ARAMAISMS: NOT WHAT THEY USED TO BE[1]

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ABSTRACT

For approximately two centuries scholars have sought to identify "Aramaisms" in Biblical Hebrew texts and utilise their presence as evidence for a post-exilic date of composition. In this article it is demonstrated that many features which have historically been identified as Aramaisms were not stable during the transmission of the Bible, as the presence or absence of Aramaic elements varies between the Masoretic Text and the biblical Dead Sea Scrolls. It is thus argued that the presence of Aramaisms is not a reliable criterion for linguistic dating as Aramaisms could often reflect Aramaic influence during a stage of the text's transmission, rather than the time of its composition.

INTRODUCTION: THE DIACHRONY DEBATE

Linguistic dating

For the last two centuries it has been typical to identify chronologically distinct phases within Biblical Hebrew (BH) (Young 2003b:1; Naudé 2004:87). While there is some variety in the labelling of the phases, a significant dichotomy distinguishes between the Classical, Standard or Early Biblical Hebrew (CBH, SBH or EBH) of the pre-exilic times and the Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) of the post-exilic times (Hurvitz 2014:1 & 1973:76; cf. Young 2003b:3–4). Indisputably post-exilic books such as Daniel, Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah are typically used as a reference point for defining LBH (e.g. Hurvitz 2014:9–10). Linguistic dating is the practice of assigning a date to a biblical text of uncertain composition date in accordance with the phase of BH to which it appears to conform (cf. Rezetko and Young 2014:395). In favour of the chronological approach, it is claimed that the pre-exilic inscriptions demonstrate many similarities to EBH, whereas late Hebrew sources such as the Qumran Hebrew of the

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Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) and Mishnaic Hebrew (MH) demonstrate important similarities to LBH (Joosten 2005:338–339; Hurvitz 1997:30). Within the chronological approach, Chronicles is considered to represent typologically younger Hebrew than Samuel-Kings (Hurvitz 2006:195). Ezekiel has been seen by some to represent a transitional stage between EBH and LBH (Joosten 2005:338–339; Hurvitz 2006:207; cf. Naudé 2000:68–69). For a detailed survey of the diachronic study of BH, see Naudé (2004, 2010, and 2012).

The challenge to the chronological model

Pre-exilic LBH and post-exilic EBH

Ehrensvärd (2003:175–186) argues that the books of Isaiah, Joel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, commonly dated to the late exilic or post-exilic times, are written in EBH. If correct, the import of this is that EBH continued to be written after the exile (Ehrensvärd 2003:177). Eskhult (2005) and Joosten (2005), in defence of the chronological approach, argue that late writers of BH betray their lateness in their syntax, even if they are relatively successful in archaising their language otherwise. Ehrensvärd (2003:172) observes, however, that even in the syntax "we do not find significant traits that are found exclusively in one group – the differences are differences in frequency".

While acknowledging general points of similarity between the pre-exilic inscriptions and SBH, Young (2003c:308) challenges the view that they are to be equated with SBH, arguing that they should be seen as an independent corpus within ancient Hebrew. In support of his argument he identifies several links between the pre-exilic inscriptions and LBH (Young 2003c:292–299). He also notes that there are systematic differences between the orthography of the inscriptions and that of BH, amongst them the 3rd masculine singular suffixes (Young 2003c:308–309).[2] From a different angle, he argues that several late sources from Qumran have a lower concentration of LBH elements than the core LBH books, and that some, such as the *Pesher Habbakuk*, should be considered EBH (Young 2008:35–37). Young

[2] Joosten (2005:336) dismisses the difference in orthography as linguistically irrelevant.

(2003c:278) accepts that LBH generally represents a typologically later form of Hebrew than SBH. Nonetheless, he argues that "LBH or proto-LBH already existed in the pre-exilic period", and that SBH "certainly continued to be used in the post-exilic period" (Young 2005:348). He thus contends that "No linguistic features... are linked exclusively to only one chronological phase of BH" (Young 2005:348). Young (2003d:313) asks the pertinent question: "If SBH could be used after the exile, and LBH before the exile, is it at all possible … to date the language of any part of biblical literature?"

Fluidity of less common linguistic features

Rezetko and Young (2014:59) note that in the historical linguistic analysis of BH it is commonly assumed "that the Hebrew language of the MT represents largely unchanged the actual language used by the original authors of biblical writings". They argue that such an assumption is "out of line with the consensus view of specialists on the history of the text of the Hebrew Bible" (Rezetko and Young 2014:60).

Young (2005:349–350) also observes that there is substantial linguistic variation between the 1QIsa[a], 4QCant[b], and the Masoretic versions of these texts. He takes this to indicate that "scribes could *and did* decisively change the linguistic profile of Biblical Hebrew books" (Young 2005:350, emphasis original).[3] Young thus considers it possible that the linguistic profile of many books in the MT could stem from some stage in the textual transmission, rather than the original authors (Young 2005:350). More recently, Rezetko and Young (2014:402), having conducted several cross-textual variable analysis (CTVA) studies and variationist analyses (VA)[4] on biblical passages, conclude that between parallel passages in the MT, and between the MT and other texts, the "common linguistic features of BH appear relatively stable", but "the less

[3] It is worth observing, however, that the MT "reflects a very conservative manuscript tradition vis-à-vis other biblical text types at Qumran" (Zevit 2012:471). See Zevit (2012:468–473) for a critique of the textual issues presented in Young, Rezetko & Ehrensvärd (2008a & 2008b) as an "oversimplification", and see Rezetko and Young (2014:100–105, 598) for their response.

