

CONTENTS

The Mediaeval Christian Hebraists of England Raphael Loewe, Cambridge, England	205
Solomon Maimon's Philosophy of Language Samuel Atlas, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion . . .	253
The Prophet in Modern Hebrew Literature Jacob B. Agus, Baltimore	289
מכהבי יהושע העשיל שור לברוך פלונטהל Ezra Spicehandler, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati	8

ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICATION OF THE BIBLICAL
TERM 'HEBREW'*

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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen!

TO SPEAK at a meeting of Orientalists and members of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis on the Origin and Signification of the term "Hebrew" may well seem superfluous, since all of us attribute to it the same meaning. In fact, nobody would venture to criticize the habit of biblical scholars and Semitists to apply the term "Hebrew" to the original language of the by far greatest part of the Old Testament. For in designating that language as Hebrew, we continue a tradition which can be traced back not only to the New Testament but even to the non-canonical Jewish literature of the second pre-Christian century. Nor would it be permissible to contest the historians' right to designate the ancient Israelites as "The Hebrews". For the modern historian who uses this adaptation of the biblical term *hā'ibrīm* as a designation of that ancient nation follows — wittingly or unwittingly — the example of Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century of our era.

On the other hand, it is a matter of fact that an exact equivalent or prototype of our term "The Hebrew Language" does not occur in the Old Testament; as has been duly noted in many a "Hebrew Grammar", the language of the ancient Israelites and Jews figures in the Old Testament once as *l'šōn Kēna'an* "the language of Canaan" and twice as *yēhūdīt* "Judean", "Jewish". Moreover, the historian of the Ancient Near East cannot fail to observe that the states of the ancient Israelites and Judeans were never known as "Hebrew monarchies" or the like. In fact, the abundant biblical evidence to the effect that "king of Israel" was the official title of the monarchs of the northern state — the state of the ten tribes — is borne out by con-

*Presidential address delivered at Toronto on April 19, 1955 before the Mid-West Section of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis at its sixteenth meeting which was held in conjunction with the American Oriental Society and the Middle West Branch of the American Oriental Society; cf. *Journal of Biblical Literature* LXXXV, 1956, p. XVII. The original text of the address was left unchanged but the addition of some footnotes seemed desirable.

temporary sources as authoritative as the famous "Moabite Stone" and the inscriptions of the Assyrian kings. For just as Mēša' of Moab defines his former overlord, 'Omrī, as king of Israel and 'Omrī's people as Israel, Shalmaneser III of Assyria refers to 'Omrī's son, Ahab, as *Aḥabbu Sir'ilaḥa* "Ahab, the Israelite". And whenever a ruler of the smaller southern state to whom the historical books of the Bible give the title "king of Judah" happens to be mentioned in an Assyrian or Babylonian official record of the eighth, seventh, or sixth pre-Christian century, he is likewise designated as "king of Judah" or simply "the Judean".

The emergence in the intertestamentary period of the term Hebrew as a designation of the Israelites and Judeans and their ancestors, as well as their language, is therefore as surprising as it is inexplicable on the basis of the historical sources of the middle and earlier half of the first pre-Christian millennium.

In these circumstances it is natural to turn to the numerous references to the Hebrews which occur in those narratives of the Book of Exodus in which we are told that a pharaoh, who had no knowledge of Joseph, oppressed the children of Israel and refused to grant them permission to make a journey into the wilderness in order to offer their sacrifices to "Yahweh, the God of Israel". As will be recalled, the story in Exodus 5 which relates the pharaoh's refusal to grant this permission defines Yahweh not only as "the God of Israel" but also as *'ēlohē hā'ibrīm* "the God of the Hebrews". Since, furthermore, the narrative in chapter 1 concerning the instructions given to the midwives speaks of Hebrew women just as, inter alia, the following legend of Moses' birth and rescue characterizes Moses as one of the infants of the Hebrews, a glance at the first chapters of the Book of Exodus seems, indeed, to indicate that the terms Hebrews and Israelites could be used indiscriminately.

