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Once Again, the Twin Histories of Arabic and Aramaic (with a focus on Syriac)

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Introduction

In 2003, D. Wasserstein published an article entitled 'Why did Arabic Succeed where Greek Failed? Language Change in the Near East after Muhammad', in which he investigated why Arabic penetrated society in such a short period of time much more deeply than Greek had been able to do over the course of more than a millennium.[1] A year later R. Hoyland published a rejoinder on 'the twin histories of Arabic and Aramaic' in which he reframed Wasserstein's question by adding Aramaic into the discussion: Hoyland rightly points out that Aramaic survived long *after* the rise of Islam alongside Arabic, and that in fact Arabic existed alongside Aramaic *before* the rise of Islam.[2] Thus, for Hoyland, Aramaic is an essential part of the story about language use after Islam. In this paper, I continue in Hoyland's line of inquiry by exploring Arabic before Islam and Aramaic after Islam. I, however, narrow

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[1] D. J. Wasserstein, 'Why Did Arabic Succeed where Greek Failed? Language Change in the Near East after Muḥammad', *Scripta Classica Israelica*, 22 (2003), 257–272.

[2] R. Hoyland, 'Language and Identity: The Twin Histories of Arabic and Aramaic (and: Why Did Aramaic Succeed where Greek Failed', *Scripta Classica Israelica*, 23 (2004), 183–199. Mention should also be made of the important contribution of A. Papaconstantinou, 'Why Did Coptic Fail where Aramaic Succeeded? Linguistic Developments in Egypt and the Near East After the Arab Conquest', in *Multilingualism in the Graeco-Roman Worlds*, ed. by A. Mullen and P. James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 58–76, who though dealing primarily with the equally-interesting situation of Coptic offers a number of pointed insights on Aramaic as well as on language use after the conquests more broadly.

the scope by focusing on language use among Syriac Christians.[3] The scope of Hoyland's paper is enormous covering the three millennia history of Aramaic *as well as* the equally long history of Arabic—even if the first half of Arabic's history is for the most part lost to us, though not entirely so.[4] Hoyland's interjection of Aramaic, especially approached through the *longue durée*, was, I am convinced, an important corrective to Wasserstein's discussion of language use after the rise of Islam. At the same time, however, I feel that by narrowing the scope to Syriac Christians I am able to provide a more textured account of the twin histories of Arabic and Aramaic.

The narrow scope also enables me to make an explicit argument: I argue *against* a linear progression from Syriac (or: Aramaic) to Arabic. I make this argument on the macro- and the micro-level. The first half of the paper approaches the question with a macro-view, though it is still not as broad as Hoyland's: I begin by discussing the use of Arabic among Syriac Christians *before* Islam. I then turn to the use of Syriac among Syriac Christians *after* Islam. Combined, these two sections, which form the first half of the paper, challenge on the macro-level a linear progression from Syriac to Arabic. In the second half of the paper, I narrow the scope even further to focus on language use at one particular location: the Naṣrid capital al-Ḥīrah (Syriac Ḥirtā), located on the Euphrates not far from the modern city of al-Najāf in south central Iraq. This gives us a chance to consider, on the one hand, the use of Arabic before Islam in a particular location among a specific population (especially among the ʿIbād) as well as, on the other hand, the use of Syriac in Islamic times. The latter discussion revolves around the famous translator Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq (808–873).

Arabic Before Islam

It is still too rarely acknowledged that Arabic existed prior to the rise of Islam. This is at least partly a definitional problem. Traditionally, Arabic has been narrowly defined to correspond more or less to the

[3] I use 'Syriac' here, following our practice in *GEDSH*, to refer to the cultural tradition that developed historically in the Middle East by Christians who spoke primarily—for this adverbial qualifier, see A. M. Butts, *Language Change in the Wake of Empire: Syriac in its Greco-Roman Context* (Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic 11; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016)—the *Syriac language* but that grew to encompass a number of communities from different backgrounds, cultures, and languages (*GEDSH*, ix), even if this reifies an artificial coherence and consistency that never actually obtained, as argued in S. Gross, 'A Long Overdue Farewell: The Purported Jewish Origins of Syriac Christianity', in *Jews and Syriac Christians: Intersections across the First Millennium*, ed. by A. M. Butts and S. Gross (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), ###–### (at fn. 2, though the entire essay speaks to the issue).

[4] I discuss this in the first section below. Since the publication of Hoyland's paper, there is now a history of Aramaic in H. Gzella, *Cultural History of Aramaic: From the Beginnings to the Advent of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), which is not without its problems, including in the socio-linguistic issues that concern us here. Unfortunately, no such work exists for Arabic, though one is being prepared by A. Al-Jallad tentatively entitled *The Word, the Blade, and the Pen: Three-Thousand Years of Arabic* (under contract with Princeton University Press).

Classical Arabic language that is first attested in the Qur'ān.[5] If other, earlier forms of the language were considered, they were generally called 'Old Arabic' or the like, but even then Old Arabic was basically defined in terms of the isoglosses of the later Classical Arabic, especially the definite article *al-*.[6] More recently, A. Al-Jallad has argued for a more-expansive definition of Arabic that includes both the traditional category of (Old) Arabic and a number of other varieties, such as Safaitic, Hismaic, and Nabataean Arabic.[7] With this broader definition, Arabic is abundantly attested in the pre-Islamic period, especially in the Safaitic and Hismaic inscriptions, which combined number more than fifty thousand.[8]

Nevertheless, even if one wishes to maintain a narrower definition, the traditional (Old) Arabic still existed prior to Islam; it is just that we have little direct evidence for it, since it was only *exceptionally*

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[5] In fact, the Qur'ān as transmitted to us attests at least two forms of Arabic, one in the consonantal text and another in the vocalization tradition(s). The classic statement is Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns* (2nd, enlarged ed. by F. Schwally, G. Bergsträsser, and O. Pretzl; Leipzig, T. Weicher, 1909–1938), vol. 3, 1–115 (an English translation by W. H. Behn is now available as *The History of the Qur'ān* [Leiden: Brill, 2013]). An important series of articles was later published by W. Diem: 'Untersuchungen zur frühen Geschichte der arabischen Orthographie. I. Die Schreibung der Vokale', *Orientalia*, 48 (1979), 207–257; 'Untersuchungen zur frühen Geschichte der arabischen Orthographie. II. Die Schreibung der Konsonanten', *Orientalia*, 49 (1980), 67–106; 'Untersuchungen zur frühen Geschichte der arabischen Orthographie. III. Endungen und Endschreibungen', *Orientalia*, 50 (1981), 332–383; 'Untersuchungen zur frühen Geschichte der arabischen Orthographie. IV. Die Schreibung der zusammenhängenden Rede. Zusammenfassung', *Orientalia*, 52 (1983), 357–404. More recently, M. Van Putten has published several insightful articles on the consonantal text: 'The Development of the Triphthongs in Quranic and Classical Arabic', *Arabian Epigraphic Notes*, 3 (2017), 47–74; 'The Feminine Ending *-at* as a Diptote in the Qur'ānic Consonantal Text and its Implications for Proto-Arabic and Proto-Semitic', *Arabica*, 64 (2017), 695–705; 'Case in the Qur'ānic Consonantal Text', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 108 (2018), 143–179; 'Hamzah in the Quranic Consonantal Text', *Orientalia*, 87 (2018), 93–120; 'Inferring the Phonetics of Quranic Arabic from the Quranic Consonantal Text', *International Journal of Arabic Linguistics* 5 (2019), 1–19.

[6] See, for example, M. C. A. Macdonald, 'Old Arabic (Epigraphic)', in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, ed. by Kees Versteegh (Leiden: Brill, 2005–2009), vol. 3, 464–477, as well as earlier idem, 'Reflections on the Linguistic Map of Pre-Islamic Arabia', *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, 11 (2000), 28–79.

[7] See especially A. Al-Jallad, 'The Earliest Stages of Arabic and its Linguistic Classification', in *Routledge Handbook of Arabic Linguistics*, ed. by E. Benmaoun and R. Bassiouney (London: Routledge, 2018), 315–331 and A. Al-Jallad, 'What is Ancient North Arabian?', in *Re-Engaging Comparative Semitic and Arabic Studies*, ed. by D. Birnstiel and N. Pat-El (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018), 1–45.

[8] For Safaitic, see A. Al-Jallad, *An Outline of the Grammar of Safaitic Inscriptions* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). Al-Jallad is currently preparing a grammar of the Hismaic inscriptions.

written in the pre-Islamic period.[9] There is, however, some attestation. Already in cuneiform inscriptions from the first millennium BCE, we find a number of mentions of Arabs as well as the occasional Arabic word, especially personal names.[10] The first clear attestation of an Arabic word comes from an inscription of the neo-Assyrian ruler Shalmaneser III (853 BCE), where one 'Gindibu the Arab' (^{m}*Gi-in-di-bu-u* ^{kur}*Ar-ba-a-a*) is mentioned along with a number of other rulers including Adad-Idri and Ahab the Israelite (1 Kings 16–20), which is the first mention of an Israelite king outside of the Bible.[11] The name Gindibu can be compared with Arabic names such as Jundub, Jundab, and Jindab from the classical period.[12] Outside of personal names, Arabic words are extremely rare, if not nonexistent, in cuneiform sources.[13] This should not, however, distract from the point that there was an Arabic language (better: Arabic languages) already in the early first millennium BCE. It is not only in cuneiform sources that we find the Arabic language. To give another example: Writing in the fifth century BCE, Herodotus mentions that the 'Arabs' worship a goddess of the sky named Ἀλιλάτ (*Histories*, I.131; III.8), which is likely the Arabic word *al-'ilat* 'the goddess'.[14] If we move slightly later in time, Nabataean Aramaic texts contain numerous Arabic words likely reflecting the fact that the authors of these inscriptions spoke Arabic but wrote Aramaic since it was the *lingua franca* of the area.[15] These are only

[9] For a solid even if now slightly outdated overview, see MacDonald, 'Old Arabic (Epigraphic)'.

[10] In general, see J. Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (London: Routledge, 2003), 119–211 as well as earlier I. Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs: Nomads on the Borders of the Fertile Crescent 9th–5th Centuries B.C.* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press; Leiden: Brill, 1982).

[11] The inscription is edited in A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC II* (*858–745 BC*) (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods 3; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 23. For discussion, see Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs*, 21, 75 and especially Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity*, 124–128.

[12] See E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863–1893), 388.

[13] For one of the better potential examples, see A. Livingstone, 'An Early Attestation of the Arabic Definite Article', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 42 (1997), 259–261, but with the comments in A. Sima, *Tiere, Pflanzen, Steine und Metalle in den altsüdarabischen Inschriften: Eine lexikalische und realienkundliche Untersuchung* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), 126–127; A. Militarev and L. Kogan, *Semitic Etymological Dictionary*, Vol. 2. *Animal Names* (AOAT 278/2; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2005), 212–213 (no. 161); J. Hämeen-Anttila, 'The Camels of Tiglath-Pileser III and the Arabic Definite Article', in *Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars: Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola*, ed. by M. Luukko, S. Svärd, and R. Mattila (Studia Orientalia 106; Helsinki: Finish Oriental Society, 2009), 99–101.

[14] This interpretation is not, however, universal; see J. Hämeen-Anttila and R. Rollinger, 'Herodot und die arabische Göttin "Alilat"', *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions*, 1 (2002), 84–99.

[15] See A. M. Butts, 'North Arabian Features in the Nabataean Aramaic Inscriptions from Madā'in Ṣāliḥ: A Contact-Linguistic Analysis', in *Near Eastern and Arabian Essays: Studies in Honour of John F. Healey*, ed. by R. Smith (Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement Series; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 45–65, with additional literature cited there.

three of the many examples of the Arabic language in indirect transmission (*Nebenuberlieferung*) prior to Islam.

