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## *Hebrew under Imperialism*

*... to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language.*

—*Esther* 1:22; 3:12; 8:9

The Hebrew language evolved under the long shadow cast by the Aramaic of the Achaemenid Empire. Imperial presence would have demanded that the Hebrew speech community become bilingual, using Aramaic alongside Hebrew. The fate of the Hebrew scribal tradition was even more precarious. The Aramaic writing system and imperial scribal infrastructure supplanted Hebrew within the empire. By the end of the Babylonian period, it is unclear what, if any, infrastructure was available in the region for the continued study of written texts and language. Yet, the Hebrew language and writing would reemerge, in part as an expression of political and religious nationalism.

The Hebrew language survived in spite of political (and linguistic) subjugation. Vernacular Hebrew continued to be spoken in isolated villages of Judah, and written Hebrew survived as a symbol of ethnicity, political legitimacy, and national autonomy. The Achaemenid involvement in the Levant can be divided into two distinct periods. During the first period, from 539

to 450 B.C.E., Persia was occupied with an unsuccessful attempt to extend its empire into Greece. Persian armies were defeated at Thermopylae and Marathon, and their fleet sank in the Gulf of Salamis. During this period, Yehud floundered in both poverty and relative obscurity. After King Xerxes died in the 460s, a major revolt broke out in Egypt, aided by the Athenians. Artaxerxes I responded in force and quelled the Egyptian revolt by 450 B.C.E. However, the revolt signaled a shift in the policy of the Persian Empire toward their satrapy, *Eber-Nari*, “Beyond the River.” The Persian rulers built a series of fortresses along the Levantine coast, and the Philistine coastal plain became the staging area for Persian control of Egypt. With the additional imperial presence in the southern Levant also came administration and writing—but not Hebrew writing. Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of the empire, and its dominant role is reflected in the epigraphic record.

### Aramaic: The Language of the Persian Empire

The Persians used the Aramaic language to administer their vast kingdom. Within this empire, Yehud was a tiny and impoverished province in the satrapy called “Beyond the River.” With the rise of the Persian Empire, the use of Aramaic spread to its farthest reaches, from Iran to Egypt. An imperial standard, Official Aramaic, had already displaced Hebrew in the local administration of the province of Yehud in the Babylonian period. Jews living in Yehud adopted the Aramaic script as their own (displacing the Paleo-Hebrew script), so much so that it even came to be called the “Jewish script.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the imposition of the Aramaic writing system and language as a *lingua franca* threatened the very existence of Hebrew.

The use of Aramaic as a *lingua franca* in the Near East had already begun in the eighth century B.C.E. (see discussion in chapter 4). The Assyrian Empire adopted Aramaic as an imperial language in their political strategy for integrating the western provinces into their empire.<sup>2</sup> In the Dûr-Sharrukîn Cylinder inscription, for example, the Assyrian monarch Sargon II (r. 722–705 B.C.E.) articulates the goal of unification, cloaked in linguistic jargon. The inscription mentions “one mouth” as a metaphor for allegiance to the Assyrian overlord, but the linguistic vehicle for this imposed allegiance was the Aramaic language. The Assyrians sent “scribes and overseers” to teach their conquered states, and in the east they utilized the Aramaic writing system to implement imperial policy. To carry out their plan, they built new administrative centers (such as Megiddo, Ekron, and Tell Jemmeh in Israel).

Vernacularization—that is, literary communication aimed at the masses—was critical to the emergence of empire in the ancient Near East.<sup>3</sup> Referring

to the formation of European and Indian societies, Sheldon Pollock observes that “using a new language for communicating literarily to a community of readers and listeners can consolidate if not create that very community, as both a sociotextual and a political formation.”<sup>4</sup> In the case of the ancient Near East, the simplicity of the alphabet as opposed to the cumbersome cuneiform writing system likely informed this choice. More than this, as a result of the spread of Aramaic, cuneiform itself became a restricted and esoteric writing system in the Persian and Hellenistic periods,<sup>5</sup> being supplanted by Aramaic in the administration of far-reaching parts of the empire. To perform its new functions, a literary standard was created, which scholars have called Official Aramaic (or Imperial Aramaic, or *Reichsaramäisch*).<sup>6</sup> Hitherto, Aramaic had been a cacophony of different dialects. The standardization and concomitant simplification of Aramaic was a natural consequence of its wide diffusion under imperial authority. Such tendencies are also evident in the Greek language in the wake of Alexander’s conquest and in Arabic in the aftermath of the advent of Islam.<sup>7</sup> For this reason sociolinguists point to Aramaic as “a classic case of imperialism utilizing a foreign language instead of trying to impose its own.”<sup>8</sup>

During the Persian period (538–333 B.C.E.), Aramaic was adopted as the language of the empire. From Egypt to Iran, we find ample written evidence for Aramaic that reflects the effectiveness of the empire in training scribes in the literary standard. This literary standard is even found in the Hebrew Bible, where sections of the books of Ezra and Daniel are written in Official Aramaic. Not incidentally, the literary characters of Ezra and Daniel are both officials of the imperial government and, hence, trained by its scribal chancellery. One indicator of authors’ training is the use of the verb *mprš*, “to translate” (Ezra 4:18), which was equivalent to the Persian term (*h*)*uzvarišn*, which describes the unique method invented in the Persian chancelleries for translating a document.<sup>9</sup> Thus, when the *torah* (that is, the Hebrew word meaning “teaching,” which was beginning to be used for the text of the Pentateuch) was read aloud in Jerusalem during the Persian period, it apparently needed to be translated into Aramaic to be understood (Neh. 8:7–8): “The Levites explained the *torah* to the people, while the people stood in their places. They read from the scroll of the *torah* of God, translating it and giving the sense; so they understood the reading.” Clearly, Hebrew was no longer understood by the majority of people, and this is also reflected in the epigraphic record. Although the province of Yehud was economically poor and demographically depopulated, we still find hundreds of inscriptions in Aramaic, reflecting the penetration of the imperial bureaucracy in virtually all aspects of economic, political, and domestic life.

Aramaic was already used as a lingua franca in the Neo-Assyrian period, but it was only the elites who understood it. By the time we reach the Persian period, Aramaic is being used by both scribes and common people. Appropriately enough, the letters written between the political leaders in Yehud and the Persian king Artaxerxes are written in Aramaic. More than this, even the narrative surrounding the correspondence between political leaders is written in Aramaic (Ezra 4:9–6:18), and undoubtedly the use of Aramaic reflected the scribal training even of the leaders of the community in Yehud. Letters written from the Egyptian Jewish community at Elephantine to Jerusalem are also written in Imperial Aramaic. Although the use of Aramaic in portions of the book of Daniel serves as a literary device (Dan. 2–7), it also reflects the degree to which the Aramaic language was increasingly used by Jews in the Second Temple period, even to the extent that it was allowed to displace Hebrew.

