In Search of Avocado

IBN WARRAQ

For Classical Arabic there has long been a need for a new etymological dictionary in which Arabists would recognize, possibly for the first time, that there were other Semitic languages; this lacuna is being filled by a glacially slow appearance of the Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache,[1] *which started with the letter k in 1970 and is already halfway through l.*

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Wa-qad daḫala fī ʿarabīyati ʾahli š-šaʾmi kaṯīrun mina s-suryānīyati kamā staʿmala ʿarabu l-ʿirāqi ʾašyāʾa mina l-fārisīya.
[A great deal of Syriac has pervaded the Arabic of the population of Syria, just as the Arabs of Iraq make use of Persian borrowings.]

Abū Bakr ibn Durayd (died 933)

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to Luxenberg's Thesis of a *Mischsprache*

When Christoph Luxenberg's *Die Syro-Aramäische Lesart des Koran* first came out in 2000, one of his theses that inspired incomprehension and even derision was his conclusion that the language of the Koran must have been a "*aramäisch-arabische Mischsprache,*"[3] that is an Aramaic-Arabic mixed or hybrid language. If we get away from the ideas imposed upon us by Islamic tradition, and instead heed the pleas of scholars such as John Wansbrough by placing the theatre of the rise of Islam and the compilation of the Koran in the Near East rather than the Arabian peninsula, then the importance of Syriac, and more generally, the Aramaic substratum not only in the formation of the Koran, but also of the Arabic language, can no longer be denied, since Syro-Aramaic or Syriac, in one form or another, was the language, in the words of Claude Gilliot and Pierre Larcher, "of written communication in the Near East from the second to the seventh centuries CE."[4]

Scholars in the field of New Testament Studies have been vigorously defending the idea that that the original language of the New Testament may well have been Syriac ever since at least[5] the seventeenth century, when that incomparable philosopher, Baruch Spinoza, put forward such a thesis, in

1670, in his extraordinarily influential work *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*Theological-Political Treatise*),[6] which is seen by many as the beginning of Biblical Criticism. Spinoza wrote that "the native language of the Apostles is none other than Syriac" and then suggested, as Steven Nadler reminds us in his superb study of the *Tractatus,* that "what we have in the Gospels is a Greek translation of the Syriac original."

Nadler continues, "Spinoza also insists, earlier in the Treatise, that the language that is essential for making sense of the Christian Gospels is Hebrew, not Greek."[7] He then quotes Spinoza's observation:

> Because all the authors, both of the Old and the New, were Hebrews, it is certain that the History of the Hebrew language is necessary above all others, not only for understanding the books of the Old Testament, which were written in this language, but also for understanding those of the New Testament. For although they have been made common to all in other languages, nevertheless they express themselves in a Hebrew manner.[8]

In other words, even the New Testament contains Hebraisms. In which case, it is not such a stretch to conjecture that the Koran may also contain, if not Hebraisms, at least Syriacisms. Before I come back to the Koran I wish to explore further the work of Biblical Scholars on Syriac and the New Testament, since their work, I believe, can teach us much about the Syriac background to the Koran, and their methodology can perhaps be fruitful for Koranic Studies.

1.2. New Testament Studies

Matthew Black (1908–1994), who was Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at the University of St. Andrews, and the first editor of the journal *New Testament Studies*, published in 1946 his work that is now considered a classic,[9] *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*.[10] Black calls his approach "linguistic," and he begins by surveying the linguistic situation in first-century Palestine, when four languages were to be found flourishing:

> Greek was the speech of the educated "hellenized" classes and the medium of cultural and commercial intercourse between Jew and foreigner; Latin was the language of the army of occupation and, to judge from Latin borrowings in Aramaic, appears also to some extent to have served the purposes of commerce, as it no doubt also did of Roman law; Hebrew, the sacred tongue of the Jewish Scriptures, continued to provide the lettered Jew with an important means of literary expression and was cultivated as a spoken tongue in the learned coteries of the Rabbis; Aramaic was the language of the people of the land and, together with Hebrew, provided the chief literary medium of the Palestinian Jew of the first century; Josephus wrote his *Jewish War* in Aramaic and later translated it into Greek.

"If," continues Black,

> Jesus was a Galilean Rabbi, it is not unlikely that He made use of Hebrew as well as Aramaic, especially . . . in His formal disputations with the Pharisees. . . . In the Palestinian Talmud Aramaic and Hebrew are found together, sometimes in the form of a kind of *Mischsprache*, sentences half Hebrew, half Aramaic, are familiar to the reader of the Talmud, and this artificial language, rabbinical in origin, may well have been in use before as after the Fall of Jerusalem. [My emphasis, I.W.]

Here we have the use of the term *Mischsprache*, fifty-four years before Luxenberg's own usage.[11] Black further argues,

> The Gospels were written in a predominantly hellenistic environment, and they were written in Greek. But Greek was was not the native language of their central Figure, nor of the earlier apostles, if it was not unfamiliar to them. Jesus must have conversed in the Galilean dialect of Aramaic, and His teaching was probably almost entirely in Aramaic. At the basis of the Greek Gospels, therefore, there must lie a Palestinian Aramaic tradition, at any rate of the sayings and teaching of Jesus, and this tradition must at one time have been translated from Aramaic into Greek. Some have thought that the Evangelists themselves were the translators of these Aramaic sources of the Gospels; they certainly must have utilized, if they did not themselves translate, early translation sources. The "Aramaic problem" of the Gospels is to determine, by internal evidence, to what extent the Greek Gospels are written in or embody "translation Greek" or how much Aramaic influence can be detected in them.[12]

At this stage, Black adds Syriac into the mix,

> but Aramaic, other than Jewish Palestinian, may have influenced the Evangelists' work and the early transmission of the Gospels in Greek. Syriac was widely spoken and written, especially in Antioch, the first great Christian centre, and there is a respectable tradition that St. Luke was a native of that city. If the third Evangelist was a "Syrian of Antioch," he was probably bilingual, with Syriac as his second language. Moreover, Palestinian Jewish Aramaic was a dialect little known outside of Palestine: much of the Palestinian Aramaic Gospel tradition may have passed through the more familiar medium of Syriac before it was finally written down in Greek. The influence of Syriac, therefore, as well as of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, may have contributed to the shaping of the Gospel Greek.[13]

Taking both a linguistic and textual approach, Black examines the grammar, syntax, and vocabulary of the Gospels to ferret out what may be Aramaisms, Syriacisms, or, more generally Semitisms. More precisely, he looks at the style

and structure of the sentence: order of words, Casus Hyperbaton, and the distribution of Asyndeton; then at the Aramaic subordinate clause. In chapter 6 he examines the Aramaic influence on grammar and vocabulary: the definite article, the pronoun, preposition, verb, and vocabulary. In part 3 Black looks at Semitic poetic form: that is, the formal element of Semitic poetry in the Gospels: for example, parallelism of lines and clauses, alliteration, assonance, and paronomasia. In part 4, Black addresses the question of translation of Aramaic, surveying synoptic variants from Aramaic, and also mistranslation and interpretation of Aramaic, and finally Aramaic as a cause of textual variants. Matthew Black's survey of the results has much to teach us; it

> yields one conclusion only which can be regarded as in any degree established, that an Aramaic sayings-source or tradition lies behind the Synoptic Gospels [i.e., Matthew, Mark, and Luke]. Where any one Semitic or Aramaic construction could be observed recurring, its distribution showed that it tended to be found most frequently, and sometimes exclusively, in the Words of Jesus. The same conclusion emerged from a study of the translation and mistranslation of Aramaic in the Gospels. . . . [The main impression remains] that we have to do with a translation-tradition, sometimes literal, mostly, however, literary and interpretative, but generally bearing the stamp upon it, in one feature or another, of its Aramaic origin. Whether that source was written or oral, it is not possible from the evidence to decide. . . .
>
> In [Luke], apart from the sayings of Jesus, there are far fewer indications of Aramaic influence, The asyndeton openings, λέγει, λέγουσι, [says, they say], characteristic of the first Gospel, though Aramaic in origin, are more likely to be a feature of Matthew's Jewish Greek style than an indication of source. Similarly, Luke's temporal conjunction, ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ [Luke 10:21; 12:12; 13:31; 20:19: *en autē té hóra* : *In the same hour*, or *at that very time*], need not imply the use of sources; it may be a Lucan Aramaism or Syriacism. The hymns embodied in the Infancy narrative are thoroughly Semitic, but not necessarily translations, though the observation of word-play when we render them in Aramaic strongly supports the translation hypothesis. In the narrative peculiar to Luke of the Emmaus Appearance it is very probable that the Greek text of Luke in WH [editor's note: Edition of New Testament by Westcott & Hort, 1881] mistranslates an Aramaic adjective in XXIV:32.[14]

Black further asks,

> What of the Fourth Gospel? Is it a translation of an Aramaic document, as Burney maintained?[15] How far is the linguistic evidence adduced by Burney, which certainly proves a strong Aramaic element, capable of proving more than that St. John is written in "Aramaized" Greek, the work perhaps of an Aramaic-speaking writer with Greek as his second language? The evidence by which translation can be most convincingly demonstrated is that of

> mistranslation. When all other explanations are considered and evidence weighed, there remains a residuum of such evidence where, if the element of conjecture cannot be eliminated altogether, it may nevertheless be said that alternative suggestions are inferior as explanations.

Noted Semitist and Assyriologist, G. R. Driver (1892–1975), quoted by Black, puts forward a theory for the Fourth Gospel which is the corresponding theory concerning the Koran put forward by Luxenberg. Here is Black again:

> Nevertheless, it is possible that an Aramaic sayings-tradition may have been utilized by John, most probably in early Greek translation sources. A not dissimilar conclusion was reached by G. R. Driver, who, while rejecting the theory of an Aramaic documentary source, thought that the evidence supported the hypothesis that John "was mentally translating, as he wrote, logia handed down by tradition and current in Christian circles in Aramaic, from that language into Greek in which he was actually composing his Gospel."[16]

Again, Black's observations concerning what he calls "Translation Greek" seem to me to be of the greatest interest and relevance for Islamology and Koranic Studies. If we take seriously the notion of the Gospels being "translated" into Greek, in some sense, where Aramaic sources were employed, then we must look at the character of the Greek "translation." Black concludes,

> The Greek Evangelists or the first Greek translators of the Gospels have not simply transmitted a tradition unaltered: they have interpreted a tradition originally circulating in one language, Aramaic, and composed in more or less literary Greek the results of their interpretation. All translation involves interpretation, but the Gospels are not just the interpretation of translators; they are also Targum[17] of the Evangelists. The consequence is that, in the transmission of the Teaching of Jesus, the end-product in Greek is often less the mind of Jesus than the ideas and interpretation of the Greek Evangelists.[18]

Black then draws attention to a feature that has taken on greater significance since the work of Günter Lüling, as we shall see in a moment: Semitic poetic form to be found in the Gospels.

> That the sayings of Jesus were cast originally in poetic form has for long been well-known, In *his Poetry of Our Lord*, Burney[19] drew attention to such features as parallelism, rhythmic structure, and even rhyme which could be detected in the underlying Aramaic of the Words of Jesus. But such characteristic features of Semitic poetry are also to be found in the hymns of Luke, in the sayings of the Baptist, and perhaps even in several non-dominical sayings in the Gospels. The most striking and one of the most characteristic features of all Semitic poetry is paronomasia,[20] together with its associated alliteration

> and assonance. When the sayings of Jesus and especially the longer connected passages are turned into simple Aramaic many examples of paronomasia, alliteration and assonance come to light. Paronomasia in particular appears to have been a regular feature of the style and teaching of our Lord in His native Aramaic. It has for the most part disappeared in the Greek Gospels.[21]

Günter Lüling put forward, first in 1974 and then in greater detail in 2003,[22] the thesis that

> considerable parts of the Koran text itself were pre-Islamic Christian strophic hymns, most probably predating by about 200 years the emergence of Islam, and quite obviously originally a real pre-Islamic Christian Koran, written in a vernacular Arabic, were reworked and reinterpreted by the earliest Islamic collectors and editors of the Koran text. The original strophic structure, with what were once regular rhymes, was intentionally destroyed and turned into continuous classical Arabic prose, the original content often being reversed into its diametrical opposite.[23]

Lüling acknowledged that his thesis was but the development of the work of such scholars as David Heinrich Müller, Rudolf Geyer, and Karl Vollers.[24]

Discussing the issue of texts and textual criticism, Black, making an explicit reference to the Koran, points out that

> in the earliest periods these writings in use in Church and Synagogue were subject to the most radical changes and alterations in both their subject-matter and text, with little regard for the author's original work. As far as the substance and contents of the Gospels are concerned, we have no reason to believe that they have suffered in any material way. . . . But while the tradition in this respect remained constant, its form in text and language went through the same stages of historical development as the Hebrew and Greek Old Testaments, the Aramaic Targums, or the *Qoran* [my emphasis, I.W.]. An early period of a "fluid text" with different "editions" varying in form and language, if substantially the same message and import, circulated in different localities. It was not till some degree of ecclesiastical unity was achieved over sufficiently wide areas that standard or Vulgate texts took place of the local Gospels and finally superseded them.[25]

The Koran text, in other words, like the Old and New Testament texts, has a history. For that matter, any text must be explicated by what Maxime Rodinson once called "the normal mechanisms of human history".

2. Precursors of Matthew Black

2.1. Fifth Century to Eighteenth Century

Matthew Black was of course not the first scholar to talk of the Aramaic substrate in the Greek Gospels, for even before Spinoza there were the works, published in 1650, of Kaspar Wyss, professor of Greek in Zurich until his death in 1659, as well as those published in 1658 of Johann Vorst (1623–1658), a German philologist and rector of a college in Berlin.[26]

Elliott C. Maloney reminds us that as early as the fifth century Christian writers found the Greek of the New Testament strange, and certainly "different from that of the Classical Greek authors, and even from the literary Hellenistic Greek used by Polybius, Epictetus, and Plutarch."[27] Isidore of Pelusium (died before 449 or 436), for instance, wrote that

> the Greeks . . . despise the divine Scripture [i.e., the New Testament] as barbarous language, and composed of foreign-sounding words, abandoning necessary conjunctions, and confusing the mind with the addition of extra-ordinary words.[28]

During the rediscovery of Antiquity of the Renaissance,

> scholars studying the biblical languages found that New Testament Greek was full of problems caused by the influence of a Semitic language they considered to be Hebrew.[29]

For instance, Sebastien Castellion (1515–1563), French preacher of tolerance and liberty of conscience, wrote in the preface to *Biblia Sacra* (Basel, 1551), that

> one should know that the New Testament was written in such a way that its diction be Hebraic . . . [for] the Apostles were Hebrews by birth, and they hebraized when writing a foreign, that is, the Greek language.

Erasmus (1466–1536) made a similar point, noting that "although the Apostles write in Greek, nevertheless they convey much from the peculiarity of their own language [Hebrew]."[30]

Theodore Beza (1519–1605), important French Protestant theologian, in his notes on the New Testament demonstrated that its books are filled with Hebraisms.[31] Joachim Camerarius (1500–1574), German Classical scholar, came to the same conclusion.[32] Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614), in

> his notes on the New Testament, written while he was only in his twenties, paid close attention to what he took as "Hebraisms": Greek words and phrases used in senses that derived from the Hebrew Old Testament.[33]

Edward Lively (died 1605), a professor of Hebrew at Cambridge, wrote several learned works on the Old Testament, indicating "an execellent grasp of Hebrew and uncommon familiarity with rabbinic writings."[34]

However, as Grafton and Weinberg point out,

> when Lively read the Greek of the Gospels—especially when he encountered expressions of time—he heard undertones that his predecessors had missed. He vividly sensed the presence of Hebrew and Aramaic beneath the Greek, and he used Jewish texts to identify the words and phrases in question.[35]

2.2. Nineteenth Century

Black himself refers to the work of Arnold Meyer and Gustaf Dalman.[36] Dalman (1855–1941), a German Lutheran theologian, and author of an important grammar of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic,[37] whose observations are relevant for Koranic Studies, brings forward incontestable evidence for the argument that Aramaic was the language of the Jews of Palestine. He summarized the evidence in the following manner:

(1) "The custom, represented in the second century after Christ as very ancient, of translating into Aramaic the text of the Hebrew Pentateuch in the synagogues of the Hebraists of Palestine."[38] (By "Hebraists," Dalman meant the putatively "Hebrew"-speaking Jews of Palestine, who formed a class distinct from the "Hellenists"; and according to Dalman, the Hebraists did not in reality speak Hebrew, but rather Aramaic, for a custom had grown up over the years whereby the Bible text and Targum were inseparable, and this custom arose at a time when the Hebrew text was no longer understood by those who frequented the synagogues. At least in public worship the Holy Scripture was not read without the translation into Aramaic. We can notice similar developments in the history of early Islam: it was clear from the beginning that large parts of the Koran were not understood, and the Hadith (Ḥadīṯ), the Traditions, were invented to explain obscure passages in the Holy Text. To translate the Koran without the Hadith still remains an impossible task, as the two are inseparable.)
(2) The Aramaic titles for classes of the people and for feasts attested by Josephus and the New Testament.
(3) The use of Aramaic language in the Temple.
(4) Old Official documents in the Aramaic language.
(5) The language of the public documents relating to purchases, debts, marriages and so forth.

(6) The unquestioned adoption in the time of Jesus of the Aramaic characters in place of the Old Hebrew in copies of the Bible Text.
(7) The Syntax and the vocabulary of the Hebrew of the Mishna, which prove themselves to be the creation of Jews who thought in Aramaic.
(8) The custom of calling the Aramaic "Hebrew."[39]

From all this evidence, Dalman draws the conclusion that Jesus must have grown up speaking Aramaic, and that he spoke in Aramaic to his disciples and to the people in order to be understood. What is of primordial importance is to establish the linguistic situation in Palestine at the time of Jesus, and the way Aramaic permeated and influenced the other languages in the area. Dalman argues that

> the Greek of the Jewish Hellenists must have been affected by Semitic tongues in several ways. In the first place, it must be assumed that the Greek spoken from Syria to Egypt was in many particulars influenced in no small degree, by the Aramaic language of the country; and further, it holds true for that portion of the Jewish people that adopted Greek in place of its Semitic mother-tongue, that this mother-tongue had been Aramaic, and that the world of thought peculiar to the Jews, which had then to be apprehended in a Greek mould, had already been fashioned in Aramaic and no longer in Hebrew. The spiritual intercourse also which Jewish Hellenists continuously had with Hebraists in Palestine implied constant interchange between Greek and Aramaic (but not Hebrew) modes of expression. Hebrew influence was active only indirectly: first, in so far as a Hebrew past underlay the Aramaic present of the Jewish people; secondly and in particular, because the Greek translation of the Old Testament had necessarily a powerful influence on the religious dialect.[40]

Many Islamologists are not familiar with dialects, and they tend to see Arabic in isolation, and subscribe to the myth of the purity of the Arabic language. As I wrote many years ago, no civilization is pure; there are no more pure civilizations than there are pure races. As a character in Nabokov's *Lolita* says, we are all a salad of racial genes; this is even more true of civilizations: civilizations are a salad of cultural genes, different interpenetrating, inter-influencing strands. Most civilizations have not developed in isolation. Let us add languages to the mix. Languages have not everywhere developed in isolation. As Dalman wrote,

> He who knows the East is aware that familiarity with several languages is not necessarily proof of higher education, but is rather a state of things arising out of the conditions of intercourse between the different populations.[41]

Growing up in Karachi in newly created Pakistan in the early 1950s, I can vouch that out in the streets I used a *Mischsprache* made up of my mother tongue, *Kutchi*, a form of Sindhi; *Urdu*, adopted as the national language, and *English*, the language of higher education. There was yet some influence from another language: *Gujarati*, the dominant language of the region where my father and I were born.

Kutchi was only used within the family for everyday purposes, so new words, for example, those for technical innovations, would have to be inserted from one of the other languages. English was taught in schools, but the pronunciation was heavily influenced by the phoneme systems of local languages. Moreover, the style was not what an English native speaker would accept as genuine colloquial English, whether British or American. Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, is a very special case: It is one of the two varieties of *Hindustani*, the most important *Modern Indo-Aryan* language. Indo-Aryan languages are all offsprings of Sanskrit (also called "Old Indo-Aryan"), an Indo-European language closely related to Old Persian and Avestan, but as such also to Greek, Latin and—of course—English. Modern Indo-Aryan languages[42] comprise most of the languages spoken in Northern India, Bangladesh, most of Nepal and large parts of Pakistan, some of them (Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi, Nepali, Assamese, Oriya, Sindhi) with many million speakers. Sanskrit is the "genealogical mother" of Modern Indo-Aryan languages, from which Gujarati, Punjabi, and so on derived. So words that go back to the "normal" linguistic development like *Hindustani/Urdu* "hāth" from *Sanskrit* "hasta" (meaning "hand") are not borrowings. However, just like French adopted learned Latin words (e.g., "légal" from Lat. "legalis") in addition to Latin words that had undergone the normal linguistic development (e.g., "loyal" from Lat. "legalis"), Hindustani, especially its Indian variety *Hindi,* often did the same.

