

BOOK REVIEW

GALILEAN ARAMAIC; ITS LINGUISTIC AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

by *MENACHEM COHEN**

Eduard Yechezkel Kutscher, *Studies in Galilean Aramaic*. Translated from the Hebrew original and annotated with additional notes from the author's handcopy, by Michael Sokoloff. Ramat Gan, Bar-Ilan University, 1976, X, 114 p.

Students and scholars of Aramaic who are not proficient in modern Hebrew owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. M. Sokoloff who took the time and effort to translate from the Hebrew one of the important studies written in the field of Palestinian Aramaic by his distinguished teacher, the late Professor E.Y. Kutscher. He has thereby enabled a wider circle of people who show an interest in early Palestinian Aramaic to gain firsthand knowledge of a basic study of great methodological importance which was written by one of the foremost Aramaic scholars of our time.

Galilean Aramaic, the subject of this study, was the spoken language of the inhabitants of the Galilee in the first centuries of the Christian era and is a branch of Middle Western Aramaic. Understanding the original form of this important branch of Aramaic is, of course, firstly the concern of Aramaic scholars. However, it should also be mentioned that interest in the Palestinian branch of Aramaic is not confined to dry scientific concern and this interest is accompanied by the emotional participation of both Jews and non-Jews, since it is possible that this Aramaic was the spoken language of certain important figures who were active in Judaism and Christianity in the first centuries of the Christian era and since basic works of both religions were written in this language.

The first scholar who attempted a scientific and systematic description of Galilean Aramaic was G. Dalman in his grammar (*Grammatik des jüdisch-palästinischen Aramäisch*, Leipzig, 1905). Dalman's work was of great importance and very

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basic, but it had a serious weakness: he relied upon unreliable texts which had been influenced in the course of their transmission by Babylonian Aramaic, which was the language familiar to the copyists. This fact casts doubt upon the reliability of many of Dalman's theories and conclusions and distorts the original form of Galilean Aramaic. It was Kutscher who pointed this out to the scholarly world in the present study which was his first important study in the field of Aramaic, and the foundation for a series of additional studies on other dialects of Aramaic.

This study originally written in Hebrew was first published in four installments in *Tarbiz* 21-22 (1951-1952) and afterwards as a separate publication with indices, an English summary and a table of contents in 1952. The primary importance of this study is its methodology. Kutscher revealed the correct method for uncovering a more original form of Galilean Aramaic than Dalman had. He also crystallized through the use of numerous examples the use of the method and its results.

Since the time in which Dalman's grammar was written, additional textual evidence concerning Palestinian Aramaic has been uncovered both in and outside of the Cairo Geniza. The finds in the Geniza include fragments of the Palestinian Talmud and of Palestinian *Targumim* as well as some additional Palestinian texts. Apart from the Geniza, Kutscher mentions only one text which can be considered reliable, succeeded in preserving the original Galilean form and was influenced only slightly by Babylonian Aramaic: Vatican Manuscript 30 (Ms. Vat. Ebr. 30) of *Bereshit Rabba*. The examination of these finds from a linguistic point of view in comparison with the editions and manuscripts which Dalman used in his grammar, point out the need for a revision of a number of Dalman's theories and conclusions. For example: Dalman states that in Galilean Aramaic the force of the determination was already weakened as was the case in Babylonian Aramaic. In early Royal Aramaic the mark of the determination was an *aleph* at the end of the word as, for example *mlk'* (the king) as opposed to the indefinite *mlk* (a king). In Middle Aramaic, Eastern Aramaic lost the force of the determination and *mlk'* represents both meanings. Dalman attempted to establish, on the basis of the text at his disposal, that Galilean Aramaic behaves similarly to Eastern Aramaic and in contrast to two other dialects of Western Aramaic – Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Samaritan Aramaic which retained the force of the determination. Kutscher shows that the conclusion of Dalman in this case, as in many other cases, is based upon unreliable texts which were already influenced by Babylonian Aramaic and, therefore, exhibited Eastern forms (pp. 7-8). An examination of reliable texts proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that in all dialects of Western Aramaic, including Galilean, the force of determination was preserved in its entirety and this fact can serve, therefore, as one of the most important signs for differentiating between Eastern and Western Aramaic.

