

Graeco-Aramaica: A Look at Greek Words in Christian Palestinian Aramaic

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Abstract The contacts between Greek and Late Aramaic varieties have been the topic of lively academic discussions, which resulted in important studies on Greek loanwords in Syriac, Samaritan Aramaic, and Jewish Palestinian Aramaic. The first study on Greek loanwords in Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA) appeared at the end of the nineteenth century, but our knowledge of the language and its texts has considerably expanded since then. The present paper investigates Greek loanwords in CPA and offers a small sample of meaningful borrowed words.

Keywords Late Aramaic. Christian Palestinian Aramaic. Greek loanwords. Greek into Christian Palestinian Aramaic. Lexis.

Summary 1 Greek words in Late Aramaic dialects. – 2 *Comparanda* for the study of Greek words in CPA. – 3 CPA outcomes of Greek consonants and vowels. – 4. A corpus-based investigation. – 4.1 From Latin into Greek, from Greek into CPA. – 4.2 From Greek into CPA, via Arabic. – 5 Conclusions.

1 Greek words in Late Aramaic dialects

Greek and Aramaic have coexisted for many centuries in West Asian regions, from the time of the Achaemenid Empire.¹ From the fourth

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century BCE, Aramaic native speakers living in the Syrian and Mesopotamian areas found themselves under the ruling authority of the Seleucid Empire (321-64 BCE) and of its official language, Greek. After the fall of this empire, Greek was retained as the official language of communication used in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, whose rulers did not impose a restrictive language policy over the areas they controlled. Latin was used only as the official language of the military. Greek was the *lingua franca* and the language of prestige in Syrian and Mesopotamian regions, while Aramaic was the mother tongue of the vast majority of the inhabitants of the area. The consequence of the prolonged contacts between the two is that Aramaic borrowed a large number of words from Greek.²

The first instance of a loanword from Greek in a variety of Aramaic dates back to the Official Aramaic phase (700 BCE-200 BCE ca.), when, around 500 BCE, the word *statēr*, from Greek *στατήρ*, appeared on the Abydos lion weight, preserved today in the British Museum in London.³ The same Greek word is extant in one of the legal papyri from Elephantine, dated 402 BCE.⁴ Around the third century BCE, three Greek names of musical instruments entered the biblical *Book of Daniel*.⁵ Loanwords from Greek are extant as well in Middle Aramaic varieties (200 BCE-200 CE ca.), and are widely attested in all Late Aramaic varieties (200 CE-1200 CE ca.).⁶ These have not been equally impacted by the linguistic influence of Greek, as the eastern varieties (i.e., Jewish Babylonian Aramaic)⁷ appear to be the ones with the smaller number of loanwords, whereas the western group (Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, Samaritan, and especially Christian Palestinian Aramaic – henceforth CPA) shows a sensibly higher

² The linguistic situation of the Syrian and Mesopotamian regions has been described in several publications. See, among others, Butts 2016a, 25-30; Debié 2019; Gzella 2015; Millar 1993; Nicosia 2021, 176-7; Sartre 2005; and Taylor 2002.

³ Butts 2016a, 56.

⁴ Brock 1996, 251; Muraoka, Porten 2003, 350. For the text of the document, see Kraeling 1953, 270.

⁵ Butts 2016a, 56. Suchard (2022) proposes to consider these words not as loanwords but rather as instances of code-switching.

⁶ For discussions on Greek words in Middle Aramaic varieties, see Brock 2005; Contini, Pagano 2015; Gzella 2006; Healey 1995; Monferrer-Sala 2013; and the Greek words in Sokoloff 2003a. For the periodization of Aramaic employed in this paper, see Fitzmyer 1979; for a discussion on the definition of Middle Aramaic, see Moriggi 2021; for the periodization of Late Aramaic, see the remarks in Butts 2019, 224, who follows Folmer 1995, 1-5; and the comments in Nicosia 2021, 178, n. 11.