Nonetheless, it cannot be taken for granted that the intertestamentary writings and the still younger sources which speak of the Hebrew language and employ the term Hebrew as an ethnical term did so under the influence of the Book of Exodus. A careful examination of the story of Moses' first action, the slaying of an Egyptian owing to which he had to leave Egypt, shows that the narrative distinguishes between Hebrews whom it describes as brothers of Moses, thus characterizing them as Israelites, and Hebrews hostile to him who seem to make common cause with the Egyptians.¹ As I pointed

¹ It is worthwhile noting that the Greek version offers *τύπωντά τινα Ἑβραίων τῶν ἐαυτοῦ ἀδελφῶν τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραήλ* instead of the concise *makkē 'āš 'ibrī mē'ēhāw* of the Masoretic text. The Septuagint thus underlines the distinction between

out some twenty-five years ago², this feature is well in line with the fact that the thirteenth chapter of the First Book of Samuel has king Saul draw a distinction between his Israelite followers and the Hebrews whom he expects to join him in his rebellion against the oppressive Philistine overlords. It is not difficult to account for this important detail. On the one hand, because in the story of Saul's and David's attitude toward the people of Gib'ōn, as well as upon other occasions, the Bible admits that the population of Palestine included, in addition to the Israelites and the garrisons of their Philistine overlords, still other elements whose loyalty toward the Philistines was certainly doubtful, and on the other hand, because the fourteenth chapter of the First Book of Samuel actually reports that, after the first defeat of the Philistines, Saul's cause was joined not only by Israelites who had remained in hiding but also by Hebrews who, being wont to go to war with the Philistines, were in their camp also at that time.

In the light of the evidence just adduced, it appears doubtful that the first chapters of the Book of Exodus or, for that matter, the Joseph story in Genesis employ the term Hebrews as an ethnical name ipso facto denoting the Israelites. Hence we are now in a position to emphasize that, according to the Book of Exodus, it was Israel and not the Hebrews for whose release Moses and Aaron pleaded with the king of Egypt, and that the non-biblical source usually quoted in connection with the exodus and Israel's subsequent settlement in Palestine, the pharaoh Merneptah's hymn of victory, speaks of Israel and not of the Hebrews.

Of much greater importance is, however, the evidence furnished by the very first of the basic laws of the Book of the Covenant which Moses is said to have promulgated in the third month after the exodus from Egypt right after the proclamation of the Ten Commandments. As will be recalled, this first law of Exodus 21, which recurs in slightly modified form in Deuteronomy 15, deals with the acquisition by an Israelite of a so-called *'ēbed 'ibrī*, that is a Hebrew servant, and prescribes that, after six years of service, such a servant shall decide whether he wishes to discontinue his service and leave as a free man or whether he prefers to stay and to become a *'ēbed l'olām* "a slave for ever".³ To assume that this law concerns Israelites in the service of

Hebrews to be identified with the Israelites and those other Hebrews obviously supposed to have belonged to another ethnical group.

² See *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 30, 1927, col. 829.

³ Thus according to Deut. 15.17. Instead of speaking of a "slave for ever" or "a perpetual slave", Ex. 21.6 characterizes the *'ēbed 'ibrī* who chooses to continue his service as a person who shall "serve his master for ever". From the viewpoint of

other Israelites proves impossible because this assumption would be contrary to the gist of those biblical laws which prevent an Israelite from selling himself into slavery and provide for capital punishment for an Israelite who steals another Israelite and sells him. Hence we are compelled to infer that the law, according to which the Hebrew servant can, after six years of service, declare his readiness to stay with his master and to become "a slave for ever", concerns not an Israelite but a non-Israelite willing to serve an Israelite. In other words, it appears that, at least in so far as the first law of the Book of the Covenant and its variant in Deuteronomy are concerned, the term Hebrew designates an "alien". The correctness of this conclusion leaps to the eye when it is recalled that the law in Leviticus 25 according to which an Israelite could not become a slave is followed by these positive statements: "And any slave, or slave-maid, whom you may acquire, you shall acquire from the nations that are round about you. You may acquire them likewise from the children of the settlers who sojourn among you and from their families who are with you, who have been begotten in your land, and they may become your property. And you may bequeath them to your children after you to hold them as property; you may make of them slaves for ever."

Since, accordingly, the biblical laws pertaining to slave-holding furnish strong evidence that, many centuries before being used as an ethnical name, the term Hebrew was an appellative noun to be rendered by "alien", it is obviously necessary to survey the biblical narratives with a view to determining whether this or a similar rendering can be regarded as adequate and exhaustive in those instances in which, in distinction from the law of Exodus 21 and Deuteronomy 15, Israelites are designated as Hebrews.

