

# Papyrus Amherst 63: A New Source for the Language, Literature, Religion, and History of the Aramaeans\*

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When I submitted the title of this lecture to the conference organizers, I had quotation marks around the word “Aramaeans”, for I do not believe that everyone who speaks Aramaic deserves to be called an Aramaean. I find now, however, that the quotation marks have been removed, presumably in an attempt to make me feel at home here in England. Somebody wants me to believe that anyone who speaks English, even an American, can call himself an Englishman.

Be that as it may, the document discussed in the present paper, papyrus Amherst 63 (the Aramaic text in demotic script) has an impeccably British pedigree. The papyrus was originally owned by — and still bears the name of — an Englishman: Lord Amherst of Hackney. Even after being sold to J. P. Morgan, it was housed for many years (1913 - 1947) at the British Museum, where it was studied by an eminent British Egyptologist, Sir Herbert Thompson. For these reasons alone, this document would be an appropriate topic for this conference.

It is true that a document discovered in the nineteenth century would not ordinarily belong at a conference devoted to “new sources”, but this document is different because it remained largely unknown and undeciphered until the past decade.

And what a source it is! It is filled with new information about a community of Aramaic-speaking exiles in Egypt — its language, literature, history, and religion. I would like to point out a major contribution of the papyrus in each of these areas.

## Language

Any literary text as long as this one can be expected to make important contributions to Northwest Semitic lexicography, and this text has already begun to fulfill its promise, shedding considerable light on at least half a dozen rare Biblical and Rabbinic lexical items. In some cases, Amherst 63 attests these lexical items in revealing contexts which resolve a controversy about meaning. Thus, our text corroborates the view that *kāšīnā* in Deut 32:15 means “you became fat” rather than

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“you kicked/rebelled”,<sup>1</sup> the view that *akšūb* in Ps 140:4 means “viper” rather than “spider, tarantula”,<sup>2</sup> and the view that *sanwērīm* in Gen 19:11 and II Kings 6:18 means “blinding light” rather than “blindness”.<sup>3</sup> In other cases, it confirms a questionable by-form: *kītran*<sup>4</sup> “pitch” alongside *īṣrān, rī* “moisture” alongside *rəwāyāh, šawʿar* “neck”<sup>5</sup> alongside *šawwar*,<sup>6</sup> and possibly *šərošī* “caning, lashes” alongside *sərošī*.

However, the most interesting contribution of the text in the area of language is the light it sheds on the nature of Qumran Aramaic and its relationship to colloquial Aramaic. It is well known<sup>7</sup> that the Genesis Apocryphon contains quite a few colloquial forms which are characteristic of the Palestinian targums — forms like *tmn* “there” and *kmn* “how” (for *tmh* and *kmh*), *ḥwy* “his brother” (for *ḥwhy*), relative-genitive *d-* (for *dy*), *ʿn* “if” (for *hn*), *ʿaphel* (for *haphel*), and possibly *bʿwn* “they sought”, *ʿtwn* “they came” (for *bʿw, ʿtw*). There is no serious difference of opinion about the identity of most of these forms, but there is disagreement about their implications. What do these forms reveal about the language of the Genesis Apocryphon? Is it a transitional dialect of Aramaic close to the vernacular, as Fitzmyer<sup>8</sup> believes, or is it Standard Literary Aramaic coloured or contaminated by

careless intrusions from the vernacular, as Greenfield,<sup>9</sup> Diez Macho,<sup>10</sup> Kaufman<sup>11</sup> and others have argued?