The epigraphic evidence for Aramaic during the fifth through fourth centuries in the southern Levant is quite impressive.<sup>10</sup> There are almost no Greek inscriptions from this period, and very few Hebrew inscriptions. Only on the northern coast, in places like Dor, Akko, and Sidon, do Greek inscriptions begin to appear, probably evidence of traders beginning in the fourth century B.C.E. As Israel Eph'al notes, "The overwhelming majority, however, is written in Aramaic, the lingua franca of the age."<sup>11</sup> Beginning in the 1960s, archaeological excavations began to uncover impressive evidence of the Aramaic administration in the region. Dozens of Aramaic ostraca have been excavated at a variety of sites. These include sixty-seven fourth-century Aramaic ostraca excavated at Beersheba, one hundred ostraca from Arad, and smaller numbers from Tell el-Kheliefeh (biblical Ezion-Geber) on the Red Sea and from Tell Jemmeh. Israel Eph'al and Joseph Naveh published a large cache of administrative ostraca from Idumea dated 363–311 B.C.E. Add to this evidence the famous papyri from Wadi el-Daliyeh and the hundreds of seals and seal impressions, as well as coins. In sum, the evidence for the use of Aramaic in Yehud is quite overwhelming, yet the evidence for Hebrew is almost completely lacking in the epigraphic record.

### Hebrew as a Living Language

To what extent did Hebrew continue as a living language after the Babylonian exile? The standard answer was articulated by the eminent Semitic scholar Chaim Rabin: "The Jewish community in the Persian period was thus, it appears, trilingual, using Aramaic for purposes of outside communication and for limited literary composition; Biblical Hebrew for normal liter-

ary composition; and in all probability an older form of Mishnaic Hebrew as a purely spoken vernacular.”<sup>12</sup> This answer was based on a set of assumptions that are no longer valid. They do not stand up to more-recent literary, epigraphic, and archaeological discoveries.

First, Rabin had suggested that Aramaic was restricted to outside communication and had only limited literary use. Yet, epigraphic discoveries demonstrate that Aramaic was used widely throughout the Levant for both local and international purposes. These discoveries include mundane uses of Aramaic for record keeping, marriage contracts, and economic transactions. To be sure, Aramaic literature is relatively limited until the end of the Persian period (that is, until 330 B.C.E.). The most well-known early Aramaic literary text is the Proverbs of Ahiqar, which was apparently a widely known scribal and school text.<sup>13</sup> According to this tale, Ahiqar is a wise scribe of the Neo-Assyrian kings. The earliest known versions of the tale date to the fifth century B.C.E. and were found at Elephantine in Egypt. The lack of a more-developed Neo-Assyrian or Persian literary corpus suggests that the primary role of Aramaic writing was largely administrative in the early periods. In contrast, Aramaic literary production flourishes in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Although some Qumran Aramaic texts (such as Enoch) were conceivably written in the late Persian period, most date to the Hellenistic period.<sup>14</sup> The Aramaic stories in the book of Daniel also seem to come from the Persian period, though the shaping of the book as a whole dates to the Hellenistic or Hasmonean period. In sum, there is meager evidence for the writing of literature in Aramaic during the Persian period.

The proposition that biblical Hebrew (instead of Aramaic) was used for normal literary composition during the Persian period is based on the assumption that this was the period when the composition of biblical literature flourished. I have dealt with this widely held assumption in earlier works,<sup>15</sup> but it is worthwhile to make a couple of observations in this context. There is no external evidence for this presumption, and the explicit internal biblical evidence is quite limited. That is, few biblical texts situate themselves as Persian compositions, so the argument must be made on external criteria that are either limited or equivocal.

Rabin thought that most of the common people would have continued to speak some form of vernacular Hebrew, a precursor to Rabbinic Hebrew. To be sure, it seems unlikely that vernacular Hebrew would have completely disappeared, especially given that it continued to be spoken (although it is difficult to be sure how widely) until the third or fourth century C.E. Joachim Schaper nuanced Rabin’s position, arguing, “The use of Aramaic and Hebrew respectively was a matter of social division, not literary genre.”<sup>16</sup> At the heart

of Schaper's argument is this assumption: "The majority of the inhabitants of Judaea had not been abducted by the Babylonians and had thus remained virtually unaffected by Aramaic linguistic influences."<sup>17</sup> To be sure, continuity and change in the Hebrew language would be greatly shaped by changes in the demographic situation in Judah. It is often asserted that the demographic situation in Judah remained largely unchanged after the Babylonian conquests; however, archaeological investigation tells a different story.

### Demographics and Language Shift in Persian Yehud

The evidence for vernacular languages spoken in ancient Yehud must necessarily begin with demographics. In his monumental work *Principles of Linguistic Change*, William Labov stressed that changes in the demographic composition of a community are a central factor determining the course of linguistic change.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the continuity of linguistic communities (that is, Hebrew speaking) as well as the introduction of new linguistic communities (namely, Aramaic speaking) can be directly correlated to the impact of the Babylonians and Persians in Yehud. Archaeological excavations and surveys indicate both continuity and significant disjunction in communities from the end of the Iron Age (586 B.C.E.) until the Hellenistic period (333 B.C.E.).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Babylonian military campaigns to Judah resulted in a massive demographic disruption. Perhaps even more important than the overall decline in population is the disjunction and displacement in individual cities, towns, and villages. Archaeologists have estimated that at least 65 percent of Persian towns were new foundations—they have no continuity from the late Iron Age into the period of Persian control. This type of demographic disjunction resulted in a significant language shift in southern Yehud during this period. In sum, the majority of Hebrew speakers were actually displaced by the events surrounding the Babylonian invasions and administration of Judah in the sixth century B.C.E. Further, most Persian towns and villages were not simply continuations of their Iron Age predecessors but rather new foundations. What language would these new settlements speak? Aramaic. New towns and villages—that is, new speech communities—appeared throughout the Persian province of Yehud, and their language was Aramaic.

There was also some continuity in Hebrew speech communities. Although most Iron Age towns and villages show a disjunction between the seventh and fifth centuries B.C.E., there are certainly many examples of continuity of settlement. According to *Principles of Linguistic Change*, we may expect continuity in the vernacular of these speech communities. The most striking

modern example of this in the modern Middle East is the stubborn persistence of Aramaic speakers in Iraq. Indeed, my UCLA colleague Yona Sabar is a native Neo-Aramaic speaker, though his children no longer speak Aramaic because his village was displaced in 1950.<sup>19</sup> Speech communities can demonstrate quite striking continuity, as long as the community is not physically displaced. Likewise, Hebrew speech communities persisted in Judah after the Babylonian invasions, into the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman periods.

By the end of the Persian period in the fourth century B.C.E., the demographic landscape of the southern Levant again began to shift, as the Persian administration extended inland. Up until the fourth century, Persian interest in the southern Levant was largely confined to the establishment of coastal centers for the control of maritime trade. Oded Lipschits notes, “In contrast to the rich, well-developed cities found along the coast, very few building remains dating to the Persian Period have been uncovered in the hill country—that is, within the province of Yehud.”<sup>20</sup> Not surprisingly, Persian interest in the region was limited to its strategic commercial and military position, which meant that their interest in the southern Levant was largely confined to the coastal plain. The changing political landscape explains the changing Persian interests in the southern Levant, beginning with Egyptian revolts headed by Pharaoh Amyrteus (404–399 B.C.E.), which resulted in sixty years of Egyptian independence (until 343 B.C.E.).<sup>21</sup> The Persians responded by strengthening their hold on the southern Levant, until they were finally able to regain control of Egypt. Only with this unrest did the Persian administration begin to take more interest in the hill country, and we begin to see significantly expanding settlements.

