

THE NARRATIVE ROLE OF SEMITIC LANGUAGES IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

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Philological studies have suggested that “the Hebrew dialect” (τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ) in Acts 21,40; 22,2; and 26,14 refers to Hebrew, not Aramaic. But why would Paul speak Hebrew when addressing fellow Jews? This article suggests that he did so in order to be understood by the Jews but *not* by the Roman tribune (who would have understood Aramaic). This scenario is supported by a number of details within the account, and by a parallel case in 4 Maccabees. The article also suggests that something similar lies behind the use of Hebrew by the resurrected Jesus (26,14).

Although there have been a number of good studies on the question of which language is denoted by “the Hebrew dialect” (τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ) in Acts 21,40; 22,2; and 26,14,¹ it can hardly be said that the best philological investigations of the matter have made much of an impact on the commentary tradition: scholars continue to write as though “the Hebrew dialect” refers to Aramaic.² This is due to a widespread presumption that Paul would have used Aramaic rather than Hebrew to address a crowd in Jerusalem, based on the well-known (but not uncontested) fact that the main vernacular of first-century Jewish Palestine was Aramaic. This presumption, coupled with the supposition that “the

¹ H. Birkeland, *The Language of Jesus* (Oslo 1954) 13; J.M. Grintz, “Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language in the Last Days of the Second Temple”, *JBL* 79 (1960) 32-47, esp. 42-5; K. Penner, “Did Paul Speak Hebrew? Ancient Names for Hebrew and Aramaic”, paper delivered at the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies Annual Meeting, May 30, 2003. See J. Cantineau, “Quelle langue parlait le peuple en Palestine au 1er siècle de notre ère?”, *Sem* 5 (1955) 99-101; H. Ott, “Um die Muttersprache Jesu: Forschungen seit Gustaf Dalman”, *NovT* 9 (1967) 1-25. Although the interpretation of τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ as “Hebrew” has been championed by those who think that Hebrew was the main vernacular of first-century Jewish Palestine, I hope to show that its philological supports are materially separate from any preconceptions about what languages were most widely spoken.

² Note the disarming casualness with which the equation “τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ = Aramaic” is often stated: e.g., F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, MI 1960) 38, writes “The New Testament writers usually call [Aramaic] ‘Hebrew’, thus not distinguishing in name between it and its sister language in which most of the Old Testament was written”. I do not mean to imply that scholars who voice a more philologically aware view are nonexistent: J.B. Tyson, *Images of Judaism in Luke-Acts* (Columbia, SC 1992) 30, correctly accepts the philological argument for Paul’s use of Hebrew.

n dialect” often denotes a language held by the ethnic group *n*, has contributed to the widespread view that, when Acts refers to Paul addressing a crowd in “the Hebrew dialect”, it really means that he spoke Aramaic.³ This view has held the day within the majority of commentaries, as well as within footnotes to translations (e.g., NRSV), and has even caused at least one popular translation (the NIV) to translate τῆ Ἑβραϊδί διαλέκτῳ as “Aramaic”. The notion that Paul would have addressed the crowd in Aramaic goes back at least as far as John Calvin: in his *Commentary on Acts* (ad 22,2), he writes that “it is uncertain whether Paul spoke in the Hebrew or in the Syrian tongue”.⁴

In sources nearly contemporaneous with Acts, does “Hebrew” ever mean Aramaic? Ken Penner consulted the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* in connection with the Septuagint, Josephus, Philo, the New Testament, and Greek authors in general up to the third century, and Sokoloff’s Jewish Palestinian Aramaic dictionary, Jastrow’s dictionary of rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic, and the Qumran Scrolls in connection with Aramaic and Hebrew writings, and he claims to have found no instance, prior to Eusebius (4th c. CE), in which “Hebrew” denotes Aramaic.⁵ It is true that confusion sets in with Eusebius, as Penner notes, but there is little warrant for reading this confusion into the New Testament. As I argue below, the interpretation of τῆ Ἑβραϊδί διαλέκτῳ as “Hebrew” is also supported by the (seldom consulted) logic of the narratives in Acts.

