

# The Language Environment of First Century Judaea

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# Contents

## Introduction: Language Issues Are Important for Gospel Studies 1

*Randall Buth*

## Sociolinguistic Issues in a Trilingual Framework 7

### 1 The Origins of the “Exclusive Aramaic Model” in the Nineteenth Century: Methodological Fallacies and Subtle Motives 9

*Guido Baltes*

### 2 The Use of Hebrew and Aramaic in Epigraphic Sources of the New Testament Era 35

*Guido Baltes*

### 3 *Hebraisti* in Ancient Texts: Does Ἑβραϊστί Ever Mean “Aramaic”? 66

*Randall Buth and Chad Pierce*

### 4 The Linguistic Ethos of the Galilee in the First Century C.E. 110

*Marc Turnage*

### 5 Hebrew versus Aramaic as Jesus’ Language: Notes on Early Opinions by Syriac Authors 182

*Serge Ruzer*

## Literary Issues in a Trilingual Framework 207

### 6 Hebrew, Aramaic, and the Differing Phenomena of Targum and Translation in the Second Temple Period and Post-Second Temple Period 209

*Daniel A. Machiela*

### 7 Distinguishing Hebrew from Aramaic in Semitized Greek Texts, with an Application for the Gospels and Pseudepigrapha 247

*Randall Buth*

<b>8 Non-Septuagintal Hebraisms in the Third Gospel: An Inconvenient Truth</b>	<b>320</b>
<i>R. Steven Notley</i>	
 <b>Reading Gospel Texts in a Trilingual Framework</b>	 <b>347</b>
<b>9 Hebrew-Only Exegesis: A Philological Approach to Jesus’ Use of the Hebrew Bible</b>	<b>349</b>
<i>R. Steven Notley and Jeffrey P. Garcia</i>	
<b>10 Jesus’ <i>Petros</i>–<i>petra</i> Wordplay (Matthew 16:18): Is It Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew?</b>	<b>375</b>
<i>David N. Bivin</i>	
<b>11 The Riddle of Jesus’ Cry from the Cross: The Meaning of ηλι ηλι λαμα σαβαχθανι (Matthew 27:46) and the Literary Function of ελωι ελωι λειμα σαβαχθανι (Mark 15:34)</b>	<b>395</b>
<i>Randall Buth</i>	
 <b>Index of Ancient Sources</b>	 <b>423</b>
<b>Subject Index</b>	<b>448</b>

# The Riddle of Jesus' Cry from the Cross: The Meaning of *ἡλι ἡλι λαμα σαβαχθανι* (Matthew 27:46) and the Literary Function of *ελωι ελωι λειμα σαβαχθανι* (Mark 15:34)

*Randall Buth*

Just before Jesus dies on the cross he cries out with a loud voice and says something that Mark and Matthew record in a foreign language. There are two reactions to this cry. Some of the people mock and say that he is calling on Elijah to save him. In Mark the reaction is that of a centurion who says “truly this was God’s son.” The same reaction in Matthew follows an earthquake.

This essay will explore several questions by evaluating them in the light of what is known about the tri-language situation of the time and especially from the perspective of current Mishnaic Hebrew scholarship. Is the story historical or did it have a historical basis? What was actually said? Most importantly, how does the cry function within the narratives of Mark and Matthew?

## 1 Establishing the Greek Text of the Foreign Words in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34

The Greek text of Matt 27:46 and Mark 15:34 is both complicated and interesting. The text in both Gospels needs to be discussed together. The four major textual groups—the Alexandrian (Alx), the Western (Wes), the Caesarean (Cae), and the Byzantine (Byz)—are all different from each other but they may be placed in two general groups. The Alexandrian, Western, and Caesarean all give a harmonistic, assimilated text between Matthew and Mark and are all probably secondary. It is the Byzantine text type that has resisted assimilation. This is especially remarkable since we are dealing with a transliteration of the words of Jesus at a high point in the gospel story. There was obviously pressure to assimilate the texts: the Alexandrian<sup>1</sup> assimilated to Mark, the

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1 *ελωι ελωι λεμα σαβαχθανει*. *℣*<sup>c</sup>, *C* (*B* reads *ελωει ελωει λεμα σαβακτανει* in Matthew, with a confused and conflated *ελωι ελωι λαμα ζαβαφθανει* in Mark). See Reuben Swanson, ed., *New Testament Greek Manuscripts, Variant Readings Arranged in Horizontal Lines Against Codex Vaticanus: Matthew, Mark*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), for fuller citations.

In the first century the graph *ει* was pronounced the same as *ι*.

Caesarean<sup>2</sup> to Matthew, and the Western<sup>3</sup> to Biblical Hebrew. But the Byzantine text type preserved a Matthew that is different from Mark.

Matt (Byz): ηλι ηλι λειμα σαβαχθανι.

Mark (Byz): ελωι ελωι λειμα σαβαχθανι.

These are probably the closest recoverable texts to the original texts of Matthew and Mark.<sup>4</sup> An alternative to these Byz readings would be to substitute the Caesarean in Matthew.<sup>5</sup>

Matt (Cae): ηλει ηλει λαμα σαβαχθανει<sup>6</sup>

Mark (Byz): ελωι ελωι λειμα σαβαχθανι.

## 2 Is the Story in Matthew and Mark with Psalm 22 and Elijah an Invention?

Rudolf Bultmann<sup>7</sup> argued that the story in Mark developed out of an unspecified cry in the tradition (Mark 15:37) that was filled out by adding a scripture.

2 ηλει ηλει λαμα σαβαχθανει. Θ, fi. See *ibid.*, for fuller citations.

3 ηλει ηλει λαμα ζαφθανει. D.

4 Westcott and Hort followed the Alexandrian family on this question, despite the strength of the assimilation explanation against their view and despite the problem with Codex Vaticanus in Mark. An overriding aversion to the Byzantine textform misled them here. UBS/NA and the new SBLGNT have corrected that.

5 In the matter of reconstructing these transliterations, I think that it is a mistake to work on each word in each author eclectically and work up to the whole sentence. UBS/NA and SBLGNT have produced a “new” reading for Matthew that does not appear in any manuscript listed in Swanson. This is a case where one should probably stay within the non-assimilating text group, which is the Byzantine. Having said that, I would not be averse to following the Caesarean text in Matthew as a very slightly different variant of the Byzantine. Both Cae and Byz basically point to the same sentence in Matthew.

6 For the title of the present study the Caesarean option was chosen for Matthew (λαμα), which highlights the difference between Matthew and Mark. The Byz reading in Matthew is the better textual choice if keeping to one unassimilated family for both Matthew and Mark. Both the Caesarean and Byzantine texts of Matthew agree on the same linguistic pedigree and structure. (The Caesarean Greek text in the title of this essay has been changed for *itacism* [ηλι for ηλει, and σαβαχθανι for σαβαχθανει] in order to accommodate “Erasmian” readers of Greek. The form λειμα was left in Mark as non-distracting for Erasmians for the title and for the broad strokes of the argument.)

7 Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 313.

David Flusser, employing a different methodology, basically agreed.<sup>8</sup> There are two problems with this approach. Many have pointed out that Mark's transliteration does not fit easily with the Elijah motif. If Mark introduced Ps 22 into the story, then he would have been the one introducing the transliteration and the Elijah motif. But Mark's transliteration does not highlight the Elijah connection for a Greek reader, in fact, *ελωι* is about as far from *ηλεια* as possible. The transliteration suggests that Mark received the story and worked it into his gospel. In addition, these suggestions do not satisfactorily deal with the embarrassment criterion. The citation of Ps 22 has been seen as embarrassing in the history of the Church. Intuitively, most commentators consider the verse as easier to explain as the inclusion of a historical detail than as a literary creation in a gospel. I share this opinion. Looking at this issue from the other side may help clarify the strength of these counterarguments. If Mark only received Ps 31:6<sup>9</sup> or an unspecified cry in the traditions,<sup>10</sup> then what would lead him to choose Ps 22:2 as a replacement? What interpretative advantage for presenting his portrayal of the messiah does he achieve through the particular verse he chose? He unnecessarily creates added complexity for the picture of a messiah or the Son of God. If he wanted an Elijah story, then he bungled the connection by his transliteration against the biblical text and he did not need a scripture in any case. In terms of probability of solutions we must accept that Mark 15:34–35

8 David Flusser, with R. Steven Notley, *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 4: "I believe that the famous quotation of Ps 22:1 [HMT 22:2] in Mark 15:34 (and Matt 27:46) is a creative invention."

9 For Robert Lindsey (*A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark* [2d ed; Jerusalem: Dugith, 1973], 63) the quotation of Ps 31 in Luke was the catalyst for Mark's substituting Ps 22:2 from a targum and rewriting the story: "The Aramaic words . . . are a direct quotation from a targum of Psalm 22 and appear to be a Markan replacement of the Lukan saying of Jesus from Psalm 31." He gives it as one among many examples of Mark replacing Luke's text but he does not explain why Mark chose a targum, nor does he discuss whether a targum existed in the first century. On a Psalms targum, see below.