[4] See the outline of the theory and method for these analyses in Rezetko and Young (2014) chapters 4 and 7.

common linguistic features are highly fluid". Below, after surveying some of the notable scholarship on Aramaisms, a collection of features labelled as Aramaisms will be subjected to a type of CTVA in an attempt to evaluate the stability or fluidity of such features.

A SURVEY OF SCHOLARSHIP ON ARAMAISMS

Introduction

Numerous references in the patriarchal traditions of the Pentateuch indicate that the Hebrews traced their relationship with the Aramaeans and their language back to the earliest times (Hurvitz 2003:24; Kutscher 1982:73). Indeed, Hebrew and Aramaic coexisted in the region for almost 2000 years (Hurvitz 2003:24). The reach and prominence of Aramaic was greatly augmented when it became the diplomatic language used by the Assyrian and Persian empires (Watt 2006:444). Despite its prominence, the reference to Aramaic in 2 Kings 18:26–27 is generally understood to indicate that in 700 B.C. only the educated classes of Judah understood Aramaic (Hurvitz 2003:27; Kutscher 1982:71). In biblical books such as Daniel, Esther, and Ezra-Nehemiah, which deal explicitly with exilic and post-exilic scenarios, there is evidence of a notable increase in Aramaic elements within the BH texts. Thus the Babylonian exile in the sixth century B.C. has been viewed as "the critical point of contact between Hebrew and Aramaic" (Hurvitz 1968:234); from the beginnings of that period "Aramaic became the main factor shaping Hebrew" (Kutscher 1982:71). Observing the increase in the prominence of Aramaic influence in clearly post-exilic biblical texts, scholars from the nineteenth century up to the present have sought to identify "Aramaisms" in BH texts of uncertain date, and use them as evidence that the text in question is of post-exilic origin. The precise definition of an "Aramaism" has been refined over the years, and the extent to which Aramaisms can be used to argue for a late date has been questioned and investigated.

Kautzsch (1902)

While a great deal of discussion on the topic of Aramaisms had already taken place before 1902, Kautzsch's monograph *Die Aramaismen im Alten Testament* was the first which attempted to gather together all the "Aramaisms" in the Old Testament. Despite original plans to include grammatical Aramaisms, the study was limited to lexical Aramaisms due to time restrictions (Kautzsch 1902:iii). The main part of Kautzsch's list was restricted to those Aramaisms which he considered "certain" (1902:21–99),[5] and his main conclusions were based on these findings (1902:99–105), though he also included a list of other Aramaisms suggested by other scholars, which did not meet his criteria for certainty (1902:105–111). Kautzsch (1902:15) used the following three criteria for selection of his "certain" Aramaisms: words which –

a) occur in an Aramaic word form;
b) occur in Western Aramaic with the same meaning, but not Canaanite or South Semitic, and
c) "are either not present in the certainly pre-exilic literature, or are present with another meaning (unknown to Aramaic), and yet become so common from the exile onwards that older, genuine Hebrew roots seem displaced by them".

As a result of his strict criteria he arrived at relatively low totals of "certain" Aramaisms for the Pentateuch, historical books, and Prophets, and higher totals for the Writings (1902:99–103). His total number of Aramaisms was 153, consisting of 63 verbal forms, 75 nouns, 5 adjectives and 10 particles, occurring in a total of 553 instances (1902:99). His overall conclusion in light of his results was that

> The influence of Aramaic on the Old Testament Hebrew is in the lexical respect far less than one has thus far been predisposed to assume (1902:99).

Despite this significant observation, Kautzsch (1902:104) made the following assertion concerning linguistic evidence which would be criticised by later scholars:

[5] In the German: *zweifellos*, "doubtless".

> … aside from a few examples (which in any case allow a satisfactory explanation) a doubtless Aramaism is still strong evidence for the composition of the section in question in the exilic or post-exilic time. Of course it can concern even an only extremely short gloss for an otherwise old text; then the Aramaism is just evidence for a secondary addition. But such Aramaisms, which are undoubted and essential elements of the actual text, could in most cases suffice to judge the time of origin at least approximately.

Nöldeke (1903:412) in his review of the monograph expressed a warning which has been reiterated by many subsequent scholars: "In all cases one must beware of the vicious circle: 'the passage is late, because it contains one or more Aramaisms' and 'the word or words are Aramaic, because the passage is late'."

It is worth noting that Nöldeke (1903:413) did not consider Kautzsch guilty of such a fallacy, describing his work as a "meticulous investigation". Nonetheless Nöldeke held that Kautzsch made judgements with more assertiveness than he deemed permissible, and he challenged a number of Kautzsch's "certain" Aramaisms (Nöldeke 1903:413–420). Nöldeke thought it reasonable to assume that Hebrew had a wealth of synonyms which might only appear in poetry, and thus he was of the opinion that a number of the Aramaic words used in Job and Proverbs could be good Hebrew Nöldeke 1903:413). He considered מלל a synonym for דבר, just like גבר for איש and עשׂה for פעל (Nöldeke 1903:413). He also urged caution in the identification of Aramaisms solely on the basis of vowel-pointing, as in the cases of סְפָר, כְּתָב, יְקָר, יְעָף, as the Aramaic vowel pointing may not have been the pronunciation of the author (Nöldeke 1903:416). For Nöldeke there was too much uncertainty to comment on the statistics in the conclusion of Kautzsch's monograph (Nöldeke 1903:420).

