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# Aramaic (Arameographic) Inscriptions on Silver and Golden Objects from Armazi and Bagineti (II-IIIcc.AD)

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# Aram Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies

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## ARAM Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies Fifty-Second International Conference:

### The Aramaeans B.C.:

### History, Literature, and Archaeology

#### Abstracts

**Prof. Daniel Bodi** (Sorbonne University, Paris)

“THE ARAMEAN HOMER: HOW THE STORY AND THE PROVERBS OF AḤIḤAR CAME ABOUT.”

The paper attempts to show how the story of Aḥiḥar was secondarily elaborated and modeled from an ancient, bilingual Sumero-Akkadian saying. Both the name Aḥiḥar and the story of Aḥiḥar are literary constructs, comparable to the figure of Homer among the Greeks. Both Aḥiḥar and Homer are legendary figures whose historicity cannot be proven. The main plot of the story of Aḥiḥar, the ‘disgrace and rehabilitation of a minister’, combined with the motif of the ‘ungrateful nephew’, was already blended in the Sumero-Akkadian collection of proverbs.

In the Sumero-Akkadian proverb (*BWL* ii 50-63 ; K 4347+16161 pl. 62, CDLI n° P499401, Vs. ii.; Foster 2005: 426), the reference to the ingrate (*ruggu*) or villain points to the first of the two basic motifs of the story of Aḥiḥar, that of the ‘ungrateful nephew’ who is identified as Nādin in the plot of the story. The second half of the saying refers to the ‘disgrace and rehabilitation of a wise vizier’ (*ummānu*) or a royal counselor, pointing to the career of Aḥiḥar in the story. Moreover, since the two motifs are found among proverbs, it shows that the Aramaic story of Aḥiḥar represents a secondarily elaborated account drawn from an original Sumero-Akkadian sequence of proverbs.

A similar manner of creating a longer literary composition from an original short proverb is found in Sumerian. The folktale of *The Old Man and the Young Girl* is mentioned on a small school tablet (BIN II 59) which contains a phrase that appears to be a summary of the whole story: *ab.ba ki.sikil.tur-ra nam.dam.šè ba-an-tuku* ‘an old man took a young girl as wife’. The phrase represents the essential idea of the story in a nutshell. This reference confirms that we are dealing with a well-known topos, also known and used in a school setting. When the schoolboy quoted this saying, he knew the accompanying story about it. It also suggests the possibility that the entire folktale was elaborated from a common saying. The text of *The Old Man and the Young Girl* is ‘best described as a burlesque invention of the scribal school’ (Alster 2005a: 385).

The Akkadian story of *The Poor Man of Nippur* too seems to have started from a proverb and was most probably a product of a Scribal School.

However, the phenomenon is associated in particular with the production of Aramaic literature. Parallels are found in the Aramaic Sheikh Faḍl inscription. This fifth-century BCE fictional literary

composition is an elaboration of an Egyptian hero epic known from a Demotic composition from 450 years later, belonging to the *Inaros Epic*.

The paper further establishes a parallel between the creation of Aḥiqar's story and the story of Daniel in the 'Lions' Den' in Dan 2.4b-7.28 written in Biblical Aramaic. The lions' den, however, goes back to a Babylonian metaphor of a god muzzling the lions' mouth mentioned in *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, a Middle Babylonian composition. The metaphor of 'the lion's pit' used in the Neo-Assyrian composition, known as the 'Forlorn Scholar', refers to the circle of scribes and scholars, and former colleagues, at the court from which Urad-Gula has been ousted. With their slander and hostility, they have turned into lions, eager to devour him. The biblical author inherited the motif of the lions' pit from the Babylonian tradition, but when he incorporated it into the story of Daniel, he turned the metaphor into a literal description (Toorn 1998: 627). Both in Aḥiqar and in the story of Daniel, the transformation of a proverb through literalization or 'narrativization' of an ancient metaphor into a story would have been done by a learned scribe, a particular technique reflecting the work of wisdom circles.

