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Targumic Development, Intersections with the New Testament, and Their Implications for Understanding the Aramaic Jesus

Abstract: Some researchers treat Targumim as pre-Christian and therefore as a precedent for Jesus's teaching, while others portray them as a later literature that should not be factored into exegesis. The apparent deadlock may be overcome, however, since notable overlaps with the New Testament are not an oddity. Many different literatures offer material comparable with the Targumim. Without such intersections the Targumic corpus could not have been dated. This paper sets out critical principles for understanding the phenomenon of intersectionality (understood in its mathematical, not sociological, sense). On that basis, historical parameters for discussing Jesus and his initial followers as Aramaic speakers are explained.

Keywords: Aramaic, Gospel study, historical Jesus, intersectionality, Targumim, tradition criticism

1. Introduction: Targumic Character, History of Discussion

After more than fifty years of concentrated attention, analysis of the provenience of the Targumim, document by document, has become possible. A thousand-year-old tradition has revealed its characteristics as a result. Owing to their extensive period of development, the Targumim have been evaluated quite differently in their relation to the New Testament. One of the most interesting features of the Targumim is that they interpret Scripture even as they translate it in a way that relates to the point of departure in Hebrew. At times they intersperse innovative elements (here italicized by way of identification, as has become a critical convention) in a manner that will attract the notice of any student of the New Testament (Targum Isa 66:24, cf. Mark 9:47–48):

> And they shall go forth and look upon the sinful men who have rebelled against my Memra; for their breaths will not die and their fire shall not be quenched, and the wicked shall be judged in Gêhina' until the righteous will say concerning them, We have seen enough.

In this case, the Aramaic term Gêhina' (אנהיג) is accorded its full eschatological valence, and appears in explicit connection with the final assertion in the book of Isaiah. The underlying Hebrew text is represented, but also focused by means of an innovative conception.

On other occasions, a Targum might use an entire phrase innovatively with wording reminiscent of the New Testament (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Lev 22:28, cf. Luke 6:36):

> My people, children of Israel, since our father is merciful in heaven, so should you be merciful on the earth.

Owing to the evident comparability with Luke 6:36, it was once current in scholarship to assert routinely that the Aramaic of the Targumim offered a precedent for the New Testament, and for Jesus's usage in particular.

1.1. History of Discussion

It was inevitable that scholars would draw comparisons between the Targums and the Gospels, given that both kinds of works were linked (even if indirectly) to the Judea and Galilee of the early centuries of the Common Era. But to Paul Kahle, the Targums and the Gospels were more than comparable or similar: the latter depended upon the former. In his Schweich Lectures, given at Oxford University in 1941, Kahle argued on the basis of materials in the Cairo Geniza that the "Palestinian Targum," as a Targumic Urtext, was earlier than the New Testament, so that interpretations found in the Palestinian Targums and the Gospels resulted from the New Testament writers – or perhaps even Jesus himself – borrowing from the Targum. This position became highly influential among Targum scholars, with Targum Pseudo-Jonathan being incorporated into the claim as well and categorized as "Palestinian."

In 1949 Alexander Díez Macho identified a manuscript of the Pentateuch from the Collegio del Neofiti in Rome as a previously unknown Targum. Díez Macho came to describe it as a complete "Palestinian Targum;" Matthew Black accepted that judgment and emphasized it in the third edition of his influential An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts, quoting Díez Macho as characterizing the form of Aramaic as "language spoken by our Lord." Asserted with the same confidence that Syriac was once declared to be the language of Jesus, this claim was falsified over time; nonetheless, it proved catalytic in the study of Aramaic.

Excitement over the new discovery was understandable, although the manuscript of Neofiti is from the sixteenth century, and for that matter materials from the Cairo Geniza come largely from between the seventh and the eleventh centuries, and some from later. Over time, critical discussion has assigned Targum Neofiti itself to no earlier than the fourth century, with other Targumim (Targum Jonathan to the Prophets and Targum Onqelos to the Pentateuch) earlier rather than later. What led to this correction, among other factors, was the evaluation of the Dead Sea Scrolls, to which Matthew Black refers, but only as "miscellaneous 'bits and pieces.'" Over time the corpus became better known, and its date and provenience give it a linguistic significance for the study of first-century Aramaic that cannot be denied (especially taken together with other discoveries in the Judean desert), eclipsing the importance of Targum Neofiti from the point of view of first-century Aramaic language. The attempt to assign the Aramaic of Targum Neofiti and the Cairo Geniza to the first century CE distorted the study of both the Targumim and the New Testament, because a standard of language from the Byzantine and medieval periods was imputed to first-century usage. This linguistic misassignment encouraged efforts at reconstructing Jesus's sayings that did not follow critical principles of assessment. Preben Wernberg-Møller, Anthony D. York, and Joseph A. Fitzmyer were key figures in drawing attention to this problem, but Martin McNamara has successfully made the distinction between the date of the language a Targum might use and the provenience of a tradition on which it might rely.

