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**Kleine Untersuchungen zur
Sprache des Alten Testaments
und seiner Umwelt**

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Vorwort der Herausgeber

Der vorliegende Band von KUSATU vereinigt Beiträge des 10. *Mainz International Colloquium on Ancient Hebrew* (MICAH), das vom 28. bis 30. Oktober 2011 an der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz gehalten wurden.

Am 30. Januar 1998 fanden sich auf Einladung von Reinhard G. Lehmann ca. vierzig in der Althebraistik forschende und lehrende Wissenschaftler aus Deutschland, den Niederlanden, Frankreich und der Schweiz zu einem *Mainzer Hebraistisches Kolloquium* zusammen. Der Anlaß war ein Vortrag von Ernst Jenni (Basel) über „Die Präposition Lamed mit dem Infinitiv“ an der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz. Das Treffen war von einem Kreis von Mitarbeitern um Diethelm Michel (1931-1999) an der *Forschungsstelle für hebräische Syntax* (seit 2003: *Forschungsstelle für Althebräische Sprache & Epigraphik*) der Mainzer Universität organisiert worden und fand so großes Interesse, daß noch im Herbst desselben Jahres ein zweites Treffen durchgeführt werden konnte, dem dann bis 2003 sechs weitere, jährlich stattfindende Tagungen unter dem Namen *Mainzer Hebraistisches Kolloquium* (MHK) folgten. Neben gezielt eingeladenen Referenten aus dem In- und Ausland konnte dabei auch vermehrt hebraistisch-semitistischen Nachwuchswissenschaftlern die Gelegenheit gegeben werden, ihre Projekte mit Kurzvorträgen (‘short papers’) in einer zugleich persönlichen und kollegialen Atmosphäre vorzustellen und zu diskutieren. Daraus werden die Diskurspartner des Faches in der Zukunft – getreu jenem *dies diem docet*, das schon seit dem 19. Jahrhundert den Seiten des Gesenius’schen Handwörterbuches voransteht.

Der internationale Zuspruch ermutigte dazu, das Kolloquium programmatisch auch auf das nähere sprachliche Umfeld des Althebräischen (Aramäisch, Phönizisch, Ugaritisch etc.) auszuweiten und es seit 2004, nun im Zweijahresrhythmus, zwei- bis dreitägig und unter dem Namen *Mainz International Colloquium on Ancient Hebrew* (MICAH) fortzuführen, organisiert an der

Mainzer *Forschungsstelle für Althebräische Sprache & Epigraphik* in Zusammenarbeit mit Anna Elise Zerneck (Mainz) und Johannes F. Diehl (Frankfurt a. M.). Das 11. *Mainz International Colloquium on Ancient Hebrew* wird vom 1. bis 3. November 2013 an der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz stattfinden.

Die Beiträge des 10. *Mainz International Colloquium on Ancient Hebrew* sind für den Druck teils nur leicht, teils aber auch erheblich überarbeitet bzw. erweitert worden. Den Prinzipien von KUSATU folgend, daß der wissenschaftliche Diskurs letztlich nicht durch äußere formale Vorgaben der Herausgeber bestimmt werden sollte, ist den Autoren dabei größtmögliche Freiheit bei der Gestaltung eingeräumt worden. Dies erklärt die zum Teil erheblichen Unterschiede der Beiträge in Länge und literarischer Form.

Der Band ist in vier Sektionen gegliedert („Grammatica & Syntactica“ – „Epigraphica“ – „Hebraica & Masoretica“ – „Aramaica“). Die Anordnung innerhalb dieser Gruppen erfolgte nach thematischen und zum Teil auch praktisch-technischen Gesichtspunkten. Aus aktuellem Anlass sind schliesslich unter einer weiteren Rubrik „Novitates“ Beobachtungen der Herausgeber zur neupublizierten Ophel-Pithosinschrift beigegeben.

In Zeiten, in denen die Geschwindigkeit literarischer Produktivität zum Qualitätsmerkmal zu verkommen droht, wird Geduld zur editorischen Tugend. In dieser Geduld üben sich die Herausgeber von KUSATU – mit welchem Erfolg, das mögen Autoren und Leser beurteilen. Wir jedenfalls jedenfalls danken unsererseits den Autoren für ihre Geduld, und stellvertretend dabei auch jenen Schnelleren, welche auf die Langsameren warteten. Ein besonderer Dank für Geduld gebührt dabei Kwang Cheol Park, der die Manuskripte mit immer wieder neuen notwendig gewordenen Änderungen und Modifikationen unermüdlich betreute und die endgültige Druckfassung erstellte.

Mainz, im Juli 2013

Reinhard G. Lehmann & Anna Elise Zerneck

The Language of Jesus and related questions – a historical survey

Mats Eskhult and Josef Eskhult¹

Introduction

As has been pertinently pointed out, the naming of languages in Antiquity was accidental; the same language might be called by different names, or two languages might be called by the same name, which means that when discussing that period a distinction between names of languages and names of peoples can scarcely be upheld.²

Prominent Fathers of the early Church believed the original language of mankind to be Hebrew, an idea that originated in ancient Jewish exegesis.³ Origen (d. 254) was convinced that Hebrew was the language that originally was given to Adam.⁴ For Jerome (d. 420) it stood to reason that Hebrew was the mother of all languages, *omnium linguarum matrix*,⁵ and he invokes the support of

¹ Mats Eskhult is chiefly responsible for the final version of this article, which builds on the painstaking work of Josef Eskhult, PhD, who has selected the primary sources in Latin and translated these excerpts and continuously taken part in the interpretation of the material. We are obliged to Dr David Andersen, Melbourne, who kindly put his unpublished manuscript: *Why Jesus Spoke Greek* at our disposal.

² See Chaim Rabin, “Hebrew and Aramaic in the First Century”, in S. Safrai and M. Stern (eds), *The Jewish People in the First Century*, vol. II, Assen & Philadelphia 1976, pp. 1007–1039, with reference to pp. 1008–1009.

³ For an up-to-date survey of the ancient debate on the original language, see M. Rubin, “The Language of Creation or the Primordial Language: A Case of Cultural Polemics in Antiquity”, in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 49, 1998, pp. 306–333, with reference to pp. 317ff. for the patristic positions.

⁴ See Origen, *Homilia in Numeros*, homily 11, ch. 4 § 4.

⁵ See Jerome *Commentarii in Sophoniam Prophetam*, on ch. 3, v. 18, see *Corpus Christianorum, Ser. Lat.*, vol. 76a, p. 708.

all antiquity for this view.⁶ Furthermore, in a third century pseudonymous work named *Recognitiones*, there is another reference to Hebrew, or rather to the language of the Hebrews (*Hebraeorum lingua*), as being the primordial tongue. Its author declares that Hebrew was given by God to humankind and prevailed until the time of the fifteenth generation, when men for the first time set up and worshipped an idol.⁷ Furthermore, other Church Fathers, such as John Chrysostom (d. 407) and Augustine (d. 430), ascribe the survival of the primordial tongue after the great confusion of languages to Heber,⁸ the ancestor of the Hebrews, who were so named after him according to the testimony of Josephus.⁹ The Hebrews accordingly retained the primordial language which became the legacy of the Israelites.¹⁰ In his *Preparatio Evangelica*, Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339) argues that Christianity represents a renewal and restoration of the ancient Hebrew ethnicity. He links the Hebrews to their supposed ancestor Heber, 'E \bar{b} ar (Gen 10:24), whose name in his interpretation means: "the one who passed over" (' \bar{a} b \bar{a} r), and thus whose offspring are passengers from this world to the divine, all-wise, and pious life.¹¹ Eusebius actually argues that Christ revived the ethnicity of the ancient Hebrews,¹² which means that the

⁶ See Jerome, *Epistula* 18,6.

⁷ See Pseudo-Clemens, *Recognitiones*, i 30. This originally Greek text has only survived in a Latin translation. Its date is uncertain (2nd to 4th cent.). Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, iii 38, refers to it as a recent writing. For a modern English translation, see A. Robertson – J. Donaldson (eds), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Edinburgh (repr.) 1986, vol. 8, p. 85.

⁸ See Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, xvi 11 and xviii, 39; John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Genesin*, no. 30, on Gen. 11:9.

⁹ See Josephus, *Antiquitates*, i 6,4.

¹⁰ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, v 30–31, transmits the rabbinic position that the original divine language remained in possession among the Israelites. The whole argumentation is found in Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, xvi 3, 5, and 11. In the Latin West, the Augustinian ideas were adopted by Isidore of Seville, Beda Venerabilis, and Claudius of Turin, among others.

¹¹ Eusebius, *Preparatio Evangelica* vii 8, 2 and xi 6,39, see the edition of Karl Mras, *Eusebius Werke*, achter Band, vols. 1-2, Berlin 1954-1956, and his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, i 4.

¹² Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelia*, iii 3.

Christians – as the true remnant of Israel – represent their ethnic heirs.¹³ Thus, Eusebius implicitly links the Hebrew language, as an integral part of ethnic identity, to Jesus and to the true knowledge of God.

The concept that Jesus and his apostles spoke Hebrew is seemingly corroborated by Josephus and the evangelists Luke and John, who refer to the idiom used among the Jews as being “in the Hebrew tongue” (τῆ ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ and ἑβραϊστί) or, as Josephus usually has it, *κατα τὴν εβραιων γλωτταν* “according to the language of the Hebrews”.¹⁴

Not until the days of Humanism was the notion of Hebrew as the language of creation *and* redemption seriously questioned. At that time, Protestant scholars in particular became convinced that Hebrew died out in the wake of the Babylonian exile, which meant that – despite the strong Greco-Roman influence – Aramaic was regarded as practically the only language used by Jesus. This concept was to be challenged by various scholars during the centuries to follow, but since Gustaf Dalman, Aramaic has been commonly held to be *the* language of Jesus; though an increasing number of scholars consider Hebrew equally entitled to be so designated; also, the role of Greek as a national language in Roman Palestine is receiving growing attention.

The present short study aims to provide a brief historical sketch of this most intriguing question of the “language of Jesus”, with a focus on early modern times, which were so decisive for the whole discussion.

The scope of this article is not only the issue of the alleged native tongue of Jesus, but also related questions, such as the language

¹³ See A. P. Johnson, *Ethnicity and Argument in Eusebius' Preparatio Evangelica*, Oxford 2006, with reference to pp. 44–45 and 227–233.

¹⁴ Thus, *σάββατα* “sabbath” and *ἡσραθά* “pentecost” are classified as Hebrew terms in Josephus (see *Antiquitates* i 1,1 and iii 10, 6), and *Bethesda*, *Gabbatha*, and *Golgotha* are glossed as Hebrew in John 5:2, 19:13, and 17, respectively

situation in Roman Palestine at large, and specifically among the Jews and in the early Christian movement.

The most important early modern studies on the language of Jesus are not monographs, but are found in works devoted to Hebrew and Oriental philology in general, such as surveys of the history of Hebrew and Aramaic, prefaces to Syriac grammars and Bible editions, and studies devoted to the impact of Hebrew and Aramaic on New Testament Greek. The critical attitude towards previous scholarship, so characteristic of the nineteenth century, entailed that much of the earlier research fell into oblivion and scholars lost sight of the continuity of the discussion. A fairly detailed review of early modern research is found in Arnold Meyer's, *Jesu Muttersprache* (1896).¹⁵ However, his unconcern for his predecessors' scholarly outlook and intellectual *point de départ* allowed him to shed only a little light on the various arguments that were put forward and how these are related to one another. In addition, he failed to recognize the deep influence of Jewish medieval scholarship on Oriental philology. As for the last hundred and fifty years, the works of Adolf Neubauer,¹⁶ Gustaf Dalman,¹⁷ Matthew Black,¹⁸ J.N. Sevenster,¹⁹ and Milka Rubin²⁰ deserve special mention.

¹⁵ A. Meyer, *Jesu Muttersprache, das galiläische Aramäisch in seiner Bedeutung für die Erklärung der Reden Jesu und der Evangelien überhaupt*, Freiburg i. B. & Leipzig 1896, with reference to the introductory chapter "Geschichtlicher Überblick über die Behandlung der Frage nach der Sprache Jesu", pp. 8–35.

¹⁶ Ad. Neubauer, "On the dialects spoken in Palestine in the time of Christ", in *Studia Biblica*, 1885, pp. 39–74.

¹⁷ G. Dalman, *Die Worte Jesu mit Berücksichtigung des nachkanonischen jüdischen Schrifttums und der aramäischen Sprache erörtert*, Leipzig 1898.

¹⁸ M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to Gospels and Acts*, Oxford, 1st ed. 1946.

¹⁹ J. N. Sevenster, *Do you know Greek? How much Greek could the first Jewish Christians have known*, (Nov. Test. Suppl. 19), Leiden 1968.

The vicissitudes of the Oriental languages

The history of Hebrew and Aramaic

In the era of Humanism, Christian scholars turned to Jewish authorities to learn Hebrew and Aramaic and to be informed about the history of these languages. On the basis of the information obtained – based on the Bible, ancient Jewish literature, and Jewish medieval scholars – they reached a conclusion that was to prevail: the Israelites retained their primordial language unchanged in Egypt and continued to speak it until the Babylonian captivity, in the wake of which Aramaic replaced Hebrew as the vernacular of the Jews.²¹ An important authority for this information was David Kimchi (c. 1160–1235). In the preface of his Hebrew grammar, *Sefer Mikhlol*, he states that since God chose Israel and revealed himself in the Bible in the Hebrew tongue (*l'sōn 'Eḇær*), all Israelites knew this language from childhood; the decisive change took place when they were forced into exile, because there they forgot the Holy Tongue.

The natural conclusion to be drawn by Christian Hebraists was that Jesus and his disciples preached the Gospel in Aramaic, a conclusion that was also corroborated by the extant *ipissima verba* of Jesus preserved by the Evangelist St. Mark. Consequently, Erasmus of Rotterdam declares in the preface of his Latin paraphrase of the Gospel according to Matthew (1522): “The evangelists were not afraid of writing down in Greek what Jesus said in Syriac”.²²

²⁰ M. Rubin, “The Language of Creation or the Primordial Language: A Case of Cultural Polemics in Antiquity”, in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 49, 1998, pp. 306–333.

²¹ See Johannes Buxtorf the Younger, *Dissertationes philologico-theologicae*, part III: “De linguae Hebraeae post confusionem conservatione et propagatione”, Basel 1662, pp. 153–158, where the most important Jewish sources and authorities on this topic are quoted, among others David Kimchi and Elias Levita.

