

A PRESENTATION BY LIVINGSCROLL

Who Translated the Cochin Hebrew New Testament?

Tracing the source languages behind the Cambridge manuscripts, from Buchanan in 1811 to scholars today

LivingScroll.org

Janice F. Baca, Translator

Ezekiel Rahabi (Hebrew Scholar, Historian)

The starting point · Rahabi first, from the 1740s

Rahabi commissioned the texts but wrote nothing naming a source language

Who

Rahabi · from the 1740s

- **Came first:** Ezekiel Rahabi was the earliest figure in the story
- **Owned and commissioned** the texts, working with them for about 45 to 60 years from the 1740s
- **Manuscripts:** MS Oo.1.32 and MS Oo.1.16.1–2

No signature

Nothing signed at the end

- **No signed statement** by Rahabi in the codices
- **No commentary** by Rahabi identifying a source language

No review notes

Nothing in the margins

- **No marginal notes or prefaces** by Rahabi inside MS Oo.1.32 or MS Oo.1.16.1–2
- **Nothing explains** how the text was made or which earlier text it came from

Rahabi's writing is silent: the source language is inferred by scholars, not read from the codices.

Leopold van Dort (Translator, Hired by Rahabi)

Commissioned by Rahabi · late 1750s, most notably 1757–1760

Van Dort worked for Rahabi, but his own writing names no source language

Who

van Dort · 1757–1760

- **Leopold van Dort** was commissioned by Rahabi
- **Active:** late 1750s, most notably 1757–1760
- **Manuscripts:** MS Oo.1.32 and MS Oo.1.16.1–2

No signature

Nothing signed at the end

- **No signed statement** by van Dort in these codices
- **No commentary** by van Dort identifying a source language

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- **Nothing explains** how the text was made or which earlier text it came from

Van Dort’s writing is silent here: any source language is inferred by scholars, not read from the codices.

David Cohen (Scribe and Copyist)

18th-century Cochin · copyist for Ezekiel Rahabi II

Role: scribe and copyist, not translator

Who

David Cohen · 18th century

- **Professional Hebrew scribe (sofer) in Cochin**
- Worked for chief merchant Ezekiel Rahabi II
- Copied major portions of the Cambridge Cochin New Testament manuscripts and the Library of Congress Hebrew Qur'ān
- Archival form of his name: David b. Isaac Cohen, a native of Berlin

What he copied

Cambridge MS Oo.1.32, ff. 132r–160v

- **Identified by his handwriting**
- **Matched to his signed 1757 Library of Congress Qur'ān by Schiller-Szinessy (19th century) and Myron M. Weinstein (1972)**
- Covers the Pauline and General Epistles, Philippians through Jude, including Hebrews

A shift in tone

Before and after folio 131

- **Earlier hand, ff. 1r–131v**
- Unknown copyist; includes anti-Christian polemical edits, such as writing Yeshu
- **Cohen's section, ff. 132r–160v**
- Drops those edits; clean, straightforward Hebrew, e.g. copying F. A. Christian's 1676 Hebrews

Cohen was a copyist, not a translator: he transcribed existing Hebrew drafts and printed books for Rahabi, and left no commentary, preface or colophon on the origin or translation language of the manuscripts.

Claudius Buchanan (Scottish Anglican Priest, Collector)

1806 acquired · 1809 donated to Cambridge · 1811 reported local claims

Claim: the whole Cochin New Testament came from “the original languages”

Who

Claudius Buchanan · 1806–1811

- **First to see the manuscripts**
- He acquired the manuscripts in 1806 and donated them to Cambridge in 1809
- In 1811 he reported what local people told him, not a book-by-book study

What he reported

A general claim

- **A Cochin rabbi translated the whole New Testament**
- **Source: “the original languages” (meaning Koine Greek)**
- Reported as local claims; Buchanan did not name a specific source language or manuscript

Why it comes first

The starting point

- **The earliest claim about the manuscripts**
- It treats the whole corpus as one translation from “the original languages”

Buchanan reported local claims; this is what was said, not a settled fact.

