



The Phonology of Biblical Hebrew: Sound Change and Allophony in a Dead Language

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Date: March 1, 2022 (Tuesday)
Time: 4:30pm - 6:15pm (Hong Kong Time, UTC +8)
*Seminar will be conducted via ZOOM



Prior registration is required

The Zoom Meeting details will be provided on 28 February 2022



Abstract

The Hebrew Bible (alternatively: the Old Testament, Tanakh) has a long and complicated history of composition and transmission. Texts composed throughout the first millennium BCE became part of one and the same liturgical corpus. After Hebrew died out as a spoken language in the second century CE, the pronunciation of the biblical texts was passed on orally, parallel to the written text, until systems to capture all the necessary phonological information in writing were developed in the early Middle Ages. How did this unique history shape the sounds of Biblical Hebrew? And to what extent can we still treat Biblical Hebrew as a natural language?

In this talk, we will examine both the diachronic and the synchronic phonology of Biblical Hebrew. For the most part, the historical phonology of Biblical Hebrew conforms to the Neogrammarian Hypothesis: when language contact and morphological change are not in play, the sound changes it underwent are regular and phonetically conditioned. Nevertheless, the exceptional mode of transmission has also had certain effects setting Biblical Hebrew phonology apart from that of natural languages.

Speaker

Benjamin D. Suchard, Ph.D. (2016, Leiden University) is a postdoctoral researcher working on Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, and the Semitic languages in general. Currently, he is conducting research projects on written vs. spoken language in Nabataean Aramaic at the Leiden University Centre for Linguistics, the Netherlands and on the interaction between the Biblical Aramaic consonantal text and its reading tradition at KU Leuven, Belgium. His publications include *The Development of the Biblical Hebrew Vowels* (Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics 99; 2019; Leiden: Brill); 'The Vocalic Phonemes of Tiberian Hebrew', *Hebrew Studies* 59 (2018), 193–207; 'Phonological Adaptation and the Biblical Aramaic and Biblical Hebrew Reflexes of *i and *u', in A. D. Hornkohl & G. Khan (eds), *Studies in Semitic Vocalisation and Reading Traditions* (Cambridge Semitic Languages and Cultures; 2020; Cambridge: Open Book), 171–189; and various other articles on the historical and synchronic phonology and morphology of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Proto-Semitic, as well as on the Aramaic portions of the book of Daniel. At twitter.com/bnuyaminim, he tweets about his research and related topics.

All are Welcome

Enquiries

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