³ G. Dalman, *Jesus-Jeshua: Studies in the Gospels* (London 1929) 18, writes “The utterance of the voice heard by Saul of Tarsus on the way to Damascus was in ‘the Hebrew language’ (Acts xxvi. 14), i.e. in Aramaic, the language in which our Lord used to speak, and which was also that of Saul”. Cf. E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Oxford 1971) 620, “Paul begins an Aramaic address”; F. Millar, *The Roman Near East: 31 BC - AD 337* (Cambridge, MA 1993) 364-5, “But then [Paul] turns to the crowd and addresses them ‘in Hebrew dialect’—by which, if he understood the distinction at all, the author of Acts ought to have meant Aramaic”. Given the years Paul spent in Arabia, there is little doubt that he knew Aramaic.

⁴ Penner, “Did Paul Speak Hebrew?”. The view that the New Testament could mean “Aramaic” when it says “Hebrew” is actually an old one: F.J. Thomson, “SS. Cyril and Methodius and a Mythical Western Heresy: Trilinguism: A Contribution to the Study of Patristic and Mediaeval Theories of Sacred Languages”, *AnBoll* 110 (1992) 67-122, esp. 76, points out that the fifth-century writer Nonnus had already supplied “Aramaic, Latin, and Greek” for Jn 19,20’s notice that the superscription on the cross was in “Hebrew, Latin, and Greek”.

⁵ Penner explains the fact that a number of Aramaic or Aramaic-looking words are labeled as “Hebrew” in John (e.g., “Bethesda” [5,2], “Gabbatha” [19,13], “Golgotha” [19,17]) as due to their being proper nouns. He gives the example of referring to “Nova Scotia” as the “English” name for Nouvelle Ecosse, when in fact what is being called “English” is really Latin (“Did Paul Speak Hebrew?”). For a table of Aramaic words in the New Testament, see A. Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (Sheffield 2001) 142.

1. Semitic Languages in Acts 21 – 22

As noted above, the failure of the “rigorous line” of philology to persuade more casual readers of Acts 21 – 22 is owed partially to the belief that Aramaic was the principal vernacular in first-century Jerusalem. I should state at the outset that I accept this belief: there are serious problems with recent efforts to rehabilitate the idea that most Palestinian Jews spoke Hebrew.⁶ Nevertheless, I question the line of inference that invokes this view so readily for understanding Acts 21,40 and 22,2, without first considering narrative elements of the account in Acts. As a result of this failure to come to grips with the role of “the Hebrew dialect” in Paul’s defense before his countrymen, both sides of the debate over τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ have drawn conclusions they should not have drawn, in both cases missing indications in the text that Paul’s use of the language in question was unexpected. Those who think that τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ denotes Aramaic are wrong for presuming that Paul would have addressed the crowd in the principal vernacular of Jerusalem, while many of those who think that τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ denotes Hebrew are wrong for presuming that the episode in Acts 21 – 22 supports the view that Hebrew was the main vernacular of first-century Jerusalem.

The account in Acts, with most of the details that I count as relevant, is as follows:

- 21,33 Then the tribune came, arrested him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; he inquired who he was and what he had done.
 34 Some in the crowd shouted one thing, some another . . .
 37 Just as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, “May I say something to you?” The tribune replied, “Do you know Greek?”

⁶ Among those arguing for Hebrew as a vernacular in first-century Jewish Palestine, see M.H. Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford 1927); W. Chomsky, “What was the Jewish Vernacular During the Second Commonwealth?”, *JQR* 42 (1951-52) 193-212; Birkenland, *The Language of Jesus*; Grintz, “Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language in the Last Days of the Second Temple”; Ch. Rabin, “Hebrew and Aramaic in the First Century”, in S. Safrai and M. Stern (eds.), *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions*, vol. 2 (Assen 1987) 1007-39; A. Tal, “Is There a Raison d’Être for an Aramaic Targum in a Hebrew-Speaking Society?”, *REJ* 160 (2001) 357-78. S. Schwartz, “Language, Power and Identity in Ancient Palestine”, *Past & Present* 148 (1995) 3-47, esp. 14-6, correctly detects a zionistic ideology behind many of the arguments for a Hebrew vernacular. Such an ideology clearly represents Chomsky’s motivation: after the first page, he spells “aramaic” in all lower-case letters while capitalizing the first letter in “Hebrew”!

