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East and West, *khes* and *shin* and the Origin of Yiddish

by
Dovid Katz

I. The Notion "Loter" and the Germanic Component

Max Weinreich believed Yiddish to have arisen "by the Rhine and its tributaries",¹ a geographic area he conceptualized in terms of its mediaeval Jewish cultural centre known as Loter.² That has been challenged in recent years from the viewpoint of bilingual dialectology. In a 1979 paper that launched a stampede away from the Loter theory and in favour of a rather more easterly origin of Yiddish, Robert D. King asked the explosive question "Where is Loter?", implying that the notion "Loter" had become a romantic and symbolic birthplace and had not been subjected to sufficient scrutiny as a viable point of origin. King reported, correctly, that "Yiddish bears hardly any trace of having been derived from or influenced by a dialect from the western part of Germany, i.e. by the Rhineland." As a consequence, "no linguist, using the evidence of Yiddish and German

- 1 M. Weinreich, "Yidish", in: *Algemejne entsiklopedye* (Series *Yidn*, II), 1940, p. 35.
- 2 See, e.g., M. Weinreich, "Prehistory and Early History of Yiddish — Facts and Conceptual Framework", in: U. Weinreich (ed.), *The Field of Yiddish — Studies in Yiddish Language, Folklore, and Literature* (Publications of the Linguistic Circle of New York, III), New York 1954, p. 78; M. Weinreich, *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh — Bagrifn, faktn, metodn*, I, New York 1973, p. 3.

dialects [...] would arrive at the conclusion that the Rhineland is the cradle of Yiddish.”³ Matisyohu Mieses, in his book *Die jiddische Sprache*, had declared in 1924 that “Western Germany is to be fully eliminated in analysis of the Yiddish language”.⁴ His lonely voice found in King a champion over a half century later, at a point in time when interest in the origin of Yiddish was beginning to blossom anew. At the first winter symposium in Yiddish studies, held at Oxford in December 1985 on “Origins of the Yiddish Language”, more easterly origins of Yiddish were supported by a number of papers that later appeared in a volume by that name.⁵ Mieses’s book had been harshly — and in many cases understandably — criticized. U. Weinreich’s generally unannotated bibliography carries the health warning “to be used with great caution” for this book.⁶ Uniquely in the history of Yiddish linguistics, it was the subject of a booklength review attacking it: Prilutski’s *Afkrume vegn*.⁷ It is only poetic justice that the book should, in the waning years of the twentieth century, provide such a vital key to the origins of Yiddish.

- 3 R.D. King, “New Perspectives on the History of Yiddish — The Evidence of the German Component”, paper placed before the First International Conference on Research in Yiddish Language and Literature at the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 6–9 August 1979, pp. 7–8.
- 4 M. Mieses, *Die jiddische Sprache — Eine historische Grammatik des Idioms der integralen Juden Ost- und Mitteleuropas*, Berlin–Vienna 1924, p. 269.
- 5 A. Faber, “A Tangled Web — Whole Hebrew and Ashkenazic Origins”, in: D. Katz (ed.), *Origins of the Yiddish Language — Papers from the First Annual Oxford Winter Symposium in Yiddish Language and Literature, 15–17 December 1985 (Winter Studies in Yiddish, I)*, Oxford 1987; D. Katz, “The Proto Dialectology of Ashkenaz”, *ibid.*, pp. 47–60; R.D. King, “Proto Yiddish Morphology”, *ibid.*, pp. 73–81; P. Wexler, “Reconceptualizing the Genesis of Yiddish in the Light of its Non-Native Components”, *ibid.*, pp. 135–142; see also D. Katz, “Preface: On the First Winter Symposium”, *ibid.*, pp. 1–5.
- 6 U. Weinreich & B. Weinreich, *Yiddish Language and Folklore — A Selective Bibliography for Research*, The Hague 1959, No. 176.
- 7 N. Prilutski, *Afkrume vegn*, published as supplement (with separate pagination at end, 1–64) to: N. Prilutski & S. Lehman (eds.), *Arkhib far yidisher shprakh-visnshaft, literatur-forshung un etnologye*, Warsaw 1926–1933.

Mieses is a leading personality in both the history of the Yiddish movement⁸ and modern Yiddish linguistics.⁹

Within the revised more easterly compass, King went on to join Mieses¹⁰ in seeing Bavarian as the specific “foundation dialect” of Yiddish and to oppose Gerzon,¹¹ who had opted for the East-Central German of Thuringia, Upper Saxony and Silesia.¹² Gerzon had in any case spoken of “Übergewicht”, not a sole source, and duly noted that far more exhaustive work on the subject would be necessary.¹³ Long after Gerzon and Mieses, and long before King, Birnbaum demonstrated the presence of major features of *both* Bavarian and East-Central German in the Germanic component of Yiddish, judiciously positing “a twofold source for the German element in Yiddish”.¹⁴ With his usual grace, King concedes

8 E.S. Goldsmith, *Architects of Yiddishism at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century — A Study in Jewish Cultural History*, Rutherford—London 1976, pp. 139–158, 236–245.

9 D. Katz, “On Yiddish, in Yiddish and for Yiddish — 500 Years of Yiddish Scholarship”, in: M.H. Gelber (ed.), *Identity and Ethos — A Festschrift for Sol Liptzin on the Occasion of His 85th Birthday*, New York-Bern-Frankfurt am Main 1986, pp. 32–33; R.D. King, “Matisyohu Mieses”, in: D.-B. Kerler (ed.), *History of Yiddish Studies — Papers from the Third Annual Oxford Winter Symposium in Yiddish Language and Literature, 13–15 December 1987 (Winter Studies in Yiddish, III)*, Chur 1991, pp. 32–35.

10 Mieses (above, n. 4), p. 270.

11 J. Gerzon, *Die jüdisch-deutsche Sprache — Eine grammatisch-lexikalische Untersuchung ihres deutschen Grundbestandes*, Köln 1902, p. 131.

12 See King (above, n. 3), p. 7; idem, “Migration and Linguistics as Illustrated by Yiddish”, paper placed before the Indo-European Symposium, IREX Conference on Comparative Linguistics, University of Texas at Austin, 4–6 November 1986, pp. 7–9; idem, “Proto Yiddish” (above, n. 5); idem, “Early Yiddish Vowel Systems and the Question of Origins”, *Field of Yiddish*, V (in press); A. Faber & R.D. King, “Yiddish and the Settlement History of Ashkenazic Jews”, *Mankind Quarterly*, XXIV (1984), pp. 393–425 = D.R. Blumenthal (ed.), *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, II (*Brown Judaic Studies*, LVII), Chico (Cal.) 1985, pp. 73–108.

13 See Gerzon (above, n. 11), p. 131.

14 S.A. Birnbaum, “Two Problems of Yiddish Linguistics”, in: U. Weinreich (above, n. 2), p. 66.

East-Central German as another important source and never hesitates to cite the arguments against his thesis alongside those for it.¹⁵

Some of King's proposed parallels with Bavarian are persuasive, e.g., early total unrounding of front rounded vowels and plural formation. Others are problematic:

1. Loss of Final Devoicing in Bavarian and Yiddish

There is no loss of final devoicing in Northwestern, Midwestern or Southwestern Yiddish, or in the two major intermediate dialects (Northern and Southern Transitional Yiddish), or, indeed, in Mideastern Yiddish.¹⁶ There is, moreover, ample evidence that final voiced consonants in Northeastern and Southeastern Yiddish result from secondary revoicing on the basis of analogy (betrayed by occasional failure to revoice where there is no analogical model)¹⁷ and occasional failure to revoice even where there is (e.g., *jóntaf*, "holiday", despite pl. *jóntóvim*).

There is, moreover, the evidence of "Yekusiel* of Prague" (whose provenance is nevertheless uncertain). Thought to have lived in the early thirteenth century,¹⁸ he is also known as Yahabi (acronym of Yekusiel Hakoyheyn ben Yehudo) and was known amongst Ashkenazim as Zalmen Hanakdn, "Zalmen the Vocalizer", i.e., expert on the Hebrew vowel pointing system.¹⁹ Defending the phonological integrity of the reading of sacred Hebrew and Aramaic texts, Zalmen Hanakdn stormed against the

15 See King, "Early Yiddish Vowel Systems" (above, n. 12).

16 But see S. Hiley, "*Klajnikajt*n — Nokh a farzeener fonologisher shtrikh in doremdikn yidish", *Oksforder yidish* (forthcoming), on the possibility of only partial application of devoicing in Mideastern Yiddish.

