Cambridge Semitic Languages and Cultures

# Interconnected Traditions

## Semitic Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

## A Festschrift for Geoffrey Khan

### Volume 1: Hebrew and the Wider Semitic World

Edited by Aaron D. Hornkohl, Nadia Vidro,
Janet C. E. Watson, Eleanor Coghill,
Magdalen M. Connolly, and Benjamin M. Outhwaite

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies

https://www.openbookpublishers.com





Semitic Languages and Cultures 35

ISSN (print): 2632-6906

ISSN (digital): 2632-6914

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80511-576-2

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80511-577-9

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80511-578-6

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0463

Cover image: Cambridge University Library T-S NS 264.63, assorted writing exercises in Hebrew, Judaeo-Arabic, and Arabic, part of a letter, and some legal text (courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library).
Cover design: Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

The fonts used in this volume are Cambria Math, Charis SIL, David, Estrangelo Edessa, Kahle, Mandaic Hebrew, Narkisim, Paleo Hebrew, SBL Greek, SBL Hebrew, Scheherazade New, Segoe UI Historic, Times New Roman.

# CHRISTIAN PALESTINIAN ARAMAIC BETWEEN GREEK AND ARABIC

*Holger Gzella*

Among the three Western Aramaic literary traditions of Late Antiquity, Christian Palestinian Aramaic is arguably the one least studied from a historical-linguistic point of view. And yet, it offers a number of insights into the language situation in Byzantine Palestine that cannot easily be gained from Jewish Palestinian and Samaritan Aramaic. A less well-known but significant point is the substrate evidence that, cumulatively, documents a certain presence of Arabic in the region already in pre-Islamic times. Such data ties in with both very recent work on the diversity and diffusion of Old Arabic varieties and ongoing interest in identifying the still under-researched factors that eventually led to the creation of another Christian Aramaic written language besides Greek and Syriac by the fifth century CE at the latest.

Excepting some thirty short inscriptions that date from the period between the fifth and the eleventh centuries CE and originate in an ecclesiastical milieu of monasteries and parishes,[1] the

[1] The treatment of the epigraphic material in the recent dictionary by Sokoloff (2014) is less reliable than the discussion of the vocabulary of the literary texts; Nebe (2016a; 2016b) makes a number of essential

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0463.27

corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic exclusively consists of translations from Greek, which results in a substantial number of lexical borrowings. Its roots in a regional Aramaic vernacular, which was spoken until about the eighth or ninth century CE, are nonetheless evident (Gzella 2015, 317–26; Stadel f.c.). First, this variety, like its two Palestinian Aramaic sister languages, simultaneously exhibits a number of innovations common to members of the Western Aramaic branch—such as third-person feminine plural forms ending in *-ē* or *-ī*, agent nouns according to the pattern /qāṭōl/ acting as by-forms of the inherited basic-stem active participle /qāṭel/, and derived-stem infinitives with an /m-/ prefix—as well as a few instances of local micro-variation—in particular, the shift of *o* and *e* in the vicinity of a preceding *i* vowel to *u* and *i*, respectively. Many lexical isoglosses of the Western dialects that still occur in Western Neo-Aramaic are also attested here.[2] Judging from the find-spots of the material, the dialect that underlies Christian Palestinian Aramaic originated in Transjordan, near Amman, and spread to the vicinity of Jerusalem.

Second, the syntax of the translated texts is highly idiomatic in character, especially as far as the rendering of verbal forms is concerned, despite the many differences in the marking

corrections. An overview of this subcorpus can be found in Hoyland (2010, 37–39).

[2] E.g., the by-form *ʾnh* ‘we’ instead of *ʾnn*; the passive participle of the root *yhb* ‘give’ with the sense ‘be, exist’; the noun **kotl* ‘wall’; the by-form of the root *zbr* ‘prune’ instead of *zmr*; the allomorphic root *ḥmī* ‘see’ instead of common Aramaic *ḥzī*; the roots *ḥsl* ‘end’, *nqī* ‘pick, choose’, and *qṣr* ‘be short’; and the noun **ṣadaqā* in the sense ‘alms’.

of tense, aspect, and modality in Aramaic as opposed to Greek. The use of periphrastic conjugations consisting of a finite form of the verb 'be' and an active participle of the main verb in order to render ongoing or repeated events in the past or future is a case in point (Li 2013, based on an analysis of the Gospels).

