

V. CONCLUSIONS

The most important single questions we should answer in this study are: first, is there a dialect of the magic bowl texts? Is there any reason at all to treat these texts as a single unit? Provided that the answer to the first question is positive, the second question is what is the nature of this dialect or these dialects? In other words, how can we correlate it/them with other Aramaic dialects of the Late Aramaic period and, in general, with any relevant Aramaic dialect?

Before trying to answer these questions – on the basis of this study – and at the same time to summarize the findings of this study, I should like to take a quick look at the basic concept in the discussion, namely ‘dialect.’ In what sense – one may ask – are the Aramaic dialects represented in the Classical Aramaic corpus to be considered dialects? While the concept ‘dialect’ generally refers to a rather uniform type of language in a given geographical area or in a given social, religious, or other group, differing from other varieties of that language,¹ in the Aramaic studies the concept ‘dialect’ often indicates linguistic features of a given text or series of texts. Importantly, we have few if any documents – excluding perhaps very short inscriptions – which are written in such a uniform language generally typical of any living dialect, a fact which has become evident in the history of Aramaic studies. Little by little almost any Aramaic document has been divided – in the course of research – into subdialects and these subdialects, perhaps, into subgroups. We know, for instance, that the Aramaic represented by Ezra differs somewhat from that of Daniel. Nevertheless, both of them as a whole are called Biblical Aramaic and any feature found in them is considered as a Biblical Aramaic feature.² Now, if the book of Ezra had not been included in the Biblical corpus, one may ponder in what sense it would be ‘Biblical Aramaic,’ then, or would we, in that case, have another Aramaic dialect: ‘Ezraic Aramaic’ as opposed to Biblical Aramaic? Lest there be any misunderstanding, I emphasize that the differences within Biblical Aramaic are, of course, not too striking. Yet I wish to note that convention plays a remarkable role when we discuss Aramaic dialects.

Perhaps the most significant single reason why most Aramaic documents contain features from originally different dialects, is the long process of redaction

¹ Cf. Trask 1996: 111.

² It has been argued that the documents in Ezra represent Official Aramaic, while the narrative in both Ezra and Daniel represent SLA. See Greenfield 1978: 34-35. Furthermore, the vocalization of Biblical Aramaic – as also noted in passing in this study – may reflect East Aramaic. See Kutscher 1971b: 403.

typical of these documents. This is most apparent with regard to the Targumic and Talmudic texts, which are to a much greater degree heterogenous than, for instance, Biblical Aramaic texts. BT is, as is well known, full of dialectal differences on various levels. On the one hand, we have standard BTA *versus* the Aramaic of the 'different' dialects, such as Nedarim, Nazir etc., the dialects of which possibly differ from each other, too. On another level, BT yields official documents of different types with a sort of Aramaic often described as Official Aramaic. Moreover, West Aramaic features are included, and there are signs of earlier dialects, such as that of the early Amoraim, infiltrated into the later traits of standard BTA. Apparently due to the gradual compilation and redaction process of BT, the different dialect types often occur side by side in the same texts. For instance, the features of standard BTA are well attested in Nedarim alongside 'standard Nedaric' features. This fact makes it especially difficult to compare BTA with other dialects: one can hardly find any Aramaic linguistic trait – excluding some peculiarities of Old Aramaic dialects – which are not included in the corpus of BT. While the study of the different traditions within BTA is only at its beginning,³ a comparison of the bowl texts with these traditions remains problematic for the time being. Often – far too often – one can only note that such and such a feature in our texts seems to find parallels, for instance, in the official documents preserved in BT, but, in the absence of detailed studies, it is hard to do anything but make off-hand comments in this respect. In the case of TO, the mixture of different linguistic features may be explained by the fact that it apparently originated in Palestine, but was redacted and transmitted in Mesopotamia.