J. S. C. F. Frey & the London Society (1810–1817)

1810–1817 · Examined Thomas Yeates's copy of the Cochin Gospels · Produced their own Hebrew New Testament in 1817

Negative: rejected as too loose from the Greek text

Who

London, 1810–1817

- **Rev. J. S. C. F. Frey, Hebrew language expert**
- The London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews
- Active: 1810–1817

What they did

Examined the Cochin Gospels

- **Examined Thomas Yeates's copy of the Cochin Gospels**
- **Acknowledged its flowing rabbinic Hebrew style**
- **Judged it unsuitable for mission printing**

Their verdict

Negative

- **Rejected it as too loose compared with the Greek text**
- **Produced their own literal biblical-Hebrew edition (1817)**
- **Did not praise it as an authentic ancient witness**

They valued a close match to the Greek text over flowing Hebrew style, so they made their own Hebrew New Testament in 1817.

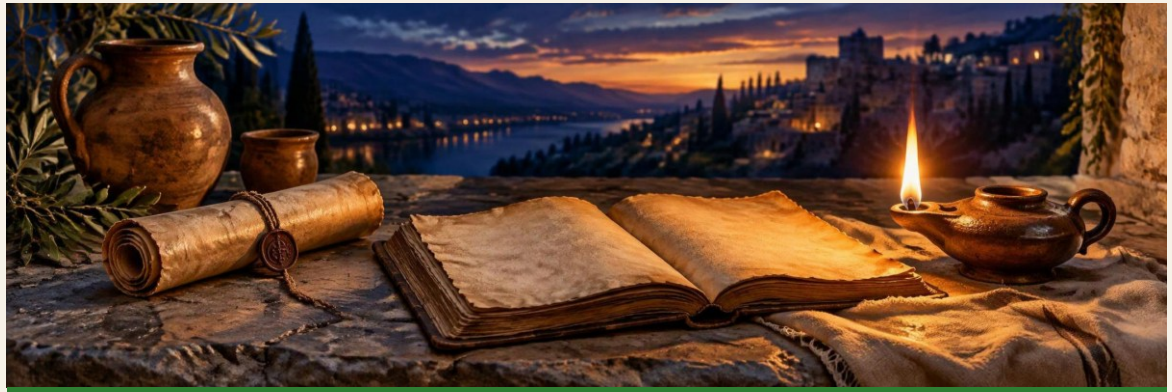
Franz Delitzsch (German Lutheran Hebrew Scholar)

1870 · Claim: Matthew through Jude translated from the Syriac Peshitta · answered by Gebhardt-Klein, 2022–23



Matthew

- **Delitzsch: translated from the Syriac Peshitta.**
- Example, Matthew 7:4: the scribe wrote “your eyes,” crossed it out, and wrote “your tooth.”



Jude

- **Delitzsch: translated from the Syriac Peshitta**.
- Example, Jude 16: it quotes Psalm 5:9.

Matthew through Jude: all “translated from Syriac”

Delitzsch’s claim: every book from Matthew through Jude was translated from the Syriac Peshitta.

Four reviewers, four different positions

Late 1800s – 1997 · Only some criticized the translation

Schiller-Szinessy (Rabbinic Expert)
Late 1800s

Criticized the language and translation

Pointed to “deficiencies in language and translation.” Saw a change in tone after folio 131 and suspected the copyist was a German Jew.

Solomon Schechter (Rabbinic Expert)
1893

A brief, harsh remark on the translator

“We can only say that the translator performed his task very badly.”

Myron Weinstein (Cataloger)
1971–72

No verdict on the translation

Identified David Cohen as the scribe of parts of the manuscripts, linking them to the Library of Congress Hebrew Qur’ān.

Stefan Reif (Cataloger)
1997

Catalogued only

Catalogued the manuscripts as nos. 916, 917 and 918. No judgment on the translation is recorded.