The Targumim are a rich source of that form of early Judaism where the folk and the expert (i.e., rabbinic) aspects of the religion met. For that reason, serious students of the New Testament should read them to help them comprehend the religious and social context within which Jesus taught and in which his movement first developed, especially in the years before the movement's transition to a Hellenistic social milieu and the Greek language. Modern students of the New Testament have sometimes become so obsessed with the issue of whether particular Targumim predate Jesus, they appear to have forgotten that Targumic influence on the Gospels does not require that chronology at all. The Gospels were composed during the close of the first century and the beginning of the second century. This is the same period during which the early stages of the Prophetic Targums and Targum Onqelos were composed, and it is reflected in many of the Palestinian Targums's early interpretations and additions. Indeed, although Targums as texts were largely composed after the events laid out in the New Testament, since they drew upon a wide range of understandings of Scripture, in many cases their interpretations of scriptural passages come from earlier decades.

To put the observation another way: the composite nature of the Targumim is such that, upon occasion, one may discern in them the survival of materials that circulated in the time of Jesus, and which probably influenced his teaching and/or the memory of that teaching among those disciples who were familiar with such traditions. Lev 22:28 in Pseudo-Jonathan is an example of such a survival, and may be assessed without assuming an early date for that Targum as a whole. Such an assumption has progressively been undermined by a more accurate understanding of the development of the Aramaic language, typified in the work of The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon. Nonetheless, since Luke 6:36 (cf. Matt 5:48) compares closely with the Targum, and other comparable sources have not yet been identified, the possibility should logically be entertained that the targumic tradition, as distinct from the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan as such, was current during the first century and that it influenced Jesus. It is, of course, theoretically possible that the saying originated with Jesus and was then anonymously taken up within the Targum. Yet the statement is rhetorically more at home within Luke than in Pseudo-Jonathan, where it appears unmotivated, and it seems inherently unlikely that Pseudo-Jonathan, which of all the Pentateuchal Targumim is perhaps the most influenced by a concern to guard and articulate Judaic integrity, would inadvertently convey a saying of Jesus. More probably, both Pseudo-Jonathan and Luke's Jesus are here independently passing on wisdom of a proverbial nature: both sources convey material from the stock of folk culture.

1.2. The Contribution of Aramaic Language Study

Linguistically it appears plain that the Targumim span a very long period of development. The chronology of the most relevant Targumim within the types of Aramaic used in Judaism has emerged as a matter of consensus, as a result of the periodization of the Aramaic language:

- Transitional Period (200 BCE–200 CE)
  - Targum Jonathan to the Prophets
  - Targum Onqelos to the Pentateuch
  - The Old Syriac Gospels
- Regional Period (200 CE–700 CE)
  - Targum Neofiti I to the Pentateuch
  - Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to the Pentateuch (with later material)
  - Earlier Targumim to the Writings
  - The Peshitta
- Revived Period (700 CE–1500 CE)
  - Cairo Geniza fragments of Targumim
  - Later Targumim to the Writings
  - Codex Reuchlinianus
  - Bibliothèque Nationale Hébreu 75
  - Fragment Targums to the Pentateuch.

Clearly, the language of the Targumim does not compete linguistically with discoveries associated with Qumran in terms of evidencing Aramaic of the first century, an observation to which we will return in the final section of this paper.

As a result of increasingly refined study of Aramaic dialects, the identification of historical allusions and references in Targumim, and their recourse to datable tropes within Rabbinic literature, it has been possible to offer a chronology of their emergence (Table 1).

Table 1: Targumic Development by Rabbinic Generation and Chronology

The table shows Targumic development by rabbinic generation and chronology. For each Targumic Collection a Rabbinic Generation and dating are ascribed. From the Targum Jonathan to the Prophets the Tannaim – Amoraim generation dated to 2nd through 4th centuries; to Pentateuchal Targumim, Targum Onqelos and Targum Neofiti the Amoraim – Seboraim/Geonim generation dated to 3rd through 6th centuries; to Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Fragments-Targums the Geonim-Rishonim generation dated to 7th through 11th centuries; to Targumim to Writings the Geonim-Rishonim generation dated to 8th through 13th centuries. The table suggest that the dating of the Targumic Collection is somehow fluid.

Targumic Collection	Rabbinic Generations	Dating
Targum Jonathan to the Prophets Latter Prophets Former Prophets	Tannaim – Amoraim	2nd through 4th centuries
Pentateuchal Targumim Targum Onqelos Targum Neofiti	Amoraim – Seboraim/Geonim	3rd through 6th centuries
Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Fragments-Targums	Geonim – Rishonim	7th through 11th centuries
Targumim to Writings	Geonim – Rishonim	8th through 13th centuries

Rabbinic discussion supports the existence of differing stages in the development of Targumim. In the case of Targum Jonathan to the Prophets, both the Tannaitic rabbi, Jonathan ben Uzziel (Megillah 3a in the Talmud), and the Amoraic authority, Joseph bar Ḥiyya, are identified as key figures in production. In the latter case, the Talmud quotes Joseph as agreeing with Targum Isa 8:6 in applying the image of the waters of Shiloah to the kingdom of the house of David (Sanhedrin 94b). The Talmudic passage also refers to Joseph as crediting the Targum with the interpretation that he approves. This is a case of an intersection, in which the agreement in how the passage is to be understood permits insight into the Targum's development in the Amoraic period. Other intersections have made possible the identification of two exegetical frameworks of the Isaiah Targum, so far the most intensively studied of the Targumim. Within that single work, for example, the Temple might be referred to as a currently existing institution that promises joy to all the inhabitants of the earth (Tg. Isa 24:16), or as a site of destruction (Tg. Isa 32:14). Analysis of other Targumim brought about a consensus worked out in Table 1. The consensus was given expression in two works, a critical introduction and a comprehensive comparison with the New Testament.