10 Flusser (*Sage*, 161) assumed that Luke assimilated Jesus' last cry to what a dying Jew would be expected to say (Luke 23:46). Flusser cited the Jewish Prayer Book. However, as his editor Steven Notley has pointed out in private communication, this is a remarkable confluence between Jewish tradition and a probable Gentile author, despite the fact that the Jewish tradition is only first attested over a millennium later. Notley argues that this points to a historical tradition behind Luke 23:46 and we would concur. Notley also provides a close attestation for this Jewish custom in the *Life of Adam and Eve* 31:4: *ἕως οὗ ἀποδῶ τὸ πνεῦμά μου εἰς τὰς χεῖρας τοῦ δεδωκότος αὐτό* "until I repay my spirit into the hands of the one who gave it." At a minimum, we would conclude that Luke has received the material behind Luke 23:46 and the parallel usage in Acts 7:59 from a Judean source, oral or written, and with a reasonable case for historicity.

was most probably based on a source, and the cry of Ps 22 is a likely candidate for being historical. We proceed from this historical conclusion.

### 3 The Language of the Eliya Story

The story about Elijah (Greek: ἡλειας/ἡλιος, vocative ἡλεια/ἡλι; sometimes ἡλειου in Old Greek OT), a common Jewish messianic motif, suggests that a pre-canonical Greek version of the story circulated with ἡλει/ἡλι not ἐλωι.<sup>11</sup> The form ἐλωι is not a good fit for an author who is writing about a wordplay with Elijah. The connection for the Greek reader is unnecessarily obscured.

If ἡλι is pre-Markan, as appears probable, then Mark is responsible for the form ἐλωι and we should at least ask ourselves if there is a reason or motive that might explain such a change. Fortunately, this is not the only place where Mark introduces a language switch into his narrative. At both 5:41 and 7:35 Mark introduces apparent Aramaic sentences in healing accounts.<sup>12</sup> Apparently when Mark was writing, he was not thinking primarily of this Eliya wordplay, but was more interested in presenting a clearly Aramaic saying.<sup>13</sup> This is the literary connection that needs to be explored. Another interesting question, assuming that Matthew had access to Mark, is why Matthew changed the transcription from what he found in Mark. However, before discussing the literary connections within each Gospel we must cover the background of the transliterated words themselves, since they have raised not a little controversy and confusion.

<sup>11</sup> Similarly, an oral tradition would have used [eli] instead of [eloi].

<sup>12</sup> τάλιθα, “little lamb/girl,” is unambiguously an Aramaic word. ἐφφαθα, “be opened,” is actually closer to a niphil Hebrew word פתח. In the first century the first Hebrew vowel was lower than [i] and Greek φφ was hard [p].) But ἐφφαθα can also be explained as colloquial development within Aramaic. Cf. Isaac Rabinowitz, “‘Be Opened’ = ΕΦΦΑΘΑ, Mk 7:34: Did Jesus Speak Hebrew?,” *ZNT* 53 (1962): 229–38; John A. Emerton, “*Maranatha* and *Ephphatha*,” *JTS* 18 (1967): 427–31; Isaac Rabinowitz, “Εφφαθα [Mk vii 34]: Certainly Hebrew, Not Aramaic,” *JSS* 16 (1971) 151–56; Shlomo Morag, “Εφφαθα [Mk vii 34]: Certainly Hebrew, Not Aramaic?,” *JSS* 17 (1972): 198–202. Because 5:41 and 15:34 are unambiguously Aramaic, it is best to read 7:35 as Aramaic, too.

<sup>13</sup> Mark 3:17 βοανηγες, Mark shows that he is capable of changing a foreign transliteration for literary effect. He probably transliterated the word בנ bene- “sons of” βοανη-precisely for its literary effect in Greek where βοαν means “to shout”. See Randall Buth, “Mark 3:17 BONEPETEM and Popular Etymology,” *JST* 3 (January 1981): 29–33.

#### 4 Semitic Background of the Individual Words

The form  $\epsilon\lambda\omega\iota$  in Mark seems intended to represent an Aramaic word for “my God,”  $\text{ܝܠܗܝ}$  in the Tiberian system.<sup>14</sup> That is easy to establish and not in dispute.

On the other hand,  $\eta\lambda\iota$ , and its acoustically equivalent by-form  $\eta\lambda\epsilon\iota$ , are most probably intended as specifically Hebrew. One needs to ask the question from the perspective of persons in antiquity who knew both Hebrew and Aramaic: Would they have recognized  $\text{ܝܠܗܝ}$  as Aramaic or Hebrew? Matthew’s transliteration  $\eta\lambda\iota/\eta\lambda\epsilon\iota$  will turn out to be a crucial point because it sets the framework for his own citation.

It has sometimes been claimed that  $\text{ܝܠܗܝ}$  is good Aramaic. For example, some have pointed to a late copy of a late Psalms Targum where  $\text{ܝܠܗܝ}$   $\text{ܝܠܗܝ}$  is in the text.<sup>15</sup> But a possible use of  $\text{ܝܠܗܝ}$  in the late<sup>16</sup> Psalms Targum at 22:2 might only mean that a foreign word was being used for midrashic purposes in a targum. Moreover, the text of the Psalms Targum at that verse probably did not contain  $\text{ܝܠܗܝ}$ . The Targum printed in the new Bar Ilan series *Miqraot Gedolot*, ‘*ha-Keter*’, reads standard Aramaic  $\text{ܝܠܗܝܐ}$ .<sup>17</sup> One must remember that a targum is a

- 14 This Aramaic may be transcribed in IPA as approximately [ʔeloɪ], though in the first century the vowel with *lamed* may have ranged anywhere from [a] to [o], depending on dialect and speaker. Etymologically the vowel came from an “a,” but a sister language Phoenician was using “o” for many of these, later Western Syriac would use “o” for this, and later Tiberian Hebrew would use [ɔ]. An IPA transcription of the Greek would produce something similar. [eloɪ] or [eloɪ]. The  $\omega$ -mega was originally a low back vowel close to [ɔ], though in the Hellenistic period both  $\omega$ -mega and  $\omicron$ -mikron were pronounced the same. So, different dialects could freely range anywhere in the mid to lower back region for the one phonemic sound, from [o] to [ɔ] or in between. On the other hand, a Hebrew form for “my God” would expect an extra vowel: [eloai]  $\text{ܝܠܗܝܐ}$ . Hellenistic Greeks would need to write this:  $\epsilon\lambda\omega\alpha\epsilon\iota$ . ( $\epsilon\lambda\omega\alpha\iota$  would be ambiguous with  $\epsilon\lambda\omega\epsilon$  and need a dieresis  $\epsilon\lambda\omega\alpha\iota$ .) The uncommon Biblical Hebrew form  $\text{אֱלֹהַי}$  might have been thought to fit perfectly but it is never attested with a suffix and is not used in Mishnaic Hebrew. Since neither Hebrew  $\text{אֱלֹהַי}$  nor Hebrew  $\text{אֱלֹהֵי}$  can explain the Greek,  $\epsilon\lambda\omega\iota$  must be considered an Aramaic word.
- 15 See Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel, with Special Reference to the Messianic Hope* (NovTSup 18; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 64: “(The targum has  $\text{ܝܠܗܝ}$ ).”
- 16 Probably seventh century or considerably later. A Psalms targum was not in use in Yemen and was not part of the otherwise excellent targumic traditions passed down through Yemenite sources. In the West, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Qimhi, who frequently quote Targumim in their commentaries, do not quote a Psalms targum.
- 17 The *Bar Ilan* targum in its Psalms volume is based primarily on Paris 110 for the consonantal Aramaic text, and primarily on Paris 1/17 for the vocalization, with a group of other manuscripts being used in a supporting role for correcting obvious mistakes.



midrashic translation and cannot be assumed to be natural Aramaic, even if it were from the correct time period. The Targum traditions are a rich index of Jewish exegesis of the biblical text. In sum, the Psalms Targum tradition has nothing to say about first-century Aramaic and the Targum probably had the normal Aramaic אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי when it developed towards the end of the first millennium. In a secondary, late manuscript, אֱלִי can only be accepted as a Hebrew insertion.

Joseph Fitzmyer has claimed that no question remains about אֱלִי being Aramaic because אֱלִי is found in Qumran Aramaic.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, his statement is premature, and somewhat misleading. The form אֱלִי/אֱלִי has not been found in Qumran. What has been found at Qumran is not so much an Aramaic word as an in-group, Hebrew code word, a quasi-proper name. Approximately 800 times in the Hebrew texts at Qumran we find אֱלִי, El, as a quasi-name. It is not used with “the” or with pronominal suffixes. It is a special name that Qumran uses for “God.” The quasi-name has been borrowed in some of the Qumranian Aramaic texts.<sup>19</sup> It is important to point out that this form, too, does not occur with suffixes and it is not a general word for “God.” Fitzmyer has acknowledged this.<sup>20</sup> It is this special Qumranian Hebrew name that appears in 4Q246ar, the so-called Son of God or Antichrist text. So, one must remember

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See Menahem Cohen, *Rabbinic Bible, “the Crown”* [*miqraot gedolot, ha-keter*]: The Book of Psalms, Part 1: Psalms 1–72 (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University, 2003 [Hebrew]), ix–x.