Throughout the course of the study, Kutscher bases his methodological approach on a vast array of details, uncovering clearly and in depth much material for a reconstruction of the original form of Galilean Aramaic. Kutscher's major source for reconstructing the forms of Galilean Aramaic is Ms. Vat. He is aided, however,

also by the Geniza fragments mentioned above, by Jewish inscriptions found in Palestine, by epigraphic material of other Palestinian dialects and by the last living remnant of Western Aramaic – the Maʿlula dialect.

Kutscher's discussions and examples concerning the possibility of reconstructing the original form of Galilean Aramaic encompass all aspects of language. He deals with a great number of examples in the second chapter of his study, in which he attempts to prove that Ms. Vat. is of excellent quality (pp. 11-14). He also deals at great length with other examples in his third and last chapter: Clarification of Grammatical Points in Galilean Aramaic. In chapter two the examples are classified according to the following categories: Spelling and Pronunciation, The Noun, Numerals, The Verb, Pronouns, Particles, Miscellanea, Vocabulary, Ketib and Qere, Various Connections, Place Names. The last chapter is devoted to a discussion of four phenomena: The Ending *-ayin*, The Construction *mn* + the Participle, Word-Final *m > n*, The Gutturals in Galilee. We will bring three representative examples from chapter two and two examples from chapter three.

An example from noun forms (pp. 22-29): *pwm* – *pm*, “mouth”. In the Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud the form is *pwm*. In two dialects of Western Aramaic, Samaritan and Christian Palestinian Aramaic the form is *pm* (or *pym*). Dalman, however, based on the texts which he used claims that the Galilean form is *pwm*. He states that there is no agreement in the Western dialects as to the form of the word. However, Ms. Vat. and Geniza fragments proved beyond a doubt that the original form in Galilean Aramaic is also *pm* and even if at times the form *pwm* does appear in the manuscript, in the great majority of cases the original form was preserved. At this point it is worthwhile to note that Kutscher in his study had not yet realized that Ms. Vat. was in effect written by three copyists, one of whom was influenced by Babylonian Aramaic more than his colleagues, and most of the instances of Babylonian influence, like the form *pwm* above are found in passages written by this scribe. See M. Sokoloff, *Lěšoněnu*, 33, (1969), 35-42.

An example of verb forms (p. 29): Infinitive of the *pě'al* conjunction: Dalman claims that in Galilean Aramaic the *pě'al* infinitive is both *mqṭl* and *mqṭwl*. However, from Geniza fragments and from Ms. Vat. it becomes clear that the form of the verb in Galilean Aramaic was only *mqṭwl*, as for example: *lmt'wn* (to claim); *lmqṭwl* (to kill) *et al.* From Geniza fragments of the Targum it can be seen that even when the orthography is defective, it is vocalized as *mqṭwl* as, for example, *lěmegzor* (to circumcize) *et al.* From this we learn that even in those few cases in which the orthography was defective, in the manuscripts there is no proof that they were pronounced *mqṭl*.

An example of vocabulary (p. 33): The importance of Ms. Vat. is also evident in this area for the reconstruction of Galilean Aramaic. At times it is possible to find in Ms. Vat. words which appear nowhere else as, for example, *mlyth* – “the place of water-drawing.” In this case, the importance of the discovery extends beyond

the specific field of Aramaic and may have possible implications for the field of biblical exegesis. In Song of Songs we find a similar *hapax legomenon*, whose meaning has long been debated by exegetes. Song of Songs 5:12: His eyes are like doves beside the water brooks, washed with milk, set by the *ml't*. Until now no parallel has been found for the word *ml't* and many proposals have been suggested. The word *mlyth* in Ms. Vat. is likely to clarify the meaning and etymology of this word and to offer an acceptable explanation for the verse.

