

Historical Proofs of the New Testament, Suggest Peshitta Primacy – Part 1

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I have discussed many of the linguistic proofs of Peshitta primacy, which is perhaps the best proof we can have, as it is internal evidence. There is however much external evidence also, such as quotes from Church fathers, and simple (yet little-known) facts about Jesus' time (and language), that also make a strong case for Peshitta primacy.

This article will deal with some historical proofs of Peshitta primacy, and will also touch on other issues, such as the Septuagint, and the other Aramaic Bible versions.

1. The Aramaic language

Aramaic is an ancient Semitic language (very similar to Hebrew) that according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, became the dominant language of the Middle East, around 500-600 years before the birth of the Messiah.

“Aramaic is thought to have first appeared among the Aramaeans about the late 11th century BC. By the 8th century BC it had become accepted by the Assyrians as a second language. The mass deportations of people by the Assyrians and the use of Aramaic as a lingua franca by Babylonian merchants served to spread the language, so that in the 7th and 6th centuries BC it gradually supplanted Akkadian as the lingua franca of the Middle East.” – Encyclopedia Britannica

“The Persians used the Aramaic language because this tongue was the language of the two Semitic empires, the empire of Assyria and the empire of Babylon. Aramaic was so firmly established as the lingua franca that no government could dispense with its use as a vehicle of expression in a far-flung empire, especially in the western provinces. Moreover, without schools and other modern facilities, Aramaic could not be replaced by the speech of conquering nations. Conquerors were not interested in imposing their languages and cultures on subjugated peoples. What they wanted was taxes, spoils, and other levies. The transition from Aramaic into Arabic, a sister tongue, took place after the conquest of the Near East by the Moslem armies in the 7th century, A.D. Nevertheless, Aramaic lingered for many centuries and still is spoken in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and northwestern Iran, as well as among the Christian Arab tribes in north-ern Arabia. Its alphabet was borrowed by the Hebrews, Arabs, Iranians, and Mongols.” – Dr. George Mamishisho Lamsa, Aramaic scholar

Aramaic even spread into such regions as Asia.

“As for the Aramaic alphabet, it achieved far wider conquests. In 1599 A.D., it was adopted for the conveyance of the Manchu language on the eve of the Manchu conquest of China. The higher religions sped it on its way by taking it into their service. In its 'Square Hebrew' variant it became the vehicle of the Jewish Scriptures and liturgy; in an Arabic adaptation it became the alphabet of Islam.” – Dr. Arnold Toynbee, Historian

Aramaic, being such a common language, used in many different countries, such as Assyria, Babylon and Israel, had many names. One name was given by the Greeks: Syriac.

“Greeks had called Aramaic by a word they coined, 'Syriac', and this artificial term was used in the West, but never in the East, where it has always been known by its own name, 'Lishana Aramaya' (the Aramaic language.)”
– Paul Younan, Aramaic scholar

“There is another name for Ancient Aramaic. The Jewish scholars of Scriptures today talk of the "Ashuri" language and they call the sacred language of the Torah "Ashurit." The modern Hebrew writing is called "Ktav Ashuri," or Ashurai Writing. This is the language in which the Ten Commandments were written and the only sacred language of the Old Testament according to most Jewish scholars. There are hundreds of pages on the Internet that a scholar can research by simply doing a search for "Ashuri, Ashurit, Ashuris, Ktav Ashurit, Ksav Ashuris.” – Victor Alexander, Aramaic scholar

Aramaic, as we know from history and the Bible (parts of Ezra, Jeremiah and Daniel were written in Aramaic, albeit with the Hebrew script), became the dominant language even among the Israelis. Even to this day, now that the Judeans use Hebrew again, the Aramaic presence is still strong in their traditions, such as the “Bar Mitzvah” – where the Aramaic “Bar”, meaning son, is used instead of the Hebrew “Ben”. Additionally, Aramaic is the primary language of the “Rabbinical Jewish” Mishnah and two Talmuds. The Aramaic language became a very important part of religion among the Judeans.

“Even to the West of the Euphrates river, in the Holy Land, the main vernacular was Aramaic. The weekly synagogue lections, called sidra or parashah, with the haphtarah, were accompanied by an oral Aramaic translation, according to fixed traditions. A number of Targumim in Aramaic were thus eventually committed to writing, some of which are of unofficial character, and of considerable antiquity. The Gemara of the Jerusalem Talmud was written in Aramaic, and received its definitive form in the 5th century. The Babylonian Talmud with its commentaries on only 36 of the Mishnah's 63 tractates, is four times as long as the Jerusalem Talmud. These Gemaroth with much other material were gathered together toward the end of the 5th century, and are in Aramaic. Since 1947, approximately 500 documents were discovered in eleven caves of Wadi Qumran near the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. In addition to the scrolls and fragments in Hebrew, there are portions and fragments of scrolls in Aramaic. Hebrew and Aramaic, which are sister languages, have always remained the most distinctive features marking Jewish and Eastern Christian religious and cultural life, even to our present time.” – Paul Younan

Even in the time of Jesus, it is undisputed that Aramaic was a widely-used language. In fact, we know from the Bible, that Jesus and the Apostles spoke Aramaic, as did the earliest Christians (made up of Judeans and other Semitic peoples such as Syrians and Chaldeans). Even the sign on Jesus' cross was written in Aramaic, as well as Greek and Latin.

Modern scholarship contends that while both Aramaic and Greek were common in Israel, in the time of Jesus, Greek was the main language, or “lingua franca”. Problems arise for this theory, when we see what famous Judean historian Josephus has to say on the matter, in 42 AD (note that Josephus wrote in Aramaic!):

“I have also taken a great deal of pains to obtain the learning of the Greeks, and understand the elements of the Greek language; although I have so accustomed myself to speak our own tongue, that I cannot pronounce Greek with sufficient exactness. For our nation does not encourage those that learn the language of many nations. On this account, as there have been many who have done their endeavors, with great patience, to obtain this Greek

learning, there have yet hardly been two or three that have succeeded herein, who were immediately rewarded for their pains.” – Antiquities XX, XI 2.