- 18 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Aramaic Language and the Study of the New Testament,” *JBL* 99 (1980): 15: “Moreover, the phrase *bereh di ’l*, ‘the Son of God,’ preserves the use of *’el* as a name for God in Aramaic, in contrast to the usual name *’elah(a)*. It thus puts an end to the debate whether the words of Jesus on the cross in the Matthean form, *eli eli lema sabachthani* (27:46), were really all Aramaic or half Hebrew and half Aramaic, as has been at times maintained. Even though the Aramaic suffixal form *’eli* has not yet turned up, the absolute *’el*, “God,” turns up several times in this text.”
- 19 For instance, in Qumran Hebrew documents the Hebrew title אֱלִי is used, which is tied to the special affinity that Qumran had for אֱלִי, El, as almost a personal name for God. Similarly, in the Aramaic 1Q20 *Genesis Apocryphon* we have a Hebrew title אֱלִי, “supreme God,” apparently taken as a loan title in an Aramaic Qumran document. 4Q246 has בְּרַח דִּי אֱלִי, “son of El/God,” עַם אֱלִי, “people of El/God,” and אֱלִי רַבָּא, “the great El/God.” 4Q538 might be a better example of a potential normal use הוּא אֱלִי טַב, “he is a good God/El,” but the reading is doubtful. 4Q542 אֱלִי אֱלִי is apparently an adaption from the Qumranic Hebrew אֱלִים אֱלִי.
- 20 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979), 93: “Even though we still do not have the suffixal form of it (אֱלִי) such as the Greek of Matt 27:46 would call for . . . , this form of the divine name should be recalled in discussions that bear on that verse (it has often been maintained that is Hebraic).”



penetrated Aramaic dialects in magic contexts, probably in a late period, but they do not prove that it was an Aramaic word in the first century or that it was being used in normal Aramaic speech or syntax. So, finding ܐܠ at Qumran and *il* in some magic texts further fills out the picture and confirms that ܐܠ was not used in Aramaic, and that the Hebrew loanword ܐܠ was only used in special, marginal Aramaic. Predictably, we do not have words like ܐܠܝ, “my God,” ܐܠܝܗ, “your God,” ܐܠܝܗ, “his God,” and so forth, in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic.<sup>26</sup> More importantly, in front of an audience that understands Hebrew, the word ܐܠ would be understood as Hebrew and there would be no thought that it was Aramaic or foreign. There is little doubt that bilingual Aramaic and Hebrew speakers would hear ܐܠܝܗ as Hebrew.<sup>27</sup>

A comparison of the Greek text with Syriac translations is complicated and ultimately unhelpful for understanding Matthew and Mark. In Matthew the Syriac Peshitto has ܐܠܐ, without the personal suffix “my.” It is also without translation, apparently since the word is recognized and used in Syriac in names like ܐܠܐ El-Shaddai and even by itself. In Mark the Peshitto has the same ܐܠܐ without “my,” although a translation in standard Aramaic/Syriac is also given, ܐܠܐܐ, “my God my God.” If the Peshitto texts are correct,<sup>28</sup> they might indicate that *il/Il* was being considered a divine name. However, one might also speculate that the Syriac ܐܠܐ is reflecting an abstract Hebraism ܐܠܐ, “force, power,”<sup>29</sup> from a parallel interpretation that shows up in the Gospel

26 One might ask whether ܐܠܝ might be an otherwise unattested signal for Aramaic magic in the first century? This, however, is ruled out by being in a sentence that is devoid of anything magical. Secondly, there is no evidence that “MY GOD” entered the Aramaic magic tradition, certainly not from pre-Christian times. As mentioned above, properly formed Hebrew words and phrases were sometimes taken in whole into the Aramaic magic traditions (cf. ܐܠܐܐ ܐܠܐܐ and ܐܠܐܐ ܐܠܐܐ on Amulet 1.23 (in Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*), but the word on the cross is not one of them.

27 Cf. Epiphanius in the *Panarion* 68.3 (Frank Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Books II and III* [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 386): “Indeed, the Lord prophesied this when he said, in Hebrew, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani.’ On the cross the Lord duly fulfilled what had been prophesied of him by saying ‘Eli, Eli,’ in Hebrew, as had originally been written. And to complete the companion phrase he said, ‘lema sabachthani,’ no longer in Hebrew but in Aramaic . . . by saying the rest no longer in Hebrew but in Aramaic, he meant to humble <the pride> of those who boast of Hebrew.”

28 From some point of time in the first millennium Syriac did not vocalize the final syllable of ܐܠܐ. However, ܐܠܐ is more likely to be explained interpretively as a name, or possibly as Hebrew “power” rather than textually, especially with the correct form provided in the following clause.

29 The cognate to this word in Syriac is ܐܠܐ, “help.”

of Peter 19 (ἡ δύναμις μου ἡ δύναμις μου, κατελείπας με, “my Power, my Power, you left me”). It appears that the Peshitto has assimilated Matthew and Mark to the same transcription, and it cannot be taken to represent either the word from the cross or Aramaic for “my God.” The Old Syriac Sinaiticus text has ܕܐ ܕܐ in Matthew without translation and ܕܐܐ ܕܐܐ in Mark without translation. Even though ܕܐ is not a word used naturally elsewhere in Syriac,<sup>30</sup> the lack of translation shows that Syriac audiences were probably able to understand ܕܐ ܕܐ,<sup>31</sup> but the phrase for “why” shows assimilation to Syriac.<sup>32</sup> The Old Syriac provides a good correspondence to the Byzantine text family in Greek.

An indirect indication that ܕܐܐ was spoken and that it was not Aramaic comes from the logic of the confusion motif. Some of the bystanders were probably Aramaic speakers without a good control of Hebrew, if at all. Passover was a feast when Aramaic- and Greek-speaking pilgrims were in Jerusalem from all over the world. In addition, many of the conscripted Roman soldiers and other non-Jews in attendance would be mainly Aramaic- and Greek-speaking. Both pilgrims and non-Jews would be primary candidates for confusing *eli eli* as *eliya eliya*, ἡλεια ἡλεια. If the sounds *eli* were not an expected or normal word in Aramaic, this could generate confusion, so that the confusion motif takes on verisimilitude with a non-Aramaic *eli*.

30 Neither ܕܐ nor ܕܐܐ are listed in Payne Smith's dictionary. According to Payne Smith, ܕܐ means “God” and is “frequently used in the composition of proper names.” There is also a wordplay listed ܕܐ ܕܐܐ, which would mean “by the help of God/Il.” For perspective: ܕܐ is not used in the Old Syriac (Curetonian or Sinaiticus), and it is not used in the Peshitto NT outside of Matt 27:46 and Mark 15:34. In the OT it mainly occurs with names; cf., e.g., Gen 33:20, ܕܐܝܠܐܗܐ ܕܐܝܠܐܗܐ ܕܐܝܠܐܗܐ, “and he called it El-elohe-Yisrael”; Gen 35:1 with a play on the name Bethel, “bet-il/el,” house of the God Il/El. Num 16:22 has a vocative ܕܐܐܐܐܐ, “O God Il.”

31 This probably shows a cross-language understanding, perhaps like “a Dios” is understood by many Anglo-Californians even though they also recognize Dios as Spanish. Hebrew and Aramaic are closer. See above, where Hebrew words for “God” enter the Aramaic magic tradition as probable “foreign magic,” yet they were apparently able to be made understandable. While “Il/El” is one of the names of God in the Syriac OT, ܕܐܐ is not used for “my God.”

32 Syriac ܕܐܐܐ *le-mono* where an extra -n- consonant is added although it was not part of either Greek tradition or Second Temple, Western Aramaic.

## 5 Short Textual Note on λειμα/λαμα, “Why?”

The transliteration λειμα in Mark probably represents the Aramaic ܠܡܐ, “why?”<sup>33</sup> The Greek transcriptions with [i] would be a perception resulting from influence of the alveolar [l] sound on the reduced vowel.