## The Survival of Hebrew

There are competing linguistic issues that we must consider as we assess the extent to which Hebrew continued to be spoken in ancient Palestine during the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman periods. On the one hand, the use of Aramaic writing reigned supreme in the Persian Empire and seriously curtailed the use of Hebrew. On the other hand, the survival of the Hebrew language was closely related to the survival of the Jewish people. That is, the survival of the language was tied to the role that it came to play in ethnic identity.

The use of Aramaic as *lingua franca* challenged the very existence of the Hebrew language. We began this chapter by pointing out that linguistic unification is an important strategy in implementing political subjugation. Aramaic certainly served this role in the empire. It was the language of commerce



and administration. As Joachim Schaper noted, it would certainly have been the language of political elites, even Jewish elites.<sup>22</sup> Yet it was the role of Aramaic in commerce that would have an impact on everyday life in Yehud. For example, all the economic records that we have from the Persian and Hellenistic periods are written in Aramaic, and as such there could not have been a simple social separation in the use of Aramaic by elites and the common man. Since most towns and villages even in the Judean hill country during the Persian period were new foundations, these communities would have spoken Aramaic. The coastal plain and northern areas were Aramaic speech communities. Only a few isolated villages remained as Hebrew speech communities.

The Aramaic-speaking communities surrounding and interspersing Yehud exerted an enormous pressure on the very survival of Hebrew speech communities. Not surprisingly, the Hebrew language that survived was heavily colored by Aramaic.<sup>23</sup> The Hebrew-speaking community from the late Persian period through the early Roman period (ca. 400 B.C.E.–200 C.E.) was largely bilingual, needing to speak both Hebrew and Aramaic. Only in the hill country around Jerusalem were there old villages where Hebrew would have continued to be spoken, while the new villages used the *lingua franca*. Indeed, Aramaic was becoming a Jewish language. For example, linguistic descriptions of Judean languages from Roman-period literary sources in Greek are ambiguous about the difference between Hebrew and Aramaic. In this context, the survival of Hebrew-speaking communities was seriously threatened. Thus, we can understand the above-quoted episode in Nehemiah 13: 23–25: “I saw Judeans 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.” It was the Judeans—that is, the indigenous population—who had married various surrounding peoples. The Hebrew-speaking community was already threatened by the fact that it was a demographic minority for three centuries under foreign political domination. At the same time, language maintenance is important for preserving ethnic boundaries.<sup>24</sup> In other words, Hebrew became integral to Judean identity. This is the undercurrent of Nehemiah’s observation that “they could not speak the language of Judah”; the statement is driven by the perceived loss of ethnic identity.

Language death is often equated with the complete assimilation of ethnic identity. Thus, the preservation of Hebrew, even if the Hebrew language was threatened, was important to the preservation and emergence of identity in the Second Temple period. Peter Trudgill points out, “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>25</sup> Leaders in the Judean community during the Persian and Hellenistic periods would fight for the survival of Hebrew because the survival of the language was tied to the survival of their identity.

The ongoing study of the biblical literature would be critical to the survival of the Hebrew language. Yet, it is difficult to find evidence for such study during the Persian period. Joachim Schaper takes up this important topic in an essay entitled “Hebrew and Its Study in the Persian Period.”<sup>26</sup> However, Schaper grasps at the proverbial straws trying to find evidence for the study of Hebrew during this period. Everything always begins with the assumption that this period was critical for the composition and editing of the Bible. For example, Anthony Saldarini writes, “Scribal activity by a variety of groups (priests, prophets, visionaries, scribes, and other community leaders) must be postulated in order to account for the composition and editing of the biblical collection during the exilic and postexilic periods.”<sup>27</sup> As an extension of this, Schaper (following the comments of Joseph Naveh and Jonas Greenfield) points out that it must have required considerable erudition to produce literary texts with the “antique flavour” of classical Hebrew.<sup>28</sup> This, of course, begs the question of exactly when biblical literature was composed. If, as I have argued, biblical literature was largely composed from the eighth until the end of the sixth centuries under the auspices of scribal institutions of ancient Judah, then the need to posit a great variety of scribal schools with “considerable erudition” during the Persian period becomes unnecessary. No one had to give most of biblical literature its “antique flavour” because most of the literature had already been written. Rather, it took fewer scribes to preserve, copy, and edit existing literature than to create a body of literature in a language that was not spoken by many people nor utilized by the government bureaucracy.

Biblical literature itself suggests a profound loss in the knowledge of Hebrew during the Persian period. For example, when the *torah* is read aloud, it must be translated into Aramaic to be understood; thus, “They read from the scroll of the *torah* of God, translating it and giving the sense; so they understood the reading” (Neh. 8:8). Schaper suggests that such texts refer to “the Jewish élite, not the common man.”<sup>29</sup> But is this anything more than an assumption? A main support for schools and the study of Hebrew in the Persian period is the book of Chronicles. Since it is widely acknowledged that Chronicles is a prime example of LBH, it is often read as a source for understanding the Persian period. Schaper is particularly interested in 1 Chronicles 2:55, which

speaks of “families/guilds of scribes (*mšpḥwt swprym*) dwelling in Jabez” that Schaper feels were “the single most important institution conducting and furthering the study of Hebrew in the Persian period.”<sup>30</sup> However, this verse has been notoriously difficult to interpret, and it is rather precarious to place this much weight on such a shaky foundation.<sup>31</sup> Many scholars (myself included) believe that this verse derives from a preexilic genealogical list and, therefore, would tell us nothing about the Persian period. A further difficulty with 1 Chronicles 2:55 is that we have no idea where these families of scribes lived: The town of Jabez has never been identified, although contextually it seems to be in the vicinity of Bethlehem. The town must also have been close to Jerusalem, as the main employer of scribes would have been the royal administration and secondarily the temple. If Jabez were a Persian-period town of scribal guilds, it seems exceedingly unlikely that the many scribes from this town would have left no written remnant regarding its location. Indeed, the location of the town is unknown from any Persian, Hellenistic, or Roman textual record! It has essentially vanished in history. Most likely, Jabez was an Iron Age town located between Bethlehem and Jerusalem that disappeared after the Babylonian invasions (like so many other towns) and, consequently, disappeared from the historical record.<sup>32</sup> With this, the evidence for Hebrew scribal guilds in Yehud also vanishes.

