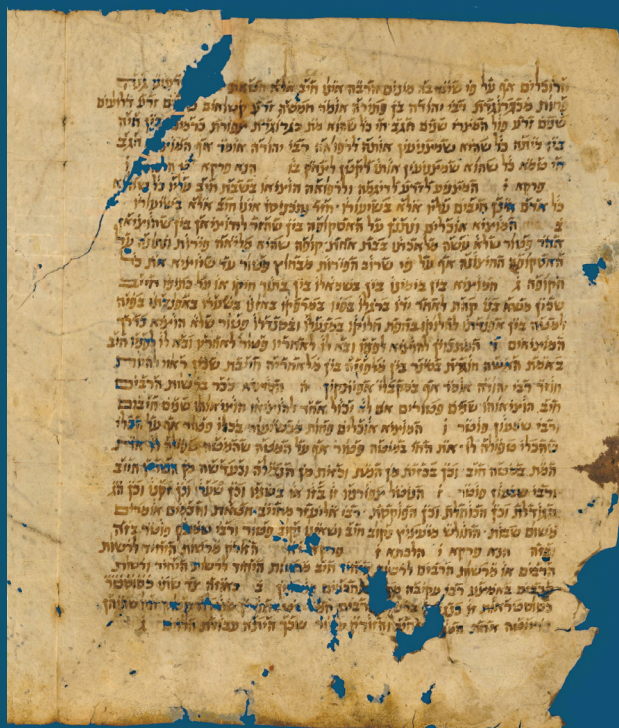


# Studies in Rabbinic Hebrew

EDITED BY SHAI HEIJMANS



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

Faculty of Asian and Middle  
Eastern Studies



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Cover image: A fragment from the Cairo Genizah, containing Mishnah Shabbat 9:7-12:4 with Babylonian vocalisation (Cambridge University Library, T-S E1.47). Courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

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# 4. TANNAITIC ARAMAIC

## METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

### AND A TEST CASE

*Christian Stadel*<sup>1</sup>

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In Israeli philological research on rabbinic literature, it is customary to distinguish לשון חכמים א, literally, ‘the Language of the Sages A’, i.e., Tannaitic Hebrew, from לשון חכמים ב ‘the Language of the Sages B’, i.e., Amoraic Hebrew.<sup>2</sup> These Hebrew terms are somewhat infelicitous, since both Tannaitic and Amoraic sages composed texts in at least two languages, Hebrew and Aramaic, which are each attested in at least two dialects, respectively. In this article, we shall offer remarks on the most neglected of the languages of the sages: Tannaitic Aramaic, viz. the Aramaic dialect used in Tannaitic literature.<sup>3</sup> Since space does not allow for a comprehensive treatment of the material,

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- 1 I thank Aaron Koller, who shared with me published and unpublished work on Tannaitic Aramaic, and I am indebted to Mor Shemesh, who collected for me the lion’s share of the raw linguistic material from the manuscript sources.
  - 2 E.g., Moshé Bar-Asher, *L’hébreu mishnique: études linguistiques* (Orbis Supplementa, vol. 2; Leuven: Peeters, 1999), pp. 3, 17.
  - 3 The dialects of Aramaic in Amoraic literature from Palestine and Babylonia are commonly known as Jewish Palestinian Aramaic and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, respectively. They have received ample grammatical treatment.

this sketch will be preliminary and restricted to three main points: 1) delineating the corpus in terms of time, place, and genres; 2) positioning Tannaitic Aramaic in the wider context of Aramaic dialects; 3) spelling out methodological difficulties (and possibilities) inherent to the Tannaitic Aramaic manuscript evidence. In addition, we shall exemplify how some of these more theoretical considerations affect the interpretation of a test case.

While Tannaitic literature is generally written in Hebrew, the Mishna, Tosefta, Sifra, and Sifre do occasionally contain Aramaic phrases, sentences, or even short texts. They represent instances of code-switching in a Hebrew text or — in the case of longer pieces — may constitute self-contained Aramaic compositions, original-language quotations of sorts, that were integrated into the wider Hebrew context. There is, of course, much more Aramaic on every page of rabbinic literature, but it stands to reason that the countless instances of isolated Aramaic words in Tannaitic Hebrew texts were mainly loanwords that had been incorporated into Hebrew to varying degrees and become part of that language.<sup>4</sup> They will therefore not be considered Tannaitic Aramaic in this sketch.

Thus defined, the corpus of Tannaitic Aramaic comprises some 350 words, with the biggest chunk (200+ words) coming not from the rabbinical works enumerated above, but from *Megillat Taanit*, which dates from the same period and is traditionally associated with rabbinic circles (*b.Shabbath* 13b).<sup>5</sup>

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4 The subject merits a detailed study; for now, see Isaac Gluska, *Hebrew and Aramaic in Contact During the Tannaitic Period: A Sociolinguistic Approach* (in Hebrew; Tel-Aviv: Papirus, 1999), which collects much material, but does not always offer the best analyses and should be used with caution. Note that while it is theoretically possible — perhaps even likely — that some of the isolated Aramaic words represent instances of code-switching and were not integrated loanwords, this is impossible to prove.

5 Vered Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2003), pp. 19–22; this book also contains the standard edition of the text.

