

THE USE OF GREEK IN FIRST-CENTURY PALESTINE:
A DIACHRONIC AND SYNCHRONIC EXAMINATION

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Introduction

The complex multilingualism of Palestine (Roman Judea and Galilee) in the first century (Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew and in some social strata, Latin) has resulted in various sociolinguistic descriptions of the varied people groups and their varieties of language. This study focuses upon Koine (or Hellenistic) Greek within multilingual Palestine, and examines the data both diachronically and synchronically to capture the complex set of factors that resulted in Koine Greek becoming the *lingua franca* and prestige language of Palestine, as well as a secondary and even primary vernacular variety for some of the population.¹ The diachronic perspective traces the historical sociolinguistic development of Greek in relation to Palestine. The emphasis is upon how Greek, the prestige language of the dominant occupiers, the Greeks and then the Romans, became the *lingua franca*, and then the prestige language and even vernacular of the dominated inhabitants during the first century CE. The synchronic perspective describes some sociolinguistic environments in which Greek was used, occasionally exploring broadly defined diglossia (often involving more than simply two varieties) and code-switching within various language communities according to the variety of factors that governed language practice, by means of sociological reconstructions and documentary and literary remains. As with many historical sociolinguistic treatments of the ancient world, our evidence is confined to extrapolation from the remaining physical artifacts

1. Cf. Stanley E. Porter, 'The Language(s) Jesus Spoke', in Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2011), III, pp. 2455-72, for an approach to the direct, indirect and inferential evidence.

available. In that sense, simply counting examples or instances is insufficient for understanding. What I attempt is, within the two broad movements explored, to explain a few instances in relation to the people, situation and language within their linguistic contexts.² This paper is organized into three major sections. The first briefly surveys recent research on the linguistic varieties within first-century Palestine. The second section traces the diachronic development of Greek in the eastern Mediterranean. The third section explores the synchronic evidence of Greek within the multilingualism of first-century Palestine (but without paying close attention to the Semitic languages). The conclusion offers a socially stratified description of the various language communities of first-century Palestine, with implications for discussion of the languages of such first-century Palestinians as Jesus of Nazareth and others in his sociolinguistic community.³

2. See Hughson T. Ong, *The Multilingual Jesus and the Sociolinguistic World of the New Testament* (LBS, 12; Leiden: Brill, 2016), p. 114. Ong's is now the most thorough treatment of first-century Palestinian multilingualism, with emphasis upon language varieties within social domains.

3. For the major categories of multilingualism discussed and defined, see Hugo Baetens Beardsmore, *Bilingualism: Basic Principles* (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2nd edn, 1986); William Downes, *Language and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 1998); John Edwards, *Multilingualism* (London: Penguin, 1994); Janet Holmes, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (London: Longman, 2nd edn, 2001); R.A. Hudson, *Sociolinguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 1996); Bernard Spolsky, 'Bilingualism', in Frederick J. Newmeyer (ed.), *Linguistics: The Cambridge Survey. IV. Language: The Socio-cultural Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 100-18; Ronald Wardhaugh, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 5th edn, 2006); and many of the essays in Rajend Mesthrie (ed.), *Cambridge Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). For my perspective on Palestinian multilingualism, see especially Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 126-80; Porter, 'Jesus and the Use of Greek in Galilee', in Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (eds.), *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (NTTS, 19; Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 123-54; Porter, 'The Language(s) Jesus Spoke'; and Porter, 'The Greek of the Jews and Early Christians: The Language of the People from a Historical Sociolinguistic Perspective', in Duncan Burns and J.W. Rogerson (eds.), *Far from Minimal: Celebrating the Work and Influence of Philip R. Davies* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2012), pp. 350-64, among a number of works. I draw upon this evidence in my paper.

Recent Research on Linguistic Varieties within First-Century Palestine

Research on linguistic varieties within first-century Palestine has moved in waves over the last several centuries. The alternation is usually between those who argue for a strong position for Greek in the active linguistic repertoire of first-century Palestinians and those who argue for a socio-culturally circumscribed role for Greek, confined to the occupying forces and their allies, the elite or those from the Diaspora. Within what might be called the modern linguistic period of discussion, there have been three major waves of thought.⁴ The first wave, from the late nineteenth century into the first third of the twentieth century, recognized a significant linguistic role for Greek in first-century Palestine. This position was based originally upon the literary artifacts available—primarily the inscriptions and literary texts, including the Greek New Testament—and then bolstered by the discovery of the numerous documentary papyri from ancient Egypt. The documentary papyri provided ostensive evidence that Koine Greek was not only the prestige language and L1 of the Greco-Roman elite but at least an active L2 of the working class (with Demotic and then Coptic being their L1). The second wave, from the early to mid-twentieth century to the late twentieth century, emphasized the Semitic languages, especially Aramaic, among the socio-economically non-elite language users in first-century Palestine, to the point of at least implicitly arguing for a functional monolingualism in Palestine (and often only begrudging admission of functional Greek usage) at least for the Jewish population. Alongside the Aramaic proponents there was a smaller movement of scholars arguing for the continued use of Hebrew as other than a variety of the religious elite.⁵ This Semitic-language movement questioned the applicability of the Egyptian Greek evidence for Palestine, and was bolstered by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and related documents, some of which were written in Aramaic but most of which were written in Hebrew. This evidence attested to active L1 use of the

4. For various accounts of this history, see Stanley E. Porter, 'The Greek of the New Testament as a Disputed Area of Research', in Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *The Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays* (JSNTSup, 60; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), pp. 11-38; and Porter, 'The Role of Greek Language Criteria in Historical Jesus Research', in Holmén and Porter (eds.), *Handbook*, I, pp. 361-404.

5. See Randall Buth and R. Steven Notley (eds.), *The Language Environment of First Century Judaea* (JCP, 26; Leiden: Brill, 2014).

Semitic languages among the Jewish population of Palestine. The third wave began in the late twentieth century, when there was a growing recognition that, whereas Aramaic and possibly Hebrew were active language varieties used in Palestine, with Aramaic being the L1 for the indigenous inhabitants, Greek was the L1 for the social and political elite and an active L2 for the indigenous population who required functional competence in social, administrative and economic domains. Hebrew may have been the prestige language for religious purposes among the indigenous Jewish population, but Greek was the prestige language of the region and the functional lingua franca of Palestine. The Greco-Roman population would have been L1 Greek users (with secondary passive Aramaic competence being very limited), and the Jewish population at least secondary Greek users (besides primary Aramaic use).