It is not until the Common Era—or perhaps a little earlier—that we first have continuous texts written in a variety of Arabic that is not too different from that which would eventually develop into Classical Arabic.[16] I mention only one here: the famous Namārah inscription (see Fig. 1).[17] This inscription was discovered in 1901 in the desert of southern Syria near Namārah, and it is now housed in the Musée du Louvre (no. Antiquités Orientales 4083). The inscription contains five lines of text describing the deeds, as an abbreviated *res gestae*, of one Mara' (traditionally: Imru') al-Qays, son of 'Amr, self-styled king of all the Arabs. The text is written in the Nabataean Aramaic script, but the language is not too distant from what we now know as Classical Arabic., Consider, for instance, the following sentence that occurs almost at the end of the inscription: *flm yblġ mlk mblġh* 'No king has reached his rank' (ln. 4). This might as well be Classical Arabic![18] At the same time, however, some features, especially the pronoun *ty* 'this' and the preposition *'kdy* 'after', depart from Classical Arabic.[19] The Namārah inscription is dated to the year 223, presumably according to the era of the Roman Province of Arabia, which corresponds to 328 CE. Thus, we have here with the Namārah inscription a case of an Arabic language, written in Nabataean script, before the rise of Islam.

[16] For inventories, none of which is the last word on the matter, see Macdonald, 'Reflections on the Linguistic Map of Pre-Islamic Arabia', 48–57, 61; idem, 'Old Arabic (Epigraphic)', 467–472 (slightly reduced from the previous inventory); A. Al-Jallad, 'On the Genetic Background of the Rbbl bn Hf'm Grave Inscription at Qaryat al-Fāw', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 77 (2014), 445–465 (445–446).

[17] The definitive edition is Y. Calvet and C. Robin, *Arabie heureuse, Arabie déserte. Les antiquités arabiques du Musée du Louvre* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1997), 265–269, where many references to the secondary literature can be found, of which, see especially A. F. L. Beeston, 'Nemara and Faw', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 42 (1979), 1–6 (2–6) and J. A. Bellamy, 'A New Reading of the Namārah Inscription', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 105 (1985), 31–48.

[18] Note especially the negation of the past tense with *lam* and the short prefix-conjugation: This is one of the isoglosses that Al-Jallad ('What is Ancient North Arabian?', 17) uses to argue for the unity of the traditional (Old) Arabic and Safaitic (and Hismaic).

[19] On the latter, see A. Al-Jallad, 'The particle *'kdy* in the Namārah inscription, its Arabic, and yet another interpretation of line 4', forthcoming.

Fig 1. Namārah inscription © Musée du Louvre, dist. RMN-GP / Pierre et Maurice Chuzeville.

If we move into the Syriac milieu, evidence for the Arabic language becomes sparser but not non-existent. Most of the evidence is related to the broader topic of the Arabs in Syriac literature.[20] We of course need to be extremely careful here: The category of Arabs, whether in antiquity or after, is a slippery one.[21] In addition, Arabs and Arabic language have never been coterminous; rather, Arabic has been used outside of Arabs, and there have been Arabs who did not speak Arabic. With these caveats in mind, it is worth looking briefly at Arabs and Syriac Christians.

Arabs were present from the very beginning of Syriac Christianity. Edessa, the cradle of Syriac Christianity, was ruled by the so-called Abgarid dynasty.[22] According to the much later *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (late eighth-century), the Abgarid dynasty began in the second century BCE around the time of the disintegration of the Seleucid Empire.[23] It lasted up until the middle of the third century, when Edessa became a Roman *colonia*.[24] A majority of the kings over this period bear patently Arabic names,

[20] The classic study is J. B. Segal, 'Arabs in Syriac Literature before the Rise of Islam', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 4 (1984), 89–123.

[21] Several relevant books have recently appeared, including G. Fisher (ed.), *Arabs and Empires before Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); P. Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); and T. Mackintosh-Smith, *Arabs: A 3,000-Year History of Peoples, Tribes and Empires* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), the first of which is the most reliable.

[22] See T. S. Wardle, 'Abgarids of Edessa', in *GEDSH*, 5–7, as well as, with more detail, F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.–A.D. 337* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 457–481 and S. K. Ross, *Roman Edessa: Politics and Culture on the Eastern Fringes of the Roman Empire, 114–242 C.E.* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[23] Edited in J.-B. Chabot, *Incerti auctoris Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum* (CSCO 91; Paris: Typographeo Reipublicae, 1927), vol. 1, 50–52; English translation in A. Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn. Parts I and II, From the Creation to the Year 506/7 AD* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2017), 98–101.

[24] From the Old Syriac documents, it can be surmised that the transition to Roman *colonia* was not linear: P. Dura 28 shows that the Abgarid dynasty must have come to an end in 212/213 when the city became a Roman *colonia*. On the basis of P. Euph. 19, which states that 28 Dec. 240 is the 2nd year of king Abgar, it can be established that the Abgarid dynasty was restored in 239 (or late 238) under Abgar

including ʿAbdu, Wā'il, Sahru, as well as the often reoccurring Abgar and Maʿnu.[25] It is within the time frame of the Abgarid dynasty that Christians first appear in Edessa and the surrounding area of Osrhoene. The earliest Christian in Edessa whom we know by name is Bardaiṣan (154–222), who Julius Africanus (*Kestoi* I.20) informs us was active in the court of Abgar VIII (177–212).[26] Thus, from the very beginning of Christianity in Edessa, there was an Arab presence.

Arabs continue to surface in Syriac literature throughout Late Antiquity. To give just one of many potential examples, the *Vita* of Rabbula of Edessa (d. 435/436) relays a brief story about the protagonist's encounter with a band of Arabs (*gaysā d-ṭayyāyē*). Rabbula withdraws to the desert, in the model of Saint Antony, and the story continues:

> 'As he stood in prayer, so as not to break off his conversation with God, he suddenly saw a band of Arabs approaching. He was glad, for they thought that the time for his coronation had already arrived. They, however, took him to be a dying man living in a barren hole, and they despised him. They left him alone, took only his food and his garments, and departed. He also praised his Lord for the following: He was amazed by the fact that a man who was coming as a kindness to bring him bread for his need met them, and they did not harm him.'[27]

This of course does not tell us much: At the very least, however, we have a hagiographic author writing in probably the mid fifth century who includes a group of marauding Arabs attacking a Christian ascetic. It is hard to imagine that such a story would have much currency with the fifth-century audience of the text if 'bands of Arabs' were unknown in Edessa at this time.

X, son of Maʿnu. Finally, it seems that Edessa must have reverted to a *colonia* by 242 on the basis of P. Euph. 20, which gives 1 Sept. 242 as year 30 of the *colonia*. For an overview of the Old Syriac documents, including publication information, see A. M. Butts, 'Old Syriac', in *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. by D. G. Hunter, P. J. J. van Geest, and B. J. L. Peerbolte (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming). John Healey and I are currently in the process of re-editing the Old Syriac documents (to be published with Oxford University Press). For the broader political situation, see Ross, *Roman Edessa*.

[25] It is interesting to note that several of these names are written with a final *waw*, paralleling a phenomenon found with (Arabic) personal names in Nabatean inscriptions. See the recent discussion in A. Al-Jallad, 'One *wāw* to Rule Them All: The Origins and Fate of Wawation in Arabic', in *Scripts and Scriptures*, ed. by F. Donner and R. Hasselbach (Chicago: Oriental Institute, forthcoming).

[26] For Bardaiṣan, see S. P. Brock, 'Bardaiṣan', in *GEDSH*, 56–57, with additional bibliography. For the witness of Julius Africanus, see the recent re-edition with English translation in M. Wallraff, C. Scardino, L. Mecella, C. Guignard, and W. Adler, *Iulius Africanus. Cesti. The Extant Fragments* (GCS nf 18; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 100–103.

[27] Edited in J. J. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi Edesseni Balaei aliorumque Opera selecta* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1865), 169. English translation in R. Doran, *Stewards of the Poor. The Man of God, Rabbula, and Hiba in Fifth-Century Edessa* (CSS 208; Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2006), 74. A more recent Syriac edition with English translation is available in R. R. Phenix, Jr., and C. B. Horn, *The Rabbula Corpus* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 24–25.

Many of the 'Arabs' mentioned in Syriac literature are not Christian, but this is not exclusively the case. I want to look at one example briefly. The hagiographic *History of the 'Slave of Christ'* narrates the harrowing tale, set on the mountain of Sinjar, of a young Jewish child, Asher, who after converting to Christianity and taking the name ʿAḇdā da-Mšiḥā ('Slave of Christ') is martyred by his father Levi in a scene reminiscent of Abraham's offering of Isaac in Genesis 22.[28] After the boy is killed, his body is hastily covered with dirt by the Christian children who converted him. Then—and this is important—a caravan of merchants passes on the road traveling from east back home to the west. As they travel on this road, they see rays shining from the make-shift burial site. They approach, see the body of the child, recognize him as a martyr, and take the body home with them placing it in a shrine. Interestingly, these merchants are described as follows in the text: 'They were Christians from the Arab peoples who are in the West' (17).[29] What's more, when they eventually discover the name of the martyr, they place a plaque above his sanctuary that is said to read: 'This is the place of the coronation of the martyr of Christ ʿAbd al-Mašīḥ' (21).[30] Outside of the opening and closing headings, which can obviously be secondary, this is the only place in the Syriac text that the name of the martyr is given in Arabic, even if it is slightly Syriacized with *šin* instead of the Arabic *sīn*. So, here, we have Arab Christians using Arabic language. Or, at the very least, that is what the text is presenting. This becomes more complicated when we consider the date of the text: The text is set in the year 390 (1). It was, however, likely written at a later date. A *terminus ante quem* can be established at around 850, since one of the recensions of the Armenian translation is dated to 873 (= 322 of the Armenian era).[31] How much earlier the text could have been written is unclear. In our recent edition, Gross and I propose that the text was probably written after 650, but it should be stressed that the arguments are not conclusive, even if we think it likely.[32] Regardless, even if the text is written in the Islamic period, the author has no problem in writing about the imagined presence of Christian Arabs who speak Arabic as early as the fourth century. This could of course be gross anachronism. But, given the other evidence for Arabs across Syria and Mesopotamia throughout Late Antiquity, I think that this story could reflect the presence of Christian Arabs who speak Arabic in this place and time, even if this particular instance is imagined by a later author.

Before moving to the next section of this paper, which turns to the use of Syriac after Islam, I want to mention another potential piece of evidence for the use of Arabic in the milieu of Syriac Christians—and perhaps even *by* Syriac Christians—prior to Islam, even if this takes us beyond the homeland of Syriac Christianity. Relatively recently, sixteen short inscriptions from the environs of Ḥimā in the

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[28] Critically edited with an English translation in A. M. Butts and S. Gross, *The History of the 'Slave of Christ': From Jewish Child to Christian Martyr* (Persian Martyr Acts in Syriac: Text and Translation 6; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2016).

[29] Butts and Gross, *The History of the 'Slave of Christ'*, 136–139.

[30] Butts and Gross, *The History of the 'Slave of Christ'*, 148–149.

[31] See already G. Garitte, "La passion géorgienne de saint ʿAbd al-Masīh," *Le Muséon*, 79 (1966), 187–237 (188 with fn. 6).

[32] For the discussion, see Butts and Gross, *The History of the 'Slave of Christ'*, 34–36.

southern part of the Arabian Peninsula have been published.[33] As the editors note, the inscriptions form an assemblage likely written around the same time by the same group of people.[34] This is important since one of the inscriptions (Ḥimà-Sud PalAr 1; see figure 2) is dated to the month of *burak* in the year 364, presumably according to the era of the Roman Province of Arabia (more on this shortly), which corresponds to February-March 470 CE.[35] Thus, we can safely assume that all sixteen inscriptions were written around the same time.[36] The inscriptions are all marked with a cross and so present themselves as Christian. Twelve of the inscriptions are written in an early form of the Arabic script, and the remaining four are in the Old South Arabian monumental script (*musnad*). The inscriptions consist mostly of personal names, including several ultimately from the Hebrew Bible, such as Isaac (*ʾsḥq*), Moses (*mwsy*), and Elijah (*ʾly*).[37] The few words that are not personal names present an intriguing picture of the language of the inscriptions. The definite article *al-* is employed several times, including in the word *ʾl-ʾlh* 'God' (Ḥimà-Sud PalAr 8; see figure 3). This strongly suggests that the inscriptions are in the Arabic language. Nevertheless, a few words cannot be Arabic but instead are Aramaic: *yrḥ* 'month', *št* 'year', and *br* 'son'. The last word occurs exclusively in personal names and so is not diagnostic. The former two present more complications, but I tentatively propose that they are to be understood as Aramaic ideograms in an otherwise Arabic text.[38] Thus, these inscriptions are, I suggest, written in the Arabic language but influenced by a broader Aramaic orthographic/scribal tradition. If we bear in mind that these inscriptions are Christian, then Aramaic here may well mean more specifically Syriac: After all, Syriac is a dialect of Aramaic. In the context of the present article, I wonder

[33] C. Robin, ʿA. I. al-Ghabbān, and S. F. al-Saʿīd, 'Inscriptions antiques de la région de Najrān (arabie séoudite méridionale): Nouveaux jalons pour l'histoire de l'écriture, de la langue et du calendrier arabes', *CRAIBL*, 2014, 1033–1128. My references to these inscriptions follow the sigla established in this article.