* * *

As the Bible depicts Joseph as the first of Jacob's — or, rather, Israel's — descendants who used to be spoken of as a Hebrew, it is in order to begin this survey with the observation that the tale of his stay in the house of Potiphar and in prison certainly contains nothing to prevent us from assuming that, in the opinion of the ancient narrator, the Egyptians called Joseph "an alien man", "the alien slave" and "an alien youth". In fact, when evaluating the circumstances

the present discussion, this difference is irrelevant because, in prescribing the piercing of the servant's ear, both Ex. 21.6 and Deut. 15.17 leave no doubt about his new status: Since he failed to avail himself of his right to leave, he is henceforth a slave.

which, according to Genesis 39, led to Joseph's imprisonment, it seems more probable that the narrator had Potiphar's wife denounce the innocent Joseph as a non-Egyptian or alien rather than as a member of any particular foreign group. For in order to convince the Egyptians of the truth of her accusation and to enrage her husband against the faithful slave, the vengeful woman did not have to refer to Joseph's foreign origin in terms other than general. By the same token, the narrator is not likely to have wished to give his hearers the impression that pharaoh learned any details about Joseph's nationality when the butler told of his meeting in prison a youth from abroad whose interpretations of dreams had proved to be correct. Finally, there is hardly any cogent reason for supposing that the statement in Genesis 43, according to which the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, singles out a special group of foreigners. On the contrary, it appears more natural and more in line with the habits of the Ancient Near East to assume that the narrator thinks here of non-Egyptians of whichever race.

Our impression that the early narrators who speak to us in the Joseph story used the term Hebrew in the sense of "alien" or the like is strengthened when we resume the examination of the pertinent chapters of the Book of Exodus and the First Book of Samuel. The latter uses our term not only in the afore-mentioned important passages which speak first of king Saul's hope that "the Hebrews" would join him and his Israelites and then relate the fulfillment of this hope, but also upon various occasions on which it tells us how the Philistines felt and reacted when confronted with events such as the arrival of the Ark of the Covenant in the camp of the Israelites (I Sa. 4.5 ff.), Saul's and his son's uprising (I Sa. 14.1 ff.) or David's readiness to fight on the side of the Philistines (I Sa. 29.2 f.). The first of these passages has the Philistines exclaim: "Strengthen yourselves and be men, Oh Philistines, lest you become servants to the Hebrews, as they became servants to you. Be men and fight!" This apprehensive exclamation reminds us, of course, of the fact that, according to the Book of Exodus, the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt was due to pharaoh's fear lest "the Hebrews" would become too strong and in case of war join the enemies of the Egyptians. In fact, the biblical narrator himself wishes us to compare Israel's oppression by, and servitude to, the Philistines with the oppression by the Egyptians; for he explains the apprehensiveness of the Philistines by asserting that they knew of the calamities and plagues with which Yahweh struck down the Egyptians. It is therefore purposely that in the Book of Samuel the use of the term Hebrews as designation of the Israelites is attributed

to the Philistines. On the other hand, it cannot be doubted that the authors of the biblical narratives were fully aware of the fact that, just as the Egyptian oppressors of an earlier period, the Philistines did not belong to the same race as the oppressed Israelites.⁴ Consequently, it is not too daring to infer that to the authors of the biblical narratives the word "Hebrews" was an appellative term for "aliens" not enjoying the same civil rights and political status as the ruling population of the country in which they were living.⁵ Unfortunately, the narrative portions of the Old Testament yield no precise information as to this inferior status of a "Hebrew" or, as we may now say, an "alien". But it is certain that his position was inferior so that the appellation "Hebrew" tended to be derogatory: as mentioned before, the biblical legislation provides for the enslavement of Hebrew men or women who, after six years of service comparable to that of a hired laborer, do not avail themselves of their right to leave their master's house.

