of the Dead Sea. Although the ninth-century B.C. Moabite inscriptions present the earliest "Hebrew" characters of the alphabetic script, their language cannot be regarded as an Hebrew dialect.

f) Edomite

7.9. Edomite, attested by a few inscriptions and seals dated from the 9th through the 4th century B.C., was the Canaanite idiom of southern Transjordan and eastern Negev. Despite our very poor knowledge of the language, palaeography and morphology reveal some specifically Edomite features.

B. Aramaic

7.10. Aramaic forms a widespread linguistic group that could be classified also as North or East Semitic. Its earliest written attestations go back to the 9th century B.C. and some of its dialects survive until the present day. Several historical stages and contemporaneous dialects have to be distinguished.

a) Early Aramaic

7.11. Early Aramaic is represented by an increasing number of inscriptions from Syria, Assyria, North Israel, and northern Transjordan dating from the 9th through the 7th century B.C. (Fig. 11). There are no important differences in the script and the spelling of the various documents, except for the Tell Fekherye statue and the Tell Ḥalaf pedestal inscription. The morphological variations point instead to the existence of several dialects that represent different levels of the evolution of the language. While the Tell Fekherye inscription (*ca.* 850 B.C.) seems to testify to the use of internal or "broken" plurals, the two Samalian inscriptions from Zincirli (8th century B.C.) apparently retain the case endings in the plural and have no emphatic state. The latter is also unattested in the Deir 'Allā plaster inscription (*ca.* 800 B.C.) and on the stele found at Tell el-Qāḍi (*ca.* 850 B.C.), and both do not use the determinative-relative *zy*. From the 8th century B.C. on, a standard form of the language prevails in the inscriptions, and even in the juridical and economic documents on clay tablets from Upper Mesopotamia and Assyria.