Moreover, the story of Daniel's friends in the fiery furnace described in another chapter written in Aramaic (Dan 3) might likewise have been elaborated from another Akkadian expression that arose with Nabonidus imposing the new theology of the god, Sîn, on the Babylonian Empire. His reform included the making of a new statue of the moon god Sîn for the temple Eḫulḫul in Harran, a cult image deemed improper and sacrilegious by the opponents of Nabonidus, who disparaged him as a 'Mad King' (Beaulieu 2007: 137-66). The denigration of his heterodox project would have been formulated with a mocking expression implying rhetorical inflation: 'If you don't worship the new statue of Sîn, the king will roast you in an oven!' (Beaulieu 2009: 289). Here again, an expression was turned into a narrative in the story of Daniel in the fiery furnace, providing an apt parallel to the creation of the story of Aḥiqar.

**Dr. Mustapha Djabellaoui** (MSH Mondes, Archéologies et Sciences de l'Antiquité, Nanterre, France)

"ARAMEANS AND CHALDEANS IN BABYLONIA: FIRST HALF OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM B.C. (1100-626)"

The Arameans and Chaldeans are two population groups that had a sustained impact on the history of Babylonia in the first millennium B.C. They are associated with each other in cuneiform sources and by scholars through time. They are described as plunderers and troublemakers in the inscriptions of the Middle Assyrian period, in which they occur for the first time. They appear as fearful adversaries of the kings of Assyria and as powerful kings of Babylon in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Eventually the term "Chaldean" becomes a name for all Babylonians and "Chaldea" replaces Babylonia as the name of the land. While the Bible portrays them as nomadic pastoralists, mercenaries and horsemen, classical literature knows them as prominent astronomers and soothsayers with great magical and philosophical knowledge. The Arameans are better known. Their origins in Babylonia can be traced back to settlers who came from Syria at the end of the second millennium. They were present most notably in the Diyala Basin around the early 9<sup>th</sup> century. By the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Arameans became numerically more predominant than the Chaldeans. They continued to be referred to mostly by the generic term "Arameans", even as new groupings emerged in the course of time, such as the *Puqūdu* and the *Gambulū*. By the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium the Aramaic language became predominant and displaced Akkadian in Babylonia. In addition, a part of Babylonian territory is called "land of Arameans". These remarkable facts testify to the existence of a strong cultural identity, able to provide social structures and a solid political framework. The main purpose of this paper is to present the difference between the Arameans of Babylonia and the Chaldeans. This question, which has often been discussed by historians, can be approached in a fresh light. Arameans and Chaldeans have produced evidence of their social, cultural, and territorial identities. Logically, these elements would be reflected at several levels of the two groups' existence. They would appear in period texts, material products, and in the cultural domain. This is nevertheless more diffi-

cult to grasp. We have a wide range of documents from this period that mention them. These documents include Assyrian royal inscriptions, letters, economic texts, *kudurrus* and other objects. Even though heterogeneous and sometimes difficult to analyse, the corpus stands as a good sample of Babylonian documents from the first part of the first millennium. This paper will first propose how it is possible to identify Arameans and Chaldeans in the sources, then examine their identities through social and political structures. Finally, we introduce some individuals whose personal paths manifest Aramean and Chaldean identities.

**Prof. Elene Giunashvili** (G. Tsereteli Institute of Oriental Studies/Ilia State University, Georgia) & **Prof. Gaby Abou-Samra** (Lebanese University)

“ARAMAIC (ARAMEOGRAPHIC) INSCRIPTIONS ON SILVER GOLDEN OBJECTS FROM ARMAZI AND BAGINETI. (II-III CC. AD)”

Old Aramaic was one of the chief written languages of Iberia before the adoption of Christianity (IV century AD). A number of original Aramaic inscriptions were found in Mtskheta, the capital of Iberia and its vicinity – Armaziskhevi, Bagineti, Samtavro and other ancient historical points of Central and West Georgia (Uplistsikhe, Deoplis Mindori, Bori, Zghuderi, Dzalisa, Vani). For the present, the whole corpus of inscriptions comprises nearly 100 units dated to I c BC –III c AD.

