This paper is intended as a historical and critical contribution to the question of the Aramaic loan-words in Ge'ez. Like loan-words elsewhere, these Aramaic words, if correctly interpreted, are evidence of cultural contacts and influences. Such evidence is especially welcome if it can shed some light on so obscure a subject as the rise of Christianity in ancient Ethiopia and the circumstances in which the Bible was translated into Ge'ez. The potential significance of the Aramaic loan-words in this connexion has, of course, long been realized. The question is whether certain conclusions which seem to be widely accepted at present rest on sound foundations. I must confess that I have for some time been troubled by doubts.

The subject is large and extends into fields which lie outside my competence. I shall therefore confine myself to a few points on which I believe I have been able to inform myself from primary sources.

The correct interpretation of the evidence is, in our case, to a large extent a matter of Aramaic dialectology. Before we draw conclusions, we must try to make sure to which Aramaic dialect a given word belongs. Syriac is Aramaic, but Aramaic is not necessarily Syriac. It will not do to speak of "Syriac", if some of the most important words are manifestly not Syriac, and it will not do either to evade the issue and to speak of "Aramaic" generally, without an attempt at closer specification, where such specification is possible. Everything depends precisely on the kind of Aramaic from which a given word has come into Ge'ez.

Unfortunately, however, it is easier to formulate such a rule than to put it into practice. The number of words exhibiting distinctive dialectal features is very limited. Most of the words we have to deal with are dialectally neutral. There arises the question whether in such cases we must resign ourselves and abstain from drawing specific conclusions.

This question is closely bound up with another problem. Must we reckon with more than one dialect, or can we assume that the Aramaic words form a homogeneous group? If we could be
sure that they are a homogeneous group, there would be no problem at all: the conclusions which we can draw from the words showing distinctive dialectal features would then apply, by implication, also to the dialectally neutral ones. Unfortunately the question does not seem to admit of a conclusive answer either way. If I may state my personal belief, I should say that words that may be reasonably assumed to belong to the Aksum period and are in common and general use in all parts of the Ethiopic Bible convey indeed the impression of being homogeneous. On the other hand, where formal dialectal criteria fail us, it is impossible to attribute a given Aramaic word to a specific dialect except by semantic arguments; and these involve the danger of arguing in a vicious circle. I believe, therefore, that it is a sound working procedure to start from the assumption that Aramaic words fulfilling the conditions of antiquity and of general use throughout the Ethiopic Bible are homogeneous. The burden of proof must, I think, rest upon those who may wish to maintain the contrary.

Having mentioned antiquity and the Aksum period, it may be as well to remind ourselves that our inquiry suffers from the uncertainty which affects all questions regarding the language and literature of ancient Ethiopia. In the complete absence of direct documentary evidence a given literary text can be attributed to the Aksum period only on internal criteria or on a priori grounds. Chief among the former is direct translation from a Greek original: it is assumed, probably rightly, that direct translation from the Greek is out of the question in the Second Period of Ethiopic literature. This applies also to the Ethiopic Bible. On a priori grounds it is unlikely that the Bible should have been translated very much later than the introduction of Christianity; and on internal evidence it is clear that the Ethiopic Bible was, in the first instance, translated directly from the Greek. I am aware that some scholars are not yet convinced that such was really the case. I can only say that all the evidence known to me leads to this conclusion, and that no evidence to the contrary has come to my knowledge. But the researches of Dillmann, Guidi, and many others, have made it clear that the old translation is heavily overlaid with the results of different revisions from other sources, including the Syriac Peshitta, as a rule through the medium of Arabic. Therefore, the mere fact that an Aramaic word occurs in our ordinary editions, especially as regards the New Testament, does not yet prove that it formed part of the old translation.
However, we must not indulge in scepticism for its own sake: I should say that the authenticity of words in common use need not be doubted unless there is some specific reason. Let me mention an example. While most of the Aramaic words are religious terms, there are also a few which denote mundane things, among them "banot" "shop, tavern". Dialectically, this word is neutral: it can be Jewish Aramaic as well as Syriac, but fortunately no important issues depend on the question whether the shopkeepers from whom the Ethiopians borrowed this word were Jews or Christians. The singular banot is well attested, and there is no particular reason to doubt its antiquity. But at Acts xxviii. 15 the famous Tres Tabernae are rendered by šalastu hawānit in the plural. Now hawānit is not an Ethiopic plural form: Ga'oz has no gawābir, corresponding, as it were, to the Arabic fawd'āl, the plural of fa'āl. Hawānit is, therefore, not Ethiopic but Arabic, and Tres Tabernae is actually rendered by at-jalāfat hawānit in several Arabic versions of Acts. As a matter of fact, the whole of verse 15 comes from an Arabic version, made from the Syriac Peshitta, and current in Egypt as textus receptus, on a par with the "Egyptian Vulgate" of the Gospels.

