

DATING THE ARAMAIC TEXTS FROM QUMRAN: POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS

A CHAPTER or paragraph on the date of composition features in almost all editions of the major Aramaic texts from Qumran, and understandably so. For only a sound chronological framework allows one to trace, albeit roughly, the history of certain key ideas in the corpus. (1) This is also true for the gradual development of genres and literary forms as it is for terminology. It does not fall within the scope of this paper to address the so-called “scriptorium controversy,” (2) but most scholars accept the view that the Aramaic texts have been imported from outside into the community, presumably copied at Qumran, and perhaps even adapted for the needs of the Qumran people. Hence, such work also serves a more general purpose and endeavours to cast some light on the still little-known literary history of Aramaic at large during the two or three centuries after the fall of the Achaemenid Empire. All this has an obvious bearing on the development of semantic fields in light of the available lexical resources. Naturally, a study along similar lines would be much harder to carry out for Qumran Hebrew, because due to the scarcity of the material, any attempt to determine its relationship with earlier and later forms of Hebrew is wrought with fundamental difficulties. Given its unbroken attestation, Aramaic thus provides one with a more suitable methodological laboratory.

As the results of any diachronic investigation affect a broad range of topics in and outside Qumran research, it seems thus worth-

(1) A case in point is the development of a priestly theology on the basis of the relationships between *Aramaic Levi* and two other sacerdotal writings, that is, the *Testament of Qahat* and the *Visions of Amram* that have been claimed to depend on it: É. Puech, “Le Testament de Qahat en araméen de la grotte 4 (4QTQah),” *RevQ* 15 (1988): 23-54.

(2) Many bibliographical references have conveniently been assembled by S.E. Fassberg, “Qumran Aramaic,” *MAARAV* 9 (2002): 19-31, esp. 21-22.

while to critically survey the assumptions underlying previous attempts to anchor the Aramaic compositions in time and place. The history of Aramaic as a group of languages and its internal subdivision continues to be a matter of debate with new material, or fresh ideas, adjusting the general picture from time to time. For that reason, a regular check of established methods and “best practice” is imperative. A number of relevant facts were yet undiscovered fifty years ago, when E. Y. Kutscher set up his landmark in a field which was then practically virgin ground. (3) The influence of his paper, the first study devoted to this topic on a sound philological basis, still sets the pace for the current debate. Against the backdrop of what can be known about Aramaic today, however, some basic suppositions, often taken for granted even in the most recent publications, should be addressed once again at greater length. (4) Obviously, the scope of the present paper is insufficient for that, so I shall confine myself by and large to pointing out possible pitfalls instead of coming up, like a magician, with a precise and comprehensive list of dates.

Given the paucity of unambiguous references to contemporary political events in the corpus and the often subjective nature of inferences from the alleged development of certain theological ideas, palaeography appears to provide the most objective criterion. The unidirectional development of characteristic letter-forms within one particular style, or “register,” enables one to create a relative chronology of different types of scripts, such as the famous “Hasmonaean” and “Herodian” classes, and fit the evidence into that pattern. (5) Radiocarbon dating and a detailed comparison with dated manuscripts, especially the legal documents from Naḥal Hever, Naḥal Şe’elim and other places in the Dead Sea region, can provide Archimedean points in “absolute” chronology. However, even if one firmly believes in the fundamental reliability of the typological method, the date thus obtained is by definition only the one of an individual manuscript representing a particular text. Unless it can be

(3) E.Y. Kutscher, “The Language of the ‘Genesis Apocryphon’: A Preliminary Study,” in *Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Scripta Hierosolymitana 4; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1958), 1-35.

(4) One can only wonder, for example, what rational base underlies the distinction in U. Schattner-Rieser, *L’araméen des manuscrits de la mer Morte I: Grammaire* (Prahins: Éditions du Zèbre, 2004), 25-26, between “older” texts like the *Prayer of Nabonidus*, some of which allegedly date from the Persian period, and “later” compositions like the *Genesis Apocryphon* and the *Targum of Job*. A reasonable *terminus post quem* for the *Prayer of Nabonidus* is the late fourth or early third century B.C.E., on which see A. Lange and M. Sieker, “Gattung und Quellenwert des Gebets des Nabonid,” in *Qumranstudien*, eds. H.-J. Fabry, A. Lange, and H. Lichtenberger (*Schriften des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum* 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 3-34, here 6-8.

(5) This method has been outlined by F.M. Cross, “The Development of the Jewish Scripts,” in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. G.E. Wright (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1961), 133-202.

convincingly demonstrated that the respective manuscript is in fact the autograph, which of course would be very difficult (an impressive array of counter-arguments has been marshalled after J. A. Fitzmyer suggested that 1Q20 was the author's copy of the *Genesis Apocryphon* despite the general proximity in time to the period of composition), palaeography yields nothing more than a *terminus ad quem* at best. Nonetheless, not all commentators consistently observe the fundamental distinction between the hypothetical date of a manuscript and the time when its contents has been composed or prepared for final redaction.

For more conclusive results, one therefore still depends on an interpretation of the development of linguistic features. Methodologically, this approach bears a close resemblance to palaeographic taxonomy, except for the significant difference that at least certain elements of grammar constitute a core part of a text, whereas the hand of a particular manuscript representing that text does not. As a consequence, not all possible hallmarks are equally relevant: orthography can easily undergo modifications in the course of scribal activities, whereas morphology, vocabulary, and above all syntax prove less susceptible to secondary changes, although that, too, can happen, especially with long chains of transmission. A recent text can, whether on purpose or not, misguide its reader by appearing in a classicizing garb and *vice versa*. The validity of an interpreter's judgment on these matters stands and falls with an adequate knowledge of the evolution of Aramaic in its various forms.