[34] Robin, al-Ghabbān, and al-Saʿīd, 'Inscriptions antiques de la région de Najrān (arabie séoudite méridionale)', 1039.

[35] Robin, al-Ghabbān, and al-Saʿīd, 'Inscriptions antiques de la région de Najrān (arabie séoudite méridionale)', 1091–1092.

[36] So already Robin, al-Ghabbān, and al-Saʿīd, 'Inscriptions antiques de la région de Najrān (arabie séoudite méridionale)', 1044.

[37] Though these names could also be understood as Jewish, the ubiquitous presence of the cross prompt the interpretation as Christian.

[38] For a similar argument involving a slightly earlier group of inscriptions, see M. C. A. Macdonald, 'Ancient Arabia and the Written Word', in *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language*, ed. by M. C. A. Macdonald (Supplement to the Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies 40; Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010), 5–28 (20); L. Nehmé, 'Aramaic or Arabic? The Nabataeo-Arabic Script and the Language of the Inscriptions Written in this Script', in *Arabic in Context. Celebrating 400 years of Arabic at Leiden University*, ed. by A. Al-Jallad (Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics 89; Leiden, Brill, 2017), 75-98 (92–93).

if we are to imagine that these inscriptions were written in Arabic by Christians who belonged to the broader Syriac Christian tradition.

Fig 2. Ḥimà-Sud PalAr 1. Image courtesy of La Mission archéologique franco-séoudienne de Najrān (MAFSN), directed by C. Robin, ʿA. I. al-Ghabbān, and S. F. al-Saʿīd.

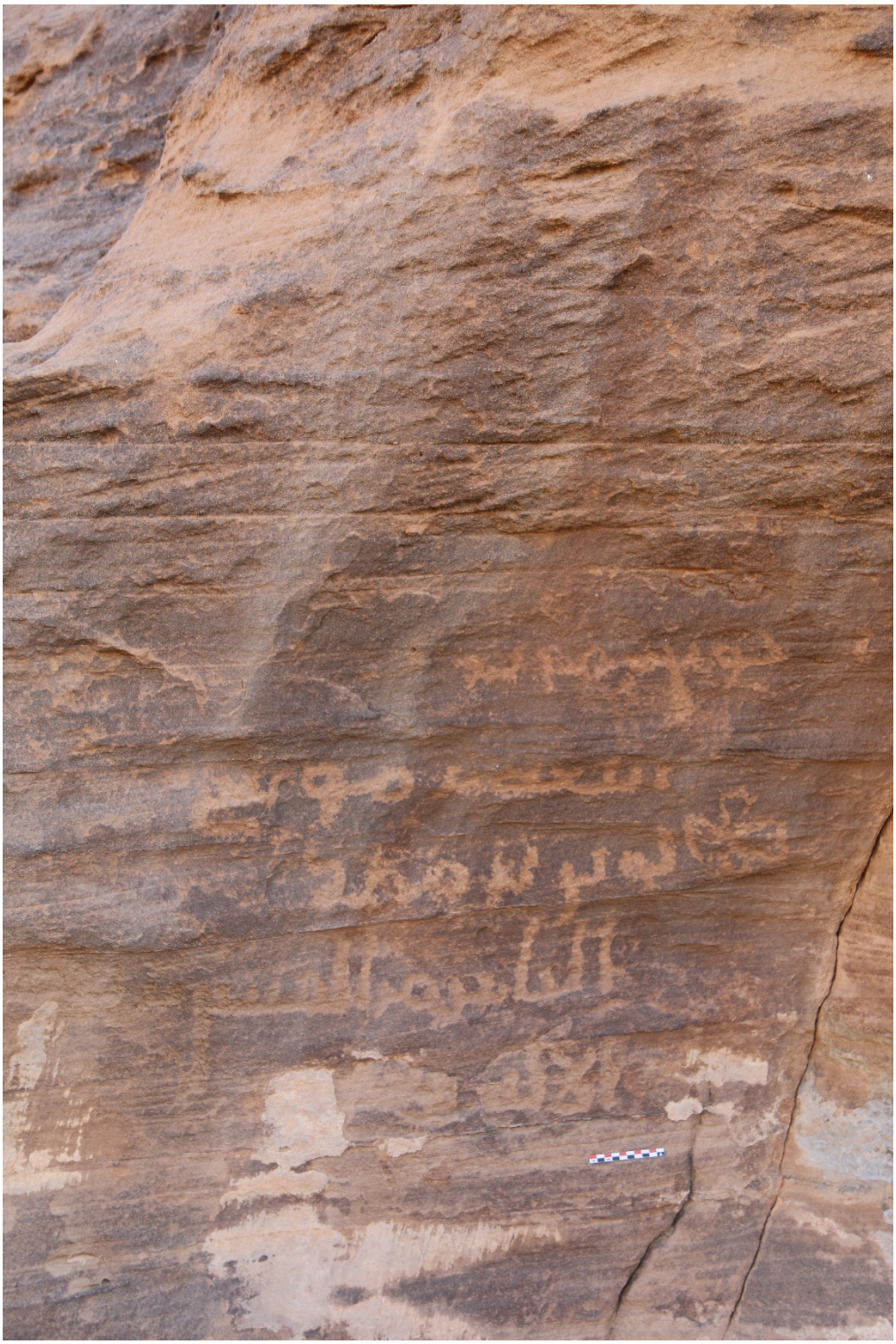

Fig 3. Ḥimà-Sud PalAr 8. Image courtesy of La Mission archéologique franco-séoudienne de Najrān (MAFSN), directed by C. Robin, ʿA. I. al-Ghabbān, and S. F. al-Saʿīd.

Ḥimā, the find-spot of these inscriptions, is only about 100 km north north-east of Najrān. As is well-known, Najrān was home to a (Syriac) Christian community (better: communities) up to the time of ʿUmar (r. 634–644) when the Christian population was resettled to Iraq.[39] This Christian population became well known throughout the broader Byzantine commonwealth due to its persecution by Joseph, the Jewish ruler of Ḥimyar.[40] Important for the discussion here is that the Christian communities in Najrān seem to have belonged to the Syriac tradition. In his *Letter on the Ḥimyarite Martyrs*, which is the earliest hagiographic account of the Najrān persecution, the Syriac miaphysite leader Simeon of Beth Arsham presents the Christians of Najrān as co-religionists.[41] Similarly, Jacob of Serugh, the important Syriac miaphysite poet, wrote a letter to the Christians in Ḥimyar to console them in the face of (presumably an earlier) persecution.[42] This and other evidence strongly suggest that the Christians of Najrān belong to the Syriac tradition, and it raises—but ultimately does not answer—the question of whether the Syriac Christians in Najrān were in some way connected with the Christians writing the Arabic inscriptions in Ḥimā, who I above suggested on other grounds belonged to the Syriac tradition.

Finally, I should mention that several Christian inscriptions in Arabic similar to those from Ḥimā have been discovered further north in the Arabian Peninsula and into Jordan. Most relevant is a Christian inscription dated to 548/549 CE from Dūmat al-Jandal in the al-Jawf region (DaJ144Par1).[43] The script of this inscription is closely similar to that of the Ḥimā inscriptions as is the language, which

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[39] In general, see L. Van Rompay, 'Nagran', in *GEDSH*, 302–303, with additional references. I say 'communities' because there seems to have been both dyophysites and mipahysites in Najrān. See C. J. Robin, 'Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and *Arabia Deserta* in Late Antiquity', in *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, ed. Fisher, 127–171 (148).

[40] A conventional historical narrative of the events is available in N. Nebes, 'The Martyrs of Najrān and End of the Ḥimyar: On the Political History of South Arabia in the Early Sixth Century', in *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations Into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, ed. by A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai, and M. Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 27–59. For more detail, especially on the various sources, see J. Beaucamp, F. Briquel-Chatonnet, and C. J. Robin, *Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux Ve et VIe siècles* (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2010). For Joseph in particular, see C. Robin, 'Joseph, dernier roi de Ḥimayr (de 522 à 525, ou une des années suivantes)', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 34 (2008), 1–124.

[41] The letter is edited in I. Guidi, 'La lettera di Simeone vescovo di Bêth-Arśâm sopra i martiri omeriti', *Atti della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Serie Terza: Memorie della Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, 7 (1881), 471–515; an English translation is available in A. Jeffery, 'Christianity in South Arabia', *The Muslim World*, 36 (1946), 204–206.

[42] Edited in G. Olinder, *Iacobi Sarugensis Epistulae quotquot supersunt* (CSCO 110; Leuven: Peeters, 1937), 87–102. For discussion, see P. M. Forness, *Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 115–131.

[43] L. Nehmé, 'New dated Inscriptions (Nabataean and pre-Islamic Arabic) from a Site near al-Jawf, Ancient Dūmah, Saudi Arabia', *Arabian Epigraphic Notes*, 3 (2017), 121–164.

is almost certainly Arabic (see *ʾl-ʾlh* 'God') but which includes the Aramaic *yrḥ* 'month' just like the Ḥimā inscriptions.[44] Mention should also be made of a recently published Christian inscription in Arabic discovered near Qaṣr Burquʿ in northeastern Jordan that mentions 'Yazīd the king', whom the editors tentatively identify as Yazīd I (r. 646–683), which if correct would bring us into the Islamic period.[45] Given these similar inscriptions from further north, it is interesting to note that the one dated inscription among the Ḥimā cache (Ḥimà-Sud PalAr 1) seems to be dated according to the era of the Roman Province of Arabia, which might suggest that the people responsible for the inscription also come from further north.[46] Regardless, setting aside the Yazīd inscription due to its uncertain dating, we have with the inscriptions from Ḥimā and the inscription of Dūmah clear evidence for the use of Arabic in the pre-Islamic period among Christians. Given what we know about the presence of Syriac Christians in the Arabian Peninsula at this time, these Arabic-using Christians were almost certainly in contact with Christians belonging to the Syriac tradition, and they may have even belonged to this tradition itself. These inscriptions thus provide yet another intersection between Arabic language and Syriac Christians in the pre-Islamic period.

Syriac After Islam

The earliest surviving Arabic literature written by Syriac Christians stems from the eighth century, and this literature becomes more common in the ninth century.[47] One of the earliest such authors about

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[44] As already noted by Nehmé in the *editio princeps* ('New dated Inscriptions [Nabataean and pre-Islamic Arabic] from a Site near al-Jawf, ancient Dūmah, Saudi Arabia', 128–129).

[45] Y. al-Shdaifat, A. Al-Jallad, Z. al-Salameen, and R. Harahsheh, 'An early Christian Arabic Graffito Mentioning "Yazīd the King"', *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, 28 (2017), 315–324.

[46] As suggested to me by Ahmad Al-Jallad (personal communication).