²² Desiderius Erasmus (1469–1537), *Paraphrasis in Evangelium Matthaei*, Basel 1522, p. 17 of the unpaginated preface: *Quidam piaculum ar-*

In the Hebrew preface of his *Meturgeman Lexicon Chaldaicum* (1541), the influential Jewish scholar Elias Levita (1468–1549)²³ gives an epitome of the history of the Hebrew and Aramaic languages. In sum it reads as follows:

According to *Bereshit Rabba* one must not belittle Aramaic, since it is found in all parts of the Bible, the Law, the ארמית, Prophets and the Writings,²⁴ and it is very akin to Hebrew; actually, it is a defective form of Hebrew. It was not in that faulty condition from Noah till Abraham, but soon after Abraham left Mesopotamia the Holy Tongue deteriorated and turned into Aramaic. Upon his arrival in Canaan, Abraham thus spoke the Holy Tongue, and his descendants did not abandon it during their long sojourn in Egypt, neither did they change their names nor their way of dressing.²⁵ As long as the Israelites lived in their own land, Aramaic was virtually unknown save for the king's counsellors, as can be gathered from what they answered the dignitary of the Assyrian court Rabshake. After having been deported from their land

bitrantur, si sacri libri vertantur in linguam Gallicam aut Britannicam. Sed Evangelistae non veriti sunt Graece scribere, quod Christus Syriace loquutus est, i.e., "Some people consider it a crime to translate sacred books into French and English, but the Evangelists did not fear to write down in Greek what Christ spoke in Syriac."

²³ Elias Levita, a native German Jew, spent most of his life in Italy teaching Hebrew to several Christian scholars, among them: Paul Fagius (1504–1549), who translated his *Tishbi* and *Meturgeman* into Latin, and Sebastian Münster (1489–1552) who, *inter alia*, translated his Hebrew grammar *Massoreth ha-Massoreth*. Others were: Santes Pagninus (1470–1536), Conrad Pellican (1478–1556), and Jean Mercier (c. 1500–1570). See further Sophie Kessler Mesguish, "Early Christian Hebraists", in M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: the History of its Interpretation*, vol. 2, Göttingen 2008, pp. 272–275.

²⁴ *Bereshit Rabbah* was first printed in Constantinople 1512. The dictum alludes to Genesis 31:47 (the heap of stones called Jegar-sahadutha), and to a single verse in Aramaic in Jeremiah 10:11, and to the Aramaic portions of Daniel and Ezra.

²⁵ This passage is quoted by J. Buxtorf, *Dissertationes philologico-theologicae*, part III, p. 154

to Babylon, the Jews forgot their language entirely, as is stated in Nehemiah.²⁶ From those days onwards, the sages taught chiefly in the Babylonian dialect of Aramaic. When Jonathan ben Uzziel in the first century B.C. became aware of this state of affairs, he translated the Prophets into Aramaic, while the proselyte Onkelos about a hundred years later translated the Torah. The Writings were not translated until still later, and then in the Jerusalemite dialect, in which Targum Jerushalmi was compiled three hundred years after the fall of Jerusalem. There is no difference in linguistic usage between Jonathan and Onkelos; they are both written in the Babylonian dialect, as are also the even linguistically purer Aramaic portions of Daniel and Ezra. Targum Jerushalmi, on the other hand, is distinguished by many loan-words from Greek and Latin and differs a great deal from the earlier Targums. It cannot be properly dated, nor can the Targum to the Writings, which for stylistic reasons most likely includes Job, Proverbs, and Psalms, while the translation of the Megilloth seems to be independent.

Christian Hebraists and scholars in general agreed with Elias Levita and believed that Aramaic became the vernacular of the Jews as a consequence of the exile. Among those who disagreed was Bartholomeus Mayer of Leipzig (1598–1631), who in his *Philologia sacra* (1629–31) argued that Hebrew remained the vernacular of the Jews until the reign of the Seleucids over Palestine.²⁷ Admittedly, during the captivity the Jews became deeply influenced by Aramaic, yet Hebrew continued to be spoken by the masses and was accordingly employed by the post-exilic biblical writers.²⁸ Actually, there was no need for a Targum before the first century B.C., he argues, and for this reason he infers that Hebrew must have remained in common use. Opposing the interpretation

²⁶ This sentence is quoted by Buxtorf, *ibidem*, p. 157.

²⁷ B. Mayer, *Philologia sacra*, vol. 1, p. 80, vol. 2, p. 103, and pp. 204–205.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, vol. 2, pp. 104–107.

given in Talmud Babli,²⁹ of Nehemiah 8:8, namely “They read from the book of the Law of God distinctly (מפורש *m^efōrāš*) and gave the sense”, he maintains that this passage refers to running commentary and not to simultaneous translation.³⁰ It was not before the time of the Maccabean revolt, in the mid second century B.C., that Hebrew, due to the politically unstable situation, yielded to Aramaic, Mayer concludes.

The highly influential Brian Walton (1600–1661)³¹ expressly refuted the objections put forward by Mayer. If Hebrew ceased to be spoken as late as during the Hellenistic period, he argues, it would have yielded to Greek and not to Aramaic, and therefore the significant change in linguistic conditions must have taken place during the Chaldean rule. Yet Walton did not think that Hebrew became extinct at once. Post-exilic biblical authors wrote in Hebrew because holy books were simply supposed to be in the Holy Tongue, which was also used in the synagogue. Hebrew was still mastered by an elite, while the language of popular instruction was not Hebrew, but Aramaic. The objection that no written Targum existed during the first post-exilic centuries was dealt with by Walton, stating that even if Hebrew ceased to be spoken as late as towards the Hasmonean period, there was still no *complete* Targum for nearly two hundred years, according to the information provided by Levita. Referring to the Talmud, to medieval Jewish scholars, and to a majority of Christian Hebraists, Walton held that Nehemiah 8:8 intimates that the scribes gave an *oral* translation of the Law; admittedly, he stated, the word מפורש “distinctly” only tells how the Hebrew text was read, but the following “and gave the

²⁹ Talmud Babli, *Megillah* 3a and *Nedarim* 37b.

³⁰ B. Mayer, *Philologia sacra*, vol. 2, pp. 133-138.

³¹ B. Walton, *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*, London 1655–57. *Prolegomenon*, ch. iii “De lingua Hebraea ejusque antiquitate, conservatione, mutatione, praestantia et usu”, with reference to § 24, p. 19, and chapter xii “De lingua Chaldaica”, with reference to § 5, p. 86. Of the same opinion were among others Johann Leusden of Utrecht (1624–1699), *Philologus Hebraeus*, Utrecht 1682, treatise no. 20, pp. 227-237, and J. Buxtorf, *Dissertationes philologico-theologicae*, III, pp. 156-158.

sense”, implies that it was rendered into Aramaic and this was the origin of the Targum.³²

Some scholars followed Mayer however, and argued that a popular form (*usus vulgaris*) of Hebrew held sway until the Hellenistic hegemony; but the prevalent opinion was that the Jews, as a result of the captivity, failed to remain loyal to Hebrew and instead adopted Aramaic, which they brought with them on their return to Judea. Only in 1706 did Mayer’s standpoint meet with firm approval in Valentin Ernst Löscher (1672–1749), *De causis linguae Ebraeae*.³³ Löscher states that the common use of Hebrew cannot possibly have disappeared in such a short time as during the captivity, nor is it very likely that the post-exilic writings were composed in a language that was unknown to the people in general. It is more probable that the biblical tongue, *Vetus Ebraismus*, was used for some two hundred years after the exile, but in the third

³² J. Greenfield – J. Naveh, “Hebrew and Aramaic in the Persian Period”, in *Cambridge History of Judaism*, Cambridge 1984, pp. 115-129, with reference to p. 116, state that in the Persian chancelleries documents were dictated in Persian but written in Aramaic, and when read aloud at the destination they were simultaneously translated to the language of the audience. This is what is meant by the term *m^efōrās* in Ezra 4:18 they add referring to H. H. Schaefer, *Iranische Beiträge*, Halle 1930, pp. 1–14. This is also the opinion of J. Schaper in his “Hebrew and its study in the Persian period”, in W. Horbury (ed.), *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda*, Edinburgh 1999, pp. 15-26, with reference to p. 15, where he explicitly refers to Neh 8:8 and the Levites in a function that “might be described as that of targumists”. As to Neh 8:8, however, S. D. Fraade, “Rabbinic Views on the Practice of Targum, and Multilingualism in the Jewish Galilee of the Third – Sixth Centuries”, in L. I. Levine (ed.), *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1992, pp. 253–286, on p. 254, note 3, states: “Rabbinic traditions which trace Targum to the time of Ezra (e.g., B. Megillah 3a, [B. Nedaraïm 37b]; J. Megillah 4,1,74d; Genesis Rabbah 36:8) are all amoraic or later, whereas the tannaitic passages which mention the recitation of Scripture in Second Temple times make no mention of the practice of Targum in such settings.”

³³ V. E. Löscher, *De causis linguae Ebraeae libri III, in quibus magna pars Ebraismi posterioribus curis restituitur, incerta & ambigua ad regulas deducuntur*, Frankfurt am Main 1706, especially pp. 45, 65–68, 72-78 and 86–87.

century B.C. the situation changed; from then on the Jews were divided into three factions: (a) Those who remained in Mesopotamia and retained the mixed Hebrew-Aramaic dialect of Onkelos and Jonathan as their language; (b) Those who moved to Palestine and mixed their inherited dialect – the origin of which he placed in Upper Mesopotamia – with local elements resulting in the so-called Jerusalemite dialect that Löscher called *Neo-Ebraea*, and which he considers to be the vernacular of Christ and his apostles; and (c) those who were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire adopted Greek and were hence called Hellenists.³⁴

Johann Gottlob Carpzov (1679–1767) of Leipzig, in his *Critica Sacra*, follows suit and states that the Jews picked up Aramaic during their captivity at the river Khabor in Lower Aram, but their newly adopted vernacular was intermingled with Hebrew phrases, and therefore deserves the name *Neo-Ebraea*. In all likelihood, post-exilic leaders and prophets spoke Hebrew to the people; and when Ezra and Nehemiah restored the public worship and renewed the covenant, it was evidently done in this language. Consequently, it was not before the Greek sovereignty that the Jews gave up Hebrew; more precisely, it was when Antiochus Epiphanes forced Syrian religion and law onto the inhabitants of Palestine and compelled them to learn Aramaic – not the pure dialect envisaged in Onkelos and Jonathan, but the local dialect that would become the vernacular of Palestine.³⁵

The presumed connection between the language of creation and the language of redemption is evident in two minor Jena theses on the language of Jesus – each filling some 30 pages – submitted by Joachim Klaeden and Johannes Reiskius in the early 1670s. Both hold Hebrew to be the language of creation, but adhering to the

³⁴ See Löscher, *De causis linguae Ebraeae*, pp. 86f. For a similar view on the language in the early Targums, see E.M. Cook, “A New Perspective on the Language of Onkelos and Jonathan”, in D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara (eds), *The Aramaic Bible*, Sheffield 1994, pp. 142–156.

³⁵ J. G. Carpzov, *Critica Sacra Veteris Testamenti*, Leipzig 1728, ch. 5, pp. 212–220.

teaching of the great philologists of their time they are also convinced that the language of Jesus was none other than Aramaic.³⁶ Klaeden opens his discussion by stating that scholars disagree about what language is the language of creation; the famous story of Pharaoh's experiment, related by Herodotus, in which two infants, segregated from social intercourse, start to speak Phrygian, deserves no credence at all, he says. More reasonable is the idea that Syriac or Greek precedes all other languages in age, although the strongest case can be made for Hebrew, because it is supported by Targum Jerushalmi (i.e., Pseudo-Jonathan),³⁷ which at Gen 11:1 "the whole earth used the same language and the same words", adds that the language spoken was nothing but the Holy Tongue, i.e., לישן קודשא. In his learned treatise, he *inter alia* discusses terminology, the position of Barth. Mayer, and the "Chaldeo-Syriac" expressions and glosses that are extant in the New Testament.

Reiskius in turn commences by quoting a dictum in *Bereshit Rabba*, the import of which is that one must never despise "Syriac", since God gave it a share of honour in all three parts of the Bible; but above all, it is the language that Jesus "imbibed with his mother's milk and consecrated by his birth, education, learning, and wonderful deeds". Nevertheless, he too, leaning on prominent philologists, favours the idea that Hebrew is the primordial tongue.³⁸ He refutes the opinion of Gregory Amira and Caspar Myricaeus and all the Maronites who give priority to Syriac.³⁹

³⁶ J. Klaeden, *Lingua Domini nostri Jesu Christi vernacula*, Jena 1672; and J. Reiskius, *Exercitatio philologica de lingua vernacula Jesu Christi*, Jena 1670.

³⁷ M. Rubin, "The Language of Creation", pp. 310–311 and 317–322, points out that already in the second century B.C., The Testament of Naphtali and the Book of Jubilees hold Hebrew to be the primordial language, an idea that was later echoed in the Midrashic literature and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, and also adopted by the Greek and Latin Church Fathers.

³⁸ Among the scholars mentioned are: Johannes Buxtorf, *Lexicon Chaldaicum Talmudicum et Rabbinicum*, Basel 1639, B. Walton, *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*, (specifically, *Proleg.*, ch. iii, § 4, p. 15, where it is

Aramaic – a language of Jesus

Classification of the Aramaic dialects

Assuming that spoken Hebrew was extinct at the time of Jesus and had been replaced by Aramaic, early modern scholars found it important to enter upon a thorough investigation of the Aramaic branch of the Oriental languages, so as to get an idea of the specific dialect that Jesus “imbibed with his mother’s milk”. These scholars had appropriate tools at their disposal. Through Bomberg’s publication of the Rabbinic Bible (1524–25) the Targums were available. Subsequently, they could benefit from the Polyglot Bibles, notably the Paris Polyglot (1629–45) and the London Polyglot (1655–57). In addition to the Hebrew text and the Septuagint and Vulgate versions, they also provided the Syriac Peshitta and the Aramaic Targum, and for some books even a rendering into Arabic.⁴⁰

From the maps in the London Polyglot, one can form an idea of how the different Oriental languages were generally thought to relate to one another. The underlying concept, evidently inherited from Levita and his predecessors, was incorporated into the common knowledge of the Oriental languages. The Euphrates constitutes the border between *Mesopotamiæ pars* to the east, and *Coele Syria* and *Antiochene* to the west, south of which lie *Phœnicia* and

argued that the etymology of, *inter alia*, makes sense only in אשׁר and אשׁר (Hebrew), and Samuel Bochart, *Geographia Sacra*, vol. 1, Caen 1646, ch. 15, cols. 49–52, as well as the “Epistula dedicatoria” in Johann Heinrich Hottinger, *Grammaticae Chaldaeo-Syriacae libri duo*, Zürich 1652.

³⁹ See the prefaces in G. Amira, *Grammatica Syriaca sive Chaldaica*, Rome 1596 and C. Myricaëus, *Grammatica Syro-Chaldaea*, Geneva 1619. Also, M. Rubin, “The Language of Creation”, pp. 322–325, relates that a Syriac tradition originating in the fourth–sixth century tract *The Cave of Treasures* – in Antiquity attributed St. Ephrem (d.373) – considers Syriac to be the primordial tongue.

⁴⁰ For a fuller account, see, e.g., “Bible editions” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. III, New York – London, 1903, pp. 154–162.

Palestina, and to the north *Commagene*.⁴¹ East of the Euphrates, Chaldee is the language spoken, west of it Syriac. The frequent Latin term *Syro-Chaldaica* for “Jerusalemite” reflects the idea that a local western dialect merged with the purer eastern one which the returning Jews brought to Palestine.⁴²

In one of his scholarly letters, Joseph Justus Scaliger of Leiden (1540–1609), essentially in accordance with Elias Levita, disentangles the relationship between the various dialects of Aramaic.⁴³ To begin with, he says, the term *Syriaca lingua* can be used either as an overall term for the Aramaic branch of the Oriental languages or in a restricted sense designating solely the Christian dialect spoken in the area of Antioch. He anticipates modern terminology, preferring the term *Aramaica lingua* for the broad sense. Aramaic at large thus consists of two branches, he says. Firstly, the pure and

⁴¹ See Ludwig Capell, *Chronologia sacra* with enclosed maps of Syria and the Holy Land, in Walton’s *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*. For a recent discussion of the notion “Syria”, see *Der neue Pauly*, vol. 11, cols. 1070–1082.