Studies which tackle this question often presuppose, explicitly or implicitly, that Aramaic developed in a linear way. According to Fitzmyer's widespread model, (6) often referred to in Qumran studies, an older stage labelled "Imperial Aramaic" and best represented by dozens of dated documentary texts as well as letters on papyrus from fifth-century Elephantine in Egypt, (7) was succeeded about 200 B.C.E by another phase during which the former standard idiom of the Achaemenid chancellery gave way to a number of local dialects. This "Middle Aramaic" stage includes, among others, the language of the numerous literary compositions in Aramaic from Qumran and is said to have lasted until about 200 C.E., when it was succeeded by "Late Aramaic." Since older features and innovations occur side by side in the Qumran material, it exhibits a certain transitory character between Achaemenid Aramaic, or "Official Aramaic," and later Palestinian Aramaic. Although Biblical Aramaic is often used as a

(6) Succinctly presented in J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave I (1Q20). A Commentary* (3d ed.); *Biblica et Orientalia* 18/B (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 2004), 30-32.

(7) For a concise description, see now M.L. Folmer, "Alt- und Reichsaramäisch," in *Sprachen aus der Welt des Alten Testaments*, ed. H. Gzella (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009), 104-31.

representative of the older stage in Qumran scholarship, the papyri from Egypt (which were much less well-known when the initial attempts to date the Qumran texts had been undertaken) now provide a more trustworthy point of comparison, especially because the dust has not settled on the linguistic position of the Book of *Daniel* in its different stages of development. As has often been emphasized, some forms of pronouns and suffixes in *Daniel* seem younger than their counterparts in *Ezra*, but may have only entered the text in the course of redactional history. On the other hand, the verbal syntax of *Daniel* exhibits a number of innovative features less likely to be secondary. (8)

Unfortunately, neither “Middle Aramaic” in general nor “Qumran Aramaic” in particular (taken here to mean the language of the Aramaic corpus from Qumran proper in a purely descriptive sense, without any straightforward historical implications) form a linguistic unity in any remote sense of the word. It is therefore quite misleading to think that the Achaemenid *koiné* as such was simply replaced by newly-emerging vernaculars. On the contrary, some of these alleged newcomers have roots long antedating the rise of the Persian Empire. Only when a wave of novel self-awareness washed over various Aramaic-speaking communities during the last decades of the moribund Seleucid Empire, several Aramaic vernaculars, which in all likelihood had developed further beneath the surface of the textual record even during the Achaemenid age, were promoted to written languages. In other words, many of them did not simply come into being after the end of the Persian chancellery; rather, they had long been in the make, but eclipsed by the prestige of Official Aramaic. Even in a relatively small area such as Palestine, a number of different forms of Aramaic are attested by material written during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

These new written languages competed with the waning power of a once forceful scribal tradition, a process which led to different degrees of interference in the individual corpora subsumed under Fitzmyer’s generic though still useful umbrella term “Middle Aramaic.” Especially orthographic standards, but also some distinctive elements of morphology and phraseology, were borrowed from Official Aramaic and thus preserved long after the latter had fallen out of use; they constitute the base of a shared literary heritage sometimes called, in the footsteps of J. C. Greenfield, “Standard Literary Aramaic.” (9) Due to the fact that Aramaic formed a so-called “dialect continuum” in which different varieties between the eastern and the

(8) See H. Gzella, *Tempus, Aspekt und Modalität im Reichsaramäischen* (Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission 48; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), 136, 215, 230.

(9) For an outline of a more complex history of Aramaic, see H. Gzella, “The Heritage of Imperial Aramaic in Eastern Aramaic,” *Aramaic Studies* 6 (2009): 85-109.

western periphery interacted with each other, just like, for example, Dutch and German, there were of course common developments spreading across the entire speech area along axes of social contact. Yet since "Middle Aramaic" itself is not homogeneous, a less static approach seems necessary for better assessing the historical-linguistic implications of the Aramaic material from the Judaeian Desert, thereby possibly also providing a better comparative framework for the contents and cultural background of the texts.

Like other languages belonging to the "Middle Aramaic" stage, "Qumran Aramaic" exhibits the same intersection of an erstwhile universal standard language, more faithfully preserved in legal documents from other sites nearby the Dead Sea, and the Aramaic dialect of Judaea which had presumably arrived in the region long before the Achaemenids. Furthermore, the unbroken prestige of Hebrew as a literary language in Palestine exercised an influence on many Aramaic compositions, especially those which elaborate on biblical material. This results in such a considerable diversity of coexisting linguistic features in each individual text that it is very hard to positively define "Qumran Aramaic" as opposed to all other forms of Aramaic contemporaneous with it. As a consequence, one can reasonably suppose also on linguistic grounds that not all texts share a common origin, although many of them may have been copied by scribes who adhered to similar traditions. Since the textual witnesses vary greatly in length and state of preservation, not every manuscript contains a sufficient amount of significant features which would permit an unequivocal diachronic assessment of its language. Following Kutscher's seminal article from 1958 on the language of the *Genesis Apocryphon*, published in 1956 as one of the first Aramaic texts from the Dead Sea region, a number of more recent studies on the linguistic position of "Qumran Aramaic" have appeared, thereby also including texts published in the meantime. Longer compositions like the *Targum of Job* (11Q10), the Enochic material from Cave Four, the manuscripts of the *New Jerusalem apocalypse* (4Q554-555 and 11Q18), the *Visions of Amram* (4Q543-548), the *Apocryphon of Levi* (4Q540-541), the *Testament of Qahat* (4Q542), and the Aramaic fragments of the *Book of Tobit* (4Q196-199) occupy a particularly prominent place in the discussion, whereas shorter pieces like, for instance, the *Messianic Apocalypse* or the *Prayer of Nabonidus*, to mention only two, can amend the general picture or confirm its validity. Some of them have already been the object of a more or less detailed investigation in Kutscher's vein, but a comprehensive reassessment of their language seems overdue. The problem is aggravated by the fact that there is still no scholarly reference grammar of the Aramaic corpus.

