“[A]lthough we possess no evidence that the Rabbis borrowed their rules of interpretation from the Greeks, the situation is quite different when we deal with formulation, terms, categories and systematization of these rules.”

This paper represents a preliminary attempt to introduce a number of insights culled from contact linguistics into the of cultural contact more broadly, with concrete historical examples drawn from Second Temple and rabbinic literature. The paper consists of four discrete sections. A discussion of the contact-linguistic approaches I employ; a brief linguistic analysis of one aspect of rabbinic Hebrew; and two sections that attempt to expand the linguistic insights into broader cultural terms.

I. MONOPARENTAL DESCENT VERSUS LANGUAGE EVOLUTION

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1 Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 78.
2 Let me state at the outset my debt to the work of Salikoko Mufwene, and particularly to his book *Language Evolution: Contact, Competition, and Change* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008). References to this book are provided parenthetically in the body of the text.
In order to appreciate the significance of the linguistic approach I intend to summarize, it is necessary to briefly survey the theoretical framework against which it argues, specifically the traditional historical-linguistics notion of asexual reproduction, also referred to as monoparental descent, according to which, languages can be traced back, through a reconstructed Stammbaum, to a single genealogical antecedent. As Sarah Thomason and Terrence Kaufman write in their influential *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics*: “This is the meaning of one of the first principles students learn when they study historical linguistics—namely, that a daughter language in a family tree is a changed later form of its single parent language … *a language can not have multiple ancestors in the course of normal transmission.*”3 This is a surprising affirmation for a book devoted to contact between two (or more) languages, and that seeks to chart a middle course between the extreme views that assert either that no language contains mixed elements or, alternately, that no language is free of such elements.4 The authors argue forcibly against attempts to deny the scope and nature of contact-induced linguistic change, demonstrating the empirical inadequacy of theories that would limit such change to a language’s lexicon or allow for grammatical influence only between structurally similar languages, and affirming the importance of extra-linguistic elements as “it is the sociolinguistic history of the speakers, and not the structure of their language, that is the primary determinant of the linguistic outcome of language contact.”5 In their analysis of linguistic contact, Thomason and Kaufman distinguish two main mechanisms of contact-induced change: borrowing

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4 These views are represented in the epigraphs of the book’s introduction: “Es gibt keine Mischsprache” (Max Müller) versus “Es gibt keine völlig ungemischte Sprache” (Hugo Schuchardt), quoted in Thomason and Kaufman, *Language Contact*, 1.
and substratum interference (or as they later call it, contact-induced interference): “borrowing” refers to the incorporation of foreign features in a way that does not affect the structure of a language; “interference” to structural shifts in the language involving phonology, morphology, or syntax.

Despite the book’s focus on linguistic contact, the authors assert that contact of a certain intensity in effect denies the possibility of linguistic analysis. This occurs when new languages emerge as the result of such intensive language contact, their structures so transformed relative to their predecessors, that they cannot be traced back to a single linguistic progenitor language. Once a language cannot be shown to have descended from a single linguistic ancestor, can no longer be considered to have a “genetic relationship” and is not properly the object of linguistic analysis since, as we saw above, “a language can not have multiple ancestors in the course of normal transmission.” Intense language contact, in other words, disrupts normal transmission and thus “the label ‘genetic relationship’ does not properly apply when transmission is imperfect … We would claim that languages arising outside of normal transmission are not related (in the genetic sense) to any antecedent systems.” What languages are these? “Examples include, and are, for social reasons, probably confined to … creole languages …”; “all early-creolized creoles also have a nongenetic origin.” These linguistically

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6 “Interference” is a technical term, roughly equivalent to “language change brought about by non-structural (or: external) factors”; recent usage has eschewed the term in favor of “contact-induced change.”
7 Thomason and Kaufman, *Language Contact*, 10; emphasis in the original.
8 Thomason and Kaufman, *Language Contact*, 48. The qualification “that did not develop directly from fully crystallized pidgins” addresses the largely discredited idea that creoles emerged from pidgins. If that were to happen, the creole could be subsumed under genetic analysis since it would have only one ancestor—the pidgin.
“parentless” languages are a form of *creatio ex nihilo*, “as new linguistic creations, they do not represent any kind of transmission, broken or unbroken.”

The exclusion of creoles from standard linguistic analysis due to their “nongenetic origin” is, for one, quite odd: Thomason and Kaufman classify creoles as orphan languages because they have two parents, not one. Moreover, as Mufwene notes (93-112), the notion of a minimally disrupted transmission from mother language to daughter language emerges from the same historical crucible as notions of linguistic superiority, linguistic purity, and racial purity. August Schleicher, who was the first to graphically represent the development of Indo-European languages in the form of a tree (*Stammbaum*), also offered a taxonomy of languages in which the reflexive languages, which include the Indo-European and Semitic groups, represent the more fully developed evolution of their speakers: “Animals can be ordered according to their morphological character. For man, however, the external form has, to a certain extent, been superseded … To classify human beings we require, I

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10 Thomason and Kaufman, *Language Contact*, 49. Thomason and Kaufman’s forceful exclusion of creoles from the comparative method appears to be motivated by a desire to preserve the method’s utility by clearly delimiting the scope of excluded languages. In other words, Thomason and Kaufman are defending historical linguistics from claims put forward by, e.g., Regna Darnell and Joel Sherzer (“Areal Linguistic Studies in North America: A Historical Perspective,” *International Journal of American Linguistics* 37 [1971], 26, quoted in Thomason and Kaufman, *Language Contact*, 8): “If mixed languages could occur, then no language could be proved to be the descendant of an earlier stage of a single other language.” Not so, argue Thomason and Kaufman: “mixed languages do not fit within the genetic model and therefore cannot be classified genetically at all; but most languages are not mixed, and the traditional family tree model of diversification and genetic relationship remains the main reference point of comparative-historical linguistics… Non-creoles can be mapped on to the ‘traditional family tree model’” (Thomason and Kaufman, *Language Contact*, 3).