2. Classification of Intersections between the New Testament and the Targumim

Intersections also appear when the language of a Targum and that of the New Testament are comparable. That comparability was once referred to under the category of a "parallel," a term which came to be used too loosely, so that very late Rabbinic sources were claimed virtually without analysis as a precedent for the usage of Jesus and his followers. Since, by definition, parallel lines do not meet, that fault should not have become as prominent as it was, but a famous article by Samuel Sandmel put "parallels," or "parallelomania" as he phrased the issue, to rest. Yet the fact of comparability remains in some cases, and is a literary phenomenon that calls for explanation. Because intersectionality with Second Temple and Rabbinic literature is indispensable to appreciating the Targumim and their development, it would impose an unnecessary obstacle to study to ignore intersections with the New Testament, whose earliest ethos reflects Second Temple Judaism.

In analytic terms, intersections show themselves as analogies, where the usage of language is close and is deployed to convey a comparable sense. The examples given at the outset of this paper offer the possibility of insight into analogical uses. By understanding intersections as analogies, the fallacy of causation, which assumes that similarity directly implies dependence, is more easily avoided (Table 2).

Table 2: Types of Strong Analogy in Wording Between Targumim and the New Testament

The table points out to the types of strong analogy in wording between Targumim and the New Testament. The division of strong analogy to type A and type B is introduced. The type A is described as a Targumic and a New Testament passage share comparable material and cognate wording associated with the same text of Scripture; the example provided is the comparison between Isa 66:24 in the Targum and the reference to Gehenna in Mark 9:47–48. The type B is described as the New Testament and a Targum share wording and sense, but there is no particular reason to assume that the wording arose as an interpretation of the same biblical passage; the example provided consists of Lev 22:28 in Pseudo-Jonathan (*My people, children of Israel, since our father is merciful in heaven, so should you be merciful on the earth*) and its relationship to Luke 6:36.

Type of Analogy	Description	Example
I. Strong Analogy, Type A	A Targumic and a New Testament passage share comparable material and cognate wording associated with the same text of Scripture.	The comparison between Isa 66:24 in the Targum and the reference to Gehenna in Mark 9:47–48.
I. Strong Analogy, Type B	The New Testament and a Targum share wording and sense, but there is no particular reason to assume that the wording arose as an interpretation of the same biblical passage.	Lev 22:28 in Pseudo-Jonathan (*My people, children of Israel, since our father is merciful in heaven, so should you be merciful on the earth*) and its relationship to Luke 6:36.

When wording is not comparable, thematic treatment might nonetheless intersect (Table 3).

Table 3: Weaker Analogy between Targumim and the New Testament

The table describes weaker analogy between Targumim and the New Testament. The weaker analogy is described as follows: A Targum passage and a New Testament passage evidence a comparable understanding of the same biblical passage, but no common wording appears. The example provided consists of Jesus's parable of the vineyard (Matt 21:33–46, Mark 12:1–12, Luke 20:9–19) and the vineyard symbolism of Tg. Isa 5:1–7, both of which relate to the Temple.

II. Weaker Analogy	A Targum passage and a New Testament passage evidence a comparable understanding of the same biblical passage, but no common wording appears.	Jesus's parable of the vineyard (Matt 21:33–46, Mark 12:1–12, Luke 20:9–19) and the vineyard symbolism of Tg. Isa 5:1–7, both of which relate to the Temple.

When analogies are not precise, they might more generally be described as similarities (Table 4).

Table 4: Verbal and Thematic Similarities between Targumim and the New Testament

The table depicts verbal and thematic similarities between Targumim and the New Testament. It is divided into two categories: Verbal Similarity and Thematic Similarity. The verbal similarity consists of characteristically Targumic phrases that appear within the New Testament (example: The "kingdom of God," Jesus's signature concern, appears in the Targumim [Targum Onqelos to Exod 15:18; Targum Jonathan to Isa 24:23; 31:4; 40:9; 52:7; Ezek 7:7; Obad 21; Zech 14:9]). The thematic similarity is described as follows: The New Testament and the Targumim share a thematic emphasis. Actual wording is not at issue; rather, a motif of Judaism surfaces in each. The example provided here consists of both Jesus (Matt 5:12; Luke 6:23) and the meturgeman of Isaiah (Tg. Isa 28:11) referring to the persistent refusal to listen to the prophets.

III. Verbal Similarity	Characteristically Targumic phrases appear within the New Testament.	The “kingdom of God,” Jesus’s signature concern, appears in the Targumim (Targum Onqelos to Exod 15:18; Targum Jonathan to Isa 24:23; 31:4; 40:9; 52:7; Ezek 7:7; Obad 21; Zech 14:9).
IV. Thematic Similarity	The New Testament and the Targumim share a thematic emphasis. Actual wording is not at issue; rather, a motif of Judaism surfaces in each.	Both Jesus (Matt 5:12; Luke 6:23) and the *meturgeman* of Isaiah (Tg. Isa 28:11) refer to the persistent refusal to listen to the prophets.