⁷ Even though Mandaic belongs as well to the group, Härbel 2021 highlights the presence of many loanwords from Greek (and other languages), which are unparalleled for an Eastern variety.

number of loanwords from Greek.⁸ Syriac, the only central variety of the Late Aramaic group, is certainly the language that features the largest number of Greek loanwords, and, as will be discussed in the next paragraph, its borrowing methods and adaptation strategies have been studied thoroughly.

A key aspect to take into account when surveying the history of Greek loanwords in Aramaic varieties is that Greek words were also transferred *between* these varieties; therefore, the exact identification of the moment at which some Greek words were originally borrowed is simply impossible. This is the case, for instance, of the loanword from Greek *κατήγορος* (the outcome of which is a secondary formation through root extraction in the D-Stem),⁹ which is invariably attested as *qṭrg* ('to accuse') in Syriac, Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, Samaritan Aramaic, and CPA. Therefore, the word was borrowed first by one of these varieties or one of their forerunners, responsible for the metathesis between *r* and *g*, and circulated as such among the others.¹⁰

Due to the years that the Mesopotamian and Syrian regions spent under the control of the Eastern Roman Empire, a relatively rich array of Latin words entered Aramaic. However, virtually all of them arrived via a previous acquisition in Greek, which is why they are often tackled within the discussion on Greek loanwords in Late Aramaic.¹¹

2 **Comparanda for the study of Greek words in CPA**

A modern study of Greek loanwords in CPA does not exist. Our only source of information on the matter dates to 1893, when Friedrich Schwally published his *Idioticon des christlich palästinischen Aramaeisch*. The volume comprises ten pages listing the loanwords from Greek and Latin, their translation into German, and short notes on their occurrences. Based on the CPA texts that were known at his time, Schwally gathered 61 Greek words and 3 Latin words with their corresponding CPA outcomes. In 1991, Christa Müller-Kessler (1991, 104-5) devoted a section of her grammar of CPA to a short list of loanwords from Greek and Latin and their occurrences.¹²

Based on the amount of CPA texts that are known to us nowadays, I was able to gather a corpus of roughly 300 loanwords from Greek, among which 26 are loanwords from Latin through Greek.

8 Among these varieties, Samaritan Aramaic contains the lowest number of loanwords. See the discussion in Butts 2016a, 206-9 and the brief notes in Nicosia 2021, 178.

9 On this derivational strategy, see Brock 2004, 37 and Butts 2016a, 111-17.

10 Butts 2016a, 57-8.

11 See, for instance, the study on Latin words in Syriac in Butts 2016b.

12 For a short history of CPA lexicography, see Sokoloff 2014a, xiii-xiv.

My research has benefitted from several previous works that served as *comparanda* and, in some cases, additional sources. Particularly, one of the main reference tools that I employed was the study of Greek loanwords in Samaritan Aramaic published by Christian Stadel and Mor Shemesh (2018). The scholars published a list of 74 loanwords - which Stadel later updated to 76 -¹³ gathered through the study of the lemmas hosted in the dictionary published by Abraham Tal (2000). Other studies on Greek words in Late Aramaic varieties and other coeval Semitic languages used in the Palestinian region are the *Griechische und lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrash und Targum* by Samuel Krauss (1899) and *A Dictionary of Greek and Latin Legal Terms in Rabbinic Literature*, which was conceived by Daniel Sperber (1984) as a follow-up to Krauss' work.¹⁴ Another useful source is the extensive study on Greek loanwords in Syriac published by Aaron Butts (2016a). This capital study, which takes into account also a small sample of Greek loanwords in Late Aramaic varieties other than Syriac, established or perfected a set of rules to determine the morphological and phonetic integration of loanwords. Most of these rules have proven to apply as well to Greek loanwords in CPA.¹⁵ Butts' study incorporated and further developed the results obtained, for instance, by Anton Schall's *Studien über griechische Fremdwörter im Syrischen* (1960), and the series of papers written by Sebastian Brock on similar topics.¹⁶ There is one important methodological difference between Butts' monograph and any analogous investigation in CPA: Butts chose to study only the loanwords that are extant in Syriac texts which were not translated from Greek. A similar approach is simply unfeasible when dealing with the corpus of CPA texts, since the only extant documents that were not translated from Greek are inscriptions and a few magical texts.¹⁷

This paper does not aim to provide a comprehensive list of loanwords from Greek in CPA, but rather to offer a general introduction to the topic, with discussions and comments on a selected sample of words.