Within the last thirty years, there have been several book-length works on this topic that assess the relationships among the several linguistic varieties. I was one of the earliest to promote a revival of active Greek in Palestinian multilingualism, and followed this initial attempt with a further volume going into more detail. I argue that Greek was the prestige language of Greco-Roman Egypt and of Palestine, and was the lingua franca of the eastern Mediterranean and a productive L2 for most of the Jewish population.⁶ An early (and widely neglected) work by G.R. Selby argues for the notion that Jesus was a functional bilingual with Aramaic and Greek, questioning the Aramaic monolingualism of what he termed the ‘Aramaic Hypothesis’, a term widely used by those who endorse Aramaic as the L1 of the indigenous population of Palestine.⁷ Jonathan Watt, recognizing the functional multilingualism of Palestine but addressing the question of residual Semitisms in the Greek of Luke and Acts, proposes an extended definition of metaphorical code-switching by the author of Luke–Acts.⁸ Sang-Il Lee accepts active bilingualism in Palestine in the first century but, rather than describing the influence as unidirectional from Aramaic to Greek or vice versa, he describes the influence as non-diglossic and

6. Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament with Reference to Tense and Mood* (SBG, 1; New York: Peter Lang, 1989), pp. 143-56, esp. pp. 154-56; Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity*, esp. pp. 103-80.

7. G.R. Selby, *Jesus, Aramaic and Greek* (Doncaster: Brynmill, 1989).

8. Jonathan M. Watt, *Code-Switching in Luke and Acts* (Berkeley Insights in Linguistics and Semiotics, 31; New York: Peter Lang, 1997).

interdirectional between the two. This indicates that, at least to him, there is not a discriminating set of factors that determines rules for diglossia.⁹ Scott Gleaves, in his comprehensive work, for the most part summarizes the previous work of other scholars, but does effectively illustrate the shift that has taken place regarding the use of Greek. He shows that the evidence indicating that Greek was actively used in first-century Palestine and even by Jesus of Nazareth is undeniably strong—even if based upon the relatively limited documentary, inscriptional and literary remains.¹⁰ Michael Wise attempts to quantify the language usage in Roman Judea. Based primarily upon the Bar Kokhba papyri manuscripts (and their signatures), encompassing at least six different papyrological archives, Wise argues for relatively widespread knowledge of Greek (he claims roughly 30%) and very widespread use of Aramaic (virtually everyone among indigenous Judeans), but his primary aim is to establish an almost equal use of Hebrew among the same population (roughly 75%).¹¹ In the latest major work, mentioned above, Hughson Ong recognizes a complex multilingual Palestine with active use among different sectors of the population and different geographical locations in the speech community of Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin, within which he argues that Greek was both the prestige language and the lingua franca of first-century Palestine, even if we must recognize that there were monolinguals and dominant bilinguals of one of the languages. He attempts to identify the various social domains within Jewish culture of the time and identify the language used for each of these social domains.¹²

Whereas the majority of recent major works on the subject has emphasized the sociolinguistic placement of Greek within the complex multilingual environment of first-century Palestine, there are those who are part of a Semitic-language resurgence, some for Aramaic but most for Hebrew. My brief, however, is not the linguistic varieties of Palestine but the place of Greek, to which I now turn.

9. Sang-Il Lee, *Jesus and Gospel Traditions in Bilingual Context: A Study in the Interdirectionality of Language* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2012).

10. G. Scott Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek? The Emerging Evidence of Greek Dominance in First-Century Palestine* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015).

11. Michael Owen Wise, *Language and Literacy in Roman Judaea: A Study of the Bar Kokhba Documents* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

12. See Ong, *Multilingual Jesus*, chs. 3-5.

Diachronic Development of Greek in the Eastern Mediterranean

The diachronic development of the place of Greek within the eastern Mediterranean is not as frequently discussed as it probably should be. I think that we learn some interesting information about the role of Greek, and even its place as the prestige language and lingua franca of first-century Palestine, by tracing its increasing linguistic hegemony upon the area. The description of this diachronic development encompasses six major periods and turns of events.

The first period is the so-called pre-Greek period. I mention this period because of the importance of showing that Palestine was long subject to Greek cultural and linguistic influence. By the pre-Greek period, I refer to the period before the coming of any Greek influence upon ancient Palestine. The major problem with identifying this period is that we do not exactly know when this period was. There is evidence of trade contact between Greek peoples and ancient Palestine from the second millennium BCE.¹³ One theory is that the Philistines were the ancient Sea Peoples (a marauding band of people who attacked a variety of coastal areas), originating with the Myceneans in the late second millennium BCE (this is perhaps confirmed by the reference in Amos 9.7 to the Philistines being from Caphtor, which is usually thought to be Crete).¹⁴ The importance of this is that there was Greek influence, especially for trade purposes, from very early on.

The second period is the pre-Alexander period. Before Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE) invaded the eastern Mediterranean, there had already been significant Greek language contact in Palestine, especially by the Phoenicians. Evidence from the seventh to the fourth centuries BCE indicates that there were Greek mercenaries, merchants and even settlers in such places as Tyre, Dor and Acco, as well as in other places much further inland (including as far east as what is now Afghanistan). Included in this evidence is recognition by the Athenians of King Strato of Sidon in 370 BCE, and a bilingual inscription from fourth-century BCE Delos that an offering was made to Apollo at Tyre.¹⁵

13. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), p. 32.

14. See K.A. Kitchen, 'The Philistines', in D.J. Wiseman (ed.), *Peoples of Old Testament Times* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 53-78 (53-54, 56).

15. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, p. 32, who cites evidence from Isaeus (4.7) and Demosthenes (52.20) on Greek colonists in Acco. For the inscription in Greek and Phoenician, see Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of*

The third period is the Alexandrian period, including that of the Ptolemies and Seleucids. In 335 BCE, Alexander the Great began his war with Persia that would effectively conquer much of the eastern Mediterranean world. He did so with an army consisting of Greek mercenaries, Thracians, Agrianians (now Bulgaria) and others from the Balkan region.¹⁶ Alexander's goal was not simply military, but also cultural, political and hence linguistic.¹⁷ Their common language was what came to be known as Koine (or common) Greek. This Koine Greek was a regularized form of Great Attic, and hence not like any of the previous Greek dialects, but clearly similar to Attic Greek used as an administrative language. This is the point at which societal multilingualism started to become individual multilingualism in the eastern Mediterranean. With the conquests of Alexander and the resulting language contact, including Palestine between 335 and 330 BCE, first the upper and middle classes and then even the lower classes adopted this variety of Greek, first as a L2 and secondary language but then as a L1 and primary language as it became the administrative and business language, and then eventually as the vernacular in the areas conquered by Alexander and then inherited by his Diadochi or Greek successive rulers. This also led to language decline of Semitic languages in Palestine. A monolingual Greek inscription erected in 334 BCE after the battle of Granicus, near ancient Priene (admittedly not Palestine but nevertheless instructive), informs the inhabitants regarding their status after their conquest.¹⁸ Even if the inscription is a public proclamation, the evidence is that there were sufficient Greek users in Priene to understand the implications. After Alexander's demise, Palestine became a disputed territory until the Ptolemaic empire established its authority. This lasted until a number of battles in the late 200s BCE finally

Jesus Christ (ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar and Martin Goodman; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), III.1, p. 108.