Gustaf Dalman referenced most of the Tannaitic Aramaic pieces (including doubtful ones from the Babylonian Talmud), but a complete list remains a desideratum.<sup>6</sup> The same holds for the grammar: no systematic description of Tannaitic Aramaic has ever been prepared.<sup>7</sup> Klaus Beyer edited most of the texts and provided a classification of their dialects,<sup>8</sup> but he did not utilise reliable rabbinic manuscripts and his editions do not always provide the best accessible text. David Talshir, in a two-page abstract of a lecture, was the first to point out the importance of the manuscript evidence and to call attention to some of the methodological problems associated with it.<sup>9</sup> Michael Sokoloff included most of the lexical material in his *Dictionary of Judean Aramaic*,<sup>10</sup> and Günter Stemberger commented on the Aramaic of the sayings of Hillel from tractate *Aboth*.<sup>11</sup>

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- 6 Gustaf Dalman, *Grammatik des jüdisch-palästinischen Aramäisch* (2nd ed.; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1905), pp. 9–10. Dalman's list does not contain material from the halakhic midrashim. For Aramaic material in Sifre on Numbers (MS Vatican 32) see Menahem Kahana, "Prolegomena to a New Edition of the Sifre on Numbers" (in Hebrew; PhD dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 160–165. I thank Mor Shemesh for the reference.
  - 7 See, e.g., the succinct overview by Yohanan Breuer, "The Aramaic of the Talmudic Period", in Shmuel Safrai and Joshua Schwartz (eds.), *The Literature of the Sages*, vol. 2: *Midrash and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science, and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2006), pp. 597–625, at pp. 606–607.
  - 8 Klaus Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), pp. 324–327, 353–362 (with an addition in the supplement volume, 1994, p. 233).
  - 9 David Talshir, "The Nature of the Aramaic in Tannaitic Literature", in Moshe Bar-Asher (ed.), *Sugiyot bilshon hakhamim* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1991), pp. 69–70.
  - 10 Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Judean Aramaic* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2003).
  - 11 Günter Stemberger, "Die aramäischen Sprüche Hillels im Traktat Avot", in: idem, *Judaica Minora II: Geschichte und Literatur des rabbinischen Judentums*

Any scholar wishing to provide a comprehensive description of Tannaitic Aramaic is faced with difficulties on three levels. Firstly, one has to test the homogeneity of the language of the corpus at the time of composition: are there indications of diachronic changes, dialectal variation, and different registers? Secondly, one has to consider the possibility of editorial changes once the original sources were incorporated into the extant literary texts. And thirdly, one has to account for possible effects of the transmission process on the language, and adopt a corresponding assessment of the manuscripts' textual reliability.

What signs are there, then, for variation in Tannaitic Aramaic? Diachronic change is not traceable in the corpus, even though the different Aramaic pieces were probably not produced at a single point in time. The Tannaitic Aramaic material has, by definition, a firm *terminus ante quem*: the final composition of the Tannaitic literary sources in the second century CE. However, these sources contain much older material, and the explicit attribution of some of the Aramaic texts to known rabbinic figures suggests that the material spans three centuries: Yose ben Yoezer, quoted in *m.Eduyoth* 8.4, lived in the second half of the second century BCE, Hillel, quoted inter alia in *Aboth* 1.13, lived approximately one hundred years later, and Rabban Gamaliel I, whose missives are preserved in *t.Sanhedrin* 2.5, was a leading authority in the Sanhedrin in the first half of the first century CE. Be that as it may, since attributions are not usually unanimous,<sup>12</sup> and thus

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(Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, vol. 138; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), pp. 374–388. The original Spanish version appeared as “Los dichos arameos de Hillel en el tratado Abot”, *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos* 53 (2004), pp. 387–405. In an unpublished paper, Aaron Koller provides a much more detailed discussion and classification of these sayings. I thank Aaron Koller for readily sharing this draft with me.

12 For example, Stemmerger, “Sprüche Hillels”, pp. 377, 383, discusses some problems concerning the attribution of *Aboth* 2.6 to Hillel. Similar

cannot be taken at face value, the general hypothesis of the chronological variety of the material should be retained.

Geographical variance, i.e., possible dialectal differences in the material, is also difficult to assess. Beyer and Sokoloff assume a Judean origin for Tannaitic Aramaic,<sup>13</sup> and it is indeed plausible (in light of both the rabbinical figures mentioned and the wider historical context) that the texts were produced in Jerusalem or its vicinity. However, Hillel the Elder, who was mentioned in the previous paragraph, is traditionally associated with Babylonia (e.g., *t.Negaim* 1.16), and if he was indeed born and brought up in the east, that could have affected his idiolect.<sup>14</sup>

Different textual genres often correspond to different linguistic registers and are thus another source of linguistic variation in Tannaitic Aramaic. Indeed, the extant texts attest to diverse genres that can be assumed to correspond to a range of

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problems of identification of the rabbis in question and of divergent textual evidence in different rabbinic writings exist for other pieces as well. If at all, these can only be resolved by case studies that combine philology as well as textual and literary criticism.

13 Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Judean Aramaic*, pp. 9–10; Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte*, vol. 1, p. 50.