Obviously, a Targum might on occasion have no particular connection with the New Testament, and yet provide an example of phrasing that illuminates the sense of a usage.

Closer attention to these examples discloses quite different kinds of intersectionality. Mark 9:47–48 agrees with the Targum in wording, and also with recourse to the Scripture that “Gehenna” is used to interpret:

> And if your eye makes you falter, throw it away: better for you to enter into the kingdom of God one-eyed than having two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where their worm does not expire and the fire is not extinguished.

The intersection does not show that Jesus quoted the Targum, but it does indicate that the vein of interpretation attributed to Jesus was comparable to that of the meturgeman of Isaiah. The Lukan admonition, “Become compassionate, just as your father is also compassionate” (Luke 6:36) likewise appears more at home in its Judaic environment when Pseudo-Jonathan Lev 22:28 is kept in mind, despite the late date of that Targum. When the authorities in the Temple are said to understand that Jesus told the parable of the vineyard against them (Mark 12:12c), that is sensible in light of the presentation of Isa 5:1–7 in the Targum, since there the management of the Sanctuary is a particular focus. More generally, the Targumim really do establish that the phrase “the kingdom of God” was neither unique to Jesus nor unusual in Judaic discourse (any more than the term ’Aba’ [אבא] was). When Mark 1:15 has Jesus announce, “The time has been filled, and the kingdom of God has approached: repent and believe in the message,” that is commensurate with Targumic usage. And the frustration of the lack of attention to the prophets’ message is as Targumic as it is biblical. An agreed awareness of the problem stands behind assertions such as appear in Matt 5:12, "Rejoice and celebrate! Because your reward is great in the heavens – for so they persecuted the prophets before you."

These and other intersections piqued my interest while I was working on the layered formation of the Isaiah Targum. In a book entitled A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible I also analyzed the Targumic dimensions of key terms of reference. Examples included the decision of God not to forgive those that refuse him, which comes to expression both in Tg. Isa 6:9, 10 and in Mark 4:12. More proverbial expressions include the threat that comes of resorting to the "sword" (expressed in Tg. Isa 50:11 and Matt 26:52) as well as "Gehenna," and the insistence that one is measured by the measure one uses (Tg. Isa 27:8 and Matt 7:2; Mark 4:24; Luke 6:38). Mamôna' is also evocatively deployed in Tg. Isa 5:23; 33:15 in a way that invites comparison with Luke 16:1–13; Matt 6:24. The evil of the current generation is lamented in Tg. Isa 57:3, inviting comparison with Mark 8:38; 9:19; Matt 12:39, 45; 16:4; 17:17; Luke 9:41). In contrast, the promise of new revelation holds out hope in Tg. Isa 48:6, as it does in Matthew 13:17; Luke 10:24. The pleasure that God takes in his chosen, a pivot in the scene of Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:11; Matt 3:17; Luke 3:22) comports with Tg. Isa 41:8–9; 43:10, as does the language relating to God as "Father" in Isa 63:16 in its versions generally.

Awareness of overlaps between the Targumim and the New Testament in itself provides a useful dimension of exegetical engagement for the analysis of both bodies of writing. For analytic work to advance, however, it was plain that the Gospels' Aramaic idioms needed to be assessed in terms of the historical linguistics of their own period, not that of the later periods represented in the Targumim. The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon, already mentioned, provides an invaluable resource in that regard, especially as supplemented by the lexical and grammatical work of one of its principal contributors, Edward M. Cook. Such contributions offer state of the art access to the current study of Aramaic and its considerable advances over the past fifty years.

When that perspective is taken into account, it is also possible to identify streams of tradition, framed under the influence of Jesus's followers, that influenced the Gospels. Jonathan ben Uzziel and Joseph bar bar Ḥiyya in the case of Targum Jonathan, it turns out, have several counterparts in the case of the Gospels. Gospels, like Targums, represent the transition from an initially oral to a well-represented textual medium, and provide evidence of a layered composition. The comparatively short time-span of the emergence of the Gospels, and the relatively large number of identifiable tradents of Jesus traditions, makes the Gospels less homogenous than the Targumim, and yet also akin to the Targumim in the process of formation involved.

3. The Aramaic Jesus in the Genesis of the Gospels

The features of scholarship just mentioned – the assessment of Aramaic of the first century and its implications for an understanding of the formation of the Gospels – have exerted an influence recently, and are central to a work that appeared at the close of 2025. Assessment within Aramaic Jesus unfolds in three stages, moving from stricter to looser connections between the Greek Gospels and Aramaic. At each of the stages, precise Aramaic forms, consistent with first-century usage, are identified and compared with the New Testament. The present discussion of the linguistic territory covered and how it is surveyed can only offer a few examples of the analysis and the principles involved: the argument proper is developed in the work cited, together with a discussion of precise Aramaic forms and of secondary literature. In three ways, intersection is again at issue: in this case, the intersection between the presentation of Jesus in the Gospels and Aramaic usages.

First, specific cases in which Aramaic is identifiably transliterated within the Greek New Testament texts are treated. For that purpose, New Testament texts are assessed in the order of their resort to such transliteration, from the greatest frequency to the least. As this stage of analysis proceeds, the settings in which the Aramaic terms and phrases involved emerge, and the streams of tradition in which they were transmitted also provide evidence to be considered. Unlike previous considerations, this first stage of analysis is not simply a list of Aramaic usages, although they are indeed listed in the contents, but also an assessment of how usages of Aramaic terms were deployed within the social environment of the speakers and reciters.