An example of syntax (pp. 51-58): The construction *mn* + participle. An examination of the texts of Ms. Vat. and Geniza fragments teach us of the existence of this construction in Galilean Aramaic in the sense of a predicative. In Syriac the construction of *kd* + participle serves this function. In the Babylonian Talmud the form usually is *ky* + participle. In Galilean Aramaic, as mentioned, the regular combination was *mn* + participle. For example: *mn ytyb gbyh 'tt hdh 'yth* – while being seated next to him a woman came. From this original form developed secondary forms as, for example, the ellision of the *nun*: *mmhlk bswq' hm' . . .* (Ms. Vat.) – while walking in the marketplace, he saw . . . Sometimes even in the plene form: *myh'zr . . .* – on returning. It appears even as a separate element: *my'zyl . . .* – on going. This construction even influenced, it appears, the creation of a construction similar to Hebrew in the language of the Sages: *m'wmd* which should be read according to the Yemenite pronunciation *me'omèd*, i.e. *m* + participle, as in Galilean Aramaic.

An example of pronunciation (pp. 67ff.): Kutscher completes his study with a sweeping discussion of the problem of the pronunciation of gutturals in the Galilee. Scholarship on this topic abounds in generalizations and unbalanced opinions and Kutscher, in his sharp discussion, replete with examples restores the necessary balance to the picture. In a lecture delivered by Kahle in Leipzig in 1921 the claim was made that already in the period of the Masoretes the inhabitants of Palestine could not pronounce the gutturals. The Masoretes, he claimed, revived the pronunciation in an artificial manner under the influence of Arabic (See P. Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza*, 1947, pp. 86-95). Many scholars were influenced by Kahle. Kutscher makes use of much material to refute this opinion and to describe the true situation.

According to Kutscher, it cannot be denied that there was a certain weakening of the pronunciation of gutturals in the Galilee and in other areas of Palestine, but attention must be paid to the stages and the weakening in different times and localities. There are places in Palestine in which there was a complete weakening of the pronunciation of gutturals in the course of time as, for example, in the case of the Samaritans. In his book *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll*, 1959, Kutscher showed that there occurred a complete weakening of gutturals in certain places in Palestine already at the end of the Second Temple period. This phenomenon was attributed to the influence of Greek which did not recognize the gutturals. However, Kutscher warns against generalizations, pointing out the many testimonies to the fact that in the first centuries of the present era and until

the Arab conquest the weakening in many places was only partial and in many cases there was no weakening at all of the gutturals. There are evidences of changes from $\text{ט} > \text{ת}$ and $\text{צ} > \text{ס}$ which occurred in certain places and circles. Other evidence points to a transition of $\text{ט} > \text{צ}$. Kutscher makes great use of Ms. Vat., among others, to prove the various types of changes.

All these proofs, however, deal with, according to Kutscher, only part of the Jewish settlements in Palestine and possibly even a minority of them. His conclusive proof is based on the names of Arab settlements in Palestine. As is known, these names very often preserve the names of the ancient settlements which preceded the Arab conquest. In most of the settlements in the Galilee, the ancient gutturals were preserved. This phenomenon cannot be understood unless we suppose that the Arabs heard it as such from the inhabitants of those places and in this point is found the most important proof for the existence of the gutturals in the pronunciation of Aramaic (and Hebrew) of a great part of the inhabitants of the Galilee.

In conclusion, some additional comments concerning the translation are in order. Although in certain respects it would have been appropriate to present the material, twenty-five years after its first appearance, researched and organized anew, the translator, together with the author decided to limit themselves to the translation alone. Even so, the translated material contains many improvements and much material brought up to date. The method of translation and the improvements which were included, in consultation with the author, are enumerated in the Translator's Preface (pp. VII-VIII). Among other improvements, many typographical mistakes and inaccuracies in references were corrected through a re-examination of photographs of manuscripts and a rechecking of references. An example of an important correction of this type is found, for instance, on p. 7: "This was not Nöldeke's opinion". In the original by mistake the exact opposite appeared: "This was also Nöldeke's opinion". However, not all mistakes of this type were detected by the translator. A significant mistake which appears also in the translation is, for example found on p. 63: "in the First Temple Period". It should read: "in the Second Temple Period." The bibliography is brought up to date and relevant studies which have since appeared were added by the translator in an addendum at the end of the book (pp. 97-105). In this addendum the translator added notes and corrections from the author's handcopy which was put at his disposal after Kutscher's death. Thus, anyone dealing today with Galilean Aramaic, even if he is proficient in modern Hebrew and can read the study in the original, will profit from an examination of Sokoloff's translation due to the great effort invested in the improvements and material brought up to date. For this the translator is to be congratulated.