

**ON SOME IMPLICATIONS OF
THE TADMURAEAN ARAMAIC/ARABIC DIGLOSSIA**

Albert F. H. Naccach

It has become customary in these presentations, because of the short time allocated to them, to focus the attention on the results of the research, leaving the methodological statements for more technical publications. Even though I believe that the results I am presenting to the select audience of this Colloquium on Palmyra and the Silk Road are well worth its attention, I will nevertheless depart from this established custom and focus instead on the methodology I followed. I have two justifications for doing so :

First, this methodology is, to the best of my knowledge, innovative and thus should be submitted to the critical evaluation of the participants of this colloquium.

Secondly, though even the preliminary results already attained are, in my opinion, far reaching in their consequences, they are easily and naturally deduced by anyone following the methodological procedure advocated here.

This procedure is most easily understood by presenting examples from the forthcoming "diwānu ruqumi tadmur al'rāmiyyah" *ديوان رُقْم تَدْمُر الأَرَامِيَّة*, an anthology of more than 200 complete, near-complete and/or satisfactorily restored inscriptions from Tadmur and its vicinity. The examples could be selected from any of the more than 200 texts included in the Diwān, but since the general theme of this colloquium is the Silk Road, I will choose my examples from among the "caravans texts". Then, once the procedure has been adequately described, I will briefly point out some of the main historical and linguistic questions thus raised.

Before proceeding it might however be helpful to sketch out the general context within which are set both the methodological procedure and the results.

I - The Context.

It is generally accepted that Tadmuraean, i.e., Palmyrene, belong to the wide-spread linguistic group that is known as Aramaic. Within the classical classification of the Semitic languages - that I propose to rename Mashriqian languages in accordance with general linguistic practice - Aramaic is considered to belong to the category of North-West Semitic together with Canaanite. Within Aramaic, Tadmuraean, together with Nabataean, is variously included either under old Aramaic or Middle Aramaic (Fitzmeir, 1974) or West Aramaic (Moscati et al., 1980). Most interesting is the definition of Palmyrene given by Moscati et al., "Palmyrene is the language of an (ethnically) Arab population which established a state at Palmyra ..." p.11 (the same definition is given for Nabataean). What is meant by ethnically can only be guessed at: it cannot be "racially Arab" (racially being the synonym of ethnically), which makes no sense, it has to be taken as meaning linguistically. Palmyrene is therefore in this definition the Aramaic language of an Arabic-speaking population. This interesting definition is further enriched by Moscati et al. definition of "Arabic as a linguistic complex embracing all the tongues of the Arabian peninsula - with the exception of some Aramaic infiltrations (Nabataean and Palmyrene) in the extreme north" p.13.

Whichever it is, Aramaic infiltration into Arabic-speaking territories or Aramaic written by Arabic-speaking peoples, these definitions call to mind the concept of diglossia.

Diglossia is a new word/concept. The 1966 Webster's Third New International Dictionary still defines diglossia as the medical "condition of having the tongue bifid". There is no entry in the Oxford English Dictionary under diglossia, but we find "diglot, using or containing two languages" (oldest attestation in Smith's Dict. Bible, 1863) and "diglottism, the use of two languages, or of words derived from two languages."

It would seem that the oldest attestation of diglossia, or rather "diglossie", with the linguistic connotations it currently carries, is to be found in "Essais de grammaire historique néo-grecque" published in 1885 by the French hellenist J. Psichari. Psichari used this term to describe the Greek linguistic situation characterized by the coexistence of *katarévousa* and *démotiki* (Prudent, 1981). It also seems that Psichari was the first to extend the use of the term diglossie to refer to the coexistence of two varieties of Arabic, the "spoken" and the "written" ones, and this in an article written in 1928 (id.)

By then the debate about these two varieties of Arabic was well under way, having been defined at the turn of the century by two famous theses. Nöldeke's thesis held that the Meccan vernacular and literary languages both belonged to the "old Arabic" type and were in no remarkable degree different from the supertribal "Standard Arabic" of the poets and the Coran (Nöldeke, 1904). Voller's thesis held that the pre-Islamic Meccan vernacular was different from the literary language (Vollers, 1906). Vollers weakened his thesis by using it in an unconvincing attempt to prove that the Coran was first written in the vernacular and only later adapted to the rules of Classical Arabic, which is an easily refutable hypothesis and one that furthermore has no relevance to the thesis about the pre-Islamic origins of the Arabic vernacular. Be that as it may, Nöldeke's thesis has generally held sway over Voller's, and Arabic diglossia, that is the coexistence of two "levels" of one "language", became a paradigmatically recognized phenomenon. And attention turned to the study of the origins of the Arabic diglossia as an important element of the history of the Arabic language.