In Mark’s Greek at 5:41, the Aramaic phrase *ṭalîta*ʾ *qûmî* (טליתא קומי) is given as *Talitha koum* (Ταλιθα κουμ), a reasonable although not quite accurate approximation of the Aramaic form. Some Greek manuscripts adjust the spelling to *Talitha koumi* (Ταλιθα κουμι), which shows a continuing awareness of Aramaic grammar by the correctors, since they give the feminine imperative – the final -î sound in Aramaic *qûmî* (קומי). Not all the cases are easily identified, and in a few instances discussion has been considerable and yet indecisive. For that reason, more than a listing needs to be involved in the cases of full transliterations that are discussed, involving over two dozen Synoptic passages. The predominance of the Synoptic Gospels reveals that their proximity to Aramaic streams of tradition was closer than John’s, although – as is also shown in Aramaic Jesus – part of John’s literary artistry involves an awareness of and recourse to Aramaic.

Some transliterations are not complete, but are fractured in terms of their presentation, so that at times the meaning of the purported transliteration remains unclear. Indeed, in fractured transliterations the derivation from Aramaic might not be specifiable in the present state of knowledge, and on occasion Aramaic does not seem really to be the basis of the usage at all. Some fractured transliterations became routine usages, and are familiar to English readers of the New Testament in the form “rabbi” applied to Jesus and in the use of “amen” at the beginning of a saying, rather than at the end. Dozens of passages are involved in the discussion of fractured transliterations, which include Matthew’s recourse to the Aramaic term *zizana*ʾ (זזנא, for “tare”) in the uniquely Matthean parable of the wheat and the weeds (Matt 13:24–30, 36–40). Although that is an example of an incidental usage, some Aramaic forms became routinized, such as *nezêra*ʾ (נזירא). In the Greek Gospels the term becomes *Nazarēnos* (Ναζαρηνός) or *Nazōraios* (Ναζωραῖος). Typically rendered “Nazarene” or “Nazorean” in English versions, when not transformed into “of Nazareth,” the Aramaic term bears a distinctive sense. The meaning is explained by its deployment in a stream of tradition associated with Mary Magdalene, as explained below.

While Synoptic passages involving fractured transliteration predominate, John's Gospel takes the process of routinization much further, for example in its deployment of terms such as *rabî/rabûnî* (רבי/רבוני) and its duplication of introductory *ʾamên* (אמן), showing a fondness for the occasional Aramaic term. Throughout, there is a pattern of awareness of Aramaic as the medium of traditions that had been received, both in particular instances and in the assimilation of usages in order to convey meanings and emphases that feature in each of the Gospels.

Second, analysis that takes account of cultural settings of Aramaic usage invites a new approach to a long-deployed technique: that of retroversion. Because no known ancient text of the New Testament prior to its Greek version exists in Aramaic, only a reconstitution of the Aramaic original is possible. Moreover, since the Gospels and associated literature were composed in Greek, there is no assurance that any complete text extant today, or any source within an extant text, actually had an Aramaic antecedent. Cumulative evidence of transliterations in Part I makes it far more plausible that the remembrance of Jesus had already made the transition from Aramaic to Greek in the period prior to the active formation of the Gospels in literary terms. For this reason, retroversion can only be recommended when (a) some linguistic indication of an Aramaic antecedent is given by the text in a particular case, (b) a plausible Aramaic-speaking tradent of the material can be identified for the passage, and (c) the result of retroversion is a clearer understanding of the Greek that ultimately emerged than would have been possible on the basis of the Greek text alone. That is the procedure in Part II of Aramaic Jesus, marking a considerable refinement of previous approaches. The fallacy of some assertions in the past, that equated anything that could be stated in Aramaic with the finding that Jesus made the statement, is put to rest.

There are too many examples to enumerate here, but a few citations will give a sense of the findings, which in the book are embedded within passages fully retroverted into Aramaic. Readers will be well familiar with discussion of the source called "Q." One of the few certain observations that might be made in regard to this material is that originally it was not called by that name;

rather, it represents halakhic teaching in Jesus’s name committed to the Twelve. As a body of material, it is comparable to the individual mishnah that a rabbi might promulgate, a number of which were incorporated during the second century CE within the literary compendium called the Mishnah. How this stream of tradition was supplied to the Gospel-writers is still a matter of dispute.

