

## I. INTRODUCTION

The subject of this study is the language or dialect of the Aramaic magic bowl texts; it endeavours to present a systematic analysis of the distinctive features of the Aramaic dialect (or dialects) reflected in the magic bowl texts (a more detailed explanation of the aims of the study is presented below in II.1. *Aims of the Study*). The focus is on the phonology and morphology of the language. The syntax of these texts is treated in connection with morphology, though less attention is paid to the syntactic features. The definition 'Aramaic magic bowl texts' refers to texts written in Hebrew square characters, not in Syriac nor Mandaic characters. Thus I limit myself to Aramaic texts which are presumed to be Jewish (see below I.1. *Aramaic Magic Bowls* and II.1. *Aims of the Study*).

### I.1. ARAMAIC MAGIC BOWLS: PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The practice of writing incantations on clay bowls, which resemble modern cereal or soup bowls, is familiar from Mesopotamia and Iran in late antiquity.<sup>1</sup> Numerous bowls were produced in these areas between the 5th and 8th centuries C.E.<sup>2</sup> The incantations under study here were inscribed in ink, generally in spiral fashion on the interior surface of a bowl, sometimes on the exterior surface as well. Texts that are of a basically similar nature are found in all the main dialects of East Aramaic: in Babylonian Jewish Aramaic (BJA), Syriac, and Mandaic.

It is generally thought that the use of the Hebrew script indicates that a bowl text is Jewish in origin. As is pointed out by Jonas Greenfield:

It has become almost a dogma in this field of research that the use of a particular script – Jewish, Mandaic, Syriac, etc. – indicated that the scribe and the person for whom the bowl was written adhered to a particular religion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Several introductions to the subject are available. One should note, at least, Montgomery 1913: 40-116; Naveh & Shaked 1985: 13-19; Isbell 1978: 5ff.; and Hamilton 1971: 7-35. Since good recent general descriptions of the magic bowls abound, the introduction of this study (excluding I.1. *Aramaic Magic Bowls: Preliminary Remarks*) concentrates on the language of these texts, a topic much less discussed. In addition to consulting the studies listed above, the person interested in such questions as the nature of the magic reflected in these texts, their dating, etc. should consult, for instance, Yamauchi 1967, and Hunter 1996.

<sup>2</sup> The dating of the bowl incantations is discussed below.

<sup>3</sup> Greenfield 1973: 150. See also Harviainen 1995: 53ff.

However, there are several bowls in which the use of a particular script and religious background do not seem to go together. The fact that the bowls reflect the syncretic magic beliefs of popular religion common to Jewish, Christian, and Mandaic communities of the era makes it difficult for us to be absolutely sure of the origin of a given text.<sup>4</sup> We may assume, at least, that not all of the clients of the 'Jewish' bowls were Jews, as suggested by Naveh and Shaked. They assume that some of the 'Jewish' bowls were written for non-Jews, since the great majority of the bowls are 'Jewish' (= written in Hebrew square characters), but only a minority of the population of Mesopotamia and Iran was Jewish. Therefore, it is probable that Jewish scribes inscribed bowls for non-Jews as well.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, it is less likely that texts inscribed in the Hebrew square characters would have been *written* by non-Jewish magicians.<sup>6</sup>

J. N. Epstein has argued that several 'Syriac' bowls published by Montgomery are Jewish in origin,<sup>7</sup> and J. Greenfield asserts that some 'Jewish' texts (= written in the Jewish script) are 'so pagan in content' that they are probably of pagan origin.<sup>8</sup> Further, he is of the opinion that one particular Mandaic text may be attributed to the Jewish background.<sup>9</sup> He argues that this bowl (McCullough Text D) – with an apparent Jewish flavour – was written in Mandaic and, according to him, possibly for a Mandaean, but it was 'clearly the work of a Jewish scribe.'<sup>10</sup> The same possibility is suggested by Baruch A. Levine: 'Jews might well have used the Mandaean script and dialect on occasion.'<sup>11</sup> We should, however, be cautious here

<sup>4</sup> Harviainen has suggested that the opening phrases in Jewish, Mandaean, and Syriac bowl texts also distinguish these texts from one another. See Harviainen 1995: 56.

<sup>5</sup> For details, see Naveh & Shaked 1985: 17-19. It is equally possible that Jews purchased bowls from non-Jewish scribes, too.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Naveh and Shaked (1985: 17-18) are of the opinion that 'the writers of these Jewish-Aramaic bowls were in all probability practitioners of magic who belonged to the Jewish community.'

<sup>7</sup> See Epstein 1922: 41-43. As is well known, Christian elements are extremely rare in Syriac bowls (see e.g. Harviainen 1995: 56). One wonders whether the majority of the Syriac bowl texts are of Christian origin at all: in addition to the fact that they lack Christian flavour, they partly differ linguistically from the Edessan type of Syriac. For instance, the gutturals are less well preserved than is normal in Syriac. See below, especially I.2.4.1. '*Koiné*' Features and III.2. *Laryngeals and Pharyngeals*. Note also that the majority of the Syriac bowl texts are *not* written in Estrangela, but in the script designated proto-Manichaean by Joseph Naveh. See Harviainen 1995: 58; Naveh & Shaked 1985: 31, 126; Hamilton 1971: 38ff.; and Naveh 1982: 149-153. Harviainen considers that the use of proto-Manichaean script instead of the standard Syriac script may be connected with the pagan nature of the Syriac bowl texts. See Harviainen 1995: 59-60.

<sup>8</sup> Greenfield 1973: 150. Cf. also Montgomery 1913: 26, n. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Greenfield 1973: 150, 154-155.

<sup>10</sup> Greenfield 1973: 154.

<sup>11</sup> Levine 1970: 343.

and not, for instance, automatically attribute a text written in the Jewish script with an 'unorthodox' content from the Jewish point of view to a pagan background. In the case of the Mandaic text discussed by Greenfield, it is apparent that the text under discussion is of Jewish origin, but possibly only in the sense that it was based on a Jewish original.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, Epstein shows that some Syriac texts, with an apparent Jewish flavour, were written for some clients as some other texts written in Hebrew square characters, a fact which – he believes – indicates that these Syriac texts 'seraient donc juifs.'<sup>13</sup>

It is known for certain that texts were copied from one religious group to another and from script to script,<sup>14</sup> which is evident in the light of the fact that texts written in different scripts may closely parallel each other.<sup>15</sup> In the process of copying, concepts typical of the 'neighbouring religion' easily infiltrated into the text copied, especially if the scribe was insufficiently careful. Besides, the clients were probably illiterate, and we cannot be convinced either that they were very well aware of the theological differences between the three religions.

Even though there is good reason to doubt the common belief – or even dogma – that the use of a particular script – Hebrew, Syriac, or Mandaic – automatically reveals the religious background of the scribe and his client, I assume that, for instance, Jewish religious concepts occurring in Mandaean texts are in most cases to be explained by two factors: The text may be a copy of a Jewish original and/or all bowls – irrespective of their religious background – display a great number of the same basic concepts. Besides, it is apparent that the Jewish mystical tradition played a remarkable role in the magic tradition reflected by the bowl texts, written in any East Aramaic script.<sup>16</sup> It must be stressed that, in general, Jewish texts differ in their phraseology and set of concepts from Mandaic and Syriac bowls.<sup>17</sup> According to Harviainen, in the majority of texts written in Hebrew square characters, there is 'an evident connection between (1) the Jewish script, (2) the distinctive initial phrases typical of these texts, and (3) the Jewish features of the contents.'<sup>18</sup> Similarly, he argues, the Mandaean texts yield features which distinguish them from their counterparts written in the Jewish or Syriac script.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Cf. also Naveh & Shaked 1985: 18-19.

<sup>13</sup> See Epstein 1922: 42-45.