And third, various passing remarks by Greek and Latin writers on aspects of daily life among Palestinian Christians make it clear that, at least outside urban centres, Aramaic served as the normal means of ordinary communication. Such words include, among others, *gubba* 'cistern' in Jerome's (347–420) *Vita Pauli* (Migne PL 23, 22), a word directly attested in Christian Palestinian Aramaic as well (Sokoloff 2014, 69); *barech* 'Bless!' in the same author's *Vita Hilarionis* (Migne PL 23, 42; the Greek and Old Church Slavonic translations even have the longer reading βάρεχ, μαρί and парехъ мари 'Bless, oh Lord!', respectively, which, in light of the preservation of word-final *-ī*, exhibits a characteristically Western-Aramaic form), which supplements other forms of the same root that occur in the corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic with the imperative (Sokoloff 2014, 63);[3] and a few stray lexemes in Epiphanius of Salamis, especially νουρα 'fire'

[3] A more detailed discussion of these textual variants and their implications can be found in Gippius et al. (2020, 6–10), but the meaning becomes clear from the gloss *id est, benedic* in the Latin text. Note that the manuscript evidence for the reading in the Old Church Slavonic translation of Jerome's *Vita Hilarionis* varies between парехъ мара (with an erroneous final *-a* in мара, apparently under the influence of the vowel in the preceding syllable), пархъ марїи, and пархъ марии, but the expected spelling мари appears in a citation of the same expression on the walls of the St Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod.

(Sokoloff 2014, 260) and presumably ϰοδδα ‘jar’ (from **kadd*), both in the emphatic state (Dummer 1968). Systematic scrutiny of the *Nebenüberlieferung* of Palestinian Aramaic in Greek and Latin ecclesiastical writers, which has been unduly neglected by lexicographers of Christian Palestinian Aramaic (such transcriptions feature in neither Schultheß 1903 nor Sokoloff 2014), will, in all likelihood, uncover more non-onomastic evidence.

There are also several passages that report the use of spoken Aramaic without citing actual words or phrases in transcription. In another section of the *Vita Hilarionis*, Jerome comments on the native pronunciation of Aramaic words in the mouth of a traveller who knew only Franconian and Latin, but, thanks to demon possession, was capable of flawless pronunciation of the typical fricative and guttural sounds of Aramaic as well as idiomatic expressions (Migne PL 23, 41). Jerome’s contemporary Egeria, a late-fourth-century pilgrim to the Holy Land from Gaul or Northern Spain, notes in her Latin itinerary that portions of the population spoke Greek, Aramaic, and both. For this reason, speeches given by the bishop—who, she adds, knew but avoided active use of Aramaic—and liturgical readings were translated on the spot from Greek into Aramaic (47, 3–4; the Latin text and an annotated German translation are easily accessible in Röwekamp 1995, 302–3). The latter furnishes precious indirect evidence of the existence of fully bilingual Greek-Aramaic dragomans in Byzantine Palestine.

Latin writers commonly used terms like *sermone Syro*, *voce Syra* or, *siriste* literally ‘in Syriac’, for Aramaic, but this is simply a convention of nomenclature (as Dummer 1968, 398–99, has

shown for Jerome) and does not imply any underlying classification of Aramaic into distinct varieties. Jerome, Egeria, and others certainly all meant the Palestinian vernacular and not literary Syriac, which was hardly spoken in Palestine anyway. The same usage recurred when earlier scholarship employed labels such as 'Modern Syriac' for Neo-Aramaic languages, or 'Palestinian Syriac' for Christian Palestinian Aramaic, respectively.[4] Conversely, Jews and Christians in the Byzantine period tended to avoid the umbrella term 'Aramaic', which would cover both Syriac and Christian Palestinian Aramaic, no doubt because it had by then assumed the meaning 'pagan' alongside the older linguistic sense.[5] Another possible designation for Aramaic in Antiquity, 'Chaldaean', was probably deemed unsuitable for similar reasons, though Jerome employed it a few times in parallelism and, as it appears, synonymously with 'Syriac' for the Aramaic parts of the book of Daniel (*In Danielem* 2.7; 4.10; 7.47). For 'Chaldaean' by and large referred, often in a derogatory way, to soothsayers and

[4] It was Nöldeke (1868) who felicitously coined the term 'Christian Palestinian Aramaic', but his use of 'Neusyrisch' for the written form of Urmia Neo-Aramaic was less than ideal (*sit venia verbo*, for many years ago, Geoffrey Khan shared with the present writer a memory of his own teacher Edward Ullendorff, who did not suffer lightly student disagreement with Nöldeke in class!).