16. Ulrich Wilcken, *Alexander the Great* (trans. G.C. Richards; New York: Norton, 1967), p. 77.

17. Wilcken, *Alexander the Great*, p. 80, cf. p. 116.

18. Geoffrey Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and its Speakers* (LL; London: Longmans, 1997), pp. 32-37. Cf. the so-called Priene inscription (OGIS 458; SEG IV 490), a later (9 BCE) unilingual Greek inscription erected at various places in Asia Minor (Priene, Apamea, Eueneia, Dorylaeum) to commemorate the birthday of the god Augustus. See Victor Ehrenberg and A.H.M. Jones, *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn, 1955), pp. 81-83.

resulted in Seleucid conquest, a condition that endured until the Hasmonean revolt in around 116–110 BCE, at which time there was a short period of Hellenistic-Jewish self-rule. This period marks significant linguistic shift in the eastern Mediterranean with Greek established as the lingua franca and the prestige language from the time of Alexander to subsequent periods, regardless of changes in direct political rule.¹⁹

The Roman or fourth period began in around 63 BCE, when the Roman general Pompey, as part of the Third Mithraditic war (73–63 BCE), conquered Palestine and established Roman rule that would last until the Arab conquest of the seventh century (apart from the Palmyrene interlude from 270–273 CE). Since the Romans adopted the cultural conventions of the Greeks, Greek continued to be the primary language of the Roman empire in the east, with Roman officials often not only code-switching between Latin and Greek but also being diglossic in their knowledge of Greek, using a High Attic form and a Low vernacular.²⁰ This period marked a political rather than a linguistic transition, although the greater Roman organizational ability brought Latin more fully into the complex linguistic mix (as a L1 for some but not all Roman political figures, who continued to have Greek as their primary language). By the time of the conquest of the Romans, Palestine had been multilingual, with Greek as the lingua franca and prestige language at least of the ruling and administrative classes, for over 250 years. Even the indigenous Jewish population would have had persistent language contact with Greek as at least an active vernacular, even if still a secondary language and L2, with code-switching depending upon rural vs. urban life, occupation, legal requirements and topic of conversation.

The Herodian or fifth period had its precursors during the Hasmonean period, when Antipater the Idumean was involved in the final days of this period (c. 50 BCE). Antipater, who clearly sided with the Romans, was the father of Herod the Great. Herod the Great ruled from around 40 BCE until his death in 4 BCE, and was succeeded by his sons as the rulers of the various portions of his kingdom. Herod was educated in Greek language, culture and philosophy (his court writer was the Greek author Nicolaus of Damascus), which he cultivated throughout his Hellenized territory by imposing Greco-Roman culture,

19. See e.g. Horrocks, *Greek*, pp. 32-37.

20. See Horrocks, *Greek*, pp. 72-73.

including encouraging Greek *paideia* (his sons were educated in Rome).²¹ Although Herod pretended to be Jewish for the sake of civil rest, he was thoroughly Hellenized in all ways, including linguistically, as were his successors, who also served as client kings within the Roman empire. The result was greater Greek language contact for all strata of society, with greater language decline of Semitic languages, especially Hebrew. By this stage, individual multilingualism became prevalent throughout Palestine. Even Jewish leaders probably had Greek as an active L2, as the Herodians (those who followed Herod) interacted with them within the broader Palestinian society.

The sixth and final period is the final Roman period. This is marked by the appointment of a Roman governor for Judea in 6 CE (with Coponius) and eventually direct Roman rule over all of the territory after the first Jewish revolt (66–70 CE) and then the second Jewish revolt (132–135 CE) (or third Jewish revolt, if the smaller one in 115–117 CE is counted). The second revolt resulted in the Jewish population being banned from living in the environs of Jerusalem, and Palestine became fully and completely part of the larger Syrian province. At this point, Greco-Roman culture reached undisputed preeminence in Palestine and continued to grow over the next several centuries (note the eastern Roman Empire or Byzantine Empire was a Greek-speaking empire). By this time, Palestine would have been under Greco-Roman domination for 450 years. Greek was not only the *lingua franca*, but the prestige language for all but the most isolated language communities (even the Dead Sea community had access to Greek documents), and widespread vernacular use would have been assumed. Whereas the non-Jewish population probably were diglossic in their use of varieties of Greek, the Jewish population would have frequently code-switched between Aramaic, their L1 and Greek, their L2, although it would be difficult to determine their primary and secondary language.

21. Nikos Kokkinos, *The Herodian Dynasty: Origins, Role in Society and Eclipse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 123-26; Martin Hengel, *The "Hellenization" of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1989), pp. 35-37; Harold W. Hoehner, *Herod Antipas* (SNTSMS, 17; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 9-16; Michael Grant, *Herod the Great* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), pp. 115-20; E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian. A Study in Political Relations* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), esp. pp. 82-83.

This summary has provided only the briefest overview of the trajectory of the coming of the Greek language to Palestine. However, I think that it is reasonable to conclude that there is a demonstrable growth in Greek language presence over time, to the point that the first century represents a very high level of Greek-language cultural saturation, even if not the height of Greek-language domination (which did not come until the second to fifth centuries, when Hebrew came under the pressure of further dispersion and possibly language endangerment). One of the sociolinguistic patterns of language change is increased density of use of a language over time, and this seems to be the case in ancient Palestine. The longer Greco-Roman domination continued, the increased density of Greek usage, first as a *lingua franca*, then as a prestige language and finally as a widespread vernacular among all social strata, for a wide range of purposes and in varied social domains.²² We now must examine how this diachronic trajectory inter-sects with more tangible evidence of Greek language use during the first century.

Synchronic Evidence and Environments of Greek Usage in First-Century Palestine

There are four bodies of evidence regarding Greek in first-century Palestine. This evidence includes the role of Greek within the Roman empire (already noted above), literary evidence including the Greek Bible, documentary evidence and epigraphic evidence. As with most historical sociolinguistic investigations, we must reconstruct the linguistic communities of practice on the basis of the remaining linguistic artifacts—while acknowledging that the evidence is lacking.²³ I summarize the major findings of research that has been developed over

22. A comparable conclusion has been arrived at by Ong, *Multilingual Jesus*, pp. 136-51; cf. Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, pp. 154-55; Horrocks, *Greek*, p. 72. One major difference regarding Greek in Egypt and Palestine was that in Egypt it was the pervasive primary language and in Palestine it was both a primary and a secondary language, depending upon the social domain. See also Tessa Rajak, *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome: Studies in Cultural and Social Interaction* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 3-11, who wisely separates language and culture; Warwick Ball, *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 3-4.

23. On historical sociolinguistics applied to ancient Greek, see Porter, 'The Greek of the Jews', esp. pp. 351-52 n. 4.

the years, but concentrate upon the epigraphic evidence as giving insight into the environments in which Greek was used.