Wagner (1966)

There were substantial developments in the fields of linguistics and Semitic studies in general in the decades which followed Kautzsch's monograph, and the scholar who attempted to incorporate these into a new overview of the Aramaisms was Max

Wagner in his monograph *Die lexikalischen und grammatikalischen Aramaismen im alttestamentlichen Hebräisch* (1966). While the main part of this work dealt with lexical Aramaisms (Wagner 1966:17–121), it included a section devoted to grammatical Aramaisms (Wagner 1966:121–138). Wagner built on the work of Kautzsch, describing his work as a "great service" and only disagreeing with 38 of his 153 certain Aramaisms (Wagner 1966:9–10). However, Wagner considered Kautzsch's three criteria for the selection of Aramaisms nearly impossible to satisfy, and judged that excluding the Aramaisms which were adopted early and naturalised gave the wrong overall impression of the influence of Aramaic (Wagner 1966:10). Wagner's own study, on the other hand, included words of a foreign origin (e.g. Persian, Akkadian) if Aramaic was the medium through which the word reached Hebrew (Wagner 1966:13). His list of lexical Aramaisms also included personal and place names, so long as they concerned Hebrew individuals or Israelite towns (Wagner 1966:14). Furthermore, it contained conjectured Aramaisms based on textual emendations, and also Aramaisms in Sirach (Wagner 1966:14). The lists of biblical passages containing each Aramaism are divided into those deemed "pre-exilic" and "exilic/post-exilic".

Wagner's methodology was sharply criticised by many scholars who reviewed his work (e.g., Greenfield 1968; Hurvitz 1969; Morag 1972; cf. Polzin 1976:10). Greenfield's (1968:233) comments on it are worth noting:

> All in all a useful book – but one which must be used with caution. The author is innocent of knowledge of modern linguistics. The problems engendered by "Languages in Contact" … do not exist for him … He does not offer firm criteria for judging the lateness of a work which is not obviously postexilic … He does not show awareness of the particular situation of Proverbs or Job … The advances in our knowledge of Aramaic, both Ancient and Western, and most pertinent to this problem, are not reflected in Wagner's book.

Hurvitz (1969:183) criticised Wagner for not establishing "clear-cut criteria by which overly doubtful examples would automatically drop out of the discussion", listing אֵיָל

אַרְיֵה and זְכָרוֹן as examples which should not have been included in his list. Morag's (1972:300) concluding evaluation reflects a common sentiment:

> In sum, a monograph which will deal with the Aramaisms of Biblical Hebrew in a way appropriate to the high standards that should be prescribed by the achievements attained in Semitics and in modern linguistics is still a *desideratum*.

E. Y. Kutscher

Kutscher's posthumously published *A history of the Hebrew language* (1982) contains a valuable discussion of the influence of Aramaic on Hebrew (1982:§100). Kutscher (1982:72) begins by identifying a number of linguistic traits which he does not think should be attributed to Aramaic influence:

- Non-standard forms and roots which appear almost exclusively in Archaic BH poetry which are standard in Aramaic, but belong to the common Semitic heritage of Hebrew and Aramaic. Examples include the root אתה ("come") and the form of the 3rd person fem. sg. perf. as in אָזְלַת in Deuteronomy 32:36.
- Biblical passages where roots and forms not standard to BH are used to characterise the language of a foreign speaker, e.g., the use of מִשָּׁלָנוּ, נָחְתִּים, and אֵיכֹה by Aramaic speakers in 2 Kings 6:8–13, or תִּבְעָיוּן, הֵתָיוּ, אֵתָיוּ, and בְּעָיוּ by Edomite-Arab speakers in Isaiah 21:11–14.
- Aramaisms in Wisdom literature, such as the word בַּר (= BH בֵּן) used in Proverbs 31:2. As Wisdom literature was considered to be of Eastern origin, Aramaic colouring may have been part and parcel of the genre.

Among the morphological elements indicative of genuine Aramaic influence in the verb, Kutscher (1982:74) lists the 2nd person fem. sg. perf. ending *-ti*, the 3rd person fem. sg. perf. ending *-at*, the form יִקְטֹלְנָה of the 3rd person fem. pl. impf. In the noun, he mentions the form הַקְטָלָה of the *Hiph'il* verbal noun, e.g., לַהֲנָפָה ("to sift", vs Heb. *הנופה) in Isaiah 30:28, and the קְטָל noun-pattern, as in the form כְּתָב ("writing", vs Heb. כְּתוֹב) (1982:74–75). In the area of syntax, he notes that the decreasing use of the *waw*

conversive in LBH may have been due to Aramaic influence, as "the tense system of MH exactly parallels that of Aramaic", but it could also be due to parallel development (1982:75). Kutscher considered the domain of vocabulary "the firmest ground when establishing Aramaic influence on Hebrew" because "Certain Aramaic consonants are historically identical with other consonants in Hebrew", as in the example of צלל \ טלל (1982:75).[6] Kutscher (1963) also proposed criteria for identifying Aramaic calques in Hebrew.

Avi Hurvitz

The Israeli scholar known for his extensive work on the typology of LBH has specifically addressed the topic of Aramaisms at least twice (Hurvitz 1968; 2003). In his first article addressing the topic,[7] Hurvitz (1968:234–240) directly addresses the question of the extent to which Aramaisms can be used in determining the age of a biblical text of uncertain date. Hurvitz asserts that, since earlier texts which contain no other traces of late language also contain sporadic Aramaisms, "evidence of Aramaic influence alone cannot serve as decisive proof for arguing a late date for a given text" (Hurvitz 1968:234).

