A Note on the Phonetic and Graphic Representation of Greek Vowels and of the Spiritus Asper in the Aramaic Transcription of Greek Loanwords

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Raanana Meridor has probably taught Greek to more men and women in Israel than any other person. Her learning, constantly enriched by intellectual curiosity, enthusiasm and conscientiousness, has for many years been a source of encouragement to her students and a model to be emulated by her colleagues. It is an honour to be allowed to participate in the tribute offered to her on her retirement by those who are linked to her by friendship, affection and admiration.

Ancient transcriptions of Greek (and other) names and loanwords into Semitic alphabets are a notorious source of mistakes and ambiguities. Since these alphabets normally use only consonantal signs the vowels of the words in the source language are often liable to be corrupted. This happens routinely in Greek loanwords in Syriac and in rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic. Thus, though no educated modern Hebrew-speaker has any doubt about סנהדרין in rabbinic Hebrew being derived from the Greek συνέδριον, there cannot have been many occasions since late antiquity on which any non-hellenized Jew has pronounced the first vowel of that word in any way other than if it had been an *alpha*; indeed I know of no modern western language in which that word, when applied to the Palestinian institution of that name is not, normally, = Sanhedrin.[1]

Though, in principle, it can be stated that practically all vowel sounds can remain unrepresented in Syriac and Jewish Aramaic transcription[2] it is true that it is possible to indicate Greek vowels or diphthongs by approximate representa-

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[1] See below for the internal aspiration in this word. We may, by the way, dismiss the spelling (by some few scholars) "synedrion" or "synhedrion" as a learned affectation.

[2] Compare, e.g., Syriac סנאנרותא, סנגרא for συνήγορος, συνηγορία with the almost fully vocalised realisations of the same words in, as it happens, Jewish Aramaic: סניגור, סניגוריא.

tions in Semitic scripts.[3] Thus compare, e.g., for *initial* vowels, the following examples:

α = א; cf. ארכי, אקילס, אקילוס, אנטונינוס, אלכסנדריא, אוויר for ἀήρ, Ἀλεξανδρεία, Ἀντωνῖνος (Antoninus), Ἄκυλας, ἀρχή.[4]

ε = א; cf., אפטא, אפיקורוס, [אפיטרופוס] אפיטרופוס, אפוטרופוס , for ἐπίτροπος, Ἐπίκουρος, ἑπτά (note, in the Hebrew/Aramaic transcription, the absence of the initial aspiration; and see below).

η = אי; cf. אישא, אמרא, אימרא, איליוס, for ἥλιος, ἡμέρα, ἦτα (Note the absence, in the Hebrew/Aramaic transcription, of the initial aspiration in איליוס and אימרא; note further that in Syriac we also find the spelling אימהרא, where the *he* represents the *epsilon* of the Greek word; see below).

ι = (י)א; cf. אמפרטר, איפודרומוס, אקנוס, for ἱκανός, ἱππόδρομος, ἱμπεράτωρ, i.e. the Greek transcription of the Latin *imperator* (Note the absence, in the Hebrew/Aramaic transcription, of the initial aspiration of ἱκανός, ἱππόδρομος; see below).

o = (ו)א; cf. אומניא, אומולוגיא, א(ו)כטא, א(ו)כלום, אפסניא, for ὀψωνία, ὄχλος, ὀκτώ (the latter sometimes = קט(ו)[נ]), ὁμολογία, ὁμόνοια. For internal - o - we also find - י -, e.g., for Greek νόμος, נימוס in both Jewish Aramaic and Syriac (Note in the Aramaic/Hebrew transcription of ὁμολογία, ὁμόνοια the absence of the initial aspiration; see below).[5]

ω = או; cf. לוגין(ו)אור, אוקיינוס, אוני, for ὠνή, Ὠκεανός, ὡρολόγιον (note the absence of the initial aspiration in the transcription of ὡρολόγιον; and see below).

