

**Introduction  
to Hebrew Linguistics  
(‘Inleiding Hebreeuwse Taalkunde’)  
UvA, Week 3, February 24, 2012**

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# Valentine's day on Eisenbrauns

See:

<http://www.eisenbrauns.com/pages/VDAY2011>

# Assignment for this week

Compare Deut. 6:4-9

- MT (masoretic text)
- Targum Onkelos (1st-2<sup>nd</sup> c. Palestine)

# Hebrew: prehistory and four periods

0. Proto-Semitic, proto-NW-Semitic, proto-Canaanite, and proto-Hbrw: *“The family tree: ancestors and relatives.”*
1. Biblical Hebrew: *“Did King David speak like the Bible?”*  
Pre-classical BH, classical BH, post-exilic BH; Qumran Masoretic Hebrew = Tiberian Hebrew
2. Mishnaic/Rabbinic Hbrw: *“A spoken language written”.*
3. Medieval Hebrew: *“Dead or alive?”*
4. Modern Hebrew, Israeli Hebrew (Israeli language)  
Haskala, language revival, contemporary IH  
*“Is it obvious that Hebrew is the language of Israel?”*

# The North-West Semitic languages

Ancestors, relatives or “just” neighbours?  
A language continuum

# The Semitic languages: subgroups

A probably standard approach:

East Semitic: Akkadian (and Eblaite?)

West Semitic:

North-West Semitic:

Ugaritic, Aramaic, Canaanite

Arabic: go to NW (Central Semitic = Arabic + NW)?  
or go to South? or go apart? Different opinions!

South Semitic:

Modern SA, Epigraphic SA, Ethiopian

# The North-West Semitic languages

- Ugaritic: 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE.
- Aramaic: 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE – today
  - => Syriac: 1<sup>st</sup> millennium CE – (today: by Syriac churches)
- **Canaanite** lgs: since 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE
  - Old Canaanite: Tel el-Amarna glosses
  - Phoenician: 1<sup>st</sup> half of 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE
    - Tyre, Sidon, Byblos: trade colonies (Mediterranean, Black Sea)
    - => Punic: in *Carthage* (originally a colony of Tyre), 1<sup>st</sup> mill BCE in Western Mediterranean, North Africa, until late Roman times (Augustine)!
  - Hebrew: 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE – today
  - Ammonite, Edomite, Moabite: early 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE

# The Tel el-Amarna letters

- Akhetaton: new capital of Pharaoh Echnaton (Amenhotep IV), after his religious reforms, cca. 1350.
- 1887: discovery of >300 cuneiform tablets: diplomatic correspondence of Amenhotep III and Ekhnaton!
- Written in Akkadian, the lingua franca of that time.
- Some of them were sent by the kings of city states in Canaan to the Pharaoh: Canaanite variety of Akkadian,...
- but also including glosses in the Canaanite language:
  - Innovations: e.g., displaying Canaanite sound shift: [ā] > [ō]
  - Archaic, proto-semitic features: e.g., case system (3 cases)
  - Cuneiform: more on vowels, but questions on consonants.
- *More info: <http://www.tau.ac.il/humanities/semitic/amarna.html>.*



# Methodological summary: The family tree model

- Find cognate words: similar words with similar meaning.
- Find regular sound correspondance in cognates
  - explain by sound laws: regular sound changes.
- Reconstruct a family tree:
  - Old languages, contemporary languages
  - and reconstructed, hypothetical \*proto-languages.

Thereby, explain gradual differentiation within a lg family.

# Isoglosses for Semitic:

	<i>Akkadian</i>	<i>Ugaritic</i>	<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>Cl. Arabic</i>	<i>Ge'ez</i>
'king'	šarru(m)	malku	melex	malik	nəgūš
are there cases?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
'build'	banū	bny	bānā	banā	nadaqa
'you, masc.'	attā	ʔattA	ʔattā	ʔanta	ʔanta
Past tense: morphology	prefixes	suffixes	suffixes	suffixes	suffixes
Dual: is there sg, du & pl?	Yes	Yes	No / not productive	Yes	No
Definite article	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes?