There is no doubt that this law remained in force throughout the centuries preceding the Babylonian exile. For according to the 34th chapter of the Book of Jeremiah, the prophet cited it in 588 B. C. after the ruling classes had violated a solemn agreement that everybody should proclaim the freedom of his Hebrew slaves and actually send them away so that, to quote the Greek version which is here superior to the Masoretic text, "no person from Judah should be a slave".⁶ As this indicates that Jeremiah's contemporaries knew full well that Hebrew meant "alien" and, especially, "resident alien", it is hardly conceivable that the subsequent use of the term as a designation of the Israelites was due to early misinterpretation of the biblical sources so far considered, all the less so since, as we recalled before, Israel's language figures in Nehemiah's memoirs as *y^ehūdāi*. Hence we must now raise the question whether Genesis 14.13 might account for the intertestamentary and later use of the old appellative noun 'ībrī as an ethnical term. For Genesis 14.13 is the only further biblical passage of significance, Jonah 1.9 being of doubtful value, on the one hand, because, as was observed by Baeck⁷, the use of 'ībrī as designation of

⁴ Cf. the habit of paraphrasing the ethnical name *P^elištim* by means of the appellative ἀλλόφυλοι.

⁵ Cf. I Sa. 13.19-21 LXX.

⁶ See Jer. 41.9 LXX in fine: πρὸς τὸ μὴ δουλεῦν ἄνδρα ἐξ Ἰούδα. That the unusual ἀνὴρ ἐξ Ἰούδα denotes a man who, while living within the kingdom of Judah, is not a Judean by race is suggested, inter alia, by the Greek version of Jer. 32, in which Ἰουδαῖοι and ἄνδρες Ἰούδα render *y^ehūdāim* and 'īš *y^ehūdā*.

⁷ *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 83, 1939, pp. 66 and 78.

Jonah may well be inspired by the narrator's desire to give his tale an archaic coloring and, on the other hand, because the Greek version substitutes for 'ībrī 'ānōkē "I am a Hebrew" or, rather, "I am an alien" δοῦλος Κυρίου ἐγώ "I am a servant of the Lord".⁸

From the viewpoint of semantics we need not dwell on the verse Gen. 14.13 "And someone who had escaped came and informed Abram, the Hebrew, who had settled down beside the terebinths of Mamre, the Amorite, a kinsman of Eshkol and Aner who were allied with Abram". For since the Book of Genesis states in detail that Abram's original home had been far away from Palestine, and since we have already demonstrated that in the biblical narratives and in the biblical legislation "Hebrew" signifies "alien" and, especially, "resident alien", it is not surprising that our verse appends the expression 'hā'ībrī as an apposition to the name of the patriarch. But it is important to note that this apposition occurs here as an epithet of the patriarch whom the Israelites glorified as their ancestor and in a tale which, as I have stated upon another occasion⁹, explains how and why this patriarch obtained for himself and, especially, for his descendants the right to settle permanently in Palestine. For if, as one could conclude from Genesis 14, his contemporaries knew Israel's famous ancestor as "the Hebrew", later generations, who had no longer any clear idea of the original signification of the archaic term, are likely to have reasoned that they, too, were entitled to call themselves "Hebrews", all the more so since this term had the external form of those many genuine ethnical designations which terminate in the so-called gentilic ending -ī.

Support for the conclusion that Abraham's epithet *hā'ībrī* was the object of discussion and speculation comes from the Septuagint. As a rule, the authors of the Greek version did not attempt to render the term "Hebrew" but considered it feasible to retain it in the Hellenized form Ἑβραῖος. Since the ending -αῖος is the characteristic feature of the Greek adaptations of Semitic designations of peoples or sects, it follows that the authors of the Greek version saw in the biblical word 'ībrī a term denoting the Israelites either as a people or as a religious

⁸ As was stated by Ralph Marcus in his annotated translation of the pertinent passage of Josephus' *Archaeology* (see *The Loeb Classical Library*, Josephus, Vol. VI, p. 111) as well as by other savants, δοῦλος Κυρίου goes back to a Hebrew text offering, or supposed to offer, 'ēbēd Y (*HWH*) instead of 'ībrī. This reading was, however, unknown to Josephus or, less probably, rejected by him. Baeck, *loc. cit.*, p. 77, who does not mention Josephus' paraphrase of the passage, seems to think that the reading δοῦλος Κυρίου is due to a translator who, being anxious to interpret the term 'ībrī, deliberately substituted עברי for עבר.

⁹ See *Revue de l'histoire des religions* CX, 1934, pp. 59 f.

community. Hence it is remarkable that, as was repeatedly emphasized¹⁰, the Greek version of Genesis 14 attributes to *hā'ibrī* the signification *ὁ περάτης*. Obviously, this indicates that there were, as late as the Hellenistic period, savants who defined the term as an appellative noun related to the word *'ēḫer* "what is beyond", "the opposite side".