Before entering upon details, it may be of some interest to cast a glance at the history of our problem, so far as I have been able to trace it.

The first reference to lexical agreements between Aramaic and Ethiopic occurs, I believe, in Ludolf's Commentarius, in the section De facilitate linguae Aethiopicae. Ludolf's friend Louis Picques, docteur de Sorbonne, had noticed that there are in Ethiopic many "Chaldaean" (i.e. Jewish-Aramaic) and Syriac words which do not occur in Arabic. This seemed strange to him (mirum videbatur), because Ethiopic grammar is so similar to Arabic grammar. Ludolf proceeds to cite a few examples, among them "Chald. & Syr." = Eth. baymnawot "faith", to which word we shall have to revert later. But the first item in the list is somewhat surprising: 渼w "venire" = Eth. bawad "intrare": 渼 is, of course, neither "Chaldaean" nor Syriac, but Hebrew, and on the other hand the root does exist in Arabic. Presumably this is a mere inadvertence on the part of either Picques or

---

1 Dillmann, Lexicon, col. 109.
2 This is the reading of the British and Foreign Bible Society text as revised by Praetorius; it is attested by Brit. Mus. Or. 328, fo. 35r. The other MSS. in the Brit. Mus. have hawānit, as in Platt's edition.
3 Graf, Geschichts der christl. arab. Lit. 1, 173-4.
ARAMAIC, SYRIAC, AND GE‘EZ

Ludolf, but it also seems to suggest that they were still unable to distinguish between loan-words and words belonging to the common Semitic stock. This need not surprise us: the distinction could not be made before the rise of Comparative Grammar proper, that is, before the first half of the nineteenth century.

In Dillmann’s Lexicon Aramaic words like baymanot are, of course, recognized as loan-words. His Prolegomena include a short but excellent paragraph on verba peregrina, classified according to languages of origin, with the relevant word-lists in footnotes. The Aramaic words derive “ab Aramaeis et Judaeis Aramaice loquentibus” and denote for the most part “quae ad res sacras et literarias pertinent”. It is interesting to note that he distinguishes between “res sacrae” and “res Christianae”, words for the latter being for the most part of Greek origin. The Aramaic words were, according to Dillmann, borrowed already at the time when the Abyssinians ruled over South Arabia and had contacts with the Jews of Arabia. Nothing more sensible has ever been written on this subject, and if Dillmann’s brief treatment, supplemented by Nöldeke’s chapter on “Hebrew and Aramaic words in Ethiopic”,1 had remained the last word on the question, there would have been no need for the present paper.

A theory attempting to connect the Aramaic words and other Aramaic features with the Christianization of Ethiopia and with the translation of the Bible into Ethiopic was put forward in the 1880’s independently by Gildemeister,2 Guidi,3 and Praetorius.4 They differ as to whether the missionaries who brought Christianity to Ethiopia were also the translators of the Bible: Gildemeister dates the Bible translation much later than the beginnings of Christianization, while Guidi and Praetorius tend to identify missionaries and translators. They agree in regarding the Aramaic words as evidence that the missionaries were speakers of Aramaic, or more exactly of Syriac; that these missionaries were the creators of the Christian-Ethiopic literary language; and that it

1 Neue Beiträge zur semit. Sprachwissenschaft (1910), pp. 52–46.
4 Anth. Gramm. (1886), § 1, p. 5; Lit. Centralblatt (1893), col. 1002; sp. Utext und Übersetzungen der Bibel (Leipzig, 1897), p. 149.
was they who introduced the Aramaic words, as expressions for fundamental notions of the Christian faith. Gildemeister quotes the following examples: baymānōt “faith”, 'arami “heathen”, 'ortī “the Jewish law, the Torah, the Pentateuch (or rather Octateuch)”, si'o’ “the nether world, Hades”.

