Cultural and Stylistic Traits
In the Language
Of Two Hebrew Versions
Of the New Testament

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Spring Semester 2018
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### Abbreviations, and Names

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All biblical names... ... will be given in Hebrew – Jesus as Yeshua, John as Yoḥanan, Peter as Kepha, Mary as Miriam etcetera
This study presents a comparison of the language features of two different Hebrew translations of the New Testament.

The focus lies primarily on the cultural concepts communicated by the wordings and the stylistics employed, and secondarily on their interpretation by investigating parallel applications in the Tanakhic writings.


The question this thesis will try to assess is if Hebrew versions of the New Testament, despite being mere translations, demonstrate language characteristics verifying such an affinity.
INTRODUCTION

This study is based upon two Hebrew translations from the Greek of the Gospel of John in the New Testament, as well as on the Hebrew Tanakh.

Biblical Hebrew

Modern Hebrew
The Modern Hebrew translation used is the 2010 edition of a version published by the Bible Society in Israel in 1976, first printed in Jerusalem in 1977. See the complete text at https://www.bible.com/bible/380/JHN.1_1

1.1 Conceptual Approach
In the comparison of these two versions of the Hebrew New Testament two major aspects will be highlighted:

Difference in the interpretation – due to both diverging connotations of terms and metaphors in Greek and Hebrew, and to the differing cultures in which the translations were undertaken.

Difference in style – due to language developments, and to an emerging theory of translation.

The BH translation was performed before the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language. The main focus of the translator was to reevolve Biblical Hebrew and to present the New Testament message in the language of the Tanakh.

The objective of the translators of the ModH version, on the other hand, was to as closely as possible adapt the text to the language then spoken in Israel, in line with the translation theory of “Dynamic equivalence” prevailing in the second half of the 20th century.\(^1\) This theory was developed by the American linguist Eugene Nida, who established a concept for the translation of the Bible into non-European languages. Nida abandoned traditional terms such as "literal translation," or "free translation," and advocated two ways of “equivalence” giving basic directions and guidelines for translations:” dynamic equivalence” and “formal equivalence.”

Formal equivalence reflects the linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, syntax and structure of the original language. Dynamic equivalence stresses the importance of transferring meaning, not grammatical form. The message of the original text has to be transported into the
receptor language in such a way that the response of the intended receptors equals the response of the original receptors.

Both concepts are evident in the ModH examples in this study:
The concept of formal equivalence in the direct quotes of Yeshua.
The concept of dynamic equivalence in the translation of metaphors alluding to body parts.

The application of Nida’s theory of translation and the by then established language usage resulted in the exclusion of archaic BH forms, as well as of the consecutive tenses, the cohortative, the infinitive absolute. The ModH translation reflects an overall development in Hebrew that even rejected the BH syntax almost entirely, including all the morphosyntactic aspects of the verb that are the main features of BH – although BH is the most important constituent of Israeli Hebrew vocabulary, phraseology, and morphology of the verb and the noun, according to E. Kutscher in “The History of the Hebrew Language”.

1.2

The Translators

The Modern Hebrew translation was undertaken by a team of experts in Israel, the most notable ones being Joseph Atzmon and Yochanan Elichay. It is known as “the Targum ḥadash.”

The Biblical Hebrew translation was achieved by a single translator, Vienna-based Isaak Salkinson, though later redacted by Christian David Ginsburg. It is mostly referred to as “the Salkinson-Ginsburg translation.”

Isaak Salkinson, 1820-1883

Salkinson was one of the finest translators of the Haskalah period, a highly acclaimed literary translator, known for rendering world classics like Schiller’s “Kabale und Liebe” (Hebrew: Nechelim veAhavim), Othello, Romeo and Juliet, and many more into Hebrew, inspired by the Haskalah movement of the late 1800s. His play “Ram and Jael” (Romeo and Juliet) was performed as late as 2017 in London. Much of his literary translation work Salkinson undertook in Vienna, Austria, where he frequented the literary salons. From 1877 until his death he worked on his great passion: a translation of the New Testament into idiomatic Biblical Hebrew.

Salkinson was a typical proponent of the European Jewry of his day. He grew up in a strictly orthodox family in an East European Jewish community (in a Belarus “Shtetl” or in Vilna), speaking Yiddish, with ties to Mittelhochdeutsch. Via England he made his way to Vienna, the cultural epicentre of the German-speaking Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Somewhat less common, in his day, was Salkinson’s genuine conversion to Christianity in London, and his subsequent ordination as a Presbyterian minister in Glasgow. In the second half of the 19th century there were many nominal conversions, but there was also a fair number of
actual Jewish believers in the Jewish Messiah Jesus/Yeshua. Salkinson, who had been reading the Hebrew Bible from the age of four, was one of them. As was Ginsburg, who finished and redacted the Biblical Hebrew translation of the New Testament after Salkinson’s death.

[Salkinson image]

**Isaak Salkinson**  
(Photo from Dunlop, John, Memories of Gospel Triumphs among the Jews during the Victorian Era, London 1894)

**Christian David Ginsburg, 1831-1914**

Ginsburg was a prominent Bible scholar originally from Warszawa who after his conversion moved to England and devoted himself to the collation of all the extant remains of the Masorah. Among his publications are the text and translation of Elias Levita's “Massoret ha-Massoret” and “The Massoreti-co-Critical Text of the Hebrew Bible.”

[Ginsburg image]

.cyber©

**Christian David Ginsburg** (Photo from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_David_Ginsburg)

### 1.3.2 The Translators of the Targum ḥadash

In line with the ideals of the 20th century the translation into Modern Hebrew was not undertaken by an individual but by a team of experts, and in this case in Israel itself. Joseph Atzmon was the team specialist in Modern Hebrew, and Yochanan Elichay in the Greek New Testament. Co-translators were Bob Lindsay, Gabriel Grossman, Miriam and Yoḥanan Ronen and Yann de Waard. An additional team of eight experts in biblical languages supervised the progress on a biannual basis.
1 Nida, Eugene A. and Taber, Charles R., The Theory and Practice of Translation, pp. 1-11
3 http://judaism.enc.enacademic.com/17052/SALKINSON%2C_Isaac_Edward
4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVSzMpD0Pms
METHODS

The corpus for my research was selected through the parallel reading of the two Hebrew translations of the Gospel of John. Since the translations represent two different Hebrew “dialects,” mirroring the radical linguistic changes in the time span between the two publishing dates, there are numerous divergences in the texts. To get an overview I divided the collected data into different tables, according to the topics I was interested in:

- Cultural traits disclosing the intended readership in the translations.
- Verbal patterns and other features indicating the time in which the translations were performed, as well as the time of origin of different passages in the Besorâ.

I also investigated the theories of translation prevailing in the 19th and 20th centuries. In Salkinson’s time the concept was to render as closely as possible the style and wording of the original text. By the mid-1900s the theory of Dynamic Equivalence by American linguist E. Nida was predominant, a theory focusing mainly on reader perception. These differing concepts provided me with further insights into the cultural background of the readers, as well as into the ambitions of the translators.

By analysing Salkinson’s letters it became clear that he did not completely conform to the prevailing theory of translation of the late 1800s. His focus was rather to establish the Jewishness of the Gospel in what he perceived as the original language of his people.

In a subsequent step, the consulting of secondary literature made apparent that Salkinson’s claim of the Jewishness of the NT was not unchallenged. The original text of the NT being written in Greek, as well as the position of several early Christian theologians favouring Greek philosophical ideas seemed to contradict the Jewish affiliation. In the 1970s the Jewishness of the Gospel was no longer questioned, as evidenced by the vocabulary of the Targum Ḥadash.

In accordance with the theory of Dynamic Equivalence, the focus of the latter translation was the perception of the reader, with the current language of the reader constituting the normative parameter. The language of the 1970s translation demonstrates clearly the shift from a Jewish minority culture struggling for identity to a majority culture in which using Jewish terms no longer required comment, or explanation.

2.1

The language development in Hebrew is discernable also in the grammar: In modern Hebrew as in other modern languages verbal expressions are predominant. In contrast older biblical texts evidence a higher frequency of nouns. I tried to collect samples of the different usage of verbs contra nouns in tables. Based on the tables I attempted to interpret the data in the light of the diachronic development, as seen in the Noun Verb Ratio model. In a further step I sought confirmation in secondary literature.
The tables also revealed the differing rhythms of time portrayed in the two translations, as described by Mats Eskhult.\(^3\)

The data for the different tables was selected through the parallel reading of the two Hebrew translations. This close reading, word by word, made it possible to discern details, and to gain additional information about the culture portrayed in the NT. Things not spelled out, but apparent when considered closely, could be evaluated. By contrasting the familiar ModH version to the more intricate BH translation thought patterns surfaced.

- In the course of analysing the tables I narrowed down my data, choosing relevant topics to investigate. In this way the corpus for my study was kept to a manageable size.
- Employing the computer’s search function, I was able to map the different applications of the relevant words in the translations.
- I also attempted to listen to an audio version of the ModH translation to discern differences in the translations but found it too time consuming.
- The next step was to search biblical and modern Hebrew dictionaries, both digital and print versions, to gain additional information on different connotations of the words I investigated.
- In a last step I looked for parallel applications of these words in the Tanakh. Placing the findings in the context of the Tanakh provided the context necessary to interpret such wordings and idioms that did not otherwise appear fully intelligible.

FOOT NOTES

3
SALKINSON VERSUS DELITZSCH

There were two late 1800s Hebrew translations of the NT to choose between for my comparison with the ModH translation of the 1970s. Both were undertaken and published shortly before ModH was launched at the turn of last century. In this study I decided to focus on one of them, the translation by the “native Hebrew reader” Isaak Salkinson from 1886 – rather than on the more scholarly translation by Prof. Franz Delitzsch from 1877.

Without having access to statistics, Prof. Delitzsch’s translation seems to be more widespread and is considered “the classic.” However, for the purpose of this thesis – exploring the affinities between the NT and the Tanakh – Salkinson’s BH translation seemed preferable.

The correspondence between Delitzsch and Salkinson sheds light on the respective positions and approaches of the two translators. Salkinson’s principal object was to attempt a translation with a stronger idiomatic emphasis than other Hebrew versions. He leaned on the BH of the Tanakh, in line with the ideals of the Jewish Haskalah movement of the 1800s. Prof. Delitzsch, on the other hand, based his work on the Hebrew of the Rabbinical literature, the Mishnaic Hebrew. His ambition was to render the NT in the Hebrew that might have been spoken in Jesus’ time. Both translations are explicitly idiomatic.

