A New View of the Aramaeans

Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo
"Sapienza"—Università di Roma

In recent years a renewed interest has been devoted to the Aramaeans, to their origins and expansion, in particular on the basis of new discoveries and methods of research. Using all the information available—mainly written but also archaeological—K. Lawson Younger has produced an historical reconstruction of each Aramaic group, tribe, and polity, in which all the still unsolved questions concerning origin and social and political development up to the dissolution of the main states in the face of the Achaemenids are discussed in depth. This article aims to present the specific character of Younger's work, focusing in particular on aspects of some old Aramaic inscriptions.

In recent years a number of works have been devoted to the Aramaeans, in particular, most recently, to their language (Gzella and Folmer 2008; Gzella 2015) and to their relations with neighboring states (Sergi et al. 2016; Berlejung et al. 2017).[1] However, the present book differs from those as, for the first time, it examines in detail Aramaic historical developments from a specifically political point of view. It reconstructs the attested Aramaean entities (groups, tribes, polities), their origins, and social and political developments, along with their relations with neighboring countries/states, utilizing all the existing written sources—mainly Assyrian texts, local inscriptions, and biblical passages. Available archaeological data are also adduced. As noted by the author, important new documentation has come to light since the once comprehensive studies by Dion (1997) and Lipiński (2000). Although the new data are included in recent comprehensive works, in particular in the volume edited by H. Niehr (2014), duly cited by Lawson Younger, their aim is different, being devoted both to the history of the Aramaean groups and polities and to specific aspects of "Aramaean culture" in its Near Eastern setting.

The structure of Younger's work, on the contrary, does not differ considerably from Lipiński's synthesis, whose publication, however, preceded the recent discoveries that have shed new light on particular issues (for example, the Middle Assyrian expansion in the Jezirah and its decline; specific new discoveries regarding certain Aramaean polities; and archaeological and epigraphic documentation, such as the Katumuwa[2] inscription). Moreover, leaving aside the differing order of presentation of the history of the various Aramaic entities, the solution of many questions still subject to debate also frequently diverges between them.

As already noted, Aramaic society, economy, law, and religion, treated by Lipiński in individual chapters (as was the case in Dion's work, and again in Niehr's handbook), are not examined by Younger, even though they are often touched upon within the context of the Aramaeans' historical development—the social questions in particular.

Aramaean history, as is well known, can be reconstructed mainly from external sources, the local documents, although important, being few and not easy to interpret. Consequently,

This is a review article of *A Political History of the Arameans: From Their Origins to the End of Their Polities*. By K. Lawson Younger. Archaeology and Biblical Studies, vol. 13. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016. Pp. xxvii + 857, illus. $97.95 (paper).

1. A more recent contribution by Younger (2017) concerns the first Assyro-Aramaean conflicts.
2. I follow the orthography and reconstruction of the names used in Younger's work.

Younger's task has been particularly hard, especially since examining the documents requires more than one kind of specialized knowledge. One of the major issues is the intricate links between Aramaean and Assyrian history, which oblige the author to analyze in detail questions concerning the development and itineraries of Assyrian wars and campaigns. Furthermore, the use of the biblical sources referring to "Aram" and its kings calls for an evaluation of the different trends concerning the composition of the biblical text, and consequently, the historical value to be attributed to each passage examined. In this regard Younger's position is sufficiently critical, although not hypercritical.

Despite the difficulties encountered, the author has achieved the aims put forward in his introduction and has produced an extremely useful, detailed, and solid historical reconstruction. In each case, he has presented clearly and analyzed in depth every question anew, and has consistently proposed well-balanced solutions—often convincing and in some cases new. The rigorous order he has imposed on his work, divided into paragraphs and sub-paragraphs leading strictly from the general to the more specific, although responding well to demand for clarity has led to some repetition, with questions already alluded to discussed again in more detail. Moreover, the detailed excursus on every specific problem occasionally interferes with a clear understanding of the overall historical process. However, the author presents helpful summary tables for every tricky question.

The historical reconstruction of the processes of the Aramaeans' rise and decline is organized into well-structured chapters that follow an approximately chronological and geographical order from north to south, each divided, as noted, into paragraphs and sub-paragraphs. The first chapter, "Preliminary Issues" (pp. 1–34), presents the geographical setting of the Aramaeans' spread, the other languages spoken in the regions of their diffusion (Luwian, Phoenician, Akkadian), and the main classification of the Aramaic scripts and phases of the language. Chapter 2 (pp. 35–107) deals with "The Origins of the Aramaeans," an issue that the author had already addressed in two important articles (Younger 2007 and 2014). Here the subject is examined in greater depth with special attention to general problems. In particular, he considers the use and meaning of the so-called socially constructed groups—the expression adopted to identify Aramean groups, or tribes, or social organizations. Further, he addresses the question of the appropriate model of nomadism to be assigned to the Aramaeans, from their beginnings through subsequent developments. The question of "mobile pastoralism"—the symbiosis/interaction between nomads and sedentary organizations and the role of climatic and economic factors—had not been dealt with within the same overall theoretical frame in the preceding monographs.