### The Gap in the Hebrew Scribal Tradition

The Hebrew scribal tradition was broken in the Babylonian and Persian periods. The disruption began with the Babylonian conquest and developed in the context of Babylonian and Persian rule. As long as the Hebrew scribal tradition had remained unbroken, new generations of students learned the meaning of older texts even as the vernacular Hebrew language underwent continual change. A gap in the scribal tradition, however, would result in a gap in the understanding of Hebrew. There is evidence for an unbroken chain of scribes from the Hellenistic period (that is, fourth century B.C.E.) through the Roman period and into the medieval period.<sup>33</sup> In other words, there is an unbroken chain of scribal tradition from the Hellenistic period up through the creation of the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible (and from then up to the present day). It is also easy to provide evidence for Hebrew scribal schools in the Iron Age, beginning as early as the beginning of the first millennium and becoming particularly robust during the period of scribal standardization of Hebrew in the late Iron Age (ca. 750–586 B.C.E.). What is difficult to account for in the historical, archaeological, and epigraphic record is evidence for Hebrew scribes in the late sixth through early fourth

centuries B.C.E. There is a gap. The silence is especially deafening in the epigraphic record, but it can even be traced in biblical literature.

How many, if any, Hebrew scribes were there in the fifth century in Persian Yehud, in Egypt, or in Mesopotamia? Were there any? It is difficult to know. It is clear that there was little infrastructure for Hebrew scribes and that Hebrew scribal traditions must have languished, even if they did not completely disappear. Hebrew and Aramaic are not so completely different that the Aramaic scribal chancellery could not have given some ancillary support for the preservation of Hebrew literature. Nevertheless, the disjunction in the Hebrew scribal institutions from the sixth century until the revival of schools in the Hellenistic period meant that archaic linguistic structures and uncommon words were no longer precisely understood by later scribes. There is a gap in the understanding of Hebrew that later scribes needed to address, and they did so with a variety of devices.

One illustration of the gap in Hebrew scribal tradition is pseudoclassicisms. This phenomenon has been studied in particular by Jan Joosten, who has identified a number of examples. He notes, "Pseudoclassicisms are less frequent in the LBH corpus than in the Qumran Scrolls. But they are not rare. Several other examples have been identified in Chronicles, Nehemiah and Daniel."<sup>34</sup> They show that later authors studied earlier texts diligently and tried to match their language and style in their own writing. They also illustrate that biblical Hebrew had become, to some degree, a dead language by the time the late biblical books were composed. Joosten notes, for example, that the book of Chronicles uses the SBH expression "to fill one's hand" ( $x + \text{ṭ} yd + pi'el ml'$ ). In SBH, however, the expression means "to ordain to a sacred office" (for example, Exod. 28:41; Lev. 8:33; Num. 3:3; Judg. 17:5, 12; 1 Kings 13:33), and in LBH it means "to bring an offering" (for example, 2 Chron. 13:9).<sup>35</sup> This use of an apparently classical expression is really a pseudoclassicism. It shows that later authors were studying the earlier texts but that the meanings of certain words and expressions from SBH were no longer understood. Indeed, SBH was a dead language, even though a vernacular Hebrew continued to be spoken and would inform the writing of Hebrew in the postexilic period.

The phenomenon of hapax legomena (that is, words that appear only once in a textual corpus) illustrates the gap in Hebrew scribal tradition. Often-times a word appears only once by chance, and it is not necessarily a rare or difficult word. More generally, hapax legomena are associated with rare and difficult words. There are about thirteen hundred hapax legomena in the Hebrew Bible, but only about four hundred are difficult to interpret.<sup>36</sup> These difficult words derive primarily from biblical texts from the sixth century

B.C.E. or earlier. The disjunction in the Hebrew scribal tradition after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem created a significant number of problematic words (as well as other linguistic features) because the meaning of many words was lost during the exilic and early postexilic periods.

It is not surprising that the Bible has hapax legomena, since it is a characteristic of all literary works, but the question is how to explain the difficult words. The first tool is simply literary context, but the other main tools are etymology and linguistic cognates. The linguistic cognates of hapax legomena reflect the scribal contexts out of which they arise. The best comparative Semitic resources for understanding most hapax legomena in the Hebrew Bible are Akkadian and Ugaritic—that is, linguistic resources dating from the thirteenth through the sixth centuries B.C.E.

Not surprisingly, the languages prevalent in the Near East during the Persian and Hellenistic periods—namely, Aramaic, Persian, and Greek—play little role in the philological problems related to the difficult hapax legomena in the Hebrew Bible. To illustrate, we may begin with examples of hapax legomena in Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles—that is, books that have internal claims that date them in the later Persian or Hellenistic periods. In Esther, for example, we immediately come upon the hapax word *ʾns* (אֲנִס), whose meaning, “to press, force, violate,” is well known from Rabbinic Hebrew. In Esther 7:4, we find the word *nzq* (נִזָּק), “damage,” which is again well known in Rabbinic Hebrew as well as Jewish Aramaic. In Esther 8:10, there is the unusual word *rmkh* (רְמוּכָה), whose etymology is unknown, though it seems like a loanword, yet its meaning of “mule, racing mare” is well established by its use in Rabbinic Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic. Turning to Ezra-Nehemiah, we find examples like *gzbr* (גִּזְבָּר) in Ezra 1:8, which is a Persian loanword meaning “treasurer” and which continued to be used in Rabbinic Hebrew. In Ezra 4:7 we find *knt* (כְּנֵת), which is an Aramaic loanword meaning “companion,” well known in contemporary texts like the Jewish Aramaic texts from Elephantine. In Daniel 9:24 we find the word *hṭk* (חֲתָק), “to determine, impose,” which is well known in later rabbinic texts, and in Daniel 10:21 the word *ršm* (רִשְׁמָה), “to record,” is likely an Aramaic loan that becomes quite common in later Hebrew texts. The book of Chronicles yields similar examples; thus, in 1 Chronicles 28:11 we find the hapax word *gnzk* (גִּנְזָק), “treasury,” a loan from Persian, and in 2 Chronicles 36:16 we find the word *lʿb* (לְעֵב), “to deride, mock,” which is well known in later Jewish texts. Examples such as these could be multiplied, but the observation is simply that the hapax legomena from LBH texts can be easily understood as loans from Persian or Aramaic or from their use in later Jewish texts.<sup>37</sup>

They are accessible in their contemporary contexts, and they are well known from the continuity of the scribal and linguistic tradition in later centuries.

