# Ambiguities

*vir bonus et prudens versus reprehendet inertis,*

*culpabit duros, incomptis adlinet atrum*

*transverso calamo signum, ambitiosa recidet*

*ornamenta, parum claris lucem dare coget,*

*arguet ambigue dictum, mutanda notabit:*

*fiet Aristarchus;*

An honest and sensible man will censure useless lines,

he will find fault with harsh ones; if they are graceless, he will draw

his pen across and smear them with a black stroke; he will cut away pretentious

ornament; he will force you to flood the obscure with light,

will convict the ambiguous phrase, will mark what should be changed,

will prove an Aristarchus.

(Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 445-450)[[1]](#footnote-1)

## Introduction

In his treatise *de sophisticis elenchi*s (“On the Refutation of the Sophists”) Aristotle classifies the fallacies which underlie the Sophists’ arguments,[[2]](#footnote-2) distinguishing between linguistic and nonlinguistic fallacies. The fallacies derived from language are divided by Aristotle into six:[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. ὁμωνυμία (*aequivocatio*, homonym) – when a word has more than one meaning.
2. ἀμφιβολία (*amphibolia*, amphiboly) – when a complex expression has more than one possible syntactic interpretation.
3. Σύνθεσις (*composito*, composition) – when parts of a complex expression, which are not intended to signify a compound, are interpreted in that way. At times this is a result of missing punctuation.
4. Διαίρεσις (*divisio*, division) – the opposite of composition, which also includes division by punctuation.
5. προσῳδία (*accentus*, accent) – when expressions with different meanings can be mistaken for one another because they are written identically except for the accent or aspiration.
6. σχῆμα λέξεως (*figura dictionis*, figure of speech) – when an expression intended to indicate one category can be interpreted as indicating another.

For Aristotle, classifying the various kinds of ambiguity is the best way to confront and undermine the arguments of the Sophists by exposing their intrinsic fallacies. Yet such a classification also has a hermeneutical potential. In the twenty-fifth chapter of his *Poetics*, Aristotle demonstrates how one can harness ambiguities in order to solve problems in the Homeric text. Some difficulties, for example, could be resolved by choosing alternative readings based on an awareness of the different ways of manipulating language.

In this chapter I wish to examine how Homeric commentators and the rabbis dealt with ambiguities stemming from the first four categories outlined by Aristotle, even though they do not necessarily use the same terminology.

The first part of the chapter will address homonyms and *amphibolia*. I will examine cases in which the Homeric scholars explicitly note that a certain verse is ἀμφίβολον (*amphibolon*). On the rabbinic side, I will focus on cases where we are told that “the matter is balanced” (הדבר שקול) or “we do not know whether A or B” (אין אנו יודעים אם א' או ב'). I aim to demonstrate that there is great resemblance between both the kind of ambiguities the rabbis and the Homeric scholars identify, and in the way they decide between the two possible readings.

The second part of the chapter will consider σύνθεσις (*synthesis*) and διαίρεσις (*diairesis*), or, more specifically, on ambiguities stemming from punctuation. I will focus on Nicanor’s comments, which deal with verses on which he comments that “the expression could be consigned to either side” (ἑκατέρωσε δύναται προσδίδοσθαι), and on Issi b. Yehuda’s enumeration of verses which have no adjudication (דברים שאין להם הכרע). I argue that Nicanor and Issi b. Yehuda, both active in the second century CE, assume that there are cases in which it is not possible to decide whether an expression standing between two parts of a sentence (or between two sentences) should be read with what precedes it or with what follows it.

## The Matter is Balanced

For Aristotle *amphibolia* is only one of the categories of ambiguity. Yet for later Homeric scholars and grammarians, *amphibolia* is the main category of ambiguity and often subsumes the category of homonyms as well. Thus, for example, the first century CE rhetor Trypho defines *amphibolia* as follows:[[4]](#footnote-4)

Ἀμφιβολία ἐστὶ λέξις ἢ λόγος δύο καὶ πλείονα πράγματα δηλοῦσα· λέξις μὲν γὰρ εἴρηται, ὅτι αἱ ὁμωνυμίαι ἀμφίβολοί εἰσιν, οἷον Αἴας, ἄδηλον γάρ, πότερον τῶν Αἰάντων δηλοῖ. λόγος δέ, ἐπεὶ καὶ ἐν λόγῳ ἀμφιβολίαι εἰσίν, οἷον

ἅρματα δ’ ἔγκλιναν πρὸς ἐνώπια παμφανόωντα· (*Il.* 8.435)

καὶ δός δέ τέ μ’ ἄνδρα ἑλεῖν, καὶ ἐς ὁρμὴν ἔγχεος ἐλθεῖν (*Il.* 5.118).

Amphibolia is a word (λέξις) or sentence (λόγος) which means two or more matters. A word – for it is said that homonyms are amphibolic. For example, ‘Aias,’ as it is unclear who of the two Aias is meant. Sentence – for in a sentence there are also amphibolies, for example: “They leaned the chariot against the shining wall” (*Il.* 8.435) and “Grant me that I may kill this man and come within spearcast” (*Il.* 5.118).

In his definition, Trypho adduces three examples which represent three kinds of ambiguities:

1. **Homonym**: According to Trypho, a homonym is an *amphibolia* of a word – a word which can refer to two or more distinct matters. Thus the name ‘Aias’ might refer to Aias son of Telamon or Aias son of Oileus. Quite a few comments in the scholia note that the names of places or people are homonyms; the scholars try to identify the exact reference.[[5]](#footnote-5)
2. **Ambiguity regarding which noun an adjective modifies**: In the verse “they leaned the chariot against the shining wall” it is unclear whether the chariot or the wall are shining. This example will be discussed in detail below.
3. **Ambiguity regarding the identification of the subject and the object**: This ambiguity is exemplified by the verse “Grant me that I may kill this man and come within spearcast”, as we will presently see.

In the following I will consider these three kinds of ambiguities, which represent a major part of the ambiguities discussed by both the Greek scholars and the Rabbis.

### 2.1 Amphibolia

We can open our discussion by analyzing Trypho’s final example. In *Il.* 5.118, Diomedes prays to Athena to help him defeat Pandarus, who had struck him with an arrow. The scholia comments on this verse:

Sch. A *Il.* 5.118c. ex. καὶ ἐς ὁρμὴν ἔγχεος ἐλθεῖν[:](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/P10.html) […] ἢ ἐμὲ ποίησον ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ἄφεσιν δόρατος, τουτέστιν δύνασθαι ἀφεῖναι δόρυ· κάμνει γὰρ ἤδη. ἢ εἰς τὴν ὁρμὴν τοῦ ἐμοῦ ἔγχους ποίησον αὐτὸν ὑπαντῆσαι.

“Grant me that I may kill this man and come within spearcast” […] Or ‘do that *I* come to cast the spear’, that is, that I can cast the spear, for he was already hit. Or ‘do that *he* comes within the reach of my spear.’

The *amphibolia* is created by the uncertainty concerning who is the subject of the second part of the sentence, since the verb is in the infinitive (ἐλθεῖν, to come) and has no explicit subject. According to the first possibility, Diomedes, the speaker, continues to be the subject and therefore the phrase should be read as “make it so that *I* come to cast my spear”. Diomedes is thus troubled by his injury, and hence he prays that he will have enough strength to cast his spear and hit Pandarus. According to the second reading, the subject is not Diomedes but rather Pandarus. Diomedes prays that Pandarus will come within the range of his spear.

In this case, the scholiast does not determine the correct reading. Yet, as we shall presently see, in most cases the commentators do indeed decide in favor of one of the two readings.

At times, the commentators resolve the ambiguity by considering the continuation of the verse. A good example can be found in the comment on the beginning of Iliad 14 describing the terrible scene Nestor sees when he comes out of his tent:

Sch. bT *Il.* 14. 14-5. ex.: [<](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html)τοὺς μὲν ὀρινομένους,[>](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html) τοὺς δὲ κλονέοντας [<](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html)ὄπισθε, [/](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/P3.html) Τρῶας ὑπερθύμους[>](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html)[:](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/P10.html) τῇ ἐπιφορᾷ διέστειλε τὴν ἀμφιβολίαν, ὡς [„](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/Q1.html)ἡ δ’ ἑτέρη θέρεϊ προρέει[“](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/Q2.html) [(](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html)22.151[)](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html)· ἐδήλωσε γὰρ ὡς ἡ πρώτη [(](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html)cf. 22.149[)](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html) χειμῶνος ῥεῖ.

“Men driven to flight, and others harrying them in confusion,/ the great-hearted Trojans”: with the following clause (*epiphora*) he (i.e., Homer) dispelled the ambiguity. Like “But the other in the summer-time runs water”. For he clarified that the first [river] runs in the winter.

When verse 14 – “men driven to flight, and others harrying them in confusion” – is read out of context, it is doubtful who is being driven in flight and who is harrying. That is, we cannot identify the subject of each of the participles.

According to the commentator, Homer resolved this ambiguity in the next verse, which describes who was doing the chasing: “the great-hearted Trojans.” Thus the ambiguity can be resolved from the immediate context; the continuation of the sentence (*epiphora*) explains its beginning.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The commentator provides another example in which the continuation of the verse clarifies an ambiguous beginning. In Iliad 22 there is a description of two springs that are the sources of the river Skamandros. The first spring is said to have hot water and the second cold water. However, in the remainder of the verse, the second spring is also said to flow in the summertime. According to the commentator, this later phrase implies that the first spring runs only in the wintertime.

Alongside solutions based on the immediate context, there are also many cases in which the commentators, and especially Aristarchus, resolve ambiguities by referring to a verse from elsewhere in the text. This is in fact an application of a rule attributed to Aristarchus: “clarifying Homer from Homer.” It can be regarded as part of what Aristarchus terms τόπος διδασκαλικός (*topos didaskalikos*), that is, a place (in the text) from which the poet intends to clarify other verses.[[7]](#footnote-7) I have dealt with the importance of this method in the first chapter. Here I will focus on cases in which one verse resolves an ambiguity in another verse. As we will see below, most of the solutions to ambiguity in rabbinic literature are similarly based on this method.

In *Il.* 15.119, after Ares declares that he intends to descend from Olympus and join the battle, we read: ὥς φάτο καί ῥ’ ἵππους κέλετο Δεῖμόν τε Φόβον τε [/](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/P3.html) ζευγνύμε (“So he spoke, and the horses he ordered Fear and Terror/ to harness”). On this this the scholia notes:[[8]](#footnote-8)

Sch. A *Il.* 15. 119. Ariston.[:](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/CB2.html) ὥς φάτο καί ῥ’ ἵππους κέλετο Δεῖμόν τε Φόβον τε [[/](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/P3.html) ζευγνύμεν][:](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/P10.html) ὅτι ἀντὶ τοῦ Δείμῳ καὶ Φόβῳ, καὶ A ὅτι ἐντεῦθεν ἡ πλάνη γέγονε τοῖς δεξαμένοις Δεῖμον καὶ Φόβον ἵππων ὀνόματα. AT εἰσὶ δὲ Ἄρεως υἱοί· A ἐν ἄλλοις γὰρ ῥητῶς φησι· [„](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/Q1.html)τῷ δὲ Φόβος φίλος υἱός[“](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/Q2.html) [(](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html)13.299[)](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html). AT

τὸ δὲ γένος τῆς ἀμφιβολίας ἔστιν εὑρεῖν καὶ ἀλλαχῇ· [„](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/Q1.html)τόνδε τέ μ’ ἄνδρα ἑλεῖν καὶ ἐς ὁρμὴν ἔγχεος ἐλθεῖν[“](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/Q2.html) [(](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html)5.118[)](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html), καὶ ἐν Ὀδυσσείᾳ [„](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/Q1.html)αἰδὼς δ’ αὖ νέον ἄνδρα γεραίτερον ἐξερέεσθαι[“](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/Q2.html) [(](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html)Od. 3.24[)](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html), ὅπερ ἀγνοήσαντές τινες ἔγραψαν [„](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/Q1.html)νέῳ ἀνδρί[“](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/Q2.html). A

“So he spoke, and the horses he ordered Fear and Terror [/ to harness]”: [There is a *diplē*,] because [it says “Fear and Terror”] instead of “*to* Fear and Terror”. And because from here originated the error for those who assumed that Fear and Terror were the names of horses. They are, however, the sons of Ares. For he (sc. Homer) says explicitly in other verses: “and with him Terror his beloved son” (*Il*. 13.299).

And this kind of ambiguity can be found elsewhere: “I may kill this man and come within spearcast” (5.118). And in the Odyssey: “It is shameful that a young man question an elder” (*Od.* 3.24). Some, having misunderstood it, wrote “*for* a young man.”

In the current verse, both ἵππους (horses) and Δεῖμόν and Φόβον (Fear and Terror) appear in the accusative case. Therefore the sentence could be read in two ways. According to one reading, Δεῖμόν and Φόβον should be understood as if they were in dative case: “and he gave the order to Fear and Terror (Δείμῳ καὶ Φόβῳ) to harness the horses.” Thus Fear and Terror are the sons of Ares. Another possibility is that Fear and Terror function in apposition to the horses: “and he ordered to harness Fear and Terror, the horses.”

According to Aristarchus, the first reading is the correct one since in *Il*. 13.299 the Greek Merionesis is compared to Ares who “strides into battle with Terror his beloved son.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Homer thus explicitly identifies Terror as Ares’ son and it is therefore clear that in *Il.* 5.119 Fear and Terror are not the names of horses. This is another example of the way Aristarchus “clarifies Homer from Homer,” by using a verse from outside the immediate textual context to solve an ambiguity.

Although it is not explicitly stated here who assumed that Fear and Terror were the names of horses, we know from other sources that this was the poet and Homeric scholar Antimachus (fl. ca. 400 BCE).[[10]](#footnote-10) Thus for example of *Il.* 4.439-440 Aristarchus notes:

Sch. A. *Il.* 4.439-40. Ariston.[:](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/CB2.html) ὦρσε δὲ τοὺς μὲν Ἄρης [<](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html)—ἄμοτον μεμαυῖα[>](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html)[:](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/P10.html) αἱ διπλαῖ, […] ὅτι Δεῖμος καὶ Φόβος Ἄρεως υἱοί. πλανηθεὶ δὲ Ἀντίμαχος ἵππων Ἄρεως ὀνόματα ἀποδέδωκεν [„](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/Q1.html)Δεῖμος τ’ ἠδὲ Φόβος πόδας αἰνετώ, υἷε θυέλλης[“](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/Q2.html).[[11]](#footnote-11)

“Ares drove these on … [and Terror drove them, and Fear, and Hate whose wrath is relentless]”: [There is a *diplē*,] because Fear and Terror are the sons of Ares. Antimachus is misled, [since] he gave the horses of Ares’ names: “may Fear and Terror be praised for their feet, sons of storm.”

In this verse it is evident that Fear and Terror are divine entities. Aristarchus thus notes that in his poem Antimachus says that the horses of Ares are called Fear and Terror, and concludes that this identification was the result of an erroneous reading of *Il.* 15.119, which Antimachus failed to consider in light of other less ambiguous verses. As Schironi wryly notes: “Aristarchus seems to be suggesting that a more careful reading would have saved Antimachus from turning minor deities into horses.”[[12]](#footnote-12) This is only one of a number of instances in which Aristarchus seeks to expose Antimachus’ mistaken readings of Homer.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Aristarchus notes at the end of the scholia to *Il*. 15.119 that Homer often employs this kind of ambiguity (γένος τῆς ἀμφιβολίας), citing two other such cases. The first example is taken from *Il.* 5.118, which we have already discussed above. In the second example, taken from the Odyssey, both νέον ἄνδρα (“young man”) and γεραίτερον (“elder”) appear in the accusative and thus the sentence could be read in two ways:[[14]](#footnote-14)

1. It is shameful that a young man question an elder
2. It is shameful that an elder question a young man

Aristarchus notes that there were some commentators who failed to notice Homer’s habitual use of this kind of ambiguity and therefore emended νέον ἄνδρα (‘young man’) in the accusative to νέῳ ἀνδρί (‘for a young man’) so that the meaning of the verse became unambiguous: “It is shameful for a young man to question an elder.”[[15]](#footnote-15) It would seem that the motivation for this emendation was moral, in order to prevent the alternative reading, which went in the face of the conventional social hierarchy. According to Aristarchus, however, there is no need for a textual emendation if one is aware of Homer’s style. It is the role of the commentator to decide what Homer’s intention was. And indeed from the immediate context it is clear that reading (A) is the most probable.