One important contribution of Younger's work to the history of the Aramaeans consists in his proposal to reconstruct from the existing documents specific trends of development tied to geographical, cultural, and political situations and individual personalities. (For example, the possibility that the rise of stable polities of a certain size was more difficult in the Jezirah, due to the persisting Assyrian presence, than in the southern Syrian region. Or the role of Aḫuni of Bīt-Adīni or of Hazael of Damascus in the enlargement of their states.) The chapter ends with an examination of the Assyrian textual occurrences regarding the relationship between Aramaeans, Aḫlamu, and Sutu, and concerning the biblical sources relating to Aram.

In the chapters that follow, we are confronted with the development of the various Aramaean groups and polities, beginning with the "Rise of the Aramean Polities in the Iron Age" (chap. 3, pp. 109–220), and the reconstruction of their history until the end of the Iron Age (Iron Age III, 700–539 BC; the chronology adopted is given on pp. 23–27). This section is devoted to the first states and groups known from around 1200 to 900, according to the regions where they are attested, already identified in the second chapter (as well as in

Younger's earlier works about Aramaean origins), while the following chapters examine the history of the same groups starting from the end of the tenth century. "The Aramean Polities of the Jezirah" occupies the fourth chapter (pp. 221–306), tracing the events concerning the initial conflicts with the Assyrians (934–884) following the renewal of Assyrian power in the Euphrates region. The relevant attestations concern the Teimanites, the polities of Gozān/Bīt-Baḫiāni, Azallu, Bīt-Yaḫīri, the Lāquē confederation, and the polity of Bīt-Zamāni.

Chapter 5 concerns the state of Bīt-Adīni (pp. 307–71); chapter 6 Sam'al/Yādīya[3]/Bīt-Gabbāri (pp. 373–424); chapter 7 Hamath and Luġath (pp. 425–99); chapter 8 Bēt-Gūš/Arpad (pp. 501–48); and chapter 9 Aram-Damascus (pp. 549–653). Chapter 10 concludes the work, presenting the Aramaeans in southern Mesopotamia (pp. 655–740), again divided into tribes and associated with other mobile groups as well as sedentary populations (particularly Chaldeans and Babylonians). A short conclusion (pp. 741–42) and an impressive list of the works cited (pp. 743– 832) close this important book. An index of the biblical passages cited and a general index follow (pp. 833–57). These are of some help in consulting Younger's monograph, but do not give even an approximate impression of its extensive contents.

Some points of particular interest: In chapter 3, as already noted, the author studies the rise of the Aramaean populations in Iron I according to three regions, each with cultural specificities that had existed since the Bronze Age: "The Hittite Sphere," "The Assyrian Sphere," and "The Levantine Sphere." (The Mesopotamian situation is examined at the end of the work; cf. already Arnold 2011 on the model sketched in Younger's articles, cited and used in the present book.) The specific situation of each region at the end of the Late Bronze Age is clearly shown to have had consequences for the different ways in which the rise of the Aramaeans occurred. The situation in the "Hittite Sphere" involved a superimposition of the Aramaeans (of the polities of Milid, 'Umq, Til Barsip, and later Hamath) upon states wherein the Luwian population element was predominant and continued earlier Hittite traditions without any marked break. However, a stratification of various population groups (for example, the Mušku) with different traditions and languages is clearly in evidence, as would be the case in Sam'al.

Younger's history of the region called the "Assyrian Sphere," that is, mainly the Jezirah, is particularly interesting, partly because of the discoveries and discussions of the last few decades, and partly because it analyzes and explains the reasons for the earlier conflicting relations with the Assyrians of this zone. Here we have, at one and the same time, the history of the beginnings of Neo-Assyrian "imperialistic" politics and that of the formation of some Aramaean entities. As appears more clearly in the fourth chapter, the Jezirah was a region that the Assyrians had regarded as part of their own territory since ancient times (the so-called Middle Assyrian Empire), and where, for a series of reasons, their desire for conquest in Iron II was earlier and stronger than elsewhere. It is consequently in that region where the ethnic "Aramaean" (Aramu) appears for the first time in documents of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076).