13 See the remarks in Stadel 2021, 356 on the word *'nqylh* and Stadel 2024, 207-8 on the word *ן*.

14 Sperber is also the author of the *Essays on Greek and Latin in the Mishna, Talmud and Midrashic Literature*, which appeared in 1982.

15 For an analysis of the merits of Butts' work and the usefulness of his results for future research, see Nicosia 2021.

16 Such as Brock 1990; 1996; and 2004.

17 Among others, Morgenstern (2011, 628) refers briefly to the fact that only epigraphical texts were composed directly in CPA, whereas the manuscripts host exclusively texts translated from Greek. It has to be taken into account that there are a handful of translations into CPA that do not employ loanwords from Greek, such as fragments from *Leviticus* and *Numbers* (see Müller-Kessler 2021), or feature only a few of them, such as the text of the *Dormition of Mary* (see the notes in Müller-Kessler 2019). For an overview of the literature written in CPA, see Díez Merino 2003.

This paper does not touch upon onomastics, but encompasses Greek (paragraph 4) and Latin (paragraph 5) loanwords in CPA, as well as Greek loanwords that entered CPA via Arabic (paragraph 6).

3 CPA outcomes of Greek consonants and vowels

Before addressing Greek loanwords in CPA, it is useful to provide a table of correspondences between Greek consonants and their representation in CPA:¹⁸

Greek	CPA	Greek	CPA
β	Ⲅ	ξ	ⲙⲁ
γ	Ⲛ	π	ⲡ (rarely ⲉ)
δ	ⲉ	ρ, ρ̂, ρ̄	ⲓ
ζ	ⲓ	σ	ⲓ, ⲙ, ⲛ (rare)
θ	ⲃ	τ	ⲃ, ⲛ
κ	ⲕ, ⲡ	φ	ⲉ
λ	ⲗ	χ	ⲛ, ⲕ (rare), ⲙ (rare)
μ	ⲙ	ψ	ⲙⲉ
ν	ⲛ		

A table with clear correspondences between Greek and CPA vowels is more complicated to build. For the time being, I will confine myself to very brief notes, to be expanded with further study.¹⁹ Greek α is usually represented with ⲕ; Greek ε with ⲙ, ⲕ, and ⲗ; Greek η with ⲕ and ⲗ; Greek ι with ⲗ; Greek ο with ⲕ and ⲉ; Greek υ with ⲉ, ⲕ, and occasionally ⲗ; and Greek ω with ⲉ.²⁰ Occasionally, Greek vowels are represented with two CPA letters, such as initial-position Greek α, that can be represented with ⲗⲕ. This summary overlooks the presence of the *spiritus*, which in some instances causes a change in the representation of Greek vowels, e.g., in the case of initial-position Greek ἡ represented by ⲗⲙ in the word ⲕⲓⲉⲙⲗⲕⲗⲙ (< Gr. ἡγεμὼν, 'prefect, governor').

¹⁸ Some notes on the topic are included in Müller-Kessler 1991, 33.

¹⁹ Some notes on the topic are included in Müller-Kessler 1991, 40-1.

²⁰ The outcomes described here do not generally appear to be influenced by the position of the vowels within words.

4 A corpus-based investigation

As previously done in the study on Greek loanwords in Samaritan Aramaic,²¹ my investigation started from the words gathered in the most recent dictionary of CPA, published by Michael Sokoloff (2014a), and then took into account several other publications, such as Schwally's aforementioned *Idiotikon*, the corpus of inscriptions published by Robert Hoyland (2010) and Thomas Bauzou et al. (1998), the texts published by Klaus Beyer (1984, 402-5) – albeit briefly –, those in the series of the *Corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic*,²² the *Texts of Various Contents* published by Sokoloff (2014b), the amulets published by Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked (1953, 108-9) and Puech (2007),²³ and the magical booklet published by Maurice Baillet (1963). Moreover, the research encompassed the CPA words in the list of loanwords from Greek in Butts' monograph (2016, 212-22). A partial investigation has been conducted on the words gathered by Friedrich Schulthess (1903) in his dictionary of CPA, but prominence has been given to the more recent one by Sokoloff.

