

The Galilean Background of Mishnaic Hebrew

GARY A. RENDSBURG



All scholars today agree that Mishnaic Hebrew (MH) represents a colloquial dialect used in Eretz-Israel in late antiquity¹ and that its literary counterpart was the continuum represented by Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) and Qumran Hebrew (QH).² These conclusions have resulted in the widely-accepted theory that the Hebrew language in late antiquity was characterized by diglossia.³

¹ The first scholar to recognize this was M. H. Segal. See his standard grammars: *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford, 1927); *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Tel-Aviv, 1936) (Hebrew).

² The grouping of BH and QH as one continuum is accepted by most scholars. See, e.g., H. Yalon, *Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Jerusalem, 1967), 71 (Hebrew). For a full treatment, see the grammars by E. Qimron, "The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls" (doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University; Jerusalem, 1976) (Hebrew); *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Atlanta, 1986). This position has been challenged recently by S. Morag, "Qumran Hebrew: Some Typological Observations," *VT* 38 (1988), 148–164. The data utilized by Morag are undeniable, but in the main it is still true that QH is closer to BH than it is to MH. On the other hand, see my closing comments below, p. 237.

³ I use the term diglossia according to its original meaning as defined by C. A. Ferguson, "Diglossia," *Word* 15 (1959), 325–340. Since Ferguson's introduction of the term, diglossia has come to mean different things to different people; see J. A. Fishman, "The Sociology of Language," in: *Current Trends in Linguistics*, ed. T. A. Sebeok (14 vols.; The Hague, 1967–76), XII, 1689–1701. On the diglossia of Hebrew in late antiquity, see E. Y. Kutscher, "The Language of *Hazal*," in: *Hanoch Yalon Jubilee Volume*, eds. S. Lieberman et al. (Jerusalem, 1963), 247–248 (Hebrew); J. Fellman, "On Diglossia," *Language Sciences* 34 (1975), 39; C. Rabin, "Hebrew and Aramaic in the First Century," in: *The Jewish People in the First Century*, eds. S. Safrai and M. Stern (2 vols.;

I will attempt here to advance the discussion by addressing the issue of the specific origins of MH. Scholars have previously opined that MH or an early form thereof was also the colloquial variety of Hebrew in biblical times,⁴ and that BH served as a literary language only.⁵ Accordingly, the diglossia of Hebrew attested to in late antiquity can be projected back to the biblical period as well.⁶

I accept this hypothesis wholeheartedly.⁷ Now, however, due to recent studies in the dialect geography of ancient Hebrew we are able to refine the above conclusion regarding MH. I propose that MH is more specifically the colloquial dialect of the northern regions of Eretz-Israel, i.e., the Galilee.

This view was once suggested in passing by C. Rabin. In a discussion of the relationship between Aramaic and MH, he wrote:

Of the many similarities with Aramaic there can be no doubt, but it is not easy to establish which of these are due to the effect of contract [*sic!*] of fully-formed Hebrew, which ones may be due to a northern origin of the parent dialects of Mishnaic Hebrew, in an area where they had common isoglosses with Aramaic, and which are the result of parallel development of Middle Aramaic and Middle Hebrew.⁸

This is the only statement about the Galilean background of MH I have encountered in the secondary literature. However, Rabin appears to have retracted from this view several years later, when he wrote that “the basis of mishnaic Hebrew . . . was the spoken language of the Judaeen population.”⁹

Assen, 1974–76), II, 1015–1016; and S. J. Lieberman, “Response to Professor Blau,” in: *Jewish Languages: Themes and Variations*, ed. H. H. Paper (Cambridge, MA, 1978), 26.

⁴ Segal, *Grammar*, 11; E. Ullendorff, *Is Biblical Hebrew a Language?* (Wiesbaden, 1977), 11 (= *BSOAS* 34 [1971], 249). Apparently this view is also stated very clearly by A. Bendavid, *Biblical Hebrew or Mishnaic Hebrew?* (Tel-Aviv, 1951), 69–73 (Hebrew) [unavailable to me, cited from C. Rabin, “Hebrew,” in: *Current Trends in Linguistics*, VI, 314]. This approach appears less explicitly, though certainly implicitly, in the book’s second edition; A. Bendavid, *Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew* (2 vols.; Tel-Aviv, 1967–71) (Hebrew).

⁵ Note the comment by J. Blau, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Wiesbaden, 1976), 1, that BH “was always a literary language” (Blau’s italics).

⁶ See G. A. Rendsburg, “*Laqfil* Infinitives: Hiph’il or Yiph’il?” *Orientalia* 51 (1982), 235–236; Ullendorff, *Is Biblical Hebrew a Language?*, 11; and W. Chomsky, *Hebrew: The Eternal Language* (Philadelphia, 1964), 161.

⁷ G. A. Rendsburg, *Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew* (New Haven, 1990).

⁸ Rabin, “Hebrew,” 322–323.

⁹ Idem, “Hebrew and Aramaic in the First Century,” 1015.

However, I would like to return to Rabin's earlier suggestion and attempt to supply the evidence to substantiate it. Before doing so, a few prefatory words about the recent research in regional dialects of ancient Hebrew are in order.