- 38 Then you are not the Egyptian who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?”
- 39 Paul replied, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city; I beg you, let me speak to the people.”
- 40 When he had given him permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the people for silence; and when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying:
- 22,1 “Brothers and fathers, listen to the defense that I now make before you.”
- 2 When they heard him addressing them in Hebrew, they became even more quiet. . .
- 23 And while they were shouting, throwing off their cloaks, and tossing dust into the air,
- 24 the tribune directed that he was to be brought into the barracks, and ordered him to be examined by flogging, to find out the reason for this outcry against him.

Paul’s decision to address the crowd in τῆ Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ appears to be tactical. What his tactic was needs to be spelled out, however, since it is often wrongly supposed that he was merely trying to demonstrate his devotion to Jewish practice.⁷ It is easy to see how the narrative might

⁷ E.g., D. Marguerat, *The First Christian Historian: Writing the “Acts of the Apostles”* (Cambridge 2002) 197 correctly observes that Luke is “accumulat[ing] the signs of Paul’s Jewishness” in Acts 22 (cf. 1 Cor 9,20), but he wrongly lists his use of Hebrew as one of those signs. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 624, who thinks that the Lukan Paul addresses the crowd in Aramaic, lists his doing so as a sign of his adherence to Judaism. B. Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* (Grand Rapids, MI 1994) 142, writes that “whereas Paul presents himself in Greek to the Tribune as a Jew who is a citizen of Tarsus, to the Jews Paul presents himself in Aramaic as a zealous Jew who, though born in Tarsus, was raised in Jerusalem”. F.J. Foakes-Jackson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York 1931) 199 seems to detect a problem in the crowd’s sudden show of respect for Paul, but tries to put it down to an evident “dignity about the Apostle”. It is of course true that the hearing of Hebrew would have enhanced the crowd’s estimation of Paul’s Jewishness. Josephus’ address to the besieged Jews in Jerusalem (*Bell.* 6.96-97) offers a partial parallel, although there is more going on both in Acts and in Josephus’ account than a simple equation of Hebrew with Jewishness. Grintz, “Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language in the Last Days of the Second Temple”, 44, writes, “Thus it can be taken for granted that when Josephus talks (*Bellum Judaicum* VI.2.1 § 96) about a speech he delivered by the command of the emperor in Hebrew: - Ἰώσηπος ὡς ἄν εἴη μὴ τῷ Ἰωάννῃ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς ἐν ἐπηκόῳ σὰς [*sic*] τὰ τε τοῦ Καίσαρος διήγγελλεν ἑβραΐζων . . . ‘standing so that his words might reach the ears not only of John but also of the multitude, (he) delivered Caesar’s message in Hebrew’—he means precisely what he says: Hebrew and not Syrian. Hebrew then was not the language of the literary circles or of the learned few; it was also the language of the ‘multitude’ of Jerusalem, the vernacular”. Grintz is probably correct to translate ἑβραΐζων as “in Hebrew”, but he moves too directly to the inference that Hebrew was the main

lead one to that view—after all, Paul clearly emphasizes his fidelity to Jewish practice, and speaking Hebrew would have helped to that end. I am not disputing that the ability to speak Hebrew would have held positive valence in a dispute over one’s Jewishness,⁸ but there are clear indicators within the narrative that Paul’s use of Hebrew had another purpose: he spoke Hebrew not so much to be understood by the crowd, or to demonstrate his Jewishness, but so as *not* to be understood by the Roman tribune (which of course is why the latter threatens to scourge Paul unless he reveals what he said in his address). That this is so is suggested not only by the tactical element in Paul’s behavior, but also by a number of more direct indicators: depending on whether one translates Ἑλληνιστὶ γινώσκεις (21,37) as a question or an observation, the tribune either asks Paul if he can speak Greek or expresses his surprise at hearing Paul speak Greek, either of which would imply that he had been speaking something other than Greek. This might suggest that Paul had wrangled with his captors in a non-Greek language, a point supported by normal expectations: whenever possible, one usually addresses a lynch mob in a language that it would understand.⁹ Yet when he addresses the crowd in “the Hebrew dialect”, they are “even more quiet” (22,2) because of the language he was using, as if they were surprised at his choice of language. Why should they be surprised at the language he used if he addressed them in the same language he had just been using? Presumably, “the Hebrew dialect” denotes something different from the language Paul had earlier been using to address his assailants, and it is fairly certain that the latter language was not Greek.