17 See E. Sapir, "Notes on Judeo-German Phonology", *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, VI (1915), p. 237.

* Editor's Note: At the author's request, his proposed standardized Ashkenazic Hebrew transcriptions of the names of Hebrew works and authors emanating from pre-modern Ashkenaz have been retained. These do not conform with standard Sephardi-based transcription of Hebrew employed elsewhere.

18 See Y.F. Gumpertz, "Sha'ar ha-Metigot le-Rabbi Yahabi", *Leshonenu*, XXII (1957), pp. 36–37.

19 Elye Bokher, *Seyfer masoyres hamasoyres*, Venice 1538, p. 77.

word-final collapse of [d] and [t] and of [v] and [f] in Hebrew reading amongst the Ashkenazim, citing, *inter alia*, the minimal pairs [gad] and [gat], [ʔav] and [ʔaf], which had been merged in sacred readings under the impact of the vernacular phonology. He cites “people who ruin many words on account of the letters at their end, pronouncing them as other letters”,²⁰ referring both to final devoicing and to regressive assimilation across word boundaries. There could scarcely be better evidence for the antiquity of final devoicing in Yiddish.

Still, there is some evidence for loss of final devoicing in some varieties of older Yiddish, especially in the overall Bavarian region. Isserlin (Yisroel ben Pesakhye, c. 1390–1460), a native of Regensburg, discussed the Jewish alphabet spelling of the final consonant in the names of the cities Augsburg, Marburg, Nuremberg, Regensburg, Strasbourg and Würzburg, remarking that “in all these, people read and pronounce a *giml* <=[g]> at the end of the word”.²¹

2. Causal Relationship between Apocope and Loss of Final Devoicing

Here, again, Western Yiddish dialects, the two transitional dialects, and Mideastern Yiddish — all have apocope *and* final devoicing. As far as Yiddish is concerned, there is no causality.

3. Loss of Vowel Length (or Tenseness) Contrasts

Northwestern, Midwestern, Southwestern, Mideastern and Northern and Southern Transitional Yiddish — all retain vowel length (or tenseness) contrasts. Southeastern Yiddish retains them in part. Only Northeastern has lost them, but its now defunct Courland subvariety did retain these oppositions into the twentieth century.²²

20 Yekusiel Hakoyheyn ben Yehudo, MS British Library, 1395, Add. 19,776 = G. Margoliouth, *Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Part I, London 1899, No. 80, fol. [189a].

21 Isserlin, *Psokim uksovim*, Venice 1519, Section 142.

22 See M. Weinreich, *Shtaplen — Fir etyudn tsu der yidisher shprakh-visnshaft un literatur-geshikhte*, Berlin 1923, pp. 199–200.

4. Similar Diminutive Systems

This point of congruence is generally accurate, but does not take into account that, modern Yiddish notwithstanding, there are ample traces of non-*l* diminutives in the historical dialectology of Yiddish.²³

5. The Forms *ec*, “you (plural nom.)”, and *ejnk*, “you (plural obj.)”

These forms, characteristic of parts of Mideastern Yiddish, are too limited geographically to serve as evidence for the larger genetic picture. The limited distribution is not new to Yiddish. Buxtorf cited <Enck> as a “Polish” Yiddish feature.²⁴ Prilutski documented the modern geographic distribution of *ec* and *ejnk* and drew attention to the Bavarian parallel.²⁵

The methodological problem inherent in these arguments is that some kind of “general Yiddish” is invoked for comparison with this or that individual German dialect. This “general Yiddish” is, moreover, too often modelled on the modern standard language, and perceived analogies are used for genetic conclusions about “Yiddish” and “German”. As Prilutski pointed out in a 1915 paper, it is “in fact not difficult to find points of contact between individual German and Yiddish dialects”.²⁶

23 See, e.g., A. Landau, “Die Sprache der Memoiren Glückels von Hameln”, *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für jüdische Volkskunde*, VII (1901), No. 1, pp. 39–40; M. Weinreich, “Bney hes un bney khes in Ashkenaz — Di problem un vos zi lozt undz hern”, in: S. Bikl & L. Lehrer (eds.), *Shmuel Niger bukh*, New York 1958, pp. 101–123, esp. p. 122 = *Yivo bleter*, XLI (1957–1958); Hebrew translation: *Leshonenu*, XXIII (1958–1959), pp. 85–101; F. Guggenheim-Grünberg, *Jiddisch auf alemannischem Sprachgebiet — 56 Karten zur Sprach- und Sachgeographie*, Zürich 1973, pp. 92–95; M.I. Herzog, *The Yiddish Language in Northern Poland — Its Geography and History* (Publication No. 37 of the Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore and Linguistics, Indiana University; *International Journal of American Linguistics*, XXXI, No. 2, Part III), Bloomington-The Hague 1965, p. 140; D.-B. Kerler, “The Eighteenth Century Origins of Modern Literary Yiddish”, Ph.D. Thesis, Oxford University, 1988, p. 416.

24 Johann Buxtorf, *Thesaurus Grammaticus Linguae Sanctae Hebraeae*, Basel 1609, p. 658.

25 N. Prilutski, *Mame loshn — Yidishe shprakhvisnshaftleke forarbetn*, I (= his *Yidishe dyalektologishe forshungen*, V), Warsaw 1924, p. 46, n. 59; see Herzog (above, n. 23), pp. 57–58; Kerler (above, n. 23), p. 397.

26 N. Prilutski, “Vos iz yidish?”, in his *Barg-aruf*, Warsaw 1917 [written 1915], p. 289.

Setting aside the Bavarian vs. East-Central German debate and King's own pro-Bavarian stance in that debate, his larger conclusion — namely, that “it is on the banks of the Danube, not on the banks of the Rhine, that we should seek the birthplace of Yiddish”²⁷ — will, I feel confident, be just as historically important a contribution to Yiddish linguistics as Landau's conclusion that Yiddish reflects diverse German dialectal features²⁸ and the second half of Prilutski's just-cited pronouncement: “but it is impossible to find a Yiddish dialect that will in all its key phonetic features agree with this or that German dialect”.²⁹ King's invaluable methodological contribution on the issue consists, I believe, in shifting the debate away from the insoluble “Which German dialect?” to the readily soluble “Which overall area of the Germanic lands?” That “overall area” does not include the mediaeval Jewish centres of Speyer, Worms and Mainz. It does account for the mediaeval Jewish centres in Regensburg, Prague, Vienna, Nuremberg and Rothenburg, among others. King and I have independently come to the conclusion that the factors of linguistic evidence and cultural history combine to make Regensburg the most likely point of origin of Yiddish, to the limited extent to which monogenesis can be conceived.³⁰

II. The Notion “Ashkenaz” and the Semitic Component

It is legitimate to view retrospectively both the Rhine and Danube Jews of the beginning of the millennium as the first “Ashkenazim” and to speak of the rabbinic culture rising amongst both as the beginnings of the

27 See King, “Migration” (above, n. 12), pp. 14–15.

28 A. Landau, “Das Deminutivum der galizisch-jüdischen Mundart”, *Deutsche Mundarten*, I (1896), p. 58.

29 See Prilutski (above, n. 26), p. 289.

30 See D. Katz, “Hebrew, Aramaic and the Rise of Yiddish”, in: J.A. Fishman (ed.), *Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages*, Leiden 1985, p. 87; King, “Migration” (above, n. 12), pp. 13–14.

civilization that came to be Ashkenaz.³¹ Genetically, both the Rhine and Danube groups are ancestors of today's Ashkenazim. The operative words are "retrospectively" and "came to be". If we were to survey the central European Jewish cultural scene of a thousand years ago as a contemporary observer might have done, we would find two distinct groups on German-speaking territory. The westerners at the Rhine were called *bney Rinus*, "Children of the Rhine" = "Rhinelanders", or *bney Loter*, "Children of Loter" = "Loterians"; the easterners were referred to variously by the geocultural designators *Peyhem/Peym*, "Bohemia", *Donau/Donou* (cf. *Donau, Dunaj*), "Danube"; and *Estraykh*, "Austria".