Depending on the theoretical framework they employ, all existing studies of which I am aware interpret the linguistic facts

either historically (this is still the dominant approach), geographically, (10) or socially. (11) By and large, they depart from the same, limited, set of basic features, yet more than once arrive at markedly different conclusions. These well-known features, insofar as they have classificatory relevance, can be grouped into characteristic traits of spelling, morphology, and morphosyntax. The most important ones include the following:

1. Inconsistent spellings (besides the general tendency towards *plene* writing (12)):
 - (a) A more conservative spelling of the relative marker {dy}, which reflects the older form /dī/, alternates with {d}. The latter presupposes the more recent change from /dī/ to proclitic /d(a)-/, as is common in Post-Achaemenid Aramaic. In all likelihood, /d(a)-/, or perhaps /di-/ as an intermediate stage, has already been generalized in pronunciation but not yet in orthography. The coexistence of {dy} and {d} would thus be an alternation in spelling alone.
 - (b) The prefix of the causative stem is sometimes spelled with {h} (especially in *IQ10*), pointing to the older form of the morpheme /ha-/. Mostly, however, it is spelled with {'}, because /ha-/ had been weakened to /'a-/. As with the relative particle, this must imply that the underlying phonetic change had long happened, because orthography tends to lag behind advances in pronunciation. Consequently, this variation, too, comes down to an alternation between a traditional and a more modern spelling.
 - (c) As in Official Aramaic, long (“geminate”) consonants are resolved, at least in spelling, by the letter {n}. (13)

(10) E.M. Cook, “Qumran Aramaic and Aramaic Dialectology,” in *Studies in Qumran Aramaic*, ed. T. Muraoka (*Abr-Nahrain Supplement* 3; Louvain: Peeters, 1992), 1-21, attempted to assign “Qumran Aramaic” a place within contemporary Aramaic using methods of dialect geography. Plotting isoglosses on a map is, however, not entirely applicable to a literary language in which features from various dialects occur side by side.

(11) Approaches informed by sociolinguistics will be briefly discussed at the end of the present paper.

(12) Supposedly, this tendency includes the famous case of the second person masculine singular suffix {kh}, instead of older {k}, for /-kā/ (see S. Fassberg, “Qumran Aramaic,” 24-25). For the time being, it must be left open whether this results from the influence of Hebrew spelling practice or represents an internal development.

(13) For scores of examples, see W. Randall Garr, “Prenasalization in Aramaic,” in *Studies in Semitic and Afroasiatic Linguistics Presented to Gene B. Gragg*, ed. C.L. Miller (*Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization* 60; Chicago, Illinois: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2007), 81-109, esp. 93-94 (who considers degemination in Aramaic as a phonetic phenomenon).

Whether this practice, which first and foremost targets secondary geminates produced by assimilation, corresponds to any phonetic reality in Aramaic or not, it has clearly been inherited from the Achaemenid chancellery tradition (where it is an innovation due to Babylonian influence). Instances with and without {n}, often of the same word, occur side by side also in the Qumran corpus. Evidence from later pointing systems, such as the *linea occultans* in Syriac, as well as internal considerations point to an orthographic rather than a phonetic variation. Consequently, the letter {n} resolving consonantal length is considered an old-fashioned spelling here.

2. Morphological variation:

- (a) Instead of *dnh* /denā/, or the even older spelling *znh*, the masculine singular proximal demonstrative (“this”) in the Qumran Aramaic corpus is mostly *dn*. Due to the general tendency towards increasingly *plene* writing, the form *dn* presumably reflects a genuine morphological change and not a novel defective orthography.
- (b) Another important diagnostic feature of the individual Aramaic languages is the direct object marker used by a particular variety. Again, the Qumran corpus exhibits some variation between Official Aramaic /la-/, the most widespread form, and a few instances of Western Aramaic /yāt/.
- (c) The conditional particle (“if”) oscillates between the standard variant *hn* /hen/ and the by-form ’n /’en/.
- (d) Several words and forms ending in a long vowel have by-forms expanded by /n/, especially *tnn* /tannān/ “here” instead of older *tnh* and *kmn* /kamān/ “how?” instead of *kmh/km’*, as well as the pronouns *hmwn* /hemūn/ “they” (from older *hm(w)*) with its by-form *’nwn* and *’l(y)n* /’ellēn/ “these” as opposed to *’lh*. This process affects more than one lexeme.
- (e) Occasionally, infinitives of the derived stems with an /m-/ prefix reappear in the corpus, besides the standard forms without such a prefix.

3. The most distinctive morphosyntactic hallmark of the Aramaic texts from Qumran is the retention of the negation /’al/ followed by the “short imperfect” (or: “jussive”) for negative commands. There are numerous examples to be found in different texts across the corpus, even though all contemporary varieties of Aramaic replaced /’al/ with the “short imperfect” by /lā/ followed by the “long imperfect”. Perhaps it was

preserved due to the influence of Second Temple Hebrew, where the same construction continued to be used.

In addition to that, one can identify a number of phonetic peculiarities in certain words or roots. Many of them involve a reflex of the Proto-Semitic phoneme */š/, which had merged with /ʕ/ long before the second century B.C.E., and another laryngeal. These two laryngeals were dissimilated in later Aramaic varieties in that one of them regularly turned into /ʕ/, but the spelling of the Qumran corpus at large suggests that the underlying phonetic change was, if anything, only incipient in the Hasmonaean period. (14)

The amount of Hebrew influences, by contrast, most of which are lexical loans or loan translations related to the semantic fields of cult, ethics, and religion, (15) seems to be evenly spread across the corpus, excepting, for whatever reason, a disproportionately high number in the *Testament of Qahat*. (16) Since most occurrences of Hebrew terms are thus punctual and specific (or derive from Hebrew phraseology if not actual texts, as in certain passages of the *Genesis Apocryphon* and the *Targum of Job*), one cannot detect either an increase or a decline of such lexical influences. As a result, they have no independent value for the purpose of dating. Rather, Hebrew in its various manifestations was a lexical resource readily available for technical terminology or synonyms in stylistic parallelism.