Hindustani and the other Modern Indo-Aryan languages are about as closely related as Italian, Spanish, and French, the case of Hindustani being special insofar as there are two written standards in use with next-to identical grammar and phoneme system: *Urdu* (written in a slightly modified Arabic alphabet), and the already-mentioned *Hindi* (written in the Devanagari alphabet, which is also used for Sanskrit). Hindustani, named after "Hindustan" (Persian: "land of the Indus," an old designation of "India"). It had adopted many Persian words, and—due to the fact that the ruling Moghul dynasty was Muslim—many Arabic words from the religious vocabulary, albeit in Persian guise, much like English adopted thousands of French words after the battle of Hastings in 1066. The new language had an early standard called *Khari Bholi*, based on the dialect of Delhi, but its colloquial form was mainly spoken in the *army*, in the Turkic language of the Moghuls (often referred to as *Chagatay* or *Old Uzbek*) called *urdu.* This word has independently been adopted into European languages as *hord* (German:

Horde)—think of the empire of the "Golden Horde"—and it etymologically corresponds to the modern Turkish word *ordu* or *army*. So this "language of the army"—*Urdu*—written in Arabic letters, was to become the new national language of India. The Hindus, however, did not want all of the Persian and Arabic words, especially those that stemmed from the religious terminology. So they replaced them by Sanskrit and pseudo-Sanskrit forms and wrote this variety of the language in the alphabet normally used for Sanskrit at that time. The language was called *Hindi,* which, in fact, is also an Arabic form (*hind* = India + adjective ending –*ī*). Moreover, concerning Modern Indo-Aryan languages in general, one should not forget the English influence.

A good example of the mixed character of Hindustani/Urdu is the words for "love": *mohabbat* (from Arabic *muḥabbat*, the *o* in the first syllable showing that it first went through Persian), *prem*, *pyār*, *išk*; and for "physical love" there is also the semantic unit (morpheme) *kām(a)* (Sanskrit) that we all know from the "*Kama*-sutra." So what the author was exposed to during his childhood was more than just a "*mischsprache,*" to use a German play on words, it was a "*Misch-masch*-Sprache (*Mischmasch*—'mingle-mangle' [compare the vowels!]; 'jumble' [think of 'mumbo-jumbo'!])."

Coming back to the holy land: The problem for all scholars, whether of the Old or New Testament, or the Koran, is to ascertain the linguistic situation in Palestine at various moments of history. Dalman argues that at

> the time of Christ there was prevalent over all Palestine, from the extreme north to the south, a single literary language in Aramaic, varying but slightly in the different parts of the country. In this literary Aramaic are written the Aramaic sections in Daniel and in Ezra, the Targum of Onkelos,[43] and the other documents assigned to the Judaen dialect, as well as the Palmyrene and Nabataean inscriptions. Concurrently (with this literary dialect) there existed a whole series of popular dialects: a Middle Palestinian, which we can recognise in a later phase as Samaritan Aramaic, and a North Palestinian, which is known to us in a Jewish and Christian form—both belonging to a subsequent period. It is highly probable that after the final overthrow of the Judaean centre of Jewish-Aramaic culture, which was the result of the Bar Kochba revolution, the North Palestinian popular dialect got the upper hand over nearly all Palestine.[44]

2.3. Developments in the Twentieth Century

Dalman was writing at the end of the nineteenth century, but since then, in the words of Joseph A. Fitzmyer, the scholar who has done the most to examine their import, "the number of texts written in some form of Aramaic that have come to light during the last seventy-five to a hundred years has been extraordinary."[45] Fitzmyer, now Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies at

the Catholic University of America, writing in the late 1970s, gives us a brief picture of the situation:

> By and large, they [editor's note: these newly discovered texts] have given us a good idea of earlier forms of the language and some of its intermediate stages. Most of the texts have come from Egypt, Palestine, or Syria, even though it is now apparent that during the period of its heyday, when it served as a sort of *lingua franca* for vast areas of the eastern Mediterranean world, it was used in many other countries as well. These new acquisitions have shed light on all sorts of older texts, biblical, ancient Near Eastern, and otherwise.

Fitzmyer suggests that the Aramaic preserved in the Greek of the Gospels points to the phenomenon of Semitic interference in that language, and in particular to Aramaic interference. I shall come back to the whole notion of "interference," an important area of research in the fairly new discipline of translation studies. Fitzmyer was the first, perhaps, to bring some methodological rigor to discussions of the Aramaic background of the New Testament, and the presence, prevalence and use of Aramaic in Palestine, which is attested from the ninth century onward.

> The earliest text is a short inscription on a jar from 'Ein Gev, dated to the middle of the ninth century by B. Mazar; and likewise from that century comes an inscribed bowl from Tell Dan, published by N. Avigad.[46] From these (currently) earliest attestations of the language right down to roughly A.D. 500 one can trace a line of evidence showing a continuous use of Aramaic in Palestine, which includes the numerous fragments from the Qumran caves, and not a few from various synagogue inscriptions dating from the third to the sixth centuries. Moreover, the invasion of Aramaisms, Aramaic vocabulary, and Aramaic syntax into the Hebrew of the later books of the Bible and into Post-Biblical Hebrew suggests its predominant use.[47]

Not only was cultural and linguistic exchange and influence the norm, but translation activity began early also. Fitzmyer writes:

> Furthermore, the existence of Aramaic targums in written form from Qumran (4Qtg.Job, 11Qtg.Job, 4QtgLev) indicates that the practice of translating the Hebrew Scriptures into Aramaic was well under way, and presumably for the usually stated reason, because the original Hebrew text read in synagogues was no longer so readily and widely understood. . . . Lastly, the use of Aramaic on tombstones and ossuaries of the first century in and around Jerusalem clearly shows that the language was in popular use, not to mention an Aramaic I.O.U. dated to the second year of Nero Caesar, A.D. 56 (Murabba'at texts 18).

While he remains skeptical about the alleged differences between the literary and spoken forms of Aramaic of this period, Fitzmyer, nonethess, makes an important observation:

> Everyone knows that the distinction [between literary and spoken forms] is valid and that it is precisely the *spoken form* [my emphasis, I. W.] of a language that eventually invades the literary and brings about the development of one dialect or phase of it from another.[48]

And yet, as we shall see, in the field of Koranic Studies there are eminent scholars who maintain that the Arabic vernaculars developed out of Classical Arabic!

3. Fitzmyer: The Languages of Palestine, and Phases of Aramaic

3.1. The Linguistic Situation in Palestine in the First Century CE

In an article first published in 1970,[49] Fitzmyer in a brilliant examination of all the extant evidence comes to the following conclusion about the linguistic situation in Palestine in the first century CE :

> I should maintain that the most commonly used language of Palestine in the first century A.D. was Aramaic, but that many Palestinian Jews, not only those in Hellenized towns, but farmers and craftsmen of less obviously Hellenized areas used Greek, at least as a second language. The data collected from Greek inscriptions and literary sources indicate that Greek was widely used. In fact, there is indication, despite Josephus' testimony, that some Palestinians spoke only Greek, the 'Ελληνισταί [Hellēnistaí]. But pockets of Palestinian Jews also used Hebrew, even though its use was not widespread. The emergence of the targums supports this. The real problem is the influence of these languages on one another. Grecized Aramaic is still to be attested in the first century. It begins to be attested in the early second century and becomes abundant in the third and fourth centuries. Is it legitimate to appeal to this evidence to postulate the same situation earlier? Latin was really a negligible factor in the language-situation of first-century Palestine, since it was confined for the most part to the Roman occupiers. If Aramaic did go into an eclipse in the Seleucid period[50], as some maintain, it did not remain there. The first-century evidence points, indeed, to its use as the most common language in Palestine.[51]

3.2. The Phases of Aramaic

In chapter three of his essay collection *A Wandering Aramean*, Fitzmyer proposed a reclassification of the phases of Aramaic into five periods:

1. Old Aramaic, from roughly 925 BCE to 700 BCE

Evidence: inscriptions on stone and other materials written in borrowed Phoenician alphabet.

Geography: northern Syria, Upper Mesopotamia, northern Palestine.
Examples: Tell Halaf inscription, Hazor sherd, Tell Dan Bowl, etc.

2. Imperial Aramaic, from roughly 700 BCE to 200 BCE

Also called "Reichsaramäisch," Official, or Standard Aramaic. Widespread and standardized.
Evidence: Vast corpus of Official Aramaic texts: letters on papyrus, skin, literary texts, graffiti, ostraca messages, clay tablets, etc.
Geography: Egypt (chiefly in Upper Egypt at Elephantine and Aswan, but also in Lower Egypt at Saqqarah and Hermopolis West), in Arabia and Palestine, Syria, and in scattered areas of Asia Minor, Assyria, Babylonia, Armenia, Ancient Indus Valley.

3. Middle Aramaic, from roughly 200 BCE to 200 CE

Emergence of real local dialects. To this phase belong the dialects of
(a) Palestine and Arabia: Nabatean, Qumran, Murabba'at, that of the inscriptions on Palestinian ossuaries and tombstones, of the Aramaic words preserved in the Greek texts of Josephus and the New Testament, and some of the texts of early Palestinian rabbinic literature;
(b) Syria and Mesopotamia: those of Palmyra, Edessa, and Hatra, and perhaps also the beginnings of early Babylonian rabbinic literature.

4. Late Aramaic, roughly 200 CE to 700 CE

(a) Western: dialects of Jewish-Palestinian Aramaic, Samaritan Aramaic, Christian Syro-Palestinian Aramaic;
(b) Eastern: the dialects of Syriac (further distinguished into a western [Jacobite] form and an eastern [Nestorian] form), Babylonian Talmudic Aramaic, and Mandaic.

Fitzmyer writes of this fourth phase, which is, perhaps, the most important phase for those looking at the history of Arabic, and the origin and rise of Islam:

> The closing limit of this phase of the language is not easily set. 700 is taken merely as a round number close to the Muhammadan Conquest and the consequent spread of Arabic which put an end to the active use of Aramaic in many areas of the Near East. But it is obvious that neither Aramaic nor Syriac died out at this time. There are, indeed, all sorts of reasons for extending the lower limit of the phase to the end of the 11th century (i.e., to the end of the Gaonic period in Palestine and Babylonia)[52] and even to the end of the 13th century among Syriac writers (Bar Hebraeus, or Abu 'l-Faraj Gregory (1226–

> 1286), and his contemporaries). The extent of the areas in which Aramaic or Syriac was still spoken was greatly reduced; and the position that it assumed vis-à-vis Arabic even in those areas is problematic. Was it being used only in closed circles (domestic, scholastic, synagogal)? In any case, it is obvious that the language did not die out completely, as the following fifth phase shows, even though it is not easy to trace the line of connection between the Late and the Modern phases.

Fitzmyer continues,

> What is striking in the Late Phase of Aramaic is not only the elements that set off its various dialects (such as the imperfect in *neqtol* or *liqtul*, the waning of the absolute and construct states of the noun, the piling up of pronominal forms, the widespread use of the possessive pronoun *dīl-*, etc.), but also the mounting influx of Greek words and constructions into almost all dialects of the language. Though the Hellenization of the eastern Mediterranean areas, such as Palestine and Syria, began much earlier, the sparse incidence of Greek words in Aramaic texts of the Middle phase stands in contrast to that of this phase.[53]

5. Modern Aramaic

Still spoken in various parts of northern Syria, Iran, Iraq and related regions. Examples include the closely related dialects of *Maʿlūla*, *Jubbʿadin*, *Baḫʿa*, all spoken in the mountains near Damascus and the only survivor of West Aramaic, *Ṭurōyō*, the modern language most closely related to Classical Syriac, originally spoken in Ṭūr ʿAbdīn in modern Turkey—most speakers meanwhile having emigrated—and a language often referred to as *Assyrian Neo-Aramaic*, the modern Aramaic language with most speakers, spoken in different dialects in Iraq, Iran, and some parts of the former Soviet Union. All of them have been heavily influenced by modern local languages such as Arabic, Kurdish, or Turkish.

4. Language Contact, Language Interference—*Mischsprache*, *Langue Mixte*, and *Langue Mélangée*

Es gibt keine völlig ungemischte Sprache
[There is no entirely unmixed language]
Hugo Schuchardt, 1884

4.1. Languages in General

Before coming back to Classical Arabic, and the language of the Koran, I should like to further explore the nature of mixed languages and the curious

reluctance of Islamologists in particular to consider the history of the Arabic language in its linguistic and cultural milieu.

In his preface to Uriel Weinreich's classic *Languages in Contact*,[54] Professor André Martinet, head of the Department of Linguistics at Columbia University in the 1950s, makes a number of pertinent observations about research and researchers in the field of linguistics:

> There was a time when the progress of research required that each community should be considered linguistically self-contained and homogeneous. Whether this autarchic situation was believed to be a fact or was conceived of as a working hypothesis need not detain us here. It certainly was a useful assumption. By making investigators blind to a large number of actual complexities, it has enabled scholars, from the founding fathers of our science down to the functionalists and structuralists of today, to abstract a number of fundamental problems, to present for them solutions perfectly valid in the frame of the hypothesis, and generally to achieve, perhaps for the first time, some rigor in a research involving man's psychic activity.
>
> Linguists will always have to revert at times to this pragmatic assumption. But we shall now have to stress the fact that a linguistic community is *never* [emphasis in the original] homogeneous and hardly ever self-contained. Dialectologists have pointed to the permeability of linguistic cells, and liguistic changes have been shown to spread like waves through space. But it remains to be emphasized that linguistic diversity begins next door, nay, at home and within one and the same man. It is not enough to point out that each individual is a battlefield for conflicting linguistic types and habits, and, at the same time, a permanent source of linguistic interference. What we heedlessly and somewhat rashly call "a language" is the aggregate of millions of such microcosms many of which evince such aberrant linguistic comportment that the question arises whether they should not be grouped into other "languages." What further complicates the picture, and may, at the same time, contribute to clarify it, is the feeling of linguistic allegiance which will largely determine the responses of every individual. This, even more than sheer intercourse, is the cement that holds each one of our "languages" together: It is different allegiance which makes two separate languages of Czech and Slovak more than the actual material differences between the two literary languages. . . . We leave aside one totally homogeneous system and shunt off to another totally homogeneous one. This is at least what we assume would take place in an ideal bilingual situation. But to what extent is this situation actually realized? By the side of a few linguistic virtuosos who, by dint of constant cultivation, manage to keep their two, or more, linguistic mediums neatly distinct, wouldn't careful observation reveal in the overwhelming majority of cases some traces at least of structural merger? On the other hand couldn't we imagine all sorts of intermediate cases between every successive two among the

> following ones; a unilingual who shifts from style to style; a substandard speaker who can, if need be, trim his speech into something close to standard; a patois speaker who can gradually improve his language from homely and slipshod to what we might call his best linguistic behavior, for all practical purposes the standard language; another patois speaker who will treat his vernacular and the standard as two clearly different registers with largely deviating structures. Contact breeds imitation and imitation breeds linguistic convergence. Linguistic divergence results from secession, estrangement, loosening of contact. In spite of the efforts of a few great scholars, like Hugo Schuchardt, linguistic research has so far favored the study of divergence at the expense of convergence.[55]

In the words of Hugo Schuchardt: *Es gibt keine völlig ungemischte Sprache* [There is no entirely unmixed language].[56]

Historical linguists have tended to concentrate on system-internal motivations and mechanisms in studying language change, dismissing external influence as insignificant. Heine and Kutieva[57] summarize the resistance among historical linguists to the idea of language contact and interference as external agents of change, and point to studies that challenge this conservative viewpoint:

> That language structure is fairly resistant to change in situations of language contact has been widely held among students of linguistics for a long time, presumably rooted in Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between "internal" and "external" linguistics. In this tradition, Edward Sapir managed to persuade a generation of American linguists that there were no really convincing cases of profound morphological influence by diffusion.[58] While it was conceded that certain parts of language, such as phonology and the lexicon, tend to be affected by pressure from other languages, grammar was considered to be immune to major restructuring. More recent studies have shown that this view is incorrect. As some of these studies have demonstrated, essentially *any part of language structure* [emphasis added by I.W.] can be transferred from one language to another.[59] In fact, there is substantial evidence to support this general claim. . . .

Sapir did not really claim that grammar is not influenced by language contact at all, but he saw its effect as rather negligeable if compared to internal reasons, although he should have known better: Especially in Indo-European studies there are numerous well-known examples of grammatical influence between languages, e.g. of Latin on European languages, a good example being the *ablativus absolutus* or the *consecutio temporum*.

A conditional sentence in English like "If I had known (*past perfect*), I would not have done it (*past conditional*)" is exactly congruent with its

French counterpart "si j'avais su (*past perfect*), je ne l'aurais pas fait (*past conditional*)." What Sapir actually did claim, however, is that language contact does not change the phonetics/phonology of a language very much and that sound changes normally go back to internal reasons and not to language contact—a view which is probably true, at least in most cases; examples to the contrary are cases of "areal phonetics": e.g., *Sorbian* (also called *Lusatian*, a Slavonic language) is phonetically influenced by German, which can easily be heard: the Slavic rolled *r* was replaced by the French "r grasseyé"; but these influences are rather on the level of phonetic *realization*, less on the *phonemic* level.

Sapir's view can be explained by a misconception which had survived among linguists for a long time: Generations of them had grown up with the notion that *every* linguistic change process was explained by either *subtratum* (i.e., influence of the former language like Gaulish for French), *superstratum* (i.e., influence of an imposed language, like English on Welsh) or *adstratum* (i.e., influence of a neighboring language like German on Hungarian). Sapir tried to put the importance of these phenomena into perspective. As Heine and Kuteva continue,

> The main purpose of [our] book is to demonstrate that the transfer of grammatical meanings and structures across languages is regular, and that it is shaped by universal processes of grammatical change.

Frans van Coetsem (1919–2002), distinguished American linguist of Flemish origin, made many contributions to the study of language contact, to which he was led by his initial research into linguistic variation. Van Coetsem begins his article *Topics in Contact Linguistics*[60] with a quote from the Polish linguist Jan N. I. Baudouin de Courtenay (1845–1929), known for his pioneering work on phonemes. De Courtenay wrote in 1897,

> All existing and extinct languages arose by way of mixture. Even individual speech, which originates and is formed in contact with fully developed individuals, is the product of mixture and interaction.[61]

Van Coetsem then makes these invaluable observations based on fifty years of reflection,

> The study of language contact is an important, integral part of linguistics, but it is still very much in the process of being proven so. In spite of the commendable efforts of such consummate linguists as Weinreich (1953) and Haugen (1969 [1953]),[62] who brought the language contact phenomenon to the forefront, it has traditionally been seen as a marginal topic in linguistics. Where in textbooks the aspect of interaction between languages is brought up at all, it is often handled in a casual manner under the notion of *borrowing* and without much further differentiation. The language system has been seen too much in

> itself rather than in its language-interactive function. . . . A directly related and strongly resistant bias has produced the glorification of the "purity" of language, with all this implies. However, a "pure" language does not exist, since all languages are mixed, albeit in different ways and to different degrees, as already Baudouin de Courtenay forcefully argued. Language contact and mixing language is the rule, not the exception. And Burney[63] mentioned [Albert] Dauzat[64] as viewing language mixing as a boon, and as having stated that: "Les plus grandes langues sont les plus métissées." Dauzat is not the only one to think that way.

Thus for van Coetsem "contact and interaction between languages is an intrinsic part of language itself."[65] Van Coetsem points to the example given by Baudouin de Courtenay of

> a type of language mixing in the which the lexicon originates from one language and the morphology from another. [Baudouin de Courtenay] described this mixed pattern, which must have been considered very remarkable at the time, as follows: "One . . . typically mixed language is the Russian-Chinese language of Kjaxta and Majmačina on the Siberian-Chinese border. . . . Its lexicon . . . is almost exclusively Russian, but its structure, its morphology bear a clear imprint of Chinese."[66]

A good example is the linguistic situation in Paraguay, where in everyday situations the Native American language Guaraní and Spanish are constantly mixed, although written standards of both languages exist, but also the case of "Spanglish" in the United States or intermediate forms of Spanish and Portuguese in the border regions of Uruguay and Brazil; another often-cited example is *Michif*, an intermediate form of the Algonquian language *Cree* and French.