Although Gregory, out of loyalty to Tischendorf’s old collaborator, printed Gildemeister’s views in full, he proceeded immediately to express his disagreement. He argued that the words chosen as examples by Gildemeister were not really Syriac, but originally Jewish-Aramaic. Therefore they could not, according to him, be looked upon as evidence for Syriac, and more especially, as Gildemeister had contended, monophysitic connexions.

Gregory seems to have instinctively felt the weakness of Gildemeister’s theory, but his criticism does not quite hit the mark and requires some modification in order to do so. It is, of course, true that the words chosen by Gildemeister are ultimately of Jewish and Palestinian origin. They had, however, become fully naturalized in Syriac, and there is no reason why they should not have come into Ethiopic through speakers of Syriac. What is remarkable about them is rather their semantics. While baymānōt is undeniably a “christlicher Hauptbegriff”, it is really somewhat astonishing to see notions like “heathen”, “Torah”, “Sheol”, described as “christliche Hauptbegriffe”. Nevertheless, these words do not suffice to prove Gregory’s argument. To drive it home, we must rely on words which differ characteristically from Syriac either in form or in meaning or in both, or which do not exist in Syriac at all. It was Wellhausen, I believe, who first drew attention in this connexion to Ṣawat “alms, charity”, which is quite unknown in Syriac. Other words which cannot be of Syriac origin are tābot and ḫa’ot. I should like to recapitulate briefly the evidence.

The most markedly Jewish of these words is no doubt Ṣawat. As Dillmann seems to have been the first to recognize, it represents the Aramaic plural of the Hebrew nāb “commandment”; nāb is common in the Palestinian Targum as a rendering of nāb “commandments”, and in Midrashic literature it occurs precisely in the meaning “alms”, which Ṣawat has in Ga’az. As Nöldeke rightly says, “this word alone would suffice to establish the fact that the ancient Abyssinians had undergone Jewish

1 “Wörter für christliche Hauptbegriffe” (Gildemeister), “Fremdwörter für die neuen Begriffe der christlichen Lehre” (Praetorius).
2 Göttingische Gesellschafts Anzeigen (1907), p. 171.
3 Lecicon, col. 228.
ARAMAIC, SYRIAC, AND GE’EZ

religious influence”.1 This conclusion seems indeed inescapable.
It was therefore with some surprise that I recently read the follow-
ing remark: “... I do not see why mapvat alone would suffice to
demonstrate Jewish religious influence among the Abyssinians.
This expression as well as fa’ot ‘idol’, gabamam ‘hell’ [etc.] go
back simply (sic) to the Biblical text that was translated into
Ethiopic about the fifth century, and thus the Hebrew expressions
were kept.”2 This remark would make sense only if the Ethiopic
Bible—including the New Testament—had been translated from
the Hebrew, and from a rather peculiar kind of Hebrew at that: a
sort of Hebrew where the word map was existed, and where map
had the meaning of the Ethiopic muset. I wasted a couple of
tedious hours in checking the relevant passages—about 180—in
order to be able to state positively that not in a single case does
mapvat correspond to map in the Hebrew.

I can be brief about fa’ot and tibot.

As regards fa’ot, the Syriac form of this word is not fa’ot, as in
Jewish Aramaic, but fa’ot; on the semantic side, the Syriac
words means just “error”; the meaning “idol”, which fa’ot has
in Go’az, is peculiar to Jewish Aramaic.

The prototype of tibot “Noah’s ark; the Ark of the Covenant;
shrine, ve’os (I Cor. iii. 16; II Cor. vi. 16)” exhibits characteristi-
cally different forms in Jewish Aramaic and Syriac respectively:
tibot (tibot) as against tabot; Syriac is thus ruled out as the
source of tibot.

