

EARLY MODERN CHRISTIAN HEBREW

A HITHERTO OVERLOOKED VARIETY OF MEDIEVAL HEBREW

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Jewish Theological Seminary – University of Jewish Studies

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of the Reformed Church in Hungary

*Hebrew Carmina Gratulatoria of the
Hungarian Peregrines in the 17th century
(K-125486) PI: József Zsengellér*



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There are many ways of writing the history of a language. One is to describe in detail the changes throughout its existence which affected its sounds, script and spelling, grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Another is to relate the history of its literature and to characterize the language of the most important works in each period. Or we may follow the contacts the language had with other languages, be it those of geographical neighbours or languages of civilization or religion, and note the influence each of these exerted upon the language with which we deal. Contrariwise, we could observe how our language influenced others, the interest it aroused, and enumerate the outstanding scholars who studied it and the results of their researches. The Hebrew language has been treated, though not exhaustively, in all the ways mentioned.

This little book adopts a different way. It endeavours to outline the links and relations between the Hebrew language and the Jewish people at various periods and to estimate the influence of changes in Jewish social life upon the use and character of the language and the services which it performed for the people in varying circumstances. The tendency of this



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The traditional narrative

- The history of a language
= the history of a people.
- Hence, the history of Hebrew
= the history of the Jewish people.

E.g., Chaim Rabin: *A Short History of the Hebrew Language*. Orot publication, 1973.



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Overview of this talk

1. Introduction of the project

“Hebrew Carmina Gratulatoria of the Hungarian Peregrines in the 17th century”

2. Some samples

3. “Early modern Christian Hebrew” as a special case of Medieval Hebrew?



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Student mobility in the early modern period

- **Peregrines**, such as Hungarian Calvinist students (e.g., of theology) studying at Dutch and German protestant universities in the 17th century.
- NRDI project (PI: József Zsengellér) 2017-2021, focusing on their Hebrew.



*Relief of a Hungarian “peregrine”.
Academy Building, Utrecht University.*

<http://kcl-eldering.blogspot.com/2007/08/>



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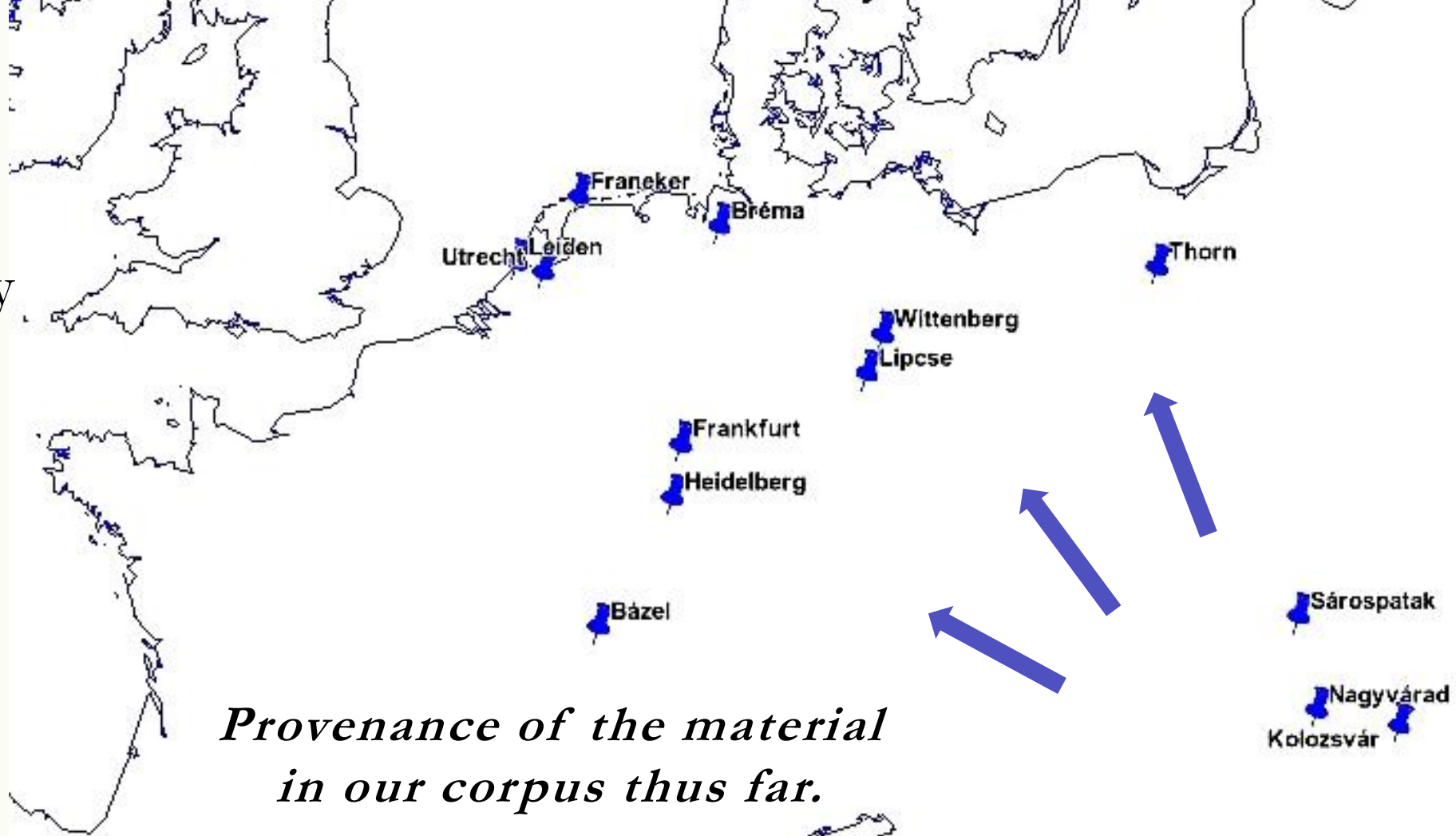