However, it was undoubtedly the work of Thomason and Kaufman that made the academic study of language contact and language change respectable, and methodologically rigorous. Thomason and Kaufman, along with Schuchardt, Bailey, and Mühlhäusler, believe

> that foreign interference in grammar as well as in lexicon is likely to have occurred in the histories of most languages. . . that the history of a language is a function of the history of its speakers, and not an independent phenomenon that can be thoroughly studied without reference to the social context in which it is embedded.[67]

Clearly, many historical linguists deny the possibility of mixed languages, since that would negate the entire Comparative Method: no language could be proven to be the descendant of an earlier stage of a single other language.

In other words, mixed languages challenge the universality of the tidy family tree.[68] In the words of Thomason and Kaufman,

> For over a hundred years, mainstream historical linguists have concentrated heavily on system-internal motivations and mechanisms in studying language change. The methodological principles embodied in the powerful Comparative Method include an assumption that virtually all language change arises through intrasystemic causes. Most historical linguists, therefore would probably still agree with Welmers' view that, in phonology and morphosyntax, external influences "are insignificant when compared with internal change . . . the established principles of comparative and historical linguistics, and *all we know about language history and language change*, demand that . . . we seek explanations first on the basis of recognized processes of internal change"[69] [Emphasis added by Thomason and Kaufman]. Max Müller's claim that mixed languages do not exist reflects this prejudice, both because a mixed language could not arise without extensive foreign influence and because the existence of mixed languages would constitute a potential threat to the integrity of the family tree model of genetic relationship (and hence to the Comparative Method itself).[70]

In Germany, already in the nineteenth century there was an alternative theory that tried to replace the notion of a tree structure of linguistic development, called the "Wellentheorie" ("wave theory"). According to this view, linguistic change is like throwing a stone into a pond: around the epicenter the ripples are biggest; moreover several stones might be thrown into the pond in different places.

Moreover, the comparative method can hardly be applied to a *dialect continuum* (like German and Arabic dialects), that is to say a situation where many dialects are spoken in a country, with neighboring dialects still being more or less mutually intelligible, but where intelligibility sinks dramatically with growing distance. *Dialect continua* seem to be the "normal case" of language split, except if there is a clear geographical boundary, as in the case of German, Icelandic, and Swedish.

In the above quotation, the famous German Indologist Max Müller and his opinion that "mixed languages do not exist" was mentioned. Especially he should have known better: Classical Sanskrit, the language he investigated so thoroughly that he is revered for it up to this day in India, is a kind of mixed language: the phonology, *"Lautstand"* (phonemic status) of the words and the morphology of the language is 98 percent Old Indo-Aryan (like in the Rigveda, composed more than three thousand years ago), but the syntax with its conspicuuous nominal style is clearly *Middle Indian*. Therefore, the Middle Indian passages in *Kalidāsas* dramas (e.g., the famous drama *Śakuntalā*) can easily be rendered into Sanskrit by replacing corresponding forms word by word. Isn't this a mixed language par excellence?

To adduce a hypothetical example: If our scholars had done the same with medieval Latin, there would be forms like "Egomeindefutuismus" ("j'm'enfoutisme"—an attitude of "not giving a damn") < ego + me + inde + futu[ere] + ismus. Still, this does not mean that the family tree should be totally dismissed: once languages have ceased to be mutually intelligible, they are on different branches.

As Thomason and Kaufman point out, it is surely no accident that it was the great creolist, Hugo Schuchardt, who argued robustly against those scholars such as Max Müller who denied the very possibility of mixed languages. Pidgins and creoles were obviously the prime candidates for mixed-language status. But Schuchardt's interests were by no means confined to pidgins and creoles, and his research on contact-induced language changes of all sorts confirmed his belief in the universality of language mixture.

Thomason and Kaufman lay down certain important principles that seem to have been denied or neglected by Arabists when discussing the Arabic language in general.

> First, *all languages change through time.* The main stimuli for change are *drift*, i.e. tendencies within language to change in certain ways as a result of structural imbalances; *dialect interference*, between stable, strongly differentiated dialects and between weakly differentiated dialects through the differential spread (in "waves") of particular changes; and *foreign interference*. Just as it is often difficult to tell whether two speech forms are dialects of one language or separate languages, so the borderline between dialect interference and foreign interference is often fuzzy. Nevertheless, many clear cases attest to the basic difference between these two types of interference. A language's geographical area may become fragmented, through the physical and/ or social factors, from the point of view of regular intercommunication. In such cases, change over time can result in dialect diversity and even language splits. Metaphorically, then, *a language can have multiple offspring.*[71]

Thomason and Kaufman further remark that "as far as the strictly linguistic possibilites go, any linguistic feature can be transferred from any language to any other language."[72]

There can be diffusion between unrelated languages that did not originally have similar grammars. Phonological rules, grammatical rules of all sorts can be transferred from one language to another.[73]

> It is the sociolinguistic history of the speakers, and not the structure of their language, that is the primary determinant of the linguistic outcome of language contact. . . . Linguistic interference is conditioned in the first instance by social factors, not linguistic ones.[74]

Thomason and Kaufman make a distinction between borrowing and substratum interference. In the latter kind of interference a group of speakers shifting to a target language (TL) fails to learn the TL perfectly.

> The errors made by members of the shifting group in speaking the TL then spread to the TL as a whole when they are imitated by original speakers of that language. . . . Interference through imperfect learning does *not* begin with vocabulary: it begins instead with sounds and syntax, and sometimes includes morphology as well before words from the shifting group's original language appear in the TL.[75]

Extensive structural borrowing is more common than has been acknowledged.[76]

A. Rosetti [77] makes a distinction between "langue mixte" and "langue mélangée." The former is applicable where there has been an interpenetration of the two morphologies, as in Norwegian, and the latter where there has been borrowing but the morphology has been left intact. Perhaps the best translation of the term "langue mélangée" would be "infused language." Rosetti attributes the existence of mixed languages and "langue mélangée" to bilingualism. He believes the bilingualism of a speaker is reflected in linguistic calques; that is, in the reproduction of the internal form of a foreign word; in German, for instance, *Eindruck* and *Ausdruck* are calqued on *im-pression* and *ex-pression.* No language is entirely exempt from infusions; that is, most languages are "langues mélangées."

4.2. Language Contact in Semitic Languages

Where Thomason and Kaufman discuss principles applicable to *all* languages, John Huehnergard, professor at the University of Texas at Austin, writing in 1996, focuses on Semitic ones. He is very critical of Arabists who refuse to recognize the existence of other Semitic languages:

> For Classical Arabic there has long been a need for a new etymological dictionary in which Arabists would *recognize, possibly for the first time, that there were other Semitic languages*; this lacuna is being filled by a glacially slow appearance of the *Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache*,[78] which started with the letter *k* in 1970 and is already halfway through *l*.[79] [Emphasis added, I.W.]

Huehnergard also feels more work needs to be done on the very large number of Aramaic dialects,

> many of which are still not readily accessible in the form of good descriptive grammars. We need comprehensive studies, for example, of Imperial Aramaic,

> of the Aramaic of *Targum Onqelos*, of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, and other dialects.[80]

John Huehnergard makes a similar point to the one made by Thomason and Kaufman when he notes and regrets the tendency to treat the "big five" Semitic languages (Akkadian, Classical Arabic, Aramaic (usually Syriac), Classical Ethiopic, and Biblical Hebrew)

> as discrete and coordinate branches of the family, so that, frequently, equal weight is given to each in reconstructions. In other words, if a feature has the same manifestation in Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew but differs in Akkadian and Ethiopic, reconstruction may favor the former simply by weight of numbers. But such procedures are methodologically unsound. We should not be comparing all attested languages directly with one another as though they all descended directly from Proto-Semitic without any intermediate steps. The picture of the family tree is not a simple fan, with Proto-Semitic at the apex and a series of rays going directly to each of the attested languages. Rather, it has two primary rays, which lead to East and West Semitic. West Semitic in turn has two rays, which lead to South and Central Semitic, and so on. For the purposes of reconstruction, therefore, one should first compare not all attested languages, but rather only those that share an immediate common ancestor; then that intermediate ancestral language may be compared with a language or branching with which it shares an immediate ancestor still farther back. Ideally, then, what should be compared in attempts to reconstruct language history are coordinate points, or nodes, in the family tree. To return to the example I used above: a feature attested jointly in Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew may reflect a development in *their* common ancestor, Central Semitic, rather than a Proto-Semitic feature; its presence in three of the attested Semitic languages should not outweigh its absence in two languages if the three are all members of the same subbranch.[81]

In the middle of a lengthy footnote,[82] Huehnergard makes an important reflection,

> Further attested languages exist as a part of a continuum of related dialects and are constantly affected by neighbouring dialects (related or not), and these facts naturally obtain equally for the real historical ancestors of attested languages.

This point is further developed, and it leads naturally to the phenomenon I have been at pains to emphasize, namely, language contact:

> Another fruitful area of sociolinguistics, as significant for the ancient Near East as for any other time and place, is the study of language contact, that is, what happens when groups speaking different languages or dialects come into

> contact with one another.[83] Several aspects of the study of languages in contact are of interest. There is, first of all, the phenomenon of linguistic interference, where part of the grammar of one language is influenced by that of the other. The most celebrated cases of large-scale interference among the Semitic languages are Akkadian and Amharic. Cushitic influence on Amharic was already discussed several decades ago by Wolf Leslau, and others have written about it . . . .[84] Linguistic interference is also seen in Ugaritic prose texts, which exhibit the same word order as the Akkadian models on which they were based,[85] in Persian or Akkadian influence on some Aramaic dialects,[86] and elsewhere.[87]

Huehnergard points to the importance of bilingualism,

> a phenomenon that is documented directly for the first time in history in third-millennium Mesopotamian lexical texts. References to bilingualism also crop up frequently in texts. At Ugarit, as is well-known, no fewer than eight languages are attested.

The linguistic processes at work in the phenomena of pidginization and creolization are also present in the ancient Near East, as for example in the Late Bronze Age Akkadian texts:

> These Akkadian texts, written by nonnative speakers in Anatolia, the Levant, and Egypt, exhibit certain simplifications and reductions in their grammar vis-à-vis the Akkadian of native Mesopotamian scribes, but also frequently exhibit other processes that suggest that they were real, spoken languages.[88]

Diglossia, an aspect of language contact, is well-attested among the Semitic languages. But not only the phenomenon of the influence of a prestige language on the spoken language, but the reverse process, vernacularization, are asseverated in Semitic languages. Huehnergard notes that

> influence of the spoken language on the learned or literary is also assumed by Assyriologists when, for example, they come across "late" features in otherwise "good" Old Babylonian, or when they consider the grammar of Standard Babylonian literary texts, in which first-millennium scribes attempted to write the classical Babylonian of the early second millennium.[89]

Finally, Edward Lipiński in his monumental study *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar*,[90] devotes nearly nine pages to "Language Contact," and confirms the findings of Thomason and Kaufman, Huehnergard, and others mentioned above. He begins:

> Living languages never hold still and one way languages change is through the influence of other languages. This problem was already discussed by Sībawayh (d. 793 A.D.) in his *Kitāb*, where he deals with Persian loanwords in Arabic, and Abū Manṣūr al-Ǧawālīqī (1072–1145 A.D.) handled the subjects in his treatise *Kitāb 'al-Mu'arrab min 'al-kalām 'al-'a'ǧamī*.

Lipiński then underlines the thesis proposed by Thomason and Kafman,

> We must accept at once that interference does not occur merely at lexical level. It can be reflected in sound substitution in the borrowing language (e.g. Old Syriac *ʾdryṭʾ* for Greek ἀνδριάς, "statue"), in the adoption of its own patterns to replace the patterns of the source language (e.g. Old Syriac *ʾrkwnwtʾ*, "governorship," from Greek ἄρχων). It can be intrusion in morphology, as shown by the verbal plural morpheme -*ūni* in the Syrian Middle Babylonian, e.g. in *i-gám-me-ru-ni*, "they will annihilate," comparable with Aramaic *yəkattəbūn* and Arabic *katabūna*. There can be intrusion in syntactical patterns as well, e.g. in the Aramaic syntagm *ʿăbīd lī*, "I have done," borrowed from Old Persian.

Lipiński expresses an important thought, almost a statement of principle, which I have been at pains to bring out throughout this introduction, namely that "language contact, leading to language interference and transference, has left its mark on *all* the Semitic languages." [Emphasis added, I. W.]

There is evidence of lexical borrowing, both between a Semitic and a non-Semitic language. Changes in the syntax or phonology of a language may result from borrowing. As for bilingualism, "there can be little doubt that there was in Mesopotamia a Sumero-Semitic bilingualism from the mid-third millennium B.C. on," a fact that explains the large number of Sumerian loanwords in East Semitic.[91] However, Lipiński feels that

> in the consideration of the extent of linguistic interference in Mesopotamia too little attention is sometimes paid to the influence on Old Akkadian and Assyro-Babylonian in spheres other than that of lexicon. Phonemic and grammatical interference should receive equal attention. The impact of the Sumerian language was felt, no doubt, also in phonology and syntax.

Lipiński, during a historical survey of the linguistic complexities of Syro-Phoenicia and Palestine, quotes from the Arab lexicographer Abū Bakr ibn Durayd (died 933), evidence that is of the utmost importance for Luxenberg's thesis:

> *Wa- qad daḫala fī ʿarabīyati ʾahli š-šaʾmi kaṯīrun mina s-suryānīyati kamā staʿmala ʿarabu l-ʿirāqi ʾašyāʾa mina l-fārisīya.*
> "A great deal of Syriac has pervaded the Arabic of the population of Syria, just as the Arabs of Iraq make use of Persian borrowings."

4.3. Hebrew as Mischsprache, or Langue Mélangée

As early as 1910,[92] Hans Bauer adumbrated a thesis, which he later developed fully with Pontus Leander,[93] wherein he suggested that

> Hebrew is not a homogeneous linguistic system but a "*Mischsprache,*" in which it is possible to distinguish an early Canaanite layer, very close to Akkadian, and another more recent layer, closer to Aramaic and Southern Semitic.[94]

Though rejected by many, this thesis seems to be accepted in some form by certain scholars such as G.R. Driver, who wrote, "Clearly the two main strands of which Hebrew is woven are Accadian and Aramaean."[95]

More recently, Professor E. Y. Kutscher has argued that while Mishnaic Hebrew has been influenced on the level of vocabulary by many languages, it is Aramaic that has had the greatest influence at all linguistic levels:

> Aramaic had a far-reaching impact and left its mark on all facets of the language, namely, orthography, phonetics and phonology, morphology including inflection, syntax, and vocabulary. There is room for investigation as to whether Mishnaic Hebrew was a *Hebrew-Aramaic mixed language* [emphasis added]. This question may be posed owing to the fact that Aramaic had a pervading influence in all spheres of the language, including inflection, which is generally considered to be impenetrable to foreign influence. It is possible, however, that because of the symbiosis of Aramaic and Hebrew-Canaanite the two exerted a mutual influence.[96]

Jack Fellman disagrees with Kutscher and, instead, considers Mishnaic Hebrew as, borrowing the term from A. Rosetti discussed above, a "langue mélange," which he translates as "composite language." [97]

4.4. Aramaic—Arabic Language Contact

Stefan Weninger, in the comprehensive handbook on Semitic languages he edited,[98] usefully summarizes the history of Arabic-Aramaic language contact and the ways Aramaic has influenced Arabic phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon, and vice versa. He writes,

> When the name of "Gindibu, the Arab" was set in stone in the mid-9th century B.C. in an inscription commemorating the Assyrian king Šalmanassar's victories in Syria, he became the first Arab to be mentioned in the historical record, in an environment in which Aramaeans had been present for at least two centuries.[99] In much later periods, when Arabian dynasties founded polities such as Hatra, Edessa, Palmyra or Petra, they frequently ruled over mixed populations which included Aramaic-speaking communities. Aramaic was also the medium of written communication.[100]

As for morphology, in Classical Arabic one finds, for instance, the derivational suffix *-ūt* which was imported from Aramaic via loanwords such as *malakūt* < *malkūṯā*, "kingdom,"[101] while Aramaic syntactical influence on

Arabic dialects is also evident. But it is in the area of lexicon we have the greatest amount of testimony of Aramaic-Arabic contact:

> Aramaic loanwords had already penetrated Arabic and its Ancient North Arabian predecessors in Pre-Islamic times in large numbers. . . .In late Antiquity, monotheism spread in the Arabian peninsula and with it Jewish and Christian concepts and terms, e.g. *'umma*, "people, religious community" (< Aramaic *'ummā*, *'ummṯā* "people" < Hebrew *'ummā* "people, tribe") or *ṣalāh*, "prayer" (< *ṣlōṯā* "id.") were imported. Many Aramaic lexemes in this category are attested in the Koran[102] and in the Life of the Prophet by Ibn Hišām.[103]

On the whole, however, Weninger's account is disappointing and inadequate, and one has the feeling that he is reluctant to say anything that may smack of "controversy" or may be considered politically incorrect. While he does list Fraenkel and Jeffery's classics in his bibliography, Weninger leaves out Rudolf Dvořák's *Über die Fremdwörter im Koran* (Wien, 1885), Alphonse Mingana's *Syriac Influence on the Style of the Koran*, and, of course, Luxenberg.[104]

However, Weninger does refer to Jan Retsö's entry from the *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics,*[105] and it is to that article we now turn. Retsö points out that by the sixth century BCE most areas of Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamia were Aramaic speaking.

> In the Arabo-Nabatean kingdom there was interaction between the users of late Imperial Aramaic as a written language and large groups of speakers of Arabic dialects. The interference between Aramaic and different forms of Arabic is thus most likely to have existed more than one millennium before the Islamic conquest. During the first two centuries of Islam, Aramaic continued to be spoken in Syria and Mesopotamia by the peasantry.

Retsö also underlines the importance of the phenomenon of bilingualism,

> In the cities, a bilingual situtation arose soon after the conquest when Arabic increasingly became the language from the time of the Crusades onwards, Aramaic came to be limited to Christian and Jewish quarters. The religious minorities were more prone to guard bilingualism.

Retsö concludes that "a bilingual Arabic-Aramaic situation has probably existed in many areas for a very long time but unfortunately this is poorly documented."

As for the Koran, Retsö argues that

> many of the most important and frequent words in the *Qur'ān* are clear Aramaic borrowings, which can be shown by a comparison with Syriac:
> *'aslam-* "to submit [to the new religion]" < *ašlem*;
> *bāb* "door," "gate" < *bāḇā*;

bīʿa "church" < *biʿṯā*;
rabb "lord," *raḥmān* "merciful" (most likely via South Arabian);
sabīl "way," "path" < *šḇīlā*;
sabt "Sabbath" < *šabṯā*;
sağad- "prostrate" < *sgeḏ*; -
safīna "ship" < *sfi(n)tā*;
tāb -/yatūb- "repent" < *tāḇ/yṯūḇ* or *nṯūḇ*;
tatbīr "destruction," from Aramaic *tḇar* "break," cf. Arabic *ṯabar-* "destroy";
'asbāṭ, pl. of *sibṭ* < *šiḇṭā* "tribes";
ʿālam "world" < *ʿālmā*;
ṣalāt "religious service, ceremony" < *ṣlūṯā*;
zakāt "alms" < *zḵūṯā*;
ʿīd "festival" < *ʿīḏā*;
qurbān "offering" < *qurbānā*;
furqān "salvation," "redemption" < *purqānā*;
madīna "town" < *mḏi(n)tā*
malakūt "kingship," < *malkūṯā*;
masīḥ "Christ" < *mšīḥā* (Jeffery 1938).

Retsö continues,

> The Aramaic origin of these words and many others is made likely by the fact that they have no semantic cognates in Arabic from which they can be derived. Thus, for instance, jannat- "garden" has no direct cognate in Arabic where the verb *janna* means "to cover." Aramaic *gi(n)tā*, on the other hand, is clearly formed from the root GNN "to surround, to protect."

But borrowings can be of several kinds. As Retsö explains,

> In the *ʿarabiyya* of the *Qur'ān* we also find several semantic borrowings which give homonyms[106] like daras- "to study" (from Aramaic draš) or "to wipe out" (original Arabic).

We also have examples of Aramaic loanwords in the earliest poetry and in Ibn 'Isḥāq's *Sīra* of the Prophet, and these loans "seem to reflect an archaic form of Aramaic." Retsö includes Luxenberg in his bibliography, and refers to him in his article, but only to dismiss his thesis without any arguments:

> In the approach taken here the Aramaic congnates in the ʿarabiyya are regarded as borrowings from Aramaic. The much further reaching claim that the ʿarabiyya of the Qur'ān is in fact a transformation of a text originally written in Aramaic or even Syriac, as claimed by Luxenberg (2000), is most difficult to verify and remains highly unlikely.

