Which Semitic Language Did Jesus and Other Contemporary Jews Speak?

STEVEN E. FASSBERG
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Jerusalem 91905, Israel

WHICH SEMITIC LANGUAGE did Jesus and other contemporary Jews speak Aramaic, Hebrew, or Aramaic and Hebrew? The answer depends on when the question was asked and of whom. The linguistic landscape in Palestine during the first two centuries of the Common Era is a subject that has long generated intense interest.[1] It has attracted Christians and scholars of Christianity as well as Jews

An oral presentation of this paper was given in the graduate colloquium of the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame on April 26, 2010. I thank Professor Gary Anderson for the invitation to participate in the colloquium as well as for his comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

[1] There have been many overviews of the subject. A few of the more noteworthy treatments in the last few decades are the collected papers of Joseph A. Fitzmyer in *The Semitic Background of the New Testament* (Biblical Resource Series, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), James Barr, "Which Language Did Jesus Speak?—Some Remarks of a Semitist," *BJRL* 53 (1970) 9-29, idem, "Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek in the Hellenistic Age," *CHJ* 2: 79-114, here 82-90, Jonas C. Greenfield, "The Languages of Palestine, 200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.," in *Jewish Languages: Theme and Variations: Proceedings of Regional Conferences of the Association for Jewish Studies Held at the University of Michigan and New York University in March–April 1975* (ed. Herbert H. Paper; Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1978) 143-54, Max Wilcox, "Semitisms in the New Testament," *ANRW* II 25.2 (1984) 978-1027, Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "An Approach to the New Testament through Aramaic Sources: The Recent Methodological Debate," *JSP* 8 (1991) 3-29, John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.; AB Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1991–2009) 1: 255-68, Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts: with an introduction by Craig A. Evans and an appendix by Geza Vermes* (3rd ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel* (SNTSMS 102; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 1-110, idem, *An Aramaic Approach to Q: Sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (SNTSMS 122; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 51-65, Alan Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (Biblical Seminar;

and scholars of Judaism The former have tended to concentrate on the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus and the Semitisms in the text of the NT and what this evidence implies about the composition of the NT The latter have concentrated mostly on Late Biblical Hebrew and Tannaitic Hebrew and what one may learn from them about the status of Hebrew as a vernacular [2]

Scholars have also scrutinized the epigraphic material from Palestine for the light it sheds on the linguistic situation graffiti, writings on tombs and ossuaries, and the Judean Desert documents Some scholars of the NT and of Second Temple–period Judaism, however, have been somewhat selective about the Judean Desert material they consider to be linguistically important They have generally attached great weight to the data from the Aramaic Dead Sea Scrolls but have viewed with suspicion what is attested in the Hebrew Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hebrew documents from other Judean Desert sites The low estimation in which the Hebrew material is held manifests itself in the tendency to ignore modern linguistic research into the Hebrew documents from Qumran, Wadi Murabba'at, Nahal Hever, Ketef Jericho, and Masada Moreover, there are scholars who seem unaware of the tremendous strides made in the past few decades in the study of Tannaitic Hebrew and its relevance for the use of Hebrew in the first two centuries of the Common Era

In this article I bring to bear on the topic of language usage in Palestine the insights of linguistic studies on the Judean Desert Hebrew documents and Tannaitic Hebrew, as well as other sources Because the publication of the Judean Desert documents has irrevocably changed the course of Aramaic and Hebrew scholarship, the survey of the subject will be divided into two parts the first half will deal with the period leading up to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, and the second, with the scholarship that followed the publication of the scrolls Though Greek and, to a limited extent, Latin were spoken in Palestine at this time, I will restrict myself to Aramaic (excluding Nabatean[3]) and Hebrew

I. Before the Judean Desert Discoveries

A Christian Sources and Scholars

The early church fathers do not often refer to the language that Jesus and the apostles spoke, but one can find scattered remarks such as that of Eusebius

Sheffield Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), Jan Joosten, "Aramaic or Hebrew behind the Greek Gospels?" *Analecta Bruxellensia* 9 (2004) 88-101

[2] For an up-to-date discussion of Tannaitic Hebrew, see Moshe Bar-Asher, "Mishnaic Hebrew An Introductory Survey," *CHJ* 4 369-403, here 371-72

[3] For recent Nabatean evidence, see *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters Hebrew Aramaic and Nabatean-Aramaic Papyri* (ed Yigael Yadin et al , Judean Desert Studies 3, Jerusalem Israel Exploration Society, 2002)

(*Dem. ev.* 3.4.44), who reports that the apostles spoke ἡ Σύρον φωνή, "the Syrian language." He also reports (*Hist eccl* 3.39.16) that, according to Papias (60–130 C.E.), Ματθαῖος μὲν οὖν Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ τὰ λόγια συνετάξατο, "Matthew organized the oracles in the Hebrew language." Whereas ἡ Σύρον φωνή is taken to mean "Aramaic," the referent of Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτος and related words in the NT and Josephus such as Ἑβραϊστί or Ἑβραΐς διάλεκτος is debated. Prima facie, the latter terms refer to Hebrew, be it a person or the language. Yet it is thought by many that Ἑβραιστί and its congeners in these corpora must refer to Aramaic.[4] This opinion is informed by the Aramaic-looking transliterated words attested in these sources and by the belief that at the end of the Second Temple period Hebrew had already died out as a spoken language or was nearly dead.[5] The assumption of the disappearance of Hebrew as a vernacular is based in part on the work of Abraham Geiger, who argued in 1845 that Mishnaic Hebrew was an artificial and learned language.[6] For some, the moribund state of spoken Hebrew in the Second Temple period is proven by the existence of Aramaic translations (targumim) of the Hebrew Bible and by the dearth of Hebrew epigraphic material apart from the Dead Sea Scrolls.[7] Accordingly, for many scholars, this situation leaves only Aramaic as a real Semitic vernacular in Palestine at the time of Jesus.