vernacular of the rebels holed up in Jerusalem. There is really little indication that Hebrew is used in this instance out of pure linguistic necessity, and, barring the (problematic) supposition that Aramaic was *not* a Jerusalemite language in the first century, the fact that Josephus bothers to mention which language he used suggests that something else is at play. It is more likely, in my view, that the Romans instructed Josephus to address John in Hebrew because of the nationalist pretensions of those who used that language and of the special attention Jerusalemites gave to that language. The Romans perhaps understood the psychological effect that an address in Hebrew would have had on the multitude. There is little room to doubt that any of a number of the Romans themselves could have addressed the Jewish rebels in Aramaic, but there was a distinct advantage in having a fellow Jew do it, and if there was an advantage to having Josephus do it rather than a Roman, there would also have been an advantage in having him do it in Hebrew rather than Aramaic. See T. Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society* (London 1983) 230-2.

⁸Rapske, *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody*, 91 n. 119, plausibly suggests that Paul’s claim to be a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil 3,5) refers to his ability to speak “Hebrew/Aramaic”. See F.F. Bruce, “Is the Paul of Acts the Real Paul?”, *BJRL* 58 (1975-76) 282-305, esp. 285.

⁹I therefore question J. Munck’s contention, *The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Garden City, NY 1967) 217 that Paul “had been expected” to address the crowd in Greek.

There are other indications that Paul addressed the crowd in an unexpected language. After Paul requests it, the tribune grants him permission to address the crowd.¹⁰ But when the crowd responds in an uproar (22,22-23), the tribune seeks to find out what Paul said to incite the crowd, ordering him “to be examined by flogging, to find out the reason for this outcry against him” (22,24). (V. 25 suggests that Paul kept the content of his address from the tribune, although it is not clear what Paul said that was so dangerous.)¹¹ This strongly suggests that Paul addressed the crowd in a language that neither the tribune nor his coterie could understand, which in turn suggests that he spoke Hebrew: Aramaic would have been known to most (if not all) of the Romans present, and Paul’s use of Aramaic would have given little reason for the Romans to beat a confession out of him.¹² (See Josephus’ claim that Roman soldiers from Syria could understand the table talk of Jews in Gamala [*Bell.* 4.37-38].) The narrative seems to suggest that the tribune himself spoke to the crowd in a non-Greek language, which could scarcely be anything other than Aramaic: in making a connection between Paul’s ability to speak Greek and his identity as “the Egyptian”,¹³ the tribune implies that the ability to speak Greek was fairly rare among the crowd in 21,33-34, yet he personally questions the crowd about Paul’s offense.¹⁴ The obvious implication is that the tribune could converse with the crowd in its native tongue (as one might expect of a high-ranking frontier post, if not most frontier posts altogether). Yet he could not understand Paul’s subsequent address “in the Hebrew dialect”. This alone suggests that “the Hebrew dialect”

¹⁰ F. Veltman, “The Defense Speeches of Paul in Acts”, in Charles H. Talbert [ed.], *Perspectives on Luke-Acts* (Danville 1978) 243-56, esp. 252, lists “Defendant ordered or permitted to speak” among the variant details recurring in defense speech forms in Greco-Roman texts, but indicates that this detail occurs in less than half of the examples he surveys.

¹¹ The content of Paul’s speech is puzzling in other ways as well. As S.E. Porter, *The Paul of Acts: Essays in Literary Criticism, Rhetoric, and Theology* (Tübingen 1999) 153, notes, “Paul does not actually say what it is that he is defending. Is it his recent behavior, or is it his entire career?”

¹² Without v. 25, it is of course possible to suppose that the tribune’s lack of access to Paul’s address was only an unintended byproduct of Paul’s use of Hebrew. But v. 25 gives pause to this objection: Why was Paul so elliptical with the tribune?

