

P 1368/19.

THE AKKADIAN INFLUENCES  
ON ARAMAIC

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THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
ASSYRIOLOGICAL STUDIES • NO. 19  
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS • CHICAGO AND LONDON

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
ORIENTAL INSTITUTE  
CHICAGO, ILL.  
1974

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book represents a substantial revision of my doctoral dissertation presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Yale University in candidacy for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1970. Its subject was suggested by Professor Franz Rosenthal, who also served as my major advisor. Other readers, all of whom gave freely of their time and valuable counsel, were professors J. J. Finkelstein, W. W. Hallo, and Marvin H. Pope. I take this opportunity to offer them once again my appreciation and gratitude and to express the hope that this study does no disservice to the consistently high quality of their instruction and scholarship.

The decision to prepare this work for publication, and to do so as soon as possible, was taken at the urging of many teachers and colleagues, chief among them the late Professor E.Y. Kutscher. His enthusiasm and assurances as to the quality of its contents far outweighed my own dissatisfactions with its less than ideal dissertation style. During my year in Jerusalem and later, during his last trip to America, we discussed together almost every substantive issue treated herein, often disagreeing, to be sure. It is with deep sadness and sincere gratitude that I dedicate this book to the memory of this great scholar, teacher, and friend.

I am grateful to Yale University, whose Sterling Fellowship enabled me to devote full time to the researching of the material collected herein, and to the Hebrew University, for granting me the Warburg Prize and a post-doctoral fellowship which allowed me to spend a year in Jerusalem doing additional research.

Stephen A. Kaufman

Chicago  
April 1974

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culture. Important here have been the works of Benno Landsberger and A. Salonen, and the works of R. Campbell-Thompson are also significant. Certainly most crucial for our immediate purposes are the two modern dictionary projects, the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* and W. von Soden's *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, which already make available an analysis of the majority of the vocabulary of Akkadian. The study of Akkadian grammar was greatly advanced by the publication of von Soden's *Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik*. Our knowledge of Sumerian, also important for the proper understanding of Akkadian, though still far from perfect, has progressed immensely in the last generation.

Nor have Aramaic studies remained static, though perhaps their progress has not been quantitatively as large as the recent achievements of cuneiform studies. Many important new groups of texts have been published, even new dialects discovered. New lexicographical works have very recently appeared, notably dealing with the older stages of Aramaic<sup>9</sup> and with Mandaic.<sup>10</sup> Significant new studies of Aramaic dialects have been made, new issues raised and old ones re-examined. Thus, the time now seems ripe for studies of the type undertaken here.

9. C.-F. Jean and Jacob Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'ouest* (Leiden, 1965); I. N. Vinnikov, "Slovar' aramejskich nadpisj," *Palestinskij Sbornik* III-XIII (1958-68).

10. MD.

## I

## PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

## GOALS OF THIS STUDY

Any etymological study of Aramaic should have at least three immediate results of interest to the philologist. It should improve his knowledge of the meaning of the Aramaic words studied; it should enable him to choose from a group of variants the form that is most probably correct (a problem especially frequent in Jewish Aramaic texts); and it should permit him to derive some rules to guide further etymological inquiries. Because of the special role that Aramaic played in the ancient Near East, however, a properly oriented study of the Akkadian influences on Aramaic should shed light on some other important issues as well. Accordingly, an attempt has been made here to concentrate on the evidence for Akkadian-Aramaic contact during the major period of that contact, roughly the first half of the first millennium B.C., which witnessed the decline of Akkadian as a spoken language, its replacement by Aramaic as the language of Mesopotamia, and the use of Aramaic as the lingua franca of the entire Near East. As a basic outcome of such a study, we might expect an improvement in our knowledge of the relationships which existed between the two languages and between the groups of people that spoke them.<sup>1</sup> More specifically our study should help to illuminate the two languages themselves, or rather the various dialects of the two languages, and their inter-relationships.

Like all long-lived and widespread languages, Akkadian developed many dialects. Modern scholars generally divide them into two major groups—Babylonian and Assyrian—which can be traced as far back as the beginning of the second millennium.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, because of the important position

1. The historian will note that I have chosen to draw few historical conclusions in this work. Problems of intercultural contact in the ancient Near East are of major importance, to be sure, but also of a nature such that the evidence of language can play only a small part in their elucidation. (For some of the problems involved in such a procedure see T. E. Hope, "Loan-Words as Cultural and Lexical Symbols," *Archivum Linguisticum* XIV [1962] 111 f., especially p. 115, and XV [1963] 29 ff.) Accordingly I leave the proper use of such evidence as this work may represent to others.