In the early modern era, the first printed edition of the Syriac NT from 1555 advanced the claim that Syriac was the language of Jesus.[8] In the seventeenth century, Brian Walton, the editor of the London polyglot, preferred the Aramaic of *Targums Onqelos* and *Jonathan*.[9] Giovanni de Rossi concluded in 1772 that Jesus,

[4] The terms have been discussed often See BDAG, 212, MM, 178; and recently Hannah M Cotton, "The Bar Kokhba Revolt and the Documents from the Judaean Desert Nabataean Participation in the Revolt *(P Yadin 52)*," in *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered New Perspectives on the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome* (ed Peter Schäfer, TSAJ 100; Tübingen Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 133-52, here 146-47

[5] Joosten, "Aramaic or Hebrew?" 89

[6] Abraham Geiger, *Lehr- und Lesebuch zur Sprache der Mischnah* (Breslau F E C. Leuckart, 1845) 1-2 Gustaf Dalman's acceptance of Geiger's position did much to spread this view among NT scholars See Dalman, *Grammatik des Judisch-Palastinischen Aramaisch* (2nd ed , Leipzig Hinrichs, 1905) 10-11, idem, *Die Worte Jesu mit Berucksichtigung des nachkanonischen judischen Schrifttums und der aramaischen Sprache* (2nd ed , Leipzig Hinrichs, 1930) 5

[7] For a different view of why the targumim arose, see Abraham Tal, "Is There a Raison d'être for an Aramaic Targum in a Hebrew-Speaking Society?" *REJ* 160 (2001) 357-78 On the relative scarcity of inscriptions, see Joseph A Fitzmyer, "The Languages of Palestine in the First Century A D ," *CBQ* 32 (1970) 501-31, here 529 In general, Fitzmyer's views as a NT scholar and Aramaist have carried great weight with other NT scholars

[8] Johann A Widmanstetter and Moses Mardenus, *Liber sacrosancti evangelii de Iesu Christo domino & Deo nostro* (Vienna Michael Zimmermann, 1555)

[9] Brian Walton, *Biblia sacra polyglotta*, vol 1, *Proleg XIII De Lingua Syriaca, & Scripturae Versionibus Syriacis* (London Thomas Roycroft, 1657) 87-93

who was from the Galilee, must have spoken the local dialect of the Galilee.[10] In contrast, in 1883 Franz Delitzsch translated the NT into Biblical Hebrew because he believed that Hebrew continued to be the literary language and the high register of speech at the time of Jesus.[11] A year after Delitzsch's translation appeared, Emil Kautzsch published a critical analysis of the transliterated words in the NT, which he assigned to "Palestinian Aramaic."[12]

The last decade of the nineteenth century witnessed the publication of several works dealing with the speech of Jesus, almost all of which were based on the connection between Jesus of Galilee and Galilean Aramaic. Two other related Palestinian Aramaic dialects, Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Samaritan Aramaic, were also noted for the information they might shed on Jesus' speech. In 1891, J. T. Marshall published a series of articles in which he expressed the belief that Palestinian Aramaic should be used for the reconstruction of Jesus' speech, in particular, the Galilean Aramaic in which the Palestinian Talmud was written together with the language of the Samaritan Targum.[13] Arnold Meyer pointed to Galilean Aramaic as Jesus' mother tongue in a monograph in 1896, in which he also stressed the relevance of Christian Palestinian Aramaic.[14] The 1898 *Die Worte Jesu* by Gustaf Dalman, which is perhaps the best known and most influential investigation into the language of Jesus, argued that the closest Aramaic dialect to Jesus' speech was *Targum Onqelos,* Dalman also noted, however, the importance of the Galilean Aramaic attested in the Palestinian Talmud.[15] On the other hand, in the same year that the first edition of Dalman's book appeared, Alfred Resch reconstructed דברי ישוע, a Hebrew pre-canonic Gospel of τὰ λόγια.[16]

The first important work on the subject in the twentieth century belonged to Julius Wellhausen, who came down on the side of Aramaic as the language that

[10] Giovanni Bernardo de Rossi, *Della lingua propria di Cristo e degli Ebrei nazionali della Palestina da' tempi de' Maccabei* (Parma dalla Stamperia reale, 1772) 12-16

[11] Franz Delitzsch, *The Hebrew New Testament of the British and Foreign Bible Society A Contribution to Hebrew Philology* (Leipzig Dorfflıng, 1883) 30

[12] E Kautzsch, *Grammatik des Biblisch-Aramaischen mit einer kritischen Erorterung der aramaischen Worter im Neuen Testament* (Leipzig F C W Vogel, 1884) One sees clearly from Kautzsch's discussion that almost all of the Semitic words transliterated into Greek have Aramaic morphology

[13] J T Marshall, "The Aramaic Gospel," *The Expositor* 4th series (1891) 3 1-17, 109-24, 205-20, 275-91, 375-90, 452-67, 4 208-23, 373-88, 435-48

[14] Arnold Meyer, *Jesu Muttersprache Das galilaische Aramaisch in seiner Bedeutung fur die Erklarung der Reden Jesu und der Evangelien uberhaupt* (Freiburg J C B Mohr, 1896)

[15] Dalman, *Die Worte Jesu,* 1st ed , the popularity of the book led to a revised English version in 1901 and a revised German version in 1930 (see n 6 above)

[16] Alfred Resch, *Die Logia Jesu nach dem griechischen und hebraischen Text wiederhergestellt Ein Versuch* (Leipzig Hinrichs, 1898) esp x-xi

Jesus spoke.[17] Friedrich Schulthess claimed in his 1924 grammar of Christian Palestinian Aramaic that this dialect was the continuation of the language that Jesus spoke and thus was more important for reconstructing the original speech of Jesus than were Galilean Aramaic or Syriac.[18] Paul Kahle thought differently and considered the Galilean Aramaic of the Cairo Geniza fragments of the Palestinian Targum that he published in 1930 to be an accurate reflection of first-century C.E. Aramaic.[19] This view was adopted by Matthew Black in 1946 in the last significant study to appear before the discovery of the Judean Desert documents.[20]

B. Jewish Sources and Scholars

Jewish scholars have looked to rabbinic literature, in particular the Mishnah, for the key to what languages were used in Palestine in the first centuries C.E. Though redacted by Judah the Prince sometime after the beginning of the third century C.E., the Mishnah includes passages that were composed before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. and that describe in the *present tense* rites that took place while sacrifices were still being offered in the temple, e.g., הקרובים מביאין תאינים וענבים הרחוקים מביאין גרוגרות וצימוקים, "They that are near bring fresh figs and grapes; they that are from far away bring dried figs and raisins" (*m. Bik.* 3:3).[21] Logically, the language of this mishnaic passage and similar descriptions reflects the Hebrew of the period in which Jesus lived.

There are a few isolated remarks from the period of the Amoraim about language, including those that relate to the earlier tannaitic period.[22] One finds in the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Roš Haš.* 26b; see also *b. Meg.* 18a) a lengthy passage that relates that even though the rabbis no longer knew the meaning of several Hebrew words, the handmaid of Judah the Prince did:

[17] Julius Wellhausen, *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1905) 14-34.

[18] Friedrich Schulthess, *Grammatik des Christlich-palästinischen Aramäisch* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1924) 3.

[19] Paul Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza* (London: British Academy, 1947) 129. He published the texts in *Masoreten des Westens* (2 vols.; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1930) 2:1-62.

[20] Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 20-21.