Before bringing Amherst 63 into the matter, we need to examine some of the practical consequences of this controversy — or, to use an Aramaic term, the *nāpəḳā minnah*. The “transition theory” implies that variability in the text is a reasonably accurate reflection of variability in speech. A sociolinguist of the variationist school would be justified, according to this view, in writing variable rules based on the data in the text; a historical linguist would be justified in speaking of a sound change in progress. Take, for example, proclitic *d-*, which occurs only eight times in the Genesis Apocryphon alongside almost 100 examples of *dy*.<sup>12</sup> Based on these frequencies, Svedlund concludes that “the shift from *dy* to the proclitic *d* seems to have been in its early stages at the time of the writing of G[enesis] A[pocryphon]”.<sup>13</sup> Somewhat more cautiously, Diez Merino writes that “Qumrán supone un estadio intermedio del paso de /dy/ a /d-/”;<sup>14</sup> he explicitly indicates that he is discussing a change in the spoken language by placing *dy* and *d-* between slashes, in phonemic notation.

The “contamination theory”, on the other hand, implies that variability in the text is not an accurate reflection of variability in speech. According to this view, the replacement of *dy* by *d-* may well have gone to completion long before the writing of the Genesis Apocryphon.

In the matter of *dy/d-*, Amherst 63 settles the matter rather unambiguously in favor of the “contamination theory”. The scribe almost always writes the relative-genitive particle without a *y* or a word-divider, and he generally dispenses with demotic *aleph*<sup>15</sup> as well. This evidence is all the more remarkable inasmuch as Amherst 63 seems to be at least two centuries older than the Genesis Apocryphon.

Even when Amherst 63 agrees with the Genesis Apocryphon in exhibiting variability, the relative frequencies may be very different. When we examine the plural perfects of final-weak verbs in the Genesis Apocryphon, we find that there are twelve cases without suffixed *-n* and two possible cases with suffixed *-n*: *bʿwn* and *ʿtwn*.<sup>16</sup> Here again, an advocate of the “transition theory” might speak of an early stage of development, since the suffix occurs only fourteen percent of the time. But in Amherst 63, the suffix occurs fifty percent of the time.<sup>17</sup> By the time of the Genesis

<sup>1</sup>R. C. Steiner and C. F. Nims, “You Can’t Offer Your Sacrifice and Eat It Too: A Polemical Poem from the Aramaic Text in Demotic Script”, *JNES* 43 (1984), p. 101.

<sup>2</sup>This is an old controversy, pitting LXX, Peshitta, Avot de-Rabbi Nathan, and Kimbi against the targum to Psalms, the Qumran Psalms scroll, Saadia, and Rasbi.

<sup>3</sup>E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City 1964), pp. 139–40.

<sup>4</sup>E. Y. Kutscher, *Studies in Galilean Aramaic* (Ramat Gan 1976), p. 33.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. S. P. Vleeming and J. W. Wesseliuss, “Betel the Saviour”, *JEOL* 28 (1985), p. 134, where, however, the *e = ʿ* is taken to be a secondary phonetic development. The form *צואר* has hitherto been unknown in Aramaic outside of BA, and even there it is only a *ketib*. As a result, some scholars have claimed that the BA *ketib* comes from Hebrew; see, for example, F. R. Blake, *A Resurvey of Hebrew Tenses* (Rome 1951), p. 94; E. Y. Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem 1959), pp. 141–42; M. Sokoloff, *The Targum to Job from Qumran Cave XI* (Ramat Gan 1974), p. 166. This claim is based on the assumption that the Proto-Semitic form is *šawwar*, and that the Hebrew *כ* is merely a *mater lectionis*. The evidence of Amherst 63 suggests that the proto-form is *šawʿar*, as maintained by other scholars; see Th. Nöldeke, *Mandäische Grammatik* (Halle 1875), pp. 127–28; H. Bauer and P. Leander, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testaments* (Halle 1922), p. 548; J. Blau, “Short Philological Notes on the Inscription of Mešaʿ”, *Maarav* 2 (1979–80), p. 148, n. 25; K. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer* (Göttingen 1984), p. 675.

<sup>6</sup>Not *šawar*, pace Vleeming and Wesseliuss, “Betel”, 134; cf. Nöldeke, *Mandäische*, p. 127–28, n. 2.

