

No. ~~II~~. THE LANGUAGE AND ITS DIALECTS.

The Aramaic ultimately divided into two groups, the Eastern and the Western. The former, occupying the Euphrates valley, includes the Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud and the Mandaic literature, and the dialect of Edessa, which as the language of the Aramaic-speaking Churches of Syria and Mesopotamia is known as Syriac.

For the early undivided Aramaic language, we have the following archaeological material:

1. Monumental inscriptions from Syria and Asia Minor, from ca. 800 ~~to~~ into the Persian period.
2. Dockets, weights, etc., from Assyria and Babylonia, from the 8th to the 5th century.
3. Papyri, chiefly from one deposit at Elephantine, opposite Assouan, Upper Egypt, dating from 500-400 B.C.

For the dialects and literatures of the Western Aramaic we may make the following divisions--but with the caution that the distinctions are often not dialectical but rather chronological and literary:

1. Biblical Aramaic, found in these portions of the Old Testament: Ezra 4.8b - 6.18; 7.12-26; Dan. 2.4 - 7.28; Jer. 10.11 (a gloss); Gen. 31.47 (a united phrase of two words).
2. The (post-Biblical) Jewish Aramaic, in which the following distinctions may be made for convenience:
  - a) The evidence for Aramaic words and phrases in the New Testament, Josephus, etc.
  - b) The Targums, the Aramaic versions of the Hebrew scriptures.
  - c) Passages in the Mishna (the eldest stratum of the Talmud), in the Gemara of the Palestinian (occasionally also the Babylonian) Gemara (the later portion of the Talmud), and in the Midrashim; particularly may be mentioned the ancient Megillat Ta'anith, or Fast Calendar.
3. The Samaritan Aramaic, particularly that of the Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch; also found in remains of the Samaritan literature.
4. The Nabataean-epigraphic material only, of the century before and the century after Christ.
5. The Palmyrene, of Tadmor-Palmyra, the caravan entrepot between Syria and Mesopotamia, epigraphic material only, of the 2nd and 3rd centuries after Christ.
6. The Christian Palestinian, of Christian communities in Palestine, going back possibly to the 5th century, contained in a literature of Biblical translations and hagiological stories of Greek origin.