Aramaic inscriptions are attested on different clay objects (mostly pithoi) found in Uplistsikhe (III-II cc BC), Dedoplis Mindori (I c BC) and Urblisi (II c AD).

Of utmost interest are two steles with Aramaic inscriptions, discovered in 1940 in Crypt 4 at Armaziskhevi. One, the so called “Armazian Monolingua” contains a 14-line Aramaic (Armazian) text.

Academic G. Tsereteli made a significant contribution to the decipherment and analysis of this inscription in his work “The Armazi Inscription of the period of Mithridates the Iberian” (1961). G. Tsereteli identified the text of the monolingual inscription as a victory stele of Shar(a)gas, the viceroy of the great king Mithridates II of Iberia, the son of the king Parsman, who was attested in the Greek inscription from Mtskheta of the epoch of Vespasian (69-79 AD), and dated to 75 AD.

The text of the monolingual seems to be a royal edict: Shar(a)gas is reporting on military operations against Armenia and their successful conclusion.

The Armazi monolingual was executed in a cursive script, which was likely to be more archaic than that of the second century bilingual inscription. As G. Tsereteli noted “an engraver did not try to give to every letter its peculiar form or to follow size proportion”. Some letters, unlike in the bilingual inscription, have little (if any) distinction from each other.

This inscription is one of the oldest sources for the political history, social life and state system of Iberia. It also sheds light on a number of cultural-historical problems of pre-Christian Georgia and its interrelations with Parthia and Rome.

The Armazi monolingual has claimed scholarly attention. F. Altheim-R. Stiehl and later G. Giorgadze devoted their works to linguistic-paleographic analysis of the monolingual.

The present paper presents an attempt at new interpretations of several passages of the inscription.

Old Aramaic and its script are mostly important for the culture of pre-Christian Georgia. On the territory of contemporary Georgia, a number of original Aramaic (Arameographic) inscriptions were found. These ancient Aramaic inscriptions were discovered in Mtskheta, the capital of Ancient Georgia (Iberia) as well as its outskirts and other different locations of Central and Western Georgia.

They were made on different objects and most of them are kept at different sites of the Georgian National Museum.

It is widely accepted, for the present, that the Aramaic inscriptions of Georgia are executed in a variety of the North-Mesopotamian type of Aramaic script, one of the outgrowths of the Imperial (Official) Aramaic writing and known as “Armazian”.

In this respect, Aramaic (Arameographic) inscriptions incised on silver bowls and dishes, as well as on golden items (such as royal plates, rings, and bracelets) found in Armazi and Bagineti are particularly interesting. Some of them are quite extensive, such as a number of dedicational inscriptions dated by III c AD found on golden bracelets from Armazi burials.

However, the rest of these inscriptions are rather short, consisting of one or two words, denoting a proper name, or a title; they also frequently have an attributive meaning.

The “Armazian” writing of these inscriptions clearly reflects a type of Aramaic cursive and is characterized by certain specific paleographic features.

The paper presents a systematic paleographic analysis of these inscriptions, offering some new interpretations.

**Dr. Giulia Francesca Grassi** (Georg-August-Universität zu Göttingen, Germany)

“ARAMAEANS AND ARAMAEAN CULTURE IN ACHAEMENID EGYPT.”

The project “Elephantine in Context”, held by the universities of Göttingen and Berlin (von Humboldt) in 2015-2018 was focused on the interactions between the different ethnic groups and cultures in Elephantine during the Achaemenid age, as reflected in the rich documentation from the island. The main idea was to evaluate the presence of all the different groups mentioned in the documents, thus breaking with a tradition focused only on the famous Judean community. The key word “context” turned out to be crucial not only for the local situation of Elephantine, but also for the evaluation of Elephantine in its broader Egyptian setting. In order to understand the cultural and ethnic interactions in the island, we have also taken into consideration texts from other Egyptian regions, thus remarking that the majority of them have been neglected, in particular when not related to the Judean communities.