Hurvitz (1968:235) makes a very important point which cannot be ignored when discussing the relationship between Hebrew and Aramaic: there are various dialects of Aramaic, which are subject to both geographical and chronological variation.[8] Thus it is possible that even a book with many Aramaisms, such as Job, was influenced by Early Aramaic and not the Aramaic of the Persian period, in which case the Aramaisms would not be an indication of lateness (Hurvitz 1968:236). Aramaisms in books such as Proverbs or Song of Songs may also have explanations other than a late

[6] More recently Pat-El (2012:246) has argued that attention be redirected from Aramaic lexemes in Hebrew to syntactic change resulting from Aramaic influence, as she considers syntactic interference "a better indicator of long and extensive contact".

[7] According to Rendsburg (2003:127), this article of Hurvitz "stands as a solid statement" and aside from enlargements and enhancements in the years since then, "nothing has contradicted the basic outline described by Hurvitz".

[8] Pat-El (2008) has attempted to identify such evidence of Aramaic dialect variation within LBH.

composition, such as an origin in Early Aramaic for the former, or a northern origin for the latter (Hurvitz 1968:236). When Aramaisms are used in the description of foreign nations and peoples, they "may well reflect the use of peculiar expressions characteristic of a foreign language" and could be considered stylistic devices rather than loanwords (Hurvitz 1968:236–237). For this reason Hurvitz stresses that it is the Imperial Aramaic of the Persian period which should be taken into account when attempting to identify biblical compositions from this period (Hurvitz 1968:237). In Hurvitz's opinion, the immediate successors to Imperial Aramaic – Eastern and Western Aramaic – should not be ignored completely, least of all Jewish Aramaic (p. 237). Hurvitz concludes from the above discussion that "one should be extremely cautious in utilizing the evidence of Aramaisms as a means of dating a given biblical text" (Hurvitz 1968:237). In light of all these concerns, Hurvitz (1968:239–240) suggests three conditions under which Aramaisms can serve as a criterion of lateness:

> 1) Where each Aramaism both satisfies the requirements of linguistic 'opposition' and has an existence and continuity in the later strata of the Hebrew language …
> 2) Where the Aramaisms in the text under investigation are by no means insignificantly isolated elements …
> 3) Where, despite the fulfilment of these two conditions, it is not plausible to assume any particular circumstances which may have given the text a peculiar and highly distinctive Aramaising character as early as the pre-exilic period (for instance, the possibility that a given text was coloured by the Northern dialect [Song of Songs], by Wisdom phraseology [Job, Proverbs], or by foreign language [2 Kings]).

Hurvitz (1997:27–28) points out that the Elephantine Aramaic papyri from the fifth century B.C. are valuable external sources for comparison, as they form part of Imperial Aramaic, and display linguistic features characteristic of LBH books. Elsewhere, however, Hurvitz (1981:91–92) describes a reason to be cautious when drawing conclusions based on these papyri:

> … we must always bear in mind that although the Elephantine papyri were *written down* in the fifth century B.C.E., the language employed in these texts was not *created* suddenly in the Persian period... It is, therefore, perfectly clear that Elephantine Aramaic on the one hand and Biblical Hebrew on the other, even when exhibiting similar (or identical) linguistic usages, could have drawn, independently and at different times, on a common third source, earlier than both.

In his more recent treatment of the matter, Hurvitz (2003) highlights several developments in the study of Aramaisms. The discovery of Aramaic inscriptions dating as early as the beginning of the first millennium B.C. are evidence that "Aramaic was widespread and enjoyed high prestige already in the pre-exilic period", thus rendering invalid the previously common view that Aramaisms were "necessarily indicative of the late biblical era" (Hurvitz 2003:29). Furthermore, the Samaria Ostraca demonstrate dialectal differences between CBH and the language of the epigraphical material from Judah, such as שת instead of שנה (Hurvitz 2003:30). Thus when Aramaisms are identified in works such as Song of Songs which may have had a northern origin, they may reflect early dialectal differences, rather than late language (Hurvitz 2003:30–31). Recapping previous observations, Hurvitz notes that archaisms in poetry, stylistic usage of Aramaic for foreign speakers, and Aramaic in Wisdom Literature should not necessarily be considered late (Hurvitz 2003:29–33). Elsewhere Hurvitz (2014:6) specifies that instances of Aramaic roots and forms in poetic parallelism in particular should be regarded as archaisms, e.g. בוא || אתא for "come" in Deuteronomy 33:2 and דרך || ארח for "way" in Genesis 49:17.

Hurvitz (2003:34–35) nonetheless maintains that some Aramaisms can be taken as a sign of lateness, among them numerous linguistic innovations in the late books, but the three criteria of distribution, linguistic contrast, and external sources must still be met. The word אִגֶּרֶת ("letter") is shown to meet these three criteria, as it appears only in the late compositions Esther, Nehemiah and Chronicles, deviates from the normal Hebrew סֵפֶר and is very common in Imperial Aramaic and in the Targums (2003:35).