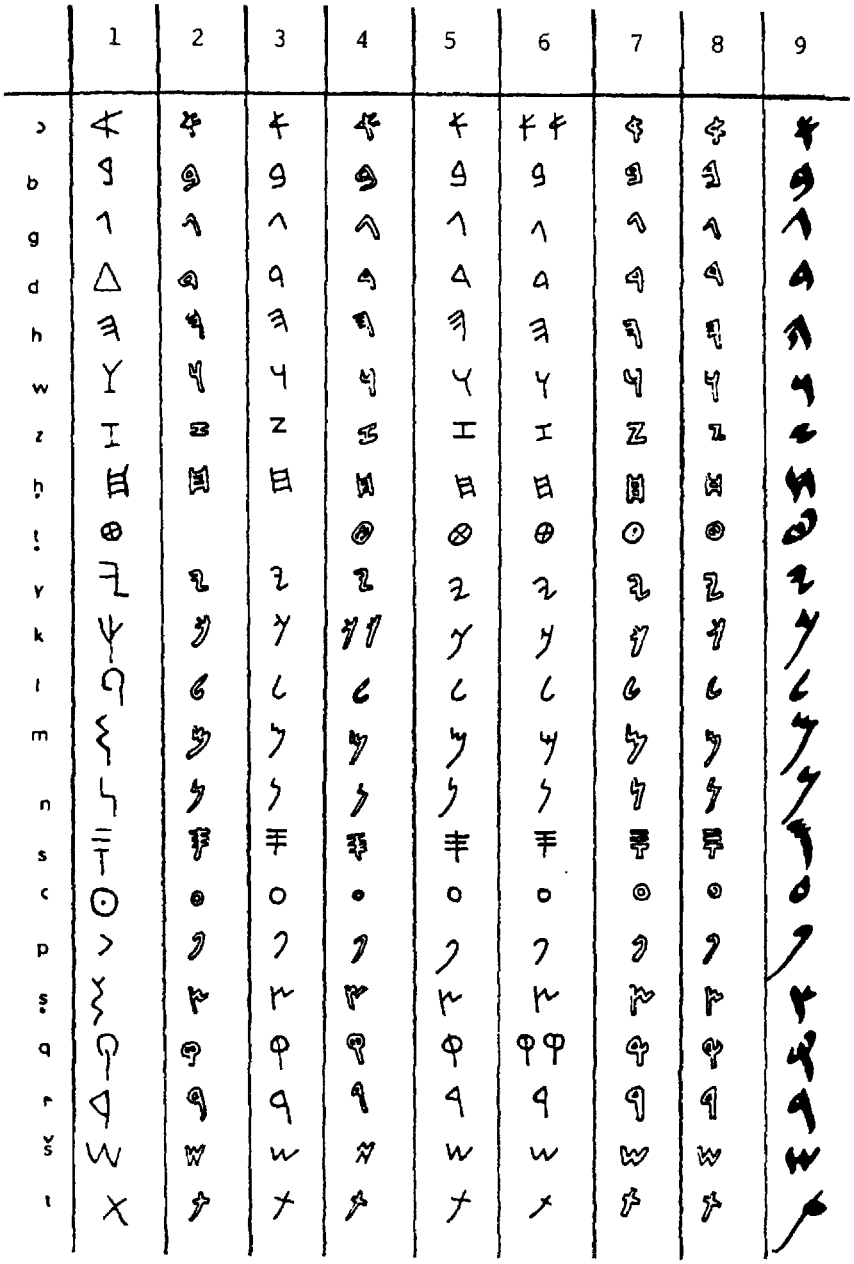


Fig. 11. Alphabetic scripts of Syria, Cilicia, and northern Transjordan in the 9th and 8th centuries B.C.:

1. Tell Fekherye, mid-9th century; 2. Kilamuwa (Zincirli), late 9th century; 3. Zakkūr (Tell Afis), beginning of the 8th century; 4. Panamuwa I (Zincirli), early 8th century; 5. Sefire, mid-8th century; 6. Karatepe, mid-8th century; 7. Panamuwa II (Zincirli), *ca.* 730; 8. Bar-Rakkāb (Zincirli), late 8th century; 9. Deir ʿAllā, *ca.* 800.

b) Official or Imperial Aramaic

7.12. Official or Imperial Aramaic is the language of the Aramaic documents of the Persian Empire, but some authors apply this qualification also to earlier texts. Beginning with the 8th century B.C. Aramaic became the *lingua franca* of the Near East and it served later as the official language of the Achaemenian administration until the end of the 4th century B.C. It is the language of various inscriptions on stone, of the Aramaic documents found in Egypt, in the Wadi Dāliyeh (Samaria), and at Persepolis, as well as of the Aramaic letters and documents quoted in the Book of Ezra.

c) Standard Literary Aramaic

7.13. Standard Literary Aramaic is the literary dialect that emerged in the 7th century B.C. and subsisted alongside the Official Aramaic of the Achaemenian period. The Story of Ahiqar, perhaps the scattered phrases of the story from the tomb at Sheikh el-Faḍl, the Bar Punesh fragments, and the narrative in the Aramaic portions of Ezra are the earliest examples of this form of speech that is further used in the Book of Daniel, in the literary Aramaic compositions discovered at Qumrān, in the Targums to the Pentateuch and to the Prophets, known as Onqelos and Jonathan, in *Megillat Ta'anit*, and, at a much later date, in the "Scroll of Antiochus".

d) Middle Aramaic

7.14. Middle Aramaic is the name generally given to the Aramaic dialects attested from the 3rd century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D. Besides the texts in Standard Literary Aramaic and in a faulty Official Aramaic that survived in non-Aramaic speaking regions of the former Persian Empire, in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and in the Caucasus, there are a number of epigraphic dialects from this period.

7.15. The documents and the Bar Kokhba letters discovered in the Judaean Desert represent the *Palestinian Aramaic* of Judaea.

7.16. Documents written in *Nabataean* were also discovered among the scrolls of the Judaean Desert. Although they are basically written in Official Aramaic, they already contain elements of Middle Aramaic on the one hand, and of Arabic on the other, like the Nabataean inscriptions

and graffiti from Transjordan, North Arabia, Negev, Egypt, Greece, and Italy. From the 2nd century B.C. to the 4th century A.D. Nabataean Aramaic was the written language of the Arab population whose main centre was Petra, historically attested from the beginning of the 4th century B.C. The Nabataean use of the Aramaic language and script continued a North Arabian tradition attested already in the 5th century B.C. by the inscriptions of the oasis of Tayma' and somewhat later by the inscription of Qaynû, king of Qedar, found at Tell el-Maskhūta (Egypt). The last dated Nabataean Aramaic text dates from 356 A.D. There are also a few inscriptions written in Nabataean Arabic (§7.38).

7.17. The *Palmyrene* inscriptions, dating from the 1st century B.C. through the 3rd century A.D., are written in a West Aramaic idiom based on Official Aramaic (Fig. 12). Traces of Arabic, which was the language of a substantial part of the population of Palmyra, are detected in some of these inscriptions, the language of which was also influenced by an East Aramaic dialect.