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Peregrines

17th c.: typically from Calvinist regions in Eastern Hungary to major Protestant universities.



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Gratulatory poems (*carmina*)

- Open lectures, public defenses and viva proceedings (*disputa*), accompanied by poems, written by fellow students (or by professors).
- Welcoming the event, commenting on the works presented + entertainment.
- Written in various languages: Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, but also Dutch, Hungarian, etc. (Postma 1995: at least 15 languages in Franeker).
- Published in print together with thesis, lecture, etc.

*Our project:
Hungarian authors, Hungarian addresses.*



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What can we learn from studying these poems?

Questions to be answered include:

- What level of linguistic competence could students achieve?
- Was their knowledge of Hebrew confined to Masoretic Biblical Hebrew?
- Or were they familiar with latter stages of the Hebrew language, as well?
- Was there transfer from mother tongue / from dominant second language?
- How do they fit into contemporaneous Hebrew / European poetry?
- What features characterize the *carmina gratulatoria* as a literary genre?



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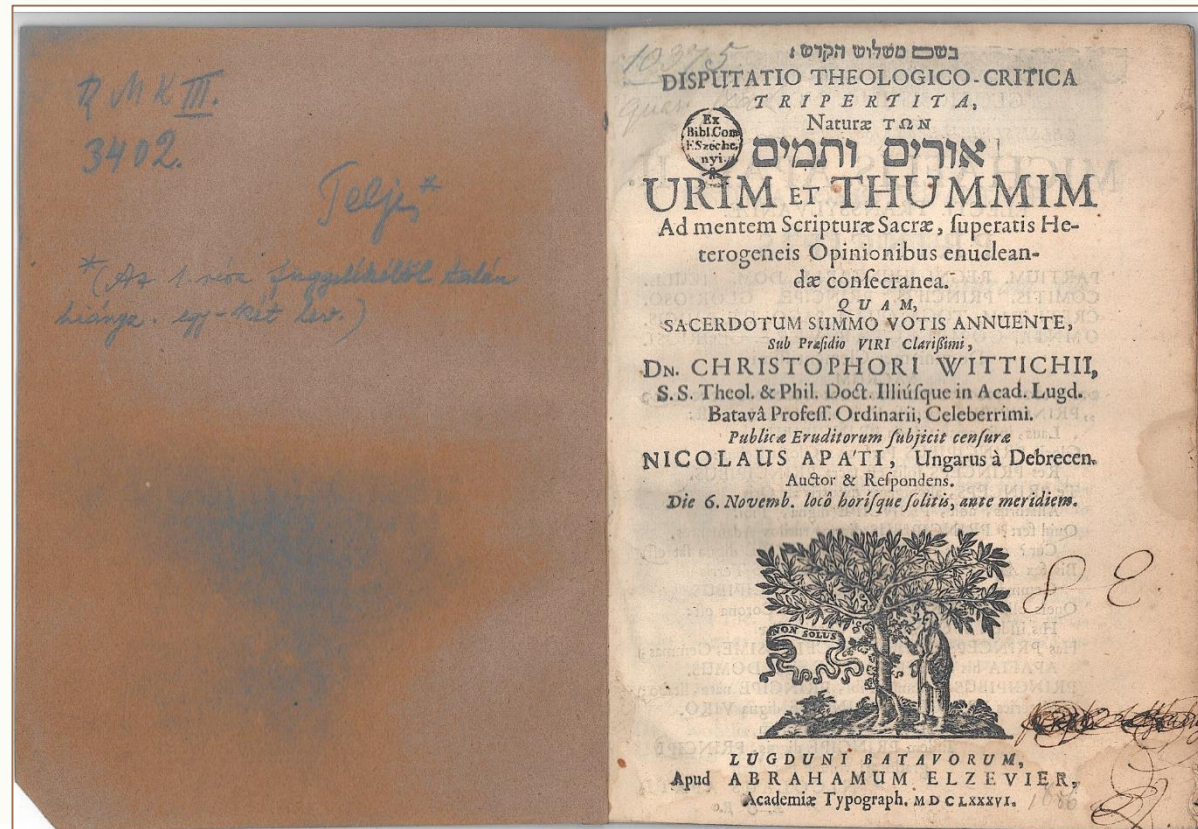


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Dissertation of *Nicolaus Apati, Ungarus à Debrecen* Abrahamus Elzevier, 1686

RMK III. 3402

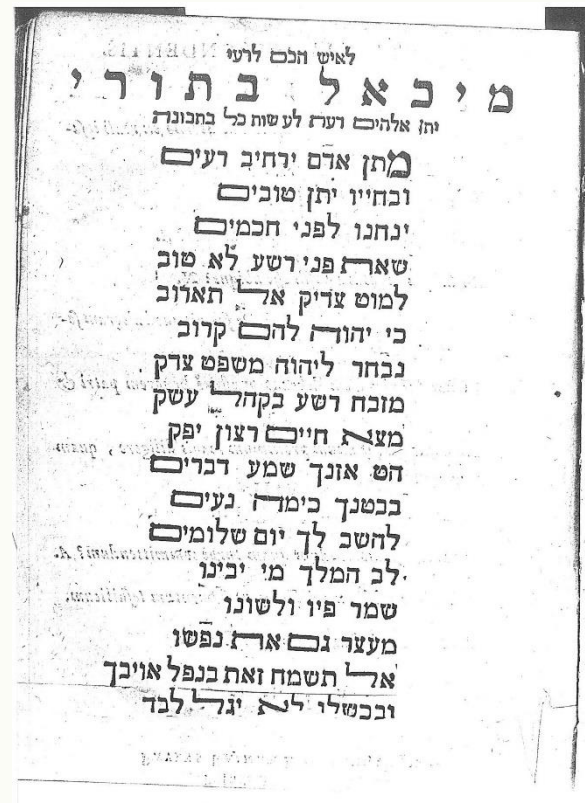
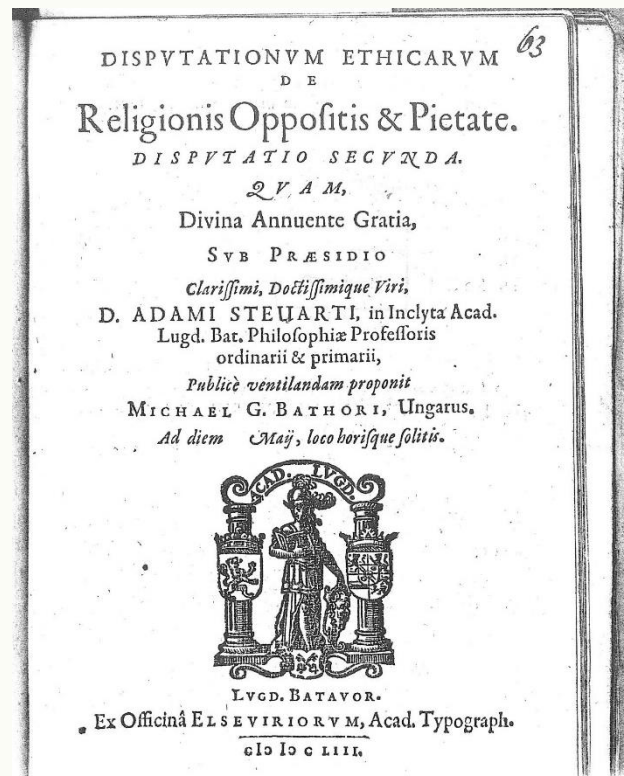



