

## ARAMAIC-LIKE FEATURES IN THE PENTATEUCH

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The term “Aramaic-like features” is to be distinguished from the term “Aramaisms.” The former refers to linguistic traits found in pre-exilic texts, whose presence can be explained by one of two reasons: either the texts are northern in origin, or the settings of the texts have an Aramean flavor. The latter refers to those features, found primarily in the post-exilic corpus, which reflect clear Aramaic influence over Hebrew. Aramaic-like features occur with a significant concentration in five sections of the Torah: Genesis 24, Genesis 30–31, Numbers 22–24, Genesis 49, and Deuteronomy 33. Style-switching explains the first three texts, since the first two are narratives geographically set in Aram, while the third portrays a prophet from Aram in the plains of Moab. Regional dialectology explains the remaining two sections: the sayings about the individual tribes must originate in those specific locations, which is why one finds words like *הָרֹם*, *הַרְרָם*, and so forth, in the blessings to Issachar, Naphtali, Joseph, and Gad. If the Pentateuch were the product of Persian-period Jewish scribes, as claimed by some scholars during the last several decades, one would expect Aramaisms or Aramaic-like features to appear throughout its 187 chapters in significant concentrations, and not, as per the main conclusion of this essay, in select chapters for specific purposes.

As is well known, a major trend has been noticeable in the field of biblical studies during the past twenty years or so. More and more scholars are dating more and more biblical texts to the Persian period and even to the Hellenistic period. Typically, scholars who take this approach base their dating of biblical texts on social, political, and theological concerns deemed to be present in the texts. In so doing, they regularly ignore the most objective criterion available for the dating of texts, namely, the linguistic evidence.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This point has been made by other scholars; see, for example, J. Joosten, “The Distinction between Classical and Late Biblical Hebrew as Reflected in Syntax,” *HS* 46 (2005): 327–339, in particular the following statement: “historical linguistics has been invoked only marginally, and only *a posteriori*. Linguistic data are no longer expected, it seems, to play a part within the historical-critical approach” (p. 328). I (and presumably Joosten *et al.*) have in mind, for example, the many published works of N.-P. Lemche, T. L. Thompson, and P. R. Davies. The last named scholar recently penned an essay in which he purports to deal with the linguistic evidence, but he speaks only in generalities, and one looks in vain for the discussion of a single specific lexical or grammatical issue; see P. R. Davies, “Biblical Hebrew and the History of Ancient Judah: Typology, Chronology and Common Sense,” in *Biblical Hebrew: Studies in Chronology and Typology*, ed. I. Young (JSOTSup 369; London: T & T Clark, 2003), pp. 150–163. Contrast every other article in this volume, each of which is replete with Hebrew data (regardless of whether or not one agrees with the conclusions).

It is thus refreshing to find, from time to time, certain scholars who do engage with the linguistic evidence. Here I may cite, most prominently, Alexander Rofé, Michael Barré, Marc Brettler, and Michael Waltisberg, all of whom have written detailed studies of specific chapters considered to be Persian-period compositions (Genesis 24, 1 Kings 21, Psalm 116, 1 Samuel 2, Judges 5).<sup>2</sup> Their treatments include a listing of Aramaisms and other late features, which, to their minds, support their conclusions.

In two previous studies, I have countered the conclusions of these scholars, for to my mind they have neglected to note the settings of the texts under consideration.<sup>3</sup> Four of the texts, I argued, were northern Israelite compositions, and thus one could expect to find Aramaic-like features in them—without attributing their presence to a late dating. The Aramaic-like features in the one remaining text, Genesis 24, were explained as elements of style-switching—the scene occurs in Aram, to which Abraham’s servant has traveled in order to obtain a bride for Isaac—and thus the language of this story reflects the environment.

The present article builds on my previous studies, though it limits its focus to the Pentateuch. I have tried to gather as many features that could possibly be labeled as Aramaisms, or as I prefer to call them, Aramaic-like features. I differentiate these two terms as follows: True *Aramaisms* are those features, mainly lexical items, found primarily in the post-exilic corpus—clear borrowings from Aramaic; while *Aramaic-like features* are those features, again mainly lexical ones, which are found in pre-exilic texts and carry a different explanation. As indicated in my two articles, they appear in pre-exilic texts for one of two reasons: either the texts are northern in origin, or the setting of the texts has an Aramean flavor.

<sup>2</sup> The first two chapters were treated by Rofé; then each of the other texts by the other three scholars listed, in respective order. Bibliography: A. Rofé, “An Enquiry into the Betrothal of Rebekah,” in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. E. Blum, C. Macholz, and E. W. Stegemann (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), pp. 27–39; A. Rofé, “The Vineyard of Naboth: The Origin and Message of the Story,” *VT* 38 (1988): 89–104; M. L. Barré, “Psalm 116: Its Structure and Its Enigmas,” *JBL* 109 (1990): 61–79; M. Z. Brettler, “The Composition of 1 Samuel 1–2,” *JBL* 116 (1997): 601–612; and M. Waltisberg, “Zum Alter der Sprache des Deboraliedes Ri 5,” *ZAH* 12 (1999): 218–232.

