The Greek and Jewish application of the term diaspora is confronted with its richly ramified modern usage.

The term diaspora belongs to the Greek (and ultimately Indo-European) root sper-; the vowel of this root shows alternations that are quite regular, which, however, we shall not discuss. In any case, the verb speírō means 'to sow'. (The root is sper-; the -i- is metathesized from an original *sper-iō.) Several Greek derivations of this root are used as terms in our scientific terminology, e.g., spérma 'seed', spóra 'sowing, seed' (given here are the Greek meanings, not the modern ones). In pre-industrial agriculture, sowing was performed by hand, the seed being thrown on and into prepared soil in such a way that in the best possible case, each seed had space enough for its growth: that means that the seeds were spread or scattered; naturally, some seeds were usually carried away by the wind or went to waste by some other circumstance. The prefixed verb dia-speírō was used in reference to such scattering of other things as well, frequently in a negative sense, such as in reference to scattered troops (Thucydides 1, 11; 5th century BC) and in other metaphors. However, it could also be used in collocations such as tò diesparménon dógma 'the widespread opinion' (Epicuros; 4th/3rd century BC). The prefixed noun diaspora 'scattering, dispersion' can have both the positive and the negative sense; the positive sense, however, did not occur frequently. This was the Greek usage.

The noun diaspora (and the verbal forms of the root) gained frequency only when it became a term in Jewish religious, historical, or philosophical discourse (insofar as its medium was Greek; e.g., Philo of Alexandria, De legatione ad Gaium [= Caligula], 281 [1st century BC/1st century AD]; Josephus Flavius, Antiquitates Iudaicae 4, 115-116 [1st century AD]), in which it usually meant the dispersion of groups of people, normally Jews. Such a dispersion was in most cases understood as part of divine justice, and we find it taken in such a sense in the Septuagint² (3rd-2nd centuries BC) and other texts. The usual reference of these passages in the Septuagint is the outstanding case of such an event, namely the captivity in Mesopotamia of a good part of the Jewish population of Palestine.

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(6th century BC). The outstandingly important passages in which this divine meting out of justice is mentioned are: 4 (or 2) Kings 25:27; Jeremiah *24:5, 25:16 (34 or 36) 4, *28:4, *29:22, *40:1, *52:31; Isaiah 45:13; Ezekiel *1:2 and 33:21; Obadiah (Abdias) 1:20; Daniel *2:25, *5:13; 12:7, and Ezra (Esdras) *6:16. In the passages marked by the asterisk, the Hebrew text uses the expression galut, which is derived from a root meaning ‘exile’. It would, then, seem that this is the Hebrew original of the Greek diaspora, as used in this sense. However, the term diasporá in the Septuagint translation is not in close cooccurrence with Hebrew galut. Relatively frequent in those passages is the Greek word aikhmalósia ‘captivity’ (from aikhmē ‘spear’ + (h)alósis ‘taking captive’) and its derivations (this is the case in two passages of Daniel, the one of Esdras, and those of Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Abdias 1:11); Daniel 12:7 has dia-skorpismós ‘scattering’ (a synonym of diasporá, with the same polysemy), Jeremiah has once ptósis ‘fall’ (29:22); the idea of a change of domicile is expressed by the translators of Jeremiah 52:31 by the Greek verb apoikízesthai, whereas the translators of Abdias (Obadiah) 1:31 used the noun metoikesía, and those of 4 (or 2) Kings 7:35 apoikesía for the same idea. The translation of Jerem. 52:31 is particularly good, because the word used is a verb in its passive form, so that the non-voluntary character of the change of habitat is well expressed. On the other hand, Jeremiah 25:16 (34 or 36) has the verbal form kai diasperó autois ‘and I will disperse them’, but the target of the action are not necessarily Jews and in the original galut does not occur.