Why it is "highly unlikely" we are not told.

5. Taking Translation Seriously: In Search of a Syriac *Vorlage* or *Vorlagen* for the Koran

5.1. Prolegomena

The Koran is a text—a human product, and hence must be explicable, to quote Maxime Rodinson once again, by "the normal mechanisms of human history."[107] In other words, like all texts, the Koran has a history. The Koran shows considerable signs of the later editing, and arrangement of Surahs, and verses within the Surahs, of an already existing text. Both Karl Vollers (1857–1909) librarian at Vice-Royal library at Cairo, and later professor of Semitic languages at Jena, and Paul Casanova (1861–1926) professor of Arabic at Collège de France, developed theories to account for what they believed were obvious signs of extensive reworking of an already existing text that eventually came to be known as the Koran. The difficulty is to establish exactly how this pre-existent text came into being. The sources of several stories found in the Koran have been located, and many of these sources are literary, occasionally in the Hebrew language, and occasionally in Aramaic or even Syriac. But how were these stories derived from these written sources? How did the stories end up in the Arabic of the Koran? Was there a conscious translation into Arabic of a Syriac or Hebrew text? Some of the Biblical narratives may, of course, have been picked up from a certain cultural milieu, from storytellers in the marketplace, from daily social intercourse with people from already deeply entrenched religious traditions. And yet, as has already been suggested, some narratives seem to have been acquired from already existing literary texts, or as Gerd Puin once put it, "The Koran is made up of a cocktail of different texts"; or, is it a composition, parts of which, at least, are, in the words of John Wansbrough,[108] "made up of originally unrelated periscopes"?[109] Does a pericope suggest a written text, albeit of a liturgical kind? Was there at some stage a series of translations, even if only in the mind of the person transmitting the narrative orally?

5.2. Methodological Principles

Scholars in recent years have paid much attention to the problem of Greek translations of Semitic originals. Professor Davila, professor of Early Jewish Studies at St Mary's College, University of St Andrews, summarizes the areas of research,[110]

> First, there are studies of the translation technique of the LXX [The Septuagint], and attempts to work out principles for retroverting the original Hebrew or Aramaic. . . . Second, there is research on the question of the original languages of the traditions preserved in Greek in the New Testament Gospels

> and, attempts to establish the existence of or even retrovert the alleged Semitic (generally Aramaic) traditions or documents behind the Greek. . . . Third are studies of the translation technique of Greek Jewish Apocrypha and pseudepigrapha whose Hebrew or Aramaic originals survive at least in part. . . . Fourth and last are studies attempting to recover or at least establish the existence of the lost Semitic originals of specific Apocrypha or pseudepigrapha.[111]

Professor Davila lays out with exemplary lucidity the methodological principles that are necessary to establish whether Semitisms in the Greek translation are due to the influence of a written text in Hebrew or Aramaic; in other words, whether a Hebrew or Aramaic *vorlage* may have existed. Often one only needs to substitute Syriac for Hebrew or Aramaic, and Arabic for Greek, to see that his principles are highly relevant for Koranic Studies in the light of the work by Christoph Luxenberg. And in the light of the work of Günter Lüling, we see that we do not even need to change "Hebrew," the only substitution required is "Arabic" for "Greek."

Our task is of course made that much more difficult by the fact that both Syriac and Arabic belong to the Semitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic phylum, whereas Greek and Hebrew (and Aramaic), belong to two different phyla, the Indo-European and Afro-Asiatic respectively. But, as we shall see in what follows, a similar difficulty besets Biblical Studies—how to establish whether the Semitisms in a Greek translation are from Hebrew or Aramaic? We know that

> the LXX is a Greek translation of Hebrew and Aramaic works that still survive and which became canonical for all Jews and Christians. Some of the Old Testament Apocrypha are Greek compositions, whereas others are certainly translations from Hebrew or Aramaic (because fragments of the originals survive, mostly in the Qumran library) or else have been argued to be such translations.

Equally,

> A number of pseudepigrapha existed in Greek versions (although often these versions do not survive in full today) but were undoubtedly translated from Hebrew or Aramaic.

For example, the Book of Jubilees is preserved in full only in Ethiopic,

> but the Greek version is quoted by Byzantine writers, and Hebrew fragments of it were found at Qumran. . . . In short, the translation into Greek of books whose canonicity would later be debated began as early as the late second century BCE and was under way by the end of the first century CE still further along by the end of the second.[112]

As Davila argues, the study of the Semitic linguistic background of Greek Apocrypha and pseudepigrapha has two possible agendas, both of which are worth pondering to see if they could also be agendas for scholars of the Koran convinced of the importance of Luxenberg's work.

> One may aim either for "retroversion," an attempt to work backwards from the surviving Greek to reconstruct the actual wording of the original Hebrew or Aramaic document or, less ambitiously, for establishing "Semitic interference"; showing that the Greek text must have been translated from a Semitic original, but not attempting a global reconstruction of that original.[113]

In the present state of Koranic Studies, even with the efforts of Lüling and Luxenberg, all such agendas are far too ambitious. All one can hope for, at the moment, is to discover Syriacisms, building up to the search for Syriac syntactic structures and morphology in the Koran.

Davila then carefully develops his preliminary methodological principles: when searching for Semitic interference or attempting retroversion first

> look for signs of improper or unusual Greek in the text. Ideally, one would find transliterations of Semitic words, nonsensical Greek that suddenly makes sense when successful retroversion shows the Greek to be an obvious mistranslation, or dual translations of a Semitic original in different Greek manuscripts.

Here, scholars like Luxenberg who are skeptical of the entire Islamic tradition, of not just the compilation of the Koran, but of the meaning of the text, would be able to show Davila many examples of "improper or unusual" Arabic, and "nonsensical" Arabic that suddenly makes sense when successful retroversion shows the Arabic to be an obvious mistranslation.

How do New Testament scholars establish that the Greek shows non-Greek, Semitic syntax? One possibility is to show that the Greek contains a high level of parataxis; that is,

> connection of clauses with the word "and" rather than subordination, use of participles, or use of other particles. Other arguments are also advanced, such as use of Semitic poetic parallelism and the alleged recovery of wordplays and puns in the retroverted original.[114]

But we are still far from establishing Semitic interference by these means.

Davila goes through some of the translation techniques used for scriptural and quasi-scriptural literature in anitiquity, contrasting "literal" translation with "dynamic equivalence." The former

> implies a one-to-one correspondence between all the grammatical and lexical elements in the original language and the target language rather than a translation that expresses the equivalent sense naturally in the target language.

Whereas the latter is freer but "dynamic," capturing "the meaning of the original on a thought-by-thought basis." Thus the crassly literal will render metaphors and idioms with word-for-word exactness often resulting in gibberish in the target language, while

> a dynamically equivalent translation seeks to translate the sense of the expression into the target language, even if this means altering the wording substantially.[115]

Discussing the whole notion of consistency of translation, Davila leans on the study of Staffan Olofsson,[116] who proposes a number of methodological principles. The three most relevant for us are the following,

> [First], more weight should be given to words in the source language which have a wide semantic range and thus would be difficult to render sensibly with a single word in the target language. [Second], the resources of the target language, the degree to which its lexicon and grammar match the source language, should be taken into account, as should, [third], the translator's knowledge of the source language, insofar as we can deduce it.

5.3. Avocados

Luxenberg has argued very persuasively for precisely what the first principle posited above has asked us to consider, namely, the polysemic nature of the words of the source language, in this case, Syriac, and the difficulties encountered in finding the right word in the target language, Arabic. Before giving evidence from Luxenberg's work, I should like to give the following example from personal experience. For several years in the late 1980s, I taught American Constitution and Institutions to first-year students at the University of Toulouse (France). All the students were French-speaking, with French as their mother tongue, but they were asked to write their class essays in English. One student writing about American attitudes and behavior wrote the following sentence:

> Americans are a litigious people, they are frequently consulting their *avocados*.

Those who know French will recognize immediately what happened. But let us, nonetheless, go through the steps that led to this error. The word "avocado" makes no sense here. We know the student is French, and therefore thinks in French. Let us translate backward, and look up "avocado" in an English-French dictionary, which gives the meaning, "avocat." Now we can

look up "avocat" in a French-English dictionary, which gives the following *meanings*:

1. Lawyer, solicitor, attorney (at law), barrister, counsel.
2. Advocate (of); champion of (a cause, person).
3. Avocado (botanical).

The word "avocat" in the source language, French, had several meanings (polysemic), but our student not knowing English, the target language, chose the wrong word from a dictionary.

Similarly, Luxenberg looks at the word *baqīya*, which is used three times, in various forms, in the Koran, at Surah 2:248; 11:86, and 11:116.

> Surah 11:116: *fa-law-lā kāna mina l-qurūni min qablikum ʾulū baqiyyatin yanhawna ʿani l-fasādi fī l-ʾarḍi ʾillā qalīlan mimman ʾanǧaynā minhum wa-ttabaʿa llaḏīna ẓalamū mā ʾutrifū fīhi wa-kānū muǧrimīna.*

T1. Bell's translation:

> If only there had been of the generations before you men of perseverance restraining from corruption in the land—except a few of those whom We rescued from amongst them; but those who have done wrong have followed that in which they luxuriated, and have become sinners.

T2. Pickthall's translation:

> If only there had been among the generations before you men possessing a remnant (of good sense) to warn (their people) from corruption in the earth, as did a few of those whom We saved from them! The wrong-doers followed that by which they were made sapless, and were guilty.

T.3. Blachère's translation :

> Parmi les générations qui furent avant vous, pourquoi les gens de piété qui interdirent le scandale sur la terre et que Nous sauvâmes, ne furent-ils que peu nombreux, alors que les Injustes suivirent le luxe où ils vivaient et furent coupables?

T.4. Paret's translation :

> Warum gab es denn unter den Generationen vor euch nicht Leute (begabt) mit (moralischer) Stärke (?), (oder: mit einem trefflichen Charakter?), die dem Unheil auf der Erde Einhalt geboten—abgesehen von (einigen) wenigen von ihnen, die wir erretteten? Diejenigen, die frevelten (– und das war die überwiegende Mehrzahl –) folgten dem Wohlleben, das ihnen zugefallen war, und waren sündig.

C.1. Bell's Commentary:

> *'ūlū baqiyyatin* is of uncertain meaning; it is usually taken as "possessors of a remnant" of good sense or piety, but this is not very satisfactory. The exhortation to endurance in the previous verse suggests that *baqiyyah* should here be taken in the sense of "persistence." The sense will then be that if only in past times there had been men of persistence to dissuade people from corruption, the evil which necessitated the punishment of the towns would not have arisen, but unfortunately there were only a few—the messenger and those who believed him—who in each case had been rescued when the punishment fell.

If we take the Arabic word *baqīya*, which, in the phrase *'ūlū baqīyatin*, is, as Bell says, of uncertain meaning, and look it up in an Arabic-Syriac dictionary, we arrive at the Syriac verbal root *iṯar*. If we then look up the word *iṯar* in a Syriac-Arabic dictionary, such as the one by Mannā,[117] we can verify immediately that this verbal root has several meanings. The translator, an Aramaic native speaker, picked, from the many possibilities, the wrong word for this context. Among the meanings possible, Mannā gives, under (4), *faḍula* and *kāna fāḍilan*, meaning "virtuous, to be excellent." Luxenberg explains,

> And corresponding to these Mannā gives us further under (2) the Arabic meaning of the Syro-Aramaic nominal forms *m-yattartā* and *m-yattrūṯā*: *faḍīla, ḥasana* (virtue, excellence). In Arabic, the expression *faḍīla*, a lexical borrowing from the Syro-Aramaic, has been taken up into the language in the figurative sense of "virtue, excellence," but not the synonymous expression *baqīya*, which is only understood in its concrete sense of "rest." It is clear from the Koranic context, however, that with *baqīya* ("rest") the Koran, following the Syro-Aramaic semantics, really means *faḍīla*, virtue. As a result, our Koranic expression *'ūlū baqīya* (=*'ūlū faḍīla*) would be expalined as "[people] with virtue. That is to say, virtuous [people]."[118]

Astonishingly enough, John Penrice in his *A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran*,[119] first published in 1873, under the word *baqīya*, gives, without any philological explanation, the correct, Luxenbergian translation for *'ūlū baqīyatin*; namely, "Endued with prudence or virtue."

The meanings of *baqīya* at Surahs 2:248 and 11:86 can also be explicated in a similar fashion under the root *iṯar* as "relics" and "rewards," respectively.

We can present the steps schematically in this way (SL=Source Language; TL=Target Language):

First example: "Avocado"

Previous Reading:
"Americans are a litigious people, they are frequently consulting their ***avocados***."

(the following scheme has been modified a bit)
SL [French] → TL [English]
TL "avocado" (no sense in this context)

First step: "translate the unclear word back into the SL"
English: "avocado" → French: "avocat"
Second step: "look for different meanings of the word in the SL"
SL "avocat" → TL_1 "lawyer"
→ TL_2 "champion, advocate (of a cause)"
→ TL_3 "avocado"
Third step: "pick the alternative meaning that fits the context in the TL"

Correct Reading:
"Americans are a litigious people, they are frequently consulting their ***lawyers***."

Second example: "baqīya"

Previous Reading: (Surah 11:116)
"'ulū baqīyatin"—"those ***of a remnant***":
Pickthall: "If only there had been among the generations before you ***men possessing a remnant*** (of good sense) to warn (their people) from corruption in the earth."

SL: Syriac; TL: Arabic
First step: "translate the unclear word back into the SL"
Arabic: "baqīya" → Syriac: "iṯar"
Second step: "look for different meanings of the word in the SL"
SL "iṯar" → TL_1 / TL_2 / TL_3
→ TL_3 "*faḍula / kāna fāḍilan*"—"virtuous / to be excellent"
Third step: "pick the alternative meaning that fits the context in the TL"

Correct Reading:
"'ulū baqīyatin" —"***the virtuous ones***":
"If only there had been among the generations before ***you men with virtue (virtuous people)*** to warn (their people) from corruption in the earth."

Third example: "yassara"

Previous Reading:
"fa-'innamā ***yassarnā***-hu bi-lisānika"—

"We have ***made*** it ***easy*** in thy tongue (in order that thou mayest thereby give good tidings to those who show piety)." *(Surah 19:97)*
SL: Syriac; TL: Arabic

First step: "translate the unclear word back into the SL"
Arabic: "yassara (3rd sg.)" → Syriac: "paššeq"
Second step: "look for different meanings of the word in the SL"
SL "paššeq" → TL_1 "to make easy, facilitate"
→ TL_2 "to explain, annotate"
→ TL_3 "to transfer, translate"
Third step: "pick the alternative meaning that fits the context in the TL"

Correct Reading:
"We ***have translated*** it (the Koran or the Scripture) into your language so that you may proclaim it (the Koran or the Scripture) to the (god-)fearing."

For the above example, Luxenberg provides a quote from Payne Smith's celebrated dictionary, *Thesaurus Syriacus*,[120] which renders the Syriac *paššeq* as "translated," and then refers us to Surah 54:17, 22, 32, and 40, where the following phrase is repeated:

> wa-la-qad yassarnā l-qur'āna li-ḏ-ḏikri fa-hal min muddakirin.

This verse is normally translated as:

> We have the Qur'ān available for the Reminder, but is there any one who takes heed? (Bell).

But Luxenberg renders it as:

> We have translated the Koran (that is, the Lectionary) as a reminder; are there then those that may (also) allow themselves to be reminded?

Luxenberg argues that

> in these passages, as a technical term, *yassara*, cannot be paraphrased in such a way as to say that God has "*made it easy*" for the Prophet insofar as He has "*revealed*" the Koran to him "*specifically in his own language,*" as Paret, for example, says. Instead, the term clearly states that this occurs indirectly by way of a *translation* from the *Scriptures*.[121]

5.4. Methodological Principles Continued

Let us come back to Davila's discussion of the methodological principles necessary to establish the *Vorlage* of a translation. He shows

> how difficult retroversion of the original text of a lost *Vorlage* is in principle. The slippage of structure and meaning between *Vorlage* and translation makes a perfect or even fairly good retroversion somewhere between difficult and impossible, and it creates many difficulties even for establishing Semitic interference.

Davila points to the added problem of distinguishing Semitic and Greek morphology and syntax:

> The basis of attempts to retrovert a Semitic original or to establish bilingual interference for Greek texts is to make distinctions between Semitic and Greek morphology and syntax, but much of their syntax is the same, and it is often difficult to be sure if a particular construction is Semitic rather than Greek.[122]

Of course, the problem is aggravated in our case, the search for a Syriac *Vorlage* of the Arabic Koran, for self-evident reasons.

For New Testament scholars, there is an urgent need to distinguish Greek from Semitic grammar. Davila refers to the work of Elliot C. Maloney[123] and Raymond Martin.[124] Martin, in particular, has proposed seventeen syntactical criteria for isolating Greek that has been translated from Hebrew or Aramaic.

Criteria 1–8 are derived from the relative frequency of eight prepositional constructions in relationship to the preposition ἐν: διά with genitive; διά in all its occurrences; εἰς ; κατά with accusative; κατά in all its occurrences; περί in all its occurrences; πρός with dative; ὑπό with genitive;

(9) the comparative frequencies of kaí and δέ in coordinating independent clauses;
(10) the separation of the Greek definite article from its substantive;
(11) a tendency to place genitives after the substantive on which they depend;
(12) a greater frequency of dependent genitive personal pronouns;
(13) a tendency to omit the article on a substantive with a dependent genitive personal pronoun;
(14) a tendency to place attributive adjectives after the word they qualify:
(15) less frequent use of attributive adjectives;
(16) less frequent use of adverbial participles; and
(17) less frequent use of the dative case without a preposition.[125]

According to Davila, "these features appear frequently in the verifiably translated Greek of the Septuagint (LXX) but are rare in in works composed in Hellenistic Greek."

I shall come back to what lessons we can learn from the translations in the Septuagint later. Maloney in a favorable review of the Martin's book suggests "that the criterion of the preposition πρός plus the dative as an indicator of Semitic origin be dropped, "because it is also very infrequent in nontranslated

Hellenistic Greek." Maloney would prefer to add four additional criteria namely,

> (1) verb-subject word order in independent clauses, (2) direct or indirect object pronouns placed immediately after their verb, (3) the frequency of third person pronouns in the oblique cases, and (4) the frequency of the remote demonstrative (eikeinos)—all of which I have shown to be more frequent in Semitic than in nontranslated Hellenistic Greek.[126]

Davila concludes that despite certain problems with Martin's criteria, his work is an important contribution to the discussion of ways to distinguish Greek morphology and syntax from that of Hebrew and Aramaic.[127]

5.5. The Problem of Interference from LXX, the Septuagint

5.5.1. Introductory Remarks

The Septuagint (or LXX) is the name given to the translation of the OT from Hebrew into Greek. According to the legendary Letter of Aristeas the LXX owes its origins to Ptolemy Philadelphus II (285–246 BCE), King of Egypt, who desired a translation for his Library at Alexandria, and commissioned seventy two (or perhaps seventy) Jerusalem elders for the onerous task; or the translation was made to meet the needs of the Jewish community who had forgotten their Hebrew. Only the Pentateuch or the Five Books of Moses were translated at first. Other books of the OT, and books of the Jewish and Protestant canon, and the Apocrypha, were translated in later centuries, and other locations, and the entire anthology came to be called the Septuagint. Thus, far from being a unitary work,

> there is wide-ranging diversity and heterogeneity within the collection—to the point that some scholars now question the continued use of the term "Septuagint," which to the unwary might suggest a greater degree of uniformity than can be demonstrated.[128]

Thus, many scholars prefer the term "Old Greek" to refer, "in the case of each individual book or unit of translations, to the earliest rendition into Greek."[129]

The importance of the LXX in the present context lies in the fact that it

> had a literary influence on Jewish literature, most of which contained a significant religious element. This is most obvious in the realm of vocabulary: many religious terms originating in the Greek Bible, especially the Pentateuch, were absorbed into the Greek written by Jews and then into New Testament and Christian Greek.[130]

Thus, the Semitic influence evident in the Greek of some of the Gospels (and the Acts) may be due to the deliberate imitation of the language of the LXX. The Semitic influence in Luke (1:5–2:52), for example,

> may (or may not) be due in part to the absorption of translated Semitic sources (especially poetic compositions), but it is difficult to escape the impression that Luke, having written the prologue (1:1–4) in good Greek style, deliberately varied his style in the infancy narrative to imitate the language of the LXX. This impression is reinforced by the high level of Septuagintalisms in the language of the Gospel of Luke overall.[131]

Another example would be the beginning of the Acts, when Moses is told to take off his sandals as he is standing on holy ground. The passage in the NT seems to be almost a direct quotation from the Septuagint (bold forms are identical):

> **εἶπεν** μὴ ἐγγίσῃς ὧδε **λῦσαι τὸ ὑπόδημα** ἐκ **τῶν ποδῶν σου ὁ γὰρ τόπος ἐν ᾧ σὺ ἕστηκας γῆ ἁγία ἐστίν**—Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." (Ex 3:5)
> **εἶπεν** δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος **λύσον τὸ ὑπόδημα τῶν ποδῶν σου ὁ γὰρ τόπος ἐν ᾧ σὺ ἕστηκας γῆ ἁγία ἐστίν**—But the Lord said to him, "take off the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." (Acts 7:33)

Hence, apparent Semitisms in Greek works could simply be imitations of the style of the LXX.

