



Alejandro F Botta

Study of Assyriology and Egyptology. Bayerische-Julius-Maximilians-Universität, Würzburg, Germany.

6. EGYPT

Alejandro F. Botta

The West Asiatic presence in Egypt is well documented by epigraphic and archaeological material as well as by the presence of West Semitic loan words.¹ By the time of the New Kingdom (1539–1292 B.C.), foreigners and foreign communities were a prominent characteristic of Egyptian society.² The first possible mention of Aramaeans in Egyptian local sources,³ however, dates to much later, to the reign of Apries (Ἀπρίης), fifth king of the 26th Egyptian (Saite) dynasty during the Late Period.⁴ The inscription of Nesuḥor, chief of the Elephantine's garrison, dated to the first quarter of the 6th century B.C., mentions *3mw*-Asiatics and *sttyw*-Asiatics, and it was interpreted by B. Porten as referring to Jews and Aramaeans.⁵ From the reign of Amasis, the P. Berlin 13615 (530 B.C.) found in Elephantine mentions *rmt* *H3rw* "man of Khor/Syria" and *rmt* *'lšwr*.⁶ The Aramaic script is referred to in Demotic as *sh* *'lšwr*,⁷ which suggests that *rmt* *'lšwr* might be referring to Aramaeans.⁸

1. Sources

The Aramaic corpus from Egypt has been collected and re-edited by B. Porten and A. Yardeni.⁹ The texts written in papyrus comprise fifty letters, plus thirty-four fragments of letters and reports; fifty-eight legal documents, plus thirty-five fragments of contracts; two literary texts, plus two fragments; one copy of the Bisitun inscription; twenty-nine accounts

¹ Helck 1971: 515–576; Hoch 1994; Saretta 1997; for the Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period, see the summary in Schneider 1998: 1–30.

² In his study of foreign names during the New Kingdom, Thomas Schneider lists 680 foreign names, 430 of them of Semitic origin; cf. Schneider 1992.

³ P. Bibliothèque Nationale 215 verso, c/14; cf. Spiegelberg 1914. Previous attempts to understand the Egyptian toponym *P-irm(w)* in Amenhotep III's topographic list (ca. 1386–1349 B.C.) and in P. Anastasi III (ca. 1210 B.C.) as referring to Aramaeans are not currently accepted; cf. Lipiński 2000a: 32–34.

⁴ Herodotus (II 161); Diodorus (I 68).

⁵ Porten 1968: 15. However, see also Johnson 1999: 214, who prefers to categorize them as two different Asiatic groups without further specification.

⁶ P. Berlin 13615 + P. Berlin 13606 a–b + P. Berlin 15824 a–b; see Zauzich 1971 and id. 1992: 361–364.

⁷ Erichsen 1941: 57; Zauzich 1992: 364; Steiner 1993: 80–82.

⁸ Johnson 1999: 214.

⁹ Porten – Yardeni 1986; iid. 1989; iid. 1993; iid. 1999.

nine lists, plus forty-seven fragments of accounts, lists, and opistographs (TAD D 3.1–47); and one hundred unidentified fragments (TAD D 4.1–34; D 5.1–66). There are fourteen leather fragments (TAD D 6.1–14) and one hundred and eleven ceramic inscriptions, fifty-seven of which are letters (TAD D 7.1–57), thirteen are accounts (TAD D 8.1–13), and fifteen are lists (TAD D 9.1–15). Twenty-six inscriptions were found on whole jars (TAD D 11.1–26), two on stone plaques (TAD D 12.1–2), and five on wooden plaques (TAD D 13.1–5). There are eight seals, bullae, and stamps (TAD D 14.1–8); five libation bowls (TAD D 15.1–5); two statuettes (TAD D 16.1–2); one dedication stone (TAD D 17.1); forty-eight funerary inscriptions (TAD D 18.1–8; D 19.1–7; D 20.1–6; D 21.1–17); and fifty-four graffiti (TAD D 22.1–54).¹⁰ Three hundred and sixteen additional ostraca from Elephantine have recently been published by H. Lozachmeur.¹¹

The oldest documents written in Aramaic and found in Egypt are a letter addressed to the “lord of Kings Pharaoh” from “Adon, king of E[kron]” (TAD A 1.1; Saqqara, end of the 7th century B.C.) and a land lease between Padi (a Philistine name?), and Aḥa, an Egyptian name (TAD B 1.1; Korobis, 515 B.C.);¹² the most recent Aramaic texts come from the Hellenistic period (ca. 2nd century B.C.), when Greek replaced Aramaic as the official language.¹³