2. This is not to say that Neo-Assyrian is necessarily a direct lineal descendant of Middle Assyrian, though it almost certainly is, or

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of writing in Mesopotamian society and its long history, the cuneiform sources do not present a complete picture of these dialects in the period with which we are concerned. For literary purposes, in almost all cases a special dialect was employed, termed by many scholars Standard Babylonian, which functioned similarly to modern Literary Arabic,<sup>3</sup> and only brief glimpses of colloquial forms appear. Even in letters and economic documents, which are generally couched in dialectal Akkadian, conservative orthography is predominant, masking the actual pronunciation. Especially in matters of phonetics and phonology, though significant amounts of evidence can be accumulated from the available texts, scholars have been extremely hesitant to propose analyses that seem to contradict so much of the written evidence. At best they speak only of free variation and, in so doing often ignore some of the evidence as well as the first principle of the historical linguist, the regular nature of phonetic change. Fortunately, the study of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian dialects themselves has aroused some renewed interest in recent years.<sup>4</sup> It is hoped that this study can provide some further information on the nature of these dialects for the benefit of Assyriologists.

Similarly, one might expect some help on matters of early Aramaic phonology. To be sure, the problems there are rather different, since the alphabetic system of writing was used, and our interest centers on the bivalent nature of some letters used for phonemes which were beginning to merge with others, notably the spirants, and on evidence for the status of vowel reduction in that early period.

that either of them is a direct lineal descendant of Old Assyrian, which may in fact not be the case. But it is beyond doubt that in all these periods there was a group of mutually intelligible dialects spoken in the geographical area of Assyria which differed from that group spoken in southern Mesopotamia. The extent to which members of the two dialect groups were intelligible to each other at any given moment cannot be determined, but intermittent contact between the two groups no doubt kept the two from increasing their differences to an extreme degree.

3. Inasmuch as this dialect functioned as the language of the official cult and was thus well known orally and aurally, it could well have been spoken on a wide scale among certain classes in some periods. Nevertheless, one can be certain that the traditional orthography masks the current pronunciation even in liturgical use. As with Modern Literary Arabic, different readers of the same text might be expected to produce renditions quite mutually distinctive, each tending toward the phonetics of his own native dialect.

4. See notably for Neo-Assyrian the works of K. Deller. Manfred Dietrich has made an auspicious start on the Neo-Babylonian material.

Not all of the speakers of early Aramaic were in close contact with speakers of Akkadian. Thus, any Akkadian features found in the descendants of such dialects must have spread to them by various means through Aramaic itself. An analysis of these Akkadian features which takes into account the quantity and nature of their distribution in the various Aramaic dialects might be an important new tool in the study of the development of Aramaic, its spread throughout the Near East, and the classification and analysis of the various Aramaic dialects.

In dealing with the Aramaic dialects, however, one is immediately confronted by the problem of terminology on which, except for the broadest outlines, no great agreement is to be found in the literature. A system of terminology based mostly on chronology is now fashionable, using the terms Old Aramaic, Official or Imperial Aramaic, Middle Aramaic, and Late Aramaic, though here, too, there is disagreement, and classificatory presuppositions must be made, especially for those dialects on the boundaries of the various divisions.<sup>5</sup> Although I accept this terminology as adequate in most cases and support its use as an aid to scholarly communication and mutual understanding, it is clearly inadequate for our purposes here. For our terminology must not presuppose solutions to the problems we are trying to solve, nor should it mask some of the differences we are trying to discover. It should by no means be classificatory, but merely descriptive. Accordingly, the terminology to be used herein is given below together with a summary of some of the problems that each dialect or group presents to scholars.

*Old Aramaic.*—By Old Aramaic is meant that Aramaic represented by the earliest known Aramaic texts from Syria up until the end of the eighth century B.C.<sup>6</sup> This is a convenient terminal date because there is a gap of perhaps as much as a century before the next Syrian Aramaic inscriptions known to us. One of the important issues of Old Aramaic studies is whether or not to consider the unique dialect represented by the Hadad and Panammuwa inscriptions from

5. Cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave I*, (2d ed., rev.; Rome, 1971) p. 22n. Many scholars would reserve the term Late Aramaic for the modern dialects and use "middle" for Fitzmyer's "late"; see Jonas C. Greenfield, "Dialect Traits in Early Aramaic," *Leš. XXXII* (1968) 359, n. 1 (Heb.)

6. For the texts and grammar see Rainer Degen, *Altaramäische Grammatik* (AbKM, Vol. XXXVIII, 3 [Wiesbaden, 1969]), who omits the Samalian material, however.