14 See Nico Adriaan van Uchelen, “Die aramäischen Sprüche Hillels: Avot I,13 en (sic) II,6 als literarische Kunstformen”, in Eep Talstra (ed.), *Narrative and Comment: Contributions to Discourse Grammar and Biblical Hebrew Presented to Wolfgang Schneider* (Amsterdam: Societas Hebraica Amstelodamensis, 1995), pp. 181–186, at p. 183. Stemberger, “Sprüche Hillels”, pp. 375–376 and Koller (in his draft) point in particular to the importance of the Eastern Aramaic lexeme ܐܬܪܐ ‘crown’ in Hillel’s saying in *Aboth* 1.13. Cp. also the brief discussion in Aaron Koller, “Learning from the *Tāg*: On a Persian Word for ‘Crown’ in Jewish Aramaic”, in Shai Secunda and Steven Fine (eds.), *Shoshannat Yaakov: Jewish and Iranian Studies in Honor of Yaakov Elman* (Brill Reference Library of Judaism, vol. 35; Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 237–245, at pp. 243–244. Additionally, note that the corresponding non-eastern lexeme כלי is attested in *Megillat Taanith* 8 with the special meaning ‘coronation tax’.

registers, from the strictly formal to the more casual. One group of texts that stands out in the corpus are legal documents and formulas.<sup>15</sup> Their language, form, and style are rooted in the Imperial Aramaic legal tradition, which continued into post-Achaemenid times throughout the Middle East.<sup>16</sup> The scribal tradition had a conservative influence on the language, which contains less innovative and dialectal features than other texts.<sup>17</sup> The chronicle accounts of *Megillat Taanit* and the letters of Rabban Gamaliel I were written in an official or semi-official language, definitely not in legalese. Their registers allow for more vernacular phenomena, in the latter source in particular. At the casual end of the spectrum stand the various sayings of rabbinical figures, which could well be representations of a spoken Aramaic dialect. Proverbs are best differentiated from other sayings (such as Yose ben Yoezer's halakhic rulings in *m.Eduyoth* 8.4), since they might represent older, commonly known linguistic material that is notoriously difficult to date or locate geographically.<sup>18</sup> Thus, e.g., the famous *לפם צערה אגרה* 'according to the pain is the gain' (attributed to Ben He He in *Aboth* 5.22, but to Hillel in *Aboth de-Rabbi Nathan* A 12) is also known from Byzantine-period Samaritan sources as *לפם די עבדתה*

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15 Talshir, "Aramaic in Tannaitic Literature", p. 69.

16 Andrew D. Gross, *Continuity and Innovation in the Aramaic Legal Tradition* (Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement, vol. 138; Leiden: Brill, 2008); Gross does not include rabbinic material in his investigation, but the Jewish epigraphic material from the time of the revolts that he covers evinces clear links to the Tannaitic texts. For a general outline of post-Achaemenid Aramaic see Holger Gzella, *A Cultural History of Aramaic: From the Beginnings to the Advent of Islam* (Handbuch der Orientalistik, section 1, vol. 111; Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 212–280.

17 This has lead Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte*, vol. 1, p. 34, to classify the dialect of the legal texts as "Hasmonäisch", which contrasts with the more innovative 'Altjudäisch' of the other Tannaitic pieces (p. 50).

18 Stemberger, "Sprüche Hillels", p. 388.



הוא אגרה.<sup>19</sup> Proverbs travel easily between different communities and places and might preserve language features not original to the context in which they have come down to us.

The discussion in the preceding paragraph has moved to the fore the dichotomy of spoken vs. written language. The two are never exactly the same, and in written texts of different registers one can expect literary language with various degrees of influence from the vernacular. However, to determine, which feature of Tannaitic Aramaic represents literary Aramaic (and which kind of literary Aramaic), and which the vernacular, is a tricky task, not least so because of the very limited corpus. Essentially, it can only be achieved through comparison with other, roughly contemporaneous Aramaic dialects from the area. In other words, in order to determine the nature of Tannaitic Aramaic, one has to establish its place on the dialectal map of the Aramaic dialects from Palestine. Natural reference points and comparanda would be Biblical Aramaic, and the more innovative Aramaic of Daniel in particular,<sup>20</sup> the Aramaic

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19 In a liturgical poem: Ze'ev Ben-Hayyim, *The Literary and Oral Tradition of Hebrew and Aramaic Amongst the Samaritans*, vol. 3/II: *The Recitation of Prayers and Hymns* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1967), p. 367, line 11; similarly in a late midrash: Ze'ev Ben-Hayyim, *Tibât Mârqe: A Collection of Samaritan Midrashim* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1988), p. 249, lines 384–385. See Ben-Hayyim's comments ad loc. for other Samaritan versions of the proverb. Note that in *Tibât Mârqe* the saying is quoted in the name of Ben Ben Eden, a practice not otherwise found in Samaritan sources. Textual fluidity is also discernible in the case of another proverb, לפום גמלא שיחנא 'according to the camel is the load', which was categorised as Jewish Palestinian Aramaic by Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (2nd ed.; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002), pp. 131–132 (based on the occurrence in *Genesis Rabbah*), but is also attested in the earlier Tannaitic Sifre on Numbers (Kahana, *Prolegomena*, p. 160).