The vast majority of biblical literature was composed in Judah in general, or in Jerusalem in particular, or by exiles from Judah and Jerusalem. Thus, the regional standard of the Bible may be called Judahite Hebrew (JH). Stories which emanate from the north, such as those concerning the northern judges or the northern kings, often reflect different grammatical usages¹⁰ and may be attributed to a northern Hebrew dialect, Israelian Hebrew (IH).¹¹ Moreover, most of these same usages are paralleled in the languages spoken to the north of Israel (Aramaic, Phoenician, and Ugaritic¹²) and in Transjordan (Deir 'Alla, Ammonite, and Moabite).¹³ This line of investigation now allows us to isolate Israelian texts in the Bible¹⁴ and to begin to write a grammar of IH.¹⁵

¹⁰ Many have been collected in the two commentaries by C. F. Burney, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings* (Oxford, 1903), 208–209; and *The Book of Judges* (London, 1918), 171–176. These two books have been reprinted in one volume with a prolegomenon by W. F. Albright (New York, 1970). The material from Kings is mentioned briefly by M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings* (AB 11; Garden City, 1988), 9.

¹¹ I have coined this term based on the usage of H. L. Ginsberg, *The Israelian Heritage of Judaism* (New York, 1982). S. Gevirtz, "Of Syntax and Style in the 'Late Biblical Hebrew' – 'Old Canaanite' Connection," *JANES* 18 (1986), 25 and n. 1, independently adduced the same term.

¹² I accept the classification system of H. L. Ginsberg, "The Northwest Semitic Languages," in: *Patriarchs*, ed. B. Mazar (New Brunswick, 1970), 102–106, which places Phoenician and Ugaritic together in his "Phoenic" group.

¹³ A convenient and very useful summary of most of the information (though not the Ugaritic data) is W. R. Garr, *Dialect Geography of Syria-Palestine, 1000–586 B.C.E.* (Philadelphia, 1985).

¹⁴ For an illustration of this method, see G. A. Rendsburg, "The Northern Origin of 'The Last Words of David' (2 Sam 23, 1–7)," *Biblica* 69 (1988), 113–121; and idem, "Additional Notes on 'The Last Words of David' (2 Sam 23, 1–7)," *Biblica* 70 (1989), 403–408. For a much more comprehensive work, see idem, *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms* (Atlanta, 1990). Other Israelian texts are noted below, in the course of the discussion.

¹⁵ Idem, "Morphological Evidence for Regional Dialects in Ancient Hebrew," in: *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew*, ed. W. Bodine (Winona Lake, forthcoming). For the theoretical framework, see B. Halpern, "Dialect Distribution in Canaan and the Deir Alla Inscriptions," in: "Working With No Data": *Semitic and Egyptian Studies Presented to Thomas O. Lambdin*, ed. D. M. Golomb (Winona Lake, 1987), 119–139. Note especially his comment that "Canaan was linguistically cantonized" (p. 139).

My own investigations of ancient Hebrew dialects have made it clear that MH shares many of the same properties as IH. Twelve such instances, taken collectively, point to the Galilean origin of MH (see Figure 1 for a convenient summary of the data).

1) The origin of the MH relative pronoun *še-* has been widely discussed, but one will agree with E. Y. Kutscher that "its use was common in the vernacular of Northern Eretz-Israel."¹⁶ This conclusion is reached on the basis of the cognate evidence and on the distribution of this form in IH texts. The cognate form *š* occurs in Phoenician and Ammonite,¹⁷ and perhaps at Deir 'Alla.¹⁸ In pre-exilic biblical texts, *še-* is limited to northern contexts: the Song of Deborah (Judg. 5:7 – twice), the Gideon cycle (Judg. 6:17, 7:12, 8:26), and the Elisha cycle (II Kgs. 6:11). Not until exilic and post-exilic times did *še-* penetrate Judah (Lam. 2:15, 2:16, 4:9, 5:18; Ezra 8:20; I Chr. 5:20, 27:27; etc.). Even in the later period its most frequent appearance is in Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, both of which are most probably northern compositions.¹⁹

2) The MH feminine singular demonstrative pronoun *zô* is another characteristic of IH, as again may be seen both in the cognate evidence and in its distribution in the Bible. In Phoenician and Aramaic the corresponding form is either *z* or *zʔ*.²⁰ The vocalization of these forms is not known but, at the very least, their consonantism aligns with the MH form *zô*. In the Bible, *zô* (or the alternate spelling *zôh*) appears in Hos. 7:16, a northern prophet; Ps. 132:12, a northern psalm;²¹ II Kgs. 6:19, in

¹⁶ E. Y. Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (Leiden, 1982), 32.

¹⁷ See Garr, *Dialect Geography*, 85–86.

¹⁸ This is the interpretation of J. A. Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla* (Chico, 1980), 31.

¹⁹ On Ecclesiastes, see M. Dahood, "Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in Qoheleth," *Biblica* 33 (1952), 30–52, 191–221; and J. R. Davila, "Qoheleth and Northern Hebrew," in: *Sopher Mahir: Northwest Semitic Studies Presented to Stanislav Segert = Maarav* 5–6 (1990), 69–87. On Song of Songs, see S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York, 1906), 448–449; and Y. Avishur, "Stylistic Common Elements between Ugaritic Literature and Song of Songs," *Beth Mikra* 59 (1974), 508–526 (Hebrew). See also the discussion in M. H. Pope, *Song of Songs* (AB 7C; Garden City, 1977), 33–34, 362. See also the Excursus, p. 238.