PART TWO

Modern-Day Researchers & Claims

In order of when each began: Jean Carmignac (1982–1985), the van Rensburgs (2022), James Scott Trimm (2022), Joseph Gebhardt-Klein (2022–2024), Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg (2022–2024), Mascha van Dort (2023), Dr. Alexander van der Haven (2023), Prof. Meir Bar-Ilan (2025), Dr. Nehemia Gordon (2025) and Dr. Miles Jones (2025–26)

Jean Carmignac (French Dead Sea Scrolls Scholar)

1982–1985 · Traductions hébraïques des Évangiles (Brepols) · Critical voice

Critical: recorded as dismissing the Cochin manuscripts as late, derivative translations

Who

Dead Sea Scrolls scholar

- Renowned French Dead Sea Scrolls scholar
- Founder of Revue de Qumrân
- Compiled Traductions hébraïques des Évangiles, 5 volumes, 1982–1985

His comment

As recorded for this deck

- Reviewed the Cambridge Cochin manuscripts in his bibliography
- **Called them late, derivative translations**
- Made by or for Jewish-Christian polemics and missionary work in India

His position

Critical

- **Dismissive of early Hebrew originality**
- **Saw no value in them for reconstructing a first-century Hebrew New Testament**

Library catalogs confirm the five-volume set (1982–85) of Hebrew Gospel translations.

Joseph Gebhardt-Klein (Semitic Language Scholar)

2022–2024 · Cochin Hebrew Matthew, MS Oo.1.32 · answering Delitzsch's Syriac claim

Matthew and Jude are not "just" translations of the Syriac Peshitta

His work

Transcription and translation

- **Matthew, MS Oo.1.32, ff. 1r–21v:** a 146-page transcription and English translation
- **Mishnaic Hebrew, often diverging into Aramaic, with seeming Peshitta or other Syriac influence**
- **Gaster 1616:** notes Manchester's copy as a more elegant text of the same work

On the Peshitta

Answering Delitzsch (1870)

- **Matthew: "not 'just' a translation of the Syriac Peshitta"**
- **Jude: too different from the Peshitta to be called a translation of it**
- **Syriac influence** sits alongside other influences

Examples and claims

What he points to

- **Matthew 7:4:** the scribe wrote "your eyes," crossed it out, and wrote "your tooth"
- **Jude 16:** it quotes Psalm 5:9
- **Names: claimed some were Portuguese**

These are Gebhardt-Klein's own claims, not settled findings. They rebut Delitzsch's blanket Syriac claim for Matthew and Jude; they do not decide the source language of the other books.

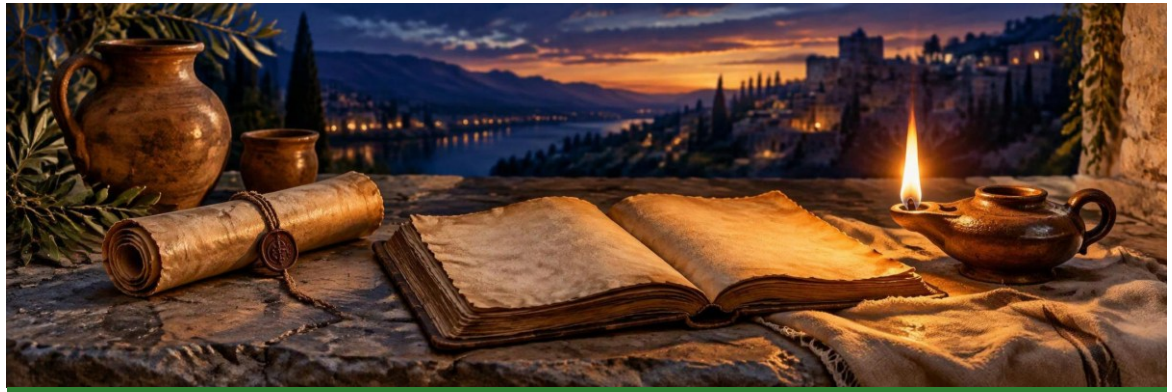
Franz Delitzsch (German Lutheran Hebrew Scholar)

1870 · Claim: Matthew through Jude translated from the Syriac Peshitta · answered by Gebhardt-Klein, 2022–23



Matthew

- Delitzsch: translated from the Syriac Peshitta.
- **Gebhardt-Klein: "not 'just' a translation of the Syriac Peshitta"; Syriac influence sits alongside other influences.**
- Example, Matthew 7:4: the scribe wrote "your eyes," crossed it out, and wrote "your tooth."



Jude

- Delitzsch: translated from the Syriac Peshitta.
- **Gebhardt-Klein: Jude is too different from the Peshitta to be called a translation of it.**
- Example, Jude 16: it quotes Psalm 5:9.