> The logical conclusion . . . is that Septuagintalisms—expressions found frequently in LXX Greek as well as direct allusions to specific LXX passages—cannot be advanced as decisive proof of Semitic interference due to translation from a Semitic *Vorlage*.

5.5.2. Translation Techniques and the Septuagint

Here, I think, it would be appropriate to discuss the work of Theo A.W. van der Louw on the translation techniques used in the Septuagint. His study *Transformations in the Septuagint* bears the subtitle *Towards an Interaction of Septuagint Studies and Translation Studies*. Thus his work bears the explicit duty of promoting interaction between Translation Studies and the study of the LXX. Since Translation Studies became a respected academic discipline in the 1970s, there has been a boom in publications, both monographs and journals devoted entirely to aspects of translation.[132] Van der Louw clearly be-

lieves that this research can be applied to Septuagint Studies fruitfully since the Septuagint is a translation.

If we think that parts of the Koran are dependent on some source text, perhaps, in Syriac, we need to reconstruct the source text. And we cannot achieve this without knowledge of the translation techniques, hence the importance of works like van der Louw's study on the Septuagint. The following discussions and examples are taken from his work *Transformations in the Septuagint.*

Chaim Rabin describes the characteristics of the Septuagint that he believes are a result of a certain type of translation technique:

(1) non-appreciation of poetic diction,
(2) the tendency to replace metaphors by plain statements,
(3) omission of parts of text,
(4) mechanical renderings,
(5) lack of consistency, and
(6) translating word for word without regard for the order or the syntax of the target language.[133]

Free translations, on the other hand, result in additions for the sake of clarity, omissions of elements considered superfluous, and exegetical substitutions, mostly for theological reasons.

Louw throughout his study makes it clear that in some cases in the Septuagint the "Greek words do not make sense in the translated text unless we take recourse to the Hebrew original,"[134] which is also a methodological principle of Luxenberg. On occasions it is clear that by his literal translation the translator has preserved the exegetical difficulty of the Masoretic Text.[135]

Finally ven der Louw gives us a comprehensive inventory of different kinds of translations, or as he prefers to call them, transformations: graphological and phonological translation, transcription or borrowing (loanword), calque, literal translation, modulations or lexcical changes, transpositions or grammatical changes, addition, omission, redistribution of semantic features, situational translation, idiomatic translation of idiom, non-idiomatic translation, explicitation, implicitation, anaphoric translation, stylistic translation and compensation, and morphematic translation.[136]

5.6. The Problem of Bilingual Interference

I have already referred, above, to the works of several Semiticists who discuss the phenomenon of bilingualism and its consequences for the study of translations. Davila reminds us of its import for Biblical Studies. I believe it is equally important for Christoph Luxenberg's thesis. Davila writes,

> If a native speaker of Hebrew or Aramaic were to compose a text in Greek, it is entirely possible—likely, even—that the writer would produce a text containing elements of Semitic interference purely because he or she thought in a

> Semitic language. This simple observation raises new difficulties for establishing that a Greek text was translated from Hebrew or Aramaic. If a Greek word displays a high density of Semitisms and many of these are not characteristic of the LXX, they could still mean that the writer was composing in Greek but thinking in Hebrew or Aramaic. There need not be a Semitic *Vorlage*.[137]

However, some linguists would be a bit more cautious here. To adduce an example from German: Even people who do not know English well will nowadays use English phrases like "am Ende des Tages," which goes back to the English expression "at the end of the day" and is more and more replacing the "real German" idiom "letzten Endes." How did this come about: the fact is that some writers or speakers—often well-known journalists—who used English every day and had to translate from it into German started to literally render these phrases into German instead of using the "semantically" corresponding form. Then other Germans inadvertently started to use them as well—they were just copying role models after all.

In the case of Greek and Aramaic this might mean the following: if "Semitic" phrases are used in a text, this might go back to linguistic interference, but it might also go back to *older stages* of influencing. Thus, Luke was maybe not *thinking in Aramaic*, but he used *the variant of Greek spoken by descendants of people who had spoken both languages, which had at that time influenced each other*.

There is yet another reason to doubt that Luke knew Hebrew or Aramaic: He tells us that St. Paul spoke "in the Hebrew" language to the Jews, probably meaning Aramaic. Could such a blunder have happened to somebody who "thought in Aramaic"?

In the book of Daniel (written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) the change of language is indicated with the words: *aramīt* and *ʿiḇrīt*. So the Jews of this era were well aware that Hebrew and Aramaic were not the same.

To adduce another example: as already mentioned, modern Hindi has replaced many Persian words common in Hindustani by Sanskrit etyma. But if a modern speaker uses these words we cannot conclude that he or she knows Sanskrit, or even that Sanskrit is his or her mother tongue; but we can conclude that at least some people *in the past* who had an impact on the linguistic development of Hindi knew Sanskrit! So the question remains: How can we detect Semitic bilingual interference in a Greek text that contains Semitisms?

> A translation written in otherwise good Greek but showing numerous Semitisms would be unlikely to be by a writer who did not know Greek well and who was displaying Semitic bilingual interference. But the other side of this coin is that a writer who could write in good Greek and who was translating a

> work into otherwise good Greek would not be likely to leave many Semitisms in the translation. So in this hypothetical case, if we found blocks of text containing a high density of Semitisms alongside blocks of good Greek we could conclude that the writer was either incorporating translated Greek passages into the work or translating passages from a Semitic source in some places while writing in his or her normal style in others.[138]

One can also conjecture that bilingual interference is not the source of Semitisms if we find clear cases of mistranslations of a Semitic original in a Greek text.

> If it can be established that the composer of the Greek text did not understand a Hebrew or Aramaic term, it shows that this writer was thinking in Greek, not a Semitic language, and therefore the Semitisms in the text are not the result of the writer mentally translating from Semitic into Greek.

Of course, in the absence of the *Vorlage* it is almost impossible to show such misunderstandings.[139]

Davila cites the work of Zipora Talshir on double translations, whose appearance in the Greek would be a possible indicator of translation. Talshir defines a double translation as follows:

> To sum up, we argued that a "double translation" comprises alternate renderings which are not free exegetical additions and do not serve another purpose than the rendering of the *Vorlage* word. We also implied that there should be a difference between the components of the "double translation" in order to justify the use of the term. It is not enough that a *Vorlage*-item is represented twice. The duplicity should be the result of two different solutions provided to one and the same problem presented by the *Vorlage*-item.[140]

Davila explains the importance of double translations:

> Thus a double translation consists of two different attempts to translate the same word or phrase of the *Vorlage*, each based on different exegetical solution to the problem. Talshir also distinguishes between double translations of single words and double translations of larger units. A double translation of a single word might arise from two attempts by the original translator to translate a word whose meaning was in doubt, or another mechanism could explain it, such as the attraction of a marginal gloss from another translation of the same work into the text or the introduction of a different rendering by a bilingual scribe who accesses to the original. . . . A double translation of a larger unit, such as a long clause or a sentence, is mush less likely to have been the work of the original translator. . . . The appearance of double translations of single words in a Greek text suspected of being a translation would not be very significant, since a possible explanation would be that the writer, whose knowledge of Greek may have been imperfect anyway, was unsure which Greek

> word was the more appropriate and so included both. But if the double translation is of a larger unit, it is much more likely that either it comes from a translator attempting to make sense of an imperfectly grasped Semitic phrase or it is a gloss from another, now lost, translation of the Semitic work. Presumably an author who was a native speaker of the Semitic language would know what the phrase meant and would not need to include two different exegeses of it in the translation. Thus the appearance of a double translation of a unit greater than a single word and based on different understandings of that unit would be a persuasive indicator that the Semitisms in the Greek work were not the result of bilingual interference.[141]

Davila ends by laying out ten steps one must take to establish Semitic interference due to translation from a Semitic *Vorlage*:

1. Look at all possible linguistic and stylistics features—morphology, vocabulary, syntax, word order, and poetic elements—for apparent Semitisms.
2. Distinguish Hebrew from Aramaic Semitisms.
3. Use Hebrew and Aramaic of the right time and place.
4. Eliminate those features also characteristic of Greek.
5. Do not eliminate apparent Semitisms found only in the non-literary Greek papyri if these Semitisms are also found in Coptic, since they may be due to Egyptian interference in the Greek of the papyri.
6. "All Semitisms that are used commonly in the LXX ('Septuagintalisms') should be set apart as a special category."
7. "Likewise, Semitisms that appear in only one or a few LXX passages, but passages frequently quoted because of their use in liturgical and apologetic contexts, should be set apart with the Septuagintalisms."
8. "Some control has to be introduced to factor out interference from the language of the LXX."
9. "Controls also have to be introduced to factor out bilingual interference."
10. "Allegedly Semitic poetic and stylistic features should be advanced—if at all—only as ancillary evidence."

6. Arabic and the Koran

Many modern non-Muslim scholars step gingerly when discussing Arabic, its history, and especially its relationship to the Koran. One wonders, for example, if Herbjørn Jenssen in his article "Arabic Language" in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*,[142] is not trying to have it both ways even if he perhaps avoids contradicting himself formally by his use of imprecise and ambiguous

language. We are first informed that there are twenty modern states that use Arabic as an official language, Then, at the beginning, he tells us that

> the language used in all these states and taught in their schools, is said to be structurally identical to the claasical langauge and the language of the Qur'ān (*al-fuṣḥā* or "classical Arabic"). It is, however, freely admitted that both its vocabulary and idiomatic usage have developed *considerably* [I. W.'s emphasis]. One, therefore, frequently finds a distinction being made between classical Arabic, on the one hand, and contemporary Arabic (*al-lugha al-'arabiyya al-ḥadītha* or *al-mu'āṣira*), on the other.

Then, at the end of the article, Jenssen insists that

> Arabic is more than the language of Islam, it is a part of Islam. It is, as indeed are all languages, a phenomenon of culture, not one of nature, and changes as does the culture for which it is a medium but at the core it is *unchanging* [emphasis added by I.W.], just as the document which is at the core of the culture of Islam, the Qur'ān, is unchanging.

Has Arabic changed and developed, or has it remained unchanging? Does he mean Classical Arabic? Or Arabic in general? But what is "Arabic" in general? Furthermore, Jenssen's attitude is clearly Islamic—not scientific—since he equates the language of the Koran with Classical Arabic (CA, henceforth). As we shall see the language of the Koran is not CA despite the insistence of Muslim theologians.

As Jenssen points out, CA is not the first langauge of anyone. But he then takes an entirely apologetic stance, trying not to offend the tender sensibilities of the Arabs, when he adds,

> this may, unless due care is taken, lead to a view of classical Arabic as somehow "artificial" or "congealed" or as a "dead language" artificially kept alive by the conservatism of certain elites. The feeling that the "real" or "living" Arabic language is represented by the colloquials is widespread. This has the laudatory effect of drawing attention to the actual colloquial usage in which most communication within the Arab world takes place, a field which is seriously understudied. It is, however, also an attitude which an Arab may regard as offensive. Not only is this person denied the status of a "native speaker" of his own language, he is also being told that he may not really master it (Parkinson),[143] and that it is a foreign language, or at least a strange dialect, even to great linguists from whom he inherited its rules (Owens).[144] One cannot help but feel that this is quite unnecessary and certainly counterproductive.[145]

The above account is hopelessly confused, begs too many questions to be taken seriously, and has as its sole justification the blazoning of the author's Islamically and politically correct sentiments. Who is responsible for this "counterproductive" attitude? The Western scholars named, D. B. Parkinson

and Jonathan Owens, or, perhaps, foreign experts on Arabic linguistics in general? But if the "Arab" who may be offended does *not* speak Classical Arabic as his first language how can he be described as a "native speaker" of classical Arabic. He is *not* being denied the status of a "native speaker" of his own language, since Classical Arabic is not his language. On the contrary, one could argue, that the ordinary Arab is being told that he should not despise his own colloquial language; he should not feel inadequate if he does not speak Classical Arabic—no one has ever spoken Classical Arabic. Arab intellectuals themselves have lamented the way Classical Arabic and its modern avatar, Modern Standard Arabic, have been foisted upon them as a label and artificial indentity. In 1929, Tawfiq Awan had argued that the vernaculars of the Middle East were languages in their own right, not mere dialects of Arabic. He wrote,

> Egypt has an Egyptian language; Lebanon has a Lebanese language; the Hijaz has a Hijazi language; and so forth—and all of these languages are by no means Arabic languages. Each of our countries has a language, which is its own possession: So why do we not write [our language] as we converse in it? For, the language in which the people speak is the language in which they also write.[146]

No less a figure than Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, (often spelled Taha Hussein, 1889–1973), the greatest modern man of letters of Egypt and the Arab world,

> made a sharp distinction between what he viewed to be Arabic *tout court*—that is, the classical and modern standard form of the language—and the sundry vernaculars in use in his contemporary native Egypt and elsewhere in the Near East. For Egyptians, Arabic is virtually a foreign language, wrote Ḥusayn: "Nobody speaks it at home, [in] school, [on] the streets, or in clubs; it is not even used in [the] Al-Azhar [Islamic University] itself. People everywhere speak a language that is definitely not Arabic, despite the partial resemblance to it."[147]

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn also wrote in 1956 that Modern Standard Arabic is

> difficult and grim, and the pupil who goes to school in order to study Arabic acquires only revulsion for his teacher and for the language, and employs his time in pursuit of any other occupations that would divert and soothe his thoughts away from this arduous effort. . . . Pupils hate nothing more than they hate studying Arabic.[148]

E. Shouby, a trained clinical and social psychologist, and a native speaker of Arabic, wrote an essay in 1951 titled, "The Influence of the Arabic Language on the Psychology of the Arabs"[149] that examined the anguished, complex, tortured relationship of Arabs to their language. Shouby wrote that

> In spite of the numerous cries for reform in both the language and the style of Arabic literature, it is still impossible for any Arab to write with no consideration for such grammatical, idiomatic, or stylistic requirements as are exemplified in the Qur'an without running the risk of being denounced as an ignorant or a stupid person, if not as an impudent abuser of the integrity of Arabic as well as of the sacredness of the revealed word of God. But whereas an Arab must write in "literary Arabic," he is not expected to use the same language in his everyday conversations; for that purpose he has to use the colloquial Arabic, which differs from one country to another, even from one city to the next. Should he try to write with the declared intention of using the colloquial—which is usually done for "humorous" purposes or to quote the spoken word—he will have to face the difficulty of spelling, and in all probability very few people outside the area in which this brand of spoken Arabic is used will fully understand him. Should he, on the other hand, try to speak the literary Arabic he writes, our writer will find himself misunderstood by the illiterate and ridiculed by all, as has been the misfortune of many purists who try to make the literary language of the books the language of everyday life. Educated Arabs themselves make fun of anybody who uses it for practical everyday life purposes, but they require any public speaker to use it rather than the colloquial. . . . The gap between the literary language and any one of the colloquials is so great that an educated Egyptian who knows the literary language as well as the colloquial Egyptian finds it difficult to understand correctly the Iraqi colloquial; and so may the educated Syrian fail to understand the spoken Arabic of Morocco or Tunis. This situation is a strong reminder of medieval Europe, when educated people wrote and read Latin but spoke the different dialects which later developed into what are now the various European languages. The medieval scholar, however, could speak Latin correctly and without the risk of being ridiculed whenever he met other scholars from other countries; the contemporary educated Arab has difficulty in mastering all the endless intricacies of literary Arabic, and even after a lifetime of study he usually has to be very alert if he wants to use it correctly.

Here is what I wrote in 2002[150]:

> Even for contemporary Arabic-speaking peoples, reading the Koran is far from being a straightforward matter. The Koran is putatively (as we shall see, it is very difficult to decide exactly what the language of the Koran is) written in what we call Classical Arabic (CA), but modern Arab populations, leaving aside the problem of illiteracy in Arab countries,[151] do not speak, read, or write, let alone think, in CA. We are confronted with the phenomenon of *diglossia*,[152] that is to say, a situation where two varieties of the same language live side by side. The two variations are high and low. High Arabic is sometimes called Modern Literary Arabic or Modern Standard Arabic; is learned through formal education in school, like Latin or Sanskrit; and would be used

> in sermons, university lectures, news broadcasts, and for mass media purposes. Low Arabic, or Colloquial Arabic, is a dialect native speakers acquire as a mother tongue, and is used at home conversing with family and friends, and also in radio or television soap operas. But, as Kaye points out, "the differences between many colloquials and the classical language are so great that a *fallāḥ* who had never been to school could hardly understand more than a few scattered words and expressions in it without great difficulty. One could assemble dozens of so-called Arabs (*fallāḥīn*) in a room, who have never been exposed to the classical language, so that not one could properly understand the other."[153]

In the introduction to his grammar of Koranic and Classical Arabic, Wheeler M. Thackston writes,

> The Koran established an unchanging norm for the Arabic language. There are, of course, certain lexical and syntactic features of Koranic Arabic that became obsolete in time, and the standardization of the language at the hands of the philologians of the eighth and ninth centuries emphasized certain extra-Koranic features of the Arabic poetic *koine* while downplaying other, Koranic usages; yet by and large not only the grammar but even the vocabulary of a modern newspaper article display only slight variation from the established norm of classicized Koranic Arabic.[154]

Though he does allow for some change and decay, Thackston it seems to me, paints a totally misleading picture of the actual linguistic situation in modern Arabic-speaking societies. He implies that anyone able to read a modern Arabic newspaper should have no difficulties with the Koran or any Classical Arabic text. Thackston seems totally insensitive "to the evolution of the language, to changes in the usage and meaning of terms over the very long period and in the very broad area in which Classical Arabic has been used."[155] Anyone who has lived in the Middle East in recent years will know that the language of the press is at best semiliterary,[156] and it's certainly simplified as far as structure and vocabulary are concerned. We can discern what would be called grammatical errors from a Classical Arabic point of view in daily newspapers or on television news. This semiliterary language is highly artificial, and certainly no one thinks in it. For an average middle-class Arab it would take considerable effort to construct even the simplest sentence, let alone talk, in Classical Arabic. The linguist Pierre Larcher has written of the

> considerable gap between Medieval Classical Arabic and Modern Classical Arabic [or what I have been calling Modern Literary Arabic], certain texts written in the former are today the object of explanatory texts in the latter.

He then adds in a footnote that he has in his library, based on this model, an edition of the *Risāla* of Shāfiʿī (died 204/820) that appeared in a collection with the significant title *Getting Closer to the Patrimony*.[157] As Kaye puts it,

> In support of the hypothesis that modern standard Arabic is ill-defined is the so-called "mixed" language or "Inter-Arabic" being used in the speeches of, say, President Bourguiba of Tunisia, noting that very few native speakers of Arabic from any Arab country can really ever master the intricacies of Classical Arabic grammar in such a way as to extemporaneously give a formal speech in it.[158]

Pierre Larcher[159] has pointed out that wherever you have a linguistic situation where two varieties of the same language coexist, you are also likely to get all sorts of linguistic mixtures, leading some linguists to talk of *triglossia*. Gustav Meiseles[160] even talks of *quadriglossia*: between Literary Arabic and Vernacular Arabic, he distinguishes a Substandard Arabic and an Educated Spoken Arabic. Still others speak of *pluri-* or *multi-* or *polyglossia*, viewed as a continuum.[161]

Given Wheeler Thackston's views quoted above it was a surprise to me to learn from Franck Salameh's article already cited that

> Harvard linguist Wheeler Thackston—and before him Taha Hussein, Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyed, Abdelaziz Fehmi Pasha, and many others—have shown that the Middle East's demotic languages are not Arabic at all, and consequently, that one can hardly speak of 280 million native Arabophones—or even of a paltry one million such Arabic speakers—without oversimplifying and pervertting an infinitely complex linguistic situation. The languages or dialects often perfunctorily labeled Arabic might indeed not be Arabic at all.[162]

However, I have been unable to procure Thackston's book referred to by Salameh, *The Vernacular Arabic of the Lebanon;*[163] thus I am forced to rely on Salameh's interpretation of Thackston's findings.