⁴² See, e.g., J. Buxtorf, *Lexicon Chaldaicum Talmudicum et Rabbinicum*, Basel 1639, s.v. The first part of the compound, namely סורסי *Syro-* reflects the ancient Greek terminology, in which the Arameans are called “Syrians” and their language “Syriac”; cf. Th. Nöldeke, ΑΣΣΥΡΙΟΣ ΣΥΡΙΟΣ ΣΥΡΟΣ, in *Hermes, Zeitschr. f. Classische Philologie*, 5, 1871, pp. 443–468, esp. p. 460. The latter part of the compound *Chaldaic* (henceforth Chaldee) stems from Jerome, who in his preface to Daniel renders ארמית by *chaldaicus sermo*, probably under the influence of the Septuagint to Dan 1:4, where לשון כשדים *lšōn kašdīm*, “the tongue of the Chaldaeans” is translated διαλέκτος χαλδαική. The Jews of the Gaonic era used *sursī* as a general designation for Aramaic, *suryānī* for Christian Aramaic, and ^a*ramith* for Jewish Aramaic. See H. Torczyner, “Aramäisch, Sprache” in *Encyclopedia Judaica – Das Judentum in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Berlin 1928–34. As is apparent from Johann David Michaelis, *Abhandlung von der syrischen Sprache*, Göttingen 1772, the terms East Aramaic and West Aramaic were introduced only towards the end of the eighteenth century, and at that time it had also become evident that Edessa, east of the Euphrates, was the main centre of early Syriac Christianity.

⁴³ See Daniel Heinsius (ed.), *Josephi Scaligeri epistulae*, Leiden 1627, book iv, letter 449, pp. 820–823.

refined dialect of *Chaldea*, consisting of the common Babylonian dialect, extant in Daniel and Ezra, and a specific Jewish variety of it encountered in the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan. The period after the exile, however, saw the emergence of a still later variety, namely Jerusalemite – found in Targum Jerushalmi and in the Targum to Job, Proverbs, and Psalms. This dialect, characterized by Greek and Latin loan words, was in common parlance, while its ancestor, the purer and older dialect found in Onkelos and Jonathan, was no longer in common use, though it was still mastered by scholars and scribes.⁴⁴ Secondly, *Syriac* (in the restricted sense) comprises several subgroups. The noblest of these is the dialect of the Peshitta, which is still used among the Maronites and the Nestorians, he says, adding that at the time of Jesus it was spoken all over Syria and Upper Mesopotamia.

Brian Walton⁴⁵ concedes that *both* Chaldee and Syriac may be used as general terms for the languages in Babylonia and Judea. He counts three main dialects: (a) Babylonian, which is found in Daniel and Ezra; (b) Jerusalemite, which was the vernacular of Jesus and his apostles, although the disciples (cf. Matt 26:73) slipped into a more rural Galilean variety, which according to Talmud Babli, *Erubin* 53a-b, was distinguished by a weak pronunciation of the gutturals;⁴⁶ and finally, (c) the dialect of Antioch and

⁴⁴ According to J. Greenfield – J. Naveh, “Hebrew and Aramaic in the Persian Period”, p. 117, *Genesis Apocryphon* gives evidence of Standard Literary Aramaic, which was later also used for the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan.

⁴⁵ See B. Walton, *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta, Prolegomenon*, ch. XII, § 5 “De lingua Chaldaica et Targumim sive Paraphrasibus in hac lingua scriptis”, pp. 85f.; and ch. XIII: “De lingua Syriaca”, pp. 91f. It should be noted that Walton refers to the comparative grammar by Ludewijk de Dieu (1590–1642), *Grammatica linguarum orientalium Hebraeorum, Chaldaeorum et Syrorum inter se collatarum*, Leiden 1628.

⁴⁶ J. Buxtorf, *Lexicon Chaldaicum Talmudicum et Rabbinicum*, s.v. גליל . refers to the talmudic references of this feature. The weak pronunciation of the gutturals is evident in a synagogue inscription from Bet Shean, see J. Greenfield, “Aramaic and the Jews”, in *Studia Aramaica* (Journal of Semitic Studies, Suppl. 4), Oxford 1995, pp. 1–18, with reference to p.

Commagene, which – Walton states – is still used among the Maronites.

John Lightfoot of Cambridge (1602–1675), in his *Horae Hebraicae* (1658) discusses the language situation among the Jews.⁴⁷ On Acts 6:1, “The Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews”, he explains that the adjective *‘ibrī* “Hebrew”, met with in לשון עברי *lāšōn ‘ibrī* “the Hebrew tongue”, is connected to the verb *‘āḥar* “to pass a limit”, and that consequently *lāšōn ‘ibrī* is to be interpreted as *lingua transfluviana*, i.e., the language spoken מעבר הנהר *mē‘ēber han-nāhār* “beyond the river” [Euphrates].⁴⁸ Having elsewhere established that Biblical Hebrew was mastered only by the priests and scribes and was not understood by common people, whereas “Syriac” – his term for Jerusalemite – was spoken in Palestine, he proposes the logical question: “Why did Jonathan and Onkelos not translate into Syriac, which was the vernacular of the whole people, in view of the fact that they, too, were in Judea, when they toiled with this work and did their best for the Jews who lived there?” His answer airs a socio-linguistic dimension: “they translated into Chaldee for the sake of both those who lived in Judea and those who lived in Babylonia”, because: “Syriac was merely common in parlance and by far not as esteemed among the Jews as Chaldee, which was more cultivated and educated dialect, and was still the language of their brethren in Babylonia”.⁴⁹

13. See also E.Y. Kutscher, *Studies in Galilean Aramaic*, Ramat Gan 1976, with reference to p. 93

⁴⁷ In the present article, Lightfoot’s *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae in quattuor Evangelistas* is quoted from the Leipzig edition 1684, henceforth *Horae Hebraicae* (1684), while *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae in Acta Apostolorum, partem aliquam Epistolae ad Romanos et priorem ad Corinthios* is quoted from the Leipzig edition 1679, henceforth *Horae Hebraicae* (1679). The whole work *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae* was republished by J. Leusden, Franeker 1699.

⁴⁸ J. Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae* (1679), pp. 47–53

⁴⁹ J. Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae* (1684), pp. 188–189, in a comment on Matt. 1:23, where he deals with the question of a “Hebrew Matthew”.

“Antiochian” Syriac proposed as the vernacular of Jesus

In contrast to the biblical languages Hebrew and Aramaic, Syriac was not widely studied at European universities before the turn of the sixteenth century. Of great importance for the development of Syriac studies were some happy coincidences in the early 1550s. Moses of Mardin, a legate of the Jacobite Patriarch, was looking for someone to publish a twelfth-century New Testament Syriac manuscript in his possession. With the assistance of the Emperor’s Chancellor Johann Abrecht Widmanstadt (1506–1559), Moses’ manuscript was printed in Vienna in 1555.⁵⁰ A strong argument in favour of the project and crucial for the discussion of the language of Jesus was Widmanstadt’s firm belief that the Syriac language of the manuscript represented Jesus’ native tongue. The title of the book says that it contains the holy Gospel in the Syriac language, consecrated by Jesus’ own mouth, and by John the Evangelist called Hebrew.⁵¹ In the preface to his Syriac primer,⁵² Widmanstadt repeats that the native tongue of Jesus was nothing but Syriac, which the writers of the New Testament called “Hebrew”, simply because it was in common use among the Hebrews.⁵³ Likewise, Immanuel Tremellius (1510–1580), Regius professor of Hebrew at Cambridge, in the preface to his translation of the Syriac New Testament into Latin (1569), holds that the Syriac version dates from the early Church, because it is scarcely probable that the

⁵⁰ See W. Strothmann, “Die Anfänge der syrischen Studien in Europa”, in *Göttinger Orientforschungen*, 1. Reihe: Syriaca, Bd 1, Wiesbaden 1971, pp. 1–22, and B. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament*, Oxford 1977, pp. 48–63.

⁵¹ The Latin title in full reads: *Liber sacrosancti Evangelii de Jesu Christo Domino et Deo nostro lingua Syra Jesu Christi vernacula Divino ipsius ore consecrata et a Joanne Evangelista Hebraica dicta*.

⁵² J. A. Widmanstadt, *Syriacae linguae prima elementa*, Vienna 1555.

⁵³ Of a similar opinion are Aegidius Gutbirius (1617–1667), who issued a new edition of Widmanstadt’s work (1664), Andreas Sennert (1606–1689) author of *Chaldaismus et Syriasmus, hoc est praecepta utriusque linguae*, Wittenberg 1651, and Christoph Crinesius (1584–1629), author of *Gymnasium Syriacum, hoc est linguae Jesu Christo vernaculae perfecta institutio*, Wittenberg 1611.

apostles and their disciples lavished less care and attention on their own countrymen than on foreigners who could only read Greek.

Widmanstadt's Syriac New Testament version remained an excellent source for proposals concerning underlying Aramaic words and phrases that frequently flavour the Greek expressions; but his more specific contention, that its language *de facto* coincides with Jesus' mother tongue, met with increasing scepticism. Joseph Justus Scaliger, mentioned above, was among the first to disprove of Widmanstadt's assertion,⁵⁴ as he simply repudiates the claim that the Galilean dialect spoken by the apostles coincides with the dialect still spoken at his time among the Maronites. Brian Walton as well points to discrepancies between the Aramaic words in the New Testament and their counterparts in Widmanstadt's edition, for instance: μαμωνᾶς (Matt 6:24) vs. *mamouna*, and Γαββαθα (John 19:13) vs. *Gephiptho*, and Γολγοθᾶ (Matt 27:33) vs. *Gogalto*, as well as μαρὰν ἄθά (1 Cor 16:22) vs. *moran etho*. He concludes that it is unlikely that the Syriac of Antioch and Commagene was identical with the native tongue of Jesus; it is more probable that he spoke a dialect closely related to the one found in Targum Onkelos.⁵⁵

More singular is Johann Adrian Bolten (d. 1807), who in his *Der Bericht des Matthäus von Jesu dem Messia* (1792) concludes that the Gospel of Matthew is full of Semitisms, which he did his best to trace to various Semitic languages, foremost Syriac and Talmudic Aramaic.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ See *Josephi Scaligeri epistulae*, book iv, letter 449, referred to above.

⁵⁵ B. Walton, *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta, Prolegomena*, ch. xiii, § 5, p. 92.

⁵⁶ J. A. Bolten, *Der Bericht des Matthäus von Jesu dem Messia*, Altona 1792 (not available, see A. Meyer, *Jesu Muttersprache*, pp. 25 and 105ff.).

Hebrew – a language of Jesus

A Hebrew Matthew

Ever since Antiquity, there was a widespread, theologically motivated notion that Hebrew was the language spoken by Jesus. The concept is found in Dante Alighieri (d. 1321), who says of Hebrew: “In this language Adam spoke [...] this is the language inherited by the Sons of Heber, who are called Hebrews after him: to them alone it remained after the Babylonian confusion, so that our Redeemer who according to his human nature was to descend from them should not use the language of confusion but the language of grace.”⁵⁷ Similarly, the Franciscan Francesco Giorgi of Venice (d. 1540) looked upon Hebrew as the language “in which the Law was given and in which the Gospel was preached”, and therefore it will most reasonably also be the tongue in which the celestial hymns are to be sung.⁵⁸

The concept of a “Hebrew Matthew” goes back to Bishop Papias of Hierapolis (d. 130). From the very beginning the Gospel of Matthew – so highly distinguished by the *sayings* of Jesus – stood at the centre of the discussion. Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 340), referring to Papias’ work “Explanation of the Lord’s sentences”, relates Papias’ statement: “Matthew compiled (συνετάξατο) the sayings (τὰ λόγια) of Jesus in Hebrew (τῇ ἑβραϊδί διαλέκτῳ), and each one rendered (ἠρμήνευσεν) them as well as he could”.⁵⁹ Likewise, Irenaeus (d. 202) states “Matthew issued a writing of the Gospel among the Hebrews in their own language (τῇ ἰδία αὐτῶν

⁵⁷ S. Botterill (ed.), Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, i 6, Cambridge 1996, p. 12.

⁵⁸ See Fr. Giorgi, *De harmonia Mundi totius carmina tria*, Venice 1525, p. 115^v of the third volume. For a presentation of Giorgi as a Cabbalist and his influence on English scholarship, see F. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, London 1979, pp. 29–36, 101–103, and 190–191.

⁵⁹ Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* (=H.E.), iii 39,16. Papias’ work was written about 125–130 A.D.; it is only preserved in fragments by Irenaeus and Eusebius.

διαλέκτω)”,⁶⁰ and Origen (d. 254) transmits the same information. He says that the first Gospel ever to be written was that of Matthew and that it was “composed in Hebrew letters (γράμμασιν ἑβραϊκοῖς συνεταγμένον)”.⁶¹ Eusebius himself concludes that Matthew “preached the Word to the Hebrews and committed his Gospel to writing in his ancestral language (τῇ πατρίῳ γλώττῃ)”, thus hinting at Hebrew.⁶²

Jerome (d. 420), in the preface to his commentary on the first Gospel, affirms that Matthew was the first to compose an account of the life of Jesus and that he wrote in Hebrew (*hebreo sermone*) for the benefit of those Jews who had come to faith in Jesus. In the preface to the four Gospels he says that the entire New Testament was originally written in Greek except for the Gospel of Matthew, who edited the Gospel of Christ in Hebrew letters (*Hebraicis litteris*).⁶³ Jerome repeatedly refers to what he thought to be the original Gospel of Matthew, written in Hebrew letters and words (*hebraicis litteris verbisque*), yet in the “Chaldee and Syriac language” (*chaldaico syroque sermone*), and named *Evangelium iuxta Hebraeos*, or *secundum Apostolos*, or *iuxta Matthaeum*.⁶⁴ This Gospel circulated among the Judaizing sects of the Ebionites and Nazarenes in Beroea in Syria, he states, and was at his time still extant in the library of Caesarea, where he copied it and translated it into Greek and Latin.⁶⁵ In his various treatises, he discusses and quotes passages from this work that are not extant in the canonical Gospels.⁶⁶ Likewise, Epiphanius (c. 315–403), bishop of Salamis, in his work *Panarion* (xxx 3,7), states that the Ebionites used the

⁶⁰ Ireneus, *Adversus Haereses*, iii 1,1 (in a preserved Latin translation of the largely lost Greek original): *Ita Matthaeus in Hebraeis ipsorum lingua scripturam edidit Evangelii*.

⁶¹ See Eusebius, *H.E.*, vi 25,4.

⁶² Eusebius, *H.E.*, iii 24,6.

⁶³ Jerome, *In Mattheum commentarius* (preface), and his *Praefatio in quatuor Evangelia*.

