

of the Dead Sea. Although the ninth-century B.C. Moabite inscriptions present the earliest “Hebrew” characters of the alphabetic script, their language cannot be regarded as an Hebrew dialect.

*f) Edomite*

**7.9.** Edomite, attested by a few inscriptions and seals dated from the 9th through the 4th century B.C., was the Canaanite idiom of southern Transjordan and eastern Negev. Despite our very poor knowledge of the language, palaeography and morphology reveal some specifically Edomite features.



**B. Aramaic**

**7.10.** Aramaic forms a widespread linguistic group that could be classified also as North or East Semitic. Its earliest written attestations go back to the 9th century B.C. and some of its dialects survive until the present day. Several historical stages and contemporaneous dialects have to be distinguished.

*a) Early Aramaic*

**7.11.** Early Aramaic is represented by an increasing number of inscriptions from Syria, Assyria, North Israel, and northern Transjordan dating from the 9th through the 7th century B.C. (Fig. 11). There are no important differences in the script and the spelling of the various documents, except for the Tell Fekherye statue and the Tell Ḥalaf pedestal inscription. The morphological variations point instead to the existence of several dialects that represent different levels of the evolution of the language. While the Tell Fekherye inscription (*ca.* 850 B.C.) seems to testify to the use of internal or “broken” plurals, the two Samalian inscriptions from Zincirli (8th century B.C.) apparently retain the case endings in the plural and have no emphatic state. The latter is also unattested in the Deir ‘Allā plaster inscription (*ca.* 800 B.C.) and on the stele found at Tell el-Qāḍi (*ca.* 850 B.C.), and both do not use the determinative-relative *zy*. From the 8th century B.C. on, a standard form of the language prevails in the inscriptions, and even in the juridical and economic documents on clay tablets from Upper Mesopotamia and Assyria.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
א	𐤀	𐤁	𐤂	𐤃	𐤄	𐤅	𐤆	𐤇	𐤈
ב	𐤉	𐤊	𐤋	𐤌	𐤍	𐤎	𐤏	𐤐	𐤑
ג	𐤒	𐤓	𐤔	𐤕	𐤖	𐤗	𐤘	𐤙	𐤚
ד	𐤛	𐤜	𐤝	𐤞	𐤟	𐤠	𐤡	𐤢	𐤣
ה	𐤤	𐤥	𐤦	𐤧	𐤨	𐤩	𐤪	𐤫	𐤬
ו	𐤭	𐤮	𐤯	𐤰	𐤱	𐤲	𐤳	𐤴	𐤵
ז	𐤶	𐤷	𐤸	𐤹	𐤺	𐤻	𐤼	𐤽	𐤾
ח	𐤿	𐥀	𐥁	𐥂	𐥃	𐥄	𐥅	𐥆	𐥇
ט	𐥈	𐥉	𐥊	𐥋	𐥌	𐥍	𐥎	𐥏	𐥐
י	𐥑	𐥒	𐥓	𐥔	𐥕	𐥖	𐥗	𐥘	𐥙
כ	𐥚	𐥛	𐥜	𐥝	𐥞	𐥟	𐥠	𐥡	𐥢
ל	𐥣	𐥤	𐥥	𐥦	𐥧	𐥨	𐥩	𐥪	𐥫
מ	𐥬	𐥭	𐥮	𐥯	𐥰	𐥱	𐥲	𐥳	𐥴
נ	𐥵	𐥶	𐥷	𐥸	𐥹	𐥺	𐥻	𐥼	𐥽
ס	𐥾	𐥿	𐦀	𐦁	𐦂	𐦃	𐦄	𐦅	𐦆
ע	𐦇	𐦈	𐦉	𐦊	𐦋	𐦌	𐦍	𐦎	𐦏
פ	𐦐	𐦑	𐦒	𐦓	𐦔	𐦕	𐦖	𐦗	𐦘
צ	𐦙	𐦚	𐦛	𐦜	𐦝	𐦞	𐦟	𐦠	𐦡
ק	𐦢	𐦣	𐦤	𐦥	𐦦	𐦧	𐦨	𐦩	𐦪
ר	𐦫	𐦬	𐦭	𐦮	𐦯	𐦰	𐦱	𐦲	𐦳
ש	𐦴	𐦵	𐦶	𐦷	𐦸	𐦹	𐦺	𐦻	𐦼
ת	𐦽	𐦾	𐦿	𐧀	𐧁	𐧂	𐧃	𐧄	𐧅

