

**Passing Through Semitic, Canaanite, Phoenician, Aramaic, Syriac  
& Arabic**

**LEBANESE VARIETY OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE  
OR OF THE CANAANITE LANGUAGE,  
OR LEBANESE LANGUAGE?**

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# **I. PREAMBLE: SEMITIC, CANAANITE, PHOENICIAN, ARAMAIC, SYRIAC AND ARABIC**

## **A. Canaanite and Phoenician**

In light of genetic studies, mostly since 2017, it is now established that Canaanites were not replaced by Phoenicians, but they ARE the Phoenicians, “Phoenician” being a Greek exonym versus the local endonym. The term “Phoenician” was later used by Romans, and is now employed by the Western World. Hence the Canaanites did not disappear and did not become extinct, neither were replaced by Phoenicians nor were transformed into the latter. Since almost 1200 BC, simply, the Canaanites became known to the west as “Phoenicians”, the name attributed to them by the Greeks because of the purple dye, although in Mathew’s gospel written in Canaanite (it is said Aramaic, see section C), they were still known as “Canaanites” as per the peoples around them; however, in Mark’s gospel written in Greek they are called “Syrian Phoenicians” (since Greeks called the Canaanites “Phoenicians”, and Phoenicia was administratively (and not more) part of the “Syria” province at that time). Also, circa 200 BC, the word “Canaan” still appeared on coins issued in Lebanon’s cities. Of note, the Romans called the Carthagenean Canaanites “Punics”, which is simply a variant of “Phoenicians”, the root being “p-n-c”, and the “p” and “f” being represented by a same letter in the Canaanite alphabet, which led to western peoples sometimes adding an “h” to the “p” to specifically indicate “F” (e.g., elephant).

## **B. Semitic and Canaanite**

It is presumed that several languages emanated from a supposed common "Semitic" language, and the name is derived from Sam son of Noah. From here emanated the hypothesis of "Semitic" peoples, which appeared "recently" around 1770 (possibly in 1781). And these languages are Arabic, Canaanite, Phoenician, Hebrew, Akkadian, Amharic - Ethiopian, Hadhramauti and Yemenite languages, Aramaic, Amoritic which yielded Edomite, Ammonite and Moabite, all four now having disappeared, but not Coptic (for most scholars). But there is no scientific proof for this matter. The hypothesis was that the languages are close. But this similarity is way closer as to Arabic, Canaanite, Phoenician, Hebrew, Aramaic and the Amoritic bunch. This similarity certainly took place in a large part after the Canaanite language was declared imperial language by the Babylonians around 590 BC (and erroneously called Aramaic in this context), but had there been any earlier similarities? The Canaanite language is at least 5500 years old (and IS Phoenician to the modern schools), Arabic about 2900 years old, Hebrew about 3800 years old, Amoritic about 4500 years old and Aramaic about 3500 years old. If there had been a similarity before the declaration of Canaanite as an imperial language, it is possible that these languages (besides Canaanite) derived from the Canaanite language, the oldest and most used, and that within the subsequent fiefdoms of the other languages. In addition, modern science assumes (while awaiting formal proof) that the Canaanite language (of course, in its ancient version before its evolution) is the basis of Arabic, and confirms that it is at the origin of Hebrew and Aramaic, and

that Amoritic is quintessentially Canaanite. And this is pretty much coherent as all these Peoples were still Bedouins of the periphery of the Land of Canaan when Canaanites had already settled and started trade east and south. Aramaic will be discussed below with regard to this particular point as well as to the belief as to being the "Imperial" language. But this is not the most important issue: the matter is further than the origins, each language being currently classified as a separate entity, but they remain relatively close to one another because in principle they have a common origin, and since Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic were profoundly influenced by Canaanite (be it after they emanated from it or since having emanated from it). As for the language preceding Canaanite and Sumerian, it remains hypothetical. So we do await a correction as to Northwest Semitic being actually Canaanite, and East Semitic being actually Sumerian (currently not considered Semitic) and / or Akkadian. Outside the scope of this summary, the link between Sumerian and Akkadian needs to be revised; we have our humble view as to that.

