Epiphanius as a Hebraist: A Study of the Hebrew Learning of

Epiphanius of Salamis

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Abstract

Hebrew learning was rare among Christians in antiquity. When Hebrew scholarship did appear among Christians, it was usually of a poor quality. Since there were no Hebrew grammars or dictionaries at their disposal, Christian scholars struggled to attain even the basics of the Hebrew language. The aim of this study is to confirm that Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 315-ca. 403) was one of the few Christian scholars of antiquity who attained a grasp of the Hebrew language that was more than rudimentary. Since they often neglected to analyze Epiphanius’ scholarship through the lenses of Late Antiquity, earlier researchers did not always recognize Epiphanius’ attainments in Hebrew. In my analysis of Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship, I duly recognize the challenges that learning Hebrew must have presented to both Christian and Jewish scholars in Late Antiquity. I conclude that although Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship was far from perfect, it compared favorably to that which preceded it.
Acknowledgements

The goodness of many persons enabled me to complete this doctoral thesis, and it is fitting that I give due recognition to them.

Exodus teaches that we must honor our parents.\(^a\) Likewise, Calvin stated that filial piety is “the mother of all virtues.”\(^b\) Thus, I begin by giving due honor, thanks, and recognition to my parents, Mrs. Doris and Mr. Johnnie Wilder. They were my first and best educators. They were the greatest benefactors of my education. I also thank and recognize Mrs. Laura Bethea and Mr. Dallas Bethea for all of their support. I acknowledge my mother’s family: Helen, Ethel Mae, Laverna, Dora, Charles (Ronny), Norris, Frank, James, Jesse, Magdalene, Veronica, Deborah, Charmaine, and Shandra.

Prof. Howard Adelson taught me how to be a historian. His influence can be seen on many pages of this doctoral thesis. Apuleius described Marcus Terentius Varro as “a thoroughly learned and erudite man”\(^c\) The description equally applied to Prof. Howard Adelson. Above all, Prof. Adelson was a mensch. His goodness helped so many graduate students, including this one.

Prof. Jaroslav Skira and Prof. Pablo Argárate are the scholars who helped me the most with this thesis. There is a saying in Aboth that applies to these great men:

במקדש שראי אנשיך נשדד ליהוה איש.

Et in loco ubi non sunt viri, da operam ut praestes virum.

\(^a\) Exodus 20.12.
\(^b\) John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis* 9.22.
\(^c\) See Apuleius, *Apology.*
In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man.\textsuperscript{d}

The subject of this thesis is not easily approached, and it was difficult for me to find a thesis director. When it appeared that I might never find a thesis director, Prof. Skira and Prof. Argárate agreed to direct this thesis. Thus, in a place where there was no helper, Prof. Jerry Skira and Prof. Pablo Argárate stood up to help me. They gave time, encouragement, and scholarly advice. I thank them. I thank Prof. Skira for organizing the committee of scholars who heard this thesis: T. Allan Smith, Robert D. Holmstedt, Young Richard Kim, and John McLaughlin. I thank them.

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One friend, Mr. Christopher Wilz, was a consistent presence and helper throughout this process. I thank Mr. Wilz for being loyal, good, and supportive. He is “inus de

\textsuperscript{d} Aboth 2.6. For the Hebrew and the English, see Joseph H. Hertz, \textit{Sayings of the Fathers} (New York: Behrman House, 1945). A more inclusive translation might be: “And where there are no persons, strive to be a person.” For the Latin, see Gulielmus Surenhusius, \textit{Mishna; sive, Totius hebraeorum juris, rituum, antiquitatum, ac legum oralium systema}, 6 vols. (Amsterdam: Gerardus and Jacobus Borstius, 1698-1703).
mille” and “ultra magnus.” Mr. Wilz contributed immensely to this thesis. I also thank his wife, Mary, and their Sophie.

J.W.
Johnnie Wilder
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANF</td>
<td>Ante-Nicene Fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apol. in Hier.</td>
<td>Rufinus, <em>Apologia in Hieronymum</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>De Praesc.</td>
<td>Tertullian, <em>De praescriptione haereticorum</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>De Carne</td>
<td>Tertullian, <em>De carne Christi</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>GCS</td>
<td><em>Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haer.</td>
<td>Irenaeus, <em>Adversus haereses</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hom. Num.</td>
<td>Origen, <em>Homilies on Numbers</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Ioann. Tract.</td>
<td>Augustine, <em>Tractatus in Ioannem</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KJV</td>
<td>King James Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCL</td>
<td>Loeb Classical Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPNF</td>
<td><em>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIV</td>
<td>New International Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td><em>Patrologia Graeca</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td><em>Patrologia Latina</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td><em>Sources chrétiennes</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Epiph.</td>
<td><em>Vita Sancti Epiphanii</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aphraates or Aphrahat (4th Cent.)</td>
<td>Syriac writer and author of <em>Demonstrations</em>. Writer of fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apuleius (c. 124-c. 170)</td>
<td>2nd and 3rd-Cent. Translators of the O.T.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquila, Theodotion, Symmachus.</td>
<td>Bishop of Alexandria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athanasius (298-373)</td>
<td>Bishop of Hippo.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Augustine of Hippo (354-430)</td>
<td>Syrian Gnostic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bardeanes (154-c.222)</td>
<td>Astronomer and geographer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudius Ptolemy (C. 100-C. 170)</td>
<td>Bishop of Carthage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprian (200-258)</td>
<td>Syriac poet and biblical commentator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephrem Syrus (d. 373)</td>
<td>Bishop of Salamis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epiphanius (c. 315-403)</td>
<td>Bishop of Caesarea and historian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260-ca. 340)</td>
<td>Bishop of Emesa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eusebius of Emesa (ca. 300-ca. 359)</td>
<td>Rabbi; Paul’s teacher (Acts 22.3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamaliel (1st Cent.)</td>
<td>Author of <em>Memoirs</em> (ὑποµνήµατα).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hegesippus (2nd Cent.)</td>
<td>Greek historian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herodotus (c. 484–c. 425 BCE)</td>
<td>Bishop of Poitiers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilary of Poitiers (d. 368)</td>
<td>Heresiologist and scholar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hippolytus (c. 170-c. 236)</td>
<td>Traditional author of Genesis Rabbah.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hoshaya (d. c. 350)</td>
<td>Heresiologist and bishop of Lyons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irenaeus (c.130-c. 200)</td>
<td>Christian Hebrew scholar and translator.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jerome (c. 347-420)</td>
<td>Bishop of Constantinople.</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Chrysostom (c. 347-407)</td>
<td>Greek theologian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John of Damascus (c. 675-c. 749)</td>
<td>Rabbi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan of Bet Guvrin, (3rd Cent.)</td>
<td>Jewish historian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josephus (c. 37-c. 100)</td>
<td>Compiler of the Mishna, also called Rabbi.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judah ha-Nasi (ca. 135-ca.220)</td>
<td>Christian apologist.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Justin Martyr (c. 100-c. 165)</td>
<td>Christian apologist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactantius (200-258)</td>
<td>Biblical commentator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origen (c. 185-c. 254)</td>
<td>Historian of monasticism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palladius (ca. 368-before 431)</td>
<td>Judaeo-Hellenic philosopher.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philo Judaeus (c. 20 BCE-after 40 CE)</td>
<td>Byzantine scholar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photius (c. 810-c. 895)</td>
<td>Martyr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pionius (d. 250)</td>
<td>Roman playwright.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plautus (254 BCE-184 BCE)</td>
<td>Historian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polybius (c. 203 BCE–c.120 BCE)</td>
<td>Bishop of Smyrna.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polycarp (c. 69-c. 155)</td>
<td>Roman emperor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Septimius Severus (r. 193-211)</td>
<td>Ecclesiastical Historian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socrates (fl. 4th cent.)</td>
<td>Ecclesiastical Historian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sozomen (fl. 4th cent.)</td>
<td>Christian apologist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertullian (160-c. 220)</td>
<td>Bishop of Cyrrhus (or Cyrus).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c. 393-c. 466)</td>
<td>Bishop of Antioch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theophilus of Antioch (2nd Cent.)</td>
<td>Cousin of Khadijah, wife of Muhammad.</td>
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</tbody>
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Chapter One: Introduction

Knowledge of Hebrew was rare among the patristic writers of the first four hundred years of Christian history. Although he wrote during this period when few Christian authors knew any Hebrew, I contend that Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 315-ca. 403) possessed a grasp of the Hebrew language that was more than rudimentary. This is to say that Epiphanius did not merely know a few words of Hebrew, but he, in fact, understood the nounal and verbal inflections of Hebrew well enough to match sections of the Hebrew text of the Scriptures in transliteration to corresponding sections of the Greek text of the Holy Scriptures. Claiming that he possessed a more than rudimentary grasp of Hebrew will also mean that he could make his own independent observations and comments on the Hebrew Scriptures and not merely repeat the words of informants and Judaeo-Hellenic texts. Furthermore, I contend that Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship compared favorably to the Hebrew scholarship of most of the patristic writers contemporaneous with him and who preceded him. The occasional use of Hebrew philology was, in fact, a distinctive characteristic of Epiphanian exegesis. Although it is evident that Epiphanius attained a grasp of Hebrew that was more than rudimentary, the manner in which he learned Hebrew is unclear. In this thesis, I will examine how Epiphanius learned Hebrew, and I will analyze Epiphanius’ use of Hebrew in his writings through a comparison of his extant writings. This will include a discussion of the use of Hebrew in other early and contemporaneous authors of Christianity’s first four hundred years. Through my analysis and through a critique of scholarship on Epiphanius, I will show that Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning was superior to most of that which preceded it in patristic literature, and when
compared to contemporaneous patristic writers, only Jerome’s Hebrew learning surpassed it.¹

Prior General Studies

General studies of Christian Hebrew scholarship in the patristic age have been rare. Much of the scholarship on the subject has been included in larger works dealing with Christian interpretations of the Old Testament.² Some scholarship on the subject has also been included in biographical works on individual patristic writers. By focusing specifically on the Hebrew scholarship of the patristic writers, the present enquiry helps fill a significant void in patristic scholarship.

In the 1800s, Jules Soury addressed Christian Hebrew study in a number of works including Des études hebraïques et exegetique au moyen age chez les chrétien d’Occident and Études historiques sur les religions, les arts, la civilisation de l’Asie anterieure et de la Grece.³ Soury was rather dismissive of all Christian Hebraists before the Reformation, excluding Jerome, about whom he wrote:

Aussi, parmi les Pères et les docteurs de l’Eglise, Jerôme et le seul et unique exégète qui ait su les langues hebraïque et chaldaïque dans une certain mesure; quant à l’arabe et au syriaque, il n’en sut rien, quoiqu’on l’ait souvent prétendu.⁴

¹ I qualify my remarks here with “nearly,” for although good Hebrew scholarship was rare in the Greek and Latin patristic texts that preceded Epiphanius, good Hebrew scholarship occasionally appeared in Syriac texts of the third and fourth centuries. I discuss these matters in the second chapter of this work.


³ This subject was not wholly neglected in older scholarship. Discussions of it appear in the literature of the Reformation and the following centuries. See the references to publications before the nineteenth century in Louis Israel Newman, Jewish Influence on Christian Movements (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925), 23.

One finds similarly favorable judgments of Jerome’s Hebrew learning in other publications of the period. Unfortunately, Soury’s remarks on the study of Hebrew in the patristic age by Christians were not as detailed as his remarks on the study of Hebrew among Christians in the Middle Ages and the Reformation.

C.J. Elliott’s article “Hebrew Learning among the Fathers” in *A Dictionary of Christian Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1880) is the foremost study of the Hebrew learning of the patristic writers. Although it was written in the nineteenth century, it is still cited as an authority in contemporary scholarship. Its analysis of the actual Hebrew words used by patristic writers gives it a special quality. Elliott’s article analyzes the Hebrew learning of many of the patristic writers from the second century to the eighth century, including: Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Epiphanius of Salamis, Jerome, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Bede. Although it covers those valuable subjects, it still leaves a number of areas unexplored, e.g.: the Peshitta, sectarian Christian literature, pseudepigrapha, and North African Christian literature.

Moreover, developments in scholarship during the last century present challenges to some of Elliott’s conclusions. For example, Elliott’s assessment of the LXX was

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somewhat harsh. He said that “it would be easy to multiply illustrations in proof of the superiority of Jerome’s work over the LXX,” but he showed no appreciation for the fact that the LXX was based on a Hebrew text that differed from the one of Jerome and from the Masoretic text that is currently in circulation. This point has been developed in numerous works since he wrote his assessment of Jerome’s efforts.

Elliott’s assessment of Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning deserves special attention, for it was not consistent with the standard that he applied to Jerome’s Hebrew learning and gave insufficient acknowledgment of Epiphanius’ attainments as a Hebraist. Elliott began his analysis by saying, “The writings of Epiphanius bear witness to a certain amount of familiarity with the Hebrew language, as will appear from the following instances.” The statement and the examples that follow it leave the impression that Elliott had some confidence in Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning. Elliott followed that statement with a long remark in which he theorized about the nature of Epiphanius’ Hebrew:

> Again, when Epiphanius quotes the first verse of Psalm cxli., he does not adhere to the Hebrew, but, as if quoting from memory, he substitutes אָבְרָלַי for אֶבָרָלַי, he inserts the words יְשַׁמֵּשׁ אָלֶיך, *let God hear*, which do not occur in the original, and he substitutes for קָרַתְךָ the words ἵεβιττὰ ἀκώλ, as they stand in the Greek text of Petavius which probably represent the Hebrew words יָבִיבֹת הִקְוָל, *let Him have regard to the voice* (tom ii. p. 163). Other explanations may be given of these variations, but they are, at least, consistent with the theory that Epiphanius was familiar with Hebrew as a spoken language, and that, in quoting from memory, he readily substituted one form of expression for another, and whilst

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10 Ibid.

deviating, whether by insertion or by omission from the original, preserved the general sense of the passage which he designed to reproduce.\textsuperscript{12}

Introducing the theory that Epiphanius might have been quoting Hebrew from memory and might have been “familiar with Hebrew as a spoken language”\textsuperscript{13} supports Elliott’s initial statement that “the writings of Epiphanius bear witness to a certain amount of familiarity with the Hebrew language.”\textsuperscript{14} However, Elliott followed that statement with remarks that were more critical of Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning:

\begin{quote}
But whilst thus displaying a certain familiarity with Hebrew as a language which has many points of affinity to his native Syriac, Epiphanius, in common with the other early fathers who possessed some slight knowledge of Hebrew, shews that his knowledge was not of a critical character.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

The assessment is neither entirely supported by ancient sources nor wholly consistent with the analysis that Elliott applied to other patristic writers, namely, Jerome. Although it is not unreasonable to conceive that Epiphanius knew some dialect of Aramaic, there is no ancient source that claims that his native tongue was Aramaic.\textsuperscript{16} Consequently, it would have been apt for Elliott to qualify his remark on Epiphanius’ “native Syriac.”\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, on account of his Palestinian origin, it is unlikely that Syriac, the dialect of

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} C.J. Elliott, “Hebrew Learning among the Fathers,” 864.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Epiphanius’ works do not reveal his native idiom. Jerome, Socrates, and Sozomen, his principal ancient biographers, say nothing about his native tongue. Goranson expresses doubt that Syriac was Epiphanius’ native language. He writes, “Several studies, e.g. Lieu, \textit{Epiphanius} and Elliott, \textit{Hebrew}, consider that Syriac may have his native language (sic); this seems unlikely.” See Stephen Craft Goranson, “The Joseph of Tiberias Episode in Epiphanius: Studies in Jewish and Christian Relations” (diss.: Duke University, 1990), 31-33. In chapter two, I address this issue in greater detail.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
Aramaic spoken at Edessa, was the dialect of Aramaic that Epiphanius knew.\(^\text{18}\) When Elliott remarked that Epiphanius displayed “a certain familiarity with Hebrew as a language which has many points of affinity with his native Syriac,”\(^\text{19}\) he implied that this similarity was a source of Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning. Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship, however, extended beyond the “points of affinity to his native Syriac.”\(^\text{20}\) Furthermore, Elliott’s statement that Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning “was not of a critical character” is refuted by the several places in which Epiphanius demonstrated a critical grasp of Hebrew’s morphology and lexicon.\(^\text{21}\) Elliott is also inconsistent in the application of his analysis, for the lack of critical understanding that Elliott attributes to Epiphanius can also be found in Jerome’s writings, whose Hebrew learning received a favorable appraisal by Elliott. Elliott said of Jerome, “It would be an easy task to multiply to an almost indefinite extent the indications afforded in the writings of Jerome of his imperfect scholarship, of his unseemly haste, and of his reliance upon sources of

\(^{18}\) It is worth noting that “Syriac” is sometimes used as a synonym for “Aramaic.” On several occasions in his article, Elliott does use “Syriac” to refer to the Aramaic dialect of Edessa, but he does not explain whether that is always the meaning that he attaches to “Syriac.” I address the matter of Epiphanius’ knowledge of Aramaic in chapter three of the current work.

\(^{19}\) C.J. Elliott, “Hebrew Learning among the Fathers,” 864.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.

\(^{21}\) Although Epiphanius’ attempt at translating an Elkasite saying in Panarion 19.4 was unsuccessful, it demonstrates that he possessed some familiarity with the morphology of Hebrew. Concerning Epiphanius’ attempt at translating the Elkasite saying, Goranson says, “His Hebrew version of backwards Aramaic is doubly wrong, but it takes some Hebrew—— and no shyness—— to make such an attempt at it. (Irenaeus didn't try.) We should notice that not until 1858 was a solution published, and even then only after a backwards Arabic reading had been published!” See Goranson, “The Joseph of Tiberias Episode in Epiphanius: Studies in Jewish and Christian Relations,” 32-33. Moreover, the distinction that Epiphanius makes between the Syriac word for fire, νοῦρα ἄρα, and the Hebrew word for fire, הַשָּׁת, demonstrates that he did possess some critical knowledge of the Hebrew lexicon. See Panarion 26.1. There are several other examples of this, including an impressive display of Hebrew in Panarion 65.4. I address these matters in chapters three and four.
information which were not unfrequently (sic) fallacious.”\textsuperscript{22} Despite acknowledging Jerome’s shortcomings as a Hebraist, Elliott offered this favorable appraisal of Jerome’s scholarship:

The name of Jerome stands out conspicuously alike upon the roll of his predecessors and of his successors until the time of the Reformation as by far the most distinguished, perhaps the only Christian writer of antiquity who was qualified to make an independent use of his Hebrew acquirements, and to whom the whole Christian church will forever owe an inestimable debt of gratitude for the preservation of so large a portion of the results of Origen’s labours, and still more for that unrivalled and imperishable work which has not been inaptly described as having “remained for eight centuries the bulwark of Western Christianity.”\textsuperscript{23}

The remarks show some willingness to overlook Jerome’s errors as a Hebraist, for Jerome’s accomplishments in Hebrew stood out in quality and importance above all other Christian Hebraists before the Reformation. Epiphanius’ impact on the church did not approach that of Jerome. Yet, although shortcomings can be found in both the Hebrew scholarship of Jerome and Epiphanius, Elliott concluded his article with a negative, dismissive assessment of Epiphanius that sounded more severe than his earlier remarks concerning Epiphanius. He wrote, “The knowledge possessed by Epiphanius, to whom we may perhaps add Eusebius and Theodoret, was of an extremely superficial character, and served only, if indeed it extended so far, as to enable them to appreciate the value of the great work of Origen.”\textsuperscript{24} To characterize Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning as being “of an extremely superficial character” is not wholly consistent with Elliott’s earlier remark that

\begin{footnotes}
\item[22] Elliott, “Hebrew Learning among the Fathers,” 867.
\item[23] Elliott, “Hebrew Learning among the Fathers,” 872.
\end{footnotes}
“Epiphanius was familiar with Hebrew as a spoken language.”\textsuperscript{25} As it concerns Epiphanius, Elliott’s article is not wholly sound.

On account of its citation in numerous publications, it appears that Elliott’s article has exerted some effect on subsequent appraisals of early Christian Hebrew scholarship. A number of publications that cite Elliott’s article have also given unfavorable assessments of Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning. Rev. Dr. Pick’s “Hebrew Study among Jews and Christians” exemplifies this. Rev. Dr. Pick, quoting Elliott’s assessment, described Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning as “extremely superficial,” but Pick described Origen’s Hebrew knowledge as “moderate” and Jerome’s as “considerable for that period.”\textsuperscript{26} Elliott, of course, spoke more favorably of the Hebrew scholarship of both Origen and Jerome than he spoke of that of Epiphanius. Closer to the present time, one finds Lahey citing Elliot’s article and also offering a somewhat lukewarm assessment of Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning. He wrote, “Among the early Christian Fathers, Jerome, it seems, was the only one who learned Hebrew well. Although Origen had wide acquaintance with the Hebrew Bible, he probably did not come to learn the language. Eusebius of Caesarea and Epiphanius made fairly extensive use of individual words or small passages from the Hebrew Bible, and this type of learning also is present to one degree or another in a small number of fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-century writers.”\textsuperscript{27} Lahey correctly noted that Epiphanius made “extensive use of individual words or small passages from the Hebrew Bible,” but he, like Elliott whom he cited, did not make a

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{25}Elliott, “Hebrew Learning among the Fathers,” 864.  


\textsuperscript{27}Lawrence Lehay, “Hebrew and Aramaic in the Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila,” in Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda, ed. William Horbury (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 106.}
special effort to highlight how rare and special it was even to use some Hebrew words or passages. Although each of the aforementioned articles cited Elliott, it is unclear whether their judgments were wholly based on his article. The present study offers a positive and corrective judgment of Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship.

Louis Israel Newman’s *Jewish Influence on Christian Movements* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925) has an informative chapter called “The Transmission of the Content of the Jewish Tradition to the Christian World” which deals with the Hebrew learning of the patristic writers. Newman’s work clearly owes a debt to Soury, whom it references several times. While the author’s account of the study of Hebrew among western Christian scholars of the Middle Ages is commendable, the author’s account of Hebrew study during the patristic age is short and has one inaccuracy. In particular, the author wrote:

> Origen, who on his mother’s side may have been Jewish in descent, though undoubtedly Christian in faith, in his capacity as presbyter at Caesarea in Palestine, must have had frequent contact with scholarly Jews; thus he mentions on numerous occasions his “magister Hebraeus,” on whose authority he gives several “haggadoth.”

Although his comment is generally sound, his statement that Origen “on his mother’s side may have been Jewish in descent” is groundless. No ancient biographical source on Origen states that he was Jewish on his mother’s side. This sort of speculation, however, has been raised in other publications, including a fictional work.

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29 Cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.1; Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 54. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64.1. Along with Origen’s own writings, these are the major ancient biographical sources of Origen. No reference is made in any of these sources to the ethnicity of Origen’s mother. Moreover, Origen gives no indication that his mother was Jewish. Our knowledge of Origen’s parentage has been called into question. Nautin, in fact, doubts that Leonidas was Origen’s father. Nautin, *Origène: Sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris:
Although McKane’s *Selected Christian Hebraists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) is principally concerned with Christian Hebrew study during the Middle Ages (Andrew of St. Victor, William Fulke, Gregory Martin, Richard Simon, and Alexander Geddes), it does provide some detail about Christian Hebrew study during the patristic age, especially in the chapter titled “The Foundations.” It covers topics such as the Septuagint, the Hexapla, *hebraica veritas*. Of course, the majority of the chapter deals with the Hebrew scholarship of Origen and Jerome, both of whom were held in special regard by the Christian Hebraists upon whom the book principally focuses. The chapter gives little attention to Eusebius of Caesarea, and it gives no attention to the scholarship of Epiphanius. Similarly, Skinner’s “Veritas Hebraica” (diss.: University of Denver, 1986) discusses patristic Hebrew scholarship but gives little attention to Epiphanius.

**Studies of Individual Patristic Writers**

Several studies have been done on the Hebrew scholarship of individual patristic writers. Studies of Jerome have been the most numerous of these, but studies of Origen have not been infrequent. These studies, however, have often been included in larger studies of their ideas. Studies focusing exclusively on their Hebrew scholarship are less common.

Origen’s Hebrew scholarship has attracted some scholarly attention and controversy. De Lange offered a somewhat unfavorable judgment of the Alexandrian theologian’s

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Hebrew learning. Such negative judgments of his Hebrew learning are not infrequent in scholarship. Origen’s Hexapla, moreover, has drawn its share of attention and controversy. The principal controversy surrounds the very structure of the Hexapla. Nautin popularized the theory that the Hexapla contained no Hebrew column. A majority of scholars seem to reject this theory. Other controversial issues include the aims of Origen’s scholarship and the extent to which Origen subscribed to *hebraica veritas*.

Since he wrote more about the Hebrew language than any other patristic writer, it is no surprise that Jerome’s Hebrew learning has received significantly more attention than that of any other ancient Christian Hebraist. As a Hebraist, Jerome is regularly judged to have been superior to all other patristic writers. Among the relevant older studies of

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35 Lev Gillet,*Communion in the Messiah: Studies in the Relationship Between Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1942, repr. 2002), 16; James Gibbons, *The Faith of our Fathers: Being a Plain Exposition and Vindication of the Church Founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ* (New York: P.J. Kennedy, 1917; reprint, Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1876), 74; Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 126. This positive evaluation of Jerome is even found in academic publications on Hebrew. Lahey, for example, writes that “Jerome, it seems, was the only one who learned Hebrew well.” As

Jürgen Dummer’s article “Die Sprachkenntnisse des Epiphanius” in Die Araber in der alten Welt (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968), is the most noteworthy prior investigation into Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship, but Dummer’s article has several weaknesses, including an excessive and contradictory skepticism about Epiphanius’ Hebrew knowledge. On the one hand, Dummer concluded that a true assessment of whether Epiphanius knew Hebrew is “unmöglich” (impossible), but despite this, he introduced the following

aforementioned, even professional Hebraists offer similar evaluations of Jerome. See Lawrence Lahey, “Hebrew and Aramaic in the Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila,” 106.


skeptical explanation for Jerome’s assertion that Epiphanius’ knew five languages:39

Soviel ist jedenfalls sicher, daß Hieronymus sowohl in der Apologia contra Rufinum als auch in Ep. 57 sehr daran interessiert war, seinen Gewährsmann Epiphanius gegenüber den jeweiligen Gegnern als den gebildeteren erscheinen zu lassen.40

Dummer’s remark is omissive, for he did not mention the other ancient sources that suggest that Epiphanius was learned in several languages.41 Aside from statements made by Jerome, the remarks of Rufinus of Aquilea are the most significant contemporaneous reflections on Epiphanius’ linguistic abilities. After hearing Epiphanius, Rufinus wrote an impression of the bishop that suggested that he was learned in languages but intolerant of Origenism.42 Dummer, however, made no reference to Rufinus’ remarks on Epiphanius,43 and this makes his negative assessment of Epiphanius’ linguistic knowledge somewhat unfair. Aside from neglecting to mention the other ancient accounts of Epiphanius’ linguistic ability, Dummer showed no regard for the confidence that Epiphanius displayed in his own Hebrew training, something uncommon in the works of his

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42 Rufinus, *De Adulteratione Librorum Origenis*; *PG* 17, 631; NPNF II 3, 426. I discuss Rufinus’ remarks in the third chapter of this work.

predecessors. Since the consultation of tetraplaric and hexaplaric texts was unremarkable in the Christian Hebrew scholarship of antiquity, it is perplexing that Dummer dedicated so much space to demonstrating that Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship was dependent upon the Hexapla of Origen. It is also disappointing that Dummer devoted so much space to listing the hexaplaric sources of Epiphanius’ Hebrew but gave little attention to analyzing the actual Hebrew used by Epiphanius in his writings. Dummer’s handling of Panarion 65.4 (the refutation of Paul of Samasota) is especially disappointing, for while it is demonstrable that the Hebrew quoted there by Epiphanius (Psalm 110.3) has a hexaplaric origin, it is clear that Epiphanius’ analysis of the Hebrew required some knowledge of the language. Dummer, however, devoted no attention to the analysis of the Hebrew that Epiphanius used there. Epiphanius’ translation of individual Hebrew nouns, verbs, and prepositions in the passage demonstrates an imperfect knowledge of Hebrew. Even if Epiphanius’ remarks on the Hebrew stemmed from the comparison of the Hebrew column to the corresponding text in the parallel Greek column, the very act of matching the Hebrew to the corresponding Greek text in the parallel Greek column would have required some familiarity with Hebrew. Unfortunately, this did not figure in Dummer’s assessment. Dummer did extensive research into the surviving Greek texts of Epiphanius’ works, but he neglected to make

44 Epiphanius, Panarion 25.4.3. Dummer makes his article “an assessment of the worth of [Jerome’s statement]” (“eine Beurteilung des Wertes dieser Angaben”; Dummer, 396). In so doing, Dummer overlooks the full richness of Epiphanius’ linguistic ability, for it extended to more than five languages. I address this in the third chapter of this work.

use of the text of *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* preserved in Syriac. This oversight is significant, for the Syriac text of *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* is the only complete text of the work that has survived, and it is replete with linguistic references relevant to any investigation of Epiphanius’ *Sprachkenntnisse*. Neglecting to refer to the Syriac text of *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* is a serious weakness of Dummer’s article. The present work will incorporate the relevant sections of the Syriac text of *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* in order to produce a fuller and sounder assessment of the linguistic attainments of Epiphanius.

Robert R. Stieglitz’ “The Hebrew Names of the Seven Planets” in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, is one of the few publications that gives due attention to Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning.\(^{46}\) Stieglitz pointed out that the first extant mention of the Hebrew names for the astrological signs is preserved in Epiphanius’ *Panarion*. The publication exemplifies the sort of scholarly attention that should be applied to the Hebrew contents of Epiphanius’ works.

Stephen Craft Goranson’s dissertation, “The Joseph of Tiberias Episode in Epiphanius: Studies in Jewish and Christian Relations” (diss.: Duke University, 1990) addressed Epiphanius’ Hebrew competence.\(^{47}\) The dissertation was more equanimous in evaluating Epiphanius’ Hebrew knowledge than Elliott and Dummer. It concluded that Epiphanius “knew some Hebrew and Aramaic.”\(^{48}\) Goranson also introduced a novel take

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on Epiphanius’ erroneous reading of an Elkesaite saying, concluding that “this may evidence his credulousness, but does not exclude language knowledge.” Goranson’s dissertation also suggested that the supposition that Syriac was Epiphanius’ native tongue may be erroneous.

Since the 1980s, major works on Epiphanius’ *Panarion* have appeared, but it is surprising that none of these works gives much attention to his Hebrew learning. Aline Pourkier’s *L’hérésiologie chez Epiphane de Salamine* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1992) is the major study of Epiphanius’ *Panarion*, but it says little about his Hebrew learning. Frank Williams’ *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis* is the first English translation of Epiphanius’ entire heresiology, but it makes only occasional references to his Hebrew learning. Likewise, Young Richard Kim’s *Epiphanius of Cyprus: Imagining an Orthodox World* (Ann Arbor, Mi.: University of Michigan Press, 2015) and his *Ancoratus* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014) do not devote much attention to Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning. Andrew Jacobs’ *Epiphanius of Cyprus: A Cultural Biography of Late Antiquity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), is only somewhat more attentive to Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning. Thus, this aspect of Epiphanius’ history is one that is still in need of new consideration.

**Justification**

I now address the question of why the present study is necessary. There have been prior studies of Christian Hebrew scholarship during the patristic age, and there have been investigations into Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship. The datedness, narrowness, and

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49 Ibid.

50 Goranson, 33-34.
inadequate contextualization of Christian Hebrew scholarship in the patristic age make a new study of this subject desirable.

The most extensive and authoritative study of patristic Hebrew scholarship was published in 1880 by C.J. Elliott, more than a century ago. Although many of Elliott’s findings are still valid, more than a century of patristic scholarship make a new investigation desirable. Many texts and relevant studies, for example, have been published in the decades since Elliott made his study. The Nag Hammadi texts have broadened our understanding of early Christianity. Moreover, the Cairo Geniza and the Dead Sea Scrolls have greatly amplified our understanding of the development of the Hebrew language. The last century has also been generous to certain areas of Epiphanian studies. The Syriac text of Epiphanius’ *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* and the Armenian text of his *De Gemmis* were published in the twentieth century, both of which contain valuable material for the study of Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship. These publications alone make it desirable to revisit the issue.

The narrowness of the scope of some of the aforementioned publications also makes the present study desirable. Consider, for example, that despite the fact that Neo-Punic, one of the languages spoken by North African Christians in antiquity, is genetically related to Hebrew, neither Elliott, Newman, nor McKane give any space to addressing how Neo-Punic might have been applied, if at all, in Scriptural exegesis. In the case of Elliott, the silence might be expected, for the study of Neo-Punic was in its infancy during the 1800s. Similar to the silence on Neo-Punic is the lack of attention given to the

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participation of Hebrew-speaking Christians in the creation of the Peshitta. Of course, this issue has appeared in publications dealing with the Syriac-speaking Christianity, but it was not addressed in the aforementioned works on Christian Hebrew study. Hebrew also played a role in sectarian Christian worship, but this is not duly addressed in the aforementioned texts. Some words of Hebrew origin do appear in Ethiopic translations of Biblical texts. This matter was not addressed in prior studies of Christian Hebrew learning in antiquity. Although the likelihood of Hebrew scholarship in ancient Axum may be small, the matter should be addressed in works dealing with ancient Christian Hebrew learning, especially since the Ethiopian tradition has such a strong affinity for Judaism. The present study seeks to address these aspects of ancient Christian Hebrew learning.

Failure to adequately appreciate the context and circumstances in which ancient Christians studied Hebrew is a shortcoming of some prior investigations. Ancient Hebraists, both Jew and Gentile, had the difficult task of reading a centuries-old text, written in a language that was no longer spoken, without the aid of verb tables, grammars, or dictionaries. Philip Alexander's “How did the rabbis learn Hebrew?” establishes a new perspective from which ancient Hebraists, should be viewed. The article points out that although the rabbis expressed themselves in Hebrew and read the

\[52\] Michael Weitzman’s *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and Sebastian P. Brock’s *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006) are commendable works that touch on the involvement of Hebrew-knowing Christians in the creation of the Peshitta, but scholarship on early Christian Hebrew learning has neglected the matter.


Hebrew text of the Scriptures, Hebrew was an incompletely understood language to them. Many years of study were necessary for the rabbis to learn Hebrew. Moreover, the use of translations as aides was not uncommon in the learning process. The study of Hebrew was on many levels comparable to the study of Latin in medieval Europe. This perspective does not frequently appear in the aforementioned scholarship, which gave little attention to the context and difficult circumstances that surrounded all Hebrew study in Late Antiquity.

The fact that Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning deserves to be reexamined also justifies this thesis. Since prior appraisals of Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship have not always been fair, the present enquiry is most appropriate. Moreover, groundbreaking new developments in Hebrew scholarship make a new investigation of his Hebrew learning desirable. Although the present enquiry focuses on Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning, the attention that it gives to his Aramaic, is especially desirable since these aspects of his scholarship have been almost wholly ignored. The aforementioned reasons more than justify this research.

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55 Alexander states, “The use of this translation method to acquire a foreign language seems to have been standard in the Graeco-Roman world in the time of the Rabbis. It is graphically illustrated by a number of bilingual Latin-Greek papyri from Egypt.” See Philip S. Alexander, “How Did the Rabbis Learn Hebrew?” in Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda, 82.

56 Frank Williams, The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Vol. 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), xii. Also, see the above discussion on the publications of Dummer and Elliott.

57 For my investigation, Alexander’s “How did the rabbis learn Hebrew?” is foremost among the new developments in Hebrew scholarship, but William M. Schniedewind’s account of the later stages of spoken Hebrew in A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins through the Rabbinic Period (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013) is another development that refocuses how we should analyze the study of Hebrew in antiquity.
Methodology

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Each subsequent chapter is listed below and accompanied by a description of the methodology applied therein. The second chapter lays the groundwork for this investigation. The second chapter will describe the state of Hebrew knowledge among Christians from the first century up to the time of Epiphanius (the middle of the fourth century). The chapter will draw special attention to the rarity of Christian writers learned in Hebrew in the period that preceded Epiphanius. The chapter will draw its examples from the works of Justin Martyr, Origen, Eusebius, and other patristic writers who regularly made use of the Hebrew language. This chapter will use relevant archaeological, Talmudic, and Midrashic evidence. Having chronologically described the state of Hebrew scholarship in the period, the context in which Epiphanius developed his Hebrew scholarship will be clear.

The third chapter will be biographical, and it will give special attention to the history of Epiphanius’ training in languages. Until recently, Epiphanius had not received a biographical monograph comparable to Brown's *Augustine*, Nautin's *Origène. Sa vie et son oeuvre*, or McGuckin's *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography*. However, with the appearances of Young Richard Kim’s *Epiphanius of Cyprus: Imagining an Orthodox World* and Andrew S. Jacobs’ *Epiphanius of Cyprus: A Cultural Biography of Late Antiquity*, Epiphanius now possesses his own biographical monographs. Important biographical sketches of Epiphanius may be found in Rapp's “The Vita of Epiphanius of Salamis - A Historical and Literary Study,” Pourkier's *L’hérésiologie chez Épiphane deSalamine*, and Williams’ *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Goranson, “The Joseph of Tiberias Episode in Epiphanius: Studies in Jewish and Christian Relations,” 37. 
Salamis. Moreover, Dechow's detailed reconstruction of Epiphanius’ life in *Dogma and Mysticism* is still of considerable value. Although Kim, Pourkier, and Dechow have done much to advance our knowledge of the saint's life, their works do not give satisfactory attention to the saint's knowledge of Hebrew and how he acquired it. Moreover, although the *Vita sancti Epiphanii* is the sole ancient text that addresses how Epiphanius learned Hebrew, Epiphanian scholarship tends to be excessively dismissive towards it. Goehring, in fact, notes that the *Vita sancti Epiphanii* “has been mostly neglected and treated with contempt by scholars.”⁵⁹ While the *Vita sancti Epiphanii* is replete with fabulous elements, the disinclination of some contemporary scholars to give serious consideration to the *Vita sancti Epiphanii* seems excessive. The second chapter of this thesis will make a judicious use of the *Vita sancti Epiphanii*.

Having described how Epiphanius learned Hebrew in the third chapter, I will use the fourth chapter to analyze what Epiphanius’ writings reveal about his Hebrew competence and what was the function of Hebrew in Epiphanius’ writings. Through the analysis of his extant writings, this chapter will demonstrate that Epiphanius possessed an imperfect knowledge of the Hebrew language, including those concepts that contemporary scholarship has associated with the study of Hebrew in antiquity.⁶⁰ The chapter will demonstrate that, exempting Jerome's Hebrew scholarship, Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship was more advanced than that of any Greek or Latin patristic writer of Late Antiquity.

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⁶⁰ Plurality and gender were among the grammatical concepts understood in ancient Hebrew scholarship. See Philip S. Alexander, “How Did the Rabbis Learn Hebrew?” 71–89. Although his knowledge was imperfect, it was still more than rudimentary (just a few words).
Through an examination of his writings, this chapter will also demonstrate that Epiphanius had a high level of confidence in his Hebrew learning. This confidence separated him from his predecessors who sometimes made reference to Jewish informants ("καλοῦσι... παῖδες Ἑβραίων") and employed terms that showed uncertainty ("ἐγὼ... ἀµφιβάλλω"). Contrary to prior scholarship, this chapter will also show that Epiphanius’ writings do not attribute his Hebrew learning to a Jewish informant as prior apologists were accustomed to do. The chapter, therefore, has an important corrective purpose.

Furthermore, the fourth chapter will demonstrate that Hebrew functioned as one of the many theological devices employed by Epiphanius in his refutation of heresy and paganism. During the two centuries prior to Epiphanius, heretical sects employed Hebrew to inject mysticism into their worship. This chapter will show that one of the chief aims of Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship was to demystify and correct the Hebrew of heretics. The defense of the integrity of the Septuagint was another function of Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning. For more than a century, Christian apologists and heresiologists had been confronted by theological assaults against the integrity of the Septuagint. Some of these assaults contributed to the emergence of the *hebraica veritas* concept, which held that the Hebrew text of the Holy Writ should be regarded as its authoritative text of the, even for the purpose of the determination of the Biblical canon. Jerome developed the concept, but it had its first, unmistakable appearance in Eusebius of Emesa’s theology. The provision of an adequate rebuttal to the *hebraica veritas* concept was a motivating

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factor behind the study of Hebrew by Christians. This chapter will show that Epiphanius
employed his Hebrew scholarship to refute the assertion that the Septuagint was inferior
to the Hebrew Bible, for Epiphanius’ theology held them to be equally valid
representations of the divine message.

Ibn Khaldun wrote that “geometry enlightens the intellect and sets one’s mind right.”63
The doctoral thesis outlined in the foregoing paragraphs owes no small debt to the careful
reasoning used in geometry. As geometricians carefully defend their statements with
axioms and postulates, patrists defend their statements by citing ancient texts and the
sound conclusions of prior investigators. Such a philosophy will direct the present opus.
The fifth chapter of this work, the conclusion, will outline what I have demonstrated in
the core of this work and give a summary account of the ancient monuments which form
the basis of my findings. I shall punctuate the conclusion by offering some remarks on
the state of research into the Hebrew learning of Christians in antiquity.

63 Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah 6.20. For the English translation, see Franz Rosenthal, trans., The
Chapter Two: Hebrew Learning in Ancient Christianity

Introduction

Hebrew learning was rare among Christians in antiquity. When it did appear, it was usually poorly developed. This chapter will describe the state of Hebrew knowledge among Christians from the first century up to the time of Epiphanius of Salamis (the middle of the fourth century). As aforementioned, prior to the current investigation, C.J. Elliott's article, “Hebrew Learning among the Fathers,” in A Dictionary of Christian Biography (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1880), was the most noteworthy general assessment of the Hebrew learning of the patristic writers. Recently, Gallagher’s Hebrew Scripture in Patristic Biblical Theory: Canon, Language, Text (Leiden: Brill, 2012) has appeared and offers valuable analyses of subjects related to the Hebrew scholarship of the patristic writers. Noteworthy assessments of the Hebrew scholarship of individual patristic writers include de Lange’s Origen and the Jews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), Grave’s Jerome’s Hebrew Philology (Leiden: Brill, 2007), and Dummer’s “Die Sprachkenntnisse des Epiphanius” (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968). Elliott’s analysis of this subject is commendable, but I shall touch on a number of matters that Elliott did not address in his publication, including the Hebrew scholarship of North African patristic writers, the development of the Peshitta, and the appearance of the hebraica veritas concept in Christian scholarship. I shall also address some relevant developments in the Hebrew scholarship of the rabbis contemporaneous with the patristic writers, developments initially studied in the last two decades. 64 The wide scope and narrative detail of this chapter does not appear in Elliott’s publication.

64 See Philip S. Alexander, “How Did the Rabbis Learn Hebrew?” in Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-
Hebrew as it Existed Contemporaneously with Ancient Christianity

I begin by establishing some basic facts about the Hebrew language as it existed contemporaneously with ancient Christianity. Although Hebrew “‘was the language of the Jewish people in biblical times,’” the biblical idiom was unmistakably different from the type of Hebrew that followed the making of the Old Testament, viz., Rabbinic Hebrew. In his *A History of the Hebrew Language*, Sáenz-Badillos divided the history of the Hebrew language into four periods: Biblical Hebrew (BH), Rabbinic Hebrew (RH), Medieval Hebrew (MH), and Modern or Israeli Hebrew (IH). In the same work, Sáenz-Badillos explained “that RH is clearly distinguished from BH by many factors, especially in morphology and lexis.” Sáenz-Badillos’ explanation is especially relevant to the present study, for although RH was the Hebrew language written by the Amoraim, the rabbis who were roughly contemporaneous with the patristic writers, the study of Biblical Hebrew was sometimes a challenge even for them. The Aramaic-speaking Amoraim underwent years of formal instruction to learn Hebrew, a language that had essentially disappeared as a vernacular. Their Christian coevals did not ordinarily have instruction in the language. Moreover, Hebrew lexicons and grammars did not exist. It is, therefore, understandable that learning the Hebrew language must have presented a formidable challenge to ancient Christians. Later in this chapter, I elaborate on how difficult it must have been for Jews and Christians to learn the Hebrew language.