²⁰ Garr, *Dialect Geography*, 83–84. An exceptional case is *zʔt* in the Tell Fekheriyeh inscription, which forms an isogloss with JH and Moabite.

²¹ The linguistic evidence is presented in Rendsburg, *Psalms*, 87–90. Note the statement of F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA, 1973), 97: "the traditions of Psalm 132 are wholly independent of the traditions in the Deuteronomistic history." I would go one step further and claim that this independence results from the psalm's Israelian provenance.

the Elisha cycle; six times in Ecclesiastes (2:2, 2:24, 5:15, 5:18, 7:23, 9:13); and Ezek. 40:45. This last example is problematic but may be explained as a northern grammatical feature in exilic and post-exilic literature due to the reunion of northern and southern exiles in Mesopotamia in the sixth century B.C.E.²² Again, our conclusion was anticipated by Kutscher: "It is probable that the form *zô/zôh* existed from early times as a dialectal form mainly in the Northern speech."²³

3) The MH plural demonstrative pronoun *ʔəllû* is only slightly different from the corresponding BH form *ʔəlleh*. This minor difference is significant, however, as the MH pronunciation probably is paralleled in Phoenician. Our evidence is meager, but the spelling *ily* by Plautus in *Poenulus* 938 apparently points to a *u*-class vowel at the end of the word.²⁴

4) The *nomen actionis* form *qəṭīlah* is very common in MH but is relatively rare in BH. However, when it occurs in the latter, *qəṭīlah* appears disproportionately in northern contexts, for example: Judg. 5:16 (Song of Deborah), Judg. 14:12, 14:19 – twice (Samson story), I Sam. 13:21 (history of Saul), I Kgs. 19:8 (Elijah cycle), Job 41:10,²⁵ Eccl. 12:12, II Chr. 30:17. The last example is especially interesting, as this chapter, which has no parallel in Kings, is specifically concerned with the remnant of Israelians residing in the north during the reign of Hezekiah of Judah. This list points to a northern home for the *qəṭīlah* form, as was already recognized by M. H. Segal: "The fact that in earlier BH it occurs only in the Song of Deborah and in the story of Elijah may, perhaps, tend to show that it was originally a Northern dialectal form."²⁶

5) The 3rd feminine singular perfect of IIIy verbs in MH bears the termination *-āt* (as opposed to BH *-āh*).²⁷ Historically, the MH ending is

²² C. H. Gordon, "North Israelite Influence on Postexilic Hebrew," *IEJ* 5 (1955), 85–88. This view has been accepted by Kutscher, *History*, 55.

²³ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁴ S. Segert, *A Grammar of Phoenician and Punic* (Munich, 1976), 56, 107.

²⁵ I accept the hypothesis of D. N. Freedman, "Orthographic Peculiarities in the Book of Job," in: *Eretz-Israel*, IX (Jerusalem, 1969), 35–44, esp. p. 43, concerning the northern provenance of the book of Job. In addition, style-switching or code-switching is at work in Job, whereby the author has intentionally colored the language of the book to enhance its non-Judahite setting. See S. A. Kaufman, "The Classification of the North West Semitic Dialects of the Biblical Period and Some Implications Thereof," in: *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1988), 55.

²⁶ Segal, *Grammar*, 103. This statement is absent in his later Hebrew edition.

²⁷ *Idem*, *Grammar*, 91–92; Kutscher, *History*, 128; and G. Haneman, *A Morphology of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Tel-Aviv, 1980), 342–343 (Hebrew).

older than its BH counterpart. It appears, therefore, that MH springs from a dialect which preserved this ancient feature.²⁸ Since the ending *-āt* is standard in Aramaic,²⁹ northern Israel would be the home of such a dialect. This is borne out by the use of *hyt* in II Kgs. 9:37 in a story set in the Jezreel Valley. Unfortunately, the picture is more complicated. Other IIIy verbs which retain the ending *-āt* in BH appear in Lev. 25:21, 26:34, Jer. 13:19, Ezek. 24:12, and in line 3 of the Siloam Tunnel inscription. The date of Leviticus is a moot point, but the two forms in this book may be explained as archaic survivals. The forms in Jeremiah and Ezekiel may be understood as true Aramaisms, since both of these books have many such examples. The last example is still problematic, since one would not expect to find a form with *-āt* in eighth-century Jerusalemite Hebrew. Do we assume that the scribe was an Israelian who had come south after the fall of Samaria? Or do we assume that this, too, is an Aramaism, based on our knowledge that Jerusalemite officials already knew Aramaic by this time (II Kgs. 18:26 = Isa. 36:11)?³⁰ Despite these difficulties, I maintain that the ending *-āt* in IIIy verbs was a characteristic of IH which continued into MH.

6) Another common trait of MH is the "double plural" construction, e.g., *rāʾšê šānîm*, whereby both *nomen regens* and *nomen rectum* in a construct chain are morphologically plural.³¹ S. Gevirtz has noted recently that this grammatical usage is characteristic of Phoenician, Ugaritic, Byblos Amarna texts, and IH.³² Examples from the Bible are to be found in Gen. 49:23 (blessing to Joseph), Judg. 5:6, 5:10 (Song of Deborah), Pss. 29:1, 45:10, 47:10, 74:13, 77:6, 78:49 (all northern psalms³³). It is true that double plurals occur elsewhere in the Bible where northern provenance

²⁸ See Kutscher, *History*, 128.

