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THE ARAMAIC OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

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IN view of recent endeavours to revive the traditional view of the date of the Book of Daniel, especially that made by Dr. Boutflower, it may not be amiss to review once again the principal linguistic arguments and to see if any new evidence in favour of the critical date can be adduced.¹ It will perhaps be as well to state at once that the writer believes that one such piece of evidence is available. If a careful study of the change of consonants and of the development of the grammatical forms in the Aramaic of the Egyptian *papyri* be made with reference to the known dates of every dated document in the series, it is possible to fix within the narrow compass of a few years the introduction of each change in the morphology of the language. It will be seen that the older forms linger on till about 450 B. C., while the new ones gradually displace them between the years 450 and 400 B. C. The purpose of this article, then, is to show what bearing this important fact has on the vexed question of the date of the Biblical dialect, especially as exhibited in the Book of Daniel.

Dr. Boutflower argues, in the first place, that, since Daniel was a courtier and diplomat under both Babylonian and Persian kings, it is not surprising to find that he wrote in Aramaic, a language which must have been continually on his lips and was more suitable than Hebrew to the wider outlook of his prophetic visions, and which would moreover have made his book available to a wider circle of readers. This is possible; but, to take only

¹ Boutflower, *In and Around the Book of Daniel*, chaps. xxi & xxii.

one point, if the author was living in the 6th century B. C., at the Babylonian court, when Babylonian was still a living language, it is surely hardly probable that he would have misinterpreted the name בִּלְטִישַׁצַּר, Belteshazzar, 'according to the name of my god Bel' (Dan. 4 8), with whom it has nothing to do; for it is the Babylonian *Balātsu-ušur*, 'Preserve his life.' A prominent servant of the court cannot have been ignorant of the Babylonian *balātu* 'life,' in itself a common word and a component part of many Babylonian names. The anachronistic reference to 'satraps', who were provincial governors under the Persians, under a Babylonian king (Dan. 3 2, *al.*) is lightly dismissed as a likely blunder for a busy old man, an aged servant of the public!

The second argument is to the effect that, if it can be shown that the Aramaic in which the *papyri* are written is essentially the same as that of Daniel, there is nothing, so far as regards the language, to prevent the referring of the date of that book to a period as early as the closing years of the life of Daniel. Very little change, it is assumed, can have taken place in the 120 years which intervened between that date and the writing of the *papyri*. Yet little more, it may be added, can have come about in the 250 years between the date of the last of the *papyri* and that assigned by critics to the book of Daniel, namely 168 or 167 B. C. The most recent supporter of the old theory takes *exempli gratiā* one of the Aramaic *papyri*—the famous petition from the Jews of Elephantine for the rebuilding of the local temple; in it he finds that out of 81 nouns and adjectives 57 occur in Biblical Aramaic, 49 of these being in Daniel, and that of the remaining roots 19 are to be found in the Hebrew lexicon, one word is possibly Assyrian, two are from old Persian, one reappears later in Syriac, and one is of doubtful meaning and origin. But, in the first place, almost all the words specially marked out by him as showing that Daniel may be dated as early as the Aramaic *papyri*—such as מֶלֶךְ 'lord,' כֵּנֶת 'companion,' בִּירְתָא 'fortress,' אֲנִית 'letter' and so on—can be shown to occur also in late Aramaic, in the Targūmīm and the Talmūd, or in Syriac; they merely permit, therefore, either the earlier or the later date. Pure Hebraisms like תַּרְוִין 'nobles,' which occurs in both documents, show only that the authors were Jews.