Fig. 11. Alphabetic scripts of Syria, Cilicia, and northern Transjordan in the 9th and 8th centuries B.C.:

1. Tell Fekherye, mid-9th century; 2. Kilamuwa (Zincirli), late 9th century; 3. Zakkūr (Tell Afis), beginning of the 8th century; 4. Panamuwa I (Zincirli), early 8th century;
5. Sefire, mid-8th century; 6. Karatepe, mid-8th century; 7. Panamuwa II (Zincirli), ca. 730; 8. Bar-Rakkāb (Zincirli), late 8th century; 9. Deir 'Allā, ca. 800.





*b) Official or Imperial Aramaic*

**7.12.** Official or Imperial Aramaic is the language of the Aramaic documents of the Persian Empire, but some authors apply this qualification also to earlier texts. Beginning with the 8th century B.C. Aramaic became the *lingua franca* of the Near East and it served later as the official language of the Achaemenian administration until the end of the 4th century B.C. It is the language of various inscriptions on stone, of the Aramaic documents found in Egypt, in the Wadi Dāliyah (Samaria), and at Persepolis, as well as of the Aramaic letters and documents quoted in the Book of Ezra.

*c) Standard Literary Aramaic*

**7.13.** Standard Literary Aramaic is the literary dialect that emerged in the 7th century B.C. and subsisted alongside the Official Aramaic of the Achaemenian period. The Story of Ahiqar, perhaps the scattered phrases of the story from the tomb at Sheikh el-Faḍl, the Bar Punesh fragments, and the narrative in the Aramaic portions of Ezra are the earliest examples of this form of speech that is further used in the Book of Daniel, in the literary Aramaic compositions discovered at Qumrān, in the Targums to the Pentateuch and to the Prophets, known as Onqelos and Jonathan, in *Megillat Ta'anit*, and, at a much later date, in the "Scroll of Antiochus".

*d) Middle Aramaic*

**7.14.** Middle Aramaic is the name generally given to the Aramaic dialects attested from the 3rd century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D. Besides the texts in Standard Literary Aramaic and in a faulty Official Aramaic that survived in non-Aramaic speaking regions of the former Persian Empire, in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and in the Caucasus, there are a number of epigraphic dialects from this period.

**7.15.** The documents and the Bar Kokhba letters discovered in the Judaeen Desert represent the *Palestinian Aramaic* of Judaea.

**7.16.** Documents written in *Nabataean* were also discovered among the scrolls of the Judaeen Desert. Although they are basically written in Official Aramaic, they already contain elements of Middle Aramaic on the one hand, and of Arabic on the other, like the Nabataean inscriptions

and graffiti from Transjordan, North Arabia, Negev, Egypt, Greece, and Italy. From the 2nd century B.C. to the 4th century A.D. Nabataean Aramaic was the written language of the Arab population whose main centre was Petra, historically attested from the beginning of the 4th century B.C. The Nabataean use of the Aramaic language and script continued a North Arabian tradition attested already in the 5th century B.C. by the inscriptions of the oasis of Tayma' and somewhat later by the inscription of Qaynû, king of Qedar, found at Tell el-Maskhûta (Egypt). The last dated Nabataean Aramaic text dates from 356 A.D. There are also a few inscriptions written in Nabataean Arabic (§7.38).

7.17. The *Palmyrene* inscriptions, dating from the 1st century B.C. through the 3rd century A.D., are written in a West Aramaic idiom based on Official Aramaic (Fig. 12). Traces of Arabic, which was the language of a substantial part of the population of Palmyra, are detected in some of these inscriptions, the language of which was also influenced by an East Aramaic dialect.