Is it not ironic that the same Greek scholars who graciously accept Josephus’ teachings as supportive of the Bible, also reject his teaching that Greek was not as widespread as many today think? For according to Josephus, the Judeans discouraged the learning of Greek, sticking instead to Aramaic! Aramaic scholar Dr. George Lamsa even goes so far as to say that it was a saying among the Judeans, that learning Greek was akin to eating the flesh of swine (which makes sense of the Judean mourning over the creation of the Septuagint, which shall be discussed later).

The Church of the East, the main Christian Church in the Eastern world (just as the Roman Catholic Church was the main Christian Church in the Western world), spread Christianity throughout the Middle East and Asia, and utilised the Aramaic New Testament Bible, the Peshitta.

“... Church of the East was making giant strides. The Ashurai people who carried the torch of the Church had embarked on a great missionary effort. They spread Christianity to India and the far reaches of China. There are historical monuments in China still today that attest to the missionary zeal of this Church. Yet all the achievements of the Church of the East are being still denied by the Western Churches to this day.

As the Ashurai nation had no country since the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC, they were the perfect candidates for the evangelization of the East. Their last king, Agbar, was healed of leprosy by two of the disciples of Jesus. The Ashurai nation became Christian in the 1st Century, followed by Armenians and Chaldeans. By the 12th Century, they were the greatest Church in Christendom.

The Church of the East was under constant persecution for centuries, but this was a blessing in disguise as they didn't have the time or the motive to change the Scriptures. They continued to copy the original Ancient Aramaic Scriptures from the Apostolic Age verbatim without even updating the language.” – Victor Alexander

2. The Aramaic Bible

The New Testament is believed to have been written in Greek... in the West. In the East, it is a common belief that the New Testament was written in the Eastern language of Aramaic. Which stance is correct? As we search for the answer to this question, let us keep in mind that Christianity is an EASTERN religion, and that many religious peoples in the East were very serious about not adding or deleting to God’s Word, unlike the “cut and paste” Westerners.

“When these texts were copied by expert scribes, they were carefully examined for accuracy before they were dedicated and permitted to be read in churches. Even one missing letter would render the text void. Easterners still adhere to God's com-mandment not to add to or omit a word from the Scriptures. The Holy Scripture condemns any addition or subtraction or modification of the Word of God.

"You shall not add to the commandment which I command you, neither shall you take from it, but you must keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you." Deut. 4:2.

"Everything that I command you, that you must be careful to do; you shall not add nor take from it." Deut. 12:32.

"Do not add to his words; lest he reprove you, and you be found a liar." Prov. 30:6.

"And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his portion from the tree of life and from the holy city and from the things which are written in this book." Rev. 22:19.

It is also true of the Jews and Moslems that they would not dare to alter a word of the Torah or Koran. Easterners are afraid that they may incur the curse if they make a change in the Word of God.

Astonishingly enough, all the Peshitta texts in Aramaic agree. There is one thing of which the Eastern scribes can boast: they copied their holy books diligently, faithfully, and meticulously. Sir Frederick Kenyon, Curator of the British Museum, in his book *Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, speaks highly of the accuracy of copying and of the antiquity of Peshitta MSS.

The versions translated from Semitic languages into Greek and Latin were subject to constant revisions. Learned men who copied them introduced changes, trying to simplify obscurities and ambiguities which were due to the work of the first translators.” – Dr. George Mamishisho Lamsa

That the Peshitta mss (manuscripts) are almost exactly the same (besides minor spelling differences), is even acknowledged by the Greek primacists (those who believe that the Greek is the original). That the Peshitta mss agree so closely while the Greek mss have numerous variants (many of which can be shown to be caused by Aramaic roots, as earlier articles in this series have shown), speaks volumes.

There is also an Aramaic version of the Old Testament, known as the Peshitta OT, or Peshitta Tanakh, which is a ‘translation’ from the Hebrew OT (like the Septuagint, the Peshitta OT is believed to have been ‘translated’ from a Hebrew version older than the widely-accepted and recent, Massoretic text).

“The Septuagint is based on early Hebrew manuscripts and not on the later ones known as the Massoretic, which were made in the 6th to the 9th centuries. In other words, there are many similarities between the Septuagint and the Peshitta text but the former contains inevitable mistranslations which were due to difficulties in transmitting Hebrew or Aramaic thought and mannerisms of speech into a totally alien tongue like Greek. But as has been said, such was not the case between Biblical Aramaic and Biblical Hebrew which are of the same origin. Josephus used Aramaic and Hebrew words indiscriminately. Thus, the term "trans-lating" from Hebrew into Aramaic or vice versa is incorrect. It would be like one stating as having translated the United States Constitution from the Pennsylvania language into the English language or from lower German to higher German. Even before the first captivity, 721 B.C., Jewish kings, scribes, and learned men understood Aramaic. 2 Kings 18:26. The Israelites never wrote their sacred literature in any language but Aramaic and Hebrew, which are sister languages. The Septuagint was made in the 3rd century, B.C., for the Alexandrian Jews. This version was never officially read by the Jews in Palestine who spoke Aramaic and read Hebrew. Instead, the Jewish authorities condemned the work and declared a period of mourning because of the defects in the version. Evidently Jesus and his disciples used a text which came from an older Hebrew original. This is apparent because Jesus' quotations from the Old Testament agree with the Peshitta text but do not agree with the Greek text. For example, in John 12:40, the Peshitta Old Testament and New Testament agree.” – Dr. George Mamishisho Lamsa

That the OT was written in Hebrew is uncontested. After all, it was written by Hebrew-speakers, for Hebrew-speakers, and tells the stories of Hebrew-speakers. So why is Aramaic primacy of the NT (New Testament) contested? Does it not make sense that the NT, written by Aramaic-speakers, for Aramaic-speakers, telling the stories of Aramaic-speakers, be written in Aramaic? According to “scholarly consensus” (i.e. the shared beliefs of many scholars, lacking in any real evidence), it makes more sense that it was written in the non-Semitic language of Greek.