[47] In general, see S. H. Griffith, 'From Aramaic to Arabic: The Languages of the Monasteries of Palestine in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 51 (1997), 11–31, esp. 24–30. A few words need to be said at this point about the controversial topic of Christian literature in Arabic, especially translations of the Bible, prior to Islam. In a series of articles in the early 1930s, A. Baumstark argued that the Bible was translated into Arabic by Christians prior to Islam (see especially his 'Das Problem eines vor-islamischen christlich-kirchlichen Schrifttums in arabischer Sprache', *Islamica*, 4 [1929–1931], 562–575). While some scholars dissented early on, such as G. Graf (*Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* [Studi e testi 118, 133, 146, 147, 172; Vatican: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1944–1952], vol. 1, 27–52), others followed Baumstark in arguing for the existence of a pre-Islamic Arabic Bible, including perhaps most prominently I. Shahîd (*Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* [Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1984], 435–443; *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* [Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1989], 422–429, 449–450; *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* [Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995–2009], vol. 2, part 2, 295). The entire question has recently been reviewed by S. H. Griffith (*The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the People of the Book in the Language of Islam* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013], 41–53, which builds upon his

whom we know is Theodore Abū Qurrah, who seems to have been born in Edessa in 750, who eventually became the Melkite bishop of Ḥarran, and who finally died sometime after 829.[48] According to his own testimony, Abū Qurrah wrote in Syriac, but none of his Syriac writings survive.[49] We do, however, have an impressive corpus of texts in both Arabic and Greek (as well as Georgian translations).[50] From just slightly later, there are surviving Arabic texts written by other Syriac Christians, such as the Syriac Orthodox author Ḥabīb b. Khidma Abū Rā'iṭah (d. ca. 851) and the Church of the East author ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī (f. ca. 850).[51] This triumvirate establishes the use of Arabic among Syriac Christians by the first half of the ninth century.[52]

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earlier 'The Gospel in Arabic: An Inquiry into its Appearance in the First Abbasid Century', *Oriens Christianus*, 69 [1985], 126–167), who judiciously concludes that 'no conclusive documentary or clear textual evidence of a pre-Islamic, written Bible in Arabic translation has yet come to light' (*The Bible in Arabic*, 42–43).

[48] In general, see A. M. Butts, 'Theodoros Abū Qurrah', in *GEDSH*, 403–405; Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 2, 7–26; S. H. Griffith, 'Reflections on the Biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah', *Parole de l'Orient* 18 (1993), 143–70; idem, *Theodore Abū Qurrah. The Intellectual Profile of an Arab Christian Writer of the First Abbasid Century* (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 1995); J. C. Lamoreaux, 'The Biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah Revisited', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 56 (2002), 25–40; idem, 'Theodore Abū Qurra', in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographic History*, Vol. 1. (*600–900*), ed. by D. Thomas and B. Roggema, with J. P. Monferrer Sala, J. Pahlitzsch, M. Swanson, H. Teule, and J. Tolan (History of Christian-Muslim Relations 11; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 439–91; Kh. Samir (trans. J. P. Monferrer-Sala), *Abū Qurrah. Vida, bibliografía y obras* (Córdoba: Universidad de Córdoba, 2005).

[49] Arabic edited in C. Bacha, *Mayāmir Thāwudūrus Abī Qurra usquf Ḥarrān* (1904), 60–61; English translation in J. C. Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abū Qurrah* (Library of the Christian East 1; Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 119.

[50] See the references in fn. 48 above.

[51] For the former, see S. H. Griffith, 'Habīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'iṭah, A Christian Mutakallim of the First Abbasid Century', *Oriens Christianus*, 64 (1980), 161–201; S. T. Keating, *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā'iṭah* (History of Christian-Muslim Relations 4; Leiden: Brill, 2006); eadem, 'Abū Rā'iṭa l-Takrītī', in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographic History*, Vol. 1. (*600–900*), ed. by Thomas, Roggema, et al., 567–581. For the latter, see M. Hayek, *ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī. Apologie et controverses* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1977); idem, "Ammār al-Baṣrī. La première Somme de théologie chrétienne en langue arabe, ou deux apologies du christianisme', *Islamochristiana*, 2 (1976) 69–133; M. Beaumont, "Ammār al-Baṣrī', in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographic History*, Vol. 1. (*600–900*), ed. by Thomas, Roggema, et al., 604–610.

[52] It is worth noting that this occurred slightly later in Egypt: Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. after 987) was among the first Christians in Egypt to choose to write in Arabic instead of Coptic. In general, see S. J. Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice. Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 201–236; Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 2, 300–318; M. W. Swanson, 'Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ', in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A*

This new movement of Syriac Christians writing Arabic notwithstanding, Syriac continued to be written. In fact, the late eighth through the ninth centuries witness an impressive literary output in Syriac across a variety of genres. To give just a few example: The Syriac Orthodox author Mushe bar Kipho (d. 903) produced a vast *oeuvre*, with his surviving writings covering biblical exegesis, theology, and liturgy, not to mention lost works on history, heresiology, and philosophy.[53] Another Syriac Orthodox author at this time is Antony of Tagrit.[54] He wrote a number of smaller treatises addressing topics such as divine providence, the sacrament of chrism, and grace as well as encomia and liturgical prayers.[55] Antony, however, is best known for his *magnum opus*, entitled 'On the Knowledge of Rhetoric', which is the only treatise on rhetoric to survive in Syriac.[56] Among the Church of the East I will point out Catholicos Timothy I (727/8–823).[57] Timothy had interests in church legislation and canon law, authoring a treatise on the topic as well as possibly playing a role in the assembly of the so-

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Bibliographic History, *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographic History*, Vol. 2 (*900–1050*), ed. D. Thomas and A. Mallett, with J. P. Monferrer Sala, J. Pahlitzsch, M. Swanson, H. Teule, and J. Tolan (History of Christian-Muslim Relations 14; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 491–509. Another interesting comparison is the adoption of Arabic by Jews: Saadya Gaon (882–942) has traditionally—though not universally (see, e.g., R. Drory, *Models and Contacts: Arabic Literature and its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture* [Leiden: Brill, 2000], 126–232)—been celebrated as the 'founder' of Judaeo-Arabic literature, at least among the Geonim and their followers. Recent research by J. Blau and S. Hopkins has, however, shown that Arabic translations of the Bible and of certain Geonic works predate Saadya by a century or so (*Early Judaeo-Arabic in Phonetic Spelling: Texts from the End of the First Millennium* [Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi, 2017] [in Hebrew]). For a model for the spread of Arabic among Jews, see Haggai ben Shammai, 'Observations on the Beginnings of Judeo-Arabic Civilization', in *Beyond Religious Borders: Interaction and Intellectual Exchange in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed. By D. M. Freidenreich and M. Goldstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 13–29.

[53] In general, see J. Reller, *Mose bar Kepha und seine Paulinenauslegung* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994), with extensive introduction.

[54] See J. W. Watt, 'Anṭun of Tagrit', in *GEDSH*, 23, with further references.

[55] These are preserved in two manuscripts, British Library Library, Add. 14726 and Add. 17208, but all remain unedited.

[56] 'On the Knowledge of Rhetoric' consists of five books, of which only the fifth book has been edited critically: J. W. Watt, *The Fifth Book of the Rhetoric of Antony of Tagrit* (CSCO 480–481; Leuven: Peeters, 1986). The entire text, albeit not critically edited, is available in E. Sewan d-Bet Qermez, *The Book of the Rhetoric of Antony Rhitor of Tagrit* (Stockholm: Författeres Bokmaskin, 2000). For the first book, see also P. E. Eskenasy, 'Antony of Tagrit's Rhetoric Book One' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1991).

[57] In general, see V. Berti, *Vita e studi di Timoteo I, Patriarca cristiano di Baghdad. Ricerche sull'epistolario e sulle fonti contigue* (Cahiers de Studia Iranica 41, Chrétiens en terre d'Iran 3; Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 2009).

called *Synodicon Orientale*, the most important juridical text for the Church of the East.[58] In addition, Timothy wrote more than two hundred letters, almost sixty of which survive.[59] These deal with a range of topics, from biblical studies to a dialogue with Caliph al-Mahdī (775–785).[60] I could continue with the historical writing by Theodosios of Edessa (late eighth – early ninth centuries) and Dionysios of Tel Maḥre (d. 845); the monastic writings by Thomas of Marga (ninth century) and Ishoʿdnaḥ (ninth century); the exegetical writings by the monk Severos (ninth century), Emmanuel bar Shahhare (d. 980), Theodore bar Koni (fl. 792), Ishoʿ bar Nun (d. 828), and Ishoʿdad of Merv (fl. 850), and this does not even cover the major authors, much less minor ones such as Benjamin of Edessa (first half of the ninth century), Dawid bar Pawlos (end of eighth century, perhaps into the ninth), and Loʿozar bar Sobhto (early ninth century), to name only a few. My point is clear: The late eighth through the ninth centuries witness an impressive literary output in Syriac across a variety of genres.

Around the turn of the millennium, however, we start to see a transition whereby Syriac Christians increasingly choose to write in Arabic rather than in Syriac. There are many ways to illustrate this, but I want to look at just one: the literary activity of Ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1043).[61] Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *oeuvre* includes more than forty items, all in Arabic. Among his works is his 'The Law of Christianity' (*Fiqh al-naṣrāniyyah*).[62] This is divided into two parts: The first is an Arabic abridgement of the various Syriac legal collections of the Church of the East, and the second part consists of an Arabic abridgement of

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[58] The *Synodicon Orientale* is edited (with French translation) in J. B. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale ou recueil de synodes nestoriens* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902). A German translation is available in O. Braun, *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale* (Stuttgart: Rothsche Verlagshandlung, 1900).

[59] The *Letters* are in the process of being (re-)edited by M. Heimgartner: *Timotheos I, Ostsyrischer Patriarch, Disputation mit dem Kalifen Al-Mahdi* (CSCO 631–632; Leuven: Peeters, 2011); *Die Briefe 42–58 des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos I* (CSCO 644–645; Leuven: Peeters, 2012); *Die Briefe 30–39 des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos I* (CSCO 661–662; Leuven: Peeters, 2016); *Die Briefe 40 und 41 des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos I* (CSCO 673–674; Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming).

[60] For Timothy as a biblical scholar, see B. ter Haar Romeny, 'Biblical Studies in the Church of the East: The Case of Catholicos Timothy I', in *Historica, Biblica, Theologica et Philosophica: Papers Presented at the Thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1999*, ed. by M. F. Wiles, E. Yarnold, and P. M. Parvis (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 503–510. For the dialogue with al-Mahdī, see the overview and bibliography in M. Heimgartner, 'Letter 59…', in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographic History*, Vol. 1. (*600–900*), ed. by Thomas, Roggema, et al., 522–526 as well as his *Timotheos I, Ostsyrischer Patriarch, Disputation mit dem Kalifen Al-Mahdi* cited in the previous footnote.

[61] For this author and his writings, see A. M. Butts, 'Ibn al-Ṭayyib', in *GEDSH*, 206–207; J. Faultless, 'Ibn al-Ṭayyib', in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographic History*, Vol. 2 (*900–1050*), ed. Thomas, A. Mallett, et al., 667–697; Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 1, 152–155; vol. 2, 160–77.

[62] Edited with a German translation in W. Hoenerbach and O. Spies, *Ibn at-Taiyib. Fiqh an-Nasrânîya, 'Das Recht der Christenheit'* (CSCO 161–162, 167–168; Leuven: L. Durbecq, 1956–1957).

Gabriel of Baṣra's collection of Syriac legal texts, largely overlapping with the first part.[63] Thus, 'The Law of Christianity' is an Arabic reworking of the existing Syriac juridical literature of the Church of the East. A similar phenomenon is found with Ibn al-Ṭayyib's monumental 'The Paradise of Christianity' (*Firdaws al-naṣrāniyya*). This is a commentary on the entire Bible in two parts. One part presents a running commentary on most of the Bible, and this is an Arabic abridgement of Isho'dad of Merv's commentary in Syriac.[64] The other part of Ibn al-Ṭayyib's 'The Paradise of Christianity' is a series of questions and answers on the entire Bible, which is again an Arabic abridgment but this time of Theodoros bar Koni's *Scholion*.[65] So, here, again, we see the systematic reworking of the earlier Syriac heritage as expressed in Syriac language for an Arabic-reading audience. Thus, Ibn al-Ṭayyib not only choose to write in Arabic instead of Syriac but also—and this is important—to transfer Syriac writings into Arabic. I am convinced that this is representative of a broader trend starting around the turn of the millennium in which Arabic increasingly comes to displace Syriac in the writings of Syriac Christians.

Nevertheless, despite this transition from Syriac to Arabic, Syriac continued—and, for that matter, continues—to be used among Syriac Christians. Written Syriac, for instance, witnesses what has been termed a renaissance in the thirteenth century.[66] This renaissance culminated with the polymath Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286), who wrote over forty works on a wide range of topics, including exegesis, theology,

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[63] See H. Kaufhold, 'Sources of Canon Law in the Eastern Churches', in *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500*, ed. by W. Hartmann and K. Pennington (History of Medieval Canon Law; Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 215–342 (310–311) and, with more detail, idem, *Die Rechtssammlung des Gabriel von Basra und ihr Verhältnis zu den anderen juristischen Sammelwerken der Nestorianer* (Berlin: J. Schweitzer, 1976).