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Hebrew in the Ministry of Jesus

Having outlined the state of the Hebrew language prior to and contemporaneous with ancient Christianity, I shall now address the presence of Hebrew in Jesus’ ministry. There are some reasons to believe that Jesus understood Hebrew and referenced a Hebrew text of the Bible in his ministry. Luke 4.16-22 is the principal text that suggests that Jesus understood the Hebrew language and used the Hebrew text of the Bible.\(^\text{68}\) It states:

> Καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς τὴν Ναζαρά, οὗ ἦν τεθραμμένος, καὶ εἰσήλθε κατὰ τὸ εἰωθὸς αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῶν σαββάτων εἰς τὴν συναγωγήν, καὶ ἀνέστη ἀναγνῶναι. καὶ ἐπεδόθη αὐτῷ βιβλίον τοῦ προφήτου Ἡσαίου, καὶ ἀνοίξας τὸ βιβλίον εὗρεν [τὸν] τόπον ὁ οὗ ἦν γεγραμμένον· πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμὲ, οὗ εἶνεκεν ἐχρισὲν μὲ, εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς ἀπέσταλκέν με, κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἀφεσιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν, ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει, κηρύξαι ἐνιαυτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν. καὶ πτύξας τὸ βιβλίον ἀποδοὺς τῷ ὑπηρέτῃ ἐκάθισεν· καὶ πάντων οἱ ὀφθαλµοὶ ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ ἦσαν ἀτενίζοντες αὐτῷ. ἤρξατο δὲ λέγειν πρὸς αὐτοὺς ὅτι σήμερον πεπλήρωται ἡ γραφὴ αὐτῇ ἐν τοῖς ῥόῳ ὑμῶν.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began

by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

The implication of the passage is that Jesus was able to read (εὗρεν τὸν τόπον). Some scholars have also interpreted the passage to indicate that Jesus knew Hebrew. Furthermore, because of the difficulty of the passage in Isaiah, there is scholarship that suggests that Jesus possessed an advanced knowledge of Biblical Hebrew. There are several references to “in the Hebrew tongue” (Ἑβραϊδι or Ἑβραϊστί) in the New Testament. However, it appears that Ἑβραϊδι and Ἑβραϊστί usually refer to Aramaic, less often to Hebrew. There is no shortage of further speculation about Jesus’ Hebrew learning. There are some, for example, who speculate that the Pharisees debated in a form of Hebrew and deduce that Jesus must have spoken some form of Hebrew in order to carry on debates with the Pharisees. Some propose that instruction in Hebrew was a part of the basic education that “Jesus, James, Joses, Judas, and Simon” received at

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69 Except where otherwise noted, the New International Version, NIV (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), is the translation of the Scriptures referenced in this chapter. For the New Testament Greek text used in this chapter, see Novum Testamentum Graece, Edition 21, as printed in The Interlinear KJV-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975).

70 For support of the claim that this passage implies that Jesus read from the Isaiah scroll, see Josh McDowell and Bill Wilson, Evidence for the Historical Jesus: A Compelling Case for His Life and His Claims (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), 226; Robert H. Stein, The Method and Message of Jesus’ Teachings (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 5. Chris Keith, however, offers a somewhat contrary interpretation of Luke 4.16-22. He notes that “despite the assumptions of most commentators, Luke does not actually claim that Jesus read from the scroll; only that he stood in order to do so.” See Chris Keith, Jesus’ Literacy: Scribal Culture and the Teacher from Galilee, 143-144, 175-188 (“Scribal Literacy and the Perception(s) of Jesus”).


72 Ibid.


74 Alan Millard, Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 141.

75 Ibid.
Nazareth. Another assertion holds that Hebrew was the primary language of Jesus’ ministry, but this has gained little support.77

Aramaic

Both Hebrew and Aramaic appear in the New Testament, but unmistakably, the more usual contention is that Aramaic was Jesus’ native idiom.78 Among those Hebrew expressions found in the New Testament are ἁλληλούϊά (Rev. 19.1), ἀµήν (Rev. 1.6, passim), ὡσαννά (Mark 11.9), σάββατον (Jn. 5.9, passim), μαµωνᾶς (Lk. 16.9), and Μεσσίας (Jn. 1.41, Jn. 4.25). Among the the New Testament’s Hebrew toponyms and personal names, one finds: ‘Αρµαγεδών (Rev. 16.16), γέεννα (Lk. 12.5, passim), and Καφανούµ (Jn. 4.46, passim), Ἰησοῦς (Mark 1.14, passim), Σίµων (Mt. 16.16), and Σαούλ (Acts 9.4). But the New Testament also has Aramaic expressions.79 For example, the Gospel of Mark’s description of the healing of Jairus’ daughter preserves an Aramaic expression that has become well-known:

αὐτὸς δὲ ἐκβαλὼν πάντας παραλαμβάνει τὸν πατέρα τοῦ παιδίου καὶ τὴν μητέρα καὶ τοὺς μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰσπορεύεται ὅπου ἦν τὸ παιδίον καὶ κρατήσας


77 Sáenz-Badillos writes, “Nowadays, there are few scholars who would disagree that in Galilee and Samaria the spoken language of the time was basically Aramaic.” See Angel Sáenz-Badillos, A History of the Hebrew Language, 170. The theory that Hebrew was Jesus’ principal language does still have its supporters. See J.A. Emerton, “Did Jesus speak Hebrew?” The Journal of Theological Studies 12, no. 2 (October, 1961), 189-202. For references to older defences of this position, see Angel Sáenz-Badillos, A History of the Hebrew Language, 167-171, esp. 170.


After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, <“Talitha koum!”> (which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). Immediately the girl stood up and walked around.\(^{80}\)

“Talitha koum” (ταλιθα κουµ) is, of course, “girl, get up” in Aramaic affirming that Jesus spoke Aramaic and possibly lending support to the assertion that Jesus was a native speaker of Aramaic.\(^{81}\) The Aramaic word for rock is כיף (khēf), and Jesus applied כיף (Κηφᾶς) to Simon bar Jona as a nickname.\(^{82}\) Jesus’ last words on the cross seem to have been in Aramaic. Mark records them thusly:

\[\text{Καὶ γενοµένης ὥρας ἑκτῆς σκότους ἐγένετο ἑδρ'] ὀλην τὴν γην ἔως ὡρας ἑνάτης, καὶ τῇ ἑνάτῃ ὥρᾳ ἐβόησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· ἐλωῒ ἐλωῒ λαµὰ σαβαχθάνι; ὁ ἐστιν μεθερµηνευόµενον· ὁ θεός µου ὁ θεός µου, εἰς τί ἐγκατέλιπες µε; καὶ τινες τῶν παρεστηκότων ἀκούσαντες ἔλεγον· Ἡλίας καθελεῖν αὐτόν; ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἀφεὶς φωνὴν µεγάλην ἐξέπνευσεν.\]

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” —which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.” Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.\(^{83}\)

Mathew records the event similarly:

\[\text{Ἀπὸ δὲ ἑκτῆς ὥρας σκότους ἐγένετο ἑπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γην ἔως ὡρας ἑνάτης.}\]

\(^{80}\) Mark 5.40-5.42.

\(^{81}\) It is worth noting that μεθερµηνευόµενον is not represented in the Syriac New Testament’s Mark 5.41. The Syriac Mark 5.41 merely records ṣoµ µךיאלי µךיא µךיא (“and he said to her, girl get up”), for ταλιθα κουµ carries the same meaning in Jesus’ dialect of Aramaic and in Syriac.

\(^{82}\) John 1.42.

\(^{83}\) Mark 15.33-37.
περὶ δὲ τὴν ἐνάτην ὥραν ἀνεβόησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγων· ἡλὶ ἡλὶ λεµὰ σαβαχθάνι· τούτῳ ἐστίν Θεός μου θεός μου, ἵναι με ἐγκατέλιπες· τινὲς δὲ τῶν ἑκεί ἐσπηκτόνων ἀκούσαντες ἔλεγον ὅτι Ἡλίαν φωνεῖ οὗτος. καὶ εὐθέως δρομὼν εἷς εἴ τινων καὶ λαβὼν σπόγγον πλήσας τινὰς καὶ περιθεὶς καλάμῳ ἐπότιζεν αὐτὸν. οὐ δὲ λεπτοὶ εἶπαν· ἵνα ἔρχεται Ἡλίας σώσων αὐτὸν. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς πάλιν κράζων φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ἀφῆκεν τὸ πνεῦμα.

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.” Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.” And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.  

“ἠλὶ ἡλὶ λεµὰ σαβαχθάνι” is said to be an Aramaic rendering of Psalm 22.1. The Hebrew of Psalm 22.1 has the root ועד (‘zd), but both Mark and Matthew present Jesus using the root פשא (šq), indicating that the words were Aramaic not Hebrew. The expression has been taken as evidence that Aramaic was Jesus’ native idiom.

Apocryphal early Christian texts also give some support to the supposition that Aramaic was the language of Jesus and the Apostles. For example, one finds in The History of Philip, the Apostle and Evangelist:


84 Matthew 27.45-50.


86 Even in the patristic age, some authors understood that the words spoken on the cross were Aramaic. See, Edmon L. Gallagher, Hebrew Scripture in Patristic Biblical Theory: Canon, Language (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 126.

And Philip said to our Lord: “I beseech Thee, the Raiser to Life of all souls,—Thou knowest me, that I am a man of Palestine, and I do not know Latin or Greek, and the people of Carthage are not acquainted with Aramaic,—and how shall I go (and) preach to them the Gospel of Thy kingdom?”

The text suggests that Latin (Ἄραμα) and Greek (Ἄραμα) were exotic languages to Philip, a man of Palestine and one of the Twelve. However, contrariwise, the text associates Aramaic (ܐܪܡܝܐ) with Philip. This apocryphal text suggests that among some early Christians, there was the belief that Aramaic was the language of Jesus and the Apostles. It is, however, difficult to say that this was the exclusive belief among Christian writers of antiquity, for there are sources which suggest other languages.

If one believes Eusebius of Caesarea, Jesus wrote a letter in the “language of Syrians” (Σύρων φωνῆς) to King Abgar of Edessa. Eusebius reported that the letter survived into his time and related the affair as follows:

For instance the King Abgarus, who ruled with great glory the nations beyond the Euphrates, being afflicted with a terrible disease which it was beyond the power of human skill to cure, when he heard of the name of Jesus, and of his miracles, which were attested by all with one accord sent a message to him by a courier and begged him to heal his disease. . . . he deemed him worthy of a personal letter. . . . You have written evidence of these things taken from the archives of Edessa, which was at that time a royal city. For in the public registers there, which contain accounts of ancient times and the acts of Abgarus, these things have been found preserved down to the present time. But there is no better

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89 The *Prologue to the Gospel of Nicodemus*, for example, suggests that Hebrew was the language of Jesus and his Apostles. See *Prologue to the Gospel of Nicodemus; ANF* 16, 125. Gallagher lists references in Jerome and Epiphanius which suggest that they believed that Aramaic was Jesus’ language. See Gallagher, *Hebrew Scripture in Patristic Biblical Theory: Canon, Language*, 126.
way than to hear the epistles themselves which we have taken from the archives
and have literally translated from the Syriac language in the following manner.90

Did Jesus actually write a letter to Abgar? In the years that followed Eusebius, several
writers repeated the legend of Abgar.91 Guth, however, explained that “most modern
interpreters concur with Rome’s 6th-century determination that the letters were
spurious.”92 Eusebius’ acceptance of the letter displayed some deficiency in “critical
insight.”93 If the letter were authentic, however, it would obviously be evidence that Jesus
spoke Aramaic and was literate—assuming that he wrote the letter himself.94

Hebrew in the Apostolic Age

There are compelling reasons to believe that Jesus’ disciples knew Hebrew and
sometimes used the Hebrew Scriptures. If one accepts Paul’s claim to have “been taught
at the feet of Gamaliel according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers” (παρὰ
tοὺς πόδας Γαµαλιὴλ πεπαιδευµένος κατὰ ἀκρίβειαν τοῦ πατρώ̨ον νόµου),95 then it is
logical to conclude that Paul knew Hebrew, for it appears that Gamaliel was not receptive
to translations. A Talmudic anecdote about Gamaliel supports this. It says:

90 Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 1.13.2, 3, 5. The Greek text may be found in GCS 9 or LCL 153.
Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, edited by David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers (Grand Rapids, MI:
93 NPNF Series II 1, 100 n. 5.
94 A Coptic version of the Abgar story does state that Jesus wrote the letter with his own hand.
Contrariwise, a Syriac version of the story suggests that a scribe was used. See Chris Keith, Jesus’
Literacy: Scribal Culture and the Teacher from Galilee (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 158.
95 Acts 22.3, KJV.
Said R. Jose: It once happened that my father Halafta visited R. Gamaliel Berabbi at Tiberias and found him sitting at the table of Johanan b. Nizuf with the Targum of the Book of Job in his hand which he was reading. Said he to him, 'I remember that R. Gamaliel, your grandfather, was standing on a high eminence on the Temple Mount, when the Book of Job in a Targumic version was brought before him, whereupon he said to the builder, "Bury it under the bricks."'

If the anecdote is reliable, then it appears more likely that Paul studied the Hebrew text during the time that he spent “at the feet of Gamaliel.” Moreover, there are passages in Paul’s epistles that indicate that he made use of the Hebrew text of the Bible. Shum, for example, theorized about how Paul might have encountered the Hebrew text of Isaiah and suggested that it is more likely that Romans 5.19b depends on a Hebrew text of Isaiah than on the Septuagint.

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96 Talmud, Shabbat 115a. The Hebrew is from Talmud Bavli, the “Vilna Shas” (Vilna: Romm, 1880-1886). For the translation, see Michael L. Rodkinson, ed., New Edition of the Babylonian Talmud (New York: New Amsterdam Book Co., 1896-1903). Compare Neusner’s translation: “R. Halafta said to him, ‘I remember Rabban Gamaliel the Elder, the father of your father, who was sitting on a step on the Temple Mountain, and they brought before him the Targum of the Book of Job, and he said to his sons (Alt.: the builder), ‘Hide it under the rubble.’” See Jacob Neusner, The Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), 356. Neusner explains that “the Pharisees took a dim view of making Targums, e.g. a heavenly voice told Jonathan b. ’Uzziel not to make a Targum of the Writings, including Job (b. Meg. 3a), the reason (supplied by a gloss) being that the date of the coming of the Messiah is therein contained. So Gamaliel’s rule is consistent with separate and unrelated traditions on the same subject.” Again, see Jacob Neusner, The Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70, 356.

97 Acts 22.3. Armin Lange, “They Confirmed the Reading” (y. Ta’am. 4.68a), in From Qumran to Aleppo: A Discussion with Emanuel Tov about the Textual History of Jewish Scriptures in Honor of his 65th Birthday (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht & Co. Kg., 2009), 74; Jewish Encyclopedia, 1906 ed., s.v. “Gamaliel I.”

Some theorize that the author of the Gospel of John knew Hebrew and used a Hebrew text of the Scriptures. The fact that the Old Testament quotations in the Gospel of John do not always correspond to the LXX has been an impetus behind the speculation that the author of the Gospel of John knew Hebrew. There are other theories that seek to explain the divergences. Freed, for example, suggested that John might have been quoting from an imperfect memory of the Scriptures, but there is no definitive conclusion of this matter.

Although there are no definitive conclusions about the Hebrew knowledge of the Gospel of John’s author, some reasoning does suggest that the author of Matthew’s Gospel might have been learned in Hebrew. In particular, Zev Farber wrote concerning Matthew 1.21:

What the Greek reader was to make of this, I do not know, but it seems clear that the origins of this concept must have been in the Hebrew/Aramaic-speaking Jewish community, since the play off the name מושיע as the Semitic root ע.ש.י makes sense only in the context of the Semitic root the ע.ש.י.

Farber’s conclusion about Matthew 1.21 makes it rather difficult for the author of Matthew not to have known some Hebrew, for some knowledge of the language is...

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100 Freed, *Old Testament Quotations in the Gospel of John*, 6. Similarly, Sparks found Hebraisms in the Gospel of Luke but concludes “that the Hebrew idiom in which he wrote came to him from the LXX; for it was the only means of access the non-Semitist had to those vital Scriptures which were the proof of the Christian preaching.” See H.F.D. Sparks, “The Semitisms of St. Luke’s Gospel,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 44, (1943): 129-138. Although there has been speculation that the Gospel of John was originally written in Aramaic, this issue does not fit within the scope of the current chapter which seeks to address the Hebrew learning of Christians before Epiphanius. For a well-known analysis of the matter, see C.F. Burney, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1922).

requisite in order to link Ἰησοῦς (יהושע) with σώσει (“he will save”). Although it maybe tempting to link the evidence of Matthew 1.21 to the ancient tradition that suggests a Hebrew origin for the Gospel of Matthew, I am not prepared to do so in the present chapter on account of the complexity of the subject.  

Some link the Epistle of Jude to Jewish Christianity, and internal evidence suggests that its author made use of a Hebrew text of the Scriptures. Bauckham suggested that Jude 12 and 13 are most likely based on a Hebrew text and not the Septuagint. The Epistle of James also represents Jewish Christianity, and it has been dated to the late first century. There is scholarship that asserts that the author of the Epistle of James knew Hebrew. However, the Epistle offers little internal evidence to support such speculation.

The foregoing section has shown that there is enough sound evidence to support the conclusion that there were Christians who understood Hebrew and who used a Hebrew

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text of the Scriptures during the Apostolic Age. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, was learned in Hebrew. However, since there is insubstantial Hebrew learning in the Apostolic Fathers, it is difficult to defend speculation that Paul or other itinerant Christian evangelists of the Apostolic Age were successful in imparting their Hebrew learning to the Gentile Christians to whom they witnessed. Since Palestine was the base of Jewish Christianity, it is logical to conclude that during the Apostolic Age, most Christians learned in Hebrew, the ancestral language of the Jews, were inhabitants of Palestine. Sects such as the Nazoreans and Ebionites preserved the beliefs of these Judaeo-Christians. It seems that these Judaeo-Christian sects also preserved knowledge of the Hebrew language. Writing about the Nazoreans in the 370s, Epiphanius of Salamis, a native of Palestine, related that

Ἑβραϊκῇ δὲ διαλέκτῳ ἀκριβῶς εἰσιν ἡσκηµένοι. Παρ’ αὐτοῖς γὰρ πᾶς ὁ νόµος καὶ οἱ προφῆται καὶ τὰ γραφεῖα λεγόµενα, φηµὶ δὲ τὰ στιχηρά καὶ αἱ Βασιλείαι καὶ Παραλειπόµενα καὶ Ἐσθὴρ καὶ τὰλλα πάντα Ἑβραϊκῶς ἀναγινώσκεται, ὡσπερ ἀµέλει καὶ παρὰ Ἰουδαίοις.

They are perfectly versed in the Hebrew language, for the entire Law, the prophets, and the so-called Writings—I mean the poetic books, Kings, Chronicles, Esther and all the rest—are read in Hebrew among them, as of course they are among the Jews.¹⁰⁸

If one accepts that there is a direct link between the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem and sects such as the Nazoreans and Ebionites, as some scholars suggest,¹⁰⁹ then it is not

¹⁰⁸ Epiphanius, Panarion 29.7.4. For the Greek, see GCS 25. For the translation, see Frank Williams, The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2009).

unreasonable to suggest a linear connection between the Hebrew learning of the early Jewish Christians and the Hebrew learning associated with the Nazoreans and Ebionites. The succeeding discussion will show that Christians trained in Hebrew left a substantial but anonymous legacy to Syrian and Palestinian Christianity, namely the Peshitta.

**The Peshitta**

The Peshitta is one of the greatest achievements and most enduring legacies of early Christian Hebrew scholarship. The Peshitta was translated during the second century, and it was, at least partially, a translation of the Old Testament directly from Hebrew into Syriac. The supposition that its translators were Jews is based on the fact that it was translated directly from Hebrew, a language then used exclusively by Jews. The presence of rabbinic interpretations in the text also suggests that Jews created it. Certain features of the Peshitta, however, suggest that some of its translators must have been Jewish Christians. For example, the inclusion of certain books in the Peshitta that Jews excluded suggests that Jewish Christians participated in its creation. Moreover, there is

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no historical link between Jews and the Peshitta.\textsuperscript{114} Syriac-speaking Christians preserved the Peshitta, something that makes it probable that some of its translators were Jewish Christians.\textsuperscript{115} Some have theorized an originally Palestinian origin for, at least, certain parts of the Peshitta.\textsuperscript{116} If true, this theory would fit comfortably with the suppositions that some Palestinian Christians preserved Hebrew and that the Peshitta was a response to the inability of Aramaic-speaking Christians to understand Hebrew or the Septuagint. The Targums, of course, responded to a similar problem among Jews. Frustratingly, however, the evidence is too scant to support the composition of a complete account of the origin of the Peshitta. Even ancient writers, not too distant from its creation, were unable to describe its origin.\textsuperscript{117} Still, it was unmistakably a monumental achievement of ancient Hebrew scholarship.

**Hebrew in Ethiopian and Arabian Christendom**

I have established that among Syriac-speaking Christians, there were some who understood Hebrew. To what extent, however, was Hebrew known in other parts of eastern Christendom? For example, was Hebrew known in Axum and Arabia? Although the relevant details are scant, some sources have survived that shed some light on the subject. The sources do not suggest that Hebrew was widely known among the Christians of Ethiopia or Arabia, but the possibility that some Christians in those lands knew Hebrew cannot be rejected.


\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{116} Sebastian P. Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 34, 108.

\textsuperscript{117} Sebastian P. Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 23.
Ethiopia was Christianized in the fourth century, and Ethiopian Christianity is characterized by a number of similarities to Judaism, including circumcision and abstention from pork.  

Ethiopic, also called Ge’ez (🇹🇹,E), was the literary language of the Axumite Empire. Ethiopic words such as ₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪ishops (commandment), ₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪يها ₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪leton (ark), and ₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪₪ียง ₪₪₪ (!$error), can ultimately be traced back to Hebrew, but do these words mean that the Ethiopic Bible was translated directly from a Hebrew text? How did words of Hebrew origin enter the Ethiopic Bible? Some scholars have theorized that parts of the Ethiopic Bible were translated into Ethiopic directly from Hebrew.  

Building on earlier publications by August Dillmann and Theodor Nöldeke, H.J. Polotsky advanced an explanation for the presence of these words in Ethiopic. Polotsky asserts that these words entered Ethiopic through exchanges with speakers of Jewish Aramaic, a dialect containing many words of Hebrew origin, during the period before the creation of the Ethiopic Bible, a theory that excludes direct translation from Hebrew into Ethiopic.  

Michael A. Knibb, who has published a monograph on the Ethiopic Old Testament, also rejects the theory that the Ethiopic Bible was translated directly from Hebrew into Ethiopic and affirms instead that the Ge’ez Old Testament was translated from Greek into Ethiopic.  

Ullendorff, however, offered a more moderate position on Ethiopic:  

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121 Michael A. Knibb, Translating the Bible (Oxford: Published for The British Academy by Oxford
I fail to understand the position of those who claim either an exclusively Greek or an exclusively Syriac Vorlage. It seems to me that the historical circumstances and a linguistic analysis of the texts already edited rule out such a dogmatic option for either posture. Some respectable pieces of evidence can be adduced in favour of each of several hypotheses, but it seems that reality was a good deal more complex and eclectic than is sometimes conceded, and the linguistic facts refuse to fall into neat patterns. If the same book — or even chapter— offers clear evidence of, say, Greek, Syriac, and Hebrew elaborations, nothing that has so far come to my notice would prevent us from assuming that all three might have been employed, in one form or another, directly or indirectly, by a team of translators. On the face of it, work on one single linguistic Vorlage was, perhaps, the exception rather than the rule in the peculiar circumstances that obtained in the Aksumite kingdom of the fourth-sixth centuries.\textsuperscript{122}

Although it does appear that those who argue against a Hebrew vorlage for the Ethiopic Bible are in the majority, it is not clear that this matter has been settled, for Gosnell and Renju, writing in 2004, reported that “there are a few Old Testament scholars of Ethiopia who insist that the Old Testament was translated directly from Hebrew.”\textsuperscript{123}

The history of Ethiopia, of course, is tied to that of Arabia. Very little, however, is known about Christianity in Arabia during the patristic age, a period overlapping with what Islamic scholars call \textit{al-Jahiliyah} (الجاهلية), the pagan pre-Islamic period in Arabia. Even less is known about the Hebrew learning of Christians in the region during the period. Some references to the subject, however, do exist. Prior accounts of Hebrew scholarship in early Christianity do not mention these references. I include them for the sake of thoroughness. The first reference appears in Eusebius of Caesarea’s \textit{Ecclesiastical History}. Describing how Pantaenius brought Christianity to the Ethiopians, Eusebius wrote:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{122} Ullendorff, \textit{Ethiopia and the Bible}, 56.

\textsuperscript{123} Mikre-Sellassie, “Early Translation of the Bible into Geez,” 35.
One of these was Pantaenus, and it is said that he went to the Indians, and the
tradition is that he found there that among some of those there who had known
Christ, the Gospel according to Matthew had preceded his coming; for Bartho-
lomew, one of the apostles, had preached to them and had left them the writing
of Matthew in Hebrew letters, which was preserved until the time mentioned.124

Jerome retransmitted Eusebius’ remarks on Pantaenus:

Pantaenus, Stoicae sectae philosophus, juxta quamdam veterem in Alexandria
consuetudinem, ubi a Marco evangelista semper Ecclesiastici fuere Doctores,
tantae prudentiae et eruditionis tam in Scripturis divinis, quam in saeculari
litteratura fuit, ut in Indiam quoque rogatus ab illius gentis legatis, a Demetrio
Alexandriae episcope, mittetur. Ubi reperit, Bartholomaeum de duodecim
Apostolis, adventum Domini nostri Jesu Christi juxta Matthaei Evangelium
praedicasse, quod Hebraicis litteris scriptum, revertens Alexandriam secum
detulit.

Pantaenus, a philosopher of the stoic school, according to some old
Alexandrian custom, where, from the time of Mark the evangelist the
ecclesiastics were always doctors, was of so great prudence and erudition
both in scripture and secular literature that, on the request of the legates
of that nation, he was sent to India by Demetrius bishop of Alexandria,
where he found that Bartholomew, one of the twelve apostles, had preached
the advent of the Lord Jesus according to the gospel of Matthew, and on
his return to Alexandria he brought this with him written in Hebrew characters.125

A number of elements remain constant in the accounts, including India, the Gospel of
Matthew, and Hebrew. Since ancient writers did not carefully distinguish between India
and Ethiopia, some scholars have interpreted Eusebius’ εἰς Ἰνδοὺς to be a reference to

124 Eusebius of Caesarea, Ecclesiastical History 5.10; PG 20, 456; NPNF Series II 1, 225. For the English
translation and Greek text used here, see volumes 153 and 265 of the Loeb Classical Library.

125 Jerome, De viris illustribus 36. For the translation, see NPNF Series II 3, 370. For the Latin, see PL 23,
651.
Ethiopia or Arabia. The references to the Gospel of Matthew written in Hebrew are a testament to how widespread the ancient belief was in the existence of a version of Matthew’s Gospel in Hebrew characters or, as some have suggested, an Aramaic version in Hebrew characters. The accounts, however, are difficult to interpret. How did these communities preserve the Gospel of Matthew written in Hebrew? Did they train their clergy to read Hebrew or Hebrew characters? No answer to these is provided in the accounts of Pantaenus’ missionary activities in India.

Additional details on Christian Hebrew learning in Arabia come from the Hadith. The Ahadith ( حداث), or Hadith (حديث), are the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Although they are a major focus of Islamic scholarship, patristic scholars do not ordinarily refer to them. However, one hadith describing the period shortly after the Prophet Muhammad received his earliest revelation also provides some possible illumination on the Hebrew learning of Christians in Arabia. The hadith says:

خديجة حتي أوت به ورقه بين نوفل بين أسد بن عبيد العزيز ابن عم خديجة وكان أمرا قد تنصر في الجاهلية وكان يكتب الكتاب العبري فيكتب من الإنجيل بالعبرانية ما شاء الله أن يكتب وكان شيخا كبيرا قد عم لهفقالت خديجة يا ابن عم اسمع من ابن أخيك

Then Khadijah went with him unto Waraqah ibn Naufal ibn Asad ibn ‘Abd al-‘Usa a son of Khadijah’s uncle. He had embraced Christianity in the Time of Ignorance and wrote the Hebrew script, and did write in Hebrew out of the Gospel whatever God willed him to write; and he was an old man and had become blind. And Khadijah said unto him: “O uncle’s son, hearken

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126 Scott Fitzgerald Johnson writes, “Thus, it is very often the case that when ‘India’ is referred to, the actual place described is probably Ethiopia or Arabia Felix.” See Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, Literary Territories: Cartographical Thinking in Late Antiquity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 134. Contrariwise, Stephen Neill writes, “It must be taken as probable that South India is the India of Pantaenus.” See Stephen Neill, A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 40.

unto thy brother’s son.”  

Some tentative conclusions may be derived from the account. Since the text indicates that Waraqah ibn Naufal “was an old man” when Khadijah and Muhammad came to him in 610, his Hebrew learning might have taken place in the first half of the sixth century, leaving open the possibility that his Hebrew teacher might have lived in the fifth century. It is tempting to pursue additional questions. How widespread was such Hebrew learning among the Christians of Arabia? How formal was Hebrew instruction there? Does Hebrew refer to the Hebrew language, to Aramaic, or simply to the letters used to write those languages? Since neither the Hadith nor the Sira add more details to the matter, no solid response can be offered to those questions.  

The Hebrew learning of Ethiopian and Arabian Christians is a neglected subject within the neglected subject of Christian Hebrew scholarship in antiquity. Ancient references to Pantaenus and Waraqah ibn Naufal whet scholastic curiosity, but the paucity of additional sources limits the meaningful conclusions that one can draw. Interdisciplinary research might extend knowledge of the subject beyond Pantaenus and Waraqah ibn Naufal.

The Hebrew Knowledge of Ante-Nicene Patristic Writers

Although it is clear from the prior sections that some knowledge of Hebrew was preserved among Jewish Christians, there is little evidence that such learning was

128 Sahih al-Bukhari 1.1.3. For the Arabic text and English translation, see Muhammad Asad, trans., Sahih al-Bukhari: The Early Years of Islam (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2013), 7-8.

transferred to gentile Christians, for second-century and third-century patristic writers show little or no familiarity with Hebrew or the Hebrew text of the Scriptures.

Critical knowledge of the Hebrew language and the Hebrew text of the Scriptures is not found in the patristic texts of the second or third century. The Hebrew learning found in the patristic texts of the period is usually etymological and rarely contains full quotations from the Hebrew Bible. The patristic writers of the second and third centuries ordinarily drew their Hebrew learning from the Septuagint, Jewish informants, and Judaeo-Hellenic texts. The remarks that follow will exemplify this by analyzing the Hebrew learning of several second-century writers.

Hegesippus

Hegesippus is the earliest-known Patristic writer said to have known Hebrew. He seems to have flourished in the middle of the second century. Almost everything that is known about him has been preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Ecclesiastical History*. He wrote:

καὶ ἕτερα δὲ πλείστα γράφει, ὅν ἐκ μέρους ἡ δὴ πρῶτον ἐμιμημονεύσαμεν, οἰκείως τοῖς καιροῖς τὰς ἱστορίας παραθέμενοι, ἐκ τοῦ καθ Ἔβραιους εὐαγγελίου καὶ τοῦ Συριακοῦ καὶ ἰδίως ἐκ τῆς Ἑβραίδος διαλέκτου τινὰ τίθησιν, ἐμφαίνων ἐξ Ἑβραίων ἑαυτὸν πεπιστευκέναι, καὶ ἄλλα δὲ ὡς ἐξ Ἰουδαϊκῆς ἀγράφου παραδόσεως μνημονεύει.

He also wrote much more, from which we have already made some quotations, arranging the narratives chronologically, and he makes extracts from the Gospel according to the Hebrews, and from the Syriac and particularly from the Hebrew language, showing that he had been converted from among the Hebrews, and he mentions points as coming from the unwritten tradition of the Jews.\(^{130}\)

Since none of Hegesippus’ writings survive, it is impossible to test the validity of

\(^{130}\) Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.22.8. For the Greek and the translation used here, see the *Loeb Classical Library* 153. The Greek passage in the *LCL* is identical with the passage printed in *GCS* 9.
Eusebius’ account of his Hebrew scholarship. Although he might have quoted “some passages in the Hebrew tongue” (ἐκ τῆς Ἑβραϊκῆς διαλέκτου τινὰ), there is no evidence that he spread his knowledge of Hebrew among Gentiles. Still, despite the scantiness of sources relating to Hegesippus, at least one scholar has accepted him as the earliest Hebraist among the patristic writers, and a very well-known historian, Ernest Renan, has given a similar evaluation of him.131

**Hebrew in the Works of Justin Martyr**

The second-century apologist Justin Martyr was a younger contemporary of Hegesippus. Hebrew does not often occur in the works of Justin Martyr. When it does occur, it leaves no strong indication that Justin knew the Hebrew language or used the Hebrew Bible. Goodenough has presented a convincing argument that Justin did not know Hebrew. He bases his conclusion on Justin’s remarks concerning the changing of Sarai’s name to Sarah.132 The Hebrew Bible (Gen. 17.5, 17.15) makes it clear that the name Abram (אברם) was changed to Abraham (אברהם), and Sarai’s name (שרי) was changed to Sarah (שרה). In Hebrew, it is clear that the changing of Abram’s name was effected by the addition of the Hebrew letter ה (h), and the changing of Sarai’s was effected by the deletion of י (y) and the addition of ה (h). The Septuagint,

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however, accounts for the name change by saying that Abram’s (῞Αβραµ) name was changed to Abraam (῾Αβραάµ), and Sara’s (Σάρα) name was changed to Sarra (Σάρρα). Since Justin’s remarks give no indication that he was familiar with the Hebrew account of the name change, Goodenough concludes that Justin knew no Hebrew and did not use the Hebrew text of the Scriptures. Goodenough’s conclusion is sound. In addition, other places in Justin’s works indicate that, although he might have been familiar with a few Hebrew words, he did not understand Hebrew.

The few Hebrew words that do occur in Justin’s writing may be traced to three sources: etymologies given in the Septuagint, Jewish informants, and Judaeo-Hellenic texts. As aforementioned, this was the regular approach to learning Hebrew employed by patristic writers of the ante-Nicene period.

Although few examples of it appear in his works, it is clear that Justin drew the meaning of some Hebrew words from the Septuagint. We have already mentioned that Justin’s remarks on the change of Σάρα to Σάρρα are derived from the account given in the Septuagint. Elsewhere Justin associated the name Ἰησοῦς with Σωτήρ:

Τὸ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ὄνομα <ἀνθρωπος> τῇ Ἑβραΐδι φωνῇ σωτήρ τῇ Ἑλληνίδι διαλέκτῳ δηλοῖ.

And the name Jesus in the Hebrew language means Σωτήρ (Saviour) in

133 Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 113.


135 Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 103.

136 Although I employ the expression “learning Hebrew,” it is worth noting that on account of the apparently informal nature of ante-Nicene Hebrew studies, it may be more appropriate to say that the patristic writers of that period “picked up Hebrew” rather than to say “learned Hebrew” which suggests a degree of formality that might not have been present.

137 Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 113.
Although Ἰησοῦς is not expressly defined to mean Σωτήρ in Matthew 1.21, such a meaning is implicit in that verse. It is likely that Justin used Matthew 1.21 to conclude that Ἰησοῦς means Σωτήρ. Justin’s basic definition of the name jibes with that given in modern lexicons. This approach towards extracting the meaning of the name Jesus was not uncommon in the patristic age. Longer, more detailed analyses of Hebrew names are found in rabbinic works contemporaneous with Justin and the other apologists. Justin’s etymology even appears to be somewhat basic when compared to, say, that given by Irenaeus about a generation afterwards, for the meaning of Ἰησοῦς. Justin might have even retained some uncertainty about the exact significance of Ἰησοῦς, for in another place, his Second Apology, he avoids expressly equating Ἰησοῦς and Σωτήρ but merely associates them. He wrote:

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138 Justin, First Apology 33. For the Greek text of the First Apology used here, see Miroslav Marcovich, ed., Justini Martyris Apologiae pro Christianis (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1994). The translations of Justin Martyr’s works used in this chapter are from the Ante-Nicene Fathers series.

139 Matthew 1.21 is referenced in the work (First Apology 33), but it is also conceivable that the link between Ἰησοῦς and Σωτήρ had become a part of a Christian oral tradition by that time. More than two generations after Justin, but less successfully, Hippolytus appears to attempt to draw deeper meanings from several Hebrew names in Genesis. Cf. Hippolytus, Refutation of all Heresies 10.26-27; ANF 5, 150.

140 The Brown-Driver-Briggs lexicon defines יְהוֹשֻעַ (Yehoshua) as “[God] is salvation.” A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (1906), s.v. יְהוֹשֻעַ.

141 Dupont reports that Augustine defined the name as “He who saves his people from sin.” See Anthony Dupont, Gratia in Augustine’s Sermones ad populum during the Pelagian Controversy: Do different contexts furnish different insights? (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 218.

142 Cf. Genesis Rabbah 86.3 (etymology of Potiphar); Genesis Rabbah 16.4 (חִדֵּכְלֵל, Hiddekel).

143 Cf. Irenaeus, Haer. 2.24.2. Although rendered incorrectly, Irenaeus’ etymology of Ἰησοῦς is detailed, and I discussed it below. Confusion in Christian scholarship about the meaning of Ἰησοῦς appeared even as late as the time of Luther when the study of Hebrew was becoming more institutionalized among Christian exegetes. See Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony: Sixteenth-century Christian-Hebraica in the Age of Renaissance Nostalgia (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1983), 205.
Ἰησοῦς δὲ καὶ ἀνθρώπου καὶ σοτῆρος ὄνομα καὶ σημασίαν ἔχει.\(^{144}\)

But “Jesus,” His name as man and Saviour, has also significance.

It is unclear whether Justin’s failure to give the significance of Ἰησοῦς indicates that he had a degree of uncertainty about its meaning at the time when he wrote his Second Apology. It is noteworthy that while Justin does not go into further detail about the meaning of Ἰησοῦς, he does give a detailed explanation of Χριστός, a Greek word, in the same chapter.\(^{145}\)

Another portion of Justin’s Hebrew learning came from Jewish informants. A passage in his Dialogue with Trypho makes it clear that Justin drew some of his Hebrew knowledge from Jewish informants:

Ἐπεὶ δὲ ὑμεῖς καὶ οἱ διδάσκαλοι ὑμῶν τολμᾶτε λέγειν μηδὲ εἰρήσθαι ἐν τῇ προφητείᾳ τοῦ Ἡσαίου Ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἥξει, ἀλλ’ Ἰδοὺ ἡ νεᾶνις ἐν γαστρὶ λήψεται καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ ἔξηγεῖσθε τὴν προφητείαν ὡς εἰς Εζεκίαν, τὸν γενόμενον ὑμῶν βασιλέα,

But since you and your teachers venture to affirm that in the prophecy of Isaiah it is not said, ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive,’ but, ‘Behold, the young woman shall conceive, and bear a son;’ and [since] you explain the prophecy as if [it referred] to Hezekiah, who was your king.\(^{146}\)

144 Justin Martyr, Second Apology 6; PG 6, 453; Dialogue with Trypho 146. For the text of the Second Apology used here, see Miroslav Marcovich, ed., Iustini Martyris Apologiae pro Christianis (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1994).


146 Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho 43. For the text of the Dialogue with Trypho used here, see Miroslav Marcovich, ed., Iustini Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997).
The statement ὑμεῖς καὶ οἱ διδάσκαλοι ὑμῶν ("you and your teachers") indicates that Justin had direct contact with Jews. Detailed analyses of his works, in fact, suggest that he derived much learning from his exchanges with Jews.\textsuperscript{147} In spite of the learning that Justin derived from his exchanges with Jews, his works display an unmistakable mistrust of Jews, especially as concerns the reliability of the Jewish Scriptures.\textsuperscript{148}

Occasional references to Hebrew appear in several Judaeo-Hellenic works, and it is not unreasonable to conclude that Justin might have availed himself of whatever Hebrew learning their works contained. Philonic and pseudo-Philonic works were storehouses of Jewish learning available to speakers of Greek. Justin’s indebtedness, however, to Philo of Alexandria has been the subject of scholarly debate. Justin does not mention Philo, but his works have enough similarity to Philo’s to suggest a link between the two. However, in his assessment of the subject, Willis Allen Shotwell wrote, “This author [Shotwell] inclines to the conclusion that any influence of Philo on Justin was an indirect influence. It could have come through Justin’s Christian predecessors.”\textsuperscript{149} Despite the uncertainty concerning the influence of Philonic works on Justin, there is agreement that another purportedly Jewish author, Aristo of Pella, had an influence on Justin, and it seems that Justin derived some Hebrew from this author’s writing.\textsuperscript{150} The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Ascension of Isaiah are other works of Jewish provenance upon which

\textsuperscript{147} Eric Francis Osborn, Justin Martyr (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1973), 95. Osborn highlights the other relevant publications on the matter.

\textsuperscript{148} Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho 71.


\textsuperscript{150} Rokeah suggests that Aristo of Pella was Justin’s source for the etymologies of satan and yisrael given in his Dialogue with Trypho. See David Rokeah, Justin Martyr and the Jews, 21.
Justin might have drawn. Thus, in Justin’s opera, there is an early appearance of the practice of “mining” Jewish texts for Hebrew words, i.e., searching Jewish texts for Hebrew definitions and Jewish lore. This practice continued as a cornerstone of Christian Hebrew scholarship in the patristic age.

Irenaeus

Irenaeus certainly was aware of the work of Justin Martyr, and some have even theorized that he was a student of Justin. Elliott, however, rightly observed that “very little is known of the early history of Irenaeus.” There may be some reason, however, to believe that he originated from Smyrna in Asia Minor, for, when speaking about Polycarp, Irenaeus related the following:

Et Polycarpus autem, non solum ab apostolis edoctus, et conversatus cum multis ex eis qui dominum nostrum viderunt, sed etiam ab apostolis in Asia, in ea quae est Smynis Ecclesis constitutus episcopus, quem et non vidimus in primus nostra aetate, multum enim perserveravit, et valde senex gloriosissime et nobilissimae martyrium faciens exivit de hac vita, haec docuit semper quae ab apostolis didicerat, quae et Ecclesiae tradidit, et sola sunt vera.

But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true.

151 Rokeah, Justin Martyr and the Jews, 30-31.
154 Irenaeus, Haer. 3.3.4; PG 7, 851. For the Latin text used in this chapter, see Sources chrétiennes 210-211, 263-264, 293-294. For the accompanying translation, see ANF 1, 416.
Irenaeus’ association of himself with Smyrna “during his early youth” (“in prima nostra aetate”) is significant, for there is reason to believe that there was an active Jewish community in second-century Smyrna, a presence that is directly relevant to the analysis of Irenaeus’ Hebrew learning. One source, the *Martyrdom of Pionius*, even suggests that the Jews of Smyrna attempted to proselytize Christians.\textsuperscript{155} The text relates:

> Audio enim, quod quosdam ex vobis Iudaei ad Synagogam vocent. Videte (quod maius accidit cuique ex animi voluntate peccatum), ne quis in inconcessum nec amplius remittendum, quod ad blasphemiam sancti Spiritus pertinet crimen admittat. Ne sitis una cum ipsis populus Gomorrhæ et iudices Sodomitæ, quorum manus innocentium sanguine et sanctorum cruore maduerunt.