[21] J. N. Epstein, *Prolegomena ad litteras Tannaiticas: Mishna, Tosephta et Interpretationes Halachicas* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1957) 21-58; Bar-Asher, "Introductory Survey," 369. All rabbinic texts cited in this paper follow the readings of the database of The Academy of the Hebrew Language, *Ma'agarim Online: Old Wine in a New Flask* (http://hebrew-treasures.huji.ac.il).

[22] M. H. Segal, דקדוק לשון המשנה (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1936) 14-15; E. Y. Kutscher, "Some Problems of the Lexicography of Mishnaic Hebrew and Its Comparison with Biblical Hebrew" (in Hebrew) in *Archive of the New Dictionary of Rabbinical Literature* (2 vols.; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1972–74) 1:29-82, here 57-60 (English xx-xxii).

לא הוו ידעי רבנן מאי סירוגין שמעוהא לאמתיה דר' דחזיתנהו לרבנן דקא עיילי פיסקי פיסקי אמרה להו עד מתי אתם נכנסין סירוגין סירוגין לא הוו ידעי רבנן מאי לגלוגות שמעוהא לאמתיה דר' דחזיתיה להההוא גברא דהוה דקא מבדר פרפחינה אמ' ליה עד מתי אתה מפזר לגלוגך לא הוו ידעי רבנן מאי סלסלה ותרוממך שמעוה לאמתיה דר' דחזיתיה להההוא גברא דקא מהפך במזייה אמרה ליה עד מתי אתה מסלסל בשערך לא הוו ידעי רבנן מאי וטאטתיה במטאטא השמד שמעוהא לאמתיה דר' דקא אמרה לחברתה שקלי טאטתא וטאטי ביתא

The rabbis did not know what was meant by סירוגין [*sērûgîn*] (until one day) they heard the handmaid of Rabbi, on seeing the rabbis enter at intervals, say to them: "How long are you going to come in by *sērûgîn sērûgîn* [intervals]?" The rabbis did not know what was meant by לגלוגות [= חלגלוגות *ḥălaglôgôt*], (until one day) they heard the handmaid of Rabbi, on seeing a man peeling purslane plants, say to him: "How long will you be peeling your *laglôg* [purslane plant]?" The rabbis did not know what was meant by סלסלה ותרוממך [*salsĕlehā utrômĕmekā* "Extol (lit., 'curl, trill') her and she shall exalt thee' Prov. 4:8] (until one day) they heard the handmaid of Rabbi say to a man who was curling his hair: "How long will you be *mĕsalsēl* [curling] your hair?" The rabbis did not know what was meant by וטאטאתיה מטאטא השמד [*wəṭē'ṭē'tîhā bemaṭ'ăṭē' hašmēd* "and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction" Isa. 14:23], (until one day) they heard the handmaid of Rabbi say to her companion: "Take the *ṭāṭētā'* [broom] and *ṭa'ṭî* [sweep] the house."

This pericope has been interpreted as indicating that a simple woman from the lower classes knew words that existed in her vernacular Hebrew, whereas the rabbis, part of the intellectual class, were unfamiliar with them, probably because they spoke Aramaic.[23] Moreover, one reads in the Babylonian Talmud (*b. B. Qam.* 82b; see also *b. Soṭah* 49b) a comment on language use attributed to Judah the Prince, in which it appears that he complained about the inroads Aramaic had made and tried to encourage the use of Hebrew and Greek: א' ר' בארץ-ישראל לשון סורסי למה או לשון הקדש או לשון יוני, "And Rabbi said: 'In the Land of Israel why (does one use) Aramaic? One should use either the holy tongue or Greek.'" Is this, too, an indication that Hebrew was still spoken despite increasing use of Aramaic, or was it wishful thinking on the part of Judah the Prince, as some have thought, since Hebrew was no longer spoken?

Yet another intriguing remark about languages is found in the Palestinian Talmud, which adduces a saying of Rabbi Jonathan from Beit Guvrin (Eleutheropolis), a fourth-century Amora: אמ' ר' יונתן דבית גוברין ארבעה לשונות נאים

[23] See Harris Birkeland, *The Language of Jesus* (Oslo: J. Dybwad, 1954) 16. Kutscher ("Some Problems," 58-59) wondered if the handmaid, who might have been elderly, was originally from Judea where they still spoke Hebrew, and moved with the rabbis to the Galilee, where only Aramaic was spoken by the younger generation of rabbis.

שישתמש בהן העולם ואילו הן לעז לזמר רומי לקרב סורסי לאילייא עברי לדיבור, "Rabbi Jonathan from Beit Guvrin said: 'Four languages are appropriate for use. They are Greek [lit., 'foreign language'] for song, Latin for battle, Aramaic for dirges, Hebrew for speech"' (*y. Meg.* 71b; see also *y. Soṭah* 21c).

Like the rabbis, medieval Jewish grammarians and lexicographers were aware of the linguistic differences between the Hebrew of the Bible and the Hebrew of the Mishnah: the subject arose in their debates as to whether Mishnaic Hebrew should be exploited for biblical exegesis.[24] The nature of Mishnaic Hebrew surfaced also in the framework of the Rabbanite–Karaite controversy concerning the origin and validity of the oral law.[25] Implicit in Saadia Gaon's linguistic work תפסיר על סבעין לפטה אלפרדה ("Explanation of the Seventy Isolated Words") was the idea that Mishnaic Hebrew was a popular, spoken language.[26]

The modern study of Mishnaic Hebrew can be said to have begun in the mid-nineteenth century with Geiger, who thought that the rabbis spoke Aramaic but wrote a bookish Hebrew.[27] Most other scholars followed him until Moshe H. Segal revolutionized the field in a 1908 article in which he demonstrated that certain features of Mishnaic Hebrew reflected processes of a living language.[28] Furthermore, Segal believed that the use of the rabbinic expression לשון בני אדם, "the language of man," indicated explicitly that the language of the rabbis was a spoken entity and not an artificial one.[29] Segal's analysis of the Mishnaic data persuaded Hebraists: his examples of a living language along with the evidence from the nascent scholarly investigation into reliable mishnaic manuscripts and the oral traditions of the Mishnah relegated Geiger's view of an artificial Hebrew to footnote status.[30] This new approach

[24] Kutscher, "Some Problems," xix; Nissan Netzer, "Mishnaic Hebrew in the Works of Medieval Hebrew Grammarians (During the Period of Original Creativity: Saadia Gaon – Ibn Bal'am)" (in Hebrew; Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1983); Aharon Maman, "The Linguistic School: Judah Ḥayyūj, Jonah ibn Janāḥ, Moses ibn Chiquitilla and Judah ibn Bal'am," in *Hebrew Bible, Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation* (ed. Magne Saebø; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000) 1.2:261-81, here 270-71.