### **C. Canaanite and Aramaic**

A summary of what figures in most references can be seen here under:

Canaanite → Phoenician, as well as Old Imperial Aramaic which gave:

→ Western Aramaic → of which Hebrew Palestinian Aramaic → Galilean Dialect

→ Nabatean Aramaic → Qalamunian Neo - Aramaic (that some list with Western Aramaic)

→ Eastern Aramaic

However, it has robustly proven that around 590 BC, the Babylonians imposed a "second" language throughout the Levant, from Georgia and Armenia to the north, and from the western borders of Babylon, to the south of Jordan among the Nabateans, and therefore to the borders of the Arabian Peninsula, encompassing the Hejaz (and including the Aramaic people based in Horan / Golan / Amana, north - east of Galilee). And they declared it an "imperial" language, and this language is practically the Canaanite language, which had become the language of the Levant at the diplomatic and economic levels, that all the inhabitants of the Levant had to duly learn and speak, including the Nabateans, in addition to their native language. Of course, said language was also that of trade through Persia up till India to the East, to Yemen to the south, and over all the Mediterranean. And the simple reason is that the Canaanites had built an economic empire, and their vocabulary had spread along the caravan routes, and the Babylonians wanted to facilitate trade within their empire. The Aramaic people, who had a kingdom in southern Syria, which expanded for a while towards Homs, did not form a civilization to carry out industries to trade with: for example, the Canaanites were the ones who built ships for the Assyrians. Let us add that Imperial Aramaic language looks like a casual evolution of Canaanite, and so does its alphabet.

However, around 500 BC, so after the Babylonian captivity, the Jews (and not the Greeks, according to rumor) cast the name "Aramaic" (to avoid the term "Canaanite") on the dominant language, and it was impossible for "educated" Jewish historians to be mistaken inadvertently. This is due to several reasons, which are united by the conflict of the Jews with the Canaanites and by the fact that the Jews considered them impure and had not got over the dominance of the

Canaanite language over their language and the Canaanite alphabet over their alphabet. And because of their deportation, they lost much of their language upon their return, and in any case, they were obliged to use Canaanite, and Hebrew was restricted to liturgical purposes (and this status quo will persist until 1948). And historians must have chosen the term "Aramaic" since the Aramaic people (the original Aramaics of Horan / Golan / Amana, who had as their first language their Aramaic which had previously emanated from Canaanite) were the largest people who spoke Canaanite in their vicinity among the several small kingdoms around them, and they (the Jews) continued to use the term "Aramaic" with the Jewish historian Josephus after AD 70, who fled to Rome after the demolition of the temple, he who wrote in his manuscripts, clarifying, that "the language of the Canaanite infidels was imposed upon us". Thus, all modern sources that mention the Old Imperial Aramaic language and its branches allude to Canaanite without knowing it. And we await the institutes to completely correct the name so that it be called "Canaanite", and so that the term "Aramaic" indicates the Aramaic language native to the Aramaics of Horan / Golan / Amana, whose traces have disappeared since 590 BC, except for a few words here and there. We do propose, however, that the expression "Canaanite - formerly known as Aramaic -", be used for around a decade, to avoid confusion. To be more specific, this correction should concern use of the term "Aramaic" between 590 BC and AD 400. And before 590 BC, it should be used for the Aramaic kingdom and People, and not even for Assyrian Empire language.

#### **D. Aramaic and Syriac**

A summary of what figures in most references can be summarized here under:

Eastern Aramaic

- Syriac (or Syriac - Aramaic or Classical Syriac) which gave:
- Eastern Syriac → Eastern Neo - Syriac (or North - Eastern Neo - Aramaic)
- Western Syriac (or Central Aramaic) → Western Neo - Syriac (or Central Neo - Aramaic)

And there are still several confusions relating to the genealogical tree of these languages in all, apart from the confidence in the sources or the lack thereof, but the details remain outside the scope of this chapter.

The transition of Aramaic language from a language resembling Canaanite (Phoenician) language with an Aramaic alphabet resembling Canaanite (Phoenician) alphabet, into a language resembling Syriac language with 3 Aramaic alphabets resembling 3 Syriac alphabets, along with the appellation "Aramaic - Syriac", is very suspicious of misuse of the term Aramaic.

