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Book Author(s): WILLIAM M. SCHNIEDEWIND

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## *Linguistic Nationalism and the Emergence of Hebrew*

*The degree of centralization in society and concentration of economic power is mirrored by the relative strength of the standard (or official) language.*

—A. Malmberg and B. Nordberg

The eighth century B.C.E. stands as a watershed in the linguistic history of Western civilization. Those tumultuous times witnessed the emergence of a linguistic imperialism in the Near East. Language ideology began to drive the creation of national literatures in Assyria and Egypt as well as in the kingdom of Judah. Indeed, the emergence of a distinct written Hebrew language should be understood as a political as much as a linguistic event.<sup>1</sup> Comparative examples abound. For instance, the distinction between Norwegian, Danish, and Scandinavian as three “languages” was more a reflex of nationalism and borders in the early twentieth century than it was the result of descriptive linguistics; likewise, the distinction between Serbian and Croatian is a reflex of political events, not linguistic events.<sup>2</sup> Such linguistic nationalism is not just a recent phenomenon; as Joshua Fishman points out, the notion that “a people’s individuality resides in its language is very old.”<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, it is perhaps as old as humanity itself. What was momentous in this period was the attachment of cultural identity to a national writing system.

In this chapter, we will see how the emergence of competing petty nations in Syria-Palestine, which characterized the early first millennium B.C.E., would mark a turning point in the history of the West Semitic languages. And, in particular, the rise of the Assyrian Empire would—for the first time—serve as a catalyst for the creation of the language of the Judean state—that is, Standard Biblical Hebrew (SBH), which would develop as the literary language of Judean scribes from the late eighth century until the disappearance of these scribes by the end of the sixth century B.C.E.

Though the sources for Judean Hebrew are straightforward, the language of the northern kingdom of Israel, *Israelian Hebrew* (IH), is more difficult to isolate. There is little doubt that there were different dialects of Hebrew in Israel and Judah during the Iron Age. This is indicated, for example, by the intentional use of nonstandard forms and words in texts dealing with the northern kingdom or in speech put into the mouths of northern figures. Thus, for example, when the northern prophet Elijah speaks, he uses forms like the imperative *liqhî*, “take” (reflecting northern dialects that preserve the initial *lamed*), when the Standard Biblical form is *q’hî*. Many more examples have been gathered by scholars,<sup>4</sup> but this serves to illustrate that the authors of the Bible were aware of different dialects and used these differences to distinguish group identity—north from south—in biblical literature; and it is hardly surprising that there would be different dialects of Hebrew in the various areas of Israel and Judah. Indeed, general studies in dialect geography lead us to expect a variety of dialects in the regions of Galilee, Samaria, and Judah. More problematic, however, is the question of whether there was a distinctive Israelian *written* standard. This seems unlikely. Whereas vernacular language is critical to group identity, there is no evidence that written language was associated with smaller groups before the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. In fact, the only fragment that we have of an Israelian monumental inscription—that is, an inscription in which a standard Israelian written register might be expected—apparently uses the typical Judean word *šr*, “which, that,” instead of the word *š*, which is typically associated with IH.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, this is meager evidence indeed, but this only underscores the minimal evidence for a standardized written IH. Ironically, most of what we know about IH was preserved by Judeans in the biblical corpus.

Even the name for the northern dialect(s) of Hebrew is unknown. Herein, we use the term *Israelian*, which utilizes a term known already for the people and the region on the Merneptah Stele in the thirteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Moreover,

the term *Israel* in Standard Biblical Hebrew is used to refer to the northern kingdom as distinct from the southern kingdom of Judah. Since *Israel* is a term for both the territory and the people, it is natural to use the related term *Israelian* for the language. It is clear, however, that there were also regional dialects that were closely associated with groups like the Gileadites or the Ephraimites (as in Judg. 12:4–6). Groups naturally associate dialect with territory, and it usually follows that the regional dialects or languages have their own names associated with the territories and ethnic groups. Indeed, the catalog of nations in Genesis 10 repeatedly used the classification “These are the descendants *by their language, their land, and their people*.” Thus, it seems likely that Gileadite, Ephraimite, Benjaminite, Samaritan, and Galilean would have been used to refer to the ancient regional dialects. There is no direct evidence of exactly what those dialects were called. The example in Judges 12 does suggest that Gileadite and Ephraimite were separate speech communities and thus are legitimate linguistic terms.

Although there is little doubt that there were “Israelian” dialects of Hebrew in antiquity, our sources are limited, sometimes disputed, and poorly encode dialect.<sup>7</sup> First, there are very few Israelian inscriptions; the only significant corpus is the Samaria ostraca. A major feature that distinguishes dialects is pronunciation, which is poorly encoded by writing systems. Indeed, an often-paraded example between British and American English would be the spelling of words like *colour/color*, yet ironically this difference in spelling actually does *not* describe a significant phonological difference between British and American English. Usually, differences in dialect are not encoded in the writing system, and consequently writing systems have a difficult time expressing the precise differences in dialect. The Canaanite shift, which describes a linguistic shift from /ā/ to /ō/ that occurred in the West Semitic languages, serves as a good illustration of this problem in Northwest Semitic dialects. We also know that the extent of this shift became more pronounced in Phoenician than in Judean. From the perspective of dialect geography, the Israelian dialect lies between Judah and Phoenicia; however, we have almost no tools to describe the extent to which this /ā/ to /ō/ shift might have affected IH. The Hebrew writing system is a poor transcription system, and the vocalic differences that make up dialects are not well represented. Nevertheless, there are more than a few indications of an IH dialect.

The classic corpus for Israelian Hebrew is the Elijah-Elisha narratives (1 Kings 17–2 Kings 8).<sup>8</sup> Other texts that are commonly proposed as Israelian Hebrew include Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 32–33, Judges 5, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Hosea, Amos, selected Psalms, and Proverbs.<sup>9</sup> In addition,

any narratives or poetry that deal with northern Israel, such as the Judges stories about Gideon, are often utilized in the search for IH. Although the extent of the IH corpus is a matter of discussion, it is quite clear that biblical literature employs style-switching and addressee-switching when speaking of foreigners. Thus, for example, the stories about Balaam or the prophetic oracles against foreign nations utilize a number of nonstandard Hebrew features that are best understood as resulting from literary style but are also meant to indicate dialect.<sup>10</sup> The epigraphic sources for IH are still rather limited. The largest epigraphic corpus, the Samaria ostraca, includes sixty-three legible texts written on potsherds; however, they are short administrative texts that provide limited linguistic information. Also important are the ostraca from Kuntillet 'Ajrud, a remote outpost in the Negev south of Judah, where twenty-one separate texts were discovered that have been identified as IH. It will be interesting to speculate about how and where the Israelian dialects might have survived the conquests of Galilee and Samaria by the Assyrians in 732 and 721 B.C.E.

Demography is one of the important indicators for linguistic change, and the Iron IIB period (840–700 B.C.E.) was characterized by wholesale shifts in the demography of the ancient Near East, including Israel and Judah. Assyrian incursions into the Levant began in 745 B.C.E. under Tiglath-pileser III and continued with the conquest of Galilee in 732 B.C.E. and Samaria in 721 B.C.E. The Philistine coastal cities were overtaken by Assyria by 712 B.C.E., and Sennacherib's campaign against Judah and Jerusalem in 701 B.C.E. devastated the Judean state. The rise of Assyria in the mid-eighth century devastated smaller states and urbanized the landscape of the entire Near East.<sup>11</sup> The Assyrian invasions had a particular impact on Jerusalem, which saw an influx of refugees from the north.