²⁹ See, e.g., R. Degen, *Altaramäische Grammatik* (Wiesbaden, 1969), 76; and F. Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (Wiesbaden, 1974), 51, 66.

³⁰ In more general terms, see Kutscher, *History*, 67.

³¹ Segal, *Grammar*, 187; and Kutscher, *History*, 129. Although there are ample illustrations of this usage in Segal, *Grammar* (Hebrew), 97–100, there is no explicit statement concerning the phenomenon.

³² Gevirtz, "Of Syntax and Style," 28–29; and idem, "Asher in the Blessing of Jacob (Genesis xlix 20)," *VT* 37 (1987), 160.

³³ For full documentation, see Rendsburg, *Psalms*. Also, consult the following references. For Psalm 29: H. L. Ginsberg, "A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter," in: *Atti del XIX Congresso Internazionale degli Orientalisti (Roma 1935)* (Rome, 1938), 472–476. For Psalm 45: M. Battenweiser, *The Psalms* (Chicago, 1938), 85–89. For Psalm 47 (within the Korah collection): M. J. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah* (Sheffield, 1982). For Psalms 74, 77, 78 (all within the Asaph collection): M. J. Buss, "The Psalms of Asaph and Korah," *JBL* 82 (1963), 382–392, esp. 384.

is not indicated, e.g., in Chronicles,³⁴ but the overall picture still favors Gevartz's conclusion. Accordingly, the use of the double plural is another trait which links MH and northern dialects.

7) The noun *pō'ēl*, "worker," the active participle from the verbal root *p'l*, "work, do," is much more common in MH than it is in BH.³⁵ This verb is standard in Phoenician,³⁶ and although the inscriptions are not vocalized it is clear in several instances that *p'l* is the active participle meaning "worker."³⁷ Ugaritic uses the by-form *b'l*,³⁸ and now *p'l* is attested in the Deir 'Alla texts (Combination I, line 2).³⁹ In none of these languages, in fact, does the verb 'šy occur. It therefore may be concluded that *p'l* is a northern lexeme. This is borne out by the distribution of this verb in the Bible;⁴⁰ a significant proportion of the attestations of *p'l* occurs in IH texts such as Hosea (7:10), Job (34:32, 36:23), Proverbs (16:4, 30:20),⁴¹ Deuteronomy 32 (v. 27),⁴² the Korah psalms (44:2), and the Asaph psalms (74:12). In addition, one example occurs in the Balaam oracles (Num. 23:23) where style-switching is clearly in effect. In light of this evidence, we are now in a position to answer the question posed by Kutscher: "Is it

³⁴ R. Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Toward an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose* (Missoula, 1976), 42.

³⁵ For a list of occurrences in MH, see C. H. Kasovsky, *Thesaurus Mishnae* (4 vols.; Jerusalem, 1956–60), IV, 1484–1485; idem, *Thesaurus Thosephtae* (6 vols.; New York, 1932–61), V, 565–567; and B. Kosovsky, *Concordantiae Verborum quae in Mechilta D'Rabbi Išmael* (4 vols.; New York, 1967–69), IV, 1493–1494.

³⁶ R. S. Tomback, *A Comparative Semitic Lexicon of the Phoenician and Punic Languages* (Missoula, 1978), 267–268.

³⁷ Ibid. Note examples h), i), j) in Tomback's list.

³⁸ C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome, 1967), 375.

³⁹ Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla*, 25, 34–35.

⁴⁰ I exclude from my calculations the construct plural participle *pō'ālê*, which is quite frequent in the idiom *pō'ālê 'āwen*, and the noun *pō'al*, "labor, work," which likewise is a common word in the Bible. For similar reasons, A. Hurvitz, "Linguistic Criteria for Dating Problematic Biblical Texts," *Hebrew Abstracts* 14 (1973), 75, excluded *pō'ālê 'āwen* from his investigations.

⁴¹ For the northern affinities of Proverbs, see W. F. Albright, "Some Canaanite-Phoenician Sources of Hebrew Wisdom," in: *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, eds. M. Noth and D. W. Thomas (SVT 3; Leiden, 1960), 1–15; Ginsberg, *The Israelian Heritage*, 36; and Y. Avishur, *Stylistic Studies of Word-Pairs in Biblical and Ancient Semitic Literatures* (AOAT 210; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1984), 440 and n. 6.

⁴² On the northern provenance of this poem, see O. Eissfeldt, *Das Lied Moses Deuteronomium 32.1–43 und das Lehrgedicht Asaphs Psalm 78 samt einer Analyse der Umgebung des Mose-Liedes* (Berlin, 1958), 42; and E. Nielsen, "Historical Perspectives and Geographical Horizons: On the Question of North-Israelite Elements in Deuteronomy," *ASTI* 11 (1977–78), 82.

possible that here, too, we should look for its origin in Canaanite where it is employed as a standard root?"⁴³ The answer is yes, with the qualification that it is specifically a northern Canaanite trait.