Additional concerns

Rendsburg

Distinguishing between two main dialects, Israelian Hebrew and Judahite Hebrew, Rendsburg (2003:106) argues that some texts which do not have a northern setting may reflect Israelian Hebrew "lexical and/or grammatical traits better known from Phoenician and/or Ugaritic". Rendsburg (2006:175) observes that several features labelled as Aramaisms have also been attested in Canaanite texts: the שַׁלִּיט of Genesis 42:6 in Ugaritic, חֵלֶף of Numbers 18:21, 31 in Phoenician, and מכס of Numbers 31 in Punic. Rendsburg (2003:106) also proposes that addressee switching in prophetic speeches directed at foreign nations could explain the presence of Aramaic-like forms in passages such as Isaiah 17:12, which is addressed to Damascus and contains the forms "יהמיון ('they roar', with retention of the *yod*) and כבירים ('great, strong, mighty')". Furthermore, he suggests that roots characteristic of Aramaic may have been chosen for the purpose of alliteration, such as the root מלל in Genesis 21:7 in the vicinity of the root מול ("circumcise") and גמל ("wean") in verses 4 and 8 (Rendsburg 2003:106–107).

The value of loanwords

In his study on loanwords in BH, Eskhult (2003:11) observes that loans from Aramaic are particularly difficult to prove, because of how closely Hebrew and Aramaic are related. It is easier to discern loanwords from languages less closely related to Hebrew, such as Akkadian, Egyptian and Persian (2003:11). Eskhult (2003:17–18) also argues that some roots which exist in BH in a Hebrew and an Aramaic phonetic form have a semantic distinction between the two forms. For example, he argues that נצר means "watch, guard, keep" whereas נטר means "to bear a grudge against someone" (aside from Song of Songs 1:6, 8:11–12), and רבץ means "lie down" but רבע means "lie down for copulation" (2003:17–18). As he holds that the distinction "seems inherited from oldest times", he suggests that attestation of the roots נטר and רבע "are not *a priori* to be judged as affected by Aramaic usage in a period when Aramaic was about to surpass Hebrew" (2003:17–18). Eskhult (2003:11) explains the occurrence of

standard Aramaic verbal roots and forms in Hebrew poetry as the result of a "common word stock that, in distribution, is employed differently in the two languages".

Young, Rezetko and Ehrensvärd

Young, Rezetko and Ehrensvärd (2008a:219–220) criticise Hurvitz's approach of using Aramaic evidence for the purpose of determining the chronological development of BH. They observe (Young et al. 2008a:219–220) that we have a very limited corpus of Old Aramaic texts, the vast majority of our Aramaic evidence being post-exilic or later:

> Because of this fact, it is almost inevitable that BH forms, whether early or late, if attested in Aramaic at all, will be found in a 'late' source. It is easy to find late Aramaic parallels for a vast array of BH linguistic features, but this is a discovery of no significance for BH chronology. It is an especially weak argument from silence to claim that if a form is unattested in our limited Old Aramaic sources, it therefore did not exist in that period... Therefore when arguing from the chronology of Aramaic to the chronology of Hebrew we are not arguing from something we have extensive knowledge about.

Young et al. (2008a:220) point out a common weakness in the identification of Aramaisms: "there is often a failure in the literature on LBH even to argue that an Aramaism is in fact late within Aramaic". They note that אִגֶּרֶת, a favourite LBH term referred to by Hurvitz (e.g., Hurvitz 2006:200; 2014:5), is "attested already in Aramaic texts from the Neo-Assyrian period", and thus it is "contemporary with EBH" (Young et al. 2008a:220). They also note some examples where the spelling of Aramaic-like forms in Hebrew and the commonly accepted Hebrew chronology do not conform to the chronology indicated by the Aramaic evidence. For example, concerning the form תנה ("repeat", = Heb. שׁנה) in Judges 5:11, the first usage of *taw* for this phoneme in Aramaic is attested far later than the date c. 1100 B.C. commonly supposed for the biblical passage (Young et al. 2008a:220). Similarly, the proto-Semitic consonant *ḏ* "is spelled with a *qoph* in Old Aramaic and *'ayin* in later

Aramaic", yet in the presumably pre-exilic Psalm 2 the root רעע (= Heb. רצץ) is spelled with *'ayin*, the later Aramaic form (Young et al. 2008b:52).

Summary

As has been seen, the approach of more recent scholars towards the chronological significance of Aramaisms is far more carefully delineated than that of the earlier scholars. Whereas any similarity of a BH text to Aramaic might previously have been labelled summarily under the blanket-term of "Aramaism", in the sense of an Aramaic form which entered Hebrew at a late stage, today one must investigate many alternative explanations for the similarity. While there is still disagreement whether linguistic features such as Aramaisms can be used at all in linguistic dating, one can point to a general scholarly consensus among Hebrew language scholars that "the value of Aramaisms as a chronological marker is extremely dubious" (Young et al. 2008a:221). To the extent that the term "Aramaism" is retained in discussions today, it is important to remember that it is "polysemous and associated with a variety of phenomena" (Hurvitz 2003:37).

ARAMAISMS ATTESTED IN THE BIBLICAL DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Introduction

Rezetko and Young (2014:171–210) analysed the linguistic variants between the MT of Samuel and Qumran Samuel, and noted a rate of one linguistic variant "about every 13 to 17 words" (2014:207). Likewise, in their analysis of parallel passages within the MT they demonstrated that "less common features of Classical Hebrew are highly fluid", and thus conclude that "the current distribution of such forms cannot be relied on as evidence of the language of particular authors at particular times and in particular places" (Rezetko and Young 2014:168). The debatable import of these conclusions is that rare Hebrew linguistic features cannot be used as a reliable indicator of the date of a text, because one cannot be certain that such a form was

present in the original state of a text's composition.[9] As Aramaisms have also been used widely in the linguistic dating of biblical texts, this study seeks to provide information on variation which applies specifically to them.

