

Summaries

Yuval Vadee

Wě'ātā mēribēbōt qōdeš mîmînô 'ēšdāt lāmô (Deut 33:2): A New Contextual Interpretation

The article treats the last two strophes of the difficult verse in Deut 33:2. After reviewing the broad spectrum of opinions regarding their interpretation, it suggests a new one based on reasoned use of parallelism. This proposal identifies penta-colon synonymous parallelism marked by the consistent appearance of the prefix *mem* at the beginning of a toponym in each hemistich. The double appearance of *lāmô* leads to dividing the parallelism into two parts, each arranged in a chiastic structure, and together they form a closed circle. In light of the structure the author claims that *'ēšdāt* is a verb that denotes revelation, like the other verbs in the previous hemistichs, and this conclusion is reinforced by examining the root of the verb. In light of the parallelism the author also claims that the meaning of *ribēbōt* is mountains and *qōdeš* should be *qādeš*. Another claim regards the word *mîmînô*, which does not mean “south”, but is rather the name of a mountain.

Moshe Bar-Asher

To What Extent Is Mishnaic Hebrew a Literary Language?

One of the primary questions in the research of Mishnaic Hebrew is “to what extent is Mishnaic Hebrew a literary language?” There is no doubt that tannaitic literature is written in a dialect that was spoken, but in this paper I would like to investigate the extent to which it was also literary. In other words, which features of this dialect do *not* belong to the spoken language and should therefore be seen as literary elements?

A full answer to the question posed would require thorough study of all tannaitic works – the Mishnah, the halakhic midrashim, and the Tosefta. As an initial effort to address this issue, I limit my inquiry to the Mishnah alone; the language of the Mishnah has already been more studied than that of other tannaitic works.

When I speak of literary elements in the Mishnah, I have in mind three components embedded in it by the authors/editors of the Mishnah, which were not part of the spoken language (what is usually meant by “Mishnaic Hebrew”): (1) vocabulary that was not part of spoken language but which was for its needs embedded in phrases that were otherwise formulated in the spoken dialect; (2) atypical grammatical features that are found in the Mishnah itself from the moment of its composition; and (3) expressions that contain distinctive stylistic features, such as the piling up of synonyms or near-synonyms often found in the Mishnah. I provide a brief example of each type.

1. Vocabulary

The Mishnah incorporates the biblical word *be-ḥippazon* into its discussion of the difference between the paschal sacrifice in Egypt and the commandment for succeeding generations: We read in the Mishnah, “the taking of the paschal lamb in Egypt was on the tenth [of Nisan] and it requires sprinkling by hyssop on the lintel and the two doorposts; it is eaten in haste (*be-ḥippazon*)” (Exod 12:11) (Pesah. 9:5).

2. Grammar

As expected, mishnaic formulations use Rabbinic Hebrew grammar, which differs in many and varied details from Biblical Hebrew. As opposed to the lexical sphere, from which many biblical elements are incorporated into the Mishnah, biblical grammatical features are rare in the Mishnah. Thus, although the directional ending *-āh* has disappeared from Mishnaic Hebrew, it appears in the Mishnah’s mention of the four cardinal directions, as in *mizrāḥah* (Tamid 2:4), among others.

3. Style

The study of style requires attention not only to the content but also to the form of a phrase. In particular, when a formulation goes beyond what is needed purely for the content, this is a stylistic matter. These, too, are

literary elements in the text; thus the question “to what extent is Mishnaic Hebrew a literary language?” must address these as well.

I cite one example: an element of liturgical style that is woven into the Mishnah, namely, expressions that pile up multiple synonyms, often found in fragments of prayers or blessings in tannaitic literature. Witness the passage in Pesah. 10:5: “Therefore we are obligated to thank (לְהוֹדוֹת) and to praise (לְהַלֵּל) and to extol (לְשַׁבַּח) and to glorify (לְפַאֵר) and to exalt (לְרוֹיֵם) and to magnify (לְגַדֵּל) the One who performed all these miracles for us and our ancestors”. Of the six verbs here, five (excluding “to thank”) are virtually synonymous. In terms of content, one verb (“to praise”) would have sufficed; the addition of the other four is a stylistic matter.