The texts with λαμα are more transparently a Hebrew word ܠܡܐ, “why?” That may be an indication that some of the Caesarean texts are preserving the more original form of the saying in Matthew, where the sentence begins with Hebrew ܠܡܐ ܠܡܐ. However, it must be remembered that the Caesarean text has assimilated Mark’s text to Matthew. Nevertheless, the Caesarean text is still a “difficult reading” in Matthew, meaning textually capable of being original and generating the other texts, since it preserves the apparent Hebrew-Aramaic language dichotomy as enunciated by Epiphanius (see footnote 27 above). The Byzantine tradition itself is rather consistent in having (ליμα, λειμα [lima]). This probably reflects internal harmonization in Matthew, but it might reflect a dialectical use of ܠܡܐ in Mishnaic Hebrew.<sup>34</sup>

## 6 Short Anecdotal Excursus on Hebrew in Jerusalem in the First Century

We have three anecdotal accounts of language use in Jerusalem that testify to a fluent use of Hebrew being taken for granted. Acts 21:33 through 22:21 records Paul in a riot, then speaking Greek to a Roman chiliarch, and then speaking Hebrew to the crowd. It has often been suggested that Luke meant

33 All of the textual traditions λειμα, λιμα, λεμα, and λαμα could theoretically refer to an Aramaic word ܠܡܐ, though the first three would be more suggestive of Aramaic and the last more suggestive of Hebrew.

34 The Hebrew Bible does not use ܠܡܐ, even where a preposition might be expected with the word “what?” For comparison, consider במה. This occurs 28 times in the Bible vocalized with *patah* as בַּמָּה (along with its byform בְּמָה) and once in Qoh 3:22 vocalized with *shva* בְּמָה. Later, in Mishnaic Hebrew, we get a distinction between ܠܡܐ and ܠܡܐ as in מַשְׁלֵי ܠܡܐ. Later, in Mishnaic Hebrew, we get a distinction between ܠܡܐ and ܠܡܐ as in מַשְׁלֵי ܠܡܐ, “they parabled a parable—to what does the matter resemble?” There may have been dialects using *lema*, “why?,” that have not been recorded due to the lack of written vocalization in antiquity. 1 Chr 15:13 has such a form but it is graphically joined to the following word ܠܡܢܚܐܫܘܢܐ. This could give some support to a dialect hypothesis. The Byzantine text family in Matthew would then provide support for such a dialectical form in Mishnaic Hebrew. However, having mentioned this possibility, we assume that it is more likely that λειμα, λιμα and λεμα represent an internal Greek corruption within the Byzantine textual traditions of Matt 27:46.

“Aramaic,” as Bible translations like the NIV and the footnote of the RSV make explicit. Allegedly, a Jew from the diaspora who can speak to them in Aramaic brings them to silence.<sup>35</sup> The problem with this suggestion is that many if not most diaspora Jews visiting from throughout the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean, could speak Aramaic as a *lingua franca*. There was nothing surprising at all and the account becomes puzzling when viewed from a wider geographical perspective. Appropriately, Luke did not say that Paul spoke in Aramaic, ἐν τῇ Συριακῇ διαλέκτῳ “in the Aramaic language.” Thanks in part to over a century of research on Mishnaic Hebrew, we now have a more fitting option. A colloquial Hebrew, not Biblical Hebrew, was used in teaching people about Jewish laws relating to daily life and groups like Qumran and even the Jewish members of Bar-Kochba’s army would use it. However, Hebrew was not widely used outside of Judea and Galilee, so hearing a speaker address a crowd in an extemporaneous public speech in Hebrew was predictably stunning. Hebrew explains the crowd’s reaction and it was also an appropriate language for discussing affairs internal to Jewish religious life. John Poirier has added another possibility that points to Hebrew.<sup>36</sup> The riot and investigation of Acts 21:33–34 may have taken place in Aramaic. If Paul participated in the investigation in any way before the Greek conversation in Acts 21:37–38, then Paul would have used Aramaic and could not switch to Aramaic in Acts 22 as something new. Roman soldiers serving in the Eastern Mediterranean had to know Greek, but many soldiers also spoke Aramaic, as Josephus exemplifies in *War* 4.37–38. Presumably, soldiers who were bilingual in Greek and Aramaic (not counting “army Latin” and other languages) would be stationed in the Temple area for organized crowd control. Finally, contemporary literature in Greek like Josephus, the LXX, the letter of Aristeas, Ben Sira, and Pseudepigrapha consistently distinguish Hebrew (Ἑβραϊς) from Aramaic

35 Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998): 704, “A parenthetical remark of Luke explains that Jews of Jerusalem are surprised that a diaspora Jew would address them, not in Greek, but in Aramaic, their native language.”

36 John C. Poirier, “The Narrative Role of Semitic Languages in the Book of Acts,” *Filología Neotestamentaria* 16 (2003): 107–16 (109–11). Also, John C. Poirier, “The Linguistic Situation in Jewish Palestine in Late Antiquity,” *JGRChJ* 4–3 (2007): 80: “when Paul addresses the crowd in τῇ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ, they immediately fall silent, greatly surprised (and respectful?) at his choice of language. This indicates that Paul’s earlier exchange with the mob was *not* in τῇ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ. But could it not be that Paul had earlier addressed the mob in Greek? No, for then the tribune would not be surprised to hear Paul address *him* in Greek. In other words, no matter what τῇ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ means, the narrative implies that Paul addressed the mob in two different languages, and that *neither* of them was Greek.”



(Συριακή). There is no unambiguous reference of Ἑβραῖς/Ἑβραϊστί to Aramaic. The closest example of an Aramaic reference are three names in the Gospel of John with an alleged Aramaic etymology that are called Hebrew names. (See the article in this volume by Randall Buth and Chad Pierce “*Hebraisti* in Ancient Texts: Does Ἑβραϊστί Ever Mean ‘Aramaic’?”) One cannot use the Gospel of John for re-reading Luke-Acts against its context and against the rest of the Greek language. Thus, Acts 22 most probably records a public speech in Hebrew.

A second anecdote comes from Josephus (*War* 5.272), where watchers on the city walls of Jerusalem warn the populace below whenever a Roman boulder is being catapulted into the city. Josephus records that the warning cry was in “the patriarchal language,”<sup>37</sup> ὁ υἱὸς ἔρχεται, “the son is coming,” a wordplay that was only possible in Hebrew: אבן באה, “stone is coming,” being shouted quickly as בן בא, “son is coming,” while אבן אתה, “stone is coming” (Aramaic *eben ata*) does not fit בר אתה, “son is coming” (Aramaic *bar ate*). The watchers apparently intuitively chose an insider language for the people, and a different one from the Roman soldiers, many of whom would know Aramaic.

Finally, Josephus records a speech that he makes on behalf of the Roman leader to the rebels holding the city. The speech is given in Hebrew, for the benefit of the rebel leaders as well as bystanders in the city. Josephus, of course, knew the difference between Hebrew and Aramaic, as he made clear when discussing the translation of the Torah into Greek. The translators did not work from Aramaic but from Hebrew (*Ant.* 12.15). Grintz comments, “Thus it can be taken for granted that when Josephus talks (*Bellum Judaicum* VI.2.1 § 96) about a speech he delivered by the command of the emperor in Hebrew: Ἰωσήπος ὡς ἂν εἴη μὴ τῷ Ἰωάννῃ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς ἐν ἐπηκόῳ στὰς τὰ τε τοῦ Καίσαρος διηγέλλεν ἑβραϊζων, ‘Standing so that his words might reach the ears not only of John but also of the multitude, (he) delivered Caesar’s message in Hebrew’—he means precisely what he says: Hebrew and not Syrian.”<sup>38</sup>

37 This has implications for the first edition of Josephus’ *War*. Josephus says that he wrote it “in the patriarchal language.” In Josephus’ own words, he apparently chose Hebrew as the language of writing for posterity, maybe like 1 Maccabees and other histories before him, despite sending the book out to the Jewish diaspora. Incidentally, our Greek edition is of such a good quality that one may doubt if it is a translation at all. It appears to be much closer in quality to an original Greek work than a translation from a Semitic language. It would be best to think of the Greek work as a second edition that has been skillfully and thoroughly rewritten over an earlier Hebrew work.

38 Jehoshua M. Grintz, “Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language in the Last Days of the Second Temple,” *JBL* 79 (1960): 32–47 (44). Earlier Grintz had surveyed Josephus’ usage of the language terms and concluded (p. 42): “An investigation into the writings of Josephus

Thus, we have three clear testimonies about the use of Hebrew in Jerusalem among a public Jewish audience. This does not require us to make Hebrew the most common language in use in Jerusalem, it is simply a language of choice in a Jewish audience in some contexts.<sup>39</sup>

## 7 Foreign Words that are Not an Example of Language Switching

We need to look at two questions in order to understand properly what is going on in Mark's writing and with his language switching, or "code switching," to use a linguistic metalanguage.

First, we should discuss foreign items that are not examples of full language switching. They are intrusions into the same governing code, the language has not changed. We will start with these easier items and then return to the the examples of full code switching.

We have names like *Boanerges* (3:17) and *Golgotha* (15:22). The names are quoted in order to bring out a wordplay on their meaning. *Boanerges* is almost humorous because it appears that Mark has altered his transliteration of a foreign name in order to play on the Greek word "to shout," βοᾶν. Literarily, the use of a foreign name is unremarkable, since names penetrate and pass through language boundaries all the time.