⁶⁴ Jerome, *Adversus Pelagianos*, iii 2.

⁶⁵ Jerome, *De viris illustribus*, ii and iii 1.

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Jerome, *Epistulae*, letter 20,5 and 120,8.

Evangelium iuxta Hebraeos, which they accredited to Matthew. He quotes from it several times in order to elucidate the false doctrine of the Ebionites.⁶⁷

The editions of Münster and du Tillet

In the days of Renaissance Humanism, it was considered to be of great concern, either to find the supposed lost Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, or at least to accomplish a reconstruction of it. As early as 1537, Sebastian Münster published the Gospel of Matthew in its alleged original Hebrew form.⁶⁸ The edition is based on a text that he had obtained from a Jew in a fragmentary state, he says, admitting that he preferred to restore it to a coherent whole.⁶⁹ In addition, in 1555 Bishop Jean du Tillet of Saint Briec published a version of the Gospel of Matthew based on a manuscript that he had chanced upon in Rome two years earlier. In the preface professor Jean Mercier at Collège Royal in Paris candidly admits that the edition can scarcely be considered the authentic work of the evangelist, nor the Gospel of the Nazarenes.⁷⁰

Münster and du Tillet both cherished a wish to present the Gospel of Matthew in a slightly restored form that would enable the reader to imagine what the original text looked like. However, later philologists were very severe in their verdict on the ubiquitous solecisms. Lodewijk de Dieu (1590–1642) described Münster's

⁶⁷ Modern scholarship is of the opinion that *Evangelium iuxta Hebraeos* was composed in Greek in second-century Egypt. See, e.g., R. Cameron, "Gospel of the Hebrews", in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, New York (Doubleday) 1992, pp. 105f.

⁶⁸ S. Münster, *Evangelium secundum Matthaeum in lingua Hebraica cum versione Latina atque succinctis annotationibus*, Basle 1537.

⁶⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 3: *non qualiter apud Hebraeorum vulgus lacerum inveni, sed a me redintegratum et in unum corpus redactum emittimus*, i.e., "not as I found it torn, among the people of the Hebrews, but reunited by me and brought into one body". This might simply indicate that he undertook editorial changes, or (more likely) that he supplemented defective parts.

⁷⁰ J. du Tillet & J. Mercerus, *Evangelium Hebraicum Matthaei, recens e Judaeorum penetralibus erutum cum interpretatione Latina*, Paris 1555.

edition as incorrect and ungrammatical.⁷¹ Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), who otherwise claimed the authenticity of the ecclesiastic tradition, could only agree with Mercier that his edition did certainly not represent the authentic work of Matthew.⁷² The savant Johann Heinrich Hottinger (1620–1677) concluded that neither of the editions had the vigour and freshness of ancient Hebrew diction (*vetus Hebraismus*).⁷³ The learned Pierre Daniel Huet (1630–1721) states that du Tillet’s edition is better than Münster’s, but both are marred by grave errors.⁷⁴ Finally, the profound biblical scholar and priest of the Oratorians Order, Richard Simon (1638–1721), suggested that the two editions were based on the Jewish scholar Shemtob ben Isaac ibn Shaprut’s translation into Hebrew from about 1380, which was contained in his polemical work *Eben Bohan*.⁷⁵

The possibility of a Hebrew Matthew discussed

Early modern scholars agreed that the spoken language in Roman Palestine presented a *mixtum compositum* of Hebrew and various forms of Aramaic – a state that was by no means at odds with their

⁷¹ L. de Dieu, *Critica sacra sive animadversiones in loca quaedam difficiliora Veteris et Novi Testamenti*, Amsterdam 1693, p. 9.

⁷² H. Grotius, *Annotationes in Libros Evangeliorum*, Amsterdam 1641, p. 6.

⁷³ J. H. Hottinger, *Thesaurus philologicus seu clavis Scripturae*, Zurich 1659, p. 512

⁷⁴ P. D. Huet, *De interpretatione*, Book 2, *De claris interpretibus*, Haag 1680, p. 141.

⁷⁵ R. Simon, *Histoire critique du texte du Nouveau Testament*, Rotterdam 1689, p. 232. Simon’s conjecture was accepted by several scholars, among them Adolf Herbst, *Des Shemtob ben Schaprut hebräische Übersetzung des Evangeliums Matthaei, nach den Drucken des S. Münsters und J. du Tillet – Mercier neu herausgegeben*, Göttingen 1879. In contrast, Pinchas Lapide, *Hebrew in the Church*, Grand Rapids 1984, pp. 53–64, argues that Münster and du Tillet relied on the same source that shows affinities with the Vulgate, but has nothing essential in common with the version by Ibn Shaprut.

own practice to mix their national languages with Latin phrases.⁷⁶ Hugo Grotius, accordingly, in his comment on *Eli, Eli lema sabachthani* “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46) takes this presumed mixture of languages for granted, which in his view explains why *Eli Eli* is Hebrew, while *lema sabachthani* is Jewish Aramaic.⁷⁷ “Likewise, John Lightfoot, in *Horae Hebraicae* on the same verse, says that *sabachthani* is Aramaic but *Eli* “My God” is not, for in Aramaic Jesus would have used *mār* – the unexpected *Eli* actually made the bystanders mistake his outcry as calling on the prophet Elijah.⁷⁸

What made the idea of a “Hebrew Matthew” troublesome, especially to Lutherans, was its dogmatic implication: if the original Matthew was in another language than Greek, it would mean that the authentic version was lost, an idea that was *a priori* deemed impossible for being at odds with Providence. Thus, the Lutheran scholar Johann Christoph Wagenseil of Altorf (1633–1705)⁷⁹ gives a detailed account of the discussion concerning the original and for him the authentic language of Matthew. Those who maintain a Hebrew original rely on the authority of the Church Fathers, he

⁷⁶ See the chapter “Mixing languages” in P. Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 2004.

⁷⁷ H. Grotius, *Annotationes in Libros Evangeliorum, ad loc.*, where he also wards off the idea that Jesus spoke Antiochian Syriac. Rather, he considers: “Jesum neque veteri usum sermone neque Syriaco sed mixta dialecto quae tum in Judaea vigeat”.

⁷⁸ J. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean*, Missoula 1979, p. 88, points out that *Genesis Apocryphon* uses מרא for “God” and מרי thus is “my God”. J. Jeremias, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, 1. Teil, *Die Verkündigung Jesu*, Gütersloh 1971, p. 16, note 15, regards it misleading to name the Matthew passage a mixture, because Hebrew *’el* was also used in Aramaic, as is shown by the Targum to Ps 22:1. Fr. Schulthess, *Das Problem der Sprache Jesu*, Zürich 1917, p. 26, holds that the outcry was actually in Hebrew, but was secondarily given an Aramaic translation.

⁷⁹ J. Chr. Wagenseil, *Exercitatio philologica de lingua authentica sive originali Novi Testamenti et praecipue Evangelii Matthaei*, Altdorf 1691, pp. 11-19 and 34-38.

states, but in the opinion of renowned Protestant scholars⁸⁰ these were misguided by Papias on this point. He finds Erasmus' statement most convincing: "To me it is not probable that Matthew wrote in Hebrew, as no one can attest that he has ever seen a vestige of that Hebrew writing; the one that was used by the Nazarenes was not written in Hebrew, but in Syro-Chaldaic, though in Hebrew characters, as Jerome says, and it is counted among the apocrypha." Referring to a number of Lutheran theologians, Wagenseil deems it awkward that the Holy Spirit first inspired a Hebrew and *then* a Greek original, of which only the latter was to be received in the Church. In the same way Löscher rejects the tradition of a Hebrew Matthew, but from a philological point of view; those who look for a copy of the Gospel of Matthew written in the style of the Bible search in vain, he says, because if one ever existed it would have been written in the mixed Neo-Hebrew vernacular of which no books are extant.⁸¹

The scholarly discussion, as summed up from a Protestant point of view in the entry "Matthäus" in *Grosses Vollständiges Universal-Lexicon*, gives the following picture:

Theologians of the Roman Church generally believe that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew, but only a few theologians of the Reformed Church share this view, and virtually no Lutherans. The evidence ultimately resting on Papias is weak: according to Eusebius he was not a very discerning man. According to Lightfoot, only the priests mastered Hebrew, while people in general spoke a mixture of Chaldaic and Syriac. In favour of a Greek original speaks the fact that Matthew writes good Greek and the biblical quotations are from the Septuagint. It appears unlikely that an original biblical writing in a language other than Greek simply disappeared, since this would venture the idea of an

⁸⁰ Wagenseil refers to *inter alia*: Desiderius Erasmus (1469–1537), Theodor Beza (1519–1605), Jean Calvin (1509–1564), Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), and Abraham Calovius (1612–1686).

⁸¹ V. E. Löscher, *De causis linguae Ebraeae*, p. 77.

authentic inspired text. Certainly, there has been a great concern in finding the original Hebrew Matthew, and there are scholars who claim to have procured it (Münster and du Tillet), but leading Orientalists deny that these editions are based on an authentic Hebrew text.⁸²

In sharp contrast to the Protestant view, Richard Simon in his *Histoire critique du Nouveau Testament* (1689) boldly argues in favour of a Hebrew original of the Gospel of Matthew.⁸³ Without entering into the ancient theologically motivated argument for Hebrew, he discusses the objection raised by Erasmus, Calvin, and Lightfoot, namely that the idea that Matthew could not have written in Hebrew because it was no longer understood among the common people starts from the mistaken assumption that Hebrew means the ancient *pure* Hebrew. This is definitely not the case, Simon argues, for Hebrew simply meant the mixed language that was current among the Jews at that time, not the *pure* Hebrew of the Bible. Having the Jews in Palestine in view Matthew naturally wrote his Gospel in their language. Moreover, the appeal to Providence in favour of a Greek original is misplaced, for neither the Jewish nor the ecclesiastic tradition ever denied the loss of several holy books in the course of history. The Gospel *iuxta Matthaeum*, which Jerome says was written in “Chaldee and Syriac” may very well have been the original Matthew, because at this time “Hebrew” was just another term for “Syro-Chaldaic”. The circumstance that a non-Greek name is given a Greek interpretation (Matt 1:23) does not prove a Greek original, because a translator may very well have adapted the text to make it easier for the reader – an idea that in Simon’s opinion holds true for the quotations from the Septuagint as well. Finally, he expressly disregards irrelevant ar-

⁸² J. H. Zedler’s *Grosses Vollständiges Universal-Lexicon*, Leipzig – Halle 1732–54, vol. 19, cols. 2109f.

⁸³ R. Simon, *Histoire critique du Nouveau Testament*, Rotterdam 1689, ch. 5: “Des Livres du Nouveau Testament en particulier & premierement de l’Evangile de Saint Matthieu. L’Original de cet Evangile à été écrit dans l’Ebreu que les Juifs de Jerusalem parloient en ce temps-là”, pp. 47–55.

gument put forward in Lightfoot's, *Horae Hebraicae* on Matt 1:23, where it is stated: "Granted that Matthew used a commonly understood language, he did not write in Hebrew, nor did he or any other New Testament author write in Syriac, unless they preferred a disagreeable language spoken by an ungrateful people" (*lingua ingrata gentis ingratae*).⁸⁴

Semitisms in New Testament Greek

The discussion of Semitisms in the New Testament found in the works of early modern scholars was not so much concerned with the *ipissima verba* of Jesus as with the linguistic milieu of the apostles. In his *Philologia sacra* (1629), Barth. Mayer had already observed that New Testament Greek is full of Semitisms, many of which are loan translations from Aramaic, e.g., the use of "Heaven" for "God", and the word "debt" in the sense of "sin" in the Lord's Prayer, since the Targum often renders Hebrew עון *'āwōn* "sin" by חובא *ḥōbā* "debt", as well as the phrase מרמא דיהוה *mēmra d-Yhwh* by which the Greek ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ is readily explained.⁸⁵

In his *De Hebraismis Novi Testamenti* (1665), the librarian of the Elector of Brandenburg, Johannes Vorstius (1623–1676) confined himself to studying Biblical Hebrew as a factor shaping New Testament Greek phraseology and syntax.⁸⁶ He elucidates words and phrases with meanings that deviate from ordinary Greek, or which are used differently. He thus demonstrates how strongly pervaded New Testament Greek is by Biblical Hebrew diction – in most

⁸⁴ J. Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae*, section "Quoniam lingua Mattæus Evangelium suum scripserit", pp. 188–193.

⁸⁵ See B. Mayer, *Philologia sacra*, II, p. 184. J. Jeremias, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, p. 20, adduces Greek ὀφείλημα to demonstrate the loan translation from Aramaic *ḥōbā*, properly "debt", but used in the sense of "sin".

⁸⁶ J. Vorstius, *De Hebraismis Novi Testamenti commentarius*, Amsterdam 1665. For a brief recent discussion, see, e.g., M. Wilcox, "Semitisms in the New Testament", in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, New York (Doubleday) 1992, cols. 1081–1086.

cases mediated by the Septuagint, but at times coined directly from the Hebrew model (vol. 2, p. 205). The Hebraisms are all *intentional*, he thinks, just like the Grecisms in the poetry of Virgil and Horace, and therefore are to be regarded not as solecisms but as ornaments that allude to the biblical mode of expression. Among the phenomena dealt with are the absolute nominative, as in: ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ “he who conquerors, I will grant him” (Rev 3:21), the genitive replacing an adjective, as in: ὁ κριτῆς τῆς ἀδικίας “the unrighteous judge” (Luke 18:6), the rendering of Hebrew paronomasia, as in: ἰδὼν εἶδον ”I have surely seen” (Acts 7:34), as well as several syntactic features, such as προσκυβεῖν with the dative, rendering Hebrew ל השתחוה ל *hištah^awā l^e*, and loan translations, such as βίβλος γενέσεως (Matt 1:1) “catalogue of lineage”, from ספר תולדות *sefær tōl^edōt*, and so on.

Greek – a language of Jesus

The concurrence of Greek and Aramaic

Interestingly, early modern scholars thought it as likely as not that Greek was widespread among the Jews in Roman Palestine and that there actually were Jewish groups that only used this language. Hence, they saw nothing peculiar in the idea that Jesus and his apostles *also* commanded Greek.

Commenting on the phrase ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνεύμενον, “which is interpreted” (Matt 1:23) John Lightfoot raises the question: In what language did Matthew write his Gospel? He refers to Talmud Jerushalmi, *Megillah* 1,9 (1,11), which contains the following saying of Jonathan of Bet Gubrin: “There are four noble languages used in the world: the vernacular for song, Latin for warfare, Aramaic for lamentation and Hebrew for speech”.⁸⁷ By using the Latin phrase

⁸⁷ J. Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae* (1684), p. 192. E.Y. Kutscher, “The language of the Hebrew and Aramaic letters of Bar-Kosiba and his generation” [Hebrew], *Leshonenu*, 26, 1961–62, p. 22, argues that this dictum indicates that Hebrew was still spoken in Judea close to 300 A.D.,

lingua vernacula when referring to the language “for song”, i.e., Greek,⁸⁸ he apparently wishes to explain why the early Church chose Greek as its own language.⁸⁹ What is more, referring to Talmud Jerushalmi, *Sotah* 21b, he points out that the Jews of Caesarea Philippi recited their prayers in Greek, אֱלֹנִיסְתִּין *'ellōnistīn*, which he thinks suggests that the Jews – not only there but in general – accepted Greek as their language. This interpretation he finds corroborated by Talmud Babli, *Megillah* 9b, where in his view the quotation from Gen 9:27: “May God enlarge Japheth”, predicts the glory that was to be bestowed on the Greek language.