2. Language

The various samples of Aramaic in Egypt show that there were linguistic variations, perhaps due to the widespread use of Aramaic by several ethnic groups. Studies in Aramaic dialectology have shown evidence of morphological and syntactical variations within the Aramaic corpus from Egypt itself. The dialect of the proverbs of Aḥiqar has been described as an independent dialect, different from the Imperial Aramaic and dated

¹⁰ For a chronological list of the discovery of papyri, parchments, ostraca, and jar inscriptions, and an alphabetic museum list of inscriptions on pottery, wood, and stone, see Porten 1997: 393–410.

¹¹ For the complete Clermont-Ganneau collection (288 ostraca), plus thirty-three of unknown provenance (X1–33), cf. Lozachmeur 2006. Nine of the Clermont-Ganneau ostraca had been published by Porten – Yardeni (TAD D 7.2, 5, 7, 10, 16, 21, 30, 35, and 44).

¹² The oldest Aramaic inscription, if one was to accept Edward Lipiński’s epigraphic dating (Lipiński 1975b), would be TAD D 20.2 dated by him to the end of the 6th century B.C. (cf. Vittmann 2003: 106). Porten – Yardeni, on the other hand, suggest “Early 5th century BCE” (TAD D 20.2, p. 252). See also Porten 2000: 187.

¹³ Naveh 1970: 45.

ca. 750–650 B.C.;¹⁴ the narrative story and the proverbs are written in different dialects.¹⁵ The Hermopolis Letters also show peculiarities in syntax and morphology compared with the Elephantine material.¹⁶

3. Identification

Despite the numerous sources written in Aramaic, documenting the presence of Aramaeans in Egypt and describing their origins, distribution, and activities is not an easy task.¹⁷ The fact that Aramaic became the *lingua franca* of the Ancient Near East under the Persian Empire and was widely used by other groups presents difficult obstacles and makes it necessary to find additional criteria for ethnic identification in addition to language and script.¹⁸

The sources, however, do not make such identification easy. For example, in the Elephantine corpus we have several cases of the same person sometimes being described as “Aramaean” and other times as “Jewish.” Johnson has suggested that these ethnic terms served the administrative function of identifying one’s position in the Elephantine bureaucracy, and that these terms seem to reflect an organizational schema imposed with the purpose of providing an administrative structure.¹⁹ This proposal opens a new direction for understanding the Jew-Aramaean “ethnic” problem in Elephantine–Syene. We would expect that in documents not related to any administrative matter the Jews would refer to themselves as Jews. That is the case in the private letters among Jews, as mentioned above. The letter in which they refer to themselves as “Syenians who are hereditary property holders in Elephantine the Fortress”²⁰ is an offer of payment for the reconstruction of the temple, i.e., it has some administrative aspect to it. Following this reasoning, “Aramaean” would be an ethnic-administrative term used by the Persian administration, while “Jew” would be an ethnic-communitarian term. Administratively speaking, all Jews were Aramaeans. The administrative character of this identification is apparent

¹⁴ Kottsieper 1990: 181.

¹⁵ As noted in Kutscher 1970: 347–412.

¹⁶ For an analysis of the phonological, morphological, and morphosyntactic variations of Imperial Aramaic, see Folmer 1995: 705–712. For the standard grammar of Egyptian Aramaic, see Muraoka – Porten 1998.

¹⁷ None of the previous studies on the Aramaeans includes a dedicated chapter to their presence in Egypt.

¹⁸ Cf. Folmer 1995: 5f; Vittmann 2003: 84f; Winnicki 2009: 260.

¹⁹ Johnson 1999: 218.

²⁰ TAD A 4.10.

when we relate the ethnic administrative qualification of Aramaeans to their membership in a certain detachment (*degel*, lit. “standard”). None of the people described by their occupation is additionally described as a member of any of the detachments. The case of Miptaḥiah as a Jewess of Elephantine and an Aramaean according to her detachment²¹ can be better explained by considering “Aramaean” as an ethnic-administrative designation and “Jew” as an ethnic-communal designation.²² As R. Yaron observed, “every Jew can be described as Aramaean, but not every Aramaean is in turn a Jew.”²³

For our study of the Aramaeans in Egypt, therefore, we should exclude the material that can be identified as Jewish or “Judean.”