<sup>14</sup> It is obvious that scribes based their work on both a *Vorlage* and the oral transmission of texts. See Hunter 1995: 62ff. One may assume that, for instance, a recited Mandaic text was quite easily rendered into Babylonian Jewish Aramaic.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Greenfield & Naveh 1985; Montgomery 1913: 167; and Hunter 1995: 67ff.

<sup>16</sup> See Greenfield 1973: 155-156 and the literature cited there.

<sup>17</sup> See Naveh & Shaked 1985: 17.

<sup>18</sup> Harviainen 1995: 58.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

Dating the magic bowls has been problematic, partly due to the fact that only a small number of the bowls have been found in controlled archaeological excavations; many of them have been purchased from antiquity dealers or found in less well-controlled excavations.<sup>20</sup> Regarding the dating of our bowls, Stephen A. Kaufman stated in 1973:

The dating of the magic bowls unfortunately remains problematic, with scholars suggesting dates ranging from 300 to 600 A.D., although most modern investigators would probably agree on a more limited range of 350 to 500 A.D. It is to be hoped that archaeological investigations of sites from this period will ultimately provide the opportunity to better date the Aramaic incantation bowls.<sup>21</sup>

More recently, it has become evident that the use of magic bowls continued to the 8th century C.E., as is confirmed by recent archaeological excavations.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, it remains uncertain when the tradition of writing Aramaic incantations on clay vessels actually began.<sup>23</sup> In any case, this genre flourished in Mesopotamia and Iran from the Late Sassanid period until the Early Islamic period (between the 5th and 8th centuries C.E.).

It is probable that the bowl incantations are recitational texts which were used to drive away evil spirits or otherwise protect a client,<sup>24</sup> but we lack accurate information as to how the bowls and the incantations were actually used.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, a variety of opinions have been expressed about the exact function and purpose of the bowls. The main theories proposed are as follows:

(1) Thomas Ellis – the first who commented on the bowls – suggested that the bowls were immersed in liquid in order for the liquid to absorb the powerful inscriptions. This potion would then – so goes the idea – be drunk by a client in need of protection. This kind of practice is known in connection with later Arabic bowl magic, even from the present-day Middle East. Yet no signs of this practice are found in connection with the Aramaic magic bowls of late antiquity. Importantly, the inscriptions seem not to have been effaced by the liquid.<sup>26</sup>

(2) Another theory regarding the use of the bowls, put forward by Layard in 1853, is based on the fact that many bowls – especially those written in Mandaic –

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Hamilton 1971: 19ff.

<sup>21</sup> Kaufman 1973: 173, n. 19.

<sup>22</sup> See Hunter 1996: 220; 1995: 61; 1997: 1, n. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> We may assume that the incantations were recited as part of magical rites. This is probable in the light of *Sefer ha-Razim*, which shows that, at least in Palestine, recitation of incantations and magical rites belonged together. See Levine 1970: 344.

<sup>25</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> For this theory, see Isbell 1978: 7; Montgomery 1913: 40. The references to the original studies are also given in these reviews.

contain wordings that allude to cemeteries. Hence Layard argued that the bowls were charms buried with the dead.<sup>27</sup> However, as was pointed out by Montgomery, the Nippur bowls were found in ruined houses, and none of them refers to funeral services etc.<sup>28</sup>

(3) The most popular single theory has been the proposal that the purpose of the bowls was to imprison harmful demons inside the bowls. This theory was first suggested by Henry Hyvernat in 1885.<sup>29</sup> Later on, it has been supported by several scholars, such as Pognon, Hilprecht, Montgomery,<sup>30</sup> McCullough,<sup>31</sup> and recently Naveh and Shaked.<sup>32</sup> This theory may gain some strength from the fact that many bowls were found in their original position upside down in the ground.<sup>33</sup> Further, the texts often speak – as pointed out by Naveh and Shaked – of ‘chaining and pressing the evil entities.’<sup>34</sup> Yet it must be admitted that at the same time they often bid them to leave and depart. According to Naveh and Shaked, ‘there is no real contradiction between these two propositions.’<sup>35</sup> McCullough has pointed out that the fact that the incantations were normally written on the inside of the bowl, even though it was obviously more difficult to write on that side, supports the theory that the inside was of special importance, in line with the ideas presented by Hyvernat, Montgomery, and others.<sup>36</sup>

Interestingly, inscriptions with Greek texts on clay bowls were discovered at the Christian settlement of Hambukol in northern Sudan.<sup>37</sup> These bowls, apparently from the late 10th century or early 11th century, were ‘probably lying upside down’ under the corners of a building.<sup>38</sup> The texts consist of names of apostles and saints in Greek.<sup>39</sup> The archaeological data demonstrate clearly that these bowls were employed as ‘foundation deposits, buried down under the corners of the building.’<sup>40</sup> Tomas Hägg points out that the Mesopotamian magic bowls are ‘strikingly

<sup>27</sup> See Isbell 1978: 7; Montgomery 1913: 40

<sup>28</sup> Montgomery 1913: 40. אִסְרָא דְקִבְרָא ‘a spell of the tomb’ occurs, however, in N&Sh 4:2. See also Naveh & Shaked 1985: 15-16.

<sup>29</sup> See Montgomery 1913: 41; Isbell 1975: 8; Isbell 1978: 7.

<sup>30</sup> See Montgomery 1913: 41-42.

<sup>31</sup> See McCullough 1967: xii-xiii.

<sup>32</sup> Naveh & Shaked 1985: 15.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> See McCullough 1967: xiii.

<sup>37</sup> See Hägg 1993: 376ff.

<sup>38</sup> Hägg 1993: 377.

<sup>39</sup> See Hägg 1993: 381ff.

<sup>40</sup> Hägg 1993: 391.

similar to the Hambukol bowls in shape and in the lay-out of the inscription.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, the texts of the Hambukol bowls are very different from our bowls. Nevertheless, Hägg concludes that both of them were used as foundation deposits.<sup>42</sup> He notes that the Mesopotamian bowl texts occasionally mention that the evil spirits are 'sealed' and 'bound' in the four corners of the house.<sup>43</sup> In both traditions, the bowls were probably placed in the corners of the building to form a magical circle.<sup>44</sup> In the case of the Hambukol bowls, the actual incantation text is lacking; the names listed are possibly understood as beneficent divine forces.<sup>45</sup>

The function as demon traps was apparently not the sole function of the bowl texts. Instead, it is probable that bowls were intended both for the house and for the cemetery.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, we do not have to consider this theory contradictory to that suggested by Layard.

(4) The trap theory was rejected by Cyrus Gordon, who assumed that the ancients would not have wished to have potentially dangerous demons trapped in their houses.<sup>47</sup> He suggested, instead, that the shape of the bowl resembles that of a human skull, endowing the bowl with magical power. Similar arguments against the trap theory are also expressed by Charles Isbell. He argues that the incantations themselves show clearly that no attempt was made to bottle up the demons in the bowls, but rather the purpose was to expel them.<sup>48</sup> By contrast, Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked are of the opinion that 'the idea of keeping demon-traps in the house need not strike us as more ridiculous than that of placing mouse-traps. In both cases the hated victim, once caught, is incapacitated and is made powerless to cause harm.'<sup>49</sup> Besides, as already noted above, they take the view that there is no real contradiction between the two functions: the entrapping and expelling of the evil entities. McCullough, too, argues that the bowls had a double function: to chase away demons and other evil entities and to imprison those of them who did not have the sense to stay away.<sup>50</sup> Note also the possibility – suggested by Harviainen – that entrapped demons were 'treated with food and drink' in order to pacify them.

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41 Hägg 1993: 392.

42 See Hägg 1993: 391ff.

43 Hägg 1993: 392.

44 Cf. Montgomery 1913: 42.

45 See Hägg 1993: 395ff.

46 See Montgomery 1913: 43-44. Further, we have, for instance, texts intended to arouse love. It is unlikely that such texts were employed as demon traps.