By the standards used for 'Aramaic dialects,' there is no doubt that we can call the Aramaic occurring in the Aramaic bowl texts the Aramaic of the bowl texts. These texts are as homogenous as many other Aramaic texts, generally regarded as Aramaic dialects. At the same time, I am fully aware that they yield features which apparently stem from different geographical areas and from different phases of Aramaic, but the same is true of practically any other JA 'dialect.' It is easy to note that our texts have not undergone any process of standardization typical of major literary languages, such as Classical Arabic and, to a lesser degree, Official Aramaic and Syriac. Yet, they contain a bundle of linguistic features which appear in most texts, and these features which occur in most of the bowl texts permit us to treat them as a single unit. As already noted repeatedly in the course of this study, there are dialectal differences between various texts, but, importantly, those texts which present linguistic features diverging from the majority, such as N&Sh 13, nevertheless also contain features typical of the majority of our bowls, so to say 'standard

³ We may note, among others, the study of the Yemenite reading tradition and MSS. by Morag and his students, the study of Nedarim by Rybak, and the investigation of the Aramaic of the early Amoraim by Eljakim Wajsberg.

bowl Aramaic' features.⁴ We cannot demonstrate differences between texts from various localities, e.g. from Nippur and from elsewhere,⁵ and it should be emphasized that we have practically no possibility of dividing bowl texts into dialect groups. This is due to several factors: first, most texts are short. Hence, each text typically contains only a handful of dialectal markers that we could exploit. This is further complicated by the significant palaeographical problems we face in the study of these texts. One sometimes cannot help feeling that the more striking are the linguistic elements (possibly) attested in a text, the more significant are the reading problems. Second, linguistic elements of different types are generally contained within the same texts (see below).⁶

As regards the nature of the Aramaic of the bowl texts, several concluding remarks need to be made. First, it is apparent that the features present in the bowl texts are not features of a single dialect (the word dialect used now in the sense it is normally used in linguistics), but features otherwise familiar from different dialects and phases of Aramaic are used side by side. Even forms known from Official Aramaic, but otherwise unattested in Late Aramaic are encountered. The bowl texts thus leave the impression of being a mixed type of language. Therefore, it is hard to believe that they represent a living dialect of the Late Aramaic period,⁷ but are to a considerable extent literary texts. To give but one instance, it is hard to imagine a living dialect with such a 'collection' of demonstrative pronouns as attested in our texts (cf. IV.4). Yet, this is not to say that they do not (also) reveal features of the spoken language of their era, but this is not due to the fact that the scribes wrote more or less as they spoke, but due to the fact that despite their attempt to write elevated language they could not help including some features of the popular language. This was apparently due to deficiencies in their education. Furthermore, in the era when our texts were produced, there were within Babylonian Jewry several literary dialects or languages, which were employed according to the types of usage and, more or less, kept separate.⁸ Some of the literary dialects or 'literary crystallizations' probably contained more elements of the actual vernacular than others. I refer to the standard dialect of BT. It is apparent that this co-existence of 'literary crystallizations' within Babylonian Jewry left traces in our texts. Those texts which

⁴ We will exemplify this below with the aid of a couple of texts.

⁵ Note that the origin of a great number of texts is unknown.

⁶ Therefore, I find the criticism of Yamauchi by Segal (1970: 610) a little unrealistic. Yamauchi allegedly treated the Mandaic incantation texts 'as a single unit.' We may assume that variations in texts may be attributed to 'dialectal or other influences,' but beyond that it is difficult to proceed.

⁷ Note that one of the presuppositions of this study is that these texts would reveal features of the 'Volksprache,' as opposed to standardized literary compositions such as Targumic and Talmudic texts.

⁸ Cf. the important article by Goshen-Gottstein (1978), especially pp. 174ff.

contain more standard BTA elements than the majority followed the literary model of standard Talmudic idiom, alongside the regular literary model of our texts.