4. *Distribution and Cosmopolitanism*

Aramaic texts were found in several Egyptian locations (cf. map 2), Saqqara–Memphis, Luxor, Hermopolis, Korobis, Abydos, Thebes, Wadi el-Hudi, and Edfu (Ptolemaic period), but the richest Egyptian documentation written in Aramaic comes from Elephantine–Syene, at the southern border of Egypt, where Babylonians,²⁴ Caspians,²⁵ Khwarezmians,²⁶ Bactrians,²⁷ Medes,²⁸ Magians,²⁹ Persians, Jews, and Aramaeans, alongside the Egyptian population, used Aramaic for their business transactions.³⁰

The Elephantine corpus points to the existence of a Jewish settlement in Elephantine, where the temple of YHWH was located,³¹ and an Aramaean settlement in Syene, where the temples of Banit,³² Nabu,³³ Bethel,³⁴ and Malkat-Shemayin³⁵ were found. Both communities interacted freely with other ethnic groups.

²¹ TAD B 5.5: 1–2.

²² The same explanation can be applied to the use of the term “Jew” in TAD A 3.8.

²³ Yaron 1964: 172.

²⁴ TAD B 2.2: 19, witness.

²⁵ TAD B 2.7: 18, 19; B 3.4: 23, 24, witnesses; B 3.4: 2, parties of the document; B 3.5: 11; B 3.12: 4, 12; B 3.12: 4–5, owners of the property.

²⁶ TAD B 2.2: 2 and B 2.3: 23, parties of documents.

²⁷ Party in TAD D 2.12: 2.

²⁸ TAD B 3.6: 17, witness.

²⁹ TAD B 3.5: 24, witnesses.

³⁰ Cf. Briant 2002: 507–510.

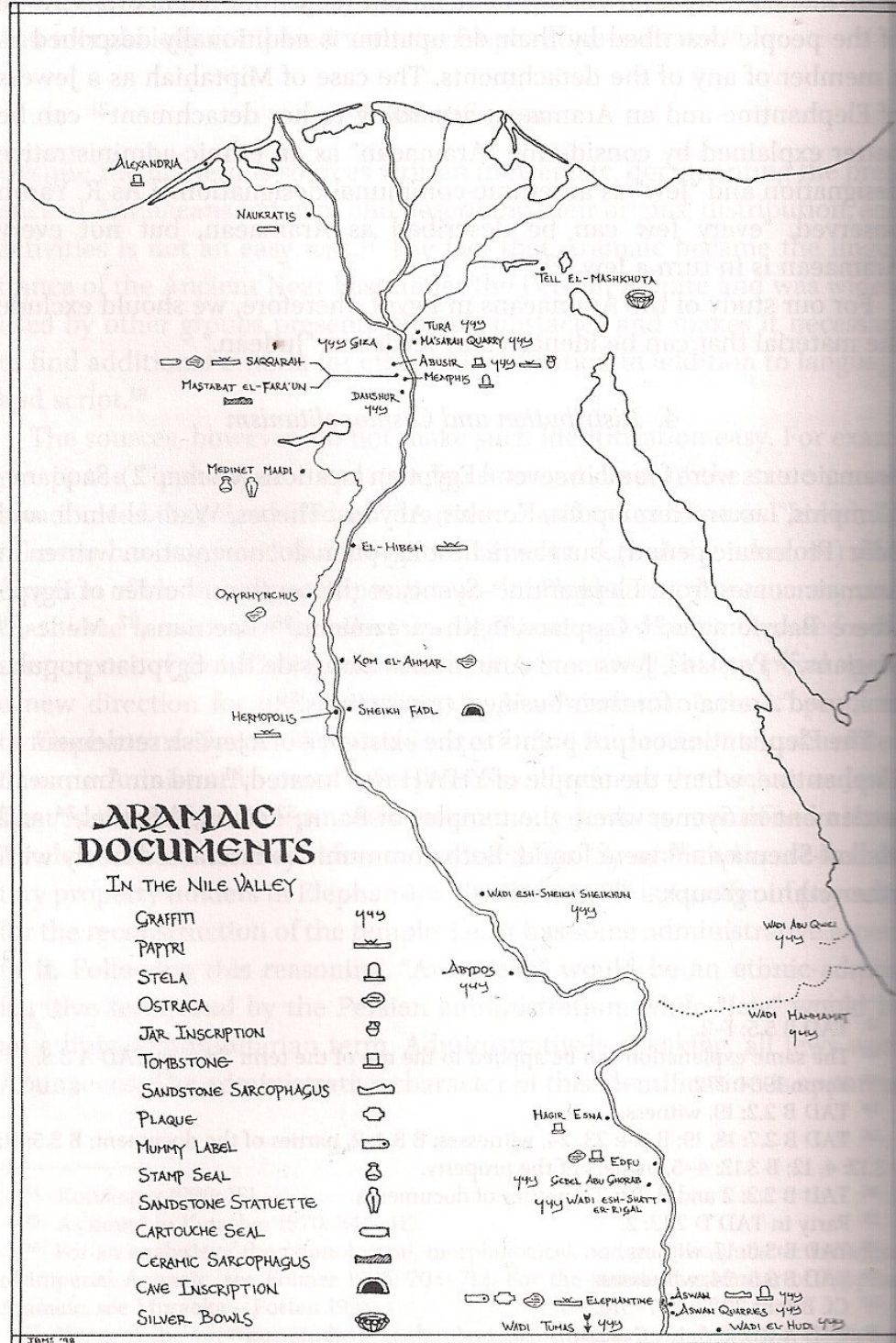
³¹ TAD A 3.3: 1; A 4.7: 6 *passim*.