believe, a higher criterion, one which is an exclusive property of man. This we find, as I have
mentioned, in language.”\textsuperscript{12} Unfortunately, Schleicher was not unique, nor was his position atypical.\textsuperscript{13}

As revolting as the origins and (mis)use of the \textit{Stammbaum} may be, they would not justify the
rejection of a theoretical paradigm that was producing robust and elegant scientific results. But as
Mufwene demonstrates, a genetic linguistics founded on the notion of monoparental descent (each
language emerging from a single predecessor) entails significant difficulties. First, comparative-
historical linguistics does not provide structural criteria by which to distinguish non-creole
(genetically admissible) from creole (genetically inadmissible) languages. So much so, that Mufwene
questions the analytic utility of the term creole, since it is not clear what is gained by identifying
Gullah (the language of the African-American population on the Sea Islands of the coast of South
Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida) as a creole in contradistinction with African American
Vernacular English, or both of these “with other colonial varieties such as Amish English, which has
clearly arisen from the contact of English with some continental European languages (notably
German or perhaps Pennsylvania Dutch and the like), under particular conditions of social isolation,
but is not identified as a (semi-)creole” (Mufwene, 43). In the absence of a linguistic line of
demarcation, the designation of a language as creole is ineluctably arbitrary.\textsuperscript{14}

A second difficulty with the genetic, mono-parental approach is its cheerful willingness to
renounce its own claims to general validity. The theoretical underpinnings of historical linguistics

\textsuperscript{12} August Schleicher, \textit{Über die Bedeutung der Sprache für die Naturgeschichte des Menschen} (Weimar: Böhlhau, 1865),
\textsuperscript{13} See also the comments of E. F. K. Koerner, “Ideology in 19th and 20th Century Study of Language: A
Neglected Aspect of Linguistic Historiography,” \textit{Indogermanische Forschung} 105 (2000). Need to discuss
Christopher Hutton.
\textsuperscript{14} Mufwene does employ the term \textit{creole} to denote languages that emerge under a particular set of social and
economic conditions.
are, its practitioners argue, in fine shape; there just happen to be languages that are not amenable to genetic analysis. Does standard scientific procedure not dictate that the existence of such languages be taken as a challenge to the theory rather than a “failure” of the languages? The broad debasement of creoles as the result of “imperfect transmission” allows practitioners of comparative linguistics to marginalize or outright ignore them, the better to preserve their methodological approach. In the case of Thomason and Kaufman, the result is a model of language contact incapable of accounting for the most fully realized empirical instances of the phenomenon. Indeed, the authors sound downright exasperated with the very survival of these languages: “The cases of this type we have studied involve a stubborn and persistent resistance to total cultural assimilation in the face of overwhelming long-term cultural pressure from source-language speakers”; “for reasons of stubborn language and cultural loyalty, the pressured group may maintain what it can of its native language.”

Responding to these deficiencies, Salikoko Mufwene has developed an evolutionary theory of language change modeled after population genetics. The “transmission” process that, according to the historical-comparative approach, allows language to pass from one generation to the next is, Mufwene argues, an idealized fiction. No individual transmits a linguistic system to their child or peers. Rather, language learners are exposed to idiolects, and it is up to them to (re)construct their own idiolect from them. Viewed in this light, language acquisition can be framed as a process that involves selection from a linguistic feature pool, with the understanding that at different stages in the speaker’s life, and in different social situations, she will select different features. The process is in a “comparable to gene recombination in biology” (Mufwene, 18): a given feature pool (the linguistic

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15 Thomason and Kaufman 48-49 and 100, respectively; emphasis added.
16 Mufwene is not concerned with the prehistoric evolution of language in homo sapiens, but rather employs evolutionary models in the contemporary study of language.
traits to which a language learner has been exposed) and a selection process “constrained by the specific external and internal ecologies of linguistic interaction” (Mufwene, 20). Here “external” denotes the social and economic setting in which the interaction takes place; “internal” the linguistic variants (be they of forms or structures or rules) available to the speaker. The recombinatory nature of language acquisition explains the constant diachronic change evident in linguistic communities. Where historical linguistics can only explain such change in terms of “imperfect transmission” or “interference,” variation is part and parcel of Mufwene’s approach, as language acquisition and transmission is always the result of “the interaction of the external ecology of a language with its internal ecology,” and it is this interaction that sheds light “not only on causes of linguistic changes but also on how these phenomena spread” (Mufwene, 23). Of course, mammalian evolution is very slow and in that regard a poor correlate to language change—a much closer analogue is the virus, which approximates language “in the ways changes occur, as they are affected by the social practices of their hosts […] In the case of linguistic and viral species, factors such as migration to a new habitat, contact with another population, and other changes in the composition of the population bear on actuation” (Mufwene, 23).17

Armed with these analytic insights, Mufwene is able to tackle a wide range of in the field of creole studies. For example, the emergence of creoles is often associated with agricultural (especially sugar) plantations, why then did Brazil, the first European colony to establish sugar plantations, produce no creole? Likely due to the high rate of racial miscegenation, resulting in a relatively greater rate of integration among the different linguistic communities that made up the workforce; Spanish colonies such as Cuba and Santo Domingo (today’s Dominican Republic) did not produce creoles,

17 “Actuation” refers to the incorporation of an innovation as a structural feature of the language.
even though the latter shares an island with Haiti, where today ten million residents are native
speakers Haitian creole—why? Here the absence is due to Spain’s aggressive Spanish literacy policy,
a subsidiary of the imperially decreed Catholic mission to the New World; English was introduced
into Ireland as a trade language in the ninth century, but it was not until seventeenth century that it
was widely adopted and began to be acquired naturalistically (i.e., not through schools), because it
was only with Oliver Cromwell’s conquest of Ireland, and its subsequent colonization on the
settlement model, that English became economically valuable (especially on the potato plantations)
and began to spread through the population. The specifics of these arguments are, of course, not
germane to the study of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism. What is, I find, compelling is the
rejection of the historical-comparative approach18 and introduction of Mufwene’s evolutionary
model.