3.1

Their divergent ideas on which Hebrew to cultivate mirrored the ongoing discussion in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The later development of ModH proved Delitzsch to have been more foresighted. ModH, though based on BH, includes many language features of Mishna Hebrew. In fact, when Hebrew was “reassembled” the debate as to “which Hebrew” to choose, reflected the tension ventilated by Delitzsch and Salkinson.

Prof. Delitzsch published their correspondence in his article “In Self-Defense: Critical Observations On My Hebrew New Testament,” written in response to a more-than-blunt comment in a publication stating that “the work of Delitzsch, in comparison with the work of Salkinson, is like a miserable tent compared with the palaces of kings.”

Delitzsch hurried to assure that he and Salkinson had been intimate friends, not rivals, and quotes a letter from Salkinson’s wife, Henrietta, from June 1883, in which Mrs. Salkinson remarked: “I do assure you that never in my dear husband's mind was there the least desire that his work should be made a rival of yours, but he regarded this work as the task of his life.”

Salkinson had long dreamt of rendering the NT in a correct, idiomatic BH. Delitzsch was determined to apply rabbinical expressions – to reach such readers “who employ the post-biblical literature.”

“I am still thoroughly convinced,” Delitzsch writes, “of the soundness of the principle which I followed in my translation of rendering the New Testament into Hebrew of such a kind as the
sacred writers would themselves have employed had they thought and written in Hebrew. There are several passages, though the number is by no means great, in which Salkinson has made in his version what we might style a more happy hit."

3.2

The author of the “more happy hits,” Salkinson, worked hard to render his NT, according to his own words, in “a style which the Jews have not yet forgotten to appreciate, that is, the biblical Hebrew.” He was convinced that “the apostle himself can have no objection to seeing his idea expressed in good old Hebrew.”

In his letter from the 11th of June 1877 Salkinson explains thoroughly how he went about his translation: “My plan is to take a good share of liberty in regard to words and phrases, and to be faithful only to the sense and spirit of the text.

"In the enclosed specimen you will see at a glance what kind of liberty I take: מלאכות-יה (mal’akhut ya) for ‘apostleship’. מלאכות (mal’akhut) is the literal rendering, but in the absolute state it does not occur. Hence it does not sound pretty, and I therefore added an intensive particle י (ya) which makes no difference in the real sense. If the reader reads מלאכות-יה ופשי (we-nafshi) ‘soul’ to the word ברוחי (ḇᵊrûḥi) ‘flying’ because the idiom requires that ברוחי (ḇᵊrûḥi) ‘flying’ in the construction of the verse should not stand alone. Hence the synonymous ופשי (we-nafshi) ‘soul’ is added, which makes no alteration in the meaning."

This letter Prof. Delitzsch published after the 9th edition of his Hebrew NT, and after the 2nd edition of Salkinson’s NT.

Salkinson never lived to see even his first edition. He died in Vienna in 1883 before his work was finished. According to his friend Delitzsch “he had prepared the first draft of it – only the Acts of the Apostles had not been completed – when his unexpected death brought sore bereavement on his family, and put a sudden stop to the work that had been so dear to him.”

Some months before he died, in a letter dated January 1883, Salkinson wrote: “I was told the other day: ‘Your suffering in the eyes is a due punishment for your work on the New Testament, with which you are going to dim the light of Israel. I replied, if my present dimness has been caused by that work, I am comforted with the hope that that work will enlighten many an eye in Israel.”

Because of Salkinson’s untimely death, his colleague Ginsburg finished the NT in England, but it was first printed in Vienna in 1886 by Hofbuchdruckerei Carl Fromme, close to the 3rd district where Salkinson had worked so diligently on the “task of his life.”

FOOT NOTE

4

A CONTROVERSIAL GOSPEL

In line with Salkinson’s object of presenting the NT as an indigenous Jewish text, I want to introduce the Gospel of John largely from a Jewish point of view, as expounded in two Jewish commentaries: “The Jewish Annotated New Testament,” a scholarly Oxford publication, catering to a Christian public, and “The Jewish New Testament Commentary” by Messianic Jewish H. Stern, a proponent of the movement the ModH translation was targeting.

The Gospel of John is said to be the most Jewish but also the most anti-Jewish of the Gospels. It differs from the Synoptic Gospels Mattityahu, Markos, and Lukas in style and content, as well as in chronology and structure. It describes three years of Yeshua’s ministry, mainly in Jerusalem and Judea, not in Galilee.

The style is more personal with more direct quotes of Yeshua. The overall message of the “Besorâ al-pi Yoḥanan” is the divinity of Yeshua, as displayed even in its symbolism.

Seven, 7, symbolizing (divine) completion, is applied three times: John’s gospel records 7 signs, refers to 7 witnesses of Yeshua being the Messiah, and presents Yeshua’s 7 “I am”-proclamations.¹

Because of the sophisticated structure as well as the wording in the first few verses of the gospel, identifying Yeshua with “the Logos,” John’s gospel has been associated by some with the Hellenistic cultural sphere. The Jewish identity of the author has likewise been questioned.

On the other hand, it is also viewed as a genuine Jewish document, and in most church traditions Yoḥanan, the son of Zebedee, is generally recognized as the author.

4.1

According to “The Jewish Annotated New Testament” the Gospel of John represents not only Christian beliefs but is an important historical document for the Jewish people. The Besorâ al-pi Yoḥanan provides an early documentation of Rabbinical traditions, laws, and ways of thinking that were already part of the Jewish culture in the 1st century CE but are not attested in the Rabbinical Writings until centuries later. “Thus, the Gospel of John attests the antiquity of the Rabbinic traditions, not the other way round,” says Adele Reinhartz in “The Jewish Annotated New Testament”.

One example would be the purification rituals. The ritual washing before meals as illustrated by the stone jugs at the wedding of Cana was only attested more than two hundred years later in the Rabbinical literature.²

John 2:6

ושם נמצאו שלוש כדים לבנות להכשר אתונר לא להכשר יין היחסיים

¹ John 2:6

² John 2:6
And there were six stone jugs to clean that which was not clean for (among) the Jews according to the law.

Another example is the Rabbinical law of not healing the chronically sick on a Shabbat. Only life threatening diseases should be attended to immediately, according to Rabbinical literature of a later dating. But this subject was up for fierce debate already in John 5:10:

The Jews told the man who had been healed: It is Shabbat. It is forbidden for you to carry your mat.

Through John 5:5 we know that the man had been chronically sick for 38 years, indicating that his illness was not life threatening. Therefore, his healing on the Shabbat was illegal according to the Rabbinical Law, as documented two hundred years later. Even the metaphor of the fig tree alluding to the “gathering of figs,” symbolic for “studying,” is first documented in later Jewish sources.

John 1:48

And Jesus answered him: Before Philippos called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.

Only by understanding this much later documented metaphor, Nataniel’s exultated reply makes sense:

John 1:49

Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel!

An additional example, not listed by “The Jewish annotated New Testament” but accounted for in “The Jewish New Testament commentary” by David Stern, is the feast of Hanukkah, commemorating the rededication of the temple in the year 164 BCE, years after the completion of the Tanakh. The earliest known recording of this feast is John 10:22:

In this time the feast of Dedication was celebrated in Jerusalem.

Unquestionably, the text of the “Besorâ al-pi Yoḥanan” displays a profound knowledge of the Jewish religious culture in the 1st century CE.

4.2

“The Jewish annotated New Testament” also cites other passages in the Besorâ that convey a different message – causing some scholars to question the Jewish origin of the Gospel of John. One example is the wrong classification in John 15:25:

To fulfil what is written in their Torah: They hated without cause.
This is a quotation from Psalm 35:19, or Psalm 69:5. In the Hebrew Bible the Psalms do not belong to the Torah. Not only observant Jews would spy this mistake immediately, even today’s secularized Israelis are well acquainted with the narrative of their book and its canon.

Still another passage, much more offensive to a Jewish audience, is John 6: 52-59:

If you do not eat the flesh of the son of man and do not drink his blood, you do not have life in inside of you.

According to Gen. 9:4 it is forbidden for Jews to consume blood:

But flesh with its life, its blood, you shall not eat.

But both the “Jewish New Testament Commentary” and “The Jewish annotated New Testament” confirm that a Jewish understanding allows for symbolic interpretations of “food and drink.” In the Midrash Rabbah to Ecclesiastes 2:24, eating and drinking is interpreted allegorically and given a religious significance.5

4.3

“The Jewish Annotated New Testament” further comments on the overall rhetoric of the Gospel of John being perceived as threatening, since it introduces the stereotype “יהודים” (“ha Yehudim) “the Jews “, and presents them collectively as an antagonistic, hostile block opposing what is true and good. The expression “the Jews,” being used 70 times, in whichever context in the Gospel of John, must be seen as anti-Jewish rhetoric, comments Adele Reinhartz.

David H. Stern, in “The Jewish New Testament Commentary,” argues in a lengthy text that it was not the original Besorâ, but biased translations, following the example of the King James Version, that distorted the meaning of different passages by selecting “the Jews” when another rendering would have been appropriate. To translate the one Greek term oi Ioudaiou correctly different English terms must be applied, maintain both Stern and Reinhartz.

“The Jewish New Testament Commentary” lists three alternative meanings of oi loudaiou:

members of the tribe of Judah, followers of the Jewish religion, people from Judea.6 Neglecting to differentiate both Stern and Reinhartz classify as a willful generalization sprung from anti-Semitic sentiments.

To illustrate the latter assessment, Stern cites the distinguished liberal theologian Rudolf Bultmann. In his commentary to the Gospel of John from 1971, Bultmann explains: “The term oi loudaiou, characteristic of the evangelist, gives an overall portrayal of the Jews. ... Oi loudaiou does not relate to the empirical state of the Jewish people (e.g. currently unsaved), but to its very nature.”7

4.4

Further, the “Jewish Annotated New Testament” argues that the Gospel of John can be perceived of as advocating Greek philosophical concepts, and more specifically of being
influenced by the writings of Aristotle, Heraclites, Plato and the Stoics. For example, John 15:13 has been linked to Aristotle’s concept of giving your life for a friend as propagated in his “Nicomachean Ethics.”

No love is greater than the love of him who gives his life for his friend.

John 1:1-2 has been associated with Plato’s discourse on the logos:

In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and God was the word. (Or in the Greek: In the beginning was “logos.” And “logos” was with God. And God was “logos.”)

The Jewish Annotated New Testament holds that from early on some Christian theologians have held the view that the prologue is a “spin-off” of Plato’s teaching. (In church history, this stance has often been seconded by a theology of the Jews having been replaced by the Christians as the covenantal people of God).