[5] The nuance 'pagan' for 'Aramaic' is well-attested in Christian Palestinian, too (the references are listed in Sokoloff 2014, 29), where it also serves as a rendering of Greek Ἕλλην with the same connotation.

diviners in Classical Latin (its older, geographical, meaning, referring to inhabitants of Babylonia also remained in use, but crops up much more rarely).[6]

While one, therefore, cannot reasonably doubt that a significant proportion of ordinary Palestinian Christians normally spoke a regional variety of Aramaic in their daily lives throughout the Byzantine period, it is more difficult to say why exactly it was eventually promoted to a written code with a script and a set of spelling conventions of its own. Roman imperial orthodoxy in Palestine employed Greek as the official ecclesiastical language, and Syriac, which had already developed a rich written tradition by that time, was available if Aramaic was preferred. The dialect on which Syriac is based belongs to a branch different from that of Palestinian Aramaic, to be sure, but, given Syriac's wide coverage across the Syrian and Mesopotamian speech area, it would presumably not have been incomprehensible to speakers of the Western varieties either.[7] Since the Christian Palestinian script had been modelled on the Syriac letterforms, the monastic environment in the eastern Jordan area, where Christian Palestinian Aramaic arose, obviously could have had access to the West-Syriac writing tradition had they so desired.

---

[6] Pease (1977, 43–4) has a survey of the relevant attestations of the term *Chaldaei* in Latin with a few concise remarks on the history of its use.

[7] According to an anecdotal story in Flavius Josephus's *Bellum Iudaicum* (IV:1.5), Roman legionaries recruited from Syria, who in all likelihood spoke an Eastern Aramaic dialect closely related to the Edessan one on which Syriac is based, could understand the table talk of Palestinian Jews conducted in their Western Aramaic vernacular.

The motivation for the decision to create a proper written form may lie in the more modest purposes for which Christian Palestinian Aramaic was employed. Presumably, it was not intended to serve as a means of an overarching ecclesiastical infrastructure of advanced theological literature, but to cater for the needs of parishioners whose communal lives would revolve around the churches and monasteries in the immediate vicinity of their homes. This would also have been the background from which the monks and members of the local clergy came. Hence the decisively down-to-earth character of the texts and the lack of a rigorous top-down standardisation. The epigraphic material consists of short building, memorial, and funerary inscriptions, in addition to a concise papyrus letter, whereas the manuscripts contain biblical, liturgical, catechetical, and hagiographic material of a generally unassuming kind, but by and large no sophisticated exegetical or philosophical treatises.

In addition, the largely phonetic spelling conventions (with the exception of ʾ as a regular means of indicating final *-ā* in the emphatic state, just as in Syriac) represent a complete break from the earlier Achaemenid chancellery language. They show that Christian Palestinian Aramaic did not evolve in a learned milieu, and no direct connection with any prior writing tradition of Aramaic in the region can be established.[8] Quite the contrary is the

[8] Beyer (1984, 50, 406) considered the language of a very short pagan dedicatory inscription from 7/6 BCE found at Elmal, half-way between the Sea of Galilee and Damascus, a witness to the ancestor dialect of Christian Palestinian Aramaic. While this is theoretically possible in

case for Syriac, which originated in circles of Edessan administrators and evolved in an unbroken developmental chain into a Christian literary language, presumably following the conversion of chancellery scribes. The large number of religious and administrative terms that Christian Palestinian Aramaic borrowed from Greek, or from Latin via Greek,[9] underscores not only the latter's prominence as the official ecclesiastical language in Roman Palestine, but also points to the lack of a native terminological apparatus in this particular Aramaic variety.[10] Rather, it was presumably geared towards transmitting basic knowledge of the orthodox Christian faith and religious practice to a predominantly rural Aramaic-speaking public with little or no access to ecclesiastical high culture.

---

terms of linguistic geography, the text itself does not exhibit any trait that might prove (or, indeed, disprove) such an affiliation.

[9] Latin loanwords in Christian Palestinian Aramaic mostly pertain to the domain of Roman provincial administration and the army, such as *speculator* (Sokoloff 2014, 23), *scutum* (23), *sudarium* (282), *signum* (285), *sicarius* (286), *strata* (292), *patricius* (327), *palatium* (332), *praetorium* (332), *fascia* (336), *piscina* (336), *flagellum* (339), *quadrans* (364), *caesar* (372), *census* (372), *cella* (374), *calamus* (375), *Kalendae* (375), *centurio* (377), *custodia* (378), *castra* (378–79), and *cassida* (379). To these add now *ptrt'* 'bowl', from Latin *patera*, attested in a fragment of the *Dormitio Mariae* not yet known to Sokoloff (CP3 fol. 4 verso, col. a, ln. 8, in Müller-Kessler 2018).

[10] For another Greek loan not yet included in Sokoloff (2014), see *ʾgps*, in all likelihood an accusative plural ἀγάπη 'agape meals' in a new fragment of the *Dormitio Mariae* (Müller-Kessler 2018, 86, who translates imprecisely with 'memorials').