The section devoted to the "Levantine Sphere" raises problems that are the topics of many debates, interwoven with the first biblical narratives concerning the wars between David and Aram and with the possible historical reconstruction based upon biblical texts. The reconstruction given by Younger of the sequence of David's wars against the Aramaeans, based mainly on 2 Sam. 8 and 10, necessarily remains hypothetical but is nonetheless interesting. Younger proposes (with other scholars, contrary to Lipiński's opinion) the exis-

3. The pronunciation of the written Aramaic *y'dy* that seems most plausible from the Assyrian sources and the local orthographic rules.

tence at that time of two different Aramaean states, Soba (with Hadad-ʿezer as ruler) and Bēt Reḥov. He also collects the documents concerning the smaller polities of Geshur, Maʿakah, and Ṭob, expounding in detail on all the various opinions about their location, extent, and even existence.[4]

Of particular importance in chapter 4, because of the first presence of local written sources, is the history of Gōzān/Bīt Baḫiāni.[5] Younger exposes how, for unclear reasons, the capital city was established at Gōzān (now Tell Ḥalaf), (re)founded around the tenth century, while the nearby larger site of Sikan (now Tell Fakhariya) at the sources of the Ḫābūr, occupied already in the second millennium, remained mainly as the cult center of Hadad. The question of its possible identification with Waššukanni is dealt with and accepted with clear reasons derived from the evidence of Middle Assyrian seal impressions and clay analysis (cf. pp. 243–44). The unsolved problem of the dating of the Kapara dynasty (and of the attribution, local and etymological, of the title "king of Palē") is treated once more in detail, and a table (pp. 250–51) shows the various proposals accompanied by the data and methods used by each scholar in proposing a solution. Younger himself proposes a date for Kapara around 935, which I find convincing (against a lower date, in particular as with Sass 2005: 93–95, and again in his later works concerning the alphabet). The date and meaning of the so-called Altar inscription (probably the base of a statue) from Tell Ḥalaf (KAI 231), with the question of the introduction of the "alphabet," are also treated (esp. pp. 257–58). The commonly accepted dating of this inscription to the tenth century would appear too high (Younger rightly proposes the tenth or ninth century), if we compare it with the script attested at Tell Fakhariya (examined in depth), dated here to the middle of the ninth.[6] The script of the statue's Aramaic inscription (KAI 309) already shows local developments, so the text from Tell Ḥalaf could be somewhat earlier.

Chapters 5–9 explore the history of periods and polities better known from written and archaeological materials, but which still present numerous unsolved questions. As in the preceding chapters, one finds here an updated analysis of every document and question, with all the solutions proposed to date and that which the author judges most probable. Consequently, every reader is afforded the possibility of judging the plausibility of each proposal. Following the method used for the polities of the Jezirah (cf. also the organization of the preceding monographs), after a short introduction the exposition begins with the issues concerning the territory of the state and ends with its history until its dissolution. The possible geographical situation of every city or place-name cited by the sources (mainly Assyrian, but also biblical, when appropriate) is discussed. It is a virtue of Younger's work to recognize in many cases the difficulty or even impossibility of choosing one reconstruction without any doubts.

It is impossible to discuss here even a small proportion of the issues touched upon by Younger. I address only a few questions mainly concerning the interpretation of local written documents. My purpose is to show that it is very hard to reconstruct in detail or with certainty the events alluded to in these inscriptions. Concerning Bēt-Gūš/Arpad, as elsewhere,

4. The personal name *b'š'*, identified in the text of the Kurkh Monolith of Salmanassar III (cf. pp. 201–2 and 201 n. 303) is not attested in Punic (as stated on p. 202); a feminine name bš', unexplained according to Benz 1972: 293, perhaps of Egyptian origin, is present in the Phoenician letter from Saqqara (KAI 50), and it is that name that is listed in Benz 1972: 101.

5. Here as in the other cases, Younger justifies the orthographies he has adopted for the names: Gōzān is "the vocalization in the Bible" (writing *gwzn* in Hebrew and Aramaic) and Baḫiāni is the Assyrian rendering of an Aramaic original.