47 See Isbell 1978: 8.

48 Isbell 1975: 14.

49 Naveh & Shaked 1985: 15.

50 McCullough 1967: xiii.

This may be supported by some wordings referring to eating and drinking on the part of demons.<sup>51</sup>

In addition, several other theories have been set forth. However, no consensus has been reached on this question.<sup>52</sup> Yet I find it plausible that employment as demon traps was, at least, one of the main functions of the magic bowls.

The magic bowl texts are quite stereotyped incantations with many constant elements.<sup>53</sup> As stated by Erica Hunter: 'All incantation bowls reiterate the dominant theme of binding and fettering, in keeping with their basic aim of thwarting or combatting demons.'<sup>54</sup> Some individual exceptions are known. The fact that there are many duplicates among the bowl texts underlines the general impression of stereotyped expression.<sup>55</sup> Despite this conventional character, it should be stressed that the texts are not homogenous, rather one could argue that they exhibit different sorts of variations on the same basic themes. It seems that the magicians, on the one hand, combine and vary rather freely familiar phrases and formulae, showing apparent creativity; and on the other hand, they carefully copy formulae or even the whole text they had before them.<sup>56</sup>

The texts consist of a variety of elements which are employed in different texts with more or less flexibility. Within the material typical of the bowl texts one may select, for instance, biblical quotations; certain verbs connected with ideas of 'binding,' 'sealing,' 'pressing,' 'healing,' and 'adjuring;' and long lists of malevolent agents, such as 'idol-spirits,' 'lilis,' 'Liliths,' 'sorceries,' 'evil eyes,' etc. Lists of benevolent agents, notably angels, occur as well. Many incantations begin with a formula referring to 𐌸𐌸𐌹 or another deity. The latter is true especially of Mandaic opening phrases, with the typical *basmala*: *bu-šmi ad-heyyi*.<sup>57</sup> The opening phrase is typically followed by adjurations to demons, which are, for instance, commanded

<sup>51</sup> See Harviainen 1978: 10.

<sup>52</sup> For details of (and references to) the different theories on the use of these incantations, see especially Naveh & Shaked 1985: 15-16; Isbell 1978: 6-9, Hamilton 1971: 7-19; and Yamauchi 1967: 54-61.

<sup>53</sup> For the nature and structure of these texts, see also Montgomery 1913: 51-66, Levine 1970: 361ff., and Hunter 1997: 3ff.

<sup>54</sup> Hunter 1997: 3.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. e.g. N&Sh 12a and B1, which are practically identical, save the names of the clients.

<sup>56</sup> Tapani Harviainen and Erica Hunter, respectively, have studied the opening formulae of the bowl texts. They have identified several incipits which occur rather frequently in their material. See Harviainen 1995: 55ff. and Hunter 1997: 6ff. It is apparent that the magicians had in their repertoire a variety of formulae which could be used and combined with each other. Harviainen assumes that different religious groups inclined to have their own opening formulae which distinguished them from others. This is, however, less apparent in the material studied by Hunter (see *ibid.*).

<sup>57</sup> See Harviainen 1995: 58.

to withdraw from the house of a client or 'bound' by the power of helping agents adjured to aid the client. The client's name is usually mentioned as well. The incantations may conclude with biblical quotations or with biblical words such as  $\text{סֶלֶב}$  and  $\text{אֲמֵן}$ . The literary style typical of the bowl texts is familiar from other genres of magical literature, e.g. amulets and magical handbooks such as *Sefer ha-Razim*.<sup>58</sup>

Little is known of the scribes or practioners who wrote the magic bowl texts. Even though incantations are commonly performed in the first person (e.g.  $\text{מִשְׁבַּעְנָא יְהִי־נָךְ}$  'I adjure you' in N&Sh 6:8-9), as a rule the practioner himself remains anonymous.<sup>59</sup> It is repeatedly argued that the bowl texts, or at least some of them, were written by poorly educated scribes (See also below I.2.4. *The Language of the Aramaic Magic Bowls*); for instance Montgomery wrote in his *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur*: 'I am inclined to think that some of the texts, especially the more illiterate ones, were written by lay people.'<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Rossell concludes that the scribes of these texts 'were often ignorant,' writing in an 'unlearned style,'<sup>61</sup> and Boyarin argues that they were 'clearly from among the less tutored members of Babylonian Jewry.'<sup>62</sup>

Erica Hunter, for her part, has surmised that the practioners may have been 'peripatetic, travelling from city to city within a certain area, or even between different regions.'<sup>63</sup> It is equally possible – she argues – that the bowls were produced in certain villages, perhaps as the hereditary occupation of some families specialized in the business.<sup>64</sup> Both are possibilities worthy of consideration, but for the time being they remain, at best, good guesses.

The scientific study of the Aramaic magic bowl texts began in 1853,<sup>65</sup> when Thomas Ellis translated six texts from the bowls found at Niniveh.<sup>66</sup> Several other texts – in Jewish Aramaic, Syriac, and Mandaic – were published by the end of the 19th century.<sup>67</sup> As pointed out by Naveh and Shaked, 'these early attempts at inter-

<sup>58</sup> One should consult the important article by Michael D. Swartz (1990) concentrating on the literary structure of Hebrew and Aramaic amulets from the Cairo Geniza. The structure of these Geniza texts shows close affinities with our texts.

<sup>59</sup> See Montgomery 1913: 46-47.

<sup>60</sup> Montgomery 1913: 47. Regarding the Mandaic texts, Yamauchi points out that it is possible that the client may often have written the text himself. See Yamauchi 1967: 15.

<sup>61</sup> Rossell 1953: 13.

<sup>62</sup> Boyarin 1978: 152.

<sup>63</sup> Hunter 1995: 75.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> A more detailed review of studies of the linguistic features of the magic bowl texts appears below in I.2.4. *The Language of the Aramaic Magic Bowl Texts*.

<sup>66</sup> For the history of research on the Aramaic magic bowls, see, for instance, Naveh & Shaked 1985: 19-21; Isbell 1975: 1ff.; Isbell 1978: 5-6.

<sup>67</sup> See Naveh & Shaked 1985: 19.

pretation are often quite faulty, though they have paved the way to subsequent research.<sup>68</sup>

The most important single study of the bowl texts is the monumental *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* by James A. Montgomery (Montgomery 1913), in which he published forty texts with comments (30 in Jewish Aramaic, 7 in Syriac, and 3 in Mandaic) and an extensive introduction to the subject.<sup>69</sup> Later on, bowl texts – in various Aramaic dialects – have been published by several scholars, such as Gordon, Oberman, Teixidor, Jeruzalmi, Yamauchi, McCullough, Hamilton, Kaufman, Isbell, Geller, Naveh and Shaked, Greenfield, Harviainen, Hunter, and Müller-Kessler.<sup>70</sup> The total number of published (Jewish) Aramaic bowl texts is now (spring 1998) 132. Several hundreds of other bowls are preserved in museums and private collections around the world.

## I.2. EAST ARAMAIC DIALECTS

It is generally considered that the Aramaic bowl incantations, the subject of the present study, were written in Jewish Aramaic (JA), more accurately Babylonian Jewish Aramaic (BJA), although – in the absence of systematic treatment – the precise nature of their language has in many ways remained unclear. To place the discussion of the language of the Aramaic bowl incantations in its proper context, a short introduction to East Aramaic dialects is necessary.

In addition, I give below a résumé of the linguistic research on Aramaic magic bowls, along with notes concerning research done in the related fields. Special attention is paid to those areas of research, such as studies on the language of Targum Onqelos (TO), which are considered to be of importance for the study of the magic incantations. No attempt is made here to give a complete picture of all the details connected with the study of the language of the bowl incantations. A fuller discussion of many questions touched upon here appears in the following chapters of this study.

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<sup>68</sup> Naveh & Shaked 1985: 19.

<sup>69</sup> See also below I.2.4. *The Language of the Aramaic Magic Bowl Texts*. The value of this work is noted, among others, by Naveh and Shaked (1985: 19-20).

