**2.17.** The five branches of Afro-Asiatic are not really parallel to each other, because closer relations can be established between some of them. Thus Libyco-Berber is certainly closer to the Semitic branch than Egypt- ian or Cushitic, while Chadic languages, as far as known presently, are obviously the most distant from the other branches. Very characteristic of Libyco-Berber and of Semitic are the preserved features of the erga- tive language type, with identical morphemes indicating either the active subject or the predicate-object, both in the singular and in the plural. Also the system of conjugation in Libyco-Berber and in Semitic is built upon a "nominal" and a "verbal" bases, with the aspectual opposition of accomplished to unaccomplished. These two branches of Afro-Asiatic are thus closely related to each other, but this relationship can best be explained in the general frame of the whole language family. The inter- relations between the five branches of Afro-Asiatic may therefore be represented schematically in the following way:

Proto-Afro-Asiatic

| Semitic | Berber | Cushitic | Egyptian | Chadic |
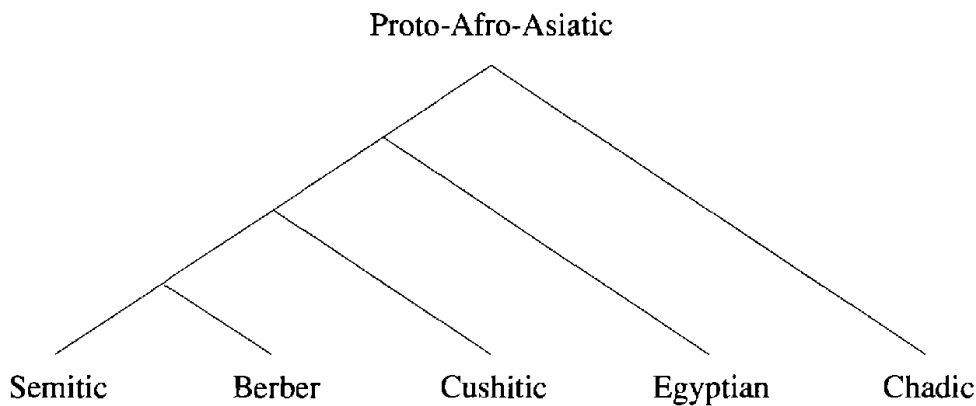
3. PROTO-SEMITIC

3.1. The Semitic languages, although their number amounts to about seventy, have a much larger layer of common elements in their phonol- ogy, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary than the Afro-Asiatic group as a whole. They also share certain common features in their evolution, easily recognizable in ancient and in modern forms of speech. These common elements and parallel developments, maintained despite lapse of time and spreading over new areas, strongly support the family-tree theory which regards the dividing process that affects a homogeneous language — in this case the Proto-Semitic — as the main impelling power from which new idioms originated. This theory does not exclude,

however, concrete applications of the wave-theory that attributes common linguistic evolutions to the spreading of linguistic changes by contacts between dialects, that may lead to the emerging of a new local *koinè*, of a new common language. In any case, neither the wave-theory nor its variant, the peripheral hypothesis, correspond to the global evidence with distant Semitic areas, as Akkadian and Ethiopic, more alike than are those which are not so widely separated. In other words, Proto-Semitic is something more than a conventional name given to the whole of elements shared by the family of languages under consideration. In view of the relatively limited geographical dispersion of the ancient core of Semitic languages and of the great measure of affinity between them, the concept of Proto-Semitic would seem comparable to that of Latin with regard to the Romance languages. The problems of the latter group are, however, more manageable owing to the fact that the Latin language is historically documented, while Proto-Semitic is a linguistic prerequisite the existence of which in prehistoric times is necessary for an understanding of the mutual relations and parallel developments of the historically documented Semitic languages.

3.2. Since the Semitic languages go apparently back to a common origin, the question of the location of the speakers of this Proto-Semitic language has been often considered of importance. Various regions have been taken into account: Syria, Arabia, and Africa. No definitive answer, however, can be given to this question without considering the Afro-Asiatic linguistic interrelations. In fact, the sedentary or half-sedentary protopopulation of North Syria and Mesopotamia was most likely non-Semitic, as appears from the large number of non-Semitic geographical names in Palaeosyrian and in Old Akkadian texts. Now, geographical names, with the exception of newly founded settlements, reflect an old and inherited linguistic tradition of the specific areas. As for Arabia, this region could hardly have supported sufficient population for such large waves of emigration before the domestication of the dromedary in the second millennium B.C., while the Semitic languages of Africa are grouped in an apparently peripheral area of Semitic and their appearance in the Horn of Africa, midst Cushitic languages, is most likely due to an ancient conquest and emigration.

3.3. The problem of the original homeland of the Semites cannot be examined historically without considering the linguistic relations between the five branches of the Afro-Asiatic language family. The

main service that comparative linguistics can render to the investigation of this prehistoric problem is not simply asserting the common origin of the languages in question, but defining the degree of their divergence and relating it to two variables: time and separation. Time is a variable related to divergence in the sense that, under like circumstances, the longer the time the greater the divergence. Separation is a variable in the sense that parts of an original language community will tend to diverge faster if they become completely separated as, say, Semitic and Libyco-Berber around e.g. 1000 B.C. The similarities in language between peoples living so far away from each other are due, not to cultural contact and borrowing, but to common linguistic tradition. Now, the most numerous isoglosses and lexicostatistical convergences are precisely those linking Semitic with Libyco-Berber, while the isoglosses and the lexicostatistical factors connecting Semitic and Egyptian, on the one hand, and Semitic and Chadic, on the other, seem to be the less important. Although the available data and the very incomplete lexicostatistical studies must be regarded as preliminary, the conclusion from purely linguistic evidence seems inescapable that the Proto-Chadic languages, followed by Egyptian, were the earliest to separate from the common trunk, while Proto-Semitic maintained, for a certain time, closer language contacts with Libyco-Berber and with Cushitic. This implies that the speakers of Proto-Semitic were still dwelling in Africa in the 5th millennium B.C., in the Neolithic Sub-pluvial (ca. 5500-3500 B.C.), when the Sahara's climate was much wetter, so that erosion took place as in other moist temperate or subtropical regions, and there was a proper system of rivers and vegetation consisting of grass with trees. Settlement was undoubtedly widespread in the Sahara at that time, and there is ample evidence of Neolithic culture with rock drawings showing animals that no longer live there. A worsening of environmental conditions is indicated in North Africa ca. 3500 B.C. with disappearance of vegetation, a major faunal break, desertification, and desertion. This might have been the period when the speakers of Proto-Semitic passed through the Nile delta from the West to the East, and reached Western Asia, where written documents of the third millennium B.C. preserve noticeable traces of Pre-Semitic and, in Mesopotamia, also of Pre-Sumerian substratum. The collapse of the Ghassulian culture in Palestine around 3300 B.C. and the Egyptian finds in southern Palestine from the Early Bronze period I (ca. 3300-3050 B.C.) may testify to the arrival of these new population groups. The Palestinian tumuli, belonging to the culture of semi-nomadic groups during much of the fourth and third

millennia B.C., seem to confirm this hypothesis, since a very similar type of sepulture characterizes pre-historic North Africa, especially Algeria, and it is a typical feature of the old Libyco-Berber tradition. Thus, from North Africa, wave after wave of Semitic migrations would seem to have set forth. The earliest of these migrants, and those who went farthest to the East, were the Akkadians who, journeying along the Fertile Crescent through Palestine and Syria, and crossing over into Mesopotamia, reached Northern Babylonia ca. 3000 B.C. and founded the first Semitic Empire at Kish (§4.2; 5.2; 6.2). The Amorites (§4.1-2; 5.3) and their congeners would appear to have followed as far as Syria before 2500 B.C. The Southern Semites would seem to have reached the moister highlands of the Yemen and Ḥaḍramawt after 2000 B.C., following the collapse of the Early Bronze culture in Palestine, while the Ethiopians would have crossed over to the Horn of Africa when drier conditions prevailed in South Arabia ca. 1500-500 B.C. Since only the most primitive type of raft was needed to cross the Straits of Bab el-Mandeb or to make the short voyage across the Hanish Islands, a relatively early date for the beginning of the last mentioned migration would not be surprising. Semitic speakers settled among Cushitic pastoralists whose presence in the region probably goes back to 3500-3000 B.C. (Fig. 5). The Libyco-Berbers continued, instead, to occupy the original language area of the speakers of Afro-Asiatic. Their African origins may even be confirmed by a relationship of Afro-Asiatic with Bantu languages (§1.2) which form the central group of the large Niger-Congo family and whose homeland probably lies in the Nigeria-Cameroon area.

3.4. Although the discussion of these problems lies outside the scope of the present work, it is useful to add that any linguistic mapping a Afro-Asiatic speakers should be complemented by an anthropological approach. The data are not so abundant as might be wished, but enough evidence is available to establish the fact that the Afro-Asians belonged basically to the long-headed or dolichocephalic Mediterranean peoples widespread in distribution in Late Neolithic and Chalcolithic times. Further subdivisions of course exist, but they are generally too ephemeral to be helpful in this context. However, skeletal evidence seems to indicate that the same Neolithic peoples from North-Africa entered the Iberian peninsula and moved into the Egyptian upper valley of the Nile in pre-dynastic times. They are well represented by the Naqāda cranial series, dated to the Amratian period (ca. 3500 B.C.), and their modern descendants — through frequently mixed with negroes — are found among the
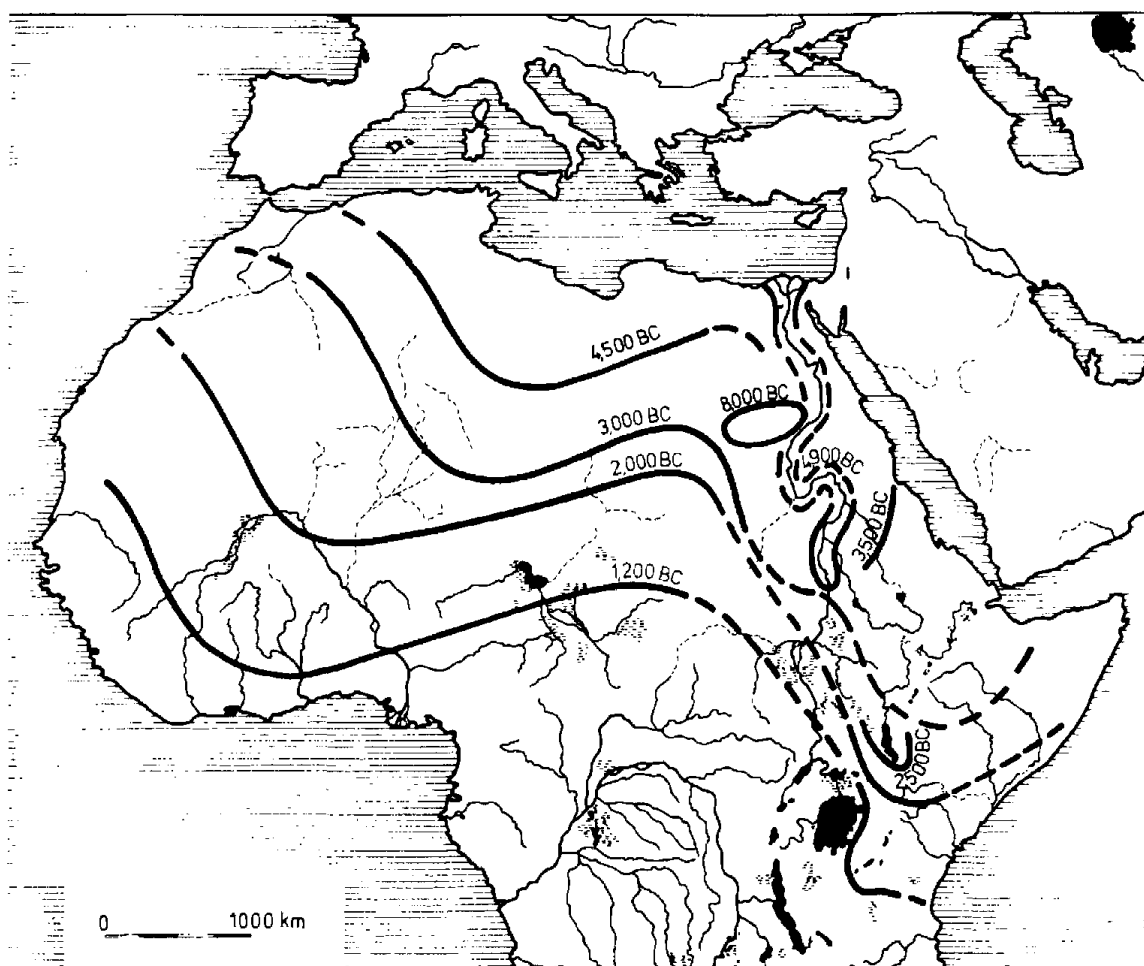
Fig. 5. The spread of the earliest pastoralists in Africa, *ca.* 8000-1200 B.C., according to L. Krzyżaniak, *Schyłek pradziejów w środkowym Sudanie*, Poznań 1992, p. 158.

speakers of Cushitic languages in the Horn of Africa and the Bedja people in the desert between the Nile and the Red Sea. Characteristic artefacts of the Amratian period, suggesting connexions with prehistoric Libyco-Berbers, are statuettes of bearded men wearing phallic sheaths, like those of the Libyans in historical times. The Amratian culture seems to have been absorbed by the Gerzean one, coming from Lower Egypt where the latter's origins begin to be investigated. The predynastic population of Lower Egypt differed from that of Upper Egypt in having broader heads, longer faces, and narrower noses. The subsequent racial history of Egypt was to be that of a gradual replacement of the Upper Egyptian or "Cushitic" type by that of prehistoric Lower Egypt. In Palestine, instead, there was no drastic change in the main anthropolog- ical type during the transition from the Chalcolithic to the Early Bronze age. Summing up, striking similarities link the physical characteristics of the predynastic Egyptians, of the contemporary Bedja population and the main Berber type, and of the Palestinian skeletons of the Early Bronze

age: dolichocephalic type, with a stature of a little less than 1.65 m. for men and about 1.55 for women, with a projecting occiput and the chin prominent. The dolicocephalic features are best preserved nowadays among the Bedouin Arabs.