As Wagner's (1966) monograph is the most extensive list of features which may or not be Aramaisms (Morag 1972:300; Polzin 1976:10), all features in the MT[10] labelled by Wagner as "lexical Aramaisms" were compared to the forms of the corresponding passages in biblical DSS, wherever such passages were extant.[11] The scope of the project only allowed for a limited number of the features included by Wagner as "grammatical Aramaisms" to be considered, and a few features identified by other scholars.

Findings

Due to the fragmentary nature of the biblical DSS, only around 20% of the specific locations containing Aramaisms were attested.[12] It should be noted that where the word "Aramaism" is used in this section, what is meant is nothing more and nothing less than a feature labelled by Wagner (1966) as an Aramaism, unless otherwise indicated. It is understood that a number of these Aramaisms are contested by other scholars.[13]

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9 Forbes (2015:33–34) nonetheless believes that through a statistical technique known as "boosting" even linguistic data with a high error rate may contribute to reliable diachronic analysis.

10 The Leningrad Codex of the MT has been used in this study.

11 Regrettably, the five passages of Ezekiel attested at Masada could not be included in this study. The publications in the *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* series were used as the reference to the Qumran texts.

12 Occasionally the passage containing an Aramaism was partially attested, but there was a lacuna where the Aramaism might have been. In other instances, even the passage was not attested. For both scenarios, it will be said that the "location" containing the Aramaism was not attested – the fragmentary nature of the DSS leaves us without information regarding the absence, presence, or nature of such an Aramaism.

13 For example, as noted above, Hurvitz (1969:183) contests the inclusion of אֵיָל, אַרְיֵה and זִכָּרוֹן. While these three lexemes have been excluded from the study, there is little doubt that some of Wagner's "Aramaisms" which have been included are disputed by other scholars.

The Pentateuch

In the books of the Pentateuch, which already contain comparatively few Aramaisms, very few of the relevant locations were attested in the biblical DSS. The only two instances of variation were in Deuteronomy 8:9. The first variant is apparently only orthographical. The lexical Aramaism מְסָכֶּנֶת (Wagner 1966:79) was spelled *plene* מסכנות in three fragments of Deuteronomy from Cave 4, and was not otherwise attested. The second and more significant variant belongs to a type which will be discussed in more detail below. The writing of a geminate consonant twice in a plural is considered a grammatical Aramaism by Wagner (1966:135). One example he gives of this is הררים in Deuteronomy 8:9. This location was attested four times in the Qumran scrolls: 4QDeut^{f}, 4QDeut^{j}, 4QDeut^{n} and 5QDeut. All four instances have this word spelled with only one *resh*, i.e., הריה.

The Prophets

None of the locations containing Aramaisms in Joshua, Judges, or 1-2 Kings was attested. In 1-2 Samuel, only five locations containing Aramaisms were attested, and of these, three differed from the MT. The lexical Aramaism מרדות (Wagner 1966:80) in the MT of 1 Samuel 20:30 is attested as מרדת in 4QSam^{b}. Though there are text critical difficulties and the original reading is uncertain, it appears that the difference is purely orthographical (Cross, Parry, Saley & Ulrich 2005:233). Two of the five, however, were attested in variant forms which could nullify their classification as Aramaisms:

- The lexical Aramaism אִשׁ (Wagner 1966:30), corresponding to Aramaic אית and Hebrew יש is present in the MT of 2 Samuel 14:19, but in 4QSam^{c} it is the standard Hebrew equivalent, יש (Ulrich 2005:258; cf. Rezetko and Young 2014:562).
- The "beautiful example" of the Aramaic *-ut* afformative, מלכות (Wagner 1966:131), is present in the MT of 1 Samuel 20:31: ומלכותך, but in 4QSam^{b} it is ממלכתך, i.e.

the common BH equivalent ממלכה[14] (cf. Rezetko and Young 2014:568; Dresher 2012:24–26).

Isaiah is by far the best attested text among the Qumran scrolls, and all of the locations containing Aramaisms were attested in 1QIsa[a], some also in 1QIsa[b] and fragments from Cave 4. While there were many orthographical variants which were not relevant to the "Aramaic" status of the words, several variants were more relevant:

- In 10:1, the MT form חֹקְקֵי is taken as an Aramaised writing of the geminate consonant twice (Wagner 1966:135). 1QIsa[a] has given the word the *plene* vocalisation חוקקי, which could indicate that the word in question is different, possibly the construct form of the participle חוקקים. The context, however: החוקקים חוקקי און\חקקי makes this scenario unlikely, and so the vocalisation of 1QIsa[a] could be a mistake. 4QIsa[a] has the same form as the MT.
- In 23:15, the MT form נשכחת is suggested by Kutscher (1974:191) to be an Aramaism, but in 4QIsa[c] it is the normal Hebrew form, נשכחה. In 1QIsa[a] the word is missing.
- Wagner (1966:39) labels MT גְּדוּפִים in 43:28 as a lexical Aramaism, but in 1QIsa[a] it is vocalised גודפים. There is a comparable difference regarding this root in 51:7, where 1QIsa[a] and 1QIsa[b] both have ממגדפותם with an extra *mem*, in contrast to MT מִגְּדֻפֹּתָם. Thus the exact form גְּדוּף appears not to be attested in the Isaiah texts from Qumran.
- One of the most striking variants concerns the usage of the root בחר in MT 48:10 בחרתיך with the Aramaic meaning "test" not characteristic of Hebrew, which would usually use the root בחן (Wagner 1966:33; Kautzsch 1902:22; cf. Nöldeke 1903:415). The form of 1QIsa[a] does in fact contain the standard Hebrew root[15]:

[14] A recent and extensive discussion of the significance of the lexeme מלכות and the *-ut* suffix can be found in Rezetko and Young (2014:329–350). They observe that "late writers and editors of biblical and other Hebrew writings also had frequent and sometimes consistent recourse to ממלכה" and conclude that "it is an error to use מלכות as 'a classic illustration' of language change in ancient Hebrew".