³² TAD A 2.2: 1; 12; A 2.4: 1.

³³ TAD A 2.3: 1.

³⁴ TAD A 2.1: 1.

³⁵ TAD A 2.2: 1.



Map 2. Distribution of Aramaic Documents, after Porten - Yardeni 1999: 304

In Saqqara, another rich source of Aramaic documents, we find a case similar to that of Elephantine. The Saqqara papyri bear witness to the life of a multi-ethnic community, which included Babylonians, Aramaeans, Sidonians, Jews, Moabites, Ionians, Carians, and Hyrcanians.³⁶

The progressive assimilation that we find in the onomasticon in both Elephantine–Syene and in Saqqara points to the cultural exchanges among the various groups attested in both places that adopted aspects of the local Egyptian culture to various degrees.³⁷ There are examples from Memphis–Saqqara where a father bears a Semitic name while his son bears an Egyptian name,³⁸ and vice versa, fathers with Egyptian names and sons with Semitic names.³⁹ There is also one example of a brother with a Semitic and a sister with an Egyptian name (TAD B 8.4: 15). A similar situation is found in Elephantine–Syene.⁴⁰ The onomastic assimilation of the Aramaeans (cf. the Hermopolis letters), however, contrasts with the almost exclusive use of Hebrew names by the Jews.

The organization of the Aramaean communities in both Syene and Memphis was based on the *ḥaylā'* (“garrison”, “troop”),⁴¹ a term encompassing not only soldiers but also their families, to whom letters were addressed,⁴² who paid tribute,⁴³ and who received payments⁴⁴ and rations.⁴⁵ The establishment of these garrisons seems to have been modeled after the Babylonian *ḥatru*-system.⁴⁶

The *ḥaylā'* (“garrison”), was under the command of a *rab ḥaylā'* (“troop commander”).⁴⁷ The garrison was divided into detachments (*degel*), which are attested in both Memphis and Elephantine–Syene,⁴⁸ under

³⁶ Aimé-Giron 1931: 58 and Segal 1983: 8f.

³⁷ Cf. Porten et al. 2011: 85–89.

³⁸ TAD C 3.6: 10; cf. Porten 2002.

³⁹ TAD C 3.611; C 4.3: 18.

⁴⁰ See Porten et al. 2011: 85–89. This situation was also attested in Babylon, where we find Egyptians bearing Babylonian names but still being listed as Egyptians; see Unger 1931: 81f and Wasmuth 2009.

⁴¹ See Segal 1983: 7f; Porten 1968: 28–35; id. et al. 2011: 83–85.

⁴² TAD A 4 1: 1; 2: 1 passim.

⁴³ TAD C 3.5: 7 passim.

⁴⁴ TAD C 3.14–32.

⁴⁵ TAD C 3.14: 38, 41. See Briant 2002: 448f.

⁴⁶ See Briant 1975: 177 n. 51; id. 2002: 506f. See also Wright 2011: 509, who suggests that the Babylonian *ḥatru*-system “resembles more the cleruchies in which Jews served during the Hellenistic period than garrisons such as Elephantine.”

⁴⁷ TAD D 17.1. All of them with Babylonian names; cf. Porten 2000: 163 with bibliography.