3.5. The spreading of Afro-Asiatic, thus delineated, implies a determinate type of linguistic expansion in Western Asia. Linguistic expansion can take place by diffusion, infiltration, and migration. Whereas diffusion necessitates no permanent displacement of language carriers and infiltration implies a movement of but a restricted number of individuals, migration signifies that whole tribes permanently displace themselves and spread over a new territory. These are the circumstances obviously reflected in the settlement of Semites in Western Asia where Semitic idioms replaced the substratum languages of the regions where today Arabic, Neo-Aramaic, and Hebrew are spoken. The substratum generally modifies the gaining language through interference, thus causing the spreading language to differentiate itself from the language of the original linguistic homeland. Interference varies in degree and kind chiefly in proportion to non-linguistic cultural receptivity or hostility. Now, judging from the great similarity of the Semitic languages and from their close relationship to Libyco-Berber, the influence of the linguistic substratum on Semitic must have been limited except in Mesopotamia where the Sumerian adstratum played an important role. Archaeological evidence from Palestine probably provides the correct interpretation of this fact, viz. the location of the new Early Bronze I settlements shows a great shift from the preceding Chalcolithic pattern. Areas densely settled in the Chalcolithic period were either totally or partially deserted, and the new sites were usually situated in different spots. Thus, the new migrants — Semites, in our hypothesis, — seem to have brought an end to the Chalcolithic settlements in Palestine. This indicates in turn that the Early Bronze age culture introduced by the Semitic population groups lacked the receptivity required to be modified in a very significant way through linguistic interference. However, the Semitic tongues of the new territories followed together with other cultural features a path of historical development more or less divergent from that of the Afro-Asiatic language of the original homeland. The latter, represented nowadays by the Libyco-Berber dialects, developed independently from Semitic during a period of 5500 years or more, if we except the borrowings from Punic and Arabic. This large span of time seems to be sufficient for explaining the differences between Semitic

and Libyco-Berber, especially if we take into account the fact that the two groups were affected, respectively in Asia and in Africa, by neighbouring forms of speech which belonged to completely different language families.

4. CLASSIFICATION OF SEMITIC LANGUAGES

4.1. The distinct Semitic tongues are ranging from important languages with large literatures to language forms used over a limited territory and either entirely unwritten or possessing but a few preserved documents. Some are attested only in the third or the second millennium B.C., while other languages have been identified as late as the 20th century A.D. It was usual, until a short time ago, to group all languages into three great branches: the East Semitic represented by Akkadian, the Northwest Semitic with Canaanite, Ugaritic, Amorite, and Aramaic, and the South Semitic with Arabic and Ethiopic.

This classification was based on the view that the first division which Semitic underwent, before 3000 B.C., was between East Semitic or Akkadian and West Semitic. At a later date, but before 2000 B.C., West Semitic was believed to have split into a northern and a southern branch. Northwest Semitic further divided into Canaanite and Aramaic, while Southwest Semitic split into Arabic, on the one side, and South Arabian and Ethiopic, on the other. This conception can no more be sustained because of the discovery of languages that do not fit into any of those branches, and in view of doubts risen with regard to the classification of Ugaritic, Amorite, and Arabic.

4.2. The discovery of new types of Semitic speeches in Northern Syria, at Ebla, Tell Beydar, and Mari, as well as in the Kish area of Central Mesopotamia, reveals the existence of a group of dialects belonging to Semitic languages of the third millennium B.C. that were related to Old Akkadian and slightly less to Amorite. It is convenient to call "Palaeosyrian" those dialects that are attested by documents found in Syria, although the language shows a certain mixture (§41.28; 48.5), while some "literary" and lexical texts are duplicated at Fāra and at Tell Abū Ṣalābīkh (Iraq). The language may be linked to some extent with the writing system brought from Mesopotamia and thus partly represent the written Semitic of the place from which the script was taken ca. 2400 B.C., probably Kish (§5.2). Unfortunately, there is no way at

present to check this hypothesis. It appears also that Palaeosyrian and Old Akkadian texts contain many proper names in which occurs an ending -*a* that qualifies the predicate state of the noun and that is attested also in some Amorite names, but does not belong to the living languages of the texts. One can assume therefore that this feature reflects an even older common stage of Semitic languages. Besides, Palaeosyrian dialects share certain linguistic features with Ugaritic, South Arabian, and Ethiopic, that obviously preserve some common archaic elements. The resulting picture shows therefore that there was no clear cut between East and West Semitic in the third millennium B.C. As for the greater affinity between Palaeosyrian and Old Akkadian, it is due to the use of the same type of script, borrowed from the Sumerians or Proto-Sumerians, and to the chronological and perhaps partly local vicinity of the written languages. The differences between the Semitic forms of speech obviously increased with the time.

4.3. There is also no clear cut between Northwest and Southwest Semitic in the first millennium B.C. For instance, some Early Aramaic dialects probably possessed the internal or "broken" plural, regularly found only in the South Semitic area, while some North Arabian languages used the prefixed article *han-*, attested normally in Canaanite languages of the first millennium B.C. Therefore, classifications based on important literary languages, as Arabic, Ethiopic, Hebrew, and Syriac, and the interpretation of other forms of speech as mere dialects of these literary languages cannot be sustained any more. For a time, varying in length in the various regions, all spoken dialects were of equal prestige, and the epigraphical documentation transmits fuller information on dialectal varieties than has since been available. But with the formation of literary languages in cultural and political centres, certain local dialects augmented their prestige and with their grammatical codification came some measure of petrifaction allowing for clearly cut linguistic features. A classification based on these standard languages does not reflect, of course, the variety of spoken dialects, the differences of which often increase with the time and in proportion as the geographical distances grow, thus blurring clearly cut linguistic divisions.

4.4. In conclusion, a subdivision of the Semitic language family should be based on the wide geographic distribution of the speeches, but take also into account, if feasible, the historically attested documentation. In ancient times, Semitic languages were spoken in Mesopotamia, Syria-

Palestine, Arabia, and Ethiopia. Beyond this area they have spread only as a result of later and historically known developments, i.e. migration, colonization, or conquest. It is convenient, therefore, to describe the Semitic languages and dialects roughly in the same geographic order, slightly corrected in view of some chronological considerations, since the linguistic material of the present survey extends in time over some 4500 years: from the mid-third millennium B.C., when we encounter the earliest written manifestations of a Semitic language (Palaeosyrian, Old Akkadian), until the present times, when some entirely unwritten forms of Semitic speech have been described and analyzed.

4.5. Therefore, the present survey will distinguish a North Semitic grouping, to which belong written languages of the third and second millennia B.C. (Palaeosyrian, Amorite, Ugaritic), an East Semitic group with Old Akkadian, Assyro-Babylonian, and Late Babylonian, that cannot simply derive from the preceding stages of Babylonian, a West Semitic group with Canaanite (Hebrew, Phoenician, Moabite, Ammonite), Aramaic, and North Arabian languages (Thamūdic, Lihyānite, Safaitic, Standard Arabic, Neo-Arabic), and a South Semitic group with South Arabian and Ethiopian languages, both ancient and modern.

4.6. This survey does not aim at giving a detailed description of all the Semitic languages. However, the lack of any up-to-date introductory work demands a summary presentation of the current knowledge in this field in order to clarify the concepts and the terminology adopted in the present comparative study. Although the latter has an introductory character, does not aim at exhaustiveness, and emphasizes the position of the great literary or standard languages, it also adduces evidence from other ancient and modern Semitic languages and dialects. Their position in the Semitic family has therefore to be briefly characterized. The terms "dialect" and "language" are taken here in their rough definition, the distinct forms of speech being called "dialects" when the differences are relatively small. In this approach, not only geographically different forms of speech may be called "dialects", but also historical stages of the languages considered, as Old Assyrian, Middle Assyrian, and Neo-Assyrian that together cover a span of 1500 years. In any case, no exact definition of "language" and "dialect" is feasible, and the "discovery" of a new Semitic language merely expresses the scholars' conviction that a type of speech appears sufficiently distinct from others so as deserve a name of its own.

5. NORTH SEMITIC

5.1. North Semitic is represented nowadays by Palaeosyrian (but cf. §4.2), Amorite, and Ugaritic. These are languages spoken and written in Upper Mesopotamia and Northern Syria in the third and second millennia B.C. They are known to us only through written records and cannot be subjected to strict phonetic analysis. However, their corpus expands steadily by the discovery of more written documents, that may reveal the existence of unknown dialects or even of new related languages, as was the case at Tell Mardikh/Ebla and at Tell Beydar, near Hassake (Syria).

A. Palaeosyrian

5.2. Palaeosyrian is represented by the "Eblaite" texts from Tell Mardikh/Ebla dating from the 24th century B.C. according to the "short" chronology (Fig. 6), by the tablets from Tell Beydar, going back to the mid-third millennium B.C. as well (Fig. 7), by the Pre-Sargonic and post-Ur-III texts from Mari, in Syria. Common scribal traditions and cultural elements are revealed by these documents and by texts from the area of Kish, in Mesopotamia, 15 km east of Babylon. It would be premature, however, to term that cultural entity "Kish civilization" and to contrast it too sharply with the Sumerian culture, especially with the written culture of Sumer. Palaeosyrian cuneiform script is of Sumerian or even of Pre-Sumerian origin and it uses Sumerian logograms or word signs, besides syllabic signs and auxiliary marks aimed at helping the understanding of the writing. It is impossible to consider the texts from different sites as written in one language spoken by a single people in the whole area extending from North Syria to Babylonia. However, the spoken languages may differ to various extents from a written *koinè* and, in any case, there are common features in the writing system, in phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. Further research and more discoveries are needed to establish how many written Semitic languages or dialects of the mid-third millennium should be distinguished in the area under consideration. Besides, the sources so far discovered — in particular the proper names — contain elements surviving from an older Semitic language that should also be studied and evaluated.
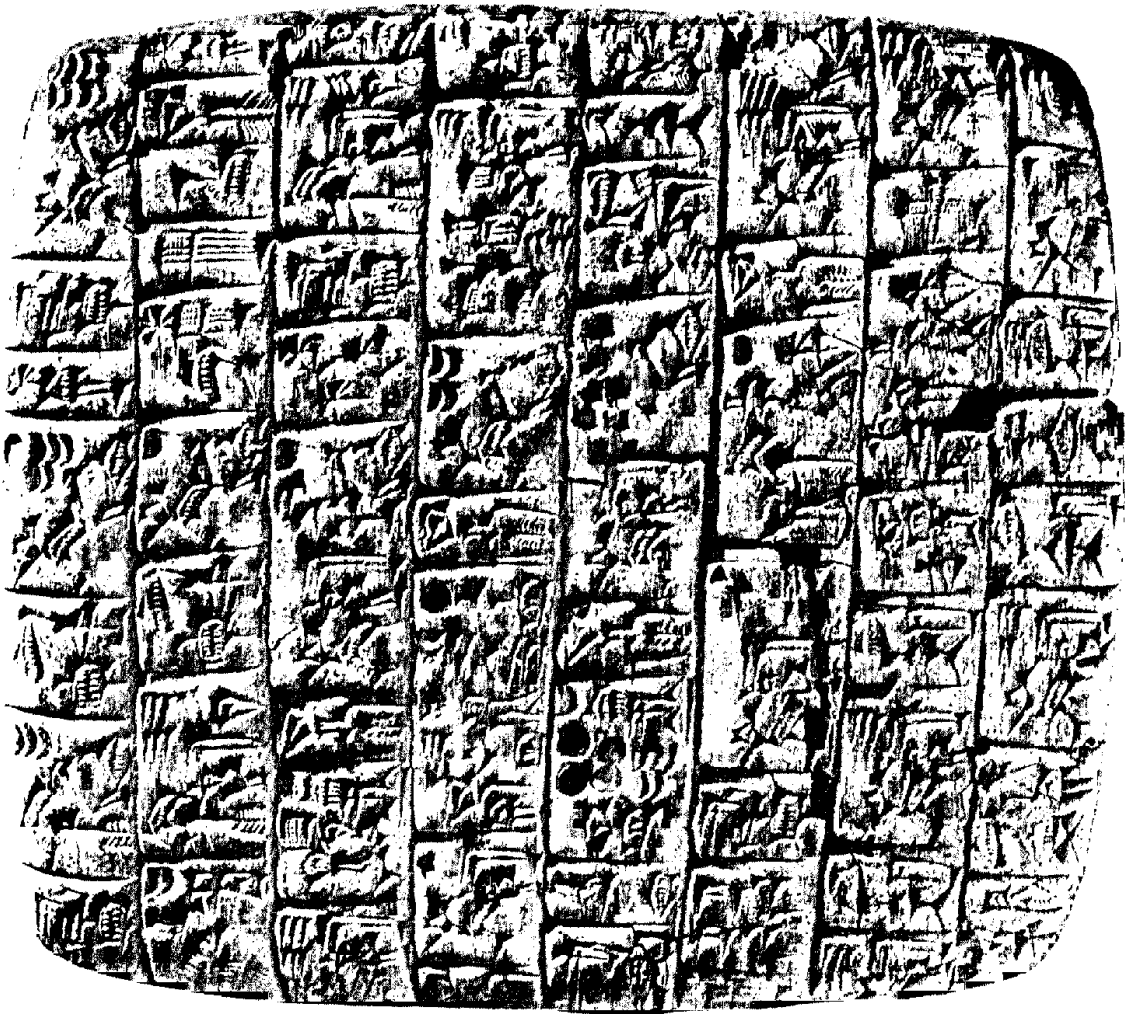
Fig. 6. Ebla Tablet TM.75.G.1377 Obverse
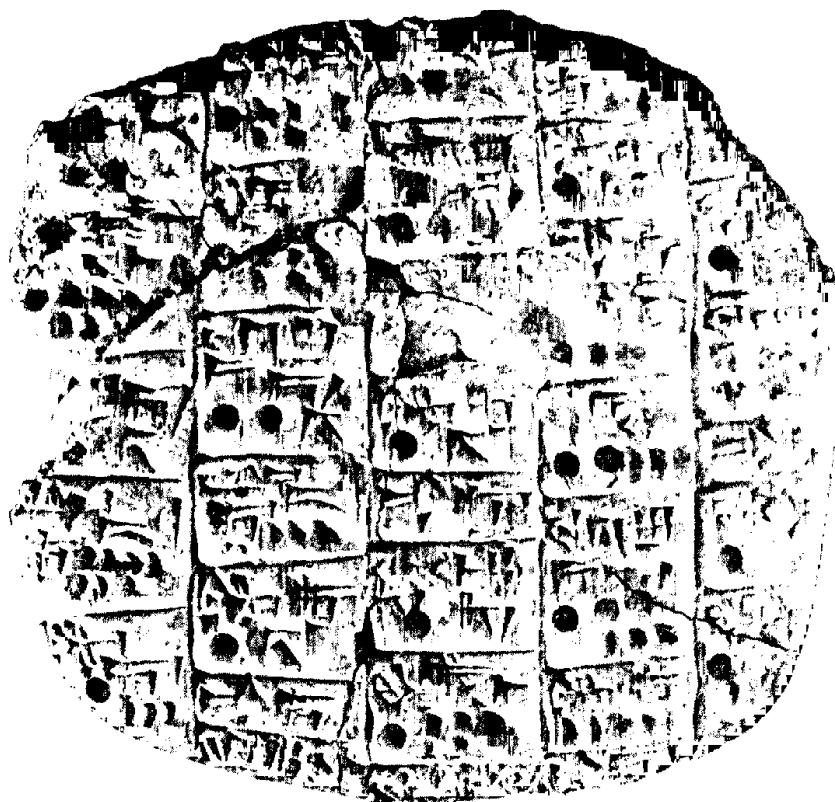(Courtesy Missione Archeologica in Siria).