[15] Kutscher (1974:223) comments on this difference: "The scribe substituted the common verb בחן which is found in the Bible some 30 times. One must however admit that were the situation reversed, i.e. Had the Scr. read בחר = MT בחן, one could have claimed that it had replaced a Hebr. root by an Aram. one! Hence, one cannot be absolutely certain ...".

בחנתיכה. Unfortunately the attestation of this word in 4QIsa[d] ends just before the relevant consonant: בח[ר\נתיך.

- The MT form הן of 54:15 is taken to be the Aramaic equivalent of the expected Hebrew אם (Wagner 1966:46; Kautzsch 1902:26; Young et al. 2008b:34). 1QIsa[a] has הנה, however, a common Hebrew word with a different meaning, which also makes sense in the context.[16] הנה is notably also the *qere* for הן in the MT of Isaiah 54:16.

In Jeremiah only three passages containing Aramaisms were attested (10:9; 13:22; 31:20), all instances agreeing with the MT. There was minimal attestation of the Minor Prophets, and when locations containing Aramaisms were attested, there were no variants.[17] There was one instance in Jonah where a Qumran scroll showed a different form of the Aramaism in the MT: in Jonah 1:8 4QXII[a] has בשלמי, the form present in the MT in 1:7, but the MT has fuller Hebrew באשר למי. The text of MurXII, however, agrees with the MT reading.

Writings

In the Psalms, 34 out of 145 – approximately one quarter of the locations containing Aramaisms – were attested at Qumran. As in Isaiah, most variants in Psalms were orthographical, but the following were relevant to the "Aramaic" status of the word:

- In the MT of 103:3–5, five instances of the 2nd person fem. sg. ending are spelled כי, and are labelled by Wagner (1966:130) as grammatical Aramaisms: עונכי, תחלאיכי, חייכי, המעטרכי, נעורכי (cf. Rendsburg 2003:112). All five words were attested in 4QPs[b] without the *yod*, i.e., in the standard Hebrew form. One of the words was also partially attested in 2QPs, also without the *yod*: המעטר]רך. These locations were not attested in any other biblical DSS.
- In 119:131, the MT has the Aramaism יאבתי, but 11QPs[a], the only Qumran text to

[16] Cf. Nöldeke (1903:416), who observed that most of Kautzsch's adduced instances of הן were the short form of Hebrew הנה.

[17] No variants relevant to the Aramaism. For Micah 1:5 MT כאריה appears as בארי]ה in MurXII, and for Nahum 1:2 MT נוטר appears as ונוטר in MurXII.

attest this location, has a root not labelled as an Aramaism:[18] תאבתי.

- The plural form הררי in 133:3, labelled as a grammatical Aramaism (Wagner 1966:135), is present only as singular הר in 11QPs[a]. This variant is less informative than the plural form הרי might have been.

In Proverbs only two passages containing Aramaisms were attested: חָסֹן in 15:6 was partially attested in 4QProv[b]. The only other Aramaism attested was in Proverbs 14:34, where the usage of the word חסד with the meaning "reproach" characteristic of Aramaic and not Hebrew is identified as an Aramaism (Wagner 1966:56; Kautzsch 1902:31–32; Young et al. 2008b:58). In 4QProv[b] Ulrich (2000:185) reads it as חסר, observing that "the surface is damaged at the right side of *resh* and there is a slight rise on the right shoulder; thus the letter could easily be mistaken for *dalet* ...". If the reading חסר is correct, it could be the word חֶסֶר, "poverty", with the resulting meaning in the context וחסר לאמים חטאת: "and sin is [the cause of] the poverty of nations". The root חסר is common in Proverbs, occurring 18 times in the MT, and the specific form חֶסֶר in Proverbs 28:22.

In the biblical DSS of Job, Song of Songs, Ruth and Lamentations, several locations containing Aramaisms were attested, none of them with variants which would challenge the Aramaic status of the words in question. In Qoheleth, the Aramaism וְאִלּוּ in the MT of 6:6 (Wagner 1966:24; Kautzsch 1902:21) was attested as ואם לוא in 4QQoh[a], a standard Hebrew form. As is well known, no portions of Esther were attested in the biblical DSS. The Aramaism זרענים in the MT of Daniel 1:16 appeared as זרעים in 1QDan[a], a form also in the MT of Daniel 1:12, which is not labelled an Aramaism by Wagner. For Ezra, Nehemiah and 1-2 Chronicles, none of the relevant locations was attested.

