

7 On the Singularity and Sanctity of the Hebrew Language

Several years after the publication of his work on the Temple of Ezekiel, Bennett took up a theme of great importance to him and of direct relevance to his forthcoming project of biblical translation: the special place of the Hebrew language in Jewish tradition, its divine character, and its remarkable continuity. In 1829, he heard about an inaugural lecture given by his Jewish contemporary Hyman Hurwitz on his appointment to the first chair in Hebraic Studies at University College, London. Some of Bennett's acquaintances asked him to respond to the lecture, a request that provided him a platform to articulate his views on the origins of Hebrew in sharp contrast to those of Hurwitz. Six years later, only three years before his death and during the period when he was nearing the completion of his translation, he published a more expansive excursus on the Hebrew language based on the polemical views he had voiced earlier regarding Hurwitz's talk. The two works together demonstrate that at the very core of Bennett's belief in Judaism's significance to the world was the sanctity of its holy tongue, the language of sacred Scripture. I shall discuss both works in what follows.

7.1 *A Critical Investigation into the Merits of the Lecture* [. . .] by Hyman Hurwitz (1829)

Hyman Hurwitz (1770–1844; see Figure 7.1) was Bennett's contemporary in every sense; like Bennett, he was born and raised in Poland—in his case, in the city of Posen—and he reached London at about the same time as Bennett. They were dissimilar, however, in the professional paths they pursued. While Bennett had established himself as an engraver with a university degree and with membership in the Royal Academy of the Arts in Berlin, Hurwitz founded a *yeshivah* for boys in Highgate, in North London, and distinguished himself as an educator in the Jewish community, albeit without any direct exposure to university study. Unlike Bennett, he had positive relations with the organized Jewish community and he was an observant Jew. Though both men fostered close contacts with Christian intellectuals, Hurwitz built his career primarily through his friendship with one individual: his neighbor from Highgate, the celebrated English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Fourteen letters penned by Coleridge to Hurwitz between 1818 and 1830 are extant, revealing much about their personal relations and professional collaboration. The correspondence includes a recommendation from Coleridge to Leonard Horner, the warden of London University, dated November 27, 1827, re-

garding Hurwitz's qualifications for a new position as Hebrew professor at what would be called University College, London. Clearly boosted by this recommendation, Hurwitz was appointed the first professor of Hebrew language and literature at the new institution famed for welcoming, among others, Jews, atheists, dissenters, and women. His credentials for the position rested on the publication of several Hebrew grammars, his refutation of Bellamy's biblical translations and exegesis, and especially *Hebrew Tales*, his well-known anthology of rabbinic narratives translated into English; it was published in 1826, just before his university appointment, and included several translations by Coleridge himself.¹

No doubt Hurwitz's appointment to be the University chair in January 1828 was the pinnacle of his academic and pedagogic career. Hurwitz also had the distinction of receiving an additional testimonial from Coleridge read aloud at the University Council meeting of February 1827, as well as the solid support of the University's chief Jewish donor, Isaac Lyon Goldsmid. Along with the other professors of modern languages, Hurwitz was paid a very small amount, with the expectation that he could earn sufficient fees from private pupils, and that, in due course, he would be paid a decent salary. Although this did not happen, since Hurwitz's classes remained small, he nevertheless continued to serve the university until his death in 1844.

On November 11, 1828, Hurwitz delivered his inaugural lecture as Professor of the Hebrew Language and Literature before a distinguished audience of academics and members of the Jewish community. It was subsequently published in the same year by John Taylor on behalf of the University of London. From his opening lines, Hurwitz openly conveyed the ultimate meaning of this moment in the history of England and its Jewish minority, and in his own personal life experience:

1 On Hyman Hurwitz, see David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 261–268; Leonard Hyman, “Hyman Hurwitz: The First Anglo-Jewish Professor,” *Jewish Historical Society of England Transactions* 21 (1962–1967): 232–242; Chris Rubinstein, “Coleridge and Jews,” *Coleridge Bulletin*, n.s., 24 (Winter 2004): 91–96, available online at *The Friends of Coleridge*, <https://www.friendsofcoleridge.com/membersonly/cb24/12%20CB%2024%20Rubinstein.pdf>; “Hyman Hurwitz (1770–1844),” *UCL Bloomsbury Project*, April 11, 2011, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/articles/individuals/hurwitz_hyman.htm; and Adam Yamey, “A Jewish Academy in North London,” *Yamey*, December 3, 2020, <https://adam-yamey-writes.com/2020/12/03/a-jewish-academy-in-north-london/>. See his inaugural address, *An Introductory Lecture Delivered in the University of London, on Tuesday, November 11, 1828* (London: John Taylor, 1828), available at https://www.google.com/books/edition/An_Introductory_Lecture_Delivered_in_the/Y-TfAAAAAAJ?hl=en; Samuel Taylor Coleridge's letters to Hyman Hurwitz (1818–1830) are in the University of Pennsylvania Van Pelt Library, Kislak Center for Special Collections, MS Coll. 868. On Hurwitz's poetry, see Karen A. Weisman, *Singing in a Foreign Land: Anglo-Jewish Poetry, 1812–1847* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), chap. 2.



Figure 7.1: Hyman Hurwitz, University College, London, Professor of Judaic Studies.

The impressive character of all that surrounds me, where the best hopes, wishes, and meditations of my life, seem at once represented and realized—and where, beyond hope, my labours and aspirations have found a sphere and an object—the importance of the charge consigned to me—the novelty of the situation in which I now for the first time stand before those whose favourable opinion and kind anticipations have placed me in it—my unusedness to public speaking, and even the strangeness of my own voice to my own ears in the silence and *felt* attention of such an audience[.] [. . .] But there are other thoughts[.] [. . .] For can I forget, dare I suffer a false delicacy to prevent me from expressing the reflection—that, novel as the situation is to *me*, I myself, viewed in connection with the name and characteristic distinction of my Race, am no less a novelty in this situation! Was it possible that I should not hail the hour, in which I heard my name among the Professors of the London University, as the commencement of a gracious revolution?—as a dawn of a moral sun that rises with blessings on its wings?—that rises for all, but with especial and more enlivening influence for those who have most suffered from the preceding darkness;—a darkness which divided man from man, and made him cling to every distinction, to every accidental difference of birth and opinion, rather than to what alone should distinguish rational creatures—their intellectual powers, and the moral uses which they make of them!²

In conveying his own emotions at this very precious moment, he was undoubtedly speaking as well for those who had come to express their utmost respect and admiration to him and to the university that had boldly appointed him.

There is no evidence of a personal relationship between Hurwitz and Bennett, although they most likely knew of each other and each other's scholarly endeavors. When Hurwitz's lecture was published, Bennett was apparently solicited by one of his Christian associates to address the substance of the Jewish professor's elegant words. Some months later, he published, at his own expense, a pamphlet titled *A Critical Investigation into the Merits of the Lecture Delivered in the University of London, November 11, 1828 by Hyman Hurwitz, Professor of the Hebrew Language and Literature* (1829).

No doubt Bennett fully appreciated the deep significance of the first appointment of a Jew to teach Hebrew at a public university in London. Nevertheless, he sincerely felt there was something lacking, and despite the accolades the lecture had received, he felt compelled to raise his objections to the words of his esteemed colleague and co-religionist. Thus, he opens:

The great eulogiums poured out in the public periodical papers, as well as praises which filled the mouths of the numerous individuals, in behalf of the lecture in question, could not fail to reach my ears as well. [. . .] My mind equally became flattered when hearing that advocates had started up, to stimulate the propagation of that language and its literature, which was for many centuries, or even ages, kept in the background, and observed it as imperfect, corrupted, and lost. I expected from the present lecturer, that he would have ap-

2 Hurwitz, *An Introductory Lecture*, 3–4.

peared as a zealous defender of the language he professes, and to rescue the same from its numerous assailants. [. . .] The pamphlet of the before-mentioned lecture, was handed to me by one of my Christian literary friends, who wished to have my opinion on the particular points contained in it, as they felt something in it which militates against the integrity of the sacred language; I call it sacred because it is confessed, on all hands, that its origin is lost in the chaos of the universal creation; it is then of a Divine origin, and could not be otherwise but sublime and perfect. The elegance of the language and eloquent style of that lecture, made me even great promises in behalf of what I expected to countenance. But how greatly I find myself disappointed in my expectation; literally to say,—it is rather fostering the vulgar opinions of degrading the Hebrew language, than to rescue it from its assailants.³

What provoked Bennett's disappointment in his Jewish colleague, and why did he expend so much energy and money to publish his hostile pamphlet? As he continues, he explains:

We have a right to ask, was it the office of a Hebrew professor, to lend his hand to support the vulgar doubts with respect to the sacred primogenity, the perfectiousness, and stability of that language? Could he not rather let the doubts remain as they stand in the vulgar opinions, for or against it, without adding fuel to fire? And if such be corroborated by a Hebrew professor, who professes Judaism, what authority will then remain for the integrity of Scripture at large? Nay, if such be his real assertion, I will pass my opinion, that the London University might save themselves the trouble and the expenses of establishing a class for the study of the language, which is avowed by its professor to be imperfect, to have undergone changes, and to have been lost.⁴

Bennett fully understood that his attack on his fellow Jew would be received poorly, especially considering his already tense relationships with Rabbi Hirschell and the lay leadership who supported him. He was likewise conscious of his own lack of formal credentials to challenge the vaunted authority of this newly appointed university professor:

I am aware of the vulgar prejudices, with respect to my attempt, in raising my hand against that sanctioned grand Tiro [Tyro] particularly as I am a mere layman, who lives in obscurity, and only known in the circle of his own family, and among a few tradesmen from whom I reap a humble profit for the support of my family; it will infallibly appear to many as a daringness, to dabble my hands in points so essential, and so critical, like the inquiries which regard the Hebrew language, and its literature. [. . .] However, prejudices never obstructed the road of inquiries before me; nor did vulgar fear check me from entering the gates of literary criticisms. But, in the present case, it was to gratify the request of my Chris-

³ Solomon Bennett, *A Critical Investigation into the Merits of the Lecture* [. . .] by Hyman Hurwitz (London: printed by the author by Samuel Pinder, 1829), 3–4.

⁴ Bennett, *A Critical Investigation*, 4.

tian literary friends, whose friendship will never be removed from my mind; and to them alone are my following inquiries directed.⁵

The issue that irked Bennett the most, that provoked him to lash out at the novice professor—the “sanctioned grand Tiro,” as he called him—was Hurwitz’s doubts about the sacred origins, the perfection, and the stability of Hebrew over the centuries, notions that Bennett deemed to be incontrovertible truth. We shall examine some of his detailed arguments immediately below. What is most salient at first glance is the unseemliness of a Jew writing to Christians to disparage another Jew. Bennett apparently was jealous of Hurwitz, whom he clearly considered inferior to him in his Hebraic learning. At one point, in a passage quoted below, he recalls perusing one of Hurwitz’s works on Hebrew grammar and dismissing it as being the mere product of a boarding-school master and teacher to Jewish boys.⁶ His arguments could easily be construed as petty and ugly, displaying his bitterness and own insecurity because he was not taken more seriously as a candidate for the position now held by Hurwitz. His tone was sarcastic and cynical throughout, recalling some of the worst of his nasty vituperations against the chief rabbi of London, and reinforcing his reputation as a contentious and prickly individual among friends and foes alike.

Beyond Bennett’s sheer temerity and bad behavior in spoiling Hurwitz’s party, so to speak, was a serious message, one at the heart of his profound understanding of the history of the Hebrew language and his ultimate faith in his own Jewish identity. A closer examination of his critique of Hurwitz’s lecture is in order. He begins his criticisms of Hurwitz with a savage attack on the latter’s claim that “[i]t is highly probable that the Hebrew, in its infant state consisted entirely, or at least mostly of words of one syllable and that it only assumed its artificial state in the process of time.” Bennett exclaims alarmingly: “We never yet heard of such a foul sentiment passing the mouth of any of the most ancient, most celebrated, and most learned of the Hebrew Rabbies, and grammarians, from time immemorial.” He continues:

This whimsical opinion, I have read (twelve years since) in a book written by our present lecturer; who to my knowledge, picked it up from among some rubbish of a modern German sophist, one Mordechai Gumpel;⁷ but, being then a boarding-school master, and teacher to Jewish boys. I passed it by with a sneer, as not worth my notice; but now seeing it

⁵ Bennett, *A Critical Investigation*, 4.

⁶ Bennett, *A Critical Investigation*, 7.

