

**Introduction
to Hebrew Linguistics**
(‘Inleiding Hebreeuwse Taalkunde’)
UvA, Week 5, March 3/10, 2011

Rabbinic (Mishnaic) Hebrew
History of the Aramaic language

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History of the Aramaic language, and its connection to the history of Hebrew

Overview of Aramaic

Older names: “Chaldean”, “Syrian”.

Pe-history of the Israelites according to Bible: Laban; Deut. 26:5.

- 10th – 7th century BCE: **Old (or Ancient) Aramaic**
- 6th – 3rd century BCE: **Imperial Aramaic**
 - Neo-Babylonian Empire and Persian Empire
 - Biblical Aramaic
- 3rd c. BCE – 2nd c. CE: **Middle Aramaic:**
 - Hellenism. Roman Empire. Functional diglossia.
- 3rd c. CE – 9th CE (and later): **Late Aramaic**
 - Eastern and Western dialects. Jewish varieties. Syriac.
- Today: **Neo-Aramaic** languages and dialects.

10th – 7th cent. BCE: Old Aramaic

- 11th c. BCE: Northwest Semitic tribes settling down in Syria.
- Arameans founding city states, such as *Damascus*.
Leaving behind inscriptions,
using their own script (borrowed from Phoenician script).
 - Tell Fekherijje: Akkadian-Aramaic bilingual royal inscription (cca. 800).
- Around the 8th c. BCE: Aramaic kingdoms gradually conquered by Neo-Assyrian Empire. Populations mixed.
- Aramean scribes in the Neo-Assyrian Empire (especially in army): Aramaic becomes *lingua franca* in the Middle East.

2Kgs 18:26 = Isa 36:11: Aramaic as diplomatic language in 701 BCE. Average people in Jerusalem do not speak it (yet).

6th – 3rd cent. BCE: Imperial Aramaic

A.k.a.: Official A, Standard Literary A, *Reichsaramäisch*:
Neo-Babylonian Empire and Persian (Akhaimenidan) Empire

- Official language of the Persian Empire (538-333)
 - Influence of Persian (as 2nd official lg), Late Babylonian (as literary lg)
 - From India to Egypt. (Aramaic script in Central Asia & India)
 - Papyri from Elephantine (*Yeb*, late 5th c.): military post in Southern Egypt, with Jewish soldiers, among others.
 - Dareios inscription in Bisutun (520); Driver-document; Ahikar; etc.
- Biblical Aramaic: (also Gen. 31:47, see slide later)
 - Jeremiah 10:11: in the Babylonian exile.
 - Portions of Ezra: probably real official documents from the Persian period.
 - Daniel: literary composition (early Middle Aramaic?)

3rd c. BCE – 2nd c. CE: Middle Aramaic

Hellenistic and early Roman period.

- Main language of Middle East. Greek primarily in cities. Roman times: also Latin, mainly by soldiers and administration only.
- Functional diglossia:
Literary language imitates Imperial Aramaic, but influenced by spoken language.
Spoken language changes, dialectal differences emerge.
- Important texts in the Jewish context: some Dead Sea Scrolls, New Testament, earliest Targumim (Onqelos on Torah, Yonathan on prophets), inscriptions in Jerusalem...
- Others: magical texts of Uruq, Nabatean texts (Arabs in Petra), texts in Palmyra, Edessa (in Syria → Syriac language on next slide), Hatra, Dura-Europos, etc.

3rd c. – 9th c. and later: Late Aramaic

- Spoken language being written down again.
- Dialects: Roman Empire in the West, Persians (Parthian Empire, then Sasanian dynasty) in the East, Edessa (origin of the Syriac language) in the middle.
- Western Late Aramaic:
 - Palestinian Jewish Aramaic: Aramaic parts of Jerusalem Talmud and midrashim, later Targumim, inscriptions, magical bowls, etc.
 - Palestinian Christian Aramaic
 - Palestinian Samaritan Aramaic
- Eastern Late Aramaic:

3rd c. – 9th c. and later: Late Aramaic

- Western Late Aramaic:

- Eastern Late Aramaic:

Babylonian (Jewish) Aramaic: Babylonian Talmud, gaonic texts.

Mandaean/Mandaic: secret texts of a gnostic religious sect in southern Mesopotamia (Iraq and western Iran).

Syriac: Holy tongue of the Syriac churches. Eastern and western varieties (of the language / of the script / of the churches). Peshitta: Bible translation to Syriac.

Transmission of the Greek culture to the Arabs.

