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Aramaic is the best-attested and longest-attested member of the NW Semitic subfamily of languages (which also includes *inter alia* Hebrew, Phoenician, Ugaritic, Moabite, Ammonite, and Edomite). The relatively small proportion of the biblical text preserved in an Aramaic original (Dan 2:4–7:28; Ezra 4:8–68 and 7:12–26; Jeremiah 10:11; Gen 31:47 [two words] as well as isolated words and phrases in Christian Scriptures) belies the importance of this language for biblical studies and for religious studies in general, for Aramaic was the primary international language of literature and communication throughout the Near East from ca. 600 B.C.E. to ca. 700 C.E. and was the major spoken language of Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia in the formative periods of Christianity and rabbinic Judaism.

Jesus and his disciples, according to the stories in the Gospels, spoke Aramaic. Parts of the later books of the Hebrew Bible, as well as portions of the Gospels and Acts, are often thought to be translations from Aramaic originals, but even if not they are undoubtedly strongly "Aramaized" in their diction. Late biblical Hebrew and rabbinic Hebrew were heavily influenced by Aramaic in both grammar and vocabulary. Two of the major translation traditions of the Hebrew Bible—the Syriac Peshitta and the Jewish Targums—are in Aramaic, as are substantial portions of rabbinic literature, the entire literary corpus of Syriac Christianity, and that of the Mandaeans (a non-Christian gnostic sect of S Mesopotamia). After the Moslem conquest, Arabic gradually displaced Aramaic as the literary and colloquial language of the Near East. Isolated pockets of Modern Aramaic speech still remain to this day, and the study and use of classical Syriac as a learned, religious language has never stopped. Indeed, it has witnessed somewhat of a revival in recent decades (see *EJ* 3: 259–87).

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A. The Periods and Sources of Aramaic

Aramaic is attested over a period of almost 3,000 years, during which time there occurred great changes of grammar, lexical stock, and usage. It has generally proved helpful for analysis to divide the several Aramaic dialects into periods, groups, and subgroups based both on chronology and geography. Although no universally accepted scheme of such classificatory phases exists, and new discoveries regularly alter our picture—especially for the sparsely attested older dialects—the general shape of the outline is clear. The following scheme represents that adopted by the major research project in the field—the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon—and incorporates discoveries through the mid-1980s.

1. Old Aramaic (to ca. 612 B.C.E.). This period witnessed the rise of the Arameans as a major force in ANE history, the adoption of their language as an international language of diplomacy in the latter days of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and the dispersal of Aramaic-speaking peoples from Egypt to Lower Mesopotamia as a result of the Assyrian policies of deportation. The scattered and generally brief remains of inscriptions on imperishable materials preserved from these times are enough to demonstrate that an international standard dialect had not yet been developed. The extant texts may be grouped into several dialects:

a. Standard Syrian (or Western Old Aramaic). These inscriptions, of very limited chronological (mid-9th to end of 8th century B.C.E.) and geographic spread (within a radius of about 100 km centered on Aleppo) include:

BR-HDD: A brief dedication of a stela to Melqart (the god of Tyre) by BR-HDD, king of Aram.
Zakkur: A stela dedicated to the god Iluwer by Zakkur, king of Hamath. Its text is reminiscent of many of the Psalms of Thanksgiving.
Sefire: Three stelae containing the text of a treaty between Matiʿel, king of Arpad, and BR-GʾYH, king of KTK, apparently the governor of one of the Neo-Assyrian Syrian provinces (perhaps Šamši-Ilu of Bit-Adini [Lemaire and Durand 1984]). This text is our best extrabiblical source for the West Semitic tradition of covenantal blessings and curses.
Nerab: Funeral stelae of two priests of the moon-god, Śehr.
BR-RKB: See Samalian, below.

b. Samalian. At modern Zinçirli, dynasts of the Neo-Hittite kingdom of Samʾal (also referred to by some scholars as Yaʾudi) wrote their dedicatory inscriptions first in Phoenician (KLMW), then in a

local, highly idiosyncratic Aramaic dialect (the so-called Hadad and PNMW inscriptions), and, finally, in standard, Syrian Old Aramaic (BR-RKB).

c. Fakhariyah. A bilingual, Neo-Assyrian and Aramaic inscription on a statue. The script and orthography of this inscription are of major importance for the history of the alphabet (Kaufman 1986).