[64] Only Genesis of the running commentary has been edited: J. C. J. Sanders, *Commentaire sur la Genèse* (CSCO 274–275; Leuven: Peeters, 1967). For Isho'dad of Merv as the source of this part, see J. C. J. Sanders, *Inleiding op het Genesiskommentaar van de Nestoriaan Ibn at-Taiyib* (Leiden: Brill, 1963); idem, *Commentaire sur la Genèse*, ii–iii ('la source principale'); R. W. Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation. A Study in Exegetical Tradition and Hermeneutics* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 38; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 66; P. Féghali, 'Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib et son commentaire sur la Genèse', *Parole de l'Orient*, 16 (1990–1991), 149–62; Faultless, 'Ibn al-Ṭayyib', 669, 681; A. M. Butts, 'Embellished with Gold: The Ethiopic Reception of Syriac Biblical Exegesis', *Oriens Christianus*, 97 (2013/2014), 137–159 (140–145).

[65] This part remains entirely unedited apart from a small excerpt from Genesis in A. M. Butts, 'In Search of Sources for Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *The Paradise of Christianity*: Theodore Bar Koni's *Scholion*', *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies*, 14 (2014), 3–29, where it is argued, with further references, that Bar Koni is the immediate source of the material.

[66] In general, see H. G. B. Teule, 'Renaissance, Syriac', in *GEDSH*, 350–351 as well as H. G. B. Teule and C. F. Tauwinkl (with R. B. ter Haar Romeny and J. van Ginkel) (eds.), *The Syriac Renaissance* (Eastern Christian Studies 9; Leuven: Peeters, 2010).

philosophy, history, grammar, and science, mostly in Syriac but also in Arabic.[67] A similar renaissance of Syriac is also found at this time in the Church of the East: Consider, for instance, ʿAbdishoʿ bar Brikha (d. 1318), who wrote important works on theology, canon law, liturgy, theological poetry, as well as a catalogue of Syriac literature, all in Syriac.[68] And, while Syriac literature that post-dates the thirteenth century has traditionally incited little interest in Syriac scholarship, it does still exist.[69] Consider, for instance, the poetic compositions in Syriac by two fifteenth-century authors, Isḥaq Shbadnaya of the Church of the East and Dawid Puniqoyo of the Syriac Orthodox Church.[70] For that matter, classical Syriac continues to functions today as a liturgical and literary language for Syriac Christians both in the Middle East and the worldwide diasporas.[71]

To summarize, the writing of Syriac does not end with the rise of Islam; far from it in fact! Rather, Syriac continued to flourish at least up to the turn of the millennium. At this time, we start to see Arabic displacing Syriac more and more, but Syriac never becomes moribund, and it even witnesses periods of increased use, such as the Syriac Renaissance in the thirteenth century. Thus, a linear progression from Syriac to Arabic, regardless of when one sets the time of transition, simply does not capture the story of language use among Syriac Christians after the rise of Islam.

Before moving to the second part of this paper, I want to pause and reflect on an additional complicating factor: the socio-linguistic context. There is, I am convinced, a key socio-linguistic difference between the period of Syriac that I have been discussing here, all the writings of which stem from after the rise of Islam—we might call this Post-Classical Syriac—compared with the earlier

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[67] See the extremely useful H. Takahashi, *Barhebraeus: A Bio-Bibliography* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2005).

[68] See J. Childers, "Abdishoʿ bar Brikha', in *GEDSH*, 3–4 as well as S. Rassi, 'Justifying Christianity in the Islamic Middle Ages: The Apologetic Theology of ʿAbdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā (d. 1318)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2016).

[69] See the detailed survey in R. Macuch, *Geschichte der spät- und neusyrischen Literatur* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1976).

[70] For the former, see T. A. Carlson, 'A Light from "The Dark Centuries": Isḥaq Shbadnaya's Life and Works', *Hugoye*, 14 (2011), 191–213 as well as idem, *Christianity in Fifteenth-Century Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), for the broader context. For the latter, see A. M. Butts, 'The Afflictions of Exile. A Syriac *Memrā* by David Puniqāyā', *Le Muséon*, 122 (2009), 53–80, with additional references.

[71] S. P. Brock, 'Some Observations on the Use of Classical Syriac in the Late Twentieth Century', *JSS*, 34 (1989), 363–375; G. A. Kiraz, 'Kthobonoyo Syriac. Some Observations and Remarks', *Hugoye*, 10 (2007), 129–142; E. K. Knudsen and E. Wardini, *Neologisms in Modern Literary Syriac* (Perspectives on Linguistics and Ancient Languages 10; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2018).

periods of Syriac: Post-Classical Syriac was never a primary spoken language and perhaps not a native language either.[72]

After the rise of Islam, part of the Syriac Christian community undoubtedly continued to speak a variety of Aramaic as their native language. There must, however, have been an ever-growing distance between the written and spoken forms of Aramaic. Consider, for instance, Syriac Christians who spoke Neo-Aramaic in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whether Ṭuroyo or related dialects in the Ṭur ʿAbdin region of southeast Turkey or one of the Northeastern Neo-Aramaic dialects (= NENA) in south-eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, and northwestern and western Iran.[73] Though the details will have varied by community, in each case we are dealing with a socio-linguistic situation in which (Post-)Classical Syriac functioned as a literary language, a liturgical language, and even, at times, a formal spoken language, and a Neo-Aramaic dialect served as the (primary) spoken language. Thus, we have a diglossic situation, depending on how one defines diglossia.[74] This much is uncontroversial. What's important for us here, however, is how much earlier does this situation extend back: Personally, I am convinced—and this is controversial—that this diglossic situation coves much, if not all, of the Syriac written after the rise of Islam. There is a good deal of evidence that I could elicit for this, but I will mention here only a small portion of it which involves Neo-Aramaic. Though Neo-Aramaic is generally

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[72] I introduced the term 'Post-Classical Syriac' in A. M. Butts, 'The Classical Syriac Language', in *The Syriac World*, ed. by D. King (London: Routledge, 2019), 222–242 (231), where a complimentary discussion can be found.

[73] For a helpful overview of Neo-Aramaic in the context of Syriac Christianity, see G. Khan, 'The Neo-Aramaic Dialects and their Historical Background', in *The Syriac World*, ed. by King, 266–289.

[74] In a now classic article, C. A. Ferguson defined diglossia as 'a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any section of the community for ordinary conversation' ('Diglossia', *Word* 15 [1959], 325–340). The concept of diglossia has, however, since been expanded by various scholars, perhaps most prominently J. Fishman (especially his 'Bilingualism with and without Diglossia; Diglossia with and without Bilingualism', *Journal of Social Issues*, 23 [1967], 29–38), to the point that diglossia hardly differs from (societal) bilingualism more broadly (in line with its etymology: Greek for 'two languages') or even from sociolect variation involving a single language. For histories of research, see M. Martin-Jones, 'Diglossia', in *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics*, ed. by W. J. Frawley (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), vol. 2, 435–438; M. Sebba, 'Societal Bilingualism', in *The SAGE Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, ed. by R. Wodak, B. Johnstone, and P. Kerswill (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2011), 445–459 (449–453); J. Jaspers, 'Diglossia and Beyond', in *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Society*, ed. by O. García, N. Flores, and M. Spotti (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 179–196—all with numerous additional references. In the case presently under discussion involving Aramaic, we are probably not too far from Ferguson's original definition.

considered a modern, spoken language, it is also attested in written form, the earliest examples of which go back to the sixteenth century. These consist of a body of religious poetry written in a NENA *koine* based on the dialect of Alqosh (and possibly also of Telkepe).[75] These texts witness a fully-developed Neo-Aramaic, the incipient form(s) of which must stretch back centuries earlier, given the amount of time necessary for the witnessed changes, such as the restructuring of the verbal system, to take place. What's more, the NENA dialects do not derive directly from Syriac but rather find their ancestors in different dialects of Aramaic. This all points to a diglossic situation for native-Aramaic speakers, in which their spoken varieties of Aramaic diverged more and more from Syriac, perhaps as early as the turn of the millennium or even earlier.[76]

After the rise of Islam, Aramaic would not of course have been the primary spoken language of all Syriac Christians. Rather, Arabic would have increasingly served as the primary spoken language and often the native language. Thus, some of the authors that I have mentioned in this section, such as Bar Hebraeus, also wrote in Arabic. For many others, we can imagine that Arabic served as their primary spoken language, if not native language. With this segment of the population, we are again faced with a socio-linguistic situation in which one language, Syriac, functioned as a literary language, a liturgical language, and perhaps even, at times, a formal spoken language, while another language, this time Arabic, served as the (primary) spoken language. This is further complicated by the fact that Arabic itself was diglossic at this time, as I will discuss at the end of this paper. For now, however, it seems clear enough that these multilingual, diglossic situations are incompatible with any attempt to establish a linear progression from Syriac to Arabic.

Having challenged in broad strokes a linear progression from Syriac to Arabic, I would now like to turn to a narrower case, first looking at language use in al-Ḥīrah and then even more specifically at the language use of Ḥunayn b. Isḥaq.

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[75] See the texts edited, with English translations, in A. Mengozzi, *Israel of Alqosh and Joseph of Telkepe. A Story in a Truthful Language. Religious Poems in Vernacular Syriac* (*North Iraq, 17th century*) (CSCO 589–590; Leuven: Peeters, 2002); A. Mengozzi (ed.), *Religious Poetry in Vernacular Syriac from Northern Iraq* (*17th–20th centuries*). *An Anthology* (CSCO 627–628; Leuven: Peeters, 2011).

[76] It is interesting to note that, though writing a bit later than I am discussing here, Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286) distinguishes various dialects of Aramaic: '… Aramaic/Syriac (*al-suryāniyyah*): God spoke to Adam in it, and it is divided into three languages/dialects (*luġāt*). The purest is *al-ārāmiyyah*, which is the language of the people of Edessa, Harran, and outer Syria. After it there is *al-falasṭīniyyah*, which is the language of the people of Damascus, the mountains of Lebanon, and the rest of inner Syria. The worst of these is *al-kaldāniyyah* (i.e. [?]) *al-nabaṭiyyah*, which is the language of the people of the mountains of Assyria and southern Iraq.' (ed. A. Ṣālḥānī, *Ta'rīkh mukhtaṣar al-duwal* [Beirut: Catholic Press, 1890], 18). It is tempting to see these at least partly as the precursors to Central Neo-Aramaic (Ṭuroyo, etc.), Western Neo-Aramaic (Maʿlula, etc.), and NENA, respectively. Regardless, my point here is that writing in the thirteenth century Bar Hebraeus distinguishes between the Aramaic spoken in the plain of Nineveh moving southward (which can basically only be the predecessor to NENA) from the Aramaic spoken in Edessa.

Language Use at al-Ḥīrah

The city of al-Ḥīrah (Syriac Ḥirtā) was located on the Euphrates not far from the modern city of al-Najāf in south central Iraq.[77] It was the capital of the Naṣrid dynasty (ca. 300 until 602 CE),[78] and Christians had a long presence there.[79] The earliest known bishop is one Hosha', who is listed in the acts of the so-called Synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (410).[80] The city of al-Ḥīrah would ultimately be associated with East-Syriac dyophysite Christianity, which would develop into the Church of the East.[81] A number of East Syriac catholicoi resided there, and several were also buried there, including important figures such as Dadisho' I (421–456), Aba I (540–552), and Isho'yahb I (582–695). In later Islamic times, the

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[77] In general, see G. Fisher and P. Wood, 'Writing the History of the 'Naṣrid' Dynasty at al-Ḥīra: The Pre-Islamic Perspective', *Iranian Studies*, 49 (2016), 247–290; M. J. Kister, 'Al-Ḥīra: Some Notes on its Relation with Arabia', *Arabica*, 11 (1968), 143–169; G. Rothstein, *Die Dynastie der Laḫmiden in al-Ḥîra. Ein Versuch zur arabisch-persischen Geschichte zur Zeit der Sasaniden* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1899); I. Toral-Niehoff, 'The 'Ibād of al-Ḥīra: An Arab Christian Community in Late Antique Iraq', in *The Qur'ān in Context*, ed. by Neuwirth, Sinai, and Marx, 323–48; eadem, *Al-Ḥîra: Eine arabische Kulturmetropole im spätantiken Kontext* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); eadem, 'Late Antique Iran and the Arabs: The Case of al-Hira', *Journal of Perisanate Studies*, 6 (2013), 115–126; P. Wood, 'Al-Ḥīra and its Histories', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 136 (2016), 785–799; as well as a number of contributions to Fisher (ed.), *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, including D. Genequand, 'The Archaeological Evidence for the Jafnids and the Naṣrids', 172–213 (207–212); H. Munt, with others, 'Arabic and Persian Sources for Pre-Islamic Arabia', 434–500 (454–467, 488–490); P. Wood with Geoffrey Greatrex, 'The Naṣrids and Christianity in al-Ḥīra', 172–213, 257–263.