The reason is mixing up vernacular languages used by a People with their literary languages, and naming Peoples according to their literary language. Hence the Greeks named all the Levantines "Syriacs" around AD 400 because of the Romans administratively naming the western Levant by "Syria" most of the times since AD 14, and due to the spread of the Syriac language, and so was the denomination "Aramaic - Syriac", which included, of course, the inhabitants of Lebanon and Palestine, and so was the term "Aramaic - Syriac language" (although

the two languages are different, and the first is actually Canaanite), especially after the spread of the Syriac alphabet and literary language at the expense of the Canaanite alphabet and literary Canaanite, which were thought to be Aramaic (that in addition to believing that the vernacular language was also Aramaic). And later the fact spread that they are all Syriacs as well as their language, and that the vernacular outside the Syriac fiefdom was also a Syriac vernacular since the literary in use had become Syriac (totally as is the case with Arabic nowadays).

So according to what preceded, Western Aramaic is in fact Canaanite, and Northeastern and Central Aramaic are in fact Syriac, Northeastern Aramaic being in fact Eastern Syriac, that is, say the Nestorian, mainly spoken on the north western border of Assyria and of the Assyrian language (northwestern Iraq and adjacent Turkey, centered on the Turkish city of Nuseibein near Qamishli in Syria), and Central Aramaic being in fact Western Syriac, that is, say the Jacobite, spoken in the north - center of Syria and adjacent Turkey, and over all said regions a common grandiloquent variety (the Standard Syriac Language) called "Estrangelo"; that said without entering into the dialects of "Central Aramaic" of the old school and the confusion that reigns there. It remains to be specified that Eastern Aramaic is the Akkadian with its 2 varieties, the Assyrian and the Chaldean, both of which use Eastern Syriac as literary, and to note the language that emanated from Akkadian, the Mandaic. So Syriac is independent from Canaanite, in terms of classifications of languages. This is why we see that the term Aramaic should be deleted from any coupling with Syriac, and surely not be used as synonym for it.

### **E. A Word as to Arabic**

It originated from the north - western section of the Syrian desert within the most eastern Canaanite Bedouins, splintering off from "Ancient Canaanite" (according the major hypothesis which awaits scientific proof), hence the majority (not to say almost all) of Arab terms having a Canaanite root (at least from ancient Canaanite). Yassin Abdel - Rahim in his book approved by the «Arab Language Council» and the Syrian «Ministry of Culture» declared that the origin of Arabic is Canaanite. The linguistic grammatical rules of Arabic remain closer to their Akkadian counterparts, and it should be noted that Canaanite and Akkadian took some deal of linguistic grammar and vocabulary from Sumerian, the first entity that prevailed in the region (between 3200 and 2300 BC), bearing in mind that the common vocabulary between Sumerian and Canaanite may have been a common heritage from an older common language, although the Sumerians wrote it before the Canaanites, in syllabary cuneiform.

## **II. WHAT IS THE LEBANESE VERNACULAR?**

According to current "public" scientific circles, the Arabic language encompasses the dialects (technically "varieties") of "the Arab countries". The peoples of the Arab League states cannot easily communicate with each other except via literary Arabic (except for countries close to one another). Of note, the conqueror adopted the Arabic language according to its literary rules (as a religious language) to use it in the process of trial of Arabization of peoples, and did not adopt

one of the spoken Arabic varieties of the Levantine - Peninsular / Sham - Arabian desert. But the vernaculars could not be changed, which explains the persistence of vernacular dialects in terms of resemblance to the native languages with their linguistic rules and pronunciations and thousands of words belonging to the peoples who were subjected, and in addition the adoption of the conquerors who settled there said vernacular languages, in spite of the introduction of numbers of Arabic words. That said, besides that many of these words that entered Lebanese had entered Arabic coming from Canaanite during at least 1500 years (from at least 900 BC until the Muslim conquest), and besides that Arabic itself emanated from ancient Canaanite, surely with much Sumero - Akkadian input.

So in the purely scientific sense of the term, there was no linguistic Arabization as the Abbasids and Mamluks wanted it, but the peoples learned literary Arabic since they were Islamized (and the few remaining were obliged), using it for literary needs, without speaking it, and it was eventually further boosted in the late nineteenth century (late 1800s) with the Arab Renaissance to combat "Turkification", and then was designated as the official language of the countries of the region established in the 20th century, and used for communication among the peoples of said region.