⁷ Mordechai Gumpel Schnaber Levison (1741–1797), who composed a Hebrew grammar called *Derekh ha-Kodesh ha-Ḥadashah*; on him, see David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), chap. 12.

repeated and sounded from the pulpit of the London University, and considering as well, the taste of modern critics, the admirers of novelties, such a profane doctrine might become in time permanent; it became then my imperative duty to expose its absurdity, and to place a guard to prevent not to be deluded by false doctrines, and base instructions like the point in question.⁸

Bennett similarly challenges Hurwitz's claims regarding the poverty and decline of biblical Hebrew, especially in the prophetic writings of Jeremiah. Bennett strongly disagrees with Hurwitz's comparison between Isaiah and Jeremiah: "On the other hand I am of the opinion, that our Hebrew professor went rather by hear-say than to have entered perspicuously in the nature of the books of these two prophets. For granting that the book of Isaiah possesses the majestic style and eloquence; yet, in some instances the purity of diction is wanting, as the language thereof is much abrogated; the metaphors, figures, and types, in some instances exaggerated, even obscure." And with respect to Jeremiah, "his orations are fiery, emphatic and energetic. [. . .] There is no more beautiful book than Lamentations, drawing tears from the eyes of the reader. [. . .] So much for the want of Jeremiah's knowledge of the Hebrew language, and the deficiency of his style and elegance." The Hebrew parts of Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah were also not inferior, in Bennett's estimation, nor was there any deviation from "Hebrew's primitive integrity." After the destruction of the First Temple, Hebrew ceased to be a vernacular but it preserved its virtue and stability, its purity and elegance, during the Second Temple period, even after 70 C.E.: "In short, to my humble opinion, the Hebrew language did not alter, nothing was lost, nor did it deviate from its primitive state from time immemorial till the present day."⁹

Bennett sums up his case against Hurwitz by referring to present realities:

True it is, that we are lost to the language, as there exists a great neglect (in this country in particular) even among my own brethren, who have no knowledge at all of the extensive field of the Hebrew literature and its language; all whose knowledge consist of a Hebrew Bible and the annual prayer-book. [. . .] But the language is never lost from those who have a desire to enter its extensive and salubrious Eden! And I am further of the opinion, that Mr. Hurwitz, as professor, may contribute his humble literary mite to the propagation of the Hebrew language but there is nothing left for him to improve on.¹⁰

He points to other examples of Hurwitz's linguistic deficiencies but finally closes with the following lines: "There are many other assertions in his lecture, which are even on base ground, though covered with that ornament of eloquence, as to

⁸ Bennett, *A Critical Investigation*, 5–7.

⁹ Bennett, *A Critical Investigation*, 11, 12, 13, 14.

¹⁰ Bennett, *A Critical Investigation*, 14–15.

stifle the audibility, and the conception of his audience; yet my funds do not allow me to be prolix, so as to extend my pamphlet; and accordingly, I must satisfy myself, and my literary friends, with this small portion of my humble abilities.” His avoidance of prolixity did not stop him from promoting his newly completed manuscript, “The Preeminence and Stability of the Hebrew Language,” and searching for a patron to support its publication: “Reference may be obtained by my venerable friend the Rt. Rev., the Lord Bishop of Salisbury [Thomas Burgess], who is well acquainted with the contents of the work.”¹¹

Not surprisingly, Bennett’s diatribe was denounced by the few reviewers who chose to comment on its publication. The reviewer in *The Christian Recorder* best summed up his contempt for Hurwitz’s Jewish critic:

Most of our readers have no doubt either seen or heard of the eloquent lecture on Hebrew literature, which was delivered by Mr. Hyman Hurwitz at the London University, on the opening of his classes at that institution. The enlightened views which were put forth in that composition, have, as was to be expected, excited the indignation of some of the professor’s Jewish brethren; and Mr. Solomon Bennett, whom we have long known as a well-meaning, but somewhat shallow man, has published a “Critical Investigation” on the subject, which requires an Oedipus for its interpretation. So far as we can gather the author’s meaning, he maintains, that the Hebrew language has undergone no changes from the time of Adam, to whom it was given, and that, by maintaining the contrary, Mr. Hurwitz has uttered “a foul sentiment,” we will only say, *Credat Judaeus*.¹² The pamphlet concludes thus: “There are many other assertions in his lecture [. . .] yet my funds do not allow me to be prolix, so as to extend my pamphlet; and accordingly, I must satisfy [?] myself and my literary friends, with this small portion of my humble abilities.” Truly, if we might ever rejoice in a man’s poverty, it would be on an occasion like this.¹³

It is no coincidence that Bennett ultimately used his attack on Hurwitz to promote his own forthcoming book on the subject. His rudeness and transparent self-promotion could not have been lost on his readers. But there remains a more serious point to underscore here. Bennett’s criticism of Hurwitz was not merely based on personal jealousy, although such jealousy is hard to ignore. He firmly

11 Bennett, *A Critical Investigation*, 18–19. On Bennett’s relationship with Thomas Burgess, see above, chap. 4.

12 “Credat Iudaeus Apella, / non ego” [The Jew Apella may believe it, not I]; Horace, *Satires* 1.5.100–101.