<sup>3</sup> G. A. Rendsburg, “Some False Leads in the Identification of Late Biblical Hebrew Texts: The Cases of Genesis 24 and 1 Samuel 2:27–36,” *JBL* 121 (2002): 23–46; and G. A. Rendsburg, “Hurvitz Redux: On the Continued Scholarly Inattention to a Simple Principle of Hebrew Philology,” in *Biblical Hebrew: Studies in Chronology and Typology*, ed. I. Young (JSOTSup 369; London: T & T Clark, 2003), pp. 104–128. Needless to say, my research in this area is heavily indebted to the pioneering article of A. Hurvitz, “The Chronological Significance of ‘Aramaisms’ in Biblical Hebrew,” *IEJ* 18 (1968): 234–240. See also his more recent treatment: A. Hurvitz, “עברית וארמית בתקופת המקרא: סוגיית ה’אראמיזמים’ במחקר,” in *Studies in Hebrew and Jewish Languages Presented to Shelomo Morag*, ed. M. Bar-Asher (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1996), pp. 79–94.

To my mind, the vast majority of the Torah is Judahite in origin. We will identify one Israelian passage at the end of this article, but by and large, the five books reflect both Standard Biblical Hebrew and a thoroughly Judahite agenda. The one exception might be the book of Deuteronomy, and a full investigation of the language of that book remains a desideratum, but to my eye, a cursory glance does not reveal the kind of concentration of Israelian Hebrew traits that one finds in, say, the material about the northern kings in the book of Kings.<sup>4</sup>

Within this decidedly Judahite corpus, however, one does find concentrations of Aramaic-like features from time to time, and it is to those texts that I now turn our attention.<sup>5</sup> The first of these is Genesis 24, which, as indicated above, I already have treated in a previous article. Note the following features, all pointed out by Rofé:

1. The expression אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם “God of heaven” in Gen 24:3, 7.
2. The phrase אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תִקַּח “that you not take” in Gen 24:3, calquing on Aramaic דְּלֹא (instead of expected Hebrew אִם).
3. The root גַּמַּא (Hiph<sup>c</sup>il) “give drink” in Gen 24:17 (instead of expected שָׁקַח [Hiph<sup>c</sup>il], which is used seven times elsewhere in the story).
4. The root עָרַח “pour” in Gen 24:20 (instead of standard Hebrew יָצַק or רָיַק [Hiph<sup>c</sup>il]).
5. The root שִׂאָה (Hitpa<sup>c</sup>el) “gaze, watch” in Gen 24:21.
6. The particle אִם-לֹא “but rather” in Gen 24:38 (instead of standard Hebrew כִּי אִם).
7. The noun מְגִדָּנִתַּי “choice gifts” in Gen 24:53.

Indeed, these are all Aramaic-like features, but they are not Aramaisms, especially when one notices the total lack of inner Hebrew indications of Late Biblical Hebrew in Genesis 24. At every point where the text could have used a Late Biblical Hebrew feature, a Standard Biblical Hebrew feature is found instead. For example, the phrase לָקַח אִשָּׁה “take a wife” occurs six times (Gen 24:3, 4, 7, 37, 38, 40 [see also v. 67]) with no instances of

<sup>4</sup> See G. A. Rendsburg, *Israelian Hebrew in the Book of Kings* (Occasional Publications of the Department of Near Eastern Studies and the Program of Jewish Studies, Cornell University 5; Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2002). For my most recent and most comprehensive statement on Israelian Hebrew (albeit largely in outline form), see G. A. Rendsburg, “A Comprehensive Guide to Israelian Hebrew: Grammar and Lexicon,” *Orient* 38 (2003): 5–35.

<sup>5</sup> In general I present the specific data in outline form only. For examples deduced in previous publications, the reader may find full discussions therein. For examples deduced here for the first time, I present more information, both substantive and bibliographic, though even in these instances I have not produced thorough treatments.

the Late Biblical Hebrew equivalent *נָשָׂא אִשָּׁה*; and the verb *נָהַר* is used for “hurry” (Gen 24:18, 20, 46), instead of the Late Biblical Hebrew equivalent *בָּהַל*.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the noun-verb ratio of .600 places this chapter firmly within the classical stratum,<sup>7</sup> as per Frank Polak’s analysis of biblical narrative style.<sup>8</sup> We are led to conclude that this chapter is an exemplar of pre-exilic Hebrew, and that the sprinkling of Aramaisms in the story constitutes a literary device, to transport the reader, along with Abraham’s servant, to the land of Aram.