An evaluation of the merits of this etymology is impossible without reviewing some data relating to that Ancient Oriental vocable which for many years has been thought to shed light on the origin of the biblical term "Hebrew" and which, I think, supports indirectly the conclusion that "alien", "resident alien" was its original signification. I refer, of course, to that international word found in numerous Akkadian sources from virtually all countries of the Ancient Near East in the form *ḥa-bi-ru* with the plural *ḥa-bi-ru-ú*, feminine *ḥa-bi-ra-tū*¹¹, whereas the Egyptian sources offer, at least seemingly, the form *'apiru*, thus agreeing with the alphabetic texts from Ras Shamra-Ugarit in which the genitive of the plural occurs in a form probably to be pronounced *'āpirīma* or *'āpirīm*. Because it could reasonably be assumed that the word *ḥa-bi-ru* belonged to the same Semitic root as the biblical term *'ibrī* and, particularly, because the first references to people designated as *ḥa-bi-ru* happened to occur in letters written by a prince of Jerusalem around 1370 B. C., it is not surprising that, as will be recalled, reputed savants defined *ḥa-bi-ru* as an ethnical name denoting either the Israelites or at least people of the same race. Fortunately, the hypotheses to this effect are now a matter of the past. When recently a group of French Assyriologists agreed to discuss the so-called *ḥabiru* problem at an international meeting and to obtain and to publish in a book prepared and edited by Jean Bottéro¹² the pertinent statements of the savants considered best informed on the subject, it turned out that, thanks to the very considerable increase of the source material, the earlier views as to the *ḥābirū* have been generally abandoned.¹³ Instead, the *ḥābirū* are defined by one author as

¹⁰ See, for instance, J. Lewy, *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 30, 1927, col. 828; *Revue de l'histoire des religions* CX, 1934, p. 35; Meek, *Hebrew Origins*, New York and London 1936, p. 9; Baeck, *loc. cit.*, p. 77.

¹¹ For the references see now Bottéro, *Le problème des Ḥabiru*, Paris 1954, pp. 149 ff.

¹² See the preceding footnote.

¹³ In distinction from the authors who leave it open whether *ḥa-bi-ru* should be regarded as an adjective (or verbal-adjective) pronounced *ḥa-bi-ru* or rather as a participle *ḥābiru*, I insist on the correctness of the latter interpretation of the ambiguous spelling for the following reasons: (1) In all probability, a genuine Akkadian adjective *ḥabiru* would occasionally alternate with a variant **ḥabru*, but this form

"immigrants" or "resident aliens", by another one as "fugitives", by a third as "refugees", by a fourth as "uprooted people", by a fifth as "displaced persons" and so forth. In other words, almost everybody agrees that the term denoted "aliens". As can also be easily seen from Bottéro's summary of the contents of the various groups of pertinent documents and their interpretation by the specialists whose comments he solicited, the ample source material now available leads necessarily to the conclusion that throughout the Ancient Near East the aliens designated as *ḥābirū* were not accorded the civil rights of the ruling races.

On the other hand, there is now disagreement as to the origin and the etymology of the word *ḥa-bi-ru* with the result that the identity of its root with that of the West Semitic word for "to traverse", "to cross over" is being contested. Whereas this etymology was formerly considered self-evident, one contributor to Bottéro's book rejected it by declaring it *unthinkable* that an Old West Semitic or, as he puts it, East Canaanite term could occur in the so far earliest group of Akkadian texts in which certain individuals are designated as *ḥa-bi-ru*.¹⁴ The savant who expressed this radical view seems to have forgotten that these texts, the Old Assyrian documents from the 19th century B. C. which have been unearthed in Central Anatolia¹⁵, make use of the term *ḥuzru* "swine"¹⁶ in which he sees a West Semitic loan-word, just as they employ the non-Akkadian term *kumrā* "priest" which appears subsequently as *kumrā* in the Aramaic literature and as *kōmer* in the Bible.¹⁷ We turn therefore without further discussion of

occurs in none of the sources mentioning LÚ.MEŠ *ḥa-bi-ru* or a single LÚ *ḥa-bi-ru*.

