IMAGINING THE JEW IN ANGLO-SAXON LITERATURE & CULTURE

EDITED BY SAMANTHA ZACHER

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3 *Hebraeam scire linguam*: Bede's Rhetoric of the Hebrew Truth

DAMIAN FLEMING

The traditional perception that Bede's biblical commentaries are largely derivative can be traced to a face-value reading of his own frequent claim that he is merely *patrum uestigia sequens* (following in the footsteps of the fathers).[1] Despite this apparent humility, however, he advanced to his readers his conception of the Hebraic source of scripture and the implications of this idea, even going so far as to determine a new age for the world. Of course, he quotes extensively from the writings of his patristic predecessors; a superficial reading of Bede's texts might view them as a scholastic catena, a mere string of others' words. Bede nevertheless often uses patristic quotations to articulate unprecedented arguments. An examination of two of Bede's works demonstrates his strikingly modern and philologically responsible understanding of Hebrew: he advances Jerome's idiosyncratic insistence on the primacy of the Hebrew Bible but does not hesitate to disagree with Jerome when he feels it is necessary. Bede's *Commentary on Genesis* reveals his controversial innovations and deft rhetorical posturing as he establishes himself as a scholar of Hebrew comparable to Jerome, and his *Letter to Plegwine* defends his original argument for the age of the world by distinguishing himself and other scholars who appreciate the importance of Hebrew from the sadly misguided Christians and even Jews who fail to do so.

1 See Ray, "Who Did Bede Think He Was?"; the work of Ray and other current Bede scholars (see, for example, the essays in the same collection) has done much to fight this image. See in particular DeGregorio, "Introduction: The New Bede," 6–9.

Bede could not read Hebrew – in any modern sense – nor would he have any opportunity to do so.[2] There were no Jewish populations in the British Isles before the Norman Conquest and there is no evidence of the study of Hebrew during this time period.[3] Nevertheless, Bede knew a lot about Hebrew, and his linguistic abilities place him among the most exceptional Latinists of the Middle Ages, evidenced by his prodigious output of Latin poetry and prose, as well as writings on the Latin language. He additionally taught himself a substantial amount of Greek with the help of a bilingual manuscript of the Acts of the Apostles.[4] Had the appropriate resources been available, there can be no doubt that Bede could have learned Hebrew. In place of Hebrew manuscripts or Jewish teachers, Bede had to rely on the collected works of Jerome, which offer the literal meanings of hundreds of Hebrew proper names and dozens of comments about the structure, orthography, and even paleography of Hebrew texts.[5] Most importantly, Bede takes from Jerome the idea that Hebrew deserves primacy as the language that contains the oldest record of salvation history, and thus, the language from which translations are made.[6]

Before the time of Bede, the importance of Hebrew in the Christian world was primarily advanced by Jerome, who devoted his life to translating the Old Testament from Hebrew to Latin and to crafting a body of commentaries and letters that justified his project. Bede follows Jerome, accepting his philological argument for a return to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament – the "Hebrew Truth" – as the ultimate source of the biblical text. We perhaps take it for granted that Jerome's translation according to the Hebrew – what we call the Vulgate – was then the foremost medieval Latin text of the Bible, but that was not a given in Bede's day. Jerome's translation competed for centuries with the Old Latin translations based on the Greek Septuagint, which were well established and

2 Sutcliffe, "The Venerable Bede's Knowledge of Hebrew."
3 Scheil, *The Footsteps of Israel*, 7.
4 Dionisotti, "On Bede, Grammars, and Greek"; Lynch, "The Venerable Bede's Knowledge of Greek."
5 In addition to the examples below, see Sutcliffe, "The Venerable Bede's Knowledge of Hebrew," 304; he notes "the care with which Bede collected scraps of information about Hebrew … and enables us to judge how eagerly he would have embraced the study of the language had he had any opportunity of doing so."
6 The importance of Hebrew rests then on its historical role in the transmission of scripture, not on any mystical or "sacred" nature that set it apart from other languages. See Dekker, "Pentecost and Linguistic Self-Consciousness," 352.

continued to be known as the texts cited by Latin patristic authors before Jerome.[7] Jerome's Latin translation was not officially declared the Bible of the Roman Church until the sixteenth century.[8] Bede, however, was part of a cultural milieu in seventh- and eighth-century Northumbria that strongly supported the Vulgate. Christopher de Hamel notes the special attention paid to textual considerations of the Bible in Bede's world, which ultimately "played a remarkable part in the dissemination of Jerome's translation. It is tempting to see the Venerable Bede, Doctor of the Church, like Saint Jerome, as having a role too in completing the publication of the Vulgate."[9]