However, truth be said, there was an Arabization of the alphabet, so that in Lebanon, the Arabic alphabet replaced the Syriac in Mount Lebanon, which had itself had replaced the Canaanite alphabet, and Canaanite alphabet was directly replaced by Arabic outside Mount Lebanon.

Some would argue that a partial linguistic Arabization took place given the introduction of vocabulary terms and pronunciations to the languages of peoples; but the naming of the influence of a language by such an adjective should not be understood that it is a change in the essence of the influenced language.

As for the influence of one language over another, this is inevitable given the balance of power and happens even without anyone striving for it.

In all simplicity, a language is vocabulary, grammar (linguistic rules) and pronunciation. But the chassis of a language remains its linguistic rules.

The rules must change enough to indicate that a given variety has derived from the mother tongue and has become a language in itself (this being essentially simplistic).

And a language evolves, and it borrows vocabulary from another language and modifies it as it sees, according to the balance between the two languages. And it can adopt linguistic rules and pronunciations if this equilibrium is very unequal (geographical proximity and simultaneous political domination, for example).

Canaanism was the only civilization (in the scientific sense, far from feelings) between Coptic Pharaonic Egypt, and Sumero - Akkadian (later Assyrian / Babylonian) Mesopotamia. The other groups were peoples, which explains the great difference as to power imbalance at the time.

And it is clear today in linguistics that the majority of the vocabulary of the Lebanese vernacular is either Canaanite words of Canaanite origin that evolved within Canaanism (ignoring the possibility that the Canaanite could have borrowed a proportion from Akkadian or Coptic, knowing that it handed them as well), or Canaanite words but which were "Syrianized" or "Arabized" and came back modified to be Lebanonized.

Similarly, the Canaanite pronunciation has also been influenced by the Arabic and Syriac pronunciation albeit mildly, and that while recalling that they were both previously influenced by Canaanite. However, the rules of the Lebanese vernacular remain closest to the rules of the Canaanite vernacular (which are very similar to the Syriac rules, since Syriac significantly borrowed its language rules from Canaanite).

The persistence of the Canaanite linguistic rules, as well as its vocabulary and pronunciations, to a large extent in the Lebanese vernacular prevent the classification of the Lebanese vernacular as a language in itself, and certainly not as an Arabic or Syriac dialect (or variety), but it remains a dialect (or more, a variety) of the Canaanite language (Lebanese - Canaanite). Therefore, whoever raises "the need to return to our original language, Canaanite" seems like a British who undoubtedly speaks English at the moment but wants to speak an "Old English" as in Shakespeare's era or earlier. Canaanite remained, but evolved, like other languages that have persisted throughout the world.

And here is the "Garshuneh" (transcription) which is currently taking a new fashion, which is to write Canaanite using Latin and Arabic alphabets instead of Syriac.

Finally, the Arabian sun in the Levant has not dimmed since the conquest, and it is therefore not logical for the Lebanese vernacular to be an Arabic dialect that Canaanite (and much often it is erroneously said Syriac, or Aramaic, or Phoenician) was able to pierce through thousands of vocabulary words and pronunciations and linguistic rules, and thus to radically change it. Indeed, the opposite took place, since the balance of power to the advantage of Arabic allowed the latter to influence the vernacular, but this influence remains "superficial", just as the Syriac influence before it, and so the vernacular Lebanese remains scientifically the Canaanite language that evolves with time. Even those who acknowledge that "Lebanese" linguistic rules are closer to those of the Canaanite language than to any other but that they are still far from them forget that they are comparing with said language as it was 3000 years ago and they forget that said language has evolved without leaving written evidence since 1500 years.

And here is a word about the surrounding countries: what was discussed so far explains the capacity of the Lebanese to understand "Syrian", "Palestinian", and to a certain extent the "Jordanian" and the "Hejazite". And "Iraqi" is an evolution of "Sumero - Akkadian" (technically



