On the Spellings of the Lexical Items $b\text{š}$, $b\text{šwn}$, and $m\text{šb} \text{́} \text{wn}$, and Other Peculiar Lexemes in Christian Palestinian Aramaic

Christian Palestinian Aramaic stands out among the group of Western Aramaic dialects for its conservative spellings. While the late copies of Galilean and Samaritan Aramaic show plenty of variations, Christian Palestinian Aramaic tends to a rather conservative orthography. Of course, one cannot expect conformity through all the early manuscripts, which surface occasionally with exceptions to the rule. This is something meticulous grammarians and lexicographers do not accept for the spelling of so-called ‘good manuscripts’ or text transmissions.\(^1\) This dialect, however, comes up with peculiar novelties by showing lexemes and spellings which do not accord with the rules, or have not been known from comparative dialects and languages. There is the odd verbal root $dš$ ‘to attempt, dare’ translating, in most instances, Greek τολμάω, the independent possessive pronoun $q(y)qn$,\(^2\) the nominal form $\text{šphly}$ ‘utility’ derived from a $\text{šafel}$, and many more which lack any connection to the related Aramaic dialects or even Semitic languages. Doubts on the first appearances of such lexemes and readings were attributed to the fact that Christian Palestinian Aramaic is transmitted for the early period only through hardly legible

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\(^1\) One should ask oneself what really makes or is a good manuscript? This is more than difficult to answer, as there are always exceptions to the rules and it depends in the early period much on the translator and scribe of the Christian Palestinian Aramaic texts.

palimpsests. It did not help that Friedrich Schulthess in his dictionary was very liberal with emendations causing the elimination of such words for the user from this reference work. In his introductory grammar such lexical items were not discussed.

Having been trained in a sound Semitic scholarly environment I also had my doubts in the beginning, which changed, however, when I started in the eighties to read and collate the palimpsest manuscripts in various libraries and collections. Suddenly these peculiar words kept showing up again. Schulthess considered the following words as uncertain: the root kwk in the itpeel participle mt'kyk ‘respecting’ Luke 18:2; 4 (Lectionary A),5 pa'el perfect liv'yt ‘I soiled’ Isaiah 63:3 (Lewis Lectionary),7 pe'al imperative liv'sw ‘forge’ Joel 3:10 (Lewis Lectionary),8 and the exceptional noun stwl ‘libation’ Joel 2:14 (Lewis Lectionary) now

3 F. Schulthess, Lexicon Syrapalaestinum (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1903).
4 F. Schulthess, Grammatik des christlich-palästinischen Arabischen (Tübingen: Mohr, 1924). The work was intended for the Porta Linguarum Series and never planned as a reference grammar. The untimely death of the author hindered him from completing this book. It was edited by E. Littmann with additional remarks by T. Nöldeke.
8 Schulthess, Lexicon Syrapalaestinum, p. 103a emended it to a verbal root b't, but Nlw 'to knead’ has in this case a special meaning ‘to forge’, which is again supported by an early attestation jwblwn in Micah 4:3 CCR3 (A. S. Lewis, Codex Climaci Rescriptus «Horac Semiticum VIII» [Cambridge: University Press, 1909], p. 2 = CCPA 1 I 198).
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attested again (CCR3) with the denominated root sll in the itpaal ‘to be libated’ Philippians 2:17 (CCR2), whereas zyrb Zechariah 9:14 (Lewis lectionary) is an obvious copying error for zyqh ‘his spark’. Even such a geographical term as tynn ‘south’ Luke 11:31; 13:29 (Lectionary A) was doubted by him. All were rejected by Schulthess in his dictionary and “verschlimmbessert” as one likes to express it in German, but in the meantime the lexemes could be convincingly established from a variety of early manuscripts.