Fig. 7. Tell Beydar Tablet 2629-T-2
(Courtesy Euro-Syrian Excavations at Tell Beydar).

B. Amorite

5.3. Amorite is the name given nowadays to a group of North Semitic dialects spoken in North Syria and Upper Mesopotamia between the middle of the third millennium and the second half of the second millennium B.C. These forms of Semitic speech are mainly known by the numerous proper names — with specific grammatical forms — which appear in various cuneiform texts, by some loanwords borrowed by Old Babylonian scribes, and by certain linguistic peculiarities occurring sporadically in Old Babylonian texts, in particular those from Mari. Some Amorite names are found also in Middle Egyptian execration texts from the 19th and 18th centuries B.C. Amorite was once called "East Canaanite" and is often considered as a Northwest Semitic language. The geographical area of the speakers of Amorite dialects and the relation of these speech forms to Palaeosyrian suggest however to classify Amorite among the North Semitic tongues and to consider "East Canaanite" as an inappropriate designation of the language under consideration.

C. Ugaritic

5.4. Ugaritic is the name given to the Semitic language discovered in 1929 at Ras Shamra, the site of ancient Ugarit, on the coast of northwestern Syria. Ugaritic was written in an alphabetic cuneiform script using 30 simple signs which, on the whole, present single consonantal sounds. The texts discovered at Ras Shamra and at Ras Ibn Hani, southwest of Ugarit, date from the 14th, 13th, and the beginning of the 12th centuries B.C. A few tablets in alphabetic cuneiform script were also found at other sites, notably in Palestine. Next to mythological and epic compositions, there are letters and administrative-economic documents that reflect a somewhat younger stage of the language.

6. EAST SEMITIC

6.1. East Semitic is represented by Old Akkadian, attested roughly from 2400 to 2000 B.C., by the various branches of Assyro-Babylonian (roughly 1900-600 B.C.), and by the Late Babylonian that cannot be derived from the preceding stages of Babylonian without admitting at least considerable interference from another Semitic language. "Akkadian" is the most diffused global appellation of these forms of speech; it comes from Akkad or Agade, the capital of the Semitic Empire of Sargon of Agade (*ca.* 2265-2210, according to a "short" chronology). Yet, to underline the distinction between Old Akkadian, on the one hand, and the Assyrian and Babylonian dialects of the second and first millennia B.C., on the other, the latter will generally be called "Assyro-Babylonian" in this *Outline*. Akkadian did use logograms or word signs, but was written mainly in syllabograms that also indicated vowels. However, this script was in several respects imperfect, owing to its Sumerian or Pre-Sumerian and thus non-Semitic origin.

A. Old Akkadian

6.2. If the Early Dynastic III or Pre-Sargonic texts from the Kish area (§5.2) are considered as written in an earlier dialect of the same language as the one used in the Semitic documents of the Empire created by Sargon of Akkad, Old Akkadian may be dated between 2350 and 2000 B.C. according to a "short" chronology. Like in the case of Palaeosyrian, its

writing is of Sumerian or non-Semitic origin and has the same general characteristics, but cuneiform signs are generally used with their normal Sumerian value, contrary to the Ebla practice, and certain speech elements are not omitted in writing, as it happens frequently at Ebla and at Mari. On the other side, there seems to be no convincing way of deriving the earliest attested Assyrian or Babylonian texts from Old Akkadian, that obviously was a local dialect of northern Babylonia that owed its prestige and literary character to the fact of being spoken in the power centre of the Kish dynasties and of the Akkadian Empire.

B. Assyro-Babylonian

6.3. The huge number of private letters, contracts, public documents, and literary texts preserved makes Assyro-Babylonian one of the principal sources for ancient Semitic. Because of the cultural prestige of Babylonian, various local forms of Assyro-Babylonian were used in the neighbouring countries and served in the second millennium B.C. for purposes of State correspondence and for official documents in areas where East Semitic was not spoken. The outstanding case of this is the Amarna correspondence, chiefly from Syria-Palestine. By a gradual process, however, between the 8th and the 6th centuries B.C., Assyro-Babylonian died out as a spoken language and was replaced by Aramaic in its homeland. Its written use, however, continued until the 1st century A.D.

6.4. *Babylonian*, the dialect of the southern part of Mesopotamia, was also used as a literary language in Assyria. The Babylonians themselves were calling it "Akkadian". Within the Babylonian dialect one can distinguish the following periods: Old Babylonian (*ca.* 1900-1500 B.C.), Middle Babylonian (*ca.* 1500-1000 B.C.), and Neo-Babylonian (*ca.* 1000-600 B.C.). There are several sub-dialects in the Old Babylonian period. Thus, the existence of dialectal differences between North Babylonian and South Babylonian, and between the earlier Old Babylonian and the later Old Babylonian has to be pointed out. Besides, there are provincial dialects from Susa (Elam), from the Diyala region, and from Mari. In addition, literary compositions, which originated in the Old Babylonian or Middle Babylonian periods, continued to be copied in later times, generally conserving their original wording. The dialect of these literary texts has been termed Standard Babylonian (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8. Middle Babylonian fragment of the Gilgamesh Epic from Megiddo
(Courtesy Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums).

6.5. The various linguistic stages of *Assyrian*, the dialect of the northern part of Mesopotamia, can be divided into Old Assyrian (*ca.* 1900-1700 B.C.), with texts principally from commercial settlements in Anatolia, but written in the same dialect, Middle Assyrian (*ca.* 1500-1000 B.C.), with records strongly influenced by Babylonian, and Neo-Assyrian (*ca.* 1000-600 B.C.), which was Aramaicized in its final phase, especially in the northwestern regions of the Assyrian Empire and in the wording of contracts.

C. Late Babylonian

6.6. Late Babylonian is the written language of South Mesopotamia in the Persian, Seleucid, and Arsacid periods from *ca.* 600 B.C. onwards,

while Aramaic and the practically unknown Chaldaean dialect were the spoken idioms which by a gradual process influenced the written language. Since people resorted in the Near East to professional scribes to have even their private letters written, read, and translated, the existence of Late Babylonian tablets belonging to this genre does not prove that Babylonian subsisted as a vernacular language at that time, although there were certainly educated people having a fairly good knowledge of the literary idiom. The latter does not seem to have borrowed an important part of its lexicon from Aramaic, but certain texts can hardly be considered as written in a truly Babylonian dialect, since their type of speech reveals a too far-reaching linguistic change in phonetics, morphology, and syntax, as the use of *iprus*-forms in the volitive functions of the Aramaic imperfect (§54.6) and the occasional transmutation of the stative into an Aramaic perfect (§38.10).

7. WEST SEMITIC

7.1. West Semitic was traditionally divided into two groups, namely the Canaanite and the Aramaic, with Hebrew and Syriac as the main literary languages. In recent times, Amorite and Ugaritic have often been considered as older forms of speech of Canaanite despite the fact that they are morphologically and syntactically more distinct from Hebrew than the North Arabian languages. For this reason, Amorite and Ugaritic have been classified here as North Semitic tongues, while the North Arabian forms of speech will be viewed as the third main family of the West Semitic languages of Syria-Palestine and Northern Arabia.

A. Canaanite

7.2. The name Canaanite, coined from the toponym Canaan, the ancient appellation of southern Syria and Palestine, will be used in the present work to designate, as a rule, the older stages of the Canaanite languages, known from sources of the second millennium B.C. The stages of the first millennium B.C. are classified, instead, as Hebrew, Phoenician, Ammonite, Moabite, and Edomite. The Hebrew language is the only one in this group that survived the Antiquity.

a) Old Canaanite

7.3. Old Canaanite forms of speech of the second millennium B.C. are reflected to a certain extent in the Old Babylonian tablets from Hazor. They are attested directly by a number of short inscriptions found in Palestine (Proto-Canaanite) and in the Sinai peninsula (Proto-Sinaitic), some superimposed upon datable Egyptian objects. The whole series is variously dated by scholars from 1800 B.C. onwards. If the inscriptions on Phoenician arrowheads and the Gezer calendar are added to this group, the latter can be dated between the mid-second millennium B.C. and the 10th century B.C., and it represents the earliest purely alphabetic form of writing. Also the pseudo-hieroglyphic inscriptions of Byblos are most likely composed in a Canaanite dialect, but they cannot be considered as deciphered.

7.4. The Amarna correspondence of the 14th century B.C. provides a large number of Canaanite glosses and linguistic peculiarities in its Babylonian cuneiform text. This material can be supplemented by the Canaanite words and forms occurring in eight texts found at Kāmid el-Lōz (Lebanon) and in a few scattered documents, by the Semitic loanwords in ancient Egyptian, and by the few words in Egyptian texts put into the mouth of Semites. Also this material is unmistakably Canaanite, but cannot be further defined with any certainty.

b) Hebrew

7.5. Hebrew is the Canaanite form of speech used inland from *ca.* 1000 B.C. onwards. In the first millennium B.C., it comprised two main dialects — the Israelite in the north and the Judahite in the south — but the biblical text retained but a few traces of dialects that can instead be identified in the epigraphical material. Besides the Bible, the Dead Sea scrolls, the documents discovered in the Judaean Desert, the Mishnah, and the Tosefta belong to the period when Hebrew was still a spoken language, at least in some parts of Judaea. The last mentioned works are written in the so-called Mishnaic Hebrew, which existed previously for hundreds of years as a vernacular but became a new literary language only in the late first century A.D. Also some of the documents discovered in the Judaean Desert are written in this idiom and its influence can be detected already in the later books of the Bible, e.g. Qohelet, the Chronicles, and Esther. The Dead Sea scrolls have revealed some linguistic features that are parallel also to the particular Samaritan

tradition of Hebrew, although Samaritan Hebrew, retained as the language of liturgy and revived as literary language from the 14th century on, exhibits innovative elements as well, developed under the influence of Aramaic and of the Arabic vernacular. Mishnaic Hebrew ceased to be spoken around 200 A.D., but it remained a written language that served for every written purpose and even flourished in poetry and literature. This later form of Mishnaic Hebrew was influenced by Biblical Hebrew and by Aramaic. As a result, this mixed idiom cannot be employed as a trustworthy basis for the study of spoken and literary Mishnaic Hebrew used in the earlier period. The same must be said about the "Masoretic" Hebrew of the 9th-10th centuries A.D. that serves as the main base for the grammatical investigation of Biblical Hebrew, though Elijah Levita (1468/9-1549) pointed already out that the Masoretic vowels and accents do not belong to the original text but had originated in post-talmudic times. In fact, although the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible is generally speaking reliable from the linguistic point of view, its phonological and grammatical interpretation by the various Schools of "Masoretes" or traditionalists, especially that from Tiberias, is conditioned by their knowledge of the language spoken more than a thousand years before them and by the reliability of oral traditions underlying the reading of the Bible in Jewish communities whose vernaculars were mainly Aramaic or Arabic dialects. Since 1881 Hebrew again became a spoken idiom and it is nowadays the language of modern Israel, known as *ivrīt*. There was a certain impact of Yiddish on the early stage of modern Hebrew, since most of the Jewish immigrants who arrived in Palestine from eastern Europe prior to World War II were native speakers of Yiddish. Instead, the recent massive immigration of Jews from Russia brings about a Slavic impact on some aspects of spoken Hebrew.