[78] In earlier scholarship, 'Lakhmid' was often used for 'Naṣrid'. See Fisher, 'Editor's Introduction', in *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, ed. Fisher, 6–8 as well as idem, 'Kingdoms or Dynasties? Arabs, History, and Identity before Islam', *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 4 (2011), 245–267

[79] In general, see E. C. D. Hunter, 'The Christian Matrix of al-Hira', in *Les controverses des chrétiens dans l'Iran sassanide*, ed. by C. Jullien (Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 2008), 41–56; Toral-Niehoff, 'The 'Ibād of al-Ḥīra'; eadem, *Al-Ḥîra*, 88–105, 151–211; Wood, 'Al-Ḥīra and its Histories', 793–797.

[80] Syriac with French translation in Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale ou recueil de synodes nestoriens*, 36, 275; German translation in Braun, *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 35

[81] Note that there was at different points in time a miaphysite presence in al-Ḥīrah as well (Wood, 'Al-Ḥīra and its Histories', 794 with fn. 65). In addition, I should point out here that Toral-Niehoff has criticized the use of the term 'dyophysite' charging that it 'is also problematic, since it also implies a belief in two natures in Christ, which the "Dyophysitists" would deny' (Toral-Niehoff, 'The 'Ibād of al-Ḥīra', fn. 15). She maintains this position in her book published a couple of years later: 'Diophysiten ist sachlich falsch und ebenfalls polemisch' (*Al-Ḥîra*, xvi). This is simply untrue. It is not factually wrong to say that this group of Christians believes in two natures in Christ: They do. For a general discussion, see S. P. Brock, 'The "Nestorian" Church: A Lamentable Misnomer', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 78 (1996), 23–35.

Christian population of al-Ḥīrah was known as the ʿIbād, in the sense of 'slave' (*ʿabd*) of Christ—compare the name of ʿAbdā da-Mšiḥā mentioned above.[82]

Important for our purposes here is that al-Ḥīrah is widely thought to have been Arabic-speaking, even in pre-Islamic times.[83] I do not have space here to rehearse all of the evidence, but I want to look briefly at a single passage. In his *History of the Prophets and Kings*, al-Ṭabarī relates the following narrative about Khālid b. Walīd's encounter with the inhabitants of al-Ḥīrah:

> فخلا خالد بأهل كل قصر منهم دون الاخرين وبدأ باصحاب عدي وقال ويحكم ما انتم اعرب فما تنقمون من العرب او عجم فما تنقمون من الانصاف والعدل فقال له عدي بل عرب عاربة وأخرى متعربة فقال لو كنتم كما تقولون لم تحادونا وتكرهوا امرنا فقال له عدي ليدلك على ما نقول انه ليس لنا لسان الا بالعربية فقال صدقتَ فقال اختاروا واحدة من ثلث أن تدخلوا في ديننا فلكم ما لنا وعليكم ما علينا إن نهضتم وهاجرتم وإن اقمتم في دياركم او الجزية او المنابذة والمناجزة فقد والله اتيتكم بقوم هم على الموت احرص منكم على الحياة فقال بل نعطيك الجزية فقال خالد تبا لكم ويحكم إن الكفر فلاة مضلة فاحمق العرب من سلكها
>
> Khālid was alone with the people of each fortress without the others. He began with the companions of ʿAdī, saying, 'Woe to you! You are not Arabs (*aʿrub*). Why do you take revenge on the Arabs (*ʿarab*) or non-Arabs (*ʿajam*)? Why do you take revenge on justice and honesty?' ʿAdī said, 'Indeed, we are pure Arabs (*ʿarab ʿāribah*), and others are arab(ic)ized (*mutʿarribah*) (Arabs)'. (Khālid) said, 'Had you been as you say, you would not have opposed us and despised the command to us'. 'Adī said to him, 'The fact that we have no language apart from Arabic proves what we say to you'. Khālid said, 'You are right'. Then he said, 'Choose one of the following three: Enter into our religion, and so you will have what we have and there will be on you what is on us, whether you arise and migrate or whether you stay in your homes. Or, there is either *jizya*. Or, resistance and fighting. By God, I have brought a people who desire death more than you (desire) life!' (ʿAdī) said, 'Indeed, we will give you the *jizya*'. Khālid said, 'May you perish! Woe to you! Disbelief is a desert that leads astray, for the one who travels through it is the most foolish of the Arabs (*ʿarab*)'.[84]

This passage is obviously very rich, and I cannot do justice to it here. But, the inhabitants of al-Ḥīrah, in the voice of ʿAdī, identify as Arabs (*ʿarab*) as opposed to non-Arabs (*ʿajam*).[85] As Arabs (*ʿarab*), they then

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[82] For analyzing 'Ibād as 'slave (of Christ)', see already Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden* (Leiden: Brill, 1879), 24 fn. 4; Rothstein, *Die Dynastie der Laḫmiden in al-Ḥîra*, 21.

[83] For language use in al-Ḥīrah, see Toral-Niehoff, *Al-Ḥîra*, 113–124, especially 114–120 on Arabic.

[84] Edited M. J. de Goeje, *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabari* (Lugd. Bat.: E. J. Brill, 1879–1901), vol. 4, 2041. An English translation is available in Kh. Y. Blankinship, *The History of al-Ṭabarī* (*Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk*), Vol. 11. *The Challenge to the Empires* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 31.

[85] Traditionally *ʿajam* is understood to refer to Persians/Iranians. More recently, A. Borrut has suggested that the opposition of *ʿarab* and *ʿajam* may refer to those who reside West of the Euphrates

are further divided into two groups: pure Arabs (*ʿarab ʿāribah*) and Arabs that have been arab(ic)ized (*mutʿarribah*).[86] It is not entirely clear what is meant by this distinction: Perhaps earlier tribes that were at the time extinct versus the contemporaneous tribes? Or, perhaps southern (that is, those descended from Qaḥṭān) versus northern (that is, those descended from ʿAdnān)? Or, not necessarily mutually exclusive with the previous, perhaps those who are originally of Arab descent versus those who are not? Or, again not necessarily mutually exclusive with the previous, in this specific case, perhaps the distinction is meant to highlight that the ʿIbād originated from different tribes by calling them Arabs that have been arab(ic)ized (*mutʿarribah*)?[87] Regardless, what is interesting for us is that Khālid initially rejects this claim, and the inhabitants of al-Ḥīrah respond by saying that their identity as Arab is proven by the fact that they speak only Arabic. Active in the latter half of the ninth century up through the first quarter of the tenth century, al-Ṭabarī is of course writing long after the events being narrated here allegedly took place (633). The depiction of the inhabitants of al-Ḥīrah as speakers of Arabic does, however, fit what we know about al-Ḥīrah from other sources.

Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq

One of the most prominent figures to come from al-Ḥīrah is Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq, who is best-known for the central role that he played in the so-called Graeco-Arabic translation movement of the early Abbasid period.[88] Ḥunayn, whose full name was Abū Zayd Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq b. Sulaymān b. Ayyūb al-ʿIbādī, was born in 808 near al-Ḥīrah, where his father was a pharmacist.[89] He studied medicine in

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versus those from the Eastern shore of the river, respectively (*Entre memoire et pouvoir: L'espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides* [*v. 72–193/692–809*] [Leiden: Brill, 2011], 330–351).

[86] Note that in a related account transmitted by al-Masʿūdī the answer is 'We are Nabateanized Arabs and Arab(ic)ized Nabateans' (*ʿarabun istanbaṭnā wanabaṭun istaʿrabnā*) (ed. with French translation in C. B. de Meynard and P. de Courteille, *Les prairies d'or* [Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1861–77], vol. 1, 218).

[87] For the 'Ibād originating from different tribes, see Rothstein, *Die Dynastie der Laḫmiden in al-Ḥîra*, 19; Toral-Niehoff, 'The 'Ibād of al-Ḥīrah', 3–4; eadem, *Al-Ḥîra*, 88–89.

[88] For the Graeco-Arabic translation movement, see D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbāsid Society* (*2nd–4th / 8th–10th centuries*) (London: Routledge, 1998).

[89] For Ḥunayn in general, see G. C. Anawati and A. Z. Iskandar, 'Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq al-ʿIbādī, Abū Zayd', in *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, vol. 15. *Supplement I*, ed. by C. C. Gillispie (New York: Scribner, 1980), 230–49; G. Bergsträsser, *Ḥunain Ibn Ishaḳ und seine Schule* (Leiden: Brill, 1913); A. M. Butts, 'Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq', in *GEDSH*, 205–206; Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 2, 122–129; D. Gutas, 'Scholars as Transmitters of Philosophical Thought', in *Philosophy in the Islamic World*, Vol. 1. *8th – 10th Centuries*, ed. by U. Rudolph, R. Hansberger, and P. Adamson, tr. by R. Hansberger (Leiden: Brill: 2017), 680–704, 766–768 (680–704); Y. Ḥabbi, *Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq* (Baghdad: Majmaʿ al-Luġah al-Suryānīyah, 1974); J. C. Lamoreaux, *Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq on His Galen Translations* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2016), xii–xviii; M. Meyerhof, 'New Light on Ḥunain ibn Isḥāq and his

Baghdad under the famous physician Yūḥannā b. Māsawayh (d. 857), who stemmed from one of the prominent medical families of Gondēshāpūr. In Baghdad, Ḥunayn became well-known as one of the fore-most translators of Greek texts into Syriac and Arabic. In addition to his translation activity, Ḥunayn was also the personal physician of Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861). He died in Baghdad in 873 (less likely is 877).[90]

I am particularly interested here in reflecting on Ḥunayn's language use. One often finds statements like the following in the secondary literature: 'Ḥunayn grew up in a bilingual environment, fluent in both Syriac and Arabic'.[91] In fact, I myself have written in a similar vein: 'He likely grew up bilingual in Arabic and Syriac, and he acquired an excellent knowledge of Greek as well as Persian in the course of his education'.[92] Such statements, however, do little more than echo the Arabic biographical sources.[93] In his *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, for instance, Ibn al-Nadīm (fl. 987) describes Ḥunayn as skilled (*faṣīḥan*) in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic'.[94] In his *'Uyūn al-'anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-'aṭibbā*, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a (d. 1270) adds Persian to the list: 'Ḥunayn was the most knowledgeable (*a'lam*) of the people of his time in Greek, Syriac, and Persian … while he also persisted in mastering Arabic, occupying himself with it, until he became one of those distinguished in it.'[95] What is needed is a more nuanced discussion of Ḥunayn's language use that moves beyond the medieval biographical sources, and that is what I aim at least to initiate here. At the outset, we should bear in mind the broader linguistic landscape of al-Ḥīrah, as discussed just above: There is a long history of the use of Arabic in al-Ḥīrah even prior to the rise of Islam. Thus, there is a strong possibility that Ḥunayn's native language would have been Arabic, and Syriac would have been his *Kirchensprache*, his learned ecclesiastical language.[96] Given this, I am particularly interested in seeing the role that Syriac plays.

Period', *Isis* 8 (1926); 685–724; J. P. Monferrer–Sala and B. Roggema, 'Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq', in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographic History*, Vol. 1. (*600–900*), ed. by Thomas, Roggema, et al., 768–79; G. Strohmaier, 'Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq und die Bilder', *Klio*, 43–45 (1965), 525–533; idem, 'Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq – An Arab Scholar Translating into Syriac', *ARAM*, 3 (1991), 163–170; M. Ullmann, *Die Medizin im Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 115–19, 205–7.

[90] For the date of his death, see Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 2, 123 fn. 2.

[91] Lamoreaux, *Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq on His Galen Translations*, xii.

[92] Butts, 'Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq', in *GEDSH*, 205.

[93] For an interesting study of the reception of Ḥunayn in these medieval sources, see J. T. Olsson, 'The Reputation of Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq in Contemporaneous and Later Sources', *Journal of Abbasid Studies*, 3 (2016), 29–55.