II. LINGUISTIC CONTACT: THE RABBINIC HEBREW DEPONENT

I begin with a brief linguistic example. In an essay that first appeared in 1953 and was
republished in 1996, the eminent Israeli linguist Joshua Blau examines the anomalous case of pa’ul
(or qatul) participles that are active in sense despite their passive morphology.19 Blau first establishes
the antiquity of the phenomenon (“already in biblical Hebrew we find the pattern”) then argues that
it “is not particular to any one Semitic language, but rather is a general [Semitic] phenomenon.” Both

18 I want to emphasize that the “comparative” in historical-comparative linguistics refers to the comparison of languages in
the same family in order to establish the extent and nature of their kinship.
19 The article first appeared in Leshonenu 18 (1952-53) 67-81; reprinted with minor changes in Blau’s collected essays
points aim to buttress an internal-Hebrew explanation of the form: since these forms become much more common in rabbinic Hebrew, one might have assumed Aramaic influence was at work, since “the non-passive sense of standing and dressing verbs are unique to Aramaic.” Blau minimizes this possibility: “the comparison with other Semitic languages demonstrates that [active sense to passive forms] is a pan-Semitic phenomenon, and the expansion of the phenomenon in a given direction could also have occurred on purely Hebrew soil (על קרקע עברית בלבד)” (רל 1b).

Blau presents a variety of biblical forms: non-passive qatul adjectives (ʾamun; ʾanush; batuah; batzur; zakbur; hamutz; ṣanum; ʾarum; ʿatzim; ṣalum); passive participles of intransitive verbs (ʾaruz, ʿatuf, saruah, yaqud); and transitive verbs that involve acts of carrying or dressing (abuz, asur).

But Blau’s analysis glosses over a number of significant issues. Some of his examples are questionable (batzur, hamutz, ṣanum, and batuah) as they may be passive in meaning; others require revision in light of recent semantic findings (abuz berev [Song 3:8] likely means “seized by war,” following Haiim Rosén’s discussion); Blau also does not refer to the frequency of the form (hamutz, ṣanum, ʾamun, ʾanush, zakbur, ṣanu); and ṣalum are all hapax legomena; and he does not distinguish between poetry and prose, or between different historical strata within biblical Hebrew.

But even if one were to resolve these difficulties, the fundamental error remains: establishing the existence of a form in earlier strata of a language does not, pace Blau and many others, mean that we have secured its “internal” status and thereby excluded the need for considering “external” factors. Consider leqales, a word securely attested in both biblical and rabbinic Hebrew, though with an important distinction: in biblical Hebrew it means “shame, reproach” (Psalm 44:12, Jeremiah 20:8), but in rabbinic Hebrew it means “to praise.” As earlier scholars have recognized, the semantic shift is due to language contact, as the rabbinic leqales is influenced by the Greek phrase kalos legein, “to speak well of, to praise.” So while leqales extends from biblical to rabbinic Hebrew, its semantic
development cannot be understood without recourse to linguistic forces outside of Hebrew.

Similarly, the modern Hebrew word *glidah*, “ice cream,” which was coined by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda. The root *g-l-d* is a biblical hapax legomenon, appearing in Job 16:15 “I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin (*gildh*),” but appears more commonly in post-biblical Hebrew, meaning “to congeal, to become solid,” and subsequently “to form a covering,” with nominal forms meaning “scab” and “ice,” among others. Ben-Yehuda’s coinage, then, can be seen as internal, since it is based on a Hebrew root, selecting one of its variant meanings. At the same time, Ben Yehuda’s coinage is very similar to *gelato*, and its phonetic similarity to the Italian “ice cream” undoubtedly played a role in the process. The same dynamic is evident with *masekha*, whose semantics shift “molten” to “mask” under the influence of *mask/mascara* and other European cognates (facilitated by the biblical word’s association with “statue” in the Decalogue); *peras* from a coinage in rabbinic Hebrew (“one half [of a *sela*]”) to “prize” under the influence of *prize/prix* and other European cognates (facilitated by the Mishnaic dictum: “Be not like a servant who serves his master in order to receive a *peras*’); and Naomi Shemer’s popular song *ein li rega dal* (“not a moment of respite”) where *dal* no longer means, as in earlier strata of Hebrew, “impoverished,” but rather “dull,” as the phrase *rega dal* is a Hebrew rendering of “[never a] dull moment.”

There are good reasons to suspect that a similar development governs the morphologically passive – semantically active forms in rabbinic Hebrew, where this form is very common and appears in basic (active) actions: רוכב על סוס ("ridden on a horse" rather than רוכב;) וי שוקד ("be diligent [passive] in the study of Torah" rather than שוקד;) נר דולק ("a burnt candle" rather than דולק;) נזכר ("was remembered" instead of זכר;) נתקבלתי ממך ("I was received

20Ghil’ad Zuckermann, who has studied the influence of phonetic similarity on semantic change, dubs the phenomenon “phono-semantic matching” (PSM).
from you”), instead of קבלת, and more. Why the shift? As Abba Ben David recognized, the preponderance of these forms is contact-induced, mirroring the Greek deponent, that is, verbs that are passive or middle in form but active in meaning. In terms of the broader theoretical concerns I wish to address, the case at hand offers a compelling example of the limitations of traditional historical-linguistic categories, and specifically the poverty of the “internal versus external” debate. Is the rabbinic leqāles internal or external to Hebrew? On the one hand, it exhibits full morphological continuity with biblical Hebrew, so it would be absurd to suggest that it is imported or borrowed. On the other hand, its meaning has not merely been altered, but completely reversed as a result of contact with Greek. Similarly with the morphologically passive but semantically active verbal forms: they are attested in biblical Hebrew and so allow for the kind of internal analysis that Blau champions, but this analysis willfully ignores the fact that rabbinic Hebrew exists in an intense contact environment with Greek, where deponent verbs are standard. Is it, then, an internal Hebrew development or external to Hebrew? Is the rabbinic Hebrew form Semitic or Indo-European? Mufwene’s approach elegantly avoids these (self-inflicted) difficulties. Where Blau’s implicit privileging of “internal” change results in an explanatory scheme that fails to account for the dramatic shift in the frequency of the morphologically-passive but semantically-active forms, Mufwene’s focus on the constant, varied contact between speakers and the broader linguistic environment (the ecology of the language) would expect change of this sort.\(^{21}\)