“The Jewish New Testament Commentary” provides another perspective, voicing a classical Christian view. The prologue is not seen as a “pagan intrusion” into the NT, but is identified as Hebraic rather than Greek thinking, since “the word being with God” and “the word being God” is a matter of both/and instead of either/or.

The Commentary further links the term logos to the Aramaic “memra” (word), a technical theological term used by the rabbis in the centuries before and after Yeshua when speaking of God’s expression of himself: “God expressing himself, commanding, calling and creating is one of the primary themes of the Bible.”

FOOT NOTES

1 Bernspång, Erik, Johannes, kommentar för bibelläsaren, Herrljunga 1983.
2 b. Ber 53b; Shabb 62b
3 b. Yoma 84b
4 b. Ber 40a
5 Der Midrasch Kohelet / zum ersten Male ins Dt. übertr. von August Wünsche, Leipzig 1880, pages 37-38
6 Lowe, Malcom, article “Who were the Ioudaioi?”, Novum Testamentum,18:2, pages 101-130.
8 Nicomachean Ethics 9.1169 a
9 Inge, William, Professor of divinity, and dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral, Gifford Lectures 1917 https://archive.org/stream/philosophyofplot01inge#page/10/mode/2up/search/98 and http://www.john-uebersax.com/plato/cp.htm
10 Already in the second century CE this view was propagated – see https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Justin-Martyr
Comparisons

and

Word Studies
Opposing details in the translations give insights into the respective intended readership, as well as into the cultural background of the translators. An example is the use of the noun “dust” as opposed to the noun “earth” in John 3:31. Salkinson uses the word עפר ‘dust’.

The preference of “dust” over “earth” could easily be linked to Salkinson, while working on his translation, being based in Catholic Vienna. In this city many Catholic religious traditions were upheld, one of them being the Ash Wednesday rite. Once a year the Catholic priest, to make people aware of their humble state and their short time on earth, dipped his forefinger in a bowl filled with ashes, and then drew a cross, with his finger, on the foreheads of his parishioners, while simultaneously reciting: “From dust are you and to dust you will return.” (Genesis 3:19)

Although Salkinson was Jewish, and the audience of his translation was Jewish, they would have been very familiar with this custom of the predominant culture. Maybe therefore Salkinson chose the word “dust”? On the other hand, with the word “dust” appearing 72 times in the Tanakh, one could argue that Salkinson should have had enough inspiration even without this Catholic reminder. But maybe not his audience, the secularized European Jewry? According to the chronicle of the British Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Jews, Viennese Jews around 1870 had to be instructed in the teaching of the Torah¹ to enable them to relate to the Good News at all, since their knowledge of the Tanakh was so rudimentary. This was shortly before Salkinson started his translation of the Besorâ, in Vienna in 1877.

5.1

In contrast, the Targum was accomplished after the founding of the State of Israel and the birth of Modern Hebrew. The word “earth” ארץ used in this translation, with a mainly Israeli audience, could possibly be associated with “land” and filling the “earth.” Taking a closer look at the Hebrew word chosen for “earth” in the Targum, this becomes even more probable.

ארץ is a noun that normally stands for the concept “land” or “world” in the Tanakh, not for the substance earth. The ordinary word used for “earth” in a physical sense is adamâ, as in Genesis 2:7:

וירא יוהו אלוהים את האדמה עפר מרחבה ופת באהו נשמה חיים ויהי האדם לוף חיים:
And Adonai the Lord formed man (of the) dust from the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

In this verse ha-adamâ, האדם, the Man, was made of. The word afar, “dust”, in combination with adamâ, seems like a more detailed specification:

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In this verse ha-adamâ, האדם, the Man, was made of. The word afar, “dust”, in combination with adamâ, seems like a more detailed specification:

Dust from the earth”. This pair afar-adamâ occurs frequently in the Tanakh. One example is Genesis 3:19:

In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, till you return to the ground; for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust shall you return.

“From dust are you and to dust you will return.” These are the very words the priest recites in the Catholic Ash Wednesday rite. In the Latin that the Catholic priest used in Salkinson’s Vienna² this sounded even more ominous: “Quia pulvis es et in pulverem reverteris.” In the Catholic reading “dust” apparently stands for a somber, or even negative abstract concept, representing futility, and death. The dust of the earth, afar-adamâ, out of which Adam was formed, can alternatively be read as simply carbon, hydrogen, oxygen etcetera, the basic elements combining to form the substance “earth,” and alluding positively to man being part of nature. (Genesis 1:12,24).

5.2

The noun dust afar is also attested in combination with the word אָרֶץ areṣ as in Genesis 13:16:

And I will set your seed as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can count the dust of the earth also your seed can be counted.

In this example afar paired with areṣ is alluding to the more general concept of “filling the earth.” This combination shows a shift of emphasis - from a concrete to an abstract concept, the very same shift that is apparent in Targum’s rendering of John 3:31:

He who is from the earth is earth and speaks of earthly interests

Salkinson’s translation of John 3:31, employing afar dust instead of areṣ earth, evokes associations not otherwise gained, even though this rendering does not coincide with the Greek “γῆ” for earth, found in the original, nor with Gen. 3:19, also rendered with “γῆ” in the Septuagint.

FOOT NOTES

1 Dunlop, John, Memories of Gospel Triumphs among the Jews during the Victorian Era, pp. 371 ff.

2 Since the 1960s the Catholic liturgy is performed in the national language.
THE WORD

The Hebrew noun davar signifying “word” also carries the alternative, concrete, even tangible meaning “thing/matter/affair.” A similar secondary connotation is likewise attributed to the Greek term rhema, signifying the spoken word. In the Septuagint rhema is one of the terms used for Hebrew davar. According to a Greek-English Lexicon of the NT the Septuagint renders rhema with the alternative meaning “thing/matter” in imitation of the Hebrew usage of davar. But the secondary meaning of rhema is connected to speech and voice. It appears in constructions like “the subject matter of speech, things spoken of, so forth as it is a matter of narration, insofar as it is a matter of command, a matter of dispute.” The secondary meaning of the Hebrew davar, however, is detached from speech and presents an actual secondary meaning, a separate usage of the noun, as seen in John 9:33.

In Salkinson’s translation:
לולא היה זה איש אלהים לא יוכל עשות דבר
If this were not a man of God, he would not be able to do a thing.

The Targum renders John 9:33 without using davar:
ולא היה הוא מataire האלהים, ולא היה יוכל לישות ממנה.
If he were not from God, he would not be able to do anything.

6.1
Davar is also employed, in the Hebrew translations of the NT, to render the Greek term logos (λόγος). But logos, unlike rhema, does not carry the alternative meaning of the Hebrew davar. In the following, whenever I discuss davar as signifying “word,” it always refers to the translation of logos.

6.1.1
In John 8:17 Salkinson uses davar in its secondary meaning, paraphrasing the Greek original.
בתרתכם כתוב כי לעפי שנים עדים יקום דבר
In your Torah it is written that by the mouth of two witness a word is raised (lit. stands up).
But leaning on the secondary meaning of davar, the passage translates: “Two witnesses settle the matter.”

The Targum renders John 8:17 quite differently:
בתרתכם כתוב שעדות שני אנשים מฬיחה יאה
In your Torah it is written that the witness of two people (is) authoritative.

Both translations refer to a passage in Deut. 19:15:
על פי שני עדים או על פי שלושה עדים יקום דבר
By the mouth of two witnesses, or by the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.
Salkinson obviously copied the exact wording of this text in his usage of *davar* as “matter” in John 8:17.

### 6.2

*Davar* signifying “something” is found at the end of the Besorâ in John 21:5. Salkinson paraphrases the verse:

יאמר אלהים ישוע בנו יישלכמ דבר לאךלו יוש ואמר יאן:

*And Yeshua said to them: My children, do you have something to eat? And they(lit.he) answered and said: “Nothing”.*

Whereas the Targum, also paraphrasing, renders it without *davar*:

אמר להם ישוע: "בני, أيון לכם דגים? השיבו לו: "אינו."

*Yeshua said to them:” My children, do you have fish? They answered him: “Nothing”*

*Davar* signifying “thing” appears frequently in the BH translation of the NT but is significantly less frequent in the ModH translation. A rare example of the Targum but not Salkinson employing *davar* as signifying “thing” is found in John 15:20-21. In Targum it reads:

אם מת deber שמרו גם את דבריכם שמרו ואת כל הדברים האלה יעשה לכם בעבור שמי

*If they listen to my word, the will also listen to your words. All these things they will do to you because of my name.*

In contrast, Salkinson’s BH translation leaves out the third *davar* and substitutes it with “all this.”

אם שמרו את deberין ואמ תדבך שמרו ואת כל דבריך האלה יעשה לכם בעבור שמי

*If they listen to my word, the will also listen to your words. All this (lit. these) they will do to you because of my name.*

### 6.3

The familiarity with the alternative connotation of *davar* has notable implications for the understanding of the term *davar* in the most well-known and controversial passage of the Gospel of John, the prologue. *Davar* (translating *logos*) is the key word in John 1:1.

Salkinson renders it:

בראתה היה דבר והדבר היה את האלהים והאלה היה דבר

*In the beginning was the word and the word was with God. And the word was God.*

The Targum’s version is almost identical:

בראתה היה דבר והדבר היה את האלהים והאלה היה דבר

*In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and God was the word.*
In John 1:3 Salkinson inserts a fourth davar, this time with the alternative meaning “thing,” as a direct translation of the Greek “πάντα” (panta) “all things.”

Everything was made by his hand and not a thing was made without him (lit. without his hand).

In the ModH translation the idiomatic fourth davar is avoided. The Targum renders John 1:3:

Everything exists by his hand, and without him all that exists, exists not (lit. is/is not).

In John 1:1 the noun davar undoubtedly stands for “word.” But because of the secondary meaning of davar, the Hebrew and especially the BH translation of the prologue is likely to provoke different associations in a Jewish readership that habitually employs davar to express “affair, thing.”

The Greek logos on the other hand carries the more abstract connotations of “calculation, planning, reasoning.” Davar appears 1430 times in the Tanakh, in various connotations, but not denoting “reasoning.” Greek, and subsequently Western thought, builds essentially on the rationale. In contrast neither the Tanakh nor the NT emphasize “head knowledge,” as will be seen in later sections, when discussing the Hebrew concepts of “head,” and “heart” respectively. There seems to be a whole world between the Greek λόγος logos and the Hebrew דבר davar. The term logos is a key concept in Greek philosophy standing for the all-encompassing Universal Reason, a Platonic and Stoic concept. In fact, because of its prologue the Hebrew origin of the Gospel of John has been questioned. The wording is read as promoting a Greek, not a Hebrew understanding.

