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The Aramaic of the Zohar: The Status Quaestionis¹

Alinda Damsma

Toward the end of the thirteenth century the Kabbalah in Spain reached its creative peak with the emergence of *Sefer ha-Zohar*, Judaism's most important corpus of mystical texts.² It is a

¹ This is an extended version of the paper I presented at the 'Jewish Languages' conference at University College London (26–27 July 2016). I would like to thank the conference organisers, Dr Lily Kahn and Prof. Mark Geller, for their kind invitation as well as for the acceptance of my paper in this volume. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference 'Zohar — East and West' at Ben Gurion University, Beer Sheva, in conjunction with the Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem (28–30 December 2015). It is a pleasure to thank my respective hosts and audiences. I am particularly indebted to Prof. Theodore Kwasman, Prof. Ronit Meroz, and Prof. Willem Smelik, for reading the draft of this paper and kindly offering their expertise. I bear sole responsibility, however, for any errors that this paper may contain.

The Aramaic dialects referred to in this article are abbreviated as follows:

JBA = Jewish Babylonian Aramaic. This dialect was used in Babylonia from about 200 CE until 900 CE (one of its sub-dialects is BTA= Babylonian Talmudic Aramaic, the main dialect employed in the Babylonian Talmud).

JLA = Jewish Literary Aramaic. This literary dialect evolved in Judea from Imperial Aramaic. It was employed from approximately 200 BCE until 200 CE. Examples are Targum Onqelos to the Pentateuch and Targum Jonathan to the Prophets.

JPA = Jewish Palestinian Aramaic. This dialect was employed in Palestine from approximately 200 CE until about 700 CE. Examples are the Aramaic parts of the Palestinian Talmud, the Palestinian Targums to the Pentateuch, and the Palestinian piyyutim.

LJLA = Late Jewish Literary Aramaic. This literary dialect has only quite recently been established, and it is thought to have developed after the seventh or eighth century CE. It combines both Western and Eastern Aramaic features, adopts many loanwords, and it also contains Hebraisms and archaisms. Examples of works written in LJLA are Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and many of the Targums to the Writings.

² *Sefer ha-Zohar* 'the Book of Splendor' – henceforth referred to as the 'Zohar' or 'Zoharic literature' – owes its name to Daniel 12:3: וְהַמְשַׁכְּלִים יִזְהָרוּ כְּזֹהַר הַרְקִיעַ, 'The enlightened shall shine like the splendor of the sky'. A comprehensive introduction to the Zohar is offered by Arthur Green in *A Guide to the Zohar* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); see also Isaiah Tishby's general introduction in *The Wisdom of the Zohar* (trans. D. Goldstein; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), vol.1, pp. 1–126. The original Hebrew version of Tishby's study, entitled *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, was published in 1949 (volume I) and 1961 (volume II), but it is still considered a monumental and valuable work.

voluminous work, mainly written in Aramaic, and the majority of its mystical doctrines and esoteric teachings are presented within the framework of a commentary on the Torah.³

Over the centuries the Zohar has aroused mixed feelings among its readership, which initially was rather limited. Both lavish praise and immense scorn have fallen to this Jewish mystical *magnum opus*. Many readers have been left bewildered by the obscurity of its language, style, and contents, considering it an inscrutable work, whereas others regard its wildly fragmented and opaque nature as a genuine reflection of life's 'spiritual turbulence'.⁴ However, once the veil that obscures its contents is lifted, the Zohar discloses an esoteric theosophy, depicted in symbolic imagery, which covers all aspects of life, from the most mundane of matters to profound divine secrets.

The Zohar's origin and the transmission of its mystical lore were shrouded in mystery. The Judeo-Spanish kabbalist Rabbi Moses de Leon, who lived in Castile and died in 1295 / 1305,⁵ was one of the first to bear witness to the existence of the Zohar, which initially circulated only in fragments among the kabbalists in Castile and Aragon. De Leon claimed to have an ancient Aramaic manuscript – the Zohar – in his possession that had circulated for centuries and originated from the Holy Land. It was believed that the Zohar's main protagonist, Rabbi Simeon bar-Yochai, was its author; a belief that is still held among traditional kabbalists and orthodox Jews. Rabbi Simeon bar-Yochai, also known under his acronym Rashbi, was a Palestinian sage who lived in the second century CE. However, shortly after the Zohar's mysterious appearance in late-thirteenth-century Castile, the claim of Rashbi's authorship was already met with suspicion. Some of de Leon's contemporaries seem to have doubted the ancient, Palestinian provenance of the Zohar, rather believing that it had been pseudepigraphically written by de Leon himself.⁶

In more recent times, Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), the founding father of modern Kabbalah scholarship, went to great lengths to prove that Moses de Leon was indeed the main

³ The Zohar comprises of well over twenty treatises, of which tractate *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* ('The Concealed Midrash') is partly written in Hebrew. For an extensive overview of the structure of the Zohar, see Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, pp. 1–7; cf. Green, *Guide to the Zohar*, pp. 159–61.

⁴ Quoting Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, p. 8.

⁵ On the debate surrounding de Leon's year of death, see Y. Liebes, 'The Year of the Death of Rabbi Moses de Leon' (in Hebrew; to be published in the memorial volume for Prof. Meir Benayahu).

⁶ For a review of traditional and scholarly opinions on the origins and authorship of the Zohar, see Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, pp. 30–55.

author of the Zohar.⁷ Under the influence of Scholem's academic authority, it was henceforth commonly accepted as axiomatic that the Zohar was composed in late-thirteenth-century Castile by de Leon, who had attributed his work to the second-century Palestinian sage Rashbi to give it authoritative status. Scholem's single-authorship theory drastically shifted the cultural context in which the Zohar had been written: it was no longer second-century Palestine, but thirteenth-century Spain. Not only was the Zohar rooted in rabbinic thought and kabbalistic concepts which dated all the way to the high Middle Ages, it was also influenced by the intellectual exchange of ideas with the surrounding Christian and Muslim cultures.

More recently the prevalent scholarly opinion on both the authorship and the coherence of the Zohar has undergone a drastic revision. It is now commonly accepted by researchers that the Zohar was written by multiple authors, although, in all probability, Moses de Leon contributed to the bulk of the Zohar.⁸ Because the Zohar seems to have been composed, extended and changed throughout several generations, it is nowadays generally viewed as a collective literary product, hence the increasingly popular reference to this corpus as 'Zoharic literature'. Nevertheless, although contemporary scholarship has tackled fundamental questions regarding the provenance and authorship of the Zohar, this Jewish mystical corpus still poses many a riddle, especially when it comes to its Aramaic idiom.

Before Scholem's Major Trends: Zoharic Aramaic is a 'mixed' dialect

Nineteenth-century scholars paid considerable attention to the Zohar, but they generally adopted a negative attitude towards it, influenced by the anti-kabbalistic sentiments of the Haskalah movement. One of the fiercest opponents of the Zohar was Samuel David Luzzatto, also known under his acronym Shadal, whose conservative-rabbinic stance made him a dissenting figure among the mainstream maskilim, who elevated reason above faith. He shared, however, their strong antipathy towards the Kabbalah, culminating in his work *An Argument concerning the Wisdom of the Kabbalah, the Antiquity of the Zohar, and the*

⁷ Scholem's extensive argumentation is found in his classic study *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1941), pp. 156–204.

⁸ The multiple authorship theory had already been briefly touched upon by Jellinek in his *Moses ben Schem-Tob de Leon und Seine Verhältniss zum Sohar* (Leipzig, 1851), but it was properly advanced by Yehuda Liebes: *Studies in the Zohar* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 85–138 (originally published in Hebrew as 'How the Zohar was written', *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 8 [1989], pp. 1–72). See, for example, also R. Meroz, 'The Archaeology of the Zohar – *Sifra Ditseni'uta* as a Sample Text', *Daat* 82 (2016), pp. ix–lxxxv.

Antiquity of the Vowel-points and Accents,⁹ written in 1827, but published in 1852. Luzzatto argued that the Zohar had caused the sages of Israel to drift away from their study of the literal meaning of the Torah and to seek God's truth through other, wasteful means instead. Moreover, the Zohar had encouraged people's interest in matters that were too sacred and incomprehensible for contemplation.¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, Luzzatto held a low opinion of the language of the book that had profaned God's honor, even dismissing it as a 'ridiculous language'.¹¹ However, the rationale behind Luzzatto's unfavourable description of Zoharic Aramaic did not lie in it being the vehicle by which the Zohar had advanced its perversion of the Jewish religion. Rather, from Luzzatto's historico-linguistic point of view, the language's mixed dialectal character rendered it impure. In his multifaceted scholarly career, Luzzatto devoted considerable attention to the Aramaic language, and his discoveries led to dramatic advances in Aramaic dialectology. For instance, Luzzatto differentiated between Biblical Aramaic and Targumic Aramaic, and he also distinguished the various types of Aramaic used in Talmud Bavli.¹² Yet, Zoharic Aramaic was impossible to classify for a dialectal purist like Luzzatto, which explains his damning verdict on it:

'[...] because, truly, it is not the language of the Bible, or of the Mishnah, or of Daniel and Ezra, or of Onqelos and Jonathan, or of the Jerusalem Targumim, or of Talmud Bavli, or of Talmud Yerushalmi, or of the midrashim, or of the geonim, or of the commentators, or of the codifiers, or of the philosophers. It is rather a ridiculous language, a mixture of all the aforementioned languages, which comes naturally to the lips of anyone who wishes to write in the language of the Talmud but has insufficient knowledge of it. In fact, I know a man who learned a little bit of Talmud and wished to write in the Talmudic language, yet he only managed to write in the language of the Zohar.'¹³

⁹ *Vikuaḥ al Hokhmat ha-Kabbalah ve-al Kadmut Sefer ha-Zohar ve-kadmut ha-Nekudot ve-ha-Te'amim* (Gorizia, 1852).

¹⁰ Cf. Tishby's discussion of Luzzatto's views on the Zohar in *Wisdom of the Zohar*, pp. 45–46.

¹¹ See quotation below.

¹² For an evaluation of Luzzatto's groundbreaking work, see T. Kwasman, 'Der Zohar und seine Beziehung zu "Late Jewish Literary Aramaic"', *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 34 (2007–2008), pp. 133–47, esp. pp. 134–35; F. Rosenthal, *Die Aramaistische Forschung seit Th. Nöldeke's Veröffentlichungen* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1939), pp. 122, 213–14.