There is a second narrative in Genesis that returns the reader, along with the action, to the land of Aram—and that of course is the story of Jacob and Laban in Genesis 30–31. Here too we find a host of Aramaic-like features in the story, as noted first by Jonas Greenfield, with additional examples put forward by the present author.<sup>9</sup> Greenfield noted three examples:

1. The verbs *וַיִּצֵל* “he took away” in Gen 31:9 and *וַיִּצִיל* “he took away” in Gen 31:16 (otherwise *נָצַל* Hiph<sup>c</sup>il means “save” in Hebrew).
2. The verb *וַיִּדְבֶק* “he overtook” in Gen 31:23 (instead of the expected Hebrew *וַיִּשָּׂג*—though see Gen 31:25).
3. The verb *לֹא נִמְשַׁתְּנִי* “you did not allow me” in Gen 31:28 (calquing on Aramaic *שבק*).

I then added the following examples:

4. The noun *לִזֵּי* “almond” in Gen 30:37 (in place of *שֶׁקֶד*).
5. The noun *נָדָר* “fortune” in Gen 30:11 (in the naming of Gad).
6. The root *זָבַד* “provide, supply” (as both verb and noun) in Gen 30:20 (in the naming of Zebulun).
7. The 3rd person feminine plural form *וַיִּחַמְּנָה* “and they were in heat” in Gen 30:38 (standard Hebrew would be *וַיִּחַמְּנָה*).

<sup>6</sup> See R. M. Wright, *Linguistic Evidence for the Pre-exilic Date of the Yahwistic Source* (LHB/OTS [JSOTSup] 419; London: T & T Clark, 2005), pp. 71–74, 82–84.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 24 contains 394 nouns and 263 verbs, yielding a noun-verb ratio of .600. The verbs are classified as follows: 44 nominal verbs and 219 finite verbs, for a nominal-finite verb ratio of .167.

<sup>8</sup> F. Polak, “התמורות ותקופות בלשון הסיפורת במקרא,” *Beth Mikra* 43 (1997–1998): 30–52, 142–160; and F. Polak, “The Oral and the Written: Syntax, Stylistics and the Development of Biblical Prose Narrative,” *JANES* 26 (1998): 59–105.

<sup>9</sup> J. C. Greenfield, “Aramaic Studies and the Bible,” in *Congress Volume Vienna 1980*, ed. J. A. Emerton (SVT 32; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), pp. 110–130, especially pp. 129–130; and G. A. Rendsburg, “Linguistic Variation and the ‘Foreign’ Factor in the Hebrew Bible,” *IOS* 15 (1996): 177–190, especially pp. 182–183.

8. The inflected participle **גִּנְבָתִי** “I was robbed” in Gen 31:39 (2 times) (even though this morpheme is attested only later in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic<sup>10</sup>).

Even more examples are forthcoming:

9. The noun **הַיְשִׁים** “he-goats” in Gen 30:35, more common in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic and other Western Aramaic dialects than in Hebrew.<sup>11</sup>
10. The noun **רְהָטִים** “troughs” in Gen 30:38, 41, which reflects Aramaic phonology, where the root **רהט** corresponds to Hebrew **רוץ** “run” (thus one reconstructs a semantic development “runner” > “trough”<sup>12</sup>).
11. The verb **הִחָלֵף** “exchange” in Gen 31:7, 41, occurring only here in the Bible with reference to wages, money, and so on, paralleling a usage well attested in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic in particular.<sup>13</sup>
12. The noun **מְנִים** “times” (in the expression **עֲשָׂרַת מְנִים** “ten times”) in Gen 31:7, 41—occurring only here in the Bible, and note how the root **מנה** “count” is standard in Aramaic and more productive than in Hebrew.
13. The form **אֶתְהָם** in Gen 32:1, in place of standard **אוֹתָם**, with the preservation of the **ה** in this form linking it to Aramaic **יתהון / יתהום**.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See G. Dalman, *Grammatik des jüdisch-palästinischen Aramäisch* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1905), p. 284.

<sup>11</sup> M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (2d edition; Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), p. 580. See also the references in A. Tal, *A Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 948. In light of the distribution of the word **תִּישׁ** in the Bible, one wonders if it is not always employed as a style-switching device. It occurs again in Gen 32:15, which in many respects continues the language of Genesis 30–31 (note both **הַיְשִׁים** and **רְהָלִים** in this verse, both of which occur in the preceding chapters); and later in the Bible in Prov 30:31 and 2 Chr 17:11. The latter two passages have Arabian affinities (note the use of the form **אֶלְקִים** in the former, and the reference to Arab tribute-bearers in the latter), which may be significant in light of the cognate *tays* in Arabic.

<sup>12</sup> Note the English words “run,” “runnel,” “runner,” and “runnet,” all meaning “small stream, rivulet.” More significantly, see also the technical meaning of “runner” = “a channel along which molten metal runs from the furnace to the mould” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “runner,” def. II.9.c.); as well as “runnel” in the sense of a man-made conduit, as in this 1883 citation: “Small runnels are generally chiselled for the purpose of conducting the water into the cistern” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “runnel,” def. 2).