At times, however, sayings in this stream of tradition deviate in the use of particular words in a way that suggests that a single Aramaic term produced different renderings. Should we say with Matt 11:12 that the kingdom of God exerts force, or with Luke 16:16 that it is messaged triumphantly? The verb *taqphah* (תקפה) in Aramaic would explain both turns of phrase. Across a broad swath of material, Peter is associated with a stream of tradition that focuses on the issue of forgiving sins, explained (for example at Mark 2:10) in such a flexible way that the Aramaic verb *šebaq* (שבק), meaning to let go or release, seems to lie behind a variety of expressions in Greek. Mary Magdalene is specifically associated with the announcement of Jesus’s resurrection in all the Gospels. Mark, the earliest of the Gospels, has the young man at the tomb identify Jesus as “the Nazarene” (*Nazarēnos* [Ναζαρηνός] in Mark 16:6), a designation that reflects *Nezêraʾ* (נזירא) in Aramaic, conveying the sense in that language of a consecrated person, a theme especially prominent in the Magdalene stream of tradition. In contrast, the stream associated with James the brother of Jesus concerned itself more tightly with the Temple in Jerusalem. The controversy in regard to *qûrbana’* [קורבנא] is a representative instance of that, and the argument turns on how the Pharisees and scribes “duly” use their teaching to distort Scripture (Mark 7:9). The usage in Greek (*kalōs* [καλῶς]) is a reach, since it would ordinarily mean something like “nicely.” But as a rendering Aramaic *yaʾut* (יאות), the sense becomes straightforward. When Jesus is remembered as labeling Antipas as “that fox” within a stream of tradition associated with Barnabas that shows awareness of the politics of Herod the Great’s son Antipas (Luke 13:31–33), the expression is easily understood as reflecting Aramaic *taʿlaʾ dêk* (תעלא דך), and articulates a prophetic Christology also characteristic of the stream.

In most cases, the streams of tradition show signs of having been updated, probably still at an oral stage prior to organized written sources, and in any case within an Aramaic environment. The kingdom of God becomes more apocalyptic by coordinating it strictly with *Gêhinaʾ* (גיהנא, Mark 9:47); Peter is solemnly designated as a foundational figure by means of the name *Kêphaʾ* (קיפא, Matt 16:18); the restrictive understanding of forgiveness that James championed is buttressed with the formal claim that while many are called only a few are selected (*beḥîrîn* [בחרין], Matt 22:14); by the close of the oral stage of Barnabas's stream of tradition, Jerusalem is imagined as threatened with destruction by means of the Aramaic metaphor of a fig tree in a vineyard (Luke 13:6–9).

These extensions of the streams already identified can also be associated with named teachers, although the process of identification is more inferential for these ancillary developments of streams. It appears that James the son of Zebedee extended the teaching of the Twelve, that Peter's follower named Mark (not to be confused with the Evangelist) accorded him preeminence, that Silas focused the approach of James the brother of Jesus, and that Symeon Niger carried on the prophetic perspective of Barnabas. This summary cannot develop the arguments concerned, which to some extent turn on the analysis of patterns of presentation and rhythms in Aramaic developed in Part II of Aramaic Jesus. It is worth observing, however, that the Magdalene stream does not show signs of such extension, but appears to have been coopted within others, especially the Barnaban stream, representing a tendency to qualify Mary Magdalene's role despite her undeniable importance in relation to Jesus's resurrection.

Third, by the time that Part I and Part II have unfolded, a foundation is laid to assess noticeable overlaps that have been discovered between the New Testament and Aramaic literature that was in the process of composition during the first century, especially the Targumim. As discussed, those overlaps, thematic emphases that relate Jesus's movement to Second Temple Judaism (and vice versa), have in recent years been a topic of investigation in their own right, but here (in a manner somewhat similar to the approach in Part II) a principle of restraint is deployed. Interest centers in Part III, therefore, not on all shared emphases, but on those that presuppose a demonstrable connection to Aramaic usage elucidating a feature or features of the Greek texts concerned in the presentation of Jesus.

The pattern of those overlaps is stunning. Thematic emphases are coherent, but equally important – different aspects of those themes are developed, depending upon the stream of tradition and the stage of development of the stream. That is, social identity is conveyed by the configuration of Jesus's teaching that is transmitted. God's kingdom might be viewed as exerting a current force in the early stage of the Twelve's transmission (Luke 16:16; Matt 11:12), but at the later phase it is seen principally in its contrast with Gehenna (Mark 9:47). Starker contrasts are also instanced: is purity, for example, a triumphant force, as in the Magdalene stream (Mark 16:6), or a status to be protected from impurity, as in the Barnaban stream (Luke 13:32–33)? And is the eschatological feast with God a promise for "many," as in the Petrine stream (Mark 14:24), or a limited promise, as in the Silan version of the stream associated with James the brother of Jesus (Matt 22:14)? Forgiveness is offered proactively in the interests of healing in the Petrine stream (Mark 2:10), but two chapters later in the same Gospel a different stream, associated with James the brother of Jesus, explicitly limits the possibility of being forgiven by recourse to an Aramaic locution (Mark 4:11, 12). The means by which judgment is exercised might be existential return on the standard a person deploys (Matt 7:2), or an objective threat to an entire city (Luke 13:6–9).

The themes of the kingdom, purity, eschatological banquet, forgiveness, and judgment are broadly shared, then, but at the same time Aramaic connections cannot be said to offer a unform depiction of Jesus's teaching. The multiple conceptions in the New Testament of how Jesus was raised from the dead should long ago have alerted scholars to the fact that communities that recollected him did so with distinctive conceptions and differing senses of their own identity. The direct equation between Jesus and Aramaic reconstruction is a fallacy. Rather, the streams of Aramaic tradition, reflecting the identities of the tradents involved in those streams, need to be assessed critically, so as to infer what actions and teachings provoked or encouraged the results. The three stages of analysis here outlined produce an understanding of the Aramaic Jesus that illuminates him, but also the settings that produced him and his memory, and the people and processes that brought that memory forward over time. Although the path to this understanding is principally by means of the primary texts involved, cited as investigation is pursued, secondary literature is also taken into account in Aramaic Jesus. Any such project needs to be located within the history of the discipline as well as within the history of the development of the Aramaic language and of the Gospels.