Semitic languages in general, and CPA in particular, employ various strategies to borrow foreign vocabulary, the most prominent of which is the mere transliteration of words which retain their original spelling, at least as far as the phonemic inventory of the recipient language allows. This is the case, for instance, of ܘܢܘܩܘܘܢܐ, a loanword from Greek βωμός, 'altar, raised platform'. Another common borrowing strategy is the extraction of a triconsonantal root. Usually, root extraction is described as a secondary formation strategy, according to which three consonants are extracted from an already borrowed noun. The result of the extraction is a denominative verb in the D-stem.²⁴ In CPA, we find instances of root extraction in the loanword ܘܢܘܩܘܘܢܐ from the Greek verb γλύφειν, 'to engrave';²⁵ ܘܢܘܩܘܘܢܐ from the substantive ܘܢܘܩܘܘܢܐ borrowed from Greek τάξις, 'order, rank';²⁶ ܘܢܘܩܘܘܢܐ from Greek εἰκῶν, 'to make sure'. These roots are attested as well in other Aramaic varieties.

21 Stadel, Shemesh 2018.

22 Müller-Kessler, Sokoloff 1996; 1997; 1998a; 1998b; and 1999.

23 When I undertook this research, I didn't know about the existence of two additional amulets, published by Puech (2012) and Abudraham (2017). These two texts – which are however quite fragmentary – will be taken into account for the publication of the comprehensive list of Greek loanwords in CPA. I wish to thank Christian Stadel for filling this gap in my bibliographical knowledge.

24 See note 8 for references.

25 On this root, see the discussion in Nicosia 2019, 274-5.

26 See the notes in Butts 2016a, 221.

- **ܐܢܘܠܕܢ**: The word is attested both in CPA and Syriac only as an adjective. Whether the adjectival suffix has been employed due to analogy with other adjectives or as the outcome of Greek final *-ή*, implying that the input form was *καθολική* instead of *καθολικός*, is difficult to say. However, based on the wide range of attestations and occurrences that the word has in Syriac, it is likely the case that the derivational suffix has been attached to a substantive form.

A derivational suffix that is widely paired with Greek loanwords in Syriac is the adverbial ending **ܕܐܪܝܢܐ**,³¹ but I could not find a single occurrence of the derivational suffix **ܕܐܪܝܢܐ**- employed with Greek loanwords in CPA. Even in cases in which the adverbial form would have been necessary, such as the words **ܐܠܘܢܐܠܐܡܐ** (< Gr. ἑλληνιστί, 'in Greek'), **ܐܕܘܪܠܐܡܐ** (< Gr. Ῥωμαϊστί, 'in Latin'), and **ܐܕܘܪܐܪܐܡܐ** (< Gr. συριστί, 'in Aramaic'), no suffix is employed, and actually these three loanwords are mere replicas of their respective Greek input forms.³²

One of the most interesting sources of loanwords is a magical booklet kept in the library of the University of Leuven. The manuscript, which represents a fascinating and still rather obscure artifact, hosts one of the very few texts that were composed directly in CPA and is the longest extant example of a magical text in CPA.³³ The composition starts with an ink recipe and a list of ingredients and colors,³⁴ mentions some magical names, goes on with three prayers – one likely to be to Jesus, one for the scorpion and one for the viper –,³⁵ and ends with some incomprehensible invocations. The text has been tentatively dated to the 6th or 7th century.³⁶

Most of the names of the pigments and ingredients of the recipe are borrowed from Greek, and most of them are also extant in Syriac. These are some examples:

31 The status of the adverbial suffix *-'yt* in CPA is debated, although Müller-Kessler ruled out the possibility that it entered CPA only as a consequence of Syriac influence. See Müller-Kessler 1991, 140-3.