This is not to say that ordinary Greek words do not surface in Christian Palestinian Aramaic, but they do not indicate a high degree of general bilingualism. The noun *nysws* 'island' (Sokoloff 2014, 264) from *νῆσος*, for instance, may reflect the characteristically Greek interest in seafaring. Such a connection appears all the more plausible when one considers that the substantivised adjective *nysny* 'islander' explicitly refers to Greeks in 'the Syrian from the East will waste away the island-dwellers from the West' (Isa. 9.11), as becomes clear from the wording in the Septuagint that underlies this rendering.[11]

Conversely, the borrowings of many Greek function words, such as ʾ from *ἤ* 'or', *gr* from *γάρ* 'but, indeed', *qygr* from *καὶ γάρ* 'for indeed', and several others seem, at first glance, to relate to spontaneous use rather than technical terminology. Upon closer examination of their distributional pattern, however, it emerges that they, too, may have entered the language via written Bible translations, because it is there that they occur particularly frequently, in contradistinction to their noteworthy absence from the inscriptions. The straightforward diction of the latter no doubt more faithfully reproduces the Aramaic dialect on which Christian Palestinian is based, so one may seriously question whether people actually used these originally Greek particles in their ordinary and spontaneous speech. Instead, the language of

[11] Sokoloff's scepticism (2014, 202) as to the etymology of *nysny* seems unwarranted given the incontestable attestation of the loan *nysws* 'island' and the general productivity of the substantivising affix *-ān*. The preposition *l-* would then mark the direct object (see Sokoloff 2014, 190, entry *l-*, item 2, for parallels).

the inscriptions seems to reflect a register different from that of the literary texts in translation. A description of the epigraphic corpus in its own right would thus be of value.

Hence, borrowings of this kind do not by themselves prove widespread active use of Greek among the Christian inhabitants of the countryside east of the river Jordan. Moreover, widespread full bilingualism would have rendered the creation of an Aramaic written language for that particular target group otiose, because everybody would have known Greek anyway. Yet the swift erosion of Greek in Palestine during the decades following the adoption of Arabic as the state language around 700 CE suggests that the idiom of urban and ecclesiastical elites had not struck deep roots in the rural parts of the region. By contrast, the use of Aramaic as a language of liturgy and religious literature continued among Jews, Christians, and Samaritans for hundreds of years after Arabic had become the dominant vernacular, by about the mid-tenth century CE.

It has been pointed out that general similarity in linguistic structure, basic vocabulary, and means of word-formation between Aramaic and Arabic, but unlike Greek, facilitated a considerably high degree of functional bilingualism and, eventually, a smooth transition from the one to the other (Hoyland 2004, 194–98). On grounds of the same similarity, Syriac translations of Greek philosophical and scientific treatises presumably played such an important role as intermediaries in transmitting these works to the emerging Muslim elites. Around 800 CE, for instance, the Eastern-Syriac Patriarch Timothy I pointed out in a Syriac letter on the production of an Arabic version of Aristotle's

*Topics* that a translation based on the Syriac was more satisfactory than earlier ventures based directly on the Greek. The latter were considered *brbryn* 'barbaric', presumably due to excessively literal and unidiomatic style (see Heimgartner 2012, 65–6, for the Syriac text and Brock 1999 for an annotated English translation).

However, Palestinian Christians seem to have switched to Arabic as the dominant language somewhat earlier and more rapidly than Jews and Samaritans. The manuscript transmission of Christian Palestinian Aramaic continued until the thirteenth century, it is true, but the amount of linguistic contamination in witnesses dating from this later period clearly shows that knowledge of Aramaic rapidly declined after the eighth century. Even so, a comparison of the reactions of Christians, Jews, and Samaritans to Arabic's advance has not yet been the focus of scholarly attention, owing to the conventional association of Arabic with Islam. Such an association is nonetheless misleading for the period immediately preceding the advent of Islam, because the three sixth-century inscriptions from Syria that are clearly identifiable as Arabic in terms of script and language were all produced in a Christian context (Mascitelli 2006, 176–87). The one from Zabad near Aleppo, dated to the year 512 CE, also contains more extensive parallel versions in Greek and in Syriac (ibid., 176–78), and the one from Harran, dated to the year 568 CE (ibid., 183–87), has a facing Greek text. They show that Arabic was on its way to becoming a written language besides Greek, though with a lower status, among Arabic-speaking Christians.

Against the background of important recent work on the prominence of early forms of Arabic in pre-Islamic Syria-Palestine, one may suppose that Christians in the eastern Jordan area, too, comprised a certain number of people who regularly spoke Arabic as a first or second language, even though it did not evolve into a written code there. In such a situation, regular instances of Arabic substrate pronunciation in Aramaic provide some clues as to the pragmatically dominant language of the writer. The most conspicuous of them is the rendering of original Semitic */p/ as [b], which, as is widely accepted, presumably results from approximation. Since */p/ had shifted to [f] in Arabic by that time, it would have been unfamiliar to speakers accustomed to conversing in Arabic, so they tried to reproduce it with the closest equivalent in the phonetic repertoire of their language. Several examples from literary texts concern Greek loanwords, such as *ʾbṣlmwṣ* 'Psalm' (Sokoloff 2014, 3), *bṭryrk* 'patriarch' (45), *brwṭy* 'at first' and *brwpyṭyʾ* 'prophecy' (62), *dʾsbwṭys* 'master' (79), *ṭbzywn* 'topaz' (144), *mṭrʾbwlyṭʾ* 'metropolitan' (219), or *rbydwn* 'fan' (389), similarly βᾶσιν instead of πᾶσιν 'all' in Greek lamp inscriptions (Gzella 2015, 325).