Quite obviously, then, several different elements have been woven into the fabric of the corpus to which the term “Qumran Aramaic” refers. The usual historical-linguistic approaches envisage to establish a relative chronology of the texts according to the frequency of archaisms, that is, typical features of older Aramaic varieties which were gradually disappearing after the Achaemenid period. Those compositions which exhibit a greater number of straightforward Official Aramaic hallmarks are therefore often viewed as older, whereas a later date is attributed to those typologically closer to Judaean Aramaic as reflected chiefly by the Bar Kosiba letters and a number of funerary inscriptions from the same period. The guiding idea is that those seemingly “later” features increase over time. When clear-cut historical allusions are absent from a text and one’s limited knowledge of the evolution of literary forms and motives

(14) See the valuable overview by M. Sokoloff, “Qumran Aramaic in Relation to the Aramaic Dialects,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years after their Discovery. Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20–25, 1997*, eds. L.H. Schiffman, E. Tov, and J.C. VanderKam (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000), 746–54, esp. 748–50.

(15) Now conveniently assembled and extensively discussed by C. Stadel, *Hebraismen in den aramäischen Texten vom Toten Meer* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008).

(16) As remarked by Stadel, *Hebraismen*, 60, who tentatively entertains the possibility that this text was translated from a Hebrew original.

does not allow one to penetrate beyond subjective judgments, a taxonomy of grammatical features has to bear all the weight. For the *Genesis Apocryphon* as the longest representative of "Qumran Aramaic," it has been suggested by Kutscher, and often repeated thereafter, that the text was composed between the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., because it appears to be typologically "later" than the Book of *Daniel* whose language as such is dated to the period of the final redaction, i.e., the second century B.C.E. (17) Nowadays, by contrast, several scholars would prefer to date much of the material in *Daniel* a century earlier.

The arguments presented in the course of this discussion still constitute the Archimedean point for dating other Aramaic writings from Qumran, soon supplemented by a analogous debate about the *Targum of Job*, which is assigned to either the third (Beyer), (18) the second (van der Ploeg and van der Woude; Sokoloff, albeit with some hesitation), (19) or the first century B.C.E. (Kaufman), (20) but in any case relatively older than the *Genesis Apocryphon*. Subsequently, the Enochic material, to which a date slightly later than the *Targum of Job* has been attributed, (21) and the *Testament of Qahat*, the profile of whose orthography "gives an impression of lateness," (22) have undergone a similar analysis. Within a linear framework, the relative sequence of composition of the core texts between the early third and the early first centuries B.C.E. would be: Aramaic *Daniel*, *Targum of Job*, *Enoch*, *Genesis Apocryphon*.

However, an approach entertaining the possibility of a non-linear development of Aramaic, as suggested above, would also have to take other factors into account in order to explain variation in the corpus. From that point of view, things turn out to be less simple than they appear at first glance. Most importantly, one has to apply a

(17) Fitzmyer, *Genesis Apocryphon*, 26-28, gives a brief review of the discussion.

(18) K. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer I* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 283.

(19) See M. Sokoloff, *The Targum to Job from Qumran Cave XI* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1974), 25, who also summarizes the earlier literature on this point.

(20) S.A. Kaufman, "The Job Targum from Qumran", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 93 (1973): 317-27, who also emphasizes the relative priority of the *Targum of Job* and thus re-dates the *Genesis Apocryphon* to the first century C.E.

(21) M. Sokoloff, "Notes on the Aramaic Fragments of Enoch from Qumran Cave 4," *MAARAV* 1/2 (1978-79): 197-224, esp. 203-204, and R.I. Vasholz, "An Additional Note on the 4QEnoch Fragments and 11TgJob," *MAARAV* 3/1 (1982): 115-118.

(22) E.M. Cook, "Remarks on the Testament of Kohath from Qumran Cave 4," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 44 (1993): 205-19, here 218. This article provides a description of the language of the fragment, which is lacking in Puech's earlier study, "Le Testament." However, Cook doubts the usefulness of linguistic dating on the basis of grammatical features and mentions a number of important caveats (217-19).

rigorous distinction between orthographic and grammatical peculiarities; contrary to common practice, the former do not always prove significant due to the extent of orthographic modifications by way of scribal transmission. The textual history of the biblical writings, too, shows that changes in spelling occur quite regularly in the course of scribal transmission. As a result, such mixed orthographies say more about the preference of one particular scribe at one particular moment, eventually leading to sundry inconsistencies in a manuscript, than about the language of a text itself.