[94] Edited in G. Flügel, A. Müller, and J. Roediger, *Kitâb al-Fihrist* (Leipzig: F.C.W. Voge, 1871–1872), 294, ln. 18.

[95] Edited in A. Müller, *Ibn Abi Useibia* (Königsberg: self-published, 1884), 186, ln. 21–24.

[96] Here I depart from Hoyland's generalization that 'men competent in all three languages [that is, Aramaic, Arabic, and Greek; AMB] were far more likely to be native Aramaic-speakers than Greek- or Arabic-speakers' ('Language and Identity: The Twin Histories of Arabic and Aramaic [and: Why Did Aramaic Succeed where Greek Failed'], 195–196). This may well be true as a broad generalization (Syriac

Ḥunayn authored a number of works, most of which have to do with medicine. In his *ʿUyūn al-ʾanbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-ʾaṭibbā*, for instance, Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa attributes 111 works to Ḥunayn.[97] Many of these are preserved only in Arabic, with no Syriac versions surviving. But, arguably the most important of Ḥunayn's medical treatises was his 'Book of questions on medicine' (*Kitāb masāʾil fī l-ṭibb*), which survives in both Arabic and Syriac versions.[98] In addition to medicine, Ḥunayn is also said to have authored works on grammar and lexicography as well as on theology. In both cases, titles are known (or works survive) in Syriac and in Arabic.[99] So, in his own writings, Ḥunayn used either Syriac or Arabic and in some cases a work exists in both.

This multilingual picture of Ḥunayn's *oeuvre* is corroborated by his translation activity. Ḥunayn and his 'school', including his son Isḥāq b. Ḥunayn, his nephew Ḥubaysh b. al-Ḥasan, as well as ʿĪsā b. Yaḥyā and others, translated well over a hundred Greek medical works, including Hippocrates, Dioscorides, as well as almost the entire corpus of Galen. In addition to medicine, they translated Greek

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speakers were more likely to learn Arabic than Arabic speakers were to learn Syriac [for a comparable situation earlier in the history of Syriac, involving Greek, see Butts, *Language Change in the Wake of Empire: Syriac in its Greco-Roman Context*, 30–40]), but in the specific case of Ḥunayn, who hailed from al-Ḥīrah, I am far from convinced. See similarly Toral-Niehoff ('The ʿIbād of al-Ḥīrah', 18: The ʿIbād of al-Ḥīrah used Syriac as their church language, as did most of the Christians in Sasanian Iran, while their colloquial language was Arabic; *Al-Ḥîra*, 121: Das Syrische war somit die gemeinsame Kirchensprache für die aramäischsprachige christliche Landbevölkerung *und die arabischen Christen in al-Ḥīrah*' [emphasis mine; AMB]); Gutas ('Scholars as Transmitters of Philosophical Thought', 683: '… it is clear that he [*scil.* Ḥunayn; AMB] must have been trilingual, speaking Arabic at home and studying Syriac and Greek at school…'); Strohmaier ('Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq – An Arab Scholar Translating into Syriac', 164: 'Arabic was his mother tongue, and at school he had to learn the psalms in Syriac').

[97] Müller, *Ibn Abi Useibia*, 184–200.

[98] Arabic edited in Muḥammad ʿAlī Abū Rayyān, Mursī Muḥammad ʿArab; Jalāl Muḥammad Mūsā, *al-Masāʾil fī l-ṭibb li-l-mutaʿallimīn li-Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq* (Cairo: Dār al-Jāmiʿāt al-Miṣrīyah, 1978); English translation in P. Paul Ghalioungui, *Questions on Medicine for Scholars by Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq* (Cairo: al-Ahram Center for Scientific Translations, 1980). For the Syriac version, see R. Degen, 'The oldest known Syriac manuscript of Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq', in *Symposium Syriacum 1976* (OCA 205; Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1978), 63–71. The Arabic version was translated into Latin under the title *Isagoge Johannitii*, in which form it remained authoritative for medieval Europe (see F. Newton, 'Constantine the African and Monte Cassio: New Elements and the Text of the *Isagoge*', in *Constantine the African and ʿAlī ibn al-ʿAbbās al-Maǧūsī: The* Pantegni *and Related Texts*, ed. by C. Burnett and D. Jacquart [Studies in Ancient Medicine 10; Leiden: Brill, 199], 16–47).

[99] For inventories of Arabic works, see C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, Vol. I (2nd ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1943), 224–27; Suppl. vol. I (Leiden: Brill, 1937), 366–39; F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden: Brill, 1967–), vol. 3, 247–56; Gutas, 'Scholars as Transmitters of Philosophical Thought', 685–704. For his Syriac works, see W. F. Macomber, 'The literary activity of Hunain b. Ishaq in Syriac', in *Mihrajān Afrām wa-Ḥunayn* (Baghdad, 1974), 545–70.

philosophical and scientific texts, including Plato, Aristotle, Proclus, and Porphyry. A number of fascinating insights into the method of Ḥunayn and his 'school' can be found in Ḥunayn's 'Letter to ʿAlī b. Yaḥyā on Galen's books which have been translated …' (*Risālah ilā ʿAlī ibn Yaḥyā fī dhikr mā turjima min kutub Jālīnūs …*).[100] In this 'Letter', Ḥunayn gives us fascinating insights into his translation activity, including how he traveled throughout Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt in order to procure Greek manuscripts (§126; see also §5; §85; *passim*); how he often collated multiple (Greek) manuscripts to obtain a sound textual basis for his translations (§5; §22; *passim*); how he often consulted and/or revised earlier (Syriac) translations of Greek works (§22; *passim*); and how he preferred a *sensus de sensu* (or, reader-oriented) approach to translation, though sometimes his patrons preferred a more literal *verbum e verbo* (or, source-oriented) approach (§9; §59.3).[101] The letter also may give us some insights into Ḥunayn's language use.

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[100] This work has a complicated transmission and publication history. It was originally written in Syriac, which Ḥunayn translated into Arabic in 856 and later revised in 864. Only the later revision survives, itself in two recensions: The earlier recension (termed B in the scholarly literature) survives in ms. Istanbul, Ayasofya 3590 with some additional information (lists of titles and translators) in ms. Istanbul, Ayasofya 3593. The later recension (termed A) survives in ms. Istanbul, Ayasofya 3631 as well as in indirect transmission in later bibliographers, such as Ibn al-Nadīm's *Kitāb al-Fihrist* (ed. Flügel, Müller, and Roediger, *Kitâb al-Fihrist*) and Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa's *ʿUyūn al-ʾanbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-ʾaṭibbā* (ed. Müller, *Ibn Abi Useibia*). In 1925, G. Bergsträsser published an edition of recension A based on the only known manuscript at the time, ms. Istanbul, Ayasofya 3631, though also taking account of the indirect witnesses (*Ḥunain Ibn Isḥāq über die syrischen und arabischen Galen-Übersetzungen* [Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1925]). Only later did Bergsträsser learn of ms. Istanbul, Ayasofya 3590 and its B recension, which prompted him to publish a supplemental volume to his earlier edition that included collations (in transcription) and other integral material (*Neue Materialien zu Ḥunain ibn Isḥāq's Galen-Bibliographie* [Leipzig: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 1932]). The witness of ms. Istanbul, Ayasofya 3593 was discovered and subsequently published only more recently by F. Käs ('Eine neue Handschrift von Ḥunain ibn Isḥāq's Galenbibliographie', *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften*, 19 [2010–2011], 135–193). Even more recently, Lamoreaux (*Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq on His Galen Translations*) has published a new edition and translation of the text, but as pointed out by D. Gutas ('A New "Edition" of Ḥunayn's Risāla', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 28 [2018], 279–284), this publication suffers from numerous problems, including most crucially in the establishment of the Arabic text itself. A new comprehensive, critical edition remains a *desideratum*. In the following, I refer to the text by Lamoreaux's section numbers, only because one can easily cross-reference from his publication to Bergsträsser's, whereas the reverse is much more difficult.

[101] For the translation method of Ḥunayn and his colleagues, see the classic article of S. P. Brock, 'The Syriac background to Ḥunayn's translation techniques', *ARAM*, 3 (1991), 139–62 as well as the more recent studies of R. Arnzen, 'Proclus on Plato's Timaeus 89e3–90c7', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 23 (2013), 1–45; G. M. Cooper, 'Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq's Galen Translations and Greco-Arabic Philology: Some Observations from the *Crises* (*De crisibus*) and the *Critical Days* (*De diebus decretoriis*)', *Oriens*, 44 (2016),

According to his *Letter*, Ḥunayn (and his 'school') translate the Greek texts of Galen into Syriac, Arabic, or both. This, however, seems to be, at least primarily, a function of the request of the particular patron, and so it is not directly indicative of Ḥunayn's own personal preference. There are, however, some potentially interesting details lurking beneath the surface.

In some cases, when an Arabic translation is needed, it seems that the Greek text is first translated into Syriac and only then is the Syriac translated into Arabic.[102] Consider, for instance, the translation history of Galen's 'Unknown Motions' (§49):

> وقد نقلها ايوب. فاما انا فلم اكن تفرغت لنقله على انه قد كان عندي نسخة. ثم اني من بعد ترجمتها الى السريانية ثم الى العربية لابي جعفر
>
> 'Job translated it. As for me, I did not have the opportunity to translate it though I had a copy. Then, I later translated it into Syriac then into Arabic for Abū Ja'far.' (§49.3–5)

There are various possible understandings of the last sentence, but the most straight-forward is that Ḥunayn first translated the text into Syriac and only then into Arabic (see the same syntax in §101.8). Note that Abū Ja'far is mentioned frequently in the *Letter* but that he never receives a Syriac copy. In addition, in the vast majority of cases in the *Letter* the patron of the translation is named, though there are exceptions. Thus, it seems that in this particular case Ḥunayn opted for Syriac to serve as a bridge between the Greek and Arabic even though there was no patron for the Syriac text.[103] Various possible explanations for this have been suggested in the secondary literature, but the most likely is that there was a long-established method for rendering Greek into Syriac developed over centuries, and so it was in some sense easier to translate the Greek into Syriac (rather than directly into Arabic), and once there was a Syriac text this could then more easily be rendered into a sister-Semitic language such as Arabic.[104]

1–43; O. Overwien, 'The Art of the Translator, or: How did Ḥunayn ibn ʾIsḥāq and his School Translate', in *Epidemics in Context: Greek Commentaries on Hippocrates in the Arabic Tradition*, ed. by P. E. Pormann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 151–169; P. E. Pormann, 'The Development of Translation Techniques from Greek into Syriac into Arabic: The Case of Galen's *On the Faculties and Powers of Simple Drugs*', in *Medieval Arabic Thought: Essays in Honour of Fritz Zimmermann*, ed. by R. Hansberger, M. Afifi al-Akiti, and C. Charles Burnett (London: Warburg Institute; Turin: Nino Aragno Editore, 2012), 134–163; U. Vagelpohl, 'In the Translator's Workshop', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 21 (2011), 249–288.

[102] It should be noted that this trajectory of Greek > Syriac > Arabic is witnessed not only in Ḥunayn's 'Letter', but it is also recorded, *inter alia*, in the *Kitāb al-Fihrist* by Ibn al-Nadīm (ed. Flügel, Müller, and Roediger, *Kitâb al-Fihrist*), the *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ* by Ibn al-Qifṭī (d. 1248) (ed. J. Lippert, *Ibn al-Qifṭī's Taʾrīḫ al-ḥukamāʾ* [Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1903]), and the *ʿUyūn al-ʾanbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-ʾaṭibbā* by Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa (ed. Müller, *Ibn Abi Useibia*), where the trajectory is found with translations from Ḥunayn and his 'school' as well as from others. I should, however, also point out that it is possible that the Arabic was not translated from the Syriac but from Greek as well. In addition, the Greek could presumably have been re-consulted when translating from Syriac to Arabic.

[103] This is not to imply that Syriac always served as a bridge (see, e.g., §129, §137).