- (Medieval Jewish Aramaic: Zohar, liturgical compositions, etc.)

20th century (21st c. ???): Neo-Aramaic

- Arabic conquest in the 7th century: gradual decline of Aramaic.
- Some islands (*Sprachinseln*) still surviving: E and W Syriac Christian and Jewish groups that resisted islamicization (or were islamicized only recently). How long will they survive?
- Western Neo-Aramaic: Ma^clūla and 2 other villages and in Syria, 60 km NW of Damascus. 5000 speakers.
- Eastern Neo-Aramaic:
 - Turoyo and related varieties: Syrian Orthodox Christians in southeastern Turkey.
 - Northeastern Neo-Aramaic languages in eastern Turkey, Northern Iraq and northwestern Iran, spoken by Eastern Syrian Christians and Jews (mainly in Israel today).
 - Neo-Mandaic (Modern Mandaic) in southern Mesopotamia (Iraq, Iran; Australia and elsewhere after the first gulf war?)

Aramaic influencing Hebrew

- Aramaic “pre-history”? Two word in Aramaic in the Torah: Gen. 31,47: Laban in Aramaic, Jacob in Hebrew.
- Northern dialect of Hebr: Aramaic influence? Dialect-continuum?
- 2Kgs 18:26 = Isa 36:11: Aramaic not spoken yet in Jerusalem.
- After 587: Aramaic (language and script) adopted by Jews in the Babylonian exile. Dominant language of the Diaspora. (Hebrew spoken mainly in Israel, until 3rd c. CE).
- Aramaic influence on Late Biblical H and Rabbinic (Mishnaic) H.
- Second language of the Jewish culture in the Middle Ages: The two *Talmudim*, *Zohar*, *kaddish*, *Ha lachma anya*, *Chad gadya*...
- Frequent Hebrew-Aramaic code switching in medieval rabbinic Hb.
- Language “purists” (Maimonides, Haskala, etc.): get rid of Aramaic
- Source of enriching Israel Hebrew: *atar* 'site', legal language...

Targum: Late-antique Jewish translations of books of the Bible to Aramaic

Torah, Deut. 6:7: דברים פרק ו פסוק ז

וּשְׁנַנְתֶּם לְבַנְיֵיךָ וּדְבַרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלַכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:

Targum Onqelos (2nd century CE, Middle Aramaic, literal translation):

תרגום אונקלוס דברים פרק ו פסוק ז

ותתנינן לבנך ותמליל בהון במתבך בביתך ובמהכך באורחא ובמשכבך ובמקימך:

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (Late Aramaic, includes more explanations):

תרגום יונתן דברים פרק ו פסוק ז

ותגמרינן לבנך ותהניין הנניין בהון במותביכון בבתיכון בזמן מיעסוקכון בחיתונכון ובמיהכון באורחכון ובפניא סמיה למשכביכון ובצפרא סמיה למקמיכון:

תרגום יונתן דברים פרק ו פסוק ז (translation of Targum Pseudo-Yonatan)

ותשננן לבניך ותהיו הוגים בהם בשבתכם בביתכם בעת עסוקיכם בחתונתכם [עם נשיכם] ובלכתכם בדרככם ובשקיעה סמוך לשכבכם ובבוקר סמוך לקומכם:

Rabbinic (Mishnaic) Hebrew

Mishnaic (Rabbinic) Hebrew

- Significantly differs from Biblical Hebrew. Why?
 - Bab. Talmud Avoda Zara 58b, Chulin 137b: לשון קודש vs. לשון חז"ל.
 - 19th century theories: Aramaic influence in Roman times? Artificial language by Aramaic speaking rabbis? No!
 - M.H. Segal, early 20th century: Spoken language during the second temple period, but never written down earlier.
 - Hebrew spoken in Judea (Jerusalem), while Aramaic spoken in Galilee during Persian, Hellenistic and Roman times?
 - Nationalistic language renaissance in 1st century CE? Maybe.
- Gradual development of post-exilic spoken Hebrew:
 - Inner development: e.g., *anaxnu* > *anu*.
 - Forms prohibited in earlier literary norm (in CBH): *lel*, *zo*, *še*.
 - External influence: Aramaic + some Greek, Persian, few Latin, Akkadian (Late Babylonian), etc.