The Semitic groups attested in Egypt during the Persian rule reflect a huge span of Semitic populations (Judeans, Phoenicians, Arabs, Babylonians etc.), each presenting its own cultural, religious and linguistic peculiarities, but also a different chronological, geographical, and social distribution.

Arameans are the most difficult group to detect. The problem lays in the use of Aramaic, in the ambiguity of the nisbe “Aramaean”, and in their tendency to assimilation. Aramaic is used not only by Arameans, but also by other Semitic populations (Arabs, Judeans), by the Achaemenid administration, and apparently (but sporadically) by other ethnic groups, such as Carians. The nisbe “Aramaean” is not used in the same way as other ethnic labels, and it is likely that it does not indicate origin. Finally, Arameans seem willing to (partially) adopt Egyptian culture, as it is clear from their proper names, the deities they worship, the iconography of their steles, and their literature.

The paper will investigate the traces of the presence of the Arameans and of the Aramaean culture in Achaemenid Egypt, and will discuss the term “Aramaean” and its implications: what did it mean to be Aramaean?

**Prof. Régine Hunziker-Rodewald** and **Mr. Andrei Aioanei** (Strasbourg University, France)

“POLITICS, POWER – AND FIGURINES: TRACING ARAMEAN IMPACT ON THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF THE SOUTHERN LEVANT IN THE EARLY IRON AGE.”

A quite homogeneous group of female figurines appeared in the Southern Levant during the Iron Age IIA and disappeared shortly after. They are identified by a distinct ‘curl’ symbol that shows only minor stylistic variation. The systematic application of this feature may indicate a shift in societal beliefs, influenced by political events and with their impact translated to the community level. The archaeological data from a key site in the northern Jordan Valley from the time of the Aramaean expansion under Hazael lead to an understanding of war through gender. The anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurative corpus at the site reveals gender-specific role models in the context of crisis narratives and the emotional toll of wartime.

**Prof. Krzysztof Jakubiak** (University of Warsaw)

“THE END OF ALL THINGS. WHAT WAS BEHIND THE HORIZON OF LIFE? – THE ARAMEAN CONCEPT OF DEATH.”

The manner of belief in eternal life varies between individuals and within humanity as a whole. Aramean tribes were not the exception in this and shared their own unique visions of the hereafter. This concept was deeply rooted in Semitic tradition and represented the overall experience of the community. Fortunately, Aramean societies left limited but resourceful objects of art and epigraphic testimonies associated with funeral practices. The oldest such art objects were affiliated with Aramaic tribes settled in Northern Mesopotamia. On the other hand, the most valuable of the iconographic representations and written sources were recorded and dated to the second century of the Common Era. The lecture will demonstrate how the old Aramaic tradition was evolving up until the birth of metropolitan cities such as Palmyra, Dura Europos or Hatra, the latter of which played a dominant role in so-called Aramaic coinage.

**Mr. Łukasz Klim**a (Warsaw University, Poland)

“THE SOCIO-POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF ARAMAEAN AND CHALDEAN “TRIBES” IN FIRST MILLENNIUM B.C. BABYLONIA.”

