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On the Spellings of the Lexical Items *b‘š*, *b‘šwn’*, and *mšb‘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 *ds‘* ‘to attempt, dare’ translating, in most instances, Greek *τολμάω*, the independent possessive pronoun *q(y)qn-*,² the nominal form *špbyh* ‘utility’ derived from a *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

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.

² T. Nöldeke, Beiträge zur Kenntniss der aramäischen Dialecte: II. Ueber den christlich-palästinischen Dialect, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 22 (1868), pp. 443-527, esp. 469 n. 1 considered ‘n’ *qqny* Jh 12:26 A in the first grammatical treatment of the dialect as completely corrupt. F. Schulthess, Reviews of (I) P. Kokowzoff, *Nouveaux Fragments Syropalestiniens de la Bibliothèque Impériale Publique de Saint-Petersbourg*, St. Petersburg, 1906; (II) H. Duensing, *Christlich-palästinisch-aramäische Texte und Fragmente nebst einer Abhandlung über den Wert der palästinischen Septuaginta*, Göttingen, 1906, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 61 (1907), pp. 206-222, esp. 215, n. 1 proposed a Greek solution for this peculiar independent pronoun.

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.³ In his introductory grammar such lexical items were not discussed.⁴

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.⁵ Schulthess considered the following words as uncertain: the root *knk* in the *itpeel* participle *mtkyk* ‘respecting’ Luke 18:2; 4 (Lectionary A),⁶ *pael* perfect *hwkyt* ‘I soiled’ Isaiah 63:3 (Lewis Lectionary),⁷ *pael* imperative *hwšw* ‘forge’ Joel 3:10 (Lewis Lectionary),⁸ and the exceptional noun *shwl* ‘libation’ Joel 2:14 (Lewis Lectionary) now

³ F. Schulthess, *Lexicon Syropalaestinum* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1903).

⁴ F. Schulthess, *Grammatik des christlich-palästinischen Aramäischen* (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.

⁵ C. Müller-Kessler, *Grammatik des Christlich-Palästinisch-Aramäischen*. Teil 1, *Schriftlehre, Lautlehre, Formenlehre* «Texte und Studien zur Orientalistik 6» (Hildesheim: Olms, 1991), pp. XIII, 6. For this grammar the grammatical and lexical material was collected from scratch on the basis of the collated originals. The grammatical treatment does not exploit or bases its structure in any instance on Schulthess’ grammatical *Vorlage* as claimed by A. Desreumaux, 3.5. *Christo-Palestinian Aramaic Manuscripts*, in A. Bausi and J. Gippert (eds.), *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies: An Introduction* (Hamburg: Tredition, 2015), pp. 43-44.

⁶ Schulthess, *Lexicon Syropalaestinum*, pp. 91b, 95a emended this word to *mtkn*‘ from a root \sqrt{kn} ‘, and again in F. Schulthess, *Reviews of* (I) P. Kokowzoff, *Nouveaux Fragments Syropalestiniens*; (II) H. Duensing, *Christlich-palästinisch-aramäische Texte*, p. 218, but the early manuscript in the collective Codex CSRO/P/S^c with Luke 18:4 and 20:13 (C. Müller-Kessler and M. Sokoloff, *The Christian Palestinian Aramaic New Testament Version from the Early Period. Gospels* «A Corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic IIA» [Groningen: STYX, 1998], pp. 150, 156) supports the reading of a root \sqrt{knk} in the late eleventh century Gospel Lectionary A. There, however, it is vocalized according to a Syriac vocalization system.

⁷ A. S. Lewis with Critical Notes by E. Nestle and a Glossary by M. D. Gibson, *A Palestinian Syriac Lectionary Containing Lessons from the Pentateuch, Job, Proverbs, Prophets, Acts, and Epistles* «Studia Sinaitica VI» (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1897), pp. XCV, 119. Nestle in his critical notes pp. XVI-XVII connected it there with the reduplicated root *lklk*. Schulthess, *Lexicon Syropalaestinum*, p. 74a corrected this reading to a verbal root *hwš* or as an alternative root *lk* on p. 104a. The original reading can be now proven by the early occurrence in the active participle *pael* of \sqrt{hwk} , *why mhwyk’ mm’ r[]wt’* ‘and it is soiled by foam’ Luke 9:39 CSRS^c (Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff, *The Christian Palestinian Aramaic New Testament Version from the Early Period. Gospels*, p. 157). The following corrections on pp. 157-160 for CPA NF Frag 7 can be made through the latest multispectral digital photography by EMEL (<https://sinai.library.ucla.edu>): read *b’y* for *b’o*. Luke 9:38; *mn r[]wt’* for *br[]wt’* Luke 9:39; *hww kwlbwn* for [...] *hww* Luke 9:43; *rby* for *mr’* and *btrk* for *btrn* Luke 9:49; *wlḥp^(sic)* [the *pe* is squeezed in as a small letter after *lamed*] for *sgd* Luke 17:16; *w’mr lbwn* for *w’mr ylbwn* Luke 17:20; *lhl* for *lk’* Luke 17:23; *wh’yk m’* for *hykm’* Luke 17:24; *hkdn* for *wkd* Luke 17:26.