<sup>13</sup> M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002), pp. 465–466.

<sup>14</sup> See the similar approach taken by Mordechai Mishor concerning the presence of **אֶתְהָם** in Exod 18:20; M. Mishor, “On the Language and Text of Exodus 18,” in *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Environment: Typological and Historical Perspectives*, ed. S. E. Fassberg and A. Hurvitz (Publications of the Institute for Advanced Studies 1; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2006), pp. 225–229, especially p. 227. Note that the present example comes from Gen 32:1—that is, one verse beyond the bounds of Genesis 30–31—on which see below, n. 18.

I also would note two additional usages, which cannot be pinned down as Aramaic-like features to the extent that I would like, but probably should be mentioned here as part of the mix as well:

14. The root כסף “yearn, long for” (in the expression נִכְסַף נִכְסַפְתָּהּ in Gen 31:30, not exactly the same as the root כסף “be ashamed, be embarrassed, be chagrined,” used commonly in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic<sup>15</sup> but the closest parallel that one finds in Semitic.
15. The unique usage represented in עַל-בְּלִי הִגִּיד לוֹ “by not telling him” in Gen 31:20—perhaps a reflection of Aramaic, especially given the large number of compound particles based on עַל in Aramaic (עַל in Aramaic (עַל) (עַל גְּבִי, אַפִּי, עַל מְנַח, עַל עֲסִיק, עַל שָׁם, etc.<sup>16</sup>), even if עַל בְּלִי itself is not attested.

If this were not enough to bring you to the land of Aram, the author included one final zinger as well, a pure Aramaic two-word expression, שְׂהָרִיתָא יְגֵר “mound of witness” in Gen 31:47, equaling Hebrew גִּלְעָד, serving as an explicit reminder that Laban and Jacob have been speaking Aramaic all along, and not Hebrew; just as Shakespeare’s single phrase *et tu Brute* suffices to remind the theatre-goer that Julius Caesar and his cohorts have been speaking Latin all along, and not Elizabethan English.

These features cannot be considered Aramaisms that penetrated Hebrew during the Persian period. As was the case with Genesis 24, also here in Genesis 30–31, whenever a Late Biblical Hebrew feature could have been used, a Standard Biblical Hebrew feature is found instead. For example, the word דֶּרֶךְ “journey, distance” is used in Gen 30:36; 31:23, instead of the Late Biblical Hebrew equivalent מִהֶלֶךְ; and once more we may note the phrase לָקַח אִשָּׁה “take a wife” in Gen 31:50, as opposed to the Late Biblical

<sup>15</sup> M. Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, pp. 592–593. In addition, note that, among the four other attestations of this root in the Bible, the closest usage is to be found in Ps 84:3, which, as part of the Korah collection, is an Israelian composition; see G. A. Rendsburg, *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms* (SBLMS 43; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 51–60. The most glaring Aramaic-like feature in Psalm 84 is the verb דוּר “dwell” in 84:11, its only occurrence in the Hebrew sections of the Bible (the verb דוּר in Ezek 24:5 means “pile, arrange,” even if one posits an ultimate connection to דוּר “dwell”; for discussion see M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37* [AB 22A; New York: Doubleday, 1997], p. 498).

<sup>16</sup> M. Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, pp. 406–408; and M. Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, p. 863.

Hebrew equivalent נָשָׂא אִשָּׁה.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the noun-verb ratio of .629 also places these two chapters firmly within the classical stratum.<sup>18</sup>

I turn now to a third Pentateuchal text, which includes a heavy dose of Aramaic-like features. In this case, the readers are not transported to the land of Aram, but instead an Aramean prophet comes to the land of Canaan. I refer, of course, to the story of Balaam in Numbers 22–24 and in particular to the oracles placed in his mouth. Here too I repeat information from my earlier study, with specific attention to the following Aramaic-like features:<sup>19</sup>

1. The reduplicatory plural form הַרְרִי “mountains” (construct) in Num 23:7.
2. The noun רֶבֶע “dust-cloud” in Num 23:10, with a cognate in Syriac, as well as in Akkadian.
3. The noun נְחָשׁ “divination” in Num 23:23 (with the plural form נְחָשִׁים in Num 24:1 in the prose narrative).
4. The noun מְלָכָה “kingdom” in Num 24:7, the classic Aramaic form, in place of the standard Hebrew form מַמְלָכָה.
5. The verb יִתְחַשֵּׁב “be considered” in Num 23:9, with the Hitpa<sup>c</sup>el serving for passive voice, as with the T-stem in Aramaic (one expects the Niph<sup>c</sup>al in Hebrew).
6. The verbal form נָטְוִי “stretched out” (or “standing tall”<sup>20</sup>) in Num 24:6, with the retention of the *yod* in the *lamed-he* verb, as in Aramaic.
7. The form נָאָם in Num 24:3–4 (3 times), 15–16 (3 times), used of human speech, occurring elsewhere only in northern settings in the

<sup>17</sup> See R. M. Wright, *Linguistic Evidence*, pp. 71–74, 95–97, 130.