It is evident from mediaeval rabbinic writings, however, that such geographic-based names were subordinate to two conceptually larger, internally generated, Jewish names. The westerners were known as *bney hes*; the easterners as *bney khes*.

A coherent conceptual picture of mediaeval Jewry in the Germanic speaking lands was provided by the Maharil (acronym of Moyreynu Horav Yankev Haleyvi, also known as Mahari Segal, Yankev Segal, Mahari Molin, Yankev ben Moyshe Haleyvi Moellin/Mollin, the Maharamo = Moyreynu Horav Molin Haleyvi, c. 1375–1427), one of the most authoritative figures in the codification of Ashkenazic custom and the most prominent rabbinic leader of his time.

In his responsa, the Maharil notes a difference in custom concerning the *tfiln*, "phylacteries", donned during weekday morning prayer. The question concerns the positioning of the box of the *tfiln shel yad*, "hand phylactery", whether it should be placed with the *maabarto*, "aperture at one end of the box through which the strap passes", at top, or at bottom. The easterners positioned the box so that the end with the *maabarto* and strap are at bottom, closer to the hand. By contrast, the western tradition placed the side with the *maabarto* at the top, closer to the head; both

31 See A. Grossman, *Hakhmey Ashkenaz ha-Rishonim — Qoroteyhem, Darkam be-Hanhagat ha-Zibbur, Yeziratam ha-Ruhanit mi-Reshit Yishshuvam ve'ad li-Gezerat Tatnu* (1096), Jerusalem 1988.

descriptions assume the arm is at rest at one's side. The Maharil put it this way:

Tfiln shel yad: The Children of Austria and all the lands of the *bney khes* position the *maabarto* toward the hand; and we, the Children of the Rhine and all the *bney hes*, position the *maabarto* toward the body, as with the head phylactery.³²

The Maharil, a native of Mainz who studied in Austria, thus conceptualized the notion "Austria" as a *subgroup* of the notion *bney khes*, and the notion "Rhine" as a subgroup of *bney hes*. Clearly, he refers to *bney khes* and *bney hes* as generally known names for the two parts of Ashkenazic Jewry, and it is quite safe to assume that this general knowledge was not new to his own generation; rabbinic style does not treat the latest slang as legal terminology in a book of authoritative responsa on Jewish law and custom.

Elsewhere the Maharil simply refers, for example, to a "custom of the <in some Mss: "land(s) of"> the *bney khes*".³³ When he refers to customs of *Estraykh*, "Austria", and *Tfutsas Rinus*, "Diaspora of the Rhine",³⁴ the reference is, possibly, specifically to these "heartlands" of the two groups.³⁵

A bit later on, in the fifteenth century, Isserlin, an easterner born in Regensburg, speaks of "the Children of the Rhine and its surrounding areas" and of "the Children of Austria and its surrounding areas".³⁶ His

32 Maharil, *Seyfer sheeyloys utshuvoys khibrom hagooyn hamuflog reysh gluso moyreynu horav rav Yaakoyv Segal tehey nishmosoy tsruro bitsroyr hakhayim omeyn keyn yehi rotsoyn*, Cremona 1556, fol. 6a; idem, *Sheeyloys utshuvoys khibrom hagooyn hamuflog reysh gluso moyreynu horav rav Yaakoyv Segal zatsal asher oyr toyrosoy hoyo zoyreyakh bikehilas koydesh Magentso*, Hanau 1610, fol. 7a; in: Y. Satz, *She'elot u-Teshuvot Maharil le-Rabbeynu Ya'aqov Molin zatzal*, Jerusalem 1979, p. 22.

33 See Maharil, *Seyfer* (above, n. 32), fol. 16b; Satz (above, n. 32), pp. 58–59.

34 Zalmen of St. Goar, *Maharil*, Sabionetta 1556, fol. 110b.

35 See D. Katz, "Origins of Yiddish Dialectology", in: idem (ed.), *Dialects of the Yiddish Language — Papers from the Second Annual Oxford Winter Symposium in Yiddish Language and Literature, 14–16 December 1986 (Winter Studies in Yiddish, II)*, Oxford 1988, p. 40.

36 Isserlin, *Seyfer trumas hadeshen*, Venice 1519, Section 31, Col. 1.

pupil Yosselin (Yoysef ben Moyshe, c. 1423–1490) recounts the following in his *Leket yoysher*, where Isserlin's own people, the *bney khes*, are contrasted with the *bney Rinus*, "Children of the Rhine":

On one occasion, Yom Kippur fell on a Monday, and he <Isserlin> would say the blessing over the new moon at the end of the Sabbath, prior to Yom Kippur, and I recall that he told me his reasoning, for he said: "I want to take with me the credit for fulfilling this commandment to the Day of Judgement", and thus I was told that the rabbis of the *bney khes* who preceded him did this also, but the *bney Rinus* did not want to bless the new moon before Yom Kippur, because, they say, it falls during the Days of Awe, and the Days of Awe are days in which we fast, and the new moon must be blessed when one is scented </happy>.³⁷

Further research is needed to establish the correlation between the ethnographic *bney hes* – *bney khes* dichotomy with the Jewish juridical distinction between the *golil hoelyoyn*, "the upper region", and *golil hatakhtoy*n, "the lower region", which are sometimes related to *Oberrhein* and *Unterrhein*, respectively.³⁸ These names were taken from classical sources and recycled, according to the custom of the era, to designate contemporary Jewish geographic constructions. In the Talmud, as in modern Israel, they designate upper and lower Galilee, respectively; in modern Hebrew, they are *Galil ha-'Elyon* and *Galil ha-Tahton*. Yankev Weil (the Mahariv = Yankev ben Yehudo, died c. 1453), commenting on the laws of the marriage contract, the amount due a bride who is a widow, the bride who is a maiden, and regional differences between fixed and variable amounts, refers to differences between the *golil hoelyoyn* and the *golil hatakhtoy*n, defining the *golil hoelyoyn* as —

the lands of the Rhine until Coblenz, and all of *Frankn* <Franconia>,

37 J. Freimann, *Leket Joscher des Joseph b. Mose — Collectaneen seines Lehrers Israel Isserlein*, Part I, Berlin 1903, p. 70.

38 See, e.g., Y.A. Dinari, *Hakhmey Ashkenaz be-Shilhey Yemey ha-Beynayim*, Jerusalem 1984, pp. 57–58, 186.

Shvabn <Swabia> and *Peyern* <Bavaria>, excepting Regensburg.

These areas are contrasted with —

golil hatakhtoyrn, in other words, from Koblenz and further <northward>.³⁹

On the face of it, the *golil hoelyoyrn* / *golil hatakhtoyrn* cultural isogloss runs from east to west, bisecting a northern and a southern area, in contrast to the *bney hes* / *bney khes* isogloss, which runs from north to south and bisects a western and an eastern territory. Unlike *bney hes* / *bney khes*, however, the *golil hoelyoyrn* and *golil hatakhtoyrn* areas are juridical, not ethnographic or linguistic concepts. Further research may determine whether, despite Yankev Weil's generous definition, taking things to Franconia, Swabia and Bavaria, the *golil hoelyoyrn* / *golil hatakhtoyrn* dichotomy was, in fact, largely a north-south division, internal to the *bney hes*. Being a term for the reach of jurisdiction, it could dramatically be extended by legal and political facts, e.g., a certain faraway community coming under the rabbinic jurisdiction of the *golil hoelyoyrn*, the heartland of which contained the three great Jewish centres of Speyer, Worms and Mainz.