d. Mesopotamian. Primarily consists of brief economic and legal texts and endorsements scratched on clay tablets (Fales 1986; Kaufman 1989). Not surprisingly, both the Fakhariyah and Mesopotamian dialects evidence a substantial amount of Akkadian influence.

e. Deir ʿAlla. This important but fragmentary text, painted on the plaster walls of a cultic installation, recounts a vision of "Balaam, son of Beor," the Transjordanian prophet known from Numbers 22–24. The fact that some scholars classify the language of this text as a Canaanite, rather than an Aramaic, dialect, illustrates that there is no demonstrable dividing line (or, in linguistic terms, a bundle of isoglosses) separating Canaanite and Aramaic at this time. See DEIR ʿALLA (TEXTS).

2. Imperial Aramaic (or "Official Aramaic"; to ca. 200 B.C.E.). During this period Aramaic spread far beyond the borders of its native lands over the vast territories of the Neo-Babylonian and even larger Persian empires—from Upper Egypt to Asia Minor and eastward to the Indian subcontinent. Unfortunately, only a remnant of the undoubtedly once vast corpus of administrative documents, records, and letters that held these empires together has been preserved, for such texts were written in ink on perishable materials, in sharp contrast to the more durable cuneiform clay tablets of earlier W Asiatic cultures. (A single syllabic cuneiform Aramaic text, an incantation from Uruk, is known. Though from Hellenistic times, its archaizing language may be ascribed to this period.) Isolated monumental stone inscriptions have been found in the various peripheral regions (e.g., Sheik Fadl in Egypt, Teima in Arabia, Daskyleion in Asia Minor), but none, surprisingly enough, in the core regions of Syria and Mesopotamia.

The bulk of the finds, however, is from Egypt, where the dry climate led to the preservation of papyrus and leather along with the expected ostraca and stone inscriptions. The major Egyptian finds are (1) papyrus archives of the Jewish military garrison at Elephantine/Syene (including deeds of sale, marriage contracts, formal letters to the authorities in Jerusalem, and fragments of literary materials); (2) the correspondence of the Persian satrap of Egypt, Arsames; (3) a packet of letters sent to family members residing at Syene and Luxor, discovered at Hermopolis; and (4) Saqqarah: a late-7th-century papyrus letter from a Philistine king (perhaps of Ekron) asking help of pharaoh against the king of Babylon; and legal and economic records on papyri and ostraca from the 5th and 4th centuries.

The Aramaic "official" letters in the book of Ezra are almost certainly composed in Imperial Aramaic, for both their language and their epistolary style are appropriate to the period.

More fascinating for their historical context than their content are the fragmentary papyrus deeds of sale, dating from mid-4th-century Samaria, discovered in a cave of the Wadi Daliyeh, near Jericho, along with the skeletons of about 200 people who had apparently fled from the approaching Macedonian army. See DALIYEH, WADI ED- (M.R. 189155).

From a linguistic perspective, what characterizes this period above all is that it witnessed the development of a literary, standard form of both the language and its orthography—an ideal to be strived for, at least in literary texts and formal documents. The model for this standard appears to have been Babylonian Aramaic as spoken and written by educated Persians. This ideal, in the guise of Standard Literary Aramaic, was to last more than a thousand years.

3. Middle Aramaic (to ca. 250 C.E.). In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, Greek replaced Aramaic as the administrative language of the Near East, while in the various Aramaic-speaking regions the dialects began to develop independently of one another. Written Aramaic, however, as is the case with most written languages, by providing a somewhat artificial, cross-dialectal uniformity, continued to serve as a vehicle of communication within and among the various groups. For this purpose, the literary standard developed in the previous period, Standard Literary Aramaic, was used, but lexical and grammatical differences based on the language(s) and dialect(s) of the local population are always evident. It is helpful to divide the texts surviving from this period into two major categories: epigraphic and canonical.

a. Epigraphic. (1) Palmyrene: dedicatory and honorific inscriptions and a decree of duty tariffs from the independent Syrian desert oasis trading city of Tadmor/Palmyra (earliest: 33 B.C.E.). Many of the texts are Greek bilinguals.