> Thackston has identified five dialectal clusters that he classified as follows: "(1) Greater Syria, including Lebabon and Palestine; (2) Mesopotamia, including the Euphrates region of Syria, Iraq, and the Persian Gulf; (3) the Arabian Peninsula, including most of what is Saudi Arabia and much of Jordan; (4) the Nile Valley, including Egypt and the Sudan; and (5) North Africa and [parts of] the . . . regions of sub-Saharan Africa."

There is substantial comprehension within each cluster, but, writes Thackston,

> When one crosses one or major boundaries, as is the case with a Baghdadi and a Damascene for instance, one begins to encounter difficulty in comprehension; and the farther one goes, the less one understands until mutual com-

> prehension disappears entirely. To take an extreme example, a Moroccan and an Iraqi can no more understand each other's dialects than can a Portuguese a Rumanian.[164]

The United Nations Arab Human Development Report of 2003, written by Arabs, such as Laila Abdel Majid, Fowziyah Abdullah Abu-Khalid, Muhammad Hassan Al-Amin, Aziz Al-Azmeh, and Sami Al-Banna, for Arabs, noted the difficulties of the Arabic language when confronted with the problems of the twenty-first century:

> Today, at the gates of the knowledge society and the future, the Arabic language is, however, facing severe challenges and a real crisis in theorization, grammar, vocabulary, usage, documentation, creativity and criticism. . . . The teaching of Arabic is also undergoing a severe crisis in terms of both methodology and curricula. The most apparent aspect of this crisis is the growing neglect of the functional aspects of (Arabic) language use. Arabic language skills in everyday life have deteriorated and Arabic language classes are often restricted to writing at the expense of reading.
>
> The situation of Arabic language teaching cannot be separated from that of classical Arabic in general, which has in effect ceased to be a spoken language. It is only the language of reading and writing; the formal language of intellectuals and academics, often used to display knowledge in lectures. Classical Arabic is not the language of cordial, spontaneous expression, emotions, daily encounters and ordinary communication. It is not a vehicle for discovering one's inner self or outer surroundings.[165]

The report ended by underlining the importance of teaching foreign languages at an early age in government schools.[166]

Kees Versteegh's much-lauded book *The Arabic Language*[167] correctly observes that

> since the Second World War, Arabic studies have become somewhat isolated from the developments in Semitic languages. Whereas before this time Arabic was usually studied within the framework of the Semitic languages, there has been a growing tendency to emphasise its character as an Islamic language and study its connection with other Islamic languages, such as Persian and Turkish. The knowledge of Arabic remains important for comparisons between Semitic languages, but increasingly these comparisons are no longer initiated from within the circle of Arabic studies.[168]

Given this promising start, one expected something more robust, scientific, and skeptical from Versteegh's study of the Arabic language, with, at least, an attempt to rectify the above-cited inadequacies. Instead we have Versteegh's uncritical acceptance of the entire Islamic tradition about the history of Ara-

bic, despite his occasional token skepticism. He refers to the Koran as "revealed" or a "revelational document" or a "revelation,"[169] which is a theological position, and hardly a scientific attitude. To treat the Koran as "revealed" assumes Versteegh knows how the Koran came into being. All our putative knowledge of the entire history of the the Prophet, the compilation of the Koran, and the rise of Islam is derived from very late tendentious and contradictory material, so we must treat with skepticism all we are told about the dialects in Pre-Islamic Arabia, the very existence of Pre-Islamic poetry, and the Koran, and so on. Therefore, Versteegh's account of the history of the Arabic language, in other words as a diachronic study, is highly unsatisfactory.

The fascinating study, by Michael Zwettler,[170] on the language of pre-Islamic poetry, the Koran, and the relationship of Arabic to the vernaculars, and also the linguistic situation in seventh century Arabia, is equally uncritical of the sources, likewise treating the Koran as a "revealed"[171] text. Zwettler's conclusions are also unsatisfactory, but along the way he provides useful summaries of the debates surrounding the vexed subject of the language of Pre-Islamic poetry and the language of the Koran. Both Zwettler and Versteegh seem to think that one can leave to one side the question of "How the Koran Came to Us," and still discuss the history of the Arabic language, pre-Islamic poetry, and so on. But until we take John Wansbrough's work seriously and work out the implications of his conclusions we cannot possibly make any progress. Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies* came out in 1977, Zwettler's thesis in 1978, and Versteegh's monograph in 1997. Neither Zwettler nor Versteegh refer to *Quranic Studies*. It was probably too late for Zwettler to take it into account, but it is scandalous that Versteegh ignores Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies* and *The Sectarian Milieu* (1978) totally.

If the Koran grew out of the polemical arenas of Palestine and the Near East, then it is possible that the answers to our questions regarding the rise of Islam lie not in the Hijaz, or the mythical cities of Mecca and Medina, but much farther north. We need to examine the linguistic and religious situation of Palestine in the seventh century; we need to examine the linguistic promiscuity of the traditional Holy Land, for which some seventh-century sources are extant, and not at the fictive dialects of the heavily romanticized Bedouins, for which, in any case, there are no seventh-century records.

Zwettler takes for granted that Pre-Islamic poetry is authentic, and he dismisses out of hand the views of skeptics such as David S. Margoliouth[172] and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn,[173] who, he believes, have been definitively refuted by scholars such as A. J. Arberry.[174] But they have not. John Wansbrough was one of the first to point out that so-called Pre-Islamic poetry often served a polemical purpose:

> Whatever may have been the original motives for collecting and recording the ancient poetry of the Arabs,[175] the earliest evidence of such activity belongs, not unexpectedly, to the third/ninth century and the work of the classical philologists. The manner in which this material was manipulated by its collectors to support almost any argument appears never to have been very successfully concealed. The procedure, moreover, was common to all fields of scholarly activity: e.g. the early dating of a verse ascribed to the *mukhaḍramī*[176] poet Nābigha Jaʿdī in order to provide a pre-Islamic proof text for a common Quranic construction (finite verb form preceded by direct object),[177] Mubarrad's admitted invention of a *Jāhilī* [Pre-Islamic] verse as a gloss to a lexical item in the *ḥadīth*,[178] and Abū ʿAmr b. ʿAlā's candid admission that save for a single verse of ʿAmr b. Kulthūm, knowledge of Yawm Khazāz would have been lost to posterity.[179] The three examples share at least one common motive: recognition of pre-Islamic poetry as authority in linguistic matters, even where such contained non-linguistic implications. Also common to all three is another, perhaps equally significant feature: Ibn Qutayba, who adduced the verse of Nābigha to explain/justify Quranic syntax, lived at the end of the third/ninth century, as did Mubarrad; Abū ʿAmr, of whom no written works were preserved, lived in the second half of the second/eighth century, but this particular dictum was alluded to only in Jāḥiẓ (third/ninth century) and explicitly in Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (fourth/tenth century). Now, that pre-Islamic poetry should have achieved a kind of status as linguistic canon some time in the third/ninth century may provoke no quarrel. That it had achieved any such status earlier must, I think, be demonstrated. The fact that it had not, in one field at least, can be shown: the absence of poetic *shawāhid* in the earliest form of scriptural exegesis might be thought to indicate that appeal to the authority of *Jāhilī* (and other) poetry was not standard practice before the third/ninth century. Assertions to the contrary may be understood as witness to the extraordinary influence exercised by the concept of *faṣāḥat al-jāhiliyya* [that is, the purity of the Arabic language of Pre-Islamic, pagan times].[180]

In other words, the putative eloquence of pre-Islamic poetry became commonplace only in the third/ninth century; there are no references to pre-Islamic poetry in the early, pre-third century, works of Koranic exegesis.

What was the nature of Arabic before and after the rise of Islam, particularly between the third and sixth centuries, and then between the seventh and ninth centuries? When did the break between the spoken and written language (the phenomenon of diglossia) take place? Out of what and when did Classical Arabic develop? In what language was the Koran written?

As I wrote in 2002,[181]

> Let us begin with the last two questions. According to Muslims, the Koran was written in the dialect of the Quraysh of Mecca, and CA was born out of the

> Meccan dialect, which was considered the linguistic norm. The language of the Koran, which is identical to the poetical *koine,* is one of the two bases of CA; Muhammad, being from Mecca, could only have received the revelation in his original dialect, that of the Quraysh. Nöldeke seems to accept the tradetional Muslim view that the Koran and pre-Islamic poetry (poetical *koine*) were the two sources of CA, and that the Koran was written in the Meccan dialect: "For me it is highly unlikely that Muhammad in the Koran had used a form of language absolutely different from the usual one in Mecca, that he would have used case and mood inflexions if his compatriots had not used them."[182]

Even if we take the traditional accounts of the rise of Islam and the compilation of the Koran as historically sound, (which they are not), there still remain a certain number of objections to the Muslim view. First, it is unlikely that there existed a linguistic norm. If Mecca were an important commercial town and center of pilgrimage, it must have been open to the linguistic influence brought by travelers from Yemen, Syria, and Najd. Second, Muhammad's preaching had at least Pan-Arab pretensions, but these pretensions would seem hardly realizable if he was using only his local dialect. Surely Muhammad's preaching in the urban language of Mecca would have had no meaning for the nomads, whose language, according to the account of Muslim scholars themselves, was considered more prestigious.

Most Western Islamologists buy this story at face value without becoming aware of the fact that this latter point is highly questionable: it will be difficult to find a language with *urban* and *rural* varieties, where the rural varieties are more prestigious! Who wants to sound like a hillbilly? In their fifth Inârah anthology, Markus Gross[183] compares the allegedly romantic attitude of Arabs (old and modern) toward Bedouin life to the romantic attitude of the Romans up to Shakespeare toward "shepherd life": consider the *bucolic* and *pastoral* poetic tradition (e.g., Theocritus, Ovid) and the idealization of "Arcadia." In the 1960s many French would have claimed to dream of being a "shepherd in the Vosges mountains," although they had never seen or touched a living sheep in their whole life. Had these Romans and French had to castrate or slaughter sheep or to stave off a pack of wolves with their shepherd's staff—this is what the crook is meant for—they would certainly not have dreamt of being shepherds! Bedouin and Shepherd life is extremely boring! Real shepherds, Bedouins and Prairie Indians ("eternal hunting-grounds") have as much tendency to romanticize their life as steel workers are prone to dream of an "eternal steel mill."

For some Western scholars, like Blachère,[184] CA was derived from pre-Islamic poetry and the language of the Koran. But for Blachère, the language of the Koran has nothing to do with the dialect of Mecca; rather it is the language of pre-Islamic poetry (the so-called poetical *koine*). As Schaade put it,

> The earliest specimens of classical Arabic known to us are found in the pre-Islamic poems. The problem arises how the poets (who for the most part must have been ignorant of writing) came to possess a common poetical language,—either (perhaps with the object of securing for their works a wider field of circulation?) they used for their purposes a language composed of elements from all the different dialects, such as may have been created by the necessities of trade, and which it only remained for them to ennoble, or the dialect of any particular tribe (perhaps owing to political circumstances?) achieved in pre-historic times special pre-eminence as a language of poetry.[185]

Blachère certainly accepts the idea that *diglossia* is an old phenomenon going back to pre-Islamic times. That is to say, scholars like Blachère, Vollers,[186] Wehr,[187] and Diem,[188] believe that the poetical *koine*, the language of pre-Islamic poetry, was a purely literary dialect, distinct from all spoken idioms and supertribal. Other scholars, like Nöldeke,[189] Fück,[190] and Blau,[191] agree with the traditional Arab view that diglossia developed as late as the first Islamic century as a result of the Arab conquests, when non-Arabs began to speak Arabic.

Karl Vollers upset many people when he argued at the beginning of the twentieth century that the Koran was written, without *iʿrāb*, inflection, or case endings, in a dialect of Naǧd, and was a result of editing and emendation carried out long after Muhammad with a view to harmonizing the sacred text with the language of so-called pre-Islamic poetry, which is that of Naǧd. Vollers is certain that the Koran as we have it today is not linguistically the revelation as it was received by Muhammad. One must take into account the numerous phonetic variants preserved in the commentaries and special treatises. These variants of a dialectal origin attest to the contrast between the speech of the Ḥiǧāz and that of Naǧd. The Koran preserves everywhere certain linguistic features maintained in Naǧd and on the way to disappearance in the Ḥiǧāz, according to Muslim grammarians; thus, the Koran represents the speech of Naǧd. The Koran is the result of adaptation, and it issues from the emendations of the text by readers of Naǧdian atavism or influenced by the nomadic dialects of this region. As to the linguistic identity of the Koran and pre-Islamic poetry, it is explained by the fact that Muslim scholars unified them one by the other during the course of the establishment of the grammar. Vollers concludes that the Koran and pre-Islamic poetry are truly the two sources of CA, but with this reservation that the Koran is an adaptation of the Ḥiǧāzi dialect to the norms of the poetical language.

Blachère contended that Vollers made too much of the putative contrast between the western dialect and eastern dialect. The contrast between the Ḥiǧāz and Naǧd is not as clear-cut as Vollers makes out. Vollers also seems to

accept certain linguistic features as true of the time of Muhammad, but which, in reality, were the creations of much later Muslim philologists. If there had been harmonization of the Koranic text with the dialects of Naǧd, one would expect to find the essential character of these dialects, the *taltala*. One would find traces of this adaptation in the vocabulary and syntax.

Wansbrough has his own reasons for rejecting Vollers's theory:

> The basic error lay in Vollers' adherence to an arbitrary and fictive chronology, though that may have been less important than his contention that the refashioned language of scripture could be identified as the CA of the Arabic grammarians. Neither from the point of view of lexicon nor from that of syntax could the claim be justified.[192]

In other words, the language of the Koran is not Classical Arabic.

However, Vollers's theory was revived in 1948 by Paul Kahle, who sees in a saying of al-Farrā' promising reward to those reciting the Koran with *iʿrāb* support for Vollers's view that the original Koran had no *iʿrāb*.[193]

Corriente also makes the point in his classic paper[194] that the language of the Koran is not CA. For Corriente, CA was standardized by the grammarians in the eighth and ninth centuries CE, on the whole depending on a central core of Old Arabic dialects as koineized in pre-Islamic poetry and rhetoric, and the speech of contemporary Bedouins. Grammarians did not invent the *iʿrāb* system, which must have existed in the texts they edited. (*Iʿrāb* is usually translated as "inflexion," indicating case and mood, but the Arab grammarians define it as "the difference that occurs, in fact or virtually, at the end of a word, because of the various antecedents that govern it.")[195] They did come with their preconceptions about what constituted good Arabic, but they nonetheless respected what they learned from their Bedouin informants in order to standardize the language, and thus fix what came to be CA. However, some did reject certain utterances of the Bedouins as being incorrect.

Koranic Arabic is structurally intermediate between OA *koine* and Eastern Bedouin Arabic and Middle Arabic, and, of course, the Koran cannot have been written in CA since this was only finally standardized over a period of time during the eighth and ninth centuries.

Native tradition identifies two groups of dialects, Ancient West and East Arabian, neither of them identical to the OA *koine*. Corriente adds a third kind of Arabic, Nabataean, the immediate forerunner of the Middle Arabic of Islamic cities. It was very widespread indeed.

Finally, Corriente calls attention to the fact that Bedouin vernaculars themselves must also have been undergoing change under various sociolinguistic pressures, a point perhaps overlooked by the romanticization of Bedouin speech by overeager Muslim grammarians.

All the above accounts rest on a number of assumptions that are not always either spelled out or subjected to rigorous questioning. For example, all our knowledge about the early dialects of Naǧd, the Ḥiǧāz, and the highland area of the southwest seems to have been gathered during the second and third Islamic centuries, when these dialects were already declining. Much of our data are preserved only in late works whose sources we cannot check.[196] Second, these accounts also accept without hesitation the traditional Muslim chronology and the accounts of the compilation of the Koran. The first scholar in modern times to radically question these accounts is, of course, John Wansbrough, who wrote:

> To draw from the same data conclusions about the origins and evolution of CA involves implicit acceptance of considerable non-linguisitic material often and erroneously supposed to be "historical fact." I refer to such assumptions as that of the isolation of speakers/writers of Arabic within the Arabian peninsula up to the seventh century, or that of the existence of *ne varietur* text of the Islamic revelation not later than the middle of the same century.[197]

Wansbrough points out that the Muslim accounts of the origins of CA have as their aim the establishment of the Ḥiǧāz as the cradle of Islam, in particular Mecca, and in the polemical milieu of the eighth-century CE Near East, to establish an independent Arab religious identity, with a specifically Arabic Holy Scripture.

> Suppression of claims made on behalf of other tribal groups to the title *afṣaḥ al-ʿarab* [the most eloquent of the Arabs] is symbolized in the account ascribed to Farrā' of how the inhabitants of cosmopolitan (!) Mecca (i.e. Quraysh) were in a position to recognize and adopt the best ingredients from each of the bedouin dialects in Arabia.[198] Besides drawing attention to the role of Mecca as cultic and commercial center, this tradition, like the ones it eventually replaced, served to identify the northern regions of the Arabian peninsula as the cradle of CA at a date prior to the proclamation of Islam.[199]

Nor can we uncritically accept Muslim claims that the language spoken by Bedouins must be identical with that of the poetry called pre-Islamic. The Bedouins were hardly disinterested referees. But more important,

> for our purposes it is well to remember that the written record of transactions between bedouin and philologist dates only from the third/ ninth century, and is thus coincident with the literary stabilization of both Quranic exegesis and Muslim historiography.[200]

There are even a number of scholars, such as Alphonse Mingana[201] and D. S. Margoliouth,[202] who think that all pre-Islamic poetry is forged, inspired by Koranic preoccupations. The Egyptian Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, in *Of Pre-Islamic Lite-*

rature,[203] the second of his two famous books, concludes that most of what we call pre-Islamic literature was forged, though he seems to accept the authenticity of some poems, albeit a tiny number.

This cautious acceptance of some pre-Islamic poetry as authentic seems to have been shared by several Western scholars, such as Goldziher, Tor Andrae, W. Marçais, and Tritton, who reject the total skepticism of Margoliouth, but shy away from the too-generous credulity of Nöldeke and Ahlwardt.[204] Of course, if all pre-Islamic poetry is forged, then there was no such thing as a poetical *koine*, and the language of the Koran obviously could not owe anything to this fictive poetical language. We would have to look elsewhere for the origins of the language of the Koran.

If the Koran did not originally have *iʿrāb*, then the present rhyme scheme[205] to be found in the Koran must be a later addition, since rhyme depends on *iʿrāb*, and the changes required in the Koranic text must have been considerable. The lack of original *iʿrāb* in the Koran, if true, also suggests that there is less of a relationship between poetry and the Koran than previously thought, and that the text of the Koran is primary.

In a comparatively recent study, Jonathan Owens makes a number of very important points, taking into account the work of Rabin, Corriente, Zwettler, and Vollers. He begins with the observation that,

> after over one hundred and fifty years of Western research on the language, there is no meaningful comparative linguistic history of Arabic. . . . Arabic is better conceptualized not as a simple linear dichotomous development, the Old vs. Neo split, but rather as a multi-branching bush, whose stem represents the language 1300 years ago.[206]

Owens applauds the work of Diem (1973)[207] which examined

> the case endings in the Arabic words found in the Aramaic inscriptions of the Arabs of Nabataea in southern Jordan, dating from about 100 BC.[208] Diem shows that Arabic personal names found in the inscriptions did not show traces of a living case system. If Diem's interpretation of the data is correct, it would mean that the *oldest* written evidence of Arabic is characterized by a linguistic trait, the lack of functional case endings, which is otherwise said to be characteristic par excellence of *Neo*-Arabic.[209]

Owens agrees with Corriente who insisted "on the need to recognize a caseless form of Arabic existing contemporaneously with case varieties." However, Owens is far more cautious than Corriente about postulating "a simple link between one variety of Old Arabic (Nabataean Arabic) and the modern dialects."[210] Instead Owens argues that the Arabic dialects descend from a variety that never did have case endings. This claim "implies that the relevant forms are so distributed that they could not have descended from the Classsical Arabic as described by Sibawaih." [211] On his own admission,

Owens's idea that modern Arabic dialects are the descendent of a caseless variety is not entirely new—Vollers had proposed in 1906

> that pre-diasporic caseless varieties of Arabic existed, and that these represent the ancestor(s) of the modern dialects (see Spitaler 1953; Diem 1973. 1991; Retsö 1994; and Corriente 1975, 1976).