To return to *bney hes* and *bney khes* and their significance for the earliest history of Yiddish: The source for the *bney hes* vs. *bney khes* differentiation is linguistic, and the rabbinic authorities themselves divulge the operative isogloss. In the book of the Maharil's customs compiled by his faithful pupil Zalmen of St. Goar, the Maharil is quoted as referring to interchangeable *hey* and *khes* in certain Hebrew words as (folkloristic? humorous?) "evidence" "for the Children of the Rhine and some other countries who render the pronunciation of the *khes* as that of the *hey*".⁴⁰

Isserlin, in a chain of argument and counter-argument on the spelling of the name *Rekhale* in a writ of divorce, refers to "the land of Austria and

39 Yaakoyv Weil, *Sheeyloys utshuvoys vehilkhoysh skito uvdiko*, Venice 1549, Section 113, fol. 46b.

40 See Zalmen of St. Goar (above, n. 34), fol. 111a.

the other countries where *khes* is pronounced as *khof*”, contrasting them with the “Children of the Rhine and the other countries <where>, like them, people pronounce *khes* as *hey*”.⁴¹ Yosselin, a native of *bney hes* country, recounts the tolerance shown him by his Regensburg-born master Isserlin, who told him:

You don’t have to pronounce *khes*, although it is the custom to do so in our city <presumably Wiener-Neustadt>.⁴²

The Maharam Mintz (Moyshe ben Yitskhok = Moyshe Leyvi Mintz, fifteenth century) refers to a “name that comes from the state of Saxony, where they read *khes* as *khof*”.⁴³

The notions *bney hes* and *bney khes* thus derive from a primeval Ashkenazic phonetic shibboleth based upon the reflex of classical Hebrew and Aramaic [ḥ], represented by the letter *khes* — <ח> (classical [ḥējθ]; cf. modern Yiddish [xɛs], modern Hebrew [xɛt]). The westerners by the Rhine merged that sound with [h], itself historically represented by <ה> = *hey* (classical [hē]; cf. modern Yiddish and modern Hebrew [hej]). They were, therefore, known as *bney hes* [hɛs], “Children of *hes*”, “Hesites”, “people who pronounce *hey* for *khes*”. The a-historic spelling <חײׁ> “hes” ([hɛs]) for the name of the letter was “minted” to encapsulate the shift to [h] in the West.

The easterners merged *khes* with velar spirant [x] (itself historically represented by <כ> (/<כׁ>) = *khof* (classical [xɔf] < [kɔf], via Northwest Semitic postvocalic spirantization; cf. modern Yiddish [xɔf], modern Hebrew [xaf]). They came to be known as the *bney khes* ([xɛs]), “Children of *khes*”, “Khesites”, “people who pronounce *khof* for *khes*”. From the vantage point of modern Yiddish dialects, all of which have [x] for both *khes* and *khof*, the term *bney khes* is “neutral”, and the term *bney hes* is

41 Isserlin (above, n. 36), Section 231, Col. 1.

42 J. Freimann, *Leket Joscher des Joseph b. Mose — Collectaneen seines Lehrers Israel Isserlein*, Part II, Berlin 1904, p. 40.

43 Maharam Mintz, *Sheeyloys utshuvoys asher ayin loy rooso ad hayoym haze*, Cracow 1617, fol. 32b.

“marked”; that is only because our own subjective starting point is *khes* = [x]. From the viewpoint of the Rhineland westerner of old Ashkenaz, the name of the letter *khes* pronounced with initial [x], as we do, would have been just as fictitious a letter. There are, in fact, manuscripts where the a-historic spelling <בני סײַת> is minted to encapsulate the shift to [x] in the East.⁴⁴ This occasional spelling was obviously conjured up by *bney hes* folk. In their (equally relatively accurate) worldview, *khes* = *hey*, and the easterners are, indeed, <בני סײַת>, those who pronounce *khof* for *khes*. For easterners it was easy, on the whole, to retain the traditional spelling חײַת (or חת) to refer to themselves in writing, using the historical spelling which jibed well with their merger of historical [h] and [x] in unitary /x/, enabling them to think that “they were pronouncing *khes* properly”. Westerners had little choice but to refer to themselves with the a-historic spelling <בני הײַת>.

The terms *bney hes* and *bney khes* were apparently coined in the mediaeval fashion of recycling names from classical texts for use in contemporary Jewish cultural geography; cf. *Ashkenaz*, *Sefarad*, *Tsorfaz*, *Knaan*, etc.⁴⁵ The Bible relates (Genesis 23) that upon the death of Sarah, Abraham purchased the Cave of the Machpelah from the <בני חת> (= [bənēj ḥēθ]), “Children of Heth”, “Hittites” (=“the Hittites”), for four hundred shekels of silver. The mediaeval *bney hes* and *bney khes* differ from contemporary recyclings in several ways. For one thing, they refer to people, not a place. For another, they are primarily linguistic, relating geography to a Jewish pronunciation, not to the co-territorial non-Jewish nation. Finally, they are obviously coined with a fine sense of early Ashkenazic humour.

There is a threefold source of humour. First, the pun of *khes*, “eighth letter of the alphabet”, and “Heth”, an ancient Hittite. Second, the occurrence of the phrase [bənēj ḥēθ] in the Bible: in mediaeval Ashkenazic Hebrew (a very much alive and flexible written language in mediaeval Ashkenaz) the formula *bney* + name of country, on the biblical model, was

44 See, e.g., MSS Bodleian Opp. 74 = Ol. 761, fol. [50b].

45 See M. Weinreich, *Geshikhte* (above, n. 2), I, p. 50.

very much in vogue, e.g., *bney Rinus*, “Children of the Rhine” = “in the Rhineland”. Indeed, a less literal, more idiomatic translation of the above-cited quote from the Maharil would have “in Austria” rather than the literal “Children of Austria” for *bney Estraykh*. Itself, the biblical [bənēj ḥēθ] is part of a well-attested paradigm of [bənēj]-prefixed forms that came to be tribal designators preserving the relevant patriarch’s name, e.g., [bənēj nōaḥ], “Children of Noah”, which came to mean “gentiles”, and, of course, [bənēj jisrāʔēl], “Children of Israel”, “Israelites”, which came in many contexts to mean “Jews”. The humour inherent in the names *bney khes* and *bney hes* derives from a sense of the ridiculous, whereby *bney* occurs with neither place nor patriarch, but a — subjectively speaking! — mispronounced letter of the alphabet. Finally, the actual account of Genesis 23 has its own, possibly biblical, humour. Ephron the Hittite — i.e., the “son of Heth” — goes from wanting to give Abraham the burial plot for nothing to kindly “agreeing” to accept four hundred shekels of silver for it. All in all, *hes/khes* is the kind of shibboleth that would have evoked a happy early collective Ashkenazic memory and may be the earliest known instance of Yiddish humour.

A note is necessary on the “sometime homophony” of the biblical Heth and the name of the letter of the alphabet in each of the two regions of old Ashkenaz: [hes] in the West, by the Rhine; [xes] in the East, by the Danube. While the initial consonant would be identical for the name of the letter and the name of Heth in the language of each of the two groups, the vowels would be identical only in some registers of Ashkenazic Hebrew for the easterners — more than enough for the pun to succeed. In studying the actual biblical text, known forms of Ashkenazic Hebrew preserve a long vowel or diphthong in the renditions of “Heth” as read from the pointed biblical text, where the *tseyre* vowel graph is present; cf. Northeastern Ashkenazic [xejs], Mideastern Ashkenazic [xajs], Western Ashkenazic [xejs], etc., all contrasting with the name of the letter, [xes] in each variety. The short [ɛ] vowel, which would make “Heth” and “*khes*, the eighth letter of the Jewish alphabet” fully homophonous, would, in fact, occur in spoken Yiddish and in readings and discussions of Talmudic and later rabbinic sources, in consequence of the rule of Closed Syllable

Shortening processing the vocalism of the Semitic component in Yiddish.⁴⁶ This phonological doublet is regular; cf., e.g., Northeastern Ashkenazic Hebrew [nejs], “miracle” ~ Yiddish and unpointed Talmudic and rabbinic [nes]; Mideastern [najs] ~ [nes]; Western [nejs] ~ [nes], etc. Amongst the *bney hes* in the West it is likely that the same short *e* ([ε]) occurred in Yiddish and in all registers of Hebrew.⁴⁷ As for homography, the biblical Heth is spelled without a *yud*, i.e., <תת>; the letter *khes* usually, but not always, with a *yud*, i.e., <תית>; but the “defective” vs. “full” orthography has no phonetic implications.