⁴⁸ TAD A 4.5: 1; A 5.2: 2; 5: 7; B 2.1: 2–3.9; 2: 3–4.9–10; 3: 2; 4: 2; 6: 2; 7: 2.10; 8: 3; 9: 2; 4: 11: 2; B 3.3: 3; 4: 2; 6: 2; 8: 2; 12: 3; 13: 2; B 4.5: 2; 6: 2; B 5.2: 2–3; 5: 2; B 6.1: 2; 3: 7; B 7.1:

the supervision of a *rab degel* (“detachment commander”).⁴⁹ These garrisons were clearly perceived by the Egyptian local population as a foreign, “Asiatic” presence.⁵⁰

5. Migration

The advance of Assyrian forces and the fall of Damascus to the Assyrians in 732 B.C. could have triggered a massive displacement of the Aramaean population, and in that case Egypt would have been an attractive destination.⁵¹ Their widespread presence during the Persian period from the very north to the southern border of Egypt, however, suggests that there was not just one event that triggered their displacement into Egypt but most likely that a multiplicity of push-pull forces were at play.

E. Kraeling, after discussing previous theories about the origins of the Jewish colony in Elephantine, proposed that the Aramaean community was established as a replacement of the previous garrison, which had defected to the Nubians, and that Jewish elements settled in Elephantine into an already existing Aramaean community, perhaps under Amasis (570–526 B.C.).⁵² R. C. Steiner has suggested that the origins of the Aramaeans from Syene should be looked for in Bethel, where they settled after being deported from Rashu.⁵³ Based on the attestation of the Aramaean deities Anat-Bethel and Anat, assimilated in Elephantine to YHWH, K. van der Toorn has suggested that the Aramaeans of Syene came from Israel but originated ultimately in north Syria.⁵⁴ J. K. Winnicki concludes that “these Aramaeans may have been the descendants of refugees who had fled from Arpad, Hamath and other Syrian cities during the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions (...).” They also may have come

2; 2: 3; B 8.6: 8–9; 10: 6; C 38.3: 7–9; 4: 35–36; C 3.19: 4; D 2.1: 2; 3: 3; 5: 3; 11: 2; 12: 3–4; D 3.39: 7; D 4.12: 2; D 22.7: 1; D 23.16: 5.

⁴⁹ TAD B 8.5: 11.

⁵⁰ See Briant 1998c: 144–151.

⁵¹ 1 Kgs 11: 14–22 narrates how after David had conquered Edom, Hadad, a member of the royal house, then a young boy, fled to Egypt, taking with him subsequently people from Midian and from Paran. Although the Bible describes him as an Edomite (*dm*), it has been suggested, based on the frequent confusion of *d/r* in the Bible, that he could have been an Aramaean; cf. Lipiński 2000a: 368a.

⁵² Kraeling 1953: 41–48, esp. 48.

⁵³ Steiner 1995: 204.

⁵⁴ Van der Toorn 1992; see also Fales 1995b: 123f, who locates them near Arpad.

as merchants.⁵⁵ The Persepolis Tablets illustrate how during the Persian period various classes of workers were moved around the empire.⁵⁶

6. Popular Religion

Letters are one of the few sources for the study of the religion of the Aramaeans in Egypt. The salutation of the Aramaic letters from Egypt is typically a blessing, a prayer, or a greeting mentioning the names of one or more Aramaean and Egyptian deities⁵⁷ or their temples: *brkky lPth zy yhzny 'pyk bšlm*, "I blessed you by/to Ptaḥ that he may let me see your face in peace."⁵⁸ The blessing follows immediately the address and its object is the addressee. Such a blessing might be considered an intercessory prayer,⁵⁹ perhaps uttered in the temple itself.

Four letters sent to Syene from Memphis open with greetings to a temple (*šlm byt DN*)⁶⁰ of Bethel⁶¹ and the Queen of Heaven (*malkat šemayin*),⁶² Banit,⁶³ and Nabu,⁶⁴ as one sent to Elephantine greets the Temple of YHWH there.⁶⁵ In 1974, J. A. Fitzmyer wrote what today remains true: "The greeting is peculiar, and its full implications have not yet been fully explored."⁶⁶ Is it a salutation ("Greetings, Temple of Nabu"), as J. A. Fitzmyer assumed, or an elliptical prayer for the well-being of the temple,

⁵⁵ Winnicki 2009: 261.

⁵⁶ Mathieson – Bettles – Davies – Smith 1995: 39; Briant 2002: 429–435; Wasmuth 2009: 134.