<sup>70</sup> See also below I.2.4. *The Language of the Aramaic Magic Bowl Texts* and II.2. *Material Used in the Study*.

### I.2.1. Classification

We shall adopt here the division of Aramaic suggested by Joseph A. Fitzmyer,<sup>71</sup> which is, perhaps, the most widely accepted division of Aramaic. He classifies the main periods of Aramaic as follows:

- (1) Old Aramaic, up to 700 B.C.E.
- (2) Official Aramaic,<sup>72</sup> 700–200 B.C.E.
- (3) Middle Aramaic, 200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.
- (4) Late Aramaic, 200 – 700 C.E.<sup>73</sup>
- (5) Modern Aramaic

The division of Aramaic into East and West Aramaic is generally made for the Late Aramaic period, though the distinction between Eastern and Western dialects was to some extent already evident in Official Aramaic and, even more, in Middle Aramaic.<sup>74</sup> Contrary to Fitzmyer's periodization, some scholars prefer to include Official Aramaic in Old Aramaic, employing the term Middle Aramaic for the Late Aramaic of Fitzmyer's periodization, and Late Aramaic for Modern Aramaic. In addition to the more commonly observed periodizations of Aramaic, Klaus Beyer has introduced a classification and terminology quite different from others.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup> See Fitzmyer 1979: 60-63.

<sup>72</sup> This period of Aramaic is also called *Reichsaramäisch*, Imperial Aramaic, or (less commonly) Standard Aramaic. Note that the Official Aramaic type of Aramaic was still used in many texts written later than 200 B.C.E. (cf. Standard Babylonian). See below I.2.3. Lately, Folmer has introduced the term 'Aramaic from the Achaemenid period.' See Folmer 1995: 9-13, especially p. 13.

<sup>73</sup> The closing limit of this period could be extended to the end of the 11th century or even further. See the discussion in Fitzmyer 1979: 62.

<sup>74</sup> See Kutscher 1971b: 361ff.; Fitzmyer 1979: 61.

<sup>75</sup> Beyer's classification of East Aramaic must be included here because of its relevance to the topic of this study. He classifies the periods of East Aramaic as follows:

The Uruk document is the most important representative of *Altostaramäisch* (Old Eastern Aramaic). *Altnordostaramäisch* is known indirectly through North-east Aramaic features in the Gosan inscription, the Hermopolis Papyri, and the Proverbs of Ahiqar. In the second century B.C.E. these dialects began to be used as literary languages, such as the dialect represented in the Palmyrene inscriptions (in which Official Aramaic influence is strong), *Ostmesopotamisch*, and *Altsyrisch*, which is represented by Syriac inscriptions from the first to third centuries C.E. In contrast with later Syriac, they exhibit some archaic features, such as  $\varpi$  for \*/s/ and *yod* as an imperfect prefix. The type of Aramaic found in the texts from Hatra is called *Ostmesopotamisch*.

*Altsüdostaramäisch* was used as a literary language only by Jews. This dialect is represented by *Jüdisch-Altbabylonisch* in which the influence of Biblical Aramaic and the Babylonian Targum (viz. Targum Onqelos) is evident. Beyer asserts that this dialect was used for Aramaic bowl incantations, as well as for a text from Dura-Europos, and it is also represented by the South-east Aramaic layer of the Babylonian Targum. In Beyer's classification, the eastern dialects of Late Aramaic are put together under the rubric *Mittelost-*

According to the classification of Aramaic dialects prevalent among scholars, the Eastern branch of Late Aramaic consists of three basic dialects: Syriac, Mandaic, and Babylonian Jewish Aramaic (henceforth BJA).

Syriac may be the best known of all Aramaic dialects, with a vast Christian literature in both poetry and prose and a standardized system of vocalization. The earliest Syriac texts are inscriptions from the first three centuries C.E. Jonas Greenfield, for one, has maintained that Syriac is to be placed linguistically between East and West Aramaic.<sup>76</sup>

Mandaic was the language spoken by the Mandaean sect in southern Mesopotamia, with the earliest written texts evidently from the fourth century C.E. Since Mandaic scribes employed *matres lectionis* with great freedom to express long, short, ultra-short, and semi-vowels, Mandaic has been of crucial importance in reconstructing the phonology of East Aramaic. BJA, which was close to Mandaic, is the Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud (hereafter BT = Babylonian Talmud; BTA = Babylonian Talmudic Aramaic), of the Geonic works, and of the writings of Anan ben Dawid. BJA was employed for the Aramaic bowl incantations as well.

East Aramaic dialects share many common characteristics which set them apart from the West Aramaic dialects. The distinctive features of East Aramaic are as follows:<sup>77</sup>

- (a) Vowels in unaccented open syllables in final position tend to disappear.
- (b)  $\text{־} \rightarrow$  or  $\text{־} \leftarrow$  serves as a prefix for 3rd p. masc. and 3rd p. fem. pl. in the imperfect tense.
- (c) The emphatic state is in general use, with the absolute state reserved only for special usages.
- (d) The masc. pl. ending in the emphatic state is  $\text{-ē}$  instead of  $\text{-ayyā}$ .
- (e) The word order is freer than in West Aramaic.
- (f) East Aramaic dialects display a great number of words borrowed from Akkadian and Persian, whereas borrowings from Greek and Latin are typical of West Aramaic.

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*aramäisch* (Middle Eastern Aramaic) [*sic*] which is comprised of *Mittelsyrisch*, *Jüdisch-Mittelbabylonisch*, and *Mandäisch* (Syriac, Babylonian Jewish Aramaic, and Mandaic respectively). Modern East Aramaic dialects are called *Neuostaramäisch* (Modern Eastern Aramaic). Beyer 1984: 45-48, 59-62, 70-71.

<sup>76</sup> Greenfield 1978: 37.

<sup>77</sup> Kutscher 1971a: cc. 275-276; Greenfield 1978: 38-40.

## 1.2.2. Babylonian Jewish Aramaic (BJA)

As noted above, BJA consists of the Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud (BTA), the Aramaic of the Geonic works, the writings of Anan – the early Karaite leader – and the Aramaic of the magic bowls. Some features of BJA, or Babylonian Aramaic in general,<sup>78</sup> are also present in the Middle Persian logograms, in which the *ketiv* is Aramaic, but *qere* Persian.<sup>79</sup> Those scholars who believe the provenance of TO to be Babylonia, tend to see its language as representative of archaic BJA.<sup>80</sup>

The earliest texts written in BJA date from the Amoraic period (3rd–6th centuries), and the latest come from the end of the Geonic period (11th century). Moreover, we have evidence preserved in BT of dialectal differences between the main Jewish centres, such as Sura and Nehardea.<sup>81</sup> Thus it is easy to understand that BJA is linguistically far from being of a homogenous nature.

The Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud itself is divided into two main dialects: (a) the basic dialect of BT (hereafter standard Babylonian Talmudic Aramaic, standard BTA) and (b) the language of the tractates Nedarim, Nazir, Keritot, Temura, Me'ila, and Tamid.<sup>82</sup> The salient features of these 'different' or 'non-standard' tractates are as follows:

(a) preservation of the final consonants, especially the *n* of the pronominal suffixes (e.g. ןה' - instead of ןה-), and of masc. pl. absolute endings, and the ן- of the 3rd p. fem. sg. perfect tense; (b) the earlier forms of the demonstrative pronouns (e.g. ןה' instead of ןה); (c) differences in vocabulary.<sup>83</sup>

In addition, typically 'non-Babylonian' elements are also attested in the Aramaic of BT and other BJA documents. These include features of West Aramaic preserved in the passages relating to Palestine, and features resembling Official Aramaic. The latter are evident in שׁטרוּת preserved in BT and other BJA compositions. For instance, the language of *Halakhot Pesuqot*, a well-known Geonic work, may be divided into three dialects: (1) the Aramaic of the שׁטרוּת, including for instance the Aramaic used for *gittim* and *ketubbot*; (2) the Aramaic of the Talmudic quotations; and (3) Geonic Aramaic, represented in the Halachic

<sup>78</sup> By the term Babylonian Aramaic (BA) is meant the Aramaic dialects of Mesopotamia, consisting of Mandaic, East Syriac, and BJA. See e.g. Epstein 1960: 13. Note, however, that for instance Kutscher, in his 1971 review of Aramaic, employs the term 'Babylonian Aramaic' for Babylonian Jewish Aramaic. See Kutscher 1971a: c. 277ff. In Aramaic studies, every scholar seems to have terminology at least slightly different from everyone else's.