The last twenty years witnessed significant improvements in our understanding of socio-political institutions of Chaldeans and Aramaeans living in (or roaming over) southern Mesopotamia in the first millennium B.C. Barjamovic (2004: 89-93) recognized both organizational similarities and differences between cities and tribes, stressing the way how the chieftains' authority was counterbalanced by kinship frameworks and collective agency. Younger (2016: 43-63) provided an overall description of the Aramean socio-political organization in both Syria and Mesopotamia in terms of “socially constructed groups”, which he prefers over the traditional notion of segmentary lineage. However, a detailed account of Chaldean and (Babylonian-) Aramaean polities, taking into consideration agencies of particular institutions, as well as positioning these systems within the conceptual framework of evolutionary anthropology, remains to be written. As any attempt to fulfil such a task in the form of a conference presentation would certainly exceed the available time, I wish to focus on its second part. Younger repeatedly describes Chaldean and Aramaean polities in Babylonia as either “tribes” or “tribal confederacies” (Younger 2016: 675; 678; 687). In my opinion the available data allow us to position Aramaean and Chaldean entities in Babylonia across a socio-evolutionary continuum between “tribe” and “chiefdom”. Their transformation from the former into the latter is observable within the timespan of Neo-Assyrian domination. A similar development from “chiefdom” into a “proto-state” can be attributed to the Chaldeans. Moreover, the main factor triggering these processes has to be seen in the empire's manifold policies. The essential set of sources belongs necessarily to Neo-Assyrian state correspondence and royal inscriptions. As auxiliary data I will include a comparison to Arabic polities encountered in Iraq by the Ottomans in the 19th century, as these exhibit striking similarities to their ancient predecessors in the same region. References: G. Barjamovic, “Civic institutions and self-government in southern Mesopotamia in the mid-first millennium B.C.”, in: J. G. Dercksen (ed.), *Assyria and Beyond: Studies presented to Mogens Trolle Larsen*, Leiden 2004, pp. 47-98. K. L. Younger Jr., *A Political History of the Arameans from Their Origins to the end of Their Polities*, Atlanta 2016.

**Dr. Haim Perlmutter** (Bar-Ilan University\*)

“ARAMAIC WORDS THAT WERE IMPORTED INTO THE HEBREW LANGUAGE IN THE HELLENISTIC AND EARLY ROMAN PERIOD: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS.”

The phenomenon of Aramaic words being imported into the Hebrew language is well known in scholarship. This phenomenon probably started as early as the Assyrian period and continued throughout until the centers of Jewish intellectual life moved from Babylon to Europe in the Middle

Ages. Several Aramaic words were imported into the Jewish language during the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods. This research focuses on two of these words; one that has social ramifications: 'Aris' (sharecropper), and another that has economic meaning: 'shutaf' (partner/partnership). The first relates to an arrangement between a landowner and tenant to share the produce of the field, and the second to two non-related people who form a partnership to advance common interests. Both words are not found in the bible and are found in the Mishna. This research searches for the earliest time that each word entered the language and suggests the socio-historic reason behind the import, positing that a word is imported when it becomes necessary to use it.

**Prof. Giuseppe Petrantoni** (University of Enna, Kore, Italy)

“ARABIC NEGATOR LĀTA AS A TOKEN OF ARAMAIC LINGUISTIC HERITAGE: AN ETYMOLOGICAL RE-CONSIDERATION.”

The aim of this paper is to revisit the origins of the Arabic negator *lāta* which occurs once in the Qur'an, meaning “it was not”. Unlike the negative copula *laysa*, it does not conjugate and it is another way to negate a sentence. In the scholarship *lāta* is generally regarded as a loan or as an Arabic-internal formation, but there is not a certain opinion about its origin and today its etymology is debated. Common opinion regards *lāta* as a reflection of the combination of North-West Semitic negator \**lā* “not” and the existential particle \**’it* “there is/are”. *lāta* is probably a crystallised form of Aramaic *lyt* or *l’yt* “there is/are not” which is attested from Old Aramaic *lyšh*. This negation particle survived and entered Arabic, assuming an arabized form.

**Dr. Nicolas Preud’homme** (University of Florence, ERC ArmEn Project, Italy)

“THE STELE OF PRINCE ŠARGAS: A NEW READING OF AND COMMENTARY ON THE LONGEST ARAMAIC INSCRIPTION FROM ANCIENT SOUTHERN CAUCASIA.”