Which isogloss to use when drawing a “family tree”?

Take into consideration:

- Possible innovations/changes in more recent languages.
- Possible language contacts (with each other, with other languages).

# Isoglosses in NW-Semitic

Ugaritic:

[ā]

Case system:

Nom Acc Gen

Old Canaanite:

[ō]

Case system:

Nom Acc Gen

Aramaic:

[ā]

No cases

Hebrew:

[ō]

No cases

# Problem with the family tree approach

- Dialects + historical developments.
- Waves of innovation in the protolanguage?
- Frequent contacts even after splitting apart?
- Theory of waves of migrations (“leaving the desert”)
  1. Akkadian (cca. 3000 BCE to the East)
  2. NW: Amorite (Amurru, cca. 2200 BCE toward the East), then Ugarit and Canaanites (to the NW)
  3. Aramaic tribes (cca. 1100 BCE, to Syria)
  4. Arabs (since Roman times until today, cf. Bedouins)
  5. Southern Arabian and Ethiopian (toward the South)

# Problems with the family tree model

- West-Semitic: Aramaic vs. Canaanite languages.
- Long debate: is Ugaritic a Canaanite language?
- Answers:
  1. Time: You cannot compare languages from different periods. Aramaic vs. Canaanite distinction in 1<sup>st</sup> millennium, whereas Ugaritic is a 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium language.
  2. Geography:
    - dialect continuum
    - isoglosses
    - Isoglosses may cross each other.
    - Waves of innovation: centre vs. periphery.

# Dialect continuum

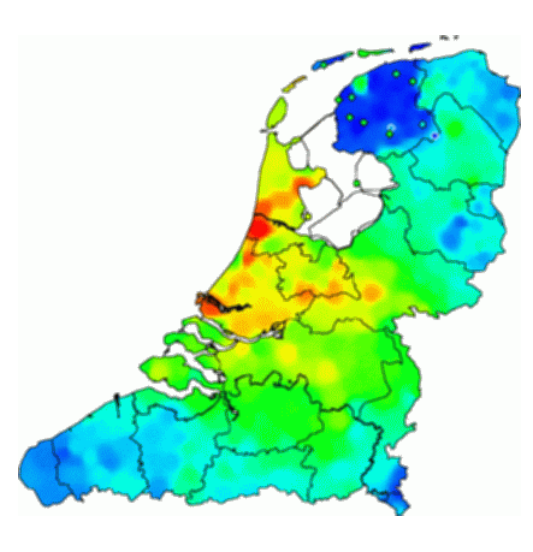
Dutch:

Gradual change:

What is a dialect?

Semi-arbitrary  
dialect borders:

Center vs.  
periphery:



(Source of the illustrations: Wilbert Heringa and John Nerbonne)

# Isoglosses

Isogloss: geographical boundary of a linguistic feature (*isolex* for lexicon=word use, *isophone* for phonological=pronunciation difference, etc.). Crossing isoglosses.

Area between two isoglosses: where does it belong to?

Historischer Verlauf der Benrather und Speyerer Linie bis 1945



**Legende:**

- **maken** Benrather Linie
- **machen** Linie
- **Appel** Speyerer Linie
- **Apfel** Linie

**Städte:**

- Städte mit bis zu 5 Mio. Einwohnern
  - Städte mit bis zu 1 Mio. Einwohnern
  - Städte mit bis zu 250.000 Einwohnern
  - Städte mit bis zu 50.000 Einwohnern
- Hauptstädte: Berlin



Source: [http://nds-nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ofbeelding:Ik-ich-Isogloss\\_-\\_Uerdinger\\_Lien.svg](http://nds-nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ofbeelding:Ik-ich-Isogloss_-_Uerdinger_Lien.svg)

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Benrather\\_und\\_Speyerer\\_Linie.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Benrather_und_Speyerer_Linie.png)

# Family tree model vs. Wave model

## Family Tree Model (August Schleicher: *Stammbaumtheorie*, 1860s):

- Biological analogy (Darwin). NB: Darwin influenced by linguistic analogy.
- Related languages originate from common ancestor:
  - different “tribes” migrating to different directions
  - “hard” geographic boundary (hill, river, political border) between “tribes”
  - language change (linguistic tree  $\neq$  genetic tree)
  - Explains linguistic diversification, but not convergence.

