

# New Perspectives in Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew

EDITED BY AARON D. HORNKOHL AND GEOFFREY KHAN





<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

© 2021 Aaron D. Hornkohl and Geoffrey Khan (eds). Copyright of individual chapters is maintained by the chapters' authors.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text and to make commercial use of the text providing attribution is made to the authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

Hornkohl, Aaron D., and Khan Geoffrey, eds. *New Perspectives in Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew*. Cambridge Semitic Languages and Cultures 7. Cambridge: University of Cambridge & Open Book Publishers, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0250>

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0250#copyright>

Further details about CC BY licenses are available at, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>

Updated digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0250#resources>

Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

Semitic Languages and Cultures 7.

ISSN (print): 2632-6906

ISSN (digital): 2632-6914

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80064-164-8

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80064-165-5

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80064-166-2

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0250

Cover image: Genizah fragment of the Hebrew Bible with Babylonian vocalisation (Num. 18.27-28, Cambridge University Library T-S A38.12; courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library). Genizah fragment of the Mishnah (Ḥallah 1, Cambridge University Library MS Add.470.1; courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library). Linguistic analysis of Ps. 1.1 (Elizabeth Robar). Images selected by Estara Arrant.

Cover design: Anna Gatti

## PREFACE

Most of the papers in this volume originated as presentations at the conference *Biblical Hebrew and Rabbinic Hebrew: New Perspectives in Philology and Linguistics*, which was held at the University of Cambridge, 8–10th July, 2019. The aim of the conference was to build bridges between various strands of research in the field of Hebrew language studies that rarely meet.

The study of Hebrew has a long tradition in European universities. Hebrew teaching began to become institutionalised within the universities by the beginning of the fourteenth century, with chairs of Hebrew established at the universities of Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Salamanca, and at the Pontifical See in Rome. By the sixteenth century, when the Renaissance was at its height, Hebrew had become a central component of the curriculum of the universities, alongside Greek and Latin, following the model of the trilingual colleges at Alcalá and Louvain. This situation changed in subsequent centuries, when Hebrew rapidly lost its central status in the general humanities curriculum and became more restricted to biblical and theological studies.

There are various clear historical stages in the development of the Hebrew language. These are:

- (i) Biblical Hebrew, i.e., the language of the Hebrew Bible written in antiquity;
- (ii) Rabbinic Hebrew, i.e., the Hebrew language of the Mishna, Talmud, and other Rabbinic texts, written in late antiquity and the Middle Ages;
- (iii) Modern Israeli Hebrew.

Broadly speaking, the study of Biblical Hebrew in universities today is concentrated in departments of biblical studies and theology; the study of Rabbinic Hebrew is concentrated in departments of Jewish studies; and the study of Modern Hebrew language is concentrated in departments of theoretical linguistics. Scholars who are researching linguistic aspects of pre-modern Hebrew (i.e., Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew) tend to be working in isolation in departments that do not have a clear linguistic focus.

One of the main aims of the conference was to bring together three main groups of scholars: (i) scholars working on Biblical Hebrew and the linguistic situation of Hebrew in antiquity, (ii) scholars working on Rabbinic Hebrew and the linguistic situation of Hebrew in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, and (iii) theoretical linguists who have worked on linguistic analyses of Modern Israeli Hebrew. These three groups of scholars seldom collaborate and there are rarely opportunities for them to meet at a conference dedicated to the Hebrew language. The aspiration of the organisers was that, by uniting these groups, the conference would give an impetus to revitalise Hebrew as a major force in the modern humanities. This would be achieved by joining together cutting-edge research on Hebrew philological sources from the ancient and medieval worlds and uniting these with state-of-the-art enquiry into general linguistic theory. The collaboration with general theoretical linguists would result in the conference helping to give the Hebrew language a more prominent role in the broad field of modern linguistics, which has extensive international outreach. This aspect of the conference followed the

initiative of the Israeli linguists Susan Rothstein, Edit Doron and Outi Bat-El, who founded the Biblical Hebrew Linguistics and Philology Network in 2017. Conferences within the framework of this network were held at Bar Ilan University in 2017 (organised by Susan Rothstein) and at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2018 (organised by Edit Doron and Robert Holmstedt). Very sadly, Susan Rothstein and Edit Doron passed away in 2019.