However, Owens points out where his interpretation differs:

> All these scholars, however, assume that some point in the pre-history of Arabic a unique case-variety ancestor existed. The present proposal [Owens's proposal] is a qualitatively different interpretation of the development of Arabic, however, in arguing that there was a variety of proto-Arabic which never had morphological case in its history. Lately Zaborski (1995) and Retsö (1995) have argued, convincingly in my opinion, that there are various traits in the modern Arabic dialects, notably pronominal forms and the "pseudo-dual," which preserve old Semitic or proto-Afroasiatic forms which are lacking in the Classical language. This latter work is important, for it creates a geometric figure out of what in comparative Semitics has too often been defined as one-dimensional structure beginning with Akkadian and ending with Classical Arabic. Adding the modern Arabic dialects creates a geometric structure with at least two dimensions in the sense that developments and/or archaisms from proto-Semitic may move directly from the proto-language to the modern dialects, bypassing Classical Arabic completely.[212]

Combining the insights of Corriente and Diem, Owens comes to the conclusion

> that at least between 100 BC and AD 800, a period of almost a millennium, there coexisted case and caseless varieties of the language. Clearly, one cannot put an absolute duration on how long the coexistence occurred, though if it lasted for 900 years it must have been of an extremely stable sort.[213]

Owens believes that, in general, linguists need to take into account the evidence from modern Arabic dialects to further research on comparative Arabic language history, and on the larger Semitic and Afroasiatic families.

Owens accords Karl Vollers a richly deserved homage. As I have already indicated above, Vollers argued that the Koran was originally composed in a variety of Arabic without case endings. Vollers's insights were lost since his arguments were

> embedded in a larger one in which he claimed that the *Qur'ān* was revealed in a west Arabian dialect differing in many respects from Classical Arabic. In what he regarded as the official version of the *Qur'ān*, this variety was later

> replaced by a more prestigious variety, associated basically with an eastern Arabian dialect.[214]

Owens continues with a robust defense of Vollers against such distinguished scholars as Nöldeke:

> Despite any shortcomings, however, [Vollers's] linguistic interpretation of the state of Arabic in the early seventh century was remarkably prescient. Moreover, . . . his assumption that there was a Koranic variant without case ending receives partial support from the Koranic reading tradition itself. . . . The present chapter may be read in conjunction with Kahle's (1948) summary of a manuscript written perhaps by a fifth-century scholar named al-Maliki, in which various *ḥadith* are cited, pointing directly and indirectly to the practice of reading the *Qur'ān* without case endings.[215]

The tradition of a caseless variety of Koranic reading is associated with a Basran Koranic reader Abū ʻAmr ibn ʻAlā' (died 770), and if this tradition is true then a tradition with a caseless variety is as old as traditions with case endings.[216] But, as Owens underlines, this conclusion has grave implications:

> To accept Vollers's position would require a fundamental rethinking, *inter alia*, of the status of caseless vs. case forms of Arabic. Indeed, already in 1906 in the preface to his book, Vollers decried the intolerant scepticism to which he was subjected when he presented his thesis to Arab scholars in Algiers. For Arabicists, the criticisms of the distinguished Theodor Nöldeke (1910) were probably of greater importance.

Owens concludes his chapter with this summary:

> With Vollers, it is argued that case and caseless forms coexisted in the eighth century, but against Vollers, there is no decisive linguistic evidence to assume that the case forms are historically primary, even if the argument for a prestige differential is compelling. It follows from this that there is no contradiction in having coexisting Koranic variants, about which no conclusions can be drawn as to historical anteriority. Indeed, assuming that the reading traditions developed before a standardizing grammatical model became prevalent, it is quite natural to expect that reading traditions should develop simultaneously around any varieties prevalent in the community.[217]

In an important footnote, Owens explains how present-day Arabic linguistics is divided into two interpretive approaches:

> The two general, opposing positions which I define here are, in the contemporary state of Arabic linguistics, relatively poorly profiled. In fact, only the first has much currency. This is unfortunate, as I believe it may be associated with a highly scholarly, but at the same time highly orthodox and restrictive interpretation of Arabic linguistic history. Among its best-known representa-

> tives are Brockelmann, Nöldeke, and Fück. What today is little appreciated is that contemporaries of Brockelmann and Nöldeke such as Vollers, de Landberg, and later Kahle argued for a broader reading of what the ʿArabiyya was. Even if I would not agree in all detailed interpretations with this latter group, I would see my position as reviving their perspectives.[218]

Pierre Larcher has argued that it was time to overthrow the theological, ideological and mythological model that has dominated the field of Koranic Studies for so long. There are two grand myths: first, that the Arabic of the Koran is Classical Arabic—in fact there is, at the least, Pre-Classical Arabic, with phonological, morphological and syntactical features that one does not find in Classical Arabic. The second myth is that the dialects were simply a "corruption" of Classical Arabic—in fact, no classical language is a point of departure, but always a point of arrival. [219] Lutz Edzard suggests that

> the fact that Classical Arabic was viewed for a long time as the "Ur-ancestor" of all the later dialects is clearly motivated by religious considerations, inasmuch as Classical Arabic is considered in the Muslim tradition to be of divine origin.[220]

Classical Arabic is not the source of the Arabic dialects. Edzard even suggests "that scholars generally no longer view Classical Arabic as the ancestor of all Arabic dialects."[221] The dialects did not emerge from a degradation of Classical Arabic. On the contrary, the opposite is true, namely Classical Arabic emerged out of the dialects. Classical Arabic is a carefully considered construction wrought from the dialects. It is worth underlining that at the center of this construction was placed the *iʿrāb,* on whose otiosity Larcher has remarked upon, and which continues to terrorize all learners of the language. The most likely hypothesis, even if it is not the only one, that remains is that the iʿrāb is a feature of great antiquity. It was retained in poetry for metrical and prosodical reasons, not because it served a syntactical purpose. It was subsequently adopted in Classical Arabic because of the prestige attached to poetry, both written and recited.[222]

7. Arabic and Syriac, Syriac and Arabic

There are a number of confused, contradictory and, not to be too coy about it, totally mythical accounts in Islamic literature and tradition on the origin of languages, though they all seem to end by proclaiming the superiority of Arabic. For ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb (died 238 AH/ 852 CE), a Cordoban jurist and historian,

> the languages of the "prophets" were Arabic, Syriac and Hebrew: All the sons of Israel spoke Hebrew; the first whom God allowed to speak it was Isaac. Sy-

> riac was the language of five prophets: Idrīs, Noah, Abraham, Lot and Jonah. Twelve of them spoke Arabic: Adam, Seth, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Ishmael, Shuʿayb, al-Khiḍr, "the three in Sūrat Yā Sīn" (Q. 36:14), Jonah, Khālid b. Sinān al-ʿAbsī, and Muḥammad. According to ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb, Adam first spoke Arabic, but later his language was distorted and changed into Syriac.[223]

According to Ibn ʿAbbās, Adam's

> language in paradise was Arabic, but when he disobeyed his lord, God deprived him of Arabic, and he spoke Syriac. God, however, restored him to his grace, and he gave him back Arabic.[224]

It has been said that Adam "spoke 700,000 languages, of which the best was Arabic." [225]

The Muslims were, in fact, imitating the corresponding attitudes of the Jews and Syrian Christians, who advocated the superiority of their own languages. And these natural assumptions of the Jews and Christians had rather surprising results among the Muslims, as we shall see in a moment.

As David H. Aaron points out,[226] at first, during the Biblical era, there was no notion of Hebrew as a Holy Tongue:

> In the *Tanakh* [Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament], Hebrew served as a marker of tribal allegiance but lacked the religious connotation that typifies post-biblical documents. One is particularly struck by the lack of language consciousness in the books of Ruth and Esther, both of which focus on the relationship between Jews and indigenous populations *outside* of the land of Israel. We thus find a remarkable degree of uniformity even among radically different genres and eras. Throughout the early literature, there is no discrete notion that Hebrew had a unique value or purpose. Hebrew during the biblical era is not yet a language of Judaism, let alone, a holy tongue.

It is only during the post-Biblical era that Hebrew first achieves religious significance, especially in the period following the conquest of the Middle East by Alexander the Great at the end of the fourth century BCE.[227] Contacts with Greek culture and language led to social and religious tensions, and attempts at self-definition. In texts deriving from the two centuries prior to the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE,

> five distinct, but surely related attitudes toward Hebrew are discernable. Each notion of the Hebrew language represents a concrete response to overt political and social conflicts with Greek pagans. But, at a more subtle level, each constitutes an attempt to confront the pressures of syncretistic tendencies within the Jewish community as well. The five notions are: (1) allegiance to language as a form of allegiance to one's ancestors; (2) language as a unifying factor in the people's politic; (3) Hebrew as the original language of all human

> beings; (4) Hebrew as the forgotten language of civilization, retaught to Abram by God; (5) Hebrew as a holy language [לשון הקודש].[228]

David H. Aaron explains notion (1):

> Confronted by the prospect of a strong cultural challenge to their national identity—perhaps in a way never previously encountered—those responding to the pressures of cultural assimilation under the Seleucids (312 BCE–63 BCE) augmented the biblical notion of ancestral inheritance (as Torah) with the notion of language.[229]

In the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* (second century BCE), "the concept of the End of Days includes the notion that the tribes of Jacob will become "one people of the Lord, with one language."[230] In the *Book of Jubilees*, probably dating from between 161 and140 BCE,[231] God sends an angel to dictate the Torah to Moses. The angel, talking of Abraham, says:

> Then the Lord God said to me: "Open his mouth and his ears, to hear and speak with his tongue in the revealed language." For from the day of the collapse it had disappeared from the mouth(s) of all mankind. I opened his mouth, ears and lips, and began to speak Hebrew with him—in the language of the creation. He took his fathers' books (they were written in Hebrew), and copied them. From that time he began to study them while I was telling him everything that he was unable (to understand).[232]

Milka Rubin comments on this passage,

> Three things are stated in these passages. The first is that the language of revelation and the language of creation are one and the same. The second is that this language is undoubtedly Hebrew, the language in which the books of the fathers were written. The third is that there was a period, between the confusion of languages and this revelation to Abraham, when the Hebrew language was dormant and forgotten. Another idea which appears in Jubilees is that all living creatures were familiar with the language of creation, and in fact spoke this language until the confusion (Jub. 3:28).[233]

In the Hebrew version of the *Testament of Naphtali* we are told that seventy angels divided the seventy languages among the families of the earth.

> But the holy language, the Hebrew language, remained only in the house of Shem and Eber, and in the house of Abraham our father, who is one of their descendents.[234]

In a fragment from Qumran, two new elements are introduced: Hebrew is called "the holy language," and it is asseverated that it was the original language of mankind at the moment of creation, and will once again be spoken

at the end of days.[235] Thus this fragment contains the earliest known use of the idiom, holy tongue, לשון הקודש, *lešōn ha-qōḏeš*. But as Aaron explains,

> the phrase in the Qumran fragment occurs one line above an idiom derived from Zephaniah 3:9 that is clearly represented; "For then I will change the speech of the peoples to a *pure speech*." If *pure speech* and *holy tongue* are parallel in this context (which is a safe bet), then we may surmise that the author used the Zephaniah verse as proof-text for the destiny of the *holy tongue*. Esther Eshel and Michael Stone speculate that the Qumran writer was leaning upon the Zephaniah verse to convey that the End of Days involved the restoration of Hebrew to its once primal status, ubiquity among the civilizations. Thus the Qumran fragment represents the earliest known use of this phrase with the connotations (1) Hebrew is the holy tongue, and, perhaps, (2) Hebrew would be the universal language in the End of Days. Eshel and Stone also contend that Hebrew was the choice of the Qumran writers specifically because, "they believed that they lived on the eve of the End of Days," when Hebrew would again become the only linguistic option.[236]

As Milka Rubin summarizes,[237]

> These traditions, which originated in Jewish circles in the second and first century BCE apparently, echoed and resonated again and again both in time and in space among all partakers in this discussion. In Jewish literature, they are prevalent in Midrashic literature which formed in the third and fourth centuries CE Thus the *Tanhuma Yelamdenu* (Gen. 11), which preserves early traditions some of which go back to the fourth century CE,[238] says that the language spoken before the confusion of languages was "*Leshon Haqodesh* the holy language through which the world had been created."[239] According to Zephaniah 3:9, says Tanhuma, this will also be the language which will be spoken by all nations in the world to come.[240] The same idea is found in the different versions of *Yerushalmi Targum* referring to Genesis 11:1.[241]

From the second century BCE onward, Hebrew was considered the language of revelation, and the primordial language in which God created the world, and in which God spoke to Adam. Hebrew was spoken by all creatures until the fall, and the onset of the confusion of tongues.[242]

The above notions about Hebrew should be seen against the background, especially of the Hasmonaean period (162–43 BCE), of the Jewish people's search for national identity. The Hebrew language became a symbol of a unique cultural identity—a national symbol, and was thus being used for ideological reasons.[243]

> The view which became prevalent in the second century BCE, that Hebrew, being God's language, was superior to all other languages, was, it seems, part of the cultural and political reaction to the hellenistic rule and culture which

> prevailed among segments of Jewish society and culture at the time, a reaction which culminated in the Hasmonaean revolt. . . . The superiority of the "people and language" of Israel appear in the Festival prayers, both in the central benediction of the Amidah and in the blessing on the wine—the *qiddush*—said at the beginning of the holiday: "Blessed art thou God . . . who has chosen us from all people and exalted us above all languages."[244]

However, given the prevalence of Aramaic in Palestine and Syria, and the fact that Hebrew was no longer understood by large parts of the population, there developed a more universal cultural trend. *Exodus Rabba* 28,[245] for example, quotes Rabbi Yochanan as saying, "One voice was divided into seven voices and these divided themselves into seventy languages."

As Van der Louw comments,[246]

> In [the latter] Midrash, dating back to the 1st century AD,[247] there is no hint at the superiority of Hebrew. The divine speech is equally communicable into all languages, a universalist thought indeed. In a later, different tradition it is said that the promulgation of the written Torah took place in four languages simultaneously: Hebrew, Latin, Arabic and Aramaic. This is tantamount to saying no language is divine. Indeed, rabbi Yishmael (2nd century AD) stated squarely that the Torah speaks human language.

Despite the fact that the *Exodus Rabbah II* was only compiled in the ninth century CE, it contains earlier material, in which case, one is tempted to ask whether the Islamic doctrine of the Koran being revealed in seven different ways[248] is not derived from the sayings of Rabbi Yochanan, one of which, as noted, reads, "One voice was divided into seven voices and these divided themselves into seventy languages."

We now turn to the Christians. Initially, the Greek and Latin church fathers, and later Byzantine sources were almost unanimous that Hebrew was the language of creation. A passage in the *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitiones* [249] (book 1, chapter 30) tells us that Hebrew was the sole language in the world until the fifteenth generation "when, for the first time, men set up an idol and worshipped it."

For St.Augustine (354–430) the Hebrew language was the primordial tongue, which God had bequeathed to the Hebrew people because they had not sinned.[250]

However, in general, Christianity did not identify itself in terms of language, and though Hellenized Christianity preferred Greek, it strove to be a universal religion transcending linguistic and cultural barriers. The Christian liturgy was translated into Syriac, Armenian and Ethiopian, early on. For the Greek church father Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330–ca. 395)

> human language is the invention of the human mind or understanding. . . . God, willing that men should speak different languages, gave human nature full liberty to formulate arbitrary sounds, so as to render their meaning more intelligible.[251]

Greek rationalism led Gregory and Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260–ca. 340) to refute the mystical idea of the language of creation in general.

On the other hand, Theodoret of Cyrrhus (ca. 393–ca. 460) was the first Greek church father to advocate Syriac as a primordial language.

> He bases his proof upon the etymology of the names of the primordial people: Adam is attributed to Syriac *ʾodamtho* (earth), Qain to Syriac *qenyono* (property), Noa to Syriac *nawho* (rest), and Abel to Syriac *ʾeblo* (mourning). On the other hand, he does not reject the Hebrew altogether, and ascribes to it a special status. Hebrew, according to Theodoret, is a holy language, which was given to Moses by God as an acquired language rather than as a natural language. In support of his claim, he says, children of the "Hebrews" do not speak Hebrew naturally; rather, they speak the language of their native country. Only later are they taught Hebrew letters and are able to read the Hebrew Scriptures. To assist his claim, Theodoret, too, uses Psalms 81:5: "I understood a language I did not know." He then proceeds to undermine the common and accepted proof among the Greek fathers, that Hebrew comes from "Heber," who alone was granted the privilege to hold on to the primordial language. If indeed, he says, Heber spoke Hebrew, then all his progeny, and many nations beside the Jewish people, should have spoken Hebrew. The Hebrew language is called so, in his opinion, because Abraham, on his way to Palestine, crossed the Euphrates. Hebra, he notes, in Syriac, means crossing.[252]

However, among Syriac writers Theodoret's position is encountered frequently: they are adamant that Syriac was the primordial language. They seemed to have been inspired by the views, or perhaps the putative views, of Ephraem the Syrian (ca. 306–373) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350–428). In the Syriac work known as *The Cave of Treasures*, probably written in the sixth century CE, we are told that the sole language spoken from Adam until the confusion of languages was Syriac, and that "Syriac is the queen of all languages."[253]

As its translator, E. A. Wallis Budge, explains,

> In the title it is attributed to Ephraim the Syrian, and this indicates that the Syrians themselves were prepared to believe that it was written early in the IVth century, for this great writer died A.D. 373. Even if this attribution be wrong, it is important as suggesting that, if not written by Ephrem himself, one of his disciples, or some member of his school, may have been the author of the book.[254]

The Cave of Treasures elaborates further,

> The ancient writers have commited an error in writing that the Hebrew language was prior, and they admitted this [bad] error herein into their writings. All languages upon the earth derive from Syriac and are tempered with it.[255]

There are four Syriac commentaries that refer to this question: the anonymous commentary of *Diyarbakir 22* (first half of the eighth century); Theodore Bar Koni, *The Book of Scholia* (ca. 791/792); Ishoʿdad of Merv (ca. 850); and *The Anonymous Commentary* from the Mingana collection (ninth to tenth century).[256] Though aware of the tradition that recognized Hebrew as the primordial language, the four commentaries still insist that it was in pure and uncontaminated Syriac language that God talked to Adam—an attitude indicative of the desire to promote a Syriac cultural and historical identity, and to prove its superiority. Thus, for example, Tatian (fl. 170–180), though writing in Greek, felt that Greek civilization was a mass of evil incompatible with Christianity, and he set out to prove the superiority of Syriac culture.

Against this background of Judeo-Christian polemics, one would expect Muslim tradition to promote Arabic as the language of God, as the most pure and beautiful of all languages. Therefore, it will come as a surprise to many to learn that

> the concept that Hebrew and Aramaic (or Syriac) were both ancient languages which contested over the title of the primordial language was so deeply embedded that it found its way into Muslim tradition as well. Not surprisingly, it was Syriac—the ancestral language of the Christians living in the important Muslim centres, which was still being spoken by them and was held in high esteem as the primordial language—which gained primacy among the Muslims. Ibn al-Nadim (end of tenth century), who was well acquainted with Christian literature, cites in *Kitab al-Fihrist*[257] Theodore "the Interpreter" (i.e. Theodore of Mopsuestia) as saying that God spoke to Adam in the Nabati dialect, which is purer than the Syriac dialect. Ibn al-Nadim goes on to explain that "Nabati is the dialect spoken by villagers, it is a broken (dialect of) Syriac, and its pronounciation is not right." There are others, he continues, who say that it is the written classical Syriac which is the pure dialect, while still others believe that it was the contemporary spoken Syriac of his day that was used by God when he spoke to Adam. When writing about the Hebrew language, Ibn al-Nadim exhibits his wide knowledge of the sources. He says[258] that he "read in some of the old books that the first who wrote Hebrew was ʿAbir b. Shalikh (i.e. ʿEber), and he placed it (this writing) among his people." Yet, he immediately goes on to quote Theodore's opinion saying that the Hebrew language is derived from the Syriac, and it was only called Hebrew after Abraham had crossed the Euphrates. Ibn al-Nadim is therefore acquainted with both tradi-

> tions, and is well versed in the prominent opinion among Syriac Christians of his day that Syriac was the primordial language, and that Hebrew was a language which derived from the Syriac and was formed only in Abraham's day. What is especially interesting is that he is aware of the internal argument amongst Syriac Christians themselves concerning the exact Syriac dialect which served as the primordial language, and was thus the pure dialect. Ibn al-Nadim does not contest the special status of the Syriac, nor does he bring any contradicting traditions on behalf of the Arabic language.