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\(^{21}\) Morphological change is considered part of the core, structural identity of a language, much more so than its vocabulary; Blau would never deny that the lexicon of rabbinic Hebrew contains many words of Greek origin.
The broader point of this essay is that these linguistic insights can be expanded to the study of non-linguistic cultural contact, as I will try to demonstrate through reference to Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism, a field whose study rests on theoretical assumptions that correlate in important regards with the Stammbaum model of comparative linguistics. The most prominent of these is the assumption of monoparental descent, which is so pervasive that it has become normative to conceive of Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism vertically, as descendants of the Israelite religion/Judaism of the Hebrew Bible. Jewish communities or individuals that cannot be located on the vector leading from the Bible to the rabbis—most obviously (so-called) Hellenistic Judaism—are, like creoles, marginalized for being the product of an illicit union between two cultures. The genealogical line from the Bible down to, say, Philo, cannot be couched in terms of normal transmission, and so the surrounding Hellenistic culture is characterized as a form of “interference.” Whatever his achievements, Jewishly speaking, Philo, like creole speakers, demonstrates imperfect learning. Consider the assumptions that underlie the category “Hellenistic Judaism” and its deployment in contemporary scholarship. Like any demarcation it is doing double work: indicating those parts of the late antique Jewish world that count as Hellenistic, while excluding other parts of the Jewish world from this designation. Since the excluded groups—contemporary Hebrew and Aramaic writing Jews—were residents of the Hellenistic kingdoms of the Ptolemies (until ~200 BCE) and the Seleucids (until ~140 BCE), and then part of the Hellenized Roman East,²² designating them as implicitly non-Hellenistic is historically problematic. Moreover, in language evolution terms, “Hellenistic Judaism” designates a marked region of the Jewish

²² The political rule of the Maccabees did not alter the linguistic and cultural situation.
landscape whose study must recognize the existence of cultural contact, in contrast to the non-Hellenistic Judaism, Judaism simpliciter, conceived as a realm of monoparental reproduction that can be (and is!) studied with minimal regard for cultural contact.

Furthermore, the language evolution approach championed by Mufwene (along with insights from other contact-linguists) may be a source of considerable analytic insight. Contrast, for example, the rich distinctions afforded by Mufwene’s ecological model, with the impossibly blunt categories of “Hellenism” and “Judaism.” Almost without fail, scholars understand there to have been an encounter between two fairly static systems, with the operative question being whether the encounter was a positive or negative development; whether, as Lee Levine’s book invites us to ask, the relationship between Judaism and Hellenism was one of “conflict or confluence.”23 To no one’s surprise, it turns out to have been a little of both: “Judaism’s encounter with Hellenism in the ancient world has fascinated scholars for generations. These two ostensibly different cultures clashed on occasion, yet in most instances contacts of Jews and Judaism with the Hellenistic-Roman world proved immensely fructifying and creative.”24 Levine’s may be a particularly schematic formulation, but the underlying logic is familiar from the work of many scholars. An approach based on the insights of contact-linguistics may add greatly needed nuance to the study of Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism. Thus, linguists have created a robust taxonomy of contact-induced change, and the corresponding intensity of contact: incorporation of non-basic (e.g., technical) vocabulary from the contact language;25 more thoroughgoing lexical incorporation; the incorporation of some

24 Levine, Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity, xi.
25 This is commonly referred to as “borrowing,” but this is a misnomer: no one is planning on giving those words back.
structural elements; massive grammatical changes. A similar taxonomy could surely be developed for
non-linguistic cultural/religious incorporations. Aside from its analytic utility, such a taxonomy
might well undermine the regnant but simplistic assumption that the absence of Greek linguistic
competence marks the relative absence of contact-induced cultural change. Until recently, German
eschewed Latinate borrowings in favor of “native” word formations: Einleitung rather than *eine
Introduktions-, Sauerstoff rather than *das Oxigen, and so forth. The result is a prima facie
“undisturbed” Germanic lexicon. But, of course, a closer investigation reveals that many of the
native words are merely calques: ein+leiten corresponding to the Latin intro+ducere (“in+lead”);
\textit{sauer+stoff} corresponding to Greek \textit{oxys}+\textit{gen} (“sour+material/product”). Kindred words prove that
this is no coincidence: Just as \textit{einleiten} is “introduce,” \textit{ableiten} is “deduce”; just as \textit{Sauerstoff} is “oxygen,”
\textit{Wasserstoff} is “hydrogen”—despite the German-language veneer, the contact-induced nature of the
words is evident beneath the surface. A similar dynamic might be at play of Second Temple and
rabbinic corpora that either do not contain Greek words (the Dead Sea Scrolls) or deal with themes
that contain little evidence of Greek linguistic evidence (Mishnaic laws of sacrifice).

As the brief survey of creole-related issues addressed by Mufwene’s approach indicates, there
is much to be gained by eschewing the language of “Judaism and/versus Hellenism” and examining
on the cultural ecology in which contact occurs: the various social/economic/political circumstances
that framed the encounters of individuals and communities. Just as, e.g., the forces at work in the
non-emergence of a Brazilian creole were not the same as those at work for a Cuban or San
Dominican, it is conceptually inadequate to refer to an “encounter with Hellenism” that
encompasses Seleucid, Ptolemaic, and Roman political regimes; urban and village living; geographic
disparity; and so on. This approach also allows for the introduction of individual-level analysis. For example, a concept like cultural “bilingualism.”