13 “A Critical Investigation into the Merits of the Lecture [of Hyman Hurwitz],” *The Christian Recorder: A Religious and Literary Journal* 2 (Thursday, February 5, 1829): 30. See also the review of the same title in *The Athenaeum and Literary Chronicle* 65 (January 21, 1829): 40: “We are sorry, for Mr. Hurwitz’s sake, that he is not met by some worthier antagonist than this miserable and ignorant blockhead. There is no footman in London who does not know more of the English vocabulary, and the laws of grammar, than Mr. Solomon Bennett.”

believed in the sanctity and continuity of the divine language. Indeed, the anonymous reviewer was correct in calling this his belief. There is a certain irony in noting that notwithstanding his reputation as a non-observant Jew at odds with rabbinic leadership, he remained a man of great faith, a faith primarily linked to the Hebrew tongue and its endurance over the ages. Despite the obvious fact that Hurwitz remained in good standing in the London Jewish community as a founder of a traditional Jewish school, it was the allegedly secular Bennett who demonstrated his true belief in the immutability of Judaism as expressed through its sacred language and literature. Bennett's book on the Hebrew language, discussed in the next section, was the continuation and ultimate outcome of his disagreement with Hyman Hurwitz.

7.2 A Theological and Critical Treatise on the Primogeniture and Integrity of the Holy Language (1835)

While Bennett had long planned to write a specific book on the Hebrew language, he did not complete the task until 1835. Despite the passage of six years, and despite his awareness that the pamphlet criticizing Hurwitz had not been well received, he remained emphatic in his excoriation of Hurwitz's position and steadfast in his belief in the divine origin and the immutability of the Hebrew language. By 1835, Hurwitz's project of translating and revising the standard edition of the Old Testament was in its final stages. It too found a place in this slim volume, since the two primary objectives of clarifying the singularly divine status of Hebrew and providing a new and accurate English translation of the Hebrew Bible were clearly intertwined in the mind of this sixty-eight-year-old Jewish scholar.

In the opening of this work dedicated to the Sephardic Hebrew scholar Moses Mocatta (1768–1857), his long-standing supporter and friend, Bennett continues to pursue the same issue that had preoccupied him in his critique of Hurwitz: “The treatise I now lay before the public has been produced in consequence of my having noticed the many works recently published on the Holy Language by modern literati and critics, the tendency of which is rather to disparage than to do honour, to that eminent and sacred language, losing sight of its antiquity and endeavouring to bring it down to a level with the modern languages.” Bennett's goal, accordingly, is to refute these false theories of modern critics in as unprejudiced a manner as possible, citing from both Christian and Jewish scholars: “Authorities and titles do not affect my mind, nor do they hin-

der me in the career of my investigations,” nor apparently did the religious affiliation of his wide-ranging sources.¹⁴

The close connection between a recognition of the divine status of Hebrew and biblical translation is emphasized from the start: “We Hebrews maintain that the language bestowed on our common parent was that in which the sacred volumes of the Hebrew Bible were written, as we behold them at the present day.” The assertions of critics who claim that the original language was lost over time

have, indeed, been made by some mere pretenders to a knowledge of Hebrew literature; for, as far as I am acquainted with critical authors on the subject, in the present day, I have not yet found any one who is capable of translating extemporaneously any portion of Hebrew, and still less have I found among them a full and thorough knowledge of Hebrew literature at large; and yet they are prone to enter into the labyrinth of Hebrew criticism,—and with no other views on the part of some, than to reject the steadfastness of the Hebrew Scriptures and the immutability of the Hebrew language; but on the part of others, to throw a black veil over Revelation and religion at large. [. . .] Such has been the assertions even of many who have styled themselves professors of the Hebrew language and its literature.¹⁵