While these tend to occur in late manuscripts that were composed in a period after the shift from Aramaic to Arabic had long taken place throughout Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamia, the word *ʾwb* for Aramaic *ʾap* 'even' in a ninth–eleventh-century tomb inscription from Gerasa near Amman exhibits the same phenomenon (Beyer 1984, 403, with additional notes on the date in Müller-Kessler 1991, 14). The use of the 'perfect of wish' *nʾḥt* 'may rest (sc. the soul of)' in the same inscription is another clear

Arabism, because a deontic-modal function of the perfect is alien to Aramaic (excepting Nabataean, which had undergone similar Arabic influence), but very normal in Arabic (Gzella 2015, 325).

At least one additional Arabic loan, possibly two, can be found in a papyrus letter from Mird, written by a frightened hermit to his abbot in the eighth century: *ʾhl* 'people' and perhaps *rʿš* 'to tremble' (Beyer 1984, 403–4).[12] Both lexemes belong to the basic vocabulary, and the emotional tone of voice suggests that the writer was in a stressful situation, in which the dominant language for spontaneous communication normally comes to the fore, especially since the style of the letter does not bear the mark of a highly educated author. One may take this as evidence that Arabic was well-established as an ordinary language among Palestinian Christians as early as the eighth century CE. The incorrect use of the emphatic and the absolute state in Aramaic in a building inscription from 1058 CE shows that language attrition had progressed considerably since then (Beyer 1984, 402).

The Arabic component in the lexicon of Christian Palestinian Aramaic is actually more extensive than the incomplete etymological information in dictionaries suggests.[13] The entry on the verb *bdl*, for instance (Sokoloff 2014, 40), specifies neither the origin nor the meaning of the word in its sole attestation in Mt. 4.3 and refers only to Schultheß's (1903, 22) old conjecture

[12] There is some discussion about the reading of the second word; see Müller-Kessler (1991, 15). It is also omitted from Sokoloff (2014).

[13] For explicit references to Arabic words, see Sokoloff (2014, 6, 258, and 320) on *ʾhl* 'crowd, people' (without a translation gloss), *nḥš* 'pierce', and *ʿrbs* 'be troubled'.

*ytʿbdwn* ‘that they (i.e., the stones) should be made (sc. to bread)’ corresponding to γένωνται in the Greek original. However, such a change is unnecessary, because, as already Schwally had realised (1893, 9–10), *bdl* corresponds to Arabic *badala* ‘change, exchange’, presumably in the factitive stem (compare Wehr and Kropfitsch 2020, 52). In addition, the attestation comes from Codex A of the Christian Palestinian Gospels, now in the Vatican Library, that is, a manuscript dating to the late period of the eleventh–thirteenth centuries, where Arabisms abound anyway.

A comparably simple explanation can be applied to the verb *yqn*, which, following a proposal by Müller-Kessler (1991, 212), has been argued to derive from Greek εἰκών ‘image’ (Sokoloff 2014, 166). This is most implausible on both phonological and semantic grounds, however. First of all, the spelling of, e.g., *ʾyqy* for εἰκῇ ‘in vain’ suggests that a verb derived from εἰκών would rather appear with an initial *ʾ-*. Moreover, the semantic development remains completely obscure. The occurrence of the factitive stem in the story of Eulogios the Stonecutter curiously lacks a translation gloss in the dictionary, but it seems to mean ‘make sure’ in the context in which it occurs, as indeed the most recent edition of the text suggests (Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff 1996, 86, 119, where the same unconvincing derivation is given).

However, the correct etymology can already be found in the *editio princeps* (Smith Lewis 1912, 35): *yqn* was not borrowed from Greek, but from Arabic *yaqina* ‘be certain’ (see also Wehr and Kropfitsch 2020, 1038), hence the factitive stem means

'make certain'.[14] As one expects, the corresponding Št-reflexive causative stem is used with the sense 'be fully convinced' in Rom. 4.21 for Greek πληροφορηθείς, literally 'be full of confidence'. The manuscripts in which both attestations occur predate the eleventh century; indeed, the one in Rom. 4.21 is from the Aramaic underwriting of the *Codex Climaci Rescriptus* and thus dates from some point in the period between the fifth and seventh centuries, which would make this verb an early loan.

