Midden-Aramese schriften in Syrië, Mesopotamië, Perzië en aangrenzende gebieden
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MIDDLE ARAMAIC SCRIPTS in SYRIA, MESOPOTAMIA, PERSIA and adjoining territories.

As more and more Aramaic textual material was discovered during the past a growing interest was taken in integral research on the various Aramaic scripts. The first part of this research was carried out by J. Naveh. In his book *The Development of the Aramaic Script* (Jerusalem 1970) Naveh has described the development of the Aramaic script from the earliest manifestations (c. 9th century B.C.) up to and including the period of the Imperial Aramaic script (c. 3rd century B.C.).

Taking this research as its starting-point, the present study deals with the Middle Aramaic scripts in Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia and adjoining territories (c. 3rd century B.C. - c. 3rd century A.D.).

After an introductory first chapter, the Palmyrene script is discussed in the second chapter. One of the conclusions is that it is impossible to establish a clear chronological development of this script, although some of the characters underwent graphical changes in the course of time. In addition, it is suggested that the current distinction between a cursive and a monumental Palmyrene script has to be made with certain reservations, as various inscriptions are marked by cursive as well as monumental elements. The terms "cursive" and "monumental" are more function-directed than script-directed: they refer to certain techniques of stonecutting rather than to the development of the script. The monumental Palmyrene script must be considered a kind of counterpart of the Greek uncial script, whereas the cursive Palmyrene script served the Palmyrene citizens for general, everyday use.

In the third chapter the Old Syriac (Edessaean) script is dealt with. This cursive Middle Aramaic script bears close resemblance to the Palmyrene script and - to a lesser degree - to Hatraean and Nabataean script-forms. A distinction is made between a documental-cursive and a monumental-cursive Old Syriac script-type. Moreover, the origins of the Old Syriac script are
discussed and some recently developed theories are put to the
test of a script-analysis.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the Middle Aramaic scripts
of North-East Mesopotamia and adjoining territories. Despite
local and regional variations, these (cursive) scripts display
such similarities with each other that it seems justified to
speak of one Middle Aramaic North-East Mesopotamian script-
tradition.

The fifth chapter considers the Middle Aramaic scripts of
South-East Mesopotamia, Persia and adjoining territories. These
scripts can be distinguished into four groups of scripts or
script-traditions:

- the Parthian/Persian (in a geographical sense);
- the (Old) Syriac (the scripts of the Syriac magic bowl
texts may be considered as belonging to this group/trad-
tion);
- the Jewish (Babylonian) Aramaic (the scripts of the
Jewish (Babylonian) Aramaic magic bowl texts belong to
this group/tradition);
- the South-Mesopotamian/Western-Persian (the Elymaic-
Aramaic, Characenian-Aramaic and Old Mandaic scripts
form part of this group/tradition).

In the sixth chapter the results of our research are summa-
rized. The Middle Aramaic scripts/script-traditions did not de-
velop out of each other. They can all (more or less directly)
be traced back to cursive Imperial Aramaic script-forms, but
they were not independent of each other. They influenced each
other mutually and borrowed various forms from each other.

The two main characteristics of the Middle Aramaic scripts
are:

a) the geographical (local and regional) identity (by which
it is possible to ascribe these scripts to a definite
Middle Aramaic script-tradition), and

b) the breadth of variation in the character-forms (illustra-
ting that character-forms are exchanged across the borders
of script-traditions, without the scripts as such losing
their identity).

Just as it is impossible to mark off clearly in time the
Imperial Aramaic scripts, so it is impossible to point out one definite end to the use of the Middle Aramaic scripts. There is no question of a clearly phased development of scripts, but it has rather been a gradual process.

This process of the formation and development of Middle Aramaic scripts out of the Imperial Aramaic script must be regarded as a process of locally and regionally determined differentiation of cursive script-forms, which (in the 3rd century B.C.) starts first along the borders of the Syrian-Mesopotamian-Persian cultural area (where the impetus to use a uniform script was less strong than in the cultural centres of this area). Then, national and political developments accelerated the process of differentiation throughout the entire area.

This process did not start everywhere at the same time, any more than it developed steadily and uniformly. Neither did it come to an end at one and the same time. Some Middle Aramaic scripts went out of use in the course of the third century A.D., others developed into standardized scripts. A distinctive phenomenon in this respect is the fact that the new uniform, standard scripts lose their local and regional character: the use of these scripts is now determined by cultural factors. With the coming into existence of Standard Aramaic scripts a new period in the history of the development of the Aramaic scripts has begun.