Even in Jerusalem first-century Palestinian Jewry was divided into two rivalling factions, namely the *Hebrews* and the *Hellenists* (Acts 6:1). The exact distinguishing criteria of the two groups is still a matter of scholarly discussion today. Already in early seventeenth-century Leiden, there was a fierce debate on this issue between professor Daniel Heinsius (1580–1655) and his colleague Claudius Salmasius (1588–1658). Both agreed that the group called *Hebraei* in Latin spoke Aramaic. Daniel Heinsius, however, maintained that the group called *Hellenistae* were Greek-oriented Jews, *Judaei Graecissantes*, who spoke a non-standard Greek under the influence of their native Semitic tongue. They also used this sociolect – as one would say today – in their synagogue service, Heinsius thought; and it was for their benefit and in accordance with their linguistic habits that the Septuagint had been translated into what may properly be named *lingua Hellenistica*.⁹⁰ Annoyed

and Fraade, “Rabbinic Views”, p. 269, thinks that this conclusion holds true for Galilee as well.

⁸⁸ The source text has *la'az* which means “foreign tongue” and hence “Greek”.

⁸⁹ A similar translation is found in J. Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel*, vol. 19, *Megillah*, Chicago 1987, p. 49: “Four languages are appropriately used in the world, and these are: everyday speech [Greek], for song; Latin, for war; Sursi [Aramaic], for wailing; Hebrew for clear speech.”

⁹⁰ Daniel Hensius put forward his idea in *Aristarchus sacer*, Leiden 1627, as well as in *Sacrarum Execitationes ad Novum Testamentum libri XX*, Leiden 1639. Compare H. B. Rosén, “Die Sprachsituation im römischen

that Heinsius in this way presupposed a language that was unknown to the ancient world, Claudius Salmasius objected that the group called *Hellenistae* should rather be designated as Greeks who had adopted Judaism, *Graeci Judaizantes*, that is to say proselytes, who continued to use their native tongue in their synagogue service. Consequently, he undertook to demonstrate that the designations *Hebraei* and *Hellenistae* are solely based on which of the two languages was used in the entire synagogue service of each group – irrespective of style and linguistic level.⁹¹ In his opinion the Hebraizing character of the Septuagint does not reflect a specific Jewish variety of Greek, for if the translators had not chosen to render the Hebrew original so literally, they might very well have preferred a more classical diction.⁹²

Richard Simon, in his *Histoire critique du Nouveau Testament*, discusses the objections to Daniel Heinsius' concept *lingua Hellenistica*. He argues that those who defended the term "la langue Hellenestique" never actually believed in the existence of a specific Greek dialect thus labelled; it was simply named so with reference to the group of Jews that are called "Hellenists". In order

Palästina", in G. Neumann – J. Untermann (eds), *Die Sprachen im römischen Reich der Kaiserzeit*, (Beihefte der Bonner Jahrbücher 40), Bonn 1980, pp. 215–239, with reference to p. 219 where he states: "Überall dort, wo eine Anlehnung an das Alte Testament vorliegt, kann sich das neutestamentliche Griechisch in der Septuaginta üblicher, d.h. hebraisierender Ausdrucksmittel bedienen".

⁹¹ Claudius Salmasius presented his objections in *Commentarius de Hellenistica* and in *Funus linguae Hellenisticae*, both published in Leiden in 1643.

⁹² The debate is related in J.G. Carpzov, *Critica sacra Veteris Testamenti*, pp. 505ff. Carpzov's own position on the origin of the Septuagint (pp. 592ff.) is that the Aristeas letter was fictitiously composed by a Greek Jew to lend the translation greater authority. The first part of the Septuagint was perhaps translated in the third century B.C., but the rest was produced successively. Later on, the Hellenistic Jews expanded this version in imitation of the Chaldee Targum of the Palestinian Jews (pp. 522f.).

to avoid further terminological controversy, he would prefer the designation “un Grec de Synagogue”.⁹³

John Lightfoot, in his comment on Acts 6:1, takes a partly different approach, arguing that the distinction between the two rival groups, the *Hellenistae* and the *Hebraei*, is to be sought in their native tongue; the first language of the former was Greek and the first language of the latter was not.⁹⁴ Consequently, he takes exception to those who proposed that the language of the synagogue service was the only distinguishing characteristic of the two groups. Indeed, many Jews were bilingual, like Paul, who was brought up with Greek in Tarsus, Lightfoot says, but in the synagogue service the reading from the Hebrew text was *never* allowed to be neglected.⁹⁵

Interestingly, Lightfoot’s opinion on the concurrence of Aramaic and Greek in Roman Palestine in his comment on Acts 6:1 differs considerably from the one he put forward on Matthew 1:23. Quoting Talmud Babli, *Sotah* 49a, he now maintains that Greek was actually held in *low* esteem in Palestine: “in the war against Titus it was decided: No one may teach his son Greek (*yāvānī*)”.⁹⁶ He contends that in the synagogues of Palestine the readings from the Bible were recited in Hebrew and rendered into Aramaic, not into Greek. Using arguments from probability, he also claims that Hebrew alone was used even in the synagogues of the Hellenists; the recitation in Greek among the Jews of the Hellenistic town of Caesarea Philippi was accordingly to be considered exceptional. This shift of opinion relates to Lightfoot’s complete change in his

⁹³ Simon, *Histoire critique du Nouveau Testament*, chs 27–28, pp. 315–335.

⁹⁴ For a similar solution of *Hellenistae* as opposed to *Hebraei*, see J. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean*, pp. 36–37. The proposal was in modern times first put forward by C. D. F. Moule in an article in *Expository Times*, 70, 1958–59.

⁹⁵ J. Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae* (1679), pp. 47–53; see also pp. 238, 271ff. and pp. 284ff., especially p. 288.

⁹⁶ See also Mishnah, *Sotah* 9,14 and the discussion in Sevenster, *Do you know Greek?*, pp. 47–49.

view on the origin of the Septuagint: he had gradually become convinced that this translation was primarily produced for a non-Jewish readership.⁹⁷

A Greek hegemony proposed and rejected

The Dutch philologist Isaac Vossius (1618–1689) aroused a great controversy by questioning the use of Aramaic in Roman Palestine. He had previously taken a minority position by presupposing that only the Greek Bible represented the inspired Holy Writ, and in 1679 in his *De Sibyllinis oraculis* he claimed it absurd to suppose that Judea alone had escaped the fate of the countries conquered by Alexander the Great and had preserved its own language instead of yielding to Greek. Consequently, the assumption that Jesus and his apostles spoke Aramaic has no historical support, he argued, but precisely as in Egypt, Asia Minor, and Syria, only Greek was heard in the cities and the towns of Palestine. Only the peasants living in the countryside used Aramaic, though one so exposed to Greek that it had become a kind of semi-Greek. Jesus and his apostles were certainly accustomed to synagogue services in Greek; if the Hebrew original was ever recited, it was followed by a translation into Greek – not Aramaic, because Aramaic, like Hebrew, had at that time been ousted from common use. It was merely spoken in the regions outside the Roman Empire.⁹⁸

In his *Histoire critique du Nouveau Testament* Richard Simon – adding to his previous objections to Vossius' view concerning the Septuagint – took strong exception to his opinion on the language situation in Roman Palestine. He confined himself, however, to

⁹⁷ For a similar view, see *Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*, s.v. Bibelübersetzungen A 2, vol. 2, p. 628. For a partly different view, see *ibid.*, s.v. Septuaginta: III Bedeutung, vol. 11, p. 439. For an entirely different view, see *ibid.*, s.v. Judentum: Kommunikationssituation, vol. 5, p. 1197.

⁹⁸ I. Vossius, *De Septuaginta interpretibus eorumque translatione et chronologia*, Haag 1661, and *idem*, *De Sibyllinis aliisque quae Christi natalem praecessere oraculis*, Oxford 1680, see especially pp. 14 and 56ff.

pointing out that the Jews in Judea spoke a Chaldeo-Syriac vernacular. Thus, chapter 6 of his book bears the title: “Les Juifs du territoire de Jerusalem parloient au temps de Jesus-Christ & des Apôtres la langue Chaldaïque ou Syriaque”. Simon remarks that the story of the seven martyrs (2 Macc 7:8, 21 and 27) implies that the Jews in second-century B.C. Palestine spoke Greek to the officials, but used their paternal tongue among themselves.⁹⁹ From this he infers that in daily life the Jews of Jerusalem preferred Aramaic, not Greek, although the latter was widespread in Palestine: “Les Juifs de Jerusalem retinrent aussi toujours cette langue [i.e. la langue Chaldaïque], bien que le Grec fût la langue vulgaire de la Palestine” (p. 61). He points to the Roman officer’s astonishment when he realized that Paul knew Greek (Acts 21:37) and draws attention to the fact that the crowd that had gathered in the Temple area became quiet and listened when they heard Paul at the top of the stairs speak to them in their ancestral tongue. All this proves that the current language of the city was *not* Greek – a circumstance that also sheds light on Josephus’ remark in the preface to *De Bello Judaico* that he had taken pains to translate his work from his paternal tongue into Greek, Simon concludes.

Vossius’ idea was taken up and proposed anew by the Neapolitan jurist Dominicus Diodati in 1767,¹⁰⁰ but was again refuted by the biblical scholar Bernard de Rossi (1742–1831), who, *inter alia*, pointed to the Aramaic words and proper names in the New Testament and the old insight that its Greek shape is conditioned by the mission to the Gentiles.¹⁰¹ Agreeing with de Rossi, the Göttingen scholar Heinrich Friedrich Pfannkuche (1766–1833), in an

⁹⁹ This is also the conclusion drawn by J. W. van Henten in his article: “The ancestral language of the Jews in 2 Maccabees”, in W. Horbury (ed.), *Hebrew Study*, pp. 53–68, with reference to p. 63.

¹⁰⁰ D. Diodati, *De Christo Graece loquente, exercitatio qua ostenditur Graecam sive Hellenisticam linguam cum Judaeis omnibus tum ipsi adeo Cristo Domino et apostolis nativam ac vernaculam fuisse*, Neapoli 1767.

¹⁰¹ B. de Rossi, *Dissertatione della lingua propria di Christo e degli Ebraei nazionali della Palestina da tempi de Maccabei*, Parma 1771.

essay on the common language in first century Palestine,¹⁰² points to the deep impact of Aramaic, which partly was a result of Shalmaneser's policy of dislocating entire populations, and partly a consequence of the use of Aramaic as chancellery language in post-exilic Judea (Ezra 4:7–8). Aramaic subsequently became the common language of the people and was by no means replaced by Greek as a result of Alexander's conquest, he states. A survey of numismatic, epigraphic, and literary sources vindicates the idea that the Seleucids, though influential in spreading Greek culture, exerted little influence on the spoken language, as evidenced by the preface to Ben Sira, Jerome's introduction to Tobit and Judith, the inscriptions of Palmyra, and not least Hebrew coins from the Maccabean era. In sum, all the evidence taken together points to Palestinian Aramaic being the national language of the Jews in the first century A.D.¹⁰³

The case for Aramaic since the nineteenth century

The legacy of Gustaf Dalman

In an attempt to find out what words and expression Jesus might have used in Aramaic, the proficient Aramaist Gustaf Dalman of Leipzig (1855–1941) examined the diction of Targum Onkelos as well as that of certain simple stories in Galilean Aramaic which are

¹⁰² H. F. Pfannkuche, "Über die palästinische Landesspache in dem Zeitalter Christi und der Apostel, ein Versuch zum Theil nach de Rossi entworfen", in J. G. Einhorn, *Allgemeine Bibliothek der biblischen Litteratur*, II, Göttingen 1797, pp. 365–480.

¹⁰³ The Palmyrean inscriptions were made available by R. Wood, *The Inscriptions of Palmyra*, London 1753. For a modern survey of numismatics in the period under discussion, see U. Rappaport, "Numismatics", in W. D. Davies and L. Finkelstein (eds), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 1, *Introduction: The Persian Period*, Cambridge 1984, pp. 32–40. Before the discovery of the Aramaic texts at Qumran there was but scarce evidence of the use of Aramaic in Palestine during the last pre-Christian centuries; see J. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean*, p. 39.

found in the early Midrashim and the Palestinian Talmud.¹⁰⁴ At this time, it was commonly known that in the Persian era Aramaic served as the official medium of communication all over the Near East, which meant that it was *not* the returning Jews that brought Aramaic to Judea. Thus, the well-known William Wright states: “The Aramaic dialect, which gradually got the upper hand since the fourth or fifth century B.C., did not come that long journey across the Syrian desert; it was *there* on the spot; and it ended by taking possession of the field, side by side with the kindred dialect of the Samaritans.”¹⁰⁵ Also, the dialect encountered in the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan was now held to be of second-century Judean – not Mesopotamian – origin. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, the early Midrashim, and the Palestinian Talmud were, however, as before, held to be of Galilean provenance.¹⁰⁶

In the introductory discussion of his work *Die Worte Jesu* (1898), Gustaf Dalman had to assess the various previous opinions on the language situation in first century Palestine at large, the question in what way the “Hebrews” differed from “the Hellenists”, the state of Hebrew as a literary language, the evidence for a Hebrew Matthew, and so on.¹⁰⁷ He affirms that in contrast to the “Hellenists”,

¹⁰⁴ G. Dalman, *Grammatik des jüdisch-palästinischen Aramäischen*, Leipzig, 1894, § 2,7–8 and § 7.

¹⁰⁵ W. Wright, *Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages*, Cambridge 1890, p.16.

¹⁰⁶ The Aramaic portions of Daniel and Ezra were no longer considered early, but were thought to be composed in a later western form of Aramaic; see, e.g., Th. Nöldeke, *Die semitischen Sprachen*, 2. Aufl. Leipzig 1899, pp. 35–36. In the 1930s, however, H. H. Schaefer demonstrated that the Aramaic portions of the Bible do not differ from the Aramaic of the Persian era, see F. Rosenthal, *Die aramaische Forschung seit Th. Nöldeke's Veröffentlichungen* (1939), repr. Leiden 1964, pp. 60–72.

¹⁰⁷ See G. Dalman, *Die Worte Jesu*, 1st ed. Leipzig, 1898, with reference to pp. 1–72. In the main part of his book Dalman (pp. 75–283) discusses topics, such as the “domain of God” and the “aeon to come”, as well as various designations and circumlocutions for God and his Messiah. In a later work titled *Jesus-Jeschua* (1922), which he considered a companion volume to his *Worte Jesu* (2nd edition 1930), he demonstrated a probable

who only knew Greek, the language spoken by the “Hebrews” was evidently Aramaic. The evidence put forward that Aramaic was the common language is, *inter alia*, the long-established use of Aramaic Targums; Aramaic designations of groups of people, feasts, and geographical names in Josephus and the New Testament; official writings and documents from this period; and the many Aramaisms in the Mishnah. He admits that the synagogue service was probably conducted in Hebrew, but remarks that according to Mishnah, *Sotah* 9,1, it might be performed in any language; and consequently, he deems Neubauer’s contention that a modernized Hebrew held sway in Judea to be in serious need of revision.¹⁰⁸ What is more, in spite of the fact that Galilee was heavily Judaized under the Hasmoneans, the existence of spoken Hebrew there is out of question for ethnographic reasons, he argues; by virtue of his Galilean parentage, Jesus was brought up speaking Aramaic.