No doubt, in the above passage Bennett referred directly to Hyman Hurwitz, as he immediately mentions Hurwitz’s hypothesis, presented in his lecture, on the derivation of Hebrew [*Ivrit*] from the patriarchs, referred to as *Ivrim*, which he quickly dismisses. And once again, he directly challenges Hurwitz by maintaining that the grammatical system of Hebrew was coeval with the language itself, requiring no improvement or alteration. Where Hurwitz had argued that one can assume that the language had undergone many and considerable changes, his object, Bennett opines, was to flatter the whims of modern critics, the adversaries of Scripture’s authority: “For if the language has really undergone alterations in various times from its primitive institution, the authority of the Scripture records of events from the Creation must infallibly become dubious, as no *positive* and standing accounts were in existence! [. . .] So long as there are no sufficient grounds to corroborate the [. . .] *antithesis*, [. . .] the universal opinion regarding

14 Solomon Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise on the Primogeniture and Integrity of the Holy Language: Showing Its Origin, in Unison with the Copiousness of Its Grammatical and Etymological System to Have Been from Time Immemorial Retroceding to That of the Creation* (London: printed for the author by Richard Taylor, 1835), v. The Hebrew title of the book is *Derush Torani u-Meḥkari al kadmut u-shelemut lashon ha-kodesh*. Besides Mocatta, Bennett’s subscribers included the Duke of Sussex (the president of the Royal Society), the Lord Viscount Kingsborough, the Lord Bishop of Chichester, the Lord Bishop of Salisbury, Thomas Pettigrew, William Frend, Asher Samson, Lynn Moses, Morris Emanuel, Aaron Goldsmid, Mrs. Housman, Samuel Hart (an artist), Myer Solomon, and Morris Solomon of Amsterdam.

15 Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 2, 3.

the immutability of the Holy Language remains valid and free from doubt.” Why then conjecture, “as suggested by the before-mentioned lecturer [Hurwitz]”?¹⁶

Bennett had previously mocked Hurwitz’s notion of the initial appearance of two-syllable roots in the biblical text in his critical response to the professor’s introductory lecture. In the first instance, he had attributed Hurwitz’s foolish error to the fallacious arguments of Mordechai Gumpel Schnaber Levison, whom he then apparently considered to be the source of Hurwitz’s error. In the present book, Bennett returns to the same issue with a vengeance! But this time, the guilty culprit is not Levison but another European Jewish scholar, Salomon Ben Seligman Pappenheim of Breslau (1740–1814), the well-known Hebrew grammarian and lexicographer:

Unfortunately, our modern Jewish literati follow in many instances the steps of modern Christian critics, in searching after *novelties* in order to introduce innovations into the Holy Language, though derogatory to the sacred code and to the language itself. [. . .] The hypothesis of the before-mentioned Professor [Hurwitz] was chewed over (though undigested) from a modern German Hebrew scholar, the fore-runner of, and runner after, novelties; viz. one Rabbi Solomon Popenhaim [sic], who in his work, *Ḥeshek Shlomo* [The delight of Solomon], declares himself to be the original inventor of that hypothesis; but more particularly in his work entitled *Yeriot Shlomo* [The curtains of Solomon], [. . .] in which he strenuously asserts that all the roots of the Holy Language consisted originally of two letters only.¹⁷

Bennett will countenance neither the ludicrous theory of this otherwise learned rabbi nor the foolish mistake of Hurwitz’s reliance on him. He writes: “The delusion of this hypothesis is sufficiently glaring: for we find throughout Scripture the generally sanctioned standard of three letters for each verb. [. . .] The same ingenious author, indeed, tries to show that even *one* letter constitutes a root,” but he concedes in his preface that one has to add some letters to the binary roots. “When a literary character has once established his fame, he becomes arbitrary, and assumes an infallible authority to advance to the world any favourite opinion or hypothesis, though not weighed by reason or supported by authorities. [. . .]

¹⁶ Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 3, 5; quotation, 11, 12. Bennett discussed the term *ivri* again on 31–33.

¹⁷ Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 26. On Pappenheim, see James Strong and John McClintock, “Pappenheim, Salomon Ben-seligmann,” in *The Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1880), at <https://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/P/pappenheim-salomon-ben-seligmann.html>, and Natalie Naimark Goldberg, “Salomon Pappenheim and His Writings: Rabbi, Maskil, Aufklaerer,” in *The Maskil in Our Time: Studies in Honor of Moshe Pelli*, ed. Zev Garber, Lev Ḥakak, and Shmuel Katz (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me’uḥad, 2017), 34–57.