I hear also that the Jews are calling you to the synagogue. Beware (because a sin out of the will of the mind befalls one more greatly), lest someone commit the forbidden and unremittable crime, which refers to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. You should not be together with them, the people of Gomorrah and the judges of Sodom, whose hands are tainted by the blood of the innocent and the murder of the saints.\textsuperscript{156}

In second-century Asia Minor, of course, there were Christians and Jews learned in Hebrew and capable of reading the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{157} It is clear that Irenaeus received some instruction in Hebrew,\textsuperscript{158} but it is uncertain whether this instruction occurred during his time in Smyrna or during his time as bishop of Lyons. Although Irenaeus did not tell us where he came into his Hebrew learning, there is more evidence for Jewish scholarship in second-century Anatolia than in second-century Gaul.\textsuperscript{159}


\textsuperscript{157} See my earlier discussion of the Peshitta.

\textsuperscript{158} Irenaeus, *Haer*. 1.21.3; *PG* 7, 662-663.
It, therefore, seems more probable that Irenaeus came upon his Hebrew learning in Anatolia before his tenure as the bishop of Lyons. When speaking about Hebrew, Irenaeus’ writings possess some degree of confidence that cannot be overlooked, a confidence rarely seen in Christian Hebraists during the patristic period. If Irenaeus did receive instruction in Hebrew, it might have given him some degree of confidence in using the language.

To what extent did informants figure in Irenaeus’ Hebrew learning? Irenaeus did not go into detail about this matter. However, it is not unreasonable to assume that Irenaeus availed himself of Jewish informants. This is certainly implied in his etymological discussion of *Iesus*. He wrote:

Et Iesus autem nomen secundum propriam Hebraeorum linguam litterarum est duarum et dimidia, sicut periti eorum dicunt, significans Dominum eum qui continet caelum et terram, quia Iesus secundum antiquam Hebraicam linguam caelum est, terra autem iterum *sura usser*.

Moreover, *Jesus*, which is a word belonging to the proper tongue of the Hebrews, contains, as the learned among them declare, two letters and a half, and signifies that Lord who contains heaven and earth; for *Jesus* in the ancient Hebrew language means “heaven,” while again “earth” is expressed by the words *sura usser*.159

The expression “sicut periti eorum dicunt” (“as the learned among them declare”) reveals the source of Irenaeus’ etymology to be Jewish. Thus, Irenaeus’ Hebrew learning, at least in part, came from Jewish informants. It is also noteworthy that by referencing “the learned among them” (“periti eorum”), Irenaeus added some Jewish authority to his Hebrew etymology. More than a century after Irenaeus, Jerome asserted that mentioning

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159 Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.24.2; *ANF* 1, 393; *PG* 7.788.
Jewish informants was a technique used to bolster exegetical claims.\textsuperscript{160} This possibility cannot be wholly dismissed in Irenaeus. While it is evident that Irenaeus availed himself of Jewish informants, the possibility that these were Jewish Christians must be entertained, especially in consideration of Irenaeus’ hostility towards Jews.\textsuperscript{161} Judaeo-Christians sometimes acted as Hebrew informants for Christian scholars. Not too long after Irenaeus’ time, for example, Origen made use of such a Judaeo-Christian for his Hebrew studies.\textsuperscript{162}

It is important to ask what motivated Irenaeus to study Hebrew. Irenaeus, unfortunately, did not disclose his original motive for studying Hebrew. However, one motive that must have encouraged his interest in the language during his maturity was its not infrequent appearance in heretical worship. When discussing the Marcosian (Gnostic) heresy, Irenaeus related that “others still repeat certain Hebrew words, in order the more thoroughly to bewilder those who are being initiated, as follows: ‘Basema, Chamosse, Baoenaora, Mistadia, Ruada, Kousta, Babaphor, Kalachthei.’”\textsuperscript{163} It is probable that the use of Hebrew by Gnostics disturbed Irenaeus, and his desire to demystify and combat

\textsuperscript{160} Contra Rufinum 1.13; PL 23, 426. Jerome’s claim is discussed in my section on Origen. The alarmingly inaccurate quality of Irenaeus’ etymology of \textit{Iesus} is addressed later in this section.

\textsuperscript{161} For a discussion of Irenaeus’ hostility towards Jews, see Denis Minns, \textit{Irenaeus} (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1994), 119-122. There were strong feelings on both sides. Elliott points out that “there existed a strong reluctance, and in some places a strict prohibition against the imparting of a knowledge of Hebrew by Jews to those whom they regarded as enemies alike to their creed and to their nation.” See Elliott, “Hebrew Learning among the Fathers,” 851.


\textsuperscript{163} Irenaeus, \textit{Haer}. 1.21.3; ANF 1, 346; PG 7, 661-662. It is noteworthy that some publications have suggested an etymological link between the mystical Hebrew-Aramaic formulas of the Gnostics sects and the expression \textit{abracadabra}. Some trace the expression back to Severus Sammonicus, the physician of the emperor Caracalla. See E. A. Wallis Budge, \textit{Amulets and Superstitions} (London: Humphrey Milford, 1930), 220-221.
their use of Hebrew is likely to have played a role in motivating his own study of the language. Likewise, it is probable that a desire to offer rebuttals to the claims of Jews also motivated his study of the language. Certainly, his opposition to the Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 7.14 required some Hebrew learning.

In later authors, one can detect *hebraica veritas*, the belief that the Hebrew text of the Scriptures contains the authoritative truth, as a motive for Hebrew study, but this does not appear in Irenaeus, who firmly adheres to the special and divine origin of the Septuagint. He wrote:

> Cum tanta igitur veritate et gratia Dei interpretae sint Scripturae, ex quibus praeparavit et reformavit Deus fidem nostram, quae in Filium eius est, et servavit nobis simplices Scripturas in Aegypto in qua adolevit et *domus Jacob*, effugiens famem, quae fuit in Chanaan, in qua et Dominus noster servatus est effugiens eam persecutionem quae erat ab Herode, et haec earum Scripturarum interpretatio priusquam Dominus noster descenderet, facta sit, et antequam Christiani ostenderentur, interpretata sit (natus est enim Dominus noster circa primum et quadragesimum annum Augusti imperii, multo autem vetustior fuit Ptolemaeus, sub quo interpretatae sunt Scripturae), vere inipudorati et audaces ostenduntur, qui nunc volunt aliter interpretationes facere quando ex ipsis Scripturis arguantur a nobis, et in fidem adventus Filii Dei concludantur.

Since, therefore, the Scriptures have been interpreted with such fidelity, and by the grace of God, and since from these God has prepared and formed again our faith towards His Son, and has preserved to us the unadulterated Scriptures in Egypt, where the house of Jacob flourished, fleeing from the famine in Canaan; where also our Lord was preserved when He fled from the persecution set on foot by Herod; and [since] this interpretation of these Scriptures was made prior to our Lord’s descent to earth, and came into being before the Christians appeared — for our Lord was born about the forty-first year of the reign of Augustus; but Ptolemy was much earlier, under whom the Scriptures were interpreted; — [since these things are so, I say,] truly these men are proved to be impudent and presumptuous, who would now show a desire to make different translations, when

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164 The demystification of the rituals of heretics was an aim of Hippolytus. But, being inexperienced in Hebrew, he was not especially effective at handling the use of Hebrew among heretics. See Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 4.28.

165 Irenaeus, *Haer*, 3.9.2; *ANF* 1, 422; *PG* 7, 870-871. It is noteworthy (ironic) that both Irenaeus and Justin acquired some knowledge of Hebrew (the language of Jewish antiquity), in part, to oppose Jewish interpretations.
we refute them out of these Scriptures, and shut them up to a belief in the advent of the Son of God.  

His remarks clearly demonstrate that he trusted in the Septuagint. Earlier in his treatise, Irenaeus even expressed mistrust for the Jewish Scriptures. Irenaeus suggested that Jewish animosity towards Christians was so intense that if Jews had been cognizant of the advent of Christianity, they might have altered their Scriptures to expunge the prophecies of Christ’s advent. He wrote:

Qui quidem si cognovissent nos futures, et usuros, his testimoniiis quae sunt ex Scripturis, nunquam dubitassent ipsi suas comburere Scripturas, quae et reliquas omnes gentes manifestant participare vitae, et eos qui gloriantur domum se esse Jacob et populum Israel, et exhaerelitatos ostendunt a gratia Dei.

They indeed, had they been cognizant of our future existence, and that we should use these proofs from the Scriptures, would themselves never have hesitated to burn their own Scriptures, which do declare that all other nations partake of [eternal] life, and show that they who boast themselves as being the house of Jacob and the people of Israel, are disinherited from the grace of God.  

Although he availed himself of Jewish informants, Irenaeus’ words represent a strong mistrust of Jews and show no desire to collaborate with them in order to study Hebrew or to appeal to them for copies of the Sacred Scriptures in the Hebrew tongue as Origen did in the generation after Irenaeus. This lack of interest in anything resembling hebraica veritas, the truth of the Hebrew Scriptures, is typical of the patristic authors who preceded Origen (Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria). Irenaeus’ Hebrew scholarship appears to be of an imperfect and poor quality, but it is difficult to offer a definitive

166 Irenaeus, Haer. 3.21.3; PG 7, 949; ANF 1, 452.

167 Irenaeus, Haer. 3.21.1; PG 7, 946-947; ANF 1, 451.

168 Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 6.16.1: τὰς τε παρὰ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις φεροµένας πρωτότυπους αὐτοῖς Ἑβραίων στοιχείας γραφὰς κτήµα ἵδον πα‧µάσθαι (Origen . . . also got into his own possession the original writings in the actual Hebrew characters, which were extant among the Jews). The translation is drawn from the Loeb Classical Library 265 (Eusebius II), pp. 50-51.
judgment of his scholarship on account of the paucity of his surviving opera. A few examples will suffice to demonstrate the typically poor quality of Irenaeus Hebrew scholarship.

Irenaeus displayed his Hebrew learning in his etymologies, which bear witness to the superficiality of his Hebrew learning. In defining *Pascha*, for example, Irenaeus fell into the error of linking *Pascha* to the Greek πάσχειν, an error that also appears in the work of other patristic writers.\(^\text{169}\) He wrote:

> Et non est numerum dicere in quibus a Moyse ostenditur Filius Dei: cuius et diem passionis non ignoravit; sed figuratim praenuntiavit eum, *Pascha* nominans: et in eadem ipsa, quae ante tantum temporis a Moyse praedicata est, passus est Dominus adimplens Pascha.

And it would be endless to recount [the occasions] upon which the Son of God is shown forth by Moses. Of the day of His passion, too, he was not ignorant; but foretold Him, after a figurative manner, by the name given to the passover; and at that very festival, which had been proclaimed such a long time previously by Moses, did our Lord suffer, thus fulfilling the passover.\(^\text{170}\)

*Pascha*, of course, comes from the Hebrew word פֶּסַח, an etymological connection that was finally added to Christian scholarship by Origen in the generation that followed Irenaeus.\(^\text{171}\) Similar to his difficulties with *Pascha*, Irenaeus had trouble defining *Sabaoth*. He wrote:

> Similiter autem et Sabaoth per ω quidem Graecam in syllaba novissima scribitur, voluntarium significant: per autem Graecam, ut puta Sabaoth, primum coelum manifestat.


\(^{170}\) Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.10.1; *ANF* 1, 473; *PG* 7, 1000.

\(^{171}\) Tadros Y. Malaty, *Lectures in Patrology, The School of Alexandria, Book Two, Origen*, English text revised by Rose Mary Halim (Jersey City, NJ: St. Mark’s Orthodox Coptic Church, 1995), 145-146.
In like manner also, *Sabaoth*, when it is spelled by a Greek Omega in the last syllable [Sabath], denotes “a voluntary agent;” but when it is spelled with a Greek Omicron—as, for instance, Sabath—it expresses “the first heaven.”\(^{172}\)

Irenaeus’ remarks on *mammon* and the supposed Hebrew word *mamuel* are perplexing.

He wrote:

> Mammonas est autem, secundum iudaicam loquelam qua et Samaritae utuntur «cupidus» et «plus quam oportet habere volens,» secundum autem hebraicam adjunctive dicitur «Mamuel» et significat «gulosam», hoc est, «qui non possit a gula continere». Secundam utraque igitur quae significantur non possimus Deo servire, et Mamonae.

For mammon is, according to the Jewish language, which the Samaritans do also use, *a covetous* man, and one who wishes to have more than he ought to have. But according to the Hebrew, it is by the addition of a syllable (adjunctive) called Manuel, and signifies *gulosum*, that is, one whose gullet is insatiable. Therefore, according to both these things which are indicated, we cannot serve God and mammon.\(^{173}\)

*Mammon* is a word of Semitic origin meaning *wealth* that occurs a few times in the New Testament and often in the Targums.\(^{174}\) Irenaeus’ remarks on *mammon* appear to be among the earliest surviving patristic interpretations of the word, for I find no interpretation of it in Clement of Rome, Barnabas, or Justin Martyr. Surprisingly, despite the several occurrences of *mammon* in the Gospels, the word gave some difficulty to Irenaeus’ whose definition of it, *a covetous man*, did not fully capture its simplest

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\(^{172}\) Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.35.3; *ANF* 1, 412; *PG* 7, 839. Since Latin does not have one distinct letter for transliterating omega and one distinct letter for transliterating omicron, Sabaoth is twice spelled the same in the selected passage from Irenaeus.

\(^{173}\) Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.8; *ANF* 1, 421; *PG* 7, 866-867.

\(^{174}\) The term *mammon* (mammonas, µαµωνᾶς, ממון) does not occur in the Old Testament. The exact provenance of the word is uncertain, but it occurs in Hebrew and Aramaic texts. See the references in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1910 ed., s.v. “Mammon”; *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (2013), s.v. “Mammon.”
meaning which is wealth.\textsuperscript{175} Perhaps, Irenaeus’ definition was influenced by its use in Luke 16.9-13, which could be interpreted as personifying mammon—such an interpretation was not uncommon in the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{176} Still, Irenaeus’ failure to give wealth as the plain meaning of mammon suggests that mammon presented some difficulty to him. He was so desirous of clarity that he appears to have inquired of an informant for clarity in regard to this word which belonged to the “Jewish language” (“Iudaicam loquelam”). Irenaeus was not alone among the patristic writers in believing mammon to signify a person. Curiously, it is in North African writers, viz., Tertullian and Augustine, that one finds the plain interpretation of mammon as a noun signifying wealth.\textsuperscript{177} It is possible that their plain interpretation is attributable to a Semitic influence. I address this below.

Irenaeus’ remarks on manuel raise additional difficulties, for manuel is not a word that easily corresponds to any known Hebrew word whose meaning resembles gulosum. It is possible that a copyist’s error may account for the matter.\textsuperscript{178} It is also possible that Irenaeus might have misremembered the expression or been given poor information by an informant. In any case, Irenaeus’ confident equating of manuel with mamnonas does not reflect well upon his Hebrew learning.

\textsuperscript{175} Wansbrough remarks that Irenaeus “shows striking ignorance of Hebrew” and lists this passage dealing with mamnonas and manuel as evidence. See Henry Wansbrough, \textit{The use and Abuse of the Bible} (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), 26.

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{177} Tertullian, \textit{De Praesc.} 12; Augustine, \textit{Sermon} 63.2.

\textsuperscript{178} Concerning manuel, the \textit{Ante-Nicene Fathers} notes: “A word of which many explanations have been proposed, but none are quite satisfactory. Harvey seems inclined to suspect the reading to be corrupt, through the ignorance and carelessness of the copyist. [Irenæus undoubtedly relied for Hebrew criticisms on some incompetent retailer of rabbinical refinements.]” \textit{ANF} 1, 421 n. 4.
Part of Irenaeus’ etymology of *Jesus* has already been referenced to show that Irenaeus’ made use of Jewish informants, but its multiple inaccuracies make it a most suitable example of just how inadequate Irenaeus’ Hebrew learning was. The entirety of his etymology is:

Et Iesus autem nomen secundum propriam Hebraeorum linguam litterarum est duarum et dimidiae, sicut periti eorum dicunt, significans Dominum eum qui continet caelum et terram, quia Iesus secundum antiquam hebraicam linguam coelum est, terra autem iterum sura user dicitur. Verbum ergo quod coelum et terra habet, ipe est Jesus. Falsa est ergo et episemi eorum redditio, et numerus autem eorum eversus est manifeste. Secundum enim propriam eorum linguam, quinque literarum est Graeco vocabulo Soter; Iesus autem iterum, secundum Hebraicam linguam duas et dimidiam habet litteras. Corruit ergo numerus calculi, qui est [in] DCCCLXXXVIII.

Moreover, *Jesus*, which is a word belonging to the proper tongue of the Hebrews, contains, as the learned among them declare, two letters and a half, and signifies that Lord who contains heaven and earth; for *Jesus* in the ancient Hebrew language means “heaven,” while again “earth” is expressed by the words *sura user*. The word, therefore, which contains heaven and earth is just *Jesus*. Their explanation, then, of the *Episemon* is false, and their numerical calculation is also manifestly overthrown. For, in their own language, *Soter* is a Greek word of five letters; but, on the other hand, in the Hebrew tongue, *Jesus* contains only two letters and a half. The total which they reckon up, viz., eight hundred and eighty-eight, therefore falls to the ground.\(^{179}\)

None of the Hebrew etymologies given there are correct. Firstly, there is no etymological link between *Iesus* and *coelum* “according to the ancient Hebrew language.” The words שָׁמַיִם *shamayim*, the Hebrew equivalent of *coelum* (*οὐρανός*), and יְהוֹשֻעַ *Yehoshua*, the Hebrew for *Iesus*, do not sound alike and come from entirely different roots.\(^{180}\) Although it is possible that the definition comes from rabbinic exegesis, no satisfactory solution has

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\(^{179}\) Irenaeus, *Haer*. 2.24.2; *ANF* 1, 393; *PG* 7, 788-790.

\(^{180}\) Referencing ישוע (Yeshua; Syr.: مِصْحَعُ) instead of יהושע (Yehoshua) would not change the relationship between these words.
been devised.\textsuperscript{181} The expression \textit{sura user} bears no resemblance to the Hebrew term for earth, \textit{ארץ} (’arets).\textsuperscript{182} It has been suggested that the expression is the result of a copyist’s error.\textsuperscript{183} The possibility that copyists’ mistakes figure in the Hebrew presented by Irenaeus is real. However, even if that is so, no one has duly connected \textit{sura user} to the Hebrew word for earth. Despite the lack of a Greek manuscript of \textit{Against Heresies} and the possibility that copyists errors figure in the manuscripts that are known, I think it is reasonable to side with Gerhard’s assessment of the matter. He wrote, “It was, however, an ignorance of the Hebrew language, which Irenaeus had in common with very many of the ancients, that misled him into this opinion.”\textsuperscript{184}

As aforementioned, Irenaeus’ sometimes displayed confidence in his Hebrew scholarship and this complicates the assessment of his Hebrew learning to some extent. Although he regarded Hebrew as a foreign language belonging to the Hebrews, when Irenaeus introduced Hebrew etymologies, he did so with confidence. Consider his translation of Marcosian Hebrew. He wrote:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{181}ANF 1, 393 n.8.

\textsuperscript{182}ANF 1, 393 n.8.

\textsuperscript{183}Ibid.

divido spiritum, cor, et supercoelestem virtutem misericordem: fruar
nomine tuo, Salvator veritatis.

Others still repeat certain Hebrew words, in order the more thoroughly
to bewilder those who are being initiated, as follows: “Basema,
Chamosse, Baoenaora, Mistadia, Ruada, Kousta, Babaphor, Kalachthei.”
The interpretation of these terms runs thus: “I invoke that which is above
every power of the Father, which is called light, and good Spirit, and life,
because Thou hast reigned in the body.” Others, again, set forth the redemption
thus: The name which is hidden from every deity, and dominion, and truth
which Jesus of Nazareth was clothed with in the lives of the light of
Christ—of Christ, who lives by the Holy Ghost, for the angelic redemption.
The name of restitution stands thus: Messia, Uphareg, Namempsoeman,
Chaldoeaur, Mosomedoea, Acphranoe, Psaua, Jesus Nazaria. The
interpretation of these words is as follows: “I do not divide the Spirit of
Christ, neither the heart nor the supercelestial power which is merciful; may
I enjoy Thy name, O Saviour of truth!”

Irenaeus’ introduction of the translation suggests that he had confidence in his
interpretation of the Hebrew. He displayed a similar confidence in other uses of Hebrew.
He wrote, for example:

‘Nihilominus autem et unigenitus et maxime autem super omnia nomen,
quod dicitur Deus, quod et ipsum hebraice Baruch dicitur, et duas et
didimium habet literas.’ Ex hoc ergo, quod firmiora nomina fecundum
Ebraicam et Graecitatis linguam, nec secundum numerum litterarum,
nec secundum supputationem convenient secundum supputationem
conveniunt figmento eorum manifesta est de reliquis impudenter extorta
supputatio.

By thus, in like manner, and not less Monogenes; but pre-eminently the
name which is above all others, by which God is called, and which in the
Hebrew tongue is expressed by Baruch, [a word] which also contains two
and a half letters. From this fact, therefore, that the more important names,
both in the Hebrew and Greek languages, do not conform to their system,
either as respects the number of letters or the reckoning brought out of them,
the forced character of their calculations respecting the rest becomes
clearly manifest.”

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185 Irenaeus, Haer. 1.21.3; ANF 1, 346; PG 7, 662-663.
186 Irenaeus, Haer. 2.24.2; ANF 1, 394; PG 7, 791.
Thus, although Irenaeus’ writings contain no shortage of Hebrew errors, it is clear that Irenaeus received some instruction in Hebrew and made some effort to learn the language as a tool to use against heretics and Jews.\(^{187}\) Irenaeus’ style suggests that he had some degree of confidence in his Hebrew learning.

**Eusebius of Caesarea on Origen’s Hebrew Scholarship**

Subsequent to and contemporaneous with Irenaeus, one can find Hebrew learning displayed by several third-century, Christian authors (Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria). However, it is unmistakable that Origen was the preeminent Christian Hebraist of the third century, and it is to him and his opera that I shall now turn. However, before I specifically initiate remarks on Origen’s contributions to Christian Hebrew scholarship, I shall dedicate some attention to Eusebius of Caesarea’s account of Origen’s Hebrew scholarship as displayed in his *Ecclesiastical History*, for an important lesson can be learned from it about the standards and expectations of the Christian Hebraist in antiquity.

Origen admired the Hebrew language and the Hebrew Scriptures, and he put considerable effort into acquiring some knowledge of Hebrew.\(^ {188}\) Although Origen did not advance far in his personal study of Hebrew,\(^ {189}\) his Hebrew scholarship exerted a considerable effect on subsequent generations of Christians. Concerning Origen’s Hebrew, Eusebius of Caesarea related:

\(^{187}\) The term “instruction” is appropriate, even if this only involved learning Hebrew etymologies.


So earnest and assiduous was Origen’s research into the divine words that he learned the Hebrew language, and procured as his own the original Hebrew Scriptures which were in the hands of the Jews. He investigated also the works of other translators of the Sacred Scriptures besides the Seventy. And in addition to the well-known translations of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, he discovered certain others which had been concealed from remote times,—in what out-of-the-way corners I know not,—and by his search he brought them to light.  

The verbiage utilized by Eusebius in describing Origen’s Hebrew studies is especially interesting. In describing Origen’s Hebrew studies, Eusebius used the term ἐκμαθεῖν. The Liddell and Scott lexicon defines ἐκμαθεῖν as “to learn thoroughly.” The Loeb Classical Library’s edition of Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History renders ἐκμαθεῖν as “made a thorough study,” conveying the same sense as the definition provided in the Liddell and Scott lexicon. Did Eusebius actually mean to imply that Origen “made a thorough study of the Hebrew tongue”? Eusebius’ use of ἀπηκριβωµένα ἐξέτασις (“accurate examination”) makes it more probable that he meant to give a high estimation of Origen’s
Hebrew learning by using ἐκμαθεῖν. Some translators, ancient and modern, have carefully rendered this aspect of Eusebius’ words. Rufinus of Aquilea, for example used perscrutari (to scrutinize thoroughly). Other translators, however, have not always taken care to capture the fullness of Eusebius’ words. An ancient Syriac translation of Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History, for example, simply renders ἐκμαθεῖν as σλ (yilef), the Syriac for “he learned.” The Patrologia Graeca’s translation renders ἐκμαθεῖν as didicerit. If indeed ἐκμαθεῖν and perscrutari were meant to imply thoroughness, as I suggest, it is dubitable that Origen ever approached that level of familiarity with the language. Origen himself expressed less confidence in his own Hebrew learning than Eusebius did. For example, around the year 240, in his Ad Africanum, Origen wrote:

ἐγὼ δὲ ἔτι ἀμφιβάλλω· ἐπείπερ φροντίσας τῶν κατά τὸν τόπον, τῷ καὶ αὐτοῦ ἡπορηκέναι ἐν αὐτοῖς, οὐκ ὀλίγος Ἐβραίος ἀνεθέμην πυνθανόμενος, πῶς παρ’ αὐτοῖς ὀνομάζεται πρίνος, καὶ πῶς λέγουσι τὸ πρίζειν· ἐτὶ δὲ εἰς τί μεταλαμβάνουσι τὴν σχῖνον τὸ φυτὸν, καὶ πῶς τὸ σχίζειν ὀνομάζουσιν.

On this point, however, I am still in doubt; because, when I was considering this passage (for I myself saw this difficulty), I consulted not a few Jews about it, asking them the Hebrew words for prinos and prisein, and how they would translate schinos the tree, and how schisis.

194 Rufinus’ somewhat loose interpretation is: “Inter cetera quoque eruditionum suarum studia ne illud quidem omisit Origenes perscrutari et addiscere etiam Hebraeae linguæ virtutem.” See Eduard Schwarz and Theodor Mommsen, eds., Die Kirchengeschichte, Die Übersetzung des Rufinus, Pt. 2, in Eusebius Werke II, GCS 9 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1908), 553. Vincent of Lerins also seems to have accepted Eusebius’ statement to imply that Origen was “proficient in Hebrew.” See Vincent of Lerins, Commonitory 17; NPNF Series II 11, 144.

195 The full sentence is: “Tantam porro curam ac diligentiam in divinis Scripturis perscrutandis adhibebat Origenes, ut Hebraicam et linguam didicerit.” See PG 20, 554.


197 Origen, Ad Africanum 6; PG 11, 61. Although Jewish origins and some knowledge of Hebrew have been associated with Julius Africanus, temporal and spatial limitations do not permit me to go into any detail.
The passage shows that Origen, even in his maturity at Caesarea, continued to be one who was still uncertain about Hebrew (ἀµφιβάλλω), not one who had thoroughly learned (ἐκµαθεῖν) the language.

What, therefore, is to be made of the high estimation of Origen’s Hebrew learning given by Eusebius? Eusebius did not state the motive or criteria of his evaluation of Origen’s Hebrew learning. However, it is evident that Eusebius was especially fond of Origen. With Pamphilus, Eusebius even produced an apology for Origen. However, Eusebius’ high appraisal of Origen’s Hebrew scholarship might be equally attributable to the very different standards of fourth-century Hebrew scholarship among Christians. In today’s world, a Hebrew scholar might be expected to understand the grammar of Hebrew, read the Hebrew script, and translate Hebrew texts without a special dependency upon lexicons. Language examinations often confirm that contemporary Hebraists possess these abilities. Such rigors, however, were unknown in Eusebius’ time. Hebraists, both Jewish and Christian, did not possess a grammatical understanding of Hebrew comparable to that possessed by the Latin and Greek grammarians contemporaneous with them. There was, for example, no Hebrew equivalent of Dionysius Thrax. Christian

about him as a Christian Hebraist. For some remarks on the matter, see William Adler, trans., Cesti: The Extant Fragments (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), xii n.10, 165 n.11.

198 Jewish students learned Hebrew through the memorization of biblical texts and the translation of these texts “into the vernacular,” meaning Aramaic for those living in Palestine. See Alexander, “How Did the Rabbis Learn Hebrew?” in Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda, 80-81. The memorization of grammatical rules was not an integral component of their education. Alexander also notes “This lack of grammatical understanding of the workings of Hebrew in no way impugns the Rabbis’ knowledge of the language. Just as Monsieur Jourdain in the Bourgeois Gentilhomme discovered that he had been speaking prose for more than forty years without knowing it, so it is perfectly obvious that one may have a total command of a language without being aware of its grammatical structure.” See Alexander, “How Did the Rabbis Learn Hebrew?” 78.

199 “Considerable grammatical observations are to be found already in the Talmud and the Midrashim. . . . But it was not until Saadia that Hebrew grammar was treated as an independent science, and not merely as
Hebraists were especially interested in etymology, being able to properly define the Hebrew names that appeared in the Bible. There were, however, no Hebrew-to-Greek or Hebrew-to-Latin lexicons to aid Christian Hebraists, just word lists of dubious value and the several Greek translations of the Hebrew text. It was accepted that the Christian Hebraist would avail himself of these Greek translations and seek clarity from Jewish informants. Christian Hebraists were comfortable with consulting transliterations of the Hebrew texts, instead of essaying to read the same text in unvocalized Hebrew letters. Lacking the years of training that allowed one to make literal translations of the Hebrew on sight, Christian Hebraists desirous of a literal rendering of the Hebrew text were wont to consult the literal translation of the Jewish convert Aquila.  

Despite his supposedly anti-Christian sentiments, Aquila’s translation was, in fact, believed to be an accurate and valid representation of the Hebrew, and it was sometimes quoted without making any reference to the actual Hebrew text.  

Bearing these facts in mind, it does not seem unusual that Eusebius applied ἐκµαθεῖν to Origen. The same factors might have figured in Eusebius’ appraisal of Hegesippus as a Hebraist, and Jerome’s estimation of Epiphanius later in the fourth century. By today’s standards, however, the use of ἐκµαθεῖν is difficult to justify. The aforesaid features of ancient Christian Hebrew scholarship will be discussed in the analysis of Origen which follows.

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201 Eusebius of Caesarea, Commentary on Isaiah 23.18; Origen, Ad Africanum 2 and 3.
Origen

Although Eusebius made it clear that Origen learned Hebrew, he did not specify how Origen learned the Hebrew language. Origen’s works, however, did furnish some details concerning how he went about learning Hebrew. Origen’s works reveal that his study of Hebrew spanned both his Alexandrian and Caesarean periods, and his works show that Jewish informants, Judaeo-Hellenic works, and Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures were important in his study of the language during both periods. I shall begin by addressing the presence of Jewish informants in Origen’s Hebrew studies. Origen understood that Hebrew was “to be found among the Jews alone,” and Jewish informants appear in Origen’s earliest works. Consider that in his Commentary on Psalms 1-25, one of his earliest works, one finds Origen introducing a biblical interpretation that he learned from a Jewish informant. Trigg explained:

Origen’s first extended work was apparently a commentary on the Psalms, the book which Christians knew best because it was their principal hymnal. He probably intended to comment on the entire psalter, but he began the work with such a minute examination that he was able to complete it only through Psalm 25. This commentary has almost entirely disappeared, but we do have a fragment that reveals Origen’s view on biblical interpretation. In it Origen adopted as his own a Jewish tradition he learned from the Hebrew. According to it, the Bible in its obscurity resembles a series of locked rooms.

Thus from early in his Alexandrian period, Origen was in contact with Jewish learning. It is reasonable to assume that Hebrew was also among the subjects discussed by Origen and his Jewish informant(s) during his Alexandrian period. The creation of the Hebrew


column of the Hexapla would certainly have necessitated some exchanges on Hebrew
between Origen and his informants. Furthermore, etymologies contained in his
Alexandrian works also suggest that Hebrew was one of the topics discussed between
Origen and his Jewish informants during his Alexandrian period. It is, for example, in
Origen’s controversial Alexandrian work, De Principiis, that one finds an early, if not the
earliest, mention of poor as a meaning for ebion. Origen’s aforementioned remarks in
Ad Africanum make it clear that Origen was still consulting with Jewish informants in
Caesarea during the latter part of his career.

It is clear that Origen had several Jewish informants during his career, and two of their
names appear to have been preserved. Origen explained that he consulted with Iullus
(Ἰούλλος) on exegetical questions:

Ἐγὼ μὲν ὡμὴν ἕνα εἶναι ἐν τῇ βιβλίῳ τῶν ψαλμῶν, ὡς ἐπεγέγρατο·
«Προσευχή τοῦ Μωσῆ ἀνθρώπου τοῦ Θεοῦ» τὸ ύστερον δὲ ἀναχινούμενος
περὶ πινὸν λογίων Θεοῦ Ἰούλλῳ τῷ πατριάρχῃ, καὶ τινὶ τῶν χρηματιζόντων
παρὰ ἱουδαίοις σοφῶν, ἀκήκοα, ὡς ἔδιδε ὅλης τῆς βιβλίου τῶν Ψαλμῶν ἀλήν
ἀπὸ τῶν πρῶτον καὶ δευτέρου, οἱ παρ᾽ Ἑβραίους ἀνεπίγραφοι, ἢ ἐπιγραφὴν
μὲν ἔχοντες, οὐχὶ δὲ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ γράφαντος, ἐκείνου εἰσὶν ὦ ὁ τὸ ὄνομα
φέρεται ἐν τῷ πρὸ τούτων ἐπιγραφήν ἔχοντι ψαλμῷ.

I thought there was one Psalm of Moses in the Book of Psalms, which
was inscribed, ‘Prayer of Moses, man of God’. Later, however, in a
discussion concerning certain oracles of God with Ioullus the patriarch
and someone the Jews considered wise, I learned that after the first
two psalms, throughout the rest of the book, those psalms which lack an
inscription among the Hebrews, or have an inscription but lack the name

204 Origen, De Principiis 4.22. Although I do allow the possibility that Origen learned the meaning of ebion
through Judaeo-Christian texts. The absence of the definition in contemporaneous works makes it more
likely that Origen came upon his definition through a Jewish or Judaeo-Christian informant. Origen’s
definition of ebion is the earliest that I can find. References to the Ebionites can be found in the works of
Irenaeus and Hippolytus and Tertullian, but they do not define ebion. See Irenaeus, Haer. 1.26.2;
Hippolytus, Refutation of all Heresies 7.22; Tertullian, De Praesc. 33; De Carne Chr. 14.18. See the
of the author, are considered to have been written by that person whose name is on the preceding psalm.\(^{205}\)

Iullus was probably not the only prominent Jew with whom Origen had exchanges. One theory suggests that Origen had exchanges with Rabbi Hoshaya of Caesarea, who, according to Jewish tradition, authored Genesis Rabbah.\(^{206}\) A section of Genesis Rabbah records what might have been an exchange between the two scholars:

A philosopher asked R. Hoshaya: ‘If circumcision is so precious, why was it not given to Adam?’ ‘If so,’ he replied, ‘why do you shave the corners of your head and leave your beard?’ ‘Because it grew with me in folly,’ was the answer. ‘If so, you should blind your eye and cut off your hands!’ ‘To such an argument have we come!’ observed he. ‘I cannot send you away empty-handed,’ said he; [the real reason is this:] whatever was created in the first six days requires further preparation, e.g., mustard needs sweetening, the bean plant needs sweetening, wheat needs grinding, and man too needs to be finished off.’\(^{207}\)

If Origen is the one referred to in the selection as פילוסופוסetchup (“a philosopher”), then it suggests that he had lively exchanges with Hoshaya, a leading Jewish figure during a period in which Caesarean Christians and Caesarean Jews competed to attract followers.\(^{208}\) Although it is unmistakable that Origen availed himself of Jewish informants, more than a century after Origen’s time, Jerome speculated about the

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\(^{205}\) For this translation from Selecta in Psalmos, see Ronald E. Heine, Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 149 (ebook). For the Greek text, see PG 12, 1056 (Huillus).


motives behind Origen’s references to ὁ Ἑβραῖος:

Ipse Origenes et Clemens et Eusebius alique conplures quando de Scripturis aliquaque disputant, et volunt approbare quod dicunt, sic solent scribere: ‘Referebat mihi Hebræus’; et ‘Audivi ab Hebræo’; et ‘Hebræorum ista sententia est’.

Origen himself, and Clement and Eusebius, and many others, when they are discussing scriptural points, and wish to have Jewish authority for what they say, write: A Hebrew stated this to me, or I heard from a Hebrew, or, That is the opinion of the Hebrews. 209

Although it is quite conceivable that referring to the Hebrew (ὁ Ἑβραῖος) was a literary device, it is unmistakable that Origen had actual Jewish informants (e.g., Iullus) and that he used them as sources of Hebrew knowledge.

Since it has surfaced several times in scholarship, let us address the hypothesis that Origen was of Jewish origin. Krauss, for example, raised this possibility in his remarks on Origen’s interest in Hebrew. 210 Moreover, in his Origen: A Historical Novel, Vrettos suggested that Origen was of Jewish ancestry and links Origen’s Hebrew learning to his Jewish upbringing in Alexandria. 211 The theory lacks a historical foundation, for neither Origen’s works nor any ancient biographical source of Origen’s life mentions that Origen was Jewish. 212

209 Contra Rufinum 1.13; PL 23, 426. For the Latin text used here, see Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina, Volume 79: S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Opera.


212 Stemberger writes, “Based on a misunderstanding of Jerome's Ep. 39, S. KRAUSS also claimed that Origen’s mother was Jewish and Knew Hebrew. This would be a most interesting detail about Jews in Alexandria, but the text does not speak of Origen's mother.” See Günter Stemberger, “Exegetical Contact Between Christians and Jews,” in Hebrew Bible, Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation, Volume 1. From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (until 1300), Part 1, Antiquity, edited by Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 576.
Despite the numerous references to Jewish informants in his works, it is clear that much of Origen’s Hebrew learning was autodidactic, a trend that was not uncommon in the Hebrew scholarship of patristic authors that followed him. Since there were no Hebrew grammars or dictionaries available in antiquity, Christian scholars sometimes drew Hebrew learning from the books that they had at their disposal. Translations of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek language were an important source of Hebrew learning for Origen. The translations of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion were especially important to Origen’s Hebrew study.\(^{213}\) Using Aquila’s very literal translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, Origen was able to discern the differences between the LXX and the Hebrew Scriptures. Origen himself acknowledged the important function of Aquila’s translation for those who did not know Hebrew:

Ωὕτω γὰρ Ἀκύλας δουλεύων τῇ Ἑβραϊκῇ λέξει έκδέδωκεν εἰπών φιλοτιµότερον πεπιστεύµενος παρὰ Ἰουδαίοις ἡρµενευκέναι τὴν γραφὴν ὃς µάλιστα εἰώθασι οἱ ἄγνοιντες τὴν Ἑβραίον διάλεκτον Κρῄσθαί ὡς πάντων µᾶλλον ἐπιτευγµένῳ.

For so Aquila, following the Hebrew reading, gives it, who has obtained the credit among the Jews of having interpreted the Scriptures with no ordinary care, and whose version is most commonly used by those who do not know Hebrew, as the one which has been most successful.\(^{214}\)

Origen did not indicate here whether he included himself among “those who do not know Hebrew” (οἱ ἄγνοιντες τὴν Ἑβραίον διάλεκτον).\(^{215}\) It is clear, however, that although

\(^{213}\) The importance of these translations is addressed in chapter four which specifically deals with Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning.

\(^{214}\) Origen, Ad Africanum 2; ANF 4, 386. For the Greek text, see PG 11, 52.

\(^{215}\) Origen makes a number of statements in other places that make his lack of Hebrew clear. See Richard Patrick Crosland Hanson, Allegory and Event; A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen’s Interpretation of Scripture (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1959), 171-172.
few actual quotations from the Hebrew text occur in Origen’s opera.\textsuperscript{216} Aquila’s translation is referenced with regularity as an accurate, literal representation of the Hebrew text.\textsuperscript{217} Despite Aquila’s supposedly anti-Christian bias, this acceptance of Aquila’s translation can be found in subsequent Christian Hebraists, including Eusebius of Caesarea.\textsuperscript{218} On account of his dependence on Aquila, it seems unlikely that Origen understood the unvocalized Hebrew text of the Scriptures that was common in his time, and, since Origen does not quote full passages from the Hebrew text,\textsuperscript{219} it is unclear to what extent the transliterated Hebrew column of his Hexapla might have aided his Hebrew study. Judaeo-Hellenic works that discussed the Hebrew text of the Sacred Scriptures were also helpful to Origen. It is clear, for example, that the \textit{Interpretatio Hebraicorum Nominum}, another Judaeo-Hellenic work, was very valuable to Origen’s self-study of the Hebrew language. The \textit{Interpretatio Hebraicorum Nominum} was an ancient literary “collection, by an anonymous Jew, of the Hebrew names occurring in Philo.”\textsuperscript{220} That work was a source of Hebrew etymologies for Origen.\textsuperscript{221} One finds, for example, Origen referring to it as an etymological source in one of his homilies on the Book of Numbers:

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{216}] Thomas P. Scheck, “Translator’s Introduction,” in \textit{Homilies on Numbers}, edited by (Christopher A. Hall Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), xxxii.
\item[\textsuperscript{217}] Richard Patrick Crosland Hanson, \textit{Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen’s Interpretation of Scripture}, 172.
\item[\textsuperscript{218}] Origen, \textit{Ad Africanum} 2, 3; Eusebius of Caesarea, \textit{Demonstratio Evangelica} 7.1, 9.4.
\item[\textsuperscript{219}] Scheck, “Translator’s Introduction,” in \textit{Homilies on Numbers}, xxxii.
\item[\textsuperscript{220}] \textit{The Jewish Encyclopedia}, 1906 ed., s.v. “Philo Judaeus.”
\end{itemize}
Verumtamen «applicuit Israel in Sattin». In interpretatione Hebraicorum nominum Sattin invenimus in lingua nostra responsum, vel refutatio dici.

Nevertheless, “Israel arrived at Sattin.” In the translation of Hebrew names, we have found that Sattin in our language means “response” or “rejection.”

Another remark in the same homily is even more revealing:


But they “worshiped idols and were consecrated to Beelphegor.” Beelphegor is the name of an idol that was worshiped among the Midianites, chiefly by women. So Israel was consecrated into the mysteries of this idol. Yet although we have diligently sought for an interpretation of this name among the Hebrew names, we have found only that it is written that Beelphegor is a “form of baseness.”

Based on Origen’s words (“requirimus attentius inter Hebraea nomina”), it is evident that the Interpretatio Hebraicorum Nominum was an essential component in Origen’s autodidactic Hebrew scholarship, for it allowed Origen to teach himself Hebrew, and it continued to serve such a function for later Christian scholars.

Scholars have expressed diverse opinions about Origen’s Hebrew competence. It is by no means my intention to offer a final judgment on the matter in these pages, but instead I

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222 Origen, Homilies on Numbers 30, 3; PG 12, 730-731. For the translation of Origen’s Homilies on Numbers used in this chapter, see Thomas P. Scheck, trans., Homilies on Numbers (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009). The Latin text is from SC 461.

223 Origen, Homilies on Numbers 20, 3; PG 12, 732; SC 461.

present a tiny sampling of the learned opinions that have been offered thus far. On the one hand, it is not uncommon to find qualified or full acceptance of the Eusebian assertion that Origen “learned the Hebrew language” (“τὴν Ἑβραίδα γλῶτταν ἐκμαθεῖν”).

Even Elliott did not fully avoid this conclusion. Surprisingly, he stated, “With the exception of Jerome, and perhaps of Origen, none of the early Christian writers appear to have possessed any knowledge of Hebrew which was worthy of the name.”

More recent scholarship, however, has cast doubt on favorable judgments of Origen’s Hebrew. De Lange, for example, stated, “No one has succeeded in establishing that Origen knew Hebrew well. My own assessment . . . is that Origen could not speak, read or write Hebrew but that he had some basic knowledge of the structure of the language and was familiar with some Hebrew words.” Similar views have been expressed elsewhere.

There are reasons to concur with De Lange’s opinion of Origen’s Hebrew scholarship, for Origen’s Hebrew scholarship contains some errors that are too profound to be overlooked. They leave the impression that he made no significant progress with Hebrew

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but simply gained a respectable vocabulary in the Language. Let a number of examples
demonstrate this.

