖ [D], ραββουεῖ [Θ], et al. They consistently record an [a] sound in the first syllable and an [i] in the final syllable according to Koine Greek phonology.

98 See *Targum Onkelos* Gen 18:12 (רבבוי), 24:9 (רבבוייה) and over two hundred more examples of *ribon-*. The problem is the first vowel [i]. Mishnaic Hebrew, too, has the word רבון, *ribbon-*.

more widely known among commentators. Yet, this understanding is too simplistic and probably shows a tendency in the eyes of New Testament scholarship to attribute anything different from a basic understanding of Hebrew or Biblical Hebrew to Aramaic.<sup>99</sup> Kutscher has demonstrated that רבּוּנִי and רבּוּנִי vs. רבּוּנִי represents a difference between Western and Eastern pronunciations of Hebrew and Aramaic rather than a Hebrew vs. Aramaic distinction. Both languages show the same West/East distinction. Texts such as the early Hebrew *Mishnah Taanit* 3:8 (according to Codex Kaufmann) and later Aramaic Palestinian Targum fragments from the Cairo Geniza<sup>100</sup> show that רבּוּנִי with *pataḥ* is found in Western Semitic texts.<sup>101</sup> Eastern texts, such as the Aramaic *Targum Onkelos* (*passim*), use the form רבּוּנִי, “*riboni*.” Kutscher has speculated that *Targum Onkelos* has caused the textual corruptions in later printed texts of both Hebrew and Aramaic.<sup>102</sup> Since the word ραββουνοί was used in both Hebrew contexts and Aramaic contexts, John must be recognized as correct when he calls *rabbouni* “Hebrew,” and it cannot be used as evidence that Ἐβραϊστί means “Aramaic.”

Ἐβραϊστί in the Gospel of John is also used to describe three toponyms. However, examination indicates that none of these “Aramaic words” are unquestionably Aramaic, and toponyms by themselves cannot be used to demonstrate that Ἐβραϊστί necessarily means “Aramaic.” Proper names may show language influence and contact but they also travel across language boundaries. Names are adopted into new languages and become part of that language.

John 5:2 reads: “Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew *Beth-zatha* (ἡ ἐπιλεγομένη Ἐβραϊστί βηθζαθά [NA-27]), which has five porticoes.” In this verse the name of the pool in Hebrew is βηθζαθά. Unfortunately, John does not tell us what βηθζαθά means and attempts to

99 For an example of the trend, and needed correction, see note 40 on ὡσάννα in Buth’s “The Riddle of Jesus’ Cry from the Cross,” pages 408–409 in the present volume, where it is noted that the Hebrew הוֹשַׁע־נַגַּן is often called Aramaic in commentaries; also in agreement on this point is Jan Joosten, “Aramaic or Hebrew behind the Gospels?,” *Analecta Bruxellensia* 9 (2004): 88–101 (91) states: “*hosanna* (said by the crowds) and *amen*, are in fact Hebrew and not Aramaic.”

100 Michael L. Klein, *Geniza Manuscripts of Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 1986). See, e.g., רבּוּנִי at 1:33 (col. 2, line 3—Gen 44:18), where the vocalization is clear but the consonants [נִי] are in a lacuna. At line 5 of col. 2, the vocalization רבּוּנִי is attested but the top parts of the consonants are missing.

101 E. Y. Kutscher, “Language of the Sages” (Hebrew), in Ben-Hayyim, Dotan, and Sarfatti, eds., *Hebrew and Aramaic Studies*, 95–98.

102 *Ibid.*, 98.

identify the Hebrew or Aramaic etymology behind the Greek have proven difficult and the spelling of the name is neither stable nor relatively certain.

(1) Gregory-Aland 02, ms B “Vaticanus,” p75, p66<sup>c</sup>, and (Ψ) read βηθσαιδα. That could come from Hebrew and Aramaic בית צידה/בית צידתא, “house of fishing/hunting,” or Hebrew and Aramaic, (א) בית ציד, “house of fishing/hunting,” or Hebrew and Aramaic, (א) בית ציד, “house of the fisherman/hunter.” However, there is no reason for assuming a fishing/hunting context to the name and most assume that this represents a scribal assimilation to the more well-known βηθσαιδα on the Sea of Galilee.