8) The verbal root *šrk*, "need," is very common in MH.⁴⁴ In BH it appears only once, in II Chr. 2:15, but its context—a letter sent by King Hiram of Tyre to Solomon—is most significant. The root *šrk* has not yet been found in a Phoenician inscription,⁴⁵ but the evidence nonetheless points to the northern home of this verb. The widespread use of this root in Aramaic dialects supports this conclusion.⁴⁶

9) The syntagma of *hyh* + participle, sometimes called the progressive tense, is a distinctively MH usage.⁴⁷ It appears commonly in Aramaic,⁴⁸ and in the Bible it appears frequently in northern settings. II Sam. 3:6, 17 concern Avner of the house of Saul; I Kgs. 22:35, II Kgs. 6:8, 17:33 (twice), 41, and II Chr. 18:34 all concern the northern kingdom of Israel; Job 1:14 is in a non-Judahite setting.⁴⁹ This evidence permits us to view this construction as a grammatical feature linking Israelian and Aramean territory.⁵⁰ The region in which MH developed is to be located within this area as well.

10) The verbal root *nwm*, "speak" in MH,⁵¹ is to be identified with BH *nʾm*. In the former, *nwm* is simply an ordinary word for "speak," an alternative to the usual verb *ʾmr*. In the Bible, *nʾm* is restricted to Divine

⁴³ Kutscher, *History*, 135.

⁴⁴ Kasovsky, *Thesaurus Mishnae*, IV, 1534–1536; idem, *Thesaurus Thosephtae*, VI, 32–38; Kosovsky, *Concordantiae Verborum quae in Mechilta*, IV, 1537–1538; and M. Moreshet, *A Lexicon of the New Verbs in the Tannaitic Hebrew* (Ramat-Gan, 1980), 312–313 (Hebrew).

⁴⁵ According to Kutscher, *History*, 136, *šrk* occurs in Ugaritic, but this is most doubtful. J. Aistleitner, *Wörterbuch der ugaritischen Sprache* (Berlin, 1967), 270, included an entry for this word, which he translated as "versagen," but his lone example is spurious. The form *yšrk* in 1 Aqht 43 is almost certainly the 3rd person masculine singular imperfect of the root *šrr* with the 2nd person masculine singular pronominal suffix *-k*, to be translated, "may he [Baal] afflict you."

⁴⁶ See the convenient survey by Moreshet, *Lexicon*, 313, n. 18**.

⁴⁷ Segal, *Grammar*, 156; and Segal, *Grammar* (Hebrew), 182.

⁴⁸ See the survey by J. C. Greenfield, "The 'Periphrastic Imperative' in Aramaic and Hebrew," *IEJ* 19 (1969), 206–207.

⁴⁹ The many examples in post-exilic books (Dan. 8:5, 7; 10:2, 9; Neh. 3:26, 5:18, 6:14, 19 [twice]) are to be considered true Aramaisms.

⁵⁰ For discussion of this phenomenon and other examples of it, see C. Rabin, "The Emergence of Classical Hebrew," in: *The Age of the Monarchies: Culture and Society*, ed. A. Malamat (Jerusalem, 1979), 72.

⁵¹ Kasovsky, *Thesaurus Mishnae*, III, 1188; idem, *Thesaurus Thosephtae*, V, 36; and Moreshet, *Lexicon*, 223–224.

speech, except in four instances—all in northern contexts. The four places where *nʾm* is predicated of humans are Num. 24:3–4, 15–16, both in the Balaam oracles; II Sam. 23:1, in a poem of undoubtedly northern origin;⁵² Ps. 36:2, in a poem with other IH characteristics;⁵³ and Prov. 30:1, in words ascribed to Agur of Massa, located by most authorities in the Syrian Desert.⁵⁴ Accordingly, the use of *nwm* for human speech in MH is to be explained as a feature of a northern dialect.

11) In MH the plural construct of *yôm*, “day,” is usually *yēmê*, but the alternative form *yēmôt* appears quite frequently.⁵⁵ This latter form is standard in Phoenician,⁵⁶ suggesting that *yēmôt* is a northern usage.⁵⁷ Support for this conclusion is found in the fact that one of the two biblical attestations of *yēmôt*, in a poem in Deut. 32:7,⁵⁸ is widely believed to be northern in origin.⁵⁹

12) The MH Nitpaʿal is often used in a passive sense.⁶⁰ The corresponding BH Hitpaʿel has this meaning in only three instances (Mic. 6:16, Prov. 31:30, Eccl. 8:10),⁶¹ all in northern contexts. The first of these is from a southern prophet, but this verse specifically mentions Omri and Ahab; the latter two appear in northern compositions, as noted above. It is most

⁵² See above, n. 14.

⁵³ For full treatment, see Rendsburg, *Psalms*, 39–43. Note the comment of C. A. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, I (ICC; New York, 1906), 315: “The author of v. 7 was familiar with Lebanon and Hermon and the Mediterranean Sea, and possibly had his home in northwestern Galilee, where these were in view.”

⁵⁴ See, for example, I. Ephʿal, *The Ancient Arabs* (Jerusalem, 1982), 218–219.