Pluralization is one of the grammatical principles understood by ancient Hebraists,²²⁹
but remarks in Origen’s Commentary on John make it clear that he did not understand
Hebrew pluralization:

Ψάρ πάν ὄνοµα ὄνοµαζόµενον οὐ μόνον ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι ἄλλα καὶ ἐν
tῷ μέλλοντι καὶ ἄλλα παρά ταύτα οὐ πάνυ συνήθως ἦµῖν ὄνοµαζόµενα
dei πιστεύειν εἶναι λογικά, ὃν ἐν τι γένος ἐκάλει Σαβαὶ ὁ Ἑβραῖος, παρό
ἐσχηµατίσθαι τὸν Σαβαώθ, ἄρχοντα ἑκεῖνον τυγχάνοντα, οὐχ ἐτέρον τοῦ
θεοῦ.

On account of “above every name which is not just in this age but in
the age to come” (Eph. 1:20), it must be believed that there are other
rational beings besides these which we are not at all accustomed to naming,
of which one is the race which the Hebrew called “Sabai,” from which
“Sabaath” is formed, which means their ruler, who is none other than God.²³⁰

Σαβαώθ ἡ ἡλίσκεται is, of course, not singular and does not mean ἄρχοντα, a singular noun.²³¹

It is possible that Origen misunderstood the relationship between Σαβai and Σαβαώθ as
explained to him by ὁ Ἑβραῖος, but the fact that Origen did not know this very basic
principle of the language suggests that his level of Hebrew, grammatical knowledge was
quite low.

²²⁹ Alexander, “How Did the Rabbis Learn Hebrew?” 77.
²³⁰ Origen, Commentary on John 1, 215. For the translation, see Trigg, Origen, 137. Trigg notes that
“Origen knows the meaning of the phrase but seems not to recognize a Hebrew plural or to understand the
construct state.” See Trigg, 264. For the Greek text, see A.E. Brooke, The Commentary of Origen on S.
John’s Gospel: The Text Revised with a Critical Introduction and Indices, Volume I (Cambridge: The
²³¹ ἡλίσκεται (Sabaoth) means armies, and the translators of the King James Bible often rendered ἡλίσκεται as
“Hosts” when it occurred in combination with the Tetragrammaton, e.g., 1 Sa. 1.11 and 2 Sa. 7:27. The
Septuagint often left the epithet untranslated, especially in Isaiah. Outside of Isaiah, ἰπαντοκράτεωρ
‘ Almighty’ is the usual rendition of ἡλίσκεται in the rest of the LXX.” See Ronald Bridges and Luther A.
Weigle, The Bible Word Book: ConcerningObsolete or Archaic Words in the King James Version of the
Origen’s ambivalent etymological remarks on *Esau* (עֵּשָׂו) offer a particularly glaring display of the superficiality of his Hebrew knowledge. Hebrew words for red are ordinarily drawn from the root דָּם ('dm), and the name אֱדֹם (Edom) is etymologically linked to this root. Origen, however, incorrectly assigned the etymology of *Edom* to *Esau*, saying:

Esau—vero ut aiunt qui Hebraea nomina interpretantur—vel a rubore vel a terra, id est *rubeus* vel *terrenus* vel, ut aliis visum est, *factura* dictus esse videatur.”

Esau—as those who interpret Hebrew names say—received his name either from redness or from earth, that is, “red” or “earthly” or, as it seemed to others, his name appears to mean “something made.”

The remarks suggest that several sources figured in Origen’s etymological remarks on *Esau*, including the book on Hebrew names (“qui Hebraea nomina interpretantur”) and input from Jewish informants (“aliis visum est”). Genesis 25.25 might have also figured in the making of Origen’s remarks, for it does describe Esau as “red and hairy” (KJV). Ultimately, Origen introduced three words as possible definitions for Esau (rubeus, terrenus, and factura), two of which (“rubeus” and “terrenus”) should have been immediately dismissed, for they bear no similarity in Hebrew to *Esau* but are pellucidly related to *Edom*. It is clear from these remarks that Origen had difficulty in making a

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233 I recognize the possibility that “qui Hebraea nomina interpretantur” does not refer to *Interpretatio Hebraicorum Nominum*, but knowing Origen’s fondness for the book, it is not unreasonable to assume that it is referenced here.
critical use of Hebrew. There is a striking contrast between Origen’s ambivalent remarks on *Esau* and the witty commentary found on the same name in rabbinic sources.\(^{234}\)

Origen’s surviving works give the impression that he was incapable of consulting the Hebrew text. References to the Hebrew text are not infrequent in Origen’s works, and these might give some impression that he actually was able to access the Hebrew text. However, full quotations of the Hebrew text are rare.\(^{235}\) Origen’s regular dependence on the Septuagint is made clear when one considers that Origen’s explanation of the changing of Sarah’s name is dependent on the Septuagint, making no mention of the completely different account given in the Hebrew text. He writes:

The Holy Spirit recorded that these events would happen in the prophecy to Jeremiah, but they would happen from Paschor. Then he said, *Paschor on the morrow brought Jeremiah out of the pit*. And after being brought out, Jeremiah said to Paschor: “It was not the Lord that called you this name, Paschor; another name has been given to you. Just as Israel was given for Jacob, Abraham for Abram, Sarra for Sara, so also for you he has given the name *Exiled*.\(^{236}\)

Origen’s remarks on the naming of Abraham and Sarah suggest that he was unfamiliar with the Hebrew text.\(^{237}\)

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\(^{234}\) Cf. Genesis Rabbah 63.8.

\(^{235}\) Thomas P. Scheck, “Translator’s Introduction,” in *Homilies on Numbers*, xxxii.

As aforementioned, although Origen might not have advanced to mastery in his personal study of Hebrew, his effect on the study of Hebrew among Christians was considerable. His *Hexapla* was an exemplar of biblical criticism to the generations of Christian scholars who followed him in the patristic age. Even his opponent, Epiphanius of Salamis, praised Origen’s *Hexapla*. He said of it:

And Origen, coming after them (the previous translators of the Bible: the Seventy-two, Aquila, and Symmachus), restored the word that was lacking in every place, but placed the asterisk by it. Not that the word was of necessity required in all cases—for it was superfluous—but because he would not permit the Jews and Samaritans to find fault with the divine Scriptures in the holy churches, since there is nothing in the words with asterisks disparaging to the faith.\(^{238}\)

Later in the same treatise, when speaking about the *Hexapla*, Epiphanius wrote:

This alone Origen did helpfully.\(^{239}\)

Jerome, indubitably the most prolific Christian Hebraist of the patristic age, gave similar credit and praise to Origen.\(^{240}\) In addition to the *Hexapla*, Origen introduced new,
Hebrew etymologies into Christian scholarship and sometimes clarified existing etymologies. Origen’s effort to improve the Greek text of the Sacred Scriptures was an impetus behind the development of hebraica veritas. It is true that not all of Origen’s work was accurate, but it might be said in his defense that his sources were not always accurate. Philip S. Alexander has given reason to believe that even the rabbis contemporaneous with Origen invested no small amount of effort into the learning of Hebrew. In some instances even after years of study, certain aspects of the Hebrew idiom were still unclear to them. Some scholars have referenced the Talmud’s account of the confusion caused among the rabbis by the word serugin (serugin) as an example of the challenge that Hebrew sometimes presented to the rabbis but might not have presented to a native speaker of Hebrew, e.g., Rabbi’s maid. The account says:

לא הוה דימי רבןמא סרורגין שמעה. לאפמא דיב רב דקאמרה לה
לרבנן דימי עליין פסקך וליב רב דת מוחת חמת סרורגין קרוגין

The Rabbis did not know what was meant by serugin, until one day they heard the maidservant of Rabbi’s household, on seeing the Rabbis enter at intervals, say to them, How long are you going to come in by serugin?

The fact that Hebrew was sometimes a challenge to the rabbis themselves elucidates the

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difficulties that must have confronted Origen and other non-Jewish Hebraists. Thus, when one analyzes Origen’s study of Hebrew study in such a context, its shortcomings become more pardonable.

Eusebius of Caesarea

Eusebius of Caesarea was especially interested in the Hebrew language, and references to Hebrew appear regularly in his works. Eusebius drew much from Origen, and it is not excessive to conclude that Origen’s Hebrew scholarship was one source of inspiration for Eusebius’ own Hebrew study. Although he did not expressly reject the Septuagint, there are indications that Eusebius “inclined to the ideal of Hebraica veritas.” No exhaustive analysis of Eusebius’ Hebrew has been done, but some sound observations about it may still be offered.

Did Eusebius of Caesarea know Hebrew? Despite numerous references to the Hebrew language in Eusbius works, it does not appear that Eusebius actually knew the Hebrew language. Moreover, there is little reason to believe that he was even able to make use of the Hebrew text of the Bible. Aryeh Kofsky offered a sensible assessment of Eusebius of Caesarea’s Hebrew knowledge:

The question as to whether Eusebius had any knowledge of Hebrew has barely been investigated. An answer to this question may shed more light on his relations with Jews. My survey of his writings indicates that he had at least a moderate lexical knowledge of the language beyond the etymological handbook attributed to Philo (Eusebius, HE 2.18.7), now lost. Such knowledge, however, was probably insufficient for an independent study of Hebrew sources.


In his analysis of Eusebius’ *Commentary on Isaiah*, Michael J. Hollerich offered a similar assessment of Eusebius’ Hebrew competence. He said:

Eusebius’ reliance on Aquila for the exact form of the Hebrew does not suggest he had confidence in his facility with the language. The evidence of the Commentary on Isaiah shows his ability to use even the transliterated Hebrew text of the Tetrapla was severely limited. When he refers to the Hebrew text, he does so normally only because he has a uniform reading among the non-Septuagintal versions. This is true of the vast majority of instances where ‘the Hebrew word’ or the ‘Hebrew reading’ is mentioned. A check of the index shows that with few exceptions Eusebius customarily appeals to the Hebrew only when he is able to find a uniform attestation for it in Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, referred to collectively as *hoi loipoi hermeneutai*. Even then he avoids a direct quotation of the content of the transliteration, satisfying himself with the bare statement that it agrees with *hoi loipoi hermeneutai*. The inference is unavoidable that his main evidence for the Hebrew is not his comprehension of the transliteration but the harmony of the Greek versions. When they agree, they must be reliable indications of the Hebrew. That he could read the Hebrew text in Hebrew script seems on the evidence of the commentary out of the question, quite apart from Nautin’s thesis that Origen’s Tetrapla and the Hexapla never contained a Hebrew Bible.

Hollerich went on to say in the following paragraph:

There are indeed some instances where Eusebius quotes directly from the transliterated Hebrew text. These mostly involve well-known biblical proper nouns that Eusebius could have recognized visually if the transliterated Hebrew resembled the Greek spelling of the word, a conjecture which could be easily checked by consulting Aquila. Examples: Eusebius could have known that the Hebrew of Isa. 25:10 had ‘Moab’ rather than ‘the region of Moab’ (in the LXX *hê Moabitis*, sc. *Chôra*) both from the transliteration and from the version of Aquila, which he quotes in the discussion of this passage.247

Hollerich followed this analysis with additional examples showing that Eusebius’ use of Hebrew was “severely limited.”

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Although his grasp of the Hebrew tongue was limited, Eusebius did have a high opinion of the Hebrew text of the Scriptures and was critical of the Septuagint. Hollerich wrote:

Perhaps we can say that the most positive achievement of this level of his exegesis was his use of the Tetrapla to relativize the status of the Septuagint and to recognize the de facto authority of the Hebrew original. The recognition did not result in a formal dethronement of the traditional text of the church. That was certainly never Eusebius’ intention. But it is at least an implicit consequence of the critical method he employed in his commentary. The scripture that he actually interpreted was Origen’s synopsis, which he treated as a virtual diatessaron of the Old Testament. The apologetic overlay of his exegesis should not conceal the fact that he elevated the versions to a status equal to the Septuagint. They claimed their authority as comparable and sometimes superior expressions of a text prior in time and authority to all of them, the Hebrew original. This was a prerequisite step towards Jerome’s decision to jettison the ecclesiastical text altogether in favour of a fresh approach to the original. Eusebius never took the step, but his persistent appeals to ‘the Hebrew text’, however limited in scope and execution, show that he would not have disapproved of it.  

It is noteworthy that Eusebius’ contemporary Lactantius did not know Hebrew, but he also held a high estimation for the Hebrew text of the Scriptures and the study of the Hebrew language. I shall address Lactantius’ opinions below.

Eusebius’ scholarship is an excellent example of the limitations of Christian Hebrew study in the generation before Epiphanius, and that the foregoing description of Eusebius’ Hebrew scholarship will contrast markedly with the Hebrew scholarship of Epiphanius described in chapters two and three. In Eusebius, there was a clear desire to access the Hebrew text, but on account of his lack of training, Eusebius was never able to do so. With the appearance of the works of Epiphanius and Jerome, the state of affairs changed greatly during the second half of the fourth century.

248 Michael J. Hollerich, Eusebius of Caesarea’s Commentary on Isaiah: Christian Exegesis in the age of Constantine, 86.
Eusebius of Emesa

Eusebius of Emesa was a student of Eusebius of Caesarea, and his writings provide an important glimpse into post-Origenian Hebrew scholarship. The Dictionary of Christian Biography says of him:

[Eusebius of Emesa] was born at Edessa of a noble family, of Christian parents, and from his earliest years was taught the Holy Scriptures. His education was continued in Palestine and subsequently at Alexandria. In Palestine he studied theology under Eusebius of Caesarea and Patrohilius of Scythopolis, from whom he contracted the Arian leanings which distinguished him to the end of his life. . . .

He was a copious writer. The greater part of his works is lost.249 Although he did not know Hebrew,250 his few extant writings make it clear that the Emesene was a supporter of hebraica veritas.251 Eusebius of Emesa’s works, in fact, display the first appearance of the hebraica veritas concept in patristic literature.252 Eusebius regarded the Septuagint as unreliable in certain places and “thought that the Syriac Bible, which he knew from his youth in Edessa, would help him to correct the Septuagint, as Syriac was, in his words, ‘a neighbor of Hebrew.’” Although Eusebius of Emesa’s critical approach to the Septuagint differed from that of Origen, it is not illogical


251 Ibid.

to see Eusebius’ critical approach to Septuagint as a part of the legacy of Origen’s Hebrew scholarship. Romeny explained:

There is, however, also a clear difference between Origen and Eusebius. Origen fostered an idealistic view of the different witnesses: the all give no more than one image of the true text of the Bible, and thus all have their relative value—though it may be that the Septuagint was especially suited to the Christian community, through God’s oikonomia. Eusebius, on the other hand, adhered to the idea of the *Hebraica veritas*; his interest in translation problems stemmed from his bilingualism. Thus Eusebius and Origen proceeded from different premises.\(^{253}\)

Later in the fourth century, Diodore of Tarsus—himself influenced by the writings of Origen—offered similar suspicions about the Septuagint.\(^{254}\)

**Hebrew Scholarship in Early Latin Christianity**

Statements found in Lactantius parallel the zeal expressed for Hebrew study by his contemporary, Eusebius of Emesa. Lactantius’ fondness for the study of Hebrew, however, was not normative among Latin Christian writers of his time. Indeed, before the late fourth-century, it is a struggle to find any inkling of Hebrew learning in Latin Christian texts.

There was no significant Hebrew scholarship among Latin writers before Jerome. Latin patristic writing first flourished in North Africa. In particular, the writings of Tertullian and Cyprian were the reference texts of third and fourth-century North African Christendom.\(^{255}\) However, one looking therein for Hebrew scholarship would find


\(^{254}\) Robert C. Hill, trans., *Diodore of Tarsus: Commentary on Psalms 1-51* (Boston: Brill, 2005), xxi.

\(^{255}\) Frédéric Chapot, “Tertullian,” in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Allan Fitzgerald and John C. Cavadini (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1999), 822-824; Peter
nothing of value, for no significant Hebrew learning is in Tertullian or Cyprian. Although it is evident that Jews were present in North Africa during the patristic age, it was evidently not a center of scholarship comparable to Palestine and Mesopotamia, both of which produced Talmuds. To some extent, the absence of a major center of Jewish scholarship might account for the lack of Christrian Hebrew scholarship in the same region, but it does not wholly explain the lack of Hebrew scholarship.

I find further elucidation when considering the importance of style and Latinity in Late Antiquity. One might expect that the fraternal relationship between Hebrew and the widely spoken Punic language of North Africa would have been a catalyst to Hebrew scholarship, but it was not. Although Punic was sometimes used in North African churches, little was done to use Punic in order to gain a deeper knowledge of the Hebrew Bible.256 When one delves deeper into the subject, it becomes evident that appeals to Punic did not agree with the Latin tastes of the period, and Latinity was a profoundly important concept to all of the Latin patristic authors. As I shall discuss, it is likely that the stylistic tastes of the time played a role in keeping the North African writers from connecting Hebrew and Punic. Indeed, although he wrote in another part of the Empire, Latinity was also of prime importance to Jerome who hesitated to introduce regional

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words of Pannonia into his writings. In the following paragraphs, I delineate Hebrew scholarship among Latin writers from the time of Tertullian through the days of Augustine and Jerome, by far the most dedicated Hebraist among the patristic writers.

**Tertullian**

Although Hebrew expressions appear in Tertullian, there is little in his corpus to suggest that Tertullian had an advanced knowledge of Hebrew or made direct use of the Hebrew text of the Scriptures. Tertullian was a master of Latin prose who also knew Greek. He is one of the few patristic writers to have left behind writings in both Latin and Greek, although none of his Greek writings survives. No ancient source explains the origin of Tertullian’s bilingualism. However, the availability of Greek instruction in Roman North Africa makes it defensible to surmise that Tertullian might have acquired his knowledge of Greek thereby. It is unmistakable that Tertullian had a facility with languages, but there is no reason to think that he ever gave any serious application of his talents to the Hebrew language.

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Still, Hebrew expressions do appear in Tertullian’s writings, and they deserve some attention. In *Adversus Iudaeos*, he drew upon his familiarity with the Scriptures in order to refute the dissenting interpretations of Jews. In the treatise, Tertullian defined the Hebrew term *Emmanuel*, and his discussion of the term revealed some things about his knowledge of Hebrew:

Sonus enim Hebraicus quod est Emmanuel interpretationem habet quod est nobiscum deus. quaere ergo, an ista vox ‘nobiscum deus’ quod est Emmanuel exinde quod Christus inluxit agitetur in Christo, et, puto, non negabis. nam qui ex Iudaismo credunt in Christum, ex quo in eum credunt, Emmanuel, cum volent dicere nobiscum deum esse, significant, atque ita constat iam venisse illum qui praedicabatur Emmanuel, quia quod significat Emmanuel venit id est nobiscum deus.

For the Hebrew sound, which is Emmanuel, has an interpretation, which is, God with us. Inquire, then, whether this speech, God with us (which is Emmanuel), be commonly applied to Christ ever since Christ's light has dawned, and I think you will not deny it. For they who out of Judaism believe in Christ, ever since their believing on Him, do, whenever they shall wish to say Emmanuel, signify that God is with us: and thus it is agreed that He who was ever predicted as Emmanuel is already come, because that which Emmanuel signifies has come— that is, God with us.262

*Emmanuel*, of course, appears in Isaiah (7.14). Matthew’s Gospel (1.23) had already defined the term. Since Matthew’s Gospel had quoted part of its Hebrew text (Ἐµµανουήλ), Isaiah 7.14 was, in fact, one of the few Old Testament passages that Christians could quote directly in Hebrew.263 Tertullian’s inclusion of this etymology might have been a calculated technique aimed at diminishing Jewish criticism of the Christian interpretation of Isaiah’s prophecy by using a direct quote from the Hebrew text of the Bible. Emphasizing his point, Tertullian defined the expression three times in the


263 *Hosanna* (ὡσαννά) is a comparable expression, for it occurs in the New Testament but can also be found in the Hebrew Bible (יהושוע, Psalm 118.25).
same chapter. However, his use of the terms suggests uncertainty, for he called Emmanuel “sonus” (sound). In the first two instances in which Tertullian gave the etymology of Emmanuel, he did not characterize it. Latin quotations in the treatise, however, are characterized as “verbis” (“words”). When Tertullian did characterize Emmanuel, he used “sonus,” quite possibly the most neutral term available to him. It was the only time that he used “sonus” in the treatise. Tertullian’s use of “sonus” suggests that he was uncertain about the grammatical nature (part of speech) of the Hebrew expression Emmanuel. This suggests that Tertullian was unfamiliar with the Hebrew language.

On account of Punic’s genetic relationship with Hebrew, the possibility that Tertullian knew Punic deserves some attention. It has been suggested, of course, that Tertullian was of Punic ancestry on account of his theology and politics. However, there is scant linguistic evidence in Tertullian’s works that he was Punic. It is noteworthy, for example, that Tertullian made no comparative link between Punic and Hebrew, despite the fact that the Scriptures abound with names common to both languages (“Baal,” “el”).

264 Tertullian, Adversus Iudaeos 9; ANF 3, 161; PG 2, 364.

265 Tertullian, Adversus Iudaeos 9.

266 In the same treatise, for example, Tertullian writes: “Denique ex hac domo Iacob etiam legem novam processuram sequentibus verbis annuntiat Esaias.” Likewise, in the same chapter, he writes “per verba prophetae.” See Tertullian, Adversus Iudaeos 3.

267 Aaron D. Conley, We Are Who We Think We Were: Christian History and Christian Ethics (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 131 n. 87.

268 Millar writes, “On the other hand the extensive works of Tertullian and Cyprian, written entirely in Africa, contain not a single reference to Punic.” See Fergus Millar, “Local Cultures in the Roman Empire: Libyan, Punic and Latin in Roman Africa,” in Rome, the Greek world, and the East, Vol. 2, edited by Hannah M. Cotton and Guy M. Rogers (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 264; Aaron D. Conley, We Are Who We Think We Were, 138 n. 100; David E. Wilhite, Tertullian the African, 8, 134.
Tertullian’s silence represents the general trend before Augustine, for Latin patristic writers before Augustine made no link between Hebrew and Punic.  

Cyprian of Carthage

Cyprian of Carthage was the greatest Latin patristic writer of the generation that followed Tertullian, and he was greatly influenced by Tertullian. Cyprian was of aristocratic pedigree. This afforded him the occasion to get a fine education that exposed him to the classics of the Latin language and provided rhetorical training for him. Cyprian was an African. Jerome, for example, wrote, “Cyprianus Afer, qui gloriose rhetoricam docuit” (“Cyprian of Africa . . . famous as a teacher of rhetoric”). Punic ancestry is implied by the term Afer. Bayard explained that Cyprian’s aristocratic ancestry should not be construed to imply “qu’il ait ignore le punique,” for “l’empeur Septime Severe le parlait bien, au commencement du meme siecle.” Although the possibility that he knew Punic must be entertained, Cyprian’s writings do not have even a trace of Punic. Likewise, Hebrew does not appear in his works.

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270 Jerome, De viris illustribus 53.


272 Jerome, De viris illustribus, 67.

273 Bayard, Le Latin de Saint Cyprien, xiv.


Lactantius

Although Lactantius’ writings do not suggest that he knew Hebrew, they do make it clear that Lactantius was interested in the language and urged that it be studied by Christians. Lactantius’ writings reveal the sentiments of an erudite Latin-speaking Christian towards the study of Hebrew at the opening of the fourth century, that century that witnessed so many significant developments in the study of the language among Christians.

Lactantius was a teacher of rhetoric from North Africa who had been “a student of Arnobius” (“Arnobii discipulus”), himself a Christian apologist and “a most successful teacher of rhetoric” (“florentissime rhetoricam docuit”).276 Lactantius was especially interested in languages. He was able to understand some Greek and even introduced some perspicacious speculation about the origin of the use of language among human beings.277 Lactantius’ story becomes especially relevant to the present subject when one takes into account the possibility that he was of Punic ancestry. Although there is no direct confirmation that Lactantius was of Punic ancestry, there is some evidence that points in that direction. One scholar, the late Basil Bolotoff, suggested that Cirta, a town with Punic roots, was Lactantius’ home.278 The same scholar proposed an etymology of the name Lactantius that linked it to a Punic form, LaQTaN, “he whose occupation is

276 Jerome, De viris illustribus 79-80; PL 23, 723.

277 Since Lactantius makes use of a Greek text (Div. Inst. 7.16; PL 6, 792), it is evident that he knew the language, but the extent of his knowledge of the language has been questioned. For remarks on this matter, see Norman Wentworth De Witt, Epicurus and his Philosophy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), 352. For a discussion of Lactantius’ use of Greek texts, see Ogilvie, The Library of Lactantius (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 4-5. Gera quotes Lactantius’ remarks on the origin of the use of language among human beings in Div. Inst. 6.10. See Deborah Levine Gera, Ancient Greek Ideas on Speech, Language, and Civilization (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 161. Cf. PL 6, 669.

278 N. Orloff, “The Late Professor Bolotoff,” Journal of Theological Studies, no. 2 (1901): 418.
He also suggested that Punic was Lactantius’ native idiom, something that raises several interesting possibilities, for if Punic were his native tongue, one might reasonably expect him to have had deeper insights into some of the Hebrew expressions found in the Sacred Scripture. However, Lactantius’ writings offer few hints that he had any special understanding of either the Punic tongue or the Hebrew one.

Hebrew is somewhat rare in Lactantius’ Divine Institutes. In one section, he equated Christum with Messias. In another section, he gave an etymology of Sabbatum (שַׁבָּת) that is noteworthy. He wrote:

Mundum Deus, et hoc rerum naturae admirabile opus, (sicut arcanis sacrae scripturae continetur, sex dierum spatio consummavit; diemque septimum, quo ab operibus suis requieverat, sanxit. Hic est autem dies Sabbati, qui lingua Hebraeorum a numero nomen, accepit unde septenarius numerus legitimus ac plenus est. Nam et dies septem sunt, quibus per vicem revolutis orbes conficiuntur annorum, et septem stellae, quae non occidunt; et septem sidera quae vocantur errantia, quorum disperses cursus, et inaequabiles motus, rerum ac temporum varietates efficere creduntur.

God completed the world and this admirable work of nature in the space of six days, as is contained in the secrets of Holy Scripture, and consecrated the seventh day, on which He had rested from His works. But this is the Sabbath-day, which in the language of the Hebrews received its name from the number, whence the seventh is the legitimate and complete number. For there are seven days, by the revolutions of which in order the circles of years are made up; and there are seven stars which do not set, and seven luminaries which are called planets, whose differing and unequal movements are believed to cause the varieties of circumstances and times.

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279 Ibid.

280 Ibid.

281 Lactantius, Divine Institutes 4.7.

The etymology of שַׁבָּת has been a vexed topic in Semitic philology. Some have derived שַׁבָּת from the root שֹׁבַּת (šbt), a root having to do with rest. Others have expressly rejected a link between שַׁבָּת and שֶׁבַע. Hirschfeld, however, after discussing attempts to derive שַׁבָּת from the root שֹׁבַּת, added this interesting remark that leans upon Lactantius’ ancient etymology for support:

Now if these derivations fail to give us a clear and concise etymology of the word in question, we are obliged to look for another one, and this was certainly given as early as in the fourth century of our era by Lactantius, who rightly maintains that the noun was derived from the number; in other words, that שַׁבָּת is nothing but a contracted form of the old Semitic form of the numeral שֶׁבַע. This assumption is strongly supported by Theophilus Antiochenus, who wrote even earlier that what the Hebrews call sabbaton is in Greek “week.” Writing as they did at a date so much nearer to the period when Hebrew was a living language, their almost unanimous verdict reveals a tradition (the origin of which was unknown to them) which still existed in the memory of the public. . . .

Despite Hirschfeld’s suggestion to the contrary, Lactantius did not invoke the Hebrew words שַׁבָּת (shabbat) or שֶׁבַע (shiv’at), a detail that may take on some significance when one takes into consideration that Lactantius’ actual knowledge of Hebrew is not established. The link between שַׁבָּת (“Sabbatum”) and שֶׁבַע (“septem”) is not found in extant Greek and Latin patristic texts before Lactantius, making Lactantius’ etymology

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284 John Walton, ed., Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament), Volume 5: The Minor Prophets, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 80; Josef Wehrle, Der Dekalog: Text, Theologie und Ethik (Berlin: Lit Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2014), 102. It is noteworthy that the note in the Patrologia Latina that accompanies Lactantius’ etymology of Sabbath reports him to derive Sabbath from quiés (setq): “Hallucinatur Ouctor noster, non enim Sabbath a numero septem, sed a quiete nomen accepit.” See PL 6, 782C.

285 PL 6, 782C; H. Hirschfeld, “Remarks on the Etymology of Sabbath,” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (1896), 354-355. I have included Hirschfeld’s remarks on account of their relevance to Lactantius, not as indication of agreement with Hirschfeld’s derivation of “Sabbath.”

remarkable and mysterious. Whence did Lactantius draw his etymology of *Sabbatum*? Did his knowledge of Hebrew traditions aid him in linking the two words? The paucity of extant evidence makes it difficult to answer these questions. Hischfeld’s assumption that the “verdict” of Lactantius and Theophilus “reveals a tradition (the origin of which was unknown to them) which still existed in the memory of the public” cannot be affirmed by examples in his extant writings, which contain too few comparable remarks on Hebrew etymology. Lactantius’ surviving works do not suggest that he was especially cognizant of any tradition about the Hebrew language. Instead, his works suggest that, as other patristic writers of the time, Lactantius’ derived his Hebrew learning uncritically from published works of Judaeo-Hellenic scholarship.

Lactantius’ etymology of *pascha*, for example, affirms that Lactantius had an uncritical dependency on Judaeo-Hellenic texts (Aristobulus, Philo, Pseudo-Philo) for his Hebrew learning. He wrote:

> Frons enim summum limen est hominis et lignum sanguine delibutum crucis significatio est. Denique immolatio pecudis ab hisipsis qui faciunt pascha nominatur, ἀπὸ τοῦ πάσχειν, quia passionis figura est, quam Deus praescius futurorum, tradidit per Moysen populo suo celebrandam.

For the forehead is the top of the threshold in man, and the wood sprinkled with blood is the emblem of the cross. Lastly, the slaying of the lamb by those very persons who perform it is called the paschal feast, from the word *paschein*, because it is a figure of the passion, which God, foreknowing the future, delivered by Moses to be celebrated by His people.²⁸⁷

Patristic writers had drawn an etymological link between *pascha* and *paschein* long before Lactantius.²⁸⁸ The link, of course, was erroneous, but on account of the poor level

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²⁸⁷ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 4.27. For the Latin text of Lactantius used in this chapter, see SC 326, 337, and 377.
of Hebrew scholarship among Christians at the time, the link continued to be accepted as a fact.\textsuperscript{289} The etymology linking \textit{pascha} with \textit{paschein} was fairly well-known by the time of Lactantius.\textsuperscript{290} However, more accurate etymologies were available in Lactantius’ time.\textsuperscript{291} The passage reveals that Lactantius, like some of his predecessors, Jewish and Christian, was susceptible to imaginative etymologies of Hebrew and lacked the ability to make a critical analysis of Hebrew.

There is a curious passage in the \textit{Divine Institutes} in which Lactantius, despite his apparently meager Hebrew learning, endeavored to judge the quality of Greek translations from the Hebrew:

\begin{quote}
Erat Iudaeis ante praeceptum, ut sacrum conficerent unguentum, quo perungí possent hi qui vocabantur ad sacerdotium vel ad regnum, et sicut nunc Romanis indumentum purpureae insigne est regiae dignitatis assumptae, sic illis unctio sacri unguenti nomen ac potestatem regiam conferebat. Verum, quoniam Graeci veteres χρίσθαι dicebant ungi, quod nunc ἀλείφεσθαι, sicut indicat Homericus versus ille: Αὐτοὺς δὲ δµῳαί λοῦσαν, καὶ χρίσαν ἐλαίῳ; ob hanc rationem nos eum Christum nuncupamus, id est, unctum, qui hebraice Messias dicitur. Unde in quibusdam graecis scripturis, quae male de Hebraicis interpretatae sunt, ἠλειµµένος scriptum invenitur, ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀλείφεσθαι. Sed tamen utrolibet nomine rex significatur: non quod ille regnum hoc terrenum fuerit adeptus, cuius capiendi nondum tempus advenit; sed quod coeleste ac sempiternum, de quo disseremus in ultimo libro. Nunc vero de prima eius nativitate dicamus.
\end{quote}

The Jews had before been directed to compose a sacred oil, with which those who were called to the priesthood or to the kingdom might be anointed. And as now the robe of purple is a sign of the assumption of royal dignity among


\textsuperscript{290} Ibid.

the Romans, so with them the anointing with the holy oil conferred the title
and power of king. But since the ancient Greeks used the word χρίσσω to
express the art of anointing, which they now express by ἀλείψεσθαι, as the verse
of Homer shows, “But the attendants washed, and anointed them with oil;” on this
account we call Him Christ, that is, the Anointed, who in Hebrew is called the
Messias. Hence in some Greek writings, which are badly translated from the
Hebrew, the word eleimmenos is found written, from the word aleiphesthai,
anointing. But, however, by either name a king is signified: not that He has
obtained this earthly kingdom, the time for receiving which has not yet arrived,
but that He sways a heavenly and eternal kingdom, concerning which we shall
speak in the last book. But now let us speak of His first nativity. 292

Lactantius, not knowing Hebrew, did not possess empirical knowledge of the faithfulness
of the Septuagint. Despite that, in the selected passage, he issued a bold critique of the
Greek text (“male de Hebraicis interpretatae”). The passage demonstrates that mistrust of
the Greek translation had emerged among Latin-speakers even before the appearance of
Jerome’s scholarship.

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine “was born in the African province, in the city of Tagaste” (“ex provincia
ergo Africana, civitate Tagastensi”), 293 and he, of course, became the most prominent
writer of North African Christendom. Although his writings were extremely learned, they
demonstrate no familiarity with the Hebrew text of the Scriptures and little familiarity
with the Hebrew language. Augustine’s Hebrew deficiency, of course, is typical of North
African Christian scholarship. However, Augustine’s scholarship contains a number of
features unattested in his North African predecessors, features that make it worthy of
some attention.

292 Lactantius, Divine Institutes 4.7; ANF 7.106.
293 Possidius, Vita Augustini 1; cf. Augustine, Ep. 126.7.
Despite his claims to have struggled with Greek, it is clear that Augustine was attentive to language and had a remarkable ability to analyze and make an effective use of language. Patristic sources make it clear that he did not know Hebrew. This is certainly the implication of Jerome’s words to Augustine:

> quod non nostra confoinximus; sed ut apud Hebraeos invenimus, divina transtulimus. Sicubi dubitas, Haebraeos interroga. Sed forte dices: quid si Hebraei aut respondere noluerint, aut mentiri voluerint?

for I have not followed my own imagination, but have rendered the divine words as I found them understood by those who speak the Hebrew language. If you have any doubt of this in any passage, ask the Jews what is the meaning of the original.

Jerome’s words “ask the Jews” (“Hebraeos interroga”) imply that Augustine did not know Hebrew. It is evident, however, that Augustine was of Punic extraction. For example, he wrote:

> Noli istum poenum monentem vel admonetem terra inflatus propagine spernere.

Don’t out of pride in your earthly ancestry dismiss one who monitors and admonishes you, just because I am Punic.

This aspect makes the study of Augustine’s Hebrew learning especially appealing. Most relevant to the present study is Augustine’s knowledge of Neo-Punic, the variety of the Punic language spoken in North Africa during Augustine’s time, for although Augustine might not have had an extensive knowledge of Neo-Punic, he certainly knew something of Neo-Punic. In fact, Augustine knew enough about Neo-

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295 Augustine, ep. 75.20; NPNF Series I 1, 342.


Punic and the two Old Testament languages, Hebrew and Aramaic, to make what is certainly one the earliest statements linking Punic, Hebrew, and Aramaic. He wrote:

Sciebat quis eam posset docere, sed iam docentem nondum agnoscebat. Iam ergo digna erat cui manifestaretur. Messias autem unctus est; unctus graece Christus est; hebraice Messias est: unde et punice: Messe dicitur ungue. Cognatae quippe sunt linguae istae et vicinae, hebraica, punica, et syra.

She knew who could teach her, but she did not yet know Him that was now teaching her. But now she was worthy to receive the manifestation of Him. Now Messias is Anointed: Anointed, in Greek, is Christ; in Hebrew, Messias; whence also, in Punic, Messe means Anoint. For the Hebrew, Punic and Syriac are cognate and neighboring languages.  

Augustine repeated the observation in several places:


But what means it, that He says they are "friends of the mammon of iniquity"? What is "the mammon of iniquity"? First, what is "mammon"? For it is not a Latin word. It is a Hebrew word, and cognate to the Punic language. For these languages are allied to one another by a kind of nearness of signification. What the Punics call mammon, is called in Latin, "lucre." What the Hebrews call mammon, is called in Latin, "riches."

Elsewhere, on the same point, he wrote:

Verum dicis. Nam illud sacerdotium in figura corporis Christi habebat uctionem, quod unitatis compage fit salvum. Nam et ipse Christus a chrismate appellatur, id est, ab uctione. Hunc Hebraei dicunt Messiam, quod verbum punicae linguae consonum est, sicut alia hebraea permulta et paene omnia.

What you say is true. For the priesthood in the body of Christ had an anointing, and its salvation is secured by the bond of unity. For indeed Christ Himself

298 Augustine, In Ioann. Tract. 15. Jerome makes similar remarks about these languages. See Josef Lössl, Jerome of Stridon: His Life, Writings and Legacy (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 211.

299 Augustine, Sermon 63.2.
derives His name from chrismo <i.e.>, that is, from ‘anointing.’ Him the Hebrews call the Messiah, which word is closely akin to the Punic language, as is the case with very many other Hebrew words, if not with almost all."}

Philologists did not thoroughly investigate the link between Punic, Hebrew, and Aramaic until the 1800s, when the first major, modern works on Phoenician and Punic were published. These examples show that although Augustine did not know Hebrew, he was sufficiently attentive to the language to link it to the Punic language. Moreover, the quotes suggest that Neo-Punic aided Augustine in his interpretation of the Scriptures. For while other patristic writers struggled to grasp the plain meaning of Mammon, viz., wealth, Augustine’s remarks show that on account of his knowledge of Punic, he was confident in understanding the term to mean lucrum. It is ironic that one of the most profound Christian observations about Hebrew during the patristic period came from someone who had only a smattering of Hebrew. Augustine’s observations about Hebrew, Punic, and Syriac demonstrate the potential for Hebrew scholarship that existed among North African writers but was never fulfilled.

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300 Augustine, <i>Contra Litteras Petiliani</i> 2.104.

301 Fredrik Thomasson explains that “there is no comprehensive monograph on the history of Phoenician studies or Semitic epigraphy as a whole.” See Fredrik Thomasson, <i>The Life of J.D. Åkerblad: Egyptian Decipherment and Orientalism in Revolutionary Times</i> (Boston: Brill, 2013), 97-98. The first chapter of Philip C. Schmitz’s <i>The Phoenician Diaspora</i> (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012) does have a good summary of the history of Phoenician studies. Despite this, it does appear that the work of Wilhelm Gesenius was pivotal in the development of Phoenician studies and in correctly linking Phoenician to other Semitic languages, especially with his <i>Scripturae linguaeque phoeniciae monumenta</i>. Moscati calls it “l’opera . . . fondamentale.” See Sabatino Moscati, <i>Problematica della civiltà fenicia</i>, Studi Semitici vol. 46 (Rome: Consiglio nazionale delle ricerche, 1974), 11. Interestingly, when Gesenius affirms the connection between Hebrew and the Phoenico-Punic language, he makes reference to Augustine’s ancient observations on the subject: “Linguam Phoeniciam Punicamque linguae Hebraeae admodum affinem esse, iam ex veteribus non semel observarunt Hieronymus et Augustinus, et hic quidem permagnae in hac re auctoritatis, quippe qui vigente adhuc lingua Punicia in Africa vivens ipse se Poenum agnoscat.” See Wilhelm Gesenius, <i>Scripturae linguaeque phoeniciae monumenta quotquot supersunt edita et inedita</i> (Lipsiae: Sumptibus typisque F.C.G. Vogelii, 1837), 331.

Considering the obvious similarity between Punic and Hebrew, why does Punic appear so rarely in North African patristic texts? It seems likely that the desire to write “in a polished style” (“limato sermone”) and the stigma against the Punic culture and language made it less desirable for patristic authors, concerned about style, to employ the language in exegeses. Speaking about the Roman novelist Apuleius, an African who flourished shortly before the before the appearance of North Africa’s earliest patristic texts, John Hilton offered the following explanation:

Since his place of birth was Madauros in Africa Proconsularis, his native language (sermopatrius) was probably Punic. . . . His linguistic background is therefore complex and this was no doubt the reason he had to watch his words carefully. He would otherwise have been disparaged by his rivals, as was the emperor Septimius Severus who “had a melodious voice but sounded like an African somehow right up to his old age.” An emperor could afford not to be too concerned on this account, but a sophist would need to be more watchful.

The use of things Punic for Roman amusement is detectable in some of the earliest literary specimens of Latin. Plautus’ *Poenulus*, for example, has entertaining examples of Punic dialogue. Learned Romans read Plautus’ works throughout the patristic age. In Tertullian’s own time, it is reported that the emperor Severus Septimius was so embarrassed by his sister’s “poor competence in Latin” that he “sent her home.”

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303 Gennadius, *De viris illustribus* 94; NPNF Series II 3, 401; PL 59, 7.


Punic prejudice is detectable in Augustine’s exchanges with Maximus of Madauros and Julian of Eclanum, both of whom expressed hostility to certain aspects of the Punic culture. Julian of Eclanum attempted to mock the Punic intellect, but Maximus of Madauros, specifically, expressed hostility towards the Punic language. Augustine, of course, defended the Punic heritage and, most relevant to this inquiry, the Punic language. Giusto Traina noted that “Saint Augustin est le seul auteur que nous donne un témoignage direct de la survie du punique dans Afrique du Nord.” Augustine’s exegetical use of Punic was in defiance of the stylistic standards of his day, the standards followed by his North African literary forerunners. His attitude towards language is well summarized in a line of his *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (138. 20): “It is better to be reproved by the grammarians than not understood by the masses” (“melius est reprehendant nos grammatici quam non intelligant populi”). Although his remark was directed towards the use of non-literary Latin, it seems that Augustine’s tolerant attitude towards language extended to Punic as well, explaining his willingness to reference Punic in his exegeses and appoint Punic-speaking pastors.

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309 Elizabeth A. Clark addressed the possibility that Augustine might have had some ambivalence towards the Punic language and culture. See Clark, “On Not retracting the Unconfessed,” 233.


The Hebrew Scholarship of Epiphanius and Jerome

The scholarly works of Epiphanius and Jerome display major advancements in early Christian Hebrew study. For the first time, in the works of Epiphanius and Jerome, there are full quotations of passages from the Hebrew text of the Scriptures. Moreover, there is greater accuracy in etymologies and a decrease in dependence on Judaeo-Hellenic works such as Interpretatio Hebraicorum Nominum. The Hebrew scholarship of Epiphanius, of course, is addressed in the two chapters that follow, but in order to round out the picture that I have presented here, I shall arrange a few words on the Hebrew scholarship of Jerome of Stridon.

Jerome had a gift for languages. Jerome relates that he was the “son of Eusebius, of the city of Strido, which is on the border of Dalmatia and Pannonia and was overthrown by the Goths” (“patre Eusebio natus, oppido Stridonis, quod a Gothis eversum, Dalmatae quondam Pannoniaeque confinium fuit”).\(^{312}\) It has been asserted that his native tongue was actually Illyrian.\(^ {313}\) There are places in his works that suggest that he was familiar with the native tongue of Dalmatia and Pannonia.\(^ {314}\) In his Commentary on Isaiah, for example, he wrote:

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Notandum quod pro lacunis LXX ζῦθον transtulerunt, quod genus est potionis ex frugibus aquaque confectum, et vulgo in Dalmatiae Pannoniaeque provinciis gentili barbaroque sermone appellatur Sabaium.
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It should be noted that instead of ‘ponds’ the Septuagint translated ζῦθον, which is a kind of beverage made of fruits and water in the local vernacular and barbaric speech in the provinces of Dalmatia and Pannonia it is called

\(^{312}\) Jerome, De viris illustribus 135.