(2) A variant reading βηθζαθα (Gregory-Aland 01 “א Sinaiticus”) might be a Greek assimilation of Hebrew/Aramaic (א) בית זית, meaning the “house of an olive tree/orchard,” but it is not as exact as βηθζαιθ/βηθζαιθα would be. A variant of this proposal would be to link βηθζαθα and βηθζαθα (ms L) to Josephus’ βεθεζα/βεζεθα, which Josephus describes as the northern expansion of the city and interprets the meaning of the name as “new city” Καινόπολις (*War* 2.328, 530; 5.149, 151, 246, 504). The pools of the account in John would be included in this larger area north of the Temple. But Josephus’ name is complicated: βεθεθα/βεζεθα does not mean “new city” in Hebrew [קרית-חדשה or קריה-חדשה] or Aramaic [קרתא חדתא].<sup>103</sup> In support of בית-זית there is a

103 Dalman preferred to read “house of the olive tree” rather than assume “new city”: “βηθζαθα Jos. Bell. Jud. V 4, 2 (‘καὶνὴ πόλις’), βηθζέθ Makk. 7, 19 A (S βηθζαιθ), βηθζαθα (Job. 5, 2 S) wäre Dach Jos. eine Anpassung des hebräischen בֵּית חַדְשָׁת oder בֵּית חַדְשָׁת an griechische Aussprache. Es ist aber אֵילָנָה בֵּית זֵיתָא, bez. אֵילָנָה בֵּית ‘Oelbaumort” (Gustaf Dalman, *Grammatik des Jüdisch-Palästinischen Aramäischen nach den Idiomen des Palästinischen Talmud und Midrasch, des Onkelostargum (Cod. Socini 84) und der Jerusalemischen Targume zum Pentateuch* [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1894]), 115.

Abraham Schalit in K. H. Rengstorf, *A Complete Concordance to Flavius Josephus, Supplement 1 Namenwörterbuch zu Flavius Josephus* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 25–26, thinks that βηθζεζα refers to an earlier name for the area north of the Hasmonean city that was called בֵּית צִאָה, “house of excrement/dung.” He speculates that during the time of Herod this area expanded into the new city and obtained a second name, “new city.”

However, because of the time differential between the incident in John 5 and Agrippa’s unfinished expansion of the “new city” in the 40s, it is possible that the name mentioned in the Gospel spread from the “five porticoes” to the rest of the area north of the Hasmonean city wall. Were the “five porticoes” impressive enough that they could lend their name to the larger area that would be encompassed by a third wall project? It is not clear.

It is also not clear that Josephus’ βεθεζα/βεζεθα and John’s βηθζαθα/βηθσεδα are to be equated as the same name. For example, Josephus’ name might reflect the town Beth-zait, since the new area of the city was built around the road that led to Beth-zait, among other northern destinations. Today *sha’ar Shechem* in Jerusalem refers to the gate that leads

βηθζαιθ (ms א) and βηθζεθ (ms A) in 1 Macc 7:19. These would appear to show a similar place name that originated in Hebrew and that the Greek forms have undergone later assimilation for euphony and/or to an Aramaic form (points 1 and 2 in the LXX discussion). The city in 1 Macc 7:19 was located several miles north of Jerusalem and is not the same place as mentioned in John 5:2. But it does illustrate how a Hebrew name “house of the olive tree” could produce the textual readings in John.

(3) A third option, βηθεσδα, is widely attested in ms A and the Byzantine tradition (also βηθεσεδα in ms E\*). Many have rejected this transcription on the grounds that it can be explained as an assimilation to an assumed Hebrew and Aramaic בית-בית/בית-בית, “house of grace.”<sup>104</sup> However, it needs to be remembered that it is the Byzantine tradition, and only the Byzantine tradition, that has correctly preserved the unassimilated words from the cross in Matt 27:46 and Mark 15:34. The Byzantine tradition is capable of maintaining an original foreign transliteration and another option is available for explaining βηθεσδα.