Mark has added three foreign technical terms at three places, *qorban* in 7:11, and *hosanna* (חַסְנָה) in 11:9–10, and *abba* in 14:36. These can be explained as a simple desire for precision, using a technical term that is easiest to communicate by citing the foreign form. *Qorban* is a rabbinic term and best interpreted

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demonstrates beyond doubt that whenever Josephus mentions γλῶττα Ἑβραίων, Ἑβραίων δι᾿ ἄλεκτον, etc., he always means 'Hebrew' and no other language."

Grintz wrote his article 50 years ago. One wonders why this article has not made more impact on NT scholarship. Perhaps the reason is that Grintz started off the article with an implicit equation of the Greek Gospel of Matthew with the Hebrew gospel mentioned in historical sources. Most Gospel scholars correctly recognize that canonical Greek Matthew is not a direct translation of a Hebrew source but is an original Greek work, even if using sources in a Semitized Greek. Grintz was certainly correct about Josephus' use of "Hebrew" for Hebrew.

- 39 E. Y. Kutscher and others long ago remarked that there may have been a difference in language patterns between Jerusalem, the capital city, and the surrounding villages. The Mishnah mentions that the *ketubba* was written in Aramaic in Jerusalem but in Hebrew in Judea. This may incidentally mirror a cosmopolitan–rural dichotomy that is known in other multilingual societies in sociolinguistic and dialectical studies. To this day in the Middle East one finds patterns of Arabic dialects that divide as city versus rural.



as Mishnaic Hebrew, befitting a halakic discussion. Also, contrary to some claim in NT studies, *hosha'-na* is distinctly Hebrew, and is not an Aramaic formulation.<sup>40</sup> The third example, *abba*, is a common Aramaic and Mishnaic

40 *hosha'-na* הושע-נא is most probably a live Hebrew collocation that did not occur in the Hebrew Bible. *hosha'* is the normal imperative form of this Hebrew verb and it occurs two times in the Hebrew Bible. Joseph Fitzmyer (*Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Origins* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 2000], 119–30 [Chapter 7, “Aramaic Evidence Affecting the Interpretation of *Hōsanna* in the New Testament”]) proposed an Aramaic origin for this word and even speculated that הושע *hosha'* might be an Aramaic loan-form in Biblical Hebrew (p. 126): “Indeed, one wonders whether the short Hebrew form [הושע—R.B.] in Ps 86:2 and Jer 31:7 (if imperatival) is not really Aramaized.” This comment appears to be an unfortunate mistake and cannot lead to explaining *hosanna*. (See any Hebrew reference grammar: הושע *hosha'* is the expected Hebrew form according to regular Hebrew morphological processes. Final pharyngeal consonants, ע, ח, cause the preceding [i] or [e] vowel in a *hiphil* imperative to change to a *pataḥ* [a]. See הנה; הִצֵּלָח; הוֹדַע; הוֹכַח; הוֹקַע; הוֹקַע; הוֹשַׁע; הוֹשַׁע. This occurs in many other morphological contexts in Hebrew, too.)

In addition, if the root of הושע is \*יִתְע' [y.θ:] as Fitzmyer suggests, then the single occurrence of הושע in the Qumran texts (4Q243 f16.2) clearly testifies that it is a loanword from Hebrew and cannot be an internal Aramaic development, which would have produced הוֹתַע\*. Furthermore, later Aramaic dialects know nothing of a verb הוֹשַׁע/הוֹשַׁע, or הוֹתַע/הוֹתַע, which suggests that the Hebrew loanword הושע was shortlived and perhaps limited to Qumran. (The same problem is true for Fitzmyer's note [124] about the name אשור in Aramaic instead of Imperial Aramaic, Syriac אַתּוּר, and Targumic Aramaic אַתּוּרִי, “Assyrian” [once אַשּׁוּרִי]. Thus, אשור in Qumran Aramaic does not attest to its being normal in Aramaic, but it, too, is most probably a loan from Hebrew.) Also, נא *na* is the ubiquitous Hebrew particle of request, frequently occurring with simple, short-form imperatives. *Na* is extremely limited in Aramaic, and not natural to it. It occurs in Qumran Aramaic as an apparent loanword from Hebrew, but it is not in Aramaic translations from the Hebrew Bible and does not occur in the Syriac Bible or later Jewish Aramaic. One may only conclude that *hosha'-na* would be normal Hebrew, despite its lack of attestation in the Hebrew Bible. It most probably developed within a Hebrew environment, either directly within itself, or indirectly within a bi-/tri-lingual environment. Fitzmyer has that part of the language data exactly backwards. After Hebrew הושע-נא (colloquial, indigenous, and non-biblical Hebrew) developed as a word of praise, it was then borrowed in wider Jewish and non-Jewish contexts by both Greek and Aramaic as a word of praise. Alternatively, הושע-נא may also represent an Aramaic calque (loan translation), still from a Hebrew environment. Aramaic did not have a structure that corresponds to the “long” Hebrew imperative (e.g. הכתיבה in Hebrew would be הכתב/אכתב in corresponding Aramaic; later Targumim to Biblical Hebrew הושיעה use ארוך פרוק; see 2 Sam 14:4, 2 Kgs 6:26. (Note the different lexeme and lack of -ah suffix.) So, with loan words from Hebrew הושיעה-נא coupled with a loan translation of the -ah imperatival suffix, Jewish Aramaic could produce a calque of הושע-נא/אושע-נא. This would fit the morphology into a pattern that would be shared between Aramaic and Hebrew: הושע. In either case, whether

Hebrew term that was already becoming known in the young Christian Greek communities through Paul's letters. All three of these technical terms add specificity beyond local color, which is one of the reasons that foreign items are quoted in a literature throughout the ages and in various languages. Technical terms function as loan words within the communication. They do not represent a change to another syntactic clausal structure. Mark's sentences were still Greek. A full change of language should be reserved for a switch to a different sentence structure, syntax, and vocabulary.

## 8 Mark's Three Examples of Language Switching

Of Mark's three examples of full language switching, two of them are quite similar. Both 5:41 and 7:34 are healing accounts where Jesus is quoted switching into a foreign language. The important question is: Why? Why did Mark switch languages?<sup>41</sup>

Commentators tend to split and focus on two issues. Some point to the fact that translation is provided and assume that Mark is interested in adding local color to his account. For example, Morna Hooker notes: "Mark takes care to translate [the words] for his readers . . . Thus, they do not function as a foreign formula in Mark's account."<sup>42</sup> Also, R. T. France observes: "Mark's preservation (and translation) of the Aramaic words is typical of his interest in vivid recreation of the scene (7:34), but the words are so ordinary that any idea that a "magical" formula is thus offered is quite without foundation."<sup>43</sup> But these approaches<sup>44</sup> show less insight at 7:34, where the word ἐφφρατα, "be opened,"

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an internal Hebrew development or a parallel Aramaic calque/loan from Hebrew, or both, Mark, Matthew, and John have all used *hosanna* without translation, as a religious loan word in Greek already in the first century.

41 Some have assumed that Jesus' switched languages at these points (cf. Harris Birkeland, *The Language of Jesus* [Oslo: I kommisjon hos J. Dybwad, 1954]) and that Mark is merely following the form of the story that he received. While possible, such a consideration is unnecessary and we will find that a literary motif will join the three accounts of language switching in Mark. However, this motif, in turn, will reinforce the impression that Mark intends for the reader to assume or "feel" a language change in the story events.

42 Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (Black's New Testament Commentaries; London: Continuum, 2001), 150.

43 R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 240.

44 In a similar vein, other commentators focus on the word τὰ λῖβα, "lamb/girl," and claim that the reason is to give local color or even to show compassion.

is about as commonplace as words can be and presents nothing significant of local color.

Others point more probably to the Hellenistic parallels and expectations of Mark's audience. Joel Marcus states:

The retention of Aramaic here is partly for effect: the exotic foreign words increase the sense of mystery about the miracle that is about to occur. Cf. Lucian of Samosata's reference to the tendency of faith healers to use *rhesis barbarike*, "foreign language" (*False Philosopher* 9). The only other healing story in which Jesus' words are rendered in Aramaic is the narrative about the deaf-mute in 7:31–37; in both cases, as Mussies ("Use," 427) points out, the Aramaic words are the verbal counterpart to the non-verbal healing action... and in both cases the healing takes place in seclusion. This combination of the motifs of seclusion and mysterious words is probably not accidental; Theissen (140–42, 148–49) notes that in the magical papyri, injunctions to silence frequently occur before or after occult formulae, in order to guard their secrecy... Also strikingly parallel to our narrative is Philostratus' story of the resuscitation of a dead girl by Apollonius of Tyana: "He simply touched her and said some secret words to her and woke her from seeming death" (*Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4.45)... The combination of motifs is so close that it is difficult not to agree with Pesch (1.310) that our story reproduces typical techniques of ancient faith healing.<sup>45</sup>

We must agree with Joel Marcus and with this overall perspective. However, we do not need to be torn between these two approaches to Mark's language switching. Mark wants the readers to know the plain, ordinary meaning of the words and Mark also wants to produce a literary effect. Mark has switched languages during a healing scene so that the actors in the story and Mark's audience can perceive words connected with miraculous power. Switching the language dramatically provides a mysterious, spiritual, power-effect to these words, even though their literal meaning is ordinary.