The case is much different when we survey hapax legomena from the main corpus of biblical literature (that is, texts composed in the sixth century B.C.E. or earlier). To be sure, it is sometimes merely happenstance that a word occurs only one time in a given corpus. It is a feature of all literary corpora that a certain percentage of the lexemes will occur only one time in the corpus. What is telling, however, is the number of difficult words that appear in the pre-sixth-century B.C.E. texts. Chaim Cohen, in his book *Biblical Hapax Legomena in the Light of Akkadian and Ugaritic*, has nicely summarized the evidence that clarifies the meaning of twenty-eight hapax legomena.<sup>38</sup> The use of ancient Semitic languages to decipher the meaning of these rare words is quite striking. Akkadian was essentially unknown outside of scholastic circles by the fifth century B.C.E., and Ugaritic disappeared as a language around 1200 B.C.E. The hapax legomena were words whose meanings were presumably understood by ancient Hebrew scribes down through the sixth century, but these meanings were lost when the scribal tradition of Hebrew suffered a disjunction by the end of the sixth century B.C.E. It is noteworthy that not a single one of these difficult hapax legomena is found in the corpus of LBH texts (for example, Esther, Dan., Ezra, Neh., Chron.). At the same time, several terms do come from the corpus of texts deriving from the Babylonian period, that is, Isaiah 40–66, Jeremiah 26–52, and Ezekiel. These terms include *šrʿ* (שׁרע), “to be afraid” (Isa. 41:10); *qbt* (קִבֵּת), “cup” (Isa. 51:22); *zyz* (זִיז), “nipple” (Isa. 66:11); *ʾyh* (אַשִׁיה), “tower” (Jer. 50:15); *lbh* (לִבָּה), “rage” (Ezek. 16:30); *swgr* (סוּגַר), “collar” (Ezek. 19:9); and *brmym* (בְּרִמִּים), “two-colored fabric” (Ezek. 27:24). The phenomenon of hapax legomena in exilic texts further underscores the continuity in the Hebrew scribal tradition through the sixth century, as is suggested by Babylonian documents (and discussed in chapter 6). More generally, the substantial number of hapax legomena in SBH texts elucidated only by Ugaritic and Akkadian further demonstrates the periodization of Hebrew into SBH and LBH corpora. The absence of difficult hapax legomena in postexilic texts or LBH, on the other hand, indicates the continuity in Hebrew scribal tradition after a major break.

The philological problems created by linguistic change coupled with a gap in scribal tradition are not limited to hapax legomena. There were also older words and constructions that had gone out of use during the monarchic period but were preserved in the textual record. An interesting example of this is the asseverative *lamed*.<sup>39</sup> Originally, there were two separate terms

in West Semitic: a negative particle /lā/, “no, not,” and an asseverative /lū/, “indeed, surely.” These two particles can be illustrated through Ugaritic as well as the Amarna letters.<sup>40</sup> The Canaanite shift caused the negative /lā/ to be pronounced as /lō/; as a result, this negative particle sounded similar to the positive asseverative particle /lū/. A prosthetic *ʾaleph* was added in Hebrew /lōʾ/ (לֹא), and this gave a graphemic distinction between the negative and the asseverative, but the asseverative nevertheless eventually disappeared in Hebrew and other Canaanite dialects. An excellent example of the problems that this disjunction created for later scribes, as well as the ways they attempted to resolve them, may be seen in Genesis 23, the story of Abraham’s purchase of a burial plot for Sarah. The repeated use of the asseverative *lamed* in this narrative, employed four times in verses 5, 11, 13, and 14, has resulted in the variety of readings suggested by the *Qere-Kethib*, the versions, and modern exegetes.<sup>41</sup> The Masoretes also misdivided the text. For instance, verses 5–6 in the Masoretic Text (MT) read:

*And the Hittites answered Abraham saying, “Indeed, listen to us my lord (MT, וַיִּשְׁמְעֵנוּ אֲדֹנָיִי לֵאמֹר לוֹ שְׂמָעֵנוּ אֲדֹנָיִי), you are a prince of God in our midst, bury your dead in our best burial plot. None of us will withhold his burial plot from you for burying your dead.”*

The MT has vocalized an original asseverative *l* as a prepositional phrase + suffix, *lu*, “to him” (also in v. 14), even though this possibility is precluded by the fact that the preceding word, *lʾmr* (לֵאמֹר), invariably introduces a direct quote in Hebrew.<sup>42</sup> The interpretive problem is repeated in verses 10–11, 13, and 14–15 with slight variations resulting from a misunderstanding of the asseverative *lamed*. In verses 10–11 we read:

Now Ephron was sitting in the midst of the Hittites and he answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, all who came in the gate of the city saying, “Indeed (MT, וַיִּשְׁמְעֵנוּ אֲדֹנָיִי לֵאמֹר), my lord, listen to me. I give you the field and I give you the cave which is in it; I give it to you before my people. Bury your dead.”

The later scribes understood the asseverative *lamed* as a simple negation, *lʾ* (לֹא), “No, my lord!”; this was made easier by the fact that the following word began with the letter *ʾaleph* and simple scribal dittography of the *ʾaleph* produced the negative. The dittography, however, was not a scribal mistake but rather a correction or clarification that gave sense to a text that the scribes no longer understood. However, the similarity between verses 10–11 and 5–6 indicates that this was merely a scribal device to create an

intelligible text for later readers. The asseverative sense of *l* in verse 11 is borne out by verse 13, where the emphatic particle *ʔ* (אָ) follows the marker of direct quotation *l'mr*. In verses 13–15 the scribe also faced additional problems with the asseverative *l*:

And Abraham spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, “Surely, if you would certainly listen to me (MT, לְאַמֹּר אִךְ אִשְׁ-אַתָּה שָׁמְעָנִי, I give the price of the land; accept it from me, so that I may bury my dead there.” And Ephron replied to Abraham, saying, “Indeed, hear me (MT, שָׁמְעָנִי לֹא אֶדְבֹּר לְךָ, the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me? Bury your dead.”

In verse 13 the Masoretic scribes make the asseverative *lamed* into a conditional *lû* (לִּי); however, this is an extremely problematic reading. On the basis of the Septuagint, scholars sometimes emend *lû* (לִּי) to *ly* (לִּי), “to me”;<sup>43</sup> however, this is no better, as it recreates a repetition of the pronoun *me* attached to both the verb and the preposition. When we recognize that this is merely the old asseverative *lamed* that is no longer understood by postexilic scribes (and modern commentators), then all the difficulties are resolved.

In other cases, the asseverative *lamed* must have created such difficulties for later scribes that the text needed to be changed in some way in order for it to be understood. In some cases no doubt the asseverative *lamed* would have simply dropped out of the text. We have some nice examples, however, of the creative changes that scribes could make to the text to render it intelligible. For example, by simply affixing an interrogative *beh*, the asseverative *lamed* could be made into a rhetorical question; thus, in Jeremiah 49:9 we find an apparent asseverative *lamed* in the statement “If grape gatherers came to you, surely [*l*] they would leave gleanings,” but Obadiah 5 clarifies this traditional saying by making it a rhetorical question: “would they not [*hlw*] leave gleanings?”<sup>44</sup> Such examples illustrate the devices that scribes could use to make outdated language intelligible for themselves and to a later generation.

Enclitic *mem* is another well-known linguistic feature of Semitic languages of the Bronze and Iron Ages that had disappeared by the Persian period. The phenomenon in biblical Hebrew has been documented in a classic article by Horace Hummel published in 1957.<sup>45</sup> Hummel demonstrated a variety of ways in which enclitic *mem* was used in Akkadian, Canaanite-Akkadian, Ugaritic, and even Egyptian. One of the first identifications of the enclitic *mem* was in Psalm 29, which was sometimes thought to be a Hebraized



Canaanite hymn.<sup>46</sup> Though this claim was overstated, the possible enclitic *mem* in verse 6 is instructive:

וַיִּדְקְדְּרֵם כְּמֹז־עֵגֶל לְבָנוֹן וְשִׂרִיִן כְּמֹז־בֶּן־דֹּאמִים, “He made Lebanon dance like a calf, and Sirion like a wild ox.”