<sup>7</sup>Thanks to E. Y. Kutscher, “The Language of the ‘Genesis Apocryphon’”, *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 4 (1957), pp. 8–9; J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1* (Rome 1966), p. 100; P. Grelot, Review of J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1*, *RB* 74 (1967), p. 102, and A. Diez Macho, *El Targum* (Madrid 1972), p. 69.

<sup>8</sup>*Genesis Apocryphon*, 2nd ed., pp. 23–24. The term “transitional dialect” was borrowed by Fitzmyer from Kutscher (“Language”, p. 6), and, as a result, Diez Macho (*El Targum*, p. 47) assumed that the position of these two scholars was identical. However, Kutscher nowhere implies that the language of the Genesis Apocryphon is close to the vernacular. He seems to be thinking rather of gradual change in the literary language due to the increasing influence of the spoken language.

<sup>9</sup>J. C. Greenfield, “Standard Literary Aramaic”, *Actes du premier congrès international de linguistique sémitique et chamito-sémitique* (The Hague 1974), p. 286; id., “Aramaic and its Dialects”, *Jewish Languages* (Cambridge, Mass. 1978), p. 36.

<sup>10</sup>*El Targum*, pp. 47ff.

<sup>11</sup>S. A. Kaufman, “The Job Targum from Qumran”, *JAOS* 93 (1973), p. 326.

<sup>12</sup>Fitzmyer, *Genesis Apocryphon*, 2nd ed., p. 27.

<sup>13</sup>G. Svedlund, *The Aramaic Portions of Pesiqta de Rab Kahana* (Uppsala 1974), p. 14.

<sup>14</sup>L. Diez Merino, “Uso del *d/dy* en el arameo de Qumrán”, *Aula Orientalis* 1 (1983), p. 82.

<sup>15</sup>It is usually assumed that the scribe intended this sign to indicate the presence of a vowel.

<sup>16</sup>A. Tal, “Revadim baʿaramit hayehudit šel ʿereš yišraʿel”, *Lešonenu* 43 (1978–79), pp. 171–72.

<sup>17</sup>XVII/9 *nsw*, XVII/14 *dlhwn*, XVIII/1 *dlhwn*, XIX/10 *ʿnwn*, XX/5 *nsw*, XXI/4 *nsw*, XXI/1 w(?)*nwn*, XXII/3 *nsw*.

Apocryphon, the frequency in the vernacular was probably higher, perhaps even 100%.

Another crucial difference between the two theories concerns Palestinian forms which do not appear at all in the Qumran scrolls. Are such forms to be considered later than the ones which do? According to the “transition theory”, the answer is yes, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Already in the Persian period, the Hermopolis letters and the Proverbs of Ahiqar exhibit *pael* and *haphel* infinitives with prefixed *m-*, as Greenfield<sup>18</sup> and Kutscher<sup>19</sup> have pointed out. If these forms are not used at Qumran, it can only be because they were rejected as being too colloquial. Amherst 63 shows that there are other such features which remained totally submerged, without a single slip to betray them: deletion of word-final *n* preceded by diphthong *ay*,<sup>20</sup> omission of *l-* before the infinitive,<sup>21</sup> the *mn* + participle construction,<sup>22</sup> and the *maqṭōlā* pattern for verbal nouns.<sup>23</sup>

Why should Amherst 63 be so much more revealing than the Qumran scrolls? After all, it too is a literary text, and it ought to be written in Standard Literary Aramaic; indeed, Greenfield's classic article on the subject labels it as such.<sup>24</sup> Part of the answer is that it is a transcribed text. Transcriptions and loanwords are extremely effective in piercing the veil which our well-trained scribes have placed over the vernacular. Let me illustrate this with two brief examples.