These two etymologies were established hundred or more years ago and have been unduly neglected in recent scholarship. To these can be added new suggestions, among which those gleaned from textual witnesses that belong to the early period, between the fifth and eighth centuries, are especially relevant for tracing pre-Islamic Arabic influence. For this was the time when the vernacular underlying Christian Palestinian Aramaic was still actively spoken, whereas later manuscripts contain many instances of secondary contamination.

The origin of *gryn* 'chattering', corresponding to Greek ἀδολεσχία, is as yet unexplained (its etymology is unclear according to Sokoloff 2014, 76, and had already eluded Duensing 1906, 157, who remarked: "Unklar, wie zu verstehen oder zu ändern"). However, a connection with Arabic *ǧarā* 'flow, run out' gains

[14] Unfortunately, the Greek original has an entirely different wording (ἀπενύσταξα 'I dozed off') and is of little help here (see Clugnet 1901, 35 line 1; Dahlman 2007, 158 ln. 145). It is unclear where the reference to an allegedly underlying Greek ἐγνώρισα in Smith Lewis's glossary (1912, 35) comes from.

credibility from the use of the same verb for ‘lament, talk nonsense’ in Western Neo-Aramaic, which belongs to the same dialect branch as Christian Palestinian Aramaic, and in the Arabic vernaculars of Syria (Arnold 2019, 300). One of the two possible occurrences, 1 Sam. 1.16, even stems from a manuscript apparently dating to the early period (at least, this is how it is classified in Sokoloff 2014, xxvii), so the underlying verb *grī* may be an Arabic loan of considerably antiquity in Western Aramaic.[15] This is just one example for the light which a study of Western Neo-Aramaic can shed on Christian Palestinian Aramaic.

Finally, the curious expression *bkwl ḥšbʾ*, literally ‘with the whole mind’, as an equivalent for ἀσέμνως ‘gladly’ in Acts 21.17 is by no means “unclear” (according to Sokoloff 2014, 141), if one takes into consideration that the Arabic cognate *ḥasaba* can be used with the meaning ‘be content’, and the corresponding noun *ḥasb* for ‘contentment’ (Wehr and Kropfitsch 2020, 190). A Nabataean contract from the Dead Sea, where, as is well known, Arabisms occur frequently, contains an instance where *ḥšb* means ‘recognise, accept’ (P. Yadin 36, 3.24, see Beyer 2004, 244–47, 402). From there, it is but a small step to the nuance ‘heartfelt

[15] The other possible attestation in Ps. 54.3 occurs in a manuscript written at the end of the twelfth century. The reading *bgrʾmy* ‘in my bones’ is palaeographically certain, but presumably corrupt, and can hardly be derived from the wording ἀδολεσχίᾳ μου of the Greek *Vorlage* (see the note by Black 1954, 18, on the difficulty). An emendation into *bgry* in the light of 1 Sam. 1.16 is an easy remedy, as Goshen-Gottstein and Shirun (2008, 18, in the corresponding note in the apparatus) and, subsequently, Sokoloff (2014, 76) plausibly suggest.

welcome' in Acts 21.17, so it turns out that the Greek and the Christian Palestinian Aramaic texts do not differ much in the end.

The root *ḥšb* obviously belongs to the basic vocabulary of Aramaic, but this particular sense, which seems otherwise unattested in pre-modern Aramaic and has hitherto puzzled editors and lexicographers, may well have been influenced by the use of its cognate in Arabic; at least, this is what the distribution of the relevant occurrences suggests. Once again, the attestation in Acts comes from the *Codex Climaci Rescriptus* and thus from a manuscript that can confidently be dated to the earliest attested period of Christian Palestinian Aramaic.

Onomastic evidence does not have the same diagnostic weight for determining the vernacular in a particular region, but as far as Christian Palestinian Aramaic is concerned, it does further corroborate the various instances of contact-induced phonological, syntactic, and lexical influence that point to the presence of Arabic speakers among Palestinian Christians already in the pre-Islamic period. Several typically Arabian names on tombstones from es-Samra near Amman occur as early as the sixth century CE. For instance, *ʿwmyrw*, *qymw*, and *šlymw* (Beyer 1984, 404) all contain a reflex of the nominative ending *-u*. This ending belongs to the most distinctive hallmarks of Arabian personal names (it also appears in all names in the Arabic version of the Zabad inscription from 512 CE) and, in the case of the most popular one, ʿAmr (*ʿmrw*), even survives into Classical Arabic spelling practice (Spitaler 1979).