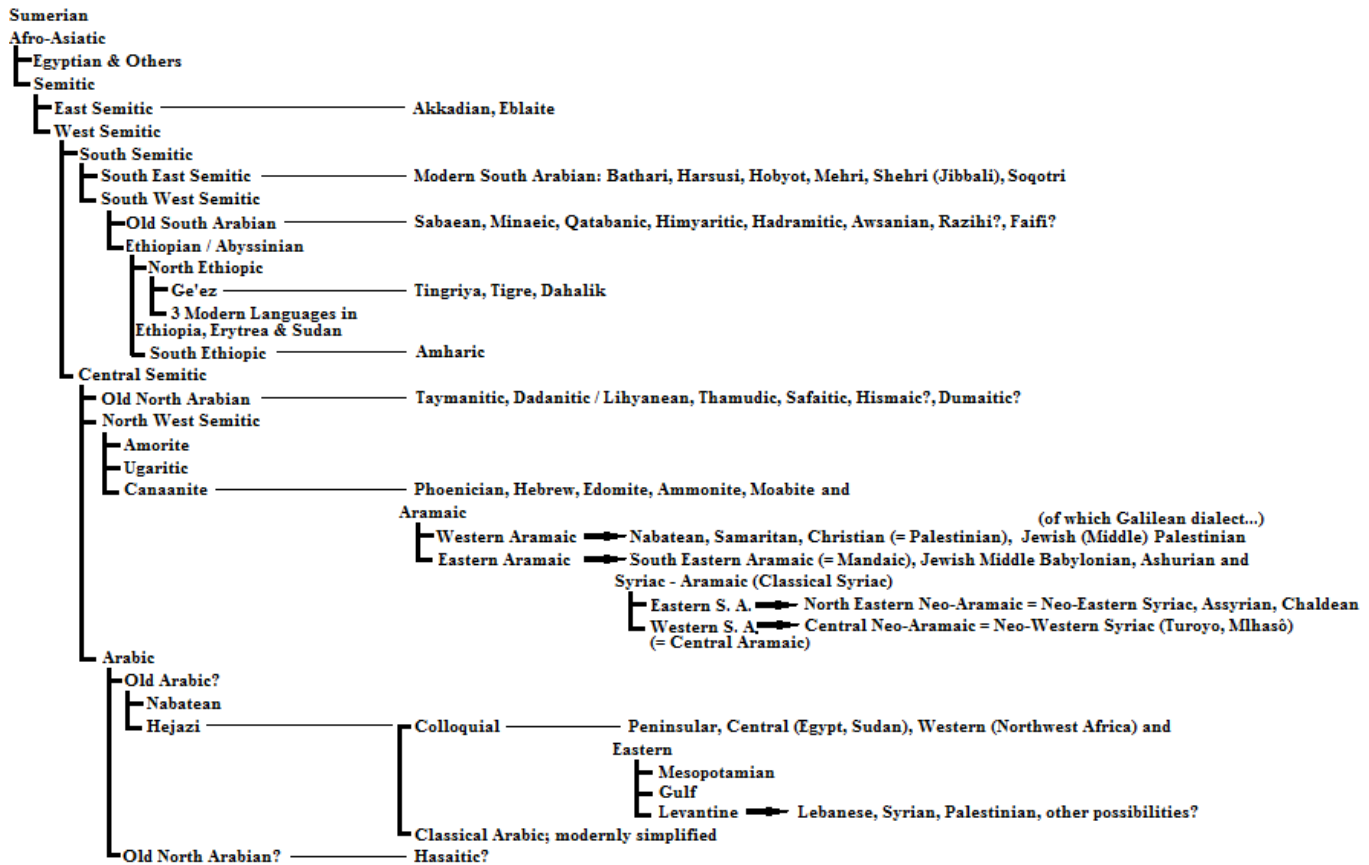
of the Assyrian and Chaldean varieties that closed Christians groups conserved in their pre - Arabized forms), and "Egyptian" an evolution of "Coptic". And putting Syriac aside, it has become evident that "Syrian", "Palestinian" and "Jordanian" (in western current Jordan) are varieties of the Canaanite language, which differ from Lebanese by the deeper influence of Arabic (literary or desert dialects) due to Arabization. And Syriac persisted in the north of Syria (and liturgically in Mount Lebanon).

Therefore, if we want to call the Lebanese dialect a "language" rather than a "variety", we will have to speak about Syrian, Palestinian and other "languages", but it is crystal clear that they not different languages.

As for the difference in terms of vocabulary, terminology and pronunciation between said countries, it also appears within each of these countries, and this is analogous to the differences between Great Britain and the rest of the world that speaks English, and even within these countries, and even within Great Britain itself.