Aramaisms in the biblical DSS not in MT

During the course of the study, it became apparent that there are also many instances where the biblical DSS have Aramaisms not in the MT. This phenomenon has been

[18] Not labelled an Aramaism by Wagner, though Kautzsch (1902:111) listed תאב amongst the debatable Aramaisms.

examined at greater length by others (e.g., Fassberg 2015:12). Tov (2000:209) has observed a number of features which he attributes to Aramaic influence on the scribe of 4QCant[b], among them the plural form הררי in Song of Songs 2:17 where the MT has הרי, the spelling אתי of the 2nd person fem. sg. pronoun, where the MT has את in 4:8, and the Aramaic plural בשמין where the MT has בשמים in 4:10. Kutscher (1974:23–28, 187–215) has identified a substantial number of features which demonstrate Aramaic influence on 1QIsa[a] which are not present in the MT Isaiah, amongst them Aramaic forms of pronouns (e.g., עלוהי vs MT עליו in Isa. 51:2), pronominal endings (e.g., גואלכי vs גאלך in 49:26), nouns (e.g., יומי vs ימי in 1:1), and verbs (e.g., מהסיר vs מסיר in 3:1) (see also Kutscher 1982:104–106). These features are exactly the type which would be considered Aramaisms in the MT (cf. Kutscher 1974:27), and yet they are here attributed to the scribe:

> Our scribe, whose mother tongue seems to have been Aramaic, and who was undoubtedly familiar with the Aramaic literature of his day, now and again inadvertently grafted Aramaic forms upon the Hebrew text (Kutscher 1974:24).

Rezetko and Young (2014:69–70) note how Kutscher (1974:44, 50, 77, 82–3, 85–86) held to the common assumption that the MT – as opposed to the biblical DSS – "represents in detail the language of the original authors". It is evidently this assumption which compels scholars to attribute Aramaic influence in non-MT manuscripts to the scribe, but Aramaic influence in the MT to the "original".

Interestingly, Hurvitz (2006:196ff.), who also prioritises the MT, makes reference to the spelling of Damascus in 1QIsa[a], which consistently has דרמשק as opposed to דמשק in the MT (Isaiah 7:8; 8:4; 10:9; 17:1; 17:3). Referring to this and external evidence from Aramaic, Hurvitz concludes that the spelling דרמשק is late and "is indicative of the Chronicler's late linguistic profile" (Hurvitz 2006:198–199). If we deduce this from the presence of דרמשק in MT Chronicles, what are we to say about the author(s) of Isaiah? According to the MT, they have an early linguistic profile in respect to the spelling of Damascus, but according to 1QIsa[a], they have a late linguistic profile (cf. Rezetko 2010). Hurvitz seems to unwittingly demonstrate that

the very types of evidence which are used in such linguistic arguments can and do vary between the MT and the biblical DSS.

Summary

The majority of the Aramaisms which were attested did not show variation between the MT and the biblical DSS, and others had orthographical variations which were not relevant to the study. There were, however, a number of significant types of variation which did occur. Occasionally the biblical DSS have a standard Hebrew form where the MT has an Aramaism.[19] It has also been observed that the biblical DSS occasionally have Aramaisms not in the MT, though these are often attributed to the scribe (Kutscher 1974:23–28, 187–215; 1982:104–106; Tov 2000:209). In two verses we have the opposite scenarios occurring between the MT and the DSS with the "Aramaism" הררי, and the standard Hebrew form הרי: In Deuteronomy 8:9 the MT has the Aramaic form ומהרריה, but the four biblical DSS attesting this passage (4QDeut[f], 4QDeut[j], 4QDeut[n] and 5QDeut) have the non-Aramaic form ומהריה. In Song of Songs 2:17, however, the MT has the non-Aramaic form הרי, but 4QCant[b] has the Aramaic form הררי. Rezetko and Young's (2014:568) observation that "characteristic 'late' linguistic features were added and subtracted from the text during its transmission" seems to hold true for "Aramaisms" to some degree.

This phenomenon raises the question as to when an Aramaic form is to be attributed to a later scribe, and when it can safely be attributed to an early stage of the composition and redaction of the text, a stage relevant to dating. Here it must be conceded that a number of lexical Aramaisms are attested multiple times without variation between the MT and the biblical DSS, and for many of them it may be safer to conjecture that they were part of the earliest forms of the text. What is apparent, nonetheless, is that Aramaic influence could affect manuscripts of a biblical text long after its composition. While utilising a criterion such as accumulation might insulate one from the risk of using isolated Aramaisms in an argument for late dating, 1QIsa[a]

[19] See the following verses above: Deut 8:9; 1 Sam 20:31; 2 Sam 14:19; Isa 23:15, 48:10, 54:15; Ps 103:3–5, 119:19; Prov 14:34; Eccl 6:6; Dan 1:16.

demonstrates that a text can even have a high concentration of Aramaic forms which are likely not representative of the "original" language of the text.

CONCLUSION

Early in the twentieth century, the identification of a certain Aramaism in a text was considered by Kautzsch to be relatively compelling evidence that that text could be assigned a late date. Today, even scholars who defend the diachronic approach to BH minimise the value of Aramaisms per se in such linguistic dating, noting that their presence in a text can be explained by many factors other than the increased post-exilic influence of Aramaic, amongst them style, dialect, common linguistic heritage, early borrowings, addressee switching, and alliteration. According to the findings of this study, it would appear that Aramaic influence on a text cannot be safely assumed to represent the "original" form of the text. In light of this, the value of Aramaisms for linguistic dating seems even more dubious than it already seemed in the light of other concerns. It is only with extreme caution and careful investigation of alternative explanations that one should consider using "Aramaisms" as linguistic evidence, and even then it should by no means be the only evidence taken into account. The days of isolated Aramaic features constituting proof of a late date of composition are over.

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