Introduction

Languages abounded in the Fertile Crescent of Late Antiquity at the time rabbinic Judaism slowly emerged as a mainstay of religious tradition. The Roman province of Judaea, later Palestine, found itself at the intersection of two linguae francae, Greek and Aramaic, with the religious tradition of its Jewish population mainly couched in Hebrew. These literary tongues went hand in hand with local vernaculars, the true variety of which will presumably always remain out of sight. The vicissitudes of Jewish life itself had long ensured that Jewish communities did not speak one language, but several and in different dialects to boot.

Since multilingualism and translation were old table fellows in the Ancient Near East and in Jewish society, it comes as no surprise that reflections on language and translation were widespread in Late Antiquity. Much has been written about the distinctive Jewish understanding of translation, and, in particular, about the contrast between the Jewish Hellenistic understanding of translation and the rather different rabbinic concept of translation, in which the Hebrew original categorically retained priority over its versions. Yet, despite widespread interest in multilingualism, language philosophy, the ancient scriptural translations and translation studies, no attempt has ever been made to correlate these topics for rabbinic Judaism in the first half of the first millennium CE, or to account for the whole complex of rabbinic views on language and translation against the backdrop of rabbinic culture at large. While the unique character of the Jewish Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible, known as the Targums, has long been appreciated, and the controversial rejection of the Greek translation better known as the Septuagint has drawn renewed attention in recent decades, an integrative, analytic study of the rabbinic views on language and multilingualism, the 'holy tongue', script and language, the place of translation and the rabbinic quotations of scriptural translations remain a desideratum in the literature.

But a lack of integration and correlation is not the only reason for the present study. All too often, surveys and summaries that deal with the issues of language perception and scriptural translation throw all rabbinic views together, without an analysis of their development or review of their unity and without an examination of the rabbinic citations of

translation for their *discursive* value in context and for the implications for rabbinic thought on translation. The rabbinic theory of translation is usually represented as a stable system even in studies that otherwise describe and analyse relevant passages in the rabbinic sources with great sophistication. As a result, harmonized accounts that are oblivious of significant cross-cultural and diachronic differences in rabbinic views on language and translation abound in secondary literature.

This study of the perception, conceptualization and use of the holy language and foreign languages in a multilingual context starts from the belief that we particularly stand to learn from an integrated approach to the rabbinic views on language and translation about the ideals, pragmatism and development of the rabbinic movement when we do not assume a priori that all these reflections, statements and applications of transla- tions in rabbinic discourse are coherent, but instead allow for dissonance, improvization, variation and development. I think it necessary to expose the rabbinic perception and reception of language and translation as anything but straightforward, monolithic, unchallenged and self-evident. To achieve this goal, I seek to link the rabbinic perception, reception, use and conception of language and the multilingual world the sages inhabited to the rabbinic use for languages in general and for scriptural translations in particular.

Central to my thesis is the question how the perception and use of foreign languages relates to that of Hebrew, in the distinct contexts of legal debate and interpretation, legal and ritual proceedings, and scriptural translation. Behind this question looms the larger issue of whether the increasing insistence upon the use of Hebrew, and its prioritization as a religious, even ethnic, language, cannot be explained as a corollary of various factors, such as the rise of the rabbinic movement to power (language as empowering a social elite, which distributes its meaning through its learning and education), the growing distance to the language of the Tora, geographical differentiation, the need to view these issues within the framework of established traditions, and even forces towards differentiation from Christianity. From the nature of our evidence it is obvious from the word go that any attempt at answering all these questions will be circumstantial, but that does not diminish their importance. More- over, I hope to demonstrate, at the very least, that the rabbinic attitudes toward language and translation, and the fluctuations of opinion, show a

gradual, non-linear and yet clearly discernible development in which the value of foreign languages recognized and emphasized in early traditions was subject to restriction and marginalization.

There are at least three reasons to question current models of language and translation theory within the pre-islamic rabbinic movement. Social theory tends to acknowledge the tentative nature of generalizations, allowing for individual, even communal, practices to have been far more varied, and the element of improvization between given borderlines to have been much more notorious than official ideologies are willing to own up to. It is indeed not utterly hopeless to probe the official line and read it against the grain, and find another story in the traces it leaves of suppressed practices and reflections, provided that additional support is found for such interpretations of the evidence.

Moreover, in recent decades historians have gradually come to terms with the contrast between an archaeological repository which did not reflect rabbinic control over Jewish society in Palestine, let alone Jewish communities in the Diaspora, as well as a lack of non-rabbinic, contemporary evidence for Jewish life all over, and the rabbinic accounts of Jewish practices. While it has long been obvious that rabbinic homiletic and legal lore is prescriptive rather than descriptive, the limited extent of rabbinic influence of Jewish society, communities and individuals in the second century CE, extending into the third, has only recently found wider acceptance in scholarship of rabbinic Judaism. Abandoning the deceptive image of a society unified under rabbinic religious leadership for a variety of Judaisms existing side by side during the first centuries CE has given much greater nuance, if not relativity, to assessments of rabbinic influence on Palestinian society, let alone the Diaspora communities.