3.1. The Aramaic Jesus and History

The Epilogue then applies the insights of the history of discussion, particularly as enriched by the detailed analysis of cases, to the issue of the Aramaic Jesus within history. The assumption that evidence of engagement with the Aramaic language indicates a direct connection with "the historical Jesus" is challenged. Indulging an idea of history that in other fields passed with the nineteenth century, some scholars of the New Testament continue to behave as if Jesus could be equated directly with certain privileged texts.

Prior to his death in 1943, the influential philosopher and working archaeologist Robin Collingwood set out a definitional claim that has had a long afterlife:

> Confronted with a ready-made statement about a subject he is studying, the scientific historian never asks himself: "Is this statement true or false," in other words, "Shall I incorporate it in my history of the subject or not?" The question he asks himself is: "What does this statement mean?"

As an archaeologist, Collingwood had ample occasion to realize that inferences were necessary to form an impression of the intents of people in history. That contributed to his insight that, although an historian always seeks for the most immediate sources possible, a source that conveys direct access to the thoughts of the past does not and cannot exist. They are all a matter of the historian's inference on the basis of the best evidence available.

The use of inference in this way caused Collingwood to conceive it as a form of "re-enactment," such that "Historical knowledge is the re-enactment of a past thought encapsulated in a context of present thoughts which, by contradicting it, confines it to a plane different from theirs." This deceptively simple principle involves actively seeing intents of the past articulated in circumstances not the historian's own. Even those who took up Collingwood's approach – including Bernard Lonergan, the Jesuit theologian whose own conception of history became very influential – have criticized Collingwood for an excessively idealist conception of the historian's craft. But Lonergan, like Collingwood, acknowledged that historical events are different from natural events in that they are involved in the meaning that people gave their actions. To apprehend them necessarily involves inference. Lonergan's criticism is rooted in his reading of Collingwood as an idealist prone to reduce events to thoughts. That appropriate corrective should be associated, in my view, with the quest for the historian to grasp intentions, rather than thoughts, as legible in actions.

By the time of Lonergan's death in 1984, however, biblical studies had entered a phase in which it was fashionable to speak of "the end of the historical-critical method," in favor of trends that included post-modernism and denominational interpretations, as well as other ideological readings. The gradual rebound in an appeal to historical methods included Maurice Casey's volumes on the Aramaic of the Gospels as well as his book on Jesus, billed as the work of "an independent historian," which also instantiates his equation of the alleged Aramaic behind the Synoptic gospels with history. The fit with accuracy is so close in his estimation that one reviewer comments on his use of "original Aramaic sources as a means to access the historic Jesus with positivistic certainty." The result recycles the Synoptic portrait to such an extent, the reviewer remarks, that it "sounds more like a creedal statement than historical analysis." Casey would not be the only scholar in the period that has seen the retreat of post-modernism in biblical studies to embrace a view of history that appears more typical of the time before Collingwood than after. In any case, analysis of the thematics of statements involving Aramaic language and literature in the Gospels has shown us that a unitary Aramaic Jesus is a mirage. Rather, differing portraits arise from differing streams of tradition.

The Aramaic Jesus is pluriform, although coherent, as is the Jesus of the Gospels. As a figure, he is an instance of cultural memory, which as a result of intense recent discussion has been described as including cognitive memory and social memory. What permits the transition from personal cognition to social association and then to cultural identity is precisely the impact of tradition, which is what is embraced as a memory even by those who are in no position to recollect personally what is related when it becomes a social memory or a cultural memory. Tradition permits the "memory" of what has never been experienced, and for that reason its force is considerable. Historical analysis does not demand accepting or denying any tradition as an accurate memory; its purpose is to permit the contextual pluriformity of traditions to emerge.

Casey's resort to an outmoded view of history at least involved systematic recourse to a sector of primary sources, in the shape of Aramaic. Other scholars of the New Testament have resorted to an extreme example of what Collingwood called "scissors-and paste," by which he meant cutting and pasting data from various source into an overall picture, as if those data were all individually and equivalently reliable. Inspired by the comparison, a colleague once updated the phrase to "Lego-scholarship." The procedure is misleading regardless of the metaphor since the "data" involved are themselves the products of the people who shaped the sources. The fallacy is compounded, when findings of secondary literature are patched together, as in many recent treatments of "the historical Jesus." James D.G. Dunn, in an example of this genre of work, discounts findings that involve "biblical and non-biblical sources of at best doubtful relevance," many of which are in Aramaic, and virtually all Judaic. He claims that such connections are excessively imaginative, by the simple expedient of not evaluating those sources. In this way, Dunn can shape his discussion to serve the interests of his revived liberal portrait of Jesus and his tradition as concerned "for all caring and concerned living," as if the current social context were continuous with Jesus's. Memory in this model is mechanical rather than cultural, and contextual development is not accorded its due.

