Randall Buth and R. Steven Notley, eds.


Each of the articles in this volume deploys insight and ingenuity in the aim of the project, which goes beyond the language environment of first century Judaea. Rather, the purpose is to dispute any assumption that “Aramaic was the only viable language for Jesus’ public teaching or for any early Semitic records of the Jesus movement,” as Randall Buth says in an introduction (p. 1). The authors wish to replace what they repeatedly call an “exclusive Aramaic model” with a devotion to Hebrew.

Guido Baltes opens the book with two articles, “The Origins of the ‘Exclusive Aramaic Model’ in the Nineteenth Century,” and “The Use of Hebrew and Aramaic in Epigraphic Sources of the New Testament Era.” The first is a competent review on the whole, but certain omissions are characteristic of the volume. Baltes notes that in 1894 Gustaf Dalman did not have access to Targumic materials discovered during the twentieth century (p. 15), but he does not observe the range of Targumim and their dialects that Dalman did take account of. Similarly, the interest in German scholarship is so strong (cf. 29–31) that the contribution of Ernest Renan in 1856—with many subsequent editions, in a remarkable treatment of Aramaic in relation to Hebrew, the Targumim, and the situation of Jesus—is ignored. When Baltes refers to recent scholarship on Aramaic, his bibliography is highly selective, and his passion for Mishnaic Hebrew as a spoken language is more vehement than substantiated (pp. 18–19).

Baltes’s treatment of epigraphic remains is much more satisfying, and it lays out much of the evidence handsomely. Among the remains, however, Baltes omits the much-discussed ossuary of Caiaphas (p. 36), an inexplicable lapse. On the next page, another error mars an otherwise sound presentation. He claims that Klaus Beyer denies that Hebrew was “a spoken language in any part of the country at the time of Jesus” (p. 37), but goes on to cite Beyer’s actual wording, in which Beyer refers to _remote_ areas where scribal language had not penetrated. Baltes acknowledges that Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew co-existed in the inscriptions he surveys (p. 53). This comes out especially in cases where Aramaic and Hebrew cannot be distinguished, although he confusingly calls such inscriptions “bilingual” (p. 50). The relationship of inscriptions to spoken language, a constant topic in much recent literature, is not explored.

Randall Buth contributes “_Hebraisti in Ancient Texts,_” in which he contends that the reference is to Hebrew, never Aramaic. To do so, he needs to contro-
vert the work of Joseph Fitzmyer (p. 67), that “words and expressions that are clearly Aramaic” are sometimes said to be hebraisted. Buth replies that suristed would have been the appropriate term (p. 72), and that when words are used in Aramaic, they might be loanwords, especially because “Greek and Aramaic interfaced all over the Middle East from the Indus Valley to the Nile and especially within Jewish communities” (pp. 75–82). The observation of such interaction leads Buth to argue that individual Aramaic words were taken into Hebrew speech (pp. 97, 104–105), so that Fitzmyer is wrong in maintaining that the usage as a whole is Aramaic.

Missing from this critique is an analysis of Fitzmyer’s role in assessing the evolving dialects of Aramaic between the fifth century BCE and the Middle Ages. Against that background, the argument for only odd words from Aramaic making their way into other languages appears strained. The usage of Aramaic within Judaism has recently been detailed with bibliography in *The Targums. A Critical Introduction* (pp. 267–283); the work appeared with both Brill and Baylor University Press in 2011, but is not cited in this volume.

Marc Turnage takes up “The Linguistic Ethos of Galilee,” and he observes that, for the first century, epigraphic materials are wanting (p. 111). He nonetheless finds it “very likely that the linguistic ethos of Galilee mirrored that of Judea” (p. 113), in which “Aramaic, both literary and spoken, did not shape any cultural message” (p. 117). Turnage’s idea here is that Aramaic was “merely used for communication,” while Hebrew shaped “the national and religious ethos.” The discovery of Aramaic manuscripts at Qumran puts strain on this perspective, and Turnage does allow “that the Qumran community did not oppose Aramaic” (p. 123), so he revises his earlier conclusion to assert “the trilingual status of the Jewish population in the land of Israel” (p. 125). Although “specialists” agree with that, he claims “New Testament scholarship” does not. In fact, the recent book that remains uncited in this volume (*The Targums*, written by Paul Flesher and myself) documents the widespread recourse to all three languages among scholars of the New Testament.

The same book also details those passages in the New Testament that have been studied in comparison to the Targumim. That evidence is not considered at all in Turnage’s claim that “sufficient evidence does not exist to assert strongly anything about Galilean language culture” (p. 164). Yet he contradicts his own claim that “there is no evidence of Aramaic Targumim in the land of Israel prior the middle of the second century” (p. 166) with belated recognition of sources at Qumran (p. 180).

Serge Ruzer deals with “Hebrew versus Aramaic as Jesus’ Language” on the basis of Syriac authors. This essay traces attitudes toward Jesus in the early period that acknowledge his linguistic difference from Syriac, although in the