<sup>79</sup> Epstein 1960: 13. See also Kutscher 1971b: 393-399.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. e.g. Epstein, who states in his 1960 grammar that TO was written in an archaic language, regular in the Babylonia of that 'transition' (מעבר) period (Epstein 1960: 14).

<sup>81</sup> Epstein 1960: 14.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> See Kutscher 1971a: cc. 275-276, 279; Epstein 1960: 14.

discussions.<sup>84</sup> The Aramaic of the שטרות is actually not BTA, but accords more or less with Official Aramaic.<sup>85</sup>

The most important sources for the study of BJA phonology and morphology are reliable manuscripts, such as the Geniza fragments of BT, the *codex unicus* (MS. Sasson no. 263) of the Geonic *Halakhot Pesuqot*,<sup>86</sup> and Codex Paris 1402 of another Geonic work, *Halakhot Gedolot*.<sup>87</sup> Of great importance is the still living reading tradition for BT preserved among the Yemenite Jews.<sup>88</sup> This reading tradition is entirely oral, since it is based on texts with no punctuation.<sup>89</sup> Yet it represents, as stated by Morag, 'a genuine reflection of a Babylonian Aramaic dialect, as learned by Yemenite scholars, assiduous readers of the Talmud, who went to Babylonia for the purpose.'<sup>90</sup> The Yemenite reading tradition probably reflects the Aramaic used in the Academies of Babylonia in the Geonic period.<sup>91</sup> Importantly, the Yemenite tradition converges in many details with the tradition present in the vocalization of *Halakhot Pesuqot* and also with reliable Talmudic MSS. from the Cairo Geniza, and thus it provides us with a relatively ancient tradition of BTA (or BJA in general).<sup>92</sup> In addition to the ancient character of the Yemenite tradition, this fact proves that the provenance of the Yemenite tradition was indeed Babylonia.<sup>93</sup>

The Babylonian punctuation of TO and TJ must be taken into account as well when studying BJA,<sup>94</sup> even though the Babylonian vocalization tradition of TO preserved in Yemen represents a tradition which is different from the Yemenite reading tradition of BTA both in its phonology and in morphology.<sup>95</sup>

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84 Sokoloff 1971: 235-236.

85 Sokoloff 1971: 236.

86 The punctuation of MS. Sasson no. 263 of the Geonic *Halakhot Pesuqot* is apparently seven or eight hundred years old. The manuscript was probably written in Babylonia or Persia. See Morag 1988: 45 and a reference given there.

87 Kutscher 1962: 170-177; Boyarin 1978: 141.

88 This reading tradition has been dealt with in detail by Shelomo Morag. For a general introduction to the Yemenite tradition, see Morag 1962: 217-221; Morag 1988: 35-40; 51-60.

89 Morag 1962: 218.

90 Morag 1962: 220.

91 Morag 1961: 120.

92 Morag 1988: 45-48; Morag 1962: 219-220.

93 Morag 1988: 45.

94 Cf. Boyarin 1978, especially pp. 141 and 146.

95 See Morag 1988: 41-45.

### 1.2.3. The Language of Targum Onqelos

As was already noted above, an important factor when analyzing the language used in the bowl texts is the Aramaic of Targum Onqelos on the Pentateuch (TO). As a matter of fact, the same applies to Targum Jonathan on the Prophets (TJ). Much of the discussion devoted to TO relates to TJ, too.<sup>96</sup> TO – whose origin and language has been a matter of dispute – is basically written in a literary dialect which is Official Aramaic with some Western Aramaic elements. Jonas Greenfield has used the term ‘Standard Literary Aramaic’ to describe the Aramaic of TO.<sup>97</sup> By the term Standard Literary Aramaic (SLA) Greenfield means literary Aramaic of the last centuries B.C.E. In his view, the earliest example of SLA is the framework story of the Proverbs of Ahiqar. Later on, the Aramaic texts from Qumran were written in SLA. Biblical Aramaic contains elements of both Official Aramaic and SLA.<sup>98</sup>

Eduard Y. Kutscher regards the TO kind of literature as ‘a cross between R. (*Reichsaramäisch*) and the Western Aramaic.’<sup>99</sup> In addition, TO shows ‘certain morphological features typical of Eastern Aramaic.’<sup>100</sup> Because of this mixture of both Western and Eastern features, dispute has arisen concerning the Targum’s place of origin. Moreover, the non-linguistic evidence concerning the origin of both TO and TJ is vague.<sup>101</sup> The common assumption today is that TO was originally (proto-Onqelos) written in Palestine in the early Christian era in a Palestinian type of Aramaic. Later on, when TO – because it had become the official Targum in Babylonia – was studied, preserved, and vocalized in Babylonia, it was influenced by native Babylonian Aramaic speech.<sup>102</sup> The same is true concerning TJ, which – it is assumed – was also originally written in a dialect with a Palestinian flavour.<sup>103</sup>

According to the rival theory, TO originated in Babylonia in the Geonic period.<sup>104</sup> Among the modern proponents of the ‘Eastern theory’ is Beyer, who holds

<sup>96</sup> Evidently due to the fact that TO is a targum of the principal part of the Bible, the Pentateuch or Torah, discussion has focused on it.

<sup>97</sup> Greenfield 1978: 34ff.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Kutscher 1957: 10, n. 44.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> See the introduction of Tal 1975.

<sup>102</sup> Greenfield 1978: 35; Kutscher 1971a: cc. 267-268.

<sup>103</sup> See Tal 1975: 213ff. Tal assumes that TJ was composed in Southern Palestine.

<sup>104</sup> This theory was already held by Geiger in the latter part of the last century. Later on, it was supported especially by Kahle and his followers, see Grossfeld 1971: cc. 842-844; Goshen-Gottstein 1978: 169-170. The theory of the Palestinian provenance of TO was formulated by Th. Nöldeke. In this century his position has been supported – with different formulations – by G. Dalman, E. Y. Kutscher, A. Tal, and J. Greenfield. For the history of research on Targum Onqelos, see Grossfeld 1971: cc. 841-851, esp. cc. 842-844; Goshen-Gottstein 1978: 169-175; Cook 1986: 7-14; and Tal 1975: 13-21.

that TO was written in *Ost-Reichsaramäisch*. Kutscher, on the other hand, has demonstrated the basic similarity of the Aramaic of TO to the Aramaic of the Genesis Apocryphon,<sup>105</sup> which may be regarded as additional evidence for the Palestinian origin of TO.<sup>106</sup> A basically identical dialect is evident in TJ, too.<sup>107</sup>

Kutscher points out the following Eastern features in the Aramaic of TO:

- (a) The 3rd p. fem. sg. in the perfect tense is *qəṭalaṭ* (and not *qiṭlaṭ* as in Biblical Aramaic), and the 1st p. sg. perfect tense is correspondingly *qəṭaliṭ*.
- (b) The emphatic state is no longer used properly.
- (c) The Eastern *-ē* (masc. pl. emphatic state) occurs side by side with the Western ending *-ayyā*. Peculiar to the Aramaic of TO are the 1st p. sg. perfect tense of the *tertia* *waw/yod* verbs of the type *קריתי*, and the verbal ending *-an* occurring in the imperfect and participle forms, e.g. *קרין* (for *קרי\**) and *תקרין* (for *תקרי\**).