The final ambiguity to be examined troubled many ancient scholars. In *Il.* 8.435, following Zeus’ rebuke of Hera, returns her chariot to Olympus where the Horai (Ὥραι) untied the horses and “leaned the chariot against the shining wall” (ἅρματα δ’ ἔκλιναν πρὸς ἐνώπια παμφανόωντα). The scholia comments on this line:

Sch. Il 8. 435c. ex.[:](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/CB2.html) ἐνώπια παμφανόωντα[:](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/P10.html) […] τινὲς δὲ τὸ ἑξῆς ἅρματα παμφανόωντα· AbT

τί οὖν ἐστι τὸ [„](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/Q1.html)τόξον μὲν πρὸς σταθμὸν ἔκλινε πρὸς ἐνώπια παμφανόωντα[“](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/Q2.html) [(](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html)cf. *Od*. 22.120-1[)](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html); T

“The shining wall”: […] some [say that] the natural order is “the shining chariot (ἅρματα παμφανόωντα)” AbT

What then about the verse “he leaned the bow against the shining wall (πρὸς ἐνώπια παμφανόωντα)” (*Od*. 22.120-1)? T

The question facing the scholars was whether the adjective ‘shining’ (παμφανόωντα) in *Il.* 8.435 refers to the chariot or to the wall, since both nouns share the same case, gender and number. According to the first interpretation, which should, as we will presently see, be ascribed to Aristarchus, ‘shining’ refers to the chariot, even though the poetical word order puts it alongside the noun ‘wall.’

Following this interpretation, the T scholia includes a question raised by a later commentator that cites a verse from Odyssey 22. Both here and in Iliad 8 the exact same expression appears at the end of the verse: πρὸς ἐνώπια παμφανόωντα (“against the shining wall”). Yet in Odyssey 22 it is unambiguously evident that the adjective ‘shining’ refers to the wall. It would thus seem that this is the case too in Iliad 8.

On the other hand, Nicanor, of the 2nd century CE, follows Aristarchus’ reading:

Sch. A *Il.* 8.435b. Nic.: βραχὺ διασταλτέον ἐπὶ τὸ πρὸς ἐνώπια, ἵνα ᾖ ἅρματα παμφανόωντα. [[16]](#footnote-16)

One should pause shortly after “against the wall,” so that it would be “shining chariot.”

According to Nicanor, one should add the punctuation mark ὑποδιαστολή, known also as βραχεῖα διαστολή. This is the eighth and final mark in the punctuation system developed by Nicanor, which designates the lightest pause in the reading, one moment (χρόνος) long. In the current case, this mark separates ‘wall’ and ‘shining,’ clarifying that the adjective refers back to the chariot: ἅρματα δ’ ἔκλιναν πρὸς ἐνώπια**,** παμφανόωντα (“and leaned the chariot against the wall**,** shining”).[[17]](#footnote-17)

In the scholia on this verse as it has come down to us, we do not find the reason why Aristarchus and Nicanor preferred to regard ‘shining’ as referring to the chariot and not the wall. Yet an explanation could be found in the scholia to *Il*. 23.509, which describes how Diomedes “vaulted down to the ground from his shining chariot” (ἐκ δίφροιο χαμαὶ θόρε παμφανόωντο):

Sch. A *Il.* 23.509a1. Ariston.: δίφροιο ... παμφανόωντος[:](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/P10.html) ὅτι τοῦτο διακρίνει τὴν ἐν ἄλλοις [(](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html)sc. 8.435[)](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html) ἀμφιβολίαν, [„](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/Q1.html)[<](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html)ἅρματα δ’ ἔκλιναν[>](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html) πρὸς [{](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB3.html)τὸ[}](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB3.html) ἐνώπια παμφανόωντα[“](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/Q2.html)· δείκνυται γὰρ τὰ ἅρματα παμφανόωντα.

“Chariot … shining”: [There is a *diplē*,] because this verse adjudicates (διακρίνει) the ambiguity in other verses: “leaned the chariot against the shining wall.” For he indicates that the chariot is shining.

According to Aristarchus, in *Il.* 23.509 ‘shining’ clearly and unambiguously refers to the chariot and therefore could function as a kind of *topos didaskalikos* and resolve (διακρίνει) the ambiguity in other verses, such as *Il.* 8.435. The use here of the verb διακρίνει with the verse as its subject is very similar to the way the term להכריע (‘adjudicate’) often functions in rabbinic literature, as we will see below.[[18]](#footnote-18)

### 2.2 And We Do Not Know

The Rabbis at times acknowledge that a verse can be read in two ways. One of the main terms used to designate a syntactical ambiguity in a verse is ואין אנו יודעים (‘and we do not know’) or איני יודע (‘I do not know’), followed by detailing the two possible readings and then adducing another verse that resolves the problem. The commentator thus admits that he cannot solve the problem without help from the text itself.

In Ex. 18:17 we read:

וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה לִקְרַאת חֹתְנוֹ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ וַיִּשַּׁק לוֹ וַיִּשְׁאֲלוּ אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וַיָּבֹאוּ הָאֹהֱלָה

Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, he bowed and kissed him; one man greeted the other, and they went into the tent.

The Mekhilta of R. Ishmael (Amalek 1, p. 193) comments:[[19]](#footnote-19)

"וישתחו וישק לו". איני יודע מי השתחוה למי או מי נשק למי.

כשהוא אומר: וישאלו איש לרעהו לשלום, מי קרוי איש?

הלא משה, שנא' "והאיש משה עניו מאד" (במד' יב 3),

הוי אומר, לא השתחוה ולא נשק אלא משה לחמיו.

מכאן אמרו שיהא האדם מוכן לכבוד חמיו.

“He bowed and kissed him”: I do not know who bowed to whom or who kissed whom.

When it says: “one man (*ish*) greeted the other,” who is called man (*ish*)?

It is Moses, for it says: “And the man (*ish*) Moses was very humble”

This means that Moses bowed and kissed his father-in-law.

From here they said: One must honor his father-in-law.

The commentator seeks to determine who is subject and who is the object of the verbs וישתחו וישק (“bowed and kissed”). One possibility is that Moses, the subject of the verb ויצא (“went out”) at the beginning of the verse, remains the subject of the remainder of the verse. We should thus understand the verse as follows: Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, he bowed and kissed *his father-in-law*. Another possibility is that Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and the latter bowed and kissed Moses. Both readings are grammatically possible.

In order to determine the correct reading, the commentator turns to the continuation of the verse (similar to *epiphora*): וישאלו איש לרעהו לשלום (‘and they greeted each other’; or: ‘one man (*ish*) greeted the other’). According to the literal sense this is a reciprocal action. However, the commentator suggests identifying ‘man’ (*ish*) with Moses, based on Num. 12:3. This leads to the conclusion that Moses bowed and kissed his father-in-law. But how did the commentator reach this conclusion? It would seem that he regards Moses to be the subject of the verb וישאלו (‘they greeted’) and therefore Moses is likely also the subject of the verbs ‘bowed and kissed.’

This solution is grammatically problematic, however: Since the וישאלו is plural, how can Moses be its subject? One possibility is that instead of וישאל**ו**­­ּ (‘they greeted’), according to the Masoretic vocalization, the commentator read וישאל**וֹ** (‘he greeted him,’ although the regular biblical form is וישאלהו). The verse would thus read “and the man (*ish*, i.e., Moses) greeted him.” Another possibility is formulated in the Pesiqta Zutrati (Yithro 18):

מי הקדים? משה הקדים, שנאמר "איש לרעהו", ואין איש אלא משה

Who greeted who first? Moses did, for it says: ‘one man (*ish*) greeted the other”, and ‘man’ is none other than Moses.

Although the verb is to be understood as plural and reciprocal, Moses was the first to extend his greeting, probably by bowing and kissing.

However, one should not understand the solution of the Mekhilta as only grammatical. Reading the Samaritan version can help clarify what is at stake:

ויצא משה לקראת חתנו **וישתחוי למשה** וישק לו וישאלו איש לרעהו לשלום ויביאהו האהלה.

Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, **he bowed to Moses** and kissed him; one man greeted the other, and he brought him into the tent.

According to this version, it in unambiguously clear that Jethro is the subject of the verbs “bow and kiss.” It would seem that the Samaritan version was intended to preserve Moses’ dignity, as it would be inappropriate for Moses, the man of God, to bow to Jethro, a foreign priest. It is likely that the Samaritan emendation was morally motivated, similar to the emendation offered for *Od.* 3.21, as we saw above (“It is shameful *for* a young man to question an elder”).

Against this backdrop, we can better understand the solution in the Midrash. According to the commentator, the use of the word *ish* refers us to Num. 12:3, a verse that highlights Moses’ humility. This character trait would make it likely that Moses would have put his pride aside and bowed and kissed his father-in-law. In this context, Jethro would have been regarded by Moses first and foremost as his father-in-law, rather than as a foreign priest, as the beginning of the verse clearly indicates (“Moses went out to meet *his father-in-law*”). This would add more poignancy to what would seem at first blush to be the verse’s rather banal moral lesson: “One must honor his father-in-law”. The lesson is much more profound: this honor should be granted regardless of the father-in-law’s beliefs and background.

Another example of a similar ambiguity can be found in Sifre Deut. (312, following Ms. London 341):[[20]](#footnote-20)

מהיכן המקום מכיר את חלקו? מיעקב, שנאמר: "כי יעקב בחר לו יק" (תה' קלה 4), "כי חלק ייי עמו יעקב חבל נחלתו".

ועדיין תלי בדלא תלי, [[21]](#footnote-21) אין אנו יודעין אם המקום בחר לו ישראל לסגולתו אם ישראל בחרו להקב'ה. תלמוד לומר "ובך בחר ייי אלקיך" (דב' ז 6).

ומניין שאף יעקב בחר לו ביק? שנאמר: "לא כאלה חלק יעקב כי יוצר הכל הוא וישראל חבל[[22]](#footnote-22) נחלתו ייי צבאות שמו" (יר' י 16).

Whence does the Omnipresent know his portion: From Jacob, for it is said: “For Jacob chose the Lord, [Israel, as His treasured possession]” (Ps. 135:4); “For the Lord’s portion is His people, Jacob His own allotment.” But the matter is still suspended: We do not know if the Omnipresent chose Israel as His treasured possession or if Israel chose the Holy One. It therefore says: “And the Lord your God chose you” (Deut. 7:6).[[23]](#footnote-23)

And whence [do we know] that Jacob also chose God? For it is said: “Not like these is the portion of Jacob for it is He who formed all things, and Israel is His allotment, the Lord of Hosts is His name” (Jer. 10:16).

The commentator seeks to answer the question “whence does the Omnipresent know his portion” with the verse from Ps. 135:4. Yet this verse turns out to be ambiguous as well. Since the verse can be read in two ways, we do not know who is the subject and who is the object of the choosing:

1. The Lord chose Jacob: כי (את) יעקב בחר לו יה (“For Jacob, the Lord has chosen”)
2. Jacob chose the Lord: כי יעקב בחר לו (את) יה **(**“For Jacob has chosen the Lord”).

The solution offered is to turn to Deut. 7:6, where it is unambiguously stated that God chose Israel. It would seem that the commentator sought to oppose a possible alternative interpretation that diverted the choice from God to Israel, while defending the traditional stance that it was God Himself who chose Israel. Having resolved the ambiguity in the verse from Psalms, the Midrash adds an element of reciprocity: After having been chosen by God as His people, Israel then choses God as their deity. It would thus seem that the ambiguity in Ps. 135:4 also touches upon important theological questions.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The two examples above dealt with ambiguity concerning the subject and the object of the verb. We can turn now to an example from Genesis Rabba which deals with ambiguity concerning which of two nouns is modified by an adjective.

In Gen. 10:21 we read:

וּלְשֵׁם יֻלַּד גַּם הוּא אֲבִי כָּל בְּנֵי עֵבֶר אֲחִי יֶפֶת הַגָּדוֹל.

Sons were also born to Shem, ancestor of all the descendants of Eber, brother of Japheth the older.

Genesis Rabba 37 (p. 349) comments:

אין אנו יודעים אם שם הוא הגדול אם יפת הוא הגדול,

מהכא דכת' "אלה תולדת שם שם בן מאת שנה ... שנתים אחר המבול" (בר' יא 10) הוי יפת גדול.

We do not know whether Shem is the oldest or Japhet is the oldest. From the following, in which it is written “These are the generations of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, [and begat Arphaxad] two years after the flood,” it is clear that Japhet is older.

Does the adjective “the older” in the verse refer to Japhet or to Shem, his brother? Who is in fact Noah’s first born? This question was a matter of much debate among commentators in antiquity.

Gen. 5:32 states: “And Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth” (וַיְהִי נֹחַ בֶּן חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד נֹחַ אֶת שֵׁם אֶת חָם וְאֶת יָפֶת).[[25]](#footnote-25) From a simple reading of the verse it would seem that it lists the sons by the order of their birth, which would mean that Shem is the oldest. This is indeed how the matter was understood by the author of the book of Jubilees (4:33), who writes of Emzara, Noah’s wife: “In its third year she gave birth to Shem for him; in its fifth year she gave birth to Ham for him; and in the first year during the sixth week she gave birth to Japheth for him.”[[26]](#footnote-26) A few chapters later (10:14) we read that Noah “gave all the books that he had written to his oldest son Shem.” The author of Jubilees clearly understood that the adjective ‘oldest’ refers to Shem. A similar understanding could be found in the Genesis Apocryphon,[[27]](#footnote-27) in the translation of Aquila,[[28]](#footnote-28) and in the Vulgate. [[29]](#footnote-29)

On the other hand, from the Greek translations of the Septuagint and Symmachus,[[30]](#footnote-30) as well as from Josephus[[31]](#footnote-31) and Seder Olam,[[32]](#footnote-32) it is clear that Japhet is older. Philo notes that those who interpret the Bible literally believed that Shem is younger.[[33]](#footnote-33) None of these sources, however, supply a rationale for deciding that Japhet is older. In Genesis Rabba, on the other hand, *the syntactical deliberation is presented explicitly* and resolved by another verse. According to Genesis Rabba, the deciding verse is Gen. 10:11, which states that Shem was a hundred years old two years after the flood. This would mean that he was 98 years old when the flood ended. In Gen. 5:32 we are told that Noah started begetting at the age of 500, and in Gen 7:6 (as well as 7:11) it is stated that “Noah was six hundred years old and the flood of waters was upon the earth” (וְנֹחַ בֶּן שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וְהַמַּבּוּל הָיָה מַיִם עַל הָאָרֶץ). If Shem was 98 years old when the flood ended, then Noah begat him when he was 502 years old. This would mean that Noah begat Japhet when he was 500 years old, and Shem only two years later.

This derasha does not explain why in other verses the brothers do not appear in their correct age order (“Shem, Ham, and Japheth”). However, a detailed explanation is given earlier in Genesis Rabba (26, p. 245-6):

"את שם את חם ואת יפת": והלא יפת הגדול? אלא כתחילה אתה דורש שהוא צדיק, ושנולד מהול, ושייחד הקב"ה שמו עליו, ושאברהם עומד ממנו, וששימש בכהונה גדולה ושנבנה בית המקדש בתחומו.

“Shem, Ham, and Japheth”: But is not Japhet the oldest? Rather, since he (sc. Shem) appears first, you expound that he was righteous; that he was born circumcised; that the Holy One singled out His name on him; that Abraham was his descendant; that he served as high priest; and that the Temple was built in his territory.

Similarly, in b.San 69b it is stated that the brothers were listed according to their wisdom (דרך חכמתן קא חשיב להו), and not according to their age.[[34]](#footnote-34) It would seem that the Targum of Ps.-Jonathan followed a similar tradition when translating that Shem “was greater in the fear of God” (רבא בדחלתא דייי').[[35]](#footnote-35)

The ambiguity addressed by Genesis Rabba concerning the adjective ‘older’ is similar to the ambiguity concerning the adjective ‘shining’ debated among the Homeric scholars. In both cases, a third verse was employed to resolve the ambiguity.

Alongside the formula אין אנו יודעים (“we do not know”), another term which often designates ambiguity is שקול (“balanced”). One of the most famous occurrences of this term is found in m.Sotah 5:5:[[36]](#footnote-36)

בו ביום דרש ר' יהושע בן הורקנוס: לא עבד איוב את הקדוש ברוך הוא אלא מאהבה שנאמר "הן יקטלני לו איחל" (איוב יג 15).

ועדיין הדבר שקול - לו אני מצפה או איני מצפה?