The evidence from within the Roman empire has already been introduced above. One of the major sociolinguistic factors of the ancient Jewish people was their linguistic adaptability. There are currently two models attempting to explain linguistic shift among the ancient Jews. The first, the prestige language hypothesis, argues that the pre-exilic Jews had L1 Hebrew and the post-exilic Jews, returning from captivity by the Babylonians and then Persians, had L1 Aramaic. The second, the languages in contact hypothesis, claims that Hebrew-speaking Jews (L1) had long had contact with other languages, such as Aramaic, and that a standardized form of Aramaic became the *lingua franca* of the Jewish people, and then their L1, during the period from Pompey to the Second Revolt.²⁴ The languages in contact hypothesis has been adopted by those who wish to find stronger evidence for continued use of Hebrew. Whether one accepts the prestige language hypothesis or the more recent languages in contact hypothesis, the result is the same regarding linguistic adaptability. However, as I have outlined the patterns of language contact above, I think that the contact hypothesis is too narrow in its scope, failing to account adequately for the Greek evidence and wider language shifts. The ancient Jewish people had a history of being linguistically adaptive, and this included Greek as well. Just as Aramaic became at first a L1 under the influence of various governmental, economic, trade and contact pressures, so Greek became at least a L2, if not L1, under the later similar influence of Hellenistic and then Roman pressures, including similar governmental, economic, trade and contact pressures.²⁵ Whereas Aramaic was subject to this contact several centuries earlier, intensifying with the Exile, Greek was especially subject to this from the time of Alexander on, some two to three centuries later. By the time of the first century in Palestine (after 300 years of Greek linguistic imposition), Greek was not only the *lingua franca* used by the governing authorities and those who wished to communicate with them, but also the prestige language (even for the religious authorities, who would have used Hebrew or Aramaic only within ethnically restricted contexts), as well as being the vernacular of administration, of trade, and of everyday discourse on a wide range of subjects, even those normally associated with Jewish

24. See Wise, *Language and Literacy*, pp. 279-88.

25. See Wise, *Language and Literacy*, pp. 287-88.

culture. Greek became the L1 of those of the upper and middle strata, and the L2 (if not the L1) of the lower strata.²⁶ Most would apparently have had Greek as at least a secondary and receptive language, with most having some active capacity.

The literary evidence confirms this linguistic appraisal. The literary evidence comes in several different forms. The Greek New Testament documents are one of the primary sources of evidence for the position of Greek within the complex multilingual repertoire of first-century Palestine. All of the documents of the New Testament were originally composed in Greek. Whereas there is some reference in early church tradition to some Semitic (whether Hebrew or Aramaic is not determinable) transmission, such as words of Jesus in a Semitic language (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39), there have been no Semitic language documents preserved, and the entire tradition of the New Testament including the tradition surrounding Jesus is in Greek. There are admitted uncertainties regarding the place of composition of the New Testament documents, but several of them purport to record events that transpired in Palestine (e.g. the Gospels and Acts). This evidence is admittedly from only one speech community that originated within Palestine, even if it quickly developed into a number of different speech communities on the basis of Christian converts from non-Jewish peoples. However, unlike those from the Qumran community, the early Christians were early on a part of what can be called mainstream Judaism (not isolationist Judaism) of the first century, beginning within Judaism influenced by the Pharisees, Sadducees and other mainstream groups, and then later due to their growth distinguishing themselves from Judaism. As opposed to such groups as those at Qumran, the early Christians as a part of mainstream Judaism may well have been a better representation of the community of practice of the Jewish population of Palestine. A particular set of instances to consider is the use of twenty-

26. I note that, outside of Palestine, the evidence indicates that Greek was the L1 and primary language of the vast majority of Jews, even among those who maintained active L2 knowledge of Aramaic or Hebrew. See Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (New York: Atheneum, 1975), pp. 347-48. Paul the Apostle is a suitable example. Evidence from the Jewish funerary inscriptions in Rome also attests to the use of Greek. See Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960), pp. 67-92. This further indicates Jewish linguistic adaptability, although this pattern would have been typical of most similar diasporic language communities.

six Aramaic words within the Gospels (there are also some Hebrew words in the words of Jesus spoken from the cross in Matthew).²⁷ There are various theories on why they are found in these Greek Gospels: they reflect the L1 usage of the speakers or authors translated for others, in which case we may have code-switching between Jesus and his conversationalists; they reflect intentional code-switching by the author to indicate a particular register (religious language or ethnic usage, depending upon the situation); or they reflect later interpretation to indicate the intermix of the two languages, Greek and Aramaic, in particular social domains. There are various possible solutions to this use of Semitic language words, but no clear indication that they indicate use of the Semitic language as a L1 or more prestigious variety than Greek. In fact, at most they may indicate that there were some productive Aramaic users, but that within the early Christian communities (which themselves were still predominantly Jewish) there was a sizable productive Greek community that did not know Aramaic.

There is further evidence from other Greek literary documents composed during this time to indicate positive Greek productivity within Palestine. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus claims to have originally written his *Antiquities* and *Jewish War* in Aramaic, but that they were then translated into Greek no doubt primarily for his Greek-speaking Roman elite audience but also for those throughout the empire who would want to read about this intriguing set of events (*Ant.* 1.5; 10.218; *War* 1.3; cf. *Ag. Ap.* 1.50).²⁸ Josephus's rival was Justus of Tiberias (in Galilee), known only through the writings of Josephus, but who was knowledgeable in Greek gained through the educational system (Josephus, *Life* 34-42, 336-360; cf. also 65, 88, 175-178, 186, 279, 390-393, 410). Other literature was written in Greek as well (e.g. *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, especially *Testaments of Judah* and *Levi*, and *Jubilees*). The Septuagint, however, may offer unique evidence into the use of Greek among Jews of Palestine. The Septuagint (or Old Greek) version of the Jewish Scriptures was translated from Hebrew into Greek in Egypt beginning in the third century BCE. There is much mythology concerning the translation (who asked for it, who performed the task, how long it took, etc.). In any case, the translation

27. Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1971), pp. 4-6.

28. Note, however, that in the *Antiquities* Josephus also paraphrases the Greek Old Testament. See Josephus, *Ant.* 1.5 note a, by the editor, Thackeray.

itself confirms the fact that Jews of Egypt, and presumably the rest of the Diaspora (if not also Palestine), were primarily L1 Greek users, and had at best only passive knowledge of Aramaic or Hebrew. They could not read or aurally understand their Scriptures in Hebrew and required that they be translated into a language that they did know, Greek. Whereas most of the books of the Septuagint are translations, some of the later books were composed only in Greek (e.g. the additions to Daniel of the *Prayer of Azariah* and the *Song of the Three Children*, *Susanna* and *Bel and the Dragon*; additions to Esther; *Wisdom of Solomon*; *2 Maccabees*; and *3 and 4 Maccabees*; some were only preserved in Greek: *1 Maccabees*, *2 Esdras*, *Judith* and *Ben Sira*)²⁹ (note also that the three musical instruments of Dan. 3.5 have Greek names, lyre, harp and pipes). Some of the books of the Septuagint are connected directly to Palestine. The linguistic situation was probably not much different in Palestine than in Egypt, as attested by the fact that a number of the Jewish Scriptures were either translated in Palestine from Hebrew to Greek (*1 Maccabees*, Esther, Chronicles, *2 Esdras* [Ezra–Nehemiah], Song of Songs, Lamentations, Qoheleth, *Judith*, *Tobit*) or originally composed in Palestine in Greek (*1 Esdras*, *2 Maccabees*), as well as the later translations of the Septuagint being made by Theodotion and Aquila. Even at Qumran, several Septuagint fragments have been found (7Q1LXXEx, 4QLXXLev^a, 4QLXXNum, 4QLXXDeut, 7Q2EpistlJer), along with the mostly unidentified Greek fragments found in Cave 7 (a total of 19 documents). The Minor Prophets Scroll (8HevXIIgr) found in the cave at Nahal Hever near the Dead Sea probably dates to the late first century BCE or possibly the first century CE, and attests to the continued use of the Jewish Scriptures in Greek, probably even among the Jewish rebels of the second revolt or Jewish patriots close to them. There is significant literary evidence that Greek was an active variety within first-century Palestine—the L1 of the social elite and of the middle social strata. However, the Septuagint evidence indicates that, even for the Jewish population that tended to be in the middle to lower classes, there was at least passive and in some instances active knowledge of Greek. The significance is that, for their religious rituals, there was clearly a culture of the use of Greek, quite possibly because of a lack of productive knowledge of Hebrew (and possibly even Aramaic).