Much more remarkable is the occurrence of common Aramaic and Hebrew words like **למאמר** and **לאמר** 'saying, or **איש** and **איש** 'man' side by side in the *papyri*, whereas the language of Daniel is free from such Hebraisms; they do prove that the writers of the *papyri* were not so familiar with Aramaic as was the author of Daniel—in other words, that Aramaic had obtained a more secure position among the Jews when the latter work was composed than at the time when the *papyri* were being written. Nor is the presence of the same prepositions, adverbs, conjunctions and compound particles both in the *papyri* and in Daniel any proof; all or almost all occur in the later dialects of Aramaic. The argument, indeed, from the vocabulary proves nothing. Not only does it remain substantially the same throughout all the dialects of any given language, whereas it is the grammatical forms and inflexions and the parts of speech, like the pronouns in common use, which exhibit variations; but also it is so imperfectly known from a strictly limited number of documents belonging to this period that it constitutes nothing better than an *argumentum e silentio*, liable to be overthrown by the next inscription or piece of *papyrus*, wherever discovered. The same may be said of the constructions and idioms now found to be common to the *papyri* and Biblical Aramaic—the use of the 'emphatic' termination with the meaning of a definite article, the employment of **אין** 'one' as an indefinite article, the free use of the relative particle, as well as the construction of the preposition with the infinitive to express purpose, of the active participle as a finite verb, of compound tenses with the verb 'to be.' These permit a date as early as the *papyri* but they do not disallow a later date. The peculiar inflection of the passive participle with the terminations of the finite verb occurs in the Talmūd commonly in the third person plural and also in the first and second persons singular; it is, therefore, no criterion of an early date, although it does not apparently occur either in Nabataean or Palmyrene. These phenomena, then, do not necessitate any modification of the verdict on the language already quoted; for they establish nothing.

There are, however, tests of a more decisive character excluding the earlier date, which can be applied to the language

—those of the interchange of consonants and of the development of grammatical forms.² These shew that the language of the *papyri* is older than that of Ezra and the language of Ezra than that of Daniel, which comes nearest of the three to Nabataean and Palmyrene. The most important variation is that in the *papyri* the proto-Semitic *dh* has generally the sound of *ʔ*, as in early Aramaic, while in Biblical Aramaic it has for the most part that of *ḏ*, as in Palmyrene and Nabataean; for example, the relative is *ʔ* 'who,' 'which' in the Egyptian documents, the inscriptions at Zinjīrlū and above all on the weights found at Nineveh, while it is *ḏ* in Biblical Aramaic as in Palmyrene and Nabataean. So also the *papyri*, like the inscriptions from Zinjīrlū, have the old forms *ʔנה* and *ʔנה* 'this,' while Biblical Aramaic always has the same forms as Palmyrene and Nabataean, *ḏḏ* and *ḏנה*. This clearly makes the Egyptian dialect older than the Biblical. But there are indications that the former is in a stage of transition. Beside the forms given above there occur in the *papyri* *ʔ* 'who' (which is never found in Biblical Aramaic) three times, *ʔנה* (masc.) and *ʔנה* (fem.) and *ʔנה* 'this' once each. Similarly for the Biblical Aramaic *ḏנה* 'gold,' which occurs in this form in the Targūmīm, the *papyri* have the older *ʔנה* five times but *ḏנה* only once. Almost the only instance of *ʔ* for *ḏ* in Biblical Aramaic is *ʔנה* 'innocence,' the *papyri* having as the corresponding adjective *ʔנה* 'innocent' once and *ʔנה* twice. The same result appears from considering the root *שקל* or *תקל* 'weighed' and its derivatives. Some *papyri* have forms with *ת* and others with *ש*, while Biblical Aramaic has only those with *ת*. In the word *ארק* or *ארע* 'land' the *papyri* and all the early inscriptions have both the early *ארקנה* and the late *ארענה*, which is common to Biblical Aramaic and Nabataean; in the case of *אק* 'wood,' the *papyri* have only that, the early form, whereas Biblical Aramaic uses only *אע*, as do the Targūmīm.