תלמוד לומר "עד אגוע לא אסיר תומתי ממני" (שם כז 5), מלמד שמאהבה עשה.

אמר רבי יהושע: מי יגלה עפר מעיניך רבן יוחנן בן זכאי שהיית דורש כל ימיך שלא עבד איוב את המקום אלא מיראה שנאמר "איש תם וישר ירא אלהים וסר מרע" (שם א 8) והלא יהושע תלמיד תלמידך למד שמאהבה עשה.

That same day R. Yehoshua b. Hyrcanus expounded: Job served the Holy One, blessed is he, only from love, as it is written, “Though he slay me yet will I wait *lo* (not/for him)” (Job 13:15).

Thus far the matter is balanced: ‘I will wait for him (*lo*)’ or ‘I will wait not (*lo*)’?

But Scripture says: “Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me” (ibid 27:5). This teaches that he acted out of love.

R. Yehoshua said: Who will take away the dust from of your eyes, O Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai. For all your life you had expounded that Job served the Omnipresent only out of fear, for it is said, “The man was perfect and upright and one that feared God and eschewed evil” (ibid 1:8). And Yehoshua, your disciple's disciple, now taught us that he acted out of love.[[37]](#footnote-37)

It is likely, as David Rosenthal has argued, that the biblical text available to the sages had here (as elsewhere) the *plene* form לוא (LW’). In the Masoretic version, on the other hand, the *ketiv* (the written tradition) is לא (L’ = not), while the *qere* (the reading tradition) is לו (LW = to him). It would seem that this is how the Masoretic scholars resolved the ambiguity of the original form לוא (LW’).[[38]](#footnote-38) In light of this *plene* version, R. Yehoshua b. Hyrcanus argues that both the reading לו (‘to Him’) and the reading לא (‘not’) are equally balanced, in the sense of plausible, and it is impossible to decide the correct interpretation from the verse itself. R. Yehoshua thus points out that the word לוא (LW’) is in fact a homonym.

In order to determine the correct reading, R. Yehoshua cites a later verse: “Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.” According to his interpretation, the meaning of this verse is that Job will continue to believe in God until the day he dies. This serves as proof that the meaning of the verse in question is that Job will continue to wait for God even if He decides to kill him.[[39]](#footnote-39)

It is also important to note the context in which this Mishna appears. R. Yehoshua b. Hyrcanus’ *derasha* concludes a chapter which contains a collection of *derashot* by R. Akiva, in which he demonstrates his novel hermeneutical skills vis-à-vis his predecessors. It would seem, as Ishay Rosen-Zvi has argued, that this Mishna does not in fact present love and fear as opposing values, nor does it necessarily decide that love is better than fear:

Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai is not depicted as disagreeing with R. Yehoshua, but rather as expressing his hermeneutical limitation: he could only ascribe fear to Job, since this is what the text permitted him. Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai was limited here by what was said explicitly in the verses, just as he was limited before by what was not explicitly said in them. R. Yehoshua b. Hyrcanus, on the other hand, used sophisticated hermeneutical tools in order to break free of these dire straits.[[40]](#footnote-40)

One of the sophisticated hermeneutical tools used by R. Yehoshua b. Hyrcanus is taking hermeneutical advantage of a homonym, in order to reverse the common understanding of the verse.[[41]](#footnote-41)

### 2.3 Conclusion

In this first part of the chapter we have seen how the rabbis and the Homeric scholars identified similar syntactical ambiguities in their canonical texts: homonyms; sentences in which it is unclear which word is the subject and which the object; sentences with unclear noun-adjective agreement.

The Homeric scholars and the rabbis shared the hermeneutical assumption that it is preferable to use the text itself to resolve ambiguity and resorted to similar methods: considering the immediate context (*epiphora*) or, more often, by using a verse from elsewhere.[[42]](#footnote-42)

It is though important to note that in three of the examples from rabbinic literature discussed above, while the rabbis were responding to a real ambiguity in text, their motivation was not solely grammatical. Rather, each of the possible alternative readings offers a different theological or moral position: fear vs. love; did God chose Israel or did Israel chose God; is it proper or not for Moses to bow to his father-in-law. In other words, at times the rabbis take advantage of these ambiguities for their own purposes. Nonetheless, these *derashot* could only have been generated against the backdrop of the rabbis’ sensitivity to syntactical ambiguities. It is indeed possible that some of the Second Temple commentaries or reworkings of biblical stories, as well as the various translations, are a product of similar deliberations. Yet the mere fact that the rabbis explicitly and reflexively present two alternative readings alongside the methods for resolution suggests a shared grammatical and exegetical discourse with the Homeric scholars.

## 3. Utrimque Possit Trahi

In Aristotle’s list of causes of ambiguity, with which we opened this chapter, the third and fourth are σύνθεσις and διαίρεσις, composition and division. Aristotle adduces several examples to demonstrate what he means by these terms, most of which are related to punctuation. Aristotle notes concerning *synthesis*: “The significance is not the same if one utters the words separately as it is if one combines them” (οὐ γὰρ ταὐτὸ σημαίνει ἂν διελών τις εἴπῃ καὶ συνθεὶς). Similarly, when discussing *diairesis*, he writes: “For the same sentence divided would not always seem to have the same meaning as when taken as a whole” (ὁ γὰρ αὐτὸς λόγος διῃρημένος καὶ συγκείμενος οὐκ ἀεὶ ταὐτὸ σημαίνειν ἂν δόξειεν).[[43]](#footnote-43) In his *Poetics*, Aristotle lists *diairesis* as one of the ways to solve textual problems and goes on to demonstrate this by suggesting a change in the punctuation of a verse from Empedocles in order to avoid a difficulty.[[44]](#footnote-44)

One of the most famous examples of an ambiguity stemming from punctuation is given by Quintilian in his *institutio oratoria*, in the chapter dealing with *amphibolia*:[[45]](#footnote-45)

per conlocationem, ubi dubium est quid quo referri oporteat, ac frequentissime cum quod medium est utrimque possit trahi […]. Vnde controversia illa: “testamento quidam iussit poni statuam auream hastam tenentem; quaeritur statua hastam tenens aurea esse debeat, an hasta esse aurea in statua alterius materiae.”

[Ambiguity might arise also] from the arrangement [of words], where there is a doubt which [words] should refer to which [words]. And most frequently when there is a middle word that may refer to both sides (*utrimque possit trahi*; i.e. to what precedes or what follows) […] From this [rose] the following controversy: “a certain man in his will ordered his heirs to erect a statue holding a spear of gold (*statuam auream hastam tenentem*). It has been asked whether the statue holding the spear should be of gold (*statua … aurea*), or whether the spear should be of gold (*hasta … aurea*) [held] by a statue from another material.”

Quintilian points to a very common ambiguity created by the possibility of a word modifying either the preceding or following word (*utrimque possit trahi*), depending on how one punctuates the sentence.

The reflexive awareness of such ambiguities is also evident in Philo’s writing. As Maren Niehoff has noted, “Philo is the first extant Bible scholar to have discussed a problem of punctuation, thus sharing another important concern of Homeric scholarship.”[[46]](#footnote-46) Like Aristotle, Philo understood the hermeneutical potential of manipulating punctuation. So, for example, Philo comments on Lev. 19:23 as follows:[[47]](#footnote-47)

μήν φησί γε· „ὁ καρπὸς αὐτοῦ τρία ἔτη ἔσται ἀπερικάθαρτος, οὐ βρωθήσεται“, […] ἡ δὲ λέξις ἐστὶν ἀμφίβολος· δηλοῖ γὰρ ἓν μέν τι τοιοῦτον „ὁ καρπὸς αὐτοῦ τρία ἔτη ἔσται“, εἶτα ἰδίᾳ τὸ „ἀπερικάθαρτος οὐ βρωθήσεται“, ἕτερον δὲ „ὁ καρπὸς αὐτοῦ τρία ἔτη ἔσται ἀπερικάθαρτος“, ἔπειθ’ οὕτως „<οὐ> βρωθήσεται.“

And yet he says: “its fruit shall remain for three years uncleansed it shall not be eaten” (Lev. 19:23). […] But the phrase is ambiguous (ἡ δὲ λέξις ἐστὶν ἀμφίβολος), for it makes manifest one [meaning] like this: “its fruit shall remain for three years” and then separately the expression “uncleansed it shall not be eaten,” while the other [meaning] is: “its fruit shall for three years remain uncleansed” and then separately the expression “and shall not be eaten”.

Philo offers two possibilities of punctuating the verse, the crux being whether “uncleansed” (ἀπερικάθαρτος) is part of the verse’s first or the second half. Philo does not decide between the two readings.

In this part I will discuss the approaches of Nicanor and Issi b. Yehuda, both of the second century CE, in cases in which it is unclear if an intervening expression should be construed with what precedes or what follows it. The chapter will focus on Nicanor’s comment that an expression “could be consigned to either side” (ἑκατέρωσε δύναται προσδίδοσθαι) and Issi b. Yehuda’s assertion that the Torah contains “words tha cannot be adjudicated” (דברים שאין להם הכרע). As we will see, both scholars addressed the same kind of ambiguities and presented two punctuation alternatives without deciding between them.

### 3.1 Nicanor and “Consigning Words to both Sides” (ἑκατέρωσε δύναται προσδίδοσθαι)

In his treatise περὶ στιγμῆς (On Punctuation), parts of which have been preserved in the A scholia, Nicanor, a grammarian from the first half of the second century CE, dealt mainly with questions of puncutaion and accent in the Homeric poems. He developed a system which included eight punctuation marks; prior to him only two were used.[[48]](#footnote-48) These punctuation marks indicated the correct reading and intonation. Due to his preoccupation with punctuation, Nicanor received the nickname στιγματίας (meaning “the branded” or “the punctuated”).

Nicanor often provides clear insructions how different verses should be punctuated.[[49]](#footnote-49) There are also many other cases, though, in which he presents two different punctuation options and notes that a word or words could be read with what precedes them or with what follows them, usually using variants of the formula ἑκατέρωσε[[50]](#footnote-50) δύναται προσδίδοσθαι[[51]](#footnote-51) (“it can be consigned to either side”). This formula appears only in the scholia attributed to Nicanor, and in fact, nowhere else in Greek literature.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Thus, for example, Nicanor notes regarding a certain word:

Sch. A *Il.* 2.450b Nic. [...] ἑκατέρῳ δύναται προσδίδοσθαι, καὶ λόγον ἔχει ἀμφότερα

[The word] could be consigned to either side, and both [readings] have a *logos*.

The word “logos” in this context is, as Blank defines it, “a reference to the natural, internal coherence of the linguistic system.”[[53]](#footnote-53) In other words, according to Nicanor, both punctuation options are grammatically plausible.

In most cases, Nicanor does not adjudicate between the two equally valid readings. For example, Nicanor comments on the description of Thetis rising from the sea, accompanied by the Nereids:

Sch. A *Il.* 18.68-9 Nic.: ἀκτὴν εἰσανέβαινον <ἘΠΙΣΧΕΡΩ ἔνθα θαμειαί[/](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/P3.html) Μυρμιδόνων εἴρυντο νέες>: τὸ ἐπισχερώ ἑκατέρωσε δύναται προσδίδοσθαι· καὶ γὰρ τὰς Νηρεΐδας ἀνιέναι τάξει πρέπον καὶ τὰς ναῦς εἰκὸς ἐφεξῆς τετάχθαι, ὡς ἐν τῷ Περὶ ναυστάθμου λέγεται.

“They (sc. the Nereids) stepped forth upon the beach in a row (ἐπισχερώ) where the ships of the Myrmidons were drawn up closely”: “in a row” could be consigned to either side. For it is appropriate that the Nereids would come up in an orderly fashion and it is also likely that the ships would be arranged in a row, as described in the [treatise] *On the Camp*.

According to Nicanor, depending on the punctuation, the adverb ἐπισχερώ (“in a row” or “in succession”) could be joined equally well with what precedes it as with what follows:

1. ἀκτὴν εἰσανέβαινον ἐπισχερώ**,** ἔνθα θαμειαί Μυρμιδόνων εἴρυντο νέες

(B) ἀκτὴν εἰσανέβαινον**,** ἐπισχερώ ἔνθα θαμειαί Μυρμιδόνων εἴρυντο νέες

(A) They stepped forth upon the beach *in a row***,** where the ships of the Myrmidons were drawn up closely.

(B) They stepped forth upon the beach**,** where *in a row* the ships of the Myrmidons were drawn up closely.

Nicanor adds that the idea that the ships would have been arranged in rows would fit well with the description in Aristarchus’ treatise *On the Camp*, in which he tried to reconstruct the arrangement of the Greek ships and the geography of the Trojan battlefield. [[54]](#footnote-54)

We can turn to another example. In *Iliad* 20, after the gods assemble, Poseidon asks why Zeus had summoned then, to which the latter responds (vv. 20-21):

ἔγνως ἐννοσίγαιε ἐμὴν ἐν στήθεσι βουλὴν

ὧν ἕνεκα ξυνάγειρα· μέλουσί μοι ὀλλύμενοί περ

You have seen, shaker of the earth, the counsel within me

Because of these (ὧν ἕνεκα) I gathered you, they who are dying are dear to me.

On these verses Nicanor notes:

Sch. A *Il.* 20.21a. Nic.: ὧν ἕνεκα ξυνάγειρα[:](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/P10.html) καὶ τοῦτο ἑκατέρωσε δύναται προσδίδοσθαι. εἰ μὲν οὖν τοῖς ἄνω, στίζομεν ἐπὶ τὸ ξυνάγειρα, εἰ δὲ τοῖς ἑξῆς, ὑποστίζομεν ἐπ’ αὐτό.

“Because of these I gathered”: This too can be consigned to either side. If it [refers] to the words above we place a long punctuation mark after “I gathered.” If, on the other hand, it [refers] to the following words we place a short punctuation mark after it.

One possibility is that the words ὧν ἕνεκα refer to the counsel in Zeus’ breast (ἐν στήθεσι βουλὴν):

1. ἔγνως ἐννοσίγαιε ἐμὴν ἐν στήθεσι βουλὴν ὧν ἕνεκα ξυνάγειρα**.** μέλουσί μοι ὀλλύμενοί περ

You have seen, shaker of the earth, the counsel within me**.** Because of this I gathered you. They who are dying are dear to me.

Even though βουλή (counsel) is in the singular whereas the relative pronoun (ὧν) is in the plural, it is possible to consider “counsel” as a collective noun. According to this punctuation, Zeus summoned the gods because of his counsel.

On the other hand, it is also possible to understand ὧν ἕνεκα, which is in plural, as referring to the continuation of the verse, that is, to the people who are dying. In that case the verse should be punctuated as follows:

1. ἔγνως ἐννοσίγαιε ἐμὴν ἐν στήθεσι βουλὴν**.** ὧν ἕνεκα ξυνάγειρα, μέλουσί μοι ὀλλύμενοί περ

You have seen, shaker of the earth, the counsel within me. Because of these I gathered you**,** they who are dying are dear to me.

It is interesting to note that, according to an interpretation preserved in the bT scholia, this is the only possible reading:

Sch. *Il.* 20.21 bT ex.: ὧν: λείπει ἀνδρῶν

“Of these”: “of the men” is missing.

The scholiast notes that there is an ellipsis and the reader must mentally add the words “of the men.” Thus the phrase would be understood unambiguously as “because of these men (ὧν ἀνδρῶν ἕνεκα) I gathered you.”

As mentioned, in most cases Nicanor does not adjudicate which of the two is the correct reading, but rather notes that both are possible. Yet at times he does show preference for one of the possibilities.[[55]](#footnote-55) So, for example, he comments on *Il.* 12.333-334:

Sch. A *Il.* 12.333-4a. Nic.: πάπτηνεν δ’ ἀνὰ πύργον Ἀχαιῶν [<](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html)εἴ τιν’ ἴδοιτο [/](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/P3.html) ἡγεμόνων[>](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html)[:](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/P10.html) τὸ Ἀχαιῶν [(](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html)333[)](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html) ἑκατέροις δύναται προσδίδοσθαι, βέλτιον δὲ τοῖς προτέροις, ἐπεὶ τὸ ἡγεμόνων [(](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html)334[)](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html) ἐπιφέρεται. καὶ ἄλλως φησὶν ἑξῆς [„](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/Q1.html)βῆ δὲ θέειν κατὰ τεῖχος Ἀχαιῶν[“](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/Q2.html) [(](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html) 352[)](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html).

“He scanned the rampart of the Achaeans if he might see someone/ of the leaders”: the words “of the Achaeans” can be consigned in either side. It is better [to join] to the first part, since “of the leaders” follows. And elsewhere he says in the natural order “but went on the run along the wall of the Achaeans” (*Il.* 12.352).