Finally, even at the surface of rabbinic literature it is not a homogeneous picture of language use in liturgical practices that confronts us. Even such basic distinctions as the differences of rabbinic opinions between Babylon and Palestine—ignoring intramural variations for the moment—has been given short shrift. That such differences shed light on both theory and practice is beyond question.

There is every reason to assume that the rabbinic movement had to come to terms with pre-existing conditions in the case of languages and translations in use in Jewish society. While the sages allocated and demarcated the use of scriptural translations in the synagogues of Late

Antiquity, they probably did not introduce translations into the liturgy. No single rabbinic source claims or implies that they did, and it is historically unlikely that they were responsible. The discussions of translations and references to interpreting do not question the absence of translation, but its presence. In Greek-speaking environments, translations were a given before the rabbis formulated their rulings. Most scholars, when they do not gloss over the subject, assume some sort of Greek and Hebrew co-existence in the early synagogue liturgy. The existence of a *dragoman*, or interpreter, in Alexandria is assumed by many, but probably is little more than a retrojection into Seleucid Alexandria of a situation which the Mishna envisages for second century CE Palestine.

Although this study probes the rabbinic reception of language and translation alongside the practice of translation in Late Antiquity, I do not pretend or intend to uncover a historical reality other than the historical *values* projected within rabbinic literature. Rabbinic reflection on the use of languages and translations in various situations requires an understanding of the historical context in which these deliberations, observations and regulations were formulated and passed on to later generations. But this context is elusive, and cannot easily be constructed for a variety of reasons. The selective nature of rabbinic literature argues against its use as a primary source for historiography in the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods. Still, notwithstanding the a-historical nature of much of the information we find in rabbinic literature, the social constructs and ideology are iden-tifiable expressions of historical, and even material, realities, which, at least to some extent it is hoped, circumvents the nettled problem of the relation between text and conditions 'on the ground'. All the same, this will not be a theoretical study of the ideological forces behind the rabbinic views on language and translation. Most of this study is about the values rabbis placed on language and translation. Although it should be readily admitted that we know precious little about contemporary practices, while the evidence we have is slender and circumstantial in nature, to insist upon contextualization of the rabbinic evidence is to question the relationship between rabbinic reflection on the practice of Bible translation and the Jewish communities in which the Tora was communally read.

A final comment on a matter of convenience and conflict. Wherever I refer to the rabbis in general, such oblique references are the result of the way rabbinic literature presents itself. The anonymous voice is

paramount, and yet we cannot collapse the anonymous voice with the literature as a whole—which would have made at least one voice strong and recognizable—because the anonymous voice itself is not one but many, not of one place but many, and not of one period but many. It is thus problematic to speak of the anonymous editors as the authors of the Bavli. I will not needlessly complicate my analysis by attempting to differentiate the voices I cannot tell apart; however, references to the *stamma* or *stammaim* just mean the anonymous voice without any assumption about their date, unless stated otherwise.

Structure
This study consists of three parts and nine chapters. The opening chapter focuses on the philosophy of language as evident in rabbinic literature and reviews what rabbinic thought offers on the questions of the origin of speech and language and how these reflections impact the appreciation of foreign languages. Whereas the Hebrew Bible hardly thematizes the concept of language, with the exception of the story of the Tower of Babel, rabbinic literature, while still falling far short of any philosophical treatise on the subject, offers scattered reflections on the question of the primordial or Adamic language, the faculty of speech, and the unity of language in the aforementioned episode of Babel. Above all, it reflects on the language of God and of the Tora in ways that have immediate ramifications for the perception of foreign languages. It offers a succinct discussion of rabbinic views on the origin of language and the implicit concept of Hebrew as the common ancestor of all languages. The dual image of the holy tongue as a single language and seventy languages is a forceful expression of this concept. In many ways, this chapter foreshadows the themes that will come to the fore in the ensuing chapters.

The second chapter concentrates on the concept of the 'holy tongue' in rabbinic literature, with an emphasis on early rabbinic literature because of the surprisingly small range of topics that we find associated with this concept and, above all, because of a renewed insistence on the use of Hebrew. This insistence is matched in a negative sense by the lack of attention to socio-linguistic or historical reasons for the language use of rites and recitations, and in a positive sense by the predominant rabbinic interest in text-immanent reasons for halakhic decisions and traditions.

All this is not to deny the rabbinic sense for reality: pragmatism and adaptation are in evidence in the third chapter about language selection in a multilingual society. In this chapter I explore the way the multilingual environment impacted on the uses and functions of languages in Jewish society. This includes a discussion of the degree to which Hebrew may still have been commanded by the Jewish population of Roman Palestine, of the level of code-switching and the implications of literary code-switching, and of the social context of translation. Here, I will delineate rabbinic ideas for the function and use of Aramaic in particular.

The second part of this study takes the locus of translation as perspective, to begin with the terminology of translation, which offers its own unique insight into the practice of translation. This chapter is followed by one about the recitation of Scripture, with due attention to marginalized practices and, in particular, the use of Greek Scripture. The locus of translation takes centre stage again when the rabbinic rules for the exclusion of certain scriptural passages from public translation are scrutinized.