Finally, if contact-induced cultural change is akin to Mufwene’s language evolution—a constant encounter between cultural agents (the equivalent of speakers) and the set of cultural features available to them—then cultural contact does not manifest itself only through change (what historical-comparative linguists call “interference”). It is, of course, easier to identify change, and the examples I gave above (the semantic shift of leqales, the proliferation of the deponent in rabbinic Hebrew) both involve change. But since the choice of cultural features is influenced by the broader cultural ecology, continuity is also contact induced. A linguistic analogue: the preservation of the earlier Semitic distinctions in the realization of (unvoiced pharyngeal fricitive) נ and (uvular fricitive) ק, or between (glottal stop) ר and (voiced pharyngeal fricitive) י among Jews living in Arabophone communities receives no attention from historical linguists as it represents “perfect transmission” from one generation of Hebrew speakers to the next. In truth, the survival of these distinctions is no less due to the encounter with the broader Arabophone environment than is the loss of these distinctions among Ashkenazi Jews.

1. Canonic Interpretation: Internally Versus Externally Motivated Change

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26 To use a much later analogy, consider the religious fluidity of some Caribbean Jews in the 17th century who maintained a Jewish name and identity, while employing a Catholic name and identity in their business dealings. See Hilit Surowitz, “May God Enlarge Japhet”: Portuguese Jews in the Early Modern Atlantic World, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Florida, 2012, 85-100. I am grateful to Dr. Surowitz-Israel for introducing me to this material, inter alia.

Monoparental descent accords priority to so-called internally motivated change. In their discussion of phonetic shifts, Thomason and Kaufman cite Lyle Campbell who “argues more cautiously that externally-induced changes, specifically sound changes, may be unnatural: in general, ‘it can be said that sound changes induced by internal factors are natural and regular, and that unnatural changes and exceptions to natural changes typically have external motivation’.”\(^2^8\) Campbell’s statement is a mix of linguistic science and linguistic isolationism: the claim that internally motivated change is regular and externally motivated is irregular can be verified or refuted by linguistic data; but what does it mean to assert that the former is \textit{natural} and the latter \textit{unnatural}? Are these analytically meaningful linguistic terms? The implication is clear. The natural state of a language is isolation, while language contact is an unnatural development—in its ideal state, genetic descent (mother language to daughter language) would be the result of internal change alone. Internally motivated change is a constitutive element in historical linguistics, for without it there would be no language speciation, no cladistics; externally motivated change is an empirical reality that must be acknowledged though it remains external to the theory—an intrusion.\(^2^9\)


\(^2^9\) It is worth noting the historiographic self-representation of linguistics as a discipline typically involves “internal” change (asexual reproduction) without due attention to the effects of “external” factors (contact-induced change). As Koerner writes: “Although it is obvious to an intellectual historian that linguistics absorbed many ideas from the natural sciences during its phases of growth … we find very little mention of this fact in the usual treatment of the history of 19th and 20th century linguistics … Indeed, they hardly ever provide the context out of which linguistics evolved into the discipline we now are familiar with; instead, they treat the history of the field almost exclusively as a mere accumulative progression of linguistic ideas through time,” “Ideology in 19th and 20th Century Study of Language,” 2. A fuller recognition of the importance—even legitimacy—of external change, then, is important for linguistics as a tool of a analysis, but also for its disciplinary self-representation.
I want to examine one significant development through this lens, namely, the doctrine that the word of God is preserved in a fixed collection of texts, and the attendant practice of interpretation as a source of authority. I do not intend to wade into the murky waters of what constitutes a canon, and the extent to which the term applies to religions that are not based on divine revelation (i.e. Greek and Roman). For the present purposes, I would emphasize that whatever the precise sense of the term, “canonicity” is not a characteristic of a collection of texts, but rather an attitude that a particular community adopts toward a collection of texts: the belief that the texts are religiously authoritative (and this will mean different things for different religious communities), and in some sense closed—the authority invested in the texts is no longer accessible through extra-textual means.

a. Internally Motivated Change

An “internal” historiographic account of the emergence of these doctrines and practices in Israelite/Jewish religion goes something like this: Biblical sources testify to the emergence of a religious ideology that links God’s word with a written text. As Hindy Najman has richly documented, the prophetic books composed after the destruction of the First Temple show an increased reliance on textual metaphors and practices: Ezekiel ingesting the scroll (Ezek 3), Habakkuk recording his prophecies in writing (Hab 2), Zechariah’s vision of the scroll hovering over the land (Zech 5), and more.30

However, textual images of divine revelation are not tantamount to a closed canon; God could continue to communicate with Israel either directly or through the mediation of a prophet. And so, alongside these developments, there emerges of a complex of practices that establishes the received text as an authority that, in different ways and degrees, stands in lieu of prophecy. This approach is well-established in the Deuteronomistic literature, the outstanding example being the alleged discovery of the book of the law of Moses during the reign of Josiah, and the religious reforms that ensue (2 Kgs 22-23). Later, it would receive imperial sanction when Nehemiah, the Persian governor of Yehud, along with Ezra the scribe, “opened the book in the sight of all the people” (Neh 8:5) as “the [aforementioned] Levites, helped the people to understand the law (torah), while the people remained in their places. So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation” (Neh 8:7-8).

There is some debate as to the meaning of the Hebrew word méforash, rendered “with interpretation” in the NRSV translation above. If the translation is correct, already in the 5th century BCE there had evolved an interpretive tradition associated with the Law, but even if it is not, the Second Temple period witnesses the emergence of a rich array of textual practices aimed at anchoring religious authority in the Torah: apocalypses and testaments attributed to biblical figures (the former to Enoch, Ezra, Baruch; the latter to the twelve patriarchs, Moses, Solomon, inter alia), historical works that explicitly invoke the authority of Scripture (Maccabees), and exegetical writings (Philo, Qumran Pesher literature). Of course, this is not an exhaustive list (how should Jubilees be

31 Though even in such a text-centered narrative as Josiah’s, the found book is not considered authoritative until the prophetess Huldah vouchsafed it (2 Kgs 14-20); prophecy remains a legitimate, though perhaps circumscribed, source of authority.
32 Deuteronomy’s consistent camouflaging of its differences with the Book of Exodus suggests that the latter had already attained authoritative standing when the former was composed, though it is difficult to divine much beyond that. See Bernard Levinson, Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
classified?), nor does it do justice to the important differences between these approaches. But for the sake of my argument I need only provide a sketch of the familiar “internal” account of the emergence of biblical canonicity.

b. Externally Motivated Change

The emergence of the Hebrew Bible as a canonic text can be told in a different manner as well, as it occurred in close proximity to the establishment of the Homeric epic as a canon of sorts, what Margalit Finkelberg has called “a foundation text.” There are at least three elements to this process: the authoritative (oral) text was established in the 6th century BCE in Athens; the Iliad and Odyssey were recited at the Panathenaea (the most important Athenian festival honoring Athena; it was the only work whose performance was legislated), an indication and a bolstering of their role as a “national” religious texts; and there emerged a rich interpretive tradition that took Homer’s poems to be the sources of ultimate truth.