The Eastern features are especially evident in the vocalization of TO.<sup>108</sup> The general consensus seems to be that the consonantal text of TO was originally Palestinian, but the vocalization reflects Babylonian dialect(s). Therefore, when discussing the origin of TO some scholars disregard those features which are ascertainable only by the vocalization. Boyarin has found the following features of TO vocalization which tally with BTA:<sup>109</sup>

- (a) The perfect form of the type *qəṭalaṭ* - *qəṭaliṭ* (cf. above).
- (b) The suffix *-āx* of the 2nd p. masc. sg. when attached to *pl.* nouns.
- (c) A tendency to avoid reduced vowels after laryngeals and pharyngeals.
- (d) The combination *wə+Cə* results in *wiC-*.
- (e) The epenthetic *i* appearing after *ʕ* and in the cluster *CiCCV* (*\*CCəCV* > *CiCCV*).
- (f) The verbal ending *-an* in the masc. pl. participles of *tertia* *w/y* verbs (cf. above).

<sup>105</sup> Kutscher 1957: 9–11. According to Kutscher (1957: 15ff.), the Genesis Apocryphon dates from the first century B.C.E. or C.E.

<sup>106</sup> Interestingly, Abraham Tal has shown that, at least on the lexical level, Syriac is the eastern dialect most closely related to TJ. See Tal 1975, for instance pp. 133ff. This may be connected with the fact that Syriac is probably to be placed between East and West Aramaic (see above).

<sup>107</sup> See Tal 1975: 214–216.

<sup>108</sup> Kutscher 1971a: c. 268.

<sup>109</sup> Boyarin 1978: 146.

#### I.2.4. The Language of the Aramaic Magic Bowls

Various points of view have been presented concerning the linguistic importance of the incantations written in any East Aramaic dialect. It is often held that due to the magical and 'incomprehensible' nature of these texts, they yield little information on the Aramaic of the Late Aramaic period. One of the most negative attitudes is reflected in the words of Rudolf Macuch regarding, it must be stressed, the Mandaic magic bowl texts. He states:

Magic bowls and rolls usually contain a mass of hardly decipherable or completely incomprehensible nonsense. They were written against the demons who were supposed to understand their magic language. Their defective and often careless writing makes their reading difficult and their interpretation doubtful. The picture of the language they give us is very incomplete.<sup>110</sup>

A different position is taken by William H. Rossell, who declares with regard to the Jewish Aramaic magic bowl texts:

The fact that these men were often ignorant does not lessen the worth of our texts. Rather, the unlearned style with its many variations of spelling frequently reflects actual speech, thus throwing new light on the phonetics and other linguistic features of JBA.<sup>111</sup>

All in all, the language of the Jewish Aramaic magic bowl texts itself has not attracted much *linguistic* attention.<sup>112</sup> It is generally held that the bowl texts written in Hebrew square characters display features of BJA; but when it comes to the specific relationship between the bowl dialect and other dialects of BJA, different points of view appear. J. B. Segal argues that the description 'Jewish Aramaic' for the Aramaic magic bowl texts is 'convenient although obviously far from accurate,' without explaining in what respect this description is inaccurate.<sup>113</sup>

The first to comment significantly on the language of the bowl texts was James A. Montgomery, who discussed some of the outstanding traits of the texts in his classic work *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur*, published in 1913. Later on, Cyrus Gordon, in his several publications of the bowl texts, has made many important notes on the language of these texts, too. In the history of research concerning the Aramaic bowl incantations, a special place is due to William H. Rossell. His grammatical sketch published in 1953 is the most important single contribution to the study of the *language* of these bowls. Rossell's work is almost exclusively

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<sup>110</sup> Macuch 1965: lix.

<sup>111</sup> Rossell 1953: 13.

<sup>112</sup> Further on, the term 'Aramaic magic bowl texts' refers to Jewish Aramaic magic bowl texts as opposed to 'Mandaic magic bowl texts' and 'Syriac magic bowl texts.' Moreover, the terms 'Aramaic (magic) bowl texts' and 'Aramaic bowl incantations' are taken as synonyms.

<sup>113</sup> See Segal 1970: 609.

based on the bowls published by Montgomery and Cyrus Gordon. He catalogues most of the peculiarities of the bowl texts, but the comparative material is almost totally neglected, and the dialect of the incantations is not brought into relation with other Aramaic dialects. Time has also passed by Rossell's study with the publication of many new bowl texts and with improvements made to readings in many texts published earlier. Since a great deal of the same linguistic features are treated both in Rossell's study and in the present study, I generally refer (in this study) to Rossell's study, only when my results are different from his and when he has some important points of view not touched upon in my study. Isbell's *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls* (1975) is also an important contribution to the study of these texts. Note, however, that the corrections and clarifications made by Epstein on the texts published by Montgomery are unfortunately not taken into account in this publication (see below). A brief grammatical sketch is provided by Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked.<sup>114</sup> The works by Naveh and Shaked (1985, 1993) in which they have published over twenty annotated texts in BJA (*plus* texts in Syriac) are the most important recent studies in the field. Many items, especially lexical ones, are dealt with by them.

In addition, many features of the texts have been discussed by a number of scholars. Mention should at least be made of Epstein, Rosenthal, Greenfield, Levine, Boyarin, and Harviainen.<sup>115</sup> J. N. Epstein, Baruch Levine, and Jonas Greenfield have contributed important philological notes on various expressions and formulae used in the texts, but occasional remarks on linguistic features may also be found in their works. An especially significant contribution is an extensive review article by Epstein,<sup>116</sup> who re-analyzed systematically the bowls previously published by Montgomery. Levine, too, has written important philological notes on the bowl texts in his long article of 1970 entitled *The Language of the Magical Bowls*. Further, his study discusses the context of these texts from different angles, a topic beyond the limits of this study.

In some of their studies E. Y. Kutscher, Shelomo Morag, and Daniel Boyarin have commented, in passing, on isolated grammatical features of the bowl incantations. Morag and Boyarin have indirectly dealt with some phonological features in their works on BJA phonology in general. Lately, Tapani Harviainen has made many penetrating observations on the grammar of the bowl texts in the wider context of BJA as a whole, as well as called attention to the presence of isoglosses held in common with Syriac and Mandaic.

<sup>114</sup> Naveh & Shaked 1985: 30-33.

<sup>115</sup> The review here pays little attention to studies on other aspects of the magic bowls besides the linguistic aspect, however important these studies may be. Some notes are, however, provided at the beginning of this study (I.1. *Aramaic Magic Bowls: Preliminary Remarks*).

<sup>116</sup> Epstein 1921-1922.

Among the aforementioned scholars Harviainen emphasizes the peculiarity of the bowl dialect (cf. below especially I.2.4.1. 'Koiné' Features) whereas some other scholars – if they make any specific observations in this respect – consider the idiom of the bowl incantations to be more or less similar to other dialects of BJA. Note, for instance, Kutscher's judgement in his short sketch of Babylonian Aramaic: 'The language of the incantation texts of Nippur (and other places) is very close (but not identical) to it.'<sup>117</sup> J. B. Segal, in his review article, concludes that Aramaic bowl texts yield 'some interesting features of popular speech.'<sup>118</sup> However, he seems to be quite sceptical about the philological importance of these texts. He states:

Neither in their date nor in their quantity have they much significance when set within the panoramic range of Mesopotamian Aramaic literature.<sup>119</sup>

Further, he takes the view that the philological importance of the Mandaic texts is greater than that of the Jewish texts.<sup>120</sup> Rossell – followed by some others – stresses the generally conservative character of the Aramaic dialect attested in the bowl texts. He states that

An archaic form of grammatical expression is retained in these incantation texts as is the rule in stylized compositions. In this they differ radically from the grammatical structure of the contemporary Babylonian Talmud, which, through the introduction of colloquialisms, tends towards a breakdown in the structure of the old written language.<sup>121</sup>

Yet, as the quotation at the beginning of this chapter shows, Rossell believes – despite the fact that in his view these texts are conservative – that these texts also frequently reflect 'actual speech.'<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, Rossell concludes that the bowl texts show some 'literary influence' of Biblical as well as of Targumic Aramaic (viz. the language of Onqelos). This, of course, fits nicely in with the generally archaic character of the texts. Klaus Beyer, in his monumental monograph on the Aramaic of the Dead Sea Scrolls, comes to the same conclusion concerning the influence of Biblical and Targumic Aramaic on the language of the bowl incantations.<sup>123</sup> In terms of his periodization of Aramaic, it is Jewish Old Babylonian

<sup>117</sup> Kutscher 1971a: c. 277. Similar views have been put forward by others, too. Fulvio Franco states that 'the bowls differ deeply because of their strongly syncretic spirit from the literature of the Babylonian Talmud, though from the linguistic point of view, they must be held for strictly similar.' (Franco 1979: 234.)