υ = (י)א; cf. איפופודין, איפופודמא, איפומנימא, איפומניקוס, אפטיקוס, אפותיקי, אפירטיס, for ὑπηρέτης, ὑποθήκη, ὑπατικός, ὑπόμνημα, ὑποπόδιον. (Note in all these examples the

3   I have taken most of the examples cited here and in what follows from S. Krauss, *Griechische und Lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrasch und Targum* I-II (Berlin 1898-9) (not to be used without the important annotations by Immanuel Löw) and from R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford 1879-1897) (with a Supplement by his daughter, J.P. Margoliouth [Oxford 1927]). For many more examples see these valuable works as well as other dictionaries.

4   For Ἄκυλας (Aquila) we normally find עקילס in Jewish sources, though אקילס is also found; it may be that עקילס is the Palestinian spelling for the Babylonian אקילס (the latter, with various forms of vocalization, is the spelling of the name in Syriac); cf. Palestinian זעטוט for Babylonian זאטוט; this word is spelt with *aleph* in *bMegilla* 9a and in *Massekhet Sopherim* 6, 4; and with *ayin* in *jTaʿaniyot*, 68a; *Sifre Deut.*, § 356 (p. 423, ed. Horovitz-Finkelstein [Berlin 1939], reprint New York 1969); and in *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness* 11, 3-4, ed. Y. Yadin (Jerusalem 1955), 300.

5   For oι-, o- *vel sim.* transcribed or transliterated in Syriac, see further Payne Smith, coll. 64 and 70ff. and 76.

absence, in the Hebrew/Aramaic transcription, of the initial Greek aspiration; and see below). In Syriac, as in Jewish Aramaic, the initial υ is often represented by - אי, but also by - איו, cf., e.g., איפאקוי, איפוגרפי, איפודימא, איפוסטאסיס for ὑπακοή, ὑπογραφή, ὑπόδημα, ὑπόστασις (note in all these cases, too, the absence of the initial aspiration) and also, e.g., איופוסטאסיס, איופסיסטוס, איופוקוריסטיקון, איופסוס, איופסון, איופסוס for ὑπόστασις, ὑποκοριστικόν, ὕψιστος, ὑψῶν, ὕψος; internally, - υ -, though often = - ו -, (e.g. אולומפיא, אולונתס, אולורא = 'Ολυμπία, ὄλυνθος, ὄλυρα), or - י - (e.g. אוטיכא for Εὐτυχής; and compare especially סונטיכא = Συντύχη) is also often = - יו -, e.g., תיוגאטר, תיומוס, תיוסיא, for θυγάτηρ, θυμός, θυσία, thus pointing to a phonetic mix similar to that achieved by Anglo-Saxon readers of classical Greek.

Similarly diphthongs such as αι, αυ, ει, ευ, οι, ου, may be found to be represented in both Aramaic and Hebrew by approximate transcriptions, as, e.g, in the following examples:

αι = initial אי or internal י: איגיאה or איגואה for αἰγεία; and ספירא, קיסר, קירוס for σφαῖρα, Καῖσαρ (Caesar), καιρός.

αυ = אב, א, או(ו) as in תנטיייא(ו)או, אבטומטוס, אגוסטוס for Αὐγοῦστος, αὐτόματος, αὐθεντία; for internal variations, cf. אדרבליס (הדרולא) אדרבלא, נווטא (הדרוליס), for ὑδραύλης, ὑδραυλίς, ναύτης.

ει = י: מגירס, פירט, טיכס for μάγειρος, πειρατής, τεῖχος (but cf. also לטרגיא for λειτουργία).

ευ = many transcriptional variations: cf. e.g. for εὐγενής, אבגניס, אוגניס, אוגניס, איגניס ; but also הוגנס and, for εὐγένεια, הוגנסיס. (For the apparent initial aspiration in the last two examples see below.)

οι = י, אי, א : cf., e.g., (אודיפוס =) אידיפוס for Οἰδίπους; אנומלין, אינומילין for οἰνόμελι,[6] איקומיני for οἰκουμένη; פייטס for ποιητής;but compare also אוקונומוס cited by Krauss, II, p. 25 as a variant for איקונומוס. Greek οἶνος is transcribed into Syriac both as איינוס and as אונוס; for internal - οι - cf., e.g., אטימוס, איטימוס = ἕτοιμος. (For the absence, in the Hebrew/Aramaic transcription, of the initial aspiration see below.)

