

**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.

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

# 10<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE: Old Aramaic

- 11<sup>th</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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).

# 6<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> official lg), Late Babylonian (as literary lg)
  - From India to Egypt. (Aramaic script in Central Asia & India)
  - Papyri from Elephantine (*Yeb*, late 5<sup>th</sup> 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?)

# 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BCE – 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

# 3<sup>rd</sup> c. – 9<sup>th</sup> 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:

# 3<sup>rd</sup> c. – 9<sup>th</sup> c. and later: Late Aramaic

- Western Late Aramaic:
- Eastern Late Aramaic:
  - Babylonian (Jewish) Aramaic: Babylonian Talmud, gaonic texts.
  - Mandean/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.)

# 20<sup>th</sup> century (21<sup>st</sup> c. ???): Neo-Aramaic

- Arabic conquest in the 7<sup>th</sup> 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<sup>c</sup>lūla 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 לְבַנְיֵיכֶם וּדְבַרְתֶּם בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּכֶם בְּבֵיתְכֶם וּבְלֶכְתְּכֶם בַּדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּכֶם וּבְקוּמְכֶם:

Targum Onqelos (2<sup>nd</sup> 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 הניין בהון במותביכון בבתיוכון 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.
  - 19<sup>th</sup> century theories: Aramaic influence in Roman times? Artificial language by Aramaic speaking rabbis? No!
  - M.H. Segal, early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 (1<sup>st</sup> c. CE – 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 (3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE – 6<sup>th</sup> 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 (7<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> 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 פּרֹקְלִיט ('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', נִשְׁקָרָן '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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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!