32 This category of borrowed Greek adverbs has not been discussed in Müller-Kessler 1991, 142-3.

33 The other known texts are five amulets written on lead (Puech 2007 and Abudraham 2017), bronze (Naveh, Shaked 1993, 107-10), silver (Puech 1996, 299-302), and copper (Puech 2012).

34 See Desreumaux 2015a, 133. For a discussion on the inks used in Syriac manuscripts, see Boutrolle, Daccache 2015; Daccache, Desreumaux 2015; Desreumaux 2015b; and Pacha Miran 2020, 66-87.

35 Morgenstern (2011, 630) reads “against” the scorpion and the viper.

36 Baillet 1963, 401.

- ܘܢܐܦܠܘܢ, ‘oak apple’, is a loanword from the genitive form κηκίδος of the Greek word κηκίς. The loanword can be found in Syriac as ܘܢܐܦܠܘܢ or ܘܢܐܦܠܘܢ, even though these two likely originated from the nominative form;³⁷
- ܘܒܠܘܢܘܢ, ‘blue vitriol; copper sulfate’, is a loanword from the genitive form χαλκανθοῦς of the Greek nominative form χαλκανθές.³⁸ The Syriac corresponding word ܘܒܠܘܢܘܢ comes from the Greek input form χαλκίτις, meaning ‘containing copper’;³⁹
- ܘܪܘܒܘܢܘܢ, ‘cinnabar, red lead’, comes from Greek συρικόν, maybe with the sense of ‘coming from the island of Syros’. Baillet (1963, 385-6) gives a detailed explanation of why the CPA loanword cannot be derived from the Greek word σηρικόν, ‘silk robe; silk’, but rather refers to the pigment known as *syricum* in Latin, which was employed as a substitute for cinnabar. However, with time, the words used to refer to this color or pigment started to be confused, hence the difficulty in retracing the original input form.⁴⁰ The word is attested in Syriac as ܘܪܘܒܘܢܘܢ ܘܪܘܒܘܢܘܢ;
- ܘܪܘܒܘܢܘܢܘܢ, ‘arsenic’, is a loanword from Greek ἀρσενικόν, and is attested in Syriac as ܘܪܘܒܘܢܘܢܘܢ;⁴¹
- ܘܪܘܒܘܢܘܢܘܢܘܢ, ‘ceruse’, comes from Greek ψιμ(μ)ύθιον, and is attested as well in Syriac as ܘܪܘܒܘܢܘܢܘܢܘܢ.⁴²

Another interesting word used in the magical booklet is ܪܘܒܘܢܘܢ, ‘urn, vase; measure’, coming from Greek ξέστης,⁴³ or rather from the Greek adaptation of the Latin word *sextarius*, and extant in Syriac as ܪܘܒܘܢܘܢ. The regular Syriac outcome of Greek ξ would be the pair *ks* (ܚܣ), but the presence of the emphatic velar stop *q* (ܩ) in this Aramaic word is a famous exception attested from Palmyrene (*qstʾwn*)

³⁷ Baillet 1963, 384.

³⁸ Baillet 1963, 385 states that the input form of the loanword is not χαλκανθοῦς, but rather the secondary form κάλκανθος. Considering the presence of η for Greek χ, this proposal is not to be excluded.

³⁹ The word is registered in Gignoux 2020, 66. Sokoloff (2009, 627) registers also the alternative orthography ܘܢܐܦܠܘܢܘܢ.

⁴⁰ Sokoloff (2014a, 1047) labels the word as a loanword from Greek σηρικόν. On the use of cinnabar in the preparation of inks, see Pacha Miran 2020, 72.

⁴¹ Gignoux (2020, 19) features the orthography ܘܪܘܒܘܢܘܢܘܢ. Interestingly, the Greek word ἀρσενικόν comes from the Old Persian word **zarnīk*, via a Semitic influence, visible in the Syriac word ܘܪܘܒܘܢܘܢ; cf. Chantraine 1968, 115-6. Thus, Syriac features two ways of calling the arsenic: the first one, ܘܪܘܒܘܢܘܢ, is a loanword from Persian, while the second one, ܘܪܘܒܘܢܘܢܘܢ, is a loanword from Greek.

