

PREFACE

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 book is sociological, and approaches somewhat the methods of the science of sociolinguistics, without any pretence at either sociological profundity or the scientific evaluation of detailed facts as practised by that science. If it helps its readers to understand how the Hebrew language went on existing throughout the long years of the exile, and why it was revived less than a hundred years ago, this book will have fulfilled its purpose.

Jerusalem

June 1973

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