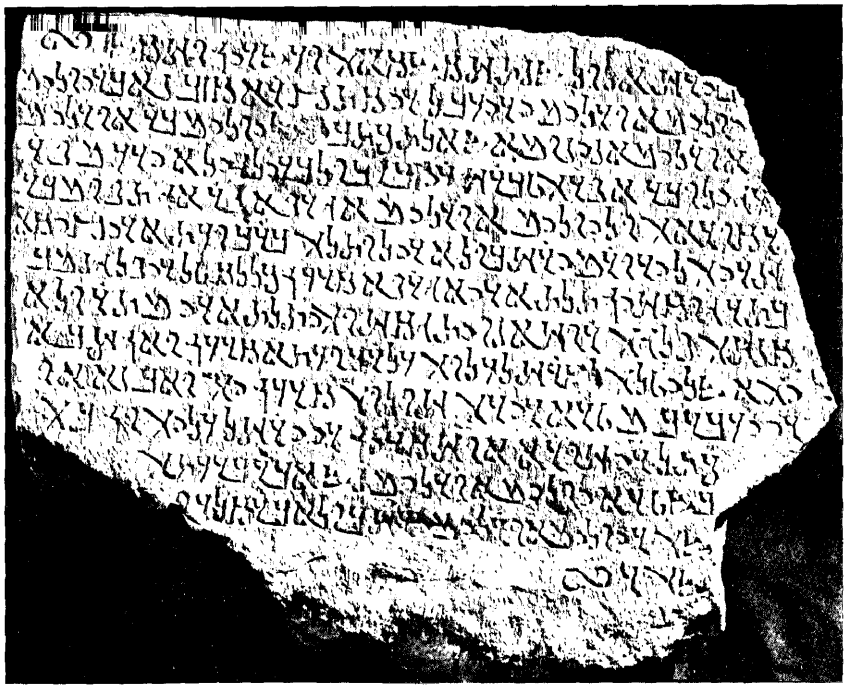


Fig. 12. Palmyrene inscription from Malkū's tomb, dated A.D. 214 (Courtesy Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen).

7.18. The *Uruk Incantation* text from the 3rd or 2nd century B.C., found in southern Iraq and written in cuneiform script on a clay tablet, is composed in East Aramaic, perhaps in the Chaldaean dialect.

7.19. Also the Aramaic texts of *Hatra*, *ca.* 100 km south-west of Mosul, show the influence of East Aramaic. They date from the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D., and their language is closely related to Syriac. The inscriptions from Ashur and other sites in the area of Upper Tigris, all dating from the Late Parthian period, reflect a closely related form of speech and are written in the North Mesopotamian variant of the Aramaic script.

7.20. The earliest *Syriac* inscriptions from the region of Edessa, modern Urfa, go back to the 1st-3rd centuries A.D. and are all of pagan origin. Their script resembles that of the contemporary cursive Palmyrene inscriptions, but their language occupies an intermediate position between West and East Aramaic.

7.21. The *Aramaic logograms* in Parthian inscriptions, i.e. words written in Aramaic but read in Middle Iranian, are the precursors of the ideograms used later in the Pahlavi texts of the Sassanid dynasty (226-642 A.D.). The most important witnesses of this use of Aramaic logograms are the Avroman parchment from 52/3 A.D. and the inscription of the Herakles statue from 150/1 A.D. Despite the contrary opinion of some authors, also the *ca.* 2000 ostraca of Nisa (Turkmenistan), from the 1st century B.C., are written with Aramaic logograms, and this may also be the case of the inscriptions found at Toprak-kale, in Uzbekistan, and considered by their editors as Khwarezmian (Middle Iranian).

e) Western Late Aramaic

7.22. From the 3rd century A.D. on, positive distinctions between East and West Aramaic can be made on ground of vocabulary, phonology, morphology, and syntax. It is a period with abundant written material. West Aramaic consists primarily of material known from Palestine.

7.23. The *Jewish Palestinian Aramaic* of the Byzantine period is often called *Galilean Aramaic* since most of the material comes from Galilee, but this appellation may be too restrictive. The material consists of a variety of dedicatory and memorial inscriptions, but the dialect is best

known from literary works, such as the Palestinian Talmud, the Aramaic parts of *Genesis Rabba*, of *Leviticus Rabba*, and of other Midrashim, and from the Palestinian Targums, as best represented by the so-called *Neofiti I Targum* from the Vatican Library and by fragments from the Cairo Geniza.