6. A date some decades later (ca. 830) is reassessed by Sass: 2016: 213 with n. 48; Sass 2017, quoting 2005: 93–95.

the etymology of the names is uncertain, as noted by the author, who rightly agrees with Lipiński's proposal that Yaḥān is originally a West Semitic personal name.[7] More controversial is the etymology of Gūš. It is perhaps worthwhile citing a Phoenician personal name attested only once in an inscription from Antas (Sardinia, fifth century BC), whose reading *bdgš* is certain (Fantar 1969: 70, pl. XXV,1, reading *brgš*; not in Benz 1972),[8] in agreement with the proposal that Gūš is perhaps a hypocoristic. Concerning the Melqart stela (KAI 201), the accepted hypothesis that the king Bar-Hadad dedicating it was a king of Arpad is convincing. However, the stela is not "stylistically Phoenician" (p. 533) as observed (citing Cecchini 2013). According to Cecchini, the relief is "[da] collocare in un ambiente siriano meridionale," with comparisons to Arslan Tash ivories attributed to Damascus. If so, one should identify the Bar-Hadad of the stela as a king of that polity. However, even according to Cecchini (2013: 294), the iconographic model is Tyrian, in agreement with the formulary of the inscription and, in my opinion, also the type of script, which is not typical of Damascus, but of a more northerly region.[9]

Concerning Damascus, the inscriptions on the horse blinker and frontlet with the name of Hazael found in Greece (KAI 311[10]) and rightly interpreted as booty from 'Umq (p. 556, fig. 9.3; p. 632, fig. 9.8),[11] lead Younger to suppose that Hamath and Luġath were subject to this state in the last part of the ninth century. Consequently, he concludes that the fragmentary stela from Tell Afis was "set up by Hazael at this time" (p. 476). However, as is already clear from the drawing on p. 474 (fig. 7.8), its script is identical to that of the Zakkur stela (KAI 202; p. 479, fig.7.9, letters not clear). Therefore it is most probable that this monument was originally erected by Zakkur's chancellery, not by Hazael,[12] the presence of whose name is difficult to explain in relation to Zakkur's kingship (as observed also by Younger). The script of Damascus at that time was slightly different and typical of that polity. In particular, in all of Hazael's inscriptions, even the Tel Dan stela (KAI 310, p. 595, fig. 9.5), which was inscribed outside Damascus, the word dividers are dots. On the Zakkur stela and on other inscriptions from that northern area (a pottery fragmentary tablet from Tell Afis,[13] the Melqart stela from Bredj) they are short strokes. Moreover, Hazael's booty inscriptions prove that this king received tribute from 'Umq, but not that he exercised true control over the entire northern region, even though the siege by Bar-Hadad and Arpad and their allies described on the Zakkur stela probably demonstrates the loss, after Hazael's death, of a previous dominant position.

Another much discussed question in relation to Damascus concerns the identification (and number) of the kings called Bar-Hadad (Ben-Hadad in the Bible). The interesting proposal

7. Lipiński 2000: 195. The explanation of the vowel *ā* is questionable; Aramaic does not have the passage of *a*, long or accented, to *o* as Canaanite.

8. The text, on a bronze tablet, is incomplete at the beginning and on the left side; however, the word in question is preceded by *bn* and followed by additional personal names.

9. Cecchini (2013: 287–95, not 275–83) believes that the Melqart stela comes from a Damascus workshop.

10. Not yet convinced of the reading of the name of Hadad (reading HDD/R).

11. The two inscriptions are not votive (cf. p. 628), but as rightly stated by Millard, cited on that same page, "celebratory notices, marking booty as the gift of the god Hadad . . . ." We do not know where they were kept in Damascus and if they were offered to the treasury of a temple. The Arslan Tash ivory with Hazael's name (KAI 232) was earlier (note the shape of the letters) and cannot, in my opinion, be linked with certainty to Hazael's northern campaign (p. 63). Nor was it obtained by this king as booty (if the subject giving the gift is *'m'*, its interpretation is not obligatorily "the army"). Contrary to the harness inscriptions, Hazael does not appear in the ivory dating formula.

12. It is difficult to suppose that Hazael had employed Zakkur's scribes. Sass (2016: 207) supposes that the stela could have been set up by Bar Hadad, restoring the text as . . .]*lḥz*'[*l 'by* . . .

13. Amadasi Guzzo 2014: 56, fig. 6.

put forward by Younger (pp. 585–90) is that Mari, the name given in the Assyrian records to a king of Damascus following Hazael (Bar-Hadad of the Zakkur stela), generally explained as a title "lord" (or "my lord")—locally, Hazael is always addressed as *mr'n* "our lord"—was in reality the personal name of Bar-Hadad (II),[14] who took the appellation Bar-Hadad when ascending the throne. It is certainly true and well demonstrated by Younger that personal names composed with *mr'* and even its hypocoristic variant are attested (as is, e.g., the case for *'dn* in Phoenician, which is at the same time a component of personal names and a title). However, there is no solid proof that kings in the West Semitic area bore "dynastic names."[15] Consequently, Younger's proposal is interesting and worthy of consideration, but the question of the real name of the Aramaean king remains open. In any case, Mari and Bar-Hadad of the Zakkur stela must be one and the same king.

