The Language Environment of First Century Judaea

Jerusalem Studies in the Synoptic Gospels

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Introduction: Language Issues Are Important for Gospel Studies

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The articles in this collection demonstrate that a change is taking place in New Testament studies. Throughout the twentieth century, New Testament scholarship primarily worked under the assumption that only two languages, Aramaic and Greek, were in common use in the land of Israel in the first century. Studies on the Gospels have assumed that Aramaic was the only viable language for Jesus' public teaching or for any early Semitic records of the Jesus movement, whether oral or written. Hebrew was considered to be restricted primarily to educated religious teachers and unsuitable for speaking parables to peasants, especially in the Galilee. However, during the twentieth century, specialists working in the field of Mishnaic Hebrew have proven that three languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, were in common use.[1] Their studies have moved Hebrew out of a restricted, marginal status within first-century language use. The articles in this volume investigate various areas where increasing linguistic data and changing perspectives impact New Testament studies. In some cases, prevalent assumptions on language use within the field of New Testament studies are challenged and found wanting. Older data have confirmed newer views when read carefully in context. Several articles go beyond the sociolinguistic questions and look at literary and interpretational questions. The fuller language background of the Gospels raises new questions that can affect the evaluation of texts and literary relationships.

Language Studies Impact Historical Understandings

Five articles relate to the general sociolinguistic situation in the land of Israel during the first century. The first article in the collection looks at the history of New Testament studies and explores why, at the end of the 19th century, scholars assumed a two-language paradigm: Guido Baltes, "The Origins of the 'Exclusive Aramaic Model' in the Nineteenth Century: Methodological Fallacies and Subtle Motives." That paradigm became a consensus to the point

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[1] Recently, Steven E. Fassberg, "Which Semitic Language Did Jesus and Other Contemporary Jews Speak?" *CBQ* 74–2 (April 2012), 263–280.

that scholars did not feel obligated to defend it. The interesting question is how such a consensus could arise when the available data up until the twentieth century was so little? Guido Baltes finds that a multiplicity of factors were responsible for this state of affairs. This article is followed by his survey of epigraphic evidence, "The Use of Hebrew and Aramaic in Epigraphic Sources of the New Testament Era." Only trilingual models can adequately account for the multi-register and sometimes surprising data that has accumulated during the twentieth century.

An additional support for the "trilingual perspective" comes through a careful re-investigation of the language names. Primary Greek lexica inform beginning students of the Greek New Testament that Ἑβραϊστί may mean "Jewish Aramaic." Buth and Pierce, "Hebraisti in Ancient Texts: Does Ἑβραϊστί Ever Mean 'Aramaic'?," investigate that claim and demonstrate that the meaning "Jewish Aramaic" for Ἑβραϊστί cannot be justified. Standard resources still appear to reflect the defective situation described in Baltes' first article so that many lexica and Bible translations will need correction.

Marc Turnage's "The Linguistic Ethos of the Galilee within the First Century C.E.," addresses the general sociological and historical issues related to the ethnic background of the Galilee. He challenges a frequently encountered opinion that the Galilee was a region that had recently been converted and Judaized and he provides a more comprehensive perspective in light of the historical and archaeological data.

Our understanding of historical attitudes within particular communities can also be enriched. Serge Ruzer, "Hebrew versus Aramaic as Jesus' Language: Notes on Early Opinions by Syriac Authors," shows that early Syriac authors seem not to reflect the attitudes that are associated with the late Byzantine and modern eras—namely, viewing Jesus as an Aramaic- and non-Hebrew speaker. While necessarily tentative, Ruzer's study helps scholars to view the historical processes involved in the history of Gospel interpretation and in Syriac studies.

Literary Studies Interact with the Language Background

In "Hebrew, Aramaic, and the Differing Phenomena of Targum and Translation in the Second Temple Period and Post-Second Temple Period," Daniel Machiela explores translation phenomena in the late Second Temple period. Targumic studies have a wide range of complicated issues with which to deal, nevertheless, Gospel studies have sometimes assumed an established, pre-Christian targumic background. Machiela's study suggests that targums and Hebrew-to-

Aramaic translation are primarily a post-New Testament phenomenon and in some cases probably originating outside the land of Israel.