[25] Ofra Tirosh Becker, "Rabbinic Hebrew Handed Down in Karaite Literature" (in Hebrew; Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999).

[26] Netzer, "Medieval Hebrew Grammarians," iv.

[27] Geiger, *Lehr- und Lesebuch*, 1.

[28] Moshe H. Segal, "Mišnaic Hebrew and Its Relation to Biblical Hebrew and to Aramaic," *JQR* o.s. 20 (1908) 647-737.

[29] M. H. Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927) 15.

[30] Moshe Bar-Asher, "The Study of Mishnaic Hebrew Grammar Based on Written Sources: Achievements, Problems, and Tasks," in *Studies in Mishnaic Hebrew* (ed. Moshe Bar-Asher; ScrHier 37; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1998) 9-42, esp. 29-32; idem, *L'hébreu mishnique: études linguistiques* (Orbis Supplementa 11; Leuven: Peeters, 1999) 3-45; Shelomo Morag, "The Study of Mishnaic Hebrew—The Oral Evidence: Nature and Appraisal," in *Studies in Mishnaic Hebrew* (ed. Bar-Asher), 43-57.

to Mishnaic Hebrew, however, met with only limited acceptance among non-Hebraists for quite some time.[31]

II. After the Judean Desert Discoveries

A Aramaic in Palestine

The Aramaic Dead Sea Scrolls provided scholars for the first time with Aramaic documents of early Palestinian provenance, as demonstrated linguistically by Edward Yechezkel Kutscher.[32] Jonas C. Greenfield added that, although Qumran Aramaic belonged to "Standard Literary Aramaic," its language reflected a Palestinian origin.[33] The publication of the scrolls led scholars to mine the documents for data relevant to the transliterations and Semitisms of the NT. The existence of scrolls at Qumran written in Aramaic as well as the evidence of Aramaisms in the Hebrew scrolls found in the same caves strengthened the claim of those who believed that Aramaic was the dominant language in Palestine and, for some, the only naturally spoken Semitic language there during the period. For most, the Aramaic scrolls quickly came to be perceived as the closest and best example of the type of Aramaic that Jesus spoke, though the degree to which the language of the literary texts from Qumran reflected actual contemporary speech was (and is still) debated.[34] It quickly became an axiom that the later, better-attested Palestinian Aramaic sources such as Galilean Aramaic also should be consulted after taking into account the time lag between them and the period in which Jesus and the apostles preached. This is clearly stated, for example, in the most recent retroversion of the Lord's Prayer into Aramaic.[35]

Not all were persuaded by the Aramaic Dead Sea Scrolls, however. Kahle

[31] As noted by Barr, "Which Language," 19 Segal's view is now accepted by almost all scholars, though some still refuse to accept the possibility that Hebrew was spoken by more than a small portion of the population

[32] E Y Kutscher, "The Language of the Genesis Apocryphon A Preliminary Study," in *Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed Chaim Rabin and Yigael Yadin, ScrHier 4, Jerusalem Magnes, 1958) 1-35

[33] Jonas C Greenfield, "Standard Literary Aramaic," in *Actes du premier congres de linguistique semitique et chamito-sémitique, Paris, 16-19 juillet 1969* (ed Andre Caquot and David Cohen, The Hague Mouton, 1974) 280-89 It is not certain, however, that all the Dead Sea Scrolls reflect Palestinian Aramaic The *Targum of Job* was written in a slightly different type of Aramaic from that of the *Genesis Apocryphon* and other Aramaic works found at Qumran Takamitsu Muraoka ("The Aramaic of the Old Targum of Job from Qumran Cave XI," *JJS* 25 [1974] 425-42) believes that it represents an Eastern type of Aramaic and was not native to Palestine

[34] For a survey, see Stuckenbruck, "Methodological Debate," 3-29

[35] *A Comparative Handbook to the Gospel of Mark Comparisons with Pseudepigrapha, the Qumran Scrolls and Rabbinic Literature* (ed Bruce Chilton et al , New Testament Gospels in Their Judaic Contexts 1, Leiden Brill, 2010) 48-60, esp 58

still clung tenaciously to his pre-scrolls view that the language of the Cairo Geniza fragments of Palestinian Targum was closer to the Aramaic of Jesus than all other dialects [36] He was followed in this by his students and other colleagues Alejandro Diez Macho's discovery in 1956 of *Targum Neofiti*, a complete exemplar of the Palestinian Targum, served to strengthen their resolve, since the language of the targum was similar to Kahle's Cairo Geniza fragments [37]

B Hebrew in Palestine

The publication of Hebrew scrolls at Qumran dated to between the third century BCE and 68 CE, the year that the site was destroyed, was no less revolutionary for Hebrew studies than it was for Aramaic Already in the first decade of research into the Dead Sea Scrolls, Henoch Yalon, Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, and Ze'ev Ben-Hayyim showed that the Hebrew of the scrolls shared isoglosses with Late Biblical Hebrew, Tannaitic Hebrew, the Samaritan oral and written traditions of the Pentateuch, the Hebrew reflected in Greek transcriptions (LXX and the Hexapla), as well as the original language underlying the medieval exemplars of Ben Sira and the *Damascus Document* from the Cairo Geniza Kutscher's 1959 book on the language and linguistic background of the Great Isaiah Scroll convinced most readers that deviations in the language of 1QIsa[a] from the MT reflected vernacular Hebrew and Aramaic in Palestine around the time of Jesus [38]

The view of the language of the Dead Sea Scrolls as essentially literary but betraying colloquial features is still maintained by most Hebraists [39] In contrast to Kutscher and the majority view, however, Shelomo Morag and Ben-Hayyim emphasized in the mid to late 1950s the vernacular elements in the scrolls and implied that the Hebrew of the scrolls was a previously unknown Hebrew dialect Today Elisha Qimron is the foremost proponent of the dialectal approach [40]

[36] Paul Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza* (2nd ed , Oxford Blackwell, 1959) 208

[37] Alejandro Diez Macho, "Una copa de todo el Targum jerosolimitano en la Vaticana," *EstBib* 15 (1956) 446-47 See also Matthew Black, "The Recovery of the Language of Jesus," *NTS* 3 (1957) 305-13 A decade later, however, Black acknowledged the importance of the Aramaic scrolls from Qumran as a linguistic propotype of the Gospels (*Aramaic Approach*, 3rd ed , 44)

[38] Eduard Yechezkel Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll* (in Hebrew, Jerusalem Magnes, 1959, Eng trans , STDJ 6, Leiden Brill, 1974)

[39] Joshua Blau, "A Conservative View of the Language of the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Diggers at the Well Proceedings of a Third International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira* (ed Takamitsu Muraoka and John F Elwolde, STJD 36, Leiden Brill, 2000) 20-25, and, in the same volume, Avi Hurvitz, "Was QH a 'Spoken' Language? On Some Recent Views and Positions Comments," 110-14