To escape from this dilemma, that the documents prove that *ḏ* is later than *ʔ*, two hypotheses are offered,—in itself a confession of weakness. The first is that, although both *ʔ* and *ḏ* represent an original *dh* (*ḏ*), it is impossible to suppose that

² The relative frequency of the various forms is calculated from the texts contained in Cooke's *North Semitic Inscriptions*.

this original *dh* (ד) became first ה and then ט; the explanation offered is that *dh* (ד) became simultaneously ה in some and ט in other dialects by a parallel development. But when both forms occur inside the same dialect, as in Egyptian Aramaic, this hypothesis is out of the question; the only reason there can be is that a transition from one sound to the other is in process. Further, the interval evidence of the dated papyri proves that ה was original and later gave place to ט. The forms of the relative and demonstrative pronouns with ה appear from the first dated document in 495 B. C. and run throughout the series; no form with ט occurs before B. C. 447, half a century later. The nouns vary somewhat. Thus טט 'gold' occurs as early as 456 B. C., but טה as late as 408 B. C.—but that in a document strongly tinged by Jewish influences; yet טא 'innocent' occurs in *Alīkar*, which is placed in the last half of the 5th century, but טב not before 419 and 410 B. C. These variations only serve to show that the years from 460 to 400 B. C. constituted the period of transition. In Greek, too, it may be noticed, the same change appears "without dialectic influence"³, for instance, ἀρίζηλος 'conspicuous' occurs in Homer, Hesiod and Pindar, while ἀρίδηλος takes its place in Simonides and Herodotus.

The alternative theory put forward by those who cling to the old view is that ה and ט were the original sounds and that *dh* (ד) was a later modification invented by the Arabs, in whose alphabet the distinction is first made. Against this it may be urged that there are clear traces of *dh* (ד) in Hebrew, according to the Massoretic tradition, in the twofold pronunciation of ט with and without an aspirate; the early distinction also of the roots טט and טה as well as of טט and טה (Ps. 78 41) shows that at any early period the Hebrews were in difficulties for a symbol to represent *dh* (ד). Now it has been shown that the substitution of ט for ה was only a gradual process in the Egyptian papyri and first became normal in Biblical Aramaic, while ה was universal in the old Syrian inscriptions. To push ט further back, therefore, recourse is had to the transcription of Aramaic proper names. The Assyrian scribes of Shalmaneser II (860—825 B. C.) wrote Addi-idri in place of the Hebrew form

³ Liddell & Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 632 a, s. v. δ.

of Hadad-'ezer, king of Damascus; since, however, the Hebraised name Ben-hadad is given correctly by the Assyrians as Bir-dadda, the word *bir* being a more correct rendering than *ben* of the Aramaic בן 'son', it is assumed that the true Aramaic form of Hadad-'ezer was Hadad-'eder. Now all nations have difficulty in transcribing and assimilating foreign proper names. Since, therefore, all the evidence at present available points to the fact that ʔ was preferred in early Aramaic, and since the form is guaranteed by the appearance of the same name (though not in reference to the same person) as 𐤁𐤓𐤕𐤁𐤀 on an early Aramaic seal, the best solution is to assume that the Assyrian scribes made a mistake. Knowing in their own language no word to give a suitable meaning to Hadad-'ezer 'Hadad-(is a)-help' (the Assyrian word nearest in sound to the Aramaic 𐤁𐤓 'help' being *izru* 'curse', which would be unlikely to be found in such a connection, coupled with a divine name) they altered Hadad-'ezer to Addi-idri or rather Addi-iṭri 'Hadad-saved', on the analogy of their own verb *ṭir* 'saved'. In any case, the form which a foreigner gives to a strange name is no guarantee of its true orthography; and there are several instances of mis-rendering of sibilants in proper names by the Assyrian scribes.

But the linguistic argument in favour of the critical view is confirmed by evidence less open to dispute than the interchange of sibilants. Not only does the interchange of other letters, like that of which examples have been given, yield the same result, but the history also of certain grammatical developments points the same way. It is well known that the pronominal suffixes of the second and third persons plural exhibit an earlier form in Ezra than in Daniel. It can further be shown that the *papyri* invariably employ the earlier form. In the inscriptions from Zinjīrlū and in the Egyptian *papyri* the form of the third person, for example, is 𐤁𐤕, in Ezra both 𐤁𐤕 and 𐤁𐤕𐤀, in which it is possible to trace the beginning of the transition, in Daniel only 𐤁𐤕𐤀, where the change is complete, in Palmyrene 𐤁𐤕 and lastly in both the Targūmim and the Talmūd 𐤁𐤕𐤀. The gradation is therefore generally from *m* to *n*, even though Nabataean has 𐤁𐤕 and the Targūm of Pseudo-Jonathan both 𐤁𐤕 and 𐤁𐤕.