Vocalized quotations of Hebrew words and sentences in the present *Outline* are generally based on the reading of the Tiberian Masoretes as preserved in the Ms. St. Petersburg B 19^A which was written in 1009 A.D. and whose vocalization was adjusted to the system of Aaron Ben-Asher. As a matter of fact, its vowel points and accents are almost identical with those of the Aleppo Codex pointed by Aaron Ben-Asher himself in the first half of the 10th century A.D. (Fig. 9).

c) Phoenician

7.6. Phoenician is the Canaanite form of speech used in the first millennium B.C. in the coastal cities of Byblos, Sidon, Tyre, in the

Fig. 9. Page from the Aleppo Codex with the text of I Chron. 2,26-3,4.

neighbouring towns, and in the various settlements and colonies established in Anatolia, along the Mediterranean shores, and on the Atlantic coast of Spain and of Morocco. The epigraphical material attests the existence of different dialects in the Phoenician homeland and overseas. In Carthage, a Tyrian foundation, the language developed a distinct form, called Punic (Fig. 10), that was also used in the Numidian kingdoms of North Africa. In its latest stage, documented down to the first centuries A.D., the Phoenician speech of West Mediterranean countries is called Neo-Punic and it is attested also in Latin script (Latino-Punic inscriptions). As far as our information goes, Neo-Punic continued to be spoken in North Africa until the 5th century A.D., perhaps down to the 11th century A.D. at Surt, in Libya, but Phoenician died out as a spoken language in the Levant at latest in the 3rd or 4th centuries A.D.
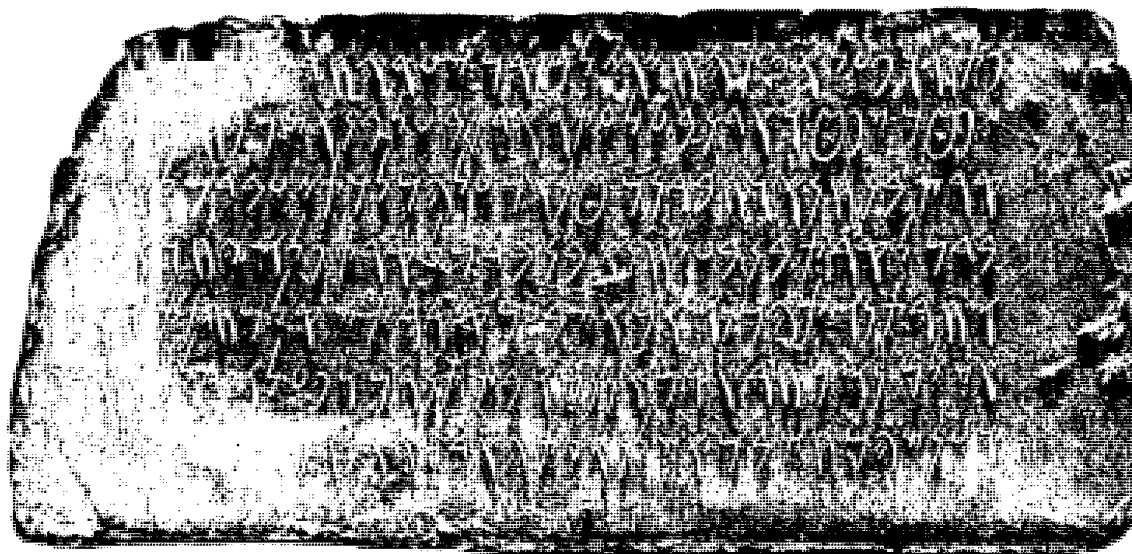

Fig. 10. Punic inscription from Carthage.

d) Ammonite

7.7. Ammonite, represented by a small corpus of inscriptions dated from the 9th to the end of the 6th century B.C., was a Canaanite form of speech, used east of the lower Jordan valley around Rabbath-Ammon, modern Ammān. It was probably more different from Hebrew than can be guessed from the unvocalized Aramaic script of the inscriptions.

e) Moabite

7.8. Moabite, represented by two inscriptions and a few seals dated from the 9th through the 6th century B.C., was a Canaanite idiom spoken east

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 Halaf 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-Qādi (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 cen-
tury B.C. The Nabataean use of the Aramaic language and script contin-
ued 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
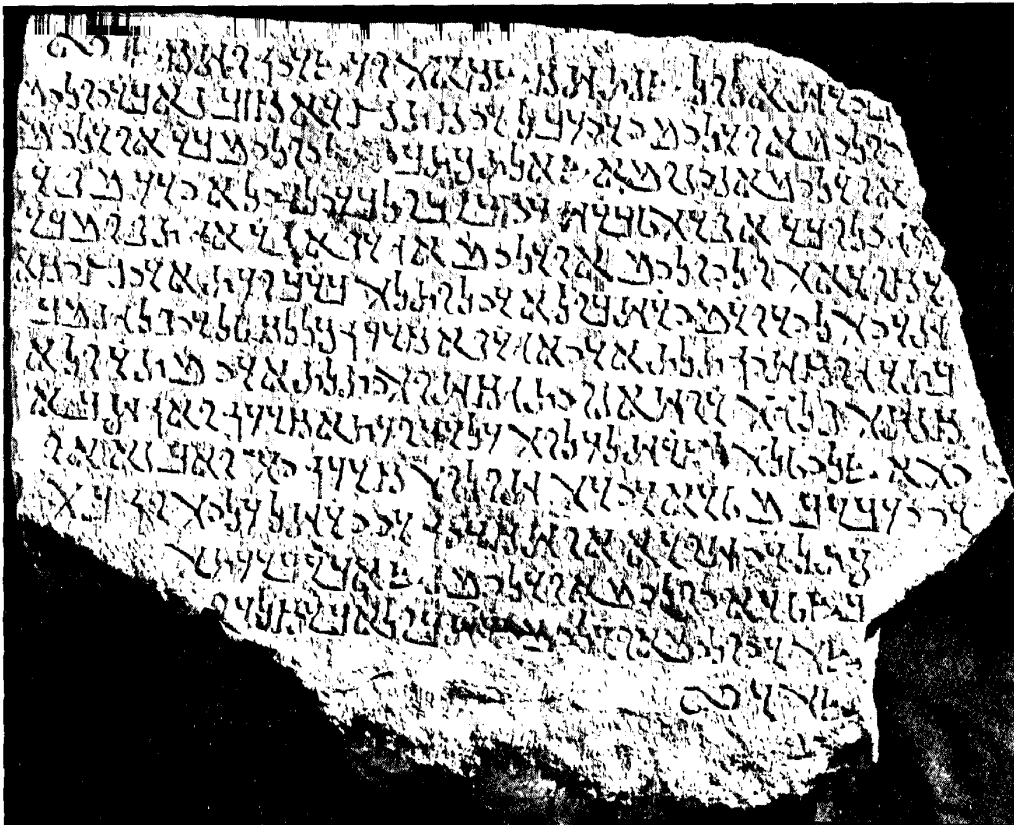East Aramaic dialect.

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 *Asatir*.

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.
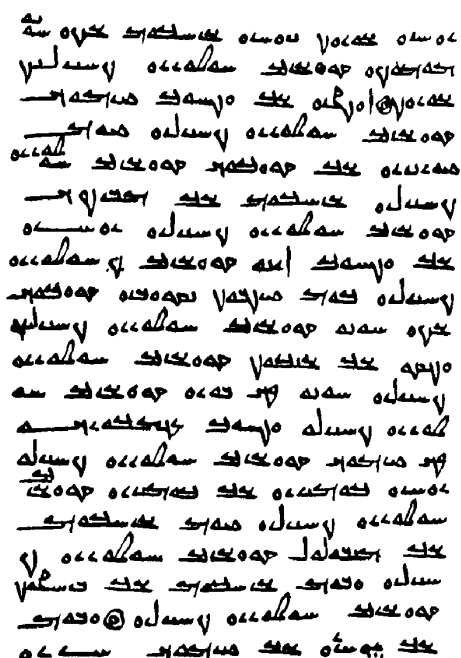
7.27. *Syriac*, originally the dialect of Edessa, occupies an intermediate position between East and West Aramaic. It is the best documented of the Aramaic languages, with a large literature in both poetry and prose, primarily of a religious Christian nature. Its oldest literary works go back to the 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 *Esṭrangelā*, a formal script which resembles that of the Syriac inscriptions of the 1st-3rd centuries A.D.,

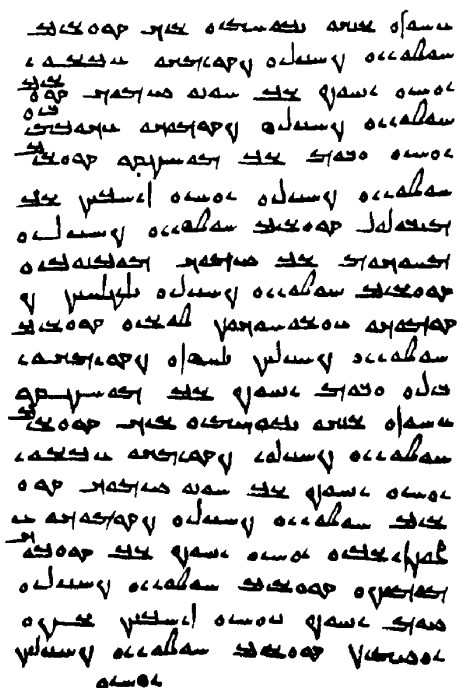| Estrangelā				Serṭō				Nestorian				Trans- cription	Name of the Letters
												ʾ	ʾālaf
												b	bēt
												g	gāmal
												d	dālat
												h	hē
												w	waw
												z	zēn
												ḥ	ḥēt
												ṭ	ṭēt
												y	yōd
												k	kāf
												l	lāmad
												m	mīm
												n	nūn
												s	semkat
												ʿ	ʿē
												p	pē
												ṣ	ṣādē
												q	qōf
												r	rēš
												š	šīn
												t	taw

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 Baḥ'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 Mlaḥsô, a village in the Diyarbakır province. The large emigration of the local population

resulted in the creation of scattered Turōyo-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,

dromedary breeders and caravaneers, were moving over great distances and living in tents. Different forms of speech have been distinguished, both urban and Bedouin.

a) Pre-Islamic North and East Arabian

7.36. Pre-Islamic North and East Arabian dialects use a variant of the South Arabian monumental script, that had developed from the common Semitic alphabet. Only the few Nabataean Arabic texts are written in Aramaic script.

7.37. *Lihyānite* is the local dialect of the oasis of al-ʻUlā, ancient Dedān, that had its own king in the 6th/5th century B.C. Lihyānite should not be distinguished, as it seems, from the language of the so-called "Dedānite" inscriptions which antedate the period when Dedān was the residence of a Persian governor in the 5th century B.C. Then, from the 4th century B.C. through the 1st century B.C., the oasis was the capital of the kingdom of Lihyān, which for nearly two centuries was home to a colony of Minaean tradesmen from South Arabia. Dedān and the neighbouring site of al-Hidjr (Hegrāʼ) were occupied in *ca.* 25 B.C. by the Nabataean kingdom. Lihyānite is represented by a series of graffiti and of mainly monumental inscriptions engraved in a variety of the South Arabian script.

7.38. *Nabataean Arabic* is represented by a few inscriptions in Aramaic script, that testify to the evolution of the language. While the case endings of the nouns are still used correctly in the bilingual Aramaic-Arabic of Oboda, dated *ca.* 100 A.D., there was no longer a fully functioning case system in the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D., as appears from the inscriptions of Hegrāʼ (267 A.D.) and an-Namāra (328 A.D.). Also in South Arabian, the case differentiation between *bnw* and *bny*, where it can be detected, has become merely vestigial by the 1st-3rd centuries A.D.

7.39. The so-called *Thamūdic* graffiti are named after Thamūd, one of several Arabian tribes mentioned in the Assyrian annals (*Tamudi*), in a Greek inscription of a Nabataean temple in northeastern Hedjaz, dated *ca.* 169 A.D., in a 5th-century Byzantine source, in North Arabian graffiti from the Taymaʼ region, in many passages of the Qurʼān, and in writings of Arab geographers. These sources make it clear that the

Thamūdaeans were living between Mecca and Tayma'. However, the name "Thamūdic" was incorrectly applied to various types of graffiti found throughout Arabia, dating from the 6th century B.C. through the 3rd or 4th century A.D. and belonging to different dialects. The oldest Thamūdic inscriptions, probably from the 6th century B.C., have been found in the northern Tayma' area.

7.40. The *Safaitic* inscriptions date from the 1st century B.C. through the 4th century A.D. They are so called because they belong to a type of graffiti first discovered in 1857 in the basaltic desert of Safā, southeast of Damascus. Many thousands of such texts, scattered over an area including southeastern Syria, Jordan, and North Arabia have so far been collected and in part published (Fig. 14-15). They are, to a large extent, memorial inscriptions that mention the name of the person and of his ancestors, often specify his job or the circumstances of his passage, and call on a deity to protect his memory and ensure peace to him. Since the Safaitic graffiti have been found on the Nabataean territory and are contemporaneous with the Nabataean Aramaic inscriptions, some of them are likely to be written in Nabataean Arabic. In any case, Safaitic texts do not belong to a single dialect, as shown e.g. by the use of two different articles, namely *h-*, which is very common in Safaitic inscriptions, and *'al*, which is widely used in Nabataean Arabic proper names but appears exceptionally in names attested by the Safaitic graffiti.