(4) A suggestion from Franz Delitzsch merits reconsideration in the light of the Qumran discoveries. He astutely suggested that the name preserves a Greek loanword in Hebrew בית-בית, “house of the colonnade/portico,” < στωά.<sup>105</sup>

- 
- to Shechem (in English “Damascus gate,” because it also leads to Damascus). The road through Joppa gate leads to Joppa (in Arabic, *baab al-khalil* because it leads to Hebron, the city of the friend [خليل] of God [Abraham]). On “house of stoa,” see option 4, בית-בית-בית.
- 104 The discovery of the Copper Scroll (3Q15) was thought to lend support to the reading βηθεσδα. In 3Q15 col. 11 12, Milik recorded the words בית אשדתן {א} בית, and he argued that this is awkwardly put in the dual form since the pool of Bethesda contained two basins (M. Baillet, J. Milik, and R. De Vaux, *Les “Petites Grottes” de Qumran* [DJD III; 2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1962, 271–272]). However, others have cast doubt on that reading. Already in 1963, B. Z. Luria (*The Copper Scroll from the Judean Desert* [Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1963 (Hebrew)], 121) read בית האשוחין, “house of waterworks.” A new edition of 3Q15 agrees with Luria’s reading: D. Brizemeure et al., *Le Rouleau de Cuivre de La Grotte 3 de Qumrân (3q15): Expertise—Restauration—Epigraphe* (STDJ 55.1; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 200, 203, 215. In the revision of the text, 3Q15 col. 11.12 reads בית האשוחין/א rather than {א} בית אשדתן. R. Ceulemans (“The Name of the Pool in Joh 5,2: A Text-Critical Note Concerning 3Q15,” *ZNTW* 55, no. 1 [2008]: 112–15) concurs. A different passage from the Copper Scroll that has never been in doubt probably does explain John 5:2. See suggestion 4.
- 105 Franz Delitzsch, “Talmudische Studien, X. Bethesda,” *Zeitschrift für die gesammte lutherische Theologie und Kirche* (Leipzig, 1856), 622–24, <http://books.google.co.il/books?id=Q8EnAAAAAAJ&pg=PR3&dq=Franz+Delitzsch+Talmudische+Studien+1856&hl=iw&sa=X&ei=VjIxt7ixHqayoQXRytGnBw&ved=0cC8Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false> (retrieved 7 February 2012). Also cited in (Strack)-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, II, 453.

This suggestion fits the Johannine context where the place has five porticos (πέντε στοάς ἔχουσα). The loanword is attested in various forms in rabbinic literature, including איסטבא, איסטווא and איסטויב.<sup>106</sup> The source for these words is the Greek στοά. If βηθεσδά is from בית-אֶסְטָיִו, then a “t” has been assimilated to “d,” something that Delitzsch already pointed out as possible from considering the name פוט Gen 10:6, where the LXX transcribes *tet* with *delta*: φουδ.<sup>107</sup> In addition to the Mishnaic Hebrew references that Delitzsch cited, we now have the Greek loan word attested at Qumran in low-register (proto-Mishnaic) Hebrew. The Copper Scroll 3Q15 11:2 has פנת האסטאן הדרומית, “from under the corner of the southern portico.”

This last suggestion, βηθεσδά > בית-אסטאן, has the ironic status of pointing to a Hebrew name whose etymology would technically be Greek. The ‘n’ at the end of the word in Qumran Hebrew is an addition to the Greek word, so that some local people may have been saying בית-אסטאן. We should use this Qumranic spelling (י)אסטאן since it is probably attested a second time at 4Q468 fragment x.<sup>108</sup> It is earlier than the Mishnaic attestations of the loanword, and the word shape fits the transliteration Βηθεσδα with only a commonplace dropping of a final “n,” which was superfluous anyway.<sup>109</sup> The interesting history of this name would give us a Greek word στοά transformed into Hebrew for the name of the place with “five porticoes,” (י)אסטאן “house of a portico,” which was turned back into Greek as Βηθεσδα. In further support, John does not claim that the etymology was scientifically and purely Hebrew, he only claims that the name was used in Hebrew. “House of stoa” fits the context better than “house of an olive tree.” None of the textual traditions in the Gospel clearly

106 See Michael Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic* (1990), 51, איסטויב; and Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Talmud*, איסטבא, p. 54.