Mishnaic (Rabbinic) Hebrew

- Why writing down the spoken language?
 - Functional diglossia is a situation hard to maintain, especially when the difference grows larger.
 - National pride in 1st – 2nd century CE, during the revolts? (Cf. Use of paleo-Hebrew script)
 - Oral genres, orally performed and transmitted texts:
 - Liturgy, prayers: *Shemone Esre (Amida)*, *Aleinu leshabeach*, blessings (e.g., of the *Shma*).
 - Oral Law (*Torah she-be-al-peh*): orally transmitted Biblical exegesis, and other traditions.
 - NB: Manuscripts are only medieval. When the text of the Mishna and of the midrashim were edited in the 3rd century CE, they might have not been written down, but transmitted orally for centuries.

Mishnaic (Rabbinic) Hebrew

Two periods of Rabbinic Hebrew:

- RH1: Tannaitic Hebrew (1st c. CE – 3rd c. CE)
 - Hebrew was still spoken in Palestine
 - DJD: Bar Kokhba letters, Cooper Scroll...
 - Rabbinic texts of the *tannaim* in Palestine:
 - Mishna: Rabbi Judah ha-Nassi, around 210 CE.
 - *Tosefta*, and the *baraytot* in the Talmudim.
 - tannaitic (halakhic) *Midrash collections*.
 - Seder Olam Rabba, Megillat Taanit, etc.
 - (No tannaitic text from Babylonia)
- Earliest texts share some isoglosses with LBH, QH.
- Example: development of ל+ ש into לש.

Mishnaic (Rabbinic) Hebrew

- RH2: Amoraic Hebrew (3rd c. CE – 6th c. CE)
 - Hebrew was not spoken anymore, even in Palestine. (Megilla 18a: “Take the broom, and sweep the floor!”)
 - Rabbinic texts of the amoraim in Palestine:
 - Hebrew in Palestinian Talmud (Talmud Yerushalmi)
 - Amoraic (aggadic) midrash collections.
 - Early mystical texts (*heikhalot*, *merkava*, *Sefer Yetsira*)
 - Early piyyutim (liturgical poetry)
 - Synagogue inscriptions, amulets, etc.
 - Amoraim in Babylonia: Hebrew in Babylonian Talmud
- After the amoraim: gaonic period (7th – 11th century) in Babylonia.

Mishnaic (Rabbinic) Hebrew

Characteristic features of the vocabulary

- Loanwords: from Latin, Akkadian... but mainly from:
 - Aramaic: e.g. שעה 'hour', אבא 'father' (vs. BH אב)
 - Greek: קטגור ('public prosecutor, openbare aanklager' from *kategoros*) and פּרִקְלִיט ('advocate' from *parakletos*); לְסָטִים ('robber' from *lestes*).
- Semantic shift (same form, but meaning changes)
 - עוֹלָם: BH: 'eternity' → shift to RH: 'world'
 - מַעֲשֵׂה: 'deed, action, practice' → additional meaning in RH: 'incident, happening, story'.
- New forms for old meaning: אשר < ש, אלה < אלו

Mishnaic (Rabbinic) Hebrew

Characteristic features of the grammar

- Expression of possession: אֲשֶׁר ל + ל < ש + ל < שֶׁל
Article proves reanalysis: še-/la-... > šel-/ha-...
- New nominal patterns:
 - -an for agent of action (רַצְחָן 'murderer', שִׁקְרָן 'liar')
- Semantic reanalysis of the verbal system:
 - BH Perfect > RH past tense, imperfect > future tense
 - Participle > present (and additional meanings)
- Change of gender of some nouns:
 - כּוּס 'cup' BH: feminine > RH: masculine (analogy)
 - שָׂדֵה 'field' BH: masc. > RH: masc and fem. (Aramaic influence)
- And much more... see 2nd block of the course.

Reading for next week

(downloadable from the website)

Read Chaim Rabin: chapters 7 (medieval poetry), 8 (medieval prose) and 9 (pre-modern times).

(Please also catch up with earlier readings. For instance, read the chapter in the *Talen van het Nabije Oosten* volume, if you haven't so far.)

Assignment for next week

- Read: B. Harshav 'Essay on Multilingualism', in EYDES.
(Downloadable from the website.)
- Assignment:
 - Collect the languages mentioned in the article.
 - Look up these languages in Ethnologue:
tell me which language family do they belong to?
 - For each language (and language variety),
describe in a sentence what the role or the status of that language was according to the article. (Why is it mentioned in the article, at all?)
(For instance: used for prayers; used by the neighbors, but not by Jews; despised; highly appreciated...).

Email by Wednesday noon. Subject: "Assignment 5".
Preferably no attachment.

See you next week!