(2) Since, as a rule, the Akkadian scribes of the second millennium considered it unnecessary to indicate the length of the first vowel of the participles of the type *qātīlu*, it would be unreasonable to draw any conclusions from the fact that no text from Mari, Babylonia or Assyria offers the spelling *ḥa-a-bi-ru*. (3) As I stated in *Hebrew Union College Annual* XIV, 1939, p. 604 with note 89, we are doubtless entitled to ascribe to a West Semitic participle of the type *qātīlu* (and hence also to a *qātīlu* form which passed from an Old West Semitic dialect into Akkadian) the meaning of a participium perfecti; accordingly, a term *ḥābiru* < *'ābiru* may well be supposed to denote as such "one who has crossed (the frontier or the like)", i. e. an "alien", "immigrant" or "resident alien".

¹⁴ See the "Note de B. Landsberger" apud Bottéro, *op. cit.*, pp. 159 f.

¹⁵ Cf. below, p. 12 with note 29.

¹⁶ Cf. J. Lewy, *American Journal of Archaeology* XLIX, 1945, p. 180.

¹⁷ The "Note de B. Landsberger" just cited comprises another example of forgetfulness which is even more surprising: Landsberger claims there that it was he who, in his article "Ḥabiru und Lulāḥḥu" (published in 1928 in *Kleinasiatische Forschungen* I, pp. 321 ff.), attributed to the term *ḥa-bi-ru* the signification "étranger ayant traversé la frontière". The truth is that this interpretation of the term was contemplated by J. Lewy, *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 30, 1927, col. 745, and that

his negative view to another statement likewise just published in Bottéro's stimulating book. Paying no attention to the weighty reasons for which other writers regarded the afore-mentioned Ugaritic spelling with *p* of the term *ḥābiru* as inconclusive, its author considers only the question whether or not **apiru* might have been a designation of people who gained their livelihood from somebody else, working for him "without wages, merely for board and keep". Since he thinks that the Akkadian verb *epēru* "to furnish somebody with food" points to the existence of a West Semitic root ' - *p* - *r* and, therefore, implies the existence of a verbal-adjective '*apirum* > *epirum* to be rendered "one provided with food", he is inclined to answer this question in the affirmative.¹⁸ In my opinion, this view is hardly tenable. In the first place because, as mentioned before, the Ugaritic spelling provides no greater certitude than does the Egyptian that the term *ḥa-bi-ru* belongs to a root ' - *p* - *r*,¹⁹ secondly because no convincing explanation of the personal name *Ḥābiru*²⁰ results from the proposal to attribute to the appellative noun **apiru* the signification "one provided with food", and thirdly because it is risky to postulate the existence of an Old West Semitic root primae *y* signifying "to provide somebody with food". In the light of the well-known fact that the ancient town of Bethlehem was also named Ephrat it is, of course, much more likely that the Old West Semitic equivalent of Akkadian *epru* "food" etc. belonged to a root primae *ṣ*.²¹ In order to meet this third objection, the law discovered by Hans Bauer²² could be invoked with a view to

Landsberger rejected it (*loc. cit.*, pp. 328 f. [see also *ibidem* p. 332]) in the following statement: "Diejenigen, welche die Identität von *ḥ* und '*ibrīm* behaupten, müssen Ein solches עִבְרִי ist aber kaum möglich Wir können es daher weder in der Bedeutung "(ständiger) Passant", d. h. Mensch ohne festen Wohnsitz oder flüchtiges Bevölkerungselement, noch auch als "einer der (die Grenze) überschritten hat" ansetzen. Während aber die zweite Bedeutung eines aktiven Part. Perf. im Semitischen überhaupt nicht ausdrückbar ist, können wir zur erstangenen gelangen bei Ansetzung einer Grundform '*ābir*." As for the untenability of this grammatical argument, see *Hebrew Union College Annual* XIV, 1939, p. 604 with note 89 where I repeated the thesis that West Semitic **ābir* means "he who crossed (the frontier)", i. e. "the foreigner", and called attention to the signification of biblical expressions such as *ḥaššābīm*, *ḥā'ōlīm* etc.

¹⁸ See the "Note de A. Goetze" apud Bottéro, *op. cit.*, pp. 161 ff.

¹⁹ Cf. now Greenberg, *The Ḥab/piru*, New Haven 1955, p. 90 with notes 23 and 24 and see also Posener apud Bottéro, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

²⁰ As for occurrences of the proper names *Ḥa-bi-ru* and *Ḥa-bi-ru*, see especially Bottéro, *op. cit.*, pp. 24 ff. sub 32; 33; 47 and cf. *ibidem*, pp. 195 f.