[40] Elisha Qimron, "The Nature of DSS Hebrew and Its Relation to BH and MH," in *Diggers at the Well* (ed Muraoka and Elwolde), 232-44

Two of the Hebrew documents that turned up at Qumran were found to differ in language from other manuscripts the *Copper Scroll* (3Q15) and *Miqsat Maʿase ha-Torah* (4QMMT) J T Milik designated the language of the former "dialecte mishnique" and declared that it proved that Mishnaic Hebrew was a language spoken by the Judean population [41] Qimron and John Strugnell categorized the latter, 4QMMT, as the text that reflects most closely the Hebrew spoken at Qumran [42] In an article recapitulating the salient linguistic features of the Hebrew Dead Sea Scrolls, Morag divided the Qumran Hebrew manuscripts into three different language varieties Most scrolls, according to Morag, were written in "General Qumran Hebrew", 4QMMT was written in "Qumran Mishnaic", and the *Copper Scroll*, because of its similarity, on the one hand, and dissimilarity, on the other, to Tannaitic Hebrew, was written in the unique "Copper Scroll Hebrew "[43]

Additional sites in the Judean Desert—Wadi Murabbaʿat, Nahal Hever, Ketef Jericho, and Masada—have yielded epigraphic finds from a slightly later period than the scrolls found at Qumran, namely, from the destruction of the First Temple (70 C E) until the end of the Second Revolt (135 C E) The corpora include, among other things, legal manuscripts, letters of Simon Bar Kosiba (more commonly known as Bar Kokhba), and the earliest Hebrew version of Ben Sira Some of these documents, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, have revealed unequivocal signs of a Hebrew vernacular [44] They also share salient features with Tannaitic Hebrew [45]

With regard to the Bar Kosiba material, Milik, Yigael Yadin, and others surmised that Bar Kosiba adopted the use of Hebrew and imposed it on administrators and soldiers for nationalistic reasons [46] A frequently cited article by Seth Schwartz on language and ideology continues this line of thought [47] Such an

[41] P Benoit, J T Milik, and R de Vaux, *Les grottes de Murabbaʿat* (2 vols , DJD 2, Oxford Clarendon, 1961) 1 70

[42] E Qimron and J Strugnell, *Qumran Cave 4 V Miqsat Maʿase ha-Torah* (DJD 10, Oxford Clarendon, 1994) 108

[43] Shelomo Morag, "Qumran Hebrew Some Typological Observations," *VT* 38 (1988) 148-64

[44] See, for example, the prefixing of the direct object marker -ת תפער (= את העפר), "the soil" (Mur 24 5, 8)

[45] For a detailed description of the language of the documents, see now Uri Mor, "The Grammar of the Epigraphic Hebrew Documents from Judaea between the First and the Second Revolts" (in Hebrew, Ph D diss , Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2009)

[46] DJD 2 70, Yigael Yadin, *Bar-Kokhba The Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome* (New York Random House, 1971) 181, Nicholas de Lange ("The Revival of the Hebrew Language in the Third Century CE," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 3 [1996] 342-58, here 343) has argued that the renewed use of Hebrew in the third century C E after it died out as a spoken language in the second century was a deliberate policy on the part of the rabbis, which was motivated by political and theological considerations

[47] Seth Schwartz, "Language, Power, and Identity in Ancient Palestine," *Past and Present* 148 (1995) 3-47

approach, however, turns a blind eye to the demonstrated vitality of Tannaitic Hebrew during the period (see below), which is surprising since the linguistic relevance of the Judean Desert documents for the study of Tannaitic Hebrew has been accepted by Hebraists since the publication of the first scrolls: today all works that treat the Hebrew of the Judean Desert documents relate, perforce, also to Tannaitic Hebrew and vice versa.[48]

Some scholars of the NT and postbiblical Judaism have acknowledged that colloquial elements have penetrated the literary texts of the Hebrew Dead Sea Scrolls, but they have preferred to downplay the possibility that a vernacular Hebrew was spoken by more than a limited number of learned Jews; in their opinion, the Hebrew Dead Sea Scrolls are evidence for literary Hebrew.[49] The general skepticism over the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls expresses itself, among other things, in the lack of attention paid to linguistic research.[50] For example, one hardly finds mention of the scholarship of Kutscher, Ben-Ḥayyim, Morag, and, for works written after 1986, Qimron.[51]

Not all have approached the Hebrew evidence with such reservations, however. For example, Jean Carmignac was convinced, on the basis of his work on the scrolls, that the language underlying the Gospels was a Hebrew similar to that of the scrolls.[52] It is curious that two other scholars who argued that Hebrew was widely spoken in Palestine did so solely on the basis of Segal's description

[48] This is well demonstrated in the proceedings of the five symposia that have been convened since 1997 on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and contemporary corpora See, for example, the most recently published volume, *Conservatism and Innovation in the Hebrew Language of the Hellenistic Period Proceedings of a Fourth International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls & Ben Sira* (ed Jan Joosten and Jean-Sébastien Rey, STDJ 73, Leiden Brill, 2008)

[49] See Black, *Aramaic Approach* (3rd ed), 48-49, Fitzmyer, "Languages of Palestine," 529-31, Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1 262-63, Casey, *Aramaic Sources*, 80 Frank Zimmermann (*The Aramaic Origin of the Four Gospels* [New York Ktav, 1979] 17), despite his acquaintance with the Bar Kosiba material (he ignores the Dead Sea Scrolls), denies the use of Hebrew as a living language and falls back on the standard position before the discovery of the Judean Desert material, namely, that Hebrew was restricted to learned use alone Barr ("Which Language" and "Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek"), J N Sevenster (*Do You Know Greek? How Much Greek Could the First Jewish Christians Have Known?* [NovTSup 19, Leiden Brill, 1968]), and Wilcox ("Semitisms") are more open to the possibility of extensive Hebrew speech than most scholars Joosten ("Aramaic or Hebrew," 90) is explicit "In the time of Jesus, Hebrew was actively spoken and written, alongside Aramaic, by many Palestinian Jews "

[50] Symptomatic of this is the fact that in Fitzmyer's important and influential "Languages of Palestine" only four pages are devoted to discussing Hebrew (the same number as is devoted to Latin), as against eleven for Aramaic and ten for Greek There is no mention, for example, of Kutscher's 1959 book on 1QIsa[a] (*Language and Linguistic Background*)

[51] Elisha Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (HSS 29, Atlanta Scholars Press, 1986)

