

# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HEBREW LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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A–F

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Who Reckons the Number', in which he even coined new Hebrew terms. Among the later Algerian scholars who wrote Hebrew compositions were Rabbi Haim Beliaḥ (1833–1920) of Tlemcen, Rabbi Sidi Fredj ben Avraham Ḥalimi (1876–1957) of Constantine, and Rabbi Maṣ'ud ben 'Eliyahu ha-Cohen (1893–1950) of Aïn Témouchent. The language used in Algerian Hebrew writings incorporates features from previous layers of Hebrew, i.e., Biblical, Rabbinic, Geonic, Arabicized Medieval strata, and, in later years, also modern terminology from the language of the *Haskala* (the Jewish Enlightenment movement). The extent to which each layer is represented in the language of a specific composition depends on its genre, topic, and author.

Circles of *maskilim*, i.e., scholars of the Jewish Enlightenment movement, were active in Algeria in the second half of the 19th century. These scholars, for whom the Hebrew language was an integral part of their national identity, submitted Hebrew articles to various Jewish newspapers published in Europe and in the Land of Israel. Several of the Algerian *maskilim* explicitly discussed in their writings the merits and status of the Hebrew language. For example, Shalom Bekache (1848–1927), who was one of the leading *maskilim* in Algiers, published in his Judeo-Arabic newspaper *Beth Israel* a detailed and reasoned essay praising the Hebrew Language and its standing in Jewish culture (issue 1, 25.6.1891, cols. 4–9; issue 2, 2.7.1891, cols. 21–25). The Algerian *maskilim* were also the driving force behind the development of Hebrew press in Algeria towards the end of the 19th century.

Evidence that Hebrew was spoken on special occasions by the Rabbanite elite in Algeria in the late 19th century is found in the introduction to Eliezer Ben Yehuda's monumental dictionary (p. 5). Ben Yehuda reports therein of his stay in Algiers during the winter of 1880–1881, and conveys his excitement over the Hebrew conversations he held with the elders of Algiers' Jewish community.

Another important aspect of Hebrew in Algeria was the significant presence of Hebrew components in the local Algerian Judeo-Arabic dialects (→ Judeo-Arabic, Medieval, Hebrew Component in). As in other Jewish languages, there are many Hebrew words and phrases embedded in Algerian Judeo-Arabic, mainly

from the realm of Jewish religion and Jewish culture. Some of these elements reflect ancient Hebrew traditions. For example, the expression *הוא הקדש ברוך הוא* *haq-qodeš baruk hu*, which is used by the Jews of Algiers, is already attested in old Rabbinic Hebrew manuscripts, as opposed to the expression *הוא הקדוש ברוך הוא* *haq-qadoš baruk hu*, which is prevalent elsewhere in North Africa.

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OFRA TIROSH-BECKER  
(The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

## Alliteration

Alliteration is a literary device whereby the same or similar consonantal sounds are used to create an oral-aural effect in a sentence or verse. Because Hebrew words are based on a trilateral root system, consonants in first, second, or third position within a Hebrew word or root may participate in the alliteration (as opposed to, for example, Old English, where initial consonants alliterate). In Biblical Hebrew alliteration was used only occasionally (also in contrast to Old English and other Old Germanic verse, in which alliteration was almost mandatory), although one should note that the device was used more frequently than commonly recognized, not only in poetry, but in prose texts as well. In particular, ancient authors would reach deep into the lexicon to

select a rare item that alliterated with other words nearby. Such soundplays were especially effective in a literature which was presented orally to an audience.

Examples in poetry include two uses of *hapax legomena*: 1) the root טנף *t-n-p* ‘soil (verb)’ in Song 5.3 אַטנפֿם *’āṭannāpēm* ‘shall I soil them’, an anagram of the root נטף *n-t-p* ‘drip’ in verse 5 נטפוּ *nāṭpū* ‘they drip’; see also the roots פתח *p-t-ḥ* ‘open’ in verses 2, 5, 6 and פשט *p-š-t* ‘disrobe’ in verse 5, along with the noun כפוח *kappōt* ‘palms’ in verse 5, which together form a string of like-sounding words based on the combination of /p/ + [dental]; 2) the root רפש *r-p-š* ‘muddy (verb)’ in the phrase רפשוּ גרפשוּ *maʿyān nirpās* ‘muddied spring’ at the beginning of Prov. 25.26, which anticipates the sounds of לפני־רשע *lipnē-rāšā* ‘before the wicked’ at the end of the verse.

Two examples in prose are the following: 1) Judg. 14.18, where the author refrained from using the word שמש *šemeš* ‘sun’ as a play on the name שמשון *šimšōn* ‘Samson’, and instead invoked the rare word החרקה *ha-ḥarsā* ‘the sun’ (elsewhere only Job 9.7), in anticipation of החרשתם *ḥāraštem* ‘you (masc.pl.) plowed’ later in the verse; 2) the unique word להקת *lahāqat* ‘band of (prophets)’ in 1 Sam. 19.20, which evokes the sounds of the common form לקחת *lāqahat* ‘to take’ five words earlier (see also two instances of the word מלאך *malāk* (once plural absolute, once plural construct), whose root לאך *l-k* enhances the oral-aural effect).

In addition, ancient Hebrew authors delighted in soundplays on proper nouns, both place and personal names. For the former, see especially Mic. 1.10–15, e.g., verse 11 with שפיר *šāpīr* ‘Shaphir’ and בשת *bōšet* ‘shame’; and verse 12 with לטוב *la-tōb* ‘for good’ and מרוח *mārōt* ‘Maroth’. While words with greater consonance may be found in the Bible, these examples are crucial to our subject, for they reveal that the ancient authors were attuned to alliteration. For example, the author of Mic. 1.11 clearly understood that the labial consonants [p] and [b] correspond to one another, while Mic 1.12 demonstrates that said individual realized the affinities between liquids [l] and [r], dentals [t] and [d], and labials [b] and [m] (see also the [o:] vowel that augments the soundplay via assonance). For an instance involving two personal names in the same passage, see 1 Sam. 2.34–36, with the rare verbal root ספח *s-p-ḥ* ‘join, assign,

associate’ (4 times elsewhere in the Bible) in the specific form ספחני *sāpāḥēnī* ‘assign me’ (verse 36) echoing the names ופינחס *hāp̄nī* and ופינחס *u-p̄inhās* ‘Hophni and Phineas’ (verse 34).

The handful of examples presented here do no more than illustrate the use of alliteration in the Bible, where literally hundreds of cases are to be found.

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GARY A. RENDSBURG  
(Rutgers University)

## Alphabet, Origin of

### I. ORIGIN

The origin of the alphabet goes back more than a thousand years earlier than when anything in the direct lineage of the alphabets of the modern world is known to have existed. People have been recording messages with pictographic ideograms for almost as long as there have been people, but if we adhere to the traditional understanding of *writing* as referring only to the explicit visible recording of *language* or *speech*, rather than extending it to cover any sort of graphic communication device, then writing began in Sumer, southern Mesopotamia, late in the 4th millennium B.C.E. A necessary (but not sufficient) condition for the origin of writing *ex nihilo* is a nascent ‘urbanism’, the settlement of people in groups larger than small villages, where everyone could know everyone else and everyone else’s business, such that some means is needed for keeping track of economic transactions. Another necessary condition is that the language of the originators of writing be *monosyllabic(ally organized)*, with