7.24. *Samaritan Aramaic*, written in an offshoot of the Palaeo-Hebrew script and spoken by Samaritans till about the 10th century A.D., is represented by the Targum to the Pentateuch, the Aramaic hymns preserved in the liturgy, and such works as *Memar Marqah* and the *Asaṭir*.

7.25. *Christian Palestinian Aramaic*, sometimes called Palestinian Syriac because of its script, was spoken by converted Jews living in Judaea and in Transjordan at least from the 3rd-4th centuries A.D. until the Arabization of Palestine. Besides some epigraphic finds, this dialect is best represented by fragments of Bible translations from Greek, as well as of translations of other Greek religious texts, such as the Melchite liturgy. The preserved sources date from the 5th-8th centuries A.D., when the language was spoken, and from the 11th-13th centuries A.D., when it was used only in the liturgy. The sources exhibit a dialect closely related to Samaritan Aramaic (§7.24) and to Galilean Aramaic (§7.23). Traces of Mishnaic Hebrew influence are found in this dialect.

f) Eastern Late Aramaic

7.26. Eastern Late Aramaic is represented by the literary languages Syriac, Mandaic, and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, as well as by the Aramaic logograms in Pahlavi and other Middle Iranian dialects.

7.27. *Syriac*, originally the dialect of Edessa, occupies an intermediate position between East and West Aramaic. It is the best documented of the Aramaic languages, with a large literature in both poetry and prose, primarily of a religious Christian nature. Its oldest literary works go back to the 2nd century A.D. and the language is used down to the present day, although Syriac was generally replaced by Neo-Arabic as a spoken idiom from the 8th century A.D. on. One can distinguish Western and Eastern Syriac, but the differences are limited to some phonetic features. Instead, there are two different vocalization systems and three main Syriac styles of writing: the *Eṣtrangelā*, a formal script which resembles that of the Syriac inscriptions of the 1st-3rd centuries A.D.,