107 See, for example, Ezra 7:22 [δ] instead of [τ] for Aramaic בִּתְיִן (= Biblical Hebrew בִּתְיִים, plural of בת “liquid measure”: ἕως οἴνου βάδων ἑκατόν, “to 100 bats of wine,” βάδων ἑκατόν ἐλαίου ἕως, “to 100 bats of oil.” This is according to the Alexandrinus manuscript. Vaticanus reads ἀποθήκων, “storehouses,” apparently understanding בִּתְיִן as the plural of בֵּית (= Hebrew בִּתְיִים). Manuscripts of Josephus also have βάδος/βάτος interchanging.

108 This is a fragment that preserves ]אסטא[. There are no other words at Qumran that use אסטא, so it appears to be a second attestation of (י)אסטאן.

109 The addition or deletion of a final ν or μ can be considered normal between Greek and Hebrew as well as within Hebrew. Cf. שילוח Σιλοαμ with “μ” added and a presumed Mishnaic Hebrew תִּשְׁמַנִּין-תִּשְׁמַנִּין Γεθσημανει/Γεσσημανει (Byz) with a deletion of “n” (the vowel pattern fits Hebrew rather than Aramaic). Hebrew כאן, “here,” from כה and כאן, “below,” from טה show an etymological addition. See names Οζα יזע and Σαβαθα τβבש listed as examples of “euphony,” with a deletion. Nasals at the end of names were unstable.

point to “house of olive” (βηθζαιθ).<sup>110</sup> “Five porticoes” can be explained as having three rows of columns around a large rectangle area with small medicinal pools at the side of two massive storage pools, or perhaps more appropriately for the larger structures, the large storage pools gave the name as four sides of a large rectangle with a fifth row of columns dividing two pools at the dam. Of course, whether the name of the pool came from בית-זית or (י)בית-אטטא,<sup>111</sup> along with its transcriptional development within Greek and its adoption in the Gospel of John, the name does not and cannot serve as proof that Ἐβραϊστί meant Aramaic for the author. If the name comes from (י)בית-אטטא, then the name is based on a Greek word that has been borrowed into Hebrew. The Gospel only claims that the name is used in Hebrew.

The name at John 19:13 Γαββαθα also presents surprising linguistic puzzles: εἰς τόπον λεγόμενον Λιθόστρωτον, Ἐβραϊστί δὲ Γαββαθα, “at a place called ‘Paved-in-stone,’ and in Hebrew *Gabbata*.” Many have assumed that the name is “Aramaic” but the etymology is not clear and in any case, the issue revolves around a name. Even if the etymology were Aramaic, it would still be the name in use in Hebrew, just like Californians call their two biggest cities San Francisco and Los Angeles in English. But an investigation into the etymology proves both enlightening and surprising.

Joseph Fitzmyer makes a misleading claim, “it [Ἐβραϊστί—RB/CP] is used at times with words and expressions that are clearly Aramaic. Thus in John 19:13, Ἐβραϊστί δὲ Γαββαθα is given as an explanation of the Lithostrotos, and γαββαθα is a Grecized form of the Aramaic word *gabbeta*, ‘raised place.’”<sup>112</sup> But is that really a word in Aramaic? Fitzmyer footnoted Dalman, *Words of Jesus*, for his statement. When we turn to Dalman’s *Words of Jesus* we read, “The discussion of these words will be found in my *Gram. des jüd.-pal. Aram.* It may here be added that Γαββαθα (*Gram.* p. 108) is incorrectly explained. ܘܩܒܬܐ, which properly means the baldness of the forepart of the head, was a fitting name for the open space in front of the Antonia Castle which served as a place of execution.” Turning to Dalman’s earlier grammar, one finds Fitzmyer’s word “Γαββαθα = ܘܩܒܬܐ, Ev. Hier. ܘܩܒܬܐ” (p. 108), but without explanation. Dalman correctly rejected his proposal ܘܩܒܬܐ in his later work. Syriac does not seem to

110 The texts βηθζεθ/βηθζαιθ of 1 Macc 7:19 point to a more probable original spelling of a name *Beyt-zayt*, “house of an olive tree.”

111 The texts βηθζεθ/βηθζαιθ of 1 Macc 7:19 and the attestation in the Copper Scroll for a Greek loan word στωά in Hebrew both point to Hebrew as the etymological origin of the name.

112 Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean*, 43.

know  $\text{ܐܘܒܐ}$ <sup>113</sup> and the Peshitto lists  $\text{ܐܘܒܐܘܢܐ}$ , suggesting that  $\text{ܐܘܒܐ}$  was not a known item. Dalman reconsidered his earlier proposal and came up with a word that is in both Hebrew and Aramaic  $\text{חֲבַת}$ , “frontal baldness.”