<sup>18</sup> The data include Gen 32:1–3. To some extent, starting at Gen 30:1 is somewhat arbitrary, since there is no break indicated in the Masoretic Text at this point. But one must begin somewhere, especially since the previous break is a *setuma* after Gen 28:10. On the other hand, a clear break is present at Gen 32:3, which is followed by a *petuḥa*, and thus I have included the first three verses of Genesis 32 in my calculations. This also will explain the incorporation of the form אָהָרָם in Gen 32:1 into our survey (on which, see above). In sum, the data are as follows: Gen 30:1–32:3 contains 608 nouns and 359 verbs, yielding a noun-verb ratio of .629. The verbs are classified as follows: 39 nominal verbs and 320 finite verbs, for an exceedingly low nominal-finite verb ratio of .109.

<sup>19</sup> G. Rendsburg, “Linguistic Variation,” pp. 183–184. The first effort in this direction was the seminal article by S. A. Kaufman, “The Classification of the North West Semitic Dialects of the Biblical Period and Some Implications Thereof,” in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies: Panel Sessions: Hebrew and Aramaic Languages* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1988), pp. 41–57, especially pp. 54–55.

<sup>20</sup> M. Moreshet, “בְּנִתְוִיָּם נָטְוִי” (במדבר כד, ו): משנה הוראה, *Beth Mikra* 48 (5732): 51–56; and S. Morag, “רובדי קדמות: עיונים לשוניים במשלי בלעם,” *Tarbiz* 50 (1981): 1–24, especially pp. 15–16, in particular n. 54.

Bible;<sup>21</sup> most likely related to Eblaite *en-ma*,<sup>22</sup> which once more takes us to the general region of Aram, even if the floruit of Ebla was at the end of the Early Bronze Age.

These are not the only examples, however. Note further the following Aramaic-like features, some of them a bit less obvious and glaring:

8. The noun מְרִיִּם “mountains” in Num 23:9 in the a-line of the couplet, replacing standard Hebrew הָרִיִּם, paired with גְּבֻעוֹת “hills” in the b-line (the only such case in the Bible); the form מְרִיִּם evokes Aramaic טוּרִיִּם “mountains,” and no doubt reflects an attempt to include that Aramaic word in the poetry, using the Old Aramaic orthography still, in which the emphatic interdental /z/ is represented by ז (before the shift to ט occurred)—in fact this orthography appears still in the Adon letter, line 8, where “he guarded” appears as נִצַּר (and not expected נִטַּר).<sup>23</sup>
9. The expression מוֹת יְשָׁרִים, literally “death of the upright,” in Num 23:10, is explained by Menahem Kister as the opposite of the expression מוֹת לָחָה “an evil death” in Nerab tomb inscription, no. 1, line 4—and indeed this verse as a whole shares much in common with Nerab tomb inscription, no. 2, lines 3–4.<sup>24</sup>
10. The verbal root גָּרַם “devour bones” in the expression וַעֲצָמֹתֵיהֶם יִגָּרַם “and their bones he devours,” in Num 24:8, uses the denominative verb based on the Aramaic word גָּרַם “bone” (2 times elsewhere in the Bible, though as the Qal; this is the only Pi<sup>c</sup>el).
11. The suffix יָהֶם added to a plural noun ending in *-ôt*, as in the above-cited word עֲצָמֹתֵיהֶם “their bones,” in Num 24:8; as is well known, Standard Biblical Hebrew prefers the form יָהֶם, while Late Biblical Hebrew prefers the form יָהֶם, with the latter occurring as a result of Aramaic influence;<sup>25</sup> not that every instance of יָהֶם in pre-exilic texts

<sup>21</sup> G. A. Rendsburg, “The Northern Origin of ‘The Last Words of David’ (2 Sam 23,1–7),” *Biblica* 69 (1988): 113–121, especially pp. 115–116.

<sup>22</sup> C. H. Gordon, “Vocalized Consonants: The Key to *um-ma/en-ma*/נאם,” in *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, ed. M. E. Cohen, D. C. Snell, and D. B. Weisberg (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 1993), pp. 109–110. See also G. A. Rendsburg, “Hebrew Philological Notes (I),” *HS* 40 (1999): 27–32, in particular pp. 29–30.

<sup>23</sup> See S. Morag, “רִבְרִי קְרִמּוֹת,” p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> M. Kister, “Some Blessing and Curse Formulae in the Bible, Northwest Semitic Inscriptions, Post-Biblical Literature and Late Antiquity,” in *Hamlet on a Hill: Semitic and Greek Studies Presented to T. Muraoka on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. F. J. Baasten and W. Th. van Peursen (OLA 118; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), p. 325.