[104] This is often stated in the scholarly literature, especially in Syriac studies; see, for example, S. P. Brock, 'Changing Fashions in Syriac Translation Technique: The Background to Syriac Translations

If such an argument is accepted, then one could think of a situation in which Ḥunayn was 'more fluent' in Syriac than in Arabic when translating Greek. In more technical, linguistic terms, Ḥunayn would have been *linguistically dominant* in Syriac (and not in Arabic) in this particular socio-linguistic situation.[105] Compare, for instance, a classic example discussed by the linguist U. Weinreich: 'A child learning both languages in its familial and play environment … may be equipped to deal with everyday things in both tongues; but if it studies certain subjects in a unilingual school, it will have difficulty in discussing these "learned" topics in the other language'.[106] Are we to imagine a similar situation, *mutatis mutandis*, for Ḥunayn?

This line of questioning takes on an additional layer of interest when it is noted that in many cases mentioned in the 'Letter to 'Alī b. Yaḥyā' it is not Ḥunayn who does the second translation from Syriac to Arabic but one of his students. Consider, for instance, the case of Galen's 'Composition of Drugs' (§84):

> وقد كان نقل هذا الكتاب الى السريانية سرجس الرأسي. ونقلته انا في خلافة امير المؤمنين المتوكل ليحنى بن ماسويه المتطبب. ونقله من نقلي حبيش بن الحسن لابي جعفر محمد بن موسى.
>
> 'Sergis al-Ra'sī had translated this book into Syriac. I myself translated it during the caliphate of the Commander of the Faithful, al-Mutawakkil, for Yuḥannā bin Masāwayh, the physician. Ḥubaysh translated it from my translation for Abū Ja'far Muḥammad bin Mūsā.' (§84.6–8)

This is one of many cases in which Ḥunayn first renders a text into Syriac and then one of his students translates his Syriac into Arabic (for another interesting example, see §18).[107] Such a process could be motivated by any number of a myriad factors:

- Perhaps Ḥunayn was better than Ḥubaysh at translating from Greek to Syriac? Or, perhaps Ḥubaysh was better than Ḥunayn at translating from Syriac to Arabic? These are not mutually exclusive.
- Perhaps Ḥunayn was better at Greek than Ḥubaysh? Or, perhaps he was better at Syriac?

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under the Abbasids', *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies*, 4 (2004), 3-14. For an insightful study of the broader historical background for Syriac serving as an intermediary, see H. Takahashi, 'Syriac as the Intermediary in Scientific Graeco-Arabica: Some Historical and Philological Observations', *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World*, 3 (2015), 66–97. For translations from Greek to Syriac, see D. King, *The Syriac Versions of the Writings of Cyril of Alexandria: A Study in Translation Technique* (CSCO 626; Leuven: Peeters, 2008).

[105] I adopt the technical term *linguistic dominance* from the contact linguist F. Van Coetsem (*Loan Phonology and the Two Transfer Types in Language Contact* [Publications in Language Sciences 27; Dordrecht, Foris Publications, 1988], 13–17; 'Outlining a Model of the Transmission Phenomenon in Language Contact', *Leuvense Bijdragen*, 84 [1995], 63–85 [70–72]; *A General and Unified Theory of the Transmission Process in Language Contact* [Heidelberg: Winter, 2000], 32, 42, 49, 58–62, 66–67).

[106] U. Weinreich, *Languages in Contact. Findings and Problems* (New York: Linguistic Circle of New York, 1953), 81.

[107] This in fact happens often: §10.4; §27, §28, §29, §30, §31, §34, §43, §45, §47, §48, §54, §58, §63, §65, §77. The opposite process may possibly be found in §4.

- These questions could further be combined with a generational factor: Are we to read into cases such as this a generational change in language use from Ḥunayn to Ḥubaysh?
- Or, perhaps in the end it was a better use of resources to have Ḥunayn, the master, only oversee what might have been the easier task of translating from Syriac into Arabic. That is, Ḥunayn was equally competent in all of these languages (Greek, Syriac, and Arabic) and tasks (translation from Greek to Syriac; translation from Syriac to Arabic). But, even if so, this would still presumably tell us something about the language skills of Ḥubaysh.[108]

These questions take on additional complications when set within the broader language landscape of al-Ḥīrah. As discussed above, there is a strong possibility that Ḥunayn's native language would have been Arabic, and Syriac would have been his learned ecclesiastical language. How does this alter how we view this situation? It seems difficult to escape the conclusion that Ḥunayn was better on the Greek and Syriac side, at least relative to Ḥubaysh—at the very least, he was more active on the Greek and Syriac side.[109] It is also at least possible that Ḥubaysh was better than Ḥunayn on the Arabic side. But, how does this square with the likelihood that Ḥunayn's first language was Arabic and that he had learned Syriac?

A final variable that I want to bring up here is the question of what exactly we mean by Arabic in this context. I have already introduced the concept of diglossia above. Diglossia gained widespread usage in the linguistic literature thanks to an article by C. A. Ferguson published in 1959, in which he described language use in Arabic-speaking countries in the modern period: Alongside the spoken dialects of Arabic there is another superposed variety that is used for literature and writing more broadly.[110] What's interesting for the present paper is that Arabic has likely been diglossic throughout its history. That is, no longer can we maintain that the modern Arabic dialects are daughters of Classical Arabic.[111] Rather, the modern dialects are continuations of ancient dialects of Arabic that must have been in use alongside the literary form of the language from at least the beginning of the Islamic

[108] Note, however, that Ḥubaysh does seem to be plenty sufficient in Syriac: He, for instance, translated from Arabic into Syriac (§38, §40).

[109] In his *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadīm already noted this: 'If we return to the catalogue of the books of Galen that Ḥunayn made for ʿAlī b. Yaḥyā, we learn that most of what Ḥunayn translated was into Syriac, though sometimes he corrected and examined the Arabic of the translations of others' (ed. Flügel, Müller, and Roediger, *Kitâb al-Fihrist*, 289, ln. 16–18).

[110] See fn. 74 above.

[111] See, e.g., J. Huehnergard, 'Arabic in its Semitic Context', in *Arabic in Context. Celebrating 400 Years of Arabic at Leiden University*, ed. Al-Jallad, 3–34 (13); Al-Jallad, 'What is Ancient North Arabian?', 8 fn. 23.

period.[112] One clear indication of this is Middle Arabic.[113] Middle Arabic refers to varieties of written Arabic in which features of Arabic dialects are found. Note that these texts are not written forms of the spoken language, but rather a written form of the classical language in which dialectic features also appear. Middle Arabic is most often found among Christians and Jews, since these communities were, at least in certain contexts, not as tied to the norms of Classical Arabic as their Muslim contemporaries.[114] But Middle Arabic is also attested among Muslims, especially when writing in less formal genres, such as papyri.[115] It is through this lens of the history of Arabic that we need to consider Ḥunayn. Even if we are to assume that Ḥunayn's native language was Arabic, as I think we are, this Arabic would not have been Classical Arabic but a different form of the language. The Classical Arabic in which Ḥunayn wrote he would have learned. In addition, it should be noted that Ḥunayn also wrote in Middle Arabic, including the very 'Letter' upon which I have been focusing here. Given all this, there is less difference between Ḥunayn's writing in Syriac and writing in Arabic than one might first imagine: In neither case is Ḥunayn writing *sensu strictu* in his native language, but rather he is writing in a learned language in both cases.

Conclusion

Much remains unclear about language use among Syriac Christians after the rise of Islam—or, before the rise of Islam for that matter. This is mostly due to the nature of the surviving evidence: Unlike Egypt where the papyrological record provides precious data for tracing the development of Greek, Coptic, and later Arabic, there is very limited documentary evidence for language use in Syria and Mesopotamia.[116] Almost all the texts that we have are literary, written by male elites and subsequently transmitted in manuscripts, sometimes over generations, during which time the language of the texts could be further manipulated.[117] Nevertheless, I would like to venture two conclusions. My first is that a

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[112] See, for instance, Al-Jallad's proposed Ancient Levantine Arabic ('Ancient Levantine Arabic. A Reconstruction Based on the Earliest Sources and the Modern Dialects' [unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 2012).

[113] The bibliography on Middle Arabic is immense; for an introduction, see J. Blau, *A Handbook of Early Middle Arabic* (Jerusalem: Max Schloessinger Memorial Foundation, 2002) as well as the collected studies in idem, *Studies in Middle Arabic and its Judaeo-Arabic Variety* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988).

[114] For Christian Middle Arabic, see J. Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic* (CSCO 267, 276, 279; Leuven: Peeters, 1966); for Jewish Middle Arabic, see J. Blau, *A Grammar of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961) [in Hebrew]; J. Blau, *Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

[115] See S. Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar of Early Arabic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[116] For the situation in Egypt, see the insightful analysis in Papaconstantinou, 'Why Did Coptic Fail Where Aramaic Succeeded? Linguistic Developments in Egypt and the Near East After the Arab Conquest'.

[117] The following by Papaconstantinou is worth quoting in full: 'The above discussions show how difficult it is to approach language shift when one needs to rely on texts written mostly, if not

linear progression from Syriac to Arabic, regardless of which time one sets the transition between the two languages, fails to capture language use among Syriac Christians. This is true on the macro-level, as I aimed to show in the first half of this paper, where we see Arabic being used by (Syriac) Christians before the rise of Islam as well as Syriac being used by Syriac Christians well after the rise of Islam, even up until the present. This is also true in a micro-situation, such as Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq: Where would Ḥunayn fall on a linear progression from Syriac to Arabic? My second and final conclusion is actually a plea for a more nuanced approach to language use that is informed by the history of the languages as well as by (socio-)linguistics. Not enough attention has been paid in my mind to the fact that Syriac, as we know it, is a highly standardized literary language that may be removed from the everyday spoken language of most Syriac-speakers in Late Antiquity much less in the Islamic period.[118] Thus, even when we have Syriac writings from the Islamic period by authors who likely spoke some form of Aramaic as their first language there was likely a significant gap between their spoken Aramaic and their written Aramaic (= Syriac). That is, we have a diglossic situation. The same is true for Arabic, which throughout its long history has often been diglossic. This is especially evident for Christians since we have examples of their Middle Arabic writings. Thus, when discussing Aramaic and Arabic in the Islamic period, we are never talking about only two languages but rather multiple varieties of each.[119] It is only by taking

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exclusively, in institutional contexts. These can be analysed linguistically for evidence of language contact, they can be read directly for straightforward pieces of information, and indirectly, in the hope of assessing the authorial or institutional intentions underlying them; but they cannot inform us about the majority of the population and they cannot capture orality—not even for the high-status individuals who produced them.' ('Why Did Coptic Fail Where Aramaic Succeeded? Linguistic Developments in Egypt and the Near East After the Arab Conquest', 66).

[118] Again, I quote Papaconstantinou: 'How biased an image of the linguistic map of seventeenth-century Europe we would have today if the overwhelming majority of surviving sources were the Latin texts produced by the members of the Republic of Letters!' ('Why Did Coptic Fail Where Aramaic Succeeded? Linguistic Developments in Egypt and the Near East After the Arab Conquest', 65). For Syriac as a standard(ized) language, see the influential study of L. Van Rompay, 'Some Preliminary Remarks on the Origins of Classical Syriac as a Standard Language: The Syriac Version of Eusebius of Caesarea's Ecclesiastical History', in *Semitic and Cushitic Studies*, ed. by G. Goldenberg and Sh. Raz (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994), 70–89 as well as the more recent remarks in D. G. K. Taylor, 'Bilingualism and Diglossia in Late Antique Syria and Mesopotamia', in *Bilingualism in Ancient Society: Language Contact and the Written Text*, ed. by J. N. Adams, M. Janse, and S. Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 298–331 (325). For some of my (preliminary) thoughts on written versus spoken varieties of Syriac in Late Antiquity, see Butts, 'The Classical Syriac Language', 225–231.

[119] To return to the linguistic literature one last time, this might be called 'double-nested diglossia', a term introduced to refer to the situation in the Indian village of Khalapur where Hindi and the local dialect functioned as High and Low languages, respectively, but each itself also consisted of high and low varieties (for the term, see R. Fasold, *The Sociolinguistics of Society* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984], 46–48; for the language situation, see J. J. Gumperz, 'Linguistic and Social Interaction in Two

into consideration such complexity that we will arrive at a more textured account of the twin histories of Arabic and Aramaic.

Communities', *American Anthropologist*, 66 [1964], 137–153). *Mutatis mutandis*, with some Syriac Christians in the Islamic period, it is conceivable that Arabic functioned as a High language and Aramaic as a Low language, and that in addition both Arabic and Aramaic also consisted of high and low varieties.