It has been asserted, however, that “‘the barbaric language’ that Jerome mentioned was in fact a rustic Latin from Pannonia and northern Italy.” If we accept Fremantle’s assessment, Jerome possessed a “remarkably pure” Latinity. If an Illyrian dialect were Jerome’s native tongue, it would make his “remarkably pure” Latinity even more impressive.

Language study was a major part of the Roman schoolboy’s education. Michael Graves gave the following description of the educational path of Roman boys:

In Rome education began at the age of seven in the “primary school” under a schoolmaster known as a *litterator* or *primus magister*. At this stage the teacher concentrated on the basics of reading and writing. At the age of roughly eleven or twelve, students came under the instruction of a *grammaticus*, who taught formal “grammar” (in our sense of the word), proper writing and speaking, and the exposition of classic literature (*grammatice*, understood broadly as “literary interpretation”). Finally, for those privileged enough to receive so much schooling, students in their late teens went to study with a *rhetor*. Although

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315 Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* 7.19; *PL* 24, 253. For the Latin text used here, see *CSEL* 73.


317 Fremantle offers this assessment of Jerome’s Latinity, “His Latinity is remarkably pure, and with the exception of the frequent use of the infinitive to express a purpose, and of a few words of late-Latin like *confortare*, we are hardly aware in reading him that we are 400 years away from the Augustan Age. His mastery of style is the more remarkable because he wrote nothing but a few letters and a very poor Commentary till about his thirty-fifth year.” See W.H. Fremantle, trans., “Prolegomena to Jerome,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 6 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912), xxviii.

318 Curiously, Jerome seems to have distanced himself from his Illyrian roots, including the impure language spoken in the region, in order to construct an identity for himself, an identity that placed an emphasis on linguistic refinement. Džino explains: “Jerome constructed his identity through his perceptions of Romanness, such as, for example, the ‘purity’ of language (*latina eruditio*) which he recommended to his parents for the upbringing of his sister Leta. Also his complaints about rusticity in his *patria* show the way Jerome was defining his identity through his class, rather than through regional identity. The purity of language and difference from those things Jerome perceived as ‘rusticity’ in his homeland were social strategies used to distinguish the identity of his class, rather than to point out different ethnic narratives.” See Danijel Džino, *Becoming Slav, Becoming Croat: Identity Transformations in Post-Roman and Early Medieval Dalmatia*, 71. If this assessment is accepted, then Jerome resembles the aforementioned North African Christian authors who appear to have esteemed Latin style so greatly that they held themselves from appealing to Neo-Punic to elucidate Hebrew terms.
we do not know the identity of Jerome’s teacher in rhetoric, we do know that his teacher in the field of *grammatice* was the well-known Aelius Donatus.\(^{319}\)

Oddly, although Jerome received an outstanding Latin education, there is some indication that he did not learn Greek until he was a young adult.\(^{320}\) Concerning Jerome’s knowledge of Greek, for example, Rufinus wrote:

Ante enim converteretur, mecum pariter et litteras graecas et linguam penitus ignorabat. Post iuramentum omnia haec, post sacramenti dati sponsionem.

Before his conversion, he and I equally were wholly ignorant of the Greek language and literature. All these things came after his, after that solemn engagement had been made.\(^{321}\)

In the 370s, Jerome moved to Syria where he learned Greek.\(^{322}\) Friesen wrote, “It is there (c. 375-377) that Jerome learned Hebrew from a converted Jew in order to read the Old Testament in its original language.”\(^{323}\) Jerome reflected on his experiences in studying Hebrew. He wrote:

Dum essem iuvenis et solitudinis me desertavallarent, incentiva vitiorum ardoremque naturae ferre non poteram; quae cum crebris ieiuniis frangerem, mens tamen cogitationibus aestuabat. Adquam edomandam cuidam fratri, qui ex Hebraeis crediderat, me in disciplinam dedi, ut post Quintiliani acumina Ciceronisque fluvios gravitatemque Frontonis et lenitetatem Plinii alphabetum discerem, stridentia anhelantiaque verba meditarer. Quid ibilaboris insupersim, quid sustinuerim difficultatis, quotiensque cessaverim et contentione discendi rursus inceperim, testis est conscientia tam mea, qui passus sum, quam eorum qui mecum duxere vitam. Et gratias ago


\(^{321}\)Rufinus, *Apology* 2.9. For the Latin text, see *Corpus Christianorum Latinorum* 20, 91.


domino, quod de amaro semine litterarum dulces fructus capio.

In my youth when the desert walled me in with its solitude I was still unable to endure the promptings of sin and the natural heat of my blood; and although I tried by frequent fasts to break the force of both, my mind still surged with [evil] thought. To subdue its turbulence I betook myself to a brother who before his conversion had been a Jew and asked him to teach me Hebrew. Thus, after having familiarized myself with the pointedness of Quintilian, the fluency of Cicero, the seriousness of Fronto and the gentleness of Pliny I began to learn my letters anew and to study to pronounce words both harsh and guttural. What labour I spent upon this task, what difficulties I went through, how often I despaired, how often I gave over and then in my eagerness to learn commenced again, can be attested both by myself the subject of this misery and by those who then lived with me. But I thank the Lord that from this seed of learning sown in bitterness I now cull sweet fruits.  

Jerome’s description of his Hebrew study is especially valuable, for it provides a glimpse into how a Christian learner of antiquity might have perceived the language, especially a Christian speaking an Indo-European language. Jerome’s reference to inhalentia refers to the gutturals sounds found in Semitic languages such as Hebrew and Aramaic, sounds that are not present in Indo-European languages such as Latin and Greek. It is likely that Hebrew’s guttural sounds would have been difficult for other speakers of Indo-European languages in the period. In the present time, some learners experience similar difficulty with the learning of Semitic languages. The expression “dulces fructus capio” suggests that Jerome believed himself to have reached a level of competence in Hebrew. As aforementioned, the confident use of Hebrew was not regularly displayed in the patristic period.

324 Jerome, ep. 125.13; PL 22, 181; NPNF Series II 6, 248. For the text used here, see Michael Graves, Jerome’s Hebrew Philology :A Study Based on his Commentary on Jeremiah (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 86.

325 J.N.D. Kelly, Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies (London: Duckworth, 1975), 50 n. 17; Patricia Cox Miller, The Poetry of Thought in Late Antiquity (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 151 n. 75.

The Hebrew instruction that Jerome provided to other Christians is a special aspect of his legacy. Although Jerome’s Christian predecessors made efforts to spread their knowledge of Hebrew, none of their efforts attained to the level that Jerome’s did. In the 380s, Jerome settled at Rome and drew around himself a circle of patrician female Christians interested in the study of the Bible. Jerome provided Hebrew instruction to these women, some of whom, including Paula, Marcella, and Eustochium, achieved proficiency in the language. Jerome’s formal and occasional writings on the Hebrew language and his promotion of *hebraica veritas* furnish an even more enduring aspect of his scholarship.

Jerome wrote important treatises that specifically addressed issues in the Hebrew text of the Scriptures for Latin-speaking Christians. His *Hebraicae quaestiones in Genesim* was “a philological inquiry concerning the original text.” Jerome also produced *Liber de nominibus Hebraicis* and *Liber de situ et nominibus locorum Hebraicorum*, a translation of Eusebius’ *Onomasticon*. These works were considered reference works on Hebrew during the Middle Ages.

With the exception of the Vulgate, *hebraica veritas* (the Hebrew truth), the belief in the authoritative truth of the Hebrew text of the Scriptures, is the greatest legacy of Jerome’s Hebrew scholarship. The concept did not originate with Jerome. As aforementioned, it can be found in the works of Eusebius of Emessa. Jerome first used the phrase in *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim*. In several of his works, Jerome

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expounded on the shortcomings of the Septuagint and the superiority of the Hebrew text.

In his Letter 49, for example, he wrote:


If you read the books of the sixteen prophets which I have rendered into Latin from the Hebrew; and if, when you have done so, you express satisfaction with my labors, the news will encourage me to take out of my desk some other works now shut up in it. I have lately translated Job into our mother tongue: you will be able to borrow a copy of it from your cousin, the saintly Marcella. Read it both in Greek and in Latin, and compare the old version with my rendering. You will then clearly see that the difference between them is that between truth and falsehood.  

Jerome’s criticism of the Greek Scriptures is even harsher in some places. For example, he wrote:

Studii ergo nostri erit, vel eorum, qui de libris Hebraicis varia suspicantur qerrors refellere: vel ea quae in Latinis et Graecis codicibus scatere videntur, auctoriti suae redder; etymologias quoque rerum, nominum atque regionum, quae in nostro sermon non resonant, vernaculae linguae explanare ratione.

It will be my simple aim, therefore, first, to point out the mistakes of those who suspect some fault in the Hebrew Scriptures, and, secondly, to correct the faults, which evidently teem in the Greek and Latin copies, by a reference to the original authority; and, further, to explain the etymology of things, names, and countries, when it is not apparent from the sound of the Latin words, by giving a paraphrase in the vulgar tongue.

Jerome’s stern critique of the Septuagint is one of the profound differences between his Hebrew scholarship and that of Epiphanius, for, as I shall demonstrate in the chapters that follow, Epiphanius of Salamis was a strong defender of the validity and divine origin of

330 Jerome, ep. 49.4; PL 22, 512; NPNF Series II 6, 80.
331 Jerome, Preface to Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim; PL 23, 936; NPNF Series II 6, 486.
the Septuagint. Although, his estimation of the Septuagint differed greatly from that of Epiphanius, their differences do not appear in the correspondences. Jerome’s Hebrew scholarship, of course, became an exemplar for Christians studying the language during the Middle Ages, and it was not replaced until the Reformation Era. Epiphanius’ left behind fewer texts than Jerome, but his Hebrew learning was comparable to that of Jerome. I address Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship in the next two chapters.
Chapter Three: The Making of an Ancient Polyglot, Epiphanius of Eleutheropolis

On account of his travels and the location of his birth, Epiphanius (ca. 315-ca. 403) was in a propitious position for learning languages. The biographical sources for Epiphanius are Epiphanius’ own writings and the testimonies of Jerome (340-420), Palladius (ca. 368-before 431), Socrates (fl. 4th cent.), and Sozomen (fl. 4th cent.). The following section does not aim to present a full biography of Epiphanius, but only to discuss the information relating to his linguistic knowledge.

Between 310 and 320 CE, Epiphanius was born in Besanduc (Βησανδούκη), a Palestinian village in the environs of Eleutheropolis (Ἐλευθερόπολις). This detail and the general course of Epiphanius’ distinguished career is furnished in Sozomen’s Ecclesiastical History. He wrote:

Οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ Παλαιστίνη μοναχῶν ἀνδρῶν διατριβαῖς ἤνθει. οἱ τε γὰρ πλείους ἐν τῇ Κωνσταντίῳ βασιλείᾳ ἀπηρίθμησαν, ἐτί περίθησαν ταύτην τῇν ἐπιστήμην σεμινώντες, οἱ δὲ ταῦτα συνουσίας εἰς ἄκρον ἁρετῆς ἐπέδοσαν κατες εὐκλείας μείζονα τοῖς ἐνθάδε φροντιστηρίοις προσετέθησαν. ὡν ἦν Ἡσυχᾶς ὁ Ἰλαρίωνος ἑταῖρος καὶ Ἐπιφάνιος ὁ ἀριστοὶ Σαλαµῖνος τῆς Κύπρου γενόµενος ἐπίσκοπος. ἐφιλοσόφησε δὲ Ἡσυχᾶς µὲν οὗ καὶ ὁ διδάσκαλος, Ἐπιφάνιος δὲ ἀµφὶ Βησανδούκην κώµην ὅθεν ἦν, νοµοῦ Ἐλευθεροπόλεως. ἐκ νέου δὲ ἐπισηµότατος ἐπὶ µοναστικῇ φιλοσοφίᾳ γέγονε παρὰ Αἰγυπτίοις καὶ Παλαιστίοις, µετὰ δὲ ταύτα καὶ Κυπρίοις, παρ’ οίς ἦρθε ἡγεµονίας τῆς ἐπισκοπεῖν. ὃν ὤμοι μᾶλλον κατὰ πᾶσαν ὡς εἰπεῖτιν ὑφ’ ἦλιον οἰκουµένων ἐστίν. ὃς ἐν ὑμῖν ἀριστοὶ παρὰ τούτων, παρὰ δὲ ταύτα καὶ παρὰ παρὰ µεθ’ ὅσης ἁρετῆς εἶχε καὶ συνουσίας ἐµβαλὼς πράγμασιν, ἀστώναι καιξένων παντοδαποῖς γνώριμος ἐν ὁλίγῳ ἐγένετο, τοῖς μὲν θεασαµένοις καὶ πείρανλαβόσα τῆς αὐτοῦ πολιτείας, τοῖς δὲ παρὰ τούτων πυθόµενοι. πρὸ δὲ τῆς εἰςΚύπρον ἀποδηµίας ἦταν Ἐλευθεροπόλεως. Ἐπιφάνιος δὲ ἀριστοὶ ἐν τῇ παρούσῃ ἡγεµονίᾳ,

Many monastical institutions flourished in Palestine. Many of those whom I enumerated under the reign of Constantius were still cultivating the science. They and their associates attained the summit of philosophical perfection, and added still greater reputation to their monasteries; and among them Hesycas, a companion of Hilarion, and Epiphanius, afterwards bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, deserve to be particularly noticed. Hesycas devoted himself to a life of philosophy in the same locality where his master had formerly resided; and Epiphanius fixed his abode near the village of Besauduc, which was his birthplace, in the government of Eleutheropolis. Having been instructed from his youth by the most celebrated ascetics, and having on this account passed the most of his time in Egypt, Epiphanius became most celebrated in Egypt and Palestine by his attainments in monastic philosophy, and was chosen by the inhabitants of Cyprus to act as bishop of the metropolis of their island. Hence he is, I think, the most revered man under the whole heaven, so to speak; for he fulfilled his priesthood in the concourse of a large city and in a seaport; and when he threw himself into civil affairs, he conducted them with so much virtue that he became known in a little while to all citizens and every variety of foreigner; to some, because they had seen the man himself, and had experience of his manner of living; and to others, who had learned it from these spectators. Before he went to Cyprus, he resided for some time, during the present reign, in Palestine.  

Dechow reported that “the name Besanduc appears nowhere else in the related literature of this period.” However, some scholars have speculated that it may be the name of “a family property” or possibly identical with Becos or Bycouca, the purported burial place of the prophet Habbakak located in the area of Eleutheropolis. Much more, however, is known about Eleutheropolis, for it is mentioned in a variety of ancient sources. It is necessary that Epiphanius’ connection to Eleutheropolis be given special scrutiny, for it is crucial to our understanding of his linguistic development.

**Eleutheropolis**

Eleutheropolis, Epiphanius’ place of origin, “flourished through the Roman and

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333 Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.32.3; *NPNF* Series II 2, 369. The Greek text is from *GCS* 50.


335 Ibid.
Byzantine periods.”336 Before the reign of the Emperor Septimius Severus (193-211), the site was known to the Romans as Βαιτογαβρεῖ.337 Flavius Josephus provided what is probably the earliest historical reference to the site when he related that Vespasian “slew above ten thousand of the people, and carried into captivity above a thousand, and drove away the rest of the multitude, and placed no small part of his own forces in them, who overran and laid waste the whole mountainous country” (κτείνει μὲν ὑπὲρ μυρίους, αἰχμαλωτίζεται δὲ ὑπὲρ χιλίους, καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν πλῆθος ἐξελάσας ἐγκαθίστησιν τῆς οἰκείας δυνάμεως οὐκ ὀλίγην, οἳ κατατρέχοντες ἐπόρθουν ἅπασαν τὴν ὅρεινήν).338 After Vespasian’s assault, the city was rebuilt. Perhaps the rebuilding was already underway by the middle of the second century when the site was listed in the Geographia of Claudius Ptolemy (C. 100-C. 170) among the cities of Judaea.339 Porter related that the name “Eleutheropolis, ‘Free City,’ first occurs upon coins in the time of Septimius Severus (A.D. 202-3).” Porter then related that the Emperor Septimius “during his visit to Palestine, conferred important privileges on several cities; and [Eleutheropolis] was one


337 There is no shortage of variant spellings in the relevant Greek manuscripts. These include: Βήταβριν, Βήταιρι, Βαϊτογαβρεῖ, Βαϊτογαβρά, Βαϊτογαβρή. The city was called Betogabri on the Tabula Peutingeriana. See Emil Schürer, The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135), Volume II, revised and edited by Geza Vermes & Fergus Millar (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2014, 194 n. 39.

338 Josephus, The Jewish War 4.8.1. For the translation, see William Whiston, The Works of Flavius Josephus, the Learned and Authentic Jewish Historian (Belfast: Simms and M’Intyre, Donegall-Street, 1841). For the Greek text, see LCL 487.

of the number.”340 In the latter half of the second century, quite possibly during Septimius’ reign, Bet Guvrin (בית גברין), the aforementioned Βαιτογαβρεῖ of Greek sources, was important enough to draw the attention of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi (ca. 135-ca. 220) who issued a taqkanah.341 The Talmud Yerushalmi states:

[It has been taught (in a baraita):] Rabbi permitted [produce sold in] Bet Shean [to be eaten without separating tithes], Rabbi permitted Caesaria, Rabbi permitted Bet Guvrin, Rabbi permitted Kfar Tzemach, Rabbi permitted the purchase of vegetables immediately in the year following the seventh year [unconcerned that they might have taken root before the end of the seventh year], and everyone jeered at him [because of these innovations].342

One theory holds that “Rabbi’s intention was to join in the Severan urbanisation initiative, and his intention in these taqkanot, as has been suggested by several scholars, was to encourage Jews to settle in those cities and help them in their economic competition with their non-Jewish neighbors.”343 For the present study, the Talmud’s recollection of Rabbi’s policy is an important historical witness to the Jewish presence in the rebuilt Bet Guvrin, a Jewish presence that was purportedly pivotal in the education of Epiphanius.344


342 Jerusalem Talmud, Demai 2.22c. For the translation, see Richard S. Sarason, Talmud Yerushalmi: Demai (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).


344 V. Epiph. 4.5; PG 41, 28-29.
It is in the works of Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260-ca.339) that one finds the earliest historical mentions of Eleutheropolis, the new name of Beth Guvrin. In his *Onomasticon*, Eleutheropolis is regularly mentioned as a reference point for the reckoning of distances. When indicating the location of Gath, for example, he wrote:

Γέθ, ἐν ταύτῃ κατελείφθησαν οἱ Ἕναχεῖμ ἀλλόφυλοι καὶ οἱ Φιλισταϊοὶ ἐξολοθρευθέντες. καὶ ἄτετι εἰς ἔτι νῦν καμή παριόντων ἀπὸ Ἐλευθεροπόλεως περὶ Διόσπολιν περὶ πέμπτον σημεῖον τῆς Ἐλευθεροπόλεως.

(In which the giants) The heathen (called) Enacim and the Philistines not being driven out remained here. There is (pointed out) even now a village (in the fifth mile) on the road from Eleutheropolis to Diospolis five miles from Eleutheropolis. \(^{346}\)

When indicating the location of Esthaol, he wrote:

Ἐσθαόλ, κλήρου Δάν, ἐνθεν ὥρματο Σαμψών καὶ εἰς ἔτι νῦν ἐστὶν ἀπὸ Ἐλευθεροπόλεος εἰς βορρᾶν ἀνιόντων εἰς Νικόπολιν.

Lot of (in tribe of) Dan. Where Samson died. It is even now (shown) ten miles north of Eleutheropolis on the road to Nicopolis. \(^{347}\)

Eusebius’ use of Eleutheropolis as a point of reference testifies to its geographical significance. Eleutheropolis was a cosmopolitan urban center whose demographics reflected pagan, Jewish, and Christian elements. Magness explained the demographic situation in Eleutheropolis around the time of Epiphanius’ birth:

During the second and third centuries, Eleutheropolis was a Roman urban center with a predominantly pagan population mixed with some Jews. After the Bar-Kokhba revolt, Eleutheropolis was among the cities with a predominantly non-Jewish population where Jews were permitted and encouraged to settle. The population adopted Christianity early on; in 325 a bishop from Eleutheropolis

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\(^{345}\) Dr. William Smith's Dictionary of the Bible (1890), s.v. “Eleutheropolis.”


\(^{347}\) Ibid., s.v. Ἐσθαόλ.
participated in the Council of Nicaea. By the sixth century, the city was clearly Christian in character. However, two finds point to Jewish presence at Eleutheropolis during this period. The first is an Aramaic inscription on a limestone column drum... The second find is a column capital decorated with a seven- branched menorah in relief... Thus, Eleutheropolis was the sort of place that could have fostered polyglottism. The city even had two names, a Greek one and an Aramaic one. The *Doctrine of Addai* (ca. 400 C.E.) related that

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\text{حَبَّ سَمَّى ذَكَارَنَّ نَفَسَهُ إِلَىُّ مَلَأَهُ مَلَأَهُ مَلَأَهُ}
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Abgar Ukkama sent Marihab and Shamshagram... and Hannan... to the city which is called Eleutheropolis, but in Aramaic Bethgubrin. The remark is an important confirmation that Eleutheropolis (Sylpwrtwl) and Bethgubrin (Nyrbwg tyb) were names of the same city, and it testifies to different cultural and linguistic forces that were at work in ancient Eleutheropolis. During the nineteenth century, remarks of this sort were crucial in the modern archaeological identification of Bet Jibrin (the site’s Arabic name) with the ancient city of Eleutheropolis.

**Relevant Rabbinic Sources**

The aforementioned description has made it clear that Eleutheropolis was a cosmopolitan Roman city, a site that drew speakers of various tongues. Rabbinic sources

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\text{George Phillips, trans., *The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle* (London: Trübner & Co., 1876), 1-2. The Syriac text is included in the same publication on pages that do not have Arabic numerals.}
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provide additional insight into the linguistic situation around Eleutheropolis. The Jerusalem Talmud reports Rabbi Jonathan of Bet Guvrin, a third-century Amora, to have said:

אמר רבי יונתן דבית גוברין ארבעה לשונות נימוי שיתמש בברפוק
ואילו ויאר לحرف לורו לחרב ספרה אליניא ערבrio דיבור וייא אן
אשרי להכתב אשוריו יי כתב אנוי ולשון ניבור יי כתב אן אנוי
כתב בחריו להכתב אשורין לשה עבי

R. Yonathan of Bet Guvrin said: Four languages are appropriately used in the world. And these are: Greek for song, Latin for war, Aramaic for mourning, Hebrew for speaking. And there are some who say: Also Assyrian for writing. Assyrian is for writing but not for speaking. Hebrew is for speaking but not for writing. They choose for themselves Assyrian writing and Hebrew speech. 352

Hezser pointed out that “the reasons for attributing the four languages to the four different and quite specific functions are dubious.” 353 Despite the possible dubiousness and ambiguity of the remark, it contains information that is germane to the present inquiry, namely, an Eleutheropolitan's cogitations on languages recorded for posterity in a historical document. The remark implies that some knowledge of these tongues could be obtained in the vicinity of Eleutheropolis. This supports the derivation that the foundation of Epiphanius’ polyglottism was obtainable in Eleutheropolis.

Epiphanius’ Early Exposure to Languages

I shall now turn my attention to Epiphanius’ own exposure to languages. In the sections that follow, I shall discuss Epiphanius’ knowledge of Aramaic, the simplicity of Epiphanius’ Greek style, how Epiphanius learned Hebrew, and the veracity of the claim that Epiphanius learned other languages.

352 Jerusalem Talmud, Megillah 1.11. The Mourner’s Kaddish that is recited by Jews is in Aramaic. The square characters of Hebrew are called the Assyrian script (אָשָׂרִי). Several rabbis demonstrated polyglottism, something that makes Epiphanius’ polyglottism seem more plausible. Consider: Genesis Rabbah 18.4; Talmud, Sotah 49b; Talmud, Menachoth 34b.

353 Catherine Hezser, Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 250.
Aramaic

It is evident that Epiphanius knew Aramaic. Jerome attested to Epiphanius’ knowledge of the tongue, but Epiphanius himself also displayed his knowledge of the language in several places. When discussing the Messalians, for example, he wrote:

φύσει γάρ μετά ταύτας πάλιν τὰς αἱρέσεις μωρά τις καὶ πάσης ἀφροσύνης ἐμπλέως ἐπανέστη ἡµῖν ἑτέρας τὰς αἱρέσεις µωρὰς καὶ πάσης ἀφροσύνης ἔµπλεως ἐπανέστη ἡµῖν ἑτέρας τις, γελοῖος µὲν ὅλη, ἀσύστατον ἔχουσα τὸ φρόνηµα, καὶ ἀνδρῶν καὶ γυναικῶν ἰπατηµένων. Μασσαλιανοὶ δὲ οὗτοι καλοῦνται, ἐρµηνευόµενοι εὐχόµενοι.

For another sect has actually arisen after these, a foolish, entirely stupid one, wholly ridiculous, inconsistent in its doctrine, and composed of deluded men and women. They are called Massalians, which means “people who pray.”

Epiphanius’ identification is correct, for Μασσαλιανοί is a Hellenization of מצלינא, an Aramaic pa’el participle meaning “praying folk” and derived from the Aramaic root צלי (to pray). Epiphanius is one of the earliest writers to mention the Messalians. Elsewhere in the Panarion, when speaking about Noah’s wife, Epiphanius identified νοῦρα (נורא, 0rwn) as Aramaic (Συριακή). He wrote:

ταύτην γὰρ φασιν τὴν Νωρίαν εἶναι τοῦ Νῶε γυναῖκα· καλοῦσι δὲ Νωρίαν, ὁπως τὰ Ἑλληνικῶς παρὰ τοῖς Ἑλλησι ραψῳδηθέντα αὐτοὶ βαρβαρικοῖς ὀνόµασιν μεταποιήσαντες τοῖς ἰπατηµένοις παρ’ αὐτῶν φαντασίαν ἐργάσωνται, ἵνα δὴ καὶ ἐρµηνεύσαν τοῖς παρ’ αὐτῶν εἰρήνης, Ἰαρίαν ταύτην ὀνοµάζοντες, ἐπειδή γὰρ νοῦρα ἐν τῇ Ἑβραϊδὶ πῦρ οὐ κατὰ τὴν βαθείαν γλῶσσαν

354 Jerome, Contra Rufinum 2.22, 3.6.

355 Epiphanius, Panarion 80.1.2. The Greek text of the Panarion employed in this chapter is from GCS 25, 31, 37.


357 The Catholic Encyclopedia’s list of sources suggests that Epiphanius’ remarks on the Messalians are the earliest ones extant. The Catholic Encyclopedia, 1910 ed., s.v. “Messalians.”
But they call her Noria in order to create an illusion for their dupes by making their own alteration, with foreign names, of the things the Greeks recited in Greek, so that they too will translate Pyrrha’s name by calling her Noria. (5) Now since “nura” means “fire” in Syriac, not ancient Hebrew—the ancient Hebrew for “fire” is “esh”—it follows that they are making an ignorant, naive use of this name.

The remarks demonstrate that Epiphanius was able to distinguish between Hebrew (ἡσὰθ, אש) and Aramaic (νοῦρα, ṭאאא, נורא). Most significantly, in another part of the Panarion, Epiphanius correctly identified Jesus’ last words as Aramaic:

For indeed, the Lord made a prophesy of this when he said, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani” in Hebrew. The Lord, come to the cross, was duly finishing the saying by saying what had been prophesied of him, “Eli, Eli,” in Hebrew as it had already been written; and [then], in adding the companion phrase he said, “lema sabachthani,” no longer in Hebrew but in Aramaic, so as to begin as it had been written of him but in going on change the rest of the line to another language.

Epiphanius’ remarks may seem insignificant nowadays, but in the fourth century, they represented a genuine improvement over the scholarship that had come before. In his Demonstratio Evangelica, for example, Eusebius of Caesarea incorrectly identified the words as Hebrew. He stated:

358 Epiphanius, Panarion 26.1.4-5.
359 Epiphanius, Panarion 69.19.5.
Τὸ «ὁ θεὸς ὁ θεός μου, πρόσχες μοι, ἵνα τί ἐγκατέλιπές με;» ἐν ἀρχαῖς τοῦ ψαλμοῦ λεγόμενον κατὰ τὸν Ματθαίον ὑπὸ τοῦ σωτήρος ἢμῶν παρὰ τὸν τοῦ πάθους καιρὸν οὕτως εἴρηται: «γενοµένης δὲ ὥρας ἐκτῆς σκότους ἐγένετο ἐὠ ὥραν τὴν γῆν ἔως ὥρας ἑνάτης, καὶ τῇ ἑνάτῃ ὥρᾳ ἐβόησεν Ἰησοῦς φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ἐλωεὶµ ἐλωεὶµ λεµᾶ σαβαχθανί, ὦ ἐστι μεθερµηνευόµενον, ὁ θεός ὁ θεός μου ἵνα τί ἐγκατέλιπές με;» εἴληπται δὲ ἠ ἐβραϊκὴ λέξις ἀπὸ τῆς προφητείας.

The words, “My God, give ear to me, why hast thou forsaken me?” spoken at the opening of the Psalm, are recorded by Matthew to have been said by our Saviour at the time of the Passion: “And at the sixth hour, there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour, and at the ninth hour Jesus called with a loud voice, Eloim, Eloim, lama sabachthani, that is to say, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” And the Hebrew words are taken from this prophecy.  

When one compares the remarks of Eusebius’ *Demonstratio Evangelica* to those of Epiphanius in the *Panarion*, it is evident that Epiphanius’ remarks possess the advantage of rightly identifying both the Aramaic content and the Hebrew content of the quote. Epiphanius’ remarks on the quote compare favorably to those of other patristic writers, for several of them either neglected to identify the language of the quote or misidentified the language of the quote. Epiphanius’ works contains numerous Aramaisms that make it difficult to deny that Epiphanius knew Aramaic. Perhaps the most salient Aramaism of *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* is Epiphanius’ inclusion of the Aramaic relative word ’êt or ̀êt (Δ) in his

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362 Cf. Athanasius, *Discourse III Against the Arians* 29.54; *NPNF* Series II 4, 423. Cf. Jerome, *Apology against Rufinus* 2.34; *NPNF* Series II 3, 517. Athanasius quotes the verse but does not identify the language as Aramaic. Jerome quotes the verse but wrongfully identifies its words as Hebrew.
transliterations of the names of the books of the Hebrew Scriptures. For example, Epiphanius writes Δμαλαχείµ for Melachim (Kings). Speaking about Epiphanius’ inaccurate transliteration of the Hebrew names of the books of the Sacred Scriptures, Dionysius Petavius noted:

Depravata sunt pleraque sacrorum librorum vocabula. Sed nos nihil immutandum censuimus. Plerisque littera δ prefixa: qui est Chaldaicus articulus.

Most of the names of the Holy Books are distorted. But we have resolved that nothing should be changed. The letter d is prefixed to most, which is the Aramaic article.  

The presence of δ suggests that Epiphanius knew Aramaic but was occasionally careless and imprecise in distinguishing between the Hebrew language and the Aramaic language. Other examples of this imprecision and carelessness are detectable in De Mensuris et Ponderibus. Epiphanius, for example, spoke of כוּזָא (ד) and בַּד as Hebrew words when it is evident that they were Aramaic words. I shall discuss these matters in the chapter that follows.

Previous examinations of Epiphanius have suggested that Aramaic was his native

363 The translation is the author’s. See Epiphanius, De Mensuris et Ponderibus 23; PG 43, 277; James E. Dean, trans., Epiphanius’ Treatise on Weights and Measures; The Syriac Version, 44 n. 265. Dionysius Petavius or Denis Pétau, S.J. (1583-1652), published notes on Epiphanius. These were copied into Migne’s editions of Epiphanius’ works. Petavius used the term “Chaldaicus articulus” (Aramaic article) to refer to τ (Δ), the relative word of the Aramaic language. Johannes Leusden (1624-1699), Petavius’ contemporary, used the term “Articulum Genitivi” (genitive article) to refer to the same. See Johannes Leusden, Schola syriaca, una cum synopsi chaldæica et dissertatione de literis & lingua samaritanorum, Second Edition (Utrecht: Ex officina Greorgii à Poolsum, 1672), 246. Modern grammarians were more accustomed to call τ the relative pronoun of Aramaic. See, for example, Frederick E. Greenspahn, An Introduction to Aramaic (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 74; Franz Rosenthal, A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic, 7th Expanded Edition (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 2006), 25. There is an inclination in contemporary scholarship that does not regard words like τ to be “overt relative pronouns.” See, for example, Robert D. Holmstedt, “The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew: A Linguistic Analysis” (diss.: University of Wisconsin, 2002), 255. Accessed August 19, 2017. http://individual.utoronto.ca/holmstedt/HolmstedtDissertation.pdf I follow this contemporary practice and refer to τ (Δ) as the Aramaic relative word.

364 Epiphanius, De Mensuris et Ponderibus 21, 43.
idiom. Pourkier, for example, wrote, “C’est qu’il est né en Palestine près d’Éleutheropolis et sa langue maternelle était l’araméen.”365 Although it is very tempting to embrace this supposition, this is not expressed in any ancient source. It is moreover very difficult to confirm this conclusion based on anything in his extant works, for Aramaic is insufficiently plenteous in his works. Epiphanius is not alone in this regard, for there is also uncertainty about the native language of Theodoret of Cyrus (ca. 393-ca.457), another Palestinian.366

It is somewhat troubling that prior scholarship has not been especially attentive to the sort of Aramaic that Epiphanius spoke. Elliott, for example, noted, “He is said to have been of Jewish extraction, and to have been acquainted with the Hebrew, the Egyptian, the Greek, and to some extent, the Latin languages, in addition to his native tongue, the Syriac.”367 Later, in the same article, he added, “But whilst thus displaying a certain familiarity with Hebrew as a language which has many points of affinity to his native Syriac, Epiphanius, in common with the other early fathers who possessed some slight knowledge of Hebrew, shews that his knowledge was not of a critical character.”368 In a recent publication, Lieu also stated that “Epiphanius grew up in Palestine and was a native speaker of Syriac.”369 Both scholars erred by specifically associating Epiphanius with Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic. Thackston wrote that Syriac was “the Aramaic dialect

368 Ibid.
369 Samuel Lieu, “Pars Tertia Commentarium,” in Greek and Latin sources on Manichaean Cosmogony and Ethics, edited by Samuel Lieu (Sydney: Ancient Cultures Research Centre, Macquarie University, NSW, 2010), 168.
of Edessa, now Urfa in Eastern Turkey, an important center of early Christianity in Mesopotamia.” Syriac eventually became “the literary language of all non-Greek eastern Christianity.”

Since no ancient source avers that Epiphanius’ native language was Syriac, such an assumption should have been accompanied by some rational justification. Syriac is a dialect of Eastern Aramaic and possesses a number of elements that make it distinct from western dialects of Aramaic. A distinctive trait of Eastern Aramaic, for example, is “the replacement of the common Aramaic third-person ‘imperfect’ preformative /y-/ by /l-/ (in Babylonia and in Eastern Mesopotamia) or /n-/ (in Syriac after about 200 C.E.).” If Syriac were Epiphanius’ native language, elements of its distinctive morphology should be detectable in the Aramaic that appears in his works. Unfortunately, Aramaic is not sufficiently abundant in the works of Epiphanius to allow the identification of his native dialect. Dummer pointed out something that could be interpreted as inconsistent with Syriac being Epiphanius’ native dialect.

Although it is difficult to confirm which language was Epiphanius’ native language, it

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372 Dummer writes: “Epiphanius unterscheidet sich also durchaus von seinem Landsmann Sozomenus, der für seine Kirchengeschichte syrische Quellen verwenden konnte.” See Dummer, “Die Sprachkenntnisse des Epiphanius” (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968), 409. Epiphanius refers to Ephrem Syrus (*Panarion* 51.22.7), but Dummer seems to regard that as a reference to the Greek translations of Ephrem’s work.
is interesting to consider how Aramaic might have affected his Greek style. Since antiquity, authors have noted that Epiphanius possessed a simple, rough, or colloquial style.\footnote{Cf. Frank Williams, trans., The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Vol. 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2009), xiv.} In the proemium of the \textit{Panarion}, Epiphanius wrote of himself:

Now since, not without God’s help, I have given the fullest consideration to the number of the requests, and from extreme love for the servants of God have consented to take the step, I shall begin—not with eloquence of language or any polished phrases, but with plain speech in a plain dialect, but with accuracy of the facts my speech conveys.\footnote{Epiphanius, \textit{Panarion, Proemium} II 2.6; Frank Williams, The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Vol. 1, 14.}

His contemporary Jerome expressed a similar opinion of his style:

Epiphanius, Cypri Salaminae episcopus, scripsit \textit{Adversus omnes haereses} libros et multa alia, quae ob eruditis propter res, a simplicioribus propter verba lectitantur. Superestusque hodie, et in extrema iam senectute varia cudit opera.

Epiphanias, bishop of Salamina in Cyprus, wrote books \textit{Against all heresies} and many others which are eagerly read by the learned, on account of their subject matter, and also by the plain people, on account of their language.\footnote{Jerome, \textit{De viris illustribus} 114; \textit{NPNF} Series II 3, 382. For the Latin text, see Ernest Cushing Richardson, ed., \textit{Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur}, vol. 14 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1896).}

The Byzantine scholar Photius expressed these sentiments concerning Epiphanius’ \textit{Panarion}:

\begin{quote}
\begin{greek}
ἐνιαχοῦ μέντοι ἀριστεύει ταῖς ἐπιβολαῖς, εἰ καὶ τῶν ῥηµάτων αὐτῷ καὶ τῆς συντάξεως οὐδὲν τὸ ἰδίωµα συµβελτιοῦται.
\end{greek}
\end{quote}

Nevertheless, in some places, it is the best in its reckoning, even if the arrangement of words in it does not produce an agreeable language.\footnote{PG 41, 21. The translation is the author’s.}

Although, one might cite Epiphanius’ incomplete rhetorical training as an explanation of his plain style, having Aramaic as his native idiom might also be a valid explanation. In
his *The Morphology of Koine Greek as used in the Apocalypse of St. John*, Mussies suggested that Epiphanius’ Greek possesses Aramaisms. He wrote:

> Doubled substantives like the ones in Mark VI 39 συµπόσια-συµπόσια “in companies” and VI 40 πρασιαὶ-πρασιαὶ “in groups” have parallels in the LXX as well as in the Patristic literature: ζυγὴ-ζυγὴ in the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, p. 90-91 (ed. Conybeare), ζυγὴ-ζυγὴ in Epiphanius *De mens. et pond.* 3, p. 155 (ed. Lagarde), both meaning “in pairs.”

On this same matter, he wrote in a footnote:

> Moreover, Epiphanius, although surnamed “of Salamis,” was born in Eleutheropolis (Judaea) ca. 315 A.D.: his use of the reduplication might be therefore a direct Aramaism. These formations run curiously parallel with Mycenaean wetei-wetei “every year” and amati-amati “every day”, but there can hardly be any historical connection.

Although it may be impossible to demonstrate that Epiphanius’ use of reduplication was the result of the influence of Aramaic, I find Mussies’ suggestion to be plausible.

**Epiphanius’ Hebrew Training**

The *Vita Sancti Epiphanii* provides the only ancient account of Epiphanius’ Hebrew training. It states:

> Ἡν δὲ τις Ἰουδαίος νοµοδιδάσκαλος ἐν Ἐλευθεροπόλει, ἀνὴρ θαυµαστὸς καὶ θἑοσεβὴς, κατά τὸν νόµον Μωυσέως. Οὗτος εἶχἑν κτήσεις ἐν τῇ κώµῃ, ἐν ᾧ ἐγεννήθη Ἐπιφάνιος, ὃς καὶ τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ ἔδει, καὶ τὴν µητέρα ἐγίνωσκεν, ὁµοίως καὶ Ἐπιφάνιον καὶ τὴν αὐτοῦ ἀδελφήν. Οὗτος εἰσελθὼν εἰς ἐπίσκεψιν τῶν ἑαὐτοῦ κτηµάτων, εἶπεν πρὸς τὴν µητέρα Ἐπιφανίου· Γύναι, βούλῃ µοι δοῦναι τὸν υἱόν σου εἰς υἱόν; καὶ ἔσῃ καὶ σὺ καὶ η θυγάτηρ σου τὰς χρείας ὑµῶν ποριζόµεναι ἐκ τοῦ ἡµετέρου οἴκου. Η δὲ µήτηρ Ἐπιφανίου ἀκούσασα παρὰ τοῦ νοµικοῦ ταῦτα, εξάρη πολύ, καὶ λαβοῦσα Ἐπιφανίου, παρέδωκεν αὐτὸν παραχρῆµα εἰς υἱόν. Τὸ δὲ ὄνοµα τοῦ νοµικοῦ ἔκαλετο Τρύφων. Οὗτος εἶχεν θυγατέρα µονογενῆ· ἐβούλετο δὲ ταύτην συζεύξει Ἐπιφανίῳ.

> Οὗτος Ἐπιφανίοις λαβὼν Ἐπιφανίοις εἰς υἱόν, ἔπαιδευσεν αὐτὸν ἐµπόνος τα τοῦ νόµου, καὶ τα στοιχεία τα Ἐβραϊκὰ µετὰ ἀκριβείας. Ἐτελεύτησεν δὲ ἡ θυγάτηρ

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378 Ibid., 218 n. 2.
There was a certain Jewish doctor of the law in Eleutheropolis, a marvelous and religious man. He had property in the town in which Epiphanius was born, who already knew his father and mother, similarly moreover he knew Epiphanius and his sister. When he came to see his properties, he said to Epiphanius’ mother: “Woman, would you like to give your son to me as my son? You and your daughter will take what you need from my house. When Epiphanius’ mother heard these things, she became very cheerful and took Epiphanius and at once gave him to the doctor of the law as his son. The doctor of the law’s name was Tryphon, who had one daughter and wanted her to marry Epiphanius.

When therefore Tryphon took Epiphanius as a his son, he carefully taught him the law and the Hebrew letters with accuracy. Tryphon’s daughter, however, died, and alone was Epiphanius in his home, advancing in age and in Hebrew wisdom.

The *Vita Sancti Epiphanii* asserts that Epiphanius learned Hebrew during his youth in Eleutheropolis, but Epiphanius’ works do not corroborate this assertion. Although the veracity of the *Vita Sancti Epiphanii* has been questioned, I find its assertions about Epiphanius’ Hebrew training to be mostly plausible. Origen rightly observed that the “Hebrew language is to be found among the Jews alone” (Ἑβραίων... διαλέκτου, παρὰ μόνοις Ἰουδαίοις εὑρισκόμενης); therefore, it was necessary that Epiphanius receive his Hebrew training from Jews or Jewish Christians. As aforementioned, Christian

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381 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.34. The ancients saw Hebrew as the language of the Jews. Cf. Augustine *De Civitate Dei* 16.3: “They were called after Heber, Hebrews, and then, dropping a letter, Hebrews; and so was their language called Hebrew, which was spoken by none but the people of Israel among whom was the city of God” (ex illo Hebraeos esse cognominatos, tamquam Hebareaeos; cum et alia possit esse opinio, ut ex Abraham tamquam Abrahami dicti esse uideantur; sed nimirum hoc uerum est, quod ex Heber Hebareaei appellati sunt, ac deinde una detrata littera Hebraei, quam linguam solus Israel populus potuit obtinere, in quo Dei ciuitas et in sanctis peregrinata est). Likewise, cf. John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 27.17:
scholars tended to draw their Hebrew learning from Judaeo-Hellenic works (e.g., *Interpretatio Hebraicorum Nominum*), Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g., the LXX, Aquila), and Jewish informants. Like Jerome, Epiphanius was able to translate actual Hebrew, an indication that he had some formal training in the language. Since Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning greatly exceeded anything that could be drawn solely from Greek translations and Judaeo-Hellenic works, it is not unreasonable to conclude that Epiphanius received instruction in the language directly from Jews. Therefore, although the specifics of the account of the *Vita Sancti Epiphanii* cannot be corroborated, its basic premise is logical.