When verse 333 is read in isolation, it could be punctuated in two ways:

(A) πάπτηνεν δ’ ἀνὰ πύργον Ἀχαιῶν**,** εἴ τιν’ ἴδοιτο

(B) πάπτηνεν δ’ ἀνὰ πύργον**,** Ἀχαιῶν εἴ τιν’ ἴδοιτο

(A) He scanned the rampart of the Achaeans, if he might see someone

(B) He scanned the rampart, if he might see someone of the Achaeans

According to Nicanor, it is better to join the words “of the Achaeans” (which appear in the genitive case) to the first part of the verse, since in the next verse there is another noun in the genitive case - ἡγεμόνων (“of the leaders”). It is therefore preferable to read: “if he might see someone/ of the leaders.” Nicanor thus uses the ἐπιφορά, the continuation of the verse, in order to decide which of the readings is more likely. Nicanor then adds another argument: a few lines later the expression τεῖχος Ἀχαιῶν (“wall of the Achaeans”) appears unambiguously, which would support the reading of πύργον Ἀχαιῶν (“rampart of the Achaeans”) in this verse. Yet, it is important to note that Nicanor does not deliver a final and conclusive judgement because both readings are grammatically viable.

In the cases discussed above, the two readings suggested are equally balanced but also mutually exclusive. However, in some cases Nicanor suggests that both readings may be correct since the middle expression can be shared by both phrases. Such a figure is often called a zeugma, as the expression grammatically yokes two phrases.[[56]](#footnote-56) When the expression is in middle between the two phrases it is called a mesozeugma. In the rhetorical treatises and Homeric commentaries one often finds such terms as ῥῆμα κοινὸν (“common verb”) and ἀπὸ κοινοῦ (“in common”), which partially overlap with zeugma, though they are not identical with it. Dickey defines the ἀπὸ κοινοῦ construction as follows:[[57]](#footnote-57) “A figure of speech using a verb or adjective with two nouns, to only one of which it is strictly applicable, while the word applicable to the other noun is omitted.” Aristotle had already used ἀπὸ κοινοῦ construction to solve problems in the Homeric text,[[58]](#footnote-58) and Aristarchus regarded it as part of Homeric syntax. Indeed we find dozens of comments in the Homeric scholia referring to the ἀπὸ κοινοῦ construction.[[59]](#footnote-59) It was also later used by some Christian authors.[[60]](#footnote-60)

A good example for combining a shared word with a question of punctuation could be found in the following comment by Nicanor:

Sch. A *Il.* 12.40a1. Nic.[:](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/CB2.html) αὐτὰρ ὅ γ’ ὡς τὸ πρόσθεν [<](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html)ἐμάρνατο ἶσος ἀέλλῃ[>](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html)[:](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/P10.html) εἴτε ὑποστίζοιμεν ἐπὶ τὸ πρόσθεν εἴτε διαστέλλοιμεν ἐπὶ τὸ ἐμάρνατο, τὸ ῥῆμα κοινὸν γίνεται ἀμφοτέρων τῶν μερῶν, ἐμάχετο ὡς πρόσθεν ἐμάχετο.

“While he as before fought like a whirlwind”: We may either put a comma after “before” or we may pause briefly after “fought.” The verb is shared by both parts: “he fought as he fought before.”

Nicanor offers two possibilities for punctuation:

1. αὐτὰρ ὅ γ’ ὡς τὸ πρόσθεν**,** ἐμάρνατο ἶσος ἀέλλῃ
2. αὐτὰρ ὅ γ’ ὡς τὸ πρόσθεν ἐμάρνατο**,** ἶσος ἀέλλῃ
3. While he as before, fought like a whirlwind.
4. While he as before fought, like a whirlwind.

Although there are two possibilities for punctuation, Nicanor notes that the verb ἐμάρνατο (fought) is shared. That is, the verb functions as a mesozeugma and the verse has the same meaning regardless of punctuation. Nicanor thus distinguishes between the question of punctuation and that of meaning—between syntax and semantics.

An example of the exegetical consequences of a shared word can be found in Nicanor’s comments on the battle between Hector and Teucer in *Il.* 823-827:

ἤτοι ὃ μὲν φαρέτρης ἐξείλετο πικρὸν ὀϊστόν,

θῆκε δ’ ἐπὶ νευρῇ· τὸν δ’ αὖ κορυθαίολος Ἕκτωρ

**αὐερύοντα παρ’ ὦμον** ὅθι κληῒς ἀποέργει

αὐχένα τε στῆθός τε μάλιστα δὲ καίριόν ἐστι,

τῇ ῥ’ ἐπὶ οἷ μεμαῶτα βάλεν λίθῳ ὀκριόεντι,

Verily he (sc. Teucer) removed a bitter arrow from his quiver,

and put it on the bowstring. However, **as he drew it back to his shoulder**,

where the clavicle divides the neck and breast, and it is especially fatal,

there Hector of the bronze helmet struck him with the rough stone.

as he hurried against him, and he broke his bowstring; his hand.[[61]](#footnote-61)

On verse 325 Nicanor notes:

Sch. A *Il.* 8.325a1 Nic. αὐερύοντα [<](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html)παρ’ ὦμον[>](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html)[:](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/P10.html) […] οὐ πάντως διασταλτέον ἐπὶ τὸ αὐερύοντα, ὡς ἀξιοῖ Νεοτέλης· ἀμφότερα γὰρ συμβέβηκε πρὸς τὸν ὦμον, καὶ τὸ βληθῆναι αὐτὸν καὶ τὸ ἐρύσαι. ὁ μέντοι Νεοτέλης Σκυθικὴν εἶναι τὴν τοξείαν ἔφασκεν τοῦ τόξου πρὸς τὸν ὦμον ἑλκομένου.

Sch. T *Il.* 8.325a2 Nic.[(](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html" \t "morph)?[)](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html). παρ’ ὦμον[:](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/P10.html) δύναται ἀμφοῖν συντάσσεσθαι.

“As he drew it back beside the shoulder”: […] As Neoteles claims, one should not at all pause even briefly (διασταλτέον) after “as he drew.” For two things happened with regards to the shoulder: he (sc. Teucer) both was hit [beside the shoulder] and drew [the bow beside the shoulder]. And indeed Neoteles said that the archery is Scythian as the bow is drawn towards the shoulder. A

“Beside the shoulder”: could be construed with both sides. T

The ambiguity hinges on what side one should construe the words “beside the shoulder”:

(A) τὸν δ’ αὖ κορυθαίολος Ἕκτωρ αὐερύοντα**,** παρ’ ὦμον ὅθι κληῒς ἀποέργει αὐχένα τε στῆθός τε … τῇ … βάλεν

(B) τὸν δ’ αὖ κορυθαίολος Ἕκτωρ αὐερύοντα παρ’ ὦμον**,** ὅθι κληῒς ἀποέργει αὐχένα τε στῆθός τε … τῇ … βάλεν

(A) As he (sc. Teucer) drew it back**,** *beside the shoulder* where the clavicle divides the neck and breast … there … Hector of the bronze helmet struck him

(B) As he (sc. Teucer) drew it back *beside the shoulder***,** where the clavicle divides the neck and breast … there … Hector of the bronze helmet struck him

According to the first reading, as Teucer was drawing back his bowstring, Hector struck him besides his shoulder where the collar-bone divides the neck and chest. According to the second reading, while Teucer was drawing back the bowstring towards his own shoulder, Hector struck him on the place where the collar-bone divides the neck and chest. This reading would indicate that Teucer followed the archery technique of the Scythians, who used to draw the bowstring to their shoulder.

Nicanor, however, refers to a third possible reading suggested by Neoteles, who was probably a pupil of Aristarchus and who composed a commentary on the Iliad.[[62]](#footnote-62) According to Neoteles, there should be no punctuation after “as he drew it back.” Moreover, Neoteles seem to have regarded “besides the shoulder” as a mesozeugma as it refers *both* backward and forwards. That is, Teucer drew the bow beside his shoulder *and* Hector hit him beside his shoulder. Thus both reading (A) *and* (B) are correct and should not be seen as mutually exclusive.

In the T scholia, which, based on the terminology, can almost certainly be attributed to Nicanor, we are told that the words παρ’ ὦμον (“beside the shoulder”) can be construed with both sides, most likely referring to readings (A) and (B) mentioned above. It is unclear whether he endorses a combination of both readings, as Neoteles would have it.

The full significance of Neoteles’ interpretation can be better understood in light of Porphyry’s comments in his *Homeric Questions*:[[63]](#footnote-63)

ἐν τούτοις τοῖς ἔπεσι τοῖς περὶ τοῦ Τεύκρου εἰρημένοις ζητοῦσι ποίαν χεῖρα τέτρωται ὁ Τεῦκρος καὶ πότερον τὴν νευρὰν ἐπὶ τὸν ὦμον ἕλκει καθάπερ οἱ Σκύθαι· τοῦτο γὰρ ᾤετο Νεοτέλης, ὅλην βίβλον γράψας περὶ τῆς κατὰ τοὺς ἥρωας τοξείας, καὶ τοὺς μὲν Κρῆτας φάμενος τὴν νευρὰν ἕλκειν ἐπὶ τὸν μαστὸν τὴν δὲ τάσιν κυκλοτερῆποιεῖσθαι, τῶν Σκυθῶν οὐκ ἐπὶ τὸν μαστὸν ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τὸν ὦμον ἑλκόντων, <ὥς> μὴ προέχειν τὰ ἐυώνυμα μέρη τοῦ τοξεύοντος τὰ δεξιά.

ῥητέον δέ· τὸ αὐερύοντα οὐ δεῖ συνάπτειν τῷ παρ’ ὦμον, ἀλλὰ στίξαντα ἐν τῷ αὐερύοντα τὸ ἑξῆς λέγειν, παρ’ ὦμον ὅθι κληῒς ἀποέργει αὐχένα τε στῆθός τε· τοῦτο γὰρ τῷ μὲν τὴν νευρὰν ἐπὶ τὸν ὦμον ἕλκειν οὐ συνᾴδει, τῷ δ’ ἐμφῆναι βουλομένῳ τὴν παρ’ ὦμον πληγήν, ὅπως καὶ πόσε, μάλιστα συνᾴδει· παρὰ γὰρ τὸν ὦμον ἡ κλείς ἐστιν, ἀποδιαιροῦσα τὸ στῆθος ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐχένος. τοῦτο μὲν οἶμαι οὕτως λύεται.

In these lines spoken about Teucer, they inquire in which hand Teucer has been wounded and whether he draws the string toward his shoulder like the Scythians. For Neoteles, who wrote a whole book *On Archery among the Heroes*, supposed this, claiming that Cretans draw the bowstring to the breast but make the extension [of the bow] round, whereas the Scythians draw [the bowstring] not to the breast, but to the shoulder, [so that] the right side of the archer does not project beyond the left side.

But one must say that “drawing back” must not construe with “beside his shoulder,” but if one punctuates at “drawing back,” the grammatical sequence means “beside his shoulder where the collar-bone divides the neck and chest” (Il. 8.325-26). For this does not accord with the claim that he draws the string to the shoulder, but very much accords with one who wants to indicate how and where [Hector struck] the blow. For alongside the shoulder is the collarbone which divides the chest from the neck. This, I believe, is solved in this way.

According to Porphyry, Neoteles composed an entire treatise *On Archery among the Heroes*, where he distinguished between the Cretans who draw the bowstring to their chest and the Scythians who draw it to their shoulder. It is likely, as Baumbach has suggested, that Porphyry erroneously attributed to Neoteles an entire treatise based on Nicanor’s note. Neoteles’ interpretation was in fact originally only part of a long digression, in his commentary to the Iliad, on various archery techniques.[[64]](#footnote-64)

In the Iliad, the archers almost always draw the bowstring to their chest.[[65]](#footnote-65) In fact, only here, if Neoteles’ reading is to be accepted, does Homer refer to the Scythian technique. Thus the question of punctuation has dramatic implications concerning the reconstruction of the art of archery in the Iliad.

Porphyry rejects Neoteles’ reading and argues that reading (A) is the most probable since the collarbone which divides the chest from the neck is indeed alongside the shoulder. Porphyry, who polemicizes against Neoteles, seems to believe that the latter endorsed only reading (B). Yet, as we have seen, Nicanor says that Neoteles regarded “beside the shoulder” as shared words. Thus the two readings suggested for this verse are not reading (A) vs. (B), but rather (A) vs. (A)+(B).

As we now turn our discussion to the rabbinic parallel to this phenomenon, we can see that Issi b. Yehuda presents similar deliberations concerning ambiguous verses.

### 3.2 Issi b. Yehuda and Words without Adjudication (מקראות שאין להם הכרע)

In the Mekhilta of R. Yishmael (Amalek 1, p. 179) Issi b. Yehuda, a sage from the school of R. Yishmael and a younger contemporary of Nicanor, [[66]](#footnote-66) states the following:[[67]](#footnote-67)

אסי בר יהודה אומר: חמשה דברים בתורה שאן להן הכרע

ואלו הן: שאת ארור מחר משוקדים וקם

שנאמר:

1. "הלא אם תיטיב שאת ואם לא תטיב לפתח חטאת רובץ",

או "הלא אם תטיב שאת ואם לא תטיב" (בר' ד 7)

1. "כי באפם הרגו איש וברצונם עקרו שור ארור אפם כי עז"

או "כי באפם הרגו איש וברצונם עקרו שור ארור" (שם מט 7-6)

1. "וצא והלחם בעמלק מחר"

או "מחר אנכי נצב על ראש הגבעה" (שמ' יז 9)

1. "משוקדים כפתוריה ופרחיה"

או "במנורה ארבעה גביעים משוקדים" (שמ' כה 34; לז 20)

1. "וקם העם הזה וזנה"

או "הנך שוכב עם אבותיך וקם" (דב' לא 16)

אלו חמשה דברים שבתורה שאין להם הכרע.

Issi b. Yehuda says: There are five words in the Torah which have no *hekhre‘a*. And they are: *se’et*,[[68]](#footnote-68) *arur* (cursed), *mahar* (tomorrow), *meshukadim* (like almonds), *ve-kam* (and will arise).

For it says:

(1) “For if you do well *se’et* and if you do not do well sin couches at the door.”

Or: “For if you do well *se’et* and if you do not do well” (Gen. 4:7).

(2) “Because in their wrath they slew men, and in their self-will they maimed an oxen (*shor*) cursed be their wrath for it is fierce”

Or: “Because in their wrath they slew men, and in their self-will they maimed an ox (*shor*) cursed” (Gen. 49:6-7).

(3) “And go out and do battle with Amalek tomorrow.”

Or: “Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill” (Ex. 17:9).

(4) “Like almonds its bulbs and its petals.”

Or: “On the lampstand there were four cups like almonds” (Ex. 25:34; 37:20).

(5) “And will arise this people and whore.”

Or: “Behold, you are soon to lie with your fathers and will arise” (Deut. 31:16).

In the Palestinian Talmud (y.Avod. Zar. 2:5, 41d) and in other parallels, another example is adduced:[[69]](#footnote-69)

רבי תנחומא מוסיף הדא :

(6) "ובני יעקב באו מן השדה כשמעם"

או "כשמעם ויתעצבו האנשים" (בר' לד 7).

R. Tanhuma adds the following:

(6) “And Jacob’s sons came in from the field having heard.”

Or “Having heard the men were distressed” (Gen. 34:7).

Scholars have debated what exactly is the meaning of “words (or in other versions: verses) which do not have *hekhre‘a*,” meaning literally “words without adjudication.” Most traditional commentators understood the phrase to refer to a doubt between two possibilities of punctuation, as is already clear from the discussion in b.Yoma 52a-b where the term מספקא (doubt) is used.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Continuing in this direction, Mordechai Breuer, Luba Charlap, and Simcha Kogut suggested that the meaning of the formula is that the two possibilities are so evenly balanced that it is impossible to adjudicate or decide (להכריע) between them. Each possibility is independent both grammatically and exegetically and therefore each should be interpreted on its own.[[71]](#footnote-71) Thus although the text has one single reading, we as commentators do not have the tools to decide which of the two is the correct one.