There can be no question that some elements in the formation of the Homeric and biblical canons were shared. James Porter opens his fascinating study of Aristarchus and Crates, the great 2nd century BCE Homeric critics of Alexandria and Pergamum, respectively, with a summary of the classical tradition concerning the formation of the Homeric texts:

According to the scholia of Dionysius Thrax (the learned Alexandrian grammarian of the mid-second century B.C.), the first critical edition of Homer came into existence in the following way. Homer's poems, scattered over time by floods, earthquakes and fire, resurfaced again, but in random quantities. It fell to Peisistratus to rescue the epics from almost certain oblivion ... Seventy-two experts (grammatikoi) were then appointed to the task of individually (kat’ idian) reassembling Homer's poems, each according to his own lights and a wage that befitted learned men and connoisseurs of poems (kritais poíemátôn).35

These seventy-two reconstructions of the Homeric epic were then placed before the group of scholars and that of Aristarchus was eventually crowned the most accurate.36 For the present argument, the key issue is, of course, the patent parallels between this account and that of the composition of the Septuagint in the Letter of Aristeas: King Ptolemy commissioned Demetrius of Phalerum, his chief librarian, to collect all the books of the world, and the latter proposed that that the law books of the Jews be included in the collection.37 The king wrote Eleazar, the High Priest in Jerusalem, and after some negotiation, seventy-two translators are sent to Alexandria where “they set to completing their several tasks, reaching agreement among themselves on each by comparing versions.”38 The similarity between the two narratives, already unmistakable, grows deeper when we

36 On the initial acceptance and subsequent rejection of the historicity of the tale see Rudolf Pfeiffer, History of Classical Scholarship: From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age (Oxford; Clarendon, 1968), 6-8.
37 For a comparison of the two accounts see Lee Martin McDonald, Forgotten Scriptures: The Selection and Rejection of Early Religious Texts (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 87-88 who is agnostic as to the historical relationship between the two narratives; Jed Wyrick, The Ascension of Authorship: Attribution and Canon Formation in Jewish, Hellenistic, and Christian Traditions (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), argues for the priority of the Septuagint story and its influence on the Peisistratus account, but without considering the relative prestige of the two works within Alexandrian society and the likelihood that the leading intellectual figures of the Hellenistic world would feel compelled to borrow from the Letter of Aristeas. See also Giuseppe Veltri’s discussion of the two narratives as part of a dynamic of canonization and decanonization in his Libraries, Translations, and ‘Canonic’ Text: The Septuagint, Aquila and Ben Sira in the Jewish and Christian Traditions (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 78-90.
recognize that the Septuagint scholars are also tasked with establishing a precise recension of the biblical text, since existing copies “have been transcribed somewhat carelessly and not as they should be, according to the report of the experts, because they have not received royal patronage.”

Another point of similarity is the number of discrete literary units (“books,” though for much of the period under discussion they were scrolls) that constitute the Hebrew Bible. As Guy Darshan has elegantly demonstrated, there are two main traditions, one that puts the number at twenty-four and another at twenty-two, and each represents a response to the Homeric division. Twenty-four, as that is the number of books in the Iliad, and, under the influence of the Iliad, the number of books in the Odyssey as well. The justification for this division—which is not original to Homer but rather dates to Hellenistic times—is that twenty-four is the number of letters in the Greek alphabet, and thus the Homeric epic reflects the same fullness or perfection as the alphabet itself. Which is, Darshan argues, the justification of the twenty-two book division of the Bible, as twenty-two is the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. (Phrased in linguistic categories, we might say that the first approach is a Jewish incorporation of a Homeric feature—“borrowing” the number twenty-four, the second, a calque—the number twenty-two is native, but its motivation is the result of cultural contact with the Greek tradition about Homer’s books).

Is the canonicity of the Torah the result of internal development, or is it externally motivated? As in the linguistic realm, Mufwene’s approach suggests the question is spurious. First, because so-called internal change (non-contact motivated change) is still external from the

perspective of the speaker. Though the increased tendency among teenagers toward elided words (vacay=vacation, awks=awkward, totes=total/totally) is “internal” in that it is not the result of language contact, qua novelties they are external to the English speaker who is hearing for the first time that “vacay was totes cray cray.” Second, because Mufwene emphasizes the contribution of contact to the selection of variants, including the contact language’s ability to mobilize features within the native language. As with leqales, glidah, maskeha, and the other examples discussed above, the emergence of canonic status for the Hebrew Bible is the result of an interaction between the internal and external ecologies of Second Temple Jewish culture and cannot be categorized as either internal or external. The cultural contact with a Hellenistic culture that was canonizing (the term is imprecise) the Homeric epic might promote the selection and thus survival of features within Judaism that accord with this process. Other phenomena may be amenable to similar ecological arguments: the Septuagint translation (third century BCE Alexandria was both the greatest center of Homeric scholarship and the largest Jewish city in the world), the increased prestige of Moses as the giver and sometimes composer of the Torah—perhaps patterned after the figure of Homer, and the composition of a sustained commentary on the Torah as a whole by Philo. These are fundamental conceptions and practices for post-Second Temple Judaism and beyond; a fuller and more nuanced understanding of their genesis is a clear desideratum.