20 E.g., Hans Bauer and Pontus Leander, *Grammatik des Biblisch-Aramäischen* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1927).

of the literary texts from the Qumran caves,<sup>21</sup> i.e., the literary language of the Hasmonean period, and the language of the sparse contemporaneous epigraphic material from Judaea.<sup>22</sup> The Aramaic of Targum Onqelos and Jonathan represents another possible candidate for a literary language from Roman Palestine, even though it is now usually assumed that in its present form the language also contains (secondary?) eastern features.<sup>23</sup> The later Jewish Palestinian Aramaic is also important, since it represents a Jewish dialect that was promoted to a literary language in Byzantine times.<sup>24</sup> Precursors of this dialect were certainly spoken (but not written) in Roman Palestine, and similarities with Jewish Palestinian Aramaic in the Tannaitic corpus could thus be interpreted as vernacular features.

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- 21 The standard reference work is Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Qumran Aramaic* (Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement, vol. 38; Leuven: Peeters, 2011). However, Muraoka lumped together the literary material and other epigraphic finds on papyrus and leather from the Judean desert, which rather belong to our next corpus, cp. my review of his book in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 70 (2013), pp. 172–178.
- 22 Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Judean Aramaic*, covers the lexicon of this corpus together with Tannaitic Aramaic; see Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte*, vol. 1, p. 50, for a very brief characterisation.
- 23 Cp. Renaud J. Kuty, *Studies in the Syntax of Targum Jonathan to Samuel* (Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement, vol. 30; Leuven: Peeters, 2010), pp. 5–11 for a *status quaestionis* on the character of the dialect. For the grammar, see Amos Dodi, “The Grammar of Targum Onqelos According to Genizah Fragments” (in Hebrew; PhD dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 1981). Talshir, “Aramaic in Tannaitic Literature”, has pointed to similarities between the languages of Targum Onqelos and the Tannaitic corpus.
- 24 There is no comprehensive grammatical treatment, but cp. Steven E. Fassberg, *A Grammar of the Palestinian Targum Fragments from the Cairo Genizah* (Harvard Semitic Studies, vol. 38; Atlanta: Scholars, 1990), and Shai Heijmans, “Morphology of the Aramaic Dialect in the Palestinian Talmud According to Geniza Manuscripts” (in Hebrew; MA dissertation, Tel-Aviv University, 2005).

In theory, the identification of lexical and morphological isoglosses with the aforementioned dialects should allow us to establish their relation to Tannaitic Aramaic. In practice, however, determining the nature of Tannaitic Aramaic is not that simple. The secondary processes of composing the Tannaitic texts and subsequently copying them several times over a period of 800 years or more surely affected the language that is preserved in the best manuscripts. The effects that composition and transmission may have had on the language in the medieval manuscripts are secondary, and thus differ in nature from the internal variation discussed above. In fact, these processes are possible sources of contamination that might mask to a certain extent the ‘original’ Tannaitic Aramaic, with its internal variation. It is not always feasible to tell original language features from later contamination, especially since many of the comparable dialects that could be used for establishing the nature of Tannaitic Aramaic are also possible sources of secondary contamination. In the following, we shall discuss (in roughly chronological order) these sources of contamination and point to the methodological problems associated with each one of them. For the most part, there is no reason to differentiate between contamination at the time of composition or during transmission.

As said above, similarities between Tannaitic Aramaic, on the one hand, and Biblical Aramaic, Qumran Aramaic, or the Aramaic of Targum Onqelos, on the other hand, may be interpreted as features of two related (post-Achaemenid Aramaic) literary languages, respectively, and would then help to place Tannaitic Aramaic on the dialectal map. However, since the books of Daniel and Ezra became part of the Jewish canon, and since Targum Onqelos subsequently garnered quasi-canonical status in Judaism as well, the languages of these works acquired prestige, and later Jewish authors and copyists

imitated them.<sup>25</sup> Any feature shared by these dialects might thus also be the result of imitation on the part of the copyists of the Tannaitic Aramaic texts.<sup>26</sup> Thus, בטילה עבדה, 'the cult ended/was stopped' (*Megillat Taanit* 28 = *t.Sotah* 13.6) was probably influenced by the similar wording in Ezra 4.24,<sup>27</sup> and the choice of lexemes in ושרת סיניה מעל רגלוי 'and she pulled his sandal from his feet' (*t.Yebamoth* 12.15, MS Erfurt) is clearly based on Targum Onqelos to Deuteronomy 25.9. However, such influence is not necessarily restricted to specific textual correspondences, but can also be of a more general nature. Perfect forms of the internal passive of the G-stem, such as אחידת 'she was taken' (*Megillat Taanit* 9 and 20), are possible candidates for linguistic influence,<sup>28</sup> especially in light of common passive t-stem forms, e.g., אתחילו 'they were taken' (*Megillat Taanit* 11). Tannaitic orthography, too, was influenced by Biblical Aramaic, e.g., in retaining the <h> in the C-stem participle מהודעין אנהנא 'we

25 For a discussion of the prestige and influence of Targum Onqelos cf., e.g., Abraham Tal, "The Role of Targum Onqelos in Literary Activity During the Middle Ages", in: Holger Gzella and Margaretha L. Folmer (eds.), *Aramaic in Its Historical and Linguistic Setting* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), pp. 159–171.

26 Wherever Tannaitic Aramaic agrees with eastern features of the language of Targum Onqelos, imitation is indeed the most likely explanation for the correspondence (except for those sayings in Tannaitic Aramaic that might display a connection to Mesopotamia, see above). A case in point would be the loss of the determining force of the article in יומא טבא 'on the seventh day in it is a festival' (*Megillat Taanith* 23; the relevant words are missing in MS Parma) or in צמו עמא על מטרא 'the people fasted for rain' (*Megillat Taanith* 36).