Bede's frequent and vocal advocacy of the importance of the Hebrew basis of biblical translation had led nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars to believe that he possessed some independent knowledge of Hebrew.[10] Bede often follows closely the footsteps of Jerome, not only borrowing from him many facts about the Hebrew language but also a pointed rhetorical stance that was originally born out of the hostility Jerome faced during his own lifetime because of his translation. Jerome's biblical prefaces, commentaries, and letters bear witness to his lifelong struggle – most famously with his contemporary Augustine – to replace the Greek Septuagint with the Hebrew Bible as the starting point for biblical translation. Jerome dubs his source text the *hebraica ueritas*, "the Hebrew Truth," a loaded term which weds his access to Hebrew with truth itself and conversely casts suspicion on any other source text.[11]

7 De Hamel, *The Book: A History of the Bible*, 25–30; Marsden, *The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England*, 8–11.
8 Sutcliffe, "The Name 'Vulgate'"; Marsden, *The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England*, 8.
9 De Hamel, *The Book: A History of the Bible*, 34.
10 Sutcliffe, "The Venerable Bede's Knowledge of Hebrew," 302, who cites scholars such as J.A. Giles, S.A. Hirsch, and Charles Singer attributing genuine knowledge of Hebrew to Bede; see also Stinson, "'Northernmost Israel': England, the Old Testament, and the Hebraic 'Veritas' as Seen by Bede and Roger Bacon." Perhaps owing to the easy availability of nineteenth-century texts on-line, the notion that Bede knew Hebrew has re-emerged in popular online references; see for example: http://www.britannia.com/bios/bede.html and http://www.stbedeepiscopalchurch.org/st-bede-episcopal-church-st-pete-fl-33704-st-bede-the-venerable.html.
11 Kamesar, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible*, 42–9; Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, 54.

Bede supports Jerome's logic and refers to him as *noster interpres* (our translator – in contrast to the *LXX interpretes* of the Septuagint) and his translation as the *hebraica ueritas*. In transferring Jerome's term for the Hebrew source to the resultant translation, Bede bestows the authority of the Hebrew text on Jerome's translation. Bede is able then to act with the authority of Jerome himself, effortlessly discussing a given reading from the Hebrew Truth compared with the Septuagint or the "old translation."[12] These are the types of comments that originally fuelled the speculation that Bede himself could read Hebrew. Our modern *index fontium* may defuse the force of these statements by pointing directly to Bede's immediate source, usually Jerome; and many editors print such verbatim quotations entirely in italics as if to remind us that this is not really Bede.[13] We ought to beware, however, of dismissing comments made by Bede as irrelevant simply because we can source them; Bede's commentaries give the impression of direct engagement with, and wholehearted support of, the Hebrew language. Given his complete mastery of classical Latin, his continually improving knowledge of Greek, and his concern with language generally, it would not be surprising if many medieval authors, like some modern ones, believed that Bede could actually read Hebrew. Although late in his career Bede himself developed a novel system of indicating his sources; these were regularly misunderstood and miscopied by scribes and do not appear in his works under consideration here.[14] And though most of his information is lifted directly from Jerome, Bede also makes original deductions about the Hebrew language and uses his own understanding of Hebrew to disagree with Jerome.

A large number of comments concerning the Hebrew language are found in Bede's *Commentary on Genesis*, which draws heavily on Jerome's

12 Kendall, trans., *Bede: On Genesis*, 56, gives a number of examples.

13 See, Jenkins, "Bede as Exegete and Theologian," 163, who challenges "anyone who desires to establish the contention that Bede was a student of Hebrew to produce any evidence for it which cannot be explained as being taken from the writings of other authors."

14 Laistner, "Source-marks in Bede Manuscripts," 350–4; Gorman, "Source Marks and Chapter Division in Bede's Commentary on Luke," 246–90. Gorman points out the problematic nature of many of the twentieth-century editions of Bede's works, especially regarding the *index fontium* and use of italics.

