

PALAEO-HEBREW.

Most of the writing in the lead books is a form of Palaeo-Hebrew script, used originally in the first temple era [about 950 -600 BCE], but retained for formal and sacred use in the time of the second temple [about 520-BCE-70 CE].

At Qumran pieces of Torah scrolls were found that were written in Palaeo-Hebrew, and the remains of one copy of Job in Palaeo-Hebrew. Some texts written in the later Hebrew script had only the sacred Name written in Palaeo-Hebrew, for example, the Psalms scroll from Cave 11, which was written about 30-50CE.

It is possible that the early Christians continued to use Palaeo-Hebrew for their sacred texts. Eusebius, a bishop in Palestine in the early fourth century, knew of Christians who read Psalm 110.3 in way that implies they were using a Paleo-Hebrew text. In his *Commentary on the Psalms* he said they understood 'from the womb', *mrhm*, as 'from Mary', *mmrym*, giving, 'I have begotten you from Mary'. This would be easy to do if they were using the Paleo-Hebrew script, since the letters h and y in this script are similar in form.

When the Jews returned from Babylon towards the end of the sixth century BCE, they adopted the Assyrian, *Ashuri*, script, which is the Hebrew alphabet used today.

Tradition links this change to the work of Ezra, the founder of 'the great synagogue', the assembly of 120 scholars over many generations who shaped the ways of the second temple community. Some scholars now think that this 'great synagogue' founded by Ezra was not a formally recognised group but rather just a way of describing the people who influenced the development of Judaism in the period between the prophets and the rabbis.

Continuing to use Palaeo-Hebrew could have been the way that some people showed their rejection of the new ways. There were certainly many people who regarded the whole period as an era of divine wrath.

Traditions preserved in the Enoch literature, especially in *1 Enoch*, regarded the 'great synagogue' as apostates whose deeds were apostate, *1 Enoch* 93.8. They rebuilt the temple but offered polluted bread there, and both the people and their leaders, described as the sheep and the shepherds, had lost their spiritual sight, *1 Enoch* 89.73-74. They were probably the people who changed the holy writings, altering and perverting the words of righteousness', *1 Enoch* 104.10, also *1 Enoch* 98.14-15 and *1 Enoch* 99.1-2.

John's gospel often presents Jesus as someone who was restoring the older ways. He called himself the good shepherd, John 10.11, whose sheep knew his voice, John 10.3. John also says that the notice on Jesus' cross said 'Jesus the Preserver, the king of the

Jews', John 19.19. This is usually translated 'Jesus of Nazareth', but what John wrote was *Nazōraios* which means the Preserver. 'Of Nazareth' is *Nazarēnos*.

The Jews called the Christians *Nozrim*, so their contemporaries saw them as 'restorers or preservers'. If the Christians also regarded themselves as 'restorers' or 'preservers' of traditions that had been wrongly abandoned or distorted, they might have expressed that sentiment by using the Palaeo-Hebrew script.

One thing we know for certain is that the Paleo-Hebrew script was used on coins minted by the Jewish nationalists who fought over many generations to liberate their land from occupying powers. Unlike coins minted by their Gentiles rulers, the Jewish coins had no human faces. Most of the symbols on them were associated with the temple, and many of the symbols also appear on the lead books.

Adopting the ancient script may have been a sign that the nationalists were not only resisting contemporary occupying powers but also aspiring to restore the older ways of the independent kingdom, as it had been many centuries earlier under the kings of the house of David.

Palaeo-Hebrew was first used again on the coins of the Hasmoneans, who ruled over the restored kingdom from the mid-second to the mid-first century BCE. It was also used on the coins minted by the leaders of the first war against Rome, which ended with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 CE. Palaeo-Hebrew was used finally on the coins minted by Bar Kochba, the leader of the second war against Rome in 132-135CE.

Some of the last coins with the Palaeo-Hebrew script also bore an image of the temple. The stylised image probably represented the holy of holies rather than the temple itself. There are good reasons to believe that the image on these coins depicted the temple as it they thought it had been in the very earliest times, or even its predecessor, the tabernacle made by Moses, rather than the later temple which the Romans had recently destroyed.



The image on the coins was the four pillars that supported the veil of the holy of holies. There are no descriptions of the pillars of later temple facade or its holy of

holies, but Moses' tabernacle had *four* pillars for the holy of holies and *five* for the outer entrance, Exodus 26.32-37. The ark of the covenant was hidden behind the veil, but on the Bar Kochba coins, the veil has gone and the ark can be seen. The ark disappeared before the second temple was built, but people said it would be restored in the temple of the Messiah, *Numbers Rabbah* XV.10.

The reappearance of the ark in the holy of holies was a powerful political and religious statement by Bar Kochba, implying that the pure religion that had been abandoned just before the first temple was destroyed would soon be restored.

This image was also the central vision in the Book of Revelation, preceding the vision of the birth of the Messiah: 'Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple', Revelation 11.19. This suggests that the Christians who preserved and used the Book of Revelation may have shared the aims of the Jewish nationalists and been a part of that movement.

Several aspects of the lead books suggest this. The Palaeo-Hebrew script is one, and another is the range of temple symbolism found on both the lead books and the coins. The form of the symbols, however, is not always identical, and there are several as-yet unidentified symbols on the lead books. What distinguishes the lead books from the nationalist coins, however, is that the lead books have several examples of a human face accompanied by the Palaeo-Hebrew script.