Dalman both recounts and reviews the discussion of the alleged use of Hebrew for literary purposes. Criticizing the arbitrary character of Resch’s method, especially his reduction of the New Testament authors to redactors, copyists, and translators, he takes exception to the whole idea of a Hebrew proto-Gospel. As for the issue of a “Hebrew Matthew”, he concludes that St. Matthew certainly compiled words, λόγια, of Jesus in his Palestinian dialect, but this is not evidence of a Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew. True, some minor texts might have been composed in Hebrew, but examples of the Hebraizing diction of the Gospels manifested through inceptive expressions, such as ἴστημι for *qūm*, and introductory καὶ ἐγένετο for *wayhī*; as well as through ἐν τῷ with temporal infinitive, and through the periphrastic ἦν διδάσκων, should rather be attributed to a liturgical diction modelled on the Septuagint, than to a Hebrew original.¹⁰⁹ As a rule of thumb, Dalman suggests that the fewer the

authentic Aramaic wording of some important texts, notably the Lord’s Prayer, the Sermon on the Mount, the Institution of the Holy Supper, and the Words on the Cross.

¹⁰⁸ Ad. Neubauer, “On the dialects spoken in Palestine”, p. 45.

¹⁰⁹ For a similar conclusion, see D. Tabachovitz, *Die Septuaginta und das Neue Testament*, Lund 1956, p. 19.

Hebraisms, the more original the wording; and the more the Hebraisms, the more the activity on the part of the editor, because the spoken Aramaic dialect was much less influenced by Hebrew than by literary Greek.

Indeed, a number of conspicuous passages in the synoptic Gospels point to an underlying wording in Aramaic, but Dalman is still not inclined to presume an Aramaic origin of any canonical gospel, because the needs of the influential “Hellenists” required a Greek version from the very outset, he thinks. A collection of *Words of Jesus* is nevertheless incontestably attested in the early ecclesiastic tradition. This fact leads over to Dalman’s actual objective, namely to discuss the Aramaic wording of such sayings of Jesus. By using the right linguistic tools, drawn from an assumed contemporary Jewish context, one can ascertain with reasonable certainty how some sayings of Jesus sounded in their original form. As for the right tools, one must above all study ancient documents that reflect a Judean provenance, in the first place Targum Onkelos – though cleansed of obvious Hebraisms.¹¹⁰ Next in turn come simple narratives from the early Midrashim in Galilean Aramaic, as these reflect a more popular style. In his search for appropriate Aramaic equivalents, Dalman was reluctant to include Christian Palestinian Aramaic, as found in the lectionary *Evangelium Hierosolymitanum*, because it was obviously translated from the Greek; nevertheless he found it advisable to consult it, especially when it differs from the Greek source by being conformed to idiomatic Aramaic.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Ad. Neubauer, “On the dialects spoken in Palestine”, pp. 61–62, had suggested that the language of the Palestinian Talmud, being a Galilean composition and distinguished by weakened gutturals, gives the best idea of the dialect spoken by Jesus and his disciples. As for Dalman’s cleansing away of Hebraisms, one must not overlook “the Hebraisms that have penetrated the living Aramaic”; see S. Fassberg, “Hebraisms in the Aramaic documents from Qumran”, in T. Muraoka (ed.), *Studies in Qumran Aramaic* (Abr-Nahrain, Suppl 3), Louvain 1992, pp. 48–69, quoted from p. 51.

¹¹¹ Christian Palestinian Aramaic was for Dalman chiefly known from the lectionary *Evangelium Hierosolymitanum* written in 1030 A.D. in ‘Abūd

Adhering to the ecclesiastic tradition, Theodor Zahn¹¹² maintained that the Gospel of Matthew was originally composed in the Aramaic vernacular, but the majority of scholars followed Dalman. An important proponent of his opinion was Matthew Black, who further developed his arguments in the influential *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (1946).¹¹³ Narratives in the Galilean dialect and written in the simple style of the popular anecdote are especially valuable for forming an opinion about the language spoken by Jesus, he says, and suggests that underlying Aramaic sources may be recognized in cases of parallelism of lines and clauses with accompanying assonance and word-play. Black believed that the diction of the assumed early Palestinian Targum – which Paul Kahle had succeeded in tracing on the basis of the Cairo Geniza – promised to tell what first-century Aramaic looked like. He was also convinced that the literature of Aramaic-speaking Christians and Samaritans deserves more attention than Dalman thought.¹¹⁴

It is generally held that the Judaic colonization of Galilee began during the brief reign of Aristobulus 103–102 B.C. It seems likely that the dialect spoken there merged with the idiom of the Jewish

c. 30 km northwest of Jerusalem, but also from earlier manuscripts found in the St. Catharine monastery and published by Agnes Smith Lewis and Margret Dunlop Gibson, between 1887 and 1909.

¹¹² See Th. Zahn, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 3rd ed. Leipzig 1907, vol. 2, p. 269.

¹¹³ M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach*, with reference to pp. 13–31, and pp. 141–142.

¹¹⁴ Recently, P. V. M. Flesher and B. Chilton, *The Targums. A Critical Introduction*, Leiden 2011, pp. 83–89, proposed that Targum Onkelos was composed in a literary variety of Middle Aramaic (200 B.C. – 200 A.D.), while Targum Jonathan was composed in a style just subsequent to it. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, on the other hand, gives evidence of a literary dialect that combines elements from the older literary Onkelos and the somewhat later Palestinian Targums, of which Neophiti, discovered in 1957, is the best preserved.

settlers, who were joined by new immigrants from the south.¹¹⁵ Joseph Fitzmyer argues that those who seek the native tongue of Jesus should turn to the contemporary language of the Aramaic texts from Qumran, such as *Genesis Apokryphon* and the *Targum to Job*, and not to Galilean Aramaic, which is not attested before the Byzantine era.¹¹⁶ This is also the opinion of Jonas Greenfield in his review of Black's well-known book *An Aramaic Approach to Gospels and Acts*: "It is with the Aramaic of the Qumran finds that one should begin the examination of a possible *Aramaic approach*".¹¹⁷ In fact, Klaus Beyer maintains that the word of Jesus *ταλιθα κουμ* is preserved in the Judean idiom, because in Galilean Aramaic it should be *talīṭā qūmīn*, which in his opinion shows that the traditions about Jesus were not committed to writing in Galilee, but entered the Greek-speaking community by way of Jerusalem.¹¹⁸ In fact, Arnold Meyer was of the opinion that the language of *Evangelium Hierosolymitanum* represents an idiom most closely akin to the language of the Gospels, an idea that was shared by Friedrich Schulthess as well.¹¹⁹ Considering these circumstances, one might perhaps venture that the wording *ταλιθα κουμ* has simply retained

¹¹⁵ According to G. Rendsburg, "The Galilean Background of Mishnaic Hebrew, in L.I. Levine, *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, pp. 225–240, some Israelite communities survived during the centuries after the Assyrian conquest – followed by Persian and Greek – and retained their Hebrew language. For this view, see also S. Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian*, Wilmington 1980, pp. 43–44.

¹¹⁶ J. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean*, p. 8.

¹¹⁷ J. Greenfield, Review of M. Black: *An Aramaic Approach to Gospels and Acts*, 3rd ed., Oxford 1967, in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 31, 1972, p. 60.

¹¹⁸ In the original: "...was bedeutet, daß die Traditionen über Jesus nicht unmittelbar von Galiläa aus, sondern über Jerusalem in das griechische Sprachgebiet gelangt sind", K. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer*, vol. 1, Göttingen 1984, pp. 123–124.

¹¹⁹ A. Meyer, *Jesu Muttersprache*, p. 155, and Fr. Schulthess, *Das Problem der Sprache Jesu*, pp. 34–39.

its original form as it sounded in an idiom that was later to survive among the Christian population.¹²⁰

The case for Hebrew since the nineteenth century

The nature of first century Hebrew

Before Willem Surenhuys' edition of the Mishnah with Latin translation¹²¹ few scholars were able to form an opinion of its language. A majority, following Walton and others, relegated this variety of Hebrew to the status of a petrified medium of communication among the learned. In fact, V. E. Löscher, J. G. Carpzov, and J. D. Michaelis stand out among the early scholars by expressly referring to Rabbinic Hebrew as a continuation of the ancient language. Löscher holds the view that his knowledge of the biblical tongue was fostered by the scribes; the Mishnah and early Midrashim prove that the scholars did their best to preserve the classical tongue. A telling piece of evidence for the continuity of Hebrew is precisely the diction of the Mishnah, Carpzov argues; despite its late date, its language is still pure and the difficulty to grasp the sense is due to the concise style and not to the alleged poor language. Michaelis, finally, says that one can scarcely understand the Sermon on the Mount, the dialogue with Nicodemus, and

¹²⁰ See Chr. Müller-Kessler, *Grammatik des Christlich-Palästinisch-Aramäischen*, Hildesheim 1991 pp. 53f., and K. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer*, pp. 128ff. However, J. Jeremias, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, p. 16, note 13, discusses the expected textual variant κοῦμ and suggests that κοῦμ is an example of *genus potius*.

¹²¹ Guilielmus Surenhusius, *Mischna sive totius Hebraeorum juris, rituum, antiquitatum, ac legum oralium systema; Latinitate donativit ac notis illustravit*, Amsterdam 1698–1703. For this work, see further P. T. van Rooden, "The Amsterdam translation of the Mishnah", in W. Horbury (ed.), *Hebrew Study*, pp. 257–267.

the Letter to the Romans without knowledge of sayings and expressions in Rabbinic Hebrew.¹²²

In his *Geschichte der Hebräischen Sprache*, Wilhelm Gesenius (d.1842) rejects the Talmudic interpretation of Nehemiah 8:8 and takes exception to the whole idea that Hebrew became extinct as a result of the exile – an idea that had been promoted by Elias Levita. Epigraphic and literary evidence contradicts this traditional conception, Gesenius emphasizes, arguing that both inscriptions on coins and the late biblical literature clearly demonstrate that Hebrew was in common use until the days of the Maccabees, but not later.¹²³

An early spokesman for Hebrew having been a living language in Palestine as late as in first century A.D. was Ad. Neubauer. Referring to the Aramaic city of Palmyra, the survival of Coptic in Egypt, and the narrative in Acts, 2:1–13, he denounced the idea that Greek was so predominant in the Orient that Palestine was no exception. True, there were several Greek towns in Palestine, but the Hellenistic influence on the average Jewish population was actually very limited, he argues, because only the western diaspora used what he calls the Judeo-Greek jargon, “All that the Jews in Palestine learnt of Greek, as far as we can judge, was at most a few sentences, sufficient to enable them to carry on trade and to hold intercourse with the lower officials.” Pointing to a dictum in Talmud Babli, *Sotah* 49b, that airs annoyance with the status of Aramaic, “Why Aramaic in the land of Israel? Either the Holy tongue or Greek”, he maintained that the Jews of Jerusalem – and perhaps

¹²² See Löscher, *De causis linguae Ebraeae*, p. 86f., J. G. Carpzov, *Critica Sacra Veteris Testamenti*, Leipzig 1728, ch. 5, p. 220, and J. D. Michaelis, *Einleitung in die göttlichen Schriften des Neuen Bundes*, Göttingen 1777, the section: “Sprache des Neuen Testaments”, especially pp. 110–111 and 130.

¹²³ See W. Gesenius, *Geschichte der Hebräischen Sprache und Schrift*, Leipzig 1815, § 13 “Aussterben der Sprache”, pp. 44–47. In addition to U. Rappaport’s article on “Numismatics”, in *Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 1, see D. Hendin, *Guide to Biblical Coins*, 5th ed. New York 2010.

in the greater part of Judea – retained a “modernized Hebrew” alongside their Aramaic dialect, while the Jews of Galilee only understood their own dialect, except for a few Hebrew expressions.¹²⁴

The discovery in 1896 of Hebrew fragments from the Cairo Geniza containing the Wisdom of Ben Sira, hitherto only known in the Greek version was significant. This finding evinced a linguistic link between a Hebrew original, composed about 190 B.C., and the diction of the early Midrashim, the Mishnah, and the Tosefta. Also, M. H. Segal’s evidence vindicating the survival of spoken Hebrew in its tannaitic form subsequently entailed a reanalysis of the language situation in Roman Palestine.¹²⁵

From the observation that biblical phrases and expressions pervade the thought and speech of Jesus and his apostles, Franz Delitzsch (d. 1891) was convinced that: “the Semite element of the New Testament Koine is Hebrew, not Aramaic”, and therefore that “our Lord and his apostles thought and spoke for the most part in Hebrew.”¹²⁶ Obviously, he believed that Biblical Hebrew was still known by average Jews, not only in Judea but also in Galilee. He cites the use of Hebrew in inscriptions, on coins, and in epitaphs, and remarks that this was the language in which the liturgical prayers and halakic rules were formulated. In fact, Delitzsch considers it

¹²⁴ Ad. Neubauer, “On the dialects spoken in Palestine”, quotations are from p. 50 and p. 66, respectively.

¹²⁵ M. H. Segal, “Mišnaic Hebrew and its Relations to Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic”, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 20, 1908, pp. 647–737, idem, *Mishnaic Hebrew Grammar*, Oxford 1927. Already S. D. Luzzatto (d. 1865) had suggested that the *tannaitic* layer of Mishnaic Hebrew (70–220 A.D.) represents the living language of the last centuries of Jewish independence; see “Hebrew language”, in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, New York-London 1901–06.

¹²⁶ The statement is quoted from the article: “The Hebrew New Testament of the British and Foreign Bible Society. A Contribution to Hebrew Philology”, reprinted in Jean Carmignac’s introduction to *Traductions hébraïques des Évangiles*, 4: Die Vier Evangelien von Franz Delitzsch, Brepols 1984, pp. xxvi–xxvii. Originally it was published in *Saat und Hoffnung* XI, 4, Leipzig 1883, pp. 195ff.

highly unlikely that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Aramaic – the language of casual speech – and not Hebrew, the Holy Tongue and language of the temple service, the language of prayer both in homes and synagogues, and the language that continued to be used for literature and formal addresses. Concerning his Hebrew translation of the New Testament, Delitzsch declares that he had done his best to use pure Biblical Hebrew and only resorted to Mishnaic expressions when he found no genuine biblical equivalents, or when the text reflects rabbinic ideas and expressions. “It is my endeavour to present the text as the writers conceived it in Hebrew and would have written it in Hebrew”, he says – indicating his conviction that both parts of the Bible spring from the same shepherd.¹²⁷

Alfred Resch (d. 1912), in his magnum opus: *Aussercanonische Paralleltex-te* (1893–97),¹²⁸ picked up where the old ecclesiastic discussion of a Hebrew Matthew left off, and accordingly tried to reconstruct a presumed pre-canonical collection of “Words of Jesus”, chiefly selected from Matthew combined with deutero-canonical sayings quoted in the patristic literature, notably in Jerome and Epiphanius. These pre-canonical sayings were all in Hebrew, he assumed, because although Aramaic was certainly used as a colloquial Roman Palestine, Hebrew was the *literary* and li-

¹²⁷ Delitzsch explicates his belief in the early ecclesiastic tradition in the introduction to his *Paulus des Apostels Brief an die Römer*, Leipzig 1870, under the heading: “Rückblick auf die Vorarbeiten vom ersten bis ins neunzehnte Jahrhundert”, pp. 16–21. The quotation above is from P. Lapede, *Hebrew in the Church*, pp. 84–85. Compare what the former rabbi Moses Aaron, alias Johan Kemper, (1670–1716) says in the preface to his Hebrew version of Matthew (Uppsala Ms O Hebr 32): “Speciminis loco oculis tuis subjicio Evangelium Mattaei tam ornate et luculenter in sermonem Hebraeum translatum, ut hoc suo habitu e monte Sinai videatur prognatum [...] Hinc concludere pronum est ambo ex uno Pastore profecta”. See J. Eskhult, *Anders Norrelius’ Latin Translation of Johan Kemper’s Hebrew Commentary on Matthew. Edited with introduction and philological commentary*, Uppsala 2007, p. 328.