So the only manuscript of the *Genesis Apocryphon*, 1Q20, contains at the same time many instances of degemination by means of an inserted {n} resolving long consonants and a very high number of the more traditional spelling {dy} of the relative marker as opposed to only a few instances of the modern variant {d}. At the same time, it also exhibits a consistent use of {h'}, presumably a sub-standard variant, (23) for the third person feminine singular suffix vis-à-vis the traditional, defective, form {h} elsewhere in the Qumran corpus (with very few exceptions). On the other hand, the manuscripts of the *Targum of Job*, 4Q157 and 11Q10, despite their more recent date around the middle of the first century C.E. (according to many scholars), prefer the old-fashioned spelling of the second person masculine singular suffix {k} in all five occurrences, as in Official Aramaic and the documentary texts from the Dead Sea. Elsewhere in the corpus, by contrast, the *plene* variant {kh} is so popular that it often features as a hallmark of Qumran Aramaic in general. Likewise, the witnesses of *TgJob* preserve the older standard form {t} for the second person masculine singular ending of the "perfect" conjugation as opposed to the *plene* variants {th} the {t'} in other manuscripts. The relative marker, too, is spelled consistently {dy}, there being no instances of {d}. Last but not least, in the orthography, the /h/ of the causative stem is only lost in intervocalic position, but the "perfect" of this stem has a prefix generally written {h} and not {'} as in most other instances. (24) From that point of view, the *Targum of Job*, despite some incidental novelties like 'lyn /'ellēn/ "these" (only once: 20:3) (25) instead of 'ln or even older 'lh /'ellē/ (as in 4Q536) and mostly, though not always, {s} for etymological */š/, (26) would appear to

(23) The similar spelling {hh} is already attested in the Hermopolis letters from the end of the sixth century B.C., hence the difference appears to be one of style. See M.L. Folmer, *The Aramaic Language in the Achaemenid Period. A Study in Linguistic Variation (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 68; Louvain: Peeters, 1995), 237-41.*

(24) M. Sokoloff, "Qumran Aramaic," 751-53, though subsumed under "Morphology." For the data, see *idem*, *Targum to Job*, 9-24. There are a few examples of {h} in the *Genesis Apocryphon* and, e.g., in 4Q562 according to K. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer II* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 126 (3:3: *hškhñ* "we found").

(25) 1Q20 of the *Genesis Apocryphon* consistently has 'ln.

(26) The merger of */š/ with */s/ spread from the second century B.C.E. onwards (Beyer, *Texte I*, 102-103).

antedate the *Genesis Apocryphon*. The latter, however, has many more instances of another archaism, that is, the “degeminating” {n}. As a result, these texts both exhibit orthographic archaisms of a different kind.

Although the *spelling* of one individual representative within a textual tradition must not simply be identified with the *language* of the archetype, there may well be instances where one can penetrate beyond mere agnosticism. By and large, the orthographic archaisms in the *Targum of Job* seem to have a more genuine ring to them than those featuring in the *Genesis Apocryphon*, because they contain a higher number of spellings known to be archaic but otherwise unattested at Qumran. In addition to that, the preference for {k} instead of {kh} and {t} instead of {th} or {t'} in certain morphemes seems to run counter to the scribes' tendency to employ *plene* writing. Unless one assumes a connaisseur scribe who consciously applied a retro chic much more exquisite than the one of his colleagues to a younger text, occasionally ruined again by an ignoramus shortly thereafter (hence the hideous vulgarism 'lyn!), a *Vorlage* of the *Targum of Job* still reflecting some spelling conventions closer to Official Aramaic seems to be a feasible explanation. Given the general character of the surviving witnesses in terms of orthography, it is not altogether impossible to explain evidently modern forms like 'lyn as secondary modifications. One has to bear in mind, however, that, as the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible suggests, more conservative scribal schools using *plene* writing in a rather moderate way continued to exist outside Qumran, presumably during the same time.

The *Genesis Apocryphon*, by contrast, appears to be less deeply rooted in Achaemenid scribal practice, because its allegedly archaic spellings breathe a more imitative air. Degemination, first and foremost, is so characteristic of Official Aramaic scribal conventions as reflected by several major Aramaic compositions from Qumran as well as Biblical Aramaic (and arguably even entered the text of the Hebrew Bible in a few instances (27)) that it would be an obvious feature to employ for those trying to maintain a classical style. Consequently, it does not contradict other indications pointing to a somewhat later date than the *Targum of Job*, because it is not an archaism of exactly the same kind as some untypical defective writings. So arguments based on orthography do not possess an independent value for pinpointing the date of composition on the same level as grammatical features, but they can enrich the discussion in a relevant though sophisticated way when they are not merely counted but categorized. A nuanced typology would thus try to distinguish more carefully between seemingly genuine archaisms and possible imitations in light of the various Aramaic scribal traditions. Even though

(27) H. Gzella, “Unusual Verbal Forms in the Book of Proverbs and Semantic Disambiguation,” in *Studies in Hebrew Language and Jewish Culture*, eds. M.F.J. Baasten and R. Munk (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 151-68.

orthography is thus prone to changes in the course of scribal transmission, it can sometimes make a meaningful contribution to the dating of texts.

Similar ambiguities arise with morphological and lexical considerations. As for the *Targum of Job*, the conservative orthographic garb seems to conflict with an interesting linguistic peculiarity: besides a number of archaisms in spelling, the same text consistently uses a more innovative by-form of the root *ḥ'k* "to laugh" (also attested in the hitherto unidentified fragment *1Q67* and in a fragment of *4QAmr^a*, i.e., *4Q543* 6:5). The original form of this root, **šḥk*, has undergone an older Aramaic sound shift by which the phoneme */š/ eventually became /'/, and a metathesis of /' / and /h/. In *11Q10*, /' / after another laryngeal has dissimilated to /' /, which thus produced the form *ḥ'k*. (28) While the secondary character of this allomorphic root can hardly be doubted, one must be cautious when using it as an argument for dating the *Targum of Job* later than texts which preserve the older form *ḥ'k*. For even if one feature by itself could carry the weight required by a convincing proof, a change from *ḥ'k* to *ḥ'k*, consistent though it is in that text, might have occurred in the course of scribal transmission—supposedly because the copyist was not aware of the difference in pronunciation due to weak articulation of laryngeals in at least some parts of the area. (29) Corruptions in manuscript traditions quite frequently arise out of changes in spelling and pronunciation. A similar variation in the two manuscripts of the *Visions of Amram* (whose composition is now often dated to the latter part of the second century B.C.) supports this view, since the older *ḥ'k* in *4QAmr^a* appears in the shape of another secondary by-form *ḥ'k*, with dissimilation of the /h/ instead of the /' /, in *4QAmr^b* (*4Q544* 1:14). No doubt the development of an unstable verbal root says something about the historical phonology of Aramaic in Hellenistic and Roman Palestine, and about the extent to which the process of scribal transmission can be influenced by contemporary pronunciation. However, it says nothing at all about the date of the *Targum of Job*, that is, the *Urtext*, vis-à-vis other Aramaic compositions from Qumran. Features like this would have to be excluded from a refined taxonomy of chronologically relevant traits.