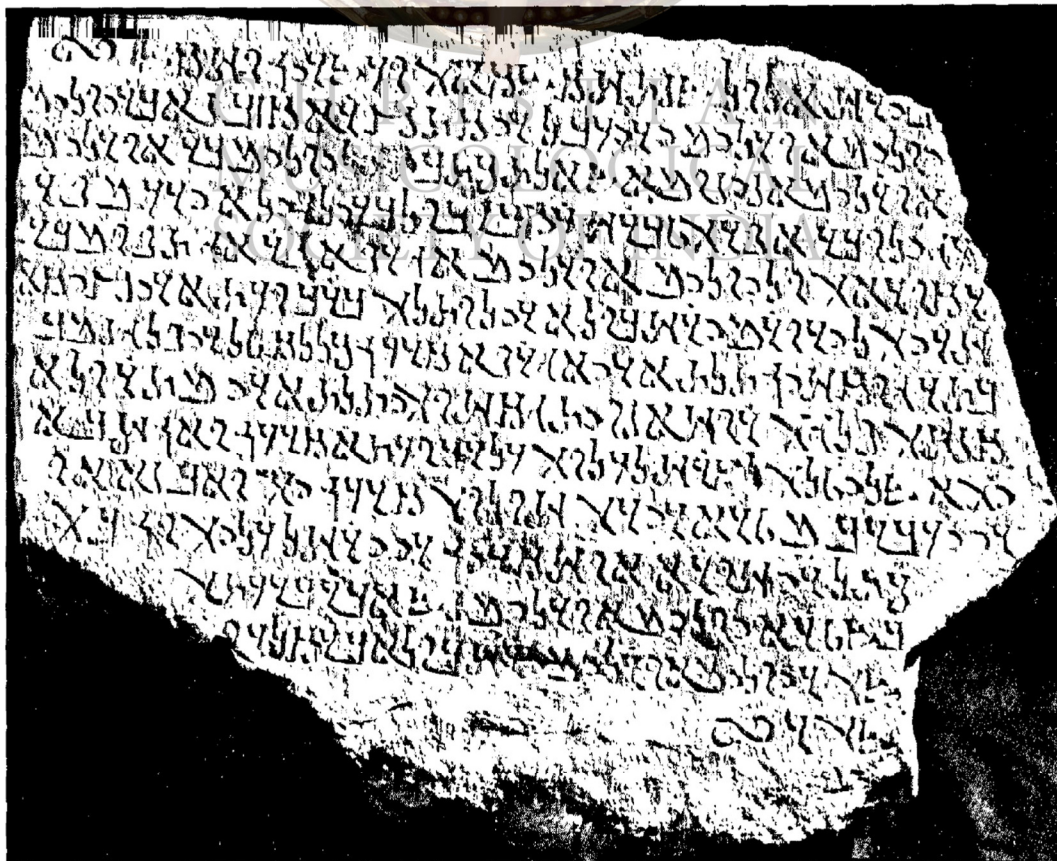


Fig. 12. Palmyrene inscription from Malkû's tomb, dated A.D. 214  
(Courtesy Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen).