7.41. *Hasaean* is the name given to the language of the inscriptions written in a variety of the South Arabian script and found mainly in the great oasis of al-Hāsa', in the east of Saudi Arabia. South Arabian script was used also in southern Iraq ("Chaldaean" inscriptions) and on the East Arabian coast, from al-Hāsa' down to 'Omān, for the rendering of various local forms of East Arabian speech. These inscriptions can be dated from the 8th through the 1st century B.C.

b) Pre-Classical Arabic

7.42. Pre-Classical Arabic dialects, both urban and Bedouin, are described to a certain extent by early Arab philologists which have preserved some data on the forms of speech in the Arab peninsula around the 7th-8th centuries A.D. For the period from the beginning of the 2nd century B.C. through the 3rd century A.D. we actually possess the inscriptions from Qaryat al-Fāw, near modern Sulayyil, on the trade

Fig. 14. Three Ṣafaitic inscriptions on a boulder in Wadi Sirḥān (courtesy of Abdu-Aziz al-Sudairi):

1° *lh lblm bn 'rm*, "(belonging) to him, to *Blm*, son of 'Amru";
2° *ldhbn nql bn mnhl*, "(belonging) to Dahbānu the carrier, son of Minhālu";
3° *ls²mt bn 'n'l*, "(belonging) to Šāmitu, son of 'An'il".

route linking Nadjrān with the eastern Arabian coast. They are written in fine monumental South Arabian script, capable of expressing the phonetic features of Arabic unambiguously. They reveal the disappearance
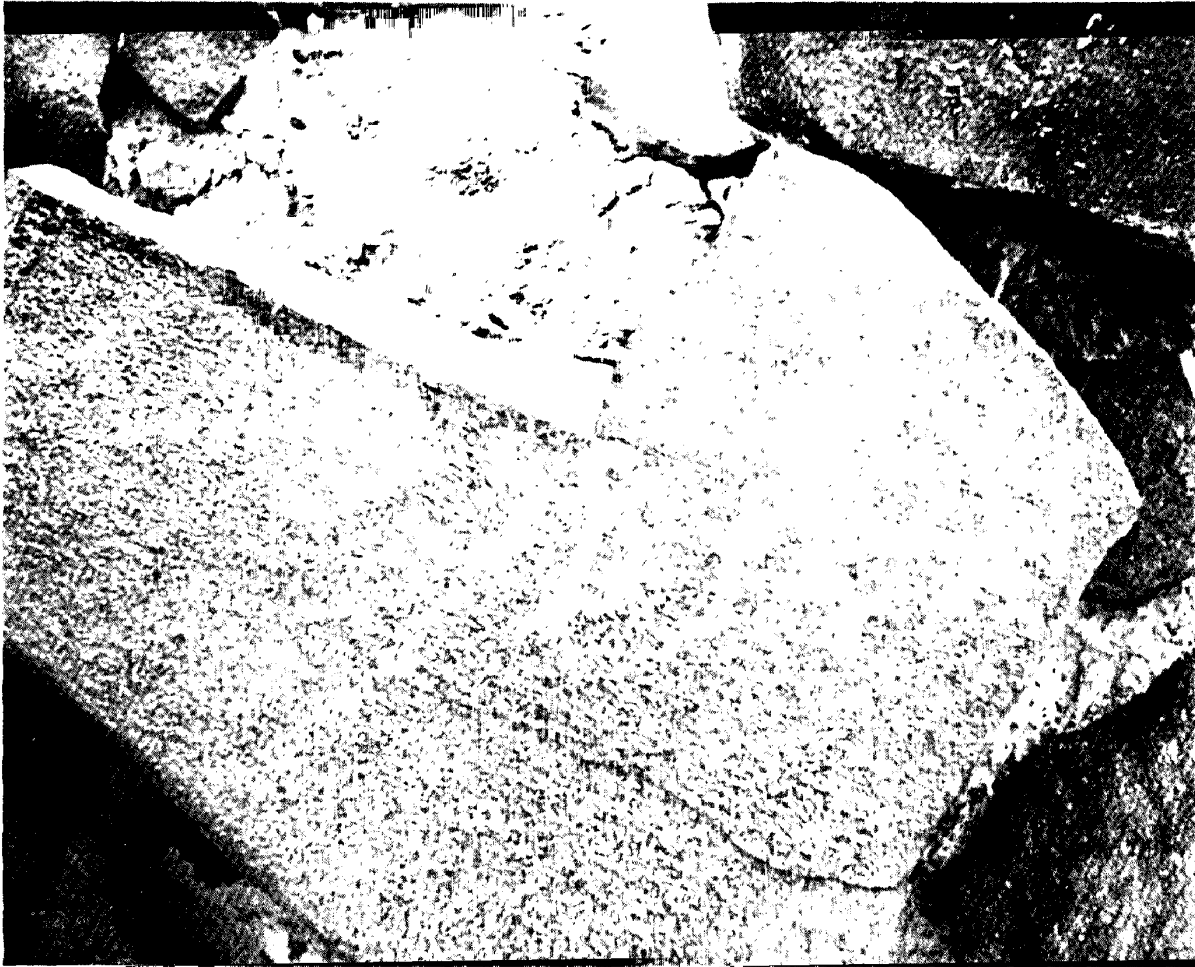
Fig. 15. Safaitic inscription on a boulder in Wadi Sirḥān (courtesy of Abdu-Aziz al-Sudairi):
l'bṣ 'trw, "(belonging) to Abūṣu, (man) of 'Aṭṭara".

of the nunation (e.g. *mn 'zzm* = Classical *min 'azīzin mā*, "from anyone strong") and of the case system (e.g. *lwldhw*, "for his child"), but attest the preservation of *š* (*s*[1]) and *š* (*s*[2]), of *ḏ*, *ṯ*, *ḍ*, *ġ*, etc. However, dialects with and without case endings coexisted, and the *-t* of the feminine ending was preserved in some idioms, while it has dropped in others, except in the construct state. The consonantal text of the Qur'ān, written in a script developed from the Nabataean cursive, is most likely a literary expression of the urban dialect of Mecca and Medina in Mohammed's time. Thus the feminine ending *-t* is replaced by the *mater lectionis -h*, like in Aramaic, except in the construct state, where ancient Qur'ān manuscripts preserve the spelling *-t*. There was no longer a fully functioning case system in nouns and the case endings, when indicated in script, have probably lost their functional yield. The consonants not

contained in the Aramaic alphabet are indicated by letters marking related sounds, according to a system already established at Tayma' in the Persian period. Thus *ḏ*, which was in Old Arabic an emphatic lateral *ś*, is signified by "ṣ" and *ẓ*, which was an emphatic interdental *ṯ*, is expressed by the corresponding dental "ṭ", just as *ṯ* is indicated by "t" and *ḏ* by "d" (Fig. 16).

c) Classical Arabic

7.43. Classical Arabic is the language of Pre-Islamic poetry, probably based on an archaic form of the dialects of Nadjd, in Central Arabia, shaped further to satisfy the needs of poetical diction and of metre, and standardized in the Abbasid empire, in the schools of al-Kūfa and Baṣrā'. Already before Islam, perhaps as early as *ca.* 500 A.D., this language was employed by poets whose vernacular may have differed strongly from the archaic Nadjdi dialects, thus testifying to the emergence of an Arabic *diglossia*, at the latest in the 6th century A.D. The early Arab philologists of the 8th-9th centuries A.D. have provided the consonantal text of the Qur'ān, that had become sacred very quickly, with a number of diacritical symbols in order to fix its pronunciation and to adapt it to the rules of Classical Arabic, without altering the holy text. However, despite the various vocalic signs and the symbols for *tanwīn* (nunation), *tā' marbūṭa* (feminine ending), *hamza*, the system of the "pausal" forms, etc., the language of the Qur'ān preserves certain features deviating from ordinary Classical Arabic and proving thus that the consonantal text has not been tampered with.

d) Neo-Arabic or Middle Arabic

7.44. Neo-Arabic or Middle Arabic is the urban language of the Arab Empire from the 8th century A.D. on, emerged from the Pre-Classical Arabic dialects. It did not arise as a result of the great Arab conquests, although Mesopotamia and Syria-Palestine provided the Aramaic linguistic substratum that stimulated the development initiated a few centuries earlier and apparent already in inscriptions and in the consonantal text of the Qur'ān. An important source for the investigation of early Neo-Arabic are South-Palestinian texts from the 8th-10th centuries A.D., as well as a bilingual Graeco-Arabic fragment from Damascus, dating back to the 8th century A.D., with the Arabic version of Ps. 78 written in Greek majuscules and thus exhibiting the vowel system.

Unbound	Bound to the right	Bound on both sides	Bound to the left	Transcription	Name of the letter
ا	ﺍ	—	—	', ā	'alif
ب	ﺑ	ﺒ	ﺑ	b	bā'
ت	ﺗ	ﺘ	ﺗ	t	tā'
ث	ﺛ	ﺜ	ﺛ	t̠	t̠ā'
ج	ﺟ	ﺠ	ﺟ	ǧ	ǧīm
ح	ﺣ	ﺤ	ﺣ	ḥ	ḥā'
خ	ﺧ	ﺨ	ﺧ	ḫ	ḫā'
د	ﺪ	—	—	d	dāl
ذ	ﺬ	—	—	d̠	d̠āl
ر	ﺮ	—	—	r	rā'
ز	ﺰ	—	—	z	zāy
س	ﺳ	ﺴ	ﺳ	s	sīn
ش	ﺷ	ﺸ	ﺷ	š	šīn
ص	ﺻ	ﺼ	ﺻ	ṣ	ṣād
ض	ﺿ	ﻀ	ﺿ	ḍ, ṣ́	ḍād
ط	ﻃ	ﻄ	ﻃ	ṭ	ṭā'
ظ	ﻇ	ﻈ	ﻇ	z̤, t̠	z̤ā'
ع	ﻋ	ﻤ	ﻋ	'	'ain
غ	ﻏ	ﻐ	ﻏ	ġ	ġain
ف	ﻓ	ﻔ	ﻓ	f	fā'
ق	ﻗ	ﻘ	ﻗ	q	qāf
ك	ﻛ	ﻜ	ﻛ	k	kāf
ل	ﻟ	ﻠ	ﻟ	l	lām
م	ﻣ	ﻤ	ﻣ	m	mīm
ن	ﻧ	ﻨ	ﻧ	n	nūn
ه	ﻬ	ﻬ	ﻫ	h	hā'
و	ﻮ	—	—	w, ū	wāw
ى	ﻰ	ﻴ	ﻳ	y, ī	yā'

Fig. 16. Arabic Script.

7.45. In almost all the Neo-Arabic dialects d has merged with z. In the dialects of the sedentary population, interdental spirants have shifted generally to the corresponding occlusives. The disappearance of the case and mood endings led to a more rigid word order in the clause, with a marked tendency to place the subject before the verb and to avoid the inserting of the object between verb and subject. The dual disappears completely in the verb, the adjective, and the pronoun, and its use with the substantive is limited. The relative pronoun becomes invariable, the asyndetic sentences become more frequent, the tenses are associated with the division of time, etc.

e) Modern Arabic

7.46. Modern Arabic dialects, spoken by some hundred and seventy million people, are no descendants of Classical Arabic but rather its contemporaries throughout history, and they are closely related to Neo-Arabic. From the sociological point of view the Modern dialects fall into Bedouin and sedentary colloquials. Among the Bedouin dialects, those of the North and Central Arabian 'Anoze, Shammar, Rwāla, and Dōsiri tribes are better known. According to geographical criteria, that imply different linguistic substrata, the following division emerges: 1° Hidjazi dialects in Saudi Arabia; 2° Southwest Arabian in Yemen and Zanzibar; 3° East Arabian dialects of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, and the 'Omānī dialects in 'Omān; 4° North Arabian dialects in Iraq, in southeastern Turkey, in the Aleppo area and in oases of the Syrian desert, in Khuzistan (Iran), and in some villages of Uzbekistan; 5° dialects of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan; 6° dialects of northern and central Egypt; 7° dialects of southern Egypt, Sudan, and Central Africa; 8° West Arabian dialects of the Maghrib with Malta and certain regions of western Egypt, to which the Arabic idioms of Muslim Spain (al-Andalus) and of Sicily were closely related. Except for Maltese, no spoken colloquial Arabic achieved official status as a written language, but there is some popular literature in various dialects. With the spread of literacy, *Modern Literary Arabic*, a direct offshoot of Classical Arabic, becomes more and more widely known and it is used today for almost all written purposes and for certain formal kinds of speaking. The Arabic which is used in ordinary conversation by all speakers of Arabic, no matter how well educated, is instead the colloquial Arabic in its different forms of speech.

8. SOUTH SEMITIC

8.1. The present summary exposition divides South Semitic into South Arabian, both epigraphic and modern, and in Ethiopic, with ancient Ethiopic or Ge'ez and various modern languages of Eritrea and Ethiopia, sometimes called "Ethio-Semitic" in order to distinguish them from the Cushitic languages of Ethiopia. This subgrouping of Semitic languages corresponds not only to geographical criteria, but also to shared linguistic features.

A. South Arabian

8.2. In Yemen, at the southern end of the Arabian peninsula, a sedentary agrarian civilization developed at least from the beginning of the second millennium B.C. At the end of the 8th century B.C. appear the oldest monumental rock and display inscriptions so far recorded. A total of at least 8000 such texts, whole or fragmentary, dating down to the 6th century A.D., have been so far discovered. Besides, hundreds of cursive texts incised with a stylus on sticks and palm-leaf stalks have been found in the Yemeni Djawf, but only some of them have been fully deciphered and published (Fig. 17).