3. What the ancient religious authorities said of the original Bible

Now things start getting exciting. We shall look at what ancient witnesses had to say on the matter. Many Church fathers speak of “Hebrew” (Aramaic was often called Hebrew, as it was the language of the Hebrews, and was often written by Judeans in the Hebrew Script) originals of New Testament books. Before we do, let us quickly read what Tatian (an ancient Assyrian Church authority, and disciple of Justin Martyr) had to say to the Greeks, about their unjustly claiming of foreign advances/works/inventions, as their own:

“Cease, then, to miscall these imitations inventions of your own! ... Wherefore lay aside this conceit, and be not ever boasting of your elegance of diction; for, while you applaud yourselves, your own people will of course side with you.” – Tatian the Assyrian

Now, let us see if any noteworthy people before the modern era, spoke of Semitic originals of NT books.

“And the presbyter said this. Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him. But afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who accommodated his instructions to the necessities, but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord's sayings. Wherefore Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them. For of one thing he took especial care, not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictitious into the statements. : Matthew put together the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he could.” – Fragments of Papias (60-130 CE) VI.

Note that “each one interpreted them as best he could” may imply that there were multiple Greek versions made, which explains the myriads of Greek versions and it’s many variants, today.

“Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.” – Irenaeus (d. by 200)

“Concerning the four Gospels which alone are uncontroverted in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that the Gospel according to Matthew, who was at one time a publican and afterwards an Apostle of Jesus Christ, was written first; and that he composed it in the Hebrew tongue and published it for the converts from Judaism. The second written was that according to Mark, who wrote it according to the instruction of Peter, who, in his General Epistle, acknowledged him as a son, saying, "The church that is in Babylon, elect together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Mark my son.” – Origen at Alexandria (185-232)

Note that Peter talks of the Church in Babylon, where Aramaic was spoken.

“About that time, Pantaeus (second century), a man highly distinguished for his learning, had charge of the school of the faithful in Alexandria. A school of sacred learning, which continues to our day, was established there

in ancient times, and as we have been informed, was managed by men of great ability and zeal for divine things. Among these it is reported that Pantaenus was at that time especially conspicuous, as he had been educated in the philosophical system of those called Stoics. They say that he displayed such zeal for the divine Word, that he was appointed as a herald of the Gospel of Christ to the nations in the East, and was sent as far as India. For indeed there were still many evangelists of the Word who sought earnestly to use their inspired zeal, after the examples of the apostles, for the increase and building up of the Divine Word. Pantaenus was one of these, and is said to have gone to India. It is reported that among persons there who knew of Christ, he found the Gospel according to Matthew, which had anticipated his own arrival. For Bartholomew, one of the apostles, had preached to them, and left with them the writing of Matthew in the Hebrew language, which they had preserved till that time. After many good deeds, Pantaenus finally became the head of the school at Alexandria, and expounded the treasures of divine doctrine both orally and in writing.” – Eusebius of Caesarea, Church History, Book V, CHAPTER 10

“For Matthew, who had at first preached to the Hebrews, when he was about to go to other peoples, committed his Gospel to writing in his native tongue, and thus compensated those whom he was obliged to leave for the loss of his presence.” – Eusebius of Caesarea, Church History, Book III, CHAPTER 24

“And he (Hegesippus) wrote of many other matters, which we have in part already mentioned, introducing the accounts in their appropriate places. And from the Syriac Gospel according to the Hebrews he quotes some passages in the Hebrew tongue, showing that he was a convert from the Hebrews, and he mentions other matters as taken from the unwritten tradition of the Jews. And not only he, but also Irenaeus and the whole company of the ancients, called the Proverbs of Solomon All-virtuous Wisdom. And when speaking of the books called Apocrypha, he records that some of them were composed in his day by certain heretics. But let us now pass on to another.” – Eusebius of Caesarea, Church History, Book IV, CHAPTER 22

“Since, in the beginning of this work, we promised to give, when needful, the words of the ancient presbyters and writers of the Church, in which they have declared those traditions which came down to them concerning the canonical books, and since Irenaeus was one of them, we will now give his words and, first, what he says of the sacred Gospels: Matthew published his Gospel among the Hebrews in their own language” – Eusebius of Caesarea, Church History, Book V, CHAPTER 8

“In the work called Hypotyposes, to sum up the matter briefly he [Clement of Alexandria] has given us the abridged accounts of all the canonical Scriptures, . . . the Epistle to the Hebrews he asserts was written by Paul, to the Hebrews, in the Hebrew tongue; but that it was carefully translated by Luke, and published among the Greeks.” – Clement of Alexandria; Hypotyposes (c. 200 CE) referred to by Eusebius in Eccl. Hist. 6:14:2

“For as Paul had addressed the Hebrews in the language of his country; some say that the evangelist Luke, others that Clement, translated the epistle.” – Eusebius (4th Cent.); Eccl. Hist. 3:38:2-3

“He (Paul) being a Hebrew wrote in Hebrew, that is, his own tongue and most fluently while things which were eloquently written in Hebrew were more eloquently turned into Greek.” – Jerome (4th Cent.); Lives of Illustrious Men, Book V

Note how Jerome does not limit Paul's usage of "Hebrew". You could take this as an implication that ALL of Paul's writings were in "Hebrew".

“To sum up briefly, he has given in the Hypotyposes abridged accounts of all canonical Scripture, not omitting the disputed books, -- I refer to Jude and the other Catholic epistles, and Barnabas and the so-called Apocalypse of Peter. He says that the Epistle to the Hebrews is the work of Paul, and that it was written to the Hebrews in the Hebrew language; but that Luke translated it carefully and published it for the Greeks, and hence the same style of expression is found in this epistle and in the Acts. But he says that the words, Paul the Apostle, were probably not prefixed, because, in sending it to the Hebrews, who were prejudiced and suspicious of him, he wisely did not wish to repel them at the very beginning by giving his name.” – Eusebius of Caesarea, Church History, Book VI, CHAPTER 14

“Notice that one of the quotes shows that Hebrews was ALSO written in Hebrew/Aramaic??? So Matthew is not the only one after all.

Another key point...LUKE DID IT FROM HEBREW/ARAMAIC INTO GREEK! [or possibly Clement of Alexandria – Chris] So Luke did know both languages well.

And finally, almost all Greek primacists agree that the best Greek in the entire NT is in (drumroll....)