[52] Jean Carmignac, *La naissance des évangiles synoptiques* (2nd ed with response to critics, Paris O E I L , 1984) esp 10

of Mishnaic Hebrew and not on the basis of epigraphic remains from the Judean Desert. The Semitist Harris Birkeland wrote in 1954 that Jesus spoke a vernacular Hebrew, though he barely mentions the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Bar Kosiba letters.[53] Similarly, Jehoshua M. Grintz, a scholar of the OT and Second Temple period, posited in a 1960 article that Hebrew was the spoken and written language in Palestine at the end of the Second Temple period, but he did so with only scant reference to the epigraphic evidence.[54]

For Hebraists, the existence of both Hebrew and Aramaic documents at Qumran and other sites in the Judean Desert, as well as the Hebraisms in the Aramaic documents and the Aramaisms in the Hebrew documents, demonstrate that speakers in Palestine before and after the turn of the Common Era were at least bilingual (in many cases also trilingual with Greek).[55] They also find additional support for Aramaic–Hebrew bilingualism in inscriptions on tombs and ossuaries in Hebrew and Aramaic. Joseph Naveh has argued that the use of Hebrew nicknames in everyday life is yet another indication of the living use of the language.[56]

An important source of information about Hebrew in the first and second centuries of the Common Era that seems to have gone unnoticed by non-Hebraists is the research conducted on Tannaitic Hebrew since the time of Segal.[57] The evidence from reliable manuscripts of the Mishnah such as MSS Kaufmann, Parma A, and Cambridge, even though they are medieval copies (approximately eleventh to fourteenth centuries C.E.), reveals a rich, dynamic, and developing Hebrew whose details have been strikingly corroborated in the past few decades by an investigation of the Hebrew oral traditions of different Jewish communities from Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and North Africa.[58] The diversity and developments in the attested traditions of Tannaitic Hebrew have not been

[53] Birkeland, *Language*, 22-23. He added, however, a curious twist: he insisted that the vernacular Hebrew spoken by Jesus was the basis for the later and *artificial* Mishnaic Hebrew.

[54] Jehoshua M. Grintz, "Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language in the Last Days of the Second Temple," *JBL* 79 (1960) 32-47, here 46-47.

[55] Note that Bar Kosiba wrote letters in Hebrew as well as in Aramaic, and he refers to himself in both Hebrew and Aramaic fashion: שמעון בן כוסבה and שמעון בר כוסבא.

[56] Joseph Naveh, "Hebrew versus Aramaic in the Epigraphic Finds of the Second Temple–Bar-Kokhba Period" (in Hebrew), *Leš* 56 (1992) 301-18; Rachel Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period* (JSJSup 94, Leiden: Brill, 2005).

[57] To a certain extent, the reason for this is that until the 1980s almost all the literature on the subject was written in Modern Hebrew.

[58] See Moshe Bar-Asher, "The Different Traditions of Mishnaic Hebrew," in "*Working with No Data" Semitic and Egyptian Studies Presented to Thomas O. Lambdin* (ed. David M. Golomb; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987) 1-38; idem, "Written Sources", Morag, "Oral Evidence." Kutscher demonstrated that the editors of printed editions of the Mishnah consciously and unconsciously changed Tannaitic features to correspond to the better-known forms and grammar of Biblical Hebrew, whereas medieval manuscripts were less subject to this "biblicizing" of the language and thus preserved a more authentic representation of Tannaitic Hebrew.

brought into the discussion by those who consider the use of Hebrew to have been severely restricted. The heterogeneity of Tannaitic Hebrew known today to Hebraists suggests that it is the product of a language that was widely used and spoken. Had Tannaitic Hebrew been merely a learned language used by just a few for religious and liturgical purposes, it would not be as variegated as we now know it to have been. Rabbinic literature itself hints at the existence of dialects in Tannaitic times.[59] Segal argued more than a hundred years ago that Mishnaic Hebrew was a living language—the evidence that has accumulated since then in support of his claim has steadily increased.

Two more relevant sources for spoken Hebrew have also been overlooked. The first is Samaritan Hebrew, in particular the oral recitation of the Pentateuch. Ben-Ḥayyim's work in the 1950s on the parallels between Samaritan Hebrew and the Hebrew Dead Sea Scrolls strongly suggested that colloquial forms of Hebrew were spoken in Palestine by Jews and Samaritans.[60] The second is the Palestinian *piyyuṭim* from the Byzantine period, which at times also display features of a living language that are paralleled in the traditions of Tannaitic Hebrew as reflected in manuscripts and oral traditions.[61]

III. Until When Was Hebrew Spoken as a Living Language?

As already noted, several scholars have viewed Hebrew as merely a literary language and, if spoken, limited to only a few scholarly families or pockets of Palestinian Jews. Klaus Beyer presented an extreme view of the demise of Hebrew as a vernacular in dating the death of Hebrew in Palestine to 400 B.C.E.[62] A similar, but slightly less extreme position is that of Schwartz, who believes that from 300 B.C.E. on Hebrew was no longer commonly spoken.[63] The anti-Hebrew bias has continued into the twenty-first century. In 2001 the late Hanan Eshel, an archaeologist and historian, argued that documents from the Judean

[59] Bar-Asher, "Introductory Survey," 381-83.

[60] Ze'ev Ben-Ḥayyim, *Studies in the Traditions of the Hebrew Language* (Madrid/Barcelona: Instituto Arias Montano, 1954) 77-92; idem, "Traditions in the Hebrew Language, with Special Reference to the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Rabin and Yadin), 200-214.

[61] Joseph Yahalom, *Poetic Language in the Early Piyyut* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985) 162-76; Israel Yeivin, "The Contribution of the Piyyut Language to the Mishnaic Language" (in Hebrew), *Massorot* 9-11 (1997) 77-89; idem, "Characteristic Linguistic Features of Piyyuṭ" (in Hebrew), in *Studies in Hebrew and Jewish Languages Presented to Shelomo Morag* (ed. Moshe Bar-Asher; Jerusalem: Center for Jewish Languages and Literatures, Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Bialik Institute, 1996) 105-18.

[62] Klaus Beyer, *The Aramaic Language: Its Distribution and Subdivision* (trans. John F. Healey; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986) 40-43.

[63] Schwartz, "Language," 3.