In his article on the piyyutim of Yanai, Lieberman also dealt briefly with this formula.[[72]](#footnote-72) According to him, in example 5 the doubt is whether one should read the word וקם (and shall arise) twice, or whether one should read it once with what follows. Aside from this case, Lieberman argues that in the rest of the verses the uncertainty is whether the word is to be read with what precedes it or with what follows it. According to Lieberman, the term הכרעות (*hakhra‘ot*), which appears also in Yannai’s piyyutim, should be explained as “words which were read twice,” similar to a balance which is tipped in both directions (כעין של מאזנים הכורעת לכאן ולכאן). He even went so far as to suggest that “it is very likely that in Palestine they would have read certain words [in the Torah] twice.”[[73]](#footnote-73)

In a detailed note, Shlomo Naeh disagrees with Lieberman’s interpretation of the term *hekhre‘a*. According to Naeh, this term means “reading the word with the beginning of the verse or with its end, but not with both.”[[74]](#footnote-74) Therefore אין הכרע (without *hekhre‘a*) could be understood as “read with both sides.” Naeh adds: “Beyond the question of the literal meaning of the formula, it would seem that one should agree with Lieberman in assuming a custom of reading these verses twice, as would seem from his logical consideration there concerning וקם (and shall arise) as well as from the targumim translations of שאת (*se’et*) and ארור (cursed).” [[75]](#footnote-75)

On the other hand, other scholars did not view this formula as presenting a doubt, but rather as indicating that the word is to be read with what comes before and what comes after, meaning in other words that both reading possibilities are correct. In his groundbreaking article on the hermeneutical methods of the Greek grammarians and the rabbis, Daube argues: [[76]](#footnote-76)

The usual technical description of a word which should be referred both to what precedes and to what follows is “a word without a *hekhreaʽ*” – in English: “a word as to which there is no tipping of the balance” or “a word without an adjucation.” The idea seems to be that, whenever the sense connection of a word is to be established, various clauses contend for it and it is our task to weigh their claims and decide between them. In about half a dozen cases, however, no such decision can or ought to be made. There is no *hekhrea;* and consequently, the word in question should be interpreted as going with both sides.

Based on this understanding, Daube wished to locate the source of this method, which reads the middle word twice, on the backdrop of the problems of *synthesis* and *diairesis* by the Greek grammarians (starting with Aristotle), and especially in light of the use of ἀπὸ κοινοῦ. Daube even presented many examples for the dilemmas of Greek and Roman grammarians concerning ambiguous sentences.

Yohanan Breuer has reexamined this issue in detail and is the only scholar to have systematically analyzed all the examples cited in the midrash alongside the one preserved in the Palestinian Talmud. According to him, the formula does not refer to a dilemma concerning punctuation, but rather to a clear and unequivocal exegetical decision that the middle word is shared. *Hekhre‘a* thus means that the word is related only to one side, whereas “without *hekhre‘a*” means that it is not related to only one side but rather to both equally.[[77]](#footnote-77) According to him, “not only does the word refer to both sides, but in all the verses this is also the most probable interpretation.”[[78]](#footnote-78)

In this section I shall argue, similar to the traditional interpretation, that the meaning of the expression “words which do not have *hekhre‘a*” is that there is a real doubt between two possible punctuations. This is indeed what seems to be suggested by the Midrash, since the readings are presented as alternatives as indicated by the particle או (or). The main doubt is whether the middle word is to be joined to what precedes it or to what follows it. Yet at times one of these readings is ungrammatical, and therefore the middle word should be considered as being shared by both sides, that is, functioning as a mesozeugma.

In other words, the doubt could be: (1) whether the word is to be joined with what precedes or what follow it; (2) whether the word it to be read with one side or both sides. It is these two possibilities together which constitute the doubt concerning punctuation. This is quite similar to what Lieberman argued, but, as we shall see, possibility (2) is not only relevant to the fifth example in the Midrash.

Unlike Daube and Breuer’s suggestion, I argue that reading of the word with both sides is only *one* of the possibilities. More precisely, it is in fact a *byproduct* of the main doubt: whether the word is to be joined with what precedes it or what follows it.

This argument can be bolstered by an examination of the ancient translations of these verses, which has not yet been considered systematically by scholars.[[79]](#footnote-79) I shall demonstrate that the various translations reflect the very same dilemma presented by Issi b. Yehuda. The notable exception is the fifth example, which, as we shall see below, does not in fact represent a true doubt concerning punctuation, but is rather polemically motivated.

Let us begin with the example in which each of the possible punctuation options results in a syntactically independent phrase.

According to Issi b. Yehuda, these are the two possible readings of Ex. 17:9:

(3.א) בחר לנו אנשים וצא הלחם בעמלק **מחר**. אנכי נצב על ראש הגבעה

(3.ב) בחר לנו אנשים וצא הלחם בעמלק. **מחר** אנכי נצב על ראש הגבעה

(3.A) Pick some men for us, and go out and do battle with Amalek **tomorrow.** I will stand on the top of the hill

(3.B) Pick some men for us, and go out and do battle with Amalek**.** **Tomorrow** I will stand on the top of the hill

It is possible that the difference between the two readings is not one of punctuation, but also in terms of the meaning, as Rashi suggests (on b.Yom. 52a): “‘Go and do battle with Amalek tomorrow,’ or ‘Go and do battle with Amalek right now and tomorrow I will station myself, but today you do not need my prayer.’” However, the following verse suggests that both actions will take place tomorrow. In light of this, Breuer argues that the word “tomorrow” is shared by both clauses.[[80]](#footnote-80) Thus, even though there may not be a difference in meaning between the two readings, the deliberation over how to punctuate the verse is reflected in the midrashim and the ancient translations. The Septuagint and the Peshitta (in most MSS)[[81]](#footnote-81) support reading A:

ἐπίλεξον σεαυτῷ ἄνδρας δυνατοὺς καὶ ἐξελθὼν παράταξαι τῷ Αμαληκ **αὔριον καὶ** ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἕστηκα ἐπὶ τῆς κορυφῆς τοῦ βουνοῦ

ܓܒܼܝ ܠܟ ܓܒܪ̈ܐ܂ ܘܦܘܩ ܢܥܒܕ ܩܪܒܐ ܥܡ ܥܡܠܝܩ ܡܚܪ܂ **ܘ**ܐܢܐ ܗܐ ܩܐܿܡ ܐܢܐ ܥܠ ܪܫܗܿ ܕܪܡܿܬܐ܂

Pick some men for yourself, and go out and do battle with Amalek **tomorrow.** **And**, behold, I will stand on the top of the hill.[[82]](#footnote-82)

The second reading is clearly endorsed by the Mekhilta of R. Yishmael (Amalek 1, p. 179): מחר נהיה מעותדין ועומדין על ראש הגבעה (Tomorrow we shall be ready and standing on the top of the hill),[[83]](#footnote-83) as well as by the cantillations.[[84]](#footnote-84)

Both readings are documented and it is likely that Issi b. Yehuda is referring to a well-known disagreement concerning punctuation.

The case adduced by R. Tanhuma from Gen. 34:7 reflects a similar ambiguity:

(6.א) ובני יעקב באו מן השדה כשמעם, ויתעצבו האנשים

(6.ב) ובני יעקב באו מן השדה, כשמעם ויתעצבו האנשים

(6.A) And Jacob’s sons came in from the field having heard. The men were distressed.

(6.B) And Jacob’s sons came in from the field. Having heard the men were distressed.

Both readings are grammatically possible.[[85]](#footnote-85) Here, too, the ancient translations reflect the difficulty of deciding how to punctuate the verse. Onkelos, Ps. Jonathan, Neofiti, and the Samaritan Targum all reflect the first reading. Onkelos, for example, renders the verse as follows:

ובני יעקב עלו מן חקלא כד שמעו **ו**אתנסיסו גבריא

And Jacob’s sons came in from the field having heard. **And** the men were distressed.

The Septuagint and the Peshitta, on the other hand, understood the verse according to the second reading:

οἱ δὲ υἱοὶ Ιακωβ ἦλθον ἐκ τοῦ πεδίου ὡς δὲ ἤκουσαν κατενύχθησαν οἱ ἄνδρες

ܘܒ̈ܢܝ ܝܥܩܘܒ ܐܬܘ ܡܢ ܚܩܠܐ܂ **ܘ**ܟܕ ܫܡܥܘ ܟܼܪܝܬ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܓܒܪ̈ܐ[[86]](#footnote-86)

And Jacob’s sons came in from the field. **And having heard** the men were distressed.

The two readings are thus distinct and evidenced in various translations. There is therefore no reason to suppose that the ambiguous word כשמעם (having heard) was considered to be applicable to both halves of the verse.

In the fourth case (Ex. 25:34=37:20) there are also two possible punctuations:

(4.א) ובמנרה ארבעה גבעים**,** משקדים כפתריה ופרחיה

(4.ב) ובמנרה ארבעה גבעים משקדים**,** כפתריה ופרחיה

(4.A) On the lampstand there were four cups**.** Like almonds its bulbs and its petals.

(4.B) On the lampstand there were four cups like almonds**,** its bulbs and its petals.

According to reading A, the bulbs and the petals are like almonds, whereas according to reading B the cups are like almonds. Breuer argued that this second reading is problematic since the words ‘its bulbs and its petals’ seem to be hanging in the air.[[87]](#footnote-87) Nonetheless, here too the different translations reflect both readings.

The tradition of the cantillations clearly favors reading A, and so too, most likely, the Aramaic targumim.[[88]](#footnote-88) The Peshitta to Ex. 37:20, on the other hand, endorses reading B:

ܘܒܡܢܪܬܐ ܐܪ̈ܒܥܐ ܐܣܩ̈ܦܝܢ ܩܒܝܥܝܢ܂ ܘܚܙܘܪ̈ܐ ܘܫ̈ܘܫܢܐ

On the lampstand there were four cups attached.[[89]](#footnote-89) And knops and lilies.

A similar reading is found in a version of the Septuagint cited in Origen’s Hexapla on Ex. 37:20:[[90]](#footnote-90)

καὶ ἐν τῇ λυχνίᾳ τέσσαες κρατῆρες έκτετυπωμένοι καρυΐσκους, οἱ σφαιρωτῆρες αὐτῆς, καὶ τὰ κρίνα αὐτῆς

And in the lampstand four cups fashioned like almonds, its knops and its lilies.

Thus both readings suggested by Issi b. Yehuda are documented in contemporary sources.

In the three examples we have just seen, each of the readings is grammatically possible. In the other examples, however, the situation is more complex. In some cases, one must assume that the middle word is shared by both halves of the verse.

We can begin with Jacob’s admonition of Simeon and Levi in Gen. 49:6-7, which presents us with the most convincing example of a shared word.

The two possible punctuations suggested by Issi b. Yehuda are as follows; the translation follows the Masoretic vocalization:

(2.א) כי באפם הרגו איש וברצונם עקרו שור. ארור אפם כי עז

(2.ב) כי באפם הרגו איש וברצונם עקרו שור ארור. אפם כי עז

(2.A) Because in their wrath they slew men, and in their self-will they maimed an oxen (*shor*). Cursed be their wrath for it is fierce

(2.B) Because in their wrath they slew men, and in their self-will they maimed an oxen (*shor*) cursed. Their wrath for it is fierce

According to reading A, both sentences stand independently. But according to reading B, the second sentence (אפם כי עז) is barely grammatical.[[91]](#footnote-91) To use Nicanor’s terminology, this is not a case where λόγον ἔχει ἀμφότερα, where each reading is semantically and syntactically coherent. And, in fact, this reading is not attested in any of the translations or midrashim.

In this light, the alternative reading should regard ארור (cursed) as a shared word:

(2.ג) כי באפם הרגו איש וברצונם עקרו שור ארור. ארור אפם כי עז ועברתם כי קשתה.

(2.C) Because in their anger they slew men, and in their self-will they maimed an oxen (*shor*) cursed.[[92]](#footnote-92) Cursed be their anger for it is fierce

According to this reading, the word “cursed” functions as a mesozeugma and creates a complex axial phrase, since the word does not fill the same grammatical role in each of the sentences, as an adjective or noun in the first and a verb in the second.

Here too the ancient translations are divided. Reading A is reflected in the Greek translations and the Peshitta, all of which vocalized ŠWR not as *shor* (oxen) but rather as *shur* (wall): [[93]](#footnote-93)

ܡܛܠ ܕܒܪܘܓܙܗܘܢ ܩܼܛܠܘ ܓܒܪ̈ܐ܂ ܘܒܚܡܬܗܘܢ ܥܩܪܘ ܫܘܪܐ܂ ܠܝܛ ܗܼܘ ܪܘܓܙܗܘܢ ܡܛܠ ܕܥܫܝܢ܂

Because in their anger they slew men, and in their wrath they destroyed a wall. **Cursed** be their wrath for it is fierce.

Fragment Targum V, which renders ŠWR as *shor* (oxen),[[94]](#footnote-94) also connected “cursed” to what follows:

ארום ברוגזיהון קטילו מלכין עם שלטונין וברעותהון זבינו יוסף אחוהון דמתיל בתורא. **ליט** הוה כרכה שכם די עלו לגווה שמעון ולוי <למ>חרבה יתיה ברוגזיהון

Because in their anger they slew kings along with their subordinates and in their self-will they sold their brother Joseph, who is compared to an oxen. **Cursed** is the city of Shechem in which Simeon and Levi entered in order to destroy it with their wrath.

On the other hand, almost all the other Aramaic Targumim, which understood ŠWR as wall (*shur*), reflect reading C, scuh as, for example, in Onkelos:

ארי ברוגזהון קטלו קטול וברעותהון תרעו שור **סנאה. ליט** רוגזהון ארי תקיף

Because in their anger they slew, and in their desire they breached a wall **of an enemy**. **Cursed** is their wrath for it is fierce.

Onkelos translates ארור (cursed) with two different words: סנאה (enemy)[[95]](#footnote-95) and ליט (cursed), the first a noun and the latter an adjective. The targumin understood the expression שור ארור (*shur arur*) as a construct: שור של ארור (the wall of the cursed one). This reading thus adds a negative portrayal of the people of Shechem to the cursing of Shimon and Levi.[[96]](#footnote-96) Based on the targumim, which translated the word *arur* twice, some scholars regarded this case as the key for understanding the rest of the examples, which supposedly also involve a shared word.[[97]](#footnote-97)

However, as we have seen, there were translations which *did not* consider *arur* to be a shared word. Reading “cursed” as a shared word is therefore just one of two possible readings! In fact, the deliberation here is between reading A and reading C, the latter of which is a combination of readings A and B. This is similar to Nicanor’s doubt concerning Teucer’s injury, discussed in detail above. There, too, Nicanor deliberated between reading A and reading A+B, which was based on the assumption of that certain words were shared by both clauses.

Another verse that served as evidence that “words without *hekhre‘a*” refer to shared words is Genesis 4:7, containing God’s address to Cain. This verse is extremely difficult to interpret, the ambiguous punctuation and the unclear meaning and grammatical function of the word *se’et* being the main problems. Many solutions for these cruxes have been offered by commentators and contemporary scholars. Given space limitations here, I will not be able to address all these solutions, but will focus on those that help illuminate the readings suggested by Issi b. Yehuda.

The following would seem to be his first reading:

(1.א) הלוא אם תיטיב – שאת; ואם לא תיטיב – לפתח חטאת רבץ.

(1.A) For if you do well – *se’et*; and if you do not do well – sin couches at the door

According to this reading, there are two complete conditional phrases (including both a protasis and an apodosis), one positive and the other negative.[[98]](#footnote-98) The result of the first is *se’et*, and the result of the second is “sin couches at the door.” This reading is supported by the Aramaic Targumim, Symmachus, Theodotion and Aquila (but not the Septuagint), the Peshitta and the Cantillations. Nevertheless, while they are in agreement concerning the punctuation, they are divided in their understanding of the meaning of *se’et*.

Ps.-Jonathan, like the rest of the Aramaic targumim[[99]](#footnote-99) and Symmachus, understand *se’et* to mean “forbearing sin,” or “forgiveness”:

הלא אם תייטיב עובדך – ישתביק לך חובך

ואין לא תייטיב עובדך בעלמא הדין – ליום דינא רבא חטאך נטיר

If you shall better your ways – your debt will be forgiven

And if you do not better your ways in this world – your sin is kept for the Great Day of Judgement.

The Peshitta, similar to Aquila and Theodotion, understood *se’et* to mean “to lift,” “receive,” or “accept”:

ܗܐ ܐܢ ܬܫܦܪ ܩܒܿܠܬ܂ ܘܐܠܐ ܬܫܼܦܪ܂ ܥܠ ܬܪܥܐ ܚܛܗܐ ܪܒܝܥ܂

For if you do well – I will accept (it),[[100]](#footnote-100) and if you do not do well – sin couches at the door.