27 See Bauer and Leander, *Grammatik*, p. 103 (§32x), on the question whether the biblical form was passive. In the Tannaitic context a passive meaning seems likely.

28 Bauer and Leander, *Grammatik*, pp. 104–105 (§32b'–g'). Note, however, that the form אחידת as such is not attested in Biblical Aramaic (or in Targum Onqelos).

announce' (*t.Sanhedrin* 2.5, MS Vienna), or by Targum Onqelos, in the *plene* spelling of the above mentioned Gt-stem Perfect אַתְּנִילָּ. <sup>29</sup> On the other hand, a lexeme like דַּעֲדָק 'small, young' (*t.Sanhedrin* 2.5), not prominently attested in the Targum, <sup>30</sup> could well be an original Tannaitic language trait. <sup>31</sup>

Since Qumran Aramaic texts and contemporaneous epigraphic material did not become canonical, they can serve as a test case: a linguistic feature found in Qumran Aramaic, but not in Biblical Aramaic and Targum Onqelos, is in all likelihood ancient and does not result from secondary influence. However, due to the similarity between the dialects and the restricted corpora, such features are very rare. A case in point might be the syntagm of the negated infinitive to express a prohibition, e.g., דְּלֹא לְמַסְפַּד ... דְּלֹא לְהַתְעַנְאָה 'one must not fast ... one must not eulogise' (*Megillat Taanith* 1 = *m.Taanith* 2.8). It is well attested in epigraphic Aramaic from the late Second Temple period, e.g., וְלֹא לְמַפְתַּח 'and one must not open' on funerary inscriptions from Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup> Even though this syntagm is also found in Biblical Aramaic, its prominence in the epigraphic corpus and the fact that a corresponding construction appears in contemporaneous Hebrew point to an authentic language feature. <sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Bauer and Leander, *Grammatik*, p. 115 (§36p); Dodi, *Grammar*, p. 189.

<sup>30</sup> Edward E. Cook, *A Glossary of Targum Onkelos According to Alexander Sperber's Edition* (Studies in the Aramaic Interpretation of Scripture, vol. 8; Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 64. There are additional attestations in Targum Jonathan.

<sup>31</sup> For other lexical correspondences with the language of Targum Onqelos see Talshir, "Aramaic in Tannaitic Literature", p. 70.

<sup>32</sup> For examples see, e.g., Hannah M. Cotton et al. (eds.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*. Vol. 1: *Jerusalem*, pt. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), p. 379 #359, p. 397 #375.

<sup>33</sup> Uri Mor, "One More Look at the Negation of the Infinitive Construct in Second Temple Hebrew", *VT* 65 (2015), pp. 437–456, adduces examples of the construction in various Hebrew and Aramaic Second Temple period corpora.

The case of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic is even more complex. Predecessors of this literary language were probably spoken in Palestine in Tannaitic times, and linguistic characteristics of the dialect in Tannaitic texts could thus be traces of the vernacular of the time.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, once this dialect was promoted to a literary language in Amoraic times, it also acquired prestige and might have served as a model for changes in the transmission of the Tannaitic Aramaic corpus. Presumably, Tannaitic Aramaic attests to both original vernacular-like traits that resemble Jewish Palestinian Aramaic and secondary influences. A possible example of the former would be the use of טליא 'the youths' (*t.Sotah* 13.5) instead of עולימיא.<sup>35</sup> The lexeme טלי is not employed in the literary Aramaic dialects of Tannaitic times, even though it existed in the spoken idiom (Mark 5.41). On the other hand, the 3pl Perfect ending -ון in the same context (נצחון טליא דאזלון) 'the youths who went were victorious', *t.Sotah* 13.5, MS Vienna) could be a secondary change introduced by a copyist. MS Erfurt has forms without *n*, and such 'regular' Perfect forms are also found elsewhere in the corpus (e.g., *m.Sotah* 9.15, *Megillat Taanit* 7, 36).<sup>36</sup> And in contradistinction to the previous example, the ending -ון is not unequivocally attested in Aramaic texts from Tannaitic times.<sup>37</sup>

Once the Babylonian Talmud became authoritative, Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, too, served as a prestigious literary language and exerted influence on Jewish copyists and scribes. Apart from possible authentic (but certainly very rare) traces in the idiolect of Tannaitic figures from the east (discussed above), all

34 Cp., e.g., the extraordinary Qumran Aramaic spelling -ון for the 3ms suffix pronoun, Muraoka, *Grammar*, p. 40 (§12f).