<sup>25</sup> For general discussion, see A. Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel* (Cahiers de la Revue Biblique 20; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1982), pp. 24–27. For



is an example of style-switching, but in the present instance, in the mouth of Balaam, this is most likely the proper explanation.<sup>26</sup>

To these certain examples, I add here two other items of potential value to our treatment:

12. The noun נְהָלִים “palm trees” in Num 24:6, a rare usage in the Bible, with a cognate in Arabic *nahl*<sup>27</sup>—was this lexeme used in Old Aramaic as well? Was it known in the land of Qedem, whence Balaam came, located at the northern reaches of the Syrian Desert?
13. The form עָרִי in the expression הָאֲזִינָה עָרִי in Num 23:18, usually translated “give ear to me”; however, since הָאֲזִינָה typically governs the preposition אֶל or -לְ (see especially Deut 1:45; Ps 77:1, both with a pronominal suffix attached to אֶל),<sup>28</sup> due consideration should be given to the suggestion that עָרִי here means “my warnings,” closely related to the noun עָרִי “covenant, testimony” occurring repeatedly in the Sefire treaties;<sup>29</sup> if this interpretation is correct, then we have here another striking Aramaic-style usage in the Balaam oracles.

In short, the Balaam oracles are filled with Aramaic-like usages, which together serve the purpose of the style-switching employed by the ancient Israelite author.

These three sections of the Torah contain the highest concentration of Aramaic-like features, but they do not hold a monopoly. There are two other texts where such elements may be found, namely, the blessings concerning the tribes in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33.<sup>30</sup> One is not surprised to find Aramaic-like features in these two chapters, but I hasten to

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the most recent treatment, see M. Bar-Asher, “עיון בסעף” (עיון בשעף), *מגילות* 2 (2004): 137–149.

<sup>26</sup> For another instance of this morpheme used for stylistic purposes, note the form אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם in 1 Kgs 14:15, in the mouth of Ahijah of Shiloh, addressed to the wife of Jeroboam. This is the only occurrence of אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם in the entire narrative corpus of Genesis through Kings, the eighth century prophets, pre-exilic Psalms, Proverbs, etc., which otherwise use אֲבוֹתָם 82 times (according to my counting). This would be another feature of Israelian Hebrew appearing in the material concerning the northern kings in the book of Kings, though I neglected to include this example in my book *Israelian Hebrew in the Book of Kings*.

<sup>27</sup> See S. Morag, “רובדי קדמות,” pp. 14–16. The only other instance is Song 6:11.

<sup>28</sup> The only other collocation of הָאֲזִינָה and עָרִי is in Job 32:11, in which the preposition introduces the object to be listened to, namely הַבּוֹנֵי־כֶם “your wise-sayings.”

<sup>29</sup> S. Morag, “רובדי קדמות,” pp. 10–12.

<sup>30</sup> For the first of these texts, see G. Rendsburg, “Israelian Hebrew Features in Genesis 49,” in *Let Your Colleagues Praise You: Studies in Memory of Stanley Gevirtz* (Part 2), ed. R. J. Ratner, L. M. Barth, M. L. Gevirtz, and B. Zuckerman, *Maarav* 8 (1992): 161–170. I have not yet published my work on the parallel material in Deuteronomy 33, though I plan to do so in the near future.

add that we find these elements specifically in the blessings to the northern and Transjordanian tribes, that is, the ones with the closest links to Aramaic speakers—but not in the blessings to Judah, Benjamin, Simeon, and Levi. Note the following from Genesis 49:

1. In line with what we noted above, regarding the verb גָּרַם in the Balaam oracles: the noun גָּרָם in Gen 49:14 in the blessing to Issachar: יִשָּׁשְׂכָר הָמֹר גָּרָם “Issachar is a donkey of bone,” using the Aramaic word for “bone” (in place of Hebrew עֲצָם).
- 2.–3. The expression אֲמָרֵי-שֹׁפָר “lambs of beauty” in Gen 49:21, in the blessing to Naphtali, using two words better attested in Aramaic: אֲמֹר “lamb” and the root שֹׁפַר “beauty, be beautiful.”
4. The noun שוֹר “wall” in Gen 49:22, in the blessing to Joseph; true, this lexeme appears in 2 Sam 22:30 = Ps 18:30 as well, but only in the b-line, where Aramaisms are more likely to occur.<sup>31</sup>

If we turn to the tribal blessings in Deuteronomy 33, we see several more Aramaic-like features, though once more they appear only in passages addressing the northern and Transjordanian tribes.

1. The noun יָרְחַיִם “months” in Deut 33:14 in the blessing to Joseph (as opposed to the standard Hebrew term חֳדָשִׁים).
2. The plural form הַרְרֵי “mountains” (construct) in Deut 33:15, also in the blessing to Joseph (see also above in the discussion about the Balaam material).
3. The verb וַיָּתָא “and he came” in Deut 33:21 in the blessing to Gad, from the root אָתָא, the standard Aramaic equivalent of Hebrew בּוֹא.
4. The noun דְּרוֹם “south” in Deut 33:23 in the blessing to Naphtali, the Aramaic equivalent to the various Hebrew words for “south,” including יָמִין, תֵּימָן, and נֶגֶב—otherwise, דְּרוֹם appears in Ezekiel, Qohelet, and Job.