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Poem from 1653 by *Pál Diószegi Kalmár* (1628/9-1663) to *Michael G. Báthory* (1631-1669)



RMK III. 1840



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Poem from 1653 by *Pál Diószegi Kalmár*
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נבחר ליהוה משפט צדק
מזבח רשע בקהל עשק
מצא חיים רצון יפק [יפיק]
הט אזנך שמע דברים
בבטנך כימה נעים
להשב [להשיב] לך יום שלומים
לב המלך מי יבינו
שמר פיו ולשונו
מעצר גם את נפשו
אל תשמח זאת בנפל אויבך
ובכשלו לא יגל לבך

לאיש חכם לרעי
מיכאל בתורי
יתן אלהים דעת לעשות כל בתבונה

מתן אדם ירחיב רעים
ובחיו יתן טובים
ינחנו לפני חכמים
שאת פני רשע לא טוב
למוט צדיק אל תארוב
כי יהוה להם קרוב



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Poem from 1653 by *Pál Diószegi Kalmár*

Prov. 8:35:

כִּי מִצְאֵי מִצְא חַיִּים
וַיִּפֶק רָצוֹן מִיְהוָה:

(1663) to *Michael G. Báthory* (1631-1669)

נבחר ליהוה משפט צדק
מזבח רשע בקהל עשק
מצא חיים רצון יפק [יפיק]
הט אזנך שמע דברים
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להשב [להשיב] לך יום שלומים
לב המלך מי יבינו
שמר פיו ולשונו
מעצר גם את נפשו
אל תשמח זאת **בנפל אויבך**
ובכשלו לא יגל לבך

Prov. 24:17:

בְּנֶפֶל אוֹיְבֶךָ אַל-תִּשְׂמַח
וּבְכִשְׁלוֹ אַל-יִגַּל לְבָבְךָ:



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לאיש חכם לרעי
מיכאל בתורי

יתן אלהים דעת לעשות כל בתבונה

Prov. 18:16:

מִתֵּן אָדָם יִרְחִיב לוֹ
וְלִפְנֵי גְדֹלִים יִנְחֲנוּ:

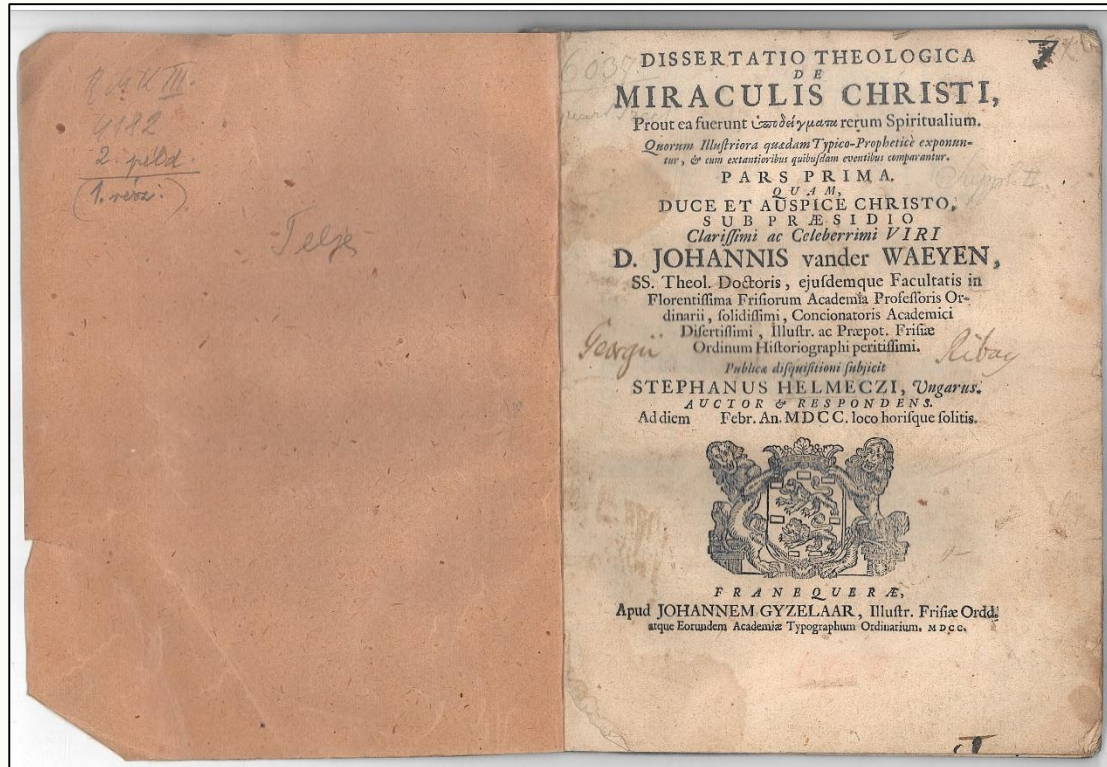
מתן אדם ירחיב רעים
ובחיו יתן טובים
ינחנו לפני חכמים