Hebrew Questions on Genesis.[15] The casualness with which Bede makes references to the spelling of words in the Hebrew alphabet vividly suggests a personal knowledge of the material. Commenting on an element in a genealogical list at Genesis 10:7, "Filii Regma: Saba et Dadan," Bede first notes that two occurrences of a seemingly identical word actually represent two different words when written in Hebrew and thus have different meanings, "Hic Saba per SIN litteram scribitur, supra uero per SAMECH … Interpretatur ergo nunc Saba Arabia" (This Saba is written with the letter SIN, but above with the letter SAMECH … therefore now Saba is interpreted Arabia). Then he makes reference to a separate verse in the psalms which – again, when read in Hebrew – demonstrates the distinction between the two words:

> Nam in septuagesimo [primo] psalmo, ubi nos habemus *Reges Arabum et Saba munera offerent*, in Hebraeo scriptum est *Reges Saba et Saba*, primum nomen per SIN, secundum per SAMECH, quae nostrae litterae similis est.[16]
>
> (For, in the seventy-first psalm, where we have *the kings of Arabia and Saba offered gifts*, in Hebrew it is written *kings of Saba and Saba*: the first name with SIN, the second with SAMECH, which is similar to our letter.)[17]

Although almost all of this is borrowed verbatim from Jerome's comments on the same verse in his *Hebrew Questions in Genesis*, Bede presents this information as part of his own running prose without attribution, giving the impression that he knows about the spelling of these words in the

15 Bede's *Commentary on Genesis* was written during two separate periods in his career; the second half was completed some years after the first. A consideration of the development of this biblical commentary is outside the scope of this article, though it is worth noting that almost all of Bede's citations from Jerome's *Hebrew Questions* appear in the latter half of the commentary. Further study of Bede's entire corpus might reveal the diachronic development of Bede's appreciation of Jerome's work and his attendant insistence on the importance of the Hebrew Truth. See Kendall, trans. *Bede: On Genesis*, 40–53.

16 Jones, ed., *Libri quatuor in principium Genesis usque ad natiuitatem Isaac et eiectionem Ismahelis adnotationum* (hereafter Bede, *In Gen.*); 144.

17 All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

Hebrew alphabet.[18] Bede also leaves his own mark in the comment on the letter SAMECH: "quae nostrae litterae similis est" (which letter is similar to *ours*), adding a level of personal immediacy which is not found in the passage from Jerome's *Hebrew Questions.* This additional comment is ultimately derived from Jerome's commentary on Ezekiel.[19] Bede pulls together disparate information about the Hebrew language and redeploys it in his own works, thus bestowing upon himself the authority of the Hebrew language.

Bede's confidence in his control of the Hebrew language is even more impressive when he uses it to disagree with or even correct Jerome. As noted above, Bede is an avid supporter of Jerome's translation project and agrees with his decision to prioritize the Hebrew text over the Septuagint. But in at least one occurrence, Bede uses his own understanding of Hebrew paleography to prefer a reading from the Septuagint over the reading chosen by Jerome. In explicating the descendants of Noah at Genesis 10, Bede notes the following:

> *Dodanim Rhodii*: melius enim legitur Rhodanim siue Rhodim, ut septuaginta interpretes transtulerunt, et in libro Hebreorum nominum etiam noster interpres posuit; similitudo enim litterarum DALETH et RES hunc apud Hebreos saepe facit errorem, ut alia legitur pro alia.[20]

18 Jerome writes: "Hic Saba per SIN literam scribitur, supra uero per SAMECH ... interpretatur ergo nunc Saba Arabia. Nam in septuagesima primo psalmo, ubi nos habemus *reges Arabum et Saba munera offerent*, in hebraeo scriptum est *reges Saba et Saba*: primum nomen per SIN, secundum per SAMECH," De Lagarde, ed., *S. Hieronymi presbyteri hebraicae quaestiones in libro Geneseos* (hereafter *Hebrew Questions*), 12: "Here [in Hebrew] Saba is written with the letter SIN, but above [where Saba is written, it is spelled] with the letter SAMECH ... therefore this occurrence of Saba is interpreted Arabia. For, in the seventy-first psalm, where we have *the kings of Arabia and Saba offered gifts*, in Hebrew it is written *kings of Saba and Saba*: the first name with SIN, the second with SAMECH." See Sutcliffe, "St. Jerome's Pronunciation of Hebrew"; Barr, "St. Jerome and the Sounds of Hebrew."

19 "In Psalmis, ubi scriptum est: *Reges Arabum et Saba munera offerent tibi*, in hebraeo habet: *Reges Saba et Saba munera offerent tibi*, quorum una 'Saba' per 'sen' litteram scribitur, alterum per 'samech' quae nostrae litterae similis est," Glorie, ed., *S. Hieronymi presbyteri commentariorum in Hiezechielem libri xiv*, 376; "In the Psalms, where it is written, *the kings of Arabia and Saba offered gifts*, in Hebrew it is written, *the kings of Saba and Saba offered gifts*, where one 'Saba' is written with the letter SEN and the other with SAMECH, which is similar to our letter."