A last test from the verb remains to be applied. In the

simple theme of one verb whose final radical is weak later Aramaic prefixes a helping vowel; for שתי 'he drank' Biblical Aramaic has אשתי, which appears elsewhere only in the late Aramaic of the Talmûd and in Syriac, as far as is at present known. The prefix of the causative theme is equally convincing. The inscriptions from Zinjirlû and Egyptian Aramaic always have ה, as in הקים 'set up,' Ezra always has ה, Daniel ה except in one case of אקים (Dan. 3 1) and in one doubtful word, and Palmyrene always אקים; the Targûmim in all but a few verbs and Syriac invariably have the forms with א. Once again, then, Daniel reflects a stage of development between Ezra and the later Aramaic.

In the imperfect the prefix of the third person singular in early Aramaic, including that of the *papyri*, is always ׀; in Biblical Aramaic it is regularly ׀ except in the case of the verb הוא 'he was,' which makes להוא 'he is.' This ל being especially characteristic of Eastern Aramaic, attempts have been made to prove from it that the Aramaic of Daniel is Babylonian Aramaic. But it should be noticed in the first place that, according to the evidence at present available, there are no instances of it till after the Christian era in Eastern Aramaic, and secondly that there are a good many sporadic occurrences of it in the later Galilean and Judean dialects. At the same time the presence of four examples (though with the original jussive significance) in an inscription from Zinjirlû proves that it is not necessarily an Eastern or Babylonian form. In the same tense verbs ׀ usually assimilate the ׀ to the following radical, so that ינתן 'he will give' becomes ינתן. Now out of ten verbs of this class the *papyri* only exhibit two isolated instances of contracted forms, both in very late documents: יחנתן 'they will come down' for ינחנתן in a text probably to be ascribed to the 4th century,⁴ and ינתן for ינתן in one of the Ptolemaic period; elsewhere not only these two verbs but all others exhibit uncontracted forms of the imperfect. In Biblical Aramaic, however, these become commoner. In Ezra two out of five and in Daniel three out of four verbs have contracted forms; in the case of נתן 'gave' Ezra

⁴ Cooke, *op. cit.*, no. 77.

has only נת , while Daniel has both נת and נתן . The inscriptions, however, vary. Those at Zinjirli have three contracted and one uncontracted, the Sinaitic and the Nabataean two uncontracted each and the Palmyrene one contracted form; but the full forms on the Sinaitic and the Nabataean monuments may be due to Arabian or Sabaean influence, since these languages do not regard *n* as a weak letter. In the Targûmim and Syriac contraction is the rule, the longer forms being exceptional, apart from certain guttural verbs. Again, therefore, the Aramaic of Daniel must be put later than that of Ezra.

That some of these forms, to which attention has been drawn, are really late developments receives curious confirmation from modern Arabic. In Syria the classical suffixes *-kum* 'you,' 'your,' and *-hum* 'them,' 'their,' have now become *-kôn* and *-hôn*. Verbs also whose final radical is weak often take a helping vowel as prefix in the speech of the *füllâhin* who say, for instance, *'âhkî* for *hakî* 'he spoke.'⁵

Both the interchange of such letters as פ and ף , therefore, and the development of the pronouns and of the verbal inflexions prove that Egyptian and Biblical Aramaic were distinct dialects. The preference also of י over יָ , of פ over ף , and of ש over שׁ mark early Eastern as a different dialect from Biblical Aramaic. Yet it is strange that, where the forms current in Assyria in the 6th and 5th centuries B. C. are known, as in the case of י and שקל , they do not agree with those found in that of Daniel, which has יָ and שקל for these words. Those, therefore, who maintain the traditional date of the book of Daniel are forced to admit (a) that he was ignorant of one of the commonest words in daily use in Babylon when he was supposed to be living there and (b) that, though resident in the East, he preferred to use a form of Western Aramaic, and (c) that this form exhibits peculiarities of which there is no trace until at least half a century after his death.