29. This list is compiled from a variety of sources. See e.g. Porter, ‘Greek of the Jews’, p. 358 n. 20.

The documentary Greek evidence must also be noted, as it perhaps offers greater insight into the activities of the middle and lower classes and their speech communities. The documentary papyri from Egypt provide a useful linguistic parallel for Palestine, especially as there are fewer documentary manuscripts found in Palestine due to climate.³⁰ In Egypt, thousands of documentary papyri have been discovered and published that bear witness to the fact that, whatever their L1 (and I believe that it is debatable whether it was Demotic or Greek), at least at this time, there were sufficient passive and even active Greek users, so as to establish Egypt as a Greek-speaking province for all social strata. Individual Egyptians, like the rest of the ancient Greco-Roman world, may have been formally illiterate, but they lived in a literate culture that demanded the use of written documents—and those documents were overwhelmingly written in Greek. This means that the indigenous Egyptian population, even if they were L1 Demotic users (although many were not), were required to have more than simply passive knowledge of Greek. Many of them were at least secondary (and L2) if not primary (and L1) Greek users within their speech community, and especially within the domain of their fiscal and legal responsibilities within the empire (censuses, contracts, wills, receipts, minutes of local town meetings, etc.). This provides a useful parallel to Palestine. Even though fewer in number, there have been a significant number of documentary Greek papyri found in Palestine. These include commercial transactions, fiduciary notes, contracts of marriage as well as fragments of philosophical and literary texts. These manuscripts have been found in a variety of places (including Masada and various sites around the Dead Sea), with varying mixes of languages.

A number of these documents have recently been studied as to their pertinence for bilingualism. Scott Charlesworth has chronicled the

30. I believe that the notion of a ‘non-discriminatory state’ (see Csaba La’da, ‘Encounters with Ancient Egypt: The Hellenistic Greek Experience’, in Roger Matthews and Cornelia Römer [eds.], *Ancient Perspectives on Egypt* [London: UCL, 2003], pp. 157-69) better explains the relationship in both Egypt and Palestine than does the ‘apartheid model’ (see John M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan [323 BCE–117 CE]* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996]; and Barclay, ‘Diaspora Judaism’, in Dan Cohn-Sherbok and John M. Court [eds.], *Religious Diversity in the Graeco-Roman World: A Survey of Recent Scholarship* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], pp. 47-64).

manuscripts available from Masada and in the Bar Kokhba archives. Wise has provided a thorough study of the manuscripts that make up the Bar Kokhba collection. Charlesworth has rightly been criticized for not apparently knowing of previous work in bilingualism and not advancing the methodological discussion. His conclusions confirm what has already been known: that there were productive L1 and L2 Greek users during the first Jewish revolt and some productive bilingualism by L1 users but more widespread receptive bilingualism even during the second revolt.³¹ Wise has used the indications of the signatures on the Bar Kokhba documents to establish use of language varieties. He estimates the use of Greek at around 30% on this basis.³² However, there are two problems with this approach. The first is that his attempt at quantitative analysis of language use on the basis simply of counting instances is inappropriate. We simply do not have a representative data set for such analysis. Further, this analysis is disjunctive and implies a unilingual environment in which the signatory of the letter signs using their L1 (or monolingual variety). Wise seems to put credence in this method on the basis of the care given to their production. However, even if the signature indicates L1 variety (and this is doubtful, without consideration of social domain factors), it does not necessarily address L2 ability. One might further argue that the signatures simply attest to ethnic identity, not necessarily to linguistic ability or competence, based upon the fact that the legal documents require certain kinds of understood or explicitly stated language statements.

Both Charlesworth and Wise treat the well-known *P.Yadin* 52, the documentary letter from Soumaios. The letter has constantly been edited and re-edited, and the latest proposal is that the letter states: ‘It (the letter) was written in Greek because of our inability to write Jewish

31. Scott D. Charlesworth, ‘Recognizing Greek Literacy in Early Roman Documents from the Judaean Desert’, *BASP* 51 (2014), pp. 161-89, esp. p. 189. His approach has rightly been criticized by Hughson T. Ong, ‘The Use of Greek in First-Century Palestine: An Issue of Method in Dialogue with Scott D. Charlesworth’, in Lois K. Fuller Dow, Craig A. Evans and Andrew W. Pitts (eds.), *The Language and Literature of the New Testament: Essays in Honor of Stanley E. Porter’s 60th Birthday* (BINS, 150; Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 218-36, specifically criticizing his article on Galilean epigraphy (see below).

32. Wise, *Language and Literacy*, p. 332.

script.³³ The author, a Nabatean, and his companion, a scribe, were unable to write in Hebrew/Aramaic script, but they could produce vernacular Greek. Wise questions this interpretation. He argues that the wording indicates that ‘the letter was written in Greek because we were unable to write it in Hebrew’, because Bar Kokhba had ‘mandated the use of Hebrew during the Second Revolt’.³⁴ This was not a statement defending the use of Greek but explaining why Hebrew was not used in this letter. The presumption is also that the recipients would be able to read the letter written in Greek. If Wise is correct that this reflects the situation as the war deteriorated, then one can see that those without access to trained or professional scribes used Greek in such circumstances, even when attempting to lead and support a Jewish revolt.³⁵ In other words, failing the availability of such scribes, the revolt of the people reverted to the use of Greek for communication, Greek that was in widespread and constant use by the lowest stratum of society.