As regards bayamnoot, the prevailing opinion seems to be that
it is Christian and “Syriac”. Nöldeke argues that the Jewish
word does not in the same degree possess a specifically
religious meaning.3 Guidi is even more positive: “it is to be noted
that this important word is indeed common to all Aramaic
dialects, but in the sense of fath ‘faith’, i.e. the Christian faith,
it is peculiar to Syriac from the N.T. on—a clear proof that those
who introduced it into Go’az were Syrians (siri)”.4

Whatever the real differences between muset and fath, the
actual use of bayamnoot shows that the Ethiopians were less sensi-
tive to them than Nöldeke and Guidi. If the Ethiopians had
received bayamnoot with the specialized meaning of “la fede

1 “Dies Wort würde allein genüßen, jüdischen religiösen Einfluß bei den
alten Abessinisern zu konstatieren”, New Beitr. p. 36.
3 New Beiträge, p. 35; cf. ibid. p. 23.
ARAMAIC, SYRIAC, AND GE'EZ

...it would be rather hard to understand that they should have used this word without hesitation in translating the Old Testament to render πιστός in its pre-Christian meaning or meanings. This is, however, precisely what they did. Of course, the word πιστός is much more prominent in the N.T. than in the LXX. In the LXX (not counting Maccabees) it occurs only 45 times as against 245 times in the N.T. Yet out of those 45 places in the O.T. and the Apocrypha it is translated 28 times by baymānot. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to believe that in the Ethiopic N.T. πιστός is invariably, or at least with very few exceptions, rendered by baymānot, as it is indeed by baymānūta in the Syriac Peshitta. If we examine those books of the N.T. in which πιστός is of most frequent occurrence, we obtain rather surprising results. In Romans, where πιστός occurs 38 times, it is rendered by baymānot only 8 times; in Galatians 6 times out of 22, and in Hebrews 9 times out of 32. The fact is that baymānot as equivalent of πιστός, Christian as well as pre-Christian, has a serious competitor in the indigenous root ā-m-n, especially the infinitives 'āmin and ta'ammo. Since 'āmin occurs in specifically Christian contexts like ba-'āmin ba-'Iyasus Kristos bâ πιστός 'Iησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Gal. ii. 16) the difference between baymānot, on the one hand, and 'āmin and ta'ammo on the other cannot be theological but must be purely linguistic. The question requires closer study than I have had time to devote to it; my impression is that the difference is indeed that between an abstract noun and an infinitive, the latter referring rather to an individual act of faith than to faith in the abstract. But this needs careful verification.

I do not wish to be misunderstood. I am not positively contending that baymānot must be of Jewish origin. There is no positive evidence to that effect. All I do contend is that the arguments which have been brought forward in favour of a Christian-Syriac origin fall short of proving what they are intended to prove. The evidence seems to me to favour the conclusion that baymānot belongs to the same group as msāwāt, tābot, tā'ot, etc., and that its use in the Ethiopic Bible is actually easier to understand, if it was in the first instance borrowed as a Jewish word.

About the time when Gildemeister, Guidi, and Praetorius were propounding their theories, there occurred an important event in the field of N.T. textual studies, namely the appearance of Westcott and Hort's edition of the Greek N.T., and especially of the Introduction written by Hort. Everybody is familiar with the
nomenclature which they used for the main types, or forms, or families, of the text: Neutral, Alexandrian, Western, and Syrian. But in order to make intelligible a theory which tries to strengthen the case for Syriac-speaking translators of the Ethiopic Bible, it may not be superfluous to recapitulate as briefly as possible what is meant by the “Western” text and by the “Syrian” text. The chief representative of the “Western” text is the Codex Bezae at Cambridge (D), a bilingual, Greek and Latin, manuscript, whose readings are often supported by the Old Latin version. After this name had come into general use among students of the N.T. text, it was found to be a misnomer, since the same readings also occur in Oriental versions. Instead of trying to state the matter in my own words, I had better quote a passage from Hort’s Introduction (p. 108):

[The appellation “Western”] was given at a time when the patristic evidence was very imperfectly known and its bearing ill understood; and was suggested by the fact that the prominent representatives of the group were Graeco-Latin MSS, certainly written in the West, and the Old Latin version, which throughout its range from Carthage to Britain is obviously Western. The fitness is more open to question since it has become evident that readings of this class were current in ancient times in the East as well as the West, and probably to a great extent originated there. On the whole we are disposed to suspect that the “Western” text took its rise in North-western Syria or Asia Minor, and that it was soon carried to Rome, and thence spread in different directions to North Africa and most of the countries of Europe. From North-western Syria it would easily pass through Palestine and Egypt to Ethiopia. But this is at present hardly more than a speculation; nor do any critical results depend on it. Whatever may have been the original home of the “Western” text, a change of designation would now cause more confusion than it would remove, and it remains true that the only continuous and approximately pure monuments of the “Western” texts now surviving have every right to the name.