¹³ *Vikuaḥ al Hokhmat ha-Kabbalah*, pp. 113–14: *כי באמת איננו לא לשון מקרא ולא לשון משנה ולא לשון דניאל ועזרא ולא לשון אנקלוס ויונתן ולא לשון התרגומים הירושלמיים ולא לשון תלמוד בבלי ולא לשון תלמוד ירושלמי ולא לשון המדרשים ולא לשון הגאונים ולא לשון המפרשים ולא לשון הפוסקים ולא לשון הפילוסופים, אלא לשון נלעג, מעורב מכל הלשונות הנזכרים, והוא לשון העולה*

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the German theologian and Orientalist Gustaf Dalman undertook a more serious attempt to establish the linguistic character of Zoharic Aramaic in his grammar of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic.¹⁴ Dalman included the Zohar among the writings that exhibited ‘mixed’ dialectal features,¹⁵ such as Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, the Fragmentary Targum, the Tosefta-Targums to the Prophets, and Aramaic apocrypha. In particular, he noticed the strong dialectal similarities between the Zoharic corpus and the Targums to the Writings.¹⁶ He even went as far as describing the Targums to the Writings and, by implication, the Zohar as ‘Kunstprodukte’, since their language does not represent the living tradition of Aramaic writing. According to Dalman, the dialect of the Targums to the Writings and the Zohar leans heavily on Jewish Palestinian Aramaic – especially the language of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and the Fragmentary Targum – but it also exhibits features from Babylonian Talmudic Aramaic.¹⁷

מאליי על שפתי כל מי שמבקש לכתוב בלשון תלמוד ולא עסק בו כל צרכו. ויודע אני באמת אדם אחד אשר למד מעט מזער בתלמוד, ומבקש לכתוב בלשון תלמוד, ואין עולה בידו אלא לשון הזהר.

¹⁴ G.H. Dalman, *Grammatik des Jüdisch-Palästinischen Aramäisch* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 2nd edn, 1905). Dalman’s grammar was first published in 1894, but appeared as a substantially revised and enlarged second edition in 1905.

¹⁵ The term ‘mixed’ refers to a type of dialect which contains linguistic elements from both Jewish Palestinian Aramaic and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, the so-called Western and Eastern features. By way of example, in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic the verb ‘to see’ is expressed by the verbal root *המי*. Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, on the other hand, mainly employs the verbal root *הזי*. A ‘mixed’ dialect is characterized by the seemingly arbitrary use of both verbs; cf. M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (DTMT, 2; Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2nd edn, 2002), pp. 194, 205–206 (henceforth referred to as *DJPA*); idem, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (DTMT, 3; Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002), pp. 444–46, 468 (henceforth referred to as *DJBA*).

¹⁶ Dalman, *Grammatik*, pp. 27–39, esp. p. 35.

¹⁷ A linguistic correspondence between the Zohar and the Targums to the Writings was also observed by Moses Gaster, who claimed that Zoharic Aramaic approximated to the language of Targum Qohelet in particular. Gaster’s notion of Zoharic Aramaic was embedded in his theory that the Zohar was of late antique, Palestinian provenance. Consequently, he believed its dialect to be ‘unquestionably Palestinian’, albeit a corrupted, vernacular Galilean form. M. Gaster, ‘Zohar’, in J. Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 1921), vol. xii, pp. 858–62, esp. p. 859. For a critical evaluation of Gaster’s theory, see Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, p. 68.

Scholem sets a major trend: Zoharic Aramaic is an artificial idiom

In 1941 Gershom Scholem published his groundbreaking work *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*,¹⁸ which included a discussion of the nature of Zoharic Aramaic that would define the scholarly treatment of this idiom for the rest of the twentieth century. Scholem set out to demonstrate that the Zohar was composed in an artificial type of Aramaic in late-thirteenth-century Spain by Moses de Leon. In order to give the Zohar authoritative status, de Leon not only attributed it to the second-century Palestinian sage Rashbi, but he also tried to make it look authentic by employing various Aramaic dialects of antiquity, which resulted in the distinctive Zoharic language. According to Scholem, the underlying sources of this artificial idiom are mainly Targum Onqelos and the Babylonian Talmud. The grammatical forms are mostly derived from Onqelos, but almost every line also contains a few linguistic elements found in Babylonian Talmudic Aramaic. To prove the artificiality of Zoharic Aramaic, Scholem gave an overview of the linguistic misunderstandings and grammatical misconstructions.¹⁹ For example:

- De Leon confuses the lexical meaning of verbs in the *Peal*²⁰ with those in the *Pael* or *Aphel*. He also employs entirely wrong forms of the *Ithpael*²¹ and gives transitive meanings to verbs in the *Ithpael*. De Leon's use of prepositions and conjunctions is often quite preposterous.
- As for the vocabulary, Scholem noticed that the Zoharic language is heavily influenced by medieval Hebrew, Arabic, and Spanish. Moreover, de Leon seems to have sometimes misunderstood the meaning of expressions in his literary sources.
- De Leon frequently gives new meanings to ancient Aramaic words and coins entirely new words and phrases.

Although Scholem's verdict on Zoharic Aramaic as an artificial idiom lacked substantial linguistic evidence, he iterated his view in subsequent publications²² and it became commonplace in academic circles. For instance, Scholem's verdict became the cornerstone of

¹⁸ See n. 7.

¹⁹ Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 163–68.

²⁰ Scholem uses the term 'Kal' for the simple conjugation rather than 'Pael'.

²¹ Designated as the 'Ethpael' by Scholem.

²² See, for example, G. Scholem, 'Zohar', in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), vol. 16, cc. 1193–1215, esp. cc. 1203–1206; idem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), pp. 226–29.

two dissertations written under his supervision,²³ and it was also adopted by Isaiah Tishby in his monumental *Wisdom of the Zohar*.²⁴

A new century, a new verdict on Zoharic Aramaic

Scholem's view on the nature of Zoharic Aramaic remained largely unchallenged, despite the meagre linguistic evidence that accompanied his claim. However, around the beginning of the twenty-first century a wind of change started to sweep through Kabbalah scholarship, starting with Charles Mopsik's critique of the standard scholarly notion of Zoharic Aramaic.²⁵ Mopsik observed that after Aramaic had ceased to be a spoken vernacular, it recurred in Jewish literary sources that dealt with mystical speculation and prophetic revelation, most notably the Zohar and the numerous works written in imitation thereof. The medieval and early modern kabbalists seem to have preferred Aramaic for a variety of literary, historical and religious reasons.

According to Mopsik, although Aramaic had become marginalized after the Islamic conquest and the subsequent spread of Arabic across the Near East, it held a unique position among the Jewish literary languages. It was not only considered a profane language by virtue of its once-prominent and longstanding vernacular use, but its fading importance also meant that it had become an increasingly obscure, archaic language and therefore the perfect means of expression for profound spiritual truths well-guarded by esoteric circles. Granted, medieval Hebrew was an ex-vernacular as well, but its sacred reputation, continuous religious and liturgical function, and philosophical contamination made it less suitable for the transmission

²³ M.Z. Kaddari, *The Grammar of the Aramaic of the 'Zohar'* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1971); this grammar is identical to Kaddari's doctoral dissertation from 1956. Y. Liebes, *Sections of the Zohar Lexicon* (in Hebrew; Ph.D. Diss. Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1976).

²⁴ Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, pp. 64–68. Note also the description of Zoharic Aramaic as an artificial creation in the following reference works: S.E. Fassberg, 'Judeo-Aramaic', in L. Kahn and A.D. Rubin (eds), *Handbook of Jewish Languages* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2016), pp. 64–117, esp. p. 96; P.V.M. Flesher, 'The History of Aramaic in Judaism', in J. Neusner, A.J. Avery-Peck, et al. (eds), *The Encyclopedia of Judaism* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2nd edn, 2005), pp. 85–96.

²⁵ C. Mopsik (trans. A. Klein), 'Late Judeo-Aramaic: The Language of Theosophic Kabbalah', *Aramaic Studies* 4.1 (2006), pp. 21–33. The original French version was entitled 'Le judéo-araméen tardif, langue de la Cabale théosophique' and published in *Les cahiers du judaïsme* 6 (1999–2000), p. 4–14; it was republished in idem, *Chemins de la cabale. Vingt-cinq études sur la mystique juive* (Paris/Tel-Aviv: L'Éclat, 2004), pp. 353–68.

of esoteric knowledge.²⁶ Mopsik suggested that Aramaic was reclaimed by the thirteenth-century Castilian kabbalists as the language of secrecy, in line with the use of Aramaic in some late antique Jewish magical treatises, such as *Harba de-Moshe* ('The Sword of Moses'), *Shimmushei Tehilim* ('Magical Uses of the Psalms'), and *Havdalah de-Rabbi Aqiva* ('The Liturgy of the Separation of Rabbi Aqiva'). He even hinted at the 'existence of a more or less underground historical transmission of ancient Aramaic writings of a magical and esoteric nature that continued until the Middle Ages'.²⁷ These ancient magical treatises may have circulated among the medieval kabbalists, who recreated an Aramaic idiom that was partly based on these writings.

Mopsik further argued that, besides its reputation as the language of secrecy, Aramaic was also attractive for the kabbalists because it was the main Talmudic language, and the nature of the homiletical exegesis in the Zohar purposely imitates the Talmud. By adopting its language, narrative style, and manner of exposition, the Zohar would closely resemble the Talmud, which Judaism held in highest reverence after the Bible. Simultaneously, the use of this obscure, archaic language would lessen the risk of a direct confrontation with contemporary Rabbinic Judaism because although the Zohar appeared to be modelled after classic rabbinic literature, its esoteric theosophy was filled with doctrinally divergent views.

Furthermore, Mopsik continued, as can be gathered from the Talmud (*b. Šabb.* 12b), angels do not understand Aramaic,²⁸ and therefore man can draw closer to God by means of this language and speak with him directly, without the interference of envious angels.²⁹

For a variety of reasons the medieval theosophists thus chose Aramaic for the expression of their system of speculation. In their attempt to recreate this idiom they drew on a selection of older literary models, such as Targum Onqelos, the Babylonian Talmud, and the aforementioned late antique Jewish magical treatises. Intriguingly, whilst acknowledging the rather distorted nature of Zoharic Aramaic, Mopsik did not consider it an artificial or pseudo-language because how could one then explain the fact that this type of Aramaic was

²⁶ Mopsik was nevertheless aware of the fact that Zoharic vocabulary betrays influence from the philosophical jargon in medieval Hebrew; 'Late Judeo-Aramaic', pp. 26–27.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁸ See also *b. Soṭah* 33a. For a detailed discussion of these Talmudic passages, see W.F. Smelik, *Rabbis, Language and Translation in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 126ff.