The five texts that we have surveyed—Genesis 24, Genesis 30–31, Numbers 22–24, Genesis 49, and Deuteronomy 33—are the only sections of the Torah with a significant concentration of Aramaic-like features, or call them Aramaisms, if you will. This cannot be coincidental. Style-switching

<sup>31</sup> G. R. Driver, “Hebrew Poetic Diction,” in *Congress Volume Copenhagen 1953* (SVT 1; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953), pp. 26–39.

explains the first three texts that we looked at, while geography explains the second two. The sayings about the individual tribes must originate in those specific locations, which is why one finds words like *נָרַם*, *נָרַם*, and so forth, in the blessings to Issachar, Naphtali, Joseph, and Gad—but not in the blessings to Judah, Benjamin, Simeon, and Levi.

If the entire Torah were the product of the Persian period or later, one would expect to find clusters of Aramaisms throughout the five books, and not just in these five specific texts, comprised of 227 verses.<sup>32</sup> Clearly this is not the case—and yet this point has neither been recognized nor been addressed by those who posit the period of Persian rule as the background for large chunks if not the entirety of the Pentateuch. In fact, one is surprised that those who propose a late dating for the Torah—in whole or in part—do not utilize this evidence (save for an occasional exception, such as Rofé, as noted at the outset). The surprise quickly dissipates, however, when one realizes that the linguistic evidence—especially the controlled use of language in well-defined literary contexts, as demonstrated herein—is largely ignored. To be perfectly honest, I feel a bit like Rab-shaqe taunting the Judahites with the offer of two thousand horses, if they were able to provide riders (2 Kgs 18:23). I here provide for those who date the Torah to the late period the evidence that they might be able to utilize—even if they have not been able to garner it for themselves—though I quickly supply the response as well: these Aramaic-like features cluster in the Pentateuch in specific texts for specific reasons, and thus cannot serve as a factor in the quest for a date.

I do not mean to imply that a single Aramaism or Aramaic-like feature cannot be found now and then in other sections of the Torah. Clearly there are scattered examples, several of which I present here, each one with a clear explanation, to my mind.

1. The verb *מָלַל* spoken by Sarah in Gen 21:7 in the phrase *מִי מָלַל* “who would utter (to Abraham that Sarah would suckle sons, that I would bear a son for his old-age).” In this case, the author reached deep into the Hebrew lexicon, presumably plucking a word from a border dialect or from Aramaic itself, in order to produce alliteration in the text. Note how *מָלַל* echoes the sounds of the roots *מָלַל* “circumcise” in Gen

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<sup>32</sup> I arrive at the number 227 in the following way: Genesis 24 consists of 67 verses; Genesis 30–31 (including 32:1–3 [see above, n. 18]) consists of 90 verses; the four Balaam oracles comprise 28 verses (4 + 7 + 7 + 10); the material about the northern tribes in Genesis 49 includes 18 verses; and finally the same material in Deuteronomy 33 includes 24 verses.

21:4 and גמל “be weaned” (2 times) in Gen 21:8.<sup>33</sup> Alliteration in biblical literature has not been fully appreciated, and yet one finds authors utilizing this technique at every turn, often in very creative ways, as in the present instance.<sup>34</sup>

2. The noun יָרְחַיִם “months,” which we noted above in Deut 33:14, occurs again in Exod 2:2, in the birth story of Moses. In this case, the author selected this word in order to create alliteration with the key phrase וַתְּחַמְרָהּ בַּחֲמֶר “and she loamed it with loam” in Exod 2:3, with a more distant echo heard in the word חֲמֶר “mortar” in Exod 1:14. As in the above example, so here: the demands of the literary device of alliteration, which appears no less in prose than it does in poetry, sent the author searching for the most appropriate word choice. In this case, we actually are not dealing with an Aramaic lexeme per se, since the word ירח also occurs in Ugaritic, Phoenician, and the Gezer calendar. More accurately, one should say that the author, presumably a Jerusalemite, selected this word from a different dialect of Hebrew, most likely one spoken in the north, which shared this lexical isogloss with Phoenician and Aramaic. As such, יָרְחַיִם in Deut 33:14 may not be an Aramaic-like feature per se, but its presence in the blessing to Joseph remains relevant nonetheless.
3. Earlier we noted that רְהֻטִים “troughs” occurs twice in Genesis 30 as part of the Aramaic coloring of the Jacob and Laban story. The noun occurs again in Exod 2:16, in the story of Moses in Midian, in a text and indeed a book otherwise devoid of Aramaisms. What function could it serve here? I would propose that this vocable serves the intertextual purpose of the author, who desires to bring the reader back to another instance of an ancient Israelite bachelor who fled his homeland for a foreign land, who encountered a female at a well, who watered her flock, and who came to marry her and live with his father-in-law. The typescene studied by Robert Alter requires very

<sup>33</sup> Elsewhere the root מלל “speak, utter” occurs in the Hebrew portions of the Bible only in (late) poetic texts: Ps 106:2; Job 8:2; 33:3. The latter two presumably are part of the overall Aramaic-like style of Job, while Psalm 106 is a late psalm where Aramaic influence is to be expected; note, for example, the root שְׁבַח “praise” in Ps 106:47, which also refers to the ingathering of the people from among the nations. On the root שְׁבַח, see A. Hurvitz, *בין לשון ללשון* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1972), pp. 88–91.