ου = או (initial) or - ו - (internal): cf. בולי, אונקיא, for οὐγκία (Latin uncia), βουλή.

For many more examples see the dictionaries.

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6   Sic; not οἰνόμηλον contra Krauss, s.v. אינומלין.The spelling ייגומילין, also cited by Krauss, is, I believe, influenced by the semantic equation יין = οἶνος. Similarly, below, the spelling יקומיני for οἰκουμένη, cited by Krauss, s.v. קומיני, seems to me to be influenced by the existence in biblical as well as in later Hebrew of the word יקום which bears precisely the same meaning as the Greek οἰκουμένη. Note that Krauss offers no other examples of initial - οι - being represented by י or by יי.

Thus, inevitably, there are in many, probably in most, cases, variations in the transcription, in the spellings, in the endings, of Greek words and names in Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic as well as in Syriac;[7] and though, in general, the names and words, no matter how different their representations may be from their original source, are transparent, there are, nevertheless, some cases in which real confusion is caused by the inability of the users of Semitic alphabets to find one-to-one correspondences between Greek vowels and diphthongs on the one hand and any possible representation of them in their own written languages on the other. In many cases phonetic and graphic ambiguities remain and lead to mistakes and corruptions. Difficulties may arise, particularly in the representation (or the lack of it) of internal vowels or diphthongs from the tendency in Hebrew and Aramaic (both Jewish and Christian) to alternate almost arbitrarily *scriptio plena* and *scriptio defectiva*. Indeed, as one can see from the examples given above, most Semitic representations of Greek vowels or diphthongs are multivalent as well as multiform: *cf.*, e.g. - ו -, או for - o - and for - ou -; הו, או, אב for - εὐ -, - o -, - αυ -, - οι -, *et multa alia*.

Difficulties arise, in any case, from the fact that practice is not uniform; this can be verified by consulting almost any dictionary entry. It would be tedious to multiply illustrations here. I shall confine myself to one single significant example. The name of a second century Greek philosopher from Gadara (הגדרי or הגרדי) mentioned in rabbinic literature is transcribed as אבטימוס, אבנימיוס, אבנמוס, אבנימוס or אבנומוס, נימוס (*bHagiga* 15b; *Gen.R.* 65, 20; *Ex.R.* 13, 1; *Ruth R.* 2, 13; see the *apparatus criticus* and commentary in the Theodor-Albeck edition of *Genesis Rabba*, p. 734, for more parallels and variants.) Though the multiform and multivalent transcriptions mentioned above make it possible to accept the identification with the name of the cynic philosopher Oenomaos of Gadara, it would have been difficult to find this identification if there were no other, non-linguistic, evidence to support it.[8]

There can be no doubt that the initial aspiration of some Greek words and names is sometimes represented in the host language (even in the case of the initial *rho*). It seems reasonable to assume that Syriac רהומי, רהומא, (Rome; but also רומי, רומא), רהומיא (Romanus; but also רומיא), רהומאית (Latin; but also רומאית) represent the aspiration associated with the Greek initial *rho* of the name ῾Ρώμη and of names and words derived from it (though, in the light of the non-aspirated al-

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7   Syriac spellings and transcriptions are very similar to those found in Hebrew and in Jewish Aramaic, with occasional variation in details, especially in endings.

8   See A. Wasserstein, "Rabban Gamliel and Proclus the Philosopher", *Zion* 14 (1980), 259 n .7 [in Hebrew]; M. Luz, "Abnimos, Nimos and Oenomaos: A Note", *JQR* 77 (1987), 191-5; *id.*, "A Description of the Greek Cynic in the Jerusalem Talmud", *JSJ* 20 (1989), 54 n. 21. As a matter of curiosity I mention here the Syriac spelling הומאנוס = Οἰνόμαος (the reference is to the King of Pisa, father-in-law of Pelops.)

ternatives, it is conceivable that the aspiration indicated in the Semitic spelling is sometimes no more than a learned reminiscence). There are a good number of similar examples.

Where internal aspiration seems to be indicated in the Semitic spelling, as, e.g., in Jewish Aramaic, in the word סנהדרין (Syriac סנדריון) and in Syriac, e.g., ס(ו)נהד(ו)ס(י) = σύνοδος it is possible that the *he* indicates the aspiration of the Greek ἔδρ-, ὁδ-, though, as we shall see, the cases are different and not altogether analogous.