²¹ Cf. also Targumic אֶרְפָּר "pasture" and, possibly, the ancient divine name *Ilaprat* which may be taken to signify "God of (the town of) Ephrat" or "God Food".

²² *Das Alphabet von Ras Schamra*, Halle 1932, pp. 74 f.

justifying the postulate that the vocabulary of the Old West Semitic languages comprised a verb ' - *p* - *r* "to provide with food". Having thus removed the difficulty arising from the spelling with *ṣ* of the toponym Ephrat and the cognate Aramaic term '*efrā* "pasture", one might be tempted to derive some support for the rendering "one provided with food" of the postulated West Semitic verbal-adjective **apiru* from those recent remarks of Albright²³ in which he attributes to the early theophorous personal names of the type '*Apra-Rašpu*, '*Apra-Ba'al* etc. the signification "Fosterling of Rešef", "Fosterling of Ba'al" and so on, contending that "Accadian *epēru* 'to feed, to foster, nourish' = Arab. '*fr*." However, this contention is not borne out by any of the current Arabic dictionaries of Lane, Freytag, Dozy, Wehr etc. Moreover, in the light of evidence furnished by the onomastics of both the Western and Eastern Semites, even he who accepts Albright's interpretation of those names will have to admit that it cannot seriously be regarded as a conclusive argument in favor of the thesis that the international term *ḥābiru* belongs to an Old West Semitic root ' - *p* - *r* meaning "to provide with food".

The West Semitic nomina propria furnishing that evidence are the numerous Phoenician names of the group *Gēr-Melqart*, *Gēr-Aštōreṭ*, *Gēr-Šafūn*, *Gēr-Ba'al* etc. in which *gēr* "sojourner of foreign nationality", "client" precedes a divine name. To be sure, it is a debatable question whether *Gēr-Ba'al* signifies "Client of Ba'al", as is usually assumed, or rather "Neighbor of Ba'al", as seems possible in view of Ethiopic *gōr* "neighbor". But there can be no doubt that the name *Gēr-Ba'al* permits us to propose for the older name '*Apra-Ba'al* a rendering which is in line with the use of the appellative nouns **āpiru* and *ḥābiru* as designations of individuals and groups regarded and treated as strangers by the people among whom they lived.²⁴ The East Semitic names which, as already intimated, must likewise be kept in mind when dealing with the signification and the etymology of these appellative nouns are the Old Babylonian names of the type *Ubār-Šamaš*, *Ubār-Nabī'um* etc. Since the first element of these names is *ubāru*, the genuine Akkadian word for "emigrant", "resident alien" — a word etymologically elucidated by Old Assyrian *wabrum* "foreigner",

²³ *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 74, 1954, p. 225.

²⁴ Cf. my comment apud Bottéro, *op. cit.*, p. 202 on ll. 53-55 of the Ras Shamra document 15109+16296, the full text of which has now been communicated by Nougayrol, *Textes accadiens et hourrites (Mission de Ras Shamra, Tome VI)*, Paris 1955, pp. 102 ff. and plates XXII f. See also the important document communicated in toto by Bottéro, *op. cit.*, pp. 122 f. sub No. 161 (R. Š. 17238). As for the foreign origin of the *ḥābiru* figuring in the Nuzi documents, see *Hebrew Union College Annual* XIV, 1939, pp. 604 ff.

“guest” and the cognate Arabic verb *wabara* “to sojourn”²⁵ —, we learn here again that terms for “alien” may well be supposed to occur in theophorous Semitic names. Moreover, when further recalling, on the one hand, that the Old Babylonian onomastic includes, in addition to the theophorous names just cited, the name *Ubarrum* “Stranger” and, on the other hand, that the Nuzi documents acquaint us with a deity *Tilla*²⁶, it appears that the personal name *Ḫa-bi-ir-Til-la*²⁷ is to the personal name *Ḫa-bi-ru* as *Ubār-Šamaš* is to *Ubarrum*. In concluding therefore that the personal name *Ḫa-bi-ru* may well have meant “Stranger” as do modern names such as *Le Strange*, we realize anew that the appellative noun *ḫābiru* is likely to have defined the individuals and groups which it designated as what they actually were from the viewpoint of the peoples among whom they lived, namely as aliens. In other words, not even the personal names *Ḫa-bi-ru* and *Ḫa-bi-ir-Til-la* can be adduced as a cogent argument against the old thesis which sees in the term *ḫābiru* the Akkadianized participle **ābiru* of the West Semitic verb *‘abara* “to traverse”, “to cross over” and maintains that a term signifying “he who crossed over”, “he who came from abroad”²⁸ is an adequate expression for “alien”, “resident alien”.