Within the assessment of Jesus in history, a mechanical approach has been encouraged by means of persistent recourse to alleged

"Criteria of Authenticity." Typically, proponents of the approach take the considerations what they call "criteria" – namely, whether a passage is multiply attested, whether it stands in tension (usually called "dissimilarity" or "discontinuity") with the Judaism and emerging Christianity of the period, and whether it is consistent (or "coherent") with what is known of Jesus – as benchmarks for what can be asserted reliably. Recently the Criteria have come under increasing scrutiny, especially in view of the implicit assumption that grounds their use, which is that the initial purpose of a given passage was historical reliability. But more profoundly, the "Criteria of Authenticity" misapprehend how traditions develop. Traditions do not follow guidelines or criteria. At best, readers today might make comparative observations among traditions along the lines of the "Criteria," but those are only observations, and not determinations of what traditions mean to say. Then, too, "Authenticity" cannot be taken as the horizon of meaning within which traditions concerning Jesus developed, which might be legendary or metaphorical or theological or typological rather than or as well as historical. So the very phrase "Criteria of Authenticity" is a category mistake, or better a series of category mistakes, since they are not criteria, do not in themselves measure a tradition, and cannot establish authenticity in the modern sense of that word. The fact that they have survived through several phases of "The Quest of the Historical Jesus" is a sign that historians of Jesus have far too easily assumed that the context of their interest corresponds to that of the New Testament.

Contextual disjuncture, however, is exactly what gives rise to the need for history. Our access to that study comes, not from disinterested sources (primary or secondary), but from evidence itself shaped by human intents. Because that is the case, the presentation of Jesus within any of the streams should not be accepted as a matter of fact. Instead, the streams in aggregate present a field of presentations. Jesus's position may be inferred by judging what he must have done and said to produce the range that the streams represent under each of the topics identified. Since the streams themselves are an inference, within which Aramaic language and literature has here been deployed as an index, to speak of Jesus in history is therefore an inference from an inference. That is the historiographic course that many researchers have attempted to cut across by positing a single, “reliable” short cut. Casey shows that some Aramaists are still prone to the same fault, but they need not succumb to it. If results are treated as inferences from which a further inference may be attempted, history will be served.

4. Conclusions

Paying attention to the Aramaic dimension of development makes it clear that traditions are always embedded in the cultural identity of those who pass them on. Tradents other than Jesus were associated with the development of streams of Aramaic tradition within the New Testament, and many contributors to those texts were quite capable of historical insight with or without competence in Aramaic. The Aramaic Jesus, therefore, emerges with differing but related representations within identifiable streams of tradition, which contribute to an evaluation of Jesus in history while requiring further historical assessment. That further assessment involves a consistent application of inference to all the evidence available, including – but by no means limited to – the Aramaic evidence.

By means of many specific examples, considerations of cultural and historical context, and engagement with the underlying linguistic issues, this article has aimed to explain how recourse to Aramaic may prove an effective tool in the critical study of Jesus as a whole. Equally important, the characteristics and textures of the traditions that fed the New Testament begin to come into focus. Because the linguistic basis of this inherently comparative study will be subject to development for some time to come, such study sets out terms of reference that adjust previous findings, but also offers prospects of further analysis, adjustment, and discovery.

Those prospects are grounded in the observation of intersections among literatures and within literatures at several levels. As illustrated by means of examples in this article, intersectional analysis has permitted the Targumim to be characterized and dated, because the history of the Aramaic language and of Rabbinic sources have become better understood in the past few decades. Indeed, the New Testament also offers a comparable corpus in relation to the Targumim. These intersections shed light on Targumic development, and – provided that fallacious assumptions of dependence are avoided – they also illuminate the development of the Gospels. Comparison of Gospels with the Targumim should proceed on the basis of the analogies described, rather than on suppositions of direct borrowing. These analogies, in turn, encourage recourse to the Aramaic usage of Jesus, by focusing on first-century usage as reflected in direct transliterations, retroversions that help account for unusual Greek turns of phrase, and thematic concerns within the Gospels that are typical of Second Temple Judaism. These, too, represent intersections with Aramaic literature, including the Targumim. Jesus himself emerges as a figure in history, not as identifiable with a single Gospel or source, but as the intersection that accounts for how the streams of tradition that refer to him came to manifest the variety that analysis in terms of Aramaic especially highlights.

Targumiczny rozwój, punkty przecięcia z Nowym Testamentem i ich implikacje dla zrozumienia aramejskiego Jezusa

Abstrakt: Niektórzy badacze traktują Targumy jako przedchrześcijańskie, a więc jako precedens dla nauczania Jezusa. Inni ukazują je jako literaturę późniejszą, która nie powinna wpływać na egzegezę. Ten pozorny impas może być jednak przezwyciężony, ponieważ wyraźne punkty styczności z Nowym Testamentem nie są rzadkością. Wiele różnych dzieł literatury zawiera materiał porównywalny z Targumami. Bez takich punktów stycznych Targumy nie mogłyby być datowane. Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia główne zasady zrozumienia fenomenu intersekcjonalności (rozumianego w sensie matematycznym, a nie socjologicznym). Na tej podstawie wyjaśnione zostają historyczne parametry dla dyskusji o Jezusie i jego pierwszych naśladowcach jako mówiących po aramejsku.

Słowa kluczowe: aramejski, badania nad Ewangeliami, Jezus historyczny, intersekcjonalność, Targumy, krytyka tradycji

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