While the use of the verbal root *ḥ'k* can thus be satisfactorily explained as a scribal alteration, a fair number of perhaps genuinely ancient forms reinforce the impression that the *Targum of Job* might be more profoundly influenced by the Official Aramaic tradition than many other texts found at Qumran. As is well known, it uses the ad-

(28) See Beyer, *Texte* I, 282 and 584; J.C. Greenfield and M. Sokoloff, "The Contribution of Qumran Aramaic to the Aramaic Vocabulary," in *Studies in Qumran Aramaic*, ed. T. Muraoka (*Abr-Nahrain Supplement* 3; Louvain: Peeters, 1992), 78-98, esp. 82. Kaufman, "Job Targum," 319, suggests a different etymology.

verbs *km'* /kamā/ "how?" and *tmh* /tammā/ "there" (elsewhere only in the *Words of Michael*, 4Q529 1:2,4) instead of the later by-forms expanded by /n/ (i.e., *kmn* /kamān/ and *tmn* /tammān/) which feature in the *Genesis Apocryphon* and *Enoch*; 4QAmr^b (4Q544 1:1) has at least *tmn*. Arguably the same phonetic phenomenon affects a few pronouns and verbal forms ending in a long vowel. (30) Once again, such forms would be likely to be adjusted by scribes. In addition to that, the *Targum* consistently uses the older, or standard, conjunction *hn* /hen/ "if" instead of 'n /'en/, as in the few other instances from Qumran (excepting two passages from the *Book of Giants*). (31)

A dividing line between the Achaemenid tradition and local varieties which is even more significant can be established on the basis of the direct object marker, that is, the particle used in order to highlight the direct object of a transitive verb. In Official Aramaic, only *l* /la-/ is clearly attested, whereas later Western Aramaic, including Jewish Palestinian, employs *yt* /yāt/ for the same purpose. (32) As a matter of fact, this dividing line cuts across the Qumranic corpus, since the *Genesis Apocryphon*, together with other compositions, consistently uses *l*, (33) but the *Targum of Job*, despite its archaisms, contains two of the few certain instances of *yt* (11Q10 35:9 and 38:9). (34) Some of them, however, could in theory have been influenced by Hebrew 'et and therefore do not possess any diagnostic value (e.g., in 11Q10 38:9 and the genealogical formula 'wld *yt* "and he procreated N.N." in 4Q559 3:8f). In other cases, however, it seems more likely that *yt* is a reflex of the Western Aramaic vernacular, without this being necessarily more recent. Last but not least, some texts have infinitives of the derived stems with an /m-/ prefix, i.e., 4QAmr^b (4Q544 1:1) and 4QTQahat (4Q542 1 ii:6), (35) and thus depart from the Achaemenid standard. Neither feature leads to clear-cut chronological conclusions.

Terminology proves likewise elusive, because the surviving material only reflects a small part of the lexicon of the older stages of Aramaic. But considerations along these lines must not be excluded

(29) Beyer, *Texte* I, 103. According to similar spelling mistakes, several Bar-Kosiba-letters attest the same phenomenon. R. Weiss, "Further Notes on the Qumran Targum to Job," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 25 (1974): 13-18, attempts to identify some other mistakes of the copyist.

(30) References can be found in Fassberg, "Qumran Aramaic," 25-26.

(31) Beyer, *Texte* I, 563.

(32) Folmer, *Aramaic Language*, 340-71.

(33) Beyer, *Texte* II, 93, also detects an instance of *yt* in *GenAp* 10:8 (*whllw wšbh yt dkrwn* "And rejoice and praise the memory [...]!", the {t} being unclear), but the reading is uncertain. Fitzmyer, *Genesis Apocryphon*, does not endeavour to identify the letters following *wšbh*.

(34) For the other examples, see Stadel, *Hebraismen*, 65.

(35) Beyer, *Texte* I, 150; II, 18. Such forms also occur sporadically in older texts; see now Folmer, "Alt- und Reichsaramäisch," 121-22.

from the discussion, because they can affect significant matters of interpretation. The fact that the *Targum of Job*, for example, contains a word hitherto only attested in late Old and Official Aramaic, i.e., the causative stem of the root *wšr* “to send” (32:3: *twšr* “you send away”), has been adduced, not altogether implausibly, in support of the view that this text has roots in the Achaemenid period. (36) If the word in question had indeed disappeared completely from living usage during Hellenistic times, it would have been difficult to function as an archaism. The use of words particular to the *Targum of Job* would thus corroborate some other evidence for a relatively early date. Supposedly, also the employment of correct Achaemenid terminology in the *Book of Tobit*, which is unattested elsewhere in the Qumran corpus, might bear on issues of relative chronology. Such terms include *hmrkl* /*hamārakal*/ “financial administrator” in 1:22 (37) as well as the corresponding abstract noun *hmrklwt* in 1:21. While this might reinforce from a linguistic point of view the commonly-held, relatively early dating on the basis of the contents between 225 and 175 B.C.E., (38) one should not underestimate the learning current in scribal circles even at later periods. The opposite phenomenon, however, is even harder to demonstrate. It has been suggested, just to highlight one particular instance, that the expressions *bny nhwr*’ “sons of light” and *bny hšwk*’ “sons of darkness” in the *Visions of Amram* (4Q548 1:11.16) resemble the ubiquitous usage of these terms in the *Rule of the Community* (*IQS*) and the *War Scroll* (*IQM*). (39) Does this necessarily imply that the *Visions of Amram* are a later, sectarian, composition? Presumably not, because at least the phrase “sons of (the troops of) darkness,” meaning demons, also occurs in a Babylonian magic bowl with no obvious Qumranic connections (40) and is thus indicative of a more widespread dualism. At most, its occurrence in the *Visions of Amram* could account for the fact that this text became part of the Qumran library.