⁴² Gignoux 2020, 21 and 24.

⁴³ Baillet (1963, 383-4) suggests that the word could also be a loanword from Greek κίστη.

to Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (*qsyt*), Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (*qistō, qystʿ*), CPA, and Syriac.⁴⁴

On the seventh page of the booklet, we find an odd word employed in the prayer for (against?) the viper. The animal is called ܠܘܘܢܘܢܘܢ,⁴⁵ and Sokoloff's dictionary labels it as a loanword from Greek εχίνοϛ. However, the spelling of this alleged loanword, equipped with the Aramaic state suffix, is very peculiar.⁴⁶ More specifically, the problem lies in the choice of rendering Greek initial ε- with the pharyngeal fricative ܢ. As pointed out by Müller-Kessler (1991, 34), contrary to Samaritan Aramaic, ܢ was not employed in CPA as a *mater lectionis* to represent *a/ā*. Nevertheless, the scholar gathered three instances, to which we now add this fourth one, of this phenomenon in the magical booklet: ܘܡܢܢܘܢܘܢ (page 7 of the booklet), ܢܢܘܢܘܢܘܢ (page 5), and ܠܘܘܢܘܢܘܢ (page 3, a loanword from Byzantine Greek λαζούριον, 'light blue').⁴⁷

The explanation provided by Baillet (1963, 395–96) for the identification of ܠܘܘܢܘܢܘܢ with the viper is based on the existence of similar words in other varieties of Aramaic, such as Jewish Babylonian and Jewish Palestinian Aramaic ܠܘܘܢܘܢ, which features the same initial fricative, or Syriac ܠܘܘܢܘܢ, clearly a loanword from Greek ἔχιδνα, 'viper'. Sokoloff's identification of ܠܘܘܢܘܢܘܢ as a loanword from Greek εχίνοϛ is not unproblematic either, given that the Greek word means 'hedgehog, urchin' and does not refer to snakes,⁴⁸ which is instead the case of the words ἔχιδνα and ἔχιϛ. Based on its aspect, the word likely entered CPA via varieties of Aramaic other than Syriac, such as Jewish Palestinian Aramaic.

4.1 From Latin into Greek, from Greek into CPA

It was already pointed out that some Latin words reached CPA via Greek. I gathered a total of 26 Latin words, mostly belonging to the military sphere or the field of measures and weights. Together with ܠܘܘܢܘܢܘܢ discussed in the previous section, I would like to mention:

⁴⁴ Butts 2016c, 17-18.

⁴⁵ Baillet 1963, 395-6.

⁴⁶ Sokoloff 2014a, 307.

⁴⁷ Syr. ܠܘܘܢܘܢ or ܠܘܢܘܢ. Again, the 'ayn is very problematic: the reading is undeniable, but its very presence might be a scribal mistake. Sokoloff (2014a, 197) proposes to emend the word into ܠܘܘܢܘܢܘܢ. On the use of light blue in inks, see Pacha Miran 2020, 69-70.

⁴⁸ Liddell, Scott 1883, 628-9. In his dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, Sokoloff (2002, 861) proposed that the word was a Semiticized form of Greek ἔχιϛ, but he later corrected himself in the dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic. See Sokoloff 2003, 406.

- ܫܘܠܘܢܐܘܪ < Gr. σκουτον < Lat. *scutum*, 'shield';
- ܐܘܪ < Gr. ἀσσάριον < Lat. *assarium*, 'assarius, small copper coin';⁴⁹
- ܕܢܐܪܝܘܢ < Gr. δηνάριον < Lat. *denarius*, 'gold denar';
- ܘܢܥܝܐ < Gr. ούγκία < Lat. *uncia*, 'ounce';⁵⁰
- ܠܗܝܘܢ/ܠܗܝܘܢ < Gr. λεγιών/λεγεών < Lat. *legio*, 'legion';
- ܡܘܕܝܘܢ < Gr. μόδιος < Lat. *modium*, 'corn measure, peck; container, bushel';
- ܡܝܠܝܘܢ < Gr. μίλιον < Lat. *mille*, 'Roman mile', 'mile-stone';
- ܡܘܕܝܘܢ < Gr. πραιτώριον < Lat. *praetorium*, 'governor's headquarters';⁵¹
- ܐܘܪܝܘܢ < Gr. καῖσαρ < Lat. *caesar*, 'Caesar, emperor';
- ܕܘܪܝܘܢ < Gr. κάστρον < Lat. *castrum*, 'cohort';⁵²
- ܕܘܪܝܘܢ < Gr. κασσίς < Lat. *cassida*, 'helmet'.⁵³

