**Publication Decision from *Journal of Biblical Literature***

"The Language of the Babylonian Exiles as Reflected in the Aramaic in Ezekiel"

Decision made on September 12th, 2018

**Editorial board's determination**

**Revise and resubmit**

**Comments from the editor**

Dear Tova Ganzel:

The editorial review of your essay “The Language of the Babylonian Exiles as Reflected in the Aramaic in Ezekiel” has been completed, and I regret to inform you that the *Journal of Biblical Literature* will not be able to publish it in its present form.

As you will see from the attached evaluations, however, the reviewers believe that the paper has potential and that the topic is important. I would suggest that you go over the comments carefully and consider revising your paper and resubmitting it to [*JBL*](https://submissions.scholasticahq.com/sites/journal-of-biblical-literature). For assistance with the revise and resubmit process on Scholastica, please see the [author's guide](http://help.scholasticahq.com/customer/portal/articles/1218626#revise-and-resubmit).

If resubmitted, your essay will undergo peer review again. The journal’s decision at that point will be based only on the revised version of the paper and the comments on the present version will not be taken into account.

Sincerely,

Adele Reinhartz Editor

**Reviewer 1**

|  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |

Comments to author

This article addresses a topic of basic interest to scholars in a number of areas, though especially for those working with the book of Ezekiel. The question of Aramaic influence in Ezekiel is an interesting one, and the article has several positive traits. Knowledge of, and interaction with, the secondary literature is generally very good. Especially commendable is the interaction with non-English literature, such as that in Modern Hebrew (e.g., Kasher). The author(s) clearly know very well the scholarship both on Ezekiel and on the relevant languages. Interaction with the diachronic and dialectical linguistic material is also solid. So, there is a solid core of very good research undergirding the article. Despite these positive traits, I have not recommended the article for publication, at least not in its present state. My reasons for this recommendation is partially summarized below. My general impression is that, with considerable further work, the article would be acceptable for publication in JBL.

1. In general, I felt that the purpose and contribution of the article are very poorly articulated and muddled. I had a difficult time figuring out what the author(s) was/were actually trying to do, and what the real takeaway of the article should be. It is clearly a very nice, useful summary of prior scholarship on the topic of Aramaic influence on Ezekiel, but what is the contribution beyond this? Only toward the end of the article did I realize that a major - if not THE major - point of the article is to serve as a counterbalance to the wave of scholarship suggesting that the natural linguistic (and therefore cultural?) background of the book is in Akkadian influence. This is certainly a worthy point, and should be made crystal clear from the very beginning of the article. However, I then would have expected much more of a focus on distinguishing exactly those cases where influence can be determined as only from Aramaic, and not Akkadian. In fact, this point gets lost almost completely in the detail of the examples provided in the bulk of the paper. If this is not the main point of the article, then the author(s) have serious work to do in framing the article in a way that is much clearer and more direct, and tailoring the material to fit that goal. Or perhaps the main goal was dealing with the alleged paucity of scholarship on Aramaic in Ezekiel mentioned in the introduction, but the reader is then very surprised to learn that there are a number of studies that have detailed the possible instances of Aramaic influence in Ezekiel. In fact, the article strikes me as largely summative of previous scholarship, with the author(s) not highlighting well where there are new contributions. The novelty seems to be in the framing, and the framing is the poorest part of the paper.
2. Part of the reason for the confusion I felt on the point above is due to using language that is at some points ambiguous, and at other points equivocating. The ambiguity begins in the title. There is no Aramaic in Ezekiel, at least not in the way most readers would expect - e.g., like the verse in Jeremiah, words in Genesis, portions of Daniel and Ezra. The title gives the immediate sense that the author(s) does/do not know what they are doing, though that clearly is not the case. Ambiguity carries into the introduction, and through the article, at many points making it hard to know exactly what is being discussed. What does "each period" mean in the first sentence? What does "usage of Aramaic" mean in the second sentence (perhaps Aramaic influence?)? (Similar is the repeated phrase "use of Akkadian".) What is meant by the comment on "which language came first" on pg. 4? I kept running into unclear phrases like this, and they left me with major questions about what the author(s) were meaning to convey. I was also bothered by the number of places where equivocating phrases such as "could be", "could have been", "could have", "may have been", "relatively", "appear to have been" (top of pg. 24 - this is an important equivocation) were used. Of course, we all realize that we are dealing with ranges of plausibility when working with ancient materials, but so many of these were piled up over the course of the article, that at the end I was left feeling that we couldn't be sure of any of this at all. I wish the author(s) would have been more forthright about what we can know with confidence, and what we can say with confidence at the end of the article. It seemed to me that it ended with mostly open-ended questions.
3. At a number of points the author(s) refer to the language situation "on the ground" during certain periods, in certain places. In general, these statements were poorly rationalized, and/or not well supported by the relevant scholarship. An example is the statement that on pg. 3 that "Paleo-Hebrew… was in use on a daily basis until the destruction of the First Temple." How do we know this? Should not at least one scholar be cited on the point, who has articulated the evidence (e.g., Schniedewind)? In the next paragraph it is stated that Aramaic was the "spoken language" in the western regions of the Achaemenid empire. How do you know that? Ingo Kottsieper's article is not indicative of the consensus view on a number of points related to the topic (if there even is a consensus - this is a debated topic), and I am not convinced this is the only article one should cite on the matter. Rabin, Barr, Schniedewind, Naveh and Greenfield, Goodblatt - all of these have different views on this topic. The "spoken language" point is simply asserted by the author(s) of the article without much discussion. In this and similar cases throughout the article, the question of how we would even know the "spoken language" (for which parts of the community?) deserves more discussion. The contribution of these issues to the article could also be made much clearer.
4. Another issue that could be better discussed and coordinated is that of authorship of Ezekiel, since this has a major bearing on when the book was written, and how we might understand Aramaic influence having taken place. At certain points the author(s) speak of "Ezekiel" writing prophecies in a certain time and place. At others there is discussion of later editors, but where and when were they? How does that impact the main points advanced in the article? All of this is poorly articulated, and leads to some ambiguity - even disagreement - in different parts of the article.
5. A final point concerns the use of diachronic comparison of languages, especially in the examples discussed in greater detail. I found this section sloppy in the sense of how comparison was being made, and I had wished there was a better discussion of the methodology behind the comparisons. Often there is a statement about something being used inn "later Aramaic," or Syriac, but what are we to make of this? The author(s) never make clear what "counts" as Aramaic influence. Is something that shows up in CPA or JPA count towards "influence"? What about something in MH that is typically taken to be an Aramaism? These are very tricky topics, but they are hardly even raised in this article. After the wide-ranging discussion of the examples, the author(s) simply declare that "Aramaic influence… is pervasive and not limited to literary aspects alone" (as an aside, is there any aspect of Ezekiel that is not "literary"?). This judgment struck me as extremely subjective, and not well-demonstrated over the course of the article. This would have been helped by some discussion of comparison and what constitutes "influence". Also, Qumran Aramaic is overlooked in several of the examples discussed (on which see Edward Cook's dictionary).