Monumental	Y	ꟻ	Ψ	ꟼ	ꟻ	Φ	⋛	⟩	Π	X
Cursive	·𝑦	𝒥	𝒥	e	𝑓	℘	𝟹	𝒥	𝒿	X
Transcription	h	l	ḥ	m	q	w	s²	r	b	t

Monumental	ꟺ	ꟻ	ꟶ	Ψ	X	ꟻ	o	ꟺ	ꟻ	ꟷ
Cursive	ꟹ	ꟹ	ꟹ	ℒ	𝒇	𝒽	𝒥	𝒥	//	⟩
Transcription	s¹	k	n	ẖ	s³	f	'	'	ṣ(ḍ)	g

Monumental	ꟺ	Π	⊞	X	H	ꟼ	ꟾ	ꟼ	ꟾ
Cursive	ꟺ	ꟼ	𝒇	ꟼ	ꟼ	℘	ꟼ	ꟼ	
Transcription	d	ġ	ṭ	z	ḏ	y	ṯ	ṣ	ẓ(z)

Fig. 17. South Arabian Alphabet.

Four principal languages, attested by epigraphical documents, have been discerned besides the modern spoken South Arabian idioms: Sabaic, Minaic, Qatabanic, and Ḥaḍramitic (Fig. 18). A number of ancient South Arabian linguistic features have been registered by early Arab grammarians and such occur also in the earliest materials of Andalusian Arabic in Spain, where many "Yemenite" tribesmen have settled in the 8th century A.D.
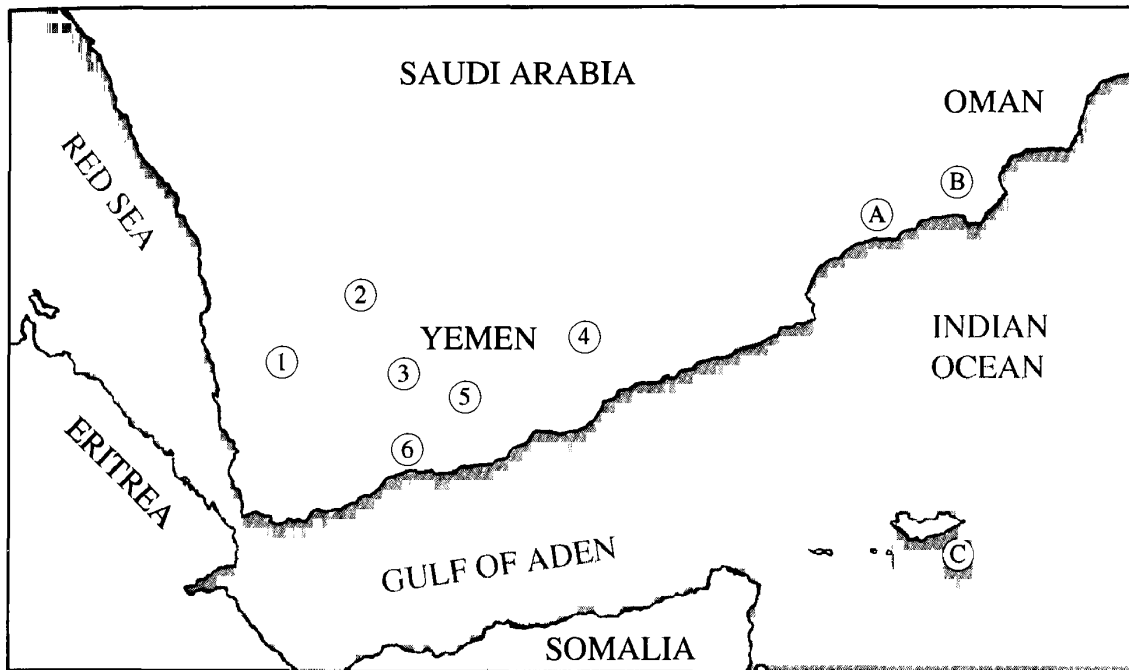
Fig. 18. South Arabian Languages

Epigraphic	Modern
1. Saba (Sabaic)	A. Mahra (Mehri)
2. Maʿin (Minaic)	B. Djibbāl (Šḥeri)
3. Qatabān (Qatabanic)	C. Soqoṭra (Soqoṭri)
4. Ḥaḍramawt (Ḥaḍramitic)	
5. Awsān (Awsānic)	
6. Ḥimyar (Ḥimyaritic)	

a) Sabaic

8.3. Sabaic is epigraphically attested from the 8th century B.C. through the 4th century A.D. in north Yemen, the realm of the ancient kingdom of Saba. In the 4th to 6th centuries A.D. its limits extended southward to include the region of Ẓafar, the centre of the kingdom of Ḥimyar, and eastward to cover the former Qatabanic and Ḥaḍramitic areas, since these languages had by then ceased to be used for epigraphic

purposes. Besides, Sabaic inscriptions dating mainly from the 5th-4th centuries B.C. have been found also in Ethiopia. However, they may be written in an Ethiopian language not classifiable properly as Sabaic.

b) Minaic

8.4. Minaic inscriptions are attested at Khirbet Ma'in, ancient Qarnāwu, the capital of the kingdom of Ma'in, at Khirbet Barāqish, ancient Yatil, with a few texts from other sites in the east end of Yemeni Djawf. Besides, there are texts from the Minaean trading settlements at al-'Ulā, ancient Dedān, and at Qaryat al-Fāw, and from scattered places outside Arabia, resulting from Minaean trading activities. Chronologically, these texts date from the 4th to the 2nd centuries B.C.

c) Qatabanic

8.5. Qatabanic monumental texts have been found in the Wadi Bayhān, in the Wadi Harīb, and on the plateau to the south of the two wadis. They date from the 5th century B.C. through the 2nd century A.D. The few inscriptions from the ephemeral kingdom of Awsān, at the southern marches of Qatabān, are in fact written in Qatabanic. To judge from the name ἡ Αὐσινίτη ἡἰών given to the East African coast in the "Periplus of the Erythraean Sea" (1st century A.D.), the people of Awsān had led the way in the South Arabian trade along the eastern coast of Africa for which the island of Soqotra was undoubtedly an important sailing centre (cf. §8.7).

d) Hadramitic

8.6. Hadramitic inscriptions have been discovered so far in the royal residence Shabwa, the capital of Hadramawt, and at several widely scattered sites, in particular at the trading settlement of Khor Rori, ancient Samhar, near modern Salālah, in 'Omān. Their chronological spread is from roughly the 4th century B.C. to the end of the 3rd century A.D., when Hadramawt was conquered in its turn by Saba, after the Sabaean conquest of Ma'in and of Qatabān.

e) Modern South Arabian

8.7. The Modern South Arabian languages, which are now confined to a relatively small area in and around Dofār and to the island of Soqotra, are

the last vestiges of a group of closely related South Semitic languages, which were spoken in the whole of South Arabia. The modern languages exhibit certain features, however, which are absent from Epigraphic South Arabian, and it has been doubted whether they can be considered as directly related to the old literary dialects. They share many distinctive features with Ethiopic. The main modern languages, spoken by some 30.000 people, are Mehri with the closely related Ḥarsūsi and Baṭḥari dialects, Šḥeri, also called Djibbāli, and Soqoṭri. The special attention paid to the Mahra tribe of this region by Arab historians and geographers was very likely due to its peculiar culture and unfamiliar language, as it appears from the typical description by Ibn al-Muḏǧāwir (13th century): "They are tall and good-looking, and have their own language which none but they understand". As for Soqoṭra, which preserved its Greek name of Island of Dioscorides, it was inhabited in the time of the "Periplus of the Erythraean Sea" by Arabs, Hindus, and by a Greek colony the going possibly back to Hellenistic times. Its commercial importance was certainly great (§8.5).

B. Ethiopic

8.8. Certain features in phonology, morphology, and syntax justify the classification of the Semitic languages of Eritrea and Ethiopia into North Ethiopic and South Ethiopic. Both are generally assumed to be derived from a common Proto-Ethiopic, although the speakers of South Ethiopic may descend from an earlier wave of Semitic immigrants (§8.9). The phonological division between North and South Ethiopic is shown by the Northern preservation of the pharyngals and laryngals. The main morphological differences appear in the secondary South Ethiopic gemination of the second radical of the verbs in the perfect of the basic stem (§41.53), in the widespread non-gemination of this radical in the imperfect (§38.7), and in the Southern sharp distinction in the conjugation of main verbs and subordinate verbs (§39.12). The North Ethiopian languages include Geʿez, Tigre, and Tigrinya, while South Ethiopic includes Amharic, Argobba, Gafat, Harari, and Gurage (Fig. 19). The close relationship between Tigre, Tigrinya, and Geʿez has not yet been sufficiently investigated. Therefore, the question whether Tigre and Tigrinya are direct descendants of Geʿez or not should remain open. An answer cannot be provided easily since the majority of Geʿez texts are translations and there is no certainty, in particular, that their syntax has not been influenced by the language of the original texts.

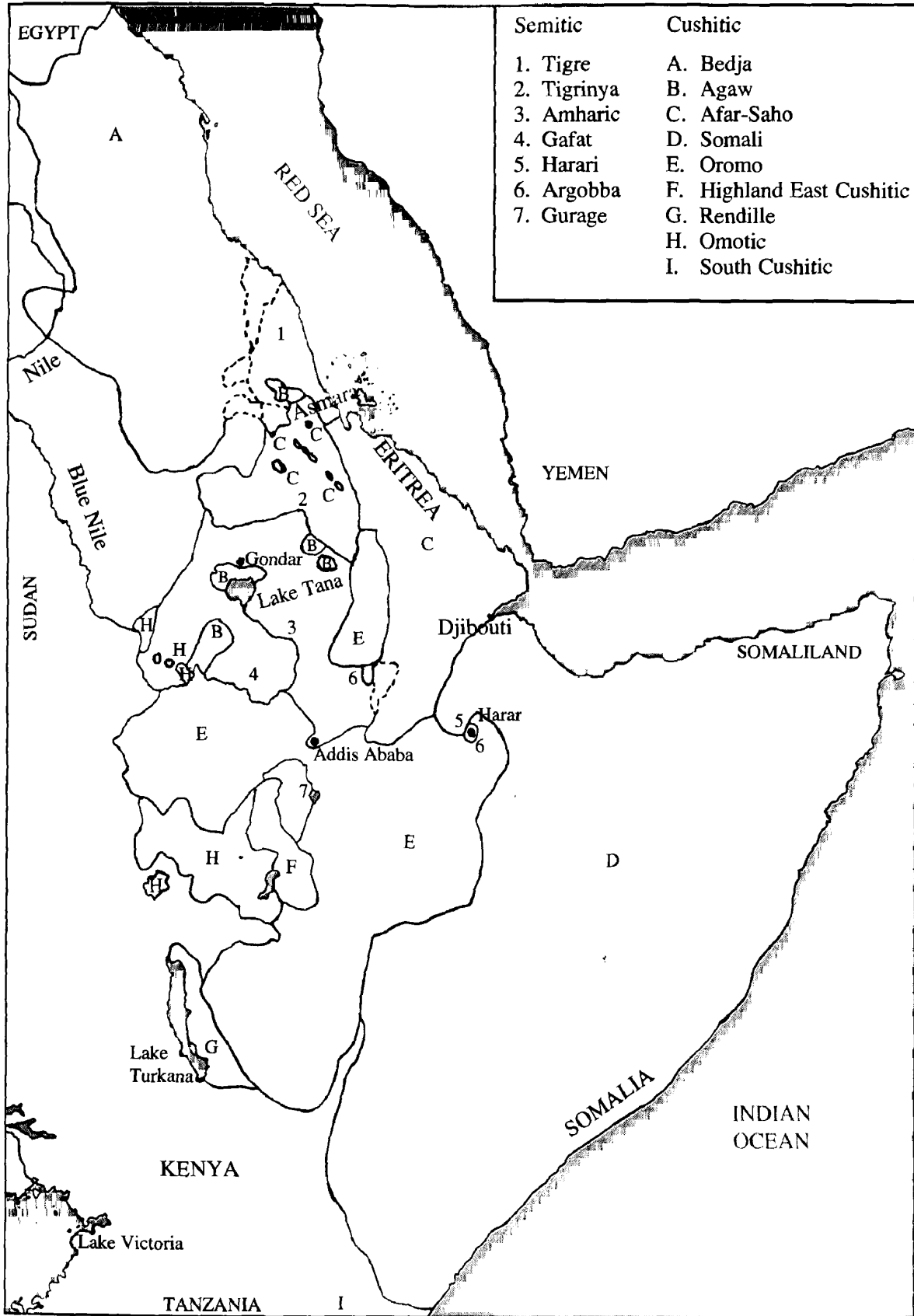| Semitic	Cushitic
1. Tigre	A. Bedja
2. Tigrinya	B. Agaw
3. Amharic	C. Afar-Saho
4. Gafat	D. Somali
5. Harari	E. Oromo
6. Argobba	F. Highland East Cushitic
7. Gurage	G. Rendille
	H. Omotic
	I. South Cushitic

Fig. 19. Semitic and Cushitic languages of the Horn of Africa.