Such appears to me to have been the confidence of the author now under our notice.” Bennett desires not to be offensive but only to “expos[e] the mistakes of the votaries of error,” to “preven[t] the student being deluded by any of these crude notions of modern critics with regard to the Holy Language,” including “the undigested and dull hypotheses as that proposed by the before-mentioned Rabbi, and in the Lecture of the Professor of the London University.”¹⁸

It is not Hurwitz alone who emerges as a target in Bennett’s later work; even Adam Clarke, the so-called preeminent scholar of the Hebrew Bible, is reintroduced, this time in a discussion on the challenge of deciphering ancient names in the biblical text and the absurd derivations offered by some contemporary scholars. He refers the reader, for example, to Dr. Adam Clarke’s Bible commentary on Numbers 27:1–11, relating to the names of Zelophad (Zelophehad) and his five daughters considered as types relating to the advent of the Messiah. Bennett snipes: “If Zelophad had had a dozen daughters, the Doctor would, doubtless, have typified them all!”¹⁹

There are also new and varied sources of which Bennett makes use, illustrating his wide erudition and his commitment to referring to books of both Jewish and Christian origin. In the same discussion of the derivation of ancient Hebrew names, he cites Ethan Smith, the pastor of a church in Poultney, Vermont, who composed a book titled *A View of the Hebrews* (1823), based on tourist accounts “of aborigines of that hemisphere”—remnants of the ten lost tribes who possess “religious principles, sentiments, customs and manners” and use words derived from ancient Hebrew.²⁰

In discussing the vowel points in Hebrew, Bennett demonstrates his knowledge of the heated debates among ancient and modern critics regarding their origins: “Some modern critics, enemies of the *teaching dots* (as they style the Hebrew vowel-points), are of the opinion that the letters [. . .] served primitively (as they pretend, in an old Hebrew language which is lost,) as vowel letters, as in all modern languages and these they pretend to reinstate.” His source for this view was *Racines Hebraique sans Points royelles* (1732), a book by Charles François Houbigant (1686–1783), a French Christian Hebraist. Bennett dismisses this position and those who embrace it: “This unhallowed and unauthorized hypothesis is also chewed over by some English Hebrew grammarians, who, in many instances, copy the whims of the French novelists.” But the letters never serve as vowels. Bennett again cites from the preface to this book on the Hebrew origins of words

¹⁸ Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 28, 29.

¹⁹ Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 11n. Clarke published his Bible commentary in 6 vols. (1810–1826).

²⁰ Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 9–10.

in Greek and Latin and other languages, mentioning that he had created his own list of such derivations.²¹

He is also familiar with and discusses *Lectures on the Elements of Hieroglyphics and Egyptian Antiquities* (1829), a book by Marquis Spineto (ca. 1774–1849), an Italian nobleman residing in Cambridge. Here is Bennett’s description:

The object of the Marquis’s work is to raise Egypt to a high antiquity of *myriads* of years, far beyond the chronology we obtain from our sacred Scriptures. It was Manetho, the vague Egyptian historian, and (like all the heathens of that period) the inveterate enemy of Scripture authority, who described to his master, Ptolemæos Philadelphus, the history of (his supposed) Old Egypt—namely, that it was of a high antiquity, and in the utmost splendour, and that it possessed all advantages peculiar to human civilization.²²

To refute Spineto, Bennett solicits the opinion of none other than his close associate Sir William Drummond, “whose authority as a historian and linguist is not to be doubted.” For Drummond, the hieroglyphics of Manetho were inauthentic fabrications and should not be trusted by modern scholars. Spineto also asserted that the invention of letters in an alphabetical order is attributable to the Egyptians, as letters emerged out of their modified hieroglyphics. This too is a false hypothesis, an attempt to undermine the primacy of the Hebrew language over all other languages.²³

Besides these new sources, Bennett also cites himself or, more precisely, his unpublished manuscript nearing completion. In this context, it is sufficient to note his interesting self-reference: “In one of the critical notes of my New Version of the Bible (Genesis v. 3.) I have proved the integrity of the chronology of the *ante*- and *post*-diluvian periods as laid down in our Hebrew text, and the gross corruptions of the Samaritan text and Septuagint”.²⁴ By 1835, at least, Bennett seems to have completed not only his revised translation of the Hebrew Bible but the critical notes as well, to the extent that he could cite from them.