In the end, I am convinced by the authors that there is some Aramaic influence in the book of Ezekiel, and appreciated the effort to bring the relevant scholarship together into one place. Much of the base content is good, but in my opinion there is a lot of work to do in orienting and focusing the article for possible publication in JBL.

**Reviewer 2**

|  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
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Comments to author

This article reviews and assesses the research on the Aramaic words in the Book of Ezekiel. The author has a keen awareness of the methodological pitfalls that abound in this field. I am not sure if the author has moved the argument any further than where the current research lies, but the article provides a fine overview of the problem. A key difficulty, which the author notes, is identifying words that are distinctly Aramaic and not Hebrew. Also problematic is distinguishing between foreign words that came directly from Aramaic and those that came from Akkadian through Aramaic into Ezekiel’s vocabulary. The introduction expands on these issues.

In fn 4, the author notes that the “underlying assumption of this study is that the prophecies under discussion were written (and possibly edited) by a prophet in the sixth century BCE.” A few scholars are cited to support this opinion. But more nuanced opinions on the dating of Ezekiel and the question of later editing, such as W. Zimmerli’s insights (W. Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24, [Hermeneia, Fortress Press, 1979]), would be helpful. The literary development of the book of Ezekiel impacts significantly on the question of Aramaic loan words.

Specific Aramaisms are patient of several explanations. For example, the Aramaism “coastlands” in 26:18 appears with the Hebrew spelling three verses earlier. Were the two forms interchangeable? This nun/mem suffix variation occurs regularly in the Aramaic sections of Daniel and Ezra. The specific contribution of this article is to illustrate that the Aramaic loan words also appear in technical descriptions. The prophecy concerning Tyre and the Temple Plan are offered as examples. The author concludes that these Aramaisms reflect a Babylonian influence.

The article is tentative in its conclusions and closes with several interesting questions, including the central problem of Akkadian influence. The other question is the nature of the Hebrew language itself in Ezekiel’s world. The value of this article is that it gathers the research on the Aramaisms in Ezekiel into one place and warns future scholars about the methodological questions at stake. This explains the author’s opening lament that Aramaisms in Ezekiel have not received a thorough study. This article amply illustrates why this is the case since it underscores that the evidence is very limited. This is a contribution to the field. I am not sure that I know more about the Aramaisms in Ezekiel having read this article but I am certainly more aware of the challenges facing any scholar in this field of study.

Small note: the phrase “in the Targum literature” should be “in Targumic literature”. There are other minor errors as well in the article that should be corrected.