translation. This source of information must, however, be used with great caution. It was not the object of Plautus to exhibit the Punic language with precision, a task for which the Latin alphabet is but ill adapted, but only to make the populace laugh at the jargon of the hated Carthaginians. Moreover, he had to force the Punic words into Latin *senarii;* and finally the text, being unintelligible to copyists, is terribly corrupt. Much ingenuity has been wasted on the Punic of Plautus ; but the passage yields valuable results to cautious investigation which does not try to explain too much. @@1 In its grammar Phoenician closely resembles Hebrew. In both dialects the consonants are the same, often in contrast to Aramaic and other cognate languages.@@2 As to vowels, Phoenician seems to diverge rather more from Hebrew. The connecting of clauses is scarcely carried further in the former language than in the latter. A slight attempt to define the tenses more sharply appears once at least in the joining of *kán* (fuit) with a perfect, to express complete accomplishment (or the pluperfect). @@3 One important difference is that the use of *wáw* conversive with the imperfect—so common in Hebrew and in the inscription of Mesha—is wanting in Phoenician. The vocabulary of the language is very like that of Hebrew, but words rare in Hebrew are often common in Phoenician. For instance, “to do” is in Phoenician not '*asa* but *pa'al* (the Arabic *fa'ala),* which in Hebrew occurs only in poetry and elevated language. “ Gold ” is not *zahab* (as in most Semitic languages) but *harúç* (Assyrian *huráç),* which is used occasionally in Hebrew poetry. Traces of dialectical distinctions have been found in the great inscription of Byblus, the inhabit­ants of which seem to be distinguished from the rest of the Phoenicians in Josh. xiii. 5 (and 1 Kings v. 32? [A.V. v. 18]). It is probable that various differences between the language of the mother-country and that of the African colonies arose at an early date, but our materials do not enable us to come to any definite conclusion on this point. In the later African inscriptions there appear certain phonetic changes, especially in consequence of the softening of the gutturals, —changes which show themselves yet more plainly in the so-called Neo-Punic inscriptions (beginning with the 1st, if not the 2d, century before our era). In these the gutturals, which had lost their real sound, are frequently interchanged in writing; and other modifications may also be perceived. Unfortunately the Neo-Punic inscriptions are written in such a debased indistinct character that it is often impossible to discover with certainty the real form of the words. This dialect was still spoken about 400, and perhaps long afterwards, in those districts of North Africa which had once belonged to Carthage. It would seem that in the mother-country the Phoenician language withstood the encroachment of Greek on the one hand and of Aramaic on the other somewhat longer than Hebrew did.

*Aramaic.—*Aramaic is nearly related to Hebræo-Phœni- cian ; but there is nevertheless a sharp line of demarcation between the two groups. Of its original home nothing . certain is known. In the Old Testament “Aram ” appears at an early period as a designation of certain districts in Syria (“Aram of Damascus,” &c.) and in Mesopotamia (“Aram of the Two Rivers”). The language of the

Aramæans gradually spread far and wide, and occupied all Syria, both those regions which were before in the possession of the Kheta, probably a non-Semitic people, and those which were most likely inhabited by Canaanite tribes ; last of all, Palestine became Aramaized. Towards the east this language was spoken on the Euphrates, and throughout the districts of the Tigris south and west of the Armenian and Kurdish mountains ; the province in which the capitals of the Arsacides and the Sásánians were situated was called “ the country of the Aramæans.” In Babylonia and Assyria a large, or perhaps the larger, portion of the population were most probably Aramæans, even at a very early date, whilst Assyrian was the language of the Government.

The oldest extant Aramaic documents consist of inscrip­tions on monuments and on seals and gems. In the Persian period Aramaic was the official language of the provinces west of the Euphrates; and this explains the fact that coins which were struck by governors and vassal princes in Asia Minor, and of which the stamp was in some cases the work of skilled Greek artists, bear Aramaic inscrip­tions, whilst those of other coins are Greek. This, of course, does not prove that Aramaic was ever spoken in Asia Minor and as far north as Sinope and the Helles­pont. In Egypt Aramaic inscriptions have been found of the Persian period, one bearing the date of the fourth year of Xerxes (482 b.c.) @@4 *; we* have also official documents on papyrus, unfortunately in a very tattered condition for the most part, which prove that the Persians preferred using this convenient language to mastering the difficulties of the Egyptian systems of writing. It is, further, very possible that at that time there were considerable numbers of Aramæans in Egypt, just as there were of Phoenicians, Greeks, and Jews. But probably this preference for Aramaic originated under the Assyrian empire, in which a very large proportion of the population spoke Aramaic, and in which this language would naturally occupy a more important position than it did under the Persians. We therefore understand why it was taken for granted that a great Assyrian official could speak Aramaic (2 Kings xviii. 26; Isa. xxxvi. 11), and for the same reason the digni­taries of Judah appear to have learned the language *(ibid.),* namely, in order to communicate with the Assyrians. @@5 The short dominion of the Chaldæans very probably strengthened this preponderance of Aramaic. A few ancient Aramaic inscriptions have lately been discovered far within the limits of Arabia, in the palm oasis of Teimá (in the north of the Hijáz) ; the oldest and by far the most important of these was very likely made before the Persian period. We may presume that Aramaic was in­troduced into the district by a mercantile colony, which settled in this ancient seat of commerce, and in conse­quence of which Aramaic may have remained for some time the literary language of the neighbouring Arabs. All these older Aramaic monuments exhibit a language which is almost absolutely identical. One peculiarity which distin­guishes it from later Aramaic is that in the relative and demonstrative pronoun the sound originally pronounced *dh* is changed into 2, as in Hebrew, not into *d,* as is required by a rule universal in the Aramaic dialects. @@6 The Egyptian monuments at least bear marks of Hebrew, or more correctly Phoenician, influence.

The Aramaic portions of the Old Testament show us the form of the language which was in use among the Jews of Palestine. Isolated passages in Ezra perhaps

@@@1 See Gildemeister, in Ritschl's *Plautus* (vol. ii. fasc. v., Leipsic,

1884).

@@@2 At an early period the Phoenician pronunciation may have distin­guished a greater number of original consonants than are distinguished in writing. It is at least remarkable that the Greeks render the name of the city of Çur (Hebrew Çór), which must originally have been pro­nounced Ṭhurr, with a τ (Tiφos), and the name of Çídón, where the *ç* runs through all the Semitic languages, with a *σ* (∑ιδωp). Distinctions of this kind, justified by etymology, have perhaps been obscured in Hebrew by the imperfection of the alphabet. In the case of *sín* and *shín* this can be positively proved.

*@@@*3 *Κán nadar,* “had vowed,” Idal. 5 (C.I.S. Phœn., No. 93).

@@@4 See the Palæographical Society’s *Oriental Series,* plate lxiii.

@@@5 We possess certain small documents in Semitic writing which

date from the Assyrian period, but of which the linguistic character is still very obscure ; they contain Aramaic, Phoenician, and probably Assyrian forms. See *Z.D.M.G.,* xxxiii. 321.

@@@6 Some traces of this phenomenon are found later.