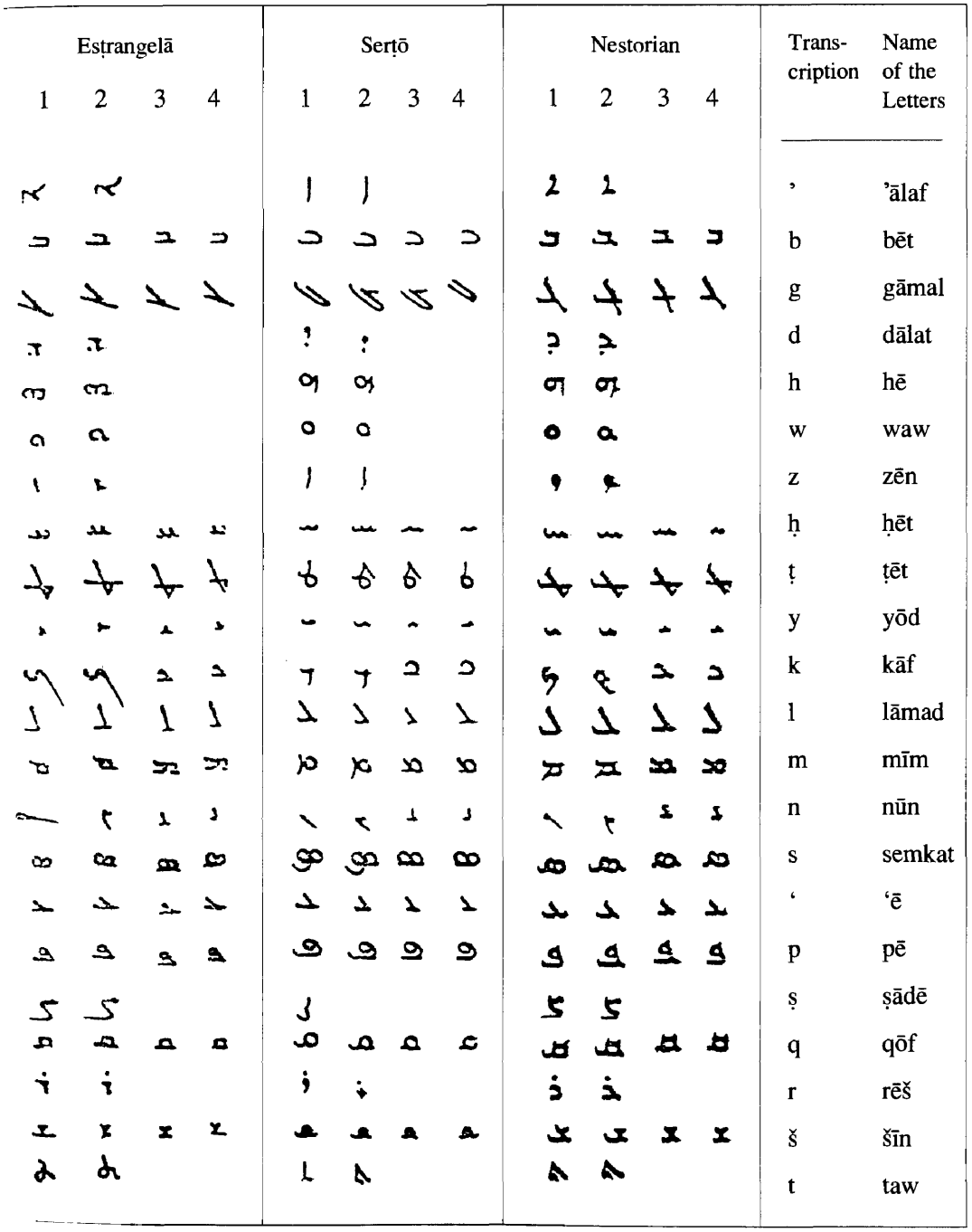
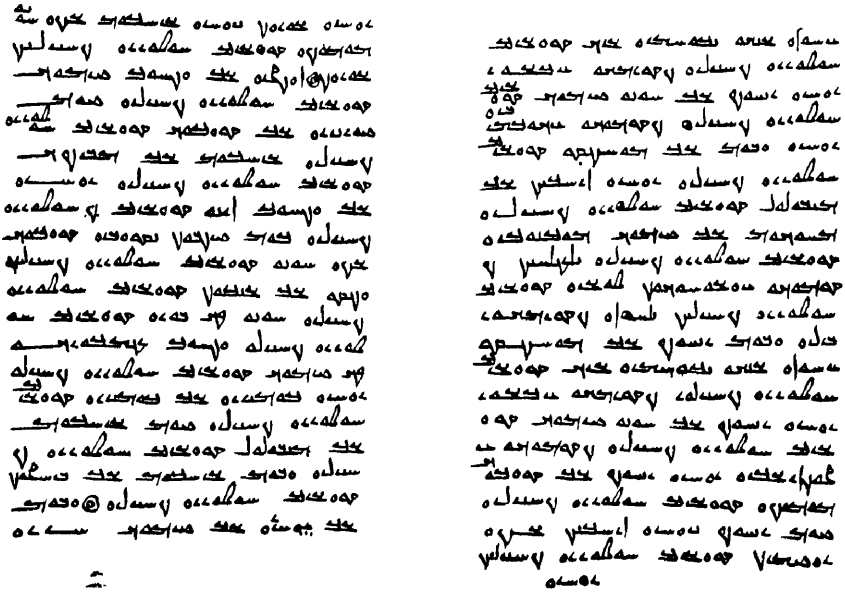


Fig. 13. Syriac Scripts.

the *Serṭō*, a developed cursive ordinarily used by the Jacobites in the West, and the Nestorian, another cursive variation used in the East. The majority of the Syriac letters have different forms depending upon their position in a word, whether at the beginning, middle or end, and whether they stand alone or are joined to others (Fig. 13). The works of Syriac grammarians, like Jacob of Edessa (7th century A.D.), have exerted an influence on both Arabic and Hebrew grammatical traditions.

7.28. *Mandaic* is the language of the Gnostic sect of the Mandaeans, whose origins are obscure. The sect flourished for a time in Upper Mesopotamia, around Harran, and then moved to southern Iraq and Iran where its adepts have still been identified in the 20th century, and a form of colloquial Mandaic has been recorded. The earliest Mandaic texts, known at present, date from the 4th-6th centuries A.D. and their major literary works may also have been written in that period. Besides, a large number of inscribed "magic" bowls, in Mandaic script and language, have been discovered in southern Iraq and Iran. They date from the 5th-7th centuries A.D. and their script represents a South Mesopotamian variant of the Aramaic script-type. Since Mandaic uses *matres lectionis* more than any other Aramaic dialect and does not follow any traditional orthography, it has been of great importance for establishing the phonology and the precise morphology of East Aramaic.