The Masoretes vocalized the enclitic *mem* as if it were an anticipatory suffix, which is not uncommon in Aramaic from the Persian period. However, the suffix would be plural and the noun that it anticipates, “Lebanon,” is singular; moreover, the anticipatory suffix is not a SBH linguistic feature. Still, the existence of the anticipatory suffix in the language of the Persian-period (and later) scribes allowed them to make sense of the enclitic *mem*—that is to say, it was not necessary to delete it in order for later scribes to make some sense of it, even though its original meaning had been lost. In the Septuagint, for example, the enclitic is simply translated with a 3mp pronoun, αὐτάς, “them.”<sup>47</sup> In sum, Hummel offered seventy-six possible examples of the enclitic *mem*, and although many of these may be explained in other ways, it was precisely because they could be understood in other ways that many of these examples were preserved by later scribes.

Another way to illustrate the gap in the Hebrew scribal tradition is through the Septuagint translation of SBH texts. A classical example is the locative *heb* (ה-) affixed to the end of words to indicate direction. This feature of Hebrew is found regularly in SBH texts as well as Epigraphic Hebrew but becomes increasingly rare in LBH and QH and exists only in frozen expressions in Rabbinic Hebrew (for example, *hws̄h*, “to the outside”; *mʿlh*, “upward”). The Hellenistic Greek translators were unaccustomed in the vernacular Hebrew of their day to seeing the locative *heb* as a generative grammatical form and as a result often understood it as part of a proper name.<sup>48</sup> Jan Joosten summarizes the situation as follows:

The locative *heb* is attached to a common noun defined by the article 140 times in Classical Biblical Hebrew [i.e., SBH], but only 7 times in Late Biblical Hebrew (20 times more cases in Classical Biblical Hebrew than in Late Biblical Hebrew). The locative *heb* is attached to a noun in the construct state 25 times in Classical Biblical Hebrew and not even once in Late Biblical Hebrew. This means that a form like הָעִירָה [“to the city”] (2 Kgs 20:20) is rare in Late Biblical Hebrew, and a syntagm like בֵּיתָהּ בְּהוּאֵל [“to the house of Bethuel”] (Gen 28:2) is unattested. In light of this distribution, it is interesting to note that in the small corpus of inscriptions we find both הָעִירָה [“to the city”] (Lak 4:7) and בֵּיתָהּ אֵלִישִׁב [“to the house of Eliashib”] (Arad 17:2). The latter expres-

sions show that in the Hebrew of the inscriptions, as in Classical Biblical Hebrew, locative *beh* is a living feature that can be freely attached to any nominal form to express direction.<sup>49</sup>

Again, the later scribes preserved the older linguistic feature, but only by understanding it in a different way, that is, as part of the geographical name.

The scribes described in the late biblical texts were trained in the Persian courts. The scribe par excellence was Ezra, who had training in the Achaemenid scribal chancellery in the royal court and then brought these skills back to Jerusalem and used them in the service of the temple and the administration of Yehud. Likewise, Nehemiah is an imperial administrator who applied his training to the administration of Jerusalem. Another literary figure is Daniel, who is depicted as having trained in the Babylonian courts and served the Persian kings. These examples undoubtedly reflect the real experiences of Jews during the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. It is no coincidence that the scribes mentioned in late biblical literature were trained in Aramaic.

The first account of training in Hebrew after the Babylonian exile is in the *Wisdom of Ben Sira*—but this example brings us well into the Hellenistic period. To be sure, Hebrew and Aramaic are closely related languages; and, theoretically, the skills of the Aramaic scribal chancellery would have been transferable to the copying, editing, and even composing of Hebrew texts. At the same time, we must not forget that Hebrew came to be written in Aramaic script during this period, another sign of the role of the imperial scribal chancellery. The very letters that scholars came to label “Jewish script” are Aramaic, reflecting the training of scribes during the Persian period. The scribes of the Persian period were trained in the imperial language and tradition—not in Hebrew—and then these skills could have been transferred to the copying, editing, and (to a limited extent) composing of Hebrew literature. Moreover, we should not merely attribute this gap to the misunderstanding of Masoretic scribes. As we pointed out above, there is a continuous scribal tradition from the Hellenistic period to the Masoretes. The break in the scribal tradition is in the fifth century B.C.E. (not the fifth century C.E.).

## Land, Ethnicity, and Language

The religious reforms of the Persian period began with a return to ancestral lands and an attempt to revive the Hebrew language. From a general linguistic, anthropological perspective, language is inextricably tied to land. This is nicely expressed in Genesis 10:5: “These are the descendants

of Japheth, in their lands, each one according to its language (*llšnw*)” (also Gen. 10:20, 31). When the book of Esther describes Persian linguistic policy, it also makes the tight connection between ethnicity, land, and language:

Dispatches were sent to all the provinces of the king, to every province in its own script and *to every nation in its own language*, that every man should wield authority in his home and *speak the language of his own people*. (Esther 1:22; also see 3:12; 8:9)

In our particular case, those who returned to Yehud from Babylon placed a premium on the nexus between locale and language. As we can see in Nehemiah 13:23–25, languages are associated with places like Ashdod, Ammon, Moab, and most important, Judah. The language of Ashdod during the Persian period was already Aramaic, but they could not label it as “Aramaic” because that would have located the language within Syria (that is, the homeland of the Aramaeans). Languages also define in-groups and out-groups. Nehemiah 13 connects intermarriage with the inability to speak the paternal language, whereas Ezra 9 associates intermarriage with a plea for ethnic purity. Injunctions about intermarriage play a central role in the religious reforms described in the book of Ezra:

The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons. Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands, and in this faithlessness the officials and leaders have led the way. (Ezra 9:1–2)

The “peoples of the lands” may speak their own languages, but for Ezra the people of Judah must speak Hebrew. Intermarriage resulted in an inability to speak Hebrew. It seems reasonable to infer that speaking Hebrew was deemed by the religious and political leaders (that is, Ezra and Nehemiah) to be part of living in the land of the ancestors. The Hebrew language was associated with the homeland, which is why the Hebrew language was called “Yehudit,” from the geographic term Judah. In contrast, the use of the nongeographic term *bryt* (עברית) “Hebrew” to describe the language would become particularly conspicuous when the Jewish people were living in the Diaspora (that is, after the two revolts against Rome in the first centuries C.E.). For Ezra-Nehemiah, speaking the languages of other peoples while living in the land of Judah was like mixing the holy seed with the peoples of other lands.

Ezra 9 depends on the Deuteronomic ideology that framed the nationalistic movements of the late monarchy in Judah. The book of Deuteronomy evidences a highly developed land theology, and this becomes a source for postexilic nationalism and religious ideology.<sup>50</sup> It is expressed, for example, by the emphasis on the *land* as given by God to Israel forever.<sup>51</sup> We can illustrate this with the following three passages from Deuteronomy:

See, *I place the land at your disposal*. Go, take possession of *the land that the Lord swore to your fathers*, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to assign to them and to their heirs after them. (Deut. 1:8; emphasis added)

Observe His laws and commandments, which I enjoin upon you this day, that it may go well with you and your children after you, and *that you may long remain in the land that the Lord your God is assigning to you for all time*. (Deut. 4:40; emphasis added)

When you cross the Jordan and *settle in the land that the Lord your God is allotting to you*, and He grants you safety from all your enemies around you and you live in security. (Deut. 12:10; emphasis added)

Nationalism is also expressed by the radical exclusivity of Israelite religious ideology, particularly in the fanaticism for holy war. This fanaticism began with extermination of the foreign nations, as we see in Deuteronomy 7:1–2:

When the Lord your God brings you to the land that you are about to enter and possess, and He dislodges many nations before you—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, seven nations much larger than you—and the Lord your God delivers them to you and you defeat them, you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy.