An Aramaic inscription found near the ancient royal capital of Caucasian Iberia brings a remarkable testimony about the political and military situation in this kingdom during the last third of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, insofar as this stele, perhaps related to the Alan invasion of Southern Caucasia around 72 CE, defends the contested legitimacy of the young King Mihrdat at the beginning of his reign. The longest Aramaic inscription from Southern Caucasia also provides information on the institutions of the Iberian kingdom, notably on the official duties of the *Pitixēs* assisting the King, as well as on the role of Aramaic writing through its links with Iranian culture, in this part of the ancient world at the crossroads between the Romans and the Parthians.

**Prof. Ben Zion Rosenfeld** (Bar Ilan University\*)

“JOSEPHUS ON THE ARAMEANS: PART 2: THE POST BIBLICAL PERIOD. WHAT CAN HISTORIANS LEARN FROM ARAMAIC WORDS THAT WERE IMPORTED INTO THE HEBREW LANGUAGE IN THE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD?”

יוספוס על הערבים – חלק ב'

דיון זה עוסק באזכורים הרבים של הערבים בדברי יוספוס מהדור של ערב מרד החשמונאים ועד סיום מלחמת החורבן (175 BCE – CE 70). יוספוס מתמקד בערבים ששכנו בטרנסג'ורדן שעברה אז הרבה שינויים דמוגרפיים, והוא מקור (175 BCE – CE 70) מרכזי לתיאוריהם. יוספוס הוא היסטוריון מדיני שתשומת לבו היא הפוליטיקה המקומית, והערבים, הנזכרים רבות בדבריו, שכנו שם לצד היהודים והתקיימו ביניהם יחסים סימביוטיים. תחילה הוא מתמקד בערבים של טרנסג'ורדן ומתאר בעיקר מגעי שכנים או מלחמות מקומיות בין שתי הקבוצות האתניות. וכן, תיאר את התגבשות הממלכה הערבית-נבטית ושליטתה בחלק נכבד מטרנסג'ורדן. הוא מוסיף מידע חשוב עליה, על מנהיגיה, ומעמדה הבינלאומי ועל פטרה בירתה המיוחדת. בהמשך, הוא מלמד גם על קיום מעורבות סימביוטית של הממשל הערבי-נבטי ממערב לירדן, אותה הכיר גם בזמנו. יוספוס מחליף לרוב את המילה נבטים במילה ערבים, ואינו מזכיר ארמים באזור זה.

This lecture discusses the prolific mentions of the Arabs in the works of Josephus. It begins with the generation just before the Hasmonean revolt, and concludes with the Great Revolt (175 BCE – 70 CE). Josephus focuses on the Arabs that dwelled in Transjordan. This area experienced significant demographic changes during this period and Josephus is an important source for this phenomenon.

A political historian, Josephus describes the Arabs in the context of their symbiotic relationship with their Jewish neighbors. He describes cooperation and wars between Jews and Arabs, and then the creation of the Nabatean kingdom that assumed control of a large part of Transjordan. He provides information about the kingdom, its leaders, its unique capital Petra, and its international status. He also relates the symbiotic relationship between the Nabatean kingdom and the Jews west of the Jordan river. When discussing the Nabateans, he usually refers to them as Arabs. He does not mention Arameans in Transjordan or southern Palestine.

**Prof. Rüdiger Schmitt** (University of Münster, Germany)

“THE ARAMEAN PANTHEON OF TELL DEIR ALLA AND THE PANTHEA OF ANCIENT PALESTINE IN THE FIRST MILLENNIUM BCE: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE.”

Epigraphic and archaeological evidence as well as the Biblical texts witness the presence of Aramean entities in the Iron Age II Period in the North and North-East of ancient Palestine, most prominently the Deir Alla Texts. Among the deities mentioned in the texts are El, the group of the Šad-day-deities, Šagar, Aštar and possibly Šamaš. Which deity is represented on the stele from the gate sanctuary at Betsaida is a matter of discussion (moon god or weather god), and will be critically evaluated in the light of additional iconographical material. The aim of my paper is an attempt to reconstruct the local Aramean “pantheon”, or rather local “panthea”, in their social contexts (family religion, official religion and group-related belief systems) in relation to the other local panthea in Iron Age II Palestine (Israel, Juda, Ammon, Moab and Edom) on the basis of the theophoric personal names and other epigraphic and archaeological evidence and to offer an analysis of the structural similarities of the religious symbolic systems (with regard to Mark Smith’s concept of translatability) as well as the distinctive features of the local Aramean religions.