## Wave theory (Johannes Schmidt: *Wellentheorie*, 1872):

- Dialect continuum; different languages in contact (cf. areal linguistics)
- *Innovation* spreads from *center* in continuously weakening circles.
- Peripheries (in all directions) not always reached by innovation: archaic features may survive in distant varieties of the language.
- Can account for complex isogloss structures: different innovations arising in different centers, spreading in perpendicular directions, and reaching different distances.



# History of the Aramaic language, and its connection to the history of Hebrew

# The West-Semitic language continuum

Hittite until 1200 BCE

Ugaritic until 1200 BCE

Phoenician

Egyptian

Tel el-Amarna

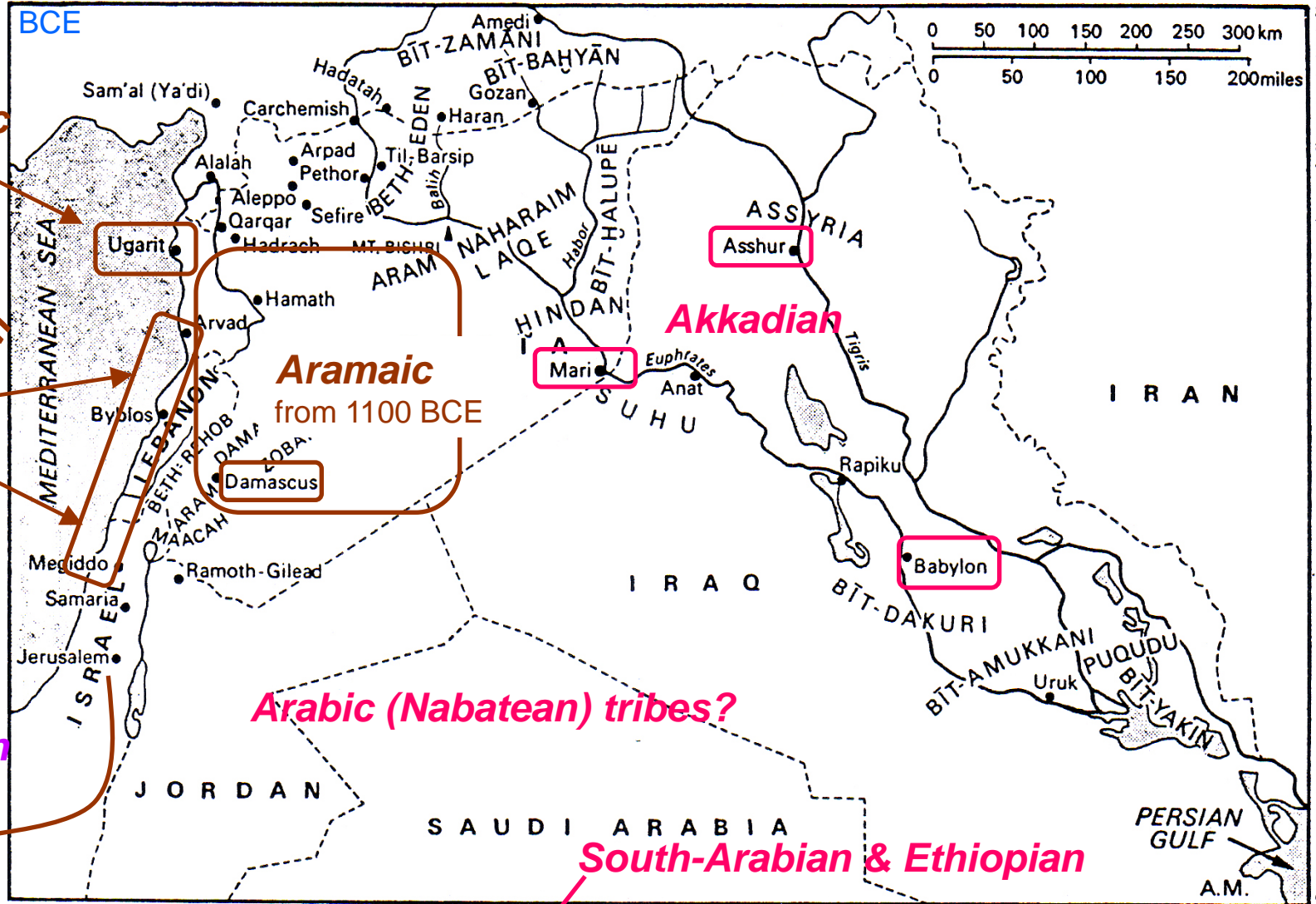


Fig. 4 The Aramaean cities and states.

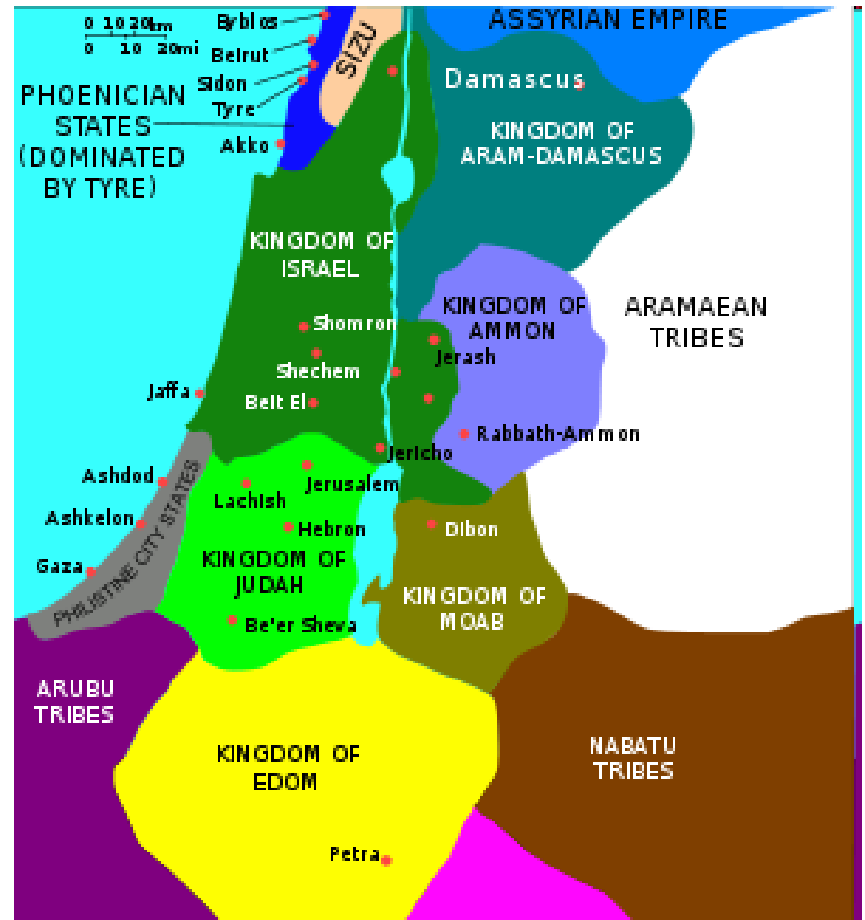
# The West-Semitic language continuum

Soon after 1000 BCE:

- (Ugaritic not anymore, no Canaanite shift)
- (Philistine language? Indo-European?)
- Aramaic in Syria (no Canaanite shift)
- Canaanite sound shift [ā] > [ō]:  
Phoenician on the coast, and  
Hebrew: Northern and Southern  
dialects? (E.g., shibbolet/sibbolet?)
- Ammonite, Moabite, Edomite  
(etc?).

*Most probably:*

- spoken dialect continuum
- artificial official/literary  
language(s) in inscriptions.



# Overview of Aramaic

Older names: “Chaldean”, “Syrian”.

Pe-history of the Israelites according to Bible: Laban; Deut. 26:5.