Historian and exegete, al-Ṭabarī[259] (839–923), equally faithful to the Syriac tradition, wrote,

> In that era ʿĀd was called "ʿĀd of Iram," and when ʿĀd was destroyed, Thamūd in turn was destroyed, the remaining sons of Iram were called Armān—they are Nabateans. All of them were of Islam while they lived in Babylon, until Nimrod b. Cush b. Canaan b. Ham b. Noah ruled over them and called on them to worship idols, which they did. Whereas one evening their speech was Syriac, the next morning God had confused their tongues, and thus they became unable to understand each other. As a result, the descendants of Shem came to have eighteen languages. The descendants of Ham also came to have eighteen languages, while the descendants of Japheth had thirty-six languages.[260]

A little later, al-Ṭabarī tells us that God destroyed the Tower of Babel, and

> on that day the languages of mankind became confused from fright, and mankind came to speak seventy-three languages. Before that the *only* language had been Syriac [emphasis added].[261]

Finally, Al-Ṭabarī cites a tradition going back to the suspiciously prolific Ibn ʿAbbās:

> When Abraham fled from Kūthā and came out of the fire, his language was Syriac. But when he crossed the Euphrates from Ḥarrān, God changed his language and it was called Hebrew (*ʿIbrānī*) because he had crossed (*ʿabara*) the Euphrates. Nimrod sent men to look for him, telling them, "If you find anyone who speaks Syriac, do not leave him, but bring him to me." They met Abraham, but left him because he spoke Hebrew and they did not understand his language.[262]

Al-Masʿūdī (ca. 896–ca. 956) in his *Murūǧ al-Ḏahab*, *Meadows of Gold,*[263] tells us that

> in his [Nimrod's] time God divided the languages; so that the descendants of Sam spoke nineteen different tongues, the descendants of Ham seventeen, and the children of Yafeth thirty-six. Later the languages broke up into a great number of dialects.

But no particular language is specified.

The traditions of Syriac as the original language were so well-entrenched in the social milieu of the Near East that even Islamic ḥadīṯ-traditions bear witness to the fact. For instance, M. J. Kister records the following tradition,

> According to another tradition God sent down to Adam 21 books *(ṣaḥīfa)* and enjoined him to perform 50 *rakʿas.* He forbade him to eat pork, carrion and blood (of animals); God also forbade him to lie, to behave treacherously and to fornicate. God's injunctions were dictated by Gibril and written down by Adam in Syriac. In Paradise Adam spoke Arabic; after his disobedience and expulsion he spoke Syriac.[264]

Kister privides us with further examples of Adam's linguistic abilities,

> *wa-ʿallama ādama l-asmā'a kullahā,* "and He taught Adam the names, all of them" [Koran 2:31] is interpreted in several different ways in the commentaries of the Qur'ān. God taught him, according to the commentators, one of the following things: the names of all the creatures, the names of events which happened in the past or which will happen in the future, all the languages (so that he could speak with each of his sons in a special language), the names of all the stars, the names of the angels, the names of his progeny, or the names of the various species of His creatures; or He taught him everything, including even the grammar of Sibawayh.[265]

Kister continues,

> Some traditions say that the secret language which God taught Adam was Syriac.[266] An early report states that God taught Adam the names in Syriac in order to hide from the angels the knowledge thus acquired. Al-Suyuti records a tradition saying that Adam spoke Arabic in Paradise; when he committed the sin he began to speak Aramaic, but after God accepted his repentance he reverted to Arabic.[267] The early ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb has a more detailed account of the language of Adam; Adam is included in the list of prophets whose language was Arabic. He descended from Paradise speaking Arabic because Arabic was the language of God, of the angels, and the people of Paradise. This is supported by the words spoken by the Prophet to Salman al-Farisi: "You should love the Arabs because of three things: your Quran and your Prophet are Arab and your language in Paradise will be Arabic." ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb explains the position of Arabic in comparison with Aramaic: Adam and his progeny spoke Arabic. In a later period Arabic degenerated *(ḥurrifa)* into Syriac, which is akin to Arabic.[268]

Thus we can see that the Muslim exegetes felt the force of the Syriac traditions regarding the primordial language, and they were forced to reply to them: Adam had spoken Arabic in Paradise; after the expulsion he spoke

Syriac (which was, according to some of the exegetes, deteriorated Arabic). But the significance of the above claims and counterclaims for Hebrew, Syriac, and Arabic are of wider import. They give credence to those theories that emphasize the slow emergence of Islam and the Koran against a background of monotheistic polemics.

As Wansbrough has stressed over and over again, all the claims of the Koran that it is "clear" Arabic only make sense in this sectarian milieu of contending cultures, prophets, and, of course, languages. The Arabic of the Koran is only clear if we assume that the target group of these texts knew other languages like Syriac as well and understood the allusions to the religious debates of the time. At least some of the so-called pre-Islamic poetry was composed after the Koran, and many of the verses adduced by lexicographers of Classical Arabic were ad hoc forgeries to prove that a certain word in the Koran was indeed Arabic, had this or that specific meaning and was of great antiquity.

Notes

1 Manfred Ullmann, ed., *Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache*, [Dictionary of the Classical Arabic Language] (Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz, 1970–).

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3 Christoph Luxenberg, *Die Syro-Aramäische Lesart des Koran* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch Verlag, 2000), p. 299; also *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran* (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2007), p. 327.

4 Claude Gilliot and Pierre Larcher, "Language and Style of the Qur'ān," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 3 (J–O), ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), p. 129.

5 As we shall see below, as early as the fifth century scholars wondered at the strangeness of the Greek of the New Testament.

6 Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* [Tractatus Theologico-Politicus], trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), p. 247.

7 Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*: *Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 171.

8 Steven Nadler, op. cit., p. 171, quoting Spinoza's *Tractatus*, chapter 7, "On the Interpretation of Scripture," p. 90 in Samuel Shirley translation (see note 6 above.)

9 Sebastian Brock, review of Matthew Black's *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, *Journal of Theological Studies 20* (1969): pp. 274–78.

10 Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts, 3rd ed.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.

11 Luxenberg had never heard of Matthew Black until I brought Black's work to his attention about three years ago, i.e., 2010.

12 Black, op. cit., pp.15–17.

13 Ibid., p. 17
14 Black, op. cit., pp. 271–72.
15 C. F. Burney (1868–1925), *The Aramaic Original of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922).
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17 *Targum* (Hebrew plural : *targumim*): translations of the books of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic, made when Aramaic was the common spoken language in Judea, and for the benefit of Jews who longer understood Hebrew (produced between ca. 250 BCE and 300 CE and read in the synagogues).
18 Black, op. cit., p. 275.
19 Charles Fox Burney, *Poetry of Our Lord* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925).
20 The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines paronomasia as follows: "A playing on words which sound alike; a word-play; a pun from L., a. Gr. παρονομασία, f. παρ(α- PARA[1] 1) + ὀνομασία naming, after παρονομάζειν to alter slightly in naming."
21 Black, op. cit., pp. 276–77.
22 Günter Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qur'ān* (Erlangen, 1974); idem., *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation* (Delhi, 2003).
23 Lüling, *Challenge to Islam,* pp. XII–XIII.
24 D. H. Müller, *Die Propheten in ihrer ursprünglichen Form: Die Grundgesetze der ursemitischen Poesie, erschlossen und nachgewiesen in Bibel, Keilinschriften und Koran und ihren Wirkungen erkannt in den Chören der griechischen Tragödie*, 2 vols. (Wien, 1896). [The Prophets in their Primordial Form: The Basic Laws of Ur-Semitic Poetry Developed and Demonstrated in the Bible, Koran and Cuneiform Inscriptions and Their Effects Identified in the Choruses of Greek tragedy]; Rudolf Geyer, "Zur Strophik des Qurāns," *WZKM 22* (1908): 265–86; [English translation in Ibn Warraq, ed., *What the Koran Really Says* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), pp. 625–46); idem., Review of Karl Vollers, *Volkssprache und Schriftsprache im alten Arabien* (Strassburg, 1906), *Göttinger Gelehrter Anzeiger* 171 (1909): 10–56; Karl Vollers, *Volkssprache und Schriftsprache im alten Arabien* (Strassburg, 1906).
25 Black, op. cit., p. 280.
26 Kaspar Wyss, *Dialectologia Sacra* (Zurich, 1650); Johann Vorst, *Philologia Sacra, seu de Hebraismis Novi Testament II* (Leyden, 1658); vol. I appeared in Amsterdam in 1665 with the general title *De Hebraismis Novi Testamenti Commentarius* (Amsterdam, 1665).
27 Elliott C. Maloney, *Semitic Interference in Marcan Syntax* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), SBL Dissertation Series 51: PhD 1979, Fordham University, p. 1.
28 Isidore of Pelusium, Epist. 4.28, in J-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca,* vol. 78, pp. 1080–81, quoted by Maloney, *Semitic Interference*, p. 5.
29 Maloney, op. cit., p. 1.
30 Erasmus, *Paraphrases in Novum Testamentum* (Basel, 1516), on Acts 10:33, quoted by Maloney, op. cit., p. 5.
31 Theodore Beza, "Digressio de dono linguarum et apostolico sermone," in *Annotationes maiores in Novum Testamentum* (Geneva, 1556) on Acts 10:46.

32 Referred to by Morus, "On the Style of the New Testament," in Charles Hodge, *A Collection of Tracts in Biblical Literature*, vol. 1 (Princeton, 1825), pp. 411–13, where he gives a further list of eleven scholars, writing between the fifteenth and eighteenth century, who came to similar conclusions.

33 Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg, *I have Always Loved the Holy Tongue: Issac Casaubon, the Jews, and a Forgotten Chapter in Renaissance Scholarship* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 68.

34 G. Lloyd-Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England*: *A Third Language* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 194.

35 Grafton and Weinberg, op. cit., p. 228.

36 Arnold Meyer, *Jesu Muttersprache* [Jesus's Mother Tongue] (Leipzig, 1896); Gustaf Dalman, *Die Worte Jesu* (Leipzig, 1898; 2nd ed., 1930), English translation, *The Words of Jesus*, trans. D. M. Kay (Edinburgh, 1902).

37 Gustaf Dalman, *Grammatik des jüdisch-palästinischen Aramäisch* (Leipzig, 1905).

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40 Ibid., p. 17

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43 Onkelos Targum: "the best known of the targumim, and the one with the greatest authority. A literal translation of the complete text of the Pentateuch, following the plain sense of scripture with many exegetical elements, especially in the poetic passages." See Alec Gilmore, *A Dictionary of the English Bible and Its Origins* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), s. v. Onkelos Targum.

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46 B. Mazar et al., "'Ein Gev: Excavations in 1961," *Israel Exploration Journal* 14 (1964): 1–49; N. Avigad (In Hebrew), "An Aramaic Inscription on the Tell Dan Bowl," *Yediot* 30 (1966): 209–12; "An Inscribed Bowl from Dan," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 100 (1968): 42–44 (+pl. XVIII).

47 Fitzmyer's footnote: Cf. M. Wagner, *Die lexikalischen und grammatikalischen Aramaismen im alttestamentalischen Hebräisch* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrifte für die alttestamentalische Wiseenschaft, 96; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1966); E. F. Kautzsch, *Die Aramaismen in Alten Testament* (Halle a. d. S.: M. Niemeyer, 1902); A. Hurvitz, "The Chronological Significance of 'Aramaisms' in Biblical Hebrew," *IEJ* 18 (1968), pp. 234–40.

48 Fitzmyer, op. cit., p. 9.

49 Originally published as the "Presidential Address of the Catholic Biblical Association" (21 August 1970) in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 32 (1970): 501–31, but also chapter 2 in Fitzmyer, *Wandering Aramean*, pp. 29–56.

50 The Seleucids (312–64 BCE), a dynasty of Hellenistic Kings, founded by Seleucus (ca. 358–281 BCE), ruled a vast realm stretching from Anatolia via Syria and Babylonia to Iran and thence to central Asia.

51 Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean*, p. 46.
52 The Gaonic or Geonic period lasted from approximately 600 CE to 1040 CE.
53 Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean*, p. 62.
54 Uriel Weinreich, *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems.* Preface by André Martinet (New York: Publications of the Linguistic Circle of New York, no. 1, 1953).
55 André Martinet, "Preface," in Weinreich, *Languages in Contact*, pp. vii–viii.
56 Hugo Schuchardt, *Dem Herrn Franz von Miklosich zum 20. November 1883: Slawo-deutsches und Slawo-italienisches* (Graz, 1884), p. 5.
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58 Heine and Kutieva's footnote: Andrei Danchev, "Language Contact and Language Change" *Folia Linguistica* 22 (1988), pp. 37–53; p. 38; "Language Change Typology and Adjectival Comparison in Contact Situations" in *Folia Linguistica Historica* 9, no. 2 (1989), pp. 161–74.
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60 Frans van Coetsem, "Topics in Contact Linguistics," *Leuvense Bijdragen* 92 (2003), p. 30 (Published posthumously).
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74 Ibid., p. 35.
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77 A. Rosetti, "Langue Mixte et Mélanges de Langues," *Acta Linguistica* 5 (1945–49): 73–79.
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80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., p. 260.
82 Ibid., p. 261 n. 40.
83 Huehnergard's note 72: The classic study is Uriel Weinreich, *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems* (The Hague: Mouton, 1953); more recent works are René Appel and Pieter Muysken, *Language Contact and Bilingualism* (London: Arnold, 1987); Ilse Lehiste, *Lectures on Language Contact* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988).
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1884 D. Hunter tr. Reuss's Hist. Canon i. 3: 'These passages . . . were disconnected fragments, . . . simply pericopes or lessons, as they were called afterwards in the Christian Church.'"

110 James R. Davila, "How Can We Tell If a Greek Apocryphon or Pseudepigraphon Has Been Translated from Hebrew or Aramaic?" *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 15 (2005): 3–61.
111 Davila, op. cit., pp. 11–16.
112 Ibid., pp. 4–11.
113 Ibid., p. 12.
114 Ibid., pp. 16–17.
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116 Staffan Olofsson, "Consistency as a Translation Technique," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, no. 1 (1992): 14–30.
117 Jacques Eugène Manna, *Vocabulaire Chaldéen-Arabe* (Mosul, 1900); reprinted with a new appendix by Bidawid (Beirut, 1975).
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122 Davila, op. cit., p. 27.
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124 Raymond A. Martin, *Syntactical Evidence of Semitic Sources in Greek Documents* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), first published 1974 by the Society of Biblical Literature.
125 Ibid., pp. 5–43, summarized in Davila, op. cit., p. 28 n. 68.
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127 Davila, op. cit., p. 31.
128 Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., *A New Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. xiii.
129 Ibid.
130 Davila, op. cit., p. 33.
131 Ibid., p. 33.
132 See Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies* (London: Routledge, 2002; first edition 1980), which has a useful bibliography of eighteen pages.
133 Theo A. W. van der Louw, *Transformations in the Septuagint: Towards an Interaction of Septuagint Studies and Translation Studies* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), p. 13, citing C. Rabin, "The Translation Process and the Character of the Septuagint," Textus 6 (1968): 22 ff.
134 Van der Louw, op. cit., p. 90.
135 Ibid., p. 108
136 Ibid., pp. 61–62.
137 Davila, op. cit., p. 37.
138 Ibid., p. 38

139 Ibid., p. 39.
140 Zipora Talshir, "Double Translations in the Septuagint," in Claude E. Cox, ed., *Proceedings of the Sixth Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies*, Jerusalem, 1986 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), pp. 21–63, quoted in Davila, op. cit., p. 40.
141 Davila, op. cit., p. 41.
142 Herbjørn Jenssen, "Arabic Language," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: E. J. Brill).
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145 Herbjørn Jenssen, op. cit.
146 Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationalism, 1900–1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 220, quoted in Franck Salameh, "Does Anyone Speak Arabic?" *Middle East Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 51.
147 Taha Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt* (Washington, DC: American Council of Learned Societies, 1954), pp. 86–87, quoted in Salameh, op. cit., p. 51.
148 Taha Hussein [Ṭāhā Ḥusayn], *Yasiru am-Nahw wa-l-Kitaba* no. 11 (Beirut: al-Adab, 1956), pp. 2, 3, 6, quoted by Salameh, op. cit., p. 53.
149 E. Souby, "The Influence of the Arabic Language on the Psychology of the Arabs," *Middle East Journal* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1951): 284–302.
150 Warraq, *What the Koran Really Says,* pp. 24–26.
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225 Gilliot and Larcher, idem., citing "Ṯa'labī, Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, *al-Kašf wa-l-bayān 'an tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ms. Istanbul, Ahmet III 76, *From Sūra 5 to the End of the Qur'ān*, part 4 (ad Q 41:44) ad Q 55:4, from an anonymous source; Goldziher, *Grammar*, 45, quoting Baġawī, *Ma'ālim*, presently still only in manuscript form; but the figure '700' in Baġawī, *Ma'ālim* 4, 266 has to be corrected!"

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240 This idea is preserved also in Karaite tradition. See Y. Erder, "Yefet Ben Eli's Attitude towards Islam," *Mikhael* 14 (1997): 46 n. 99 (in Hebrew), quoted in Rubin, op. cit.

241 Pseudo Jonathan, Gen. 1:1: A similar version appears in Neofiti I: see A. Diez Macho, *Neophiti I*, *vol. I: Genesis* (Madrid, 1968), p. 57. On the tradition of the Yerushalmi Targum, see A. Shinan, *The Embroidered Targum* (Jerusalem, 1992), pp. 113–15 (in Hebrew), quoted in Rubin, op. cit.

242 Rubin, "Language of Creation," p. 312.

243 Ibid., p. 313

244 Ibid., pp. 313–14.

245 Exodus Rabba—the second part (12–40) is a homiletical Midrash, which, according to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, "makes use of tannaitic literature, the Jerusalem Talmud, and early amoraic Midrashim, but not entire themes from the Babylonian Talmud. Many of its homilies also occur in the known editions of the Tanḥuma. It contains several halakhic expositions, numerous parables, and some aggadot of a comparatively late type. For the most part, however, it exhibits features which place it earlier than Exodus Rabbah I, and it was apparently compiled in the ninth century CE."

246 Theo A. W. van der Louw, *Transformations in the Septuagint: Towards an Interaction of Septuagint Studies and Translation Studies* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), p. 52.

247 Van der Louw's note in ibid.: "The Midrash is attributed to Rabbi Jochanan (3rd century AD), but it underlies the famous NT passage of Acts 2 and must hence be older. There a multiplication of languages takes place on the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), at which the giving of the Torah (!) was celebrated (חג מתן תורה)."

248 For example in al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, trans. M. M. Khan, 9 vols. (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1997), vol. 6, book LXVI, ch. 5 Hadith, 4991, pp. 427–28.

249 *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions*: according to Georg Strecker, "the Recognitions came into being independently of the Homilies—probably about 350 A.D.—in Syria or Palestine," in Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2 (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991), p. 485.

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257 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. G. Flugel (Leipzig, 1872), p. 12.

258 Ibid., p. 14.

259 See Ṭabarī, *Annales* I, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden, 1879), pp. 220, 322, transl. William M. Brinner in *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. 2 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 18, 108.

260 Brinner, trans., *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 2, p. 18, notes: "Thus yielding 72, the supposed number of languages spoken in the world."

261 Ibid., p. 108.

262 Ibid., p. 128.

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264 M. J. Kister, "Adam: A Study of Some Legends of Tafsir and Hadith Literature," in J. L. Kraemer, ed., *Israel Oriental Studies*, vol. 13 (Brill, 1993), pp. 118–19. Kister gives the following reference: "Anonymous, Siyar al-anbiyd', MS Br. Mus. Or. 1510, fol. 19b."

265 Ibid., pp. 140–41. Kister gives the following references: "Abū Ḥayyān, op. cit., I, 145–146; and comp. al-Faḍl al-Ṭabarī, *Mağma' al-Bayān fī tafsīr al-qur'ān*, Beirut 1380/1961, I, 168–196; and see al-Mağlisī, op. cit., XI, 146. *Knowledge of language ('ilm al-luġa)* follows in importance the perception of the unity of God; God showed the angels the superiority of Adam by his knowledge of language (see al-Samarqandī, Tafsīr, MS, fol.13b.)."

266 Kister's note: "Al-Ṣāliḥī, *al-Sīra al-šāmiyya* (= Subul al-hudā wa-l-rašād), I, 364."

267 Kister's note: "Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manṯūr*, 1, 58; and see a similar report in al-Mas'ūdī's *Aḫbār al-zamān*, p. 49."

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