⁵⁵ Kasovsky, *Thesaurus Mishnae*, II, 846; idem, *Thesaurus Thosephtae*, III, 499–501; and Kosovsky, *Concordantiae Verborum quae in Mechilta*, III, 929.

⁵⁶ Tomback, *Phoenician and Punic*, 125.

⁵⁷ For a different explanation, see Kutscher, *History*, 134.

⁵⁸ The second attestation is in Ps. 90:15. Since there is no concentration of IH features in this psalm, it cannot be considered a northern composition. There is another IH characteristic, the use of the root *nʿm*, “pleasant, good”; see Rendsburg, “Additional Notes on ‘The Last Words of David’,” esp. p. 407, n. 38, but this is insufficient to ascribe northern provenance to Psalm 90. The form *yēmôt* was used in Ps. 90:15, probably to evoke a similar sound to the form *šĕnôt*, “years of,” in the next stich. One might compare the manner in which American poets occasionally employ British usages (lorry = “truck,” lift = “elevator,” flat = “apartment,” etc.) for metrical or rhyming purposes.

⁵⁹ See above, n. 42.

⁶⁰ Segal, *Grammar*, 67.

⁶¹ E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford, 1910), 150. Only two of the three examples are cited there; perhaps Mic. 6:16 is excluded because it is often emended by critics. See D. R. Hillers, *Micah* (Philadelphia, 1984), 81, note s.

probable, therefore, that the passive connotation of the Nitpa'al/Hitpa'el conjugation was a feature of northern Hebrew reflected in both MH and IH.

These twelve points of morphology, syntax, and vocabulary are a representative sampling of the nexuses linking MH and IH.⁶² To these points may be added the larger issue of the relationship between MH and Aramaic. Scholars have noted previously the strong Aramaic coloring of MH. While many of these judgments have been grossly exaggerated, it is obvious that MH has more ties to Aramaic than does BH. This phenomenon, however, is not to be attributed to any Aramaic influence over MH, rather it is the result of dialect geography. IH/MH was used in a region of Israel with close ties to Aramean and Phoenician territory. Accordingly, the isoglosses, which may be traced on a map, will frequently link IH/MH with Aramaic and Phoenician to the exclusion of standard BH (= JH). These data point to the Galilean origin of Mishnaic Hebrew, which should not be surprising given the Galilean provenance of the Mishnah itself. Moreover, this also explains the "striking points of contact" between MH and Punic (a North African branch of Phoenician) noted by J. T. Milik.⁶³

While it is true that IH is attested mainly before 721 B.C.E. and that MH is attested only from ca. 200 C.E. onward, we simply have very little evidence of northern language in the millennium which separates these two dates (an exception would be Nehemiah 9, on which see below, n. 67). Indeed, "we hear very little about further developments on the territory of the state of Israel after the fall of Samaria."⁶⁴ But there are sufficient clues in the Bible and elsewhere to support our assumption that Israelians continued to populate the region even after 721 B.C.E. A sketch of the evidence follows.

⁶² I am inclined to view the data presented by B. A. Levine, "Survivals of Ancient Canaanite in the Mishnah" (doctoral dissertation, Brandeis University; Waltham, 1962), and J. C. Greenfield, "Amurrite, Ugaritic, and Canaanite," in: *Proceedings of the International Conference on Semitic Studies* (Jerusalem, 1969), 99, as further support for the Galilean background of MH. Even though Ugaritic words serve as the springboard for these avenues of research, as noted above, n. 12, Ugaritic and Phoenician are to be classified together within Northwest Semitic.

⁶³ J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea* (Naperville, 1959), 131.

⁶⁴ S. Herrmann, *A History of Israel in Old Testament Times* (Philadelphia, 1981), 252.

First of all, the annals of Sargon II inform us that only 27,290 inhabitants of Samaria were exiled.⁶⁵ This relatively small number suggests that a large population remained behind. Secondly, stories such as those in II Chr. 30 and Jer. 41:4–5 imply that Israelians continued to dwell in their homeland and were even loyal to Jerusalem.⁶⁶ Thirdly, the survey of history in Neh. 9:5–37 is written from the perspective of a northerner some years after the fall of Samaria, as can be seen in the expression, “from the days of the kings of Assyria unto this day” (v. 32).⁶⁷ Finally, our post-biblical sources (e.g., Josephus) attest to the existence of a substantial Jewish population in the Galilee and Samaria but give no impression that they migrated there from Judah. Accordingly, despite the fact that II Kgs. 17:24 refers to the transfer of Mesopotamians to Samaria, and notwithstanding the complex problem of the origin of the Samaritans, “it can be stated with assurance that the Assyrians did not annihilate the Israelite population of the North, and that the rural population of Samaria and Galilee remained and continued to exist.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, we may assume, having no evidence to the contrary, that IH continued to be used in the region and that MH was its eventual successor.

To return now to matters of linguistics. From the list of twelve features which link IH and MH, it must be stressed that IH and MH are not identical. As stated at the outset, not only did regional varieties of ancient Hebrew exist, but diglossia did as well. I believe, as did earlier scholars in the field of Hebrew linguistics, that IH (as part of what we call BH) was a literary dialect and that MH was a colloquial one. One important point should suffice to illustrate the distinction between the two: the consecutive tenses were characteristic of the written dialect,

⁶⁵ A. L. Oppenheim, “Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts,” in: *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. J. B. Pritchard (Princeton, 1969), 284–285.