“Western”, as used with regard to the textual history and the textual criticism of the N.T., is thus a rather extreme case of a purely conventional technical term, of اصطلاح as opposed to لغة or لائحة, a word which cannot be understood by reference to ordinary usage, but requires to be explained by a specialist of the تفسیر concerned.

The appellation “Syrian” is more in keeping with ordinary usage, inasmuch as this text-form is believed to have taken shape in Syria, more exactly at Antioch; it is believed to represent the
Lucianic recension. However, the “Syrian” text very soon ceased to be confined to its original home; in Byzantine times it was the prevalent text throughout Greek Christendom.

In the same year which saw the second edition of Westcott–Hort (1896) there appeared L. Hackspill’s study of the Ethiopic version of the Gospels, undertaken under the stimulus of Westcott–Hort and on the basis of the criteria set up by them. It was a particularly valuable feature of Hackspill’s work that he based his examination on neither of the two existing editions, the old Roman edition (1548) reprinted in the London Polyglot and the Bible Society text, but on the old Paris MS., no. 32 in Zotenberg’s catalogue, to which attention had been drawn by Zotenberg himself and by Guidi. Hackspill’s result was that the Greek text underlying the Ethiopic version was what he called in German “syrisch-occidental”. In this compound adjective “syrisch” corresponds to Westcott–Hort’s “Syrian”, and “occidental” to their “Western”, meaning to say that the Greek text in question contained both “Syrian” and “Western” elements.

Hackspill’s study deservedly acquired authoritative standing and his results found their way into the standard books on the history of Ethiopia and of Ethiopian literature. His “syrisch-occidental” thus needed to be turned into Italian and became “siro-occidentale”. Unfortunately, however, taken out of its context and placed before readers who need not be familiar with the “Syrian” text and the “Western” text, neither “syrisch-occidental” nor “siro-occidentale” is likely to be understood in the sense in which the appellation was meant by Hackspill. A German reader might easily imagine that “syrisch-occidental” was a somewhat quaint way of saying “westsyrisch”, as opposed to “ostsyrisch”; and I am told that “siro-occidentale” can be legitimately used with this meaning. When Conti Rossini writes of a Greek text which was current “nelle chiese siro-occidentali”, one suspects that the great historian must indeed have meant “West Syrian” in the geographical sense; “siro-occidentale” as intended by Hackspill is meaningless if applied to Churches. And when Guidi, after stating that the testo from which the Ethiopic version was made “è il siro-occidentale di S. Luciano”, goes on to say “onde è che in questa traduzione figurano parole aramaiche

e nominatamente siriache”,¹ the word onde “whence” is somewhat infelicitously chosen: the reader is inevitably led to believe that the use of the Antiochian text on the part of the translators implies that they were speakers of Syriac; and the addition of the words “di S. Luciano” shows clearly that even Guidi understood “occidentale” not in the textual (“Western”) but in the purely geographical sense; in this purely geographical use the word “western” adds nothing to the mere “Syrian”, because there has never been an “East Syrian” text, from which it might be desirable to distinguish the text of Antioch as West Syrian. If a man like Guidi was capable of this misunderstanding, we cannot blame a contemporary scholar for writing, in English, “that the Bible translations into Ethiopic were made from a West Syrian recension”.²

To sum up: in the light of the linguistic evidence it seems hardly possible that the Aramaic words should have been introduced by Syriac-speaking missionaries or Bible translators:³ some of the words are characteristically non-Syriac, while none of them is characteristically and exclusively Syriac. The formal linguistic evidence is paralleled and supported by the semantic evidence. None of these words is distinctively Christian in meaning. What they denote belongs to the Judaic leaven in Christianity. It is perhaps remarkable that perfectly good indigenous words were found for notions like “baptism”, “saviour”, “cross”, “resurrection”. The interpretation of these linguistic facts in terms of history may be left to those who are better qualified than I am. As regards the supposed textual evidence for Syriac-speaking Bible-translators, I hope to have shown that at least some of it rests on mere verbal misunderstanding.

³ Although I cannot accept his premises, I agree, therefore, with Gildemeister’s conclusion that the formation of “ecclesiastical” Ethiopic and the translation of the Bible belong to different periods.