20 Bede, *In Gen.*, 142–3.

> (*The Dodanim are the people of Rhodes*: it is better to read Rhodanim or Rhodim, as the Septuagint translated, and our translator put in the *Book of Hebrew Names*; for the similarity of the letters DALETH and RES often creates this mistake among Hebrews, as the one is read for the other.)

The core of his commentary – that the Dodanim are the people of Rhodes and this is what the Septuagint says – comes from Jerome's *Hebrew Questions*; the rest of the passage is unsourced.[21] Bede does not merely note that these two words refer to the same people but suggests a possible emendation to the Vulgate text: that we should read *Rhodanim* in place of *Dodanim*. Naturally, in suggesting a change to the text of Jerome's translation, Bede has to look elsewhere for his justification, hence the unusual appeal to the authority of the Septuagint. He also uses another text of Jerome's as evidence ("as our translator puts in the *Book of Hebrew Names* ..."), but fails to mention that, although *Rhodim* is included in Jerome's *Book of Hebrew Names*, *Dodanim* is as well.[22] Strikingly, Bede gives the impression of knowing the Hebrew language at the level of spelling – paleography even – noting the common confusion of the letters *dalet*: ד and *resh*: ר in the present tense ("facit errorem"), as if this were a mistake he himself has witnessed Hebrews making. Bede's awareness of this potential letter confusion also derives from Jerome but not in reference to this text; in fact, to make this connection, Bede synthesized information from two separate references in Jerome's commentary on Ezekiel.[23]

21 "Dodanim Rhodii: ita enim LXX interpretes transtulerunt," Jerome, *Hebrew Questions*, 12.

22 Lagarde, ed. *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum*, 64, 70.

23 "*Filii Dadan negotiatores tui*: Pro quo, nescio quid uolentes, Septuaginta filios Rhodiorum interpretati sunt, nisi forte primae litterae falsi similitudine, ut pro Dadan legerunt Radan ... sed melius est Dadan alterius loci nomen accipere, et ut in hebraico et apud ceteros interpretes habetur," Glorie, ed., 368, "*The sons of Dadan were thy merchants*: For this, I don't know what they were wishing, the Septuagint translates 'sons of Rhodians,' unless by chance they were deceived by the similarity of the first letter, so that they read Radan for Dadan ... but it is better to accept Dadan as the name of the other place, as is found in the Hebrew and among the other translators." "*Syrus negotiator tuus:* Syrus quoque fuit negotiator Tyri, pro quo in hebraeo positum est *aram* in cuius loco Septuagesima homines interpretati sunt, pro *aram* legentes *adam*, et RES et DALETH litterarum, sicut supra, decepti similtudine," Glorie, ed., 369–70, "*Syrus was thy merchant:* Syrus was also the merchant for Tyrus, for whom in the Hebrew it has 'aram' in place of which the Septuagint has translated 'men,' reading 'adam' for 'aram,' having been deceived by the similarity of the letters RES and DALETH, as above."

Bede shows himself here to be comfortable drawing upon diverse, and even conflicting texts, and ultimately deciding issues for himself. He uses his own knowledge of Hebrew – though derived from Jerome – to go so far as to make an argument that corrects Jerome's translation of the Bible. The overall impression of the passage leaves one with the feeling that Bede is sympathetic, or perhaps even patronizing, towards what he characterizes as a mistake by Jerome: "It's okay Jerome, sometimes even the Jews get this wrong."

There are other passages within Bede's *Commentary on Genesis* that lack an immediate source, yet present the appearance of direct knowledge of Hebrew, as in the following example, in which Bede comments on God's seemingly unusual syntax. In reference to Genesis 4:7, God's rebuke to Cain following the rejection of his offering, "Sed sub te erit appetitus eius, et tu dominaberis illius" (but the lust thereof shall be under thee, and thou shalt have dominion over it), Bede explains:

> Iuxta idioma linguae hebreae indicatiuum modum pro imperatiuo posuit, qualia habes innumera: *Diliges Dominum Deum tuum, Diliges proximum tuum, Non fornicaberis, Non furtum facies, Non falsum testimonium dices,* pro eo, ut diceretur, "Dilige," "Et ne occidas," "Ne forniceris," "Ne furtum facias," "Ne falsum testimonium dicas."[24]
>
> (Following Hebrew usage [God] uses the indicative mood in place of the imperative; you have many examples, *Thou shalt love the Lord your God, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, Thou shalt not fornicate, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not speak false testimony*, as if it should say, "Love!," "And do not kill," "Do not fornicate," "Do not steal," "Do not speak false testimony.")