(2) Nabatean: tomb and votive texts from the Arab kingdom of Petra (earliest: 170 B.C.E.). A hoard of legal papyri from the Bar Kokhba period was discovered in one of the Naḥal Ḥever caves.

(3) Hatran: dedicatory inscriptions from the important, 2d-century C.E. Parthian kingdom of Hatra. A smaller, similar group was found at nearby Assur.

(4) Other: isolated inscriptions from Syria (especially Dura-Europos), Asia Minor, Armenia, Georgia, Media, Parthia, Persia, and Babylonia. Archival materials from the Judean desert are also to be placed here.

b. Canonical. (1) Daniel. The Aramaic portions of this biblical book (in contrast to the material in Ezra) clearly belong to this dialect rather than to Imperial Aramaic.

(2) Jewish Literary Aramaic. (a) Qumran. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, much (if not most) of the nonsectarian, parabiblical material is in Aramaic. This includes the *Genesis Apocryphon,* the *Targum of Job,* the books of *Enoch,* and the *Testament of Levi.*

(b) Targum Onkelos/Jonathan. Although the only reliable mss stem ultimately from the Babylonian academies, the consonantal texts of Targum Onkelos to the Torah and Jonathan to the Prophets apparently originated in Palestine in this period.

(c) Legal Formulas. Preserved in rabbinic literature are texts and formulas of an authentic Aramaic tradition.

(3) Middle Iranian Ideograms. After a brief flirtation with cuneiform for their monumental inscriptions ("Old Persian"), the Persians adopted the Aramaic script for writing their language; and, perhaps under the cuneiform model, in both Parthian and Pehlevi, Aramaic ideograms were used to indicate some Persian lexical units.

(4) Demotic Material. Also, apparently, from the earliest part of this period is the Aramaic material preserved in the demotic script on papyrus Amherst 63, which includes several hymns in a mixed Canaanite/Aramaic dialect and, in relatively good Aramaic, the lengthy story of the conflict between the two royal Assyrian brothers Asshurbanipal and Shamashshumukin. The decipherment of this material has been a slow process, but it is already clear that many unexpected features appear in the Aramaic of this text. Since Standard Literary Aramaic is very much a function of orthographic tradition, the occurrence here of such unexpected forms should not be a great surprise.

4. Late Aramaic (to ca. 1200 C.E.). The bulk of our evidence for Aramaic comes from the vast literature and occasional inscriptions of this period. During the early centuries of this period Aramaic dialects were still widely spoken. During the second half of this period, however, Arabic had already displaced Aramaic as the spoken language of much of the population. Consequently, many of our texts were composed and/or transmitted by persons whose Aramaic dialect was only a learned language. Although the dialects of this period were previously divided into two branches (Eastern and Western), it now seems best to think rather of three: Palestinian, Syrian, and Babylonian.

a. Palestinian. (1) **Jewish.** (a) Inscriptions (mostly from synagogues); (b) Targumic: the dialect of the Palestinian Targums (Neofiti, Genizah fragments, and the Fragment Targum); (c) Galilean: the dialect of the Talmud and midrashim of Palestine (so-called "Yerushalmi").

(2) Christian. Christian Palestinian Aramaic is attested in a small group of inscriptions, bible translations, and liturgical lectionaries from the Judean region written in Syriac script.

(3) Samaritan. Two different translations of the Torah, liturgical poetry, and some literary/exegetical works are preserved from this group. The reading tradition of the modern Samaritan priests is a valuable linguistic source here, as it is for their Hebrew tradition.

b. Syrian. (1) Syriac. The liturgical language of Eastern Christianity is by far the best documented Aramaic dialect. A vast and varied literature in two (Eastern/Nestorian, Western/Jacobite) dialects and orthographies has been preserved, as well as small collections of epigraphic and archival materials. The orthography of Syriac is based on Standard Literary Aramaic, while its lexicon and grammar are primarily that of the city of Edessa.