¹²⁸ See particularly A. Resch, *Paralleltex-te zu Mattäus und Marcus*, Leipzig 1894, p. 86, and *Das Kindheitsevangelium nach Lucas und Matthäus*, Leipzig 1897, p. 323.

turgical language, while Greek was solely used in communication with non-Jews. Resch rhetorically asks which of these languages was most probably employed by the apostles to propagate the teaching of their Lord in a written form – and in answer he says that the whole patristic tradition speaks in favour of Hebrew.

Harris Birkeland

The insight that Hebrew was in common use much longer than previously believed paved the way for a new perspective on the language situation in first-century Palestine. However, it was not before the findings at Qumran that this insight gave rise to a renewed call to view Hebrew as the language of Jesus. This appeal was put forward in 1954 by the Norwegian Orientalist Harris Birkeland in his *The Language of Jesus*.¹²⁹ He did not develop his idea on the basis of the rather archaistic Qumran Hebrew, but on the assumption of a widespread popular Hebrew vernacular.

In the introductory sections, Birkeland relates the current views on the history of Aramaic and the linguistic situation in Palestine. He gives credit to Matthew Black for his “excellent, cautious and critical investigation of the Aramaic background of the Gospels”, but draws attention to a weak point in the unanimous scholarly opinion on the use of Aramaic, namely that “there is no evidence that it was the popular language, the language of the masses, of the proletariat” (p. 10), for Aramaic long been used for literary purposes *without* any connection to the spoken dialects in the Near East. From *Antiquitates* x 1,2 and xii 2,1, it is clear that Josephus knew the difference between Hebrew and Aramaic. This means that when in *De Bello Judaico* v 9, 2 he states that he spoke to his compatriots in his ancestral tongue, he means his Hebrew-speaking ancestors. And when Acts 21:40 states that Paul addressed the crowd at the Temple in Hebrew, this cannot be interpreted as Aramaic, because Aramaic was at that time called “Syriac”.

¹²⁹ H. Birkeland, “The Language of Jesus”, in *Avh. Videnskaps-Akademi, hist.-fil. kl.*, Oslo 1954, pp. 5–40.

In fact, says Birkeland, the use of the term *l'sōn b'nē 'adām* “the tongue of the people” in the Mishna tractates *Nedarim* and *Nazir* indicates that colloquial Hebrew was still in use about 200 A.D. The learned variety of Hebrew envisaged in the Mishnah, however, represents both a living *and* an artificial language, he argues, assuming that it was a kind of *koine* based on several popular dialects, but the *real* Hebrew colloquial was exclusively oral. Yet, it was in this idiom that Jesus addressed the poor and uneducated.

Birkeland elegantly solves the problem concerning the words of Jesus in Aramaic, viz., *ταλιθα κουμ* “girl arise!” (Mark 5:41) and *εφφαθα* “be opened!” (Mark 7:34), by presupposing that these exceptional Aramaic expressions were left in their original form when the original Hebrew was rendered into Greek. The words on the cross, *ελωι ελωι λεμα σαβαχθανι* “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34), are preferably to be interpreted as originally uttered in Hebrew in line with *codex Bezae* to Matthew.

Finally, Birkeland questions the unanimous opinion that the Bible readings in the synagogue service had to be translated into Aramaic, because Hebrew was no longer understood. Aramaic, he says, was first of all a *literary* language, used and understood by those who had some education, and subsequently was adopted by the upper classes in Palestine. The translation of biblical passages into Aramaic was necessary to convey a correct interpretation, and it was most conveniently done in a language clearly distinguishable from Scripture. In its linguistic form, however, the Targum was old-fashioned and literary and was accordingly *not* read for the benefit of the masses, who still spoke a modernized Hebrew.

Matthew Black in his “Aramaic studies and the language of Jesus”¹³⁰ objects to Birkeland’s position, saying: “it is absurd to suggest that the Hebrew Scriptures were paraphrased for the benefit of

¹³⁰ M. Black, “Aramaic studies and the language of Jesus”, in M. Black – G. Fohrer, *In Memoriam Paul Kahle*, Berlin 1968, pp. 17–28, quoted from 27.

the ‘upper classes’”. James Barr, in contrast, was in favour¹³¹ in as far as he agreed that the rendering of the biblical readings into Aramaic in the synagogue service never replaced Hebrew. Instead: “The Aramaic version functioned as a more or less authoritative interpretation, which both elucidated the linguistic obscurities of the original and smoothed out its religious difficulties.” From this he concludes that: “the existence of the Targum is not a particularly strong argument against the co-existence of Hebrew in the Palestinian culture”.

In 1973, J. A. Emerton addressed the problem anew of vernacular Hebrew in first-century Palestine.¹³² His main question was how the use of Hebrew according to the antique sources relates to the use of Aramaic; Dalman argued that Hebrew was read, but not spoken; Segal thought that it was commonly spoken in Judea, but in Galilee only by educated people; while Birkeland, finally, held that it was spoken all over Palestine. In view of the findings of letters and documents in Mishnaic Hebrew at Muraba‘at and Naḥal Hever from the time of Bar Kokhba’s revolt (132–135 AD), leading scholars such as Kutscher, Morag, and Segert, are reported to have accepted the arguments in favour of Hebrew having been a common vernacular. Yet Emerton maintains that of the three languages Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew, the latter was likely to have been chosen for nationalistic reasons – a conclusion that nevertheless presupposes a much wider acquaintance with Hebrew among common people than was previously supposed, he concedes

¹³¹ J. Barr, “Which language did Jesus speak? – some remarks of a Semitist”, in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 53, 1970-71, pp. 9–29, quoted from p. 25.

¹³² J. A. Emerton, “The problem of vernacular Hebrew in the first century A.D. and the language of Jesus”, in *Journal of Theological Studies* (= *JTS*), N.S. 24, 1973, pp. 1–23, with special reference to p. 8. He had long before reviewed Birkeland’s article in *Journal of Theological Studies* (= *JTS*), N.S., 12, 1961, pp. 189–202.

The question of a Hebrew Matthew anew

Interestingly, the Qumran scholar Jean Carmignac (d. 1986) definitely took a minority position when he opened his lecture: “Studies in the Hebrew background of the synoptic Gospels” by stating that since the discoveries at Qumran, Muraba‘at, and Naḥal Ḥever one can no longer simply reject the hypothesis that the documents behind the synoptic Gospels were originally composed in Hebrew, most likely in Qumranic Hebrew. Having stated his arguments, he arrives at the conclusion that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew, Mark made a straightforward translation into Greek of the material at his disposal, and in Luke’s case someone translated the original for him in a very literal way, and despite his endeavour to polish the text many Hebraisms still remain.¹³³

Some decades ago, the American Hebraist George Howard rekindled the debate on a “Hebrew Matthew”, using arguments from textual criticism. In the introduction to his edition of the Gospel of Matthew from ibn Shaprut’s *Eben Boḥan*¹³⁴ he maintains that ibn Shaprut is part of a constantly revised textual tradition that originates in the tract *Nestor ha-Komer*. This, he reports, was composed in Hebrew in the Near East 500–800 A.D. and served as a pattern for polemic references to the Gospels. Because the Hebrew text used by Ibn Shaprut shows sporadic affinities with ancient variants of the Greek text (which were only discovered in modern times), it testifies to an independent tradition that may reach back as far as to the first century, Howard argues, though without having properly discussed the diction and grammar of the text.¹³⁵

¹³³ J. Carmignac, “Studies in the Hebrew background of the synoptic Gospels”, in *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*, vol. VII, Leiden 1970, pp. 64–93, with special reference to pp. 64–65 and 89–90.

¹³⁴ G. Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, Maco, 1995. This edition also comprises some articles written after the appearance of the 1st ed. 1987.

¹³⁵ “Stylistically, Shem-Tob’s text of Matthew is written in Biblical Hebrew with a healthy mixture of Mishnaic Hebrew and later rabbinic vocabulary and idiom”, Howard maintains, p. 234; but Ch. Rabin, “Hebrew and Aramaic in the First Century”, p. 1015, note 3, lays down

Spoken Hebrew in Roman Palestine

Chaim Rabin held that Mishnaic Hebrew was commonly spoken in first-century Judea, while Aramaic and Greek were the dominant languages on the coastal plain and in Galilee, where Hebrew was relegated to mainly serving as a literary language. Nevertheless, prestige and loyalty were accorded to Hebrew, not to Aramaic. People who habitually spoke Aramaic, but had acquired a certain facility in Hebrew, would count themselves as Hebrew speakers, he says, and continues: “Those who, like Jesus, took part in the discussion in the synagogues (Mark 1:21) and in the Temple of Jerusalem (Mark 11:17) and disputed on Halakah (Matthew 19:3) no doubt did so in mishnaic Hebrew”.¹³⁶

According to Ḥayim Rosén, in contrast, Hebrew was *not* widely spoken in Roman Palestine. The term ἑβραϊστί, he remarks, simply means “in the language of the Hebrews”. Since the adverb ending -ιστί refers to peoples or countries, but not to languages, references to ἑβραϊστί cannot be used to prove that Palestinian Jews of the first century spoke what we nowadays call Hebrew.¹³⁷ The use of Hebrew during the revolt of Bar-Kokhba was perhaps a parenthesis born out of patriotic zeal, he thinks: “We may have to do with a dedicated return to an older, in the national consciousness sancti-

that it was only in the ninth century that Jews began again to use Biblical Hebrew. In addition, W. Horbury, in his “Hebrew Matthew and Hebrew study”, in W. Horbury (ed.), *Hebrew Study*, pp. 122–131, suggests that occasional correspondences to ancient text witnesses are rather to be explained “from the encounter of Jews over the years with various forms of Christian gospel texts in other languages”, p. 129. For a recent review of the discussion and some evidence in favour of Howard’s idea, see C. A. Evans – S. E. Porter (eds), *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, Leicester, 2000, s.v. “Hebrew Matthew”, pp. 463–464.

¹³⁶ Ch. Rabin, “Hebrew and Aramaic in the First Century”, with reference to p. 1036. Matthew Black, too, thought it highly probable that Jesus, being well versed in the Scriptures, was able to compose, or converse, as freely in Hebrew as in Aramaic; see his “Aramaic studies and the language of Jesus”, p. 28

¹³⁷ H. B. Rosén, “Die Sprachsituation im römischen Palästina”, with reference to p. 225.

fied idiom, a rebirth of Hebrew as colloquial, just as we in our time have revived it anew.”¹³⁸ Contemporary dedicatory inscriptions in synagogues are mainly in Aramaic or Greek, while dedications in Hebrew are infrequent, and in the necropolises Hebrew is encountered only in formulae.¹³⁹ The many Greek loanwords for phenomena of everyday life, and for private and family law, strongly indicate a strong Greco-Roman influence, he states, adding that it actually suggests a bilingual Greek-Aramaic society, in which Greek may be labelled the national language, while Hebrew, even in the family sphere, was replaced by Aramaic – the literary variety of which was still a *lingua franca*.¹⁴⁰ In a similar way, Joseph Fitzmyer¹⁴¹ saw little evidence of colloquial Hebrew in first-century Palestine; Hebrew inscriptions are few in number, he says, and the Qumran literature is archaistic and lacks spontaneity and therefore not to be reckoned with. The latter statement, however, is in need of correction after the discovery of the Qumran sectarian halakhic letter *Miqṣat Mišnē ha-Tōrā* (4QMMT); its language strongly resembles that of Mishnaic Hebrew in its use of the particle ψ instead of אשר , to mention just one feature.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ *Ibidim*: “Wir dürften es hier mit einem gewollten Zurückgreifen auf eine ältere, im nationalem Bewußtsein geheiligte Sprachform zu tun haben, einer Wiederbelebung des Hebräischen als Umgangssprache, wie wir sie in unserer Zeit erneut erlebt haben”.

¹³⁹ H. B. Rosén, *op. cit.*, p. 228–229.

¹⁴⁰ H. B. Rosén, *op. cit.*, p. 238: “Wenn wir die von uns hier in Betracht gezogenenen Sprachen etikettieren wollen, so mögen wir im Hinblick auf die erfolgte Desäkularisierung des Hebräischen dem Aramäischen in seiner jüdischen Form den Titel einer Familiärsprache zuweisen, dem genügend differenzierten nichtlokalen Aramäisch denjenigen einer *Lingua franca*, deren auch rituelle Anwendung auffällig ist; das Griechische möge man am besten als Landessprache bezeichnen.”

¹⁴¹ J. Fitzmyer, “The languages of Palestine in the first century A.D.”, *A Wandering Aramean*, pp. 29–56.

¹⁴² On some points the Hebrew of MMT is at variance with Mishnaic Hebrew, e.g., the use of כי – and not ψ – to introduce a causal clause, the use of a temporal infinitive, and the modal use of *liqtol*; see E. Qimron – J. Strugnell, *Qumran Cave 4, V: Miqṣat Ma‘aše Ha-Torah* (Discoveries in the Judean Desert X), Oxford 1994, pp. 74–81.

That Jews in first-century Palestine used their “ancestral tongue” is unchallenged; the point at issue is if this expression refers to Aramaic or Hebrew. Josephus, in *Antiquitates* x 1, 2, distinguishes between Aramaic *συριστί*, and Hebrew *ἑβραϊστί*, when he relates how the Jerusalem courtiers entreat the Assyrian Rabshake to negotiate in *ʿarāmīt* and not in *yehudit*.¹⁴³ Although he obviously was aware of the distinction, it can still hardly be argued that the default sense of *ἑβραϊστί* in Josephus and the New Testament is Hebrew as opposed to Aramaic. If, however, the default sense of *ἑβραϊστί* and *τῆ ἑβραϊδί διαλέκτῳ* is defined as: “in the tongue of the Hebrews”, it is an open question whether Hebrew in the narrow sense is included or excluded. This would mean that the exact language (in our sense) of Josephus’ speech in *τῆ ἑβραϊδί διαλέκτῳ* is of no immediate interest, since his point is that he did not deliver his speech in Greek. This conclusion might hold true even for Paul’s speech in Acts 21:40ff., although his choice to address the crowd in *τῆ ἑβραϊδί διαλέκτῳ* was as unexpected as it was deliberate, a circumstance that points to Mishnaic Hebrew.¹⁴⁴

Drawing on Rabbinic sources, Bernard Spolsky¹⁴⁵ argues that in first-century Palestine Hebrew was used in Judean villages, while it was rivalled by Aramaic and Greek in Jerusalem, Galilee, and the cities on the coast; but the evidence for this conclusion is mainly taken from Talmudic references, most of which were already duly

¹⁴³ In addition, Josephus in *Antiquitates* xii 15 says that though Hebrew in script and pronunciation is similar to Syriac, it is nevertheless of a distinct type. This statement is based on a passage in the Letter of Aristeas that rather relates to the script than to the language as such. We owe Dr. Andersen for this information.