For the Maharil and Isserlin, *bney hes* and *bney khes* were living ethnographic designations that obviously existed long before them. Later on the *bney hes* and *bney khes* disappear from the face of Ashkenaz as the erstwhile territories of both, by the Rhine as well as the Danube, were constructed as the *new* West, in contradistinction to the *new* East, the Ashkenazic-settled Slavic and Baltic lands. The New West had [x] for classical [ħ], just like the Old East by the Danube and the New East in the Slavic and Baltic regions. Nevertheless, traces persisted, and scholars have from time to time commented on the phenomenon. Elye Bokher (Eylioḥu ben Osher Halevy Ashkenazi = Elijah Levita, c. 1469–1549), in his lexicographic masterpiece *Tishbi*, derived Yiddish *mékḳ*, “erase”, from Hebrew radical $\sqrt{\text{mḥq}}$, commenting:

The teachers who did not know how to translate the notion “erasing” into *Loshn ashkenaz* <Yiddish>, said it in Hebrew, *mḥqan* <méxkḳ?>, and the pupils thought it was *loshn Ashkenaz* and said *mejqan* <mékḳ?>, not pronouncing the *khes*, as is the way of the Ashkenazim [...].⁴⁸

46 See D. Katz, “Explorations in the History of the Semitic Component of Yiddish”, Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1982, pp. 295–300, 307; idem, “Proto Dialectology” (above, n. 5). For a listing of Talmudic and rabbinic occurrences of “the Children of Heth”, see A. Himan, *Tora ha-Ketuva ve-Hamassora*, I, Tel Aviv 1965, p. 45.

47 See Katz, “Proto Dialectology” (above, n. 5), pp. 56–57.

48 Elye Bokher, *Seyfer Hatishbi leEylioḥu Hatishbi shoyroshov keminyan tishbi*, Isny 1541, p. [103].

Leaving aside questions on the etymology and phonetic history of the word in question,⁴⁹ the comment about “the way of the Ashkenazim” in not pronouncing *khes* — presumably because it went to zero in environments where [h] cannot occur — is revealing, as is an instance of Elye Bokher’s own rhyming of *khes* with *hey* in his satirical poem *Hamavdl*.⁵⁰

Yoysef Yuzpe Han Norlingen of Frankfurt (1570–1637), in his posthumously published *Yoysef oymets*, vigorously defends the western tradition of pronouncing [h] for *khes*, citing three categories of evidence. First, both *khes* and *hey* are part of the class of gutturals in classical Hebrew grammar comprising [ʔ], [h], [ħ] and [ʕ], whereupon he notes that the [x] represented by *khof* has the same place of articulation as its corresponding plosive [k], and cannot, therefore, be related to [ħ]. Second, the great Ashkenazic rabbis rhymed *khes* and *hey* in their liturgical poetry, but never *khes* and *khof*. One of them was Rabeynu Gershom himself, the symbolic founder of Ashkenaz. Here the *Yoysef oymets* adds:

Bearing in mind that he is called *Mooyr hagoylo* <“light of the Exile”>, <and has> *hey* and *khes* in one rhyme, it is proper to follow him in all the dispersions of Israel, for his *takones* <edicts> are established and live as if they were given at Sinai.

Finally, the *Yoysef oymets* cites the Rosh (Osher ben Yekhiel / Asher ben Yehi’el, 1250–1327), who remarked that *hey* and *khes* are similar “in reading and writing”. He concludes with a broadside against the latter day scions of the *bney khes*:

It seems to me that the <Jews of the> Land of Poland, which was settled by great scholars later than Ashkenaz, as is known amongst

49 See Katz, “Origins” (above, n. 35), p. 42.

50 See N. Shtif, “A geshribene yidishe biblyotek in a yidish hoyz in Venetsye inmitn dem zekhtsntn yorhundert”, *Tsaytshrift*, I (1926), p. 151, verse 5, n. 4; idem, “Naye materyaln tsu Eyliohu Haleyvi’s *Hamavdl-lid*”, *Shriftn fun der katedre far yidisher kultur ba der alukrainisher visnshaftlekher akademye, literarishe un filologishe sektsye*, I (1928), p. 166, n. 3.

the codifiers, invented the manner of their reading of *khes* themselves.⁵¹

In spite of his normative (and ethnographically patriotic) motives, Yoysef Yuzpe pioneered the historical linguistic reconstruction of *khes* renditions among Ashkenazim by applying graphemic analysis to old Ashkenazic Hebrew texts, identifying the underlying merger of *khes* and *hey* in them and linking his documentary sources with a reading tradition or pronunciation known to him in his own time. A curious footnote to his contribution was written by one of his descendants, Yoysef Kosman Segal, who adds a fourth proof in his *Noyheyg katsoyn yoyseyf*: interchangeability of *hey* and *khes* in Talmudic usage in a few items. However, he then proceeds to debunk each of the four proofs in turn, claiming that none of them relate to pronunciation norm. The key textual proof (rhyme in old Ashkenazic liturgical prayer) is invalid, in Yoysef Kosman's view, because "God forbid that our prayers should not be accepted without rhyme".⁵²

A number of nineteenth and twentieth century scholars have commented on *bney hes* / *bney khes* within the tradition of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Like Yoysef Yuzpe Han before him, Shloyme Yehude Rapoport deduced from mediaeval Ashkenazic liturgical poetry rhyming *khes* with *hey*, that the two were merged, commenting:

Actually, such rhyme is fitting for Ashkenazic Jews, who cannot even today pronounce the letter *khes*, and their pronunciation of it is like *hey*.⁵³

The connection between "*khes* problems" and the mediaeval terms *bney*

51 Yoysef Yuzpe Han Norlingen, *Seyfer yoysef oymets / yoysif oymets* [in Yiddishized Ashkenazic Hebrew, *yoysif* (Western [jousif]) and *yoyseyf* (Western [jousejf]), the author's name, are homophonous in consequence of posttonic reduction, giving unitary *yoysef* (Western [j'usaf])], Frankfurt 1723, Section 2, fol. 4b.

52 Yoysef Kosman Segal, *Noyheyg katsoyn yoyseyf*, Hanau 1718, fols. 13b–14b.

53 Shloyme Yehude Leyb Koyheyn Rapoport, "Zman umokoym Reb Elozor Hakalir, veinyoney piyutov ufiyutey zulosoy, uketsas inyoney hatfiloys", *Bikurey hoitim*, X (1829), p. 105.

hes and *bney khes* was rediscovered for *Wissenschaft des Judentums* by Güdemann,⁵⁴ who cited some of the references in the Maharil and Isserlin and explained their linguistic basis, crediting D. Kaufmann.⁵⁵ Among twentieth-century Hebrew scholars, Gumpertz cites a number of sources and comments:

In isolated cases, I myself have heard *hey* instead of *khes* in the speech of Rhinelanders, especially in the middle of a word.⁵⁶

The most profound modern analysis of the *bney hes* / *bney khes* phenomenon is Max Weinreich's 1958 study, "Bney hes un bney khes in Ashkenaz — Di problem un vos zi lozt undz hern", a pioneering study in multilingual phonology.⁵⁷ The following are some of its major conclusions: (1) in the period Weinreich calls *breyshis yidish alef* ("Genesis Yiddish 1", before ± 1100), one "has to do with *bney hes* almost exclusively". (2) In his *breyshis yidish beyz* ("Genesis Yiddish 2", ±1100 – ±1250), the *bney hes* predominate "overwhelmingly". (3) In his Old Yiddish period (±1250 – ± 1500), the *bney khes*, who had their [x] realization of Semitic [ħ] all along, suddenly arose onto the arena of Ashkenazic history by virtue of the fourteenth-century rise of the Danube centres of learning, symbolized by the Maharil's move eastward. (4) The victory of [x] — i.e., of *bney khes* realizations in all of later Yiddish — is to be explained by a conscious, normative realignment of lexical items, whereby [h] < [ħ] was disentangled from [h] < [h] and merged with [x] by way of its being reinterpreted. (5) The disentanglement and realignment were brought about by the "Babylonian Renaissance", which brought Tiberian norms of Hebrew

54 M. Güdemann, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der Juden in Deutschland während des XIV. und XV. Jahrhunderts* (*Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der abendländischen Juden*, III), Vienna 1888, pp. 75–76.