At the close of the book, Bennett reiterates his deep concerns about the Hebrew language while offering some hope for the future of its perpetuation. It is in this context, too, that he describes the genesis of his project to keep the Hebrew

²¹ Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 14, 24 and note. On Houbigant, see Joseph Jacobs and M. Seligsohn, “Houbigant, Charles François,” in *Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, managing ed. Isidore Singer, 12 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901–1906), 6:484, available at <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7910-houbigant-charles-francois>.

²² Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 38.

²³ Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 39n (quotation), 39–42. On Drummond and his relationship to Bennett, see chapter 4, above.

²⁴ Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 22n.

Bible at the forefront of Western civilization. The fate of the Holy Language in his time is directly connected to a larger dilemma. As Hebrew is “reduced to a level with the modern languages,” its decline might be viewed as a way “of reducing revealed religion to an institution of mere human invention.” He also notes with sadness the concomitant neglect of Hebrew literature, in particular the volumes of the Talmud: “These volumes, which are the great treasure of all fundamental laws, both in their minutiae and in their details; comprising also the extent of all jurisprudence; the laws of inheritances and entailments; criminal and penal, matrimonial and divorce laws; divine and ritual laws, ethics, and moral precepts,—all underwent one fate, that of consignment to the flames[.]”²⁵

Hebrew books, he notes, are no longer abused in recent centuries; many precious tomes are preserved in public and private library collections; and an elite group of Christian scholars such as the Buxtorfs, Surenhusius, and Bartolucci and their successors cultivate Hebraic studies with great devotion. “But alas!,” he adds,

the same prejudices which prevailed against the Jewish nation in the barbarous times of Europe are still continued against them, against the Holy Language, against Rabbinical literature in general, and even against their fundamental knowledge of the true Unity of God! I must not, however, be too censorious towards the literati of our Christian brethren, considering that most of my Israelitish brethren in this kingdom are also indifferent towards the Holy Language and the extensive literature of the Rabbies. [. . .] [I]t is the province of the Rabbies of the different synagogues to endeavour to excite attention to the subject[.]²⁶

It is at this juncture in the narrative that Bennett introduces his own work and shifts finally from the plight of Hebrew in general to that of the legacy of the Hebrew Bible in particular:

Although the far greater portion of my life has been devoted to different branches of the Arts, for the support of my family, yet literature was never wholly neglected by me. Biblical criticism has been the chief object of my attention, more particularly the authorized version of the Old Testament. In the course of my studies, instances of corrupt and erroneous translation continually presented themselves; the Hagiographical Books and the twelve minor Prophets particularly, overwhelmed me with surprise; in them I found that the instances of correct translation were far outnumbered by those of corrupt and erroneous interpretation: the authorized version of these books, indeed, may be said, in general terms, to be inconsistent with the originals and with the grammar and etiology of the Holy Language, (instances of which I have given in a pamphlet entitled “Critical Remarks on the Authorized Version” [1834].) Of these errors I made memoranda, which I preserved, some in the margin of a

²⁵ Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 43.

²⁶ Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, 47–48.

copy of the English Bible, but the greater portion separately in a book which I kept for that purpose.²⁷

The details of that project will constitute the subject of the next chapter. Bennett concludes this notice with the hope that his ultimate efforts will bear fruit and that others will appreciate his achievement and support its ultimate publication:

But how to introduce into the world the result of my holy labour I am utterly at a loss: for it is vain to expect that the Church will patronize it; and consequently the Government will refuse its sanction, and I regret that my circumstances will not justify me in publishing the Work on my own responsibility.

My hopes, however, are flattered with the idea that in this great Metropolis of the world, where literature and all branches of human perfection are so extensively cultivated and patronized, my sacred labours may find both admirers and advocates divested of religious and political prejudices; and to such liberal-minded lovers of truth my appeal for assistance in this sacred undertaking is fervently directed.²⁸

Just like his pamphlet against Hyman Hurwitz, this essay on the Hebrew language ends with an advertisement for his ultimate literary and religious effort to come. His hopes were dashed by his premature death in 1838 and by the lack of support for so ambitious a project. But he came close to realizing his lifetime goal, as we shall soon explore.

²⁷ Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, "Notice," following 49. Compare this reference—to memoranda in the margin of a copy of the English book as well as a separate book—with the detailed discussion of this project in the next chapter. In the extant two volumes I have studied, there are marginal notes as well as added original pages inserted into the binding, not a separate book.

²⁸ Bennett, *A Theological and Critical Treatise*, "Notice," following 49.