Refugees probably began arriving in Jerusalem after the Assyrian conquest of Samaria in 721 B.C.E. A few years later an influx of dispossessed Judeans came into the Jerusalem region from the foothills of Judah following the campaign of Sennacherib against Judah in 701 B.C.E.<sup>12</sup> The total built-up area decreased by about 70 percent, suggesting that the depopulation especially affected smaller agricultural towns and villages, more than larger cities.<sup>13</sup> These events can be placed within a larger context that shaped the city of Jerusalem, where SBH as a written language was forged. Rather than trying to barricade his borders, Hezekiah tried to integrate these refugees into his realm, with the hopes of restoring an idealized golden age of Israel, the kingdom of David and Solomon.<sup>14</sup> These events raise the question of how the language of the refugees from northern Israel might have influenced Judean

Hebrew. Gary Rendsburg, for example, has estimated that at least 16 percent, and perhaps as much as 30 percent, of the Hebrew Bible may directly reflect IH.<sup>15</sup> The influx of northern refugees certainly helps to account for the substantial quantity of northern texts and IH in the Hebrew Bible.

The exile of the northern kingdom by Assyria and the subsequent urbanization of the rural south were catalysts for literary activity that resulted in the composition of extended portions of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>16</sup> It gave rise to the prophetic works of Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah of Jerusalem, to priestly liturgies and ritual texts, as well as to a pre-Deuteronomic historical work. The northern kingdom takes a prominent place in the Hebrew Bible, with accounts of its history (in the book of Kings), its prophets (for example, Amos and Hosea), and its tribal ancestors (in the Pentateuch and the book of Judges). The literary idealization of a golden age that united north and south, Israel and Judah, under the aegis of David and Solomon also presumes the standardization of a literary language. On the one hand, the use of writing as a transnational communication technology would *not* have encouraged the localization of a national script; on the other hand, the development and preservation of cultural traditions and history would have encouraged the nationalization of writing technology. The social and political events of the eighth century apparently encouraged both the preservation of literary and cultural traditions in writing and the nationalization or localization of writing technology—that is, the full development of Hebrew writing alongside the local vernacular.

Even though many Israelian traditions found their way into the Hebrew Bible, they were collected and transmitted in Judah and Jerusalem. This fact is an important caveat in the search for IH. The natural place to begin a search for an IH dialect in the Bible might be the supposedly northern prophets Amos and Hosea. This search, unfortunately, is not entirely satisfying. With regard to the book of Hosea, early scholars generally did not find strong indications of a northern dialect. For example, William Rainey Harper concluded, “It cannot be maintained that the peculiarities of Hosea furnish any considerable data toward the hypothesis of a Northern dialect as distinguished from the Southern.”<sup>17</sup> Actually, these examples only remind us that the Hebrew Bible was collected, edited, and written in Jerusalem and Judah. The well-known wordplay in Amos 8:2 between *qāyīš*, “summer,” and *qēš*, “end,” derives in part from the dialect difference between the south and the north, namely the well-known contraction of diphthongs in IH, so the scribe is aware of the dialect differences and even utilizes them.<sup>18</sup> Yet the book as a whole is transmitted in the standard biblical dialect. Thus, even

though there are northern texts and traditions that are compiled into the Bible, this was done in the south. The evidence for the standardization of Hebrew is Judean.

The emergence of a standardized Hebrew *language* again raises the question, What do we mean by “language”? For practical reasons, when discussing ancient languages we must speak of *written codes* rather than *vernaculars*. Through the lenses of our written artifacts, at best we only see glimpses of vernacular dialects. These glimpses suggest that dialects were differentiated in the southern Levant in all periods and that the early Israelites had their own vernacular language that they could use to differentiate both internally between tribes and clans and externally from the *gēr* (that is, “resident alien”) and *nokri* (“foreigner”) in their midst. The famous shibboleth-sibboleth incident in Judges 12 illustrates both a linguistic consciousness and the use of dialect for differentiating identity. Writing, however, was not a vehicle for ethnic or tribal identity in the ancient Near East during the second millennium. For example, the Amarna letters employ a Canaanite-Akkadian language unique in the cuneiform world of the second millennium B.C.E., but this language levels the differences between individual dialects. Although we may glimpse some indications of individual dialects in the letters, the writing system was primarily a means of leveling the differences between the vernaculars of the Levant rather than a means of differentiating the various speech communities (to use the linguistic jargon)—or tribes (to use the biblical or anthropological category).

The widespread adoption of the linear alphabet made writing largely autonomous from Levantine dialects at the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E. More generally, written language in Mesopotamia and the Levant was a transnational phenomenon, and the profession of scribes in the Near East was transnational. The exception was ancient Egypt. There, hieroglyphic writing was always strictly part of the Egyptian cultural system, and the Egyptian writing system was not borrowed by foreign cultures for the writing of a wide variety of languages and dialects in the manner of Mesopotamian cuneiform or the West Semitic alphabet. Egyptian writing was always a local phenomenon. Not so with writing in the Levant. Through the second millennium and into the early first millennium, writing was a transnational cultural phenomenon. This began to change by the ninth century and especially in the eighth century B.C.E. Eventually, a local writing tradition became incorporated into Judean ethnic and national identity. That is to say, writing was nationalized in ancient Judah. The only questions are, When exactly did *written* language emerge as a unique part of Judean culture? And why did writing change from being an autonomous to a nationalized technology?

In the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.E., a sense of ethnicity and national identity began to consolidate in Syria-Palestine, even while (and perhaps because) the Assyrian Empire emerged and began to grow beyond “the two rivers.”<sup>19</sup> The growing sense of ethnic identity in the Near East included a sense of Judean identity. Implicit in this sense of identity was linguistic distinctiveness that spread beyond vernacular to local written language. Out of the political turmoil that marked the end of the Late Bronze Age throughout the eastern Mediterranean world arose petty kingdoms—Israel, Judah, Ammon, Moab, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, Damascus—competing for supremacy in the Levant. These kingdoms would develop a sense of ethnic identity characterized by national gods, border conflicts, and a growing linguistic differentiation. Classical Hebrew (and by “classical Hebrew” we mean specifically the written language) emerged from the developing sense of a national identity in Judah. In contrast, the northern Syrian states that had used Phoenician to write their local inscriptions began using Aramaic—using both local Aramaic dialects and developing a distinctive Aramaic ductus.

The period needs to be broken down into at least three distinct historical eras: 1200–840 B.C.E., 840–500 B.C.E., and 500–250 B.C.E., which correspond with some seminal political periods and reflect aspects of continuity and distinction in material culture.<sup>20</sup> The first period (1200–840 B.C.E.) is the period of *Phoenicianizing* language, that is, when Levantine kingdoms all used a similar script. The second period (840–500 B.C.E.) witnessed the emergence of a distinct Paleo-Hebrew national script, whereas the third period (500–250 B.C.E.) reflected the pervasive use of Aramaic script for writing in the Levant (including Judah/Yehud). The use of the Aramaic script had already begun with the Neo-Assyrian administration, but it became normative in Yehud during the Babylonian period (post-586 B.C.E.) as a result of Babylonian administration in the Levant. Eventually, the Jews embraced the Aramaic script during the Persian and early Hellenistic periods (500–250 B.C.E.), so much so that it came to be known as “Jewish script,” and the Hebrew script that we use today is really a development of this branch of the Aramaic script.