There has been much debate among scholars c. Kogut suggested the following reading, understanding *se’et* to mean “forbearing sin” (נשיאת עוון):

(1.ב) הלוא אם תיטיב – [מוטב], שאת ואם לא תיטיב.

(1.B) For if you do well – [good]; *se’et* and if you do not do well

According to Kogut, “it would seem that behind this punctuation, which the biblical syntax does not support, stands the motivation to turn the bettering of the way (אם תיטיב) from a *condition*, which it is possible not to fulfill, to a *demand*, expressed as a rhetorical condition.”[[101]](#footnote-101) Yet as Mordechai Breuer had already noted, such a reading either ignores the *vav* conjunctive and reads “you shall forbear your sin (*se’et*) if you do not do well” (תישא את עוונך אם לא תיטיב); or necessitates considering *se’et* as if it were placed at the end of the conditional clause: “and if you do not do well – you shall forbear your sin (*se’et*)” (ואם לא תיטיב תישא את עוונך).[[102]](#footnote-102) To that one can add that Kogut did not supply any evidence that such a reading indeed existed in antiquity.

Daube, in line with his understanding of “words without *hekhre‘a*” means shared words and that Issi b. Yehuda offers in fact only one reading, interprets the verse as follows:[[103]](#footnote-103)

The Rabbis understand the verse in this way: “If thou doest well, there shall be forgiveness; there shall be forgiveness if thou doest not well; the sin lieth at the door” etc. God, that is, told Cain that, if he behaved decently to Abel, his evil thought would be pardoned; but even if he killed his brother, he would still retain a chance of pardon – even then victory over sin by repentance would be possible.

According to Daube, the verse should be read as follows:

(1.ג) הלוא אם תיטיב – שאת, שאת – ואם לא תיטיב.

(1.C) For if you do well – *se’et*; *se’et* – also if you do not do well.[[104]](#footnote-104)

Daube considered the *vav* conjunctive in the second part of the verse should be understood as “even” or “also.” According to this understanding, Issi b. Yehuda completely severed the continuation of the verse – “sin couches at the door” – from the conditional phrases. This reading is highly problematic and we find no trace of it in the ancient translations and interpretations.[[105]](#footnote-105) Moreover, according to Daube’s reading, Issi b. Yehuda does not even consider reading A, which was in fact the most common and accepted reading in late antiquity.[[106]](#footnote-106)

It would seem then that the most plausible reading is the one suggested by Mordechai and Yohanan Breuer:[[107]](#footnote-107)

(1.ד) הלוא אם תיטיב שאת – [ניחא], ואם לא תיטיב – לפתח חטאת רבץ.

(1.D) For if you do *se’et* well - [good]; and if you do not do [*se’et*] well – sin couches at the door

According to this reading, in the protasis of the second conditional sentence there is an ellipsis and one has to assume the word *se’et*. More importantly, the first conditional sentence is defective and is missing an apodosis. Such a structure of a rhetorical condition with a missing apodosis is documented several times in the Bible, as, for example, in Ex. 32:32:[[108]](#footnote-108)

וְעַתָּה אִם תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם –, וְאִם אַיִן מְחֵנִי נָא מִסִּפְרְךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתָבְתָּ

And now, if you shall bare their sin – ; and if not, please blot me from the book which you have written.

Reading D would therefore seem the most likely. First, it is grammatically plausible, unlike the other suggestions. Second, and more importantly, it is supported by the Midrash, as in Sifre Deut. 54 (p. 121):

ברכה וקללה, הברכה אם תשמעו והקללה אם לא תשמעו.

כיוצא בו אתה אומר: "הלא אם תיטיב שאת" (בר' ד 7):

אם תיטיב שאת – ברכה, ואם לא תיטיב שאת – קללה

Blessing and curse, the blessing if you shall listen and the curse if you shall not listen.

Similarly you say: “For if you do bare (*se’et*) well”:

For if you do forbear (*se’et*) well – a blessing, and if you do not forbear (*se’et*) well – a curse.[[109]](#footnote-109)

According to the reading offered in this derasha, one has to complete the apodosis of the first sentence (with “blessing”) and add the word *se’et* to the protasis of both sentences, exactly as in reading D.

After presenting reading A and D, Breuer concludes “here too there is no doubt, but rather a clear decision that the word refers both backward and forwards.”[[110]](#footnote-110) Such an assertion, however, seems valid only in the case of reading D, in which the word *se’et* elliptically functions as part of the protasis of the second condition. In fact, there is clear exegetical deliberation between the two suggested punctuation options: in each reading, the word *se’et* has a different meaning and a different grammatical role. According to reading 1.A, *se’et* is the apodosis of the first condition, and its meaning is probably “forbearing sin” or “forgiveness.” According to reading 1.D, on the other hand, *se’et* is linked to תיטיב (to do well), and likely means “to act” or “to behave.” Whereas in the case of ארור (cursed) it was possible to argue that reading the word twice sustains both reading 2.A and 2.B, in the case of *se’et* this is impossible, as the meanings of readings 1.A and 1.D are incompatible and mutually exclusive!

It would seem therefore that in his reading of Gen. 4:7, too, Issi b. Yehuda presents two discrete punctuation options, in both of which the word *se’et* is part of the first conditional phrase. The dilemma is whether the word is part of the protasis or the apodosis. In addition, according to the second option (1.D), the word *se’et* belongs elliptically to the protasis of the second conditional phrase as well.

We have seen thus far that there is a true difficulty in deciding between two possible punctuations in the first four examples adduced by Issi b. Yehuda as well as in the additional example provided by R. Tanhuma. This difficulty is also reflected in the translations and Midrashim, which are not in agreement concerning the correct reading. In contrast, the fifth and last example in Issi b. Yehuda’s list is categorically different from those that come before.

According to Issi b. Yehuda, it is uncertain which of the two following readings of Deut. 31:16 is correct:

(5.א) הנך שכב עם אבתיך. וקם העם הזה וזנה אחרי אלהי נכר הארץ

(5.ב) הנך שכב עם אבתיך וקם. העם הזה וזנה אחרי אלהי נכר הארץ

(5.A) Behold, you are soon to lie with your fathers. *And will arise* this people and whore after the gods of the strangers of the land.

(5.B) Behold, you are soon to lie with your fathers *and will arise*. This people and whore after the gods of the strangers of the land.

As several scholars have already noted,[[111]](#footnote-111) it is clear that reading B cannot stand on its own grammatically. Rather, the word וקם (and will arise) needs to be read twice:

(5.ג) הנך שוכב עם אבותיך **וקם. וקם** העם הזה וזנה אחרי אלהי נכר הארץ

(5.C) Behold, you are soon to lie with your fathers *and will arise*. *And will arise* this people and whore after the gods of the strangers of the land.

Yet unlike the previous examples, there is no real syntactical ambiguity here, since it is evident that reading A is the only possibility that conveys the literal sense of the verse. All ancient translations reflect this reading.

Reading C, on the other hand, is based on a non-literal understanding of the verse whose sole purpose is proving that resurrection is attested in the Torah. It would seem that this reading has a polemical context, as can be clearly seen in the following story from b.San. 90b:

שאלו מינין את רבן גמליאל: מניין שהקדוש ברוך הוא מחייה מתים?

אמר להם מן התורה, ומן הנביאים, ומן הכתובים, ולא קיבלו ממנו.

מן התורה - דכתיב "ויאמר ה' אל משה הנך שכב עם אבתיך וקם"

אמרו לו: ודילמא "וקם העם הזה וזנה!" [...]

Heretics (*minim*) asked Rabban Gamaliel: Whence (do we know) that the Holy One, Blessed be He, resurrects the dead?

He said to them: From the Torah, from the Prophets, and from the Writings. But they did not accept [proofs] from him.

[He said:] From the Torah – for it is written: “and God said to Moses: Behold, you are soon to lie with your fathers and will arise.”

They said to him: and maybe [it should be read]: “And will arise this people and whore”! […]

Rabban Gamaliel employs a non-literal reading to prove to the heretics that resurrection does indeed appear in the Torah. Yet the heretics, rightly, reject his reading and suggest that the verse should be read in the more straightforward way.[[112]](#footnote-112)

It would seem that in this case Issi b. Yehuda does not address a true syntactical problem, but instead wishes to take advantage of the existence of verses without *hekhre‘a*, which he has just enumerated, in order to find a proof for resurrection in the Torah. For the non-literal reading to make grammatical sense it is necessary to regard the word וקם (“and will arise”) as a shared word, a mesozeugma. This, however, does not pose a difficulty; some of the previous verses identified by Issi b. Yehuda also made a use of a shared word as part of one of the two possible readings. In fact, Issi b. Yehuda does not argue that reading C, comprised of readings A + B, is the sole correct reading, but only that, in light of the previous examples, it is at the very least possible and cannot be rejected out of hand.

Moreover, it is no accident that the list of “words without *hekhre‘a*” ends with this very example. At first blush it might appear that this is due to the fact that the list follows the Pentateuchal order, ending with a verse from Deuteronomy. However, in light of what we have seen, it is more likely that this verse is in fact the very purpose for the composition of this list; the previous examples, based on real exegetical difficulties, are supposed to lend support and credibility to the reading which provides a proof for resurrection from the Torah.

In sum, the expression “words without *hekhre‘a*” should be understood as referring to verses which contain an unresolvable ambiguity regarding punctuation, that is, whether a word is to be read with what precedes it or with what follows. This concurs with how the midrash presents the two readings as two equally valid possibilities (the second of which is introduced by “or” [או]). In some cases, one of the readings demands that we treat the middle word as a mesozeugma which should be read twice. This interpretation stands in contrast to the approach of David Daube and Yohanan Breuer who argue that the expression does not indicate a doubt but rather *one single reading* that contains a shared word.

In five of the six cases (including the one proposed by R. Tanhuma) there is a real exegetical difficulty which is also reflected in the readings proposed by the ancient translations and midrashim. In the third (מחר), fourth (משוקדים) and sixth (כשמעם) cases, the two punctuation options are equally plausible grammatically. In the second case, the word ארור (cursed) needs to be read twice in order for the second reading to be grammatical. In the first case, on the other hand, there is no grammatical imperative to duplicate the word *se’et* in the second reading, but nevertheless the word is implied elliptically in the second condition (ואם לא תיטיב [שאת] – לפתח חטאת רובץ). Finally, I argued that the fifth case does not reflect a true syntactical ambiguity concerning punctuation, but rather takes advantage of the existence of such ambiguities in order to grant legitimization to a reading that proves resurrection from the Torah. As mentioned, this may be the implicit motivation for the compilation of this list.

### 3.3 Conclusion

To conclude, in this part I have discussed how Nicanor and Issi b. Yehuda, two scholars of the second century CE, dealt with cases in which a word or words in a sentence could be read either with the preceding or the following phrase. As we have seen, both scholars believed that in some cases it not possible to decide between the two readings. It would seem that the expression דברים שאין להם הכרע (“words without *hekhre‘a*”) is equivalent to ἑκατέρωσε δύναται προσδίδοσθαι: both indicate that the two punctuation options are equally plausible grammatically, and it is therefore preferable to present the reader with both readings without advocating one over the other.

As noted above, Daube is the only scholar who sought parallels to “words without *hekhre‘a*” in Greco-Roman literature by comparing it to ἀπὸ κοινοῦ (“shared word”). In his conclusion, he points to several differences between the rabbis and the Greco-Roman grammarians:[[113]](#footnote-113)

In the first place, whereas in the Greek and Latin ones, from the formal point of view, the word in question readily goes with either what precedes it, in the majority of the Rabbinic cases, only one division accords with good grammar. […] In the second place, with the probable exception of the sophists, a Greek or Latin grammarian would normally plump for one of the two alternatives. He would argue either for *statuam auream – hastam tenentem* or for *statuam – auream hastam tenetem*. The Rabbis in the half a dozen cases without *hekhreaʽ* connect the word both with the preceding and with the following clauses at the same time. […] None of the familiar Greek or Latin ἀπὸ κοινοῦ constructions are as extreme as the Rabbinic figure of absence of *hekhreaʽ*.

In light of our findings, it is possible to question Daube’s conclusions from both the Rabbinic and the Greek side. First, Daube argues that, except for the Sophists, the Greek and Roman grammarians almost always decided in favor of one of the readings. Yet, as we have seen, Nicanor often does not decide which is the correct reading, but is instead content with noting the fact that both reading are grammatically possible.

In addition, Daube’s equation of “words without *hekhre‘a*” with the ἀπὸ κοινοῦ construction and his subsequent argument that the rabbis read the verses in opposition to the rules of grammar should be rejected. As I have shown at great length, “words without *hekhre‘a*” represents a true doubt between two readings, both of which are syntactically valid.[[114]](#footnote-114)

Yet even though most of Daube’s conclusions are problematic, he was nonetheless correct in comparing Issi b. Yehuda’s approach to that of the problems of *synthesis* and *diairesis* in the Greco-Roman literature. The most precise parallel, though, is not to be found in theoretical writings such as those of Aristotle and Quintilian, but rather in the concrete and systematic commentaries of Nicanor, Issi b. Yehuda’s older contemporary.

This is a rare case in which it is possible to identify by name a Jewish and a Greek scholar living in exactly the same period who dealt with the same type of syntactical problems. This does *not* prove that there was necessarily any direct interaction between the two. Nevertheless, the striking similarity points to a specific historical context for the appearance of Issi b. Yehuda’s sophisticated grammatical approach.

## Conclusion

This chapter focused on the ways Greek and rabbinic commentators dealt with various ambiguities in their respective canonical texts. In the first part, I examined how they tackled ambiguities stemming from homonyms; uncertainty regarding which noun is described by an adjective; and doubts regarding which word is the object and which the subject. Both the rabbis and the Homeric scholars seem to have preferred to resolve these ambiguities based on the immediate context or by applying a verse from elsewhere. The second part of the chapter focused on Nicanor and Issi b. Yehuda’s presentation of two syntactically valid ways of punctuating certain verses, without deciding which of the two is the correct reading.

Besides the rabbis, other early Jewish commentators and translators faced similar problems of syntactical ambiguities. However, they did not explicitly present the various alternative readings, but instead resolved the ambiguity by rewriting or translating the text. The Rabbis, on the other hand, directly and explicitly comment upon various syntactical ambiguities and strive to address them transparently using fixed and consistent terminology.

In some of the examples above we have seen how the rabbis take advantage of ambiguities for moral and theological purposes (e.g., fear vs. love; God choosing Israel or Israel choosing God; biblical proofs for resurrection). Yet such interpretations could have been formulated only against the backdrop of a systematic and reflexive engagement with the syntax of the biblical text. Although in most of the cases discussed in this chapter there in not necessarily a direct terminological link between the Homeric and rabbinic commentaries, the striking similarities in identifying syntactical ambiguities and in presenting them explicitly reflect a shared intellectual context and demonstrate that the rabbis took part in contemporary grammatical discourse.

## Appendix: Prosody

We have seen above that R. Yehoshua suggested reading לו (LW) instead of לא (L’). As noted, this is most probably based on a written version לוא (LW’). R. Yehoshua therefore takes advantage of the ambivalence of the written tradition (*ketiv*) to change the reading tradition (*qere*). It is even possible that this also entailed a change in pronunciation.

It is interesting to compare this to the following change of οὗ to οὐ found in Aristotle’s discussion of prosody in his *de sophisticis elenchis* (166b):

Παρὰ δὲ τὴν προσῳδίαν ἐν μὲν τοῖς ἄνευ γραφῆς διαλεκτικοῖς οὐ ῥᾴδιον ποιῆσαι λόγον, ἐν δὲ τοῖς γεγραμμένοις καὶ ποιήμασι μᾶλλον. οἷον καὶ τὸν Ὅμηρον ἔνιοι διορθοῦνται πρὸς τοὺς ἐλέγχοντας ὡς ἄτοπον εἰρηκότα “τὸ μὲν οὗ καταπύθεται ὄμβρῳ[”](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/Q.html)· λύουσι γὰρ αὐτὸ τῇ προσῳδίᾳ, λέγοντες τὸ [“](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/Q.html)ου[”](https://samba.huji.ac.il/+CSCO+0h756767633A2F2F6A6A6A2E6779742E6870762E727168++/help/BetaManual/online/Q.html) ὀξύτερον.

It is not easy to construct an argument relating to accent in discussions which are not written down, but it is easier in written matter and poetry. For example, some people emend Homer to meet the objection of critics that his phrase τὸ μὲν οὐ καταπύθεται ὄμβρῳ is a strange one. For they solve the difficulty by a change of accent (τῇ προσῳδίᾳ), pronouncing the “ου” more sharply (ὀξύτερον).[[115]](#footnote-115)

According to Aristotle, the transition to a written text opens up the possibility of manipulating accents, as the exegete can now give precedence to the written tradition over the oral one.