There is no particular difficulty in the assumption that the term diasporá gained currency only in the later Hellenistic and Roman period, as exemplified above by Philo and Josephus. It has, particularly in the Septuagint, the same polysemy as in the non-Jewish Greek texts; it occurs also in several passages not quoted above, but enumerated in the special dictionary to the Septuagint. The idea of divine punishment is not necessarily present in these passages (so in Gen. 9:19). Both the noun and the verbal forms collocate not only with designations of people (and mostly Jews), but also with words denoting, e.g., war, winds, tempests, and with words that belong to the semantic domain of winnowing. (The purport of some of the passages is obviously or probably metaphorical.) This shows that the word diasporá had, in this Hellenistic Jewish literature, the same polysemy as in non-Jewish Greek. The assumption that the Greek word acquired the meaning of a Hebrew model (in other words, that a part of its polysemy, the one connected with divine punishment, was loan-translated from Hebrew) is highly probable, or practically certain. David Gold (personal communication) is undoubtedly right in suggesting two possible Hebrew models, viz. hapezura ‘the Dispersion’ as abbreviation of hapezura haheyudit ‘the Jewish Dispersion’, or hatefutsot ‘the [Jewish] Dispersion’: either or both of them could be the model. The roots from which these two nouns are derived are <pzr> and <nps>, both meaning ‘scatter, disperse’.

The noun diasporá was also used to refer to the places where those scattered people lived, both in Jewish and in later Christian texts, but the distinctions among the notions ‘exile’, ‘people in exile’, and ‘place of exile’, or equivalently,
The old Christian church (1st-2nd centuries AD), which used the Septuagint as the sacred text and whose language was Greek even in the Western parts of the Roman Empire, applied the word and concept of diasporá in both the verbal and the nominal forms, either in the same meaning and with the same reference as in the Jewish texts of the Hellenistic and Roman epochs (i.e., Jews scattered among Gentiles, John 7, 35), or to express the idea of Christians living among non-Christians (originally only Jews, Acts 8, 1; but later among any non-Christians, 1 Peter 1, 1).

When the Christian church lost its minority character and acquired majority status, and then even the status of the official church of the Roman Empire (4th century), the usage mentioned in the preceding paragraph disappeared. At the same time, Latin became the ecclesiastic language in the West. It is important to notice that the Vulgate (i.e., the Latin text of the Christian Bible as translated from Hebrew and Greek at the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century, which for centuries was the authorized version in the Christian church and is used in that capacity in the Roman Catholic Church to this day) uses in most of the passages of the Jewish Scriptures (the Old Testament) which are mentioned above, the expression transmigratio, and in quite a small minority of cases expressions like captivitas. In the passages of the Christian New Testament that have been quoted above, the Vulgate offers dispersio or a verbal form that belongs to the same root (dispersi sunt) for the Greek diasporá.

In short, then, what we find is that at the end of antiquity, the word diasporá was being used in reference to people who had belonged to a community, which, however, had come to be scattered. Excepting the first centuries of the existence of Christianity, the usage of the term was restricted to the Jewish texts written in Greek.

It is in this sense that the word diaspora has come to gain an increased frequency in modern times; tracing the history of the term through the Middle Ages and into the early Modern Age will be a highly interesting topic for future research. At any rate, it was particularly in the 19th century that the word became part of the cultural and scholarly terminology in the European languages. (The use of the verbal forms of the Greek root was discontinued.) It was only natural that it was in the context of Jewish history and contemporary Jewish situations, present then and subsequently, and in the discussion of their consequences, that the term diaspora was used; it had to be so, given the tragedies and vicissitudes of Jewish history, beginning with events such as the above-mentioned captivity in Mesopotamia (6th century BC) or the conquest of Jerusalem, during which the Temple was destroyed by the army of the future Emperor Titus (1st century AD). The sequence of calamities then continued with a series of larger or smaller rebellions against the Roman Empire. New waves of migrations were caused by events such as the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, from some parts of the Habsburg
monarchy, and from other places in the 15th and subsequent centuries. No need to mention the catastrophes of the century just coming to its end.9

The original connection of diasporá and related expressions with the idea of divine justice and punishment would seem to imply that the term necessarily refers, or at least in antiquity used to refer, to something involuntary and perhaps permanently disagreeable. Nevertheless, to take an example, the Jewish diaspora in Alexandria (and in the whole of Egypt10) was already in antiquity quite voluntary and developed into an economically and culturally flourishing center of Jewish life, its disruption coming only much later. This is one of the reasons why some Jewish historiographers prefer to make the distinction of Hebrew galut 'exile' (involuntary), over against diasporá 'diaspora, dispersion' (voluntary). Again, only a study of more sources can show with more clarity how far such a distinction can be claimed already for the Hellenistic and Roman sources (with the exception of the Septuagint, where such a distinction seems not to occur), or whether it developed in some more recent Jewish texts and is perhaps treated somewhat normatively.