The first example concerns the Aramaic word *klklr* “rubbish heap” in line 22 of the Tell Fekherye inscription. Greenfield and Shaffer have devoted a delightful study to this word.<sup>25</sup> They note that the word is attested in this fully reduplicated form in the Targum to Prophets and other targumic texts but that “the usual form ... for this word in both the Palestinian and Babylonian dialects of Aramaic, as well as Syriac and Mandaic is *qlqlā* in the absolute form and *qilqlā* in the determined form”.<sup>26</sup> Finally, they point to the attestation of an Akkadian *kiqillutu* with the same meaning: “Of linguistic importance is the fact that the word *kiqillutu* is a loan word in Neo-Assyrian from Aramaic, and this loan word follows the form *qīqlā*, *qīqiltā* known to

us from later Aramaic dialects. Thus both the more literary *qlqlr* has been found in the Tell Fekherye inscription and the more colloquial *kiqillutu* in Neo-Assyrian texts. This is added evidence for the use of Aramaic as a spoken language in Assyria”.

They could have added that it is also evidence for the antiquity and amazing tenacity of the distinction between written and spoken Aramaic. It appears that well-trained scribes succeeded in suppressing a colloquial form for a millennium until the old norms broke down in Late Aramaic. We know this now thanks to a cuneiform scribe whose career did not depend upon mastering the correct, historical spelling of this word. There is a certain amount of poetic justice in this example. Scholars are always turning to the *sēpiru*, the Aramaic scribe, to find out how Akkadian was pronounced; for once we can thank a *ṭupšarru*, an Akkadian scribe, for information about the pronunciation of Aramaic.

The second example is *ἐφφαθά* “be opened” in Mark 7:34. Here we learn from a Greek scribe that the assimilation of reflexive-passive *t* had already taken place in colloquial Aramaic — assuming, of course, that this is not Hebrew.<sup>27</sup> Here again, no Aramaic scribe would have been caught dead writing such a form in Palestine during that period.<sup>28</sup>

It is thus completely natural that we should find colloquial pronunciations appearing much earlier in Amherst 63 than in normally written Aramaic texts. We should make every effort to use this foreign scribe to outsmart the native scribes who make life so difficult for us.

## Literature

Amherst 63 concludes with a story about the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal and his brother, Shamash-shum-ukin — a story which Greenfield has called the “Tale of Two Brothers”. This story is, in all likelihood, an ancestor of the Sardanapallus legend known from Greek and Latin sources, whose fiery death scene was the basis for a tragedy by Byron (*Sardanapalus*) and a well-known painting by Delacroix (“The Death of Sardanapalus”). As far as I know, this is the only extant ancient Near Eastern composition, other than the Bible, which has served (at least, indirectly) as the inspiration for modern European literature and art.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>18</sup>J. C. Greenfield, “Dialect Traits in Early Aramaic” [Hebrew], *Lešonenu* 32 (1967-68), pp. 367-368; id., “The Dialects of Early Aramaic”, *JNES* 37 (1978), pp. 96-97.

<sup>19</sup>E. Y. Kutscher, “The Hermopolis Papyri”, *JOS* 1 (1971), pp. 107-108.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Kutscher, *Studies*, pp. 43-51.

<sup>21</sup>See W. B. Stevenson, *Grammar of Palestinian Jewish Aramaic* (Oxford 1924), p. 53 (where, however, the statement about BA is not correct); J. M. Lindenberger, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar* (Baltimore 1983), p. 111; J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* (Jerusalem 1985), p. 33; A. Tal, “Hammaqor lešurotaw berovde ha'aramit hayehudit be'eres yišra'el”, *Hebrew Language Studies Presented to Zeev Ben-Hayyim* (Jerusalem 1983), pp. 207-208.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Kutscher, *Studies*, pp. 51-58. The construction is used adverbially, i.e., in circumstantial clauses. It may have developed by analogy with the *mn+dy*+perfect construction, attested in BA.

<sup>23</sup>M. Sokoloff, “The Noun-Pattern MQTWLY in Middle Western Aramaic” [Hebrew], *Erkhe hamilton hehadat lesifrut hazat*, vol. 2 (Ramat Gan 1974), pp. 74-84.

<sup>24</sup>Greenfield, “Standard Literary Aramaic”, p. 284.

