Notes on Foreign Words in Hatran Aramaic

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1 Hatran Aramaic and its Language Contacts

Among the “Middle Aramaic” or “Later Imperial Aramaic” varieties, the Aramaic of Hatra and Assur has been hitherto rather less studied, particularly regarding the foreign components in its vocabulary. In this perspective, not only Judean and other Palestinian Aramaic varieties, but also Nabataean, Palmyrene, and even Old Syriac have been repeatedly investigated, particularly in the last 25 years. In sharp contrast, Hatran Aramaic vocabulary is of course

1 RC is responsible for the non-Akkadian lexical data, PP for the Akkadian ones, whereas we are jointly answerable for the general structure of this paper and for the etymological solutions presented here. Materially, RC wrote §§1, 2 and the first half of §4; PP wrote §3 and the second half of §4. Note the following abbreviations: Akk. = Akkadian; ANA = Ancient North Arabian; Arm. = Armenian; BA = Biblical Aramaic; Bab. = Babylonian; CA = Classical Arabic; CPA = Christian Palestinian Aramaic; Gr. = Greek; HA = Hatran Aramaic; Has. = Hasaitic; JBA = Jewish Babylonian Aramaic; JPA = Jewish Palestinian Aramaic; JudA = Judean Aramaic; Lat. = Latin; LB = Late Babylonian; LH = Late Biblical Hebrew; Lih. = Lihyanite; MA = Middle Assyrian; Md. = Mandaic; Med. = Median; MIr. = Middle Iranian; NA = Neo Assyrian; Nab. = Nabatean; NB = Neo Babylonian; NP = Neo-Persian; OA = Old Assyrian; OArk. = Old Akkadian; OAr. = Old Arabic; OAram. = Old Aramaic; OB = Old Babylonian; OFa = Official Aramaic; Oil. = Old Iranian; OP = Old Persian; OSyr. = Old Syriac; Palm. = Palmyrene; Parth. = Parthian; QA = Qumran Aramaic; QH = Qumran Hebrew; SA = Samaritan Aramaic; Sab. = Sabaic; Saf. = Safaitic; Sum. = Sumerian; Syr. = Syriac.

2 We shall conventionally employ this expression in the chronological meaning introduced in 1969 by Joseph A. Fitzmyer to denote the phase of Aramaic roughly from 200 BC to 200 AD; for other understandings of “Middle Aramaic” in the history of Aramaic studies, see Moriggi 2012, with essential bibliography.

3 This alternative terminology has lately been advocated by Gzella 2008: 108ff and 2011: 604ff, who labels “Eastern Mesopotamian Aramaic” (in conformity with Beyer’s suggested designation “Ostmesopotamisch” [1984: 46 and 1998: 7]) the variety dominating the area between Hatra and the ancient city of Assur, which we conventionally name “Hatran Aramaic” in the present paper (“Hatran” is here the linguistic, “Hatrene” the non-linguistic adjective related to Hatra; cf. Kaizer 2006: 139 n. 2 for a similar solution).

4 All of these Aramaic varieties are covered in Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995. No less than four lexicographical tools are devoted to the Dead Sea material, all with concise etymological information: Beyer 1984: 499–741; 1994: 301–432; 2004: 339–506; Sokoloff 2003; to these may be added the glossary for Judean Aramaic in Yadin et al. 2002: 398–404. Nabataean, albeit certainly in need of an updated dictionary complementing Cantineau 1932: 53–173 and the
recorded in concise glossaries appended to the main text collections, as well as in Hoftijzer and Jongeling's dictionary of epigraphic North-West Semitic (1995), but no specific study has been devoted so far to a discussion of foreign (loan)words in the language, with the exception of Harnack's diffuse but today largely outdated essay (1970) on Iranian titles in the inscriptions of Hatra: this gap in Aramaic lexicology has prompted us to offer here a first assessment of the data, with some tentative etymological indications. Our starting point was of course Beyer's excellent glossary (1998, integrated in 2013), offering some sparing etymological information, mostly implicit, and partly inferable from the hypothetical vocalization and translation provided, according to the style of presentation adopted for his masterly glossaries of Dead Sea Aramaic texts.

Hatran Aramaic (HA) is documented in ca. 600 lapidary inscriptions and graffiti, a part of which are dated between 44 BC and 238 AD, belonging to different epigraphic genres, each characterized by its distinctive formulary and specialized lexis: building, votive, funerary, memorial, and legal texts, to which may be added the sub-genre of blessings and curses. No texts on soft media, such as are extant for Judean Aramaic, Palmyrene, and Old Syriac, are so far known for HA. The remarkable linguistic and orthographic uniformity of the HA corpus has brought Holger Gzella to advance the quite plausible hypothesis of the existence of a royal chancellery, whose activity imposed some degree of standardization throughout the whole area of diffusion of this Aramaic variety somewhat disappointing Jobling 1995, has been repeatedly investigated regarding its lexical borrowings from Arabic (O'Connor 1986, Greenfield 1992, and the glossary for Nabataean in Yadin et al. 2002: 405–410) and from Greek and Latin (Healey 1995, in comparison with Old Syriac, and Monferrer Sala 2013). Palmyrene has an excellent glossary in PAT 333–421, while attention has been devoted both to its Greek and Latin (Brock 2005, in comparison with Syriac; Gzella 2006: 26–31, in a broader sociolinguistic frame) and to its Arabic loanwords (Maraqten 1998). Old Syriac vocabulary is accounted for in an essential word list in Drijvers and Healey 1999: 267–275, while its foreign loanwords are discussed by Healey 1995, in comparison with Nabataean.