Aramaic and Hebrew inherited a common Northwest Semitic linguistic tradition. Already in the Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age (that is, up until the ninth century B.C.E.), Aramaic and Hebrew scribes shared a common scribal tradition. However, it was the use of Aramaic as a diplomatic language in the Neo-Assyrian Empire beginning in the eighth century B.C.E. that especially elevated its role in the history of the Hebrew language. Indeed, it is in this context that we may recall the scribes of Hezekiah asking the Assyrians to speak Aramaic (2 Kings 18:26). The Assyrians apparently sent



administrators with training in Aramaic, called the <sup>LÜ</sup>A.BA scribes in Akkadian (with A and BA being a code for the first two letters of the alphabet), who spread Assyrian administration and ideology into the new provinces of the empire.<sup>21</sup> Judean scribes—those responsible for the composition and editing of the Hebrew Bible—would likely have learned Aramaic from Assyrian administrators (that is, the <sup>LÜ</sup>A.BA, or *sepīru*), so it is hardly surprising that Aramaic influence creeps into biblical texts as well as Epigraphic Hebrew of the late Iron II period. As a result, the chronological significance of Aramaisms in Hebrew is quite complex.<sup>22</sup> It is often difficult to be certain whether Aramaic loanwords in biblical literature derive from the late Judean monarchy (eighth to seventh century B.C.E.), the period of Babylonian and Persian rule (sixth to fourth century B.C.E.), or the later Hellenistic period (third to second century B.C.E.).<sup>23</sup> To be sure, the most pervasive influence of Aramaic on Hebrew came in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman periods, when Aramaic became the first language for many people in Syria-Palestine (especially outside of the immediate environs of Jerusalem). Still, the beginnings of Aramaic influence on Judean scribes must be traced back to the Neo-Assyrian period (as will be discussed further in chapter 5).

Hebrew vernacular was part of a cultural system. If the cultural system asserts some distinctiveness, then this distinctiveness will be reflected in language. As much as the Hebrew language is part of the cultural system, so the assertion of cultural distinctiveness in Israel would have had linguistic implications. This chapter takes issue with Seth Schwartz, who argued that Hebrew was not central to the self-understanding of the Israelites before Alexander the Great.<sup>24</sup> Schwartz offers two arguments for his conclusion. First, in contrast with Greek, there is no “elaborate metalanguage to describe different types of written (and spoken?) discourse.”<sup>25</sup> Second, the books of Ezra and Daniel switch between Hebrew and Aramaic, demonstrating that each book was “unselfconscious about what language it happens to be using.”<sup>26</sup> Actually, the use of Aramaic in Ezra begins quite intentionally with diplomatic correspondence, namely, they “wrote to King Artaxerxes of Persia; the letter was written in Aramaic and translated” (Ezra 4:7). When discussion of the official business detailed in Persian documents concludes in Ezra 6:18, the narrative switches back to Hebrew. The linguistic code thus corresponds to the content. The sociolinguistic practice of code-switching, that is, the moving between languages or registers, is always loaded with social and ideological importance.<sup>27</sup> Typically, code-switching reflects group membership or social prestige. Although the code-switching in Daniel may be more complex, the switch from Hebrew to Aramaic occurs at a point where the Aramaic linguistic code was expected, in a public address to a foreign

king: "The Chaldeans spoke to the [Persian] king in Aramaic" (Dan. 2:4). Rather than suggesting that these texts were "unselfconscious" or random in their interchange between languages, the changes occur at points where code-switching is an expected, self-conscious sociolinguistic strategy. To be fair, code-switching is usually discussed in social situations where people are speaking, and the movement between languages can be rather fluid. In a literary text, code-switching is much more intrusive and intentional. Yet one must conclude that the use of both Aramaic and Hebrew and the intentional code-switching between the two underscores the roles of these two languages for group identity and social prestige that are so typical of this phenomenon in sociolinguistic studies.

The period following the Babylonian invasions and exiles ushered in profound changes in the social life of the people, and languages played specific roles in this new historical context. Jews in the Second Temple period were well aware of the encroachment of Aramaic upon Hebrew, and they were conscious about the role of language for their culture and identity (see chapter 7). Indeed, the book of Nehemiah will pointedly make the connection between language and identity:

In those days also I saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke the language of various peoples. (Neh. 13:23–24)

In Qumran Hebrew there would be a marked avoidance of Aramaic (see chapter 8). As for the former argument, it is essentially an argument from silence. We do not have enough sources to know much about metalanguage in the eighth century B.C.E. Moreover, it does not require an elaborate metalanguage for people to recognize the centrality of language in cultural and ethnic identity. It should not be surprising that a short-lived uprising during the Persian period tried to reclaim linguistic identity by using Paleo-Hebrew script on coins, just as the Hasmoneans would a couple of centuries later.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the coining of the term *Judean*, known from the book of Isaiah as well as the book of Kings (Isa. 36:11; 2 Kings 18:26), already indicates some development of a metalanguage to distinguish Hebrew from other Levantine dialects. Indeed, the term *Judean* even shows a conscious distinction from IH.

What about the Hebrew script? Vernacular dialects are always part of social identity, but not necessarily writing systems. Christopher Rollston has cogently pointed out that "the fact that the Phoenician script persisted during the tenth and early-ninth centuries in Israelite territories is a demonstration

that the Old Hebrew script had not yet developed.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the Phoenician script persisted throughout the Near East into the ninth century. Perhaps the most interesting example of this is the Tell Fakhariyeh inscription, which was discovered in north Syria. The inscription dates to the ninth century B.C.E. and was written using an “archaic” Phoenician script but in the Aramaic language.<sup>30</sup> Even into the late eighth century, the Phoenician script continued to be used in Anatolia and north Syria.<sup>31</sup> The situation changed after the ninth century B.C.E. Phoenician script was no longer used throughout the Near East, and local varieties began to develop.

By the late eighth century, the Hebrew script was differentiated from Phoenician. Exactly when the transition took place is more difficult to pinpoint. Rollston understands the creation of a Hebrew national script as a “conscious decision” intended as a nationalistic statement and not merely an evolutionary development.<sup>32</sup> Although he does not explain his reasoning, his conclusion is certainly sound. Localizing a script is a way of culturally appropriating writing. Hebrew writing was no longer simply a communication technology; it became part of Judean culture. Moreover, the function of the scribe became increasingly part of local administration and economy as opposed to international correspondence and relations. Rollston’s dating, however, is more problematic. He locates the nationalization of the Hebrew writing system in the ninth century primarily on the basis of the Moabite Stele, a Moabite monumental inscription from the mid-ninth century B.C.E. There is very little evidence of Hebrew writing from the ninth century, and the evidence from Moab is not altogether convincing for a *Hebrew* national script. The other (more meager) evidence cited is also not Judean, namely, the short Moabite el-Kerak inscription and the (Israelian) Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions. The elongation of tails on letters that Rollston identifies as the beginnings of a distinctive Hebrew script seems just as likely to be simply a cursive form of the Phoenician script, which can be seen in the Kition Bowl that dates to the eighth century from Cyprus.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, the early Phoenician script is known mostly through monumental inscriptions, so there is only later evidence from ostraca (like the Kition Bowl) or papyri where a cursive might have been employed. The evidence is still sketchy for the exact timing of the development of the Hebrew national script, although it is clearly in full bloom when we begin to see the large numbers of Hebrew inscriptions in the late eighth century B.C.E. By contrast, there is much more evidence for the development of a distinctive Aramaic script, which Rollston places in the eighth century B.C.E. For Hebrew, the inscriptional evidence from the ninth century is too limited to place the development of a distinctive Hebrew national script that early; rather, based on the present

evidence—namely, the appearance of large numbers of Hebrew inscriptions (and particularly seals and seal impressions) in the late eighth century—we must place the distinctive Hebrew (or, more specifically, Judean) national script in the eighth century.

The distinctive feature of the Old Hebrew script is its cursive style, in contrast with both Phoenician and the developing Aramaic script. A critical part of paleographic evolution is the writing technology used—that is, writing with ink versus inscribing on wet clay. The writing technologies affect the ways letters or signs develop. Clay, for example, was used in northern Syria as the material for accounting texts well into the seventh century for Aramaic texts. The use of clay as a writing technology is a legacy of Mesopotamian cuneiform culture. In contrast, ink and papyrus were inventions of the Egyptians and mostly influenced writing in the southern Levant. The use of ink encouraged the development of more cursive letters, whereas impressing or carving letters into wet clay encouraged more angular shapes, and this is exactly what we see in comparing Old Aramaic with Old Hebrew. In this respect, it is actually surprising that the more formal monumental style of the Phoenician script lingered in the southern Levant into the ninth century B.C.E.