²⁹ On the jealousy and rivalry of the angels toward Israel in rabbinic literature, see P. Schäfer's classic study *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen. Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelvorbildung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975).

understood by contemporaries and subsequent generations? Instead, Mopsik argued, the Aramaic employed by the Castilian kabbalists constituted ‘an independent idiolect in its own right’.³⁰

In similar vein, Yehuda Liebes disputed the scholarly contention that Zoharic Aramaic was an artificially manufactured idiom.³¹ He did not deny the idiosyncratic nature of Zoharic Aramaic, nor the fact that it does not conform to the standard classification of Aramaic dialects,³² but he refused to label it ‘artificial’, just like Mopsik. However, in contrast to the latter, Liebes did not consider it a recreated idiom, but a completely natural, literary language that stood within the living tradition of Aramaic writing. Thus, according to Liebes, Aramaic still functioned as a living literary language among the medieval Spanish Jews, as evidenced by their legal and poetical works and, most notably, by their kabbalistic writings. Liebes, too, observed that Aramaic had been the language of choice in earlier magico-mystical compositions, such as the works of the earliest kabbalists, the magical texts from the Cairo Genizah, and *Sidrei di-Shimusha Rabba* (‘Great Magical Formulary’).³³

Turning again to the Zohar, Liebes observed that Aramaic was the best vehicle for advancing the Zohar’s mystical purposes due to the language’s esoteric status, just as it had traditionally been in the earlier magico-mystical writings.³⁴ Nevertheless, in his search for

³⁰ Mopsik, ‘Late Judeo-Aramaic’, p. 26.

³¹ Y. Liebes (trans. D. Freedman and A. Rapoport-Albert), ‘Hebrew and Aramaic as Languages of the Zohar’, *Aramaic Studies* 4.1 (2006), pp. 35–52. The Hebrew version was subsequently published in *Ha'Ivrit* 58.3 (2010), pp. 111–26. These publications are based on a lecture that Liebes presented in Hebrew to the assembly of the Israeli Academy of the Hebrew Language (29 November 2004). An earlier version of that paper was delivered by the author at the international Zohar research group of the Institute of Advanced Studies in Jerusalem (7 May 1999).

³² I have to add that in the past few decades dramatic progress has been made in the field of Aramaic dialectology, which has now made it possible to propose a tentative dialectal classification of Zoharic Aramaic, see further below in this article.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³⁴ Liebes illustrated this notion with a beautiful quotation from Haim Nachman Bialik’s essay ‘הספר העברי’, in *idem*, דברי ספרות (Tel Aviv, 1959), p. 47:

וגם בלילה לא שכב לבה ולא כבה נרה: הספר הקלסי של הקבלה, חזיון לילה זה של העם העברי, בשפתה וברוחה נברא. ומה שיש בזה מן הפלא, הוא, כי בימי ה"זהר" הלשון הארמית הרי כבר מתה מיתה גמורה בפי העם העברי. ואולי דוקא משום כך יפה היתה זו למסתורין כאור החור של הלבנה המתה לבעלי חלומות.

‘Even at night, her [Aramaic’s] heart did not sleep nor was her light extinguished. The classic book of the Kabbalah, this nocturnal vision of the Hebrew nation, was created in her language and her spirit. The wonder of it is that in the days of the *Zohar* the Aramaic language was already completely dead in the speech of the Jewish

reasons why Aramaic had become the language of choice for the Zohar, Liebes discovered an intriguing paradox: Aramaic is used in the Zohar because of its simultaneous status as the most elevated and the most degraded of languages. On the one hand, Aramaic is the vehicle by which man can establish an intimate, direct relationship with God for the angels do not understand it and, hence, cannot serve as (jealous) intermediaries.³⁵ On the other, as stated by the Zohar itself, Aramaic is the language of evil,³⁶ the language of ‘the other side’ (*siṭra ’ahra*), the use of which helps to keep evil forces at bay because a total disregard for evil results in hubris.³⁷

Whilst asserting the genuine, literary nature of Zoharic Aramaic, Liebes did not assume it had developed organically out of a single Aramaic dialect. It had rather incorporated elements from various Aramaic sources and their respective dialects. In this process some terms had been interpreted mistakenly, or Hebrew meanings had been given to Aramaic words.³⁸ Liebes regarded these lexical peculiarities as insufficient evidence for the artificiality of Zoharic Aramaic. They rather testify to the naturalness of Zoharic Aramaic because languages have the tendency to incorporate terms that are actually based on misunderstandings or misspellings of the literary sources they draw from. Moreover, Liebes continued, the traces of medieval Hebrew, Spanish and Arabic that can be detected in Zoharic Aramaic reflect the language environment of the Judeo-Spanish kabbalists, who were exposed to and used a variety of languages in different contexts. Within this multilingual environment Aramaic served as the traditional language of mystical speculation:

The Aramaic of the *Zohar* represents a genuine linguistic need and is not merely camouflage employed to give the illusion of the time and place of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai.³⁹

people. Perhaps for this reason it was appropriate for the mysterious, like the pale light of the dead moon for the dreamer.’ Translated into English by D. Freedman and A. Rapoport-Albert in Liebes, ‘Hebrew and Aramaic’, p. 40.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 43–45, 49–51. As seen above, Mopsik also referred to the angels not understanding Aramaic.

³⁶ See Zohar 2:129b; in this passage Aramaic is called *targum*, which is the actual designation of the late antique Bible translations in Aramaic. The association between *targum* and the forces of evil could be borne out of the wide semantic range of the verbal root *r-g-m*, from which not only the term *targum* (‘translation’) is derived, but also the Arabic word for devil, *rajim* (‘stoned’); Liebes, *Hebrew and Aramaic*, p. 47 n. 57.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 46–49.

³⁸ As exemplified by Scholem in *Major Trends*, see p. 165.

³⁹ Liebes, *Hebrew and Aramaic*, p. 39.

Liebes found further proof of the genuineness of Zoharic Aramaic in its smooth and natural flow; sometimes this sonorous language even seems to demand to be spoken aloud so the depth of the secret knowledge can be fully appreciated.⁴⁰

Scholem's thesis further challenged in London (2004–2009)

Liebes' tantalizing suggestion that the Zoharic language has a late medieval literary Aramaic provenance was elaborated on in the years 2004–2009. During those years a major research project, entitled 'Late Aramaic: The Literary and Linguistic Context of the *Zohar*', was conducted in the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London. The project was directed by Ada Rapoport-Albert, Willem Smelik, and Mark Geller, in close collaboration with Theodore Kwasman of the Martin Buber Institute, University of Cologne, and funded by the British Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The project aimed to prove that the Aramaic of the Zohar, with its distinctive lexical, grammatical, and syntactical features, was in fact a product of an unbroken, living tradition of Aramaic writing which still existed far into the Middle Ages and was not confined to late thirteenth-century Castile.⁴¹

The project thus challenged Scholem's characterization of Zoharic Aramaic as an artificial idiom and questioned the method by which he had gathered his, rather meagre, linguistic evidence.⁴² For instance, astoundingly, neither Scholem nor his pupil Tishby seemed to have consulted the standard Aramaic reference works to establish the validity of his claim, such as the aforementioned grammar by Dalman⁴³ and Krauss' study on Greek and Latin loanwords

⁴⁰ A similar observation was made by Arthur Green who, in spite of his apparent support of Scholem's stance on Zoharic Aramaic, was struck by the language's effectiveness and vibrancy: 'What is surprising about this seemingly patched-together language is how well it works [...] Although technically one may say with Scholem that the Zohar's Aramaic is "artificial," not reflecting any known spoken dialect, in fact one who dwells for a while in the Zohar's pages finds it very much a *living* language, powerful and evocative in its own right'; Green, *A Guide to the Zohar*, pp. 172–73.

⁴¹ The project did not set out to demonstrate that Aramaic was ever used by the kabbalists as a vernacular, but it was conducted on the premise that Aramaic was solely employed by them as a literary language. For an introduction to the AHRC research project and its aims, see A. Rapoport-Albert and T. Kwasman, 'Late Aramaic: The Literary and Linguistic Context of the *Zohar*', *Aramaic Studies* 4.1 (2006), pp. 5–19.

⁴² See Rapoport-Albert and Kwasman, 'Late Aramaic', p. 14.

⁴³ See above n. 13.

in Aramaic.⁴⁴ Scholem's assertions on Zoharic Aramaic were subjected to a preliminary critical examination, resulting in the following observations:⁴⁵

- Scholem referred to the apparent lexical confusion between the *Peal* and the *Pael* or *Aphel* verb-stems as one of the characteristics of Zoharic Aramaic. However, in Aramaic, irrespective of which dialect, the lexical distinctions between these three conjugations have faded in several verb-stems. According to the traditional designation, the *Pael* and *Aphel* conjugations are intensive or causative in their meanings, but these conjugations cannot always be understood in terms of intensity or causation. Consequently, the *Peal* of a verb-stem can convey the same meaning as the *Pael* or the *Aphel*. For instance, in the *Peal* the verb עלל/עול usually means 'to come in', but the simple conjugation can also be employed in the *Aphel* sense of 'to bring in'. The lexical overlap between *Peal* and *Pael* is visible with the verb חדי, חcihw, besides its usual meaning 'to be glad', expresses the causative sense 'to gladden' in the *Peal*.
- Scholem found further proof of the language's artificiality in de Leon's use of the *Ithpael*, such as the apparent lack of metathesis⁴⁶ and assimilation⁴⁷ as well as the transitive meanings attributed to this passive-reflexive conjugation. Unmetathesised forms are, however, attested in the *Ithpael*, *Ithpeal* and *Ittafal* in a variety of Middle to Late Aramaic sources – both in Western and Eastern Aramaic – such as the Bar Kokhba letters, the Palestinian targums, the incantation bowls, and the Babylonian Talmud. Moreover, the tendency to use the *Ithpael* in a transitive sense is far from anomalous as evidenced by the following examples from the Babylonian Talmud: אידכריה רב 'Rav remembered what he had studied' (*b. Sanh.* 82a); זיל אשתבח לה לערפה 'Go, praise Orpah' (*b. Sanh.* 95a).
- With regard to the idiosyncratic vocabulary of Zoharic Aramaic, Scholem observed the occurrence of verbs carrying Hebraised meanings that do not convey the actual

⁴⁴ S. Krauss, *Griechische und lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrasch und Targum* (2 vols; Berlin: Calvary, 1898–1899).