Deuteronomy goes on to forbid intermarriage (7:3–4) and then enjoins Israel to destroy the foreign nations' religious shrines and images (v. 5). The Mosaic voice then explains that Israel is a holy nation (v. 6). Nehemiah picks up this land ideology and makes a very typical association with linguistic nationalism.

## The Revival of “Biblical” Hebrew: Late Biblical Hebrew

Although the epigraphic evidence from the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. is almost exclusively written in Aramaic, vernacular Hebrew still played a role in the villages of Yehud during the Persian period. Moreover,

written Hebrew had a symbolic role in the emergence of a new political and religious identity.

After the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in the early sixth century, until the rise of Hellenism in the third century B.C.E., the epigraphic evidence for Hebrew is “very slight.”<sup>52</sup> The earliest evidence includes a few seal impressions dating to the early fifth century (that is, the beginning of Persian rule in Yehud), which were published by Nahman Avigad.<sup>53</sup> Avigad suggested that they were written in an archaizing Aramaic script but noted that the seals used Hebrew words such as *bn* (בן), “son of,” and *ʾmt* (אִמָּה), “maidservant of,” and the Hebrew prefixed definite article *h-* (ה-). The use of the Hebrew word *ben* instead of the Aramaic *bar*, “son,” is telling, even if there is the admixture of Aramaic script with these Hebrew words, because words such as *son* are ethnic markers. The use of the Hebrew prefixed definite article *h-*, as opposed to the suffixed Aramaic *-ʾ* (א-), is also a revealing linguistic marker. Even though the overall epigraphic record points to the overwhelming use of Aramaic, the use of Hebrew on a few coins and seals indicates that Hebrew continued to have an important place in Jewish cultural identity.<sup>54</sup>

Beginning in the fourth century B.C.E., coinage was introduced into the economy of ancient Yehud. The first coins bearing the imprint *yhd*, “Yehud,” written in Aramaic script seem to appear just after 400 B.C.E., and coins actually minted in Jerusalem also seem to appear by the early to mid-fourth century B.C.E. There are also a few coins dating to the mid-fourth century B.C.E. that use the Hebrew words *khn* (כֹּהֵן), “priest,” or *phh* (פֶּהָה), “governor,” written in Paleo-Hebrew letters. Coins in particular are symbols of political identity, and the use of the old Hebrew script on these symbols of political power are revealing of the role that Hebrew continued to have in the political ideology. The use of officially minted coins allowed merchants to conduct business without having to use stone weights or metal rings and bars. The use of coins spread increasingly throughout the region; they were especially used for the collection of taxes, and this no doubt facilitated their more general acceptance. Indeed, according to the book of Ezra, the Jews collected donations for the rebuilding of the temple measured in coins: “61,000 gold darics [*drkmwnym*], 5,000 minas of silver, and 100 priestly tunics” (2:69). *Daric* was a Persian word for a gold coin introduced by the Persian king Darius in the late sixth century B.C.E. The word appears in LBH spelled either *ʾdrknym* or *drkmwnym* (Ezra 2:69; 8:27; 1 Chron. 29:7; Neh. 7:66–71), and its description as a “gold” coin points to its Persian origin.<sup>55</sup> All the coins minted under the aegis of the Persians used Aramaic script and the inscription “Yehud” (*yhwḏ*), the name of the Persian province.<sup>56</sup>

From the late fourth century, there are two Samaritan seal impressions written with Paleo-Hebrew letters—a script that would come to be known as “Samaritan” script.<sup>57</sup> These include the impression from “[xxx]-yahu, son of Sanballat, governor of Samaria.” These types of inscriptions—coins and seal impressions—were official symbols of the Jewish and Samaritan governments. They point to the ideological role of Hebrew for both the Jewish and Samaritan linguistic communities in the late Persian period. The Samaritan seal impressions illustrate the complexity of using seals and coins as evidence of the linguistic situation. The seals were part of the discoveries at Wadi Daliyeh just north of Jericho. The most important finds were Aramaic legal papyri, including slave conveyances, property deeds, and marriage contracts. The inscriptions also included some seal impressions used to seal the documents. Although the seal impression of the son of Sanballat, governor of Samaria, was inscribed in the Hebrew language and script, it was affixed to an Aramaic legal papyrus. The use of the Hebrew language on the seal of a Samaritan governor most certainly acknowledges the ideological value of Hebrew as the old language of the Israelite and Judean monarchy, and its use on a Samaritan governor’s seal can be understood as asserting the antiquity of the Samaritan people and their roots in ancient Israel.

Literary sources from the Second Temple period point to the competing claims of leaders in Jerusalem and Samaria to antiquity and legitimacy. Seals and coins were two vehicles for asserting such claims. As such, they certainly reflect the important role that Hebrew would play in ideologies of linguistic communities in Judah during the Second Temple period. However, they are poor evidence for assessing the extent of the vernacular use of Hebrew. We must assess the role of all textual artifacts “in modeling the cultural phenomenology of nationalism.”<sup>58</sup> Letters, marriage contracts, or economic texts are more valuable in assessing vernacular than are seals and coins. Seals and coins, however, are important indicators of the ideological import of language. In the present case, it is telling for the vernacular language that all legal and economic texts dating to the Persian and early Hellenistic periods, whether from the government or from the rural population, were written in Aramaic.

Persian control of the Levant, however, began to break down in the mid-fourth century B.C.E., and the “Yehud” coins reflect this political unrest. Two different types of Yehud coins include inscriptions in Paleo-Hebrew letters instead of the standard script of the empire—Aramaic. Most striking is a coin probably minted in Jerusalem in the early fourth century B.C.E. bearing the inscription *ywhnn hkwhn*, “Yochanan, the priest,” which points to a certain

autonomy as well as leadership by the Jerusalem temple and priests in the late Persian period.<sup>59</sup> The use of the Hebrew definite article *h-* (as opposed to the Aramaic *-ʾ*) differentiates the language from the Aramaic of the Persian administration. We also find examples of coins with the Paleo-Hebrew imprint, for example, “Yeheziah, the governor” (*yḥzqyh/hpḥh*). The importance of language and script in the coins is underscored by later changes in the Hellenistic period. Betlyon observes, “The coin series then continues under Ptolemaic sponsorship after Alexander. Old dies were initially reused, with the inscription ‘Yehud’ (in Aramaic) replaced by ‘Yehudah’ (in Hebrew).”<sup>60</sup> The choice of language and script on coins thus closely mirrored the ebb and flow of political events in the fourth century B.C.E., with the old Hebrew script and language being tied to aspirations of political autonomy.