The group of Latin loanwords includes a small sample of words belonging to other semantic fields, such as ܠܘܫܝܘܢ < Gr. φασκία < Lat. *fascia*,⁵⁴ 'bandage used to wrap a corpse'; ܕܘܠܝܘܢ < Gr. κελλίον < Lat. *cella*, *cellula*, 'cell'; ܘܠܠܘܢ < Gr. κάλαμος < Lat. *calamus*, 'reed pen, stylus'.

An interesting loanword from Latin extant in CPA is the word ܘܠܠܘܢ, which supposedly comes from a Greek form σίγνον < Latin *signum*, 'sign'. What is peculiar is that the text in which it is found, the *Acta Pilati*, treats it like a plural,⁵⁵ since the word is used as a translation of the Greek plural τὰ σίγνα.⁵⁶ Reconstructing the input form poses a problem: the presence of a final ܘ- is usually explained as the result of a loanword from a Greek plural accusative form, but second declension neutral nouns feature only -α as their plural accusative ending, not -αϛ. The problem appears as well in the Syriac

⁴⁹ The CPA outcome lost the Greek and Latin declension suffixes.

⁵⁰ Syr. ܘܢܥܝܐ. The presence of the final ܘ- in CPA testifies to the fact the input form was probably a Greek accusative plural.

⁵¹ Cf. Jewish Palestinian Aramaic for ρ>l.

⁵² The input form is the plural κάστρα instead of the singular κάστρον. Sokoloff (2014a, 378) registers two spellings, ܕܘܪܝܘܢ and ܕܘܪܝܘܢ. The presence of the emphatic *s* is probably triggered by the influence of the following emphatic sound *t*. A similar phenomenon is attested in another loanword from Latin, *custodia*, through Greek κουστωδία, which is attested in CPA both as ܕܘܪܝܘܢ and ܕܘܪܝܘܢ.

⁵³ The input form is the genitive κασσίδου.

⁵⁴ Even though such a word is not immediately connected to the military sphere, the military could have been its conduit.

⁵⁵ Sokoloff 2014b, 17.

⁵⁶ For the Greek text, see Tischendorf 1876, 222.

translation of *Acta Pilati*, which features **ܘܫܘܢܬܐ**,⁵⁷ even though Syriac could have hardly prompted the CPA outcome, as the CPA translation of this text was made directly from Greek.⁵⁸ Whether such hypothetical Syriac influence was vehiculated by a translator who worked both on Syriac and CPA translations of the Greek text, which resulted in the same “quirk”, is impossible to prove.

4.2 From Greek into CPA, via Arabic

It is not always easy to identify how or when a Greek word entered CPA vocabulary and texts. However, there are some instances in which this identification is possible, as in the case of a handful of Greek words that entered CPA through Arabic (spoken by Christians). Whether this mediation was made in writing or simply in the mind of scribes who were speakers of Arabic remains to be ascertained.⁵⁹ Be as it may, the influence of Arabic is shown in the CPA realization of Greek π: since Arabic lacks the bilabial voiceless stop *p* and replaces it with the voiced *b*, these loanwords feature ܒ instead of the usual ܦ:

- ܒܘܪܘܚܐ < Ar. < Gr. πρώτη, ‘at first’;
- ܕܒܘܪܘܚܐ < Ar. < Gr. προφητεία, ‘prophecy’;
- (ܕܒܘܪܘܚܐ) ܘܒܘܪܘܚܐ < Ar. < Gr. δεσπότης, ‘master’;
- ܕܒܘܪܘܚܐ < Ar. < Gr. τοπάζιον, ‘topaz’;⁶⁰
- ܕܒܘܪܘܚܐ < Ar. < Gr. μητροπολίτης, ‘metropolitan’;
- ܕܒܘܪܘܚܐ < Ar. < Gr. ῥιπίδιον, ‘fan (used by the deacon)’.