⁴⁵ Rapoport-Albert and Kwasman, 'Late Aramaic', pp. 15–19; references and further examples cited there.

⁴⁶ I.e. the η of the preformative -אֵ does not interchange with the following sibilant.

⁴⁷ I.e. the η of the preformative -אֵ does not assimilate to the following dental.

Aramaic sense. He illustrated this phenomenon with the seemingly distinctive usage of the *Aphel* of the verb-stem הָיַן , which usually means ‘to lend’, but is employed in the Zohar in the sense of ‘to accompany’. The latter meaning is ascribed to the *Piel* conjugation of the Hebrew verb-stem לָוָה , which is the equivalent of Aramaic הָיַן . Hence, according to Scholem, the underlying reason for this shift in meaning was de Leon’s wrong metaphrase, thereby excluding the possibility that lexical changes could have occurred in an earlier phase in the historical development of the Aramaic language. Yet, this is exactly what seems to have happened with the verb הָיַן as attested by older types of Aramaic, such as Samaritan Aramaic and Mandaic. For instance, in Samaritan Aramaic the verb הָיַן *morf devired* הָיַן has the meaning ‘to attach’ in the *Aphel*, which is semantically close to the use of הָיַן in the sense of ‘to accompany’ in Zoharic Aramaic. Therefore, cases such as this are certainly not unique to the Zohar; shifts in verbal meanings were already witnessed in older Aramaic dialects. No doubt Hebrew contributed to this phenomenon, most likely under the influence of the targumic practice.

- Scholem further argued that the neologisms, abundantly found in the Zohar, were a product of de Leon’s own imagination. Especially noteworthy was the presence of the consonants ט , דנא , ס particularly ק in most of these newly coined words and phrases. However, the marked preference for these consonants hints at the possibility that some of the supposed neologisms are in fact corrupted Greek or Latin loanwords. This assumption is supported by the observations of Moshe and Dalia Hoshen, who briefly examined two peculiar Zoharic terms, קוֹסְטָרִין and יִרְטָסְק , and traced the former back to $\xi\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\omicron\nu$ and *sextarius*, and the latter to $\kappa\acute{\alpha}\sigma\tau\rho\alpha$ /*castra* and *quaestor*.⁴⁸ In their study they referred to Late Palestinian Aramaic sources to prove that the usage of corrupted loanwords is by no means unique to the Zohar.

As promising as this preliminary examination of the examples brought forward by Scholem was, Zoharic Aramaic had to be set against the linguistic profiles of other Late Jewish Aramaic sources in order to systematically assess its linguistic integrity and to locate more precisely its position within the literary Aramaic tradition. However, Aramaic scholarship had

⁴⁸ M. and D. Hoshen, $\text{לבירור מספר לשונות בספר הזוהר}$, *Sinai* 110 (1992), pp. 274–77. On the possible influence of Greek on Zoharic Aramaic, see also R. Meroz, ‘The Story in the Zohar about the Grieving Dead’, in N. Riemer (ed.), *Between Heaven and Earth – Festschrift on the Occasion of the 70th Birthday of Karl E. Grözinger* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), pp. 43–54.

hitherto paid little attention to the dialectal varieties in the later stages of literary Aramaic because most Late Aramaic writings were deemed to be dialectally ‘impure’ from a historico-linguistic point of view.⁴⁹ The prevalent dismissive attitude towards Late Aramaic made it a challenge to establish the nature and dialectal position of the Zoharic language due to a lack of linguistic research on comparative material. Hence, within the framework of the AHCR project, linguistic profiles of various Late Jewish Aramaic sources, both esoteric and non-esoteric of character, were created. The project focused on writings for which no such profiles had previously existed, such as the Aramaic Toldot Yeshu fragments, liturgical poetry from the Cairo Genizah, and the Targumic Toseftot to Ezekiel.

Another dialectal enigma: the Aramaic Toldot Yeshu fragments

The language of the Aramaic Toldot Yeshu fragments was subjected to a thorough linguistic analysis by Willem Smelik.⁵⁰ These fragments came into view because, just like the Zohar, their dialect had been dismissed as an anomaly given the mixture of Palestinian and Babylonian Aramaic features, the imitation of Targumic Aramaic – specifically the dialect of Targum Onqelos –, and the underlying Hebrew expressions wrapped in artificial Aramaic garb.⁵¹ Such a verdict, remarkably similar to Scholem’s notion of Zoharic Aramaic, begged for a proper linguistic examination of the five major textual witnesses, three of which are located in the Cambridge Cairo Genizah Library,⁵² and the other two belong to the Adler

⁴⁹ On the lack of scholarly interest in Late Aramaic texts, see W.F. Smelik, ‘The Aramaic Dialect(s) of the Toldot Yeshu Fragments’, *Aramaic Studies* 7.1 (2009), pp. 39–73, esp. pp. 42–43.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Louis Ginzberg as cited in Smelik, ‘Aramaic Dialect(s) of the Toldot Yeshu Fragments’, pp. 41–42. Smelik further refers to Daniel Boyarin’s tantalizing suggestion that the distinctive language of the Toldot Yeshu is suggestive of an incomplete dialectal translation: the text originated in Palestine and was subsequently recast into Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, although it retained some of its original Palestinian Aramaic lexical and syntactical features; *ibid.*, p. 42. Below we shall see that Smelik also suggests that the Toldot Yeshu narrative was transmitted from Palestine to Babylonia, but he argues that the dialectal mixture in these fragments is too erratic to be the result of a straightforward transposition from Western into Eastern Aramaic. The textual history of the Toldot Yeshu composition seems to have been far more complex.

⁵² MS TS Misc. 35.87; MS TS Misc. 35.88; and MS TS NS 298.56.

Collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York.⁵³ Smelik concluded his study with the following observations:⁵⁴

- The fragments display a marked preference for BTA as well as for the JLA dialect of Targum Onqelos, with certain dialectal morphemes being used interchangeably;
- The seemingly arbitrary use of JLA and BTA morphemes precludes any association with Geonic Aramaic for the latter dialect employs literary forms in a far more systematic manner;
- The overwhelming presence of easternisms in the majority of these fragments testifies against the straightforward identification of their language with LJLA, although some characteristics of this literary dialect are discernible;
- MS TS Misc. 35.88 exhibits the fewest traces of the aforementioned eastern dialects, veering more towards Palestinian Aramaic given the occurrence of distinctive western morphological features and the lack of *rekram tcejbo eht sa n*’;
- Hebraisms are attested, most notably in MS 2529 (Adler 2102), but they do not offer any diachronic or geographic clues and, hence, do not serve as dialect markers.

According to Smelik, the dialectal mixture provides clues to the development of the Toldot Yeshu composition: the narrative originated in third or fourth-century Palestine, as evidenced by MS TS Misc. 35.88, and was subsequently transmitted to Babylonia, in either oral or written form, where it underwent linguistic updating. Thus, in the East the narrative’s wording was almost completely transformed from Galilean Aramaic into BTA, with only a few scattered remnants of the former. The unsystematic, yet pervasive mixture of certain JLA and BTA morphemes seems to have occurred at a later stage, probably during the process of manuscript reproduction, at a time when the JLA dialect had acquired a high status. Nevertheless, whilst the introduction of literary forms in the Toldot Yeshu narrative may have started in Babylonia – which accounts for the JLA features –, the random attestations of LJLA suggest that the composition eventually returned to the West, its homeland, where its literary character was further embellished.

Although Smelik points out that the language of the Toldot Yeshu cannot be considered a prefiguration of Zoharic Aramaic,⁵⁵ his in-depth study of the dialectal transitions in the textual witnesses certainly furthers our understanding of the heterogeneous character of late literary

⁵³ MSS 2529.1–2 (Adler 2102).

⁵⁴ For the full conclusions, see Smelik, ‘Aramaic Dialect(s) of the Toldot Yeshu Fragments’, pp. 69–73.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

Aramaic and its transmission, and it also illustrates the impact of scribal interference on the literary character of Late Jewish Aramaic writings. Smelik's grammatical analysis of the Toldot Yeshe thus raises important, complex issues which need to be addressed in any linguistic assessment of the Zohar.

Dialectal mixture in a piyyut from the Cairo Genizah

Smelik continued his linguistic examination of Late Aramaic sources by scrutinizing an odd specimen of liturgical poetry.⁵⁶ The piyyut is preserved in two fragments, both of them located in the Cambridge Cairo Genizah Library.⁵⁷

With imagery remarkably similar to Ezra 4–6, the poem describes how the Jews succeeded in rebuilding Jerusalem and its temple, despite their enemies' attempts to thwart them. The poet not only recycled the Ezra story, but he also borrowed visionary elements from Daniel 2 and 7, which give the poem its distinctive eschatological character. Interestingly, the poet reused the Aramaic of Ezra and Daniel as well and combined it with neologisms, Hebrew calques, and Western and Eastern Aramaic elements. On linguistic grounds, Smelik proposes a late date for this piyyut because the imitation of Biblical Aramaic and the juxtaposition of Western and Eastern features are typical of the literary Aramaic practice from the last quarter of the first millennium CE.⁵⁸

Just like his earlier examination of the Aramaic of the Toldot Yeshe, Smelik's study revealed an intriguing linguistic heterogeneity and underscored that some of the most distinctive 'flaws' of Zoharic Aramaic – such as the fusion of dialects and the presence of archaisms, neologisms, and Hebrew calques – did in fact occur in other medieval Jewish Aramaic writings.

The linguistic profile of the Tosefta-Targums to Ezekiel 1:1

My analysis of the Tosefta-Targums to Ezekiel – the additional liturgical and alternative readings of Targum Ezekiel – was also embedded in the AHRC project.⁵⁹ The Zohar's homiletical nature and its similarities with the JLA dialect of Targums Onqelos and Jonathan warranted a linguistic examination of the Targumim. The AHCR project wanted to examine

⁵⁶ W.F. Smelik, 'A Biblical Aramaic Pastiche from the Cairo Geniza', *Aramaic Studies* 9.2 (2011), pp. 325–39.

⁵⁷ MSS TS H12.8–9 (the latter manuscript contains the entire poem).

⁵⁸ Smelik, 'A Biblical Aramaic Pastiche', pp. 338–39.