55 D. Kaufmann, "La famille de Yehiel de Pise" (final installment), *Revue des Études Juives*, XXVI (1893), p. 239, n. 3.

56 Y.F. Gumpertz, *Mivta'ey Sefatenu*, Jerusalem 1953, p. 21.

57 See M. Weinreich (above, n. 23); idem, *Geshikhte* (above, n. 2), II, pp. 39–40, 277; IV, pp. 57–59; see now also D. Katz, "The Children of Heth and the Ego of Linguistics — A Story of Seven Yiddish Mergers", *Transactions of the Philological Society*, LXXXIX (1991), pp. 95–121 (written after the present paper).

pronunciation into Ashkenaz of the thirteenth century. (6) Yiddish names such as *Itsik* [ícik], *Rele* [rélə], *Sime* [símə] and the verb *mekn* [mékŋ], “erase”, which lack a consonantal reflex of classical [ḥ] (cf. proposed etymons [jiʃḥóq], [rōḥél], [śimḥó], $\sqrt{mḥq}$), are items that escaped reversal of merger because they were not identified with their etymons. (7) Germanic component *ekdish*, “scorpion”, is another *bney hes* relic, lacking a reflex for <h> in Middle High German *egedehse*. (8) Finally, the *bney hes* ~ *bney khes* configuration in Yiddish corresponds with German dialect variation. In the series *Fuchs*, “fox”; *Ochse*, “ox”; *wachsen*, “grow”, etc., German dialects on Yiddish *bney hes* territory have [s] (<[hs]>); those on *bney khes* territory have [ks].

Weinreich’s pioneering work in linking Yiddish dialectology, mediaeval Hebrew phonetics and German evidence is a splendid achievement, integrating to mutual advantage three fields of scholarly enquiry, where workers in each were, before Weinreich, generally loathe to see the need for looking at the other two. I do not, however, agree with most of Weinreich’s linguistic analyses, nor his inferences regarding the larger questions in the history of Yiddish, but I find the need to stress, as I have often done, that the fruits of his own work are so potent as to allow for the most fundamental disagreement within the larger Weinreichian conceptual framework for the structure of Yiddish and of Ashkenazic linguistic history.

I shall begin by offering an alternative linguistic analysis and will proceed, in Part III, to draw some inferences pertaining to the origin of Yiddish.

Both the Hebrew and Aramaic reading tradition and the vernacular Semitic component that became part of Yiddish were brought from the Near East to the Germanic lands that were to become Ashkenaz.⁵⁸ Both

58 See D. Katz, “Fun aramish biz yidish — Roshe prokim”, unpublished paper, Department of Linguistics, Columbia University, 1975; idem, “Der semitisher kheylek in yidish — A yerushe fun kadmoynim; Metodn un meglekhkaytn”, paper placed before the First International Conference on Research in Yiddish Language and Literature at the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 6–9 August 1979,

the reading tradition and the vernacular Semitic component had three separate “h sounds”.

1. [h], corresponding with syllable initial <ה> — classical Hebrew *hē*, modern Yiddish *hej*.
2. [x], corresponding with spirant <ח> / <כּ>, final <ך> — *xōf*, *xof*.
3. [ħ], corresponding with <ת> — *ħēθ*, *xēs*.

That any variety could have merged [ħ] alone with [h], without taking [x] along with it, is ample proof that [ħ] and [x] were in no way merged at the outset. That proof is definitive for the western area, where [ħ] > [h] and [x] was preserved on its own. It is likely for the eastern area, where in all probability [ħ] > [x], leaving historical [h] preserved on its own, but I know of no way of proving this for the East over the alternative possibility, i.e., that [ħ] and [x] had “arrived merged” in the Danube region.

Synchronically active rules deriving from Semitic phonology continue to survive in Yiddish to this day in its Semitic component, e.g., stress shift to maintain boundary-linked accentuation upon suffixation, contrasting with Germanic component root-bound stress; cf. Semitic component *ákšŋ*, “stubborn fellow”, pl. *akšónim*, vs. Germanic component *lébŋ*, “life”; *lébədik*, “lively”. The specific Semitic component synchronic phonology that continues to thrive within Yiddish includes Stress Assignment, Posttonic Reduction (as synchronically active rule), Closed Syllable Shortening and unique segmental distribution.⁵⁹ The distinct phonology of the Semitic component in Yiddish results from Germanic impact upon a Semitic system.⁶⁰

By contrast, Semitic *phonetics* does not survive in Yiddish, although, to be sure, it has left recoverable traces. One needn't be a Darwinist to see that, like the other pharyngeals, [ħ] stood little chance of survival in the

published with addendum in *Oksforder yidish*, II (1991), pp. 17–95. Hebrew version: *Hasifrut*, NS 10:3–4 / 35–36 (1986), pp. 228–251; idem (above, n. 30).

59 See Katz, “Explorations” (above, n. 46), §§ 5.6.1–5.6.4; idem (above, n. 30), pp. 94–95.

60 See D. Katz, “Reconstruction of the Stress System in the Semitic Component of Yiddish”, John Marshall Essay (unpublished), London 1980.

central European environment. In fact, all “non-European-compatible” Semitic phones were lost under the impact of the European phonetic scene, and these were their fates:

(a) Loss:

[ʔ] (<א> — classical Hebrew *ʔōleḥ*, modern Yiddish *álef*) > Ø.

[ʕ] (<ע> — *ʕájin*, *ájin*) > Ø.

Both were there to start with, and can be recovered *via* reconstruction.

(b) Merger with European-compatible consonants:

[ɣ] (spirant <ג> / <ג̄> — *gímel*, *giml*), merged with [g].

[ð] (spirant <ד> / <ד̄> — *ðólēθ*, *dálət*), merged with [d].

[w] (<ו> — *wōw*, *vov*), merged with [v].

[ʈ] (<ט> — *tēθ*, *tes*), merged with [t].

[q] (<ק> — *qōf* / *qūf*, *kuf*), merged with [k].

[θ] (spirant <ת> / <ת̄> — *θōw*, *sof*), merged with [s].

(c) Phonemic preservation *via* phonetic shift:

[ʃ] (<צ> — *ʃáði*, *cádik*), affricated to [c], leaving a distinct /c/ or /tʃ/ phoneme.

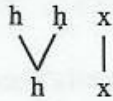
Here, too, we have thirteenth-century testimony from Zalmen Hanakdn. From his remarks it is obvious that the mergers of [ʔ] (<א>) and [ʕ] (<ע>) (as Ø?), [w] (<ו>) and [v] (spirant <ב> / <ב̄>), [ʈ] (<ט>) and [t] (<ת> / <ת̄>), [k] (<כ> / <כ̄>) and [q] (<ק>) had already occurred in the reading tradition known to him.⁶¹ It was obvious to him that those mergers were the result of the impact of the vernacular upon the reading tradition.

So, then, [ħ] (classical *ħēθ*), too, was frankly doomed in the Germanic environment, but, unlike the others, it didn't disappear uniformly in the Ashkenazic pronunciation of Hebrew or in the Semitic component of spoken Yiddish. In the West, by the Rhine and the adjacent areas it merged with [h] in positions where [h] can occur; where [h] cannot occur,

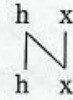
61 See Yekusiel Hakoyheyn ben Yehudo (above, n. 20), fol. [189a].

syllable-finally, it was lost altogether. It was never “reintroduced”, and there was no “Babylonian Renaissance”.⁶² Contrary to Weinreich’s temporal sequence for the western area, proposing a reversal of merger and disentanglement conditioned by the “Babylonian Renaissance”, i.e.,

Stage 1

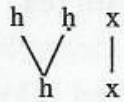


Stage 2

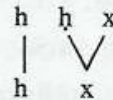


I propose geographic differentiation to account for the phenomena:

West



East



What, then, is the relationship of these Yiddish developments to German dialectology? None. There was no [h] in German any more than there was [ʃ] or [t] or [q] or [θ]. There is the broader relationship with German as a whole, and with the Germanic component in Yiddish, in so far as the phonetic untenability of pharyngeal [ħ] is concerned, but whether it was “lost to [h]”, as in the West, or “lost to [x]”, as in the East, is a wholly internal Yiddish development, and the German isogloss western [s] vs. eastern [ks], which Weinreich draws upon as the conditioning factor, is irrelevant for the Semitic component of Yiddish and the fate of [ħ] within it. Sprachbund proponents might, however, propose certain wider tendencies, for example, overall “western *h* sound weakness”, adjacent to the Romance (*ergo* the Laazic) area, and overall “eastern *h* sound strength”, adjacent to the Slavic (*ergo* the Knaanic) area. Yekusiel remarks:

We also know that some of the Children of the Land of Canaan <i.e., the Slavic regions> pronounce the *khes* with the articulation of *khof*.⁶³

62 See Katz, “Der semitisher kheylek” (above, n. 58), p. 48; idem, “Proto Dialectology” (above, n. 5), p. 57.

63 Yekusiel Hakoyheyn ben Yehudo (above, n. 20), fol. [189b].

One problem for Sprachbund proponents here is that all Ashkenazim, eastern as much as western, lost [ħ], retained [x], albeit in a much wider lexical distribution in the East, and retained [h], albeit in a much wider lexical distribution in the West. Still, there is evidence to postulate [ħ] > [h] in a contiguous western area, comprising both Laazic and Rhineland Ashkenazic, and [h] > [x] in a contiguous eastern area, comprising both Knaanic and Danube Ashkenazic.

All that is left of the “[h] for *khes*” realization of the *bney hes* of old is a handful of relics, hardly any of which are certain *bney hes* relics. German component *ékdiš*, “scorpion”, may derive from German (*h*)s territory,⁶⁴ but that is not to the point here, because [ħ] is a non-Germanic consonant, which was lost in all parts of Ashkenaz. Moreover, **ékdixš* would not be particularly tenable phonetically, and [xš] > [š] would be likely with no recourse to *bney hes* of old. The verb *mékḥ*, “erase”, may be a *bney hes* relic as Elye Bokher⁶⁵ and Max Weinreich⁶⁶ propose; equally, it may be a case of good old-fashioned assimilation, whereby [xk] > [k]. In the same entry in his *Tishbi*, Elye Bokher compares *mékḥ* with *šéxtḥ*, “slaughter”, where he, the alleged “*bney hes* man”,⁶⁷ knows only *šéxtḥ*. No trace of **šétḥ*, as would be the case if he actually were one.

What, then, of Elye Bokher’s remark that “they <those who say *mékḥ*> did not pronounce the *khes*, as is the way of the Ashkenazim”?⁶⁸ And what, then, of his own rhyme in his *Hamavdl* of the reflexes of classical *məxallé* and *gallōḥ*, presumably [məxálə] and [gálə]?⁶⁹ And, indeed, what of the above-cited passages of the *Yoysefoymets*, Yoysef Kosman and the latter-day testimony of Rapoport and Gumpertz? The answer is, I think, that long after the disappearance of the *bney hes* as both an ethnographic and linguistic entity, traces of *heslessness* were observable for centuries in the Yiddish of Jews on erstwhile *bney hes* territory. Possibly these traces

64 See M. Weinreich (above, n. 23), pp. 112–115, 117.

65 Elye Bokher (above, n. 48), p. [103].

66 M. Weinreich (above, n. 23), p. 109.

67 *Ibid.*, pp. 103–104.

68 Elye Bokher (above, n. 48).

69 *Ibid.*, p. 151, Stanza 5, lines 2–3, in: Shtif, “A geshribene biblyotek” (above, n. 50).

survived in the reading tradition far longer than in the spoken language.

Finally, Zalmen Hanakdn notes that the *bney hes* have another characteristic feature:

We also know that there are some Ashkenazim who pronounce ן [*hē* = *h*] and ן [*hēθ* = *h*] as one, and likewise ן [*šin* = *š*] and ן [*šin* = *s*].⁷⁰

In pointed Hebrew and Aramaic texts, <ן>, marked by the diacritic to the left, denotes a [s] rather than a [š] pronunciation (the letter is known as *sin*, *šin smol* or *smol* in Yiddish, and as *sin* in modern Hebrew). Transcribed [š] by Semitists to distinguish it from *samekh* (<נ>, classical *sōmex*, modern Yiddish *sámex* = [s]), it was, nevertheless, fully merged with *samekh* long before the European period in Jewish history, and attempts to prove otherwise have not succeeded.⁷¹

By the early thirteenth century, then, it was known to Zalmen Hanakdn that the sub-group of Ashkenazim who had merged [h] with [h] — i.e., the *bney hes* — had also merged [š] and [s]. Unlike [h], which is limited to the Semitic component, [š] and [s] are well represented in the Germanic component, and so, in a stroke, Zalmen Hanakdn solves for us the old question of why a single grapheme, <ן>, is used almost exclusively for both historical [š] and [s] in old Yiddish texts.⁷² It is an orthographic principle that comes into play twice in the renowned 1272 sentence in the Worms prayer book⁷³ and is well established in the 1382 Cambridge

70 See above, n. 62.

71 See A. Faber, "Early Medieval Hebrew Sibilants in the Rhineland, South-Central and Eastern Europe", *Hebrew Annual Review*, VI (1982), p. 86. On the fate of Hebrew sibilants in mediaeval Europe, see Gumpertz (above, n. 18); idem (above, n. 56), pp. 33–50; M. Weinreich, *Geshikhte* (above, n. 2), II, pp. 36–38; IV, pp. 51–55; Faber (above, this note); idem (above, n. 5), p. 18.

72 See, e.g., N. Shtif, "Mikhael Adams dray yidishe bikher", *Filologiske shriftn*, II (1928), pp. 143–146; E. Timm, *Graphische und phonische Struktur des Westjiddischen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Zeit um 1600*, Tübingen 1987, pp. 272–273; Kerler (above, n. 23), pp. 227–228.

73 See M. Weinreich, "A yidisher zats fun far zibn hundert yor — Analiz fun gor a vikhtikn shprakhikn gefins", *Yidishe shprakh*, XXIII (1963), pp. 91–92.

Codex. Shmeruk demonstrates by way of exceptions to the rule, engendered by an acrostic in the Codex, that *samekh* is one of the letters that —

do not belong to the inventory of graphic representations for the non-Hebrew-Aramaic components of Yiddish in the fourteenth century. And as far as can be judged from the consistency of our copyist, this tradition was by then already a well-established principle.⁷⁴

Evidence of merger in early Ashkenazic Hebrew manuscripts is also well established.⁷⁵

Sprachbund proponents who may wish to see sibilant merger continuity amongst both Rhineland Ashkenazim — i.e., *bney hes* — and the Laazic areas on Romance territory may refer to the famous words of David Kimchi (c. 1160–c. 1235) in his commentary to Judges 12:6 (the original Shibboleth: identification of Ephraimites *via* their [sibbóleθ] realization of [šibbóleθ]). Kimchi compares the poor Ephraimites' phonetics to the pronunciation of *šīn* ([š]) as spirantized *tōw* (= θōw) in *Tsořfas*, the Jewish culture area roughly corresponding with the French language territory. Whether Kimchi refers to the classical [θ] or some other sibilant is open to speculation.

Avoiding both <ס>, the univalent letter for [s], and <שׁ> and <שׂ>, old Yiddish texts conspicuously have plain *shin* (<שׁ>), irrespective of whether [s] or [š] is expected on historical grounds. Zalmen Hanakdn explains why: they were merged in the language of the Rhineland Jews. Max Weinreich considered the old orthographic merger to reflect a phonetic merger and implied that it might be at the root of a similar merger in

74 C. Shmeruk, "The Hebrew Acrostic in the *Yoysef Hatsadik* Poem of the Cambridge Yiddish Codex", *Michigan Germanic Studies*, III (1977), p. 75.