Estrangelā				Sertō				Nestorian				Trans- cription	Name of the Letters
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4		
Ⲁ	Ⲁ			Ⲁ	Ⲁ			Ⲁ	Ⲁ			ʾ	ʾālaf
Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	Ⲃ	b	bēt
Ⲅ	Ⲅ	Ⲅ	Ⲅ	Ⲅ	Ⲅ	Ⲅ	Ⲅ	Ⲅ	Ⲅ	Ⲅ	Ⲅ	g	gāmal
Ⲇ	Ⲇ	Ⲇ	Ⲇ	Ⲇ	Ⲇ	Ⲇ	Ⲇ	Ⲇ	Ⲇ	Ⲇ	Ⲇ	d	dālat
Ⲉ	Ⲉ	Ⲉ	Ⲉ	Ⲉ	Ⲉ	Ⲉ	Ⲉ	Ⲉ	Ⲉ	Ⲉ	Ⲉ	h	hē
Ⲋ	Ⲋ	Ⲋ	Ⲋ	Ⲋ	Ⲋ	Ⲋ	Ⲋ	Ⲋ	Ⲋ	Ⲋ	Ⲋ	w	waw
Ⲍ	Ⲍ	Ⲍ	Ⲍ	Ⲍ	Ⲍ	Ⲍ	Ⲍ	Ⲍ	Ⲍ	Ⲍ	Ⲍ	z	zēn
Ⲏ	Ⲏ	Ⲏ	Ⲏ	Ⲏ	Ⲏ	Ⲏ	Ⲏ	Ⲏ	Ⲏ	Ⲏ	Ⲏ	ḥ	ḥēt
Ⲑ	Ⲑ	Ⲑ	Ⲑ	Ⲑ	Ⲑ	Ⲑ	Ⲑ	Ⲑ	Ⲑ	Ⲑ	Ⲑ	ṭ	ṭēt
Ⲓ	Ⲓ	Ⲓ	Ⲓ	Ⲓ	Ⲓ	Ⲓ	Ⲓ	Ⲓ	Ⲓ	Ⲓ	Ⲓ	y	yōd
Ⲕ	Ⲕ	Ⲕ	Ⲕ	Ⲕ	Ⲕ	Ⲕ	Ⲕ	Ⲕ	Ⲕ	Ⲕ	Ⲕ	k	kāf
Ⲗ	Ⲗ	Ⲗ	Ⲗ	Ⲗ	Ⲗ	Ⲗ	Ⲗ	Ⲗ	Ⲗ	Ⲗ	Ⲗ	l	lāmad
Ⲙ	Ⲙ	Ⲙ	Ⲙ	Ⲙ	Ⲙ	Ⲙ	Ⲙ	Ⲙ	Ⲙ	Ⲙ	Ⲙ	m	mīm
Ⲛ	Ⲛ	Ⲛ	Ⲛ	Ⲛ	Ⲛ	Ⲛ	Ⲛ	Ⲛ	Ⲛ	Ⲛ	Ⲛ	n	nūn
Ⲝ	Ⲝ	Ⲝ	Ⲝ	Ⲝ	Ⲝ	Ⲝ	Ⲝ	Ⲝ	Ⲝ	Ⲝ	Ⲝ	s	semkat
Ⲟ	Ⲟ	Ⲟ	Ⲟ	Ⲟ	Ⲟ	Ⲟ	Ⲟ	Ⲟ	Ⲟ	Ⲟ	Ⲟ	ʿ	ʿē
Ⲡ	Ⲡ	Ⲡ	Ⲡ	Ⲡ	Ⲡ	Ⲡ	Ⲡ	Ⲡ	Ⲡ	Ⲡ	Ⲡ	p	pē
Ⲣ	Ⲣ	Ⲣ	Ⲣ	Ⲣ	Ⲣ	Ⲣ	Ⲣ	Ⲣ	Ⲣ	Ⲣ	Ⲣ	s	ṣādē
Ⲥ	Ⲥ	Ⲥ	Ⲥ	Ⲥ	Ⲥ	Ⲥ	Ⲥ	Ⲥ	Ⲥ	Ⲥ	Ⲥ	q	qōf
ⲧ	ⲧ	ⲧ	ⲧ	ⲧ	ⲧ	ⲧ	ⲧ	ⲧ	ⲧ	ⲧ	ⲧ	r	rēš
ⲩ	ⲩ	ⲩ	ⲩ	ⲩ	ⲩ	ⲩ	ⲩ	ⲩ	ⲩ	ⲩ	ⲩ	š	šīn
ⲫ	ⲫ	ⲫ	ⲫ	ⲫ	ⲫ	ⲫ	ⲫ	ⲫ	ⲫ	ⲫ	ⲫ	t	taw

Fig. 13. Syriac Scripts.





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