⁵⁹ A. Damsma, *The Targumic Toseftot to Ezekiel* (SAIS, 13; Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2012).

whether the fusion of dialects had already occurred in the later sources within the Targumic corpus, such as the Tosefta-Targums to the Prophets, whose language had hitherto received little scholarly attention.⁶⁰

The Tosefta-Targum to Ezekiel 1:1, which expounds the prophet's vision of the celestial throne chariot, was of special interest to the project because the extant textual witnesses display segments of unique mystical lore that bears strong resemblances with the Hekhalot and Shi'ur Qomah traditions.⁶¹ In addition, the Tosefta-Targum to Ezekiel 1:1 appears to have circulated in an esoteric milieu in which the Zohar featured prominently. For instance, a heading in one of the manuscripts ascribes the Targum to the late medieval Italian kabbalist Menahem ha-Recanati,⁶² whose writings contain numerous quotations from the Zohar.⁶³ Moreover, the sixteenth-century kabbalist Moses ben Jacob Cordovero refers in his commentary on the Zohar's *Shir ha-Shirim* to a list with details on the *hayyot* ('creatures') that is preserved בְּתוֹסֶפֶת דְּנְבוּאָת יִחְזַקְאֵל ('in the Tosefta of the prophecy of Ezekiel'),⁶⁴ which probably meant the Tosefta-Targum to Ezekiel 1:1 because most of its textual witnesses contain a detailed description of the bodily dimensions of the *hayyot*.

On the strength of my linguistic, literary and exegetical analyses I tentatively dated this Tosefta-Targum to the Genonic period and suggested the Eastern diaspora as its presumable place of origin.⁶⁵ My linguistic analysis revealed that this Targumic text, like the other Tosefta-Targums to Ezekiel, employs a language that basically belongs to the JLA dialect of Targums Onqelos and Jonathan. However, sometimes it displays a linguistic heterogeneity

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 167–68.

⁶¹ For the critical text, translation and commentary, see *ibid.*, pp. 8–110; one of the textual witnesses, MS Codex Manchester Gaster 1478, is discussed in A. Damsma, 'An Analysis of the Dialect and Early Jewish Mystical Lore in a Targumic Tosefta to Ezekiel 1.1 (Ms Gaster 1478)', in *Aramaic Studies* 6.1 (2008), pp. 17–58. Since the publication of my studies on the Tosefta-Targum to Ezekiel 1:1 three more fragments have surfaced: London, British Library Or. 10369 (= Gaster 262); New York, JTSA ENA 2478.10–11; Paris, AIU XI.225 (f. 2r–v). I am very grateful to Prof. Gideon Bohak for calling my attention to these fragments.

⁶² The Tosefta-Targum with the reference to Recanati is preserved on ff. 108r–109r of MS JTSA L260^A, which belongs to the Lutzki collection of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. In all likelihood, Recanati copied this Targum himself or had it copied for him.

⁶³ See *Perush al ha-Torah*; *Sefer Ta'amei ha-Mitzvot*; and *Perush ha-Tefillot*; cf. M. Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati the Kabbalist* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Schocken Publishing House, 1998).

⁶⁴ This reference is preserved on f. 3^b of MS Hebr. 4°74 of the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem; see G. Scholem and B. Joel, *Catalogue of Hebrew Manuscripts in the National and University Library, Jerusalem. Vol. 1: Kabbalah* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: University Press, 1930), p. 95.

⁶⁵ Damsma, *Targumic Toseftot to Ezekiel*, pp. 180–82.

which is reminiscent of the LJLA dialect found in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and the Targums to the Writings. The dialectal deviations from JLA occur too frequently to dismiss them as mere scribal intrusions. Moreover, the fact that they are attested in Cairo Genizah fragments, which are reckoned amongst the ‘cleaner’ manuscripts, appears to confirm the genuine heterogeneous character of this Tosefta-Targum.⁶⁶

Interestingly, my linguistic analysis of the Tosefta-Targum to Ezekiel 1:1 found evidence of the same grammatical ‘misconstructions’ which Scholem had attributed to the Zohar’s artificial Aramaic idiom, such as the apparent lexical confusion between the *Peal* and the *Pael* or *Aphel* verb-stems. Within the relatively small corpus of fragments, I noticed the indiscriminate use of the *Peal* and the *Aphel* stems for the verb *הרב* ‘to destroy’.⁶⁷ The manuscripts also employed interchangeably the *Peal* and the *Aphel* stems of *הדר* ‘to go around, encircle’.⁶⁸ Scholem found further proof of the Zohar’s ‘faulty’ Aramaic grammar in its transitive use of the passive-reflexive conjugation(s). However, I discovered an *Ithpeel* form of *שמע* ‘to listen’ being used in a transitive rather than passive meaning.⁶⁹

Pilot studies on Zoharic Aramaic

As demonstrated above, the AHRC project established that some of the most distinctive ‘flaws’ of Zoharic Aramaic are also attested in other medieval Jewish Aramaic writings, irrespective of their geographical provenance. The mixture of dialects had not been artificially manufactured by Moses de Leon, but occurred to a variable degree in other late Jewish Aramaic sources that circulated among Jewish communities, both in Palestine and throughout the Diaspora. Hence, the language of the Zohar represented a genuine stage in the linguistic development of Jewish literary Aramaic. The AHRC project mainly focused on the linguistic trajectory towards Zoharic Aramaic, excluding a profound examination of the Zoharic language itself. The findings of the project nevertheless revealed an urgent need for revision of the customary view on Zoharic Aramaic, and several pilot studies have since been undertaken.

Theodore Kwasman examined whether the grammatical features that are characteristic of the LJLA dialect of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and the Targums to the Writings are also found

⁶⁶ For the full linguistic profile of the Tosefta-Targums to Ezekiel, see *ibid.*, pp. 167–79.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82 n. 355.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93 n. 421.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.14 n. 52.

in Zoharic Aramaic.⁷⁰ According to Kwasman, the comparison between the Zohar and the LJLA Targums is warranted for the following reasons:⁷¹

- These texts have been composed in a literary type of Aramaic which has often been described as artificial due to its composite of Western and Eastern dialects.
- They draw from the same sources, such as Targum Onqelos, the Babylonian Talmud, and the Palestinian Targums, to create a coherent, consistent composition in this so-called artificial idiom.
- The JLA dialect of Targum Onqelos, however, seems to function as the basic template. For instance, the verbal system of Targum Onqelos has largely exerted its influence on the Zohar and the LJLA Targums.
- All these texts were composed later than the seventh or eighth century CE.
- Their textual witnesses are often flawed and stem from a relatively late date.

The basis for Kwasman's comparative study was the linguistic profile which Edward Cook had created to compare Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to other Aramaic writings.⁷² Cook's profile included grammatical and lexical features which – in their co-occurrence – were deemed characteristic of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan; for example, the use of the 2msg personal pronoun אנת; the 3mpl pronominal suffix הוּם- on nouns; the Eastern forms of the numerals; the frequent particles בגין and ללגב; the preference for pronominal suffixes on verbs rather than on the object marker ית; and the use of חמי instead of חוי to express the verb 'to see'.⁷³ Cook's linguistic comparison revealed a striking similarity between Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and the Targums to the Writings.⁷⁴ This result prompted Cook to treat these Targums as a separate dialectal category, which has since been identified as the LJLA dialect.⁷⁵

Kwasman adapted Cook's comparative table with slight alterations and added a column for the Zohar.⁷⁶ Interestingly, according to Kwasman's sample survey, the Zohar is in a 56,6%

⁷⁰ T. Kwasman, 'Der Zohar und seine Beziehung zu "Late Jewish Literary Aramaic"', *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 34 (2007–2008), pp. 133–47.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 138–39.

⁷² E.M. Cook, *Rewriting the Bible. The Text and Language of the Pseudo-Jonathan Targum* (Ph.D. Diss. University of California, Los Angeles, 1986), pp. 266–80.

⁷³ For an overview and discussion of all the features in this profile, see Cook, *Rewriting the Bible*, pp. 270–72.

⁷⁴ See table 1, *ibid.*, p. 274.

⁷⁵ Cf. S.A. Kaufman, 'Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Late Jewish Literary Aramaic', in M. Bar-Asher, M. Garsiel, et al. (eds), *Moshe Goshen-Gottstein — In Memoriam* (in Hebrew; Studies in Bible and Exegesis, 3; Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1993), pp. 363–82.

⁷⁶ Kwasman, 'Der Zohar und seine Beziehung', pp. 143–45.

agreement with Targum Pseudo-Jonathan's profile, which firmly places it within the LJLA dialect given the percentages of the Targums to the Writings: Esther 46%, Qoheleth 46%, Ruth 50%, Lamentations 53%, Chronicles 76%, Job 80%, and Psalms 80%. Kwasman concluded his comparative study with the following observation:

Die zuerst von Dalman als "Sprachdenkmäler mit gemischtem Sprachtypus" beschriebene Textgattung, in der die Hagiographen eine Verbindung mit dem Zohar haben, scheint sich mehr und mehr zu erhärten. Auch die Ergebnisse aus Cooks Tabelle zeigen – wenn wir den Zohar mit hinzunehmen – eine eindeutige Beziehung zwischen Pseudo-Jonathan, den Hagiographen und dem Zohar. Konsequenterweise würde der Zohar damit zu dem "Late Jewish Literary Aramaic" gehören, welches die letzte Phase des literarischen Aramäisch ausmacht und nach dem 7. oder 8. Jahrhundert entstanden ist.⁷⁷

Shortly after the publication of Kwasman's article, I delivered a paper at the final conference of the AHRC project 'Late Aramaic: The Literary and Linguistic Context of the Zohar' at University College London (9–11 November 2009). I presented the findings of my preliminary linguistic analysis of a passage in Parashat Terumah (Zohar 2:172a). This short passage, presented below, elaborates on *b. Šabbat* 98a by comparing the clasps of the tabernacle to the stars and discussing how these heavenly bodies impinge on human affairs through their influence on specific gemstones. The text is part of a larger astro-magical treatise which, according to the Zohar itself, is quoted from *Sifra de-Shlomo Malka* 'the Book of King Solomon', a frequently cited, yet possibly fictitious royal volume. Daniel Matt suggests that the actual source may have been the *Lapidario* ('Lapidary'), which King Alfonso the Wise of Castile (1252–1284) had commissioned to be translated from Arabic.⁷⁸ It is not uncommon for the authors of the Zohar to rework literary sources to such an extent that it is nigh impossible to determine the real source, if it ever existed.⁷⁹ The fact that our passage is introduced by the technical term תנינן 'we have learned' does not prove its dependence on an extraneous source. Even if our passage is excerpted from an existing source – such as the *Lapidario* as suggested by Matt –, we are presumably dealing with late material that the

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 146.

⁷⁸ D.C. Matt (trans. and ed.), *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition* (vol. 5; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 501 n. 882; cf. Y. Liebes, *The Cult of the Dawn: The Attitude of the Zohar towards Idolatry* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Carmel Publishing House, 2011), p. 65.