--The Gospel of Luke
--The Epistle to the Hebrews

(I wonder why! HmMMMMMMMM.)” – Andrew Gabriel Roth, Aramaic scholar

These quotes may explain the oddity that while most of the Greek NT is in very bad Greek (referred to as “Koine Greek”, but more appropriately referred to as “shockingly bad grammar translation Greek”), the Greek version of the book of HEBREWS (written originally in Hebrew/Aramaic as would be expected) has among the best Greek in the NT! It is also noteworthy to mention that while most in the West believe that Luke was Greek, he was actually more likely a Syrian, as implied by Eusebius:

“But Luke, who was born at Antioch, and by profession a physician, being for the most part connected with Paul, and familiarly acquainted with the rest of the apostles, has left us two inspired books... One of these is his gospel” – Eusebius

Where is the evidence that Luke was actually Greek? There is none, like Greek primacy, it is just taken for granted. Does the fact that he was very educated, a physician, automatically disqualify him from being a Semite? How offensive to the Semites! We know little of this man, but do know that he was born in Aramaic-speaking Syria. That Syria was an Aramaic-speaking country is dangerous to contest as the Romans even called the Aramaic language, “Syriacos”.

A few of the above quotes implied that Mark also wrote in Aramaic. Almost all Greek primacists tell us that Mark's Greek is the worst in the NT, written in a very rudimentary style. I wonder why...

Isn't it odd that books apparently written to Greeks, are in bad Greek, while the books written to the Hebrews are in good Greek? Could it be that all the books had Semitic originals, and that the translator of Hebrews just happened to be very well versed in Greek? Could it be that the books written to “Greek Churches” were actually

written to the assemblies of Semites in those areas, who were the first Christians? The amount of linguistic evidence in the “Greek books” of Aramaic originals, seems to imply so! Could it be that the non-sensical differing qualities of Greek in the Greek NT could be caused by different people, with different abilities, translating from the Aramaic originals?

Finally, let us turn to Josephus again. According to Flavius Josephus, the Romans had to have him translate the call to the Jews to surrender into "their own language" (Wars 5:9:2). What's the matter? Couldn't the Judeans speak Greek? Josephus' writings on the language of the Judeans in Jesus' time is also consistent with the Maccabean victory. Modern scholarship claims that in Jesus' day, the common language of the Judeans was Greek. This completely ignores the victory of Judeas Maccabees and his army, in defeating the Greeks and wiping Hellenism out of Israel!

4. What the modern authorities say

Let's take a look at what more modern witnesses have to say.

“... the originality of the Peshitta text, as the Patriarch and Head of the Holy Apostolic and Catholic Church of the East, we wish to state, that the Church of the East received the scriptures from the hands of the blessed Apostles themselves in the Aramaic original, the language spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and that the Peshitta is the text of the Church of the East which has come down from the Biblical times without any change or revision.”
– Mar Eshai Shimun, Patriarch of the Church of the East, April 5, 1957

Well, that was to be expected, coming from the former “Pope” of the Church of the East, which uses the Peshitta, and holds it as the original. Let us see what their “enemies” have to say! The Roman Catholic Church speaks:

“Christ, after all spoke in the language of His contemporaries. He offered the first sacrifice of the Eucharist in Aramaic, a language understood by all the people who heard Him. The Apostles and Disciples did the same and never in a language other than that of the gathered faithful.” – Latin Patriarch Maximus at Vatican II

“However, we believe the second hypothesis to be the more probable, viz., that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Aramaic.” – Catholic Encyclopedia (1913)

The Church of the East, which uses the Peshitta NT, was the largest single Christian Church in the world.

“In the first century, the Assyrians were among the first people to embrace Christianity. Until then, they worshiped their god, Ashur. In 33 AD, the Assyrian Church was founded. By the end of the 12th century, the Assyrian Church was larger than the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches combined. It expanded over the Asian continent from Syria to Mongolia, Korea, China, Japan and the Philippines. But the days of glory were coming to an end.” – Reem Haddad, Reporter

So, even up to the Middle Ages, the largest Christian Church used the Aramaic Original. Unfortunately the West's knowledge of the Aramaic Peshitta was extremely limited. If only they had had the internet in those times!

But if the East knew of the Aramaic Original, why didn't the West? Could it be that the Roman Catholic Church, being a Western Church, and wanting to distance itself from the Judeans, would suppress knowledge and lie about the Aramaic original? Lying and suppression? The Roman Catholic Church? Never! Intense sarcasm intended.

[Note: The Church of the East is not a perfect Church. Over time they have consistently made concessions to their traditional enemies in the West, the Roman Catholic Church. One example is on the issue of the Sabbath. The COE was once Sabbath-keeping, but now does no longer teach the observance of the 7th day. However, using this information against the COE's stance on the Aramaic originals is flawed. It would be like saying that the Greek cannot be the original, because it is used by the Roman Catholic Church. – Chris]

Even the Book of Revelation, part of the “Western Five” (the 5 books in the regular 27 book NT canon, that do not feature in the original Peshitta 22 book canon, but do feature in later Aramaic versions) has been thought to have an Aramaic original.

“Two or three... are plausible readings; and might well be judged worthy of adoption if there were any ground for supposing the Apocalypse to have been originally written, or to be based on a document written, in an Aramaic idiom.” – The Apocalypse of St. John in a Syriac Version Hitherto Unknown 1897; p. lxxix

“... the Book of Revelation was written in a Semitic language, and that the Greek translation... is a remarkably close rendering of the original.” – C. C. Torrey, Documents of the Primitive Church 1941; p. 160

“We come to the conclusion, therefore that the Apocalypse as a whole is a translation from Hebrew or Aramaic” – RBY Scott; The Original Language of the Apocalypse 1928; p. 6

“When we turn to the New Testament we find that there are reasons for suspecting a Hebrew or Aramaic original for the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, John and for the apocalypse.” – Hugh J. Schonfield; An Old Hebrew Text

Let us not let the Gospels feel left out:

“Thus it was that the writer turned seriously to tackle the question of the original language of the Fourth Gospel; and quickly convincing himself that the theory of an original Aramaic document was no chimera, but a fact which was capable of the fullest verification...” – Charles Burney; The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel; 1922; p. 3

“The material of our Four Gospels is all Palestinian, and the language in which it was originally written is Aramaic, then the principle language of the land... In regard to Lk. it remains to be said, that of all the Four Gospels it is the one which gives by far the plainest and most constant evidence of being a translation.” – C. C. Torrey; Our Translated Gospels; 1936 p. ix, lix

But what of Paul the Apostle? Surely this “Hellenistic Jew”, writing to “Greek Churches” would have written in Greek! That last sentence is so full of fallacies, I feel ashamed for having to write it. Paul was born in Tarsus, a city that belonged to the Babylonian, Assyrian and Persian empires – all of which spoke Aramaic. Archaeological evidence points to Tarsus' usage of Aramaic – coins have been found from the time of Jesus, with Aramaic inscriptions. Coins! There goes the theory that Greek was necessary for trade! While all this is very interesting, it

may be a moot point concerning Paul. After all, he wasn't raised in Aramaic-speaking Tarsus... but he was raised in Aramaic-speaking Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). We also saw from the Jerome quote that he spoke and wrote in "Hebrew".