Reading davar with a Hebrew mindset and interpreting the prologue as an expression of Old Testament thought leads to a fundamentally different understanding of the text. The “New Testament Hebrew commentary” quotes Romanian Jewish pastor and dissident Richard Wurmbrand who suggests a Midrashic reading. Wurmbrand translates John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Real Thing.”

6.4

In the Tanakh the concept “word” is frequently used in combination with the concept “God.” According to the Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English lexicon, the expression “word of God” is used 394 times in the Tanakh, often in the context of divine communication. In Psalm 33:6 we find the concept of the word of God being the creative agent by which the heavens were made:

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

Both the wording and the concept mirror the Prologue of John in stating that nothing was made without the word that was with God. In the Septuagint as well as in the Greek NT “word,” in Ps. 33:6 and in John 1:1, is rendered with logos. But in Ps. 33:6 word of God is paired with a
concrete illustration: the word is being transported by the breath of God’s mouth. This visualization fits ill with the philosophical concept of logos often attributed to the Greek original of the Prologue. The Hebrew Besorâ, applying davar in both its abstract and its concrete meanings, could help to bridge the cultural/intellectual gap.

FOOT NOTES
2 Plural, πάντα (without the article (cf. Winer’s Grammar, 116 (110); Matthiae, § 438)) all things
4 Inge, William Ralph, “The Philosophy of Plotinus,” Gifford Lectures, 1918, see
https://archive.org/stream/philosophyofplot01inge#page/10/mode/2up/search/98
Some of the wordings in the NT and the Gospel of John seem illogical. Reading the passage in the Biblical Hebrew translation provides additional insights. One of these passages is found in John 1:31 and 33. In the rendering of the Targum, the day after having baptized Yeshua in the Jordan, Yoḥanan haMatbil (John the Baptist) exclaimed in verse 31:

“ואני לא הכרתיו, אבל להטביל לתiershipすること כדי לジョン הקדוש להתייחס או להטביל במים.”

But I did not know (hikkir) him. But in order that he shall be revealed to Israel I came and baptized in water.

In verse 33 he continues:

“אני לא הכרתיו, אבל שלוחי告诉他 in order to baptize in water, he told me.

A puzzling statement! Yeshua was a relative of Yoḥanan’s. Close enough for the pregnant Miriam to walk for days to spend three months with Elisheva, then pregnant with Yoḥanan. Later every year from the age of twelve, Yeshua walked to Jerusalem to take part in the same religious festivals that Yoḥanan surely attended. Yoḥanan must have met Yeshua before, still he claimed not to know him. Had they not met since they grew up, so that Yoḥanan did not recognize him?

7.1

Examining the text in the two Hebrew translations we find a significant difference in the rendering of the word to know. The Targum uses the word hikkir for “to know” in John 1:31-33. The word employed by Salkinson in the BH translation is yada’.

Salkinson translates 1:31:

And I did not know (yāda’) him. Still in order that he shall be revealed to Israel, I have come to baptize in water.

And 1:33:

And I did not know (yāda’) him, still he who sent me to baptize in water told me.

The verb הָכָר hikkir, in the Targum is the common expression in Modern Hebrew for “to know,” “to recognize” or “to be familiar” with someone. Hikkir is not as common in the Tanakh, but still evident in Biblical Hebrew. According to the BH lexicon hikkir is a hifil form, of the questionable qal nkr. There is a wide range of meanings attributed to its different stem formations. In its nifal form it can mean “pretend,” in piel “disfigure,” in hitpael it can stand for “disguising” one’s identity. The adjective nokri means “foreign,” “strange.”
In its meaning “recognize” it is attested in Genesis 27:23:

ולא הכריו כי היו ידו שעשו אחיו

And he recognized him not because his hands were Esau’s, his brother’s.

... as well as in Ruth 3:14

ותקהם בניו כי אשה ידע ואיתרעה

And she rose up before one could recognize another.

7.2

The qal verb ידע yada‘, on the other hand, appears still more often in the Tanakh. It is attested 810 times, with different connotations. One outstanding meaning is “knowing sexually” as in Genesis 4:1 or “knowing deeply” (on a psychological level) as in Exodus 6:7.

Genesis 4:1

והאדם ידע את-יהוה אשתו וההר והלד את-קין

And Adam knew Eve his wife and she conceived and bore Cain.

Exodus 6:7

והייתי לכם לאלהים וידעתם כי אני יהוה אלהיכם

And to you I will be God and you will know that I am the Lord your God.

Yāda‘ explicitly denotes intimacy, a connotation that hikkir does not carry. Hikkir seems to indicate a more distant acquaintance, whereas yada‘ implies a deep knowledge from the inside out, as exemplified in Genesis 4:1, and Exodus 6:7. This fits well with Yoḥanan’s exclamation: “I did not know him!” He was acquainted with Jesus, but he did not know who was hidden inside of him! Nevertheless, there are other facets. Yada‘, the same word that describes intimate knowledge, is also used in Genesis 19:5, where Lot is requested to bring out his male guests to the men of Sodom to be known by them. The following verses, in which Lot offers his two teenage-daughters in lieu of the guests, make it clear that the text does not refer to an intimate “knowledge” on a psychological level.

Genesis 19:5

והיאים אליהם ובנט את-

Bring them out to so we will know them.

Genesis 19:8

לי שני בנות אשר לא ידעתי אישה ואיתרנא את-

I have two daughters that have not known a man. I will bring them out to you.

Another contradicting example is found in Deuteronomy 33:9, where hikkir and yada‘ appear almost like synonyms.

ואת אחיו לא הכר את בן לא ידע

His brother he did not know (acknowledge) and his son he did not know.

7.3

Still, the examples from Genesis 4:1 yada‘ versus hikkir in Ruth 3:14 are valid. Also the original Greek NT distinguishes between “oida,” know, and “ginosko,” know of. In John 1:31-33 the
verb “oida” is employed, not “ginosko.” Salkinson’s rendering obviously took account of the Greek original. By using the language of the Tanakh, he provides his audience with insights not gained through the ModH translation. The information accessed by examining the etymological background of *yada‘* and *hikkir* affirms the need to differentiate between “being acquainted with” and “knowing” a person.

Returning to the Besorâ al-pi Yoḥanan, we find that even the ModH version uses the verb *yada‘* to convey “knowing deeply” in contrast to “being acquainted.” In John 6:61 the Targum translates:

Yeshua knew in his heart that his disciples grumbled about this.

Salkinson renders John 6:61:

And Yeshua knew in his soul that his disciples did not accommodate with this.

7.4

Moreover, in ModH *yada‘* and *hikkir* are used as synonyms in John 8:55. The Targum renders “to know” with *hikkir*:

And you do not (makkir) know him, but I (makkir) know him. If I say that I do not (makkir) know him, I am a liar like you.

In Salkinson’s translation the same verse is rendered with *yada‘*:

And you don’t (yada‘) know him, still I (yada‘) know him and if I say that I do not (yada‘) know him, I am lying like you.

These examples attest to a shift in the meaning of the Hebrew *hikkir* since the 1800s, when Salkinson undertook his translation. But the choice of wording might also indicate that the Targum followed a trend of the 1970s to avoid biblical phraseology, and therefore missed conveying insider information.

Looking at the Greek original’s rendering of John 8:55, we find that two verbs are employed in this sequence to convey “to know”: both “oida” and “ginosko.” In this way the Greek provides an even more differentiated picture. When Yeshua addresses his audience with “You do not know him (ginosko), still I know (oida) him and if I said that I do not know (oida) him I am lying like you” he presents a rather realistic estimation of our human capacity to know God.

Thus even Salkinson fails to make an important point by using only the one word “*yada‘*” in John 8:55. His translation of John 7:26-27 gives evidence of his employing both *hikkir* and *yada‘*.

John 7:26-27

Surely our leaders know (hikkir) that he really is the messiah.
Arı את היאיש הזה ידועنا מאין הוא אבל המשיח בבאו לא ידוע אדם מאין בא׃

But this man, we know (yada’) where he comes from. However, when the messiah comes no man will know (yada’) where he comes from.

The same distinction would have been fitting in the rendering of John 8:55.
THINKING BY HEART

"Learning by heart" is an English term for memorizing. This has an equivalent in BH in the reoccurring admonishment to keep the Lord’s commandments safe “in the heart” or even “to write down words on the tablet of the heart.” As in Proverbs 3:3:

גכתב עלי- handjob לבר
Write them on the tablet of your heart.

In Biblical Hebrew there is yet another concept related to the heart: “thinking by heart.” This is found in the BH translation by Salkinson, but hardly in the ModH translation. As stated earlier, Salkinson’s foremost ambition was to connect his New Testament translation to the language of the Tanakh, to show his fellow Jews that the New Testament was really a Jewish book. He was therefore eager to use as many idioms as would reasonably “fit.”

The various “thinking by heart”-expressions clearly fit the pace and the depth of the language of the Tanakh. In terms of grammar Biblical Hebrew is not a sophisticated language. Unlike Greek, Hebrew is not built on cases, but instead uses a few particles.

ל ב מ m, b, l meaning “from,” or “in” or “to,” plus the object marker את et.

8.1

In Hebrew even different body parts are employed to signify different functions and human activities.\(^1\) For example, constructions with the word hand are used to convey “beside,” similar to the English “close at hand”. But also “by” or “through,” are rendered with hand, in this case symbolizing the agent of the accomplishment in question.

The liver, the kidneys, the stomach are used to illustrate inner feelings.

The throat symbolizes the soul.

The womb signals an attitude of mercy and love.

The hips figure in metaphors expressing readiness and determination.

The bones stand for the self, the essence of a person.

The heart on the other hand is primarily referred to as the seat of thinking and understanding, but also of courage. This is very apparent in Salkinson’s BH translation. He very often uses constructions that combine heart with the cognitive: knowing, understanding, thinking.

As in John 21:25:

אמס-כתבנו כל חולם אחר АлексECH יושב לבבי כי ולא תוכל כלל-העולם את-הספרים אשר escrito construto
If they wrote down everything one after the other my heart thinks that the whole world could not contain the books that would be written.

In the same verse the “sober” ModH translation skips the heart and sticks to “thinking” only:

If there were written in detail I think that the world itself could not contain the books written.
8.2

Even in the Tanakh there are numerous allusions to the heart as the seat of understanding.

Isaiah 44:19

וַלֵּא שָׁבַב אַל-לָבָן אַל-דֻּבָּת אַל-תַּבּוּר

And none considers in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding.