41 “I maintain that all language changes are externally motivated, in the sense that motivation for change is external to language structure, and contact (situated at the inter-ideolectal level) has always been an important factor causing changes in the ‘balance of power’ among competing variants” (Mufwene, 32).
2. Metropolitan Bias: Onias’ Temple

The Onias Temple was established in the second century BCE in the town of Leontopolis, in the province of Heliopolis in Ptolemaic Egypt. Most modern scholars have emphasized the theological issues arising from the existence of a Jewish temple outside Jerusalem, and judged the temple’s importance accordingly. Thus, Tcherikover argues that since Egyptian Jewry “reverenced the tradition of its fathers […] it is hard to imagine that [Onias] found support among the broad sections of the Jews of Egypt when he was about to do something so obviously opposed to Jewish tradition.” If so, Tcherikover concludes, “the shrine possessed a purely local significance, being the temple of the military colony of Leontopolis. This assumption resolves a number of questions … [including] to a certain extent also the flouting of Jewish sacred values.” Indeed, Tcherikover asserts, “Egyptian Jewry never fully recognized the shrine, and as long as the Temple of Jerusalem remained intact their gaze was directed toward it.” Similarly, Abraham Wasserstein writes: “Few things are as certain about Jewish liturgical arrangements in the late biblical period and in proto-rabbinic Judaism as the exclusive attachment to the Temple in Jerusalem.”

46 Abraham Wasserstein, “Notes on the Temple of Onias at Leontopolis,” *Illinois Classics Studies* 18 (1993), 119. Wasserstein’s commitment to the view that the Jerusalem priesthood was the sole representative of legitimate Judaism is outrageously lacking in nuance: “We must not be misled by the romanticising, archaeology-fed nostalgia and enthusiasm aroused by the discoveries in the Judean desert into thinking that the sectarians there were authentically Jewish […] we tend, sometimes unthinkingly, to adopt these sectarians as authentically Jewish and to forget that they were inveterate heretics and enemies of the Jerusalem establishment” (122, n. 11). It is not clear from the article on what grounds Abraham Wasserstein determines what groups and practices are to be considered authentically Jewish.
Daniel Schwartz, however, suggests the Onias temple cannot be thus marginalized. The province of Heliopolis figures prominently in Egyptian Jewish landscape—cited in 86 of 156 inscriptions in Horbury and Noy’s *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt*—and so Schwartz wonders: “Is it plausible that a temple located at the very heart of this important Jewish population center, would be marginal and unimportant? Moreover, had the Jewish of Alexandria so fully submitted to the authority and the sanctity of Jerusalem, would they have ignored the Onias Temple, whose very existence constitutes a gross violation of Torah law?” The scholars who would minimize the role of the Onias Temple assume the “Alexandrian devotees of the Jerusalem Temple were not particularly troubled by the grave transgression of Torah law that the Onias Temple entailed … This assumption is utterly implausible in light of the teachings of the prophets and the biblical historiography, both of which denounce sacrificial sites (*bamot*) outside Jerusalem.”

Schwartz resolves this difficulty by positing the existence of two groups of Egyptian Jews: devotees of the Jerusalem Temple who disparage the Onias Temple, and highly “spiritualized” Alexandrian Jews uninterested in the institution of the temple and sacrifice, who accepted the Onias Temple with equanimity, as they do the Jerusalem Temple.

The above quotes are a small sample of the extensive scholarly literature on the Onias Temple, but they suffice as an indication of the scholarly consensus that the existence of the Egyptian sanctuary must be explained in light of its “gross violation of Torah law,” namely, the centralization of the cult in Jerusalem. But, surprisingly, the Mishnah does not share this view:

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51 Cite Gruen, Bohak, etc.
If a man said “I vow to offer a burnt offering,” he must offer it in the [Jerusalem] Temple—if he offered it in the Temple of Onias he has not fulfilled his obligation. If he said “I vow to offer burnt offering in the Temple of Onias”—he must offer it in the [Jerusalem] Temple but if he offered it in the Temple of Onias he fulfilled his obligation. Rabbi Shimon says, “This is no burnt offering.” If a man said “I vow to be a Nazirite,” he must offer the Nazirite offering it in the [Jerusalem] Temple—if he offered it in the Temple of Onias he has not fulfilled his obligation. If he said “I vow to be a Nazirite in the Temple of Onias”—he must offer the Nazirite offering in the [Jerusalem] Temple but if he offered it in the Temple of Onias he fulfilled his obligation. Rabbi Shimon says, “This is no Nazirite offering.” (Mishnah Menahot 13:10)

The Mishnah clearly privileges the Jerusalem Temple over the Temple of Onias (which was destroyed shortly after the Jerusalem Temple—so in both cases the rabbinic discussion is theoretical), but it recognizes the legitimacy of sacrifices made in the Egyptian temple.52

Why does the Mishnah not share the view that contemporary scholars assert as self-evident, that the Onias Temple is a religious outrage? Perhaps because the scholars are replicating the common error of creolistic scholarship in holding that the colonial founders were speakers of the metropolitan language. As Robert Chaudenson has shown in his work on French Caribbean creoles, the majority of the settlers in the French Caribbean came from the langue d’oil regions in northern France—Normandy, Brittany, Ile-de-France, etc.. Yet “[o]ne of the biggest and most appalling mistakes in research on French creoles has been to use the present French norm a the point of reference … although we do not know much about the varieties of French spoken by the colonists,

52 The Tosefta (Menahot 13.12) adopts a stricter view, decreeing that anyone making an offering at the Onias Temple has not fulfilled his obligation and is liable for excision (karet).
we can be sure that they were very different from modern standard French.” Chaudenson, in other words, is pointing out the fundamental problematic of using metropolitan French, the normative French of literate Parisians, as the standard against which to judge the “deviation” of French creoles.