⁷⁹ On the determination of the literary sources used in the Zohar, see Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, pp. 74–83.

authors reworked into their own language. Below we thus find an interesting sample of Zoharic Aramaic which, nevertheless, should not be seen as representative of the whole corpus, given the Zohar's diverse character:⁸⁰

1 ועשית קרסי נחושת חמשים וכתוב ועשית חמשים קרסי זהב ותנינן מאן דלא חמא אינון קרסים במשכנא
 2 לא חמא נהירו דככביא ברקיעא בגין דבההוא חיזו ובההוא גוונא דמיין לכל מאן דאסתכל בהו. ככביא
 3 אית ברקיעא דאלין נפקי מההוא רקיעא דכל ככביא אדוקין תמן בההוא רקיעא אית מאה חלוני משקופין
 4 מנהון לסטר מזרח ומנהון לסטר דרום ובכל חלונא וחלונא ככבא חד. וכד שמשא אזיל באינון חלוני
 5 ומשקופין די ברקיעא נציץ בנציצו ואלין ככביא נפקי מההוא נציצו דשמשא לאתנצצא ואצטבעו מנהון
 6 סומקין כגוונא דנחשת ומנהון ירוקין כגוונא דזהב ועל דא אלין סומקין ואלין ירוקין. חמשים אינון באינון
 7 חמשים חלונין (נ"א וחמשים אינון באינון חלונין) אחרנין דלסטר מזרח אינון ירוקין דלסטר דרום אינון
 8 סומקין בהו אתאחד סיומא דמשכנא. בכל אינון ככביא דנפקי מההוא רקיע ונציץ ומלהטי⁸¹ מתערבי
 9 אינון ככביא בליליא ונציץ ומלהטי ושלטי בהאי עלמא מנהון על נחשת מנהון על זהב ירקרק ואתתקנן
 10 ומגדלן על חילא דלהון. אלין ככביא שלטי בכ"ה ופלגא נקודין דליליא דאינון רגעי שעתא ואינון דמגדלי
 11 נחשת אינון סומקי ולהטי ונציץ. וכד אושיטו תלת זימנין נציצו לסטרא דמזרח או חמש או שבע מלכי
 12 עמין ייתון על ההוא סטרא וכל עתרא ודהבא יסתלק מההוא סטרא.

line 1^c 'You shall make fifty bronze clasps' (Exod. 26:11), and it is written, 'You shall make fifty golden clasps' (Exod. 26:6). We have learned: whoever has not seen those clasps in the

⁸⁰ The textual basis for this Zoharic passage is the Mantua edition (1558–1560). I am grateful to Dr Daphne Freedman, who kindly shared her score of this passage's editions and manuscripts with me. I am also indebted to Prof. Ronit Meroz, who provided the information on the textual witnesses. I have tried to render this passage as literally as possible to convey the Zohar's idiosyncratic style. More detailed comments on this astro-magical treatise can be found in Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 5, pp. 501–502. Manuscript key to textual variants:

Cremona edition	1559–60
Oxford, the Bodleian library, Neubauer Cat. 1564	15th century, North African script
Oxford, the Bodleian library, Neubauer Cat. 2514	16th century, Safed, Sephardic script
New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary 1930	1553, Pieve di Cento, Italian script
Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. Cod. Hebr. 20.	16th century, Sephardic script
Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. Cod. Hebr. 218.	1536, Sephardic script
Moscow, Guenzburg Collection, Russian State Library. 293.	1549, Pisa, Italian script

⁸¹ [ונציץ ומלהטי] The Mantua editions reads ונציץ ומלהטי twice (see next line), perhaps we are dealing here with a case of dittography.

tabernacle ^{line 2} has not seen the light of the stars in the sky, for they were like that appearance and that colour to whoever looked at them. ^{line 3} There are stars in the sky that emerge from that firmament where all the stars are fixed. There are one hundred latticed windows in that firmament, ^{line 4} some of them on the side of the east and some of them on the side of the south, and one star in every single window. When the sun passes those windows ^{line 5} and lattices which are in the firmament, it sparkles with sparkle, and these stars emerge to sparkle from that sparkle of the sun and they become coloured, some of them ^{line 6} become red like the colour of bronze and some of them become yellow like the colour of gold; and for this reason these are red and those⁸² are yellow. There are fifty in those ^{line 7} fifty other windows;⁸³ the ones on the side of the east are yellow, the ones on the side of the south are ^{line 8} red. With them the completion of the tabernacle was clasped. With all those stars which emerge from that firmament mingle ^{line 9} the stars⁸⁴ in the night, sparkling, glowing, and ruling over this world. Some of them over bronze, some of them over yellowish gold, and [the manner in which] they are arranged increases ^{line 10} their strength.⁸⁵ These stars rule over twenty-five and a half points of the night which are moments of an hour, and those that cause bronze to grow ^{line 11} are red, glowing and sparkling. When they send forth a sparkle three times to the side of the east, or five or seven, the kings of the nations ^{line 12} will attack that side, and all wealth and gold will disappear from that side.

In my pilot study I sought to establish whether the linguistic heterogeneity that characterizes this Zoharic passage approximates to the LJLA dialect of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and the Targums to the Writings, as observed by Kwasman in his sample survey. I distinguished four linguistic categories: orthography, vocabulary, morphology, and syntax. In each respective category I listed the passage's deviations from JLA, the dialect of Targums Onqelos and Jonathan, which appears to underlie Zoharic Aramaic. Subsequently, I examined whether these deviations agreed with LJLA's profile, on the strength of Edward Cook's preliminary description of that dialect.⁸⁶

⁸² those] Lit. 'these'.

⁸³ The Mantua edition refers to another version that reads: 'There are fifty in those fifty windows and there are fifty in those other windows'.

⁸⁴ the stars] Lit. 'those stars'.

⁸⁵ I.e. the position of the stars determines the strength of the metals bronze and gold.

⁸⁶ See n. 72.

I. Orthography

With regard to the passage's orthography, the textual witnesses abound in orthographic variants, such as plene and defective spellings. For example, the noun כוכב 'star' is spelled with or without the vowel letter *waw*. This category is nevertheless the least important because divergent consonantal spellings do not reveal the linguistic character of a text, but rather the lexical, grammatical, and syntactical patterns. However, there may be an interesting exception: the spelling of the relative pronoun with *yod* in line 5.⁸⁷ The independent form יַי / יֵי is characteristic of Old and Official Aramaic, including Biblical Aramaic. In Middle Aramaic a gradual shift from יַי to -י occurs – as reflected in the writings of Qumran – but this development never results in a complete change-over in Palestine. Cook explains the predominant spelling with יַי in the Palestinian Targums to the Pentateuch and even more so in the LJLA dialect of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and the Targums to the Writings as a 'historical spelling or an archaizing feature, probably the former'.⁸⁸ The LJLA dialect tends to use archaisms, and the ample presence of יַי in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and its congeners fits well into this pattern. However, the sole attestation of יַי in our Zoharic passage, which primarily uses -י, serves as insufficient proof of a dialectal correspondence with LJLA.⁸⁹

II. Vocabulary

This category is more important because some lexemes are characteristic of a certain Aramaic dialect. Presented below are vocabulary items that are attested in our astro-magical passage, but absent in the JLA corpus.

Westernism

A distinctive Westernism is the verb חמי 'to see',⁹⁰ which is also found in LJLA.⁹¹ The verb even features in Cook's linguistic profile for analyzing Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and other Aramaic sources.⁹²

⁸⁷ Absent in Oxford 1564, Oxford 2514.

⁸⁸ Cook, *Rewriting the Bible*, p. 144.

⁸⁹ Alternatively, יַי may be a contraction of -י and the existential particle אִית. Thanks are due to Prof. Stephen Kaufman, who kindly put forward this suggestion.

⁹⁰ Lines 1-2. In line 2 Munich 218 reads חזא; in that manuscript חמי and its Eastern equivalent חז thus feature simultaneously.

⁹¹ Damsma, *Targumic Toseftot to Ezekiel*, p. 170; Sokoloff, *DJPA*, pp. 194, 205–206.

⁹² Cook, *Rewriting the Bible*, p. 272.

Easternisms

In his study of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan's language, Cook observes a natural use of Eastern Aramaic features which do not appear to be derived from another source.⁹³ In the Zoharic passage I came across the following lexical items that are not attested in JLA: גוּוּנָא 'colour'⁹⁴; נְקוּדִין 'points'⁹⁵; סִיּוּמָא 'completion'⁹⁶. However, because of their infrequency – and the likelihood that they are Hebraisms instead – I am hesitant to attach undue weight to these lexemes, in contrast to a typical dialectal marker like the Westernism חָמִי 'to see'.

Hebraisms

The LJLA dialect of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and its congeners shows the tendency to adopt Hebraisms,⁹⁷ of which we also find some evidence in our astro-magical passage. Although the examples presented below are not dialect markers per se, they serve to illustrate that our Zoharic text shares with LJLA the tendency to use this types of vocabulary items. According to Cook, the influence of Hebrew on Targum Pseudo-Jonathan's language is particularly noticeable in the lexical sphere. He distinguishes several types of Hebraisms, and the ones attested in our Zoharic passage could be classified as immediate Hebraisms:⁹⁸ חִלּוּנָא 'windows'⁹⁹; מְזֵרְחָא 'east'¹⁰⁰; נְחֹשֶׁת 'bronze'¹⁰¹; זָהָב 'gold'¹⁰²; יֶרְקֶרְק 'greenish, yellowish'¹⁰³.

III. Morphology

This is an important linguistic category because morphological deviations reveal a deeper level of change than do either orthographic or lexical peculiarities. Our Zoharic passage exhibits a few interesting morphological features that differ from JLA:

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 249–59.

⁹⁴ Lines 2, 6 (2x). Cf. Sokoloff, *DJBA*, p. 267–68.

⁹⁵ Line 10. NY 1930, Munich 218: נְקוּדִין. Cf. Sokoloff, *DJBA*, p. 772.

⁹⁶ Line 8. Cf. Sokoloff, *DJBA*, p. 800.

⁹⁷ See Cook, *Rewriting the Bible*, pp. 225–248.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 226: '[...] an immediate Hebraism in PsJ is one that clearly alludes to or derives from a Hebrew source, or one that is found rarely or not at all in any other Aramaic writing'.

⁹⁹ Lines 3, 4 (3x), 7.

¹⁰⁰ Lines 4, 7, 11.