There are some cases (fewer in Hebrew and in Jewish Aramaic than in Syriac) in which the Greek aspiration seems to have been retained: הלמי, הילמי for Greek ἄλμη = brine;[9] the name ה(י)לני for Ἑλένη, mother of Monobazos, King of Adiabene;[10] הילסטון sometimes as an alternative spelling for the more frequent אליסטון *vel sim.* is said to represent the Greek ἡλιαστόν = wine especially sweet because the grapes have been left long on the vine to be dried by the sun (not apparently known to Greek dictionaries; but compare LSJ s.v. ἡλιάζω for the meaning postulated here, where we find a reference to Anon. *Incred.* 17: πολλάκις ὁ οἶνος ἡλιαζόμενος τελειοῦται τῇ κράσει καὶ τῇ δυνάμει.);[11] perhaps הלכשיש = ἕλκωσις, ulceration (this word is apparently found only in the Targumim; see Krauss s.v); in Syriac הלס and also אלס for Greece; and הלני, הלנא Helen, mother of Constantine; also הלניאסמוס, הלניקא for ἑλληνισμός, ἑλληνικός, et nonnulla similia; and in rabbinic Hebrew *cf.* הימנון for ὕμνος; and הידור (but also אידור) for ὕδωρ. The last example is explained in the texts: *jSukka* 53d has אוֹ תנחומא תרגם עקילס הגר הדר הידור אילן שהוא על פני המים ; and *cf. bSukka* 35a: אל תקרי הדר אלא הידור שכן בלשון יוני קורין למים הידור. The reference in both talmudic passages is to *Lev.* 23.40. The spelling הידור (with ה) seems to have been caused (or encouraged) by the desire to connect it with הדר. There are also some oddities (superfluous initial aspiration) like הינדיא (presumably influenced by Hebrew הודו) = India; הינדיק= Ἰνδική. Finally, both in rabbinic Hebrew and in Syriac הדיוט(א) = ἰδιώτης, where I cannot think of an explanation. The oddities are few in number and, if they were a widespread phenomenon, could be explained as a hyper-correction comparable to similar (intrusive) initial aspirations in some forms of popular English. In any case, in a suspiciously large proportion of the cases listed in the dictionaries the aspiration stands before an *epsilon* (or another e-sound like η or αι: thus the simplest explanation for cases like הילסטון, הלני, הלס, הלניאסמוס, הלכשיש, is that the *he* does not represent the original Greek aspiration but the original *epsilon* or other e-sound; for this see below.

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9   *M.Shabbat* 14, 2; and *jShabbat* 14c; *bShabbat* 108b; *bErubin* 14b; *jTerumot* 47a.
10   *bYoma* 37a; *bSukka* 2b; *bNazir* 19b.
11   *bB.B.* 97b.

Thus, in spite of these not at all negligible examples it is, I think, fair to say that Greek initial and even more internal aspiration is mostly, even if not always, lost both in Jewish Aramaic and in Syriac, and more often in the former than in the latter.[12]

On the other hand, the vocabulary of the Aramaic dialects contains a large number of words spelt with a *he*, initial or internal, in which it is certain that the *he* does not represent an original Greek aspiration. One of many clear examples of this phenomenon is Syriac אונומהלי = οἰνόμελι, (Jewish Aramaic אינומילין and variants). This is not an isolated case: cf., e.g., the transliterations הבאלון = ἔβαλον (Payne Smith, col. 962); הגהנה(ו)ט = ἐγένετο (Payne Smith, col. 969); הלהאיסון = ἐλέησον; הכינוס = ἔχινος; and compare פהנטא = πέντε; פהרגמוס = Πέργαμος; פרהסטיסהן = παρέστησεν; פהדיון = πεδίον; פרהקלהסא = παρεκάλεσα; פאריהפידימוס = παρεπίδημος; סינדהסמוס as well as סינדסמוס for συνδεσμός; compare also Syriac פהוקי for πεύκη; for some no less interesting transcriptions (Semitic *he* for Greek - αι -, pronounced - ε -) compare: פהדא = παῖδα; פהדיקא = παιδικά; cf. also Syriac אידהא for Ἰουδαία; and for many more examples see Payne Smith, in appropriate places, e.g., coll. 1032ff. for transcriptions and transliterations of Greek words beginning with ἐπι-; coll. 3043ff. for words beginning with πε-.[13]