שאת פני רשע לא טוב
למוט צדיק אל תארוב
כי יהוה להם קרוב

Prov. 18:5:

שְׂאֵת פְּנֵי-רָשָׁע לֹא-טוֹב
לְהִטּוֹת צְדִיק בַּמִּשְׁפָּט:

Poem from 1700 by *Paulus A. Gyöngyösi* to *Stephanus Helmeczi* in Franeker



פזמון שלבלוזמאות לבחור הבחיר
 שטפנום הלמצי
 על פרישן המשיח הנפלפל
 כ סילקי ואלה א. הונא כל לאדם
 אכנ שלמלכ. ב. יי את פרישן חכם
 ב. נטרא נמד בארת!
 יספ שוב פרס את מתנים בסתר המשיח ג.
 פרק את דרכים. ד. ומסתורין. יי אישי אלה
 כדין חסיד. ז. ברזילא!
 א. Ecol. 11 & 91 Ach. 171 Gen. 11 B. Efa. 33: 43: 44: ג. Prov. 8: Pfal. 78:
 Rom. 16: ד. Prov. 11 & 8: Pfal. 119: 1: Gen. 41 & 18: 19: Jef. 32: ז. Joh. 2: 11:
 1: Tim. 1:

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Poem from 1700 by *Paulus A. Gyöngyösi*
to *Stephanus Helmeczi* in Franeker

פזמון שלבלוזמאות לבחור הבחיר
שטפנוס חלמצי
על פרישן המשיח המפלפל

Words known only from
postbiblical sources:

בלוזמא, פזמון

(Jastrow: 'drinking of spiced wines')

בסילקי ואלה. α. הוונא כל לאדם
אפן שלמלכ. β. יי' את פרידן חכם
בגמרא גמר בארת:
יספ שוב פרס את מתנים בסתר המשיח. γ.
פרק את דרכים. δ. ומסתורין. ε. יי' אישי אלה
כדין חסיד. ζ. ברזילא:

α. Eccl. 11 & 91, Act. 17, Gen. 1: β. Esa. 33: 43: 44: γ. Prov. 8: Psal. 78: Rom.
16: δ. Prov. 1: & 8: Psal. 119: ε. Gen. 4: & 18: 19: Jes. 32: ζ. Joh. 21: η Tim. 1



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Poem from 1692 by *Josephus Csuzi* to *Stephanus T. M. Vasarhelyi* in Franeker



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Poem from 1692 by *Josephus Csuzi* to *Stephanus T. M. Vasarhelyi*

Postbiblical syntax:

Biblical background text is Psalm 2:4:

יוֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁחַק אֲדֹנָי יִלְעַג-לָמוֹ:

He that sitteth in heaven laugheth,

the Lord hath them in derision. (JPA)

the Messiah-King

Unexpected dagesh
in ו, ב and ת. Why?