The final category is epigraphic evidence. During the reign of the Herodian rulers, all of the minted coins had Greek inscriptions on them (it was only during the first and second Jewish revolts that Jewish coins were again printed with Hebrew lettering, indicating the use of Hebrew for religio-political reasons, not linguistic ones; see above on *P.Yadin* 52), apart from Herod Agrippa II who used Greek and Latin (with Latin

33. Charlesworth, ‘Greek Literacy’, p. 186, citing Helen M. Cotton, ‘Greek Letters’, in Helen M. Cotton and Ada Yardeni, *Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek Documentary Texts from Nahal Hever and Other Sites: With an Appendix Containing Alleged Qumran Texts* (The Seiyal Collection, 2; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 351-66 (354) [this reference is apparently incorrect and should probably read: Yigael Yadin et al., eds., *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters: Hebrew, Aramaic and Nabatean-Aramaic Papyri* [JDS, 3; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Shrine of the Book, 2002], pp. 351-66 [354]). The crucial lines are now interpreted to read: ἐγράφη δ[ἐ] Ἐληνεστὶ διὰ τ[ὸ ἡ]μᾶς μὴ εὐρηκ[έ]ναι Ἑβραεστὶ ἐ[γγρ]άψασθαι rather than: ἐγράφη δ[ἐ] Ἐληνιστὶ διὰ τ[ὸ ὀρ]μὴν μὴ εὐρηθ[ῆ]ναι Ἑβραεστὶ γ[ρά]ψασθαι. I have admittedly only examined the photograph, but I am not sure that the latest reading of the Greek is entirely accurate, or that the translation is the best one. See Stanley E. Porter, ‘The Greek Papyri of the Judaean Desert and the World of the Roman East’, in Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans (eds.), *The Scrolls and the Scriptures: Qumran Fifty Years After* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 293-316.

34. Wise, *Language and Literacy*, p. 251.

35. Wise, *Language and Literacy*, p. 252.

as a tribute to Roman imperial power reflected in his rule).³⁶ As with most other places in the empire where such study has been done, the majority of Jewish inscriptions are in Greek. As Peter van der Horst states,

The distribution of languages over the extant Jewish inscriptions from the ancient Mediterranean world is very revealing. A global count of all the published inscriptions as far as their languages are concerned reveals the following: 68% of the inscriptions are in Greek, 18% are in a Semitic language (either Hebrew or one of the Aramaic dialects), 12% are in Latin, and 2% are bilingual (most bilinguals have Greek as one of the languages, so that in fact 70% of the inscriptions contain Greek).³⁷

Furthermore, the majority of them are in Greek throughout Palestine, with only Jerusalem having relatively equal numbers. As van der Horst states,

That Greek was indeed the predominant language of the Jews becomes even more apparent when one looks at the situation in Roman Palestine. There, too, the majority of the inscriptions are in Greek, not a vast majority to be sure, but at least more than half of them (between 55 and 60%) ... It is only in Jerusalem that the number of Semitic epitaphs seems to equal approximately the number of those in Greek.³⁸

There is continuing debate about the ability of the various language communities to be able to read the inscriptions, due to their sometimes artificial writing. Nevertheless, their evidence is important, even if it is several steps removed from the oral register—especially when we see that some of them are written in the Koine dialect.

With reference to specific inscriptions, several significant inscriptions offer major insights into use of Greek in Palestinian multilingualism. I begin with multilingual inscriptions. Such multilingual inscriptions were common throughout the Greco-Roman period. As J.N. Adams states, ‘Bilingual texts are a rich source of information

36. The Hasmonean ruler Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BCE) had issued bilingual coins with Greek and Hebrew, as did Mattathias Antigonus (40–37 BCE). The Hasmonean revolt was more about political and nationalistic than cultural independence. See Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, p. 248.

37. Peter W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs* (Kampen: Kok, 1991), p. 22. The same is surprisingly true in Rome. See Leon, *Jews of Ancient Rome*, p. 76, where 76% are Greek, 23% Latin and 1% others.

38. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, p. 23.

about bilingual issues, but are not a straightforward subject of study.³⁹ He notes that there are a variety of reasons for use of multiple languages on such inscriptions, with widespread exposure to readers being only one possible but not necessary one. He uses as an example a hypothetical public Latin and Greek inscription, which may include Latin simply to indicate what he calls ‘the Romanness of imperial power’.⁴⁰ In other words, the use of multilingual inscriptions may not have reflected communities of practice, but other purposes. As Adams says, ‘One of the versions might have been included for symbolic rather than communicative purpose, with (e.g.) the presentation of a type of identity determining the inclusion of the second language.’⁴¹ Adams believes that in many cases of bilingual inscriptions, due to the person writing and the place written, one can determine the language of the sponsor of the inscription.⁴² There are several possible explanations of the epigraphic evidence in Roman Palestine including Jerusalem, not all of them, however, indicating that a Semitic language was the productive L1 or primary language. A major reason for Jewish epitaphs in a Semitic language is to reflect ethnic or religious allegiance, regardless of knowledge of Greek. However, the use of Greek on a Jewish epitaph found in Palestine, including Jerusalem (whether uni- or multilingual), almost assuredly indicates primary use of Greek by the individual. In other words, for bilingual Greek and Semitic or Greek and Latin funerary inscriptions by Jews, and certainly for Jewish Greek unilingual funerary inscriptions, found in Palestine (as well as in Rome), the primary language of the sponsor would have been Greek.⁴³

39. J.N. Adams, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 31.

40. Adams, *Bilingualism*, p. 32.

41. Adams, *Bilingualism*, pp. 34-35.

42. Adams, *Bilingualism*, p. 32.

43. The Beth She‘arim evidence mostly post-dates the period of consideration. However, the evidence for Greek is overwhelming. Of the total number of inscriptions (247), 219 were in Greek (c. 89%), 46 in Hebrew, 10 in Palmyrene, 3 in Aramaic and 1 in Greek but in Hebrew transliteration (Nahman Avigad, *Beth She‘arim: Volume 3, The Excavations 1953–1958* [New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1976], p. 230). When one considers that Hebrew had probably suffered language decline after Bar Kokhba (p. 231), these statistics are telling. First, the use of Hebrew appears to be as a religious language, appropriate for a necropolis with the remains of numerous significant Jewish dead including rabbis. Secondly, Greek is used in the vast majority of inscriptions no doubt because it was

Several bilingual inscriptions are worth considering. The Rosetta stone from early second-century BCE Egypt (*OGIS* 90; 196 BCE), written in hieroglyphics, Demotic and Greek, is an important example. The three languages represent the historical language of the indigenous Egyptian population (hieroglyphics) even though no longer an active language, their identifiable ethnic language (Demotic) and the lingua franca (Greek). As in Palestine, by this time, Egypt had been under Greek control for 130 years, and so there were many Egyptians who had at the very least passive knowledge of Greek, and probably primary productive knowledge, whether they were educated in Greek or not. In this instance, the use of Demotic and Greek is probably designed to ensure the widest number of readers of the inscription, including those of the indigenous population with Demotic as their L1 and all others, including indigenous and non-indigenous inhabitants who would have had Greek as their L1 or L2. Thus, the Rosetta stone indicates less broad diglossia than it does vernacular usage of two distinct and broad varieties, Demotic and Greek. The titulus above Jesus' head at the crucifixion (Jn 19.20) is another multilingual inscription, but where different reasons may be suggested for the use of languages. The titulus was written in three languages, Hebrew/Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The Hebrew/Aramaic reflects the ethnic language of the conquered, whether it was a L1 or L2, but may well have been included as a way of

