in the period of our inscriptions: it would seem, therefore, that we must assume a dialectical cleavage, perhaps originated by the influence of Hebrew or Canaanean. Particularly remarkable is the use of the *waw consecutivum* in the inscriptions of the king of Ḥamāth hitherto only known from Hebrew. Traces of the divergent phonetic treatment are found in the Hellenistic era, and—here and there— even later. Still, at the most, these can scarcely be more than conscious archaisms,—a view which is particularly corroborated by the fact, that, in certain Aramaic documents of the Persian period, both forms are used interchangeably, *e.g. arqā, “* earth,” and *ar'ā.* The latter orthography doubtless represents the actual pronunciation of the writer. It is to be observed, however, that *zī* for *dī,* held its ground with especial tenacity as a form of the relative pronoun and in other capacities. 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 some Aramaic inscriptions have been found of the Persian period, one bearing the date of the fourth year of Xerxes (482 b.c.). We possessed, even before this, a few official documents and other written pieces in Aramaic, inscribed upon papyrus, and dating from this period, but unfortunately in a very dilapidated condition. Latterly, however, we have had a whole series of similar documents of the 5th century b.c., in a very good state of preservation, bearing upon the affairs of Jewish colonists in the far south of Egypt. In that country, where the native writing was so formidable to the learner, the Aramaic language and script may well have appeared peculiarly serviceable. Thus they were employed, and frequently, even by indigenous Egyptians. But we need not doubt that, in Egypt, Aramaic was also spoken by many who had migrated from Syria; and this must be assumed to have been the case with the Jewish colonists mentioned. The fact is now established that these Jews who had come to Egypt before the Persian period were military colonists, and were often referred to in documents as “ Aramaeans.” According to Deut. xvii. 16, the kings of Judah sold their subjects to the kings of Egypt, who at that time obtained numbers of warriors from foreign countries, instead of employing their own unwarlike subjects. The Syrian kings also sent soldiers to Egypt, from whom the Jews learned Aramaic. That this was used not only as an official language, but also as a vernacular, is shown by the fact that fragments of ordinary speech are found in Judaea-Aramaic papyri. That the Egyptian- Aramaic documents exhibit traces of Hebrew and Phoenician influence is a matter for no surprise. Probably the preference shown by the Persians 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. The short dominion of the Chaldaeans very probably strengthened this preponderance of Aramaic. A few ancient Aramaic inscriptions have been discovered far within the limits of Arabia, in the palm oasis of Tcimã (in the north of the I.lijãz); 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.

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 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 still exhibits various antique features, found in the Egyptian papyri too, which afterwards disappeared,—for example, the formation of the passive by means of internal vowel-change, and the causative with *ha* instead of with *a*,—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 3rd century), and on the Nabataean 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 Nabataean 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 Nabataeans 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 Nabataean 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 Ḥejr (not far from Teimā) 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 *ghair,* “ other than,” and in several syntactic features. The great inscriptions cease with the overthrow of the Nabataean 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. We know hundreds of these Sinaitic inscriptions.@@2 In any case Aramaic then exercised an immense influence. This is also proved by the place which it occupies in the strange Pahlavī writing, various branches of which date from the time of the Parthian empire (see Pahlavi). Biblical Aramaic, as also the language of the Palmyrene and Nabataean 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 farther 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 trans- lation into Aramaic, the language of the peopIe. 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 text of the Targums was punctu­ated later in Babylonia, in the supra-linear system there prevalent. Although this task was performed carefully, the punctuation is hardly as trustworthy as that of the Aramaic pieces of the Bible,— much less the transcriptions in the known Tiberian system used in the European Targum manuscripts. 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 Midrashïm 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 farthest 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 noticeable. Attempts have been made latterly to utilize the above- mentioned books as a means of reconstructing to some extent the dialect spoken by Jesus and the Apostles, and of retranslating the utterances of Jesus into their original Galilaean form. This, however, is a far too venturesome undertaking. How far these Jewish works actually exhibit the Galilean language can hardly be definitely determined; and to this must be added the inexactitude of the traditional text, and, finally, the by no means inconsiderable difference in time.

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, partly accompanied by a scanty 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.

@@@1 The decree which is said to have been sent by Ezra (vii. 12 sqq.) is in its present form a comparatively late production.

@@@2 Even to the *Cosmas Indicopleustes* (first half of the 6th century) the Sinaitic inscriptions, the latest of which were then no more than 200-300 years old, were described as memorials of the Israelite exodus under Moses. And similar views have been propounded down to a short while ago!