Matthew and Jude are not Syriac translations, so Delitzsch's blanket claim cannot be made for Matthew through Jude.

Justin J. and Michael J. van Rensburg (Researchers)

HebrewGospels.com · 2022–2024 · The Hebrew Revelation, James and Jude (2022; version 2, 2024)

A split verdict: most books Peshitta-like, three books claimed as original Hebrew

Most books

Rejected as original Hebrew

- **Gospels, Acts and most Epistles**
- **No signs of an original Hebrew text, they say**
- **Close to the Aramaic/Syriac Peshitta**
- **Untranslated Aramaic and Aramaic-like words**
- **Conclusion: translated or heavily adapted from Syriac**

Three exceptions

Claimed as original Hebrew

- **Revelation (Oo.1.16.2), James and Jude (Oo.1.32)**
- **Not translations from Greek, Latin or Aramaic, they argue**
- No untranslated Syriac/Aramaic words
- Hebrew wordplays, gapping, inverted word order, linking keywords
- **Unique agreements with the oldest Greek manuscripts**

How they edited

Their printed edition

- **Revelation: base text Oo.1.16.2**
- **Spellings standardized**
- **Compared with Manchester Gaster 1616**
- Published in The Hebrew Revelation, James and Jude (2022; v. 2, 2024)

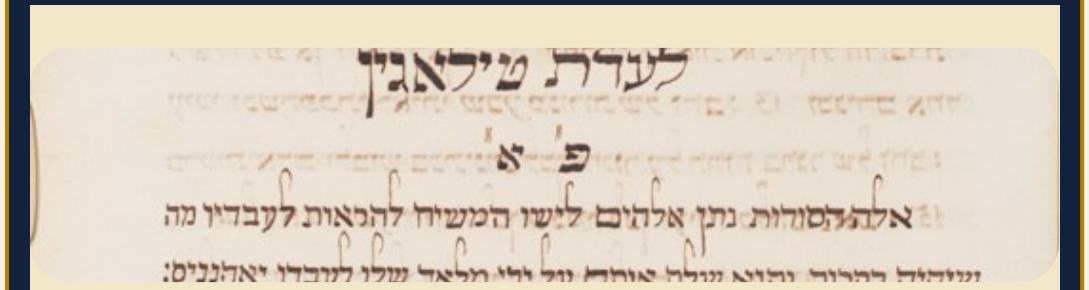
These are the van Rensburgs' own claims, not a settled finding.

Two manuscripts Comparison

Manchester Gaster 1616 and Cambridge MS Oo.1.16.2 · a copy and its source

Manchester Gaster 1616

John Rylands Library, Manchester · Revelation (the copy)



Copied: 1810

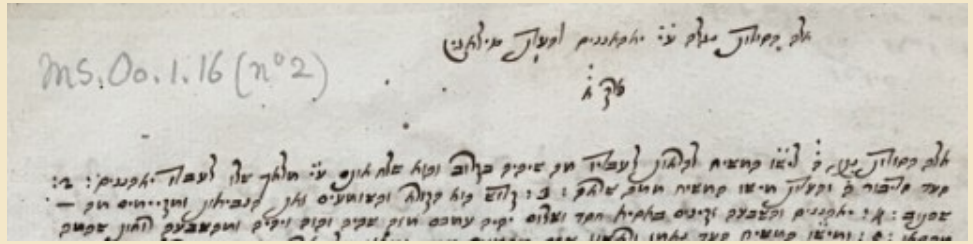
By: Thomas Yeates (Yates) of the British Museum

Origin: Copied in Europe, after Buchanan brought the Cochin manuscripts to Cambridge

copied from

Cochin Cambridge Revelation

Cambridge University Library, MS Oo.1.16.2 (the source)



Copied: before c. 1770 (the scribe died c. 1770)

By: David Cohen, per Weinstein

Origin: Cochin, India; acquired by Buchanan in 1806

The Manchester Gaster 1616 Revelation is a copy of the Cochin Cambridge Revelation. Manchester's catalogue records Gaster 1616 as a copy made by Thomas Yeates in 1810. Cambridge gives no copying date for Oo.1.16.2, so "before c. 1770" is inferred from the scribe's death.

Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg (Biblical Scholar, Educator)

2022–2024 · Hebrew Insights from Revelation (2021) · Hebrew Visions of Revelation (2023)

Revelation was translated from the Greek text, in his reading

Who he is

Biblical Scholar, Educator

- **Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg,** author on the Hebrew and Jewish background of the New Testament
- **Co-author** with Pinchas Shir of a Revelation series
- **Titles:** Hebrew Insights from Revelation (2021), Hebrew Visions of Revelation (2023)

His Revelation work

Hebrew roots of the text

- **Insights (ch. 1–5):** Revelation as a Jewish apocalypse with a Hebrew literary structure
- **Visions (ch. 6–14):** the Jewish background of its imagery
- **Aim:** reconnect readers with the Hebrew roots and Semitic essence of Revelation

His position here

On the Cochin Revelation

- **Source: Revelation translated from the Greek text**
- **Against: the van Rensburgs' claim that Oo.1.16.2 is original Hebrew**
- **Note:** his Hebrew-roots books study Revelation's Semitic features; they are not a claim that the Cochin text is original Hebrew

These are his own positions, not settled findings.

Dr. Miles Jones (Romantic Languages, Accelerated Learning)

Bnei Emunah Institute · Hebrew Voices #215 (Apr 2025) · Joel Blackford Live (Aug 2026)

A mixed position: much of it Greek, with some Hebrew markers

What he said

Greek, in his words

- **“A good part of it really did come straight from the Greek” (#215)**
- **James and Jude: “you can look phrase by phrase and you can see the Greek coming out”**
- **Aug 19–20, 2026: said Cochin Luke and Revelation were translated from Greek**

Where he sees Hebrew

Counter-points

- **Three “authentication verses” (Mt 27:51, Mk 15:38, Lk 23:45) follow the Hebrew Gospels, not Luther, the Statenvertaling Dutch, or the Syriac polyglot**
- Says a Hebrew manuscript would be called a translation even by its author, because of the Inquisition (#215)

How to read it

Not one verdict

- Greek claims are book-specific; Hebrew claims rest on a few Gospel verses
- **Direct disagreement: he calls James and Jude Greek**

Jones’s positions are his own claims, as reported in this deck and the Hebrew Voices #215 description, not a settled finding.

Cochin Luke & Revelation: Dr. Miles Jones claimed this during his August 19–20, 2026 livestream appearance on Joel Blackford Live, stating that the Cochin Hebrew New Testament was translated from Greek. Also, April 30, 2025 episode of Hebrew Voices #215, M. Jones claimed that James & Jude are Greek

James Scott Trimm (Nazarene Scholar, Translator)

Nazarene scholar · Davar (Substack) · blog 2022 · research update Nov 2026

Cochin Matthew: translated from Syriac, yet possibly an important witness

Earlier view

2022: dismissed

- Blog, Apr 2022: “Hebrew Translation of the Peshitta”
- Had “largely dismissed” Cochin Matthew as a translation of the Syriac Peshitta

Detailed study

Nov 2026, commissioned

- **Says it “substantially confirmed” the Syriac-translation view**
- **Cites Syriac translation artifacts and distinctive agreements with the Peshitta**
- **Substack series on Cochin Matthew: a Peshitta element, an Old Syriac element, a “lost Syriac witness”**

What it means

His open question

- **Not an independent witness to an original Hebrew Matthew, in his words**
- **The underlying Syriac source may preserve important early readings**
- He says the implications may reach other Gospels and books; no evidence given yet

Trimm’s own claims from his Nov 7, 2026 Substack update and 2022 blog; his research is still in progress.

Mascha van Dort (Historian & Genealogist Researcher)

2023 · Who she is · Dutch archival historian and genealogist

A historian of old Dutch records, not an expert in ancient languages

Who

Mascha van Dort

- **Dutch archival historian and genealogist**
- Researcher of the van Dort family
- Her claims about the manuscripts follow on the next slide

Her field

Archives, not languages

- **18th-century Dutch East India Company (VOC) colonial records**
- **Her work is not the study of ancient Hebrew and related languages**

Family link

Stated with Nehemia Gordon, PhD

- **Not a descendant of Leopold van Dort**
- She stated this together with Dr. Nehemia Gordon

Her background is colonial archives, not the study of ancient languages. Her claims about the manuscripts are on the next slide.