It is of significance – as pointed out repeatedly in the course of this study – that the bowl texts share many features with official documents embedded in BT, even though we cannot present any detailed comparisons with them. I believe that our texts and these documents belong to the basically same literary model. Both of them follow the model of TO and, in fact, Official Aramaic, and both of them also reveal features of standard BTA. The Nedarim type of Aramaic and Geonic Aramaic are also closely allied to same set of ‘literary crystallizations.’⁹ Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that none of these traditions is identical with any other tradition. Many of the isoglosses in common with these traditions have been noted and discussed in this study. Note, however, that, since several of these traditions, such as Geonic Aramaic and ‘non-Babylonian’ elements embedded in BT, have not been the subject of detailed study, we cannot produce careful comparisons which would reveal the exact linguistic profile of each of these traditions in comparison with others. Moreover, we are faced with some problems of definition. For instance, what is actually meant by ‘Geonic Aramaic’ is open to further definition.¹⁰ For these reasons, part of my argumentation concerning the relationship between our texts and these traditions is of an impressionistic nature, even though I have tried to make the best use of all the scattered information regarding these traditions.¹¹

All in all, the basic nature or, so to say, the linguistic profile of the bowl texts appears to be conservative, a fact noted by several scholars (cf. I.2.4). This conservative character is evident when we compare our texts with other dialects of the same period. This comparison demonstrates that the Aramaic in the bowl texts is clearly more archaic than standard BTA and Mandaic. These conservative traits are evident both in the phonology and morphology of the texts. The typical archaic features of the magic bowls may be summarized with the aid of the following table:

⁹ Further, it is probable that the Aramaic of the Early Amoraim – analyzed by Eljakim Wajsborg – has many affinities with the same group of dialects. The basic similarity of many of these traditions was noted by Harviainen (1983: 110ff.). Yet I do not believe, in contrast with Harviainen, that the bowl texts and cognates reflect a living rural dialect as opposed to an urban dialect represented by standard BTA. Cf. also Kaufman 1974: 163.

¹⁰ We know, for instance, that the major Geonic work *Halakhot Pesuqot* abounds in dialectal differences. See Sokoloff 1971: 235-236.

¹¹ In each chapter of this study, the forms of the bowl texts are compared with corresponding forms in other Aramaic dialects.

- (1) The vacillation between *'aleph* and *he* to indicate final /ā/ (see III.1).
- (2) Laryngeals and pharyngeals are better preserved in the orthography than in BJA, in general (III.2).
- (3) The tendency to maintain consonants in final position, e.g. the ך- of pronouns and in nominal endings and the ן- of the 3rd p. fem. sg. perfect form (III.3; IV.10.1).
- (4) The tendency to maintain word-final vowels in unstressed open syllables (III.5).
- (5) The occurrence of conservative and archaic personal pronouns, such as םןןןם, instead of forms of standard BTA. Note also the preservation of gender distinction in the 2nd p. sg. and pl. (IV.1).
- (6) Many conservative forms of suffixed pronouns, e.g. ך- for the 1st p. sg.; preservation of gender distinction in the 2nd p. sg.; ךן- as the 3rd p. masc. sg. with pl. nouns; and םן- for the 1st. p. pl. (IV.3).
- (7) An archaic basic set of proximal demonstratives (ךןך 'this' masc. sg.; םךן fem. sg.; ךןל 'these'). The texts also attest to many other conservative forms as minority forms (IV.4).
- (8) The regular form of the independent personal pronoun is ךל, as opposed to the standard BTA ךן (IV.5).
- (9) Conservative forms of interrogative and indefinite pronouns prevail over 'more developed' variants (IV.7).
- (10) The frequent use of the absolute state alongside the regular emphatic state (IV.8.1).
- (11) In the masc. pl. absolute state, ךן- prevails over ך- (IV.8.3).
- (12) Conservative variants of prepositions, adverbs, and conjunctions prevail over variants in standard BTA, e.g. the object marker ן is common (IV.9).
- (13) Possible remnants of *haf'el* alongside the regular *'af'el* (IV.10).
- (14) Conservative endings in the perfect: ן- for the 3rd. p. fem. sg.; םן- for the 1st. p. pl.; ךןן, with the final ך-, for the 2nd p. masc. pl.; ן- for the 3rd p. masc. pl.; ן- for the 3rd. p. fem. pl.; and the type םןןן, resembling the Aramaic of TO, for the 1st p. sg. of *tertiaae wawlyod* verbs.
- (15) ך as the major form of the imperfect prefix instead of ךן/ךל. The final *nun* is normally preserved in the 2nd p. fem. sg. and in the 2nd and 3rd p. pl. forms (IV.10.2).
- (16) The possible preservation of a specific fem. form for 2nd p. pl. imperatives (IV.10.3).