(2) Late Jewish Literary Aramaic. This literary dialect, only recently recognized, served for the composition of Aramaic parabiblical and liturgical texts (the best known of them being Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Targum Psalms, and the canonical Targum of Job) and in some cases (Tobit and perhaps others) for the translation into Aramaic of works whose presumed Hebrew or Aramaic original had been lost. Like other literary dialects, it borrows heavily from its forebears, in this case Biblical Aramaic, Jewish Literary Aramaic, Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic. Like most rabbinic materials, the texts have suffered greatly in transmission and often give the impression of

massive inconsistency. Recent studies have revealed, however, that this is a real, albeit literary dialect with its own grammar and lexicon, whose lexical affinities point to a close relationship with the Syriac-speaking region.

c. Babylonian. (1) Jewish. The spoken language of the Jews of Babylonia, preserved primarily in large parts of the Babylonian Talmud. Slightly different dialects are found on "magic bowls" (incantations written on pottery bowls) and in the halakic literature of the post-Talmudic Babylonian sages *(gaʾonîm)*. The written and oral traditions of the Jews of Yemen are particularly important sources for this material.

(2) Mandaic. The spoken and literary language of a non-Christian gnostic sect. The sect itself is generally thought to have Palestinian origins, but its language is totally at home in Mesopotamia.

5. Modern Aramaic (to the present day). These dialects can be divided into the same three geographic groups.

a. Western. Here Aramaic is still spoken only in the town of Ma'lula (ca. 30 miles NNE of Damascus) and surrounding villages. The vocabulary is heavily Arabized.

b. Syrian. Western Syrian (Turoyo) is the language of Jacobite Christians in the region of Tur-ʿAbdin in SE Turkey. This dialect is the descendant of something very like classical Syriac. Eastern Syrian is spoken in the Kurdistani regions of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Azerbaijan by Christians and, formerly, by Jews. Substantial communities of the former are now found in North America. The Jewish speakers have mostly settled in Israel. These dialects are widely spoken by their respective communities and have been studied extensively during the past century. It has become clear that they are not the descendants of any known literary Aramaic dialect.

c. Babylonian. Mandaic is still used, at least until recently, by some Mandaeans in southernmost Iraq and adjacent areas in Iran.

In addition, in recent years classical Syriac has undergone somewhat of a revival as a learned vehicle of communication for Syriac Christians, both in the Middle East and among immigrant communities in Europe and North America.

B. Linguistic Overview

The following summary presupposes a basic acquaintance with the structure of Aramaic's better known cognate language, Biblical Hebrew.

1. Old Aramaic. a. Phonology. In this period the Proto-Semitic phonemic inventory survives virtually unchanged, though some minor changes in articulation seem to be indicated. Since the linear consonantal alphabet used for Aramaic, borrowed from a Canaanite/Phoenician source, had only 22 graphemes, however, several of the characters had to be polyphonous: Thus

šin indicates: *š, ś,* and *ṯ*.
samek (at Fakhariyah only) indicates both *s* and *ṯ*.
zayin indicates *z* and *ḏ*.
ṣade indicates *ṣ* and *ẓ*.
qop indicates *q* and *ḍ* (probably a velar spirant by this time).
ḥet indicates *ḥ* and *ḫ*.
ʿayin indicates *ʿ* and *ġ*.

That these consonantal phonemes still survived (rather than having merged with their graphic equivalent) is surmised largely on the basis of their independent histories in the subsequent dialects. In the case of *ḫ and ġ*, however, evidence for their existence is primarily extrapolated from the fact that they are still regularly distinguished in the demotic papyrus (see above). The result of these orthographic choices is (with the exception of *qop*) to give these texts an appearance very similar to that of Canaanite, a fact that has led some scholars to unwarranted claims of Canaanite influence in grammar, vocabulary, and style. The consonant *nun* is assimilated to a following consonant: *ʾt*, "you."

b. Morphology. (1) Nouns. The most notable difference between Aramaic and the other NW Semitic dialects is the presence of the suffixed definite article *-ā(ʾ)*. Probably in origin the same form as the Hebrew and Phoenician *ha-*, the suffixation of this deictic element gives Aramaic the appearance of having three noun states (absolute, construct, emphatic [or determined]) rather than two (absolute and construct) as in Hebrew. The morphology of noun affixes is set out paradigmatically in Table 1.

	absolute	construct	emphatic
m. sg.	*mlk*	*mlk*	*mlkʾ*
m. pl.	*mlkn (-īn)*	*mlky (-ay)*	*mlkyʾ (-ayyāʾ)*
f. sg.	*mlkh (-a[h])*	*mlkt (-at)*	*mlktʾ (-atāʾ)*
f. pl.	*mlkn (-ān)*	*mlkt (-āt)*	*mlktʾ (-ātāʾ)*

Note, vis-à-vis Hebrew, the final *nun* as opposed to Hebrew *mem* in the m. pl. abs. and likewise the *nun* in the f. pl. abs. instead of the expected *taw*. Standard

Old Aramaic does seem to use the *taw* f. pl. for attributive adjectives, however; thus *lḥyt,* "bad" (Sefire III:2).