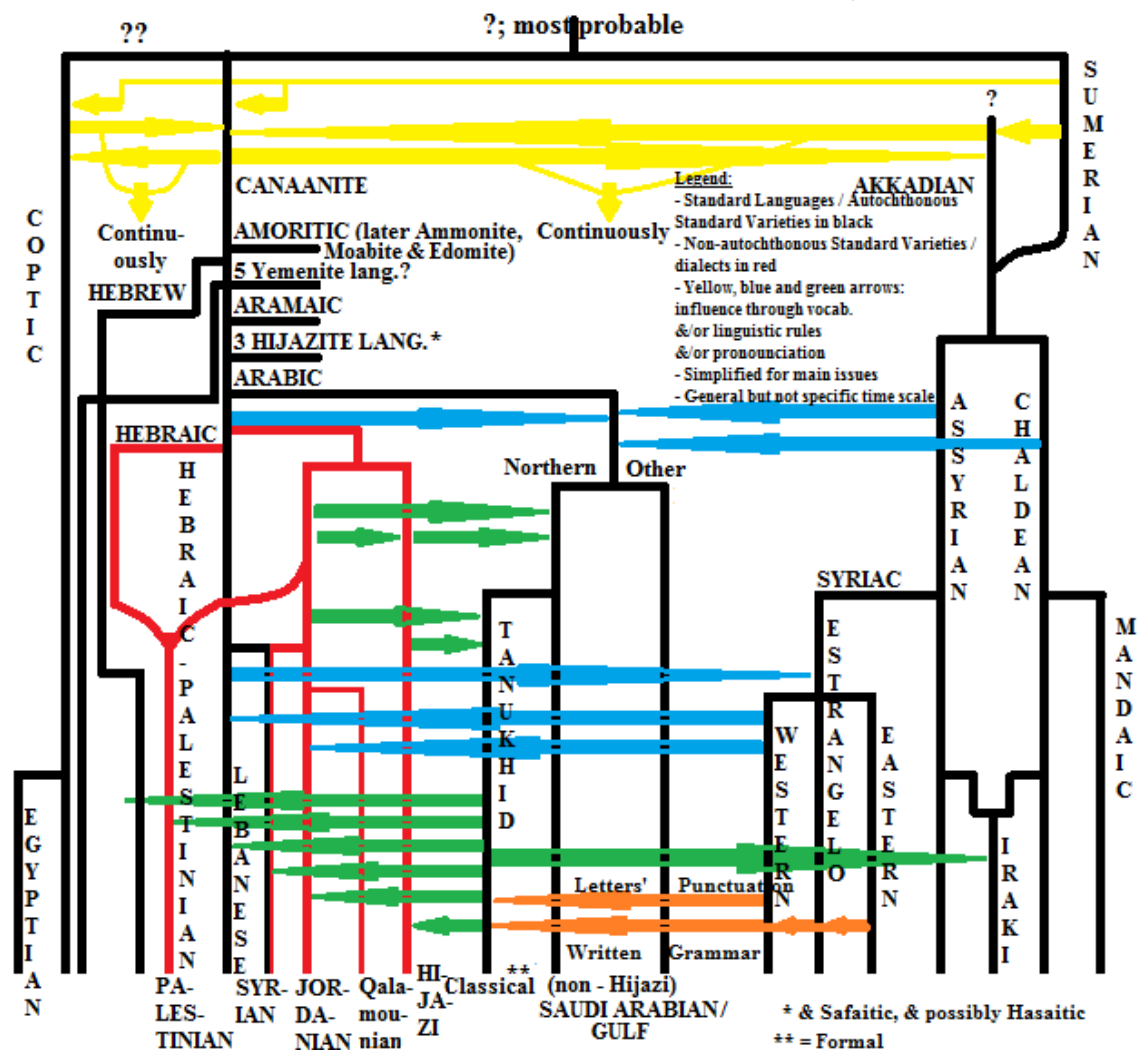
# Language Pedigree (Levant & Peninsula) (as per the Old School)

Closest visualization, said so since some conflicting information, not to be hereby tackled.