Once more at the risk of caricaturing what is a very rich debate, we might define its terms by two famous positions, each one tallying with one of the two theories just reviewed. Ferguson argued for the existence of a pre-Islamic Arabic koine - a more or less uniform speech - from which the post-Islamic Arabic vernacular emerged (Ferguson, 1959), while Blau's position can be resumed as follows: no Arabic diglossia existed before Islam, Arabic diglossia arose as late as the first Islamic century as a result of the great Arab conquest. In the towns of the new Arab Empire various types of dialects emerged and a dichotomy arose between these neoarabic types and the Bedouin languages, without the intermediary of an old pre-Classical-Arabic koine (Blau, 1977). Again it would seem that it is this latter position that has attracted the wider consensus. Accordingly, the vernaculars are seen as post-Islamic, whence their designation as Neoarabic, while Arabic - Classical Arabic, or Standard Arabic or 'arabiyya- is conceived as having been there "from before". How long before? Till recently the answer to this question was shaped by the conception of Arabic "as either the proto-type or true image of primitive Semitic" (Moscati et al., 5.3., 1980), and Arabic was confusedly seen as harking back to the prehistoric times of Proto-Semitic.

Quite naturally the study of North-Mashriqian epigraphy is playing the key role now in trying to answer the question about the origins of Arabic. It is quite instructive in this regard to compare the uses made of the Nabataean and the Tadmuraean corpora. Let us look at them in turn, starting each time with Cantineau's seminal interpretations.

For Cantineau "... la Nabatène était un état arabe, de population arabe, gouverné par une dynastie arabe, ayant probablement l'arabe comme langue parlée..." (Cantineau, 1935, p.3) and he posited a slow but steady influence of Arabic on Nabataean Aramaic leading to the former replacing the latter by the Fourth century A.D. (Cantineau, 1930). Cantineau's interpretation is now being refined by studies that are finally helping us acquire a detailed description of the origins of Arabic, or more precisely Nabataean Arabic (Milik, 1985; Starcky, 1985; O'Connor, 1986; Graf, 1990).

Palmyra was, on the other hand, for Cantineau "un état syro-mésopotamien, malgré l'existence d'éléments arabes

dents and readers while introducing them to the Tadmurean script, but second and more importantly, it reminds the readers that they are dealing with old texts, and in so doing helps them distantiate themselves from these texts, something that, as we will soon see, might easily be forgotten. The informations about missing characters (*), about restituted characters (*) and line division in the inscription, are indicated with this step, which is not provided with a line identification, contrary to the following steps.

The second step, always identified by -i-, is the transliteration in the Arabic script of the original inscription. In this transliteration I always followed the transliteration proposed in the reference indicated on the right side facing the inscription's number - in our case here Inv. X, 47. The only difference is that instead of Latin or Square Hebrew characters, it is the Arabic characters that are used. This is very easily done, the 22+1 (final nun) Tadmurean characters each having one and only one equivalent in the Arabic alphabet. This is of course done without in any way prejudging the phonetic realisation of these characters, something that is left for the next step. Transliteration of Tadmurean Aramaic text into Arabic is a very straightforward step, with one tremendous advantage: the texts presented in this form are very nearly intelligible to the average Arabic reader. Paradoxically this advantage carries also with it its reverse: the Arab reader would naturally tend to read the text in Arabic transliteration as if it was in the Arabic language, for instance the vocables *كله* and *بكل* and *بنى* and *له* would naturally be read "in Arabic". To avoid this pitfall it is necessary to go through the next step.

The third step, always identified by -b- is the transcription in the Arabic script of the Tadmurean Aramaic. In the field of "Semitics" transcription is only used systematically by Assyriologists. Aramaicists dealing with Palmyraean or Nabataean or Hatraean texts usually relegate transcription to single-word commentaries. In these cases there are two widely used systems, the first oldest and nearly abandoned now is implemented in Square Hebrew character with masoretic diacritical marks, the second is implemented in the latin character with a rather standardized system of vowel indication. The Arabic system used here is formally identical to the later system. To implement it, it was enough to use a larger part of the formal diacritical apparatus developed to vocalize the consonantal Coranic text than commonly used in literary Arabic. Thus the "vowel" /e/ is represented by the "imēleh", though instead of the form (َ) used in the Coran, we choose (◌) which graphically translate the "inclination" of the fatha towards the kasra. In this stunningly simple manner the transcription of Aramaic - any Aramaic corpus - is very simply and accurately implemented in the Arabic script, incomparably more elegantly than in the latin script, as I submit, would agree anyone who takes the time to examine even the short sample presented here. For a full discussion of the transcription system followed here - not only its shape, i.e., Arabic or latin alphabet - I must, for reasons of space, refer you to a forthcoming publication (Naccach, 1989) However, we should not forget that the Arabic transcription system is only a very congenial tool for making available, i.e. legible, the results of the crucial step in any dealing with an epigraphical corpus, which is, of course, the reading of the original text. It is the proposals made by the epigraphist for how the original graphemes were realised in speech that the transcription systems represents on paper.