It is in its noun morphology where the Samalian dialect differs most markedly from the other early Aramaic dialects. It uses no orthographically indicated definite article and has f. pl. in *-t.* Its most distinctive feature, however, is surely the absence of *nunation* on the plural accompanying the retention of case distinction; thus *ʾlhw* is nominative, while *ʾlhy* is the oblique (accusative/genitive) form for "gods." The Deir ʿAlla plaster text yields no evidence of a definite article.

(2) Verbs. The three basic conjugations (stems) are the basic stem (*Peʿal: katab/yiktub,* etc.), factitive stem *(Paʿel: kattib),* and causative stem *(Hapʿel: haktib).* Passives are expressed by internal vowel modification of the active form (presumably using the vowel pattern *u-a* in the derived conjugations as in Hebrew; Middle Aramaic has a basic passive stem *Peʿil* in the perfect—identical with the passive participle—but no evidence for such a form is found this early.) No certain *Nipʿal* is attested in normative Aramaic, though it does occur at Deir ʿAlla and, possibly, in Samalian. Reflexive/middle stems with a *taw* augment *(ʾtpʿl),* which will soon begin to replace the internal passives, are still rare in this period. At Fakhariyah, the reflexive of the basic stem still has infixed *taw,* as in Arabic and Ugaritic. Attested verb formatives are shown in Table 2.

Suffixing formatives:

	sing.	pl.
1c	−t	−n
2m	−t	−tm
3m		−w
3f	−t	

Prefixing/suffixing formatives:

1c	ʾ–	n–
2m	t–	t– –n
3m	y–	y– –n
3f	t–	y– –n

Additionally, a separate jussive form exists, differing morphologically (and orthographically) from the imperfect in its absence of nunation in the 3 m pl. and 2 m pl. (and, presumably, the 2 f. s, as in later Aramaic) and in final weak roots, where the imperfect ends in *-h* (presumably /ē/), the jussive in *-y* (probably, simply /ī/). The two forms are also distinct when they have pronominal suffixes, where (as in Hebrew) the imperfect inserts the so-called "energic" *nun* between the stem and the suffix, while the jussive does not. Samalian uses jussive-like forms for the imperfect as well (cf. Heb *yktbw*). In Fakhariyah, Mesopotamian, and Samalian, the 3d person jussive may take a *lamed* preformative instead of a *yod* (cf. the Akkadian precative), a form that was to be the ancestor of the later *l-/n-* preformative of the E Aramaic dialects. It is now clear that the so-called "imperfect consecutive" narrative tense was common to Old Syrian Aramaic and Hebrew. Its former designation "converted imperfect" is a misnomer. It is a remnant of the archaic prefixing preterite tense surviving from some earlier stage of the Semitic languages and still to be found in Old Aramaic (in the Zakkur inscription and at Deir ʿAlla, but not at Sam'al). It is one of many grammatical and lexical isoglosses in respect to which Hebrew groups with Aramaic rather than Phoenician.

In its nominal forms, too, Old Aramaic now appears to be much closer to Hebrew than previously thought. In Syrian Old Aramaic a distinct "infinitive absolute" is attested (cf. Sefire III:2 *hskr thskrhm,* "you shall certainly hand them over"). The infinitive absolute is formed without suffixes; in contrast, the "construct" infinitives (verbal nouns) of the derived stems have a feminine ending (*ḥzyh,* "to see": *lhmtty,* "to kill me"). Pronouns suffixed to these construct infinitives are morphologically like affixes to nouns rather than affixes to verbs. In the basic stem, Fakhariyah has infinitives with the *mem* preformative (known from later Aramaic), whereas the other dialects (again like Hebrew) have so far yielded only forms without the *mem.* On the other hand, at Fakhariyah the derived stem verbal noun seems to be without feminine ending. The *Peʿal* passive participle is *Peʿil* (cf. Heb *Pāʿûl*).