<sup>25</sup>J. C. Greenfield and A. Shaffer, “*Qlqlr*, *Tubkinnu*, Refuse Tips and Treasure Trove” *Anatolian Studies* 33 (1983), pp. 123-29.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>27</sup>See S. Morag, “*ḔḔḔḔ* (Mark vii. 34): Certainly Hebrew, Not Aramaic?”, *JSS* 17 (1972), pp. 198-202 and the literature cited there.

<sup>28</sup>A possible exception is cited by M. McNamara, “The Spoken Aramaic of First Century Palestine”, *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 2 (1977), p. 119; but cf. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte*, pp. 464, 466, and 672 s.v. *pšr*. Later Palestinian scribes do record the assimilation; cf. Morag, “*ḔḔḔḔ*”; S.E. Fassberg, *A Grammar of the Palestinian Targum Fragments from the Cairo Geniza* (Atlanta 1990), pp. 68-69 and 98, fn. 61; M. Bar-Asher, “Two Grammatical Phenomena in Palestinian Syriac” [Hebrew], *Meḥqarim bešaron* (Jerusalem 1987), pp. 114-117; id., “Le syro-palestinien: études grammaticales”, *JA* 276 (1988), 50-53.

<sup>29</sup>The tale of Semiramis inspired a tragedy by Voltaire, an opera by Rossini, and a ballet by Gluck, but the original (Aramaic?) version is not extant. Ahiqar, on the other hand, is extant in its original Aramaic version or something close to it. However, according to J. M. Lindenberger, in *The Old*

This text affords the rare opportunity to study the process by which oriental lore reached the West. Comparison of the Aramaic story with cuneiform sources shows that it is basically a piece of pro-Ashurbanipal political propaganda masquerading as popular history.<sup>30</sup> In Ctesias' Greek version this rather sober narrative has metamorphosed into a legend about a transvestite king. The transformation is so thorough that were it not for the (misapplied) name Saradanapallus and the death scene, there would be no reason to suspect any connection between the two narratives. All of this should provide rich fodder for literary historians and cultural anthropologists with a psychoanalytic bent.

### History

In this area, there are some exciting new discoveries to report. I have deciphered a passage reporting a conversation between the king and the young spokesman of a newly-arrived group of *š.m<sup>m</sup> ʔʔ[.] ʔ.y<sup>3</sup>.n<sup>m</sup>* "Samaritans". (It is not yet clear whether the king in question is the king of Rash, the original homeland of our community, or the king of Egypt.) The king, whoever he is, inquires about the boy's origin; the boy replies that he is from *ʔ.y<sup>3</sup>hwt* (Judea), that his brothers are from *š.mryn<sup>m</sup>* (Samaria), and that his sister is now being brought from *y.<sup>3</sup>eir<sup>3</sup>wš.rm<sup>3</sup>.<sup>m</sup>* (Jerusalem). The king welcomes them and instructs the boy to pick up a *qab* of wheat on his shoulder, predicting that he will achieve great wealth in his new land. What we have here is nothing less than an account of the arrival in exile of men from the Land of Israel — the only such account ever found. That this account was considered very important in antiquity as well is clear from its key position within the papyrus (immediately preceding the sacred marriage ceremony; see below) and from its opening words: "with my own two eyes I watched ...".

The newly arrived group consists only of males and is characterized as a *gayis* "troop" — a word used also in the Tale of Two Brothers. In other words, they are soldiers. Either the Rashans lived among soldiers from Judea and Samaria or (if this is a story about the founding of the Rashan community in Egypt) they were themselves soldiers from Judea and Samaria. Either way, one gets the impression that the Rashan community is somehow connected with the Elephantine community. We are probably dealing, then, with a text produced by the Aramaeans of Syene, the pagan neighbors of the Elephantine Jews, as conjectured by Vleeming and Wesselius.<sup>31</sup>

*Testament Pseudepigrapha*. J. H. Charlesworth, ed., vol. 2 (Garden City 1985), p. 492, its "influence on Western culture in general has been very slight"; with the exception of a Roman mosaic and Norman French fable, "Ahiqar does not appear to have had any impact on Western literature and art".