The next step naturally consists in connecting such a relative chronology of linguistic peculiarities with the framework often called “absolute” chronology. For this purpose, datable manuscripts containing a specific feature provide a suitable *terminus ad quem*. Yet in a number of respects, the attempt to bridge the gap between the typological and the anagraphic date turns out to be the most vulnerable element. Here the discussion about a limited set of linguistic traits, as

(36) Beyer, *Texte* I, 282.

(37) For references to Achaemenid documents, see Beyer, *Texte* II, 385 (s.v.).

(38) J.A. Fitzmyer, *Tobit* (Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature; Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2003), 50-54.

(39) Fassberg, “Qumran Aramaic,” 22 with note 16.

(40) No. 13, line 9, in J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls. Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (3d ed. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998), 198-214. Note also *gbry hšwkh* “the men of darkness” *ibid.*, line 20.

it has been going for the past fifty years since Kutscher's article from 1958, can still make progress in the light of new material. Leaving aside some nagging doubts about the reliability of the typological method for dating manuscripts, it is not sufficient simply to count "older" and "younger," or "archaic" and "innovative," hallmarks and compare their numbers according to usual practice. Most importantly, their respective weight must be assessed. It has already been suggested above that not every orthographical modernism is equally indicative of a recent date. Similarly, not every divergence from Official Aramaic points to a younger development, since the evolution of language by means of diachronic change is not the only factor which causes variation in a corpus.

Geographical, or dialectal, diversity comes to mind most readily. But while its importance has been demonstrated sufficiently for other Aramaic corpora, a purely "horizontal" perspective does not take one very far in Qumran studies. Past attempts to point out assumed Eastern Aramaic features at least in the *Targum of Job* and the *Genesis Apocryphon* on the basis of degemination and word-order (41) have been unsuccessful, since these traits are part of the common standard language, yet, *pace* Kutscher and Greenfield, Official Aramaic cannot be classified as Eastern Aramaic. (42) Hence, divergences from Palestinian usage must not simply count as "Easternisms." Reflexes of local variation mostly seem to affect words containing laryngeals, because, as has been outlined above, the pronunciation of these sounds was weak in several adjacent regions, including Samaria, Eastern Jordan, and the South-Eastern fringe areas of Galilee. (43)

Given the limited evidence for dialectal variation, social factors appear to play a more important role. Consequently, one has to account for the coexistence of different "registers," such as "standard" versus "sub-standard," and perhaps even different literary traditions. This calls for a stricter distinction between genuinely archaic features which might point to an earlier date of composition of a particular text and conscious archaisms on the part of the scribes. An even more old-fashioned style of Aramaic than the literary language of the Qumran corpus is also attested in several inscriptions from the Persian Gulf, in all likelihood composed between the first and the third centuries C.E. These texts appear to be an extremely close reproduction of the Achaemenid standard with only a more extensive use of *plene* writing. (44) Hence, they exhibit the even more tradi-

(41) T. Muraoka, "The Aramaic of the Old Targum of Job from Qumran Cave XI," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 25 (1974): 425-43.

(42) Gzella, "Heritage," 105-106.

(43) See E.Y. Kutscher, "Contemporary Studies in North-Western Semitic," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 10 (1965): 21-51.

(44) H. Gzella, "Aramaic in the Parthian Period: The Arsacid Inscriptions," in *Aramaic in its Historical and Linguistic Setting*, eds. H. Gzella and M.L. Folmer

tional spellings {zy} for the relative marker (instead of {dy}) and {znh} for the proximal demonstrative (instead of {dnh}). In the more immediate vicinity of the Dead Sea region, a number of Aramaic inscriptions from Mount Gerizim, which have recently been published, show that {zy} (interchanging with {dy}) and the causative-stem prefix with {h} were still common in Samaria during the Herodian period. (45) The mere occurrence of such features on its own thus cannot prove an early date of composition, it is only indicative of a more conservative scribal practice. Such practice does not have to be part and parcel of an unbroken tradition, but could just as well spring from a conscious effort to imitate an older style. A similar renaissance of some Old Canaanite features, for example, can be observed in various corpora of Second Temple Hebrew. (46) Hence, not every Official Aramaic feature discovered in a text from the Qumran corpus necessarily places that text closer to the Achaemenid period as opposed to Achaemenid style. For a consistent diachronic perspective, instances of fashionable archaizing therefore have to be excluded.

Conversely, not every linguistic trait which deviates from the Official Aramaic standard points to a late date of composition. Despite the fact that many presentations of the language of the Qumran Aramaic texts insinuate a linear development from Official to Palestinian Aramaic, a number of purported differences vis-à-vis the standard are actually ancient hallmarks of a Western Aramaic branch which antedate the Persian Empire and survived beneath the surface of Official Aramaic just in order to appear again in Hellenistic and Roman times. (47) Such features include the spelling of the causative-stem prefix with {'} instead of {h}, the by-form /'en/ "if" instead of typologically earlier /hen/, both of which are attested in late sixth-century private letters from Hermopolis, and the object marker /yât/ instead of *l*, which is likewise already known from Old Aramaic, as are infinitive forms of the derived stems with a prefixed /m-/. Moreover, the expansion of a word-final long vowel by /n/, as

(Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission 50; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), 107-30.