⁶⁶ Concerning II Chr. 30, I agree with J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia, 1972), 281, that “there is no reason whatever to question the historicity of this incident.”

⁶⁷ The northern provenance of Neh. 9 was first posited by A. C. Welch, “The Source of Nehemiah IX,” *ZAW* 47 (1929), 130–137. Welch, however, assumed that the text came from ca. 721 B.C.E., probably because he never considered the possibility of a continued Israelian presence in the northern part of the country. See G. A. Rendsburg, “The Northern Origin of Nehemiah 9,” *Biblica* (forthcoming), where the linguistic evidence to support Welch’s northern hypothesis will be presented.

⁶⁸ S. Japhet, “People and Land in the Restoration Period,” in: *Das Land Israel in biblischer Zeit*, ed. G. Strecker (Göttingen, 1983), 103–125, esp. 105. I thank Professor Japhet for bringing this article to my attention.

northern (IH) or southern (JH), but they were not used in spoken Hebrew (e.g., MH).⁶⁹

Similarities and differences between IH and MH can be understood only within the larger picture of Hebrew dialectology. Accordingly, I conclude with a brief presentation of the different varieties of ancient Hebrew known to date (see Figure 2). We may distinguish a southern literary dialect (JH) and a northern literary dialect (IH) in the biblical period.⁷⁰ About 80 per cent of the Bible is written in the former, but we are able to isolate texts composed in the latter. In contrast to these written regional varieties were the spoken dialects of Eretz-Israel, which are obviously much harder to reconstruct, though sufficient colloquialisms have penetrated the biblical corpus to afford us a glance at ancient spoken Hebrew.⁷¹

We have determined that MH was a spoken dialect native to the northern region of Israel in the post-biblical period, or late antiquity. Little can be said about the written dialect of the north. It is possible, however, that the language of certain prose tales imbedded in rabbinic literature (e.g., the story of the sons of Levi in M Yevamot 16:7) represents the written dialect of the north, especially since these stories include grammatical features (infinitive absolute, consecutive tenses, etc.) more reminiscent of BH than of MH.⁷²

In the southern part of the country, particularly in Jerusalem, we assume a continuation of JH, especially in its LBH garb. Unfortunately, we have no demonstrably Jerusalemite texts from the first century C.E. by which to test this assumption. QH, with its many links to BH, especially

⁶⁹ On this dichotomy, see G. A. Rendsburg, "Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew as Revealed Through Compound Verbs," in: *Bono Homini Donum: Essays in Historical Linguistics in Memory of J. Alexander Kerns*, eds. Y. L. Arbeitman and A. R. Bomhard (Amsterdam, 1981), 665–677. The discussion of the progressive tense there needs alteration in light of the present article.

⁷⁰ Even this is an oversimplification. Presumably there were many local varieties: Galilean, Ephraimite, Gileadite, Benjaminite, Judahite, Negevite, etc. But given the information at our disposal, it is sufficient and convenient to distinguish two main regional standards: JH and IH.

⁷¹ The data are assembled in Rendsburg, *Disglossia in Ancient Hebrew*.

⁷² For discussion of these stories, though without any assignment of them to a northern literary dialect, see C. Rabin, "The Historical Background of Qumran Hebrew," in: *Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, eds. C. Rabin and Y. Yadin (*Scripta Hierosolymitana*, IV; Jerusalem, 1965), 155–156; and Rabin, "Hebrew and Aramaic in the First Century," 1015–1017.

LBH, is obviously a literary dialect of the southern part of the country, but one hesitates to equate it with the regional standard of Jerusalem.⁷³

The spoken language of the southern region of Israel is another enigma and should perhaps be associated with such texts as the Copper Scroll (3Q15) and *Miqṣat Ma'āse ha-Torah* (= MMT) (4Q394–399) from Qumran and the Bar-Kokhba letters. The language of these texts is similar to MH but not identical with it.⁷⁴ The minor differences which separate the Copper Scroll, MMT, and the Bar-Kokhba letters from the language of the Mishnah are probably due to regional variation.⁷⁵ The linguistic cantonization of Eretz-Israel assumed for the biblical period no doubt continued into late antiquity as well. Rabbinic literature itself advises us of local variations;⁷⁶ it is also important to recall Jerome's observation about the Hebrew he encountered in Eretz-Israel ca. 400 C.E.: "According to the discretion of readers and the different regions the same word is pronounced with different sounds and accents."⁷⁷

⁷³ This is the most important conclusion I derive from Morag, "Qumran Hebrew: Some Typological Observations."

⁷⁴ On the Copper Scroll, see J. T. Milik, "Le rouleau de cuivre provenant de la grotte 3Q (3Q15)," in: *Les 'petites grottes' de Qumrân*, eds. M. Baillet, J. T. Milik, and R. de Vaux (*DJD*, III; Oxford, 1962), 221–225. This material should be read in conjunction with the important review article by J. C. Greenfield, "The Small Caves of Qumran," *JAOS* 89 (1969), 136–137. A full treatment of MMT is still forthcoming; in the meantime, see E. Qimron and J. Strugnell, "An Unpublished Halakhic Letter from Qumran," in: *Biblical Archaeology Today* (Jerusalem, 1985), 404–406. On the Bar-Kokhba letters, see E. Y. Kutscher, "The Language of the Hebrew and Aramaic Letters of Bar Kosiba and his Contemporaries, Second Study: The Hebrew Letters," *Leshonenu* 26 (1961), 7–23 (Hebrew); idem, *History*, 142.