While it has long been noted that the language switch can imitate the effect of whispered, magical, mysterious, power words, commentators have sometimes retreated from this in the healing accounts, assuming that this explanation does not work well with the cry from the cross. If it does not work in

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45 J. Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (AB 27A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 363. Marcus cited: Gerard Mussies, "The Use of Hebrew and Aramaic in the Greek New Testament," *NTS* 30 (1984): 416–432; Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, translated Francis McDonagh (SPCK; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983).

Mark 15, then one might be justified in looking for a more generic reason at 5:41 and 7:34. We can approach this question from another angle. A Greek audience would naturally make the connection between the language switch and the healing. With this background we need to approach Mark 15:34 and to see how it might play for various audiences.

## 9 Mark's Purpose in Changing $\eta\lambda\iota \eta\lambda\iota$ into $\epsilon\lambda\omega\iota \epsilon\lambda\omega\iota$

As argued above, Mark probably received the story with the words from Ps 22 and the Elijah comment in Greek together with  $\eta\lambda\iota \eta\lambda\iota$ , or perhaps orally with  $\text{אֱלִי אֱלִי}$ . This raises a legitimate question: Why would Mark choose to put the foreign language transcription into a fully Aramaic form and against the natural flow of the story? The question is a legitimate part of reading the Gospel, but it must be acknowledged at the outset that we do not have an explanation from Mark himself and we will be required to read between the lines in a culturally sensitive manner.

One interesting motive might have been to refer to a targumic midrash associated with Ps 22. But we have no record of an Aramaic targum for Psalms being in existence in the first century in the land of Israel.

Romantic, modern ideas that the language change might show us in which language Jesus did his teaching do not help us either. Mark missed many opportunities to give us transliterated words of teaching, and the cross is certainly not a teaching scene. The words may convey some "local color," too. They certainly do bring the audience right into the scene. But this is a climax that goes far beyond "local color."

More promising is a cultural phenomenon, mentioned in Jewish traditions, that will mesh well with the mysterious, spiritual power that is associated with Mark's other two language changes. In the late Second Temple Period the *bat qol*, or heavenly voice, sometimes speaks in Aramaic.

Shmuel Safrai explained this:

Tannaic and amoraic literatures contain references to prophetic utterances which were heard by various sages or by high priests in the Holy of Holies in the Temple . . . These utterances are set in early contexts such as the wars of the Hasmoneans, the period of Hillel the Elder, or the attempt to set up an idol in the Temple during the reign of the Roman Emperor Gaius Caligula (37–41 C.E.).

There are many references in tannaitic and amoraic sources to heavenly voices, most of which are in Hebrew even when within an Aramaic context (e.g. *b. Ketub* 77b). However a number of utterances are in Aramaic,

including some of the early ones. For example, according to rabbinic tradition the heavenly voice heard by John Hyrcanus in the Temple in the last decade of the second century B.C.E. proclaiming that his sons who had gone to fight in Antioch were victorious, was in Aramaic (*t. Sotah* 13.5 and parallels; cf. *Ant.* 13.282).<sup>[15]</sup> [Footnote 15: See S. Safrai, "Zechariah's Prestigious Task," *Jerusalem Perspective* 2.6 (1989): 1, 4.] The heavenly voice heard by a priest from the Holy of Holies which announced that Gaius Caligula had been murdered (41 C.E.) and that his decree ordering the erecting of his statue in the Temple had been abrogated, is also in Aramaic.<sup>[16]</sup> [Footnote 16: *T. Sotah* 13.6. The utterance that the priest heard was, "Abolished is the abomination that the hater wished to bring into the sanctuary.] The rabbinic source even stresses that "he [an anachronistic reference to Shim'on the Righteous] heard it in the Aramaic language." Samuel ha-Katan's words (circa 115 C.E.) pertaining to the future troubles of Israel likewise is in Aramaic (*b. Sotah* 48b; and *b. Sanh.* 11a). The sources note that "he said them in the Aramaic language."

The apparent reason for the heavenly voices being in Aramaic is the desire of certain sources to signal the general decline in the level of Israel's holiness, and to point out that the charismatics of later generations who merited such heavenly utterances were not on par with biblical prophets such as Moses or Isaiah. Only in the third to fourth centuries C.E., did the phenomenon of recording heavenly voices in Aramaic come to an end. Then, like other important material such as halakah or prayer, heavenly voices were recorded in Hebrew.<sup>[17]</sup> [Footnote 17: Even in later rabbinic sources, however, a number of heavenly voices were recorded in Aramaic (*y. Peah.* 15d; and *b. Baba Batra* 3b, *et al.*)]<sup>46</sup>

Now we are not required to accept the historicity of the rabbinic records, nor can we ignore them. They become important to the degree that they reflect the cultural views of Jewish people during the first century. We should look at one of Safrai's examples that has external support:

יוחנן כהן גדול שמע דבר מבית קדש הקדשים  
נצחין טליא דאזלי לאגחא קרבא באנטוכת  
וכתבו אותה [שעה] ואותו היום  
וכוונו ואותה שעה היתה שנצחו

46 Shmuel Safrai, "Literary Languages in the Time of Jesus," *Jerusalem Perspective* 4, no. 2 (March–April 1991); online [www.jerusalemerspective.com](http://www.jerusalemerspective.com).

[Heb] Yochanan the high priest heard a word inside the holy of holies  
 [Aram] "The little kids who go to wage war against Antioch are getting the victory"  
 [Heb] and they wrote it at that very hour and day  
 and they checked and it was the very hour that they were victorious.

With this we compare Josephus, *Ant.* 13.282:

παράδοξον δέ τι καὶ περὶ τοῦ ἀρχιερέως Ὑρκανοῦ λέγεται  
 τίνα τρόπον αὐτῷ τὸ θεῖον εἰς λόγους ἦλθεν φασὶν γάρ  
 ὅτι κατ' ἐκείνην τὴν ἡμέραν καθ' ἣν οἱ παῖδες αὐτοῦ τῷ Κυζικηνῷ συνέβαλον  
 αὐτὸς ἐν τῷ ναῷ θυμιῶν μόνος ὢν ἀρχιερεὺς ἀκούσειε φωνῆς  
 ὡς οἱ παῖδες αὐτοῦ νενικήκασιν ἀρτίως τὸν Ἀντίοχον

Now a very surprising thing is related of this high priest Hyrcanus, how God came to discourse with him; for they say that on the very same day on which his sons fought with Antiochus Cyzicenus, he was alone in the temple as high priest offering incense, and heard a voice, that his sons had just then overcome Antiochus.

Here we have confirmation from Josephus that the tradition that Hyrcanus heard a heavenly voice was in popular circulation in the first century. We must trust the rabbinic quotation for the data that this was in Aramaic. The special notices in similar stories with an Aramaic *bat qol* cited by Safrai (ובלשון ארמי, "and in Aramaic he heard it") add credibility and memorability to that part of the tradition. This suggests that the Hyrcanus story, and others, included an Aramaic *bat qol* in the popular mindset of the first century. Note that Hyrcanus was in the temple when he heard this. As Safrai points out, there is a strong link between an Aramaic *bat qol* and the temple.

Mark's relationship to the temple cannot be covered in the present study. There is just one curious fact that should be brought out. We can assume that Mark was aware of the actual geography of the temple and Golgotha. All of our geographical knowledge makes it probable that the centurion could not have seen the temple veil, the פרוכת, τὸ καταπέτασμα, when standing at the cross. The temple faced east to the Mount of Olives, it was surrounded by a wall, and was far above the immediate surroundings in the Kidron Valley. Golgotha was most likely west of the temple. However, literarily, this does change the atmosphere of the story. It is fair for us to conclude that Mark saw a link between the power words on the cross and the temple damage. But we should not think that Mark thought that the centurion himself saw the temple veil

being torn. This should be read as privileged information that Mark supplies for the reader, or at least ambiguous information for the reader. The reader cannot know if the centurion saw the veil as it ripped, but the centurion certainly heard Jesus last words and final cry.

The connection to the temple is therefore a Markan connection more than a centurion connection. If indeed there is a Markan connection, we may speculate that Mark's choice to introduce a language switch at this point was strengthened by the confluence of two effects: (1) The foreign language serves as a sign of a power event, something extra-dimensional, and (2) the foreign language is connected to a strange phenomenon at the temple, not too differently from a *bat qol*.