Having thus gathered evidence that the Old West Semitic participle **ābiru*, which appears as *ḫa-bi-ru* in an Assyrian letter written in Anatolia as early as the nineteenth century B. C.²⁹, and the similar term *‘ibrī*, as used in the narratives and legislative portions of the Old Testament, conveyed one and the same notion “alien”, “resident alien”, we must now attempt to determine whether this can convincingly be explained by resorting to the theory, first advanced by Littmann³⁰, that the participle *‘ābiru* as well as *‘ibrī* ultimately go

²⁵ For the references and for the details see *Hebrew Union College Annual* XXVII, 1956, p. 59.

²⁶ For the references see I. J. Gelb, P. M. Purves and A. A. MacRae, *Nuzi Personal Names*, Chicago 1943, p. 266; for an attempt at determining the character of this deity see *Hebrew Union College Annual* XXIII, Part I, 1950–51, p. 380, note 77.

²⁷ For the reference see now Bottéro, *op. cit.*, p. 62; as for the occurrence in a Kassite text of the variant writing *Ḫa-bi-ir-di-il-la*, see Purves, *American Journal of Semitic Languages* LVII, 1940, pp. 172 f.; J. Lewy, *Hebrew Union College Annual* XV, 1940, p. 48, note 7.

²⁸ Cf. my remarks apud Bottéro, *op. cit.*, p. 163 and above, p. 8, note 13.

²⁹ See now Bottéro, *op. cit.*, pp. 8 ff. On the evidence permitting us to date that Old Assyrian letter, which comes from the “Nabi-Enlil archive” uncovered at Alishar, see now *Orientalia* XXVI, 1957, pp. 14 ff.

³⁰ Apud Spiegelberg, *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 10, 1907, col. 620, note 1. As for other savants who expressed much the same view as Littmann, see *ibidem*, 30, 1927, col. 828 with note 2.

back to *‘abir* or whether the synonymity and similarity of the two terms should rather be attributed to the more or less accidental fact that the Old West Semitic root *‘abara* offered more than one possibility of expressing the notion “alien”. This means that we are now confronted with the question whether or not the interpretation of *‘ibrī* as an appellative meaning “alien” permits us to endorse the opinion of that ancient translator of Genesis 14 who, as indicated by his afore-cited rendering of *ḫā‘ibrī* by means of *ὁ περὰ τῆς*, actually defined the biblical term as an appellative noun signifying “the one from beyond”, “the one from the other side”. Judging from the semantics of various other languages it would seem that, on principle, this question can be answered in the affirmative; for the character of terms such as Latin *extraneus* “(not pertinent to us, to our house or to our country but) belonging to what is outside (*extra*)” or English *foreigner*, which ultimately goes back to Latin *foris* “outside” as does Italian *forestiere* “stranger”, “guest”, makes it clear that more than one vocable signifying “alien” is an adjectival derivative of words which, just as Hebrew *‘ēḇer* > **‘ibrī*³¹, denote an area outside one’s own territory.

In considering it therefore unnecessary to propose for the biblical appellative term “Hebrew” an etymology other than that suggested by the Septuagint, we do not, of course, deny that the political status of the individuals and groups designated by the Old Testament as Hebrews was virtually the same as that of the aliens who, in pre-biblical times, used to be designated as *ḫābirū*. Unfortunately, it is impossible to dwell today on this particular point and its historical implications. For an adequate discussion of the various aspects and the ramifications of the so-called problem of the *ḫābirū* would compel us to go far beyond the scope of this attempt to elucidate the origin and the primary signification of the biblical term “Hebrew”.

³¹ As already intimated, I would not know of any cogent reason for assuming that **‘ibr-* goes back to **‘abir*. Nor is there any certainty that the (postulated) reduction **‘abir* > **‘ibir* > **‘ibr*, on which Littman based the proposal to explain *‘ibrī* as a derivative of **‘abir*, occurred as late as the second pre-Christian millennium.