35 Thus already Talshir, "Aramaic in Tannaitic Literature", p. 70.

36 But note קרון 'they called' (*m.Eduyoth* 8.4), in MSS Kaufmann and Parma A.

37 Cp. Muraoka, *Grammar*, p. 99 (§24fa).

Jewish Babylonian Aramaic traits in the Tannaitic material can be dismissed as late corruptions. A number of such Babylonian forms are easily recognizable in the Tosefta MS Erfurt, e.g., the participle with clitic pronoun מהודענא 'we declare' and the C-stem infinitive לאפוקי 'to bring out' in *t.Sanhedrin* 2.5.<sup>38</sup>

In the preceding paragraphs, we have pointed to numerous possible examples of linguistic forms in Tannaitic Aramaic texts that could be secondary: results of linguistic updating and alignment to the norms of prestigious literary languages that affected the text in the manuscripts up to the Middle Ages. However, apart from Jewish Babylonian Aramaic forms, which can confidently be assigned to the transmission process, the interpretation of other language traits remains equivocal, and we cannot tell original from secondary forms with certainty. But while the interpretation of the data might sometimes be contestable, the validity of the methodological assumption of linguistic interference during the copying of the manuscripts can be ascertained. For in the Aramaic Levi Document we possess one Aramaic text from late Second-Temple period Palestine for which we can compare the language in the contemporaneous Dead Sea Scrolls with a medieval copy from the Cairo Genizah.<sup>39</sup> There is not much overlap between the surviving fragments, but even

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38 In these particular cases, influence from *b.Sanhedrin* 11a is possible, where the text from the Tosefta is reproduced. Admittedly, the Babylonian forms do not occur in the Vilna edition, but such forms are found in manuscripts (for example, the Yemenite MS Yad Harav Herzog 1 ad loc.). We would then be dealing with a two-step process: the Tannaitic Aramaic was 'babylonianised' in its new talmudic context, and this new text form then exerted influence on the Tosefta in MS Erfurt, due to the prestige of the Babylonian Talmud.

39 Jonas C. Greenfield, Michael E. Stone, and Esther Eshel, *The Aramaic Levi Document: Edition, Translation, Commentary* (Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha, vol. 19; Leiden: Brill, 2004).

this very restricted corpus evinces linguistic updating of the kind we have assumed for the Tannaitic Aramaic texts, e.g., in the spelling of C-stem participles and infinitives with <h>.<sup>40</sup>

Thus far we have tried to disentangle the different layers of the consonantal texts in Tannaitic Aramaic that we encounter in the medieval manuscripts. When taking into account all possible uncertainties of the original language situation and every possible source of interference during the transmission process, even the consonantal skeleton sometimes remains elusive. Additionally, in some of the manuscripts some words of the Tannaitic Aramaic corpus are also pointed with vowel signs. This further increases the variability and variegation of the material. As with the Hebrew parts, the consonantal and vocalisation traditions of each manuscript are to be judged separately.<sup>41</sup> Due to the sparsity of the material, it is doubtful whether one can reach definite conclusions about the reliability and the independence of the vocalisation traditions. We shall only exemplify the divergence

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40 Stig Norin, "The Aramaic Levi: Comparing the Qumran Fragments with the Genizah Text", *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 27 (2013), pp. 118–130, has compared the parallel passages. The C-stem forms are discussed on p. 126, a Jewish Palestinian Aramaic lexical trait on p. 121. Note that Norin's linguistic discussions are at times idiosyncratic and should not always be trusted, but the article is still a useful compilation of differences in the parallel passages. For other secondary traits in the language of the Genizah copy (unparalleled in the Dead Sea Scrolls material) see Greenfield et al., *Aramaic Levi*, p. 25 and my review of Muraoka, *Grammar*, in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 70 (2013), pp. 172–178, at p. 173.

41 For the basic distinction cp., e.g., Moshe Bar-Asher, "Forgotten Linguistic Forms in Tannaitic Hebrew: A Comparative Study of the Consonantal and Vocalized Texts of MS Kaufmann" (in Hebrew), in: Moshe Bar-Asher et al. (eds.), *Hebrew Language Studies Presented to Zeev Ben-Hayyim*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983), pp. 83–110, at pp. 99–103.



(even within one manuscript). The following noun phrase is vocalised in MSS Parma A and B, and twice in MS Kaufmann:

<i>m.Eduyoth</i> 8.4	MS Kaufmann	וּמְשָׁקָה בֵּית מְטַבְּחֵיָּהּ
<i>m.Kelim</i> 15.6	MS Kaufmann	וּמְשָׁקָה בֵּית מְטַבְּחֵיָּהּ
	MS Parma A	וּמְשָׁקֵי בֵּית מְטַבְּחֵיָּהּ
	MS Parma B	וּמְשָׁקָה בֵּית מְטַבְּחֵיָּהּ

Thus far, we have systematically covered all methodological problems that scholars of Tannaitic Aramaic have to address. Of course, not all problems and caveats are relevant for the whole corpus. In the following, we shall apply the conclusions from the methodological part to one text: the halakhic rulings of R. Yose ben Yoezer from *m.Eduyoth* 8.4. We shall try to establish what can and what cannot be said about the language of this pericope. In MS Kaufmann, the text reads as follows:

העיד ר' יוסה בן יועזר איש צרידה על אֵיִל קְמִיצֵיָּהּ דְּכִי וְעַל מְשָׁקָה בֵּית  
מְטַבְּחֵיָּהּ דְּכִיִּין וְדִי יִקְרַב לְמִיתָהּ מְסָאֵב וְקִרְוֹן לִיהּ יוֹסֶה שְׂרִיִּיא

R. Yose ben Yoezer, the man from Şredah, testified: about the *Ayyal* locust: clean; and about the liquids from the slaughterhouse [of the Temple]: clean; and one who touches a dead: unclean. And they called him 'Yose the Permitter'.