$\text{חֲבַת}$  is a possible etymology, but its meaning does not inspire confidence. Everyone would agree that this does not line up with  $\text{Λιθόστρωτος}$ , “paved-in-stone.” In light of points 1 (euphony), 2 (assimilation to Aramaic), and 4 (a borrowed Aramaic name), there would be no problem with John calling  $\text{Γαββαθα}$ / $\text{חֲבַת}$  “Hebrew.” But we have other options, too.

Hebrew has a word  $\text{גְּבַע}$  that means “eyebrow.” While “eyebrow” might not seem much of an improvement over “baldness,” it does have the advantage of being used for a “ridge” or “hill” in Greek:  $\delta\phi\rho\acute{\upsilon}\varsigma$ , “eyebrow; ridge, edge of a hill.” However, Hebrew by itself does not easily explain the “θ.” In the LXX such names often come from the “directional *-he*”:  $\text{גְּבַתָּה}$ , “to the ridge,” if, in fact, an alleged meaning “ridge” was in use for  $\text{גְּבַה}$  in Hebrew.

Perhaps  $\text{Γαββαθα}$  is related to Hebrew  $\text{גְּבַעְתָּה}$ , “to the hill,” the Hebrew place-name  $\text{גְּבַע}$  north of Jerusalem,  $\text{גְּבַעַת שָׁאִיל}$ , “Hill of Saul” (which may or may not be related to  $\text{גֶּבֶע-בְּנִימִין}$ , “Geba of Benjamin,” Old Greek  $\text{Γαβαα}$  Judg 20:10), or Aramaic  $\text{ܟܘܒܬܗ}$ , “hill”? The vowels are not the best match, though Josephus does have  $\text{Γαβαθ Σαουλ}$  (*War* 5.51). As a precedent for this, opposite 1 Sam 15:34  $\text{גְּבַעַת שָׁאִיל}$  the Old Greek simplifies and transliterates  $\text{Γαβαα}$ . That is a town a few kilometers north of Jerusalem and is a different place from our  $\text{Γαββαθα}$ .<sup>114</sup> However, even if the vowels in  $\text{Γαββαθα}$  can be explained as dialectically different from the Masoretic text’s  $\text{גְּבַעַת}$ , another problem is explaining why the

113 There is no entry listed in J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary, founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903). The three CPA lectionaries at Matt 26.23 have the word  $\text{ܐܘܒܐ}$  for  $\text{τρύβλιον}$ , “bowl.” CPA is a dialect from the last half of the first millennium C.E. and shows heavy influence from Greek. A better, first-century etymology is available.

114 Other less probable options include: Hebrew  $\text{אֲבָת}$ , “natural (shallow) cavity, pond.” Was the pavement covering a natural cistern?  $\text{גְּבַתָּה/אֲבָתָּה}$  “hills” (near Sepphoris), but again the vowels and shape are not a good match. There is also a biblical place name  $\text{גְּבַתֹּן}$  (Josh 21:23–24) that was later called  $\text{גְּבַת}$  (Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Talmud*,  $\text{גְּבַת}$ ). Could such a name have been re-applied to some place in Jerusalem, perhaps connected to Levites from Gibbethon? Incidentally, neither Dalman’s disavowed  $\text{גְּבַה}$ , nor  $\text{גְּבַעַת}$ , come from the root  $\text{גְּבַה}$ , “to be tall, high.” The root  $\text{*גְּבַה}$  does not exist in Syriac and Western Aramaic though it is attested in some Babylonian talmudic texts and a few later targumim to Psalms, Job, and Chronicles. Thus, one cannot speculate about  $\text{*ܐܘܒܐ}$ . Hebrew from that root would presumably have produced  $\text{גְּבוּהָה}$ -[אֲרִץ]. Even with  $\text{גְּבַתָּה}$ , “frontal baldness,” and Latin *gabata* “platter,” we can only speculate, we do not know how  $\text{Γαββαθα}$  was named or what it meant.