Isaiah 10:7

וְלָבָבָו לֹא יִשְׁחַב

Nor does his heart think so.

This corresponds to Salkinson’s direct quote in John 16:2. Yeshua says:

הָעֹצְצִי הָצָה הָעֹצְצִי אָצְרִי הָוָסְסִי יִשְׁחַב בָּלָב

The time comes when everyone who kills you will think in his heart …

In this verse Yeshua is clearly referring to the perpetrators’ thoughts, not to their emotions.

8.3

It is Greek classical thinking that associates the heart with emotion, in contrast to the rationale. But this is in no way true of Biblical Hebrew. A screening of the lexical use of the word “heart” reveals that in BH the heart is the sole seat of thinking – the only part of the body associated with the cognitive. That is why Yeshua talks about thoughts originating in the heart in Matthew 15:19.

In Salkinson’s version the phrase is rendered:

כִי מִמְּחֹר הַלָּבָן יְזָא יְזָא מֵתְשָׁבְתָּת בְּרָע הַלָּבָן

For from the inside of the heart exit impulsive evil thoughts.

In the Targum:

כִּי מִמְּחֹר הַלָּבָן מֵתְשָׁבְתָּת בְּרָע

For out of the heart come evil thoughts.

It is important to observe that Yeshua was not contrasting the irrational evil thoughts of the heart with the “clean” (impartial, and objective) thoughts of the brain. Such a contrasting would make no sense in the Biblical Hebrew that Yeshua was schooled in, nor in the Rabbinical Hebrew vernacular that he might have spoken,² since thinking was not associated with the head!

8.4

If Yeshua was a “Hebrew thinker” he possibly associated his “feeling self” not with the heart but with “the bones.” As mentioned above, in Biblical Hebrew the very essence of a person is symbolized by “the bones.” In Jeremiah 20:9 the bones are identified as the seat of perception, and of intense feeling:

וַהֲרוֹה בָּלָב אֶצָּא בָּעֵרָת בּוֹשָׁת מִי הָוָסְסִי מִי הָוָסְסִי בָּלָב אָלָא בָּלָא אָלָא

And it was inside me (lit. my heart) like a burning fire shut up in my bones and I was weary with restraining myself but could not.
bone, in combination with flesh, is the expression denoting a person’s “total being”. Interestingly, the metaphor “bone and flesh” is used in both BH and ModH.

As in Genesis 29:14:

And Laban said to him: “Surely you are my bone and my flesh.”

8.5

Searching the Hebrew lexicons for metaphors referring to the heart, numerous word pairs reveal that the heart – unlike the bones – does not primarily feel. The heart thinks, knows, talks, and decides, and many things besides. Still, both the Tanakh and the NT document the heart’s capacity to feel joy and sorrow.

In Psalm 16:9 David (דוד) writes:

לכן שמח לבי ויגל כבודי

Therefore my heart is glad, and my honor rejoices.

In the NT Book of Acts 2:37, it says in Salkinson’s translation:

ויהי כשמעם ויגע הדבר כמדקרות חרב אל-לבם

And it was when they heard that the word hit their heart like a stabbing sword.

The Targum leaves out “the sword” in Acts 2:37:

cשתטים הארץ הוא לב

As they heard their hearts were saddened a lot.

The different rendering in the Targum demonstrates the shift in concepts since the 1800s. In adherence to Nida’s theory of Dynamic Equivalence, in the 1970s the allusion to a “stabbing sword” was excluded. However, in the Bible the emotional capacities of the heart are viewed as valuable, also the courage originating from it. In Proverbs 4:23 the readers are encouraged to protect their hearts:

מכיל-משמר נזר לב-מלכי-מדינה לפני כל-איש-הנפש תנו:

In everything guard your hearts diligently for from it comes life (lit. is the exit of life)

8.6

The heart is also the center of communication between God and man and God’s inroad to man’s thought life. As in Proverbs 21:1:

(Like) streams of water is the heart of the king in the hands of the Lord, he turns it wherever he wants.

Expressions, inspired by Greek mythology, portraying the heart as irrationally emotional are clearly not based on Hebrew linguistic traditions.

FOOT NOTES

1 Eskhult, Mats, “Kropp och sinnebilder i bibelns värld,” unpublished.

2 Yeshua had relatives in rural towns in Judea where Rabbinical Hebrew was supposedly spoken until the Bar Kochba Revolt, according to J. Milik, quoted in Blau J., Phonology and Morphology of Biblical Hebrew p.10
FROM THE HEAD

Both Hebrew versions of the Prologue of Yoḥanan start with the word bereshit, in the beginning, the very first word of the Bible. The Book of Genesis is even named Bereshit in the Jewish Tanakh. Bereshit ברשע is an adverb derived from the masculine noun רָעָשׁ (rōš) ‘head’. In Salkinson’s translation we encounter another adverb based on the same noun, in the second verse of the prologue, John 1:2: מִרְאָשׁ (me-rōš) ‘from the head’, meaning in advance, beforehand.

הוא היה מראש את-האלאים.
Lit. *He was from the head* (rōš) *with the Lord (beforehand, in advance).*

The Targum instead repeats the adverb bereshit in John 1:2:

הוא היה בראשית עם האלהים.
*It was from the beginning with the Lord.*

By repeating, the Targum highlights again the link between the Besorâ and the Narrative of the Creation. Salkinson’s translation, on the other hand, draws the attention to the word ראש (rōš) ‘head’. According to the Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon¹ the word ראש, rōš ‘head’, is attested 599 times in the Tanakh and stands for eight different categories.

9.1

1. The body part head
   2 Kings 4:19
   יאמר אלי-אביו ראשי ראשי
   And he said to his father “my head, my head.”

2. The hair of the head
   Numbers 6:9
   וגלח ראשו ביו טהרתו
   And he shall shave the hair of his head on the day of his cleaning

3. Top (of mountain, tower, hill)
   Isaiah 2:2
   נכון יהיה הר בית-יהוה בראש ההרים ונשא מגבעות
   Established will be the mountain of the Lord’s house as the top of the mountains, lifted high above the hills.

4. Beginning
   Ezekiel 40:1
   בראש השנה העשור לחדש
   In the *beginning* of the year on the tenth of the month

5. Choicest (highest)
   Psalm 137:6
   אם-לא אשר על ירושלים על ראש שמחתי
   If I should ever return to Jerusalem, the top of the mountains.

If I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy

6. Chief, leader
1Kings 8:1
יהוה שלמה את-חקין ישראל את-כל-ראשו המموت,
Salomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the chiefs of the tribes.

7. Total amount
Proverbs 8:26
עד-לא עשה ארץ וחרב רוחו תעוףochrome
He had not made the earth, nor the field nor the total of the dust of the world

8. Branch (of a river) or Company (of solders)
Genesis 2:10
נהר יצא מעדן….ומשם יפרדו והיה לארבעה רטבים.
And a river went out from Eden....and from there it was divided and became four branches.

9.2
Rōš appears also in different idioms, like גנטו בריאות 'to pay someone back'.

Ezekiel 9:10:
וגם-אני לא-תחוס עיני ולא-אחמול דרכם בריאות גנטו:
And as for me also, my eye shall not spare, nor will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head.

Or in 'above one’s head' that translates “carrying responsibility” or “being answerable.”

Ezra 9:6:
עונתינו רבו למעלה ראש ואשמתנו גדלה עד לשמיים:
Our sins have risen above the head and our guilt has grown up to the heavens.

9.3
Head, rōš, meaning leader is frequent in both Hebrew versions of the Gospel of John.

As in John 11:47 in Salkinson’s translation:
יקחיהו רהשו הכוהנים ו렀ורשים את-הסנהדרין ויאמרו: "מה נעשה?"
And the leaders (lit. heads) of the priests and the Pharisees gathered the Sanhedrin and they said: What shall we do?

The Targum renders John 11:47:
כוןו ראמש הכוהנים וворотשים את הסנהדרין. אמרו: "מה נעשא?"
The leaders (lit. heads) of the priests and the Pharisees gathered the Sanhedrin. They said: “What shall we do?”

Head, rōš, signifying the body part is employed in John 19:30.
The Targum translates:
ובחרו כנה ראש זו נפשו.
And lowering his head he gave up his spirit.
Salkinson renders:

ויט את-ראשה ויפקד את-רוחו

And he lowered his head and commanded his spirit.

Also signifying **top**, רֹ֥שׁ is found in Salkinson’s translation of John 19:29:

ויטבלו ספוג בחמץ וישימן על-ראש אזוב ויגיעוהו אל-פיו

And they dipped a sponge into vinegar and placed it **on top** (lit. **on the head**) of a hyssop branch and touched his mouth.

The Targum translates almost identically, but again, does not include רֹ֥שׁ in this phrase.

**9.4**

It is remarkable that not a single of the many examples both in the Tanakh and in the Gospel of John links רֹ֥שׁ to the thinking capacity that our Western culture associates with the head. The phenomena “head knowledge” was clearly not an issue since it was not part of the Hebrew culture as portrayed in the Tanakh, or in the NT. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it was the heart, as the seat of understanding, wisdom and decision that was associated with the thinking process. But since the heart in the Tanakh is also perceived of as having emotions, the thinking process referred to was not of the type “analytical thinking” that distinguishes Greek philosophical thought. Biblical Hebrew does not highlight the “lively intellect” housed in a “bright head.” It rather emphasizes the liveliness of the heart. A well-tuned heart is seen as a necessary prerogative for thinking properly.

**Roֹשׁ** seems to signify position: The leader, the beginning, the end(sum) and the course, as shown in connotations 4-8.

**FOOT NOTE:**

The most obvious divergences between the BH and ModH versions of the NT are not found in the shift of grammar or style, but simply in the naming of persons and times. The diverging names used in the two translations like no other indicative give away both the identity of the translators as well as the intended readership. In Salkinson’s version familiar Jewish names for festive days position the occurrences in the Jewish calendar. On the other hand, some major objects of identification carry Latin/Greek names, mirroring both the culture in which his translation was undertaken, as well as the culture of the audience his translation was aimed at: a Jewish minority in a Christian majority culture. The names were a means of helping the audience to understand that the Christian saints and festivals they had heard about all their life in fact signified Jewish sages and religious traditions. Using Christian names in a Hebrew text made the convergence obvious. In this way, it was possible to identify the NT as a Jewish heritage.