Mascha van Dort: Her Claims, Book by Book

2023 · Her claims, book by book

Claim: 7 books come from Leopold van Dort's Dutch and German sources

MS Oo.1.16.1

1757–1760 · Dutch + German

- **6 books: Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians**
- Source: Dutch Statenvertaling and Luther's German Bible
- Attributed to Leopold van Dort, for Ezekiel Rahabi

MS Oo.1.16.2 (Revelation)

1757–1760 · Dutch + German

- **Revelation**, attributed to Leopold van Dort (Dutch Statenvertaling and Luther's German Bible)
- **No direct proof:** no closing note by the scribe names a translator (unlike the 1757 Library of Congress Hebrew Qur'ān, LC Hebr. MS 183), and no VOC record mentions Revelation
- **Inferred from:** Delitzsch's 1870 stylistic comparison; binding with Oo.1.16.1 on matching paper; Oo.1.32 lacks Revelation
- **Weak point:** binding does not prove a single origin; she tested sample passages, not all 22 chapters
- **No names show any trace of Dutch or German transliteration**

MS Oo.1.32

1741–1756 · neither

- **20 books. Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John**
- **Philippians, Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon**
- **Hebrews**: copied from F. A. Christian's 1676 printed Hebrew translation (**from Greek**)
- James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude
- Gospels and the other epistles (ff. 1–131): an earlier, unnamed German-speaking convert; David Cohen copied ff. 132r–160v

Pushback: Gordon says the same scribe writes ruach ha'kodis, a phonetic confusion rather than an insult (Luke 1:1, masiach).

Dr. Alexander van der Haven (Hebrew Scholar, Historian)

2023 · “A Jewish Qur’an” · Religions 14, no. 11 · University of Bergen

Positive: he frames Rahabi’s Cochin workshop as a pioneering interreligious project

Who

Historian, University of Bergen

- Historian of early modern Jewish thought
- Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion, University of Bergen

His article

Religions, 30 Oct 2023

- “A Jewish Qur’an: An Eighteenth-Century Hebrew Qur’an Translation in Its Indian Context”
- Studies Library of Congress Heb. MS 183, the Hebrew Qur’ān, and its Dutch source
- Argues it served as cultural-diplomatic capital for Cochin Jews

His position

Positive

- **Frames Rahabi’s Cochin workshop positively**
- **Not “deficient translations” but a sophisticated, pioneering 18th-century project**
- Connects Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scriptures in India

Prof. Meir Bar-Ilan (Talmud and Jewish History)

2025 · Hebrew Voices discussion with Nehemia Gordon · Bar-Ilan University

Critical: recorded as endorsing the 18th-century translation view

Who

Bar-Ilan University

- Professor of Talmud and Jewish History at Bar-Ilan University
- Interviewed by Nehemia Gordon on Hebrew Voices

His comment

2025

- Publicly praised Mascha van Dort’s archival research
- Agreed the Cochin Hebrew Gospels are 18th-century European-mediated translations made in Cochin

His position

Critical

- **Endorses the 18th-century translation view**
- **Not ancient Semitic originals**

Gordon says in Hebrew Voices #212 (Apr 2, 2025) that Bar-Ilan recommended Mascha van Dort’s research.

Dr. Nehemia Gordon (Biblical Scholar, Manuscript Research)

Makor Hebrew Foundation · host of Hebrew Voices · Cochin series, 2025

The interviewer and convener: he calls the manuscripts “a mixed bag”

Who he is

Bible scholar, host

- Nehemia Gordon, PhD
- Hosts the Hebrew Voices podcast at NehemiasWall.com

His Cochin work

Interviews, 2025

- Hebrew Voices #215 (Apr 30, 2025), with Dr. Miles Jones and Jonathan Felt
- Series with Mascha van Dort on the Cochin translators

His position

Mixed

- **Calls the manuscripts “a mixed bag”**
- Credits Mascha van Dort’s archival research on Leopold’s life
- Says she is “not claiming to have discovered something new” about “the unclean” [#215]

Gordon’s own words are from Hebrew Voices #215 and its show notes. His position is not a book-by-book verdict.