### Linguistic Imperialism

In contrast to the conceptually fixed boundaries of nations, the boundaries of *empires* are continually in flux. The size of the empire is not determined but rather is contingent on territorial expansion (and sometimes contraction). The absence of fixed boundaries in empires means that territories and their inhabitants are sociologically heterogeneous. Empires consist of many different peoples and distinct territories. Likewise, empires can accommodate, to some extent, a diversity of religion, as the Assyrian Empire did.<sup>34</sup> The Persian Empire even encouraged the diversity of religion. The Assyrian Empire does present some interesting problems. The empire began as a nation with fixed boundaries and a national god, Ashur. This national ideology remained even as boundaries and ethnicity were reinvented. Assyrian rulers had known a defined national border, even as they conquered diverse territories and incorporated them within the borders of Assyria. Language divided the diverse peoples of the emerging Assyrian Empire. As Peter Trudgill observed, linguistic subjugation or unification (depending on one's viewpoint) is a strategy in implementing political subjugation (or unification).<sup>35</sup> Linguistic imperialism was part of the Assyrian imperial strategy and would have a lasting impact on the linguistic landscape of the Near East.

The Assyrian Empire and its administration had paved the way for the more mundane use of writing by introducing a special type of scribe (<sup>LÜ</sup>A.BA). The A.BA scribal training was restricted to Aramaic for administrative purposes, and Aramaic writing thus became a technological tool utilized for administration and commerce. Scribes no longer needed the complete training in the Mesopotamian *edubba* (from the Sumerian, É.DUB.BA, “house of tablets”), which was the traditional Mesopotamian place of learning that included a repository of school curricula for the training of scribes. The *edubba*, however, was a tradition for the training of scribes in the prestige language of the empire, that is, Akkadian cuneiform. The Assyrian linguistic ideology associated elite scribal training specifically with cuneiform writing as opposed to the more mundane alphabetic (Aramaic) writing system. In fact, Aramaic was held in a certain level of contempt, as we see, for example, in a letter from King Sargon II:

[As to what you wrote]: “There are informers [. . . to the king] and coming to his presence; *if it is acceptable to the king, let me write and send my messages to the king on Aram[aic] parchments*”—why would you not write and send me messages in Akkadian? Really, the message which you write in it must be drawn up in this very manner—this is a fixed regulation! (SAA 17, 2:13–18; emphasis added)

There is a measurable sense of hostility at the thought that correspondence within the eastern part of the Assyrian realm might be written in Aramaic. As Barbara Porter points out, the Assyrians continued to erect royal monuments in the west using Akkadian because “the cuneiform signs by their very presence and quantity demonstrated the wealth and power of . . . the foreign overlord.”<sup>36</sup> This may be contrasted with Fales’s characterization of Aramaic as a “second recognized official idiom *of social and economic interest* within the empire itself.”<sup>37</sup> The Aramaic writing system was a technological tool used by Assyrian administrators in the Levant, but it was limited to social and economic interests in the west and did not carry the same prestige of cuneiform with its literature and history that were bound up in the *edubba*. The Assyrians sent these administrative scribes to the far reaches of their kingdom in order to teach fealty to Assyria and to oversee the administration of the empire. It was through such Assyrian linguistic imperialism that Aramaic came to play a role in administration and commerce (for example, 2 Kings 18:26) and to be known as a *lingua franca* by the officials in Jerusalem.

The Assyrians began using Aramaic as a unifying administrative language in the eighth century B.C.E. The Assyrians recognized a close relationship between language and their imperial goals, and a central part of Assyrian

imperial ideology was to unify peoples of “divergent speech” into a people of “one language”—at least metaphorically if not in practice. According to the Dûr-Sharrukîn Cylinder inscription, language ideology played a significant role in Sargon II’s (r. 721–705 B.C.E.) conception of the empire. According to the old standard translation of Luckenbill:

Peoples of the four regions of the world, *of foreign tongue and divergent speech*, dwellers of mountain and lowland, all that were ruled by the light of the gods, the lord of all, I carried off at Assur, my lord’s command, by the might of my scepter. *I made them of one mouth* and settled them therein. Assyrians, fully competent to teach them how to fear god and the king, I dispatched as scribes and officials. The gods who dwell in heaven and earth, and in that city, listened with favor to my word, and granted me the eternal boon of building that city and growing old in its midst.<sup>38</sup>

The phrasing of the Dûr-Sharrukîn Cylinder inscription, especially in the old translation of Luckenbill, shows an acute linguistic ideology: “peoples of . . . foreign tongue,” “divergent speech,” uniting with “one mouth,” and sending “scribes” “to teach.” The creation of a vast empire meant dealing with language barriers and differences: “peoples of . . . foreign tongue.” The Akkadian expression translated “foreign tongue and divergent speech” is pejorative. Specifically, the expression “foreign tongue,” translating the Akkadian *lišānu aḫītu*, has quite negative connotations. It is more than a “foreign” language; it implies a language of “secrecy, hiding, and falsehood,” that is, languages that could undermine an empire.<sup>39</sup> This is typical linguistic ideology regarding foreign languages. The languages of the conquered peoples are both foreign and suspicious. These peoples with their strange languages, Sargon claims, he literally gave “one mouth” by supposedly sending “scribes” to teach them.<sup>40</sup> There are Neo-Assyrian references to Aramaean scribes writing Aramaic: <sup>LÜ</sup>A.BA *armaja ana muḫ[ḫi . . . iṣ]apparuma*, “the scribe writing Aramaic.”<sup>41</sup> This would suggest that *Aramaean scribes* were being sent to teach and make the peoples of divergent tongues “one mouth.” The Akkadian noun *šāpiru* invariably bears the standard Akkadian meaning of merely an administrator, which would suggest that these administrators were scribes whose administrative training was limited to Aramaic. Sargon sent administrators who had limited and utilitarian training in Aramaic to teach the “peoples of . . . foreign tongue.” This raises the question, What exactly were these “foreigners” being taught? Certainly not the written Akkadian language, and probably not even the vernacular Assyrian language. More likely, they were being trained for the Assyrian administration and loyalty to the crown. With

regard to loyalty, recall the idiom in the above inscription, “I unified them,” which translates the Akkadian expression *pā ištēn ašaškinma*, which Luckenbill translated literally as “I made them of one mouth.” Such a translation still leaves the nature of this “unification” unclear. By one mouth, can we infer that there was one language? Not likely. More likely, “one mouth” implied swearing fealty to the Assyrians and not necessarily acquiring their language. The Aramaic language was a critical tool of Assyrian administration for incorporating and indoctrinating its vassals.

The Assyrian administrators teach the peoples of foreign tongue “to fear [the Assyrian] god” and to swear fealty to their Assyrian “king.” Swearing loyalty to the king would imply knowledge of Assyrian treaty language and ideology. Indeed, intimate knowledge of Assyrian vassal treaties is evident in the Aramaic Sefire inscription as well as in the book of Deuteronomy. Such knowledge of Assyrian treaty language was likely communicated by Assyrian administrators (with training as Aramaic scribes). In the final analysis, a cylinder inscription such as Dûr-Sharrukîn certainly reflects pure ideology, and its concern for language should make us aware of how critical language issues were to the forging of the empire.