5452 = 1692

אדון הארץ היושב בשמים
חפץ לו ליסוד את מלכות באנשים:
אשר מעולם ראתה לפניה
את הסמאל עם מלאכיו צריה:
על זאת המלכות אלה תמיד רגשו
להשמיד אתה מאד מאד כספו:
אז המשיח המלך ילעג למו
ירועם האל כי חזקה זרועו:
עוד מלכות הזאת באחרית הימים
תכבד כאשר נבאו הנביאים:
אבל העידו זאת לנו רבים אותות
יהוה גבור יכלה לו פעלות:



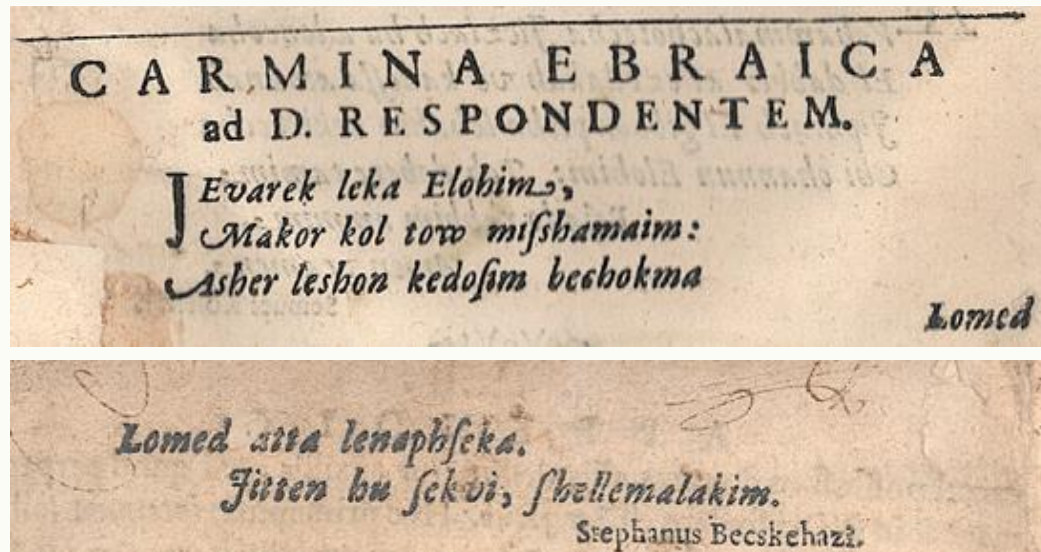
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Reconstructing pronunciation

- *Stephanus Becskehazi* to *Stephanus Szekeleyhidi* in 1651 (RMNY III 2356)



Jevarek leka Elohim,
Makor kol tov misshamaim:
Asher leshon kedosim bechokma
Lomed atta lenaphseka,
Jitten hu sekvi, shellemalakim.



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Early Modern Christian Hebrew as a case of Medieval Hebrew?

Medieval Jewish Hebrew

- Second Language Acquisition only
 - Very early and intensive acquisition
- Heavy training on Torah, *then* NaKh,
+ heavy training on postbiblical Hebrew
- Written modality, incl. reading up
 - Oral modality??
- Inference from L1? (+ from Aramaic?)

Medieval Christian Hebrew

- Second Language Acquisition only
 - Late and not so intensive acquisition
- Heavy training on Old Testament, e.g.,
Mishlei + some postbiblical influence?
- Written modality, incl. reading up
 - Oral modality ????
- Inference from L1 + Latin, Greek etc.?



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Early Modern Christian Hebrew as a case of Medieval Hebrew?

Medieval Jewish Hebrew

- *Sampling bias:*
the best texts from the best rabbis
are best known to us.
 - Aiming at an ideal and unknown audience,
with whom Hebrew is the only shared lang.
 - *Lg. choice:* Hebrew as language of the Jews,
past (biblical and rabbinic) and present.
- + Hebrew as the language of revelation.

Medieval Christian Hebrew

- *Sampling bias:*
currently working on a random sample
of possibly mediocre students.
 - Aiming at specific peers with shared
languages and past experiences.
 - *Lg. choice:* Hebrew as language of the Jews
(*'sido nyelv'*), past (biblical times) and present.
- + Hebrew as the language of creation.



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A final note

- Please bear in mind that this is still work in progress.
- Any feedback or suggestion is welcome!



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Thank you for your attention!

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