In other words, Mark was presenting these words from the cross as miraculous and efficacious, like a *bat qol*. For Mark, Jesus' words from the cross were a voice from heaven. This literary connection is strengthened by the centurion's conclusion and by the structure of the book as a whole. Many have seen an *inclusio* (literary echo) between the opening of the Gospel at Jesus' baptism and the crucifixion scene. Mark 1:10–11 has a splitting of the heavens and Mark 15 has a splitting of the temple veil. Both have a top down orientation. Mark 1 is heaven to earth, Mark 15 is top-down ripping. At both the baptism and crucifixion it is declared that Jesus is God's Son. The centurion's evidence for his statement is the foreign sentence from the cross and a loud cry. Here, we can add that the voice from heaven at the baptism can be paralleled by the mysterious, power effect of a foreign language at 15:34. Mark was presenting this Aramaic cry as the equivalent of the baptismal heavenly voice. Furthermore, the choice of full Aramaic for Mark is reinforced by its association with the language switching for two miracles earlier in the Gospel, by its cultural association with the *bat qol*, by the Aramaic background to קבש,<sup>47</sup> and by the association of the *bat qol* with the temple.

There is an interesting sign during the Great War (66–70 C.E.) related to danger for the temple reported by Josephus at *War* 6.299:

κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἑορτὴν ἣ πεντηκοστὴ καλεῖται  
 νύκτωρ οἱ ἱερεῖς παρελθόντες εἰς τὸ ἔνδον ἱερόν  
 ὥσπερ αὐτοῖς ἔθος πρὸς τὰς λειτουργίας  
 πρῶτον μὲν κινήσεως [ἔφασαν] ἀντιλαβέσθαι καὶ κτύπου  
 μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα φωνῆς ἀθρόας  
 “μεταβαίνομεν ἐντεῦθεν”

47 See below for a fuller discussion of קבש in both Hebrew and Aramaic.



Moreover, at the feast which is called Pentecost,  
 the priests on entering the inner court of the temple by night,  
 as their custom was in the discharge of their ministrations,  
 reported that they were conscious, first of a commotion and a din,  
 and after that of a voice as of a host,  
 "We are departing hence."<sup>48</sup>

Here is a voice, similar to a *bat qol*, that is connected to the temple. Josephus also gives an account of the temple doors swinging open of their own accord in the middle of the night during a Passover feast before the War.<sup>49</sup> If the Gospel of Mark was written before the Great War, then this becomes an interesting cultural parallel. However, if Mark wrote after the outbreak of the War, and even more so after the destruction of the Temple, then Mark may have heard a version of one or more of these stories.

Mark is certainly someone who is interested in moving things around for literary effect. A close parallel is provided by the parable of the Tenants. Against an original order of throwing out the owner's son and then murdering him, testified by the minor agreement of Luke and Matthew, Mark puts the murder inside the vineyard. Because of the connection in the parable between the vineyard and the temple, Mark appears to be magnifying corpse uncleanness on the part of the temple authorities.<sup>50</sup> They do not just murder, they commit murder in the vineyard! A second example can be brought from Mark's handling of the cursing of the fig tree and the chronological differences with Matthew's account. Mark puts the cleansing of the temple between two references to the cursing of the fig tree.<sup>51</sup>

For all of these reasons or for some of them, it appears that Mark had both the skill and literary precedent to alter the words on the cross slightly into a full

48 For text and translation, see H. St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus*, Vol. 3, *The Jewish War, Books IV–VII* (LCL; London: Heinemann, 1928; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968).

49 Josephus, *War* 6.290–96.

50 See R. Buth and B. Kvasnica, "Temple Authorities and Tithe Evasion: The Linguistic Background and Impact of the Parable of the Vineyard, the Tenants and the Son," in *Jesus' Last Week* (ed. R. Steven Notley, Marc Turnage and Brian Becker; Jerusalem Studies in the Synoptic Gospels 1; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 53–80.

51 See David N. Bivin, "Evidence of an Editor's Hand in Two Instances of Mark's Account of Jesus' Last Week?," in Notley, Turnage, and Becker, eds., *Jesus' Last Week*, 211–24. (A revised version of this essay is available online, [www.jerusalemerspective.com](http://www.jerusalemerspective.com).)



Aramaic form  $\epsilon\lambda\omega\iota \epsilon\lambda\omega\iota$ . Mark wanted the reader to perceive the power behind the words and to feel their impact.

# 10 Matthew's Presentation of $\eta\lambda\iota \eta\lambda\iota \lambda\epsilon\iota\mu\alpha/\lambda\alpha\mu\alpha \sigma\alpha\beta\alpha\chi\theta\alpha\nu\epsilon\iota$

Once it is clear that Matthew's text is  $\eta\lambda\iota/\eta\lambda\epsilon\iota$  and that it is Hebrew, we can make some observations and ask some interesting questions.

Assuming that Matthew saw Mark's account of the crucifixion, it becomes clear that Matthew has changed Mark's text, most probably consciously.<sup>52</sup> Matthew has changed an Aramaic text into a text that is Hebrew at the beginning. The change is a language change. In multilingual societies language switching is commonplace, of course, and there are certain expectations and practices that can be observed. Once the threshold or reason for fully changing a language has been triggered, the communication tends to stay in that language for some time, even after the initial reason may have lost its validity.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, we would expect that the remainder of the sentence would be Hebrew after Matthew consciously changes language. If the cry from the cross was originally in Hebrew and according to Ps 22, we would expect something like *lama azabtani*, similar to what is found in Codex Bezae. The same would be true if Matthew was assimilating the cry to the words of the psalm. But Matthew's text is different. Since Matthew is either correcting Mark or documenting his own source, and since  $\eta\lambda\iota$  is clearly Hebrew, and since full language change normally stays in the same language, this sentence is probably being presented by Matthew as a Hebrew sentence. This is within what Mishnaic Hebrew scholarship would expect. Outside of Mishnaic Hebrew scholarship one might ask if such a Hebrew reading of the text is possible, and in any case one may ask if it is probable. How should one interpret the verb *shvaqtani*, a verb that is common in Aramaic and means "you left me"?

52 Of course, Matthew may have been encouraged to substitute his transliteration simply through acquaintance with a pre-Markan form of the story.

53 For an example of this sociolinguistic phenomenon in a biblical text, note the canonical text of Ezra 4:8–22 and 4:23–5:7. The citation of the actual correspondence with the Persian king uses the original language (4:8–22), then the story of Ezra continues in Aramaic even after the conclusion of the letter. A second letter is cited in 5:7–17, with continuing narrative in 6:1–2, another Aramaic document in 6:3–12, more Aramaic narrative in 6:13–18, but returning to Hebrew narrative in 6:19–7:11. Then an Aramaic letter is quoted in Ezra 7:12–26 with a return to Hebrew in 7:27 for the author's personal words, staying in Hebrew for the rest of the book.

The verb שבק is used in a Hebrew parable in *Pesiqta Rabbati* 44. Parables were traditionally given in Hebrew and may be considered to be an understandable register of language. It may be granted as “a given” that parables were intended to be understandable to common folk.

דבר אחר [שובה ישראל]  
אומרים על הושע ועל אליהו אכזריים היו  
חס ושלום לא היו אכזריים, האכזרי היה מציל  
אלא למה הדבר דומה  
לבן מלכים שדנו המלך ונתחייב שריפה, מה עשה (סונקנתרו) [סנקתדרון]  
אמר למלך  
שבקו בבית האסורים וירעב  
(אותה) [ואתה] שורפו  
והוא חשב לומר עד שתשוב חמתו

Another example: [Concerning “return O Israel” (Hos 14:2)]

They say that Hosea and Elijah were cruel.

In no way, the cruel person would have been someone who was a lifesaver.

To what does the matter resemble?

To a king's son whom the king had judged and was found liable of death by burning.

What did the king's counselor do?

He said to the king,

“Abandon him שְׁבֹקוּ in the prison and let him starve!

And then you can burn him.”

He was thinking, saying to himself, “until his anger stops.”

However, even though this is an excellent example of שבק entering the Hebrew language, the *Pesiqta Rabbati* collection is late, dated to 845 C.E., though containing old material. Alone, it would carry little weight for the first century.<sup>54</sup> Further support can be brought from the Mishnah. *M. Gittin* 9:3 has the phrase אגרת שבוקין, “letter of divorce,” but it is in the midst of an Aramaic sentence.

54 שבק is later attested as an idiom (a metaphor related to Aramaic in *b. Ber.* 61b) in medieval and modern Hebrew: שבק חיים, “he passed away, died.” Despite the connection with “death,” this idiom is obviously not related to the saying from the cross, where “God” is the subject of שבק.