Of particular significance are the many ways in which collaboration between Hebrew philologists with theoretical linguists will invigorate the field.

There are two primary historical reasons for the avoidance of linguistic theory in Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew language study. The first is one of environment and access. As remarked above, the vast majority of Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew teaching and research occurs in departments that are not primarily concerned with linguistics. Thus, the study of pre-modern Hebrew typically occurs in contexts in which the appropriate linguistics education is unavailable. This situation continues to contribute to, and even to exacerbate, the second historical reason for the lack of linguistically-informed analysis of Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew—a deep-seated antipathy between traditional philology, which has characterised the study of Biblical Hebrew since its ‘rediscovery’ by European scholars in the Renaissance, and the relative latecomer, modern linguistics. This tension between modern linguistic theory and philology was not historically born from, or limited to, Hebrew studies. August Schleicher (1821–1868) was the first to argue for a clear distinction between *Philologie*, an essentially historical endeavour using language as

a means to study culture, and *Linguistik*, the scientific study of language itself. Ironically, though Schleicher considered his own work to be linguistic, the following generation of scholars derisively cast Schleicher's work as the older 'philology' based on historical linguistics. This was in contrast to their own 'newer' methods, which were increasingly associated with non-historical, synchronic language description (see Holmstedt 2006). This misleading dichotomy between 'philology as historical language study' and 'linguistics as synchronic language study' not only resulted in the long-standing tension between philology and linguistics, but was imported directly into Biblical Hebrew studies, illustrated most clearly in James Barr's influential 1969 article 'The Ancient Semitic Languages: The Conflict between Philology and Linguistics'.

Considerable obstacles notwithstanding, the melding of contemporary linguistic theory and the study of Biblical Hebrew has occurred, though rarely and in isolated bursts of individual scholarship. Though individual efforts are a welcome contribution to this small but important movement in Biblical Hebrew studies, the conference sought to set a new paradigm in collaboration between Hebrew philologists working on different periods of the language and some of the world's leading theoretical linguists who have worked in particular on Modern Hebrew.

Finding the appropriate methodologies for applying linguistic theory to Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew is not a trivial challenge. Linguists working on the modern language have at their disposal large corpora and search engines, as well as the possibility of generating data by working with native speakers.

Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew are restricted to fixed corpora, with their own search engines, but, of course, no possibility of generating new data. Further complicating the endeavour is the transmitted nature of the biblical and rabbinic sources that serve as philological texts used as linguistic texts for analysis (on the relationship of philological text to linguistics text, see Hale 2007).

An additional objective of the conference was to bring together early career scholars, such as graduate students and post-doctoral researchers, and established senior scholars in the field. The early career researchers displayed posters and made short presentations interspersed with the presentations of other participants.

The present volume is the published outcome of this initiative in Cambridge. It contains peer-reviewed papers in the fields of Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew that apply methodologies of philology and theoretical linguistics. These include contributions by established scholars and by students and early career researchers. The abstracts of the papers are given after this preface.

We would like to express here our gratitude to the conference organising team, which was led by post-doctoral researcher Dr Magdalen Connolly and included graduate students Estara Arant, Nick Posegay, Johan Lundberg, Joseph Habib, Cody Kingham, Dorota Molin, and post-doctoral researcher Dr Ben Kantor. It was thanks to their hard work and superb organisational skills that the conference was such a great success.

Estara Arrant has also given us invaluable assistance in the preparation of the volume, including logistical support and proof-reading, for which we register here our heartfelt thanks.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support that we received for the organisation of the conference from the Thyssen Foundation (in response to a joint application by Cambridge and Lutz Edzard), the Arts and Humanities Research Council (from a grant funding a project directed by Michael Rand), and Hebrew Trust funds of the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to Open Book Publishers for all their efficient help in publishing the volume. Their open-access initiative will allow this publication to be widely read throughout the world.

The Editors, Cambridge, February 2021

## References

- Barr, James. 1969. 'The Ancient Semitic Languages—The Conflict between Philology and Linguistics'. In *Transactions of the Philological Society 1968*, 37–55. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Hale, Mark 2007. *Historical Linguistics: Theory and Method*. Blackwell Textbooks in Linguistics 21. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Holmstedt, Robert D. 2016. *The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew*. Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic 10. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.