The combination of Arabic influence already in early Christian Palestinian Aramaic texts, on the one hand, and the presence

of characteristically Arabian names in the speech area of this particular Aramaic dialect, on the other, permits further insights into the linguistic setting in which this literary idiom evolved. More precisely, the cumulative evidence strongly suggests that Arabic gained some currency among Christians in the region between Jerusalem and further to the east as far as Amman in the pre-Islamic period, possibly even to a greater extent than Greek. This is also the kind of scenario where instances of structural convergence between languages in contact arise, for instance, as Stadel (2022) has argued convincingly, the loss of the infinitive in Christian Palestinian Aramaic and its replacement by the imperfect on analogy with Arabic. Comparable phenomena are unattested in contemporaneous Jewish Palestinian or Samaritan Aramaic material. This seems to reflect the overarching demographic situation. Since the majority of the Palestinian population between the fifth century and the early Islamic period were Christians, it is only to be expected that this group included the most sizeable segment of Arabic speakers.

In addition, the distributional pattern of Old Arabic inscriptions outside Arabia (a summary of the evidence can be found in Al-Jallad 2018, 322–24) supports the hypothesis of a significantly more prominent presence of Arabic varieties in Transjordan than elsewhere in Palestine. For want of a common supraregional writing tradition before the latter part of the fifth century, they were composed in several different scripts. Speakers of Arabic in this area, too, would have been adequately serviced by an Aramaic literary language, because it was linguistically closer to their vernacular than Greek. The wish to cater also for their

needs may have been another consideration involved in the decision to create a written standard for Christian Palestinian Aramaic besides Greek as the official ecclesiastical language.

As a result of the early presence of Arabic, the shift from Aramaic to Arabic appears to have been completed earlier, perhaps by about a century, among Christians in the eastern Jordan area than among Jews, Samaritans, and Christians in other parts of Palestine. Individual Arabic lexemes or syntactic features thus cannot serve as a reliable criterion for dating Christian Palestinian Aramaic texts, because not all of them necessarily result from secondary contamination. Their frequency nonetheless increases over time, so it is concentration rather than sheer presence that offers some guidance for diachronic analyses.

More importantly, they bring to the fore the extent to which Arabic was part of the linguistic fabric of Byzantine Palestine. Interactions between Aramaic and Arabic in pre-Islamic times are fertile ground for future research, but anyone who wishes to embark on such work would be well-advised to learn from the philological precision, sound judgment, and clarity of exposition that Geoffrey Khan himself so admirably applies in his many precious contributions to these and other languages in the medieval and modern periods!

## References

Al-Jallad, Ahmad. 2018. 'The Earliest Stages of Arabic and its Linguistic Classification'. In *The Routledge Handbook of Arabic Linguistics*, edited by Elabbas Benmamoun and Reem Bassiouney, 315–31. New York: Routledge.

Arnold, Werner. 2019. *Das Neuwestaramäische. Teil VI: Wörterbuch*. Semitica Viva 4,6. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Beyer, Klaus. 1984–2004. *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer samt den Inschriften aus Palästina, dem Testament Levis aus der Kairoer Genisa, der Fastenrolle und den alten talmudischen Zitaten. Aramaistische Einleitung. Text, Übersetzung, Deutung. Grammatik / Wörterbuch. Deutsch-aramäische Wortliste*. 3 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Black, Matthew. 1954. *A Christian Palestinian Syriac Horologion (Berlin MS. Or. Oct. 1019)*. Texts and Studies. Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brock, Sebastian P. 1999. 'Two Letters of the Patriarch Timothy from the Late Eighth Century on Translations from Greek'. *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 9: 233–46.

Clugnet, Léon. 1901. *Vie (et récits) de l'Abbé Daniel le Scétiote*. Bibliothéque hagiographique orientale 1. Paris: Picard.

Dahlman, Britt. 2007. *Saint Daniel of Sketis: A Group of Hagiographic Texts Edited with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis; Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 10. Uppsala: Uppsala University Library.

Duensing, Hugo. 1906. *Christlich-palästinisch-aramäische Texte und Fragmente nebst einer Abhandlung über den Wert der palästinischen Septuaginta*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Dummer, Jürgen. 1968. 'Die Sprachkenntnisse des Epiphanius'. In *Die Araber in der Alten Welt*, edited by Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl, vol. V/1: 392–435. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Gippius, Alexei A., Holger Gzella, Savva M. Mikheev, and Jos Schaeken. 2020. 'Semitic Inscriptions in the St. Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod: A Reply to Alternative Interpretations'. *Russian Linguistics* 44: 1–12.

Goshen-Gottstein, Moshe H., and Hanan Shirun. 2009. *The Bible in the Syropalestinian Version: Part II: Psalms*. The Hebrew University Bible Project Monograph Series 5. Jerusalem: Magnes Press.