- (17) Imperative endings with ʾ- (2nd p. fem. sg.) and ʿ- (2nd p. pl.) alongside forms with no ending (IV.10.3).
- (18) Conservative elements in participles, including:
 - (a) the pl. endings ʾʿ- (masc.) and ʿ- (fem);
 - (b) absence of the particle ʾʿ;
 - (c) the *pa.* participle pattern *məqattal* (IV.10.4).
- (19) The infinitive of the type *qattālā* of derived stems alongside BTA forms (IV.10.5).
- (20) Plural object suffixes of the type ʾʿ(*)- (IV.10.7).

These archaic features diverge from standard BTA, and many of them are isoglosses held in common with either TO, Nedarim etc., the Aramaic of the Geonim, or with the official documents preserved in BT (or in some cases with all of them). Nevertheless, the Aramaic of the bowl texts is not totally identical with any of them, as is evident on the basis of the comparisons made in each chapter of this study. I emphasize that due to our lack of comprehensive knowledge of these dialects the exact relationship remains open for further research.

In addition to these features, the magic bowl texts exhibit late or more developed (less conservative) linguistic features which often tally with standard BTA. It is typical that archaic and more developed traits occur in the very same texts. In the following table, we enumerate the most important single features of a more developed nature:

- (1) ʾ- is the regular ending for final /ā/;¹² and – what is more important – it is quite often used for /ā/ in a medial position, too (see III.1).
- (2) Indications of weakening in the laryngeals and pharyngeals, though they are in general well preserved, at least in the orthography (III.2).
- (3) Instances of deletion of ʿ- and, exceptionally, of other final consonants, too (III.3).
- (4) Rather common representation of vocal *shwa* by *yod* (III.5).
- (5) Instances of deletion of unstressed vowels in the final position. In the majority of cases, however, they are preserved (III.5).
- (6) The use of *waw* as a counterpart of */ā/. The trait is attested only in a minority of bowls (III.6).
- (7) Though suffixed pronouns, in general, show conservative traits, the following more developed features also occur:

¹² The regular use of ʾ- for /ā/ in final position is typical of East Aramaic. Note, however, that TO, too, employs ʾ- in this function.