No source has been identified for this comment, though Jones[25] suggests comparing a line from Jerome's translation of Origen's homily on the Song of Songs, which reads, "Moris est scripturarum, imperatiuum modum pro optatiuo ponere" (It is the custom of scripture to put the imperative mood in place of the optative).[26] This comment locates the unusual syntax in

24 Bede, *In Gen.*, 75.
25 Ibid.
26 Vallarsi, ed. *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Stridonensis presbyteri operum, tomus tertius*, col. 506.

the context of scripture, in general, rather than the Hebrew language, and addresses the use of the imperative and the optative as opposed to the imperative and indicative. Expressions of the type "mos scripturarum" are common in Jerome and Bede to explain unusual grammatical constructions, but that is not what is at issue here. Bede is not talking about *scriptural* usage but *Hebrew* usage. The phrase "iuxta idioma hebreae linguae" is also not uncommon in Jerome, but he never suggests that in Hebrew the indicative is used for the imperative. The statement as a whole represents an original induction on the part of Bede, who has drawn his own conclusion about the Hebrew language by combining his knowledge of Latin grammar and the text of the Vulgate, which he knows is very often derived from Hebrew usage.[27] We can only imagine the impact such a statement could have had on Bede's readers: because he presents seemingly new information about Hebrew usage as compared with Latin usage, one might conclude that Bede himself had knowledge of Hebrew. The fact that Bede makes such a statement based on personal observation demonstrates his comfort discussing Hebrew on his own authority; he likely believed he had some knowledge of Hebrew as he did in the case of Greek. This brief overview shows why Bede's readers – from the eighth to the nineteenth century – could easily suppose that Bede had a real knowledge of Hebrew. Bede felt comfortable enough in his knowledge of Hebrew to refer to it throughout his commentaries, drawing together often disparate comments from Jerome, making original observations, and even dissenting from Jerome. The full force of his confidence in his understanding is seen when someone dared to challenge his conclusions derived from his understanding of Hebrew.

Perhaps the most significant and pointed rhetorical use of Hebrew in the writings of Bede concerns the age of the world. Bede's claim to merely follow in the footsteps of the fathers is most suspect in the case of chronology, as few of his patristic predecessors wrote anything on the subject.[28] Lacking a direct model to follow, Bede's original deductions and calculations in his works on time and the calendar led him to suggest a new figure for the age of the world; he was thus perceived as undermining established

27 As Kendall points out, some of Bede's examples are in fact from the Greek New Testament, "But, of course, the phrasing in Greek or Aramaic is influenced by the idiom of the Old, which is Bede's point" (trans. *Bede: On Genesis*, 143).
28 Wallis, "Bede and Science" and "Introduction" to *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*.

eschatology. Although he draws upon the work of a number of fathers, he follows none of them directly and ultimately rests his authority on the Hebrew Truth itself in direct opposition to the Septuagint, which in this context he debases as an inaccurate, Jewish text. Bede is so confident in the foundation of the Hebrew Truth that he departs from the work of Jerome, Augustine, and others, only to turn around and line those same authorities up behind his own view.

In addition to Bede's role as biblical commentator, he was also the foremost authority on the calendar in the Middle Ages. His decision to employ Dionysus Exiguus's dating scheme starting at the birth of Christ established the use of *anno domini* as the norm for dating years in Western Europe, and his comprehensive *Reckoning of Time* served as the foundational work on the Latin calendar until the Renaissance.[29] Early in his career, Bede sought to fill a gap in the corpus of Christian learning by writing a concise introduction to the calendar, *On Times*.[30] This short computistical manual would allow clerics to understand the reasoning behind the dating of Easter.[31] At the end of this highly influential text, Bede appended a short *Chronicle*, which traces the highlights of world history from creation to his own time.[32] This *Chronicle* begins with an overview of the six ages of the world, the sixth and current age having begun at the Incarnation, a concept not original to Bede. Like so many of Bede's works, this *Chronicle* represents a synthesis, modelled in great part on the fourth-century *Chronicon* of Eusebius of Caesarea as translated into Latin by Jerome, combined with the chronicle found in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* – which itself combined Eusebius's dates with Augustine's scheme of six ages of the world.[33] The numerical figures in both Eusebius-Jerome and Isidore are based on the Septuagint; Augustine does not particularly care about literal dates. Bede's innovation in his *Chronicle* was recalculating the individual years that made up the dates leading to the Incarnation based solely on the information found in Jerome's translation

29 Wallis, "Bede and Science"; Declercq, *Anno Domini*, 169.
30 Both of Bede's treatises on time are published in Jones, ed., *Bedae opera de temporibus*; reprinted in CCSL 123B.
31 Wallis, trans., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, lxiv.
32 Mommsen, ed., in MGH AA 13 (Berlin, 1898), 223–354; this is reprinted in Jones' CCSL edition of Bede's works on time.
33 Wallis, lxiii–lxxi; Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 17–34.

of the Bible – the Hebrew Truth.[34] As a result of recalculating these figures, Bede offered a new age for the world. Where the Eusebius-Jerome *Chronicon* placed the Incarnation at *anno mundi* 5199, Bede's calculation placed it at 3952; he removed 1247 years from the traditionally accepted age of the world.