10.1

This line of thought was already established in the mid 1900s, when the ModH translation was undertaken. Since the characters were, at that point of time, already identified as Jewish they naturally carried traditional Hebrew names. Also, by then the majority of readers were Hebrew speakers living in a Jewish majority culture, with less exposure to Christian lingo. Therefore, in the Targum names that normally are associated with the NT are lacking. For example, St. Peter, the Catholic saint is not called by his Greek nick name “Petros” but is presented as the Jew Kefa.

Salkinson also mentions the Hebrew Kefa, but then cites its Greek translation “Petros”:


Simon, Yoḥanan’s son, you will be called Kefa (meaning rock)

Salkinson then continues to use Petros throughout the whole Besorâ as seen in John 21:15:

And Yeshua said to Simon Petros: “Simon, son of Jonah”

The Targum, no less consequently, uses the Hebrew name, as seen in the same verse, John 21:15:

Said Yeshua to Simon Kefa, Simon son of Yoḥanan.

The Targum attributes a father named Yoḥanan to Simon, while Salkinson calls Simon’s father Jona. Besides, the Targum uses the Aramaic bar for son, while the Targum uses the Hebrew...
ben, possibly because of the general assumption in the 1970s that Hebrew and not Aramaic names were used in the 1st century CE.

Kefa is often identified as being Aramaic, however it is attested twice in the Hebrew Tanakh and appears to be an ordinary Hebrew noun (even though in this verse paired with the Aramaic bar).

Jeremiah 4:29
באו כפים לעבים לע
They enter into the thickets and climb up upon the rocks.

Job 30:6
בגורי נחלים לשב תרי אבר כפים
To dwell in the cliffs of the valleys, in caves of the earth, and in the rocks.

10.2
Other names are not adapted to Greek in either version. Both translations name the author of the Gospel discussed in this thesis Yoḥan, and not John in English or Ioannes in Latin. Also, Yeshua is always Yeshua even in Salkinson’s text, and not Jesus. Still Salkinson explains his identity in John 1:41:
מצאנו את־המשיח אשר בלשון יון כריסטוס
We found the Messiah who is called Christos in the Greek tongue.

In contrast, the Targum renders John 1:41:
מצאנו את המשיח
We found the Messiah.

Seemingly, it was no longer necessary to mention the Greek expression since the audience was familiar with the concept and the title המשיח, the Messiah. Other ordinary Hebrew names were used in both the BH and ModH translations, for example the Jewish wintertime festival mentioned in John 10:22:
hanukkah.

The Targum renders John 10:22:
אותה עת חגגו בירושלים את חג החנוכה
At this time, they celebrated in Jerusalem the feast of Hanukkah.

Salkinson writes:
And it was in the days of Hanukkah, in the days of winter in Jerusalem.

10.3
But there are also major divergences in the naming of special days. Salkinson translates John 20:19:
and it was in the evening on this Shabbat.

The evening of the Shabbat seems to denote the Jewish מֹצֵאָשָּׁבָּת, “Mōse šabbat”, the evening following the Shabbat.¹
The Targum translates John 20:19:
לָעַת עַרְבֶּה בָּאוֹת יָם רַאשׁוֹן בְּשָׁבוֹא

At the evenings time of the same first day of the week

In Hebrew the weekdays have no names, except for the Shabbat. All other days are numbered according to their proximity to the Shabbat. The first day of the week is the first day after the Shabbat, Sunday, and not Saturday, as in Salkinson’s translation. The Jewish New Testament Commentary explains this seeming incoherence by referring to a significant difference between the Jewish and the Latin calendars. In the Jewish calendar a day starts and ends in the evening. Sunday, then, starts Saturday evening around 6 pm and ends on Sunday around 6 pm. The Latin calendar is a midnight-to-midnight calendar with Sunday starting after 12 pm on Saturday. Stern comments that the Jewish believers met on Saturday evening. He refers to the Jewish Sabbath observation ending at sundown on Saturday, stating: “It would be natural for Jewish believers who had rested on Shabbat with the rest of the Jewish community to assemble afterwards.” Thus, the evening “on the first day of the week” in Targum’s translation of John 20:19 could very well denote Saturday evening.

FOOT NOTES
1 http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/music/Compilations/Pages/compilation006.aspx
2 Liturgical churches share this tradition of reckoning a day from the evening “before.”
Several attempts have been made to show the Semitic origin of the NT by translations into Hebrew, not from the Greek but from early Aramaic sources. One such translation was done in Uppsala in the 1700s by a former Krakow rabbi lecturing at the university. \(^1\) Another, quite recent translation from the Aramaic Peshitta text stems from Jerusalem. Its 2004 editor’s note states explicitly that the aim of this translation from Aramaic into Hebrew is to show the Semitic, and the Jewish backgrounds of the books of the New Covenant. \(^2\) Even though the Hebrew translations discussed in this thesis are not based on the Aramaic New Testament, but on the Greek original, they also reveal underlying Semitic ways of expression. This is more apparent in the BH translation, not being as adapted to the overall development in Western languages as the ModH version. \(^3\)

11.1

Examining the texts, it is striking how the very “management of time” discloses the habits of the originators as well as of the readership. This is apparent in the grammar, but also in cultural traits depicted in the text – especially when viewed from another culture. To give an example, Yeshua in John 14:31 tells his disciples: “Let’s get up and leave the place.” Then, he does not leave, but, on the contrary, stays on to teach John 15, 16, and 17. Apparently, the time reference given was a statement of intention. This example indicates that the appropriate thing to do in the Jewish culture of the 1st century was to announce your intentions a good while in advance, as well as saying things more than once, in a repetitive manner. The latter is highlighted in John 21:16-17. This sequence, with Yeshua questioning Kefa and commissioning him three times in a row, displays the emphatic conversational style typical of the ancient Jewish culture, the culture evident in the Tanakh.

In Salkinson’s version it says:

יוֹם אֶחָד פְּסִמָּה שֵׁם שֵׁמוֹ דֵּרֶךְ-יְוָה אָהֵב אֱלֹהִים
And he said to him \textit{a second time} Simon son of Yonah do you love me

יוֹם אֶחָד פְּסִמָּה שֵׁם שֵׁמוֹ דֵּרֶךְ-יְוָה אָהֵב אֱלֹהִים
And he said to him \textit{a third time} Simon son of Yonah do you love me.

The above passage shows a close affinity with a passage in Genesis 18:16-32, in which Abraham pleads with the Lord to spare Sodom. Again and again he negotiates, as stated in Genesis 18:32:

יוֹם אֶחָד פְּסִמָּה שֵׁם שֵׁמוֹ דֵּרֶךְ-יְוָה אָהֵב אֱלֹהִים
And he said please do not be angry, my Lord, that I speak \textit{yet another time}, maybe ten will be found there.
Another cultural marker is the duplication of nouns observable in Salkinson’s translation. In the ModH translation it is less common, even though duplications are still used in modern Hebrew, like *yom yom*, “every day” (lit. day day), an expression attested in Genesis 39:10. An equivalent can be found in Salkinson’s translation of John 20:23:

אַלַי אָישׁ אָישׁ תסליוֹ לָא תסליוֹ

Every man (lit. man man) whose sins you forgive

In contrast, the ModH translation says:

כָל מַיַּשָּׁלְתוֹ לָא תסליוֹ

Everyone whose sins you forgive

Also, in the narrative of the Tanakh duplication is a stylistic element employed to engage the audience. This trait is discernable in the BH translation, for example in the wording of certain statements of Yeshua. By repeating the same word twice, Yeshua builds up a tension that captures the listener’s attention. This stylistic element is apparent in Salkinson’s translation of John 8:36 (coinciding, in this case, closely with the Greek original).

אֶפַרְMiami יִשָּׁה אֲחַסַּם מְפָשִׁים מְפָשִׁים הָרִי אֶל הָרִי

If the son makes you free, you are surely free (lit. if the son makes you free, free you are)

In contrast, he Targum renders John 8:36:

אֶפַרְMiami יִשָּׁה אֲחַסַּם מְפָשִׁים בֵּינֵי חָרוֹן תִּהְיוּוּ

If the son frees you, truly you will be free men. (lit. you will be sons of freedom)

The Targum seems to follow European stylistic rules of avoiding repetition. Still the expression used is idiomatic Hebrew typical of the 1st century CE.

The usage of repetition to emphasize the truth of a statement is also a frequent element in Biblical Hebrew. One example is in Genesis 3:4:

וַיֹּאמֶר הָנָשִׁי אֶל-הָאֲשָׁר לָא מָתַתְתָּן:

And the snake said to the woman they will surely not die (lit. death die)

Likewise, the use of repetition is common as a means to intensify a phrase. As in Jeremiah 31:18:

שָמַוִּים שָמַוִּים אֲפֶרֶם מַתִּקְוָד

Listening I listened to Efraim moaning (lit. fluttering)

In Salkinson’s version of John 12:34 we find again an idiomatic duplication (though not in line with the Greek):
You say that lifted up shall be the son of man (lit. lift he will be lifted)

The Targum renders John 12:34:
אתה אומר שבן אדם יַהֲנָשָׁה
You say that the son of man must be lifted up.

These examples illustrate two different mindsets apparent in the audiences of the two translations. The Targum witnesses to a faster lifestyle compared to the culture of the 1800s, when Salkinson tried to capture his readership. In modern society repeating things already said is not interpreted as intensification, but rather as a waste of time.

11.4
Parallels in quotations

However, stylistic repetitions are found in both Salkinson and Targum, mainly in quotations. Judging from the language, and the lack of divergence between the two translations, many of the direct quotes attributed to Yeshua and his contemporaries seem to indicate either an established oral tradition, or to an early, singular written source. This corresponds with the texts in the Tanakh where passages with more verbless clauses evidence an earlier date of origin. The Targum employs stylistic repetition only in what is specified as direct speech, mainly in the “Sayings of Yeshua.” One example of a quotation appearing in both versions is John 6: 26. The Targum renders the verse:
ענה להם ישוע:"אמן, אתיםเ amiנ"
Yeshua answered them: “Amen, amen I tell you…”

Salskinson translates John 6:26:
ויען אתם ישוע אמר "אני אומר לכם..." And Yeshua answered them saying: “Amen, amen I tell you....”

11.5
Time in Grammar

Even the grammar of Modern Hebrew reflects the time aspect. At the beginning of the last century, when Modern Hebrew was up for discussion, a deliberate decision was made to omit archaisms and outdated structures, such as the consecutive forms of the verb, cohortatives, and the infinitive absolute with emphatic function. The translation into ModH complies with this decision and does not use the waw-consecutive, but the perfect to indicate time. In contrast, Salkinson’s 1800s BH translation uses the waw consecutive exclusively. Echoing the Tanakh with its roots in an early oral tradition, the BH translation offers the listener/reader space for reflection, as well as allowing the narrator time to breathe. For example, John 11:1 in Salkinson’s translation reads:
ויהי איש חלה ושמה לזרע מבתיה לשה מידת אחותה: And there was a sick man and his name was Lazarus from Betania, the place of abode of Miriam and her sister Martha.
In the Targum, John 11:1 is rendered:

An incidence (act) involving one sick (man), Lazarus from Betania, from the village where Miriam and her sister Martha lived.