⁵⁷ Ptaḥ in TAD A 2.1: 2; 2.2: 2; 2.3: 2; 2.4: 2; 2.5: 2; 2.6: 1 coming from Memphis and addressed to Luxor and Syene.

⁵⁸ Cf. Couroyer 1978: 578–581; Dion 1981: 63; Schwiderski 2000: 126–128. Muraoka – Porten 1998: 198f translated the formula, "I said to Ptah a blessing for you: 'May he show me your face in peace!'"

⁵⁹ Like those discussed by Sweeney 1985: 213–230.

⁶⁰ TAD A 2.1–4.

⁶¹ TAD A 2.6: 1–2. Bethel is also attested in several names: Bethelnathan (TAD A 2.1: 3.7); Bethelshezib (TAD A 2.5: 6), etc.; cf. Vincent 1937: 562–592 and Porten 1969: 118f.

⁶² The Queen of Heaven (*nbt pt* in Egyptian) was an epithet applied to the goddess Anat; cf. Porten 1968: 164f and van der Toorn 1992: 96.

⁶³ TAD A 2.2: 4. Banit is one of the names of Ishtar and appears in several Aramaean names, Banitsar, Banitsarel, Makkibanit, etc.

⁶⁴ TAD A 2.3. A Babylonian deity. The inscription on a ceramic sarcophagus (TAD D 18: 1) mentions a priest of Nabu, Sheil, residing in Syene. Nabu is also attested in the Sheikh Fadl Cave Inscription (TAD D 23.1.6: 7; 16a: 2) and in names from Memphis and Syene: Nabunathan, Nabuša (TAD A 2.1: 2.13; A 2.2: 2.6; A 2.5: 1.10), Nabušežib, Nabubarach (TAD D 11.9: 2), Nabudalah, etc.; cf. Porten 1968: 119f.

⁶⁵ TAD A 3.3: 1; cf. Vincent 1937: 25–60, 312–391.

⁶⁶ It has no known epistolary parallels; cf. Fitzmyer 1974: 212. The attempt of Fales 1987: 455f to attach it to the following address appears forced.

“Peace be with the Temple of Nabu,” as we had previously suggested.⁶⁷ A letter inscribed on an ostrakon from Yarḥu to Haggai⁶⁸ also mentions the gods Bel, Nabu, Šamaš,⁶⁹ and Nergal, showing some degree of continuity between the gods worshipped by the Aramaeans in Egypt and those worshipped in Syria.⁷⁰ Gods worshipped or revered by Aramaeans in Egypt include Addu (Adad), Anat (the Queen of Heaven), Atta, Attar, Ba‘al, Banit, Bel, Bethel, El, Eshem, Hadad, Horus, Ḥerem, Mar and Marah, Marduk, Nabu, Nanai, Nergal, Nusku, Osiris, Ptaḥ, Šahr (moon-god), Šamaš, and Yahu. H. Niehr has suggested the following religious hierarchy among the gods mentioned in Aḥiqar: Hadad, Divine Council, El, Šamaš, and the rest of the gods.⁷¹

The Aramaean onomasticon shows a high percentage of theophoric names, (Nabu and Bethel-names are the most popular) expressing aspects of their personal piety, for example,⁷² NBWŠZB (Nabušežib)⁷³ and its short form NBWŠH (Nabuša), “Nabu Rescued,”⁷⁴ NBWNTN (Nabunathan), “Nabu Gave,”⁷⁵ NBWŠRH (Nabušarah), “Nabu Released,”⁷⁶ ŠZBNEW (Šezibnabu), “Nabu Saved,”⁷⁷ NBW^cQB (Nabuaqab), “Nabu Protected,”⁷⁸ NBWŠDQ (Nabušadaq), “Nabu Is Just,”⁷⁹ NBWBRK (Nabubarach), “Nabu Blessed,”⁸⁰ NBWNRV (Nabunuri), and “Nabu Is My Light.”⁸¹

Funerary inscriptions attest to the high level of acculturation of Aramaeans in Egypt.⁸² A famous example is the stele TAD D 20.30 (cf. fig. XLV),⁸³ which displays an inscription in Hieroglyph and another in Aramaic.⁸⁴ The Hieroglyph reads:

⁶⁷ Botta 1996–1999: 7; see also Botta – Porten forthcoming.

⁶⁸ TAD D 7.30: 2.

⁶⁹ Attested also in the proper name Šamašnuri (TAD B 4.2: 12; D 18.16: 1).