It is also interesting to note that this alleged Hellenist, was a Pharisee. The Pharisaic Judeans were staunchly opposed to Hellenism, so how then could Paul have been a Hellenistic Jew? Did he really write his letters to the "Greek Churches" in Greek?

“It is known that Aramaic remained a language of Jews living in the Diaspora, and in fact Jewish Aramaic inscriptions have been found at Rome, Pompei and even England. If Paul wrote his Epistle's in Hebrew or Aramaic to a core group of Jews at each congregation who then passed the message on to their Gentile counterparts then this might give some added dimension to Paul's phrase "to the Jew first and then to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10). It is clear that Paul did not write his letters in the native tongues of the cities to which he wrote. Certainly no one would argue for a Latin original of Romans.” – Dr. James Trimm, Aramaic scholar

This would make sense of the Apostle Paul's oft-used quote, "to the Judean first, and then to the Gentile/Aramean".

The word in Aramaic for "Arameans" (Armaya) is believed by many to also mean "Gentiles" (while the Greek usually says "Gentiles" or "Greeks", the Aramaic usually says "Arameans"). This seems confusing, but many (perhaps most) of the Gentiles involved with early Christianity were Aramean. Arameans were the same basic race of people as Assyrians and Syrians (different to today's Arabic "Syrians"). Many labels used to describe the same people. As Christianity started to really bloom in Antioch, Syria, it is not surprising to see the Arameans being spoken of so much in the New Testament, and as being representative of Gentiles in general.

Another interesting point to consider about the Gentiles, is that so often the Bible talks of Judeans and Gentiles (as above, it may not mean Gentiles at all, as "Armaya" are being referred to, but let us digress). What then about the "lost 10 tribes", the Israelites? Since they are not Judean, are they Gentile? If so, we have yet another prominent Aramaic-speaking Semitic group, as part of "the Gentiles". With so many Aramaic-speaking Gentiles in the Middle East, is it such a stretch to imagine that Aramaic-speaking authors would write in Aramaic - utilising Aramaic idioms - to Aramaic-speaking Judeans, Israelites, Chaldeans, Syrians and Assyrians? In fact, why would these authors use so many Aramaic idioms, if they wrote in Greek, to Greek-speaking people who wouldn't understand them?

Scholars who claim that books such as the Pauline Epistles were written in Aramaic, to primarily Semitic congregations in Greece and Rome, are backed up by the Bible:

Romans 2:17-18

17 Now if you who are called a Jew trust on the law and are proud of God,

18 And because you know his will and know the things which must be observed, which you have learned from the law,

There goes the theory that Romans was addressed to "Romans".

Romans 11:13

13 It is to you Gentiles that I speak, inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, and perhaps magnify my ministry;

It was also addressed to Gentiles. Note that “Gentiles” does not only include Greeks and Romans as Greek primacists may want to believe. “Gentiles” includes many Aramaic-speaking Semitic groups, such as the Chaldeans, Syrians, Assyrians, Canaanite-Phoenicians and possibly non-Judean Israelites.

1Corinthians 10:1

1 MOREOVER, brethren, I want you to know that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea;

2 And all were baptized by Moses, both in the cloud and in the sea;

Now we focus on Greece, and it seems that again, Paul is talking to Judeans. 1Corinthians and 2Corinthians are full of references to Israelite law and history. Clearly, though Paul writes to people in Greece and Rome, these people are Judeans and Aramaic-speaking Gentiles. It is no wonder then that the Pauline Epistles are so overflowing with Aramaicisms. We must never forget the order of preaching. “To the Judean first...” And according to famous Judean historian Flavius Josephus, the Judeans had great difficulty learning Greek, while they did speak Aramaic (Josephus even wrote in Aramaic).

The following quote sheds important light on the myth that the Semites in Jesus’ time spoke Greek:

“Another factor is this: if the people in the Near East spoke Greek, and their Scriptures were written in that language, why did their descendants not know it? Why have several hundred million Mohammedans and Christians, since the first century, been taught that Jesus, his Apostles, and the early Christians spoke Aramaic and that the Scriptures were written in that language? Twenty-five years ago [from the time of the writing in 1946 – Chris] the writer was shocked upon learning of the prevailing belief in Europe and America that the Scriptures were written first in Greek.” – Dr. George Mamishisho Lamsa

Finally, here is an interesting discussion by historian and Aramaic Scholar, William Norton. Note that he speaks of the “Peshitto”, when he actually refers to the “Peshitta”. These two versions will be discussed later in this article.

“Jesudad said that the New Covenant Peshito is "a translation made by the care and solicitude of Thaddaeus and other apostles." Books written, as the Gospel of Matthew was, in the Syriac of Palestine, needed very little change when translated into the Syriac of Edessa. Paul's letter to the Hebrews, the letter of James, the first of Peter, and the first of John, were all addressed to Hebrews, and probably, therefore, were first written in Syriac, the language of the Hebrews; and needed but few changes when translated into the dialect of Edessa. These few changes were probably what Jesudad called a "translation," so far as the word had reference to these books. The Apostles, when taking the care and oversight of the translation of all the books in the Peshito, were not bound as an uninspired translator would have been, to follow always the exact words of what was translated. They had divine authority to use whatever difference of expression the Holy Spirit might guide them to adopt, as better fitted for use in the translation.