On the whole, the picture of the Aramaeans that emerges from the present work is that of groups which, at the start of their history, were extremely mobile but united by a common language. Their origins—not a single origin, as stressed by the author—remain very elusive and fragmented (remaining, it seems, at that stage in southern Mesopotamia), and their histories differed notably according to place, time, and geographical, climatic, and social conditions, which are at best unevenly known according to the sources at our disposal. Their development has been followed here using all the extant documents, mainly written, but also archaeological. The entire exposition well reflects the intricate and incomplete history of these groups of "multi-cultural" composition that, despite their fragmentation, imposed their language and writing on the whole of the Near East.

The geographical charts (here called "figures") and tables (summing up the most frequently discussed problems or chronologies) that follow the numbering of chapters and paragraphs (see list on pp. xiii–xv) aid our understanding of the complicated history of the Aramaeans before the Achaemenid empire. No other work concerning the ancient Aramaeans is so comprehensive or essential for all analytical and synthetic work, not only regarding the characteristics of this population but also its relationship to Assyrian history, and consequently also the issues concerning the different stages of and reasons for the rise and development of Assyrian power, particularly in the West and Northwest.

REFERENCES

Amadasi Guzzo, M. G. 2014. Tell Afis in the Iron Age: The Aramaic Inscriptions. *Near Eastern Archaeology* 77: 53–56.

Arnold, B. T. 2011. Aramean Origins: The Evidence from Babylonia. *AfO* 52: 179–85.

Benz, F. L. 1972. *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.

Berlejung, A., A. M. Maeir, and A. Schüle, eds. 2017. *Wandering Arameans outside Syria: Textual and Archaeological Perspectives*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

Cecchini, S. M. 2013. La stele di Breyg. In *Fenicios e Púnicos por terra e mar*, ed. A. M. Arruda. Pp. 287–95. Lisbon: Centro de Arqueologia de la Universidade de Lisboa.

Dion, P. E. 1997. *Les Araméens à l'Âge du Fer: Histoire politique et structures sociales*. Paris: Gabalda.

14. Or III, according to the reconstruction accepted.

15. Moreover, it is not easy to assume that, at the same time that Damascene inscriptions used the royal name Bar-Hadad, the Assyrians employed his original personal name. (They would more probably have known a foreign king by his dynastic name.) It is, in any case, hazardous to employ modern criteria to judge habits and traditions of distant places and times.

Fantar, M. 1969. Les inscriptions. In *Ricerche puniche ad Antas: Rapporto preliminare della Missione archeologica dell'Università di Roma e della Soprintendenza alle Antichità di Cagliari*, ed. E. Acquaro et al. Pp. 47–93. Rome: Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente.

Gzella, H. 2015. *A Cultural History of Aramaic: From the Beginnings to the Advent of Islam*. Leiden: Brill.

———, and M. L. Folmer, eds. 2008. *Aramaic in Its Historical and Linguistic Setting*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

KAI = H. Donner and W. Röllig. 1966–2002. *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*. 3 vols. in 1. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

Lipiński, E. 2000. *The Aramaeans: Their Ancient History, Culture, Religion*. Leuven: Peeters.

Niehr, H., ed. 2014. *The Aramaeans in Ancient Syria*. Leiden: Brill.

Sass, B. 2005. *The Alphabet at the Turn of the Millennium: The West Semitic Alphabet ca. 1150–850 BCE. The Antiquity of the Arabian, Greek and Phrygian Alphabets*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, The Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology.

———. 2016. Aram and Israel during the 10th–9th Centuries BCE, or IA IIA, The Alphabet. In Sergi et al. 2016: 199–227.

———. 2017. The Emergence of Monumental West Semitic Alphabetic Writing, with an Emphasis on Byblos. *Semitica* 59: 109–41.

Sergi, O., M. Oeming, and I. J. de Hulster, eds. 2016. *In Search of Aram and Israel: Politics and Identity*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Younger, K. L. Jr. 2007. The Late Bronze Age/Iron Age Transition and the Origin of the Arameans. In *Ugarit at Seventy-Five: Its Environs and the Bible*, ed. K. L. Younger Jr. Pp. 131–74. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.

———. 2014. "War and Peace" and the Origins of the Arameans. In *Krieg und Frieden im Alten Vorderasien*, ed. H. Neumann, R. Dittmann, S. Paulus, G. Neumann, and A. Schuster-Brandis. Pp. 861–74. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag.

———. 2017. Tiglathpileser I and the Initial Conflicts of the Assyrians with the Arameans. In Berlejung et al. 2017: 195–227.