Gospel texts consistently have a double “ββ,” contra Josephus and the LXX. Accepting such a [-ββ-] as an idiosyncrasy that may be unnecessarily trying to block a first century softening of Greek *Beta* into a bi-labial fricative, Gabbata would mean “the hill” in Hebrew/Aramaic and might have referred to the area of the Herodian palace on the western ridge of Jerusalem, geographically above the temple area and even further west and higher than the Hasmonean palace, which was also west and above the temple area.<sup>115</sup> The Herodian palace compound is presumably where Pilate would have been lodging for the holiday, with Herod Antipas staying in the Hasmonean palace.<sup>116</sup> However, there is a major flaw in this line of speculation about Γαβ[β]αθα meaning “the Hill.” The Λιθόστρωτος is apparently a small, particular spot in the governmental building complexes and not a whole mountain. If Γαββαθα were derived from “the hill” or even “to the hill,” it would not appear to be a local name for the same particular place as the Λιθόστρωτος.

A better option comes from Latin and was first argued by Charles C. Torrey.<sup>117</sup> *Gabata* means “platter, dish” and is attested in Latin in the first century (*Martial* 7, 48, 3 and 11, 31, 18). Why might the “paved-in-stone” place, that is, the *Lithostrotos*, be called “the platter”? We do not know. There may have been something special in the building’s shape, history, or perhaps a mosaic design in the pavement that gave it such a name (e.g. a large platter of fruit). However, if such a name were coined and in place, it might help to explain why a Judean dialect of Aramaic (CPA) half a millennium later would have a word unattested in other Aramaic dialects, ܩܒܬܐ, “a kind of dinner dish,” used in the

115 Josephus writes of the Hasmonean palace, “Now this palace had been erected of old by the children of Asamoneus, and was situated upon an elevation, and afforded a most delightful prospect to those that had a mind to take a view of the city, which prospect was desired by the king; and there he could lie down, and eat, and then observe what was done in the temple” (*Ant.* 20.190 [20.8.11.]).

116 Older speculation about Pilate staying at the fortress of Antonia north of the Temple should not be followed. Steven Notley (Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley, *The Sacred Bridge* [Jerusalem: Carta, 2006], 365–66), supports a consensus on the Herodian palace: “Benoit has argued convincingly that Pilate was staying in the palace of Herod the Great on the western hill.” Philo suggests that Pilate stayed at Herod’s palace, “Pilate . . . dedicated some gilt shields in the palace of Herod” (*Legat.* 299 [*Gaius* 299]). Josephus also suggests that governors stayed at Herod’s palace: “Now at this time [66 C.E.—RB/CP] Florus took up his quarters at the palace; and on the next day he had his tribunal set before it, and sat upon it, when the high priests, and the men of power, and those of the greatest eminence in the city, came all before that tribunal” (*War* 2.301).

117 Charles C. Torrey, “Studies in the Aramaic of the First Century A.D. (New Testament Writings),” *ZAW* 65, no. 1 (1953): 228–47.

CPA lectionaries at Matt 26:23 opposite Greek *τῦβλιον*, “bowl.” The same lectionaries have the same *כַּבֵּי* at John 19:13. We only need to explain *Γαββαθα* in the first century and a Latin loan word *gabata* would explain the name. The best part of this explanation is that it highlights the ability of a proper name to cross language boundaries. It might also explain why John did not mention what either *βηθεσδα* or *γαββαθα* meant. They may both have been loanwords, from Greek and Latin, respectively. As names based on foreign loan words their meaning may not have been widely transparent for Hebrew speakers or Aramaic speakers. John, of course, does not tell us what these names mean, nor does he tell us whether the names were also in use in Aramaic *Συριστί*, he only states that they were in use in Hebrew *Ἑβραϊστί*.

The third toponym in John that is called Hebrew is *Γολγοθᾶ*. This name is fairly transparent and John tells us what it means. Both Hebrew and Aramaic have a word for “skull,” *גְּלִיגְלִי*. The Greek has dropped the second *lamed* but it is otherwise clear. The *-α* at the end of a Hebrew name could have arisen from euphony, or as an assimilation to an Aramaic form of the same name, or it may be the adoption of a name that was first coined in Aramaic. None of these are grounds for saying that John was referring to Aramaic when he wrote *Ἑβραϊστί*. We have shown that Greek writers distinguished *Ἑβραϊστί* from *Συριστί* consistently. Consequently, it would be a poor methodology to generate a unique meaning for one author when the common meaning can also explain that same author. The author was naming the language being used and what the language users thought about the meaning of the name. To go beyond that would be to twist the author’s words into something for which there is no clear evidence and against attested usage for all other authors. If John meant “Aramaic” he could have said so. *Συριστί* was already part of the common language. Thus, the “Aramaic” claim for *Ἑβραϊστί* goes far beyond the evidence. We only have *Ἑβραϊστί* attested in contexts where Hebrew is unambiguously Hebrew or where it is justified as Hebrew.