⁷⁰ Cf. Niehr 2003: 185–195.

⁷¹ Niehr 2007: 20.

⁷² Cf. Kornfeld 1978.

⁷³ TAD A 2.1: 15; B 8.4: 1,13; CG X2 cv 8, L, 1, IIIa; cf. Lozachmeur 2006: 481.

⁷⁴ TAD A 2.1: 2.13; A 2.2: 2.6; A 2.5: 1.10.

⁷⁵ TAD A 2.3: 14; A 3.1R: 3; A 3.1V: 4, 6; B 2.8: 11.12; D 9.9: 4; D 22.30: 1.

⁷⁶ TAD B 8.4: 1.

⁷⁷ TAD A 3.1v: 1.

⁷⁸ TAD A 6.2: 23; 28; C 3.13: 54; C 3.15: 20, [31].

⁷⁹ TAD C 3.8 III B: 28.

⁸⁰ TAD D 11.9: 2.

⁸¹ TAD C 4.8: 8.

⁸² Cf. Wasmuth 2010.

⁸³ Formerly ÄM 7707; cf. Porten 2000: 188; Vittmann 2003: 106, 110; TM 91158.

⁸⁴ Translation by Porten and Gee; see Porten – Gee 2001: 289–295 and Vittmann 2003: 106, 110.

An offering which the king gives (to) Osiris, foremost of the westerners, great god, lord of Abydos, so that they may give a good burial in the necropolis and a good reputation upon earth to the one revered before the great god, lord of heaven, Akhatabu.

The Aramaic inscription reads:

Blessed be Aba, son of Ḥor, and Aḥatbu, daughter of Adiya, both of Khastemeḥi, before Osiris, the god. Absali, son of Abah, (whose) mother is Aḥatabu so said in the year 4 month of Meḥir (of) the king of kings, Xerxes.

7. *Legal Traditions*

The study of the patronymics of the Elephantine–Syene scribes shows that the majority of scribes with Hebrew–Aramaic patronymics were active in Elephantine and that the majority of scribes with Aramaic or Akkadian patronymics were active in Syene. The consequences of the various origins of the scribes' patronymics for the legal formulary were noticed early by R. Yaron, who stated that: "The nationality of the scribes is of obvious importance, since it was their task to supply the proper formulas for the documents, to find the proper legal expression for the wishes of the parties. In doing so, a scribe would naturally draw on his own legal system, with which he was familiar."⁸⁵

R. Yaron's statement supports the assumption that the Aramaic documents written in Egypt did not belong to one and only one legal and/or scribal tradition.⁸⁶ We postulate the existence of six scribal traditions attested by the Syenian scribes: the Abah tradition, represented by the document drawn up by his son Itu (TAD B 2.2); the Nabuzeribni tradition, represented by the documents drawn up in Syene by his son Attarshuri (TAD B 2.3 and B 2.4) and his great-grandson Nabutukulti in Elephantine (TAD B 2.11); the Nabunathan tradition, represented by the document drawn up by his son Peṭeese (TAD B 2.8); the Nergal(u)šezib tradition, represented by the document drawn up by his son Raukhšana (TAD B 3.9); the Ešemšezib tradition, represented by the document drawn up by his grandson Šaweram (TAD B 3.13); and the Mannuki tradition, whose

⁸⁵ Yaron 1961: 12f.

⁸⁶ Cf. Botta 2006. A scribal tradition is defined by the transmission of the skills to produce a legal instrument from father or teacher to son or student. Variations in the formulary could be attributed to different scribal schools. A legal tradition is the sum of individual laws and the types of institutions created to enforce them. Nuzi is one of the best-documented cases of several scribal traditions within a city, see Friedman: 1982: 199–211; for Emar, see Faist 2008.

only attestation is the document drawn up by his son Bunni (TAD B 3.2).⁸⁷ In addition, we consider the papyri from Saqqara (TAD B 8.1–4; B 8.6–12, and B 5.6) and TAD B 1.1 as belonging to separate scribal traditions from the documents of Elephantine–Syene.⁸⁸

Within this variety of scribal traditions, however, certain common features can be ascertained within the Aramaic corpus. The legal documents are regularly composed according to a general objective framework (date, parties, scribe, witnesses, endorsement) into which the operative section is inserted.⁸⁹ They are drawn up in the first person by the party undertaking obligations without any dialogue reflecting the offer and acceptance of the terms described in the contract. Instead, there is usually a certificate of performance and a declaration of satisfaction with the quality of the performance. The operative section is characterized by its subjective and personal quality; it constitutes the core of the document's legal function, describing the legal changes that have taken place. For every type of transaction, there is a corresponding set of legal formulae constituting the operative section.⁹⁰