**Epiphanius’ Exposure to Other Languages**

Although my focus is upon Epiphanius’ knowledge of Hebrew, it is valuable to devote some attention to Epiphanius’ exposure to other languages, for it demonstrates a penchant for the study of foreign languages that rarely appears among the patristic writers. Epiphanius’ reputation as a polyglot is mightily demonstrated in the combative exchange between Rufinus of Aquileia and Jerome. In his *De Adulteratione Librorum Origenis*, Rufinus spoke critically of Epiphanius on account of Epiphanius’ hostility towards all things Origenian. Describing a speech that Epiphanius gave, Rufinus wrote:

> Denique quidam ex ipsis, qui se velut evangelizandi, necessitatem per omnes gentes et per omnes linguis habere putat de Origene male loquendi, sex millia librorum eius se legisse, quam plurima fratrum multitudine audiente, confessus est.

“And the Jews were called Hebrews from Heber, from whom Abraham, the chosen vessel, was descended. And his successors guarded the language of angels which Adam spoke. And for this reason they are called Hebrews and their language Hebrew.” For the Ethiopic text, see H. Zotenberg, trans., *Chronique de Jean, évêque de Nikiou* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1883). For the translation of Nikiu’s Chronicle, see R.H. Charles, trans., *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu* (London: Oxford, Published for the Text and Translation Society by William & Norgate, 1916). For the Latin text of *De Civitate Dei*, see LCL 415. For the translation, see NPNF Series I 2, 312.
For instance, one of these men, who thinks that a necessity is laid upon him, like that of preaching the Gospel, to speak evil of Origen among all nations and tongues, declared in a vast assembly of Christian hearers that he had read six thousand of his works.\footnote{PG 17, 631.}

Although delivered as an anti-Epiphanius statement suggests that he accepted Epiphanius as a person of learning, and the words suggest that Rufinus regarded Epiphanius as someone familiar with many languages (“per omnes linguas”). In his \textit{Apologia Adversus Libros Rufini}, Jerome confirmed that Epiphanius was a person familiar with five languages. He wrote:

\begin{quote}
In qua multitudine et caterva fratrum tu quoque medius eras, quando ille in sua Epistola queritur, pro Origenis haeresi nefaria a te dogmata esse prolatata. Crimini ei dandum est quare Graecam, Syram, et Hebraeam et Aegyptiacam linguam, ex parte et Latinum noverit? Ergo et Apostoli et Apostolici viri, qui linguis loquebantur, in crimine sunt; et me trilinguem, bilinguis ipse ridebis?
\end{quote}

Oddly, although he wrote in praise and defense of Epiphanius, by listing only five languages, Jerome might have actually underestimated the linguistic capacities of his friend, Epiphanius, for a reading of Epiphanius’ works suggests that he had some degree of familiarity with more than five languages and dialects. In addition to the five listed by

\footnote{Jerome, \textit{Contra Rufinum} 2.22; PL 23, 445-446.}
Jerome, references to Arabic and several dialects of Greek may be found in Epiphanius’ works.

**Coptic**

On account of his sojourn in Alexandria during his youth, it is not implausible that Epiphanius had some degree of familiarity with Coptic. Sozomen reported that the Palestinian native Epiphanius “passed the most of his time in Egypt” (ἐν Ἀιγύπτῳ πλεῖστον διατρίψας χρόνον).\(^{384}\) Epiphanius’ works contain several reflections on the time that he spent in Egypt.\(^{385}\) Although Coptic remained the language of most Egyptians until Islamic times, there is evidence of bilingualism throughout Roman Egypt, for Greek had been widely used in the region since the days of Alexander the Great (332 BCE) and the Ptolemaic Dynasty (305 BCE -30 BCE).\(^{386}\) Although it is tempting to jump to conclusions, it is difficult to corroborate that Epiphanius had a degree of familiarity with Coptic simply based on the fact that he dwelled in Egypt. Simply dwelling in a region does not confirm that one knows the language of its inhabitants.\(^{387}\)

But there is more to consider, for Epiphanius’ literary monuments contain several references to the Egyptian language which might shed some light on the subject.

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\(^{384}\) Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.32.3; *NPNF* Series II 2, 369.

\(^{385}\) Epiphanius, *Panarion* 18.3, 26, 39.1.2. For an analysis of Epiphanius’ days in Egypt, see chapter 1 (“But the Merciful God Rescued me from their Depravity”) in Young Richard Kim, *Epiphanius of Cyprus: Imagining an Orthodox World*, esp. 17-22.


\(^{387}\) John Chrysostom, for example, dwelled for many years at Antioch but did not learn Aramaic. See Catharine P. Roth, *On Wealth and Poverty* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 8.
Speaking about the heretic Hieracas, an “Egyptian heresiarch” (Αἰγύπτιος αἱρεσιάρχης), whom he knew, Epiphanius wrote:

οὗτος ἐν τῇ Λεοντῷ τῇ κατ’ Αἴγυπτον ὑπῆρχεν, ἐν προπαιδείᾳ οὐ μικρὰ ὑπάρξας, Ἐλληνικῶν τε πάντων λόγων ἐπιτηδεύμασιν ἀσκηθείς, ἰατροσοφιστικὴ τε καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις τοῖς τῶν Αἰγυπτίων καὶ Ἐλλήνων μαθήμασιν ἀκριβὸς ἐπιστάς· τάχα δὲ καὶ ἀστρονομίας καὶ μαγείας ὁ ἀνὴρ παρῆγατο. ἐμπειρότατος γὰρ ὑπῆρχε πολλῶν λόγων καὶ ἐν ἐξηγήσει, ὡς ὑποφαίνουσιν οἱ αὐτοῦ λόγοι *, πάνυ δὲ τὴν τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἐπιστάμενον γλῶσσαν (Αἰγύπτιος γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ ἦν), ἄλλα καὶ τῇ τῶν Ἐλλήνων τετρανωµένος οὐ μικρῶς, ὡς κατὰ πάντα τρόπον.

He lived at Leontus in Egypt and had quite a bit of education, for he was proficient in the Greek and other literary studies, and well acquainted with medicine and the other subjects of Greek and Egyptian learning, and perhaps he had dabbled in astrology and magic. For he was very well versed in many subjects and, as his works show, < an extremely scholarly > expositor of scripture. He knew Coptic very well—the man was Egyptian—and was also quite clear in Greek, for he was quick in every way.

Epiphanius gave an estimation of the Hieracas’ learning and his linguistic accomplishments. It is evident that Epiphanius’ estimation of Hieracas’ Greek (τῇ τῶν Ἐλλήνων τετρανωµένος οὐ μικρῶς) was based on his own (Epiphanius’) unmistakable mastery of the Greek tongue. But, likewise, it is not unreasonable to assume that Epiphanius’ estimation of Hieracas’ Coptic fluency (πάνυ δὲ τὴν τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἐπιστάμενος γλῶσσαν) was based on some degree of personal familiarity with the Coptic language. It would be illogical for Epiphanius to give an estimation of Hieracas’ Coptic if he did not know something of Coptic himself. Epiphanius’ evaluation of Hieracas’ Coptic is possibly the strongest evidence of his own Coptic learning furnished in his extant monuments.

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388 Epiphanius, Panarion 55.5.2.
389 Epiphanius, Panarion 67.1.2.
In his works, Epiphanius occasionally referred to specific words of the Egyptian language. Although, I do not believe that the references are sufficiently unambiguous to provide any real clarity on the subject, a brief consideration of them does reveal something about Epiphanius’ preoccupation with linguistic matters.

The ancient Egyptians divided their land into administrative districts that they called *sepatu,* but as far back as Herodotus, Greek writers had used *νοµοὶ* (nomes) as a translation of *sepatu.* Since *νοµός* does appear in the LXX, and thinking that its meaning might not be generally known, Epiphanius devoted considerable space to explaining what *νοµοί* are. He wrote:

νοµὸν γὰρ οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι φασὶ τὴν ἑκάστης πόλεως περιοικίδα ἦτοι περίχωρον. εὕροις δ’ ἄν, ὡς φιλολόγε, καὶ τοῦτο εἰς σαντοῦ ὠφέλειαν πρὸς φιλομάθειαν καὶ σαφήνειαν, εἰς εὐσεβὴ σύστασιν καὶ φράσιν τῶν ἐν τῇ θείᾳ γραφῇ κειμένων, τῶν εἰς ἀπορίαν πινὰς ἐμβαλόντων δι’ ἀπειρίαν. ὅπου γὰρ ἐν τῷ ἄγιῳ προφήτῃ Ἡσαΐᾳ εὕροις γεγραµµένον περὶ νοµῶν πόλεων Αἰγυπτιακῶν οἷον Τάνεως ἢ Μέµφεως ἢ νοµοῦ τῆς Βουβάστου, τὴν περίµετρον τῆς τυχόσης πόλεως σηµαίνει. καὶ τοῦτο φιλομαθείας ἕνεκεν ἔρµηνευέσθω.

The Egyptians call the neighborhood or environs of each city a “nome.” You may find even this of use to you, scholarly reader, for love of learning and clarity’s sake, as a pious confirmation and explanation of the points in sacred scripture that baffle some because of their inexperience. Whenever you find a mention of “nomes” of Egyptian cities in the holy prophet Isaiah—such as the “nomes” of Tanis or Memphis, or the “nome” of Bubastis—it means the area around one city or another. And there, for love of learning’s sake, you have the translation.

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The selection demonstrates that there was a didactic motive behind the linguistic
discussions found in Epiphanius’ works, a philological characteristic of his personality
that might have inspired Bardion’s request that Epiphanius indite the work that came to
be known as *De Mensuris et Ponderibus*, a treatise replete with philological discursions
of this sort. Epiphanius’ definition of νοµοί, however, is not evidence of any real
familiarity with Coptic since νοµοί was widely used in Greek texts dealing with Egypt.
The same applies to Epiphanius’ remarks on the definition of Ἀρτάβη. Although
Epiphanius’ remarks on Τυβί (the fifth Egyptian month) are not evidence of any
significant knowledge of Coptic, they occur in a passage that displays Epiphanius’
preoccupation with languages more lucidly than perhaps any section of his opera. He
wrote:

Γεννηθέντος γὰρ αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ Ἰανουαρίῳ μηνὶ τουτέστιν πρὸ ὀκτώειδὸν Ἰανουαρίων – ἡτὶς ἐστὶ κατὰ Ῥωμαίους πέμπτη Ἰανουαρίου ἑσπέρα εἰς ἧττην ἑπιφώσκουσα, κατ’ Αἰγυπτίους Τυβί ἕνδεκάτη, κατὰ Σύρους εἰτ’ οὖν Ἐλληνας Ἀὐδυναίοιο ἑκτην, κατὰ Κυπρίους εἰτ’ οὖν Σαλαμινίουσ πέμπτουπέμπτη, κατὰ Παφίους Ἰουλίου τεσσαρεσκαιδεκάτη, κατὰ Ἄραβας Ἀλεωίς μίακαί εἰκᾶς, κατὰ Καππάδοκας Ἀταρτᾶ τρισκαιδεκάτη, κατὰ Ἀθηναίους Μαιµακτηριῶνος πέμπτη, κατὰ Εβραίους Τηβῆθ’ πέμπτη.

For Christ was born in the month of January, that is, on the eighth before the Ides
of January—in the Roman calendar this is the evening of January fifth, at the
beginning of January sixth. In the Egyptian calendar it is the eleventh of Tybi. In
the Syrian or Greek it is the sixth of Audynaeus. In the Cypriote or Salaminian it
is the fifth day of the fifth month. In the Arabian it is the twenty-first of Aleom. < In the Macedonian it is the sixteenth of Apellaeus. > In the Cappadocian it is the thirteenth of Atartes. In the Athenian
it is the fifth of Maemacterium. And in the Hebrew calendar it is the fifth of

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394 Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 28.

395 Τυβί (ⲧⲱⲃⲉ) is the fifth Coptic month. See *A Coptic Dictionary* (2000), s.v. ⲧⲱⲃⲉ.
The passage contains a multitude of linguistic references. It is not expected that Epiphanius possessed intimate familiarity with the languages. However, the passage does demonstrate that Epiphanius was somewhat attentive towards and interested in languages.397

Latin

Although his writings contain few traces of Latin, it is not implausible that Epiphanius understood Latin. Roman officials used Latin in Eleutheropolis and Egypt.398 Epiphanius could have picked up some Latin during his time in those places. Since he knew no Coptic, Jerome might not have been able to verify Epiphanius’ knowledge of Coptic, but he certainly was capable of evaluating Epiphanius’ grasp of Latin; therefore, his statement that Epiphanius knew “in part also the Latin” (“et ex parte Latinam”) does carry some weight. It is conceivable that Jerome had occasion to evaluate Epiphanius’ knowledge of the Latin language during Epiphanius’ sojourn in Paula’s home in 382. Although Paula spoke Greek, it would not have been strange for Epiphanius to make a display of whatever Latin he possessed. In an explanatory note, Dean suggested that Epiphanius’ definition of sextan as “six times” might come from Low Latin.399 If so, this

396 Epiphanius, Panarion 51.24.1.


399 Dean writes, “Low Latin may have had some such term as sexter for ‘six times,’ after the analogy of ter
would be consistent with someone who acquired Latin without formal instruction in the language, a process that might explain how Epiphanius acquired some knowledge of the tongue.

Epiphanius’ writings make it clear that he knew several Latin words, but they furnish too few examples to validate the assertion that he actually understood the language in a meaningful way. His writings indicate that he knew how to count in Latin, how to tell time in Latin, how to measure in Latin, and the jargon of Roman taxation. Let the following serve as examples. In *De Mensuris et Ponderibus*, he wrote concerning *libra*:

\[
\text{The *litra* is translated by the Romans as *libra*, which among the Romans etymologically means equality, that is to say, equality by measure. And there is in it 12 ounces. But from what language the name of the ounce has come we do not know with certainty.}^{400}
\]

Concerning *jugum*, Epiphanius wrote:

\[
\text{Concerning the *jugum*. And there are 6 fields in a *jugon* of land of the second class, but 5 (in land) of the first class. But among the Romans *jugum* means “pair” or “yoke,” because it is the plowing of a yoke of oxen for a whole day.}^{401}
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Epiphanius’ remarks clearly show that he had some knowledge of the Latin language,

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400 Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 54.

401 Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 59.
even if this knowledge was restricted to a few words (jugum, libra).

**Arabic and Dialects**

Epiphanius’ works furnish some of the earliest references to the Arabic language in western literature. In the *Panarion*, he wrote:

τούτο δὲ καὶ ἐν Πέτρᾳ τῇ πόλει μητρόπολις δὲ ἐστὶ τῆς Ἀραβίας, ἣτις ἐστὶν Ἕδωμ ἡ ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς γεγραμμένη ἐν τῷ ἐκείσε εἰδωλεῖω οὕτως γίνεται, καὶ Ἀραβικῇ διαλέκτῳ ἐξυμνοῦσι τὴν παρθένον, καλοῦντες αὐτὴν Ἀραβιστὶ Χααµοῦ τουτέστιν Κόρην εἴτ' οὖν παρθένον καὶ τὸν ἐξ αὐτῆς γεγεννηµένον Δουσάρην τουτέστιν μονογενὴ τοῦ δεσπότου, τούτο δὲ καὶ ἐν Ἑλούσῃ γίνεται τῇ πόλει κατ' ἐκείνην τὴν νύκτα, ὡς ἐκεῖ ἐν τῇ Πέτρᾳ καὶ ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ.

This is also done in the same way in the city of Petra, in the temple of the idol there. (Petra is the capital city of Arabia, the scriptural Edom.) They praise the virgin with hymns in the Arab language calling her, in Arabic, Chaamu—that is, Core, or virgin. And the child who is born of her they call Dusares, that is, “the Lord’s only-begotten.” And this is also done that night in the city of Elusa, as it is there in Petra, and in Alexandria.

One theory links the word Χααµοῦ to the Arabic root gh-l-m, a root connected to words such as غلامُ ghulām (boy, lad) and غلومَة ghulūma (youth, youthfulness).

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403 Epiphanius, *Panarion* 51.22.11.

404 John F. Healey; *The Religion of the Nabataeans* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 104.

Although it is tempting to link Χααµοῦ to these words, I do not believe that the Arabic word to which Epiphanius refers has been satisfactorily identified.\(^{406}\)

Epiphanius’ *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* contains a number of references to Arabic which are of doubtful value for the present analysis of Epiphanius’ knowledge of Hebrew, but they deserve some attention, especially since these are also some of the earliest references to the Arabic language in literature. For example, Epiphanius wrote concerning *modja* (ܡܕܝܐ):

\[
:\text{In the same way also the Syrians and Arabians say *modja*, which is pronounced in Hebrew *mode*; but it is translated from the Hebrew into the Greek as *modja*, which is the *mode*.}\(^{407}\)
\]

In the same work, Epiphanius made another reference to Arabic:

\[
:\text{But the *plethron* is 20 by 20 cubits, called the *sataean* among the Palestinians and Arabians.}\(^{408}\)
\]

Moreover, in *De Mensuris et Ponderibus*, after explaining that *jugum* means “pair” among the Romans “because it is the plowing of a yoke of oxen for a whole day,” Epiphanius then proceeds to explain that “for the same reason also (we find) the decad in the agriculture of the Palestinians and Arabians. But among the Cyprians they are called

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\(^{406}\) Although the exact meaning of Χααµοῦ may be undetermined, Millar says that Epiphanius’ “reference cannot be dismissed, and Epiphanius’ awareness of Arabic as a language is significant.” See Millar, *Rome, the Greek World, and the East*, 403. It is conceivable that the speakers of Arabic stopped using the word that Epiphanius sought to indicate before the creation of Arabic literature.

\(^{407}\) Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 23.

\(^{408}\) Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 59.
zyga, and among other peoples syntelesmata, an explanation that suggests that he had some personal knowledge of the Arabians as he did the Palestinians and Cyprians. The section is another affirmation of Epiphanius’ attentiveness to languages and dialects.

Numerous other references also evidence that Epiphanius was attentive to dialects. Epiphanius spent many years as the bishop of Salamis on the island of Cyprus, and the Cypriot dialect of Greek drew his attention. Concerning the choinix (χοινίξ), he noted, for example, that “the Cyprians say choiniqta” (το Χοινίκια). In another place, Epiphanius noted that the nevel (νεβίλ), a measure of liquids, is what Cyprians call the foreus (φόρευς). Epiphanius also made reference to the Alexandrian dialect of Greek, noting, for example, that the Alexandrians used the term chalkina to refer to chalkoi, silver coins. Epiphanius wrote these words in the 390s, many years after he left Alexandria, suggesting that his attentiveness to dialects was a lifelong habit.

**Conclusion of Chapter Three**

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that Epiphanius’ experiences were conducive to the development of polyglottism. Eleutheropolis, Epiphanius’ hometown, was a multiethnic milieu in which the sounds of several languages could be heard. The *Vita Sancti Epiphanii* proposes that Epiphanius received formal training in the Hebrew language during his youth in Eleutheropolis. Jews were present in Eleutheropolis during

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409 Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 59.
411 Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 32.
412 Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 50.
Epiphanius’ youth; therefore, the *Vita Sancti Epiphanii*’s account is mostly plausible. Epiphanius’ writings contain references to Arabic, Latin, and several other languages and dialects. The paucity of these references, however, makes it difficult to estimate the extent of his familiarity with these languages. Nevertheless, it is evident that Epiphanius possessed a somewhat lively interest in languages and dialects.
Chapter Four: Hebrew in the Works of Epiphanius’ of Salamis

References to the Hebrew language are not infrequent in the works of Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 315-ca. 403). Like those of his younger contemporary Jerome (ca. 340-420), the writings of Epiphanius represent a substantial improvement in the quality of Christian Hebrew scholarship.

The Quality of Epiphanius’ Hebrew Learning

Although his scholarship was imperfect, Epiphanius attained to a level of Hebrew learning that exceeded that of most of his patristic predecessors. Epiphanius was familiar with the Hebrew alphabet. Epiphanius understood the basic morphology of the Hebrew language, including gender, number (singularity and plurality), and conjugation. Unlike some of his predecessors, Epiphanius’ Hebrew vocabulary was not especially indebted to lists of Hebrew names and was not merely a repetition of the council of Jewish informants. Epiphanius understood Hebrew well enough to make up his own reconstructions of the Hebrew text and attempt to translate texts that had not been translated by earlier scholars. In the paragraphs that follow, I shall bring forth selections from Epiphanius’ works that demonstrate his Hebrew learning. At the end of this chapter, I shall analyze Epiphanius’ views on the important subject of hebraica veritas.

413 Epiphanius’ rabbinic contemporaries were in possession of similar Hebrew, grammatical concepts. See Alexander, “How Did the Rabbis Learn Hebrew?” 77.

414 See my remarks on Interpretatio Hebraicorum Nominum and Jewish informants in the second chapter of this work. Also, see Charles Kannengiesser, Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity, 202; Louis Israel Newman, Jewish Influence on Christian Movements, 28.
The Hebrew Alphabet

Epiphanius’ writings clearly indicate that he understood the Hebrew alphabet. For example, in the Panarion, he wrote:

αὕτα εἰσίν αἱ εἴκοσι ἕξῆνεν τῶν Ἴουδαίων· εἴκοσι δύο δὲ εἰσίν ὡς τὰ παρ’ αὐτῶις στοιχεία τῶν Ἑβραίκων γραμμάτων ἀριθμούμενα διὰ τὸ διπλοῦσθαι δέκα βιβλίους εἰς πέντε λογιζοµένας. περὶ τούτου δὲ ἄλλη ποιον σαφῶς εἰρήκαμεν.

These are the 27 books given the Jews by God. They are counted as 22, however, like the letters of their Hebrew alphabet, because ten books are doubled and reckoned as five. But I have explained this clearly elsewhere.  

Surprisingly, knowledge of the number of letters contained in the Hebrew alphabet was probably not widely known among the patristic writers. This is certainly the implication of Athanasius’ (298-373) remarks in his well-known Paschal Epistle (367). He wrote:

Ἔστι τοῖνυν τῆς μὲν παλαιᾶς διαθήκης βιβλία τῷ ἀριθµῷ τὰ πάντα εἴκοσιδύο, τοσαῦτα γάρ, ὡς ἡκουσα, καὶ τὰ στοιχεία τὰ παρ’ Ἑβραίοις εἶναι παραδέδοται, τῇ δὲ τάξει καὶ τῷ ὅνοµατι ἐστιν ἕκαστον οὕτως:

There are, then, of the Old Testament, twenty-two books in number; for, as I have heard, it is handed down that this is the number of the letters among the Hebrews; their respective order and names being as follows.  

The phrase ὡς ἡκουσα (“as I have heard”) expresses a degree of qualification, making it difficult to assume that the knowledge that Epiphanius presented in the passage cited above was common knowledge. There had been, however, several patristic writers who wrote on the Hebrew alphabet before Epiphanius. In his Praeparatio Evangelica, for example, Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260-ca. 340) displayed substantial learning in regard to the historical origin of the Hebrew alphabet. Later in his De Mensuris et Ponderibus

\[\text{References:}\]

415 Epiphanius, Panarion 8.6.3.

416 Athanasius, Letter 39; NPNF Series II 4, 552.

417 Eusebius of Caesarea, Praeparatio Evangelica 10.5. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis 1.16.75; Herodotus, Histories 5.58; Talmud, Shabbath 104a. Other patristic writers express an understanding that
(392), Epiphanius added a description of the Hebrew alphabet that must have seemed remarkably learned in its time:

... and thus were translated the twenty-seven recognized canonical books, but twenty-two when counted according to the letters of the alphabet of the Hebrews. For the names of the letters are twenty-two. But there are five of them that have a double form, for k has a double form, and m and n and p and s. Therefore in this manner the books also are counted as twenty-two; but there are twenty-seven, because five of them are double. 418

The details provided in Epiphanius’ description of the Hebrew alphabet are accurate and display a respectable knowledge of the Hebrew script. 419 Later in the same treatise, Epiphanius not only gave the names of the Hebrew letters but also suggested that there is a numerological significance behind their number, twenty-two. He wrote:

And he showed Moses through an angel that there would also be twenty-two heads from Adam to Jacob, otherwise Israel, when he said: “And I will choose for myself from his seed a people more numerous than any other people.” And the heads, which are the generations, concerning whom the Lord spoke, are as follows: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah, Eber, Peleg, Reu—for the Scripture omits Cainan from the number—Serug, Nahor, Terah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, otherwise Israel—altogether, twenty-two generations. Therefore there are twenty-two letters among the Hebrews, which are these: alef, beth, gimel, deletel, he, waw, zej, heth, teth, jodh, kaf, lamedh, mem, nun, samekh, cajin, pe, sadhen, qof, resh, shin, taw. Therefore also there are twenty-two books of the Old Testament; but they are said among the Hebrews to be counted as twenty-two though they are (really) twenty-seven, because five of their letters also are

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418 Epiphanius, De Mensuris et Ponderibus 4.

419 Epiphanius’ remarks on the Hebrew alphabet give a detailed look at the structure and form of the letters themselves, and I believe that this was an advancement in patristic Hebrew scholarship. Irenaeus, for example, seemed puzzled by the Hebrew alphabet and actually writes: “For these ancient, original, and generally called sacred letters of the Hebrews are ten in number.” See Irenaeus, Haer. 2.24.2; ANF 1, 393. Eusebius’ Praeparatio Evangelica chap. 10 and Origen’s Hom. Num. 4 convey details about the alphabet, but neither passage describes the form and structure of the alphabet. I have not found equally detailed remarks on the forms of the Hebrew letters in earlier patristic texts.

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double—*kaf* has a duplicate form, also *mem, nun, pe, and saddhe*—for the books also are counted in this manner.\(^{420}\)

This description of the Hebrew alphabet—unremarkable as it is by today’s standards—had an influence that stretched several centuries into Byzantine history, for its influence on John of Damascus in the eighth century is evident.\(^{421}\)

**Epiphanius’ Hebrew Vocabulary**

In comparison to other patristic writers, Epiphanius possessed a substantial Hebrew vocabulary, and he used Hebrew with accuracy on several occasions. In the remarks that follow, I shall supply examples to detail the breadth and accuracy of Epiphanius’ knowledge of Hebrew words.

On several occasions in the *Panarion*, Epiphanius displayed his Hebrew learning, and I shall begin by drawing attention to some of the Hebrew words that he used in the *Panarion*, his longest work. Epiphanius’ definition of *Φαρισαῖοι* (Pharisees) is consistent with modern definitions of the term and rabbinic understandings of the term, both of which link the term to separation.\(^{422}\) Epiphanius wrote:

\[
\text{ἐλέγοντο δὲ Φαρισαῖοι διὰ τὸ ἀφωρισµένου εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν}
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\(^{420}\) Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 22.

\(^{421}\) John of Damascus wrote: Εἶκοσι δύο γὰρ στοιχεία ἐχουσιν, ἕξ ὧν πέντε διπλούνται, ὡς γίνεσθαι αὐτὰ ἐκοσι ἐπτά· διπλοὺν γὰρ ἔστι τὸ Χὰφ καὶ τὸ Μὲµ καὶ τὸ Νοῦν καὶ τὸ Φὶ καὶ τὸ Σαδ. Διό καὶ αἱ βίβλια κατὰ τούτον τὸν τρόπον ἐκοσι δύο μὲν ἀριθµοῦνται, ἐκοσι ἐπτά δὲ ἐὑρίσκονται διὰ τὸ πέντε ἐξ αὐτῶν διπλοῦσθαι. John of Damascus, *Expositio Fidei* 4.17; *Fathers of the Church* 37, 375 n. 11. For the Greek, see B. Kotter, ed., *Expositio Fidei: Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 2, Patristische Texte und Studien 12 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973). John of Damascus, however, does not provide the Hebrew names of the books of the Old Testament as does Epiphanius. The surviving Greek text of Epiphanius’ *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* relates: Τὸ γὰρ χάφ ἔστι διπλοῦν καὶ τὸ μέµ καὶ τὸ νοῦν καὶ τὸ φὶ καὶ τὸ σαδ. Διό καὶ αἱ βίβλια κατὰ τούτον τὸν τρόπον ἐκοσι δύο μὲν ἀριθµοῦνται, ἐκοσι ἐπτά δὲ ἐὑρίσκονται, διὰ τὸ πέντε ἐξ αὐτῶν διπλοῦσθαι. See Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 4; *PG* 43, 244. The textual similarities are evident, and it appears that Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship extended across the centuries. The fact that a scholar of the caliber of John of Damascus quoted from Epiphanius’ description of the Hebrew alphabet centuries after its appearance testifies to the significance of Epiphanius’ contribution.

\(^{422}\) *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906 ed., s.v. “Pharisees.”
But they were called “Pharisees” because they were separated from the others by the extra voluntary ceremonies they believed in; “pharesh” is Hebrew for “separation.”

Epiphanius’ rightly observed that the Hebrew root פָרֶשׁ (فارِس) is connected to the idea of separation (ἀφορισµός). Epiphanius’ remarks on Φαρισαῖοι also exemplify his attentiveness to the meanings of the Hebrew words that appear in the Greek Scriptures, a tendency that permeates much of his writing. For, since he regarded himself as a linguist, Epiphanius made special efforts to impart linguistic knowledge to Christians who did not possess his linguistic knowledge. As Jerome, Epiphanius’ younger contemporary, “utilized his knowledge of Hebrew in order to clarify the ambiguities of Hebrew words for the Latin reader,” likewise Epiphanius utilized his knowledge of Hebrew to educate Greek learners who were usually untrained in the Hebrew tongue. This didactic desire to impart Hebrew knowledge to his coreligionists might also have been a motive behind Epiphanius’ etymological remark on Αδὰµ shortly after his initial derivation of Φαρισαῖοι. Epiphanius wrote:

Καὶ γὰρ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς Ἀδὰµ τῇ ἑκτῇ ἡμέρᾳ πλασθεὶς ἀπὸ γῆς καὶ λαβὼν τὸ ἐμφύσηµα ἐζωογονήθη οὐ γάρ, ὡς τινὲς οἴονται, ἀπὸ πέµπτης ἡρξάτο καὶ τῇ ἑκτῇ ἐτελειώθη· ἔσφαλται γὰρ ἡ τῶν λεγόντων τοῦτο διάνοια, ἀπλοὺς τε ἦν καὶ ἄκακος, οὐκ ὄνοµά τι κεκτηµένος ἔτερον, οὐ

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423 Epiphanius, Panarion 16.1.7.

424 A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature (1903), s.v. פָּרֶשׁ.

425 On the surface, Epiphanius’ linguistic references might appear to be pedantic, but there seems to have been a genuine pastoral and didactic motive behind them. See Epiphanius, Panarion 24.1, 25.4.

426 Michael Graves, Jerome’s Hebrew Philology: A Study Based on his Commentary on Jeremiah (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 38.
For at the beginning Adam was brought to life on the sixth day, after being formed from earth and infused with (God’s breath). He was not begun on the fifth day, as some think, and finished on the sixth; the idea of those who say this is a mistaken one. He was unspoiled and innocent of evil and had no other name, for he had no additional name of an opinion, a belief, or a distinctive way of life. He was simply called “Adam,” which means “man.”

In the current world, a bishop conveying the Hebrew meaning of Ἀδάμ in a publication would draw little attention. Indeed, many Bibles contain glossaries that define each important name in the Holy Writ. Such, however, was not the case in the fourth century. Hebrew etymological learning was not ubiquitous among Christian authors. For example, Gregory of Nyssa, a coeval of Epiphanius, handled the same word with a degree of caution. He wrote:

Accordingly, the Image of God, which we behold in universal humanity, had its consummation then; but Adam as yet was not; for the thing formed from the earth is called Adam, by etymological nomenclature, as those tell us who are acquainted with the Hebrew tongue—wherefore also the apostle, who was specially learned in his native tongue, the tongue of the Israelites, calls the man “of the earth” χοικός, as though translating the name Adam into the Greek word.

Although Gregory’s etymology is sound, the phrase “who are acquainted with the Hebrew tongue” suggests that Gregory was not among those who knew Hebrew and, therefore, introduced his Hebrew etymology in a cautious manner. Thus, even among Epiphanius’ most learned contemporaries, Hebrew knowledge was not universal. Epiphanius was not the first Christian scholar to define Ἀδάμ, but, on account of the fact that such knowledge was not ubiquitous, his iteration of its meaning was a useful

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427 Epiphanius, Panarion 1.1.
428 Gregory of Nyssa, On the Making of Man 22.3.
contribution to Christian Hebrew scholarship.

In the chapter of the *Panarion* that deals with the Ὀσσαῖοι (Ossaeans, Essenes), Epiphanius introduced a number of remarks on Hebrew, especially during his refutation of Elxai. Epiphanius began the chapter by proposing his own etymology for the Hebraic appellation Ὀσσαῖοι (Essenes). He wrote:

τοῦτο δὲ τὸ γένος τῶν Ὀσσαίων ἑρµηνεύεται διὰ τῆς ἑκδόσεως τοῦ ὀνόµατος στιβαρόν γένος.

And from the translation of the name, this “People of the Ossaeans” means “sturdy people.”

In antiquity numerous etymologies were suggested for the name *Essenes*. One theory linked the name to a Hebrew root צנוע signifying humility. Another theory linked the name to the Greek word ὀσιότης (holiness). Epiphanius’ remark linked the name to עזז, a root signifying strength and found in both Hebrew and Aramaic. This is evidence of Epiphanius’ willingness to be daring and independent with his Hebrew learning, even when incorrect. As I shall explain, this willingness to use Hebrew reappears in his bumbling attempts to translate Gnostic sayings and propose etymologies for biblical measures.

Epiphanius used a good deal of Hebrew in his discourse against Elxai, a figure of

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429 Epiphanius, *Panarion* 19.1.3.


431 Ibid.

432 *Lexicon Syriacum*, 1895, s.v. עזז; *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1865, s.v. עזז.
Trajan’s time (98-117) whom Epiphanius described as “a fraud” (ἀπατηλός).

It seems that Epiphanius’ use of Hebrew in refuting Elxai was aimed at demystifying the claims of his followers, who still existed in Epiphanius’ time. Similarly, decades earlier, Irenaeus had tried to use Hebrew to demystify claims of the Marcosians (Gnostics). It is worth noting that Epiphanius’ proposed his own translation of the name Ἡλξαϊ, something not present in earlier accounts.

He wrote:

φαντάζονται δὲ δήθεν καλεῖν τοῦτον δύναμιν ἀποκαλυµµένην, διὰ τὸ ἢλ καλεῖσθαι δύναµιν, ξαϊ δὲ κεκαλυµµένον.

They imagine that they are calling Elxai a power revealed, if you please, since “el” means “power” but “xai” is “hidden.”

“Power” (δύναµις) is one of several ways to translate the Hebrew word יָה (יה). The Hebrew root יֵס (יֵס) is connected to hiding; therefore, κεκαλυµµένος (hidden) is not an unreasonable interpretation of ξαϊ. Epiphanius’ etymology of Ἡλξαϊ demonstrates confidence and the ability to apply Hebrew in a context that did not focus on Scriptural exegesis.

In several instances, Epiphanius gave clear and accurate explanations of Hebrew words that prior patristic writers struggled to define, and in some cases, Hebrew words appear for the first time in Epiphanius’ works. Epiphanius’ remarks on Jesus’ last words, for example, were an improvement over the comments that Eusebius of Caesarea offered.

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433 Epiphanius, Panarion 19.1.5.

434 Although their Hebrew learning was less developed than that of Epiphanius, the demystification of Gnostic prayer formulas was also a desire of Irenaeus and Hippolytus. Cf. Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies 4.28; Irenaeus, Haer. 1.21.3. See my discussion of this in the second chapter of this work.

435 Hippolytus, Philosophumena 9.13-17; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 6.38.

436 Epiphanius, Panarion 19.2.1.
on the same verse earlier in the same century.\(^{437}\) Epiphanius’ remarks on SabaOTH show a better understanding of the word than one finds in Ambrose and Origen.\(^{438}\) Earlier heresiologists, Hippolytus and Irenaeus, knew the Gnostic divine name Καυλακαῦ but did not define it.\(^{439}\) Epiphanius, however, explained the Hebrew meaning of Καυλακαῦ.\(^{440}\) These examples serve as evidence that Epiphanius possessed a Hebrew vocabulary that was sometimes capable of avoiding the difficulties that troubled earlier Christian Hebraists. Moreover, these examples show that his vocabulary was not wholly dependent upon Judaeo-Hellenic texts, Origen, or remarks made by prior Christian Hebraists.

### The Hebrew Zodiac

Further evidence of the quality and extent of Epiphanius’ Hebrew vocabulary comes from his remarks on Hebrew astrological terms. These remarks indicate that Epiphanius’ Hebrew vocabulary was not exclusively confined to biblical terms. The Hebrew names of the planets and signs of the zodiac make their first literary appearance in the *Panarion* of Epiphanius. In his discourse on the Pharisees, Epiphanius gave the names of the planets.

He wrote:

Ωμολόγουν δὲ οὗτοι ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν, ἐπίστευον τε ἀγγέλους εἶναι καὶ πνεῦμα, ἤγνόησαν δὲ υἱὸν θεοῦ ὡς οἱ ἄλλοι. ἄλλα καὶ εἰμαρµένη καὶ ἀστρονοµία παρ’ αὐτοῖς σφόδρα ἐχρηµάτιζεν. αὐτίκα γοῦν τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ ὀνόµατα τὰ ἐκ τῆς Ἑβραϊκῆς ἀστρονοµίας κατὰ τὴν Ἑβραϊκὴν ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν, ἐπίστευον τε ἀγγέλους εἶναι καὶ πνεῦμα, ἤγνόησαν δὲ υἱὸν θεοῦ ὡς οἱ ἄλλοι. ἄλλα καὶ εἰμαρµένη καὶ ἀστρονοµία παρ’ αὐτοῖς σφόδρα ἐχρηµάτιζεν. αὐτίκα γοῦν τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ ὀνόµατα τὰ ἐκ τῆς Ἑβραϊκῆς ἀστρονοµίας κατὰ τὴν Ἑβραϊκὴν ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν, ἐπίστευον τε ἀγγέλους εἶναι καὶ πνεῦμα, ἤγνόησαν δὲ υἱὸν θεοῦ ὡς οἱ ἄλλοι. ἄλλα καὶ εἰμαρµένη καὶ ἀστρονοµία παρ’ αὐτοῖς σφόδρα ἐχρηµάτιζεν. αὐτίκα γοῦν τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ ὀνόµατα τὰ ἐκ τῆς Ἑβραϊκῆς ἀστρονοµίας κατὰ τὴν Ἑβραϊκὴν ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν, ἐπίστευον τε ἀγγέλους εἶναι καὶ πνεῦμα, ἤγνόησαν δὲ υἱὸν θεοῦ ὡς οἱ ἄλλοι. ἄλλα καὶ εἰμαρµένη καὶ ἀστρονοµία παρ’ αὐτοῖς σφόδρα ἐχρηµάτιζεν. αὐτίκα γοῦν τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ ὀνόµατα τὰ ἐκ τῆς Ἑβραϊκῆς ἀστρονοµίας κατὰ τὴν Ἑβραϊκὴν ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν, ἐπίστευον τε ἀγγέλους εἶναι καὶ πνεῦμα, ἤγνόησαν δὲ υἱὸν θεοῦ ὡς οἱ ἄλλοι. ἄλλα καὶ εἰμαρµένη καὶ ἀστρονοµία παρ’ αὐτοῖς σφόδρα ἐχρηµάτιζεν. αὐτίκα γοῦν τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ ὀνόµατα τὰ ἐκ τῆς Ἑβραϊκῆς ἀστρονοµίας κατὰ τὴν Ἑβραϊκὴν

\(^{437}\) I addressed this matter in the previous chapter.

\(^{438}\) Epiphanius writes: καὶ τὸ Σαβαώθ δυνάµεων ἐρµηνεύεται κύριος οὖν Σαβαώθ κύριος τῶν δυνάµεων. See Epiphanius, *Panarion* 40.5.8. For Origen’s troubles with SabaOTH, see Trigg, 264. I have also addressed the matter in the second chapter. See Ambrose, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 4.1.14; *NPNF* Series II 10, 264.

\(^{439}\) Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.24.5-6; Hippolytus, *Refutation of all Heresies* 5.3.

\(^{440}\) Epiphanius, *Panarion* 25.4. I expound on this later in this chapter.
They acknowledged the resurrection of the dead and believed in angels and a Spirit, but like the others they knew nothing of the Son of God. Moreover fate and astrology meant a great deal to them. To begin with, they have other names in Hebrew for the Greek names that are taken from the astrology of the misguided. For example, Helius is Chammah and Shemesh. Selene is Jareach, or Ha-lbanah, and hence is also called Mene—the “month” is called “the mene” and the moon is called “mene,” as it also is in Greek because of the month. Ares is Kokhabh Okbol; Hermes is Kokhabh Chochmah; Zeus, Kokhabh Baal; Aphrodite, Zerva or Lilith; Cronus is Kokhabh Shabtai. (They have other terms for him too, but I cannot give the names of these things exactly.)

After giving the Hebrew names of the planets, Epiphanius immediately gave the Hebrew names of the signs of the zodiac:

Moreover, here again are their Hebrew names for what the misguided futilely regard as planets, though < the Greeks, who > wrongfully misled the world into impiety, call them the signs of the zodiac: Tela, Sor, Tomim, Zartan, Ari, Bethulah, Moznaim, Akrahb, Qesheth, Gdi, Dalli, Daggim. Following the Greeks to no purpose, they, I mean the Pharisees, translated the same terms into Hebrew as follows. Aries is what they call Tela; Taurus is Sor; Gemini, Tomim; Cancer, Zartan; Leo, Ari; Virgo, Bethulah; Libra, Moznaim; Scorpio, Akrahb; Sagittarius, Qesheth; Capricorn, Gdi; Aquarius, Dalli; Pisces, Daggim.442

441 Epiphanius, Panarion 16.2.
442 Ibid.
It was not uncommon for patristic writers to exercise knowledge of astrology for the purpose of confuting its claims. In another section of the *Panarion*, for example, Epiphanius’ spoke well of Bardesanes’ polemic against astrology.\(^{443}\) It is not unreasonable to suppose that Epiphanius’ knowledge of Hebrew astrological terms is connected to his desire to confute the claims of astrology. Stieglitz explained that the names of the zodiac signs and planets do appear in a synagogue of the third century, but their appearance in the *Panarion* is their first appearance in literature.\(^{444}\) Although it alludes to astrology, the Hebrew Bible does not mention the zodiac. Epiphanius’ mentioning of these words, therefore, shows again that his knowledge of Hebrew was not confined exclusively to the biblical idiom or to words that might be found in Judaeo-Hellenic texts, e.g., *Interpretatio Hebraicorum Nominum*. Epiphanius’ inclusion of these names suggests that he knew something of living, contemporaneous Rabbinic Hebrew. One theory suggests that Hebrew did survive into the fourth century as a spoken language and that Jerome learned his Hebrew, in part, through the spoken word.\(^{445}\) Epiphanius might very well have had the same learning experience, but, as mentioned in the prior chapter, the mystery is how he came upon this knowledge.\(^{446}\)

**Epiphanius’ Knowledge of Hebrew Grammar**

As I have already stated, the formal study of Hebrew grammar was not especially

\(^{443}\) Epiphanius, *Panarion* 56.1.


\(^{445}\) Michael Graves, *Jerome’s Hebrew Philology: A Study Based on his Commentary on Jeremiah*, 76-127, esp. 84-85.

\(^{446}\) The only ancient source to address this matter is the sometimes discredited *Vita Sancti Epiphanii*, which suggests that Epiphanius was trained in Hebrew by a Jew. See my remarks in the prior chapter.
well-developed in the fourth century. Despite this, there were still several grammatical principles that ancient Hebraists understood. Among these were: gender, person, number, and tense. Epiphanius of Salamis’ writings give evidence that he understood several of these principles. In the paragraphs that follow, I lay out the Hebrew grammatical knowledge that Epiphanius displayed in his works.