The Gospel of Mark has often been characterized as exhibiting Aramaic influence, as is illustrated in recent monographs.[2] Such claims require an investigation into the identification and differentiation of Aramaic and Hebrew influence within Greek documents of the period. This is addressed in the study by Randall Buth, "Distinguishing Hebrew from Aramaic in Semitized Greek texts, with an Application for the Gospels and Pseudepigrapha." One result of this study undermines the plausibility that Mark had an Aramaic source. The same study contributes to our understanding of the linguistic profiles of Jewish Greek literature, which includes the Synoptic Gospels, in the Second Temple Period.

The amount of biblical phraseology in Luke has led to a common explanation that Luke has gathered much of his phraseology from the Greek Bible, the "Septuagint." This explanation, of course, begs the question for another phenomenon, "non-Septuagintal Hebraisms." Steven Notley's "Non-Septuagintal Hebraisms in the Third Gospel: An Inconvenient Truth," investigates Hebraisms that could not have been learned by Luke from the LXX. The existence of Hebraisms in Luke's Gospel is a challenge to common positions on Lukan composition. If these Hebraisms are not in Mark or Matthew, then Luke would appear to have a Hebraic-Greek source that is not dependent on those two Gospels.

Language Studies Impact the Reading of Gospel Texts

Our general picture of the historical Jesus is directly affected by language. In what language did Jesus teach, and what was the make-up of his audience linguistically? The study by Steven Notley and Jeffrey Garcia, "Hebrew-only Exegesis: A Philological Approach to Jesus' Use of the Hebrew Bible," provides evidence that connects Jesus' teaching directly to the Hebrew Bible. This naturally informs the reading of Gospel pericopae.

Two of the volume's articles bring new linguistic evidence to the interpretation of Gospel texts. David Bivin's, "Jesus' *Petros-petra* Wordplay (Matt 16:18):

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2 Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 102, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and *Aramaic Sources to Q: Sources for Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (SNTSMS 122; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Is It Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew?" finds that *Petros* is attested as a name in Hebrew (based, of course, on a Greek etymology). That detail challenges previous approaches to the issue of Peter's name and his confession that Jesus is the Messiah, and it leads to another line of understanding for Gospel texts and the Pauline epistles.

A long-standing crux of New Testament interpretation has been the exact wording and significance of the "cry of dereliction" at the crucifixion. Randall Buth's "The Riddle of Jesus' Cry from the Cross: The Meaning of ηλι ηλι λαμα σαβαχθανι (Matt 27:46) and the Literary Function of ελωι ελωι λειμα σαβαχθανι (Mark 15:34)," sifts through the complicated textual and linguistic evidence. A trilingual approach provides a key understanding of how and why Matthew and Mark differ in their presentation of this cry from the cross.

Language Studies and Synoptic Criticism

The articles in this volume not only underscore the importance that language questions have for New Testament studies, they point the field down new pathways. Synoptic criticism benefits from detailed linguistic appraisals of the Synoptic Gospels. This does not mean, of course, that a Hebraism or Aramaism, by and in itself, is evidence of an older stratum or a more authentic stratum. Far from it. An Aramaic feature like Matthew's narrative-τότε style can be added by Matthew himself in Greek. But "narrative τότε" is still a datum for synoptic criticism. Its non-occurrence in Mark and Luke must be addressed. The same can be said for items such as Mark's καί style. The three impersonal ἐγένετο styles in Luke versus the one in Acts are also data for synoptic discussion. Features like word order, verb tense, vocabulary choice, Septuagintal profile, colloquial Greek syntax, and literary Greek syntax must be traced in individual Gospel pericopae every bit as much as traditional data like minor agreements, identical wordings, and pericope order are traced and explained.

An Invitation to the Hebrew-Aramaic-Greek Trilingual Perspective

In the many issues touched upon in this volume, it is a trilingual approach to the material that allows the authors to move beyond some of the inconsistencies and misdirections brought about by bilingual Greek-Aramaic assumptions. Up-to-date and accurate language studies are vital for a comprehensive understanding of the New Testament Gospels. One of the distinctives of the collaboration between Jewish and Christian scholars studying the Gospels

together in Israel is the elevation of Hebrew to a language of discourse. That level of language use brings with it a heightened appreciation for the broader trilingual data at play in the first century of our common era. The articles presented in this volume are an invitation to join in that discussion.

We would like to thank those who have assisted us in bringing this volume to completion, including our friends and colleagues at Brill: Loes Schouten, Mattie Kuiper and Gera van Bedaf. However, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge publicly our gratitude to Brian Becker, who indexed the ancient sources in our work with his state-of-the-art source indexing software (ReferenceIndexer.com).

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