¹⁰¹ Line 6 (Oxford 1564, Oxford 2514, NY 1930, Munich 218: נְחֹשֶׁת), 7, 9.

¹⁰² Lines 6 (Oxford 1564, Oxford 2514: דְּהָבָא), 9. In line 12 the Aramaic lexeme is used: דְּהָבָא.

¹⁰³ Line 9.

Pronominal suffix 3mpl

The pronominal suffix third person masculine plural הון- occurs in apocopated form in בהו,¹⁰⁴ and the loss of ה- is a distinctively Eastern feature.¹⁰⁵ However, we also find the non-apocopated form in מנהון¹⁰⁶ and דלהון¹⁰⁷. The simultaneous use of these apocopated and non-apocopated forms is attested in JBA.¹⁰⁸

Demonstrative adjectives

Our Zoharic passage deviates from JLA in its use of the proximal masculine singular form האי 'this'.¹⁰⁹ In the language of Targums Onqelos and Jonathan we find הון instead. The form האי is employed in JBA¹¹⁰ and in some LJLA writings,¹¹¹ albeit in the latter as a seemingly rare Easternism.

The astro-magical text further uses the form אלין as the proximate plural 'these'.¹¹² As an adjectival form אלין is also attested in JBA,¹¹³ JPA,¹¹⁴ and LJLA.¹¹⁵ It is, however, absent in JLA, where the prefixed form האלין is exclusively used.

Our text frequently employs the form אינון as the distal plural 'those'.¹¹⁶ This seems to be a Western feature, albeit a rare one.¹¹⁷ The JLA dialect of Targums Onqelos and Jonathan has the adjectival form האנון, which is also employed in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.¹¹⁸

¹⁰⁴ Lines 2, 8 (in line 8 Oxford 1564, Oxford 2514, NY 1930: בהווא).

¹⁰⁵ E.A. Bar-Asher Siegal, *Introduction to the Grammar of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2nd edn, 2016), pp. 61ff.

¹⁰⁶ Lines 4 (2x; in the second attestation Munich 20: (מניהון) 5, 6 (Cremona edition, Munich 20: (מניהון) 9 (2x)).

¹⁰⁷ Line 10 (Oxford 1564, Oxford 2514, Munich 218: (דילהון)).

¹⁰⁸ Bar-Asher Siegal, *Introduction*, p. 104; J.N. Epstein, *A Grammar of Babylonian Aramaic* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1960), p. 23; M. Morgenstern, *Studies in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Based upon Early Eastern Manuscripts* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), pp. 204–206.

¹⁰⁹ Line 9.

¹¹⁰ Bar-Asher Siegal, *Introduction*, pp. 90–91; Sokoloff, *DJBA*, pp. 358–59; cf. Dalman, *Grammatik*, p. 111.

¹¹¹ Targum Ruth 4:6; Targum Sheni 2:18; Tosefta-Targum 2Kgs. 4:1; Tosefta-Targum 2Kgs. 4:7; Tosefta-Targum Hos. 2:1.

¹¹² Lines 5, 10.

¹¹³ Bar-Asher Siegal, *Introduction*, pp. 90–92 (he observes that the form אלין is usually employed in a legal context, which tends to be linguistically conservative); Epstein, *Grammar*, p. 23; cf. Sokoloff, *DJBA*, pp. 115–16.

¹¹⁴ Dalman, *Grammatik*, pp. 111–14; Sokoloff, *DJPA*, p. 153.

¹¹⁵ Cook, *Rewriting the Bible*, pp. 139–40.

Verbal inflections

This short passage clearly prefers the apocopated form to express the masculine plural participle: נפקי 'they emerge', lines 3¹¹⁹, 5, 8; נצצי 'they sparkle', lines 8, 9¹²⁰, 11¹²¹; מלהטי 'they glow', lines 8, 9; להטי 'they glow', line 11; מתערבי 'they mingle', line 8; שלטי 'they rule', lines 9, 10¹²²; מגדלי 'they cause to grow', line 10. The apocopation of final nun in the masculine plural participle is a common feature in JBA.¹²³

The second line has דמיין as the masculine plural participial form of דמי 'to be similar'. In the JLA dialect, on the other hand, the masculine plural participle has the ending ך- in III-y verbs. The יין- ending is attested in JBA (although uncommon in BTA),¹²⁴ JPA,¹²⁵ and LJLA.¹²⁶ Cook points out that in LJLA's Targum Pseudo-Jonathan we find a mixture of both forms as different verbs employ different endings.¹²⁷ As it turns out, in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan the verb דמי has the ending יין- in the masculine plural participle,¹²⁸ and the same applies to other LJLA writings.¹²⁹

Conjunction בגין ד-

In line 2 of our Zoharic passage we find the conjunction בגין ד- 'because, in order that', which is a combination of the preposition בגין with the relative pronoun ד-. This conjunction is

¹¹⁶ Lines 1, 4, 6, 8, 9.

¹¹⁷ Dalman, *Grammatik*, p. 112; S.E. Fassberg, *A Grammar of the Palestinian Targum Fragments from the Cairo Genizah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), p. 123; Sokoloff, *DJPA*, p. 163; Wm. B. Stevenson, *Grammar of Palestinian Jewish Aramaic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn, 1962), p. 18.

¹¹⁸ Cook, *Rewriting the Bible*, pp. 137–38.

¹¹⁹ Oxford 1564, Oxford 2514: נפקין.

¹²⁰ NY 1930: מנצצי.

¹²¹ Oxford 1564, Oxford 2514, NY 1930, Munich 218: מנצצי.

¹²² NY 1930: שלטין.

¹²³ Bar-Asher Siegal, *Introduction*, p. 133; Epstein, *Grammar*, p. 39; Morgenstern, *Studies*, pp. 192–93.

¹²⁴ Bar-Asher Siegal, *Introduction*, p. 163; Epstein, *Grammar*, p. 79.

¹²⁵ Dalman, *Grammatik*, pp. 340, 350; Fassberg, *Grammar*, p. 189; D.M. Golomb, *A Grammar of Targum Neofiti* (HSM, 34; Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 155, 185.

¹²⁶ Cook, *Rewriting the Bible*, p. 209.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹²⁸ See Targum Pseudo-Jonathan's rendering of Gen. 18:22, 29:20, 37:3; Num. 13:33, 23:19; Deut. 4:7, 32:32.

¹²⁹ Targum Lamentations 5:3; Targum Psalms 66:11, 90:6, 126:1; Targum Song of Songs 4:3, 5:2, 7:7.

unattested in JLA; the preposition בגין is found once in JLA's Targum Jonathan.¹³⁰ The preposition בגין and the conjunction בגין-ד seem to be typically Western Aramaic features as they are frequently attested in JPA.¹³¹ They also feature prominently in LJLA,¹³² and Cook even includes בגין in his linguistic profile for comparing Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to the Targums to the Writings and other Aramaic documents.¹³³

IV. Syntax

Little scholarly attention has hitherto been paid to JLA's syntax.¹³⁴ It nonetheless transpired that the Zoharic passage bears certain distinctive syntactical features that differ from JLA:

Word order demonstrative adjective

A diagnostic is the position of the demonstrative adjective. In JPA – with the exception of the Palestinian Targums – and JBA it usually precedes the noun.¹³⁵ In the JLA dialect of Targums Onqelos and Jonathan, on the other hand, the reverse order is predominant, perhaps under the influence of the Hebrew *Vorlage*.¹³⁶ In Targum Pseudo-Jonathan's LJLA dialect the instances in which the demonstrative adjective precedes the noun or rather follows it are almost equally distributed.¹³⁷ In our Zoharic passage the demonstrative adjective solely precedes the noun, which agrees with the JPA and JBA pattern: אינון קרסים 'those clasps', line 1¹³⁸; ההוא חיון 'that

¹³⁰ Targum Jonathan to Isa. 28:15. We find בגין also in the Tosefta-Targums to 1 Kgs. 16:34, 2 Kgs. 24:4, Isa. 33:8, but the dialect of these Targums is generally considered LJLA.

¹³¹ Dalman, *Grammatik*, p. 237; Fassberg, *Grammar*, pp. 194, 197; Golomb, *Grammar*, p. 23; Sokoloff, *DJPA*, p. 84.

¹³² Cook, *Rewriting the Bible*, pp. 151, 158; J. Levy, *Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Targumim und einen grossen Theil des rabbinischen Schriftthums* (Leipzig: Baumgärtner's Buchhandlung, 3rd edn, 1881), pp. 136–37.

¹³³ Cook, *Rewriting the Bible*, p. 271.

¹³⁴ For an overview of studies on the syntax of the JLA dialect of Targums Onqelos and Jonathan, see R.J. Kutty, *Studies in the Syntax of Targum Jonathan to Samuel* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), pp. 12–14.

¹³⁵ Bar-Asher Siegal, *Introduction*, p. 93; Dalman, *Grammatik*, p. 113; M. Schlesinger, *Satzlehre der aramäischen Sprache des babylonischen Talmuds* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, reprint 1995), p. 83; Stevenson, *Grammar*, p. 19.

¹³⁶ The same order is found in Targum Neofiti and the Fragmentary Targums; cf. Fassberg, *Grammar*, p. 122; Golomb, *Grammar*, p. 56; Stevenson, *Grammar*, p. 19; A. Tal, *The Language of the Targum of the Former Prophets and its position within the Aramaic Dialects* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1975), p. 8.

¹³⁷ Cook, *Rewriting the Bible*, pp. 137–38.

¹³⁸ Munich 20: אינון קרסין; NY 1930, Moscow 293: אנון קרסים.

appearance', line 2; ההוא גוונא 'that colour', line 2¹³⁹; ההוא רקיעא 'that firmament', line 3¹⁴⁰, line 3¹⁴¹; אינון חלונין 'those windows', line 4¹⁴²; אלין ככביא 'these stars', lines 5¹⁴³, 10¹⁴⁴; ההוא נציצו 'that sparkle', line 5; אינון חמשים חלונין 'those fifty windows', line 6–7¹⁴⁵; אינון ככביא 'those stars', lines 8¹⁴⁶, 9¹⁴⁷; ההוא רקיע 'that firmament', line 8¹⁴⁸; האי עלמא 'this world', line 9; ההוא סטרא 'that side', line 12 (2x).¹⁴⁹

Expression of the genitive relationship

Cook's study of the genitive relationship in the midrashic portions in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan's translation of Deuteronomy revealed a marked preference for the construct state, followed by the use of the genitive particle -ד and, lastly, the proleptic pronominal suffix combined with the genitive particle -ד.¹⁵⁰ A slight preference for the genitive particle is noticeable in our Zoharic passage, followed by the construct state. I did not come across attestations of the proleptic pronominal suffix combined with the genitive particle -ד.