Aristotle demonstrates how, by changing the accent of οὗ, it is possible to solve a textual problem. In chapter 25 of the *Poetics* he notes that Hippias of Thasos (5th century BCE) was the scholar who offered this emendation (οὐ), which is in fact the version that appears in all the surviving manuscripts of the *Iliad*.[[116]](#footnote-116) The more difficult version that probably stood in front of Hippias is the following (*Il*. 23.326-328, from Nestor address to his son, Antilochus, before the chariot-race):

σῆμα δέ τοι ἐρέω μάλ’ ἀριφραδές, οὐδέ σε λήσει.

ἕστηκε ξύλον αὖον ὅσον τ’ ὄργυι’ ὑπὲρ αἴης

ἢ δρυὸς ἢ πεύκης· τὸ μὲν **οὗ** καταπύθεται ὄμβρῳ,

I will give you a clear mark and you cannot fail to notice it.

There is a dry stump standing up from the ground about six feet,

oak, it may be, or pine, **part of which** (οὗ) rots away by rain-water

According to this version, part of the dry stump rotted from rain water. This version was deemed problematic and strange (ἄτοπον) by ancient critics. Vahlens, followed by Carroll, argues that the difficulty was stylistic, as the correct order should be οὗ τὸ μὲν and not τὸ μὲν οὗ.[[117]](#footnote-117) Michael of Ephesus, 12th century, however, posits a more substantial difficulty in his commentary to *de sophisticis elenchis* (erroneously attributed to Alexander)[[118]](#footnote-118): Nestor points from afar at a dry stump but is not sure whether it is pine or oak. How then can he notice that part of the stump has rotted? The problem, then, is likely that of verisimilitude.

Hippias of Thasos’ solution was to change the accent (and remove the rough breathing), thus changing οὗ to the negation οὐ.[[119]](#footnote-119) Following this change, the meaning of the verse is “which does *not* (οὐ) rot away by rain-water” instead of “*part of which* (οὗ) rots away by rain-water.”

In addition, this version, as the scholia notes,[[120]](#footnote-120) accords well with the opinion of Theophrastus (371-287 BCE), Aristotle’s successor, who in his *Historia Plantarum* (5, 4, 3) writes that the pine does not rot from rain water or sweet water in general, but only from sea water. Thus according to the scholia, Homer, through Nestor, teaches us a scientific fact: oak and pine do not rot from rain water. It is possible that Theophrastus’ statement contributed to the universal acceptance of the version οὐ.[[121]](#footnote-121) Moreover, if such an opinion concerning the pine existed already in Hippias’ time, it can be proposed that the critics argued that Homer’s statement that part of the pine rotted from rain water was factually wrong, flying in the face of contemporary science.[[122]](#footnote-122)

This example is just one of many cases in which Homeric scholars change the received traditional pronunciation of a word in order to solve an exegetical problem, without actually emending the written text. Thus, for example, Aristotle adduces another case in which Hippias changed δ**ί**δομεν to διδ**ό**μεν; in Sch. bT *Il.* 18.591-592b ex. a change in breathing is suggested from **οἷ**ον to **οἶ**ον;[[123]](#footnote-123) and, in an example discussed above in chapter three, some scholars suggest changing Δ**ό**λων (Dolon) to δολ**ῶ**ν (tricking) (Sch. A *Il.* 10.447a. Ariston.).

Philo too recognized the hermeneutical potential in changing an accent. In *Leg.* 3.51 he suggests reading God’s address to Adam in Gen. 3:9 not only as the question πο**ῦ** εἶ (“where are you?”), but also as the indicative statement πο**ὺ** εἶ (“you are here somewhere”).[[124]](#footnote-124)

In the Rabbinic tradition, the obvious comparison is to those cases in which the rabbis prefer the consonantal text (אם למקרא) over the pronunciation tradition (אם למסורת), which allows them to change the vocalization. Quite often, these derashot are introduced by the formula אל תקרי א' אלא ב' (“do not read A but rather B”). As shown by Shlomo Naeh and Moshe Zipor, in many of such cases the rabbis do not necessarily invent a new reading but rather follow an alternative reading tradition that is sometimes known to us from translations or other biblical manuscripts.[[125]](#footnote-125) In the aggadic derashot (especially in amoraic literature), in contrast, it is clear that many rabbis made use of the wide potential of possible vocalizations of the consonantal text for their homiletical purposes, without any recourse to preexisting alternative versions.[[126]](#footnote-126) It is important to note that, unlike the Hellenistic precedents, these alternative vocalizations are usually *not* intended to replace the traditional one but rather to supplement it.

Let us examine one short example. In the description of the crossing of the sea we read in Ex. 14:29:

וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָלְכוּ בַיַּבָּשָׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם וְהַמַּיִם לָהֶם חֹמָה מִימִינָם וּמִשְּׂמֹאלָם:

But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall (ḤMH) unto them on their right hand, and on their left

The Mekhilta of R. Ishmael notes (va-Yehi 6, pp. 111-112):[[127]](#footnote-127)

ומנין שאף הים נתמלא עליהם חימה. שלמעלן נאמ' "והמים להם חומה". וכאן "חמה" כתיב חסר ו'ו.

And whence [do we know] that even the sea was filled with rage (*ḥema*) against them? For above it says: “and the waters were unto them ḤWMH” (Ex. 14:22) whereas here it is written: “ḤMH”, without a *vav*.

This interpretation takes advantage of the defective spelling of חמה (ḤMH), unlike the *plene* spelling חומה (ḤWMH) earlier on in v. 22, in order to offer another vocalization: instead of reading it as *ḥoma* (wall) the commentator suggest to read it as *ḥema* (rage), even though this runs counter to both the received reading tradition and the literal sense.

The similarity between the change of accent in Greek commentaries and the change of vocalization of the written text by the rabbis *does not* point to influence, but rather further highlights the ways in which the stabilization of the written version of a canonical text opens up new hermeneutical venues to commentators of different textual communities.[[128]](#footnote-128)

1. Trans. Rushton Fairclough 1942, p. 487. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For a comprehensive discussion of this work see Ebbesen 1981 and Adelo 1977. Cf. Galen’s' work on fallacies (*Capt*.), which was influenced by Aristotle (see Robert 1977). See also Quinitilian, *Instit*. ….. See also Daube 1953, pp. 177-180 and Lausberg 1998, pp. 96-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Aristot. *Soph. El.* 165b. The definitions are adapted from Ebbesen 1981, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Trypho I, pp. 203-204. Cf. the almost identical definition in Trypho II, p. 245, who adduces further examples. On the two Tryphos, see Dickey 2007, pp. 84-85 with further bibliography. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For a collection of the scholiae discussing homonyms see Erbse 1969-1999, 7:134-135 (index V) s.v. homonyma. For further examples and discussion see Nünlist 2009, pp. 240-242 and note 8 as well as Schironi 2018, pp. 267-272. The vast majority of the homonyms discussed by the scholia are private names, but there are several cases where commentators discuss homonymous nouns and adjectives. Thus, for example, in Sch. A *Il.* 8.513b Ariston. Aristarchus notes that βέλος might designate both the arrow and the wound caused by it. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Dickey (2007, p. 238) translates the term ἐπιφορά as “conclusion; act of following immediately”. Cf. Lallot 1998, p. 252; Dalimier 2001, pp. 411-412. See also Sch. bT Od. 1.268a. It is interesting to compare this kind of solution to similar terms in rabbinic literature which designate a resolution from the immediate context: ממקומו הוא מוכרע (‘it is decided from its context’, e.g., Mekh. RY 3 [p. 213]; Sifra Aharei 3,2 81c; 5,1 82b); שפיל לסיפא דקרא (‘go down to the end of the verse’, e.g., b.Ber. 10a; b.Eruv. 101a; b.Suk. 52b; b.Hul. 87a); תשובתו בצידו (‘its solution is at its side’, e.g., b.Sot. 29b) רפואתה בצידה (‘its cure is at its side’, e.g., Gen. Rab. 8 [p. 63]). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Nünlist 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See also the short discussion of the scholia in Schironi 2018, pp. 684-685. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. And indeed on *Il.* 13.299 Aristarchus notes:

   Sch. *Il.* A 13.299a. Ariston: τῷ δὲ Φόβος φίλος υἱός[:](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/P10.html) ὅτι ῥητῶς Ἄρεως υἱὸς Φόβος. ἡ δὲ ἀναφορὰ πρὸς τὴν ἀμφιβολίαν τοῦ [„](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/Q1.html)καί ῥ’ ἵππους κέλετο Δεῖμόν τε Φόβον τε [<](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html)[/](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/P3.html) ζευγνύμεν[>](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB2.html)[“](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/Q2.html) [(](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html)15.119-20[)](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html).

   “With Terror his beloved son”: [There is a *diplē*,] because Phobos [is] expressly [called] Ares’ son. The reference (ἀναφορὰ) is to to the ambiguity of “and he (sc. Poseidon) ordered Fear and Terror to harness the horses” (*Il.* 15.119-120). (trans. Nünlist 2012, p. 117)

   See also the discussion in Nünlist 2012, pp. 117-118, who defines the use of *anaphora* by Aristarchus as follows: “It expressly identifies the subject of the passage for which the information that is provided by the note (or the line itself) is relevant, but it does not necessarily spell out why or in what respect this information is important.” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. On Antimachus, see Matthews 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Antim. fr. 37. Cf. Sch. *Il.* T 299b. ex. [(](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html" \t "morph)Ariston.[)](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/SB1.html) and see commentary on this fragment in Matthews 1996, pp. 150-151. Cf. Lehrs 1882, pp. 177-178. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Schironi 2018, p. 685. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For discussion of mis-dependence see chapter 1. For Aristarchus’ critique of Antimachus’ reading of Homer, see Schironi 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Cf. Quintilian, *Instit*. 7.9 “Accusativi geminatione facta amphibolia solvitur ablativo, ut illud ‘Lachetem audivi percussisse Demean’ fiat ‘a Lachete percussum Demean.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Cf. Eust. ad Od. 3.24, I, p. 110: “Τὸ δὲ, αἰδώς δ’ αὖ νέον ἄνδρα γεραίτερον ἐξερέεσθαι, γνωμικῶς μὲν ἐῤῥέθη. σχῆμα δὲ ἀμφιβολίας ἔχει.” οἰήσεται γάρ τις, ἀμφίβολον εἶναι εἴτε αἰδὼς, νέον ἄνδρα ἐρώτησιν διδόναι ἀνδρὶ γέροντι. εἴτε καὶ ἀνάπαλιν. τοιαῦτα γὰρ ὑποβάλλουσι νοεῖν αἱ συνεχεῖς δύο αἰτιατικαί. ὡς καὶ ἐν τῷ, ὦ Ζεῦ, δὸς καταβαλεῖν τὸν σὺν ἐμέ. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Cf. Sch. A *Il.* 13.261a1-2 Nic.; Sch. D *Il*. 13.261; Sch. *Od*. 4.42 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Dickey 2007, p. 263; Blank 1983, pp. 50-51; Lallot 1998, p. 85. Nicanor is consistent in this reading, cf. Sch. A *Il.* 13.261a1. Nic. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The term διακρίνει is also used in order to designate a resolution of a doubt within the context of a single narrative, as can be seen in the following scholia which deals with Zeus’ address to Hera, where he notes that Menelaus won the duel with Paris:

    Sch. bT *Il.* 4.13 ex.: ἀλλ’ ἦ τοι νίκη μὲν ἀρηϊφίλου Μενελάου[:](http://www.tlg.uci.edu/help/BetaManual/online/P10.html) […] διέκρινε δὲ τὸ ἀμφίβολον ὁ λόγος τοῦ Διός, ὅπως μὴ δοκῇ τοῖς Ἀχαιοῖς χαρίζεσθαι ὁ ποιητής.

    “So, the victory now is with warlike Menelaus”: […] The word of Zeus adjudicates the doubt (διέκρινε δὲ τὸ ἀμφίβολον), so that it would not seem that that the poet prefers the Achaeans. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This text has also been discussed in chapter 1. Cf. Mekh. RS 18:17, p. 130. For a similar ambiguity resolved by another verse see Mekh. RI, Yitro 1, p. 192; Mekh. RS 18:5, pp. 131-132. See also Sifra, Miluim 1,2 43c. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The version which appears in Ms London 341 and Ms Oxford 151 is clearly superior to the secondary version Finkelstein chose for his edition (Sifre Deuteronomy, pp. 353-354). For parallels see ibid. On this midrash, see Urbach 1978, pp. 470-471 and Flusser 1977, pp. 182-183; Goshen-Gottstein 1993; Yuval 2010, pp. 31-32; Rokeah 1979; Mihaly 1964; Basser 1984, pp. 132-137. The following discussion is mainly based on Paz and Bar-On 2011, pp. 45-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. For a similar ambiguity, see e.g., Sif. Deut. 333, p. 383. For further occurrences of the term תלי בדלא תלי see Mekh. Rashbi 12:14, p. 16; Sifre Num. 91, p. 230; Sif. Zut. Num. 7:2, p. 253 (where a Hebrew version of the term appears, based on the Yalqut: עדין הדבר תלוי); Sif. Deut. 342, p. 393. Urbach (1978, 470-471 note 19) as well as Albeck (1927, p. 77) argued that the original version of the term was ועדין הדבר תלי and that the words בדלא תלי where introduced based on a term in the Babylonian Talmud: תלי תניא בדלא תניא (e.g. b.Shab. 22a). Yet as Kahana has argued, there seems to be no reason to doubt the version of most MSS (Kahana 2011, 3:625 note 5). It should be noted that this term does not always indicate ambiguity but at times also a simple lack of information. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. In the Masoretic text שבט. It is hard to decide whether the Midrash preserves an alternative version of the verse or that this is a scribal error inspired by Deut. 32:9. In any case it would seem that the Midrash clearly identifies an inner-biblical commentary on Deut. 32:8-9, which regards the difference between Israel and the nations as based on Israel’s recognition of the true God as opposed to the nations’ mistakes, and not in an action of God Himself. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Finklestein refers in his edition to Deut. 14:2 most likely due to the *vav* conjunctive in ובך (cf. Midrash Tannaim to Deuteronomy 14:2, p. 73). However, the citation is more suitable to Deut. 7:6, where the word אלוקיך, missing in Deut. 14:2, appears. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. For further discussion see Paz and Bar-On ???? [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Cf. Gen. 6:10 and see 10:1 (וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת בְּנֵי נֹחַ שֵׁם חָם וָיָפֶת), although the description of the genealogies of Noah’s sons in the following verse begins with Japhet. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Trans. VanderKam. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Genesis Apocryphon ???: ל[שם] ברי רבא יליד לה בר לקדמין ארפכשד תרתין שנין בתר מבולא ו[הוו]א כול בני שם [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Hexapla 1:28: [sc. ἀδελφῷ Ιαφεθ] τῷ μεγάλῳ, [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. For a discussion of the various versions, see Ginzburg 1913-1928, 5:179-180 and note 30; Hayward 1996, pp. 69-70; Milikowsky 2013, 2:20 and note 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Septuaguint Gen. 10:21: Καὶ τῷ Σημ ἐγενήθη καὶ αὐτῷ […] ἀδελφῷ Ιαφεθ τοῦ μείζονος. (Symmachus: τοῦ πρεσβυτέρου). The Aramaic translations (except for Ps.-Jonathan) preserve the ambiguity of the Hebrew, but it would seem that they too understood Japhet to be older. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Josephus, Antiquities, 1:143: “And to Shem, the third son of Noah”. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Seder Olam 1:221, see Milikowsky 2013, 2:20 note 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Quest. Gen. 2:79. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. For a similar consideration in the scholia see chapter 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. It would seem that this is the correct understanding of the title שם רבא, which appears in b.San 108b. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. For a discussion of the Mishna in its context see Rosen-Zvi 2006, 114-117. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Trans. Danby, p. 299 (modified). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Rosenthal 1983. For similar cases of a *ketiv* לא and *qere* לו, see, e.g., Ex. 21:8; Lev. 18:21; 25:30; 2Sam. 16:18; 19:7; 2King 8:10; Isa. 9:2; 63:9; Prov. 19:7; 26:2; Job 6:21; 41:4. In 1Sam 2:15 the *ketiv* is לו and the *qere* לא. It should be noted that in the Bible לו and לא often appear side-by-side and it is likely that some of these cases originally had the word לוא. The form לוא appears often in the Dead Sea Scrolls, where it usually stands for לא, although occasionally also for לו. In the Masoretic text tooלוא appears dozens of times, mostly with the meaning לא. See Rosenthal 1983, p. 406. The same kind of deliberations by the rabbis are found *Gen. Rab*. 64, p. 712 and Midrash Tannaim, Deut. 14:2. See discussion below note ??? [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Cf. Urbach 1978, pp. 357-358. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Rosen-Zvi 2006, p. 116 (my translation). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. For a similar method in Homeric commentaries see the appendix. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. In Midrash Tannaim (Deut. 14:2) we find a compilation of eleven examples of ambiguities presented in a uniform template (ואין אנו יודעין ... ת"ל). Some of these examples haves parallels elsewhere in rabbinic literature, while others appear only here. This compilation might be later product but it well represents the rabbis’ approach to ambiguities. Ten of the cases deal with syntactical ambiguities (the exception being Gen. 21:12, which consists of a semantic ambiguity) and might be divided into the three categories discussed in this chapter:

    1. Homonyms – whether one should readלוא as opposed toלא or לו: Gen. 26:32 (ויאמרו לו מצאנו מים; cf. *Gen. Rab*. 64, p. 712) resolved by the following verse (*epiphora*); 1Sam 2:3 (ולו נתכנו עלילות) resolved by a verse from elsewhere; Job 13:15, discussed above.