A different matter has been the misreading by Jan P. N. Land in the figura etymologica *’rr ty’wr ‘indignatus est, adversatus est’ Deuteronomium 7:26 (lectionary), which was accepted as such by Schulthess for his dictionary as deriving from ضر, but with the appearance of the new biblical parallel in Codex Climaci Rescriptus as ndwd tndd in the pael, and through several collations by me the correct reading for the St Petersburg fragment could be established as *ndd tynwd, an imperfect pael from an Aramaic root √ndd with the derived abstract noun pael ndwd /qittūl/ in the special meaning ‘to treat with contempt, abhore’ < προςοχθίζω. This root is now found again thrice in a recently identified Christian Palestinian Aramaic – Greek palimpsest (Greek NF M 167) stored in the Monastery of St Catherine. There are tnwd ‘(my soul) will detest’ Leviticus 26:30, w:ndw ‘and (their souls) detested’ Leviticus 26:43, and ndt. ‘(my soul did not) detest’ Leviticus 26:44. An etymological connection with Samaritan Aramaic נ Nah ‘carcass’ (Memar Marqeh) is conceivable.

9 Schulthess, Lexicon Syropalaestinum, p. 137a (incerta), but both readings are certain, since they have now been attested in the meantime in two early manuscripts from the Codex Climaci Rescriptus, see already Lewis, Codex Climaci Rescriptus, pp. 2 = CCPA I 195; 162 = CCPA IIB 139.

10 Compare the understanding of ܐ ̈ ܙܠܝܩ ‘the rays’ of light in Syriac ܘܠܬܡܬܐ ... ܗܐ ܐܝܬ ܓܝܪ ܒܗܘܢ ܕܣܓܕܝܢ ܠ ܐ ܕܢܗܘܪ̈ܐ . ܘܠܤܗܪܐ ܐܝܟ ܫܪܟܐ ܕܚܪ̈ܢܐ ܕܐܟܘܬܗܘܢ ܒܟܘܟܒܬܐ ܕܨܡܛܐ. ܠܐ ܬܫܬܒܘܢ ܒܙܠܝܩ ‘See, for there are among you, who worship ... and the sun and the moon as the rest from Harran, which are like them. Do not be captivated by the rays of the lights and by the Venus star of splendour’ (G. Philipps, The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle [London: Trübner & Co, 1876], p. 24.17-21 Syriac).

11 Schulthess, Lexicon Syropalaestinum, p. 84b thought it should be drwm’. With the attested gentilic tymnyy ‘southern’ Job 6:19 CCR3 (Lewis, Codex Climaci Rescriptus, p. 28 = CCPA I 111) and tymny ‘the Temanite’ Job 4:1 (C. Müller-Kessler, A Palimpsest Fragment with Unattested Passages of Job 3:1c-4:3b in Christian Palestinian Aramaic under Sinai, Greek NF MG 14, Collectanea Christiana Orientalia 17 [2020], pp. 183-196, esp. 194) this choice of word is acceptable for CPA. tymn or ymn are both good terms for ‘south’ in Aramaic, even in Western Aramaic.


13 Lewis, Codex Climaci Rescriptus, p. 18 = CCPA I 74.


With the decipherment of more new unpublished texts and unread passages certain words and previously odd spellings keep appearing repeatedly. Doubted lexemes on account of being attested in hardly readable palimpsests even occur in later non-palimpsest texts. Therefore, there can now be no doubt about their readings, as in for example the frequent occurring $ds$ ‘to attempt, dare’. The real gold mine, however, for such idiosyncratic words are still the Catecheses of Cyril of Jerusalem (şıkımun ‘ant; a creeping animal’) IX 13; qıyyım ‘shoots’ IX 10; ṣsr ‘saw’ XIII 12; swnyhyky ‘my palate’ IX 13, and the books of Job with $m'w'l$ $<$ *$nwgl$ ‘pus’ Job 7:5 CCR3 (lectionary), and of Isaiah with $dwbs$ ‘bear’ Isaiah 11:7 (lectionary); $sg$ ‘flax(-wick)’ Isaiah 42:3 (lectionary); $ry'$ $v'h'$ ‘crushed’ Isaiah 42:3 (lectionary), and the Epistles $mrtnw$ ᵇᵣᵣᵢ$'strie’ 1 Corinthians 3:3 CCR2B, but sometimes also Patristic texts $Yrb's'to make trouble’ (Tale of a Monk).