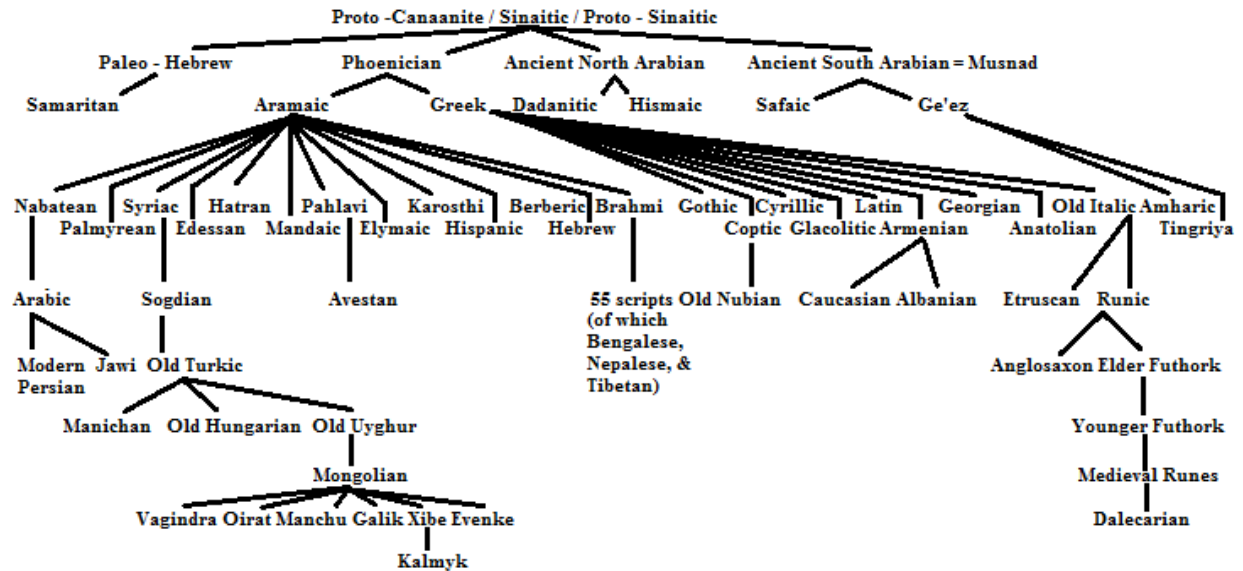
## Language Pedigree (Levant & Peninsula) (as per the Analysis Detailed in the Text)

Canaanite, Coptic, Sumerian: at least 3500 BC; Akkadian: 2500 BC (we can speak of Sumero - Akkadian after the fusion, and even suspect that Akkadian is a more recent Sumerian than Sumerian as currently recognized, although language schools until now consider Sumerian a separate language); in yellow, occurred simultaneously; Amoritic: \* 2500 BC; Hebrew: 1850 BC; 5 Yemenite languages: unknown precisely, ~ 1500 BC; Aramaic: \* 1200 BC; 3 Hejazite languages: unknown precisely, ~ 1000 BC; Arabic: 900 BC; Hejazite Canaanite: 590 BC; Nabatean Canaanite: 590 BC; the 2 upper green arrows simultaneously; Hebraic Canaanite: 590 BC; Hebraic - Palestinian Canaanite: AD 135; Syriac: AD 200; the 2 lower blue arrows: simultaneously; Formal Arabic: AD 400; Arabic letters' punctuation: AD 670; Arabic written grammar: AD 790; the 7 lower green arrows: simultaneously; Syrian, Hebraic - Palestinian, Jordanian ("Jordanian Canaanite" is scientifically "Nabataean", as in "pure") and Hejazi Canaanite could comprise varieties within each country, and Lebanese Canaanite comprises two varieties, and Syrian may be dissected into 2 or more varieties, but varieties will not be addressed in detail here under. Chaldean = Babylonian. Of note, what is known as Ugaritic and Eblaite languages are actually the Canaanite language with geographical and more, temporal, differences. Qalamunian is a dialect of the Nabatean variety of the Canaanite language that has not evolved till today. \* Aramaic, Amoritic and the latter's daughters, Ammonite, Moabite and Edomite, which were the languages of relatively small Peoples who were, before their settlement and establishment of kingdoms, Bedouins of Canaanite culture since they were located at the periphery of the Canaanite civilization, and with the latter's proper names, mythology, alphabet..., are not and cannot be but varieties of the Canaanite language, that said although this conclusion, due to its delay, is not translated throughout this work.