⁷⁵ This was recognized by Milik, *Les 'petites grottes'*, 222, who considered the language of the Copper Scroll to be an "hébreu populaire, parlé effectivement par les Juifs résidant en Judée, au sud-ouest et au sud de la Palestine, ainsi que dans la vallée du Jourdain."

⁷⁶ See Kutscher, *History*, 141–142.

⁷⁷ Quoted by Kutscher, *ibid.*, 142.

Excursus on Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs

As a result of this study, I propose a compromise position regarding the language of Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. Dahood argued for a northern provenance of Ecclesiastes on the basis of the many affinities between the book and Phoenician.⁷⁸ He was challenged, in many ways correctly, by R. Gordis, who claimed that the language of Ecclesiastes was closer to MH than it was to Phoenician.⁷⁹ The same conclusion was reached by Bendavid.⁸⁰ In light of the above, I claim that both views are correct. The Hebrew of Ecclesiastes is similar to *both* Phoenician and MH because all three comprise what we may tentatively label the Israelian-Phoenician dialect bundle. A very similar conclusion was reached independently by Davila.⁸¹ D. C. Fredericks also argued for a northern origin of Ecclesiastes but placed it in pre-exilic times, presumably because he did not take into consideration the possibility of Israelians remaining in Eretz-Israel in post-exilic times.⁸²

There has been less controversy concerning Song of Songs, but we may contrast the view of Driver and Avishur favoring a northern origin⁸³ with that of Bendavid favoring connections with MH.⁸⁴ Again, the Hebrew of Song of Songs may be *both* northern and close to MH, in light of the Israelian-Phoenician dialect bundle.

⁷⁸ Dahood, "Canaanite-Phoenician Influence."

⁷⁹ R. Gordis, "Was Koheleth a Phoenician?" *JBL* 74 (1955), 103–114.

⁸⁰ Bendavid, *Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew*, 77–80.

⁸¹ Davila, "Qoheleth and Northern Hebrew."

⁸² D. C. Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language: Re-evaluating Its Nature and Date* (Lewiston, NY, 1988).

⁸³ See above, n. 19.

⁸⁴ Bendavid, *Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew*, 74–76.

Fig. 1: Summary of MH Features and Their Cognates

MH Features	IH	Phoenician	Aramaic	Other
1. relative pronoun <i>še-</i>	<i>še-</i>	ʔš	—	Ammonite: ʔš Deir ‘Alla: ʔš (?)
2. fem. sg. demonstrative pronoun <i>zô</i>	<i>zô(h)</i>	<i>z(?)</i>	<i>zʔ</i>	—
3. plural demonstrative pronoun <i>ʔellû</i>	—	Plautus: <i>ily</i>	—	—
4. <i>qəṭīlah</i> form	<i>qəṭīlah</i>	—	—	—
5. 3rd fem. sg. perfect of IIIy verbs in <i>-āt</i>	<i>-āt</i>	—	<i>-āt</i>	—
6. “double plural” construction	dbl. pl.	dbl. pl.	—	Ugaritic: dbl. pl. Amarna: dbl. pl.
7. root <i>ʔl</i> , “work, do”	<i>ʔl</i>	<i>ʔl</i>	—	Deir ‘Alla: <i>ʔl</i> Ugaritic: <i>ʔl</i>
8. root <i>ʃrk</i> , “need”	—	(see Other)	<i>ʃrk</i>	II Chr. 2:15: <i>ʃrk</i>
9. <i>hyh</i> + participle	<i>hyh</i> + part.	—	<i>hyh</i> + part.	—
10. root <i>nwm</i> , “speak”	<i>nʔm</i>	—	—	—
11. plural construct <i>yēmôt</i> , “days”	<i>yēmôt</i>	<i>ymt</i>	—	—
12. Nitpa‘al in passive sense	Hitpa‘el in passive sense	—	—	—

Fig. 2: Varieties of Ancient Hebrew

	BIBLICAL		POST-BIBLICAL	
	Spoken	Written	Spoken	Written
N O R T H	isolated colloquialisms	IH	MH	isolated stories (e.g., M Yevamot 16:7)
S O U T H	isolated colloquialisms	JH	MMT Copper Scroll Bar-Kokhba	JH? QH?

THE GALILEE IN LATE ANTIQUITY

edited by Lee I. Levine

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America
New York and Jerusalem

Distributed by Harvard University Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts and London

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Printed in the United States of America

The Hebrew version of this volume will be published jointly by
The Jewish Theological Seminary of America and
Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, Jerusalem.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The Galilee in late antiquity / edited by Lee I. Levine.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-674-34113-9 : \$35.00

1. Galilee (Israel)--History--Congresses. 2. Jews--
-History--70-638--xCongresses. 3. Judaism--History--Talmudic
period, 10-425--Congresses. 4. Gallilee (Israel)--Church history--
-Congresses. I. Levine, Lee I.

DS110.G2G37 1992

933--dc20

92-12475 CIP