Chaim Tadmor pointed out many years ago in his classic article “The Aramaization of Assyria” that there were practical aspects to the use of Aramaic for the Assyrian administration of the west. Tadmor points to “evidence that in the Western parts of the Empire, Aramaic served as the language of diplomacy and administration alongside of, or instead of, Akkadian.”<sup>42</sup> Tadmor cites three texts from the Assyrian royal correspondence. First, there is Nimrud letter 13 from the period of Tiglath-pileser III (r. 744–727 B.C.E.), in which Qurdi-ashur-lamur writes to the king as follows: “I have had Nabu-ushezib bring this sealed Aramaic letter [*kaniku annîtu armêtu*] from the city of Tyre.” This explicitly mentions the use of Aramaic in diplomatic correspondence in the west. In the case of Nimrud letter 14, we are left to infer that Aramaic was used when the letter refers to a “sealed letter” written from Ayanuri, apparently a Moabite, which we may safely assume was not written in cuneiform. Tadmor also notes the reference to an Aramaic letter (literally, *egirtu armêtu*) in ABL 872, allegedly dating to the time of Shalmaneser III (r. 858–824 B.C.E.). Since the publication of Tadmor’s article, more evidence has come to light. Some of this evidence has been nicely summarized by Frederick Fales in several publications, particularly his article “The Use and Function of Aramaic Tablets,” in which he argues for the role of Aramaic as an official administrative language within the empire.<sup>43</sup>

One of the most interesting illustrations of the increasing role of the Aramaic language and scribes in the Neo-Assyrian period is the appearance of

a new logogram for scribes: <sup>LÜ</sup>A.BA, “the ABC scribe.” Laurie Pearce has pointed to a distinction between the new scribal title *sepīru* and the traditional term *ṭupšarru*, which relate to the scribes’ competence. The *sepīru* produced only administrative documents, whereas the *ṭupšarru* produced both literary and administrative texts.<sup>44</sup> It is noteworthy that surviving Aramaic texts from the Neo-Assyrian period through the Persian period are predominantly administrative and legal texts. There are almost no Aramaic literary texts, with the notable exception of the Proverbs of Ahiqar, which was part of the scribal curriculum.<sup>45</sup> Tradition has it that Ahiqar was a scribe of the court of Sennacherib, though the story now serves as an exhortatory tale about the proper conduct and loyalties of a scribe. The logogram <sup>LÜ</sup>A.BA seems to be related to the activities of an Aramaic scribe called a *sepīru*, which is a better normalization for A.BA than *ṭupšarru*. The <sup>LÜ</sup>A.BA logogram should be understood specifically as an Aramaean or “alphabetic” scribe, as A and BA are the Akkadian equivalents of the first two letters of the Aramaic ABCs.<sup>46</sup> The logogram would thus be an iconic invention to indicate an “ABC scribe.” This proposal is made more plausible by the fact that the logogram seems to first appear in the early Neo-Assyrian period, namely, in a colophon from Tiglath-pileser I, and then it becomes quite prevalent in the Neo-Assyrian inscriptions.<sup>47</sup> By the Neo-Babylonian period, some nuances of the origin of this logogram may already be disappearing. It is also noteworthy that when late-Assyrian texts refer to foreign scribes, such as Egyptian scribes, the logogram A.BA is used instead of the older term DUB.SAR. The evidence concerning the logogram A.BA, however, is not unequivocal. For example, it has been pointed out that in Ugaritic lexical texts we find <sup>LÜ</sup>DUB.SAR equated with <sup>LÜ</sup>A.BA and *ṭupšarru* for “scribe.”<sup>48</sup> Of course, the term *sepīru*, which is an Aramaic loanword into Akkadian, was not available to the Ugaritic scribes. The appearance of the logogram <sup>LÜ</sup>A.BA for “scribe,” particularly in the mixed scribal culture of Ugarit, is itself suggestive. Thus, there may have been different nuances for the logograms <sup>LÜ</sup>DUB.SAR and <sup>LÜ</sup>A.BA, but the only available Akkadian transcription was *ṭupšarru*. Moreover, it is important to note that abecedaries were pivotal for the early training of alphabetic scribes at Ugarit, whereas cuneiform scribes began by learning signs grouped by syllables, such as *ta-ti-tu* exercises. For this reason, the understanding of <sup>LÜ</sup>A.BA as “ABC scribe” seems particularly inviting.

A national reaction to linguistic imperialism is linguistic nationalism.<sup>49</sup> Languages act as political lightning rods for group consciousness and solidarity. A recent example of linguistic nationalism accompanied the rapid rise of independent European nation-states during the twentieth century; the increase in nation-states was paralleled by the growth in autonomous,



national, and official languages. Over the past two centuries the number of official languages in Europe has grown from sixteen to more than sixty. For example, the breakup of Yugoslavia was accompanied by the establishment of independent languages. Likewise, the breakup of the Soviet Union has encouraged the development of autonomous national languages. Peter Trudgill notes, "Where language is a defining characteristic of a minority ethnic group wanting independence, particularly where other (for example physical) characteristics are not significant (as in the case of Welsh), linguistic factors are likely to play an important role in any separatist movement they might undertake."<sup>50</sup> The linguistic expression of such nationalist and separatist movements is typically spelling reform. Such a scenario seems likely, *a priori*, in the Levant in the ninth and eighth centuries. One of the characteristic features that would distinguish the emerging Canaanite and Aramaic written vernaculars from Phoenician was the introduction of vowel letters. As we have seen, the Assyrians considered linguistic diversity in the west an impediment to their imperial aspirations. Language became an instrument of imperial administration. In both Egyptian and Akkadian texts from the second millennium, the inhabitants of the Levant from the Wadi el-Arish up to the Orontes River were considered one ethnic group that we usually refer to as Canaanite. Although the Amarna letters are ample-enough evidence of competition among the various city-states, it is also clear that this competition was not grounded in ethnicity.

### From Israelian Hebrew to Judean Hebrew in Jerusalem

The Assyrian Empire brought not only globalization but also massive local population shifts. This demographic change would be critical to the formation of the Hebrew language. In particular, a massive influx of refugees migrated from the vanquished kingdom of Israel into the southern hill country after the conquest of Samaria in 721 B.C.E.<sup>51</sup> Archaeological excavations and surveys have pointed to a burgeoning population in Jerusalem, which can be explained by refugees from the Assyrian invasions to the north and west of Jerusalem. Estimates suggest that Jerusalem's population grew at least threefold in the late eighth and early seventh centuries. Subsequent excavations in the region surrounding Jerusalem have further continued to support these conclusions, pointing to an escalating population not only in Jerusalem itself but also in its vicinity.<sup>52</sup> Sites like Ramat Rahel, to the south of Jerusalem, and Gibeon (el-Jib), to the north of Jerusalem, began to thrive in the late eighth century. Throughout the immediate countryside, farmsteads and small villages cropped up and helped support the urbanization and growth of Je-

rusalem. Recent archaeological surveys have provided more-specific evidence about the composition of these demographic changes. The demographic disruption was especially profound in the vicinity of Bethel—that is, in the regional territory at the boundary of the tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin.<sup>53</sup> Bethel's demise is indicative of a more general decline: "The number of sites there decreased from 238 in the eighth century to 127 in the Persian period and the total built-up area shrank even more spectacularly, from c. 170 to 45 hectares."<sup>54</sup> This would indicate that the influx of population into Jerusalem was dominated by refugees from southern Ephraim and Benjamin. Such demographic changes portend the influence of northern scribes in Jerusalem.