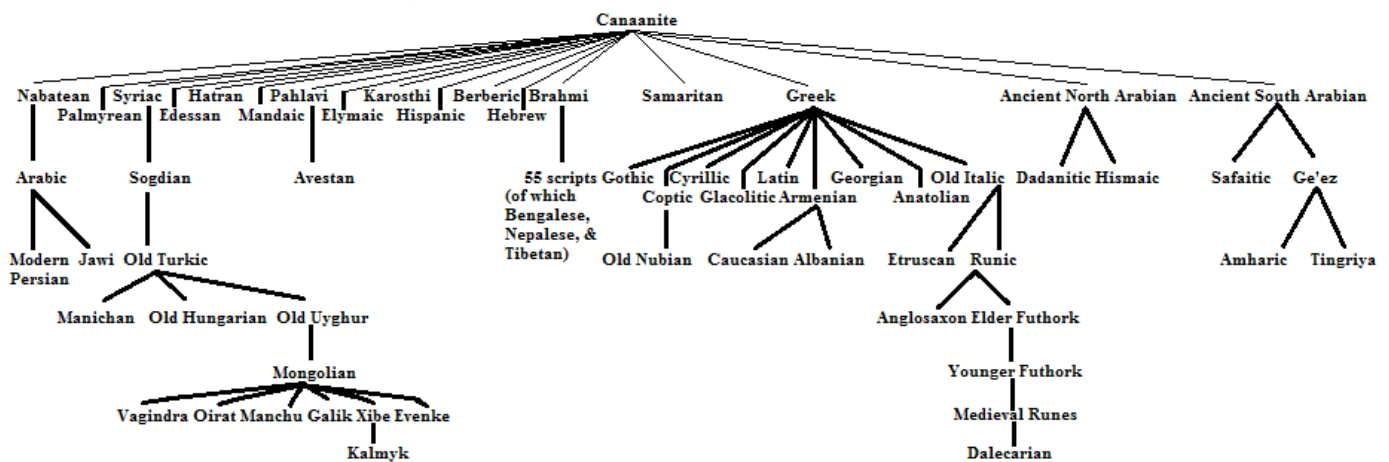
## Alphabet Pedigree (as per the Old School)

Closest visualization, said so since some conflicting information, not to be hereby tackled. What is sure is that Nabatean did not offshoot from Syriac as some references state, and of note Nabatean is older.



## Alphabet Pedigree (as per the New School)

Closest visualization, said so since some conflicting information, not to be hereby tackled. What is sure is that Nabatean did not offshoot from Syriac as some references state, and of note Nabatean is older.



## Languages in Lebanon (as per the Analysis Detailed in the Text)

- Without minority languages.
- We will not go back to the political, religious, or national - ethnic history of the groups that came to Lebanon before they settled in the latter.
- There are overlapping periods of time where the switch is neither instantaneous nor over all the geographical area, or there are two languages for a same purpose. Dates are mostly approximate: we won't always distinguish between an exact year or an approximate year. Also, not all changes seen were abrupt as they appear.
- The social designation outside the framework of religion "Christians of Lebanon" is a misnomer, since Christianity is a religion without a worldliness, and it excludes non - believers, and we adopt "Canaanites of Lebanon", based on what sciences have concluded. The social designation outside the framework of religion specifically, "Muslims of Lebanon", is a correct designation since Islam is a religion and a worldliness, although it includes non - believer minority that still lives part of the worldliness of its environment, and it is without a clear social classification at present.
- The Maronites in Mount Lebanon are interspersed with a Rum (Greek in the confessional sense) minority since Christianity prevailed there, and the latter followed the former politically between 676 up till 1382, and for a period of time hierarchically within the framework of the clergy (between 702 and 1054), but in their Byzantine liturgy. And the Rums (Greek in the confessional sense) outside Mount Lebanon are interspersed with a Maronite minority. However, we still cannot say "Mount Lebanon" instead of "Maronites," since their extension was not complete on Mount Lebanon since their first defeat against the Abbasids ~ year 800.
- Greek as literary since ~ 500 BC, and it was an official language favored by the Greeks without being imposed, along with Canaanite, between 333 and 64 BC; Latin since 64 BC, with acceptance of Greek and Canaanite where prevalent; Canaanite since the dawn of history.
- We mentioned the Syriac language without its further details.