It must be mentioned, however, that with the development of more liberal, or rather, less orthodox forms of Judaism, the component of divine justice and punishment in the notion of the term diaspora became increasingly evanescent, at least for many speakers, and that with the arrival of Zionism (late 19th/early 20th century) and with the foundation of the state of Israel (1948), the problems of the Jewish diaspora acquired a new angle from which they could be considered. Not only is Israel not a diaspora, but one can even raise the question as to whether, e.g., Western Europe and the United States should not cease to be considered diasporas.

From the beginning of the modern use of the term, the diaspora was a typically Jewish phenomenon. This was the case because it is only about the Jews that one could say, up to the middle of the 20th century, that all of them were living in the diaspora: there was no state, area, or city which would be considered the main center of Jewish life, culture, language, or population. This, indeed, is the strongest form of diaspora: no homeland at all. Also, only few areas in Europe contained no Jewish diaspora, whereas other major portions of the population of Europe, mainly the agrarian segment, were quite sedentary far into the modern age, up to the time of the liberalization of society that took place from the end of the 18th century onwards. (The large-scale emigrations of English and French speakers to North America that took place in the 17th and 18th centuries have not led to the establishment of what would be called diasporas because of the scope of the events and the number of people involved, as mentioned below.) However, it is primarily the 19th century that witnessed massive emigrations of non-Jews of various ethnicities from Europe and the creation of various diasporas elsewhere, chiefly in the United States. With these massive movements of populations, the term began to be applied frequently not only to Jewish history, culture,
and problems, but increasingly and by now, it would seem, perhaps prevalently, in reference to other groups of people.

We shall not try to offer a definition of diaspora, because as of now, there are too many divergent opinions on it; or rather, the ways in which the term is used are widely divergent. But we can discuss some delimitative criteria, using various examples. No attempt, however, is made here to mention all the forms or types of modern diaspora, or even most of the situations actually referred to as diasporas.

Immersed in the areas of various forms of Scottish speech, there are to be found some enclaves of Gaelic that are scattered chiefly on the Hebrides, on the Orkneys, and in several Highland counties of Scotland. It would seem that the reason why this situation is usually not called the 'Gaelic diaspora' lies in the fact that the speakers are not immigrants to these areas: Gaelic is a RESIDUAL LANGUAGE there.

Gypsies are speakers of an Indo-European Indian (Indic) language who live in scattered groups, mostly in Europe and North America. Only a segment of this ethnic group became sedentary, and this only quite recently; the rest have lived a nomadic life. To my knowledge, they are not called the 'Gypsy diaspora', the reason apparently being that immigrants living in diaspora are supposed to be sedentary and to be in real contact with their neighbors. In the modern world, no language has more native speakers who are descendants of immigrants who had gone overseas from one country, than English; still, I doubt that there does or ever did exist a collocation like the 'English diaspora in North America (Australia, New Zealand ...)’, even before these territories acquired their independence from Great Britain. The diaspora is expected to be a minority of the population: there is a British diaspora in India, even a diaspora of English-speaking expatriates in Paris, Florence, and so forth. In the same way, the French speakers in Quebec usually are not called a diaspora; but it would seem that the French speakers in the rest of Canada and in Louisiana, etc., can be, and sometimes are, so called.

The preceding paragraphs repeatedly mention the language of the people in diaspora; however, the paradigmatic case, the Jewish diaspora, has for centuries consisted of people without a common everyday language, but largely connected by common (but not in all respects completely identical) culture and ritual. For instance, today’s Indian diaspora throughout the world probably continues to speak as many languages as are counted in India itself (including English). Of course, the Jewish diaspora has existed for many generations, i.e., for twenty-six centuries, whereas the other diasporas are mostly fairly recent, so it is not yet possible to be sure about the outcome of possible linguistic interference in the non-Jewish cases.