Now there are two levels of linguistic analysis that are involved in attempting to recreate the long-gone "paroles" of any Mashriqian linguistic instance. The first pertains to the particular phonetic system used by a specific group of speakers in a given place at a specific time. The second pertains to the more general morphophonemic system that can be shared by a multitude of groups each one having a particular and - slightly - different phonetic system.

The transcription system represents only the morphophonemic system, and does not attempt to indicate the phonetic system: how were the *چ* and *ك* and *ق* pronounced or how far into the *â*→*ô* shift was the phonetic system, or even the realisation of the *ب چ ر ك ف ت* lies outside the realms of any practical attempt at representation, and even at profitable study.

For this reason the Arabic transcription system is ideally suited because it uses script conventions that have specifically been developed to graphically represent only the morphophonemic level of language, in contradistinction for

example to the Masoretic Hebrew system that attempted to represent one particular phonetic system. Thus the writing, to pick one example, of مَلَكَا represents the facts that the word is in the defined state, but does not indicate if it is to be pronounced /malkâ/ or /malkô/ or even /malkhô/ or /malkhâ/, it however excludes all /mlaxx/ possibilities. This is because the phonetic realisation is part of a system whose constraints are in no way related to the constraints of the graphic system used to represent them (except in the extreme case of the International Phonetic System).

Since this is, to the best of my knowledge a pioneering attempt at transcribing and not simply transliterating Aramaic in the Arabic script (Wolfinson, 1929; Freyha, 1952; Khazin, 1956; Abu Assaf, 1988), I have tried to avoid as much as possible original readings, and I have followed, wherever that was available in the reference works from which I selected this anthology, the readings proposed by these references (I.I.P., C.I.S., R.S.P. mainly). Since however these readings all seem to have the same base (some mixture of Biblical Aramaic, Syriac and modern Arabic dialects) I have sometimes ventured new ones. Let me briefly illustrate this by a few examples from our sample text # 41 :

Verbs like عُزْرَهون or شَفَر or أَقْبِمُو pose no problems (we will come back to the ز in عُزْرَهون), the same would have been true with active and passive participles. With proper name we can often use the vocalization of Greek transcription: Taimarsos تَيْمَ أَرْضُو تَيْمَرُصُو, Lisams لِشَمَش. But in a number of nominal or deverbal nouns we are in the dark, is it صَلَم or صَلْم ? is it يَرْح or يَرِح ? how to decide ? Sometimes the elements of choice are more evident. For instance, the word for caravan, written شِيرَتَا is read by Cantineau شِيرَتَا from the "schème qatâl" exemples of which are شَلَمَا جَلَلَا شَطْرَا كَتَبَا أَنْشَا آلَهَا (Cantineau, 1935, p.103). But on page 108 he mentions le schème qattâl "qui fournit des noms d'agent, mais avec une nuance de répétition de l'action, qui est un métier plutôt qu'une action isolée" and he gives as exemple طَبَّحَا. So we would read شِيرَتَا (شِيرَه) a reading reinforced by Arabic السَّيَّارَة مؤنث السَّيَّار. Again, sometimes the element of choice, even though present, are not enough to help us make a choice, for example, with the word for the traders, the members of the caravans, both readin تَجْرِيَا (qâttal) or تَجْرِيَا (qâtel) are equally possible. In any case many important speech elements, such as pronouns and various affixes can be pinpointed with conventional precision - if not phonetic accuracy - such as لَ masc. or لَ fem or يَ and يَا for the m.p. or يَا for the nisbeh m.p. etc ...

A second problem whose solution the transcription is supposed to carry is that of deciding if the phonemic make up of Tadmurean was limited to what was immediately realised in script, or if we have in Tadmur a situation similar to that of the Kufic Arabic writing. This is a very complex problem for whose solution elements from as far as the 2 Ugaritic alphabets and the pronunciation of the various modern ammiyyât dialects have to be considered. Sometimes the hesitations of the Tadmurean scribes give us an indication, for instance in our sample text we have عذر elsewhere it is عذر, From which a probable deduction is that it was عذر (but how was the ز realised?). Brother was most probably أَخ, but how can we choose between يَرِح and يَرْح ? we are probably right in having عَلَم and عَلِيم, but there is no hard and fast rule - at least that I could find out - and every word has to be studied on a case by case basis. In all cases where I felt there are different possible readings, I have explained, however briefly, my readings in a commentary.