Desert demonstrated that the scribes had a poor grasp of Hebrew: he considered the Aramaisms in the Hebrew document Mur. 42 to be evidence that it was difficult for the author to communicate fully in Hebrew.[64] Eshel also thought, as did others before him, that the choice of Greek as the medium of writing in P. Yadin 3 indicated a poor command of Hebrew.[65] And as recently as 2009, Avigdor Shinan, an expert on midrashic literature, wrote in a commentary on *Pirqe Abot* ("The Sayings of the Fathers") that Aramaic was the language of speech throughout the mishnaic period.[66]

On the other hand, it is a given for almost all Hebraists and Aramaists that Hebrew was more widely used than had been previously thought. Based on the epigraphic material, Naveh has maintained that Aramaic was more common than Hebrew in daily life in the Second Temple period, yet Hebrew was still widely spoken.[67] Bernard Spolsky, building on the work of others, suggests that the languages spoken by community and in the region were the following in descending order of frequency:[68]

Jews:

Judean villages	Hebrew
Galilee	Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek
Coastal cities	Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew
Jerusalem, upper class	Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew
Jerusalem, lower class	Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek

[64] Hanan Eshel, "Hebrew in Economic Documents from the Judean Desert" (in Hebrew), *Leš* 63 (2001) 41-52 Yet, out of eighty-three words in Mur 42, only two are formed from Aramaic roots (זבנות, "purchase," and בשרון, "negligence") There are three attestations of the Aramaic third person masculine singular pronominal suffix (כתבה, "he wrote it" [2x] and נפשה, "himself") A preferable interpretation would be that the use of Aramaic in Hebrew documents (and Hebrew in Aramaic documents) is proof of bilingualism on the part of the scribes

[65] Papyrus Yadin 3 12-15 has been translated "It was written in Greek because of no means having been found to write it in Hebrew" (Hayim Lapin, "Palm Fronds and Citrons Notes on Two Letters from Bar Kosiba's Administration," *HUCA* 64 [1993] 111-35, here 114-15) More recently Cotton ("Bar Kokhba Revolt") has discussed the lines and stressed the difficulty of the Greek reading She dismisses the older interpretration of the lines and raises the possibility that Soumaios, who is mentioned in the papyrus, is not Simeon Bar Kosiba, but rather a Nabatean, and for this reason it is difficult for him to write in the Jewish Aramaic (as opposed to Nabatean) script

[66] Avigdor Shinan, *Pirke Avot A New Israeli Commentary* (in Hebrew, Jerusalem Yediot Acharonot and Hemed Books, 2009) 26-27 I thank Professor Anderson for drawing Shinan's remarks to my attention

[67] Naveh, "Second Temple Period," 11

[68] Bernard Spolsky, "Jewish Multilingualism in the First Century An Essay in Historical Sociolinguistics," in *Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages* (ed Joshua A Fishman, Contributions to the Sociology of Jewish Lanugages 1, Leiden Brill, 1985) 35-50, here 41

Non-Jews in Palestine:	
Government officials	Greek and some Latin
Coastal cities (Greek colonies)	Greek
Elsewhere:	Aramaic

Willem F. Smelik has aptly summarized current thinking among those who deal with Hebrew and Aramaic: "All recent treatments suppose bi- or multilingualism and usually Aramaic as the principal spoken language."[69]

There is no doubt that Aramaic overwhelmed Hebrew after the second century C.E. and that Hebrew gradually became restricted to liturgy and writing. But did it really disappear entirely as a spoken language?[70] There are tantalizing snippets that hint that Hebrew might have continued as a vernacular in Palestine, at least to a limited extent. Rabbi Jonathan's comment in *y. Meg.* 71b (and *y. Soṭah* 21c; see section IB above), if taken at face value, indicates that Hebrew was still used as a vernacular in the fourth century C.E. Moreover, there is a papyrus, Oxford MS. Heb. d. 69 (P), which on paleographic grounds is dated to the fifth or sixth century C.E. Although it comes from the Amoraic period, it is written in part in the type of Mishnaic Hebrew that is reflected in reliable tannaitic manuscripts. For example, one finds אדן ("man") with final *nun* instead of *mem*, the proper noun יודן ("Yudan" < יהודה, "Judah") with final nasalization, and the proper noun לעזר ("Leʿazar" < אלעזר, "Elazar") with aphaeresis of the initial *alef*:[71]

> . . . תשלח אותן לי עם אדן נאמן שאני צריך אותן הרבה שלומך ושלום כל בני ביתך יפרה וירבה לעולם שלום ואם יודן מביא לך את האיגרת הזו תן אותן לו עבדך ועפרך ותלימידך איסי כתב מדעת לעזר בן יוסה
>
> . . . send me them with a trusted man since I need them greatly. Your welfare and the welfare of all your household, may it be fruitful and increase forever. Goodbye. And if Yudan brings you this letter, give them (the owed carats) to him. Your servant and your dust, your disciple. Issi (Esi/e?) wrote this on behalf of Ləʿazar b. Yose.

The use of Hebrew at this period in a liturgical or religious work is not unexpected; the document, however, is a personal letter about business.

No less intriguing is a Geniza Judeo-Arabic fragment (T-S. Ar. 21/17), possibly from the tenth century C.E., in which the author writes of sitting in the mar-

[69] Willem F. Smelik, *The Targum of Judges* (OTS 36; Leiden: Brill, 1995) 8.

[70] Joseph Naveh, "Hebrew versus Aramaic in the Epigraphic Finds after the Bar Kokhba Revolt" (in Hebrew), *Leš* 57 (1992) 17-38.

[71] See the discussion in Mordechai Mishor, "A New Edition of a Hebrew Letter: Oxford Ms. Heb. d. 69(P)" (in Hebrew), *Leš* 53 (1989) 215-64.

kets and streets of Tiberias investigating how the simple folk speak Aramaic and Hebrew [72]

> וכנת אטיל אלג׳לוס פי סאחאת טבריה ושוארעהא א[סת]מע כלאם אלסוקה ואלעאמה ואבחת׳ ען אללגה ואצול[הא] אנטר הל ינכסר שי ממא אצלת או ינפסד שי ממא טהר לי ופי מא נטק ב[ה מן]אלעבראני ואל סריאני ואנואעה אע [= אעני] לגה אלתרגום וגירה פאנה מג׳אנס ללעבראני
>
> I have been sitting for a long time in the squares and streets of Tiberias listening to the speech of the market and of the simple folk and investigating (their) language and its origins, seeing if something was corrupted from what I considered to be (its) basis, or if something was missing from what seemed to be (correct), and how the Hebrew and Aramaic languages and their varieties were pronounced, that is to say, the language of the Targum and other (dialects), because it is similar to the Hebrew language

At first blush both MS Heb d 69 (P) and T-S Ar 21/17 indicate that Hebrew still may have been used in Palestine after the end of the tannaitic period, and not only for nonsecular purposes [73]

IV Written versus Oral Evidence and the Parallel of Neo-Aramaic

In closing, I would like to offer a parallel for the use of a spoken language long after there are no longer written records of it I turn to Aramaic, the language that displaced Hebrew in Palestine and which served for centuries as the lingua franca of the Near East until after the Arab conquests in the seventh century C E Following the spread of Islam and Arabic, the number of Aramaic speakers began to decline until sometime before the modern period, at which time it was confined to liturgical use in some Near Eastern churches, or so it was generally thought in the West