From the Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans, ed. E.S. Drower (Leiden 1959).

7.29. *Jewish Babylonian Aramaic* is known primarily from the Babylonian Talmud, the Geonic texts, the *Book of Commandments* by 'Anan ben Dawid, the early Karaite leader, and the Jewish Babylonian incantations of the "magic" bowls from the Nippur region. These various sources, for which good manuscripts should be used, date from the 3rd through the 11th century A.D. Differences have been detected in the language of these texts spread over eight centuries.

7.30. The *Aramaic logograms* in Pahlavi and other Middle Iranian dialects are mostly derived from Official Aramaic, but some of them indicate changes due either to the influence of Late Eastern Aramaic or to errors made by the scribes who no longer knew the Aramaic language. Most useful is the *Frahang i Pahlavīk*, a kind of Aramaic - Middle Iranian glossary that might go back at least to the 7th century A.D.

g) Neo-Aramaic

7.31. Neo-Aramaic dialects are spoken nowadays by about half a million people living in various regions of the Near East or emigrated to other parts of the world. These dialects are the surving remains of the once widespread Aramaic languages, preserved by religious minorities in mountainous retreat areas. They are divided into three main groups.

7.32. *Western Neo-Aramaic* is still used by Christians and Moslems in the three villages of Ma'lūla, Ǧubb 'Adīn, and Baḫ'ā, about 60 km. north of Damascus. The language is reminiscent in many respects of the ancient Aramaic dialects of Palestine (§7.23-25). Characteristic of this Western form of spoken Aramaic are the changes $\bar{a} > \bar{o}$ and $p > f$, the use of the *y*-prefix in the 3rd person of the imperfect, etc. Western Aramaic is exposed to strong phonetic, grammatical, and lexical influences of vernacular Arabic.

7.33. *Ṭūrōyo* comprises the dialects spoken by Christians in the Ṭūr 'Abdīn area, near Mardin, in southeastern Turkey. These dialects occupy an intermediate position between Western and Eastern Neo-Aramaic. Like Eastern Neo-Aramaic (§7.34), they show a tendency to use the pharyngal *ḥ* and have developed a conjugation based on participles, but they exhibit the unconditioned change $\bar{a} > \bar{o}$ like Western Neo-Aramaic. A closely related idiom was spoken at Mlaḥsō, a village in the Diyarbakır province. The large emigration of the local population

resulted in the creation of scattered Ṭurōyo-speaking communities in Western Europe.

7.34. *Eastern Neo-Aramaic*, called also "Modern Syriac" or "Assyrian", is the continuation of the eastern branch of Late Aramaic. There are archaic elements retained in Neo-Aramaic which are absent from Classical Syriac (§7.27), as well as innovations shared by Mandaic (§7.28) and by Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (§7.29), but lacking in Syriac. It is assumed therefore that Eastern Neo-Aramaic developed from a language similar to Mandaic and to Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, but there are no documents extant in this form of speech since it was not used as a literary vehicle. Neo-Aramaic dialects are used in Kurdistan, near the common borders of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, in the neighbourhood of Lake Urmia, in Iran, and near Mosul, in Iraq. They are spoken both by Jews and by Christians of different denominations: Nestorians, Chaldaeans, and Jacobites. Benjamin of Tudela, who visited Kurdistan in the mid-12th century A.D., reports that the Jews living there were speaking Aramaic. Nowadays, however, most of the Jews have emigrated to Israel, while the emigration of Christians to the United States and to Armenia, Georgia, and Russia had already started as a result of World War I. The Christians write in the Nestorian type of Syriac script, used for printing periodicals, books, and pamphlets. The fairly uniform standard written language of these publications is based on the Urmi dialect. It gave rise to a spoken *koinè* that coexists nowadays with the dialects.

In this *Outline*, as at rule, references to Neo-Aramaic, made without further specification, point to the Eastern Neo-Aramaic.

C. Arabic

7.35. The earliest attestations of Arabic are a number of proper names borne by leaders of Arab tribes mentioned in Neo-Assyrian texts. While some of them bear Aramaic names, others have names that belong to a group of dialects now called Proto-Arabic or Ancient North Arabian. Various North Arabian populations have to be distinguished, differing by their language and their script, and above all by their way of life. While populations of merchants and farmers were settled in towns and oases, semi-nomadic breeders of sheep and goats were living in precarious shelters in the vicinity of sedentary settlements, and true nomads,