The expression 'act' is derived from Mishnah Hebrew. Whereas Salkinson’s BH style is reminiscent of the story tellers of old, and their melodious rhythms: “And there was.... and his name was...” The Targum’s wording is more concise and matter of fact, not following the natural rhythm of the human voice.

11.6

Time in the Masorah

This “breathing time” was formalized in the Masorah as the so called pausa form in the punctuation system of the Masoretes 800 CE. But, in fact, the pausa reflects the much older tradition of declaiming Tanakh texts in the synagogues in the original Biblical Hebrew, not spoken since around 400 BCE. In the Pausa vocalization changes. The longer wowel in the masculine ending is shortened by omitting the last vowel a. This leaves room to draw a breath and is therefore a regular element in the punctuation of the Tanakh. Even in Salkinson’s translation the pausa form is evidenced in a direct quote. Salkinson renders John 9:26:

And they said to him: What did he do to you (shortened ending), how did he manipulate your eyes?

The Targum renders the same verse:

They continued and asked him: ”What did he do to you (ending with the long wowel a)? How did he manipulate your eyes?

Time to breathe and to reflect were and are important to grasp the meaning of Hebrew for those who do not use the language for every day purposes. In contrast, the translators of ModH do not have to consider these language difficulties, their audience being Hebrew speakers, so fluent that they even read newspapers without vowel points. Still, the ModH version carries Masoretic punctuation, given that there are many “learners” among the readership.

FOOT NOTES

1. Johan Christian Jacob Kemper (1670–1716), formerly Moshe ben Aharon of Kraków.
2. Barday, Bishop Jacob, and Pazzanini, Prof. Massimo, editor’s note of The New Covenant Aramaic Peshitta Text with Hebrew Translations, p. vi
12

TIME WITHOUT VERBS

Another outstanding feature in the two Hebrew translations is the diverging frequency of verbless clauses, attesting to the metamorphosis from BH and Mishna Hebrew into Modern Hebrew. The frequency of verbless clauses also indicates the time of origin for varying sequences in the text, since the employment of verbal constructions reflects the changes in the Hebrew language over time. This has been researched at length within the framework of the Tanakh. The more archaic sections of the Tanakh show a higher frequency of verbless clauses, and overall fewer verbs in relation to the number of nouns in the text. The noun-verb ratio provides a valuable tool to ascertain the time period during which a particular text was written.¹

12.1

Noun contra Verb

This can be seen in one of the most ancient texts of the Tanakh: the Song of Deborah in the Book of Judges. Judges 5:9-10:

לבי לוחקים ישראל המنموים בין ברך יהוה:
My heart (goes out) towards the rulers of Israel, the volunteers among the people/ Bless you the Lord/

רכבי אתמות צחרות ישיב על-ميد וחלים על-דור סוחו:
Riders on tawny asses, recliners on couches, striders on the road, speak!

Verse 9 provides an example of the sophisticated usage of verbless clauses, verse 10 is an example of a lengthy phrase with a high number of nouns and only one verb at the very end.

The verb-noun ratio in the Tanakh has been researched by Frank Pollak² who in this way developed a statistical method to analyse different text sequences. His method is also very helpful in the study of the two Hebrew version of John. It is not surprising that Salkinson’s translation into BH shows fewer verbs and more nouns, compared to the translation into ModH. This is not only in line with the BH grammar Salkinson attempts to apply, but also reflects the overall change in language and attitude between the 19th and the 20th centuries. The ongoing development in European languages favouring active verbs over static nouns is also discernible in the Hebrew language.

12.2 Modern versus Ancient

The contrasting versions of Salkinson and the authors of the Targum supply ample illustration. In Salkinson’s translation John 1:38 is rendered as a verbless clause:
Where (is) your dwelling place?

The Targum, on the other hand, renders John 1:38 with a verbal construction:

איפה אתה גר?

Where do you live?

Another example is John 2:22. In Salkinson’s verbless version:

אחרי תקומתו מן המתים

After his resurrection from the dead

In the Targum, using a verbal construction, John 2:22 reads:

כאשר קםמן המתים

When resurrected from the dead

But even the Targum, though otherwise different in style, includes a fair number of verbless clauses, particularly in the direct quotes from the teachings of Yeshua. The density of verbless clauses in these quotes seems to fortify the hypothesis of an earlier script with the ‘Sayings of Yeshua’ being incorporated and still discernible in the Gospel of John. The translators of the Targum by rendering the quotations in their supposedly original vernacular present Yeshua as culturally Jewish and position him in the first century CE. Yeshua being a teacher well versed in scripture, as well as having roots in Judea, most likely did not only speak Galilean Aramaic, but also the Rabbinic Hebrew still prevailing in Judea until the Bar Kochba revolt. The narrative of the Targum, on the other hand, reflects the Hebrew of the 20th century, with an estimated 10 percent foreign, mainly western loanwords and additional loan translations.

12.2

Differing styles

In John 21:5 we find a good illustration of this duality of style. Also, here the contrast to the BH translation makes the divergence more apparent. In Salkinson’s version John 21:5 reads:

בני היש-להכם דרב לאל

My children, do you have anything to eat? (lit. exists for you a thing)

The Targum translates John 21:5:

בני, איזו לום דים?

My children, don’t you have any fish? (lit. absent/not for you)

This quotation in Salkinson’s version displays a verbless clause, with the noun yesh “property” instead of the pronoun ayn “absent/not” in the Targum. Even though the Targum uses a verbless construction, the abrupt phrasing of the question seems more or less coherent with the Hebrew spoken in 20th century Israel, whereas the conversational style employed by Salkinson echoes the discourse of the Jewish communities as far ahead in time as the 19th century.
Verbless contra Verbal

The following example shows an almost identical phrasing in both translations, except for the archaic anokhi in the Salkinson version and the idiomatic duplication of 'the wine', missing in the ModH translation. In John 15:1 Salkinson states:

 אני הגבןitimate האב הכרם
I (am) the vine; the true vine and my father (is) the gardener. (lit. I the vine, the true vine, my father the gardener)

The Targums renders Joh 15:1:

 אני הגבןитель האב הכרם
I (am) the true vine and my father (is) the gardener.

This particular difference in style becomes even more apparent in quotations where the Targum uses verbless clauses, and Salkinson, contrary to his normal employment, chooses verbal constructions instead of verbless clauses. John 8:58 in Salkinson’s version reads:

 אני היהי עוד לא-היה אברהם
I was already (when) Abraham was not yet.

John 8:58 in Targum, on the other hand, is rendered with the archaic verbless clause:

 בטרם היהי עד לא-יהי אברהם
Before Abraham (had his) being I (was). (lit. Before existence Avraham I he)

This verse is normally seen as referring to Exodus 3:14. In this example Targum’s rendering seems closer to the Hebrew of the Tanakh than Salkinson’s translation.

FOOT NOTES

1 Miller-Naudé, Cynthia L. and Zevit, Zioni, Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew, pp. 351-353.
2 Polak, Frank H., Professor Emeritus at the Tel Aviv University.
3 Many of the direct quotes in the NT both from Yeshua as well as from his contemporaries seem to be residues of an oral transmission. This goes even for the Tanakh: passages different in style, with more verbless clauses interwoven, seem to be direct quotes that were passed on orally.
4 According to Milik, Rabbinic Hebrew was a spoken language in Judaea. This is confirmed also in Saenz-Badillos A History of the Hebrew Language, pp. 170 - 171.
6 This style is still evident in colloquial German in cities with a formerly large Jewish population, like Vienna, where Salkinson comprised his translation
FROM THE CONCRETE TO THE ABSTRACT

The Hebrew language in the Salkinson/Ginsburg translation appears to be quite archaic, based on similes rather than on abstractions. Comparing the language use to the Hebrew NT of the 20th century, after the revitalization of the Hebrew language, there is an observable leap into a more abstract thinking and wordsmithing, well in line with the overall developments in modern society. This shift makes the connection between the 19th century translation and the culture in which the language of the Tanakh evolved more tangible. Biblical Hebrew has roots as far back as the 2nd millennium BCE, roots that despite later redactions are still discernable in the older sequences of the Tanakh. The BH version of the NT mirrors this ancient tongue in its linguistic characteristics.

13.1 Embroidering

One of them is the abundant use of body parts to illustrate actions, directions, positions etcetera, as seen in chapters 4 and 5. Another link is the employing of time consuming, repetitive patterns in expressions and emphatic constructions, and the usage of verbless clauses as discussed in the previous chapters.

In this chapter I want to highlight the BH custom of applying concrete, descriptive words rather than abstractions, both nouns and verbs, but also idiomatic constructions with concrete connotations. This trait surfaces when contrasting BH texts with the equivalent ModH translations. The Targum uses shorter phrases, trying to convey the message in a form that does not divert the attention of the reader, and by avoiding “superfluous” information. In contrast, Salkinson tends to add colour to his text by inserting concrete nouns and/or verbs/adverbs. In John 12:20 both a verb, an adverb and a noun are used to embroider the text.

The Targum renders John 12:20:

בין העולים להשתתוגות בהง רו אנשים יונים.

Among the pilgrims coming to worship at the feast were Greek people.

John 12:20 in Salkinsons’ version:

בתוך עולי הרגל להשתחות מצאו גם יונים:

In the midst of the pilgrims who came on foot to worship, were also found some Greek.

An example with a graphic verb is found in John 12:36. The Targum translates:

בעוד האור נשאר עמלכם האמינו באור, למון תהי לבני האור.

As long as the light is left with you believe in the light, so that you will become children of the light.
In Salkinson’s rendering John 12:36 reads:

האמינו באור כל עדת הઆור עליكم לעטוע ולהיה בי האור

Believe in the light as long as it shines on you, so that you will be children of the light.

The more depictive verb shine seems to allude to the sunlight, and to have a more positive connotation than the adjective left. It is easy to imagine the bright sunlight engulfing a person, filling a room. Left, on the other hand, might even be associated with “loss.” Salkinson uses זורח, shine, in the prologue in John 1:5 – also here presumably alluding to the sunlight.

וזאור זרח בחשך

And the light shines in the darkness.