Religiously-motivated emigration can create a diaspora of communities other than Jewish ones; such was, for instance, the case of the Huguenots. French Calvinists, who were forced to leave France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by King Louis XIV (17th century). One can discover traces of that dias-
Diaspora, for instance, the French personal names that we find in relatively great numbers in South Africa (not to mention the excellent vineyards and wineries there); this is not surprising, seeing the Calvinist character of the majority of the Dutch settlers there, which must have made the territory quite attractive to the French Calvinists.

With the wane in modern days of the idea of immediate divine intercession in human political affairs, however, the ideological component of the decision to emigrate has come to be supplied either by the powers that be that had sufficient will and strength simply to expel the unwanted part of the population (take, for instance, the expulsion of the Accadians from the former French Canada after its conquest by the British in the 18th century), or else it was the decision of the emigrants themselves, who felt oppressed by the regime in their country (as in the case of the ‘White’ Russians between 1917 and about 1925, who formed a diaspora in Western and Central Europe, and in the United States). This second type of politically motivated emigration tends, however, not to be really massive, given that the oppressive regimes usually discourage or forbid emigration. In any case, during the last centuries political and ideological reasons for the formation of diasporas tend to be more frequent than religious ones.

It would seem, however, that the conception of a diaspora as the result of many people leaving their original countries in search of economic opportunities has gained currency in modern times, or is close to doing so. Just like religious diasporas, political diasporas seem by now to be less numerous — both in respect to the number of diasporas and to the number of people participating in the emigration — than economic ones (and this in spite of the occasional overlap of the political and the economic motives, as in the case of the massive emigration of Jews from Tsarist Russia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries). If we take the United States as an example, one can say that while the 20th century brought increased numbers of political refugees, mainly from the Fascist and Communist regimes, most immigrants in both the 19th and the 20th centuries (chiefly in its first part, up to World War I) would seem to have arrived in search of better economic opportunities.

Nowadays, the most up-to-date usage of the term (which some perhaps may even deem irreverently innovative) can be illustrated by Time magazine (June 19, 2000, p. B 26), where we read the following title and subtitle: ‘The Golden Diaspora. Indian immigrants to the U.S. are ... the most spectacular success story.’ However, at the same time Newsweek (June 10, 2000, p. 48) offers a case of reference to an involuntary diaspora in the following caption: ‘Cyberculture: Targeting the African diaspora’. The caption refers to a discussion that follows in the article about there being new webpages on the Internet concerning African-American history and culture. The difference of putting the name ‘African diaspora’ to what can, in terms of its result, also be called the ‘African-American diaspora’ aptly attracts attention to the fact that there are temporal and evolutionary dimensions in a diaspora, which is not a static phenomenon, but a process.
NOTES

1 The italicized words with accents are transliterations from the Greek; without accents, they represent their versions in Latin and other modern languages.

2 The Septuagint (or in Latin, Septuaginta) is a translation into Greek of the books of the Jewish Bible (= the Christian Old Testament); the translators were Jews, most of them probably from Alexandria, whose number is said to have been seventy.

3 Dr. David Gold (New York) was kind enough to supply all the Hebrew data and their interpretation; naturally, any error is mine.

4 The textual criticism of the passage offers some problems, particularly in respect to the number of the verse.


7 The preceding statement is somewhat problematic, because many if not most authors of Christian texts in the first two centuries were Jews themselves. However, it is not possible to pursue this line of thought in this short article.

8 When requirements of style call for variation, some derivation of the same Indo-European root that appears in Greek sper-, spor- is frequently used, but in its Latin form. See, for instance, the title and subtitle of a book by Joel Beinin, The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry; Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). (The Latin verb from which the noun dispersion is derived belongs to an extended form of the Indo-European root *sper-, but the derivation of the form is too complicated to be discussed here.)

9 Writing in July 2000.

10 Naturally, the reference is to Ptolemaic Egypt, not to the Egypt of the Pharaohs.

11 The exemplification and the whole discussion in the paragraphs that follow are necessarily incomplete and rather impressionistic. An accurate description of the various types of usage and an indication of their relative frequencies, dates of the first attested contexts, etc. would require a lengthy study based on a vast corpus of English (and preferably, French, German, Post-Classical and Modern Latin, Yiddish, etc.) lexical material. I owe thanks to Dr. Dale Hartkemeyer. LST, for help with the following exemplification and other aspects of the article.