*Hebrew.—*Hebrew and Phoenician are but dialects of one and the same language. It is only as the language of the people of Israel that Hebrew can be known with any pre­cision. Since in the Old Testament a few of the neigh­bouring peoples are represented as being descended from Eber, the eponym of the Hebrews, that is, are regarded as nearly related to the latter, it was natural to suppose that they likewise spoke Hebrew,—a supposition which, at least in the case of the Moabites, has been fully confirmed by the discovery of the Mesha inscription (date, soon after 900 B.c.). The language of this inscription scarcely differs from that of the Old Testament ; the only important distinction is the occurrence of a reflexive form (with *t* after the first radical), which appears nowhere else but in Arabic. We may remark in passing that the style of this inscription is quite that of the Old Testament, and enables us to maintain with certainty that a similar historical literature existed amongst the Moabites. But it must be remembered that ancient Semitic inscriptions exhibit, in a sense, nothing but the skeleton of the language, since they do not express the vowels at all, or do so only in certain cases ; still less do they indicate other phonetic modifications, such as the doubling of consonants, &c. It is therefore very possible that *to the ear* the language of Moab seemed to differ considerably from that of the Judæans.

The Mesha inscription is the only non-Israelite source from which any knowledge of ancient Hebrew can be obtained. (See Hebrew Language and Literature.) Some fragments in the Old Testament belong to the second millennium before our era,—particularly the song of Deborah (Judges v.), a document which, in spite of its many obscurities in matters of detail, throws much light on the condition of the Israelites at the time when the Canaanites were still contending with them for the posses­sion of the country. The first rise of an historical litera­ture may very probably date from before the establishment of the monarchy. Various portions of the Old Testament belong to the time of the earlier kings ; but it was under the later kings that a great part of extant Hebrew litera­ture came into shape. To this age also belong the Siloam inscription and a few seals and gems bearing the names of Israelites. The Hebrew language is thus known to us from a very ancient period. But we are far from being acquainted with its real phonetic condition in the time of David or Isaiah. For, much as we owe to the labours of the later Jewish schools, which with infinite care fixed the pronunciation of the sacred text by adding vowels and other signs, it is evident that even at the best they could only represent the pronunciation of the language in its latest stage, not that of very early ages. Besides, their object was not to exhibit Hebrew simply as it was, but to show how it should be read in the solemn chant of the synagogue. Accordingly, the pronunciation of the older period may have differed considerably from that repre­sented by the punctuation. Such differences are now and then indicated by the customary spelling of the ancient texts, @@1 and sometimes the orthography is directly at vari­ance with the punctuation. @@2 In a few rare cases we may derive help from the somewhat older tradition contained in the representation of Hebrew words and proper names by Greek letters, especially in the ancient Alexandrine translation of the Bible (the so-called Septuagint). It is of particular importance to remark that this older tradi­tion still retains an original *a* in many cases where the

punctuation has the later *i* or *e.* We have examined this point somewhat in detail, in order to contradict the false but ever-recurring notion that the ordinary text of the Bible represents without any essential modification the pronunciation of ancient Hebrew, whereas in reality it ex­presses (in a very instructive and careful manner, it is true) only its latest development, and that for the purpose of solemn public recitation. A clear trace of dialectical differences within Israel is found in Judges xii. 6, which shows that the ancient Ephraimites pronounced *s* instead of *sh.*

The destruction of the Judæan kingdom dealt a heavy blow to the Hebrew language. But it is going too far to suppose that it was altogether banished from ordinary life at the time of the exile, and that Aramaic came into use among all the Jews. In the East even small communities, especially if they form a religious body, often cling per­sistently to their mother-tongue, though they may be sur­rounded by a population of alien speech; and such was probably the case with the Jews in Babylonia. See Hebrew Language, vol. xi. p. 597. Even so late as the time of Ezra Hebrew was in all probability the ordinary language of the new community. In Neh. xiii. 24 we find a complaint that the children of Jews by wives from Ashdod and other places spoke half in the “Jewish” language and half in the language of Ashdod, or whatever else may have been the tongue of their mothers. No one can sup­pose that Nehemiah would have been particularly zealous that the children of Jews should speak an Aramaic dialect with correctness. He no doubt refers to Hebrew as it was then spoken,—a stage in its development of which Nehemiah’s own work gives a very fair idea. And, more­over, the inhabitants of Ashdod spoke Hebrew. G. Hoff­mann @@3 has deciphered inscriptions (written in Greek letters, but, after the Hebrew fashion, from right to left) on two coins struck about 150 years after Nehemiah, which are in pure Hebrew @@4; nor does the language seem to diverge at all from that of the Old Testament. It is therefore probable that Nehemiah alludes only to a slightly different local dialect. If the Philistines of Ashdod still continued to speak Hebrew about the year 300 b.c., it cannot be supposed that the Jews had given up this their own lan­guage nearly three centuries earlier. We may also con­clude that the Philistines from the earliest period spoke the same language as their eastern neighbours, with whom they had so often been at war, but had also lived in close pacific intercourse.

After the time of Alexander large bodies of the Jewish population were settled in Alexandria and other western cities, and were very rapidly Hellenized. Meanwhile the principal language of Syria and the neighbouring countries, Aramaic, the influence of which may be perceived even in some pre-exilic writings, began to spread more and more among the Jews. Hebrew gradually ceased to be the lan­guage of the people and became that of religion and the schools. The book of Daniel, written in 167 or 166 b.c., begins in Hebrew, then suddenly passes into Aramaic, and ends again in Hebrew. Similarly the redactor of Ezra (or more correctly of the Chronicles, of which Ezra and Nehe­miah form the conclusion) borrows large portions from an Aramaic work, in most cases without translating them into Hebrew. No reason can be assigned for the use of Aramaic in Jewish works intended primarily for Jerusalem, unless it were already the dominant speech, whilst, on the other hand, it was very natural for a pious Jew to write in the

@@@1 For example, we may conclude with tolerable certainty, from the presence and absence of the vowel-letters *y* and *w,* that in older times the accented *e* and *o* were not pronounced long, and that, on the other hand, the diphthongs *au* and *ai* were used for the later ó and *é.*

@@@2 The very first word of the Bible contains an Aleph *(spiritus lenis),* which is required by etymology and was once audible, but which the pronunciation represented by the point-system ignores.

@@@3 See Sallet’s *Zeitschrift für Numismatik,* 1882 (Berlin).

@@@4 The inscriptions, short as they are, exhibit the exclusively Hebrew word *ir* ('*ír*), “ town,” and the feminine *asina (hasínah), “* the strong,” with the termination *ah* (not *at,* as in Phoenician). Had the Ashdodites been accustomed to use a dead language on their coins they would certainly have employed the native Semitic writing.