The reconceptualization of translation forms the topic of Chapter Six, 'Between Holy Writ and Oral Tora'. To understand the peculiar border position of translation between the written Scriptures and the oral tradition it is necessary to dwell on the oral culture in which rabbinic learning was rooted, its norms and perception. The orality of rabbinic culture has received much attention in recent years, while the stark contrast between orality and literacy has been played down in the most recent accounts. Nevertheless most studies tend to generalize or harmonize all the different expressions of rabbinic statements, values and practices in this regard, and much stands to be gained from a careful analysis of the possible development of the rabbinic tradition, as well as improvizations and variations of practice.

This development, or conceptual transition, is approached from another angle in Chapter Seven, 'Ashurit and Alphabet'. There is good reason to assume that two of the Mishna's rulings on writing scripture contradict each other with something having to give way. I address this issue in the shape of a reception history of the requirement to write Scripture in Ashurit—the square Jewish script—and of the mishna, which wavers between the accreditation of Scripture as written in any language or Scripture written in Greek, if translated it must be. Many questions about the Ashurit script and the distinction or connection between script and language will pass

review, because this chapter exposes important tendencies in the rabbinic debate about the value and role of scriptural translation.

The third part dwells on the use of translations and the perception of the translator. To establish whether the rabbis set great store, if any, by the translations at their disposal, or those made on the fly, Chapter Eight, '*Targum* in Talmud' analyses the different formats of cited translations. One of the goals of the inquiry is to assess the impact of the cited translation on the debate and train of thought, wherever possible or relevant. At the same time an effort was made to increase the textcritical basis for this part of the investigation as far as the Babylonian Talmud (Bavli) is concerned, something which, all too often, goes ignored but frequently makes crucial contributions to our reading of the relevant passages. Unmarked translations are also included, even though they may not formally represent 'running translations', that is a complete translation of the source text, but often represent ad-hoc and partial translations or just lexical equivalents in another language. Even so, they shed light on how languages and translations were viewed and used. The discussion of Aquila's translations will focus on those elements which may add to previous treatments of the topic; hence retranslations into Greek or comparison with the Hexaplaric material will not be my main focus. Instead, I will concentrate on the structure of these citations and their significance for the debate. Citations of the Palestinian Targum(s), although not formally marked as such, will be treated together for the light they throw on the status of Aramaic scriptural translation among Palestinian rabbis. With all the translations cited, I will not pay extensive attention to their value as witnesses of a textual tradition, either in Babylon or in Palestine, or their translation strategies as characteristics of a translation as document. This chapter is all about the reception of *targum*, its perception and the use it is put to among the Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis.

The final chapter, before the conclusion, shifts the spotlight to one famous interpreter, Aquila the Proselyte, and his reception in rabbinic literature. The goal of this chapter is decidedly not to verify any historical veracity these narratives may have had, or even the existence of the persona himself, but to reflect on the way the famous proselyte and translator has been put to use in the narrative interests of later generations, leading up to the use of his name in justification of the practice of translation.

Quotations and translations

To facilitate reading and verifying the translations and interpretations put forward here, the sources will be quoted at length; the arguments rest on the detail of close readings. Quotations follow the generally established critical editions. Those from the Babylonian Talmud follow the Vilna edition *unless* stated otherwise, with relevant variant readings acknowledged in footnotes. Without the benefit of a stemma, the choice of the base text is mainly pragmatic and does not indicate that I believe the witness to represent the oldest form of the text available. Likewise, the standard edition of the Talmud is quoted for ease of reference, but not because of an assumed higher textcritical value, although not necessarily denying that value either. The Palestinian Talmud, or Yerushalmi, is cited after the edition of the Leiden manuscript by Sussman. The Mishna is cited after MS Kaufman A50 unless stated otherwise. The Tosefta is cited after MS Erfurt as edited by Lieberman, or the edition by Zuckermandel for the tractates Lieberman did not edit, unless I explicitly cite another manuscript. The text of the Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael is cited after the edition by Horovitz and Rabin, with the relevant page numbers, but the references to tractate and *parasha* follow the edition of Lauterbach.

Throughout the text, a distinction will be made between the Mishna as the literary document and a *mishna* as a single unit in that document; similarly, Midrash refers to a literary document while *midrash* refers to a unit within a rabbinic document; and Targum refers to a literary document while *targum* refers to a translation as an activity or without identifying it with any of the known translations.

Translations of the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic literature are loosely based on JPS, Neusner's translations and the Soncino translations, but, more frequently than not, they are freely adapted to express the point of view more clearly. In these translations, I never aim for literalism (however defined) but try to bring across the semantic thrust (however imperfect) as idiomatically as possible, without straying too far from the wording of the source texts. In these translations I do not put the direct speech of named rabbis between quotation marks, because it is often difficult to say where one voice ends and the other begins, and the important and characteristic impression of a seamless whole would be visually interrupted. Scriptural quotations, however, are *always* put between quotation marks, followed in round brackets by book, chapter and verse.

Part I

Multilingualism and the holy tongue