8.9. The Semitic languages of Eritrea and Ethiopia occupy a geographical area in which Cushitic was and still is employed. When Semites from ancient Yemen settled in Ethiopia, they imposed their South Arabian language on this Cushitic domain. A period of bilingualism followed, which still endures. The Cushitic group lost ground, but not without having an impact on the structure and vocabulary of the South Arabian idioms spoken by the conquering Semites. This influence of the Cushitic substratum on the Semitic languages of Eritrea and Ethiopia is a crucial problem of Ethiopic linguistics. In the north, the Cushitic languages of Bedja, Agaw, and Saho-Afar appear as the linguistic substratum of Ge'ez, Tigre, and Tigrinya, and partially of Amharic and Gafat, while Eastern Sidamo or Highland East Cushitic covered the domain of Amharic, Argobba, Harari, and Gurage, which were influenced also by Oromo and by Somali (§2.9-11). The influence of the Cushitic is stronger in the south than in the north.

8.10. The South Arabian inscriptions found in Ethiopia, especially those of the 5th-4th centuries B.C., prove the existence of ancient relations between southwest Arabia and Ethiopia and might indicate that Semitic was brought to Eritrea and to Ethiopia from Yemen in the first millennium B.C., if not earlier (§3.3).

a) North Ethiopic

8.11. *Ge'ez*, called also Ethiopic, is attested by epigraphic texts from the 2nd century A.D., especially at Aksum, in present-day Tigre province. It was the language of the Aksum Empire, which was converted to Christianity in the 4th century A.D. The Bible was translated from Greek into Ge'ez between the 5th and the 7th centuries A.D., although the oldest known manuscripts go back only to the 14th century. Ge'ez remained a spoken language until the end of the 9th century A.D. It survived as a literary language, as the language of worship and sacred literature, and it is still taught in the Church schools. However, no definite conclusion concerning its ancient pronunciation can be drawn on this basis since present-day pronunciation of Ge'ez is influenced by the spoken language, and particularly by Amharic.

8.12. *Tigre* is spoken in Eritrea by seminomadic tribal communities numbering some 300.000 people. It is closely related to Ge'ez, although it is not certain that it is the direct descendant of the language of the

Aksum Empire. It was mainly influenced by two Cushitic languages: the Bedja and the Agaw. The references to Tigre in the present *Outline* are based in particular on the dialect of the Mansa' tribe.

8.13. *Tigrinya* is spoken by some five to six million people, mostly Christians, in the Tigre province of northern Ethiopia — hence Tigrinya is called also Tigray — and in the central regions of Eritrea. Tigrinya is thus, after Arabic and Amharic (§8.14), the living Semitic language with the largest number of speakers. As in the case of Tigre, the language is closely related to ancient Ge'ez; it was influenced mainly by Agaw. Tigrinya literature, written in Ethiopic script (Fig. 21), is only in its beginnings, but it is developing steadily with papers, magazines, and books being produced. The earliest known document written in Tigrinya is the code of customary law discovered at Sarda and dating from the 19th century A.D.

b) South Ethiopic

8.14. *Amharic* is the official language of Ethiopia. It is spoken in the central and southern highlands of the country by some fifteen million people. The oldest Amharic documents actually known are songs from the 14th century A.D. Amharic syntax and vocabulary are strongly influenced by Cushitic, and Amharic lacks the archaic features discernible in other South Ethiopian languages. The absence of these features in Amharic is due to the fact that it represents an innovated type of South Ethiopic. There are dialect variations in Amharic which bear on phonology, especially regarding palatalization, also on a few grammatical points, and on the vocabulary, with a marked difference between towns and the countryside. The references to Amharic in the present *Outline* are based on the literary language, unless stated otherwise.

8.15. *Argobba* was still recently spoken in a few villages to the north of Addis Ababa. It was spoken also to the south of Harar, but the language disappeared in favour of Cushitic Oromo. It is with Amharic that Argobba has the greatest number of essential features in common.

8.16. *Harari* is spoken in the city of Harar in eastern Ethiopia. Some Harari texts, dating to the 16th century, are preserved in Arabic script and more recent texts, from the 19th century, have been written in Ethiopic script. Harari has several features in common with North

Ethiopic and the opinion was expressed that Harar was a military colony from northern Ethiopia. No extra-linguistic data help us yet in answering this question.

8.17. *Gurage* is a cluster of rather divergent dialects spoken to the southwest of Addis Ababa by a population numbering about 600.000 persons or more according to other estimations. The Gurage dialects are divided into three groups: a West Gurage group including Chaha, Eža, Ennemor, Endegeň, and Gyeto; an East Gurage group including Selṭi, Wolane, and the dialects spoken on the five islands of Lake Zway; and a North(east) Gurage group represented by Soddo or Aymallal, with a possible sub-group Muher, Gogot, and Masqan, which are alternatively considered as a sub-branch of West Gurage. From the three main groups of dialects, the Eastern ones come closely to Harari and have several features in common with North Ethiopic. There must have been a territorial continuity between the East Gurage and the Harari speakers, later disrupted by population movements.

8.18. *Gafat* was a Semitic language spoken in the region of the Blue Nile, in western Ethiopia. At present, the language disappeared completely in favour of Amharic. Its study is based mainly on a translation of the Song of Songs made from Amharic into Gafat in 1769-72 at the request of James Bruce and on the ample documentation collected in 1947 by W. Leslau from four native speakers. Gafat has some archaic characteristics and a number of features in common with the North Gurage dialect Aymallal, called also Soddo (§8.17). It is the only Semitic language preserving, e.g., the plural noun *kitač* (< *kitāti), "children", related to ancient Egyptian *ktt*, "little one". It also preserved the noun *mossay*, "child", related to Egyptian *mś*, "child", from the root *mśi*, "to give birth". This word appears as *mossa* in Amharic and as *muča* in Oromo; the root is attested in Gurage with the meaning "calf", corresponding to Coptic *mase*, "calf": *m^wäsa* in Chaha, *m^wässa* in Muher, and *mossa* in Soddo. The Soddo and Gafat domains must have been once contiguous. Later, the movements of the Oromo tribes separated them.

9. LANGUAGE AND SCRIPT

9.1. Most languages have existed and still exist as purely oral forms of communication. Writing is no more than a secondary, graphic and largely inadequate representation of spoken language. There is even a greater difference between a living language and a "dead" language, deprived of sound and gesture. This was already perceived by Antoine Fabre d'Olivet (1768-1825) who refused to identify the letters and the vocalization of ancient Hebrew writing with actual phonetic elements, being aware that these elements are "signs" of the real words, as emphatically expressed but unskilfully worked out in his book *La langue hébraïque restituée et le véritable sens des mots hébreux rétabli et prouvé par leur analyse radicale* (Paris 1815-16). His "signs" were, in fact, the precursors of the phonemes as distinguished from their actual realization (§10.7). Yet, written records also present indubitable advantages and the debt of modern society to writing is enormous. Granted the importance of writing, in particular for the knowledge of ancient languages, a student of linguistics must remember that writing is still only a secondary representation of language, that it reflects a standard speech while true dialectal forms transpire but rarely, and that spoken language provides the final clue for understanding its written expression, formulated in common types of script the rigid conservatism of which helps concealing local pronunciations. A treatment of Semitic scripts lies outside the scope of the present work. However, since writing systems may condition and even influence linguistic data, the following aperçu deals with the essential facts of the Semitic writing systems.

A. Cuneiform Script

9.2. The written records of North and East Semitic, as well as the Amarna letters, make use of the cuneiform writing system, the graphs of which, when Semitic texts first began to be written in it, were arranged in vertical columns progressing from right to left. At a somewhat later stage, the texts were arranged in horizontal lines progressing from left to right. A graph in the cuneiform writing system is a wedge or a cluster of wedges imprinted in clay, or imitations of such imprints in other materials. Such a graph is called a "sign" and its referent in the language is called its "value". With the exception of Ugaritic, which uses alphabetic cuneiform signs, the elements of the cuneiform script consist of syllabic signs or syllabograms, of word signs or logograms, often followed by

phonetic complements, and of determinatives that specify the class or category of the word which they determine, without being pronounced. Word dividers consisting in small vertical wedges occur irregularly in Old Assyrian texts and they are often used later in Ugaritic cuneiform alphabetic script.

9.3. The Sumerian or Pre-Sumerian origin of the cuneiform writing system, the local variations in the use of signs, and the changes occurring between earlier and later texts cause problems for the correct analysis of the Semitic phonology. The writing system was not designed for Semitic and palliatives, such as scribal conventions and later differentiations of signs, never reached a point where it could be said that every combination of phonemes found expression in the writing. In particular, the notation of pharyngals, laryngals, and semivowels, the distinction of interdentals and dentals, of voiced, unvoiced, and emphatic consonants belonging to the same "triad", the indication of the length of vowels and of the doubling of consonants never received a satisfactory and unambiguous solution. The indication of vowels by syllabograms is of considerable assistance to the linguistic analysis, but the distinction of *i* and *e* does generally not find expression in the writing. Thus, for instance, the cuneiform sign IB has the values *ib*, *ip*, *eb*, *ep*, but may also signify *yib* or *yip* at the beginning of a verbal form. The sign GIŠ has the values *iz*, *is*, *iṣ*, *ez*, *es*, *eṣ*, besides *giš*, the sign DI stands for *di*, *ṭi*, *de*, *ṭe*, and KI has the values *ki*, *qí*, *ke*, *qé*. In short, it is difficult, therefore, to reach phonetically satisfactory conclusions without using data drawn from comparative Semitic linguistics. Besides, the morpho-graphemic spellings like *qa-qa-ad-šu*, "his head", which are often described as reflecting the deep morphological structure of the language (*qaqqad* + *šu*), correspond to an actual pronunciation *qaqqassu*, in accordance with genuine East Semitic morpho-phonemic rules. In other words, also the consonantic elements require an appropriate evaluation and an interpretation. This applies in particular to the Ebla texts that cannot be understood by taking the cuneiform signs at face value, neither in Sumerian nor in Semitic words.

B. Alphabetic Script

9.4. The West and South Semitic languages, as well as Ugaritic, use consonantal alphabetic scripts developed from an alphabet created in

Canaan in the mid-second millennium B.C. and based on Egyptian hieroglyphic signs. While the Ugaritic script represents a cuneiform adaptation of this new writing system, the West and South Semitic languages used its original linear form which developed into two distinct types of letters: the so-called Phoenician alphabet with twenty-two letters and the South Arabian alphabet with twenty-nine letters. The main lines of the evolution of the Semitic alphabet are shown schematically in Fig. 20.

9.5. The Semitic alphabet was originally purely consonantal in character, probably because its creation was inspired by the Egyptian hieroglyphic "alphabet". However, the Ugaritic script of the 14th century B.C. already possesses two supplementary signs 'i and 'u, distinct from the original ' that received the value 'a. These three signs could be used also to mark the vowels a, i/e, u, short or long, at least in Hurrian texts written in alphabetic cuneiform script. Besides, a fully developed use of *matres lectionis* or vowel letters appears in Aramaic and in Moabite as early as the mid-9th century B.C. Three or four consonantal signs of the Phoenician alphabet received a supplementary function in order to indicate long final vowels and, to a limited extent, even long medial vowels: w was used to mark ū/ō, y served to indicate ī/ē, h was used initially to mark final -ē and then also final -ā, for which also ' served in Aramaic, perhaps as early as the 8th century B.C., and later in Arabic. This vocalic use of the letters under consideration was borrowed by the Greeks together with the Semitic alphabet and was extended to short vowels, like in later Semitic texts. The ambivalent use of w and y allows sometimes for the possibility that either the diphthong aw/ay or a long vowel is represented in a word. Only Mishnaic Hebrew and some Late Aramaic dialects show the practice of indicating consonantal w and y by a double spelling ww and yy; e.g. Mishnaic Hebrew ywwny /Yawnē/ instead of Biblical Hebrew ybnh /Yabnē/; Christian Palestinian Aramaic ḥyy' /(ḥ)ayya/, "the life".

Greek o was not borrowed directly from Semitic but by application of the acrophonic principle to the Greek translation ὀφθαλμός of Semitic 'ayn, "eye".