¹⁴⁴ See J. N. Sevenster, *Do you know Greek?*, p. 24. Another passage (2 Cor 11:22) probably hints at Paul’s ability to speak and write Hebrew, a proficiency only attained by the most erudite.

¹⁴⁵ B. Spolsky, “Jewish Multilingualism in the First Century: An Essay in Historical Sociolinguistics”, in J.A. Fishman (ed.), *Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages*, Leiden 1985, pp. 35–50, with reference to pp. 38–41.

discussed by John Lightfoot and his contemporaries.¹⁴⁶ Steven Fraade,¹⁴⁷ more specifically refers to external evidence when he affirms that Hebrew and Aramaic continued to coexist, albeit in competition with one another. “The targumic setting, both in study and worship, was a bilingual one, wherein both Hebrew and Aramaic (besides Greek, of course) were widely used in Palestine as vehicles of creative expression and comprehension in the period, not simply up to the Bar-Kokhba revolt, as is now commonly held, but significantly thereafter as well.”¹⁴⁸ He also calls attention to extra-rabbinic evidence for bilingualism in the Galilee of Late Antiquity, by referring to the many inscriptions in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek found at ancient synagogues and related sites, of which seven are reported to be in Hebrew and at least one having a dedicatory inscription in both Hebrew and Aramaic.¹⁴⁹

It is generally acknowledged that educated Jews in first-century Palestine knew Biblical Hebrew from school, and that Mishanic Hebrew was commonly used in conversation among learned Jews.¹⁵⁰ The sectarian literature at Qumran, however, was composed by people that used a different types of Hebrew for their

¹⁴⁶ Spolsky quotes Talm. Babli, *Erubin* 53a, *Nedarim* 37b, *Sotah* 49b and Talm. Jerushalmi, *Sotah* 21b [Megillah 1 9].

¹⁴⁷ S. D. Fraade, “Rabbinic Views on the Practice of Targum, and Multilingualism in the Jewish Galilee of the Third – Sixth Centuries”, in L. L. Levine (ed.), *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1992, pp. 253–286.

¹⁴⁸ S.D. Fraade, “Rabbinic Views”, p. 283, and p. 274 for quotation.

¹⁴⁹ S.D. Fraade, “Rabbinic Views”, p. 277.

¹⁵⁰ See Ph. Alexander, “How did the Rabbis learn Hebrew”, in W. Horbury (ed.), *Hebrew Study*, pp. 71–89, with reference to the section “The Hebrew school system”. In the article “Hebrew” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, the 1st ed. 1958 says: that Hebrew “ceased to be a spoken language around the fourth century BCE”, while the 3rd ed. 1997 says: that Hebrew “continued to be used as a spoken and written language in the New Testament period”.

literary purpose.¹⁵¹ To some scholars, with Elisha Qimron as their foremost spokesman, the documents in Qumranic Hebrew prove the existence of a specific dialect once spoken in sectarian villages in Palestine. Other scholars, such as William Schniedewind, think that the kind of Hebrew attested in these documents is nothing but a jargon that was used to stress the exclusivity of the group forming the community. Still others, following Joshua Blau, take an intermediate position, namely that the Qumranic variety of Hebrew is an elevated sociolect, saturated with biblical expressions and characterized by word formations of an unusual form and spelling under the influence of obsolete scribal habits and contemporary Hebrew dialects.¹⁵² Nevertheless, the section dedicated to Hebrew grammar in the publication *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period*¹⁵³ shows that in contrast to the clear Aramaisms that might be purely literary,¹⁵⁴ there is at least one feature that presupposes *spoken* Hebrew, namely the syncope of *'ālæf* in the *nota accusativi*. This is manifest in the phrase אַתְּ (הַמְקוֹם)

¹⁵¹ Ch. Rabin, “The Historical Background of Qumran Hebrew”, in *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, vol. 4: Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Jerusalem 1958, pp. 144–161.

¹⁵² See the articles by E. Qimron “The nature of DSS Hebrew and its relations to BH and MH”, W. M. Schniedewind, “Linguistic ideology in Qumran Hebrew”, and J. Blau, “Conservative view of the language of the Dead Sea Scrolls”, in T. Muraoka - J. F. Elwolde, *Diggers at the Well*, Leiden 2000. Compare also S. Fassberg, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the language of Jewish Scriptures”, in N. Dávid *et alii* (eds), *The Hebrew Bible in the Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Göttingen 2012, pp. 129–136, with reference to pp. 130–131. See also Ph. Alexander, *op. cit.*, p. 74, note 3.

¹⁵³ Y. Yadaï, J. C. Greenfield, A. Yardeni, B. A. Levine (eds), *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters, Hebrew, Aramaic and Nabatean-Aramaic Papyri*, Jerusalem 2002, with reference to pp. 14–19,

¹⁵⁴ *Inter alia*, this influence is manifested in the interchange between final *'ālæf* and *hē*, the plural endings *-īm* and *-in*, and the causatives *hif'īl* and *'af'el*; furthermore, in the occasional defective spelling of *-ō-* in the participle and feminine plural, the occurrence of *הַמְנוּ* instead of *וְהַמְנוּ* and the use of participle with pronoun, e.g., *מְדַא אַנִּי*.

hammāqōm) which in pronunciation and hence writing has developed into a תמקום (*tammāqōm*).

The case for Greek since the nineteenth century

The impact of the Greco-Roman culture

Arguments in favour of Greek as being *one* of the languages of Jesus were put forward by H. E. Paulus of Jena (d. 1851) in his *De Judaeis Palaestinensibus* (1803).¹⁵⁵ The native tongue of the Jews was certainly Aramaic, he concedes, but in the bilingual society of Roman Palestine, Greek was so prevalent in Galilee and Judea that Jesus and his disciples had no difficulty using it in their public speeches when convenient. Paulus' opinion was shared by the Catholic scholar Johann Leonard Hug (d. 1846), who in his introduction to the New Testament (1821) states that in all likelihood the Hellenistic influence in Palestine was so great that the apostles had no problem to write down their experiences with Jesus in Greek. To him it seemed as likely as not that Jesus himself spoke Greek to his audience – at least to the proselytes, the gentiles, and the woman of Syrophoenician descent. He answers the objection that Jesus' *ipissima verba* are preserved in the Aramaic exclamations: *ταλιθα κουμ* "girl arise!" *εφφαθα* "be opened!", by suggesting that these words were only rendered in this form because they were so exceptional.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ H. E. Paulus, *Verosimilia Judaeis Palaestinensibus Jesu atque etiam apostolis non Aramaea dialecto solum, sed Graeca quoque aramaizante locutis*, Jena 1803 (not available; for a summary see Ad. Neubauer, "On the dialects spoken in Palestine", p. 40).

¹⁵⁶ "Man könnte erwiedern, die hebräischen Worte auf diesen Stellen, seyen von der Evangelisten als Merkwürdigkeiten angeführt", L. Hug, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 3. Aufl. Stuttgart 1826, vol. II, § 10: "Zustand der Landessprache in Palästina, als Matthäus sein Evangelium schrieb", quoted from p. 53. As we saw, more than hundred years later Harris Birkeland proposed a similar explanation of *ταλιθα κουμ*, but then in favour of Hebrew as the language spoken by Jesus.

Moreover, Karl August Credner (d. 1857), in his introduction to the New Testament (1836), takes a similar approach.¹⁵⁷ Referring to a dictum in Josephus *Antiquitates* xx 12,1, where it is stated that proficiency in Greek is not considered a mark of erudition among the Jews, since knowledge of it can be acquired even by slaves,¹⁵⁸ Credner argues that customs officials and fishermen – such as the disciples – simply *had* to master Greek in order to earn their livelihood. He continues by arguing that their master Jesus in all probability spoke Greek to people from Hellenistic towns in Galilee and Decapolis (cf. Matt 4:25 and Mark 3:8), and that he obviously had no need of an interpreter when facing the centurion in Capernaum and later Pilate. However, since a Greek-speaking Messiah would have appeared abominable to the Jews, Jesus did not speak Greek to them, but used the deteriorated kind of Hebrew that was still their national tongue.

Spoken Greek in Roman Palestine

In his book *Do you know Greek?*, published in 1968, J. N. Sevenster, professor of New Testament exegesis in Amsterdam, lays down that in the first century of the Christian era the Jewish land was an island in a sea of Hellenistic powers. When the Romans first occupied Palestine it already contained a large number of Hellenistic towns, which were strung out in an almost continuous line along the coast and on the east side of the Jordan. From this he concludes: “There were many regions of the Jewish land that bordered directly on areas where mainly or almost exclusively Greek was spoken. The obvious assumption is that the inhabitants of such regions at least understood Greek, often spoke it and were thus bilingual. This can possibly be said of people from all levels of

¹⁵⁷ K. A. Credner, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, I, Halle 1836, with reference to pp. 182–188.

¹⁵⁸ Josephus, *Antiquitates* xx 12,1: “For our people do not welcome those who master the speech of many nations or adorn their style with the smoothness of diction, because they consider that such skill is not only common to ordinary freeman, but that even slaves acquire it, if they so choose.”

society, not merely the top social or intellectual layer”, and adds that such a situation was certainly prevalent in Galilee.¹⁵⁹

Martin Hengel, famous for his studies in ancient Judaism and Hellenistic religion, argues that after such a long period of Greek cultural influence first-century Palestinian Judaism was altogether Hellenistic. He remarks that a substantial Jewish population lived in the Hellenized cities of the coastal plain, as well as in Tiberias, Sepphoris, Caesarea Philippi, Gadara, and Scytopolis. The fact that Jesus’ hometown Nazareth was situated only 6 km from Sepphoris offered various opportunities for contacts with non-Jews, both for him and his family. Also, among his followers there are several persons who in all likelihood were bilingual, such as Zaccheus the chief tax-gatherer in Jericho, Joseph of Arimathea, Silas, and John Mark. Also, a thorough mastery of Greek education and literature helped James, the brother of Jesus and leader of the earliest community in Jerusalem, to write his letter in excellent Greek. Nevertheless, Hengel expresses a *caveat*: the imprecise meaning of the adjective Hellenistic requires one to be cautious in using it to characterize earliest Christianity. There are factors that must not be neglected, among them being social class, level of education, and choice of language for communication.¹⁶⁰

The archaeologists Eric M. Meyers and James F. Strange,¹⁶¹ citing the literary works of Josephus, apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, and inscriptions in a colloquial style, are more prone to point to the position of Greek as a contemporary language in Roman Palestine. Greek was evidently understood by Jews of some education, they conclude, and for a large group of people – not least in Galilee – it was in fact the first language, for it should be borne in mind that Greek was spoken not only in the cities of Decapolis, but also in

¹⁵⁹ J. N. Sevenster, *Do you know Greek?, How much Greek could the first Jewish Christians have known?*, Leiden 1968, p. 99.

¹⁶⁰ M. Hengel, *The ‘Hellenization’ of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*, Philadelphia 1989, with references to pp. 14–17 and 53–54.

¹⁶¹ E. M. Meyers – J. F. Strange, *Archaeology, the Rabbis, and Early Christianity*, Abington 1981, pp. 78–91.

Caesarea Philippi, Tiberias, and Magdala, not to mention Sepphoris which was so close to Nazareth. Also, H. C. Kee (drawing on Meyers and Strange) maintains that Lower Galilee was Greek-Aramaic bilingual. He underlines that the “clienteles rallied by Jesus” involved people, such as craftsmen, fishermen, and tax collectors, who beyond doubt were bilingual being so exposed to Greek in their everyday life.¹⁶²

Final reflexions

Ever since early modern times, erudite biblical scholars have given proof of a good comprehension of all of the pertinent factors involved. In the seventeenth century, traditional Jewish ideas concerning the history of the biblical languages – to a great part mediated by Elias Levita – led to a scholarly discussion of the use of Hebrew and Aramaic in order to shed light on the language situation in first-century Palestine. None of the three languages Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek was excluded from being considered at least *one* of the languages spoken by Jesus and his disciples.

Studious scholars paid heed to the few biblical remarks on linguistic usage in ancient Israel and to the scanty information on the languages of Palestine to be found in Jewish traditional literature. They discussed the different Aramaic dialects; scrutinized the style and form of the Targums; took sides for or against Classical Syriac as the language of Jesus. Based on their knowledge of ancient history, they evaluated the impact of Greco-Roman culture in Palestine, but arrived at completely different conclusions. They agreed on the importance of the occasional Aramaic words and phrases in the New Testament, but disagreed whether these point to underlying Aramaic sources or not; they agreed that New Testament Greek is saturated with features of Hebrew origin, but disagreed whether these were mediated by the Septuagint or picked up from spoken Hebrew. Dalman’s appeal to view Aramaic as the common

¹⁶² H. C. Kee, “Early Christianity in the Galilee”, in L.I. Levine, *The Galilee in late Antiquity*, pp. 3–22, with reference to pp. 14–15 and 20–22.

language among Galilean Jews not only led to a disregard of the previous attention to Greek, but also tended to overlook the findings indicating that Hebrew was used for much longer than previously believed, and therefore was probably used even in common contexts, even by Jesus. Still the Aramaic quotations of Jesus in the Gospels cannot easily be brushed aside: *ταλιθα κουμ* and *εφραθα* were likely uttered in stressed conditions, and *ελωι ελωι λεμα σαβαχθανι* was a cry of agony, and therefore these words are believed to reflect a native tongue.

The notion of Hebrew as the everlasting language in the history of salvation and the idea of an original Hebrew Gospel of Matthew have exerted a perpetual influence on the issue of the “language of Jesus”; but the nature of a primordial language goes beyond man’s comprehension, and even from the earliest days of Christianity there was no effort to ensure that the words of Jesus were preserved in their original tongue. Nonetheless and not very fruitfully, the discussion in bygone days to a large degree dealt with which of the three languages Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek that was *the* language of Jesus. But the matter at hand has constantly manifested itself as a most elusive notion, not least so because several concepts tend to be mixed together: native tongue, idiom used in common parlance, and language chosen for formal address, or used when addressing non-Jews. All three languages were certainly used in first-century Palestine, but not to the same extent in speech as in writing, and not to the same degree in the various geographical, sociological, and ethnic environments. One should perhaps rather speak about the *languages* of Jesus in the plural. The question at issue, then, is rather what environment is to be judged as being of the greatest importance for Jesus in word and deed.

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