⁸ Schulthess, *Lexicon Syropalaestinum*, p. 103a emended it to a verbal root *hwš*, but $\sqrt{hwš}$ ‘to knead’ has in this case a special meaning ‘to forge’, which is again supported by an early attestation *yhwšwn* in Micah 4:3 CCR3 (A. S. Lewis, *Codex Climaci Rescriptus* «Horae Semiticae VIII» [Cambridge: University Press, 1909], p. 2 = CCPA I 198).

With the decipherment of more new unpublished texts and unread passages certain words and previously odd spellings keep appearing repeatedly. Doubtful 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’.¹⁷ The real gold mine, however, for such idiosyncratic words are still the Catecheses of Cyril of Jerusalem (*hksmwn* ‘ant; a creeping animal’ IX 13; *qyqyn* ‘shoots’ IX 10; *tsr* ‘saw’ XIII 12; *šmyhyky* ‘my palate’ IX 13),¹⁸ and the books of Job with *m’wl* < **mwgl*¹⁹ ‘pus’ Job 7:5 CCR3 (lectionary), and of Isaiah with *dwbs* ‘bear’ Isaiah 11:7 (lectionary); *sg* ‘flax(-wick)’²⁰ Isaiah 42:3 (lectionary); *r’y* ‘ \sqrt{r} ’ ‘crushed’ Isaiah 42:3 (lectionary),²¹ and the Epistles *mrtmw* $\xi\rho\iota\varsigma$ ‘strife’ 1 Corinthians 3:3 CCR2B,²² but sometimes also Patristic texts *t’rbs* ‘to make trouble’ (Tale of a Monk).²³

One peculiarity from the beginning was *b’swnb dkers* ‘gluttony’ Cyril IV 37,²⁴ which Schulthess corrected in his dictionary to *b’jwnb*, and it entered into our edition as *b’nwnb*

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 copyist in Mark 12:34 (Lectionary A) as *bs* [active participle] and was emended to *rs* by Schulthess, *Lexicon Syropalaestinum*, p. 32b. A similar writing error occurs again in *šwbbh* ‘its heat’ Matthew 20:12 (Lectionary A) for better *šwrbh*.

¹⁸ For more examples and oddities see C. Müller-Kessler, Codex Sinaiticus Rescriptus. A Collection of Christian Palestinian Aramaic Manuscripts, *Le Muséon* 127 (2014), pp. 263-309, esp. 282-283.

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 *γάρ*, *δέ*, *δή*, and *οὖν*, the verb *πεισαι*, and specific terms like architectonic *γλύφω*, *κάρταλλος*, *κεφαλίς*, *κιβωτός*, *κίρκος*, *κοιτών*, *πῆγμα*, musical instrument *κιθάρα*, technical items *κασσίτερος*, *λέβης*, animals *δράκων*, *κῆτος*, *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): *סיגס*, *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.

²¹ The passage is in preparation in C. Müller-Kessler, The Early Lectionary Tradition in Christian Palestinian Aramaic: Lections Containing Unattested Old Testament Passages (Sinai, Greek NF MG 32), *Le Muséon*. The root only occurs in the reduplicated form, see Schulthess, *Lexicon Syropalaestinum*, p. 195b.

²² To appear in C. Müller-Kessler, The Missing Quire of *Codex Climaci Rescriptus* Containing 1-2 Corinthians in Christian Palestinian Aramaic (Sin. syr. NF M38), in Jana Gruskova, Grigory Kessel, Claudia Rapp, and Giulia Rossetto (eds.), *New Light on Old Manuscripts: Recent Advances in Palimpsest Studies* (Vienna: Austrian Academy) [in press].

²³ H. Duensing, *Christlich-palästinisch-aramäische Texte und Fragmente* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), p. 20.

²⁴ Land, *Anecdota Syriaca* IV, p. 200 (Fragm. 41).

'uncertain',²⁵ although the last commentary on my St Petersburg research papers says that it is really a *šbn*²⁶, therefore the reading *b'šwnb* by Land had been correct from the beginning. *b'šwn*' also occurs in an unknown homily Syr. 19(b) rb20 published by Hugo Duensing.²⁷ Lewis has a reading *bršw*' Job 21:27 in her tenth-century lectionary, where the reading in the original manuscript was corrected to *bršwn*' (pl. I),²⁸ obviously a misunderstanding for *b'šwn*' by the copyist.

Now with another nominal form *mb'šnw* of an *afel* with *-ān* + *-ū* suffixes 'badness, wickedness' occurring in Cyril XVI 8 (Georgian NF 19, fol. 60 v [r])²⁹ it looks as if the spellings with *'ayin* are rather consistent for these nominal forms of a secondary root *b'š*, of which none are attested yet for a historical spelling of *b'š*' 'to be evil' in Christian Palestinian Aramaic. Gustav Dalman already listed a secondary root *בשׁב* for the Jewish Western Aramaic texts,³⁰ including an *afel*, without quotation of the sources, which is also occurring as a variant spelling in Samaritan Aramaic.³¹ With the new evidence, the reading *b'š* might make finally more sense in the Khirbet Mird letter in line 9 *b'š lyby* 'my heart is weak'.³²

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, *b'š*, *b'šwn*, and

Resumen: El arameo cristiano palestinese 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

²⁵ C. Müller-Kessler and M. Sokoloff, *The Catechism of Cyril of Jerusalem in the Christian Palestinian Aramaic Version* («A Corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic V») (Groningen: STYX, 1999), pp. 41, 228b sub *b'nwn*.