the language of the people (i.e. the vernacular variety was used). Thirdly, it defies belief to posit that this use of Greek simply began in the late first or early second century. The use of Greek may have increased, but it was already present, and merely the result of previous language contact. As Avigad (*Beth She'arim*, p. 230) says, 'The most prominent feature is the profusion of Greek inscriptions in contrast to the paucity of Hebrew inscriptions. It emerges that Greek was the tongue spoken by many Palestinian Jews and by all the Diaspora Jews, except for a small group of Palmyrene Jews who also wrote in Palmyrene.' Schwabe and Lifshitz (Moshe Schwabe and Baruch Lifshitz, *Beth She'arim: Volume 2, The Greek Inscriptions* [New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1974], p. 219) add: 'Anyone who has examined the Greco-Roman inscriptions discovered in Palestine, including those of Beth She'arim, is well aware that, from the point of view of language, they are not different from Greek inscriptions of the same type and period that have come to light in Syria, in Asia Minor and in other parts of the Hellenized Orient. Phonetic and grammatical vulgarisms were common everywhere, but it is perhaps this very aspect of the Greco-Jewish inscriptions that points to the fact that Greek was used by the Jews in general and not only by the intellectuals and city dwellers among them.' In other words, vernacular Greek was the primary language, perhaps even the L1, of the Jewish population, including higher to lower social classes.

branding Jesus as the Jewish messianic pretender who would dare to rival the Roman throne. The Latin reflected the official language of the empire, and is no doubt used to show Roman power (as even the Roman soldiers, who were from the various eastern regions, may not have been able to read it; Pilate did not have it written in Latin so he could go and observe it!). The Greek represents the lingua franca and the language probably used by the majority of those in Palestine, especially of the upper and middle strata with productive L1 and L2 capacity, and is included to ensure that the inscription had its communicative value.⁴⁴ As with the Rosetta stone, the titulus indicates less broad diglossia than it does the vernacular of the majority of the population, including the lower social stratum.

This raises the question of how to understand a number of important unilingual Greek inscriptions from ancient Palestine.⁴⁵ We noted above how multilingual inscriptions indicate the language of a community on the basis of their social domain and context of use. I believe that we can argue similarly for unilingual inscriptions, on the basis of their purpose, proposed audience and social domain of use. These unilingual inscriptions, even though only in Greek, are not merely public proclamations erected for political or related purposes, but were functionally communicative for the entire Palestinian population. The first is an inscription prohibiting the robbing of graves. This unilingual Greek inscription (*SEG VIII 13*) was dictated by one of the Caesars in the first century or early second century, although there are questions

44. Although it falls outside of our timeframe, the Greek–Aramaic Asoka inscription from Kandahar (the eastern most Greek inscription found), dated to the third or fourth centuries CE, attests to the penetration and continued use of Greek, at least as an administrative language. See G. Pugliese Carratelli and G. Garbini, *A Bilingual Graeco–Aramaic Edict by Aśoka: The First Greek Inscription Discovered in Afghanistan* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1964), esp. pp. 7-12.

45. An inscription that falls outside of the first century to note is: an inscription from Joppa honoring Ptolemy IV Philopator (217 BCE). Charlesworth (Scott D. Charlesworth, ‘The Use of Greek in Early Roman Galilee: The Inscriptional Evidence Re-examined’, *JSNT* 38 [2016], pp. 356-96) treats the inscriptions of early Roman Galilee. He concludes that there was minimal functional bilingualism indicated, and that Jesus and his disciples may have been productive bilinguals. As has been indicated above, Ong (‘Use of Greek’) criticizes Charlesworth not for his conclusions but for being ignorant of much previous research and not methodologically advancing the discussion.

about dating.⁴⁶ The inscription may be from Nazareth, although that may simply be the city from which it was shipped to France (it is held in the Paris National Library). If it originated somewhere in Galilee, then the inscription was probably written after 44 CE when the Romans assumed direct rule from Herod Agrippa (although if it originated elsewhere in Palestine, it may have been written any time from Augustus on, as the use of ‘Caesar’ without modification could indicate Augustus).⁴⁷ The Greek inscription may have been translated from Latin, reflecting broad diglossia within the Roman imperial administration, but not expected (at least for these two broad varieties) among the general populace. The Romans had legions recruited from several different regions in the empire, and hence Greek would have been their common language of command. However, this inscription was not written for the Roman soldiers, but for the inhabitants of the area and probably not the social elite or even the middle social stratum. Even though the edict not to rob graves at threat of capital punishment may have originated in Latin, the only language in which such an inscription could be written to address the diverse population of the area would have been Greek, understood either as the L1 or L2 of the diverse speech communities that would have included Hellenistic cities of the Decapolis and Jewish cities of Galilee itself. The fact that the inscription is written in Koine (vernacular) Greek supports this conclusion,⁴⁸ but also indicates minimal diglossic expectation among this broader populace.

46. See Ehrenberg and Jones, *Documents*, p. 149, for text; and van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, pp. 159-60; Laura Boffo, *Iscrizioni Greche e Latine per lo Studio della Bibbia* (Brescia: Paideia, 1994), pp. 319-33; Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and the Ossuaries* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), pp. 35-37, for text, translation and commentary. See also Mark A. Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus* (SNTSMS, 134; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 56-60, for comments regarding the placement of the inscription within its Roman context. Much of Chancey’s argument (see pp. 122-65) relies too much on equating culture and language, without realizing the broader sociolinguistic patterns (he rejects sociolinguistics). His evidence shows a Greek trajectory but little evidence for Aramaic, which one might expect for his argument. The evidence for Greek in Galilee is clearly stronger than he admits.

47. See Ehrenberg and Jones, *Documents*, p. 149, who suggest the possibility of Palestinian origin under Augustus, Tiberius or Claudius; Evans, *Jesus*, p. 35.

48. See Boffo, *Iscrizioni*, p. 324.

The second inscription is the Theodotus inscription (*SEG VIII 170*). This unilingual Greek inscription, found at the bottom of a well in Jerusalem, where it was apparently cast during the first Jewish revolt (attempts to date it later are unconvincing), is a commendatory inscription for a beneficent donor to a Jewish synagogue.⁴⁹ Acts 6.1, with reference to Hellenists and Hebrews, probably indicates that there were those among the Jewish population whose primary language was a Semitic language and those for whom it was Greek (cf. Acts 6.9, with reference to the synagogue of the Libertines/Freedmen, which Adolf Deissmann says this inscription is from), and no doubt those who spoke both. The Theodotus inscription was written for a synagogue where Greek was the primary language. The inscription states that, Theodotus, who was a priest and head of the synagogue as well as being son of the head of the synagogue who was also son of the head of the synagogue, built the synagogue. The importance of this inscription is that it indicates that there were established Jewish speech communities in Palestine, probably in Jerusalem, for whom Greek was their L1, including those in positions of leadership in the synagogue. There is also incidental confirmation of the use of Greek by Diaspora Jews in that the synagogue was built to welcome foreigners.