What we observe in a very large number of such cases is the simple fact that in Aramaic the Greek *epsilon* is sometimes, indeed often, represented by the fifth letter of the Syriac and Hebrew alphabets. It may be that this is due to the position of the *epsilon* in the Greek alphabet, corresponding to that of the Hebrew and Aramaic *he* in those alphabets, and also corresponding to the numerical value of these letter signs (= 5) in both Hebrew and Aramaic as well as in Greek. This may be a kind of explanation, though it is curiously unsatisfactory.[14]

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12   It is worth noting that the frequent retention of the aspiration in Latin transcriptions of Greek names and loanwords may indicate the persistence of the original Greek phonetic aspiration in a foreign linguistic milieu. Compare, *inter multa alia*, Latin *rhetor* for Greek ῥήτωρ, Rhesus = Ῥησος, hydrops = ὕδρωψ, Hyllus = Ὕλλος.

13   For a more accurate study of these phenomena it would be necessary to distinguish rather more carefully than I have been able to do in this paper between the graphic representation of Greek loanwords in Hebrew, Jewish Aramaic and Syriac on the one hand and the mere transliteration of Greek names or words in some Syriac texts, especially in medieval dictionaries like those of Īšo b. Ali and Abū-al-Ḥasan b. Bahlūl, both of the tenth century; see A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur* (Bonn 1922), 241f.

14   A. Schall, *Studien über Griechische Fremdwörter im Syrischen* (Darmstadt 1960), 34, relying on Reckendorf, "Drei alte orthographische Rätsel", in *Florilegium de Vogüé* (1909), 511 (*non vidi*) explains the *he* as a Greek ε turned round 90 degrees, "da in der Estrangelâschrift die Zeilen von oben nach unten geschrieben werden". This does not help. We shall see, in any case, that the representation *he* in Hebrew

Whether or not this explanation is right, the fact remains that the Greek *epsilon* is often represented in Syriac (and in Jewish Aramaic/Hebrew) by a *he*, independently of whether or not an aspiration is present in the Greek source.

This means that such cases as סנהדרין may have to be looked at with suspicion; there too the Semitic *he* probably represents, not the aspiration, but the vowel *epsilon* (Syriac סנדריון). Similarly, in the Hebrew/Jewish Aramaic פרהסיא(ה) (Greek παρρησία) and in Syriac פרהסיא, the *he* probably represents the Greek - η - rather than the aspiration of *rhō*.

The importance of recognising this fact derives from the use we can make of it. There are cases in Hebrew and Aramaic texts in which the apparent presence of an aspiration in a Greek word transliterated into the local Semitic script is apt to mislead the reader. I was thus misled recently when writing a paper on the important material contained in the Babatha archive;[15] and I was liable to mislead such readers as did not know better into believing that in the Nabataean Aramaic inscription I was discussing there the word הפרך could stand indifferently for ὑπαρχ-/ἐπαρχ-. In fact, of course, the *he* there represents the Greek *epsilon*, exactly as in the other cases of Nabataean (and other Aramaic) occurrences of הפארכיא, הפרך, הפרכיה, הפרכא, which I mention there (pp. 98-99) as being transcriptions of Greek ἐπαρχεία.[16]

There is one further point to be noted: the inscriptions and the document I have just mentioned are dated between AD 107 and 125 and are thus older than the manuscripts of any literary evidence for the graphic phenomenon discussed here.

For Semitic *he* = *epsilon* or something like it we find parallels in some spellings within Hebrew itself;[17] and what is particularly interesting is the fact that as in the case of the *he* = *epsilon* equation in Greek loanwords in Hebrew or Aramaic (e.g. ἐπαρχεία transcribed into Aramaic with an initial *he*) so also in the case of the Hebrew spellings inside Hebrew we have very early datable examples.

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and Aramaic for Greek ε is very old; and it can therefore not be a result of developments in the history of one of the varieties of the Syriac alphabet.

