There is a well-known series of books dedicated to the exploration of the impact various historic cultures had upon what came after, whose titles include *The Legacy of Greece* and *The Legacy of Rome*. Based on the same concept is *The Legacy of Mesopotamia*, edited by Stephanie Dalley, an excellent collection of papers on the impact of Mesopotamian civilization on surrounding cultures.¹ We might think that it would be impossible to devote a book of this kind to the ancient Aramaeans, partly because there is no period of Aramaean empire or cultural dominance to which we could refer back, partly because it is much more difficult to identify the legacy of the ancient, “pagan” Aramaeans, as opposed to that of the Christian Aramaeans. The latter retain an Aramaean identity, which has been reinvigorated in modern times as a result of political circumstances. These modern Aramaeans are culturally Christians, with an identity analogous to that of Jewish and Mandaeans Aramaic-speakers.

In fact, the Aramaeans lived in a close symbiotic relationship with other distinct peoples of the Ancient Near East. In Mesopotamia and adjacent areas, the Aramaeans were, throughout most of their history, under the spell of cuneiform culture. Some of the earliest Aramaic texts are bilinguals in Aramaic and the Assyrian dialect of Akkadian.² Aramaean religious centers like Harran became the focus of attention to Mesopotamian deities,³ and Aramaic traditional legal formulae as revealed in practical documents were not entirely separable from the Mesopotamian legal tradition.⁴ In the West, Aramaean states were in close contact with Israel

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¹ Dalley 1998a.
² See the Tell Fekherye inscription, Abou-Assaf – Bordreuil – Millard 1982.
³ In the Harran case, the moon-god Sin; Green 1992.
and Phoenicia,\textsuperscript{5} the Phoenician god Ba’alšamem being accepted into Aramaean tradition,\textsuperscript{6} and with northern Arabia.\textsuperscript{7}

It is thus not easy to identify distinct elements of the Aramaean heritage in later times. To take two examples, the earliest Syriac legal documents contain legal formulae that could be regarded as Aramaean, but that might alternatively be interpreted as Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian.\textsuperscript{8} Again, at Palmyra the main temple is dedicated to Bel, a version of Babylonian Marduk\textsuperscript{9}: should we regard him as part of the Aramaean heritage or part of the legacy of Mesopotamia?

The Aramaic script and Aramaic language are indisputably Aramaean artifacts. These were the main legacies to later ages. However, this inheritance is not a sure guide to Aramaean cultural influence. Communities with a shared language tradition may be very different from each other historically and culturally. The Aramaic script and language were adopted by peoples like the Jews and the Nabataeans in a process of Aramicization in the last centuries B.C., though neither had much in common with the Aramaeans of earlier times: the Jews were eager to keep Aramaean religious influence at arm’s length,\textsuperscript{10} while the Nabataeans owed more culturally to Arabia than to Syria-Palestine.\textsuperscript{11} Although the evidence is scanty, it appears that even Phoenicia, from which the Aramaeans originally borrowed the alphabet around 1000 B.C., was later colonized by Aramaic,\textsuperscript{12} with Aramaic being used, at least for official purposes, from an early date: the Adon papyrus of 604/3 B.C. attests to this.\textsuperscript{13} Traces of Aramaic impact are still to be found in the Anti-Lebanon range at Ma’lula and nearby villages north of Damascus.\textsuperscript{14}

Arguably the script that the Aramaeans developed is one of their greatest gifts to posterity. While it was probably not the Aramaic form of the alphabet that, through transmission to the Aegean, gave birth to the western alphabetic tradition, the impact of Aramaic writing on

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\textsuperscript{5} Millard 1973.
\textsuperscript{6} Niehr 2003: 89–184.
\textsuperscript{7} Notably Tayma; see Abu Duruk 1986, but for an excellent recent summary, see Hausleiter 2010; cf. on Tayma also H. Niehr’s chapter on northern Arabia in this volume.
\textsuperscript{8} Healey 2005a.
\textsuperscript{10} Millard 1973: 148f; see 2 Kgs 16: 10–13 for Ahaz’s introduction of an Aramaean cult to Jerusalem.
\textsuperscript{11} Healey 1989 and id. 2001: 2–12.
\textsuperscript{12} Segert 1965: 216.
\textsuperscript{14} Arnold 2000: 347–357.