The social and demographic changes certainly left behind some literary evidence. For example, according to the second book of Kings, King Hezekiah named his son Manasseh, a name well known as one of the leading tribes of the northern kingdom. The Judean monarch also arranged a marriage between his son and a family from Jotbah, a village in Galilee (see 2 Kings 21:19). Another tradition—namely, that Manasseh followed in the sins of King Ahab of Israel—suggests that the northern émigrés also left their mark on religious practice in Jerusalem (2 Kings 21:3). The biblical prophetic literature also has indications of the social and demographic changes. For example, the prophet Isaiah enigmatically named his son Shear-Jashub, which translates literally as "a remnant shall return" (Isa. 7:3). This seems to be a thinly veiled reference to the refugees from the north who flooded into Jerusalem in the wake of the Assyrian campaigns.<sup>55</sup> The book of Isaiah refers to Galilee and Samaria as a "land of deep darkness" ravaged by war, and then claims that the governance of the Davidic royal family will be their salvation (Isa. 8:23–9:6 [English versions 9:1–7]). The book of Micah expresses the social tensions that such northern refugees would have introduced: "Hear this, you rulers of the house of Jacob and chiefs of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong!" (3:9). The poet identifies the northern kingdom—that is, "rulers of the house of Jacob and chiefs of the house of Israel"—as those who built Jerusalem. The ties between Samaria and Jerusalem had already developed under the Judean king Jehoshaphat (r. 871–847 B.C.E.), who created an alliance with Samaria through marriage. An Israelite princess, Athaliah, even became queen of Judah according to the biblical tradition (r. 841–835 B.C.E.). Such ties perhaps made it easier to absorb refugees from the north.

The linguistic evidence of these refugees is difficult to measure precisely.<sup>56</sup> The very fact that we can point to texts that show some indication of northern influence, for example the Elijah-Elisha narratives, arises from the fact that these texts show *deviations from biblical Hebrew*. In the case of the

Elijah-Elisha narratives,<sup>57</sup> these deviations are part of the literary style of the narrative. That is, the biblical author preserves the northern idiom while incorporating folktales about a couple of northern prophets. It is also possible that the author is not so much preserving the northern idiom as giving a literary flourish to the narrative. In either case, the northern elements are included precisely because they are nonstandard. Part of the difficulty in measuring the influence of IH in Jerusalem is the problem of identifying its features. One example is the use of the feminine marker *-t* (ת-) in IH, which follows Phoenician, as opposed to the classical (and Judean) use of *-h* (ה-), as in the Judean word *šnh*, “year,” which is spelled *št* in the Samaria ostraca. Another frequently cited example for IH is the contraction of diphthongs such as *yên* (ינ, “wine”) in the Samaria ostraca instead of the classical (and Judean) *yayîn* (יין, “wine”). It seems likely that such contractions are not merely spelling conventions but also reflect vernacular. Contraction is also apparent in the theophoric additions (that is, the use of divine names as part of a personal name) to personal names, as in the Israelian *-yāw* (י-א) as opposed to the Judean *-yahû* (י-הו), which are both shortened from the full name Yahweh (יהוה).<sup>58</sup> Contraction of diphthongs and shortened spelling are typical of Phoenician and likely reflect the influence of Phoenician scribal practice in Samaria. It is important to recall at this point that the script itself was also borrowed from Phoenician and does not clearly distinguish itself from Phoenician until the eighth century.

The well-known linguistic peculiarities of the Siloam Tunnel inscription may stem from the influence of northern scribes and workmen.<sup>59</sup> The tunnel along with its inscription were apparently completed at the end of the eighth century, that is, during a time when a substantial number of northern refugees were being assimilated into Jerusalem society. Three linguistic features of the inscription may be understood as influenced by northern scribes and workmen: (1) the *-w* suffix; (2) the verbal form *hyt*, using the 3fs suffix conjugation; and (3) the term *mwzh* for “spring” instead of the standard biblical Hebrew term *mʿyn*.<sup>60</sup> The last term, *mwzh*, does use the long (Judean) spelling with *w* instead of the more typical contracted Israelian spelling of the diphthong (that is, *\*mzh*), which may underscore a mixed dialect or perhaps reflect some unofficial aspect of the inscription.

Israelian Hebrew’s contraction of spelling for diphthongs has been thought to reject the practice of so-called *historical spelling*, which some have argued is the origin of vowel letters (or *matres lectionis*, “mothers of reading”) in Hebrew and Aramaic. The beginnings of the practice of using vowel letters in the West Semitic dialects has been the subject of some debate among scholars. Usually this problem begins with a discussion of “historical spelling,” by

which scholars refer to the retention of contracted consonant letters *yod* and *waw*, which were part of original diphthongs, as vowels. To be more accurate, however, scholars are really speaking of *historical phonology*. The contraction of diphthongs (specifically, /aw/ and /ay/), for example, is a matter of phonology, not spelling. It is worth noting that the contraction of diphthongs in speech did not require a change in spelling. Quite the contrary. Spelling changes tend to be quite conservative in spite of radical developments in speech patterns. Furthermore, the very attribution of historical spelling begs the question of which spelling was “historical”—or, more precisely, standard. Is there evidence to suggest that words such as /\*yayîn > yê/, “wine,” and /\*bayît > bê/, “house,” as well as /\*yawm > yôm/, “day,” and /\*mawt > mô/, “death,” were first spelled with longer spellings such as *yyn*, *byt*, *ywm*, or *mwt* rather than shorter spellings such as *yn*, *bt*, *ym*, or *mt*? The opposite is the case: The first attestations of these words in any Northwest Semitic alphabetic inscriptions are with the shorter “nonhistorical” spellings, in thirteenth-century Ugaritic inscriptions and in tenth-century Phoenician inscriptions. The tenth-century Hebrew/Canaanite inscription from Gezer also points to the shorter orthography. Thus, in terms of the history of spelling, the shorter spelling is standard, and the longer spelling would be a Hebrew innovation. In this respect, there is little “historical” about historical spelling.

The Moabite inscription from King Mesha (ca. 840 B.C.E.) can serve as an example of the problem of historical spelling in ancient alphabetic inscriptions. The inscription has the word for “house” spelled with the shortened form *bt* /\*bê/ (six times; lines 7, 23, 27, 30, 31) and with the longer form *byt* /\*bāyit/ (once, line 25). After considering a variety of explanations for this variation, Cross and Freedman conclude that this inconsistency must ultimately be understood as an example of historical spelling.<sup>61</sup> Andrew Dearman notes, “Since the letter *yod* was already being used to represent *ê* in the final position, it should not be surprising to find the same sound represented by the same letter internally, whether the scribe included it inadvertently or not.”<sup>62</sup> These explanations all assume a close correspondence between orthography and phonology—a correspondence that cannot be proved and is not axiomatic in the linguistics of writing systems. When we examine the context of the seven occurrences of *bt/byt* in the inscription, it turns out that the single occurrence of the longer spelling *byt* appears in a direct speech. In this respect, the spelling *byt* could be labeled as an example of *mater lectionis*, or “mother of reading,” or in this case, a “child of speech.” That is, the spelling seems to be an attempt to differentiate standard spelling from the idiosyncrasies of speech. This phenomenon is certainly known in the Hebrew

Bible, where the direct speech of foreigners is particularly colored by dialectal elements.

The population shifts and urbanization occasioned by the Assyrian era of Near Eastern history would have had profound implications for the linguistic environment of the late Judean monarchy. William Labov observes that “we often see a *rapid transformation of the more salient features of the rural dialects* as speakers enter the city.”<sup>63</sup> A certain homogenization of language naturally occurs. Labov further notes that “the creation of low-prestige working-class dialects . . . embodies two major linguistic trends of the past several centuries: *the decline of local dialects* and the growth of vertical stratification in language.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, there is at the same time a tendency for linguistic homogenization (that is, “decline of local dialects”) and linguistic diglossia (that is, “vertical stratification”). These trends, according to Labov, operate “wherever large capital cities are developing at the expense of the hinterland.” Such trends, however, would have appeared most prominently in speech, not writing. Thus, even though this nicely describes the linguistic environment in Judah during the late monarchy, in what way would linguistic homogenization as well as diglossia be seen in the textual artifacts? Such influence might only be seen if (1) scribes from other regions were migrating into and serving in Jerusalem, or (2) writing was spreading throughout society. It is possible that examples of diglossia and homogenization might be gleaned from two types of textual artifacts: graffiti and direct speech embedded in narrative. Unfortunately, direct speech in the Hebrew Bible cannot be assumed to be a precise representation of vernacular. Though there are embedded aspects of direct speech that may be gleaned for the study of vernacular, it is still part of the written narrative. Indeed, one author studying direct speech in the Bible even came to the conclusion that “the ancients discoursed in poetry, even in daily activities.”<sup>65</sup> Others have argued that spoken and written dialects did not differ in antiquity, even though, as Gary Rendsburg points out in his critique, this “flies in the face of linguistic consensus.”<sup>66</sup> The linguistic consensus is that no language is spoken as it is written; there is always a measure of diglossia between the vernacular and writing.<sup>67</sup> Rendsburg attempts to isolate the ancient Hebrew vernacular by pointing to isoglosses between biblical Hebrew and later Rabbinic Hebrew (which was based on vernacular language; see further in chapter 9).