c. Syntax. The various verbal forms are used in constructions virtually identical to constructions found in classical Hebrew prose, although the word order is, perhaps, a bit more free. Except for the Fakhariyah bilingual, the distinctive verb-final word order of formal Imperial Aramaic has not yet made its appearance. Only in Fakhariyah and Mesopotamian do we encounter genitive constructions using the old determinative pronoun (later, the relative) *zy (ḏī > dī > d-).* Complex definite direct objects may be introduced by the particle *ʾyt (ʾiyāt > yt* in later Western Aramaic; cf.

Hebrew ʾet). Verbal phrases subordinated to a main verb use the verbal noun if the relationship is telic, but otherwise the imperfect seems to be preferred. This gives rise to the distinctive double negative *lʾkhl lʾšlḥ,* "I shall not be able to send."

2. Imperial Aramaic. a. Phonology. The graphic representation of consonants begins to change noticeably, presumably as a result of phoneme mergers and the ensuing or concomitant introduction of the spirantization of stops (the "rafe" pronunciation of the *begad-kepat* consonants in Hebrew, a phenomenon surely due to Aramaic influence). Though in this period archaizing orthographies are common (particularly with *z* for historical *ḏ* and *q* for original *ḏ*), the language here starts to employ the consonantal inventory it will have in subsequent dialects. These mergers are: *ṯ > t, ḏ > d, ṭ> ʿ, ẓ > ṣ, ḫ > ḥ* (though in some dialects the reverse may have been the case), *ġ > ʿ.* The initial tendency for *ś* to merge with *s* probably can also be ascribed to this period, since it is common to all subsequent dialects. The other distinctively Aramaic phonological feature—the reduction of short vowels in open unstressed syllables—also seems to have had its start in this period, at least for *i/u* vowels.

A noteworthy feature of the formal language (the base of Standard Literary Aramaic) is frequent nasalization, a process whose orthographic manifestation is the dissimilation of long ("doubled") consonants into *nun* + consonant. In some of these forms—e.g., *ʾnt(h), "you"*—the *nun* is etymologically correct but had been assimilated in Old Aramaic. In others (e.g., *mndʿ,* "knowledge"), it is strictly a phonetic phenomenon.

b. Morphology. The semi-demotic language of the personal letters evidences features that are later to appear in the formal language: weakening of the *Hapʿel (hktb/yhktb)* to *apʿel (ʾktb/yktb),* and substitution of *nun* for *mem* on the plural pronominal suffixes. The later Western Aramaic features of *-n* on the 3 pl. perfect of IIIy verbs and *mem* preformative of derived stem infinitives are also found. Changes in the formal language include the simplification of the infinitive to a single form *(Peʿal mktb),* the use of 3 m. pl. forms for 3 f. pl, and the first appearance of the determined plural ending *-ē.* This form appears first on gentilics and collectives, and later, in the Eastern dialects, will replace *-ayyā* as the normal ending of the masculine plural.

c. Syntax. Morphosyntactic developments characterizing Imperial Aramaic involve the restriction of some features of the language and the expansion of others. The use of internal passives is limited in favor of the *ʾt-* preformative stems (only *ʾetpeʿel* and *ʾetpaʿal* are attested in this period). Internal passives seem to have survived the longest in the causative conjugation. Biblical Aramaic word-initial *ht-* is probably a Hebraism.

The imperative/jussive contrast is sporadically neutralized. The participle, used only as a substantive in Old Aramaic, is employed as a present tense verb. In personal letters a compound tense develops which uses the participle with forms of the verb *hwy,* "to be"; this compound tense becomes common in the later dialects. The "imperfect consecutive" disappears as a narrative tense.

The distribution of particles undergoes considerable change. The particle *ʾyt* (later *yt*), which marks definite direct objects, is supplanted by the prefix *l-* affixed to the object. Use of *dy/zy* (later Aramaic *d-*) as a determined pronoun marking genitival constructions becomes widespread.

Word order remains generally unchanged in the demotic and archival materials. In the formal language of the official letters (and in Biblical Aramaic), however, verb final constructions become very common, probably due to the influence of Persian, an Indo-European language.