²⁶ This correction was sent to Michael Sokoloff before the book went into print, but has never been integrated.

²⁷ Duensing, *Christlich-palästinisch-aramäische Texte*, p. 69.

²⁸ Lewis, *A Palestinian Syriac Lectionary*, p. 75 (f. 118r).

²⁹ C. Müller-Kessler, Neue Palimpsestfragmente zu den Katechesen des Cyrill von Jerusalem im *Codex Sinaiticus rescriptus* (Georg. NF 19, 71) mit einem zweiten Textzeugen (Syr. NF 11) aus dem Fundus des St. Katherinenklosters, *Oriens Christianus* 104 (2021) [in press].

³⁰ G. Dalman, *Aramäisch-Neuhebräisches Handwörterbuch zu Targum, Talmud und Midrasch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1938), p. 61a.

³¹ Tal, *Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic*, p. 78.

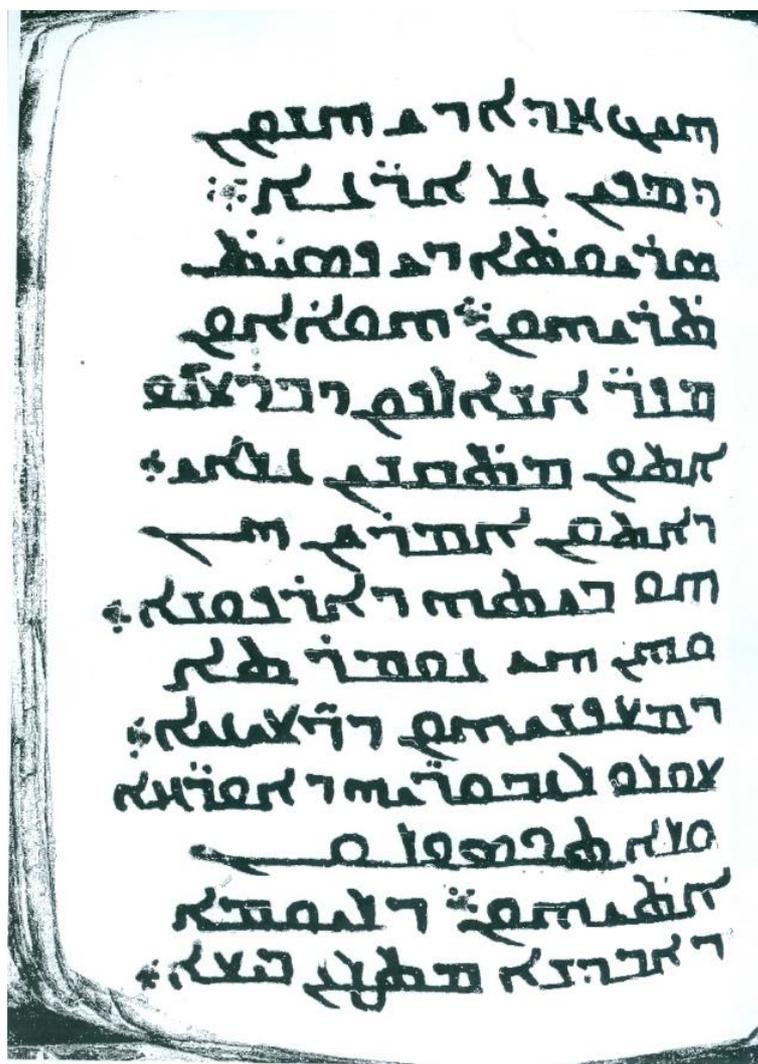
³² See J. T. Milik, The Archaeological Remains at el-Mird in the Wilderness of Judaea: Appendix. The Monastery of Kastellion, *Biblica* 42 (1961), pp. 21-27, esp. 25. For K. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer*, Band I (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), p. 404 the verb *r'š* is Arabic, but the root has been attested in a 'good' early manuscript *r'šy* 'burst into' Galatians 4:27 CCR2 (Lewis, *Codex Climaci Rescriptus*, p. 150 = CCPA IIB 114). It is originally Hebrew and belongs obviously to the inherited Hebrew roots in use in Christian Palestinian Aramaic.

mb'šwn, which are variant derivations of *b'š*, 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.

de este dialecto, *b'š*, *b'šwn* y *mb'šwn* que son variantes derivadas de *b'š*, han interesado a académicos por más de un siglo. Además de otro grupo de palabras 'incorrectamente pronunciadas', estas han sido consideradas sin duda en el primer diccionario, gramática y edición de textos, pero parecen tener una explicación en su sonido y un origen etimológico.

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



Pl. I: Lewis Lectionary, f. 118r — Westminster College Cambridge