If, therefore, in comparing the Syriac with the Greek text, we find that they both express nearly the same meaning, but that in places a supposed Greek original so differs in words from the Syriac, that if the Syriac had been made by an uninspired translator, he would be justly condemned for such licentious departure from his Greek copy, the reason may be, that the inspired translator has been divinely guided to make that difference; and if, in some of these cases of different wording, the Syriac meaning be more clear, or exact, or better adapted for Syrian readers than the Greek reading is, those very differences become evidence of the correctness of the Syrian belief that the Peshito was made "by the care and solicitude of Apostles." For it is evident that an uninspired translator could not, as a rule, bring light out of darkness, clearness out of obscurity, exactness and correctness out of ambiguity and uncertainty. Persons familiar with the Peshito admit the truth of Faust Nairon's remark, that the Peshito does really sometimes "make clear, things difficult or doubtful in the Greek." (Introduction, p. 9.)

Bishop Walton quotes with approval the remark of De Dieu, that "the true meaning of phrases which often occur in the N. T., can scarcely be sought from any other source than the Syriac." (Polyg. Prol. xiii. 19.) J. D. Michaelis says, "the Syriac Version leads us sometimes to just and beautiful explanations, where other help is insufficient." (Marsh's Michaelis, vol. ii. p. 44.)

Josephus is a very important witness in proof of the extent to which Syriac was known and used in the first century. He took part in the war against the Romans which led to the destruction of Jerusalem, A. D. 70. He was taken captive by them, and was well acquainted with all the events connected with the war. He wrote a history of it in Syriac; and states how great a multitude of people, living in different nations, from near the Caspian Sea to the bounds of Arabia, could read and understand what he had written in Syriac.

He afterwards wrote the same history in Greek, that those who spoke Greek, and those of the Romans, and of any other nation who knew Greek, but did not know Syriac, might read it also. He says, that in order to write the Greek history, he used at Rome the aid of persons who knew Greek; that Greek was to him a "foreign language;" (Jewish Antiquities, Book I.); and that very few of his countrymen knew it well. (Jewish Antiq. Bk. XX., Chap. IX.)” – William Norton, Aramaic scholar and historian, from “Internal Evidence that the Peshito was Made in Cent. 1., and is not a Mere Translation of the Greek”

5. The Septuagint

It is a common misconception that the Septuagint was made for Judeans in general, and was quoted by Jesus and the Apostles. This is an outright fallacy. The Septuagint was made for the Alexandrian Judeans, those Greek-speaking Judeans in Alexandria. That it were the Alexandrian Judeans that spoke Greek, and not Judeans in general, also gives weight to the belief that Clement of Alexandria had to translate the book of Hebrews into Greek. As Judeans themselves tell us, the creation of the Septuagint was frowned upon in Israel:

Note: the Septuagint is also known as the LXX and the Seventy.

“While Philo and his Alexandrian co-religionists looked upon the Seventy as the work of inspired men, Palestinian rabbis subsequently considered the day on which the Septuagint was completed as one of the most unfortunate in Israel's history, seeing that the Torah could never adequately be translated. And there are indications enough that the consequences of such translations were not all of a desirable nature.” – Jewish Publication Society 1955

“However, there are other commemorative days that fall immediately before the Tenth of Tevet and their memory has been silently incorporated in the fast day of the Tenth of Tevet as well. On the eighth of Tevet, King Ptolemy of Egypt forced 70 Jewish scholars to gather and translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek. Even though the Talmud relates to us that this project was blessed with a miracle -- the 70 scholars were all placed in separate cubicles and yet they all came up with the same translation -- the general view of the rabbis of the time towards this project was decidedly negative. The Talmud records that when this translation became public "darkness descended on the world.” – Rabbi Barry Leff

“In fact, the church father Jerome mentions that the "Hebrew Gospel" (really Aramaic in Hebrew script) originally had HEBREW OT QUOTES IN IT THAT WERE SWITCHED FOR THE LXX OR SOME GREEK VERSION LATER ON.” – Andrew Gabriel Roth, Aramaic scholar and “Nazarene Jew”

If the Judeans mourned the translating of the Hebrew OT into Greek (according to scholars, “Koine Greek”), imagine the shock to them if their fellow Judeans had written the NT in Greek also!

And why would Aramaic-speaking Jesus and the Aramaic-speaking Apostles read and quote the Septuagint? They had access to the Hebrew, and there are many examples where the Greek NT differs from the Septuagint, while agreeing with the Peshitta (some of which are shown in “Miscellaneous Proofs in the New Testament, Suggest Peshitta Primacy – Part 1”).

6. The Greek NT: a pale imitation

As has been shown in other articles of this series, the Greek New Testament is full of errors, contradictions, variants and bad grammar, while lacking the numerous wordplays, true meanings of idioms and poetry of the Peshitta. The Greek NT dilutes the original message, just as the Septuagint did, and is a main reason why the Judeans mourned it. In fact, the Greek NT reads much like the Septuagint, what with its bad grammar and “Koine Greek”. The Septuagint was a Greek translation of a Semitic original. Put two and two together...

Can one prove that the Greek is the original? Nobody actually can. It’s just taken for granted. Since all the Greek versions have corruptions, contradictions etc, it is clear that they are not the originals. Many will shout “Manuscript evidence” at the top of their lungs, as supporting evidence of Greek primacy. “Manuscript evidence” – the favourite term of the Greek primacist and it means nothing. There are 5000 Greek mss and fragments of mss. So what? There are millions of English Bibles worldwide, was the Bible then written in English? There is plenty of “publishing evidence” that the New Testament was written in English!

What about age? Obviously, the original must also be the oldest. Well, this we cannot determine either. It is acknowledged on both camps that the originals are long gone and that we are left with copies of copies. So, dating the various mss does not help anyone much. It is interesting to note however, that as of the year 2003 AD, the oldest dated Biblical manuscript is the Peshitta Old Testament Ms. 14,425 held in the British museum. It is believed to have been written in 464 AD. It is also notable that many Semites revered their Scripture so much that they would not let it disintegrate. Rather they would copy them precisely, and do away with the originals or older copies.