Genitive particle -ד: נהירו דככביא 'the light of the stars', line 2¹⁵¹; נציצו דשמשא 'the sparkle of the sun', line 5; גוונא דנחשת 'the colour of bronze', line 6¹⁵²; גוונא דזהב 'the colour of gold', line 6¹⁵³; סיומא דמשכנא 'the completion of the tabernacle', line 8; נקודין דליליא 'points of the night', line 10¹⁵⁴; סטרא דמזרח 'the side of the east', line 11¹⁵⁵.

¹³⁹ Cremona edition: ההו' גוונא.

¹⁴⁰ All Mss: ההוא רקיע.

¹⁴¹ All Mss, except Oxford 1564: ההוא רקיע.

¹⁴² NY 1930, Moscow 293: אנון חלונין.

¹⁴³ NY 1930, Moscow 293: ואלין ככביא. Oxford 1564: ואלין כוכביא. Oxford 2514: אלין כוכביא.

¹⁴⁴ Oxford 1564, Oxford 2514: אילין כוכביא. Moscow 293: אלין ככביא.

¹⁴⁵ Cremona edition: אינון חמשי' חלונין. Oxford 1564, Oxford 2514, Munich 218: אינון חמשי' חלונין. NY 1930, Moscow 293: אנון חמשים חלונין.

¹⁴⁶ NY 1930, Moscow 293: אנון ככביא. Oxford 1564, Oxford 2514: אנון ככביא.

¹⁴⁷ Cremona edition: אינון ככבי'. Oxford 1564, Oxford 2514: אינון כוכביא. NY 1930, Moscow 293: אנון ככביא.

¹⁴⁸ Oxford 1564, Oxford 2514: האי רקיע. Moscow 293: ההוא רקיעא.

¹⁴⁹ Moscow 293: ההוא סט'

¹⁵⁰ For an overview of the ways in which the genitive relationship is expressed in various Aramaic dialects, see Cook, *Rewriting the Bible*, pp. 212–15.

¹⁵¹ Moscow 293: נהירו דככביא. Oxford 1564, Oxford 2514: נהירו דכוכביא. NY 1930, Munich 218: נהירו דככבים.

¹⁵² Oxford 1564, Oxford 2514, NY 1930, Munich 218: גוונא נחשא.

¹⁵³ Oxford 1564, Oxford 2514: גוונא דדהבא.

¹⁵⁴ NY 1930, Munich 218: נקדין דליליא.

¹⁵⁵ Oxford 2514: סטר דמזרח. Moscow 293: סט' דמזרח.

Construct state: סטר מזר ‘the side of the east’, lines 4, 7; סטר דרום ‘the side of the south’, lines 4¹⁵⁶, 7; רגעיי שעתא ‘moments of an hour’, line 10¹⁵⁷; מלכי עמין ‘the kings of the nations’, line 11¹⁵⁸.

In sum, my analysis of this Zoharic passage revealed an intriguing linguistic heterogeneity that approximates to the LJLA dialect of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and its congeners. I came across identical morphological features, Hebraisms, a Westernism, and possible Easternisms. However, the astro-magical text also displayed some noticeable deviations, such as the apocopation of final nun in the masculine plural participle, the use of eht sa אינון demonstrative adjective, the pre-nominal position of the demonstrative adjective, and the slight preference for the genitive particle -ד to express the genitive relationship. Whether these differences are perhaps caused by scribal interference or dialectal transitions in the subsequent development of the literary Aramaic tradition, at this stage of research, they prevent a straightforward identification of our passage’s language with LJLA, as based on the description of the latter dialect by Cook.¹⁵⁹

Towards a new grammar of Zoharic Aramaic

The current wave of scholarly interest in Zoharic Aramaic is a far cry from the days of Gershom Scholem, under whose influence it was commonly accepted in academic circles that the Zohar was composed in an artificial type of Aramaic. The two pilot studies have confirmed the need for an extensive and systematic linguistic analysis of Zoharic Aramaic, a task which the present author aims to undertake. The first step is to establish the linguistic

¹⁵⁶ Cremona edition: סטר דרום

¹⁵⁷ Munich 20: רגעיי שכינת ? Moscow 293: רגעיי שכינתא ?

¹⁵⁸ Munich 20: מלכי עלמין, but corrected to עמין in the margin.

¹⁵⁹ To gain further understanding of the late literary Aramaic tradition, especially with regard to the linguistic nature of mystical writings, the present author aims to analyze the Aramaic of the pre-Zoharic treatise *Aggadat Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi*, published in A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrman, 2nd edn, 1938), vol. 5, pp. 43–44; cf. M. Perry, *Tradition and Transformation: Knowledge Transmission among Western European Jews in the Middle Ages* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz HaMeuhad, 2010). The language of this treatise had also been dismissed as ‘artificial’ by Scholem and Tishby; G. Scholem, *Devils, Demons and Souls: Essays on Demonology by Gershom Scholem* (ed. E. Liebes; in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2004), p. 139; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, p. 67; cf. Rapoport-Albert and Kwasman, ‘Late Aramaic’, p. 8 n. 7.

profile of a representative Zoharic unit. Thereafter the dialectal position of this newly created linguistic profile will be located within the literary Aramaic tradition of the Middle Ages.

A complicating factor whilst dealing with the Zohar's language is the absence of an authoritative, canonical version of the text. The standard printed editions – which in turn are based on the Mantua edition (1558–60) and, to a lesser degree, the Cremona edition (1559–60) – are markedly different from the extant manuscripts, with regard to their contents and arrangement of the materials. To make matters even more complicated, the manuscripts themselves have been interfered with by scribes and copyists, showing signs of – at times drastic – editing and revision. Identifying a representative Zoharic unit, let alone establishing the textual evolution of such a unit, would therefore pose a challenging and time-consuming task. However, Ronit Meroz from Tel Aviv University has conducted extensive and groundbreaking research on some of the complex and dynamic textual traditions of the Zohar, systematically collating and scrutinizing dozens of extant manuscripts, fragments and other sources.¹⁶⁰ Her philological-textual analysis has resulted, amongst others, in the preparation of an annotated critical edition of the Exodus pericope in the Zohar.¹⁶¹ Meroz's much-welcomed text edition provides an excellent, representative basis for my research because the Exodus unit belongs to the core of the Zohar. For my linguistic analysis of the Exodus pericope I adopt the same methodology which I applied in my aforementioned pilot study.

Once I have created the linguistic profile of the Exodus pericope, I shall establish in the second stage of my research its dialectal classification within the literary Aramaic tradition of the Middle Ages. Since the middle of the twentieth century, dramatic progress has been made in Aramaic dialectology, largely through the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the ongoing disclosure of the Aramaic Cairo Genizah fragments, and the identification and publication of the Targum Neofiti I manuscript.¹⁶² Thanks also to the recently published linguistic profiles of

¹⁶⁰ For more information on Meroz's philological-textual research, conducted within the framework of her 'Zohar HaRaki'a' project, see R. Meroz and J. Weiss, 'The Source of Guillaume Postel's 1553 Zohar Latin Translation', *Renaissance Studies* 29.2 (2015), pp. 247–60, esp. pp. 248–52.

¹⁶¹ R. Meroz, *Headwaters of the Zohar – Research and Editions of Zohar, the Pericope of Exodus* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, in print).

¹⁶² Rapoport-Albert and Kwasman rightly add nuance to Scholem's verdict on Zoharic Aramaic with their observation that in his days the scholarly study of Aramaic dialectology was still in its infancy because the aforementioned ground-breaking discoveries had not yet been made or published; Rapoport-Albert and Kwasman, 'Late Aramaic', p. 14 n. 22.

several late Jewish Aramaic writings it has now become possible to locate the position of Zoharic Aramaic within the literary Aramaic tradition of the Middle Ages.

The output of my research will be presented in a monograph that clarifies the linguistic profile and dialectal classification of pericope Exodus. The only grammar of the Zohar ever published was written by Menahem Kaddari.¹⁶³ However, nowadays Kaddari's grammar is somewhat outdated for several reasons.¹⁶⁴ It adopts Scholem's untenable characterization of the Zoharic language as artificial. It is based on flawed printed editions and does not discuss the Zoharic language in its literary and linguistic context. Neither does it include the hugely significant recent developments in both Aramaic dialectology and the textual research of Zoharic literature.

Finally, my linguistic analysis of Zoharic Aramaic does not seek to diminish the literary and artistic expression of the composer(s) of this remarkable Jewish mystical corpus. The unique, innovative style of the Zohar remains undisputed.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, although the Zohar seems purposefully ambiguous and mysterious in its language and style, its obscure nature does not necessarily render Zoharic Aramaic artificial. Artistic works seek to violate existing norms, but the standard still constitutes the background against which these violations and distortions can occur.¹⁶⁶ Zoharic Aramaic seems to be rooted in the living Aramaic literary

¹⁶³ See n. 23.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Kwasman, 'Der Zohar und seine Beziehung', p. 133 n. 1.

¹⁶⁵ On the poetic nature of the Zohar's language, see D.C. Matt (trans. and ed.), *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition* (vol. 1; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. xix–xxi.

¹⁶⁶ See Jan Mukařovský's influential essay 'Standard Language and Poetic Language', in L. Burke, T. Crowley, and A. Girvin (eds), *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 225–30 (for the original Czech version of Mukařovský article, entitled 'Jazyk spisovný a jazyk básnický', see B. Havránek and M. Weingart [eds], *Spisovná čeština a jazyková kultura* [Prague: Melantrich 1932], pp. 123–49). Mukařovský observed the following: 'Many of the linguistic components of a work of poetry do not deviate from the norm of the standard because they constitute the background against which the distortion of the other components is reflected. The theoretician of the standard language can therefore include works of poetry in his data with the reservation that he will differentiate the distorted components from those that are not distorted. An assumption that all components have to agree with the norm of the standard would, of course, be erroneous' (p. 226). Applying Mukařovský's terminology to the language of the Zohar, recent studies – as described above – have established that several linguistic components that had hitherto been dismissed as 'distorted' were in fact part of the standard (literary) language. However, the occurrence of genuinely distorted components in the Zohar, such as neologisms, does not hinder the linguistic analysis and dialectal classification of the standard language that constitutes the background of Zoharic Aramaic.

tradition, but the composer(s) gave a unique twist to this literary language in order to achieve the desired aesthetic and mystifying effects.