In recent decades scholars have isolated a few manuscript references that indicate that Christians and Jews in the Middle Ages actually spoke Aramaic An

[72] N Allony, "ʿEli ben Yĕhuda Hannazir and His Treatise ʿKitāb ʾUsūl al-Lugha al-ʿIbrāniyya'" (in Hebrew), *Les* 34 [1970] 75-105, here 98-101 For an argument against the attribution of this work to ʿEli ben Yehuda Hannazir, see Ilan Eldar, "On the Identity of Some *Genıza* Fragments" (in Hebrew), *Alei Sefer* 12 (1986) 51-61, here 59-61

[73] As suggested already by E Y Kutscher, "Present State of Research into Mishnaic Hebrew (Especially Lexicography) and Its Tasks" (in Hebrew), in *Archive of the New Dictionary* 1 57-60, Steven D Fraade, "Rabbinic Views on the Practice of Targum, and Multilingualism in the Jewish Galilee of the Third–Sixth Centuries," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity* (ed L ee I Levine, New York Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992) 253-86, here 273-82, Bar-Asher, "Introductory Survey," 369–70 n 2 Admittedly, the evidence of the Judeo-Arabic manuscript for a vernacular Hebrew in the tenth century is considerably more difficult to find than the evidence of the Hebrew manuscript from the fifth or sixth century C E

Arabic *materia medica* work, *al-Kitāb al-Mustaʿīnī* by ibn Baklarish, preserved in a manuscript from the early eleventh century, contains a Neo-Aramaic gloss in Arabic transcription: لبن النسا: يعرف النسا بالسريانية بختة, "the milk of women: 'women' in *suryaniyya* is *baxta.*"[74] The twelfth-century Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela mentions visiting Aramaic-speaking Jewish communities in Kurdistan:[75]

> משם חמשה ימים לעמאריה ושם כמו כ"ה אלף מישראל. והיא תחלת הקהלות הדרים בהרי חפטון כי שם יותר ממאה קהלות מישראל. והיא תחלת ארץ מדי והם מן הגלות הראשון שהגלה שלמנאסר המלך. והם מדברים בלשון תרגום . . .
>
> Thence it is five days to Amadia where there are about 25,000 Israelites. This is the first of those communities that dwell in the mountains of Chafton, where there are more than 100 Jewish communities. Here is the commencement of the land of Media. The Jews belong to the first exile which King Shalmanezar led away; *and they speak the language in which the Targum is written . . .*

One also finds a five-word Neo-Aramaic sentence inserted into the Judeo-Arabic Bible translation of Ibn Sūsān from around 1570, which was written by a pupil from Kurdistan who came to study in Safed: אייתי ציבי דקיקי אדליק נורא, "Bring sticks (and) light a fire!"[76]

In the seventeenth century, European Christian travelers in the Near East reported for the first time hearing spoken Aramaic; in the nineteenth century, the first Neo-Aramaic oral texts were published.[77] The oral evidence testifying to the survival of Aramaic as a living vernacular of Christians and Jews in Kurdistan (Iraqi, Iranian, and Turkish) and Iranian Azerbaijan stunned Aramaists. In isolated villages, Christians and Jews continued from the seventh century C.E. on to speak Aramaic uninterruptedly into the nineteenth and twentieth century until persecution and massacres either killed them off or sent them into exile. In addition, in southwestern Iran another Aramaic vernacular, Neo-Mandaic, was spoken by Mandeans, the descendants of the late antique Gnostic sect. The native Aramaic speakers managed to preserve their language because of the rough terrain that cut off their remote communities from the rest of the world, and they continued to speak their native Aramaic tongue as a vernacular despite the surrounding adstrata

[74] *Suryaniyya* usually indicates Syriac, but the following word is clearly Neo-Aramaic. See Geoffrey Khan, "The North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic Dialects," *JSS* 52 (2007) 1-20, here 11.

[75] Marcus N. Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela: Critical Text, Translation and Commentary* (London: Henry Frowde, 1907), Hebrew text p. נא; English translation p. 54.

[76] Simon Hopkins, "A Neo-Aramaic Quotation in a Judaeo-Arabic Source" (in Hebrew), in *Heritage and Innovation in Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Culture: Proceedings of the Sixth Conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies* (ed. Joshua Blau and David Doron; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2000) 119-25.

[77] Simon Hopkins, "The Jews of Kurdistan in Eretz Israel and Their Language" (in Hebrew), *Peʿamim* 56 (1993) 50-74, here 53.

of Arabic, Kurdish, Persian, and Turkish. They spoke Aramaic at home and with co-religionists, but scarcely wrote a word in their vernacular.[78] It is estimated that there are still a few hundred thousand native Aramaic speakers dispersed over the entire globe.

The "rediscovery" of Neo-Aramaic shows that the lack of written evidence does not necessarily point to the absence of speech. Languages may continue to be spoken long after they cease being written down. In the light of the parallel of Neo-Aramaic, the scattered evidence of the use of Hebrew after the tannaitic period should not be rejected out of hand.

V. Conclusion

There is no denying that Jesus spoke Aramaic: the transliterated words attributed to him in the NT are Aramaic. As a Jew from the Galilee, he must have spoken some form of Galilean Aramaic that antedates the Galilean Aramaic we know from the Late Aramaic period. But as a Jew living in Palestine, he must also have spoken Hebrew, since Hebrew was still alive during this period and even later. The vernacular evidence in the Judean Desert documents, both the earlier (Hebrew Dead Sea Scrolls) and later documents (such as the Bar Kosiba letters) from different Judean Desert sites, demonstrates that Hebrew continued to be used, not only in writing and prayer but also in speech. Moreover, manuscripts and oral traditions of Tannaitic Hebrew demonstrate that Hebrew was a vital, developing, and multifaceted language with dialects that was spoken until at least the end of the second century C.E. In the light of this evidence, it seems most unlikely that Jesus would not have known Hebrew in addition to Aramaic. Not only would he have been able to read from the Torah, but he would have been able also to converse naturally in Hebrew.

Moreover, Hebrew may not have died out at the end of the tannaitic period. The limited evidence from the Talmud and epigraphic sources hints that there may yet have been some pockets of Hebrew speech after the second century C.E. The analogy of Neo-Aramaic, a language that was thought to have perished as a spoken language since it left no written works, but in fact continued to be spoken uninterruptedly until present times, should give one pause before deciding categorically that Hebrew no longer was spoken after 70 C.E., or even 200 C.E.

[78] There are few written documents in Neo-Aramaic. The oldest date to the sixteenth and seventeeth centuries and have religious content.

ATLAS Serials

Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.