## Linguistic Nationalism

Perhaps pushing back against the emergence of empire was the notion of national identity that seems to have emerged in the Levant by the late ninth

or eighth century B.C.E. Although the term *nationalism* is typically applied to the study of modern history, the categories that typify nationalism—including language—were also operative in antiquity.<sup>68</sup> Peoples of the ancient Near East were aware of differences in religion, territory, history, culture, and language. This awareness of difference forms the roots of ancient nationalism, even if we would not want to compare modern nationalism with nationalism in the Iron Age.<sup>69</sup> Most readily traceable aspects of political nationalism include temple, territory, kingship, and the army. Calendar, law, and language are also visible in the historical process.

Ethnicity is a relatively fluid concept whose boundaries can appear and disappear in the course of history. Languages are also fluid social constructs that often appear, disappear, and change as national boundaries move and shift. Linguistic characteristics, through the shifting political tides, tend to be “the most important *defining* criteria for ethnic-group membership.”<sup>70</sup> This was true even in antiquity, as we see, for example, in the shibboleth incident in Judges 12, where the Gileadites distinguished themselves from the neighboring Ephraimites through a linguistic marker. Language is a readily available marker of group and ethnic identity.

The identification of a language with a people is a fundamental tenet of language ideology. This romantic linguistic notion is usually associated with the eighteenth-century German Enlightenment and particularly with Johan Herder’s characterization of language as the genius of a people.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, language acts as an important symbol of group identity. In recent history, nationalistic ideology of language has structured state policy; and an important part of the claim to nationhood is the claim to a distinct language. Although language is closely tied to nationalistic movements of the early modern era, it is intrinsic to ethnic and group identity. Ethnic consciousness rose with a growing nationalism that characterized Syria-Palestine in the ninth century B.C.E. At this time, independent states arose in Syria-Palestine, including Israel, Judah, Philistia, Moab, and Ammon, as well as Aramaean states. Evidence of an incipient nationalism comes from a variety of sources.

One prominent indication of a growing sense of nationalism was the emergence of national gods.<sup>72</sup> For example, the royal monument erected by Mesha, king of Moab, in the mid-ninth century reads:

I am Mesha, son of Chemosh-[yat], king of Moab, the Dibonite. My father had reigned over Moab thirty years, and I reigned after my father, and I made this high place for Chemosh in Qarhoh [. . .] because he saved me from all the kings and caused me to triumph over all my

adversaries. Now Omri was king of Israel, and he oppressed Moab because Chemosh was angry with his land.

Strikingly, Chemosh is the particular god of the Moabites (as opposed to a general Semitic deity like Baal or El), and Moab is “his land.” Chemosh arises as a national deity in Moab just as Yahweh appears in Israel and Judah. Throughout the southern Levant we see the rise of such national gods. A Josianic writer provides a list of the various national deities and has the prophet Ahijah speaking for Yahweh, decrying, “For they have forsaken Me; they have worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Phoenicians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites” (1 Kings 11:33). Personal names with theophoric elements (for example, *-iah* for Yahweh, as in Isaiah, which means “Yahweh saves”) provide evidence for the exclusivity of these national deities. Jeffrey Tigay’s work on the corpus of names in ancient Judah illustrates the centrality of a single national deity, Yahweh, even if there were polytheistic aspects to ancient Judean religious praxis.<sup>73</sup> The evidence from names in Ammon, Moab, and Edom—although it has not been analyzed as systematically as the Israelite material has—shows similar patterns.<sup>74</sup> Stephen Grosby, for instance, notes a similar development in Edom that begins in the eighth century B.C.E.: “The names of the kings of Edom contained the divine name ‘Qaush,’ for example, Qaushmalaka (‘Qaush has become king,’ from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, 744–27 B.C.), Qaushgabri (‘Qaush is powerful,’ from the reign of Esarhaddon, 680–69 B.C.).”<sup>75</sup> Grosby goes on to point out that the development of monolatry that is suggested by personal names would have led to an increased degree of sociological uniformity required to speak of ethnicity.

Strong nationalistic fervor could be fostered through both territorially bounded religion and a common legal code. It is commonly acknowledged that the Deuteronomic laws are central to the religious and political program of the Josianic period (the late seventh century B.C.E.). It is hardly coincidental that this written codification of law can be located in the late-Judean monarchy. Deuteronomy also begins to employ the written text as religious and cultural authority. For example, in Deuteronomy 27:2–3 we read:

On the day that you cross over the Jordan into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones and cover them with plaster. You shall write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over, to enter the land that the Lord your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

As many scholars have noted, the book of Deuteronomy borrows the literary features of Near Eastern treaties as its literary template. The treaty genre is a quintessentially *written* artifact. Typically, Near Eastern treaties culminate with curses for those who break the treaty, and curses are derivative of the genre of magic. Magic texts also use writing as a fundamental element of their rituals. Deuteronomy thus justifies itself through the use of writing, particularly employing the treaty genre in order to reinforce its own authority. It might be added here that the treaty genre—a covenant sealed with a written document—was particularly significant in elevating the authority of written text. Writing had long had cultural power in magic ritual, legal texts, and royal monuments, but Deuteronomy employs these genres to give its written words more-general cultural authority.

Another indication of ethnicity is an emerging interest in national boundaries, which contrasts sharply with the city-states of the Amarna period. Grosby has examined the different notions of boundaries and nationality in antiquity and has identified three basic categories: empires, nations, and city-kingsdoms.<sup>76</sup> An extended yet bounded and sociologically homogenous territory characterizes *nations*. The boundaries of nations are conceptually fixed, even if they are ideological and even fictional. Israel's conceptual boundaries (Num. 34),<sup>77</sup> for example, seem to bear little resemblance to the historical realia for most—if not all—of the monarchy.

Nations typically have a common name for the land, people, and language. The names Israel and Judah come to refer to both the territory and the people inhabiting the territory. This meaning for Israel is already clear in the Tell Dan inscription (ca. 825 B.C.E.), where a clan-based designation is used for Judah: The Aramaean inscription refers to “the king of *Israel* and the king of the house of David.”<sup>78</sup> A similar use of the clan-based designation *house of David* for Judah, as against *Israel* for the northern kingdom, apparently can be found in the contemporary Moabite Stone (ca. 850).<sup>79</sup> In the Moabite Stone, Israel quite clearly refers to a people, though perhaps also to a nation. The first use of *Israel* as the name of a people goes back to the famous line in the Merneptah Stele (ca. 1207 B.C.E.): “As for (the people) Israel, their seed is not!” The text clearly uses the determinative for a people with Israel, but there is insufficient context to make any broad conclusions other than that Israel was an early term for a people. Another ninth-century text (ca. 840 B.C.E.), the Kurkh Monolith of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, mentions a coalition of kings that included “from the *land* of Israel” (<sup>KUR</sup>*sir'alāia*).<sup>80</sup> The various uses of Israel in these passages suggest that Israel had become a flexible term referring to a people but also to a land and perhaps even to a nation.