**Prof. Dan Shapira** (Bar-Ilan University, Israel)

“MANNA > "BREAD OF LIFE" > "THIS IS THE BREAD OF POVERTY": A LONG ARAMAIC JOURNEY FROM DESERT TO THE GALILEE TO THE PASSOVER SUPPER.”

Aramaic was used first as an official language of an Iranian entity during the Median period. The ‘Old Persian’ language was, in fact, Persianized Old Median. The Old Persian cuneiform writing was modelled on the Aramaic script (with some influences from other writing systems); probably, this ‘Old Persian’ cuneiform was adopted from Media.

The use of Aramaic writing in the Achaemenid Empire had some interesting, and not fully understood characteristics: it prompted the creation of new writing systems in India and elsewhere, modelled on Aramaic (and ‘Old Persian’ / \*Median cuneiform?); local variations of Aramaic script proper in the Achaemenid Empire and thereafter need an explanation – there are too many local variations and the geographical fragmentation does not seem to be a good explanation; what exactly does “For he sent letters into all the king’s provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language” (Esther 1:22) mean, if we know that the language of inter-governmental correspondence was the rather uniform ‘Imperial Aramaic’, or rather the (Old) Persian relexified into Aramaic words?; how come the Hebrew Bible was rewritten into Aramaic characters?

**Dr. Kenneth Silver**, (Principal author. Curator, The National Museums of World Culture, The Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm, Sweden); **Dr. Minna Silver** (Adj. Professor, The University of Oulu, The University of Helsinki, Finland); **Mr. Markus Törmä** (Phil. Lic., The Helsinki University of Technology, Finland); **Dr. Raffaella Pappalardo** (The University of Naples, Italy).

“THE CONFLICT ZONE BETWEEN ROME/BYZANTIUM AND PERSIA.”



“THE FINNISH SWEDISH ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT MESOPOTAMIA (FSAPM): DOCUMENTATION OF ROMAN AND BYZANTINE FORTIFIED SITES AND THE ARAMAEANS’ PAST IN THE TÜR ‘ABDĪN AREA, EASTERN TURKEY.”

In 2014-2016 the Finnish-Swedish Archaeological Project in Mesopotamia (FSAPM) initiated a pilot study of an unexplored area in the Tūr Abdin region in Northern Mesopotamia (present-day Mardin Province in south-eastern Turkey). The project is reliant on satellite image data sources for prospecting, identifying, recording, and mapping largely unknown archaeological sites as well as studying their landscapes in the region. The purpose is to record and document sites in this endangered area with the aim of saving its cultural heritage.

In 2016-2022, the project expanded into a satellite prospecting of the eastern *limes* and the ancient border zone between the Graeco-Roman/Byzantine world and Parthia/Persia. The satellite prospecting of the eastern *limes* revealed that there were major differences in the location, design, and patterns of the individual military sites located that would somehow need to be explained. The results of the prospecting in the Tūr ‘Abdīn in 2015–2022 surpassed many expectations. The most significant new sites, representing fortified cities or towns, were pinpointed in the central mountain where this expedition conducted its archaeological reconnaissance work in 2014–2016 and satellite mapping in 2016–2022. There is also some new support for the theory that the Late Antique border was drawn on a N-S axis across the Tūr ‘Abdīn.

Finally, one peculiarity of the Tūr ‘Abdīn is its Aramaeanness and the polities which remain a relatively unexplored area, although the Aramaic language has kept its strong place in the region until modern times. The project also yielded some new evidence for the Neo-Assyrian and Aramaean settlement history of the Tūr ‘Abdīn.