There is one instance in which the passage π > ܒ > ܒ might have caused a hypercorrection. In the text of the *Service of Compline*, we find the curious word ܕܒܘܪܘܚܐ, ‘the Devil’.⁶¹ The text belongs to the CPA *Horologion* preserved in the Berlin manuscript Or. Oct. 1019, copied by the priest PHEME in Jerusalem in 1187/1188 CE.⁶²

⁵⁷ Raḥmani 1908, vol. 2: 3.20. Sokoloff (2009, 999) indicates *σιγύνα* as the Greek counterpart of the word.

⁵⁸ Brock 1971.

⁵⁹ Although I personally find it highly likely, since the alleged intermediary Arabic words are absent from most dictionaries. Interesting examples are the words for ‘metropolitan’ and ‘topaz’, which are usually written *مطران* (created via root extraction) and *توباز* (featuring an initial ܬ which could have hardly prompted CPA ܒ) and cannot possibly be the input forms of CPA outcomes. The possible input forms of the loanwords gathered here could be searched in Christian Arabic vernacular, which lacks a reference dictionary.

⁶⁰ See note 51.

⁶¹ Black 1954, 88 and 280.

⁶² Black (1954, 4-5) explains that the text was likely copied from an earlier parchment manuscript. A leaf of this latter manuscript belongs to the Mingana collection in Birmingham, labelled Mingana Syriac 660.

Since the text belongs to the late phase (ca. eleventh to thirteenth century) when CPA was no longer spoken but still employed as a liturgical language, and had gotten heavily influenced by Arabic (and Syriac),⁶³ the scribe might have opted for ܨ instead of ܘ as the result of hypercorrection. The scribe must have been aware, therefore, that Greek π turned into ϕ in Arabic and decided to replace ܘ with ܨ to avoid a possible mistake. If this scribe was responsible for such a “misunderstanding”, it implies that he recognised the word ܩܘܠܘܨܘܬܐ as coming from Greek διάβολος; alternatively, this could be a mere scribal mistake caused by distraction or by the use of a copy with such mistake.

5 Conclusions

This paper offered a brief introduction to the study of Greek loanwords in CPA and provided an overview of the main borrowing strategies employed. Moreover, it discussed a sample of loanwords from Latin via Greek, and from Greek via Arabic, to provide the most accurate sketch of the possibilities that this line of research has to offer. This research opens the path to additional trajectories: first, to conduct an extensive comparison with Greek words attested in the other Late Aramaic varieties, aiming to assess the level of innovation or, conversely, alignment to other western varieties testified by CPA. Second, to compare the Greek loanwords attested in CPA with those extant in Western Neo-Aramaic varieties spoken in modern-day Syria, which show the presence of many words coming from their Late Aramaic ancestor. An example is the word used in CPA to refer to Bedouins/Arabs: ܩܘܠܘܨܘܬܐ . ܩܘܠܘܨܘܬܐ is a loanword from Byzantine Greek σαρακηνός,⁶⁴ which is attested as well in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic as ܩܘܠܘܨܘܬܐ, and is extant in the Western Neo-Aramaic Muslim dialect of the Syrian village of Bax'ā (pl. *sarkōyin*), where it refers to Muslim people.⁶⁵ This line of study and its possible applications contribute to widening our understanding of modern vernaculars, and to tracing their connection to Late Aramaic varieties.⁶⁶

63 For a chronology of CPA, see Morgenstern 2011, 629-31 and the discussion in Díez Merino 2003. For a discussion on the sources of the late phase, see Müller-Kessler 1991, 23-6.

64 See Macdonald 2009 on the possible Semitic origin of the Greek word.

65 See the discussion in Contini, Nicosia 2020, 99-100.

66 The opposite approach, i.e., using modern vernaculars to explain obscure Syriac words, was recently used in Mutzafi 2024.

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