

A Methodological Discussion Concerning the Liveness of the Aramaic of the Zohar

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Starting from Scholem, scholars dealt at large with two questions regarding the Zoharic Aramaic: 1) Do the linguistic data in the Zoharic corpus provide tools for the identification of the time and place of the composition of the Zohar? 2) Is the Aramaic of the Zohar artificial? The discussions on these two questions often intersect. However, it is by no means trivial what the symptoms are to diagnose a language as artificial, or even what artificiality means in this context. The goal of the current paper, therefore, is to clarify first the nature of this question and the meaning of the term "artificial" when we discuss the Aramaic of the Zohar.

In light of this, this paper aims at understanding this literary Aramaic for its own sake, by shifting the attention to the linguistic innovations exhibited in this composition. Instead of considering them as "mistakes", it tries to understand which type of linguistic knowledge they reveal. The main claim of the paper, accordingly, is that languages can live in different mediums, and to represent different types of linguistic knowledge.