Bede's radical reconfiguration, produced out of strict reverence for the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, was apparently not well received by some. The popular opinion had developed that each of the ages of the world was roughly a millennium long, based on the fact that Augustine outlined six ages of the world and that in the established chronicles Christ was born in the sixth millennium. Bede's new figure of Christ's birth in 3952 seemed to suggest that the Incarnation did not occur in the sixth age of the world, and therefore, might seem to undermine the six-age scheme altogether. As a result of his recalculations, Bede was apparently accused of heresy in England; all that remains of the controversy is Bede's heated letter to one Plegwine responding to the charge, in which he concisely outlines his logic and reckoning for his figures.[35]

This letter represents one of the clearest moments showing Bede coming into his own as an authority and church father in his own right, vehemently defending his original work where he has clearly departed from the footsteps of the fathers.[36] He opens the letter by questioning how on earth he could be charged with heresy or be said to deny that the Incarnation occurred in the sixth age. He channels the spirit of Jerome here, asserting his own authority because of its base in the Hebrew Truth, deriding those whose linguistic abilities are inferior to his, and equating the Septuagint with its dubious Jewish translators in contrast to Jerome, "our Christian translator."

34 Daniel McCarthy has recently argued that Bede in fact borrowed these figures from Adomnan's copy of the Iona Annals. McCarthy's article came to my attention too late to be given full consideration here; nevertheless, if McCarthy's thesis is correct, Bede's rhetorical posturing which I outline below becomes even more impressive; "Bede's Primary Source for the Vulgate Chronology."
35 Wallis, "Bede and Science," 120–1. Wallis is skeptical as to the seriousness of the charge of heresy; the only evidence we have of it is Bede's own letter. Nevertheless, the vehemence with which Bede attacks the charge shows its importance to Bede. See Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 35–64.
36 Ray, *Bede, Rhetoric, and the Creation of Christian Latin Culture*; ibid., "Cicero and Bede."

In quo annorum series iuxta **hebraicam ueritatem**, ubi LXX interpretibus longe breuior habetur, erat annotata, ita ut usque ad Aduentum Saluatoris in carne nec quinque annorum millia sint completa. Suadebamque illi fraternae, fateor, charitatis et ipsius **ueritatis** intuitu ut Scripturae Sacrae post Christianum nobis interpretem translatae potius quam Iudaicis interpretationibus uel chronographorum imperitiae, fidem accommodare disceret, digito ostendens quod Eusebius in descriptione temporum neque **hebraicam ueritatem** neque LXX translatorum per omnia sit editionem secutus.[37]

(In this work [*On Times*], the sequence of years was given according to the **Hebrew Truth**; this is far shorter than the Septuagint, so that up to the Advent of the Savior in the flesh, five thousand years were not completed. And I believe that I advised, in consideration of fraternal charity and **truth** itself, that credence be given to the Holy Scripture as it is translated by our Christian translator [Jerome], rather than to Jewish translators [Septuagint], or the ignorance of chronographers, pointing out how Eusebius in his designation of times followed neither the **Hebrew Truth** nor the Septuagint in every instance.)[38] (my emphasis added)

Taking a clever rhetorical turn, which again he inherits from Jerome, Bede is able to elevate the Hebrew Truth while at the same time distancing himself from the Jews.[39] The Hebrew Bible is not the suspect Jewish text: the Septuagint is.

Bede also learned from Jerome that one cannot completely denigrate the Jews if one is to rely on the authority of the Hebrew text. Bede quotes Jerome's commentary on Isaiah to counter the hypothetical objection that the Jews may have maliciously altered their texts to deceive Christians; picking up Jerome's rhetoric here and below, Bede contrasts the notion of the truth (*ueritas*) and specifically the *hebraica ueritas* with what is falsified or mendacious: "Quod si aliquis dixerit Hebraeos libros postea a Iudaeis esse **falsatos**, eosque dum nostris inuident auctoritatem sibi abstulisse **ueritatem**, audiat Origenem …" (Should anyone say that the

37 Bede, *Epistola ad Pleguinam*, ed. Jones, 617–26.
38 Wallis, trans., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 406.
39 For a study of Bede's ambiguous portrayal of the Jews, see Scheil, *The Footsteps of Israel*, 30–97.