- (a) 𐤀- as a 3rd p. masc. sg. form used with masc. pl. nouns (alongside 𐤀𐤀-);
 - (b) the occurrence of the pl. suffixes with the final *nun* elided in some texts;
 - (c) confusion of the 2nd p. sg. suffixes used with sg. nouns and the ones used with pl. nouns, as in BTA and Mandaic;¹³ (d) the 3rd p. masc. pl. suffix 𐤀- as in Mandaic (IV.3).
- (8) The use (word order; no difference between substantival and adjectival use) of the demonstratives accords with late dialects; further, some minority demonstrative forms with affinities with standard BTA appear (IV.4).
 - (9) Analytical constructions predominate in genitive expressions as in BTA (IV.8.2).
 - (10) In the masc. pl. absolute state, 𐤀- appears alongside the more common 𐤀- (IV.8.3).
 - (11) The regular ending for the masc. pl. emphatic state is *-ē*, as in BTA; in the fem., the absolute pl. is rarely met with, and in the fem. sg. emphatic state, 𐤀- is found, alongside the regular 𐤀/𐤀- (IV.8; IV.8.3).
 - (12) Some typically late or more developed prepositions, adverbs, and conjunctions occur (IV.9).
 - (13) Few instances of 3rd p. masc. pl. perfect forms with the loss of 𐤀- and the perfect of the type 𐤀𐤀𐤀, as in BTA (IV.10).
 - (14) The imperfect prefixes 𐤀 and 𐤀 of the 3rd p. masc. alongside the more common 𐤀 (IV.10.2).
 - (15) Bowl texts employ both the short and long imperfect of the verb 𐤀𐤀𐤀 'to be,' as opposed to TO (IV.10.2.1).
 - (16) The imperative forms for the 2nd p. fem. sg. and 2nd p. pl. with no endings alongside forms with 𐤀- and 𐤀- (IV.10.3).
 - (17) Late forms in participles – alongside conservative forms – including:
 - (a) the pl. forms with 𐤀- (masc.) and 𐤀- (fem.);
 - (b) several *verba tertiae waw/yod* patterns familiar from BTA;
 - (c) the occurrence of *pa.* participles of *verba mediae waw/yod* with the prefix 𐤀- (IV.10.4).
 - (18) Several typically BTA infinitive patterns of derived stems, alongside *qattālā* (IV.10.5).
 - (19) Plural object suffixes (affixed to verbs) of the type 𐤀𐤀(𐤀)- and 𐤀𐤀(𐤀)- (IV.10.7).

¹³ The trait is common with the *qere* of Biblical Aramaic, too.

As has been pointed out repeatedly, only a few of these late or more developed features are majority features in the bowl texts. These include nos. (1); (8); (9) and (11).

Further, in some of the cases, the conservative and more developed features are practically equally well represented in our texts. Such cases are nos. (16); (17); (18); and (19).

Most of the more developed features accord with standard BTA or, at least, with some subdialects within BJA. Moreover, several of them are shared with Mandaic, too. At least, the following traits accord with standard BTA: (1); (2); (3); (4);¹⁴ (5); (7); (8); (9); (10); (11); (12); (13); (14); (15); (16); (17); (18); and (19). The use of *yod* as a counterpart of *shwa* is attested here and there within branches of Late Aramaic, including some representatives of BJA and Mandaic in particular, whereas the use of *waw* as a counterpart of */ā/ is – as far as I know – without parallels in Aramaic. These two traits are apparently indicative of spoken Aramaic features unintentionally introduced into our texts.

Even though many of the conservative features tally with TO, the appearance of the late features alongside the conservative ones clearly implies that our texts are BJA texts of the Late Aramaic period, which, nevertheless, include a remarkably great number of conservative linguistic elements. The fact that the bowl texts accord in many syntactic features (cf. above) with Late Aramaic and BTA in particular suggests that the use of conservative elements is of a non-native character: the scribes included conservative features of '*Hocharamäisch*,' but could not use them in a syntactically correct form. One may note here – in passing – that they also included elements of Biblical Hebrew, but could not spell Hebrew words correctly. The use of (or attempt to use) both the TO type of Aramaic (or even the Official Aramaic type of Aramaic) and Biblical Hebrew may probably be explained by the high prestige of these dialects.

As noted, the conservative and late linguistic features generally appear intermingled in the same texts. The occurrence of conservative and late features side by side is likely to be explained by a model according to which the conservative elements represent imitation of literary Aramaic tradition with affinities to TO, whereas the late features may be understood as signs of influence from the spoken dialects of the era. Further, one may assume that the BTA type of Aramaic was already in the process of development into a literary dialect.¹⁵ This 'competition' between literary models may have had its effect on our texts. This fact may explain the frequent infiltration of late features into our texts. Were these features understood as totally non-literal, the scribes would possibly not have incorporated them

¹⁴ This trait is more common in our texts than in other BJA documents.

¹⁵ Note that our texts were contemporary with BT.

alongside features of TO and even of Official Aramaic. But in a situation where there were two compelling literary models,¹⁶ the co-existence of conservative and late features is only natural. And, in fact, the same co-existence of archaic and late elements is to varying degrees typical of any BJA document.