We have given the Aramaic in its Hebrew context, since it contains the attribution of the rulings to R. Yose ben Yoezer, a member of the first pair of the *zugot*. Thus, if this attribution is reliable, the Aramaic is to be dated to the second half of the second century BCE, in the early Maccabean period.<sup>42</sup> And if Yose indeed hailed from Şredah, somewhere in the mountains

42 And, strictly speaking, this would not be Tannaitic Aramaic. However, we retain this term and understand it to be a little fuzzy at the edges.

of Ephraim,<sup>43</sup> his Aramaic could have been coloured by the local dialect. The Aramaic text of the Mishnah falls into two parts: The *verbatim* quotation of Yose's rulings, and the comment on his epithet. The latter is anonymous, and not datable.

The second halakhic ruling of the Mishnah has partial parallels elsewhere in the Tannaitic corpus. *Sifra Šerašim*, parasha 8, chapter 1 reads: שהרי היעיד יוסה בן יעוזר איש צרידה על משקה בת (MS Vatican ebr. 66), and *m.Kelim* 15.6 has כל המקשין טמאין ומשקה בית מטבחייה טהורין (MS Kaufmann). How do these texts relate to *m.Eduyoth* 8.4? The former case is obviously a quotation from the Mishnah,<sup>44</sup> and the latter would seem to be a translation, given that the predication is in Hebrew.<sup>45</sup> The version in *m.Eduyoth* 8.4 is thus primary, and it stands to reason that its Aramaic is the original language of these rulings.<sup>46</sup> However, the very fact that the Aramaic material was reworked confirms our methodological caveat above that the texts might have been affected at the time of their composition: other texts, too, could be the result of partial translation, though this is impossible to prove.

Turning to the consonantal text in the manuscripts, one notes minor differences in the Aramaic:<sup>47</sup>

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43 Either close to Bet-El or farther to the north-west (cp. 1 Kgs 11.26); the exact identification is uncertain.

44 The exact wording from the *Sifra* is also attested in witnesses to the text of the Mishnah, see Kenneth Jeremy Wieder, "Mishnah Eduyot: A Literary History of a Unique Tractate" (PhD dissertation, New York University, 2005), p. 575 ad loc.

45 The connection to *m.Eduyoth* 8.4 is clear from the unusual spelling of the plural construct משקה in both places in MS Kaufmann.

46 Cp. the judgment of Wieder, "Mishnah Eduyot", pp. 230–231.

47 See the critical edition in Wieder, "Mishnah Eduyot", pp. 575–576, for variants from more manuscripts.

MS Kaufmann:

על אייל קמצייה דכי ועל משקה בית מטבחייה דכין ודי יקרב למיתה מסאב וקרן  
ליה יוסה שרייא

MS Parma A:

על אייל קמצייה דכי ועל משקי בית מטבחייה דכן ודי יקרב למיתא מסאב וקרן  
ליה יוסה שרייא

MS Cambridge:

על אייל קמצייה דכי ועל משקה בית מטבחיא דכאן ודי יקרב למיתה מסאב וקרן  
ליה יוסי שרייא

Some of these differences are certainly mistakes, and the respective forms should be emended. The *mater lectionis* in MS Kaufmann קמצייה is superfluous, as shown by comparative evidence from other dialects; the other manuscripts and the vocalisation tradition of MS Kaufmann represent the correct form. The form דכאן in MS Cambridge is also an error; either of the readings from the other manuscripts is preferable.<sup>48</sup> If the spelling משקה (MSS Kaufmann and Cambridge) represents the construct plural, as suggested by the plural of the predicate (both here and in the Hebrew parallel *m.Kelim* 15.6),<sup>49</sup> it should be emended to משקי, as in MS Parma A.

In addition to these erroneous forms, two Jewish Palestinian Aramaic orthographic conventions are also clearly secondary (for this dialect was not a written language when the rulings were produced): one is the spelling of the final *-ā* of the definite article with <h>, not <'>, in MSS Kaufmann and Cambridge, and with the noun מיתה also in MS Parma A. Interestingly, the

48 The form could perhaps be interpreted as a *plene* spelling of דכן from MS Parma A. But <'> for short *a* would be exceptional.

49 But according to Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Judean Aramaic*, p. 64 s.v., this is a singular construct. The incongruence would then remain unexplained.

epithet שרייא is consistently spelled with <ʾ>. The other one is the spelling <yy> for consonantal y, especially in the definite plural ending -ayyā, in MSS Kaufmann and Parma A, and once in MS Cambridge. In addition, the *plene* spelling <yh> of the 3msg suffix, though common in Targum manuscripts, is also unattested until the end of the Second-Temple period, and therefore probably secondary in our piece.

The adjusted text of the Mishnah — with emendations and non-Jewish Palestinian Aramaic orthography — would thus run like this: על איל קמציא דכי ועל משקי בית מטבחיא דבין/דכן ודי\*: יקרב למיתא מסאב וקרון לה יוסה שריא. This short text evinces some potentially diagnostic language traits that merit discussion. One orthographic-phonological trait is the spelling <dy> of the nominalizing particle. This spelling as a separate word is typical for older strata of Aramaic, including Biblical Aramaic. Qumran Aramaic has both this spelling and the proclitic <d->, as in later dialects,<sup>50</sup> and *prima facie* a similar picture emerges for Tannaitic Aramaic. However, the orthography of the particle in the manuscripts oscillates, as in the parallel די אמר (*t.Sotah* 13.6, MS Vienna), דיאמר (MS Erfurt), and דאמיר (*Megillat Taanith* 28). The spelling <dy> is thus hardly diagnostic and could well be secondarily influenced by Biblical Aramaic orthography.