One peculiarity from the beginning was $b'swnb$ $dk'rs$ ‘gluttony’ Cyril IV 37, which Schulthess corrected in his dictionary to $b'ywnb$, and it entered into our edition as $b'swnb$

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17 S. P. Brock, Fragments of PS-John Chrysostom: Homily on the Prodigal Son in Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Le Muséon 112 (1999), pp. 335-362, esp. 339, 345, 351, n. 29. This root was misunderstood by the copist in Mark 12:34 (LECTIONARY A) as $kt'$ [active participle] and was emended to $nt'$ by Schulthess, Lexicon Syropalaestinum, p. 32. A similar writing error occurs again in $swbh$ ‘its heat’ Matthew 20:12 (LECTIONARY A) for better $swbh$.


19 The elision of intervocalic $/g/$ is not a Western Aramaic phonetic trait, but more an Eastern feature. The assumption of a phonetic change, however, is more feasible than a Greek loan in this biblical passage. Greek influence on the CPA lexicography in early Bible (Old Testament) translation or lectionaries is hardly noticeable. It is restricted as in early Syriac texts (4th to 6th cent.) to certain particles γαρ, δε, δη, and οὖν, the verb παίζει, and specific terms like architectonic γλώσσαι, κάρσταλος, κιβάρ, κιβώτος, κίρκος, κοτόν, πύγμα, musical instrument κιβάρα, technical items καπέταρος, λάβρος, animals δράκων, κήτος, πάρδος, or plants κρίνον.

20 This lexical item is now also established in the Hebrew book of Ben Sira and was recently discussed at length in E. Reymond, J.-S. Rey, and J. Joosten, A New Hebrew Word in Ben Sira 40:4 (MS B IX verso, line 12 = Or. 1102): $rwx$, Revue Biblique 124 (2017), pp. 103-110. It is a primary noun and does not require a basic root to be derived from as assumed on p. 107.


24 Land, Anecdota Syriaca IV, p. 200 (Fragm. 41).
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‘uncertain’, although the last commentary on my St Petersburg research papers says that it is really a shin, therefore the reading b’swnb by Land had been correct from the beginning. b’swn’ also occurs in an unknown homily Syr. 19(b) rb20 published by Hugo Duensing. Lewis has a reading bšw’ Job 21:27 in her tenth-century lectionary, where the reading in the original manuscript was corrected to bšwn’ (pl. I), obviously a misunderstanding for b’swn by the抄ist.

Now with another nominal form mbšnw of an afel with -ān + -ū suffixes ‘badness, wickedness’ occurring in Cyril XVI 8 (Georgian NF 19, fol. 60 v [r]) it looks as if the spellings with ʾayin are rather consistent for these nominal forms of a secondary root bš, of which none are attested yet for a historical spelling of bš ‘to be evil’ in Christian Palestinian Aramaic. Gustav Dalman already listed a secondary root יִשׁ for the Jewish Western Aramaic texts, including an afel, without quotation of the sources, which is also occurring as a variant spelling in Samaritan Aramaic. With the new evidence, the reading bš might make finally more sense in the Khirbet Mird letter in line 9 bšfyb ‘my heart is weak’.

In the end it should be stressed again that secured readings of words should be left untouched in the editions as they occur in their originals, as more examples might turn up. If falsely emended or not even indicated in the critical apparatus as such, they cannot be established as correct lexemes, or might be overlooked in the future by scholars in their lexical studies.

**Abstract:** Christian Palestinian Aramaic has always been a mine of peculiar words and spellings despite being a rather conservative written dialect within Western Aramaic group. Three words in this dialect, bš, b’swn, and mšb’wn, and

**Resumen:** El arameo cristiano palestinense ha sido siempre una fuente de palabras y pronunciaciones peculiares debido a que se trata de un dialecto escrito conservado por el grupo arameo occidental. Tres palabras

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28 This correction was sent to Michael Sokoloff before the book went into print, but has never been integrated.


which are variant derivations of \( b\dot{\text{s}} \)
have puzzled scholars for more than a century. In addition to another set of ‘incorrectly
spelled’ words, these were considered doubtful
in the first dictionary, grammar, and text
editions, but they turned out to have sound
explanations and etymological origins.

**Keywords**: Christian Palestinian Aramaic; *Codex Climaci Rescriptus, Codex Sinaiticus Rescriptus*; Cyril of Jerusalem; Khirbet Mird; Samaritan Aramaic.

**Palabras clave**: Arameo cristiano palestínense; *Codex Climaci Rescriptus, Codex Sinaiticus Rescriptus*; Cirilo de Jerusalén; Khibert Mird; Arameo samaritano.
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