Interestingly, the references to *ʿereṭz yisraʿel* (אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל), “the land of Israel,” in the Bible derive mainly from the Elijah-Elisha narratives, where they refer to the northern kingdom. A later (probably sixth-century B.C.E.) text such as Ezekiel 27:17, which reads, “Judah and the land of Israel were your merchants,” separates Judah from “the land of Israel.” Wherever it is clear in the Hebrew Bible, the land of Israel refers to the territory of the northern kingdom (see 2 Kings 5:2; 6:23; Ezek. 27:17; 2 Chron. 30:25). The use of the term *ʿereṭz yisraʿel* to refer to the territory of both Judah and Israel is a later development of Jewish tradition. This development is already implicit in the use of *yisraʿel* in late-biblical (postexilic) literature to refer to the community in Persian Yehud.<sup>81</sup>

Evidence for the common use of land and people for Judah appears only in the eighth century—about a century later than in Israel. A building inscription (ca. 740 B.C.E.) from the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III mentions Jehoahaz of Judah (*ia-ú-ḥa-zi ia-ú-da-a-a*);<sup>82</sup> and the famous description of Sennacherib’s third campaign in Judah and Jerusalem (in 701 B.C.E.) mentions “Hezekiah, the Judean” (*ha-za-qi-ia-ú<sup>L</sup> ia-ú-da-ai*).<sup>83</sup>

Concomitant with this terminological conflation between *land* and *people* is the development of a territorial kinship—that is, a social fiction that a territorially bounded people are related by blood.<sup>84</sup> In the present case, the fiction is that the *Israelites* are the sons of Abraham, even though it is clear even in biblical literature that nonkin groups became part of *Israel*—as, for example, the Kenites (cf. Gen. 15:18–21; Judg. 1:16). Ironically, literature is one of the means by which a territorial, extensive kinship is advanced, but close reading also demonstrates the fictive nature of this kinship. These national and ethnic linguistic identities have a tendency to correspond with a distinct geographic boundary and religious practice. Thus, city-states have no extended, bounded relation of center to the periphery, whereas nations do. Likewise, although city-states may have patron deities, they are not necessarily exclusive to the city. The recording of extensive boundary lists (for example, Josh. 15–18) is usually related to political activities of the late eighth century B.C.E. Likewise, the beginnings of religious centralization are not merely coincidentally related to the political and linguistic identity that seems to be crystallizing in the late eighth century B.C.E.

Finally, language is an important basis for kinship affiliation, and in our case, the Judean language is the common denominator for the Judean people. *Judean* (*yhwḏyt*; יְהוּדִית) is a derivative of the tribal and geographic name Judah (*yhwḏh*), and its use to refer to the Hebrew language first appears in the Hebrew Bible in the story of the Assyrian assault on Jerusalem, where an Assyrian emissary insists on speaking “Judean” rather than Aramaic (see

2 Kings 18:26–28; Isa. 36:11–13). It is probably not a coincidence that the Assyrians, whose own literature betrays strong linguistic consciousness and language ideology, are credited with using the term *Judean* to refer to the Hebrew language. The Assyrians made language ideology part of their imperial plan, so it is not surprising that language ideology was also elevated in local states like Judah.

Assyrian imperialism also resulted in the disappearance of northern Hebrew dialects. By this, I do not mean to infer that there is no evidence for IH. Indeed, scholars have successfully identified aspects of IH in the literary and epigraphic record. Still, the disappearance of northern Israelite towns and villages after the Assyrian invasions resulted in the disappearance of the speech communities that would have been necessary for the preservation of vernacular dialects. At the same time, the migration of northern refugees into Jerusalem and Judah did lead to the preservation of IH, if only in fragments and glimpses, in the biblical literature compiled and edited during the late eighth century B.C.E. It has been argued that later Rabbinic Hebrew was influenced by IH,<sup>85</sup> but this could not have been a direct lineage. Samaria and Galilee became Assyrian then Babylonian and Persian provinces after 721 B.C.E. Speech communities were disrupted and dislocated. No longer inscriptions have been found that were written in IH after 721 B.C.E. The local administrative language became Aramaic, and the local vernaculars were also Aramaic. The later Samaritan Hebrew seems to have little direct relationship with the earlier IH dialects. Rather, Samaritan Hebrew is a religious language based on the Bible and colored by local Aramaic dialects. Israelian Hebrew disappeared and is now preserved by a few inscriptions and through linguistic analysis of biblical literature.

## Commonly Proposed Israelian Hebrew Features

The following are the some commonly proposed features of IH:<sup>86</sup>

1. Monophthongization of diphthongs, e.g., /ay/ > /ê/. See Samaria ostraca, *yn* /*\*yēn*/ (cf. SBH *yyn* /*\*yayin*/), “wine”; 1 Samuel 10:14, *ʔn* (cf. SBH *ʔyn*), “where”; and Gezer 1:7, *qš*, “summer” (cf. SBH *qys*). Compare Ugaritic and Phoenician.
2. Feminine-singular nominal ending *-t*. Compare Phoenician, Moabite, Aramaic, and Rabbinic Hebrew. See Samaria ostraca *št* (cf. SBH *šnh*), “year”; Genesis 49:22, *pṛt*, “she-ass”; Judges 5:29, *ḥkmt*, “wise lady”; 2 Kings 6:8, *thnt*, “camp”; 2 Kings 9:17, *špʿt* (cf. SBH *špʿh*), “multitude”; Hosea 7:5, *ḥmt*, “poison.”

3. Shortened theophoric prefix and suffix using *-yw* (cf. SBH *-yhw*). See Samaria ostraca, Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions.
4. The relative pronoun *š-* (instead of SBH *šr*). Compare Phoenician and Ammonite. See Judges 5:7; 6:17; 2 Kings 6:11; Psalm 133:2; Song of Songs; Ecclesiastes. This also becomes the standard form in Rabbinic Hebrew. Sometimes it is also described as ABH (e.g., Judg. 5:7), though it seems more appropriate to list it as IH.
5. Suffix form of verbs (III-*yod*) with *-t*. Compare Aramaic and RH. See 2 Kings 9:37, Qere *hyt* (cf. SBH *hyth* used in the Ketibh), "she was"; Leviticus 25:21, *št*, "it shall make"; note the Siloam Tunnel inscription, line 3, *hyt*.<sup>87</sup>
6. The use of *hd*, *hd* (חֶד/חֶד), "a certain (indefinite)," as an indefinite pronoun. See examples in Judges 9:53; 13:2; 1 Samuel 1:1; 7:9, 12; 2 Samuel 18:10; 1 Kings 19:4, 5; 20:13, 35; 22:9; 2 Kings 4:1; 7:8, 13; 8:6; 12:1. Some external evidence is provided by the Deir 'Alla inscription (ii.10, *khd*).
7. 2fs pronoun *ty*, "you" (contrast SBH *t*), e.g., 2 Kings 4:7μ, 16, 23; 8:1; and the 2fs suffix *-ky* (contrast SBH *-k*, Judg. 17:2; 2 Kings 4:2; Jer. 4:30).
8. Lexicon. Terms such as *drt*, "coat" (1 Kings 19:13, 19; 2 Kings 2:8, 13; contrast SBH *m'yl*); *kd*, "jar" (Judg. 7:16–20; 1 Kings 17:12, 14, 16; 18:34; Tell el-'Oreme inscription); *nqd*, "shepherd" (2 Kings 3:4; Amos 1:1; Mesha Inscription; contrast SBH *rw'h*); *gbr*, "to crouch, bend" (1 Kings 18:42; 2 Kings 4:34, 35; contrast BH *rbš* and *škb*); *šns*, "to gird" (1 Kings 18:46; contrast SBH *hgr* and *zr*); *rmwn*, "palace" (Hos. 8:14; contrast SBH *byt-hmlk*, *hykl*); *tny*, "repeat" (Judg. 5:11; 11:40; Hos. 8:10; contrast SBH *šnh*).