The Targum, on the other hand, translates John 1:5:

וזאור מאיר בחשך

And the light illuminates the darkness.

Again, the ModH “illuminate” appears factual, and “cool,” whereas Salkinson’s “shine” carries an emotional warmth (even to a modern audience). The word זורח, shining, is well established in the Tanakh. We find it in Isaiah 60:1:

וכבוד יהוה עליך זרח:

The glory of the Lord has risen above you. (lit. shining over you)

By using a metaphor alluding to sunlight, Salkinson introduces a positive note even in the passage where Yeshua is detained and questioned in the house of Caiphas.

The Targum renders John 18:20:

השיב לו ישוע: "אני בגלוי דברתי אל עולם.

Yeshua answered him: “I spoke openly to the world.” (lit. revealed)

Salkinson translates John 18:20:

ויען אתו ישוע אנכי לעין השמש דברתי אל עולם

And Yeshua answered him: “in the eye of the sun I spoke to the world.” (in broad daylight, in public)

The above examples illustrate, on the one hand, Salkinson’s gifting as a translator, not only with words, but with nuances. But essentially his Hebrew corresponds to the “concrete” language of the Tanakh.

13.2.

Cutting short

In John 1:39 we find an example of how the Targum, in its ambition to simplify, omits information found in the Greek original, information that the translators considered unnecessary. John 1:39 in Salkinson’s translation reads:

ויאמרו אליו רביב אשיר אאמר מורוアイמחומ 모르ב: And they said to him: “Rabbi, which means teacher, where is the place where you live?”
In contrast the Targum, in John 1:39, cuts out the whole sequence explaining the word *rabbi* with *mori*, since this information is irrelevant to their modern Hebrew speaking audience. 

אמרו לו: "רבי, איפה אתה גר?"

The said to him: “Rabbi, where do you live?”

This example demonstrates how information with an illustrative function only is oftentimes considered superfluous in modern texts and is therefore rationalized away. It also exemplifies a more dynamic translation theory.

13.3 Vernacular expressions

Even in ModH some archaisms are still in use. Even young people express that they “like somebody” by saying that “someone has found favor in their eyes.” The same wording is found in Genesis 6:8, where Noah “found favor in the eyes of God”, as well as in Exodus 3:21:

And I will give *favor* to this people in the eyes of the Egyptians.

13.3.1 Another example is the still common use of *hinne*, “see” or “behold” that was already in use in the first millennium BCE, as attested in Psalm 133:1:

הנה ונתתי את־חן העם־הזה בעיני מצרים

*Behold, how good, how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together (lit. even to sit together)*

“Behold” or “see” was also the very idiom so often used by Yeshua, displaying the Hebrew roots of the Gospel like no other characteristic. But appearing in common European translations, the expression stands out as peculiar, alienating the reader from the text.

In the Gospel of John we find the *hinne* in the mouth of *יוחנן המטביל* (Yoḥanan haMatbil) ‘John the Baptist’. Since this is a direct quote *hinne* usually appears in both translations. But typically, the Targum avoids repetition.

John 1:29 in the Targum reads:

The next day Yoḥanan saw Jesus come towards him. Yoḥanan exclaimed: Behold the lamb of God that lifts off the sin of the world.

But in Salkinson’s translation *נהנה* is used three times after each other, in John 1:29-30:

And it was on the day after, and he saw Yeshua come to him and he said: Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. (lit. lifts off the sin of the world)

Verse 30 continues:

And he is the one I spoke about *behold* a man comes after me and *behold* he existed first before I was. (lit. He was before me be because he was first before I was)
The question is: Did Salkinson repeated hinne three times in this quote, because he, as a skillful translator, chose to employ the language of the Tanakh? Or was this repetitive pattern still the way ordinary people expressed themselves (even though in Yiddish, not in Hebrew) in the Jewish minority culture of his childhood? Judging by the German vernacular spoken in Vienna, a city strongly influenced in its literary culture by its substantial, pre-war Jewish population, this could very well have been the case.¹

If my assumption is right, Salkinson and his contemporaries used the same linguistical patterns as displayed in the direct quotes of Yeshua from before the destruction of the second temple in the year 70.

FOOT NOTE
1 See collection of Jewish jokes: Landmann, Salcia, Der JÜDISCHE Witz, Soziologie und Sammlung; Patmos Verlag, 2010, as well as Jewish artist and songwriter in colloquial Viennese, Arik Brauer, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyPeaSEZZow
RÉSUMÉ AND CONCLUSION

In chapters 5-13, by analysing key words and features, cultural differences and affinities surfaced. Salkinson’s language showed that he was living in a diaspora setting, as was his readership. His readers were familiar with the names of Christian saints, and with Christian customs, but they were not familiar with the NT writings and did not know about the parallelism between texts of the NT and the Tanakh.

As discussed in Chapter 5 “Dust”, this could be the reason for Salkinson choosing the term afar ‘dust’, a familiar expression in the Catholic culture he lived and worked in. This is shown also in 10.1 Nomen est Omen, by Salkinson’s introducing of “Christian” names like Petros/Peter, who was venerated as a saint in the Catholic tradition.

His use of Jewish names for Jewish holidays like Hanukkah and Shabbat, as discussed in 10.3, shows how Salkinson sought to convey the message to his readership that the NT was part of their own Jewish cultural inheritance. He did this further by employing, as much as possible, metaphors and idioms from the Tanakh. His elegant rendering of idiomatically correct Hebrew conveys insider information about his upbringing in a Jewish Shtetl where boys were taught Hebrew from the age of 3.

Salkinson’s “Wurm” (fancy) for Biblical Hebrew, apparent in the translation, shows that he was inspired by the Jewish Haskalah movement he encountered in the literary circles he frequented. The Haskalah envisioned both a cultural acceptance in the European mainstream culture, but also a revival of Jewish culture in general, and of the perceived “pure” language of their forefathers, Biblical Hebrew, in contrast to Yiddish and Mishna Hebrew that was (falsely) looked down upon as an inferior “language mix.” Salkinson’s occasional clumsy renderings, as seen in 12.2, are most likely due to his refusal to use Mishna Hebrew.

This also verifies the assumption in 2.1 that Salkinson’s main focus was not to adapt his language as closely as possible to the receptor language, in this case the Mishna Hebrew that was more familiar to his readership, but to produce a BH text. Nor did he agree with the concept of the 1800s to translate the original text word by word, as seen in 3.2. In principle Salkinson shared the ambition of the 1970s translators – to provoke a response of the readers equalling the response of the original receptors.

In terms of theory this was only developed in the 20th century by American linguist E. Nida. His theory, known as Dynamic Equivalence, was applied in Bible translations worldwide in the second half of the 1900s, and strongly influenced the translators of the Targum ḥadash.

But the language usage of the Targum also gives evidence to the great shift of emphasis at the turn of the 19th century, when the Haskalah ideals, with their dreams of integration, were abandoned in favour of Zionist ideas, of establishing a Jewish state. This might account for the usage of the word “land” adama rather than the word ‘
“dust” afar, as discussed in 5.2.

Curiously, the language of the new state had many more Mishna Hebrew elements than anticipated by the proponents of Biblical Hebrew in the 1800s. In line with this, the Modern Hebrew, employed in the Targum, exhibits ties to Mishna Hebrew, as seen in 11.6. This example contradicts the early decision made by the translators to avoid Hebraisms and constructions of the kind that Salkinson employed, see 12.2!

Another fascinating feature, emerging in the comparison, are the sociological developments that the two “languages” bear witness to. The language usage in the ModH version provides a good illustration of the sociological changes that the Jewish nation underwent. But it also illustrates general developments in the Western culture, as seen in the examples discussed in 13.1 and 13.2. These examples make the affinity of the ModH translation to modern Western thought obvious.

In contrast, the language in the BH translation illustrates both the slower pace of a more rural culture and even the historic affinity to the culture of the early Hebrews and its oral traditions, as exemplified in 11.6 and 11.7.

Another interesting aspect was the insight into the age of a text to be gained from analysing its density of verbs, as seen in 12.1. A higher frequency of verbless clauses indicates an earlier time of origin. Even the ModH translation displays passages with verbless constructions, but almost exclusively in direct quotes, as seen in 12.3.

Like in Salkinson’s translation, the names given in the ModH version convey a diversity of information about the readership, as well as of their expected religious affiliation. With the emerging of a Jewish state also a Jewish קהילה (qehilah) “church” emerged using classical Jewish names for the festivals and other activities described in the Besorà.

The affinity of both Hebrew versions to the mindset of the Tanakh is displayed in the connotations of the different wordings, as exemplified in the discussion on the heart in 8.3. Reflecting on Yeshua’s statement on the heart, it becomes clear that he uses the metaphor of the “heart” with the same connotations as the Tanakh. By this the passage assumes a different meaning than implied in the Greek original. Since this is prominent in both translations it verifies that the Hebrew versions of the NT, independent of the preferences of the respective translators, enhance the understanding of the text.

The same is exemplified in the discussion on “the word”. The shifts in connotations between the Greek logos and the Hebrew davar, brought to mind by reading the text in a Hebrew translation, provoke a different understanding, as discussed in 6.5. Since these Tanakhic connotations of davar are independent of the translation, it becomes evident that a Hebrew NT conveys a more differentiated message than the Greek original, composed, as it were, in a different cultural sphere with different linguistic references.

**These examples further affirm that Hebrew versions of the NT, despite being mere translations, verify the affinity of the NT to the Tanakh.**
In my estimation the Hebrew translations of the New Testament, both the BH translations and the ModH translation shed more light on the NT writings. Many wordings become clearer and things fall into place, as in 7.1 “Knowing”.

By weighing the connotations of the different wordings, as in chapters 6.1.1, 8.3, and 9.4 a picture emerges of the colourful culture of 1st century Judea, as well as of the heated debates in the generation living shortly before the destruction of the second temple. Thus, the Hebrew translations provide valuable details, and insider information about the background of the Christian faith. Also, the fact of the NT representing an early documentation of Jewish religious life, as seen in 4.1, becomes more tangible by reading the NT in Hebrew.

The Targum ḥadash is the version widely read today in the Jewish Messianic congregations in Israel and elsewhere, since its language is more easily accessible to contemporary Hebrew speakers. But it is the translations of the late 1800s, both Salkinson, and Delitzsch’s rendering into Mishna Hebrew that keep the door open to the cultural heritage of the Tanakh. Salkinson’s translation, more than the ModH NT, emphasizes the bond between the Old Testament and the New in its strict adherence to Biblical Hebrew, and with a terminology born out of the thought life of the ancient Near East.
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