NICOLAS-ANTOINE BOULANGER'S *DICTIONNAIRE HEBREU-FRANÇAIS* (MID-18TH CENTURY)
A SHORT USER'S GUIDE

Pitts Scholars Program
April 2017

Discovering Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger's *Lexicon*

The following user's guide hopes to help future scholars to explore and bring into light the uniqueness and richness of Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger's *Hebrew to French Lexicon*. Recently discovered at the Archives and Manuscript Department of Pitts Library (Emory University), the lexicon is a unique artifact consisting of three handwritten volumes purchased in May 1771, in France, for 1200 pounds.[1] It is the work of the French encyclopedist and philosopher Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger. The document is not dated but must have been composed before 1759 (the date of his death).

This user's guide is but one aspect of a larger project with Pitts Theology Library. Further to a discussion with Brandon Wason (Archives/Special Collections),[2] we agreed on the purpose of the project in the setting of the Pitts Scholars Program. It is twofold as it seeks to offer to the Emory community a user's guide to the dictionary as well as a paper emphasizing Boulanger's contribution to Hebrew lexicography. The essay hopes to offer a more thorough and contextualized description of Boulanger's lexicon than the user's guide. In this sense, balancing between a user's guide focusing on one page and an essay will exemplify a move from micro-structure to macro-structure.

Opening Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger's Dictionnaire *For the First Time…*

The dictionary contains Hebrew and Aramaic words with definitions in French. Though its arrangement is consistent in its organization by Latin characters (A-Z), in introducing each Hebrew letter with a set of "observations,"[3] the organization of the materials seems to undergo modifications through the three volumes. The user's guide aims at providing keys to technical terms and abbreviations (for instance, in the manner of a short glossary). It will provide a detailed analysis of the following pages "a-aba," the right page of "aba-abé" and the left page of "abe-abi."

---

[1] The first page of the first volume unfortunately does not mention the name of the purchaser. Still, he/she stresses the unicity of the document. Tracing the document's journey from Europe to America would make a fascinating investigation (one that I unfortunately did not have the time to address in the course of this study; I could only recall that the document was part of the Hartford Seminary's gift to Candler School of Theology).

[2] I am grateful to Brandon Wason for guiding me to resources on the Enlightenment (especially the online Encyclopedia which contains original articles written by Boulanger). His finding aid on the Boulanger's dictionary proved especially helpful to frame the document's analysis.

[3] See B. Wason, Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger, Dictionnaire hébreu-français, 17— Finding aid (permanent link: http://pid.emory.edu/ark:/25593/rfrqt)

Boulanger introduces each letter with a couple of "observations" of different kinds: grammatical, lexical, annotations related to the origins of the Hebrew language (with a special attention to other languages, whether Greek, Arabic or Egyptian)[4] and to pronunciation. These observations make use of a numbering system (starting with letter 'B', these observations are numbered).[5] For the letter "a," Boulanger notes that a different translation will distinguish א (transliterated as " ") from ע (transliterated as "a")

Table 1. Sample of the Page "a-aba"

	a aba	
a	א vaut 1. א vaut 1000, הא vaut 5000 ③	
hah	הָה ah. helas. cris de tristesfe (…)	
ab	אַב pere maitre docteur prosfesfeur inventeur. Il signifie père chez les heb ; Cald, Sir, arab. et de plus l'ancien le premier. Le Rabbin. on le derive d'avah vouloir 437 les arabes disfent au nom abu, a l'accuf aba et aux gen, dat, voc, abl. abi. (…)	
abadim abaddir ①	avadim esclaves serviteur R. abad ④ B.786 père magnifique. Cetait auffi une pierre facrée de la Phenicie dite quelqfois bethiles (…) ②	

---

4 As will be evident from further remarks, Boulanger seems to favor Greek to explain any affinity with Hebrew.
5 This seems to confirm the 'draft' aspect of the dictionary. For instance, it seems that between the writing of both letter 'A' and 'B' sections, Boulanger changed his mind and, besides the numeration of the observations, he also added a few annotations, crossed out or erased preceding ones.

Legend of Table 1.

(1) Each page is divided into three columns. The left column contains the transliterated entries.

(2) The central column presents translations as well as entries in their Hebrew characters. Note that not all words are written in their Hebrew characters; some entries only occur in their transliterated forms (this is especially true of the following page "aba-abé"). Another case is the appearance of an entry in its Hebrew characters after multiple occurrences in its transliterated form (for instance, אֲבַדָּה signifying "perte, perdition").