<sup>30</sup>For the time being, see R. C. Steiner and C. F. Nims, "Ashurbanipal and Shamash-shum-ukin: A Tale of Two Brothers from the Aramaic Text in Demotic Script", *RB* 92 (1985), pp. 61-65.

<sup>31</sup>"Bethel", p. 111.

It is also clear that the Rashans did not go directly from Rash to Syene; they made a stopover on the way. All of the evidence points to Bethel as the place. In one of the dialogues dealing with the history of the community, a man relates that he was forced to abandon his home town — a magnificent "city full of ivory houses (*ḫḫ š.n<sup>m</sup>* = *bty šn*)"<sup>32</sup> — when its spring dried up (XI/6-11). The dialogue is immediately followed by the paganized version of Psalm 20 (XI/11-19), which has been linked by Weinfeld<sup>33</sup> and Zevit<sup>34</sup> to Jeroboam's temple at Bethel. Indeed, the occurrence of the name *Bethel* in this prayer is the only one of the nine occurrences in the papyrus which is not written with the Egyptian god determinative. It is not impossible that the priest who dictated the text told the scribe that this occurrence referred to the city of Bethel rather than the god. It appears, therefore, that the drought-stricken city described in the dialogue is Bethel, a city which was indeed renowned for its "ivory houses" - the *bty šn* of Amos 3:14-15. A migration from Bethel to Egypt caused by the drying up of a spring would, if it included native Israelites, conform perfectly to Hosea's prophesy that Ephraim's "fountain shall be parched, his spring dried up" (13:15) and that the resulting famine would lead the Ephraimites to return to Egypt (9:2-3,6). Another possible reference to Bethel comes in a broken context where the words *y.š.k<sup>m</sup>* and *ʔ.kryk<sup>m</sup>* occur in close proximity. It is difficult to resist the temptation to interpret the first word as *yšk* "will kiss" and the second as *ʔglyk* "your calves", alluding to the practice, derided by Hosea (13:2), of kissing the golden calves at the Bethel sanctuary (V/12). Finally, the text refers to the god Bethel both as *Eshe(m)-Bethel* (XV/14,15) and as "Resident of Hamath (*t.ʔ ḫ.m.n<sup>m</sup>*)" (VIII/6,10), thereby establishing another link with the city of Bethel, in which colonists from Hamath worshipped a god by the name of Ashima (II Kings 17:28-30).<sup>35</sup>

How did these Aramaeans get to Bethel? There is substantial new evidence indicating that their original homeland, called *rš* and *ʔrš* in the papyrus, is the land between Babylonia and Elam which the Assyrians called Rashu and Arashu.<sup>36</sup> It appears that Ashurbanipal, who captured Rashu in his campaign against Elam, deported its inhabitants to the Assyrian province of Samaria, like the Elamites from Susa mentioned in Ezra 4:9-10. Most or all of them wound up in Bethel, joining the foreign colonists settled there by earlier Assyrian kings.

<sup>32</sup>Aramaic *b* is occasionally rendered with demotic *p* in the papyrus, e.g., VIII/5 *i.p.ḫ.n<sup>m</sup>*=*ḫḫn* "butchers", XV/6 *ii.ḫp ḫ<sup>3</sup>=ddhb* "of gold".

<sup>33</sup>M. Weinfeld, "The Pagan Version of Psalm 20:2-6: Vicissitudes of a Psalmic Creation in Israel and its Neighbors" [Hebrew], *ET* 18 (1985), p. 131.

<sup>34</sup>Z. Zevit, "The Common Origin of the Aramaicized Prayer to Horus and of Psalm 20", *JAOS* 110 (1990), p. 224.