15   "A Marriage Contract from the Province of Arabia Nova: Notes on Papyrus Yadin 18", *JQR* 80 (1989), 93-130. My friend Professor Naphtali Lewis has courteously drawn attention to what he rightly and charitably calls a somewhat confusing presentation of the evidence concerning ἐπαρχ- and ὑπαρχ- in my footnote 29 there. (See N. Lewis, "The World of P. Yadin", *BASP* 28 (1991), 35 n. 3). I am glad of the opportunity to set the record straight, especially since the evidence seems to fit into a general pattern of some importance, the observation of which may save other students of ancient documents from similar mistakes.

16   *Cf.* also הפרכותא = ἐπαρχότης (= ἐπαρχία); see Löw *ap*. Krauss, 116.

17   I am grateful to Professor J. Naveh for pointing this out to me.

J. Naveh cites the spelling שהצלכם instead of שאצלכם in *Pap. Murabba'at* 43, line 4 (a letter of Simeon b. Kosba);[18] and he also mentions the spelling שהתשלחו for שְׁתִשְׁלֹחו in *Pap. Nahal Hever* 51.[19]

Cf. also שהלרבי for שֶׁלרבי in an inscription from Dabbura, on the Golan, not far from Lake Huleh in northern Israel. This inscription is to be dated probably, though not quite certainly, towards the end of the second century AD. The same spelling is found on a sarcophagus from Beth She'arim.[20]

Dr. Haggai Misgav of the Hebrew University has drawn my attention to the fact that a similar tendency may be observed even in the text of the Bible. *Cf. Eccl.* 6.10: *ketib* שהתקיף for *qere* שֶׁתָּקִיף; and *cf.* also *Eccl.* 10.3.

J.N. Epstein has noted the traces of the tendency to write the consonantal sign *he* for the vowel *segol* in the transmission of rabbinic literature;[21] he quotes, *inter alia*, the following examples from the Kaufmann manuscript of the Mishna, here described as Ms. ק:

שהדרכן (שֶׁדרכן) לילך ולהזיק: ב"ק, א"א.

אוכלין ומשקין שהבתוכו (שֶׁבתוכו): עדיות, א"יד.

שהנחלקה (שֶׁנחלקה) לשנים: עדיות, ג"ט.

מהגמון שהבבסורייה (שֶׁבסורייה): עדיות, ז"ז.

שהמחשבת (שֶׁמחשבת) נוכרי: חולין, ב"ז.

Epstein notes (1252 n. 1) that in all these cases the *he* serves in the place of a *segol* ("ח ביונית", as he puts it).

Here again we are in the fortunate position of having examples of actual spellings some of which can be dated to a very early period and are thus not liable to the suspicion that they may reflect phonetic developments in the later history of the languages involved[22] or corruptions in the course of transmission.

For the philologist there are obvious advantages to be derived from the study of transcriptions and transliterations from one language into another. The student of cultures in contact, particularly of adjoining and intermingling civilisations such as we find in the meeting between the two supranational civilisations of the Near East in antiquity — Hellenistic and Semitic —, has the further benefit of

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18   על חרס וגמא (Jerusalem 1992), 108-9. See also P. Benoit, O.P., J.T. Milik, R. de Vaux, O.P., *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* II: *Les Grottes de Murabba'at* (Oxford 1961), 159ff.; and for more literature see Naveh, *op. cit.*, 106ff., in the notes.

19   *Op. cit.*, 110.

20   See Naveh, *loc. cit.*, and also *ibid.* 128; D. Urman, "Jewish Inscriptions from Dabbura in the Golan", *IEJ*, 22 (1972), 21 pl. 7; and J. Naveh, על פסיפס ואבן (Jerusalem 1978), 25-6; and *id.*, *IOS* 9 (1979), 30-31 (with Fig. 7); and *id.* חרס, 128.

21   J.N. Epstein, מבוא לנוסח המשנה (Jerusalem 1948), part II, 1252.

22   Hebrew itself; and, for the examples mentioned in the earlier part of this paper, Hebrew and Aramaic as host languages.

being able to observe the effects of varying degrees of mutual influences and borrowings from one international language into another over many centuries.

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