Scholarly discussion of the Onias Temple may be driven by the same metropolitan bias. In this analogy, the Jerusalem-centered religious tradition that developed over the course of the Second Temple period is the “metropolitan religion,” the standard by which other Jewish communities are judged, and the task at hand is to identify what might have been the “language of the colonists,” that is, the religious worldview and practices of the Jews who settled in Egypt early on. The evidence is spotty, but suggestive. The exchange between Jeremiah and the yehudim who settled in Egypt following the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE is fascinating. The prophet opens with a familiar accusation: the religious provocations of his audience, their continued insistence on worshipping other gods, provoked the wrath of God and caused the destruction of Judah (Jeremiah 44:2-3). Remarkably, the book of Jeremiah provides us with the response of the addressees:

As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we are not going to listen to you. Instead, we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the Queen of Heaven and pour out libations to her, just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials, used to do in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. We used to have plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no misfortune. But from the time we stopped making offerings to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out libations to her, we have lacked everything and have perished by the sword and by famine. (Jer 44:15-18)

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53 Robert Chaudenson, _Creolization of Language and Culture_ (revised in collaboration with Salikoko S. Mufwene), translated by Shari Pargman et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 66. “La Fontaine, in describing his journey to Limousin [a province in southwest France, AYI] claimed that French was barely even spoken beyond Chavigny (Vienne),” 151.

54 I transliterate the Hebrew term since the debates surrounding its proper translation—“Jews” or “Judeans”—are not relevant to my analysis.
This is a cogent, even powerful rebuttal. Its first part speaks to the genealogy of Judean polytheism: the gods worshipped in Judaea were not, as the prophet claimed, “other gods that they had not known, neither they, nor you, nor your ancestors.” To the contrary, it was normative to worship deities other than YHWH; the Egyptian yehudim will continue their practices “just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials, used to do in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem.” As an ideological statement, these early yehudim (the “settlers” in the Chaudenson analogy) clearly did not come to Egypt committed to the Deuteronomistic worldview. And with good reason: the book of Kings reports that “Solomon followed Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites … Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem.” (1 Kg 11:1-7); and three centuries later, after discovering the Book of the Law in the temple, Josiah’s first reform act was to rid the Jerusalem Temple of all cult objects used in the worship of gods other than the LORD: “The king commanded … to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven … He deposed the idolatrous priests … who made offerings to Baal, to the sun, the moon, the constellations, and all the host of the heavens. He brought out the image of Asherah from the house of the LORD” (2 Kg 23:4-5). Though the Deuteronomist characterizes these activities as a persistent theological error, the historical account does confirm that at its founding and again at the time of its reformation the Jerusalem Temple was the site of ongoing, sanctioned worship of other gods in addition to YHWH. The “genealogical” claim of the Egyptian yehudim’s response to
Jeremiah—this is our worship since time immemorial—finds support in these passages. As, it should be noted, does their retributive claim: “We used to have plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no misfortune. But from the time we stopped making offerings to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out libations to her, we have lacked everything and have perished by the sword and by famine” (Jer 44:17-18). The First Temple stood as a (largely) polytheistic institution from its foundation to the Josianic reforms, but twenty-five years after Josiah’s death, was destroyed by the Babylonians. Like Jeremiah, the Egyptian yehudim hold that the destruction was an act of divine retribution for a religious transgression, but unlike Jeremiah they hold that the transgression was Josiah’s—the king who turned against the gods and goddesses that had been worshipped for centuries and brought ruin onto Judah.

For our purposes, Jeremiah 44 is of critical importance in that it provides a vista into the “language of the colonists,” that is, the non-Deuteronomistic, indeed anti-Deuteronomistic religious worldview of the Judeans now living in Egypt. Since one of the main planks in the Deuteronomistic platform was the establishment of Jerusalem as the sole legitimate site of temple worship, it is possible that the post-586 communities established in Egypt were largely opposed to this view, perhaps considering the centralization of the cult as a sacrilegious innovation that brought destruction onto the People of Israel. If the historiographic account of the yehudim is correct, the “metropolitan” model adopted by contemporary scholars may, in fact, be diametrically wrong: the post-586 communities in Egypt are the heirs of the dominant ancient Judean religious tradition.

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55 This position is argued in Morton Smith’s classic work Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972).
56 Note that Jeremiah’s prophecy is addressed to all the yehudim in Egypt: “The word that came to Jeremiah for all the Judeans living in the land of Egypt, at Migdol, at Tahpanhes, at Memphis, and in the land of Pathros” (Jer 44:1).
Reframing the discussion of the Onias Temple in this manner offers the clear analytic advantage of examining the Egyptian community’s evolution on its own terms, rather than by highlighting the ways in which it differs (or, more commonly: deviates) from Deuteronomistic ideology. Indeed, modern scholars’ obsession with the notion of “competition” between the Temple of Onias and the Jerusalem Temple is itself a projection of the either/or logic of Deuteronomy onto the Egyptian community: a non-centralized cult means, by definition, that different temples can legitimately exist in different locations without one usurping the claims of the other.57 Recognizing the metropolitan bias may also explain the relatively accepting position of the Mishnah, that explicitly allows for the legitimacy of offerings made at the Onias Temple under certain circumstances—perhaps a reflection of those sages’ recognition that the two temples may have been able to maintain a peaceful coexistence.

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Let me conclude by acknowledging that in trying to combine theoretical insights with historical analysis this paper covers a great deal of ground. Perhaps too much. My hope is that I have been able to communicate the to my mind great potential of contact linguistics, and particularly Salikoko Mufwene’s language evolution approach, as a methodological model for the study of cultural contact. The historical analysis focuses on Second Temple and rabbinic material because that is

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57 A similar logic may be at work with other non-monotheistic and non-monolatrous sanctuaries, including the Jewish temple at Elephantine, which remained active until 410 BCE, when it was destroyed by Egyptian priests, then rebuilt and abandoned at an unknown date after 400 BCE; and the Hellenistic edifice in Araq el Amir (Jordan) that according to some archaeologists was a temple tied to the Tobiad dynasty who enjoyed close ties with the Ptolemaic dynasty.
where my training lies; the insights extend much further into other areas of Jewish history and beyond.