Gzella, Holger. 2015. *A Cultural History of Aramaic: From the Beginnings to the Advent of Islam.* Handbook of Oriental Studies I/111. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

———. 2021. *Aramaic: A History of the First World Language.* Translated by Benjamin D. Suchard. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Heimgartner, Martin. 2012 *Die Briefe 42–58 des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos I.* Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 644, Scriptores Syri 248. Louvain: Peeters.

Hoyland, Robert. 2004. 'Language and Identity: The Twin Histories of Arabic and Aramaic (and: Why did Aramaic Succeed where Greek Failed?)'. *Scripta Classica Israelica* 23: 183–99.

———. 2010. 'Mount Nebo, Jabal Ramm, and the Status of Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Old Arabic in Late Roman Palestine'. In *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language: Papers from the Special Session of the Seminar for Arabian Studies Held on 24 July, 2009*, edited by Michael C. A. Macdonald, 29–46. Supplement to the Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies 40. Oxford: Archaeopress.

Li, Tarsee. 2013. *Greek Indicative Verbs in the Christian Palestinian Aramaic Gospels: Translation Technique and the Aramaic Verbal System*. Perspectives on Linguistics and Ancient Languages 3. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press.

Mascitelli, Daniele. 2006. *L'arabo in epoca preislamica: Formazione di una lingua*. Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider.

Müller-Kessler, Christa. 1991. *Grammatik des Christlich-Palästinisch-Aramäischen. Teil 1: Schriftlehre, Lautlehre, Formenlehre*. Texte und Studien zur Orientalistik 6. Hildesheim etc.: Olms.

———. 2018. 'Three Early Witnesses of the "Dormition of Mary" in Christian Palestinian Aramaic: Palimpsests from the Cairo Genizah (Taylor-Schechter Collection) and the New Finds in St Catherine's Monastery'. *Apocrypha* 29: 69–95.

Müller-Kessler, Christa, and Michael Sokoloff. 1996. *A Corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Vol. III: The Forty Martyrs of the Sinai Desert, Eulogios, the Stone-Cutter, and Anastasia*. Groningen: STYX Publications.

Nebe, G. Wilhelm. 2016a. Review of *Texts of Various Contents in Christian Palestinian Aramaic* and *A Dictionary of Christian Palestinian Aramaic*, by Michael Sokoloff. *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 111: 44–46.

———. 2016b. Review of *A Dictionary of Christian Palestinian Aramaic*, by Michael Sokoloff. *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 111: 46–48.

Nöldeke, Theodor. 1868. 'Über den christlich-palästinischen Dialekt'. *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 22: 443–527.

Pease, Arthur Stanley. 1977. *M. Tulli Ciceronis De divinatione libri duo*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft (originally published in: *University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature* 6 [1920] 161–500 and 8 [1923] 153–474).

Röwekamp, Georg. 1995. *Aetheria: Itinerarium = Reisebericht / Egeria. Mit Auszügen aus De locis sanctis = Die heiligen Stätten / Petrus Diaconus*. Fontes Christiani 20. Freiburg et al.: Herder.

Schultheß, Friedrich. 1903. *Lexicon Syropalaestinum*. Berlin: Reimer.

Schwally, Friedrich. 1893. *Idioticon des Christlich Palästinischen Aramaeisch*. Gießen: Ricker.

Smith Lewis, Agnes. 1912. *The Forty Martyrs of the Sinai Desert and the Story of Eulogios. From a Palestinian Syriac and Arabic Palimpsest*. Horae Semiticae 9. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sokoloff, Michael. 2014. *A Dictionary of Christian Palestinian Aramaic*. Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 234. Louvain: Peeters.

Spitaler, Anton. 1979. ‘واو عمرو und Verwandtes’. In *Die islamische Welt zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit: Festschrift für Hans Robert Roemer zum 65. Geburtstag*, edited by Ulrich Haarmann and Peter Bachmann, 591–608. Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft (reprinted in: Spitaler, Anton. 1988. *Philologica. Beiträge zur Arabistik und Semitistik*, 351–368. Diskurse der Arabistik 1. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz).

Stadel, Christian. 2022. ‘The Loss of the Infinitive and Its Replacement by the Imperfect in Christian Palestinian Aramaic’. In *The IOS Annual Volume 21. “Carrying a Torch to Distant Mountains”*, edited by Yoram Cohen, Amir Gilan, Letizia Cerqueglini, and Beata Sheyhatovitch, 274–310. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

———. Forthcoming. ‘The Formative Milieu and Linguistic Profile of Christian Palestinian Aramaic’. In *Christian Palestinian Aramaic: Not Quite the Right ‘Syriac’—An International Online Workshop, 3 July 2021*, edited by Riccardo Contini and Emiliano Bronislaw Fiori.

Wehr, Hans, and Lorenz Kropfitsch. 2020. *Arabisches Wörterbuch für die Schriftsprache der Gegenwart*. 6th edition. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.