It is also interesting to note that the vast majority of Greek mss and fragments postdate the 9th century – they were written nearly 1000 years after the originals were written, or later. Here are some of the primary Greek mss and the approximate ages that have been assigned to them:

- Codex Sinaiticus (Codex) (350 CE) Contains almost all of the NT and over half of the LXX.
- Codex Alexandrinus (Codex A) (c. 400 CE) Almost the entire Bible (LXX and NT).
- Codex Vaticanus (Codex B) (325-350 CE) Contains most of the Bible (LXX and NT).
- Codex Ephraemi (Codex C) (400’s CE) Represents most of the NT except 2Thes. and 2John.
- Codex Bezae (Codex D) (450 CE) Contains the Four Gospels and Acts in Greek and Latin.
- Codex Washingtonensis (Codex W) (450 CE) sometimes called Codex Freerianus Contains the Four Gospels
- Codex Claromontanus (Codex D(p)) (500’s) Contains the Pauline Epistles.

These ages are hardly impressive, when Aramaic (that “Hebrew dialect”) originals are quoted and being talked about as early as the second century!

One topic often used as supporting evidence of Greek primacy, is that many of the important early Christians were Greek, such as Timothy and Titus. The Greek NT says that they were Greek, but the original Aramaic NT tells us that they were actually Aramean (Acts 16:1, Galatians 2:3).

With the Messiah, Apostles and early Christians being Aramaic-speaking, why on Earth would the New Testament have been written in Greek? Why would Aramaic-speaking Paul, write to Aramaic-speaking Timothy and Titus, in Greek, rather than in Aramaic? Why would Paul write to Greeks, using Aramaic idioms that they wouldn’t understand?

Note: Another interesting issue may be touched upon in a future article. That of “Koine Greek” and “Translation Greek”. Of course, the Septuagint, being a translation of a Semitic original, is quite different from extra-Biblical examples of Koine Greek, as it is “translation Greek”. Unsurprisingly to Peshitta primacists, the Greek New Testament reads more like the translation Greek of the LXX, rather than Koine Greek.

7. Other Aramaic versions

The original Peshitta is the most authoritative of the Aramaic versions. The Church of the East (COE) maintains it’s tradition that they were given the original books by the Apostles themselves. Internal and external evidence has not been able to contradict this, rather, it supports the COE stance that the Peshitta books are the originals. There are two main other Aramaic versions, one of which is likened to a “revised Peshitta” (the Peshitto), and one of which is a fraud (the Old Syriac).

The Peshitto

This version is so similar to the original Peshitta (which the Church of the East held as canon), that often the names are confused, with Westerners often calling the Peshitta, “Peshitto”, and vice versa. The 22 books that are common in both the Peshitta and the Peshitto are practically identical – only a handful of verses are different. The biggest difference is that the Peshitto (which the Syrian Orthodox Church – a split-off from the COE – held as canon) includes the “Western 5”. Those 5 books (2Peter, 2John, 3John, Jude, Revelation) that are included in most Western canons (making a total of 27 books), but omitted in the Peshitta.

The reason for this seems to be that the Peshitta canon was sealed very early, before the “Western 5” were found. To this day, the COE has never accepted these five books as canon, but they do not necessarily discourage their study. The “Western 5” of the Peshitta divides many Aramaic primacists. While all tend to agree that there were definitely Aramaic originals to these books, some believe that the Peshitto contains these originals, while others say that the “Western 5” in the Peshitto seem to have a heavier Greek influence and are translated or revised from the Greek translations of the Aramaic originals.

The latter group often states that the best case for Aramaic originals of the “Western 5”, lies not in the Aramaic versions of the Peshitto, but in the Greek translations! For they tend to have many Aramaicisms (like the other 22 books) and poor Greek grammar (hence the heavy attention Revelation has received in the linguistic articles of this series).

The “Old Syriac”

The very name of this version is a slap in the face to Peshitta primacists. It is modeled after the name of the Old Latin, the alleged precursor to the Latin Vulgate. It is generally accepted by most Bible scholars that this version precedes the Peshitta and the Peshitto. As you will soon discover, this notion is completely false and illogical.

The Old Syriac contains the four Gospels only. It consists of two main documents, the Old Syriac Sinaiticus, and the Old Syriac Curetonianus. These two manuscripts disagree with each other to such an extent, that it is highly questionable why they are considered to be “one version”. Furthermore, the Old Syriac agrees very closely with the Greek Codex Bezae, considered by many Greek scholars to be the “original Greek”. This is one of the main reasons why Greek primacists rate the Old Syriac as the “best Aramaic”.

To add insult to injury, scholarly consensus holds that the Peshitta (and the Peshitto along with it – it seems that most Greek primacists are unaware that there are differences between the Peshitta and the Peshitto, however slight) was translated from the Greek by Rabulla, the bishop of Edessa from 412-435 AD. One of the main proponents of this belief has been noted textual critic, F. C. Burkitt. Scholarly consensus says that it was the “Byzantine Greek”. The irony of this belief is that from the many split words discussed earlier in this series, sometimes the Peshitta agrees with the Byzantine Greek, and sometimes with the Alexandrian Greek, heavily implying that both Greek traditions actually stem from the Peshitta.

That Rabulla created the Peshitta is a completely irrational belief, to those who are familiar with the history of the two big Aramaic-speaking Churches. The problem with this belief is that the Peshitta/Peshitto (keep in mind that these versions are almost identical) was used by both the COE and the SOC, even long after Rabulla’s death. When the big Church split into the COE and SOC in 431 AD, Rabulla sided with the SOC and heavily persecuted the COE, which led to them naming him, “the tyrant of Edessa”. It is not reasonable to assume that the COE would use a version of the Bible created by their biggest enemy, while they believed that they had the original Aramaic Bible. It is even more incredible that this “Rabulla-Peshitta” theory remains so strong, despite not a single shred of evidence to support it. It seems that the Greek primacy movement will do anything to suppress the Aramaic.