Epiphanius understood Hebrew gender. Remarks in his *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* make this clear:

Concerning the *choinix*. But the *choinix*, also the *hyfi*, is one measure, though called by two names. But it is variously measured among different people. And in the Hebrew language it is used as a masculine, but in the Greek as a feminine.

A similar remark is made concerning the *seah*:

Concerning the *seah*. It is called “seah,” being derived from the Hebrew, and it is used as a feminine; but in Greek it is neither feminine nor masculine, that is, neuter, for we say *saton* and not *satos*.

Hebrew nouns can be either feminine or masculine. It is clear from the foregoing quotations that Epiphanius understood Hebrew gender. Epiphanius rightly observed that although χοῖνιξ is used as a feminine in Greek, χοῖνιξ (Swqynwk) is used as a masculine in Aramaic, which Epiphanius wrongly identified as Hebrew. He rightly observed that the Hebrew word *seah* (נפח) is feminine, but the Greek word σάτον is

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448 Philip S. Alexander, “How Did the Rabbis Learn Hebrew?” 77.


450 Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 21.

neuter. Therefore, it is evident that Epiphanius understood Hebrew gender well enough to make comparisons between it and Greek.

Hebrew nouns are ordinarily pluralized by adding suffixes to singular nouns. The יים (-im) suffix is used to pluralize masculine nouns, and theות (-ot) suffix is used to pluralize feminine nouns. Epiphanius mentioned several nouns that bear Hebrew plural suffixes. Among these are: θωµίµ, µωζανήµ, δεγγήµ. As aforementioned, Epiphanius’ writings do not disclose how he learned the Hebrew astrological terms, but one can use logic to draw some very plausible conclusions. The remarks that Epiphanius made after listing the Hebrew planetary names suggest that he was producing these terms from memory. He wrote, “They have other terms for him too, but I cannot give the names of these things exactly” (παρ’ αὐτοίς καὶ ἄλλοις ὀνόμασιν, οὐκ ἠδυνήθην δὲ ἀκριβῶς τὴν τούτων ἐπωνυμίαν ἐκθέειναί). Since these terms do not appear in the Judaeo-Hellenic reference works that were available to patristic Hebraists, it is likely that Epiphanius learned these terms through his exchanges with Jews or during some formal Hebrew instruction, such as that imagined in the Vita Sancti Epiphanii. If Epiphanius initially encountered these terms through oral transmission, then some praise is due to the orthography that these words receive in the Panarion. The word δεγγήµ, for example, has two gammas suggesting that Epiphanius correctly understood that the word’s Hebrew pronunciation doubles the g sound. Of the three non-singular signs of the zodiac listed by Epiphanius, µωζανήµ (םנַימֹאזְ) is the only one that does not end in –ים (ם-). The orthography of this word might reveal asignificant detail about the level of Epiphanius’

452 Epiphanius, Panarion 16.2.3.

Hebrew attainment, for μωζανήµ is not a plural Hebrew word; rather, it possesses the Hebrew dual ending -ayim. The -ήµ ending seems to be Epiphanius’ way of representing -ayim, the Hebrew dual ending. The dual ending was not infrequent in Rabbinic Hebrew, but the analogous Greek dual ending (e.g.: χώρα, χώραν) was uncommon in the Koiné Greek spoken throughout the Eastern Roman Empire. The use of the ήµ in the orthography of the word suggests that Epiphanius was aware of the Hebrew dual ending and sought to represent it using Greek letters. If indeed Epiphanius was aware of the Hebrew dual ending, it supports the conclusion that his Hebrew learning was more than rudimentary.

Further, the representation of the Hebrew dual ending in the orthography of μωζανήµ suggests that Epiphanius’ had an appreciation for the correct pronunciation of the Hebrew language. As aforementioned, remarks in De Mensuris et Ponderibus also suggest that Epiphanius was attentive to the correct pronunciation of Hebrew and other languages. For example, in regard to the correct pronunciation of modia (µόδια, מידה), he wrote:

In the same way also the Syrians and Arabians say modja, which is pronounced in Hebrew mode; but it is translated from the Hebrew into the Greek as modja, which is the mode.455

In regard to mode (מידה), Dean rightly noted that “there is no such Hebrew term,” but


455 Epiphanius, De Mensuris et Ponderibus 23. Although, their value is dubious, Epiphanius makes other references to the proper vocalization of Hebrew and other languages. See De Mensuris et Ponderibus 26 (Hebrew, Greek), 43 (Hebrew), 52 (Greek), 55 (Latin), 56 (Latin).
Dean does not allow the possibility that *mode* was a non-literary word that Epiphanius might have heard in use among Jews and, consequently, interpreted to be Hebrew.\(^{456}\) Although *mode* might not have been an actual word of Hebrew, Epiphanius’ remark demonstrates that he was concerned with the proper use and pronunciation of words in Hebrew and other languages. This might be reflected in the orthography of μωζανήμ (םִנַּיְמֹאז). Several parts of Epiphanius’ works suggest that he had some knowledge of Hebrew tenses and verb conjugation. In *De Mensuris et Ponderibus*, he correctly gave ἐκέκραξα (“I have cried”) as a translation of the Hebrew καριθί (ךְֹרָיתִי).\(^{457}\) Strictly speaking, this translation suggests that he understood the perfect conjugation of the Hebrew verb, certainly as it pertained to the first person singular of the *qal* (simple) paradigm. Below, I discuss how this passage can be interpreted to demonstrate that Epiphanius had exposure to Rabbinic Hebrew, for the form καριθί (ךְֹרָיתִי) is consistent with the conjugation of the לִשְׁנָי verb in Rabbinic Hebrew.\(^{458}\) Also, it is not an excessive extrapolation to consider this to be general evidence of Epiphanius’ knowledge of the conjugation of the Hebrew verb in the simple perfect. This becomes more evident when one takes into consideration the knowledge of the Hebrew

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\(^{456}\) James Elmer Dean, trans., *Epiphanius’ Treatise on Weights and Measures; The Syriac Version* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 45 n. 274. It seems rather curious that Dean did not allow for the possibility that *mode* was a non-literary word of Hebrew. Martin Sprengling suggested that Epiphanius was receiving bad Hebrew advice by “some rabbi spoofing him.” Dean’s remarks on Low Latin clearly suggest that Epiphanius sometimes preserved non-literary expressions, words that were used but never written. See Dean, *Epiphanius’ Treatise on Weights and Measures; The Syriac Version*, ix, 66 n. 467. Martin Sprengling’s quote appears on page ix of Dean’s *Epiphanius*.

\(^{457}\) The Syriac text of *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* (page 50b) has Ḫִרַטִּא (qryt) as a transliteration of what is presumably the Hebrew יִחָרְאת (“I have cried”), written in Biblical Hebrew as יִחָרְאת.

verb demonstrated in other remarks. For example, although Epiphanius’ translation of קָבָה (Heb.: קָבָה, qaba) maybe incorrect, his remarks reveal that he understood the temporal form of the Hebrew verb that קָבָה should signify. He wrote:

Concerning the cab. The cab, from the same language, is a variable measure. Sometimes it is one-fourth of a modius, sometimes one-fifth, and at other times one-sixth. It nevertheless is a measure, but it is called a cab because the modius is divided into parts; for the Hebrew qava means “he has butchered” or “he has cut up,” and when transferred to the Greek it was called qaba for the sake of clearness.⁴⁵⁹

If one accepts that the Syriac translations “he has butchered” ( всей ) and “he has cut up” ( סכין ) are faithful expressions of the original Greek text, then much can be deduced about Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning from these remarks. Although Dean explains that קָבָה (קָבָה) is “a purely supposititious root so far as the Hebrew is concerned,”Epiphanius’ remarks on קָבָה demonstrate knowledge of the qal third-person masculine singular of the Hebrew perfect verb. His remarks suggest that he understood that when it is in the perfect, the qal third-person masculine singular Hebrew verb takes the form פָּעַל (pa’al).⁴⁶⁰ These examples suggest that Epiphanius’ knowledge of the Hebrew verb was beyond the superficial.

⁴⁵⁹ Epiphanius, De Mensuris et Ponderibus 25.

⁴⁶⁰ Some grammarians prefer to express this as קָטַל (qatal). For related evidence about Epiphanius’ knowledge of the Hebrew verb in the perfect, see Epiphanius’ remarks on פָּרְשָׁה (פרש) in Panarion 16.1.7.
Epiphanius’ Quotation of the Hebrew Bible

Epiphanius’ use of actual Hebrew quotations probably exemplifies his attainments in Hebrew more clearly than any aspect of his extant scholarship. Patristic writers accessed the Sacred Scriptures through translations, and actual quotations from the Hebrew text of the Sacred Scriptures do not occur frequently in patristic texts. The Hebrew quotations that one finds are usually short, often consisting of a name or word. The quotations are often used tentatively. It is not uncommon in patristic texts, for example, to find mentions of ὁ Ἑβραῖος and the like in order to bolster the credibility of claims about Hebrew.461 Origen’s etymological remarks on ἐσσά (woman, πυτίς) exemplify this. He wrote:

Φησὶν ὁ Ἀδὰμ ἐπὶ τῇ γυναικὶ οἰκοδομηθείσῃ ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκ τῆς πλευρᾶς τοῦ ἀνδρός: «Αὔτη κληθήσεται γυνή, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρός αὐτῆς ἐλήφθη.» Φασὶ δὲ οἱ Ἑβραῖοι ἑσσά μὲν καλεῖσθαι τὴν γυναῖκα· δηλοῦσθαι δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς λέξεως τὸ «ἐλαβον,» ὡς δῆλον ἐκ τοῦ· «Χῶς ἴσουωθ ἑσσά,» ὡς ἐρμηνευεται· «Ποτήριον αἰσθησίων λήμμωμαι» «ἰς» δὲ τὸν ἄνδρα, ὡς φανερὸν ἐκ τοῦ· «Εσρὴ αἰς,» ὡς ἐρμηνευεται· «Μακάριος ἀνήρ.» Κατὰ μὲν οὖν Ἑβραίους ἐσσά ἄνδρος, ὁτι ἀπὸ ἰς ἀνδρός αὐτῆς ἐλήφθη αὕτη.

When the woman was made by God from the rib of the man, Adam says, “She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of her husband.” Now the Jews say that the woman was called “Essa,” and that “taken” is a translation of this word as is evident from “chos isouoth essa,” which means, “I have taken the cup of salvation;” and that “is” means “man,” as we see from “Hesre aïs,” which is, “Blessed is the man.” According to the Jews, then, “is” is “man,” and “essa,” “woman,” because she was taken out of her husband (is).462

Although the Hebrew quotation helps to illumine the etymology of ἐσσά, the quoted passage is short, and the phrase Κατὰ μὲν οὖν Ἑβραίους hints at Origen’s dependence

461 Jerome made this assertion in antiquity. See Contra Rufinum 1.13. Also, see my remarks in the second chapter of this work on Origen and the value of referencing a Jewish informant in patristic texts.

462 Origen, Ad Africanum 12; ANF 4, 391.
upon Jewish informants for even this small quotation. Origen’s verbiage also suggests that he had a lack of confidence in his own Hebrew training. Among the Syriac writers who preceded Epiphanius, both Aphraates and Ephrem made use of Hebrew.  

Aphraates commented:

But however, the names of God are many and are venerable, as He delivered His names to Moses, saying to him:— I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. This is My Name for ever, and this is My memorial unto generations. And He called His name Ahiyah ashar Ahiyah, El Shaddai and Adonai Sabaoth. By these namesis God called.

The phrase אַּבְיָה אֲשֶׁר-אַבְיָה ("Ahiyah ashar Ahiyah") is very short, but it is an actual transliteration of Exodus 3.14. Since “Ahiyah ashar Ahiyah” occurs in the Peshitta, it was not difficult for Aphraates to find this Hebrew transliteration. Although Aphraates listed several Hebrew names, it is noteworthy that he provided no explanation of their meanings. This was not uncommon with Hebrew quotations in the time before Epiphanius. Michael Graves explained that Hilary of Poitiers (d. 368) “argued that the

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463 Ephrem Syrus, *Commentary on Genesis* 3: *Fathers of the Church* 91, 76.

464 Aphraates, *Demonstration* 17, 5; *NPNF* Series II 13, 388. *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* gives the transliteration “Ahiyah ashar Ahiyah” for אַּבְיָה אֲשֶׁר-אַבְיָה since it is vocalized thusly in the Syriac text. See *Patrologia Syriaca* 1, 792. The Hebrew of Exodus 3.14, however, is ’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh (יֶהַּיֵּה שֶׁר יֶהַּיֵּה).

465 Exodus 3.14 (Peshitta):

466 Contrast Aphraates’ list of Hebrew names with that of Epiphanius. Epiphanius’ list supplies Hebrew translations of the names, but Aphraates does not do so. See Epiphanius, *Panarion* 40.5.

inherent ambiguity of Hebrew made direct reference to it in his own day essentially useless."^468 A noticeable change in patristic Hebrew scholarship appeared in Epiphanius’ works, beginning in the 370s, for he not only quoted Hebrew but also attempted to explain Hebrew.

Epiphanius is one of the few Greek writers of the latter part of the fourth century who actually gave quotes from the Hebrew text of the Scriptures. His quotations do not always agree with any known Hebrew text, but he did make an actual effort to quote Hebrew. In the paragraphs that follow, I shall provide examples of Epiphanius making reference to the Hebrew text of the Scriptures. Afterwards, I shall explain how his misquotations of Hebrew might actually demonstrate that he possessed some advanced knowledge of the language.

Hebrew quotations appear several times in Epiphanius’ Panarion. Several of these references are to heretical texts, but they are still somewhat revelatory in regard to his Hebrew learning. He wrote concerning Καυλακαῦ:^469

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ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τοῦ Καυλακαῦ τίς τῶν γινωσκόντων οὐκ ἂν καταγελάσειν, ὅτι τὰς Ἑβραϊστικάλῶς εἰρημένας λέξεις καὶ Ἑλληνιστὶ καλῶς ἔρμηνευθέσας καὶ εἰσέστε νῦν παρὰ τοῖς Ἑβραϊστὶ ἀναγνώσκουσιν φανερὰς οὕσας καὶ οὐδὲν σκόλιον ἔχοντας αὐτοὶ εἰσεἰδωλοποιοῦσας τε καὶ εἰς μορφὰς καὶ εἰς ἐνυποστατικὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ ως εἰπειδάνδρινον πλάνην παρὰ τοῖς Ἑβραῖστι ἀναγινώσκοντες, τοῖς ἀφελέσι διὰ φαντασίας τὴν πλάνην ὑποσπείροντες, ἀνατυποῦσιν εἰς τὴν τῆς αἰσχρᾶς μυθώδους τέχνης ύποσποράν; καυλακαῦ γὰρ ἐν τῷ Ἡσαίᾳ γέγραπται, λέξις τις οὕσα ἐν τῇ δωδεκάτῃ ὥρασι, ἐνθα λέγει «θλίψιν ἐπὶ θλίψιν, ἐλπὶς ἐπὶ ἐλπὶς, ἐτί μικρὸν ἐτί μικρὸν προσδέχον;»· ὡς καὶ αὐτὰ τῷ Ἑβραϊκῇ ρήματα τελείοτατα ἐνταῦθα παραθῆταις αὐτάς λέξειν ὡς ἐτίς γεγραμμένα τὸ γὰρ σαυλασαῦ σαυλασαῦ ἔρμηνευεται θλίψεις ἐπὶ θλίψεις, καυλακαῦ καυλακαῦ ἐλπίζει ἐλπίδα, ζητοῦσι ἐτὶ μικρὸν ἐτὶ μικρὸν προσδέχον.
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^468 Michael Graves, Jerome's Hebrew Philology: A Study Based on His Commentary on Jeremiah, 38 n. 87.

^469 Williams defines “Kaulakau” as “the Basilidean name for Christ.” See Frank Williams, The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Book I, 86 n. 18.
Furthermore, how can any knowledgeable person not laugh at Kaulakau? To plant their imposture in the simple by means of something imaginary, they turn the good Hebrew words, correctly rendered in Greek, still clear to those who read Hebrew, and containing nothing obscure, into images, shapes, real principles, practically statuary, for the sowing of their shameful art with its fictitious basis. “Kaulakau,” is in Isaiah, and is an expression in the twelfth vision, where he says, “Await tribulation upon tribulation, hope upon hope, a little more a little more.” I am going to give the Hebrew words themselves here in full, word for word as they are written. “Tsav l’tsav, tsav l’tsav,” means “tribulation upon tribulation.” “Qav l’qav, qav l’qav” means “hope upon hope.” “Z’ei sham, z’ei sham” means, “Await a little more a little more.”

The passage represents an advancement in Christian Hebrew scholarship, for, although Καυλακαῦ appears in the heresiologies of Irenaeus and Hippolytus, neither one of them attempted to explain the meaning of the Hebrew. Epiphanius’ translation exemplified Epiphanius’ willingness to apply his Hebrew learning. This passage also displays a level of confidence that is uncommon in patristic passages that quote or address Hebrew. With the words “any knowledgeable person” (τίς τῶν γινωσκόντων), Epiphanius implied that he is a knowledgeable person. Epiphanius’ translation falls within the range of possible translations that one might apply to the words. The word σαυ (צַו) is Hebrew for precept or commandment. Epiphanius, however, gave θλίψις (tribulation, pressure) as a translation for σαυ (צַו). It is possible that he mistook tsaw (צַו) for a similar sounding word such as צַר (distress). Thus, although Epiphanius’ translation of צַו was incorrect, by mistaking צַו for a similar sounding word, Epiphanius displayed himself to possess a

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470 Epiphanius, Panarion 25.4. Cf. Epiphanius, Panarion 34.20. Καυλακαῦ is drawn from the Hebrew of Isaiah 28.10.

471 Irenaeus, Haer. 1.24.5-6; Hippolytus, Refutation of all Heresies 5.3. Contrast Epiphanius mocking Gnostics for taking “Hebrew phrases for proper names.” See Jacobs, Epiphanius of Cyprus, 147 n. 66.

472 The word צַו can also mean line. See A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, 1865, s.v. צַו.

473 A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (1906), s.v. צַר; Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature (1903), s.v. צַר.
more than rudimentary vocabulary. The other words, however, are translated correctly.

Epiphanius correctly gave ἐλπίς as a translation of the Hebrew word קַו (קַו).

Epiphanius correctly gave μικρόν as a translation of the Hebrew word עיר (עיר).

In today’s world, where Hebrew dictionaries and interlinear Bibles are plenteous, such translations may not seem especially impressive. The philological analysis that Epiphanius offered, however, was remarkable for a fourth-century, Christian Hebraist.

On two occasions in De Mensuris et Ponderibus, Epiphanius’ quoted from the Hebrew text of the Scriptures. In one instance, Epiphanius, defending the dignity of the Septuagint, quoted a verse from Genesis in Hebrew:

There occurs in the first part of Genesis w‘j ‘dm slw ‘ym sn’ wts’ mywt sn’, which is translated, “and Adam lived thirty years and nine hundred years,” as Aquila also agrees. Here the seventy-two translators, being Hebrews and having been carefully instructed from early youth in the language of the Hebrews as well as that of the Greeks, did not merely translate the Hebrew writing into the Greek, but also, translating with insight, they retained the expression that was uttered twice among the Hebrews; but, instead of the word “year” being employed in two places, they used it in but one.

Epiphanius’ correctly matched the Hebrew passage to Aquila’s corresponding translation.

Some degree of Hebrew learning was displayed by merely having the ability to match a

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474 Brown, Driver, Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (1906 [The BDB lexicon]), s.v. קֶו and קו; Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature (1903), s.v. קי.

475 The word עיר (עיר) means little or small, but ורי is the more regular form in Hebrew. See Gesenius, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (1865), s.v. ורי and ורי; Brown, Driver, Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (1906), s.v. ורי and ורי.

476 Epiphanius, De Mensuris et Ponderibus, 2. The quotation is from Genesis 5.5. Cf. Epiphanius, Panarion 65.4. Although it may appear to be nonsensical, the Syriac manuscript has the word שָׁנָה and transliterates the Hebrew in this manner:

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See page 47c of the Syriac manuscript of De Mensuris et Ponderibus in Epiphanius’ Treatise on Weights and Measures; The Syriac Version (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1935).

The actual Hebrew of Genesis 5.5 is:

עֵיֵר מֵאָדָם אַבֶּדָם אָדָם שָׁנָה מֵאָדָם שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה

Hebrew quotation to the literal Greek translation that corresponds to it. Dean, however, explained that the Hebrew presented here by Epiphanius “appears to be a blundering attempt to reconstruct in Greek letters the Hebrew of Gen. 5:5 from which the LXX reading came.” At first, Epiphanius’ “blundering attempt” to reconstruct the Hebrew of Genesis 5.5 does not reflect well upon his Hebrew scholarship. However, later in this chapter, I shall explain how Epiphanius’ blunders actually reveal that, for his time, he actually possessed a rather good grasp on the Hebrew language. Another revelatory quote appears later in *De Mensuris et Ponderibus*. Epiphanius explained:

But that what is said may be clear to you, how marvelously, under the guidance of God and in the harmony of the Holy Spirit, they translated harmoniously and were not at variance with one another, in order that thereby knowing and being assured you may agree with our statement, I shall give you a demonstration of these things by means of a brief quotation. In the one hundred fortieth Psalm it is put in the Hebrew thus: ’dwny ’lk qryjt, sm’ ’yl, ’byt’ ‘qwl, which is, being translated, “O Lord, I have cried unto thee; answer me; consider the voice.” But the Hebrew does not have “of my request.” Behold, then, how lame it is found to be! So the seventy-two translators, when they added “of my request,” made the line unhaling and translated: “O Lord, I have cried unto thee; answer me; consider the voice of my request.” And behold in what beautiful style the psalm is (now) chanted! Understand then, from this very brief statement, the similar things inserted by these translators everywhere in the additions, for the words are well added in explanation and for the advantage of the peoples about to be called to the faith of God and the obtaining of the inheritance of life from the divine words of the Old Testament and the New.

Like the foregoing quote, this quote is made in defense of the dignity of the Septuagint. I take up this matter below, but here I address what this passage conveys about Epiphanius as a Hebraist. In the first place, the same level of confidence reappears in this passage. With no discernible uncertainty, he wrote “it is put in the Hebrew thus” and “but the


Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 6. The Hebrew is from Ps. 141.1.
Hebrew does not have.” Although common in earlier Christian Hebraists, no appeal to the authority of the Jews or a Jewish informant is found in the passage, and I have found no such appeal in any of Epiphanius’ works. Epiphanius correctly matched a Hebrew text to its corresponding Greek translation, and the very act of matching the Hebrew text to its corresponding Greek is a linguistic feat. Epiphanius did similarly in the foregoing example, but here an even greater degree of Hebrew learning is requisite on account of the fact that no word is repeated. In the foregoing quotation, the repetition of year could have supplied a clue. Here, as in the foregoing example, Epiphanius misquoted the Hebrew. Dean was again quite critical of the quotation. He wrote that this quotation “seems itself to be a blundering attempt to reconstruct in Greek letters the Hebrew original of Ps. 141:1.” I concur with Dean’s suspicions in both instances. However, this “blundering attempt,” like the foregoing misquotation, provides another approach to the estimation of Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning. This I shall address forthwith.

**Epiphanius’ Misquotation of Hebrew**

As described above, Epiphanius brought forth two misquoted Hebrew verses in defense of the integrity of the Septuagint, one from Psalm 141.1 and one from Genesis 5.5. In both cases, it appears that Epiphanius made a “blundering attempt” to reconstruct the Hebrew. The verses, however, suggest that for his age, Epiphanius had good knowledge of the Hebrew language, for the very act of approximating a

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479 In chapter 30 of the Panarion, there is a description of what is known as the Joseph of Tiberius episode, a description of Epiphanius’ dealings with a learned Jew named Joseph. It is clear from the description that this occurred many years before the writing of the Panarion. The description suggests that religion and the Hebrew language were discussed. However, there is little or nothing there to suggest that Joseph was Epiphanius’ Hebraist. See Epiphanius, Panarion 30, esp. 4. I address this more generally below.

480 Transliterated in the Syriac manuscript as ܐܢܣ, a representation of the Hebrew שָׁנָה.

481 James Elmer Dean, trans., Epiphanius’ Treatise on Weights and Measures; The Syriac Version, 21 n. 44.
verse of biblical Hebrew demands a good knowledge of the Hebrew idiom. I shall address Epiphanius’ attempt to quote Psalm 141.1. Since it has already been quoted, I give here the surviving Greek text, the Syriac text, and a parallel transliteration of the Syriac into Hebrew characters:

אודונא אלך קרהתי שמיעי אביי אבריה אכל

Some remarks might bring clarity to the Hebrew text that Epiphanius was trying to convey. The Syriac text has אביטא, but it is clear that אביטא is meant (קריתי, I have cried). On account of the fact that the Greek alphabet has no distinct letter for the exclusive representation of either shin or ‘ayin, the Syriac text uses אילי as a transliteration of איום, but it is clear that אيلي (שמע אלי, hear me) is the Hebrew phrase that is meant. The Syriac text has אקול, but it is more likely that אקול ( UIImage) is meant. The use of a final א (א) would not have made sense in Syriac orthography which uses the א (א) for the expression of the final a sound. Taking these things into account, Mercati offered the following reconstruction of what Epiphanius meant to convey as Psalm 141.1:

O LORD, I have cried to thee. Listen to me. Consider the voice.482

Epiphanius’ rendering of the Psalm does not correspond to the Hebrew text of the Psalm as preserved in the Masoretic text. The Masoretic text of the Psalm is:

O LORD, I call to you; come quickly to me. Hear my voice when I call to you.\textsuperscript{483}

The differences are clear. Although Epiphanius’ did not quote the Psalm exactly as it appears in the Hebrew, his misquotation of Psalm 141.1 did display some advanced knowledge of Hebrew, for it is unlikely that one possessing a merely rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew could have made the mistakes that Epiphanius made in quoting the verse. Jewish tradition, for example, called for the use of Adonai (דֹנָי) as a substitute for the Tetragrammaton. Epiphanius’ inclusion of אֲדֹנָי in place of the Tetragrammaton that appears in Psalm 141.1 clearly indicates that Epiphanius was familiar with traditional Jewish reverence for the Tetragrammaton. The phrase יָשָׁה (“unto thee I have cried”) is clearly an analytical approximation of the synthetic construction יָשָׁה (I have called thee”). The verb כָּרַת (ךָרַת, יָשָׁה)\textsuperscript{484} also demonstrates that Epiphanius’ knowledge of Hebrew grammar was not entirely dependent upon comparisons to Syriac, for the Aramaic first person singular perfect form of qr’ would have been qrēt.\textsuperscript{485} The form כָּרַת, however, is clearly modeled after Hebrew. The phrase יָשָׁה (“make haste unto me”) is not represented in Epiphanius’ transliteration. However, Epiphanius did offer יָשָׁה (lit.: “listen to me” or “hear me”), which can be interpreted as an approximation of יָשָׁה (“listen” or “give ear”). The

\textsuperscript{483} NIV Psalm 141.1.

\textsuperscript{484} It is of great value that this vocalization is preserved in the Greek, for the Syriac text is unvocalized and would not have allowed for the present remarks.

expression הַמַּכְלָה (lit.: “consider the voice” or “look to the voice”), which approximates the phrase יִקְוֵה יִנְהָה ("give ear unto my voice"). Thus, if one accepts that Epiphanius’ transliteration of the Psalm was a mental reconstruction and not a genuine presentation from a Hebrew manuscript, then the quotation can be seen as evidence that Epiphanius understood Hebrew well enough to reconstruct a biblical verse, to approximate a biblical verse based on a faulty memory of it, or even to add his own interpretation of the intent of the passage. Such a reconstruction or approximation could not be effected by one who merely possessed a rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew.

Although there is some value in Mercati’s reconstruction of Epiphanius’ version of Psalm 141.1, I do not fully agree with the reconstruction or with his interpretation of the significance of Epiphanius’ version of Psalm 141.1. The Syriac manuscript of De Mensuris et Ponderibus has יָלָני which Mercati represents as יָלָנ (to me). It is more likely that יָלָנ represents the Hebrew יָלָנ (to me), for when the Hebrew word יָלָנ is intended in the manuscript it is represented by יָלָנ. A far more significant problem with Mercati’s reconstruction of Epiphanius’ version of Psalm 141.1 is Mercati’s use of קָרָאת (qarathi, καριθί, qarithi) to represent יִתְקָר (τυρχ, καριθί, qarithi). Neither the Greek text nor the Syriac text of De Mensuris et Ponderibus has יִתְקָר. Each text has יִתְקָר (τυρχ, καριθί, qarithi), and this is significant. Although יִתְקָר is not the conjugation of קָרָא that one expects to find in Biblical Hebrew, the spelling יִתְקָר is consistent with how יִתְקָר verbs were often conjugated in Rabbinic Hebrew. Epiphanius was a contemporary of the Amoraim and

486 See page 70c of the Syriac manuscript of De Mensuris et Ponderibus in Epiphanius’ Treatise on Weights and Measures; The Syriac Version.
had contacts with Jews. The imaginative *Vita Sancti Epiphanii* relates that Epiphanius received Hebrew instruction from a Jew, and some of Epiphanius’ remarks suggest that he had exposure to spoken Hebrew.\(^{487}\) If indeed Epiphanius had formal instruction in Hebrew, it is likely that he would have followed some of the trends found in spoken Hebrew, such as conjugating לֵא verbs as one does לֵה verbs. Although the appearance of יְּיָהָ does not absolutely demonstrate that Epiphanius reconstructed Psalm 141.1, it is certainly not injurious to the hypothesis.

I will now draw attention to Mercati’s interpretation of the significance of Epiphanius’ quotation of Psalm 141.1, an interpretation that Dummer appeared to favor. Mercati suggested that Epiphanius’ quotation of the Hebrew of Psalm 141.1 preserved a genuine version of the Psalm that differed from the Masoretic version. Mercati wrote:

> S. Epifanio, ragionando sotto un diverso aspetto e per tutt’altroscopo, oppose l’Ebraico di Ps. 140 (141) 1 ai LXX per inferirne la perfezione di questi: noi, concedendo ben volontieri la migliore conservazione del loro originale, siamo grati a lui d’avercene almeno in parte conservato il tenore sì notevolmente diverso dal masoretico con interesse e vantaggio non lieve della critica d’entrambi i testi.\(^{488}\)

Neither Elliott nor Dean saw this as an important textual variant preserved by the hand of Epiphanius.\(^{489}\) Although the possibility that Epiphanius did preserve a genuine textual variant cannot by dismissed in full, it seems more likely to me that Epiphanius made a poor approximation of the Psalm from memory or reworked from a Greek text, a theory suggested in Elliott’s analysis of Epiphanius. It also seems more likely that

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\(^{487}\) Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 2 (“found among the Hebrews”), 23 (“called among the Hebrews”). Also, see my earlier remarks on mode (חפץ).

\(^{488}\) G. Mercati, “Sul testo ebraico del Salmo 140 (141),” in *Note di Letteratura Biblica, Studi e Testi* 5 (1901): 8-16, esp. 16.

Epiphanius simply had a poor copy of the Psalms. The poor quality of the reconstruction and its Rabbinic features, however, make it difficult to accept Mercati’s opinion.

**Epiphanius’ Difficulty in Distinguishing Hebrew from Aramaic**

Although the foregoing support the claim that Epiphanius knew Hebrew, it is evident that Epiphanius’ use of the language in his scholarship was sometimes clumsy and confused. In the prior chapter, I drew attention to Epiphanius’ ability to distinguish between Hebrew and Aramaic. Epiphanius, for example, correctly gave ḫṣāθ as the Hebrew word for fire, while noting that νοῦρα is the Aramaic word. Although this is a clear indication of Epiphanius’ capacity to distinguish between Aramaic and Hebrew, Epiphanius did not always perfectly distinguish between the two languages. In his *Ancoratus*, for example, Epiphanius incorrectly regarded βάρ as a Hebrew word. He wrote:

> ὁ γὰρ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ Ἰωνᾶς ἐκάλειτο, τὸ δὲ βάρ ἑρμηνεύεται ἐκ τῆς Ἑβραϊκῆς διαλέκτου νιὸς.

For his father was called Jonah, and the “bar” is translated from the Hebrew language as “son.”

The Hebrew word for son is *ben* (בֵּן). The Aramaic word for son is *bar* (בַּר). Although Ἑβραϊστί does occasionally carry this meaning in Hebrew texts, such a use is a borrowing from Aramaic. In fairness to Epiphanius, the Gospel of John, to which he refers, uses the term Ἑβραῖστι in reference to Aramaic. Epiphanius’ remarks on γάζα displayed a similar confusion of Hebrew with Aramaic. He wrote:

> καὶ ἦν ἐκεῖσε γαζοφυλακίον τις οἶκος ἐσφραγισμένος· γάζα δὲ ἑρμηνεύεται κατὰ τὴν Ἐβραῖδα θησαυρός.

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Now there was a “gazophylacium” there which was sealed—“gaza” means “treasure” in Hebrew.\(^{491}\)

Here he mistook \(\gamma\acute{\alpha}\zeta\alpha\) for a Hebrew word. The word \(\gamma\acute{\alpha}\zeta\alpha\) (treasure) is found in Greek and Aramaic (\(\gamma\acute{\alpha}\zeta\alpha\)), but it probably “goes back to Median ganza.”\(^{492}\) A similar-sounding term, \(\tau\gamma\zeta\) (genez), is found in the Hebrew Bible. Although it is conceivable that Epiphanius confused the words on account of the similarity of their sounds, the preponderance of the evidence suggests that Epiphanius was not careful in appealing to vernacular Aramaic in order to find cognates and similar-sounding words for the explication of Hebrew. The technique of appealing to vernacular Aramaic in order to explain Hebrew words did not originate with Epiphanius,\(^{493}\) but Epiphanius used it extensively. His use of the technique, however, often produced inaccurate results.

In 392, at the request of Bardion, “a certain venerable priest” dwelling at Constantinople,\(^{494}\) Epiphanius produced the treatise *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* for the education of “whoever wishes to have an understanding of the terms most frequently employed in the divine Scriptures . . . the measures and weights and an understanding of other things.”\(^{495}\) The fact that such a treatise was requested of Epiphanius testifies to his reputation as a man of erudition. Although the treatise does contain a few significant and correct uses of Hebrew, Epiphanius’ use of Hebrew in the treatise ordinarily displays a

\(^{491}\) Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30.6.7.

\(^{492}\) *Comparative Dictionary of Ge’ez (Classical Ethiopic): Ge’ez-English, English-Ge’ez, with an Index of the Semitic Roots* (1987), s.v. \(\gamma\acute{\alpha}\zeta\alpha\).


\(^{494}\) Dean, trans., *Epiphanius’ Treatise on Weights and Measures; The Syriac Version*, 11.

\(^{495}\) Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 1.
formidable Aramaic influence. On account of Epiphanius’ confusion of Hebrew and Aramaic, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* has no small number of erroneous statements about Hebrew. In one part of *De Mensuris et Ponderibus*, for example, Epiphanius mistook בַּד (בַּד), an Aramaic word, for a Hebrew word. He wrote:

ירוק

Concerning the *bath*. The *bath*, so called, is also from the Hebrew language, the oil press being synonymously called *bîth*, for *bath* is interpreted “oil press.”⁴⁹⁶ Epiphanius erred in his remarks, for Dean noted that “the Aramaic בַּד means oil press.”⁴⁹⁷ However, the Hebrew word for oil press is נְדָה. Epiphanius committed a similar error in his remarks on כּוּזָא (כּוּזָא). He wrote:

ירוק

Concerning the *chus*. The *chus* is taken from the Hebrew term that is pronounced *kuza*.⁴⁹⁸ Dean, citing Jastrow, related that כּוּזָא (כּוּזָא) is “clearly Aramaic.” Jastrow listed כּוּזָא as an Aramaic word meaning “wine pitcher, jug.”⁴⁹⁹ Throughout his publication, Dean noted Aramaic words, phrases, and etymologies that Epiphanius mistakenly referenced as

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⁴⁹⁶ Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 21.


⁴⁹⁸ Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 43.

⁴⁹⁹ *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (1903), s.v. כּוּזָא.
Hebrew, including: bath, sekel, and kor.\textsuperscript{500} Although it is clear that Epiphanius had some degree of Hebrew learning, errors such as these do not reflect well on his mastery of Hebrew.

\textbf{Epiphanius' Indebtedness to Informants and Judaeo-Hellenic Literature}

Having described the positive and negative aspects of Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning, it will now be useful to address the belief asserted in some prior scholarship that Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship owed a debt to Jewish informants, learned Jews who supplied him with Hebrew knowledge in the manner that other Christian scholars had been supplied.\textsuperscript{501}

It is evident that Epiphanius consulted Judaeo-Hellenic, pseudepigraphal, and patristic texts.\textsuperscript{502} However, I do not believe that his Hebrew scholarship was greatly indebted to them, for he diverges from and adds to their scholarship on several occasions.\textsuperscript{503} Moreover, one possessing a more than rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew, such as Epiphanius, would not need to rely on the sparse Hebrew references found in such texts. Nevertheless, as I have explained, Epiphanius had read some of these authors. Among the Judaeo-Hellenic and patristic authors that Epiphanius consulted were: Philo Judaeus, Pseudo-Philo, Josephus, Aquila, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Eusebius of Caesarea.\textsuperscript{504} It

\textsuperscript{500} James Elmer Dean, trans., \textit{Epiphanius’ Treatise on Weights and Measures; The Syriac Version} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1935), 40 n. 235 (bath); 64 n. 458 (sekel). A similar error is Epiphanius’ confusion of \textsuperscript{א}ככ (\textit{acak}) with \textsuperscript{אככ} (\textit{acak}). See \textit{De Gemmis} 8 (Coptic).

\textsuperscript{501} James Elmer Dean, trans., \textit{Epiphanius’ Treatise on Weights and Measures; The Syriac Version}, ix; Pourkier, \textit{L’hérésiologie chez Epiphane de Salamine}, 470.

\textsuperscript{502} Frank Williams, \textit{The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis}, Book I, xxv-xxvii.

\textsuperscript{503} Please see my earlier remarks in which I describe several instances of Epiphanius adding to or diverging from prior Hebrew scholarship. See, for example, Epiphanius, \textit{Panarion} 19.1.3 (Essenes), 19.2.1 (Elxai).

\textsuperscript{504} Epiphanius \textit{Panarion} 24.8.1 (Irenaeus), 29.5.1 (Philo); \textit{De Mensuris et Ponderibus} 56 (Eusebius of Caesarea), 74 (Josephus).
must also be said that Epiphanius made an extensive study of the works of Origen. Although Epiphanius was especially fond of the pseudepigraphal work Jubilees and drew extrabiblical folklore from it. Although Epiphanius did not disclose what Hebrew knowledge he drew from these works, it may be possible to link some of his philological remarks to them. The real debt that Epiphanius owed to these authors and their opera did not primarily lie in scattered etymologies of Hebrew words. What Epiphanius probably learned from writers like Origen and Eusebius was how to include Hebrew scholarship in one’s writings. The references to Hebrew in Origen must have shown Epiphanius that there was a need to expound upon the Hebrew names found in Scripture, and it is imaginable that Irenaeus’ works showed Epiphanius the utility of demystifying the Hebrew of Gnostics.

As mentioned above, prior scholarship has included speculation that Epiphanius was indebted to Jewish informants for his Hebrew learning. Although it is clear that Epiphanius drew some of his knowledge about the Jewish religion from his exchanges with Jews, I have found little reason to believe that Jewish informants supplied his Hebrew knowledge. Epiphanius began his literary career late in his life. His most polished work, Ancoratus, was written in 374, and his largest work the Panarion was

505 Rufinus, Epilogue to Pamphilus; NPNF Series II 3, 426.

506 Epiphanius, Panarion 39.6.1.

507 Jubilees, for example, probably influenced Epiphanius’ etymology of Serug. See Epiphanius, Panarion 3.3.4; Jubilees 11.6. Since Epiphanius had done extensive reading in the works of Origen, it is possible that Epiphanius’ definition of ebion (יהו) as poor was influenced by the earlier definition of the word given by Origen. See Origen, DePrincipiis 4.1.22; Epiphanius, Panarion 30.17.1.

508 I do not refer to the imagined νομοδιδάσκαλος who taught him Hebrew during his youth. See V. Epiph. 4-5.
written between 374 and 377. \[^{509}\] These works were composed on the island of Cyprus where Epiphanius had been a bishop since 367. There is no evidence that Epiphanius was accompanied by a retinue of Jewish informants when he assumed the bishopric of Cyprus. His works make no mention of any Jewish informant analogous to Ἰούλλος or ὁ Ἑβραῖος mentioned in the works of Origen. \[^{510}\] Moreover, on account of the second-century Roman massacre of Cypriot Jews, there are questions about the robustness of Cyprus’ Jewish population during Epiphanius’ episcopate (367-ca. 403). The Jewish Encyclopedia reports:

Under the leadership of one Artemion, the Cyprian Jews participated in the great uprising against the Romans under Trajan (117), and they are reported to have massacred 240,000 Greeks (Dio Cassius, lxviii. 32). This insurrection was finally quelled after considerable bloodshed (perhaps by Q. Marcius Turbo, who suppressed the uprising in Cyrene and Egypt), with the result that the Jews of Cyprus were almost entirely extirpated. The blood of the Jews slaughtered in Palestine is said to have streamed as far as Cyprus (Lam. R. i. 16, iv. 19); that is, the insurrection and the consequent slaughter of the Jews extended to Cyprus. In further punishment a severe law was enacted, according to which no Jew was thereafter to be permitted to land on Cyprian soil, not even in case of shipwreck; nevertheless Jewish residents were still to be found upon the island at a later period; and the products of the soil, to which Talmudists frequently refer (for instance, the “cumin” of Cyprus, Yer. Dem. ii. 1), were probably brought into the market by them. So rapidly did the Jews multiply that in610 they were sufficiently numerous to participate in the insurrection against the Greeks under Heraclius. \[^{511}\]

Considering the foregoing account, there are reasons to doubt that Epiphanius was relying on the Jewish population of Cyprus for his Hebrew scholarship.

It seems more sensible to think that Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship, undoubtedly...


\[^{510}\] PG 12, 1056.

\[^{511}\] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906 ed., s.v. “Cyprus.”
imperfect in quality, was the result of several processes, including his occasionally vague recollections or his carelessness in citation. As mentioned, Epiphanius, like his predecessors, drew Hebrew learning from the Septuagint and other Judaeo-Hellenic texts. At some point during his years in Palestine, Epiphanius might have actually heard Hebrew and received some training in the language. He certainly seems to have drawn upon years of Scriptural study and similarities between Aramaic and Hebrew to work out his remarks on the Hebrew language. I believe that this is a more sensible hypothesis than the suspicion that Epiphanius’ imperfect Hebrew was supplied by Jewish informants.

Epiphanius and Hebraica Veritas

It is not unreasonable to wonder why Epiphanius, a possessor of some degree of Hebrew learning, did not make a more extensive use of Hebrew. Why are Epiphanius’ appeals to the Hebrew text significantly fewer than those of Jerome? Epiphanius’ beliefs about hebraica veritas supply some answers to such questions.

Epiphanius did not subscribe to the concept known as hebraica veritas, and this is unmistakably one significant and formidable difference between the Hebrew scholarship of Jerome and Epiphanius. As aforementioned, hebraica veritas is the belief that the Hebrew text of the Scriptures contains the authoritative truth. The works of Eusebius of Emesa (ca. 300-ca. 359) contain the earliest expression of this belief. Jerome was probably antiquity’s most vociferous proponent of the theory, and he believed that the

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512 Epiphanius makes numerous admissions of forgetfulness. See Epiphanius, Panarion 27.6.4; 30.4.3. Williams, 88 n. 1, 104 n 2; 70 n. 500. 2. Epiphanius even experienced forgetfulness with his Hebrew knowledge. See Pan. 16.2.3.