¹³ See Josephus, *Bell.* 2.261-63; *Ant.* 20.169-71; R.A. Horsley and J.S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements at the Time of Jesus* (Minneapolis 1985) 167-70.

¹⁴ Of course, the Asian Jews who accused Paul (Acts 21,27) presumably could have spoken Greek. Haenchen’s account, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 621, is thoroughly confused at this point, not least in supposing that the tribune “gives up” (rather than lights upon) the idea that Paul is “the Egyptian” when he hears him speak Greek. This is grammatically possible, but Haenchen’s complaints against the historicity of this reading of Luke’s account also weigh against this rendering.

is not Aramaic. Paul's use of Hebrew is therefore *not* an indication that Hebrew was the vernacular, although it may count as evidence that a good number (but not necessarily all) within the crowd could understand Hebrew to some degree.¹⁵

This understanding of Paul's tactic, I believe, is supported by a similar use of Hebrew in the presence of a foreign persecuting authority in a slightly earlier Jewish writing. In 4 Maccabees, we are told of a mother who, in the presence of the persecutor, urged the youngest of her seven sons to join his brothers in martyrdom. The narrative twice states that her address to her son was *in Hebrew* (12,7; 16,15). What might be the point of this detail? It would appear that she chose that language specifically in order to communicate a message contrary to that which the king expected of her. This is implied in 4 Macc. 12,8-9, where the king is pleased to expect the boy to relent, in response to what he assumed was his mother's plea for him to give in for her sake. The king evidently had believed that the mother had tried to talk her son out of his headstrong stand for the national religion, and he was eager to receive from him the obeisance that would save his life. The mother had communicated the opposite of what the king expected, however, and she pulled off this subterfuge by using a language that the king could not understand. The similarity with what is going on in Acts is striking, perhaps even to the point of raising the question of dependence (at some level).

2. Semitic Languages in Acts 26

A brief look at the remaining reference to "the Hebrew dialect" in Acts is in order, especially since the foregoing investigation may offer a way forward in this case as well. The phrase τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ reappears in Acts 26,14:

- 26,12 ...I was traveling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests,
 13 when at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions.
 14 When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language (τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ), "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads."

¹⁵ It is worth noting that the interpretation offered here challenges the once widely held view that the book of Acts intended to show that Christianity was not a threat to Rome. Paul's behavior in this instance speaks of his non-cooperation with the Romans.

What should we make of Paul's (or Luke's) care in mentioning that Jesus spoke "Hebrew" at the Damascus Road christophany? Here the narrative clues are fewer than those guiding our interpretation of Acts 21,40 and 22,2, but there may be some hints in the parallel accounts of Paul's christophany in chapters 9 and 22.

As I hope to show, the narrative role of τῆ Ἑβραϊδί διαλέκτω in Acts 26,14 may be similar to what it is in 21,40 and 22,2. More specifically, I suggest that Christ's use of Hebrew was intended to leave Paul's traveling companions out of the loop. It is of course true that Hebrew was in some ways a more appropriate language for a heavenly being.¹⁶ It may be doubted, however, whether that point is strong enough to merit mention by the author, and if so, why would it be mentioned only in the book's third account of the experience? Perhaps we should consider the effect of Paul's christophany on his traveling companions. In both 9,7 and 22,9 we are given to know that these companions were on the outside looking in with respect to Paul's christophany (although they had also been knocked to the ground), but these two verses diverge in how they relate Paul's companions' lack of access to what the Lord said to Paul. In 9,7, we are told that the men "stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no one", while Acts 22,9 offers a different account, according to which the men with Paul *saw* the light but did *not* "hear the voice of him that spoke". The plain indication of both accounts is that Christ's message for Paul was not intended for his fellow travelers, and this might suggest (albeit only weakly) that the use of an exclusivist language would have been appropriate. A more promising indication that this is the case springs from the fact that we can reconcile the second account to the first rather easily by taking ἀκούω in 22,9 in the sense of "understand": the men indeed *heard* the voice, as 9,7 says, but they did not *understand* what it said (22,9).¹⁷ And why did they not understand? Perhaps Paul tells us why in 26,14: the Lord spoke to him *in Hebrew*.