Hebrew books were **falsified** later on by the Jews and that they, when they begrudge authority to us, deprive themselves of the **truth**, let them listen to Origen …), who demonstrates that this cannot be the case.[40] Bede cites the Jewish historian Josephus, who verifies the shorter chronological figures and the fact that the Jews did not falsify the texts, and Jerome: "Audiat beatum Hieronimum quod non Hebraeos sed Graecos codices dicat esse **falsatos**" (Let him listen to the blessed Jerome who says that the Greek, and not the Hebrew manuscripts are **false**).[41] Finally, Bede directly invokes the trials Jerome suffered as a result of his translation from the Hebrew as a model for himself:

Quippe qui in tam necessaria diuinae Scripturae translatione paene a Latinis simul et Hebraeis est lapidibus oppressus – ab Hebraeis quidem quod eis inridendi Christianos et calumniandi pro codicibus **mendosis** occasio foret ablata; a Latinis autem quod noua eis et insolita tam etsi meliora pro ueteribus ingererentur et solitis.[42]

(Indeed, on account of such a necessary translation of Holy Scriptures, [Jerome] was pelted with stones by both the Latins and the Hebrews, almost at the same time – by the Hebrews, because he robbed them of the opportunity to mock and revile the Christians on account of their **fallacious** books, by the Latins because he had introduced new and unfamiliar, albeit better, things in place of old and familiar ones.)[43]

Although forging his own path, Bede envisions himself following in the footsteps of Jerome's persecution, even by fellow Christians, for introducing material that is "new and unfamiliar, albeit better." In his later, much longer *De temporum ratione* Bede more explicitly draws attention to the novelty of his enterprise: "Should anyone be annoyed that I have presumed to try my hand at this subject, since I have labored to confect a new work out of what can be found scattered here and there in the writings of the ancients, then let him listen to what St Augustine says, 'It is necessary

40 Bede, *Epistola ad Pleguinam*, 620; Wallis, trans., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 409.
41 Bede, *Epistola ad Pleguinam*, 621; Wallis, trans., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 410.
42 Bede, *Epistola ad Pleguinam*, 623.
43 Wallis, trans., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 412.

that many men make many books ....'"[44] When discussing his conception of world chronology, Bede is forced to acknowledge the newness of the undertaking, which he justifies by citing his adherence to the truth. The tradition – even the well-worn path of the fathers – cannot be followed when it is shown to be erroneous.

In the *Letter to Plegwine*, Bede is further able to muster Augustine in support of his case. Quoting *The City of God,* Bede makes the reasonable, philological claim that when disagreement is found between two texts "ei linguae potius credatur unde est in aliam per interpretes facta translatio" (greater faith should be put in [the version] in the language from which the translation was made into another language by translators).[45] Although in principle Augustine supported the Septuagint over Jerome's new translation, he had to admit that in a case of disagreement, the text in the original language should be preferred.[46] This concession on Augustine's part is significant because the Septuagint carried the weight of tradition and, in some circles, divine inspiration. Over the course of his writings, Augustine generally sides with the Septuagint. Bede, however, is able to cherry-pick evidence to obscure the division on this issue between two of the most important Latin Fathers and use both in support of his own argument.

In the letter, Bede builds a rhetorical tour-de-force in defence of the Hebrew Truth and his reliance on it. He concludes by placing himself among the noble crowd of authorities whom he has cited to support his reliance on the Hebrew and rhetorically brackets this list with the words "Hebrew Truth" and "Hebrew language" (in bold):

> Agnoscas etiam ... qua ipse auctoritate assertionem meae computationis astruam: **hebraica** uidelicet, **ueritate**, per Originem prodita, per Hieronymum edita, per Augustinum laudata, et per Iosephum confirmata. Quibus ego in rebus talibus non ullos inuenio doctiores. Neque autem mirandum, laudabilem uirum Eusebium, quamuis miro sapiendi dicendique ingenio testam

44 Wallis, trans., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 4; "Si quem sane uel illud offendit cur aliquid de huiusmodi negotio temptare praesumpserim, quare de his quae sparsim in ueterum scriptis inueniri potuerant ipse nouum opus condere studuerim, audiat dicente sancto Augustino quia ideo necesse est plures a pluribus fieri libros..." *De temporum ratione*, ed. Jones, 265.
45 Bede, *Epistola ad Pleguinam*, 622; Wallis, trans., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 410.
46 Goodwin, *Take Hold of the Robe of a Jew*, 78–94.