Septuagint erred in several places.\textsuperscript{514} Epiphanius did not entertain any views that disparaged the dignity of the Septuagint. He regarded it as a divinely inspired translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the equal of the Hebrew text. Describing the miraculous manner in which the Septuagint was produced by seventy-two translators under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he wrote:

For while they were seventy-two in number and on the Pharian island, but called Anoge, opposite Alexandria, they were in thirty-six cells, two in each cell. From morning to evening they were shut up, and in the evening they would cross over in thirty-six small boats and go again to the palace of Ptolemy Philadelphus and dine with him. And each pair slept in (one of) thirty-six bedchambers, so that they might not talk with one another, but might produce an unadulterated translation. Thus they conducted themselves. For, having constructed the thirty-six cells already mentioned, over on the island, and formed them into pairs, Ptolemy shut them up in them two by two, as I have said. And with them he shut up two youths to minister to them in preparing food and (in other) service, and also skilled scribes. Moreover, he had made no opening into these cells through the walls, but in the roof above he opened what are called roof windows. But while thus abiding from morning to evening shut in by locks, they were translating as follows. To every pair one book was given. That is to say, the book of the Genesis of the World to one pair, the Exodus of the Israelites to another pair, that of Leviticus to another, and the next book in order to the next; and thus were translated the twenty-seven recognized canonical books, but twenty-two when counted according to the letters of the alphabet of the Hebrews. . . . They were given to every pair of translators in rotation, and again from the first pair to the second, and from the second pair to the third; and thus they went, every one going around. And they were translated thirty-six times, as the story goes, both the twenty-two and the seventy-two that are apocryphal. . . . And when they were completed, the king sat on a lofty throne; and thirty-six readers also sat below, holding thirty-six duplicates of each book, and one had a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures. Each reader read alone, and the others kept watch. No disagreement was found, but it was such an amazing work of God that it was recognized that these men possessed the gift of the Holy Spirit, because they agreed in translation.\textsuperscript{515}

Thus, for Epiphanius, the Septuagint was just as inspired as the Hebrew Scriptures.

Epiphanius revealed little interest in appealing to the Hebrew Scriptures for clarity and

\textsuperscript{514} Jerome, \textit{Preface to Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim}; \textit{PL} 23, 936; \textit{NPNF} Series II 6, 486.

\textsuperscript{515} Epiphanius, \textit{De Mensuris et Ponderibus} 3, 5-6. The \textit{Letter of Aristeas} is the source of the tale.
expressed disdain for making a show of Hebrew learning.\textsuperscript{516} Epiphanius expressed exasperation towards Aquila’s literal translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, suggesting that it did not sound as beautiful as the Septuagint.\textsuperscript{517} Epiphanius had the same low regard for the two other translators, Symmachus and Theodotion. He wrote:

Now you become the judge, O great lover of the good, of such a matter as this, whether the truth is more likely to be found with these three—I mean Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion—who, moreover, were not together, but were remote from one another in both time and place; and there were not many, but only three, and yet they were unable to agree with one another. Or (was the truth) with the seventy-two, who were the first to translate, were at the same time, and were divided into thirty-six groups, according to the command of the king?\textsuperscript{518}

Epiphanius’ high regard for the Septuagint is wholly clear, and I believe that it explains, at least in part, why Epiphanius’ works on Hebrew scholarship and quotations from the Hebrew text are significantly fewer than those of Jerome.\textsuperscript{519}

**Conclusion of Chapter Four**

In this chapter, I have analyzed the Hebrew scholarship of Epiphanius of Salamis. Although his Hebrew scholarship was far from perfect, Epiphanius understood the Hebrew alphabet, some Hebrew grammar, and possessed a comparatively impressive Hebrew vocabulary. Epiphanius approached Hebrew with a level of confidence that was uncommon in patristic writing, for many of Epiphanius’ predecessors bolstered their Hebrew claims by ascribing them to a Jewish informant. Epiphanius did not mention Jewish informants for the purpose of bolstering his claims about Hebrew.

\textsuperscript{516} Epiphanius, *Panarion* 42.12.3 elenchus 13 and 21.

\textsuperscript{517} Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 2 and 6.

\textsuperscript{518} Epiphanius, *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 17.

\textsuperscript{519} Let it be understood that Epiphanius’ use of Hebrew was less than that of Jerome. However, although he included just a handful of quotations from the Hebrew text, Epiphanius’ use of Hebrew was significantly more ample than most other patristic writers, for their use of Hebrew texts, as aforesaid, was relatively infrequent. See my Chap. 2.
Epiphanius’ attained a level of Hebrew learning that enabled him to analyze Hebrew texts on his own, and it is possible that he was able to approximate verses from the Hebrew Bible. It would indeed be a blemish on Epiphanius’ scholarship if he deliberately used his own reconstructions of Scripture in place of the actual Hebrew text, but Epiphanius’ misquotations reveal that he did not possess a merely superficial knowledge of the language. Although he did draw some Hebrew learning from Judaeo-Hellenic texts, it appears that Epiphanius’ used Aramaic to develop many of his Hebrew etymologies, and there is no shortage of examples of Epiphanius’ mistakenly assigning Aramaic meanings to Hebrew words. This was a major flaw of Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship. However, Epiphanius did get things right sometimes. Moreover, his intentions were benign, for he endeavored to demystify the Hebrew of Gnostics and clarify the Scriptures for his coreligionists. In general, it may be said with some degree of confidence that Epiphanius of Salamis’ Hebrew scholarship was a step above much that preceded it in patristic literature.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

In my doctoral thesis, I have demonstrated that although some ancient Christians did know the Hebrew language, knowledge of Hebrew was rare among the patristic writers. Jerome (ca. 340-420) was one of the few patristic writers who made a serious attempt at learning the Hebrew language, and his reputation is well-known. Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 315-ca. 403), a friend and older contemporary of Jerome, also made a serious study of the Hebrew language. Although Epiphanius was not as careful or prolific in his Hebrew scholarship as Jerome, he did learn the language beyond its elementary stages. Since I have touched upon many subjects in this work, a digest of my research will be useful to the reader. Therefore, I shall concentrate the most salient arguments of my doctoral thesis in this concluding chapter.

Prior Scholarship on Hebrew Learning in Ancient Christianity

There have been prior investigations into the Hebrew scholarship of ancient Christians, but my study differs from these in several important ways. The space that I have given to describing the historical context in which ancient Christian Hebrew scholarship was conducted is possibly the most significant difference. Prior investigations of the Hebrew learning of the Church Fathers tended to be inattentive to the context in which the Church Fathers conducted their Hebrew studies. In *The Critical Historian*, G. Kitson Clark referred to context as “perhaps the most important principle of historical scholarship.” Clark explained:

> It is necessary when considering any historical evidence to take account of the situation at the moment in time when the event it records happened,

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520 Although I prefer the term “patristic writers,” I occasionally replace it with the term “Church Fathers.”
and also at the moment when it was recorded. To neglect the context of historical evidence is to misunderstand its meaning.521

Having such a principle in mind when I began this research, it was rather disappointing to me that several important studies of patristic Hebrew scholarship did not adequately describe or appreciate the difficult historical circumstances in which ancient Christian Hebraists labored.522 The Christian Hebraists of Late Antiquity took up the study of Hebrew in an era before the appearance of Hebrew grammars and dictionaries.523 Working under such a disadvantage, the Christian Hebraists of Late Antiquity showed themselves to be resourceful by culling whatever Hebrew knowledge they could from the Septuagint, Judaean-Hellenic texts, and by consulting Jewish informants. Naturally, their disadvantageous circumstances contributed to the usually poor quality of their Hebrew scholarship. However, when one considers the extenuating circumstances in which they labored, their occasional successes attain a degree of splendor. It was the Christian Hebraists of antiquity, after all, who directed the production of the Peshitta, the Hexapla, and the Vulgate. Christian Hebraists improved and expanded the _Interpretatio Hebraicorum Nominum_ for the purpose of biblical interpretation. Among the many words


522 I mainly refer in this instance to the publications of Elliott and Dummer. Both Elliott and Dummer make negative assessments of patristic Hebrew scholarship, but they do little to draw attention to how difficult it was to conduct Hebrew scholarship. Moreover, neither of them does much to draw attention to the successes of the Christian Hebraists. I address their claims below.

523 Shimeon Brisman explained that Rabbi Saadia Gaon (882-942) compiled “the first dictionary of the Hebrew language—the _Egron_.” See Shimeon Brisman, _A History and Guide to Judaic Dictionaries and Concordances_, Volume 3, Part 1 (Hoboken: KTAV Pub. House, 2000), 3-5. The formal study of Hebrew grammar and lexicography can be traced back to medieval Jewish scholars known as the Masoretes and the subsequent efforts of scholars such as Saadia Gaon, Menachem bin Saruq (910-970), and David Kimhi (1160-1235). See E.Y. Kutscher, _A History of the Hebrew Language_ (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1982), 158-159; Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, _An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax_ (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 32-34.
of these scholars, one can find some of the earliest assertions of the nexus between Hebrew and Punic.\textsuperscript{524} Such a link was not formally made in the West until the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. In the second chapter of this work, I have provided a narrative that outlines this context in which the patristic writers labored before the Epiphanius and Jerome conducted their Hebrew scholarship. I close the second chapter of my doctoral thesis by pointing out that, despite their shortcomings, the Hebrew scholarship of Epiphanius and Jerome was a step above that of most of those who preceded them.

Earlier studies of Christian Hebrew scholarship by C.J. Elliott and Jürgen Dummer are especially relevant to the present study on account of their assessments of the Hebrew learning of Epiphanius of Salamis. I shall put forth my disagreements with them in the following remarks.

Although I do not fully concur with its approach, C.J. Elliott’s 1880 article, “Hebrew Learning among the Fathers,” does relate many important details about the Hebrew learning of the Church Fathers. It is deservedly cited as an authority more than one hundred years after its initial appearance.\textsuperscript{525} This not only testifies to the quality of Elliott’s research but also to the lack of general investigations into the Hebrew learning of the patristic writers. There are, however, significant differences between my study and Elliott’s study. Firstly, there are stylistic differences between the two works. I have composed a broad analytical narrative of Hebrew scholarship in ancient Christianity, but Elliott’s article is skeletal, giving insufficient details about the context in which

\textsuperscript{524} Augustine, \textit{Sermon} 63.2.

Christians conducted Hebrew scholarship in Late Antiquity. Elliott principally focused on Greek patrology, but my study is duly attentive to Christian Hebrew learning in Arabia, Roman North Africa, and Ethiopia.

Elliott's assessments of the Hebrew learning of the Fathers were occasionally too negative. This was especially true in regard to his remarks on Ephrem Syrus (d. 373) and Epiphanius. Like his contemporary Philip Schaff, Elliott cast doubt upon the Hebrew learning of Ephrem Syrus:

> If any inference respecting Ephrem's knowledge of Hebrew may be drawn from the Greek works which are ascribed to him, that inference would be of an unfavorable character, as will appear from the following instances . . . .

Elliott then cited sections of the Greek translations of Ephrem's works that reflected poorly on his Hebrew learning. He followed that by making a few references to Ephrem's Syriac works that showed his knowledge of the Hebrew text was of a poor quality. Interestingly, the citations reflected more on Ephrem's knowledge of the Hebrew text than his actual knowledge of the Hebrew language. Elliott terminated his remarks by saying:

> Upon the whole, it is clear that if Ephrem was able to consult the Hebrew text, he made but little use of the knowledge which he possessed, and that he relied mainly on the Peshito in his Syriac writings.

Krauss, however, has cited several instances in which Ephrem did quote from the Hebrew text. If Elliott had compared the frequency of Hebrew in Ephrem's writings to its

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frequency in his contemporaries, he would have found the regularity of Ephrem's citations of the Hebrew text to compare favorably to that of his contemporaries.\textsuperscript{529} Elliott’s lack of appreciation for the frequency of Hebrew in Ephrem’s works in comparison to his contemporaries is an example of the inattentiveness to context found in prior studies of patristic Hebrew to which I have already referred. In regard to those instances in which Ephrem's Hebrew scholarship is accurate, Elliott suggested that Ephrem “probably obtained his information from Jewish sources.” Contrariwise, Krauss pointed out that the correctness of his Hebrew citations would have necessitated more than a rudimentary familiarity with the structure of the language.\textsuperscript{530} Thus, although it is possible that Ephrem “obtained his information from Jewish sources,” it is reasonable to think that he himself possessed some degree of familiarity with Hebrew in order to use it with the proficiency that Krauss described.

Of course, Elliott's somewhat negative assessment of Epiphanius’ Hebrew has been at the center of my disagreements with his opinions. Elliott’s stated that Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning “was not of a critical character,” but he did not apply a similar criticism to Jerome’s Hebrew scholarship which has no small number of errors.\textsuperscript{531} Moreover,


\textsuperscript{529}Hebrew does not appear with regularity in the works of Aphraates (4\textsuperscript{th} Cent.). When it occurs, it seems to be drawn from Hebrew phrases left in the Peshitta by its translators. Moreover, the absence of an analysis of the Hebrew in Aphraates’ works suggests that he did not understand the language. Another Syrian, Eusebius of Emesa (fl. ca. 360), did not know Hebrew, despite his strong admiration for the Hebrew text. See R.B. ter Haar Romeny, \textit{A Syrian in Greek Dress: The use of Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac Biblical Texts in Eusebius of Emesa's Commentary on Genesis} (Lovanii: In Aedibus Peeters, 1997), 167.


\textsuperscript{531}Although Epiphanius’ attempt at translating an Elkasite saying in \textit{Panarion} 19.4 was unsuccessful, it demonstrated that he possessed some familiarity with the morphology of Hebrew. Concerning Epiphanius’ attempt at translating the Elkasite saying, Goranson said, “His Hebrew version of backwards Aramaic is
Elliott’s assessment of Epiphanius’ Hebrew learning showed a lack of appreciation for the context in which Epiphanius’ conducted his Hebrew scholarship. I have taken a more equanimous approach to Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship by showing an appreciation for the difficult times in which it was conducted, showing that although it was imperfect, it compared favorably to that of its contemporaries and predecessors. Elliott’s article also contains at least one factual error that is relevant to the analysis of Epiphanius’ Hebrew. In particular, Elliott suggested that Syriac was Epiphanius’ native language. There is, however, no ancient source that claims that his native tongue was Syriac. The current work, therefore, serves as a corrective to some of Elliott’s claims.

In his article, “Die Sprachkenntnisse des Epiphanius,” Jürgen Dummer’s essayed to investigate Epiphanius’ knowledge of languages. The article has exerted some degree of influence on opinions about Epiphanius’ Hebrew, but it has several weaknesses, including an excessive and contradictory skepticism about Epiphanius’ Hebrew knowledge. I am not the first to be critical of the findings of Dummer. In his dissertation, Goranson characterized Dummer’s study and an earlier study by Gressman as doubly wrong, but it takes some Hebrew— and no shyness— to make such an attempt at it. (Irenaeus didn't try.) We should notice that not until 1858 was a solution published, and even then only after a backwards Arabic reading had been published! See Stephen Craft Goranson, “The Joseph of Tiberias Episode in Epiphanius: Studies in Jewish and Christian Relations” (diss.: Duke University, 1990), 32-33. Moreover, the distinction that Epiphanius makes between the Syriac word for fire, νοῦρα, and the Hebrew word for fire, ḫeľal, demonstrated that he did possess some critical knowledge of the Hebrew lexicon. See Panarion 26.1. There are several other examples of this. I address these matters in chapter three.

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533 Epiphanius’ works do not reveal his native idiom. Jerome, Socrates, and Sozomen, his principal ancient biographers, say nothing about his native tongue. Goranson expressed doubt that Syriac was Epiphanius’ native language. He wrote, “Several studies, e.g. Lieu, Epiphanius and Elliott, Hebrew, consider that Syriac may have his native language (sic); this seems unlikely.” See Goranson, “The Joseph of Tiberias Episode in Epiphanius: Studies in Jewish and Christian Relations,” 31-33. In chapter two, I address this issue in greater detail.
“collections of his linguistic errors” and suggested a more favorable opinion of Epiphanius’ Hebrew.\footnote{Goranson, “The Joseph of Tiberias Episode in Epiphanius: Studies in Jewish and Christian Relations,” 31-33. Several decades before Dummer offered his assessment of Epiphanius’ linguistic abilities, Gressman offered a similarly negative assessment of Epiphanius’ knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic. See Hugo Gressman, “Judisch-Aramaisches bei Epiphanius,” in Zeitschrift für die neuestestamentliche Wissenschaft 16 (1915): 191-197.} I shall begin to lay out my disagreements with Dummer’s study by pointing out a contradiction in his study. On the one hand, Dummer concludes that a true assessment of whether Epiphanius knew Hebrew is “unmöglich” (impossible),\footnote{Dummer’s article has several pages in which he traces Epiphanius’ Hebrew to places in Frederick Field’s Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875), a reconstruction of Origen’s Hexapla. Dummer reasoned that since Epiphanius’ drew Hebrew words and quotations from the Hexapla, it is “unmöglich” (impossible) to confirm that Epiphanius knew Hebrew. The full statement is: “Für das Hebräische ist eine Entscheidung insofern unmöglich, als möglicherweise alle Angaben über den hebräischen Text des Alten Testamentes aus der Hexapla des Origenes stammen.” See Jürgen Dummer, “Die Sprachkenntnisse des Epiphanius,” in Die Araber in der alten Welt, eds. Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968), 5:1, 434.} but despite this, he introduces speculation that Jerome exaggerated the Hebrew learning of Epiphanius in order to “allow his informant, Epiphanius, to appear more educated to respective opponents” (seinen Gewährsmann Epiphanius gegenüber den jeweiligen Gegnern als den gebildeteren erscheinen zu lassen).\footnote{Ibid. Jerome credits Epiphanius with the knowledge of five languages: “et papa Epiphanius, πεντάγλωττος, quia quinque linguis contra te et amasium tuum [Origenem] loguitur.” In the same work, Jerome gives a list of languages known by Epiphanius: “Crimini ei dandum est quare Graecam, Syram, et Hebraeam et Aegyptiacam linguam, ex parte et Latinam noverit?” See Jerome, Contra Rufinum 2.22, 3.6.} Thus, according to Dummer’s speculation, Jerome’s attribution of polyglottism to Epiphanius was an exaggeration aimed at advancing his attack against Rufinus of Aquileia (345-410), a rival. Speculation can sometimes be valuable, but it must be pointed out that no ancient source confirms Dummer’s speculation that Jerome exaggerated Epiphanius’ linguistic knowledge for polemical purposes. Furthermore, Dummer’s account is unfairly omissive, for it does not mention other ancient sources that also suggest that Epiphanius was learned in languages. Rufinus of Aquilea, for example, was no admirer of Epiphanius, but he made remarks
that suggested that Epiphanius was learned in languages.\textsuperscript{537} The \textit{Vita Sancti Epiphanii} is also is another ancient source that suggests that Epiphanius’ was a polyglot. It specifically attributes Hebrew learning to Epiphanius.\textsuperscript{538} Moreover, the Syriac version of \textit{De Mensuris et Ponderibus}, the most complete version of that work, contains numerous references that suggest that Epiphanius was learned in languages, references that are not preserved in the Greek text of the work. Dummer, however, did not refer to the Syriac text of \textit{De Mensuris et Ponderibus}.\textsuperscript{539} Dummer did not give consideration to these sources in his article. In fact, despite having an impressive list of the Hebrew references in Epiphanius’ works,\textsuperscript{540} Dummer’s investigation of Epiphanius’ knowledge of languages was not exhaustive, for several of Epiphanius’ works preserved in translations were not examined by Dummer.\textsuperscript{541} The impression, therefore, that Dummer presents of Epiphanius’ reputation for languages is incomplete and unnecessarily unfavorable.

Since the consultation of hexaplaric texts was commonplace in the Christian Hebrew scholarship of antiquity, it is perplexing that Dummer gave so much space to demonstrating that Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship was dependent upon the Hexapla of

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\textsuperscript{537} Rufinus, \textit{De Adulteratione Librorum Origenis}; \textit{PG} 17, 631; \textit{NPNF} II 3, 426.

\textsuperscript{538} \textit{V. Epiph.} 4-5; \textit{PG} 41, 28-29.

\textsuperscript{539} It is clear that Dummer was aware of the Syriac text, but he did not weigh it in his judgment. See Dummer, “Die Sprachkenntnisse des Epiphanius,” 403 n. 15.

\textsuperscript{540} Dummer, “Die Sprachkenntnisse des Epiphanius,” 400-402.

\textsuperscript{541} I refer to publications such as \textit{Epiphanius’ Treatise on Weights and Measures; The Syriac Version} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1935) and \textit{Epiphanius De Gemmis; The Old Georgian Version and the Fragments of the Armenian Version} (London: Christophers, 1934). The consideration of these sources would probably not have altered the negative conclusion that Dummer reached about Epiphanius’ knowledge of languages. It is, however, valuable to point out that he did not weigh all of the available Epiphanian texts.
Consulting the Tetrapla or the Hexapla was commonplace among the Christian Hebraists of Late Antiquity. For example, Eusebius of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, and Theodoret consulted the Tetrapla or the Hexapla. It is, therefore, disappointing that Dummer gave so much space to listing the hexaplaric sources of Epiphanius’ Hebrew but gave little attention to analyzing the actual Hebrew used by Epiphanius in his writings. If Dummer had focused on the correctness of Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship, he might have noticed that the very acts of quoting Hebrew in transliteration and matching the Hebrew text to its corresponding Greek translation required Epiphanius to have a level of Hebrew knowledge that extended beyond the mere rudiments of the language. Moreover, if Dummer had attempted a more comparative analysis, he might have concluded that Epiphanius’ imperfect knowledge of Hebrew compared favorably to that of his contemporaries and predecessors on account of the rarity of sound Hebrew knowledge among the Church Fathers. My study, of course, gives

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542 Alexander points out that the Aramaic Targumim would have been used for Hebrew instruction among Jews in Palestine, and he suggests that Aquila’s translation might have been used for a similar purpose among Greek-speaking Jews. If this is true, then it is not difficult to understand why Epiphanius might have consulted the Hexapla with its many aids to understanding the Hebrew. Thus, Dummer’s concern about Epiphanius’ dependency on the Hexapla is unnecessary. See Philip S. Alexander, “How Did the Rabbis Learn Hebrew?” in Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda, ed. William Horbury (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 81, 83.


544 In Panarion 65.4.5, Epiphanius quotes some of the Hebrew text of Psalm 109 (110).3. Epiphanius also explains the meanings of the individual Hebrew words (רֶחֶם, שַׁחַר) of the quote in a way that must have required some knowledge of the Hebrew language. Dummer cited the Hexapla as the source of the quote but neglected to analyze the quality of Epiphanius’ remarks about the individual Hebrew words. This failure to analyze the actual Hebrew used by Epiphanius is a major weakness of Dummer’s article. See Dummer, “Die Sprachkenntnisse des Epiphanius,” 401. I give due attention to Epiphanius’ Hebrew vocabulary in chapter four of this doctoral thesis.
due attention to the context in which Epiphanius operated and provides an alternative to Dummer’s skeptical interpretation of Epiphanean texts.\textsuperscript{545}

**Hebrew in the Time of Jesus and the Apostles**

In the second chapter of my doctoral thesis, I lay out a description of Christian Hebrew study in the time of and before Epiphanius in order to provide the proper context within which to analyze Epiphanius’ Hebrew scholarship. I shall now describe the state of the Hebrew language in the Roman Empire and then the Hebrew learning of Christians from the time of Jesus and the Apostles to the fourth century.

By the time of the historian Polybius (c. 203 BCE–c.120 BCE), the Latin language of the early Roman Republic (founded c. 510 BCE) was barely intelligible. When speaking about the first treaty between the Romans and the Carthaginians (508 BCE),\textsuperscript{546} Polybius related:

\[\text{γίνονται τοιγαρούν συνθῆκαι Ῥωµαίοις καὶ Καρχηδονίοις πρῶται κατὰ Λευκίου Ἰούνιον Βρούτου καὶ Μάρκου Ωράτιου, τοὺς πρῶτους κατασταθέντας ὑπάτους μετὰ τὴν τῶν βασιλέων κατάλυσιν, ύψ’ ὄν συνέβη καθεροθήναι καὶ τὸ τοῦ Δίως ιερὸν τοῦ Καπετωλίου. ταῦτα δ’ ἐστὶ πρῶτα τῆς Ξέρξου διαβάσεως εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα τριάκοντ’ ἔστιν δυεῖν δύσειν. ἂς καθ’ ὅσον ἦν δυνατόν ἀκριβέστατα διερµηνεύσαντες ἥμεῖς υπογεγράφαμεν. τηλικαύτη γάρ}\]


Although it is evident that the Hebrew of the Torah (5th cent. BCE and earlier) was not nearly as unintelligible to Jews of the Roman Empire as archaic Latin was to the Romans, it is clear that both Latin and Hebrew had undergone diachronic changes that rendered the older forms of the languages difficult to understand. Just as a degree of scholarship was requisite for the interpretation of archaic Latin texts, a degree of scholarship was necessary for the interpretation of texts written in Biblical Hebrew. In the Talmud, Rabbi Jonathan (fl. 2nd and 3rd century CE) states, “The Torah uses its own language and the Sages their own” (לשון תורה ולשון חכמים ולשון תורה ולשון חכמים), an acknowledgment of the fact that the Hebrew language had changed. Indeed by the time of the Amoraim and the Church Fathers, Aramaic had largely replaced Hebrew as the everyday spoken language of the Jews of the Roman Empire. The few remaining Jews who used Hebrew for daily communication spoke a form of Hebrew that was significantly different from the literary

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548 *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (2003), s.v. “Bible Formation and Canon.” The exact date of the completion of the Torah has been the subject of some debate. The *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* suggests that the Torah was recognized “by the fifth century B.C.,” and I provide this date simply as an aid to chronological clarity.

549 See Alexander, “How Did the Rabbis Learn Hebrew?” 71-89.

Hebrew of the Sacred Scriptures. Schniedewind explained that Hebrew was revived as a literary language and gave voice to the political and religious aspirations of Jewish groups in the Hellenistic period. Still, the progressive shift from Hebrew toward Aramaic was not halted by the ebb and flow of Jewish autonomy in the Persian through Roman periods. By the third century C.E., the language shift from Hebrew to Aramaic was complete (as a result of the Roman displacement of Hebrew-speaking villages), and Hebrew essentially disappeared as a vernacular language in Roman Palestine. Even as Hebrew was receding as a vernacular and written language, it was also being preserved as an icon of political legitimacy and national identity, as a liturgical language, and as a sacred tongue.  

Philip S. Alexander pointed out that the problem for the Rabbis was “how to acquire a mastery of Hebrew, a literary language no longer spoken.” In order to prepare themselves for the reading of the Hebrew Scriptures, Jewish men underwent years of training in the Hebrew language. No formal grammars existed, and Alexander suggested that their training was accomplished through the use of rote memorization and translations. Still, they possessed some understanding of grammatical principles. There was, for example, some discourse on the grammatical form known as locative *heh* (יה) that one sometimes finds in the texts composed in Biblical Hebrew:

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552 Alexander, “How Did the Rabbis Learn Hebrew?” 76.

553 Alexander, “How Did the Rabbis Learn Hebrew?” 80-81.
SEDOMAH (TO SODOM).

It was taught in R. Nehemiah’s name: When a word requires a lamed as a prefix you add heh as a suffix [instead], e.g. SEDOMAH (TO SODOM), se’irah (to Seir), mtzraimah (to Egypt), haranah (to Haran). An objection was raised: Yet it is written, The wicked shall return lisheolah to the netherworld (Ps. ix, i8). Said R. Abba b. Zabda: That means to the nethermost compartment of hell. ¹⁵⁵⁴

This intellectual exchange on one of Hebrew’s morphological features gives some indication of how the grammatical principles of the Hebrew language were acquired through years of study. The appearance of translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, e.g. the Targums, is further evidence of how increasingly challenging it must have been for Jews to understand the Holy Scriptures in their original tongue. An appreciation of this historical setting fosters a greater appreciation for the challenges that the Church Fathers had to overcome in their studies of Hebrew, for clearly if Hebrew had to be studied by Jews over the course of several years, it must have presented considerable difficulty to Christian learners who ordinarily had no access to the Hebrew classes in which Jews did their learning.

Having discussed the state of the Hebrew language at the time of early Christianity, I shall now describe the Hebrew learning of Christians from the time of Jesus and the

¹⁵⁵⁴ Genesis Rabbah 50.3. Cf. Mekhiltah 16.1.3A-3B: R. Nehemiah says: “. . . to Succoth . . .” (Exod. 12:37). Whenever you need to place a lamed at the beginning [of the word], place [instead] a heh at its end!”

Rabbinic literature contains remarks on some aspects of the Hebrew language, giving some indication of the approach that Jewish scholars used to study the language: Genesis Rabbah 1.11 (a mnemonic on the Hebrew script); Genesis Rabbah 13.12 (explanation of Hebrew words for “land”); Talmud, Pesachim 93b (discussion of the meaning of the uncommon word פִּכּוֹנַה [megaddef]); Talmud, Keritot 7b (a longer discussion of the meaning of פִּכּוֹנַה; Pesikta de Rav Kahana, Piska 12.24 (discussion of the meaning of יִכְוָנָא). The pronoun יִכְוָנָא (אֲנָפַחֵי) was a feature of archaic Hebrew whose relatives can be found in Phoenician (אֲנָפַחֵי) and more distantly in Coptic (אֲנָפַחֵי). The word however was infrequent in Late Biblical Hebrew and Rabbinic Hebrew. The discussion of יִכְוָנָא in Pesikta de-Rab Kahana, Piska 12.24, therefore, is especially enlightening, for it reveals how archaic Hebrew words could be the subject of uncertainty. See William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, Pesikta de-Rab Kahana (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975), 247 n. 76; B. Barry Levy, Fixing God's Torah: The Accuracy of the Hebrew Bible Text in Jewish Law (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 70.
Apostles to the fourth century. There are reasons to believe that Jesus understood the Hebrew language. In Luke 4.16-22, for example, one finds that after “having unrolled the scroll” (ἀναπτύξας τὸ βιβλίον), Jesus “found the place” (εὗρε τὸν τόπον). Since the Scriptures were in Hebrew, it is not unreasonable to think that the verse implies that Jesus understood Hebrew. In addition, there are several theories that suggest that Hebrew was the vernacular of Palestinian Jews during Jesus’ time. Although it is generally agreed that Aramaic was the vernacular of Palestine in Jesus’ time, theories suggesting that he was a native Hebrew speaker still appear.

There are reasons to think that some of Jesus’ disciples knew Hebrew. The play on words contained in Matthew 1.21 suggests that its author knew Hebrew. The link implied between Ἰησοῦς and σώσει does not work in Greek. It makes sense, however, in Hebrew, for יֵשׁוּעַ (Jesus) and יָשָׁו (he shall save) are etymologically and phonically linked. Paul’s letters have some references that appear to be based on the Hebrew text and not the Septuagint. The same has been suggested for the Epistle of Jude. There are remarks in patristic texts which comment on the language of Jesus’ disciples. Some texts suggest that the language was Aramaic, others suggest that it was Hebrew. It is, however, difficult to ascribe great significance to them since they were written so long after the events that they describe. Thus, there is evidence suggesting that knowledge

557 For example, First Corinthians 15.47, Romans 5.19b. See remarks on Romans 5.19b in Shiu-Lun Shum, Paul’s use of Isaiah in Romans: A Comparative Study of Paul’s Letter to the Romans and the Sibylline and Qumran Sectarian Texts (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 176, 197.
559 The History of Philip, The Apostle and Evangelist: The translation is from William Wright, Apocryphal
of Hebrew was preserved among Christians in the generations that immediately followed Jesus’ crucifixion.

The Peshitta

I have suggested that Jewish Christians learned in Hebrew had a hand in the creation of the Peshitta during the second century. It is agreed that the Peshitta was translated by Jews, but there are some who reason that Jewish Christians played some role in its creation. 560 Certainly Christians were the ones who preserved it, for it has no historical association with Judaism. 561 In Panarion 29, Epiphanius discussed the Nazoreans (Ναζωραῖοι), a Judaeo-Christian sect of Palestine and Syria, and offered the following remark:

They are perfectly versed in the Hebrew language, for the entire Law, the prophets, and the so-called Writings—I mean the poetic books, Kings, Chronicles, Esther and all the rest—are read in Hebrew among

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them, as of course they are among the Jews. (5) They are different from Jews, and different from Christians, only in the following ways. They disagree with Jews because of their belief in Christ; but they are not in accord with Christians because they are still fettered by the Law...  

Based on this and similar references in the Talmud and the works of Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260-ca. 340) and Jerome, I have suggested that persons learned in Hebrew were present in eastern Christendom from the time of Jesus into the fourth or fifth century, and the Peshitta is one of the great products of their learning.

**The Patristic Writers and Hebrew**

Patristic writers from the second and third centuries possessed no significant familiarity with the Hebrew language. Patristic writers of that period ordinarily accessed the Sacred Scriptures through translations, e.g., the Septuagint, the Afra, and the Peshitta. Disputes with Jews and Gnostics and intellectual curiosity, especially concerning the meanings of the names in the Sacred Scriptures, inspired them to pursue the study of Hebrew. Lacking those tools such as grammars and glossaries and instructors, Christian Hebraists needed to be resourceful, and one finds a multifaceted approach to the study of Hebrew in the writings of the Church Fathers. The literal translation of Aquila (fl. 2nd

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562 Epiphanius, *Panarion* 29.7.4.


564 These Christians learned in Hebrew contributed to the creation of the Peshitta, but they remain anonymous. Although it is tempting to see the influence of these anonymous Christian scholars in the works of Ephrem and other eastern writers who employed Hebrew, it is difficult to find written corroboration for such a hypothesis.
cent.) gave Christian writers a closer knowledge of the Hebrew text. By collating the Hebrew text and its translations in his *Hexapla*, Origen centralized both the priority of the Hebrew text and the importance of having accurate translations of it. Origen also searched (“mined”) Judaeo-Hellenic texts for Hebrew meanings and Jewish folklore, a resourceful practice that introduced many Hebrew meanings into subsequent patristic texts. Still, despite this sensibility, patristic texts from the second and third century do not contain significant Hebrew quotations from the Sacred Scriptures. The quotations that do appear tend to be short or tenuously offered, i.e., attributed to a Jewish informant.

Indeed, when patristic writers of the period introduced Hebrew knowledge, it tended to come from etymologies given in the Septuagint, Jewish informants, or Judaeo-Hellenic texts.

In Nicene and Post-Nicene patristic writers, one sees the earliest appearance of the *hebraica veritas* concept, the belief in the authoritative truth of the Hebrew Scriptures. This concept makes its first appearance in the writings of Eusebius of Emesa (ca. 300-ca. 359), and there is a discernible link between Origen and the Emesene. Romeny reported that Eusebius of Caesarea “was the mediator of Origen’s ideas, which can more clearly be

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565 It might have performed a similarly didactic function among Jews. See Alexander, “How Did the Rabbis Learn Hebrew?” 80-81.

566 *The Book of Hebrew Names (Interpretatio Hebraicorum Nominum)*, falsely attributed to Philo, was especially highly regarded by patristic writers of the second and third centuries as a source of Hebrew etymologies. Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Jerome spoke highly of it: Origen, *Genesis Homilies* 12.4, *Homilies on Numbers* 20.25.3.4; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.18; Jerome, *Preface to the Book on Hebrew Names*.

567 Origen, *Ad Africanum* 12.

568 For example: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 113; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.24.2; Origen, *Homilies on Numbers* 30.3.
shown to have influenced Eusebius of Emesa.569 Eusebius of Emesa believed that the Hebrew text possessed an authority that surpassed that of the Septuagint. Moreover, he believed that the Septuagint was a flawed text. In the writings of Jerome, which began to appear a generation after Eusebius of Emesa, the *hebraica veritas* concept received its greatest ancient promoter.

Several patristic writers of the early fourth century also supported Hebrew study, and some supplied technical manuals to promote the advancement of Hebrew learning among Christians. These include Lactantius (ca. 240-ca. 320) and Eusebius of Caesarea. Lactantius did not know Hebrew but recognized the value of Hebrew study and wrote critically about the Septuagint years before Eusebius of Emesa and Jerome.570 Although his Hebrew knowledge was limited, Eusebius of Caesarea applied what he did know about the Hebrew language and the Hebrew Bible to produce several works that equipped Christians with the tools necessary for a clearer knowledge of Hebrew words and geographical locations contained in the Hebrew Bible.571 The writings of these figures reveal the growing demand among some fourth-century Christian scholars to know more about the Hebrew language and the Hebrew Bible. This demand was one of several forces that compelled Epiphanius and Jerome to compose technical works dealing with the Hebrew Bible and the Hebrew language later in the century.

In chapter two, I explain that “the scholarly works of Epiphanius and Jerome display major advancements in early Christian Hebrew study.” Imperfections appear in the


570 Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 4.7.

571 Eusebius’ *Onomasticon* and *Praeparatio Evangelica* were in part given to such purposes.
Hebrew scholarship of both Epiphanius and Jerome, but their works contain full Hebrew quotations from the Holy Scriptures and confident analyses of those quotations. This represents a significant departure from the cautious and occasionally uncertain use of Hebrew that appeared in many of the patristic works that preceded them.

Although he was one of the best known Christian figures of his time, numerous questions still surround Epiphanius, especially in regard to his early years. Scholars agree that he was of Palestinian origin, received some Greek instruction during a sojourn in Egypt, returned to Palestine where he founded a monastery through which he gained a reputation as a defender of Nicene Orthodoxy. In 367, Epiphanius was elevated to the position of bishop of Constantia (Salamis) on the island of Cyprus, where he presided until his expiration in 403.\textsuperscript{572} His writings make it clear that Epiphanius was the recipient of Hebrew instruction, but standard ancient biographical sources do not disclose whence he received such instruction. An ancient romantic account of his life attributes his Hebrew knowledge to instruction that he received from a learned Jew.\textsuperscript{573} Its account is not implausible and deserves some consideration, for it does provide clarification concerning the origin of Epiphanius’ Hebrew knowledge.

Indeed, Epiphanius was often less than careful with his scholarship. In \textit{Panarion} 26.5, for example, Epiphanius mistakenly classifies a verse from Revelations as an apocryphal text.\textsuperscript{574} In \textit{De Mensuris et Ponderibus} 16, Epiphanius gives an incorrect sequence of the Roman emperors and claims that Caracalla was also called Geta. In \textit{Panarion} 64, he

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{572} Sozomen, \textit{Historia Ecclesiastica} 6.32.3.
\item \textsuperscript{573} \textit{Vita Sancti Epiphanii} 4-5.
\item \textsuperscript{574} Frank Williams, trans., \textit{The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis}, Vol. 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2009), 94 n. 25.
\end{itemize}
offers an account of the life of Origen that does not jibe with any other ancient account, a poor reflection on the scholarship of one who expressed support for the utter destruction of Origen’s heresy “from under heaven together with that Amalek himself.” The exact cause of Epiphanius’ errors is unknown, but they might have been the result of senectitude or forgetfulness or carelessness. Williams suggested that Epiphanius dictated many of his works with apparently little regard for style or proofreading. Thus, there is no shortage of errors in his works. At other times, Epiphanius was not a careful Hebraist, but I have brought forth evidence that makes it difficult to maintain the position that he was untrained in Hebrew. When one considers Epiphanius’ Hebrew quotations, especially his misquotation of the Hebrew of Psalm 141.1, it is difficult to deny that he possessed knowledge of Hebrew that was more than superficial. The Hebrew of Psalm 141.1 has ירְאֶתָה, a synthetic construction. Epiphanius, however, replaced this with the analytical formulation יתְקָרֶא לֹא א. One who merely dabbled in Hebrew could not have reconstructed the Psalm in that manner. Therefore, Epiphanius’ incorrect quotation of the Psalm makes his scholarship look bad, but it enables the

575 Jerome, Letter 91; NPNF Series II 6, 185. Williams suggests that Epiphanius’ account of Origen’s life may be based on “oral tradition.” See Frank Williams, trans., The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Vol. 1, 153 n. 1. In any case, its divergence from the traditional ancient account is unmistakable and is not a good reflection on Epiphanius’ scholarship. See Epiphanius, Panarion 64.

576 In the 390s, Jerome described Epiphanius as being in “his extreme old age.” See Jerome, De viris illustribus 114.

577 Frank Williams, trans., The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Vol. 1, xii, xiv.


579 The Syriac text has כְּבָר.
modern analyst to conclude that his Hebrew learning encompassed more than just the basics. Epiphanius’ analysis of Psalm 109 (110) in Panarion 65.4.5 gives further evidence that his Hebrew training must have extended beyond the mere rudiments of the language, meaning he could understand some Hebrew grammar and morphology, not just a few words.

**Hebrew Learning in North African Patrology**

The behavior of North African writers throughout the patristic age is an intriguing subject, and I have dedicated some space in the second chapter to the analysis of their writings. Although some might have had knowledge of Hebrew’s sister, Neo-Punic, they rarely applied their knowledge of Punic to the exegesis of Scripture. For example, although it is probable that Cyprian (200-258), Tertullian (160-220), and Lactantius were of Punic ancestry, they do not make reference to Punic in their writings. I have hypothesized that societal prejudices and the pressure of maintaining good Latinity might have motivated North African patristic writers to limit their exegetical use of Punic. Augustine (354-430), however, did refer to the Punic language and make perspicacious statements linking Punic and Hebrew. Jerome made similar remarks around the same time. Augustine’s remarks demonstrate the potentially great use to which Punic might have been applied during the patristic age but was not on account of literary expectations and other mitigating factors.

One learned Latin writer, of course, devoted considerable energy to Hebrew scholarship. Naturally, I speak of Jerome. His numerous writings on the Hebrew language exerted a formidable impact on the study of Hebrew among Latin speakers in the centuries that followed him. I have suggested that the great difference between
Jerome and Epiphanius rests in their attitudes towards the Septuagint. Jerome was unmistakably critical of the Septuagint, drawing attention to its flaws in several of his writings.\textsuperscript{580} Epiphanius, on the other hand, believed that the Septuagint was a divinely inspired translation, free from any blemish.\textsuperscript{581} Their different attitudes affected their scholarship. Believing that the Septuagint was flawed, Jerome made it his business to produce a Latin translation of the Scriptures based on the Hebrew text. This was, of course, the Vulgate. Epiphanius did compose a treatise, \textit{De Mensuris et Ponderibus}, dealing with miscellaneous technical aspects of the Holy Writ and containing numerous references to the Hebrew language. Throughout that treatise, however, Epiphanius apologized for and promoted the dignity of the Septuagint.\textsuperscript{582} I have suggested that Epiphanius’ satisfaction with the Septuagint might explain why he did not refer to the Hebrew text of the Scriptures with greater regularity. Although Epiphanius’ works ordinarily contain more analyses and quotations of actual Hebrew than those of his contemporaries and predecessors, his works contain significantly fewer appeals to Hebrew than those of Jerome. I reason that since he did not regard the Hebrew Bible to be more sublime than the Septuagint, Epiphanius did not feel the need to refer to it as regularly as Jerome.

This investigation has drawn fresh attention to an important aspect of Christian antiquity, the Hebrew learning of the Church Fathers. Before this study, the authoritative investigation of the subject quoted in most scholarship was an article by C.J. Elliott that

\textsuperscript{580} Jerome, \textit{Preface to Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim}.

\textsuperscript{581} Epiphanius, \textit{De Mensuris et Ponderibus} 3, 5-6.

\textsuperscript{582} Epiphanius, \textit{De Mensuris et Ponderibus} 16.
appeared in 1880. That article will continue to be an authority on this subject, for it covers Jerome and Bede and several later authors that were outside of the scope of this study. It is my hope that this research will join Elliott’s article and others like it as an aid to future investigators wanting to know about Hebrew scholarship in ancient Christianity.
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