Source languages behind the manuscripts

Who argued what · six source languages across three manuscripts

Six source languages have been argued across the manuscripts

Dutch
Statenvertaling

M. Van Dort: Acts, Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians (Oo.1.16.1). Revelation is inferred, not documented.

German
Luther's Bible

M. Van Dort: the same books, alongside the Dutch. Oo.1.32's earlier translator is called German-speaking; no source text is stated.

Syriac
Peshitta

Delitzsch (1870): Matthew through Jude.
Gebhardt-Klein (2022–23) said it was neither Matthew nor Jude.
James Scott Trimm (Facebook, Nov 2026): Matthew, possibly the whole of the New Testament, from Syriac texts.
Van Rensburgs (2022–24): most books resemble the Peshitta.

Portuguese
some names

Gebhardt-Klein: claimed some names were Portuguese.

Hebrew
Revelation, James, Jude

Van Rensburgs (2022–24): claim Revelation (Oo.1.16.2), James and Jude (Oo.1.32) are authentic original Hebrew, not translations.

Greek
per Jones & Buchanan

M. Van Dort: Hebrews, via Christian's 1676 text (i.e., a translation from the Greek text).
Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg: Revelation translation from the Greek text
M. Jones (2025): "A good part came straight from Greek," e.g., and a second statement about James and Jude.
Claudius Buchanan (1811): local claims of a translation from "the original languages," which he took to be Greek.



PART THREE

What Language Was Really Spoken?

Mishnaic Hebrew, Aramaic in the days of the disciples: what the Bar Kokhba letters and the Qumran scrolls show

Rabbinic Hebrew in the Days of the Disciples

Evidence from the Bar Kokhba letters and the Qumran scrolls

Mishnaic Hebrew was a living, spoken language in the days of the disciples

Dr. Roy Blizzard

With David Bivin

- Co-author, with David Bivin, of ***Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus***
- Reads difficult Greek expressions against Hebrew idioms
- Sets Yeshua's teaching in its Jewish setting, mainly in the Synoptic Gospels

Bar Kokhba letters

c. 132–135 CE

- Everyday letters found in caves near the Dead Sea
- Written in Mishnaic Hebrew, alongside Aramaic and Greek
- Mundane military and administrative business: a living language, not a scholars' language

Qumran texts

Before 70 CE

- The Copper Scroll and MMT (**Miqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah**, "Some works of the Torah")
- Both point to Mishnaic-type Hebrew in use before 70 CE
- The idiom was already alive in Yeshua's own day

"Today, thanks to the letters of Bar-Koseba (Bar Kokhba letters) and his contemporaries not the slightest doubt remains that Graetz, Segal, Ben Yehuda, Klausner and others were right in assuming that MH was a living language, and that Geiger was wrong. These letters (first half of the second century C.E.), which were found in caves near the Dead Sea did not originate in scholarly circles but dealt with mundane matters that had to do with their military and administrative background. ***Therefore, if these letters employ MH (alongside Aramaic and Greek), there can be only one explanation - it was the spoken language, and not an artificial language created by and for the scholars of the academies."***

— History of the Hebrew Language, ed. Raphael Kutscher, p. 117, §193 (MH = Mishnaic Hebrew)

Findings, book by book

What the text appears to show · Matthew, Jude, Pastoral Epistles, Revelation

Only the Pastoral Epistles appear to come from the Peshitta; Matthew and Jude show some Syriac signs but not translations

Matthew

Not Greek, not Peshitta

Not translated from Greek or the Peshitta

- Some words appear to come from the Peshitta (signs of Syriac)
- Some words appear to come from Shem Tov
- Jewish Palestinian Aramaic profile
- Rabbinic (Mishnaic) Hebrew

Jude

Not from the Peshitta

Not from the Syriac Peshitta

- Shows some signs of Syriac texts, but not a translation
- Rabbinic (Mishnaic) Hebrew

Pastoral Epistles

Peshitta link

Appear to be translated from the Syriac Peshitta

- 1–2 Timothy and Titus
- The one group with a Syriac connection

Revelation

Not Greek, not Syriac

Not from the Greek text or the Syriac text

- Rabbinic (Mishnaic) Hebrew

All books except those that appear to be Syriac show Rabbinic (Mishnaic) Hebrew.



LivingScroll.org

Janice F. Baca