    2. Subject/object: Ps. 135:4 (כי יעקב בחר לו יה and ישראל לסגולתו); Hos. 12:5 (וישר אל מלאך ויוכל בכה ויתחנן לו; cf. b.Hul. 92a); Job 14:19 (אבנים שחקו מים). The first three cases are resolved by another verse and the fourth by an *epiphora*.

    3. Noun/adjective: Gen 10:12 (ואת רסן בין נינוה ובין כלח היא העיר הגדלה; cf. *Gen. Rab*. 37, p. 347; b.Yom 10a); Gen. 10:21 (discussed above); Isa. 6:1 (וארא את ה' יושב על כסא רם ונשא). All three cases are resolved by a verse from outside the immediate context. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Aristot., *Soph. El.* 165b, trans. Forster. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Aristot., *Poet*. 1461a. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Quintilian, instit., 7, 9, 8-7. Daube 1953, p. 178 discusses this example in the context of “verses without adjudication” (מקראות שאין להם הכרע). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Niehoff 2011, p. 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. *Plant*. 113. Trans. Niehoff 2011, p. 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See discussion by Blank 1983. For a short description of Nicanor’s work see Matthaios 2000, with further bibliography. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. See e.g. Sch. A *Il.*15.128a Nic; Sch. A *Il.* 11.409a Nic.; Sch. A *Il.* 1.388 Nic.; Sch. A *Il.* 14.75-76 Nic. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. or ἑκατέρῳ ; ἑκατέροις; ἀμφοῖν etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. At times, Nicanor uses alternative verbs: δύναται ἑκατέρωσε συντάττεσθαι; ἀμφοῖν δύναται συνάπτεσθαι. In other cases, the alternatives are simply presented by ‘or…or’ without an introductory formula. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. The infinitive verb form προσδίδοσθαι is documented only in the Homeric scholia in notes which are attributed to Nicanor, and *nowhere else* in the entire corpus of ancient Greek. It is possible though that it was adapted from the Latin as it appears already in Quintilian. See e.g., the text cited above (Instit. 7.9.7): utrimque possit trahi. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Blank 1983, p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. This title could also be translated as *On the anchorage*. This treatise is mentioned elsewhere in the scholia: Sch. A *Il.* 10.53b, 10.110, 10.112, 11.6, 12.258a/b, 13.681a, 15.449-51a. For a collection of all the fragments and a suggestion of the original structure of the treatise see Goedhardt 1879. See now discussion in Schironi 2018, pp. 303-305 and n. 174; p. 35 n. 21. Cf. Lehrs 1882, pp. 221-224 and Nünlist 2012, p. 123 n. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. For similar cases see sch. A *Il.* 2.147a Nic.; Sch. A *Il.* 11.746 Nic.; Sch. A *Il.* 12.333-334 Nic.; Sch. A. *Il.* 22.428a Nic.; sch. A *Il.* 23.97-8. Nic.; Sch. *Il.* A 23.285-6 Nic. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. On the zeugma in rhetorical and grammatical literature, see Lausberg 1998, pp. 309-315, §§692-708; Lallot 1998, pp. 115-117; Dickey 2007, p. 244; Blank 1983, p. 64. Another relevant term is σύλληψις (and the verb συνήλειπται) which Dickey defines as follows (2007, p. 259): “A rhetorical figure by which a predicate belonging to one subject is attributed to several.” On σύλληψις in Aristarchus’ comments see Schironi 2018, pp. 161-163 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Dickey 2007, p. 244. Cf. definition by Lesbonax, *de figuris* (Περὶ σχημάτων; 2nd century CE) § 31B: ἀπὸ κοινοῦ ἐστι λέξις ἅπαξ μὲν λεγομένη, πολλάκις δὲ νοουμένη καὶ ἔξωθεν λαμβανομένη, . . . καὶ Ὅμηρος (Il. 1.15) ‘ἐλίσσετο πάντας Ἀχαιούς, Ἀτρεΐδα δὲ μάλιστα’· ἀπὸ κοινοῦ γὰρ ἐπ’ ἐκείνου μὲν τὸ ᾔτησα [sic; prob. leg. ᾔτησε], ἐπὶ τούτου δὲ τὸ ἐλίσσετο.

    “In common” (*apo koinou*) is an element of the phrase which is expressed once but implied many times and which must be supplied from outside . . . and Homer [has]: “he begged all the Achaeans, and especially the sons of Atreus,” for [the predicate] “he asked” in the latter section is *apo koinou*, while in the former there is “he begged” (trans. Schironi 2018, p. 207 note 213). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. See e.g., Aristotle’s solution to the problem of Nestor’s cup discussed in the appendix to chapter 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. See discussion in Schironi 2018, pp. 207-209 with references. As Schironi notes (ibid, p. 208): “According to Aristarchus, not everyone was able to recognize this syntactic peculiarity of Homer, so that in the course of time interpolators (διασκευασταί) added lines in order to supplement what in their opinion was missing.” ἀπὸ κοινοῦ and ῥῆμα κοινὸν also appear hundreds of times in the various scholiae on plays. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. See e.g., Origen, Genesis, fr. E 199 (p. 284) and fr. D9 (p. 154). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Trans. MacPahil, p. 143 [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. For other references to an interpretation by Neoteles, see Sch. *Il.* 16. 175c; Sch. *Il.* 24.110. On Neoteles see Baumbach 2006; Pagani 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Porphyry, Homeric Questions (MacPhail), 8.322-329, pp. 142-144. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Baumbach 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. See e.g., *Il*. 4.121-124. For a discussion of Archery in the Homeric literature see Schwarz 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. From several sources it would seem that Issi b. Yehuda is a sage of Babylonian origin and part of the school or R. Yishmael. See Epstein 1957, pp. 571-572; Hoffman 1928, pp. 39-40; Sagiv 2009, pp. 199-201. Sagiv had examined Issi b. Yehuda’s derasha preserved in b.Kid. 32b: מפני שיבה תקום – אפילו כל שיבה במשמע. Sagiv’s conclusion is that there is a significant exegetical innovation in Issi b. Yehuda’s interpretation compared to previous interpretations: “reading the verse literally is a defiance against the accepted interpretation” (ibid, p. 201). It may be possible to apply this conclusion also to Issi b. Yehuda’s “words without *hekhre‘a*”: the mere fact of compiling such a list is innovative. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Cited according to Kahana 1999, p. 164. For parallels, see Mekh. RS 17:9 (cf. Kahana 1999, p. 165); y.AZ 2:5 41c-d (בחמש השאות שבתורה); GR 80, pp. 957-958 (חמשה מקראות בתורה שאן להם הכרע); Song of Songs Rabba 1, 2, 6 (מחמשת הכרעות שבתורה); b.Yoma 52a (חמשה מקראות בתורה שאין להן הכרע); Avot d’RN B 44 62a (חמשה דברים בתורה צריכים הכרע); Braita d’Melechet ha-Mishkan 10 (חמשה דברים בתורה אין להם הכרעה). On the term השאות, which appears in the Palestinian Talmud, see Naeh 2005, p. 419 note 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. The exact meaning of this word is unclear. See detailed discussion below. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Cf. GR 80, p. 957; Song of Songs Rabba 1:2, 6. Cf. the statement in b.Yom 52b concerning the five words without *hekhre‘a*: הני מילי דאוריתא אבל דנביאי טובא איכא (“This regards the Torah, but in the Prophets there are many more cases”). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Breuer 2011, p. 54 note 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Breuer 1995; Charlap 2002; Kogot 1994, pp. 33-36. Goldin 1983, pp. 157-158. And see the overview in Breuer 2011, p. 54 and references in note 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Lieberman 1939, p. 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Naeh 2005, p. 419 note 28. Cf. Kahana 1999, p. 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Naeh, ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Daube 1953, p. 174. Cf. ibid, p. 172: “The Rabbis – or some of them – claim that there are about half a dozen words in the Bible which, contrary to the rules of grammar, should be connected both with what precedes them and with what follows them.” [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Breuer 2011, pp. 55-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Ibid, p. 63. Breuer argued that he is offering a novel understanding since, according to him, *all* modern scholars understood the term without *hekhre‘a* as referring to punctuation (ibid, p. 54, note 2). It would seem, however, that Breuer overlooked the important notes by Lieberman and Naeh, as well as Daube’s article, which even pointed to the possible connection of this very understanding of the term with the Greek grammarians. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. In Minhat Yehuda (Gen. Rab., pp. 957-958), some translations of some of the verses are cited. Goldin 1983, p. 157 has hinted at the possibility that the translations reflect Issi b. Yehuda’s deliberations. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Breuer 2011, 54-55. One can formulate his argument by paraphrasing Nicanor’s words, we have seen above: εἴτε ὑποστίζοιμεν ἐπὶ τὸ בעמלק εἴτε διαστέλλοιμεν ἐπὶ τὸ מחר, τὸ מחר κοινὸν γίνεται ἀμφοτέρων τῶν μερῶν [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Peshitta (Leiden), p. 157. It should be noted that in an early MS from 463/4 CE (British Museum Add. Ms. 14.425) written by John of Amid, we find the reading ܘܡܚܪ ܐܢܐ (“*and* tomorrow I”). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. A similar understanding seems to be reflected in the Samaritan Targum: אמר משה ליהושע בחר לנן גברים ופק אגחי בעמלק מחר אהנה קעם על ריש גבעתה ואטר האלהים באדי [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Cf. Mekh. Rashbi 17:9, p. 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. The Aramaic Targumim seem to preserve the ambiguity. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. According to Breuer (2011, p. 62) reading (A) is more probable syntactically but reading (B) more likely contextually, as it is more likely that the sons of Jacob returned from the field and then they heard and were saddened, rather than they returned from the field after hearing and only later were saddened. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. However, British Museum Add. Ms. 14.425 has ܟܕ ܫܡܥܘ without the *waw* conjunctive. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Breuer, ibid, p. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. See e.g., Ps.- Jonathan: ובמנרתא ארבעא כלידין משקעין בצייוריהון חיזורהא ושושנהא [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. This is how the translator renders the difficult Hebrew word משוקדים (which was translated above as “like almonds”). Possibly he had a version which read משוקעים. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Origen, *Hexapla*, 154. The Septuagint to Ex. 25:34 understands the verse similarly but adds the words ἐν τῷ ἑνὶ καλαμίσκῳ (“in one branch”) based on the previous verse: καὶ ἐν τῇ λυχνίᾳ τέσσαρες κρατῆρες ἐκτετυπωμένοι καρυίσκους· ἐν τῷ ἑνὶ καλαμίσκῳ οἱ σφαιρωτῆρες καὶ τὰ κρίνα αὐτῆς. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. See, however, Kogut 1994, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Or: “of a cursed one.” See below. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. And also read עָקְרוּ (*‘aqru*, meaning “uprooted,” “destroyed”) instead of the Masoretic עִקְּרוּ (*‘iqru*, meaning “maimed”). [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. A similar understanding is found in the Samaritan Targum: הלא ברגזון קטלו גבר ובריחותון עקרו תור [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Ps.-Jonathan, Neofiti and the Geniza Targum use בעל דבבהון (enemy) and ליט (cursed) [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Breuer 2011, p. 59 and Blau 1994-5, p. 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. See e.g. Breuer ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Kogut 1994, pp. 34-35 [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. For Onkelos, see note 106 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. See Sokoloff 2009, p. 1311, s.v. ܩܒܠ Pa. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Kogut 1994, p. 35 (my translation, emphasis in the original) [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Breuer 1995, 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Daube 1953, p. 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. This was also how Rashi (on b.Yom. 52b) understood the second reading. Yet he considered *se’et* to have a different meaning in each of the conditions (הלא אם תיטיב שאת ולשון סליחה הוא, או שאת אם לא תיטיב - ולשון נשיאות עון הוא.). [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Daube believed that Targum Onkelus supports his reading. Despite this fact, he noticed that Onkelus in fact translates the first half of verse twice, in two different ways. This double Targum appears chiastically. For a detailed discussion see Paz 2015, p…. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Both Daube and Kogut did not supply any evidence to support their reading. It would seem that they based their proposals on the way the alternative readings of Issi. B. Yehuda are presented in the Palestinian Talmud, the Mekhilta d’Rashbi and in some of the MSS of the Mekh. RI: הלא אם תיטיב שאת או שאת אם לא תיטיב. For a detailed discussion of the variants in the Mekh. RI, see Kahana 1999, p. 164. However, according to the Geniza fragment of the Mekh. RI (cited above), the alternatives are presented as follows:

     הלא אם תיטיב שאת ואם לא תטיב לפתח חטאת רובץ או הלא אם תטיב שאת ואם לא תטיב

     Thus one cannot trust these citations in order to prove that according to the second reading *se’et* was placed at the beginning of the second condition (שאת ואם לא תיטיב). [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Breuer 2011, p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Breuer 1995, pp. 191-192; Breuer 2011, p. 57 note 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. A similar deliberation concerning this verse can be found in GR 22,6 , pp. 209-210 (and comments *ad loc*.) [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Breuer 2011, p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Lieberman 1939, p. 151; Daube 1953, pp. 172-173; Breuer 2011, pp. 56-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. For a discussion of this polemic in the context of the rabbis’ ambivalent approach to non-contextual interpretation, see Hayes 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Duabe 1953, p. 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Daube is correct in claiming that there are derashot which could be understood only if we assume that the rabbis read a word twice, that is, that regarded a certain word to be shared. Daube (1953, p. 173) refers to m.Sot. 7:4. See also m.Menahot 8:7; Sifre Deut. 104, p. 163; Mekh. RY, Pisha 16, p. 62 and further references in Albeck 1959, 5:369. For a doubling of words in dersahot which create dialogues see Mazeh 2014, p. 11 and note 21. An explicit use of a shared word could be found in Sifra Hova 6,6 21b on Lev. 4:25. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Trans. Forster… [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. For the possibility that Hippias is indeed responsible for the emendation and the existing version, see already Wolf 1884, p. 129 [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Vahlens 1865, p. 368; Carroll 1905, p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Michael of Ephesus, *in Aristotelis sophisticos elenchos commentarium*, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. For a comprehensive discussion of the terminology for accents used in Aristotle’s time, see Wackernagel 1952, pp. 1078-1081. For a discussion of whether a change in breathing falls under the category of prosody, see Jannaris 1902, pp. 76-77; Edlow 1977, p. 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Sch. bT Il. 23.328 ex. and Erbse’s detailed comment ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. On Theophrastus as a literary critic, see Grabbe 1952. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. In should be noted that Verdenius (1970, p. 229 note 103) suggested that the version οὗ was in fact an emendation of οὐ intended to refrain from an excess of didacticism. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Cf. Porphyry, Homeric Questions (MacPhail), 18.590-593 p. 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. See Niehoff ???? [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Naeh 1992, esp. p. 409 and note 22. On dershot אל תקרי see Tsipor 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. See e.g. Heineman 1970, pp. 126-127. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. In Vatican and Munich Mss: ומניין שאף הים נתמלא עליהם חימה שנ' והמים להם חומה אל תיקרא חומה אלא חימה. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. I hope to address this in detail in a future study. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)