- 10<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE: **Old (or Ancient) Aramaic**

- 6<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE: **Imperial Aramaic**

– Neo-Babylonian Empire and Persian Empire

– Biblical Aramaic

- 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BCE – 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE: **Middle Aramaic:**

– Hellenism. Roman Empire. Functional diglossia.

- 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE – 9<sup>th</sup> CE (and later): **Late Aramaic**

– Eastern and Western dialects. Jewish varieties. Syriac.

- Today: **Neo-Aramaic** languages and dialects.

# 10<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE: Old Aramaic

- 11<sup>th</sup> c. BCE: Northwest Semitic tribes settling down in Syria.
- Arameans founding city states, such as *Damascus*.  
Leaving behind inscriptions,  
using their own script (borrowed from Phoenician script).
  - Tell Fekherijje: Akkadian-Aramaic bilingual royal inscription (cca. 800).
- Around the 8<sup>th</sup> c. BCE: Aramaic kingdoms gradually conquered by Neo-Assyrian Empire. Populations mixed.
- Aramean scribes in the Neo-Assyrian Empire (especially in army): Aramaic becomes *lingua franca* in the Middle East.

**2Kgs 18:26 = Isa 36:11:** Aramaic as diplomatic language in 701 BCE. Average people in Jerusalem do not speak it (yet).

# 6<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BCE: Imperial Aramaic

A.k.a.: Official A, Standard Literary A, *Reichsaramäisch*:  
*Neo-Babylonian Empire and Persian (Akhaimenidan) Empire*

- Official language of the Persian Empire (538-333)
  - Influence of Persian (as 2<sup>nd</sup> official lg), Late Babylonian (as literary lg)
  - From India to Egypt. (Aramaic script in Central Asia & India)
  - Papyri from Elephantine (*Yeb*, late 5<sup>th</sup> c.): military post in Southern Egypt, with Jewish soldiers, among others.
  - Dareios inscription in Bisutun (520); Driver-document; Ahikar; etc.
- Biblical Aramaic: (also Gen. 31:47, see slide later)
  - Jeremiah 10:11: in the Babylonian exile.
  - Portions of Ezra: probably real official documents from the Persian period.
  - Daniel: literary composition (early Middle Aramaic?)

# 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BCE – 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE: Middle Aramaic

Hellenistic and early Roman period.

- Main language of Middle East. Greek primarily in cities. Roman times: also Latin, mainly by soldiers and administration only.
- Functional diglossia:  
Literary language imitates Imperial Aramaic, but influenced by spoken language.  
Spoken language changes, dialectal differences emerge.
- Important texts in the Jewish context: some Dead Sea Scrolls, New Testament, earliest Targumim (Onqelos on Torah, Yonathan on prophets), inscriptions in Jerusalem...
- Others: magical texts of Uruq, Nabatean texts (Arabs in Petra), texts in Palmyra, Edessa (in Syria → Syriac language on next slide), Hatra, Dura-Europos, etc.

# 3<sup>rd</sup> c. – 9<sup>th</sup> c. and later: Late Aramaic

- Spoken language being written down again.
- Dialects: Roman Empire in the West, Persians (Parthian Empire, then Sasanian dynasty) in the East, Edessa (origin of the Syriac language) in the middle.
- Western Late Aramaic:
  - Palestinian Jewish Aramaic: Aramaic parts of Jerusalem Talmud and midrashim, later Targumim, inscriptions, magical bowls, etc.
  - Palestinian Christian Aramaic
  - Palestinian Samaritan Aramaic
- Eastern Late Aramaic:



# 3<sup>rd</sup> c. – 9<sup>th</sup> c. and later: Late Aramaic

- Western Late Aramaic:

- Eastern Late Aramaic:

Babylonian (Jewish) Aramaic: Babylonian Talmud, gaonic texts.

Mandean/Mandaic: secret texts of a gnostic religious sect in southern Mesopotamia (Iraq and western Iran).

Syriac: Holy tongue of the Syriac churches. Eastern and western varieties (of the language / of the script / of the churches). Peshitta: Bible translation to Syriac.

Transmission of the Greek culture to the Arabs.

- (Medieval Jewish Aramaic: Zohar, liturgical compositions, etc.)