As I see it, the weaknesses of this interpretation are twofold: (1) under ordinary rules of exegesis, it is far from clear that conflicting verses should be reconciled in this way, and (2) we cannot know that Paul's

¹⁶ A. Feuillet, *Le Christ sagesse de Dieu: D'après les épîtres Pauliniennes* (Paris 1966) 19, emphasizes that Christ is presented within the account as "un être céleste et glorieux". Hebrew was widely held to be the language of heaven. According to b. Sota 36b and Gen. Rab. 89, Pharaoh knew all seventy languages of the nations, yet his ignorance of Hebrew made him inferior to Joseph. But cf. b. Sot. 33a on the possibility of an Aramaic *bat qol*. On non-Hebrew oracles, see Dalman, *Jesus-Jeshua*, 17.

¹⁷ In both verses, φωνή is accompanied by the definite article.

companions were ignorant of Hebrew. Yet there is something to be said against both points. As for (1), the reconciliation of Acts 9,7 with 22,9 was not the point of the investigation. Rather, that reconciliation serves as an independent support for my interpretation of 26,14. This, I think, increases the likelihood of the reconciliation by multiplying its narrational usefulness. As for (2), it should be pointed out that we do not know whether the men traveling with Paul were his regular associates or a dispatch from the Temple guard. The former scenario strikes me as more likely, however, and in it we are met with the greater probability that these men could not understand Hebrew. As a final consideration, let us also remember that it is in 26,14, and there *alone*, that we are told that the Lord spoke to Paul “in the Hebrew dialect”. This detail merits mention in 26,14, which suggests that it has some significance for understanding what is going on, but it does not merit mention in chaps. 9 and 22, which perhaps suggests that its point was made in some other way in those chapters.¹⁸

Conclusion

Philology is on the side of translating τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ as “Hebrew”, but scholarship has not been of one mind on whether philology alone should decide the issue. The point of this article is that philology need not bear the whole burden of exegesis: the narrative logic of Acts 21 – 22 leads to the same conclusion. The tribune forges a connection between Paul’s ability to speak Greek and his possible identity as “the Egyptian”, which implies that Greek was fairly scarce among the Jewish crowd, yet while the tribune is depicted as conversing directly with the crowd in an effort to learn Paul’s offense (implying that the tribune could understand

¹⁸ The heavenly voice’s reference to Paul “kicking against the goads” is a graecism (see Euripides, *Bacchae* 794-95; F. Smend, “Untersuchungen zu den Acta-Darstellungen von der Bekehrung des Paulus”, *ΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ* 1 [1925] 34-45, esp. 36-37), which is difficult to accept as an element originally conveyed in Hebrew. As C. F. Evans, “The Kerygma”, *JTS* 7 (1956) 25-41, esp. 34, observes, “the risen Christ, although speaking in the Hebrew tongue, uses a Greek tag ‘to kick against the goads’. Of course, it is possible that Paul’s trial was in Greek, and that Paul has supplied this graecism, but it is more likely that Luke has supplied it. See H. Windisch, “Die Christusepiphanie vor Damascus und ihre religionsgeschichtlichen Parallelen”, *ZNW* 31 (1932) 1-23; A. Vögeli, “Lukas und Euripides”, *TZ* 9 (1953) 415-38. This still leaves us with the question of how the note about Christ speaking in Hebrew functions rhetorically, for either Paul or Luke. For understanding this rhetorical function, it is significant that Hebrew was not universally regarded as the language of oracles: see Dalman, *Jesus-Jeshua*, 17.

Aramaic), he is ready to resort to scourging to find out what Paul said when he addressed the crowd “in the Hebrew dialect”. Taken as a whole, therefore, the episode depicts Paul using three different languages: Aramaic, then Greek, then Hebrew. It also appears that a tactical denial of access can explain the reference to τῆ Ἑβραϊδί διαλέκτῳ in Acts 26,14. Christ spoke to Paul in Hebrew so that his traveling companions would not understand what was being said.¹⁹

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¹⁹ I would like to thank Mr. Ken Penner for reading and commenting on this article.