<sup>118</sup> Segal 1970: 609.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Rossell 1953: 11.

<sup>122</sup> The reference is given above at the beginning of the chapter.

<sup>123</sup> Beyer 1984: 47-48.

(‘Jüdisch-Altbabylonisch’) which was used for the Aramaic bowl incantations. According to him, however, the incantations display some later features, such as the use of *n-* as an imperfect prefix.

The fact that the bowl texts represent various dialects was already noted by Montgomery.<sup>124</sup> Harviainen is also of the opinion that the bowl texts do not attest a single dialect, though the differences are not ‘very conspicuous.’<sup>125</sup> No serious attempt has been made to specify the different dialect types represented by the bowl texts.

A number of arguments for possible connections of the dialect of the Aramaic bowl incantations with Mandaic were set forth by Montgomery.<sup>126</sup> In addition, Montgomery asserts that the bowl texts show ‘some Syriac idioms.’<sup>127</sup> He is followed in this by Rossell and,<sup>128</sup> more recently, by Harviainen, who has especially stressed the linguistic features of the Aramaic incantations that they have in common with Mandaic and Syriac (see below).

The main linguistic affinities with Mandaic proposed by Montgomery are:<sup>129</sup>

- (a) The *shwa* is frequently written with ך̣.
- (b) Weakening in the laryngeals and pharyngeals, especially in ך̣ and ך̣.
- (c) The intrusion of auxiliary vowels, e.g. ך̣ישׁלׁטׁן.
- (d) Some orthographic features.
- (e) The interchange of the prepositions ל and על.
- (f) The 3rd p. masc. sg. form of the suffixed possessive pronoun, viz. ך̣י-, attached to pl. nouns, e.g. בׁנׁיה instead of בׁנׁהי.<sup>130</sup>

In actual fact, most of the ‘Mandaizing characteristics’ are features shared by BJA in general. An example that is ready to hand is the suffixed possessive pronoun ך̣י- attached to pl. nouns.<sup>131</sup> Owing to the less perfect knowledge of BJA in his time, Montgomery regarded these features of the bowl texts as deriving from Mandaic.

Harviainen – building on the work of Solomon Rybak<sup>132</sup> – has shown that the dialect of Aramaic magic bowls yields many features which tally with the linguistic

<sup>124</sup> Montgomery 1913: 30.

<sup>125</sup> Harviainen 1983: 107, n. 1.

<sup>126</sup> Montgomery 1913: 30-31 and elsewhere.

<sup>127</sup> Montgomery 1913: 30.

<sup>128</sup> See Rossell 1953: 11.

<sup>129</sup> See Montgomery 1913: 30-31.

<sup>130</sup> Montgomery 1913: 125, 172.

<sup>131</sup> See Kutscher 1971a: c. 281 and Epstein 1960: 123.

<sup>132</sup> Solomon F. Rybak, in his dissertation *The Aramaic Dialect of Nedarim* (1980), has collated the linguistic features which set the tractate Nedarim apart from the remainder of the

peculiarities of Nedarim. They also attest to several features held in common with both the Aramaic of Onqelos and Geonic Aramaic. The most important features held in common with Nedarim are as follows:<sup>133</sup>

- (a) א representing medial [ā].<sup>134</sup>
- (b) Many common pronominal forms, such as the demonstrative pronouns ׀הדין and ׀הלין, and the pronominal suffixes ׀כין-, ׀כין׀-, ׀הין-, and ׀הין׀-.
- (c) The final ה- of the 3rd p. fem. sg. perfect tense is preserved.
- (d) The verbal endings ׀ה- and ׀ה׀-.
- (e) ׀- as the ending of the masc. pl. in the absolute state.
- (f) The preposition על.
- (g) Several lexical isoglosses in common.

The most important of the features which are in agreement with 'Targumic' (viz. Targum Onqelos and Jonathan) and Geonic Aramaic is the object particle ׀ה.<sup>135</sup> According to Harviainen, the features which are held in common with standard BTA as opposed to Nedarim consist of (a) א as the personal pronoun of the 2nd person masc. sg.; (b) ׀- as the ending of the masc. pl. in the absolute state;<sup>136</sup> and (c) some lexical isoglosses.<sup>137</sup>

Harviainen concludes that the idiom of the bowl texts

clearly sides with Targumic and Geonic Aramaic as well as with the language of Nedarim against BTA which leaves the impression of a 'younger' modification of Aramaic.<sup>138</sup>

However, the language of the bowl texts is not 'entirely identical' with any of these.

Harviainen has also pointed out similarities between the idiom of the bowl texts and the 'non-Babylonian' features of BTA.<sup>139</sup> Many of these 'non-Babylonian' features – as noted by Sh. Friedman – appear in contexts where a cure for bad dreams is dealt with. Harviainen argues that these contexts 'closely resemble bowl incantations.' The salient linguistic similarities – noted by Harviainen – are:

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Babylonian Talmud (BT). Additionally, he has compared the salient linguistic features of Nedarim with Geonic Aramaic and with the Aramaic of Targum Onqelos and Jonathan.

<sup>133</sup> The features enumerated below are collected from Harviainen 1983: 104-106.

<sup>134</sup> This ambiguous expression implies that 'aleph is used for \*/ā/ in a medial position.

<sup>135</sup> Some of the features in common with Nedarim presented above, also tally with Targumic and/or Geonic Aramaic.

<sup>136</sup> According to Harviainen, both ׀- and ׀- are attested in the bowl texts.

<sup>137</sup> Harviainen 1983: 105-106.

<sup>138</sup> Harviainen 1983: 107.

<sup>139</sup> The 'non-Babylonian' features of BTA are presented by Sh. Friedman (1974: 58-69).

- (a) ܦ' - as the possessive suffix of the 3rd p. fem. sg.  
 (b) The imperfect prefix -' (instead of -ܢ or -ܢܘ).<sup>140</sup>

#### 1.2.4.1. 'KOINÉ' FEATURES

In a series of papers Harviainen has introduced the term 'Eastern Aramaic 'koiné' to describe the linguistic features of the Aramaic, Syriac, and Mandaic bowl incantations which do not conform to the boundaries of literary dialects.<sup>141</sup> Thus, according to Harviainen, a Syriac incantation may reveal tell-tale Jewish Aramaic (or Mandaic) features and *vice versa*. Some of these koiné features, such as the indication of /ā/ by ܐ and the use of the 3rd p. sg. possessive suffix ܦ' - also with pl. nouns, are found only in the bowl incantations.<sup>142</sup>

Harviainen argues that the koiné features testify in favour of an amalgamation of closely related East Aramaic dialects in Central Mesopotamia.<sup>143</sup> Among the literary Aramaic dialects, Mandaic shows most affinities with the 'koiné' features, but the 'koiné' is not 'identical with any known type of Eastern Aramaic.'<sup>144</sup> The abundance of Mandaic forms represented by the 'koiné' may be due to 'less solid literary usage of this dialect.'<sup>145</sup>

Based on the bowls published by him, Harviainen points out the following 'koiné' features:<sup>146</sup>

- (a) The confusion of laryngeals.  
 (b) Phonetic spellings, such as the use of ' as the counterpart of *shwa*.  
 (c) The use of ܐ as the counterpart of /ā/.  
 (d) The conformation of masculine plural nouns supplied with possessive suffixes to the corresponding singular forms, and a similar development in

<sup>140</sup> Harviainen 1983: 108-109.