(45) See Y. Magen, H. Misgav, and L. Tsfania, *Mount Gerizim Excavations I: The Aramaic, Hebrew and Samaritan Inscriptions* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2004). Most examples come from the stereotypical dedicatory formula *zy hqrb* "that which offered (N.N.);" and may reflect fossilized spellings, but since many inscriptions are broken, the true frequency of these older variants cannot be determined.

(46) Cf. S.E. Fassberg, "The Infinitive Absolute as Finite Verb and Standard Literary Hebrew of the Second Temple Period," in *Conservatism and Innovation in the Hebrew Language of the Hellenistic Period*, eds. J. Joosten and J.-S. Rey (STDJ 73; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 47-60, esp. 55-57.

(47) Perceptively remarked with regards to spelling by M. Sokoloff, "Aramaic Fragments," 203.

in *kmn* /kamān/ and *tmn* /tammān/, also begins in the fifth century at the latest. (48) They are all part of an undercurrent (in terms of orthography and language) which had long accompanied Official Aramaic in the West without regularly reaching the surface. Palestinian Aramaic, as a consequence, has not emerged directly from Official Aramaic by means of a unidirectional process of language change, but it is, like a chemical reaction, the result of intense contact of remnants of the Persian chancellery idiom with a local dialect which had already been in use in Judaea long before the Achaemenids arrived.

This situation has given rise to the assumption of a diglossia situation, that is, an influence of the spoken, Palestinian, dialect on the more traditional literary language, even though the differences may have been slight and did not of necessity amount to bilingualism. Influence from a vernacular can be plausibly demonstrated if the same non-standard features also occur in other, contemporaneous, sources. What is more, it appears quite feasible that the impact of a previous literary standard language began to wane once the Hasmonaean had come to an end. (49) As a consequence, an increasing number of Palestinian-like features in the Aramaic corpus from Qumran could suggest a later date of the respective texts. Certain peculiarities of the Aramaic Bar-Kosiba letters from C.E. 132–35 and later contracts, e.g., the increasing use of the object marker *yt* and the decline of the “short imperfect,” confirm this general picture. But such conclusions are only valid on the basis of cumulative evidence, since occasional sub-standard forms may well crop up much earlier.

In a paper which has attracted less attention than it basically deserves, M. O. Wise voiced a rigorous critique of linguistic taxonomy as practised by Kutscher, Fitzmyer, Sokoloff, and others, claiming that the same method, applied to the same data, could yield exactly opposite results. (50) Instead, he takes the dichotomy between standard language and vernacular, as has already been applied, though with greater caution, by Greenfield and Beyer, perhaps somewhat unduly to the extreme and for the first time enriches it by the distinction between an official, “scribal,” manuscript and a “personal copy” of a text which adheres less strictly to traditional spelling and morphology. A racy tone of voice, a broad focus on book production during that period in general, and a thrust directed right against the mainstream opinion did not prove conducive to the reception of this essay, thereby obscuring, unfortunately, also its valid points. Not all differences, it is true, necessarily come down to a distinction between

(48) Beyer, *Texte* I, 149.

(49) Correctly pointed out by Beyer, *Texte* I, 34–35.

(50) M.O. Wise, “Accidents and Accident: A Scribal View of Linguistic Dating of the Aramaic Scrolls from Qumran,” in *Studies in Qumran Aramaic*, ed. T. Muraoka (*Abr-Nahrain Supplement* 3; Louvain: Peeters, 1992), 124–67. See also Cook, “Remarks,” 219 with note 50.

the written and the spoken language, because some of them might be indicative of various literary styles. One should note that even the Official Aramaic literary tradition has undergone some changes in Palestine, as it appears from a few distinctive features common to various corpora of “Jewish Literary Aramaic” from that area, including Aramaic material from the Bible, Qumran, and other places in Judaea. (51)

However, instead of simply arguing that “linguistic dating of the Aramaic DSS is an exercise in futility,” as Wise does, (52) one should utilize non-linear models of the development of Aramaic and its multi-dialectal scribal context with competing orthographies for improving the underlying typological method. This implies 1) a stricter distinction between spelling and grammar; 2) a more efficient “filter” in order to convincingly identify alterations on the basis of contemporary pronunciation or morphology and against the background of a typology of frequent modifications; 3) a sophisticated appreciation of orthographic, grammatical, and lexical features which lend themselves less easily to imitation than others, thereby account for their weight rather than their number. Especially the third facet of a refined typological method could profit considerably from further work on historical syntax. The latter has so far been largely confined to word order, an intriguingly complicated area of linguistics, but this would be the topic of another contribution.

The case-studies presented in the course of this paper thus suggest that linguistic dating of the Aramaic texts from Qumran is ripe for reinvestigation. A comparative framework which includes the entire material might confirm conclusions arrived at by different means, modify current assumptions concerning the relative or absolute date of a particular text, or identify with greater certainty cases which have to remain inconclusive. Ideally, linguistic and contextual features are to be studied hand in hand, and that will in all likelihood yield results both surprising and interesting. It is thus not altogether implausible that finer diachronic distinctions can be made within the larger corpus of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, including the Qumran compositions. Before such a new, and no doubt valuable, endeavour has been undertaken, however, no existing chronology of the texts should *a priori* be enforced on the study of the material.

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(51) Such as occasional /-ā'-/ in gentilics instead of /-āy-/ before another vowel, e.g., /kašdā'in/ “Chaldaeans” in Dan 3:8 and, similarly, the participle of “hollow roots” (/qāyem/>/qā'em/ “standing”); some feminine nouns ending in */-ī/ have plural forms with /-aw-/ instead of /-iy-/; the 3rd person “imperfect” of *hwy* “to be” has a preformative /l-/.

(52) Wise, “Accidents and Accidence,” 167.