<sup>34</sup> I have noted instances of the employment of rare words to produce alliteration, in both prose and poetry, in previous publications, though only now is my first sustained essay on the subject to appear: G. A. Rendsburg, “Alliteration in the Exodus Narrative,” in *Shalom Paul Festschrift*, ed. C. Cohen, A. V. Hurowitz, A. Hurvitz, Y. Muffs, B. J. Schwartz, and J. H. Tigay (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming). The example presented in the next paragraph, יָרְחַיִם in Exod 2:2, is among the passages treated in my forthcoming article.

little lexical linkage to allow the reader to see such connections<sup>35</sup>—nonetheless, the author of Exodus 2 went the extra step and included the key word רְהֲטִים in his story, just as other key words and expressions, such as כִּי-טֹב in Exod 2:2 and הִבָּה in Exod 2:3, 5, bring the reader back to other parts of the Genesis story.

4. The particle הֵן “if” occurs in Lev 25:20, clearly an Aramaic form, instead of the regular Hebrew form אִם. As I will show in a forthcoming article,<sup>36</sup> the jubilee pericope at the end of the book of Leviticus has three other atypical grammatical forms, all of which are to be classified as Israelian Hebrew features: a) the infinitive absolute קָנָה continuing a finite verb (Lev 25:14); b) the vocalization קָנַעַט (Lev 25:16); and c) the form עָשָׂה (Lev 25:21). For reasons that I leave for others to explain, this section of the Torah, and only this one, I might add, appears to stem from northern Israel.

There may be other Aramaisms lurking here or there in the Torah, but regardless, I believe that my survey is more or less complete. Some words that have been labeled as Aramaisms<sup>37</sup> turn out to appear in Canaanite texts as well, such as שְׁלִיט in Gen 42:6, which occurs in Ugaritic;<sup>38</sup> הִלָּךְ in Numb 18:21, 31, the root of which occurs in Phoenician,<sup>39</sup> and מְכָס in Numbers 31 (6 times), which finds a congener in the *nomen agentis* or participle form מֹכַס in Punic.<sup>40</sup> Though even if one were to accept these terms as Aramaisms (see the information conveyed in notes 39–40), still we would be dealing with isolated occurrences of such items, with no significant concentration present.

In conclusion, if the Pentateuch were the product of Persian-period Jewish scribes, as claimed in prominent places during the last several dec-

<sup>35</sup> R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), pp. 52–58.

<sup>36</sup> G. A. Rendsburg, “קטע שנת היובל (ויקרא כה, ה–כד) כחיבור צפוני,” in *Avi Hurvitz Festschrift*, ed. S. E. Fassberg and A. Maman (forthcoming).

<sup>37</sup> See, most prominently, in M. Wagner, *Die lexikalischen und grammatikalischen Aramaismen im alttestamentlichen Hebräisch* (BZAW 96; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1966), pp. 56, 76, 114.

<sup>38</sup> G. del Olmo Lete and J. Sanmartín, *Diccionario de la lengua ugarítica*, 2 vols. (Aula Orientalis Supplementa; Barcelona: Editorial AUSA, 1996–2000), p. 440. Alternative interpretations of Ugaritic *šlyt* are possible (see the dictionary entry for the word as the Š-stem of the root *lyt*), but a connection with Hebrew שְׁלִיט remains the simplest explanation.

<sup>39</sup> C. R. Krahmalkov, *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary* (OLA 90; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), p. 185. One could argue, of course, that the root הִלָּךְ “exchange” and its nominal forms passed from Aramaic into both Hebrew and Phoenician as a result of the considerable trade between and among the three groups of speakers. If this were the case, then הִלָּךְ in Num 18:21, 31 would be a true Aramaism, though again, one relatively isolated in the Torah.

<sup>40</sup> C. R. Krahmalkov, *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary*, p. 281. The point made above for הִלָּךְ may be repeated here for מְכָס; note that once more we are dealing with a lexeme from the semantic field of trade.

ades, one would expect Aramaisms or Aramaic-like features to appear throughout its 187 chapters in significant concentrations, and not, as per the main conclusion of this essay, in select chapters for specific purposes.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> My thanks to both Ziony Zevit and Clinton Moyer for their comments on an earlier version of this paper—though I alone, of course, remain responsible for the final version.