Again, there is no doubt that, like the body of tannaitic literature, grammatically and lexically the Mishnah fundamentally reflects a spoken dialect of Hebrew. The composers of this literature, however, also had in their possession an authoritative body of literature: the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible. All tannaitic texts are closely connected to biblical literature; it is therefore not surprising that this literature is reflected in the texts formulated by the rabbis themselves, borrowing from it lexical and grammatical elements as well as stylistic features.

Yuval Weiss

The Masoretic Comments about *Ta‘ama Kadma* and *Ta‘ama Tinyana* in the Story of Reuben and Bilhah

The story of Reuben and Bilhah (Gen 35:22) is unusually accentuated by two systems, similar to the Ten Commandments. In both cases the masoretic comments term the two accentuation systems *kadma* and *tinyana*, Aramaic words meaning first and second. According to Breuer, this terminology means that the accentuation system termed *kadma* preceded the other one chronologically.

Investigation of a variety of medieval manuscripts casts doubt on this understanding. Masoretic comments found in thirty manuscripts indicate disagreement about which of the accentuation systems is termed *kadma*. Is it reasonable to assume that the Masoretes disagree about historical

facts? Moreover, another disagreement that arises concerns the order of the accents, whenever two accents are to be marked in the same place. In similar cases, as for the Ten Commandments, the masoretic vocalizers always use the same order; here both orders are found.

I suggest that the two disagreements are related, and that *kadma* means the accent marked first. This literal meaning accords better with the common goal of the masoretic comments, which is conservation of the sacred text and symbols, not indication of historical facts. This suggestion is also in line with the findings in the manuscripts, although the limited amount of data prevents arriving at definitive conclusions.

Meirav (Tubul) Kahana

Yes–No and Multiple-Choice Questions in the Mishnah

‘Yes–no’ questions have two-answer options, which are mutually exclusive choices. Multiple-choice questions, on the other hand, expect the choice of one answer from several options. The article offers a review of these question types as they appear in the Mishnah, from several aspects: syntactic – examining the question words and question structures; semantic and pragmatic – examining the purpose of the question in the discourse; and contextual – study of the entire discourse in which the question is embedded. The research shows that most of the ‘yes–no’ questions are found in halakhic discourse, mainly in the context of negotiations between sages, and that some are rhetorical.

Syntactically, only several of these questions begin with a question word. Most appear in fixed structures, which from a semantic perspective make a simple claim. The main purposes of the questions discussed are to seek information, usually halakhic; to express bewilderment; or to prove or disprove something. Researching ‘yes–no’ questions underscores how the editor of the Mishnah uses stylistic means to convey content.

Adam Bin-Nun

Aron Dotan, *Studies in Hebrew Linguistics and Masora*, Assupot 20, Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2021, 438 pp.

This volume is a collection of thirty-five of Professor Aron Dotan's articles. Arranged in eight sections, the articles treat the study of the Masorah and medieval grammar. With the exception of one article published here for the first time, the articles included in the volume were written over nearly a fifty-year period (1965–2012).

The review is divided into four sections. The first section is devoted to milestones in Dotan's life that are related to the book under review here. The second section briefly surveys the book, and the third addresses several features of Dotan's articles and research methods. Section four, which is the main part of the article, is dedicated to comments on, and discussion of, ten selected articles from the book. For each article the main idea is presented, and references to scholars who have discussed Dotan's conclusions are provided, expanded, and sometimes also commented on. Naturally, there are also references to the latest and constantly developing research. Occasionally, several examples are added to those noted by Dotan and, in some cases, Dotan's words are explained or amplified in light of what he himself wrote elsewhere. Hence, my remarks also reflect my indebtedness to Dotan.

English summaries edited by Dena Ordan