Depending on the entries, Boulanger adds a commentary. For instance, the word אַב is explained by reference to the development of the Hebrew language: אַב may signify the "rabbi" in Rabbinic Hebrew. Other Oriental languages serve as a comparison: in the case of אַב, Boulanger mentions the different cases in Arabic, thus basing his grammatical comments upon the cases of Latin grammar. Here, the Hebrew for "ab" corresponds to the Arabic "abu' in the nominative, to "aba" in the accusative and to "abi" in the remaining cases (genitive, vocative, dative and ablative).[6] Boulanger's commentary on אַב further illustrates a cultural transliteration: the month of "ab" (אַב) is the fifth month that corresponds to July and August. Thus, the lexicon displays a constant comparison of cultures: Hebrews, Arabs, Chaldeans and Persians are mentioned to construct the linguistic genealogy of the multiple meanings of אַב.

(3) The first page of a letter usually presents its numeric value and its place in the Hebrew alphabet.

(4) The limits of using transliterated entries show in Boulanger's possible confusion between both pronunciations: "abadim" in the first column becomes "avadim" in the central column. However, transliterations do not only follow the movements of Hebrew pronunciation, but also the changes of spelling according to gender and number. For instance, there will be

- one entry for the singular ("abed/aved, eved"),
- one for the plural ("abadoh/avaddoh")

---

[6] This method recalls that of the French rationalists in their "search for the rational order underpinning language," a search carried out by Claude Lancelot and Antoine Arnauld in their Grammaire générale et raisonnée, described in the Encyclopédie (1757). See Vivien Law. *The History of Linguistics in Europe from Plato to 1600*. Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics. (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 264.

- and one for the noun with attached personal suffixes ("avadi" translated as "mon esclave"/my slave).

Later, a triplet reproduce the same associations around the entry "aved":

- the noun in its singular form: aved serviteur, valet
- the noun in its plural form: avedei esclaves
- the noun with a first person pronoun suffix: avedi mon esclave

Table 2. Right page of « aba-abé »

			A
		montagne ou moyse mourut עֲבָרִים nom. 27.12 près nabo 43ᵐ campent nom 33.47	abarim

Table 3. Left Page of "abe-abi"

Abel fils d'Adam Abel-Satim Abihaiel	הֶבֶל gen.4.2 הָבֶל id. en moab. 44 "campement" אָבֵל־הַשִּׁטִּים nom. 33.49 levite pere de Suriel אֲבִיחָיִל nom.3.35	

Boulanger devotes a special space for proper names (places, sites or characters), following the same organization of transliterations (in the left column) and French translations with the Hebrew spelling (in the central column). He usually inserts biblical references (as shown in tables 2 and 3). He may add a brief explanation (quoting the Vulgate, Abraham is "patrem multitudionis gentrium" in Gen 17:5). One should note that Boulanger's lexicon was not necessarily destined to

further the reading of the Bible. His work was, at least, destined to embody the reading of the Bible within the larger framework of religions. Thus, the right page devoted to proper names may include names related to Greek mythology.[7]

A Note on Verbs

Verbs appear according to their roots and derivative forms, thus occurring several times as well as nouns. For instance the entry for "ajarim" (עירים) follows "air" (עיר) which Boulanger translates as "poulain" (foal). They may also be translated in their conjugated forms: for instance, Boulanger translates אָהַב as "il a aimé" ("he loved") and gives numerous synonyms from the expression of desire and will to concupiscence ("désirer ardemment, vouloir, avoir de la concupiscence). The lexicon further relates this verb to other verbal roots such as "ivah," "havah" and "chavah."

A Brief Glossary of Abbreviations

Abbreviations	French or Latin Term (*with brief English translation)*
Abl	Ablatif
Accuf.	Accusatif
Arab.	Arabe
B	(*probably referring to Boulanger's works*)
bat	bâtiment (*building*)
heb.	hébreu
Cald.	Chaldéen
gr. 127	grammaire, groupe
id	idem
inf	infinitif
imp	imparfait (*equivalent of the imperfect tense*)
plu	pluriel
qqfois	quelques fois (*sometimes*)
R	racine (*root*)
v	voir (*see*)
voc	vocatif

[7] For a detailed analysis of Boulanger's personal ideological stance, see the essay "Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger's Dictionnaire Hébreu-Français (mid-18th century) or Deciphering the Acculturated Visages of the Hebrew Language."