# 20<sup>th</sup> century (21<sup>st</sup> c. ???): Neo-Aramaic

- Arabic conquest in the 7<sup>th</sup> century: gradual decline of Aramaic.
- Some islands (*Sprachinseln*) still surviving: E and W Syriac Christian and Jewish groups that resisted islamicization (or were islamicized only recently). How long will they survive?
- Western Neo-Aramaic: Ma<sup>ç</sup>lūla and 2 other villages and in Syria, 60 km NW of Damascus. 5000 speakers.
- Eastern Neo-Aramaic:
  - Turoyo and related varieties: Syrian Orthodox Christians in southeastern Turkey.
  - Northeastern Neo-Aramaic languages in eastern Turkey, Northern Iraq and northwestern Iran, spoken by Eastern Syrian Christians and Jews (mainly in Israel today).
  - Neo-Mandaic (Modern Mandaic) in southern Mesopotamia (Iraq, Iran; Australia and elsewhere after the first gulf war?)

# Aramaic influencing Hebrew

- Aramaic “pre-history”? Two word in Aramaic in the Torah: Gen. 31,47: Laban in Aramaic, Jacob in Hebrew.
- Northern dialect of Hebr: Aramaic influence? Dialect-continuum?
- 2Kgs 18:26 = Isa 36:11: Aramaic not spoken yet in Jerusalem.
- After 587: Aramaic (language and script) adopted by Jews in the Babylonian exile. Dominant language of the Diaspora. (Hebrew spoken mainly in Israel, until 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE).
- Aramaic influence on Late Biblical H and Rabbinic (Mishnaic) H.
- Second language of the Jewish culture in the Middle Ages: The two *Talmudim*, *Zohar*, *kaddish*, *Ha lachma anya*, *Chad gadya*...
- Frequent Hebrew-Aramaic code switching in medieval rabbinic Hb.
- Language “purists” (Maimonides, Haskala, etc.): get rid of Aramaic
- Source of enriching Israel Hebrew: *atar* 'site', legal language...

# Targum: Late-antique Jewish translations of books of the Bible to Aramaic

Torah, Deut. 6:7: דברים פרק ו פסוק ז

וּשְׁנַנְתֶּם לְבַנְיָךְ וּדְבַרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלַכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:

Targum Onqelos (2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, Middle Aramaic, literal translation):

תרגום אונקלוס דברים פרק ו פסוק ז

ותתנינן לבנך ותמליל בהון במתבך בביתך ובמהכך באורחא ובמשכבך ובמקימך:

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (Late Aramaic, includes more explanations):

תרגום יונתן דברים פרק ו פסוק ז

ותגמרינן לבנך ותקוין הנניין בהון במותביכון בבתיוכון בזמן מיעסוקכון בחיתונכון ובמיהכון באורחכון ובפניא סמיר למשכביכון ובצפרא סמיר למקמיכון:

תרגום יונתן דברים פרק ו פסוק ז (translation of Targum Pseudo-Yonatan)

ותשננן לבניך ותהיו הוגים בהם בשבתכם בביתכם בעת עסוקיכם בחתונתכם [עם נשיכם] ובלכתכם בדרככם ובשקיעה סמוך לשכבכם ובבוקר סמוך לקומכם:

# Assignment for next week

1. Arie Schippers en Kees Versteegh. *Het Arabisch: Norm en realiteit*. Coutinho 1987. Pp. 11-27 (semitische talen, schrift)
2. John Huehnergard: 'Introduction'. In: John Kaltner and Steven L. McKenzie (eds.): *Beyond Babel: A Handbook for BH and Related Languages*. SBL 2002. Pp. 1-18.

Assignment: 1. Find contradictions between the two articles.  
2. How are Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Arabic scripts (writing systems) related?

My goals:

- (1) Make sure you read carefully and learn the chapters.
- (2) Teach you to read critically: not to necessarily accept everything, since other opinions are also possible.
- (3) Show that many opinions can be simultaneously around in science.

# Additionally

Highly and urgently recommended: Appel et al.,  
*Taal en Taalwetenschap*, chapters 17-19 (287-343).

See you next week!