The third inscription is the Temple warning inscription. This is a unilingual inscription in Greek with two examples of it, but Josephus, who notes the presence of the inscription (*War* 5.194; 6.124-125; *Ant.*

49. See Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (trans. Lionel R.M. Strachan; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927), pp. 439-41, who addresses the issue of dating by pointing out that Jews were prohibited in Jerusalem after 70 CE for a considerable length of time (and hence there would have been no visitors as indicated in the inscription), so an inscription in Imperial lettering had to date to before that time; Boffo, *Iscrizioni*, pp. 274-82; cf. Evans, *Jesus*, pp. 38-43, who thoroughly discusses the more recent proposals regarding the dating issue (but does not take Deissmann's arguments into account). I also mention *SEG XXXIII 1277*, a first-century unilingual Greek inscription found in Jerusalem by Paris from Rhodes, who paid for part of the pavement of Herod's Temple. The contributor was probably Jewish. The fact that he is from Rhodes would confirm the use of Greek as the vernacular outside of Palestine. However, the fact that he wrote the inscription in Greek and it was erected in the Temple area probably also indicates its being read for communicative purposes in Jerusalem (in the vernacular), and not just by the social or religious elites (as a prestige language). See Boffo, *Iscrizioni*, pp. 291-94; Hengel, "Hellenization", p. 66 n. 34.

15.417), attests that the warning was also written in Latin (*War* 5.194).⁵⁰ The first instance of the inscription, now housed in the Istanbul Museum (*OGIS* 598; *SEG* VIII 169), is complete and indicates that those of other races (i.e. non-Jews) who were caught violating the wall around the Temple would be responsible for their own deaths. The second example, found outside the Old City of Jerusalem, is fragmentary, but seems to have said the same. The inscriptions date from the very late first century BCE to the first century CE. Even if there were a Latin version, the Greek form stood on its own and, due to its placement apart from the Latin inscription, was effectively and actually unilingual, without the expectation of diglossia as a means of communication. There are several issues raised by this inscription, however. The first concerns the actual language of the Greek inscriptions. The inscription is written in Koine (vernacular) Greek, and thus, there was no diglossic expectation reflected in its communicative purpose, but it was addressed to the widest population base.

The second issue is that the word translated ‘foreigner’ (ἄλλογενής) is found only in Jewish and Christian sources, not in secular sources. Its earliest attested use is in the Septuagint (Gen. 17.17). This linguistically transparent Jewish/Christian word, indicating one who is of another race, is used from a Jewish standpoint (the inscription must have been written from a Jewish standpoint, as the reference is to one who is of another race, that is, other than the Jews). In the two accounts of Josephus citing the inscription, he uses two different words for ‘foreigner’ (*War* 5.194; *Ant.* 15.417), both found in earlier classical sources (ἄλλόφυλος, ἄλλοεθνής). This is understandable as Josephus was writing for his Roman audience.⁵¹ The use of ‘the temple’ (τὸ ἱερόν) is also more typical of Jewish-Christian authors of the first century to refer to the Jerusalem Temple, with other words being more generally used of such a structure by secular authors (or the word would be used in the plural).

The third issue concerns who erected these inscriptions. One might expect the inscriptions to have been erected by the Romans, hence the

50. The first is discussed and presented in Deissmann, *Light*, pp. 79-81; Schürer, *History*, II, p. 285 n. 57; Jack Finegan, *The Archeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, rev. edn, 1992), p. 197, with both; Boffo, *Iscrizioni*, pp. 283-90 with the first; and Evans, *Jesus*, pp. 31-35, with both.

51. See F. Büchsel, ‘ἄλλος, etc.’, in *TDNT*, I, pp. 266-67.

Latin form of the inscriptions, but Josephus indicates (*War* 6.124-126) that that task was given to the Jews. These inscriptions were probably erected by the Herodian rulers in consultation with the Jewish leaders, as part of the building plan, and hence by the local rulers, not the Romans. There is no doubt that this warning that those who were not Jews (those of other races) that entered the Temple would bring death upon themselves was addressed primarily to warn Gentiles, as they were the ones explicitly prohibited by the inscription. The Latin inscription—assuming it existed—was perhaps used to warn Romans (although on other occasions the Romans had entered the Temple and would do so again), but may well have simply reflected Roman imperial power—the warning was in Latin in order to carry more imperial authority or simply to recognize Roman authority. However, even if Gentiles were the primary audience (especially of the Greek inscription), the phrasing of the Greek inscriptions indicates that they were written from a Jewish standpoint and for Jews as well—even if their lives did not depend upon them in the same way as did others. These inscriptions reflect the use of Greek as a primary language of the Jews for both religious and political purposes.

The fact that these unilingual inscriptions functioned as they did (especially the first and third) indicates that Greek was not just the language of administration but the *lingua franca* to be relied upon for widespread communication, by both Jews and non-Jews. In other words, there is every indication that the overwhelming majority of those who would see these inscriptions were either Greek L1 or productive L2 users, and quite probably primary Greek users. I realize that perhaps the majority of the population were functionally illiterate and were dependent upon those who were literate, but this makes the case for functional vernacular Greek even more forcefully, as the illiterate were dependent upon them. This use of Greek includes the social elite, but also the middle to the lower social strata who were literate.

Conclusion and Implications

There has been much misunderstanding regarding the role of Greek within first-century Palestine. This is no doubt because there has been confusion over racial and ethnic identity, nationality and religion, among other things. However, both the diachronic and synchronic

planes of evidence point in the same direction, and in fact reinforce each other. The evidence of multilingualism within first-century Palestine is hard to deny or underestimate. The major issue is to identify the relative significance of the evidence for the varieties of language and the social domains of their usage. In this paper, I have concentrated upon Greek, but have attempted to defend that the use of Greek was widespread within the variety of social strata and in a wide range of social domains. Greek was not solely the lingua franca of the administration of first-century Palestine, nor was it simply the prestige or standard language for much communication, but it was apparently also the vernacular used by the entire range of social strata, as is made clear by both the reinforced language maintenance of Greek and the social domains indicated by the literary, documentary and epigraphic evidence. For those within the social elite, Greek was the L1, and at least the L2 for the middle and lower social strata, even if we cannot determine the exact percentages. However, Greek was also the primary language for the upper and middle strata, as they engaged in administrative, economic, business and civic responsibilities, but it was also the secondary language and possibly the primary language for a significant number of the lower social stratum. The implications for further research clearly focus on determining the language usage of the early Christian movement. One of the restrictions in such previous research has often been the failure to understand the complex multilingual environment of first-century Palestine. Whereas there is no doubt that Aramaic continued to be a L1 and possibly even the primary language for some in the lower social stratum, the language shift from prestige language to constricted vernacular has implications for how we view the early teachings and writings of the early Christian movement, and how we explain its transformation from a focused regional religious movement, to a much more widespread and noteworthy social and religious movement. The indication is that linguistic continuity provided by the use of vernacular Greek was one of the significant factors in this seamless transformation.