<sup>35</sup>This last point calls to mind the Vincent-Albright theory that the Elephantine community came from the vicinity of Bethel; W.F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, 5th edition (Baltimore 1968), pp. 171-173. One of the pillars on which that theory rests is the conjecture that Eshem-Bethel of the Elephantine papyri is to be identified with Ashima.

<sup>36</sup>See now R. C. Steiner, "The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script: The Liturgy of a New Year's Festival Imported from Bethel to Syene by Exiles from Rash," *JAOS* 111 (1991), pp. 362-363.

## Religion

It appears from the account in II Kings 17 that the earlier colonists had taken over Jeroboam's temple, where one of the priests, returned from exile at their request, "taught them how to worship the Lord" — presumably a reference to the temple service. If our reconstruction is correct, that temple service included a northern version of Psalm 20, which was later transmitted to the Rashans in paganized form. Even in that altered form, the prayer still retains Israelite divine names, as do the prayers which follow it in column XII.

This Israelite influence is rather superficial. For the most part the religion reflected in the papyrus is not Israelite but pagan, with rituals resembling those of the Babylonian Akitu festival. The papyrus includes the first complete record of a sacred marriage ceremony in a West Semitic language and the first attestation of the actual marriage declaration of this rite in any Semitic language. This is the only extant liturgy of a pagan festival celebrated in the Land of Israel in Biblical times.

The ceremony begins with the celebrant's arrival at the gate leading to the courtyard of the New Year's chapel; he stops there and recites a blessing (III/6-8). A voice from within calls out to him to enter the courtyard (III/8-9). After he enters and washes his hands (III/10-11), the statue of Marah (= Nana, Nanai), the Queen of Rash, is brought into the assembly of the gods (IVA/9-10). The gods rise from their thrones and give the order for her to be seated among them (IVA/11-13). Each of the assembled gods is asked to bless the king (IVA/15-21, VII/1-7). As in the Akitu festival, the king makes a negative confession (VI/3, 9), and is told not to be afraid, that the god will destroy his enemies and bless him (VI/12-17). Sheep are slaughtered and turned into smoke, while sixty singers lift their voices and sixty temple servitors burn myrrh and frankincense (VII/7-13). The chief god is invited to feast on lamb and become inebriated with wine, to the accompaniment of sweet harp and lyre music (XII/1-10). Spoon-stuffed ducks are brought to the table on ivory platters (XV/10-12).

The high point of the festival is the sacred marriage ceremony. The king initiates the rite by declaring: "Nana, thou art my wife" (XVI/7). "In thy bridal chamber, a priest sings" — he continues — "Nanai, bring near to me thy lips" (XVI/8-9). The king and the goddess keep a vigil outside the bridal chamber, a bower erected for the occasion in a cedar grove (XI/1-3, XVII/2-3), with music from a nearby grave preventing them from dozing off (XVI/9-11); one is reminded of the condemnation of grove and grave in Isa 65:3-4. At the appointed hour, the king invites the goddess to enter the bridal chamber: "My beloved, enter the door into our house. With my mouth, consort of our lord, let me kiss thee" (XVI/12). They enter the "perfumed hideaway", where the goddess is lain upon an embroidered bedspread (XVI/13-14). The ceremony culminates in an exchange of blessings between Nanai

and Baal of Heaven and a promise by the king to rebuild the ruined capital of Rash (XVI/15-19).

We may recall that, according to II Kings 17:33, the people deported by the Assyrians to Samaria "worshipped the Lord, while worshipping their own gods", including, for example, Ashima of Hamath. However, the reliability of this report has been called into question by Talmon. According to him, "[this] tradition ... is not at all objective historical testimony".<sup>37</sup> It is therefore worth noting that the Biblical record is completely corroborated by Amherst 63. By the time the Rashans migrated to Egypt, they worshipped both Eshem-Bethel, the Resident of Hamath, and, *lehavdil*, the God of Israel.

<sup>37</sup>S. Talmon, "Biblical Tradition on the Early History of the Samaritans" [Hebrew], *Eretz Shomron* (Jerusalem 1973), p. 27.

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