

BOOK REVIEWS

Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Christian Palestinian Aramaic*, OLA 234 (Leuven: Peeters, 2014). Pp. xlii + 466; \$122.00.

Michael Sokoloff, *Texts of Various Contents in Christian Palestinian Aramaic*, OLA 235 (Leuven: Peeters, 2014). Pp. x + 248; \$95.00.

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Christian Palestinian Aramaic is the Late Aramaic dialect preserved in Melkite Christian writings that can be dated between the fifth and thirteenth centuries. Geographically, Christian Palestinian Aramaic is attested primarily in Palestine and Transjordan as well as in isolated locations in Egypt and Sinai (a number of the manuscripts are associated with the Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai). The preferred designation ‘Christian Palestinian Aramaic’ goes back to Th. Nöldeke’s description of this dialect in 1868 (ZDMG 22, 443–527). This dialect is also occasionally termed ‘Syro-Palestinian Aramaic’ or quite misleadingly ‘Palestinian Syriac’. It should be stressed that Christian Palestinian Aramaic is *not* a Palestinian variety of Syriac.¹ Rather, linguistically Christian Palestinian Aramaic is more closely related to Jewish Palestinian Aramaic and Samaritan Aramaic than it is to Syriac: Together Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, and Samaritan Aramaic comprise the traditional Western branch of Late Aramaic. Christian Palestinian Aramaic does, however, make use of a script adapted from Syriac, and in addition it attests a number of contact features from Syriac, especially in its later period.

¹ Thus, the vocabulary of Christian Palestinian Aramaic should not have been included in R. Payne Smith’s monumental *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879–1901).

The last quarter of a century or so has seen a tremendous boom in the study of Christian Palestinian Aramaic, at least relatively speaking. Most foundationally, a majority of the texts from the earliest period have been re-edited, thanks in part to the author of the two works under review here, M. Sokoloff. The textual attestation of Christian Palestinian Aramaic can be divided into several periods, the most important of which is the first that spans from the fifth to the eighth century when Christian Palestinian Aramaic was still a spoken language. Most of the manuscript witnesses to Christian Palestinian Aramaic in this period consist of the underwriting in palimpsest manuscripts. Two of the most important such palimpsests are *Codex Climaci Rescriptus*, which was formerly held by the Westminster Theological College (Cambridge, UK) but is now privately owned, and *Codex Sinaiticus Rescriptus*, recently renamed *Codex Sinaiticus Zosimi Rescriptus*, two-thirds of which is currently held in the National Library of Russia (St. Petersburg) with most of the remaining folios in the Schøyen Collection as well as a few additional fragments in other libraries.² In addition to these two almost complete manuscripts, there are a number of additional palimpsest manuscripts in which the underwriting is Christian Palestinian Aramaic. In the mid-1990s, Ch. Müller-Kessler and M. Sokoloff undertook to publish all the Christian Palestinian Aramaic texts from the earliest period in a series entitled *A Corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic* (Groningen: STYX Publications) (= *CCPA*). In this series, the authors (re-)edited the texts based on a fresh examination of all the available manuscript evidence—a painstaking task given that almost all the manuscripts are palimpsest, not to mention that they are scattered across the globe. Five joint volumes appeared, which included (re-)editions of the Old Testament (vol. I, 1997), the New Testament (vol. IIA–B,

² For the latter palimpsest, see A. Desreumaux, *Codex Sinaiticus Zosimi rescriptus: Description codicologique des feuillets araméens melkites des manuscrits Schøyen 35, 36 et 37 (Londres-Oslo)* (Lausanne: Éditions du Zébre, 1997).

1998), two of the more-completely preserved hagiographic texts, i.e., the *Forty Martyrs of the Sinai Desert* and the *Life of Eulogios the Stone-Cutter* (vol. III, 1996), and the catechism of Cyril of Jerusalem (vol. IV, 1999). A sixth planned volume, which was to include various fragmentary texts that were not included in the previous volumes, never, however, appeared. In his *Texts of Various Contents in Christian Palestinian Aramaic* under review here, Sokoloff collects the texts that were intended for this volume. Unlike the volumes in *CCPA*, however, the texts in the volume under review have not been (re-)edited based on the manuscripts but are reprinted from a range of scattered books and articles. Thus, as useful as this volume is in collecting these texts in one convenient place, it is a *beta*-version, as Sokoloff duly acknowledges. Sokoloff helpfully provides English translations for all the texts in the volume. Some of the texts are extant in only a single (fragmentary) folio, whereas others contain several folios; none are, however, very long. The texts fall into various genres. There are fragments from a range of apocryphal acts as well as from an apocryphal gospel. Several of the texts are apophthegmata (texts 9–12) or of a related genre, e.g., Geronticon (text 18). There are also a number of hagiographic texts, including fragments from *vitae* for Antony (by Athanasius), for Rabbula, and for Abraham of Qidun. Of particular interest for a Syriac audience, the volume includes a handful of texts attributed to Ephrem (texts 13–17): These are translations from Greek (i.e., Ephraem Graecus) and not from Syriac.³ More than a dozen of the texts in the volume remain unidentified, providing an opportunity for the discovery of new authors in Christian Palestinian Aramaic, as was the case with A. Suci's recent identification of a saying attributed to Abba Isaiah of Scetis (included as text 34 in the present volume).⁴ The volume concludes with several useful

³ See A. Desreumaux, "Ephraim in Christian Palestinian Aramaic," *Hugoye* 1 (1998), 221–226.