> ferrumque, ut dicitur, conglutinare ualeret, non ualere tamen quod non didicerat, hoc est, **hebraeam** scire **linguam.**[47]
>
> (For you should know ... by what authority I build the assertion of my computation: namely by the **Hebrew Truth,** recorded by Origen, published by Jerome, praised by Augustine, confirmed by Josephus. I have found none more learned in such matters than these. Nor is it to be wondered at that that praiseworthy man, Eusebius, although he was able, as they say, to bind iron and brick by his marvelous talent in speaking and thinking, nevertheless could not do what he had not learned to do, that is, to know the **Hebrew language.**)[48]

Bede places himself among this group of "the most learned on these matters" who support the Hebrew Truth, a group of scholars he ranks more highly than Eusebius, excluded for the singular reason that he did not know Hebrew. The rhetorical implication looms large that the other scholars, including Bede, know Hebrew so that their opinions concerning the Old Testament carry much more weight. The charges of heresy brought against Bede, such as they were, are wrong-headed because they are due to ignorance of the Hebrew language. Of course, when we think of eighth-century Northumbria – or all of Western Europe, even – we generally imagine that ignorance of Hebrew was widespread, if not universal. This is not how Bede imagines the situation. Like Jerome, Bede is confident enough in his understanding of Hebrew, and its special claim to truth, to draw a line in the sand: he places himself squarely on one side, backed up by Jerome, Augustine, Origen, and Josephus, in opposition to the praiseworthy – though ultimately misguided – Eusebius, the Jews who translated the Septuagint, and the foolish monk who accused Bede of heresy.

It has long been established that Bede's knowledge of Hebrew is derivative and that all his information can be traced primarily to the Latin texts of Jerome. Sourcing passages, however, should not be an end in itself. The fact that the question of Bede's knowledge of Hebrew was ever raised is suggestive of the historical perception of his acquaintance with Hebrew and how deep and frequent his borrowings from Jerome are. Furthermore, not all of Bede's references to Hebrew can be classified as

47 Bede, *Epistola ad Pleguinam*, 625.
48 Wallis, trans., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 414.

simply derivative. Most of Bede's information originates with Jerome, but he uses it to make his own observations about the Bible on the basis of his understanding of the Hebrew language. A modern conception of what constitutes knowledge of a language ought not to obscure the value of the texts examined here as evidence for language contact by medieval readers. Bede, following Jerome, insists on the importance of Hebrew in biblical study; in doing so, he presents Hebrew as accessible even in the farthest corner of the earth. But in addition to following and proclaiming the importance of Jerome's translation, Bede was also a trailblazer himself. As recent scholarship has shown, the old image of Bede – which originates with Bede himself – merely following in the footsteps of the fathers must be taken with a healthy grain of salt. The fact that Bede made a point of engaging with texts and subjects in a way no previous church father had, shows he was not simply a compiler. This is patently clear when considering the role of Hebrew in his exegesis and its importance in his study of the calendar. Standing on Jerome's shoulders and waving the flag of the Hebrew Truth, Bede traced new paths of Christian scholarship, even proposing a new date for the age of the world. And he could dismiss those who disagreed with him because they were ignorant of Hebrew.

4 Building Anti-Semitism in Bede

KATHY LAVEZZO

As Nicholas Howe has observed, despite Bede's fame as a writer deeply invested in questions of time and date, "throughout Bede's writing there runs an abiding concern with ideas of place."[1] The Northumbrian scholar famous for his contributions to calculating the date of Easter, chronicle writing, and the adoption of the *anno domini* method, also emphasized issues of geography and location.[2] For example, Bede's work on dating had a crucial spatial dimension: the *computus* mapped the communal identity of the faithful via its shared observance of Easter throughout Christian territories.[3] And, in Bede's renowned chronicle, the marginal positioning of Britain "on the mental map of Christendom" in the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (hereafter *EH*) performs a key structural role in his account of historical action, shifting the vantage point of one surveying Christendom from a Roman gazing upon the distant northern land of the Britons to an Anglo-Saxon "looking from the island south towards Rome and the remains of the old empire."[4]

For Howe, Bede's cultural geography is particularly noteworthy for its emphasis on natural spaces, on landscapes and topographies, as opposed to man-made places. For example, through an extended discussion of English landscape in the *EH*, Howe shows how Bede offers his readers not only "a deep geographical setting for historical exposition" but also

1 Howe, *Writing the Map*, 126.
2 Ibid.
3 On the *computus* see also Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*.
4 Howe, *Writing the Map*, 133.