Finally, I should like to exemplify this co-existence of conservative and late features in the same texts with the aid of a couple of examples:

N&sh 13 is an extensive bowl text with an exceptionally large number of features in common with standard BTA. It yields, for instance, the following more developed or late features:

- (1) The tendency to drop final consonantal elements, especially final ך-.¹⁷
- (2) *Yod* is used to indicate *shwa*.
- (3) *Waw* as a counterpart of */ā/.
- (4) Final unstressed /ū/ is frequently dropped in 3rd p. pl. perfect endings.
- (5) The use of the 3rd masc. sg. suffix יה- also with masc. pl. nouns, i.e. בְּנוֹהִי for בְּנוֹהִים.
- (6) הִי- for the fem. sg. emphatic state.
- (7) The prepositions קִמ- (for קִדֵּמ-), 'between,' and כִּי.
- (8) The 3rd masc. pl. perfect of the type קָטַל.
- (9) The preposition ל- is preferred to indicate the direct object, as in BTA.¹⁸
- (10) Pl. object suffixes of the type (י)נְהוּ- and (י)נְכוּ-.¹⁹

As may be noted, most of these features are shared by standard BTA (cf. above).

However, the bowl also exhibits many features which deviate from BTA, but which it has in common with the majority of magic bowls. These features include for instance: (1) the 3rd p. masc. imperfect prefix י׳;²⁰ (2) many conservative prepositions and particles, such as תְּחֹת, עַל, and יֵת. (3) the demonstrative pronoun הַדָּא.

¹⁶ I.e. the 'Targumic' model, which, in fact, was based on Official Aramaic (as is evident in the light of Abraham Tal's study of TJ, see Tal 1975: 213ff.), and the 'Talmudic' model, which was developed in the study of the Law.

¹⁷ E.g. צִמְחִי (for צִמְחִין in line 20) and נִיזִי (for נִיזִיל in line 19).

¹⁸ E.g. תְּכַרְוּ חֵף כְּלָהוּ לְאֵילֵהִי דְחַרְשֵׁי 'they all covered the gods of sorcerers' (line 15); תְּכַרְוּ לְשִׁפּוּרְהוּ 'they broke their trumpets' (16). Note that this trait is not 'late' in the sense that it already occurs in Official Aramaic. Yet it is 'late' in the sense that it clearly prevails over הֵת in the East Aramaic dialects of the Late Aramaic period. See IV.9. and IV.10.6.

¹⁹ E.g. שְׂדוּנְהוּ.

²⁰ ל- and ו- are unattested.

Another sample text analyzed here is AIT 28;²¹ it yields the following late traits:

- (1) /ā/ in medial position is occasionally marked with 'aleph (חרוניאתא).
- (2) *Yod* as a counterpart of vocal *shwa* (e.g. איתכבישו).
- (3) Only -נ as the imperfect prefix of the 3rd p. masc. (e.g. נישתגר).
- (4) 3rd p. masc. pl. perfect of the type קטול (נחורת).²²
- (5) The suffix תי- used with a sg. noun (בשמיד מרי שמיא ארעא).

Yet, the following conservative traits are present, too:

- (1) The demonstrative pronoun דדין.
- (2) The preposition על.
- (3) 3rd p. masc. pl. perfect with the final ו- (איתכבישו).
- (4) 3rd p. fem. pl. perfect of the type *qəṭalā* (כללה).
- (5) The object suffix -*innūn* (היא תיפרוסינון).

In addition, of importance is the demonstrative pronoun ד/די, which is problematic, since it may be classified as either a conservative or a late trait: if we read די, the form is without doubt a conservative element, but if we read דו, the *waw* as a counterpart of */ā/ is a late trait, while, by contrast, the basic pronoun is definitely conservative. In general, this bowl, too, yields more late elements than the majority of bowl texts.

²¹ The reading of AIT 28 is heavily based on the emendations by Epstein (1921: 55-56).

²² One could read נחורת as well.