belong to the Persian period, but have certainly been re­modelled by a later writer. @@1 Yet in Ezra we find a few antique forms which do not occur in Daniel. The Aramaic pieces contained in the Bible have the great advantage of being furnished with vowels and other orthographical signs, though these were not inserted until long after the composition of the books, and are sometimes at variance with the text itself. But, since Aramaic was still a living language when the punctuation came into existence, and since the lapse of time was not so very great, the tradition ran less risk of corruption than in the case of Hebrew. Its general correctness is further attested by the innumer­able points of resemblance between this language and Syriac, with which we are accurately acquainted. The Aramaic of the Bible exhibits various antique features which afterwards disappeared,—for example, the formation of the passive by means of internal vowel-change, and the causative with *ha* instead of with *α*,—phenomena which have been falsely explained as Hebraisms. Biblical Aramaic agrees in all essential points with the language used in the numerous inscriptions of Palmyra (beginning soon before the Christian era and extending to about the end of the 3d century) and on the Nabatæan coins and stone monuments (concluding about the year 100). Aramaic was the language of Palmyra, the aristocracy of which were to a great extent of Arabian extraction. In the northern portion of the Nabatæan kingdom (not far from Damascus) there was probably a large Aramaic population, but farther south Arabic was spoken. At that time, how­ever, Aramaic was highly esteemed as a cultivated lan­guage, for which reason the Arabs in question made use of it, as their own language was not reduced to writing, just as in those ages Greek inscriptions were set up in many districts where no one spoke Greek. That the Nabatæans were Arabs is sufficiently proved by the fact that, with the exception of a few Greek names, almost all the numerous names which occur in the Nabatæan inscrip­tions are Arabic, in many cases with distinctly Arabic terminations. A further proof of this is that in the great inscriptions over the tombs of Hejr (not far from Teimá) the native Arabic continually shows through the foreign disguise,—for instance, in the use of Arabic words when­ever the writer does not happen to remember the corre­sponding Aramaic terms, in the use of the Arabic particle *fα*, of the Arabic *ghair,* “other than,” and in several syntactic features. The great inscriptions cease with the overthrow of the Nabatæan kingdom by Trajan (105) ; but the Arabian nomads in those countries, especially in the Sinaitic peninsula, often scratched their names on the rocks down to a later period, adding some benedictory formula in Aramaic. The fact that several centuries after­wards the name of “Nabatæan” was used by the Arabs as synonymous with “ Aramæan ” was probably due to the gradual spread of Aramaic over a great part of what had once been the country of the Nabatæans. In any case Aramaic then exercised an immense influence. This is also proved by the place which it occupies in the strange Pahlavf writing, various branches of which date from the time of the Parthian empire (see Pahlaví). Biblical Aramaic, as also the language of the Palmyrene and Nabatæan inscriptions, may be described as an older form of Western Aramaic. The opinion that the Palestinian Jews brought their Aramaic dialect direct from Babylon —whence the incorrect name “ Chaldee ”—is altogether untenable.

We may now trace somewhat further the development of Western Aramaic in Palestine ; but unhappily few of

the sources from which we derive our information can be thoroughly trusted. In the synagogues it was necessary that the reading of the Bible should be followed by an oral “ targum ” or translation into Aramaic, the language of the people. The Targum was at a later period fixed in writing, but the officially sanctioned form of the Targum to the Pentateuch (the so-called Targum of Onkelos) and of that to the prophets (the so-called Jonathan) was not finally settled till the 4th or 5th century, and not in Palestine but in Babylonia. The redactors of the Targum preserved on the whole the older Palestinian dialect ; yet that of Babylon, which differed considerably from the former, exercised a vitiating influence. The punctuation, which was added later, first in Babylonia, is far less trust­worthy than that of the Aramaic pieces in the Bible. The language of Onkelos and Jonathan differs but little from Biblical Aramaic. The language spoken some time after­wards by the Palestinian Jews, especially in Galilee, is exhibited in a series of rabbinical works, the so-called Jeru­salem Targums (of which, however, those on the Hagio­grapha are in some cases of later date), a few Midrashic works, and the Jerusalem Talmud. Unfortunately all these books, of which the Midrashím and the Talmud contain much Hebrew as well as Aramaic, have not been handed down with care, and require to be used with great caution for linguistic purposes. Moreover, the influence of the older language and orthography has in part ob­scured the characteristics of these popular dialects ; for example, various gutturals are still written, although they are no longer pronounced. The adaptation of the spelling to the real pronunciation is carried furthest in the Jeru­salem Talmud, but not in a consistent manner. Besides, all these books are without vowel-points ; but the frequent use of vowel-letters in the later Jewish works renders this defect less sensible.

Not only the Jews but also the Christians of Palestine retained their native dialect for some time as an ecclesi­astical and literary language. We possess translations of the Gospels and fragments of other works in this dialect by the Palestinian Christians dating from about the 5th century, accompanied by a punctuation which was not added till some time later. This dialect closely resembles that of the Palestinian Jews, as was to be expected from the fact that those who spoke it were of Jewish origin.

Finally, the Samaritans, among the inhabitants of Palestine, translated their only sacred book, the Pentateuch, into their own dialect. The critical study of this trans­lation proves that the language which lies at its base was very much the same as that of the neighbouring Jews. Perhaps, indeed, the Samaritans may have carried the softening of the gutturals a little further than the Jews of Galilee. Their absurd attempt to embellish the language of the translation by arbitrarily introducing forms borrowed from the Hebrew original has given rise to the false notion that Samaritan is a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic. The introduction of Hebrew and even of Arabic words and forms was practised in Samaria on a still larger scale by copyists who lived after Aramaic had become extinct. The later works written in the Samaritan dialect are, from a linguistic point of view, as worthless as the compositions of Samaritans in Hebrew ; the writers, who spoke Arabic, endeavoured to write in languages with which they were but half acquainted.

All these Western Aramaic dialects, including that of the oldest inscriptions, have this feature among others in common, that they form the third person singular masculine and the third person plural masculine and feminine in the imperfect by prefixing *y*, as do the other Semitic languages. And in these dialects the termina­tion *á* (the so-called “ status emphaticus ”) still retained

@@@1 The decree which is said to have been sent by Ezra is in its present form a comparatively late production.