⁴ "An Addition to the Christian-Palestinian Aramaic Literary Corpus: *Logos XV* of Abba Isaiah of Scetis," *JSS* 61 (2016), 449–461.

appendices: a collection of Christian Palestinian Aramaic epigraphic texts (Appendix 1); various corrections to *CCPA*, both in readings and translations (Appendices 2–4), and a list identifying passages cited in the syntax portion of F. Schulthess' *Grammatik des christlich-palästinischen Aramäisch* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1924), which remains the only syntactic treatment of this dialect, as I discuss below. In the end, this volume is a valuable stopgap while we await definitive re-editions of the texts collected here. Scholars interested in Christianity in the Eastern Mediterranean during Late Antiquity will undoubtedly find texts of interest in this volume.

The traditional grammatical and lexicographic tools for Christian Palestinian Aramaic go back to two works by F. Schulthess published in the first quarter of the twentieth century: his *Lexicon Syropalaestinum* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1903) followed in 1924 by his *Grammatik des christlich-palästinischen Aramäisch*, which I have already mentioned. For more than half a century, these remained the standard tools. In 1977, M. Bar-Asher defended a dissertation (written in Hebrew) on the grammar of Christian Palestinian Aramaic at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; the dissertation was, however, never published, though a French article presenting some of its results did appear (*Journal Asiatique* 276 [1988], 27–59). Then, in 1991, Ch. Müller-Kessler published her *Grammatik des Christlich-Palästinisch-Aramäischen* (Hildesheim: G. Olms), which also began as a dissertation, defended at the Freie Universität of Berlin. Müller-Kessler's grammar provided an updated treatment of the phonology and morphology of Christian Palestinian Aramaic. The promised syntax volume has not yet, however, appeared, and so one must still have recourse to Schulthess' *Grammatik des christlich-palästinischen Aramäisch*. A new analysis of the syntax of Christian Palestinian Aramaic, which takes account of the Greek *Vorlagen* of the texts as well as of the many recent developments in the syntactic analysis of Late Aramaic, remains a

desideratum.⁵ Similarly, for the lexicon, the only tool available has been Schulthess' *Lexicon*, now well over a century old, or the glossaries in the individual volumes of *CCPA* or other text editions. This lexicographic lacuna has, however, now been filled with the first volume under review here. In his *A Dictionary of Christian Palestinian Aramaic*, Sokoloff provides a state-of-the-art lexicographic tool for this dialect of Aramaic. The dictionary follows the same format and layout as Sokoloff's other dictionaries (for publication details of these, see below). The lemmata are organized alphabetically, not by root. Each entry provides information on part of speech, etymology—by which Sokoloff primarily means cognates in other dialects of Late Aramaic, especially Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, Samaritan Aramaic, and Syriac but not full Aramaic cognates and certainly not a broader Semitic etymology—and abundant attestations, organized based on a generally well-conceived semantic analysis. The attestations are often cited in context but only rarely translated. This makes the dictionary less user-friendly than it could have been had all the examples been translated. Another issue related to accessibility is that all the Christian Palestinian Aramaic words in the dictionary have been typeset in a font that attempts to reflect the script of Christian Palestinian Aramaic as it is found in the manuscripts. On the one hand, this makes the dictionary much more difficult to use for the scholar, or especially student, who is not a specialist in Christian Palestinian Aramaic but only occasionally needs to consult a word in this particular dialect. On the other hand, it is probably not asking too much for such people to learn at the very least the script of the language that they need to consult.

The lexicographic situation of Late Aramaic—as well as of Aramaic more broadly—looks entirely different today than it did just thirty years ago. This is in large part due to the

⁵ See recently in this vein T. Li, *Greek Indicative Verbs in the Christian Palestinian Aramaic Gospels: Translation Technique and the Aramaic Verbal System*, PLAL 3 (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2013).

work of one tireless scholar: Michael Sokoloff. Sokoloff has published monumental dictionaries of both Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002) and Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1990 [1st ed.]; 2002 [2nd ed.]; 2017 [3rd ed.]). It is no overstatement to say that these dictionaries have revolutionized our understanding of the lexica of these two Jewish dialects of Late Aramaic, which were for far too long inextricably intertwined in works such as M. Jastrow's *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Putnam, 1903; often reprinted). In addition, Sokoloff has produced an English translation, with substantial updates and corrections, of the second edition of C. Brockelmann's *Lexicon Syriacum* (Halis Saxonium: Sumptibus M. Niemeyer, 1928).⁶ This work has not in my opinion received the thanks and praise that it deserves from Syriac scholars: Sokoloff's *Syriac Lexicon* places the study of Syriac lexicography on a superior footing to what was previously available, and it will not be supplanted until an entirely new lexicon of Syriac, based on a much larger corpus of Syriac texts with a copious—perhaps even exhaustive—listing of attestations, appears sometime in the probably distant future. And, now, in his *Dictionary of Christian Palestinian Aramaic*, Sokoloff has delivered yet another fine dictionary of a Late Aramaic dialect. These four dictionaries by Sokoloff are joined by A. Tal's dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic (Leiden: Brill, 2000), leaving only Mandaic among the Late Aramaic dialects lacking an updated lexicographic tool.⁷ Thanks to the

⁶ M. Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon. A Translation from the Latin, Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns – Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009).

⁷ E. S. Drower's and R. Macuch's *A Mandaic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) is out of date. It should, however, be noted that a new dictionary of Mandaic is currently being prepared by M. Morgenstern. See his "A New Mandaic Dictionary: Challenges, Accomplishments, and Prospects," in T. Li and K. Dyer, eds., *From Ancient Manuscripts to Modern Dictionaries. Select Studies in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek*, PLAL 9 (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2017), 139–171.

labors of Sokoloff, as well as others, our understanding of the lexica—and by extension the languages—of the Late Aramaic dialects is far better than it has ever been.