Two morphological traits are also of interest. The mpl passive participle ‘clean’ is spelled דכיין in MS Kaufmann, and דכן in MS Parma A. The former spelling presumably represents *dakayin*, as in Biblical Aramaic (and later western dialects), the latter *dakan*, as in Targum Onqelos.<sup>51</sup> Since the sound change underlying

50 Muraoka, *Grammar*, p. 50 (§15).

51 Bauer and Leander, *Grammatik*, p. 233 (§62g); Fassberg, *Grammar*, p. 189 (§143l); Dodi, *Grammar*, p. 353. I assume with Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte*, vol. 1, pp. 128–136, that unstressed short vowels in open syllables were elided in the second or third century CE.

the Targumic form is typical for Babylonia,<sup>52</sup> one may assume that the Tannaitic form was *dakayin*, and that דכן in MS Parma A is secondary. The second morphological feature has already been mentioned in our methodological remarks: the Jewish Palestinian Aramaic 3pl Perfect ending ון-. The fact that all good manuscripts have the reading קרון, not קרו, could be marshalled in support of the authenticity of the form, which would then be a vernacular feature. But such forms with *-n* are not otherwise attested until well into the Common Era, which would make this an extreme outlier. However, the interpretation as an original language feature becomes a little more probable if one takes into account that the form is not part of Yose's rulings and could thus be later than these. A date sometime in the first two centuries CE is more easily reconcilable with the vernacular interpretation, but it is hypothetical. Ultimately, we cannot decide which of the interpretations of the form is more probable: it could be an original vernacular feature or a secondary scribal imitation of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic.

Individual syntactical and lexical traits from Yose's third ruling are best discussed together. In the relative clause די יקרב למיתא 'one who touches a corpse/dead body/the dead', the noun מיתא appears with the definite article, even though the referent is indefinite. This usage is typical of eastern Aramaic, where the article had lost its function of marking definiteness, and the syntactic peculiarity is thus best interpreted as secondary influence from Targumic Aramaic. Presumably, דיקרב במיתא in Targum Onqelos to Numbers 19.11 (for Hebrew הִנֵּגַת בְּמֵת, without the definite article) is the source of the determined form, for Yose's halakhic ruling seemingly recapitulates the command

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52 W. Randall Garr, "*\*ay > a* in Targum Onqelos", *JAOS* 111 (1991), pp. 712–719.

from this verse.<sup>53</sup> This rather surprising fact did not escape the rabbis, who — assuming that Yose was not simply reiterating the plain meaning of the biblical verse — offered explanations on which specific situations Yose could have been referring to (*b.Abodah Zarah* 37b). The reason behind the talmudic discussion also bears on the lexical peculiarity of the Tannaitic piece. The G-stem verb קרב with different verbal arguments conveys different meanings: with the prepositions על (of humans) or ל it expresses the notion ‘to come near someone/something’, while the notion ‘to touch someone/something’ usually requires an argument with the preposition ב.<sup>54</sup> Only in the later Jewish Palestinian Aramaic does this strict distinction unravel and the notion ‘to touch something’ also comes to be expressed by an argument with ל.<sup>55</sup> This leaves us with two possible interpretations for the Tannaitic text: either Yose meant to say ‘one who comes near a dead body’, i.e., he wanted to convey a notion different from the biblical verse, or the unusual verbal argument with ל is a Jewish Palestinian Aramaic vernacular feature.<sup>56</sup> The former is difficult in terms of content. And the latter would be all the more noteworthy in light of the proposition ב in Targum Onqelos, as well as in the Palestinian Targumim to Numbers 19.11, which were undoubtedly known to the copyists.

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53 But מיתא is also used elsewhere in the Targum with an indefinite referent, e.g., *Exod.* 12.30, *Num.* 6.9.

54 Holger Gzella, ‘קרב’, in idem (ed.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 9: *Aramäisches Wörterbuch* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), pp. 671–675, at p. 672; Edward M. Cook, *Dictionary of Qumran Aramaic* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015), p. 211 s.v.

55 Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic* (2nd ed.; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002), p. 502 s.v.

56 The preposition ב remains exceptional even when other manuscripts are taken into account, see Wieder, “Mishnah Eduyot”, p. 576 ad loc.

Although Tannaitic literature was composed mainly in Hebrew, it also incorporates a number of brief texts in Aramaic. The language of these short pieces (and of the related *Megillat Taanit*) can be called ‘Tannaitic Aramaic’. Due to the very small corpus, and since it is preserved only in medieval manuscripts, this language is very difficult to characterise and describe with precision. In this sketch we have tried to list and discuss the methodological problems that face every student of Tannaitic Aramaic. We have then applied these to a test case. It turned out that it is indeed possible to go beyond the manuscript evidence and excavate a more original form of the Tannaitic Aramaic dialect, e.g., by identifying and eliminating secondary traits. However, other linguistic features remain ambiguous. We can tell why this is the case, and we can point to the possible interpretations of the data, but we cannot reach a definite conclusion.