<sup>141</sup> Harviainen 1978: 27-28; 1981: 23-24; 1983: 107, n. 1. Note that Abraham Tal, too, has used the term *koiné* in connection with Aramaic. But, in contrast, he refers to the literary Aramaic of the early Christian period, such as Nabatean and the dialect of TJ, which – despite wide geographical expanse – reveals a rather uniform linguistic tradition, which as a superdialectal language may be compared with the Greek *koiné*. See Tal 1975: 213ff. and elsewhere. It must be stressed that Harviainen has used the term in a totally different sense.

<sup>142</sup> Harviainen 1983: 107, n. 1. As a matter of fact, 'the conformation of masc. plural nouns supplied with possessive suffixes to the corresponding singular forms' is normal in BJA, and hence cannot be regarded as a speciality of the bowl texts. Hence, there is no reason to conclude that 'Bowl texts bridge the gap which has existed between Mandaic and Northern Modern dialects in this respect.' Cf. Harviainen 1981: 20.

<sup>143</sup> Harviainen 1978: 27.

<sup>144</sup> Harviainen 1981: 24.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> Harviainen 1981: 23-24; 1983: 107, n. 1.

prepositions which follow the pattern of masculine plurals when supplied with suffixes.<sup>147</sup>

- (e) Confusion in the gender of the plural pronominal suffixes.
- (f) Pronouns which do not conform to the boundaries of literary dialects.<sup>148</sup>
- (g) Easy transfer of nouns and different noun formations from one dialect to another.<sup>149</sup>
- (h) The possible confusion of genders of the plural forms in the imperfect tense.
- (i) The use of the imperfect prefix -ʾ besides -l.

For my part, I think Harviainen is right in stressing the exceptional features of the bowl texts, as well as in demonstrating deviations between spoken and literary dialects of East Aramaic. Furthermore, it is possible, as Harviainen states, that 'many of the exceptional features have been normalized since they have seemed like mistakes to the publisher.'<sup>150</sup>

Harviainen's comments concerning possible similarities between the 'koiné' features and the trends of development in the Modern East Aramaic dialects may also be a promising start for a new line of inquiry.<sup>151</sup>

In some details, however, Harviainen's hypothesis is open to criticism. First, some of the data adduced in its favour can be explained as resulting from the fact that an incantation text written, for instance, in BJA may derive its origin from a Mandaic or Syriac incantation and *vice versa*. It seems that some of the forms were copied mechanically from one source to another. Greenfield and Naveh have shown convincingly that the Aramaic incantation – published by Harviainen – which displays Mandaic forms is based on a Mandaic version.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, some of the most prominent BJA features in the Syriac bowls, such as the demonstrative pronoun ܢܗܕܝܢ, are mostly restricted to texts which can be claimed to be based on BJA originals.<sup>153</sup> Hence, we could argue that BJA features appear in the Syriac texts

<sup>147</sup> E.g. בנייה 'his sons' (for בנניה\*); עליה 'over him' (for עליה\*).

<sup>148</sup> The most important of these is the demonstrative pronoun *hdyn*, which appears in a Syriac bowl published by Harviainen and in a small group of parallel versions, see Harviainen 1978: 16.

<sup>149</sup> The bowl incantations published by Harviainen disclose a great deal of Mandaic vocabulary, cf. Harviainen 1978: 26; 1981: 19, 24. According to Harviainen, the koiné trends most readily influence the lexical level of language.

<sup>150</sup> Harviainen 1981: 23.

<sup>151</sup> See Harviainen 1981: 20, 23.

<sup>152</sup> See Greenfield & Naveh 1985: 102-105. See also above I.1. *Aramaic Magic Bowls: Preliminary Remarks*.

<sup>153</sup> See Naveh & Shaked 1985: 128. Among the Syriac incantations, the BJA form ܢܗܕܝܢ occurs in most of the cases in a group of texts with basically the same text; see Naveh & Shaked 1985: 126, 128 and Harviainen 1978: 4, 16. ܢܗܕܝܢ is attested in the phrases *ptgm' hdyn* and



features that the Aramaic bowl incantations share with Mandaic are well attested in BJA in general. This is, of course, due to the well-known proximity of BJA and Mandaic. In actual fact, some of the common features, such as the confusion of laryngeals, occur more frequently in BTA than in the Aramaic magic incantations. The lexical features deviating from literary dialects can, as Harviainen explicitly admits, be 'attributable to our imperfect knowledge' of Jewish Aramaic.<sup>160</sup> In other words, the lexical deviations prove little unless they are supported by phonetic and morphological traits.

The most that may be said with certainty is that the bowl incantations written in an East Aramaic dialect attest to some features which do not conform to the anticipated boundaries of East Aramaic dialects; and I believe that more features of this kind will be discovered in the incantations. However, it is difficult to determine whether these features are due to textual borrowings from other dialects, or whether they reinforce the deviations between the spoken and literary language.

It is noteworthy that in their language the Syriac magic incantations evince BJA features noticeably more often than the Aramaic incantations exhibit Syriac features. This argument may gain some additional force from the fact that a peculiar verbal form with clear affinities to BJA (viz. כְּתַבְתִּי) is attested in a Syriac bowl recently published by Naveh and Shaked.<sup>161</sup> Moreover, the same text commonly uses -ל as an imperfect prefix of the 3rd p. masc., alongside the regular Syriac -י, e.g. וְלֹא לְרַמּוּן 'they should not cast' (N&Sh 26:5).<sup>162</sup> According to Naveh and Shaked, this bowl is of Christian origin.<sup>163</sup> Otherwise -ל is, as far as I know, unattested in the Syriac bowl texts.

All in all, there seem to be a number of linguistic traits in the Syriac bowl texts which deviate from genuine Syriac. It is difficult to ascertain whether these BJA features are attributable to possible BJA originals on which the Syriac texts were based or whether they are traits of the actual vernacular, with a mixed type of dialect. The latter possibility is connected with the ideas put forth by Harviainen. Note also that some of the Syriac texts could have been written by a Jewish scribe, a possibility which could also explain BJA features in the texts written in Syriac characters.<sup>164</sup> It is noteworthy here – as already pointed out at the beginning of this study – that the majority of the Syriac texts are written in proto-Manichaean script

<sup>160</sup> See Harviainen 1981: 19.

<sup>161</sup> See Naveh & Shaked 1993: 142. It must be stressed, however, that the ending יְרֵ- appears in BJA only for *verba tertiae wawlyod*. See Epstein 1960: 96; Morag 1988: 253, and below IV.10.1. *Perfect*. The ending is characteristic of TO (see IV.10.1).

<sup>162</sup> The prefix -ל is well known in BTA. See e.g. Epstein 1960: 34, 36.

<sup>163</sup> See also Naveh & Shaked 1993: 140-141.

<sup>164</sup> This theory is discussed earlier in this study. See I.1. *Aramaic Magic Bowls: Preliminary Remarks*.

as opposed to the standard Edessan type of Syriac, a fact which may intimate that they stem from different communities – with a slightly different type of dialect – than the bulk of Syriac literature.<sup>165</sup> This possibility fits in rather well with the linguistic differences between Syriac observable in the bowl texts and other variants of Syriac. Further studies are needed to explain the BJA features in the Syriac bowls, even though in most cases it seems plausible that they can be attributed to the copying of texts from one script to another.

As for the Mandaic features in the Aramaic bowl texts, the question is complicated, as noted above, by the closeness of these two dialects of East Aramaic. The isoglosses will be noted and discussed in the course of this study.

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<sup>165</sup> See above I.1. *Aramaic Magic Bowls: Preliminary Remarks*.