75 See Gumpertz, *Mivta'ey* (above, n. 56), p. 39; I. Eldar, *Massoret ha-Qeri'ah ha-Qedam-Ashkenazit — Mahutah ve-Hayesodot ha-Meshuttafim lah ule-Massoret Sefarad*, I: 'Inyeney Hagaya ve-Niqqud ('Eda ve-Lashon — Pirsumey Mif'al Massorot ha-Lashon shel 'Adot Yisrael, IV), Jerusalem 1978, pp. 101–103.

modern Northeastern ("Lithuanian") Yiddish.⁷⁶ Uriel Weinreich considered the solid correspondence between the clear [š] vs. [s] phonemic distinction in all other Yiddish dialects with etyma in the source languages to be so solid as to demonstrate that the distinction goes back to early times. He also implied that the old orthographic merger had no necessary phonological implications.⁷⁷

III. Inferences

Why do all documented forms of Yiddish, western as well as eastern, have [x] in virtually all positions where classical Hebrew and Aramaic have [ħ]? Why do they all have, with the exception of the *sabesdiker losn* area of Northeastern Yiddish, [š] and [s] according to the historic distribution in both mediaeval German and classical Hebrew and Aramaic? Because all modern Yiddish dialects derive from the Danube area, and the linguistic variety spoken in the Rhineland, where these features obtained, disappeared, with few traces, many centuries ago.

Around a thousand years ago, the Jewish civilization that was to become Ashkenaz was an established entity. It consisted of two distinct groups. To the west was the initially more influential group in the Rhineland, called "Loter", centered in the cities of Speyer, Worms and Mainz. Its inhabitants, and those of the satellites and outposts of the area, were collectively known as *bney hes* because of their [h] pronunciation of <h> in both Hebrew and Aramaic and in the Semitic component of their Yiddish. In the eastern regions of the German-speaking territories there was the initially less influential group, known as *bney khes*, with its centres in Regensburg, Rothenburg, Nuremberg, Prague and Vienna (cities that had Jewish populations predating the official "founding dates" of extant records), and other cities and towns of the area that was *then* Eastern Ashkenaz (not to be confused with the later Eastern Ashkenaz in the

76 M. Weinreich (above, n. 22), p. 202.

77 U. Weinreich, "Sábesdiker losn in Yiddish — A Problem of Linguistic Affinity", *Word*, VIII (1952), pp. 365, 369.

Slavic and Baltic lands). Its inhabitants were collectively known as *bney khes* because of their [x] pronunciation of <כ>, again, in both Hebrew and Aramaic and in the Semitic component of their Yiddish. From Zalmen Hanakdn's comments and the massive evidence from manuscripts both in Old Yiddish and mediaeval central European Hebrew, we also know that the westerners merged [š] and [s]. There is, moreover, evidence from mediaeval Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts to suggest that the Rhinelanders had a Sephardic-like system of vocalism in their Hebrew and Aramaic, comprising five short vowels, while the Easterners had ten vowels, five long and five short, corresponding with all documented forms of Ashkenazic.⁷⁸ Last but not least, we may quite safely infer that the Germanic component of the language of the westerners bore more than casual similarity to the German dialects of the Rhineland, and so, Mieses's and King's evidence concerning the eastern provenance of the Germanic component in Yiddish is matched by the evidence for the eastern provenance of the Semitic component in Yiddish, as well as the Ashkenazic Hebrew and Aramaic reading tradition.

Through the vicissitudes of history, the language of the great centres of Speyer, Worms and Mainz was doomed to early extinction, whilst the language of Regensburg and its environs was destined to spread to the four corners of Ashkenaz, including the Rhineland, and occupy one of the largest linguistic empires in the history of Europe. Those "vicissitudes" include the national Jewish tragedies entailed by the Crusades, starting in 1096, and the massacres following the Black Death in 1348–1349. On the other hand, they also include the meteoric rise of Regensburg and the East within the Ashkenazic cultural panorama.

In terms of cultural history, the West, comprising the Franco-Rhineland symbiosis, was the nucleus of Ashkenazic rabbinic culture in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Among its well-known figures are Shimen Hagodl (Shim'on ha-Gadol, Mainz, c. 950–1020); Rabeynu Gershom (b. Metz, c. 960, d. Mainz, 1040); Eliezer Hagodl (Eli'ezer ha-Gadol, b. Worms, d. Mainz, c. 1055); Rashi (b. Troyes, 1040, studied in Mainz and Worms,

78 See Katz, "Proto Dialectology" (above, n. 5), pp. 52–54, 57.

and, according to tradition, brought his school to Worms, c. 1065, d. Troyes, 1105); Rabeynu Tam (France, c. 1100–1171); Shmuel Hakhosid (Shemu'el he-Ḥasid, b. Speyer, c. 1120, d. 1175). During the twelfth century, the East comes into its own with such heavyweights as Borekh ben Yitskhok of Regensburg (Barukh ben Yizḥaq), Yitskhok Halovn of Bohemia (Yizḥaq ha-Lavan), Ribam (Yitskhok ben Mordkhe / Yizḥaq ben Mordekhai, Bohemia), Pesakhye of Regensburg and, toward the end of the twelfth century, Yitskhok of Vienna, author of the *Or zorua*. The combined history of national tragedies, ensuing migration eastward, and the rise of influence of the eastern regions of the German-speaking lands, is perhaps best symbolized by the rabbinic leaders who moved eastward. Prominent among them are Yehude Khosid (Yehudah he-Ḥasid, b. Speyer, c. 1150, d. Regensburg, 1217), founder of the mystical *Khasidey Ashkenaz* movement; the Maharam Rotnburg (Meyer ben Borekh / Meir ben Barukh, b. Worms, c. 1215, d. Alsace, 1293) whose *yeshivah* in Rothenburg trained the leaders of the following generation, including the Rosh (Osher ben Yekhiel / Asher ben Yehi'el). It is also symbolic that the Maharil, who was born in Mainz c. 1375 and died in Worms c. 1427, travelled eastward to study Talmud before returning to Mainz.

Yiddish is roughly the same age as the lost Rhineland Jewish language. Both were in the process of creation and stabilization around the turn of the millennium. They were to have very different fates. For some two centuries the Rhineland Jewish language enjoyed the prestige of being the language of the hub of Ashkenazic cultural primacy in Loter in the Rhineland. By virtue of massacres in the West, migrations from the West, and the rise of the East as a great centre of learning, the centre of gravity shifted. The migrants from Loter abandoned the Rhineland Jewish language and adopted Yiddish. It was Yiddish that was brought to the “New East” — in the history of Yiddish, the Slavic and Baltic lands, where migrants who ultimately hailed from both parts of Old Ashkenaz settled. The Rhineland Jewish language, *hes*, merged *shin* and *sin*, Western-based Germanic component and all, disappeared sometime in the late middle ages as its speakers adopted Yiddish. The spread of Yiddish from the Danube westward, to replace the Rhineland Jewish language that had

been rooted in Loter, is one of the most intriguing chapters in the history of Yiddish, and one that cries out for research. The result of these processes is the well-known and scarcely believable degree of consistency of correspondence between all dialects of Yiddish and between all varieties of Ashkenazic Hebrew and Aramaic.⁷⁹

A handful of traces of the Rhineland Jewish language may survive in modern Yiddish; a somewhat larger trace survived in Western Yiddish. The Rhineland Jewish language had a great impact on written Yiddish for many centuries. It is evident in many features of the literary language that has come to be known as "Old Yiddish".⁸⁰ The extant texts represent a vast array of mixtures of (1) Rhineland Jewish, (2) various authors' and copyists' conceptions of contemporary standard literary German, and, at a certain stage, (3) Yiddish. The lack of correspondence between "Old Yiddish" texts and all known varieties of Yiddish can thus be explained. But this is a topic for another day.

The doomed Rhineland Jewish language of the West certainly bore many similarities to Yiddish, not least of which was the combining of Germanic and Semitic components. They were not, however, the same components as in Yiddish. Nor did they necessarily combine in the same way as in Yiddish. In short, Rhineland Jewish in the West and Yiddish in the East were two different Jewish languages. All modern varieties of Yiddish are readily derivable from the language of the *bney khes*, which arose on the banks of the Danube. The earliest stage of the easterly Jewish language, recoverable *via* reconstruction, is therefore *Proto Yiddish*.⁸¹

79 See Katz, "Explorations" (above, n. 46), pp. 111–131; idem (above, n. 30), pp. 92–96; idem, "Proto Dialectology" (above, n. 5), pp. 48–50.

80 See J.C. Frakes, *The Politics of Interpretation — Alterity and Ideology in Old Yiddish Studies*, Albany 1989; D. Katz, Review of Frakes (above), *Journal of Jewish Studies*, XLI (1990).

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