Syriac historian, Dr. Arthur Voobus on Burkitt’s claims:

“This kind of reconstruction of textual history is pure fiction without a shred of evidence to support it” – Early Versions of the New Testament, Estonian Theological Society, 1954, pp. 90-97

Famous textual critic, Dr. Bruce Metzger adds:

“The question who it was that produced the Peshitta version of the New Testament will perhaps never be answered. That it was not Rubbula has been proved by Voobus's researches. . . In any case, however, in view of the adoption of the same version of the Scriptures by both the Eastern (Nestorian) and Western (Jacobite) branches of Syrian Christendom, we must conclude that it had attained a considerable degree of status before the division of the Syrian Church in AD 431.” – Early Versions of the New Testament, New York: Claredon, 1977, p. 36

Burkitt’s theory is all the more illogical when you consider that the COE and SOC were practically mortal enemies, yet were using the same Aramaic tradition. Clearly, the Peshitta must have gained much respect and reverence by the COE and SOC, long before they split.

Now that we have cast aside the notion that Rabulla created the Peshitta from the Greek translation, we yet do not cast aside the idea that Rabulla did in fact make an Aramaic version from the Greek. A colleague of his wrote the following after Rabulla’s death:

“By the wisdom of God that was in him he translated the New Testament from Greek into Syriac because of its variations, exactly as it was.” – Rabul episcopi Edesseni, Baleei, aliorumque opera selecta, Oxford 1865, ed. J. J. Overbeck

Rabulla himself stated:

“The presbyters and deacons shall see to it that in all the churches a copy of the Evangelion de Mepharreshe shall be available and read.” – Zahn, Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons, i. (1881), p. 105

Clearly, Rabulla did make an Aramaic version from the Greek. And we have its name: Evangelion de Mepharreshe.

Could this be the Old Syriac? We shall let the Old Syriac answer that one! Old Syriac John (the last of the four Gospels) ends with:

ܐܘܢ ܕܡܦܚܪܫܐ ܕܥܘܢܗܘܢ ܕܡܦܚܪܫܐ

“Shlam Evangelion de Mepharreshe”

“Here ends the Evangelion de Mepharreshe”

Besides this blatant proof, the “Evangelion de Mepharreshe” has little in common with the Peshitta, even though they are apparently “the same version”.

This title, “Evangelion de Mepharreshe” is a combination of Greek and Aramaic, meaning “Separate Gospels”. This brings us to a discussion on a minor Aramaic version that has played such a major role in the history of the misunderstandings of the original Aramaic Scriptures. This minor version will also help to explain why Rabulla made his own version of the Gospels in the first place.

Rabulla, the Old Syriac and Tatian’s Diatessaron

Infamous Assyrian apologist, Tatian, created a harmony of the four Peshitta Gospels, in order to have a continuous narrative of the life of Jesus. This Aramaic version, is known as the “Diatessaron” (meaning “Gospel harmony”) aka “Evangelion da Mehallete”. Sound familiar? It should. It basically means, “Mixed Gospels”. It is generally accepted by most scholars as being published around 175 AD or earlier. Only fragments remain of the original Aramaic version, but further translations into Arabic, Latin and Armenian still exist.

The Diatessaron became a very popular version in Syria, during the 4th and 5th centuries. Even in Edessa, the diocese of Rabulla. When he saw that nearly every Church was using the Diatessaron, Rabulla ordered the priests and deacons to ensure that every church should have a copy of the his “Evangelion da Mepharreshe”.

He wanted to replace the “Evangelion da Mehallete” (“Mixed Gospels”) with his “Evangelion da Mepharreshe” (“Separate Gospels”).

The true story now becomes very clear. Rabulla created the Old Syriac, not the Peshitta! This makes complete sense, after seeing Rabulla's emphasis on the Gospels (to rival the Diatessaron, the harmonised Gospel) and the fact that the Old Syriac consists of the four Gospels only.

Happily enough, internal evidence from the Arabic translation of the Assyrian Diatessaron (the only surviving version translated into a sister Semitic tongue) heavily indicates that the Diatessaron stems from the Peshitta. This would date the Peshitta to around 175 AD at the absolute latest. Pretty impressive, when the New Testament is believed to have been completed around 100 AD.

But why in countering the Diatessaron, did Rabulla create the Old Syriac (from the Greek translation), instead of using the original Peshitta Gospels? The author does not understand, especially since his ally, the SOC, revered the Peshitta tradition. Perhaps he wanted to make a name for himself. Or perhaps he conspired to suppress the Peshitta tradition. Indeed, the SOC did make use of his Old Syriac for a while, before reverting back to their more trustworthy Peshitto.

In any case, this investigation yields some vital facts:

- Rabulla did not create the Peshitta, he created the Old Syriac.
- The Peshitta does not stem from the Old Syriac, the Old Syriac stems from the Peshitta, via the Greek.
- The Peshitta dates back to 175 AD at the very latest.

It all makes sense now. One would expect the COE to reject the version created by Rabulla, their great persecutor. Yet they didn't reject the Peshitta. They rejected the Old Syriac. That the Old Syriac was a poor version (unavoidable seeing as it was an Aramaic translation from a Greek translation of the original Aramaic*), is evident not only by the COE's rejection, but also the eventual rejection of the SOC, Rabulla's ally. Both Churches decided to stay with the Peshitta tradition. Yet scholars still are adamant that the Old Syriac is somehow older and superior to the Peshitta and Peshitto.

* - The Old Syriac shares many similarities with the Western Greek text (aka Codex Bezae, aka Manuscript D) as textual critic Dr. James Trimm demonstrates. And the Western Greek text seems to be an early Greek translation of the Peshitta as indicated by its "Semiticness" (the NT author's were all Semites after all) and its variants with other Greek manuscripts, that stem from mistranslations/misunderstandings of the original Peshitta passages (split words).

After learning the true history of the "Old Syriac", you may be loathe to call it by that name. A popular alternative among Peshitta enthusiasts is "Old Scratch", as manuscripts were found where the Old Syriac was scratched off to make way for a priest's biography.

Before I started compiling this article, I always kept in mind that internal evidence, from the linguistics is probably the best evidence we have. However, the historical evidence supporting Peshitta primacy (and the lack of evidence for Greek NT primacy) also makes an extremely strong case for Aramaic originality.

Now that we have seen the various proofs of Peshitta Primacy, let us see how this knowledge can be used practically. The next articles in this series will deal with Greek contradictions that are solved by the Peshitta (yet more linguistic proof, in itself) and insights into Biblical doctrine from the Aramaic. – Christopher Lancaster