9.6. The use of the *matres lectionis* w and y is also attested in the South Arabian type of alphabetic script, with the same vocalic values ū/ō and ī/ē. Instead, there is no notation at all for ā, not even in the Pre-Classical Arabic inscriptions from Qaryat al-Fāw, written in monumental
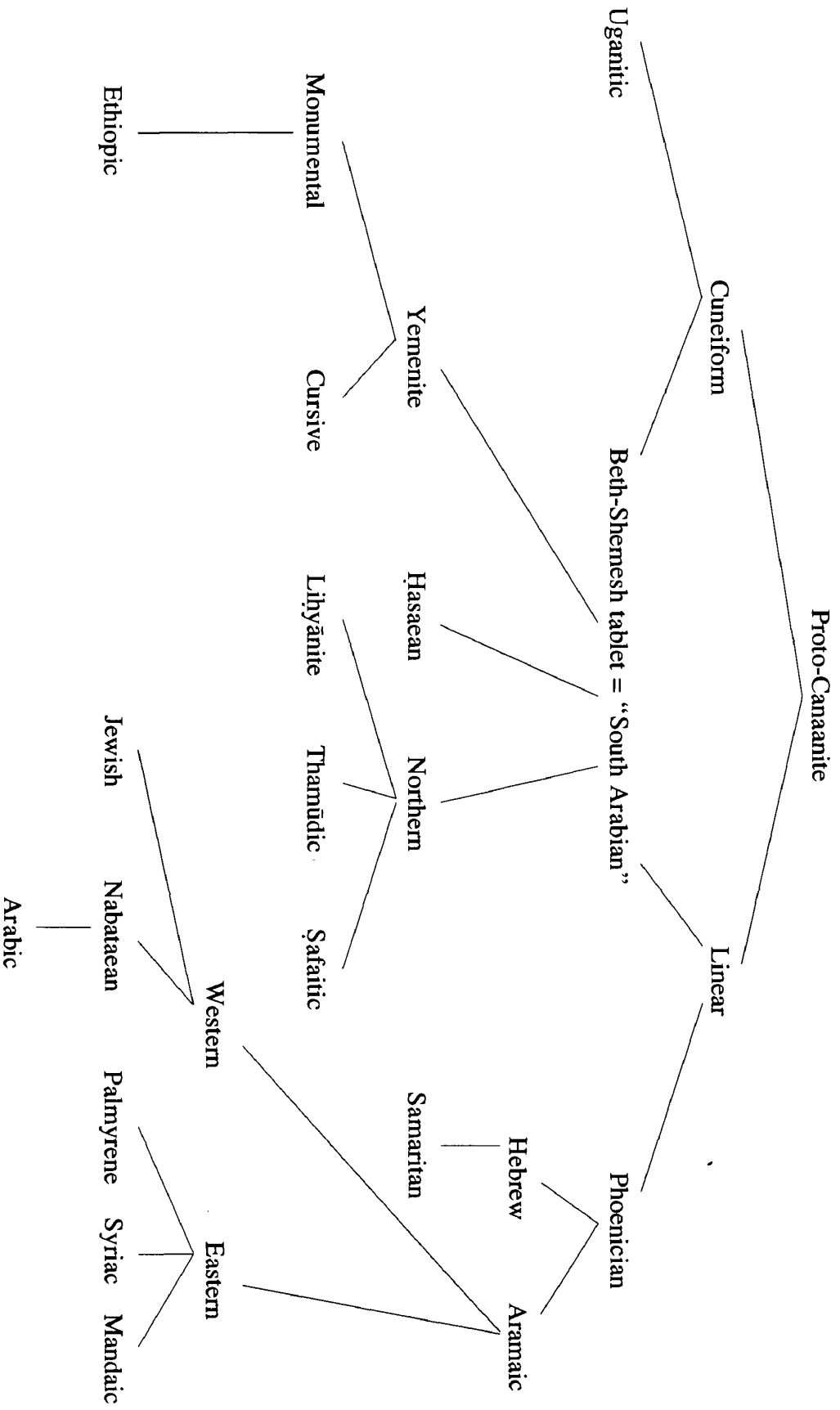
Fig. 20. Evolution of the Semitic alphabet.

South Arabian script (§7.42). However, the Liḥyānite inscriptions of the Hellenistic period follow the Aramaic scribal tradition and use *h* as a vowel letter for *ā*, e.g. *mh* /*mā*/, "what"; *'dh* /*'idā*/, "while". Occasionally, they indicate an internal long vowel as well, like in *'ḥwhm* /*'aḥūhum*/, "your brother".

9.7. The South Arabian script has been adapted in Ethiopic to denote seven vowels by a variety of changes in the shape of the consonantal symbols. Vowels have thus become an integral part of Ethiopic writing which assumed a syllabic character, comparable to some extent with the cuneiform writing system. The orthography, however, has two defects: it does not indicate the gemination or consonantal lengthening, and it uses the same set of symbols to mark the vowel *ə* and the absence of any vowel. Besides, the pronunciation of Ge'ez preserved in the Ethiopic Church is influenced by Amharic. The latter uses the traditional Ethiopic syllabary with additional signs: it has thirty-three characters, each of which occurs in a basic form and in six other forms known as orders. In addition to these 231 forms, there are thirty-nine others which represent labialization and are usually listed as an appendix to the main list (see Fig. 21). Two additional symbols indicating gemination and non-gemination are often used in traditional grammars written in Amharic. The gemination is marked by a small *ṭə*, an abbreviation of *ṭəbq*, "tight", placed above the letter, while the non-gemination is marked by *la*, an abbreviation of *yälalla*, "that is loose", placed also above the letter.

9.8. Contrary to the other West Semitic languages, Phoenician did not use any vowel letters, except in a few forms brought about by linguistic change. In some Late Phoenician inscriptions from Cyprus and in Punic, however, *w* and *y* are exceptionally used as vowel letters in foreign names or words. Besides, the Late Punic and the Neo-Punic inscriptions did employ *w*, *y*, ', *h*, *ḥ*, and ' as vowel letters, according to two different systems (§21.14). The best represented system uses ' for *a*, and ' for *e* and *o*. In the second system, ' stands for *a*, *h* for *e*, and ' for *o*. Besides, *ḥ* can be used for *a*.

9.9. Vowel notation by means of *matres lectionis* does not fix the meaning and the reading of texts in an unambiguous way. Besides, there is a notable deficiency in the absence of any consistent marking of geminated or long consonants. These deficiencies have been partly obviated in the 7th-9th centuries A.D. by a complicated system of diacritical signs

Name of the letter	Transcription	Consonant + Vowel							Consonant + w + Vowel				
		1 ä/a	2 u	3 i	4 a/ā	5 e	6 ə/ø	7 o	1 ʷä	3 ʷi	4 ʷa	5 ʷe	6 ʷə
hoy	h	ሀ	ሁ	ሂ	ሃ	ሄ	ህ	ሆ					
lawe	l	ለ	ሉ	ሊ	ላ	ሌ	ል	ሎ			ሏ		
hawt	h < ḥ	ሐ	ሑ	ሒ	ሓ	ሔ	ሕ	ሖ					
may	m	መ	ሙ	ሚ	ማ	ሜ	ም	ሞ			ሟ		
šawt	s < š	ሠ	ሡ	ሢ	ሣ	ሤ	ሥ	ሦ					
rees	r	ረ	ሩ	ሪ	ራ	ሬ	ር	ሮ			ሯ		
sat	s	ሰ	ሱ	ሲ	ሳ	ሴ	ስ	ሶ			ሷ		
šat	š	ሸ	ሹ	ሺ	ሻ	ሼ	ሽ	ሾ			ሿ		
qaf	q	ቀ	ቁ	ቂ	ቃ	ቄ	ቅ	ቆ	ቈ	ቊ	ቋ	ቌ	ቍ
bet	b	በ	ቡ	ቢ	ባ	ቤ	ብ	ቦ			ቧ		
tawe	t	ተ	ቱ	ቲ	ታ	ቴ	ት	ቶ			ቷ		
čawe	č	ቸ	ቹ	ቺ	ቻ	ቼ	ች	ቾ			ቿ		
harm	h < ḫ	ኀ	ኁ	ኂ	ኃ	ኄ	ኅ	ኆ	ኈ	ኊ	ኋ	ኌ	ኍ
nahas	n	ነ	ኑ	ኒ	ና	ኔ	ን	ኖ			ኗ		
ñahas	ñ	ኘ	ኙ	ኚ	ኛ	ኜ	ኝ	ኞ			ኟ		
'alf	'	አ	ኡ	ኢ	ኣ	ኤ	እ	ኦ					
kaf	k	ከ	ኩ	ኪ	ካ	ኬ	ክ	ኮ	ኰ	ኲ	ኳ	ኴ	ኵ
kaf	h < k	ኸ	ኹ	ኺ	ኻ	ኼ	ኽ	ኾ			ዃ		
wawe	w	ወ	ዉ	ዊ	ዋ	ዌ	ው	ዎ					
'ain	' < '	ዐ	ዑ	ዒ	ዓ	ዔ	ዕ	ዖ					
zay	z	ዘ	ዙ	ዚ	ዛ	ዜ	ዝ	ዞ			ዟ		
žay	ž	ዠ	ዡ	ዢ	ዣ	ዤ	ዥ	ዦ			ዧ		
yaman	y	የ	ዩ	ዪ	ያ	ዬ	ይ	ዮ					
dent	d	ደ	ዱ	ዲ	ዳ	ዴ	ድ	ዶ			ዷ		
ǧent	ǧ	ጀ	ጁ	ጂ	ጃ	ጄ	ጅ	ጆ			ጇ		
gaml	g	ገ	ጉ	ጊ	ጋ	ጌ	ግ	ጎ	ጐ	ጒ	ጓ	ጔ	ጕ
tait	ṭ	ጠ	ጡ	ጢ	ጣ	ጤ	ጥ	ጦ			ጧ		
čait	č̣	ጨ	ጩ	ጪ	ጫ	ጬ	ጭ	ጮ			ጯ		
pait	p̣	ጰ	ጱ	ጲ	ጳ	ጴ	ጵ	ጶ					
saday	ṣ	ጸ	ጹ	ጺ	ጻ	ጼ	ጽ	ጾ			ጿ		
dappa	ṣ < ṣ́	ፀ	ፁ	ፂ	ፃ	ፄ	ፅ	ፆ					
af	f	ፈ	ፉ	ፊ	ፋ	ፌ	ፍ	ፎ			ፏ		
pesa	p	ፐ	ፑ	ፒ	ፓ	ፔ	ፕ	ፖ					

Fig. 21. Amharic syllabary.

aiming at fixing the pronunciation of Syriac, Hebrew, Jewish Aramaic, and Classical Arabic, especially for the reading of the sacred texts. The pronunciation thus fixed was a traditional one, but no definite conclusion concerning the older vocalizations can be drawn on its basis.

9.10. The so-called Phoenician alphabet was used for Aramaic, Hebrew, the languages of Transjordan, and later for Classical Arabic, the script of which derives from the Nabataean Aramaic cursive. The twenty-two symbols of that alphabet could not express the Semitic phonemes which did not exist any more in Late Canaanite and Phoenician languages. In Early Aramaic, for example, the three sounds *t*, *š*, and *ś* were all designated by the same symbol "š", except in the Tell Fekherye inscription of the mid-9th century B.C., where *t* was indicated by the letter "s". The real phonemic status of the languages using the Phoenician alphabet can only be established by synchronic comparisons with cuneiform, hieroglyphic, and South Arabian spellings, or by diachronic references to later spellings, to much later diacritic signs, and eventually to the pronunciation of some consonants in modern conservative idioms such as Modern South Arabian. The use of diacritics is widespread and serves to distinguish various sounds expressed by the same consonantal symbol, e.g. in Arabic and in Neo-Aramaic. The oldest attestations of a diacritical dot distinguishing *d* and *r* are found in the Palmyrene inscriptions of the 3rd century A.D. and in Syriac. That "punctuation" system was further developed by Arab scribes who called it *naqt* and used diacritical dots to distinguish consonantal phonemes represented by the same characters. The use of these diacritics is attested in the earliest Islamic papyri and inscriptions from the 7th century A.D. A similar system was adopted in modern times to write spoken Aramaic that contains an expanded sound system comprising some thirty-one consonantal phonemes. Thus, by adding special diacritics to a number of the original twenty-two letters, new sounds are represented. With a simple dot placed under "g" one obtains *ġ*; with a small upside-down v-like diacritic under the same letter, one gets *ǧ*. Using the same principle one gets *ḥ* and *č* from "k", etc.

9.11. Different punctuation signs have been used in the alphabetic script to divide each two words of a text. They go back either to a vertical stroke used as word divider or to a pair of dots arranged like a colon (:), sometimes to three dots, placed one on top of the other, later reduced to one dot. The three systems are used in the Aramaic Tell Fekherye

inscription of the 9th century B.C. The vertical stroke keeps with the tradition attested in Ugaritic by the small vertical wedge and anticipated in Old Assyrian texts (§9.2). This practice was continued in West Semitic inscriptions of the 11th and 10th centuries B.C., and in Epigraphic South Arabian, while the Moabite Mesha inscription uses small strokes to mark out sentences or contextual units. The three dots occur on the Lachish ewer from the 13th or 12th century B.C., in archaic Greek writing, and in two lines of the Tell Fekherye inscription. The pair of dots and the single dot are better attested. In particular, two square dots are employed as word dividers in the Ethiopian writing system, which uses four square dots arranged in a square pattern (::) as a sentence divider. In Masoretic Hebrew, instead, the pair of dots (:) is used as verse divider. From the mid-first millennium B.C., space was used to separate words in West Semitic instead of dots, and this practice began to be followed also by printers of modern Ethiopic texts. However, there are West Semitic inscriptions and even Ethiopian newspapers where the words are run together.

C. Transcription and Transliteration

9.12. The transcription of Semitic words, which is employed in this work, follows the usual conventions and is based mainly on the standard form of the languages concerned. When the transcription differs from the simple transliteration of the signs, the latter is also given, for example in Nabataean Arabic: *fa-yaf'al lā fidā wa-lā 'aṭarā (pyp'l l' pd' wl' 'tr')*, "and he acted neither for reward nor for favour" (cf. § 38.11), or *ḏū 'asrā li-Ṯāǧ (dw 'sr' ltg)*, "who campaigned up to Thadj". Allophones are indicated only in special circumstances, in accordance with the requirements of an introduction.

9.13. No attempt is made in the present *Outline* to deal in a systematic way with the problem of transliterating foreign names and words into a Semitic writing system, although occasional references to such transcriptions occur in the part dealing with phonology. A different but related problem concerns the use of one offshoot of the Semitic alphabetic script to write texts in another Semitic language. This is the case, in particular, of mediaeval Arabic texts written either in Syriac script and named *garšūnī*, or in Hebrew characters and called "Judaeo-Arabic". Besides, there are Hebrew texts, mainly biblical and liturgical, in

Arabic transcription, and there is a Berber translation of a Passover *Hag-gadah* in Hebrew characters. Such texts may have a great linguistic importance, but an *Outline* cannot enter into the discussion of questions they may raise and dialects they reveal. Instead, occasional reference will be made to the vocalized transcriptions of Punic words in the *Poenulus* of Plautus, and of Hebrew words in Origen's Hexapla and in a few other works.