גופו שלֹגֵט  
הרי את מוֹתֶרֶת לְכָל אָדָם  
ר' יוֹדָה אֹמֵר  
וְדָן דִּי יְהוּדָי לִיד מִינִי  
סִפֵּר תִּירוּבִין [[ו]]א[י]גֶרֶת שְׁבוּקִין [וגט גְּרוּשִׁין]  
מֵהֶד לְהִיתְנַסְבָּה לְכָל גָּבֵר דִּיתַצְבִּיין<sup>55</sup>

"The essential formula of the writ of divorce is,  
 'Lo, thou art permitted to any man'.  
 R. Judah says: [His formula is given in Aramaic]  
 'Let this be from me  
 your writ of divorce, letter of dismissal, and deed of liberation,  
 that thou mayest marry whatsoever man thou wilt."<sup>56</sup>

Moshe Bar Asher makes the point that the morphology of *shibbuqin* is "pure Hebrew."<sup>57</sup> But the context of the sentence is Aramaic.

Likewise, the existence of some names in the Hebrew Bible (יִשְׁבֵּק, Gen 25:2 and 1 Chr 1:31, and שׁוֹבֵק, Neh 10:25) might suggest that the verb had been used at one time in Hebrew. But these are not evidence for its use in Hebrew in the first century.

A better parallel to what may be happening in Matthew can be seen in a text from the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishma'el on Exod 12:4.

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- 55 The Hebrew text is from Accordance Bible Software, "Kaufmann Mishna," Version 2.2 (Oak Tree Software, 2009).
- 56 Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah, Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1933): 319.
- 57 Moshe Bar Asher, "Mishnaic Hebrew: An Introductory Survey," in *The Literature of the Sages, Second Part* (ed. edited by Shmuel Safrai, Zeev Safrai, Joshua Schwartz, Peter J. Tomson; Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum, Section Two, the Literature of the Jewish People in the Period of the Second Temple and the Talmud [3b, Midrash and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science, and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature]; Assen: Royal van Gorcum and Fortress Press, 2006), 567–96. Bar Asher writes (p. 587): "Similarly the word, found in the expression אִגְרֶת שְׁבוּקִין (*m. Git.* 9:3, 'bill of divorce') is a Hebrew form, following the pure Hebrew pattern *pī'ul*,<sup>[82]</sup> but based on the Aramaic root š.b.q. meaning 'forsake.' [Footnote 82: Many terms related to family life are formed in מְח on the pattern of *pī'ul* in the plural (*pī'ūlin*). Examples are *qiddūšin*, 'betrothal'; *nissū'in*, 'marriage,' *gērūšin* (< *gūrūšin*) 'divorce'; and *šibbūqin*, 'release.']"

איש לפי אכלו תִּכְסּוּ עַל הַשֶּׁה  
 רבי יאשיה אומר, לשון סורסי הוא זה,  
 כאדם שאומר למכירו  
 בוס לי טלה זה

“You shall estimate (*takossu*) the persons for the lamb according to what a person eats.”

Rabbi Yoshiya says, This is Aramaic, like when someone says to his friend, “Butcher this lamb for me.” [בוס is used in place of normal Hebrew שַׁחַט]

Yohanan Breuer has clarified this situation:

The Aramaic verb נִכַּס does not appear in Mishnaic Hebrew, and here it is considered Aramaic (‘a Syriac expression’). Nevertheless, it appears in a purely Hebrew sentence—בוס לי טלה זה—ascribed to “one saying to his neighbour.”<sup>[7]</sup> [Footnote 7: While the verb is adduced in order to explain the verse, such a sentence could not have been framed without suitable background in the vernacular.] It may thus be concluded that it was by virtue of the close relationship between the two languages that so free a borrowing of a verb could take place from one language to the other. These two examples show that in the spoken Hebrew there existed a certain degree of “openness” towards Aramaic, which enabled the Hebrew speaker to borrow a word from Aramaic on occasion and to use it in his natural speech, without considering the question whether it actually belonged to the stock of the Hebrew vocabulary.<sup>58</sup>

The distillation of all of this is that Matthew is probably recording a Hebrew sentence, although we can recognize the language as “Aramaized” Hebrew. Our text in Matthew becomes a good example of what Yohanan Breuer was describing: words can be inserted in Mishnaic Hebrew without hesitation. This exactly fits what Mishnaic Hebrew scholarship has been learning about the first-century language situation. Thus, the hearers around the cross in Matthew’s account heard a Hebrew sentence, at least any who heard *eli eli*.

58 Yohanan Breuer, “The Aramaic of the Talmudic Period,” in Safrai, Schwartz, and Tomson, eds., *The Literature of the Sages, Second Part*, 599. Incidentally, it is irrelevant to this discussion that the biblical text is technically using a different verb נָסַח, “was numbered” than נִכַּס. The point is that it was considered natural and normal to borrow an Aramaic verb in a Hebrew sentence.

A more interesting question now becomes the intention and fuller context of the statement. If we project the story into its historical context, a couple of interesting points arise.

First of all, the text does not quote Ps 22:2 exactly but introduces a word substitution of שבקתני for עזבתני. Spoken in Hebrew, this would introduce an allusion to the technical divorce terminology שיבוקין, giving a sense of “divorce” to the rejection.

Secondly, this alteration of the text leads the listener to consider the “interpretation” of the passage and to consider the whole context, something that was commonly done in midrashic and ancient exegesis. The end of Ps 22:22–32 does have a hopeful conclusion. Other items are of interest in the psalm. The verb tense in Ps 22:22, עניתני, “you have answered me,” is special. It is in the context of a request and follows four imperatives, and implies the confidence of a sure answer. The next verse continues from the new perspective, from a state of salvation, “I would recount your name to my brothers, in the midst of the congregation I will<sup>59</sup> praise you.” The rest of the psalm implies a salvation. Modern scholarship has sometimes been reluctant to include such a positive reading of this cry from the cross,<sup>60</sup> but its presumed circulation by the first generation of the Jerusalem Jesus-community, leading to its adoption by Mark and Matthew, probably guarantees that such an interpretation was understood within that Jewish community.<sup>61</sup> In the full context of Ps 22, the texts of

59 This follows the MT, with its *energetic*, “more indicative” אהללך.

60 Cf. E. Rivkin, *What Crucified Jesus?* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 108, cited by W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; London: Continuum, 2004), 3:625: “the words are ‘among the most pathetic ever uttered in the annals of history.’”

61 Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 3:625) reject such an interpretation: “Others have supposed that, whatever be the truth regarding Jesus himself, our evangelist and his first readers would have understood the quotation of Ps 22.2 to be like a Jewish midrash, in which the first part of a verse is quoted and the rest assumed; and as Psalm 22 moves on from complaint to faith and praise, so should Jesus’ words imply the same. This interpretation dulls the impact of our verse, which is the culmination of a Matthean theme.”

Yet Davies and Allison accept its basic point anyway: “The abandonment, although real, is not the final fact. God does finally vindicate his Son.” This admission by Davies and Allison reinforces the view that the context of the psalm was probably known and understood when the story about the cry from the cross circulated, assuming that it was not invented by Mark. The “final vindication” would have colored the interpretation of the reference to Ps 22, from the beginning of the circulation of the story within the new community, especially within a Jewish community that was accustomed to sophisticated reading of scripture. The only thing that Davies and Allison are really denying is that Matthew, and perhaps Jesus, would have been party to such a salvific intention when quoting

Matthew and Mark are neither expressing ultimate despair, nor incompatible with the more reverential reference to Ps 31 in Luke.

## 11 Conclusion

The Gospels of Matthew and Mark have separate transcriptions and the Gospel authors probably had separate literary purposes.

Matthew has recorded a Hebrew reference to Psalm 22:2 that was explicitly midrashic and that uses language that was connected with divorce. He probably intended for the audience to include the interpretive framework of the whole psalm, which included a faith in God's salvation. The transliteration *ηλι ηλι λειμα σαβαχθανι/ηλει ηλει λαμα σαβαχθανει* in Matthew has a better claim to historical accuracy and to a pre-Synoptic version of the story than the one in Mark. In addition, Matt 27:46 is the earliest attestation of Mishnaic Hebrew קושׁ.

Mark has taken a pre-Synoptic story about the word from the cross and Elijah and has rewritten the transliteration fully into Aramaic for a consistent literary effect, probably including a linguistic allusion to a *bat qol*. For Mark, this continues his use of Aramaic language switching to provide the reader with a sense of mystery, awe, and spiritual power. Mark appears to treat the cry from the cross as if it were a "voice from heaven" and also to present the centurion as reacting to the word from the cross as if it were a "voice from heaven." This creates a literary analogy (*inclusio*) between the baptism scene, Mark 1:11, where a heavenly voice mentions a "son" along with a ripping of the sky, and the scene at the cross where the centurion concludes that this was a "divine son" and the temple curtain rips. Mark wanted the reader to feel the impact subliminally behind the words on the cross.

This essay has also demonstrated the help that current Mishnaic Hebrew scholarship is able to contribute to New Testament studies, especially in cases of textual complexity where there is a need for linguistic sensitivity, as in the case of Jesus' words from the cross. Reciprocally, the New Testament data, even in Greek dress, makes a small contribution to Mishnaic Hebrew studies.

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Ps 22:2. That is beyond our knowledge, of course. The midrashic interpretation of the verse stands as a reasonable reading of the linguistic data in the citation by Matthew.