The discussion concerning these last three toponyms is not to argue that only Hebrew represents each etymology rather than Aramaic. It is entirely possible that all three names were first coined in Aramaic or in Hebrew as place names, or perhaps they came from Greek, Latin, Aramaic, and Hebrew. There are questions remaining on the history of each of these names. Nevertheless, proper lexicography leads us to recognize that the author of the Gospel treated the names as Hebrew, not as Aramaic.

The final example of *Ἑβραϊστί* in the Fourth Gospel comes from John 19:20. In this verse Pilate has Jesus’ charge written out; namely, that he was the “King of the Jews.” This verse claims that the sign was written in Greek, Latin, and in Hebrew (*Ἑβραϊστί*). There is no evidence within the verse to indicate whether

the language was Hebrew or Aramaic. Scholars who support the Aramaic theory read this as Aramaic based upon presuppositions already cited above rather from the text itself. Thus, the verse does not move us any further along towards a clearer understanding of the meaning of Ἑβραϊστί.

Although much of current scholarship states that Ἑβραῖς means “Aramaic” among ancient Greek authors, a careful reading of early Jewish and Christian literature has shown a consistent and careful distinction between “Hebrew” and “Aramaic.” Without any proof to the contrary, even the Gospel of John needs to be included with the rest of the literature of the period.<sup>118</sup>

#### 4 Conclusion

It has been demonstrated that the use of Ἑβραῖς/Ἑβραϊστί for the Hebrew language is well attested throughout early Jewish and Christian literature. Examples from the LXX, the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, and from Josephus all point to a clear use of the term for the Hebrew language, rather than for an Aramaic dialect common to the Hebrew people. The theory that Ἑβραϊστί means “Aramaic” is weak and ultimately untenable because the only potential examples are three poorly understood toponyms in one Greek author (the Gospel of John). That evidence is without definitive value because toponyms transcend language boundaries and there are several ways to account for the three names according to precedents with Hebrew–Aramaic–Greek interface. In the New Testament itself, the book of Revelation and Acts uses Ἑβραῖς unambiguously to signify “Hebrew,” and there are no instances in which Ἑβραῖς should be necessarily explained as “Aramaic.” Everywhere Greek authors consistently use Ἑβραϊκή/Ἑβραϊστί for Hebrew words and Συριακή/Συριστί for Aramaic.

This study helps to clarify the linguistic environment of the Second Temple period and the first century. According to the author of Acts, Hebrew was a language of public communication among the Jewish audiences in Jerusalem and Paul was able to speak publicly in Hebrew. According to Josephus, Josephus twice addressed a crowd in Hebrew on behalf of Roman commanders. According to *Aristeas*, the knowledge of Hebrew was necessary for translating

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118 Rajak's summary is short and to the point: “In the Gospel of John certain names are said to be ‘in Hebrew’: Bethesda (5:2), Gabbatha (19.13), Golgotha (19.17) and the appellation ‘Rabbouni’ (20.16). While the place-name forms look Aramaic, they could have served at the time in Hebrew too, if there was constant interaction between the two languages” (Rajak, *Josephus*, 232).

the Torah into Greek. According to Papias, the Church maintained a tradition that Matthew recorded the “oracles” of the Lord in Hebrew.

A question can be posed relating to the title of the article: What do Ἑβραῖστί and Συριστί mean in the first century? Answer: Ἑβραῖστί means “Hebrew,” Συριστί means “Aramaic,” and no, Ἑβραῖστί does not ever appear to mean “Aramaic” in attested texts during the Second Temple and Greco-Roman periods.<sup>119</sup>

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119 Such a simple statement would not normally need an essay of this length, but that length is partially a testimony to how widely this term has been misused and misunderstood.