### The Use of Paleo-Hebrew Script

Apart from a few coins, the Paleo-Hebrew script is largely unknown in the Persian period. Aramaic script eclipsed Hebrew during this period. Angel Sáenz-Badillos suggests that this limited evidence of Hebrew writing is enough to confirm that “Hebrew continued to be spoken and understood in Jerusalem and Judaea.”<sup>61</sup> Although I agree with his conclusion, the epigraphic evidence is insufficient to support it. Rather, the evidence of Hebrew script exclusively on seals and coins suggests that the Hebrew script was largely symbolic in the Persian period. We must look instead to the limited demographic continuity of villages between the Iron Age and Persian period to find evidence for cultural and, presumably, linguistic continuity.

Even when Hebrew literature began to flourish again in the late Hellenistic and Roman periods (for example, the Dead Sea Scrolls), Hebrew was usually written with Aramaic script. Linguistic anthropologists have noted the important role of script and orthography for linguistic communities,<sup>62</sup> and the relative development of the Hebrew and Aramaic scripts and their roles in the linguistic community certainly points to the shift from Hebrew to Aramaic that took place during the Persian period. However, the use of Hebrew script on coins and seals indicates that Hebrew script was associated with political autonomy and legitimacy. The Paleo-Hebrew script made claims to antiquity and legitimacy; it connected governments (for example, Samaritan, Hasmonean, Bar Kokhba) and religious groups (for example, the Qumran sect) with the golden age of ancient Israel.

The Aramaic script underwent enormous development from the seventh through the second centuries B.C.E., whereas the Hebrew script saw very little development. The enormous change in the Aramaic script reflects the

constant use and adaptation of a living language. It is as if the Hebrew writing system was frozen in time, and in a manner of speaking it was.<sup>63</sup> The contrast reflects the different fates of these two writing systems. Aramaic was actively used, whereas the old Hebrew script was lightly used and served a largely ideological purpose. The revival of the Hebrew language during the late Persian and Hellenistic periods, however, would utilize the Aramaic writing system—a change that would underscore a major transition in the history of the Hebrew language.

### Commonly Proposed Features of Late Biblical Hebrew

Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) designates biblical and inscriptional Hebrew of the Persian and early Hellenistic periods—that is, the fifth through the third centuries B.C.E. This dating highlights a gap in Hebrew scribal tradition and written literary production.<sup>64</sup> The main corpus of postexilic biblical texts includes Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Daniel. Other partial works that can be included in LBH include books like Job (the prologue and epilogue, chapters 1–2, 42) and certain psalms.<sup>65</sup> In addition to the aforementioned works, we should include the book of Ecclesiastes as well as the Song of Songs, which are among the few biblical texts that include Persian (or Greek) loanwords.<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, there is much debate about the dating of biblical literature, and it is best to base descriptions of LBH on this primary corpus. For example, many scholars have traditionally dated the priestly source of the Pentateuch (for example, much of the books of Leviticus and Numbers) to the postexilic period, following the evolutionary theory of the Wellhausen Documentary Hypothesis, but other scholars have pointed out that there is nothing in the language itself to indicate a postexilic origin or composition.<sup>67</sup>

Some commonly proposed features of Late Biblical Hebrew include the following:

1. Increased use of vowel letters (i.e., *plene* spelling). This is particularly evident in passages in Chronicles that parallel Samuel and Kings; for example, the most prominent example of *plene* spelling is *dwyd*, “David.”
2. Nominal patterns influenced by Aramaic. For example, the use of the Aramaic morpheme *–wn*, as in *ḥsrwn*, “lacking” (Eccles. 1:15); *šlṭwn*, “power” (Eccles. 8:4); *ršwn*, “desire” (Esther 1:8); and *–wn* as in *sklwt*, “folly” (Eccles. 1:17), or *mlkwt*, “kingdom” (2 Chron. 1:1).



3. Use of plural nominal forms to denote collectives. For example, *pšym* for *pšh*, “passover,” and *dmym* for SBH *dm*, “blood.” Double plural constructions, for example, *ʾnšy šmwyt*, “men of renown” (1 Chron. 5:24), for SBH *ʾnšy šm* (Num. 16:2). Doubly marked plural nouns, for example, *byrnywt*, “fortresses” (2 Chron. 17:12).
4. Changes in directional particles. For example, *l-*, “to,” is preferred over *ʾl*. The directional *heh* begins to disappear, for example, *lyrwšlm*, “to Jerusalem,” instead of SBH *yršlmh*.
5. Particles that are rare or not found in SBH. For example, *ʾw*, “if only” (Esther 7:4).
6. Shifting meaning in particles. For example, *ʾbl* shifts from being an asseverative particle, “truly,” in SBH to a negation particle, “however, but”; *hrbh*, “very” (Neh. 2:2; 3:33) as opposed to SBH substantive, “much, many.”
7. The relative particle *š-*, “of, which, that,” begins to replace *ʾšr*. Note the appearance of the compound genitive *šl*, “belonging to” (formed from the relative *š* and the preposition *l-*), as in *šly*, “mine” (Song 1:6), or *šlšlmh*, “belonging to Solomon” (Song 3:7).
8. Changing verbal system. This includes: (i) gradual disappearance of the *waw* consecutive; for example, a decrease in use of *wyby*, “and it came to pass” (the standard formula beginning narratives in SBH); (ii) development of the active participle as a present tense; (iii) development of the periphrastic construction *byh* + participle to denote ongoing or habitual action, as in *hyw ʾmrym*, “they used to speak” (Neh. 6:19); (iv) preference for active verbal constructions, for example, *qrʾw lw ʾyr dwyd*, “they called it the City of David” (1 Chron. 11:7), as opposed to the more typical SBH, “was called”; (v) use of the particle *ʾz* (𐤀𐤆) followed by the perfect, as in *ʾz ʾmr dwyd*, “then David said” (1 Chron. 15:2), as opposed to the short imperfect or archaic preterite in SBH (1 Kings 8:1); (vi) avoidance of infinitive absolute as an imperative; compare “Go and say to David” (1 Chron. 21:10) and SBH (2 Sam. 24:12); (vii) *nipʿal* has replaced the *qal* passive; and (viii) longer imperfect forms that resemble the cohortative morphologically but not semantically, as in *wʾʾblh*, “I mourned” (Neh. 1:4).
9. Changes in word order. For example, “Solomon, the king” (2 Chron. 10:2) instead of SBH “King Solomon” (1 Kings 1:34), and cardinal numbers follow (instead of precede) the noun they are describing.
10. Preference for *ʾny* as opposed to *ʾnky*, “I.”

11. Vocabulary and idioms that become common in Rabbinic Hebrew are first attested in LBH.
12. LBH is characterized by a proliferation of loanwords. Especially notable are Persian loanwords such as *dt*, “law” (Esther 1:13), which appear in LBH but never in SBH. Aramaic loanwords and idioms are especially common, including Aramaic calques derived from official language, that is, expressions such as “may the king live forever” (Neh. 2:3) or “if it pleases the king” (Neh. 2:7).