In conclusion, it is now possible, in view of the discovery of the *papyri* at Elephantine, to go beyond the verdict that "the

⁵ Driver, *Grammar of the Colloquial Arabic of Syria and Palestine*, p. 18.

Aramaic permits a date after the conquest of Palestine by Alexander the great (B. C. 332),” and with fairness to say that the development of the language, as it can be traced in the documents hitherto recovered, especially in those that are definitely dated, shows that both the Egyptian and the Biblical dialects are in a state of transition; that the earlier *papyri*, down to the middle of the 5th century, exhibit an earlier and those of the second half of the century a later stage, that the language of Ezra is almost identical with that of this second period, and that that of Daniel is distinctly later. To define these periods more exactly is impossible; for, while it is practicable to distinguish the successive stages through which a language has passed, it is out of the question to fix either the *terminus a quo* or the *terminus ad quem* of any given stage. To make the attempt would be to employ a fallacious *argumentum e silentio* which would be liable to be at any moment upset. But the fact that the Aramaic of Daniel must be subsequent to that of the *papyri* and of Ezra, in conjunction with the fact that the author can be shown actually to have preferred forms first known to have come into use in Egyptian Aramaic half a century after his death in preference to those proved to have been current in the Ninevite dialect of his own time is sufficient to establish the fact that it cannot have been written at any time in the 6th century by an author who had spent the greater part of his life at the Babylonian court.

The evidence of the foreign words is the same. There are not more than two Greek words at the most in the 85 documents on *papyri*,⁶ in spite of the long and close commercial connection between Egypt and Greece, whereas there are three in four chapters of Daniel. The only inference possible is that the book of Daniel was written at a time when the knowledge of Greek was more widely diffused in the East than it was in the 5th century—namely, after the Macedonian conquest. Further, in addition to the fact that one of the words does not appear at all in extant Greek literature till that epoch, in the case of the other it is an important point that the employment of an ab-

⁶ G. R. Driver in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. xxv, p. 299.

stract term like *συμφωνία* 'concord of sound' in the concrete sense of a musical instrument is a post-classical usage, inconceivable in the age of Herodotus or Thucydides. The fewness of the Greek words in Aramaic written in a Hellenising age is not, as the traditionalists suggest, surprising. It would, on the contrary, be more than surprising if a Jew, strongly opposed to Hellenistic tendencies, had not deliberately avoided them, only making use of them as technical terms denoting things for which the Semitic languages offered no native name.

The Persian words are equally instructive. In all the Aramaic *papyri* together, according to a cursory examination, there are about 20 words of undoubtedly Persian origin; none of them apart from proper names occur in any document dated before 435 B. C., except the Persian coin called **𐤎𐤓** and the weight called **𐤎𐤓𐤕**. In other words, although Cyrus II overthrew the Babylonian monarchy in 538 B. C. and Cambyses II (529—521 B. C.) shortly afterwards added Egypt to the Persian empire, few Persian words seem to have obtained a footing in Aramaic till after Darius (who died in 486 B. C.) had reconquered the rebellious provinces. Now there are about 15 Persian loan-words in the Aramaic portions of Ezra, who led back the exiles in 458 B. C., when Persian influence was at its height, and only about the same number in the much longer Aramaic section in Daniel. This lower proportion in Daniel is to be explained by the fact that after the overthrow of that empire by the Macedonians in 333 B. C. Persian gradually gave way to Greek. The Aramaic *papyri*, on the other hand, show that a high percentage of Persian words would not be expected in Aramaic as early as the time of Cyrus II. The inscriptions bear this out. In those from Zinjirli the only foreign element is a few Assyrian words; in Nabataean there are one Babylonian and a few Greek terms and a considerable Arabic element, while in Palmyrene there are many Greek, some Arabic and only two Persian words. It is, therefore, against the facts to say that "the dialect of Daniel must have been used at or near Babylon at a time not long after the founding of the Persian empire."⁷

⁷ Boutflower, *op. cit.*, pp. 241—267.