3. Later Dialects. a. Phonology. Short vowels in unstressed syllables are reduced and, in some cases, totally elided. The vocalization traditions indicate that in the period after the loss of final case vowels, stress was generally on the final syllable of the word, although the modern dialects (and some reading traditions) show a strong tendency toward penultimate stress (the phonological situation that had obtained prior to the loss of those vowels). Weakening of the laryngeal/pharyngeal consonants is characteristic both of Palestinian dialects (Samaritan and some Galilean) and of Babylonian. In Syriac and Babylonian, final unstressed long vowels are elided, as are final liquids, nasals, and interdentals in Babylonian.

Characteristic of all Aramaic dialects, indeed of all Semitic languages, is variation of vowel quality in different environments of stress and syllable length, even though such changes are indicated only irregularly in the schemes of vowel pointing introduced in Late Aramaic. Typically, front and back vowels are raised in closed stressed syllables and lowered in closed unstressed syllables. In Western Syriac, all mid and low long vowels are raised; thus *ō > ū, ē > ī,* and *ā > ō.* In some dialects

simplification of diphthongs is similarly conditioned; in others (notably Syriac), *ay* and *aw* are tenaciously preserved (almost certainly due to secondary restoration) in the reading traditions.

b. Morphology. In Hatran, Syriac (occasionally in Palmyrene), and Babylonian, *-ē* has become the normal m. pl. emphatic suffix.

The *Hapʿel* reflexive/passive *ʾettapʿal* (< *ʾethapʿal*) occurs in all later branches of Aramaic. After the demise of the internal passives, then, the following symmetrical pattern of stem formation is distinctive to Aramaic:

Basic: *kĕṯaḇ ʾeṯkēṯeḇ*
Factitive: *katteḇ ʾeṯkattaḇ*
Causative:*ʾaḵteḇ ʾettaḵtaḇ*

Though a substantial group of derived stems with the prefixes *š-* and *s-* occur, some borrowed from Akkadian, others, no doubt, survivals from an earlier stage of the language (e.g., *šaḵlel,* "to complete"; *šaʿbed,* "to enslave"), the *Šapʿel* is not a productive causative conjugation in Aramaic.

The infinitives of the derived stems continue to show substantial variation, e.g., for the *Hapʿel*:

SLA *ʾaḵtāḇā*""(*ʾaḵtāḇū-* before suffixes)
Western *maḵtāḇā*""(but *ʾaḵtāḇā* as a verbal noun)
Syriac *maḵtāḇū*
Babyl. *ʾaḵtōḇē*""(also in proto-Eastern Neo-Aram.)

As the original participle *(kāṯeḇ)* becomes a tense, a new, nominal participle *kāṯōḇ* frequently appears.

In Babylonian, the precative preformative *l-* is the normal prefix of the preformative tense (sometimes *n-*), while in Classical Syriac *n-* (presumably simply a phonetic variant of *l-*) is used.

In Palestinian Jewish Targumic and Galilean the prefix of the 1 c.s. imperfect is *n-* (instead of *ʾ-*).

c. Syntax. In Eastern Aramaic the system of nominal states is restructured so that the emphatic (old determined) form becomes the normal form of the noun. Thus *malkā* means "the king" or "a king." The old absolute is preserved in predicate nominatives and distributive constructions, as well as with numerals. The use of both the construct state and the bound form with pronominal suffixes becomes more and more limited over time. Palestinian Jewish Targumic tends to avoid the use of pronominal suffixes on verbs as well.

Internal passives, at first limited to the perfect, are finally replaced by the *ʾt-* stems.

In most dialects, participles have eventually become a full-fledged present, even displacing the imperfect as a general present-future. (The imperfect, then, is restricted to use as a modal form.) In Syrian and Babylonian the pronouns are joined enclitically to the participle as subject markers: *kāṯeḇ + ʾănā > kāṯeḇnā.* (In Western Aramaic the pronouns preceded the participle; this is the origin of the present-future forms at Maʿlula.)

Proto-Eastern Neo-Aramaic develops a new past tense from the passive participle that totally displaces the old perfect: *kĕṯīb-lī,* "I wrote." Ultimately, the present-future system is reshaped as well: The present-future (old participle) entirely displaces the old imperfect, and new present tense forms are developed.

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