The fourth steps, allways identified by - ح - is accurately, if clumsily referred to as a "morphologically congruent transform". While transliteration and transcription are widely used steps, the "morphologically congruent transform" or m.c.t. (which could also be called "isomorphic transform") is to the best of my knowledge, a procedure that I developed. The m.c.t. is useful for dealing with all the Mashriqian languages, but I will limit my remarks here to its application for Aramaic texts, and more precisely, Tadmurean.

The establishment of the structural isomorphism of languages has been identified as "one of the basis tasks of present-day linguistics" (Gamkrelidze, 1977). While this might seem a very ambitious task for general linguistics, or even for Indo-European linguistics, the structural isomorphism that holds between the Mashriqian linguistic instances

mudic, Lihyanic, Safaitic, late Nabataean) of the various post-Islamic Arabic vernacular (including Christian Palestinian, Geniza, Kharshouny and the 'ammiyyat of Bilād ash-shām) and of the progressive systematization of Classical Arabic.

Meanwhile we might say that, if Classical Arabic and the vernacular/ 'ammiyyat can be lumped together under the expression Arabic diglossia, then Tadmuraean Aramaic / Arabic diglossia is as good a description as the imprecise terms Aramaic and Arabic allow us to devise.

We should not use terms such as Arabic or Aramaic to describe the language of the Mashriqian epigraphical texts from Tadmur. Rather we should study this corpus for clues as to the historical evolution of the various referents of Arabic, Aramaic and even Cananean.

Bibliography

Blau, J., 1977 : "The beginnings of the Arabic diglossia. A study in the origins of Neoarabic" *Afroasiatic linguistics* 4/3

Cantineau, J., 1930 : *le Nabatéen* . 2 vol. Paris.

Cantineau, J., 1935 : *Grammaire du Palmyrénien Epigraphique*. Le Caire

Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum, pars secunda, tonus III, fasc. primus

Ferguson, C.A., 1959 : "The Arabic Koine" . *Language*, vol. 35, pp. 616-30

Fitzmeir, J.A., 1974 : *A wandering Aramean*.

Gamkrelidze, Th.V. 1977 : "Language typology and linguistic reconstruction" in *Proc. 12 th International Congress of linguists, Vienna*.

Gawlikowsky M., 1974 : *Recueil d'inscriptions palmyréniennes provenant de fouilles syriennes et polonaises à Palmyre, Memoires A.I.B.L., XVI, Paris*

Graf, D.F., 1990 : "The origins of the Nabataeans" , *Aram* vol. 2, 1&2, pp. 45-75

Inventaire des inscriptions de Palmyre, I-IX, J. Cantineau ed. (Damas - Beyrouth, 1930-36); X, J. Starcky ed. (Damas, 1949); XI, J. Teixidor ed. (Damas - Beyrouth 1965); XII, A. Bounni and J. Teixidor eds. (Damas, 1975).

Milik, J.T., 1972 : *Dédicaces faites par des dieux (Palmyre, Hatra, Tyr) et des thiasés sémitiques à l'époque romaine*. Paris
Milik, J.T., 1985 : "Origines des Nabatéens", in A. Hadidi ed. *Studies in the history and archaeology of Jordan I. Amman*.

Moscatti, S. et al. , 1962 : *An introduction to the comparative grammar of the Semitic languages, phonology and morphology*. Wiesbaden

Naccach, A.F.H., 1985 : *The representation of the long-time-span structures of human history : the case of the Mashriq*. Unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, U.C.B., University Microfilms Int., Ann Arbor.

Nöldeke, Th., 1904 : *Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*. Strassburg.

O'Connor, M., 1986 : "The Arabic Loanwords in Nabatean Aramaic", *J.N.E.S.*, vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 213-229

Prudent, L. - F., 1981 : "Diglossie et interlecte", *languages*, vol. 61, pp. 13-38.

Starcky, J., 1985 : "Les Inscriptions Nabatéennes et l'histoire de la Syrie méridionale et du Nord de la Jordanie", in J. - M. Dentzer ed. *Hauran I. Recherches archéologiques sur la Syrie du Sud à l'époque Hellenistique et Romaine*. Paris.

Teixidor, J., 1979 : "The Pantheon of Palmyra". Leiden.

Vollers K., 1906 : Volkssprache und Schriftsprache im alten Arabien.

ابو عساف ، علي ، ١٩٨٨ : الأراميون تاريخاً ولغة وفناً. دمشق
الخازن ، نسيب، ١٩٥٦ : من الساميين الى العرب . بيروت.
السامرائي ، ابراهيم ، ١٩٨٥ : دراسات في اللفتين السريانية والعربية. بيروت عمان.
نقاش، البير، ١٩٨٩ : التوطئة الى قراءة التراث الأرامي، مكتبة لسان المشرق ، ديوان الدراسات (١) . بيروت
ولفنسن ، أ، ١٩٢٩ : تاريخ اللغات السامية. دار القلم بيروت. ١٩٨٠