8. Literature

The two major Aramaic literary works coming from Egypt are the Proverbs of Aḥiqar and P. Amherst 63.⁹¹ The story of the Aramaean sage Aḥiqar⁹² (dated to the late 5th century B.C.), “a wise and skillful scribe” (*spr ḥkym wṁhyr*) and “[be]arer of the seal of Sennacherib, King of Assy[ria]” (*[sb]yt*

⁸⁷ The place of production of the document is not mentioned in the text. Porten et al. 2011: 206 consider it as coming from Elephantine. We consider Bunni to be from Syene because of his patronymic, but TAD B 3.2 was possibly drawn up in Elephantine according to his “place of execution” formula.

⁸⁸ Bunni, son of Mannuki, bearer of an Akkadian patronymic, and whose only attested document does not mention the place of production is considered here to belong to the Syenian scribes.

⁸⁹ Cf. Yaron: 1957 and Porten et al. 2011: 82f. For detailed studies on the Aramaic legal sources, see Yaron 1961; Verger 1965; Muffs 1969; Cussini 1992; Lipiński 2000a: 557–597; Porten 2003; Gross 2008; Botta 2009.

⁹⁰ For a discussion of the component of the document's formulary, see Botta 2009: 44–56. For a detailed study of the structure of the Aramaic deeds of conveyance, see Gross 2008: 20–26.

⁹¹ Only a few lines remain from the tale of Ḥor bar Punesh (TAD C 1.2); see Porten 2004.

⁹² See TAD C 1.1 for the 1993 critical edition by B. Porten and A. Yardeni; followed by Grelot 2001; Schwiderski 2004: 83–104; Contini 2005: 113–139; Niehr 2007; Weigl 2010. For criticism of the rearrangement of sheets by Porten – Yardeni (cf. Yardeni 1994: 77 n. 9), see Kottsieper 2008: 110f; id. 2009: 412–414. For connections with Egyptian wisdom, see Quack 2011.

ʿzqth zyśnh ʿryb),⁹³ who served as counselor to Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, is without doubt the best-known and most influential Aramaic text found in Egypt.⁹⁴ The text includes a biographical section telling the story of the wise counselor; the betrayal by his nephew and protégée, Nadin; and a collection of sayings, written in a different dialect than the biographical narrative and whose origin should be looked for in 8th-century southern Syria.⁹⁵

P. Amherst 63 (dated to the 4th century B.C.) is a liturgical Aramaic composition, written in Demotic script, for use in the New Year's festival. It has been suggested that it could have been used by the Aramaeans of Syene. The text mentions the gods: Nanai from Ayakku, Nebo from Borsippa, Bethel, Mar from Rash, Marah from Shur, Ba'al from Zephon, Bel from Babylon, Belit from Esangila, Pidra[i] from Raphia, the throne of Horus and Osiris from the Negeb, Anat, and Mami. The text also includes a psalm that closely resembles Psalm 20 and that properly serves as a conclusion for this chapter:

May Horus answer us in our straits.
 May the Lord answer us in our straits.
 O Bow(man)-in-the-Heavens, shine forth.
 Send your messenger from the temple of Arash.
 And from Zephon may Horus sustain us.
 May Horus grant to us what is in our heart
 May Mar grant to us as is in our heart.
 All counsels may Horus fulfill.
 May the Lord (*'dny*) not diminish any request of our heart.
 Some by the bow, some by the spear.
 (But) behold (as for) us, the lord Mar our god (*'Ihn*) (is) Hor.
 May our numen (*'In*) be with us.
 May the numen (*'l*) of Bethel answer us on the morrow.
 May Ba'al of Heavens (*b'l šmy'n*), the Lord (*mr*) bless.
 For your pious ones (are) your blessings.⁹⁶ (P. Amherst 63 XI 11–19)

⁹³ TAD C 1.1: 1–3.

⁹⁴ For the development of the Aḥiqar tradition, see Contini – Grottanelli 2005: 40f and Niehr 2007: 23–31.

⁹⁵ Kottsieper 2008: 111; but see also Niehr 2007: 22f.

⁹⁶ Cf. Vleeming – Wesselius 1982; Nims – Steiner 1983; Zevit 1990.